FAITH, HOPE AND APATHY

Politics and Popular Opinion in Thuringia,
1945-1968

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the interplay of social and political history in the Soviet Zone of Occupation of Germany/GDR between 1945 and 1968, taking Thuringia/Bezirk Erfurt as a case study. The thesis explores the changing nature of popular reactions to SED rule during this period, evaluates the nature and degree of regime stability achieved by 1968, and illustrates the methods which achieved this stability.

An introductory chapter outlines Thuringia's political and social situation at the end of World War Two, and briefly comments on the emergence of the regional KPD, SPD and SED. The following chapter discusses how the rival political parties and the 'mass organisations' created by the SED were coopted to support the SED's self-proclaimed 'leading role'. However, these organisations were often inefficiently led, and their memberships indifferent or oppositional well into the 1960s.

The second section illustrates the changing extent of SED hegemony through snapshots of popular opinion. Particular attention is paid to the initial postwar years, Stalin's death, the popular uprising of 1953, agricultural collectivisation (1960), the sealing of the GDR's borders (1961), and trends in the mid-1960s. The third section concentrates on church-state relations to illustrate the interplay between the SED's attempts at political dominance and popular responses. The concluding section examines responses to the ideological challenges of the constitutional debate and invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968).

The thesis demonstrates that although some stability was attained by the mid-1950s, it depended more on the GDR's fixed external parameters than the SED's often inefficient rule. Outward conformity remained incomplete by the late 1960s. Ideological commitment also remained elusive, even among those responsible for perpetuating the system, and political challenges to the regime occurred in both 'normal' and 'crisis' years. Nonetheless, the high levels of conformist behaviour ensured the regime would not collapse for domestic reasons alone.
For my parents
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DAS EICHSFELD
Thuringia in 1918
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Thüringen im Jahre 1918

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The Thuringia map shows various territories including:
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- Herzogtum Sachsen-Meiningen
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- Fürstentum Schwarzburg-Sondershausen
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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most frequently asked question about Germany’s twentieth century history is not ‘What happened?’ but ‘How could it have happened?’. Usually this question has referred to the national socialist dictatorship, a period of history which seems impossible to comprehend within the normal framework of historiographical analysis. Even fifty years after the end of the Second World War the spectre of German neonazism still fascinates and terrifies the world, while similar political groupings elsewhere are relatively ignored. Perhaps underlying this perception is the memory of German national socialism as, at least initially, a genuinely popular mass movement. Western perceptions of state and society in the formerly socialist countries of eastern Europe, however, assume a form of rule imposed on the masses by a small minority with no popular or democratic legitimacy. Hence, the peoples of the former Soviet Union are generally not expected to feel collective responsibility for the millions of victims of Stalin’s purges, while Germans, even two generations later, are still faced with the guilt of the nazi holocaust against the Jewish people.

This peculiar contrast between the origins of two systems - in shorthand at least ‘fascism’ and ‘communism’ - which in their most extreme forms, Hitler’s Third Reich and Stalin’s Soviet Union, produced arguably similar results, is of direct relevance to the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), whose population had been urged in the space of a few short years to fight both for the Führer’s final victory over the Soviet Union and for the victory of socialism at the side of the Soviet Union. For 44 years, from the arrival of Soviet troops in 1945 to the ‘peaceful revolution’ of autumn 1989, this population lived mainly quiescently under ‘real existing socialism’. ‘How could it have happened?’, one might well ask. There are two principal schools of thought in answering this question.
First is the marxist argument proffered mainly during the GDR’s existence that socialism was an inevitable historical development and the natural positive response to the horrors of nazism. The division of the German working class movement during the Weimar Republic was overcome by the necessity of joint action by communists and social democrats to ensure that fascism never returned. Thus the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) was created and legitimised as the leading political force in the GDR. The SED’s legitimacy was accepted, in this explanation, not only among the working classes but also among other sections of the population who, after a period of ‘class struggle’ against both internal opponents and western ‘imperialist agents’ in the Cold War, accepted and allied themselves with socialism, embodied in the SED, as the rightful, majority societal and economic order. The USSR’s role as Germany’s liberator from national socialism and as the leading global force in socialism is also emphasised, but in the spirit of internationalism rather than of military force. This official party line was largely unable to explain all the internal opposition which occurred in the GDR, even years after the initial ‘class struggle’ was waged but before the system collapsed. Nor, for instance, did it explain the SED’s tendency to appeal to elites in society more than to the traditional working class, on whose numerical superiority the SED’s legitimacy supposedly rested. However, the role of institutions such as the Stasi, the ‘popular’ name for the GDR’s Ministry of State Security, and the single list electoral system in maintaining socialism in the GDR is legitimised in this argument by the need to prevent fascism from re-emerging and individuals or small groupings from overthrowing socialism for their own personal vested interests to the detriment of the greater good. In the marxist view, this was ‘scientifically’ proven to lie in socialist and ultimately communist rule, as defined by the SED at the Soviet party’s behest.

In stark contrast it is argued, as I have indicated, that socialist or communist systems are imposed on the population by a small minority and possess no legitimacy, democratic or

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1 Cf., e.g., Gerhard Rossmann, ed, Geschichte der SED: Abrif (Berlin: Dietz, 1976), pp.5-7; Walter Ulbricht’s foreword to Vereint sind wir alles: Erinnerungen an die Gründung der SED, ed. by Fanny Rosner and others (Berlin: Dietz, 1966), pp.5-14.
2 Cf., e.g., Vom Werden unseres Staates, ed. by K.-H. Schöneburg and others, 2 vols (Berlin: Dietz, 1966-1968), II (1968), pp.80-1; Tord Riemann and Fritz Tech, Warum, was und wie wir wählen, 3rd edn (Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1986), pp.41-46.
otherwise. In the particular case of the GDR, which arose from the postwar Soviet occupation zone (Sowjetische Besatzungszone, SBZ) in Germany, it is argued that east German socialism and quiescence were the product of Soviet tanks, of the barbed wire and ‘shoot to kill’ regime at the Berlin Wall, and of the notorious Stasi. This view is, perhaps understandably, predominant amongst the many who experienced personal difficulties at the hands of the GDR state, but also in western Germany, reflecting both the Cold War and a nationalist bitterness at the division of Germany after 1945. As the western occupation zones of Germany merged into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and developed along conservative, capitalist lines, in stark contrast to the GDR, it became important in the western state to legitimise the FRG’s own political course, particularly at a time when the political and economic non-viability of ‘real’ socialist or Moscow-aligned communist systems was still unproved. Nationalist and conservative, capitalist appeals were deployed in the FRG’s diplomatic and propaganda offensive against the GDR, particularly during the iciest period of the Cold War before the advent of Ostpolitik in the early 1970s.³

Since the GDR’s collapse, many western German politicians and historians, as well as many eastern German opponents of the GDR, have been at pains to continue the battle, perhaps still perceiving the need to legitimise the FRG’s political and economic system to the state’s newly acquired eastern citizens.⁴ Writing in 1990, for instance, Thomas Neumann’s history of SED rule was an attempt to discredit marxism per se and write off the GDR’s history as simple stalinism.⁵ In 1994, a Bundestag enquiry concluded that the GDR was ‘a dictatorial system based on violence and injustice’. The conclusion was unsurprising, as the commission’s aim before the investigation had been to:⁶

...ensure that those forces which were decisive in organising the repression of people in the GDR never again receive a political chance in united Germany.⁷

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⁴ Cf. the introduction to my chapter, ‘The failed experiment: East German communism’, in German History Since 1800, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (London: Edward Arnold, forthcoming).
⁷ Ibid, p.5.
This policy has effectively led, since 1989, to the FRG’s retrospective reversal of the diplomatic and legal recognition it had accorded the GDR since the days of Ostpolitik and to lengthy litigation in the FRG’s courts against the GDR’s political hierarchy and officialdom concerning their actions within a now defunct state with a very different concept of law and order.\textsuperscript{8} Strangely, the offensive against the GDR’s memory relaunched since late 1989 by those who reject the GDR’s very legitimacy as a state has been in sharp contrast to the memories of millions of east Germans of their former lives, to the widely observed, enduring wave of nostalgia for numerous elements of the GDR (not least job security and a sense of solidarity, but also for particular brand names), and to the relatively strong showing of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the SED’s successor.\textsuperscript{9}

The questions underlying this thesis were conceived in 1988, before the GDR’s collapse, but have become still more relevant since 1989. Originally I noted that a state like the GDR could not function as a stable entity if only a small number of fanatical communists existed to coerce the entire population. It became clear that large numbers of people actively supported the state system, whether in one of the GDR’s political parties or mass organisations, or as managers of a factory or business. While much of the GDR’s stability was no longer attributed by the late 1980s to Soviet troops but to the omnipresent, omniscient Stasi, in practice this meant that possibly hundreds of thousands of people were also working directly or indirectly in the Stasi for the system’s preservation. Beyond this, the vast majority of the remainder of the population had to be prepared to tolerate passively the system that the smaller, but still large, group of people were working to uphold. On occasion, as on election days, this vast, normally passive, majority had to be prepared to vote actively for the candidates of the Nationale Front (NF), the ‘governing coalition’ of the GDR’s constitutional political parties.

\textsuperscript{8} Most notable was the case against Erich Honecker and other former Politbüro members. Cf., e.g., ‘In Sachen Erich Honecker’, Kursbuch 111 (1993); cf. also Knut Holm, Der Modrow-Prozeß (Berlin: SPOTLESS-Verlag, 1993).

That this situation of overwhelming active or passive support of the system existed for almost 40 years is an historical fact, however uncomfortable it might appear in 1997 in either eastern or western Germany. The continued allegiance of many east Germans since 1989 to some, if not all, aspects of the GDR state, and the refusal of most east Germans to condemn it entirely, means that an understanding of why this state of affairs evolved and persisted is both essential to understanding modern east German society and a prerequisite for a true unification of Germany on the basis of the differing experiences of Germans in both parts of the country. It is important to establish whether east Germans principally supported, accepted or tolerated the GDR’s system of government, and to determine the extent to which east Germans themselves created their society or had it imposed by Soviet intervention. As the number of committed communists in 1945 was relatively small, it is also clear that they did not and could not ensure the country’s transformation to a stable socialist society alone. How and to what extent were they able to coopt the rest of the population? What in any case is meant by the term ‘SED rule’? By 1968 the party counted over 1.8 million members, approximately one adult in seven, but it would seem unlikely that these large numbers formed an homogenous political mass. It is hard to reconstruct the range of personal motivations for party membership, but it is possible to gauge the degree of dedication to the cause amongst party members and thus to determine the realistic extent of the SED’s political hegemony over time.

Beyond these questions’ specific relevance to Germany, there is potentially wider significance for a case study of the methods used by one grouping in a society, in this case the SED’s communist core, to acquire active and passive support throughout society. It is to this general question that this thesis addresses itself, in the context of one region of the GDR.

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This thesis takes as a central assumption that the GDR was for most of its history a stable state. This assumption is based on the lack of popular uprisings and political adventurism in the GDR, other than around 17 June 1953, which was particularly notable when compared to the instability in some eastern European states (particularly neighbouring Poland) in the postwar era. Certainly, the GDR’s history was not marked by repeated, mass attempts to overturn the SED’s hegemony until the late 1980s, despite the existence of active, if tiny, openly oppositional minorities. Alongside the questions of how this stability was achieved and whether the GDR’s population principally supported, accepted or tolerated SED rule, this thesis also addresses the question of how long it took to achieve stability for the GDR’s socialist order and to identify the key turning points in this process. I aim to demonstrate that the GDR had essentially stabilised in terms of the population’s outward behaviour by 1968, but that a number of existential questions remained which may have contributed to the system’s ultimate collapse. 1968 is a useful cut off point as the year included two seemingly contradictory developments, namely both the population’s mainly negative reactions to the GDR’s involvement in repressing Dubček’s ‘socialism with a human face’ in Czechoslovakia and the adoption of the GDR’s first socialist constitution at the end of a prolonged period of relatively open popular debate and after a referendum not run in accordance with the GDR’s normal intimidating election procedure.

In postulating a history of stability, I am immediately at variance with an important stream of historical thought on the GDR, namely that it was doomed to failure virtually from the start, and at least from the time of the apparent failed uprising of June 1953 onwards. This viewpoint has been expressed most clearly in Untergang auf Raten, in which Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle examined a range of public opinion reports, mainly collated by the Stasi and which appeared to tell a tale of inevitable decline. In some senses, their thesis is correct: clearly the GDR did collapse in 1989/90, and did so chiefly because its population was no longer prepared to support or tolerate the political and economic system which the SED imposed upon them. However, it seems

simplistic to view the GDR’s history exclusively in terms of decline, as the title of their book (literally ‘Downfall By Instalments’) suggests. I hope that this thesis will clearly demonstrate that the SED did succeed in establishing an essentially stable polity out of chaos and on the ruins of a state in which organised communism had been illegal. Further, the SED succeeded in convincing some that its cause was right and coopting many others in support, while neutralising effective opposition until the late 1980s. Viewed in this light, the GDR’s history becomes one of construction and advancement of the party’s power and influence until at least the early 1980s, by which point the internal difficulties and contradictions and a changed international climate conspired to reverse the process, events which are beyond the scope of this thesis.

I hope to demonstrate in this work that decline and collapse became less rather than more likely as the 1960s progressed, even though the foundations of the SED’s power were far from secure even by this point. Though the continuing lack of ideological certainty in the 1960s among many of those upon whom the system ultimately rested and amongst many of the younger generation may be partially seen as the seeds of the system’s later collapse, the reasons which encouraged or compelled so many people to carry the system during the 1960s, even against their own personal preferences, should not be overlooked, as they contributed greatly to the SED’s overall stability. In enabling the system to solidify in the 1960s for whatever reasons, functionaries and non-functionaries alike were laying the foundations of political longevity which can of itself become a stabilising factor. In some respects one could perhaps compare the GDR to the Third French Republic, founded not out of love of republicanism but simply because a monarchy could not be agreed upon.\(^12\) Although the Third Republic continued to be despised by many of its citizens, it gradually came to be seen as the norm and was finally overcome only by the external challenge of the nazi invasion. Downfall, yes, but hardly by inevitable instalments.

It seemed advisable to concentrate on a particular region rather than to consider the history of the entire GDR, as the country’s general political history in a domestic and international framework, as well as the methods used by the SED to assert its power, have been well documented by historians and politicians in the FRG, the GDR and elsewhere. Such histories are extremely useful and informative in establishing the essential contours of the GDR’s political history, but tend not to reveal how well the SED was able to exert power in the localities or the actual effects on the population of national political developments, other than in very general terms. How were policies decided in Berlin actually implemented in the localities? How were they experienced by real people? Which sections of the population supported or opposed particular measures? The answers to these questions are as important in recording and understanding the GDR’s history as the country’s political developments at the macro level.

To the extent that the GDR’s population figured in much historical work on the country before 1989, an uneven picture emerged. GDR histories tended to record the general welcome from the population for each new SED move, while FRG histories have often recorded the opposite, despite the existence of some limited case studies which concentrated on snapshots of individuals in particular towns and cities, and of useful works such as Lutz Niethammer’s which relied on individuals’ memories. Now that GDR archives are open, detailed information is available which enables a more balanced and comprehensive view of popular opinion. A study which focuses on a particular region permits an examination of local power relations and an evaluation of opinion and reaction across the whole spectrum of society, but on a scale which fits the constraints of a doctoral dissertation.

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In the particular case of the GDR, as a highly centralised state, there has also been a relative lack of regional studies produced outside the country (though this is being gradually remedied since the Wende). The GDR was often perceived abroad as a largely homogenous state, and most attention was paid to its capital, Berlin. However, those who knew the country before 1989 were well aware that life in Berlin was very different to that in Rostock or Dresden. This thesis is intended in part to rectify the longstanding western monotone view of the GDR by demonstrating, for instance, that events such as 17 June 1953 took a rather different course in the regions than in Berlin, and that local factors such as religious heritage could be highly significant in determining responses to SED policies.

The region chosen for study, Thuringia in the southwest of the GDR, recommends itself for various historical and demographic reasons, discussed in Chapter Two. However, this thesis does not aim to prove that Thuringia was either unique in the GDR, or necessarily typical of the GDR in every respect. The degree to which Thuringia was representative of the GDR will only be ascertainable once similar pieces of research have been undertaken in the country’s other regions and are available for comparison. This thesis is to be taken as a record of one region’s experience of the GDR. I hope that its conclusions may shed more general light on the mechanisms employed by a party such as the SED in establishing its hegemony in a particular locality, and on the patterns of behaviour of a regional population away from the country’s capital in shaping and responding to the local forms of the national political, societal and economic framework.

Thuringia existed as an administrative unit of the GDR only until 1952, before re-emerging as a Land of the united Germany in 1990. In the intervening period, Thuringia was divided into three Bezirke, centred on the towns of Erfurt, Gera and Suhl. As separate archives exist for each of these administrations after 1952, and as Bezirk Erfurt was a diverse area in its own right, this thesis concentrates on Bezirk Erfurt for the post-1952 period, but refers to the whole of Thuringia for the period between 1945 and 1952.
The limitations of a doctoral thesis do not permit a comprehensive account of politics and society in Bezirk Erfurt between 1945 and 1968. Rather than attempt such a project I have preferred to concentrate on several topics in some detail which I believe to be representative of developments in other spheres, discussed against a background of the wider developments between these dates. The aim has been to explore the interplay between the state and party authorities in Bezirk Erfurt on the one hand, and the general population (including the grassroots state and party functionaries and members) on the other. How well and by what means were the authorities able to control the region at different times during this period, and how well or badly did the population respond?

In order to pursue this line of questioning, the thesis is divided into four principal sections, which are designed to tease out various strands before showing how they fitted together.

The first section presents a short introduction to Thuringia’s social and economic structures and considers the collapse of national socialism in Thuringia and the region’s temporary occupation by American forces between April and June 1945 to illustrate the immediate situation faced by the incoming Soviet occupiers and civilian rulers at the end of the war. There is a brief discussion of the emergence of the Thuringian communist and social democratic parties after the war, and their merger as the SED, but these topics are not explored at length here as much material on the subject has already been published. In the following chapter the emphasis shifts to the other political forces which emerged after 1945 and how these were fashioned into the SED’s tools to prevent any challenge to the party’s hegemony. These developments provide an example of how those elements of the regional SED which were loyal to the central party line secured an unchallenged hold on the region’s political and administrative life.

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15 This is referred to in the footnotes of Chapter Two.
16 In this thesis the term 'regional' refers to the Land Thüringen level before 1952 and the Bezirk Erfurt level thereafter; the term 'district' refers to the Kreis level, and the term 'local' to subordinate levels (towns and villages under the direct jurisdiction of a Kreis). Cf. the maps which precede this chapter.
In the second section the emphasis shifts to popular reactions to the development of ‘real socialism’ in Thuringia from the perspective of the ruled and the coopted. The section is arranged chronologically and concentrates on the region at particular junctions in its postwar history. Some of these are the turning points traditionally emphasised in GDR histories, such as the creation of the GDR itself, the uprising of 17 June 1953, the impact of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. However, I also focus on other periods which are not normally accorded the same importance, such as Stalin’s death and the collectivisation of agriculture (1960), as well as the years which followed the erection of the Berlin Wall. This is intended to place the headline grabbing events in the context of ongoing trends and demonstrate that people’s lives could be just as affected by domestic developments as by those with obvious national or international implications. In examining popular reaction to these events and to longer term developments in various parts of the population, this section aims to demonstrate the progressive degree of stabilisation of the GDR’s political system in the region, and to provide evidence for the sources of support, acceptance and opposition, as well as exploring the motivations for these varying reactions. Attention is paid not only to the reactions of the general population, but also to the degree to which functionaries and party members at the grass roots were capable of implementing the policy decisions taken higher up. Materials in the state and party archives suggest that filling district and local posts with the apparently loyal was not enough to secure full cooperation with the regional authorities.

As it would be impossible to cover all the aspects of life and development in Thuringia in which the regional authorities interacted with ordinary people and well established traditions to mould societal and economic forms towards ‘real existing socialism’, the third major section presents a case study of how the system of control was deployed to influence the population’s lives practically. The particular example chosen concerns relations between party and state and the churches in Thuringia/Bezirk Erfurt and explores the SED’s attempts to destroy organised religion as a societal force which challenged the party’s hegemonic aspirations. The story of the churches’ decline under
the pressure of a well organised campaign stands as an example for the methods used in similar transformations, such as the nationalisation of private businesses and the overhaul of the education system, to name but two of the relevant topics which it has been impossible to discuss fully within the ambit of this thesis.

The final section attempts to determine the degree of stability achieved for SED rule by 1968, by first examining popular reactions to both the constitutional debate and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Treaty troops with GDR participation, and finally drawing conclusions about the course and nature of developments throughout the period under review.

Establishing the answers to the questions posed above is no straightforward matter. As I have indicated, much opinion and material on the GDR is heavily biased from one standpoint or the other. Material published in the GDR served not primarily to provide an historical record but to serve the cause of marxism and the ‘historical mission’ of the GDR. More neutral or positive reporting which was not underpinned by a basic view of the GDR as a totalitarian state has been criticised by, among others, Jens Hacker. These trends have continued beyond the Wende. The persistent and often undifferentiated western view of the SED’s creation has been of a Zwangsvereinigung, a unification forced on social democrats by

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17 For a detailed discussion of the GDR’s marxist historiography, see: Andreas Dorpalen, German History in Marxist Perspective (London: I. B. Tauris), especially Chapter 1. Cf. also the instructions to write socialist history given in, e.g.: Paul Lauerwald and Siegfried Wietstruk, Ortschroniken: warum, was, wie?, 2nd edn (Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1984); Paul Lauerwald, ‘Die Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Heimatgeschichte und Ortschronikführung nach dem X. Parteitag der SED’, Heimatgeschichte, 14 (1982), 5-15.

18 See particularly Fricke’s Politik und Justiz in der DDR (Cologne: Verlag Politik und Wissenschaft, 1979) which catalogues the GDR’s methods of political persecution.


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communists.\textsuperscript{20} A similar example is the unambiguously anti-SED standpoint adopted by Gerhard Besier in his otherwise informative text on the GDR churches.\textsuperscript{21} There have also been renewed attempts to dismiss and decry the GDR as ‘totalitarian’, a highly politicised term which has little value as an historical concept of definition.\textsuperscript{22} The political orientation of the Bundestag’s historical investigation has already been noted. In response to what they saw as an attempt at history by the victors, historians close to the PDS have sometimes tried:

...to oppose from left-wing standpoints this attempt to claim the power of interpretation over a significant part of German history.\textsuperscript{23}

My approach to such politicised literature has been to extract from it relevant factual material, and interesting interpretations from both sides, while not necessarily accepting the record of secondary literature as an accurate account of the GDR’s reality. In this I hope to have followed Jürgen Kocka’s call for a differentiated, more objective approach, which avoids sensationalism and does not assume that Germany’s division was necessarily illegitimate in its time.\textsuperscript{24} As a piece of secondary literature itself, this thesis aims to report the GDR as dispassionately as possible with no particular political axe to grind, least of all from a nationalist perspective, and to avoid exploiting the clichés of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{25} However, the thesis also approaches the GDR as a state which, between 1949 and 1990 had as much (or as little) right to exist as the FRG. It must be recognised that this in itself is a viewpoint which is controversial in certain quarters.

\textsuperscript{20} Cf., e.g., a report commissioned by the SPD by Helga Grebing and others, \textit{Zur Situation der Sozialdemokratie in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1950} (Marburg: Schüren Presseverlag, 1992).
\textsuperscript{21} Gerhard Besier, \textit{Der SED-Staat und die Kirche: Der Weg in die Anpassung} (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993).
\textsuperscript{25} Where such clichés as ‘workers’ and peasants’ state’ are used, they appear in inverted commas.
Another trend in GDR history writing since the Wende has been the predominance of detailed studies on specific individual topics, often limited to a particular region or time span,\(^\text{26}\) and large volumes of original documents.\(^\text{27}\) In line with the political tendencies already outlined, there has also been a largely unbalanced flurry of publications about corruption, the repressive nature of the GDR and in particular the Stasi.\(^\text{28}\) By contrast, relatively few works have attempted to offer an interpretation of GDR society as a whole while also employing significant amounts of empirical evidence.\(^\text{29}\) This thesis hopes to make a contribution to this area of GDR history writing by offering a history of GDR society and an interpretation of its dynamics from the perspective of Thuringia.

This work is principally based on extensive searches of two major archives, the Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Weimar, and that of the SED Bezirksleitung, Erfurt, the latter since incorporated into the former. The closely related nature of party and state in the GDR meant that very similar materials could be found in both archives, and that both archives (but particularly the Weimar archive) contained materials from a wide range of sources. This resulted from the tendency of the state organs, including the police and on occasion the Stasi, the bloc parties and mass organisations to report to the SED and each other. As there was also multiple reporting of the same issues by a range of diverse sources (party officials, state functionaries, local policemen, FDJ officials and many others), I was often able to corroborate events and opinions reported in one source with evidence collated independently by another.\(^\text{30}\)


\(^{29}\) An exception has been Mary Fulbrook’s *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Apart from files relating to internal functions of both the state and party apparatuses, one of my principal sources has been the records of public opinion kept by the various offices of the state and the parties and mass organisations and held in both archives. However, these sources have often proved as problematic as the secondary literature. It has been quite difficult to gauge the veracity of such reports and to interpret their contents. While reports in the early postwar period tend to record very negative popular opinion on a wide range of issues, this negative reporting dies down somewhat in reports produced after the mid-1950s. Reporters seem to have preferred to pass on a more positive account of life and popular reactions to developments in their particular locality or economic sector. 1960s reports on reactions to specific developments regularly begin with several pages of individuals’ positive comments, before hinting and finally admitting that a certain proportion (occasionally ‘most’) of the population is dissatisfied.

Given our knowledge of the ideological and economic problems facing the GDR’s leadership at a macro level, and the ultimate collapse of the system in 1989, it is tempting to ignore positive statements and concentrate entirely on the negative. This in itself may produce a distorted picture, and ignores the point that the very existence of large numbers of people prepared to make positive comments about the system and its development is evidence of a growing degree of acceptance of the GDR, whether born of conviction, pragmatism or other factors. In analysing these reports I have tried to take greatest note of consistency between different sources relating to the same event or topic, and to read between the lines, for instance paying more credence to the ‘many’ or ‘most’ who may be reported to hold one opinion than the list of twenty (or perhaps far fewer) named others who hold the opposite viewpoint.

As I have indicated, in the case of specific incidents, such as the events of 17 June 1953 or reactions to the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, records from different sources tend to tally in their evidence of particular cases of protest or support. Police records also tend to provide quite precise and comprehensive reporting of specific incidents, from which the degree of unrest in the population as a whole can be deduced.
Given the seeming accuracy of police reports, and the great controversy surrounding that of Stasi reports, I have preferred not to include an evaluation of Stasi records in this thesis.

Ultimately it is difficult to be entirely certain that the portrait painted in this thesis of Thuringia in the early GDR years is entirely accurate or representative. We are dependent on the opinions, political standpoints and motivations of those who compiled the vast archives which the GDR bequeathed us in 1990. I have, informally, attempted to verify my understanding of the GDR in conversation with a large number of Thuringians who experienced the period under review, and have been pleased that my own view, formed from paper records, seems to accord with their memories. Though many of those who lived through the period discussed here may have experiences which are at variance with parts of my portrayal, this thesis is also intended as an attempt to record a significant chapter of their lives from contemporary records.

‘Faith, hope and apathy, but the greatest of these is apathy,’ as Saint Paul might have described the complex nature of popular opinion in the GDR. In different ways, these three viewpoints characterised the outlook of supporters and opponents of SED rule alike. Within the SED were many inspired with great faith in the scientifically proven socialist utopia to come. Throughout society were many who were gripped with enthusiasm in the early postwar years for building a new, progressive Germany. However, at least until 1968 the party was simultaneously undermined by the alternative, deep rooted Christian faith and its links to the obviously more prosperous West German state under Christian Democratic rule. As the failures of socialist economics mounted, and the threat of German unification periodically grew, those whose personal fortunes depended on the continuation of SED rule hoped that their faith in marxism and the SED leadership was well placed. Many of their compatriots, however, placed their hope in German unity as a means of ending SED rule. The

32 I Corinthians 13.
widespread popular excitement surrounding every superpower summit meeting bears witness to much wishful thinking about a speedy international settlement. The greatest influence on SED hegemony, however, was the growing apathy towards the party and its political systems. This apathy existed within the population at large, and the state and party structures, throwing into questionable appropriateness terms such as ‘dictatorship’ or ‘totalitarian’ to describe SED rule. This apathy initially resulted from the far greater personal concerns in the harsh postwar climate, but increasingly from the perception of living in a society based on contradictions and whose political structures seemed unalterable. However, although apathy undermined ideological belief in the population at large and in the functionaries on whom the power structures depended, it also relieved the SED system from the far greater degree of active opposition which might have been expected from a population which was mainly coopted but frequently not committed to socialism. The following chapters record and examine how each of the sentiments in the title was present in postwar Thuringian society and jointly contributed to both the form and popular perception of SED rule.
PART I

ESTABLISHING SOCIALIST RULE
2

THE THURINGIAN BACKGROUND

Naturally, the Soviet occupation authorities and the KPD did not begin operations in a vacuum in 1945, but in an area with particular historical legacies and current demographic characteristics and problems, not least the political and material legacy of the Third Reich. These influences partly determined the course of developments and reactions to them. This chapter therefore summarises Thuringia’s demographic situation at war’s end, its recent political history and the first major postwar political event, the emergence of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Having laid these foundations, Chapter Three discusses how the newly formed SED established its institutional hegemony against the opposition of alternative political forces.

Territory and political background

As a political entity Thuringia emerged from centuries of dynastic divisions only in 1920, albeit without Erfurt and other traditionally ‘Thuringian’ areas which remained Prussian.1 After Soviet occupation authorities arrived in July 1945, they formally merged Prussian Thuringia into a new, homogenous Land Thüringen.2

Thuringia’s new boundaries were not entirely uncontroversial. The greatest difficulty was the homogenous Catholic Eichsfeld region in northwest Thuringia, previously divided between two Prussian provinces. Once the largely insignificant border between these provinces became the demarcation line between two occupation zones, and then a

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mainly impassable Cold War frontier, the area, its families and economic ties were rent asunder, with the bulk of the Eichsfeld left in *Land Thüringen* but a third in the British zone. The Thuringian Eichsfeld also gave the SBZ its only majority Catholic community. While 76% of Thuringia's population was Protestant (SBZ=81%), 84.1% of the Eichsfeld's population was Catholic (SBZ=12%). The 1910 census had revealed an even higher proportion of Catholics in Heiligenstadt (91.6%) than Worbis (75.5%). There were also significant Catholic populations in the adjoining *Kreise* of Mühlhausen (46.1) and Nordhausen (25.1%). This unique Thuringian example allows an examination of potential different reactions to SBZ/GDR policies in a community of minority importance in the whole state but of key local importance. Meanwhile, the occupation authorities could not control the churches' boundaries. Even in 1997, the Protestant churches organise their affairs according to pre-1918 dynastic borders. This situation had repercussions for SED religious policy throughout the GDR period.7

Politically, Thuringia is often described as having been 'red' 8 Symbolically, it hosted three significant founding or programmatic conferences of German socialism in Eisenach (1869), Gotha (1875) and Erfurt (1891). Before 1914 Thuringia was 'a Socialist stronghold',9 where the SPD gained 47% of votes in 1912. This left wing domination continued after World War One, despite party political fragmentation.10 The SPD and USPD together scored 57.1% in the 1919 national elections,11 and despite

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3 See Map 5, p.15.
4 *Elections and Political Parties in Germany* (Bad Godesberg: Office of the High Commissioner for Germany, 1952), p.12; *Statistische Praxis* 3.9 (September 1948), Beilage.
5 *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich 1919*, p.9. (Berlin: Puttkamer & Mähnert, 1919)
6 *Statistische Praxis* 3.9 (September 1948), Beilage.
7 See Part III.
10 On Thuringian developments between 1918 and 1933, see *Thüringen auf dem Weg ins »Dritte Reich«*, ed. by Detlev Heiden and Gunther Mai (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, [n.d.]).
weakening after the revolution, the left wing parties together achieved 49.4% of the vote in the 1920 Landtag elections. Interestingly, while the moderate SPD had more support than the radical USPD nationally, the situation in Thuringia was virtually reversed.

However, the left’s support fell below 40% in 1924 following the socialist Land government’s radical measures between 1921 and 1923. While still slightly higher than the left’s vote elsewhere in Germany, this development consigned the Thuringian SPD to permanent opposition. Tracey observes that the:

almost even [division] between industrial workers and non-industrial economic groups [...] meant a very close balance between the parties of the left and right, a situation made even more difficult by the absence of any moderating centre forces of consequence. [...] The consequences included an [...] exaggerated importance for minority parties, and a high degree of political polarisation.

Tracey’s reasoning accounts for the significantly higher level of voter support for extremist parties. KPD support in Thuringia was always between two and five percent higher than the national average, even in 1933. Of greater longterm significance was the strong showing made by the various guises of the national socialist party, which was higher than average in Thuringia even in the early 1920s. This trend persisted as Hitler’s party grew. By 1930 NSDAP support in Thuringia was so comparatively strong that the Land became a testbed for NSDAP government participation, altering Hitler’s scepticism about power sharing. In 1932 the NSDAP formed the Thuringian government. Even in Third Reich elections, the NSDAP usually recorded slightly more absolute support in Thuringia than elsewhere.

References:
15 Various editions of Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich.
16 Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich 1924/1925, pp.390-3.
17 Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich 1934 (Berlin: Verlag von Reimar Hobbing, 1934), pp.550-1; Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich 1937 (Berlin: Verlag für Sozialpolitik,
In summary, Thuringia was traditionally ‘red’ insofar as the SPD was consistently the region’s largest single party until 1932, except during the USPD’s separation. The KPD also found more support in Thuringia than in most regions. Yet despite the left’s apparent strength, a right wing government coalition outvoted the combined Thuringian left for much of the Weimar era, even without the NSDAP. The region’s most striking political feature, however, is its tendency to lean towards extremism and/or exaggerate national trends. This was true of SPD support in pre-republican days, of the unusually large USPD vote in 1918/19, in nazism’s swift rise and, especially in Bezirk Erfurt, in 1990’s overwhelming CDU vote. Thus although the region’s immediate political past seemed inauspicious for launching a communist experiment in 1945, its tendency to conform to political trends suggested that Thuringians might rally to a new cause.

According to the first census of the Soviet occupation period, in 1946 some 16.2% of the SBZ’s population, 2,943,251 people, lived in the newly formed Land Thüringen, geographically the SBZ’s smallest Land. More than 17,000 other people resided in various transit, refugee/evacuee and POW camps on census day, reflecting postwar upheavals. Erfurt alone sheltered 667,570 refugees and evacuees between April 1945 and 1949, and estimates suggest over two million people passed through the town. Many people arriving in Thuringia and elsewhere in the SBZ were those expelled from east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, or from Czechoslovakia and other German-occupied areas.

In economic terms, Thuringia faced problems typical across Germany. In 1938, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia combined had been a net exporter of goods. As Thuringia was

18 Statistische Praxis 1.3 (December 1946), Karteiblatt; ibid, 1.3 (December 1946), p.37.
19 Ibid, 3.5 (May 1948), Beilage.
21 Statistische Praxis, 2.9 (September 1947), Karteiblatt.
also largely dependent on raw material imports, the deepening division of Germany inevitably brought economic problems. Though losses were generally less significant than in other German regions, the war cost some 90,000 Thuringian soldiers’ lives and over 10,000 civilians killed in bomb raids. The most devastating attacks were launched on Nordhausen on 3 and 4 April 1945, when some 8,300 people (14% of the population) were killed and 78.8% of buildings entirely or partly destroyed. Housing stock was also lost, ranging from 5% in Erfurt, Eisenach and Gotha, to 10% in Gera, 15% in Jena and 55% in Nordhausen. Though this thesis does not pursue a detailed economic history of postwar Thuringia, the social hardships exacerbated by such factors are important in understanding many citizens’ dissatisfaction with the GDR in the early years.

