

# **Labor in the Collapse of the GDR and Reunification: A Crucial, Yet Overlooked Actor**

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## **Abstract**

Was labour involved in the events of 1989-1990 in Germany? Most studies of the East German revolution and the subsequent unification of Germany say no. This study argues in the opposite direction and by contextualizing the dynamics of East and West German labour offers a new picture of supposedly well-known events.

The study explores the different ways in which East and West German labour became crucial actors in 1989-1990. It first enlightens the participation of East German workers to the revolution, by revealing the multifaceted overlapping of developments in the shop floors and the streets. Dynamics within labour, the work shows, were a core constituent of the political processes that marked GDR's end.

The analysis then focuses on the politics of four West German unions (metal, chemistry, media, and public service) and of their federation (DGB) and unearths the setting up of a tripartite crisis management of the East German economic reforms, between the West German government, employers and unions. Set up as early as February 1990, this formal and informal agreement led to the adjunction of the "social" dimension to the Monetary, Economic and Social Union of May 1990, i.e. the preservation of the existing West German institutions, norms and actors of the social systems and industrial relations in unified Germany. The two collective bargaining partners became in charge of keeping social tension to a minimum during the economic reforms, through the tools of collective bargaining.

The flipside of this institutional extension was the rapid setting up of trade unions structures in eastern Germany, a last aspect analyzed in this work. The rapid extension of the DGB unions and employers associations was an organizational "tour de force." But it came with a cost for the trade unions: the subjection of East German union activists in the "new" unions, and the renunciation to core programmatic claims at home.

### **Keywords:**

Germany, East Germany, Unification, Labour, Trade Unions, Social Partnership

# Zusammenfassung

Waren die Arbeitnehmer bei den Ereignissen 1989/90 in Deutschland involviert?

Die meisten Untersuchungen über die Revolution und die darauffolgende Vereinigung Deutschlands verneinen dies; die vorliegende Untersuchung behauptet aber das Gegenteil. Durch die Kontextualisierung der Dynamiken in der ost- und westdeutschen Arbeitnehmerschaft schafft sie ein neues Bild von vermeintlich bekannten Ereignissen.

Die Studie untersucht die unterschiedlichen Wege auf denen die ost- und westdeutsche Arbeitnehmerschaft zu entscheidenden Akteuren 1989-1990 wurden. Zunächst stellt sie die Beteiligung der ostdeutschen Arbeitnehmer an der Revolution heraus, durch das Aufdecken von vielfältigen Überschneidungen der Entwicklungen in den Betrieben und auf der Strasse. Dynamiken innerhalb der Arbeitnehmerschaft, so zeigt die Studie, waren ein Kernbestandteil der politischen Prozesse, welche das Ende der DDR markierte.

Darauffolgend konzentriert sich die Analyse auf die Politik von vier Westdeutschen Gewerkschaften (Metall, Chemie, Medien und Öffentlicher Dienst) und ihres Dachverband (DGB) und deckt die Einrichtung eines Krisenmanagements der ostdeutschen Wirtschaftsreformen, zwischen der Westdeutschen Regierung, Arbeitgebern und Gewerkschaften auf. Bereits im Februar 1990 gegründet, führte dieses formelle und informelle Abkommen zur Erhaltung der existierenden Westdeutschen Institutionen, Normen und Akteure der sozialen Systeme und industriellen Beziehungen im vereinten Deutschland.

Die Kehrseite dieser institutionellen Erweiterung war die schnelle Etablierung der Gewerkschaftsstrukturen in Ostdeutschland, der letzte Aspekt, welcher in der Arbeit analysiert wird. Die schnelle Verbreitung der DGB Gewerkschaften und der Arbeitgeberverbänden war eine organisierte „tour de force“. Die Kosten für die Gewerkschaften waren die Unterwerfung der ostdeutschen Gewerkschaftsaktivisten unter die „neuen“ Gewerkschaften und die Abkehr vom Kern der programmatischen Forderungen zu Hause.

Schlagwörter:

Deutschland, Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Vereinigung, Arbeiterbewegung, Gewerkschaften, Sozialpartnerschaft

# Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>I</b>
<b>Zusammenfassung</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>Table of contents</b> .....	<b>III</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>VII</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>VIII</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Part 1: The Framework of Analysis</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1 Questions tackled, Questions left untouched</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>1.2 The historiography on German labor in the revolution and reunification</b> .....	<b>11</b>
1.2.1 Toward a global labor history, or why a dissertation on labor history in the first decade of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century? .....	11
1.2.2 East German labor in the collapse of the GDR and the East German Revolution: Actors or spectators? .....	16
1.2.3 The West German trade unions in the revolution and reunification: A supporting role in act two .....	26
1.2.4 The transfer of industrial relations: A paradigmatic model for reunification.....	35
1.2.5 Beyond the walls of academia: On the path towards an integrated history of post-war Germany .....	41
<b>1.3 Hypotheses, approach and actors</b> .....	<b>47</b>
1.3.1 The hypotheses .....	47
1.3.2 The approach .....	49
1.3.3 The actors under examination.....	50
1.3.3.1 The “East German labor” .....	50
1.3.3.2 Four trade unions from the German Confederation of Trade Unions .....	51
1.3.3.3 Other actors to consider in further research.....	53
<b>1.4 Sources: Narrowing down the choice</b> .....	<b>53</b>
1.4.1 Publications of the trade unions and employers’ associations.....	53
1.4.2 Trade union archives .....	55
1.4.3 Interviews and discussions .....	56
1.4.4 Sources for the study of the East German labor between 1986 and 1990 .....	59
<b>Part 2: East German Labor in the Collapse of the GDR and the Revolution</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction: Absent on Paper: Workers in the East German Revolution</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>2.2 The Regime’s Perspective of Labor: Repression and Neutralization of Workers’ Potential Resistance in the Second Half of the 1980s</b> .....	<b>63</b>
2.2.1 Surveillance and Repression In the Workplace .....	63
2.2.1.1 SED Workplace Organizations in the Second Half of the 1980s: The Party is Over .....	64
2.2.1.2 Stasi’s Involvement in Production.....	66
2.2.1.2.1 The Stasi Workplace Reports in the Second Half of the 1980s.....	67
2.2.1.2.2 Stasi’s Repressive Action in Workplaces in the Second Half of the 1980s .....	73
2.2.1.3 Reports by the Trade Unions in the Second Half of the 1980s .....	75
2.2.1.3.1 The 1969 Directive .....	75
2.2.1.3.2 The Reports in the Second Half of the 1980s .....	77
2.2.2 Neutralization of Worker Discontent.....	81

2.2.2.1 Employment and Wage .....	81
2.2.2.1.1 Distorted Plans.....	81
2.2.2.1.2 Loosened Wage Control .....	83
2.2.2.1.3 Employment, Wages and Productivity in the 1980s.....	84
2.2.2.2 Industrial Social Policy.....	86
2.2.2.2.1 An Industrial Type of Social Policy .....	87
2.2.2.2.2 The Costs of the Social Policy in the 1980s .....	89
2.2.2.3 Labor Law and Workers' Rights .....	91
2.2.2.3.1 The 1974 Revision of the East German Labor Law .....	92
2.2.2.3.2 Other labor legislations.....	93
2.2.3 Conclusion.....	94
<b>2.3 Labor from a Worker's Perspective: Forms and Extent of the Defense of Interests .....</b>	<b>95</b>
2.3.1 The Official Structures for the Defense of Worker Interests.....	96
2.3.1.1 The Trade Union.....	96
2.3.1.2 Brigades.....	97
2.3.1.3 The Arbitration Commissions .....	99
2.3.1.4 Petitions .....	101
2.3.2 Defense of Interests beyond Official Structures.....	102
2.3.2.1 Strikes.....	102
2.3.2.2 Struggles over Wages and Norms .....	103
2.3.2.2.1 Workplace Resistance as a Means of Defending Workers' Interests in Industrial Societies.....	105
<b>2.4 Struggles over Wages and Norms in the GDR in Historical Perspective .....</b>	<b>107</b>
2.4.1 Building on Jeffrey Kopstein's Theses.....	108
2.4.2 The Economic and Political Crisis of 1959-1962.....	109
2.4.3 The Economic and Political Crisis of 1967-1972.....	114
2.4.4 Conclusion: Struggles over Wages and Norms as Reoccurring Motif in GDR History .....	121
<b>2.5 East German Labor and the Fall of the GDR.....</b>	<b>124</b>
2.5.1 Erfurt Enterprises in Stasi Reports, October-November 1989 .....	128
2.5.2 The Revolution in GDR Workplaces.....	137
2.5.2.1 A Study of 51 Cases .....	138
2.5.2.2 On West German Words to Describe East German Realities .....	143
2.5.2.3 Search for Effective Structures for the Defense of Interests .....	144
2.5.2.4 Studying workers' motivations for action .....	145
2.5.3 The February Shift: How to Implement Effective Mechanisms for the Defense of Worker Interests .....	149
<b>2.6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Part 3: West German trade unions, the fall of the GDR and the reunification: for this system, all our men, all our money! .....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>3.1 Trade unions in the Federal Republic of Germany toward the end of the 1980s.....</b>	<b>159</b>
3.1.1 Works councils and the stability of the West German industrial relations.....	159
3.1.2 New challenges to trade union action.....	162
3.1.2.1 The 1981 DGB Program.....	162
3.1.2.2 New economic realities .....	163
3.1.2.3 Erosion of unions' political strength.....	164
3.1.2.4 Internal challenges.....	166
3.1.3 Reflections as to the future of trade union politics.....	167
3.1.3.1 Orientation crisis of the West German trade unions.....	167
3.1.3.2 Ways out of the orientation crisis.....	169
3.1.3.3 A period in between.....	170

3.1.4 The four trade unions at the end of the 1980s .....	171
3.1.4.1 IG Metall .....	171
3.1.4.2 Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union (IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik) ...	172
3.1.4.3 Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (Öffentlicher Dienste, Transport und Verkehr).....	172
3.1.4.4 Media Industrial Union (Media Industrial Union). .....	172
<b>3.2 From Ostpolitik to support and collaboration: the DGB unions and the East German Revolution (May 1989 – February 1990).....</b>	<b>173</b>
3.2.1 The first weeks: Wait and See .....	173
3.2.2 A First Strategy: Towards Support and Collaboration (September 1989-February 1990).....	178
3.2.2.1 The initiator: IG Metall .....	179
3.2.2.2 With an eye on the unification: Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union .....	187
3.2.2.3 Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (Öffentlicher Dienst, Transport und Verkehr, ÖTV).....	195
3.2.2.4 Media Industrial Union.....	200
3.2.3 Why so little contacts with the East German opposition and independent initiatives?.....	207
<b>3.3 The road to the unification and the worries of the DGB unions (January- February 1990).....</b>	<b>212</b>
3.3.1 Calls for unification and the reaction of DGB unions .....	212
3.3.2 The outcomes of the East German migration on trade union activity in the Federal Republic.....	214
<b>3.4 The Debate over socialism in the West German trade unions: Where do we go now (but nowhere)? .....</b>	<b>220</b>
3.4.1 The inadequacies of the literature.....	221
3.4.2 Vast problems, no clear solutions.....	223
3.4.3 The programmatic exhaustion of the trade unions .....	230
<b>3.5 West German Employers' Associations' Shift in Position to Favoring the Extension of the Labor Law .....</b>	<b>235</b>
3.5.1 Concerns on social stability in West Germany (January 1990).....	236
3.5.2 Shift in position on the extension of the West German labor law (February 1990).....	238
3.5.3 Conclusion.....	242
<b>3.6 Achieving Monetary, Economic and Social Union: It takes three to tango .....</b>	<b>243</b>
3.6.1 The Monetary, Economic and Social Union in literature .....	243
3.6.2 Establishing West German tripartite consensus?.....	245
3.6.3 Convincing people to stay in the GDR: A new strategy for unity.....	247
3.6.3.1 The Federal Chancellery's evolving position on the question of unity.....	247
3.6.3.2 The new strategy: Rapid monetary and economic union .....	250
3.6.4 Assembling West German runners at the starting line: The course of the Federal Chancellery from February 6 to March 18, 1990. ....	252
3.6.4.1 The reaction of the West German economic actors to the chancellor's plan .....	253
3.6.4.2 Negotiations between German governments: Ensuring the extension of the labor law .....	256
3.6.4.3 Achieving consensus amongst the West German collective bargaining partners ...	260
3.6.5 The new logic behind DGB unions' activities: Achieving social union .....	269
3.6.5.1 A key moment in the reunification process .....	269
3.6.5.2 The three sources of the tripartite consensus.....	270
3.6.5.3 The new logic of DGB unions' action.....	272
<b>3.7 DGB Unions and the Institutional Extension of West German Industrial Relations I: Establishing the Framework for Expansion.....</b>	<b>273</b>
3.7.1 The role of the DGB in the disbanding of the FDGB.....	274

3.7.2 What kind of Works Constitution Act for the GDR? .....	281
3.7.2.1 East German labor: In favor of a revised version of the Works Constitution Act... ..	281
3.7.2.2 DGB unions and the introduction of works councils .....	283
3.7.2.3 Trade union indecision on the East German law on trade unions .....	284
3.7.3 DGB unions' activities in support of legal extension (April - May 1990) .....	289
3.7.3.1 Delaying action until the battle is over .....	290
3.7.3.2 Confirmation of the tripartite consensus in May .....	294
3.7.4 Conclusion .....	297
<b>3.8 The DGB Unions and the Institutional Extension of West German Industrial Relations II: Expanding trade unions structures and collective bargaining rounds .....</b>	<b>298</b>
3.8.1 Variations on one single theme .....	298
3.8.2 The expansion of IG Metall .....	300
3.8.2.1 From cooperation to the merger of the two metal unions .....	301
3.8.2.2 IG Metall takes control of the merger process .....	303
3.8.2.3 The organization of the expansion: The July 10 meeting .....	305
3.8.2.4 The dissolution of IG Metall (DDR) .....	309
3.8.2.5 The cost of expansion .....	310
3.8.3 The expansion of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union .....	311
3.8.3.1 The five preconditions from February 28 .....	312
3.8.3.2 Collaboration with employers' associations .....	314
3.8.3.3 Difficulties encountered in introducing works councils .....	314
3.8.3.4 The completion of the expansion .....	316
3.8.3.5 The debate on former FDGB officials .....	316
3.8.3.6 The training of East German union secretaries .....	318
3.8.4 The expansion of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union .....	320
3.8.4.1 The first attempt at developing a common strategy .....	320
3.8.4.2 A new organization based on former trade unions .....	322
3.8.4.3 Organizing expansion .....	324
3.8.4.4 Recruiting and organizing new members .....	327
3.8.4.5 The difficulty in integrating East German unionists into union activities .....	329
3.8.5 The expansion of Media Industrial Union .....	330
3.8.5.1 One common goal: Merger .....	331
3.8.5.2 Tensions between East and West German media unions .....	333
3.8.5.3 Convincing the East German rank-and-file to accept expansion .....	333
3.8.5.4 Establishing the structures for the new union in eastern Germany .....	336
3.8.6 Conclusion .....	338
<b>3.9 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>Part 4: Conclusion: The Paradox of Continuity .....</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>355</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>391</b>



## List of Tables

Table 1: Working conditions and relationships within the enterprise (17 occurrences).....	69
Table 2 : Wages and working time (19 occurrences).....	69
Table 3 : Consumer goods (21 occurrences).....	70
Table 4 : Trade union and the realization of the quota requirements (12 occurrences).....	70
Table 5 : Social policy (27 occurrences).....	70
Table 6 : Political conditions (14 occurrences).....	71
Table 7 : Expressions of worker dissatisfaction cited in MfS enterprise reports, November 1986 - August 1989 .....	71
Table 8 : Example of tariff in the productive sector in DDR-Mark (1970) .....	115
Table 9 : Wages and working conditions (9 occurrences) .....	130
Table 10 : SED, FDGB and enterprise leaders (34 occurrences).....	131
Table 11 : Political, economic and social topics (17 occurrences) .....	131
Table 12 : Initiatives taken by workers in East German enterprises; motivations; relation to other structures for the defense of interests; reference to models; September 1989 – February 1990 .....	139
Table 13 : Frequency of occurrences of motivations*, by month.....	146
Table 14 : I) Internal functioning of the initiated structure for the defense of worker interests.....	150
Table 15 : II) Wages, working time and working conditions.....	151
Table 16 : III) Workers' rights and duties in the enterprise .....	151
Table 17 : IV) Social policy, economic and political issues .....	152

## Abbreviations

AGB	1978 East German labor constitution (Arbeitsgesetzbuch)
APO	Company division party organization (Abteilungsparteiorganisation)
BGL	Company trade union (Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung)
BPO	Company party organization (Betriebsparteiorganisation)
CDU	Christian-democratic Union (Christlich-demokratische Union)
DGB	German Confederation of Trade Unions (deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund)
EES	Economic System of Socialism
FDGB	Free Confederation of German Trade Unions (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund)
GBA	1961 East German labor constitution (Gesetzbuch der Arbeit)
IM	Unofficial Stasi collaborators (Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter)
KK	Company arbitration commission (Konfliktkommission)
MfS	Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit)
MLL	Enterprise bonuses (Mehrleistungslöhne)
NES	New Economic System
OPK	Operative Personal Control (Operative Personenkontrolle)
OV	Operative Process (Operativer Vorgang)
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)
SPD	German-social-democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)
VEB	People-owned companies (Volkseigenerbetrieb)
VL	East German shop floor delegates (Vertrauensleute)

# Introduction

## The Genesis of a Ph.D. dissertation

The 1989 demonstrations in the German Democratic Republic were among my first political memories. My experience of these events came by way of the evening news on Canadian television, yet I was moved by the images of an insuppressible and jubilant population demonstrating in ever-greater numbers each week and finally toppling the regime. The teenager that I was could not hold back the tears when he saw demonstrators climbing on the Berlin Wall and, using pickaxes and other tools, tearing it down on November 9, 1989. I was again struck by similar emotions a few months later when the television broadcast Nina Hagen performed a somber version of Schubert's Ave Maria in front of the wall. In all honesty, the images of the East German revolution still cause a tide of emotions to rise within me and, whenever I show any clips in my German history classes, I avoid looking at the screen whenever possible.

There is surely a connection between this political and emotional experience and my interest in German history. During my four years as an undergraduate student in history in Ottawa, I developed a strong interest in the German labor movement. In the 1990s, it was especially interesting to study the establishment of the post-war system of industrial relations in seminars on the history of West Germany and to follow, at the same time, its erosion. While I was learning more about the major role labor played in the political, economic and social history of post-war West Germany, their influence was already in decline. German, British, French and Canadian specialists on industrial relations questioned whether the "German model" could survive these profound changes in the world economy which was shaped by the effects of the newly-termed "globalization".

This critical situation was not specific to Germany, as trade unions in many countries were facing similar difficulties. The German case had certain unique characteristics (i.e., the 1990 reunification), however, which had increased the challenges faced by trade unions. For the topic of my Masters thesis (*Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées* (DESS) at Strasbourg's *Centre d'études germaniques*), I chose DGB politics during reunification. The objective of this paper was to analyze how the West German Confederation of Trade Unions responded to this event so influential on its core activities. Literature on the subject on a whole criticizes the DGB's incapacity to implement strategies favoring reunification. With few exceptions, the majority of DGB unions is described as having either opposed reunification or begrudgingly

adjusted their course to reflect decisions made without their input. To put it in different terms, the DGB only accepted reunification late on in the process and was therefore unable to play any role. My initial intent was, in the wake of these studies, to look at the causes of DGB's reticence. But as I learned more on the subject through various sources, I started to question the theory. Producing a broad comparative chronology of DGB's initiatives in 1989-90 was one of the major challenges in writing this thesis. A summary of what I believed were the main ambiguities in literature on the topic was published as a review article in *Centre d'études germaniques' Revue d'Allemagne* in 2001.

I came to Berlin to continue my studies of recent changes to West German union politics. An initial Ph.D. project aimed at examining the evolution of DGB unions' strategies and program during the late 1980s through a comparative study of the two main political episodes of these years: reunification and European integration. My goals were to critically investigate in greater detail the 'Johnny come lately' theory of 1989-90 and to integrate the European dimension into the analysis.

After months of reading and annotating union documents on Europe from the 1980s, I came to the conclusion that the DGB had not conducted a critical review on the European question in those years. Only a handful of documents addressed issues crucial to my work, such as union goals and strategies with regard to European integration, as well as the influence of the latter on labor politics and its program. Naturally, the objective of expanding the social dimension of the CEE treaty was sometimes touched upon in the union press, for instance in 1989 when the Maastricht process was launched. Yet most of the hundred articles from the years 1983-1990 were mere attempts to familiarize union secretaries and members with European directives and institutions. The DGB's stances on Europe had obviously been decided earlier and were no longer called into question. By contrast, articles on reunification were full of interesting insights on the evolution of unions' politics.

This disparity forced certain methodological adjustments. Three options were available. I could expand the temporal framework in order to discover when the choice in favor of Europe was made and why this support was no longer brought into question by the DGB. Yet much evidence would suggest that pro-European positions were widely held since the 1950s and that my research would have to go back to that period. I doubted that a comparison between events that occurred in economic and political contexts radically different, i.e., the 1950s and the 1980s, would provide any insight into the recent developments of union politics in Germany. The second option was to proceed to an asymmetrical comparison and devote greater attention to reunification. From this perspective, European integration would have been re-

ferred to only in relation to the phenomenon mentioned above, i.e., that it had not brought about a rethink among West German unions of their strategies, goals and program. The third option was to drop the comparison and focus on reunification.

This last option appeared to be the most appropriate for two reasons. One related to my central interest in the recent developments in labor politics in Germany and the necessity to focus on this core issue. The other reason concerned the East German dimension of the topic. In my readings of West German union press articles from 1989, I was forced to re-evaluate another deep-seated tendency in the historiography on the collapse of the GDR, namely that East German workers had not played a role in the revolution – or only in the role as consumers -, and that the workplaces had, on the whole, remained unaffected by the events. In 1989, however, DGB press published several papers on workplace initiatives relating to the implementation of new structures of worker representation. These articles offered another perspective on the 1989 revolution, in which the workplace also had a role in the affecting events. Interestingly, these articles on East German worker initiatives in 1989 were in stark contrast to the DGB's discourse a few months later. Beginning in March 1990, the DGB unions endorsed, with increasing vigor, the theory of the non-involvement of the East German labor movement in the revolution. Such an reversal of course on the discourse had a practical corollary, i.e., the promotion by the DGB unions of their organizational expansion into the GDR. After standing essentially alone in its support of the developments at East German workplaces in the FRG, the West German union press now derided them.

How should this change be interpreted? In order to understand DGB politics in relation to the East German revolution and reunification, one cannot avoid examining the situation at East German workplaces. To interpret the changing attitude of the DGB, the role of workers and labor-related issues in the collapse of the GDR needed to be specifically addressed. Certain discoveries made at the East German archives and various articles I read on the subject convinced me to attach ever-greater importance to the East German dimension, until I ultimately decided to reject the European dimension altogether. The initial comparative approach was thus abandoned in favor of an integrated, or German-German, approach.

### **The methodological approach**

It would not be uncommon for one to claim that political developments influence academic research. While the introduction of political considerations into the free sphere of pure academic knowledge is often criticized, it can also have a positive influence on developments, for

instance the re-evaluation of the paradigms that had governed research on a specific topic to date. This is happening in the historiography of contemporary Germany, with the calls for a "unification" of post-war German history. The idea is to create one common narrative for the history of the East and West Germany. The low key ceremony commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of 1990 unification could not conceal the major differences that still persisted between East and West Germans. These are also expressed in different relationships to the past of the two post-war German states. The dissatisfaction expressed by many East Germans at high school history curriculum which paints a picture of the GDR as merely a totalitarian footnote in German history is fully understandable. As a result, it would appear as if the unification of post-war German history could be historians' contribution to tearing down the "wall in the minds of people".

Reflections on the unification of post-war German history started to gain in importance in the years during which this dissertation was written. This can be seen as one crucial step toward an even more ambitious project, i.e., that of an integrated post-war European history, including an examination of Eastern and Western bloc countries. The advantages of an integrated, German-German approach for the study of labor in the reunification process are immense. As I began to scrutinize the problems associated with my work, I came to realize the importance of not neglecting one country in concentrating on the other, and to place each country on an equal footing in examining them, to use an expression by the East German historian Jörg Roessler. This methodology produced different conclusions to those found in other works on the topic. Phenomena, that may at first appear inconsequential when considered in their immediate East or West German context, sometimes reveal broader implications if viewed in terms of their relationship to the situation on the other side of the border.

It is thus my belief that the German-German approach can be quite useful, especially in the study of economic, social and labor issues. This work is an attempt to write a German-German history of the East German revolution and reunification from the perspective of labor. My interest in recent developments in labor politics in Germany require that the types of activity engaged in by labor, as well as their discourse, receive due consideration. In this work, I shall attempt to create a balance between these activities (the different levels of labor politics and militancy) and discourse (union declarations and theoretical debates). No single aspect is given greater weight over the other. On the contrary, the author has made every effort to describe both aspects in their mutual interrelations.

## **The sections**

The following study is divided in three parts of varying lengths. The first, and shortest, defines the framework of analysis. A brief introduction of the questions guiding us through the exploration of the topic is followed by a review of the literature on labor and the events of the years 1989/90. This discussion of the historiography allows us to clear up the inconsistencies mentioned above and to define the core questions which this work shall attempt to answer. A description of the actors observed and the methodological approach in use concludes this section. This is notably more concise than in standard German dissertations in history. However, further concepts and issues related to the historiography are discussed in the course of the introduction.

The second part explores the participation of workers and the role of labor-related issues in the collapse of the GDR. It opens with an analysis of the situation in East German workplaces in the second half of the 1980s, i.e., in the years and months preceding the revolution. To achieve this comparison, the opinion of leaders and workers on the situation within the labor movement is brought into the discussion. This comparison examines the major top-down struggles over wages and production quotas. Although it is difficult to pinpoint concrete manifestations of these struggles, the negative economic and political impact thereof is unmistakable. The hypothesis that struggles over wages and norms had immediate political implications in the East German context is examined and observed in two other periods of political crisis: 1959-1962 and 1967-1972. The participation of workers in the events of 1989-90 shall be considered thereafter. The analysis of worker initiatives at 51 workplaces enterprises and the situation in Erfurt indicates important correlations between developments outside and inside the workplaces in these months.

The third part is dedicated to the response of the DGB unions to the East German revolution and its strategies on reunification. Throughout this third section, we will track the shift from a strategy of support and collaboration toward one dedicated to institutional extension. This shift was accompanied by important theoretical debates among the DGB unions, which shall also be addressed in these pages. The last two chapters describe the implementation of a strategy dedicated to the legal extension and organizational expansion in the GDR by the DGB unions. It shall show how important the participation of DGB unions was in the reunification process with a description of the role assigned to the West German collective bargaining partners in the federal government's reunification roadmap.

The retelling of the events surrounding the establishment of a tripartite consensus in West Germany – government, employers, trade unions – in support of institutional extension was among the most difficult tasks in this study. Only limited sources were available and interviews did not provide the information needed to confirm (or disprove) all hypotheses explored here. The recently published study by Gerhard A. Ritter on the decision-making process that led to the institutional extension of the West German labor law to the GDR (*Der Preis der Einheit*, Munich: Ch. Beck, 2006) would have been a valuable source of information, but alas it was published just as this study was concluded. The analysis of this process put forth in the coming pages was not able to fully include Ritter's findings on the subject.

Quotes cited in the text are generally translated except for longer excerpts which remain in the original German. All references to sources are provided in detail in the footnotes. In the case of studies, only the last name of the author(s) is indicated, along with the year of publication and page numbers in the footnotes. Full details of the sources and studies cited herein are provided in the bibliography.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Hartmut Kaelble who acted as my guide throughout my work over the past years. His comments and questions were always thought provoking and insightful. Listening to his remarks during the graduate seminar in social history provided the most rigorous training in historical methodology I was to receive. My gratitude also goes out to Professor Frédéric Hartweg who assisted me in the initial phase of this study in Strasbourg. I would like to thank my fellow students in the seminars at the Humboldt University for providing valuable insight through their work and questions, especially on the formulation of hypotheses and in the analysis of sources. If my case is somewhat representative, the average Canadian Ph.D. candidate in history still suffers lacks in these domains in comparison to his or her German colleague. For these very reasons, my thanks go to my colleagues and friends at the Centre Marc-Bloch, in particular in the GDR and labor research groups. Their comments and suggestions at different stages in my research proved extremely valuable. I would like to express my thanks to the German historians, British political scientists and French sociologists who critiqued and corrected sections of this work and prompted me to delve deeper in my research. In that respect, I am especially indebted to two former East German opposition activists, who always had time for my questions and were great sources of motivation. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of my numerous contacts at IG Metall, Media Industrial Union and Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (both now part of ver.di) and , Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and the DGB, who have taken the time to talk to me, discuss my theories and furnish documentation. I wish to ex-



press my gratitude to the archivists at the BStU and Sapmo archives, the BDA, IG Metall's Central Library and Archive, and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. I also want to thank the library staff at the university and public libraries in Berlin, Strasbourg, Munich, Saarbrücken, Ottawa and Montreal, where much of the research for this study was conducted. I express my heartfelt gratitude to my friends and family members who supported and motivated me, as well as to James Weekes and Wendy Kloke who proof-read this work. And finally, I wish to thank Mélanie for everything.



## **Part 1: The Framework of Analysis**

This first section of this work presents the methodological underpinnings of the analysis developed hereinafter. The first chapter introduces the questions which this study will attempt to answer (1.1). The discussion of five historiographical issues serves to summarize how these questions have been treated in literature to date and, more generally, how the historiography portrays the involvement of labor in the revolution and reunification (1.2). This discussion allows the author to introduce the approach of this study which is detailed, together with the hypotheses and the actors observed, in the subsequent section (1.3). The last section presents the different types of sources drawn upon in this study (1.4).

### **1.1 Questions tackled, Questions left untouched**

The central story of this work pertains to the role of labor in the events of 1989-90 in Germany. Four core questions form the pillars upon which this story is constructed.

The first question concerns the role of East German labor in the collapse of the GDR. It tackles the issue from two angles: 1) the role of labor as one of the long-term factors that culminated in the “collapse of the GDR” at the end of the 1980s; 2) and the role of labor in the 1989-90 “revolution” that brought about the downfall of the GDR. The debate on whether the fall of the GDR was the result of a collapse, or a revolution, is addressed in section 1.2. This discussion on the role of the East German labor in the collapse of the GDR forms a central theme throughout the entire second part of this work.

The second question concerns the strategies implemented by the West German trade unions in the context of the East German revolution and German unification. What goals and motives were behind these strategies?

The implications and impact of West German unions’ strategies for achieving German reunification constitute the third subject matter addressed in this study.

Finally, the question of how the episodes of 1989-90 fit into the postwar history of the German labor is the fourth main subject on which this work is oriented. These three core issues shall be evaluated in the third part.

Ph.D. dissertations are as much about the issues they discuss as about the ones they leave untouched. The decision to exclude a topic has not always been easy, but it was required in order to maintain a certain balance in the narration of the central story. Two issues which are not examined in this study, though some reference to them is made, are the disbanding of the Free (East) German Confederation of Trade Unions (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, FDGB) and the liquidation of its assets. Both are considered some of the key aspects which shaped the West German trade unions' strategies. I decided not to provide an account of the tumultuous episodes surrounding the disbanding of the FDGB because this story has already been thoroughly researched by other authors.<sup>1</sup> The legal and economic legacy of FDGB's assets is a crucial issue which has yet to receive its due attention. The amount of research that would have been necessary to properly reconstruct the events surrounding the liquidation of these assets raises doubts as to whether it could be told satisfactorily here. Furthermore it is a story without an end, as the fate of many of these assets (mainly buildings) is not yet decided. These reasons appeared sufficient to exclude this topic from the present analysis.

A third crucial issue not discussed in this work is the collective bargaining rounds in East Germany from July 1990 forward and the relationship of DGB trade unions to the privatization agency in charge of the sale of East German enterprises (*Treuhandanstalt*). It is not for a lack of interest in this rather tedious character of collective bargaining rounds that motivated this decision. An earlier draft of this dissertation project included a fifth part which would have been dedicated to collective bargaining and the *Treuhandanstalt*, between the years 1990 and 1993. It is rather a certain degree of realism on the author's part as to what could be accomplished within the framework of this study that ultimately led to the decision to eliminate this part altogether.

Finally, all sector-specific issues (specific to the situation in the shipbuilding industry, the chemical industry, etc.) are purposely neglected, as are issues relating to female employees, young workers and vocational training.<sup>2</sup> Again, these choices are somewhat spurious, as all these issues were part of unions' deliberations and strategies. As such, these topics should have found their appropriate place in this study. It is especially regrettable that the gender dimension could not be included. Despite all attempts, I was in the end not able to incorporate the gender issue in a way that would enhance the treatment of the core questions rather than lengthen and obscure it.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Weinert/Gilles 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For information on unions and the vocational training in 1989-90, see: Giraud 1999.

As so often in studies on the labor movement, the gender dimension is thus omitted with the justification that a specific study would be necessary. I am aware of the limits resulted from this failure to include such topics will have on the conclusions proposed herein.

## **1.2 The historiography on German labor in the revolution and reunification**

The second chapter highlights how the historiography discusses five issues that are central to the analysis developed in this work. The first issues concerns the writing of labor history today. The second issue involves the role of East German labor in the collapse of the GDR. The question of whether or not the West German trade unions were party to the events of 1989-90 is the third topic examined. An analysis of the literature on institutional transfer and how it can be integrated into this analysis is proposed later in the paper. Finally, various models for an integrated history of postwar Germany, i.e., the approach adopted here, are discussed.

### **1.2.1 Toward a global labor history, or why a dissertation on labor history in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

The “end of work” and the crisis in labor history

When I first arrived at the university in the mid-1990s, the debate over the “end of work” was in full swing. The radical segmentation of the labor markets and a manifold increase in the number of forms of employment status in the last fifteen to twenty years had produced deep qualitative mutations within western societies.<sup>3</sup> The repercussions of these mutations can be observed in an increase of insecurity and instability in relation to employment.<sup>4</sup> The situation had also generated worldwide best-sellers in which pessimistic visions of the future of western societies were detailed. In his essay published around this time, Jeremy Rifkin had predicted that a loss of up to 40% of all jobs by the year 2000 would split American society in two groups: people without jobs and people forced to work up to 60 hours a week.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Castel 1995.

<sup>4</sup> “Instability” is an unsatisfactory translation of the French “précarité”. The use of “prekär” by German social scientists is not rare although the translation remains criticized.

<sup>5</sup> Rifkin 1995.

At the opposite end of the best-sellers' lists, many studies in social sciences argued that western societies were in fact going through a "paradigmatic rupture". Since no later than industrialization, the concept of "work" had been the main factor in the organization of western societies. Work had locked, managed, employed and distributed people in space and time. It had defined the main social conflicts.<sup>6</sup> This no longer seemed to be the case. Work had "been objectively displaced from its status as a central and self-evident fact of life." As a consequence, it had even lost "its subjective role as the central motivating force in the activity of workers."<sup>7</sup> Hence, new forms of work had produced mutations in the nature and contours of social conflicts as well. The development of "new social movements", distinct from the "old" labor movement, confirmed at the same time that this argument had merits of its own.<sup>8</sup>

Despite focusing on the past, history did not remain untouched by this evolution. The "paradigmatic rupture" induced in social sciences by the decrease in employment rates found its corollary in a reassessment of some of the basic assumptions of traditional labor history. Labor historians became interested in the longer development toward this "long-term shift in standards and values" that now appeared to have been successfully completed by western societies with the displacement of work from its former central position.<sup>9</sup> By the 1990s, the broad field of labor history had entered a period of crisis.<sup>10</sup> "Is labor history dead?", asked Rae Frances and Bruce Scates (1993). Their uncertainty on the future of the discipline was no longer shared by most of their colleagues, who seemed to have buried it for good, as Verity Burgmann illustrated in "The Strange Death of Labor History" (1991).

There were additional reasons for the growing skepticism toward labor history in the 1990s. One was the "metamorphosis of the worldwide political constellation". This expression, borrowed from Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen, refers to a new context marked by the exhaustion of the "spirit of the 1960s", the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the programmatic crises experienced by social-democratic parties. This political metamorphosis redirected students and academics toward other fields of historical research. Still, the crisis of labor history in the 1990s cannot be attributed solely to external factors, such as the "end of work" and a new political context. Factors linked to the scientific evolution in the field have contributed their fair share in instigating this crisis.

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<sup>6</sup> Gagnon 1996, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Offe 1985, pp. 147-148.

<sup>8</sup> Brand 1987.

<sup>9</sup> I draw on the explanations provided by Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen (1999), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Van der Linden 1993; Berlanstein 1993; Terry 1994.

Two internal factors for the crisis of labor history can be identified in particular. One concerns the fragmentation of the field. The numerous studies in labor history made since the 1970s have constantly overlapped with other disciplines. Among those disciplines, Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen identify “women’s history, urban history, agrarian history, cultural anthropology, folklore, social economics, the history of technology, historical government theories, industrial relations, the history of law”. This overlap pushed one to the “realization that a cohesion of content is lacking.”<sup>11</sup> This opening up to the methods and findings of these disciplines has as it turned out made it seemingly impossible to create comprehensive and unified definitions of the objects and concepts of labor history. What should and should not be included under the term “labor”? Which tasks are accomplished by “workers” and which are not? Which societies can be described as “societies based on labor” and which cannot? To what extent does “wage labor” differentiate between industrialized and non-industrialized societies? Advances made in interdisciplinary fields challenged labor historians, who faced great problems in proposing comprehensive characterizations of “labor”, “workers”, “work-based societies” (*Arbeitsgesellschaften*) and even “wage labor”. Confronted by these difficulties, labor history studies simply refrained from generalizing in their findings in a way that allowed for a better understanding of the core objects and concepts of their own field.

The second internal factor for the crisis of the labor history related to the radical criticism of previous interpretative frameworks. The difficulty in proposing much-needed new approaches was magnified by decades of studies that opened the various shortcomings of the previous frameworks developed by Karl Marx and Max Weber to re-assessment, as were the works of classical liberal labor historians like Lujo Brentano and members of the academic left, such as Lucien Herr of the Ecole normale supérieure in France. According to van der Linden and Lucassen, these frameworks share a “very specific and restricted definitions of labor” and their limited account of “the consequences of labor relationships and related organizations”. The works produced or inspired by these old school labor historians share a lack of interest for “fuzzy and contradictory class locations (self-employment, indentured labor, etc.)” and for “conflicting and transnational identities (gender, ethnicity, etc.)”.<sup>12</sup> They also shared a limited temporal and spatial field of observation, mainly the western and European societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This narrow perspective had resulted *nolens volens* in normative, ethnocentric conclusions. The developments of innovative historical approaches since the 1970s,

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<sup>11</sup> Van der Linden/Lucassen 1999, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

especially in the different ramifications of cultural history, made all these shortcomings appear more glaring.

#### Writing labor history today: The project of a global labor history

Even in the short summary provided above, the critical state of labor history almost begs the question at this early point in the work how labor history can be written today. I believe the project of a *global labor history*, initiated around the turn of the century by historians at the International Institute for Social History of Amsterdam, is indeed an interesting and thought-provoking proposition in that respect.

The purpose of the global labor history project is to go beyond the observations made in Western European and North American industrialized societies and conceive comparative and transnational studies on pre-industrial periods and on African, Asian and South American civilizations.<sup>13</sup> The comparative and transnational perspective should allow for a better understanding of how different national labor movements reacted to international structural developments. It is of special interest to labor organizations (trade unions and political parties) founded as international organizations. It aims to integrate into comprehensive concepts various realities observed in regions that do not belong to the Western Hemisphere. The so-called crisis of “normal labor relations” which, in most countries, was never the norm, is for instance criticized.<sup>14</sup> Another of its main goals is to incorporate the gender- and work-related numerous issues in a more effective manner than tradition labor history has done. The objective of the global labor history is to integrate the results and generalize the propositions of labor history studies, in a way that allows labor to take its “proper and important place in general history and in social sciences.”<sup>15</sup> In that respect, the revisions initiated in Amsterdam regarding the field of labor history takes its rightful place among other attempts to solve the great puzzle known in history departments as the “problem of synthesis”.<sup>16</sup>

The present work is not an essay on global labor history, as it is not a comparative study and does not adopt a transnational perspective. Yet the definition of labor movements and the core questions posed by the global labor history are fundamental elements of this study.

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<sup>13</sup> Van der Linden 2002. See the following studies: Scholliers/Schwarz 2003; Elmhirst/Saptari 2004 and the special issue of the *International Review of Social History* 49/12 on “Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements: Framing Protest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America” (December 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Van der Linden 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Van der Linden/Lucassen 1999, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> One of the seminal articles on the “problem of synthesis” in labor history is: Brody 1980.



One of the main objectives of labor history is, obviously, to study labor movements. Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen define labor movements as: “(i) groups of wage earners that attempt to realize certain (ii) wishes and demands through (iii) methods of action, possibly in (iv) a sustained organizational framework – and who may use (v) a broader ideology to justify their actions.”<sup>17</sup> Simply reduced to an ensemble of collective projects by wage earners, labor movements appear to be a more extensive social phenomenon than usually conceded by social scientists in other fields. This broad understanding of labor movements (i and ii) allows and requires that they be approached using a multiplicity of questions and methodologies. A strong preference, however, is shown for studies on the forms of action and organizations (iii). The refusal to overly restrict the criteria (“*possibly* in a sustained organizational framework”, “who *may* use a broader ideology to justify their action”) also allows the researcher to incorporate forms of workers’ actions often not identified with labor movements, i.e., those of a more informal nature. Such a definition of labor movements necessarily focuses on the multiple combinations of public and private strategies by workers directed toward defending their interests. It invites the researcher to highlight how political and economic conditions influence these combinations. This definition of labor movements is crucial for the analysis of the defense of workers’ interests in the GDR elaborated on in the second part of this work.

The global labor history tackles labor movements’ organizational history with (no less than) four “core questions”: how does one define the origin or emergence of labor organizations? What factors explains the pattern of growth and development of labor organizations? What ideas and philosophies do labor movements promote? Why do individual workers join labor organizations?<sup>18</sup> The study of the encounter of labor movements from both Germanies in 1989-90 offers interesting clues for answering the first three of these questions.

Critics have stressed the difficulties of including such a divergent program under the single banner of global labor history. On the one hand, according to their observation, the project is sustained by a handful of historians, most of whom have been active for decades in the networks associated with the International Institute of Social History. Their argument, in essence, is that the limited amount of work that these resolute defenders of labor history have performed makes the quest for a “truly global labor history” (Marcel van der Linden) seem like a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> These questions are derived from John T. Dunlop’s seminal essay from the late forties titled: “The Development of Labor Organizations: A Theoretical Framework”, in: Richard A. Lester and Joseph Shister (eds), 1948, *Insights into Labor Issues* (New York: Macmillan), pp. 163-193, 163, quoted in: Ibid., p. 20. These views are still considered valid by the initiators of the global labor history.

distant reality.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it has been underlined that initial attempts at “globalizing” labor history appear rather meek in comparison with the fine research program that have been developed. The gender dimension is still said to be insufficiently incorporated. Critics also argue that, despite the inclusion of a broader temporal and spatial perspective, labor history remains unable to renew the basic concepts and objectives forged through studies of industrialized Western societies. If its diagnosis on the shortcomings of traditional labor history hold true, the global labor history approach would seem incapable of proposing a cure to these ills.<sup>20</sup>

There is an implicit connection between this study and the project of a global labor history. For instance, the depiction of extremely individualized methods of defending workers’ interests in the GDR should attract the interest of historians comparing how different political and economic conditions determine how workers’ interests are defended. But the connection to the global labor history project is implicit because the findings contained herein are not discussed from this perspective. If labor history has yet to overcome its current crisis, the global labor history program clarifies the methodological problems at issue, suggests interesting new avenues to explore and offers the necessary tools to begin the quest.

### **1.2.2 East German labor in the collapse of the GDR and the East German Revolution: Actors or spectators?**

If humans were divined with nine lives like cats, it might theoretically be possible for a person to go through a sizable number of monographs, essays, articles and reports dedicated to the final days of the GDR. If, as part of this hypothetical experiment, this avid reader were asked about the role played by workers in the events, his or her first reaction would very likely be one of silence. Could any other reaction be expected? The topic of workers and their role in events is absent from most literature dedicated to the outburst of popular discontent in the GDR in 1989. What role could be played by an actor not even mentioned in the credits? After this initial surprise, our diligent test subject would now very likely answer that “workers” had not contributed to the fall of the GDR regime. As was the case with other groups in East German society (e.g., homosexuals, the aged, twins, etc.), the specific realities of wage labor have not found their way into the events of 1989-1990. Speaking as an expert on literature of the collapse of the GDR, our human guinea pig could come to no other but to state that

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<sup>19</sup> Hüttner 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Welskopp 2004.

the workers indeed played no role and would obviously suggest we shift the discussion to a more central aspect of the topic.

Such an experiment is of course impossible. In light of that fact, how could one possibly support such a claim that workers are absent from the bulk of contributions on the East German events in 1989-1990? Should one compile and submit a page-long list of studies that make *no* reference to workers? That would make for a rather dull read. I therefore ask the reader to accept the argument as axiomatic. It is the author's personal conclusion based on his readings and seminars he has attended on the history of the *Wende* and reunification. This axiom forms the basis for the following discussion. Its function is to stress how the debates described hereinafter takes its place on the margins of the historiography on the fall of the GDR.

However, the question of why workers did not play a role in the events of 1989-90 has been examined in different studies. In one way, they form the corollary of the axiomatic remarks made previously, and can be seen as their justification as well. Different dimensions of this alleged lack of participation are hinted at. The passivity observed on GDR's shop floors at the end of the 1980s might explain why the workplace had become an unlikely scene of political mobilization and action.<sup>21</sup> Case studies were said to reveal only minor or insufficient attempts by East German workers to reform the structures for defending their interests.<sup>22</sup> The inability of opposition groups with a keen interest in the fate of the labor movement – e.g., the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IUG), the United Left (VL) and certain elements within the New Forum (NF) - to win over large numbers of workers to their cause, was also highlighted.<sup>23</sup>

The ultimate confirmation of the non-existent role of labor in the events of 1989-90 would seem to be furnished by East German opposition leaders themselves, who portray the upheaval as a "revolution after business hours" (Revolution nach Feierabend).<sup>24</sup> The expression was used to stress distinct points, but always referred to the lack of strike action and the fact that most demonstrations were held in the evening or during the weekends. Wolfgang Thierse employed it to call for the rejection of industrial action by many workers. A "very German way" to conduct a revolution, he said.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Reichel 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Kädtler/Kottwitz 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Jander 1996.

<sup>24</sup> See the recollection of Democratic Awakening's activist Margot Friedrich (1991), which uses the expression as title.

<sup>25</sup> "Revolution machen wir nach Feierabend – Gespräch mit Wolfgang Thierse in Ost-Berlin", *express*, 12/89, pp. 4-5, quote p. 5.

Social-democrat activist Richard Schröder (from the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SDP) uses this expression in his call for participants to respect the same level of order that prevailed at the evening gatherings.<sup>26</sup> The "revolution after business hours" characterizes the 1989-90 events in a light that underlines labor's lack of a role in events.

Another frequent characterization of the East German revolution seeks to stress the disconnect that existed between workers and the events on the ground: the "revolution of consumers". This expression suggests that there are two types of revolutions: the "revolution of producers" and the "revolution of consumers". The desire of the people to move to West Germany and enjoy a level of service quality and material comfort comparable to that of their West German brethren did play a key role in 1989-90. Certain authors have argued that these considerations were of little consequence in the radical transformation of the conditions of production and had much more to do with consumerism. For those authors, the *Wende* and reunification basically boil down to a "revolution of consumers".<sup>27</sup>

The concept of a "revolution of consumers" is implicitly and explicitly discussed at length in the second part of this work. As it will become apparent, I refute this argument in the case of the East German revolution. Without going into great detail here, I shall nonetheless state the reasons for my reservations as to the heuristic value of the concept. I truthfully doubt that the East German demonstrators who shouted "We are the people!" made a distinction between production stoppages that represented a threat to their pay and the lack of consumer goods. Would they have had any reason to draw such distinctions? Shouldn't their experience have led them instead to view both phenomena as the consequence of the same economic problems? The distinction between "revolution of producers" and "revolution of consumers" remains problematic: a) because producers and consumers are the same persons, b) because wages and consumption are mutually dependent, and, finally, c) because in the GDR conflicts relating to issues of production or to consumption opposed working people to the regime.

Until now, different arguments were recalled that support the hypothesis that workers remained on the sidelines during the East German revolution. The 1999 study by the American sociologist Linda Fuller, titled *Where Was the Working Class? Revolution in Eastern Germany* constitutes the most comprehensive contribution to this hypothesis. The arguments developed in her book deserve special attention in our discussion.

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<sup>26</sup> "Wende. Wir waren doch keine Kasperletheater", *Berliner Zeitung*, November 5, 1999, internet edition: <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/1999/1105/politik/0074/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Schroeder (Wolfgang) 2000, pp. 113-117.

Where was the working class?

The starting point of Fuller's analysis is her characterization of the East German class structure as divided into two main classes: workers and intelligentsia. The former included blue and white-collar workers; the latter, state officials, party members, managers, and intellectuals. The East German revolution, in the eyes of Fuller, was propelled forward by one group within the intelligentsia: the intellectuals. It was, in her words, a conflict within the ruling class, "a struggle that occurred largely between two segments of the intelligentsia – one defending the status quo and the other determined to overthrow it."<sup>28</sup> The other class, i.e., the working class, were not party to this struggle. Fuller's story of the East German revolution is also a story of the "non-involvement of workers".

This depiction of the events of 1989-90 as a "revolution of intellectuals" is frequently espoused in historiography. It places the focus on the role played by authors, artists, scientists, students, and priests, and on their over-representation in the citizens' movement. It stresses the importance of theatres and universities as key venues for popular protest.<sup>29</sup> But whereas most advocates of this argument are satisfied with this interpretation of the revolution, Fuller is critical of the inability of the intellectuals to bridge the gap that separated them from the working class.<sup>30</sup> Years of little or no contact between the groups would not be easily overcome. On the one hand, explains Fuller, intellectuals did not understand the realities faced by workers and cultivated certain prejudices against them. They saw workers as being driven by materialistic considerations, as fundamentally apolitical, unable to think for themselves, unwilling to inform themselves, and uninterested in principles such as democracy and freedom, the main objects of their protest.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, she continues, workers looked suspiciously at the intellectuals' movement as just another struggle for power between the ruling elite. They did not attach themselves to a protest which they felt was not theirs. Fuller tones down her argument by presenting a few examples of workers who felt empowered by the revolutionary spirit and its growing presence at the workplace.<sup>32</sup> All in all, however, these remained exceptions to the rule. For Fuller, it is the failure of intellectuals to reach workers that resulted in the failure of the East German revolution, and hence led to reunification.

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<sup>28</sup> Fuller 1999, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Brown 1991, Randle 1991, Reich 1992. Jeffrey Kopstein (1996, footnote 1) underscores that this interpretation also implicitly describes most of the democratization studies on Eastern Europe.

<sup>30</sup> For another type of critical assessment of the role of the intellectuals in 1989-90, which seek to support their ill-informed pretension of leading the mobilization and reform the GDR, see: Torpey 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Fuller 1999, pp. 98-100.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

Fuller's criticism of the East German intellectuals finds common ground in the research conducted by a group of sociologists headed by Detlef Pollack in Leipzig. The "masses", according to their conclusions, appeared only at the margins of the citizens' movement's considerations. The working population was occasionally seen as the "target of political activity", more often, however, as an obstacle to sound reform.<sup>33</sup>

"Where Was the Working Class?" had remained a question not posed in the literature on the East German revolution. Linda Fuller is due proper credit for bringing the issue to the fore and presenting such a convincing argument in response. Her argumentation, however, has been criticized.

The political scientist Gareth Dale in particular has directed his criticisms towards Linda Fuller's methods and conclusions. He dedicates an entire chapter in one of his books to disputing them.<sup>34</sup> In a nutshell, his analysis is twofold. Firstly, he questions Fuller's depiction of the East German class structure as dividing into two disparate groups, with the intelligentsia on the one side and the workers on the other. The intelligentsia, he states, did not constitute one ruling bloc. Expanding on the work of the sociologist Günter Erbe, he highlights several important distinctions within this group, especially between the *nomenclatura* and the intellectuals. The former was distinguished from the latter through its decision-making authority, its relation to property, as well as its control over resources, investments, and the production process in general.<sup>35</sup> But Dale distinguishes between subgroupings within the intellectual community as well. He depicts this group as torn between different proposals and philosophies. Some intellectuals had obviously "more to lose than their chains" and assiduously bowed to authority. They enjoyed the privileges afforded them by their position and defended the regime.<sup>36</sup> They certainly fit into Fuller's depiction of intellectuals as one component of the ruling class. Others, however, were constantly in conflict with the authorities. Their living and working conditions forced them into the role of dissidents, however "of a kind that sought to achieve change through negotiation." Dale depicts the political stance of these intellectuals as an attempt to mediate between the top and bottom strata of the East German society, as "seeking a balance between order and reform". They also cultivated the myth that "the interests of ruling and working classes can be 'properly reconciled' within the framework of a market economy, a notion that found embodiment in the then fashionable discourse on 'civil soci-

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<sup>33</sup> Pollack et al. (eds.) 1992, pp. 48-50.

<sup>34</sup> Dale 2005, chapter 9.

<sup>35</sup> Dale (ibid., p. 185) refers to: Günter Erbe, 1982, *Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz in der DDR* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag), p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> Dale 2005, p. 173.

ety".<sup>37</sup> Despite this criticism, Dale refuses to identify this second group of intellectuals with the first.

The second aspect of Dale's critique of Linda Fuller's approach concerns the thesis of "workers' non-involvement in the revolution". He rejects this altogether. He stresses that Fuller's opinion on workers' lack of interest in political issues is based on interviews conducted in... 1988, in remote cities like Bernau and the surrounding area, as well as Berlin. Her sample of workers' attitude toward the state power is not representative of the situation in southern industrial cities like Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz), the locations of the largest popular mobilizations. The apathy she noted in 1988 had disappeared one year later, explains Dale. His main argument is based on math:

Between August 1989 and April 1990, 2,600 public demonstrations and over 300 rallies took place, as well as over 200 strikes and a dozen factory occupations. The largest three of the 2,600 demonstrations attracted well over 1 million people. No accurate figures exist for the total number of participants in demonstrations and public protests. That it was several million is indisputable. One researcher has estimated the figure at over 5 million. Yet there were only 1.6 million graduates in the land. Even had they all mustered on the streets in long and learned processions, intellectuals would still have comprised only a minority of the crowds.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, if intellectuals had initiated the protest, it was the workers who swelled the ranks of the demonstrators. They have been the dynamic element in the mass popular mobilization. Dale also points to some studies, which countered the widely held assumption about the dominance of intellectuals in the protest movement. For instance, the survey of the origins and motives of the Leipzig demonstrators by Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern concludes that people with a university degree reported the lowest rate of participation at the demonstrations – lower than any category of worker.<sup>39</sup> Dale concludes: "Workers were not only involved, but played the decisive part in toppling the regime."<sup>40</sup>

The restoration of the balance of accounts away from one that overemphasized the role of the intellectuals is welcome. Dale's counter-argument that the East German revolution was a genuine workers' revolution might come as a surprise and it has not been without its critics. The historian Gary Bruce believes that Dale's assertion is undermined by the author's failure to assess the role of street demonstrations in bringing about the collapse of the GDR. "If East

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>39</sup> Id. Dale refers specifically to Opp/Voss/Gern 1993, p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

Germany was toppled due more to regime implosion than revolution from below, the role of workers in the process may not be as significant as Dale suggests."<sup>41</sup>

Or maybe the working class was there after all?

The question of whether the end of the GDR was caused by an implosion or a revolution is one of the most hotly debated issues in the historiography on East Germany. I have used both concepts so far, without specifying their exact meaning. Implosion implies longer terms factors in the crisis, for instance, of an economic nature. These reached a climax in 1989, and brought about the collapse of the regime. Revolution stresses the role of the popular mobilization in the events.<sup>42</sup> Gary Bruce suggests that if the end of the GDR corresponds to an implosion, the contribution of the mass mobilization of the working population was limited. This assertion is open to qualification. Studies defending the implosion theory, as well as those defending the revolution theory, argue that the part played by workers in these phenomena was crucial.

Academic works highlighting the role of workers in 1989-90 are rare in literature. I again will stress this point prior to discussing it, with the goal of underlining how the pages devoted to the subject in this chapter do not truly reflect their actual place in the historiography. Be that as it may, many authors have challenged the dominant theory of the non-involvement of workers in the fall of the GDR and we shall take a closer look at their arguments now.

The story of the regime's implosion as a result of dynamics at the workplace is narrated by Peter Alheit and Hanna Haack (2004). Their study on the working class milieu in Rostock's Neptune Shipyards during the early years of the GDR is captivating. Building on their case analysis, the authors depict the revitalization and consolidation of working class milieus in East Germany, which, they argue, was more pronounced than in West Germany after World War II.<sup>43</sup> The suppression of independent structures of interest representation by the regime led this revitalized working class to rapidly develop spheres of autonomy. This autonomy had its main expression in informal and formal wage negotiations between workers and managers. The introduction of workers' brigades after 1953 institutionalized these practices and increased worker autonomy, argue Alheit and Haack. The centrally planned economy made company managers heavily reliant on an extended workforce. As a result, the scales of the

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce 2006.

<sup>42</sup> In favor of the implosion thesis, see: Joas/Kohli 1993. In favor of the revolution thesis, see: Zwahr 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Alheit/Haack 2004, chapters 1-3.



balance tipped more often than not in favor of the workers. Workers' brigades also gave them the power to prevent any major rise in production quotas, new methods of work organization and further compulsory vocational training programs. This would form the basis of a "counter-culture of workers".

The second thesis presented by the authors concerns the consequences of this resulting autonomy, mainly demonstrated by these workers' brigade. On the one hand, the wage autonomy undercut company profitability and ultimately led, on a national basis, to the erosion of GDR's economic foundation. On the other hand, worker autonomy proved to be an effective deterrent against the essential modernization of the country. The impact of worker autonomy, according to Alheit and Haack, was a sustained process of economic destabilization, initiated in the country's early years, which ultimately led to its fall at the end of the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> While "workers" were supposed to be the ruling class in the GDR, their autonomy ultimately served to hasten its collapse.<sup>45</sup>

These provocative theories do not meet with universal approval. Peter Hübner, one of the foremost authorities on East German labor, rejects an argument which ultimately implies that the dictatorship of the party and a centralized economy would have worked, if only workers had been more amenable to change. The story of the fall of the GDR, Hübner reminds the reader, is also the story of its longevity. Other institutional and economic factors, that were later to arise, explain why the GDR lasted until and ultimately collapsed in 1989.<sup>46</sup> In his work, Hübner stresses the importance of the political upheavals of 1961 and 1971 in GDR's labor history.<sup>47</sup>

Another, less straightforward, variant on the role of workers in the collapse of the GDR is proposed by Jeffrey Kopstein. His argument focuses on the "long-term capacity of otherwise powerless workers to immobilize the regime through nonpolitical acts of everyday resistance." By this, he means work slow-downs, employee absenteeism and other forms of worker protest against the regime's efforts to increase productivity. This resistance resulted into relatively high wages in relation to relatively low productivity rates, weak labor discipline and over-employment. East German workers have constantly been able to render ineffective the new methods of labor discipline tested by the regime over the years and ultimately "under-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Hübner 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Hübner 1995, 1999b.

mined any hope of meaningful economic reform."<sup>48</sup> This conflicting dynamic was crucial in the economic decline and the implosion of the East German regime.

Up to this point, his argument shares much in common with that of Alheit and Haack. But Kopstein is more cautious in his arguments, and depicts workers' resistance as a necessary, albeit insufficient, factor in itself to cause the fall of the GDR. Despite their "virtual veto power over wages, prices, and production quotas," he writes, workers "did not possess an outright stranglehold on the East German economy".<sup>49</sup>

Kopstein supplements his analysis of the GDR's economic decline with a study of the mid-ranking regional party secretaries. He shows how their constant recourse to "campaigns" to stimulate greater productivity served less to solve the severe economic problems than to reaffirm their position as intermediaries. Kopstein illustrates how regional party secretaries, caught between the constraints of centralized planning and labor resistance, had an interest in perpetuating the economic crisis. They had become the actors in a political theater preventing "alternative ways of conceiving the GDR's economic problems."<sup>50</sup> Their activities devoted to preserving their own political power contributed to the collapse of the regime. Jeffrey Kopstein thus depicts the fall of the GDR as a collapse, largely, though not exclusively, caused by workers' resistance at the workplace.

Other authors nevertheless continue to stress on the role of workers in the fall of the GDR, but they depict this process as a revolution and not a collapse. The contributions of the Berlin sociologist Renate Hürtgen deserve particular mention here. Her work is discussed in the second part of this work. Different arguments have been put forward to support the theory of the revolutionary contribution of workers to the fall of the GDR.

One such postulation concerns the precursors to the revolution in the second half of the 1980s. As Dirk Philipsen and others have shown, the story of the East German revolution is not the story of a spontaneous uprising.<sup>51</sup> Many of these early signs appeared at the workplace. Hence, a growing conflict potential emerged between workers and authorities at the workplace in the years preceding the revolution.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kopstein 1996, p. 391. Studies on the evolution of wages in the GDR can be seen as confirming many of Kopstein's arguments. See for instance: Bust-Bartels 1980, Vollmer 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Kopstein 1997, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>51</sup> Philipsen 1993.

<sup>52</sup> See the long discussion between East German workplace activists of the late 1980s in: Hürtgen/Gehrke 2001.

Furthermore, the desire of workers to halt the downward tendencies in living and working conditions, the underlying cause behind these tensions between workers and management at the workplace, was crucial in 1989-90. It was the impetus for the exodus to West Germany, the popular mobilization, street protests and, ultimately, reunification.<sup>53</sup> Signs of political forms of protest had also reappeared in workplaces in 1989, after years of dormancy.<sup>54</sup>

Another argument rejects the claim that little happened at East German workplaces during the revolution. If the opposition was not present in most enterprises, there were several major exceptions to this, where whole groups of workers joined the New Forum or Democratic Awakening.<sup>55</sup> Political discussion also occurred with great frequency at the workplace during those months. The revolutionary spirit of the street did not stop at the factory gates, as attempts at increasing workers' say at work and reshaping the mechanisms of interest representation were not unheard of.<sup>56</sup> Major strikes, and even a few calls to general strikes, were recorded, after years of relative inactivity.<sup>57</sup> If one includes workers' participation at the demonstrations, it is difficult to speak in overall terms of the non-involvement of labor in the East German revolution.

The authors who stress these phenomena refuse to view the manifestations of workers' participation as mere inferior indicators, or attendant effects of a revolution otherwise initiated by intellectuals. They rather suggest a synergy between the street and the workplace. But do this synergy and signs of worker participation together add up to a workers' revolution? More specifically: to what extent did attempts at reshaping the structures of interest representation take hold on East German shop floors? We generally identify strong workers' movements in the Eastern Bloc with far-reaching attempts to sweep away the official trade unions and replace them with new, independent organizations. Such a broad movement for transformation never occurred in the GDR in 1989-90. Can this fact be reconciled with the claim that it was the workers who led the revolution? After all, no narrative of the East German revolution that took this standpoint has been proposed to date. Is the characterization of the East German revolution as a workers' revolution not an inflated view of their role in the events? This question has yet to be answered for lack of a narrative incorporating labor into a general history of the revolution.

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<sup>53</sup> Timmer 2000, pp. 90-112; Zatlin 1994.

<sup>54</sup> Stolle 2001, pp. 95-97.

<sup>55</sup> Gehrke 2001a, p. 228.

<sup>56</sup> See the numerous sources published in: Hürtgen/Gehrke 2001. The 120 documented cases are analyzed in the second part of this work.

<sup>57</sup> Gehrke 2001b.

Another issue which I believe requires further research in order to emphasize the role of workers relates to the precise degree of autonomy enjoyed by this group throughout the history of the GDR (identified as a factor of collapse) and the part it played in the revolution.

All of these arguments and questions are examined and discussed in the second part. The question as to how labor can be integrated into a narrative of the revolution and reunification is a central target of the analysis laid out here. To accomplish this task, I shall integrate a dimension which is (almost) completely absent from the works cited, namely the activities of the West German trade union movement. In the author's opinion, this is indispensable in understanding the role played by workers and labor-related issues in 1989-90.

### **1.2.3 The West German trade unions in the revolution and reunification: A supporting role in act two**

The use of theater analogies to introduce the debates on the participation of the East German labor to the events of 1989-90 (actors or spectators) can also be carried forward to the discussion of the politics of West German trade unions. On this issue, however, literature is not divided into two opposing camps. On the contrary, a striking level of consensus is to be found on the point of where the West German trade unions were during the "play" of the fall of the GDR and reunification. In the first act (revolution), they were observing the play from backstage. In the second act (reunification), they had a non-speaking role and were only briefly at centerstage. Their entry did not represent any major break in the plot, but rather announced its dénouement. The presence on stage of the West German trade unions confirmed the conclusion that the audience had come to expect.

This is, transposed in theatrical metaphors, how literature has depicted the role of the West German trade unions in 1989-90: a minor role in the great drama of reunification, i.e., support for the application of the West German legal and economic system in the eastern German territories at the eleventh hour. The reader may be somewhat taken aback to see a doctoral candidate staking the claim that the entire historiography on a specific subject can be reduced to one or two simple hypotheses. Consensus is rare in such fields prone to debating every minor detail. If several authors examine the same topic by posing a completely different set of questions, how could they possibly come to the same answers? The risk is high that the readers may view this claim of consensus on the historiography as not worthy of the academic pretense of this work.

However the case may be, I nevertheless want to attempt the exercise. The point I would like to stress is not that all contributions to the politics of the West German trade unions in 1989-90 state the "same facts". Different issues have, in fact, been tackled by different authors. My objective is rather to show that these studies share a common interpretation of the political context in which the West German trade unions acted. As a result, their conclusions can easily be incorporated into one single narrative on the politics of the West German trade unions regarding the revolution and reunification. It is with this in mind that I would like point to the existence of consensus on this issue in literature.

The Confederation of German Trade Unions: A step behind events of the East German revolution

The first comprehensive analysis of the politics of the trade union members of the Confederation of the German Trade Unions (DGB) in 1989-90 would also be one of the most influential. Most of the key ideas that allow one to speak of one common approach to the topic in literature are to be found in this book. Contrary to most of the studies that borrowed the same analytical fulcrums, here the authors explicitly define the interpretation of the reunification process that underlies their assessment of the DGB unions' strategy. For these reasons, the book by Manfred Wilke and Hans-Peter Müller, entitled *Zwischen Solidarität und Eigennutz: Die Gewerkschaften des DGB im deutschen Einigungsprozess* (1991), should be cited first in this discussion. The treasure trove of information contained in this essay makes it an invaluable source of reference. It guides the reader throughout this work, though its fundamental hypotheses shall be refuted.

In the first chapter of their book, Wilke and Müller define the 1990 reunification as the extension of a "core state". The authors state that countries like Italy and Germany were united through the extension of core states, Piedmont and Prussia respectively. In that sense, the eastward expansion of the "core state" of the Federal Republic of Germany, or, the conversely, the entry of the East German Länder into the Federal Republic of Germany, does not represent a historical aberration. It is somewhat odd, however, that these authors should regard this "model" as the only available option for Germany in 1990. They do not detail the different phases, nor the considerations and tactics of East and West German actors that made reunification a process of West German expansion.. They strongly suggest that the purpose of the East German revolution from the outset had been the incorporation into the FRG, and that the territorial expansion of this core state was the only way to make reunification reality.

I find this explanation not fully sufficient. To depict reunification as *the* goal at the offset of the revolution in September 1989 and, additionally, to infer that the East German population was motivated by the incorporation into the Federal Republic is historical expediency. How the East German revolution evolved into the reunification movement has already been thoroughly analyzed. I do not believe it is necessary to go into these debates here. As will be made clear throughout the work, however, I think it is crucial to understand this evolution as a political process, consisting of many different phases. My interpretation of these events is influenced by the explanations of Karsten Timmer (2000), as my numerous references to his study indicate. Wilke and Müller's depiction of the East German revolution as a movement favorable to the incorporation into the Federal Republic of Germany may have corresponded to strong impressions left by events still recent in 1991. I doubt that it offers a satisfactory explanation of the complexity of the processes it purports to describe. Yet, this premise informs the analysis of Wilke and Müller and with it, the entire literature on the subject.

The product of such an interpretation will come as little surprise. Wilke and Müller's depiction of the strategies adopted by the DGB unions becomes the story of the failure of many of these unions to properly grasp the pro-unification inclinations of the revolution. The authors underline how many West German union leaders were thrown off balance by the "fall of socialism" and refused for months to accept the collapse of the GDR. They depict the DGB unions as lagging behind the political developments in 1989-90, as reluctantly revising their discourse and action to the reality on the ground (i.e., reunification) that they long refused to publicly admit. Unable to influence the course of the events, they remained "one step behind" the political developments during the entire period.

The main point illustrating the DGB unions' inability to move in step with the course of the developments was their late acceptance of reunification. Only after the total collapse of GDR state structures in March 1990, did the DGB unions finally overcome their initial displeasure with the prospect of reunification, and finally accept what had become inevitable. It would appear that the DGB unions had compensated for this delay in reaction only after they had finally started to act to expand their structures into the new *Länder*. The Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union certainly defended this option from the end of February 1990 onward, but unions like IG Metall waited until June to do likewise.<sup>58</sup> Because they boarded the moving train they call reunification rather late in the game, the DGB unions were unable to exert influence over its ultimate design.

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<sup>58</sup> Tiemann/Schmid/Löbner 1993.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the DGB, held in the midst of the unification process on May 20-25, 1990, is analyzed in similar terms. The West German trade unions specialists Hans-Hermann Hertle and Wolfgang Schroeder, for instance, state that the resolutions on reunification adopted by the delegates were small in number and detail the formulation thereof. The motions adopted called for a constitutional re-definition of Germany, i.e., for the application of Article 146 of the Federal Republic's Basic Law (Grundgesetz). Article 146 foresaw the adoption of a constitution by the German people. Among those speaking out against the use of this article, many East and West German politicians suggested it would be fully sufficient to invoke Article 23, which made allowances for the entry of German territories into the constitutional order of the Federal Republic of Germany. By the end of May 1990, at which time the DGB congress was held, the political pressure for invoking Article 23 was very strong. Although the DGB delegates had adopted resolutions stressing their opposition to Article 23 and their preference for Article 146, this was not indeed backed by any plan of action. It did not go beyond verbal censure, with little political consequence. The delegates also adopted multiple resolutions aimed at guaranteeing the same level of social security for all workers throughout Germany. These resolutions merely represented the first to offer supplementary proposals on how this objective might be achieved. Hertle and Schroeder portray these positions without an underlying agenda as a sign of the DGB's inability to go beyond formal declarations of principle and shape the reunification process according to its own set of priorities.<sup>59</sup>

The American political scientist David Patton also describes the DGB unions' reservations on reunification and their inability to influence its course. He does not, however, simply argue that the DGB unions were powerless in their own right, but speaks of Chancellor Kohl's ability to discredit all the proposals they supported.<sup>60</sup> The analysis is somewhat different, but the conclusion remains very similar.

#### The failure of the trade unions' Ostpolitik

What reasons could possibly explain why the DGB unions opposed reunification for so long and remained, even after this admission, unable to advance their agenda in the process? The ability of Helmut Kohl to ignore union proposals is one factor stressed by David Patton. Most analysts agree these difficulties can be put down to the active participation of the DGB unions

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<sup>59</sup> Hertle/Schroeder 1990.

<sup>60</sup> Patton 1993.

in the "second phase" of establishing contacts with the East German state. The second phase of the Ostpolitik was developed by Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1983, after the party went into opposition. The intensification of the contact policy with the GDR had its roots in the desire of the SPD to counter-balance the rise in East-West tensions taking place at the time with a policy aimed at safeguarding peace and security in Europe. Inevitably, such a policy of contact and dialogue placed great emphasis on relations within the official structures of the East German regime. Banking on contacts with the party of the German Socialist Unity Party (SED) as a guarantee of security, the SPD stated that any destabilization of the regime presented a potential threat to peace. Different analysts point to these basic principles of the "second Ostpolitik" in explaining the relative lack of collaboration between the SPD and the East German opposition in 1989 and the skepticism of many within the party leadership towards reunification.<sup>61</sup>

This framework of explanation is employed in the case of the West German trade unions as well. Throughout the 1980s, the DGB and its union members had been active supporters of the second phase of the Ostpolitik. They regularly met their East German counterparts at the Free Confederation of German Trade Unions (FDGB) and jointly established several types of collaboration, exchanges and common working groups. The inability of the DGB unions to come out in favor of deposing the East German regime and, by that fact, the FDGB in 1989-90, is said to have been the result of this year-long policy of contact. A widely-held argument suggests that, had the DGB unions attempted to collaborate with the East German opposition instead of maintaining contacts with the FDGB, this would have signified their implicit approval of the collapse of the regime and removed any specter of neutrality on the issues of reunification from the beginning of the revolution.<sup>62</sup> Activists from the East German opposition, reporting on their difficulties in obtaining the support of the DGB unions in 1989, appear to confirm this suspicion.<sup>63</sup>

Critical assessments of the second phase of the DGB's Ostpolitik many times go a step further and blame some of the DGB unions. These are accused of having compromised themselves by collaborating with the Eastern Bloc regimes and becoming the *tool* of these powers in West Germany. The Printing and Paper Industrial Union (IG Druck und Papier), which was later to merge with other DGB unions to form the IG Medien in 1989, is the target of particularly strong criticism. The refusal of this union at the beginning of the 1980s to support the fight of

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<sup>61</sup> Uschner 1991; Moseleit 1991.

<sup>62</sup> Seideneck 1991.

<sup>63</sup> Wilkens-Friedrich 1994.



the independent Polish trade union *Solidarnosc* is given as one clear example of its *instrumentalization*. The Printing and Paper Industrial Union's president at the time, Leonard Mahlein, downplayed the significance of the Solidarity movement, which he derided as reactionary and antisocialist, as allied of Pope John Paul II and American President Ronald Reagan.<sup>64</sup>

If the opinion that the DGB unions' Ostpolitik suffered from different shortcomings is indeed nearly universal, the allegation that some DGB unions had become instruments of the Eastern Bloc regimes is open to debate. It has been stressed that the contacts of the Printing and Paper Industrial Union, together with the FDGB and other trade unions from the Eastern Bloc, do not account for the inner developments of this union. The defense of the social and economic interests of the Printing and Paper Industrial Union was never negatively affected by these contacts.<sup>65</sup> In the author's view, this argument has its merit.

Finally, it should be stressed that many DGB union leaders in 1990 personally criticized their own inability to accept and assume a role in the reunification process. They also pointed to their high-level contacts with the East German FDGB and their lack of a proper understanding of the opposition groups in explaining this failure. The head of the Trade Union Education and Science, Dieter Wunder, highlighted this point with a play on words: the DGB unions have sat too long at the same table with FDGB head Harry Tisch (*Tisch*, of course, being the German word for table).<sup>66</sup> An important text by DGB head Ernst Breit demanded that the trade union members overcome any reservations they may have in regards to reunification and establish contacts with the East German opposition. Up to now, Breit wrote in March 1990, the reunification process has proceeded "without and against the opposition of the West German trade unions". This situation needs to be reversed, he went on to conclude.<sup>67</sup> Even IG Medien's president, Detlef Hensche, who was one of the union leaders accused of holding sympathies towards the East German regime, admitted at the same time that his union's refusal to support German reunification had been a mistake. This situation, he explained, resulted from IG Medien's (and the former Printing and Paper Industrial Union's) refusal to join the chorus of recriminations led by the conservative elites from the FRG and targeted at the GDR. This stance by his union was, in retrospect, incorrect and in need of revision, he stated at the beginning of March.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Wilke/Hertle 1992, with numerous documents.

<sup>65</sup> Fichter/Kurbjuhn 1993, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Dieter Wunder, "Zu lange mit Harry Tisch am Tisch gegessen", *Die Quelle*, 1/90, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Ernst Breit, "Deutsche Einigung – Ohne und gegen die Gewerkschaften?", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 3/90, pp. 129-132.

<sup>68</sup> "Wir wollten nicht ins gleiche Horn tuten wie Springer und Strauß", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 2, 1990.

## The necessary organizational expansion into eastern Germany

It might therefore seem as if one could only begin talking about the implementation of a strategy by the DGB unions from the moment where their actions became determined by the reunification process, i.e., from March 1990 forward. The preceding months could essentially be characterized by a lack of political vision, as the DGB unions would remain entangled in its misguided obligations of their *Ostpolitik*. This interpretation put forward in literature is corroborated by the DGB unions themselves, which would make it something resembling an official account of their own course of action, as early as 1990.

As the third part of this work shall make clear, I think it is important to describe the DGB unions' strategy prior to their shift to a pro-reunification stance from a positive angle, i.e., describe what it was rather than what it was not. I make no attempt to refute the notion of a fundamental shift in March 1990, but I do reject the assumption that the line taken previously could be labeled as indecisive based on compromises with the East German regime. Such a standpoint is overly determined by the issue of the reunification. This perspective was hardly conceivable before February/March 1990. At that time, when reunification had not yet been placed at the top of West Germany's political agenda, other considerations guided the DGB unions' strategy. I believe that an adequate description of what can be called the "first" and "second" strategies of the DGB unions puts their action in a different light. It ultimately leads one to reverse any assumptions on their lack of influence over the completion of reunification. To come back to the theater analogy proposed at the beginning of this discussion, I view the role played by the DGB unions in reunification as crucial to the process, and believe that the influence brought to bear by the unions is evident in the description of their "first strategy" and the reasons that brought about the shift.

But any discussions on this topic shall be reserved for later examination. This hypothesis is presented in greater detail in the next chapter and further expanded on in the third part. Literature, once again, is dominated by the view that the DGB unions' late conversion to reunification prevented them from setting the agenda in the process. As a consequence, they were left with no other choice but to do the inevitable, from a trade union perspective, and implement a policy of organizational expansion into eastern Germany.

The organizational expansion of the DGB unions can be interpreted as the adaptation of the invocation to Article 23 of the Basic Law on reunification. The state unification was accomplished by the entry of eastern Germany into the political, economic and constitutional order of the Federal Republic of Germany, whereas the merging of trade unions occurred by East

German workers joining West German unions and the establishment of the latter's structures in eastern Germany. Analysts depict this process of organizational expansion as one initiated and controlled by the DGB unions, but do however argue that it corresponded to the wishes of the East German workers.<sup>69</sup> The dissolution of the FDGB and its trade unions, by and large instigated on behalf of the DGB unions, would have occurred without significant opposition and conflict. The enlargement of DGB trade unions through the rejection of the East German organizations was a process "completely free and the wish of all actors".<sup>70</sup>

This interpretation is so dominant in the historiography that it has been for all intents and purposes implicitly suggested that the organizational expansion of the DGB unions concluded the program of the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions (IUG).<sup>71</sup> I do not endeavor to retell the story of the IUG, a minor union, in this work. I will explain, however, why I believe this proposition is misleading. The IUG was no doubt in favor of creating new trade unions in the GDR in addition to the restructured organizations based on the former FDGB. But the concept of trade union activities that it espoused was based on local, grass-roots democratic precepts.<sup>72</sup> It had little to do with the institution of worker representation as practiced by the DGB unions. In fact, IUG's conceptions drew more upon the "localist" and "syndicalist" traditions of the German labor movements, categorically rejected by the industry-specific West German trade unions. Furthermore, the IUG manifesto read by Heiner Müller to the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered at Alexander Platz on November 4, 1989, warned explicitly against any hijacking of the East German revolution by West German politicians and economic actors.<sup>73</sup> The allegations that the IUG promoted the expansion of the DGB unions, or that this enlargement bolstered IUG's fight for the establishment of independent trade unions in the GDR are, in my view, mistaken.

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<sup>69</sup> Schmitz/Tiemann/Löhrlein 1992, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Henneberger and Keller 1992, p. 186.

<sup>71</sup> This argument is clearly set out in: Kleinfeld 1999, p. 770. The implicit suggestion that the IUG's program had been implemented through the expansion of the DGB unions often is preceded by the inclusion of the history of the IUG into that of the extension of the DGB structures. See: Gill 1999, p. 74; Fichter and Lutz 1991.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Jander (1996) who wrote a book on the IUG, criticizes its leader for their "revolutionary romanticism".

<sup>73</sup> Hürtgen 2001 XXXXX. A personal anecdote might best express the point I am trying to make. When I asked Renate Hürtgen, founder of the IUG, her opinion on the theory that the IUG program was completed through the enlargement of the DGB unions, she could not hold back the laughter. She told me that she had been offered a position at the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union shortly after reunification. She had turned down the offer because the atmosphere at this DGB union's office in Berlin reminded her of the former FDGB.

The DGB unions' enlargement is depicted as a successful, basically collaborative process (opposition to the dissolution of the FDGB coming mainly from the many secretaries and GDR loyalists). It has been an organizational *tour de force*: within 6 months, union structures had been set up in eastern Germany and collective bargainings initiated. Michael Fichter and Maria Kurbjuhn try to give a more precise description of this enlargement process based on a system of classification. They distinguish, for instance, between legal avenues, DGB unions that founded new trade unions in the GDR, and those that merged with their East German counterparts.<sup>74</sup>

I will introduce and discuss the four types of expansion proposed in this system of classification in detail in the section 3.7. Let me stress for the time being that the author maintain certain doubts as to whether this information will truly contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics in place during the enlargement process at the DGB unions in 1990. It introduces distinctions where characteristics common to all four types - a process initiated in and controlled by DGB unions' headquarters in West Germany - are more significant. At the same time, it does not shed any new light on where the origins and roots of these variations lay and why different DGB unions followed different tacts in their expansion policy and not one single unified course. In the author's opinion, the reference to the strategy implemented by the DGB unions before March 1990 is absolutely necessary to understanding this last aspect. Someone looking to evaluate the different legal approaches adopted in the merger of trade unions – this issue has gained somewhat in importance with the fall in union membership since the 1980s – may find the classification of the different expansion processes of interest. In my opinion, its heuristic value in understanding of the eastward expansion of the DGB unions in 1990 is limited.

Processes presented from the point of view of their conclusion

Once again, the impression that literature leaves in regards to the role of the DGB unions in the revolution and reunification is one-sided, in spite of the plurality of issues under discussion. An abridged version of this story might look something like this. The Ostpolitik of the DGB unions resulted in their long-held refusal to accept the collapse of the GDR in 1989. Their close contacts with the regime prevented them from acting in strict accordance with the popular will, as they rejected reunification and, instead, promoted reforms within the East

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<sup>74</sup> Fichter and Kurbjuhn 1993.

German state and trade unions. With the main exception of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union, most of the DGB unions agreed to base their actions around the process of reunification only after it had become a de facto reality. This late conversion left the DGB unions with no alternative but to join the bandwagon on reunification, without any possibility of influencing its agenda. From March 1990 onward, the DGB unions gradually acted to expand their structures into the East German regions. The four types of expansion implemented by the DGB unions mirrored the entry of the new Länder in the Federal Republic along the lines of Article 23 of the Basic Law. The East German workers began joining the ranks of the DGB unions as an immediate effect of the revolution. This solution was approved by all actors involved.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, the processes described here are considered solely from the perspective of reunification. They are furthermore presented from the point of view of their conclusion impact, i.e., the narrative put forward in literature draws the shortest possible link between the outbreak of the East German revolution and the eastward expansion of the DGB unions. The result is, in the author's opinion, not a simplified but a simplistic explanation of the issues and processes at play. Crucial programmatic debates, e.g., the long and laborious debate over socialism, that shook the West German trade unions in 1989-90 and were part of their strategy reflections, are overlooked. Tensions and even conflicts with East German unionists are silenced. In the end, the literature on the subject would seem to suggest that the controlled expansion of the DGB trade unions was the only possible option in 1990, and that, somehow, none other existed. The French have a somewhat fatalistic and ironic expression that summarizes what, I believe, is how the literature published to date has presented the expansion of the DGB unions: *ce qui devait arriver arriva*. This work tries to challenge this interpretation by demonstrating that, as historians often say, things are not that simple.

#### **1.2.4 The transfer of industrial relations: A paradigmatic model for reunification**

The analysis on the West German trade unions' strategy during reunification suffers from significant shortcomings that call for re-evaluation. Another reason to proceed with such a re-assessment has its origins in multiple studies depicting German reunification as an institutional transfer. The studies considered above portray the East German revolution as motivated

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Kittner manages to give an even shorter version of this story! See the first five lines of: Kittner 1992, p. 33.

by the goal of incorporating the East German territories into the legal and economic order of the Federal Republic of Germany. Seen from this perspective, the DGB unions remained “outsiders” to the events - one could even say opposed to them – so long as they did not act to translating the reunification’s consequences on the field of worker representation: their organizational expansion. Only then, it would seem, did they act in unison with the East German popular movement.

Political scientists who view the reunification process as an institutional transfer propose a substantially different interpretation. They refuse to accept the ‘two-step’ explanation, according to which reunification was the manifestation of a previously held desire of the East German population. They instead regard reunification as the organization by West German federations and associations of an “ad hoc, big-bang institutional transfer” (Gerhard Lehbruch) from West Germany to the East German territories. It furthermore involved distributing the risks associated with the chosen course amongst these West German organizational actors.<sup>76</sup>

The assessment of reunification as an institutional transfer initiated in then West Germany allows for a dynamic and nuanced approach to the process. Researchers studying the institutional transfer point to a clash, or coming together, of different actors with different agendas. For instance, an investigation of different sectoral institutional transfers has clarified the different models of relationships between East and West German actors, ranging from cooperative to confrontational. The arguments presented on the origins of the institutional transfer, the West German association system (Verbändesystem), and the diverse interaction between actors from both countries throughout the process are two valuable contributions made by the institutional transfer approach. They are crucial for the analysis developed in this work.

If the author drew inspiration from the literature on institutional transfer, the time frame and the questions examined are broader than those considered in this work. The study on German institutional transfer views reunification as a long process, encompassing not only the legal aspects, completed in 1990, but also the way in which the institutions and norms were (more or less) adapted to the new East German context. I shall limit my research to the year 1990. In view of the facts presented above, the specific subject matter of this paper shall be the legal transfer of the West German labor law and institutions of industrial relations. Issues relating to how the newly transferred institutions performed in the first years post-reunification are not examined with. As will be made clear in section 3.6, I shall stress this distinction in talking about “legal extension” and avoiding the expression “institutional transfer”.

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<sup>76</sup> Wiesenthal 1995a, p. 20.

Most of the questions that are of interest to analysts researching institutional transfer do not specifically relate to German reunification. These have arisen within the larger theoretical debate on the persistence of the systems of norms and institutions, and whether or not such systems can be transferred under conditions and within contexts different from those that initially produced them. These debates shall not be discussed in this piece.<sup>77</sup> There is, however, one issue raised by analysts on the subject of the institutional transfer that is crucial to this work. It is the point that links these studies on institutional transfer and this work. This issue concerns the reasons behind the transfer of institutions that were themselves "obsolete". The goal is to satisfactorily answer the question of why no new and innovative institutional reforms were attempted in 1990, that in spite of the "unique nature" of the transfer process.<sup>78</sup>

Different answers have been proposed. The influence of institutional actors' agendas and the tendency of these institutional actors to oversimplify the difficulty involved in overcoming these new challenges, i.e., to interpret the original dilemma as a set of circumstances within the realm of standard practice, have been underlined.<sup>79</sup> Another answer suggests that it had less to do with the institutional routines and more to do with the logical attempt by West German actors to limit the degree of uncertainty that prompted them to favor the transfer of the institutions and norms of the Federal Republic of Germany to the new *Länder*.<sup>80</sup>

Some authors, among them Helmut Wiesenthal, consider both explanations persuasive and not mutually exclusive. Institutional constraints, the limit of uncertainty as well as other considerations, Wiesenthal explains, have influenced the actions of West German institutional actors. The key aspect for the study of German institutional transfer, according to him, is the autonomy of the West German institutional actors, and among those actors, he focuses on the associations. The autonomy of the West German associations explains how various considerations compelled them to plan the transfer to the new *Länder*. It clarifies why the level of modification to the East German context varied from sector to sector. It allows one to identify different types of interaction between West and East German actors.<sup>81</sup>

Helmut Wiesenthal's argument is not that the autonomy of the West German associations led to such a wide range of constellations that common trends cannot be identified. He defines the respective limits in the points of convergence and divergence that existed between the numer-

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<sup>77</sup> For information on the results of the analysis of the German institutional transfer for the neo-corporatist theory of actors, see: Thumfart 2002, pp. 340-345.

<sup>78</sup> Czada 1994, p. 247.

<sup>79</sup> The (neo-) institutionalist approach is developed by Gerhard Lehbruch. See: Lehbruch 1993.

<sup>80</sup> Wolfgang Renzsch develops this 'rational choice' approach. See: Renzsch 1994.

<sup>81</sup> Wiesenthal (ed.)1995a.

ous sectoral institutional transfers. I believe that the following three elements can be identified as factors of convergence.<sup>82</sup> Firstly, all institutional transfers were initially launched as processes excluding any specific adaptation to the East German context. Any adaptations to the new context (hence divergences between the different sectoral institutional transfers) came only after gaining initial empirical knowledge of the East German conditions on the ground.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, the strategy of rapid economic and political unification implemented by the federal government was thought of, at least in part, as a way to prevent any potential re-evaluation of the West German institutional order by the East and West German population. This government strategy supported the West German associations in their initial commitment to institutional transfer in its current, unmodified form. Finally, all institutional transfers resulted in a loss of influence by local actors in the restructuring of institutions in eastern Germany. Only later did relations between East and West German actors begin to take on their own character and vary from sector to sector. In some cases, West German actors maintained a rivalry with their East German counterparts, while in others, various forms of cooperation were developed. I cite these elements highlighted in the study of the institutional transfer in order to stress the following point. Of all the sectoral institutional transfers that were part of German reunification, Helmut Wiesenthal underlines the unique importance of the transfer of the system of industrial relations. This particular sectoral transfer was accomplished by the West German trade unions and employers' associations. Four central elements lend the transfer of the system of industrial relations its special importance. Firstly, industrial relations was among the first sectors of activity transferred to the GDR. Secondly, this particular transfer was to become (together with the ambulatory health system) the archetype for wholesale transfers, with no adaptations to the new context (even after other sectors had started to adapt to the new realities).<sup>84</sup> Thirdly, institutions and standards of industrial relations were essential for achieving the crucial objective of bringing working and living conditions in both east and west into line in a unified Germany, as well as for managing the social consequences of the economic reforms. Finally, the tense relations between trade union actors from both countries are depicted as the prototypical competitive interaction between East and West German actors, characterized by the domination of the latter and their ignorance of the East German realities on the ground.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> This is taken from: Wiesenthal 1995b; Wielgoths and Wisenthal 1995.

<sup>83</sup> Czada also defines the German reunification as a 'learning process' in which (some) West German actors learnt to adapt the institutions to the context of the new *Länder*. See: Czada 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Wiesenthal 1995b, pp. 26-27; Ettl and Wiesenthal 1994.

<sup>85</sup> Wielgoths and Wiesenthal 1995, pp. 301-308.



Hence analysts of institutional transfer observed how, in many respects, the transfer of industrial relations took on a paradigmatic quality for the achievement of the German reunification. It was, in the author's opinion, this observation, made in the course of studies on German reunification, that motivated Helmut Wiesenthal, Wilfried Ettl and Jan Wielgoths to devote special attention to the politics of the West German trade unions and employers' associations. In other words, it was not the review of the strategies and actions of the West German social partners in 1990 that led them to describe German reunification as a process of institutional transfer. It was, conversely, their interpretation of reunification as an institutional transfer that allowed them to discern the actual significance of the West German social partners to the reunification process.<sup>86</sup>

Wiesenthal, Ettl and Wielgoths make use of literature on the politics of the DGB unions presented in the previous section (1.1.3) in describing the transfer of industrial relations. This may appear somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, there was a genuine attempt on their part to demonstrate the importance of West German social partners in achieving German reunification, whilst, at the same time, these same authors refer to studies that would seem to defend, as far as West German trade unions are concerned, the opposite point of view. They do not however address this contentious issue. On the other hand, while their analysis of reunification enables them to highlight facts that were left at the margins of the debate for reasons unknown, their descriptions of the politics of the West German trade unions in 1990 remain somewhat shallow. Their approach should ultimately result in questions being raised as to the conclusions put forth in the literature on this topic. They are prevented from doing this by avoiding to propose a detailed description of the DGB unions' politics in 1990.<sup>87</sup> I believe that, as they lean too heavily on the studies cited in 1.1.3, Wiesenthal, Ettl and Wielgoths make certain factual errors in their argumentation in favor of their own hypotheses.

An example of this will now be introduced. (It shall be examined at greater length in the third part of this work.) Wiesenthal, Ettl and Wielgoths raise the issue of the agreement between the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and the Federation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), ratified on March 9, 1990. In this agreement, both West German social partners indicated their resolve to proceed with the transfer of the West German system of industrial relations to the GDR. The important point here is, of course, the date. Authors who highlight the fact that this transfer represented the will of the East German population stress

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<sup>86</sup> Ettl and Wiesenthal 1994, Wiesenthal 1995b, Ettl 1995, Wielgoths and Wiesenthal 1995.

<sup>87</sup> Ettl 1995 is a detailed description of the politics of the West German employers' associations but it does not allow for a re-evaluation of the literature on the politics of the DGB unions.

that this will was expressed in the results of the GDR elections held on March 18. Nine days is by no means a long period of time, but this undeniably indicates that the decision of the DGB and the BDA was not a reaction to the electoral results. Wiesenthal, Ettl and Wielgohs are absolutely right to view this agreement as a sign that the transfer of the West German system of industrial relations was based first and foremost on a decision of the West German social partners.

Their claim that Chancellor Helmut Kohl subsequently gave his “de facto” support to this decision is, according to my own research, incorrect.<sup>88</sup> Evidence pointing to this sequence of events (first the DGB/BDA agreement and then the de facto approval by the federal government), is not to be found in the literature cited by Wielgohs and Wiesenthal. \_This claim rather takes the form of a plausible scenario due to the lack of any information on the reaction of the federal government to this agreement. Further research on the contacts between the federal government, the DGB unions and the West German employers’ associations in 1990 should have provided them with the facts required to conclude that the events did not occur in the sequence they indicate. In this work, I present different and contrary evidence on the establishment of a tripartite consensus in favor of the transfer of the system of industrial relations, complemented by details of informal and formal meetings with representatives from the West German government, unions and employers’ associations in mid-February.

In spite of their interest in the politics of the West German social partners in 1990, Wiesenthal, Ettl and Wielgohs have not proposed an alternative narrative to the one discussed in subsection 1.1.3. However, any re-evaluation of this dominant theory requires a highly-detailed study of the politics of the West German trade unions during reunification from the vantage point they developed. This is one of the objectives of this work. As the perspective adopted here is determined by the study of the politics of labor organizations rather than the study of the transfer of institutions of industrial relations, I will refrain from using the expression institutional transfer. I instead refer to “legal extension” and “organizational expansion”. They basically equate to the transfer of the West German labor law and West German trade union structures. But whereas the concept of transfer can be understood as a process of importing institutions and standards by East German actors, “legal extension” and “organizational expansion” stress how the impetus for this action came from the West German social organiza-

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<sup>88</sup> Wielgoh and Wiesenthal 1995, p. 304. “Somit hatte der Staat den Arbeitsmarktparteien die Tarifautonomie auch für den neuen Handlungsraum konzidiert und ihnen durch Unterlassung eigener Aktivitäten de facto die Aufgabe übertragen, mit den Mitteln der Tarifpolitik zur Realisierung des propagierten Ziels gleicher Lebensbedingungen beizutragen.”

tions and the federal government. This more aptly corresponds to the story told in the third part.

### **1.2.5 Beyond the walls of academia: On the path towards an integrated history of post-war Germany**

The last issue in the review of topical literature concerns how the post-war history of Germany is being written more than fifteen years after reunification. The question raised deal with the treatment given to the forty years of the GDR. Must the history of GDR necessarily be considered as distinct and independent from that of the Federal Republic, thereby implying that historians of one state cannot write on the other? Is it necessary for one to juxtapose a *failed* East German history against a *successful* history of West Germany? Or should the history of both postwar states be merged, and a “German-German” perspective formed? If that is indeed the case, how can this be accomplished? The following pages shall introduce the principal methods for merging (or de-merging) the histories of the two postwar German states. Two models for an integrated history of postwar Germany shall furthermore be presented and critically analyzed.

Beginning in the 1960s, historians of the FRG and the GDR had ceased to write “all-German accounts of the postwar era”. They henceforth became specialists in the history of one of the respective German states and refrained from considering the two states together. This approach was to dominate the historiography in both states for the next two decades.<sup>89</sup> Until reunification, the few accounts of the postwar period that incorporated both German states did not challenge the prevailing approach. This literature juxtaposed and defined in separate terms the history of each country.<sup>90</sup>

This situation changed partially after 1990. Different treatments of the history of the GDR were now clearly discernable. One involves a partial integration of the East German history in that of the FRG. This is usually achieved by adding a brief summary of GDR’s history into a book on the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. This summary is often contained in a chapter immediately preceding the one on reunification.<sup>91</sup> The result of such a treatment is

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<sup>89</sup> Roesler 2006, p. 13. Also: Kleßmann 2005, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Kleßmann 1988.

<sup>91</sup> E.g.: Bark and Gress 1992.

the GDR is looked upon as nothing more than a “footnote” in German history, with the Federal Republic as the only legitimate German state in the postwar years.<sup>92</sup>

Another approach consists of contrasting the “success” of the Federal Republic with the “failure” of the GDR. In his recent history of postwar Germany, Peter Graf Kielmansegg, defines his interpretation as follows: the presentation of two different and distinct histories; one with a future and one without. As far as the latter is concerned, he explains in reference to the GDR, one needs to explore the reasons behind this pre-programmed collapse.<sup>93</sup> This second approach, which regards the GDR as a state living on borrowed time, can be combined with the first one and shares its shortcomings.

A third approach consists of keeping the history of the GDR separate and distinct from that of the Federal Republic of Germany and refraining from any further comparison. This reinforces, of course, the dominant trend in the pre-reunification historiography. The GDR appears isolated from West Germany and not influenced by developments observed there. Historical studies on the GDR further isolate it from its neighbor. According to Jörg Roesler, two characteristics of the GDR literature are responsible for that fact. One is the “disproportionate moral rigor of the historical judgments” that comprises much of the literature on the GDR. It promotes a “tendency towards ‘posthumous overkill’ of the SED system” which impedes any comparison with the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>94</sup> The second characteristic concerns overspecialization in research on the GDR and the relative lack of comparisons on specific topics.<sup>95</sup>

The fourth treatment differs radically from the first three. Most authors look at the FRG and the GDR as having separate and divergent histories. (Those subscribing the first two approaches do so explicitly; those endorsing the third, do so implicitly.) A few historians do however support the opposite view and insist that similarities did indeed exist between both postwar German states. Peter Bender – an essayist and not an academic historian - stresses that the history of the two countries evolved on the basis of a common geopolitical situation: both had been subject to military occupation, both enjoyed strained relations with their respective allies and both were ardent Cold Warriors.<sup>96</sup> Such crucial similarities call for a his-

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<sup>92</sup> For a critique of this trend in the field of economic history, see: Steiner 2006b.

<sup>93</sup> Kielmansegg, Peter Graf, *Nach der Katastrophe. Eine Geschichte des geteilten Deutschlands* (Berlin: 2000), quoted in: Kleßmann 2005, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Roesler 2006, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Idem. Roesler mentions as one of the very few examples of such a comparison: Horst Barthel, 2001, *Umweltpolitik in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte).

<sup>96</sup> Peter Bender, *Episode oder Epoche? Zur Geschichte des geteilten Deutschland* (München 1996), quoted in: Kleßmann 2005, p. 2.

tory of postwar Germany in which West and East German citizens acknowledge their own experience and are able to understand the experiences of their compatriots on the other side of the border, Bender claims.<sup>97</sup>

The treatment of GDR's history proposed by Peter Bender builds on the numerous "parallel developments" observable in the history of both countries and the experiences of their respective populations. Yet he does not fail to mention the main difference between both countries: an alliance with Washington is not comparable to one with Moscow. The study of what Bender termed their "mutual relations" allows one to go beyond an approach that simply focuses on the differences that existed between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany. This methodological counterpoint has paved the way for an integrated history of postwar Germany. Two methodological frameworks for an integrated history of postwar Germany have been further developed, in a continuation of Bender's work.

Christoph Kleßmann has been one of the few (West) German historians to have studied both Germanies prior to reunification. The framework he established for an integrated history of postwar Germany now goes beyond the separate expositions typical of his previous work. His model is built on six different historical dynamics and periods: 1945, representing both an end of an era and a new opportunity; internal consequences of the formation of alliances; specific developments induced by the division; forms of asymmetrical interdependence; problems affecting countries in all alliances; trends toward a new rapprochement.<sup>98</sup> Kleßmann argues that these six dynamics and periods allow one to conjoin the history of the two Germanies in a way that balances the convergences and divergences, mutual influences, and common problems. This framework stands in opposition to "contrastive histories" (Kontrastgeschichte), which ignore the similarities and overlaps, and "national" histories that treat the GDR as a mere footnote in German history.

The phrase "forms of asymmetrical interdependence" indicates, however, that the evolution of the GDR "cannot be understood without [continuous references to] the Federal Republic", whereas the opposite is less true. On the one hand, the problems of the East German state (relating to the border, its youth policy, the legitimizing state ideology of antifascism, the policy toward organized religion, the development of the welfare state, the consumption policy, and

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<sup>97</sup> Peter Bender, *Fall und Aufstieg. Deutschland zwischen Kriegsende, Teilung und Vereinigung* (Halle 2002), pp. 216-217, cited in: Roesler 2006, p. 18.

<sup>98</sup> Kleßmann 2006. Original German quote: 1945 als Endpunkt und Chance, innere Folgen der Blockbildung, Eigendynamik der Teilung, Formen asymmetrischer Verflechtung, Systemübergreifende Problemlagen, Trends der Wiederannäherung.

the active assistance to third world countries) were the product of its competing ambitions with the Federal Republic of Germany. These would all become factors in the collapse of the GDR. On the other hand, Kleßmann views the influence of the GDR on the FRG as acting to reinforce the political system in place in West Germany. The existence of the GDR favored the inner political consensus in West Germany and discredited the “alternative social concepts”, for instance, of the labor movement, he argues.<sup>99</sup> Kleßmann refuses to consider the East German history as a mere footnote in the history of West Germany, though he does stress the asymmetry in their relationships.