Thuringia between Third Reich and Soviet occupation

Although Thuringia was allotted to the Soviet Occupation Zone, military requirements meant that the region was initially conquered during April 1945 by the Americans. They remained until the agreed handover on 1 July 1945, the day on which the Soviets permitted the western allies to enter Berlin. Thus the populations of Thuringia and other SBZ border areas were uniquely able to compare American and Soviet occupation. The impressions left by the Americans later assumed greater significance in the developing Cold War.

22 Gutsche, Geschichte der Stadt Erfurt, p.472.
23 Facius, pp.549, 559.
25 Facius, p.559.
As clear central policies were lacking, the Americans made varied impressions. Although mainly fearful and apprehensive, Germans were often surprised at the Americans' modern equipment and healthy and tidy appearance. In Saalfeld distrust diminished and was replaced with relief after the first days passed peacefully. Americans generally behaved correctly to Germans, though one observer disparagingly concluded:

The Americans' attitude was essentially that of civilised victors over underdeveloped natives who had invited punishment of their own fault.

Some memoirs recall arrogance, especially among American officers, and an initial tendency to regard all Germans as 'nazis', but reports of open attacks (verbal or physical) on Germans are scarce. Although many Germans suffered indignities and irritations at American hands, there were also reports of troops giving children chocolate.

Beyond the most urgent denazification measures and attempts to secure public health, the Americans essentially conducted a holding operation, knowing they would not be in Thuringia long. The regular turnover of American personnel while the war continued also militated against much concerted action. Later, the generally non-interventionist nature of American rule contrasted sharply and favourably with the intrusive nature of politics under the SMA and SED.

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29 Kreutzer, pp.39-40.
31 Siebert, p.40; Käthe Meyer-Weyrich, '...was wäre uns nicht alles erspart geblieben', Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens, 8-9 (1988-89), 137-143 (p.138).
The Americans' departure from Thuringia in early July 1945 greatly shocked many. The allied agreements on zonal borders remained largely unknown in Thuringia. The Americans and Hermann Brill, the American-appointed social democrat Thuringian president, denied rumours in late June of the feared Russians' imminent arrival.

As the Americans retreated, Soviet occupation forces advanced from Saxony. They met a mixed reaction. Communists in some towns held special ceremonies. The liberal mayor of Gera, Dr Rudolf Paul, also ensured that he was prominent in welcoming the Soviets. Conversely, there was little welcome in Weimar: the Thuringian premier, Brill, refused to greet his new masters, and residents remained safely indoors, mindful of nazi propaganda and dreading the Soviets' arrival.

Support for nazism at war's end is hard to gauge accurately, but it is clear that confidence in and acceptance of the nazi regime seriously declined during 1945. Once the war was over, the external symbols of nazism were quickly discarded: for instance, SA uniforms and busts of Hitler were deposited into the Eichsfeld's rivers, and prior to Saalfeld's surrender,

people had buried, burnt, thrown away or otherwise destroyed the flags, books and emblems, indeed anything which might have reminded them of their own involvement with national socialism. Probably there was no longer any

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32 Cf., e.g., Kreutzer, p.45; Ruth Knabe, 'In der Stadtverwaltung von Hildburghausen', Kultur und Geschichte Thüringens, 8-9 (1988-89), 106-112 (p.112).
35 'Bericht an die Bezirksleitung der K.P.D. über die derzeitige Stimmung der Bevölkerung in Weimar', 15 July 1945, Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Weimar (hereafter, ThHStAW), Md1 273, fol 15.
36 Hoffmann (note 33), p.41.
38 Siebert, p.17.
attachment to national socialism left by the last war year, so it was easy to part with the external symbols of this system.\(^{39}\)

Kreutzer is undoubtedly correct to emphasise that these were only outward signs, and that many still retained an inner attachment to the familiar political forms. Even three weeks after the fall of Großwerther, a teenage diarist recorded on 2 May:

>a sad, very sad piece of news. Our beloved Führer, Adolf Hitler, has died a hero’s death defending Berlin.\(^{40}\)

Even days after American occupation, a Berkach vicar noted that popular opinion was ‘unfathomable’: ‘They still expect a radical change and reversal of the war [...] and still believe in the Führer...’.\(^{41}\) Similarly, Ernst Thape, a social democrat held in Buchenwald, noted on 22 April that very few Weimar residents believed the nazi system had collapsed; they feared the nazis would return and take their revenge.\(^{42}\) These latter reports suggest a slightly more lingering end to the ‘Hitler myth’ than suggested in Ian Kershaw’s book of that title.\(^{43}\)

Though NSDAP membership alone is no clear guide to inward beliefs, an October 1945 survey showed more than 187,000 registered ex-NSDAP members still in residence, some 6% of Thuringia’s total population. There were 23,000 in Erfurt alone, almost 10% of the city’s inhabitants.\(^{44}\) Thuringia had a far higher than average percentage of NSDAP teachers (98%) and local authority employees (96%) than elsewhere in the Reich (75%).\(^{45}\) While extremist incidents, such as the Werwolf murder of a KPD

\(^{39}\) Kreutzer, p.40.

\(^{40}\) Paul Lauerwald, ‘Schicksalstage 1945 in Großwerther: Das Tagebuch der Ursula Schönemann’, Beiträge zur Heimatkunde aus Stadt und Kreis Nordhausen, 16 (1991), 61-82 (p.67).


\(^{44}\) ‘Meldung der Einwohnerzahl...’, 23 October 1945, ThHStAW, MdI5, 18, fol 42: This compares with some 8,500,000 NSDAP members in the Reich in 1945 according to Norbert Frei, Der Führerstaat: Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft 1933 bis 1945, 2nd edn (Munich: dtv, 1989), p.255.

\(^{45}\) Figures cited by Fuchs, p.57.
member near Wehnde, were exceptional, nazi allegiances did not disappear overnight. The Americans reacted to this by organising visits for local residents to concentration camps. Initially, 1,000 Weimar citizens were forced to visit nearby Buchenwald on 16 April 1945. Various sources note the deep impact of such visits as they were reported throughout the population.

Dr Rudolf Paul remembered, when President of Thuringia, that initially most people ‘lived from day to day with no meaning or aim’. However, an active minority already had clear visions of the future. These people had either been active against nazism and at liberty during the war, or held in Buchenwald concentration camp. The direct origins of some postwar political groupings can be traced to members of both groups.

Although Thuringia was later regarded as an important centre of antifascist resistance during 1944 and 1945, little was practically achieved beyond local efforts to disrupt the war effort and alleviate the worst effects of war and nazi terror on individual prisoners and other groups. The most effective wartime resistance came when local groups scuppered nazi orders to destroy facilities before the allies’ advance.

Thuringia’s communist leader, Theodor Neubauer, perceptively wrote in late 1943:

Unfortunately there is a widespread current in Germany’s working class that expects all salvation from the ‘Red Army’ and would like to passively look on until the ‘Russians come and liberate us’.

Thuringia’s most important centre of wartime resistance was within Buchenwald concentration camp. The illegal political activities there were of far greater significance for Thuringia’s later political development as a large number of leading KPD (e.g. Ernst Busse, Hermann Axen, Karl Reimann, Walter Bartel, Theodor Neubauer) or SPD (e.g.

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46 Report by Ernst Egert, p.4, LPA, V/5/006.
48 Cited in Fuchs, p.57.
50 E.g., Egert (note 46), p.4, reports how his KPD cell saved a local potash works.
Hermann Brill, Rudolf Breitscheid, Benedikt Kautsky) members were imprisoned there. In the immediate post-liberation period many key postwar Thuringian politicians were influenced by their experiences in Buchenwald.

Apart from a non-party political International Camp Committee, which coordinated resistance work, Buchenwald’s political organisation fell into three main categories: a complicated communist structure, parts of which became the first postwar Thuringian KPD leadership; a smaller, non-communist left wing organisation, developed shortly before Buchenwald’s dissolution and later the kernel of the Thuringian SPD; and the non-party, antifascist Volksfront initiative, elements of which formed the antifascist Demokratischer Block in August 1945.  

Although resistance work contributed little to nazism’s overthrow, there were three important longer term consequences. First, the wartime groupings shared great solidarity and often became the nucleus of antifascist committees and KPD or (less commonly) SPD party organisations after liberation. Their many underground meetings provided forums to discuss postwar possibilities and to spread anything known of the exiled KPD and NKFD leaderships’ line(s); when arrested communists arrived in Buchenwald, they transmitted this information to fellow inmates. Antifascists of other political persuasions without this wartime experience often reorganised themselves more slowly, allowing communist and social democratic groups to take the initiative in many districts. Secondly, where communists and social democrats collaborated in conspiratory wartime activities, foundations were laid for a united workers’ party. This was forcefully reflected by August Frölich, a Thuringian SPD minister in the 1920s who became a regional SED elder statesman. In August 1944 he was taken, chained to Theodor Neubauer, to a Gestapo prison in Berlin. He later recalled his thoughts:

52 Though executed in Buchenwald, the KPD’s leader Ernst Thälmann was never a prisoner of the camp.
53 On prisoners’ political institutions in Buchenwald, see Wahl, pp.82-5, 92-3, 104, 113-4; Konzentrationslager Buchenwald: Bericht des internationalen Lagerkomitees Buchenwald (Weimar: Thüringer Volksverlag, [1949?]), especially p.132.  

44
Did we really have to be tied together like two desperate criminals by our deadly enemies whom we had always fought? Why didn’t we, as social democrats and communists, combine in the united struggle before 1933 instead of fighting each other? The answer to this question became a personal vow: if you should survive the nazi period, then you will start afresh and work to unite the two workers’ parties.54

Thirdly, the (often exaggerated) record of dedicated antifascist wartime resistance by communists and social democrats, as presented in official SED histories, became legendary. Although the effects of antifascist resistance had been minimal in Thuringia, as noted above, they were exploited as far as possible and proved perhaps the largest element in the popular legitimation of SED hegemony, at least until autumn 1989.55 Though Fröhlich’s private convictions were undoubtedly sincere, given his postwar active loyalty to the SED, publicly they could be used to strengthen such propaganda, giving rise to what some post-Wende commentators have controversially dubbed the ‘antifascist myth’.56

The road to socialist unity

Much has appeared on Thuringia’s postwar political development. Thus only the briefest résumé of the re-emergence and merger of the two workers’ parties is required here.57 Days after the Soviets arrived in Thuringia, the leader of the KPD’s

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54 August Fröhlich, ‘Der Höhepunkt meines politischen Lebens’, in Rosner, pp.515-519 (pp.516-517).
55 The region’s numerous antifascist memorials are catalogued in: Gitta Günther and Wolfgang Schneider, Gedenkstätten der Arbeiterbewegung: Bezirk Erfurt (Erfurt: SED BL Erfurt and others, [n.d.]).
57 The other political parties and organisations are dealt with at length in Chapter Three. On the KPD, SPD and their merger in Thuringia, see principally: Wahl; Steffen Kachel, ‘Das Wiedererwachen der Arbeiterbewegung und die thüringische Sozialdemokratie’ (unpublished dissertation, Universität Leipzig, 1993). Also of interest are Overesch, Hermann Brill; Overesch, Machtergreifung; various detailed references to Thuringia by Harry Krisch, German Politics Under Soviet Occupation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Anne Anweiler, Zur Geschichte der Vereinigung von KPD und SPD in Thüringen 1945-1946, Beiträge zur Geschichte Thüringens (Erfurt: SED BL Erfurt/Bezirkskommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte der örtlichen Arbeiterbewegung, 1971); Kolesnitschenko, pp.59-71.
main Central Committee delegation from Moscow exile to Germany, Walter Ulbricht, visited local communist leaders, principally drawn from the former Buchenwald group, to acquaint them with the central political line and their next priorities. The Central Committee imposed a new leader, Georg Schneider, who was quickly replaced by a more competent functionary, Werner Eggerath. The still potent force of internal communist party discipline ensured there was no opposition to the Berlin leadership’s domination of the regional party. Much of the following year was devoted to building a functioning communist party organisation across Thuringia.

Meanwhile, the Thuringian SPD’s re-emergence was complicated by the views of Hermann Brill. Brill, the leading social democrat in Buchenwald, had visions of a new, united working class party on the model of the British Labour Party and established a Bund demokratischer Sozialisten (League of Democratic Socialists, BDS) during American occupation. Close analysis of Brill’s programmatic publications reveals certain inconsistencies and an idealism which was wholly inappropriate in a country which had recently signed an unconditional surrender. However, the force of his personality and the absence of an alternative regional leader with such strong antifascist credentials ensured Brill’s initial dominance of Thuringian social democracy. However, Brill’s position was undermined when the Soviets refused to license the BDS. By August Brill had to abandon the title ‘BDS’ in favour of ‘SPD’ and recognise the party’s Berlin Zentralausschuß. By December Brill left the SBZ for a post with the American military government. As an ardent anti-communist he had come under Soviet pressure to support the SPD’s merger with the KPD. Brill was replaced as Thuringian SPD leader by Heinrich Hoffmann, a self-important social democrat who hoped for personal advantage from his good relations with the SMATh, and who was prepared to take the SPD into the proposed Socialist Unity Party.

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58 Eggerath’s memoirs provide an interesting legitimation of communist tactics in 1945-6: Die fröhliche Beichte (Berlin: Dietz, 1975).
59 Cf. records in the sequence LPA, I/1.
60 This is not the view of his main biographer, Manfred Overesch in 'Hermann Brill: Thuringia 1899-45'.
After Brill withdrew from Thuringian politics, institutional KPD-SPD unity came relatively smoothly, and essentially followed the contours of the campaign in the rest of the SBZ. Local initiatives were emphasised to suggest the unity campaign had started at the grassroots. Thus following the Berlin ‘Sechziger’ conference, the SPD and KPD Kreis organisations in Rudolstadt decided on 22 December to work jointly towards unity. The Gera and Greiz parties jointly adopted similar pro-unity resolutions in the following days. A meeting of the parties’ leading functionaries at Land level on 6 January 1946 also produced a resolution welcoming the Berlin agreement to increase cooperation and pledging joint action in various spheres, including ‘joint functionary meetings to discuss all local questions’. Both parties pledged that ‘all obstacles in the path of this development towards a true working class unity must be pushed aside’. This effectively pre-empted any alternative course and seemingly threatened any member of either party who disagreed.

From early January, the grassroots unity campaign progressed as party organisations at all levels formed joint committees and adopted pro-unity resolutions. The details, publicised locally and regionally, themselves gave the movement greater momentum. The 6 January meeting summoned a ‘joint Land functionaries’ conference’ to Jena on 19 and 20 January, to be addressed by the parties’ respective zonal leaders, Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl. Prior joint meetings in the districts resolved that delegates Jena should call for immediate unification of the two parties. However, as the Berlin leaderships had themselves not yet finally agreed the merger, the Jena delegates merely agreed that membership meetings and party education should be organised jointly henceforth. After this conference, local party groups went a stage further and independently announced their formal mergers. While there is clear evidence that in many areas the communists forced the pace of unity, there is also little evidence in contemporary records of local resistance by social democrats to the campaign, except where personal differences existed in small communities. Though the communists

61 Cited in Anweiler, p.108.
forced the movement, many members of both parties (such as August Frölich) accepted the need for working class unity and were happy to merge at the party basis.\(^{62}\)

The final phase began at a joint meeting of the KPD’s *Bezirksvorstand* and the SPD’s *Landesvorstand* on 5 February at which Hoffmann unexpectedly announced the Thuringian SPD’s view that the parties should merge on 28 April. The executives eventually agreed to merge formally on 6-7 April in Gotha. This decision apparently greatly surprised the central party leaderships,\(^{63}\) and possibly accelerated their agreement on 26 February to a zonal merger, after negotiations between the eastern and western SPD collapsed. The Thuringian resolution of 5 February re-emphasised that opposition to unity would not be tolerated:

> The leaderships of both parties in Thuringia commit themselves to supporting all steps for the speedy creation of unity and declare the fiercest battle against all opponents of a united workers’ party.\(^{64}\)

Thereafter the unity campaign geared up, culminating in district conferences of each party to elect delegates to the unity conference. The Thuringian KPD and SPD conferences of 6 April and the unity conference the following day were accompanied by celebrations throughout the region, repeated at zonal level on 21 and 22 April to mark the official merger in Berlin of the KPD and Soviet zone SPD into the new Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

In the following years, the Thuringian SED leadership made concerted efforts under several leaders to establish an efficient party organisation. These were often frustrated


\(^{63}\) Eggerath, pp.357-8.

\(^{64}\) Cited in Anweiler, p.121.
by inefficient or uncommitted staff, as well as by shortages of fuel and other resources.\textsuperscript{65} In common with the rest of the SED, there were increasing efforts after 1948 to reduce social democratic influence in the party. These culminated in the check of every party member held during 1950 and 1951.\textsuperscript{66} This uncovered not only many remnants of social democracy in the ‘party of a new type’, but also suspicions of active oppositional communists such as KPO (Communist Party Opposition) and ‘Lenin League’ members.\textsuperscript{67} The party took this opportunity to rid itself of the uncommitted and the oppositional within its ranks, but, as later chapters will demonstrate, soon discovered that it had only scratched the surface.

Thus socialist unity had been created, at least on the surface. However, SED hegemony depended not only on uniting the political working class, but also on dominating and coopting alternative political forces and the non-political social interest groups. This process is the subject of the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{66} LPA, AIV/2/4-119, AIV/2/4-127
\textsuperscript{67} LPA, AIV/2/4-139.
The SED’s stabilisation under communists loyal to Moscow could not alone guarantee the party’s complete control of the SBZ/GDR’s political landscape. Alongside the various categories of socialists, either united in the SED or intimidated out of the zone’s political life, were those of other political persuasions or interest groups, and those of none. The SED aimed to win the acceptance, and preferably loyalty, of all these people. The non-socialist masses had to be involved in building socialism, and those with divergent political interests had to be reconciled to the SED’s cause or politically neutralised. To achieve these goals the SMAD and KPD/SED either created new political and societal structures specifically intended to support communist goals, or attempted to transform those which already existed by a process of Gleichschaltung. These structures included alternative political parties within a coalition ‘bloc’ and officially neutral ‘mass organisations’, catering for women, young people, trades unionists and other groups.

Although the KPD/SED was naturally keen to secure its power by these means from the outset, the process was only implemented in stages which accorded to the USSR’s developing Germany policy and which can only be sketched here.¹ Immediately after the war, when Stalin still hoped for a united Germany, the SMAD licensed two ‘bourgeois’ parties alongside the KPD and SPD, the Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany, CDU) and the Liberal-

¹ On Stalin’s German policy, cf. Wilfried Loth, Stalins ungeliebtes Kind: Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994). On the founding of the parties and organisations, see the relevant chapters in Broszat and Weber, SBZ-Handbuch.
Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (Liberal Democratic Party of Germany, LDPD). These parties’ existence symbolised a political pluralism which was essential to the new system’s democratic credibility as an alternative both to the Third Reich and the one-party Soviet state. Only in 1948, when cooperation between the wartime allies was foundering, were two satellite parties founded for and by the SED. These were the National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, NDPD, for nationalists and reformed NSDAP members), and the Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Democratic Farmers’ Party of Germany, DBD). Meanwhile, the zonal CDU and LDPD leaderships were required to support the Soviet initiative to create a ‘German Democratic Republic’ through a ‘People’s Congress movement’. As Germany’s division deepened, the CDU and LDPD leaderships were steadily purged of personalities still committed to their original pan-German and liberal or conservative goals. Finally, the CDU, LDPD and the mass organisations formally recognised the SED as the ‘leading party’ in 1952/3 following the west’s rejection of Stalin’s proposals for German unity and the Soviets’ recognition that a socialist GDR would remain a longterm tactical commitment.

The Gleichschaltung of politics and societal structures made necessary by changing Soviet strategy is well recorded at the SBZ/GDR level. This chapter examines how these processes were mirrored regionally and locally, and with what success. Local material demonstrates that these structures for coopting and neutralising political opponents remained vital to SED hegemony for decades. Although the ‘bloc’ parties were outwardly loyal allies of the SED, as judged by their national and regional leaders’ public declarations, locally their memberships often remained highly critical, well into the 1960s. However, although the SED failed to convert the majority of bloc party members to socialism, it succeeded in politically neutralising and effectively coopting

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these potential opponents through their membership of a political party with an apparent stake in the GDR’s government. By these methods the SED dominated the political system. Equally, the SED-dominated mass organisations failed to convert the mass of the apolitical population, but by their very existence occupied the available space for societal activities and thus largely prevented the emergence of alternatives. As this chapter hopes to demonstrate, though the bloc party and mass organisation structures appeared secure, particularly at national level, at the grass roots they often rested on shaky foundations, emphasising the dissonance between cooption and convergence which characterised the GDR’s outward stability.

Establishing the structures

The SMAD’s initial plans for a four-party system were implemented relatively easily in Thuringia because this arrangement had essentially developed autonomously during the American period. Alongside the KPD and SPD, non-socialist groupings emerged parallel to those established in Berlin.

Former Weimar members of the liberal Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP) formed a local group of the future Demokratische Partei on 23 April 1945, seven weeks before the Berlin LDPD. Several other Thuringian founding committees existed by early July. Though liberals participated in antifascist committees and civil administration under American rule, the Thuringian Demokratische Partei was legally established only on 29 July. It recognised the Berlin leadership and adopted the name ‘LDPD’ only in December. Weber’s assertion that the SMAD forced the LDPD’s creation is untrue of Thuringia.

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4 Agsten and Bogisch, pp.29-30.
As a non-denominational Christian party, the CDU was a new phenomenon in Germany, but perhaps naturally at home in Thuringia with its Protestant majority but sizeable Catholic population. Though a Christian party apparently formed spontaneously only in the Eichsfeld during American occupation, a Christian party was generally expected to emerge. Thus a Zentrum representative, Max Kolter, was invited to join the socialists and liberals on Weimar’s ‘Political Committee’ on 26 April.\(^7\) He and other former Zentrum colleagues contributed to Thuringia’s civil administration under American rule. Such activity encouraged the Thuringian CDU’s formation on 22 July.\(^8\) However, neither Christian nor liberal democrats were as well organised or as certain of their aims in mid-1945 as the two socialist parties, and consequently took fewer initiatives as the postwar government and political framework settled.

The SMAD’s four-party system complete, founders of other political movements (principally the antifascist committees which developed spontaneously after the war in many localities) had either to subordinate themselves to the permitted parties or suspend their activities. Thus on 3 August 1945 the Thuringian government prohibited the Thüringer Volkspartei (‘Thuringian People’s Party’), the intended successor to the pre-1933 liberal Deutsche Volkspartei.\(^9\) This set a precedent which prevented the spontaneous formation of political or social organisations until late 1989. Undeterred, some of the Volkspartei’s founders joined the CDU, including August Bach, later the party’s national chairman.

The CDU and LDPD gained considerable support in the early postwar period. By mid-1946 the Thuringian CDU had around 35,000 members and the Thuringian LDPD slightly more, figures which remained constant in the SBZ years. Although the Thuringian SED’s membership (approximately 270,000 by mid-1947) far outnumbered

\(^6\) Siebert, p.108.
\(^7\) Wahl, p.165.
\(^8\) Ibid, pp.133–4.
\(^9\) July/August correspondence on the Thüringer Volkspartei, ThHStAW, BdMP 660, fols 63–71.
even their combined total,\textsuperscript{10} the CDU and LDPD represented a significant electoral threat to the SED, which the population perceived as mainly responsible for their hardships.\textsuperscript{11} Regional election results reflected this dissatisfaction and rewarded the CDU and LDPD. In 1946 they jointly controlled 47 of the Thuringian \textit{Landtag}'s 100 seats. In local elections, the CDU and LDPD won joint control of eight of the twelve town or city councils. The SED was stronger in rural districts, with majorities in 12 of the 22 rural parliaments (\textit{Kreistage}). In a further six \textit{Kreise} the workers’ party majority depended on support from the allied farmers’ cooperative movement, VdgB. Of the two ‘bourgeois’ parties, the LDPD was strongest in urban areas, but the CDU was slightly more popular in rural districts, and particularly in the Eichsfeld (67.3% support).\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{FIGURE 1: Elections to town and city councils, September 1946, share of vote}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\pie{38/LDPD,39.5/SED,21/CDU,1/others}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

The relative success of the ‘bourgeois parties’ was achieved despite intervention by the Soviets who, for instance, disbanded the local CDU or LDPD groups in Rudolstadt before the elections and prevented their candidates from standing. Overall, only 58% of Thuringia’s population lived in constituencies with SMAD-registered CDU groups at the 1946 elections.\textsuperscript{13} The strength of the ‘bourgeois parties’ in 1946, their reluctance to

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{10} \textit{SBZ-Handbuch}, pp. 510, 540, 570.
\item\textsuperscript{11} See Chapter Four.
\item\textsuperscript{12} Figures and graphs calculated from Dressel, pp. 154-165; Krippendorff, p. 96.
\end{itemize}

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cooperate with the SED during 1947, and the prospect of future elections encouraged a more hardline approach to the bloc parties and sparked the party system's expansion.

FIGURE 2: Elections to rural district councils (Kreistage), October 1946, share of vote

![Pie chart showing election results for CDU, LDPD, SED, and VdgB etc.]

FIGURE 3: Landtag elections, October 1946, share of vote

![Pie chart showing election results for CDU, LDPD, SED, and VdgB etc.]

The local CDU and LDPD leaders perceived the new parties' creation as an SED attempt to splinter the non-socialist camp. In Catholic Heiligenstadt the SED later considered the new parties were highly instrumental in breaking the district CDU's

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14 Cf. May and June 1948 SED reports, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 19, especially folios 230, 235, 238, 257 and 262.
power. To counter the threat, the CDU unsuccessfully attempted to create a local LDPD organisation as an ally.\textsuperscript{15} The new DBD was a particularly important creation in Thuringia, where the \textit{Landbund} (Agricultural League) was important in Weimar Republic politics. The KPD/SED had initially resisted a separate farmers’ party as a regressive step,\textsuperscript{16} hoping instead to secure farmers’ and agricultural workers’ support through measures such as the land reform, assistance during the planting and harvesting seasons and the establishment of the Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS). However, many farmers’ longstanding fears of collectivisation under communist rule proved overwhelming. Only 3.6\% of Thuringian SED members were farmers or landworkers by mid-1947.\textsuperscript{17} The party feared that farmers were responsible for the CDU’s relatively strong showing.

The SED entrusted the DBD and NDPD to leaders sympathetic to itself. Thus the Thuringian NDPD’s founder was a prewar KPD member who had joined the SED in 1946.\textsuperscript{18} All \textit{Land} and, as far as possible, \textit{Kreis} executive members were approved by the Thuringian SED, which gave the new party a monthly subsidy of DM 10,000.\textsuperscript{19} Thuringia’s SED interior minister decreed that the NDPD should receive special protection and requested the police not to arrest its leaders.\textsuperscript{20} Unlike the Thuringian CDU and LDPD, the two new creations initially attracted little spontaneous support. The Rudolstadt DBD’s inaugural meeting was called by the head of the district agricultural office, a ‘fairly helpless’ SED man. Of the DBD’s five strong \textit{Kreis} executive, three were SED members. Feeling among the farmers present was negative.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} 'Bericht über den Stand der Blockarbeit im Kreis Heiligenstadt', p.1, undated [summer 1952?], LPA, IV/4.06/144.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Cf. \textit{TVZ}, 8 September 1945, p.3, and 5 March 1946, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{SBZ-Handbuch}, p.511.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Letter from Gebhardt (SED), 1 April 1949, ThHStAW, Mdl 305, fol 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The NDPD’s creation also excited no public interest in the town. In Greiz district, most farmers responded passively to the new DBD.

Despite being created as an SED tool, the DBD’s new members were not always clear about the subordinate role intended for them. Initially, they sometimes tried to establish an independent role. Thus the SED had to remind a DBD representative who called for strong DBD representation on an agricultural commission that the SED also represented farmers’ interests. Similarly, two DBD district functionaries made veiled attacks on SED agricultural policy and functionaries in a party meeting in Weißensee.

As most people remained wary of political parties after their experiences in the Third Reich, different organisations were required to win popular support for SED policies. The SMAD and the KPD/SED considered it essential that these ‘mass organisations’ should be clearly under KPD/SED control. Therefore only one, ‘united’ organisation was licensed for each societal interest group because, it was argued, the social divisions under Weimar had produced nazism. The Buchenwald communists, who desired ‘antinazi mass organisations like unity trades unions for the workers’, had already endorsed this policy in April 1945. The comparatively well organised communists quickly took the initiative in founding these movements.

The Thuringian Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (‘Free German Trades Union Federation’, FDGB) was founded illegally under American occupation mainly by two communists, Willy Albrecht (ex-Buchenwald) and Richard Eyermann. The nascent Thuringian KPD benefited from the absence of an effective BDS/SPD and insisted upon

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25 KPD Buchenwald resolution, 22 April 1945, LPA, V/6/19-002.
a single union during April and May 1945,\textsuperscript{27} despite arguing for separate KPD and SPD organisations. By May the principle of antifascist unity had brought the FDGB widespread support from social democratic and communist functionaries alike.\textsuperscript{28} Despite the general chaos, 6,000 Erfurt workers joined the FDGB by 18 June and were organised in a complex hierarchical structure, whose central secretariat was firmly under Albrecht’s, and therefore the KPD’s, control.\textsuperscript{29} Similar unified trades unions emerged independently elsewhere during the American period.\textsuperscript{30} After the Soviets’ arrival these various unions were brought within a Thuringian FDGB under Albrecht’s leadership.\textsuperscript{31} This development removed the danger that independent factory committees might pursue alternative political lines.\textsuperscript{32}

Communists also sponsored the other ‘unity’ mass organisations such as the \textit{Freie Deutsche Jugend} (‘Free German Youth’, FDJ), organised with limited success in Thuringia by December 1945 and which grew steadily with SED support thereafter, and the \textit{Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft} (‘Society for German-Soviet Friendship’, DSF), which emerged in Thuringia from a ‘German-Russian Club’ founded at Werner Eggerath’s initiative.\textsuperscript{33} Over the following years the SED established other organisations for women, younger children, sport, charitable work and the rest of the social spectrum.

This plurality brought potential dangers as well as benefits for the SED. The ‘bourgeois parties’ were founded with political goals sharply opposed to marxist socialism. Though spawned by the SED, the DBD and NDPD also assembled elements traditionally suspicious of or opposed to socialism. For instance, in at least one village (Bienstädt),

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Wahl, p.150; Benser, \textit{Die KPD}, pp.80, 83.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Albrecht (note 26), p.1; Karl Kuron, ‘Schaut wie stark wir sind: 20 Jahre FDGB’, undated manuscript, LPA, V/5/094.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Albrecht (note 26), p.4.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Kuron (note 28), pp.4-8.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Wahl, pp.156-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} An independent body existed at Zeiss and Schott in Jena. Cf. an undated leaflet in LPA, V/6/14-003.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Heinrich Hoffmann, ‘Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Gesellschaft für deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft in Thüringen’, 1968, p.20, LPA, V/6/6-30.
\end{itemize}

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the DBD became a new political home for ex-NSDAP members. The Bienstädt DBD recruited 60 members within weeks, including all the former local NSDAP functionaries, whereas the SED had taken four years to attract only 26 members.\textsuperscript{34} The local leaderships were often an unknown quantity. Once Soviet tactics required a "people's democracy" under SED hegemony, it became crucial to limit this pluralism and ensure the loyalty of each party and organisation, particularly as legal provision existed for elections and the participation of each licensed party in parliaments and administrations. As the mass organisations, which were also allotted parliamentary seats, each had a monopoly of their own target audience, their existence was less dangerous, providing they remained under the SED's firm control and did not develop any separatist tendencies or become alternative powerbases.

The SED's control over this institutional framework partly depended on two other institutions, the Democratic Bloc and the \textit{Nationale Front} (NF), both of which represented all the parties and mass organisations. The SED used the bloc and the NF to demonstrate the unanimous support apparently enjoyed by SED policies across society. The role of these organisations is considered later, but their origins can be outlined here.

The Democratic Bloc emerged from antifascist initiatives taken by politicians of various convictions. Guided partly by the belief that party political divisions had helped Hitler to power, but mainly by the extreme conditions of defeat, most politicians overlooked their differences and cooperated. The Thuringian bloc's roots lay in Buchenwald where communists, social democrats and some independent \textit{Volksfront} members formed a 'Thuringian Committee' after liberation. This committee amalgamated with Weimar's 'Anti-Nazi Committee', one of many spontaneous antifascist groupings which formed to re-establish normal life and services, and thereby head the new political system. This merger linked Thuringia's two most important antifascist groups: that with the greatest moral legitimacy and that of the regional capital. Thuringia's other antifascist

\textsuperscript{34} Informationsstelle Gotha, 'Betr. DBP', 1 December 1949, ThHStAW, Afl 86.
committees eventually subordinated themselves to the Weimar ‘Thuringian Committee’. 35

In June, the Thuringian Committee merged with a body nominated by Hermann Brill to advise the Thuringian civil government organs under his control in Weimar. The new committee’s organisation rested on party parity, but the left wing parties dominated as the fledgling ‘bourgeois’ parties were too weak to be effective. 36 After the Americans’ departure, Richard Eyermann (KPD) requested that the government’s proposed decrees be presented to the Committee in advance. 37 As a forum for securing inter-party agreement on important matters, the Thuringian Committee was clearly the forerunner of the later bloc, but as an external check on the government was arguably also a precursor of the Landtag.

As communists neither created nor dominated the Thuringian Committee, it did not fit the structures being established by the KPD leadership and the SMAD. On 4 July Walter Ulbricht, the senior KPD functionary in Berlin, told the Thuringian communists to create a regional four-party bloc similar to the zonal model being established in Berlin. 38 The Thuringian bloc was established on 17 August with a programme of denazification, economic reconstruction and democratic rights. 39 The bloc’s standing orders stipulated weekly meetings and a chairmanship that rotated monthly between the parties, but the requirement for unanimous decisions was not specifically included. 40 Once the central Thuringian bloc was established, the parties also formed district and local blocs.

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35 Organisational details, membership, in Wahl, pp.93-97.
36 Ibid, pp.136-141.
37 ‘Bericht vom Thüringenausschuß’, 4 July 1945, LPA, V/6/6-16.
38 Wahl, p.110.
40 Geschäftsordnung für den Block antifaschistischer Parteien’, undated, LPA, V/6/14-002.
Though the bloc was initially created to achieve consensus between the parties before
government decisions were taken or (later) matters came before the Landtag, the
KPD/SED exploited the principle of antifascist unity by arguing that Germany’s
continuing abnormal political and economic situation required indefinite party political
unanimity. A tradition emerged of accepting only unanimous bloc decisions. In practice
the KPD/SED could veto other parties’ policy suggestions, while publicly decrying
objections to the KPD/SED’s own policies as at best ‘reactionary’ attacks against the
new antifascist democratic order and at worst as a return to the policies of the Weimar
Republic and national socialism itself.41

The ‘National Front of Democratic Germany’ (Nationale Front, NF) was a somewhat
later development which emerged from the ‘People’s Congress Movement for Unity
and a Just Peace’ of 1947-49. This was an SED-inspired campaign to involve the
masses in approving the SED’s constitutional draft for a ‘German Democratic
Republic’, intended to embrace all four occupation zones. The movement culminated in
elections in the SBZ to a ‘Third People’s Congress’ held in May 1949 with
representatives of all the zone’s parties and mass organisations. The People’s Congress
adopted a constitutional draft based on the SED’s proposals, and elected a ‘German
People’s Council’. On 7 October 1949, with Moscow’s approval and at the SED’s
bidding, this body proclaimed itself the ‘Provisional People’s Chamber of the German
Democratic Republic’ and enacted the new constitution.