A further framework for an integrated history of postwar Germany is proposed by the East German historian Jörg Roesler. Despite sharing many characteristics, his approach differs from that of Christoph Kleßmann on a series of points. One difference consists of his rejection of the “primacy of political history”, the approach championed by Kleßmann and Bender. Roesler argues for the primacy of the economy. The importance of the economy in both countries as the principal source of their legitimacy and stability makes it, he believes, a better approach for an integrated history. Yet Roesler does not favor a traditional comparative history of both postwar German economies. He instead makes the case for interlinking the economic and social developments. It was less the economic growth as such that was key to the history of the FRG and the GDR, he argues, but how economic growth directly impacted on the living and working conditions of the respective populations. In the eyes of Roesler, an economic and social history approach is the most suitable method for writing an integrated history of postwar Germany.<sup>100</sup>

Another difference to the framework developed by Kleßmann consists of the periodization proposed by Roesler. As it is difficult to determine common political periods for both Germany states – as we have seen above, Kleßmann proposes a blend of historical dynamics and periods -, the economic and social history approach permits such a common periodization. He proposes the following six periods: the end of the war and the resurgence of the economy (1945-48/49); diverging paths in terms of economic prosperity ( up to the mid- 1960s); crisis and consolidation through economic reforms (up to the 1970s); different reactions to the oil crises (up to the 1980s); consolidation of economic gains by one side and the economic decline of the other (the 1980s); rapprochement and political union (*Anschluss*) (autumn 1989 until autumn 1990). These six periods form the structure of Roesler’s book.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Roesler 2006, p. 22.

A final point of divergence to Kleßmann's approach is also worth mentioning here. It concerns the greater emphasis placed on the "equality of both [postwar German] states in the eyes of history".<sup>101</sup> The "asymmetry" that Kleßmann maintains in his study of the overlaps between both countries, i.e., his insistence on stressing the greater influence of the FRG on the GDR than vice versa, is not present in Roesler's framework. He makes the implicit argument that the study of mutual influences requires no pre-qualifications. He highlights East Germany's influence on the Federal Republic, something overlooked by Kleßmann. This includes, for instance, how the competition between the two countries played a significant role in the introduction of a highly developed welfare state in the Federal Republic of Germany. The approach used by Roesler in his study of the two German states is indicated in the byline to the title: "Eine Analyse auf gleicher Augenhöhe" (English approximation: An analysis on an equal footing).

Roesler examines four points in each of the six periods. The first concerns the obvious differences between the two countries. The writer must in this case avoid the trap of having the descriptions simply devolving into "black and white comparisons" that were characteristic of the pre-reunification historiography in both states, writes Roesler. The second point concerns the similarities. Under this banner, Roesler means: a common past; a similar standing in the international arena; a strong industrial economic foundation; and a similar importance assigned to economic growth, consumption and social security. The third point deals with the interrelations of the two German states. It encompasses commerce, migration, visit policy, the influence of one country's media in the other state, etc. The fourth point concerns the conflicts and competition between the Federal Republic and the GDR, mainly in the area of economic performance and social security.<sup>102</sup>

Despite different methodological approaches, the frameworks developed by Christoph Kleßmann and Jörg Roesler are based on the recognition that significant inadequacies existed in the historiography on postwar Germany. Both endeavor to create more nuanced accounts of this history by describing the similarities, differences, overlaps, commonalities, and conflicts that existed between the FRG and the GDR. This study is an attempt to write an integrated history of the German labor during the revolution and reunification.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-20.

This topic is closer to the economic and social history approach developed by Jörg Roesler, although the political dimension, more typical of Christoph Kleßmann's methodology, is crucial in the argument developed herein.

The year 1989-1990 is, as we have seen, the last of the six periods designated by Jörg Roesler. This is not the best chapter in his book. It is naturally difficult to study the similarities, differences, mutual relations, and conflicts that existed in such a short period of time. Roesler concentrates on the question of how the mutual relations between both states evolved. But if this choice can be justified by the relative shortness of the time period under examination, the political macro-perspective adopted by the author in this chapter is more difficult to comprehend. Roesler's analysis shows how relations between the two states evolved rapidly from one of "equals" to assumption of control over the reunification process by the federal government. The inability of the East German government under Hans Modrow to counteract this development with a negotiated compromise is highlighted here. As the title of the chapter suggests, the reunification process is in these pages simply described as an *Anschluss*, or union, by decision of and under the control of Bonn.<sup>103</sup>

I consider this rather conventional interpretation of reunification wanting. It overlooks, among others, the role played by the West German associations, as described in the literature on institutional transfer. Furthermore a glaring omission on the part of Jörg Roesler, who has extensively written on the East German labor, is his failure to incorporate this dimension into his discussions on the reunification process. The inclusion of issues related to labor (the perception of the economic reality of the GDR by workers; the revolution's manifestations on the shop floors; the repercussions of the migration of East German workers on the West German labor markets; the reaction of West German trade unions, etc.) would allow for a genuine social-economic approach of the unification, which Roesler claims his methodology does. As he focuses solely on the macro level of the political decision-making process, his contributions to the understanding of reunification are rather marginal. Whereas the methodological framework he developed is an important contribution to the writing of postwar Germany's history, its value in the study of reunification has yet to be demonstrated.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 211-215.



## 1.3 Hypotheses, approach and actors

This introduction of some of the issues key to this study allow for an examination of the hypotheses developed (1.3.1), the approach adopted (1.3.2) and the actors observed (1.3.3) in this work.

### 1.3.1 The hypotheses

One hypothesis relates to each of the four questions introduced in section 1.1. For clarity's sake, the four questions will be reintroduced at this point. Each hypothesis is also rapidly put in relation to the historiographical issues discussed above.

The first question asks whether East German labor should be considered a factor in the collapse of the GDR and whether the East German labor had a role in the revolution.

Hypothesis 1: Both questions can be answered with yes. The study of workers' defense of its interests reveals 'hidden', though long-term, industrial conflicts, with dramatic economic and political consequences. A look at the interconnection between what was happening inside and outside the East German workplaces in 1989-90 indeed indicates that the workers did participate in the revolution.

This hypothesis, developed in the second part of this study, is a contribution to the small number of essays that analyze and highlight the role of labor in the fall of the GDR (1.2.2).

The second question looks at the strategies adopted by the West German trade unions in reaction to the East German revolution and German reunification. What goals motivated these strategies?

Hypothesis 2) Two different strategies were implemented by the DGB unions. The first aimed at supporting and collaborating in the restructuring of the instruments for defending workers' interests in the GDR (until February 1990). The second strategy (from the end of February onward) found its basis in the consensus with the federal government and the West German employers' associations, and favored the extension of the labor law and the welfare system to the GDR. The organizational expansion of DGB structures into East Germany was also a component of the second strategy.

This hypothesis is critical of how the dominant approach presented the argument that the DGB unions remained "one step behind" at all phases of the East German revolution and reunification process (1.2.3).

The third question considers how DGB's strategies influenced the reunification process.

Hypothesis 3) The DGB unions' resolute action in favor of legal extension and the expansion of their structures was, in the opinion of the federal government, a necessary precondition for achieving reunification. The organization of institutional transfer and the start of work by these institutions in the GDR constituted, to a large extent, the reunification process. For this to be accomplished, the participation of trade unions and employers' associations was necessary.

This hypothesis shares obvious commonalities with the literature on institutional transfer. This study is however more interested in the history predating and leading up to institutional transfer, i.e., the conditions under which it was developed and implemented (1.2.4). By shifting the focus away from the institutional transfer and towards the establishment of a tripartite consensus between West German actors, one puts a crucial assumption from previous studies on its head, namely that West German unions and employers applied pressure on the federal government to extend the labor law. The initiative came from the federal government, although each of the parties to the collective bargaining agreement was also rapidly shifting its stance to a position favoring transfer.

The fourth question asks what place the episodes of 1989-90 have in the history of German labor.

Hypothesis 4) Measured in terms of effectiveness, the DGB unions' strategy of legal extension and organizational expansion was an undeniable success, a manifestation of their power and the crucial role that they filled in the Federal Republic of Germany. Yet the fact that the actors from West German unions were unanimous in supporting this strictly defensive strategy was also the product of their general lack of direction in the 1980s, which could be described as a long and gradual process of programmatic exhaustion.

The way in which the episodes of 1989-90 fit into the previous evolutionary development within the German labor movement has not yet received sufficient attention in the historiography, a fact that prevented the inclusion of this topic in the previous review of literature. This fourth hypothesis is considered within the context of the debates on the future trade union politics at the end of the 1980s (3.1.3).

### 1.3.2 The approach

As the discussion on literature indicates, this work is first and foremost an attempt at writing an integrated history of the German labor during the revolution and reunification of 1989-90. An integrated approach requires that East German and West German labor movements be examined under similar criteria. It dictates that they be considered on their autonomous, extremely different, developments until 1990. It also prescribes an analysis of how both movements acted and reacted in 1990: the obstacles and problem resolution, the convergences and their limits.

Whereas the integrated perspective is explicit understood, this work additionally pursues an implicit goal, which is to contribute to the project of a global labor history. This is done in particular in the second part, where worker practices for defending interests in the GDR are analyzed. Such a study is relevant to the global labor history and asks how workers unite public and private strategies in order to defend their interests in specific economic, political and social contexts. The state of East German labor can be considered as an extreme case, where only small-scale initiatives for defending individual worker interests were possible. As such, it may serve to assist in focusing a broad comparative endeavor like the global labor history project.<sup>104</sup> Any possible contributions to a global labor history by this study remains however implicit, precisely because its conclusions are not discussed in this perspective.

This study shares certain traits or characteristics embodied by the popular 1960s term “technical history”.<sup>105</sup> The developments under analysis are tracked in detail, on a weekly, even daily, basis. Chronological accuracy remains a major concern throughout this work. Yet not all historical developments are linear. Some cannot be placed in a precise moment in time, e.g., reflections of a more theoretical nature, for instance. Such reflections can only be understood as dynamic phenomena, and cannot be reduced to single events in time. Hence an effort is made not only to “reconstruct” chronological developments (meetings, decisions, initiatives, etc.), but also to merge them with those dynamic phenomena permeating the period into one single narrative.

The most obvious manifestations of this concern are: an attempt to illustrate the interaction between the actors’ actions and discourse and a refusal to single out one to the benefit or detriment of the other (be it through a narrated chronology or discourse analysis).

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<sup>104</sup> Kopstein 2001 develops a similar concept, although not with the global labor history project in mind.

<sup>105</sup> Kracauer 2006 [1966], chapter 3.

The term interaction infers that each party influences the other. On some occasions, actions decide the fate of theoretical reflections. In this study, I argue that the unanimous approval of a strategy dedicated to the extension of the West German labor law to Eastern Germany, sometime between the end of February and the beginning of March 1990, marked the end of the debate over the future of trade union politics. It brought an end to these discussions, even if they had been launched in a different context than that of reunification.

The notion of interaction can also be used to describe the desire of this study to express certain realities often considered as separate topics in literature and consigned to different fields of specialty as one reality. It stresses, for instance, the interrelation between East German labor's experiences from the 1980s and the end of the GDR and the perception of these events in the Federal Republic of Germany and the end of the reunification process. Interactions between and continuities within these phenomena are the particular vantage point selected for use in this work to test the conclusions proffered in literature.

### **1.3.3 The actors under examination**

#### **1.3.3.1 The “East German labor”**

A portion of this work deals with the study of industrial conflicts in GDR's workplaces during the 1980s. I refer to one of the two actors in those conflicts as “East German labor”. The expression does not refer to workers from any one specific sector, nor to blue or white-collar workers in particular. It seeks conversely, to meld them. Such an abstraction may appear superficial.<sup>106</sup> Did any collective body worthy of the name 'East German labor' exist in the GDR? The reference to such an amorphous actor is put into further doubt by the importance of individual worker strategies in the struggles aimed at increasing wages while decreasing labor norms. What is the true value of observations on micro-phenomena taken from such a distant vantage point? Even Toynbee, who prefers to observe historical developments from far afield, asserted that the writing of history demanded one take the “ant perspective” as well as the “bird perspective”.

The reason why I decided to restrict myself to the “bird perspective” for the analysis of labor conflicts in the GDR relates to the hypothesis developed herein, which concerns intractable top-down conflicts at East German workplaces. My aim is not to detail how individual prac-

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<sup>106</sup> I thank Thomas Lindenberger for his remarks which forced me to reflect on the labels used and inspired the following explanations.

tices, adapted to specific workplace conditions, enabled workers to influence wages and productivity (a concern which would necessitate a micro-historical approach). My objective is rather to focus on the cumulative effect of these many individual practices on the East German economy, as well as the regime's attempts to ban them. This story can be told, I believe, from a macro-historical perspective.

Another problem relates to my use of the expression "East German labor". One might argue that top-down conflicts over wages and working norms set workers against workers – they occurred, so to speak, within the "East German labor" -, as managers and party secretaries were themselves salaried employees. Furthermore some in the latter group would sometimes turn a blind eye to workers' practices, which could make them more an ally than an adversary. Here I ask for a bit of semantic tolerance on the part of the reader. One must keep in mind that when I refer to "East German labor" I am speaking of the vast majority of workers from the "lower echelons", with little or no official responsibility. I do not include those salaried employees from the "upper echelons", who bore significant responsibility in the regime structures, in this category. In order to avoid any possible confusion, I define industrial conflicts opposing "labor" to "power-holders".

The 1989-90 revolution saw the re-emergence of open collective action from workers at the workplaces. This shift from individual to collective action allows one to refocus our observations and to eliminate the category of "East German labor". From 1989 on it is possible to "zoom" in on the activities of certain segments within "East German labor". Worker activists are thus observed at their place of work by disseminating the documentation on 51 different worker initiatives displayed over GDR's territory and Stasi reports on the situation in Erfurt-based enterprises.

### **1.3.3.2 Four trade unions from the German Confederation of Trade Unions**

Unlike its East German counterpart, the West German labor movement can be observed through its organizations. The strategies implemented by four trade unions, all members of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB), are examined and traced over time in this study. They are: IG Metall; Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union (IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik); Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union (Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienste, Transport und Verkehr) and Media Industrial Union (IG Medien). Aside from these four unions, the acts of intervention by the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) will also be examined, though less systematically. The four DGB

unions on which this study focuses were chosen for their respective importance, as well as for their role in the West German labor movement in general.

These four organizations were cross-sectoral trade unions, bringing together workers from different industrial branches under one umbrella. IG Metall, the Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union, and the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union were the largest three of the DGB's 16 member organizations. Together, these four unions represented 60% of the 7,757,000 DGB members in 1989. IG Metall and the Media Industrial Union were at the forefront of the "activist" wing of the DGB unions, whereas the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union was the main exponent of its "accommodationist" wing.<sup>107</sup> The Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union was a "centrist" union, that often helped to broker compromises in case where conflicts arose between the two wings.<sup>108</sup> Together, these four unions cover a substantial portion of the Federal Republic's industrial, public and service sectors.

The numerical and functional importance of these organizations makes them the prime objects to observe in understanding the strategies developed by the West German labor movement. As mentioned above, I argue that, despite some slight variations, all DGB unions first implemented a strategy of support and collaboration, thereafter followed by a strategy dedicated to legal extension and organizational expansion. Hence the sector-related and ideological differences between these four unions – differences that led the author to select them for his survey sample – become a way to highlight the convergence of the West German unions' politics on the occasion of the East German revolution and German reunification. I argue that the course pursued by these four unions exemplify an evolution that could be traced by observing any other West German trade union. When I refer to these four unions as "case studies", it is not in the same sense that Jacques Revel uses the expression, namely as extreme manifestations necessary to identify a phenomenon.<sup>109</sup> It is rather as four expressions of the same process, four evolutionary developments that do not differ substantially from one another. I also depict them as variations on the same theme.

The prime limitation imposed on any study based on the observation of labor organizations is that, in most cases, they do not tell us much about workers' reactions to unions' politics.

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<sup>107</sup> This dichotomy was developed by Andrei S. Markovits (1986).

<sup>108</sup> The relations between activist, centrist and accommodationist unions is again examined in chapter 3.1.

<sup>109</sup> Fabiani and Revel 2005.

This study is not an exception to the rule on that front. Its story is told “from the top” and does not discuss either how the unions’ politics by rank-and-file West German workers or the consequences of said policy. I have tried to circumvent this problem by examining not only at the central union policies but also their implementation by the regional organs. Hence the camera’s perspective moves from the headquarters to the intermediary structures, but does not explore the realities confronted by workers on the shop floor.

### **1.3.3.3 Other actors to consider in further research**

One of the most obvious limitations to this study is due to the actors under observation. Despite examining 51 worker initiatives in the GDR and analyzing the situation at Erfurt-based enterprises and despite incorporating the regional dimension into the discussion on the various strategies of DBG unions, the points of observation remain high, to go back to Toynbee’s analogy once more. An excellent way to test the hypotheses and the conclusions developed over the following pages would be to analyze them “from the bottom up”, i.e., from a perspective closer to realities faced by workers. For the study of labor in the GDR and the FRG, this could take the form of case studies of workers’ reactions in specific workplaces and cities.

## **1.4 Sources: Narrowing down the choice**

The last chapter in this first part introduces the main sources used in this work. The utilization of some of them, such as reports submitted to the GDR State Security agency, raise specific, complex issues and questions which are reintroduced in the course of the study.

### **1.4.1 Publications of the trade unions and employers’ associations**

The union press is widely cited in this work. The press is a major component of unions’ relations with the public and with their members. In the 1980s, the DGB unions had over 30 different publications, with a circulation of over 15 million. In terms of total circulation, IG Metall’s monthly *metall* was the single most important publication, with a print run totaling 2.3 million copies.<sup>110</sup> Of these publications, some are targeted at the members, others at unions’ secretaries and yet others present studies and analyses crucial to the trade unions. All publications of this sort are cited in this study. (*metall*, *ÖTV Magazin* and *Kontrapunkt* are dedicated

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<sup>110</sup> Heilmann 1995, pp. 70-72.

to the members of the IG Metall, the Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union and the Media Industrial Union; *Die Quelle* and *Der Metaller* are dedicated to union secretaries at the DGB and IG Metall; the publications of DGB's Economic and Social Science Research Institute (Wissenschaftlich- und sozialwissenschaftliches Institut des DGB) *WSI-Mitteilungen* and *Die Mitbestimmung*, as well as DGB's theoretical review *Der Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* are also widely referred to in this work.) The high journalistic quality of these publications and the vast amount of information available therein made them an invaluable resource in reconstructing, for descriptive purposes, the exact details of the implementation of DGB unions' strategies in 1989-90. Press releases are another form of trade union publication used in this work. I consulted the collections of press releases by the DGB and the four unions under consideration here at IG Metall's Central Library (Zentralbibliothek) in Frankfurt am Main.

In order to avoid the risks inherent in using publications in a study of organizations that were responsible for their content, clear guidelines were established on how to treat these articles and press releases. Editorials in publications targeted at union members are signed by the president or a vice-president, and present the union's positions on critical current issues. They can be used to trace the evolution of these stances over time, as a chronic of outlook of various DGB unions on the East German revolution and German reunification. As far as articles are concerned, they serve as a source of factual information, e.g., dates of meetings, support initiatives that were launched, declarations, etc. Finally, the contributions to theoretical debates, to which a good portion of these publications was devoted in 1989-1990, provide an excellent assessment of the state of the debate on trade union politics within the West German labor movement.

In comparison with the trade unions, employers' associations have been relatively slow to develop their press service.<sup>111</sup> In this study, two publications from the West German such associations are examined. The first is the Confederation of German Employers' Associations' bi-monthly, *Der Arbeitgeber*. Only editorials from this magazine are cited, in the same way and for the same purposes as their union counterparts. I also refer to several articles published in a bulletin on trade union issues published by the German Economic Institute (IW), a research institute associated with the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, titled *Der Gewerkschaftsreport*. These articles and reports furnish information both on the politics of the DGB unions and on the theoretical debates resounding within the German labor movement.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 85.



## 1.4.2 Trade union archives

One of the main obstacles to research on this subject is the 20-year delay in the opening of trade union archives. The dedicated assistance of the DGB archivist Klaus Mertsching was alas of little use in circumventing this provision. This calls for a re-evaluation of the hypotheses developed here in four years! Mr. Mertsching's help was nevertheless invaluable, as he was able to advise me on the correct dates of some meetings I refer to. He also provided details on the formation of a Working Group by the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs, the DGB, the Confederation of German Employers' Associations and the Trade Union of German Employees (Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft), on March 12. This Working Group was by no means secret, but I had never to date come across any reference to it. Unfortunately, the minutes from its meetings, given that these files are locked in the archives<sup>112</sup>, will not be available for inspection for four years.

The same 20-year rule blocks access to the IG Metall archives, located in the organization's headquarters in Frankfurt am Main. Allowances are made for certain exceptional dispensations, and the DGB or the IG Metall president can grant access to some documents before the deadline. In such cases, they reserve the right to decide which excerpts may be cited. Unsurprisingly, our requests for access to DGB or IG Metall archives for the months of February to June 1990 were rejected.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Klaus Mertsching unsuccessfully searched for the minutes of the discussions in the Federal Chancellery building on February 20; the meetings between the DGB unions and Employers' Associations leading to the declaration of March 9, 1990; the DGB Working Group on inter-German activities meeting from April 26, 1990; the DGB Working Group on the GDR discussions from May 9, 1990; the meetings between representatives of the DGB and GDR unions from May 10, 1990; and the discussion between union representatives and the chancellor from May 15, 1990. These meetings are discussed in sections 3.6 to 3.8.

<sup>113</sup> Here is an anecdote. In February 2004, I met Bernd Thierron, in charge of international affairs at the IG Metall, in Frankfurt to discuss how it would be possible to develop closer contacts between IG Metall and the Québec Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN). At that time, I was helping the Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony IG Metall and the Canadian Confédération des syndicats nationaux develop a cooperative agreement among unions active at Bombardier plants around the world. My request for access to the closed part of IG Metall's archives had already been refused by the union, but once in the Frankfurt headquarters, I made a further attempt. I asked to meet the chief archivist and told him about the initiatives to develop a cooperation between unions negotiating with the Bombardier management and also mentioned my work on the German union movement. I explained to him that I was looking for evidence of meetings between Franz Steinkühler, then IG Metall head, and Chancellor Kohl, between the dates of February 6 and March 9, 1990, and if it would be possible to search the archives. It would even be possible for me to extend my stay by another day in Frankfurt, if today was not possible, I added, demonstrating my flexibility on the matter. But it was not to be. I was told what I already knew – since I had experienced it a few months earlier: I should first submit an official request, explaining what information I was looking for, what this research was about, how the information would be used, etc. Only the president's office could grant exemptions. I thanked him for his time and told him a proper request would be submitted. But, as there was little reason to believe a second petition would produce different results. I simply abandoned any further attempts.

Hence the internal documents quoted – letters and meeting minutes, in particular – were not obtained from the unions’ archives but were given to me by individual secretaries whom I interviewed. The internal documents from the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union were all taken from a variety of sources prepared by this union and published in 1993.

Such rules are not unusual for any organization’s archives; the 20-year rule regarding free public access is actually quite short. (The archive at the employers’ associations, for instance, can only be visited with special permission.) Yet I have had excellent experience with the BDA archivists, who sent me copies of archived documents, without the need to fill out requests and without imposing any restriction on its eventual use.

The difficulty in obtaining access to the archived material posed a unique difficulty in the analysis of the meetings held between representatives of the federal government, DGB unions and BDA employers’ associations, and the establishment of what I refer to as an informal tripartite consensus on the extension of the West German labor law and industrial relations to the GDR. (This hypothesis is developed in section 3.6.) Yet without access to the minutes, the formation of an informal tripartite consensus between West German actors remains merely an unproven theory, formulated on the basis of the sudden convergence of strategy of these actors between February 20 and March 9; these strategies would remain aligned for several months to follow.

### **1.4.3 Interviews and discussions**

There are alternative ways to gain access to sources where it had previously been denied. For instance, sources can be created, i.e., through interviews. Depending on the type of information one is looking for, a good interview might even be more fruitful than the minutes of meetings, often written in a highly formalistic language. This is certainly the case in regards to the hypothesis on the tripartite consensus: if I was able talk to a person who was party to those meetings, I might learn what was said there.

Previous experiences drawing on oral history had convinced me that it can be very useful source for the history of the union movement.<sup>114</sup> Information on the views of actors in any given situation, the tensions within an organization and informal deals with employers, for instance, is valuable and likely to come out during an interview. Unless one is blessed with

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<sup>114</sup> In collecting material for a biography of the trade unionist and former head of the UNESCO in Canada, Jacques-Victor Morin, I conducted about 40 hours of interview with this person, and about the same number with former colleagues. See: Denis (Mathieu) 2003.

infinite amount of time, it is important to be careful when choosing the interviewees. Based on my personal experience, persons from the top hierarchy at trade unions often remain reserved in their responses and produce conventional explanations. It is frustrating to receive standard responses in line with the organization's official position, when one suspects that, due to his or her position within the organizations, the interviewee must surely know the true facts behind the story. Mid-ranking union secretaries are often more open in their manner but are not always privy to backroom discussions. Persons who were directly involved in the events they describe as frustrating are more likely to speak of internal tensions, and bring vital new details to their narrative. Such information can be of great value.

For chapter 3.6, I notably attempted to locate individuals who might be able to confirm or deny that informal meetings between Helmut Kohl, DGB head Ernst Breit, IG Metall chief Franz Steinkühler and representatives of employers' associations took place sometime in the second half of February 1990. Was there a time and place where union representatives told Chancellor Kohl in no uncertain terms that, if the West German labor law and rules of industrial relations were remained as their current state, in unified Germany, they would participate to the implementation of the Monetary, Economic and Social Union? If anything to that extent had actually taken place, who would have know this?

All attempts to gain an interview with the union's heads proved futile. Although I had received a recommendation from one of his friends, Franz Steinkühler refused my request for an interview, based on the fact that he had already given numerous interviews on reunification and that all details on the matter could be found in those interviews. I met with Media Industrial Union's former head, Detlef Hensche, who categorically rejected the notion that informal meetings between government's, unions' and employers' representatives from West Germany were stated a precondition to the implementation of the MESU. All attempts to contact former DGB head Ernst Breit and chemistry union leader Rappe proved unsuccessful.

As this work will attempt to demonstrate, there was a fundamental change in the actors involved in the process of restructuring the structure for defending East German workers' interests. While East Germans had determined the course of the process until February 1990, West German actors gained the upper hand at the beginning in March. East German unionists may have had an input on the exact nature of this transition, which they may have resented as a loss of power? The author's interviews with "frustrated" East German reform unionists were no more successful. Two interviews and one discussion with East German unionists still active in IG Metall and the DGB today did not bring me any closer to resolving the issue of informal tripartite meetings, although they did consider the theory plausible.

The only indication of informal meetings during the fifteen days from February 20 to March 9, 1990, came in the form of faint nods of agreement, by one IG Metall secretary. This secretary had been one of the first West German IG Metall secretaries sent to Leipzig at the beginning of 1990. He had been a member of the GDR Working Group established at the union in January 1990. He seemed to be the person who could shed light on all my questions. When asked why Detlef Hensche had so vehemently rejected the possible occurrence of such informal meetings, he replied that Hensche had probably never been informed of them, as he was not party to any such discussions. When I requested his assistance in gaining access to the (closed) minutes of the GDR Working Group, he instead offered to personally answer any question I may have.

My pleasure in having dug up the perfect interviewee was only matched by my disappointment in not having been able to obtain a proper interview. There was little hint of hesitation in agreeing to the interview but, at some point, it was no longer possible to arrange an appointment with him and all contact with said person faded away.<sup>115</sup>

While the time spent seeking out prospective interviewees and preparing the interviews did not always produce the desired results, informal discussions with union secretaries, journalists and activists, from both parties, were extremely valuable. Even if most of these meetings were planned, as I had contacted said person and scheduled an appointment, they were however informal in nature. They usually took place at his/her office, home or in a café. During those discussions it was not my original intent to gather specific information for use in the story I wanted to tell, although this aspect was present as well. My main priority was instead to understand the context in which these individuals were involved, the motives behind their actions, the goals they were pursuing, the factors influencing their actions both positively and negatively, and their opinion on these events fifteen years later. To put it in slightly differently, the author was trying to narrow the gap that separates the analysis of a specific reality created by historians and the experience of the actors who experienced the events in their own words. I am not saying that, as far as history writing goes, the memories of these actors could possibly replace thorough analysis. They, of course, cannot. Yet as this study deals with very recent topics, I wanted to dedicate special attention to various actors' perceptions, in order to avoid the risk that, were they to look at the story told in the following pages, they would not

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<sup>115</sup> His reluctance may not have anything to do with the topics discussed in this work: all this took place during the 2003 crisis at IG Metall after the failed strike for the introduction of the 35-hour working week in the former East German *Länder*. My contact was constantly out of town. After the storm has passed over the union, however, he never returned my calls. I was also unsuccessful to see him by appearing unannounced at his office twice.

recognize the events to which they were party. It is highly unlikely that any of the East and West German actors I was able to talk to would agree with the different arguments developed in this work. I do hope, however, that they will be able to somehow connect their experiences to them.

#### **1.4.4 Sources for the study of the East German labor between 1986 and 1990**

In addition to the sources mentioned above, the chapters dedicated to the GDR integrate other kinds of information. One of them is the reports compiled by the East German State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, or Stasi for short) on the conditions in the country's shop floors from 1986 to the beginning of 1990. These reports were written by official and unofficial Stasi employees. They were consulted in Berlin. A list of the reports used for this work is furnished in the bibliography.

During the second half of the 1980s, the Free Confederation of East German Trade Unions (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) was also producing similar reports on conditions on the shop floors. These reports were summarized once or twice a year in a longer account, presented to the FDGB presidium. These reports were published together with other FDGB internal document of those years.<sup>116</sup>

I also make extensive use of the 120 leaflets, declarations and sundry sources documenting the depth of penetration of the revolutionary spirit at GDR's workplaces published by Bernd Gehrke and Renate Hürtgen (2001).

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<sup>116</sup> Eckelmann/Hertle/Weinert 1990.



## Part 2: East German Labor in the Collapse of the GDR and the Revolution

### 2.1 Introduction: Absent on Paper: Workers in the East German Revolution

As indicated in the review of literature in the first part of this work, the vast majority of studies on the collapse of the GDR denies workers any role by refusing to consider them as actors in the events. Many studies make a case for this implicit negation and go on to explain why East German workers did not participate in the revolution.<sup>117</sup> The overwhelming historiographical assumption is that labor played either no role or a negligible role in bringing about the downfall of the SED government.<sup>118</sup> Still, one cannot escape a certain dissatisfaction arising from inconsistencies in literature,<sup>119</sup> two of which deserve further investigation. First of all: the GDR has been widely described as a ‘society based on work’ (*Arbeitsgesellschaft*) because of its high rate of wage labor, the ideological meaning of work, the industrial social policy, etc.<sup>120</sup> What is the connection between this fundamental role of work and the fall of the regime? Bluntly stated, existing literature conveys the impression that there was only a minor link between East German societal structures and the social upheaval of 1989.<sup>121</sup> If this is indeed a paradox, perhaps the resolution thereof might be worthy of future research in social science departments around the world.

The second question arises from the first. Nearly all East German citizens of voting age were workers.<sup>122</sup> The bulk of the people that left the GDR and the demonstrators in 1989 were workers.<sup>123</sup> This specific social position must have heavily shaped their experiences in the GDR and their relationship to the regime.

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<sup>117</sup> Kädtler/ Kottwitz 1990; Fuler 1999.

<sup>118</sup> The work of the few authors, e.g., Renate Hürtgen, Bernd Gehrke and Jörg Roesler, who consider workers as actors in the 1989 revolution, is discussed below.

<sup>119</sup> The author tried to expose these inconsistencies through bibliographical references. See: Denis 2001.

<sup>120</sup> Kohli 1994; Reichel 2001.

<sup>121</sup> As argued by Jeanette Madarász (2003). Her analysis of the GDR society ends in 1987, the year the country "became unstable."

<sup>122</sup> Author uses word ‘workers’ as short for wage-earners to encompass blue (*Arbeiter*) and white collar workers (*Angestellten*).

<sup>123</sup> Dale 1005, pp. 177-85. Author thanks Gareth Dale for allowing reading of study prior to publication.

The East German revolution, however, has been widely described as a revolution of consumers -- as opposed to a revolution of producers -- since its focal point were gatherings which occurred after work hours; it was also said to have been driven by political and material considerations. This distinction between two 'kinds' of revolution is highly questionable from a historical viewpoint. Revolutions emerge as a result of various different experiences, motivations and locations for action. As previously pointed out in 1.2.2, the distinction between 'producers' and 'consumers' is problematic because they are one in the same, because wages and consumption are intrinsically related (in the standard of living, for instance) and because workers were in conflict with the SED regime over both issues.

Hence, from the point of view of labor, social historical studies on the GDR and analyses of the 1989 popular movement are often a poor match. On the one hand, the collapse of a work-based social organization must necessarily have raised many labor-related issues. On the other hand, if consumption was so crucial in 1989, then the East German revolution took one of the most classical forms of revolution of producers. The questions thus explored here are as follows: how could the situation in the Eastern German labor system of the 1980s be a catalyst for the East German revolution? How should the role of workers in the revolution be assessed?

The argument made in this work is that examining labor is essential to understanding how the East German society overthrew the regime in 1989. Regarding the first question, the author suggests that the conflict of interest between the regime and workers, and the forms those conflicts took, were fundamental components of the relationship between the population and the regime in the years before 1989, and thus crucial in understanding the factors of its collapse. As for the second question, the author will demonstrate that there was indeed a correlation between workers' actions inside and outside the workplace. This correlation brings to light the nature of their significant role. The author hopes to convince readers of the role of labor in both the history of the East German revolution and the period predating this event.

The situation in labor in the 1980s can be assessed by analyzing two perspectives (both workers and leadership) and how they overlap.



## 2.2 The Regime's Perspective of Labor: Repression and Neutralization of Workers' Potential Resistance in the Second Half of the 1980s

The SED's policy toward the working population combined elements of repression with a neutralization of discontent. The concept of neutralization is used to depict measures which were supposed to be taken positively by the population and convince them to accept the existing conditions.<sup>124</sup> The workplace -- as the prime source of income, social policy, distribution of resources and alleged worker rights -- served as one of, if not the main, centers of the SED's policy of repression and neutralization. Let us examine both aspects.

### 2.2.1 Surveillance and Repression In the Workplace

How were workplaces linked to the chain of the SED regime?<sup>125</sup> With the aim of managing production, the SED assumed "full control over the labor market." In other words, the party had to carry out all tasks related to qualifying workers, motivating them and encouraging greater productivity in the workforce, while at the same time monitoring the internal power relations within the workplaces. The word 'repression' is thus used in a broad sense, i.e., as a means to bring the people to work and accept the conditions set by the leadership, and thus as a central component of the SED's economic policy.

Verantwortung für den gesamten Arbeitsmarkt zu haben hiess nämlich auch, dass sich der SED-Staat nunmehr allein und ausschliesslich in dem allen Unternehmern in Industrieländern gleichermaßen ausgesetzten Dilemma befand, die Motivation und das Interesse der lohnarbeitenden Bevölkerung anstacheln zu müssen, ihre Qualifikation und Subjektivität zu entwickeln, um die Arbeitsleistung zu erhöhen und eine effektive Anwendung neuer Maschinerie und Technik zu gewährleisten – ohne jedoch die Machtbeziehungen dabei in Frage stellen oder auch gefährden zu lassen.<sup>126</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the workplace and sites of production became the most closely monitored places in the GDR. Among the different networks of surveillance and repression present within East German workplaces, the main three are examined in the following pages: the SED workplace organization (or *Betriebsparteiorganisationen*, BPOs), the Ministry for State Security (or *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS) and the trade union (or *Betriebsgewerkschaft-*

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<sup>124</sup> It has been developed and used by the British historian, Tim Mason, in relation to the social policy of the Third Reich. See: Mason 1995.

<sup>125</sup> Workplace or 'enterprise' (Betrieb) is short for any place outside of the home where people work for a wage. It encompasses all three traditional industrial sectors.

<sup>126</sup> Hürtgen 2001a, p. 23.

*sleitung*, BGL). These structures were not genuinely independent from each other, as the MfS made broad use of the information gathered by the BPOs and the BGLs to supplement its own reports. The objective is to determine how each of these structures assessed the state of top-down relationships in East German workplaces in the second half of the 1980s. If these depictions somehow converge, one can expect a good representation of the way those in power viewed the situation within labor in those years.

The author does not argue that BPOs and BGLs were only structures of repression. In these pages, it is, however, only this crucial aspect of their activities that receives attention.

### **2.2.1.1 SED Workplace Organizations in the Second Half of the 1980s: The Party is Over**

One basic structure used to control and repress workers was the internal organization of the SED within the workplace: the BPO. It was in 1954 that the constitution of the SED included the introduction of party organizations at the workplace, with the goal of uniting all party members at one enterprise. BPOs met once a month and elected their leaders (the *Betriebsparteileitung*, BPL) each year. Depending upon the size of the enterprise, a BPO was divided up into Division organizations (*Abteilungsparteiorganisation*, APO) and other smaller organizational groups (*Parteigruppen*). The BPO was accountable to the district (*Kreis*) Party organization.

BPO meetings were never democratic as they always worked from a top-down dynamic; their purpose was to inform local members of the decisions of the Party leadership. Besides holding meetings and training its members, the BPO's main official function was to pass on SED labor-related decisions (mainly economic in nature<sup>127</sup>) to the members within the enterprise. Party members were expected to make the case for these decisions with their colleagues.

Until the mid-1960s, reports of BPO meetings show evidence of some internal life. After this period, however, all BPO reports gradually "become standardized, diluted and progressively emptied of any meaning. (...) The sources lose their voices."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Although BPOs have sometimes also played a political role, their members, for instance, were compelled to sign petitions in support of the repression of the 1968 Prague upheaval or the expulsion of Wolf Biermann in 1976.

<sup>128</sup> This is the conclusion of the French historian Sandrine Kott who draws on a study of the archives of at least five Berlin enterprises. See Kott 2001, pp. 38-39. Michel Christian who has worked on SED structures within enterprises shares this understanding. I thank him for his useful explanations.

The size of the role played by a BPO within an enterprise in the 1980s seems to have been based on the number of party members in the enterprise. In turn, the number of members depended a great deal on the importance, in terms of the size of workforce, of the enterprise (the relation between both curves was usually direct: bigger enterprises had a higher rate of party members). Studies conducted by the SED district offices in Stalinstadt and Havelstadt in the early 1980s show great variations in SED membership in workplaces in different sectors, as well as based on the gender composition of the workforce. Figures range from 29% of the entire workforce in the steel and rolling mill industries, to a 8% in the textile industry at the bottom end, in Havelstadt. Commenting on these figures, Thomas Reichel concludes:

Daraus ergibt sich der Gesamteindruck, dass es der SED nur in den Grossbetrieben vor allem der traditionellen Schwer- und Metallindustrie gelang, ein Viertel oder etwas mehr der Belegschaften – auch der Arbeiter – zumindest formal als Mitglieder ihrer Partei zu rekrutieren, während sie in kleineren Betrieben, insbesondere solchen mit einem hohen Frauenanteil, kaum den Sprung über die 10-Prozent-Marke schaffte.<sup>129</sup>

The number of people leaving the party, especially workers, increased slightly in the 1980s (a trend that started in the previous decade). Yet the bulk of members remained in their BPOs and continued to take part in (or at least attend) party activities. In fact, the situation within BPOs in the 1980s appears to have come to a standstill of sorts.

If BPOs represented stagnation, petrifying social life within the enterprise, what was the extent of their influence on the workforce? Reichel considers this evidence of a certain level of achieved control, in other words a degree of “discipline and conformity on the part of workers,” at least of those who remained in the SED.<sup>130</sup>

Yet, as mentioned above, BPO reports are not particularly reliable source. Though they reveal apathetic tendencies among the workforce, reports by other intelligence-gathering organizations, the Stasi and the trade unions for instance, offer a different view, at least of the very last years of the GDR. Perhaps the formal internal workings of the BPO and the standard language of their reports tell us more about the state of the SED’s workplace structures in the 1980s than about the actual situation in labor.

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<sup>129</sup> Reichel 2001, p. 94.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

### 2.2.1.2 Stasi's Involvement in Production

The Ministry for State Security was another structure used for surveillance and repression at the workplace. In the 1950s, its presence in enterprises was limited to the implementation and protection of the state ownership against former owners. After the June 1953 strike, the MfS started to compile reports on the “state of mind and opinions” of workers. Late 1950s, plans for setting up a methodical surveillance of production and enterprises by the MfS resulted a decade later in the implementation of Security Officials (*Sicherheitsbeauftragten*), Operative Groups (*Operativgruppen*) and Complementary Service Units (*Objektdienststellen*) in all economic sectors and important enterprises. The objectives of these monitoring activities and intelligence-gathering network were to ensure the successful fulfillment of the production plan, to keep tabs on contacts with the West and to explain production troubles and stops.<sup>131</sup>

The rise in trade with the West (which increased risks of industrial espionage and escapes) in the 1980s and growing failure to achieve production goals generated more work for the Economic Section of the Ministry, or the *Hauptabteilung XVIII*.<sup>132</sup> The *Solidarnosc* crisis in Poland (1980-81) further reinforced the Stasi's interest in workers' state-of-mind and the atmosphere on the shop floors. From the human resources point of view, this need for more eyes and ears in the workplace led to an increased call for unofficial collaborators (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, IM). In the second half of the 1970s, the HA XVIII had an average of approximately 11,000 IMs. In the 1980s, each *Kombinat* had a few hundred IMs reporting regularly on the internal situation at the workplace. The VEB *Chemische Werke* Buna had one IM for every 152 workers (204 for a total workforce of 31,000), the VEB Leuna, one for every 105 workers, (306 for 32,000 workers), the chemistry VEB *ChemieKombinat* Bitterfeld, one for 116 every workers (173 for 20,000 workers); the machinery *WerkzeugmaschinenKombinat* Fritz-Eckert, one for every 70 workers (390 for 27,400 workers). Export-oriented enterprises like the latter had a higher proportion of IMs. Enterprises in highly sensitive sectors, i.e. the production of armaments, were likely to have an internal Complementary Service Unity -- its own local Stasi division. For instance, the Complementary Service Unity within the VEB Wismut had about 600 regular collaborators (one for every 30 workers).<sup>133</sup>

The Stasi's activities in the enterprises included scrutinizing why production quotas had not been met, investigating reasons for breaks and production stops, espionage, security breaches,

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<sup>131</sup> Gieseke 2001, pp. 139-140.

<sup>132</sup> Vollnhals 1994, p. 513.

<sup>133</sup> Gieseke 2001, pp. 142-144.

contacts with the West, as well as ‘negative statements’ made by workers and underground political activities. Hence, the Stasi spied mostly on the top level management. In 1983, three-quarters of the 23 Operations of Person Control (*Operative Personenkontrolle*, OPK) launched in the HA XVIII concerned high-ranking management personnel. It is also at that level where it recruited most of its IMs.<sup>134</sup>

What role did the Stasi play in controlling the workforce? How do the Stasi reports which have emerged to date depict the situation for workers in enterprises in the 1980s? An analysis of the Stasi workplace reports is necessary to answer these questions.

#### 2.2.1.2.1 The Stasi Workplace Reports in the Second Half of the 1980s

Let us look at 24 Stasi reports about the situation in labor from November 1986 to August 1989.<sup>135</sup> The shortest were a few lines long; the longest over a hundred pages.<sup>136</sup> According to the author’s observations, the MfS was interested in at least four kinds of disturbances in labor:

- 1) A critical number of people leaving the FDGB or the SED in a short period of time. Our reports include nine cases, ranging from four to 23 exits each. The reports present the person (occupation, views on colleagues, membership in other organizations), the reasons given for leaving, the reaction by the BGL’s or BPO’s leaders, and whether or not the worker reconsidered her or his decision after discussions with the latter.
- 2) Unrest in the workforce. Five cases, each presented as the result of a combination of factors. The reports describe the prevailing “political-ideological” state of mind of the staff, the origins of dissatisfaction, who was involved, and how the BGL, BPO, and management reacted. Reporters also give their assessment -- in all of the cases mentioned positive -- of the legitimacy of the grievances.
- 3) Specific problems in one regional economic sector. Three cases, all caused by supply shortages resulting in inability to meet the quota requirements at a regional level. The cases are based on many enterprise reports. They stress the lack of productivity and the dis-

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<sup>134</sup> Hürtgen 2003, p. 35; Weil 2000, pp. 46-50.

<sup>135</sup> After that date, reports were full of problems ensuing from the chain of events of the fall of 1989. They are subject to further investigation below.

<sup>136</sup> BVfS HA XX, 34, S. 427-429; BVfS ZAIG 4222, S. 1-6; ZAIG 16081, S. 14-15; AS Leipzig, HA VII, 2972, S. 26-30; BVfS AS Potsdam, AKG 433, KD Zossen, S. 84-87; BVfS AS Potsdam AKG 433, S. 88-90; BVfS AS Potsdam, Abt. VXIII, 1390, 1397, 1398; BVfS AS Rostock, Abt. XVIII, 14/89, S. 403-406; BVfS AS Rostock, AKG 276/50/89, S. 120-122; BV AS Rostock, KD Rst. A/J, 19, S.1-370; BV AS Rostock, OD KKW Greifswald, Nr. 41, S. 127, 140-143; BV AS Dresden, KD Freital 15440, PI 09/88, S. 1-2; BVfS AS Frankfurt (O), Abt. XIX, 4160, S. 4-6; BV AS Erfurt, AKG 228, S. 1-16.

crepancies between the quota and the actual production. The reporters address the fact that quota requirements were quite often met only on paper. These reports always emphasize the unrest in the workforce because of unpaid bonuses, a detail suggesting that the unrest might have been the main reason for the inquiry in the first place.

- 4) The context of an upcoming election or congress. Nine such cases are present in the 24 reports. Before and after events such as an FDGB congress, BGL elections, or municipal elections, Stasi people in workplaces were asked to summarize discussions held in assemblies and criticisms made by workers. The results of the votes were also analyzed (participation, blank ballots, incidents, etc.).

What most strikes the reader of these reports is the wide range of reasons proposed as the cause for dissatisfaction among workers at enterprises in the second half of the 1980s. Labor-related concerns such as wages (with their corollary of consumption) and professional classification were strongly represented as the reasons for complaints expressed and claims made at the workplace, not least because they were more or less tolerated by the regime. Yet, the motives covered various aspects of workers' everyday life -- both inside and outside the workplace. These other topics included: working conditions, organization of work and production, management, work of the BGL, production quotas, the economy, housing, holidays, services, culture, media, mass organizations, even political leadership and political conditions, although the formulations remained very reasonable.

The following is a list of reasons for dissatisfaction and claims articulated in labor between November 1986 and August 1989, as it appears in the 24 Stasi reports, as well as the number of occurrences.<sup>137</sup> Different formulations naturally may refer to a same claim, and classification proved necessary. An intermediary classification between the simple list and overly broad range of categories (as wages, working conditions, etc.) was chosen.

Those who experienced the events of 1989-1990, who know the history behind them cannot help but identify in this list many of their causes as well as the basis of the claims made during those months. The MfS enterprise reports document the longer history of the East German revolution.

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<sup>137</sup> This paper does not try to qualify in each case the number of workers concerned or the context in which the claim was formulated (i.e. conversations? BGL meeting?), though most of them apparently took place during official gatherings. In the context of this work, the emphasis is put on the kinds and range of topics addressed by workers in enterprises rather than upon the venue.

**Grounds for workers dissatisfaction and claims made, cited in MfS enterprise reports,  
November 1986-August 1989**

Table 1: Working conditions and relationships within the enterprise (17 occurrences)

Lack of materials, parts and spare parts	6 occurrences
Management impropriety	3 occurrences
Poor labor organization in the enterprise	2 occurrences
Enterprise cafeteria was closed	1 occurrence
Insufficient supplies for night workers	1 occurrence
Growing tension between workers in different divisions in enterprise	1 occurrence
Need for the introduction of new technologies	1 occurrence
Poor working conditions	1 occurrence
Need for improvement of sanitary conditions at work	1 occurrence

Table 2 : Wages and working time (19 occurrences)

End-of-the-year bonus was not or not entirely paid	6 occurrences
Need for a wages system partially or totally based on performance	3 occurrences
Required performance too high / too much overtime	3 occurrences
Question of wages	2 occurrences
Overtime was not entirely paid	2 occurrences
Mistakes in the calculation of wages	1 occurrence
Need for work time reduction	1 occurrence
Need to abolish vocational training and classes on Saturdays	1 occurrence

Table 3 : Consumer goods (21 occurrences)

Need for improvements to consumer goods	14 occurrences
Dissatisfaction over price appreciation	5 occurrences
Development of 'two-class system' because of Inter-hops	1 occurrence
Need for an improvement of the general quality of products	1 occurrence

Table 4 : Trade union and the realization of the quota requirements (12 occurrences)

Dissatisfaction over the work of the BGL or the FDGB	6 occurrences
Quota requirements met only on paper (inaccurate official statements and articles)	2 occurrences
FDGB dues too high and various perceptions	2 occurrences
Difficulty to meet quota requirements	1 occurrence
FDGB did not implement announced social policy measures	1 occurrence

Table 5 : Social policy (27 occurrences)

Lack of rooms at holiday resorts	8 occurrences
Lack of apartments for worker families	6 occurrences
Problems in district healthcare facilities and insufficient medical supplies	6 occurrences
Lack of services (transportation, roads, reparations)	3 occurrences
Need for increase of pensions	2 occurrences
Need for a better housing subsidy policy	1 occurrence
Lack of financial resources devoted to culture	1 occurrence



Table 6 : Political conditions (14 occurrences)

Suppression of the magazine <i>Sputnik</i>	1 occurrence
Restrictions on travel visas	5 occurrences
Political conditions in the GDR	2 occurrences
'Government and SED should address the problems'	2 occurrences
Do not feel represented by SED	2 occurrences
Refusal of permission to take part in FDJ activities	1 occurrence
FDJ's work deemed uninteresting	1 occurrence

Within certain limits which will be defined below, dissatisfaction could be expressed at the workplace and thus the Stasi took the pulse of the population there.<sup>138</sup> Yet, the diversity of views observed in the reports of the last years of the 1980s was new.<sup>139</sup> The topics and issues addressed by workers in labor between 1986 and 1989 now encompassed and went beyond happenings within the factory gates. They point to a deep-seated discontent from various aspects of their lives. However, the forms through which this dissatisfaction could manifest itself were few. A list of ways workers expressed their dissatisfaction found in the same 24 Stasi reports bolster this argument.

Table 7 : Expressions of worker dissatisfaction cited in MfS enterprise reports, November 1986 - August 1989

Quitting the FDGB	6 occurrences (61 persons)
Stop in payment of FDGB dues / refusal to pay a new increase (until expulsion)	4 occurrences
Critical information ('kritische Hinweisen') in BGL meeting	3 occurrences
Scribbling upon ballots / negative vote in BGL elections	2 occurrences
Quitting the SED / BPO	2 occurrences (16 persons)

<sup>138</sup> The former activist Bernd Gehrke, who has written and published many critical studies on the East German opposition, made a similar remark in his speech at the conference on "East German Workers and the Events of 1989-1990" Center Marc-Bloch on February 24, 2004, in Berlin.

<sup>139</sup> For information on the typical claims made by workers in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly related to wages and working conditions, see: Hürtgen 2005, pp. 247-298.

Boycott of 1989 municipal elections	2 occurrences
Leaving the GDR / request for a visa for the FRG	2 occurrences (19 persons in 3 years)
Quitting the German-Soviet Friendship (enterprise-based organization)	1 occurrence (3 persons)
Quitting the FDJ (enterprise-based cell)	1 occurrence (5 persons)
Petition to the GDR State Council	1 occurrence (47 signatures)
Negative statements (until expulsion from FDGB)	1 occurrence
Refusal to work overtime	1 occurrence

The comparison of the two charts reveals a clear dichotomy between a deep dissatisfaction and the modest expressions it would take. While the number of issues addressed by workers were broad, the scope of possible actions remained extremely narrow, almost limited to the canceling their memberships in mass organizations, the FDGB at the forefront. Sometimes the ‘exit option,’ to use Hirschmann’s terminology, was used in a passive, less direct way, when workers managed to be expelled from the union instead of quitting it. A further section goes deeper in the question of the forms taken in defending worker interests.

Dissatisfaction not directly related to work was sometimes voiced at the workplace. In March 1989, IM Giltowsky reported on the reasons stated by 24 workers to leave the FDGB, SED or the German-Soviet Friendship (or *Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*, DSF) in the cable workshop Turm in Frankfurt (Oder) since the summer of 1988: rejected requests to travel to West Germany, the ban on the pro-Perestroika magazine *Sputnik*, low pensions for mothers and the limited availability of consumer goods.<sup>140</sup>

Different reasons provide an explanation of why disapproval of a political decision had repercussions in the workplace: many fields of state activity, in social policy matters and the availability of consumer goods for instance, were in fact provided in enterprises, and the regime allowed the expression of some forms of criticisms at the workplace. Furthermore, the population at work experienced first hand many of the contradictions inherent in the regime: inavailability and shortages of goods, never-ending economic problems, discrepancies between official discourse and labor reality. Obviously, some workers felt it was appropriate to protest against the banning of a magazine by leaving the SED, FDGB or DSF.

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<sup>140</sup> MfS BV Frankfurt (Oder), “At the meeting on 3/16/1989 the source reported as requested on quitting of SED, FDGB, DSF and FDJ membership”, pp. 4-5.

#### 2.2.1.2.2 Stasi's Repressive Action in Workplaces in the Second Half of the 1980s

Like a boxer waiting for the right moment to strike, the eyes of the MfS worked together with its arms and fists. A secret police does not merely compile reports and register complaints: its repressive character was intrinsic. In that regard, Renate Hürtgen has shown that MfS's interventions in workplaces served to set the limits on workers' actions and words. She used different cases of Operative Personal Control and Operative Process from 1983 as evidence.<sup>141</sup> An Operative Personal Control (Operative Personenkontrolle, OPK) against someone was opened on the basis of what the Stasi considered a unlawful act, whereas an Operative Process (Operativer Vorgang, OV) aimed at preventing an unlawful act from occurring.

Following Renate Hürtgen's study, workers without any leading functions first fell under Stasi's observation when they were suspected of having caused economic damage or of having made hostile or negative statements. An OPK or OV was launched when the 'incident' took on 'political character,' i.e., when it concerned more than one worker. Individual actions, such as leaving the SED or the FDGB, were systematically registered, but the MfS came into play when such actions could be interpreted as 'collective' or 'public' - in other words: as soon as they were said to be no longer individual in nature. This was one of the clearest limits to the expression of worker dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the Stasi was thoroughly capable of undermining an individual's life through different means of demoralization, criminalization, and isolation in the enterprise. It usually began with transfer to another division and travel bans. In December 1988, to give just one example, 47 workers of Lubmin signed a 3-page-petition - a long and explicit listing of grievances - to the Rostock district powers. The text had gone through many hands and rewritings. After intervention by the Stasi, some of the signatories had been transferred to other divisions.<sup>142</sup>

In the second half of the 1980s, such collective expressions of worker dissatisfaction multiplied, much to the alarm of authorities. To give one example: between November 1987 and April 1988, 13 workers at the energy plant *VEB EnergieKombinat Potsdam* left the FDGB; two of them also left the SED. A Stasi report from June 1988 states that the following state structures or persons were in turn informed of this situation: first, the heads of the district direction of the Mine and Energy Trade Union (IG Bergbau und Energie) and the FDGB; the SED district offices (which set up a working group on that issue). This was then forwarded to FDGB Federal Offices, the Council of Ministers, the Central Committee and finally conclu-

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<sup>141</sup> Hürtgen 2003.

<sup>142</sup> BStU BV Rostock, OD KKW Greifswald Nr. 41, no title, December 16, 1988, p. 126.

ded with a discussion between Politburo members Harry Tisch, Günter Mittag, Willi Stoph and Erich Honecker.<sup>143</sup> Obviously the situation was still considered exceptional, but it was the number of said events, until then infrequent, that characterized the Stasi reports on the workplace in those years.

The reports written in the context of the BGL elections of 1989 recorded this growth in worker dissatisfaction. Though the one-list system prevented the election of any other candidates, the number of blank ballots increased significantly, especially for high-ranking BGL secretaries. Ballots were spoiled, insults written beside the name of some candidates (i.e. shirker, alcoholic, homosexual, criminal, asocial) and even the names of alternative write-in 'candidates'. At assemblies, workers were more critical than in years past and criticized those union secretaries in particular that were members of the SED.<sup>144</sup> These exceptional expressions of discontent were the result of problems often addressed, but never solved, as well as new ones.

Probleme, die die Werktätigen seit längerem bewegen, die bereits mehrfach angesprochen und bisher nicht verändert wurden, werden unduldsamer zur Sprache gebracht. Gleichzeitig informieren Bezirksleitungen, dass es in einzelnen Kollektiven in Industrie und Bauwesen angesichts dieser Probleme, begonnen bei der planmässigen Material und Ersatzteilbereitstellung bis hin zur Verbesserung der Arbeitserversorgung und den sanitären Bedingungen, zunehmend kritische Anfragen und Diskussionen gibt.<sup>145</sup>

Reporting over the course of BGL elections in Zossen, Lieutenant Colonel Fleischmann expressed his worries that the upcoming municipal elections of May 1989 would also be affected by the same kind of incidents.<sup>146</sup> History proved his fears right in that respect. Hence, the municipal elections of 1989, often presented as the first station of GDR's Calvary, took place a month after troubled BGL elections. Both events take place in the same context. In other words, the workplace was part of the very first expressions of public dissatisfaction in 1989. The emergence of a new "public sphere" in the GDR should thus not be limited, as often the case, to the observation of the municipal elections of May by citizen groups.

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<sup>143</sup> MfS BV Potsdam, "Information zu operativ-bedeutsamen Austrittsbewegungen aus dem FDGB im VEB EnergieKombinat Potsdam", June 10, 1988, XVIII1397, pp. 1-4.

<sup>144</sup> MfS BV Potsdam, "Operative Informationen zum VEB Funkwerk Dabendorf", Zossen, April 18, 1989, AKG 433; Ibid., "Information zu den Gewerkschaftswahlen"; BV Berlin, "Information über Verlauf und Ergebnisse der Gewerkschaftswahlen 1989", March 20, 1989, ZAIG 16801, p. 14-15.

<sup>145</sup> MfS BV Berlin, "Information über Verlauf und Ergebnisse der Gewerkschaftswahlen 1989", p. 14. Same remarks in: BV Rostock, "Information über beabsichtigte Austritte aus dem FDGB", Rostock, June 14, 1989, AKG Nr. 276, pp. 120-23.

<sup>146</sup> "Gleichzeitig wurden Tendenzen sichtbar, die in differenzierter Form sich auf das Verhalten einzelner Bürger bei den Kommunalwahlen auswirken könnten." MfS BV Potsdam, "Information zu den Gewerkschaftswahlen", p. 88.

### 2.2.1.3 Reports by the Trade Unions in the Second Half of the 1980s

Beside the SED and the Stasi, the Free Confederation of German Trade Unions (or Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, FDGB) established a third structure of surveillance and repression at the workplace. Its reports of the second half of the 1980s offer a portrait of the situation similar to those by Stasi employees.

#### 2.2.1.3.1 The 1969 Directive

The history of the FDGB starts with the second Soviet military decree of June 1945, which extended the right to form trade unions and organizations for defending the interests and rights of workers. By fall 1945, two million people in the Soviet sector belonged to trade unions. These unions formed the FDGB in February 1946 which - rapidly placed under the control of the KPD, first in Berlin and then elsewhere - served as a significant vehicle for the fusion with the SPD and the creation of the SED during the same year.<sup>147</sup> Forty years later, the FDGB had become, in terms of size, the most important mass organization of the GDR: its membership approached 9.6 million. In other words, in all of the GDR, only about 200,000 workers were *not* members. In 1988, FDGB had about 350,000 union workplace representatives (*Vertrauensleute*) and 340,000 elected secretaries on social security matters.<sup>148</sup>

How did the FDGB do its share in controlling and repressing the workforce? The local union (or *Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung*, BGL) was intended to serve as the structure for defending worker interests at enterprises. As stated in the constitution, however, their main duty was to mobilize the workforce in order meet the production quota. If workers were unhappy or complained, if production came to a halt, it was the responsibility of BGL work controllers - over 110,000 in 1988 - to investigate the causes. Where required, the BGL took measures to reprimand those involved or it forced them to publicly denounce their own action (*Kritik und Selbstkritik*).<sup>149</sup> This process by which the BGL brought workers to retract what they said or fall back into line and these methods of coercion and re-education were termed the school of socialism (*Schule des Sozialismus*). The training of workers, in that specific sense, was regarded as another of the BGL's main tasks.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Gill 1989, p. 100, Leonhard 1955, pp. 428-31.

<sup>148</sup> Hübner 1999, p. 545.

<sup>149</sup> Work controllers also had other functions. They sometimes, in a limited way, criticized some of the management decisions, usually without much effect. See: Hürtgen 2005, pp. 180-192.

<sup>150</sup> Weinert/Gilles 1999, pp. 21-22.

The FDGB had built its own tight-knit network at workplaces meant to supply the regime with information on the situation on the shop floor and on the state of mind of the workforce. In that respect, the FDGB directive of February 10, 1969, on the role, tasks and organization of information is fundamental.<sup>151</sup> In the context post-Prague uprising, the directive's goals were to revise the bottom-to-top flow of information, from the workplace to FDGB district and federal structures. According to Wolfgang Eckelmann, head of FDGB Organization Division from 1987 to 1990, this directive had three goals. One was to re-organize the writing of reports in a way that enables computerized collection and processing of information. As stated in the directive:

Die Vorbereitung und Durchführung jeder gewerkschaftlichen Leitungsaufgabe stützt sich auf Informationsprozesse. Die Information dient der Entscheidungsvorbereitung und -findung, der Beschlussdurchführung, den Planungs- und Kontrollprozessen sowie der gewerkschaftlichen Analysen- und Prognosetätigkeit.

A second motive was to increase the reliability of the reports. Comparing its information with that collected by the MfS or the BPO in enterprises, the FDGB came to the conclusion that many informants described the situation on the shop floor in a unduly favorable light. Such information was useless in keeping track of problems and discontent on the shop floor and for controlling the workforce. After Prague, the FDGB wished more reliable and exact information. The directive also intensified the exchange of information between the FDGB and the MfS.<sup>152</sup>

A third motive was to take a systematic census of all conflicts, damage and stops in production that impacted on working and living conditions of workers.<sup>153</sup> The reports had to specify when and where a conflict or an 'exceptional incident' had taken place, its causes and consequences, its nature and history, the number of workers involved and the measures to be taken. To quote Eckelmann:

Der FDGB sah seine Rolle bei diesen Konflikten nicht darin, Interessenvertretung zu betreiben, sondern darin, die Arbeitnehmer davon zu überzeugen, dass Arbeitsniederlegungen „nicht der Weg ist, um Probleme zu lösen.“ Die ‚Auseinandersetzungen‘, die im Anschluss an solche Vorkommnisse in der Regel geführt wurden, zielten durchweg darauf ab, die Arbeitnehmer von der Unsinnigkeit von Streiks im real existierenden Sozialismus zu überzeugen. Diese Vorkommnisse waren für den FDGB nicht Anlass für eine Politik der Interessenvertretung, sondern als ‚schule des Marxismus-Leninismus‘ und

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<sup>151</sup> “Richtlinie über Rolle, Aufgaben und Organization der Gewerkschaftsinformation im System der wissenschaftlichen Leitungstätigkeit des FDGB”, 10.02.1969, ZGA FDGB 4966, printed in: Eckelmann/Hertle/Weinert 1990, pp. 199-200.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 87, Hürtgen / Gehrke 2001, pp. 178-182.

<sup>153</sup> See also the “Ordnung für die Erfassung von Arbeitskonflikten und besonderen Vorkommnissen”, 27.10.1969, ZGA FDGB 4966; published in: Eckelmann / Hertle / Weinert 1990, pp. 200-203.

als Institution des ‚sozialistischen Byzantismus‘ (Theo Pirker) übermittelte der FDGB die berichteten Vorgänge dem Politbüro und der Staatssicherheit.<sup>154</sup>

The implementation of intensified means of surveillance produced immediate results. In the first nine months of 1970, 117 work conflicts, ‘acts of sabotage’ and ‘activities of the enemies of the working class’ were recorded in enterprises, almost as many as in the entire previous year. Of that number, 19 work stoppages by workers (*Arbeitsniederlegungen*), four threats of work stoppage and three petitions related to pay or holiday issues were listed.<sup>155</sup> In 1971, the number of so-called exceptional incidents had jumped to 306, with 75 work conflicts and stoppages and 61 ‘acts of provocation and sabotage.’ According to the FDGB reports, the following year saw 63 work conflicts and stoppages and 51 acts of provocation and sabotage, for a total of 353 exceptional incidents.<sup>156</sup>

It is of great consequence that the majority of the exceptional incidents recorded in those years by the FDGB were fires and damage to production (62, 170, 239 cases, respectively). This sheds a harsh light on the working conditions in the GDR.

#### 2.2.1.3.2 The Reports in the Second Half of the 1980s

With the Solidarnosc crisis in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s, the FDGB kept a close watch on East German workplaces in order to prevent any similar protests. Reassured by reports which regarded a “Polish scenario” as improbable, the FDGB leadership seemed convinced of its own contribution to preventing the emergence of dissent in labor - to the point of considering its internal organization of model character which could be useful to the Polish.<sup>157</sup>

Zur Unterstützung der Qualifizierung leitender polnischer Gewerkschaftskader werden durch die Gewerkschaftshochschule ‚Fritz Heckert‘ beim Bundesvorstand des FDGB an der Aussenstelle der Gewerkschaftshochschule für Ausländerbildung Grünheide vom 12.-30.9. und vom 4.-22. Oktober 1982 je ein Lehrgang für je 40 leitende Funktionäre der Branchengewerkschaften durchgeführt.<sup>158</sup>

If there was no sign of immediate threat, there was a lot of seismic activity going on beneath the surface by the mid-1980s – at least enough to be noticed by some vigilant West German

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>155</sup> “Analyse über Arbeitskonflikte und besondere Vorkommnisse, die in den Monaten Januar bis September 1970 stattfanden”, 22.10.1970, ZGA FDGB 5414, reproduced in: Ibid., pp. 203-205.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 88. A new FDGB directive of 1973 strengthened its control and “work of persuasion” in labor.

<sup>157</sup> “Orientierung für die weitere Gestaltung der Beziehungen zu den polnischen Klassengewerkschaften”, June 30, 1982, ZGA FDGB 5349, reproduced in: Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>158</sup> ZGA FDGB 5349, quoted in: Ibid., p. 97.

observers.<sup>159</sup> In fact, the most reliable sources on these expressions of discontent were the reports the FDGB apparatus collected and evaluated each month! As per FDGB specifications, the reports are full of details and quotes, and are written in a relatively neutral language making them very useful to the historian. Mary Fulbrook considers them to be one of the best sources of information on everyday life in the GDR.<sup>160</sup>

In November 1986, the organizational division in the FDGB had produced an analysis of the situation in East German labor following the recent BGL elections. According to Wolfgang Eckelmann, who himself introduced it to the secretariat of FDGB federal board (Sekretariat des Bundesvorstandes), the report presented a realistic overview of the criticism and suggestions made by workers, based on first-hand information gathered in recent BGL general assemblies from at least seventeen VEBs.<sup>161</sup> The criticisms focused on the numerous problems preventing production from running smoothly.

Eine Vielzahl der Vorschläge und Kritiken bezieht sich erneut auf die termin-, qualitäts- und sortimentsgerechte Bereitstellung von Material und Ersatzteilen sowie auf die Versorgung mit Werkzeugen und Kleinmechanismen. Kritisiert wurde z.B., dass nicht genügend Scheren für die Textilindustrie, Handblechscheren für die Werften, Messer für die Schlacht- und Verarbeitungsbetriebe, Ständerbohrmaschinen und Winkelschleifer, ... Waggons und Container für die Beladung sowie Hubgeräte und Gabelstapler... zur Verfügung stehen. Ausserdem können oft Gabelstapler und andere Technik nicht genutzt werden, weil Batterien, Ersatzteile oder Reparaturkapazitäten fehlen.<sup>162</sup>

Workers also had much to complain about when it came to their working conditions. The general feeling was that they had declined to such a degree during the last years as to threaten their health and security at work: roofs and windows leaked; rooms were poorly heated; showers and toilets were either missing or were not repaired; dust was allowed to accumulate. Many expressed the wish to see new technologies introduced to improve productivity. Others wanted commuting time to be considered as working time. One general complaint was that these problems had been pointed out years ago and that they had worsened as nothing had been done to resolve them. As Eckelman explained to FDGB secretariat in 1986:

Die Mitglieder brachten ihre Unzufriedenheit zum Ausdruck, dass teilweise ihre Vorschläge und Kritiken zur Verbesserung der materiellen Arbeitsbedingungen nur ungenügend beantwortet und mitunter seit Jahren keiner Lösung zugeführt wurden. Das be-

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<sup>159</sup> Sander 1983 and Bust-Bartels 1980 are two examples.

<sup>160</sup> Fulbrook 1996, p. 277-278.

<sup>161</sup> "Einige Vorschläge, Hinweise und Kritike aus den gewerkschaftlichen Wahlversammlungen", November 1986, published in: Eckelmann / Hertle / Weinert 1990, pp. 217-221.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in: Ibid., p. 101.



einträchtig in einigen Betrieben bereits die Arbeitssicherheit und die Arbeitsbedingungen der Werktätigen.<sup>163</sup>

The report did not meet with the expected reaction within FDGB Federal Board, as it was sharply criticized as being “unrealistic” by President Harry Tisch. “The mood and the political situation are stable,” was the response. The report was immediately rejected and its authors rebuked. This touches upon one striking ambiguity of the East German regime in the 1980s: the denial of the very discontent it reported upon.

A new synthesis on the situation in labor was presented ten months later, after union members assemblies had been held in August and September 1987. It focused again on wages, shortages of all kinds and the working conditions. Yet, the problems identified by workers now went beyond the factory gates, as they concerned living conditions in a broad sense.

So wie in den Mitgliederversammlungen im Juli gibt es nach wie vor Diskussionen zur Versorgung. (...) Im Vordergrund stehen dabei die nicht ausreichende und territorial unterschiedliche Versorgung mit Fleisch- und Wurstwaren sowie Obst und Gemüse. Verärgert sind Mitglieder auch darüber, dass das Warensortiment auf diesem Gebiet besonders nach 16.00 Uhr ungenügend ist und das vorhandene Obst und Gemüse nicht in entsprechender Qualität und Sauberkeit angeboten wird. Erneut löst die nicht bedarfsgerechte Bereitstellung von modischer Kinder-, Damen- und Herrenoberbekleidung sowie von Schuhen breitere Diskussionen aus. Unverständnis gibt es ebenfalls über das lückenhafte Sortiment bei Artikeln der Kosmetik und der Haushaltschemie (z.B. Haarlack, -farben und -festiger, Nagellack, Feinwaschmittel, Allzweckreiniger). Ausserdem wird das Angebot an geleittem Wandfarben, Latex-Aussenanstrichstoffen, Pkw-Ersatzteilen, Fahrradschläuchen und ‚1000 kleinen Dingen‘ bemängelt.

Recent declarations made by Erich Honecker had aroused some hope in GDR's shop floors. During his visit in the FRG, Honecker had stated that peaceful collaboration would lead to closer contacts between the two German states. In many BGL assemblies, workers questioned this statement's meaning and expressed their wish that the paperwork required to visit West Germany be reduced.<sup>164</sup>

The 1987 report received a similar response by Harry Tisch as its 1986 forerunner. He contradicted the reported facts on the basis that the reports by the BPOs – which, as previously seen, were no longer a reliable source - did not mention any such problems. He exclaimed:

Was sollen diese Feststellungen zu den Versorgungsproblemen? Dazu noch diese breite Abhandlung. Ich habe alle Berichte der 1. Bezirkssekretäre der SED angesehen. Dort ist kein Wort darüber zu lesen. Soll ich diese Probleme lösen?... Was unternehmen denn die Bezirksvorstände des FDGB und die Zentralvorstände? Sie schieben uns alles auf

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<sup>163</sup> Idem.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 103 and 102.

den Tisch, und dann macht mal. Sie selbst müssen das verändern, doch nicht in erster Linie wir. Mängel aneinanderreihen, das bringt nichts.

As to the wish to see a loosening of the formalities involved in travel to West Germany, Tisch response to Eckelmann stated that they were “individual claims” and, therefore, of minor importance:

Das ist doch nicht wahr! Natürlich mag es hier und da den Wunsch geben zu reisen, bitte schön, auch weitere Reiseerleichterungen einzuführen. Aber das ist doch nicht die Forderung der Mehrheit der Bürger oder unserer Mitglieder... Das sind vereinzelte Forderungen, deshalb ist die Einschätzung falsch... Du mußt das Wesentliche vom Unwesentlichen unterscheiden.<sup>165</sup>

The same problems were seen again in the reports on the situation in labor in 1988 and 1989, and as they were becoming more acute, the list of grievances grew longer. Supplies of medication appeared in the 1988 report, with workers’ complaints about the long waiting periods for services, for example.<sup>166</sup> The number of exceptional incidents also grew steadily during those years: 832 (1986), 893 (1987), 999 (1988). As work conflicts and interruptions decreased from 29 (1986) to 14 (1988), the vast majority of incidents now took place ‘in the unions’ (*Vorkommnisse in den Gewerkschaften*). This seems to indicate that workers were more open than in the previous years.<sup>167</sup> In any case, such clashes increased at the eve of the collapse of the GDR and, here again, the words of FDGB reports mirrored those of the Stasi:

Immer unduldsamer reagieren die Mitglieder auf die teilweise schleppende Behandlung von Vorhaben für bessere Arbeitsbedingungen, von Neuerervorschlägen, der sozialistischen Gemeinschaftsarbeit, Versäumnissen bei der rechtzeitigen Qualifizierung sowie der schnellen und realen Information über betriebliche Fragen.<sup>168</sup>

It is fascinating to see how the information structures in labor, skillfully developed over years, sent clear distress signals to the top leadership in the last half of the 1980s. Informants on the shop floor felt the growing sense of displeasure, heard the voices growing louder and saw the list of grievances grow. No question, though the highest total ever, 999 recorded ‘exceptional events’ in 1988 remained relatively low considering the problems workers had to face on a daily basis. While informants - diligently recording each departure from the union and travel

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>166</sup> “Auszüge aus Informationen an das Sekretariat des Bundesvorstandes des FDGB (1988-1989)”, published in: Ibid., pp. 222-226.

<sup>167</sup> The majority were stealing of property and embezzlements of all kinds. “Information über besondere Vorkommnisse, die im Jahre 1988 dem Bundesvorstand des FDGB gemeldet wurden”, March 1, 1989, reproduced in: Ibid., pp. 227-228.

<sup>168</sup> “Information über Inhalt und Verlauf der Wahlversammlungen in den gewerkschaftlichen Grundorganisationen – Gewerkschaftsgruppen – Beschluss des Sekretariats des Bundesvorstandes des FDGB vom 8. März 1989”, reproduced in: Ibid., p. 223-224.

request - were concerned about the obvious increase, Harry Tisch - his back to the wall - tried to put the situation in a positive light in view of the high rate of FDGB membership compared to other trade unions in the world:

Wir haben ein Organisationsverhältnis von 97.4%. Wo in der Welt gibt es eine Gewerkschaft, die über einen solchen Organisiertenstand verfügt? Im Vergleich dazu sind die Austritte unerheblich.<sup>169</sup>

## **2.2.2 Neutralization of Worker Discontent**

In regard to the working population, the regime used labor not only as a look-out post but also in its active policy of neutralizing potential conflicts of interest.<sup>170</sup> SED leaders were prompt to present economic, social and legal achievements of labor – i.e. full employment, social policy, and extended worker rights - as a testimony to the superiority of real-existing socialism over capitalistic societies. Three aspects of the regime's neutralization policy in labor are considered in the following pages: employment and wage, enterprise-based social policy, labor law and rights of workers. The tightening of the financial resources throughout the 1980s limited the regime's capacity to maintain its neutralization policy toward the working population. Although attempts were made from the mid-1980s on to go back over some of its fundamentals, the measures taken created growing discontent in the shop floors. It is a common thread leading to the 1989 upheaval.

### **2.2.2.1 Employment and Wage**

The following pages recount how the plan was carried out regarding the number of positions and the level of wages. This examination highlights how planning was impossible when it came to human resource management. As a consequence, enterprises were able to enjoy a great deal of autonomy with respect to the total number of workers and the level of wages.

#### **2.2.2.1.1 Distorted Plans**

Devising the plan was a sophisticated venture that went through at least the following stations. The Plan Commission worked out a first draft on the basis of the objectives set by the SED leadership. This draft was distributed among the ministries, which dealt out the quotas to be filled along the different *Kombinate*. The *Kombinate* then carried out the same procedure

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<sup>169</sup> Quoted in: Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>170</sup> Skyba 2002.

within their enterprises. The management at each enterprise negotiated with distributors and made projections on the amount and type of resources necessary to meet the plan's requirements. This information then went back to the Plan Commission, which balanced the sheets and assessed the needs for all kinds of materials, energy, machinery and human resources. The plan was ultimately ratified by the government ministers and the People's Chamber.

Hence, the plan rested entirely on the information the enterprises forwarded to the ministries and the Plan Commission, especially regarding human resources. Here, two things were sufficient to make any attempt at planning for human resources hopeless. The first is that nothing less than the militarization of close to 10 million workers and the entire labor processes would have been required to ensure the plan's provisions be respected. It would have also supposed a tight control over the number of industrial injuries and pregnancies, and over work schedules.

Um dies zu erreichen, hätte es zusätzlich eines System administrativ-dirigistischer Maßnahmen der Arbeitskräfte lenkung und umfangreicher Kontrollen bedurft, die letztlich eine vollständige Übertragung militärischer Organisationsprinzipien auf den Arbeitskräfteeinsatz impliziert hätten. Betriebe hätten alle benötigten Arbeitskräfte direkt von der Zentrale zugewiesen erhalten und wären gezwungen gewesen, nicht mehr benötigte Arbeitskräfte an ihre Leitungsorgane zu melden; private Haushalte hätten Beruf und Arbeitsplatz nicht mehr frei wählen können, sondern zentral zugewiesen bekommen.<sup>171</sup>

As heavy-handed as they were, the repressive structures in labor did not result in militarization. The second cause preventing the definitive planning of needs in human resources stemmed from the plan's rigidity regarding the quantitative goals. As a consequence, enterprise managers took advantage of their role in drafting the plan to manipulate it from the outset. To obtain the necessary staff for their enterprise and meet the objectives, they could foresee processes of production requiring more workers, boost the number of projected injuries, and hence the number of replacement workers required, and they could increase the needs for administrators, which, in fact, would be assigned productive tasks.

Those practices were expanded in the 1980s, as enterprises had repeatedly been assigned unrealistic quotas, production interruptions because of shortages or machinery breakdowns, and sudden quota readjustments. More workers meant more room to maneuver and meet the quota. Until the mid-1950s, the regime had tried to supervise to some degree the assignment of the workers, along its economic priorities, with coercive and financial incentives. The death of Stalin, the 1953 upheaval, and the change in the political climate ultimately spelt the end of

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<sup>171</sup> Vollmer 1999, p. 338.

such practices. The 1960s and 1970s saw the progressive lifting of all restrictions on the choice of the workplace.<sup>172</sup> Upstream distortions on the needs for worked were inflated.<sup>173</sup> In the 1980s GDR leaders were well aware of these long-established practices.<sup>174</sup>

Such practices required the collusion of management and the BPO. And even at higher levels of the hierarchy, upstream distortions were considered inevitable and tolerated. Having to choose between requests for more workers or risk not meeting the objectives, the plan-makers chose to comply. The act of employing too many workers was rarely punished.<sup>175</sup>

Full employment resulted from the plan's rigidity and the semi-autonomy of enterprises regarding human resources management. According to Uwe Vollmer, full employment hence covered up an actual unemployment rate of about 15%, in the 1980s.<sup>176</sup> When the regime tried to increase norms and productivity while decreasing wages, enterprises reacted by hiring more workers. The need for a more workers seemed insatiable: approximately two million positions were being offered for some 112,000 job seekers - a rate of approximately 20/1 in 1984.<sup>177</sup>

#### 2.2.2.1.2 Loosened Wage Control

The same kind of semi-autonomy of management could be observed with respect to wage formation. Wages were made up of a basic pay and bonuses. Bonuses were designed to reward the fulfillment or exceeding of the plan's norms.<sup>178</sup> Plan-related bonuses had a distorting effect as described above. They led managers to provide plan-makers with information likely

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<sup>172</sup> The only exceptions remained prisoners and soldiers, sometimes sent into the production, as well as persons with particular psychological problems and categorized as 'asocial' or 'criminal.'

<sup>173</sup> Though this increase was not stopped. For the period 1949-1975, distortion rates peaked in 1951-55 and in 1971-75. see: *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>174</sup> "Schreiben des Leiters der Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik an Günter Mittag", December 13, 1988, SAPMO BArch, DY30/41748, reproduced in: *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>175</sup> An investigation of 4,000 enterprises in 1982 revealed 39% errors as regards to the human resources. In 1983, legal actions was only taken against managers in 107 cases. In 1988, "false information" were found in the bookkeeping of the Wohnungsneubau and the Gesellschaftsbau of the WohnungsKombinat of Dresden, for a total value of about 139 million mark ("Schreiben des Leiters der Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik an das Mitglied des Politbüros und den Sekretär des Zentralkomitees, Dr. Mittag", January 28, 1988, SAPMO BArch, DY/41748, reproduced in: Vollmer 1999., p. 367).

<sup>176</sup> His definition of the East German 'type' of unemployment would probably be considered "too rigid" by the ministry of Economics and Employment and the Federal Employment Service, which would call for more semantic flexibility. In fact, Vollmer's criteria would boost unemployment figures in all countries of the world. Besides unproductive time spent at work, he considers all workers unemployed who wished a supplementary (second or third) job in order to maximize their revenues, those who had found a new job but enjoyed an average of 20 days off before they began, those used for tasks below their level of qualification - even if these represented only a part of their responsibilities (Vollmer 1999., pp. 328-29).

<sup>177</sup> "Anlage zu einer SED-Hausmitteilung von der Abteilung Planung und Finanzen an Günter Mittag", January 22, 1985, SAPMO BArch, DY30/35646, reproduced in: Vollmer 1999., pp. 367-69.

<sup>178</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, pp. 94-97.

to assign low quotas to their enterprises in order to raise wages and keep workers from becoming tempted to accept another job with better pay.

In addition to the basic pay and bonuses, many enterprises had their own system of bonuses (piece or speed bonuses) rewarding increased efficiency, the so-called *Mehrleistungslöhne* (MLL). MLL were introduced as an added incentive for the carrying out and surpassing of the plan and as a means of binding workers to their enterprise. They also granted enterprises a decisive influence over a worker's actual pay. Enterprises used the leeway offered by the MLL to secure their workforce and headhunt for new additions. By the mid-1980s, the MLL had reached the average of 30% of a worker's pay, well beyond the estimates of the plan.<sup>179</sup>

Even smaller enterprises without MLLs could find ways to outsmart the plan with hidden pay increases. Paying artificial promotions or bonuses for tasks that were hardly quantifiable (so-called *fiktive Stücklöhne*) was a widespread practice.

Such practices rendered the planning of employment and wage levels illusory. The plan had lost track of the total wage bill such that fiscal policy in the GDR was rendered ineffective in the 1980s.<sup>180</sup>

#### 2.2.2.1.3 Employment, Wages and Productivity in the 1980s

The dynamics at work in employment and wages intensified East German economic problems, which in turn brought enterprises to make greater use of their autonomy and resort to increased workforces and hidden wage increases. This vicious economic circle had concrete effects on the workers' productivity: wages tended to lose their value as an incentive. In the second half of the 1980s, the situation had become highly problematic.

Reports indicated that in many enterprises, wages were simply disconnected from one's performance. Here an excerpt from a personal letter one "consultant" wrote to Erich Honecker in December 1988:

In Berlin-Hessenwinkel wurden Rohre für Gasleitungen 1987/1988 verlegt. Von fünf Arbeitern, die Gräben ziehen oder die Rohre einbringen, arbeitet einer, manchmal zwei. Die anderen unterhalten sich. Mit einem Arbeiter dieser Gruppe, der Mauerarbeiten verrichtet, sprach ich. Er sagte, dass er einen Grundlohn von etwa 800,- Mark habe und

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<sup>179</sup> Vollmer 1999, p. 344.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., pp. 351-354.

durch Leistung etwa 1000,- Mark monatlich verdiene. Die Arbeiter erhalten also für vielleicht 50 Prozent der möglichen Arbeitsleistung einen Leistungszuschlag.<sup>181</sup>

Many directors tolerated “leveling” practices, through which bonuses were shared between workers, regardless of his or her actual performance (so-called *Gleichmacherei*):

Durch die Leiter wird in vielen Fällen die Auseinandersetzung mit Werktätigen über Mängel in der Arbeit gescheut. (...) Gegenwärtig erhalten in vielen Brigaden alle Kollektivmitglieder unabhängig von ihrem persönlichen Beitrag zum kollektiven Gesamtergebnis den gleichen Lohn. Das führt nach Auffassung der Bauarbeiter zur Gleichmacherei.<sup>182</sup>

“Unexcused absence from work” (*unentschuldigte Fehlstunden*) were on the rise since the second half of the 1970s: from 3.3 hours in 1976 to 6.3 hours in 1982.<sup>183</sup> Productivity was falling: 82.4% of the time spent at work was considered to be productive hours in 1982. Seven years later, in sectors such as construction, reports assumed this rate had fallen under 70%. In his letter to Erich Honecker, Erich Hanke spoke of unexploited reserves in human resources at between 30 and 100% depending on the sector.

Because of the numerous bottlenecks, production stops/breakdowns and shortages, overtime also grew steadily in the 1980s, together with unproductive hours and hidden unemployment – a rather astonishing combination. Indifference and exasperation was growing among workers.

Nicht nur Genossen, sondern grosse Teile der Bevölkerung sind unzufrieden und verstehen die ungenügende Arbeitszeitsausnützung und die geringe Arbeitsdisziplin vieler Beschäftigten nicht.<sup>184</sup>

Toward the end of the decade, Honecker's entourage was considering the introduction of wages “entirely based on performance,” as in “capitalist industries.” Honecker ordered discussions on this proposition in the FDGB and had them tested in some enterprises. Not all leaders believed it was possible to undertake such a radical step. They rather put forward the so-called “productive wage” system, which introduced greater differentiation in wage formation without going as far as that envisioned by Honecker and his staff. The latter rejected such, what they considered, half-hearted measures.

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<sup>181</sup> “Brief von Prof.em Erich Hanke an Erich Honecker”, December 1988, SAPMO BArch, DY 30/41763, reproduced in: Vollmer 1999., pp. 369-71.

<sup>182</sup> “Bericht einer Arbeitsgruppe der Abteilung Planung und Finanzen und Bauwesen des Zentralkomitees der SED, des Ministeriums für Bauwesen und der zuständigen Industriegewerkschaft”, March 2, 1989, SAPMO BArch, DY 30/41763, reproduced in: Vollmer 1999, pp. 371-73, p. 372.

<sup>183</sup> “Information zur Entwicklung der Arbeits- und Ausfallzeiten der Produktionsarbeiter in den produzierenden Bereichen im I. Quartal 1982”, SAPMO BArch, DY 30/30077, reproduced in: Vollmer 1999., pp. 361-2.

<sup>184</sup> “Brief von Prof.em. Erich Hanke an Erich Honecker”, p. 369.

Auch die gegenwärtige Einführung von sogenannten ‘Produktivlöhne’ in der Industrie wird die Erwartungen nach einem wesentlichen Leistungsschub nicht erfüllen. (...) Zur Erreichung unserer Ziele (...) sowie zur Überwindung unserer Arbeitskräfteproblem sollten höhere Arbeitsleistungen durch eine wesentlich wirksamere Stimulierung stärker gefördert werden. Der Lohn der Arbeiter sollte ohne Begrenzung entsprechend ihrer Leistung steigen. Bei der Ausarbeitung entsprechender Methoden sollten wir uns stärker auf bewährte Verfahrensweisen kapitalistischer Unternehmer besinnen. Sie waren in Zeiten der Konjunktur stark daran interessiert, hohe Arbeitsleistungen wirksam zu stimulieren. (...) Ihr wirkliches Interesse an der Arbeit kann sich nur entwickeln, wenn der Arbeiter nicht nur durch grössere Leistungen Vorteile hat, sondern auch voll die Verluste schlechter Arbeit tragen muss.<sup>185</sup>

Yet, it is impossible to overlook that these competitive options discussed in the Politburo at the end of the 1980s shared the same goals: decreasing wages and make them depend more directly on one's quantitative performance.

### 2.2.2.2 Industrial Social Policy

Industrial social policy was another key component of the regime's neutralizing policy toward the working population. A key date here is 1971, when after vicious internal struggles between opposite camps, Walter Ulbricht was removed from office and replaced by Erich Honecker as SED First Secretary.<sup>186</sup> This episode, which marked the realignment of the GDR leadership with the USSR, had the development of social policy at its core. The end of the 1960s had seen workers becoming restless in many Eastern Bloc countries, as in the case of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland two years later. Without questioning the leading role of the state parties in the popular democracies, the Soviet leaders showed themselves nonetheless favorable to some changes in government policy in the form of an increased standard of living in those countries. In the GDR, this new approach in social policy was termed “unity of the economic and the social policy” and was introduced by 1972.<sup>187</sup>

In addition to the more traditional components of social security, such as health, pensions, family support and education, the East German leadership targeted housing and consumption as fields of industrial social policy requiring rapid improvements. Between 1971 and 1989, the continuous rise of the standards of living was identified as *the* mechanism for the "progression of socialism" and linked to social policy.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 370, underlined in original.

<sup>186</sup> This section is mainly based around: Hertle 1992, Frerich/Frey 1993, Hockerts 1994, Schneider 1996, Schmidt 1999, Boyer/Skyba 1999, Boyer 2001, Skyba 2002.

<sup>187</sup> Boyer/Skyba 1999, pp. 582-84.



Between 1971 and 1985, almost two million apartments were built or renovated. By 1989, the GDR had 426 apartments for 1,000 inhabitants, a relatively high rate by international standards but nevertheless insufficient: 781,000 applications for new apartments had been registered, the majority on grounds that they lacked modern conveniences.<sup>188</sup> The production of consumer goods also grew significantly during this period. In 1989, 99% of East German families possessed a refrigerator (1970: 56%), 88% a television (1970: 69%) and 99% a washing machine (1970: 53%).<sup>189</sup> If the production of motorized vehicles had increased to its peak of 217,931 units in 1986, it is a known fact that true demand was never met.<sup>190</sup> The state also subsidized rents, electricity, water, heating, goods of basic consumption and the cost of public transportation.

#### 2.2.2.2.1 An Industrial Type of Social Policy

Most administrative tasks accomplished, services delivered and counseling provided in the enterprises qualifies East German social policy as industrial (*betriebliche Sozialpolitik*). A quick overview demonstrates its importance.

In 1988, East German enterprises operated 122 polyclinics, 306 infirmaries (*Betriebsambulatorien*), 1,683 medical stations (*Arztsanitätsstellen*) and 1,327 nurse stations (*Schwesternsanitätsstellen*), as well as outpatient facilities for smaller enterprises. The company-based healthcare system (*Betriebsgesundheitswesen*) cared for 75% of the GDR's workforce and employed about 18,000 persons. Company doctors were responsible for an average of 3,100 persons. (This includes persons at large, not only workers, because company healthcare facilities, especially in larger plants, also cared for those living near the enterprise.<sup>191</sup>) The services delivered in company healthcare facilities went well beyond labor-related medical care and treatment.

Enterprises had day-care centers for workers' children. They shared this responsibility with districts, cities and towns. This vast network of highly subsidized day-care centers was among the most significant East German family policy measures. It was designed to support a rising birth rate and to reduce the tension between family and work, even though campaigns to bring women to work were scaled back in the 1980s.<sup>192</sup> In the same spirit, and also to foster the

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<sup>188</sup> Frerich/Frey 1993, pp. 426, 439, 450-54.

<sup>189</sup> Schneider 1996, p. 125 and Weber 1999, p. 289.

<sup>190</sup> In 1989, 52% of East German families owned a motor vehicle; the waiting period for delivery was about 10 years. Schneider 1996, pp. 125-28.

<sup>191</sup> Frerich/Frey 1993, p. 250; Hockerts 1994, pp. 526-27.

<sup>192</sup> Frerich/Frey 1993, p. 422.

development of a strong bond to labor at an early age, enterprises were compelled to design cultural and sport programs for school-aged children.

The trade unions were used to assign apartments intended for worker families; yet as the bulk of apartments were reserved for worker families, this task was of great importance. BGL housing commissions helped workers to complete the request form and counsel district offices in the actual decision-making process.<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, many enterprises had taken over the practice, typical of German entrepreneurs since the Wilhelmine period, of providing a certain number of apartments to workers. These “company apartments” (*Werkwohnungen*) were seen as a way to secure enough workers, always a problem at such enterprises. BGL were jointly responsible for the distribution of these apartments.<sup>194</sup>

The FDGB possessed a large number of holiday resorts, reserved for FDGB members, a fact that might shed some light on high membership levels. The number of reservations available in FDGB holiday resorts remained stable at about one million throughout the 1960s, but grew significantly in the following decades to 1,446,853 in 1975 and 1,863,900 in 1986. This would however fall in the second half of the 1980s: 1,833,300 reservations available in 1989.<sup>195</sup> The allocation of available slots in these resorts was assigned to a specific unit within BGL and the FDGB: the Holiday Service (*FDGB-Feriedienst*). Since 1979, the FDGB Holiday Service also managed the allocation of the more than three million slots in company sanatoriums and health resorts. These company homes and resorts were not only intended for use by overworked employees; they also served to increase the number of holiday options. In the second half of the 1980s, the FDGB Holiday Service managed the allocation of about 7.5 million holidays (about 1,400,000 in the form of camping), and employed 18,000.<sup>196</sup>

Despite these figures, the availability of slots, especially during the summertime, was considered insufficient by many workers. At the end of the 1980s, an average member of the FDGB was granted summer vacation at a facility once every seven years. In 1987, FDGB president Tisch thought a good way to solve the problem was to spread holidays throughout the year.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 427.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 440-42.

<sup>195</sup> Vollmer 1999, p. 327.

<sup>196</sup> Frerich/Frey 1993, pp. 168-69; Vollmer 1999, p. 327; Weinert / Gilles 1999, p. 24.

Und es ist eine Illusion zu glauben, dass man sich nur im Juni, Juli oder August an der Ostsee erholen könnte. Diese Ostsee hat eine Küste, wo man sich das ganze Jahr, besonders auch im Frühjahr, gut erholen kann.<sup>197</sup>

In the same vein, many food products, such as bananas, were sometimes supplied to enterprises and distributed among workers. In addition, most consultation on social policy issues took place at the enterprise level. Beside the 18,000 staff responsible for Holiday Services, about 400,000 BGL members took part to the managing of social policy in the GDR, of which 280,000 were elected officials responsible for social issues.<sup>198</sup> These main elements of social policy all converged to make the enterprise the main administrator and provider of social services in the GDR.

#### 2.2.2.2.2 The Costs of the Social Policy in the 1980s

In the second half of the 1980s, not only did financing for social policy suffer from a weak economy. It had in turn become a burden for the entire economy, which recorded an annual deficit of 8 billion and an exterior debt of 20 billion marks in 1988. Hospital service deteriorated, materials for housing were of a poor quality, slots in holiday resorts fell in number, various everyday products were unavailable. These problems are familiar as detailed in the FDGB and Stasi reports previously analyzed.

Among the Politburo members, this situation manifested itself in an important controversy between Günter Mittag, in charge of the economy, and Gerhard Schürer, president of the State Plan Commission. Faced with a growing budget deficit, the latter proposed radical economic reforms: a reduction of subsidies for rent/energy and in the supply of consumer goods, together with a sharp increase of trade with capitalist countries.<sup>199</sup> For Gerhard Schürer and other Politburo members like Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, the only way out of the crisis was join in a confederation with the Federal Republic of Germany and have this country assume its debt. This offer reached chancellor Kohl's ears and was even discussed between the USA and the USSR at the end of 1989.<sup>200</sup> Such a confederation would have been based on the restructuring of the East German economic and social policy, as well as a drastic reduction in the level of social benefits offered to the East German population and a severe fall in the standard

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<sup>197</sup> *Protokoll des 11. FDGB-Kongresses vom 22. bis 25 April 1987 in Berlin* (Berlin-Ost, 1987, p. 31), quoted in Weinert / Gilles 1999, p. 26.

<sup>198</sup> Hockerts 1994, p. 523 and Weinert / Gilles 1999, p. 24.

<sup>199</sup> Together with other measures. "Überlegungen zur weiteren Arbeit am Volkswirtschaftsplan 1989 und darüber hinaus", Berlin, April 26, 1988, quoted in: Hertle 1992, pp. 128-29.

<sup>200</sup> Hertle 1992, p. 131.

of living. For them, too, at that time, “there was no alternative.” Margaret Thatcher’s course for western economies was their plan to guarantee the future of ‘socialism’ in Germany.

Mittag rejected this proposition altogether and Schürer’s attempts to convince Honecker were fruitless. Although he was considering models to lower wages, Honecker did not want to risk such a direct confrontation with the population.<sup>201</sup> On the contrary: facing growing dissatisfaction, the Politburo and the FDGB worked to increase retirement pensions, a measure demanded by the population.<sup>202</sup> The economy and social policy were crumbling, but the resort to new social improvements, never to be implemented, was the response of Honecker, Mittag and Tisch.<sup>203</sup> As head of the FDGB, and as such, responsible for social policy, Harry Tisch still had reservations about Schürer’s 1988 proposition, even years later:

Dass man nun sagt, er [Schürer] mahnte und mahnte, so ist das ja nun nicht. Wenn er das heute sagt, dann sagt er auch zuviel über sich. So viel hat Schürer nicht gemahnt. Und wenn er sich beruft auf sein Papier, das er 1988 eingereicht hat: Das war ein schwaches Papier, das hätte die Lösung auch nicht gebracht. Darum wurde das Papier auch zurückgewiesen, es enthielt nur eine Umschichtung, daraus war doch keine Strategie zu entnehmen.<sup>204</sup>

Yet failures of the social policy, the scale of the regime’s success, often produced popular discontent. The outcome was that measures announced to appease workers may well have produced greater antagonism if they were not implemented. For instance, a Stasi report from June 1989, noted that a wage increase, announced to quell worker discontent in one division of the *VEB Düngemittelwerk*, could not be paid due to a lack of financial resources. The result was greater anger of the workforce here.<sup>205</sup>

For our purposes, the importance of this debate, often described as a crucial ideological confrontation between reformers (Schürer, Schalck-Golodkowski) and conservatives (Honecker, Mittag, Tisch), should not be overestimated. With respect to the relationships between regime leadership and the working population, both the "reformist" and the "conservative" camps announced major decreases in the standards of living. If the "conservative" camp maintained the social policy, it was unable to finance these provisions. Instead of an ideological controversy, we may rather be confronted with different strategies to increase productivity

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>202</sup> It was announced on November 29, 1988. Weinert/Gilles 1999, pp. 36-37.

<sup>203</sup> Except that months later, Mittag made several propositions for economic reforms that resembled some of Schürer’s paper. Hertle 1992, p. 130.

<sup>204</sup> “Wir waren überzeugt, dass unser System richtig ist. Gespräch mit Harry Tisch, Berlin, 9.12.1993”, in: Pirker et al., 1990, pp. 121-142, pp. 130-31.

<sup>205</sup> MfS BV Rostock, “Information über beabsichtigte Austritte aus dem FDGB”, Rostock, June 14, 1989, AKG Nr. 276, p. 2. Similar comments in: Lepsius 1994, p. 24; Hockerts 1994, pp. 535-37; Schmidt, pp. 298-99.

and decrease state expenditures – a combination that resulted in a decrease in the workers' standard of living – without prompting unrest among the population.

### 2.2.2.3 Labor Law and Workers' Rights

What was the status of the law in the GDR? Was the East German state functioning within the rule of law or employing extrajudicial practices? There is more at stake here than just the relationship of the East German regime to legality. Ultimately, it was the meaning of key concepts of legal theory, such as *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* (rule of law) which is at stake. One crucial reflection on that issue concerns the nature of the concept: one definition, in standard use in the 1920s, considers *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* as the recourse to the language of the law by the state; another in common use today defines it as the respect of certain limits, defined in the laws, by the state. Which modern state cannot be said fall under the first definition? Which actually meets the requirements of the second one? Unsurprisingly, the question over the status of the law in the GDR has led to diverse and contradictory answers that rely on different interpretations of the notion.<sup>206</sup>

The specific aspect of the problem of the status of the law in the GDR raised in this work concerns the use of the labor law and worker rights by the regime to neutralize potential conflicts with the working population. If labor-friendly laws and workers' rights were important elements of the regime's neutralization policy, during the second half of the 1980s, however, worker complaints started to be directed at the fact that worker rights only existed on paper. In 1989 workers claimed to make direct use, for their own benefit, of these rights exercised in their name by the FDGB. Hence, the argument developed in the next pages is somewhat different than the one proposed thus far on employment, wages and social policy. In these matters, the focus was on the exhaustion of the economic foundation for the regime's neutralization policy at the workplace. In the case of the labor law, it was the 1989 events that offered a first true indication that worker rights may have played a role in this policy. Attempts made that year to transform the East German labor (*Arbeitsgesetzbuch*, AGB) from an arm of the regime into an arm against it, suggest that workers viewed it in favorable terms, as a genuine victory for labor which needed to be implemented in line with its spirit. In that respect, workers would seem to view laws on labor in a positive light, and as such these laws can be considered as one instrument in the regime's neutralization policy of potential conflicts at

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<sup>206</sup> An excellent introduction to the status of law in the GDR with bibliographical references is found in Gerhard Dilcher 1994.

the workplace. The objective of the following pages is to highlight the extent of labor law's role in this policy.

#### 2.2.2.3.1 The 1974 Revision of the East German Labor Law

At the SED's 8<sup>th</sup> Convention in 1971, Honecker stated that it was imperative to reform the labor law of 1961 (the *Gesetzbuch der Arbeit*, GBA). In a "strengthening socialist society", Honecker explained referring to the GDR, workers and their unions were entitled to more wide-ranging rights than called for in the GBA. And labor law had to become more understandable to workers, he stated, so that they would have recourse to it in case of conflict at the workplace. Though always presented as a more comprehensive set of texts than that of West Germany, the East German labor law had been amended over the course of a decade to include 400 new laws, resolutions (*Beschlüsse*) and edicts (*Verordnungen*); 150 basic labor agreements (*Rahmenkollektivverträge*); and about 220 prescriptions on workplace safety (*Arbeitsschutzanordnungen*). Not something one could describe as a user-friendly law! The delegates at SED's 8<sup>th</sup> Convention adopted a resolution calling for a revision of the GBA and, the following year, the FDGB was made responsible for making propositions on how to revise its content.<sup>207</sup>

During the next years, according to the FDGB, 5.6 million workers took part in different meetings on the revision of the GBA. A total of 147,806 proposals were submitted, while numerous questions were raised and specific information announced. Of those, 39,533 contained concrete proposals for modification of the original proposition. In conclusion, 90 changes to the content and 144 to the wording found their way into the final proposition made by the FDGB.<sup>208</sup> The new labor law, the *Arbeitsgesetzbuch* (AGB), was finally adopted by the People's Chamber in June 1977 and came into force in January 1978.

The AGB was part of the attempts by the regime to solve the economic difficulties of the second half of the 1970s through greater control and mobilization of the workforce. The majority of co-determination rights were exercised at the enterprise level and thus by the BGL. BGL co-determination rights touched on all aspects of worker role in the labor process: production and labor organization, ratification and control of collective agreements, wages and remuneration, work time, holidays, breaks and paid leave, human resource management, gender-related

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<sup>207</sup> *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VIII. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1971* (Ost-Berlin, 1971), in: Frerich/Frey, p. 149.

<sup>208</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, June 17, 1977, in: *Ibid.*, p. 150.

issues, vocational training and specialization programs, disciplinary action, conflict resolution, awards for merit, industrial social policy, health and security at work, the supply of consumer goods, cultural and sport programs.<sup>209</sup>

#### 2.2.2.3.2 Other labor legislations

In 1972, the FDGB had been granted consultation and co-determination rights at a regional and national level, on all matters concerning the “shaping of the developed socialist society and the overall enhancement of the socialist state power.” Over the years the FDGB and the Council of Ministers drafted numerous joint resolutions on improving working and living conditions, health and safety at work, social and wages policies, work culture (*Arbeitskultur*), sport and cultural life of the workers. The following is an excerpt from a Fritz-Heckert FDGB University brochure giving the detail of FDGB's objectives:

Dazu gehör[en] das Recht auf Arbeit, auf Gleichberechtigung der Frau, auf Schutz und Förderung der Jugend, auf Mitbestimmung und Mitgestaltung der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung, auf Lohn nach Qualität und Quantität, auf Bildung, Freizeit und Erholung, auf Schutz der Gesundheit und der Arbeitskraft, auf Teilnahme am kulturellen Leben, auf Fürsorge im Alter und bei Invalidität sowie das Recht auf materielle Sicherheit bei Krankheit und Unfällen.<sup>210</sup>

Of all these nominal rights, the FDGB was not invoking them in support of workers; the right to work needs to be addressed because of the role it was to play in worker demands in 1990. Article 24 of the constitution described the right to work as a result of the socialization of the economy. Yet this was not meant as a legal right (*unmittelbar einklagbares Recht*). Its inclusion in the constitution reflected full employment: whoever wanted a job in the GDR could have one. The right to work was the term given to a *de facto* situation which had little to do with the defense of workers' rights or with socialist ideas. Yet its legal formulation as a right nevertheless shaped East German workers' experience. The year 1989-1990 saw a certain effort, though unsuccessful, on the part of workers, trade unionists, opposition groups and, as a result of their pressure, De Maiziere's government to include the right to work in the unified German constitution. Article 24 was complemented by the protection against dismissals:

Dem Arbeitnehmer musste vor einer Kündigung zunächst ein Änderungsvertrag (Veränderung im Betrieb) oder ein Überleitungsvertrag (Arbeitsplatzwechsel in einen anderen Betrieb durch dreiseitigen Vertrag) angeboten werden, und die betriebliche Gewerkschaftsleitung musste der Kündigung zustimmen, bevor eine ordentliche Kündigung zulässig war. Eine fristlose Kündigung war nur mit der Zustimmung der Gewerkschaft

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., pp. 69, 70, 95, 151-53.

<sup>210</sup> FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule Fritz Heckert, 1987, p. 297, in: Frerich/Frey 1993, p. 151.

unter engen Voraussetzungen (Verletzung staatsbürgerlicher Pflichten oder der sozialistischen Arbeitsdisziplin) möglich. Die Werktätigen waren also beamtenähnlich abgesichert.<sup>211</sup>

In case of conflicts, the provisions for protection against dismissals could, on rare occasions, be advantageous to workers.<sup>212</sup> Yet some formulations of this law hinted at objectives other than the protection of workers against arbitrary decisions of managers. For instance, it provided that workers remain at their job unless they had acted illegally. Hence one's protection against dismissals was complemented by the "duty to work honorably" (*ehrenvolle Arbeitspflicht*). Obviously, the protection against dismissals was inseparable from attempts to stabilize the distribution of the workforce and to raise productivity rates. Reduced workforce mobility helped to control wage appreciation, and ultimately should help in planning economic growth. On the shop floor, it was the task of the BGL to make sure that both the right to work and the duty to work honorably were respected.

### 2.2.3 Conclusion

A top-down perspective on the world of labor reveals a regime's two-pronged strategy toward workers. One aspect was the close surveillance and repression of the workforce. The network of information-gathering and repressive structures in enterprises was very tightly intertwined with the SED, the Stasi and the FDGB. These networks supplied the top hierarchy with information on the state of mind of workers and their accusations. If the reports coming from SED enterprise structures in the 1980s are of minor interest in that respect, those from the Stasi and the FDGB are valuable. They depict with similar concern the rise in dissatisfaction in the second half of the 1980s. They drew the attention of the ruling elite to manifold topics causing discontent among the working population. Stasi and FDGB reports from enterprises document the history leading up to the East German revolution.

How could worker dissatisfaction and the potential threat it represented to the regime be quelled? The second aspect of the regime's relationship to labor was the implementation of an active policy of neutralization of conflicts at the workplace. The reference here is to the relative autonomy of enterprises in employment and wage formation, the provisions of the industrial social policy and a worker-friendly labor law – although only on paper. Yet, in the se-

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<sup>211</sup> Walker 1991, p. 4.

<sup>212</sup> "Gespräch mit Betriebsräten der Walzwerk Finow GmbH über Lage und Aussichten ihres Betriebs", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 42/7 (July 1991), pp. 435-441, esp. p. 440.



cond half of the 1980s, the GDR faced a critical economic situation, which severely reduced the possibility for the regime to maintain its policy of neutralizing conflicts at the workplace.

Repressive surveillance and neutralizing policies were mutually conditioned and cannot be correctly understood separately: the FDGB for instance was at the core of both. At this point of presentation, a first conclusion highlights the role of exhausted economic latitude in the sustained rise in living standards and the neutralization policy for potential conflicts at the workplace. The validity of this preliminary conclusion must in turn be confronted with the analysis of workers' perspective on labor. Does the situation in labor during the 1980s appear different when viewed from within?

### **2.3 Labor from a Worker's Perspective: Forms and Extent of the Defense of Interests**

What has been written thus far on the repression at the workplace and the neutralization of workers' potential force of reprisal creates the framework of workers' experience with labor in the GDR. It is within these limits established by the regime that the great majority of workers developed ways to defend their interests. This section is dedicated to the study of defense of workers' interests in the GDR. Workers' experiences were not exclusively shaped by tensions and conflicts, but also by good social relationships, worker satisfaction and reward, as well as by apathy and indifference. There is an obvious limit to the approach centered on the defense of interests: it does not adequately give voice to the literature on everyday life in East German enterprises highlighting a range of interlinked facets of workers' life – literature which thus does not allow one to view of the workplace solely as a place of conflict.<sup>213</sup> There are, however, excellent reasons for questioning workers' defense of interests in the GDR - which interests could be defended and how. It allows one to look at the workplace as a location from which conflicts were never entirely eradicated, despite the regime's numerous attempts, something often ignored in literature. The first section of this chapter addresses the effectiveness of official structures for workers to defend their interests. The second turns to hidden forms of interest defense. This chapter asks which interests could be defended, and how effective the open and covert forms were.

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<sup>213</sup> Kott 2001; Weil 2001; Hürtgen 2001 a.

### 2.3.1 The Official Structures for the Defense of Worker Interests

The author's initial inquiry is whether or not the official mechanisms for the defense of workers' interests was successful in that role.

#### 2.3.1.1 The Trade Union

The BGL's primary goals were the increase of productivity and the fulfillment of the quota. As such, it held regular discussions with the workforce, in order to find way to increase production. Driven by considerations over cost-cutting, increases to production quality and workforce mobilization, they were not a structure to defend workers' interests.<sup>214</sup> The idea that they could have been a mechanism for this is "grotesque", to use the expression of Axel Bust-Bartels.<sup>215</sup>

The extent to which workers' input in union assemblies was allowed varied from BGL to BGL. In many assemblies, there never was anything resembling a discussion.<sup>216</sup> Yet if workers criticized some of management's decisions publicly, they were likely to do it there. In those assemblies where some exchange between workers and union officials took place, critical issues addressed were restricted to norms, wages and working conditions. Notwithstanding these limitations, these were delicate topics for the regime, and BGL officials were never comfortable with union assemblies. The trend was to "muzzle" or suppress them altogether. Also fewer workers attended the union assemblies in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>217</sup>

These trends reversed between 1987 and 1989. More workers attended BGL general assemblies and took the floor. The BGL elections in 1987 and 1989 became in many enterprises the unexpected forum for an avalanche of complaints and expressions of anger by workers, as Stasi and FDGB enterprise reports from those years show. Although the halls of union assemblies were full of angry voices at the end of the 1980s, the assessment of the role of BGLs in defending workers' interests should not be altered.<sup>218</sup>

Variations, of course, existed. The relationship between the workforce and the union could develop, among other criteria, based on the size of the enterprise. A bigger enterprise and BGL could support better social services, a more diverse cultural program and better holiday

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<sup>214</sup> Sander 1997, p. 23.

<sup>215</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 156.

<sup>216</sup> Sander 1997, p. 24.

<sup>217</sup> In 1971, an East German magazine complained about the fact that 1.5 million workers had no regular union assemblies (*Die Arbeit*, 10/1971, quoted in Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 156); Weil 2001, p. 96; Sander 1983, p. 98.

<sup>218</sup> This is a point strongly stressed in Hürgen 2005.

resorts. A smaller BGL, with less or no full-time representatives, was more likely to be overwhelmed by administrative tasks and unable to offer such services.<sup>219</sup> That workers preferred better social services and holiday resorts is quite clear, but this observation does not qualify as a *differentiated* conclusion as to the function of BGL.

The assessment of the personal input of individual shop floor delegates (*Vertrauensleute*, VL) exposes nuances. Some VLs used their position to improve working conditions and defend, within a very limited scope, their colleagues' interests.<sup>220</sup> Renate Hürtgen admit that some VLs could seek the consent of the workers for obtaining a coffee machine for a brigade, a new chair for a worker, or a spot in holiday resort for a family. Yet she also clearly stresses that the archive of FDGB's federal executive committee contains only a few letters of VLs attempting to defend workers' interests for the period 1971-1986.<sup>221</sup> As the general situation deteriorated in enterprises in the 1980s, VLs found themselves in an even tougher position to gain anything for workers. As conflicts developed, most of VLs fell to the wayside and lost their intermediary function between the workforce and management.<sup>222</sup> Just like it would be unfair to ignore the commitment of some VLs towards their colleagues it would be false to conclude based on these individual examples that BGL as a structure furthered workers' interests.

### 2.3.1.2 Brigades

Designed as a self-regulatory workforce structure, brigades were designed to increase worker input and productivity – a function they failed to fulfill on a large scale. Internal discipline and training by brigades, already formal in the 1970s, vanished in the face of the daily production problems in the 1980s.<sup>223</sup>

In some cases, brigades could be used to defend a specific kind of worker interest. In order to mobilize the workforce and increase productivity, brigades were expected to sign contracts with the management. These contracts established the performance and subsequently the wages, bonus and reward structures for the brigade members. They were not free and open contracts, yet their ratification opened a realm which workers tried to use to gain better wages

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<sup>219</sup> Weil 2001, p. 86-87.

<sup>220</sup> See for instance the interviews of Peter Pischner from the cable plant VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree Wilhelm Pieck (in: Hertle 1990, p. 26) and Helga Bunke ("Es war nicht nur alles Krampf", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 42/7 (July 1991), p. 437).

<sup>221</sup> Hürtgen 2001 b, p. 152.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156. Some VLs, like the ones mentioned in the next to last note, added their voices to the growing protest in 1989, but they don't give any indication that their responsibilities have brought any 'positive results' to the movement or played any role in defining strategies or goals.

<sup>223</sup> Weil 2001, p. 117.

and bonuses. Informal negotiations and compromises over wages were greater up to the end of the 1960s. After that period, there was less leeway for such compromises.<sup>224</sup>

Despite the reduction in the room for compromise, brigades remained a major force in determining wages and norms. In 1988, 63% of the GDR workforce (5.5 million workers) were organized in brigades, a very high figure given that the percentage had remained stable at 3% of the workforce between the 1950s and the mid-1960s.<sup>225</sup> In many enterprises they existed only on paper.<sup>226</sup> Yet, 85% of existing brigades in 1988 had been the recipient of the ‘Brigade of socialist work’ bonus at least once. It indicates that their function in redistribution and the payment of wages should not to be underestimated.<sup>227</sup>

Whether or not brigades existed in an enterprise had a lot to do with the state of internal relations and the nature of informal agreements between workers and management. They often disappeared where they failed to increase productivity, as the management tried to develop some other forms of agreement with the workforce (on norms, wages, work organization, internal discipline).

These few points demonstrate how brigades had a certain potential to promote workers’ interests. Yet these possibilities clearly had their limits, as brigades remained dedicated to mobilizing the workforce. There is almost nothing in the way of criticism in the brigade journals (*Brigadetagebücher*); they are not a reliable source from which to gauge the state of labor/management relationships.<sup>228</sup>

The perspective of interest defense prevents one from making far-reaching conclusions on the meaning of brigades in the life of workers. Approaches emphasizing the quality of relationships between brigade members often conclude that brigades were the very core of East German social organization. As such, this assumption is taken straight from GDR official documents. This argument usually stresses the fact that brigade members met outside the workplace and went to the theater or concerts together.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Roesler 1994, p. 157, Roesler 1999, p.428 .

<sup>225</sup> Roesler 1994, p. 145.

<sup>226</sup> Weil 2001, p. 114.

<sup>227</sup> Roesler 1994, p. 145.

<sup>228</sup> Weil 2001, p. 113, Roesler 1999, p. 476, Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 163. Kott 2001 shows that too many anecdotes on production difficulties or stoppages in these journals could be interpreted by the regime as a veiled criticism and was not tolerated (p.141).

<sup>229</sup> Kott 2001 gives some in chapter 3.

Despite the fact that brigades were sometime rewarded with free tickets for concerts or plays – this explains why, in some cases, brigade members went out together – other factors forced a more nuanced approach when considering the significance of brigades in the East German society. It is well-known that some workers grouped together and financed their autonomous cultural funds, outside the brigade framework, and were hence free from any ties to norm fulfillment.<sup>230</sup>

When and where brigades could help to improve their working and living conditions, workers were more likely to organize or stay in a brigade. If they felt this was not the case or if local relationships with management allowed for better arrangements, workers were rarely involved in brigades. Brigades did not play a role in the revolution of 1989 and they had disappeared from shop floors by the Monetary and Social Union of July 1990.<sup>231</sup> As soon as they loss any role in determining wages, norms and supplies, and thus were unable to help workers to defend their interests in those matters, brigades disappeared.<sup>232</sup>

### **2.3.1.3 The Arbitration Commissions**

In case of a conflict, individual workers had the opportunity to refer their case to their company arbitration commission (Konfliktkommission, KK). The bulk of cases submitted to these commissions resulted from a worker objecting to a management decision about his/her job classification, bonuses and wages.<sup>233</sup> The commissions also enjoyed a certain autonomy in seeking situation-specific compromises in cases of disputes between colleagues.<sup>234</sup>

After the legal extension of the West German labor law into the GDR in 1990, East German unionists have affirmed that, from time to time and in a limited way, disputes over wages and job classification had been settled by KKs in favor of workers. Although these limits were somewhat flexible, this should not cause one to overestimate the actual possibilities available. The following excerpt is from a discussion between Bergmann-Borsig unionists and editors of the West German *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* which took place on April 19, 1990. Although the former secretary in charge of legal disputes emphasises the opportunities offered

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<sup>230</sup> Weil 2001, p. 118.

<sup>231</sup> Roesler 1994, p. 163.

<sup>232</sup> Linda Fuller's argument that those FDGB trade unionists that played a role in 1989-1990 had been active in workers' *Kollektive*, such as brigades, is not convincing due to a lack of evidence (Fuller 1999, pp. 131-40). On the whole, Hürtgen 2005 (pp. 313 sq) shares Roesler's assessment.

<sup>233</sup> Walker 1991, p. 7.

<sup>234</sup> Thiel 1997.

by the East German labor law, the restrictions to the defense of workers' interests because of KKs are nevertheless quite clear in his statement:

Ich bin in der BGL für Arbeitsrecht zuständig und war als Parteilooser nie einem Parteisekretär gegenüber rechenschaftspflichtig. Ich habe immer versucht, den Spielraum, den das Arbeitsgesetzbuch ermöglicht, zu nutzen. Dieser Spielraum war in der Vergangenheit grösser als manch einer es vermutet hat und als auch viele Parteisekretäre wahrhaben wollen. Aber es war nicht leicht, sich innerhalb der sehr eng gesetzten Grenzen durchzusetzen. Oft genug bin ich als gewerkschaftlicher Prozessvertreter in der Konfliktkommissionen (...) in die Schranken verwiesen worden, weil nicht sein konnte, was nicht sein durfte. Das ging bis zu Diskriminierungen. So bin ich vom Justitiar des Betriebs als 'Winkeladvokat' beschimpft worden, weil ich mich für einen Kollegen eingestetzt hatte, der fristlos entlassen worden war. Auch in anderen Fällen habe ich die Erfahrung gemacht, dass man alles tun durfte, nur nicht die Grundsätze des Sozialismus in Frage zu stellen.<sup>235</sup>

Like its predecessor, the KKs resembled a structure that allowed individual workers to successfully defend some of their interests against management. They would have been, using this interpretation, largely accepted by workers.<sup>236</sup> This depiction requires some adjustment. The roughly 28.000 KKs of the 1980s held on average 2.5 hearings yearly. The bulk of cases submitted to them were from management to enforce disciplinary measures or claims for damages against workers. Where the case submitted by the workers was actually accepted by the KK, the verdict was rarely in their favor. With this in mind, the argument stating the KKs offered workers some protection of his/her rights does not hold up. Renate Hürtgen depicts them as "underappreciated" structures to which workers "had practically no recourse".<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> "Die Unsicherheit wächst" *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 5-6/41, p. 395. See also: Hertle 1990, p. 21.

<sup>236</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>237</sup> Hürtgen 2005, pp. 279-284.

### 2.3.1.4 Petitions

A final official mechanism for defending workers' interests, i.e., petitions sent to the FDGB executive committee, needs further examination here.<sup>238</sup> The appeal to the head of the FDGB was an officially sanctioned means to express the concerns and needs of workers. The topics ranged from workers' rights to unpaid bonuses and undelivered vocational training; from the gaps in the social policy to complaints about local FDGB officials. In the 1980s, the lack of holiday resort spots was the number one topic brought to the FDGB executive committee.

Renate Hürtgen pinpoints the trends in worker petitions. Firstly, their number increased dramatically during the 1980s, from 699 in 1980 to 1,885 in 1988. Secondly, in these petitions, workers expressed real criticism and demands on a variety of topics, which broadened and became more political toward the end of the 1980s. This was the time at which the reforms by Gorbachev, rigged trade union elections, environment protection, the Tiananmen Square massacre, were being debated. Thus, these petitions demonstrate the levels of growing anger in labor at that time. Thirdly, though collective petitions were not uncommon in the 1970s, they had almost disappeared by the next decade: five collective petitions of 114 submitted in 1986. Petitions in the 1980s were generally written by individual workers, at home, in a somewhat deferential tone. They shared certain similarities, writes Hürtgen, with the ancient petitions to the king. But in 1988 and in 1989, workers once again began submitting collective petitions, a sign of the social upheaval to come.<sup>239</sup>

There is no doubt that individual workers used petitions to express their frustrations and interests. What type of response could the petitioner expect? At least he or she was entitled to an answer.<sup>240</sup> In the 1980s, the number of positive responses dropped radically, so that by the end of the decade the petitioners no longer lost any hope of success in their undertaking. If

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<sup>238</sup> Other structures have been introduced that were said to offer workers the opportunity to defend their interests. The short-lived *Arbeiterkomitees* (1956-58), *ständige Produktionsberatung* (1959-71) and *Produktionskomitee* (1963-71) are three examples. Bust-Bartels concludes on the last two they never performed that purpose (1980, p. 157), Thomas Reichel on the former that they never were accepted by the workforce or by local union officials (1999, p. 451-52). As to the *Arbeiter- und Bauerninspektion*, where it functioned, it was controlled by the BPO. Its goal was to ensure the implementation of management's decisions for production quota fulfillment. It did not further workers' interests (Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 158). It should be noted that we do not discuss the role of *Ferienkommissionen* here, although they were significant for a worker's living conditions. An improvement in the availability of holiday resorts was of course in the workers' interest. This issue has been covered in detail above, and it therefore unnecessary to discuss this point any further.

<sup>239</sup> Hürtgen 2001 c, pp. 198-204.

<sup>240</sup> Up until the end, workers sent petitions and the *Bundesvorstand* responded. A response dated February 8, 1990, to a worker's petition stated: "In diesem Zusammenhang möchten wir Ihnen mitteilen..., (dass) der Bundesvorstand nicht mehr besteht..." Quoted in: Hürtgen 2001c, p. 203.

they wrote in greater number to the FDGB executive committee, it was mainly to express their opinions clearly to the leaders.<sup>241</sup>

Overall, the significance of official mechanisms for promoting workers' interests remained very limited. It mainly allowed individuals or small groups of workers to be heard on problems related to wages and norms, professional classification and some management decisions. Still, they are evidence of growing worker dissatisfaction in the late 1980s.

### **2.3.2 Defense of Interests beyond Official Structures**

East German workers never limited their action to the restricted potential of defending interest permitted by the official structures. A review on how workers defended their interests must take other criteria into consideration.

#### **2.3.2.1 Strikes**

Strikes happened throughout the GDR history. Work stoppages, as they were called after 1953, were mainly recorded by the FDGB trade unions for construction-forest management, metal, and textile-clothing-leather. The majority of work stoppages happened in Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz), Halle, Dresden, Gera, Berlin and Rostock in the 1980s. These trends correlate to the composition of East German industry, both in its leading sectors and in its geographical distribution. Strikes had a “defensive character” (Renate Hürtgen) in the GDR. They were spontaneous reactions aimed at improving working conditions (repair of toilets and showers, the reintroduction of a Sunday premium, better food at the canteen, etc.). After 1953, no strike was called in order to bring wages in line with a norm increase. This typical included sit-ins lasting a few hours.

The number of work stoppages fell over time: 138 (1963), 28 (1969), 15 (1978), 0 (1984) and 2 (1988).<sup>242</sup> The number of workers involved in a work stoppage also tended to decrease beginning in the 1970s. Until 1989 it remained very low, usually about 3 to 5, in many cases only 1 and sometimes up to 20 workers in extreme cases. By the mid-1980s, strikes had almost disappeared from East German shop floors.<sup>243</sup> Nevertheless, considered over the whole

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<sup>241</sup> Hürtgen 2005, p. 293.

<sup>242</sup> These figures are from Renate Hürtgen. Although the long-term trend is unmistakable, some variations were seen. The six-month period between the end of the Ulbricht government and the arrival of Honecker saw 63 work stoppages. Also of interest: of the 39 work stoppages in 1972, 16 were launched by Polish and Hungarian workers. Hürtgen 2001 c, pp. 187-188.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 188.



period, strikes were a sign that struggles between labor and management went beyond official structures. To quote Axel Bust-Bartels: “*Diese Streiks sind Einzelfälle. Aber wie die Spitze eines Eisbergs deuten sie auf die Stimmung und das Widerstandspotential in den Betrieben hin.*”<sup>244</sup>

### 2.3.2.2 Struggles over Wages and Norms

One key struggle between the workforce and management concerned the relation between wages and norms. This economic relation is essential and can be interpreted in many ways: it is closely linked to productivity, the gross national product, and the rate of capital accumulation. In this dispute between workers and management, official structures played a rather superficial role in comparison to more informal means.

The expression ‘struggles over wages and norms’ refers to attempts by the regime to increase work productivity and lower wages, and efforts, on the other hand, by workers to find ways to resist those rise in quotas and increase their pay. These struggles took place for instance when new technologies were introduced, changes in the criteria for the payment of bonuses were made, or new professional classifications introduced, which usually aimed at enhancing productivity and lowering worker pay.<sup>245</sup>

Worker resistance adapted to the nature of the activity, organization of work, and the state of vertical and horizontal relationships (between management and workers, and between workers). Because of many different forms this took, it is impossible to create a list of the measures taken. Yet without attempting a typology, some general forms can be highlighted:<sup>246</sup>

- Workers unhappy with their wages or tasks threatened to leave.
- The norm only applied to a certain period, to prevent it from being raised. Production rates were then increased, leading to higher wages. If the possibility of a rise in the norm existed, production slowed again.
- Production rates were kept low and suddenly sped up toward the end of the period, so that workers were entitled to bonuses for additional work to meet the plan on time.

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<sup>244</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 134.

<sup>245</sup> The main attempt to change the composition of wages in the 1970s was labeled the *Wissenschaftlich-technische Arbeitsorganisation* (WAO). It was essentially the acceptance of the latest American models of work organization and was specifically aimed at stopping the rise in wages. Kopstein 1997, p. 158-160.

<sup>246</sup> From the above-mentioned Stasi reports over the situation in enterprises between 1987 and 1989; Bust-Bartels 1980, Sander 1983, Kopstein 1997, Hürtgen 2001 c.

- Workers asked for “unrealistic” modes of remuneration that they felt could lead to higher wages.<sup>247</sup>
- The work might be done carelessly, thus causing overtime for necessary adjustments.

These ways to carry out struggles over wages and norms cannot be viewed separately from many other practices, well known to researchers on the everyday reality of work (*Betriebsalltag*), namely workers' insubordination and manifestations of work resistance. Manifestations of resistance in production are key to understanding how workers could be successful in their disputes over wages and norms. Questioning the mechanisms for defending labor's interests compels one to assess the economic impact of East German workers' insubordination and expressions of work resistance:<sup>248</sup>

- Social isolation and physical assaults on those determining the norms.
- High rate of absenteeism.<sup>249</sup>
- Longer pauses, shopping during working hours.
- Discussions over work and working conditions in small, informal circles.
- Refusal to perform overtime.
- Minimal involvement in one's work (*Arbeitszurückhaltung*), especially in industries with poor working conditions.
- Redistribution of bonuses among a group of workers (*Gleichmacherei*).
- Resisting orders.
- Tool and material theft.
- Sabotage.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> This was the case with the introduction of the piecework wage (*Stücklohn*, for a long time favored by the regime which considered it a good way to achieve greater productivity) in sectors such as machine maintenance and repair, for example.

<sup>248</sup> Some of these workers' practices can be related to what is often designated as their *Eigensinn* (obstinancy) by historians of everyday life. This historiographical orientation, theorized by Alf Lüdtke and others before and after him, is more encompassing than what is at stake here. What is of interest here is *not* every way found by workers to gain a control of some area of their work, time and work environment, but those ways that can be understood as a form of defense of their interests. Needless to say that beatings on the shop floor, to take one of Lüdtke's favorite example, were important in the everyday life of workers; for our purposes, physical assaults on norm-makers are more significant (Lüdtke 2000, esp. chapters 1 and 2).

<sup>249</sup> This only refers to unjustified sick leave. The total number of sick leaves grew steadily from the 1970s onward. Absenteeism was high, at around 10 days a year in the 1980s. Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 161; Kopstein 1997, p. 157.

<sup>250</sup> This expression belongs to the language of the Stasi and refers, as previously seen, to cases that usually had nothing to do with actual acts of sabotage.

Some authors have underlined how these practices enabled workers to score points in the disputes over wages and norms.<sup>251</sup> Yet, many others defend the opposite view. As means to defend workers' interests, these of insubordination and work resistance were deemed "individualistic," "passive," and as mere signs of a "grumble society,"<sup>252</sup> secondary-level resistance - as opposed to debate in assemblies, strikes, and similar actions. Historians, according to the argument, must refrain from "over-politicizing" (author's expression) the meaning of these mechanisms for defending workers' interests: "By equating most nonconformist acts with fundamental protest against the regime as such, we would misleadingly transform East Germany into a society of 'resistance fighters,'" warns Andrew Port.<sup>253</sup> Yet, practices of work resistance in other contexts have been appraised in a more positive light, as an active form of workers' defense of interests within contexts that prevented more open forms of action.<sup>254</sup>

#### 2.3.2.2.1 Workplace Resistance as a Means of Defending Workers' Interests in Industrial Societies

Michael Grüttner suggests that lower regard for practices of labor resistance in many historical studies probably find their roots in Friedrich Engels's contemporary observations of the English workers' struggles (in his *Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* from 1845), in which he distinguishes between three "phases": 1) crime, the "rawest and most fruitless" and "less conscious form of protest"; 2) struggles against the introduction of machinery, the first form of collective action by the working class; and finally, 3) the formation of unions and the launching of strikes; specific forms of struggles by the working class.<sup>255</sup>

The question at stake here concerns whether different forms of insubordination and work resistance can *still* be considered forms of defending the interests in societies after modern forms of organization and action of the labor movement – trade unions, strikes, collective bargaining – have been implemented? In other words: Is there anything like labor action in industrial countries where these organizations and actions are denied to workers?

The argument defended here is that there is a broad variety of potential forms of action by workers that exist in industrial societies. It is the economical and political context that deter-

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<sup>251</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980 was among the first and most ardent defenders of this hypothesis.

<sup>252</sup> Kopstein 1997, Port 1999, esp. p. 793, Hürtgen 2001c.

<sup>253</sup> Port 1999, p. 807.

<sup>254</sup> See: James Scott's study of such practices by Malay paddy wage farmers (Scott 1985) and Donald Filzer's analysis of work resistance in the Soviet context (Filzer 1986, esp. chapter 8).

<sup>255</sup> Engels 1983 (1845), pp. 166-69, Grüttner 1982, p. 54. Author's translation. Before enumerating the three phases, Engels warns the reader that he limits himself to facts that *characterize the contemporary situation of the English proletariat*. (p. 167)

mines which are likely to bare results and thus prevail at a given time and place. Although there is a difference between setting up picket lines and shopping during working hours, both can be seen as expressions of the conflicting relations typical of industrial societies between labor buyers (management) and labor sellers (workers). Can a massive recourse to practices that are largely covert, individual and limited to wages/work performance relation, as was the case in the GDR in the 1980s, be considered as manifestations of a collective dispute? The author believes this to be the case.

Edward P. Thompson in the 1960s and, more recently, Anson Rabinbach have emphasized the inherent violence of wage labor, which disciplines wage earners' productive activities and time.<sup>256</sup> Building on Thompson's groundbreaking essay, Rabinbach insists on this constitutive feature of industrial societies based on wage labor which is the radical separation between work and leisure, and the need of management to exploit the labor it buys as efficiently as possible. Before it can be successfully implemented, the maximum exploitation of bought time requires coercion... much of time! A key moment for the acceptance of the industrial wage system and its organization of time, Thompson argues, happens when workers stop struggling *against* time and start to struggle *for* time (i.e. for overtime supplements or paid breaks). The violence of the recent industrialization in Mexico and African countries had convinced him that this process of self-discipline takes place every time the "industrial way of life" aims to replace another one; never is this process the "inevitable, neutral, result of a technological evolution," he writes, but rather the product of the "implementation of a mode of exploitation" and of the "resistance to that exploitation."<sup>257</sup>

Studies on worker practices at the workplace in greatly varying contexts suggest that manifestations of work resistance continue to linger after workers have acknowledged the logic of the wage system.<sup>258</sup> Further more, Western systems of industrial relations can be looked as an implicit acknowledgement that, in order to enhance profits, the management *has* to exploit the time it buys from workers as efficiently as possible.<sup>259</sup> And because they are not motors or machines, to go back to Rabinbach's study, workers somehow *have* to develop ways regain

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<sup>256</sup> Thompson 2004 (1967) and Rabinbach 2004 (1991), among many others. Lafargue's *Droit à la paresse – réfutation du droit au travail de 1848* (1883, numerous reprints) needs to be recalled here as a classical critique of the industrial work discipline.

<sup>257</sup> Thompson 2004, p. 83, translated from the French.

<sup>258</sup> Scott 1985 on farm wage workers, Grüttner 1982 on Hamburg dock workers before World War I; Mason 1995 on German labor during the Third Reich; Seidman 1991 for a comparison of work resistance during the French Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War; Price 2001 on contemporary American workers; Levaray 2001 on today's French chemical industry.

<sup>259</sup> Hence is it revealing that introductions to industrial relations open with examples of industrial conflicts related to pay (Hyman 1975, pp. 9-31, Müller-Jentsch 1986, 11-17, 29-39).

time, to earn more, to counter efforts of employers, to shape work in a way that suits them, to circumvent prescribed methods, rules and orders. Workers continue to resist work even after they have submitted to it through a work contract. This tension is also reflected in the labor law, which remains hopelessly torn between the poles of the signatories' *freedom* and the *act of submission* that a work contract represents.<sup>260</sup>

These ideas deserve a more systematic development. Hopefully the reader will accept the following argument: manifestations of work resistance can be expressions of workers' share in the industrial dispute against management. There is no reason to devalue them from the outset, as many labor historians of the GDR do. Hence the most relevant question relates to the economic and political impact of such individual worker-led practices in the struggles over wages and norms in the GDR.<sup>261</sup> In order to do this, the problem needs to be viewed over a longer period of time, i.e., beyond the second half of the 1980s.

## **2.4 Struggles over Wages and Norms in the GDR in Historical Perspective**

This chapter explores the impact of the disputes over wages and norms in two periods in the GDR history after the 1953 upheaval and before the 1989 revolution: 1959-1962 and 1967-1972. In both of these periods, the regime launched major offensives against the working population in order to break its resistance. These offensives resulted in various repressive and "neutralizing" measures enabling the regime to quell resistance, although only for a limited time. Just as water always adapts to the contours of the landscape and finds the river, workers adapted to conditions and found ways to defend their interests.

The literature on East German economic history cannot be covered in a systematic manner or be given due recognition here.<sup>262</sup> If authors generally put economic growth at the core of GDR's history until its end, and rightly so, the coverage is marked by significant divisions and contradictory assessments.

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<sup>260</sup> Supiot 2002 (1994), pp. 111-123.

<sup>261</sup> The social impact of individual practices have been put to light in another context in German criminal history literature. The most convincing articulation of this argument remains Blasius 1978. See also the critique of this approach by Evans, not convincing in his refusal to consider the theft of timber in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a form of social protest: Evans 1988.

<sup>262</sup> Reflections for this chapter followed from the reading of: Damus 1986, Weinert 1995, Kopstein 1997, Küchler 1999, Judt 1999, Vollmer 1999, Schroeder 2000, Klenke 2001, Dale 2004, Steiner 2004.

One fundamental demarcation line can be drawn along the appreciation of the particular nature of Soviet-style economies. A great number of economic studies stress the “commando” component, the lack of initiatives, the intrinsic ineffectiveness of planned economies, and thus compare them negatively to market economies. As far as the 1989-1990 changes are concerned, these authors usually adopt a modernizing stance as the post-1989 economic transformations are viewed as a process of catch-up.<sup>263</sup> Some authors reject these concepts, and view the relation of the GDR to the world economy at all stages of its development.<sup>264</sup> According to such an outlook, the evolution of Soviet-style economic policies followed, or reacted to, economic trends and cycles, just as market-type economies do. Some economic phenomena, as the impact of both oil crises in the 1970s, sent ripples through Soviet-style economies similar to those experienced in market economies. Hence the differences between Eastern and Western economic policies should not blur the strong convergence supported by the fact that they were part of a greater world economy. Marx’s idea from *18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) comes to mind. To paraphrase, men and women in fact make their own history, but they do not choose the conditions in which they make it. The look at GDR’s economic policy proposed here has drawn more extensively from the work of the second group of authors than the first, and especially from the work of Jeffrey Kopstein.

#### **2.4.1 Building on Jeffrey Kopstein’s Theses**

Jeffrey Kopstein acknowledges the practices of East German workers as manifestations of conflicts with power-holders. In his study published in 1997, he argues that the GDR collapsed because of its economic policy. The failure of the East German economy, Kopstein explains, was the result of a hostile political environment conditioned by three factors: the political and economic dependence on the USSR; the conflict between divergent interests of central and local bureaucracy; and the “veto power” the regime “had to give its workers” on wages, prices and norms.<sup>265</sup> The first two factors played an undeniable role in the East German economic decay. To summarize Kopstein's thesis with a metaphor taken from physics, these two forces – relations with USSR and worker resistance – canceled each other during the 1980s and produced inertia throughout the whole bureaucratic apparatus that split as to the best way to overcome the crisis. The tergiversations of the second half of the 1980s in the politburo have been presented above.

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<sup>263</sup> Weinert 1995, Schroeder 2000, Steiner 2004.

<sup>264</sup> Damus 1986, K uchler 1999, Dale 2004, Roesler 2006.

<sup>265</sup> Kopstein 1997, pp. 2 and 11.

The specific importance of Kopstein's third factor for the collapse of East Germany, manifestations of resistance in labor, is developed in a short essay published in 2001.<sup>266</sup> In a nutshell, Kopstein argues that if many historians played down workers' everyday resistance as insignificant as this was done on an individual basis, the East German elite feared it nonetheless, just like they feared it might be the prelude to mass uprising. Hence even if we do not share the belief that workers' practices threatened the regime, we still have to acknowledge the effect of the elite's subjective perception of reality.

But analysis of the ebb and flow of wage policy, piece rate policy, price policy, housing policy, and consumer goods policy suggests very strongly that both the Nazis and the SED did worry. And it is the discrepancy between the *objective* political capacities of the state and the society, and the *perceived* potential for conflict that is most interesting. It is true that the 'hidden transcripts' of everyday resistance may not amount to very much when elites are not aware of them, when they remain hidden. But the one thing we know about totalitarian regimes is that very little does remain hidden.<sup>267</sup>

The following pages develop a similar argument. Labor resistance manifested itself especially against attempts by power-holders to increase the profit margin. The regime tried to break this resistance. Its successes were always relative and short-lived, as worker practices adapted and regained their effectiveness. The hypothesis is that struggles over wages and norms were crucial components of GDR political and economic crises, in 1959-1962 and 1967-1972.

#### **2.4.2 The Economic and Political Crisis of 1959-1962**

The mid-1950s opened a period of downward economic cycle caused to a large extent by an ambitious investment program that led to severe shortages of consumer goods and to the abrogation of the plan in 1959. The double digit growth rates of the 1950s fell dramatically, as did investment: from 25% in 1956 to 15% in 1959 and further to 1.4% in 1962. Other factors aggravated this far from brilliant economic backdrop. The new stage of campaign collectivization launched in 1958 and the quasi-elimination of private farming brought about the emigration of thousands of farmers as well as a sharp decline in agricultural production. A problem of workforce shortages developed beginning in 1955. As a reaction to Adenauer's announcement about the suspension of trade between the two Germanys in 1960, the East German engineering and chemical industries stocked up with essential products and destroyed

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<sup>266</sup> Kopstein 2001. He uses "everyday resistance" in the definition of James Scott, as "everything, from shirking, grumbling, work to rule, jokes, machine breaking but short of collective action." These kinds of workers' practices match up with the ones identified in chapter 2.3.2. on the defense of interests outside the official structures.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., pp. 106 and 107.

their budgets.<sup>268</sup> Low productivity rates gained the attention of East German leaders toward the end of the decade.

In order to steer the workforce towards target industries, the regime had introduced great differences in wages after 1953. The results were contrary to those expected. Since enterprises competed to secure their workforce, differentiated tariffs actually brought about a general increase of wages. Instead of stabilizing labor in target industries, workforce movements accelerated. In the third quarter of 1958, according to the State Plan Commission, 5.1% of the workforce in the state-owned industry (81%) changed jobs.<sup>269</sup> The inefficiency of the regime's attempts to steer the workforce through monetary incentives becomes obvious when comparing tariff vs. actual wages. In 1957, the light engineering industry (*Leichtmaschinenbau*) was ranked first place in terms of tariff wages and 35<sup>th</sup> place for actual wages.<sup>270</sup> Furthermore, by the late 1950s, the relation of norms to wages had become one of the growing system imbalances. Norms were over-fulfilled at an increasing pace: the average worker fulfilled them at 125% in 1954 and at 164% in 1961.<sup>271</sup> The overall percentage of over-fulfillment of more than 200% had increased significantly in all industries.<sup>272</sup>

Different models of piece wage (*Stücklohn*) were tried out throughout the 1950s as a demonstrative attempt by the regime to improve production while restricting wage growth. The piece wage failed to tighten the relationship between wage and production.<sup>273</sup> A new wage scale and job classification scheme (*Wirtschaftszweiglohngruppenkatalog*, WLG), meant to slow wage growth and increase productivity, did not make its way to the shop floor. Key sectors like engineering and metallurgy were especially reluctant to change. Between 1950 and 1960, the ratio of wage increases to production rises was 1:0.84, whereas 1:0.3 had been planned. During the first five months of 1961, the average wage increased at 5.3% though the plan foresaw only 1.6%.<sup>274</sup> Workers were visibly able to secure a minor victory in their struggle over wages and norms.

There are good reasons to reject any straightforward distinction between politics and economics in the phenomenon discussed here. Workers' economic struggles had such immediate

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<sup>268</sup> Dale 2004, pp. 157-58.

<sup>269</sup> BAB, DE 1/671, pp. 2-13, quoted in Hoffmann 1999, p. 76. The destabilizing effects of such mandatory workforce movements requires greater analysis. They might help to reassess the general assumption that social mobility stabilized the GDR.

<sup>270</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 66.

<sup>271</sup> Dale 2004, p. 154.

<sup>272</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 66. In the Central German glass and porcelain industry, the norm was fulfilled at an average of 150% in 1956 and at 170% only four years later (Goes 1999, p. 314).

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-92.



political implications that it would be misleading to set both aspects apart, especially for analytical purposes. Practices of bonus redistribution were prevalent among the East German workforce, which reduced the effect of bonuses on a worker's individual input and the relation between productivity and wages, and ultimately prevented norm increase.

This situation created tensions between workers and the people responsible for the calculation and distribution of bonuses in enterprises toward the end of the 1950s. Some BGL secretaries chose to tolerate the redistribution of bonuses among workers and to oppose norm increases. A press campaign launched in 1958 against those BGL secretaries announced draconian measures taken by the GDR leaders.

In 1959, important purges were made in the FDGB. At the trade union's Fifth Congress, the number of members of the Executive Committee was raised to 199 from 155 members, of which 95 were not re-elected (a renewal rate of 69.85%). Of the 32 presidium members, 21 were not re-elected (a renewal rate of 65.6%). This political campaign granted the SED a stronger position within the FDGB and in the shop floors.<sup>275</sup>

Growing discrepancies between productivity and wages created worker dissatisfaction. For one thing, it made shortages in consumer goods and everyday necessities, such as coal, felt more acutely.<sup>276</sup> There were 166 strikes recorded in 1960 and 98 in the first three quarters of 1961.<sup>277</sup> Unhappy workers had a few cards up their sleeves: they could change their job, enterprise, or they could leave the country altogether.

Of the 8,465 wage-earners in heavy engineering that left the GDR in 1955, 76% were workers and 58% were young. In the chemical industry, 2,603 wage-earners left in 1955; 3,001 in 1956 and the trend was upwards. In 1960 official accounts evaluated that the number of workers in the GDR would fall by 85,000 in the following year, during a period marked by a shortage of workers.<sup>278</sup> These alarming projections revealed a sense of optimism, as the uncertainty on the settlement of the Second Berlin crisis seemed to have boosted the trend: 350,000 persons left the GDR in 1956 and 200,000 between January and the beginning of August 1961.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Out of 636,000 FDGB voluntary officials (the so-called *ehrenamtlichen Funktionären*) in 1958, 464,000 were not SED members (Ibid, p. 90).

<sup>276</sup> Hübner 1999, pp. 24-25, Hoffmann 1999, p. 74.

<sup>277</sup> Information Nr. 48/1961, BV des FDGB, Abt. Org., „Vertraulich! Analyse der klassenfeindlichen Tätigkeiten“ im III. Quartal 1961, insbesondere nach dem 13. August, SAPMO Barch DY 34/20553, quoted in Hürtgen/Gehrke 2001, p. 186.

<sup>278</sup> Although aspects related to family and women are unfortunately left aside, let it be mentioned that 70% of women able to work were employed in 1960. Hoffmann 1999, p. 77.

<sup>279</sup> Hoffman 1999, p. 72, Dale 2004, p. 157.

Who left the country? Out of the 200,000 persons that left in 1961, 60.6% were wage-earners, 22.2% worked in industry or trade (Handwerk), and 11.9% in trade and transportation. People aged between 18 and 24 years old represented 26.6% of the migrants, those between 25 and 44 years old 23.8% and those between 45 and 65 years old 19.6%. Whereas men represented 45% of the East German population, they represented 60% of the migrants. Young male wage-earners was truly representative of the average migrant. Peter Hübner adds that workers (here: *Arbeiter*) were, in absolute terms, the largest and, in relative terms, the second largest group of migrants.<sup>280</sup>

It is not hard to estimate the impact of this migrant flow on the East German economy. Official reports calculated at 120 billion DM the loss in production output between 1951 and 1961. Add to that the 16.3 billion DM in vocational training lost over the same period with the trainees that left the country. By 1961, labor shortages forced the GDR to replace these workers with foreign staff.<sup>281</sup>

In order to prevent the worker from leaving, more resources were needed. The question was where to obtain them. In November 1960, Ulbricht turned to Khrushchev and stated in no uncertain terms that

...the fulfillment of the main economic task is not secured... You can be sure that we are doing everything in our power. However, West Germany has turned out to be a strong economic force. In the final analysis, we cannot choose against whom we would like to compete. We are simply forced to square off against West Germany. However, the GDR does not have enough economic power to do this alone.<sup>282</sup>

When the gentlemen met at the end of the same month, Ulbricht was even more explicit:

To maintain a normal situation we need a yearly growth of no less than 10 percent. Otherwise we will not provide the necessities. If I cannot pay a worker in Berlin a higher salary, he will go to West Berlin. This is the situation. We must improve the situation of the doctors and the intelligentsia and some workers, since the situation in West Germany is improving faster. In 1961 they already will have implemented a forty-hour work week; they will raise salaries, about which we cannot even think.

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<sup>280</sup> Hübner 1999, pp. 23-24.

<sup>281</sup> SAPMO, NY 4182/972, pp. 90-91, DY 30/J IV 2/2A/840, DY30/J IV 2/2/780, p. 15, quoted in Hoffmann 1999, p. 73.

<sup>282</sup> Letters cited in André Steiner, "Auf dem Weg zur Mauer? Ulbricht an Chruschtschow in November 1960", *Utopie Kreativ* 31-32 (May-June 1993), pp. 94-111, quoted in Kopstein 1997, p. 43.

Discrepancies have grown between us. We cannot achieve our goals with the help of propaganda alone.<sup>283</sup>

To improve the situation of target groups of wage-earners, Ulbricht asked for more steel and a twofold increase in foreign currency reserves, demands that were rejected.

The Berlin Wall was an obvious attempt to settle the problems of labor shortages and to keep workers in the GDR.<sup>284</sup> It was a part of a major offensive to stop the disruptive effects on the economy of hidden struggles over wages and norms and increase productivity rates. Control and repression on the shop floor also increased.<sup>285</sup> The wall and the purges in the FDGB were aspects of this offensive, furthered by an economic campaign.

The aim of the Array of Production Campaign (*Produktionsaufgebot*) was to increase productivity and its slogan enjoined workers to “produce more in the same amount of time for the same pay.” In the fall of 1961, the GDR leadership’s repeated declarations that “Whoever does not work properly works for the Federal Republic of Germany” made clear that the quality of work and production had become highly politicized issues.

This offensive by the regime brought some results. The flow of the workforce to the West was contained. The regime also scored some points in the struggles over wages, especially in the first steps towards replacing piece wages with new forms of remuneration, as the bonus piece wage (*Prämienstücklohn*) and the additional performance wage (*Mehrleistungslohn*) that included a longer list of criteria in calculating bonuses.<sup>286</sup> Tariff wages increased by only 0.8% in 1962, while productivity rose 8.2%. This greater control over tariff wage growth was maintained for another year or two.

Hence repression in the workplace helped to increase productivity. Yet the overall economic situation remained far from rosy for most of the population. Rationing was reintroduced in 1962 for butter, meat, and eggs. The water content of sausages was raised in order to meet overall demand.<sup>287</sup> From 1962 on, SED leaders looked for models of economic reforms that could improve the productive output and the supply of food, consumer goods and other eve-

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<sup>283</sup> *Record of Meeting of Comrade N.S. Khrushchev with Comrade W. Ulbricht. 30 November 1960.* Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Fonds 0742, Opis, Por 4, Papka 43, secret; translated and reprinted in Hope M. Harrison, “Ulbricht and the Concrete ‘Rose’: New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1961,” Working Paper 5 (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1993), Appendix A, quoted in Kopstein 1997, pp. 43-44.

<sup>284</sup> Hoffmann 1999, p. 77, Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 71.

<sup>285</sup> Hübner 1999, p. 27.

<sup>286</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, pp. 94-95.

<sup>287</sup> BAP SPK, E-1 51770, quoted in Kopstein 1997, p. 48.

ryday necessities. At the SED's 6<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1963, Ulbricht announced the principles that would later become the New Economic System (NES).<sup>288</sup>

The period from 1959-1962 was crucial in the history of labor coercion in the GDR. After that period, worker resistance did not stop but it became more secretive and started in small groups. Though the forms of labor resistance in the preceding chapter that can be described as individual and covert were already a fact of life pre-1961, they are more specific to the period after the construction of the Berlin Wall.<sup>289</sup>

### 2.4.3 The Economic and Political Crisis of 1967-1972

The first years of the NES saw an improvement to GDR economic performance: productivity increased by 7% in 1964 and by 6% the next year. The gross national product increased by 5% in both years.<sup>290</sup> The availability of consumer goods such as televisions, washing machines, refrigerators and automobiles grew.

The regime wished to lower wages. Lump sum payments were tested as a replacement to bonuses as a means to stem the latter's increase. Yet workers were quick to turn this new modality to their advantage: once the norm was met, productivity decreased. Bonuses decreased yet the norm remained low. Also, more autonomy on wage formation was allowed at the enterprise level, compelled to balance profits and wages as in market economies.<sup>291</sup> In order to facilitate this, management was made responsible for determining the criteria for calculating their enterprise bonuses. In addition, greater differentiation was introduced in the tariff system during the 1960s. The productive sector for instance had 72 different tariffs, each of them containing eight wage groups (*Lohngruppen*), including four basic wage levels (*Basislohnstufen*). The productive sector alone tallied a total of 2,304 possible tariff wages! The flexibility thus gained by enterprises was reflected in the fact that a worker of a lower wage group could actually earn more than if he had been classified higher.

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<sup>288</sup> Kopstein 1997, p. 48, Dale 2004, chapter 5. Breaking labor's resistance was not the sole motive of the NES, but it was required for its implementation. In the leaders' minds, the improvement of the GDR's economic performance was supposed to break labor's resistance in the first place. Improved economic performance could in return release more wealth that could be used to meet worker demands. Success and failure of the NES were also measured by the regime by the degree of resistance in the shop floors.

<sup>289</sup> Dale 2004, p. 142.

<sup>290</sup> Badstübner, Rolf (Ed.), *Geschichte der DDR*, Berlin (Ost), 1981, p. 255, cited in Weber 1999, p. 239. Sander 1983 (Chapter 2) argues that the improvement of productivity and higher rates of capital accumulation resulted from an upturn in the economic cycle and had very little to do with the regime's reforms in plan-making, which were relaxed at that time. The same kind of argument is given in Kopstein 1997, p. 52, but it is not developed. Conjunction and coercion probably share responsibility for post-1961 economic growth.

<sup>291</sup> Dale 2004, p. 170.

Table 8 : Example of tariff in the productive sector in DDR-Mark (1970)

	I	II	III	IV
Wage group 4	2.10	2.30	2.50	2.75
Wage group 5	2.40	2.60	2.85	3.10

From: Axel Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 111

The regime leaders hoped that this new autonomy given to enterprises in wage formation would result in productivity remaining higher than wage growth over the long term. The opposite occurred, and wages increased even more rapidly as a result of these NES measures. An official report for the Finance Ministry from April 1966 noted that wage growth outmatched productivity growth in seven of the eight VEBs in the mining industry, in three out of five in metallurgy and in nine out of fourteen in machine building.<sup>292</sup> The average bonus rose from 240 East German Marks in 1963 to 286 marks in 1964.<sup>293</sup> It continued to rise in the subsequent years, bringing the relation between wage and bonus close to 50%-50%, where it was of 61%-39% in 1961.<sup>294</sup>

The ineffectiveness of these measures was partially the result of workers' covert struggles. After the setback of 1961-1962, labor conflicts re-emerged in the 1960s. In some enterprises, the installation of new machinery was prevented by workers who were worried that they would lose qualifications and money. Tensions over the organization of work and the bonus criteria were recorded by the FDGB. The attempt to implement proven American models of technical-scientific work in the definition of norms and bonuses (the *technisch-wissenschaftliche Arbeitsnormen*, TAN) was decidedly rejected by workers. For instance, the suggestions of managers to integrate issues of discipline and faulty products into the calculation of bonuses aroused anger.<sup>295</sup> Workers were able to gain a reduction in number of work days from five to six.

The NES spoke of the "rationalization of investments," a process which meant closures as well as worker transfers. The first attempts at such a site closure (coal mines in Zwickau 1966-67) raised such protest from the local miners that the management and party secretaries convinced the SED to backtrack. The third stage of price reform, announced for the beginning

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<sup>292</sup> SAPMO-BA, SED NL 182/973 and BAP SPK, E-1 56087, cited in Kopstein 1997, p. 62.

<sup>293</sup> Figures taken from an unpublished paper from 1991 by André Steiner, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>294</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, pp. 110-111.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

of 1966, had to be postponed not least because of some leaders' fear as to the popular reaction if the lowering of price subsidies was not followed by an increase in production output.<sup>296</sup>

At SED's 7<sup>th</sup> Congress in April 1967, the NES was extended and retitled the "Economic System of Socialism" (EES). This new name corresponded with Ulbricht's decision to proceed more quickly with the reforms initiated a few years ago. After it became clear that the NES had not been thoroughly implemented, Ulbricht was prepared to directly confront East German workers, as in 1953 and in 1961.

The first measure of this new offensive against labor was taken in the second half of 1967, and attempted to reign in bonuses through the introduction of a yearly premium. Any time the annual norm was fulfilled or exceeded by an enterprise, it was rewarded with a single yearly bonus, whose share represented two-thirds of the enterprise's bonus fund. The methods of distributing the funds were to be decided within each enterprise, according to its overall performance, as well as the performance of each division and individual worker. However, the amount of the premium was calculated as a percentage of the tariff wage. The reform thus clearly benefited wage-earners with higher tariff wages, like master tradesmen, technical-scientific elite (as engineers) and economists. Demands from the shop floor forced a revision and, by 1968, the yearly premium was calculated on the basis of real salary (wage and bonus). Hence this reform did not meet its objective of halting the growth in salaries. The yearly bonus became a sort of a "thirteenth month" pay, that 44% of GDR's workforce received by 1971.<sup>297</sup>

The second step can be said to have been the adoption of a new constitution in 1968, the first article stressing beyond a doubt that the SED led the country.<sup>298</sup>

The third step was a 1968 upward revision of productivity and investment targets for the period 1966-1970. To make ends meet, investment and accumulation rates had to be maintained between 22 and 30% of the gross national product for the next six years. Investments (the so-called "centrally approved structural projects") were raised from 2.2 billion to approximately 10 billion marks for 1970. In some regions, according to government head Willi Stoph, "The required investment in 1970 was therefore greater than the entire stock of industrial capacity."<sup>299</sup> The strategy of Ulbricht and Mittag was premised on the broad introduction of Wes-

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<sup>296</sup> Kopstein 1997, p. 61-64.

<sup>297</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, pp. 105-111.

<sup>298</sup> Weber 1999, pp. 261-63.

<sup>299</sup> From Gerhard Naumann and Eckhard Trümpler 1990, *Von Ulbricht zu Honecker*, Berlin, p. 39 quoted in: Dale 2004, p. 176.

tern technologies and production techniques, and both men were willing to get into as deep debt as possible with western countries to do so. The idea was that credits could be repaid from production output surpluses and gains in market shares in the West. The expected boom would drive the GDR to outstrip the FRG, first in some key economic sectors (such as micro-electronics) and eventually in the overall economic performance.<sup>300</sup> The attempt to transform the GDR into a transit point between both economic blocs and to redirect a significant share of the East German production towards western markets did not meet with unanimous enthusiasm in the SED and the USSR, but Ulbricht and Mittag were eager to play the game.<sup>301</sup>

The inescapable outcome of the EES reforms was a fall in the living and working conditions for the East German populous. Higher investment rates and the modification of state's expenditure policy were to result in an increase of the costs for consumer goods, housing, energy and transportation. The financing of the health system was to be reduced. More intensive production techniques would have to be implemented. Ulbricht knew that the greatest obstacle to these reforms was their implementation in the shop floors. He thought there would be a period of confrontation lasting about three years with workers, after which he hoped to have brought the protest under control and reap the benefits of this economic reorientation.<sup>302</sup> In the post-1968 context, the Ulbricht / Mittag agenda worried many GDR and Soviet leaders.

As soon as they were undertaken, the first of the EES reforms caused shortages in consumer goods and in the energy sector. By the beginning of 1969, monthly reports of SED's district or regional organizations indicated growing popular dissatisfaction toward the economic policy. Shortfalls in deliveries throughout 1970 forced the extra shifts (*Sonderschichten*), especially in the machine building, metallurgy and transportation sectors, measures that met with great displeasure on the part of labor. From the summer on, subsidies on consumer goods and health expenditures decreased and working conditions deteriorated as the pace of production was intensified.

FDGB and SED functionaries feared that labor discontent might spill over into political criticism. The SED First Secretary for Berlin singled out the imbalance between salaries and available goods and the resulting devaluation of wages as a major source of concern in the population. His Dresden counterparts noticed that the economic problems risked destabilizing the upcoming party elections.<sup>303</sup> Another party Secretary wrote:

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<sup>300</sup> Klenke 2001, pp. 38-41.

<sup>301</sup> Dale 2004, pp. 177-78.

<sup>302</sup> BAP SPK, E-1 56253, 56079, cited in Kopstein 1997, p. 69, 73, Dale 2004, pp. 170-72.

<sup>303</sup> SAPMO-BA, SED IV A2/5/11 and 14, SED A2/2021/481 and 482, cited in Kopstein 1997, p. 69.

Individual customers are increasingly linking their criticism of the supply situation with expressions of discontent with the politics of the Party and government. They say that shortages of goods reflect the failure of the socialist economic system.<sup>304</sup>

Many SED leaders, Erich Honecker included, lost confidence in Ulbricht's ability to overcome the impasse in which the regime seemed to be stuck. Sign of an overheating economy and recession were already visible, and the continued implementation of the EES required more work and a lowering of wages' share in the gross national product. The GDR, according to Honecker's view, was "on the brink of catastrophe."<sup>305</sup>

Politburo members forced Ulbricht to make some concessions to workers in December 1970. The minimum wage and pensions were raised and a small reduction of industrial investment announced. Yet Ulbricht remained determined to continue his policy at any cost. The sudden wave of industrial conflicts and strikes in Poland in December 1970 shook some already skeptical leaders to manoeuvre against the head of the party, as it seems likely that the Polish upheaval could spread to the GDR. As Mittag's right-hand man, Claus Krömke, recalled, the fear of another 1953 "was in everybody's mind, everybody!"<sup>306</sup> At the SED's 14<sup>th</sup> plenary session in January 1971, Ulbricht's leadership came under strong attack. The debt policy toward the West was criticized and the fear that deteriorating living and working conditions might result into political protest expressed. To quote Willi Stoph during the meeting:

We cannot set as a goal of 10 percent rise in labor productivity per year without having the real conditions for its fulfillment at hand... This leads to serious imbalances in various sectors of the economy and to political complications.<sup>307</sup>

By May, Ulbricht was gradually removed from office through multiple intrigues and behind-the-scenes dealings by the faction surrounding Honecker.

Resistance to the economic policy was among the prime causes in the 1971 shift of power from Ulbricht to Honecker. Other factors played a part in the change as well and historians have rightly stressed the significance of the reluctance of a large portion of the SED apparatus to loosen the economic and political ties with the USSR. In that sense, this presentation fails to offer a thorough explanation of the shift. Nevertheless, a targeted exploration of the role of labor in the change from Ulbricht to Honecker reveals its *sine qua non* character.

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<sup>304</sup> Taken from Naumann and Trümpler 1990, p. 113 quoted in Dale 2004, p. 181.

<sup>305</sup> Peter Przybylski 1991, *Tatort Politbüro Bd. 1*, Berlin, Rowohlt, p. 103, quoted in Dale 2004, p. 181.

<sup>306</sup> Cited in Dale 2004, p. 182, Kopstein 1997, pp. 69-70.

<sup>307</sup> From Naumann and Trümpler 1990, p. 41.



The focus put on the impact on the living and working conditions from Ulbricht's reforms reveals how the attempt to overcome labor resistance and increase productivity rates also shaped Honecker's policy. Despite differences in respective methods, both leaders shared this common goal. The strategy was the same, yet the means and the time scale were different. In 1970, Ulbricht had launched a confrontation with East German workers as the requirement for improved economic performance. If the immediate reduction of the potential for industrial conflicts was Honecker's first priority when he took the power, he was as focused on the improvement of productivity as his predecessor. Yet, he reversed Ulbricht's strategy and believed social appeasement to be the condition that would enhance economic performance.<sup>308</sup> And he was allowing this process more time to be implemented.

Honecker's political repression of the working population took two forms. The first was a stabilization of the GDR's geopolitical situation. One aspect was the reaffirmation of strong ties bonding the GDR to the USSR. In fact, beyond the eastern reorientation of GDR trade, one could suggest that the recent upheavals in Czechoslovakia and Poland convinced Honecker that good relations with the USSR would prove crucial if labor discontent ever got out of hand. The other aspect of this geopolitical stabilization was the new *Ostpolitik* put forward by the SPD-led coalition in Bonn which brought about the international diplomatic recognition of the SED state. There are vast historical debates over the meaning of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* for the stability of the East German regime. A prudent answer to this question should consider both the apparent short-term stabilization and long-term destabilization.<sup>309</sup> The *Ostpolitik* also meant the strengthening of the repressive power of the SED state. Tackled from the perspective of the relationship between labor and the regime, *Ostpolitik* could be said to have strengthened the regime's position. The pacification on the borders enabled SED leaders to deploy repression within the borders, if necessary, without interference from outside.

The second form of political repression was the increasing surveillance activities, notably of the Stasi, in enterprises from 1971 on.<sup>310</sup> The Stasi had been active in enterprises before, tracking sabotages and causes of disruption in the production. Yet, it was after 1971 that it systematized its repressive activities in labor and attempted to transform the shop floor into a "location of political *disciplining*."<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> There were also differences between basic economic policy orientations of both leaders: at the time when Ulbricht tried to gain market share in western markets and decentralize the economy, Honecker focused on tightening the inner Comecon trade relationships and greater centralization.

<sup>309</sup> Bark/Gress 1992, p. 1161-1166.

<sup>310</sup> Gieseke 2001, p. 141.

<sup>311</sup> Raschka 2001, pp. 19-35, esp. 28-30

In additions to the improvement of political repression, the 1971 shift also introduced a long-term global scheme for the reorganization of production. The ‘Scientific-Technological Organization of Labor’ (*Wissenschaftlich-technische Arbeitsorganisation*, WAO) was initiated at the SED’s 8<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1971, but would only be implemented a few years later. The WAO’s main tasks were to reduce employment, introduce the three-shift system and improve productivity through better work organization. In the minds of leaders, the renewal of vocational training programs paved the way for new job classification scales, a necessary step in regaining control over the wage growth. The WAO agenda required from the management at enterprises that they significantly improve productivity through better organization of labor. Norms were to be restructured to take quality and quantity of production into account. This amounted to, in short, more production, more rapidly and for less money.

Company directors were given until 1974 to develop WAO scheme for their enterprise. The latest ‘Fordistic’ American literature was widely used: different tests were made, workers were filmed and timed, methods of organization of labor were introduced with their original English names, as the Method Times Measurement, Motion-Time-Analysis, Work-Factor System, etc.<sup>312</sup> The success or failure of the WAO relied on real norm increases and wage decreases. SED leaders did not attempt any central designs but rather left it to each enterprise and ultimately to the master in each brigade to develop and implement the WAO. He or she often set up a WAO-collective of four to six workers responsible for making suggestions on how increase productivity. By the mid-1970s the introduction of WAO had brought its first results.

Partiell hat das durchaus zum ‘von oben’ gewünschten Erfolg geführt. Über die Einbeziehung der WAO-Kennzahl ‘Niveau’ und ‘Qualität’ der Arbeitsnormen in den Wettbewerb wurde der Anteil der technischen begründeten Arbeitsnormen erhöht und die Arbeit nach Zeit normativen verstärkt.<sup>313</sup>

In order to dismiss workers without protest, a large portion of the surpluses from lay-offs was to be redistributed among workers and managers. In one VEB in Dessau, 70% of the money thus saved remained in the collective, 20% was paid directly to the director and 10% went into the director’s personal fund. Yet, very little jobs were eliminated as a result of the WAO: a total of 1,645 in 10 VEBs in 1973, for instance.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, pp. 114-127.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Other ways to control the wage growth were also attempted at the time. The nationalization of the remaining private and parastatal enterprises in 1971, though it was not its sole cause, was one such attempt. The private and semi-private sector employed 470,000 people and was accountable for 11,3% of GDR's production. These small enterprises produced mainly machinery and consumer goods on short order for VEBs and the West. They usually paid higher wages for overtime and extra shifts, and acted to put an upward pressure on wages in all sectors.<sup>315</sup> By 1975 the SED announced its willingness to raise basic wages (Grundlöhne), a formula masking new attempts to bring the wage/bonus rate to 70/30, from the current roughly 50/50 relationship. It aimed at raising tariff wages slightly but decreasing bonuses more so that the overall workers' share of the national wealth would fall. The fruit and vegetable industry (obst- und gemüseverarbeitende Industrie) was one of the very few examples where the 70/30 rate was nearly achieved.<sup>316</sup>

Hence, beside some divisions in certain enterprises, whose examples were blown up out of proportion, the WAO campaign was a relative failure. Many enterprises reported strong resistance to the introduction of new forms of remuneration. In enterprises, divisions or brigades where WAO methods were introduced with the workforce's approval, they usually resulted in a lowering of the physical requirements of the work and not in an upward revision of norms. By the second half of the 1970s, norms were still met by an average of 120% and could not be increased, while wages and bonuses counted respectively for a rough 50% of a worker's wage.<sup>317</sup> In 1981, Honecker was still calling for a complete implementation of the WAO in all enterprises, for productivity increases and a lowering of labor costs.<sup>318</sup>

#### **2.4.4 Conclusion: Struggles over Wages and Norms as Reoccurring Motif in GDR History**

Until the 1980s, the most permanent and fundamental conflicts between power-holders and the working population occurred around the relationship between wages and norms, and, to a lesser extent, on working conditions. Two main reasons explain why most disputes centered on wages and norms when it comes to studying top-down conflicts in the world of labor. Both points have been introduced above.

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<sup>315</sup> SAPMO-BA, SED IV A 2/5/11, cited in Kopstein 1997, p. 78.

<sup>316</sup> Bust-Bartels 1980, p. 129.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-130.

<sup>318</sup> *Protokoll des X. Parteitages der SED I*, 1981 Berlin, Dietz Verlag, pp. 65-74, quoted in: Kopstein 1997, pp. 82-3.

Firstly, the relationship between wages and work performance is a core part of any industrial economy, and Soviet-style economies were industrial economies like Western market economies. It is this relationship which determined to a large extent the standard of living of people: budget and consumption, division of working time and rest time, housing, and also health, leisure activities, access to services, even social relations. Yet, the ways in which these conflicts express themselves changed according to the prevailing conditions.

Secondly, East German workers were especially effective in developing ways to increase wages and maintain low norms, while limiting the risks of falling into the clutches of repressive structures. There is something exceptional about this. The possibility to oppose leadership decisions, in any sphere, was basically non-existent, while the types of conflicts that could be ruled out through official channels were very limited in scope. As the relationship between wages and norms is concerned, however, workers found tricks to turn it to their advantage. The widespread use of these tricks gave them an unusual power that appeared destabilizing enough for the leadership to develop major campaigns against it.

This is not to say that workers manipulated this relationship along their good will, nor that they did not run any risk doing it. We have seen that the regime's campaigns were partly effective and countered workers' resistance for a while. Yet strategies to increase wages and lower the norms altered and influenced the overall economic performance again – and brought about the regime to react decisively in turn.

This is not to say that as years progressed workers developed ever-greater number of tactics to undermine the plan until there were so many of them that the economy collapsed. Top-down struggles over wages and norms should not be understood as one linear, straightforward, development. They were processes: conflicts emerged, were repressed, re-emerged in another form. Repressive measures and means to neutralize dissatisfaction overcame resistance and workers suffered many defeats. Still, new manifestations of disputes over wages and norms appeared within a new context with time.

Nor is this to say that East German workers were one homogeneous group. Different groups of workers had divergent and incompatible interests. Hence, not only top-down but also horizontal conflictual dynamics were present in East German enterprises.<sup>319</sup> The emphasis on individual strategies in the struggles over wages and norms does not reject this dimension, although it is not further developed in these pages.

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<sup>319</sup> Kott 2001, chapters 1 and 4.

The author does not argue that every unwarranted sick day or refusal to do overtime was meant as an act of conscious political resistance. It appears, however, that in the GDR the widespread recourse to practices that increased wages and lower work output had a strong political impact. The impact of workers' practices was probably greater than intended by many of their initiators.

Finally, the working population's interests were never limited to wages, norms and working conditions. An important fact is that, in the GDR more than in any state in German industrial history, living conditions were deeply interlinked with the workplace. The enterprise-based family policy is a good example, as the extent of services depended on the size of the enterprise. We have seen how the deterioration of living and housing conditions was often addressed in labor in the 1980s, because this was where the bulk of services in these matters were provided.

Yet, beside these covert struggles over wages and norms, the East German shop floors seemed for decades mostly free of any open top-down conflicts. Until the second half of the 1980s, the regime appeared successful in its repressive policy, as potential open conflicts with workers were contained. The regime was also successful in externalizing the working people's dissatisfaction outside the shopfloors, a situation which also played its role in the 1989 "revolution after closing hours", as previously indicated. Struggles over wages and norms indicate that there was a serious rumblings behind this seemingly calm facade.

In his 1983 study on the East German vocational training system, Theodor Sander observed an spread of conflicts between the regime and the population into several spheres of people's life outside the workplaces: state administrations, education, media, culture, and housing.<sup>320</sup> Sander considered, however, that the focal point of these developments laid in the attempts at increasing production, shortages, shop floor repression, poor working conditions, and failures in the industrial social policy. In other words, workshop realities – that determined the covert struggles over wages and norms, and for better working conditions - were responsible for the gradual emergence of conflicts outside the factory gates – inside was impossible due to the repressive structures - and a subsequent radicalization of many people's stances towards the regime. 'Niches,' apathy, grumbling, withdrawing from the norms defined by the regime: these were also manifestations of frustration and conflicts produced in the world of labor and exacerbated by their impact (i.e. wage devaluation) in other spheres of life. Prophetic, Sander

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<sup>320</sup> Sander 1983, p. 96.

expected these trends, which he understands as an “ideological conflict” between leaders and the population, to intensify in the following years:

Gleichzeitig bedeutet die weitere Steigerung der Arbeitsproduktivität aber auch das Sinken des relativen Lohnes, die Verschlechterung der Arbeitsbedingungen gerade im Bereich der Tätigkeit von Fach- und Hochschulkadern und im produktionsvorbereitenden Bereich und den relativen Qualifikationsverlust, die den Übergang der Arbeiterklasse von der arbeitsbezogenen, partikularistischen Kritik des Systems zur Systembezogenen, universalistischen Kritik forcieren. Damit ist unvermeidlich die Vertiefung des ideologischen gegensatzes von Führenden und Arbeiterklasse verbunden. Die Vertiefung des ideologischen gegensatzes in der Entwicklung der sozialen Auseinandersetzungen, die die Gruppe der Führenden vergeblich mit der Bildungsexpansion zu kompensieren versucht, ist vor allem daran abzulesen, dass die Vermittlung der Lehre des ‘Marxismus-Leninismus’ als einer typischen Systemrechtfertigungslehre auf wachsende Schwierigkeiten stösst und in grossen Teilen der Arbeiterklasse schon zu einer Unmöglichkeit geworden ist.<sup>321</sup>

The depiction of the late 1970s and 1980s as a period where conflicts inside and outside the workplace mutually reinforced each other is a hypothesis that deserves further consideration. It is therefore unfortunate that Theodor Sander's work has not received its due attention.

The historical roundabout has shown how struggles over wages and norms have been an enduring conflict between the working population and the leaders: workers resisted to measures aiming at boosting productivity rates while leaders attempted to neutralize resistance with various measures. They were crucial in the economic and political crises of 1958-1962 and 1967-1972. This antagonism adapted to changing economic, political and social conditions, re-emerged, and was the basis for all of the country's crises, perhaps never sufficient in its own right, but nevertheless a necessary catalyst.

It would be incomprehensible that this ongoing conflict of interests no longer played any role in 1989. This work now turns to the year 1989 and tries to assess labor's role in the events of those months.

## **2.5 East German Labor and the Fall of the GDR**

The story of workers in the 1989 revolution has not been written yet. Many reasons are responsible for this fact. A first wave of works on the 1989 revolution has underlined the role of the opposition groups, whose demands and modes of action were assumed to have given the population its agenda and strategy during those months. The most in-depth and influential work in that respect remains the monograph by Erhart Neubert (1997). Despite the emphasis

on opposition groups, and hence on people that were not power-holders in the GDR, the priority given to the agendas and actions of those groups ends up in a history viewed “from the top” if little effort is made to understand if, how and why opposition groups influenced the popular mobilization and how the groups’ various discourses reflected people’s experiences.<sup>322</sup> For example, none of these groups’ public figures were involved in low-level wage labor performed by the majority: Ehrhart Neubert (Democratic Awakening) was theologian, Gerd Poppe (Initiative for peace and human rights), physician, Angelika Barbe (Social-Democratic Party), biologist, Bärbel Bohley (Women for Peace, New Forum), painter; many were doctors, journalists, scholars. Following this perspective, the push for revolution came from members of the intelligentsia and professional classes from academic backgrounds. The absence of workers within the highest circle of opposition leaders could be seen as evidence that they (the workers) were not actors in the revolution.

It seems, however, that in Neubert’s view not all opposition groups equally lent support to or were involved in the opposition. His interest lays in opposition groups that addressed topics such as equality between men and women, peace, environment, human rights and parliamentary democracy. Groups rooted in the world of labor, like sections of the New Forum, the United Left and the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions are, at best, denied a role in 1989, and are often depicted as having actually hindered democratic reforms. These last two groups are depicted as small groups of individuals obsessed with theoretical problems and playing a “clear role of the outsider” within the opposition.<sup>323</sup>

Die Initiative [für unabhängige Gewerkschaften] blockierte eine demokratische Gewerkschaftsreform mehr, als dass sie ihr diente. Die Verbindung zur Opposition blieb minimal, da sie nur der Vereinigten Linke nahestand.<sup>324</sup>

Former members of the United Left now criticize the time spent on theoretical discussions in their organization.<sup>325</sup> Yet the portrayal of some groups as outsiders resulted in the overestimation of the internal coherence of the groups accepted as the “opposition” – and eventually into a false estimation of its role in the revolution. The opposition activist Neubert seemed challenged by the limits of the influence of the opposition groups when, discussing with the West

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, pp. 162-63.

<sup>322</sup> The research group on the East German opposition from the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung* Potsdam aims at studying the East German opposition in connection with the dynamics of the popular mobilization.

<sup>323</sup> Neubert 1997, p. 840.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., p. 849. Martin Jander 1996 shares a similar judgement.

<sup>325</sup> The author had discussions with two founding members of the United Left. One of them, also active in the New Forum, now claimed he should have limited himself to the latter.

German union magazine *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* in the heat of the events in mid-December 1989, he stressed the importance of “politicizing” the people – a rather puzzling affirmation, given the extraordinary political developments of the moment. What Neubert would seem to imply was the desire to bring the people to act in accordance with the priorities and agenda of his Democratic Awakening. The difficulties of pushing through this agenda, and the fear of what would happen if it were to fail, were stated a few times during the interview, as in the following excerpt.

Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte – Gibt es konkrete Schritte, die in den nächsten Wochen notwendig sind, um etwa den ‘Ausverkauf’ von Grund und Boden oder Kapitalbeteiligung zu kontrollieren und in kontrollierte Bahnen zu lenken?

Ehrhart Neubert – Wir versuchen es. Wir haben einen Forderungskataklog aufgestellt und an die Regierung gegeben und werden das auch am ‘runden Tisch’ fordern. Wie weit wir uns durchsetzen können, wissen wir nicht, aber wir hoffen, dass wir zusammen mit anderen oppositionellen Gruppen oder Parteien ein Stück weiterkommen. Wir haben aber auch die Bürger und die Arbeiterschaft aufgerufen, so schnell wie möglich zu Gewerkschaftsbildungen zu kommen. Ich sehe da zwar in mancher Hinsicht schwarz, aber wenn die Menschen in dieser Hinsicht schnell genug politisiert werden, könnte vielleicht noch das Schlimmste verhütet werden. Davon hängt auch ein Stückchen die Zukunft der DDR ab. Wenn es uns nicht gelingt, hier politisch Fuss zu fassen, so dass wir Mithandelnde werden, dann wird das System der DDR tatsächlich vollständig zerfallen.<sup>326</sup>

As historical research moved from the study of the opposition groups to that of the popular mobilization, it became clear that people’s role in the revolution could not be simply limited to that of vehicles for conveying opposition ideas and demands. In his prize-winning dissertation published in 2000, Karsten Timmer studies the slogans and posters used in the demonstrations of fall 1989.<sup>327</sup> The convergence between the opposition’s agenda and the popular protest that Timmer dates from the demonstration in Leipzig on October 9, 1989, gave the movement its distinctive characteristic as well as its strength.<sup>328</sup> Yet this convergence lasted roughly until the first weeks of December, until the reforms of the GDR became increasingly jeopardized by the perspective of reunification. Thereafter, the social movement split precisely on the question of whether or not the GDR should be unified with the Federal Republic. This split, according to Timmer, signaled the start of the East German revolution.

The weight Timmer attributes to the convergence between the opposition and popular mobilization highlight the fact that the history of political formations is not the history of popular

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<sup>326</sup> “Demokratischer Aufbruch (Erhart [sic]Neubert)”, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89, pp. 762-68, quote pp. 763-64.

<sup>327</sup> Timmer 2000, chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.



movements – a remark classic in social history, but one which ultimately drives us apart from Neubert and Timmer.<sup>329</sup> Timmer is correct in stating that unification changed the conditions under which the social protest evolved in the GDR. But he seems to forget that, despite the importance of the changes occurring at the end of 1990, the popular mobilization remained in many respects a continuation of the movement of the previous months.

Though in very different ways, both Neubert and Timmer overstress the convergence between popular mobilization and opposition groups. This might blur how other common experiences could be play a determining role in popular mobilization.

One of the strongest continuity lines during the popular mobilization of 1989-1990 in the GDR is the will of the working population to reverse the downward trend in living and working conditions. Let us consider some figures and facts. The majority of people who left the GDR were workers. Between August 1989 and April 1990, 3,115 political activities were recorded, of which 2,129 were demonstrations in 522 cities and municipalities. Figures on the number of people that participated to these gatherings and activities range between a minimum of 1.2 and five million, although this figure appear unrealistic.<sup>330</sup> Evaluations of the proportion of opposition group members at these gatherings are about 2%. As a pun on the slogans used at the demonstrations of the time, Bernd Gehrke roguishly asks: who was the people? The answer is of course that the great majority of them were workers. Signs of the upheaval to come had been reported within labor for several years. Contentious BGL elections in March 1989 were forerunners to the popular scrutiny during the municipal elections in May. The popular protest that was to bring down the GDR began in September 1989, as people reported back to work and realized that many of their colleagues had fled. Their worries about the future fell upon the deaf ears of leaders.<sup>331</sup> Between September 1989 and February 1990, about 200 strikes were recorded in the GDR. Just like the demonstrations, the majority of these strikes occurred in the southern regions.<sup>332</sup> Another indication of the interweaving of labor and political developments is of course the disintegration of the FDGB structures as representing the SED state structure.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> The problems induced by the identification of a movement with its forefront organizations have aroused many debates between specialists of the working class. Former theories, dominant in the 1970s and the 1980s, which considered labor organizations as “reflections” of the class have been proven short-sighted in many respects and severely criticized in the 1990s. See: Buhle/Buhle 1994, especially p. 135.

<sup>330</sup> Dale 2005, pp. 177-85. I thank Gareth Dale for allowing me to read his study prior to publication.

<sup>331</sup> Timmer 2000, pp. 90-112.

<sup>332</sup> Gehrke 2001 b.

<sup>333</sup> For several assessments of FDGB's disintegration, which is not systematically reviewed in this work, see: Pirker 1990; Gill 1991; Weinert/Gilles 1999.

Hence, many elements suggest the importance of questions relating to living and working conditions of wage earners in 1989-1990, and the participation of workers in the events. A look at the development leading up to the mobilization in Erfurt indicates how the situation inside and outside the workplace overlapped during the months of October and November 1989.

### 2.5.1 Erfurt Enterprises in Stasi Reports, October-November 1989

To understand the revolution, one must study the situation in GDR shop floors. While the head of the FDGB changed three times between the beginning of October and the beginning of December, many BGL leaders were forced to resign and were replaced by activists acceptable to the workforce.<sup>334</sup> Managers were also voted out of office and had to leave. In fact, the disintegration of state power during those months concentrated more autonomy and power in workplaces for managers and workers.<sup>335</sup>

The examination of the role of workers in the revolution starts with a new examination of Stasi archives - to observations made in the workplaces in the Erfurt district by the highly developed Stasi network between mid-October and mid-November 1989. What these reports tell us about the situation in the enterprises in this district during the critical weeks as the protest movement unfolded and the wall fell is in certain respects fascinating. During the five weeks from October 13 and November 16, the heads of the Stasi's Erfurt division XVIII produced close to 20 reports for their superiors in the MfS. All but one of these reports was a journal of information gathered by IM and other informants in different workplaces (between 2 and 12 enterprises quoted in each report).<sup>336</sup> The other was an Immediate Report (*Sofortbericht*) written after "politically irresponsible remarks" had been made in front of all party, union and state secretaries at one VEB by its general director.<sup>337</sup>

Observations made in Erfurt in October-November 1989 document the link between what happened inside and outside the workplace. One obvious characteristic of these reports is the alarming (for the Stasi) situation depicted. They indicate a high degree of discontent within

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<sup>334</sup> Hertle 1990, p. 5; Wilkens-Friedrich 1994, p. 31; Roesler 2002, p. 763.

<sup>335</sup> Roesler 2002, p. 763.

<sup>336</sup> BStU AS Erfurt, Abt. XVIII, 41, "Reaktionen der Bevölkerung", October 17-24, 1989, pp. 01-15; BStU AS Erfurt Abt. XVIII, 79, n.t., n.d. (October 16, 1989 indicated), pp. 01-14; BStU AS Erfurt, Abt. XVIII, 112, Bd. 1, "Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII", October 13-31, 1989, pp. 001-124; BStU AS Erfurt, Abt. XVIII, 113 Bd. 2, "Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII", November 1-16, 1989, pp. 001-100.

<sup>337</sup> BStU AS Erfurt, Abt. XVIII 113, Bd. 2, "Sofortbericht zu Versammlung im VEB Kombinat Umformtechnik 'Herbert Warnke' Erfurt", November 1, 1989, pp. 101-102.

labor and urged the state apparatus to come up with answers to workers' grievances. A prime example is this report from November 8:

Im gesamten Verantwortungsbereich ist unter den Werktätigen eine explosive Stimmung vorhanden. Charakteristisch für die gegenwärtige Situation ist, daß derzeit jede, von den Werktätigen schon längst erwartete Maßnahme von vornherein einer starken Abwertung bis Verneinung unterworfen ist. Es kommt immer wieder zum Ausdruck, daß der Funke zur Entzündung der prekären Situation schon in der Luft liegt und es nur noch eine Frage der Zeit ist, bis es "knallt".

Reports show hamstrung state secretaries paying only lip service to the government's commitment to dialogue and reforms:

Nach wie vor wird die Hilflosigkeit der örtlichen Parteifunktionäre in den Betrieben und Einrichtungen des Verkehrs- und Nachrichtenwesens als unverständlich aufgenommen.

Im Direktorat F+T des KME wird von Angehörigen der wissenschaftlich-technischen Intelligenz ausgesagt, daß ein geschlossenes offensives Auftreten der Bezirksparteiorganisation bis heute nicht erkennbar ist. Sporadische Ansätze gehen nur bis zu Standpunktpapieren und nicht weiter. Gleiche Ratlosigkeit herrsche bei der ZPL.

Diese Linie setzt sich offenbar vom Generaldirektor über Betriebsdirektoren und Fachdirektoren fort. Alle sind für den Dialog (übrigens keine Erfindung des Jahres 1989), aber keiner möchte ihn so richtig im Betrieb, denn dann müßten ja auch unsere Leiter die Arbeit ihrer letzten Jahre analysieren. Und es ist doch viel einfacher, auf etwas "von oben" zu warten.<sup>338</sup>

Guidelines for action at the enterprise level were required from the reporters. Major-general Schwarz wrote, quoting a worker, on October 16: "*Geredet wurde schon zu lange und zu viel, jetzt muß etwas getan werden und zwar sehr schnell.*" Lieutenant Budan reported on November 1 that Erfurt BPO members insisted that "*Das Stadium des 'Nur Redens' muß umgehend beendet werden (keine Pallawerveranstaltungen mehr) (...) Dialog ersetzt nicht Leistung.*" Two days later, he wrote that a widespread belief among workers was that "*Jetzt sind keine Reden, sondern Taten erforderlich.*"

A strong imbalance between the discontent on the shop floors and the absence of leadership from above fills the reports. Cases of corruption, the deplorable state of the economy, the absence of constructive dialogue between population and its leaders, the announcement of only minor reforms and incendiary declarations by local officials left an air of incertitude over the

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<sup>338</sup> N.t., October 16, 1989, Abt. XVIII, 79, p. 4; "Tagesbericht zur Lage im verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII", November 10, p. 41 and November 1, p. 95. The last excerpt which paraphrases what is presented as a dominant opinion among workers, refers to a strategy which consists of announcing insufficient, "short-sighted measures" only to "say something".

workplaces in the district. The heads of the Erfurt division XVIII described the situation like a powder keg which might be sparked by any incident:

Auch wenn die allgemeine Stimmungslage relativ ruhig erscheint, sollte dies nicht täuschen. In der gegenwärtigen Zeit kann auch ein ‘Ausrutscher’ in der Dialogführung z.B. des Gen. Müller zur Freisetzung ungewollter emotionen führen.<sup>339</sup>

Only strike threats seemed to bring about the reforms workers were asking for,<sup>340</sup> a problematic situation encouraging the radicalization of goals: “Success breeds courage – which demands will be made next?”<sup>341</sup> As they had been doing for years, MfS informants listed causes for dissatisfaction of the workforce. They described them as “concrete measures, quickly noticeable for everyone” that should be implemented, if the regime wished to gain the initiative over events.<sup>342</sup> Here is a list of those demands:

**Claims made by workers in Erfurt enterprises, taken from Stasi reports from October 16 to November 16, 1989.**

Table 9 : Wages and working conditions (9 occurrences)

1- Improvement of working conditions	3 occurrences
2- Wages more closely linked to performance and/or the formation.	2 occurrences
3- Improvement of the supply of consumer goods (within the enterprise).	2 occurrences
4- Improvement of social and hygienic conditions at the workplace.	1 occurrence
5- Disciplinary measures against shirkers.	1 occurrence

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<sup>339</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, November 1, 1989, p. 95. This refers to the first secretary of the district SED who publicly refused to launch any debate on the privileges of the elite with the local population during a meeting.

<sup>340</sup> “Reaktion der Bevölkerung”, October 17, 1989, pp. 1-15.

<sup>341</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, November 1, 1989, p. 92.

<sup>342</sup> Abt. XVIII, 79, n.t., n.d. (October 16, 1989), p. 01.

Table 10 : SED, FDGB and enterprise leaders (34 occurrences)

6- Investigation of cases of corruption and embezzlement, resignation of culprits	8 occurrences
7- Resignation of party, union and enterprise officials	7 occurrences
8- Reduction of the state, party, union and enterprise apparatus	3 occurrences
9- Introduction of a real and concrete dialogue between workers and leaders	3 occurrences
10- FDGB should defend workers' interests and be independent of the SED	3 occurrences
11- Creation of structures for the defense of workers' interests outside the FDGB	3 occurrences
12- Free and close-ballot elections of all FDGB and BGL officials	2 occurrences
13- FDGB accounts should be made public	2 occurrences
14- Neither the FDGB nor the SED should have any role in the economy	2 occurrences
15- The SED and the FDGB should acknowledge their mistakes	1 occurrence

Table 11 : Political, economic and social topics (17 occurrences)

16- Implementation of concrete reforms	3 occurrences
17- Reduction of travel restrictions	2 occurrences
18- Freedom to strike	2 occurrences
19- Implementation of measures for the protection of the environment	2 occurrences
20- Co-determination rights for workers	1 occurrence
21- The SED should renounce to its leading role in politics	1 occurrence
22- Restriction of the number of years an official can spend in a specific post	1 occurrence
23- Improvement of living conditions	1 occurrence
24- Better conditions for the use of leisure time	1 occurrence
25- Legalization of the New Forum	1 occurrence
26- Measures to stop New Forum's rise	1 occurrence
27- Less welfare state provisions for "asocial" citizens	1 occurrence

These claims do not need to be systematically compared with the previous table documenting the demands made between November 1986 and August 1989, as they undeniably converge. The range of demands expressed in the workplace between October and November is even larger and more political in nature, an obvious effect of the revolutionary events taking pla-

ce.<sup>343</sup> An obvious transition was occurring, from the focus on wages and working conditions of the previous years to the overthrow of the regime leaders; from individual and covert action to collective and open action.

The main contribution of the Stasi reports is the evidences they provide of the interrelations between the world of labor and others areas of political activity more widely identified with the East German revolution, such as churches or the streets. Relating to the weeks of October and November 1989, four different aspects of these interrelations between developments outside and inside the workplace appear in those reports.

Firstly, political topics that shook the country did not stop at the factory gates and thus made their way into the workplace. These political topics were intensely discussed among the workforce. The appraisal of workers' response to some leadership declarations and decisions by the Politburo or the FDGB form the framework of the Stasi reports. The first paragraphs always summarize these reactions, which are detailed afterwards for each enterprise mentioned. The rejection of the SED and the FDGB by workers is unmistakable. Many drew comparisons with the 1953 strikes.

Im Mittelpunkt des Stimmungs- und Reaktionsbildes unter den Werktätigen aller Bereiche und Leitungsebenen unseres Verantwortungsbereiches stehen nach wie vor Diskussionen und Gespräche über die 11. Tagung der Volkskammer, dabei insbesondere der Auftritt des Gen. Mielke sowie zur politischen Lage im Bezirk bzw. im eigenen Betrieb.

Mit großem Interesse und Aufmerksamkeit wurde die 11. Volkstammertagung von den HF-Kadern und Produktionsarbeitern des Investabes ESO III/IV verfolgt, das live und zu einem Großteil während der Arbeitszeit.

Hinsichtlich der Wahl von Maleuda und Modrow gibt es zum größten Teil positive Standpunkte. Eine Ablehnung dieser Personen ist nicht erkennbar. (...)

Mit absolut großer Bestürzung wurden die Diskussionsreden führender Politiker (Stoph, Sindermann, Schürer, Höfner) und ihre quasi Offenbarung aufgenommen. Bestürzung, verbunden mit Unverständnis und Verzweiflung, daß über Jahre hinweg, eigentlich seit dem VIII. Parteitag gelogen wurde, der Volkskammer als höchstem Machtorgan bewußt nie die Rolle zukam (zukommen sollte!), die ihr gehört. (...) Die Ursachen dafür werden nicht allein bei Honecker und Mittag gesehen, sondern hier wird die Partei als Ganzes in die Verantwortung gezwungen. (...)

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<sup>343</sup> Some of the claims listed may come as a surprise, such as the calls to stop the New Forum's rise and to reduce the welfare state provisions for so-called asocial persons, and perhaps maybe to take disciplinary action against shirkers. All of them were mentioned only once, in General Schwarz's report of October 16, 1989. The first came from a school. The origin of the other two is not mentioned. It might be that General Schwarz understood some of workers' aspirations in the regime's own terms, that he 'translated' them into measures acceptable for the regime, or that he included what he himself considered the necessary urgent steps.

Das in den letzten Tagen mühsam wiedergewonnene Vertrauen bei einigen Genossen und Nichtgenossen wurde im ergebnis dieser Tagung vollständig neutralisiert, da diese Enthüllungen die Erwartungen weit überstiegen.

Ältere Genossen bezeichnen die Situation ‘kritischer als vor dem 17. Juni 1953’. Als Grund nennen sie, daß damals nur in den Zentren der Städte solche Kontroversen waren. Heute ist das ganze Land eine ‘unkontrollierte Situation’.<sup>344</sup>

Secondly, the shop floor could serve as a base for political mobilization outside the workplace. A report from November 1 began with the warning that, had FDGB president Harry Tisch not announced his plans to resign, workers were ready to “go it their own way,” which meant forming independent trade unions and “organizing demonstrations in enterprises and on the streets.” On November 10, Lieutenant Budan reported that the New Forum and the Democratic Awakening used some enterprisene newspapers to display “their demands, caustic remarks and commentaries as well as calls to demonstrations.”<sup>345</sup> This second kind of link between political action inside and outside the workplace is connected to the first kind, by the fact that political topics were discussed in the workplace.

It can also be connected to the third kind of link, by the fact that the democratization process going on outside labor, had immediate consequences in the workplace. The Stasi reports suggest that workers did not choose “politics” over “economics,” if this implies that one area was more crucial to them than the other. Many of their political claims meant fundamental changes for the organization of work and the defense of interests as well: “The FDGB should defend worker interests and be independent from the SED,” “Creation of structures for the defense of worker interests outside the FDGB” and “Neither the FDGB nor the SED should have any role in the economy,” are obvious examples of such interrelated consequences. None of the demands listed in the “SED, FDGB and enterprise leaders” section differentiates between political or economic leaders, between party, union or enterprise secretaries. If there was a certain focus of workers on the top of the GDR pyramid, local leaders were also targeted for their misconduct or reluctance to implement changes.<sup>346</sup>

Fourthly, the street could serve as a location for action on unmet demands at the enterprise level. The concentration of political and economic decision-making in the hands of the SED makes it unsurprising that workers took part in demonstrations after experiencing the hesitation of the leadership at enterprises to implement reforms. One worker in the mechanical for-

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<sup>344</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, October 31, 1989, p. 10.

<sup>345</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, November 10, 1989, p. 41.

<sup>346</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, October 31, 1989, p. 9.

ming enterprise *Herbert Warnke* is reported to have explained his participation to demonstrations as follows:

Ich selbst war schon in der Kirche und habe mitdemonstriert. Ich tue es, weil ich denke, daß dadurch sich doch einiges ändert. Wir haben in unserem Betrieb so viel geredet, Hinweise gegeben – aber die “Kaste der Nehmer” macht weiter. Wir werden gezwungen, weiter auf die Straße zu gehen. Erst durch unseren Aufbruch hat sich was getan.<sup>347</sup>

The Stasi reports shed light on the interrelations between developments outside and inside enterprises during the revolution. This relationship was not one-sided: in a city like Erfurt, they could be linked in at least four different ways. The important point here is that developments within the workplace could lead workers to act outside its walls, just as political developments had an immediate impact inside these walls.

Of course, workers were not alone in acting in line with the links between developments inside and outside the workplace. Leaders also did this, for their own reasons. By the end of October, some BGL secretaries pushed for the rapid organization of new trade union elections. Such a step, in their opinion, would let the “steam out” and enable one to move the political processes from the streets and into the walls of enterprises:

Neuwahlen im FDGB könnten insgesamt viel Dampf herauslassen” und konstruktive Diskussionen von der Straße weg in die Betrieb ziehen.<sup>348</sup>

Beside the interrelations between developments inside and outside the workplace, the Stasi reports in Erfurt document the erosion of power structures at the enterprise level, which took many forms. One was leaders losing their cool. The general director of *Herbert Warnke* lost his temper during a meeting of all enterprise officials. He insulted and accused them of plotting against him, continued to ridicule the party’s politics, which he termed “*Bananenpolitik*,” expressed his wish for a war to break out, so authority could finally be restored, and vehemently denounced the New Forum. Lieutenant Budan expressed his concerns about the effect these words might have on workers. He proposed that all the participants meet again in order to “limit the political damages” of the meeting.<sup>349</sup>

Another form of power erosion could be seen in the doubts now clearly expressed by IMs about the reaction to the political crisis by the heads of state. On November 1, Budan deemed it necessary to read at length from a report by an endured IM:

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, November 3, 1989, p. 90.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, November 1, 1989, p. 92.

<sup>349</sup> “Sofortbericht zu Versammlung im VEB Kombinat Umformtechnik ‘Herbert Warnke’ Erfurt”, November 1, 1989, pp. 101-02.



Durch einen langjährigen IM in Leitungsfunktion im VEB EnergieKombinat wird wörtlich die Meinung vertreten (stellvertretend für viele andere Kader):

“Die gegenwärtig im FDGB aufgebrochenen Probleme habe ich bisher nicht gekannt. Sie erschienen mir jedoch sehr massiv und was noch hinzu kommt, mit Fakten belegbar. In bekannt gewordenen Gesprächen mit Arbeitern mag auch persönliches Überwiegen.

Mit einem unguuten Gefühl nahm ich gestern zur Kenntnis wie die Diskussion auf der 10. Tagung des FDGB verlaufen ist und wie massive die Angriffe auf den genossen Tisch vorgebracht wurden.

Umso unverständlicher ist mir die Reaktion des Vorstandes zur Verlegung der Tagung bzw. Fortsetzung der Tagung auf den 17. November 1989. Für mich sind das 18 Tage Verlust.(...)

Ich schätze ein, daß diese Zeit durch staatsfeindliche Kräfte genutzt werden kann, um eine neue Gewerkschaft herauszubilden, die eventuell dem Charakter der ‘Solidarnosc’ in Polen entspricht.”<sup>350</sup>

The heads of the division XVIII in Berlin could read on November 14 that disappointment and discontent spread amongst long-time “admirers of Honecker” and “antifascist resistance fighters” in Erfurt. They learned how IMs “...who have worked faithfully and loyally with our organization for more than 20 years have resigned and question any further collaboration.” Other IMs questioned the purpose of their work during all those years. Didn’t they see these problems coming years earlier? Low and mid-ranking officials pointed an accusing finger at their superiors for the problems now being faced:

IM stellen immer stärker die Frage, was ist denn mit unseren Berichten gemacht worden, wer hat denn auf uns gehört. Heute muß man zu der Erkenntnis gelangen, daß alles für umsonst war, daß es lediglich Zeitvertreib darstellte. Die IM meinen, großes Vertrauen in das MfS gesetzt zu haben, was das MfS nicht gerechtfertigt hat. Es treten Behauptungen auf, daß das Schwert der Partei mehr als stumpf war, bezogen auf die Innenpolitik – alles war nur Agitation. (...) Es drängt sich bei vielen die Frage auf:

Hatte das MfS nun die richtigen Informationen zu Ursachen und notwendigen Veränderungen oder nicht?

Wurde damit verantwortungsbewußt umgegangen?

Wurde an die richtigen Stellen weiterinformiert?

Hätte nicht auch ein Minister des MfS die Aufgabe gehabt, mit Konsequenz im PB aufzutreten und auf Veränderungen einzuwirken?<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, November 1, 1989, pp. 97-98.

<sup>351</sup> “Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII”, November 14, 1989, pp. 18-20.

A third manifestation of the erosion of power in the workplace was the new refusal of some worker organizations to comply with orders. For example, between 60% and 80% of workers' Task Forces (*Kampfgruppen*) in Erfurt refused to follow special instructions on closing streets and public places. In one Task Force of the train company Deutsche Reichsbahn, the training was cancelled after workers threatened the instructors with clubs. Only 30 of the 120 workers in the communication engineering VEB in Arnstadt were ready to follow the instructions. Workers in Eisenach explained their refusal of the instructions by stated they feared they would have to intervene against popular gatherings, wrote General Major Schwarz.<sup>352</sup>

A fourth manifestation of the erosion of power took the form of specific claims by some of the regime's structures in the workplace. For instance, members of the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ) in the VEB KUTE made the following demands: the independence of the FDJ from the SED, more places in vocational training centers, quicker implementation of technological innovations, more participation of young workers in planning discussions, better sanitary conditions at work, better supply of food and consumer goods at the enterprise.<sup>353</sup>

It seems very likely that the informants from the Erfurt division XVIII, Lieutenant Colonel Budan in particular, made wide use of some standardized type of persons that the regime saw as its friends or enemies. They helped to stress some information, to give them more weight and eventually influence leadership decisions. The resorting to individuals like old and loyal IM or pro-Honecker antifascist resister when describing some criticisms seemed to belong to a specific *art d'écrire*, which leads to wondering to what extent it was not Budan himself speaking behind these masks. Such a literary strategy could mobilize negative figures as well, whose existence would prompt the regime to protect itself. At the end of his report from November 16 for instance, Budan warned that the lack of reforms incited workers to leave the country or to seek reunification. He underscored his point by calling attention to the many "non-party-affiliated workers" who stayed in the GDR only "to experience its collapse."

Hence, the Stasi reports from Erfurt workplaces between mid-October and mid-November 1989 highlight some important features of the role of workers and labor-related topics in the revolution. First, the MfS reports depicted the prevailing state of mind among workers as very worrisome for the regime. Their rejection of representatives of state power and their resoluteness in demanding fundamental changes brought the informants from Erfurt division XVIII to

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<sup>352</sup> Abt. XVIII, 79, n.t., n.d. (October 16, 1989), pp. 13-14.

<sup>353</sup> "Tagesbericht zur Lage im Verantwortungsbereich der Abteilung XVIII", November 8, 1989, pp.59-60.

turn to their superiors for guidelines and to call for the implementation of reforms. The enumeration of demands formulated on the shop floors was supposed to show the kind of reforms that could help neutralize the protest. Secondly, the reports do not distinguish between the world of labor and others areas of political action and depict them as interconnected. At least four different kinds of interrelations between actions outside and inside the enterprises' walls were represented in these reports. They show how developments within the workplace could lead workers to act outside its walls, and how political developments ('outside') had a direct impact on the organization of work and the defense of worker interests ('inside'). Finally, the reports show different manifestations of the erosion of power structures within the enterprise. All of these observations attempt, in their own way, to introduce labor as a catalyst in explaining the East German revolution.

### **2.5.2 The Revolution in GDR Workplaces**

The author now proposes to further the analysis of the part played by labor in the EastGerman revolution based on a study of the situation at 51 enterprises. This approach is justified by the need to go beyond many *idées reçues* over the role of labor in 1989-1990 and thus to overcome the lack of information on what actually happened in enterprises at the time. To do so we intend to examine 85 of the 120 sources published by Renate Hürtgen and Bernd Gehrke (2001) documenting the situation in 50 enterprises, as well as the 7 sources on the situation in the Cabel Plant Oberspree, published by Hans-Hermann Hertle (1990). This period lasts from September 1989 to February 1990, but concentrates on the months of November-January and February. All of those sources were worker-based.