Locally, the People’s Congress Movement entailed creating committees to involve the
wider population in meetings and discussions about the SED’s draft constitution and
win support for it. The SED founded these district and local committees with the bloc
parties’ and mass organisations’ support. Three Thuringian People’s Congresses and a

41 Cf. Gregory W. Sandford, From Hitler to Ulbricht: The Communist Reconstruction of East Germany
series of district conferences were held in connection with the corresponding ‘national’ (zonal) congresses.\textsuperscript{42}

Following the GDR’s creation, their work in shaping the constitution complete, the local People’s Congress committees became committees of the \textit{Nationale Front}. The NF’s initial task was to rally the population for Soviet and SED policy on the German question, but also to support the whole range of GDR (SED) policies, a particularly important task before the 1950 elections. Within months of its creation the NF was also charged with presenting the single electoral lists of candidates from all parties and organisations at GDR, regional and local level. As these ‘national’ tasks were presented as matters of general concern and beyond party political considerations, the NF was effectively an attempt to involve every last citizen, the political alongside the apolitical, in the new state’s political life.\textsuperscript{43} The Thuringian SED noted on 25 May 1949:

\begin{quote}
It is necessary that the entire population be addressed within this movement, and that it must be relieved of all party political differences.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Despite the NF’s officially non-partisan role, the true situation was that:

\begin{quote}
The GDR’s communists have never denied that the National Front was established and developed under the SED’s leadership. Its initiatives and activities fashioned the National Front’s political profile...\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

The SED attempted to use these four structures (the ‘bloc’ parties, the mass organisations, the bloc and the \textit{Nationale Front}) to dominate the GDR’s political system and coopt the masses’ support via organisations which appealed to each sector of society. The remainder of this chapter investigates the SED’s methods and degree of success.


\textsuperscript{44} SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.33/49 der Sitzung des Kleinen Sekretariates’, 25 May 1949, LPA, IV/L2/3-036.

\textsuperscript{45} Helmut Neef and others, \textit{Die Nationale Front der DDR: Geschichtlicher Überblick} (Berlin: Dietz, 1984), p.46.
Enforcing loyalty: the transformation of the Thuringian bloc parties

Having permitted the establishment of ‘bourgeois’ parties, the SMAD and its SED allies attempted to coopt them to support the USSR’s developing policy on Germany, and to prevent them opposing key socialisation measures, such as the extensive land reform. Apart from hindering these parties’ election campaigns in 1946, the SMAD and SED achieved these ends principally by intimidating and/or removing CDU and LDPP leaders who pursued alternative policy avenues. Generally speaking, the SMAD expected that the bloc parties’ members would follow the centrally adopted path and attempted to align them with the SED from top down. The machinations at central level are well recorded, and include the SMAD’s removal of the CDU’s first leaders, Andreas Hermes and Walther Schreiber, in December 1945, and their successor, Jakob Kaiser, two years later. The result of these moves was that leaders who supported strong coalition with the SED either through conviction or pragmatism came to dominate the SBZ/GDR party leaderships by the early 1950s, and imposed this policy throughout their parties.

Pressure was also exerted where necessary to ensure the cooperation of the Land leaderships. Between 1945 and 1950 a number of prominent CDU and LDPP figures were either arrested or intimidated until they left the SBZ. These developments are also fairly well recorded and require only sketching here. The Thuringian CDU received an early foretaste of later developments when one of its founder members, Max Kolter, Thuringia’s first postwar director of agriculture and forestry, was charged in November 1945 with maladministration, failure to implement denazification measures and

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46 Cf. a CDU letter to the SMATh, 26 August 1946, complaining at numerous obstacles, cited by Suckut, p.145.
47 Cf., e.g., Gradl; Krippendorff, especially p.9 on the methods of intimidation; Bürgerliche< Parteien in der SBZ/DDR: Zur Geschichte von CDU, LDP(D), DBD und NDPP 1945 bis 1953, ed. by Jürgen Frölich (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995).
48 Suckut, pp.119, 125.
resistance to the land reform. The SMATh decreed Kolter’s removal on 5 November. The KPD initially accused Kolter of faking illness to excuse his departure, but he died on 22 December. In the following years intimidation and force removed from the CDU leadership those personalities who were not prepared to subjugate their policies to the SED’s. These included Georg Schneider, the Thuringian party organiser, who had emphasised the clear difference between marxism and the CDU’s idea of socialism. Schneider was removed from his post and expelled from Thuringia by the SMATh shortly after Kaiser’s removal in Berlin. 15 Thuringian Kreis chairmen were also removed after Kaiser was deposed.

A further wave of party cleansing began in 1949/50 prior to the first GDR unity list elections. The Thuringian party chairman, Siegfried Trommsdorff, was not re-appointed after his connections to West Berlin became known, but also because he had protected the ‘reactionary’ CDU group in Erfurt despite instructions to expel its leader. Minister Georg Grosse also fled westwards after refusing to accept the CDU’s change of direction. Aloys Schaefer, himself sentenced to ten years in a work camp for opposing SMATh policy as Landrat in the Eichsfeld, lists eight Thuringian CDU functionaries who were imprisoned and a further eleven senior figures, including four ministers and three other Landtag members, who fled westwards to avoid similar fates. This list does not include district functionaries outside the Eichsfeld, the members who fled following a campaign to unmask an alleged financial conspiracy, or Walter Rucker, the Thuringian trade minister, who was expelled from the party in 1950 for his political differences and alleged involvement in the financial conspiracy. Despite these explicit warnings to other members, the existence of opposition to the party leadership and links

51 Thiel, p.25.
53 Gradl, p.156.
54 Thiel, p.38, Gradl, p.158.
56 Schaefer, pp.100-101.
57 Thiel, pp.56-9.

64
to the western CDU was great enough to spark a series of trials in Erfurt and Gera in
December 1952 and January 1953, after which heavy sentences were handed down. The
arrest of the GDR’s CDU foreign minister, Georg Dertinger, in January 1953 served as a
further reminder to the party’s regional and local leaderships to toe the SED line.
The Heiligenstadt district leadership, with which Dertinger had close contacts,
responded by instituting a membership review. This decision was clearly a difficult one
for the district chairman who was so shocked by Dertinger’s arrest that he could not
work for two days, suggesting indecision between leaving the Eichsfeld to avoid a
similar fate or remaining and actively acknowledging SED hegemony. In all, some 1536
Thuringian CDU members fled to the west between 1948 and 1953.

The LDPD suffered similar losses, including the well recorded case of its Landtag
leader, Hermann Becker. Becker was arrested by the NKVD in July 1948, presumably
in connection with his activities as editor of the LDPD’s Thuringian newspaper. This
arrest frightened several other CDU and LDPD politicians into escape. In the same
month, Alphons Gaertner, President of the Thuringian Credit Bank, fled to the west. As
the SMAD’s favoured candidate to succeed the recently deceased Wilhelm Külz as the
LDPD’s zonal leader, Gaertner had demanded, and been refused, the party’s right to
pursue liberal policies. Three years later, Leonhard Moog, Thuringia’s minister of
finance, also resigned his post once safely in West Berlin. Moog had attempted to deny
the SED’s ‘leading role’. Thereafter the SED implicated Moog, Gaertner and other
senior LDPD figures in a grave financial scandal, having discussed how Moog’s

58 Michael Richter, Die Ost-CDU 1948-1952: Zwischen Widerstand und Gleichschaltung, Forschungen
und Quellen zur Zeitgeschichte, 19, 2nd edn (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1991), pp.285-6. Richter also
details the other incidents of intimidation against the Thuringian CDU, passim.
60 Richter, p.391.
61 Fricke, pp.61-2.
62 Gradl, p.155.
64 Ibid, p.204.
65 Cf. Werner Eggerath’s speech to the Landtag, 24 February 1950, reproduced in Dokumente und
Materialien zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in Thüringen 1949-1952, ed. by Harry Sieber, Gottfried
Börnert and Günther Michel-Triller, Beiträge zur Geschichte Thüringens (Erfurt: SED Bezirksleitung
departure could best be used to discredit his Thuringian LDPD colleagues. Obeying the Thuringian SED’s decisions, workers assembled at LDPD offices around Thuringia demanding the party’s condemnation of Moog and explanations for its failure to remove him. In the following days, the LDPD was subjected to a campaign of embarrassment which targeted local party representatives believed to sympathise with Moog’s independent line. Much was made in the SED’s Arnstadt press of the district LDPD’s failure to criticise Moog without the Land executive’s clearance, and in Gotha the SED’s reports of further alleged LDPD financial improprieties punned with the term ‘Moogelei’.

Against this background, the CDU and LDPD leaders who remained could be in no doubt that their positions and personal safety depended on loyalty to the SED. However, many senior figures in these parties followed the SED’s requirements from convictions born of nazism and the Second World War, and the GDR’s party system could not have functioned without them. Nonetheless, they could not have dominated their parties without the interventionist role played by the SMAD and SED in these early years.

Despite the installation of loyal bloc leaders by these methods at GDR and regional level, there remained much to be done to hinder opposition in the localities. Many district and local executives and members did not respect their regional and national leaders’ loyalty to the SED. Beyond personal campaigns, the SED used the Democratic

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67 Cf., e.g., Kreisrat Weißensee to Mdl, 21 January 1950, ThHStAW, Afl 87.
Bloc and the National Front to ensure the parties’ local loyalties and if necessary to bypass them.

**A united front: from *Antifa* committee to Democratic Bloc and *Nationale Front***

Though originally created to achieve party consensus, the local blocs became as essential to the SED’s attempts to neutralise the ‘bourgeois’ parties as its crusades against leading ‘reactionary’ politicians. Initially, however, this was not immediately apparent, as the blocs concentrated on practical issues. During 1945 the Thuringian bloc issued urgent appeals to support harvest and reconstruction work. The bloc’s precise role quickly became unclear as conditions settled, and its quasi-governmental role superfluous once parliamentary life resumed in 1946. Its recommendations had always been non-binding, and after 1946 the parties debated government policy in the *Landtag*, generally agreeing a common stance in preliminary party meetings. Meanwhile, other powers initially assumed by the bloc passed outside Thuringian control to the SBZ’s ‘German Economics Commission’ (DWK) and later the GDR government. By 1948 the bloc met on average only monthly (just 50 meetings were held in the first three years). The bloc’s role had already largely shifted from coordinating views on government policy to ensuring unanimity of approach in internal party matters, such as the rights of former NSDAP members to join political parties. The bloc also reconciled interparty divisions over filling key posts.

The SED increasingly used the bloc to demonstrate cross-party support for SED schemes via public resolutions, such as that welcoming the new SED-led government.

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71 The general comments made about the Thuringian and *Bezirk* Erfurt bloc are drawn from the incomplete records in: ThHStAW, BdMP 658, 659, 666-673; LT 200-201; Mdf 263, 274; Vs/St 701; S 542; NF 209, 210; LPA BIV/2/15-735.

for East Berlin in November 1948. However, the SED avoided divisive discussions by not attempting unanimous bloc support for pro-SED resolutions on controversial matters such as the currency reform and the Berlin blockade if it feared the CDU and/or LDPD would disagree. In the late 1940s the principle of unanimous decisions allowed the CDU and LDPD, still not entirely gleichgeschaltet, to hinder SED plans. However, the CDU and LDPD could avoid actively supporting a bloc motion without being accused of reactionary behaviour because resolutions passed unless they were actively opposed.

Despite its decreasing importance, the bloc nonetheless represented a potential source of political power. As such, the SED was anxious to dominate it. As the SED was outnumbered in the bloc by the CDU and LDPD’s combined forces, the SED integrated the emergent but already loyal mass organisations. The central Thuringian bloc devoted much time to the rights of the mass organisations (and after 1948 the DBD and NDPD) to participate in political life on an equal footing with the original post-1945 parties. The bloc was widened on 2 December 1946 to include the FDJ, FDGB, women’s committee (later DFD), Cultural League (KB) and VdgB. The DBD and NDPD joined immediately after their formation in 1948. The SED also agitated for its close ally, the nazi victims’ association (VVN) to be admitted. The LDPD vetoed this for some time, arguing that the political parties would be further weakened if the mass organisations were allowed still more representation.

In the late 1940s, as Germany’s division became more entrenched, the bloc was deployed to support the SED’s battle to neutralise the CDU and LDPD leaderships. In February 1949 the Thuringian bloc passed an SED resolution demanding energetic action against anti-Soviet, nationalist, chauvinist and neofascist tendencies in the parties

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73 ‘Protokoll der 54. Landesblocksitzung am 15.12.1948’, ibid, fol 76.
74 E.g., the SED’s proposal for an aid committee for Berlin was accepted without active CDU and LDPD support: ‘Protokoll der 55. Landesblocksitzung am 20.1.1949’, ibid, fol 81.
and organisations. Though the minutes of this meeting are missing, it is clear that CDU and LDPD representatives could not have opposed the motion without exposing themselves to similar charges. Similarly, the LDPD bloc representatives condemned their Brandenburg counterparts for reactionary comments in January 1950. In January 1953, shortly after the CDU foreign minister, Dertinger, was removed on conspiracy and spying charges, the bloc considered ‘democratic vigilance’. The discussion demonstrated the CDU and LDPD regional leaderships’ loyalty when both parties assured the bloc that the right conclusions had been drawn, and when the LDPD representative even asked those present to help his party exclude elements which did not belong in the LDPD.

However, despite the SED’s 1949 resolution, the Thuringian bloc reflected the CDU and LDPD regional leaderships’ increased loyalty, rather than having been the instrument which principally achieved it. Even before the parties and organisations formally recognised the SED’s leading role, by the early 1950s the Gleichschaltung of their regional leaderships meant the Thuringian SED no longer needed regional bloc meetings to coerce the other parties. By this point, at Land and later Bezirk level, the only important remnant of the bloc’s original role as a mediator between the parties was its function in formally agreeing election mechanisms. Thus it was in the bloc that the parties agreed to the unity list elections of 1950, thereafter to each party and organisation’s share of candidates, and finally to each member’s share of government posts. In November 1950, bloc discussions still initiated some reorganisation of Thuringia’s ministries.

Beyond this the bloc remained the forum from which the political parties demonstrated both their apparent diversity and their official unity via resolutions which supported...
SED standpoints and the USSR, and/or condemned developments in the FRG. The bloc’s diminished importance was underlined in 1951 when its Thuringian secretariat was disbanded and its administration entrusted to the National Front. Acquiescence to SED policies was clear from the new Bezirk bloc’s November 1952 guidelines. In these the parties and mass organisations committed themselves, as their national leaders had done, to the ‘building of socialism under the leadership of the working class’, a task which ‘corresponds to the interests of the entire German nation’. By way of double assurance, the guidelines committed the regional parties and organisations to follow the policies of the loyal central bloc, and imposed these conditions on the subordinate district and local blocs. Thus was party discipline extended to the bloc parties.

However, the district and local blocs generally took rather longer to comply than the Land/Bezirk bloc. Their records demonstrate the wide gulf between the politics pursued by the bloc parties’ upper echelons, who were persuaded or even handpicked by the SMA to support SED policies, and these same parties’ local members. Even when genuine debate had given way to socialist unity at regional level, the class struggle was still being fought in the localities. Here the SED used bloc meetings to expose and depose local leaders who opposed the SED’s ‘progressive’ line and thus achieve full compliance in the localities. The local blocs’ SED representatives had the task of clarifying the SED’s line to members in other parties who had not yet grasped the ‘scientific’ truth of marxism-leninism, and persuading the other parties to distance themselves from ‘reactionary forces’ in their midst. Though the chairmanship of the blocs rotated monthly between the parties, by 1950 80% of Thuringia’s district bloc secretaries were SED members who could dictate agendas.

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83 ‘Richtlinien der Arbeit des Bezirksblocks Erfurt...’ [3 November 1952], ThHStAW, Vs/St 707, fols 10-11.
84 ‘Protokoll der Blocksitzung am 4. Dezember 1952’ (Gotha), p.10, LPA, IV/4.05/123.
86 ‘Protokoll Nr.25/50 der Sekretariatssitzung der SED Thüringen am 8.6.50’, LPA, IV/L/2/3-043; these posts, presumably superfluous by 1951, were later abolished to save money: SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.4/51 der Landessekretariatssitzung vom 1. Februar 1951’, LPA, IV/L/2/3-051, p.17.
The Heiligenstadt bloc offers several practical examples of how the SED’s intimidating local bloc policy was implemented. As a CDU stronghold, the Eichsfeld particularly concerned the SED. By late 1952, however, the SED optimistically felt it had ‘broken the CDU’s predominance by systematic work and the growth of our party’. Much depended on the attitudes of individual CDU leaders. The SED was anxious to remove its opponents, and to intimidate the others into cautious loyalty. Particularly during 1949 and 1950 the SED used the bloc to contest the moral high ground over the CDU’s apparent misdeeds. This entirely accorded with the zonal bloc’s policy, adopted at the SED’s insistence in June 1949 after numerous incidents of CDU and LDPD opposition during the May 1949 People’s Congress election campaign, upon which the future GDR constitution depended. The CDU and LDPD’s loyal central organs agreed that their parties would exclude ‘reactionary elements’ at all levels. Thereafter the SED’s campaign began in earnest.

In August 1949 the Heiligenstadt SED demanded a full inquiry into an article in the CDU’s Thüringer Tageblatt newspaper which had accused SED officials of attempting to prevent a CDU mayor being elected in Heuthen. This attack foreshadowed various similar actions during 1950, mainly prior to the October elections. In February the bloc investigated the case of Opfermann, a prominent local CDU member and deputy Landrat accused of financial improprieties in the running of a cinema, possessing fascist literature and making unclear public statements about the NF. Though Opfermann adequately explained his actions in February, the case was reopened on 6 March. Matters came to a head in April when SED groups occupied the district council building and pushed Opfermann out of a window in the so-called ‘Eichsfeld defenestration’. Opfermann, unhurt, and Landrat Braedel fled thereafter. Extensive records exist for this Kreis bloc: LPA, IV/4.06/144.

87 Extensive records exist for this Kreis bloc: LPA, IV/4.06/144.
88 1952[?] report (note 15).
91 ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Kreisantifa-Blocks am 13.2.1950...’, ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Kreisantifa-Blocks am 6.3.1950...’, ibid; Richter, p.231
Schyma, a regular CDU bloc representative and local government official, also attracted the SED’s wrath in February by refusing to support an SED resolution calling on all parties to assist each other in removing saboteurs. Schyma insisted the CDU needed ‘no guardian angel’. In response the SED launched a full inquiry into ambiguous comments Schyma allegedly made weeks earlier. The case was considered in conjunction with that of the district FDJ chairman, Tyra, who had recently resigned his position (but not been expelled from the SED) in similar circumstances. Though the case against Schyma was weak and disputed, it was referred (despite the CDU’s objections) to the Landesblock. Ultimately Schyma also withdrew from public life.92

In the same 6 March meeting the CDU’s Otto Strecker, NF Kreis secretary, was attacked for withholding information about Opfermann. Despite being suspended, Strecker was able to return to public life and remained the CDU’s district chairman in Worbis.93 Similarly the CDU’s Karl Jünemann, mayor of Heiligenstadt, was attacked in the bloc for apparently hindering the FDJ’s efforts to plaster the town with posters. The SED’s newspaper reported his alleged remarks about the FDJ in a scurrilous article.94 He was again attacked in July for apparently inappropriate wording in a poster he issued about Colorado beetles.95 Jünemann defended himself easily on both counts and remained mayor into the 1970s. The SED failed to remove Jünemann and Strecker, but demonstrated the precarious position of any bloc party politician, even in trivial matters. To retain their positions Jünemann, Strecker and their colleagues knew they would have to display absolute loyalty, and did so in the following decades.96

The SED underscored this point with a final attack on König, a regular CDU bloc representative, Kreistag chairman and a politician who had done much to cement the CDU’s alliance with the SED. This loyalty did not prevent his removal from the

92 ‘Niederschrift über die erweiterte Kreis-Antifa-Blocksitzung am 22.2.1950...’; ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Kreisantifa-Blocks am 13.4.1950...’; LPA, IV/4.06/144, and 6 March minutes (note 91).
93 Thiel, p.67.
94 ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Kreisantifa-Blocks am 14.3.1950...’, LPA, IV/4.06/144.
95 ‘Protokoll zur Antifa-Blocksitzung am 10.7.1950’, pp.3-5, ibid.
96 Das Wirken christlicher Demokraten im Bezirksverband Erfurt, pp.17-19.
and as a CDU representative after he publicly criticised the GDR government for issuing certain agricultural directives late. After this campaign, the remaining CDU district leadership refrained from seriously opposing the development of socialism. The next major attack in the district bloc, in 1951, concerned not personalities but the CDU newspaper’s advertising methods.

The SED’s success was evident in the Heiligenstadt bloc’s agreement to the key issue of unity election lists (even though the parties were still jockeying for position within the unity list framework before the 1957 elections) and to numerous resolutions supporting GDR/USSR policies and condemning ‘Anglo-American warmongers’. Though the SED noted the local CDU’s failure to recognise the SED’s leading role in October 1952, and felt the party often tried to regain its old predominance, the district bloc was essentially gleichgeschaltet by 1952. However, the SED recognised its limits and did not bring certain potentially divisive matters to the bloc. Thus, the Heiligenstadt bloc issued no resolution mourning Stalin and did not discuss the key local issue of border closures and deportations of border populations during 1952 until after 17 June 1953. Even then, the discussion was still essentially loyal to SED positions, if slightly broader than usual. By 1954 the SED used the bloc to give specific instructions to the other parties (as prior to the 1954 elections and the celebrations for 1 May 1955).

The Heiligenstadt Kreis bloc was fairly typical of the other district blocs, where the SED also employed intimidation in the early 1950s. For instance, the Sondershausen Kreis bloc was used before the 1950 elections to launch a campaign against an LDPD teacher accused of making dubious comments. Meanwhile similar investigations

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97 Bloc minutes, 2 August 1950 and 8 August 1950, LPA, IV/4.06/144.
98 "Protokoll über die Kreisblockssitzung am 28.2.1951...", ibid.
99 Cf., e.g., "Protokoll der am 13.4.1957 stattgefundene Blockssitzung", pp.8-11, ibid
102 Kreis Sondershausen bloc minutes, LPA, IV/4.11/263.
were conducted in Gotha, mainly into LDPD and CDU officials, but also into the DBD in Langenhain, which contained many former LDPD members.\footnote{Kreis Gotha bloc minutes, LPA, IV/4.05/123, especially 27 January, 1 March, 2 June and 4 July 1950.}

The town and village blocs were more problematic. Kreis Heiligenstadt again provides examples of this. In many communities there was a serious lack of interparty cooperation before the 1950 elections. Even local DBD groups caused the SED problems, again suggesting that its national leaders were hardly representative of the membership. Lacking local cooperation meant most local bloc meetings held before the 1951 referendum were organised by Kreis supervisors rather than local party groups.\footnote{SED Worbis, 'Stand der Blockarbeit...', 3 October 1951, LPA, IV/4.06/144.} Often personal differences impeded village bloc work.\footnote{Kreisblock Worbis (Heiligenstadt), 'Rundschreiben an den Ortsblock...', 8 November 1951, ibid.} Even by 1956 local bloc work was often practically non-existent. However, where it did continue the bloc parties' representatives always accepted SED resolutions. When 'reactionary elements' seemed likely to create difficulties, the district SED pressurised the relevant party to remove those concerned. The principle of the next highest bloc checking local election candidates ensured that the more loyal Kreis bloc counteracted any 'reactionary' village tendencies. However, the SED found bloc work particularly difficult in Kreis Heiligenstadt because in many villages it had few or no members. In such circumstances the SED's Kreis secretary warned that pursuing bloc work at all costs meant placing one or two SED members against a sea of CDU members and that better results could be achieved by building up the NF (see below).\footnote{SED Heiligenstadt, 'Stand der Blockarbeit...', 6 January 1956, ibid.}

Once the parties' and organisations' long term alliance with the SED was firmly soldered, the blocs at all levels acquired a new, dual function. On the one hand, each member organisation reported the opinions of the part of the population for which it was particularly responsible. On the other, the SED used the meetings to coordinate the members' work in the overall framework of political campaigning, and to ensure that all parties and organisations actively participated. The SED's new Thuringian leader, Erich
Mückenberger, insisted in 1950 that the party should work politically in the bloc and emphasised that it was a ‘priority to involve [the bourgeois parties] in the strengthening of the GDR’s antifascist-democratic order’. In this way the ‘bloc’ parties might also attract public blame for continuing hardships. The SED’s regional secretariat determined the content of bloc resolutions. It was hoped that such resolutions would guide the political thought of the members in whose name they were issued. In the mid-1950s, when the loyalty of the bloc parties’ rank and file was still not guaranteed, the SED stipulated that the bloc should:

influence the CDU’s policy more strongly; the comrades must hold discussions beforehand and then give the CDU concrete tasks [...] which they must then report on. The progressive CDU members are to be obliged to argue more with the reactionary forces.

The SED unambiguously set the bloc’s agenda. As the SED’s regional first secretary, Alois Bräutigam, freely proclaimed on the regional bloc’s 20th anniversary:

After every meeting of our Central Committee we conduct a joint discussion with the chairmen of the bloc parties, in which we explain the problems and conclusions for the Bezirk...

These meetings were always held after events such as SED Party Congresses to officially acquaint the other parties with the latest official line and secure their public welcome for it. Other meetings concerned technical matters such as mobilising the workforce for the harvest. An SED official usually gave the keynote address, even when the topic was agriculture in a meeting formally called by the DBD. There generally followed a brief discussion of potential problems in securing popular support for a measure, and finally a public resolution was issued in the name of all those present, symbolising the supposed unity of all sections of society. However, the Bezirk

107 SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.1/50 der Sekretariatssitzung...’, 2 January 1950, p.3, LPA, IV/L/2/3-038.
108 1 February 1951 minutes (note 86).
110 Untitled speech by Alois Bräutigam [1965], LPA, BIV/2/15-735.
111 Bezirksblock meeting, 25 July 1958, ThHStAW, NF 209, fols 125-129.
112 For instance, on 9 February 1952 the Landesblock principally (and typically) discussed preparations for spring field cultivation. Agenda in ThHStAW, LT 200-201, fol 133.
113 Bezirksblock meeting, 14 March 1962, ThHStAW, NF 210, fol 8 ff.
bloc’s dwindling significance is reflected in the irregularity of its meetings by the mid-1950s.

The last trace of significant dissent between the parties in the regional bloc came in meetings after the 1950 elections to agree nominations for new mayors and district executives. Although the CDU cited political and ideological reasons for claiming an extra post, the bloc’s outward unity was maintained. When candidates for the 1957 and 1958 elections were debated, the lengthy discussions were essentially of a technical nature. Similarly, when the Bezirk Erfurt bloc discussed the political situation after the 20th CPSU party congress and again after the Hungarian and Polish crises of 1956 it was essentially to consider necessary steps to stabilise the GDR’s socialist order, not to question the system itself, though the LDPD made some carefully worded criticism about agricultural policy in April 1956. Such criticisms as one member organisation made of another after the mid-1950s concerned inefficiencies in political campaigning for socialism rather than ideological differences. By the 1960s the Bezirk bloc had degenerated to a public relations exercise in official unity, a formality for the organisation of elections and the channelling of political campaigns, and retained no significant role for as long as the various parties’ and organisations’ leaders maintained their loyalty to the SED.

Similarly, by the late 1950s district bloc records generally demonstrate the SED’s hegemony and the subordinate positions which the other parties had adopted. Though, for example, the Heiligenstadt district bloc handled much more business and took more decisions than its Land/Bezirk counterpart in the 1950s, by the 1960s it had the same limited function. The discussions after SED speeches merely discussed practical

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114 20 November 1950 minutes (note 81), especially fols 127, 137.
115 See especially Bezirksblock meetings of 8 April, 7 May, 23 and 27 September 1958, ThHStAW, NF 209, fols 57ff, 100ff, 152ff, 158.
116 Bezirksblock minutes, 18 April, 29 October and 7 December 1956, ibid, fols 28-35, 47-52, 54-56.
117 Surviving minutes for 1960s Bezirksblock meetings, ThHStAW, NF 210, LPA BIV/2/15-735.
118 Cf., e.g., ‘Protokoll über die Kreisblocksitzung am 9. April 1957’ (Weimar-Land), in which the SED’s proposals for the coming local elections (including the unity list) were accepted without demur: LPA, IV/4.12/206.
problems of implementing the unanimously agreed policies. Where problems did occur (mainly in the earlier 1950s), democratic centralism and party discipline were deployed to bring bloc party members into line with SED policy. A Kreis Gotha SED representative made this clear in 1952 during a discussion about an LDPD representative’s privately expressed political doubts. The SED man stated:

...we, the elected representatives of the parties and organisations, are duty bound to implement for the good of the people the policy decided by our friends in the central bloc and which we have recognised.

Thus, providing the SED ensured the loyalty of the bloc parties’ national leaders, discipline within each party eventually ensured local loyalty. When, particularly in the earlier years, loyalty was lacking, the party hierarchy intervened. For instance, when LDPD members in Holzengel did not support their party’s agreement to the Oder-Neisse border in 1950, the LDPD’s Kreis Sondershausen executive removed the local chairman and installed more reliable bloc representatives. But although the bloc parties’ disciplinary measures overcame local difficulties, and did not allow them to filter up to threaten the parties’ national organisations, subordination by local members did not mean the argument had been won, as a Kreis Langensalza report hinted:

Our party’s [SED] proposals in the bloc are accepted without contradiction and without statements by the individual bloc parties.

Even in 1959 the Nordhausen SED could specifically report only that the bloc parties’ Kreis leaders recognised the SED’s leading role. At a lower level:

The bloc friends in Mackenrode are unclear about our party’s leading role because they make this dependent on numerical strength.

Though the political battles of the early 1950s intimidated bloc party officials into subservience, before 1961 some exploited the open borders to escape their political

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119 Minutes of some Kreis Heiligenstadt bloc meetings, 1963–1967, LPA, IVA/4.06/140.
120 4 December 1952 minutes (note 84), p.10.
cage. Between 1956 and 1958, three Kreis Gotha NF members (one CDU, one NDPD and one Kulturbund) 'fled the republic'.

In summary, the district and local blocs perhaps had greater importance than their Bezirk counterparts, where the SED's most loyal allies were already in place, in securing the bloc parties' agreement to SED policies before local councils discussed them. However, bloc work was often entirely lacking in some localities. Typically, local bloc work in Landkreis Weimar was 'variable', with a total lack of cooperation between the parties in numerous localities. The Kreis Heiligenstadt local blocs met ever less regularly by the late 1950s, and the Nordhausen bloc had not met 'for a long time' by 1955. In most of Kreis Apolda the local blocs did not meet for months and the parties worked 'beside rather than with one another'. Though lethargy and lack of political commitment, even in those responsible for maintaining the system, undoubtedly prevented the bloc from fulfilling a more significant role in the GDR's local politics, there were other reasons. These included the imposition of 'democratic centralism' in government but also, as noted above, the creation of the Nationale Front (NF) in early 1950.

The NF's responsibilities largely overlapped with the bloc's. Confusion developed about the two bodies' relative roles. In Kreis Nordhausen:

...comrades are also unable to decide which tasks (and in which form) should be handled in the bloc and [which] in the local committee of the NF.

This in turn provoked a reluctance to participate in both:

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124 SED Gotha, 'Einschätzung der Arbeit der Nationale Front...', 7 May 1958, pp.12, 25, LPA, IV/4.05/122.
125 SED Worbis, 'Bericht über den Stand der Blockarbeit', 22 September 1958, p.1, LPA, IV/4.13/167; the Sondershausen Kreisblock agreed in 1950 that its decisions would be binding on the parties' local council groups. Nonetheless, the DSF and SED had to struggle before the CDU and LDPD accepted a bloc resolution on the renaming of a street in the council meeting: May 1950 report (note 121), pp.3-4.
After all, it is always the same faces, whether in the bloc or the local committee of the National Front, and not very much really comes out of the meetings.\textsuperscript{130}

The Thuringian SED made considerable efforts to ensure that the NF, like the blocs, worked within the party’s framework. The NF’s first Thuringian secretary, Paul Dahm, was an SED nominee who regularly received detailed instructions, binding under the principle of party discipline.\textsuperscript{131} As at all layers of political and economic life, the SED also attempted to create party groups within each district’s NF secretariat. These groups coordinated SED members’ efforts within the NF according to the SED Kreis organisations’ instructions. However, although the SED thereby gained a clear advantage over the other less well coordinated parties, by 1952 these structures were still not functioning efficiently, reflecting the SED’s own unsettled internal situation: ‘The SED group in the Thuringian committee still does not exert the leading role.’\textsuperscript{132}

Though the SED was anxious that ‘the bourgeois parties must not be allowed to play second fiddle’, the NF was, like the bloc, an attempt to further involve and implicate the other parties and mass organisations in SED policies (‘...how can we activate the movement in the towns, particularly the bourgeois forces?’).\textsuperscript{133} One of the Thuringian NF’s first resolutions was to ‘unmask and render harmless all reactionaries and two-faced [members]’ in the parties and mass organisations.\textsuperscript{134} Given the movement’s broad, common denominator aims, the SED could easily criticise members of other parties who failed to support the NF actively, even when this involved propagating specifically SED policies.

Though the NF had its own structures, the bloc parties effectively headed the organisation. The NF increasingly duplicated and assumed the bloc’s function of

\textsuperscript{130} 22 September 1958 report (note 125), p.3.

\textsuperscript{131} Cf., e.g., the SED’s resolutions to Dahm on future NF activities: 1 February 1951 minutes (note 86).

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Protokoll Nr.41 von der Sekretariatsitzung der Landesleitung Thüringen am 12.7.51’, p.15, LPA, IV/L/2/3-036; SED LL, ‘Informationsbericht-Nr.15/52’, 15 February 1952, ThHStAW, BdMP 674/1.

\textsuperscript{133} ‘Protokoll Nr. 41/49 der Sekretariatsitzung des Landesvorstandes am 6.7.49’ (point 5), LPA, IV/L/2/3-036.

collating information about the opinions of the various sections of society. This enabled the NF to plan differentiated political agitation. However, local NF committees, if formed at all, usually remained largely dormant unless activated by SED envoys during election campaigns. The active committees were dominated by SED loyalists. The local CDU and LDPD organisations remained distanced from the movement, despite their central leaderships’ policies. As only a small proportion of committee members were without party or organisational affiliation, the SED’s control of the organisation was secure.

FIGURE 4: Membership of Kreis Hildburghausen NF committees, July 1950


When the NF was created, and particularly before the 1950 election and the 1951 referendum, great efforts went into involving the entire population in the movement. It was planned to form NF communities for the residents of every house or block of flats, and the households of every village. These ‘communities’ would be the bottom rung of a national hierarchy of elected committees. However, in practice the creation of these ‘house and village communities’ was fraught with difficulties. If founded at all, the communities often existed on paper only and, like the local committees, were dominated by the SED, and mainly concentrated on non-political local issues.\footnote{Cf Henkel, pp.104, 108}
Although the SED’s goal of involving everyone was never achieved, the communities did succeed in involving more apolitical citizens without threatening the SED’s power, which was secured through the local NF committees.

**FIGURE 6: Composition of Bezirk Erfurt Nationale Front 'communities' executives, July 1953**

![Pie chart showing the composition of Bezirk Erfurt Nationale Front 'communities' executives, July 1953.]

- **no party**: 70%
- **SED**: 23%
- **CDU/LDPD**: 4%
- **DBD/NDPD**: 3%

Source: NF Bezirkssekretariat, 'Informationsbericht Nr.18/53, 31 July 1953, ThHStAW, S 547, fol 240

The NF’s success in political agitation was limited during the 1950 election campaign. Each party and organisation represented was required to provide NF agitators in each district to canvass each household and clarify political problems. However, the canvassing teams were usually formed behind schedule, the parties often delegated too few functionaries or members, and few of these actually attended training sessions or
went canvassing. CDU and LDPD members were most often absent, but local and
district SED organisations also regularly neglected their NF commitments.137

The public ‘instruction centres’ were still less successful. Not only were most centres
hardly visited by the public, but some were inaccessible or mainly unstaffed.138 Even
when the NF instructors and canvassers were active, many failed to answer the public’s
questions ‘correctly’, if at all, perhaps because there were no easy answers to the
frequent enquiries about food supplies and the whereabouts of German POWs in the
USSR.139 The instruction centres became ‘dormant’ after the 1950 election, apparently
due to the SED’s negligence. Despite reopening and proving slightly more popular
before the 1951 referendum, particularly if they organised special events, in some areas
they were used so little that many SED and NF functionaries did not bother keeping
them open all day.140 Though revived for the 1954 campaigns, they were not the
‘political centre’ of each community,141 and are not mentioned in reports of later
campaigns.

Apart from political canvassing, NF meetings were arranged to discuss general political
problems and present candidates for preliminary voter approval. In 1950 these meetings
often enjoyed only limited success. In the Eichsfeld ‘discussions in most meetings
[were] of a very low level’ and concentrated on food supplies and practical agricultural
problems, rather than political issues. The CDU, though the district’s largest party,
distanced itself from this ‘communist affair’, whose members ‘must be
excommunicated’.142

137 See, e.g., many reports in ThHStAW, BdMP 228 and 229.
140 ‘Analyse der Volksbefragung vom 3.-5.6.1951...’, p.24, undated, LPA, AIV/2/4-123; 23 May 1951
report (note 138), fol 290.

83
The NF’s effectiveness improved parallel to that of the SED during the 1950s. By 1955 the workers’ party clearly dominated the Bezirk and Kreis committees numerically, and therefore the whole organisation. However, even at Bezirk level there was still no SED party group and several SED comrades were among the 30% of Bezirk committee members who regularly missed meetings. Though not as active in 1955 as during election years, the NF nonetheless involved significant numbers in political events who might otherwise not have demonstrated public allegiance. For instance, 52,423 citizens participated in 5,428 ‘house or village community’ meetings to protest against the Paris Treaties during January and February. Nonetheless, even though some NF committees consisted entirely of SED representatives, in 1958 the party concluded that their work had still not ‘awakened all the forces of our population’ by far.

The NF tended to lapse into inactivity between election campaigns, so that great efforts were needed to resume work as each election approached. In 1961 even the Bezirk committee needed ‘activating’; in 1965, some Kreis committees were not coordinating election work, a complaint often simultaneously targeted at the SED Kreisleitung. Many localities had an inactive or ineffective NF committee, or no committee at all, when election campaigns began. In 1962, midway between two campaigns, the Kreis secretariats were generally uninformed about local NF work, and there was only ‘hesitant’ control over the local groups. By 1961, for instance, there had been no NF work in Hausen and Tastungen (Kreis Worbis) ‘for years’.

144 ‘Bericht des Bezirkssausschusses Erfurt der Nationalen Front...’, 6 January 1956, ibid, fol 104.
146 General comments are drawn from election reports in the LPA sequence BIV/2/13.
Ineffectiveness usually reflected the NF’s inability to coordinate activities with the state apparatus, and the various parties and organisations’ continuing failure to cooperate: ultimately the NF was only the sum of its parts.\footnote{152}

The relatively low level of public involvement in the NF during the early 1950s, and in associated campaigns such as the various peace organisations, slowly taught the SED an important lesson. The masses would never be willing to fight actively for socialism, or any other political cause, particularly while there were other pressing practical concerns. In the 1950s these included poor food supplies and the accommodation of the many settlers from the lost eastern provinces. By sponsoring so many different organisations (the parties, the trades union and the other mass organisations, the NF, the various ban the bomb campaigns, etc.) and insisting that each organisation provided members to actively help each of the others, the SED achieved overkill. The apolitical majority merely contributed their signatures on petitions or attended occasional processions (particularly if these took place during working hours). Many realised that the NF’s ‘aim is communism’ and avoided the movement.\footnote{153} Meanwhile the committed minority became overworked and unable to match the hectic demands of political life. The SED secretary (theoretically at the ‘vanguard of the proletariat’) and NF chairman in a border village of \textit{Kreis} Heiligenstadt summed up many Thuringians’ feelings in 1950:

\begin{quote}
We have no instruction groups and no peace committees either. We’ve had enough, we’re all in favour of peace, we don’t need any other organisation.\footnote{154}
\end{quote}

However, the SED did not significantly drop the pace of its political campaigning via the NF, the parties and mass organisations until the 1960s, when it began to content itself with the active support of only a proportion of the population and the passive support/lack of opposition of the rest.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{152} 25 September 1961 report (note 147), pp.56-7.
\item \textsuperscript{153} 13 July 1950 report (note 142).
\item \textsuperscript{154} Afi, ‘Ber.Nr.200/50’, 13 July 1950, ThHStAW, BdMP 229.
\end{itemize}

85
Though the SED’s initial hopes of involving the entire population were doomed to fail, the NF did provide a useful forum for addressing a wide variety of sectors of the population in differentiated meetings. While churchgoers and the intelligentsia were naturally suspicious of the SED, many were prepared to attend NF events. This work was underway by the 1958 election, and was well developed by 1961 in the form of specific working groups for Christians, intelligentsia, women, etc. However, some groups which were established on paper in accordance with central directives failed to function in practice.

Despite the shortcomings in the SED’s terms, the NF must be regarded as partially successful. It took the SED’s message to hundreds of thousands of individuals across Bezirk Erfurt at each election campaign, and on numerous other political occasions, thus cementing the status quo in the popular consciousness. The NF provided a mechanism for involving thousands of citizens outside mainstream political life in signing petitions and even in writing letters of protest to deputies in the FRG’s Bundestag. Though the house and village communities never involved the entire population, and though those which did exist did not match the SED’s original aspirations, large numbers attended community meetings before each election or were approached by NF instructors. For instance, across Bezirk Erfurt some 1,350,685 participants participated in 84,771 NF election events during the 1963 campaign, most of them ‘differentiated discussions’. 31,989 families (105,333 people) were sought out for discussions, and a further 94,514 attended 9,652 ‘house community’ meetings. It should, however, be remembered that not every NF meeting achieved its goal: though a public meeting in Wehnde (Kreis Worbis) attracted a good turnout, no speaker mentioned the ‘National Document’, the meeting’s purpose, but instead discussed border security installations, footpaths, new waterpipes and local roads. Despite such

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156 In Kreis Worbis, only one NF working group was active in mid-1963: NF Bezirkssektariat, ‘Information (Monat Juni bis 5.7.1963)’, ThHStAW, S 547, fol 27.
failings, we can conclude that the SED could not have achieved these levels of even outward conformity purely in its own right.

**The role of the bloc parties: the CDU**

Having discussed the structures in which the parties and organisations were joined together, their individual internal developments also merit attention. After establishing the bloc party leaderships’ loyalty to SED policies in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the SED had to consolidate this position among these parties’ rank and file memberships. However, during the following two decades, the SED and the bloc parties’ leaders succeeded merely in preventing open opposition among bloc party members, but failed to win most hearts and minds for the SED’s cause. As space constraints prevent discussing all four bloc parties in detail, this section refers to the development of internal structures and members’ opinions within the CDU. The CDU, as a party with an independent, alternative political agenda in the late 1940s and a clear mirror image in its western namesake, allows a study of the extent to which the party and its members transformed their political outlook to accord with the SED/GDR’s structures. Apart from providing an example of a GDR bloc party which can stand for others (Thuringian records show the parties all experienced similar problems), an understanding of the CDU’s internal problems also casts light on why the SED did not deploy this ostensibly Christian party more often in local church-state relations, the topic of Part Three of this thesis.

Though the SED could not control the bloc parties as straightforwardly as the mass organisations, the party intervened to direct CDU activities when it felt this appropriate, particularly in the early years. The party was keen for the CDU to take an active part in political life, but this could not be at any price. During the 1950 election campaign, at which point most party members had still to be *gleichgeschaltet*, a third of the CDU officials supplied for polling stations were rejected as suspicious after checks by
Thuringia's returning officer. The Thuringian government also failed to allocate the party adequate motor transport and a daily newspaper, perhaps fearful that opponents might utilise such facilities.

The SED also carefully monitored personnel matters. Thus, after SED intervention an apparent 'enemy' was not re-elected to the regional executive in 1954, though the CDU could not be persuaded to expel him for lack of hard evidence. In order to remain informed about CDU developments, and to counter any possible resurgence of 'reactionaries' after June 1953, the SED established contacts with 'positive' CDU members in the state administration or trades unions. Despite the official fraternal ties, the 'CDU executive or members must under no circumstances learn of the contact'.

Prior to the 1954 elections the SED hoped to use material gathered in this way to popularise 'positive' CDU forces. The SED also monitored the CDU's membership profile, regularly complaining that the party numbered too many workers (22%), and prevented the bloc parties re-establishing party cells for their members in the state administration in case they threatened SED hegemony.

Internally, the CDU's loyalty to the GDR system was established almost entirely from the top down. As noted above, the battles of the late 1940s and early 1950s had removed virtually all 'reactionary elements' from the key posts in the party leadership, even at Kreis level. Occasionally the SED maintained discipline by attacking the CDU even after 1952. For instance, the extremely loyal Hermann Kalb (chairman of the Bezirk party) was publicly criticised in February 1953 for missing a public meeting. This sin might, as Kalb realised, have toppled him in the tense atmosphere of 1950-1951.

160 2 December 1953 report (note 109).
161 Cf., e.g., 6 January 1955 report (note 127), p.6.
162 SED Erfurt-Stadt, 'Monatsbericht', 28 March 1953, p.8, LPA, IV/5.01/137.
Even without such attacks, the CDU Bezirk executive was clearly \textit{gleichgeschaltet} in the early 1950s. The CDU’s fifth Thuringian conference (June 1952) passed resolutions of total commitment to the GDR’s policies, Stalin and the USSR, and damned Adenauer’s western CDU. One committed the party ‘from Christian responsibility to the socialist renewal of our society’.\textsuperscript{164} The Thuringian executive was faithfully echoing the national leadership’s policies. The transformation was certainly complete when the regional party proclaimed in 1956: “The GDR is a stable component of the socialist world system.”\textsuperscript{165} The Bezirk executive met only every six weeks by 1956, when the party’s independent political life was over. Its meetings loyally dealt with topics such as CPSU conferences and SED decisions, as well as internal matters.\textsuperscript{166} The executive’s work plans display similar loyalty. Party members were to fight for peace and German unity, and against the Adenauer government. The Bezirk executive optimistically ordained in 1953:

\begin{quote}
Vigilance against all divergences from the party and government line must be exercised in every local group and every local group meeting. An aggressive discussion will clarify all points of doubt.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

The CDU supported the SED’s campaigns for peace and German unity (on the GDR’s terms) and against the bomb. Party members received regular instructions to support mass organisations such as the DSF and the NF’s ‘national construction programme’. A systematic ideological instruction programme was devised to convince members of SED policies.\textsuperscript{168}

Most CDU \textit{Kreis} leaders were also reliable by the mid-1950s. Thus one CDU representative on the \textit{Kreis} Langensalza bloc emphasised the significance of the SED’s Fourth Party Congress and noted:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{164} ‘Entwurf Entschließung! Volkswirtschaft’, June 1952, ThHStAW, Vs/St 713, fol 3.
\textsuperscript{165} CDU Bezirksverband, ‘Direktive für die Neuwahl der Ausschüsse der Nationalen Front...’, April 1956, ThHStAW, Vs/St 708, fol 421.
\textsuperscript{166} Agendas for CDU Bezirk executive meetings (1952-1956), ThHStAW, Vs/St 712.
\textsuperscript{167} CDU Bezirksleitung, ‘Zusatz-Arbeitsplan...’, 10 July 1953, ThHStAW, Vs/St 707, fol 52.
\textsuperscript{168} CDU \textit{Bezirk} executive work plans for the mid-1950s, ibid.
\end{quote}
The ‘National Document’ could have been published by no other party than the party of the working class, the SED.\(^{169}\)

The SED was generally satisfied with CDU district executives’ composition by the mid-1950s,\(^{170}\) though there were exceptions. For instance, the CDU’s Weimar *Kreis* secretary regularly failed to acknowledge the SED’s leading role unconditionally.\(^{171}\) Too much loyalty, however, could be counterproductive. CDU members said one Weimar functionary had ‘too many SED tendencies’.\(^{172}\) Overall, the CDU’s *Bezirk* Erfurt organisation was participating fully in the GDR’s socialisation, at least on paper.

However, enthusiasm was not ensured at *Kreis* level in the 1950s. In 1956 the SED felt the CDU’s *Bezirk* executive was still not acting against the remaining ‘reactionary elements’.\(^{173}\) As will become apparent, this problem remained well into the 1960s. The root cause was that the central CDU, in adopting the SED’s policies wholesale, had created a socialist party quite different to the Christian party which most CDU members thought they had joined. Many of the CDU’s early members must have felt their party had deserted them by 1950. That year a Siebleben priest felt poor attendance at party meetings was because

\[
\text{a large proportion of the members [...] are real representatives of the CDU and have nothing to do with the policies of our zone.\(^{174}\)}
\]

His comments suggest members were confused about the split between the separate CDU parties in east and west. Shortly after the central CDU recognised the SED’s leading role in 1952, most delegates to the Worbis district conference (presumably the most loyal local members) had ‘nothing to say’ about party matters.\(^{175}\) After the debacle

\[^{169}\text{‘Protokoll über die Blocksitzung am 15.5.1954...’ (Bad Langensalza), p.2, LPA, IV/4.07/197.}\]
\[^{170}\text{SED appraisals are in the sequences on ‘befreundete Organisationen’ of the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* records in LPA.}\]
\[^{172}\text{Ibid, p.2.}\]
\[^{173}\text{6 January 1955 report (note 127), p.2. The regional executive had regularly, if infrequently, concerned itself with expulsions since at least 1952 (see agendas in ThHStAW, Vs/St 712), pointing to an arguably overzealous SED reporter.}\]
\[^{174}\text{SED Gotha, untitled, undated report [March 1950?], LPA, IV/4.05/122.}\]
\[^{175}\text{‘Kreiskonferenz Worbis am 20.11.1952’, 4 December 1952, ThHStAW, Vs/St 708, fol 87.}\]
of June 1953 most *Kreis* Apolda functionaries welcomed the ‘new course’, but felt it could have been avoided had the CDU’s leadership listened to its members’ comments which ‘expressed the population’s true feelings’. They called for a re-establishment of specific CDU policies and warned that membership would otherwise decline. Many CDU members disagreed with the CDU leadership’s wholehearted support for SED policies, which persisted after June 1953. Although ‘open enemy activity’ was by now rare, perhaps reflecting the impact of the earlier bitter struggles, ideological clarity (in the SED’s terms) had still to be achieved. Possibly 60-65% opposed single electoral lists in 1954. Many members could not believe that leading party functionaries were really expressing their own opinions in speeches, and asked them privately to say what they really thought at the end of meetings.

In the mid-1950s, members’ lack of enthusiasm for Soviet-style socialism was reflected in figures which revealed that the CDU had the lowest DSF membership of any party in Weimar. The 1956 *Kreis* Langensalza conference avoided political problems (a characteristic frequently attributed to the CDU). One delegate noted that ‘members are very often persuaded to see their first enemy in the marxist’. In the late 1950s many CDU (and LDPD) members were ‘still very unclear about the leading role of our party [the SED] and our government’s policy’. Most members in many local groups in almost every *Kreis* reportedly disagreed with their own party’s policies. Although the CDU’s role was to win members’ support for the SED’s churches policy, even district leaders opposed the introduction of a secular alternative to confirmation in local meetings. Not until 1958 could the SED note that the Heiligenstadt CDU had distanced itself from

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176 ‘Bericht über die Kreisfunktionärsversammlung des Kreisverbandes Apolda’, 4 September 1953, ibid, fols 203-205.


181 Undated, untitled report [late 1955?], LPA, IV/4.06/1-227. See also Chapter Eight.
Bishop Freusberg’s anti-GDR comments. However, disillusionment with the leadership’s compliance often resulted in increasing local inactivity.

Attendance at party meetings was also generally poor (28% in November 1954). The SED did not always welcome party activities which did occur and complained that the well attended meetings of Christmas 1954 were of a ‘predominantly religious character and political problems were addressed unsatisfactorily’. Even ten years later only 30% of members in urban areas attended meetings, though the figure reached 50% in villages. Many groups only had one or two active members, and as the party’s influence decreased, so did the ‘active core’. The party’s overall membership also declined, by about a quarter in Thuringia by 1950, and by over a fifth again in Bezirk Erfurt between 1954 and 1959, leaving 12,364 ‘friends of the Union’. The Apolda functionary’s fears of 1953 seemed justified. We can speculate that many who left were founder members whose political hopes of a democratic, Christian state had been dashed and who sympathised with Adenauer’s CDU.

However, this development had some advantages for the SED. The departure of the frustrated early idealists removed from active political life a tranche of those who would never be convinced. The 1960s proved more stable: the CDU still had 12,030 members in Bezirk Erfurt on 31 December 1965. In the previous six months the party had

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acquired 196 members, while losing 258. Of these, 113 had left the party, 57 had moved and 87 had died, but significantly only one had been expelled.189

Party work generally improved in the 1960s. For instance, attendance at 1964’s party election meetings (68.6%) had improved by 11.8% since 1963.190 The proportion was 75.6% in 1965, by which year the political ‘reticence’ in the difficult Worbis district was reportedly broken.191 Nonetheless, many delegates at 1962’s Weimar district conference had still not fully understood the ‘dangers of West German militarism and imperialism’ and felt both German states should make compromises, in clear contradiction of their own party’s policies.192 In 1966, ‘the overwhelming majority of our [CDU] members support the leading role of [...] the SED’. Nonetheless, some Unionsfreunde in most groups still felt the SED’s coming party congress was of no importance to them. Many still ‘entertained illusions about reunification’ and/or felt the border security measures were ‘not primarily directed against Bonn’s aggressive policies but to prevent GDR citizens breaching the border’, even though this blatantly contradicted official explanations by the government and all the party leaderships.193 A 1966 report summarises well the popular attitudes of many CDU members, reflected in much contemporary archive material:

Certainly, the analysis of opinion formation shows unambiguously that, apart from exceptions, our members no longer want to depart from the GDR’s societal forms. However, they do not yet commit themselves proudly to the same extent to our German Democratic Republic. Otherwise their open support for the basic questions of our national policy in party meetings and National Front residents’ forums would be more comprehensive.194

194 Ibid, fol 66.
Similarly, many CDU members failed to support their party’s policy in the crises of 1968.\textsuperscript{195}

By the 1960s, many, probably most, CDU members generally supported the GDR system and hoped to use their party membership to secure Christianity within socialism. Some members had originally believed in antifascist Christian socialism in 1945 and followed the party’s course as a natural progression. Other Christians grew up within the developing GDR system and joined the party as an alternative to the SED, albeit in some cases simply to maintain an outward facade of loyalty. The SED sometimes noted this ‘escape route’ function of the CDU. For example, in 1960 CDU membership drives were reportedly attracting:

> those residents, and particularly farmers, who are against the socialist transformation and believe that in joining the CDU they have found a safe haven to remain untouched by the socialist transformation.\textsuperscript{196}

For many, CDU membership may have meant a position in the state administration, or the promise of such a job. The question remains as to why, at least until 1968, so many individuals remained in the CDU despite fundamentally disagreeing with the party’s support for the SED. The available archival sources have shed no light on this question. We can speculate that the reason lay in pragmatism, as outlined here, or in a hope of changing the system from within. Ultimately the LDPD partially fulfilled this hope in 1989 when its leader, Manfred Gerlach, realised his party’s potential power and began to break free of the SED’s bonds.\textsuperscript{197}

Once the other parties were effectively ‘coordinated’ to the SED, their raison d’être became less certain. In June 1961, Nordhausen LDPD members were unclear ‘about the role of the petty-bourgeois parties in the further construction of socialism in the GDR’ and asked whether they would simply be subsumed into the NF.\textsuperscript{198} Similarly, in 1966,

\textsuperscript{195} See Chapter Ten.
\textsuperscript{198} NF Bezirkssekretariat, ‘Informationsbericht’, 8 June 1961, ThHStAW, S 547, fol 147.
one local CDU group believed the SED’s next party congress would ‘decide to build communism and then there would be no further place for the bloc parties’. One member resigned because ‘the CDU is only allowed to do what the SED prescribes’. The bloc parties’ position was nonetheless highly secure. The apparent multiparty system was a useful fig leaf of apparent democratic legitimation and seemingly demonstrated the acceptance for SED policies of all sectors of the population.

Though their memberships were small in the late 1960s, the SED knew it would lose access to a much larger proportion of the population if the bloc parties were dissolved, and risk losing control over the politically active who were principally organised in them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership (1967)</th>
<th>Proportion of Bezirk Erfurt population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SED 122,370</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU 11,490</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDPD 7,750</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBD 7,300</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDPD 6,160</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 1,253,540</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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**Uniting the non-political majority: the role of the mass organisations**

The many mass organisations were also integral to the SED’s political system in presenting the party’s policies to the non-political masses on the basis of social interest.

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groupings. Unlike the bloc parties, they were theoretically non-political, as each had a monopoly in catering for its own section of society. In practice, however, the mass organisations were intended to be ‘an extension of the party at the grass roots’.

No aspect of life was written off as apolitical and exempt. Thus, when the comrade responsible for the Thuringian Sport Committee regretfully informed the SED in 1949 that some people felt sport had nothing to do with politics, the SED took steps to prove that it did. As Thuringian SED leader, Werner Eggerath felt it essential to achieve the closest contact between the sports movement and the party.

The mass organisations’ usefulness depended on their remaining firmly under SED control. The party’s ‘organisation and instruction’ department regularly held meetings with the mass organisations’ leaders who, like the bloc party leaders, received directives for their work. Success was essentially secured by party discipline: the SED leaders of the various organisations accepted that their positions depended on the party’s will rather than that of the individual organisation. Typically, the SED’s Bad Langensalza Kreisleitung told SED members in the mass organisations: ‘You are party functionaries and have the task of being active in a particular mass organisation.’ Equally, Willy Albrecht considered his position as Thuringian FDGB chairman to be a party appointment. His subsequent appointment as a minister and his replacement at the FDGB, were also party decisions, ratified by the SED’s Central Secretariat.

However, not all SED functionaries realised the mass organisations’ true role quickly enough. The Thuringian secretariat chided some comrades in January 1948 for confusing non-partisanship with being apolitical. Despite some members’ ideological and tactical uncertainties, the official line was quickly made clear. Following poor
coordination with the regional FDGB during the 1 May 1948 celebrations, the SED declared:

In future the union should be the event’s organiser, but the party must have exclusive control.\(^{205}\)

SED members dominated the mass organisations’ leaderships from their inception,\(^{206}\) and as its organisational methods stabilised, the party insisted that the mass organisations’ personnel decisions required its approval.\(^{207}\) Thus, when the new Bezirke were formed in 1952, the SED decided who would sit on the mass organisations’ new Bezirk and Kreis executives.\(^{208}\) To further ensure the organisations’ obedience, the SED’s Thuringian secretariat members were assigned particular organisations whose executive meetings they were to attend.\(^{209}\) In January 1949 the party began regularly checking the ideological and organisational situation of the organisations, to ensure that the party’s leading role was enshrined in each.\(^{210}\)

The creation of SED party groups in each mass organisation at all levels helped to coordinate party efforts.\(^{211}\) Though the ‘bourgeois’ parties were encouraged to show their support for what were becoming organisations with an SED programme, under no circumstances would they be allowed to take over. When it appeared that the CDU and LDPD were becoming increasingly active in the Young Pioneer movement, the Thuringian SED decreed: ‘All friendship leaders […] must absolutely be SED members.’\(^{212}\)

\(^{205}\) SED LL, ‘Sekretariatsitzung am 8.5.1948’, ibid.

\(^{206}\) Cf., e.g., FDJ Mühlhausen statistics, 15 December 1953, LPA, IV/4.08/219: 11 of the 24 FDJ’s Mühlhausen Kreisleitung were SED members or candidates. The remaining members belonged to no party. Furthermore, 15 of the FDJ’s 19 permanent staff in Kreis Mühlhausen were also SED members or candidates; the others belonged to no party.

\(^{207}\) SED LL, ‘Sekretariatsitzung am 10.2.1948, LPA, IV/L2/3-032. The SED approved, e.g., the new FDJ leadership (‘Sekretariatsitzung vom 7.9.1948’, LPA, IV/L2/3-033), and that of the DSF (‘Protokoll Nr.51/49 der Sekretariatsitzung des Landesvorstandes am 7.9.49’, LPA, IV/L2/3-037).

\(^{208}\) ‘Beschlussprotokoll Nr.27 von der Sekretariatsitzung der Landesleitung Thüringen am 24.6.52’, pp.5-6, LPA, IV/L2/3-078; SED LL, ‘Beschlußprotokoll’, 3 July 1952, LPA, IV/L2/3-080.


\(^{210}\) SED LL, ‘Arbeitsssekretariatssitzung am 7.1.1949’, LPA, IV/L2/3-035.

\(^{211}\) SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.46/49 der Sekretariatsitzung am 27.7.1949’, LPA, IV/L2/3-036.

\(^{212}\) 7 September 1949 minutes (note 207).
Despite its efforts, the SED’s aspirations for the mass organisations outstripped its achievements during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In late 1949, the incoming Thuringian SED leader, Erich Mückenberger, found it necessary to redouble party efforts to control them.\textsuperscript{213} However, the SED’s own relative weakness was still apparent in 1951 when many SED cells within the FDJ hierarchy led only a ‘shadow existence’. In 1952 repeated requests from the SED’s Sonneberg leadership failed to induce senior district FDJ members to attend an SED meeting. Most SED \textit{Kreisleitungen} were still failing to give the FDJ adequate directions.\textsuperscript{214} Even in 1955 some SED members called for the FDGB to be neutral.\textsuperscript{215} Meanwhile the DFD’s Mühlhausen leader wanted the party’s support for her organisation to be less obvious,\textsuperscript{216} presumably fearing that it would otherwise never attract the women wary of socialism whom the DFD hoped to address.

The SED’s control mechanisms improved during the 1950s. For instance, in November 1950 the Thuringian secretariat members were each instructed to oversee specific mass organisations’ plans for the ‘DSF month’.\textsuperscript{217} Practically, however, such measures only ensured that the mass organisations developed no alternative political line. The organisations still failed to develop significant extra enthusiasm and support for the SED’s objectives. Reports from the mid-1950s suggest that this failure was closely linked to the SED’s own continuing weaknesses in this period, not least some comrades’ refusal to assume responsibilities in the mass organisations.\textsuperscript{218} A 1956 inspection noted that the mass organisations’:

\begin{quote}

\textbf{great task in developing a socialist consciousness in the workers and in winning over the working class, the middle classes and in particular young people [...] has not been fulfilled in \textit{Kreis} Apolda.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{213} SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.72/49 der Sekretariatssitzung am 19.12.1949’, LPA, IV/L/2/3-037.
\textsuperscript{215} ‘Einschatzung der Lage in der Partei...’ undated [1955?], ThHStAW, Vs/St 656, fol 89.
\textsuperscript{216} ‘Protokoll Nr.60/49 der Sekretariatssitzung des Landesvorstandes am 2. Nov. 1949’, LPA, IV/L/2/3-037.
\textsuperscript{217} ‘Protokoll Nr.47 über die Sitzung des Sekretariats der Landesleitung SED Thüringen am 16. November 1950’, p.15, LPA, IV/L/2/3-048.
\textsuperscript{218} 1955[?] report (note 215), fol 89.
The Apolda SED was proving incapable of directing the FDGB and FDJ. It was noted that the NF’s district committee meetings were not even attended by all its SED members. 219

However, by the 1960s the SED’s organisational efficiency finally and significantly improved. The leading comrades in each mass organisation met regularly to receive instructions for their political work with the masses, and systematically reported back to the SED Kreis- or Bezirksleitung on the success or otherwise of recent activities and potential problems in societal attitudes. In the 1960s the mass organisations complained only rarely about lacking SED support. 220

How successful were the mass organisations in taking the SED’s message to the apolitical masses? Statistically, the permeation of society varied between organisations, and in some cases did not rise dramatically after an initial period of construction and growth. For instance, the Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands (‘Democratic Women’s League of Germany’, DFD), organised 8.1% of Thuringia’s women by 1950, a figure which rose to only around 15% of adult women (77,600 members) by 1967. 221

Though the DSF grew substantially (from 144,522 Thuringian members in late 1949 to 207,600 in Bezirk Erfurt alone by 1957), 222 the organisation still numbered only 10-11% of the population in most districts among its membership by the early 1960s. 223 The FDJ, meanwhile, claimed to represent 57.1% of the region’s under-25s in 1950, and

220 For meetings of this type, see, e.g., LPA, IV/5 01/167. Only problems with the NF are reported in the extensive 17 November 1961 Bad Langensalza report (note 200).
221 SED LL, ‘Protokoll Nr.34/50 der Sekretariatssitzung’, 3 August 1950, p.4, LPA, IV/L/2/3-045. The SBZ-Handbuch gives the proportion as only 6.4% on 1 January 1950 (p.710); SED BL, ‘Vorlage für das Politibüro des Zentralkomitees’, 5 October 1967, Appendix 3, ThHStAW, Vs/St 900.
223 DSF BV, ‘Erläuterungen zum statistischen Vergleich’, 15 August 1962, ibid, fol 244.
48.4% (96,749 members) in 1967,\textsuperscript{224} around two thirds of Bezirk Erfurt's working age population (470,000 members) belonged to the FDGB by the same year.\textsuperscript{225}

The size of the two largest mass organisations, the FDGB and FDJ, reflect the importance attached by the SED to workers and young people respectively. However, although the membership figures for some 'mass' organisations were relatively small, their importance lay in organising significant numbers who otherwise remained beyond the SED's influence. This was already clear in 1950 when 73% of DFD members belonged to no political party. However, as a further 22.7% were SED members, the organisation was clearly under the party's control.\textsuperscript{226} Similarly, of the 446 delegates to the FDJ's 1963 Bezirk conference, 297 were SED members or candidates. Only eleven belonged to other parties. 384 were FDGB members and therefore also subject to the SED's influence elsewhere. All those proposed for election to the FDJ's Bezirk organs were duly elected.\textsuperscript{227} On special occasions the mass organisations could be deployed for extra mass agitation. For instance, 41,863 people attended the DSF's 1965 events to celebrate Lithuanian culture, and that year's election campaign brought many new members.\textsuperscript{228}

However, it is doubtful that the mass organisations were able to mould popular attitudes significantly, despite such impressive statistics. Space prevents a detailed analysis of the mass organisations' effectiveness here, but the reports of general apathy or opposition to developments during the 1950s and 1960s, discussed in the following chapters, suggest that they generally failed in their allotted task. Many people became members merely to


\textsuperscript{225} 5 October 1967 report (note 221).

\textsuperscript{226} 3 August 1950 minutes (note 221), p.4.

\textsuperscript{227} 'Information [...] über die Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz der Freien Deutschen Jugend...', 15 May 1963, and 'Wahlen der FDJ', 31 May 1963, LPA, BIV/2/15-733. However, there were still too few SED members in certain FDJ Kreisleistungen in 1966: FDJ BL, 'Über die politisch-ideologische und organisatorische Festigung der Organisation...', undated [1966?], appendix, ibid.

\textsuperscript{228} 'Arbeit des Bezirksvorstandes der Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft...', 18 November 1965, ibid.
display a token symbol of identity with the state, despite inward apathy. That citizens failed to take their membership seriously is, for instance, apparent from DSF figures, which show that only 57% of members paid their dues during 1957. Similarly, in eight Kreise, fewer than 50% of local groups held the meetings scheduled for October 1960 (a mere 8% in Worbis), and average attendance was merely 30%, reflecting extremely low turnouts in rural areas. Such statistics suggest that the local leaders responsible for organising such events were as apathetic as the general membership.

Though the organisations' functionaries understood their role by the 1960s, they were still failing to achieve ideological results with their memberships. Even in 1963 not all FDGB members understood the 'role of the union in the building of socialism'. Numerous union members complained that the FDGB did not fight the government for workers' rights, and that everything was decided by functionaries who acted as they pleased. The union was also failing in its 'transmission' function of winning workers' support for new economic measures and productivity initiatives. Similarly, DSF members remained unconvinced of the socialist system's superiority and asked why living standards were so much lower in the USSR than the USA.

A recurrent theme in the following chapters is young people's apathy or resistance to the GDR's development. Examples are the necessity of conscription to the National People's Army (NVA) after voluntary enlistment failed to recruit adequate numbers, and the widespread youth cynicism of 1968. Such examples suggest that the FDJ, too, was failing in its tasks, particularly in rural districts. As ever, much depended on the strength of each district leadership. In 1962, for instance, youth involvement in the

229 7 February 1957 report (note 222), fol 84
231 'Zu einigen Fragen...', 27 May 1963, LPA, BIV/2/15-733. On the bloc parties' and mass organisations' role as 'transmission belts' to take the SED's message to a wider population, cf., e.g., Roderick Kulbach and Hermann Weber, Parteien im Blocksystem der DDR: Aufbau und Funktion der LDPD und NDPD (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1969), pp.16-18.
232 18 November 1965 report (note 225).
233 On 1968, see Chapter Ten.
productivity campaign before the SED’s Sixth Party Congress varied from district to district according to the organisational abilities of each FDJ Kreisleitung. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that young people’s ideological awareness was correspondingly greater in districts with high productivity.

1960s reports suggest that in practice the FDJ paid lip service to its political role. At 1966 FDJ election meetings, for instance, there were critical questions about trips to the west, the border regime and the GDR’s industrial pricing policy, but ‘relatively little discussion’ about the slogan ‘The GDR is our state’, ‘too few debates about the personal implications of professing loyalty to the GDR’, nor any ‘systematic arguments against listening to and watching western transmissions’. Instead the organisation concentrated on more tangible tasks, such as improving educational standards and involving young people in economic tasks and increasing productivity. These were areas where concrete results could be recorded, despite complaints about poor living standards. Meanwhile, many FDJ groups neglected or avoided the more difficult political indoctrination of youth, leaving uncertainties about the SED’s leading role. The SED was angry that young people in border regions still wanted to visit western relatives, and blamed the FDJ for not preventing such views. However, the organisation was bound to be weakened if, even in the mid-1960s, not all FDJ leaders yet believed their own arguments in controversial matters such as the FRG and western media, if Heiligenstadt FDJ staff still harboured grave doubts about the unity of the socialist camp, and if most Kreis secretariats were still unclear about the ‘class-based education of children’.

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235 1966[?] report (note 227), pp.5-6.
239 6 December 1962 report (note 234), fols 64-5.
These brief examples of the mass organisations’ activities, and the lengthier discussion of popular opinion in the following chapters, demonstrate that the mass organisations fulfilled only half of their allotted role, namely preventing the development of alternative structures which might have threatened the SED’s hold on political power. This was achieved mainly in the wealth of activities they provided and in the consumption of the administrative and organisational energies of the more active members of society. Furthermore, by the 1960s the SED apparatus had greatly improved its control over the mass organisations’ internal structures and could rely on sufficient numbers of allies within them to maintain its leading role, even though some leading members in practice did not participate. In the DFD, not even all Bezirksvorstand members were active in 1960.241

The mass organisations generally failed to inspire the masses with socialist ideology and thus to secure the SED’s longterm future against the lure of different political avenues once the international climate changed to permit alternatives. In practice the SED had deceived itself by relying on impressive statistics of participation in the mass organisations, while failing to comprehend that these organisations merely permitted most members a form of outward conformity which cost them relatively little to maintain. The discrepancy between statistics of theoretical GDR loyalists, organised within the bloc parties and mass organisations, and the degree of actual support experienced by the SED leadership at times of crisis and in normal years, underlies much of the material in Part Two of this thesis.