There are two main sets of questions in that exploration. The first concerns the initiatives taken by workers to defend their interests. The second concerns the motivations and objectives that drove workers to act between September 1989 and February 1990, and the results of their action. The author aims at showing the existence of a dynamic of reshaping the mechanisms for the defense of workers' interests.

### 2.5.2.1 A Study of 51 Cases

A look at a synoptic table summarizes the initiatives by workers in 51 enterprises and the motivations behind them. Many of these initiatives specified whether they wanted to work outside the official structures for the defense of workers' interests (the FDGB-BGL) or if their aim was to replace them. Some of them also made explicit references to foreign systems of worker representation or to Round Tables, either as good or bad models. These elements are also present in the table. These sources make it possible to enter the gates of many enterprises and allow an insight into what was happening behind the walls. The picture is one of both diverse and complex phenomena.

The major disadvantage of these sources is that they do not document any workplace where the work of the BGL remained unchallenged, either because its members gained legitimacy through the rapid implementation of reforms or simply because none came into being. Given the difficulty in estimating the number of workplaces where no worker initiatives were started in 1989-1990, as well as the state of the defense of worker interests in them, a *dynamic* of restructuring the mechanisms for this is described in these pages. To only consider enterprises where workers challenged the work of the BGL would encourage less cautious formulations (such as "process of restructuring" instead of "dynamic of restructuring"). "Dynamic" refers as well to this situation where workers had only a latent power to block unpopular management decisions.

Table 12 : Initiatives taken by workers in East German enterprises; motivations; relation to other structures for the defense of interests; reference to models; September 1989 – February 1990

Enterprise or institution	Initiative taken	Month	Motivations to act*	Relation to other structures for the defense of worker interests	Positive or negative reference to models
1- Deutsches Theater	Petition to the SED head	September	9		
2- VEB Bergmann-Borsig	Petition to the FDGB head	September	9		
	Formation of a works council	January	1, 2, 5, 6		
3- VEB Elgawa	Formation of a group of workers	October	9		
4- ITP Dresden	Formation of a new trade union	October	1, 9	Outside the BGL, but calls for the resignation of its members	
5- VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree	Reform of the BGL	October	1, 3		
6- VEB Stahl- und Walzwerk Hennigsdorf	Petition to the FDGB head	October	9		
7- VEB Geräte- und Reglerwerk Teltow	Formation of a new trade union	October	1, 3, 5	Outside the FDGB-BGL	Alternative to the West German system
	Formation of a provisory works council	November	1, 2, 3, 5, 6		
8- SGB Schuh- und Lederwaren Radebeul	Formation of a group of workers	October	1, 9		
	Formation of a works council	February	5		
9- VEB Wasser- u. Abwasserwerke Berlin	Petition to the management	October	1		
10- VEB Mineralstoff Bad Berka	Formation of a new trade union	October			
11- VEB Energie Kombinat Erfurt	Formation of a new trade union	October	1		
12- VEB Reparaturwerk Clara Zetkin Erfurt	Formation of a group of workers	October	1, 9		

\*Motivations to act: **1)** To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management; **2)** To protect workers from the impact of reforms at the enterprise; **3)** Loss of confidence in the FDGB; **4)** Workers are still members of the FDGB; **5)** To practice all of workers' co-determination rights; **6)** To represent all workers to management; **7)** To represent workers not in the FDGB; **8)** West German works councils have no legal foundation in the GDR; **9)** To call upon political reforms; **10)** To define workers' rights

## Suite

Enterprise or institution	Initiative taken	Month	Motivations to act*	Relation to other structures for the defense of workers' interests	Positive or negative reference to models
13- VEB Schraubenwerk Betriebsteil	Petition to the district administration Formation of a new trade union	October November	9 1, 5	The structure is less important than the exercise of rights; calls for the dissolution of the FDGB To replace the FDGB-BGL	
14- Brauereien Bürgerbräu	Formation of a works council	November	5, 6		
15- VEB Glaswerk Stralau	Formation of a group of workers	November	9		
16- Regiewerk. d. Kraftverkehrs Bergen	Call to strike	November	1		
17- KOM-Fahrer Kraftverkehrs. Meissen	Call to strike	November	1		
18- VEB Strömungsmaschinenbau Pirna	Petition to the BPO by a group of engineers	November	1, 9		
19- VEB Handels-Invest. Berlin	Formation of a new trade union	November	5, 7	Outside the FDGB-BGL	
20- Busfahrer Meisterb. 35	Petition to FDGB head	November	1, 5		
21- VEB Baukema	Formation of a new trade union	November	3	Outside the FDGB-BGL	
22- Unnamed enterprise in Plauen	Formation of a new trade union	November	1	Took over the FDGB-BGL	
23- VEB Elektromontage Oranienburg	Petition to the management	November	1, 5		
24- Postamt Erfurt – Gispersleben	Speech at a demonstration Formation of a new East German post trade union	November December	1, 5 1, 3, 5, 9	FDGB should reimburse the dues of the last ten years	
25- VEB Hochvakuum Dresden	Formation of a works council	December	1, 5	Will define its relation with the FDGB-BGL	
26-VEB Berliner Aufzugs- u. Fahrzeugbau	Formation of a new trade union	December	1, 3, 5, 9	Step towards the merger of all enterprise-based trade unions	

\*Motivations to act: **1)** To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management; **2)** To protect workers from the impact of reforms at the enterprise; **3)** Loss of confidence in the FDGB; **4)** Workers are still members of the FDGB; **5)** To practice all of workers' co-determination rights; **6)** To represent all workers to management; **7)** To represent workers not in the FDGB; **8)** West German works councils have no legal foundation in the GDR; **9)** To call upon political reforms; **10)** To define workers' rights

## Suite

Enterprise or institution	Initiative taken	Month	Motivations to act*	Relation to other structures for the defense of workers' interests	Positive or negative reference to models
27- Zentrum für Wissenschaftl. Gerätebau	Formation of a works council	December	5	Outside BGL and other trade unions	
28- Kommunale Wohnungsverw. Berlin-Mitte	Petition to FDGB head	December	1, 9	Calls for the dissolution of the FDGB	
29- VEB für Fernsehелеktr. Berlin	Formation of a supervisory board	December	5	Outside the BGL and a works council, still to be formed	
	Formation of a new trade union	December	1	Outside the BGL	
	Formation of a works council	January	1		The West German model is inappropriate in a country where workers possess the enterprises
30- Staatlicher Forstbetrieb Stralsund	Formation of a new trade union	December	3, 5	Outside the BGL	
31- Rat der Werktätigen in Karl-Marx-Stadt	Reform of the BGLs	December	5, 6, 8	Outside the FDGB, still present in some of the city's enterprises	The West German model is inappropriate where workers possess the enterprises
32- Schwertransport Leipzig	Formation of a works council	December	1, 5, 6	Outside the BGL	
33- VEB Chemie- u. Tankanlagenbau Fürstenwalde	Formation of a new trade union	December	5	Outside the BGL	
34- Heizkraftw. Gera	Formation of a works council	December	1	Outside the BGL	
35- VEB Vereinigte Zellstoffwerke Pirna	Formation of a works council	December	10		
36- VEB Möbelk. Berlin	Formation of a new trade union	January	1, 5	To replace the FDGB-BGL	
37- Grosswäsch. Geizhain	Formation of a new trade union	January			
38- VEB Schiffselektron. Wildau	Formation of a new trade union	January	1, 3, 5	To replace the FDGB-BGL	
39- Handelsorg.	Formation of a new trade union	January	1	Outside the BGL	

\*Motivations to act: **1)** To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management; **2)** To protect workers from the impact of reforms at the enterprise; **3)** Loss of confidence in the FDGB; **4)** Workers are still members of the FDGB; **5)** To practice all of workers' co-determination rights; **6)** To represent all workers to management; **7)** To represent workers not in the FDGB; **8)** West German works councils have no legal foundation in the GDR; **9)** To call upon political reforms; **10)** To define workers' rights

## Suite

Enterprise or institution	Initiative taken	Month	Motivations to act*	Relation to other structures for the defense of workers' interests	Positive or negative reference to models
40- VEB Sachsenbräu Leipzig	Formation of a works council	January	1, 2, 5, 6	Outside the BGL	Mentions the West German dual system
41- Lössnitzer Arbeiterrat	Formation of a new trade unions and works councils	January	3, 7	To replace the FDGB-BGL	
42- VEB Kraftwerk Eisenhüttenstadt	Formation of a works council	January	5, 6	Together with the formation of new trade unions	Favorable to the Swedish model, but with more rights for workers
43- AEB	Formation of a works council	January	3, 5, 6	Outside the BGL, to force its reform	
44- VEB Elmo Oranienburg	Formation of a works council	January	1, 2, 6		An enterprise Round Table
45- VEB Funkwerk Köpenick, Betriebsteil Dabendorf	Formation of a works council	January	5, 6		
46- Konsum Backwaren Görlitz	Warning strike	January	1, 2		
47- Görlitzer Maschinenbau	Formation of a group of workers	January	1, 5	Outside the BGL	
48- VEB Geophysik	Formation of works council	February	10	Outside the BGL	The West German model does not grant workers with enough rights
49- Generaldirektion in der Deutschen Reichsbahn	Reform the BGL	February	4, 8, 10	The actual structure counts less than the exercise of rights	The West German model would be a setback
50- VEB Schaltelektronik Oppach	Formation of a works council	February	1, 2, 3, 6	Outside the BGL	
51- VEB WAB Görlitz	Formation of a works council	February	2, 5, 6, 8	Outside the BGL and to replace it if reforms are not implemented	

\*Motivations to act: **1)** To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management; **2)** To protect workers from the impact of reforms at the enterprise; **3)** Loss of confidence in the FDGB; **4)** Workers are still members of the FDGB; **5)** To practice all of workers' co-determination rights; **6)** To represent all workers to management; **7)** To represent workers not in the FDGB; **8)** West German works councils have no legal foundation in the GDR; **9)** To call upon political reforms; **10)** To define workers' rights



### 2.5.2.2 On West German Words to Describe East German Realities

Some remarks are necessary. First, every initiative listed here as “formation of a works council” refers to a structure representing the entire workforce of an enterprise, in contrast to trade unions, which are membership organizations. Many were named “works council” (*Betriebsrat*) by their initiators, but other designations were also used.<sup>354</sup>

When they tried, almost on the spot, to assess recent trends in the reconfiguration of the structures for the defense of worker interests in the GDR, West German analysts referred to every worker initiative taken in the workplace as a “works council,” which they distinguished from initiatives taken by reformers within FDGB unions, including reforms of the local BGL.<sup>355</sup> Their binomial taxonomy – works council/trade unions - was used by other West German and American analysts<sup>356</sup>, and it is used here too.

Yet some comments are necessary to prevent a West German perspective from distorting the East German reality. The use of “works council” for East German initiatives has often become a performative category, in the sense that conclusions were disguised as empirical reviews although they were the result of the terminology in use. Hence two arguments first made by Pirker and his colleagues remained dominant in literature since and have a lot to do with their semantic choices. The first consisted in the observation of the settlement of two structures of worker representation in the GDR in line with the changes of 1989-1990, trade unions and works councils. The use of West German ‘works council’ for different initiatives made a complex process look like an almost natural reproduction of West German dual structures. The second was to depict the reform of the FDGB unions as attempts by defenders of the regime to save their heads. As a (logical?) consequence, the dual terminology initiators closed their analysis in 1990 with calls to the West German trade unions to support the East German “works councils” in what they suggested was their democratic fight against undemocratic trade unions. Such an argumentation agrees with the mood in West German trade unions at the same time and in literature since.

The problem with this transposition of West German terminology to an East German context is not that many works councils did not formulate the encompassing character of their structures (cases 8, 25, 27, 29, 34, 35, 48 do not refer to the will to bring together all workers under the same organization of defense of interests). Experience with works councils during the

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<sup>354</sup> *Institutsrat* in the *Zentrum für wissenschaftlichen Gerätebau* (case 27), *Unabhängige Interessenvertretung Werktätiger* in the AEB (case 43) or *Kollektiv Projektierung* in the VEB Elmo (case 44).

<sup>355</sup> Pirker 1990; Kädtler/Kollwitz 1990.

<sup>356</sup> Seideneck 1991 and Fuller 1999, for instance.

Weimar years, in the immediate post-war Soviet zone and in West Germany made it quite clear to East German workers that any corresponding initiative, however named, was meant to unite all of an enterprise's workers under a single umbrella. The main problem is rather that the East German trade unions were also enterprise-based and united nearly 100% of the workforce. Hence "works council" initiatives challenged the established practices of trade unions in a way that the reference to the West German dual system muddled instead of cleared up. The relationship between East German works councils and trade unions were not one-sided. In case 14, the formation of a works council was meant to replace the BGL altogether. In case 25, initiators stated that they were to clarify the relationship between works council and trade union "later on". In another, the "works council" was rather implemented in order to accelerate trade union reform (case 43); a fourth one saw itself as a potential replacement if the BGL did not continue with reform (case 51). Many works councils were initiated as a structure "outside the BGL," as a complementary workplace-based structure representing all workers (cases 25, 27, 32, 34, 40, 42, 43, 48, 50, 51). The relationships between BGL and other enterprise-based initiatives related to the conditions prevailing in all enterprises, not with the reproduction of the West German dual structures of workers' representation.

On an analytical level, there is no difference between the formation of 'works councils' and that of alternative trade unions beside – or replacing - the existing BGL (cases 4, 13, 22, 26, 36, 38). In both cases the initiative taken was aimed at renewing the defense of interests in the workplace (as pointed at, differently, in cases 13 and 26 and in two municipal initiatives, cases 31 and 41).

### **2.5.2.3 Search for Effective Structures for the Defense of Interests**

The formation of works councils and new trade unions indicate a search in many workplaces for the most adequate structures for the defense of worker interests. The different initiatives listed suggest a proven dynamic with the aim of creating effective structures.

Three cases from the above table (13, 29 and 49) point in a more constructive direction, as they downplay the name of the structure name while emphasizing the effectiveness of the defense of worker interests in the enterprise. These cases show how the number of structures (trade unions, works council, supervisory board, groups of workers) in a single enterprise responded more to the internal state of the defense of worker interests and less to inherent characteristics of one structure or another. The more examples compared, the more obvious it becomes that it was the specific setting of local conditions – previous experiences of defense of worker interests, degree of functionality of the BGL in fall 1989, reaction of management

and BGL officials to the workforce, success or failure of initial reforms, effectiveness of workers' influence over decision-making processes in the enterprise, presence of militant activists, etc. - which brought workers to launch different initiatives. The contingency of local conditions determined the emergence of one or more structures for the defense of worker interests. And with this contingency, indecision and uncertainty are a mark of this period.

The dynamic of experimenting and the quest for an effective defense of worker interests are also shown in the explicit reference to the strengths and weaknesses of other systems of worker representation. In the 51 cases displayed in this work, the West German and the Swedish systems are referred to.<sup>357</sup>

#### **2.5.2.4 Studying workers' motivations for action**

Let us turn to the motivations. Again, the context explains that a same motivation was found in different workplaces in different initiatives. Consider, for example, the motivation to action #1, "To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management." Workers reacted differently to the refusal by the BGL or the management to implement the reforms they demanded (cases 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 34, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 46, 50). Various actions inside and outside the factory gates were undertaken. Some petitioned the party, the FDGB, or the management (cases 9, 18, 20, 23, 28). Some formed a new trade union either outside the BGL (cases 4, 7, 26, 29, 39), or to replace it (cases 5, 22, 36, 38). Others formed a "works council" (cases 2, 25, 29, 32, 34, 40, 44, 50), a "supervisory council" (case 29) or a "group of workers" (cases 8, 12). Some called their colleagues to strike (cases 16 and 17) or launched a warning strike (case 46). In one case, workers participated to a local political gathering and initiated a sectoral trade union (case 24). Sometimes, more than one such initiative was undertaken (cases 2, 7, 8, 13, 24, 24). To go deeper in the study of the motivations for action, here is a graph displaying how the motivations are distributed throughout this period.

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<sup>357</sup> Former Environmental Library activist Christian Halbrock informed the author of at least one meeting between East Berlin workers, opposition activists, and two French journalists (probably at the beginning of 1990.) on the structures of representation and rights of workers in France.

Table 13 : Frequency of occurrences of motivations\*, by month

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Number of workplaces concerned
September									2		2
October	7		2		1				6		11
November	9	1	2		7	2	1		2		12
December	8		3		9	3		1	3	1	13
January	9	4	3		8	6	1				13
February	1	2	1	1	2	2		2		1	5
Total / column	34	7	11	1	27	13	2	3	13	2	59

\*Motivations to act: **1)** To force reforms upon a reluctant union or management; **2)** To protect workers from the impact of reforms at the enterprise; **3)** Loss of confidence in the FDGB; **4)** Workers are still members of the FDGB; **5)** To practice all of workers' co-determination rights; **6)** To represent all workers to management; **7)** To represent workers not in the FDGB; **8)** West German workscouncils have no legal foundation in the GDR; **9)** To call upon political reforms; **10)** To define workers' rights.

The only objective of this table is to identify general trends in time. The picture produced is as follows.

In September, worker initiatives (two petitions) participated in the launch of the movement for political reforms in the country (motivation 9). This basically corresponds to a period of "politicization" of workers' demands in some workplaces. It is also in line with the fact that the protest began when people reported back to work in September and realized that thousands of their colleagues had fled.

In October, workers continued to bolster the movement for political reforms in the country (motivation 9) with actions at the workplace. Given, for instance, the significance of the demonstration of 70,000 people on October 9 in Leipzig where no intervention occurred and the fact that Honecker was finally forced to resign 11 days later, this month marked the beginning of changes in the GDR. Many initiatives of that month attempted to force reforms within enterprises upon reluctant BGL leaders or the management. This is another demonstration of the relationship between developments inside and outside the workplace. Common trends were prevalent between November and January in a way that justifies considering these months as a single period. Firstly, complementary and overlapping initiatives multiplied during those months. Although some of these were launched *against* others (independent trade union

against the former BGL, for instance), the dominant assumption was that, during the initial period, different structures of worker representation were not mutually exclusive.<sup>358</sup>

A second trend was the central role of the workplace in the initiatives. Attempts at reforming the FDGB from the top were less significant.<sup>359</sup>

A third trend was the desire to exercise workers' rights as formally defined in the East German labor law and in the constitution - in legal terms, rightful claims rather than demands. This trend emerges in view of the predominance of motivations 1 (to implement reforms against reluctant union or management) and 5 (to practice all of workers' rights within the enterprise), which appear in 34 of 38 cases of those months. It suggests that many initiatives sought to develop mechanisms to enable workers to exercise what was considered legitimate rights. Hence, it is striking that "the will to determinate worker rights" (motivation 10) is mentioned only once during these three months – it suggests an agreement among workers as to the nature of their rights. The most common basis for the initiatives launched between November and January were the rights of workers as defined by GDR labor law.

It would be ridiculous, however, to state that every initiative was driven by the unanimous will to implement the East German labor law and no thing else. A fourth trend, though less dominant than the former, was a review of foreign models of worker representation and labor laws. These references show attempts at weighing the pros and cons of the international experiences. The envisaged union pluralism is reminiscent, i.e. of the French system, and a clear rejection of the unitary model of the FRG. The West German dual model and labor laws were sometime explicitly condemned as inadequate for the GDR, proof that this model was also discussed and preferred by some workers.<sup>360</sup> Reasons mentioned for negative opinions of the West German model underscored the East German workplace unionism (as opposed to West German sector-based unionism), more extensive worker rights in the GDR, and the will to produce a blend of different models.

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<sup>358</sup> The interviews published in the December 1989 issue of the *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* (12/89) contain many corresponding indications by opposition activists that all initiatives taken in the world of labor would result in a better defense of worker interests. See "Demokratischer Aufbruch (Ehrhart Neubert)", p. 764 and "Vereinigte Linke (Wolfgang Wolff)", p. 788.

<sup>359</sup> Hürtgen 2005 rejects any role for them in the East German "workplace revolution".

<sup>360</sup> Discussions in September 2003 with works councilors from four former Deutsche Reichsbahn (now Bombardier) plants showed that in Görlitz, the West German dual model was preferred by workers from December 1989 on. In the three other plants, different initiatives were taken beside the reform of the BGL.

Plurality, workplace initiatives, exercise of worker rights defined in the East German labor law and a review of international experiences: these are the dominant trends observed in the author's sample of 51 East German workplaces between November and January. The first three directly reflect different worker experiences in the GDR, the fourth, a need for a receptiveness to other models. All of them amount to a dynamic for restructuring the mechanisms for the defense of worker interests in the GDR. Though not driven by a mass of active workers, initiatives could potentially emerge in every enterprise and change many aspects of everyday life at work.

The motivations for worker action were different in February. At first glance, these changes appear somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the motivations changed and multiplied. This new combination points towards a new situation and, as the context changed, a motivation could garner new meaning. On the other hand, the number of initiatives fell in February, an unlikely indication of a growing incentive to act. Is this a paradox?

Significantly in February, the desire to implement reforms within the enterprise (motivation 1) which had been dominant until then, fell in stature to the attempt to protect workers from the impact of the introduction of the market economy (motivation 2), the exercise of workers' co-determination rights (motivation 5), the unification of all workers under one organization (motivation 6) and lack of any legal foundation for works councils (motivation 8). This change indicates concerns resulting from upcoming economic reforms. Without stopping, the dynamic of reshaping the structures for the defense of worker interests became strongly determined by the shift towards the Monetary and Economic Union and the discussion on the transfer of the West German labor law in the GDR. Helmut Kohl's proposition for a quick unification through a rapid economic union had been made at the beginning of the month. The East German Ordinance on joint ventures from the end of January opened the door to the inflow of western capital. East German managers were not only discussing economic collaboration but also the selling parts of East German enterprises to West German entrepreneurs. Workers were frequently not informed of the progress of talks.

The new context established in February further intensified the question of the future of employment, worker rights and the mechanisms for the defense of worker interests in the GDR. The claim that West German works councils had no legal foundation in the GDR (motivations 8) shows that many workplace activists rejected a pure and simple transfer of West German labor law and structures of worker representation into the GDR.

The study of motivations produces an insight into some changes in February. Other criteria facilitate a better grasp of the nature of those changes.

### **2.5.3 The February Shift: How to Implement Effective Mechanisms for the Defense of Worker Interests**

According to the economic historian Jörg Roesler, one of the effects of the new context of January-February 1990 was that workers began to raise the question of property after having previously concentrated on the “re-organization of worker representation”.<sup>361</sup> Joint venture with West German companies sometimes “whipped” the workforce and into action, as they wished to see their property rights respected. They wrote letters to managers in which they demanded a role in all talks which could effect their job security, they set up structures intended to ensure their active participation, and some went on strike.<sup>362</sup>

The balance of power was not especially unfavorable to workers in February, explains Roesler. In many workplaces, they forced through agreements granting them wide-ranging co-determination rights on any modification of ownership. Clauses to these agreements usually envisioned that they could be preserved in a joint venture with a West German firm. Such agreements were rejected by Western managers used to less requirements on access to information. Former West German Minister of the Economy, Hans Apel, commented on his experience as president of the supervisory board of the East German ESPAG:

Die Macht liegt in diesen Monaten der Wende (bei der ESPAG und) auch im Kombinat Senftenberg bei den Vertretern der Arbeitnehmer.<sup>363</sup>

In the office machinery plant in Sömmerda, the participation of workers led to a specific form of worker ownership. Known as the Sömmerda Model, the agreement foresaw that a 75% stake in the enterprise would belong to the workforce and the rest to the East German trust agency *Treuhandanstalt*. Similar solutions to the property question were discussed and enacted in other workplaces as well.

Not surprisingly, the Sömmerda Model met with little enthusiasm from the West German FDP and the economic press. Fritz Heinz Himmelreich from the Confederation of German

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<sup>361</sup> Roesler 2002.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, p. 764.

<sup>363</sup> Hans Apel, 2000, *Zerstörte Illusionen. Meine ostdeutschen Jahre* (Munich), p. 51, cited in: Ibid, p. 765.

employers' Associations (BDA) rejected it as a “syndicalist economic order ” and projected, if it were to take hold, a “complete disempowerment of owners”<sup>364</sup>

Hence, Jörg Roesler demonstrates that the context of February brought workers to address property issues, something they had not done before. The sample of 51 workplaces studied in this work produces a slightly different observation. These differences show how difficult it is to put a finger on actual trends common to all East German workplaces. One significant change suggested by our sample lies in the comparison of the objectives put forward before and during February 1990. The period November–January had topics relating to the defense of worker interests but also political issues being addressed in the workplaces. The month of February saw a focus on the topics relating to internal structures and worker rights.

### **Comparison of objectives put forward in initiatives, October 1989-January 1990/February 1990**

Table 14 : I) Internal functioning of the initiated structure for the defense of worker interests

<b>October –January (initiatives taken in 12 enterprises)</b>	
Be based on a down-to-top construction and modes of action	10
Be independent from party control / no mandatory party membership	4
Working out of a new constitution for the FDGB	3
Independence from the direction / accountable only to members	3
Hold regular general assemblies	3
Represent all workers within the enterprise	3
Let BGL pay their president	2
Improve trade union officials' behavior toward workers	1
Establish permanent or ad hoc commissions	1
Requires no additional fees beside membership dues	1
Elect its officials through secret and free elections	1
More active in representing workers' interests	1
Not represented in parliaments	1
Structure of workers' representation also at the regional level	1
Has regular consultation hours for members	1
Recall procedures for all elected officials	1
Minimum length of service in the enterprise required to become union official	1
Dual structure of workers' representation	1

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<sup>364</sup> Quoted in Annegret Schüle, 1995, *BWS Sömmerda. Die wechselvolle Geschichte eines Industriestandortes in Thüringen 1816-1995* (Erfurt), p. 343, cited in: *Ibid*, pp. 765-66.



**February (initiative taken in 1 enterprise)**

Based on a bottom-to-top construction and modes of action	1
Be independent from party control	1
Temporary dual structure of workers' representation	1

Table 15 : II) Wages, working time and working conditions

**November-January (initiatives taken in 12 enterprises)**

Force reform of the remuneration system	11
Force a reduction in working hours	3
Improve safety and working conditions	3
More holidays	2
Force reorganization of production within enterprise	2
Ensure that time spent at work is productive	1

**February - none**

Table 16 : III) Workers' rights and duties in the enterprise

**October – January (initiatives taken in 31 enterprises)**

Ensure co-determination rights and accurate implementation of collective agreements	22
Protection of the enterprise's independence and secrecy	4
Co-determination in the nominations / control over management	4
Participation to the implementation of reforms in the enterprise	3
Job security	3
Co-determination over the enterprise's funds and profits	2
Better worker rights than included in the AGB	2
Protection of the freedom of speech	1
Right to information	1
Right to the development of one's individuality at the workplace	1

**February (initiatives taken in 5 enterprises)**

Ensure co-determination and rights of workers and accurate implementation of collective agreements	3
Co-determination rights on all changes in the enterprise	2
Better workers' rights than allotted for in the East German labor law	2
Working out of a GDR version of the Works Constitution Act	1

Table 17 : IV) Social policy, economic and political issues

**October-January (initiatives taken in 10 enterprises)**

Reshaping of the Plan / investment policy	4
Participation of workers in the reshaping of the economic system	2
Investigation of all corruption cases in the GDR	2
Develop better social policy programs	1
Better trade union trips and holidays resorts	1
Ending all privileges	1
Ensuring that workers are not victims of the economic changes	1

**February (none)**

The concentration on topics relating to the internal functioning of trade unions and workers' rights indicates new contingencies and a will to attend to the most urgent matters first, namely the organization of an efficient structure for the defense of workers' interests, which will ensure the respect of worker rights. Because of their former significance for trade union action, the withdrawal in February of objectives concerning social policy issues was especially significant in that respect. After all, East Germans were still in charge of the social policy and workers continued to go to their local union to receive services.

The situation in February can be defined as volatile and transitional. Where and when they launched initiatives, workers were sometimes strong enough to ratify advantageous workplace agreements securing their rights - yet they never knew how long those agreements would remain valid. This uncertainty about undergoing economic reforms and the future legal framework for the defense of worker interests was also reflected in the focus on goals and the reduction in the number of initiatives. These contradictory phenomena were manifestations of the difficulties faced by workers in their attempts to develop effective structures for the defense of their rights and interests in a changing context.

The kind of complex situation produced by such contradictory phenomena is described below in an interview of Bergmann-Borsig BGL members. It took place in April 1990, at a moment where the local union found itself torn in the process of the judicial transition from the East

German to the West German labor law.<sup>365</sup> Yet the transitional problems described by the head of the BGL had started in February.

Ein großes Handikap ist die bisherige Aufgabenverteilung der Gewerkschaften bei uns. Historisch gesehen waren wir für die Verwaltung von Engpässen zuständig. Gab es früher beispielsweise Bananen, hat sie die Gewerkschaft im Betrieb verteilt, damit jeder einmal Bananen bekam. So war das bei uns in den sechziger Jahren. (...) Wir sind jetzt in der schwierigen Phase, wo wir das eine [the different tasks of the industrial social policy] nicht mehr sollen und das andere, zum Beispiel Tarifpolitik noch nicht können. Um nur ein Beispiel zu nennen: Wir haben zur Zeit zweihundert Wohnungssuchende auf der Liste. Wir können in einer solchen Situation diese Aufgabe doch nicht einfach einstellen. Es sind schwierige Fragen, vor denen wir jetzt in der Übergangszeit stehen.<sup>366</sup>

A similar situation, added other BGL members participating to the interview, was prevalent within the enterprise's kindergarten and health resorts. At the same time, the management acted unlawfully, bypassed the union and fixed wages without consultation.

Returning to the table "Comparison of objectives put forward in initiatives, October 1989-January 1990/February 1990", it is interesting to note that the East German labor law remained the main point of reference, also in February. Even where workers called for the drafting an East German version of the West German Works Constitution Act, the formulation explicitly involved labor regulations more advantageous to workers than those of the Federal Republic of Germany, hence a symbiosis rather than a transfer. It may be more than anecdotal that during the years spent on this research, the author did not find one single written East German source calling for the transfer of West German legal institutions in the GDR. They were undeniably discussed at East German workplaces. Still, one clear expression of this reflection is the statement over their inadequacies.

This was to change, as we shall see. Yet, the analysis of initiatives taken in 51 workplaces suggests that legal extension of the West German labor law in the GDR cannot be seen as an explicit choice made by East German workers resulting from the dynamic involved in restructuring the mechanisms for the defense of their interests. Outside, West German, influences were necessary in the process. This is the object of the next section. How and why the East German labor could provide fertile grounds for such influence can be examined by looking at the poor results of the different initiatives taken in the 51 workplaces considered in this section.

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<sup>365</sup> This process is described in the next part.

<sup>366</sup> "Die Unsicherheit wächst", pp. 399-400.

Even after making due allowances for the type of sources considered and the fact that they might not adequately document their entire impact, the scarcity of concrete effects of the numerous initiatives taken is obvious.

### **In November**

7- A 'collective agreement' has been signed with management. The BGL has agreed to consider the dissolution of the Task Forces and political organizations.

14- The management has agreed to all claims and demands, but since they don't go far enough, new ones have to be drafted

### **In December**

32- An enterprise agreement was signed with the management, establishing the mechanisms of the works council, as well as worker co-determination rights. It will remain in force until an East German version of the Works Constitution Act is promulgated

### **In January**

38- The BGL president was forced to resign

### **In February**

48- A collaboration agreement was signed with the management, laying down the functioning of the works council, as well as workers co-determination rights. It will remain in force until an East German version of the Works Constitution Act is promulgated.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The central question guiding us throughout the second part of this work concerns the role of workers in the collapse of the GDR. To perform a proper assessment of the situation within the labor movement during the second half of the 1980s, a two-pronged approach was required, one that considered the vantage point of the regime and the workers. With respect to workers, the regime uses both surveillance and repression at the workplace, plus policies aimed at neutralizing potential conflicts. During these years the Stasi and FDGB officials in workplaces registered growing discontent stemming from various issues affecting workers' lives, inside and outside the workplace. These included: working conditions, the organization of labor, management, trade union, production planning, the availability of consumer goods, housing, vacation, services, culture, the media, mass organizations, political leadership and the political system. Their reports recorded claims of workers in detail and consistently stated how worrisome the situation was becoming. They also listed the kinds of measures that would meet with the approval of the workers. The warning signals conveyed to higher-level officials

in Stasi and FDGB reports reached a leadership which was no longer able to quell discontent as it once had. Previously, the favored tools in the neutralization policy of the regime had included improvements to the living conditions of the population through employment and industrial social policy, as well as an array of (nominal) worker rights. The economic situation in the second half of the 1980s made it impossible for the regime to continue to neutralize potential conflicts by enacting such policies. They were rather concentrating on ways to further drive down wages and on social policy provisions.

A review of the mechanisms for defending their interests examined the situation of workers at the end of the 1980s. The official structures was very limited in that respect. BGL, brigades, arbitration commissions and petitions to the FDGB only allowed individuals to voice opinions on issues related to wages/norms, classification and some management decisions. One key area where worker interests could be defended related to the correlation of wages to norms. Various individual and covert practices enabled them to influence the pace of production and to raise wages. Lowering wages and raising productivity had become the main priority of the SED leadership in the late 1980s, with worker resistance to these goals serving as the main obstacle.

Hence, the juxtaposition of the regime's and workers' perspectives on labor in the 1980s highlights the struggles over wages and norms: the desire to increase productivity, the resistance to this, attempts at repressing and neutralizing this resistance. The enlargement of the period under review shows that struggles over wages and norms were a permanent cause of friction between the power-holders and the working population. Two periods of political crisis, 1959-1962 and 1967-1972, are especially revealing in that respect. During those years, the regime conducted wide-ranging campaigns against labor, with the goal of significantly increasing productivity and lowering wages. These campaigns included a restructuring of payment schemes and the organization of labor, as well as increased surveillance and repression and certain measures set to neutralize conflicts (i.e. boosting the availability of consumer goods and new social policy provisions). During the second half of the 1980s, the government leadership tried to build on a new strategy of repressive and neutralizing policies, yet the economic difficulties and labor resistance made this impossible.

Struggles over wages and norms were an enduring conflict between the population and its leadership. The antagonism took new forms as economic, political and social conditions changed. It re-emerged and would ultimately determine the political crises confronting the nation, although never in itself the key catalyst, but always a necessary one in setting these off. Interaction between workers and the regime was never limited to these struggles, nor we-

re the social conflicts in the GDR limited to them. They are, however, the most visible mark of how conflicting interests of the workers and the leadership immediately shaped the history of the country. Toward the end of the 1980s, many early signs of popular protest were recorded in the labor movement, precursory events to come. Analysis of the situation at enterprises is thus crucial in understanding the build up of tensions leading to the 1989 revolution, both long-term in nature and forming in the months leading to upheaval.

Were workers also actors in the revolution? Many indications would suggest yes. Those who left the GDR during that summer were workers; the protest began as people reported back to work in September and realized that thousands of their colleagues had fled. The majority of the 5 million persons that participated in the 2,600 demonstrations were workers, and 200 strikes were recorded. Stasi reports from Erfurt between October and November are valuable in understanding the correlations between what was happening inside and outside the factory gates during the revolution. In a city like Erfurt, no fewer than four kinds of correlation can be inferred from Stasi documents: political developments at the state and regional level were strongly debated among workers on the shop floor; the workplace was used to mobilize workers for political action outside the factory gates; the regime's collapse had immediate repercussions on the power structures at the workplace; and discontent at working conditions caused workers to engage in activities outside the factory gates. These correlations show that the workplace requires due consideration when attempting to understand the dynamics at play during the revolution.

The Stasi reports from Erfurt enterprises are also full of examples of the dramatic erosion of power structures within labor during the revolution. This gradual loss of control over labor deprived the regime of its bases of operation precisely where much of its surveillance and intervention capacities were centered. This illustrates another aspect of how political developments and the situation on shop floors were deeply interrelated.

By the first half of November 1989, individuals associated with the state domination, in the party or the FDGB at a national, regional and enterprise level, had been forced to resign. When the Wall fell, the political agenda changed and opened the road to wide-ranging reforms in all areas. A review of sources documenting worker initiatives in 51 enterprises between November and January shows how this reform process came into being within the labor movement. Concerns expressed by workers related directly to the defense of their interests. Many initiatives were launched under various names. What united these initiatives was the common search to find the most effective structures to defend worker interests. The great number of complementary and overlapping worker initiatives to defend their interests was one

important trend in these months. Another trend was the dominant role the workplace was playing in every initiative. A third one was the widespread reference to the worker rights as defined under the East German labor law and constitution. These initiatives often focused on effectively exercising these rights that existed only on paper in the GDR. A fourth trend involved evaluating foreign models of worker representation and labor laws as guidance in the process of supplementing and amending the East German laws. Together, these trends form to a dynamic of potential restructuring of the structures for defending workers' interests. Although not driven by a mass of active workers, such initiatives could nevertheless emerge in every enterprise.

There are two major advantages to refer to a dynamic: 1) it indicates that local conditions help explain why initiatives did or did not emerge, and 2) it underscores the instability and unpredictability of this period. A decision of the management or the BGL, for instance, could be the catalyst for worker initiatives in workplaces where tensions had not previously existed. Unless more case studies close it, the gap between the proliferation of initiatives identified in some studies (as in this one) and the persistent inclination of the literature to consider all of them exceptional might have to be bridged in a way similar to that by which composers invited unreceptive audiences to listen to minimalist music in the 1950s. First-time listeners complained that “nothing” happened in these pieces. In response, composers did not reply that “a lot” was going on in minimalist music, but rather that its richness derived from the fact that “anything” could happen. It is up to the listener to hear how unpredictable minimalist music actually is, and it is up to the historian to interpret how unstable the East German workplaces were in 1989.

The burgeoning of this reshaping dynamic produced only a few flowers to show for it. There was no overall consensus on what mechanisms for defending worker interests should be set up. In February, the restructuring of these mechanisms grew in urgency with the opening of the GDR to the market economy and international competition. This brought about greater concentration on the topics relating to internal structures and worker rights (in comparison to November-January) and a growing need to unite all of the workers at one enterprise under one blanket organization. Wherever such initiatives were launched, workers could ratify favorable agreements, however without knowing how long such agreements would remain valid. The overall number of initiatives fell in February. Hence, the situation in February appears uncertain and volatile. The next section demonstrate how the decision to transfer the West German labor law was made in those weeks. This transposition cannot be seen as resulting from the East German dynamics involved in reshaping the mechanisms for defending worker interests,

although in the difficult context of February, many East German workers may have become more receptive to such a solution.



## **Part 3: West German trade unions, the fall of the GDR and the reunification: for this system, all our men, all our money!**

### **3.1 Trade unions in the Federal Republic of Germany toward the end of the 1980s**

This chapter introduces the situation of trade unions in the Federal Republic at the eve of the unification. It portrays an ambivalent situation, characterized by a certain stability (3.1.1) of Capital/Labor relationships but also by numerous economic, political and internal challenges to trade union politics (3.1.2). This ambivalent situation resulted in core discussions as to the future of trade unions' program, organization and action (3.1.3). This chapter introduces as well the four DGB trade unions studied in this work (3.1.4).

#### **3.1.1 Works councils and the stability of the West German industrial relations**

At the end of the 1980s many specialists of the West German industrial relations underscored the stability of labor organizations in West Germany. Whereas in many industrialized countries changing economic and political conditions during the previous decade had brought in their wake severe setbacks for trade unions, in West Germany, they appeared in a better shape. This stability was surprising, as the country had gone through the same kind of conservative political shift (with the Christian-Democratic Union replacing the Social-Democratic Party as major partner of the governmental coalition in 1982) and industrial adjustments that caused the weakening of their counterparts in other countries as Britain, the United States and Canada.<sup>367</sup> Yet throughout the decade they suffered smaller loss of membership, less industrial conflicts and obtained better gains in collective bargaining than their counterparts from these countries.

Among different works exploring the causes of the stability of West German trade unions, Kathleen A. Thelen's *Union of Parts – Labor Politics in Postwar Germany* (1991) deserves

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<sup>367</sup> Katzenstein 1989.

special credits.<sup>368</sup> Published just after the unification, this important study digs into the sources of the West German trade unions' stability until 1989. Some of Thelen's main hypotheses and findings are precious to understand the DGB unions' strategies during the unification.

In a nutshell, Thelen's argument highlights the meaning West Germany's institutions of industrial relations when it comes to understand trade unions' stability. The "institutional arrangement within which conflicts between labor and capital are resolved have contributed to stable, collaborative adjustments", she explains.<sup>369</sup> She credits the works councils, in charge of worker representation at the plant level, for the resiliency of the sectoral trade unions' strength throughout the economic turmoil and political changes. Despite legal disconnection between unions and works councils, the latter was the main cause behind the former's capacity to hold up their central power as their political and market strength decreased. The new economic conditions have induced the partial substitution of quantitative issues (wage) with qualitative issues in collective bargaining. This shift involved a partial decentralization of collective bargaining, "because such qualitative issues are often plant-specific and thus difficult to resolve in the context of uniform centralized negotiations."<sup>370</sup> Yet works councils' important legal rights at the plant level permitted that this decentralization could be accomplished without weakening the trade unions. Thelen even argues that the stability of labor-capital relations throughout this decentralization process confirmed labor's strength in the FRG.

A long evolution had transformed works councils into vehicles of trade unions' strength in West Germany. This path was determined by three turning points. The first was the adoption of the Works Constitution Act in 1950-52. The introduction of the dual structure of labor representation, with the works councils in charge of the representation of workers' rights at the plant level, corresponded to a defeat of the trade unions. Their attempts to prevent the disconnection between both structures of worker representation, and to ensure unions' domination over the works councils, were in vain. Contrary to the situation in vigour during the Weimar Republic, works councils in the Federal Republic of Germany were not introduced as an extension of the union at workplace but as a structure of the company. Clear limits were thus set to the defense of workers' interests at the plant level, as no action detrimental to the normal functioning of the company (like strikes) can be attempted by the works council.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Himmelmann 1987 develops similar arguments.

<sup>369</sup> Thelen 1991, p. 2.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. On DGB unions' positions during the discussions surrounding the adoption of the Works Constitution Act, see: Otto 1975.

The DGB unions found ways to overcome this defeat and to limit the negative outcomes of their banning from the workplace. IG Metall's action was especially determinant in finding legal obstacles could be circumscribed. On the one hand, this union initiated the election of shop stewards (Vertrauensleute), in order to maintain the contact between the union and the rank and file. On the other hand, IG Metall initiated the setting up of trade union lists of candidates to the works council elections. With a majority of works councilors acting in conformity with the union's policies, the risks that works councils accept poor work conditions and wages conditions were made smaller.

Union dominated works councils ensured the predominance of trade unions over the works councils within the dual structure of worker representation. This predominance was confirmed with the modifications of the Works Constitution Act of 1969 and 1972. These revisions build the second turning point in the history of the relationship between the two west German structures of worker representation. They represented a victory of the trade unions, as the improvement of works councils' prerogatives was not detrimental to trade unions. In Thelen's words, the meaning of the second turning point can be summarized as follows:

[T]he union redirected demands for increased influence for plant representatives *within the union* into a battle to enhance their powers *in the plant*. The revised Works Constitution Act of 1972, passed with the support of the Social Democratic government, strengthened the rights of works councils vis-à-vis management, even as it explicitly reinforced their subordination to the central union. (...) In sum, the maturing of the relationship between central unions and works councils since World War II was accomplished in two phases. The first, a political defeat for labor in 1952, emphasized the independence of works councils from the unions. The second, a political victory two decades later, reemphasized their subordination to the unions, while also bolstering their powers in the plants.<sup>372</sup>

The third turning point occurred between the years 1984 and 1989. It was illustrated by the decentralization of collective bargaining, and the increasing import of works councils for trade unions' strategies. The collective bargaining rounds of 1984, 1987 and 1989 in the metal industry exemplify this decentralization, believes Thelen.<sup>373</sup> After a long strike in 1984, IG Metall achieved to bring the employers' association to accept a gradual implementation of the 35-hour workweek. However, adjustments in the metal industry prevented the union to improve its central position toward employers, despite this important victory. Inversely, after this long conflict employers refrained from confronting the union again. The 1987 and 1990 bargaining rounds confirmed the gradual passage to the 35-hour workweek whilst introducing

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<sup>372</sup> Thelen 1991, p. 67.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-100.

more flexibility in the shaping of the work schedules at the plant level. In this process, the meaning of works council increased. Kathleen Thelen believes that union control over works councils allowed the decentralization of collective bargaining without weakening the position of trade unions.<sup>374</sup> She is aware that this evolution did not go without a certain ambiguity.

Firstly, the decentralization of collective bargaining induced the individualization of the exercise of workers' rights, a process detrimental to union and works council power. For instance, the 1987 framework for a gradual working time reduction in the metal industry allowed 18% of the workforce to continue to work 40 hours a week, on a voluntary basis. Works councils' possible control is limited to the verification of the share of the workforce concerned.

Secondly, in order to guarantee that collective bargaining decentralization does not threaten union power, two conditions need to be met. One is that unions continue to control the works councils, and the other, that employers remain member of their employers associations (so that a significant share of an industry is bound to the collective agreements ratified).<sup>375</sup> When she published her book in 1991, Kathleen A. Thelen was confident that the West German trade unions had successfully gone through the turbulent decade of the 1980s and that the stability of industrial relations in Germany allowed them to contemplate the future with confidence.

### **3.1.2 New challenges to trade union action**

The stability and flexibility underlined by Kathleen A. Thelen is indubitable, yet it covers only one aspect of West German unions' reality in the 1980s. The inclination of political scientists and specialists of industrial relations to condense the stability of Capital-Labor relations in the FRG into a symbol of union power was not shared by the unions themselves, who did not equate little industrial conflicts with little concerns. Although labor appeared protected from too frontal attacks, peaceful industrial relations did not indicate a status quo in Capital-Labor relationships. Despite the stability, the strength of trade unions was eroding. The 1981 DGB program offered little help in identifying a way out of this critical situation.

#### **3.1.2.1 The 1981 DGB Program**

At the origin of the 1981 DGB program, there was a reflection initiated by IG Metall in 1972 on the measures that the trade unions could take in reaction to the end of the "reform eupho-

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<sup>374</sup> The counterargument is developed in : Weber 1987.

ria” and the reduction of labor victories. Different forums and action programs throughout the second half of the 1970s prepared the ground for the final adoption of a new program by the DGB. Beside classic trade unions' demands (e.g. the right to work, improvement of working conditions, increasing of wages, fairer wealth redistribution, better vocational training), the attainment of full employment was made unions' top priority. The 1981 program conducted a strategic reorientation on the defense of established worker rights. The program's preamble insisted on the recognition by the West German Basic Law of a legal basis to trade union politics.<sup>376</sup> But the adoption of a new program did not prevent the DGB unions from difficulties. Economic, political and internal developments challenged them to the point where the program supposed to take them out of their stagnation and revitalize their action soon appeared in need of important corrections. Which were those challenges?

### 3.1.2.2 New economic realities

It would be a foolhardy enterprise to present the economic phenomena challenging trade unions' politics during the 1980s. Yet, as most of these phenomena continue to shape Germany's economic and social reality today, this presentation can be limited to naming them without going into the details of their development and implications.

Among those economic challenges to union politics, the “various forms of flexibilization [of production], decentralization [of decision-making] and forms of individualization [of work conditions]” deserve the first mention.<sup>377</sup> Globalization of markets (the term made its apparition by the mid-1980s) and greater international competition affected German exportations severely and intensified the developments just mentioned.<sup>378</sup> More than in previous decades, the introduction of new technologies was responsible for the “decline of workers' social condition” (layoffs, poorer working conditions, and downgradings).<sup>379</sup>

These economic developments resulted in an increase of unemployment. Whereas unemployment had remained stable at around 4,5% during the second half of the 1970s, it was twice as high a decade later.<sup>380</sup> The new, structural character of unemployment had not in-

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>376</sup> Schönhoven 1987, pp. 244-246.

<sup>377</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 37; Weber 1987. These are the phenomena that Thelen believed did *not* challenge unions' strength.

<sup>378</sup> Hemmert/Milert/Schmitz 1989, pp. 456-458.

<sup>379</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 33.

<sup>380</sup> Frerich 1987, p. 499.

duced a severe decline in unions' membership, which oscillated between 7,471,000 (1977) and 7,958,000 (1981), to reach 7,757,000 (1987), although the share organized workers decreased slightly over the period, from 34.2% (1978) to 32,9% (1985). Yet, labor's capacity to enter into industrial conflict was affected.<sup>381</sup> By the mid-1980s, unemployment was singled out as the mother of all evils by the DGB. The West German trade unions developed numerous working time reduction proposals and initiatives to generate full employment again.<sup>382</sup>

Beside growing unemployment, changes in the structures of employment were also disadvantageous for trade unions. Traditional union strongholds such as coal, steel, and docks, were declining rapidly, while the growing service sectors remained less receptive to unions.<sup>383</sup> White-collar, female and young workers were in consequence insufficiently represented among the membership. Whereas whiter-collar workers (Angestellten) represented more than 50% of the workforce in 1987, they counted for about 23% of DGB members. Female workers counted also for 23% of DGB members.<sup>384</sup>

The vocational training system faced major difficulties as well. The surplus of 27,300 training places in 1980 (694,600 places for 667,300 requests) had melted to a deficit of close to 37,000 training places five years later (719,100 places for 756,000 requests). Specialists forecast that this shortfall was to worsen in upcoming years.<sup>385</sup>

These are the main economic challenges faced by West german trade unions by the end of the 1980s. This unfavorable economic context was supplemented by a political environment unreceptive to unions' program.

### **3.1.2.3 Erosion of unions' political strength**

The political climate was unfavorable to unions. The difficulties in sustaining the welfare state programs was problematic for organizations who considered high West German standards of social protection as one of their main achievements.<sup>386</sup> By the mid-1980s, these programs suffered from various illnesses: an enduring decline in the birthrate, unemployment and the development of the black economy had induced short and middle term financing problems of the retirement pension and the health systems in particular. As incomes diminished, expendi-

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<sup>381</sup> Armingeon 1988, p. 98-103.

<sup>382</sup> Schneider 1989, pp. 360-377; Markovits 1986, pp. 127-45.

<sup>383</sup> Schneider 1989, p. 399.

<sup>384</sup> Armingeon 1988, pp. 71-80.

<sup>385</sup> Frerich 1987, p. 505.

<sup>386</sup> Schönhoven 1996; Remeke 2005.

tures, especially in the health sector, grew. The result was a continuous rise of workers' contributions and a diminution of retirement pensions and health services covered.<sup>387</sup>

Reflections over possible reforms of the welfare state systems generated options rejected by the trade unions, such as the privatization of whole areas of social protection (which meant either poorer protection or higher contributions for workers) or the exclusion of certain categories of persons covered (foreigners, for instance) from the public programs.<sup>388</sup>

The erosion of unions' power had been reinforced by the election of the conservative-liberal coalition in 1983. Different programmatic papers published by the Christian Union (CDU/CSU) and the Liberals (FDP) made no doubt that the new government contemplated important revisions of the labor laws.<sup>389</sup> Explicit was their goal to reduce "unions' bosses' power over the free development of each individual worker along his or her own performance".<sup>390</sup> For the first time in FRG's history, the cabinet counted no union official.<sup>391</sup>

The most crucial reform introduced by the new government concerned the rewriting of article 116 of the Labor Promoting Law (*Arbeitsförderungsgesetz*) in 1986. This revision stopped unemployment benefits for workers forced to inactivity because of a strike in another province (e.g. for lack of pieces). This cut unions' capacity to interrupt production with a limited number of actual strikers – a strategy proved determinant during the 1984 conflict.<sup>392</sup>

Yet, the conservative-liberal government showed interest for centralized tripartite negotiations. This may have been an opportunity for trade unions to gain anew some influence on policy-making in Bonn. In 1985 and again in 1987, chancellor Kohl organized tripartite discussions, but they did not result into corporatist agreements. These attempts show, however, that the federal government was not following an anti-union agenda similar to that of other state leaders at the same time.<sup>393</sup> Nevertheless, during the 1980s relationships between the DGB and the CDU had been carried out to the detriment of the trade unions.<sup>394</sup>

The erosion of unions' political strength was also perceptible in a certain loosening of its historical bonds with the social-democratic party. Between 1975 and 1982, the DGB criticized

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<sup>387</sup> Frerich 1987, pp. 361-369, 432-433, 525-527.

<sup>388</sup> Such privatization and exclusionist measures are proposed by Frerich (*ibid.*, p. 528).

<sup>389</sup> Kastendiek 1987, pp. 185-190.

<sup>390</sup> Hoffmann 1987, p. 359. This governmental course also weakened the position of the Christian-Democratic Workers' Division within the CDU (the *Christlich-Demokratische Arbeitnehmerschaft*).

<sup>391</sup> Until then every cabinet had counted between two and four former union secretaries. See: Armingeon 1985, pp. 223-224.

<sup>392</sup> Thelen 1991, pp. 90-92.

<sup>393</sup> Hemmer/Milert/Schmitz 1989, pp. 449-450.

<sup>394</sup> Neuhaus 1996, p. 346.

the lack of reforms put forward by the SPD. The 1983 federal elections saw an important decrease of SPD support among union members. The union watchword “Confidence in our own strength” synthesized this distancing, although observers believed it to be a momentary phenomenon.<sup>395</sup>

Detrimental relationships with the CDU and loosened bonds with the social-democracy were completed by an ambivalent relation to the Greens. Although the DGB had greeted Greens' bill proposal on the banning of lockouts in 1984, the friction between environmental protection and preservation of employment in some industries, different organizational conceptions and diverse goals made a sustained collaboration unlikely.<sup>396</sup>

#### **3.1.2.4 Internal challenges**

Toward the end of the 1980s, many authors insisted that internal challenges enhanced DGB's difficulties to adapt to these economic and political conditions. Rank and file members complained about strongly centralized organizations which left them little chance to influence their course. Also, membership recruiting was unsatisfactory in many developing industries and regions.<sup>397</sup> DGB unions' solutions to get round this last problem were various. Some had recourse to administrative means and made the process of membership resiliation more complicated.<sup>398</sup> Others, usually among the smaller trade unions, called for a redistribution of industries within the DGB organizations in order to reduce the ascendancy of IG Metall and the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (which counted over 50% of the delegates to DGB congresses).<sup>399</sup>

The competition between DGB's accommodationist and radical wings intensified, e.g. on the issue of working time reduction, IG Metall's fight for industry-wide working time reduction without loss of pay was not supported by the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union who privileged so-called “flexible models” of working time reduction (i.e. longer holidays or earlier retirement).<sup>400</sup> Of course, various conceptions or different wings were not a new phenomenon for the German trade union movement, yet it is significant that internal tensions remained on the increase throughout the 1980s. All in all, the DGB faced great difficulties to

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<sup>395</sup> Armingeon 1988, pp. 125-132.

<sup>396</sup> Hemmer/Milert/Schmitz 1989, pp. 451-452.

<sup>397</sup> Müller-Jentsch 1987.

<sup>398</sup> Müller-Jentsch (1986), pp. 83-4.

<sup>399</sup> Markovits 1986, p. 21. Markovits refutes that this numerical domination has induced a political domination of these unions in the DGB.

<sup>400</sup> Milano 1996, pp. 188-198.



adapt structures and politics in a way that enabled its organizations to respond to the new challenges.<sup>401</sup> This combination of external and internal challenges brought about a vast theoretical reflection as to how the 1981 DGB program could be revised in order to permit successful adaptation of trade union politics to the new realities. This debate was in full swing toward the end of the decade.

### **3.1.3 Reflections as to the future of trade union politics**

The 1988 DGB action program was a first attempt to discern possible avenues for a strategic reorientation. That same year IG Metall initiated a huge reflection of the entire West German labor movement to which hundreds of activists and intellectuals, from Germany and other countries took part. The Debate over the future of trade union politics (Zukunftsdebatte) was aiming at identifying solutions to problems face by trade unions in West Germany and in other countries.<sup>402</sup> Other DGB unions initiated their own, more modest, critical reflection on the future of union politics in specific industries. Vast research projects were thus subsidized by the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (“Future through public services” - Zukunft durch öffentliche Dienste), the Construction Industrial Union (“Constructing and Living 2000” - Bauen und Wohnen 2000), the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union, the Trade, Banks and Insurances Union and the union foundation Hans-Böckler-Stiftung.<sup>403</sup>

Reflections as to the future of trade union politics was the main topic a vast selection of books published at the end of the 1980s – and also after. It is impossible to propose an overlook of this literature here. Yet, in order to give an outlook on the state of these reflections toward the end of the 1980s, the author proposes to turn to five books and articles published between 1987 and 1989 in which historians and specialists tackle the topic of the future of trade union politics in West Germany.<sup>404</sup> These five contributions circumscribe the outlines of the overall reflections on the topic at the end of the 1980s.

#### **3.1.3.1 Orientation crisis of the West German trade unions**

One observation, common to the five contributions, concerns the risk that trade unions no longer be able to fulfill their social functions.

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<sup>401</sup> Grebing 1988, p. 27.

<sup>402</sup> Schneider 1989, p. 392. The contributions to the debate were published in seven volumes by IG Metall in 1988 and 1989: *Die andere Zukunft: Solidarität und Freiheit* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag).

<sup>403</sup> Hemmer/Milert/Schmitz 1989, pp. 446-447.

<sup>404</sup> Grebing 1988, Hemmert/Milert/Schmitz 1989, Hoffmann 1988, Schneider 1989, Schönhoven 1987.

[Die Gewerkschaften] sind weit entfernt von der beanspruchten Aufgabe, Gegenmacht mit gesellschaftsverändernden Perspektiven zu sein; am besten können sie sich noch selbst darstellen als Versicherungsverein für Privilegierte. Vor allem fehlen ihnen mit den italienischen Gewerkschaften vergleichbare Anstöße zu einer organisatorischen und inhaltlichen Neuorientierung als Antwort auf den Strukturwandel des modernen Kapitalismus. Wie die SPD haben auch die Gewerkschaften kein Konzept für die effiziente Kontrolle multinational verstärkter ökonomischer Macht.<sup>405</sup>

Die Gewerkschaften müssen sich, ihre Programmatik und ihre Praxis – wie so häufig in ihrer langen Geschichte – zusammen mit der durch ihre eigene Politik veränderten Welt wandeln. Orientierungspunkte für diesen Wandlungsprozess bieten die bei der Schilderung der aktuellen gewerkschaftlichen Programmdebatte näher beleuchteten Problemfelder der Gewerkschaftspolitik, deren Berücksichtigung zugleich Möglichkeiten einer Zusammenarbeit mit den neuen sozialen Bewegungen eröffnet. Dabei haben die Gewerkschaften wahrlich keinen Anlass, ihre Grundprinzipien aufzugeben: Soziale Gerechtigkeit, menschliche Solidarität, freiheitliche Demokratie und internationale Zusammenarbeit sind Eckpunkte der Gewerkschaftspolitik, die angesichts weltweiter Not, Ausbeutung, politischer Manipulation und Unterdrückung, angesichts von Umweltzerstörung und Kriegsgefahren nichts an Aktualität eingebüßt haben. Die Gewerkschaften sind im Umbruch – vermutlich tiefergreifend als je zuvor in ihrer Geschichte. Aber am Ende sind sie nicht.<sup>406</sup>

One of the main grey zones concerned the goals of trade union politics. What are they fighting for? Given the detrimental economic and political conditions, some authors suggested a defensive tactic, i.e. dedicated to the preservation of labor's positions and established worker rights. Such a defensive approach was made necessary, these authors believe, by the slowdown in economic activity. Unions could no longer assume that profits can grow indefinitely.<sup>407</sup> Others did not share this standpoint. They considered that changing economic conditions should change union politics. The persistence of established practices, based on established legislations could not be an option. Any claim on wage or working time, they argued, needs to take place within a strategy determined by broader objectives. Preserving what unions had was insufficient. West German unions were no longer successful with their policy of small-scale reforms for a loss of long-term objectives.<sup>408</sup> Some authors hence suggested a broad expansion of unions' goals, including greater control on production.<sup>409</sup>

That unions come to expand their action in order to intervene in more spheres of activity was doubtful. Many were in fact recommending the narrowing of unions' tasks and the abandonment of some traditional goals.

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<sup>405</sup> Grebing 1988, p. 27.

<sup>406</sup> Schneider 1989, p. 402.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

<sup>408</sup> Hemmert/Milert/Schmitz 1989, p. 454.

<sup>409</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 38.

They looked at any claim that could open the way to a new law, as dangerous. It was the case e.g. of the banning of lockouts, a year-long top priority for the DGB. Some considered preferable to abandon such fights, instead of risking to see the government propose new measures, which would more than likely result in a further weakening of worker rights. They regarded any new legislation as a Pandora's Box, more detrimental than beneficial to trade unions.<sup>410</sup> They accepted to bury traditional union demands in order to prevent intrusions in the collective bargaining autonomy. A similar skepticism was manifested on the issue of working time reduction. This demand of trade unions had been the core of some of the biggest industrial fights of the previous years. Yet the fear that working time reduction could only be achieved at the price of massive lay-offs was on the rise.<sup>411</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 Ways out of the orientation crisis

Internal reforms stood high on the priority list. They should look at facilitating the recruiting of female and young white-collar workers. Union publications and the cultural policy, neglected in recent years, should be revitalized. Authors making these suggestions did not fail to mention that budget restraints pushed unions toward further centralization and cutbacks in press and cultural activities. And they stressed that, even if they were implemented, these measures would not suffice to resolve unions' orientation crisis.<sup>412</sup>

Alongside internal reforms, many insisted on giving environmental protection and international union strategies a greater weight in DGB politics. Concrete proposals on these two aspects were few. As protection of the environment was concerned, authors usually limited themselves to better worker protection against the use of dangerous products.<sup>413</sup>

On the whole, economic, political and internal challenges were giving already existing legal tools a more significant role in unions' politics.<sup>414</sup> Collective agreements on wages (Lohnrahmentarifvertrag), agreements on the protection against rationalization (Rationalisierungsschutzabkommen), advisory boards on innovation (Innovationsberatungsstellen) and co-determination (Mitbestimmungsformen) appeared the surest defense of workers' interests. It was a strategic withdrawal on well-proven instruments, hardly compatible with any broad-

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<sup>410</sup> Hemmert/Milert/Schmitz 1989, p. 452.

<sup>411</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 34.

<sup>412</sup> Schneider 1989, pp. 398-399; Hemmert/Milert/Schmitz 1989, pp. 456-457; Hoffmann 1988, p. 35.

<sup>413</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 35; Schneider 1989, pp. 392-393.

<sup>414</sup> These legalistic tendencies of unions' politics have been mentioned in the discussion of Kathleen Thelen's book (in 3.1.1).

ening of unions' action as some were calling for. Could these very legal instruments at least be used for broader purposes than had been the case so far? Some seemed to believe it.<sup>415</sup>

Attempts at sketching the state of the union movement toward the end of the 1980s are torn between these two trends: a need for programmatic redefinition in order to face new realities, and a strategic withdrawal on established legal instruments. Most specialists were articulating both trends, yet the scales usually tipped in favor of one or the other. Some inclined toward a broadening of unions' interventions, productive issues (Jürgen Hoffmann), all spheres of workers' lives (Oskar Negt), or international action (Michael Schneider).<sup>416</sup> Others insisted on the preservation of labor's established position. They remained skeptical toward any challenging of the core labor-capital compromise in West Germany (Klaus Schönhoven)<sup>417</sup>, or prompted unions to focus on what they do best (Wolfgang Streeck).<sup>418</sup> All authors looked at the undergoing period as transitory and believed that only time could determine the kind of changes union politics would have to go through.

### 3.1.3.3 A period in between

This rapid survey of challenges and reflections shaking the West German union movement toward the end of the 1980s shows an open and ambivalent situation. Most specialists attempted to connect more or less conciliable tendencies: protection of worker rights, focusing on a few core spheres of activity, internal reforms and programmatic re-orientations. Most of these contributions accorded a crucial role to time for the determination of the changes necessary. Hence, even authors with different insight on the state of the West German unions concluded on the importance to win time, i.e. to preserve unions' positions until the outlines of necessary reforms were more visible. Some were confident, others worried.

“Tickt eine Zeitbombe... an den Fundamenten der Gewerkschaftsbewegung“ (Alvin Toffler)? Jedenfalls sind sich Gewerkschaftsanalytiker weitgehend darin einig, dass “eine neue Definition von Gewerkschaften und von Gewerkschaftspolitik“ (Martin Baethge) notwendig ist. Die Gewerkschaften der Bundesrepublik sind für diese Jahrhundertaufgabe mit ihrer bisherigen Organisationsstruktur – Einheitsgewerkschaft, Industrieverbandsprinzip – mit ihrer tarifpolitischen Durchsetzungs- und ihrer politischen Kompromissfähigkeit vielleicht besser gerüstet als viele ihrer Bruderorganisationen. Diese wertvollen Bestände zu bewahren und weiterzuentwickeln, dabei gleichzeitig viele neue Elemente in Organisation und Politik aufzunehmen, wird die Aufgabe der Zu-

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<sup>415</sup> Hofmann 1988, pp. 34-36.

<sup>416</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 36; Hemmer/Milert/Schmitz 1989, p. 447; Schneider 1989, p. 393.

<sup>417</sup> Schönhoven 1987, pp. 249-250.

<sup>418</sup> Hemmer/Milert/Schmitz 1989, p. 448.

kunft sein. Zu bleiben wie man ist und dabei doch auch gründlich anders zu werden – das ist eine große Herausforderung und eine schwer zu lösende praktische Aufgabe.<sup>419</sup>

Es muss auch hervorgehoben werden, dass sich solche neue Formen nur auf Basis einer defensiven Politik entwickeln können, die die Aufgabe hat, kurzfristig die Folgen der Krise abzuwehren und Zeit für die Entwicklung eigener Formen gewerkschaftlicher Politik der Beeinflussung des Restrukturierungsprozesses zu gewinnen.<sup>420</sup>

### **3.1.4 The four trade unions at the end of the 1980s**

The following pages summon up core information on the four trade unions considered in this work and complete the portrayal of the West German union movement at the end of the 1980s.

#### **3.1.4.1 IG Metall**

With its 2.7 million members (1987) in the steel, shipbuilding, electrical, mechanical engineering and automobile industries, IG Metall was West Germany's largest single trade union. It represented about 35% of all DGB members and as such, accounted for one third of all union members in the FRG. IG Metall maintained an unmistakable worker profile, with 85% of its memberships made of blue-collar workers.<sup>421</sup> The former head of the union's Stuttgart chapter Franz Steinkühler had been elected president in 1986.

The cycle of collective bargaining rounds in West Germany opened traditionally with the metal industry. The results achieved in the metal and steel industry oriented the negotiations in other sectors. Hence the impact of the collective agreements ratified by IG Metall was great and some estimated that they had an immediate influence on the wages and working time of about one third of the country's workforce.<sup>422</sup>

IG Metall was DGB's main "activist union".<sup>423</sup> Its main fight during the 1980s concerned the 35-hour workweek. The outcomes of its 1984 strike (introduced above) were appraised variously: Kathleen Thelen (1991) insists on the ground-breaking meaning of the diminution to 38.5 hours and believed the trend set irreversible, while Hajo Weber (1987) looked skeptically at the flexibility introduced by the agreement, allowing important variations from one enterprise to the other. IG Metall's activist posture was again confirmed with the initiation of the debate over the future of trade union politics, in 1988.

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>420</sup> Hoffmann 1988, p. 33.

<sup>421</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 200.

<sup>422</sup> Markovits 1986, p. 166.

<sup>423</sup> The distinction between activist and accommodationist unions comes from Markovits 1986.

#### **3.1.4.2 Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union (IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik)**

With 665,000 members, the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union was DGB's third largest union in 1987. The union was made up of 80,5% of blue-collar workers.<sup>424</sup> The severe crisis undergone by the chemical industry had induced a moderate wage policy from this union. Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union had become West Germany's main advocate of social partnership unionism and the leader of DGB's "accommodationist" wing in the 1980s. This new profile resulted from an internal fight of the late 1970s closed by the exclusion of the union's "activist wing" by the leaders of the main chemical corporations' works councils.<sup>425</sup> The union was headed since 1982 by SPD MP Hermann Rappe.

#### **3.1.4.3 Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (Öffentlicher Dienste, Transport und Verkehr)**

DGB's second largest union, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union counted over 1,2 million members throughout the 1980s. It was West Germany's first white-collar workers' organization, and they represented 46,3% of the union's members (with 46% of blue-collar workers and 6,7% of civil servants).<sup>426</sup> Monika-Wulf-Mathies headed the union since 1982. The union was in charge of a vast range of public service areas, which granted it for wages and working time conditions in the public sector a role comparable to that of IG Metall in the industrial sector. By the mid-1980s, the public service union had initiated discussions with other DGB and independent trade unions in order to intensify the organization of white-collar workers in West Germany. This ultimately led to a vast merger and the creation of one unitary German union for the service sector, ver.di, in 1999.<sup>427</sup>

#### **3.1.4.4 Media Industrial Union (Media Industrial Union).**

The Media Industrial Union was created in April 1989, after the merger of three DGB unions of the printing and communication industries. The new organization counted 180,000 members. It conserved the activist profile of its main constituent, the Printing and Paper Industrial Union (IG Druck und Papier), a 145,000-member organization (75% of blue-collar workers), which had been "West Germany's most outspoken representative on matters of radical social

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<sup>424</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 128.

<sup>425</sup> Markovits 1986, pp. 322-326.

<sup>426</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 225.

<sup>427</sup> This information had been given to me by Hartmut Simon, in charge of the relations with the public and the archives at ver.di.

change”. Since the 1970s, a dramatic wave of dismissals caused by the computerization in the printing industry resulted in hard industrial fights, e.g. in 1977. If the beginning of the 1980s had been more peaceful, the printing and paper union went on strike in 1984 for the 35-hour workweek, and obtained, like IG Metall, a 90-minute reduction.<sup>428</sup> Media Industrial Union’s first president was Erwin Ferlemann, head of the printing and paper union since 1983.

## **3.2 From Ostpolitik to support and collaboration: the DGB unions and the East German Revolution (May 1989 – February 1990)**

This chapter depicts how the DGB unions reacted to the East German revolution until February 1990. After a few weeks of wait-and-see policy, the DGB unions implemented a strategy of support and collaboration that benefited the East German trade unions of the FDGB in their attempts to reform into genuine organizations for the defense of workers’ interests. Although the implementation of this strategy by all DGB unions varied in the detail, it remained shaped by common boundaries and objectives, so that these differences appear as variations on one common theme.

### **3.2.1 The first weeks: Wait and See**

The literature has highlighted how the West German trade unions were caught unawares by the East German revolution. Many observers and West German trade union leaders have insisted on the absence of public stances by the DGB union leaders during the first weeks of the revolution. The burden represented by the Ostpolitik is given as crucial factor for the alleged incapacity of the West German trade unions to either shape the developments in 1989 or at least go along with them.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Markovits 1986, pp. 401-414, quote p. 414.

<sup>429</sup> The political scientist Klaus von Beyme also criticised the policy of the DGB in 1989, which, he argued, ruined an “historical chance” and forced the latter into “a structural dead-end”. He nevertheless defended the Ostpolitik: “Die Ostpolitik der Gewerkschaften war immer unzweideutig und blieb unkompromittiert. Keine Umarmung von Harry Tisch war degoutanter als die vielen Umarmungen konservativer Staatsmänner, die bei Ceauşescu waren.“ Klaus von Beyme, “Aspkete der Gewerkschaftsentwicklung in einem geeinten Deutschland – historische Chancen oder strukturelle Sackgasse?”, in *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 5-6/90, p. 333.

These hesitations and this reluctance to reconsider their relationship with the FDGB have been widely depicted in the literature as a serious mistake by the DGB unions, a mistake which forced them to “catch up with history” (my expression) a few months later and left them unable to exert influence over the developments that led to the unification of Germany by October 1990.

Different elements corroborate this interpretation. In October 1989, the course of meetings between the heads of trade unions from both Germanies states pleased the East German State Security (Stasi), whose reporters greeted the “offen[e] von gegenseitigem Vertrauen und Dialogbereitschaft gekennzeichnet[e] Atmosphäre.”<sup>430</sup> If the Stasi reports are anything to go by, it would seem that neither the visits in the GDR of the Saarland DGB by January, the Mines and Energy Union (IG Bergbau und Energie) by May, the Public Service and Transport Union (Öffentlicher Dienst, Transport und Verkehr, ÖTV) by August<sup>431</sup>, or the Media Union (IG Medien) by October<sup>432</sup>, gave the GDR officials any reason to complain.

By August, as the first waves of East German departures had already attracted the public's attention in the Federal Republic and elsewhere, a delegation of the DGB Trade, Banks and Insurances Union (Handel, Banken und Versicherungen, HBV) met with FDGB functionaries. The press declaration published by HBV after the meeting confined itself to the usual lingo, an implicit confirmation that the union had no intention to tackle topics that could be unpleasant to their East German hosts.

Die Delegation wurde vom Vorsitzenden des Bundesvorstandes des Freien Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, Harry Tisch, zu einem freimütigen Informations- und Meinungs-

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<sup>430</sup> *Information der Zentralvorstände der IG-Druck und Papier und der Gewerkschaft Kunst des FDGB über die Ergebnisse des Besuchs einer Leitungsdelegation der IG Medien im DGB vom 4. bis 6. Oktober[1989] in der DDR*, BStU, HA XX 1178, p. 2.

<sup>431</sup> N.T., BStU, HA XX Nr. 34. “Es gab Übereinstimmung darüber, dass die Gewerkschaften sich weiterhin engagieren müssen, um ihren Beitrag zur Sicherung des Friedens und zur Abrüstung. (...) Als besonders angenehm hätten sie [die ÖTV-Delegierten] die offene Atmosphäre bei allen Begegnungen empfunden, zumal sie doch mit vielen Vorurteilen in die DDR gekommen seien. Ihre Bilder von der DDR seien geprägt von den Medien in der BRD“ (p.282). The topic of the meeting concerned the role of the trade unions in the communal policy. Apparently the West German unionists did not raise any questions on the changes occurring in the USSR, Poland and Hungary (p. 283).

<sup>432</sup> “Beide Seiten waren sich einig, dass sich die Beziehungen zwischen dem FDGB und dem DGB auf der Grundlage der jüngsten Verhandlungen der Kollegen [Harry] Tisch und [Ernst] Breit [Vorsitzenden des FDGB bzw. des DGB] in der BRD auch in Zukunft positiv entwickeln müssen und einen stabilisierenden Faktor in der bewegten ideologischen Auseinandersetzung unserer Zeit darstellen. (...) Die Delegation [der IG Medien] brachte ihren Unmut über die Hetzkampagne der Medien in der BRD im Zusammenhang mit der illegalen Ausreise von DDR-Bürgern zum Ausdruck“. *Information der Zentralvorstände der IG-Druck und Papier un der Gewerkschaft Kunst des FDGB über die Ergebnisse des Besuchs einer Leitungsdelegation der IG Medien im DGB vom 4. bis 6. Oktober[1989] in der DDR*, p. 2.



saustausch empfangen. Das wirken der Gewerkschaften für den Frieden und die Tätigkeit in den unterschiedlichen Wirtschaftsordnungen standen dabei im Mittelpunkt.<sup>433</sup>

As a matter of fact, during the first eight months of 1989, the DGB unions members thought it preferable not to change an iota of the basic principles sustaining their Ostpolitik. After a meeting with his counterpart in the DGB in April, FDGB head Harry Tisch wrote to SED's Secretary General Erich Honecker:

Im Gegensatz zur BRD-Regierung und auch zur SPD hat sich der Bundesvorstand des DGB bislang nicht in die inneren Angelegenheiten der DDR einzumischen versucht bzw. Forderungen nach Veränderungen an die Gewerkschaften der DDR erhoben. Breit erweckte den Eindruck, dass wir auch weiterhin von dieser Position des DGB ausgehen können.<sup>434</sup>

Until September 1989, there were but very few breaches of the non-interference principle by the DGB union leaders. One of those few examples was the wish formulated by IG Metall head Franz Steinkühler in June that the FDGB take the lead of the social changes in the GDR. He also expressed the hope that the East German workers be granted the right to strike as soon as possible.<sup>435</sup>

Hence the attitude of the DGB unions during the months preceding the outburst of the East German revolution can be described as a "wait and see" policy. This characterization is in accordance with the dominant trend of the literature on the subject. Contrary to the argument developed here, however, authors like Manfred Wilke, Hans-Peter Müller and Peter Seideneck among others consider that the DGB unions continued to trail behind the developments during the whole duration of the revolution and the unification process. Although the depiction of the DGB unions' approach of the East German pre-revolutionary weeks (until September) as a "wait and see policy" is partially in accordance with their analysis, I would like to take issues with their condemnation of this policy.

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<sup>433</sup> *Pressedienst*, Gewerkschaft Handel, Banken und Versicherungen im DGB, Nr. 129/89, August 7, 1989, quoted in Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 175.

<sup>434</sup> *FDGB-Vorsitzender an SED-Generalsekretär am 4. April 1989: DGB-Interesse an Fortsetzung des FDGB-Dialogues*, ArchGew A 200.12869, reproduced in: Wilke/Hertle 1992, Document 8.

<sup>435</sup> "Gespräch mit Franz Steinkühler", *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*, June 20, 1989, and "Steinkühler verlangt Streikrecht für Gewerkschaften in der DDR", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 22, 1989. There was a critical tradition within the IG Metall as regard to the GDR. In the 1970s, this union was perceived by the East German regime as an organisation strongly influenced by leftist groups hostile to the GDR, like left-wing social-democrats and Trotskyists. According to FDGB reports, the solidarity campaign with Wolf Biermann by the union and its youth wing (headed by Franz Steinkühler), for instance, had shown how these groups' hatred of the GDR had passed over all bounds. See: "Fakten zur Rolle der IG Metall im DGB in Zusammenhang mit dem Auftritt Wolf Biermanns in der BRD und Reaktionene zu seiner Ausbürgerung – Vergleiche zum Prager rühling", January 1977, ZGA FDGB 10672, reproduced in: Eckelmann/Hertle/Weinert 1990, pp. 212-14.

“Wait and see”: the preservation of the Ostpolitik until further notice

It would be foolhardy to refuse to consider that the inertia characteristic of any huge organization like a trade union has played a part the preservation of the contact policy and the non-interference principle by the DGB unions until September 1989. It certainly did. My point here is that bureaucratic inertia alone does not account for this preservation. I consider that, from the perspective of the DGB unions, at least two elements substantiate the “wait and see” policy, until September 1989.

First of all, one has to keep in mind the USSR when tackling any issue concerning the GDR. The Perestroika and the Glasnost, the keywords behind the reforms that the new Secretary General of the Communist Party of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, wanted to implement, gave rise to tremendous hopes, both in eastern and western countries. Launched by 1985, these state-led processes of “peace-keeping” through demilitarization, of extensive abrogation of the “Breznev Doctrine” (as the post-1968 sword of Damocles of a Soviet military intervention in any satellite country had been called), of careful loosening up of the political life and of gradual widening of the authorised freedom of speech, seemed to have entered a second phase in 1989. By April Mikhail Gorbachev had announced a radical program of personnel reduction within the direction structures of the Communist Party. Was he going to succeed? Was some sector of the state or military apparatus going to attempt a coup? Who could tell?

These topics were developed in the previous part. From 1985 to 1989, the changes introduced by Gorbachev met a rather cold reception from the GDR leaders, who appeared more than reluctant to follow his “New Thinking”. If the East German opposition did not result from the Perestroika, it nevertheless benefited from it. Many opposition activists hid their activities behind the Perestroika program and Gorbachev’s declarations.<sup>436</sup> These years saw the birth and rapid radicalization of the East German opposition, a process which the former opposition activist and historian Erhart Neubert describes as the development from its “formation” to its constitution as a “counter-power”.

During those years, the bulk of West German political, economic and social actors observing the changes in the eastern bloc, made no attempt to help the East German opposition. The West German Greens were the single major exception to this rule, after 1987. The rest of the political parties and organizations in the Federal Republic restricted their contacts, if any, to

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<sup>436</sup> Neubert 1998, pp. 635-637.

their official East German counterparts.<sup>437</sup> This was an undisputed approach, based on the claim that the East German leaders would never hesitate to repress the people and suppress these new-found spaces of relative freedom as soon as they would feel threatened.

Coming back to the trade unions, it even seems that, at the very beginning of the 1989 East German crisis, the respect of the Ostpolitik principles could appear legitimized by the events. As the regime started to face an open resistance from its population, the preservation of contacts between both countries did not lose their rationale, quite on the contrary. As a matter of fact West German trade unions, like the DGB Chemistry-Paper-Ceramics (IG Chemie Papier und Keramik, IG CPK) and the German Civil Servants Union (Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft, DAG), started to have official contacts with the East German FDGB by May 1989. In other words, it was in the tumultuous context of the months and weeks preceding the revolution that these two trade unions decided to participate to the Ostpolitik.<sup>438</sup>

The second element that I would like to invoke against the a posteriori condemnation of the wait and see stance by the DGB unions can be formulated as an adage: May is not September and September is not December. As the previously quoted study by Karsten Timmer shows, the vision according to which what happened between May and September 1989 in the GDR - the first important wave of departures and the proof of distortions of electoral results – heralded the uprising and the forthcoming fall of the state, is misleading.<sup>439</sup> During those months, the repressive power of the state remained at its height. The dialectics of the East German “niche society” still set the mark quite high for large segments of the population to undertake political action. The turning point was attained as the workers came back from holiday by the beginning of September. People started to summon information from the political officials on the conditions of their colleagues’ escape. They started to require reforms, so that people would stop to leave the country by the thousands. These topics are reintroduced in greater details in the second part of this work. For now, the argument that I want to make is that the sequence of events of the 1989 revolution started in September. The first opposition group, the Neues Forum, was formed toward the end of September. Therefore, I suggest that, unless one refuses any legitimacy to the Ostpolitik – the case of many authors but certainly not that of the DGB unions -, there was little reason to reconsider the policy of contacts with the East Ger-

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<sup>437</sup> There are numerous examples, ranging from the meetings of leaders from both states, to the relations between the CDU’s Junge Union with the East German FDJ, to the SPD with the SED, to the DGB with the FDGB, to the Churches. Ibid., pp. 637-642 and 660-670.

<sup>438</sup> IG CPK 1993, p.3. The meeting between the IG CPK and the IG Chemie-Glass und Keramik im FDGB took place on May 21. Youth sections of both unions had nevertheless met several times before. “FDGB und DAG nehmen offizielle Gespräche auf”, *Tribüne*, May 10, 1989, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 33.

<sup>439</sup> Timmer 2000, p. 80.

man trade unions before September. From September onwards, the DGB unions abandoned their “wait and see” policy for a strategy of support of and collaboration with East German unionists.

### **3.2.2 A First Strategy: Towards Support and Collaboration (September 1989-February 1990)**

From September 1989 onward the DGB unions developed a common strategy dedicated to support the efforts made by East German unionists to reshape the mechanisms for the defense of workers’ interest in their country. As the word “development” suggests, this strategy was not static during this time and has evolved over the period and along the different trade unions. The DGB unions have implemented it to various degrees. Still, I argue that all the initiatives taken by the DGB unions between September 1989 and February 1990 can be condensed under a few characteristics. These characteristics allow to talk of one common strategy. We will see how the four DGB unions under scrutiny in this work implemented this strategy.

One comment is required before introducing the four components of the DGB unions’ first strategy. I would certainly be misunderstood if one was led to understand that the contours of this common strategy had been delineated by the DGB trade union leaders sometimes in September 1989 and implemented afterwards. These components were never explicated, at least not all of them. Only through the distance can these four components be suggested as the contours circumscribing the reaction of the DGB unions toward the East German revolution.

The first component was the will of the DGB unions to analyze for themselves and by their own means how the situation was evolving in the GDR. The DGB unions made unmistakable efforts to develop their own picture of the actors, causes and consequences of the popular outburst, independent from that produced by West German mass media. The trade union press for instance gave numerous accounts of the evolution of the reshaping process of the defense of workers’ interests in the GDR. The second part of this work has benefited a great deal from the amount of articles on this topic.

The second component of the DGB unions’ strategy concerned the identification of ways to assist and support these evolutions in the East German trade unions and shop floors. Contacts from DGB unions with East German opposition groups or initiatives for independent trade unions remained comparatively modest. Without breaking with it, the support of reforms of the trade unions and on the shop floors and the collaboration with their actors were no longer the former Ostpolitik. Support and collaboration were seen within the DGB as the most ap-

appropriate and respectful answer to the political developments and the difficult reshaping of the mechanisms for the defence of workers' interests in the GDR.

The third component was the insistence that all forms of concrete support and cooperation by the DGB unions fulfil requests explicitly articulated by East German unionists and workers. This resolve to react to the needs expressed by East German actors pulled along in his wake the unwillingness of the DGB unions to address the topic of the unification until the turn of 1990. If the reluctance of West German left-wing activists toward the unification had its part in this blackout on the unification, the refusal to address the issue was primarily substantially justified with the argument that the impulse toward the unification had to come from the East German population itself. As we are about to see, some DGB union leaders presented the West German unions as a democratic barrier against attempts made by the pro-unification elites in the Federal Republic. They also called upon the democratic spirit of the East German revolution to spread out in the Federal Republic and bring about reforms there too.

The fourth and last component introduces an element of comparison with the second strategy by the DGB unions, implemented after February 1990. It consists in the greater differentiation in the implementation of the first strategy by the various DGB unions. Whereas the second strategy was fully implemented by all DGB unions, the first was developed with more or less conviction, along the cases. As a consequence, the resources set off to implement the second strategy were also incommensurably higher than those devoted to the first. Despite different degrees of implementation, the contours of the first strategy remained unchallenged by the DGB unions that were more reluctant to implement it thoroughly.

### **3.2.2.1 The initiator: IG Metall**

The first strategy implemented by all DGB unions was heavily influenced by the course of the IG Metall between the months of September 1989 and February 1990. In June 1989 IG Metall's head, Franz Steinkühler, had counted among the very few DGB union leaders to comment on the evolution of the political situation in the GDR. In September, he reacted more thoroughly, as the wave of exits from the GDR was plunging the country into a political crisis. His reaction was articulated around two key ideas. On the one hand, Franz Steinkühler felt it necessary to stand up for the Ostpolitik and affirmed that it would be furthered.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> There was not going to be any contact between IG Metall and East German trade unions in 1989, until the meeting with the head of the newly-founded IG Metall (DDR), by December 7.

Auch die IG Metall unterhält Kontakte zu den Staatsgewerkschaften im Osten nicht deshalb, weil wir deren Politik für richtig halten oder weil sie uns besonders nahestehen. Unser Ziel ist, politische Gegensätze nicht zu zwischenstaatlichen Gegensätzen werden zu lassen, für menschliche Erleichterungen einzutreten, Erfahrungen zu vermitteln, die den Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern den Alltag erleichtern. (...) [D]er Abbruch von Kontakten würde niemanden nützen. Den Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern in den Ländern des Ostens wäre nicht geholfen. Es ist ein Irrtum zu glauben, dass durch Kontaktsperren die Machthaber im Osten reformfreudiger werden würden. Durch Isolation würde die Starre und Bewegungslosigkeit noch zunehmen.

On the other hand, the wave of departures manifested the deep popular dissatisfaction towards the regime and its growing rejection among the population. Steinkühler depicted the East German system as a perversion of socialism and stressed the urgency of reforms.<sup>441</sup>

Die zutiefst humanistische Idee des Sozialismus wird durch staatsbürokratische Systeme pervertiert. Die Machthaber in Ost-Berlin müssen endlich begreifen, dass sie nicht weiter die Menschen von der Teilhabe am politischen Leben ausschliessen können. (...) Allerdings wird die IG Metall es sich nicht nehmen lassen, öffentlich und vor allem in Gesprächen unmissverständlich deutlich zu machen, dass wir Reformen erwarten. Die Gewerkschaften im Osten müssen endlich zu Interessenvertretern der Arbeitnehmer werden und dürfen nicht Transmissionsriemen staatsbürokratischer Parteien bleiben.<sup>442</sup>

During the five weeks separating this editorial and the IG Metall's 16<sup>th</sup> Congress (held from October 22 to 28), the union's head made few public comments on the East German issue. It did not reconsider its contact policy. In that time, however, the political instability had evolved toward a revolutionary situation. Articles published in the union's press had followed this evolution from the perspective of workers of the metal industry.<sup>443</sup> During the congress, held two weeks before the opening of the Wall, Franz Steinkühler used stronger words against the East German government and trade unions. It was their arrogance and despise of fundamental democratic rights by the regime, he accused, that was responsible of the revolution. The refusal of the FDGB to gain its independence from the state and obtain the right to strike had its part in the popular dissatisfaction. Steinkühler greeted the East German upheaval, which he linked to the historical struggles of the German labor movement.

Wir, die vor 100 Jahren mit dem Gesang „Brüder zur Sonne, zur Freiheit“ angetreten sind; wir wissen nur zu gut, was dem arbeitenden Menschen Freiheit und soziale Gerechtigkeit bedeuten. Es ist nicht Hunger und Not, es ist nicht Elend und materieller Mangel allein, die Verzweiflung erzeugen. Es ist die Arroganz eines Obrigkeitsregimes, das die elementarsten demokratischen Rechte mit Füßen tritt und über die Köpfe hinweg selbstherrlich alles zu reglementieren sucht. Damit muss Schluss sein! Ich habe

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<sup>441</sup> In August a special two-page feature of the union's magazine *Metall* (17/89, pp. 8-9) had also called for reforms, particularly in the FDGB, in order to stop the stream of departures.

<sup>442</sup> Franz Steinkühler, "Wir erwarten Reformen", *Metall*, 19/89 (September 22), p. 3.

<sup>443</sup> Robert Fuss, "Freiheit mit Fallen", *Metall*, 19/89 (September 22), pp. 16-17; Klaus Klöppel, "Es gärt im VEB", *Ibid.*, p. 17; Klaus Klöppel, "Von unten nach oben regnet es nicht", *Metall*, 20/89 (October 6), pp. 22-23.

mehrfach an den FDGB appelliert, sich aus der Umklammerung von Staat und Partei zu lösen und Unabhängigkeit und Streikrecht zu reklamieren.

For Steinkühler, the living conditions of the populations in the south-eastern parts of the world, the trade unions struggles in north-western countries and the ecological concerns everywhere, imposed that a new economic system be developed that goes beyond the western capitalist model. Against the “eastern state-bureaucratic communism” and the “western inhuman capitalism”, Steinkühler reaffirmed the relevance of the “democratic socialist” program put forward by his union.

Die Idee eines humanen und demokratischen Sozialismus steht noch immer deutlich gegen den staatsbürokratischer Kommunismus östlicher Prägung und den inhumanen Kapitalismus westlicher Prägung. Der Zusammenbruch des sogenannten Sozialismus ist keinesfalls eine Niederlage des Sozialismus. Und er ist schon gar kein Sieg des Kapitalismus. (...) Kapitalismus ist eben nicht nur mit der Demokratie der Bundesrepublik, Frankreichs oder der USA verbunden, sondern ebenso mit den Diktaturen Chiles und Südafrikas. Und auch die fürchterliche Nazi-Diktatur war ein kapitalistisches System. Es würde ein Stück gemeinsamer Zukunft verspielt werden, wenn Perestroika letztlich nur darauf hinausliefe, unser Zivilisationsmodell zu kopieren, auf unser Produktions- und Lebenstempo zu beschleunigen. (...) Die Konsequenz kann nur lauten, dass wir, die industriell hoch entwickelten Länder, vorangehen müssen mit der ökologischen Umgestaltung unserer Industriegesellschaft, und dass die weniger entwickelten Länder parallel zum industriellen Fortschritt den ökologischen Fortschritt planen.<sup>444</sup>

These strong words had little concrete outcomes. Despite its greeting, IG Metall looked at the East German revolution from the outside. The opening of the wall a few days later changed this perspective. In an article, Steinkühler referred to the developments taking place in the GDR as a political and economic self-determination process led by the people. He insisted on the protection of the autonomy of the process but offered the assistance of the West German unions. If this help was welcomed, IG Metall could support East German unionists in the development of structures for the defense of their interests, as well as political activists.

Die IG Metall steht gemeinsam mit den DGB-Gewerkschaften den Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmern in der DDR mit Rat und Tat zur Seite. Welche Organisationsform sie jedoch wählen, bleibt ihnen überlassen. Ich kann ihnen nur raten, sich die historischen Erfahrungen der Einheitgewerkschaft in der Bundesrepublik anzuschauen. Staatsferne, parteipolitische Unabhängigkeit und einheitliche Interessenvertretung sind tragende Prinzipien einer starken und unabhängigen Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Wir mischen uns nicht ein. Wir geben aber gerne Erfahrungen an alle Parteien und Gruppierungen in der DDR weiter, wenn dies gewünscht wird.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Franz Steinkühler, “Fieberstunde der Geschichte”, *Metall*, 22/89 (November 3), pp. 20-21.

<sup>445</sup> Franz Steinkühler, “Was jetzt zu tun ist”, *Metall*, 23/89 (November 17), pp. 8-9, quote p. 9.

Hence the IG Metall was strongly opposed to what it considered pressures exerted by the Federal government in favor of the unification and the western market economy: “Eine Wiedervereinigungsdebatte jetzt würde darüber hinaus die Reformentwicklung in der DDR eher behindern als fördern.” “Auch die Wahl des Wirtschaftssystems muss eine Entscheidung der Menschen in der DDR bleiben und darf nicht von der Bundesregierung oder der bundesdeutschen Wirtschaft entschieden werden.”<sup>446</sup>

Because of the insistence by IG Metall on the autonomy of the self-determination process, it is not surprising that Chancellor Kohl’s plan for a medium-term unification, the so-called 10-point plan made public by November 28, has been criticised in the union’s press. The vagueness of the plan on the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border was condemned. The requirement of market economy as a pre-condition to a program of economic assistance was depicted as “economic blackmail”. The unification envisioned in the plan aim at implementing “a social system, that fits into a conservative, outdated idea of the world (konservatives Weltbild von vorgestern).”<sup>447</sup>

#### IG Metall’s press and the changes in the GDR

The IG Metall’s press in November and December documents the attention paid by this union to the changes taking place in the GDR. It also gives the details of the assistance to East German unionists developed from that moment on.

Three topics stand out from the articles published in IG Metall’s press in November 1989. Furthermore one aspect misses in these articles. One of these topics was the reform process of the East German metal union. The articles covering that question allow to appreciate the variety but also the uneven progress of this process. Among these, one analyzed how the “pressure of the streets” had made its way into the world of labor and, from there, rapidly shaken the entire FDGB structures.<sup>448</sup> It recalled how the rank and file protests had forced the FDGB direction to resign, by November 2. Another article questioned the capacity of the FDGB, now more or less similar to an empty shell, to reform itself into a democratic confederation of independent unions dedicated to the defense of workers’ interests. “Everything is still opened”, concluded the journalist, who showed himself rather suspicious as to the likelihood

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<sup>446</sup> Idem.

<sup>447</sup> Dieter Staadt, “Nach dem Rausch der Kater”, *Metall*, 25-26/89 (December 13), p. 4.

<sup>448</sup> Klaus Klöppel, “Die Revolution nach Feierabend”, *Metall*, 23/89 (November 17), pp. 10, 15-16.



of decided steps into that direction before the FDGB congress, to be held at the end of January 1990.<sup>449</sup>

The re-foundation of IG Metall (DDR), on November 27, as the first independent FDGB union member, was greeted. An enthusiastic and extensive report of the debates and reforms undertaken during this congress was published in *Metall*.<sup>450</sup> With regards to the relations between both German metal unions, the new head of the East German metal union had declared: “[Ich glaube] von der IG Metall der BRD viel lernen können, ohne alles übernehmen zu müssen.” He had also called for the organization of forums of discussions for unionists from both organizations in the next future.<sup>451</sup> These declarations, reproduced in IG Metall’s press, seemed to confirm the strategy implemented by the union’s head. The re-founding of IG Metall (DDR) as an independent FDGB union member, its new democratic structures, the interest for a collaboration with IG Metall that would not deprive East German unionists of their power of determination over the reforms implemented: all these elements highlighted by the articles in IG Metall’s press founded the strategy of the union so far. Only the reservations toward the right to strike expressed by some members of IG Metall (DDR) were in contradiction with this strategy. The conquest of the right to strike had been repeatedly counted among the first priorities of the reform process, by IG Metall’s head. Many articles echoed these reservations toward the right to strike, usually together with disapproving comments.<sup>452</sup>

The second topic highlighted by the IG Metall press concerns a process closely connected to the reform of the East German metal union. Many articles portrayed the turbulent situation on the shop floors of the metal plants and workshops of the GDR. On the one hand, the East German metal industry, the first industrial sector of the country, was in a bad shape. In 1988, this sector counted 1.5 million workers and 44% of all East German enterprises. Its predominance was also reflected in the fact that five out of eleven ministers were responsible for it. The productivity of the metal industry, estimated to reach 56% of its West German counterpart in 1988, had fell to 30%, by November 1989.<sup>453</sup> On the other hand, in different metal plants, workers had started to transform the state of internal relationships. IG Metall’s journalists sent to the GDR portrayed the plants and workshops of the East German metal industry as the scene of far-reaching debates among workers and the location of fundamental transforma-

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<sup>449</sup> Steffen Uhlmann, “DDR-Gewerkschaften am Scheideweg. Kampf um Eigenständigkeit”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 12/89, pp. 12-13.

<sup>450</sup> Michael Böhm, “An diesem Sonntag tat sich eine neue Welt auf”, *Metall*, 24/89 (December 1), p. 7-8.

<sup>451</sup> Michael Böhm, “Von Papenburg nach Jena”, *Metall*, 24/89 (December 1), p. 7.

<sup>452</sup> Uhlmann, “DDR-Gewerkschaften am Scheideweg.”; Böhm, “An diesem Sonntag”; Michael Böhm, “Wir fangen wieder bei null an”, *Metall*, 25-26/89, (December 13), pp. 8-10.

<sup>453</sup> Schroeder 2000, pp. 60, 64

tion of the production process, the organization of work and the representation of workers. In many of these plants and workshops, as one journalist put it, workers were taking “their future in their own hands”.<sup>454</sup>

These articles in IG Metall’s press also showed how the IG Metall (DDR) was continuously challenged by groups of workers in plants and workshops, unconvinced by its renewal process. These workers directed unequivocal calls to the IG Metall for support and assistance:

Eigentlich sind wir mit unserer Arbeit wieder am Nullpunkt. (...) Wir brauchen jetzt den möglichst schnellen und praktischen Erfahrungsaustausch mit den westlichen Gewerkschaften, wie man Tarife und Vereinbarungen wirklich macht. Wir müssen ja nicht alles übernehmen, aber kennen wollen wir es wenigstens.<sup>455</sup>

The third aspect highlighted by IG Metall’s press between November and December was about the outcomes of the opening of the borders for the workers and the trade unions in the Federal Republic. Concerns were articulated as to the downward spiral effect on incomes exerted by illegal or underpaid East Germans working in the Federal Republic.<sup>456</sup> As this aspect was to count among the causes that brought a shift in the strategy of the West German, it is analyzed in the following chapters. Let us just notice that these concerns appeared in IG Metall’s press in November.

A fourth aspect of the coverage of the changes occurring in the GDR by IG Metall’s press has to be formulated negatively. It is missing beside the previous three. There has been no mention of the activity of the East German opposition or the initiatives for independent trade unions (IUG) in the plants and workshops of the metal industry. The numerous and detailed descriptions of the turbulent situation on the shop floors have however forgot this piece, which would have completed the puzzle. The result was a portrayal of the East German labor into which, although contested by its rank and file, IG Metall (DDR) appeared as the only organized force of defense of workers’ interests above the representation in the shop floor. This is also how IG Metall’s head understood the situation, as the treaty of cooperation with IG Metall (DDR) ratified by the beginning of December shows.

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<sup>454</sup> Michael Böhm, “Aufschwung oder Ausverkauf”, *Metall*, 1/90 (January 12), pp. 12-15.

<sup>455</sup> Böhm, “Wir fangen wieder bei null an”, p. 9.

<sup>456</sup> Michael Böhm, “Hilfestellen für den Dritten Weg”, *Metall*, 23/89 (November 17), p. 16; Waltraud Bierwirth, “So geht’s nicht!”, *Metall*, 23/89 (November 17), p. 20; Klaus Klöppel, “Sozialdumping von gewissenlosen Unternehmern”, *Metall*, 24/89 (December 1), pp. 8-9.

## **The cooperation with IG Metall (DDR)**

The analysis of the situation in East German labor developed by IG Metall's press seemed to find an echo in the clauses of the Cooperation Agreement between IG Metall and IG Metall (DDR), recently (re)founded as independent FDGB union member.<sup>457</sup>

Six articles built the substance of this agreement signed by December 6. The first was the creation of a twinning program (Partnerschaften) between workers of enterprises from comparable size from both Germanies. Twenty-five "partnerships" were hence initiated. This type of cooperation at the shop floor level aimed at supplying East German unionists on shop floors with material and information. The second article announced the organization of seminars by IG Metall on issues relating to the defense of workers' interests on the shop floor, to which East and West German unionists were to participate. Furthermore IG Metall pledged to open its seminars to GDR's shop floor delegates of the metal industry, and to develop new seminars on topics of specific consequence for East German unionists. The third article concerned the formation of East German union functionaries to issues relating to the internal organization, finances, membership and recruiting. The launching of collective bargaining rounds in the next future justified a special attention. Article four heralded a conference on this topic. The fifth article was about the development of formation programs for all categories of union functionaries of the East German metal industry. The sixth and last article announced that the seminars held in the IG Metall school of Spandau/West-Berlin were now going to include visits in metal plants and workshops of the GDR. These six initiatives built the "first steps" of a cooperation between both German metal unions which was to develop.

One obvious goal of IG Metall with this agreement was to sustain the reform process of its East German homologous. The strong emphasis on the shop floors in articles 1,2,6, is important. It were the East German structures of workers' representation, and their renewal, that had presided over the initiatives announced in the agreement. East German unions were enterprise-based, West German were not. The attention to meeting the specific needs of East German unionists on the shop floors and to define the cooperation initiated as a mutual assistance, despite the evidence of a one-sided process of support, echoed the strategy that IG Metall developed since a few months. It was in accordance with Steinkühler's repeated pledge to an active assistance that would not interfere into the decision-making processes but simply offer help where it was required.

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<sup>457</sup> *Kooperationsvertrag zwischen der IG Metall der Bundesrepublik und der IG Metall der DDR* published in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89 (December 1989), pp. 807-808.

On the following day (December 7), Franz Steinkühler and IG Metall (DDR)'s head Hartwig Bugiel, who were meeting for the first time, announced the creation of a GDR Working Group (DDR-Arbeitsgruppe) in every IG Metall regional divisions. The GDR Working Group was put under the direct supervision of Franz Steinkühler's cabinet. According to Jochen Kletzin, member of the GDR Working Group, both initiatives were regarded within IG Metall as resolute support of and collaboration to the East German self-determination movement.<sup>458</sup>

The agreement between both metal unions became a model for comparable agreements between trade unions of both Germanies. Between December 1989 and February 1990, the following agreements were ratified between DGB unions and independent FDGB union members:

- Between the Construction Industrial Union (IG Bau-Steine-Erden) and the East German Construction and Wood Union (IG Bau-Holz (DDR)), by December 16, 1989;
- Between the Education and Science Union (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft), the East German Education and Teachers Union (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Unterricht (DDR)) and the East German Science Union (Gewerkschaft Wissenschaft (DDR)), by the beginning of January 1990;
- Between the Mines and Energy Industrial Union (IG Bergbau und Energie), the East German Mines, Energy and Water Economy Union (IG Bergbau-Energie und Wasserwirtschaft (DDR)) and the East German Wismut Industrial Union (IG Wismut (DDR)), by January 25, 1990;
- Between the Horticulture, Agriculture and Forestry Union (Gewerkschaft Gartenbau, Land- und Forstwirtschaft) and the East German Agriculture, Forestry and Alimentation Union (Gewerkschaft Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft (DDR)), by January 26, 1990.