PART II

POPULAR OPINION:
THE APOLITICAL MASSES?
Part Two of this thesis discusses the interface between political domination and popular response at various stages of Thuringia's postwar development. Some of the snapshots discussed below concern the political management and popular perceptions of the events traditionally seen as turning points in GDR history, such as the founding of the GDR state in October 1949, the uprising of 17 June 1953 and the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. However, some of the developments with which we shall be concerned in the chapters below have generally received less attention in histories of the GDR. They include the impact of the forcible completion of agricultural collectivisation in 1960, and a discussion of some aspects of GDR society in the mid-1960s between the building of the Berlin Wall and the crisis over Czechoslovakia’s ‘Prague Spring’. Attention is paid not only to popular opinion in the crisis years and in the intervening, more stable periods, but also to the degree to which local personnel in the parties and state administration were willing and able to maintain SED hegemony at these various junctures.

As the following chapters aim to demonstrate, the development of public opinion generally remained fairly constant. Longterm considerations and disenchantment with the realities of everyday life proved as potent in shaping popular attitudes to the GDR as the major political turning points. For the immediately affected local communities, developments such as the final campaign to collectivise agriculture were as important as events of international significance, such as the closure of the GDR’s borders.

However, the widespread perception that the population could do little to change the political framework either domestically or in terms of the international situation ensured that the mass of the population concentrated principally on making the best of their own lives in what were often difficult material situations. One consequence of this was a passive acceptance of the status quo, but another was a general political apathy, born particularly of the difficult conditions and the SBZ/GDR’s political path in the immediate postwar years. These are discussed in the following chapter.
THURINGIA FROM POSTWAR SURVIVAL TO JUNE REVOLT

Thuringians in the postwar framework

While a minority concerned itself with Thuringia's postwar political development, the majority experienced the early years from an entirely different perspective. It is important not to overlook the material conditions which principally determined the masses' perception of life. As this section hopes to demonstrate, these popular perceptions had important ramifications for the rate and degree of political stabilisation. Clear connections were made in the public mind between the material difficulties of postwar life and the actions of the Soviet military authorities and their German favourites, the KPD/SED. Often life-threatening conditions produced political apathy and resentment of Thuringia's new rulers, factors which undermined public confidence in SED rule throughout the GDR period. Peter Florin, the GDR's former United Nations representative, commented in 1991:

Socialism's problem lies in popular trust, a trust that must be constantly renewed. If this doesn't happen, the movement and the goal have failed. At the beginning, in the summer of 1945, there was trust in large parts of the population, even a reserve of trust. But it wasn't used. The party can only make claims which correspond to the truth. If that isn't the case, then the party loses all trust, and that is precisely what happened.¹

The initial collapse of this popular trust occurred in the 1945-1949 period. Though the KPD/SED and the SMAD were not responsible for the harsh conditions, public opinion almost inevitably blamed those currently in power for their current hardships.

A brief discussion of the harsh realities of Thuringian life between 1945 and 1949 may aid an appreciation of the social background of these political consequences. The immediate impact of wartime destruction has already been noted.\(^2\) After the war Thuringians faced severe shortages of food, livestock, fuel and raw materials.\(^3\) As they had largely been spared such conditions during the war, the Soviet takeover must have seemed like a step backwards. The dismantling or sequestering of factories, railway lines and other installations for reparations further diminished economic capacity. Thuringia also had to supply other regions and the SMAD with significant amounts of its industrial and agricultural output. Meanwhile, urgently needed supplies from the western zones were usually inaccessible.\(^4\) Additionally some two million refugees and POWs poured through Thuringia,\(^5\) placing extra demands on the overstretched infrastructure. Some 700,000 'resettlers' remained in Thuringia,\(^6\) and had to be housed, fed, clothed, employed and integrated. Simultaneously the loss of the many thousands of enslaved foreign landworkers caused a labour shortage. Weimar district alone needed 4,500 extra rural hands in June 1945.\(^7\)

Inadequate food supplies, cramped accommodation, even soap shortages, produced disease and epidemic. Typhoid, typhus, diphtheria and tuberculosis were prevalent,\(^8\) killing many and necessitating widespread immunisation campaigns.\(^9\) In the unsettled

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\(^2\) See Chapter 2.
\(^3\) Report by Albu, undated, PRO, FO 1050/105.
\(^5\) *Gutsche, Geschichte der Stadt Erfurt*, p. 475.
\(^8\) 10% of Nordhausen's population had typhus in February 1946: 'Consolidated Report No. 8', 28 February 1946, para. 32, PRO, FO 1050/433.
\(^9\) Herbert Löser, 'Zur Durchsetzung einer neuen, fortschrittlichen Gesundheitspolitik nach 1945 in der Stadt Erfurt und im Land Thüringen', in *Beiträge zur Geschichte Thüringens*, ed by Horst Müller (Erfurt: Museen der Stadt), II (1970), 82-91 (p. 86); figures in Heinz Domeinski, 'Der Aufbau eines demokratischen Gesundheitswesens in Thüringen von 1945 bis zur Gründung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', in *Beiträge zur Geschichte Thüringens*, ed by H. Sieber and others
postwar conditions sexually transmitted diseases proliferated. Perhaps 60% of Mühlhausen women had contracted a venereal disease by mid-1946. Thuringian hospitals were still treating 8,000 VD cases in late 1946, and the infection rate dropped significantly only in 1947. Infant mortality, which reportedly reached 26% in Heiligenstadt in 1945, was still 10% in February 1946. The lack of medical supplies, caused by interzonal trade restrictions, hindered further improvements. Meanwhile, denazification removed many necessary but politically unacceptable doctors, though some experts in essential fields were exempted.

The early months and years saw urgent infrastructural repair work, repeated appeals to secure the harvests, and desperate searches for firewood before winter. Electricity and gas were rationed, and soup kitchens opened. Villagers donated fruit for urban children, and furniture, household equipment, shoes, textiles and money were collected for refugees. Even glass from picture frames was requested to replace damaged windows. The gravity of the situation is apparent from a December 1945 headline: 'We're collecting everything!' Even the KPD's regional head recognised that most Thuringians were still living 'hand to mouth' in December 1945. Though calorie levels were higher than in some SBZ provinces, famine was reported in certain

(Erfurt: SED Bezirksleitung Erfurt/Bezirkskommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte der örtlichen Arbeiterbewegung/Rat des Bezirkes, Abteilung Kultur), IV (1984), 34-94 (pp.46, 61).
11 Consolidated Report No.9, 30 April 1946, p.9, PRO, FO 1050/433.
12 Consolidated Report No.14, 15 November 1946, para 28, PRO, FO 1005/1633; Löser, p.84.
16 See, e.g., TVZ, 26 August 1945, p.1; Thüringer Volks, 6 July 1946, p.1.
18 Hartwig and Wahl, p.22.
20 Hartwig and Wahl, p.22.
21 TVZ, 3 December 1945, p.1.
22 Eggerath, p.298.

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localities, and uncertain, inadequate food supplies characterised the following years. Even the meagre promised rations could not always be supplied in practice. For instance, only children received meat rations in Gera during September 1946, while adults received substitute fish or cheese rations. Meanwhile, Altenburg restaurant diners were required to supply their own potatoes. Many farmers were forced to surrender all their produce, and conditions in the refugee camps were still ‘catastrophic’ in January 1947.

Despite wartime destruction, industrial output increased significantly after the Soviet takeover. 90.8% of Thuringian firms were operating by January 1946, and Erfurt’s output increased by 27.5% between 1946 and 1947, despite setbacks during the harsh winter. Nonetheless, Soviet methods hampered economic reconstruction. Although the SMA was anxious to increase output, one businessman complained that Soviet planning requirements impeded industrialists’ ‘imagination’. ‘Harassed and fearful’ managers estimated production capacity according to SMA promises of raw materials which were frequently not delivered. Dismantled railway lines and vehicle shortages made transporting raw materials ‘practically impossible’. Soviet mismanagement therefore negated Soviet encouragement. Many of the goods produced were initially exported (albeit for payment) to the USSR, rather than benefiting Thuringians.

Even when raw material and food supplies improved, conditions normalised only slowly and setbacks occurred. In 1948/9 wartime rubble still remained in parts of Erfurt.
and, despite Soviet decrees and municipal ordinances, in Weimar, where popular criticism grew. In March 1947 paper supplies became so short that even the SED’s Thuringian newspaper was reduced to a single sheet, with no publication on Mondays. More seriously, 1948 saw an abdominal typhus epidemic in Erfurt due to inadequately pasteurised milk.\textsuperscript{32}

Against the background of these harsh conditions, four strands of popular response crystallised: anti-Soviet feeling, anti-SED feeling, political apathy, and resistance to the early socialisation policies. These are dealt with in turn below.

First, the Red Army did much to shape public perceptions in these early years. GDR histories presented the Soviet liberators as anxious to rebuild, ensure food supplies and restore normality.\textsuperscript{33} Even post-1989 memoirs are not exclusively damning, recalling, for instance, the sometimes farcical rather than barbaric nature of Soviet rule, under which pictures of Stalin had to be reverently removed from newspapers before they could be used for scrap.\textsuperscript{34}

Nonetheless, the occupiers quickly made themselves unpopular. For instance, they requisitioned Weimar’s one remaining hospital on entering the town, leading to births on the streets and deaths.\textsuperscript{35} Soviet soldiers also committed numerous, often violent crimes, notably armed robbery, assault and rape. By April 1946 the Nordhausen district prosecutor’s office alone had some 80 cases outstanding from the previous few months.\textsuperscript{36} Individual soldiers regularly ‘requisitioned’ food supplies,\textsuperscript{37} despite signs

\textsuperscript{32} Food supplies stabilised by mid-1947: Günther and Wallraf, pp.679-681, 684, 689; Gutsche, p.497; Domeinski, p.45.
\textsuperscript{34} Klaus Schmölting, ‘Artern 1945: Als die Russen kamen’, \textit{Aratora}, 2 (1992), 85-88.
\textsuperscript{35} ‘Bericht an die Bezirksleitung der K.P.D...’, 15 July 1945, ThHStAW, Mdl 273, fol 15.
\textsuperscript{36} See various reports from throughout Thuringia, ThHStAW, ObLW 12 and ObLW 13, especially Nordhausen report of 17 April 1946, ObLW 13, fol 21.
placed in shops on the commandant’s orders warning soldiers against such illegal requisitions. On occasion non-compliant Germans were killed or injured. Soviet demands sometimes jeopardised adequate supplies to the local population. Even German policemen were forced to surrender bicycles and motorcycles, and were threatened with guns. There were numerous reports of rape, with alcohol often a contributory factor. Although not every complaint was justified on further investigation, the Soviets’ plunder and rape convinced many Thuringians that allied policy was the destruction not merely of nazism, but of Germany herself. Deep distrust grew in the very working class circles upon which the future political course depended. One British officer reported:

From every side I received evidence of their [Germans’] hatred for and fear of the Russians. They regard no woman as safe if living in a Russian area and repeated stories of assault and rape are circulated among them and believed wholeheartedly.

Rape and pillage were not even temporary features resulting from battle fatigue, as the Soviet troops who occupied Thuringia had been at peace for two months by July 1945. Rapes occurred even years later, and harassment of women was still apparent in late 1949.

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37 Cf. e.g. an untitled police report signed ‘Schröder, Obwm’, probably September 1946, ThHStAW, Landrat Worbis 96.
39 Notes of December 1945, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 18, fol 376, 381.
40 Cf. e.g. an untitled police report (note 37), Kreispolizeidirektion Worbis-Heiligenstadt, ‘Übergriffe russischer Soldaten’, 7 October 1946, ThHStAW, Landrat Worbis 96.
42 Kreispolizei Eichsfeld, ‘Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht’, 30 November 1945, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 386, fol 84.
44 Report by J.F. Christie, 4 August 1945, p.2, PRO, FO 1049/75.
45 15 July 1945 report (note 35).
46 Report by J.R. Little, 3 July 1945, p.2, PRO, FO 1049/68.
Unwarranted arrests by the SMA and particularly the NKVD caused further unrest. Interior Minister Ernst Busse complained to the SMA’s Kolesnitschenko about NKVD arbitrariness in December 1945, but even in 1948 the Red Army could not intervene to reverse NKVD actions, and distanced itself from them. Gallingly, some were imprisoned in Buchenwald alongside ex-nazis and political prisoners for no apparent reason except general intimidation of the population. As Ministerpräsident, Werner Eggerath complained in June 1947 that men working near the camp were threatened with arrest if they approached again. Some arrests resulted merely from Soviet mistakes or flimsy denunciations by Germans. In the first days of occupation, minor acts of resistance against Soviet troops could result in serious reprisals for an entire village. In Küllstedt local youths caused a disturbance on 9 July 1945 after Soviet soldiers tried to buy scarce food supplies. 32 men were arrested, of whom seven were shot and nine transported to the USSR. The NKVD compounded problems by intervening in numerous cases to protect Russians who had committed crimes or corrupt German officials appointed by the SMA. Consequently, confidence in the justice system collapsed. Considering these arbitrary actions and earlier nazi propaganda, many feared young people would be arrested and deported to Russia. The extraction of reparations led to much additional bitterness.

Unfavourable comparison with the Americans was quick; optimistic rumours quickly spread that the English would soon replace the Russians. The KPD publicly denied

48 Letter from Busse to SMATH, 11 December 1945, ThHStAW, BdMP 645, fol 325.
51 ThHStAW, BdMP 647, fol 226.
53 Siebert, pp.87-89.
56 ‚Was sagt die Bevölkerung zur Roten Armee...?’, undated [mid-1945?], ThHStAW, MdI 273, fol 20.
any change of occupying power in September 1945,^7 but despite a Thuringian 'Law Against Rumour Mongering' of 20 December 1945,^8 similar rumours persisted for years. This was one of many examples of wishful thinking: any positive rumour was seized on and exaggerated in the hope that deliverance from the arduous postwar situation was close. Even in late 1949, Meiningen farmers delayed their produce deliveries because of rumours that the Soviets would soon leave and take the harvest with them, before being replaced by the Americans. Such rumours were widespread and persistent, and repeated similar disruption four years earlier.59

From its inception the KPD's Thüringer Volkszeitung (TVZ) tried to reverse the trend with laudatory articles about the USSR and favourable reports of Soviet POW camps. Although some viewed Soviet occupation as a necessary consequence of the lost war,^0 rapes, thefts, reparations demands, economic mismanagement and Soviet soldiers' stupidity or arrogance were frequent enough to provoke caution or rejection of the Soviets in large sections of the population.^1 Significantly, workers at the prestigious, though largely dismantled, Zeiss and Schott works in Jena staged a 'go slow' in protest at the production quotas imposed by the representatives of the supposed motherland of the international proletariat.52 Even loyal trade unionist functionaries noted many workers' prejudices against the USSR.53 Such attitudes militated against a revival of a popular socialist internationalist movement. Against this background, and often ignorant of conditions elsewhere in Germany, Thuringians believed their treatment to be particularly harsh. A British observer noted: 'Despite the recent cuts in the British Zone,

57 TVZ, 7 and 18 September 1945.
58 Regierungsblatt für das Land Thüringen, Teil I: Gesetzesammlung, 1946, iii-xv, LPA, V/6/5-048.
59 Kreisrat Meiningen, 'Informationsbericht über die Stimmung auf dem Lande... ', 3 September 1949, and similar reports from Nordhausen, ThHStAW, Afl 87; 'Die russische Besatzungsmacht bleibt. Schluß mit den Gerüchten... ', TVZ, 7 September 1945, p.1.
61 Numerous reports, e.g., Kreispolizei Eichsfeld, 'Lage-Tätigkeitsbericht', 6 November 1945, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 386, fol 61; Oberstaatsanwalt Rudolstadt, 'Politischer Stimmungsbericht', 8 April 1946, ThHStAW, ObLW 12; MdI, 'Bericht Nr.2', 12 August 1949, ThHStAW, MdI 69, fol 7.
63 Willy Gienger, 'Die Jugend hungerte nach Brot und Wissen', in Aufbruch in unsere Zeit, ed. by Erwin Lehmann and others (Berlin: Tribüne Verlag, 1975), pp.79-84 (pp.80-1).
people still believe that the ration scale in the Russian Zone is far less. The Soviets only enjoyed genuine widespread support when they proposed that all occupying troops should leave Germany.

By 1947, with the shock of the nazi collapse receding, some Thuringians voiced the opinion that the ‘Russian rabble’ was exploiting Germans and should be thrown out. In this context, comments that ‘we are already Russian’ were hardly complimentary.

Early reports about the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF) also reflect the anti-Soviet opinion which grew during the late 1940s. Gotha officials felt that rising DSF membership figures hardly reflected true friendship to the USSR, which was lacking in the town. These figures instead underlined the population’s growing realisation of the societal and career advantages inherent in joining the mass organisations. While Gotha functionaries assumed Goebbels’ propaganda was responsible for persistent anti-Soviet sentiment, Mühlhausen officials noted more credible reasons:

The man in the street is saying “He [the Russian] should first give us more to eat, then there’ll be friendship!”

Even SED members hesitated about DSF membership, citing relatives in Soviet internment or clashes with Russian soldiers in 1945/46. Clearly, the occupation power’s misdeeds had implications for popular acceptance of the emerging political order, often perceived as a punishment for losing the war. TVZ reminders that naziism, not communism, had caused Germany’s catastrophe were mainly ineffective.

The second strand of popular response, anti-KPD/SED attitudes, existed both independently and as a product of anti-Soviet opinion, as the population closely identified the KPD, and later the SED, with the SMA. The KPD/SED’s high profile in

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64 30 April 1946 report (note 11), p.9.
65 SED LV, ‘Zur Information Nr.88’, 11 June 1948, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 19, fol 256.
government and the party’s close working links to the SMA ensured the public quickly related grievances of all kinds to communist rule, as for instance when inspectors insisted that rural populations surrendered the quotas of agricultural produce agreed by the Thuringian government and the SMATH.68 Internally, the SED leadership realised that its poor standing during 1947 and 1948 resulted from anti-SED propaganda and, more crucially, inadequate food supplies. (When a food crisis hit Gera, for instance, the SED was automatically blamed.69) In Weimar the SED was called the ‘Russian party’ and its newspaper a ‘communist paper’ whose one-sided reports were disbelieved.70

As the group hit worst by the material difficulties and shortages, the working class in particular lacked confidence in the party which claimed to be their own. Price rises and low pay naturally hit working class morale badly, while events such as the FDGB festival in Eisenach, where functionaries feasted despite the scarcity of food supplies, caused indignation.71 A comrade visiting from Berlin noted the ironic tragedy that ‘we come from the working class [...] and we are largely unpopular among the workers’.72 Anti-SED feeling was such that activists at an Arnstadt conference in December 1948 were denounced as ‘Russian lackeys’ by their workmates, and screws were thrown.73 Similarly, many Erfurt firms lacked SED groups as workers refused to join a party which was blamed for all problems.74 The party’s ideological priorities in the late 1940s distracted its leaders from practical problems, with consequences for popular support. Even Eggerath concluded that the relatively poor 1949 election results reflected the

68 Hapstedt police, ‘Situationsbericht’, 18 November 1947, ThHStAW, BdMP 271/34, fol 123.
69 SED LV, ‘Zur Information Nr.91’, 15 June 1948, ThHStAW, Mdl/5, 19, fol 265.
72 Protokoll über die Polizeileitertagung in Tabarz am 11. und 12.10.1947, ThHStAW, Mdl/5, 19, fols 178, 185.
74 SED LV, ‘Zur Information Nr.87’, 11 June 1948, p.3, ThHStAW, Mdl/5, 19, fol 254.
party’s ignorance of “the questions which move the masses”. A further report noted that comrades were ‘not listening to the masses at all’.

By the time the GDR was founded, support for the SED was severely lacking. Although the SED’s standing among its key support group, workers, was ‘rising’, Greiz observers noted that:

The entire population disapproved of the party’s measures. [...] Among workers, the party’s standing is only rising insofar as they are supplied with material goods.

The intelligentsia were still sceptical and the ‘petit-bourgeoisie’ ‘hardly recognised the party’s work’. In Schleiz they apparently viewed the SED as their class’s ‘gravedigger’. Farmers, the party’s main target group in 1945, mainly judged the SED sceptically or with reserve. Attitudes to the state administration were also influenced by living standards or incidences of corruption.

Thirdly, alongside widespread rejection of the Red Army and the SED was the ultimately more potent phenomenon of political apathy. Preoccupation with daily survival and natural political scepticism following the collapse of nazism made general passivity understandable. However, the KPD/SED’s aspirations required popular enthusiasm and revolutionary spirit, not apathy. The TVZ’s triumphal optimism during the KPD/SPD merger and the 1946 elections was greatly at odds with popular sentiment, which cared little for politics and more for material issues and personal needs. Even at the culmination of the KPD/SPD merger, the Ilmenau public prosecutor’s office noted complete disinterest amongst workers and all other groups. Ironically it was the Gotha office, the scene of the Thuringian merger, which noted that older people in particular:

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77 LPKK, ‘Überblick über den Zustand und die Lage der Partei...’, 8 August 1949, section V, LPA, BIV/2/4-56.
are collapsing under the weight of their cares and can see no other escape from 
the current hardships than suicide.78

People discussed food, coal and clothing rations rather than the political future.79
Though not all negative opinion of the situation was specifically political, the SED and 
SMAD were often heavily criticised. For instance, rumours spread in Jena that 
electricity cuts in September 1946 were a punishment for the town’s relatively low SED 
vote (some 36%),80 and there were inevitably political dimensions to the frequent 
complaints about better supplies for the intelligentsia.81 An old trade unionist remarked 
bitterly:

I’ve been in the union all my life and taken part in one strike after another 
against exploitation. Now we have a workers’ government again, the thanks is 
to finish my retirement starving.82

On occasion, the public showed an uncanny memory for ministerial promises made 
many months earlier which remained unfulfilled.83 Such incidents indicate depleting 
public confidence despite original optimism and faith. Where people felt themselves 
unobserved, as in railway carriages, their conversation became still more negative.84

Almost from the beginning of Soviet occupation and KPD/SED rule the widespread 
non-politically motivated dissent was counterbalanced by the fourth strand of popular 
reaction, active resistance. Authentic ‘werewolf’ activity was rare and there was little 
sign of active nazism, but swastikas, daubed on walls and in schools, quickly became a 
common form of resistance. In Erfurt, young people were still openly wearing Hitler

78 Public prosecutor’s office situation reports of 1945/46, especially Ilmenau, 9 April 1946, and Gotha, 
8 April 1946, ThHStAW, ObLW 12. Most Gera reports stand out for their highly positive reporting of 
popular sentiment, preemitting a style of report which later predominated.
80 Präsidialamt, ‘Gas- und Stromversorgung der Stadt Jena’, 30 September 1946, ThHStAW, MdI 
100, fol 25.
82 15 June 1948 report (note 69), fol 268.
83 Kreisrat Sonneberg, ‘Diskussionen bei Bildungsabenden der SED-Strassenbezirksgruppen...’ 
[August 1949?], ThHStAW, Aft 87.

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Youth insignia in April 1946. Despite rashes of swastikas to coincide with particular events, such as the People's Congress of 1948 and the Thuringian prime minister's visit to Heiligenstadt, most people no longer took nazism seriously as an ideological movement. Instead, swastikas (quicker and easier to daub than the black-red-gold flag which had also been appropriated by the SED) appear to have retained validity as a national symbol to be employed in opposition to foreign rule, whether by the Red Army or the 'Russian party'. As time passed, they were increasingly used negatively against a party which defined itself as 'antifascist' rather than positively to promote the restoration of national socialist rule. This is not to suggest that all nazi symbols used as opposition to SED rule were ideologically value free. Clearly, some citizens still mourned the Third Reich (and did so into the 1950s and beyond), as the appearance in 1949 of a large poster of Hitler bearing the motto 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer' suggests.

The precise nature and degree of opposition within the SBZ/GDR in the late 1940s is hard to establish, not least because some was undoubtedly imported from the western zones. Handpainted CDU posters supporting the deposed Jakob Kaiser, the defacing (by workers) of pictures of SED leaders Otto Grotewohl and Wilhelm Pieck and of the KPD martyr Ernst Thälmann on a train, even the disruption of an Apolda Kreistag meeting by 100 workers angry at plans to rename Viktoriastraße 'Peace Street', are examples of essentially spontaneous responses to particular circumstances. The widespread defacing of SED materials before the 1946 elections clearly reflected the party's poor reputation at a time of food and fuel shortages. Physical attacks on SED members and the derision of pupils in KPD and SPD youth groups probably reflected

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85 Various reports of 1945/46, ThHStAW, ObLW 12; 'Niederschrift über die Inspekteur-Besprechung', 30 April 1946, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 19, fol 26.
86 Worbis police report, 21 January 1948, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 386, fol 287; Kreispolizei Eichsfeld, 'Lage-Tätigkeitsbericht', 6 November 1945, ibid, fol 61.
87 Informationssstelle Gotha, 21 December 1949 report, ThHStAW, Afl 86.
88 Worbis police report, 21 January 1948, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 386, fol 287.
89 MdI, 'Wochenbericht', 1 October 1949, ThHStAW, MdI 69, fol 50.
90 MdI, 'Wochenbericht', 29 October 1949, ibid, fol 57.
91 'Dienstbesprechung mit den Gebietsinspektoren beim 1. Vizepräsidenten', 7 September 1946, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 19, fol 55.
individual frustrations or personal rivalries. However, other incidents suggest more carefully orchestrated opposition to socialism itself. These included the distribution of the West Berlin *Telegraf* in Eisenach, the politically explosive posters which appeared throughout Altenburg in 1946 comparing the FDJ to the Hitler Youth and attacking the FDGB; the apparent bombing of the SED’s Mühlhausen headquarters (not an isolated incident), allegedly the work of SED members; and the many leaflets opposing the People’s Congress during the 1949 election campaign.

Finally, a further widespread form of popular opposition was *Zonen- or Republikflucht*, ‘fleeing the zone/republic’. Figures for this phenomenon between 1945 and 1949 would be difficult to compile, as large numbers passed through and left the SBZ legally during this period. However, the attempts at strong border security even in these early years, and reports of high placed officials and party members heading westward, suggest many Thuringians also left for the western zones in the hope of easier political and economic conditions.

A useful cross section of opinion at the end of the 1945-49 period can be gauged by examining reactions to the GDR’s founding on 7 October 1949. Opinion was split between the three groups which had clearly established themselves since 1945: supporters (the smallest group), opponents and (seemingly a majority) those who had no particular opinion.

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94 ‘Telefonische Durchsage der Polizeidirektion Altenburg’, 4 May 1946, ThHStAW, MdI/5, 18, fol 164.  
96 Eggerath (note 75), fol 111.  
97 E.g., MdI ‘Wochenbericht’, 1 October 1949, ThHStAW, MdI 69, fols 49-50; MdI ‘Wochenbericht’, 22 October 1949, ibid, fol 53.
Supporters consisted of people already involved in the parties or the apparatus, or those on whom the significance behind the creation of two competing German governments was lost and who believed the SED’s assurances that the GDR would strengthen German unity. There were hopes that the despised Russians would disappear, and the economic situation would improve. These opinions reflected wishful thinking in a difficult situation rather than a considered reaction. To encourage positive reactions, the government organised big parades in the major towns, which were remembered in official histories years afterwards. Young people, in particular, were bussed to Berlin to participate in the ‘national’ events. However, some contemporary reports noted disappointing attendances at local events, reflecting the population’s ‘wait and see’ attitude.

More common, however, were the views that a separate East German government would deepen the division, perhaps permanently. Many (perceptively) felt the GDR’s creation was a Soviet measure and that Moscow controlled the government. Some even feared war. A regular criticism was that the new government had not been confirmed by elections in advance, that no elections would be held for a further year, and that the government did not reflect the true spectrum of current political opinion, a subtle way of saying that the SED had lost much ground since the 1946 elections. The SED was widely accused of ‘tactical behaviour’. Gotha students believed the SED could never win elections. Some citizens took a differentiated approach, emphasising their acceptance of the new state but their disapproval of the new government’s policies and their insistence that the GDR should be independent rather than a Soviet puppet state.

99 E.g., SED LV, ‘Stimmen zur provisorischen Regierung’, 14 October 1949, pp.2-3, ibid; RdS Gotha, Politik’, 8 October 1949, ThHStAW, Afl 86.
102 8 and 14 October 1949 reports (note 99); MdI, ‘Wochenbericht’, 26 November 1949, ThHStAW, Mdl 69, fol 77.
Others disapproved of the GDR on principle, but supported the government’s much vaunted peace policies.

The bloc parties’ grassroots were often sceptical or opposed to the new state. While CDU local meetings mainly avoided the issue, scepticism and a ‘flood of negative discussions’ characterised LDPD events, particularly after the SED’s pronouncement that ‘elections are not essential to democracy’. The GDR’s creation highlighted the loyal LDPD leadership’s distance from its more rebellious grassroots. However, some SED members were also confused. An Elxleben SED meeting on 11 October seemingly failed to mention the GDR’s creation. More embarrassingly, various local council celebrations of the GDR’s birth were cancelled because bloc party representatives and some SED members failed to appear. Three CDU members on Gotha council abstained from a resolution welcoming the transfer of powers to the GDR government.

Some concrete opposition also emerged. Opponents generally concealed their opinions, but ‘try to create a negative feeling in the population with malicious comments and jokes’. An oft-repeated crack was that together Grotewohl, Pieck and Ulbricht (respectively the new state’s prime minister, president and deputy prime minister) made ‘GPU’, also the initials of the Soviet secret police. In isolated instances, posters opposing the new state appeared, and the large torchlight procession to mark the GDR’s birth in Gotha was marred by students’ negative comments, leading to one arrest.

However, the most common reported reaction in the reports commissioned to depict popular opinions on the new state, apart from confusion, was indifference. This was

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106 Mdl, ‘Wochenbericht’, 29 October 1949 and 9 December 1949, ThHStAW, Mdl 69, fols 58, 82.
reflected forty years later in an article which complained that regional histories too often overlooked the immediate impact of the GDR’s founding in the localities. In October 1949, the new state’s birth was entirely overshadowed by disappointment over the poor level of potato supplies. Even in January 1950, some Thuringians hardly realised that they now lived in the GDR. Those who did often saw no difference between the young GDR and the Bonn or any previous governments. The political events of October 1949 in Berlin, though later perceived as an historical watershed, mattered little to those still anxious to secure the next day’s meals. Workers, described as ‘incomprehensibly politically immature’ typically commented: ‘I don’t care who’s in charge up there as long as I get more to eat.’ Conversely, those workers who did care about the government’s composition were angered at the inclusion of ‘bourgeois’ bloc party politicians. The prevailing atmosphere among workers was one of scepticism and rejection until the new government achieved concrete successes. Pensioners, those dependent on state benefits and resettlers had even less confidence in the new government. Young people were more usually prepared to involve themselves in the new state, but the many church adherents rejected the GDR government altogether, while private traders hoped (vainly) for better trading conditions.

In conclusion, the 1945-1949 period was essentially characterised by a pervasive ‘feel bad’ factor, caused essentially by extremely harsh material conditions but exacerbated by incompetence and errors by the SMAD and KPD/SED, which cost them much potential political support throughout the population, but particularly among workers, whose ‘class consciousness’ dwindled before the struggle to survive. On 7 October 1949, as the new era dawned, the Thuringian Information Office concluded:

Political clarity among the masses is extremely bad, the ‘stomach question’ controls everything.

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112 ‘Deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaf’, 7 October 1949, ThHStAW, Afl 87.
1953: Act One - Stalin’s death

By 1953 the contours of the GDR’s political life were fairly clearly defined. An election in 1950 and a referendum the following year had been successfully concluded, with the active participation (from whatever motives) of practically the entire population in almost every locality. The celebrations of events such as May Day and SED party congresses were becoming regular rituals, and the SED’s Second Party Conference (1952) had set a clear course for ‘the building of socialism in the GDR’. After the western allies had rejected Stalin’s note proposing German unification in the same year, the GDR’s future seemed more certain. The snapshot of 1953 provides an insight into how the GDR’s population viewed this situation, and to what extent the GDR’s political masters were in control of their state.

While the events surrounding the uprising of 17 June 1953 have been a natural focus for historians, popular reactions to Stalin’s death on 5 March 1953 have received less attention. The death of the GDR’s godfather stood out from the constant succession of political events to which the party hierarchy expected appropriate popular responses. As Stalin was the leading symbol of world socialism, reactions to his death shed light on popular attitudes to socialism itself. The SED recognised this in commissioning special reports during the fortnight following Stalin’s death, and ordering reporters to attend all church services to report on any comments made in sermons.¹¹³

The official responses to Stalin’s death were as grandiose as might be expected in a monarchy on the sovereign’s death. Special newspapers were published, and official buildings flew their flags at half mast. The public was also encouraged to display flags on their homes. On the SED Bezirksleitung’s instructions, the state organs, parties, firms, LPGs and prominent individuals made formal visits to the SKK’s offices to present written expressions of their official sympathy; party executives, local parliaments and blocs held mourning meetings. To mark Stalin’s funeral workers were

¹¹³ These reports are in LPA, BIV/2/23-13.
to participate in mourning processions and mourning assemblies were arranged in all collective and nationalised farms. Guards of honour were mounted at public statues or busts of Stalin, and wreaths laid at Soviet war cemeteries.

Most, but not all, official acts passed smoothly. The bloc parties’ local organisations demonstrated that their loyalty was not yet unequivocal. Despite issuing clear protocol instructions, the SED indignantly noted that the CDU’s Bezirksleitung had not visited the SKK until 7 March, and then only in a joint delegation following a special bloc meeting. The regional LDPD leadership, meanwhile, visited only once and presented no documents. In Erfurt’s local bloc meeting, the LDPD made only a short statement about Stalin’s death, while the CDU and DBD said nothing at all. The LDPD’s local deputy chairman also missed the mourning procession, while a Langensalza CDU court official commented that she would rather sweep the streets than join the DSF to mark Stalin’s passing. Throughout the Bezirk the bloc parties were ‘very restrained’ in their comments, to the SED’s dismay, though it was relieved at similar restraint from the churches, which generally refrained from openly rejoicing, perhaps sensitive of the palpable public shock. Although one sermon claimed that ‘Jesus has chased off the highest devil,’ conversely Heiligenstadt’s two Catholic churches rang their bells to mark the funeral and offered an ‘Our Father’ for Stalin.

The SED was also disappointed at the relatively poor display of flags. Although many private shops were appropriately decorated, HO and Konsum shops were not, despite the SED’s specific instructions to comrades employed there. Most residential accommodation also lacked flags. The SED noted:

We believe that a further improvement in flag decoration would have occurred if all comrades had set an example with their own flats. Weimar Town district

notes on this point that the number of flags in the town suggests the SED has only 500, not 5,000 members [there].

Nonetheless, participation in the special ceremonies and processions was generally high, even in factories and small rural communities. In many towns large halls could not accommodate all who wished to attend the events. A special meeting in Gotha was the biggest local occasion for years. Many events attracted people who otherwise took no part in the GDR’s frenetic mass political activity. In all, 219,870 people (over 35% of the population) flocked to the marches held in the 13 Kreisstädte, with sizeable turnouts even in Catholic Heiligenstadt and Worbis. A further 25,200 marched in smaller communities by 9 March. Some mourners took Stalin’s death very much to heart: one housewife of no party affiliation commented she would rather have lost her father than Stalin. The occasion was, however, marred by the absence of Soviet soldiers from some processions, especially in Nordhausen where Soviet troops played football during the funeral.

Despite the encouraging signs, comparatively few pledges were made to increase production in the major factories ‘relative to the strength of the party organisation and the workforce’. The pledge movement was drying up by 17 March, despite the brief revival encouraged by the timely death of the Czechoslovak president, Klement Gottwald, on 14 March. Though some significant material pledges were recorded, most had been to study Stalin’s works or find new members for the mass organisations. However, in the wake of Stalin’s death, 1066 applications to join the SED were received, though tellingly only 571 to join the DSF, despite the nature of the event.
In the first days following Stalin’s death, there were practically no disturbances and only isolated reported negative comments about the departed leader, though high school pupils were reported to have been less disciplined at the processions, during which they talked. This initial ‘unnatural reserve’ gave way to isolated incidents of protest after about four days. Guards of honour were scorned and sometimes doused in water or earth from flowerpots by schoolchildren, and typed anti-Stalin letters were circulated; an SED man’s window was broken by a catapult, and a woman whose picture had appeared in Das Volk alongside her eulogy to Stalin received a telephone threat.

Children in particular, probably tactlessly repeating what they heard adults saying at home, welcomed Stalin’s death and hoped Adenauer would now bring peace and German unity. Children were also found delivering anti-SED leaflets in Apolda and producing them in Langensalza.

Occasionally people commented openly that they were glad Stalin had ‘croaked’ or repeated NWDR reports that he really died ‘years ago’. Such reports were regularly passed to the MfS. NWDR features about Stalin’s murder of Lenin’s associates after October 1917 were also discussed. More significant, however, were the more widespread views that Stalin’s death would bring policy changes and increase the risk of war as his successors might not achieve as successful a peace policy. Such opinions were heard among both SED members and the general public, who generally perceived Malenkov as a hardliner and speculated about Kremlin power struggles. These reactions not only suggested that the official portrayal of Stalin as a progressive ‘dove’ had found widespread acceptance, but more significantly, as the SED realised, that ‘these people do not recognise the great strength of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union’.

125 10 March 1953 report (note 114); 28 March 1953 report (note 123).
127 12 March 1953 report (note 115); ‘Informationsbericht Nr. 1’ (note 119).
128 Various reports in LPA, BIV/2/23-13, especially 10 March 1953 report (note 114).
Rumours also circulated widely that the GDR’s president, Wilhelm Pieck, who had not attended the Moscow ceremonies, was seriously ill.\textsuperscript{129}

The public’s attention found new focus within a fortnight of Stalin’s death, notably the FRG’s ratification of the Paris Treaties and the poor food situation.\textsuperscript{130} Although there were hardly any hints of the later widespread rejection of Stalin and stalinism (indeed quite the reverse), the public clearly perceived that Stalin’s death had weakened the world communist movement and that no smooth transition had occurred to guarantee the continuation of his policies. Although most citizens conformed to the loyal behaviour patterns expected of them, belief in the scientifically proven, inevitable progression to communism was clearly lacking, and hopes of possible German reunification were reawakened. Some farmers optimistically foresaw the return of capitalism in the USSR.\textsuperscript{131} This clear awareness of potential problems in the leadership of both the USSR and the GDR (Pieck) almost certainly, if subconsciously, encouraged a sense that active opposition to the serious problems of 1952/53 might bear some fruit in a period when communist rule seemed less secure.

1953: Act Two - June uprising

The background to the crisis which did occur just three months after Stalin’s death is well known. Most commentators agree that its roots lay in particular in the implementation of the decisions of the SED’s Second Party Conference (July 1952), which resolved to ‘build socialism in the GDR’,\textsuperscript{132} though one can also see the uprising as the culmination of the frustrations born of poor living conditions since the end of the

\textsuperscript{129} 14 March 1953 report (note 116).
\textsuperscript{130} 28 March 1953 report (note 123), pp.3-4.
\textsuperscript{131} ‘Informationsbericht Nr.1’ (note 119); ‘Bericht Nr.3’ (note 119).
war. The attempt to build socialism was made at the cost of inadequate investment in consumer requirements; an intensified ‘class struggle’ against real and supposed opponents of socialism; reduced social welfare payments; the swift establishment of agricultural cooperatives (LPGs) and the associated food shortages caused by the desertion of many ‘big’ farmers; and ultimately the raising of work quotas, which effectively meant that the ‘workers’ government’ cut workers’ pay. The overall effect of these measures was the worsening of already low living standards and increasing popular resentment of the SED and the Soviet Union, which seemed intent on deepening Germany’s division. None of the Thuringian materials I have seen suggests that the traditional view of the causes of unrest requires a radical re-evaluation. However, local materials do allow further insights into the nature of the uprising, which has proved more controversial. While some historians have classified 17 June as principally a workers’ uprising, others believe it to have been a general revolt which crossed class boundaries. In Bezirk Erfurt, this seems not to have been the case. In terms of the state’s development thereafter, 17 June has been seen as marking both the beginning of the GDR’s ultimate collapse and the date of the state’s effective founding.\textsuperscript{133} As this thesis hopes to demonstrate, neither of these views is accurate.

Despite the deeply ingrained popular frustration, born of material and economic hardship and political rancour, Thuringia, in common with the rest of the GDR, remained peaceful during 1952 and early 1953. When the post-Stalin Soviet government forced the SED and GDR government to implement a U-turn, the ‘New Course’ of 9 June 1953 was initially generally welcomed.\textsuperscript{134} In some quarters there was optimism that great changes were imminent, such as the return of the American


\textsuperscript{134} BdVP, ‘Stimmungsbericht anlässlich des Vorschlag des ZK...’, 12 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fols 188-190.
occupiers and the disbanding of the LPGs. Heiligenstadt women apparently embraced each other in the streets with tears in their eyes as the news was relayed over the town’s public address system. Some of the optimism was fuelled by rumours that Pieck, Ulbricht and Grotewohl were dead or had fled the country. Such rumours were perhaps comparisons with the end of the Third Reich and suggest at least an unconscious comparison of the two regimes in the public mind. There was an initial wave of thanks to the government and party for relieving the population of so many burdens. However, after the initial shock of the changes that had been announced, scepticism emerged that the promises would be kept and thoughts quickly turned to the source of past mistakes. Negative opinions of the government and SED began to dominate. Even an SED group secretary was heard to say that ‘great crimes have been committed’ and that all who had made such great mistakes, including Konrad Adenauer and Wilhelm Pieck, should have to answer before the courts. Various Heiligenstadt comrades felt similarly. However, the greatest immediate impression made upon the public by the reforms of the ‘New Course’ was not the wider political considerations, but more that marmalade and public transport prices had been lowered.

The general history of 17 June 1953 has been often and well sketched and does not require much further rehearsal here. However, the Bezirk Erfurt materials show that events took a somewhat different course in the region than in Berlin, which will be summarised before being subjected to more detailed examination. First, the unrest, mainly but not exclusively in the form of strikes, was not restricted to 17 June 1953, but extended for several days afterwards in some provincial towns. Secondly, however, the level of participation in Bezirk Erfurt was surprisingly low. Only a small minority of the population made any effort to demonstrate its dissatisfaction with the regime, though this was undoubtedly at least partly due to the presence or rumoured presence of Soviet troops (the ‘friends’, in SED parlance). Many areas experienced no unusual

135 BdVP, ‘Stimmungsbericht anläßlich des Vorschlag des ZK... (Nr.3)’, 13 June 1953, ibid, fol 195.
137 Ibid.
disturbances at all. Thirdly, the perception of 17 June 1953 as a major watershed in the GDR's history can, perhaps, be relativised given the surprising speed with which 'normal' life resumed. At least in the provinces, the legend which grew up around 17 June 1953 was far more substantial than the events of June 1953 themselves. These three points can now be clarified.

There were some forewarnings of the unrest to come before 17 June. For instance, at least one strike occurred in Bezirk Erfurt, in the VEB Abus, Gotha, in the night of 11-12 June, over the issue of higher work quotas. There were also isolated incidents such as that in Martinfeld on 16 June when small groups displayed oppositional attitudes and youths swore at two SED members and turned over a party car. However, such incidents were not particularly unusual. The main wave of strikes and demonstrations took its lead from the disturbances in Berlin on 16 June, by which point the Bezirk police was already on full alert. The police noted the influence on local workers of the West Berlin radio station, Rias, which had broadcast details of the Berlin demonstrations on 16 June and news of strikes and further demonstrations the following day. The main sources of unrest on 17 June itself were workers and farmers, the latter group having been particularly badly hurt by SED policies during the previous year. However, strikes occurred at only seven factories in Bezirk Erfurt on 17 June, all of them in Erfurt, Weimar, Eisenach and Sömmerda. Additionally, building workers at Erfurt's Pathological Institute and an FDGB holiday home in Friedrichsroda (Kreis Gotha) struck. The other disturbances consisted of demonstrations, mainly led by farmers and principally designed to release people imprisoned during the 'class struggle', although other specific economic grievances were also raised. These

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141 [BdVP], 'Telefonische Durchsage am 16.6.1953', ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fol 198.
gatherings, which succeeded in releasing some prisoners by force, occurred in four Kreis centres and in two smaller towns, but farmers from some smaller villages marched to the local centres to swell the larger protests. The Mühlhausen demonstration was particularly well attended. Although the farmers’ activities were not so widespread as to require a re-evaluation of Diedrich’s thesis of 17 June 1953 as essentially a workers’ uprising, Bezirk Erfurt’s events do qualify his view that farmers were unable to rise spontaneously and make contact with others. Equally, the interpretation of 17 June as a workers’ uprising does not imply that most workers revolted. The reverse was the case.

Although these strikes and demonstrations were unprecedented in the GDR’s history, on 17 June they remained limited to relatively few centres. On 18 June there were seven strikes, and 19 June six, before the strike movement abated. During this time, strikes broke out in Nordhausen and Gotha factories, but otherwise remained limited to the areas affected on the first day. By 19 June, most of the strikes were centred on Erfurt. Thereafter, no more strikes or demonstrations were reported and an uneasy peace settled, amid rumours that Russian soldiers had, for instance, killed eighty people with machine guns. The police reports may not be entirely comprehensive, as other sources refer to much smaller strikes involving just a few workers, such as that in the technical department of a dentistry clinic in Erfurt. However, after allowing for the fact that some firms were on strike for two or three days, I calculate that a total of only about 32,000 workers struck in Bezirk Erfurt in the days surrounding 17 June 1953. This compares with a working age population of some 850,000, and therefore a strike participation rate of about four percent. A further 10,600 appear to have taken part in disturbances large enough to be classified as demonstrations.

143 BdVP, ‘Blitz-Fernschreiben’, 17 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fols 204-5; 24[?] June 1953 report (note 139); 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fol 593.
144 Diedrich, pp.142, 148.
146 BdVP, ‘Täglicher Bericht…’, 21 June 1953, ibid, fol 269; (same title, same date), ibid, fol 273.
147 KPKK Erfurt-Stadt report (untitled), 24 June 1953, LPA, BIV/2/4-48.
148 26 June 1953 report (note 145), fols 306-9; Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1955, pp.20-1.
Beyond this there were minor incidents which coincided with the larger events but which were not otherwise unusual. Thus a film projectionist in Wolkramshausen claimed he had orders to cover over frames which included shots of Walter Ulbricht, and a Heiligenstadt comrade who defended SED policies had a piece of material tightened in a sling around her neck.149

Another problem area was schools. Although teachers worked normally through the crisis,150 schoolchildren in some districts were excited by the crisis into copycat actions, frequently declaring their own ‘strikes’ or removing pictures of Stalin and SED leaders from classroom walls.151 Presumably expressing their parents’ feelings, there was considerable resistance to Russian lessons among pupils. However, children could be easily manipulated back to compliant behaviour. A Gispersleben Russian teacher responded to a strike call written on her blackboard by keeping her class in after school and discussing their behaviour with them. ‘The children went pale from fear and agitation and promised never to repeat such foolishness.’152 Similarly, when a group of schoolgirls threatened to leave the Young Pioneers, their teacher said they could no longer participate in school sports. The girls remained in the association.153 However, although teachers remained basically loyal and kept order in occasionally riotous situations, many teachers adopted the same ‘wait and see’ approach as much of the rest of the population.154

Overall, only a very small part of the population was directly involved in strikes or demonstrations, though the proportions were clearly far larger and therefore more visible in centres such as Sömmerda and Erfurt. It also emerged that some of the

factories which struck were firms which had been suffering particular difficulties for some time. The Sömmersda firm Rheinmetall, for instance, had lost major orders under the state plan and been forced to lay off thousands of workers, causing much local discontent and severe loss of morale, which boiled over once the Berlin workers had given the lead.\footnote{29 June 1953 report (note 142), fols 541-2.}

However, the statistics of successful strikes and demonstrations should not obscure the many other unsuccessful attempts to launch strikes and mount demonstrations. These failures, and the speed with which the strikes which did break out were brought under control, are testimony to the efficacy of the emergency measures taken to combat the threat to SED rule. Although the SED party organisation had clearly been weak in allowing entire workforces to strike in certain factories, practically all functionaries in the state and party apparatus worked normally during the crisis.\footnote{Various reports in ThHStAW, OI 108.} Their quick responses prevented more strikes breaking out in various firms in Kreis Sondershausen.\footnote{SED Sondershausen, ‘Analyse über die Ereignisse des 17.6. und nach dem 17.6.1953’, undated [November 1953?], LPA, BIV/2/4-48.}

More importantly still, the party could rely on the loyalty of the police force and the state security service to intervene where necessary and restore order.\footnote{This conclusion is also reached by Diedrich, pp.177-8.} This became particularly important in areas such as Weimar, where SED agitators could not dissuade workers from striking.\footnote{29 June 1953 report (note 142), fol 553.} The integrated nature of the state’s response demonstrated a high degree of administrative efficiency. The police actions in particular were carefully coordinated with the state security apparatus, appropriate SED offices and the Soviet commandants, who declared martial law throughout the Bezirk by the morning of 18 June.\footnote{Ibid, fols 559, 563-4; BdVP, ‘SSD-Fernschreiben’, 17 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fol 137.} The Soviets also coordinated with the SED. In Weimar, for instance, the commandant followed the party’s advice about shortening the hours of curfew on 24
June. On 18 June the Bezirk police president also equipped his force with strict powers to prevent threats to the state. They read:

On the instructions of a higher authority, I order:

1. All provocateurs, saboteurs who during the night and today are guilty of an attack on members of the German People’s Police, state functionaries or who remove emblems of the German Democratic Republic (e.g. pictures of Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, Comrade Stalin, other emblems and banners) will be shot without trial in the presence of the masses.

2. Great attention must be taken not to shoot randomly into the masses so that innocent children or women are not hurt. Instead, the culprits should be removed from the crowd with a heavy kick and shot on the spot.

3. The persons arrested during today and yesterday, and who are acknowledged as the main ringleaders, are to be transferred to Erfurt immediately today and shot tomorrow morning.

4. Anyone who physically or by any other means resists arrest by the People’s Police will be shot without trial.

The shoot to kill order was reiterated in a police order of 19 June, according to which anyone resisting arrest during the curfew period should be shot. Interestingly, no police officers objected to this order, although in practice they fulfilled their duties without shooting anyone. Indeed, police officers were reported to have obeyed all orders and no negative reports were made, beyond a recommendation on 25 June that some policemen’s haircuts had appeared sloppy. The KVP major’s concern with this mundane detail is itself a reflection of returning order.

The police and Soviet forces maintained order by two principal methods. First, they were concerned to prevent strikes spreading from one factory to another and therefore prevented workers in a striking factory sending delegations to workers elsewhere calling for support. These attempts involved loyal SED members and police occupying

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telephone exchanges, and police and Soviet tanks appearing at factory gates to prevent workers leaving. Thus, as strikes developed in Erfurt on 19 June, two factories were ‘secured by three lorries of friends’ and it was decided to send in tanks unless calm was quickly restored in the town. Similarly, when striking miners from the Mansfeld region in Kreis Halle returned to their Eichsfeld homes, great efforts were made to prevent them inciting the local population to similar action. In Apolda, Soviet troops dispersed a crowd which had spontaneously gathered to welcome home striking workers from the nearby Zeiss works in Jena. The local authorities were organised enough to move the bus stop where the Jena workers were expected away from the district SED headquarters. Where necessary, GDR police and/or Soviet soldiers occupied entire areas. In Weimar, Soviet forces secured all public buildings, and on 21 June the police occupied all important railway stations to avoid a rumoured railway strike. To intimidate the general population, heavy patrols were mounted. In Erfurt every main street and important junction was manned, and every vehicle and pedestrian was checked. The intervention of Soviet troops proved decisive in dispersing a crowd of 3,000 who had gathered in the centre of Mühlhausen hoping to force the release of prisoners and who had already compelled armed German police to retreat. Thus, at least in Bezirk Erfurt, the actions of Soviet troops were not quite as described by Arnulf Baring. Rather than intervening once a strike or demonstration was over, they were essentially used to intimidate workforces or crowds into ceasing their activities.

The second significant method was to remove the main ringleaders behind the strikes and demonstrations. Plain clothes police and state security officials mixed with demonstrators at strike meetings to identify those concerned. However, those arrested

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165 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fol 560.  
166 BdVP, 'Lagebericht', 19 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fol 236.  
167 19 June 1953 report (note 140).  
168 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fols 547-8.  
169 Ibid, fols 555, 574.  
170 Ibid, fol 563.  
171 Ibid, fol 547.  
were mainly taken during the night to avoid launching any major offensive in front of the ringleaders' colleagues, who only noticed their absence the following day. This strategy prevented the strike movement from forming any coherent leadership as an alternative to the SED and FDGB leaders.

As other commentators have noted, the lack of a clear leadership severely weakened the strike movement. Where strike committees existed, they emerged fairly spontaneously and were unequal to the police and state security tactics outlined above. The arrests ensured that the committees collapsed as quickly as they had formed. Another weakness was clearly that workers and farmers failed to unite in opposition to SED rule, just as they had failed to unite to establish it in the mid-1940s. Thus, Bezirk Erfurt materials do not corroborate Manfred Hagen's view that general political demands proliferated because a solidarity developed between the different classes which overcame grievances specific to each.

Most of those who participated in the strikes, spoke at meetings or joined strike committees were ordinary workers. However, among them were a certain number of SED members. Thus it was an SED man who tore down the red flag at the SED headquarters in Apolda during a demonstration on 17 June. Elsewhere some SED trustees and rank and file members were influential in causing strikes or were elected to strike committees, as in various Erfurt plants where five members emerged as 'provocateurs'. Similarly, SED members had been among those trying (unsuccessfully) to incite strikes in Kreis Sondershausen. In all, 89 members were

173 Ibid, fols 553-6, 561.
175 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fol 546.
177 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fol 549.
178 SED Erfurt-West, 'Zwischenbericht an die Bezirksparteikontrollkommission', 22 June 1953, LPA, BIV/2/4-48.
179 November 1953[?] report (note 157).
expelled from the party by November 1953 in connection with their actions in mid-June. A further 163 members left the GDR without the party’s permission in the three months after 17 June. However, as this represented merely around 0.3% of the SED’s membership in Bezirk Erfurt, the importance of these figures should not be overstated. However, there were larger numbers of SED members who had not displayed outward opposition, but who had also not rallied to the party in its hour of need. Thus of the 22 ‘most trustworthy and aware’ comrades asked to protect buildings in central Erfurt on 21 June, only 17 appeared, and five of these wore no party badge. Similarly, one SED member employed in the city administration who refused to protect buildings said he felt ‘not in the least connected with the party and the working class’. By the autumn a thorough investigation was underway into members’ actions during the June crisis. By this point it was clear that local party organisations were failing to take concerted action against disloyal members. Thus the party organisation in Erfurt’s Optima plant had still not uncovered the ‘agents and saboteurs’ behind the strike and had launched only one party trial. The local party was clearly protecting its own. Fewer than half the members in the firm attended a meeting to discuss this one case, and not all of these voted to expel the member concerned. The company had also failed to sack the man. The party inspection commission concluded:

The party leaderships are shying away, there are strong tendencies of retreat and appeasement, a characteristic of social democracy, in some party leaderships.

17 June therefore had the effect of unmasking the serious ideological deficiencies within the SED which had partly accounted for the party’s loss of control in some areas.

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There were individual cases of resignations from the party around the region in response to the government’s admission of mistakes, and at least one where party members commented that the SED should ‘build a German communism which had nothing in common with the Russian communism’. Not only had some members failed to support the leadership unequivocally during the crisis, or had expressed doubts about certain aspects of party policy (such as the symbolic importance of wearing party badges, questioned by some teachers), but even after order had been restored some local party organisations had failed to discipline members who had not consistently toed the official line. It is unlikely that the investigation teams discovered the full extent of cases where party groups had failed to act against members harbouring doubts about the leadership’s political line. The available evidence must place serious doubt on the degree of ideological commitment of the SED’s rank and file. We can conclude that alongside the many committed socialists were many others who used their party membership for personal advantage. Most of these did not unmask themselves during the crisis, or at most left their party badges at home while awaiting the outcome. As 17 June effectively changed nothing, these less committed members were then able to continue as though nothing had happened. However, it is also fair to conclude that there were at least enough loyal SED members, from whatever motivation, to ensure that the party organisation did not disintegrate.

Comments in a Weimar report support these conclusions. The district party investigation commission noted that comrades had mainly supported the party and actively guarded ‘our achievements’ in the localities. ‘However, there are also some comrades who are wavering or have capitulated.’ Typically their comments included doubts that Pieck would ever return and assertions that only the Red Army had saved the Central Committee. ‘It is evident that none of these comrades has ever acted as a comrade, and that they are only comrades because of their position.’ Nonetheless, ‘it

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183 Various reports in ibid.
must be said that the comrades in the MTS and the state apparatus have conducted themselves well as comrades, even if passively in some cases.  

In defining the June crisis, attention must also be paid to the slogans used during the strikes and demonstrations. Initially, economic demands predominated, but these were quickly linked to and overtaken by political points. The police recorded a variety of slogans on 17 June. At this stage, most concerned economic hardships or local grievances and included calls to reduce work quotas to 1952 levels, reinstate sacked and imprisoned workers and farmers, raise pensions and reduce the levels of produce farmers were expected to deliver to the state. However, a smaller number of political slogans were also in evidence on 17 June. Most frequently these included calls to remove the government and hold free elections throughout Germany, and to release all prisoners of war. There were also incidences of political symbols, such as SED headquarters, coming under attack. The following day’s unrest was accompanied by more political slogans, in particular as a response to the arrests of the previous day and the deaths of 16 workers during the unrest in Berlin. By 19 June, political demands were clearly dominant. However, with the exception of calls for free elections across Germany, the political demands were far vaguer than the economic grievances.

No group emerged with a specific action plan, and there was no doubt that Germany’s political future still depended on the four allies. As the west had conspicuously failed to intervene, as the SED and its Soviet supporters had clearly succeeded in restoring order, and as the GDR’s political system provided no outlet for undesirable calls for radical change, there was no direction for the population’s political demands to take after 20 June when the strike movement was broken. Although these political demands were undoubtedly shared by a large proportion of Thuringians, it is worth restating here that

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187 BdVP, 'Blitz-Fernschreiben', 17 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fols 204-5.
188 29 June 1953 report (note 142), fols 549-550.
189 BdVP, 'Blitz-Fernschreiben', 18 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fols 224-5.
190 BdVP, 'Analyse der Ereignisse...', 20 June 1953, ibid, fol 263.
only a minority of the population had positively stated them, even given the opportunity of 17 June granted by the demonstrators in Berlin. The dominant apolitical nature of public opinion had persisted even through this crisis, and increasingly resumed once order had clearly been restored. While Hagen’s comment that ‘hundreds of thousands’ had abandoned the ‘pretence of harmony’ on 17 June may be accurate if the GDR is seen as a whole, his reminder that some people remained entirely unaffected by these events is true of much of Bezirk Erfurt.191

Nonetheless, the peace was uneasy as normality returned. The rural population was reported to be extremely reserved and waiting to see how things would develop. Many would not be satisfied before seeing the concrete results of the government’s promises. Few volunteered to discuss the political interpretation of the recent unrest in public meetings, and party and state propagandists found few interlocutors in the factories they visited.192 Scepticism about the official SED explanation of 17 June as a western imperialist plot to overthrow the GDR was reflected in a refusal to regard American care packets for GDR citizens as a means of preparing a new attack.193 In isolated cases, workforces were still making economic and political demands and threatening strikes in July. This was notably the case in the Jena Zeiss works (Bezirk Gera), where a union meeting of 7 July called for everything from better quality shoes to free elections and German unity.194 Public calls for the government to resign continued into July. Sometimes they came from minor functionaries such as parish council chairmen.195 More generally, the population used public meetings to complain about concrete material problems rather than abstract political issues. Thus discussions concerned continuing shortages, specific local power abuses and the restrictions about travel into

191 Hagen, pp.200, 202.
194 ‘Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben der BdVP Gera Nr.178 vom 10.7.53...’, ThHStAW, Mdl/20, 66, fol 318.
the border areas, which remained in force. The population reportedly expressed its mistrust of the government and hoped to retain this new freedom to discuss and criticise and that there would be no new ‘black lists’.

However, simultaneously the population also resumed the compliant patterns of normal life. The Nationale Front’s house and village community elections continued apace and local groups elaborated plans to improve local amenities and in some cases to ‘increase vigilance’ lest any new ‘putsch attempts’ occur. Within a week of staging an all out strike, workers at the Sömmerda ‘Rheinmetall’ plant were persuaded to issue a statement welcoming the Central Committee’s latest decisions. Similarly, 20,000 people gathered in Erfurt on 13 August to hear the Interior Minister, Willi Stoph, and unanimously endorsed a resolution calling for a peace treaty with Germany. By mid-August, the bulk of discussion again centred on material problems, such as fuel and electricity shortages and issues such as the pay differentials between workers in private firms and the better paid VEBs. By the following year, some 96% of Bezirk Erfurt’s population was again prepared to vote for the candidates of the Nationale Front in the Volkskammer elections, demonstrating that most people were as prepared to conform to the political behaviour expected of them as before 17 June.

What conclusions can be drawn from the June 1953 crisis? Clearly, Thuringians did have an interest in political change, even if this interest was actively expressed and acted upon by only a minority. However, it took a crisis of material welfare to unleash even this relatively minor level of public unrest. The speed with which normality resumed suggests that the unrest of mid-June was merely an interruption of an

200 15 August 1953 report (note 193), fols 253-4.
201 Chronik zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung im Bezirk Erfurt 1952 bis 1961, p.84.
underlying preparedness at least to tolerate the status quo in the absence of any viable alternatives. That there were no viable alternatives had been proven by the success of German authorities (the police and/or the SED) in preventing the expression of a potentially far greater degree of open opposition, and by the effectiveness of Soviet troops in intimidating the crowds into dispersing and the strikers to resume work. Although numerous SED members demonstrated loyalty to the workers they believed they should be representing rather than to the national leadership, and although many others behaved cautiously while waiting to see which side would gain the upper hand, with few, parochial, exceptions the party and state apparatus at no time seemed in danger of disintegrating. Clearly, the party did temporarily lose control of public order and require Soviet assistance to restore its hegemony in some districts. However, the effectiveness of the GDR police and state security services bear particular testimony to the degree of popular control achieved by German authorities under the SED’s direction within eight years of the end of the war. In this sense, 17 June 1953 did not mark the GDR’s ‘true founding’: the state was already functioning relatively securely.202

Although 17 June clearly gave the SED leadership a fright, prompting the party to tighten control and ensure that basic living standards were maintained, and although 17 June was often referred to in future years as a symbol of the population’s potential power, its historiographical status as a watershed in GDR history seems overstated when viewed from a regional perspective. Thuringians did not initiate unrest before events began in Berlin, and most Thuringians had no direct experience of conflict with the authorities even during the crisis. Although trust in the SED was further undermined,203 for most people it was the photographic images of repression in Berlin which remained potent as a denial of the regime’s avowed humanitarian aims, rather than any personal experience. In this sense, those workers who raised the spectre of 17 June when disgruntled in later years, particularly in 1956, were merely seizing a symbol. But their threats of a repeat performance were bluster. 17 June had been more of a

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202 Cf. the title of Mitter’s article (note 133).
203 Cf. Hagen, p.204.
failure for the population than the government, and all the structures of power remained intact.

The authorities’ response to 17 June merely confirmed a truth which had been apparent since the end of the war: Germany was under foreign occupation, and there were no alternatives. In the sense that anti-Soviet attitudes had been prevalent since before 1945, 17 June changed little. As the disturbances had merely proved what was already obvious, and as the authorities seemed keen to resume the normal round of everyday life while making efforts to provide better living standards, most people regarded a return to an apolitical life of making the best of things as the most favourable option, at least until such time as the opportunity for change again seemed to be within reach. However, in later years the population was not so quick to take a lead from events elsewhere as in 1953. This became particularly apparent when the GDR remained mainly peaceful in 1956, despite the opportunity to mimic the uprising which had begun in Hungary. Reactions to this next landmark in postwar European history are the subject of the following chapter.
1956: Destalinisation and the Hungarian example

While 1953 clearly marked a serious challenge for the SED, it was one which the party overcame. As noted in the previous chapter, life returned to normal fairly quickly, consisting in the following years of a combination of generally poor living standards which were increasingly falling behind those achieved in West Germany, and outwardly conformist behaviour. Within this context, 1956 merits attention as a year which brought hitherto unprecedented international and ideological tensions. The CPSU's hesitant destalinisation and the more pragmatic ideological approach introduced at the 20th Party Congress in February created confusion within the SED and encouraged political scepticism and rejection in the population. The prospect that Poland and Hungary might overthrow socialism during the autumn, culminating in civil war in Hungary in late October and a Soviet invasion of the country on 4 November, threatened copycat reactions in the GDR and thereby SED rule. The party's inability to provide a cogent marxist analysis of events acutely undermined its claim to ideological leadership. This section illustrates differing popular reactions to the events of 1956, and explains how SED rule overcame the dangers.

Political opinion in 1956 was often unsophisticated. The population seemed essentially divided between three groups: passionate adherents of the SED; passionate opponents of communism, further embittered by Germany's division; and those, probably a majority, who were concerned principally with their own material welfare. The absence of guaranteed adequate living standards by 1956 was crucial in determining the year's political outcome.
Even before the CPSU conference began, the SED invited general opposition by creating a National People’s Army (NVA).\(^1\) Popular reactions to this move indicate the degree of political stability the SED had achieved by early 1956. Although loyalists considered the move a justified reaction to West German militarism and NATO’s expansion,

in the factories, tractor stations and state farms there are uncertainties and also a striking number of negative and directly dissenting discussions among workers, young people, white collar workers and in some cases even among members of our party.\(^2\)

Even the NVA’s supporters often emphasised traditional empathies for military training rather than the ideological necessity of defending socialism. The issue revealed true feelings about the GDR:

In many conversations, lacking faith in the working class’s strength [and] insufficient attachment to our workers’ and peasants’ state were clearly apparent.\(^3\)

This ‘insufficient attachment’ signified continuing strong desires for German unification. Young people feared having to shoot western relatives, and many foresaw civil war, rather than a war between a socialist and a capitalist state.

Pacifism was much in evidence. The NVA’s creation quickly shattered the moral strength of the SED’s formerly strong anti-militarism, particularly in comparisons which undermined the SED’s antifascist legitimacy: ‘It is just like Hitler: there’ll be conscription and then war.’\(^4\) Many believed:

The NVA’s creation is incompatible with the peaceful unification of our fatherland. There is a contradiction here between the words and deeds of our government.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) These paragraphs are based on various reports in LPA, BIV/2/5-025, e.g.: ‘Kurzinformation Nr.2/56’, 20 January 1956; ‘Situationsbericht Nr.2/56’, 25 January 1956, pp.9-12; ‘Kurzinformation Nr.6/56’, 8 February 1956.


\(^3\) Ibid, p.2.

\(^4\) Ibid, p.3.

\(^5\) 8 February report (note 1), p.4.
Many noted the similarity of NVA and *Wehrmacht* uniforms, and some feared the reactions from countries which had experienced nazi occupation. Furthermore, the official claim that NVA uniforms incorporated old German traditions encountered the oppositional, if logical, response that the *Deutschlandlied* should also be sung again. The population clearly identified SED coercion when they derided press reports that the NVA was founded to meet the demands of workers, farmers and the intelligentsia. Some attempted to mimic SED tactics, demanding a referendum.

Young people, the group principally affected, were most vehement in their reaction. Despite their ideological preparation, the SED noted that ‘only a small proportion of our youth’ was enthusiastic, while most were reserved or biding their time. Many youths vowed never to enlist voluntarily. Some threatened to leave the GDR if conscription were introduced. Ex-soldiers’ stories of rigorous army discipline dissuaded youngsters still further, as did fears that NVA soldiers might be posted to hotspots where socialist nations seemed threatened. Women, meanwhile, feared they would lose a new generation of menfolk in war.

More practically, given the food shortages, the rural population feared the new army would aggravate the shortage of agricultural workers. Others believed that diverting workers into regiments would reduce supplies of essential goods. The new army’s finances dominated many discussions, and a direct link was made to price rises for furniture.

The depth of opposition to this new militarism, similar to that in West Germany against the new Federal Army,\(^6\) undoubtedly explains why conscription was not introduced until 1962 and suggests domestic limitations to SED hegemony. Reactions to the new NVA underline the SED’s political and ideological insecurity eleven years after war’s end.

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The SED forfeited much goodwill by allowing the political concerns which provoked the NVA’s creation to outweigh antifascist idealism.

However, developments of greater ideological significance quickly overshadowed the issue. After the uneventful SED district delegate conferences in January 1956, where little attention was paid to ideological theory, the party’s ideological strength was tested by the CPSU’s 20th Party Congress, at which Soviet leaders suggested a more pragmatic line on socialist expansion, emphasised peaceful coexistence, and publicly distanced themselves from Stalin and the personality cult. Finally Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s methods in a ‘secret speech’. After publishing the public details, the SED hesitantly began altering its own line away from stalinism.\(^7\)

Reflecting the genuine shock at Stalin’s death in 1953, many SED comrades were unwilling to denounce him. Many comrades felt ‘Comrade Stalin has not deserved such criticism’ and refused to accept he was no longer a ‘classic’ communist leader. Older members in particular warned they would distance themselves from the party if Stalin were belittled. Some members (and non-members) took Stalin’s fall more pragmatically. Having already removed pictures of the Kaiser and Hitler, they enquired whether they should now remove Stalin’s pictures and burn his books. Others were more critical, asking why such problems were not addressed during Stalin’s lifetime. More dangerously, some members drew wider consequences, noting that the whole Central Committee had supported Stalin, and that Ulbricht, too, had made mistakes. Such widespread comments, though dangerous to the SED hierarchy now, at least reflected the success of past party education and older members’ genuine political enthusiasm. However, local party leaderships could not embrace the new line or answer members’ questions about why the CPSU was only criticising Stalin very generally, rather than detailing concrete mistakes as was expected of other party members.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Weber, Geschichte der DDR, pp.276-278.