These agreements were not identical. All of them, however, intended to further the cooperation with their East German homologous through common meetings and seminars specifically dedicated to the problems met in the democratization of the former FDGB. All of them also put a strong emphasis on supporting East German unionists in the shop floors.

These cooperation agreements thus reflected the predilection of the DGB unions for a two-pronged collaboration with East German unionists. On the one hand, collaboration at the sector level, with the newly (re-)founded trade unions. Here the goal was to support the reform of

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<sup>458</sup> Kletzin 1994, p. 76.

the former FDGB into a confederation of efficient workers organizations, independent from the state and political parties.<sup>459</sup> On the other hand, collaboration with unionists in shops and workshops. There, the goal was to support the renewal of the structures for the defense of workers' interests at the workplace. The mediation of the support by many DGB unions through agreements with the East German sectoral trade unions marked a certain continuity with the former Ostpolitik. It left close to no place for collaboration with independent initiatives (turned against the reform of the unions coming from the FDGB). The abandonment of the strategy of support and collaboration was not going to mean a turn toward these independent initiatives. Support and collaboration remained directed toward the sectoral organizations.

Coming back to IG Metall, the assistance to its East German homologous was furthered by a collaboration agreement, this time between the Berlin offices of both metal unions. This new agreement, made public by January 18, 1990, consolidated the course formerly initiated. It foresaw new twinnings between plants and workshops from the eastern and western parts of the city, continuous contacts and exchanges of information between both Berlin offices, and the setting up of formation on topics crucial to East German unionists. Hence, the focal point of the support and collaboration strategy of IG Metall was the twinnings. By February 1990, 35 such partnerships had been concluded. Unionists from the twinned plants and workshops held common meetings, but I could not find information on the discussions and activities held on these occasions. According to the president of IG Metall (DDR), Hartwig Bugiel:

Die 35 Betriebs-Partnerschaften haben eine grosse Ausstrahlungskraft gewonnen auf andere Betriebe. Und auf dieser Basis, dass Betriebe zusammenarbeiten, ist auch ein Zusammenwachsen für uns als Gewerkschaften möglich. Das ist nach meiner Meinung eines der wichtigsten Themen überhaupt. Wo wir mit unseren Kollegen reden, ist Partnerschaft.<sup>460</sup>

### **3.2.2.2 With an eye on the unification: Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union**

#### **A literature of the dichotomy**

Andrei S. Markovits depicts in detail the inner DGB opposition between the "activist" and "accommodationist" trade unions. This conflict took on different configurations throughout the history of the DGB. It had crystallised since the second half of the 1970s as a controversy

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<sup>459</sup> As Franz Steinkühler formulated it beginning of December 1989: "Sitzung des Beirats der IG Metall. Kampf um Köpfe geht jetzt los", *Metall*, 1/90 (January 12), p. 16.

<sup>460</sup> "Wir brauchen mehr Hilfe. Metall-Interview mit dem DDR-IG-Metall-Vorsitzenden Hartwig Bugiel", *Metall*, 3/90 (February 9), pp. 8-10.

between the “activism” of the IG Metall and the orientation of “social partnership” of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union.<sup>461</sup>

The differences between these two unions have been continuously highlighted in the literature. It is thus not a surprise to find this dichotomy in analyses of DGB unions' strategy in 1990. The political scientist Klaus von Beyme, for instance, defines IG Metall's strategy as a "policy of the third way", that is a policy dedicated to assist the GDR in its evolution toward a new economic system "between western market economies and eastern socialist economies". He opposes this strategy to the more pragmatic one developed by the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and oriented towards the objective of the unification.<sup>462</sup> Translated in the concepts used here, the argument made is that the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union did not change its former strategy in February 1990. From November 1989 on, argues von Beyme, this union has remained loyal to the same strategy, turned toward the accomplishment of the unification. For this understanding, the rapid completion of the unification corroborated the "historical rightness" (the expression is mine) of the strategy by the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union.

The argument that the strategy by the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union diverged from that by IG Metall, and was somehow proven right by the events, underlies *mutatis mutandis* the quasi totality of the studies published on the subject.<sup>463</sup>

This interpretation is misleading. Unquestionably, the “anti-communist” creed of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union seemed confirmed by the ongoing fall of the eastern bloc. It is also correct to notice the stances made by the union's head in favor of a social market economic system in the GDR and for the unification of both German states.<sup>464</sup> None of these elements were present in IG Metall's discourse at the moment. Yet, differences in discourse should not be overrated for they did not materialize into different strategies. Until February 1990, just like IG Metall and the other DGB unions, the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union examined the situation in East German trade unions and workplaces. The union developed different means aiming at supporting the reshaping of the structures of workers' representation.

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<sup>461</sup> Markovits 1986, pp.126-157, 237-266, 313-326.

<sup>462</sup> Von Beyme 1990, p. 338.

<sup>463</sup> Denis 2001.

<sup>464</sup> Hermann Rappe, “Für ein freies und demokratisches Deutschland”, *Presse-Dienst IG CPK*, December 14, 1989, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 4.

This assistance took the form of seminars on topics of a specific interest for East German unionists and a twinning program between comparable chemical companies in both lands. The West German chemistry union actively supported the reform of the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB), through material aid and specific programs of formation. The criteria characterising the first period are thus all met. The main difference with IG Metall lies in a more partial implementation of the same strategy.

### **The story**

Contacts between the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB) had been launched by May 1989, with a meeting in Hanover. A timid policy of contact had been launched, and if Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union's head had refused to publish a declaration in common with its East German homologous after the meeting, it had accepted the invitation to meet again in Halle by June 1990.

Public stances on the East German revolution by the DGB chemistry union remained sporadic until November. The first important declaration by Hermann Rappe, head of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and SPD MP, was made by the second-half of this month. Rappe declared himself favorable to a proposition made by CDU MP Kurt Biedenkopf and SPD politician Georg Leber. Following this proposition, West German workers should work for free on June 17, for a period of five years. Ten billions DM per year could thus be spared and used for the improvement of the East German enterprises. Hermann Rappe greeted this measure as workers' share in the construction of a better future in the GDR. He also called for supplementary solidarity means, to be financed through the renunciation by the federal government of the announced income-tax decrease and the cancellation of the purchase of military planes Jäger 90, a contract of almost one hundred billions DM.<sup>465</sup>

It was a month later, that the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union outlined its course as to the events in the GDR, with a long paper by Hermann Rappe entitled "For a free and democratic Germany". At that time, the calls in favor of the unification in the East German demonstrations had replaced those for reform. That concern was addressed by the DGB union, which evoked the unification, as a far away perspective. How the union conceived this process had been influenced by the first unification plan proposed by the Kohl government, the so-called "ten-point plan" (presented in chapter 3.5), published a few days before. In confor-

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<sup>465</sup> "DGB aufgeschlossen für Solidaritätsoffer am 17. Juni", *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*, November 16, 1989, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 3.

mity with this plan, Hermann Rappe mentioned a rather long process, with a loose "confederal agreement" (Staatenbundregelung) between both states as first step.

The declaration by the union also stressed the urgency of improving the East German infrastructures, especially in sectors like transportation, post, communications and the protection of the environment, a task which supposed the introduction of private investments and the active involvement of the Federal Republic and private investments. The introduction of the market economy in the GDR supposed in return the development of a free trade union movement there. In that respect, the DGB chemistry union reiterated its willingness to support the reform of the Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB). The collaboration with this union was going to evolve along the needs expressed by the East German unionists. Hermann Rappe finally expressed the hope that the achievement of the unification between both states was to be accompanied by the unification of both German chemistry unions.

Jeder Wandel der Wirtschaftsordnung in der DDR in Richtung auf marktwirtschaftliche Strukturen und Konzepten muss unter sozialen Vorzeichen und sozialer Absicherung erfolgen. Dafür – wir für den Aufbau und die Sicherung eines freiheitlichen demokratischen Rechtsstaates überhaupt – sind freie Gewerkschaften eine Grundvoraussetzung. Zur Marktwirtschaft, soll sie auch sozial sein, gehört systemimmanent eine freie und kraftvolle Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Ob es den bisherigen DDR-Gewerkschaften im FDGB, der sich hauptsächlich als der klassische Transmissionsriemen zur kommunistischen Einheitspartei verstand und auch so wirkte, gelingt, aus sich selbst von innen heraus einen Wandlungsprozess zu bewältigen, bleibt abzuwarten. Wir – die IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik – werden jede Art von Kooperation und praktischer Hilfe anbieten, wenn, wann und wie unsere Kolleginnen und Kollegen drüben das wollen. Wenn ich unsere Solidarität und Hilfe beim Aufbau freier und kraftvoller Gewerkschaften in der DDR anbiete, dann denke ich dabei auch ein paar Jahre weiter. Ich möchte helfen, eine Gewerkschaftsbewegung in der DDR vorzubereiten, die auch einmal eine Vereinigung mit Gewerkschaften unseres Charakters und Selbstverständnisses vollziehen kann. Ich gehe dabei aus von der Vereinigung der beiden Länder am Ende eines Prozesses, also auch von einer Vereinigung der Gewerkschaften.

Hermann Rappe made no secret of his preference for the introduction of the market economy and the unification. And he believed that these steps, were they to be taken, would lead to the merger of the trade unions. But he denied that pointing up these preferences summed up to an interference into the self-determination process of East Germans. On the contrary, Rappe saw these perspectives as preserving the freedom of self-determination. He condemned those persons and organizations, in the Federal Republic and the GDR, who insisted on the importance of preserving "socialist" features in eastern Germany. He obviously meant IG Metall among others. This kind of stances was a perversion of the respect of self-determination, he concluded. He depicted them as cynical, considering that the "socialist ideology" had been responsi-



ble for the oppression of the populations of eastern Europe and for the 70-year split of the labor movement.

All das ist keine Bevormundung und Einmischung. Im Gegenteil, es ist der einzige gerade Weg in freier Selbstbestimmung hüben und drüben zu Demokratie und Rechtsstaatlichkeit. Um so unverständlicher sind mir manche Reaktionen in der Bundesrepublik und in der DDR, die da meinen, in der DDR nun noch manches „Sozialistische“ retten zu können und zu müssen. In der DDR und in Osteuropa sind nicht nur Ideologien zu Bruch gegangen, mit denen diese Völker seit dem Kriegsende unterdrückt wurden, sondern die der Arbeiterbewegung seit 70 Jahren Spaltung brachten. Ausgerechnet die DDR jetzt zu neuen Experimenten missbrauchen zu wollen, das betrachte ich als Einmischung und Bevormundung, ja als Zynismus gegenüber den Menschen in der DDR.<sup>466</sup>

It is interesting to see how each DGB union depicted its own position as protecting the right to a free self-determination by the East German population, even if it did not match with that of other DGB members. The divergence between how IG metal understood the course of the self-determination process – as a search for a "third way" – and how the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union understood it – as leading to a free market economy and the German unification – echoed the programmatic differences between both unions. Each of them interpreted the fall of the GDR as a justification of its own orientations.

In a way, the two unions were right. Their positions, although divergent, respected the self-determination movement. They were focusing on different trends of the movement. Until December 1989, the will for reforms had remained dominant in the demonstrations and the reference to a "third way" explicitly made by many speakers. Since December, however, when Hermann Rappe made his declaration, the calls for unification had won the upper hand in the demonstrations.<sup>467</sup> This divergence between both unions was significant. Ultimately, it reproduced the historical division between the "accommodationist" and the radical unions among the DGB. It echoed very different conceptions of the goals of trade union politics. I would thus be misunderstood if I gave the impression that the verbal denunciations of the support to the "third way" were just a routine pointed remark by Hermann Rappe, without much consequence. As we shall see in an ulterior chapter, the fall of the GDR did raise many crucial questions as the objectives of trade union politics in a free market economy. These programmatic questions were not peripheral but central in the strategies developed by the DGB unions in 1989-90. If divergent programmatic conceptions did not materialize into different strategies, their common strategy had, in turn, critical programmatic consequences. The Chemistry,

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<sup>466</sup> Rappe, "Für ein freies und demokratisches Deutschland".

<sup>467</sup> Timmer 2000.

Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union implemented an assistance program that shared a lot with that of IG Metall, not only the claim that it was developed in order to support the process of free self-determination.

A program of collaboration between the two chemistry unions was announced, by December 18, shortly after Rappe's declaration, on the occasion of the meeting between both heads. Hartmut Löschner, former vice-president of the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB), had become president, after Edith Weber had resigned during the union's 13<sup>th</sup> Central Session of the Executive Committee (Zentralvorstandssitzung), by November 22. The core of this collaboration was a training program between comparable chemistry enterprises to be developed in the next months as well as training sessions on organizational issues and collective bargaining for the East German functionaries.<sup>468</sup>

The acceleration of the exodus following the opening of the wall brought the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union to offer accommodation in one of its schools to more than 150 recent East German migrants in need of a shelter, for close to three weeks, from December 18 until January 6.<sup>469</sup> As far as I could tell, the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union was the only West German trade union to undertake a solidarity action of that nature. Hermann Rappe, who ate and discussed with the guests on December 27, explained that his union had not in mind to choose whether it was preferable to leave the GDR or to stay there, since reforms were now implemented. His union, he stated, was going to help the Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB) as well as the people who had left their country. "Man muss dies jedem einzelnen selbst überlassen, sich zu entscheiden, ob er geht oder bleibt. Auf jeden Fall gilt es für alle, die jetzt hier sind, die eigene Familie und Substanz wiederzufinden. Dabei möchten wir helfen." When Rappe restated his personal preference for the unification, he was applauded enthusiastically by his guests. Under unification, he understood, as almost everybody at the time, a rather long process at the end of which the "social market economy" would be introduced in eastern Germany.<sup>470</sup>

The first twinnings were rapidly developed. By the beginning of January, new directions for the development of collaboration with the East German trade union were considered in the West German union's headquarters. According to multiple requests by the East German chem-

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<sup>468</sup> "Treffen IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik und IG Chemie-Glas-Keramik (DDR)", December 19, 1989, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 5.

<sup>469</sup> "IG Chemie stellt ihre Schule für DDR-Übersiedler zur Verfügung", November 15, 1989 and "Weihnachten für 154 DDR-Übersiedler in der Schulungsstätte der IG Chemie", *Neue Deister-Zeitung*, December 27, 1989, reproduced in: Ibid., document 2.

<sup>470</sup> "Weihnachten für 154 DDR-Übersiedler in der Schulungsstätte der IG Chemie".

istry union and the company-based trade unions, the most urgent task appeared to be information on the work, tasks and goals of West German trade unions. The important amount of requests for information, meetings and training sessions addressed to the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union convinced this union's head of opening an Information and Counselling Office in Leipzig (Informations- und Beratungsbüro). This Office was to be made responsible to coordinate the union's information activity in the GDR. Topics like collective bargaining, the protection of the environment and the defence of workers' interests at the workplace were targeted. The Office was also made responsible of developing new partnerships between unionists of comparable chemistry companies in both countries. Hence the opening of an office in Leipzig was an important furthering of the collaboration strategy. This collaboration concerned primarily the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB), but the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union stressed that its support was available to any force acting at the development of new structures of representation of interests in the GDR.

Das Beratungsbüro ist offen für alle Interessenten aus den Betrieben. Dies gilt auch für die Oppositionsparteien in der DDR wie die SPD und das Neue Forum. Eine Zusammenarbeit mit der DDR-Gewerkschaft IG Chemie-Glas-Keramik ist für den geschäftsführenden Hauptvorstand der IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik selbstverständlich. Diese Zusammenarbeit wird auch in der Frage ‚Beratungsbüro‘ erfolgen“.<sup>471</sup>

A circular letter sent one week later to the members of the Direction (Hauptvorstand) and Advisory Committee (Beirat) expressed some reservation as to the course of collaboration between both unions. In this letter, Hermann Rappe questioned the nature of the changes occurring in the representation of workers' interests and in the East German Chemistry union. For the first time in a more or less public document, he showed himself dubious as to the reform process of the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB). But despite these reservations, the strategy of the union remained motivated by the impulse coming from East German actors. The letter certainly called upon the attention how timid and hesitant the reform of the East German structures of worker representation were evolving. But it made it also unambiguous that the West German union had no other intention than to wait and observe how East German unionists were going to develop new union structures and political stances.

Dabei ist bisher offen, wie sich die neuen Strukturen, insbesondere innerhalb der betrieblichen Gewerkschaftsvertretung, gestalten werden. In vielen Betrieben sind die Be-

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<sup>471</sup> “IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik richtet in Leipzig ein Beratungsbüro ein”, January 16, 1990, reproduced in: *Ibid.*, document 8.

triebsgewerkschaftsleitungen abgewählt worden und die Belegschaften haben Betriebsräte gewählt. Wir hoffen, erste Aufschlüsse über die weitere Entwicklung der Gewerkschaften über den am 31.1./1.2.1990 stattfindenden FDGB-Kongress zu erhalten. Es wird darauf ankommen, ob die Gewerkschaften in der DDR sich von der SED lossagen und zu Formen freier Gewerkschaften unseres Charakters und Selbstverständnisses finden. Auch innerhalb der DDR-Chemiegewerkschaft sind Veränderungen zu verzeichnen, ohne dass wir bisher abschließend beurteilen können, wie sich die Organisationsformen und auch politische Standpunkte entwickeln.<sup>472</sup>

Both unions' heads met again in Hanover on January 26 and 27, 1990. The first congress of the East German Chemistry, Glass, Ceramics Industrial Union (FDGB) was announced for April 27 and 28. The purpose of the congress were to further the internal reform of the union and identify new paths of collaboration with the DGB homologous. Both unions also declared that they were in favor of the country's unification.<sup>473</sup>

The Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union was the earliest advocate of the German unification among DGB union members. It was also among the first to plead for the introduction of works councils in the GDR.<sup>474</sup> Until February, however, its strategy remained unchanged. It laid on a twinning program, specific seminars on issues crucial to east German unionists, on the material and logistic support of the reform of its East german homologous.

Nach entsprechender Klärung im FDGB muss die IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik ihre Organisationsform finden. Mit Delegiertenwahlen in den Betrieben muss sie ihren Kongress Ende April vorbereiten. (...) Wir, die Industriegewerkschaft Chemie-Papier-Keramik, wollen unseren Kolleginnen und Kollegen in der DDR mit Rat und Tat zur Seite stehen. Für die tägliche Arbeit wollen wir ihnen die technischen Hilfsmittel zur Verfügung stellen. Wir suchen einen breiten Kontakt durch Betriebspartnerschaften. Wir laden zu Fachlehrgängen in der Bundesrepublik ein und werden auch durch andere Veranstaltungen und Entsendung von Fachreferenten bei der Lösung beiderseitiger Probleme helfen. (...) Wir wollen beraten und helfen, und nicht bevormunden, aber das Ziel ist klar: Bei allen Schritten auf die Vereinigung beider bisheriger Staaten hin auch die Vereinigung beider Gewerkschaftsorganisationen zu verwirklichen. Vorrangig geht es nun, wie man so sagt, ums Ganze, auch aus Sicht der Gewerkschaften, und, wie ich hoffe, beider Organisationsbereiche: um gegenseitige Solidarität.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Hermann Rappe, "Rundschreiben: Gewerkschaftliche Zusammenarbeit mit der DDR", January 22, 1990, reproduced in: Ibid., document 10.

<sup>473</sup> "Auf dem Weg zur Vertragsgemeinschaft", January 30, 1990, reproduced in: Ibid., document 12.

<sup>474</sup> "Wir raten Euch, das Betriebsräterecht einzuführen", said Hermann Rappe to the IG CGK (FDGB) officials, on January 27, 1990, in Hanover. See: Hermann Rappe, "Freie und starke Gewerkschaften sind nötig! Wir wollen dabei helfen!", February 20, 1990, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 11.

<sup>475</sup> Idem.

### **3.2.2.3 Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (Öffentlicher Dienst, Transport und Verkehr, ÖTV)**

#### **A 'centrist' trade union**

In 1989, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union was Germany's largest public sector union and DGB's second largest union, after IG Metall. Blue and white-collar employees of a great variety of public activities, such as public administration, hospitals and universities were grouped together under its umbrella. Transport and traffic represented the union's largest sector. Its broad range of sectors had made the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union the "least homogeneous union in Germany", a reality reflected in the union's decentralized functioning.<sup>476</sup> The positions put forward by this union were more than often the result of hard-negotiated compromises between a variety of stances defended by different sectors and regions. This inner diversity was not only a burden but also a guarantee of influence among the DGB. The compromises developed by the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union were occasionally adopted by the DGB. The Confederation is often confronted with situations where it has to come up with compromises acceptable to its different union members. The deals found in the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union were often taken over by the DGB.

The unity of action of all DGB unions in 1989-90 made such an arbiter between them unnecessary. However, the fourth characteristic of the support and collaboration strategy – the variable degree of implementation – is revealed without ambiguity by the few actions undertaken by the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union. In fact, the 'centrist' function of this union within the DGB makes this moderation instructive. Until February 1990, it was possible for a trade union as important as the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union to limit its involvement in the GDR. After February, this option was to have vanished.

The analysis of the action and the public discourse of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union reveals three elements.

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<sup>476</sup> Turner 1998, p. 91.

The first element concerns the multiplicity of articles on the situation within the East German labor published by the union's press. Reports on the East German opposition groups were also published by *Das Magazin* (the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's monthly), an interest shared among the West German union press only by the *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*.<sup>477</sup>

The second element concerns the absence of contact between the head of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union and any East German union of the numerous public and the transport sectors. Until February, the collaboration implemented between the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union and its East German homologous remained small-scale initiatives taken by regional sections of the DGB union.

The third element concerns the worries expressed within the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union as to the outcomes of the migration of thousands of East German workers to the Federal Republic. coming from the GDR.

### **The story**

A meeting of the executive direction (Hauptvorstand) of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union by October 10 and 11, 1989, was the occasion for the union head, Monika Wulf-Mathies, to report on the situation in the eastern Bloc. She insisted on the non-involvement of trade unions into the changes going on in most of the eastern countries, and blamed the East German and Hungarian trade unions in particular. She heralded her intent to support the reform of the eastern trade unions, the development of systems of labor contracts and freedom to strike in these countries.

Aufgabe aller Gewerkschaften des DGB, so Monika Wulf-Mathies, müsse sein „den demokratischer Prozess in den osteuropäischen Ländern zu unterstützen und den Gewerkschaften dabei zu helfen, eigenständige Strukturen aufzubauen und Instrumente zu entwickeln, mit denen gewerkschaftliche Forderungen durchgesetzt werden.“ Dazu gehörten vor allem ein Tarifvertragssystem und das Streikrecht.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> The *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* published a long introduction to the East German opposition - who they were, what they wanted, their program for labor -, with interviews of representatives from the Demokratischer Aufbruch, Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte, Neues Forum, Sozialdemokratische Partei and Vereinigte Linke, as well as with SPD thinker Erhard Eppler and GDR specialists Wolfgang Leonhard and Renate Damus: "Forum: Deutsch-deutsche Fragen", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89, pp. 740-788.

<sup>478</sup> "Hauptvorstand diskutiert in Stuttgart aktuelle Themen. Im Osten viel Neues, in Bonn alter Ärger", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 11/89, pp. 3-4, quote: p. 4.

Soon after, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union published a declaration calling for thorough reforms of the East German FDGB. If it underlined that effective reforms in the GDR could only be made by East Germans, it remained silent as to the kind of collaboration considered. On the integration of the East German immigrants, the declaration was more explicit. The Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's members were encouraged to endeavour the integration of East German workers at the workplace and in the union. The West German union refused any positive discrimination for East German immigrant workers.

Alle Gewerkschaftsmitglieder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seien aufgefordert, sich die betriebliche und gewerkschaftliche Integration der Flüchtlinge zu bemühen. Die ehemalign Bürger der DDR müßten „eine faire Chance zum Neuanfang erhalten“. Das setzte allerdings auch – um Resentiments vorzubeugen – Gleichbehandlung mit Bundesbürgern bei der Wohnungsversorgung und beim Wettbewerb um Arbeitsplätze voraus.<sup>479</sup>

If the head of the three other unions presented here attempted to characterize the nature of the East German revolution, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union remained parsimonious on the historical and sociological signification of the popular upheaval in the GDR. This can be linked to this union's lower ideological profile within the West German trade union movement. In fact, it can be seen as another manifestation of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's middle position among the DGB unions that Monika Wulf-Mathies held out one hand to the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and the other to the IG Metall in her declarations. She borrowed from the first her reference to the “dramatic decay of socialist utopias” and to the second the comment that “the failure of a system of one-party state-capitalism does not correspond to the beatification of private capitalism.” She concluded that “there is no exhibit to the assertion that the future in the West can only be built on the heap of rubble of the welfare state”, a statement which promised to meet broad acceptance within the trade unions.<sup>480</sup>

The Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's press published many articles on the East German opposition and the situation at the workplace.

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<sup>479</sup> “Betroffenheit und Hoffnung. Reaktionen auf das Geschehen in der DDR”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 11/89, p. 2. Earlier in September, Ulrike Peretzki-Leid, member of the executive direction of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union wrote to the West German Ministry of Health. She insisted that the East German vocational training for nurses be acknowledged by the Federal Republic. “Auf keinen Fall dürfen wir zulassen, dass Neuankömmlinge, die vielfach auf eine lange Berufserfahrung im Pflegebereich zurückblicken können, in der BRD mit einer Bezahlung als Hilfskraft abgespeist werden.” See: “Ist anzuerkennen. Krankenpflegeexamen der DDR”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 10/89, p. 19.

<sup>480</sup> “Hauptvorstand diskutiert in Stuttgart”, p. 3.

One essay by the well-known East German activist Wolfgang Templin recounted the history of the opposition on the East German opposition since 1987. At least two elements of Templin's analysis might have drawn the attention of West German unionists interested by the connections between labor and the East German revolution. First of all, Templin did not oppose the different groups of the opposition but juxtaposed them as complementary forces, within different spheres of action. Second of all, he presented the United Left as the only opposition group present in the workplaces putting forward claims for labor.<sup>481</sup>

The articles published in the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's press on the situation in East German labor focused on the changes occurring at the workplace and within the FDGB. In a way, the emphasis on these two levels, to the detriment of the intermediary echelon of the sectoral trade unions, was an adequate representation of the changes occurring. The dynamics at stake within the East German labor shook primarily the structures of worker representation at the workplace<sup>482</sup> and the FDGB.<sup>483</sup> However, this evacuation of the changes occurring in the East German trade unions of the public and transport sectors was also consistent with the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's policy. The DGB union put a hold on the contacts maintained with its East German homologous over the last years. A letter of mid-December by the union's head to the circle and district administrations made that aspect clear. Only contacts between district or local administrations remained allowed, while contact between the higher hierarchies of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union and of East German trade unions of the public and transport sectors were abandoned.<sup>484</sup>

Two reasons explain the reluctance of the DGB union to develop a broad policy of collaboration with its East German homologous. One concerned the fact that the East German public and transport sectors counted at least 8 different trade unions. This multiplicity made any centralized policy of collaboration a difficult endeavor.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Wolfgang Templin, "Wir sind das Volk. Aufbruch in der DDR fördert Oppositionsgruppen", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 11/89, pp. 35-36, quote: p. 36.

<sup>482</sup> As noticed in: Klaus Klöppel, "Nicht katzbuckeln. Mitglieder setzen Funktionäre unter Druck", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 1/90, p. 39.

<sup>483</sup> Especially the articles on the FDGB Congress of January 1990: Klaus Klöppel, "Abschied vom Sozialismus. Auch Gewerkschaften in der DDR sind für radikale Reformen", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 2/90, pp. 35-36 and the dossier "Kongreß des FDGB: Außerordentlich. Moment mal wir verzetteln uns", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 3/90, pp. 31-34. Also: Klaus Klöppel, "SED verliert die führende Rolle. Gewerkschaften der DDR auf Suche nach neuem Profil" and Ingolf Kern, "Aufräumen, neu beginnen", both: *ÖTV-Magazin*, 1/90, p. 40.

<sup>484</sup> Fichter and Kurbjuhn (1993), entry "December 20, 1989".

<sup>485</sup> Monika Wulf-Mathies, president of ÖTV, called "a problem" the fact that her organisation faced 8 different unions. See: "ÖTV schickt Beraterstab in die DDR", *Der Tagesspiegel*, February 17, 1990, p. 2, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 226.



The other concerned the strong imbrication of the state apparatus within the structures of the East German regime of domination. It was difficult to consider that the collaboration with the East German Ministries, State's Organs and Municipalities Union (Gewerkschaft Ministerien, Staatsorgane, Kommunalwirtschaft) for instance, could further the reform of trade unions in the GDR.

The Rhineland-Palatinate administration was one of the Länder administration of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union that developed small-scale initiatives of collaboration with their East German counterparts. Meetings and seminars for East and West German unionists were organized.<sup>486</sup> “After decades during which we had to satisfy ourselves with meetings with high-rank union officials”, the time had come, explained Ulrich Galle, head of the Rhineland-Palatinate administration of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union, that nursing personnel, bus drivers and civil employees of both Germanies met and discussed.<sup>487</sup> On January 8, 1990, he addressed the round 100.000 participants to a demonstration for “trade unions and the right to strike” in Karl-Marx-Stadt. His speech highlighted what he considered where utmost priorities: a thorough reform of the FDGB, “from the basis to the summit”, the implementation of a collective bargaining system in the GDR and the recognition of workers' right to strike. It was important, he maintained, that the FDGB be preserved as unitary confederation of trade unions in the GDR. The good working conditions of the West German workers was the result of unitary trade unionism.

“Wie ist es bei uns?” fragte Ulrich Galle. Nur die Einheit der Gewerkschaften, nur sie als starke Gegenkraft hätten im Kapitalismus den Unternehmern bessere Arbeitsbedingungen abtrotzen können. “Gäbe es bei uns eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Gewerkschaftsbewegungen – wir müssten heute auf viele verzichten”.<sup>488</sup>

These small-scale initiatives corresponded to the logic of the first period, although they remained scarce. They built the core of the collaboration policy of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union until the mid-February 1990. By then, the union's head was to identify new strategy guidelines that followed a different goal.

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<sup>486</sup> On January 18, 1990, secretaries and workplace representatives of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union officials from Nord-Rhine-Westfalia met with officials of the East German Health System Union (Gewerkschaft Gesundheitswesen (FDGB)) in Schwerin. The discussions enlightened how the massive departures had undermined the East German public health services. East German participants questioned their West German colleagues about the health system in the Federal Republic. “Radikaler Bruch”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 2/90, p. 36.

<sup>487</sup> “Deutsch-deutsches Seminar”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 1/90, p. 31.

<sup>488</sup> “Streikrecht”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 2/90, p. 36.

### 3.2.2.4 Media Industrial Union

In 1989, IG Medien counted amongst the active promoters of the support and collaboration policy with the East German trade unions.

The politics of the Media Industrial Union toward the East German revolution policy can be summarised in three points. First of all, the radical character of the changes going on in the GDR was emphasised by this union's leaders. They understood these changes as connected with other historical struggles in favor of democracy and socialism. Second of all, the complexity of the renewal process of the East German trade unions made the identification of the kind of support and collaboration wished for by the East German actors difficult. This probably explain the relatively low number of actual collaboration initiatives implemented, despite favorable inclinations manifested by the Media Industrial Union's head. Third of all, the Media Industrial Union leaders made no secret of their preference for the upholding of the East German state and criticised repeatedly chancellor Kohl's pro-unification stances.

#### The story

The first echoes of the events in the eastern bloc appeared in the Media Industrial Union press by mid-September 1989. The union's vice-president Detlef Hensche wondered if the massive departures from the GDR, the economic and political reforms in Poland and Hungary, as well as the strikes in the USSR meant the "death of socialism" and the confirmation of the "superiority of the capitalist economic order". His answer highlighted the failure of "the attempt to resolve economic, social, ecological and other problems from the top, on the basis of a centralised administration." In that respect, the capitalist market economy was more flexible and efficient, he wrote. However, a socialist alternative aiming at redistributing the economic and political power of decision among several levels of political action and the workplace was everything but dead, believed Detlef Hensche. He was convinced that the people of Poland and Hungary favored it. In consequence, he invited his and other western trade unions to assist the reforms undertaken in these countries. In the case of the GDR this supposed to refuse to distort the self-determination process with "reunification slogans".<sup>489</sup>

The Media Industrial Union maintained its Ostpolitik unchanged until the first half of October. During a meeting with FDGB union leaders of the media held from October 4 to 6, in East-Berlin, the head of the Media Industrial Union criticized how the West German media covered the East German crisis, a way, they affirmed, to divert from key problems at home,

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<sup>489</sup> Detlef Hensche, "Siegt der Kapitalismus?", *Kontrapunkt*, 19/1989, p. 5.

like unemployment. The head of the Media Industrial Union, Erwin Ferlemann, affirmed that the relationships between East and West German trade unions were strong enough to resist these hard times. They were to be carried on, despite the fact that some DGB union members had started to question them - meant was the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union. Following a report to the East German Stasi by the heads of the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union and the Art Trade Union, Werner Peplowski and Herbert Bischoff:

Ferlemann informierte über sein Gespräch mit [DGB president] Breit vor der Abreise in die DDR zur Weiterführung des bewährten Dialogs und darüber, daß manche Gewerkschaften im DGB „in dieser Zeit“ kein Verständnis hätten, daß eine Leitungsdelegation die DDR besucht. Ferlemann betonte, daß die Beziehungen zwischen beiden Vorständen und den internationalen Organisationen (Internationale Grafische Föderation und Ständiges Komitee der Gewerkschaften der Grafischen Industrie) stark genug seien, um Belastungen auch in politisch schwierigen Zeiten standzuhalten. (...) Beide Seiten betonen die Nützlichkeit des konstruktiven Dialogs zwischen den zentralen Vorständen als ein gutes Mittel für ein besseres Verständnis über die Gewerkschaftsarbeit in unterschiedlichen Gesellschaftsordnungen.<sup>490</sup>

By that time, however, the popular mobilization in the GDR was weakening the state's structures. By October 18, Erich Honecker was forced to resign as secretary general of the SED. A new column by Detlef Hensche in the Media Industrial Union's bi-weekly greeted the perspective of fundamental reforms in the GDR, while disparaging “CDU/CSU politicians dreaming of the borders of 1937”. He depicted the spectre of Germany's unification as an inexorable threat to peace in Europe. The future of democracy and socialism in Germany, he wrote, supposed the upholding of the GDR as a state.

Endlich deutet sich eine Chance an, daß auch in der DDR eine Öffnung für mehr Demokratie möglich ist. Wird sie nicht genutzt, dürften der Sozialismus und seine Ideale auf deutschem Boden für lange Zeit abgedankt haben. Die Debatte über die Wiedervereinigung kann dabei nur stören. Sie stellt die Eigenstaatlichkeit und Existenzberechtigung der DDR in Frage. Wiedervereinigungsparolen sind daher dazu angetan, den Prozeß einer demokratischen Erneuerung in der DDR von vorneherein zu ersticken. (...) Die deutsche Frage kann nur bedeuten, endlich zu einem nationalen Selbstverständnis der Friedensfähigkeit, der Demokratie, der Toleranz und Freiheit zu gelangen. Das setzt Anerkennung der bestehenden Grenzen und Staaten voraus und bedeutet demokratische Reformen in beiden deutschen Staaten, auch bei uns.<sup>491</sup>

The opening of the wall by November 9, marked a sharpening of the critique against the federal government and other West German politicians accused of harming the unfolding of the free self-determination process in the GDR by stimulating the “nationalist frenzy”. In this

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<sup>490</sup> *Information der Zentralvorstände der IG Druck und Papier und der Gewerkschaft Kunst des FDGB über die Ergebnisse des Besuchs einer Leitungsdelegation der IG Medien im DGB vom 4. bis 6. Oktober[1989] in der DDR*, BStU, HA XX 1178.

<sup>491</sup> Detlef Hensche, “Die deutsche Frage”, *Kontrapunkt*, 21/1989, p. 5.

context, Hensche wrote in a new column, the role of the DGB unions was to support the sovereign search for its own "way" by the East German population, without interfering in the process.<sup>492</sup>

The comprehension of the East German revolution and of the issues at stake developed by Detlef Hensche in the union's press was endorsed as official positions of the Media Industrial Union in a declaration by the Union Council (Gewerkschaftsrat) published by December 1. Its argument was built on two ideas. First of all, the East German "peaceful revolution" had broken up with the "Stalinist structures" of the East German state and headed toward the instauration of a "socialism with a human face", in the spirit of the Spring of Prague and the reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. It was not a victory of the capitalist market economy over "socialism". Second of all, the pro-unification declarations and the vagueness on the question of the Polish borders of the federal government favored a further destabilization of the GDR and were intolerable interferences in the East German self-determination movement. Such interferences needed to be opposed by the West German trade union movement.<sup>493</sup> The declaration also heralded the intention of the Media Industrial Union to develop support initiatives for the reform of the East German trade unions of the media sector. This, however, revealed to be easier said than done.

Despite the enthusiasm displayed by the Media Industrial Union's head for the East German revolution, the union's press was not free from worries as to the state of the East German labor and trade unions. One journalist depicted this situation as "alarming": the production was disorganised by the departures, overtime rose, the East German trade unions and their confederation FDGB implemented close to no reform, and workers were leaving them by the thousands. The condition of the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union (FDGB) was portrayed in comparable terms. This union appeared considerably weakened by the departures for the Federal Republic and the low level of confidence of the round 150,000 members in front of the timid reforms undertaken.<sup>494</sup>

Representatives of the Media Industrial Union and the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union (FDGB) met in East-Berlin on January 3, 1990. The goal of this three-day meeting

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<sup>492</sup> Detlef Hensche, "DDR: Demokratie statt Bevormundung", *Kontrapunkt*, 23/1989, p. 5.

<sup>493</sup> "Der Gewerkschaftsrat der IG Medien zur Lage in der DDR: Alleingänge der Bundesregierung gefährden den Frieden", *Kontrapunkt*, 25-26/1989, p. 4.

<sup>494</sup> Klaus Klöppel, "Weltmeister im Demonstrieren", *Kontrapunkt*, 24/1989, pp. 23-26. In the same issue, also: Hans Dieter Baroth, "Heftiger Streit um die 40-Stunden-Woche", pp. 22-23. The number of members who had left the East German trade unions in 1989 was evaluated at 800,000. Several tens of thousands had also ceased to pay their contributions, a traditional way of leaving the : Norbert Hüsson, "Interview mit Werner Peplowski über die Zukunft des FDGB und der DDR-Gewerkschaften", *Kontrapunkt*, 2/1990, pp. 10-11.

was to develop the collaboration between both unions. The ratification of two collaboration agreements was decided. The development of collaboration at the shop floor level between workers and unionists from both lands, and the offer of particular training sessions for East German unionists by the Media Industrial Union were more specifically targeted. These agreements were presented as measures to develop the collaboration between two equal partners, that were to share and discuss over mutual suggestions, objectives and strategies.<sup>495</sup> A few days later, IG Medien printed 100,000 copies of a IG Druck und Papier flyer calling for independent trade unions in the GDR.

Yet the development of an active collaboration turned out to be difficult. One cause for these difficulties was the ambiguities of the East German media unions' reform. Whereas a minimal convergence with the orientations of the Media Industrial Union made collaboration possible, certain hesitations made its materialization difficult. Two interviews with the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union's head Werner Peplowski, published by the Media Industrial Union press, attempted to determine the nature of the reform undertaken and the scope of the convergence between both trade unions. One objective of such questions was to figure how collaboration could materialize.

In one interview published in December 1989, Peplowski recalled the points that made consensus among East German workers: independence from the FDGB; proclamation of a Law on trade unions granting worker associations wide-ranging co-determination rights; introduction of the collective bargaining autonomy; identification of the protection of the environment as a priority in the GDR. He also identified unsettled issues which provoked debates among members and union officials. For instance, if the "strike taboo" had been breached in 1989, he explained, many workers and unionists still considered the strike as an inadequate expression of industrial conflict in a country where workers possessed the means of production. Whether Peplowski shared this opinion, shaped by decades of anti-strike propaganda in the GDR, and counted himself among those East German unionists "still searching for alternatives" to the strike was not clear. Another issue that divided the union members was the claim for the immediate instauration of the 40-hour work week at equal pay in the paper and printing industry. Workers and union officials, opposed to this claim, riposted that the miserable state of the East German economy made longer work week inescapable.<sup>496</sup> Such reluctances toward an

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<sup>495</sup> Detlef Hensche, "Gespräche mit der IG Druck und Papier im FDGB – Kooperation geplant", *Kontrapunkt*, 2/1990, pp. 8-9.

<sup>496</sup> Werner Peplowski, "Die IG Druck und Papier im FDGB der DDR will eigene eingefahrene Gleise rigoros verlassen", *Kontrapunkt*, 24/1989, pp. 26-29, quote: p. 26.

autonomous comprehension of workers' interests made the collaboration with the Media Industrial Union difficult.

When Peplowski was asked how the collaboration with the Media Industrial Union could be developed, he identified two topics. The first concerned the development of stances and proposals for the introduction of a Collective Bargaining Law in the GDR. He explicitly referred to the West German law of 1949 as a model in that respect. The second concerned the reform of the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union (FDGB) and the Arts and Culture Union (FDGB), as well as their eventual merger into an East German Media Industrial Union. Again the West German Media Industrial Union was seen as a model.<sup>497</sup>

The hesitations of the East German Paper and Printing Industrial Union's reform were tackled again in a second interview published a month later. In the following excerpt, an IG Medien journalist is trying to drive Peplowski in the corner by challenging his views on the improvement of the defence of workers' interests in the GDR. He also tries to identify the kind of collaboration that the Media Industrial Union could develop.

*Die DGB-Satzung ist zur begehrten Lektüre geworden. Wollt ihr den DGB kopieren?*

WP: Das wäre schlimm! Der DGB hat Jahre gebraucht, um sein Profil zu finden. Und im Kopieren besteht die Gefahr, daß man sich keine eigene Identität schafft, sondern sich nur anpaßt. (...).

*Was könnte übernommen werden?*

WP: Eine Reihe von Grundsätzen, zum Beispiel in der Frage des Schutzes der Werktätigen bzw. der Arbeitnehmer (...). Übernehmen können wir auch den Grundsatz der Tarifautonomie – aber unter den Bedingungen einer sozialistischen Wirtschaft.

*Wie ist bei Euch Tarifautonomie möglich?*

WP: Die Voraussetzung ist, daß der Minister, dein Tarifpartner, tatsächlich alle Zahlen offen auf den Tisch legt. (...).

*Wie ist sicherzustellen, daß der Minister wirklich alles offenlegt?*

WP: In der Verfassung muß eine Rechenschaftspflicht der staatlichen Organe gegenüber den Gewerkschaften verankert werden. Andererseits gehören zur Tarifautonomie auch Kenntnisse über Tarifpolitik, die uns noch fehlen. Hier wäre für uns die Hilfe des DGB und seiner Gewerkschaften wichtig. Wir brauchen sie sogar.

*Für uns ist Tarifautonomie ohne Streikrecht nicht denkbar.*

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<sup>497</sup> A meeting between both East German media unions by December 10 and 11, had stressed the need for one strong media trade union in the GDR. Ibid., pp. 27 and 29.

WP: Für uns inzwischen auch nicht mehr.

*Wie ist Streiken denn möglich, wo doch die Werktätigen gleichzeitig Besitzer der Produktionsmittel sind?*

WP: Das ist der Casus knacktus. Die Werktätigen so zu definieren, bedeutet eine überzogene und uns einschränkende Rechtsposition. Damit konnte jede Forderung abgeschmettert werden, eine Konfliktlösung war so unmöglich.

Ich sehe meine Frage noch nicht beantwortet.

WP: Da muß man erst einmal klären, wogegen man streikt. Ich könnte mir vorstellen, daß man dann streikt, wenn vernünftige und sorgfältig abgewogene Forderungen der Gewerkschaften von den Betriebsleitern in alter Manier abgeschmettert werden. Ich könnte mir auch vorstellen, daß man – wenn das Lohngefügen insgesamt nicht stimmt – Lohnstreiks gegen den zuständigen Minister führt; vorausgesetzt, daß lange Verhandlungen zu keinem Ergebnis geführt haben. Das ist aber sehr viel Theorie und Illusion, wir haben es ja alle noch nicht gemacht.

Arbeitsniederlegungen hat's aber schon gegeben.

WP: Ja, aber die Streikenden haben weiter Lohn bekommen und sich verpflichtet, nachzuarbeiten.<sup>498</sup>

In another passage, Werner Peplowski says he is grateful that the Media Industrial Union refuses to join its voice to the calls for the unification.

*Was hälst du von den Rufen nach Wiedervereinigung?*

WP: Nichts. Und ich bin dankbar dafür, daß die IG Medien diese Meinung teilt. Erstens sind die DDR und die Bundesrepublik unter ganz anderen Voraussetzungen entstanden; und zweitens ist bei uns eine demokratische Bewegung entstanden, auf die wir stolz sein dürfen, und die nicht kaputtgehen darf.<sup>499</sup>

The unification was not as far from the considerations of the West German trade union as Peplowski affirmed. Since the beginning of December, the Media Industrial Union's leaders considered the unification likely. They believed that the unification made common goals for East and West German trade unions inescapable. The ambiguities of the reform of their East German union partners appeared to be a greater problem than thought at first. The evolution towards the determination of a "trade union agenda" for the unification comes out from three consecutive columns by the Media Industrial Union's vice-president Detlef Hensche. In the first of these, published by the beginning of December 1989, he insisted on the general goals

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<sup>498</sup> Hüsson, "Interview mit Werner Peplowski über die Zukunft des FDGB und der DDR-Gewerkschaften", pp. 10-11.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

of trade union politics, thus common to East and West German trade unions. If these goals could be forced onto the political agenda, he wrote, the unification was not going to be a nightmare for German workers.

So verständlich die Forderung des Neuen Forums und anderer Oppositionsgruppen ist, eine eigenständige DDR zu erhalten – sie könnte von der Entwicklung überrollt werden. Mindestens ebenso wichtig ist es daher für uns, die eigene Sprachlosigkeit zu überwinden und unsere Ziele und Inhalte zu benennen. (...) Unsere Themen lauten zum Beispiel hüben wie drüben: Für Demokratie in Betrieb und Unternehmen einzutreten; freie Berichterstattung in Presse und Funk zu verwirklichen, die die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit widerspiegelt und den Bürger umfassend informiert; eine gesunde Umwelt wiederherzustellen, die auch unseren Kindern ein Überleben möglich macht; das Recht auf Arbeit und Bildung zu verwirklichen; eine demokratische Gesellschaft zu gestalten, die für alle vielfältige Entwicklungschancen öffnet und alle in gleicher Weise am gesellschaftlichen Reichtum teilhaben läßt; und schließlich: An einer Welt des Friedens und des Ausgleichs zwischen Nord und Süd mitzuwirken. Unter diesen Zielen müßte die nationale Einheit kein Schreckgespenst sein. Das heißt aber auch, daß wir unsere Themen auf die Tagesordnung setzen müssen, gemeinsam mit der demokratischen Bewegung in der DDR, statt daß wir die inhaltliche Zielsetzung allein dem Bundeskanzler, der Wirtschaft und der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung überlassen.<sup>500</sup>

The second piece marked the acknowledgement that the economic reforms of the GDR was to be pursued on the basis of the free market economy. The rapid liberalization of the Polish economy, and its 500% inflation, was given as a model of what was going to happen in the GDR. This “first act” was to be followed by a “second”, predicted Hensche, in which the International Monetary Fund was to force enterprises to close and subventions to end, thus provoking dismissals, price and rents increase, wage reduction, lower living standards and poverty. The “democratic shaping” of the eastern European societies was now delayed to the “third act”. Hence the “socialism with a human face”, depicted as the genuine character of the revolutionary movements observed in those countries only a few weeks earlier, was now conceived as a possible reaction to the contradictions of capitalism, in an unpredictable future.

Der Kampf um eine demokratische Gestaltung der Gesellschaft könnte in Polen, Ungarn, oder in der DDR den dritten Akt bestimmen; und der wird demokratische Betriebe, Streikrecht, demokratische Medien und manches andere mehr einschließen. Wir sollten dabei Hilfe leisten. Und hierzulande? Im goldenen Westen? Die heute triumphieren, könnten bald von ihren eigenen Widersprüchen eingeholt werden. (...) Der Reformdruck wird folglich auch im Westen zunehmen.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Detlef Hensche, “Nationale Einheit – für wen?”, *Kontrapunkt*, 25-26/1989, p. 5.

<sup>501</sup> Detlef Hensche, “Fürs Paradies teure Eintrittskarten”, *Kontrapunkt*, 1/1990, p. 5.



In the third column, Detlef Hensche defined what he thought could be a common strategy for German trade unions in the perspective unification and implacable economic reforms. He proposed that East and West German trade unions fought together for the setting up of far-reaching social and labor laws in unified Germany. The most imminent danger for German workers was to let GDR become the Federal Republic's "colony of low wages".

[Es] wäre ein idealistischer Trugschluß, man müßte die Arbeiter von Leipzig nur über das wahre Gesicht von Kapitalismus und Konsumdenken aufklären, damit sie den Sozialismus vervollkommen. Die Geschichte wird anders verlaufen. „Das Kapital geht dorthin, wo es sich wohlfühlt“, erklärte Unternehmerpräsident Necker dieser Tage und nannte die Bedingungen, unter denen es sich in der DDR wohlfühlt: Rendite und Vorherrschaft. „Das Kapital“ hat derzeit auch die Macht, die Bedingungen fürs eigene Wohlbefinden weitgehend durchzusetzen. Bis zur Grenze gewerkschaftlicher Gegenwehr, die noch zu entwickeln ist. Nebenbei, wäre unter solchen Aussichten nicht für die Menschen in der DDR die Einheit samt einheitlichem Sozialsystem letztlich die bessere Alternative, als die einer Niedriglohn-Kolonie der BRD?<sup>502</sup>

This call for a common fight of East and West German unions for social and labor laws, formulated here for the first time by the Media Industrial Union's vice-president, became the strategy of all DGB unions a few weeks later.

### **3.2.3 Why so little contacts with the East German opposition and independent initiatives?**

This chapter cannot be closed without addressing the question as to why the support and collaboration strategy of the DGB unions benefited almost exclusively to the East German trade unions and not to the East German opposition or the initiatives in favor of the creation of independent trade unions. The continuity with the Ostpolitik was an important factor that facilitated the support of East German unions' efforts to reform and take their independence from the FDGB.<sup>503</sup> Yet one could look at this continuity (in short: contacts with the East German trade unions) as being largely formal. Whereas the Ostpolitik materialized into diplomatic contacts with high-ranking union representatives, the support and collaboration strategy aimed at supporting the development of new structures for the defense of workers' interests. It focused on the workplace and on contacts between unionists from the rank and file in both lands. The question can thus be so reformulated: why did the inevitable adjustment of the

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<sup>502</sup> Detlef Hensche, "DDR: Welche Zukunft?", *Kontrapunkt*, 2/1990, p. 5.

<sup>503</sup> The IG Metall was the first East German trade union to declare its independence from the FDGB, on November 27-28, 1989. Formally, this independence meant that the organization had become a federated union member of the FDGB. The East German Police Trade Union (Gewerkschaft der Volkspolizei) became the 18<sup>th</sup> and last East German independent union member of the FDGB, by January 20, 1990.

DGB unions' politics during the fall 1989 not bring about a closer collaboration with the East German opposition groups or the initiatives for new trade unions?

East German opposition activists or initiators of independent union initiatives complained about the lack of support from the West German trade unions. Some New Forum's activists for instance, have pointed the finger at the IG Metall<sup>504</sup> and the Education and Science Trade Union.<sup>505</sup> The same sort of criticisms came from workplace unionists – often not linked to any group – who tried to set up new structures of worker representation in the East German public sector and who were unable to benefit from the support of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union.<sup>506</sup> These activists explained the support of the East German unions as the outcome of a mistaken belief that such “Stalinist” structures could be reformed into genuine structures for the defense of workers' interests.

Criticisms against the DGB unions' collaboration with the East German trade unions was not heard only in the GDR. Some West German observers looked at the opposition groups and the independent initiatives, such as the Initiative for independent trade unions (IUG), as the vectors of a genuine reshaping of the structures for the defense of workers' interests. They inversely depicted the East German trade unions as little more than structures of the regime, whose so-called reforms had more to do with attempts of defenders of the regime to save their head.

This argument was developed in the very first study on the reform of the East German trade unions published in the Federal Republic by March 1990. The authors, a group of social scientists of Berlin's Free University, distinguished between the reforms of workers' structures of representation lead at the workplace, considered legitimate and democratic, and those within the FDGB, looked at suspiciously. In consequence, they urged the DGB and its union members to end their contacts with the FDGB unions to the benefice of a collaboration with the initiatives working at the setting up of new trade unions in the GDR.<sup>507</sup> This analysis, proposed in the midst of the events, is often referred to as a justification for the end of contacts with the East German trade unions and the organizational expansion of the DGB unions in eastern Germany. Yet despite what has been suggested by some authors, the organizational expansion of the DGB unions did not result from a collaboration with the opposition groups

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<sup>504</sup> Wilkens-Friedrich 1994.

<sup>505</sup> Petra Berkert, “Verunsicherung und der Versuch zur Neuorientierung”, *Erziehung und Wissenschaft*, 3/90, p. 2, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 153.

<sup>506</sup> The details can be traced back in: Fichter/Lutz 1991.

<sup>507</sup> Pirker, Hertle, Kädtler and Weinert 1990.

or the initiatives for independent trade unions.<sup>508</sup> It was, as we will see in the following chapters, a process entirely lead by the DGB unions.

One motive for the distance of the DGB unions from the East German opposition groups and the independent initiatives has to do with the latter's small-scale format and dispersal.<sup>509</sup> In many workplaces, independent initiatives remained the project of a minority group<sup>510</sup>, in others they were rejected altogether by workers.<sup>511</sup> The few opposition groups present in the workplaces never found a widespread basis of support there.<sup>512</sup> Some of these groups tried to develop more comprehensive conceptions on labor-related issues but were unsuccessful in reversing the tendency.<sup>513</sup>

Another aspect concerns the absence of common claims and conceptions by these several initiatives. As we saw in the second part of this work, their programs covered a broad spectrum of conceptions reaching from a "company union"-kind of unionism to "syndicalist" tendencies. The West German trade unions, used to consider these two extremes as inevitable "flaws" of company-based unionism, must have understood their spontaneous emergence in the GDR as a confirmation of the superiority of industry-based unionism.

I would like to stress a third and last factor which, combined to the first two, may enlighten the DGB unions' conduct. I argue that the question as to why the DGB unions did not support the opposition groups and independent initiatives *instead* of the East German trade unions is, to a certain extent, misleading. Of course, the individual record of Werner Peplowski, who had headed the East German Printing and Paper Industrial Union since the beginning of the 1980s, and of Renate Hürtgen, founder of the "syndicalist" Initiative for Independent Trade Unions, made the political resonance of the collaboration with one different from collaboration with the other. Yet it has become apparent in the second part of this work that clear-cut distinctions between the different components of the reshaping of the East German union landscape are deceiving. The bulk of the East German actors conceived the reform of the trade unions, the presence of opposition groups in workplaces and the setting-up of new company-based trade unions as various sides of one movement. The main line of demarcation did

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<sup>508</sup> Seideneck 1991, pp. 4-5, among others.

<sup>509</sup> Kädtler/Kottwitz 1990, p. II.

<sup>510</sup> See the interview of Peter Pischner, head of the Betriebsgewerkschaftsrat in VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree Wilhelm Pieck in: Hertle 1990, p. 13.

<sup>511</sup> See for instance the interviews with Betriebsräten of Walzwerk Finow: "Wir sind in den Kapitalismus gestoßen worden", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/91, p. 759. Also: Fuller 1999, p. 117.

<sup>512</sup> Fuller 1999, chapter 1.

<sup>513</sup> See for instance: "Demokratischer Aufbruch. Gespräch mit Erhart Neubert", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89, p. 764.

not seem to have ran between illegitimate and legitimate programs of reform – as many West Germans understood the relationship between the reform of the FDGB unions and the independent initiatives - but between activists granted with workers' confidence and those without.

Hence, the East German opposition groups never asked the DGB unions to stop their contacts with the FDGB unions. Here is an excerpt of an interview given to the DGB's monthly *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* by Erhart Neubert of the Democratic Awakening, in which he states that his group supports the reform of FDGB unions and the setting up of new trade unions beside them.

Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte: Zielen die Vorstellungen [of the Democratic Awakening on labor issues] mehr auf eine Reformierung der bisherigen Gewerkschaften oder auf die Gründung neuer, unabhängiger Gewerkschaften, die sich dann möglicherweise wieder auf gesamtstaatlicher Ebene der DDR zusammenschließen?

Erhart Neubert: Es wird auf beides hinauslaufen. Einerseits wird die alte Gewerkschaft, der FDGB, versuchen, sich zu reformieren. Dieser Prozeß, der mit personellen Fragen beginnt und mit Strukturfragen endet, hat bereits eingesetzt. Andererseits bilden sich auch von unten Gewerkschaften. Es gibt interessante Prozesse. Sogar in der Polizei – das ist eine der wichtigsten politischen Gewerkschaftsentwicklungen – beginnt sich jetzt eine Gruppe zu konstituieren, die eine Gewerkschaft aufbauen und die aktiv an der Entpolitisierung der Volkspolizei mitarbeiten will. Das ist natürlich keine Fortsetzung der Arbeit des FDGB, das hat eine vollkommen neue Qualität.<sup>514</sup>

In the same issue, Wolfgang Wolff of United Left developed a similar approach.

Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte: Auf einem Gewerkschaftstag Ende Januar soll auch der bisher eng an die SED gebundene FDGB reformiert werden. Welche Rolle werden in Zukunft die Gewerkschaften in der DDR spielen?

Wolfgang Wolff: Unser Hauptinteresse gilt dem Engagement in den Betrieben. Wir treten für die Bildung unabhängiger Körperschaften der Werktätigen ein, die die jeweiligen betrieblichen Interessen wahrnehmen und allen Betriebsangehörigen, unabhängig von gewerkschaftlicher oder parteilicher Organisation, offenstehen. Neben solchen Körperschaften sollten Gewerkschaften tätig sein, die sich für die Verbesserung der Arbeits- und Lohnverhältnisse einsetzen? Unter engagierten Werktätigen gibt es drei Positionen zur Gewerkschaftsfrage: Erstens: den FDGB demokratisieren und reformieren, so daß er zu einer wirklichen Interessenvertretung der Werktätigen wird; zweitens: neben dem FDGB eine unabhängige Einheitsgewerkschaft aufbauen; drittens: neben dem FDGB verschiedene unabhängige Gewerkschaften aufbauen. Wir unterstützen alle drei Positionen.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Idem.

<sup>515</sup> "Vereinigte Linke. Gespräch mit Wolfgang Wolff", *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89, p. 788.

When asked whether West German experiences of co-determination and autonomous collective bargaining could inspire the reshaping of the East German union labor law and practices of industrial relations, Ingrid Brandenburg of the New Forum answered only from the perspective of the collaboration between the FDGB and the DGB unions.

Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte: Könnten in diesem Zusammenhang Erfahrungen bundesdeutscher Arbeitnehmer hilfreich sein? Der DGB und die Gewerkschaften verfügen zum Beispiel über eine lange Erfahrung in der Mitbestimmung und in der Tarifpolitik; sie haben Einblick in die Ökonomie. Könnten diese Erfahrungen für die DDR nutzbar gemacht werden?

Ingrid Brandenburg: Das ist ohne Zweifel möglich. Der FDGB – die bisherige Vertretung der Werktätigen in unserem Land – hat keine derartigen Aufgaben zu erfüllen gehabt. (...) In diesem Zusammenhang wäre es von sehr großem Nutzen, wenn ein neugestalteter Gewerkschaftsbund unseres Landes mit entsprechenden Vertretern des DGB in Form von Schulungen, Diskussionen, Materialstudien sich derartige Kenntnisse aneignen könnte.<sup>516</sup>

In conclusion, the weak presence of the East German opposition and independent initiatives in the workplaces, the legacies of the Ostpolitik and partial illusions as to the strength of FDGB reformers help explain that the support and collaboration strategy of the DGB unions benefited almost exclusively to the FDGB unions. If East German activists have criticized this situation, they never expected the DGB unions to end their contacts with the FDGB unions. The partial rupture with between East and West German trade unions came later on, as a consequence of the organizational expansion of the DGB unions. The consequence of the strategy reorientation of the DGB unions did not materialize into a greater collaboration with the East German opposition and independent initiatives.

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<sup>516</sup> “Neues Forum. Gespräch mit Ingrid Brandenburg und Bernd Schneider”, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/89, p. 777.

### 3.3 The road to the unification and the worries of the DGB unions (January-February 1990)

#### 3.3.1 Calls for unification and the reaction of DGB unions

Hartmut Zwahr among others has emphasised the leading role of Leipzig in the events that brought the GDR down.<sup>517</sup> The Leipzig model of demonstrations, weekly pacific massive demonstrations following a prayer for peace, was reproduced in Dresden, Berlin, Jena, Karl-Marx-Stadt, and in smaller towns. The slogans chanted in Leipzig also set the tone for claims heard in other East German cities. “We are the people”, the cry for radical reforms of the state, dominant until December 1989, came from Leipzig. It was also in Leipzig that “We are one people” was first heard. By mid-December, unification had become the main lighthouse on the road followed by the popular movement not only in Leipzig, but in the GDR.

Many historians have described the twist from a “democratic revolution for a better GDR and a better socialism” to a “national democratic revolution” favorable to unification.<sup>518</sup> But they have differently appraised the meaning of this twist. Karsten Timmer calls it a “rupture”. From September to mid-December, he explains, the East German upheaval could be characterised as a “social movement”, a massive symbiosis between the wills of large popular mobilisations (especially in Leipzig) and the reforms proposed by emerging opposition groups (mainly in Berlin). This symbiosis explains the strength and the achievements of the movement. As the enthusiasm for unification became dominant, explains Timmer, this symbiosis ruptured. Demonstrations split up between partisans and opponents of unification. The debate over unification brought about a split in the “social movement” and brought about its end.<sup>519</sup>

Focusing on Leipzig, Hartmut Zwahr offers another analysis of this turn.<sup>520</sup> He considers that two movements acted simultaneously within the East German revolution. The first, the “escape” (Aufbruch), concerns the stream of departures to the Federal Republic in 1989 and the will of many East Germans to “dispose of the GDR” (die DDR aufzugeben). Eventually, this movement focused on the objective of the unification, explains Zwahr. From December 1989 on, it dominated all the demonstrations. The second movement, the “outburst” (Ausbruch),

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<sup>517</sup> Zwahr 1993.

<sup>518</sup> According to Zwahr 1994, p.433, the expression was developed by Sigrid Meuschel in *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR. Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR*, Frankfurt a/Main, 1992.

<sup>519</sup> Timmer 2000, chapter 6, esp. pp. 335, 344-49.

<sup>520</sup> Zwahr 1994.

had to do with a “collective transition to a democratic revolution”, in other words the democratic reform of the GDR. This movement spread slowly from Leipzig to the rest of the GDR. If it never was able to catch up with the rapidity of the first, Zwahr does not conclude that the former won and the latter lost. The East German revolution was produced by the interaction of both.<sup>521</sup>

These two explanations of the gradual prevalence of the unification over the reform of the GDR in demonstrations can be regarded as incompatible. Both agree, however, to date this prevalence to mid-December 1989. They were recalled in order to show the evolution of the DGB unions on the unification, between December 1989 and February 1990. This evolution followed the chronology observed in the GDR. From December onward, the DGB unions integrated the perspective of the unification into their strategy. The first signs of this evolution appeared in our discussion of the implementation of the support and collaboration strategy by the Chemistry, Paper and Ceramics Industrial Union and the Media Industrial Union. A subsequent chapter will show that this evolution among the DGB unions was to be completed by the beginning of March.

By mid-December Chemistry union’s head Hermann Rappe made his preference for a unified Germany unmistakable. As other declarations of the same period prove (see 3.2.1.2), he contemplated, as most East and West German political actors, the accomplishment of the unification as a slow process.

Wir wollen und müssen festhalten am Verfassungsauftrag unseres Grundgesetzes, in dessen Präambel festgeschrieben ist: „Das gesamte Deutsche Volk bleibt aufgefordert, in freier Selbstbestimmung die Einheit und Freiheit Deutschlands zu vollenden.“ Das heisst, wir wollen ein freies und demokratisches Deutschland, worüber in beiden bisherigen deutschen Staaten frei abgestimmt werden muss. Ich glaube nicht an die Bildung eines Bundesstaates in kurzer Zeit, aber realistisch ist es, zunächst schrittweise einen Staatenbundregelung ins Auge zu fassen.<sup>522</sup>

At the beginning of January 1990, IG Metall’s Advisory Committee (Beirat) made a first step toward the unification, as the union declared itself in favor of the ratification of a Community Agreement (Vertragsgemeinschaft) between both German states.<sup>523</sup> A few days before this declaration by IG Metall, Chancellor Kohl had published his “10-point-plan” for the unification. Kohl’s plan identified the Community Agreement as the first of the three stages toward the achievement of the unification. Whereas IG Metall had condemned the pro-unification

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid., p. 455. Neubert 1998, pp. 900-03 comes to a similar conclusion.

<sup>522</sup> Hermann Rappe, “Für ein freies und demokratisches Deutschland”, *Presse-Dienst IG CPK*, December 14, 1989, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 4.

<sup>523</sup> “Kampf um Köpfe geht jetzt los – Sitzung des Beirats der IG Metall”, *metall*, 1/90, p. 16.

declarations by the cabinet members, its new position marked a partial convergence with the federal government's positions.

Of the four trade unions studied here, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union was the only one who did not state a certain openness to the unification in December 1989 and January 1990. This union did not address the topic of the unification at all, neither to state its support or opposition – and did not do so before the mid-February, as we will see in the last chapter of this work. Within the DGB, this silence on the unification was shared by the Mines and Energy Industrial Union (IG Bergbau und Energie).<sup>524</sup> The small Horticulture, Agriculture and Forestry Union (Gewerkschaft Gartenbau, Land- und Forstwirtschaft) for its part refused explicitly to make any step toward the acceptance of the unification until February.

As the unification started to profile itself, the continuous migration of East Germans in the Federal Republic arose the worries of the DGB unions.

### **3.3.2 The outcomes of the East German migration on trade union activity in the Federal Republic**

The crisis of the GDR in 1989 was initiated by the stream of departures for the Federal Republic, via the Hungarian, Polish and Austrian borders. Such an uncontrolled exodus as the one that shook the GDR in the second half of 1989 can be only partially reconstructed. The known statistics nonetheless offer a clear picture: in 1989, a minimum of 343,854 East Germans flew to the Federal Republic, out of which only 36,484 had been allotted an official exit visa (Ausreise) by East German authorities between January and the end of June.<sup>525</sup>

By the mid-October activists of the United Left raised the alarm: they estimated that up to 100,000 refugees had already fled and the numbers were not diminishing.<sup>526</sup> On October 23, Chancellor Kohl revealed to US President George Bush his expectation of about 150,000 young East German migrants (under 30 years old) until Christmas.<sup>527</sup> Kohl believed that only radical reforms in the GDR could stop the flow. However, every announcements and reforms by

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<sup>524</sup> Wilke / Müller (1991), pp. 115-16.

<sup>525</sup> By means of comparison, between 1985 and 1988, an average of 27,470 East Germans left for the FRG yearly, including refugees, migrants and political prisoners, whose freedom had been 'bought' by the Federal Republic. Zwahr (1994), p. 426 and 440. Egon Krenz estimates 300,000 persons had already left the GDR before the opening of the wall (*Wenn Mauern fallen. Die friedliche Revolution. Vorgeschichte, Ablauf, Auswirkungen*, Wien, 1990, p. 170, quoted in: Zwahr 1994, note 87, p. 461).

<sup>526</sup> "Erklärung von Teilnehmern am Treffen der 'Vereinigten Linken' in Böhlen bei Leipzig", reproduced in Charles Schüddekopf and Lutw Niethammer (eds.), „*Wir sind das Volk!*“ *Flugschriften, Aufrufe und Texte einer deutschen Revolution*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1990, p. 127, quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 434.



the East German government resulted in new departures by the tens of thousands. On that respect, the opening of the wall by November 9 only speeded things up, as the risks of reprisals vanished.<sup>528</sup> In the first 25 days of 1990 only, the Federal Republic had already recorded 42,500 new East German migrants.<sup>529</sup>

Such an exodus exerted devastating effects on the East German economy. A significant share of the those who left the country in 1989 were workers aged between 28 and 39 years old.<sup>530</sup> From the 343,854 registered East Germans arrived in Federal Republic in 1989, 225,000 were full-time workers. Out of a total number of 9,5 million workers, it represented a rough 2,4 percent of the East German workforce. Medical services, manufacturing and construction sectors were especially hit by the labor haemorrhage. In Leipzig for instance, then a city of 500,000, more than 10,000 jobs stood vacant in the first half of January.<sup>531</sup>

Just as much as the GDR could not afford to lose hundreds of thousands of workers, the West German labor market was not in a condition to absorb such a sudden arrival of workforce. As showed in chapter 3.1, unemployment had become a central concern of West German trade unions during the 1980s, as it remained above 9% from 1985 onward. This situation threatened trade unions, through an enduring decrease of membership and a diminished power of resistance in case of industrial conflicts. Obviously, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of East Germans migrants, from which a significant share were young and well-trained workers, also meant a renewed pressure on the West German labor markets and wages. The phenomena just described promised to intensify.

The financing of the Federal Republic's welfare state systems depends on the levels of employment and wages. Hundreds of thousands of new citizens entitled to social benefits within a lapse of a few months could only deepen the financial crisis of the Federal Republic's welfare systems and make voices for privatisation and exclusionist measures louder (see chapter 3.1). The DGB unions had always opposed such measures, but they had been aware that 'too less' people financed 'too many' beneficiaries.

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<sup>527</sup> Bundesministerium des Innern 1998, document 64 "Telegongespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Präsident Bush, 23. Oktober 1989", pp. 459-60.

<sup>528</sup> Winters 1999, p. 477.

<sup>529</sup> Bundesministerium des Innern 1998, document 145 "Gespräch des Bundesministers Seiters mit Ministerpräsident Modrow in Berlin (Ost), 25. Januar 1990", p. 708. The edition from February 2, 1990, of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* wrote that 56,177 people flew in January alone. Zatlín 1994, p. 67.

<sup>530</sup> Zwahr (1994), pp. 451-52, 454.

<sup>531</sup> Zatlín 1994, p. 67.

After the opening of the Wall, the newly elected Saarland Minister-President and social-democrat chancellor-candidate Oskar Lafontaine severely denounced the perpetuation of the guaranteed social protection for East German migrants. Given the scope of the West German welfare state provisions, affirmed Lafontaine, the preservation of this policy by the Kohl government after the opening of the Wall was nothing but an incentive to the East German population to leave the GDR.

Lafontaine himself was favorable to the imposition of a control over the migration from the GDR. He made the stabilization of the economy and of the political situation in the GDR depend on the stabilization of its population. In a political context determined by an intensification of the calls for unification in both East and West Germany, Lafontaine insisted on the stabilization of the GDR as a precondition to a unified Germany. It should be recalled however that his views and hard stances were not hegemonic within the SPD in 1989-90. The party's leader, Hans-Jochen Vogel, for instance, remained more compassionate toward East German migrants and put less emphasis on preconditions to unification.<sup>532</sup>

No DGB union leader openly echoed Lafontaine's worries that the stream of East German migrants endangered the financing of the welfare state, and, in so doing, menaced the future of social protection in the Federal Republic. From the late summer 1989 on, the DGB union members have tried to favor the integration of East German migrants in their organisations and thus in the Federal Republic. But the development of the collaboration between East and West German trade unions saw the multiplication of their joint calls to people to stay in the GDR.

By early September 1989, Ulrike Peretzki-Leid of the direction of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union insisted that the East German nursing training and exams be recognized in the Federal Republic, in order to facilitate the social integration of East German newcomers. In her letter to the Federal Health Ministry of Health, she wrote:

Auf keinen Fall dürfen wir zulassen, dass Neuankömmlinge, die vielfach auf eine lange Berufserfahrung im Pflegebereich zurückblicken können, in der BRD mit einer Bezahlung als Hilfskraft abgespeist werden.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> All that precedes is taken from Louise Kouteynikoff's unpublished Masters thesis from 1997, *Die SPD und die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands*, directed by Professor Henri Ménéudier, Université Paris III (Asnières).

<sup>533</sup> "Ist anzuerkennen. Krankenpflegeexamen der DDR", *ÖTV-Magazin*, 10/89, p. 19.

The topic was tackled again a month later. It could be read in a declaration by the Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union that it was the task of all West German unionists to facilitate the integration of East Germans at the workplace and in the unions. However, the declaration did not detail how this integration could be encouraged but stressed that it should not take the form of positive discrimination measures.

Alle Gewerkschaftsmitglieder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seien aufgefordert, sich die betriebliche und gewerkschaftliche Integration der Flüchtlinge zu bemühen. Die ehemaligen Bürger der DDR müssten „eine faire Chance zum Neuanfang erhalten“. Das setzte allerdings auch – um Resentiments vorzubeugen – Gleichbehandlung mit Bundesbürgern bei der Wohnungsversorgung und beim Wettbewerb um Arbeitsplätze voraus.<sup>534</sup>

Many companies had promptly presented as “positive discrimination” measures that were rejected by West German unions and associations for unemployed workers. When the metal company Hoesch announced that it was to hire and accommodate a certain amount of East Germans, the Dortmund organisation of unemployed workers Aldio vehemently denounced this initiative:

Wir fragen uns, warum diese Arbeitsplätze uns nicht angeboten wurden. Über 5000 Bewerbungen sind in den letzten Jahren aus unseren Reihen bei Hoesch eingegangen. Vergebens! (...) So wie Hoesch darf man nicht handeln. Wir sind nicht gegen Aussiedler und gegen DDR-Übersiedler. Aber was hier praktiziert wird, erzeugt Neid, Hass und Fremdgefährlichkeit.<sup>535</sup>

The head of the Media Industrial Union, Erwin Ferlemann, also stressed the importance for unions not to turn their back to East German migrants. The integration of East Germans, both employed and unemployed, in the trade unions was a good way to limit the intensification of the “social problems” and the growth of far right forces.

Denn, wir haben eben auch genug Probleme im eigenen Land. Neben den Wohnungsnun auch die verstärkten Probleme auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. Vielleicht gehen ja viele in die DDR unter den veränderten Verhältnissen zurück. Die anderen aber, die hierbleiben wollen, die haben wir, auch im eigenen, unserem eigenen Interesse, zu integrieren. Wir müssen sie eingliedern, damit wir selbst hier nicht noch größere soziale Probleme bekommen. Die würden nur einer Gruppe nützen, den Radikalen von der rechten äußeren Seite.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> “Betroffenheit und Hoffnung. Reaktionen auf das Geschehen in der DDR”, *ÖTV-Magazin*, 11/89, p. 2. The Education and Science Union was also opposed to measures of positive discrimination for East Germans. See: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 152.

<sup>535</sup> Waltraud Bierwirth, “So geht’s nicht! Hoesch bevorzugt DDR-Übersiedler”, *Metall*, 23/89 (November 17), p. 20.

<sup>536</sup> Erwin Ferlemann, “Hoffentlich werden noch viele den Weg zu uns finden”, *Kontrapunkt*, 1/1990, pp. 10-11, quote: p. 10.

If the situation in West-Berlin offered a foretaste of what was coming, than the DGB unions had reasons to worry. The West-Berlin office of the DGB rang the alarm against the growing number of West German employers hiring East Germans (and East Europeans) illegally. Many East German workers were willing to work ‘on the side’ in the Federal Republic for lower wages or on week-ends. By the mid-November, the DGB estimated at 16,000 the number of East Germans and East Europeans working illegally in West-Berlin, although the city counted more than 80,000 unemployed workers. According to the DGB West-Berlin office, this practice was rapidly spreading from sectors like hotels and restaurants to many others. The different levels of government were asked to eliminate all legal loopholes enabling employers to hire East German citizens without paying social contributions.<sup>537</sup>

Two declarations by DGB unions published by the first weeks of February show the development of the reflections of West German unions on these issues. They are of a special interest because of their transitory character, from the support and collaboration strategy to the strategy of legal extension. The first object of these declarations was the announcement of new measures of collaboration. Yet in comparison with comparable declarations, these two contained a novelty. For the first time, the West German union “asked” something in return for their help, namely that East German workers stay in the GDR. The new connection between collaboration and pleas to East German workers to stay in the GDR indicate how problematic the unsettled situation between both Germanies was becoming.

Herman Rappe, head of the chemistry union, expressed clearly his worries as to the outcomes of the migration from eastern to western Germany. In a text written by the end of January and published a few weeks later, he presented for the first time the relationship between the two German chemistry unions as fair’s fair. The West German unions were to help improve the reshaping of the East German unions in return for what East German workers had to stay in the GDR.

Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in der DDR bedarf unserer Hilfe gerade auch zur Sicherung, zum Erhalt und zum Ausbau der neugewonnenen politischen Rechte und Freiheiten. (...) Die Zeit drängt. (...) Unsere Solidarität in der Bundesrepublik besteht darin, in breiter Form Wirtschaftshilfe zu leisten und dabei auch deutlich zu sagen, dass das Opfer kostet. Eure Solidarität in der DDR besteht darin, mitzuhelfen, dass die Menschen dort bleiben, um an den Aufgaben der Zeit [Germany’s unification], die vor uns liegt,

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<sup>537</sup> For example, if someone worked less than 15 hours a week and earned less than 450 DM a month, quite honorable earnings for the East at that time, his or her employer also spared the social contributions. Klaus Klöppel, “Sozialdumping von gewissenlosen Unternehmern”, *Metall*, 24/89 (December 1), pp. 8-9.

mitzuarbeiten. Gelingt dies nicht, bleibt unsere Hilfe wenig wirksam. Beide Teile der Gewerkschaft haben jetzt vor allem diese grosse Aufgabe.<sup>538</sup>

The IG Metall used words no less explicit. A joint declaration with its East German homologous heralding the opening of eight IG Metall information offices in the GDR contained a clear plea to East German workers to stay in the GDR. The high level of material and social security reached in the Federal Republic, stated the declaration, resulted from 40 years of decided trade union action. In order to reach comparable standards of living and working conditions, East German Workers had to participate actively to the reconstruction of the trade union movement in the GDR.

Wir bitten die Menschen in der DDR ihr Land nicht zu verlassen, sondern am demokratischen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Aufbau der DDR mitzuwirken. Der materielle Wohlstand und das Niveau der sozialen Sicherheit in der Bundesrepublik ist nicht das automatische Ergebnis einer nach marktwirtschaftlichen Prinzipien funktionierenden Ökonomie. Es ist vor allem das Resultat einer seit über 40 Jahren währenden Auseinandersetzung starker Gewerkschaften um sozialen Fortschritt, um Mitbestimmung, Arbeitszeitverkürzung und Einkommenserhöhung. Marktwirtschaft ist nur dann sozial, wenn sie durch den Sozialstaat und durch freie, unabhängige und starke Gewerkschaften begrenzt und ausgestaltet wird. Wir fordern die Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer in der DDR auf, den Gewerkschaften nicht den Rücken zu kehren, sondern sich aktiv am demokratischen Neuaufbau der Gewerkschaftsbewegung in der DDR zu beteiligen.<sup>539</sup>

Such calls indicated the growing worries of the West German trade unions as to the economic and social outcomes in the Federal Republic of the weekly arrival of thousands of East Germans. The necessity to react to this challenge, as well as a thorough integration of unification were crucial in bringing about a shift in the strategy of the DGB unions. Beside these considerations, linked to the conditions of trade union politics and the likeliness of the unification, an explanation of the strategy shift has to take into consideration the state of theoretical debates within the West German trade union movement.

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<sup>538</sup> Rappe, "Freie und starke Gewerkschaften sind nötig! Wir wollen dabei helfen!", in: IG CPK 1993, document 11.

<sup>539</sup> "Gemeinsame Erklärung vom 27. Februar 1990, reproduced in: Fichter/Lutz 1991, document 5.

### **3.4 The Debate over socialism in the West German trade unions: Where do we go now (but nowhere)?**

The sudden outbreak of the Debate over socialism was one of the most symptomatic and yet underestimated outcome of the fall of the eastern Bloc regimes on the DGB unions. The Debate was an encompassing reflection on the relationship of West German trade unions to socialist goals and to the historical experiences of the USSR and the eastern Bloc. The first articles appeared in the union press in the midst of the fall of the GDR, in October/November 1989. Contributions to the Debate were regularly published until 1991. An article attempting preliminary conclusions of the Debate was published in 1993 – it turned out to be the last. During those years, the Debate over socialism was fed by about 60 contributions by union's heads, secretaries and members, politicians, historians of the labour movement, specialists of industrial relations and intellectuals. It was echoed in the employers' press as well.<sup>540</sup>

Not only the trade unions but also West German political parties, socialist circles, religious organizations and left-wing intellectuals felt forced to re-evaluate their socialist ambitions with the fall of the GDR. The number of contributions to this global Debate over socialism in these organisations' press and by these intellectuals during those years can be evaluated as several hundreds. It was a significant episode of the history of the German left in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, one to which, hopefully, historians will grant more consideration in the future than has been the case so far.

The Debate over socialism was especially strong within the union press. In this chapter, only articles published in a union magazine or an independent journal with a dominant trade union profile are considered. The bulk of these were explicitly published as contributions to the Debate or with titles that made it clear that this is what they were about. Included are the articles published during this period which discuss the program and goals of trade union politics after the fall of the eastern Bloc, as well as the historical conceptions underlying it (for instance three contributions on "What is progress today?"). Also included are the readers' replies to these articles. Not considered are the articles on the collapse of the eastern Bloc's regimes that leave untouched the question of the implications on the West German unions' goals and programs. Our listing includes articles taken from *Der Gewerkschafter*, *Kontrapunkt*, *Gewerk-*

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<sup>540</sup> The contributions to the Sozialismus-Debatte are assembled in a specific section of the bibliography.

*schaftliche Monatshefte*, *Die Mitbestimmung*, *Sozialismus* and *Express*. A systematic survey of the West German trade union press would obviously result in more articles.

### **3.4.1 The inadequacies of the literature**

The Debate over socialism is inescapable for the analysis of DGB unions' strategy in 1989-1990. The numerous topics tackled along its unfolding indicate how exceptional it was: what is socialism? What is the union movement's socialism? Is socialism to be accomplished within or beyond capitalism? What is the relationship of trade unions to capitalism? What are the goals and ends of trade union politics? What does the fall of the eastern Bloc change for western trade unions? What was the nature of the eastern political regimes and economies? What were the convergences and divergences between the West German left and these countries' regimes? Why were so many in the West fascinated for so long with the USSR? What are the historical roots of Stalinism? It is rare to see theoretical, programmatic and historical topics receive such a broad coverage during a long period of time in the German union press. If they do, they would usually capture scholars' attention – an obvious example is the vast literature on the mass strike debate of 1904-06. The Debate over socialism did not. Why is it so?

A few hints can already be given. The references to contributions to the Debate, be it in the trade union press or elsewhere, are usually strongly incomplete. Most unionists and observers are just not aware of the number of articles published. More than often, debaters referred only to articles published in the *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* and rarely to more than two or three of them. Hence it would seem as if much of the participants themselves were not fully aware of the extent of the Debate to which they contributed. The comment applies to the publishers of the *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* as well. When I wrote and asked them if all the contributions had been collected or whether the Debate over socialism had been the object of a specific publication, they answered by sending three articles. Even the publishers of a good share of the papers do not realize how many of their columns the Debate actually mobilised.

A second aspect is that the people interested in the Debate, the observers who tried to draw it up, usually miss its importance. The problem in their case is the very narrow view they take of it, as they understand the Debate as a quarrel between those trade unionists who wanted to maintain 'socialism' as an element of the trade union self-perception, and those who refused the term any role in western trade union politics. Of all the facets of the Debate this was, of course, the easiest to grasp. It was by no means the most significant. Following this demarcation line – pro or contra 'socialism', however defined –, the story of the Debate goes as fol-

lows: in December 1989, Dieter Wunder, head of the Education and Science Union, formulated the belief that, in the face of the collapse of the eastern Bloc, the DGB unions should stop referring to “socialism” and accept the capitalist economy once and for all.

Für die Gewerkschaften gibt es keinen Grund mehr, ihren Beschlüssen die Vorstellung einer alternativen Gesellschaftsordnung zugrunde zu legen – es gibt derzeit keine realistische Vorstellung einer wünschenswerten Alternative. Es gibt nur die kapitalistische Gesellschaft mit ihren Stärken und Schwächen sowie die Kritik an ihr und gewisse Leitideen, in welcher Richtung sich eine kapitalistische Gesellschaft verändern sollte.<sup>541</sup>

Among other contributions sharing this view, the position of Norbert Römer, speaker of the Mine and Energy Industrial Union, can be quoted.<sup>542</sup> On the opposite side, there were contributions by heads and secretaries of unions like IG Metall and the Media Industrial Union who, unsurprisingly, given these unions’ left-wing profile, defended the preservation of the “democratic socialist” conceptions and the references to a “third way” in the trade unions’ program.

Mitbestimmung, Demokratisierung der Wirtschaft, Ausbau des Sozialstaats, gewerkschaftliche Gegenmacht mit Tarifautonomie und Streikrecht sowie die Verwirklichung der Grundwerte Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität in allen Lebensbereichen sind die Eckpunkte des dritten Weges, eines Weges zwischen dem Manchester-Kapitalismus zu Beginn der Industrialisierung, wie er heute noch in vielen Ländern herrscht, und einer staatsbürokratischen, zentralen Planwirtschaft, die nicht nur ökonomisch ineffizient ist, sondern auch zur Einschränkung der demokratischen Freiheitsrechte des Einzelnen führt.<sup>543</sup>

Formulated that way, the Debate over socialism does not tell us much about the DGB unions and the period: some unions were more on the right, others more on the left. The left-wing unions usually saw their action in a democratic socialist light, while the right-wing unions considered references to socialism unnecessary at best, dangerous at worst. This demarcation line between DGB unions, the metal and media unions on the left side, the chemistry and mines unions on the right side, is familiar to any regular reader of the newspapers of those years. Had the Debate over socialism been just another name for the debate between “conflicting” and “cooperative” approaches of trade union politics? A narrow view of it brings one to such a false impression. In fact, reading the Debate that way makes it almost impossible to

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<sup>541</sup> Dieter Wunder, “Der Zusammenbruch des ‘realen Sozialismus’ und das Selbstverständnis der Gewerkschaften”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 12/1989, pp. 714-718, p. 715.

<sup>542</sup> Norbert Römer, “Politik sozialer Partnerschaft. Stellungnahme zur gewerkschaftlichen Sozialismus-Debatte”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 4/1990, pp. 217-226.

<sup>543</sup> Karlheinz Blessing, “Die Wirklichkeit drängt zum demokratischen Sozialismus – eine Replik auf Dieter Wunder”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 1/1990, pp. 2-9.



draw any conclusion at all. Should we settle it by counting the nays and yeas for socialism?<sup>544</sup> Should we expect one side to surrender to the arguments of the other? In fact, when they did not choose one side against the other<sup>545</sup>, most observers could not do more than suggest that the questions raised during the Debate over socialism would continue to stir the reflections over the future of trade union politics in Germany, the *Zukunftsdebatte*.<sup>546</sup>

### 3.4.2 Vast problems, no clear solutions

Of all the topics present in the Debate, three are of importance to us:

- 1) What repercussions does the collapse of the eastern Bloc have on the DGB unions? How should the DGB unions act in regard of the fall of the GDR?
- 2) What are the fundamentals of the DGB unions' program? What are the purposes of their action?
- 3) What is socialism for those who want to maintain it as a trade union concept?

Read along these lines, the Debate over socialism reveals all its signification. It gives the measure of the strong impact on the DGB unions of the economic changes that were occurring since at least a decade. The interrogations of the previous years as to the future of trade union politics suddenly reached their peak in 1989-90. As a matter of fact, the Debate was a condensed re-formulation of these interrogations into a fundamental questioning over the scope, meaning and ends of trade union politics in free-market economies. The fall of the GDR, the arrival of East German migrants in the Federal Republic, the reshaping of the trade union landscape in the GDR, the perspective of a unification: the political context of 1989-90 suddenly made answers to these questions more inescapable than before for the DGB unions. The response of the DGB unions to this context was also to be an answer to interrogations over the scope and ends of trade union action; any intervention of DGB unions in the East German reform process supposed that they knew what they supported and what they rejected. The outbreak of the Debate over socialism was like the *point d'orgue* at the end of a musical

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<sup>544</sup> By the way, according to our reading, 26 contributions out of 50 were favourable to 'socialism', variously defined.

<sup>545</sup> Wilke/Hertle 1991, pp. 37-39.

<sup>546</sup> For example: Heinz Werner Meyer, "Die gewerkschaftliche Zukunftsdebatte – eine Zwischenbilanz", in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 9/1991, p. 538-548; Rudolph, Karsten, "Die Zukunft des Sozialismus im Epochenwechsel. Eine Zwischenbemerkung", in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 12/1993, p. 757-766; Loe-ding/Rosenthal 1998, pp. 161-167.

phrase, a sudden concentration of the tension developed before, a moment which marks both the apogee of a long phrase and the announcement of a new one.

I do not propose answers to the three sets of questions just mentioned, but try to enlighten the Debate over socialism with their light. The first feature thus revealed is the acknowledgement of the urgency of a revision of orientations and ends of trade union politics, in the face of the collapse of the eastern Bloc. This belief is shared by all contributors and constitutes the common ground on which the Debate unfolded. For some contributors, it was the “failure of socialism”, the fall of regimes that called themselves socialist, which imposed this revision. Socialism, so their claim, did not have anything to propose against the problems of the day.

Aber welche Idee des Sozialismus meinen wir denn? Was können wir den heutigen in Leipzig Demonstrierenden, den Kollegen in den DDR-Betrieben sagen, die ihren Wunsch nach einem besseren Leben nur durch eine Vereinigung mit der kapitalistischen Bundesrepublik für erfüllbar halten? Die gefällige Eigenversicherung, daß der Stalinismus ja nur die pervertierte Form des Sozialismus gewesen sein, ist mittlerweile zu billig und bringt vor allem in der Wirklichkeit niemand weiter. Theologisch wirkende Vertröstungen auf eine bessere sozialistische Zukunft ebensowenig.

Die Revolution in Osteuropa hat die Welt so grundlegend verändert, daß wir uns um eine aufrichtige Diskussion bisheriger Orientierungen nicht drücken können. Eine genau Bilanz ist erforderlich, neue Orientierungen wohl unvermeidlich.<sup>547</sup>

For many, however, the urgency of a programmatic revision by the trade unions did not result from the fall of the eastern Bloc but from supranational developments of the recent years, specific to western economies: loss of legal and political rights of workers, a decrease in the GDP share of wages, massive unemployment, the externalisation of poverty in third-world countries and the destruction of the environment, as well as the need for more positive action toward women and the youth.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> “DKP am Ende – der Sozialismus auch? Eine Ideologie tritt ab?”, in: *express* 1/1990, p. 1. Also: Edgar Weick, “Die DDR und wir. Chancen für einen Neuanfang”, in: *express* 12/1989, p. 7; Hinrich Oetjen, “Vom perfekten Gegenentwurf haben alle die Schnauze voll”, in: *Die Mitbestimmung* 3/1990, pp. 229-230; in a lesser measure, Manfred Scharrer, “Das letzte Wort der Geschichte”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 12/1990, pp. 777-785.

<sup>548</sup> Karlheinz Blessing, “Die Wirklichkeit drängt zum demokratischen Sozialismus – eine Replik auf Dieter Wunder”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 1/1990, pp. 2-9; Christian Götz, “Für eine neue Streitkultur”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 5-6/1990, pp. 410-415; Karlheinz Hiesinger, “Wider die Politik persönlicher Denunziation”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 7/1990, pp. 455-462; Heinz Bierbaum and Michael Wendl, “Abschied von der Einheitsgewerkschaft?”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 8/1990, p. 535-544; Michael Schneider, “Die säkulare Verwechslung – Welche Ideologien und Mystifikationen haben den linken Blick nach Osten getrübt?”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 9/1990, pp. 545-555; Werner Post, “Nachruf auf den Sozialismus?”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 9/1990, pp. 555-564; Heinz Werner Meyer, “Die gewerkschaftliche Zukunftsdebatte – eine Zwischenbilanz”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 9/1991, p. 538-548.

The decisive point here is not whether people considered programmatic revisions necessary as a result of developments in the capitalist economy, of the collapse of the eastern regimes, or of both. The crucial point is that all agreed that such revisions were now imperative. No contributors to the Debate would have denied that the pressure toward some re-evaluation of the means and goals of trade union politics was strong before the opening of the wall. The collapse of the eastern regimes came within this context. The fall of the GDR intensified the need for a redefinition of the aims and goals of trade union politics: its outcomes in the Federal Republic increased the pressure on the labor market and on the welfare state. The launching of the Debate over socialism in the fall of 1989 marked less a new interest for programmatic revisions as a sudden urgency to define their nature.

In order to revise the orientations and ends of trade union politics, a return to the fundamentals was necessary. The attempt at defining these fundamentals is a second feature of the Debate. The aim of trade union politics, so the dominant assumption, was to confer its social quality to the capitalist society. Whether someone pleaded in favor of socialism or not seems of little consequence in that respect. Defined as non-socialist, trade union politics was understood, in Dieter Wunder's words quoted before, as the continuous critique of the capitalist society and the attempts to change it. Defined as socialist, trade union politics was also seen as the attempt to reinforce the social component of capitalism. The first of the two following quotes is taken from an article favorable to the "democratic socialism", the second, opposes the preservation of reference to socialism.

Die Frage nach dem dritten Weg ist damit auch ein Stück weit beantwortet. Es ist der von [Eduard] Heimann beschriebene Einbau des sozialen Gegenprinzips in die Architektur des Kapitalismus.<sup>549</sup>

Daher werden alle Bemühungen ein alternatives Wirtschaftssystem zu konzipieren, nur immer wieder das Scheitern des Sozialismus veranschaulichen. Gescheitert ist aber keineswegs das reformsozialistische Projekt, durch zielstrebige reformpolitik eine andere, bessere und gerechtere Gesellschaft zu verwirklichen. Trotz beachtlicher Erfolge in den wenigen Ländern der Erde mit einer starken reformistischen Arbeiterbewegung hat dieses Projekt noch große Aufgaben vor sich, die aber nur auf der Grundlage eines effizienten Wirtschaftssystems zu erfüllen sind.

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<sup>549</sup> Blessing, "Die Wirklichkeit drängt zum demokratischen Sozialismus – eine Replik auf Dieter Wunder", p. 5. Reference is made to Eduard Heimann's book of 1929, *Soziale Theorie des Kapitalismus*.

Hierbei gibt es schlechtere, aber keine besseren Alternativen zum System der kapitalistischen Marktwirtschaft.<sup>550</sup>

The divergence over the qualification (socialist or non-socialist) of trade union politics seems of no consequence in these two excerpts. There is however an unmistakable convergence as to the end of this action: to shape capitalism with a more social face. This convergence reflects decades of trade union practice in the Federal Republic and a belief in the model of the unitary, non-partisan trade unions. Insisting too much on the “socialist/non-socialist” component of the Debate comes down to blurring the historical weight of the post-war compromises in favour of unitary unions, which impregnated the great bulk of the contributions.<sup>551</sup>

How can trade unions determine the kind of social corrections they want to enforce? A very broad answer was: through the reference to great values and principles. On the non-socialist side, trade union politics was depicted as the materialization of principles like freedom, equality, equity, solidarity, human rights, democracy, participation and the protection of the environment.<sup>552</sup>

Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund und seine Gewerkschaften engagieren sich für eine Gesellschaft, in der Menschenwürde und Menschenrechte Grundwerte sind; sie fordern einen Staat, der als soziale Demokratie organisiert ist. Es geht um eine Gesellschaft, in der die Spannung zwischen den großen Ideen der französischen Revolution ‘Freiheit – Gleichheit – Brüderlichkeit’ auf die beste (den Menschen mögliche) Weise gelöst wird, in der individuelle Freiheitsrechte mit dem Verlangen nach sozialer Gerechtigkeit zum Ausgleich gebracht werden. Und es muß eine Gesellschaft sein, der es gelingt, Natur und Umwelt so zu schützen, daß die natürlichen Lebensgrundlagen der gegenwärtigen und der künftigen Generationen nicht weiter zerstört, sondern gesichert werden kann. (...) Wir brauchen also keine neuen gesellschaftlichen Visionen, keine alternativen Gesellschaftsmodelle, keine ‘Dritten Wege’.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Horst Heimann, “Aussprache: Der Sieg des Reformsozialismus”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 4/1990, p. 250-252, p. 252. Also: Wunder “Der Zusammenbruch des ‘realen Sozialismus’ und das Selbstverständnis der Gewerkschaften”; Harry Pross, “Der Sozialismus wird überleben”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 8/1990, pp. 526-534; Detlev Albers, “1989-1917”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 12/1990, pp. 766-777.

<sup>551</sup> Manfred Wilke has published many studies denouncing the influence of socialist and communist unions’ heads and functionaries in the DGB. This is probably the most criticised and the less convincing aspect of his work. Despite the fact that many unionists outed by Wilke were members of the SPD, we believed the frequent argument that the political preferences of left-socialist or communist unionists never prejudiced their action in the Einheitsgewerkschaft, to be fully convincing.

<sup>552</sup> Wunder “Der Zusammenbruch des ‘realen Sozialismus’ und das Selbstverständnis der Gewerkschaften”; Oetjen, “Vom perfekten Gegenentwurf haben alle die Schnauze voll”; Meyer, “Die gewerkschaftliche Zukunftsdebatte – eine Zwischenbilanz”, p. 540; Müller-Jentsch, Walther, “Nach dem Zusammenbruch des Staatssozialismus – Politische Lehren und Perspektiven”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 9/1991, pp. 548-554, p. 553.

<sup>553</sup> Günter Pehl, “Gewerkschaftliche Grundwerte: Freiheit und Gerechtigkeit für alle – Solidarität – soziale Demokratie”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 3/1990, pp. 133-140, p. 134-135.

On the other side, trade union politics were depicted as part of the “democratic socialist task”, namely... the realization of freedom, equality, equity, solidarity, human rights, democracy, participation, protection of the environment, protection of peace and tolerance.

Das Bad Godesberger Program verstand demokratischen Sozialismus als die Aufgabe, Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität durch Demokratisierung der Gesellschaft, durch soziale und wirtschaftliche Reformen zu verwirklichen. Das Berliner Programm der SPD von 1989 bestätigt diesen dynamischen und prozeßhaften Charakter des demokratischen Sozialismus ausdrücklich: ‘Diese Grundwerte zu verwirklichen und die Demokratie zu vollenden, ist die dauernde Aufgabe des demokratischen Sozialismus’.<sup>554</sup>

Beside the adjunction of the protection of peace and tolerance in the socialist basket, the similitude of the references made to great principles in both ‘camps’ is hard to miss. One has less the impression of looking at two opposite sides as at the reflection of the same image in a mirror. As a matter of fact, nobody can be against virtue – especially not in the trade union movement. To call in such principles certainly fitted into the Debate’s need for orientations but it did not provide them. What did unions’ struggle for democracy, solidarity, equality and the likes meant concretely in 1989/1990? How should unions act in this specific context? What should they fight for? Those questions, underlying the outbreak of the Debate over socialism, found very little response. In fact, this is a third feature, the Debate is mainly characterized by its scarcity of concrete answers to its central question: what is to be done now?

Some contributors knew at least what could no longer be done. The DGB unions, they insisted, had to abandon or redefine some historical components of their catalogue of demands and goals. On that subject, few lines were as explicit as the ones quoted hereafter and, given the function of their authors, they have particular implications. They clearly attempt at pulling the curtain on an epoch of the history of the trade union movement in Germany, that of macro-economic interventions within the march of the free-market capitalist economy. Here are excerpts from the contributions by the head of the DGB formation service and the DGB president of the time:

Das schließt nach dem Zusammenbruch des realen Sozialismus auch Inhalte wie Planung, Vergesellschaftung, Mitbestimmung und Gemeinwirtschaft als globales Konzept aus, die immer noch Bestand unserer Ideologie bilden. Jedenfalls muß darüber sehr viel

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<sup>554</sup> Blessing, “Die Wirklichkeit drängt zum demokratischen Sozialismus – eine Replik auf Dieter Wunder”, p. 4. See also: Christoph Georgi, “Aussprache: Ein Gegenvorschlag zur Neubesinnung”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 3/1990, p.192; Heimann, “Aussprache: Der Sieg des Reformsozialismus”, p. 252; Götz, “Für eine neue Streitkultur”; Dieter Staad, “Kapitalismus ohne Alternative?”, in: *Der Gewerkschafter* 8/1990, pp. 17-20; Post, “Nachruf auf den Sozialismus?”; Detlef Hensche, “Wie weiter? Fragen am Sterbebett des realen Sozialismus”, in: *Kontrapunkt* 21/1990, p. 12; Scharrer, “Das letzte Wort der Geschichte”, p. 785.

differenzierter nachgedacht werden und solches nicht leichtfertig immer als letztes Mittel gefordert werden, wenn wir mit unserem Latein ansonsten am Ende sind.<sup>555</sup>

Der Zusammenbruch des real existierenden Sozialismus hat endgültig klar gemacht, daß Fortschritt nicht mit der schematischen Änderung von Eigentumsverhältnissen zu bewirken ist. Die Vergesellschaftung der Produktionsmittel sowie die zentrale ökonomische Planung und Lenkung gehören nun in das Museum der Arbeiterbewegung.<sup>556</sup>

For some contributors, the trade unions' fight was nothing more than the realization of the West German constitution. At the beginning and at the end of trade union politics, there is the Grundgesetz. The thorough implementation of the Grundgesetz could be seen as 'socialist' or 'non-socialist', along the preferences of their authors.