More seriously still, Khrushchev’s assertion that there were various ways to socialism, and that a peaceful progression was possible in certain circumstances, was seen by many workers and SED members as proof that the social democrats had been right. Many former social democrats in the SED concluded:

There we have it, our theory [...] was right. Now, after so many years, this path will be possible.\(^9\)

In some areas, SED members discussed little else.\(^10\) These were dangerous signals for communist predominance within the SED. Some, perhaps thinking of Germany, asked which countries could take Khrushchev’s suggested parliamentary route to socialism.\(^11\)

Confusion existed among the SED’s rank and file and members in key positions alike. For instance, teachers, essential to young people’s ideological development, were unclear about the personality cult, the GDR’s class structure, and whether ‘antagonistic contradictions’ existed in the GDR.\(^12\) Such problems were not created, merely exposed and aggravated by the 20th Party Congress.\(^13\) The SED had already concluded in early February that despite some teachers’ ideological growth, many frequently avoided ‘aggressive debates’, lacked faith in Germany’s ‘democratic forces’, had little awareness of the ‘shift in the balance of power’, did not offensively attack ‘bourgeois ideologies’ and did not recognise the ‘party’s leading role in education questions’.\(^14\) This message was reinforced in June 1956:

A large proportion of comrade teachers is also encumbered with bourgeois thought. They are not rigorous in enforcing party policies, are compromising and avoid every debate. [...] Many older colleagues have a very hesitant attitude towards our state which is partly expressed in oppositional comments.\(^15\)

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9 23 February report (note 8), p.2.
11 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr. 7/56’, 18 February 1956, pp.3-4, ibid.
13 Many ideological problems of 1956 were apparent in 1955: cf. ‘Einschätzung der Lage in der Partei…’, undated [mid-1955], ThHStAW, Vs/St 656, fols 87-96’.
A significant change to communist ideology, the denunciation of Stalin or the admission that social democracy was legitimate were each bound to cause confusion within the SED's ranks and encourage opposition. For all three of these developments to have occurred simultaneously seriously undermined the party, even before the upheavals of November 1956.

During the late spring and summer, by which point the 'secret speech' was well known, criticism and ideological confusion grew within the party. Increasingly criticism shifted to the SED's own leadership. Party groups in a Weimar factory were not alone in noting that:

the personality cult expresses itself here [in the GDR] in the emphasis placed on personalities such as Comrade Walter Ulbricht.

'When will our ZK draw the necessary conclusions?', many comrades asked. Others fondly remembered Ernst Thälmann, the KPD's pre-war leader, and believed he 'would turn in his grave if he could see our party'. The contradiction between many members' rejection of Khrushchev's destalinisation and their simultaneous criticism of the SED hierarchy's own hardline approach went unnoticed.

However, SED members generally did not act on their serious indictments of party practice, reflecting ingrained party discipline and the absence of political alternatives. The witchhunts of the early 1950s inhibited any thought of re-establishing a separate SPD. A further factor was members' concentration on pressing economic problems. Although the Bezirksleitung complained in September that 'in our membership meetings ideological problems have been submerged and economic problems are the main topic', this tendency spared the party organisation acute short term problems. There were no easy answers to the 'wealth of uncertainties about ideological questions in many of our party's basic organisations'. Discussing economic matters avoided

16 SED BL, 'Informationsnotizen', 3 August 1956, pp.3-4, ibid.
17 SED BL, 'Wie entwickelt sich die schöpferische Aktivität der Parteimitglieder...?', 24 September 1956, pp.6-7, ibid.
prolonging ideological discussions which might have rent the party asunder following the CPSU’s 20th Congress.

1956’s political and economic problems caused the SED problems in expanding its membership. The ZK’s July 1956 plan to enrol 50,000 extra production workers as party members failed, partly due to low wages and the severe economic situation. Worbis construction workers bluntly stated: ‘So long as a quarter of a pound of mince costs DM 1.50 in the GDR, we won’t join the party.’ However, political pressures also played a role. Whereas joining the party seemed advantageous in the initial postwar phase, now some workers felt that ‘if a war comes, membership of our party would be disadvantageous’, or expressed lacking faith in socialism by commenting:

I’d be happy to join the party, but supposing things change? They’ve imprisoned the communists in West Germany.

Peer pressure sometimes dissuaded workers from joining the party. Opportunistic failure to join the SED grew as the Hungarian crisis deepened in late October and November. Many potential candidates delayed their formal application to await the outcome. Nonetheless, the Bezirk Erfurt party gained 5,716 new candidates during 1956, 2,241 of them in the last quarter.

Despite ideological confusion and scepticism, political discontentment generally remained static rather than deepening following the 20th CPSU Party Congress. Although the CDU’s regional chairman, Kalb, believed more people were now interested in political developments, in Arenshausen, for instance,

most people are not following the 20th Party Congress because it is too long and its importance is not yet recognised.

19 ‘Stand der Realisierung des Beschlusses des ZK…’, undated, pp.5-6, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
22 Bezirk bloc minutes, 18 April 1956, ThHStAW, NF 209, fol 32.
23 ‘Durchsage KL Heiligenstadt’, 24 February 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-025.
Mühlhausen parents pragmatically refused to discuss the Congress speeches at a school meeting 'because we can’t yet know how the decisions will turn out.'

Popular attention was diverted from the communist movement’s internal difficulties by more pressing concerns. Margarine, meat, marmalade and many other essentials were in very short supply and dominated discussions. Even the DBD’s Heiligenstadt district executive criticised the GDR over fertiliser shortages. Others wondered how a seven hour day could be introduced when sausages were so expensive, or focused on housing difficulties and higher prices for work clothes. Price cuts in June also distracted attention from high politics. Although these were generally welcomed, many feared they would be shortlived and demanded that the cuts be extended to food. Cynicism was widespread. Workers in particular demanded that their (workers’) government should ‘concentrate more on everyday items’. Housewives, though pleased at cheaper children’s clothes, were angered that promised meat rations had not materialised.

Other discussions centred on local matters, often to the exclusion of wider political issues. The key topic in Heiligenstadt schools by June 1956 was the Catholic church’s role, while village meetings discussed road building and aesthetic improvements rather than the NVA and Khrushchev. Party work in the localities continued normally, and organisational rather than ideological problems dominated functionaries’ agendas by May 1956. Interest in ideological problems was also overshadowed when the FRG introduced conscription in May 1956, a more tangible problem which attracted general condemnation.

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24 3 March report (note 12), fol 49.
25 SED Heiligenstadt, ‘Stand der Blockarbeit...’, 6 January 1956, p.5, LPA, IV/4.06/144.
26 ‘Bericht über die Stimmung der Bevölkerung des Landkreises Erfurt...’, 29 March 1956, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/5-050.
28 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.27/56’, 5 June 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
30 Zwischenbericht über die Lage...’, 22 May 1956, LPA, BIV/2/12-009.
31 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.30/56’, 9 July 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
Thus, ongoing concern about material conditions, combined with ideological insecurity and some criticism of the SED hierarchy over the NVA and Khrushchev's innovations, were the backdrop for reactions to the events in Poland and Hungary. The first major development, the Poznan uprising of 28 June, essentially resulted from Poles' frustration at inadequate wages and food supplies. Immediate comparisons were drawn in the GDR to 17 June 1953. There was widespread acceptance that Poles should protest at their poverty, and no credence for official explanations of imperialist provocations. However the subtext was that Thuringians considered themselves rather better than 'backward' Poland. Thus there was no attempt at a copycat revolt which would have suggested Germans were no better than Poles. There are few indications that the population drew conclusions for the GDR at this juncture. Only farmers, often the first to wish the GDR's downfall, were reported as seeing the possible consequences for the GDR. Some drank to the Polish disturbances, and one commented: 'Now things are simmering everywhere and soon an end will be put to socialism'.

Not until late October, when Gomulka was reinstalled as Polish party leader, did public opinion seriously concern itself with Poland and Hungary again. On 22 October the SED expected reactions to a Neues Deutschland article on Poland of the previous day. However, reactions were slow: embarrassingly, it appeared that 'ND is read very little among workers'. Instead, western radio reports, wild rumours and speculation quickly spread from 23 October onwards. Warsaw was apparently occupied by Russian tanks; there had been disturbances in Magdeburg or Halle; Poland would break with the USSR; thousands of Hungarian students had left the party to form their own

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33 SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.29/56', 29 June 1956; 'Informationsnotizen', 18 July 1956, p.6, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
35 'Durchsage KL Mühlhausen', 22 October 1956, p.2, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
organisation. The Hungarian uprising, the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet troops, rioting in Hungary and the Soviet invasion understandably fuelled these discussions. The following paragraphs examine the extent to which Thuringians also drew conclusions about the future of SED rule, the GDR as a separate state and socialism itself; in other words, to what extent did popular reactions threaten SED rule, and why did this threat not cause the system to collapse in 1956?

Initial reactions were confused. Speculation centred on the causes of the Polish upheavals and was based on western radio reports rather than the unread ND article. In many factories ‘workers are clear that the consequences of the personality cult can’t be removed with a ZK resolution’. Some concluded that the problems resulted from the expulsion of Germans from Poland, and debated the Oder-Neisse question. However, on 22 October many still paid greater attention to the sugar shortage, and few political consequences were drawn from the Polish developments. One reporter depressingly concluded:

In general we can say that apart from the continual discussions and disputes about production questions, material difficulties, housing problems and supply questions, the situation in the factories is normal.

As tension mounted in Poland and particularly Hungary, political themes acquired greater currency. The SED’s ideological authority was quickly challenged from two directions in late October. While some SED members could not comprehend that Gomulka (removed from his party posts and imprisoned in Stalin’s last years) was now rehabilitated, other workers welcomed Poland’s resistance to Soviet dictates and concluded ‘it’s time the same happened here’.

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37 Untitled SED Heiligenstadt report, 22 October 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
Nonetheless, a significant number of workers and many SED members quickly realised the potential dangers to socialism and rallied round, offering armed support if necessary. Although some acknowledged previous mistakes, or criticised the SED’s portrayal of socialist construction as a ‘pure victory march’, they insisted workers did not want a return to capitalism. Some retained their idealism and hoped to reform socialism, as seemed to be happening in Hungary. Thus, a mere eleven years after Hitler’s defeat there remained many committed socialists who were not prepared to abandon their achievements and risk merging with the monopoly capitalist, neo-fascist system they perceived to exist in West Germany. The danger that Hungarian fascism or Horthyism might return if communism there were overthrown strengthened the perception of general danger.

Those who held the levers of power and dared not yield control naturally supported such sentiments, but also took concrete steps to preserve the system. From 19 October the Erfurt police radio room was constantly staffed. On 24 October the Bezirk police chief ordered that alarm readiness be checked and public opinion secretly gauged. From 26 October rapid reaction forces were on permanent standby in all districts. Preparations were made to alert the Kampfgruppen and supply them with guns, even though no ammunition was available in Worbis district, where groups lacked adequate training. Some Kampfgruppen commanders seemed only too eager to prepare for real action. The bloc parties also remained publicly loyal. Their representatives in bloc meetings supported the SED line, despite private doubts among many CDU members.

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42 Police memos and orders in ThHStAW, MdI/20, 73, fols 3, 4, 21.
44 ‘Durchsage KL Eisenach’, 2 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
and the party’s Heiligenstadt Kreisleitung. Negative tendencies were also reported among LDPD members. Publicly, though, the line held at Bezirk and Kreis level, demonstrating the key bloc party figures’ loyalty to the SED by 1956.

However, ideological confusion within the SED itself quickly grew. Some comrades could not understand that the Hungarian People’s Army had supported the demonstrators in apparent defiance of the marxist laws of history. Some comrades’ belief that Poland was taking a ‘special road to socialism’ also threatened the SED’s legitimacy after Khrushchev’s ‘secret’ speech and Anton Ackermann’s 1946 thesis of a special German road to socialism, which he retracted under pressure in 1948. By late October the SED’s Kreisleitungen reported that some members did not believe the leadership was building socialism correctly. Some expected the ZK’s removal and the return of Wilhelm Zaisser and Rudolf Herrnstadt, Ulbricht’s principal opponents in 1953. Even various local party secretaries openly called for Ulbricht’s removal, claiming his empty promises had created a situation similar to that in Poland and Hungary, or that his road to socialism was wrong.

In the wider population, these events reopened the sensitive issue of the right to strike. According to several medical students, the differing reactions to the strike movements in West Germany, where workers’ demands were eventually recognised, and Hungary, where they provoked gunfire, clearly demonstrated ‘where true democracy and freedom reign’. Some workers felt legal strikes would help the government understand which measures were acceptable to workers and which not.

47 ‘Informatorischer Bericht Nr.49/56’, 14 November 1956, p.6, ibid.
48 27 October report (note 40), p.4.
50 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.43/56’, 31 October 1956, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
52 Medizinische Akademie Erfurt, ‘Über die politische Lage...’, 30 October 1956, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-026.
The political troubles in Poland and Hungary also focused complaints about the GDR’s poor living standards. With socialism under attack in both countries for failing to guarantee reasonable conditions, Thuringians felt entitled to join in. The link with these other countries was clearly made:

In connection with the developments about the situation in Poland and Hungary there are still exhaustive discussions about supply and wage questions here in the GDR...^{54}

As a Weimar shop assistant plainly remarked:

In socialism it is worse than capitalism, at least we could buy things then. Today there’s no eggs, butter, milk, etc.^{55}

By early November panic buying was underway. Goods were hoarded and savings accounts emptied as the international situation worsened.^{56} In one area an HO outlet reported far higher sales of essentials than usual in October.^{57} In some areas, customers provocatively asked for unavailable goods in order to complain.^{58} Many ordinary people warned the Hungarian uprising would be repeated in the GDR if things did not improve. As the crisis deepened, some perceived a relationship between high food prices and the cost of the ‘bloated administration’ run by the parties, mass organisations and state.^{59}

Some felt money should be spent on flats rather than cultural centres and memorials.^{60}

The likely imminent abolition of ration cards fuelled popular concerns and produced further threats of rebellion, as many feared supplies would not be guaranteed at all without cards, and that shortages would mean price rises. The unfair operation of the bonus system for production workers accentuated material grievances.^{61} Thus an SED man trying to raise work quotas was told by the worker concerned: ‘Just go on like that, then you’ll get the same as them in Hungary.’^{62}

^{54} Ibid, p.9.
^{55} Ibid, p.7.
^{57} 3 November report (note 51), p.7.
^{58} ‘Durchsage Stadtleitung Erfurt’, 7 November 1956, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
^{59} 3 November report (note 51), p.6.
^{60} ‘Lage- und Stimmungsbericht aus dem Kreisgebiet Weimar’, 19 November 1956, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 73, fol 72.
^{61} 31 October report (note 50), p.4.
Linked to concerns about living standards were frequent comparisons between the Polish crisis (where work quotas had partly inflamed the masses) and the GDR’s situation before 17 June 1953. These served various functions. Partly they represented a warning that an uprising had already occurred once in the GDR and could happen again. The SED’s opponents and supporters alike warned that June 1953 would be repeated unless work quotas were quickly revised and promises about prices and supplies kept. The vocabulary of 1953 was intoned, as in Langensalza where students began predicting a ‘new course in the whole socialist camp’, though with no conception of what this might actually mean. In a clear rebuke to the SED, many wondered why no lessons had been learned from 17 June. Conversely, 17 June 1953 was also cited by many rank and file comrades and others who still believed the official explanations of capitalist provocations and saw new cause to defend socialism, as in 1953. Equally, popular memories of the suppression undoubtedly militated against serious rebellion.

Beyond general unrest, there were many examples of oppositional activity during the crisis period. There were isolated calls for strikes along the lines of those in Hungary and Poland, and evidence of a more concerted campaign of disruption in the Jena Zeiss works. When an MTS team leader was attacked in Mechelroda his assailants shouted: ‘Beat the dogs like they did in Magdeburg!’ Indeed, threats against SED members and functionaries proliferated during this period, encouraged in late October and early November by highly exaggerated reports that many Hungarian communist officials had been murdered. Thus the party secretary of the Arnstadt Konsum organisation, on refusing to buy a second round of drinks after work, was told: ‘Just wait, you bigwigs, you’ll soon get the same treatment as them in Hungary.’ Elsewhere workers were heard discussing who would be hanged from which tree, or threatening that all SED

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63 27 October report (note 40), pp.5-6.
65 27 October report (note 40), pp.7-8.
66 ‘Durchsage KL Arnstadt’, 1 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027; details of attacks on Hungarian communists in Lomax, pp.123-129.
members would be killed. Some threats came from known former nazi activists, one of whom commented: ‘We haven’t forgotten what you did to us in 1945. Soon our time will come.’ In Weimar, a window in the SED Kreisleitung was broken, and in December an explosion was reported in the Volk’s Heiligenstadt office. Oppositional leafleting and the appearance of antisocialist graffiti was also much in evidence. Other isolated incidents included the vandalism of a Soviet war memorial in Nordhausen. However, despite the many oppositional incidents, a comparison of daily police reports of November and December 1956 with the comparable period in 1955 shows no significant increase in the numbers or seriousness of recorded oppositional incidents.

Understandably many SED functionaries were worried by the threats against them. Some were said to be ‘helpless’, and many, worried by reports from Hungary, asked: ‘Is there no help for the working class functionaries, must they all be slaughtered like that?’ Some complained both that Soviet troops were withdrawn from Hungary before the situation stabilised, and that the GDR’s media had reported a restoration of order when the opposite was true. Many SED members doubted Hungary’s survival as a people’s democracy and refused to counter oppositional discussions, adopting wait and see attitudes. This tendency reflected either fear of reprisals if SED rule collapsed or severely lacking conviction in socialism. Others, no doubt desperate to preserve their positions, called for Soviet intervention in Hungary to maintain the status quo. These comrades criticised the eventual Soviet invasion of Hungary on 4 November only for coming so late.

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68 BdVP, ‘Lagebericht’, 30 November 1956, ThHStAW, Vs/St 534, fol 111.
69 14 November report (note 47), pp.6-7.
70 BdVP daily report, 19-20 December 1956, ThHStAW, Vs/St 534, fol 85.
71 14 November 1956 (note 47), pp.6-7.
72 BdVP daily report, 24-25 December 1956, ThHStAW, Vs/St 534, fol 79.
73 Compare the BdVP daily reports for these periods in ThHStAW, Vs/St 534 (1956) and ThHStAW, Vs/St 545 (1955).
74 2 November report (note 43), p.3.
75 1 November report (note 66).
78 E.g., ‘Durchsage KL Mühlhausen’, 5 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
The Red Army’s actions in Hungary were decisive in shaping GDR opinion and raised the whole question of intervention by one socialist country in another’s affairs. Even before the invasion there were complaints at Soviet interference.\textsuperscript{79} Thus a Heiligenstadt student asked why the Russians were intervening in Hungary, but widened the issue by declaring: ‘The Russians should leave the GDR as well.’\textsuperscript{80} The situation became more acute after Britain and France attempted to defend the Suez Canal on 31 October. The SED’s attempts to distinguish imperialist intervention in Egypt from fraternal assistance to defend socialism in Hungary predictably undermined the party’s ideological position still further. Similarly, some noted the contradiction between official support for the Algerian ‘uprising’ and condemnation of the Hungarian ‘putsch’.\textsuperscript{81}

Reactions to the eventual invasion were mixed. Some, convinced that socialism and their own positions must be protected, welcomed the move. Most, however, felt it was at best an unnecessary overreaction, at worst an illegal act. In isolated incidents, young people responded by leaving the DSF or, as in Weimar, demanding the dismantling of the Stalin memorial. Workers in one factory agreed that the USSR had ‘raped’ Hungary.\textsuperscript{82} Elsewhere workers believed ‘the Russians can only keep and suppress these countries by force’.\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, many queried the legitimacy of János Kádár’s new government.\textsuperscript{84}

Though the invasion ended the immediate Hungarian problem, it did not resolve the ideological uncertainty felt by many SED members and demonstrated serious internal weaknesses. When the mayor of Heuthen asked if members supported their party as much as in 1951/52, they unanimously replied ‘No!’, and complained ‘the party does

\textsuperscript{79} 29 October report (note 41), p.5; 1 November report (note 68), p.2.
\textsuperscript{80} 27 October report (note 40), p.4.
\textsuperscript{81} 29 October report (note 41), p.6.
\textsuperscript{83} 6 November BL report (note 82).
\textsuperscript{84} E.g., SED Heiligenstadt, ‘Vertraulicher Bericht’, 12 November 1956, p.1, LPA, IV/4.06/108.
not represent working class interests'. Many reports noted a 'certain confusion [Wirrwarr] among many comrades'. Those responsible for party education in Kreis Worbis, theoretically the most loyal, often admitted to doubts caused by western broadcasts they should not have heard. Members’ meetings often produced lively, detailed discussions and:

many debates about ideological uncertainties, misconceptions, etc. [...] the western broadcasters’ arguments sometimes stick and comrades do not always adopt an appropriate class-based standpoint.

Added sources of confusion were the strong French Communist Party’s failure to prevent French intervention over Suez, and the role of Kádár, the Hungarian Communist Party’s gravedigger and saviour within one week.

Many comrades attempted to mask uncertainties about Hungary by instead condemning England, France and Israel for invading Egypt, a less controversial issue. Attendance at membership meetings rose, dramatically in some cases, suggesting SED members perceived a need to achieve clarity in ideological issues or an opportunity to protest while the leadership was weakened. Although pre-1933 KPD members remained particularly loyal, they were by now a minority within the party, and their loyalty was offset by the fact that:

a large number of the party organisations is internally split over personal discord and disunity amongst the comrades. [...] In a few cases there are still comrades who belonged to the SPD before 1933 and still have a negative attitude to comrades who formerly belonged to the KPD.

Nor did the Hungarian invasion end threats of violence in the GDR. One comrade said she had never been so afraid, ‘not even on 17 June’, while Gebesee schoolchildren threatened to ‘throw the mayor out of the window if things don’t change’. Some SED

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85 ‘Durchsage der Kreisleitung Heiligenstadt’, 6 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
86 8 November report (note 46), pp.3-5, 10.
87 ‘Durchsage KL Heiligenstadt’, 8 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
89 ‘Durchsage KL Erfurt-Land’, 6 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
members remained worried that Soviet troops might yet desert the GDR, exposing them to the same retaliation their Hungarian comrades had suffered.  

Apart from exposing the SED's fragility as a mass party, the crisis revealed worrying signs that passive acceptance of the GDR system was completely breaking down in some quarters. Farmers were, as ever, prominent in this trend, taking the opportunity to call again for a free economy and an end to cultivation plans, which the SED had earlier promised to withdraw but reimposed.  

By 29 October LPG farmers already felt they should no longer be so conscientious in their work because the Hungarian situation would spread to the GDR.  

On 1 November Ballstedt farmers decided to withhold food deliveries 'because the regime here can't last much longer'.  

By 3 November, various Worbis farmers refused to deliver food and advised each other against signing new contracts with the MTS until the international situation was clearer.  

When some farmers (even in LPGs) deliberately left the potato harvest too late, the effects were quickly felt in the shops.  

Although the Hungarian uprising was crushed, farmers remained militant weeks after 4 November, and refused to adopt cultivation plans in many villages (40 in Kreis Nordhausen alone). Many remained confident that 'things will soon change'.  

The potential longterm effects of the crisis were also visible in schools and colleges. Teachers, on whom the party depended to transmit ideological certainty to younger generations, particularly concerned the SED. As indicated above, the 'ideological-political situation' at schools and particularly high schools was 'very weak' in mid-1956.  

Teachers shared the same doubts and uncertainties as the rest of the population, and also relied principally on western radio for information, even to prepare current
affairs classes. The Worbis Kreisleitung quickly concluded that teachers and lecturers lacked the ‘ideological strength to cope with the discussions’. Other districts reached similar conclusions after the Hungarian invasion. Even staff in the Sondershausen RdK’s education department and the head of the town’s high school, a longstanding SED member, harboured uncertainties and failed to support their staff. Though the specific problems of 1956 are not cited as reasons, Republikflucht was a serious problem in education. 203 Bezirk Erfurt teachers left the GDR between 1 January 1956 and 31 January 1957. Clearly, education was not yet in reliable hands, despite the SED’s strenuous attempts since the 1940s to recruit and train loyal teachers.

Pupils and students also demanded the party’s special attention. As early as 1 November, medical students voted 120 to 7 to demand an end to compulsory Russian classes. Schoolchildren around the region also rejected Russian lessons. After all, some argued, ‘in Hungary the Russian books were burned as well.’ Parents were still demanding English should replace Russian in December 1956, and Russian teachers reported discipline problems. Of greater concern were demands for an independent students’ organisation, and such isolated incidents as a hunger strike among Nordhausen trainee teachers protesting at high rents and limited leisure time, a student strike at Sülzhayn technical college, and a sixth form’s demands that flags be flown at half mast to mark the October revolution’s anniversary. Young people displayed particular resistance to making donations for Hungary, while one teacher who made positive comments about Hungary was pelted with gym shoes. Elsewhere children

100 SED Erfurt, ‘Tagliche Berichterstattung...’, 2 November 1956, p.2, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
103 Cf. Bezirk bloc minutes (note 45), fol 51.
104 8 November report (note 46), pp.5-6, 8.
105 30 November report (note 102), fol 117.
commented that SED meant 'So endet Deutschland' ('That's how Germany ends').

Clearly young people were very prepared to embarrass or protest against the state and party, and as such were a vent for the opinions their parents expressed in the privacy of their homes and/or the western radio commentaries they heard there. For instance, some young people's open opposition could easily be traced to parents with fascist pasts.

The SED considered farmers and young people were the groups of greatest concern for longest after the crisis subsided.

Despite all the SED's anxieties, normality quickly resumed, SED rule was not seriously challenged and the system did not collapse. Though everyday problems remained, they were not greatly aggravated by the year's crises. The thousands who continued to 'flee the republic' did so principally for personal or economic reasons. There is no evidence that Hungary and Poland or dissatisfaction over the NVA or destalinisation were particular causes, and figures between January and August 1956 were actually lower than the equivalent period in 1955. Nor were specific links made between these problems and the expulsion of 2,007 SED members from the party during 1956, considerably fewer than in 1955 and mainly not for ideological differences. More than half had already left the GDR, while many others had committed crimes or indulged in 'immoral behaviour'. Even the Jugendweihe preparations seemed undisturbed by the wider crisis during November 1956, with participation rates significantly increased compared to November 1955. Life continued, with all its problems, much as normal despite the unusually disruptive international framework.

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107 'Durchsage KL Heiligenstadt', 9 November 1956, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
109 SED BL, 'Informationsbericht Nr.51/56', 20 November 1956, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
110 Cf. none of these reasons is cited in 'Republikflucht', 23 October 1956, LPA, BIV/2/10-008, or a Heiligenstadt KPKK report, 'Fälle von Republikflucht in den Monaten Juli und August 1956', 19 September 1956, LPA, IV/4.06/162.
111 Cf. undated report (note 21), pp.3-4, SED Heiligenstadt, 'Politische Einschätzung zur Durchführung von Parteiverfahren', 12 December 1956, LPA, IV/4.06/162.
112 'Informatorischer Bericht über den Stand der Jugendweihe...', 15 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/9.02-021.
Why was the crisis not far more damaging to SED rule? First, the party’s inability to present a waterproof ideological explanation for the events of October and November 1956, though much discussed, was of secondary importance to the population’s everyday concerns. Many workers were more interested in discussing their own factory’s problems than arcane ideological disputes, and believed shortcomings could be overcome if functionaries acted on workers’ complaints and suggestions. Essentially, these complaints were no worse in 1956 than previous years and, with the exception of some farmers, most people realised only greater effort would resolve practical problems. Thus, the Hungarian crisis was not the sole topic of discussion. Though these external problems were discussed at the meetings coincidentally held during this period to elect new local union executives, the 14 page SED report on the meetings mentions discussions of Hungary and Poland only once, briefly. Workers used these meetings primarily to discuss factory issues and grievances. Within days of the invasion, discussion predominantly returned to the severe winter food shortages threatening the population. In some areas, the SED had trouble engaging its members in any political discussions.

Secondly, the Soviet invasion of Hungary was largely offset by the Suez Crisis, an issue on which the population identified with the SED’s standpoint and which attracted general condemnation as a clear case of imperialism. The widespread fear that world war would begin over Hungary and/or the Suez Crisis may also (perhaps subconsciously) have discouraged further destabilising behaviour. By late November there was a ‘depressed atmosphere among large parts of the population due to the overall political situation’ and a ‘certain tension’ linked to the fear of war. Some wondered if Christmas, only a month away, would be spent in peace.

114 ‘Situationsbericht’, 6 November 1956, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.
116 Cf., e.g., 2 November report (note 44), p.2.
Thirdly, most ordinary people were very guarded in their public comments and awaited the outcome of events before committing themselves. This attitude was understandable given the experience of 17 June 1953 and its reinforcement by the Soviet invasion of Hungary after 4 November 1956, though opinion reports rarely record such thoughts being expressed so directly. The Soviet presence in the GDR was still very evident, the MfS’s efficiency and profile higher than in 1953, and the state’s administrative structures much stronger. All these factors militated against all but isolated attempts at serious resistance and made the emergence of opposition leaders practically impossible. The few recorded strike calls or specific demands (end to communism, Russian departure, new government, higher living standards, a united, free Germany) were merely posted on a wall, not proclaimed at a meeting.\footnote{30 November report (note 68), fol 113; BdVP, ‘Lagebericht Nr.55/56’, 27 October 1956, ThHStAW, Vs/St 534, fol 160.}

Although peace prevailed, there were some serious consequences. The GDR’s media were highly discredited, having carried contradictory reports, suggested Hungary was quiet at the height of the revolutionary unrest, and been consistently behind with the news. Suspicions grew that Moscow censored the GDR’s news.\footnote{‘Durchsage der Kreisleitung Heiligenstadt’, 10 November 1956, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-027.} Practically everyone, including SED members, listened to West German radio or the ‘neutral’ Austrian and Swiss stations.\footnote{14 November report (note 47), p.3.} From the ‘secret speech’ to the Soviet occupation of Budapest, 1956 established the western media as essential information sources in a crisis. The mass medium which fuelled the 1989 revolution, television, was barely available in 1956, so that West German pictures of the Hungarian riots and bloodshed were not widely seen, though they excited discussion where they were and complaints that GDR television had broadcast nothing comparable.\footnote{‘Durchsage der Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land’, 2 November 1956, p.2, LPA, BIV/2/5-027; 2 November report (note 44), p.3.}

1956 also seriously undermined much of the optimism and faith in socialism. For many, whether party members or not, the lasting perception was that ‘the events in Poland and
Hungary prove there’s something wrong in the socialist system'. After the Hungarian rebellion was crushed, the SED dispatched its loyal supporters, often those with strong antifascist credentials and not necessarily party members, to shame doubters in the weakest points into submission. One reporter noted:

This mass appearance of class conscious workers found a very good reception in the whole factory, so that the negative elements crawled into their mouseholes.

However, these ‘negative elements’ remained within the ‘mouseholes’ of society to argue their case another day. The SED had not won the argument, merely temporarily silenced it.

1960: ‘Socialist springtime in agriculture’

While the events of 1956 demonstrated how the GDR’s population reacted to a period of major international and ideological crisis, there is also scope to discuss domestic upheavals in a similar framework. Although the final phase of agricultural collectivisation, forced through in March/April 1960, has generally not received as much attention as June 1953, the Berlin crisis of 1958 or the closure of the GDR’s borders in August 1961, popular reactions to this development also provide a useful insight into patterns of conformity and opposition to SED rule, as collectivisation was an issue which directly affected the lives of most of the rural population. This was essentially a matter of direct local and personal significance, rather than a reaction to events in distant Berlin, Moscow or Budapest.

The overwhelming resistance of farmers and rural workers to socialism, from their general refusal to join the KPD and fears of losing their land under communism, through to halting food deliveries in October/November 1956, already noted, largely explains the SED’s wish to neutralise the political disruption of this essential group of

123 20 November report (note 109), p.3.
workers. The collectivisation of agriculture was, therefore, one of a series of attempts to consolidate and stabilise SED rule.124

The first agricultural cooperatives (LPGs) were founded after the SED’s Second Party Conference (1952), but the movement developed relatively slowly during the 1950s. Only 37% of agricultural land was collectively farmed by December 1958, and 43.5% by November 1959. Bezirk Erfurt, where independent farmers dominated,125 was significantly below average with comparable figures of only 17.7% in 1958 and 33.4% in December 1959.126 That month the ZK resolved to socialise agriculture quickly. Simultaneously the first entirely ‘collective Kreis’ was created and a campaign began to emulate this example around the country. The SED’s official history records:

In early 1960 the Central Committee gave all Bezirk and Kreis leaderships and all basic organisations in the agricultural sector the task of winning over the remaining independent farmers to join the LPGs.127

Under party discipline, all forces were to be mobilised and collectivisation completed by almost any means. At Bezirk level, the SED, DBD, Democratic Bloc, NF, CDU, FDGB, Rat des Bezirkes and Bezirkstag all met to discuss ways of supporting the campaign, though at Kreis level the issue was sometimes dismissed as an ‘SED matter’, particularly by the CDU and local councils.128 By 3 April 1960 the Bezirk was declared vollgenossenschaftlich (‘entirely collectivised’), although a few farmers still tenaciously defended their independence. On paper at least, the increase from 33.4% to 85% of

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125 Osmond, p.138.
127 Roßmann, p.401.
agricultural land under collectivisation represented an enormous achievement.\textsuperscript{129} The following pages discuss the campaign's difficulties, and the degree of actual success in the following months.

The low figures achieved before 1960 clearly demonstrated that unusual measures were necessary to introduce socialism to the countryside. Simply sending 'leading comrades' from the \textit{Bezirk} level to key localities did not achieve a 'breakthrough' in 1957,\textsuperscript{130} or in the following two years. Partly this was because the issue was not tackled earlier. Full collectivisation would have been extremely unpopular in 1945, and was not attempted for numerous reasons (not least the Soviets' initial reluctance to endanger German unity), but it might have been accepted more easily had it been presented as a political measure engendered by wartime defeat, alongside deindustrialisation and asset stripping. By the late 1950s, however, the population was less willing to accept such measures as the price of nazism in a state which boasted full sovereignty. More importantly, many 'new farmers' who had benefited from the land reform of 1945/46 were now well established and insisted 'we [...] have no intention of being landworkers again'. Even 'new farmers' in the SED were 'developing into strong medium size farmers and resisting entering LPGs or forming new ones'.\textsuperscript{131}

The SED's BL often received little practical support from the \textit{Kreisleitungen}, who sometimes only began work once \textit{Bezirk} staff arrived, or the local party groups, which often lacked a 'common viewpoint' about socialising agriculture. Even the BL agitators for socialist agriculture were not wholly reliable, and some members requested to be withdrawn from 'unfavourable' areas such as Heiligenstadt. Where the teams did appear, they often met resistance. Sometimes, farmers' relatives arrived from miles around to help resist collectivisation propaganda. Elsewhere, children insulted and hit LPG farmers' children, and farmers considering forming a new LPG were warned they

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Statistisches Jahrbuch 1966: Bezirk Erfurt}, p.14. The remaining land belonged to state farms or consisted of tiny plots owned by individuals.
\textsuperscript{130} SED BL, 'Einsatz von leitenden Genossen der Bezirksstellen...', 5 November 1957, LPA, BIV/2/7-24.
\textsuperscript{131} 'Auswertung der Ergebnisse des Einsatzes leitender Funktionäre...', 28 January 1958, pp.3-4, ibid.
would be ‘pointed at’, presumably a serious threat in small communities. Elsewhere, farmers simply refused to talk to functionaries because they were ‘allegedly too involved in agricultural work’. Furthermore, many ordinary workers failed to support the SED as they often held small parcels of land which they were unwilling to surrender. Some workers strengthened independent farmers by helping them in their free time. Even the MTS stations, designed as key SED supports in the countryside, lacked the requisite ‘fighting spirit’ and their functionaries could see no ‘personal perspective’.

The SED’s problems were acute in the Eichsfeld, where pre-1960 plans foresaw a much slower development. In Kreis Heiligenstadt LPGs farmed only 10.5% of agricultural land in January 1958. This figure was expected to rise to only 40% by 1960. In practice, despite progress during 1958, LPGs controlled only 23.8% of the district’s land by July 1959. Where LPGs did exist, they often lacked SED members, so that the party was unable to exert the ‘leading role’. Instead, ‘the LPGs consist mainly of members of petty bourgeois parties’.