Wir brauchen also keine neuen gesellschaftlichen Visionen, keine alternativen Gesellschaftsmodelle, keine 'dritten Wege'. Vielmehr ist es notwendig, alle Kraft dafür aufzuwenden, daß die Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland auf der Spur bleibt, die das Grundgesetz vorgezeichnet hat. Es geht darum, dafür einzutreten, daß der Verfassungsauftrag, zur sozialen Demokratie tatsächlich erfüllt wird. Starke gesellschaftliche Kräfte sind am Werk, um die Bundesrepublik von diesem Weg abzudrängen, mindestens soweit es das Gebot der Sozialstaatlichkeit angeht.<sup>557</sup>

Der Kapitalismus der Bundesrepublik – Marktwirtschaft plus Sozialstaat – ist nicht (zumindest noch nicht) mit der westdeutschen Gesellschaftsordnung identisch. Deren Rahmen wird in der Regel eine 'freiheitlich-demokratische Grundordnung' genannt, die deutlich benennbar ist und – auch nach oberster Rechtssprechung – die hier zur Zeit 'herrschende' Wirtschaftsordnung zwar als Möglichkeit einräumt, jedoch nicht zwingend vorschreibt. Es gibt also nicht nur Gründe, sondern auch Rechte, in der Bundesrepublik auch weiterhin – trotz DDR-Konkurs und nicht nur mangels DKP-Verbot – sozialistische Konzepte zu vertreten.<sup>558</sup>

As will become clear in the next chapter, it is significant that these professions of faith in the West German constitution were published in March 1990. They were written in the weeks where the DGB unions chose to act in favor of the extension of the West German legal order in the GDR. Such a reductionist comprehension of the trade unions' goals, a reduction to what the legal order framing their action, in the context of a debate over the deepest meaning and furthest ends of trade unions, reaches beyond *constitutional patriotism*: after all, the DGB unions were favorable to revisions of the constitution, as the inclusion of a right to work, for

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<sup>555</sup> Oetjen, "Vom perfekten Gegenentwurf haben alle die Schnauze voll", p. 230.

<sup>556</sup> Meyer, "Die gewerkschaftliche Zukunftsdebatte – eine Zwischenbilanz", p. 540.

<sup>557</sup> Günter, "Gewerkschaftliche Grundwerte: Freiheit und Gerechtigkeit für alle – Solidarität – soziale Demokratie", p. 135. Otto Sundt argues in a similar way, though he refers to the Tarifvertragsgesetz and not specifically to the constitution: "Aussprache: Gewerkschaften brauchen keine Sozialistische Tradition", in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 3/1990, pp. 188-190.

<sup>558</sup> Georgi, "Aussprache: Ein Gegenvorschlag zur Neubesinnung", p. 191.

instance. Such a reduction rather indicates that many West German unionists no longer consider changes of the legal framework in which they acted likely, nor desirable.

Finally, contributions insisted on the necessity for trade unions to develop a new “internal culture”, in which more openness would be made to new members, new ideas, debates, tolerance and critique.<sup>559</sup>

In all the contributions considered here, there is only a handful of concrete indications of how trade unions’ politics should change. A step from collective to individual rights is proposed by some authors, at least the individualization of the practice of workers’ rights. Discussions over labor processes in management circles that include workers (Qualitätszirkel) is presented as an avenue for the development of workers’ participation and co-determination.<sup>560</sup> In his synthesis published in 1991, DGB head Heinz-Werner Meyer urges trade unions to use employers’ need for more flexibility to the benefice of (individual) workers. Meyer greeted the new opportunities opened by the 35-hour workweek in the metal and printing industries, but concluded that, in the future, working time reductions would be more individual in nature (rather than imposed to a whole sector).

Mehr Selbstbestimmung der Individuen durch neue Formen der Gestaltung von Arbeit, Zeit und neue Beteiligungsformen bildet den Grundriß jenes Porträts zukünftiger Arbeitspolitik der Gewerkschaften, das in ersten Umrissen bereits heute verwirklicht ist.<sup>561</sup>

Another proposition made by Heinz-Werner Meyer was to abandon the work-based financial contribution and service provision of the welfare state in favor of a universal common basic social security. Although Meyer did not go into the details of his proposition, models of “basic social protection” (Grundsicherung) usually suppose that they can be supplemented with individual private insurance programs.

One contribution stressed that the DGB unions should use the opportunity given by the negotiations on the unification to try to keep some of the East German social rights in unified Germany, especially those compatible with their program: public kindergarten, free abortion, a constitutional right to work, the interdiction of lock-outs.<sup>562</sup> This contribution was the only one in the whole Debate which proposed a strategy leading to gaining new social rights for the West German working population. All of these were classic goals of trade unions, re-

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<sup>559</sup> Detlef Hensche, “Der Sozialismus geht – was kommt? Lehren aus dem Niedergang”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 5-6/1990, pp. 403-410; Götz, “Für eine neue Streitkultur”.

<sup>560</sup> Sundt, “Aussprache: Gewerkschaften brauchen keine Sozialistische Tradition”, p. 190.

<sup>561</sup> Meyer, “Die gewerkschaftliche Zukunftsdebatte – eine Zwischenbilanz”, p. 543.

<sup>562</sup> Jürgen Hoffmann, “Verordnete Emanzipation zerstört Emanzipation und Solidarität”, *Die Mitbestimmung* 5/1990, pp. 354-358.

peated dozens of times in congress resolutions and public declarations by union officials over the years. They had become part of the unions' creed. Yet they came up only once in the Debate over socialism, a symptom that the Debate was also drawing the line on some of the never met historical demands of the trade union movement, which had guided its daily action until then.

Finally, two authors suggested that the DGB unions develop a coordinated tariff policy for both Germanies, as well as programs for the development of employment and social security in the GDR. The DGB unions had to prevent that the current developments in the GDR bring about negative outcomes in the Federal Republic. They were prompted to act as a quarantine line against developments that could threaten labor's positions and rights in the Federal Republic. At the moment where they were made, in August 1990, these precepts for action already defined all of the DGB unions' strategy toward the GDR.

Wenn es zu der zu befürchtende Segmentierung der Arbeitsmarkt- und Lohnstrukturen in der DDR mit einer spürbaren Rückwirkung auf den bereits segmentierten bundesdeutschen Arbeitsmarkt in Richtung Lohnreduzierung für alle Formen gering qualifizierter Arbeit kommt, enthält ein koordiniertes tarifpolitisches Handeln der Gewerkschaften zentrale Bedeutung. Ebenso notwendig werden staatliche Maßnahmen der Arbeitsmarkt- und sozialpolitischen Regulierung, um die zu erwartende 'Schmutzkonzurrenz' unterhalb der tariflichen Mindestnormen einzudämmen.<sup>563</sup>

### **3.4.3 The programmatic exhaustion of the trade unions**

The Debate over socialism is an *état des lieux* of trade unions' program and politics in the Federal Republic at the end of the 1980s. The dichotomy between the Debate's origin, the perception of the urgency of a programmatic reorientation, and its very modest contribution in providing concrete elements of what this reorientation could look like, is striking. References to the strengthening of the "social dimension" within the capitalist economy or to great principles were of a limited help, if they were not supplemented with concrete indications as to how these principles could be conjugated in the present times. The few concrete perspectives that emerged in the midst of the Debate usually meant an unambiguous narrowing of trade unions' role and pretensions: the rejection of interventions at the macro-economic level, although developments at that level were said to shake labor politics and conceptions; the abandonment of year-long claims for the improvement of the legal order of the Federal Republic; the preference for individualized forms of defence of workers' interests, hence to hand over more responsibility to the works councils, in a dual system of representation that limits the



scope of works councils' action more than that of unions. The Debate over socialism has enlightened the exhaustion of the perspectives of post-war trade union politics in the Federal Republic.

In his prize-winning essay, Serge Denis (2003) analyses what he terms the “programmatic exhaustion” of the international social democracy. Within international social democracy, the economic developments known as globalization (internationalization of productive processes and of financial circuits, as well as the corollary need for more autonomy for each individual enterprise) have been unilaterally understood as marking a point of no return for the social democratic project. Important theoreticians of European social democracy, Rudolf Meidner and Fritz Scharpf among others, appear rather helpless as to the future of this project in the globalized economy. For Meidner, the socialist ends (which he limits to full employment and equity) remain valid, but the ways to achieve them, have to be modernised, an assertion which he does not detail. Scharpf is more explicit. Social democracy has no theory as to how it can handle its “inevitable adaptation” to the developments within the capitalist economy, he writes, since Keynesian policies are impossible at the international or the European level. Besides diverse micro-level strategies aiming at creating/preserving jobs, Scharpf resolves himself to do the promotion of what he calls “socialism in one class”: tax increases for the working population, in order to help those penalized by the economic transformations, without corresponding increases of the social contributions of employers.<sup>564</sup>

Can such conceptions, for instance the promotion of a sharing out of the social risks within the sole working population, be considered part of the history of socialism, asks Denis?<sup>565</sup> He answers negatively. These proposals rather illustrate the programmatic exhaustion of the social democratic project. This exhaustion shows through reflections still grounded in an obsolete framework – the one that had determined, until then, the short and medium-term goals, strategies and punctual interventions -, which cannot be transcended.

« Epuisement programmatique », parce que les difficultés d'orientation, voire les impasses, se nourrissent précisément de la caducité du cadre ayant défini les objectifs à

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<sup>563</sup> Bierbaum/Wendl, “Abschied von der Einheitsgewerkschaft?”, pp. 540-541.

<sup>564</sup> Rudolf Meidner, 1994, “The Rise and Fall of the Swedish Model”, in: W. Clement and R. Mahon (dir.), *Swedish Social Democracy: A Model in Transition* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press), pp. 337-346; Fritz Scharpf, 1990, *La social-démocratie face à la crise* (Paris, Economica); both quoted in: Denis (Serge) 2003, pp. 22-23.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., footnote 9, p. 188.

court et à moyen termes depuis 1945, les façons de faire et les plate-formes plus ponctuelles aussi. Les problèmes ne sauraient être vus comme conjoncturels.<sup>566</sup>

The dilemma is not of a temporary nature, believes Denis. In a provocative hypothesis, he suggests that it marks the opening of a period of decomposition of the social democracy and re-composition of the political action modalities by workers. It is this double process that he attempts to analyse in his book.

As economic organisations of workers, closely linked to social democratic parties, western trade unions are touched by the programmatic exhaustion of the social democratic project just as much as political parties. As the term exhaustion suggests, we are dealing with a process whose development varied in the different countries, although its basic format is the same everywhere. The launching of the Debate over socialism in 1989 allows to date the acknowledgement by the West German unions of the exhaustion of their programmatic orientations. After at least a decade of growing unemployment and dismantling of the welfare state, and in the context of the fall of ‘socialism’, the launching of the Debate indicated a sudden intensification of the quest for new orientations - and its failure.<sup>567</sup>

Hence, the programmatic exhaustion of trade unions appears in the Debate’s dichotomy between the necessity of programmatic re-orientations and the scarcity of concrete indications. It is *not* symbolized by the fact that *some* unionists urged their colleagues to accept the narrowing conditions allowed for by the capitalist free-market economy, and to limit, for instance, trade union politics to interventions at the micro-economic level. Such accomodationist orientations were always present in the trade union movement.<sup>568</sup> It is rather symbolized by the fact that *no* contribution to the Debate could take the opposite view of proposing anything else than the abandonment of core demands of trade unions. The programmatic exhaustion of trade unions is patent through the incapacity to define the margins and goals of trade union politics within the new economic conditions, beyond vague calls to take advantage, for the benefit of workers, of employers’ readiness to listen to workers’ suggestions.

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>567</sup> In my opinion the consequences of the programmatic exhaustion cannot be the same for trade unions as for social democratic parties, given that one shares Denis’ clear-cut argument on the latter. Trade unions cannot change their nature as workers’ organisations.

<sup>568</sup> The Debate marked, however, the abandonment by some reputed ‘socialist’ intellectuals, like Walther Müller-Jentsch and other collaborators of *express*, of their belief in the appropriateness of such measures. See the mini debate in the Debate launched in this journal which resulted in a ‘victory’ of the non-socialist side, in the form of an unsigned editorial calling for a revision of previous positions: Klaus W. Kowol, “Entzauberung”, in: *express* 10/1989, p. 2; Müller-Jentsch, Walther, “Antworten auf Klaus W. Kowol, *express* 10/89”, in: *express* 11/1989, p. 7; Eberhard Schmidt, “Fauler Zauber”, in: *express* 11/1989, p. 7; Weick, “Die DDR und wir. Chancen für einen Neuanfang”; “DKP am Ende – der Sozialismus auch? Eine Ideologie tritt ab?”.

It is often transcribed in the reduction of goals and ends to a strict acceptance of what unions already had. Authors defending socialist perspectives presented the West German social market economy as one form of realization of socialism,<sup>569</sup> others, socialism, the unions' program as identical with the West German constitution and labor laws. This, to stress the point one more time, in a period where mutations within the economy and of the legal order compelled trade unions to programmatic re-orientations.

It is doubtful that theoretical debates within a movement can be settled in the columns of its press alone. For sure, the Debate over socialism was not. It is the practice of the DGB unions that solved the Debate's interrogations. It is in a strategy entirely devoted to the eastward extension of the West German labor laws and the organizational expansion that the Debate over socialism found its conclusion. The *unanimity* of the DGB unions for the extension of an eroding model was an almost logical outcome of the programmatic exhaustion diagnosed in the Debate over socialism. In any case the implementation of this strategy marked the actual end of the Debate. It is not the fact that some DGB unions' heads pleaded for the legal extension and refused "any experiments" that is historically significant in 1990. What is crucial is that nobody within the West German union movement could envisage any other positive perspective than the legal extension. Bluntly put, it is significant that it was the left-wing Media Industrial Union, whose secretaries voiced their fidelity to the democratic socialist tradition in the Debate, which, the first, pleaded for the legal extension in 1989 (see 3.2).

The strategic shift of DGB unions toward the legal extension was made in February 1990, a few weeks only after the launching of the Debate. That the Debate found its conclusion in this strategy, although contributions continued to be published, cannot be seen if the Debate is understood as a theoretical quarrel between the partisans and opponents of 'socialism' within the DGB unions. This explains, together with incomplete listings of the contributions and narrow analyses of its significance, why the Debate over socialism has not received all due attention in the literature.

Launched as a reflection over the scope, goals and means of trade union politics in the end of the 1980s and in the context of the fall of the GDR, the Debate over socialism bears witness of the historical implications of the programmatic exhaustion of trade unions. 'Historical' refers here to the fact that, as natural and obvious the alignment behind the West German economic and legal order without ands, ifs or buts might have been for the DGB unions by the beginning of 1990, it marked a breach in their history. Some West German historians of the

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<sup>569</sup> Pross, "Der Sozialismus wird überleben".

labor movement were particularly aware of the historical implications of a strategy dedicated to the legal extension. They have expressed their worries in January 1990, in a discussion published along the Debate over socialism. It was the lack of historical knowledge, so a shared opinion among the discussants, that prevented the DGB unions to define an ‘historically correct’ (my expression) strategy and which prompted them to favor the extension of “obsolete structures” and practices in the GDR. Yet, their greater historical sensibility did not allow these scholars to rise above the dilemma faced by unions and propose any alternative – but this, one should rightly argue, was not their role.

It is interesting to see how, in the following excerpt, veterans of social history, especially sensible to the weight of the period for West German unions, have it hard to go beyond calls to a "return" to unions' "fundamental values" – like the bulk of other contributions to the Debate. One historian (Steinberg) makes a proposition similar to the legal extension, another suggests that the DGB unions limit the scope of their intervention in the GDR (Hartwich). Klaus Tenfelde makes an interesting reference to the years of illegality under Bismarck's antisocialist Laws which forced trade unions to reorganise their politics differently but which turned out to their advantage. In his view, but Tenfelde does not explicit the implications for the DGB unions of this lesson from the past, an unfavorable context does not necessarily come out on a weakening of trade unions. But they need to know what it is that they want, one should add. This discussion, summarizes the contours and implications of the exhaustion of the historical perspectives of western trade union movements better than any other contribution to the Debate over socialism, and counts therefore among the most interesting ones.

BORSODORF: [Das] Industriegewerkschaftssystem ist in der Bundesrepublik schon kein den Produktionsverhältnissen adäquates Organisationsprinzip mehr. Es beruht auf einer Vorstellung der Produktionsverhältnisse, die den Werkstoff (Holz, Metall und so weiter) zum Organisationsschnittpunkt der Arbeitnehmer macht. Eine solche sozusagen überholte Struktur in der DDR zu installieren, ist höchstens in dem Sinne richtig, daß das Industriegewerkschaftsprinzip demokratischer ist als eine zentralistische Einheitsgewerkschaft.

STEINBERG: Ich glaube, die Frage der Organisationsstruktur ist zweitrangig. Was die bundesrepublikanischen Gewerkschaften sich überlegen müssen ist, welche Sozialstrategien sie hinsichtlich der Lebenslage der arbeitenden Menschen in der heutigen DDR entwickeln wollen – auch unter dem Aspekt einer nach ökonomischen Gesichtspunkten gar nicht aufzuhaltenden Vereinigung. Das scheint mir das zentrale Problem der Gewerkschaften zu sein, bei dem es um ein Instrumentarium geht, das verhindert, daß innerhalb der Werktätigen eine Zweiklassengesellschaft unter einem politischen Dach entsteht.

HARTWICH: Die Gewerkschaften sind überfordert, wenn sie die Lage der Arbeiter in der DDR tatsächlich verbessern wollten. In der Bundesrepublik steht den Gewerkschaften

nach meiner Beobachtung das Wasser bis zum Halse, weil sie, entsprechend ihren Funktionen als Arbeitnehmer-Organisationen, schwierige Auseinandersetzungen vor sich haben. Nach meinem Verständnis sind die anstehenden Tarifausschließungen auch ihre vordringlichste Aufgabe. Deshalb kann man auch nicht sagen, die Gewerkschaften müßten sich in dieser Situation in erster Linie um die Entwicklung in der DDR kümmern. (...)

MOMMSEN: (...) Zu erwarten und zu fordern wäre eine stärkere Ausrichtung in eigenen Traditionen und eine entsprechende Handlungsorientierung. In einer Situation, wie wir sie jetzt haben, können die Gewerkschaften nicht warten, bis Wissenschaftler ihnen gesagt haben, was sie tun müssen, sondern sie müssen sich auf ihre eigenen Wertstandpunkte beziehen, wenn sie nicht ihre moralische Glaubwürdigkeit verlieren wollen. In solche Situationen geht es eben nicht nur darum, politische Interessenstandpunkte zu berücksichtigen, sondern darum, eine grundsätzliche Position zu haben. (...) Ich bin davon überzeugt, daß in einer Zeit politischer Umschichtung wie der heutigen, die Besinnung auf die eigene grundsätzliche Position absolut notwendig ist. Daß der gesamte östliche Sozialismus vollkommen zusammengebrochen ist, und damit ja auch die marxistische Tradition, stellt eine epochale Wandlung dar, auf die auch die Gewerkschaften reagieren müssen, weil sich die Perspektiven ändern. Der gewerkschaftliche Pragmatismus kann auf die Dauer nicht genügen.(...)

BEIER: (...) Die Gewerkschaften haben auch gelegentlich versucht, Grundsätze gewerkschaftlichen Verhaltens in Tugendkatalogen nach dem biblischen Vorbild der zehn Gebote zu formulieren. Das blieb trivial. Nirgendwo findet sich eine anspruchsvolle, systematische Ausarbeitung gewerkschaftlicher Ethik. Es fehlt auch an entsprechenden Instanzen im Aufbau der Verbände. (...) In der fehlenden ethischen Instanz sehe ich eine empfindliche Lücke in der bisherigen gewerkschaftlichen Theorie und Praxis.

TENFELDE: Suchen wir jetzt nicht etwas zuviel nach gewerkschaftlicher Ethik? Daß es so etwas wie eine Tugendkatalog gewerkschaftliche Handelns nicht gibt, ist ein Preis, der für die Gründung der Einheitsgewerkschaft gezahlt werden mußte. (...) [Ich] erinnere mich an die Unterdrückung der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung während des Sozialistengesetzes. Damals hat sie die große Chance des 12jährigen Verbot genutzt, um sich an Haupt und Gliedern zu erneuern und zu neuen Organisationen zu finden. Biete nicht auch das Ende eines 40jährigen Verbots der Arbeiterbewegung in der DDR heute die Chance einer relativen neuorganisierung der Gewerkschaften? Dabei kann es nicht darum gehen, DGB-Prinzipien zu übernehmen, die sich als überlebt erwiesen haben.

### **3.5 West German Employers' Associations' Shift in Position to Favoring the Extension of the Labor Law**

This chapter is dedicated to the West German employers' association, the Bundesvereinigung der deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände (BDA). This is the only section to cover this topic in this work otherwise devoted solely to trade unions. The following pages shall demonstrate how the BDA analyzed the situation in the GDR and how it defined its activities within that context, mainly from the dates of January to February 1990. We will see how during those weeks

the employers' federation began to favor the legal extension of the West German labor law to cover the GDR.

The BDA press, and more specifically the editorials of the bi-weekly *Der Arbeitgeber*, is particularly useful in tracking these developments. The topics covered in this magazine are also indicative of the sort of information that was important to West German employers' associations and hence to their reactions to the changes observed in the GDR. This emphasis on the editorials and the topics covered in the employers' press corresponds to the way the press of the trade unions is covered in this work.

As was the case with the union's press, considerations given to problems relating to the integration of tens of thousands of East German workers in the West German labor market dominated the coverage of the East German crisis in the West German employers' press. In the first weeks of 1990, the positions of West German unions and management regarding the GDR were highly convergent.

### **3.5.1 Concerns on social stability in West Germany (January 1990)**

*Der Arbeitgeber* did not cover the 1989 East German revolution. The only article published in 1989 that dealt expressly with the GDR was a piece published in June complaining about the decline of trade between the two countries.<sup>570</sup> None of the topics associated with new events surrounding the East German uprising, not even the opening of the Berlin Wall, found their way into the BDA magazine until the beginning of 1990.

This silence on the issue indicates that the position taken by the BDA, if viewed in a positive light, may be compared to the “wait-and-see” policy adopted for a period of time by the DGB unions. Whereas the DGB unions only pursued this policy during the initial few weeks of the East German revolution, the BDA seemed to have followed this line until December 1989. Yet, in the case of the BDA, the organization has received little criticism for its lack of a public stance and silence on the issue of the East German revolution. As we have seen earlier in this paper, the trade union press published a great number of articles on the events taking place in East Germany in the fall 1989, in relation to their effects on enterprises themselves for instance. Whilst the DGB union members supported the actors in the East German revolution through its strategy of support and collaboration, the same cannot be said of the BDA. Nonetheless, the employers' associations was never the object of criticism, either external or inter-

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<sup>570</sup> “Mondernisierungsbedarf der DDR”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 11/41 (June 9, 1989), pp. 403-04.

nal, as was the union movement ever since February 1990.<sup>571</sup> Was there any attempt to reopen the issue of why the BDA only started to address the East German crisis at the turn of the year 1990? The answer here is no.<sup>572</sup>

The West German employers' press began to take an interest in the East German revolution after it had begun to have major repercussions in West Germany itself. In an editorial entitled "Self-determination" (Selbstbestimmung) dated January 19, 1990, the BDA invited its readers to reconsider and now support the gradualist approach to reunification as defined by chancellor Helmut Kohl seven weeks earlier in his so-called 10-Point Plan ("we recommend a re-evaluation"). The editorialist wrote that organizing free elections in the GDR would be crucial in shaping Germany's future and stated that the BDA would support any East German individual or organization in favor of elections. BDA's support for reunification included a rejection of any sort of hybrid model of the two economic systems. The editorialist called for the implementation of a "freemarket economic system" in a reunified Germany.<sup>573</sup>

One might suspect that the BDA reconsidered its position on the 10-point plan to one of support as an attempt to find a solution to the massive migration of East German citizens to West Germany. In its annual report for the year 1989, published around this time, the BDA executive secretary (Hauptgeschäftsführer), Fritz-Heinz Himmelreich, estimated the number of unemployed East German workers in the Federal Republic at about 240,000.<sup>574</sup> The West German constitution prevented any restriction on movement between the two Germany states. The risks of increasing strains on the social services budget by East German migration could hardly be overlooked. This particularly threatened to push up unemployment and retirement pensions costs.

One member of the executive committee of the Hessen Federation of Employers' Associations called on West German employers to avoid making any public declarations that could prompt skilled East German workers to leave for West Germany. The stabilization of the situation on the border was given top priority.

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<sup>571</sup> *Der Arbeitgeber* contributed to this criticism against the trade unions, blaming the IG Metall because it did not address the collapse of the GDR regime during its congress of November 1989. Klaus Schneider, "Ein Kongress mit drei Gesichtern", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 22/41 (November 17, 1989), pp. 842-45, esp. 845.

<sup>572</sup> No traces of an attempt to re-evaluate its positions are to be found either in the BDA press or in the subsequent analyses of the BDA strategy in 1990. See: Henneberger 1991; Thumfart 2002, pp. 319-21.

<sup>573</sup> Thomas Gross, "Selbstbestimmung", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 2/42 (January 19, 1990), p. 48.

<sup>574</sup> Fritz-Heinz Himmelreich, "Europa und DDR: Themen der Sozialpolitik", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 1/42 (January 5, 1990), pp. 16-17.

The lack of skilled workers in West Germany should not be “artificially raised”, he contended.<sup>575</sup> Some in the BDA therefore shared (at least in part) the opinion of the DGB unions on the negative consequences on social stability in the FRG brought about by West German companies recruiting East German workers and the resulting downward pressure on wages.<sup>576</sup>

It is essential to integrate the hundreds of thousands East German migrants into West Germany’s system, wrote Fritz-Heinz Himmelreich in his 1989 report. This demanded that the federal government adopt wide-ranging reforms that should include deregulation, privatization of the welfare system (especially the pension system) and new tax schemes. Himmelreich also called for major changes to the nature of negotiations between employers and trade unions in the Federal Republic of Germany. The end of the “real-existing socialism” in East Germany, he claimed, also implied the demise of “democratic socialism” in the Western union movement and presupposed a programmatic reorientation of the latter. The role of employers in that context was to promote the argument that “socialist theories” had utterly and completely failed. Such remarks obviously added to a profound malaise at the DGB unions, whose most obvious manifestation was without doubt visible in the debate over the future of socialism. These can be found in other articles in *Der Arbeitgeber* in 1990 as well.<sup>577</sup>

Der Untergang des ‘real-existierenden Sozialismus in Osteuropa’ nötigt den demokratischen Sozialismus hier in der Bundesrepublik zu einer neuen ordnungspolitischen Ortsbestimmung. Wir stehen vor einer neuen Systemdebatte bei der es darum geht, die demokratische Gesellschaft von der Systemimmanenz des Scheiterns sozialistischer Theorien zu überzeugen.<sup>578</sup>

### **3.5.2 Shift in position on the extension of the West German labor law (February 1990)**

The Federal chancellor’s proposal for a rapid reunification of the two German states through a preliminary monetary and economic union met with little enthusiasm in the West German economic establishment when announced on February 6, 1990.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Henning von Vieregge, “Arbeit suchen und finden bei uns”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 2/42 (January 19, 1990, pp. 63-64.

<sup>576</sup> For a (partial) rebuttal, see: Reiner Baumeister, “Aussiedler aus Osteuropa sind keine Kostgänger”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 5/42 (March 9, 1990), p. 186.

<sup>577</sup> Norbert Reis, “Vormundschaft oder Freiheit – das ist die Frage”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 5/42 (March 9, 1990), pp. 178-80; Horst-Udo Niedenhoff and Manfred Wilke, “Krise der SED-Herrschaft, Sozialismusdisput im DGB”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 5/42 (March 9, 1990), pp. 181-84; Klaus Schneider, “Verlorene Utopien”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 11-12/42 (June 15, 1990), p. 460.

<sup>578</sup> Himmelreich, “Europa und DDR”, p. 17.

<sup>579</sup> Grosser 1998, pp. 190-97.



At that time, most of West Germany's major economic institutions, including the economic council of so-called 'Five Wise Men', the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) and the Bundesbank (German central bank), advocated a gradual transition for East German enterprises and a progressive opening of the GDR economy to international competition. The introduction of the German Mark in the GDR should, in the opinion of these analysts, only take place after a substantial narrowing of the production gap between the two countries to ensure that the rise in unemployment in the GDR can be kept to a minimum. According to an in-depth analysis, the GDR could only maintain its productivity levels by drastically slashing wages if deprived of sovereignty over its monetary policy. This would result in higher unemployment and an accelerated exodus to West Germany. Karl-Otto Pöhl, the Bundesbank president, who would soon be forced to resign, and the bank's vice-president publicly criticized the plan as "unrealistic".<sup>580</sup>

The president of the Federation of German Industries (Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie, BDI), Tyll Necker, also expressed his reservations on Chancellor Kohl's belief that the rapid monetary and economic union would lift productivity levels in the GDR.<sup>581</sup> Yet the criticism from the Federation of German Industries' remained muted.

The Confederation of German Employers' Associations did not echo the complaints of other West German economic institutions about the chancellor's proposal. In fact, the employers' lobby group made no public stance on the proposal for monetary union.<sup>582</sup> The BDI and BDA were not actively engaged in the campaign led by West German economic institutes and banks against Chancellor Kohl's proposal.<sup>583</sup>

Although it avoided any explicit endorsement of the plan, an editorial in the Confederation of German Employers' Associations' magazine following the announcement of the February 6 proposal was a prudent step along the course set out by the chancellor. The editorialist, Josef Siegers, highlighted how central the issue of "work" was to the current German debate. Job creation, wage rates, unemployment: all these issues were crucial and would come to determine the future economic and political roadmap. One single labor market was already forming in Germany, as commuter traffic figures between the two countries (Berufs-Pendelverkehr) illus-

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<sup>580</sup> "Währungsunion stösst auf Ablehnung", *Franfurter Rundschau*, February 9, 1990; "DIW-Präsident: Die von Bonn gewollte Einheitswährung ist kontraproduktiv", *Franfurter Rundschau*, February 10, 1990. Also: Zatlín 1994, p. 69.

<sup>581</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from February 9, 1990, quoted in: Vilmar / Guittard 1999, p. 23.

<sup>582</sup> There is no mention of any official stance by the BDA on Chancellor Kohl's call for a rapid monetary and economic union in *Der Arbeitgeber*, the *Franfurter Rundschau*, the *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *Die Tageszeitung*.

<sup>583</sup> Grosser 1998, p. 191.

trate. This situation, however, was creating alarming tensions between workers in the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>584</sup> The labor market and welfare state in West Germany were not in a position to assimilate a constant influx of thousands of East German workers. The East German economy needed to be restructured and reformed (saniert) through a coordinated monetary policy from both Germany states, wrote Siegers. He went on to say that this coordinated policy had to be enshrined in legislation along the same basic lines of the West Germany's Labor Promoting Law (Arbeitsförderungsgesetz). He finally appealed to politicians to take the necessary measures to ensure it was viable for East German workers to stay in the GDR:

Alles tun, um das Verbleiben in der DDR attraktiv und sinnvoll zu gestalten! Alles vermeiden, was zusätzlich zum Sog des Wohlstandsgefälles Anreize für ein Übersiedeln schafft!<sup>585</sup>

These arguments, the problems identified and the solutions proposed had much in common with the Federal government's views. Without yet publicly supporting the government's course of action on currency union and the adoption of the monetary policy, the Confederation of the German Employers' Associations defended similar positions in this editorial in its *Arbeitgeber* newsletter from February 23, 1990. Three days earlier, representatives from the West German industry, employers and trade unions had been invited to the federal chancellery for discussions on the government's policy toward the GDR. The next issue of *Der Arbeitgeber*, published on March 9, announced the logical conclusion to the BDA's gradual shift in position. This issue's editorial contained a clear appeal for rapid monetary union as proposed by Chancellor Kohl one month earlier.

Der Traum von Freiheit und Wohlstand in Einheit hat aber gute Chancen, Wirklichkeit zu werden, wenn das Angebot des Bundeskanzlers zu einer Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion jetzt zügig mit konkretem Inhalt gefüllt wird. Wirtschaftsreform und Währungsunion sind dabei untrennbar miteinander verbunden. Das eine läuft ohne das andere ins Leere. Gewerbefreiheit, Wettbewerb, freie Preisbildung, Privateigentum und Finanzreform sind einige Stichworte, die den Weg in die soziale Marktwirtschaft markieren.

The column, once more authored by BDA's executive secretary Himmelreich, called for reforming the East German labor and social laws along the lines of legislation in place in the Federal Republic of Germany. Unified Germany's labor legislation should be modeled on the West German laws, i.e., based on the autonomy of the collective bargaining partners (Tarifautonomie) and the right to industrial strikes. This legal framework would, in the words of

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<sup>584</sup> See chapter 3.3.

<sup>585</sup> Josef Siegers, "Deutschland einig Arbeitsmarkt", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 4/42 (February 23, 1990), p. 124.

Himmelreich, open the door to autonomous collective bargaining, the organization of work in the GDR and an urgently needed reform of the East German economy.

Es muss eine staatsfreie Aushandlung der Löhne und Arbeitsbedingungen im Rahmen einer Tarifautonomie verankert werden, deren institutionelle Voraussetzungen – von der Bildung unabhängiger Arbeitgeber- und Arbeitnehmerorganisationen bis hin zum garantierten Recht auf Streik und Aussperrung – schleunigst zu schaffen sind. Dies bedeutet nicht, dass mit Einführung der Tarifautonomie in der DDR dort sofort westdeutsche Löhne gezahlt werden könnten. Dazu ist der Produktivitätsrückstand der DDR-Wirtschaft zu gross. Niveau und Zuwachs der Löhne müssen sich vielmehr an den dortigen Produktivitätsverhältnissen orientieren. Grosse Produktivitätssprünge ergäben sich aus der Ablösung des überalterten Maschinenparks durch neueste Technik wie aus der vollen Nutzung der vorhandenen Kapazitäten, die bisher wegen Materialmangels oder permanenter Maschinendefekte allenfalls zur Hälfte ausgelastet waren.<sup>586</sup>

This clarification of the strategy of the West German employers' associations was published together with an important BDA/DGB agreement.<sup>587</sup> In this agreement, both union and management called for West Germany's labor law to be extended to the GDR and declared their readiness to play an active role in reforming the East German economy in accordance with these laws. The March 9 agreement is the main manifestation of the tripartite consensus on the legal extension of West German labor laws signed by the West German government, labor organizations and employers' associations. The next chapters will explore in greater detail how the tripartite consensus was formed. Hence, the BDA took several crucial steps in realigning its position closer to that of the federal government between February 20 and March 9. We will see that the corresponding evolution in the position of the DGB unions followed the same basic timeframe.

By the end of March, the Confederation of German Employers' Associations was strongly criticizing any attempts made by the GDR to implement a more "labor-friendly" labor law than the one in place in the Federal Republic. The law on trade unions and its granting of wide-ranging co-determination, the prohibition of lock-outs and the obligation to pay wages during strikes, all measures adopted by the East German parliament, were severely attacked by the BDA. They were described as "acts of sabotage" and as attempts to introduce "socialist elements" in a unified Germany. The BDA requested that the DGB unions withhold support for such pro-labor measures which would only impede investment and threaten the system of social partnership in the Federal Republic of Germany.

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<sup>586</sup> Fritz-Heinz Himmelreich, "Sozialmarktwirtschaft für ganz Deutschland", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 5/42 (March 9, 1990), p. 172.

<sup>587</sup> Both this issue of *Der Arbeitgeber* and the BDA/DGB agreement were released on March 9.

So verführerisch es auch aus der Sicht der DGB-Gewerkschaften sein mag, eine vermeintliche Chance zu nutzen, so sollten sie dieser Versuchung nicht erliegen, denn dann wäre auch unsere seit Jahrzehnten bewährte freiheitliche Wirtschaftsordnung beschädigt. Es ist zu hoffen, dass sich in den Gewerkschaften die Kräfte durchsetzen, die einer unheiligen Allianz widerstehen. Erste Äusserungen in diese Richtung liegen vor. Hierin läge ein Beweis für die Funktionsfähigkeit unserer partnerschaftlich verfassten sozialen Marktwirtschaft, mit der nicht nur der Weg zur deutschen Einigung geebnet, sondern auch die europäische Integration beschleunigt wird.<sup>588</sup>

As we will see in the upcoming chapters, any concerns the BDA may have had relating to DGB union support for East German "input" in drafting the new labor law for a unified Germany were shortlived at best. Once the contours of BDA's political support for extending the West German labor law to the GDR had been defined, *Der Arbeitgeber* assigned considerable column space to printing comparative statistics from East and West Germany for its readers. Working time, wages, productivity, levels of health and security at work were highlighted. This insistence on the conditions of employability in the GDR was necessary to West German employers who wanted to invest there. At least five comparative articles<sup>589</sup> and two special booklets<sup>590</sup> were published by *Der Arbeitgeber* between January and July 1, 1990, the date on which the Monetary, Economic and Social Union came into effect.

### 3.5.3 Conclusion

This brief examination of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations' press between January and March 1990 suggests the following conclusions. Unlike the West German trade unions, the employers' press had not covered the political revolution in the GDR. The first articles relating to these issues concerned the destabilizing effects of the massive influx of East German workers onto the West German labor market and into the welfare system. These concerns gave cause to the BDA for agreeing to the proposal on monetary union set forth by Chancellor Kohl. The BDA advocated extending the West German labor law and collective bargaining autonomy to the GDR. This position, shared by the DGB, became the

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<sup>588</sup> Dieter Frank Wienke, "Minenleger", *Der Arbeitgeber*, 6/42 (March 23, 1990), p. 212.

<sup>589</sup> Elisabeth Neifer-Dichmann, "Arbeitszeit in der DDR: Seit zwanzig Jahren kaum Veränderung", 2/42 (January 19, 1990), pp. 61-62; Werner Dichmann, "Arbeitnehmerschutz in der DDR: Ein Vergleich mit der Bundesrepublik", 4/42 (February 23, 1990), pp. 128-30; Kurt Kreizberg, "Soziale Sicherung in der DDR: Hohe Staatsquote – niedrige Renten", 6/42 (March 23, 1990), pp. 217-21; Klaus Adomeit, "Das Arbeitsrecht in den Systemen von Bundesrepublik und DDR: Pluralismus und Wahlrecht sichern die Gerechtigkeit", 9/42 (May 11, 1990), pp. 374-75; Alexander Barthel, "Innerdeutsche Aspekte der Lohnbesteuerung", 10/42, pp. 436-37.

<sup>590</sup> Manfred Kaufmann, "Arbeitseinkommen in der DDR", Sonderheft DDR, April 1990; Alexander Barthel *et al.*, "Vom Lohndiktat zur Tarifautonomie – Arbeitsbedingungen im deutsch-deutschen Vergleich", Sonderheft DDR II, Juni 1990. Another special part (Sonderteil) was published in August: Babette Wagner and Johannes Göbel, "Rechtsrahmen für die DDR-Tarifpolitik – Deutsch-deutscher Vergleich von Arbeitszeit und Urlaub", 15/42 (August 3, 1990), pp. 574-84.

object of an agreement between unions and employers' associations. Most of these developments took place between February 20 and March 9, 1990.

## **3.6 Achieving Monetary, Economic and Social Union: It takes three to tango**

### **3.6.1 The Monetary, Economic and Social Union in literature**

The Monetary, Economic and Social Union (MESU) between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, which went into effect on July 1, 1990, was the first and most crucial step towards achieving German unity. It marked the introduction of the Deutsche Mark in the GDR, the assumption of control over the country's financial and monetary policy by the West German federal government and the Bundesbank, the final transition to a free market economy and the opening of the market to international competition.<sup>591</sup> It initiated the legal and institutional transfer from the FRG to the GDR, which led a few months later to the incorporation of the new *Länder* into the Federal Republic.

The history of the MESU is well documented. The vast collection of documents from the years 1989/1990 housed at the Federal Chancellery is vital in understanding how the East German crisis was perceived by the chancellor and his entourage and, likewise, how they came to consider the rapid introduction of the DM and economic union as the optimum solution to this problem.<sup>592</sup> The standard work on the negotiations leading to the ratification of the MESU, published in a four-volume history of the German unity,<sup>593</sup> is especially informative on the evolution of the positions of the East and West German governments. For our purposes, an excellent source of supplementary information to Grosser's book is the history of the social union published by the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs.<sup>594</sup>

In their investigations on the top-level decision-making process, these three papers were successful in demonstrating how the firm-handed approach of the chancellor compelled the Bundesbank, West German industry and the East German government to act in line with his plan for the rapid transfer of the West German legal and economic system to the former East

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<sup>591</sup> Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung 1990.

<sup>592</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998.

<sup>593</sup> Grosser 1998.

<sup>594</sup> Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994.

Germany.<sup>595</sup> Two issues seem especially crucial in persuading Helmut Kohl to accelerate the pace of the MESU initiative. Firstly, the belief that, although economically risky, it was, politically speaking, the only possible route to take. Secondly, the results of the March 18 elections in the GDR, in which the CDU-affiliated Alliance for Germany (Allianz für Deutschland) gained 47.7% of the vote, were widely interpreted as a plebiscite in favor of his roadmap for reunification.<sup>596</sup> Helmut Kohl writes in his memoirs:

Mit diesem Votum hatte die große Mehrheit der Wähler in der DDR ein klares Signal dafür gegeben, die Wiedervereinigung nach Artikel 23 des Grundgesetzes zu vollenden. Das war für mich das allerwichtigste Ergebnis dieser Wahl. Und ich war ganz stolz darauf.<sup>597</sup>

The majority of studies on the MESU attach a great deal of importance to this union of (West German) political resolve and positive (East German) popular response. Yet other factors paved the way for the MESU treaty and would determine the final form it was to take. The fact, for instance, that the prosperous Federal Republic of Germany clearly enjoyed a position of strength and was successful in imposing its views on the GDR government during the preliminary talks and negotiations or as seen in the conversion of West German economic and social actors, including the trade unions and the employers' associations, to the chancellor's plan. In fact, many indicators would suggest that the implementation of the MESU required the participation of the West German social partners. This hypothesis shall be further developed in the upcoming pages.

A recent book by historian Gerhard A. Ritter confirms the importance of social policy and labor law in Helmut Kohl's unification plan.<sup>598</sup> The addition of the social component was designed to prevent pauperization and secure the acceptance of the new system among the East German population.

Die soziale Flankierung der Einheit betraf vor allem die Arbeitsmarktpolitik und das System der sozialen Sicherung. Durch eine starke Expansion der aktiven Arbeitsmarktpolitik, die zeitweise über zwei Millionen Erwerbstätige im Osten Deutschlands erfasste, versuchte man den wirtschaftlichen Umbruch abzufedern, einen «Dammbbruch», eine «beschäftigungspolitische Katastrophe», die zu einem sozialen Flächenbrand in den neuen Bundesländern hätte führen können, zu verhindern. Die Übertragung des relativ

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<sup>595</sup> "Währungsunion mit Wirtschaftsreform", February 7, 1990, in: Bundeskanzleramt 1998, document 165B.

<sup>596</sup> The Allianz für Deutschland was a coalition of the Ost-CDU, the Deutsche Sozialunion and the Demokratischer Aufbruch. On March 18, the Ost-CDU alone received 40,5% of the vote. Andersen/Woyke 1990 §40 summarize in clear-cut sentences the dominant view on the polls' results. In their analysis of the public opinion, Förster/Roski 1990 come to the conclusion that East Germans voted in favor of reunification and not for Kohl's proposition for rapid MESU.

<sup>597</sup> Kohl 2005, p. 1087-88.

<sup>598</sup> Ritter 2006.

großzügigen bundesdeutschen Systems der sozialen Sicherung sollte einer Verarmung der Bevölkerung entgegenwirken und die Akzeptanz der neuen Ordnung sichern.<sup>599</sup>

Ritter shows in his study the determination of the Chancellor, the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs, the DGB unions, the social-democratic opposition and the totality of East German political parties to proceed to a one-step thorough institutional extension of the West German labor law in the GDR. The opposition of some economic forces, mainly in the banking and financial sectors, did not weigh much against this resolve. Granted with an extensive access to closed archives, also from the DGB, Ritter re-enacts how the institutional extension of West Germany's labor and social laws in the GDR was carried out. The process he depicts is highly political, in the sense that his attention is grabbed by meetings and discussions between the chancellery, the federal labor ministry, and the East German government. Yet, he shows that DGB unions and BDA employers' associations were also associated to the decision-making processes regarding the extension of the labor and social laws to the GDR.

Before Ritter's book, detailed information as to the participation of other actors, e.g. the West German social partners, was not available. Ritter's hypotheses on the consequence of labor and social issues in the reunification is very similar to the one developed in these pages. Unfortunately, his 550-page study was published only a few weeks after this work had been completed, at a moment where it was no longer possible to discuss it appropriately in this context. The following account was thus written without recourse to this book. Gerhard A. Ritter would probably agree with parts of the argument developed in these pages, especially with the role of Chancellor Kohl behind the participation of the DGB unions and BDA employers' associations to the institutional extension of the West German labor and social systems in the GDR. However, Gerhard A. Ritter would probably object to the author of this paper, that the focus on the ratification of the tripartite consensus centers too much on the chancellery and the West German social partners and fails to acknowledge the specific role of Norbert Blüm, the Federal Minister for Labor and Social Affairs.

### **3.6.2 Establishing West German tripartite consensus?**

Although they do not explicitly make such arguments, the document collections of the chancellery and the labor ministry, as well as the study by Dieter Grossers suggest the West German government, trade unions and employers' associations reached an agreement by consensus in favor of Chancellor Kohl's plan for a MESU. This would take place *before* the East German

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid., introduction. Url: <http://rsw.beck.de/rsw/shop/default.asp?docid=190327>

elections of March 18, 1990, hence notwithstanding the consultation with the East German population. This consensus took the form of an informal agreement for the tripartite management of the East German economic, political and social crisis by West German actors. The meaning of the term *agreement* is in this case twofold: 1) more abstractly relating to an explicit acknowledgement by these actors of their responsibility to resolve the East German crisis and 2) more concretely in reference to the official announcement, in the form of a joint declaration by the DGB and the BDA, stating their intended course of action.

In a nutshell, the consensus involved the transfer of the FRG's framework for industrial relations to the GDR, as a precondition for the immediate entry of the West German social partners on the East German scene. Their role consisted of overseeing, industry by industry, enterprise by enterprise (by way of management and works council), the reorganization of work, the ratification of collective bargaining agreements, as well as the reconfiguration of wage structures, the technical guidelines on dismissals and redundancy packages, and programs for vocational training. The MESU treaty introduced a legal framework, whereby its implementation was left to the West German collective bargaining partners.<sup>600</sup> Hence, among the many implications, this consensus granted West German collective bargaining organizations a key role in achieving economic and social union, the core issue in German reunification.

Some political scientists have described the first collective bargaining sessions held in eastern Germany at the beginning of the 1990s as corporatist in nature.<sup>601</sup> Their insistence on adopting the shared objectives and strategies of the (West) German state and collective bargaining organizations during the first years of the 1990s indicate that relations were, without being totally void of tension, largely consensual in nature. Surprisingly, questions as to *why* corporatist agreements were allowed to be made, and *when* mutual relations between West German actors were initially established have not always received due attention by such scholars.

Experts in industrial relations have underlined, for their part, the key role played by West German labor and employers' organizations in the process of economic transformation in eastern Germany during the 1990s.<sup>602</sup> They did not however answer the question on *how* these organizations came to assume such important functions in the reunification process.

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<sup>600</sup> This should not be interpreted as somehow demeaning the role of other actors, such as the Bundesbank and the different governments, in the process.

<sup>601</sup> Kleinfeld 1992; Thumfart 2002, pp. 340-46 (with extended bibliographical references).

<sup>602</sup> Fichter 1991 and 1993; Röbenack 1992; Ettl/Wiesenthal 1994. See also the discussion on "transfer literature" in the first part (chapter 1.2.4).



This chapter attempts to shed light on a little noticed episode in the history of German reunification: consensus building between the West German government and the collective bargaining partners on the issue of achieving MESU. It seeks to provide details on why and how this consensus had formed between labor and employers' associations during the weeks of February 6, to March 9, 1990. It aims at highlighting the implications of this consensus for the DGB unions. It finally considers what the answers to these questions tell us about how German unity was achieved. As dates are central to the discussion here, a chronology is provided in the appendix.

### **3.6.3 Convincing people to stay in the GDR: A new strategy for unity**

The history of the MESU is examined in this chapter from a West German perspective. In other words, East German and international considerations are explicitly excluded from the following exposé, for the sake of clarity and conciseness in presentation. The addition of other factors and levels of political activity might further refine the argument being put forth here, but it is my belief that it would not significantly alter it.

#### **3.6.3.1 The Federal Chancellery's evolving position on the question of unity**

A report from the FRG's Permanent Representation in East Berlin, written at the beginning of December 1989, concluded: "Right now the power resides in the streets in the GDR".<sup>603</sup> When Helmut Kohl went to Dresden on December 19 for his first visit to the GDR since the beginning of the revolution, he could genuinely sense the truth in these words. What he saw made a very strong impression on him. The collapse of state power, the half-hearted nature of the reforms being implemented and the desperate state of the economy led him to the belief that the flow of migrants headed for West Germany was unlikely to stop. In Kohl's opinion, the East German people needed reasons to stay in the GDR. They needed to believe that their general situation – mainly in terms of their standard of living – would improve rapidly. This, he thought, demanded a realignment of his government's political and economical strategy on the GDR.

This realignment was twofold. Firstly, on the political level, West Germany decided to speed up the timetable on reunification. According to his memoirs, Helmut Kohl told his political staff upon departure from Dresden airport on December 19,

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<sup>603</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, document 114, "Fernschreiben des Staatssekretärs Bertele an Bundesminister Seitzers", December 7, 1989.

Ich glaube wir schaffen die Einheit. Das läuft. Ich glaube, das ist nicht mehr aufzuhalten, die Menschen wollen das. Das Regime ist definitiv am Ende.<sup>604</sup>

For Helmut Kohl, there could be little doubt, in spite of the fact that rapid reunification had to appear to come from the streets, it had to be initiated and managed by the federal government. Given the high level of social upheaval in the GDR, it was quite risky to give the appearance of trying to channel the protest, but Helmut Kohl wanted to make sure that the East German revolution had as its end result the integration of the GDR into the Federal Republic of Germany.

Kohls Strategie beruht auf zwei Leitgedanken. Einerseits muss er alles zu tun [sic], [um] die Entwicklung voranzubringen. Es darf jedoch nicht der Eindruck entstehen, als sei er die treibende Kraft. Vielmehr muss für alle überzeugend sein, dass es nicht die Bundesregierung ist, die auf die Wiedervereinigung drängt. Reinen Gewissens vermag Kohl nur dann Druck auszuüben, wenn er sagen kann, dass dieser nicht ursächlich von ihm selbst, sondern von den Leuten auf der Strasse in der DDR ausgeht. Andererseits darf der Umwälzungsprozess erst zu einem gewissen Abschluss kommen, wenn die Wiedervereinigung erreicht ist. Die Bundesregierung muss also dafür sorgen, die „Revolution unvollendet“ zu halten und „unblütig“ dazu.<sup>605</sup>

Secondly, on the economic level, the federal chancellery became active in its pursuit of ways for West German private capitals to enter and invest in the GDR. The question of “how billions of DM could flow into the GDR in a short period of time?” had become the main topic of discussion in Bonn.<sup>606</sup> “I am convinced that an economic boom can only take place if the general conditions on the ground are right,” declared Helmut Kohl at the conference of the Chambers of Industry and Commerce from Low Saxony. Investors must have confidence that they are making good use of their investment resources and that they will be profitable.”<sup>607</sup> In order to establish whether the conditions for massive private investments existed in the GDR, the head of the chancellery, Rudolf Seiters, met on January 9, 1990 with 14 economic experts from the federal chancellery, several ministries, banks and industry in order to establish whether the conditions for massive private investments were now in place.<sup>608</sup>

The observations shared in this discussion gave the experts little reason for optimism: the conditions for direct investment by West German investors were not in place at the current

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<sup>604</sup> Kohl 2005, p. 1028.

<sup>605</sup> Introduction by Hanns Jürgen Küsters: Ibid, p. 77. The quotes are taken from Schäuble 1991, p. 5 [sic: p. 23: “Die Revolution unvollendet halten, unblutig halten, weil nur so war der Sache der Einheit zu dienen war – der Leitgedanke bestimmte auch mein Verhalten gegenüber der Ost-CDU”].

<sup>606</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, p. 71, 80.

<sup>607</sup> Speech held on January 12, 1990. Presse- und Informationsdienst der Bundesregierung vom 18.1.1990, quoted in: Von Plato 2003, p. 328.

<sup>608</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, “Gespräch des Chefs des Bundeskanzleramtes Seiters mit Wirtschaftsexperten”, January 9, 1990, document 137.

time; reliable information on the state of the East German currency and debt was not available; the lack of adequate instruments of monetary policy created the risk of inflation; five different exchange rates between the East and West German Mark existed<sup>609</sup>; the DM was likely to become a parallel currency and the nature of the monetary policy adopted by the East German government was still impossible to predict; prices, and more crucially, the system of price formation were still pending reform; the arrival of old-age pensioners by the thousands in the FRG was expected to continue unless retirement pensions increased.<sup>610</sup> The common assumptions were that the economic reforms were insufficient and implemented too slowly, that the enterprises should be granted greater autonomy and, finally, that no one seemed willing or able to take the necessary steps in the GDR.

The experts remained realistic on what could be hoped for. In the opinion of State Secretary von Würzen, one could not expect to achieve comprehensive price reform and total freedom of investments in a short term. He recalled that they had not been implemented in West Germany in one fell swoop in 1945 either. The head of the German Industry and Trade Conference (DIHT) suggested that one should determine who among the East German opposition activists were the most “economically responsible”, and attempt to make them spokespersons, or “conveyors”, as he termed it, of a “better” economic policy. Was there any opposition group with a concept on introducing market economy reforms, however rudimentary, replied a skeptical State Secretary Tegtmeier?<sup>611</sup>

Tegtmeier's doubts were confirmed two weeks later, when Rudolf Seiters met with the representatives from the East German opposition groups at a round table discussion in East Berlin.<sup>612</sup> All of the parties expressed reservations about the economic programs set forth by Seiters. Many participants complained that the discussions were dominated by economic issues and ignored the social implications.<sup>613</sup> Studies confirm the existence of a strong social component in all economic programs developed by the East German opposition in 1989-1990.<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Among them, 1:1 and 1:5 in the currency funds; 1:3 in the private transport sector; 1:4,4 was also used, to which different rates freely determined in other kinds of exchanges must be added. Ibid., p. 691.

<sup>610</sup> State Secretary Tegtmeier from the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs underlined that the average East German pension was of 400 to 500 Ostmark per month, whereas the West German average amounted to 20,000 DM p.a.. About 100,000 new pensioners thus resulted in 2 billions DM of extra public spending. Ibid., p. 693.

<sup>611</sup> “Sts Dr. Tegtmeier fragt später zu diesem Fragenkomplex, ob es überhaupt Gruppen gebe, die ein halbwegs geschlossenes Marktwirtschaftskonzept kennen und vertreten wollen”. Idem.

<sup>612</sup> The Round Table was the name given to the unelected East German government led by SED head Hans Modrow; this also included the participation of opposition groups.

<sup>613</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, “Gespräch des Bundesministers Seiters mit Vertretern des Runden Tisches”, January 25, 1990, document 146.

<sup>614</sup> Roesler 2002; Zatlin 1994.

Many of the reforms called for by the federal chancellery had been launched by the East German government during the second half of January.<sup>615</sup> By the end of the month, however, the situation had not stabilized in the GDR; if anything it was worsening. In conversations with a group of chancellery representatives, Hans Modrow portrayed a country plagued by strikes, violence and loss of state control.

MP Modrow zeichnete ein düsteres Bild von der inneren Lage der DDR. Er wies auf den Verfall der staatlichen Autorität, übergreifende Streikbewegungen und die Gefahr von Gewaltanwendung bei inneren Auseinandersetzungen hin. Er warb nachdrücklich um Unterstützung von unserer Seite durch positive Signale und auch durch konkrete wirtschaftliche/finanzielle Hilfe; hierzu übergab er eine Liste mit Wünschen. (...)

Die Entwicklung im Lande führe in zunehmendem Maße zu Instabilität, die sich jetzt auch an der Basis, auf der Kommunalebene, bemerkbar mache. Entscheidungen und Überlegungen müßten ständig aus der Notwendigkeit des Tages getroffen werden. (...) Die Kräfte am Runden Tisch hätten auf die Entwicklung im Lande keinen Einfluß mehr. Das gelte für die Vorgänge vom 15. Januar sowie für die Demonstrationen in Leipzig.<sup>616</sup>

In the meantime, the East German government and the Round Table had also agreed on the principle of reunification and, as an attempt to stabilize the collapse of state power, agreed to reschedule the May 6 elections for March 18. However, contrary to Hans Modrow's expectations, this convergence of positions of the two states was not greeted in Bonn as an incentive to greater collaboration. The former uncertainties hampering the implementation of the federal government's roadmap were now vanishing.<sup>617</sup> For one thing, Helmut Kohl and his advisers were less concerned about finding East German actors to promote their program for reforms than they were in making the shift to a position of openly promoting it themselves.

### **3.6.3.2 The new strategy: Rapid monetary and economic union**

A note, dated January 29, prompted Chancellor Kohl to use the newfound consensus on the goals reached between the two German governments to take the initiative and set the agenda for post-election negotiations.<sup>618</sup> In order to achieve this, a "proper roadmap" for achieving

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<sup>615</sup> These measures were presented to the Federal State Secretaries to a positive reception on January 24, 1990 (Ebenda, document 142).

<sup>616</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Gespräch des Bundesministers Seiters mit Ministerpräsident Modrow", January 25, 1990, document 147. The West-Berlin Senator Pfarr made a similar portrayal: Ebenda, "Deutschlandpolitisches Gespräch bei dem Chef des Bundeskanzleramtes Seiters", January 24, 1990, document 142.

<sup>617</sup> Kohl 2005, p. 1057 and 1064; Schäuble 1991, p. 24.

<sup>618</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirigenten Hartmann", January 29, 1990, document 151. The author indicated that SPD MPs shared the same positions.

unity had to be tabled no later than the beginning of March, the note suggested.<sup>619</sup> This plan should introduce a “policy of grand measures”, thus skipping certain stages of the convergence process initially envisaged in the chancellor’s ten-point plan from November 28, 1989.

Some elements of this strategy proposed to the chancellor did not influence the course he would eventually take. The January 29 note is nevertheless highly informative on the objectives guiding the chancellery’s actions at the end of January 1990: setting up a plan for accelerated reunification; taking control over the negotiations by making this plan public before the election of a new government in the GDR; the priority given to monetary, economic and social issues over political unity.

Die entscheidende Frage der nächsten Jahre wird sein, wie schnell es gelingt, mit der DDR eine Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion herzustellen, die den Bedingungen in beiden deutschen Staaten gerecht wird. Ebenso wichtig wird die schrittweise Anpassung der Sozialsysteme sein. Hierzu könnten grundsätzliche Aussagen getroffen werden, wobei es auch erforderlich sein wird, sich auf den ordnungspolitischen Rahmen festzulegen (“sozial verpflichtete Marktwirtschaft”).

The note left little doubt that, from the federal government’s perspective, reunification signified the extension of its legal, political and economic systems. In order to bring pressure to bear on the future East German government, the note recommended that the government sign off with its international allies, and even the Soviet Union, on the outline of this agenda prior to opening negotiations.

The “economic reconstruction of the GDR” was again indicated as the top priority in the forthcoming negotiations in a draft proposal presented to the chancellor three days later.<sup>620</sup> This proposal contained the key points of Kohl’s roadmap for unity (“Proposal to the GDR Leadership on Opening Negotiations on Monetary Union and Economic Reform”) formally presented on February 6. When Helmut Kohl met Hans Modrow in Davos on February 3, he used the occasion to set out his government’s new strategy had been determined. With the East German head of state describing the political situation as catastrophic and trying to persuade his counterpart in Bonn to work together to reverse it, Helmut Kohl agreed that some drastic

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<sup>619</sup> The note specified “before the reappearance of Oskar Lafontaine” on the federal political scene. The head of the Saarland SPD was in all probability going to win the May elections in this *Land* and was critical of any plan for rapid reunification.

<sup>620</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, “Vorlage des Regierungsdirektors Mertes an Bundeskanzler Kohl”, February 2, 1990, document 157.

steps were required before the elections, but he did not go so far as to inform Modrow of the nature of the measures he had decided to undertake.<sup>621</sup>

The roadmap, announced on February 6, 1990, attempted to resolve two interrelated issues: the collapse of state authority in the GDR and the stream of East German migrants to the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the basic principle underlining the roadmap, the flow could only be stemmed through private capital, but potential West German investors were still put off by the economic and social conditions on the ground, as well as the lack of sufficient economic reforms undertaken in the GDR. The roadmap had the aim of establishing the legal framework within which West German capital could begin flowing into eastern Germany immediately. For the federal government, the next step consisted of mobilizing West German actors to assist in implementing this roadmap.

### **3.6.4 Assembling West German runners at the starting line: The course of the Federal Chancellery from February 6 to March 18, 1990.**

Many, even within Helmut Kohl's government, were caught off guard by his extension of an invitation to the East German government on February 6 to negotiate "monetary union with accompanying economic reforms". On the same day, the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Helmut Hausmann, had published a plan drafted by his office. It envisaged a three-stage economic and monetary union, which was to be fully implemented by January 1993. In an attempt to accelerate the process and achieve monetary union at the beginning of the reform process rather than at the end, the government had unexpectedly reversed course on its strategy, which represented an about-face even within the cabinet. The ministers nevertheless bowed to the argument that even if a "gradual process within a longer timeframe would be preferable", the continuous stream of migrants heading west and the ongoing collapse of state authority in the GDR made immediate resolute actions "unavoidable". They therefore granted approval to the chancellor's new course of action that same day.<sup>622</sup>

A re-calibration of the ratio of wages to productivity in the GDR was central to achieving monetary and economic union. Finance Minister Theo Waigel explicitly made this point in a letter to the CDU's parliamentary group on February 7. To attain this goal, productivity rates, estimated by experts at about 50% of their West German counterparts, needed to improve. To

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<sup>621</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Ministerpräsident Modrow", February 3, 1990, document 158.

<sup>622</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Vermerk des Regierungsdirektors Nehring", February 6, 1990, document 163.

mobilize billions of German Marks, West German private investors needed assurances on the legal status and economic conditions faced by East German enterprises. Among the preconditions for private investments, Theo Waigel named free collective bargaining.

4. Eine Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion setzt ein gemeinsames ordnungspolitisches Fundament voraus. Die Einzelheiten hierzu sind bekannt: Herstellung von Märkten, freie Preise, Dominanz des Privateigentums an den Produktionsmitteln, freier Außenhandel, Gewerbefreiheit und Rechtsschutz, freie Tarifvertragsparteien, ein leistungsfähiges Steuersystem.

5. (...) [Die Mobilisierung von Privatkapital] wiederum setzt einen ausreichenden Investitionsschutz und möglichst liberale Bedingungen für ein Engagement westlicher Investoren voraus.<sup>623</sup>

According to government plans, the setting of wages, the establishment of minimum working conditions and provisions on redundancy agreements and vocational training were left to the collective bargaining organizations. In other words, if they were to be implemented, the monetary and economic union required the participation of negotiating parties who (1) accepted this legal and economic framework; and (2) were able to immediately assume the duties imparted on them within this framework.

#### **3.6.4.1 The reaction of the West German economic actors to the chancellor's plan**

To paraphrase the Frankfurter Rundschau's front page headline from February 9, 1990: the vast majority of economic actors in the Federal Republic of Germany rejected monetary union. The head of the Federation of German Industries (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie), Tyll Necker, claimed that monetary union would allow East Germany to attain a level of prosperity comparable to West Germany within a short period of time.<sup>624</sup> The Bundesbank's president, Karl-Otto Pöhl, expressed grave doubt on its chances of success. The German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung) deemed Kohl's roadmap "counterproductive" and "incapable of stemming the flow of migrants". The institute felt that monetary and economic union would most probably lead to an increase in unemployment rates in both countries and that East German enterprises could likely not survive direct international competition without an initial transition period during which they would be afforded protection.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Währungsunion mit Wirtschaftsreform", February 7, 1990, document 165B.

<sup>624</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 9, 1990, quoted in: Vilmar/Guittard 1999, p. 23.

<sup>625</sup> "DIW-Präsident: Die von Bonn gewollte Einheitswährung ist kontraproduktiv", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 10, 1990.

The Dresdner Bank challenged the chancellor's rationale for monetary union and stressed that GDR's debts were not unbearably high and that, although not "strong", the *Ostmark* was certainly far from being the "weakest currency".<sup>626</sup> International financial circles had concerns about the stability of the DM due to the immense costs involved with monetary union and reforming the East German economy.<sup>627</sup> In a letter to the chancellor, the head of the Council of Economic Advisors (the so-called Five Wise Men) challenged the government's position on several key points: 1) monetary union prior to economic reform would not stop the flow of migration due to the large number of bankruptcies that would certainly result from it; 2) a common currency was likely to highlight the differences in wages and produce claims for pay rises, thereby creating the risk of wages outpacing productivity.<sup>628</sup> The Confederation of German Employers' Associations did not take an official stance but left, as in many cases, it to the Federation of German Industries to criticize the government's policies.<sup>629</sup>

The DGB unions did not criticize Kohl's proposal to the same extent that those in the industrial, banking and finance sectors did. Six press statements on the GDR and the German reunification published by the DGB between February 7 and 15, instead suggest that the proposal compelled the West German trade unions to reconsider their strategy. The most remarkable feature of these six declarations is without doubt how they managed to remain silent on Bonn's roadmap and did not take a stance on the issue.<sup>630</sup> The declarations from February 7, 8, 9 and 13, made absolutely no mention of Kohl's proposal.<sup>631</sup> On February 14, the DGB harshly criticized the federal government for its refusal to deliver immediate assistance of 15 billions DM as requested by the 17 ministers at the round table discussions, but it did not take a position on the overall agenda pursued by Bonn.<sup>632</sup> Whatever the reason may have been for this, whether intentional or not, it can be interpreted as a gradual and passive acceptance of Bonn's agenda on the part of the DGB unions.

These six press statements reveal the DGB's two main priorities. One was to incorporate a social component into monetary and economic union. This objective was in line with Kohl's

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<sup>626</sup> *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, February 21, 1990, quoted in: Zatlin 1994, p. 73.

<sup>627</sup> "Hält die D-Mark die Währungsunion aus?", *Die tageszeitung*, February 14, 1990.

<sup>628</sup> Bundeskanzleramt 1998, "Schreiben des Sachverständigenrats zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung, Schneider, an Bundeskanzler Kohl", February 9, 1990, document 168.

<sup>629</sup> The previous chapter has shown that the Confederation of German Employers' Associations rapidly evolved toward the government's positions after February 6.

<sup>630</sup> DGB unions have no further reaction to Bonn's roadmap in those days; nor did the DGB.

<sup>631</sup> "DGB fordert umfangreiche Soforthilfen für die DDR und Kurswechsel in der Finanzpolitik", February 7, 1990; "Geuenich: Es muß einen gesamtdeutschen Tisch geben", February 8, 1990; "Breit: Deutsche Lösung nur im europäischen Rahmen möglich", February 9, 1990; "Dialog DGB/ZDH fortgesetzt", February 13, 1990. The DGB press statement quoted in this and the next six footnotes are from: DGB Nachrichten-Dienst 1991.

<sup>632</sup> "DGB: Wirtschaftliche und soziale Risiken der Währungsunion abfangen", February 14, 1990.



roadmap, as it took the form of a *roadmap+*, in DGB's press statements. One aspect of this social component as identified by the DGB was the establishment of social welfare programs for the unemployed, the retired and the "socially disadvantaged"; immediate aid valued at 15 billions of DM; a public fund for modernizing the East German infrastructure and environmental protection. The DGB also called for the introduction of the freedom of association, collective bargaining autonomy and co-determination rights in the GDR, plus the establishment of a strong, free trade union movement.<sup>633</sup> The second priority of the DGB was also compatible with Kohl's roadmap as it entailed the "coordinated involvement" of West German economic actors in stopping the flood of migrants to the Federal Republic of Germany. To reach this goal, the DGB called on governments, employers and trade unions to act in unison to find solutions to the most urgent social problems in the GDR.

Zur Lösung dieser "außerordentlich komplizierten Fragen" schlug Geuenich "die Einrichtung eines deutsch-deutschen Tisches, spätestens nach dem Wahltag in der DDR am 18. März" vor. An einem solchen Tisch müssten die entscheidende Kräfte beider Teile Deutschlands gemeinsam versuchen, die Entwicklung in den Griff zu bekommen. Und diese entscheidende Kräfte seien die Regierungen, das Unternehmerlagen und die Gewerkschaften, sagte Geuenich.<sup>634</sup>

A first step in coordinating the actions of the West German economic actors as requested by the DGB occurred with the publication of a declaration by the DGB and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks, ZDH) on February 13. This declaration stated that political change in the GDR would be marked by the introduction of some form of a social market economy.

Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) und der Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks (ZDH) sind sich darin einig, dass die politischen Reformen in der DDR mit einem wirtschaftlichen Strukturwandel hin zu einer sozialen Marktwirtschaft verbunden sein müssen.<sup>635</sup>

By mid-February, the DGB was on the way to adopting the basic outline of Bonn's agenda as its own. At that time, however, it was still opposed to the legal extension of the West German labor law in its current state without improvements, although the confederation did not specify what type of improvements it wanted.<sup>636</sup> Contrary to the federal chancellor, the DGB also maintained a certain degree of ambivalence on the issue of the total timeframe for the German

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<sup>633</sup> Idem; "DGB fordert umfangreiche Soforthilfen für die DDR und Kurswechsel in der Finanzpolitik"; "Blätter: Marktwirtschaft in der DDR nur mit sozialer Komponente", February 15, 1990.

<sup>634</sup> "Geuenich: Es muß eine gesamtdeutschen Tisch geben".

<sup>635</sup> "Dialog DGB/ZDH fortgesetzt".

<sup>636</sup> I.e., its criticism of the West German *Handwerksordnung* and its rejection of the ZDH transfer proposal in the GDR. Idem.

reunification process. On several occasions, Ernst Breit continued to press for a slow approach, something the federal government had rejected.

“Auch für uns ist eine Vertragsgemeinschaft zwischen der DDR und der Bundesrepublik eine politische Perspektive, die eines Tages vielleicht auch zu föderativen Strukturen führen kann”, sagte Breit.<sup>637</sup>

These were minor differences between its position and the federal government’s course. One Press statement published by the DGB in the weeks following the announcement of Bonn’s roadmap suggest the organization was passively accepting it. A shift in position was occurring which would soon lead the DGB unions to act in concert with the FRG government and employers’ associations on the issue of the transfer of the institutions and practices of industrial relations to the GDR.

#### **3.6.4.2 Negotiations between German governments: Ensuring the extension of the labor law**

Helmut Kohl’s invitation to open negotiations on monetary and economic union was viewed by the East German government for exactly what it was: an attempt to seize the initiative before the March elections and to mobilize West German private capital.<sup>638</sup> During a visit to Bonn on 13-14 February, Hans Modrow made an unsuccessfully bid to pressure Helmut Kohl into immediately opening negotiations on the terms of the monetary union. This would provide him the opportunity to acquire a degree of legitimacy for his government, with a view towards the upcoming elections. The federal chancellery’s refusal to ascent to this request and open the negotiations with an un-elected government found its corollary in the active effort to persuade West Germans and other parties to support its reunification proposal.<sup>639</sup> This effort was directed toward West Germany’s international allies such as the United States, France and Europe, as well as the Soviet Union. It was also geared towards a number of West German institutions and organizations, e.g., trade unions and employers’ organizations.<sup>640</sup> When defining the weeks from February 6 to March 18 as a period of “internal preparations” in

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<sup>637</sup> “Breit: Deutsche Lösung nur im europäischen Rahmen möglich”.

<sup>638</sup> Grosser 1998, pp. 199-202.

<sup>639</sup> As we will see, this public refusal to open negotiations with the Modrow government should be taken with a grain of salt, as the “Experts Discussions on the Implementation of Monetary Union” between the two governments took place from February 20 to March 13. These meetings, which preceded the East German elections, were crucial to the process of ratifying the Monetary, Economic and Social Union. See: Grosser 1998, pp. 209-224.

<sup>640</sup> On February 9, the Federal government could be certain the *Länder* (the majority of which were under SPD leadership) supported its course of action. The president of the Bundesbank, Karl Otto Pöhl, also kept his criticisms to himself after February 7.

West Germany, Dieter Grosser is speaking of the intense activity within the West German state structures to pressurize the *Länder* to accept reunification. The meetings and talks with trade unions and employers' associations, held during those weeks, can also be included as part of these "internal preparations".

Let us now consider how the "social union" was added to the initial plan for "monetary and economic union". This initiative had its origins within the federal government.

The Cabinet Committee on German Unity (Kabinettsausschuß Deutsche Einheit) held its first session on February 7 and was chaired by Kohl. The Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs was party to this committee, and it was charged with the task of planning the extension of the West German welfare system to East Germany. Previous meetings between civil servants from this ministry and their East German counterparts had been used by the former to argue for the adoption of the same structures for its welfare system by the former. Their goal had been to preserve the West German structures.<sup>641</sup> Now that the federal government had seized the initiative on reunification, exerting influence over East German decision-makers had become secondary in importance, while efforts to draw up plans on extension were now at the top of the agenda. When the Cabinet Committee met on February 14, a Working Group on the Labor and Social Affairs (Arbeitsgruppe Angleichung der Arbeits- und Sozialordnung) was created and given until March 6 to detail any problems likely to hinder the rapid extension of the West German welfare system.

When the 17 ministers of the Round Table met the head of the chancellery, Rudolf Seiters, on February 13 and 14, they announced their intention of introducing a social charter in the GDR. This charter, listing East German citizens' social rights, was to be basis of negotiation for the GDR in talks with West Germany on monetary, economic and social union.

Intense discussions between representatives of the Round Table, opposition activists and West German lawyers, and specialists in labor and social law (such as Professor Stephan Leibfried from the Bremen University) on the first weekend in March led to the drafting of the Social Charter. It took the form of a list of rights (Ansprüche), as time constraints did not allow them to produce a more universal document.

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<sup>641</sup> "Es galt von vornherein, die eigene Position gegenüber möglichen Veränderungen als Folge deutsch-deutscher Entwicklungen zu behaupten und zu sichern. Was über Jahrzehnte hingewachsen und sozialpolitisch immer wieder bestätigt worden war - wenn auch meistens im Streit! -, sollte auf dem Umweg über die DDR nicht gefährdet, ja, nicht einmal im Wortsinne „in Frage gestellt“ werden können. Diese Haltung war überwiegend in den bezwingenden Charme scheinbar uneigennütziger Hilfe gekleidet, entsprach aber im übrigen lediglich den gegebenen Wettbewerbsbedingungen in der Bundesrepublik." Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994, p. 28.

The charter contained numerous clauses relating to labor and made multiple references to the European Social Charter and ILO declarations. The East German labor code (*Arbeitsgesetzbuch*) also served as template for those drafting the document. The charter's first article, for instance, proclaimed the "right to work". The right to work was intended as a universal right and called for an active state policy on employment, guarantees on collective bargaining autonomy, as well as the right to strike, the prohibition of lock-outs, and pledges of further vocational training programs. Allowances were also made for the refusal of work overtime and restricting the normal workweek to 40 hours. The second article advocated company-financed kindergartens and holiday resorts. Without specific reference to the GDR – in fact, many clauses echoed the DGB unions' program, many provisions to the Social Charter were rooted in labor's experience in its own country. They aimed at preserving rights deemed legitimate and likely to ensure better protection for workers against the negative impact of economic reform.

The strong "social" aspect of the Social Charter was dismissed by the East German Chamber of the People, which rejected the document. During the final session on March 7, the members of the Chamber merely approved the principle (*Grundlinie*) of the Social Charter and ratified 22 positions (*Standpunkte*) that should serve as a guideline in further deliberations by the next government. Even if some of the principles listed in the Charter would continue to be part of the catalogue of demands put forward by the East German government in the coming months (e.g., the ban on lock-outs), the Social Charter project had de facto been abandoned. Many East German MPs had refused to ratify claims they felt were unlikely to the Federal government to cooperate with the East German government to achieve reunification.<sup>642</sup>

These concerns were well-founded. The shelving of the Social Charter, however, would in no way prevent the federal government from doing just that. Aside from a few caustic remarks to the press, the entire West German political class remained silent on both the project and the diplomatic rejection of the Social Charter by the Chamber of the People.

Wer in Bonn nach Spuren der DDR-Sozialcharta forscht, tut das vergebens. Im Bundeskanzleramt ist amtlich nichts erfaßt, im Deutschen Bundestag ebenfalls nichts – gar nicht zu reden von der Gemeinsamen Verfassungskommission.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Gerd Poppe revealed that the East German government wondered whether the Round Table had not "lost its mind" after perusing the draft proposal of the Social Charter. Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994, pp. 34-35.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35; Grosser 1998, p. 210.

The refusal by the West German political class and the unions to address the issue of the Social Charter was not only an attempt to drain the life out of the budding East German initiatives deemed incompatible with the legal extension approved by Bonn. It also signified the transfer of authority, orchestrated by the chancellery, over the political developments in the GDR.

A new step in this direction was taken on February 20, with the first Experts Discussions on Preparing for Monetary Union (Erstes Expertengespräch zur Vorbereitung der Währungsunion) between the two German governments. Even if the federal government described them merely as preliminary talks prior to future negotiations on monetary and economic union, these discussions focused on nothing less than outlining the steps for implementing monetary and economic union. The Preliminary Report by the Commission of Experts on Preparations on Monetary Union (Zwischenbericht der Expertenkommission zur Vorbereitung der Währungsunion) from March 13, adopted the principle of legal extension as the basis of negotiations between both states. This was a victory for the West German delegation.<sup>644</sup>

Therefore, a few days before the East German elections, both German states agreed that reunification would, according to the formula, start with the rapid “monetary and economic union, backed up by social measures”. They had also agreed on the principle of extending the West German welfare systems to cover the GDR; the details and transition measures still needed to be negotiated with the next East German government. They had finally agreed to refrain from any political interference or intervention in the collective bargaining process in compliance with the West German model of collective bargaining autonomy (Tarifautonomie). Unions and employers’ associations were given responsibility for preparing the technical aspects and addressing the social impact of the economic reform on the GDR (wage grids, labor processes, employment and dismissal, vocational training).

With the Preliminary Report, the West German delegation had succeeded in instigating the reunification process along the basic contours of the February 6 roadmap prior to the March 18 East German elections. The two delegations had not yet reached accord on all matters. The delays in implementation were among the contentious issues, as Berlin demanded more time than Bonn considered necessary. The East German delegation also refused to abandon the law on the trade unions and its claim for the right to work.<sup>645</sup> Nevertheless, between February 20 (the First Experts Discussion on Monetary and Economic Union) and March 13 (the Prelimi-

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<sup>644</sup> Grosser 1998, p. 224.

nary Report), the federal government had succeeded in imposing its “extension” agenda for achieving reunification and, in so doing, had gained the initiative on this issue.

### **3.6.4.3 Achieving consensus amongst the West German collective bargaining partners**

There was a major byline to the story of the German-German negotiations. It concerned the realignment of the positions held by West German unions and employers to favor the chancellor’s course of action on reunification during this period. Between February 20 and March 9, tripartite consensus on the extension of the West German labor law, welfare system and industrial relations was achieved.

At 10:00 am on February 20, a few hours before the first experts discussions on the monetary and economic union between the two German states, Chancellor Kohl met 16 representatives of West German employers and industrial associations, 24 heads of enterprises and banks and two trade union leaders at the Federal Chancellery.<sup>646</sup> The aim of this 3-hour meeting was to determine the nature of the role to be played by these organizations and enterprises in the GDR. In his letter of invitation to the president of the BDA, Klaus Murmann, Helmut Kohl wrote:

[D]ie jüngsten Entwicklungen in der DDR fordern auch von uns rasches Handeln. Nur so können wir unseren Teil dazu beitragen, dass unsere Landsleute in der DDR wieder eine begründete Zukunftsperspektive sehen und in ihrer angestammten Heimat bleiben. (...)

Wir wollen gemeinsam rasch wirkende Möglichkeiten für Direkthilfen und Investitionen zugunsten der DDR erörtern. Angesichts der Dramatik der Entwicklung bitte ich Sie um ihre persönliche Teilnahme.<sup>647</sup>

After initial widespread rejection of Helmut Kohl’s proposal in economic, industrial and financial circles, all parties to the February 20 meeting now stated their willingness to collaborate with the federal government in achieving monetary and economic union. The president of the Federation of German Industries, Tyll Nekker, shared with the Kohl government the belief

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<sup>645</sup> In a milder form than the one put forward in the Social Charter, however. On all the Experts discussions and Preliminary Report, see: Grosser 1998, pp. 209-224.

<sup>646</sup> I was provided with the list of participants by the BDA archive staff, and it is included in the appendix (copy handed to the author by the BDA).

<sup>647</sup> Letter from Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl to the President of the BDA, Bonn, February 8, 1990 (copy given to the author by the BDA).

that the East German economy should be reformed mainly by “its own internal forces”, i.e., market forces, with state subsidies and financial injections kept to a minimum.<sup>648</sup>

For the purpose of this analysis, the position defended by employers’ associations during this meeting is crucial. The Confederation of German Employers’ Associations petitioned for the introduction of free wage formation (an economic mechanism) in the GDR. Its president went on to explain that this presupposed collective bargaining autonomy, the formation of employers’ associations, the freedom of strike and the ban of lock-outs. The employers’ associations also expressed their preference for extending West German laws on labor to East Germany (employment and dismissal, co-determination, Works Constitution Act) and the abandonment of East German labor laws.

Für die Angleichung der beiden Wirtschaftssystemen zu einer Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion seien marktwirtschaftliche Bedingungen nicht nur bei der Preisbildung, sondern auch bei der Lohnfindung einzuführen. (...) Die Tarifautonomie sei gesetzlich zu verankern. Das bedeute: Unabhängige Arbeitgeber- und Arbeitnehmerorganisationen sowie das Recht auf Streik und Aussperrung. Dabei sei ein Gleichgewicht der Kräfte erforderlich.

Niveau und Zuwachs der Löhne müssten sich an den Produktivitätsverhältnissen orientieren. Auch das Recht der Arbeitgeber, Einstellungen und Entlassungen – nach Maßstäben des westdeutschen Kündigungsschutzes – vornehmen zu können, sei eine notwendige Voraussetzung für Anpassungsfähigkeit der DDR-Wirtschaft und damit für ihren Aufschwung.

Die Mitbestimmung nach dem Arbeitsgesetzbuch der DDR müsse (...) durch das Betriebsverfassungsgesetz der Bundesrepublik ersetzt werden.<sup>649</sup>

The Confederation of German Employers’ Associations finally called for the extension of West Germany’s welfare system. In actual fact, the employers’ associations were agreeing to Bonn’s roadmap in terms more explicit than those still used by the DGB.

Aside from Ernst Breit, the head of the “white collar” German Employees Union (Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft, DAG), Roland Issen, was the only trade union representative present at the Federal Chancellery on February 20. Given the number of entrepreneurs, industrialists and financiers, the absence of more DGB unions’ heads and the Federal Minister for Labor and Social Affairs, Norbert Blüm, is indicative of the main object of this meeting, namely to convince the major West German economic actors that Bonn’s roadmap for reunification established the necessary preconditions for private investment in the GDR. The declara-

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<sup>648</sup> “DGB verlangt 15 Milliarden für DDR-Sofortprogramm”, *Die tageszeitung*, February 21, 1990.

<sup>649</sup> PDA [press division of the BDA], “Arbeitgeber zum Wirtschaftsgespräch beim Kanzler: Marktwirtschaftliche Bedingungen auch bei Löhnen in der DDR”, February 20, 1990.

tion by the Confederation of German Employers' Associations quoted above demonstrates, however, that topics relating to the labor law, industrial relations and the welfare system were also discussed. The positions put forward by the employers' association may well have convinced union representatives that there was common ground to be found between West Germany's social parties in achieving reunification.

After the meeting, the DGB insisted on distancing itself somewhat from the federal government's positions. The union confederation renewed its call on the federal government to transfer the payment of promised assistance of 15 billions DM. Talking to journalists, Ernst Breit criticized what he called "the lack of strategy" of the federal government when it came to guaranteeing a rise in the quality of life for East German citizens and protection against unemployment. He also criticized the fact that the positions taken by various organizations, institutions and enterprises present at the meeting had only been voiced, but that it never actually came to open debate between those in attendance. The introduction of the market economy did not mean a wholesale adoption of the entire "system from the Federal Republic of Germany" by the GDR, concluded Breit, arguably with the positions of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations in mind.<sup>650</sup>

Chancellor Kohl emerged from the meeting with a different understanding of the DGB's positions than the statements made by Ernst Breit led some journalists to believe. According to Kohl's close associate, Horst Teltschick, Ernst Breit had expressed "constructive ideas", which were by no means in opposition to those of the government. Recalling Helmut Kohl's account of the meeting with the cabinet, Teltschick's very brief comments in his memoirs focus exclusively on the DGB president's receptiveness to monetary and economic union. Obviously Helmut Kohl had been surprised to find the DGB leader was *not* opposed to his plan of action.

Es sei ungewöhnlich ermutigend verlaufen. DGB-Chef Ernst Breit habe sich sehr konstruktiv verhalten. Alle seien überzeugt, dass Tausende von Projekten in Gang kämen, wenn erst die Rahmenbedingungen geschaffen seien.<sup>651</sup>

In Kohl's opinion, the DGB was predisposed to implementing his agenda for monetary and economic union. However surprised he might have been, the DGB's press releases from the previous two weeks had indicated this willingness. At least two considerations must have compelled the chancellor to seek the support and participation of the West German trade un-

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<sup>650</sup> "DGB verlangt 15 Milliarden für DDR-Sofortprogramm"; "Firmen stehen in Startlöchern", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 21, 1990.

<sup>651</sup> Teltschick 1991, p. 154.



ions and employers' associations for his plan. The first related to the multiple roles played by these organizations in the operation of the welfare state in West Germany, e.g., through their representatives on the boards at the social services department or due to the close connection between collective agreements and the financing of the social security system.<sup>652</sup> Before the February 20 meeting at the chancellery, Labor Minister Norbert Blüm had already made it clear that monetary and economic union could only be achieved with the active participation of free trade unions and employers' associations. The following excerpt from an interview can be interpreted as a veiled advance to DGB unions and BDA associations to participate in the government's agenda on extension. Norbert Blüm was well aware that no trade unions in the GDR, let alone employers' associations, which were non-existent, were in a position to launch and manage such highly complex and technical tasks.

[R]ichtig ist, dass man ein Zusammenwachsen des Sozialstaates nur organisieren kann, wenn auch die Finanz- und Wirtschaftspolitik ordnungsgleich ist. Sie können nicht einer sozialistischen Ordnung ein Sozialsystem mit Selbstverwaltung, wie wir es haben, aufoktroieren. Da fehlen schon allein die Partner wie freie Gewerkschaften und Arbeitgeberverbände.<sup>653</sup>

The second consideration relates to the "incalculable social risks" associated with implementing this type of shock therapy on the East German economy.<sup>654</sup> In order to bring the standard of living in the two Germanies more into line while at the same time maintaining social order, monetary and economic union required the participation of established collective bargaining partners, closely based on the mechanisms of West German industrial relations and social legislation.

To put it bluntly, for the extension of West Germany's economic and social system to the GDR to work, the participation of the West German unions and employers' associations was absolutely imperative. It was these organizations who would determine the nature and impact of the economic reforms, through collective bargaining and the establishment of works councils at the workplace.

Besides these two arguments, based on the inherent logic of the chancellery's course, one important stance by DGB head Breit and two official declarations by this organization

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<sup>652</sup> See: Allen 1997, chapter 13, "Governance and Policy Making", esp. p. 296. Christopher S. Allen's explanations are based on: Peter Katzenstein, 1987, *Policy and Politics in West Germany: The Growth of a Semi-Sovereign State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

<sup>653</sup> "Die DDR braucht Aufbau eines Sozialstaates wie in der Bundesrepublik", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 10, 1990.

<sup>654</sup> Grosser 1998, p. 199.

confirm the alignment of the positions of West German social partners on the agenda of the federal government.

Until the second half of February, the DGB unions supported the restructuring the system for defending the interest of East German workers, without itself interfering in the process. The March 1990 issue of the DGB monthly, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, published an article by Ernst Breit calling for a shift in this strategy.<sup>655</sup> All previous reservations should be abandoned, the DGB head wrote, in favor of resolute action to build free and independent trade unions in the GDR as rapidly as possible.

Die große Frage, auf die es bislang nur kleine leise Antworten gibt, lautet demnach: Was kann die Gewerkschaftsbewegung aus eigener Kraft? In der DDR liegt die alte Gewerkschaft am Boden. Was an ihre Stelle treten soll, darüber herrscht, zumindest dem Arbeitstitel nach, flächendeckende Eintracht vom Rhein bis zur Oder/Neiße: eine freie und unabhängige Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Ihr Entstehungsprozess allerdings wurde erstens durch die fatale Konstellation behindert, dass der DGB auf die Aktion der Arbeitnehmerschaft der DDR und diese auf das Tätigwerden des FDGB und seiner Gewerkschaften wartete. Zum anderen wurde über die Alternative gestritten, ob freie Gewerkschaften in der DDR am Ende eines Reformprozesses des FDGB stehen oder nur auf dem Wege einer Neugründung gebildet werden können. (p. 130)

According to the strategy outlined in the excerpt, which prompted them not to make any specific claims, Ernst Breit now identified several clear objectives for the West German unions in the GDR. First, their activities had to acknowledge that reunification was imminent (“At present, rejecting reunification can only be viewed as a sectarian politics,” p. 131). Secondly, the German union movement had to unify as fast as possible. Thirdly, trade unions had to guarantee a high level of social security for the East German population to go along with economic reform.

Das Rezept der wirtschaftsliberalen Wunderdoktoren, ohne Rücksicht auf soziale Verluste erst einmal die Ökonomie gesunden zu lassen, führt in der Regel zu kranken Gesellschaften und undemokratischen Staaten. Die Marktwirtschaft ist nicht sozial, sondern brutal. Marktwirtschaft ohne die Verankerung des Sozialstaates und ohne den Ausbau der Demokratie würde die DDR-Bevölkerung vom Regen in die Traufe geraten lassen; der erhofften Goldregen bliebe den Kassen der Konzerne vorbehalten. (p. 132)

Breit justified the need for strategic reorientation on this matter using the argument that quick action was demanded to block the plan of the Kohl government. He presented it as economic reforms based solely on market forces – i.e., with no social protection, a frightening prospect naturally both for the DGB unions and the East German workers. One would search, however,

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<sup>655</sup> Ernst Breit, “Deutsche Einigung – ohne und gegen die Gewerkschaften?”, in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 3/90, pp. 129-132.

in vain in this text for any indication of how DGB unions would oppose Bonn's agenda while working, at the same time, towards reunification. This hint of verbal radicalism – DGB unions' involvement was required in order to block the implementation of the “model” and “conservative principles” of the federal government - veiled a strategic reorientation which, in fact, included collaborating in the putting Helmut Kohl's reunification plan into place. This was done to ensure nothing less than full extension of the West German labor and social systems. Although he continued to warn against merely extending West Germany's legal system to the East, Ernst Breit nevertheless used the well-known post-war slogan of Konrad Adenauer against nationalization. In this context, “No experiments!” could be interpreted as support for the extension of the West German welfare state and industrial relations to include the GDR.

Verständnis dafür zu verweigern, dass der alte Adenauer-Slogan “Keine Experimente” in der inzwischen wieder schweigende DDR-Mehrheit grassiert, wäre fast so arrogant wie das Gehabe macher, die mit D-Mark gerüstet und der Gnade der westlichen Geburt gesegnet gen Osten aufbrechen. (p. 131)

Ernst Breit's article announced the publication of two declarations by the DGB, representing several further steps towards a new strategy. The first was the Resolution on German Unity, dated March 7.<sup>656</sup> This document, produced on behalf of the West German union movement, clearly favored reunification, something the DGB had refrained from doing to date. The resolution continued to echo the ideas of the previous months, including the need to maintain the ban on lock-outs in the GDR<sup>657</sup> and to revise the West German labor law. Yet the improvements sought by the DGB were used merely as a pretext for injecting another variable into the debate, something which had now become DGB's top priority: obtaining a guarantee that reunification would not result in fewer rights for West German workers. It was under this condition that the DGB unions were willing to take an active role in pushing for monetary and economic union.

Auch für die gegenwärtige Situation in der Bundesrepublik gilt es, die Chance des Einigungsprozesses zu nutzen. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass hier millionenfache Arbeitslosigkeit, krasse Ungerechtigkeiten bei der Verteilung von Einkommen und Vermögen, kein Verbot der Aussperrung, unzureichende Mitbestimmungsrechte, Defizite bei der

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<sup>656</sup> “Entschließung zur deutschen Einheit”, March 7, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>657</sup> Whether one could interpret this to mean that the ban of lock-outs should be upheld *temporarily* in the GDR or adopted *permanently* in a reunified Germany, is not specified in the resolution or in any other declaration by one of the DGB unions. It suggests that the DGB unions did not believe that the policy banning lockouts would be adopted in a reunified Germany. This ambiguity should temper DGB unions' repeated contention that their persistent calls for maintaining the ban on lockouts somehow signified their rejection of simple legal extension of the West German social welfare system. The lack of political action to support those calls for maintaining the ban on lockouts shall be analyzed in the next chapter.

Versorgung mit öffentlichen Gütern und Dienstleistungen und zahlreiche weitere Mängel bestehen, darf der Weg hin zur deutschen Einheit einschließlich der hieraus für die Bundesrepublik zunächst resultierenden finanziellen Belastungen nicht zu einem Stillstand bei der Beseitigung dieser Mängel führen oder gar dazu missbraucht werden, tarifpolitische Verweigerungshaltungen der Arbeitgeber zu begründen. Keinesfalls darf das Zusammenwachsen der unterschiedlichen wirtschafts- und sozialpolitischen Regelungen in beiden deutschen Staaten zum Abbau von Arbeitnehmerrechte führen.

The DGB concluded its resolution with a call for the German union movement to unify as a necessary counterweight to monetary and economic union.

Der DGB setzt sich zum Ziel eine einheitliche deutsche Gewerkschaftsbewegung zu schaffen, um den Anforderungen entsprechen zu können, die sich durch Kooperationen von Unternehmen der Bundesrepublik und der DDR und durch eine Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft und Währungsunion ergeben.

The Joint Declaration by the DGB and the German Confederation of Employers' Associations for a unified economic and social welfare system was the second declaration marking this strategic shift. It was published only two days after the resolution, and added further details on at least two points.<sup>658</sup> Firstly, the Joint Declaration left no doubt that statements by the DGB welcoming unification could only be understood to mean a rapid process based on monetary and economic union as proposed by the federal chancellery.

DGB und BDA begrüßen das Angebot der Bundesregierung, eine Wirtschaftseinheit und Währungsunion zwischen beiden deutschen Staaten zu schaffen. Sie ist ein wesentlicher Schritt hin zur politischen Einheit und trägt zugleich dem Anliegen der Mensch der DDR auf Verbesserung der dortigen Lebensverhältnisse Rechnung.

Wirtschafts- und sozialpolitischen Fortschritt in der DDR wird es nur auf der Basis einer Ordnungspolitik geben können, die marktwirtschaftlichen Prinzipien folgt. Sie ist auch Voraussetzung für die dringend notwendigen unternehmerischen Investitionen.

Eine Reform der Wirtschaftsordnung schafft zugleich die Voraussetzung für ein stabiles währungspolitisches Fundament. Beides – Wirtschaftsreform und Währungsunion – muß rasch und gleichzeitig erfolgen.

Secondly, the Joint Declaration affirmed the necessity to bring the working and living conditions throughout the reunified Germany into line, with the high standards of West Germany as the reference point.

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<sup>658</sup> “Gemeinsame Erklärung des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes und der Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände zu einer einheitlichen Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion in beiden deutschen Staaten”, March 9, 1990, in: DGB 1991. This declaration was written during a meeting between DGB and BDA presidents, Ernst Breit and Klaus Murmann, on March 9. The BDA archive does not include any documentation on this meeting. The documents stored at the DGB archive are not open to the public.

Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund und die Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände sind sich darin einig, dass eine wirtschaftliche Neuordnung der DDR sozial abgesichert werden muss. Wirtschaftliche Effizienz und soziale Gerechtigkeit gehören in einer sozialen Marktwirtschaft zusammen. Allerdings wird eine Angleichung an bundesdeutsche Sozialstandards nur in Etappen zu erreichen sein. Dafür sind die Unterschiede in den vorhandenen Strukturen zu groß. Im Interesse einer organischen Gesamtentwicklung kann es nur um die allmähliche und schrittweise Schaffung einer einheitlichen Sozialordnung gehen.

These goals common to the DGB and the BDA – economic reforms and gradual leveling of the social standards – left little room for future improvements to the federal labor and social laws, something the DGB unions still presented as their goal in the resolution published two days earlier. One half of the two-page Joint Declaration consisted of a list of policy tools that should be introduced in the GDR for preparing the groundwork for leveling the social standards in unified Germany: collective bargaining autonomy for trade unions and employers' associations, unemployment benefits, the merging of welfare programs on the basis of the West German method of financing and payment, co-determination rules corresponding to those in place at West German enterprises and, finally, vocational training programs based on the West German dual model. The mechanisms identified by the DGB and BDA were the key pillars of their program in West Germany. They were in other words, the measures they intended to introduce in the former East Germany.

The Joint Declaration ended where Helmut Kohl's roadmap started off, namely with the attempt to convince East German workers to stay in the GDR.

Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund und die Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände appellieren an die Menschen in der DDR, dort zu bleiben und damit die Voraussetzungen für eine Gesundung und Stabilisierung von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft zu verbessern. Hinzu kommt, dass die Kapazitäten in der Bundesrepublik für die Aufnahme weiterer Übersiedler erschöpft sind.

The Joint Declaration from March 9 marked the alignment of the West German collective bargaining partners on the program promoted by the federal chancellor.<sup>659</sup> A working group consisting of representative from the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs, the DGB, the BDA and the German Employees Union (Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft) was formed on March 12, one day before the ratification of the Preliminary Report by both German delegations, announcing the extension of the West German labor law and welfare system in East Germany. The working group met a second time on June 26, only a few days before the

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<sup>659</sup> The March editorial of BDA's *Der Arbeitgeber* (published on March 9), stressed the importance of maintaining the principles of the West German "social market economy for the whole Germany". *Der Arbeitgeber*, 5/42, p. 172.

MESU came into force, and again a few weeks later on August 7. The formation of this working group only three days after the DGB/BDA Joint Declaration is a further indication that, aside from preparations for legal extension, the weeks from February 20 to March 13 were used to set up a crisis-management alliance, which included a team of West German actors to manage the economic reforms and its social impact. Yet without access to the DGB archives, it is still impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy the exact nature of the meetings of this working group.

It is not possible at this time to confirm with any certainty the author's suspicions that informal tripartite meetings were held some time between the chancellery meeting of February 20 and the first meeting of the Working Group on March 12. But many elements suggest coordinated action on the part of the three parties. Why did the DGB and the BDA unexpectedly begin promoting a policy that they had up to now refused to support, only a few short days before March elections in East Germany? Why did the DGB and the BDA request that key pillars of industrial relations in West Germany be introduced in the GDR, specifically in the days where the federal government was pressurizing its East German counterparts to acknowledge general institutional transfer as the guiding principle of reunification? Finally, what is the likelihood that the DGB and the BDA were preparing to assume crucial roles in the drive to achieve MESU without any sort of coordination with the federal government – in negotiations on this issue?

The closest the author came to receiving confirmation of his belief that informal tripartite meetings had indeed occurred took the form of several nods of acknowledgement by one IG Metall secretary, a member of the union's GDR Working Group. I have explained in chapter 1.4.3 how all attempts to obtain a definite answer as to the content of these informal meetings during an interview with this secretary came to naught.

As explained in the review of the literature, the analysts studying the institutional transfer develop a slightly different argument. Helmut Wiesenthal and others believe that the DGB/BDA Joint Declaration of March 9 aimed at forcing the federal government to openly acknowledge that the West German social partners played a specific role in achieving reunification.<sup>660</sup> This argument is lacking in two respects. Firstly, it does not take into account the chronology of events. The Cabinet Committee had begun deliberations on how to organize the institutional transfer of West German labor and social laws at its first meeting on February 7, whereas the DGB unions and the BDA associations did not react to the chancellor's proposal

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<sup>660</sup> Wiesenthal 1995b. See 1.2.4.

for several weeks. Secondly, it fails to take full account for the fact that, without the participation of West German collective bargaining partners, the federal government's roadmap for reunification could not have been achieved. The Joint Declaration cannot itself be viewed as separate and distinct from the positions advocated by the federal government relating to the transfer of the labor laws and welfare system during its negotiations with its East German counterparts. There is nothing in the DGB/BDA Joint Declaration that countered these positions. It rather complemented them by incorporating collective bargaining autonomy.

It is therefore likely that the chronological parallels between the imposition of the West German labor laws and welfare system on the East German government and the decision of the West German collective bargaining partners to promote the extension indicates that a West German tripartite consensus did indeed exist. The blend of formal and informal tripartite policy-making typical to certain periods in West German political life<sup>661</sup> - and Helmut Kohl had made some attempts to revive such practices<sup>662</sup> - adds to the likelihood that tripartite consensus on Monetary, Economic and Social Union was achieved in this manner. As it was not possible to access the DGB archives, the author is unable to shed any more light on the process leading up to the drafting and publication of the Joint Declaration. The archives will be opened to the public and for research purposes in four years' time.

### **3.6.5 The new logic behind DGB unions' activities: Achieving social union**

Any confirmation that the definition of a new course by the DGB unions had been facilitated by informal tripartite meetings would shed more light on the road to Germany's unification. Yet, even if this hypothesis is disproved, it would not change the fact that a West German tripartite consensus on the extension of the labor laws and the welfare system did de facto exist prior to the East German elections of March 18, 1990.

#### **3.6.5.1 A key moment in the reunification process**

The significance of this consensus, symbolized by the DGB/BDA Joint Declaration, in regards to the reunification process is to this day not given its proper weight.<sup>663</sup> Even publications on the MESU, like Dieter Grosser's study or a book on the topic from the Federal Minis-

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<sup>661</sup> Markovits 1986; Allen 1997. Thelen 1991 argues however that the Federal Republic cannot be considered a typical "corporatist country".

<sup>662</sup> See chapter 3.1.2.3.

<sup>663</sup> Once again this sentence was written before Gerhard A. Ritter's book on the topic (Ritter 2006). Although I leave my point of view untouched, it has been made irrelevant with this publication.

try for Labor and Social Affairs, left the issue untouched. Aside from the support lent by the West German collective bargaining partners to MESU, two other points would seem to confirm the key role the tripartite consensus played in the reunification process.

Firstly, the Joint Declaration is crucial in explaining why the *social* component was incorporated into Kohl's initial proposal on monetary and economic union. If one carefully reads the press reports and articles from March and April 1990, it will become abundantly clear that the two German delegations began referring to the Monetary, Economic and *Social* Union as the core issue in their negotiations. The reasons for the sudden addition of the social union into the economic reform plan initially drawn up in Bonn has failed to spark the interest of researchers, who use both expressions interchangeably. Sources at the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Affairs simply indicate that the social component was incorporated into the program in the weeks immediately following the initial proposal, as it became increasingly important to define the framework for managing the social risks associated with economic union.

Je mehr in den folgenden Wochen deutlich wurde, welche Brüche und Verwerfungen die Währungs- und Wirtschaftsunion auslösen würden, desto mehr rückte freilich die Notwendigkeit in den Vordergrund, als wesentliches drittes Element die Sozialunion hinzuzufügen.<sup>664</sup>

Secondly, the Joint Declaration put the West German social partners into crisis management mode to tackle issues relating to East German labor. With the Joint Declaration, the DGB unions and the BDA associations volunteered for front line duty in a reform process that was to strike a strong blow to the world of labor. The next chapters shall demonstrate how the experiences on the front forced them to consolidate their activities in eastern Germany, much to the detriment of local actors. This pattern – assumption of West German institutional control over these activities in the new *Länder* –, indeed so characteristic of the reunification process,<sup>665</sup> was exemplified and initiated, by the crisis management performed by the West German collective bargaining partners in relation to the East German labor.<sup>666</sup>

### **3.6.5.2 The three sources of the tripartite consensus**

The previous chapters have introduced various concerns held by the federal government, the DGB unions and the BDA associations in regards to the changing situation in the GDR. Three

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<sup>664</sup> Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994, p. 19.

<sup>665</sup> Thumfart 2002.

<sup>666</sup> Ettl/Wiesenthal 1994. See 1.2.4.



in particular were shared by these West German actors and opened the way for this consensus to take shape. Let us summarize them in brief.

The first source was the decision that the stream of migration from East to West Germany had to stop. The arrival of tens of thousands of East Germans each month threatened to undermine the financial stability of the social security programs, such as retirement pensions, health care and the unemployment schemes.<sup>667</sup> The DGB unions also worried about the concomitant downward pressure exerted on wages and working conditions in West Germany.

The second source of the tripartite consensus involved the necessity to define the legal framework for the process of economic reform in the GDR. This required that the legal conditions for the protection of private property and lifting of the prohibition on profit were first put in place. Its goal also included specifying the limits to employers' and workers' power within an enterprise and the duties of each party. In some East German enterprises, workers were quickly growing accustomed to discussing management decisions and, on some occasions, even voted out managers who made unpopular decisions. Potential West German investors were turned off by this legal uncertainty, and so were the DGB unions. They, however, feared that West German employers could use the legal ambiguities existing in the GDR to establish zones where workers were given less protection and rights, a situation which would necessarily have repercussions on West Germany and on a reunified Germany.

The third source of the tripartite consensus was the desire to incorporate provisions on social security within the framework of these economic reforms. This became an absolute necessity in the face of the dual goal of rapid economic reforms and a rapid improvement in the standard of living. High levels of social protection had to be provided in the GDR in order to stop its citizens from leaving.

These sources paved the way for the tripartite consensus and the intense involvement of the West German collective bargaining partners in the reunification process. This consensus was a success of Kohl in his attempts to forge new alliances between his government and various institutional actors in West Germany on the issue of reunification.<sup>668</sup> For the DGB member

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<sup>667</sup> The Federal Republic would have to allocate 1.8 billion DM for every 100,000 East German unemployed workers in the country. According to Labor Minister Blüm, twice as many unemployed workers could receive benefits if they were to stay in the GDR. "Arbeitslosenkasse für die DDR?", *Die tageszeitung*, March 6, 1990.

<sup>668</sup> Patton 1994. While Patton is mistaken in regards to the position of DGB unions takes on the economic union, which he depicts as rejectionist, the argument he develops in this article is similar to the perspective adopted in this work. Patton shows that Kohl's choice of West German allies in the quest for reunification was made before the East German elections of March 18, 1990.

unions, this entailed the adoption of a new course of action, which in turn was to form the basis for a new strategy.

### 3.6.5.3 The new logic of DGB unions' action

Despite the emphasis placed in this chapter on exploring the theory of informal tripartite meetings between February 20 and March 9, it is important not to characterize the unions' course of action *after* those meetings as some sort of secret pact. In truth, few West German union leaders were involved in talks with the chancellor during those days. When discussing my theory with the Media Industrial Union's former president Detlef Hensche (1990: vice-president), he refused to entertain the notion that such meetings actually took place (see chapter 1.4). The IG Metall secretary who confirmed the existence thereof was not surprised by Detlef Hensche's reaction since "he [Hensche] was not present and had probably never heard anything about them". Yet, as most West German union leaders did not meet with Helmut Kohl in those days, all DGB unions strictly followed the new course of action at this time. In fact, it was Detlef Hensche himself who was the first official from the DGB unions to press for the extension of the labor law.<sup>669</sup> Hence, the true factors behind the strategic shift relate to concerns expressed on the repercussions of a collapse of the GDR (East German migration, fewer worker rights in the GDR, et al.). Yet, if the tripartite consensus cannot be attributed to some sort of secret pact that West German actors would simply implement afterwards, what is it that was actually agreed upon? What issues did this consensus leave unresolved?

The consensus represented first and foremost a common voice in favor of extending West Germany's welfare state, labor laws and industrial relations to cover the GDR. In doing so, it aided in undermining the GDR government's position in favor of merging the two respective concepts on the welfare state and labor laws during the negotiations. However, the question on whether or not to supplement the extension of the West German labor law with stopgap measures, was, by all appearances, not addressed by the three West German actors at this time.

The tripartite consensus also involved extending West German wage agreements to include East Germany. This entailed a colossal organizational effort on their part, which in turn needed to be achieved within a short period of time, namely before or immediately after the MESU entered into law on July 1<sup>st</sup>. The main tasks for the trade unions demanding immediate action included: the establishment of union structures in the new *Länder*; the organization of

works councils at enterprises; legal advice to East German member unions and training for East German trade unionists on issues of West German labor law; the ratification of collective wage agreements; and the ratification of redundancy, employability and vocational training programs.

This consensus provided solutions to the questions left unanswered the restructuring of the defense of workers' interests in the GDR. The role assigned to East German actors as part of the duties enumerated above was to be settled once the actual process had begun.

In other words, the tripartite consensus in itself did not represent the new strategy of the West German trade unions. It rather marked the introduction of a new logic to their core policy toward Eastern Germany, from which the new strategy would be derived. This new course of action had the target of preserving West German labor laws and maintaining the levels of social protection in a unified Germany. It established three criteria for assessing any strategic option: the effectiveness, predictability and speed of implementation. It finally stated its preference for solutions produced during top-level negotiations with the federal government and employers' associations.

How this new logic evolved into a new strategy shall form the core topic of the two final chapters of this study. The tripartite consensus and the DGB/BDA declaration had not provided solutions to all the questions raised by the East German crisis, but certainly did change the nature of DGB unions' responses by changing the way they were posed.

### **3.7 DGB Unions and the Institutional Extension of West German Industrial Relations I: Establishing the Framework for Expansion**

This chapter analyzes the role played by the DGB unions in the eastward *extension* of West Germany's labor laws and industrial relations. This extension might also be termed an "institutional transfer" - and perhaps this standard concept taken from social sciences should have been used here in this case. The reason why the rather unusual term "institutional extension" is preferable to transfer is due to the distinct West German perspective this expression offers, i.e., the export of specific institutions, whereas transfer would rather suggest an East German

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<sup>669</sup> See 3.2.2.4.

perspective, i.e., the import of institutions. Institutional transfers are usually initiated by the states where the institutions are established, in this case the GDR. To speak of an institutional transfer of West German industrial relations in the GDR might create the impression that the main impetus behind the transfer came from East German actors. My argument runs counter to this claim, namely that the institutional expansion of industrial relations was shaped by West German actors.

The present chapter opens with an analysis of the part played by the DGB in the disbanding of the FDGB. It then goes on to consider how the DGB acted in order to guarantee the full extension of West German labor laws - in other words, with no improvement to or reduction of worker rights. Some West German unionists were wary of this “no give, no gain” strategy, dedicated to the establishment of institutions that West German trade unions had long criticized as insufficient and whose reform was at the core of their program. Despite, or because of this uneasiness voiced by various parties, the lack of any alternative proposition among the DGB unions in those months, the strongly held belief that no alternative strategy was practical, would strongly indicate a programmatic exhaustion of the West German trade union movement.

### **3.7.1 The role of the DGB in the disbanding of the FDGB**

The reactions to the FDGB congress, held on January 31 and February 1, 1990, were rather muted at the DGB headquarters in Düsseldorf. The chaotic course of the congress and unresolved questions, one of which concerned the nature of the ties between the trade unions and their confederation, raised doubts as to FDGB’s capacity for internal reform.<sup>670</sup> The delegates had ratified a resolution calling for a law on trade unions with co-determination rights from the workplace level (the right to veto all decisions and appointments, up to and including the director) to the state level (the right to propose and challenge legislation effecting workers). The resolution also included the ban on lockouts and a right to strike (i.e., general or “political” strikes).<sup>671</sup>

Very few officials from the West German unions considered such legislation on trade unions to be a realist legal framework for the future of East German trade unions. Among the East German workforce, the opinions on the course and the resolutions of the FDGB congress ran

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<sup>670</sup> “Nach nur zehn Minuten brach das Mißtrauen auf”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 1, 1990; “FDGB droht mit Generalstreik” and “Eklat auf FDGB-Kongreß” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 2, 1990.

<sup>671</sup> “Entwurf des gewerkschaftlichen Dachverbandes FDGB für eine Änderung der DDR-Verfassung”, February 1, 1990, reproduced in: Gill 1991, document 20. On the FDGB congress, see: Weinert/Gilles 1999, pp. 91-102.

the full spectrum, ranging from positions supporting the immediate disbanding of the FDGB<sup>672</sup> to the belief that the congress had set in motion a genuine renewal of trade union activities in the country.<sup>673</sup>

Immediately after the FDGB congress, the head of the German Post Union (Deutsche Postgewerkschaft), Kurt van Haaren, persuaded the DGB to increase presence of West German unions in the GDR and expand its collaboration with the FDGB. This measure was necessary, he explained, in order to strengthen the inadequate reforms initiated. DGB's executive board agreed on a motion to open a Berlin office responsible for liaising with the FDGB and its unions.<sup>674</sup>

The support and collaboration strategy appeared to receive further support, after DGB vice-president Werner Milert had severely criticized the control of FDGB's apparatus by former SED officials during a meeting of the confederation's national executive board. The DGB union heads, also present, expressed varying degrees of support for Milert's point of view. As a result the DGB executive board decided to leave it up to each member union to individually assess the extent of reforms conducted within the sister organization(s) and determine the exact nature of their collaboration with them.

[Werner Milert führt aus], dass die alten Funktionäre noch vorherrschen und die SED/PDS ihre Leute im FDGB unterzubringen versucht. Positiv sei nur der Schritt zur Bildung autonomer Einzelgewerkschaften. Nach den Berichten aus den Gewerkschaften über des Stand der Kontakte und der Reformbemühungen in den neuen Einzelgewerkschaften des FDGB stellen die Teilnehmer u.a. fest, dass die Erneuerungsfähigkeit der bestehenden DDR-Gewerkschaften unterschiedlich einzuschätzen sei und von daher, „bei aller Gemeinsamkeit, die es zwischen DGB und Gewerkschaften geben soll, von einer unterschiedlichen Vorgehensweise der Gewerkschaften in bezug auf ihre Ansprechorganisationen in der DDR auszugehen ist“.<sup>675</sup>

A regional committee of the DGB and FDGB was opened in Berlin on February 26, with the aim of finding common solutions to problems such as unemployment, speculators and the black economy.<sup>676</sup> Two days later, DGB's national executive board allocated 2 millions DM in funds for expanding contacts between the trade unions in each country. A series of working

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<sup>672</sup> More than 800,000 FDGB members had left the organization between December 1, 1989, and January 31, 1990. See: "Verspielt der FDGB seine Millionen-Basis?", *Die tageszeitung*, January 31, 1989.

<sup>673</sup> "Die Unsicherheit wächst: Gespräch mit Gewerkschaftern der Firma Bergmann-Borsig über die betriebliche und gewerkschaftliche Lage", in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 5-6/90, p. 394.

<sup>674</sup> Fichter/Kurbjuhn 1993, February 12, 1990, p. 78. The extended chronology by Michael Fichter and Maria Kurbjuhn shows that those DGB unions, who had not already opened advisory offices in the GDR, did so between mid-February and the beginning of March.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, February 16, 1990, p. 79.

<sup>676</sup> "Regionalausschuss. DGB und FDGB gründen für den Großraum Berlin einen Ausschuss", *Die tageszeitung*, February 28, 1990.

groups was also set up.<sup>677</sup> Speaking in front of journalists, Ernst Breit declared that reunification should not take the form of a simple extension of West German laws.<sup>678</sup>

As the previous chapter illustrated, such declarations no longer reflected the DGB's actual positions at the time they were made in the final days of February. The first DGB union to announce a shift in stance was the Chemistry Industrial Union. This union's head, Hermann Rappe, called for a cessation of all contacts with the FDGB and for the disbanding of the East German unions within the DGB organizations. All attempts by FDGB head Helga Mausch to present such views as minority opinions within the DGB were unsuccessful, as they rapidly found numerous followers.<sup>679</sup>

After the March elections, the DGB started to publicly distance itself from the FDGB. In front of the executive committee of the Post Union, DGB head Ernst Breit publicly criticized the reforms implemented by the FDGB for the first time. He called on the East German trade unions to speed up the pace of reform. If certain elements within the DGB had any serious misgivings on the reforms undertaken by the FDGB, it was rare to find any press statements with so much reserve.

Nachdrücklich kritisierte Breit die „Halbherzigkeiten“ des DDR-Gewerkschaftsbundes FDGB und einiger seiner Mitgliedsgewerkschaften. (...) „Noch immer klammern sich zu viele an die bisherigen Gewerkschaftsstrukturen und Machtverhältnisse“, kritisierte er. (...) „Strenge Zurückhaltung“ [by the DGB unions] sei in zweifelhaften Fällen geboten.<sup>680</sup>

The relationships between the two union federations rapidly deteriorated. By the end of March, newspapers were reporting that the Bundesbank was considering a general exchange rate of 2 GDR Marks to 1 DM (2:1). The DGB and the FDGB shared a position supporting a 1:1 rate. Arguably as a means to revitalize its image, the FDGB openly attacked the Bundesbank's proposal and tried to organize a campaign against it.<sup>681</sup> On April 3, FDGB head Helga Mausch sent a draft joint declaration stating its opposition to the 2:1 rate to Ernst Breit. This contained veiled references to the possible recourse to general strike action.

Die Gewerkschaften wenden sich mit Entschiedenheit gegen die Empfehlung der Bundesbank und führender Politiker der BRD-Regierung, die DDR-Mark im Verhältnis 2:1 umzutauschen. Das ist nicht nur Wahlbetrug. Es ist vor allem ein unzumutbares und unerträgliches Spiel mit den Sorgen, Erwartungen und Ängsten vieler Menschen. Sozial-

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<sup>677</sup> Fichter/Kurbjuhn 1993, February 28, 1990, p. 81.

<sup>678</sup> “Breit selbst meinte dazu, es dürfe nicht dazu kommen, dass das BRD-Recht über die DDR übergestülpt wird”. “FDGB und DGB auf einer Linie“, *Die tageszeitung*, March 3, 1990.

<sup>679</sup> Quoted in: Pirker et al. 1990, p. 62.

<sup>680</sup> “Breit: In der DDR ‚schnellstens Tritt fassen‘”, March 23, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>681</sup> “Protest gegen Währungsspekulation”, *Tribüne*, April 2, 1990, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 62.

abbau, Altersarmut und wirtschaftliche Not sind damit programmiert. Das nehmen wir als Gewerkschaften nicht hin. (...) Deshalb fordern wir vom Bundeskanzler und der Bundesregierung, das Wahlversprechen einzuhalten. Wir werden für die Rechte der Gewerkschaftsmitglieder mit allen Mitteln eintreten.<sup>682</sup>

Ernst Breit's answer was brief and to the point:

Werte Kollegin Mausch. Bezugnehmend auf die Telexe von Kollegen R. Schramm vom 2. und 3. April teile ich Dir mit, dass der DGB einer gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Währungsunion mit dem FDGB nicht zustimmt. Der DGB-Bundesvorstand hat in seiner Sitzung am 3.4.1990 dazu eine eigene Erklärung abgegeben.<sup>683</sup>

The press statement that Ernst Breit was referring to argued for an exchange rate of 1:1, but was not forceful in its style and contained no indication that the DGB considered its opposition to the Bundesbank's plans one of its top priorities.<sup>684</sup>

Together with East German environmental, women's and civic organizations, as well as those fighting for the rights of the unemployed, the FDGB and its member unions organized a day of protest against the 2:1 exchange rate on April 5, with around one million people gathering throughout the GDR (100,000 in Berlin).<sup>685</sup> The DGB refused to take part for fear of being instrumentalized by the FDGB.<sup>686</sup>

In fact, the DGB was now concentrating its efforts on the dissolution of the FDGB and unifying German trade unions under its umbrella. When the DGB announced its decision to suspend all collaborative activities with the FDGB, the delegates to the first post-*Wende* congress of the East German mines and energy trade union (IG Bergbau, Energie und Wasserwirtschaft) were taken by surprise.<sup>687</sup>

Only the collaboration between trade unions was maintained. Yet the positions of the East German trade unions did not differ greatly from those that the DGB presented as characteristic of the FDGB. The delegates from the East German Mines and Energy Union voted for a resolution supporting a political strike against the 2:1 exchange rate. In an interview, the president of the DGB miners union, clearly irritated by the decision, stated in reaction to this

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<sup>682</sup> "Fernschreiben Nr. 8584822 vom 3.4.1990", quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>683</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>684</sup> The first sentence is indicative of the text as a whole: "Vor übereilten Festlegungen bei der Verwirklichung der Währungsunion zwischen der Bundesrepublik und der DDR warnte am Dienstag der Bundesvorstand des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes." See: "DGB-Bundesvorstand: Währungsunion mit der DDR muss Vertrauen in den Einigungsprozess schaffen", April 3, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>685</sup> "Wir sind ein blödes Volk!", *Die tageszeitung*, April 6, 1990.

<sup>686</sup> Weinert/Gilles 1999, pp. 116-117.

<sup>687</sup> "IGBE-Gewerkschaftstag mit kleinen Fehlern", *Die tageszeitung*, April 9, 1990.

vote that “other measures would be more appropriate in a parliamentary political system”.<sup>688</sup> The DGB unions refused to take the debate over the exchange rate into the public arena and this choice appears partially determined by a desire to isolate the FDGB.

The FDGB attempted to escape its isolation. In retrospect, many of the assertions made in its declaration from April 27 apparently fail to register the developments of the previous months, as if somehow ignoring the crucial steps that had been taken toward the institutional extension of the West German system. The FDGB claimed that any merger of the German union movements required the collaboration of the federations and trade unions in both countries; that workers in the GDR should have the right to determine what kind of workplace representation they preferred; that East German enterprise-based trade unions should be placed on an equal footing with works councils; that the legal distinctions between blue-collar and white-collar workers should be eliminated in a unified Germany. The declaration called for the support of the DGB and its union members, though it insisted that these battles were primarily to be waged by the FDGB and the East German trade unions.<sup>689</sup>

This declaration is the object of severe criticism from contemporary observers, who understandably faced great difficulty in explaining its significance.<sup>690</sup> In spite of any reservations one may have on the content of the text, the publication of this declaration can be seen as a sign of resistance to the attempts of the DGB to force the disbanding of the FDGB. In a resolution put to vote on April 18 (nine days before the declaration by the FDGB and the East German unions), the DGB had pressed the East German unions to join the DGB.<sup>691</sup> By the end of the month, Breit announced that the FDGB was “soon to disband”.<sup>692</sup>

The proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back came in the form of a new declaration by the FDGB and the East German trade unions, dated May 2. It criticized the social components included in the first draft of the MESU as inadequate and argued in favor of a 1:1 exchange

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<sup>688</sup> “Streik bei 2:1?”, *Die tageszeitung*, April 9, 1990.

<sup>689</sup> “Gesellschaft muss sozial gerecht sein. Standpunkt der im Dachverband vereinigten IG und Gewerkschaften zur Vereinigung der deutschen Gewerkschaften”, *Tribüne*, April 24, 1990, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, pp. 75-77.

<sup>690</sup> “Während sie als Einzelverbandsvorsitzende im Geschwindschritt die gewerkschaftliche Verbandseinheit anstrebten, leistete sich die Versammlung derselben Leute eine Kollektivmeinung, die immer noch von einer länger andauernden Existenz der DDR auszugehen schien und die ernsthaft glaubte, Zeit genug zu haben, um alle Räder des sozialen Rechts- und Verfassungsstaates und der sozialen Marktwirtschaft noch einmal zu erfinden.” *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>691</sup> “FDGB entspricht unseren Kriterien nicht – Aufgaben des DGB im Zusammenhang mit dem dem deutschen Einigungsprozess”, *express*, 5/90, p. 6.

<sup>692</sup> “Breit: Keine Vereinigung mit dem FDGB”, April 27, 1990, in: DGB 1991; “FDGB ohne Zukunft”, *Die tageszeitung*, April 28, 1990.



rate.<sup>693</sup> In an open letter to the De Maizière government, the declaration was with a list of demands: a two-phase wage increase averaging 50% within two months; the immediate introduction of a 38-hour work week; state guarantees on the liquidity of enterprises (in order to ensure workers were paid); more public information on the developments surrounding the negotiations on unification, as well as the participation of trade unions in these talks. As proof of their resolve to fight for “social security and the democratic co-determination rights of workers”, warning strikes and a day of protest were announced.<sup>694</sup>

Lothar De Maizière’s reply to both documents was harsh, as he accused the FDGB of seeking to destabilize the country.<sup>695</sup> He agreed to meet trade union representatives on a regular basis and to notify them of any development in the negotiations on MESU and the unification treaty, not least because its political partner (the Ost-SPD) echoed concerns about flaws in the social component of the MESU similar to those expressed by the FDGB. Yet De Maizière explicitly rejected all union demands.<sup>696</sup>

The day of action for a 1:1 exchange rate and better social protection was scheduled for May 10. “Political warning strikes” were announced in the leather and textile industries. The heads of the FDGB and of the East German unions had speculated on a similar degree of success that they had had on April 5, but internal reports proved these assumptions incorrect: in 10 of the 15 East German districts, the unions were unable to agree on what kind of action to take. Polls conducted on union members indicated that a majority of workers were opposed to the demonstrations and warning strikes and even greeted the MESU.<sup>697</sup> While it may appear that many in the FDGB thought that the organization’s future existence could only be guaranteed by following a radical agenda of defending workers’ interests within the context of reunification, a large portion of East German workers did not believe in its strategy of open confrontation with the De Maizière government.

Without the overwhelming support of its member unions, the FDGB had no future. The DGB was, of course, aware of that fact. On May 7, the DGB published a joint declaration with the Ost-SPD, which was in effect a partial dissociation of the party from the FDGB. The declaration’s purpose was to state that both organizations agreed that the MESU should not result in

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<sup>693</sup> “Entscheidende Aussagen fehlen – Gemeinsamer Standpunkt der im Dachverband vereinten Gewerkschaften zum Austauschkurs”, *Tribüne*, May 3, 1990, p. 1, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 79.

<sup>694</sup> “50 Prozent mehr! Offener Brief an Regierung”, *Tribüne*, May 7, 1990, quoted in: idem.

<sup>695</sup> “FDGB-Forderungen zurückgewiesen”, *Die tageszeitung*, May 7, 1990.

<sup>696</sup> “Krach in der Großen Koalition”, *Die tageszeitung*, May 9, 1990.

<sup>697</sup> Weinert/Gilles 1999, pp. 123-24.

a “loss of workers’ rights” and was formulated in such a manner to promote institutional extension as an acceptable solution.<sup>698</sup>

On May 8, Ernst Breit reiterated that German workers were to unite under the umbrella of the DGB and that, though the assistance of the East German trade unions was welcome, any form of collaboration with the FDGB was explicitly ruled out.<sup>699</sup> Two days before FDGB’s day of action, the DGB expressed only mild criticisms of the MESU and, in fact, made no effort to actively oppose it. The West German trade union federation maintained the tripartite consensus.

Dieser Linie entsprach es durchaus, dass der DGB zwar Kritik und Bedenken zu einzelnen Vorschriften und Formulierungen des Staatsvertragsentwurfs anmeldete, Enttäuschung äußerte, dass „alle Chancen, bessere Mitbestimmungsregelungen zu erreichen, ausgeschlossen werden sollen“, wie es in einer Stellungnahme hieß, auf Abweichungen und Widersprüche hinwies, aber dies doch alles in einem äußerst moderaten bis resignativen Ton vortrug. Das konnte nur als Signal an die Bundesregierung gewertet werden, dass der DGB auf keinen Fall aus dem prinzipiellen Konsens über die Notwendigkeit der Einheit ausscheren wollte und den politischen Führungsanspruch der Bundesregierung in dieser frage voll akzeptierte.<sup>700</sup>

Pressed by its West German counterpart, the East German miners union (IG Bergbau, Energie und Wasserwirtschaft) announced its exit from the FDGB on May 8, which in turn prompted other East German trade unions to follow suit.<sup>701</sup> The bell had tolled for the FDGB. On the next day, in a decision which came as a surprise to journalists but probably less so to the top echelons of DGB union leadership, all of the East German trade unions announced their exit from the FDGB and the dissolution of the federation in September. They adopted the DGB’s statements from previous months: German trade unions were to unify within the DGB, and this process had to be completed before Germany’s political unification.<sup>702</sup> A Council of Spokespersons (Sprecherrat), with Peter Rothe, leader of the railway union (Gewerkschaft der Eisenbahner Deutschlands), at its head, was in charge of representing the East German unions and of disbanding the FDGB.<sup>703</sup> All but a few of the demonstrations and warning strikes

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<sup>698</sup> “DGB und SPD-Ost erörtern Staatsvertragsentwurf”, May 7, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>699</sup> “Ein Dach für alle? Der Vorsitzende des DGB, Ernst Breit, lehnt eine Vereinigung ab”, *Tribüne*, May 8, 1990, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 81.

<sup>700</sup> Idem. The authors refer to: “Kaum Chancen zur besseren Mitbestimmung. Stellungnahme des DGB zum Staatsvertragsentwurf”, *Tribüne*, May 9, 1990.

<sup>701</sup> “DDR-IG Bergbau tritt aus FDGB aus” and “Der FDGB-Crash ist vorprogrammiert”, *Die tageszeitung*, May 10, 1990.

<sup>702</sup> “Beschuß der Vorsitzenden der Einzelgewerkschaften des FDGB über dessen Auflösung (9. Mai 1990)”, reproduced in: Gill 1991, document 21.

<sup>703</sup> The disbanding of the FDGB took place on September 14, by 112 votes in favor and two against. On all these questions: Weinert/Gilles 1999.

called for the following day were cancelled.<sup>704</sup> Explaining the reasons behind this sudden abandonment of the FDGB, Peter Praikow, from the East German Post Union (Deutsche Postgewerkschaft), confirmed that it was the precondition for any collaboration with the DGB.<sup>705</sup>

The disbanding of the FDGB was greeted by Chemistry Union president Hermann Rappe as “a victory for democracy”.<sup>706</sup> DGB head Ernst Breit held meetings with its East German counterpart from the Council of Spokespersons, Peter Rothe, in Düsseldorf on May 10 and 14. Four days later, the DGB assumed control over the finances, assets, and legal and public divisions of the FDGB.

### **3.7.2 What kind of Works Constitution Act for the GDR?**

At the same time they were working to bring about the dissolution of the FDGB, the DGB unions were debating the issue of the exact makeup of the labor law that would be introduced in the GDR. The entry of West German social partners onto the East German scene was conditioned upon the introduction of works councils. The West German unions actively sought to neutralize any doubts or opposition to the introduction of the dual structure of worker representation harbored by many East German union activists.

#### **3.7.2.1 East German labor: In favor of a revised version of the Works Constitution Act**

The analysis of the restructuring of the instruments for defending workers' interests in the GDR proposed in the second part make the arguments that this process mainly took place at the workplace. In the East German context, workplace militancy was often incompatible with the proper functioning of the dual structure of worker representation. This is revealed by a representative survey conducted in 1990 on workers in Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz), by two academics at the city's Technical University.<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Some strikes were still held by workers of the Gewerkschaft Textil-Bekleidung-Leder, Gewerkschaft Unterricht und Erziehung and the Gewerkschaft Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft.

<sup>705</sup> “Protokoll der Zusammenkunft des Geschäftsführenden Vorstands mit der Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung des FDGB”, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 85.

<sup>706</sup> “Der FDGB ist nur noch ein bürokratischer Torso”, *Die tageszeitung*, May 11, 1990.

<sup>707</sup> Volkmar Kreißig und Erhard Schreiber, “Unerfahren in de Marktwirtschaft – Eine Repräsentativbefragung im Schraubenwerk Karl-Marx-Stadt”, *express*, 3/90, pp. 6-7. All quotes and information are taken from this article until indicated otherwise.

This survey is of such value because of the time it was carried out, namely just before the February shift in position by the unions.<sup>708</sup> It stresses that workers supported the introduction of a version of the market economy in the GDR that would be “as social as possible”, and include “strong and independent trade unions” at the workplace (96.5%). Whether one was a union member or supported the election of a works council to complement the company union did not change the fact that most were in favor of preserving the trade union structures at the workplace.

Interestingly, the survey indicates the “spontaneous support of East German workers for the West German model of trade unions and works councils”.<sup>709</sup> Yet the authors stress the discrepancy between how the West German dual model was understood by East German workers and its reality. Nearly three out of four workers in favor of works councils viewed them either as a “provisional trade union” (before a reformed enterprise-based trade union could be established) or as a structure of interest representation “to complement the trade union”. Most believed that works councils had broader co-determination rights than they actually did.<sup>710</sup>

As the authors of this survey recall, some DGB secretaries sent to the GDR initially refused to promote the institutional extension of West German dual structure of workers’ representation. They criticized the rights of the works councils as being no better than union rights under the SED regime. Those very same DGB secretaries had exhorted their East German colleagues to expand the right to strike and a ban on lockouts the East German labor law, which otherwise should be kept. This way, they thought, German reunification would facilitate a broadening of worker rights.

Die Betriebsräte verhielten sich zur Unternehmensleitung wie die alten BGL zu ihrer staatlichen Leitung, d.h. sie hätten objektiv auch nicht mehr zu bestimmen als jene. Es käme darauf an, einheitliche Interessenvertretungen der Werktätigen zu schaffen, durch starke, unabhängigen Gewerkschaften die in der Verfassung und im Arbeitsgesetzbuch der DDR gesetzlich fixierten Mitbestimmungsrechte zu verteidigen, insbesondere durch das Streikrecht und das Aussperrungsverbot zu erweitern, wesentlich verbindlicher zu gestalten und tatsächlich durchzusetzen. Damit würde zugleich der Kampf des DGB für eine wesentliche Erweiterung des Mitbestimmungsrechts der Arbeitnehmer unterstützt, würde eine wichtige Komponente sozialen Fortschritts verteidigt und erweitert, die die

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<sup>708</sup> The results were presented by the authors in a conference of “workers and intellectuals” held in Karl-Marx-Stadt in mid-February, and was initiated by the Neues Forum and other groups.

<sup>709</sup> This spontaneous interest of East German workers for the West German structures of interest representation has often been highlighted by West German unionists sent to work in the GDR, but was not apparent in the sources used in this work so far.

<sup>710</sup> Even this formulation does not reflect the West German dual model in its current form. Works councils were often set up in the GDR to represent all workers at an enterprise, after many had left the BGL. Their aim was to obtain the same rights as trade unions, which they sought to reform or aimed at replacing altogether. Both structures were enterprise-based and fulfilled the same functions.

DDR in den Prozess der Vereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten einbringen könnte.<sup>711</sup>

The confusion among East German workers surrounding the respective positions of trade unions and works councils, coupled with the absence of a legal framework for any other form of interest representation than trade unions, represented a threat to worker rights.<sup>712</sup> In many enterprises, the management was trying to take advantage of this confusion and had set up works councils according to the Works Constitution Act, thereby restricting worker rights. This experience brought some East German activists to fondly “remember the rights” formally conferred upon them by the East German labor law. Their focus was on preserving those rights.<sup>713</sup>

The resistance of East German trade unionists to the introduction of the dual model has not received sufficient attention in literature to date. Authors have generally overlooked the confusion of East German workers as to the actual rights of works councils in West Germany and did themselves not quite grasp the meaning of workplace-based worker initiatives which, although called “works councils”, had little in common with their West German counterparts. However, it is not possible to describe the introduction of the Works Constitution Act in the GDR without mentioning the strategic *volte face* of the DGB and the constant pressure exerted on the East German unions from the end of February on to follow suit and make the demand for the extension of the dual structure of workers’ representation.

### 3.7.2.2 DGB unions and the introduction of works councils

The first appeals by DGB unions for the introduction of the dual model of workers’ representation and the adoption of the Works Constitution Act in the GDR followed a meeting with Helmut Kohl and representatives of industries and banks on February 20, already mentioned several times in this paper. In conjunction with the opening of eight offices in the GDR, the Trade, Bank, Insurance Union (Handel, Bank Versicherungen) required that East German unions relent to the introduction of the Works Constitution Act in their country. “We do not

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<sup>711</sup> Idem.

<sup>712</sup> The same observations were made elsewhere in the GDR, for instance in Rostock. See: Klaus Balzer, “Bummelstreik, als “Bild” ausblieb”, *Die Mitbestimmung*, 3/90, pp. 188-191.

<sup>713</sup> This assessment was shared by the president of the company union council (Betriebsgewerkschaftsrat) in the VEB Kabelwerk Oberspree, Peter Pischner. In December 1989, he explains, the workers in general were under the impression that works councils had more rights than BGL. Throughout the discussions between delegates from cable enterprises in both countries, West German works councilors beseeched their East German colleagues not to relinquish any of their former rights.. Based on their extensive experience with works councils, they informed their East German counterpart that such councils did not have effective co-determination rights. See: Hertle 1990, p. 11.

have the luxury of a year-long process to determine what it is that trade unions indeed want.”<sup>714</sup>

By the end of the month, the Chemistry Union had published a list of requirements for further cooperation with its East German counterpart, which included the adoption of the Works Constitution Act and the elimination of company-based trade unions. In Hermann Rappe’s words, the press statement declared:

Anerkennung des Betriebsrätewesens wie es in der Bundesrepublik durch das Betriebsverfassungsgesetz geregelt ist. Das bisherige DDR-System der Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitungen (BGL) passe nicht in eine parlamentarische Demokratie, sondern nur in einen diktatorischen Staat.<sup>715</sup>

Toward the end of March, the DGB construction union (IG Bau-Steine-Erden) named the introduction of West German-style works councils as one of the preconditions for ratifying any unification agreement with its East German counterpart (IG Bau-Holz). The introduction of works councils was also stated as a condition for the collaboration of the public service union, the mine union, the media union, the chemistry union and IG Metall.<sup>716</sup>

### 3.7.2.3 Trade union indecision on the East German law on trade unions

On the issue of worker rights, there was an inherent contradiction between the DGB unions’ public discourse, which produced a rosy assessment of the level of worker rights in the GDR, and their actions in support of legal extension. This contradiction revealed a certain apprehension toward a policy that signified the abandonment of important demands for the revision of those laws.

The inner DGB debate focused on several constitutional amendments to and the Law on trade unions (Gewerkschaftsgesetz) ratified by the East German parliament on March 6. Should support be granted or denied? The revised articles 44 and 45 of the East German constitution guaranteed the freedom of activity for trade unions, proclaimed the right to strike and outlawed lockouts.

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<sup>714</sup> “Gewerkschaft HBV geht in der DDR”, *Die tageszeitung*, February 22, 1990.

<sup>715</sup> “Die IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik verstärkt ihre Arbeit in der DDR”, February 28, 1990, in: IG CPK 1993. As we shall see in the next chapter, the first works councils based on the West German model were introduced in the GDR in April 1990 in the chemical industry.

<sup>716</sup> Fichter/Kurbjuhn 1993, March 26, 1990 and December 16, 1989; “Einheits-ÖTV im Visier”, *Die tageszeitung*, March 30, 1990; Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 117; “Zum Aufbau einer einheitlichen IG Medien in beiden deutschen Staaten; Beschluss des Gewerkschaftsrates der IG Medien, 2. Mai 1990”, *Kontrapunkt*, 11/1990, p. 27; “Die IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik verstärkt ihre Arbeit in der DDR”; “Schwierige Annäherung. Feindliche Übernahme”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, May 25, 1990.

The law on trade unions proclaimed the right to work. Article 3 authorized company trade unions to ratify agreements on all issues relating to the working and living conditions of workers. Article 8 introduced legal safeguards to protect trade union activity at enterprises. Article 18 imposed arbitration before any strike action. A strike could be stopped by the government if the common good was at risk. Article 10 granted trade unions the right to propose legislation.<sup>717</sup>

The law on trade unions contained multiple provisions from previous East German legislation. The local union leader in the cable plant Kabelwerk Oberspree, Peter Pischner, confirmed that the law aimed to protect trade union activists from unilateral decisions by management. Many newly elected worker representatives were dismissed without legal recourse, while crucial decisions were made without first consulting workers' representation councils. As a consequence the law attempted to "push for full and complete application of all East German labor laws. (...) Nobody [was] supporting a reduction in workers' rights."<sup>718</sup> However, the law on trade unions did not receive the support of left-wing East German union activists. Many members of the Initiative for Independent Trade Unions and the United Left considered it an attempt to lend legitimacy to discredited former local union leaders still in office.<sup>719</sup>

Meetings with West German works councilors and union secretaries had convinced some East German union activists that it was necessary to obtain greater rights of co-determination than those that already existed in West Germany.<sup>720</sup>

Unsurprisingly the law on trade unions was harshly criticized by West German employers' and industry associations.

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<sup>717</sup> Wolfgang Däubler and Thomas Klebe, "Mitbestimmung – ein Angebot für die DDR?", *Die Mitbestimmung*, 5/90, pp. 363-368; Heinz Deutschland, "Was wird aus dem FDGB? Das neue Gewerkschaftsgesetz in der DDR", *Sozialismus*, 3/90, pp. 48-49; Manfred H. Bobke-von Carmen, "Einstimmung auf den Markt – Das Gewerkschaftsgesetz der DDR", *Sozialismus*, 4/90, pp. 6-7.

<sup>718</sup> Hertle 1990, p. 21.

<sup>719</sup> Discussions with Renate Hürtgen (IUG) and Bernd Gehrke (Vereinigte Linke), September 2005.

<sup>720</sup> Kreißig/Schreiber, "Unerfahren in die Marktwirtschaft". Conversely, information sessions organized by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung for instance, presented West German co-determination rights in a positive light, certainly as a model to copy in the GDR (Frank von Auer, "Neu zu entdecken: Mitbestimmung in der DDR", *Die Mitbestimmung*, 3/90, pp. 232-233). It indicates a certain degree of ambivalence, very limited in time however, on the part of West German unions toward the extension of labor law to the GDR.

It was described as “an attempt to render neutral the democratic revolution through the insertion of such fraudulent legislation into the law books”<sup>721</sup> and as “a prime obstacle to investment.”<sup>722</sup> An editorial in *Der Arbeitgeber* went so far as to suggest that the law created a minefield on the path to reunification and threatened to undermine the economic system of the Federal Republic of Germany. The DGB unions, in the words of the editorialist, should not allow themselves to be seduced by this law and remain faithful to the practices of social partnership. It was a call for upholding the tripartite consensus in support of institutional extension.

Zwiespältig erscheint die Haltung der DGB-Gewerkschaften zu diesem Gesetz. Zwar wird es von ihnen nicht uneingeschränkt bejaht, doch gibt es eine Reihe von Übereinstimmungen mit ihren Positionen. Werden nicht bis zu heutigem Tage eine Aussperungsverbot gefordert, die Ausweitung der schon sehr weitreichenden Mitbestimmung verlangt und eine weitgehende Freistellung von Arbeitskosten beansprucht?

So verführerisch es auch aus der Sicht der DGB-Gewerkschaften sein mag, eine vermeintliche Chance zu nutzen, so sollten sie dieser Versuchung nicht erliegen, denn dann wäre auch unsere seit Jahrzehnten bewährte freiheitliche Wirtschaftsordnung beschädigt. Es ist zu hoffen, dass sich in den Gewerkschaften die Kräfte durchsetzen, die einer unheiligen Allianz widerstehen. Erste Äußerungen in diese Richtung liegen vor. Hierin läge ein Beweis für die Funktionsfähigkeit unserer partnerschaftlich verfassten sozialen Marktwirtschaft, mit der nicht nur der Weg zur deutschen Einigung geebnet, sondern auch die europäische Integration beschleunigt wird.<sup>723</sup>

The ambivalence towards the future of East German labor law hinted at in this editorial in *Der Arbeitgeber* – legal extension or a new set of laws? -, existed among the DGB unions. Indications of this are to be found in at least three kinds of documents.

One was the publication of a series of articles in the West German trade union press that presented the law in a favorable, albeit muted and critical, light. These articles welcomed the inclusion of the right to work, the right to strike and the ban on lockouts in the law. They also embraced the broad-ranging legal framework that would be established for the protection of trade union activities it provided. Those articles make constant reference to the flaws and ambiguities of the law: Are company unions the only structure of workers’ representation? Do no others exist? How would co-determination look in practice? What were the implications of the

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<sup>721</sup> Werner Dichmann, “Macht durch die Hintertür. Das Gewerkschaftsgesetz: Stoßrichtung und Folgen”, *Gewerkschaftsreport*, 3/90, pp. 5-13.

<sup>722</sup> By the BDI, the DIHT and Ulf Fink, head of the committee representing the interests of wage earners at the CDU, the CDA, who was to become DGB vice-president less than three months later (“Gewerkschaftsgesetz”, *Die tageszeitung*, March 8, 1990; “Billiglohnland DDR. DIHT: Gewerkschaftsgesetz und andere regelungen müssen vom Tisch”, *Die tageszeitung*, March 13, 1990; “Kritik an Gewerkschaftsgesetz”, *Die tageszeitung*, March 2, 1990).

<sup>723</sup> Dieter Frank Wienke, “Minenleger”, *Der Arbeitgeber*, 6/90, p. 212.



right to work? They were especially hostile to the right of the government to intervene to prevent strikes, something inconceivable in West Germany because of collective bargaining autonomy.

Yet these reservations did not prevent certain parties from expressing rather sympathetic opinions on the law, and one WSI analyst even called the law on trade unions “one of the most intriguing innovations” of the interim period between the fall of the SED regime and the elections.<sup>724</sup> Labor specialist Wolfgang Däubler bluntly stated that the legal extension of the Federal Republic’s labor law would represent a setback for East German workers. It would weaken their position vis-à-vis employers within the realm of what was possibly achievable within a free market economy. The extension of the West German labor law, he insisted, would not only mean the introduction of a complex set of laws but also forty years of jurisprudence. It would take years before East Germans could effectively negotiate within this extensive legal framework. Until that time, only West Germans would possess the necessary skills to defend East German workers’ interests. There was a great risk that the labor law would be seen as the “law of the occupying forces” (Besatzerrecht) in eastern Germany.<sup>725</sup>

Secondly, the ambivalence of West German unionists to the law on trade unions is documented in draft legislation on worker representation at the workplace in eastern Germany drawn up by DGB’s Legal Division.<sup>726</sup> To use an concept taken from the history of philosophy, this proposal attempted a Hegelian synthesis of legal extension and the new laws. The proposal had at its core the extension of the Works Constitution Act. Yet it was not the current manifestation of the West German law, but a revised version of it which granted greater worker rights and protection, that this project sought to introduce in eastern Germany. The revisions put forward in this draft legislation echoed the reforms called for by the DGB unions in their program.<sup>727</sup> It guaranteed a continuity with union politics in West Germany and could be regarded as a fusion of both legal systems. The author is unable to retrace the history of this legislative proposal here as it was not possible to obtain access to the archives.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>724</sup>“DDR-Volkskammer beschloss Gewerkschaftsgesetz”, *WSI-Informationsdienst*, 2/90, p. 3; “Was wird aus dem FDGB?”; “Mitbestimmung – eine Angebot für die DDR?”; “Einstimmung auf den Markt”. The quotation is taken from the last article.

<sup>725</sup> Wolfgang Däubler, “Arbeitsbeziehungen und Recht – Überlegungen zur Situation in der DDR”, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 5-6/90, pp. 353-361, especially p. 360.

<sup>726</sup> “Gesetz über die Interessenvertretung der Beschäftigten in Betrieben und Unternehmen”, May 7, 1990.

<sup>727</sup> Kehrman 1992, pp. 568-569.

<sup>728</sup> Attempts to contact Karl Kehrman, former legal advisor to the DGB, by telephone ultimately proved to be unfruitful and rather costly. The receptionists at the Berlin DGB headquarters referred me to the (now private) DGB legal division in Düsseldorf, while their colleagues in Düsseldorf repeated that the only way to contact Karl Kehrman was through the Berlin office.

All indications do, however, point to the fact that its importance in the overall strategy of the DGB was extremely limited. There was no public declaration to announce it, no articles about it in the union press, and no mention of it in subsequent actions or policies of the DGB unions. The explanation provided by the person in charge of drafting the proposal was somewhat cryptic as to the reasons on why it was shelved so quickly:

Schwierigkeiten bereitete dann aber dessen [of this proposal] Durchsetzung, weil niemand die Probleme vorhergesehen hatte, die sich in der Praxis stellten.<sup>729</sup>

Thirdly, despite certain criticism, the official stance of the DGB on the law on trade unions remained on whole positive until April. The DGB greeted the fact that it finally established the framework for trade union activity in the GDR. A press statement stressed that a new labor law was necessary due to the legal and economic disparities.

Der DGB hält die pauschale Verdammung eines DDR-Gewerkschaftsgesetzes für un gerechtfertigt. So wenig der DDG ein Gewerkschaftsgesetz für die Bundesrepublik wolle, so wenig er mit einigen Punkten des DDR-Geszentwurfes übereinstimme: Es müsse respektiert werden, dass sich die Ausgangsbedingungen für Gewerkschaftsarbeit in der DDR gründlich unterscheiden von der Situation in der Bundesrepublik (...).<sup>730</sup>

When the law was ratified by the East German parliament, DGB head Ernst Breit spoke of “a step in the right direction”.<sup>731</sup>

Although they favored legal extension, DGB’s public discourse indicated a degree of ambivalence over the necessity to adapt these laws to the new context. The DGB/BDA agreement made no specific mention of that matter. Many authors fail to consider the fact that the West German union movement did not begin to unilaterally condemn the law on trade unions until the end of April 1990.<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>729</sup> Kehrman 1992, p. 568.

<sup>730</sup> “DGB: DDR-Gewerkschaftsgesetz nicht pauschal verdammen”, February 28, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>731</sup> “DGB: DDR-Gewerkschaftsgesetz überwiegend positiv”, March 7, 1990, in: DGB 1991.

<sup>732</sup> Gill 1991, especially p. 77.

### 3.7.3 DGB unions' activities in support of legal extension (April - May 1990)

Until the end of March official DGB declarations promoted a form of legal extension of the West German labor law that included enhanced worker rights. The DGB's public discourse made specific mention of two key amendments to the law in particular: the right to work and the ban on lockouts.<sup>733</sup>

In one of his first public statements on the law on trade unions, Ernst Breit had stressed his support for a ban on lockouts that it included.<sup>734</sup> The DGB's Declaration on German Unity of March 7, reiterated its backing for a ban on lockouts introduced by the East German law and stated its desire to see this measure adopted in the Federal Republic.<sup>735</sup> Trade union slogans for the May 1 demonstrations included the demand for a constitutional right to work and an expansion of workers' rights.<sup>736</sup> In its reaction to the first draft of the MESU treaty on April 17, the DGB named the right to work and co-determination as the "basic conditions" to guarantee West German labor movement support for the treaty.<sup>737</sup> From this date until the end of the month, several calls were made for amendments to the treaty to include a constitutional right to work and the ban on lockouts.<sup>738</sup>

The reasons for pushing for such measures were manifold. Both were part of the East German law on trade unions and could facilitate a fusion between the respective laws in East and West Germany, a strategy favored by many East German unionists. Both claims also had been core union demands since the 1970s in West Germany.<sup>739</sup> In reintroducing these demands into its reunification strategy, the DGB maintained a continuity with its program and activities. Fi-

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<sup>733</sup> The right to work was not an individual right but an incentive to draft new policies aimed at achieving full employment. The "ban of lockouts" (Aussperrungsverbot) referred, more realistically, to restrictions on lockouts. These were not the only improvements to the West German legislation requested by the DGB unions. Others included: greater environmental protection, more humane working conditions, an end to civil servant status, and gender equality. In addition to the reasons indicated in the text, one could legitimately make arguments for the first because of the more immediate impact they had on trade union activities.

<sup>734</sup> "On that point, we agree!". "DGB übt gegenüber dem FDGB wohlwollende Zurückhaltung", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 6, 1990.

<sup>735</sup> "Entschließung zur deutschen Einheit", March 7, 1990, in: DGB 1991, p. 2. On the same day, the SPD and the Greens presented a project of reform of the Betriebsverfassungsgesetz to the parliament, welcomed as positive by the DGB ("DGB: Betriebsverfassungsreform ist überfällig", March 7, 1990, in: *Ibid.*).

<sup>736</sup> "Mai-Aufruf des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes: Solidarität sichert unsere Zukunft!", April 12, 1990, in: *Ibid.*

<sup>737</sup> The catalogue of demands, including more items than those mentioned here, was prefaced with the following sentence: "Eine künftige gesamtdeutsche Arbeits- und Sozialordnung muss mindestens die folgenden Elemente umfassen". "Grundzüge der Arbeits- und Sozialordnung in einem geeinten Deutschland", April 18, 1990, in: *Ibid.*

<sup>738</sup> "Blättel: Sozialstaat in Ost und West weiter ausbauen", April 27, 1990; "DGB: Soziale Errungenschaften verteidigen!", April 30, 1990; "Zimmermann: Aussperrung ächten und verbieten", April 30, 1990, in: *Ibid.*

<sup>739</sup> Markovits 1986, pp. 142-145.

nally, these amendments could counteract to the erosion of the West German labor law. In fact, the DGB union declarations in favor of the introduction of a revised version of the Works Constitution Act in the GDR were never followed up by any action.

### **3.7.3.1 Delaying action until the battle is over**

A few days before the publication of the second and final draft of the MESU Treaty in mid-May the DGB focused its interventions on the preservation of the West German worker rights and muted its demands for improvements. The GDR should not become, even during any short period of transition, an area where workers enjoyed fewer rights.<sup>740</sup> A joint declaration illustrated that this concern was shared by the DGB and the Council of Spokespersons of the East German trade unions.

Die bundesdeutschen Arbeitnehmerschutz- und Mitbestimmungsrechte müssten mindestens lückenlos übernommen werden. In Einzelpunkten sollten auch Fortschritte angestrebt werden.<sup>741</sup>

The only improvement explicitly mentioned in this declaration – greater co-determination on the introduction of new technologies - was significant in the context of the economic reforms, it did however not carry the same political weight as the right to work or the ban on lockouts, of which no mention was made.

Six days before the adoption of the MESU by both German parliaments, the text of the treaty, which envisioned the extension of the West German labor law, was welcomed by the DGB and the East German unions.<sup>742</sup> The muted criticisms concerned specific areas where the rule of extension was not fully enforced. (Collective bargaining autonomy appeared somewhat limited in the public sector, for instance.)<sup>743</sup> The DGB and East German unions requested such revisions, an unequivocal statement of support for simple legal extension. Calls for improvements to this system were vague in nature, including an indirect reference to “economic democracy” (p.1) and, again, made no mention of the ban on lockouts or the right to work. The weak formulations suggested that trade unions had no intention of criticizing the treaty too harshly.

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<sup>740</sup> “DGB und SPD-Ost erörtern Staatsvertragsentwurf”, May 7, 1990, in: Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> “Unabhängige und starke Einheitsgewerkschaft in Deutschland ist das Ziel”.

<sup>742</sup> “Stellungnahme zum Entwurf der Bundesregierung für einen Staatsvertrag mit der DDR”, May 16, 1990 (version completed on May 12), in: Ibid..

<sup>743</sup> Helmut Kohl was to dissipate union worries on the following day, as we shall see.

Aus Sicht des DGB und des Sprecherrates der Gewerkschaften der DDR zu kritisieren ist, dass mit dem Staatsvertragsentwurf alle Chancen, bessere Mitbestimmungsregelungen zu erreichen, ausgeschlossen werden sollen.<sup>744</sup>

On May 20, two days after the MESU Treaty was ratified, claims for a constitutional right to work and a ban on lockouts suddenly re-emerged on the union's public agenda. Such appeals were made several times during the 14<sup>th</sup> DGB congress (20-25 May in Hamburg), this time with the Unification Treaty and the future German Constitution on the agenda. Ernst Breit mentioned these points in his speech.<sup>745</sup> During his report to the congress, he welcomed the fact that the MESU Treaty was much improved over the first draft but repeated that there was a serious risk that the GDR would become a "paradise for low-cost labor" (Lohndrucker) and a "place of social dumping". To prevent this, Breit explained, the right to work and a ban on lockouts were necessary.

[Dennoch halte ich] es nicht für ein unzumutbares Ansinnen, dass in Bonn aus Anlass des Deutschen Einigungsprozesses wenigstens über einige gewerkschaftliche Anliegen neu nachgedacht werden könnte. Ich nenne das Verbot der Aussperrung, die Erweiterung der Mitbestimmung bei der Einführung neuer Technologien oder ein Recht auf Arbeit, verstanden als wirtschaftspolitisches Ziel, mit oberster Priorität für Vollbeschäftigung zu sorgen.<sup>746</sup>

Various congress resolutions sanctioned these positions. Motion 1 stipulated that the unification process should lead to an improvement in workers' rights, including the right to work, a ban on lockouts, an enhanced right to strike, greater safeguards for collective bargaining autonomy in the public sector, and more co-determination rights in enterprises.<sup>747</sup> Delegates criticized the DGB executive board, which they felt had surrendered the initiative to the federal government.<sup>748</sup> The new president of the DGB, Heinz-Werner Meyer, echoed his predecessor's concerns that the GDR could become an area where workers enjoyed fewer rights and less protection<sup>749</sup>, and made calls for the revision of the West German labor law as part of its adoption by the GDR.

The month of June witnessed the start of negotiations on the treaty of unification between the two German states. At that time, the ban on lockouts would permanently be removed from DGB's public discourse. Of the measures that could facilitate a fusion of the two respective

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<sup>744</sup> "Stellungnahme zum Entwurf der Bundesregierung für einen Staatsvertrag mit der DDR", p. 11.

<sup>745</sup> "Breit: Einheit darf nicht zur 'Ellenbogengesellschaft' führen", May 20, 1990, in: Ibid..

<sup>746</sup> "Breit: Über gewerkschaftliche Anliegen neu nachdenken", May 21, 1990, in: Ibid..

<sup>747</sup> The motion mentioned 'social rights' and not 'workers' rights'. It also included the environmental protection. Other motions related to retaining East German laws on abortion and women's rights, for instance. See: Hertle/Schroeder 1990, pp. 3-4.

<sup>748</sup> Neuhaus 1996, p. 306.

<sup>749</sup> "DGB: Soziale Marktwirtschaft in der DDR nur mit wirksamen Betriebsräten", June 11, 1990, in: Ibid..

labor laws, only the right to work remained. This issue formed the focal point of DGB-president Meyer's speech to delegates from the miner's union.<sup>750</sup>

The ratification of the labor and employment laws by the GDR parliament in June represented an opportunity for the unions to promote the improvement of workers' rights in a unified Germany, alas one that would go unused. On many issues, these provisional East German variants of the West German laws introduced higher standards than those prevailing in the Federal Republic of Germany. The East German Labor Promoting Law (*Arbeitsförderungs-gesetz der DDR*), for instance, did not include the controversial article 116, granting workers the right to attend vocational training programs even if his or her labor contract was still valid. In addition, it, created the necessary legal framework for the accrual of part-time work and vocational training credits. These provisional measures were to remain in place until June 31, 1991 or the beginning of 1992.<sup>751</sup>

Two documents containing the demands and goals of the DGB unions in relation to the unification treaty included a reference to the right to work.<sup>752</sup> In both documents, however, the 'right' moment for trade unions to address, and eventually push for, improvements to the labor and employment laws was again postponed, this time until after reunification.

Der DGB und der Sprecherrat fordern den Erhalt der für die Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer günstigeren Vorschriften des geltenden Arbeitsrechts der DDR bis zu dem Zeitpunkt, zu dem der zukünftige gesamtdeutsche Gesetzgeber ein einheitliches Recht schafft.<sup>753</sup>

The publication of the treaty on national unification in mid-August assuaged some of the fears of the DGB and the East German unions, as it bolstered the extension process initiated by the MESU. The reaction of the German unions to the content of the document was therefore positive and they called for its rapid implementation. East German workers, they explained, were confronted with a rapid rise in unemployment and it was important to provide the necessary social security and unemployment benefits.

Der Leitgedanke des Vertragsentwurfs – die Übertragung der für die Bundesrepublik bestehenden Rechtsordnung auf die DDR als Weg zur Schaffung von Rechtsgleichheit – ist auch nach Auffassung des DGB und des Sprecherrates grundsätzlich der in der jetzigen Situation geeignete Weg zur schnellstmöglichen Herstellung der deutschen Einheit,

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<sup>750</sup> "Meyer: Recht auf Arbeit muss Staatsziel werden", June 8, 1990, in: *Ibid.*

<sup>751</sup> For a detailed analysis of labor law in the new Länder, see: Walker 1991.

<sup>752</sup> "Sozialpolitische Forderungen des DGB für den deutschen Einigungsprozess", July 20, 1990, esp. p. 3; "Anforderungen an den angestrebten Einigungsvertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik", July 30, 1990, esp. p. 2, in: *Ibid.*

<sup>753</sup> "Anforderungen an den angestrebten Einigungsvertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik", p. 8.

die wiederum von den Menschen beider deutschen Staaten gewünscht wird. Zugleich ist die schnellstmögliche Herstellung der deutschen Einheit – unabhängig von Wahlterminen – notwendig, um die Folgen der vom DGB und vom Sprecherrat stets als übereilt charakterisierten Einführung der Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion nunmehr schnell und wirkungsvoll beseitigen zu können; Folgen, die heute insbesondere in der bestehenden und weiter drohenden Arbeitslosigkeit zum Ausdruck kommen.<sup>754</sup>

The DGB and East German unions deplored the fact that some of their main objectives – they only specifically indicated the inclusion of the right to work and environmental protection in the future constitution - remained unaddressed in the unification treaty. However, they stated, the realization of these goals could be achieved through the invocation of article 5 to the treaty, relating to constitutional amendments. It can therefore be said the union goals were premised on the implementation of the unification treaty.

Nachdrücklich begrüßen der DGB und der Sprecherrat die vorgesehene Empfehlung an die gesetzgebenden Körperschaften des vereinten Deutschlands, sich mit Änderungen oder Ergänzungen des Grundgesetzes zu befassen. Allerdings sollten die in Artikel 5 des Vertragsentwurfs erwähnten Überlegungen zur Aufnahme von Staatszielbestimmungen im Hinblick auf einzelne solcher Ziele – z.B.: Recht auf Arbeit, Umweltschutz – präzisiert werden; hierzu verweisen der DGB und der Sprecherrat auf ihre Anforderungen an den angestrebten Einigungsvertrag vom 27.7.90 [20.07.90].<sup>755</sup>

The constitutional revision anticipated by the German unions would never take place. In November 1993, the parliamentary commission on constitutional reform presented a report which suggested no significant modifications to the Grundgesetz and none that related to topics of great import to the trade unions.<sup>756</sup> As with their calls for the right to work and a ban on lockouts, which were not followed up by any concrete action, the DGB and East German unions likewise did not launch any campaigns after August to promote the constitutional amendments, which according to their claims represented an opportunity to revise the labor laws.

To claim that the DGB and East German unions worked to improve the position of workers in the German constitution and legislation would be lending too much credence to words which were not followed up by action. The revisions put forward in the declarations between February and August were all acknowledged demands of the West German unions. The Green MP Werner Schulz complained that they offered the picture of a catalogue of “unions’ lost strug-

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<sup>754</sup> “Stellungnahme zum 1. Entwurf eines Vertrages zwischen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands”, August 20, 1990, in: *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>755</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>756</sup> However, some modifications based on proposals from the East German government were incorporated into the state constitutions of the Bundesländer. See: Rucht 1995, p. 14.

gles”.<sup>757</sup> Some authors have also stressed how little action was taken to back up the motions of DGB’s 14<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Der Fülle und der thematischen Spannweite der Forderungen entspricht indes kein politisch-strategischer Handlungsbezug. Keiner dieser Anträge enthält Hinweise, auf welchem Weg und mit welchen Mitteln eine Einlösung der gewerkschaftlichen Forderungen erreicht werden soll. Die Frage der politischen Relevanz der Beschlüsse stellt sich insbesondere bei den Forderungen, die schon seit langem in der Bundesrepublik erhoben werden, deren Verwirklichung aber bisher scheiterte, sei es am mangelnden gewerkschaftlichen Kräfteinsatz oder den widrigen politischen Kräfte- und Mehrheitsverhältnissen – oder beidem. Welche glücklichen politischen Umstände nunmehr Ziele wie eine erweiterte Mitbestimmung, das Verbot der Aussperrung oder gar das Recht auf Arbeit für das Gebiet der DDR durchsetzbar erscheinen ließen, wurde auch in der Diskussion nicht deutlich.<sup>758</sup>

Even if these demands were indeed part of the unions’ discourse in these months, the objective of forcing a revision of the West German labor law would never determine their strategy.

### 3.7.3.2 Confirmation of the tripartite consensus in May

It was more a fear that the West German labor law would not be extended in its entirety than calls to revise the labor law that ultimately determined the unions’ strategy. What was the likelihood that the legal extension agreed upon by the West German government, employers and trade unions toward the end of February would be carried out only in part, i.e., with fewer workers’ rights and less protection? Could the worst-case scenario of an insufficient legal framework for trade union activities in the GDR indeed come true?

Some within the federal government supported the extension of such a ‘stripped down’ West German labor law in the GDR and tried to convince the chancellor of the logic of this course prior to adoption of the MESU. The Federal Minister of Finance for instance argued against an immediate and full extension of workers’ rights and protection to the GDR, a position shared by the representatives of the Bundesbank. They expressed concerns that high levels of workers’ rights and protection would threaten the restructuring of the East German economy and pleaded for a gradual raising of labor standards to that of their West German counterparts.

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<sup>757</sup> Werner Schulz, “Wahlprüfsteine auf dem Prüfstand”, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 11/90, p. 725. Schulz was primarily referring to the *cornerstones* of the DGB’s election platform with the December 1990 elections in mind; these however contain the claims that we have already analyzed in this section. His comment can thus be cited here, even if the author is not referring explicitly to the cornerstones of its platform published in November.

<sup>758</sup> Hertle/Schroeder 1990, p. 4-5.



As a result of these preliminary discussions, the delegates decided to assess the feasibility of introducing lower levels of worker protection in the GDR.<sup>759</sup>

Helmut Kohl was receptive to these arguments but wanted to come to negotiations table with a draft MESU proposal acceptable to the GDR, i.e., one that included a strong social component. Dieter Grosser's comments on possible resistance within the Federal Republic of Germany if reduced workers' rights and protection were adopted in the GDR are in clear reference to fears the DGB trade unions harbored about the impact of partial extension on the West German working population.

Bezeichnend war auch, dass die Ost-CDU und die mit ihr in der Allianz verbündeten Parteien im Wahlkampf die unverzüglich „Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion“ und nicht lediglich die Währungsunion und Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft gefordert und keinen Zweifel daran gelassen hatten, dass sie den westdeutschen Sozialstaat in vollem Umfange wünschten. Außerdem war abzusehen, dass sich auch in Westdeutschland Widerstände regen würden, wenn die Bundesregierung versuchte, in Ostdeutschland ein niedrigeres Niveau der sozialen Sicherheit durchzusetzen. Es lag auf der Hand, dass dies als erster Schritt zum Abbau ökonomisch nicht mehr vertretbarer sozialer Sicherungen auch in Westdeutschland interpretiert werden könnte.<sup>760</sup>

In the second (April 8) and third draft (April 19) proposals, the cabinet resolved a majority of the contentious issues on the labor and social laws through its support for full and immediate extension. This third draft, after minor revision by the chancellor to bolster social protection for East German citizens, was the treaty proposition presented by the Federal Republic of Germany to the GDR at the negotiating table.<sup>761</sup>

By the beginning of May, both German states had agreed on a preliminary version of the MESU treaty, which was subsequently announced. The difficulty in predicting the ultimate impact of rapid monetary and economic union might have played a role in obtaining approval for a full and immediate extension of the labor law.

In dieser Lage relativ hoher Ungewissheit, wie sich die Einheit auf die eigene konkrete Position auswirken würde, sahen die wichtigsten Interessengruppen wenig Anlass für Versuche, auf den Vertragsinhalt Einfluss zu nehmen. Das galt natürlich nur so lange, als sie sicher sein konnten, dass die bestehende Wirtschafts- und Sozialordnung nicht geändert werden würde.<sup>762</sup>

If any fears of a weakening of workers' position were indeed valid, Dieter Grosser believes the likelihood that the West German labor law would be extended only partially (or in revised

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<sup>759</sup> Grosser 1998, p. 257.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid., pp. 280-292.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

form) was virtually nil. The ratification of the MESU treaty in May 1990 maintained and strengthened the tripartite consensus formed two and a half months earlier in its most obvious manifestation, i.e., in full and immediate legal extension.

Despite its support for MESU, the DBG had certain reservations about the treaty's formulation, as it would seem to suggest a limitation of collective bargaining autonomy in the public sector. The heads of the DGB and the public service union met with the chancellor on May 15. Helmut Kohl's letter to Monika Wulf-Matthies the next day removed any such doubts.<sup>763</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> DGB congress, held from May 20 to 25, confirmed the *bonne entente* between the trade unions and the government. During the congress, the number of members representing the DGB executive board was reduced from nine to eight, while the number of CDU officials was kept at two. Furthermore, the new elected president, Heinz-Werner Meyer<sup>764</sup>, promoted an agenda similar to that of the CDU.<sup>765</sup> The DGB congress had "forged links" with the CDU.<sup>766</sup> At the same time, indications of a temporarily cooling in relations with the SPD were also evident in some union publications.<sup>767</sup>

The insistence on harmonizing the positions of the DGB unions and the Kohl government, based on a common interest in proceeding with the legal extension, should not obscure the fact that their views on how this process should move forward were not identical in every respect. The DGB considered that contingencies for more temporary, situation-specific, measures should have been made. It had also lost a seat on the board of directors of the Treuhandanstalt, the agency in charge of restructuring and privatizing East German enterprises. The MESU treaty, signed in May, confirmed the legal transfer of the West German labor law in its entirety, with no revisions or the resultant reduction or increase in rights. Within a context where the legal issues relating to the restructuring of the economy promised to be frequent, two conditions for legal extension included a guarantee that individuals could

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<sup>763</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, pp. 87-8, 230.

<sup>764</sup> He was elected with only 333 votes out of 521, with more than a third of the delegates voting against him although he ran uncontested. It was the poorest showing for any DGB president ever in an election.

<sup>765</sup> In the magazine on trade union-related topics published by the Deutsches Institut der Wirtschaft, the *Gewerkschaftsreport*, Wolfgang Pege clearly stated that a reduction in the number of CDU delegates to the DGB Bundesvorstand would have amounted to less CDU influence over the unitary trade unions (Wolfgang Pege 1990, "Rotverschiebung? Zur Kandidaten-Diskussion für die neue DGB-Spitze", p. 22). Two members of the CDU thus maintained the influence of the CDU in the DGB, and the election of a president whose positions were identified to those of the CDU, increased this influence. The election of Ulf Fink, president of the CDA, as DGB vice-president was not easy. He had no experience in trade union action and played no significant role in his party. He received only 58,8% of the delegates' support. The media however greeted his election. Hertle/Schroeder 1990, p. 20.

<sup>766</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 49; similar comments in: Hertle/Schroeder 1990, p. 18.

<sup>767</sup> Klaus Lang for instance criticized the fact that the SPD had not developed any alternative to the rapid monetary union and criticized the first tariff agreements signed by the DGB unions (Lang 1991, p. 187).

seek legal recourse and that the labor tribunals would not sufficiently staffed to prevent them from being overwhelmed by the caseload. In order to accomplish this objective, DGB legal services set up no fewer than 30 legal offices, with more than 80 legal advisers in the GDR, at the beginning of 1991. Their main function was to offer East German workers legal assistance. In 1992, the number of offices had increased to 40, with over 170 advisers.<sup>768</sup> The DGB has also accepted the establishment of workplace-based boards of labor arbitration (Schiedsstellen für Arbeitsrecht), which helped to resolve legal disputes according to the statutes of the law and, more specifically, sought out situation-specific solutions. The experiment lasted until 1993, with varying degrees of success according to different observers.<sup>769</sup> West German union officials were strongly opposed to this structure. Yet these examples indicate the importance of the efforts made by the DGB to support the rapid adoption of the West German labor law and state institutions responsible for monitoring compliance in the eastern *Länder*.

### 3.7.4 Conclusion

After the tripartite consensus was initially achieved in February and March, it was reconfirmed in no uncertain terms in May. In the intervening months, despite numerous public declarations supporting amendments to the West German labor law (with a concomitant extension to the GDR), DGB unions' strategy had become dedicated to simple legal extension. Why? Because calls for amendments to boost worker rights and protection, crucial in gaining the support of the East German unions and voices of concern within the DGB, received little or no support and were ignored. In regards to the immense organizational task required of the trade unions in implementing legal extension, this choice should come as no surprise.

It is however remarkable that no entity within the German union movement raised any objections to the abandonment of efforts to amend the West German labor law. The concept of simple extension was at first promoted by speakers from the left-wing unions. This consensus in favor of transposing one 'model' no longer existed because it could no longer guarantee a stable framework for trade union politics in the FRG – and therefore represents the unique feature in this episode in trade union history in Germany.

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<sup>768</sup> Kehrman 1992, p. 570.

<sup>769</sup> Beck/Rosendahl/Schuster 1992.

### **3.8 The DGB Unions and the Institutional Extension of West German Industrial Relations II: Expanding trade unions structures and collective bargaining rounds**

This final section shifts the focus from the macro-level to our four case studies. It shall highlight the extraordinary resources committed by the individual West German trade unions to the expansion of their structures into Eastern Germany and the impressive display of organizational skills demonstrated in this phase. The establishment of DGB union structures in Eastern Germany coincided with the launch of collective bargaining in that region. The merger of German unions was a result of the geographical expansion of the DGB unions, the disbanding of the East German organizations, and East German workers joining the ranks of the DGB organizations. This process was coordinated by the West German unions. The launch of collective bargaining rounds was the corollary of the organizational expansion. The aim of rapidly lifting the working and living conditions in former East Germany to West German levels, a stated goal of the social partners, meant that the first rounds of collective bargaining went smoothly and were free of any major conflict.

#### **3.8.1 Variations on one single theme**

The analysis of DGB union expansion into eastern Germany clearly demonstrates the level of influence they wielded over the process of reshaping of the trade union landscape in the GDR. Practical considerations forced the DGB unions to continue its collaboration with their East German counterparts for a period of time after the disbandment of the FDGB and to take a somewhat different tact in the further efforts to expand their structures. One can clearly detect certain distinctions between the modalities chosen in seeking organizational expansion. Michael Fichter and Maria Kurbjuhn distinguish between

- 1) DGB unions which, after at first playing an active role in the reform of their East German sister organizations, forcibly brought about their dissolution and organized the incorporation of these East German workers into their enlarged structures;<sup>770</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Fichter/Kurbjuhn 1993. The authors include the following unions in the first category: IG Bergbau und Energie, IG Bau-Steine-Erden, IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik, the Gewerkschaft der Eisenbahner, the Gewerkschaft Gartenbau, Land- und Forstwirtschaft, the Gewerkschaft Holz und Kunststoff, the Gewerkschaft Leder, IG Medien, the Deutsche Postgewerkschaft and the Gewerkschaft Textil und Bekleidung.

- 2) DGB unions which, after initially supporting the reform of East German trade unions, favored the creation of new trade unions in the GDR under the same names (e.g., the Trade, Banks and Insurance Union of the GDR). These would later be disbanded and absorbed into the DGB organization;<sup>771</sup>
- 3) DGB unions which focused their expansion policies on the (controlled) development of an East German organization (with the same name and structures) that would later be absorbed;<sup>772</sup>
- 4) And the IG Metall, which is said to have followed its own course for expansion. A period of close collaboration with the East German IG Metall was followed by a break in relations and an assumption of complete control over the process to establish its structures in the GDR. In contrast to the first two categories of unions, IG Metall did not retain any of the former officials from the former East German union.

These differences highlight the degree to which geographical expansion assumed different forms. Such variations were the product of varying levels of receptiveness among the East German unions to the West German agenda, coupled with the unequal ability of the DGB union to impose this on them rapidly. All these strategies shared common goals (eastward expansion of the DGB unions and the incorporation of East German workers), a common timeline and remained under the control of the West German unions.<sup>773</sup> It is my belief that the classification system proposed by Fichter and Kurbjuhn represent only a minor contribution to the overall understanding the enlargement process. As we shall soon see, the commonalities between the expansion processes at the chemistry and media unions, both assigned to the first category in Fichter and Kurbjuhn's system, were no greater than those between similar processes at the IG Metall and the Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union.

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<sup>771</sup> This category includes the Handel-Banken und Versicherungen and the Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuß-Gaststätten.

<sup>772</sup> This category includes the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, the Gewerkschaft der Polizei and the Öffentliche Dienste, Transport und Verkehr. In my opinion, the Police Union (Gewerkschaft der Polizei) .

<sup>773</sup> The DGB unions adopted this stance on enlargement some time before the beginning of May. The conferences on disbanding the East German unions were held from the end of September to the end of October. The individual DGB unions amended their bylaws to allow for the expansion of their activities into the new *Länder* in the time between September and November. East German workers were invited to join the DGB union on 1 October and 1 November 1, respectively, (or in the case of IG Metall, on January 1). The first conferences on unified trade unions were held between January and June 1991.

The point I am attempted to make is that any differences that may exist are of secondary importance when compared to the goals, timelines and resolve that all DGB unions held in common. Their activities were concerted and coordinated. We are therefore not dealing with three, four or even five different strategies of the DGB unions, but indeed several manifestations upon one single strategy brought about by contextual differences. The modalities of DGB union expansion were mere variations on one common theme. To expand on this analogy, one could say that the slight variations observed in the expansion process at the DGB unions were more like the minor exercises by a novice composer than the wide range of musical expressions heard in the Goldberg or Diabelli Variations.

For this reason, the methodology employed by Manfred Wilke and Hans-Peter Müller, whose book, published in 1991, details the expansion of each DGB union on a case by case basis, presenting these processes as multiple manifestations on one process, is preferable to the model proposed by Fichter and Kurbjuhn. This approach is thus promoted in the upcoming section, which will detail the expansion process at IG Metall, the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union, the Public Service, Transport and Traffic Union and the Media Industrial Union.

### **3.8.2 The expansion of IG Metall**

Looking back on the first decade of IG Metall activities in the eastern *Länder*, the then head of the Saxony district offices (later Brandenburg-Saxony), Hasso Düvel, underlined, not without a hint of pride, that it took only six months for his organization to establish its structures and to ratify the first collective agreements in the (former) GDR.<sup>774</sup> This impressive organizational feat will be described in the pages to come. Greater attention is devoted to the IG Metall expansion than to other trade unions because it is the best documented of the four case studies. This in-depth study of the process at IG Metall will be useful in approaching the remaining three case studies.

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<sup>774</sup> Düvel 1999, p.

### 3.8.2.1 From cooperation to the merger of the two metal unions

In February 1990, IG Metall was working to intensify the partnerships between workers at “similar enterprises” in East and West Germany. There was growing anxiety among East German workers about their future job security. On the one hand, workers maintained their memberships in the union (only about 10% of the 1.68 millions had left), arguably to bolster their bargaining power vis-à-vis factory managers. Conversely, the numerous types of employee representation and worker rights in place at East German workplaces created a certain sense of confusion. This situation prevented the IG Metall (DDR) from pushing through its agenda and was unfavorable to its reform program. In many workplaces, the local union had stopped transferring union dues to the IG Metall (DDR).<sup>775</sup>

In an editorial published at the beginning of February, IG Metall president Franz Steinkühler expressed concerns which brought about the March shift in strategy. Under the motto, “We’re joining in on the action”, Steinkühler stressed how developments within the East German labor would determine the situation of trade unions in a unified Germany. He called for a “radical break from the politics, organization and personnel of [the East German IG Metall's] past”.

Über die Zukunft der Arbeitnehmer- und Gewerkschaftsrechte in einem geeinten Deutschland wird heute auf dem Territorium der DDR entschieden. Wenn dort Sozialstandards heruntergefahren und Arbeitnehmerrechte beschnitten werden, und wenn dort ein zersplittertes Gewerkschaftswesen entsteht, dann wird dies schwer zu korrigierende Auswirkungen auf die Situation in einem gemeinsamen Deutschland haben.<sup>776</sup>

An attempt by the IG Metall to initiate the merger of the two metal unions was made on March 15, during a meeting of the union's advisory board. In view of the resounding “success” of its first eight information offices, IG Metall announced the opening of seven new ones in the GDR six days after the DGB/BDA joint declaration and three before the East German elections. This decision transformed the information offices into bases of operations for the IG Metall in the GDR. One person involved in the process made the point that it was no longer “enough to simply staff the information offices with a few retired trade unionists.” He stressed that, due to the major role these offices were to play in achieving a merger between the two metal unions, it was absolutely imperative for officials to remain in constant close contact with the union leadership. For the IG Metall, “becoming involved in the GDR” meant allowing the East German industry union to assume the central position among work-

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<sup>775</sup> Michael Böhm, “Im Wartesaal zur Einheit”, *metall*, 5/90, pp. 8-9; Michael Böhm, “Das Vertrauen muss vor Ort wachsen”, *metall*, 7/90, pp. 8-9.

<sup>776</sup> Franz Steinkühler, “Wir mischen uns jetzt ein”, *metall*, 3/90 (February 9), p. 3.

place structures of worker representation. IG Metall's Council lamented that the reverse situation still present in the GDR was encouraging “a trend towards company unions” (betriebssyndikalistische Tendenzen) and undermining the overall effectiveness of trade unionism.<sup>777</sup>

Yet IG Metall (GDR) was not able to implement the measures its West German counterparts deemed necessary. The 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of Delegates of the IG Metall (DDR), held on April 8 and 9, did not produce the outcome anticipated by the West German union. Even if a resolution in favor of works councils, and the East German version of the Works Constitution Act were passed, internal reforms had brought the structures of the two unions more into line and specific criticism was voiced at the FDGB, IG Metall was nevertheless disappointed by the results of the assembly. Its main reason for discontent related to the inability of Franz Steinkühler to achieve any sort of consensus among delegates on the issue of speeding up the pace of the merger (which he wanted to see completed in time for IG Metall's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June 1991). The resolution on the merger as adopted merely called for the establishment of a joint commission responsible for determining the conditions and schedule for the merger.<sup>778</sup> IG Metall had other grounds for caution. IG Metall's observers believed that the collective bargaining issues had not received sufficient attention, something they viewed as confirming their suspicion that IG Metall (DDR) was in no position to enter into such negotiations in the near future. Despite a motion supporting works councils and the Works Constitution Act, the delegates refused to criticize the East German law on trade unions. The lack of any clear preference for one model of worker representation by the East German delegates thus remained unchanged. Finally, even if the FDGB apparatus had ultimately proved unsuccessful in its attempt to defeat the reformer Hartwig Bugiel in the race for the union presidency, its candidate Karin Schubert was elected to oversee the union's finances.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> See the summary of the advisory board meeting: “Bruch mit der Vergangenheit”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 4/90, p. 7-8.

<sup>778</sup> Zentralvorstand der IG Metall, *IG Metall aktuell*, Berlin, 1990, p. 3, cited in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 210.

<sup>779</sup> Klaus-Peter Wolf, “Tücken der Vergangenheit”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 5/90, pp. 12-13; “Erneuerer setzten sich durch”, *Die tageszeitung*, April 11, 1990.



### 3.8.2.2 IG Metall takes control of the merger process

The collaborative activities between the two unions was initially continued.<sup>780</sup> A conflict developed in the course of discussions between the presidents of IG Metall (East and West) in Frankfurt and Berlin. While Frankfurt tried to impose its agenda on expansion, Berlin sought a major role in co-determining the merger process, which led to a breakdown in relations between the two parties in May. IG Metall took measures to isolate the East German union and further pursue its organizational expansion.

On May 8, IG Metall's executive committee adopted a five-point memorandum which announced that the merger of the two metal workers union would take the form of individual East German workers joining the IG Metall,<sup>781</sup> which was indeed a novel approach. The memorandum also clearly rejected the East German law on trade unions. In reaction, East German metal union president Hartwig Bugiel toned down its criticism of the MESU (the vote was scheduled for ten days later although its exact content was already known), even if he continued to talk of a "diktat from West Germany".<sup>782</sup> On the next day, May 9, Bugiel co-signed the declaration calling for the dissolution of the FDGB, together with the other heads of East German trade unions. But his attempts to maintain his influence on the merger process proved ineffective.

On May 25 during the DGB congress, Franz Steinkühler reiterated that the merger of German unions signified "a unification of the West German trade unions and the East German people". During a meeting held that the very same day, IG Metall's executive committee confirmed its stranglehold on the merger process. Decision-making authority and supervision of the process were held centrally in the hands of the union's president, first vice-president and

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<sup>780</sup> With varying results. The director of the information office in Karl-Marx-Stadt stated how difficult it was for IG Metall (DDR) to receive its share of union dues from the enterprise unions. Although the majority of the city's workers were members of the union, less than 8% of the union fees were transferred to the local branch of the IG Metall (DDR)! In his view, this could be interpreted as a rejection of the union's leadership by the rank and file. The antiquated bookkeeping methods used by the union also made it almost impossible to trace and determine the payment of dues. See: Edmund Möller, "Bei Null anfangen", *Der Gewerkschafter*, 7/90, pp. 8-9. There were other, more positive, experiences of collaboration between the two unions at that time, for instance, at the Robotron Büromaschinenwerk Sömmerda. Workers, management and unions restructured the enterprise. 75% of the shares in the company were distributed among employees and the remaining 25% were transferred to the Treuhandanstalt. 50% of the seats on the board of administrators were reserved for representatives of workers. What had been presented at the time as a "model" for a new approach to co-determination and the improvement of worker rights by the IG Metall was an experiment that was not to be repeated. See: "Volkseigentum sichern", *Der Gewerkschafter*, 5/90, p. 24; Roesler 2002.

<sup>781</sup> "Die soziale Einheit gestalten! Memorandum des IG Metall zur sozialen Ausgestaltung des Prozesses der Einigung der beiden deutschen Staaten", May 8, 1990, cited in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 210.

<sup>782</sup> "Moderate Gewerkschaftskritik am Staatsvertrag", *Die tageszeitung*, May 9, 1990.

treasurer.<sup>783</sup> In a declaration to the press, members of the executive committee stated that either IG Metall (DDR) was to give “the signal for its disbandment and for its members to join the IG Metall” or the latter would “actively recruit members in the GDR”. The threat was obvious and Berlin conceded. On the same day, Steinkühler announced the disbanding of IG Metall (DDR).

Die IG Metall der DDR wird im September auf einer Zentraldelegiertenkonferenz die satzungsgemäßen Voraussetzungen für den Übertritt ihrer Mitglieder schaffen.<sup>784</sup>

On the following evening, an agreement was ratified by the two metal unions, which revised key aspects of the memorandum published three weeks earlier: organizational expansion of IG Metall and the admission of individual East German workers into the organization.<sup>785</sup> The Central Assembly of Delegates of IG Metall (DDR) in September would conclude the process of disbandment. A special congress of IG Metall in November would make the necessary changes to the organizational bylaws and allow for the expansion and the admission of East German workers, which would occur between January 1 and the end of May 2001 - in time for IG Metall's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>786</sup> The agreement confirmed the failure of IG Metall (DDR)'s vision for a negotiated merger.<sup>787</sup>

Franz Steinkühler justified the cessation of collaboration with the East German union by stating that weak unions and poor collective agreements in the GDR represented a real threat to wages, working conditions and union power in the Federal Republic.

Wenn dort schlechte Verträge abgeschlossen werden, dann verschlechtert dies die tarifpolitischen Ausgangsbedingungen in einem vereinten Deutschland und beschwört damit die Gefahr eines tarifpolitischen Stillstandes oder gar Rückschrittes auch für unsere Tarifverträge herauf. Dies gilt in gleichem Maße für die Mitbestimmung, die Betriebsverfassung, die Sozialpolitik und für alle übrigen Gebiete gewerkschaftlicher Interessenvertretung. Und dies gilt nicht zuletzt auch für die gewerkschaftliche Stärke selbst.<sup>788</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> “Vorlage für die Sitzung der geschäftsführenden Vorstandsmitglieder am: 28. Mai 1990”, p. 1.

<sup>784</sup> Jutta Roitsch, “Schwierige Annäherung – feindliche Übernahme”, *Frankfurter*, May 25, 1990.

<sup>785</sup> All signs would seem to indicate that it is with this commission in mind that IG Metall's executive committee named the president, the vice-president and the treasurer responsible of the negotiations with the IG Metall (DDR) on the previous day.

<sup>786</sup> “Gewerkschaftseinheit verwirklichen”, republished in: *Der Gewerkschafter*, 6/90, p. 5.

<sup>787</sup> “Metaller in Ost und West bald vereint”, *Die tageszeitung*, May 26, 1990. There was apparently a certain degree of confusion among journalists on the precise details of the agreement. This article contains two errors, namely that IG Metall (DDR) members were to join the IG Metall en masse and that officials from the East German union were to be rehabilitated by the West German union. It is impossible to know the source of this confusion. But the direct language used by IG Metall at that time, reported the day before in Jutta Roitsch's article (see above), indicates that they were probably the work of the taz journalist.

<sup>788</sup> Franz Steinkühler, “Eine IG Metall für Deutschland”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 6/90, pp. 4-5.

Franz Steinkühler put arguments previously made in opposition to the legal extension on their head, as he now used them to justify a strategy that excluded any collaboration with East German unionists. In this regard, he stated that East German unionists were not sufficiently versed in the West German labor law and its legal system and furthermore lacked the support of East German workers in the IG Metall (DDR), as factors that motivated the IG Metall to act independently. Similarly, an official sent to Leipzig in 1990 portrayed the desire of East German metal unionists to uphold union representation at the workplace level as the product of a complete “lack of knowledge of the history of the labor movement”.<sup>789</sup> The development of the system of industrial relations in the Federal Republic of Germany, with all the triumphs, setbacks and compromises of the trade unions, was viewed as “the” history of the labor movement. The fact that IG Metall (DDR) remained ambivalent toward this model was seen as confirmation that IG Metall needed to exert greater control over the merger process.<sup>790</sup>

After the May 25 agreement, the active campaign to get workers to join the IG Metall, along with the organization of the disbandment, were among the few tasks given to IG Metall (DDR).

### **3.8.2.3 The organization of the expansion: The July 10 meeting**

IG Metall organized five working groups, coordinated by a committee supervised by Franz Steinkühler’s right-hand man, Karlheinz Blessing.<sup>791</sup> Special attention shall be devoted to the activities of this Coordination Committee and the Working Group I (organization, structures, staff) and IV (works councils, training and recruitment). Their reports were presented to IG Metall’s executive committee on July 10.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> Kletzin 1994, p. 85.

<sup>790</sup> In all our discussions with him, Jochen Kletzin was visibly more enthusiastic about his experience in Leipzig and the people he worked with there, than he was when he wrote his article which would seem to point to the difficulties encountered here. It is possible that the tug of war between Frankfurt and Berlin did not take on the same dimensions in all East German regions as the top union officials - the discussions between the two IG Metall executives - would lead us to believe. According to the head of the IG Metall in West Berlin, the collaboration between unionists from both organizations in this city went rather smoothly and, if anything, went against the wishes of Frankfurt. See: Manfred Foede, “Vereint mit der DDR”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 11/90, pp. 21-22.

<sup>791</sup> Working Group 1 was responsible for issues relating to the organization, structures, personnel and conferences. Working Group 2 was responsible of issues relating to membership and finances. Working Group 3 prepared the collective bargaining negotiations. Working Group 4 was in charge of union politics in relation to works councils, training and recruitment. Working group 5 was in charge of the team collaboration (Personen-gruppenarbeit). See: “Vorlage für die Sitzung der geschäftsführenden Vorstandsmitglieder am: 28. Mai 1990”.

<sup>792</sup> “Vorlage zur Gliederung der DDR-Aktivitäten” and “Zeit- und Aktivitätenplan zur Übertragung der Organisationsstrukturen der IGM für die BRD auf das Gebiet der DDR”, both adopted by IG Metall’s executive board on June 29, 1990, and included in the: “Vorlage für die Sitzung des Vorstands am 10. Juli 1990”. Also: “Vorlage für die Sitzung des Vorstandes am 10. Juli 1990 – Betriebsratswahlen in der DDR”.

Reports prepared by the Coordination Committee and the Working Group I illustrate how the expansion process hinged on organizational efficiency conditioned by the need to proceed with the utmost urgency. Other considerations were of a secondary importance and often sacrificed due to need to act as quickly as possible.

The expansion plan drafted by Working Group I (organization, structures, personnel) prepared the “organizational integration of the territories of the GDR into the jurisdiction of the IG Metall”.<sup>793</sup> It was rooted in procedures originally conceived for the opening of administrative offices (Verwaltungsstellen) and was under the supervision of the district office (Bezirksleitung). The recent experience of consolidating four administrative offices in North Rhine-Westphalia served as a model for expansion. The fact that the fusion of four administrative offices in a union stronghold in West Germany could be compared to the establishment of top-to-bottom IG Metall structures in the GDR illustrates how the expansion was primarily viewed in June of that year as an organizational and bureaucratic challenge. The reports prepared by Working Group I stressed that the conditions for rapid progress towards expansion were 1) a retention of the current statutes and 2) continued use of present methods of operation.<sup>794</sup>

To achieve such continuity, the choice of the personnel was crucial. The first staff members sent by IG Metall to the GDR had often been retired and honorary officers of the union (Ehrenamtlichen). The expansion process now required reliable, full-time officials dedicated to implementing the strategy drafted in Frankfurt. The selection of personnel was especially important for initiating the new round of collective bargaining in the near future. The Eastern district executive committees (Bezirksleitungen), who were assigned this portfolio, needed staff capable of handling the negotiations. The employee policy was thus a key aspect in the expansion and the union’s executive committee was careful not to surrender its influence over the nomination process and refused to hire IG Metall (DDR) officials, at least initially.

The financial autonomy of the East German administrative offices in charge of the member relations was another priority, and was necessary from the very beginning.<sup>795</sup> An administrative office needed about 20,000 members (of which an average of 10,000 were full paying members) to achieve financial autonomy. Working Group II (membership and finances) estimated that about 60% of the 1.68 millions of IG Metall (DDR) would join the IG Metall,

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<sup>793</sup> “Vorlage zur Gliederung der DDR-Aktivitäten”, p. 4.

<sup>794</sup> Idem and “Zeit- und Aktivitätenplan zur Übertragung der Organisationsstrukturen der IGM für die BRD auf das Gebiet der DDR”, p. 2.

<sup>795</sup> “Vorlage zur Gliederung der DDR-Aktivitäten”, p. 4.

figures which in retrospect were quite accurate.<sup>796</sup> A simple calculation thus suggests that 50 administrative offices could be maintained. 37 were initially opened.

The opening of district headquarters and administrative offices was the top priority and had to be completed by January 1, 1991. To date, the IG Metall's structures in the GDR had been officially designated Information and Counseling offices. They were set to become the actual structures of representation for the region's metal workers on July 1, 1990, the date the MESU came into effect. To supplement the small teams at the first 15 information offices, IG Metall announced the opening of 35 information offices and 100 new officials on July 10.

Each union information office was given until December 31, 1990, to complete the process of restructuring themselves into operational district headquarters or administrative offices. The representative secretaries from the district headquarters (beauftragter Geschäftsführer) were in charge of coordinating the establishment of the administrative offices, with the number of such offices set at between six and nine per district. Their work was closely coordinated by Frankfurt, demonstrated by the fact that union officials were obligated to seek prior approval from the union executive board for any expenses exceeding 10,000 DM.

To ensure the first round of collective bargaining could take place, the number of new district headquarters was kept to a bare minimum, as seen by the fact that only two fully autonomous East German district headquarters were created in Berlin and Dresden. The others were incorporated into West German regional chapters, who assumed control over the collective bargaining negotiations. For example, the East German districts of Rostock, Schwerin and Neubrandenburg were integrated into the Hamburg regional chapter; Halle and Magdeburg into Hanover; Erfurt, Suhr and Gera into Frankfurt, etc. The districts of Chemnitz (Karl-Marx-Stadt), Dresden and Leipzig were combined to form a regional chapter based in Dresden, while the districts of East and West Berlin were combined with Potsdam, Frankfurt/Oder and Cottbus in the new Berlin regional chapter.<sup>797</sup>

The transformation of the Information and Counseling offices into genuine administrative offices was performed parallel to these other activities. The designated heads of the administrative offices were to remain in their posts until the election of an executive board was con-

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<sup>796</sup> Werner Schreiber, "Gewerkschaftseinheit finanzierbar", *Der Gewerkschafter*, 7/90, p. 1 and Ibid., "Solides Fundament", *Der Gewerkschafter*, 9/90, pp. 4-5.

<sup>797</sup> "Vorlage zur Gliederung der DDR-Aktivitäten", pp. 6-7.

firmed by Frankfurt after May 1991.<sup>798</sup> Recent experiences in North Rhine-Westphalia had shown that it was easier to split an administrative office in two than merge two into one. The recommendations of Working Group I to initially restrict the number of administrative offices were thus heeded.<sup>799</sup>

The July 10 report by the Working Group IV (works councils, training and recruitment) on the organization of works councils' election recommended holding works councils elections in as many metal enterprises as possible before the end of the year.<sup>800</sup> Working Group IV stressed the vital role these first rounds of elections would be for the future success of IG Metall's endeavors to transplant its structures to eastern Germany.

Mit dieser Betriebsratswahl werden die entscheidenden Grundlagen für die zukünftige Funktionsstruktur, für das Erscheinungsbild der IG Metall im Betrieb, für die Mitgliederbetreuung und Werbung sowie für den Organisationsaufbau gelegt.<sup>801</sup>

Working Group IV drafted a training scheme aimed at East German unionists to cover the preparation, organization and participation in works council elections. The practical goal of this training program was to provide assistance to unionists at enterprises in preparing voter lists, candidate lists and in the selection of the election committees. These instructional seminars were taught by full-time West German officers (Hauptamtlicher), assigned in Frankfurt by the head of the educational division. Under the recommendation of Working Group IV, the union magazine *metall* published supplements targeted at the East German unionists, which explained the intricacies of works council elections. IG Metall's executive committee also tried to dispel any doubts or uncertainties currently held by East German rank-and-file unionists. In a letter, they reiterated the responsibility of employers for the material organization of works councils elections and stated it was illegal to deduct the time used to vote from working hours.<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> In order to provide the reader with more details on the IG Metall's plan of expansion in the GDR, the a copy of the timetable drafted by the Working Group I and ratified by the Vorstand on July 10 is included in the appendix.

<sup>799</sup> "Zeit- und Aktivitätenplan zur Übertragung der Organisationsstrukturen der IGM für die BRD auf das Gebiet der DDR", p. 3.

<sup>800</sup> "Vorlage für die Sitzung des Vorstandes am 10. Juli 1990. Betriebsratswahlen in der DDR". The MESU treaty included provisions for works councils election to be held between July 2, 1990 and June 31, 1991.

<sup>801</sup> "Vorlage für die Sitzung des Vorstandes am 10. Juli 1990. Betriebsratswahlen in der DDR", 2nd page (unnumbered).

<sup>802</sup> Franz Steinkühler and Horst Klaus, "An die Geschäftsleitungen der Betriebe der Metallwirtschaft in der DDR", August 24, 1990, copy in possession of the author.

Hence, the July 10 meeting laid the groundwork for the expansion of IG Metall into the GDR. The decisions approved and confirmed that day were key to the entire process: the opening of 35 information offices, the dispatch of 100 West German officials, as well as the confirmation that no former officials from the IG Metall (DDR) would be hired to perform functions in the new eastern structures of the IG Metall. With this in mind, this meeting could be described as the final break in all ties between the two metal trade unions.<sup>803</sup>

#### 3.8.2.4 The dissolution of IG Metall (DDR)

IG Metall (DDR) set the date for its disbandment for December 31 at a congress held on October 5-6. The union also adopted the legal measures necessary for the incorporation of its members into the IG Metall.<sup>804</sup> The resolutions from the congress were adopted out of necessity and for no other reason. In an open letter to its members, the union's president wrote:

Uns stehen weitere soziale Kämpfe um unsere Interessen bevor. Um sie erfolgreich zu bestehen, bedarf es einer einheitlichen IG Metall im geeinten Deutschland.<sup>805</sup>

Some pronouncements, such as the IG Metall's recognition of the years of membership in the East German union, were certainly welcomed by the delegates. Still, many were obviously upset by a process which, they felt, left them with no other option but to comply with the decisions made in Frankfurt. Franz Steinkühler was reaching out to these persons when he declared:

Niemand braucht mit gesenktem Haupt in die deutsche Einheit gehen – und erst recht nicht in die geeinte IG Metall. Ich wünsche mir möglichst viele Kolleginnen und Kollegen aus der ehemaligen DDR mit aufrechtem Gang und mit Rückgrat und wir wollen nichts tun um dazu beizutragen ihnen diesen Gang noch schwerer zu machen als er ohnehin ist.<sup>806</sup>

Hartwig Bugiel, still head of the IG Metall (DDR), made a very similar declaration and added that the disbandment of his organization was “not a sign of weakness”.<sup>807</sup> According to Franz Steinkühler, the redundancy package offered by the IG Metall to the dismissed East German

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<sup>803</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 215.

<sup>804</sup> “Zeit des Abschieds”, *metall*, 21/90, p. 16.

<sup>805</sup> Cited in: “Letzte Etappe”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 11/90, p. 7.

<sup>806</sup> The abovementioned article reports the first part of this quote. The longer excerpt printed here is from the cover of a brochure distributed during IG Metall's 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Congress.

<sup>807</sup> The same brochure contained this declaration on its back side: “Wir als Metaller der ehemaligen DDR können erhobenen Hauptes und aufrechten Ganges in die Gewerkschaftseinheit gehen. Die Auflösung der IG Metall der DDR ist kein Zeichen der Schwäche!”.

secretaries was so generous that they would be well-advised not to publicize it, as many East German unemployed workers would show little sympathy for their complaints.<sup>808</sup>

Were these officials handed “golden parachutes” in order to pacify any resistance to the expansion process? Maybe these could be seen as an incentive for the IG Metall (DDR) leadership to keep a low profile after losing the battle for a merger of the two unions. The author was unable to find more information about this severance package. Until Spring 2004, Hartwig Bugiel was in charge of liquidating the assets of the IG Metall (DDR). He has twice refused to address these issues. I attempted to arrange an interview with him and also offered him the opportunity to address the GDR study group at the Centre Marc-Bloch in Berlin. He was quite vocal in his refusals over the phone.

The remaining legal barriers to expansion were lifted during IG Metall’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Congress held on 1 + 2 November 1991 in Bonn. The required amendments to the organizational statutes were all approved by the delegates.<sup>809</sup>

### **3.8.2.5 The cost of expansion**

It is very hard to determine the exact cost of expansion for the IG Metall. According to the Provisional Report of the union treasurer published in September 1991, the union funds had grown by about 6.9 millions DM in 1990. The rise in West German membership had more than compensated for the expenditures in the GDR.<sup>810</sup> The figures published a few months later in IG Metall's Annual Report showed a loss of about 10.8 millions DM in 1990, despite an additional 3.5 million DM in interest payments.

What brought about the 17.7 millions DM difference (from a 6.9 million surplus to a 10.8 million deficit)? According to the Annual Report, the bulk of this sum (13.3 millions DM), was allocated to the union training schools. The Provisional Report indicated costs of 27 millions DM in 1990 (roughly as much as in 1989), while this sum had jumped to 40.3 millions in the Annual Report. The chances that this 50 % rise had not been anticipated are quite slim. Nonetheless, the importance of training costs indicate the great efforts made by IG Metall to educate the East German unionists about the mechanisms of the West German system of industrial relations. The training program developed by Working Group IV during the Summer

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<sup>808</sup> “Letzte Etappe”.

<sup>809</sup> The amendments proposed by the executive committee and adopted by the delegates were published in: “Auf dem Weg zur Einheit”, *metall*, 19/90, pp. 8-9.

<sup>810</sup> Werner Schreiber, “Keine Turbulenzen”, *Der Gewerkschafter*, 9/91, pp. 6-7.



1990 is without doubt partially responsible from the increase in the budget for the training schools.

A comparison with the budget allotted to each department in 1989 clearly indicates an even greater financial commitment by IG Metall in 1990 to finance its expansion. Although the union's income grew by 51 millions DM, its spending increased by about 86 millions DM, showing a loss of 35 millions DM.<sup>811</sup> It is impossible to calculate the share earmarked for union activities in the GDR, although one can reasonably assume that it represented a major portion of this sum. A similar comparison for the years 1990/1991 shows income rose at a faster pace than spending (190 millions vs. 167 millions DM).<sup>812</sup> Even if it is impossible to verify the claim that all the added expenditures were devoted to operations in eastern Germany, the addition of more than one million new members would appear to compensate for any costs incurred.

No figures for the total cost of expansion appear to exist. The estimates presented here are incomplete, as no allowances are made for full-time West German officials working in eastern Germany among others. Attempts by IG Metall to recover former properties of the Wilhelmine and Weimar German Metal Association (Deutscher Metall Verband) through the liquidation of FDGB's assets are an indicator of the tremendous resources mobilized for organizational expansion.<sup>813</sup> Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain any figures on the value of the assets recovered by IG Metall at the time of publication.

### **3.8.3 The expansion of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union**

The expansion of the chemistry union took a path which, to a certain extent, deviated from the one chosen by the IG Metall. The IG Metall's expansion was premised on the disbandment of its East German counterpart, whereas Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union took the route of cooperation with the East German Chemistry, Glass and Ceramics Union. The structures of the East German chemistry union were built on those of its predecessor. This strategy can be described as a merger, however one must bear in mind that this was not a merger of equals. The conditions for this merger were established in Hanover by the West German chemistry union and accepted, without much resistance, by its East German counterpart. For-

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<sup>811</sup> The exact figures are: Revenue = +DM 50,912,010; expenditures = DM 85,742,970. Profit/loss = -34.830.960 DM. See: Vorstand der IG Metall 1992, pp. 339-340.

<sup>812</sup> The exact figures are: Revenue = DM 190,558,500; expenditures = 167,110,010 DM. Profit/loss = +23.448.490 DM. See: Ibid., pp. 340-341.

<sup>813</sup> The financial statement indicates that the union tried to recover 98 former DMV properties (Ibid., p. 337). See also: Franz Steinkühler, "Es geht um Gerechtigkeit", *metall*, 18/90, p. 3.

mer East German officials assumed roles in the enlarged organization, which forced the union leadership in Hanover to commit significant resources to their training.

### 3.8.3.1 The five preconditions from February 28.

The respective presidents of the two chemistry unions met at the end of January to increase the level of cooperation between their organizations in day-to-day operations.<sup>814</sup> Though this declaration was in line with in the first strategy of the DGB unions, the support for German reunification included in this statement was indeed new.

Die IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik und die IG Chemie-Glas-Keramik (DDR) wollen alle Bestrebungen unterstützen und fördern, die der Wiedervereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten dienen.

It was not the first pro-unity stance taken by a DGB member union, but most likely the first joint declaration with an East German union. Much evidence indicates that this support for German reunification was instigated on the part of the chemistry union to complement its collaborative activities. Although hinted at in the January declaration, it did not expressly state that the collaborative endeavors pursued by the two chemistry unions would ultimately result in their merger.

The Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union declared its plan for a merger with its East German counterpart for the first time one month later. This document, announcing the intensification of the union's presence in the GDR, marked an end to its former strategy of support and collaboration.<sup>815</sup> The chemistry union was the first DGB union to make this shift, and its measures toward legal extension and organizational expansion were more resolute than those taken by IG Metall's Council at its March 15 meeting.<sup>816</sup> Its declaration stressed the importance of the social union and announced the DGB/BDA joint declaration due for publication nine days later. The DGB union declared its intention of entering the East German fray and to assume control over the organization of collective bargaining there.

Der Prozess einer Kooperation bis zur Fusion werde auch diktiert von den wirtschaftlichen Gang der westlichen Kapitalbeteiligungen in der DDR. Mit den Arbeitgeberverbänden in der Bundesrepublik strebe man die Bildung gemischter Kommissionen an, um die künftige Tarifarbeit in der DDR vorzubereiten.

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<sup>814</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Auf dem Weg zum Vertragsgemeinschaft", January 30, 1990.

<sup>815</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Die IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik verstärkt ihre Arbeit in der DDR", February 28, 1990, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 14.

<sup>816</sup> See above, 3.8.1.2.

For the first time, the merger of the two chemistry unions was explicitly stated as an objective. In the DGB union agenda, the term ‘merger’ referred to an expansion process based on the absorption of the employees and assets of its East German counterpart. The union's presence in the GDR was expanded: three new offices were opened in addition to the one in Leipzig and more West German officials were sent in to bolster the operation.

The main points of this declaration stated the five requirements that the IG CGK(DDR) had to meet. The chemistry union established these as the preconditions for any merger. The wording of the document captures how the expansion of the DGB unions was interconnected with legal extension. The first precondition referred to the acceptance of the main political principles of the West German chemistry union, i.e., support for parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and independence from political parties and non-union organizations. The second one obliged the East German union to enact the West German law on co-determination and to establish works councils in the GDR. The third precondition demanded the rescission of the law on trade unions and a rejection of political strikes. The fourth precondition related to compliance with the principles of social partnership and cooperation as practiced by the West German chemistry union. Finally, the headquarters of the unified chemistry union were to remain in Hanover.

Such preconditions basically equate to the eastward expansion of the West German chemistry union's structures in the GDR. They probably would have been accepted on principle by Hartmut Löschner, head of IG CGK (DDR) since 1982, before their publication. This plan for expansion guaranteed future employment for most of the East German union secretaries, rare at other unions in the GDR.

This plan demanded the ratification of the five preconditions by the East German chemistry union's Central Delegates Conference in April. Rappe insisted that no further steps toward merger could be taken until that time. He demanded that Löschner use the days and weeks until the start of the conference to persuade the delegates to accept these conditions, or the strategy of his union might be revised.

Zurzeit heißt es für uns bei allen verstärkten Aktivitäten in der DDR vor weiteren Schritten abzuwarten. Am 27. und 28. April findet in Bernau eine außerordentliche Zentraldelegiertenversammlung der IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik mit 300 gewählten Delegierten statt, auf der auch ein neuer Vorstand gewählt wird. Die dort getroffenen Beschlüsse werden erkennbar machen, ob dann nach einer Kooperationsphase mit verschiedenen gemeinsamen Vorstandskommissionen eine spätere Fusion erreichbar ist.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, “Große Aufgaben für eine starke Gewerkschaft”, March 29, 1990, p. 1.

### **3.8.3.2 Collaboration with employers' associations**

The West German chemistry union used the months of March and April to establish a collaborative framework with the West German employers' associations. In the direct aftermath of the DGB/BDA joint declaration from March 9, the West German chemistry union and employers ratified three agreements, its most obvious transposition in any sectoral level. In these agreements, the social partners called for an extension of the West German labor laws and the dual structure of worker representation. They agreed to engage in collective bargaining in the GDR.

A four-point joint declaration by the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union and the Federal Chemistry Employers' Association (Bundesarbeitgeberverband Chemie) was first ratified on March 13. Both partners agreed to exchange information in small working groups, and on the introduction of a social market economy, works councils and social partnership practices in the GDR.<sup>818</sup>

A second agreement, with the employers' associations from the paper industry (Vereinigung der Arbeitgeberverbände der deutschen Papierindustrie), was signed four weeks later.<sup>819</sup> This declaration opened by stating that the form of cooperation practiced in West Germany, "based on the social market economy and freely elected works councils", was a "suitable model for the GDR". Both organizations declared their intent to establish effective industry-level collective bargaining authority and social partnership in the GDR.

The third agreement was signed with the employers from the rubber and ceramics industry less than one month after the first.<sup>820</sup> The similarity of the formulations used in this document with the other two declarations is unmistakable.

### **3.8.3.3 Difficulties encountered in introducing works councils**

West German union secretaries sent to the GDR actively promoted legal extension and organizational expansion. It would not have been possible for the West German chemistry union to superimpose its structures onto those of the former FDGB union without the support of workers at the workplace. Yet suspicions toward the East German chemistry union remained deep-seated and the collaboration with former officials often questioned. West German union secre-

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<sup>818</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Gemeinsame Verfahrensgrundsätze zur Entwicklung in der DDR", March 13, 1990.

<sup>819</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Gemeinsame Thesen zur Zusammenarbeit in der DDR", April 5, 1990.

<sup>820</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Zusammenarbeit bei DDR-Fragen mit Kautschuk- und Keramikindustrie", April 11, 1990.

taries exploited the broad interest of East German workers in enterprise partnerships and the West German system of worker representation<sup>821</sup>, to systematically promote legal extension and the merger with the East German union. Instructions sent to all administrative offices and districts made these points clear.<sup>822</sup>

Michael Mersmann, head of the West German chemistry union's district office in Leipzig, sensed a positive response from East German workers to his actions. In May, he claimed he had succeeded in persuading the employees at 90 East German chemistry enterprises to organize elections for works councils.<sup>823</sup> An internal memorandum from June tempered these claims.<sup>824</sup> Not only was the number of elected works councils in the GDR chemistry lower (60, not 90) but there was seemingly little reason to believe these works councils would be capable of acting independently in the near future. The works councils usually coexisted with the former enterprise-based trade unions, serving as a supervisory board of the latter, and did not as such lobby on behalf of the workers' interests. The absence of legal status for works councils made their existence dependent on agreements with the management. These agreements were the sole legal documents safeguarding their work and the actions of works councilor. The author of the memo doubted whether these works councils were stable enough to perform the duties imparted on them by the Works Constitution Act and he recommended new elections as soon as possible.

Many of these concerns were voiced at a meeting on workplace structures of worker representation organized by the Citizens' Committee of Wurzen. Questions from the audience indicated an interest in works councils, yet the lack of legal protection and the fear of being associated with former union secretaries made the task of recruiting works councilors very difficult.

Berichte von Kündigungsdrohungen der noch amtierenden Betriebsleitungen. Angst vor Entlassung, auch wg. Betätigung für eine BR-Wahl bestimmten Diskussion. Viele Einschätzungen liefen darauf hinaus, dass es Schwierigkeiten bei der Findung von Kandi-

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<sup>821</sup> The young official (only 29 at the time) in charge of the IG CPK office in Leipzig, Michael Mersmann, placed the number of requests he received for meetings between East German and West German workers and unionists from East German enterprises at about 50 per day. According to Hermann Rappe's associate, Günter Malott, IG CPK offices on the East German border also received about 100 such requests a day. See: Michael Mersmann "Prüfstein Solidarität", *Umschau*, 3/90, reprinted in: IG CPK, 1993, document 26; Günter Malott, "Für ein System gewählter Betriebsräte", *Die Mitbestimmung*, 3/90, pp. 198-199.

<sup>822</sup> Mitteilung des Vorsitzenden, "Koordinierung der Gewerkschaftskontakte zur DDR", March 19, 1990, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 16.

<sup>823</sup> "Massenentlassungen prägen das Bild der DDR-Chemie", *Chemische Rundschau*, 18 (May 4, 1990), reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 45.

<sup>824</sup> Seppel Kraus, "Vermerk: Lehrgang mit den DDR-Kollegen vom 28.05. – 01.06.1990 in Hustedt", June 5, 1990, published in: *Ibid.*, document 54.

daten geben wird: Frust über bisherige Interessenvertretung, Angst vor Repressalien, Gleichsetzung mit alter BGL.<sup>825</sup>

### 3.8.3.4 The completion of the expansion

What would have happened if the East German chemistry union had refused to ratify the five preconditions during its Central Delegates' Conference in April? This question was put to Hermann Rappe, in the presence of Hartmut Löschner, just before the start of the conference. He responded by stating that his union would launch a new, competing chemistry union in the GDR. As already stated above, similar threats would be made by IG Metall a few weeks later.

Auf die Frage, was denn passiere, wenn die DDR-Gewerkschafter nicht wie gewünscht sich zu den Kooperations- und Fusionsbedingungen der IG Chemie bereiterklärten, entgegnete Rappe in Anwesenheit des DDR-Vorstandsvorsitzenden Löschner ungerührt, dass dann noch in der nächsten Woche eine neue IG Chemie in der DDR gegründet würde. Die Büros in der DDR waren damit mehr als bloße Beratungs- und Informationsbüros. Sie waren eine organisatorische Option für den Fall, das sich Unerwartetes ereignen sollte.<sup>826</sup>

No action was required on this threat. The two-day Main Conference of Delegates, held on April 27 and 28, modified the organization's statutes and set the stage for merger.<sup>827</sup> Motion 7 unanimously ratified the five preconditions set by the West German chemistry union.<sup>828</sup> Hartmut Löschner was re-elected with 84% of the vote.<sup>829</sup> From this point forward, there appeared to be few obstacles on the path towards merger. From October 1 on, the East German chemistry union members were allowed to join to the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union. They remained members of both unions until the disbandment of the East German organization on May 31, 1991. On June 1, the chemistry union's expansion was completed.

### 3.8.3.5 The debate on former FDGB officials

From the perspective of the union leadership, the establishment of the West German chemistry union in the GDR went more smoothly than the similar process at IG Metall. Though it did

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<sup>825</sup> "Aktentnotiz über eine Podiumsdiskussion des Bürgerkomitees Wurzen zu Fragen Betriebsräte, Betriebsratswahlen am 22.03.1990, 19.00 Uhr", printed in: Ibid., document 23.

<sup>826</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 133. The authors also refer to: Ralf Neubauer, "Rappe und die Heilsbotschaft von der IG Chemie", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 30, 1990.

<sup>827</sup> IG CGK (DDR), "Grundsatzantrag 6 – Schaffung einer einheitlichen Industriegewerkschaft im Rahmen des deutschen Einheitsprozesses", printed in: IG CPK 1993, document 29.

<sup>828</sup> IG CGK (DDR), "Grundsatzantrag 7 – Bestimmung der sozialen und demokratischen Grundpositionene der IG Chemie, Glas und Keramik für ihre zukünftige Arbeit und den Prozess der Fusion mit der IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik der BRD", reproduced in: Ibid., document 30.

<sup>829</sup> IG CPK presse-dienst, "Jetzt zügig zu einer gesamtdeutschen IG Chemie", April 30, 1990, printed in: Ibid., document 35.

not require much maneuvering to compel its East German counterpart to adopt its agenda, the West German chemistry union faced stiffer resistance on the part of workers. The April resolutions called for the heads of the administrative offices and district chapters to be appointed and not elected, as is usually the case at DGB unions. The effect of this measure was that many former FDGB secretaries, whose appointment faced open hostility from rank-and-file members, were confirmed in their posts. Many workers felt their efforts to reshape the East German union landscape had been in vain.

Wir haben uns doch zum Trottel gemacht! Haben erneuert und erneuert und erneuert, und am Ende saßen dieselben Leute wie vorher an der Tränke. Das geht ja soweit, dass der ehemalige Chef des FDGB-Kreisvorstandes hier im Werk, der inzwischen als Tarifexperte in den Unternehmerverband der Chemie gewechselt ist, wahrscheinlich bei den nächsten Tarifverhandlungen einem seiner jahrelangen Spezis und Kreisvorstandskollegen aus FDGB-Zeiten gegenüber sitzen wird. Einer von denen ist nämlich jetzt im Hauptvorstand der IG für Tariffragen zuständig.<sup>830</sup>

Many criticized the alliance between the chemistry unions, and were against retaining former FDGB secretaries in the new organization. Yet Hermann Rappe made it clear that he did not intend to choose which secretaries would remain and which would lose their posts. The sole determinant of whether one was deemed capable of working at the unified union was one's willingness to collaborate on building a united chemistry union.

Interessiert uns nicht, ob einer bis Ende '89 oder Anfang'90 aus voller Überzeugung oder halber Überzeugung oder weil es eben so war und nicht anders ging in der SED war. Uns interessiert, wie die Haltung jetzt ist, wo der große Zusammenbruch hier da ist, und nicht mehr.<sup>831</sup>

The workers' anger could be felt at many of the meetings. On one such occasion, a young union secretary named Horst Seel, aged 36 years, suggested that workers send a petition to the union president, as in the days of the FDGB. His proposal was greeted with boos and shouts of disapproval ("How shall we explain that to our colleagues?"). The displeasure at the retention of former FDGB secretaries in the new unified chemistry union was strong enough to finally compel Hanover to fire many of the more controversial secretaries at the end of August.<sup>832</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> Peters, "Alte Hintern auf neuen Sesseln. Geburtsfehler der neuen Satzung der IG Chemie/Ost".

<sup>831</sup> D. Peters, "Alte Hintern auf neuen Sesseln. Geburtsfehler der neuen Satzung der IG Chemie/Ost", *express*, 10/1990, p. 7. Rappe did not view this position as in any way conflicting with the union's historical rejection of "communist" influence, as he added that PDS members, however, were not welcome to join the union's staff: "Ich denke mir, wer jetzt noch in der PDS ist oder sich dahingezogen fühlt, mit den gleichen politischen Inhalten arbeiten will, dem würde ich ganz kollegial raten, es bei uns zu lassen. Es wird nicht gehen bei uns". Quoted in: D. Peters, "Überholen, ohne einzuholen. IG Chemie-Ost als getreue Kopie der IG Chemie-West", *express*, 9/90, p. 10.

<sup>832</sup> Idem.

Was there a direct link between the retention of former union secretaries and the low rate of new members joining the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union? Some observers believed this was the case. If claims of 500,000 members made by the East German chemistry union in March 1990 are accurate<sup>833</sup>, the number of 150,782 new members by September 1990<sup>834</sup> probably fell below expectations. At the end of the membership drive in May 1991 only a handful of new members had joined the organization, which had a total of 160,000 East German members.<sup>835</sup>

### 3.8.3.6 The training of East German union secretaries

The high level of suspicion towards “discredited” officials was palpable even among the East German chemistry secretaries themselves. These reservations were especially evident during training seminars on West German labor law.

A report submitted to the union president by the person in charge of overseeing one six-week program provides valuable insight on the nature of the instruction given to East German union secretaries.<sup>836</sup> In his report, he pointed to the “enormity” of the task facing East German union officials. Over the course of the seminars, they had to acquaint themselves with the new economic, tax, political and welfare systems, as well as the new labor law. Due to vast range of topics on discussion, most of the participants were unable to absorb all this information and, as a result, insecurity and anxiety were widespread.

Die Probleme, die auf die Kolleginnen und Kollegen zukommen, sind immens und kaum von ihnen zu bewältigen.<sup>837</sup>

The influence of former chemistry union secretaries in the workplaces was very limited, and it was as a consequent difficult to recruit new members and keep existing ones, he added. He joined the chorus of voices within the union who were rather skeptical about the true power of the works councils which had been set up too hastily. As it was difficult to obtain a copy of the East German Works Constitution Act (Betriebsverfassung der DDR), there were no mate-

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<sup>833</sup> Helmut Kipp, “Löschner: Zur staatlichen Einheit gehört die Vereinigung der Gewerkschaften”, *Handelsblatt*, March 2, 1990, reproduced in: IG CPK 1993, document 21.

<sup>834</sup> Letter from Wolfgang Schultze (IG CPK Vorstand) to the “colleagues” of the IG CGK (DDR) including the table, “Mitgliederzahlen auf dem Gebiet der DDR. Stand: 07.09.1990”, reproduced in: *Ibid.*, document 87.

<sup>835</sup> “Nur noch wenige Tage Zeit für den Übertritt in die Industriegewerkschaft Chemie-Papier-Keramik”, *gp magazin*, 5/91, reprinted in: *Ibid.*, document 156.

<sup>836</sup> Seppel Kraus, “Vermerk: Lehrgang mit den DDR-Kollegen vom 28.05.-01.06.1990 in Hustedt”, June 5, 1990, reproduced in: *Ibid.*, document 54.

<sup>837</sup> *Idem*, p. 1. Similar experiences were made by other IG CPK instructors during the seminar “Grundlehrgang für Hauptamtliche aus der DDR, Aufbaulehrgang und Vertiefungslehrgang”. See: Hans Eisenbeiß, “Sprung ins kalte Wasser”, *Umschau*, 6/90, p. 32, published in: *Ibid.*, document 74.



rials to teach the officials about the technicalities of works council election in the GDR! The report concluded that in all likelihood most of the “works councils” had not been elected under conditions that met the conditions of the Works Constitution Act. New elections were therefore necessary. This added to the uncertainty among those in attendance, as many feared that their right to elect works councils would be challenged.

Die meisten der anwesenden Kollegen gingen davon aus, dass, wenn sie einen Rat gewählt haben, der den Namen Betriebsrat hat und sich an die Bestimmungen des Betriebsverfassungsgesetz anlehnt, sie dann nicht mehr neu Wählen müssen. Dieses entspricht jedoch nicht meiner Rechtsauffassung, denn ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass die so gewählten Räte nicht für die nächsten 4 Jahre bestehen bleiben. Ich kann mir nur vorstellen, dass sie eine Legitimation bis zur Neuwahl entsprechend den Rechtsvorschriften des Betriebsverfassungsgesetzes haben. Diese Rechtsauffassung habe ich den Kollegen mitgeteilt, die daraufhin um großen Teil recht verunsichert waren, weil sie:

a) Angst haben, dass den Menschen irgendwann das Wählen über ist

und

b) sie wohl bisher andere Rechtsauffassungen gehört haben.

Deshalb wäre es sehr wichtig gewesen, die Übergangsbestimmungen auch einmal im Gesetzestext nachlesen zu können.<sup>838</sup>

This report describes the tremendous challenge involved in organizing and carrying out the extensive training scheme. It also restated the complications involved in dealing with a wide range of personal experiences. This made it impossible for the instructors to address the participants as one single group. Some had been active and performed specific duties in the union pre-Wende, while others had remained ‘apolitical’ and therefore had little to do with the dominance of the East German regime and still others, conversely, had been subject to government reprisals for the views they espoused. One of the few commonly held attitudes of the participants at the seminars was a deep-seated suspicion toward those officials who had filled high posts in the former union.

Prinzipiell hatte dies die Auswirkung auf den Lehrgang, dass das Zusammenleben nicht ganz einfach war. Die Verbitterung saß bei den Kollegen sehr tief. Der Zorn richtete sich besonders auf einen der DDR-Teilnehmer des 6-Wochen-Seminars. Ihm unterstell-

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<sup>838</sup> Id., p. 4. This report probably contributed to Hermann Rappe’s decision to seek confirmation from Labor Minister Norbert Blüm on the legitimacy of “works councils” elected democratically before July 1, 1990, and verification that new elections would not be scheduled after the introduction of the *Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*. The legal opinion sent by Blüm to Rappe confirmed that, in most of the cases, these works councils were legitimate under law. The concerns voiced by the IG CPK trainer were thus dispelled. See: “Brief von Hermann Rappe und Hubertus Schmoldt an Norbert Blüm bezüglich Betriebsratswahlen in der DDR, 7.9.1990” and “Brief von Norbert Blüm an Hermann rappe bezüglich eventueller Betriebsratswahlen im Frühjahr 1991 in der ehemaligen DDR, 1.10.1990”, both published in: Ibid., documents 82 and 95.

ten die Kollegen eine Zusammenarbeit mit der Staatssicherheit. (...) Redebeiträge von ihm seien mit Buh-Rufen begleitet worden.

Prinzipiell kann man festhalten, dass ein großes Misstrauen gegen alle Gewerkschafter, die bereits vor der Wende hauptamtliche Gewerkschafter waren, vorhanden war.<sup>839</sup>

From an organizational point of view, the expansion of the chemistry union was a success, as district chapters participated in collective bargaining negotiations only a few weeks after July 1, and administrative offices maintained contact with union members. The difficulties confronted in any strategy of expansion that involved retaining a majority of the former FDGB secretaries explain the relatively limited number of new members joining from the ranks of the old East German chemistry union.

### **3.8.4 The expansion of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union**

At the core of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's strategy of support and collaboration was the organization of seminars for East German union activists. Such initiatives were implemented by the regional offices, e.g., for Rhineland-Palatine, whose leader, Ulrich Galles, was especially active in this area.<sup>840</sup> For many months, the union headquarters in Stuttgart refrained from releasing further details on its intervention in the GDR. As of February 1990, no far-reaching collaboration program had been developed with any of the nine East German trade unions in the transport and public sectors. According to the proposal for monetary and economic union presented by chancellor Kohl on February 6, there was overriding need for more clearly defined objectives in the union's East German policy.

#### **3.8.4.1 The first attempt at developing a common strategy**

A meeting of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's executive committee (Hauptvorstand) on February 14 and 15 attempted to establish central objectives and goals for the union's disorganized initiatives. Under the banner of unwavering support for "free, independent and democratic trade unions in the GDR", the union announced the dispatch of 15 union secretaries responsible for advising East German activists on issues of collective bar-

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<sup>839</sup> Kraus "Vermerk", p. 2. To hear an opposing view on the debate, see the report from a second IG CPK instructor, who argued that East Germans needed to be taught how to form and express their own opinions and views. His seminars were based on the idea that the dictatorship had eradicated the creativity and the independence of thought in the East German population, and that the top priority should be to help East German unionists develop their communications capabilities. See: Walter 1991.

<sup>840</sup> "Deutsch-deutsches Seminar", ÖTV Magazin, 1/90, p. 31; "Wort und Tat. Materielle Hilfe aus Mainz", ÖTV Magazin 3/90, p. 36.

gaining, social policy, labor law and worker representation at the workplace. An information and counseling office in East Berlin was placed in charge of coordinating their activities.<sup>841</sup>

The most striking feature of the union's forced involvement in the GDR was less the announced measures than its demands made to the federal government. In this act, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union would be the first DGB union to depart from this stated component of the strategy of support and collaboration, which required that DGB unions only restate demands already made by East German union activists. The Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union asked the chancellor to protect West German worker rights by achieving unity and to maintain the East German standard of living for its people. Without taking any stance on the issue of a monetary and economic union, the union stressed its opposition to any process that would open the way to privatization in the transport and public sectors.

This declaration, published only a few days after Kohl's proposal, was not a definitive shift toward a strategy of legal extension and organizational expansion. The first meeting between representatives from business and the trade unions and the chancellor was scheduled for five days later, on February 20. It nonetheless represented a milestone in this shift. In an interview conducted around the time the declaration was published, a journalist from the union-owned *Magazin* tried to press union head Monika Wulf-Mathies into admitting that the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union was in fact preparing its entry (or push) into the GDR. She denied this, claiming that ÖTV "is not seeking to dictate the terms but to offer its assistance", and as he indicated in his piece, she became visibly irritated.

ötv-magazin: Ausverkauf und Einmarsch, zwei Schlagworte – ist bei der Gewerkschaft ÖTV Einmarsch in die DDR angesagt?

Monika Wulf-Mathies: Nein, davon kann keine Rede sein. Aber wenn Kolleginnen und Kollegen in der DDR uns um Hilfe bitten; ist es selbstverständlich, dass wir sie nicht im Stich lassen.

ötv-magazin: Gilt da vielleicht Dein Satz: „Bei der rasanten Entwicklung in Deutschland ist nichts auszuschließen“?

Monika Wulf-Mathies: Gemach, gemacht.<sup>842</sup>

The fact that she had to refute these questions in an interview published in the union press would at least indicate that those options were considered. She also refused to accept legal extension as a potential solution to the problems faced by East German workers. "We cannot

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<sup>841</sup> "Aus dem Beschluss des Hauptvorstandes der ÖTV zur Lage in der DDR", ÖTV Magazin, 3/90, p. 35.

<sup>842</sup> "Wir lassen sie nicht im Stich", ÖTV Magazin, 3/90, p. 5.

tackle the problems in the GDR, she said, by simply transplanting (überstülpen) the systems developed in the Federal Republic and adapting it to the specific realities on the ground."<sup>843</sup>

#### 3.8.4.2 A new organization based on former trade unions

Despite Wulf-Mathies' declarations, legal extension and organizational expansion would nevertheless become pillars of the union's strategy shortly thereafter. In March, the discussions focused on possible ways to proceed with the expansion of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union into the GDR. The existence of nine different trade unions, as well as a number of local and independent initiatives in East Germany, represented a real challenge.<sup>844</sup> The large number of potential partners to a cooperation agreement made it more difficult to reach any sort of compromise. Furthermore, the political implications of a possible merger that included the discredited former officials from the union of ministries and government bodies were hard to avoid.

From March 5 to 8, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union held meetings with representatives from the nine East German trade unions and a similar number of professional associations at a conference in Berlin. Though all parties agreed on the goal of forming one single trade union for the transport and public sectors in Germany, different visions on how this might be achieved were put forward. Some favored the establishment of an *ÖTV der DDR*, while others preferred to merge the West and East German organizations. During the meeting, neither of these options stood out against the other and all East German representatives agreed that both options should remain available to the East German workers as long as two Germanies were in existence.<sup>845</sup>

The alternative to an expansion strategy based on a merger with East German trade unions was to establish a new organization (i.e., the *ÖTV der DDR*), and this rapidly became the course promoted by the union president. Representatives from the West German union expressed this preference during a second meeting with representatives from East German trade unions on March 22 and 23. The establishment of an *ÖTV der DDR* was now necessary, they

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<sup>843</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>844</sup> These trade unions included: Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienste, Gewerkschaft Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen, Gewerkschaft Ministerien, Staatsorgane und Kommunalwirtschaft, Gewerkschaft der Zöllner, Industriegewerkschaft Transport, Gewerkschaft Wissenschaft, IG Bergbau – Energie und Wasserwirtschaft, Gewerkschaft der Armeeingehörigen der DDR, Gewerkschaft der Zivilbeschäftigten der National Volksarmee. It should be noted that several professional associations, for instance in the health sector, had also been created to represent the interests of these specific professions.

<sup>845</sup> Klaus Klöppel, "Komplett in die Gewerkschaft ÖTV" and "Einheitliche Interessenvertretung", *ÖTV Magazin*, 4/90, pp. 7-8.

explained, due to a lack of confidence in the East German trade unions among workers. It was simply not an option to stand pat, they went on to say, as rival organizations, such as the Trade Union of German Employees (Deutsche Angestellten-Gewerkschaft, DAG) and the Alliance of German Civil Servants (Deutscher Beamtenbund), were recruiting East German members.<sup>846</sup>

The decision to launch the *ÖTV der DDR* was mainly driven by concerns harbored in Stuttgart that the reunification process might actually weaken the union's power. The union's position among workers from the transport and public sectors in West Germany and in a unified Germany was at stake. Stuttgart wanted to make sure that it would have a say in determining the changes taking place in Germany, and this required its participation in the collective bargaining negotiations in the GDR. This in turn pushed the issue of how fast to proceed with the establishment of its structures in this region to the top of the agenda. This viewpoint was shared by all DGB unions.

At the opening of an information office in East Berlin on March 29, Monika Wulf-Mathies announced how her union intended to achieve expansion. The path chosen combined the establishment of a new trade union with collaboration with the East German trade unions. Monika Wulf-Mathies portrayed the establishment of *ÖTV der DDR* as a sign that there would be no merger with East German unions, though she did appear open to collaboration with those organizations (as well as with other initiatives) to achieve this goal. The following weeks demonstrated that she was not merely paying lip service to collaboration, as the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union drew upon of the local chapters and staff of the East German unions.<sup>847</sup>

The shift of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union toward a strategy dedicated to legal extension and organizational expansion took place in March, as the title of one press article quoted above – “*ÖTV seeks link-up*” - indicates. The preference for emulating West German organizational structures of the public sector in the GDR was reaffirmed, with the exception of the professional designation of *Beamte*, or civil servant status, which the union did not want to see introduced there.

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<sup>846</sup> Klaus Klöppel, “Votum für die schnelle D-Mark”, *ÖTV Magazin*, 4/90, p.8. See also: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 228. The decisions by non-DGB unions, such as the DAG and the DBB, to expand their organizations into the GDR surely acted as an incentive for many DGB unions to do likewise. In the four cases under review here, it is in the public sector that the threat represented by the DAG (and hence the DBB) loomed largest. Their presence in the GDR might have actually increased their influence in West Germany. The appeal of West German unions to East German workers set off a “hunt for new members” (*express*, 10/90, p. 7) which not only set DGB against non-DGB unions, but also, as we are about to see, DGB unions against each other.

<sup>847</sup> “*ÖTV will Anschluss der DDR*” and “*Einheits-ÖTV im Visier*” *Die tageszeitung*, March 30, 1990.

The union's opposition to this professional category, with its unique legal status, which granted civil servants high levels of protection against dismissal but forbade strike action on their part, was common knowledge. If the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union had attempted to improve civil servants' rights to collective action in the 1960s, "they never actually made any serious attempts to put it to the test (right to strike for civil servants-MD)," according to Michael Kittner.<sup>848</sup> Hence, it was more or less standard union practice, as Monika Wulf-Mathies stated in March 1990, that her union rejected any special legal status for civil servants and opposed its extension to the GDR where it did not exist. In July, the union accused the federal government of seeking to introduce civil servant status in the GDR as a means to limit trade union influence on wages in the public sector.<sup>849</sup> A few articles in the union press echoed these sentiments and underlined that the ban on strike action by civil servants was incompatible with European Union legislation.<sup>850</sup> Such declarations could hardly be labeled as "attempts" to prevent the introduction of the West German law to cover civil servants, as Manfred Wilke and Hans-Peter Müller write.<sup>851</sup> These could best be described as drawing on the traditions of the union's program and past struggles. They had little substantive impact on the union policies. As a supporter of legal extension, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union helped ensure the continuation of civil servant status in Germany, which it had already by and large accepted in spite of its tradition of public opposition.

### 3.8.4.3 Organizing expansion

In regards to the other DGB unions, the shift in stance by the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union to a "second strategy" occurred in March. In the case of this union, the development of its structures in the GDR would truly commence in May. The creation of the *ÖTV der DDR* was ratified by representatives from the different East German trade unions and independent initiatives on May 9/10. At this time the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union, the newly established structures of *ÖTV der DDR* and IG Transport (DDR) also ratified a cooperative agreement which arranged for the latter's disbandment, with the date set for June 9. Similar agreements with other East German unions followed shortly thereafter.<sup>852</sup>

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<sup>848</sup> Kittner 2005, pp. 682-683.

<sup>849</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 232.

<sup>850</sup> "Beamtenrecht für die DDR: nicht geeignet", *ÖTV Magazin*, 6/90, p. 7 and "Beamte gibt es erst von März an", *ÖTV Magazin*, 1/91, p. 14.

<sup>851</sup> Idem.

<sup>852</sup> "Vereinigen", *ÖTV Magazin*, 6/90, p. 15.

In 1990 tensions developed between DGB member unions contesting the recategorization of industries within the confederation's organizations. The broad-ranging public service and transport union was at the center of many of those disputes. The DGB Mines and Energy Union had ratified a cooperative agreement with the East German Mines, Energy and Water-Supply Union. One of the obvious goals of the DGB union was to obtain influence the East German water supply sector, which it had been claiming in West Germany since 1988. These attempts were naturally severely criticized by the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union.<sup>853</sup> Started in April 1990, the battle between the two unions lasted almost a year. Arbitration proceedings were finally initiated at the beginning of 1991, chaired by former DGB president Ernst Breit. Not surprisingly, the arbitration commission decided to maintain the divisions within the DGB unions, and the Mines and Energy Union was forced to "return" 70.000 East German workers from the water-supply sector to the ÖTV.<sup>854</sup>

A similar dispute erupted between the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union and the Education and Science Union (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft) for the workers organized in the East German Science Union (Gewerkschaft Wissenschaft). This conflict was resolved more smoothly than the one involving the Mines and Energy Union. On April 23, 1990, both DGB unions agreed that neither would poach workers from the other.<sup>855</sup> A cooperative agreement was signed between this union and the East German Science Union on May 21. It envisioned the disbandment of the East German Science Union and the establishment of two DGB unions.<sup>856</sup>

The expansion strategy was ratified at the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's 14th Congress, which commenced on May 22. Several motions called on the federal government to consult with the union on all issues relating to the reform of the East German transport and public sectors.<sup>857</sup> A week earlier, on May 16, during a meeting with chancellor Kohl, Monika Wulf-Mathies addressed certain specific restrictions to full collective bargaining autonomy in the transport and public sectors in the MESU treaty. The first draft of the treaty stated that all

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<sup>853</sup> Jutta Roitsch, "Gewerkschaften im Konkurrenzkampf", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 12, 1990.

<sup>854</sup> This transfer was not without its problems, as the first collective agreements had already been ratified by the Mines and Energy Union for those workers. Wilke/Müller 1991, pp. 118-124.

<sup>855</sup> "GEW und ÖTV sind im Gespräch: Für Kooperation", *ÖTV Magazin*, 5/90, p. 11.

<sup>856</sup> "Enge Kooperation", *ÖTV Magazin*, 7-8/90, p. 15. Another similar conflict opposed the ÖTV to the Commerce, Banks and Insurance Union (Handel, Banken und Versicherungen). This DGB union had signed a collective agreement on behalf of the East German employees working at savings banks (Sparkassenangestellten). In June the ÖTV sided with the non-DGB union from the Trade Union of German Employees (DAG) in denouncing this encroachment on the DAG's "territory". They joined forces in opposing the outsider and managed to quickly ratify a better collective agreement for their respective members from this sector. See: Wilke / Müller 1991, p. 231.

<sup>857</sup> "Das Ziel: Eine Gewerkschaftsbewegung unter dem Dach des DGB schaffen", *ÖTV Magazin*, 6/90, p. 15.

collective agreements in the East German public sector required the prior approval of the Ministry of Finance, something the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union considered a restriction imposed by the government on the autonomy of the social partners. In a letter to Monika Wulf-Mathies sent the following day, Helmut Kohl stated that this phrase would be removed from the treaty and collective bargaining autonomy would be respected in the public sector. As previously demonstrated, this episode was important to the confirmation of the tripartite consensus on May 1990. The union's joint strategy was reaffirmed during the 14<sup>th</sup> congress at the end of the month.

An agreement signed on May 30 defined the conditions for the dissolution of the six East German unions in the transport and the public sectors and their absorption in the newly established *ÖTV der DDR*.<sup>858</sup> This union would come into existence on June 9. The disbandment of the East German unions was announced for November 1, as most observers at that time thought reunification could occur only after that date. The merger of the two *ÖTV* unions into one single entity was announced for the same day. The East German unions had to organize campaigns to convince their members to join the new organization.

The announcement that summer that reunification was scheduled for October 3 instead of January 1, had the cataclysmic effect in Stuttgart. While the East German unions had abandoned any hope of autonomy following the dissolution of the East German state, the merger of the two *ÖTV* unions was to be completed only by the beginning of November. The likelihood that a sizable share of the workers would not have joined the new organization by the day of the reunification was quite high. This four week gap could be used by employers to impose lower wages, while the *ÖTV der DDR* would not yet be in a position to react adequately. The date of the merger of the two Public Services, Transport and Traffic Unions was hurriedly brought forward to October 3.<sup>859</sup> The dissolution of the East German trade unions was ratified at congresses held during the second half of September and the first days of October.<sup>860</sup>

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<sup>858</sup> "Auf zwei Wegen zur Einheit", "Geeinte ÖTV als gemeinsame Kraft", *ÖTV Magazin*, 7-8/90, p. 15. See also: "Keine Alternative zur ÖTV", *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>859</sup> For a summary of the agenda of the conference, see: "Gutes bewahren, Schlechtes ändern", *ÖTV Magazin*, 7-8/90, p. 9.

<sup>860</sup> For instance, the East German Health and Social Services Union (Gewerkschaft Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen (DDR)) held its conference on disbandment on September 22; a week later it was the turn of the IG Transport (DDR) and the Public Sector trade union (Gewerkschaft öffentlicher Dienste (DDR)) met on October 2. See: "Mit einer starken Gewerkschaft in eine gemeinsame Zukunft", *ÖTV Magazin*, 10/90, pp. 19-20.



#### 3.8.4.4 Recruiting and organizing new members

The recruitment of East German members mobilized the resources of the West German officials. The inevitable administrative chaos resulting from nearly one million new members joining within the span of a few weeks had been further heightened by the earlier completion of the reunification process on October 3. Of the 640,000 members of the East German Health and Social Service Union in Autumn 1989 (this number had dropped to 400,000 by January 1990), 260,000 joined the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union. The IG Transport (DDR) saw 150,000 of its 250,000 join the new union. By February 1991, 800,000 East German workers were recruited, slightly less than expected, but not an insignificant number considering the union had only 1,2 million members in West Germany. Job losses probably meant up to one-third of these members would soon leave the organization.

The completion of all tasks relating to expansion and the stream of new members were the main priorities in Stuttgart. It mobilized the union's human resources during the second half of the year 1990. The organization only began to focus on the actual defense of worker interests once the representative authority of the organization had been secured in the region. The way in which activities were prioritized, i.e., the administrative tasks surrounding expansion were given priority and were to be carried out before the union would shift its focus to defending its members' interests, irritated many East German workers who complained that their new union neglected the immediate tasks relating to protecting workers against possible layoffs.<sup>861</sup>

From an organizational point of view, with the time constraints as the main impetus for action, the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's expansion was facing one main obstacle. As a result of this hastily performed process directed from above, the number of union offices in Eastern Germany initially remained limited. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, for instance, where the union had some 80,000 members, only three district administrative offices (Kreisverwaltungen) and a handful of branch offices (Nebenstellen) were opened.<sup>862</sup> In the initial phase, the union limited the number of district administrations to fourteen – equal to the number of former Information Offices.<sup>863</sup> In all of eastern Germany, not one single regional head office (Bezirksleitungen) was set up. Well aware that this situation made dialogue between the organization and its new members difficult, Monika Wulf-Mathies promised that

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<sup>861</sup> "Fehlritte beim Übertritt", *Tribüne*, October 1, 1990, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 234.

<sup>862</sup> "ÖTV eröffnet Landesbüro in Schwerin", *Tribüne*, November, 14, 1990, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 235.

<sup>863</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 235.

the situation would be rectified once they had more information on where district administrative offices and branch offices were required.<sup>864</sup>

The main reasons for its decision (made at the union's headquarters in Stuttgart) to deploy small teams to establish its Information Offices as the rudimentary structures in the new *Länder* were time and the necessity to launch collective bargaining as soon as possible. Beginning in mid-December, the fourteen East German regional administrative offices held delegates' conferences and elected executive committees. This process saw about 3,700 delegates elect local leaders and delegates to the first post-reunification conference. The topics under discussion varied from one conference to the other, but fears expressed on the impact of unemployment dominated the debate.<sup>865</sup>

The Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union held its conference on reunification in Stuttgart on February 14 and 15, 1991, with 689 delegates from western and 311 from eastern Germany in attendance. The union was the first of the DGB unions to complete this process. The expansion process was not wrapped up until one year after the leadership in Stuttgart had attempted to outline the union's policy on the GDR (on February 15, 1990). In her address, Monika Wulf-Mathies welcomed the union's success. If there were any concerns about the ability of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union's to head the collective bargaining rounds in the GDR, the arrival of 800,000 new members had proved them to be unfounded, she stated.<sup>866</sup>

There were no surprises at the conference. Twelve East German members were added to the union's executive committee, which increased in size to 49 members, and eighteen to the advisory board (Beirat), which was expanded from 96 to 114 members. The delegates also backed the board's strategy for the upcoming round of collective bargaining negotiations, i.e., the adoption of the West German framework agreement on employment conditions (Mantel-tarifvertrag) in the former East Germany, as well as the leveling of living standards and working conditions in the transport and public sectors by the year 1992.<sup>867</sup> The union's president wanted to postpone the debate over a potential relocation to Berlin. Originally, the move to Stuttgart had only been provisional, until a return to Berlin was made possible by reunifica-

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<sup>864</sup> "Kein Anlass für lohnpolitische Vereinigungsopfer".

<sup>865</sup> For information on the elections in Halle, see: "Historisches Datum", *ÖTV Magazin*, 1/91, p. 36; in Frankfurt/Oder: "Praktizierte Demokratie", *ÖTV Magazin*, 2/91, pp. 8-9; in East Berlin: "Das Handeln bestimmen", *ÖTV Magazin*, 2/91, p. 9-10; in Dresden: "Ist unser eigenes Werk", *ÖTV Magazin*, 2/91, p. 10.

<sup>866</sup> Monika Wulf-Mathies, "Lasst uns aufeinander hören und voneinander lernen", *ÖTV Argumente*, 2/91, pp. 3-16, esp. p. 4-5; "Die Euphorie der ersten Tage ist verschwunden", *ÖTV Magazin*, 3/91, pp. 6-7.

<sup>867</sup> Motions C1 to C11, in: *ÖTV Argumente*, 2/91; "Lebhafte Debatte", *ÖTV Magazin*, 3/91, p. 14.

tion. The delegates agreed and ratified a motion stating that a move to Berlin at this moment would be too expensive and that the question would need to be re-examined at a later time.<sup>868</sup>

### 3.8.4.5 The difficulty in integrating East German unionists into union activities

From an organizational standpoint, the expansion of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union was completed in short time. The union had difficulties in establishing a dialogue with East German workers from the transport and public sectors. The claims made by the union president that the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union had been “the only trade union (...) with its roots in [East German] grassroots initiatives and developed independently from the old [FDGB] trade union apparatus” is simply untrue.<sup>869</sup> The decision to create the *ÖTV der DDR* had been taken in Stuttgart and the expansion was carried out with the active participation of former East German trade unions from the transport and public sectors.

A study conducted in the spring of 1990 suggested that East German workers had a positive view of the union.<sup>870</sup> The 800,000 new members also confirm that Stuttgart’s strategy has found a strong resonance in eastern Germany. Many East German members would soon criticize the minor role they were given within the union. Many were irritated that the strategy gave priority to organizational tasks over protecting its members against layoffs. The relative lack of local and regional structures in eastern Germany highlighted the disconnect between the positions taken by president of the union and the reality of its members.

East German delegates expressed the concerns of their colleagues after Monika Wulf-Mathies’ report at the special conference. One delegate from Dresden stated, “The situation is actually worse” than it was described by the union’s head. The threat of unemployment was the main concern of East German workers. One West German delegate, active in support groups for unemployed workers, summarized the situation as follows:

Ich kann euch sagen, die sind nicht enttäuscht, die packt das kalte Grauen! Denn im Gegensatz zu den westlichen Bundesländern, in denen man sich an diese zwei Jahrzehnte bestehende Arbeitslosigkeit in Millionenhöhe zu gewöhnen scheint, werden die Menschen in den neuen Ländern von der Arbeitslosigkeit lawinenartig überrollt.<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>868</sup> Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 237.

<sup>869</sup> “...die einzige damals landesweite Gewerkschaft, die aus Basisinitiativen entstanden ist und unabhängig vom alten Gewerkschaftsapparat gebildet wurde”. See: “Die Euphorie der ersten Tage ist verschwunden”, *ÖTV Magazin*, 3/91, pp. 6-7, p. 6.

<sup>870</sup> “Sehr gut bekannt”, *ÖTV Magazin*, 5/90, p. 11.

<sup>871</sup> “Viele Menschen sind verzweifelt”, *ÖTV Magazin*, 3/91, pp. 8-9, quote p. 8.

Was it possible to unify such disparate needs as those of East and West German workers and prevent employers from playing one region off against another? East German delegates had reservations about this. Based by his own experience, one of them concluded that the choice for East German workers would be between a job under terms dictated by his employer or no job at all. More attention needed to be devoted to the problems of East German workers, East German delegates insisted, and they turned to the union's president for solutions.

Wir brauchen nicht nur finanzielle Hilfe von den alten Bundesländern, nein, vor allem ist es nach meiner Meinung wichtig, moralische und ideelle Hilfe zu geben. Viele Menschen sind verzweifelt, wenn sie mit den Problemen des Tages konfrontiert werden und keinen Ausweg sehen.<sup>872</sup>

West German union secretaries active in the new *Länder* saw first hand the problems faced by the union in the East. One of them acknowledged that the situation had become unmanageable: East German unionists apparently had their doubts about the "solutions" proposed by the West German officials, as they saw how ineffective these were in the East German context and in preventing a rise in unemployment. Union secretaries were working 18 to 20 hours a day, frustration was growing among East German workers and communication problems between East and West Germans were worsening an already difficult situation. As these problems mounted, West German secretaries sought to centralize decision-making authority, including over the upcoming collective bargaining rounds, in their own hands, without consulting their East German colleagues. The effect of "several catastrophes striking at once, always larger and more numerous than what one could have anticipated" made it impossible to get the East German unionists to participate or attend training workshops. No union could possibly counter such opposing forces, concluded the secretary.<sup>873</sup>

### **3.8.5 The expansion of Media Industrial Union**

Through the process of expansion, the Media Industrial Union attempted to maintain a greater level of continuity with the "first strategy" than the other DGB unions had. This union took great care to ensure any expansion plan included the active participation of the East German trade unions from the media sectors, as reflected by its insistence on referring to the process as a "merger". In discussions with the author, one official in charge of organizing the expansion process insisted that every effort had been made to act "in a different manner than the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union", presented as the prime example of expansion

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<sup>872</sup> Id.

<sup>873</sup> Hintz 1994, pp. 93-96, quoted from p. 96.

imposed upon the East German unions. Despite all its efforts, the complexity of the task involved in organizing a genuine merger of equals within a short period of time eventually forced the Media Industrial Union to assume control over the process. Ultimately, the expansion of Media Industrial Union would follow the same pattern and schedule of the other DGB unions.

### 3.8.5.1 One common goal: Merger

By the second half of February 1990, the Media Industrial Union and the three main East German trade unions in the media sector – the IG Print and Paper; the Art, Culture and Media Union; the Association of Journalists – agreed to merge their organizations. The intensification of the collaboration was thus envisioned as a step along the path towards fusion.<sup>874</sup> One central aspect of this collaboration was providing training to East German unionists on issues relating to the West German labor law.<sup>875</sup>

A “union cartel” was formed.<sup>876</sup> The goal of this first step toward merger was to coordinate the collective bargaining activities of the German media unions. This would lessen the impact of the industrial reforms affecting the sector in Eastern Germany and improve the working conditions here. Rapidly, however, this loose “union cartel” would prove inadequate to perform these tasks, as the East German unions were unable to impose their views to employers. The Media Industrial Union opened an Information Office in East Berlin to ensure a stronger presence in the GDR and hasten the pace of the merger.<sup>877</sup>

The East German Print and Paper Union ratified the principle of a merger with the other East German media unions and the Media Industrial Union at its conference on March 2 and 3.<sup>878</sup>

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<sup>874</sup> “Neugeburt der Gewerkschaften. Werner Peplowski: Die gemeinsamen Aufgaben sehen”, *Kontrapunkt*, 4/90, pp. 20-21. “VdJ-Vorsitzender Kurze: Zwei Journalistenverbände sind tragisch”, *Kontrapunkt*, 8/90, p. 28.

<sup>875</sup> According to the first Media Industrial Union secretary sent to the GDR, some East German workers did not voice any criticism towards the West German labor law, which they wanted to see extended to their country: “Freiheit für wen?”, *Kontrapunkt*, 10/90, p. 20. Based on the experience of other officials, there was considerable interest in drafting a new law: “Von Berlin nach Berlin: Gewerkschafter auf Tournee”, *Kontrapunkt*, 5/90, pp. 15-16 and “Für eine wirkungsvolle Interessenvertretung sorgen”, *Kontrapunkt*, 10/90, p. 38.

<sup>876</sup> “DDR-Gewerkschafter zu Arbeitskampschulungen eingeladen”, *Kontrapunkt*, 6/90, p. 4; “Freiheit für wen?”.

<sup>877</sup> This office was inaugurated on March 20, 1990. “IG Medien eröffnet Büro in Berlin (DDR)”, *Kontrapunkt*, 7/90, p. 4.

<sup>878</sup> Susanne Anger, “Von der ‘Mit-Mach-Gewerkschaft’ zur kämpferischen Interessenvertretung”, *Kontrapunkt*, 6/90, p. 29.

Though the contract signed with the Industrial Media Union did not alter the foundations for cooperation in place for the last few months (the mutual exchange of information and assistance, partnership programs, joint working groups, training for East German officials), the West German Media Industrial Union was placed in charge of collective bargaining for the East German Print and Paper Union.<sup>879</sup> The Media Industrial Union was now active on East German soil.

Similar steps were made with the foundation of the East German Art, Culture and Media Union in mid-March. The former FDGB Art Union passed a resolution calling for the merger of all German media unions, as well as a “cooperative agreement” which transferred its collective bargaining authority to the Media Industrial Union.<sup>880</sup>

By the end of the month, the East German Association of Journalists also paved the way for its merger with the Media Industrial Union. Until January 1990, this union had worked together with the Media Industrial Union and the non-DGB-affiliated German Journalists’ Association. It had even signed a cooperative agreement with the latter in February. The industrial turmoil, the “colonization of the East German media landscape” by West German media groups, as the union president described it, and the substantial number of bankruptcies that it promised to produce, induced the East German Association of Journalists to reorient its strategy to focus on collaboration with the more powerful Media Industrial Union, a volte-face that angered the German Journalists Association.<sup>881</sup> Its president implicitly accused the East German Association of Journalists of using the antidemocratic tactics of the FDGB.

Wenn sich ein Bundes- oder Gesamtvorstand des Deutschen Journalisten-Verbandes erlauben würde, in dieser Weise die Mitgliedschaft von oben zu manipulieren, würde solche Vorstände von der Basis hinweggefegt.<sup>882</sup>

The East German Association of Journalists became the impetus behind a cooperative agreement between the three East German media unions, in preparation for the merger with the Media Industrial Union. Hence, as with the other cases studied here, the decisive steps toward Media Industrial Union’ expansion were made in March.

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<sup>879</sup> “IG Medien und IG Drupa schließen Kooperationsvertrag” and “Gemeinsame Tarifpolitik”, *Kontrapunkt*, 7/90, p. 4.

<sup>880</sup> “Kunst-Gewerkschaft in der DDR neu konstituiert”, *Kontrapunkt*, 8/90, pp. 4-5.

<sup>881</sup> “VdJ-Vorstand: IG Medien schnellstens bilden!”, *Neue Deutsche Presse*, 4/90 (March 31, 1990), p. 1, quoted in: Wilke/Müller 1991, p. 193.

<sup>882</sup> Ernst-Otto Maetzke, “Streit zwischen Journalistenverbänden”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 26, 1990, cited in: Idem.

By the end of this month, all German media unions shared the common objective of merging into one single organization and had ratified cooperative agreements with this in mind.

### **3.8.5.2 Tensions between East and West German media unions**

While the German media unions may have agreed on the goal, they disagreed over the path and pace of the process. For the Media Industrial Union, these issues could only be addressed through collective bargaining. This therefore meant that the structures necessary to launch the next rounds of collective bargaining needed to be put in place as soon as possible. The fact that it was responsible for collective bargaining forced the Media Industrial Union to “speed up the pace of the merger”, which entailed taking complete control over the establishment of its structures in the GDR.<sup>883</sup> The “merger” would indeed have much in common with the expansion process at the other DGB unions.

The procedure for establishing local chapters (Ortsverein) in the GDR as specified by the union council (Gewerkschaftsrat) called for the immediate “merger” of the three East German media unions into the West German Media Industrial Union and transfer of decision-making authority in the GDR to West German officials.<sup>884</sup> The delegates from the East German media unions in attendance indicated their opposition to a rapid merger which amounted to disbandment and virtually eliminated any chance for them to influence the process.<sup>885</sup>

In an interview published in May, the head of the East German Art, Culture and Media Union, Ruth Martin, criticized the prevailing attitude “among DGB officials” – at best a veiled reference to the Media Industrial Union, which did not assign any portfolios to East German unionists. They acted as if “they knew everything” and did all the work themselves.<sup>886</sup> Martin felt she had been stripped of her authority to determine union policies.

### **3.8.5.3 Convincing the East German rank-and-file to accept expansion**

Despite their criticisms of the Media Industrial Union strategy, the East German media unions were unable to propose a realistic alternative. The East German government had refused their calls to open negotiations on the general agreements on employment conditions (Mantel-

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<sup>883</sup> Hermann Zöller, “Im Eilzug zur Einheit?”, *Kontrapunkt*, 8/90, p. 37.

<sup>884</sup> The declaration “Auf dem Weg zur IG Medien Deutschland” was passed on May 2, 1990. It was published in: *Kontrapunkt*, 11/90, p. 26.

<sup>885</sup> “Auf dem Weg zur IG Medien Deutschland”, *ibid.*

<sup>886</sup> “Interview von Ruth Martin, Vorsitzende der Gewerkschaft Kunst-Kultur-Medien in der DDR”, *ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

tarifverträge), with the argument that it would only negotiate with organizations “similar to the DGB unions”.<sup>887</sup>

The need to launch a new round of collective bargaining, together with the government’s refusal to negotiate with them, succeeded in forcing the East German media unions to come into line with Media Industrial Union’s strategy. After a long and heated discussion, the East German media unions finally agreed to rapid expansion during a meeting on May 28 in Stuttgart.<sup>888</sup> The Media Industrial Union’s expansion process was now controlled centrally by the union leadership from its headquarters in West Germany. The idea of a ‘merger of equals’ had been effectively abandoned.

Like other DGB unions, the Media Industrial Union initially thought that East German union members would gain an insight into the new union, laws and procedures during the first collective bargaining rounds. Yet many obstacles remained along the route. East German workers tended to focus on workplace structures of representation (works councils etc.) and acted far too independently of the union.<sup>889</sup> Training workshops on the Works Constitution Act often devolved into discussions on how to combine the East and West German labor laws to provide the best possible protection to workers.<sup>890</sup> Such discussions, encouraged in the Media Industrial Union press at the beginning of the year, had become problematic five or six months later, once the opportunity to propose such changes, if any indeed ever existed, had passed.

The Media Industrial Union bet on collective agreements favorable to the workers to overcome these difficulties.<sup>891</sup> Once such agreements were signed, East German workers would come to understand the advantages of a strong union. The lack of East German participation in the union would be tackled once a collective bargaining routine practice had been firmly established in eastern Germany. Using this roundabout logic, the centralization of decision-making in West German hands was hastened by the urgency originating from the upcoming round of collective bargaining and ended up in a confirmation of the necessity of this centralization.

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<sup>887</sup> “Gewerkschaft Kunst, Kultur, Media (DDR): Wir brauchen neue Manteltarifverträge”, *Kontrapunkt*, 13/90, p. 24 and “Unsere Sofortforderungen zur Tarifpolitik”, *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>888</sup> “Schnelle Fusion mit IG Medien beschlossen” *Kontrapunkt*, 12/90, pp. 24-25.

<sup>889</sup> “Kooperation mit Maxwell bedroht 800 Arbeitsplätze”, *Kontrapunkt*, 12/90, p. 27 and “Neue Formen der Gewerkschaftsarbeit”, *Kontrapunkt*, 15/90, pp. 28-29.

<sup>890</sup> “Das neu erworbene Wissen weiterermitteln”, *Kontrapunkt*, 15/90, p. 29.

<sup>891</sup> “Neue Formen der Gewerkschaftsarbeit”.



The resentment among some East German unionists for the loss of input was once more expressed during the conference on disbanding the Print and Paper Union in June. The resolutions passed here approved the agenda of the Media Industrial Union's president: the disbandment of the organization on September 30 and its replacement by the Media Industrial Union on the next day; priority given to collective bargaining negotiations with the goal of a rapid leveling the working and living conditions in Germany; setting up of works councils in the GDR and election of union workplace representatives (Vertrauensleute). One called for an increase in the number of West German union secretaries in Eastern Germany.<sup>892</sup> Another declared that all union activity would be supervised by the West German officials from the East Berlin office. Until indicated otherwise, the East German members of the union's executive committee (Hauptvorstand) would not be elected but co-opted by the other members. Finally the delegates were asked to approve the dismissal of all union officials on September 30, without the possibility of re-election to their former posts.<sup>893</sup>

The resolutions continued to refer to the activities of the West German union secretaries as a form of "assistance" provided to the East German union. Similarly the dissolution was termed a "merger" and described as a "grassroots level" process in the conference documents. The continued use of such vocabulary from the first strategy was intended to gloss over the actual changes that were passed at the conference. Speaking at the podium, the president of the East German Print and Paper Union admitted that the "merger as it was originally planned" was not complete. Yet the resolutions endorsed West German control over Media Industrial Union's expansion plans.

The delegates harshly criticized the resolutions and voted against the organization's disbandment and the dismissal of its staff. Many denounced a process "directed from above", which presented the East German unionists with practically no chance for rebuilding their union. In an impromptu speech, Media Industrial Union's vice-president Detlef Hensche convinced the delegates to reconsider their decision. A second vote on disbandment was scheduled after the addition of an amendment instituting the automatic transfer of all Print and Paper Union's members to the new union.<sup>894</sup> The new resolution, which took the aspect of a collective action

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<sup>892</sup> "Beschlüsse des Gewerkschaftstages der IG Druck und Papier (DDR) am 23. Juni 1990", *Kontrapunkt*, 14/90, p. 19.

<sup>893</sup> "Ab 1. Oktober: Einheitliche IG Medien Deutschland", *ibid.*, pp. 12-17.

<sup>894</sup> This provision forced every Print and Paper Union member who did *not* want to become member of the IG Medien to specifically indicate this. The original resolution called for individual East German workers to join the IG Medien.

of all members into the Media Industrial Union, was adopted unanimously.<sup>895</sup> Delegates expressed their doubts and fears in their comments after the conference.<sup>896</sup>

The conference of the East German Association of Journalists on disbandment was convened around that time (June 23-24) and was characterized by similar debates. Unlike their colleagues at the Print and Paper Union, the delegates from the Association of Journalists did not reject the resolutions proposed by the president of the union and the disbandment was adopted without amendment, with the date set for September 30. Hence the decision to join the Media Industrial Union (or the German Journalists Association) was left to each individual member. The establishment of a “section” (Fachgruppe) for East German journalists within the Media Industrial Union related to an attempt by the East German union to guarantee a framework for intervening in the new organization.<sup>897</sup>

The conference on disbandment of the East German Arts, Culture and Media Union was held on September 9.<sup>898</sup> Although none of the union’s delegates voted against disbanding, many criticized the influence exerted by Stuttgart in the process. The youth section of the organization was especially vocal in its criticism. The resolution on disbanding made arrangements for the automatic transfer of the 40.000 members to the Media Industrial Union.<sup>899</sup>

#### **3.8.5.4 Establishing the structures for the new union in eastern Germany**

Several resolutions on opening the Media Industrial Union to East German members and the establishment of state and district offices in Eastern Germany were adopted in Stuttgart in July. By the beginning of 1991, about 185,500 workers from the East German media sectors had joined or remained members of the Media Industrial Union. In view of the roughly 200,000 members in the three East German unions that had disbanded, this number is remarkably high. The majority were workers “automatically” transferred to the Media Industrial Union thanks to resolutions adopted by their former organizations. The Media Industrial Union estimated the number of East German workers who had joined in the previous months at 4,500, i.e. those who had not been members of one of the disbanded unions. Furthermore the total number of East German unionized workers was insufficient to guarantee a strong presence for the union in eastern Germany.

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<sup>895</sup> “Gewerkschaftstag der IG Druck und Papier (DDR) beschloss Übertritt in die IG Medien”, *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>896</sup> “Stimmen von Delegierten zum Abschluss des Gewerkschaftstages”, *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>897</sup> “Verband der Journalisten der DDR beschloss seine Auflösung”, *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>898</sup> It was set by vote for October 26, almost one month after the two other East German trade unions from the media sectors.

<sup>899</sup> “Gewerkschaft Kunst, Kultur, Medien am Ende”, *Die tageszeitung*, September 11, 1990.

The issue was discussed during the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Media Industrial Union's executive committee on September 6 and 7. It stressed how economic transformation and unemployment made recruiting workers ready to take up posts in works councils or the union all the more difficult. The low rate of union membership among workers prevented a satisfactory number of district offices from achieving financial autonomy. This meant further expansion of the network of offices had to remain at the current low number until further notice, which made the recruitment of new members evermore complicated. In order to increase the rate of participation of East Germans in the organization, the union's head announced the creation of 75 full-time positions reserved for East Germans. It continued to go on assume the positive impact of the first collective agreements would be the solution to its current problems.<sup>900</sup>

Media Industrial Union's expansion was completed during the special conference on October 25-26. The transfer of the union members from the Print and Paper Union and the Art, Culture and Media Union was approved and the union's territory was expanded to include the new *Länder*. The temporary assumption of control over the union's activities in the new *Länder* by the East Berlin office was also ratified. Until further notice, the co-opted East German members of the union's executive committee would not have the right to vote.<sup>901</sup>

In his speech, Detlef Hensche stressed that there was no alternative but for the Media Industrial Union to play "an active role" in eastern Germany. This statement was somewhat arrogant in its tone, Hensche acknowledged, and it opened the door to numerous conflicts. He rejected, however, the accusation made in former East and West Germany that his organization had "taken over" the East German media unions. The pace of reunification had forced it to speed up the expansion process, Hensche explained, which ran counter to the preferred strategy of his union.

Natürlich verlief die Zusammenarbeit nicht ohne Brüche und Konflikte, etwa, als die IG Druck und Papier die Übernahme aller Beschäftigten verlangte, was wir schon aus finanziellen Gründen ablehnen mussten. Oder, als in Leipzig die ersten Beauftragten aus dem Westen ihre Arbeit aufnahmen, hatten sie vor Ort durchaus nicht nur Unterstützung des alten Gewerkschaftsapparats erfahren. Damit bin ich beim anderen Pol unseres Vorgehens: Auch wenn wir immer wieder, bisweilen geradezu beschwörend, von ‚Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe‘ reden – der eigenen, aktiven Rolle im Erneuerungsprozess konnten wir uns nicht entziehen. (...) So kann es nicht überraschen, dass der Vorwurf der Vereinnahmung erhoben wurde, auch im Westen. Was den Umgang miteinander angeht, gibt es sicher manches an westlicher Besserwisserei und Unduldsamkeit zu kritisieren. Dennoch geht der Vorwurf der Vereinnahmung historisch an der Sache vorbei. Der Anstoß

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<sup>900</sup> "11. Sitzung des Hauptvorstandes der IG Medien. Die IG Medien steht vor einem großen Berg von Aufgaben", *Kontrapunkt*, 19/90, pp. 30-31.

<sup>901</sup> "Ab 1. Oktober: Einheitliche IG Medien Deutschland".

zur Vereinigung kam nicht vom Westen, schon gar nicht von den westlichen Gewerkschaften. Auch wir haben in Ziel und Tempo nur atemlos nachvollzogen, was die übergroße Mehrheit der DDR-Bevölkerung eingeleitet hat, indem sie sich vom SED-System und damit auch von den alten Gewerkschaften abgewandt hat. Wenn die Gewerkschaften der DDR zu irgendetwas gezwungen worden sind, so durch die eigene Krise und den eigenen Vertrauensverlust, und damit letztlich durch die eigenen Mitglieder. Und das hat ja wohl etwas mit der eigenen vierzigjährigen Geschichte zu tun, nicht dagegen mit den westdeutschen Gewerkschaften.<sup>902</sup>

### 3.8.6 Conclusion

The statement from Detlef Hensche quoted above applies to the process not only at his organization but also at the three other DGB unions under consideration in this work. In all four cases, most actors to the process perceived the pace of the East German collapse and the speed of the reunification process as leaving no other alternative but to accelerate the process of organizational expansion. The expansion of the DGB unions cannot be viewed as separate and distinct from their actions in support of the legal extension of West German labor laws as described in the previous section. Together these formed the core strategy for institutional transfer of West German industrial relations to eastern Germany.

The most obvious manifestation of this overlap lies in the chronology. The months of March and May had been crucial to establishing and consolidating the tripartite consensus. They were central to the process of organizational expansion. Each of DGB unions had shifted their strategy to one of expansion by March, between February 28 in the case of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union, with the publication of its list of “Preconditions”, and March 22-23 in the case of the Public Service and Transport Union, with the announcement of the creation of the *ÖTV der DDR*.

The conflicts with East German unionists unwilling to surrender their power and influence were more open within the IG Metall and Media Industrial Union, who were also initially more inclined to support a merger of the East and West German organizations. The expansion of these two unions ultimately resulted in a refusal to keep former East German officials in the organization. Yet even the expansion of the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union, which retained a significant share of the former East German officials, was marked by distrust. The union president in Hanover repeatedly reminded them that the organization could be enlarged without their assistance.

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<sup>902</sup> Detlef Hensche, “Rede beim Außerordentlichen Gewerkschaftstag der IG Medien am 25. und 26. Oktober 1990”, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 12/90, p. 797.

The conferences on disbanding the East German unions were marked by emotional debates and sharp criticism of the strategy of the DGB unions. Yet in all four cases studied in this work, the month of May saw the latter reaffirm their control over the expansion process and a renewed emphasis on the opening of local offices, collective bargaining and recruitment.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The DGB unions implemented two different strategies during the events of 1989-90.

Their first strategy was based on the support and collaboration of the renewal of workers' defense of interests in the GDR. It was implemented with more or less acuity by the different DGB trade unions. In the sample observed in this study, the continuum ranges from IG Metall and Media Industrial Union, closely associated with the support and collaboration strategy, to the Chemistry, Paper, Ceramics Industrial Union, to the Public Services, Transport, Traffic Union, which only initiated it.

Yet in their diverging intensity the action of all DGB unions shared the same four characteristics. First of all, they made genuine efforts to follow how the revolution found expression in GDR's workplaces. The West German union press published numerous articles on the FDGB unions' reform and other initiatives by workplace activists and members of opposition groups. These articles show that most changes occurred at the workplace level.

Second of all, the DGB unions assisted and supported reform initiatives taken by FDGB unionists and other activists. One typical form of assistance were twinning programs between workers of comparable enterprises in both countries. They allowed East German workers to learn about the West German labor law, dual structure of interests representation and industrial relations. Material assistance was also frequent, as well as seminars. Some West German union secretaries may have tried to convince their East German colleagues to adopt these law, structures and model. Yet others insisted on the limits imparted to trade union politics in the Federal Republic. Fundamentally, such meetings were thought as a way to help East German workers and unionists make their own choices as to the kind of labor law and labor organizations they wished to have.

The insistence of DGB unions that all forms of concrete support and cooperation fulfilled an explicit request by East German unionists and workers forms the third characteristic of the first strategy. It is closely linked to the principle of any support action, which stipulates that the first interested, in that case East German workers, have to make their own choices.

The fourth characteristic concerns the possibility for the DGB unions to develop the strategy with more or less intensity, along the difficulty of these tasks or other priorities. This characteristic had been already recalled above.

The strategy of support and collaboration lasted from October 1989 until the first weeks of February 1990. Yet from January onward, calls for adjustments of this policy were published in the union press. Two main reasons explained that union leaders felt such adjustments essential. The first was the need for an official stance on Germany's unification, which the bulk of DGB unions had insufficiently addressed. In January, the calls for the unification had become so loud that they made a clear position of the DGB unions on the question unavoidable. The second reason behind the adjustment of the DGB strategy concerned deep worries as to the outcomes of the fall of the GDR on the situation of trade unions in the Federal Republic. Weak East German unions risked to be unable to bargain on an equal basis with employers. The result threatened to be negative outcomes on wages, worker rights and the strength of unions in the Federal Republic as well. Unification made the necessity to avoid such a situation only more urgent.

Since the second half of the 1980s, new economic circumstances had induced a vast programmatic reflection within the West German union movement. This reflection suddenly reached its peak with the so-called fall of socialism and the growing necessity of defining what it was that the DGB unions wanted in the context of unification. The Debate over socialism has not received its due attention so far. About sixty articles were published in different union publications over a period of three years, the bulk of which between December 1989 and December 1990. The Debate over socialism deserves to be considered amongst the most crucial theoretical debates of the post-war German labor movement. However, despite the importance of the issues tackled and the quantity of contributions, the Debate's main feature was the impressive similarity of the arguments put forward either for or against the upholding of the reference to democratic socialism in the DGB program. The respective arguments were very analogous and defended very similar positions. They identified the goals of trade union politics with the existing labor legislation, in other words with the preservation of the Federal Republic's *acquis social*. Whereas the Debate arose from the urgency of adapting the program to new circumstances, none of its contributors was able to identify what new union goals and strategies could look like. The Debate expressed the profound programmatic crisis of the West German labor movement at the end of the 1980s.

With regard to the unification, the will to preserve the West German labor law had obvious repercussions. It meant a reorientation of the DGB strategy around the objective of the legal

extension of Federal Republic's labor legislations in the GDR. West German union activists were not alone to privilege this option. A look at the employers' press between January and March 1990, allows to see how West German employers' associations also became supporters of the legal extension. The reason behind their preference had to do with the lack of a legal framework for investment in the GDR and the advantages of transposing one they knew well.

One major influence in the transformation of the West German unions and employers' associations into resolute partisans of the legal extension was the unification course of the federal government. Helmut Kohl's unification plan, publicized as a proposal to the East German government on February 6, 1990, supposed the participation of the West German collective bargaining partners. This proposal intended to achieve a rapid two-step unification: first, the monetary and economic union, second, the political union. It was based on GDR's annexation, or in other words on the eastward extension of the Federal Republic's legal order. The internal reports of the Federal Chancellery (among other sources) show that the implementation of this unification scheme supposed the participation of collective bargaining partners who could determine, through collective bargaining, the social outcomes of the monetary and economic union. Unemployment in particular promised to grow rapidly in the GDR, yet one major objective of the unification was to stop the migration of East German workers to the Federal Republic. In the chancellery, only the West German unions and employers' associations were considered for these tasks.

As representatives of unions and employer' associations met with the Helmut Kohl on February 20, they signaled their readiness to play their part in the chancellor's unification plan. Different indications were given in chapter 3.6 suggesting the holding of informal tripartite meetings at that time. Let us recall two. First of all, immediately after February 20, union and employers' associations rapidly published declarations in favor of the legal extension. The main documents in that respect were the pro-unification declaration of March 7 and the joint declaration with the BDA two days later. The latter was especially important. The second indication of the setting up of a tripartite consensus was the transformation of the initial monetary and economic union into the Monetary, Economic and Social Union. The inclusion of the social aspect marked the participation of the trade unions and employers' associations to the achievement of the unification.

Two weeks after the February 20 meeting, a consensus reigned between the Federal Republic's government, trade unions and employers' associations. It was based on a common preference for the extension of the labor law in the GDR and the launching of industrial relations in the GDR on the basis of the organizational expansion of the West German collective bar-

gaining partners. For the DGB unions this consensus confirmed a new logic of action, aiming at preserving the West German labor legislations in unified Germany. It established predictability and rapidity as main criteria for evaluating any strategic option. It finally introduced a preference for solutions negotiated at the top, with the federal government and employers' associations.

A two-pronged strategy rapidly ensued from the new logic of action adopted in March. On the one hand, this new strategy aimed at guaranteeing the rapid enlargement of the West German legal institutions of industrial relations to Eastern Germany. Contrary to their previous guidelines, the DGB unions now struggled against any East German institution and proposal that was not in key with the legal extension. They engaged the battle against the resilience of workplace union structures and for the introduction of works councils. They fought the Law on trade unions, which granted worker organizations extended co-determination rights but allowed the government to stop a strike – a violation of the sacrosanct principle of the collective bargaining partners' autonomy. They also managed to bring the East German trade unions to call for the dissolution of the FDGB, in May.

If the DGB unions were successful in guaranteeing the institutional extension, this result could not be obtained without conflicts with East German union activists, the bulk of which privileged the fusion of both labor laws. Yet the DGB achieved to obtain East German unions' support of the institutional enlargement just before the ratification of the MESU treaty by mid-May 1990. The treaty ratified by the two German governments confirmed the enlargement of the West German labor law, and the success of Helmut Kohl, the DGB unions and the West German employers' associations.

The second prong of the new strategy concerned the organizational expansion of the DGB unions in the GDR. Massive exits from the East German unions and the necessity to initiate collective bargaining rapidly were perceived in DGB unions' headquarters as leaving no other option than a hurried organizational expansion. The consequence was a loss of power of East German to the benefit of West German actors. Decision-making processes were monopolized by West German secretaries. As a result, conflicts with East German unionists were present in all cases studied here. Yet by May the DGB unions had successfully brought all East German unions to accept the expansion and act at their dissolution. From an organizational point of view, the setting up of operative union structures on the East German territory within six months can be looked at as a *tour de force* by the DGB unions.



The chronology indicates how this two-pronged strategy was closely linked to the tripartite consensus. The months of March and May marked the implementation and the confirmation of the tripartite consensus. It was also in these months that the DGB unions took the major decisions and made their most decided steps in order to guarantee the institutional extension and undertake their organizational expansion.



## **Part 4: Conclusion: The Paradox of Continuity**

Four questions were explored within this study. The first concerned the role of workers in the collapse of the GDR. This historical event can be observed from a long or short-term perspective. Our investigations deal with the impact of labor conflicts as one of the enduring factors that brought about the collapse and with the participation of workers in the 1989 revolution. With respect to the impact of labor conflicts on this, the argument developed in part II emphasizes the crucial role they were to play.

Various sources testify to the presence of top-down struggles at East German workplaces. These sources include reports prepared by the trade union, the Stasi, and the SED up until the 1970s. These reports allow one to identify periods of relative calm and times of social tension. Yet the ever-greater levels of workplace surveillance and suppression of such activities prevented these conflicts from taking on an open, collective nature. As a consequence, worker actions were individual and non-public. They took the form of production slowdowns, resistance to the introduction of new modes of compensation, absenteeism, systematic redistribution of bonuses among workers, and so forth. Such practices essentially aimed at decreasing the work quotas and increasing wages. The evolution of wages is thus a second category of source that can be indicative of the presence of hidden labor conflicts. Periods where wages grow faster than productivity (it often takes the form of a rise in one component of wages, i.e., bonuses) suggest a greater capacity of workers to resist the government's economic plan.

Such individual actions can only be identified as a form of labor conflict because of their widespread nature and important outcomes in the East German context. The repercussions thereof in the specific context of the GDR are unmistakable. The reports from the FDGB and Stasi, as well as the evolution of wages, indicate stronger top-down struggles over wages and quotas in the following periods: 1959-1962, 1967-1972, and in the second half of the 1980s. If the general strike of 1953 is also included, the portrait is unambiguous: labor conflicts, in the form of (post-1953) hidden struggle over wages and norms, were a factor in all of GDR's political crises. The nature of the antagonism changed according to the economic, political and social conditions, and re-emerged, perhaps never sufficient in its own right, but always a necessary catalyst in these episodes.

Needless to say, interaction between workers and the regime was never limited to these struggles, nor were the social conflicts in the GDR solely premised on this conflict. Furthermore the widespread occurrence of small-scale forms of workplace resistance should not blur the

fact that East German workers never as such formed one unified group with shared interests. “East German Workers” had, of course, diverse and conflicting interests, which could also be expressed in the struggles over wages and norms. To reiterate, the argument put forward in this work states that the struggles over wages and norms were part of broader political crises and indicate the role these conflicting interests between works and the state at the workplace played in directly shaping the history of that country. They contributed greatly to the long term factors that facilitated the collapse of the GDR.

The 1989 revolution was no exception in that respect. Signs of growing dissatisfaction had been reported at workplaces in the previous years. Contentious BGL elections in March 1989 were the precursor to tensions in the May municipal elections. Most of those who left the GDR during the summer were workers. The protests began when people reported back to work in September and realized that thousands of their colleagues had fled. The great majority of the 5 million persons that participated in the 2,600 demonstrations were workers. Moreover, significant moves towards democratization were made in East German workplaces during those months: directors and union officials were removed from office, new mechanisms for defending worker interests were tested, 200 strikes recorded, and various models of worker participation and rights attempted.

These are indications of different types of overlap between developments inside and outside the workplaces. Four kinds of overlap were identified: the debate of political developments in the shop floor; the recruitment at the workplace for political action outside the factory gates; the repercussions of the regime’s collapse on the power structures at the workplace; the participation in political activities outside the factory resulting from dissatisfaction with the situation at the workplace. Such important interconnections imply that the workplace should be considered when seeking to understand the dynamics in place during the East German revolution.

How the revolution affected labor can be considered by analyzing the changes in worker demands. Sources from 51 East German enterprises were examined in the course of this study and several conclusions were drawn from this review. Firstly, the overarching concerns of the previous months and the first weeks of the revolution were replaced by initiatives to restructure the mechanisms for defending worker interests. These initiatives shared the common goal of establishing the optimal structures for worker representation. Secondly, although some of these initiatives amounted to competing options – i.e., the reform of the FDGB unions or the establishment of new organizations –, this contest was not to play a conclusive role. Their respective supporters regarded them as complementary, overlapping options. Time would

ultimately tell which strategy proved superior. Thirdly, the bulk of structures for worker representation set up during the revolution were workplace-based. Fourthly, the East German labor law and constitution inspired most of the concepts put forward by labor activists. They often targeted the effective practice of rights that still remained on the books. Fifthly, there was an interest in ‘foreign models’ of worker representation and labor laws. The situation in West Germany was looked at with a particular interest, though France and Sweden were also brought into consideration. Together these trends make up the dynamic restructuring of the mechanisms for defending workers interests in the GDR. Although this process was not driven by the active participation of large numbers of workers, there are indications that many such initiatives sprouted at East German enterprises.

The second question explored in this work concerns the strategies adopted by the West German trade unions and the goals behind these. The DGB and its member unions implemented two strategies successively. Their first strategy is described here as a support and collaboration policy. Its aim was to aid in restructuring the mechanisms of worker defense in the GDR by actively supporting the initiatives. The provision of assistance was premised on the fact that any resources supplied had to fulfill direct requests made by East German activists. The DGB unions considered themselves defenders of the right of East Germans to free self-determination, i.e., free from the pressures of West German political and economic actors. Typical measures of the first strategy included partnership programs and seminars. They supported and encouraged the discussions over the future forms of worker representation and the labor law in the GDR. The precepts of the support and collaboration strategy would determine the DGB unions’ policies with regard to the East German revolution until February 1990.

This strategy was eventually abandoned out of the concerns expressed within the DGB of a mass influx of unemployed East German workers into West Germany and the absence of strong unions in the GDR. The situation and strength of West German trade unions, not yet significantly challenged at the end of the 1980s, risked further destabilization from the East German revolution. Beginning in January 1990, union leaders started to consider the extension of West Germany’s institutions of industrial relations to the GDR as an appropriate method to obviate the occurrence of such problems.

Yet the direct impulse for strategic shift came from the federal government at the beginning of February 1990. Its plan for a two-step reunification process – first, monetary and economic union, following by political union – required the participation of unions and employers’ as-

sociations to manage the social impact of this rapid process. A meeting at the Federal Chancellery on February 20 – probably followed by others of a more informal nature – established a tripartite consensus between the West German government, unions and employers' associations in support of legal extension. Fourteen days later, on March 9, the consensus was sealed with the publication of a joint declaration by the DGB and the BDA (The Confederation of German Employers' Association) calling for the introduction of the West German labor law and dual structure of worker representation in the GDR.

The second strategy of the DGB unions was thus implemented beginning in March. Its objectives were legal extension and institutional expansion, i.e., the expansion of the DGB unions into eastern Germany. The institutional extension involved bringing the East German structures of worker representation into line with those in West Germany. Until May the DGB unions struggled to persuade their East German counterparts to act in accordance with this strategy. Immediately before the publication of the MESU treaty on May 18 (planned for July 1), the DGB unions had gained the support of the East German unions for the introduction of works councils, the abandonment of the East German law on trade unions and the dissolution of the FDGB. The process leading to this outcome was not without its conflicts between labor organizations in both Germanies; the DGB repeatedly threatened to break off ties if its positions were not accepted. The decision-making process leading to the dissolution of the East German unions and their members joining West German organizations, i.e., the decision to expand the DGB unions into the East, followed the same timeline (from March and May).

The rapid establishment of DGB union structures in East Germany, the capacity of the latter to influence the social impact of the economic “cold start” together with employers, was a remarkable display of organizational mobilization by the West German unions. Reliable figures on the financial and human resources devoted to achieving institutional extension and organizational expansion are hard to find and would require further research. Yet all indications point to the fact that the completion of these tasks consumed a considerable share of the DGB unions' resources.

The major number of new members joining the DGB unions in the second half of 1990 indicates a certain convergence of the “second strategy” with the aspirations of the East German workers. Contrary to the assumptions expressed in the literature to date, much would indicate that this convergence began in the West and spread to East Germany. In other words, the clear guidelines of the DGB from March onward were highly influential in bringing the East German labor to consider institutional extension and organizational expansion as a valuable option. Prior to this, some had favored such solutions, although there is little evidence that

would allow one to conclude that such opinions were dominant among East German workers. All of DGB's East German counterpart organizations had always stated their preference for combining the East and West German labor laws (in some cases, elements from other models were also considered, as indicated above) into a new set of laws.

In fact, many East German union and workplace activists continued to defend the fusion of both German labor laws for use in a unified Germany well after the reunification treaties had secured simple institutional extension. The workshops held for East Germans on the technicalities of the West German labor law sometimes devolved into uncontrolled discussions on the optimum fusion of both laws, much to the irritation of the DGB organizers. The perception amongst West German unionists that their East German colleagues could not yet effectively function in the new system, as well as the urgent need to proceed with the launch of trade union activities in Eastern Germany as rapidly as possible, resulted in a strong centralization of decision-making authority in the hands of unelected West German officials. The dissatisfaction of East German members and activists with this situation was soon evident in the East German structures of the DGB unions. Hence the consensus between East and West German labor activists was partial and only for a limited period of time. The consensus by itself does not fully explain the unification process of the German unions, contrary to the dominant argument put forth in literature on the topic. Tensions and an unequal balance of power between East and West German unionists must also be considered.

The third question explored in this study concerns the impact DGB policies had in bringing about unification. On this point, the historiography splits. While literature on institutional transfer considers industrial relations to be the first sector in which the general transfer was completed, studies on DGB politics in 1989-90 criticize what they see as the unions' inability to keep up with the pace of political developments.

The present study of DGB politics provides multiple arguments that support the hypothesis found in literature on transfer. The documents of the Federal Chancellery and Labor Ministry indicate how unions (and employers' associations) were part of reunification plans from the very beginning. As already indicated on several occasions in the previous pages, the need to stop the westward stream of migrants required not only rapid reunification but also a realignment of living and working conditions in both regions to bring them into line. The active participation of well-proven tariff organizations could lead to, e.g., a lower anticipated rise in unemployment, negotiated redundancy packages, and programs for vocational retraining. In

the volatile political context of the GDR, the West German social partners help preserve social stability during the dramatic economic and social upheaval. An exaggerated formulation of the argument would state that the DGB unions did not adapt their policies to the realities of the reunification process because there could be no reunification (or more aptly no MESU) without their participation. This would be taking the argument too far. The point, however, is that the actual reunification process left it up to the West German social partners to perform the crucial restructuring of the labor market. The shift in strategy by the DGB unions to one dedicated to institutional extension was completed with the publication of the DGB/BDA joint declaration on March 9. This was more than a week before the East German elections, widely presented as the moment in time when the East German population accepted Kohl's reunification plan. The DGB was not a passive onlooker to these developments and indeed played an active role in them.

The fourth, and final, question examined in this study concerns the incorporation of the 1989-1990 events into the history of the German labor movement. Two aspects have been highlighted in that respect. The first concerns the merger of the East and West German labor in the same trade unions. With it, a new chapter in the post-war history of the German labor had begun. Again, reunification was the result of a partial and temporary convergence in the respective positions, but also a centralized process led by West German union secretaries. The rapid success of organizational expansion should not blur the fact that the process was never free of East / West tensions. It would take longer before East German workers and unionists found a place within their new organizations and contributed to setting its agenda. Although this hypothesis is not tested in this study, it would appear in all likelihood that the first major industrial conflicts in the new *Länder* often aided in integrating and adding a regional dimension to these organizations.

The second aspect concerns the institutional extension policy and how it took place within the debates at the time on the future of trade union politics. This debate had begun in the second half on the 1980s as a means to revise labor's goals and practices in view of high levels of unemployment and the intensification of international capital flows. Despite unemployment, the West German unions had maintained high membership rates throughout this decade. They did not suffer the kind of critical setback their British, American and Canadian counterparts had. Yet a broad programmatic review was nonetheless seen as unavoidable, precisely to prevent a similar weakening of unions from occurring in Germany. The high number of contributions to IG Metall's *Zukunftstdebatte* is one sign of the importance of the debate on the future



of trade union politics; such reflections had started in most of the DGB unions toward the end of the decade.

The events of 1989-90 in the GDR intensified the debate and provoked its premature conclusion. The fall of the GDR confirmed the urgency to redefine the unions' goals. The questioning of the "democratic socialist" foundation of the DGB program within the union ranks became louder. The need to define a reunification policy also added to the urgency for unions to redefine what it was that they wanted. The debate over socialism, initiated in December 1989 as the calls for reunification came to dominate the East German demonstrations, was a palpable manifestation of how the East German events gave renewed impulse to the review on the future of trade union politics. Yet, while every article stated a need for revisions to union politics, the majority of the contributions to the debate on socialism limited themselves to identifying core values that should act as a guide in making these adjustments. It is quite revealing that the same values – democracy, solidarity, equity, social justice – were put forth by both those who supported retaining the reference to democratic socialism and those who opposed it. It is hence the lack of real proposals on how labor's goals and policies could be changed that is most striking to anyone reading these articles.

Many contributions to the debate reduced union goals to the existing labor law and institutions of industrial relations in place in the Federal Republic of Germany. The practical affect of such ideas was evident: the main task of the West German labor movement in the 1990 context was to guarantee the preservation of these laws and institutions in a unified Germany. The policy on institutional extension implemented by the DGB unions from March 1990 onward marked the actual conclusion of the debate over socialism. Even if articles on this debate continued to be published until 1993, none was able to see beyond the existing reality.

The debate over socialism and the strategy for institutional extension are closely interlinked. They express two sides of one reality: the programmatic exhaustion of the West German labor movement. It would come as no surprise to any historian of the German labor movement that some DGB union leaders sought to preserve the established institutions. He or she would have no trouble finding previous events where similar inclinations guided the tactics of union leaders. The consensus among those in the West German labor movement for institutional extension confers specific historical significance to this episode. No force within the DGB unions fought for a revision of the West German labor law in a unified Germany. All unions supported institutional extension in an unaltered form; the left-wing unions, such as the Media Industrial Union, which might seem likely defenders of such positions, were the first to call for extension.

Never in the history of DGB unions had these organizations aligned their goals with the simple preservation of the existing institutions. After all, their ability to act within the framework of these institutions and to intervene in political debates rested on their capacity to see beyond the existing order. In 1990, the DGB unions did not merely temporarily drop key programmatic demands, such as revised co-determination laws and a ban on lock-outs. They spoke out against them, while fighting to prevent any type of combination of the East and West German labor law. The one-sided approach of the West German unions in support of the West German labor laws and institutions of industrial relations was indeed a novelty.

The preservation of these laws and institutions in 1990 in their present, unaltered form was perceived by the DGB unions as a guarantee of continuity. Yet the consensus in favor of a strategy consenting to the abandonment of key demands was the result of a year-long process ending in programmatic exhaustion, unexpectedly exposed by the events of 1989-90. In this regard, reunification marked the end of one chapter in the West German labor history.

The expression “paradox of continuity” refers to this interplay between permanence and termination of a period. The institutional extension policy was indeed a choice for a specific set of continuities and discontinuities: a decision favoring the preservation of labor’s victories in West Germany at the expense of those demands that remained unfulfilled. It was a confirmation of what already had been accomplished, accompanied by a sense of relief that any negative impact to the programmatic foundations of union politics in the West Germany could thus be avoided. Historians of the labor movement were keenly aware of this interplay whereby any action designed to maintain continuity inevitably brought about a dramatic upheaval. Some, including Helga Grebing, Michael Schneider, and Klaus Tenfelde in particular, tried to sound the alarm bells. They suggested that other configurations of continuity / discontinuity would be more appropriate in a context determined by a changing economy and reunification. They examined the struggle to reform the West German labor law, with revised goals and tactics as a preferable alternative. The labor movement history, recalled Tenfelde, contains many examples of transformative political and economic shifts resulting in strengthened trade unions. Adaptation to a new context should not mean a renunciation of broader goals, he said.

In any case, one obvious holdover from the pre-unification period to the one that was to follow is the apparent crisis in the agenda adopted by the German union movement. The tripartite consensus had clearly crumbled sometime in 1992 with the first breach of a collective labor

contract in post-war Germany by the metal industry.<sup>903</sup> It was the announcement that the leveling of working and living standards in Germany would be a longer process than originally envisioned in 1990. After slightly more than fifteen years, the standards specified above were still out of line in all but a few industrial sectors, despite limited wage demands by trade unions. After an unsuccessful strike in the eastern metal industry in 2003, the slow pace of improvement to working conditions was reversed in this industry and instead replaced by lowering standards, a process rapidly introduced in other sectors, e.g., retailing. The past years have been marked by a stripping down of the labor law and erosion of worker rights in Germany. The DGB unions have lost more members than they had gained through new East Germans members joining their organizations in 1990-1991.<sup>904</sup> If anything, alarming pre-reunification developments that guided DGB policy in 1990 appear stronger slightly more than fifteen years on. While debate on programmatic reorientation was an open and vital process in the DGB of the late 1980s, the same cannot be said of today. The German unions, like their European counterparts, appear to face an even more critical "loss of perspective" now, one that hampers their current policies and puts their future success in doubt.<sup>905</sup> For German unions, the experience of reunification was crucial in that respect. The choice of institutional extension and their unsuccessful policy of leveling working and living conditions in Germany make programmatic reorientation an even more difficult process today than it was then. Yet it is an inescapable reality. The author would not be the first person to state that the redefinition of trade union policies will be the main challenge faced by labor organizations in the coming years. It is nonetheless with these words, and with a certain confidence that the movement will be successful in renewing itself, that I conclude this work.

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<sup>903</sup> Turner 1998.

<sup>904</sup> Denis 2005.

<sup>905</sup> Patsure/Verberckmoes/De Witte 1996.



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# Appendix

## Setting up the tripartite consensus in favor of the Monetary, Economic and Social Union – A Chronology

1989

December 7

Chancellor Kohl worries about the fact that the power lays in the street in the GDR

December 14

“Revenge is in the air” in the GDR, explains Chancellor Kohl.

December 19

Kohl’s visit to Dresden persuades him that every attempt to delay the unification will intensify the stream of immigration. From then on he should try to control the developments in the GDR, although they must look as if ensuing from “the street”. The East German revolution must remain “incomplete”.

1990

January 12

During a Niedersachsen Industrie- und Handelskammer meeting, Chancellor Kohl declares that economic growth in the GDR will only occur if the overall framework is adequate and investors have confidence

January 15

Theo Waigel hands in his *Vermerk Zehn Punkte auf dem Weg zu einer deutsch-deutschen Währungsunion*. It is a plan for a monetary union along the 10 point-plan of November (realisation of unification in between 2 to 4 years). Kohl is more and more inclined to consider a rapid introduction of the DM in the GDR, as the only way to stop the political crisis in that country and the stream of migrants in the FRG. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the BKA works on a plan for a rapid monetary union. What is still missing, according to Kohl, is a legal and economical framework.

January 25

During his meeting with Helmut Kohl, Hans Modrow depicts the social protest as being on the rise and the power of the state as vanishing. He vainly asks for 15 Billion DM in immediate help from the Federal Republic. Rudolf Seiters requires an East German plan for the realisation of unity and for the adaptation to the social and labour laws of the Federal Republic. Modrow replies that it is impossible as the situation is too unstable.

January 29

Paper of the Ministry of Finances on the immediate introduction of the DM in the GDR (“D-Day solution”).

February 5

Kohl depicts an unstable GDR plagued with strikes to President Mitterrand and insists on the necessity to stabilise the situation as fast as possible. Two days later, he describes the situation with similar terms to the president of Poland.

February 6

Chancellor Kohl announces a roadmap for the rapid realisation of political unity, with a monetary and economic union as first step.

February 7

1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Cabinet Committee on the Unity, under Chancellor Kohl’s presidency, whose goal is to prepare the rapid introduction of the monetary and economic union. The social component is not explicitly mentioned, but the Ministry of Labour is represented receives the task of setting up a plan for the adaptation to the labour and social laws, and to the education and vocational training systems of the Federal Republic. The Sachverständigenrat underlines that the rapid introduction of the DM will result in calls for rapid levelling of the living standards in the East. Such hopes, impossible to fulfil, should not be provoked.

February 9

Horst Köhler (BKA) writes in an intern note that the rapid monetary union will probably result in a momentary loss of jobs in the GDR. It is important to define the legal framework allowing for the introduction of the DM in the GDR. The Bundesländer accept to take part to the negotiations with the East German government beside the Federal government.

February 10

Lothar Späth states to the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* that the monetary union makes sense only if the entire West German economic framework is transferred in the GDR, only of the GDR “capitulates”.

February 12

To the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chancellor Kohl states his preference for the unity to be achieved along article 23 instead of article 146. The latter, he explains, could enable the SPD to include “socialist elements” into the Grundgesetz.

February 13/14

Rudolf Seiters meets some ministers of the East German government. Members of the Round Table ask for an immediate financial aid and reject a rapid monetary union. Tatjana Böhm argues in favour of a “social union”<sup>906</sup> with encompassing welfare provisions for the eastern population, because of the inevitable problems that will ensue from the reform of the economy.

February 14

2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Cabinet Committee on the Unity. All departments (including Labor and Social Affairs) are given until March 5, to document the different questions and problems likely to emerge during the negotiations with the East German government on the monetary, economic and social union. The government leads active “internal preparations”, in order to start the negotiation as soon as possible after March 18.

February 20

1<sup>st</sup> Experts Talks in the Bundeskanzleramt. The FRG, so the government, has to make it clear that the transposition of the entire legal frame of the social market economy is a condition sine qua non to the monetary union. The BDA has a similar position. In front of journalists, the DGB restates its official position favorable to the payment of an immediate assistance of 15 billions of DM to the GDR.

February 21

First round of expert discussions on open assets (offene Vermögensfragen).

March 2

Labor Minister Norbert Blüm proposes the implementation of an Arbeitsförderungsgesetz in the GDR strongly similar to that of the FRG. He is also favourable to the introduction of Arbeitsverwaltungen (included in the AFG/DDR), Arbeitsbeschaffungsmassnahmen and a system of vocational training strongly inspired by the West German institutions. CSU MP Scharrenbroich enjoins the DGB to extend its organisations to the GDR and to unify German workers under its roof. The FDGB, he states, belongs to the “dustbins of history”.

March 5

2<sup>nd</sup> Experts talks. For the FRG, the structures of prices and wages in the GDR have to be reformed. Little social elements mentioned. The GDR tries to bring more social consideration in the discussions.

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<sup>906</sup> The Federal government talked at the time of a “monetary and economic union”, and considered the social dispositions included in the plan as instruments towards economic goals. The insistence on the social union then, and ultimately the ratification of the “monetary, economic and *social* union”, acknowledged a greater importance to the protection of the population during the transformation and to the goal of an increase of the standard of living of the East German population than first considered by the Federal government, even though one of its foremost objective had been from the beginning the increase of the standard of living in those regions.

March 6

The Volkskammer adopts the Grundlinie of the Social Chart, written the preceding week end by members of the Round Table together with West German specialists of social policy. It foresees a social union between both countries which would be the result of a reciprocal process of reforms. It lists social rights, including the right to work. The Volkskammer also adopts the Law on trade unions, which grant these organisations with wide ranging co-determination rights, from the shop floor to the parliamentary.

March 7

The DGB publishes a declaration in which it supports the political unity, the introduction of the collective bargaining autonomy, the unification of the union movement within the DGB. It asks the West German government to include unions in the discussions on the realisation of the monetary and economic union, to which the social component should be added.

March 9

DGB head Ernst Breit and BDA president Klaus Murmann meet. Both organizations publish a joint declaration in which they support Chancellor Kohl's plan for a rapid monetary, economic and social union, and announce their wish to act within its realm in the GDR.

March 12

First meeting of the Working Group formed by the Labour Ministry, DGB, BDA and DAG. BDI and Deutsche Bank heads plead for the rapid realization of Kohl's plan of a monetary and economic union, at the opening of the Leipziger Messe.

March 13

Temporary report of the Commission of Experts on the preparation of the monetary union.

March 18

The electoral results are greeted as a gift of god by Helmut Kohl. He is especially proud that East German workers have voted for him..

March 23

DGB head Ernst Breit addresses the delegates of the Deutsche Postgewerkschaft. Because of the lack of conviction engaged in the reform of the FDGB, he explains, the DGB unions have to unify as soon as possible. Despite the links, DGB unions should keep as much distance as possible from FDGB functionaries, as soon as doubts as to the nature of their work arouse.

March 29 and 30

Second round of experts discussions on open assets (offene Vermögensfragen).

April 3

DGB head Ernst Breit refuses to sign a joint declaration submitted by the FDGB against exchange rate of 2:1 for wages. Although the DGB is also favourable to a 1:1 conversion of wages, it rejects strike as a means to reach this end, as evoked in the declaration, states Breit.

April 4

First proposition by the West German experts of treaty with the GDR on a “Währungsunion mit Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft”.

April 10

First meeting between DGB and East German unions on collective bargaining.

April 12

In the union magazine *Die Quelle*, DGB head Ernst Breit criticises the East German Law on trade unions. Although he himself is favourable to the interdiction of lock-outs, any legislation restricts the autonomy of collective bargaining partners. This is a Pandora Box, as the West German government would use this opportunity to adopt anti-labour legislation. Breit explains that he does not know if East German trade unions will comply to unify into the DGB unions. The will of East German workers will have to be respected.

April 18

Publication of the Tasks of the DGB in relation with the unity. It follows the declaration of March 7, and supports free and independent trade unions in the GDR, favourable to the collective bargaining autonomy, to co-determination, to elected representation of workers in the workplace and against lock-outs.

East German trade unions publish a joint declaration in which they support the German unity, the unification of trade unions within the DGB, the social market economy and the democratic renewal of East German trade unions.

April 18 and 19

Third round of experts discussions on open assets (offene Vermögensfragen)

April 25

Beginning of the negotiations between both countries on a “Monetary, Economic and Social Union”.

April 26

Meeting of the DGB Working Group on inter-German relations. DGB’s Legal Advisor (Karl Kehrmann?) considers the unification of trade unions “by takeover” the only practical way. East German unions should consequently dissolve their organisations, their members and assets be recuperated by the corresponding DGB union.

April 27

Second meeting between the FRG and the GDR on a “Monetary, Economic and Social Union”.

In a letter to the FDGB, DGB head Ernst Breit explains his organisation’s support of the Monetary, economic and Social union.

April 30

Third meeting between the FRG and the GDR on a “Monetary, Economic and Social Union”.

May 1

Commemorations for the 100<sup>th</sup> May 1 demonstrations. DGB and FDGB unions do not demonstrate together (with the exception of the IG Metall in Berlin).

May 2

Declaration in 12 points on the exchange rates by the West German government.

The DGB executive is favourable to the adhesion of the 18 independent East German trade unions to the DGB, without the FDGB.

May 3 and 4

Fourth meeting between the FRG and the GDR on a “Monetary, Economic and Social Union”.

May 5

Five-point Declaration by the FDGB and the East German trade unions on the gradual realisation of the unification of German trade unions. At each step mutual respect, reciprocal comprehension and co-operation should prevail between organisations of both countries.

They should be considered themselves equal in rights, as partners in the realisation of a common goal.

May 7

Publication of a scheme for a law on co-determination rights in East German enterprises, worked out by lawyers, judges and the DGB Rechtsschutz division (Gesetz über die Interessenvertretung der Beschäftigten in Betrieben und Unternehmen). It foresees many improvements to the rights allotted to workers by the BetrVG.

May 8

Declaration by the DGB executive on the economic reform of the GDR. Although some criticisms should be made about the Monetary, Economic and Social Union, these questions are now closed. The unification of trade unions will occur under the roof of the DGB with the help of the East German trade unions.

May 9

The 21 East German trade unions quit the FDGB. A Sprecherrat is formed, headed by the railway union's president Peter Rothe.

DGB's Committee on activities in the GDR reports of the different unions as to the state of the co-operation between unions of both countries. Three possible ways for the unification are considered: a merger after reforms of the East German union supervised by its DGB counterpart in the form of a dissolution of the former into the latter; adhesion of East German workers to the DGB union; merger with a new East German trade union formed and supervised by the DGB union.

May 10

Different actions by East German trade unions against the Monetary, Economic and Social Union are cancelled.

DGB head Ernst Breit meets Sprecherrat's speaker Peter Rothe. The latter declares that he now approves the Monetary, Economic and Social Union, although it could be improved. Breit states that the political unity should be realised as soon as possible.

May 11 to 13

Last round of negotiations on a "Monetary, Economic and Social Union".

May 14

The FDGB is dissolved. The DGB takes the responsibility of the buildings, legal services and public relations of trade unions in East Germany. The DGB and the Sprecherrat adopt a joint position on the Monetary, Economic and Social Union. The West German labour laws should at least be respected in the GDR (freedom of association, collective bargaining autonomy, BetrVG, protection against dismissals). The interdiction of lock-outs is not mentioned.

May 15

DGB and ÖTV's heads, Ernst Breit and Monika Wulf-Mathies, meet Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who guarantees that the collective bargaining autonomy will not be restricted for the public sector during the collective bargaining in the East.

May 18

Ratification of the Treaty on a Monetary, Economic and Social Union.

May 20 to 25

DGB's 14<sup>th</sup> Congress. Heinz-Werner Meyer is the new president.

June 11

DGB adopts its Schritte zur Wahrnehmung von Aufgaben der Gewerkschaftsbundes im geeinten Deutschland. It foresees the establishment of DGB regional divisions.

June 18

The Conference of Chamber of commerce (DIHT) states that economic forces can restructure the economy of the GDR by its own forces and resources.

June 21

Adoption of the Monetary, Economic and Social Union.

June 22

The VK introduces the West German laws concerned by the Monetary, Economic and Social Union. The SPD-Ost is successful in crossing off the paragraph 4 of the article 116 AFG/DDR. With the political unity on October 3, this paragraph is finally introduced in the new Länder.

June 25

The West German law on surveillance committees (Aufsichtsratsgesetz) comes into effect in the GDR.

June 26

Second meeting of the Working Group formed by the Labour Ministry, DGB, BDA and DAG.

June 28

Abrogation of the East German Law on trade unions

June 29

Law on the Schiedsstellen für Arbeitsrecht in the GDR. Every enterprise with more than 50 workers is required to have one, others can.

August 7

Third Meeting of the Working Group formed by the Labour Ministry, DGB, BDA and DAG.