The SED’s rural weakness in the Eichsfeld was not confined to the LPGs. A brigade visiting Kreis Mühlhausen in late 1959 concluded that ‘the party organisations are not yet up to their tasks’ and that in many areas ‘the party’s leading role is not secured’. Equally, many local blocs had not met for years, and many VdgB organisations consistently opposed further socialisation measures, although they existed mainly to encourage collectivisation. Local state structures were also heavily criticised, not least the Mühlhausen RdK for its poor cadre policies. Some local council staff were ‘neither

132 Ibid, p.3.
able nor willing to implement the party’s and government’s decisions’. As an example of the unfavourable rural conditions just six months before collectivisation was completed, the brigade noted that in Großengottern the VdgB chairman was an ex-SS member who had served in Buchenwald, the CDU mayor was an NSDAP member from 1933 to 1945 and had served in the Waffen-SS, and a leading local SED member had also been an NSDAP member and worked in the mayor’s office under the Third Reich. Where local SED functionaries tried to encourage LPG expansion, their methods often encouraged resistance, as in Zella where the mayor threatened to sack the local kindergarten teacher unless her brother, the village CDU leader, joined the LPG. Corrupt comrades in some local administrations further complicated the situation.¹³⁹

A similar situation existed in Kreis Heiligenstadt where local forces opposing collectivisation were so strong that even the BL’s brigades could not ‘isolate and completely unmask’ opponents in some villages. The campaign clearly demonstrated the district party’s weaknesses. For instance, the ‘strengthening brigades’ sent to help new LPGs made little impact. However, as the district secretary reminded his Bezirk superiors, the entire SED organisation in Kreis Heiligenstadt had fewer members than the party group in the AWE car plant in Eisenach.¹⁴⁰ The Bezirk brigades met with similarly ‘strong rudiments of bourgeois consciousness’ in Kreis Worbis and achieved little during January 1960. Clearly, significantly greater efforts were required.¹⁴¹

The contours of farming reactions to the LPG campaign were quickly established during January 1960 once the major collectivisation drive began, and the same arguments were repeated throughout the campaign. Typically, financially secure independent farmers in Kreis Erfurt-Land resisted collectivisation because they doubted they would earn as much in LPGs.¹⁴² Many were convinced they would have to work harder in an LPG and

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¹³⁹ ‘Stellungnahme der Brigade der Bezirksleitung…’, 14 October 1959, LPA, BIV/2/7-24.
insisted they would never join voluntarily. In some cases farmers determined to resist for as long as possible, as ‘things might change’. Their optimism lay in the continuing belief that socialism and the GDR might quickly collapse. Such thoughts were fuelled by speculation about the forthcoming Paris summit meeting in May. If this ended German division, or even if the Soviets swapped parts of Thuringia for West Berlin, as many farmers speculated, collectivisation could be avoided. Sometimes farmers openly doubted the wisdom of socialist economics in comments such as:

The capitalist states have achieved world standards without cooperatives and without large field cultivation.

Some farmers tried blackmail by insisting their family retained three acres for personal use, or that they received high guaranteed wages and full compensation for their land and livestock. Others had personal reasons for refusing, such as Kurt M. of Großwelsbach who remembered that the ‘Russians had taken everything from him in 1945 and were not his friends’, or the Oettern VdB chairman whose wife had been taken by the Russians. There were more isolated examples of open opposition, such as the anonymous letter threatening the Apolda RdK chairman with hanging if he cooperated with collectivisation, a warning reminiscent of the tactics of 1956.

As January brought relatively little progress, agitation work increased during February. For instance, loudspeaker cars supported by teams of agitators toured the Erfurt area spreading propaganda and broadcasting individual farmers’ opinions. In Kreis Nordhausen alone, 1,317 agitators were operating by 7 February. However, many independent farmers, including some SED members, simply locked their doors and

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147 Ibid; VPKA Sömmerda, ‘Information’, 21 March 1960, ThHStAW, Vs/St 335, fol 42.
149 8 February 1960 report (note 143), fol 91.
152 7 March 1960 report (note 145), fol 2.
refused to discuss LPGs with the activist brigades, who were often denied accommodation in their target villages. Farmers avoided public meetings and those who did attend mainly did not join in discussion. In some villages, even parish councillors refused to attend meetings where the socialisation of agriculture appeared on the agenda. Some threatened to resign or commented that ‘the GDR can go down the plughole, but I’m not joining the LPG’, again demonstrating that SED control over local state structures was still far from total. Similarly, a Trebra parish councillor said he had been elected to prevent collectivisation, and the Jützenbach DBD chairman disloyally told farmers to throw agricultural commissions off their land ‘because your land is your private property’.

Anti-LPG sentiment among the most resistant seemed to increase proportionally to the SED’s persuasion tactics. Thus Kurt R. of Mülverstedt declared:

Better to be carried out dead from the farm than join the LPG. Things may change. LPG entry is just force, they’re just trapping us.

However, provoking such sharp reactions enabled the SED’s brigades to ‘unmask’ apparently reactionary forces, isolate them from the rest of their community, and thereby create moral pressure to join an LPG as a sign of good faith.

Despite activists’ increasing efforts between January and mid-March, success remained elusive. For instance, though 600 comrades and industrial workers were spread around 57 communities in Kreis Weimar, they recruited only 49 new LPG members by 8 February; only 1% of agricultural land was collectivised in Kreis Mühlhausen between 1 January and 20 February 1960. On 19 March only 39.8% of the Bezirk’s agricultural land was under LPG control, an increase of just 1% since 1 March. While Kreis

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155 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.20/60’, 24 March 1960, p.4, LPA, IV/2/3-323.  
156 19 February 1960 (note 145), fol 33.  
Langensalza (57.2%) was particularly successful, Heiligenstadt, Eisenach and Worbis
districts languished at 27.5%, 19.3% and 17.8% respectively.\textsuperscript{158}

The SED now initiated perhaps the most intensive campaign ever outside election and
referendum periods. On 21 March, 3,818 functionaries and workers were enrolled in the
Bezirk's agitation brigades; by 25 March there were 5,398, and the figure peaked the
following day at 9,724, before receding to 1,729 on 2 April. By this point the
collectivisation programme was essentially complete, and these staff were busy training
the new LPG chairmen and treasurers.\textsuperscript{159} There was a clear correlation between the size
of the brigades employed and the number of hectares collectivised, with 16.9% of the
Bezirk's agricultural land collectivised between 26 and 28 March alone.\textsuperscript{160} At the height
of the campaign, staff were drawn from various RdB departments, firms, authorities, the
SED, the mass organisations and the other parties.\textsuperscript{161}

From mid-March these brigades no longer took 'no' for an answer, despite many
farmers' insistence that they wanted to harvest independently once more before joining
a collective,\textsuperscript{162} an attempt to play for time in case the international situation changed.
Some farmers admitted defeat once the large activist brigades arrived in mid-March.
Many were persuaded of the severe financial disincentives of remaining independent in
talks over the farmhouse kitchen table.\textsuperscript{163} In other cases coercion and force were
necessary. Though specific mentions of this are rare, occasional references suggest this
was a significant factor in achieving full collectivisation by 1 April. Thus one farmer
who refused to join an LPG was given a six months' suspended sentence,\textsuperscript{164} and the MfS
was involved when a Buttstädt farmer issued a 15 point plan, including mainly

\textsuperscript{158} 'Meldung über die sozialistische Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft, Stichtag: 19 March 1960',
ThHStAW, Vs/St 335, fol 78; RdB, 'Situationsbericht', 18 March 1960, 1400, ibid, fol 17.
\textsuperscript{159} Cf. various reports, ibid, especially fols 90, 92, 95, 112.
\textsuperscript{160} 'Einschätzung zum Stand der sozialistischen Umgestaltung [...] nach dem Stand vom 1.4.1960', ibid, fol
111.
\textsuperscript{161} RdB report, 21 March 1960, ibid, fols 35-38; RdB, '5./1960 Informationsbericht', 28 March 1960,
ThHStAW, OF 274, fol 2.
\textsuperscript{162} 'Anlage zur Meldung vom 23. März 1960', ThHStAW, Vs/St 335, fol 86.
\textsuperscript{163} Private information.
\textsuperscript{164} 21 March 1960 report (note 147), fols 42-3.
economic demands. The Stasi achieved the local farmers’ withdrawal of this plan, and also intervened in cases where farmers insulted brigade members. A local policeman dealt with a farmer’s wife whom others had persuaded not to join the LPG. Perhaps the Dachwig farmers who agreed to collectivisation before being approached by ‘instruction’ brigades did so to avoid similar coercion and fear.

Particular efforts were required in the Eichsfeld and especially the border zones, whither strengthened teams were dispatched in late March. As late as 28 March the frustrated Kreis Heiligenstadt SED chairman could merely report that discussions were underway, and that Eichsfeld farmers were asking questions which had been resolved elsewhere years earlier:

They’re asking questions which we cleared up in Kreis Weimar in 1953 in connection with that 17 June. They’re bringing up questions about democracy from the Hungarian events of 1956 and similar rubbish. It’s as though we’d never discussed these questions with them or explained them to them.

On 31 March all RdK chairmen were told to drop all other work and leave for Kreis Heiligenstadt with ‘two of their best comrades’, to ensure the Bezirk was fully collectivised by the following morning.

Although the Bezirk was proclaimed ‘fully collectivised’ on 1 April in time for a prearranged celebratory ‘popular festival’ on 2-3 April, problems with individual farmers were still reported on 6 April. In some areas LPGs were founded on paper, even though they would not begin collective farming until the autumn. ‘Enemy activity’ was not reported in the first days following the campaign’s completion, but isolated

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171 Similar cases reported by Osmond, p.157.
oppositional incidents were noted, as in Struth where the new collective farmers ironically suggested their LPG be named ‘Freedom’ or ‘1st April’.¹⁷²

Many problems remained even after the campaign was completed on paper. A special RdB meeting addressed the new LPGs’ weakness on 13 April and concluded that all state functionaries, in all departments, should acquire a minimum knowledge of agriculture to support the cooperatives. Officials from older LPGs and state farms were coopted to the new cooperatives.¹⁷³ However, cooperation between the various parties and organisations remained ‘inadequate’ in the localities.¹⁷⁴

By the autumn, difficulties were still very apparent in the LPGs.¹⁷⁵ Many cooperative farmers had not yet accepted their new status, resisted the calls to merge LPGs and disregard old farm and field boundaries, and hoped sabotage might yet reverse events. They told one another: ‘Don’t work so fast, the LPGs will collapse anyway.’ Many felt bitter that the cooperatives had been forced upon them. In some LPGs, cooperative work did not begin, as in Herda where farmers simply ignored the LPG chairman’s instructions. In some cases, LPG farmers withdrew from the cooperatives during the autumn and following spring and summer.¹⁷⁶ Various comrades in rural SED groups also still doubted the potential of socialist agriculture.¹⁷⁷

More than a year after the LPGs were founded, the situation remained unstable. Slightly fewer than half the LPGs had SED groups to uphold the party line (even assuming all these were reliable),¹⁷⁸ and there were still reports of LPG chairmen resigning and

¹⁷⁵ Bezirk Erfurt was representative of wider problems: cf. Osmond, pp.161-2.
¹⁷⁷ SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.66/60’, 27 October 1960, p.4, LPA, BIV/2/5-039.
¹⁷⁸ Calculated from Kreis reports [April 1961?], LPA, BIV/2/7-6.
members' threats to resign. In the Herda LPG alone, 27 members threatened to withdraw during June 1961, though all but one was persuaded to stay. The problems often resulted from dictatorial management, but managers were also under pressure. The seven resigning LPG chairmen in Kreis Worbis all blamed overwork, but the SED noted that in three of these LPGs there was no 'normal cooperative work'. Similar problems existed in the market gardening cooperatives (GPGs) in the Erfurt city area, where 38 members issued withdrawal declarations during late June 1961. The local SED felt this reflected 'lacking political certainty about the issue of a peace treaty with Germany and the perspectives of the GPGs'.

That some LPGs still had poor internal working relationships is revealed in the comment of an SED man in Hohenfelde:

When the women in our cooperative start singing in the fields again, then everything will be alright, but presently we're still a long way off.

In some areas there were still signs of deliberate attempts to break up the LPGs during early 1961, particularly among farmers with close contacts to the Catholic church. There was evidence, for example, of sabotage in the Dingelstäd MTS station. The MfS reviewed the situation closely. The MfS also tried to take the initiative by suggesting 'public trials' against politically vulnerable LPG farmers who had allegedly sabotaged cooperative work. The subject of one such trial was a farmer who, as an SS member, had killed Jews during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, had attempted Republikflucht and maintained links to the west and former citizens of Pomerania. Such an individual was not surprisingly opposed to SED policies. The Stasi noted the political aims of the proposed public trial:

...the proof should be given that former fascist elements, influenced by West German broadcasters and revanchist organisations, are trying to hinder the development of the GDR’s cattle industry...

179 SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.26/61', 3 July 1961, LPA, BIV/2/5-041.
In other words, anyone who opposed collectivisation could be branded a fascist. As in 1956, the SED had not won the argument, but merely forced through its policies against massive popular opposition. In 1960, the success in agriculture was administrative, not political. Though farmers grew used to LPGs after the Berlin Wall was closed, attempts to further socialise agriculture within the LPG framework met with continued resistance during the 1960s.

This chapter aims to have demonstrated that a domestic crisis could be just as influential for popular opinion as an international crisis. Collectivisation in the countryside was as important to rural communities as the Hungarian crisis of 1956 or the Berlin Wall’s construction in 1961 were for the wider population. Yet, just as with agricultural collectivisation, the Wall did not mark an immediate change in social attitudes. In the longer term, there was a surprising degree of continuity in popular responses to SED rule in town and country alike. These issues are the focus of the next chapter.

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183 Cf. Osmond, p.159.
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THURINGIA BEHIND THE WALL

As indicated above, when viewed in a broad perspective, it is possible to relativise the conventional significance attached to the Berlin Wall's construction in 1961 as a major caesura in GDR history, particularly as it affected a population such as that in Bezirk Erfurt, some 250 kilometres away from Berlin. Although party and state officials may have felt somewhat strengthened by the security the Wall offered, this chapter aims to demonstrate that patterns of conformity and non-conformity across the population were not particularly affected by the Wall's construction, and that life quickly settled back into the previously established contours after August 1961. This becomes clear from a consideration of events just before the Wall was built, and in the years thereafter.

1961: The borders are sealed

Although agricultural developments were the SED's main focus in early 1960, there were many other causes for concern, in terms of both popular attitudes (reflected in higher Republikflucht), and of the continuing weakness of local party and state structures. However, the 1960/61 period marked a turning point for the SED, not only because the GDR's borders were finally sealed in August 1961 and thereafter, but also because the party's own structures finally began to stabilise. The party made more determined attempts to improve basic administration and to unmask the weak and oppositional elements within its ranks. Nonetheless, problems remained throughout the decade.

The political framework had changed in two significant ways since 1956. First, by 1960 western television was a significant disruptive political factor for the SED, despite the
shortage of sets.¹ The party attempted to deter this powerful new source of ideological ‘poisoning’ and ‘border crossing’ with campaigns in which citizens pledged to remove the part of the receiver which received the western channels. Secondly, the food supply situation, though still far from stable, was less of an issue.² Instead worries centred more often on shortages of school textbooks, high textiles prices and the lack of checked shirts.³ Despite the clear increases in industrial and food production, and production workers’ wage rises since 1956,⁴ perceptions of austerity persevered, suggesting lower tolerance levels. Even the improved food supplies were poor and still provoked ‘negative discussions’.⁵ Sometimes there were severe difficulties, as in Heiligenstadt district where butter and bread were often unavailable in early August 1961 and hens were 102,200 eggs behind with the state plan.⁶ But one of the greatest popular economic complaints resulted directly from the SED’s own misplaced optimism in claiming in 1958 that the GDR would overtake West German standards by 1961. The population now realised this target was totally unattainable.⁷

There were some tentative signs that the GDR was gaining growing acceptance, if only because it had existed for eleven years. President Wilhelm Pieck’s death in September 1960 evoked general sadness and some spontaneous displays of flags at half mast on private houses.⁸ However, the subsequent establishment of a Staatsrat (Council of State) under the SED’s First Secretary, Walter Ulbricht created some confusion. Some

⁴ RdB, ‘Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung...’, July 1961, ThHStAW, Vs/St 577, fols 91-93.
⁵ 8 February 1960 report (note 2), fol 91.
⁸ SED BL, ‘Kurzninformation Nr.53/60’, 8 September 1960, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-039.
noted Ulbricht’s accumulation of posts and feared he might ‘follow in Stalin’s footsteps’.9

More importantly, the ongoing ‘German question’ increasingly dominated public debate. The growing gulf between eastern and western Germany, and the difficulty in obtaining visas for travel between the GDR and FRG in either direction, had always been problematic for the SED, but assumed much larger dimensions in public opinion in the late 1950s as the West Berlin issue reached a head. Many citizens of Bezirk Erfurt believed that ‘Thuringia will return to the Americans if West Berlin becomes a free city’,° demonstrating the continuing potency of the brief American occupation over a decade later. However, the more tangible visa question dominated some public meetings within a month of Khrushchev’s ultimatum to transfer Soviet responsibilities in West Berlin to the GDR government.11 The continuing Berlin crisis provided farmers with an excuse to delay LPG membership during 1959.12 Despite the SED’s campaigns to send resolutions to that year’s Geneva summit, few believed they could influence the outcome, or that the summit would achieve anything.13 After Khrushchev and Kennedy failed to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough in Vienna in mid-1961 and the USSR proposed a bilateral peace treaty with Germany, some believed war would ensue. Only the more thoughtful pointed out that the real hindrance to German unity was that West German workers were better off than their GDR counterparts and consequently did not want socialism.14 The same underlying argument was more frequently heard in calls for ‘free all-German elections’,15 or that the whole of Berlin should become a ‘free city’.16

14 13 June 1961 report (note 10), pp.5-6.
Opposition to the SED was still chiefly influenced by the symbolism of the Third Reich and by events in the FRG. For instance, in January 1960 antisemitic provocations in West Germany were echoed in the GDR with a renewed outbreak of swastikas, antisemitic graffiti and slogans such as ‘Ulbricht my enemy, Hitler my friend’. Despite perpetual anti-western propaganda, few believed the west wanted war or regarded Adenauer as a danger. Some workers even thought ‘Willi [sic] Brandt is a good representative of the working class’. Although Soviet disarmament proposals were widely welcomed, this presumably reflected general hopes for peace rather than devotion to the socialist camp. However, there was cynicism in some quarters, even among some presumably loyal local government officials. Understandably, plans to station nuclear weapons in the GDR caused some fear. By mid-1961 many felt:

When they talk most about peace, then they want war. That’s how it was under Hitler too.

Resistance to SED rule was also expressed in reactions to the enlistment campaigns for the NVA. Naturally, many young people wished to avoid military service (which remained voluntary until 1962). The NVA campaigns and GDR foreign and military policy were further undermined by the general refusal to view West Germans as enemies, the obvious contradiction between the SED’s avowed peace policies and the simultaneous military expansion, and fears that military expenditure would reduce living standards. The FDJ’s inefficacy was revealed when some members declared: ‘We’re pacifists and won’t carry guns’. Women were particularly reluctant for their sons to enlist. Young people were reportedly fatalistic rather than keen to defend

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22 SED Erfurt, ‘Informationsbericht...’, 21 August 1961, p.20, LPA, IV/5.01/144.
socialism, believing they could do nothing and the atom bombs would fall one day.\textsuperscript{24} The likely implications of a bilateral peace treaty for travel permits and world peace created a general ‘fear psychosis’.\textsuperscript{25} Even without the NVA problem, youth work was still highly unsatisfactory in some areas in 1960. In Dingelstädt, for instance, young people emulated western models by ‘standing around on corners, watching western television and worshipping Presly [sic]’. The result of these ‘demoralising tendencies’ was rising youth criminality.\textsuperscript{26}

There were also serious but isolated problems in factories, with occasional strikes over raised work quotas. Although this was essentially the reason for the 1953 disturbances, the much improved degree of SED control by 1961 was reflected in the speedy isolation of such strikes. Thus a stoppage at an Eisenach car plant was limited to one department and concluded within four hours.\textsuperscript{27}

Sometimes the Cold War’s underlying uncertainties were reflected in the rumours which accompanied shortages. For instance, some believed that the chemicals needed for washing powder would instead be used ‘for a new war’, or that pigs were being purchased to ensure meat supplies in wartime.\textsuperscript{28} Such comments suggested that many people still considered the GDR was a provisional state and Europe’s postwar borders as temporary.

In late 1960 many SED members shared the general public’s perceptions. Meetings about ‘ideological-political questions’ were poorly attended in rural areas. It emerged that these groups had long since held no fundamental discussions. Comrades at an Erfurt VEB ‘underestimate the aggression of west German militarism to a dangerous extent’. At another members were too busy fulfilling the plan to worry about ideological matters, suggesting a non-political motivation for party membership. Even in economic

\textsuperscript{24} SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.66/60’, 27 October 1960, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/5-039.
\textsuperscript{25} 22 July 1961 report (note 15), p.3.
\textsuperscript{26} SED BL, ‘Kurze Einschätzung der Kreisparteiaktivtagung am 5.10.60…’, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/5-060.
\textsuperscript{27} SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.27/61’, 4 July 1961, LPA, BIV/2/5-041.
\textsuperscript{28} 15 October 1960 report (note 9), p.7.
matters, however, comrades and non-SED workers alike doubted the economic plans were realistic and did not believe in the ‘force of the popular masses’. The economic situation was generally perceived to be ‘worse now than years ago’. The SED’s rank and file understood as little as most citizens of issues such as peaceful coexistence and the status of Germany. Even the ‘fighting groups of the working class’ seemed unreliable. One member said he would refuse to fight workers if they rebelled about food shortages. Some workers considered the ‘fighting groups’ the equivalent of Hitler’s *Volkssturm.* Many grassroots members demonstrated ‘liberal behaviour’ and did not recognise the party’s decisions as ‘irrevocable’. Comrade H., a KPD man since 1928, expressed many SED members’ loss of faith:

Your policies are wrong. Can’t you see that all the workers and farmers are leaving your republic?

Echoing the fears of 1956, an Eisenach comrade believed:

The comrades will soon be put through the mincer anyway. The trees to hang us all on are already marked out.

Thus, the SED seemed poorly placed to withstand the political challenges of sealing the GDR’s borders. In July 1961 non-workplace party meetings attracted only around half the members, but far fewer in some areas (only 29.1% in *Kreis* Apolda). Despite the looming elections, members lacked ‘fighting spirit’ and were often reserved on key issues. Though generally loyal, even the *Kreisleitung* in Erfurt-Land was not wholly reliable and had a ‘serious deficit in political work with the masses’. Many district leaderships supported local groups inadequately, and in some areas attracted few new members. In the Eichsfeld, recruitment slowed further during 1961.

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30 BPO MTS Bornhagen, ‘Wie entwickelt sich die Kampfkraft der Parteiorganisation?’, 5 November 1960, p.1, LPA, IV/4.06/121.

183
Against this background, the ZK’s July 1961 call to ‘further raise the fighting force of the [SED’s] basic organisations’ seemed highly necessary, and quickly produced a rash of local self-criticism. The Erfurt Stadtleitung began an ‘offensive battle to remove all forms of liberalism’ in factories. ‘Liberalism’ and ‘immoral behaviour’ (often alcohol abuse) were now reported to have infected many Kreis Worbis party groups and diminished the party’s image. The most notable result of the campaign was the sudden frequency of the word Kampf (‘battle’) in SED reports. However, there was little opportunity to raise the party’s battle readiness before 13 August dawned. As a July report noted, the party’s propaganda and agitation had not created clarity in key political questions, its argumentation was ‘clumsy’, particularly in the press, and lacking vigilance had enabled ‘ideological coexistence’ to grow, even among SED members.

Most observers agree that the Berlin Wall’s construction was principally caused by Republikflucht. Though not as high as in the mid-1950s, this phenomenon increased again as international tensions worsened and fears grew that the doors would be closed (‘Torschlußpanik’).

Relatively few party members left: even in Kreis Heiligenstadt the highest figure was 4.01% of the total in 1960. However, some of these held important positions, such as a mayor, the district education director and the secretary to the SED’s deputy Kreis secretary. Often specific material difficulties caused people to leave, or threaten to. Typically, a combine harvester operator drunkenly threatened: ‘If my flat problem isn’t sorted, I’m going to Adenauer.’ In rural border districts, collectivisation sometimes led

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35 Roßmann, p.415.
37 ‘Bericht der Kreisparteikontrollkommission Worbis...’, 1 August 1961, pp.3-4, LPA, IV/4.13/192.

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to the *Republikflucht* of entire families.\(^{42}\) Frustration over refused visa applications was another frequent cause, even among otherwise loyal SED supporters.\(^{43}\) Some complained the government was hindering ‘human and family contacts’. Others threatened to relinquish party activities unless they received a visa. Some believed visas were only issued to those with personal contacts.

**Republikflucht (sample Kreise), 1957-1960**

![Graph showing Republikflucht (sample Kreise), 1957-1960](image)


*Torschlußpanik* set in by mid-1961 when the border closures seemed almost inevitable. One comrade protested: ‘We must not lock people in!’. Others provocatively called on the government to ‘decide that nobody can travel to or from West Germany any more’. Meanwhile, Ifla citizens felt it was high time they ‘cleared off, before Berlin is shut’. Police stations reported citizens ‘energetically’ insisting they be given visas immediately. The fear that visas would no longer be available was combined with actual and perceived grave economic difficulties. This generalised into widespread

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\(^{43}\) Graf (SED Worbis 1st Secretary) to Bräutigam, 28 April 1961, ibid.
apathy and a ‘feel bad’ factor within the party which undermined many comrades’ faith in socialism’s future.⁴⁴

The Torschlußpanik is also visible in 1961’s monthly Republikflucht statistics:

![Republikflucht, 1961, selected districts](image)


Despite these inherent weaknesses, the SED rose to the challenge once the Berlin borders were closed on 12-13 August 1961. The Bezirksleitung met early on 13 August, with representatives of the security organs and the mass organisations present. They dictated various measures which were quickly communicated to the districts.⁴⁵ In Erfurt, for instance, the SED Stadtleitung conferred with the chairs of the bloc parties and mass organisations, and acquainted functionaries with the official explanations. Officials visited key installations to explain the developments and prevent any disruption to water, gas, electricity and postal services.⁴⁶ Similar procedures were repeated in every

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⁴⁶ SED Erfurt, ‘Erste Meinungen und Stellungnahmen...’, 13 August 1961, pp.1-2, LPA, IV/5.01/144.
Kreis and at Bezirk level. In factories, most SED members were apparently on the offensive and directing discussions on 14 August.

The public’s initial reactions to the Berlin Wall were often unusually positive, perhaps because the development had been foreseen. Even in June 1961, bus passengers were overheard saying that ‘Adenauer will close the borders’ unless the West Berlin question is solved. Immediately after the borders were closed, numerous citizens felt the measures should have been taken much earlier and welcomed the end to the ‘slave trade’ of GDR workers taking jobs in the west. Others agreed with steps to prevent ‘West Berliners buying up the GDR’. One excited youth commented: ‘I’d like to be a Volkspolizist standing at the sectoral border now, that’s where it’s at.’

However, these early responses suggest ignorance of the true scale of the measures. After all, Berlin’s sectoral borders had been closed before. In the early days, few can have realised that visits to the west were now forbidden. Railway workers, for instance, felt it important to ‘show people that traffic will still be maintained and these steps are only a series of security and control measures’. Thus, initial resistance was vague, with isolated calls for free elections or the return of the eastern territories, or complaints that the GDR’s supplies would be better without the LPGs. The security forces were quick to dampen any outspoken resistance, and arrested six Eisenach youths for ‘wild, rabble rousing propaganda’. But even on the first day, some feared the west’s reactions. By 15 August, as western reports of tanks and barbed wire filtered

50 SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr. 19/61’, 2 June 1961, p.6, LPA, BIV/2/5-041.
51 13 August 1961 report (note 46), pp.3-5.
52 13 August 1961 report (note 49), p.1
57 Ibid, p.6.
58 13 August 1961 report (note 47), p.3.
through, numerous citizens began commenting that the measures were too harsh and could lead to war. The impact of western television became apparent:

I am against the border hoppers but I’m not in favour of ripping up streets in Berlin to put up barbed wire. It’s true, I saw it myself on western TV.59

As days passed, and clarity about the Wall’s implications grew, so dissatisfaction increased, along with rumours of conscription and an imminent currency exchange.60 Calls for "free", pan-German elections’ continued.61 Many correctly foresaw that the measures would deepen Germany’s division. Some feared wages would fall with the borders closed. Ulbricht was personally blamed for the Wall, and some workers felt Pieck and Grotewohl would have acted differently.62 Although many workforces and other groups were persuaded to sign resolutions welcoming the moves, compliance was not total. Some factories recorded significant levels of abstentions (40% in VEB Holzbau, Erfurt). Young workers sometimes attempted to blackmail the SED by threatening poor election results in September if more visas were not made available.63 Graffiti artists depicted Ulbricht on gallows or daubed slogans about ‘Ulbricht, the Russians’ watchdog’. One of the nine people arrested in Kreis Sömmerda on 19 August alone had threatened to murder Ulbricht. Other crimes included ripping down the GDR flag or drawing swastikas.64 In response, the SED increased propagandist activity, often linked to the imminent Young Pioneers’ Jamboree. Apart from house meetings, Pioneer delegations worked with the general public on resolutions welcoming the border closures and pledging support to the GDR and Ulbricht.65 Nonetheless, four weeks later the Wall remained central to popular discussion, and threats not to vote if visas to West Germany were refused increased.66

60 SED Erfurt, ‘Zweitägige Berichterstattung’, 25 August 1961, p.3, LPA, IV/5.01/144.
63 SED Erfurt, ‘Tägliche Information...’, 15 August 1961, LPA, IV/5.01/144.
64 SED BL, ‘Zusammenfassung von Fakten...’, 2 September 1961, p.8, LPA, BIV/2/5-042.
66 SED Erfurt, ‘Anhang zum Inf.Bericht vom 11.9.61’, LPA, IV/5.01/144.
Fears of war and the rumoured currency exchange provoked more practical reactions. In some Kreis Worbis villages, sales increased by up to 600% in the days after the Wall’s construction,\textsuperscript{67} and panic buying continued into September.\textsuperscript{68} Thereafter rumours of future shortages encouraged hoarding, causing shortages and further unrest.\textsuperscript{69} There were also examples of unusually high cash withdrawals from banks.\textsuperscript{70}

It was easier to achieve active support from VEB workers than those in private firms or firms with 50% state participation (HSBs), where discussions centred on ‘personal matters’. In one HSB the staff spontaneously left a meeting at their normal clocking off time, without electing a ‘voters’ representative’.\textsuperscript{71} Relations with HSBs were not eased by ‘sectarian’ attitudes among state officials who despised private businesses in socialism.\textsuperscript{72}

Doctors and other medical staff were particularly dissatisfied. They had for years demanded privileged travel arrangements, for professional and personal reasons, and the SED had often complied to retain their services in the GDR. The Wall prompted an ‘open, provocative attitude’ from some doctors and nurses once its implications became clear.\textsuperscript{73}

Despite the general discontent engendered by the sealed borders, reactions were ‘spontaneous, individual and generally helpless’,\textsuperscript{74} and therefore did not translate into any structured, meaningful opposition to the SED. This was most evident when local elections proceeded normally just five weeks later. The official results showed higher turnouts and fewer ‘No’ votes in every Kreis compared to the 1957 figures.\textsuperscript{75} As will

\textsuperscript{68} 8 September 1961 report (note 23), p.5.
\textsuperscript{70} SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.42/61’, 20 August 1961, p.4, LPA, BIV/2/5-041.
\textsuperscript{71} 22 August 1961 report (note 65), p.6.
\textsuperscript{73} 21 August 1961 report (note 36), pp.11-12.
\textsuperscript{74} Fulbrook, \textit{Anatomy of a Dictatorship}, p.192.
\textsuperscript{75} SED BL, untitled report, undated [1961], p.2, LPA, BIV/2/13-725.
become apparent, this result was achieved despite rather than because of good party organisation in many areas. The archives give no indication of why GDR citizens did not defy the SED and Moscow over the Wall by voting ‘No’. We can merely speculate that this was the first sign of a trend towards making one’s peace with the GDR after the escape hatch had been closed. Voting remained compulsory, and the Wall had created a greater inducement to conform to the rules of a country which could no longer be left. By taking no action over the Berlin Wall themselves, the western allies had arguably set a precedent for upholding the status quo which individual GDR citizens could not resist.

The SED faced a still greater challenge in its weakest area shortly after the September elections when further measures were taken to secure the western border. Such action was made necessary by the continuing Republikflucht after 13 August. By the end of August, 81 Bezirk Erfurt residents had fled the GDR in 30 incidents. Another 97 had been arrested in the attempt and there were 20 cases of people entering the prohibited ‘ten metre strip’. (112 people were also arrested trying to enter the GDR illegally.) The new regime included stricter rules about entering the ‘prohibited areas’ near the border, and later evacuating apparently unreliable citizens from the villages closest to the border. For the SED this meant further antagonising the Catholic community in the Eichsfeld: 38 of Kreis Heiligenstadt’s parishes were within five kilometres of the border.

The public meetings to explain these measures were well attended, even by those who had never attended meetings before. The high turnout clearly reflects anxiety about the new measures. The party was quickly inundated with practical questions. How would doctors and vets enter the prohibited zones, and how would residents reach chemists outside it? How would essential services be available during the curfew? In some communities, the SED was pleased to note great willingness to assist border patrols.

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77 ‘Bericht der Arbeitsgruppe Heiligenstadt...’, 12 October 1961, p.1, LPA, IV/4.06/149.
though some 'helpers' may simply have wished to reconnoitre border installations to facilitate later breakouts. Similarly, farmers perhaps had more than agricultural motives when they queried the use of fields directly adjacent to the border. The difficulty of obtaining passes for the 'restricted zone' caused increasing aggravation.

Fuelled by memories of the expulsions of allegedly untrustworthy elements from the border areas in 1952, rumours about similar evacuations emerged almost immediately after 13 August. When the evacuations began on 3 October, the local population seemed resigned to them, providing they were not personally affected, and with few exceptions worked normally, merely expressing the hope that 'they've got the right ones'. Large assemblies to watch the evacuations were rare. Even the sister and fiancée of a deported Fretterode man made no complaint as 'he was no good anyway'. Few posed questions at explanatory meetings. Though tensions were relieved by the promise that the forcible removals were now complete, the population adopted an even more reserved attitude. However, people also began behaving more loyally, perhaps believing they could avoid further SED interference by keeping the peace. Kreis Eisenach residents felt: 'It's better to accept some unpleasantness than be deported.' Thus the local population handed would-be escapees to the authorities, and even readiness to remove the western channel from TV sets increased.

Despite the stricter border regime and the evacuations, Republikflucht continued, mainly involving villagers near the border. Most spectacularly, on 2 October twelve families numbering 53 people, including the LPG chairman, fled from Böseckendorf, a

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80 SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.59/61', 23 September 1961, p.4, LPA, BIV/2/5-042.
81 RdK Heiligenstadt, 'Einschätzung der Lage im Grenzgebiet', 26 October 1961, p.3, LPA, IV/4.06/149.
83 SED Heiligenstadt telephone messages, 3 October 1961, LPA, IV/4.06/149; SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.66/61', 3 October 1961, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-042.
84 'Durchsage der KL Heiligenstadt', 4 October 1961, 10.00; SED Heiligenstadt telex no.55, 5 October 1961, LPA, IV/4.06/149.
85 SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.61/61', 2 October 1961, p.1, LPA, BIV/2/5-042.
village within 500 metres of the border. The date suggests that a desire to escape deportation was the direct cause. A further twelve members of two Böseckendorf families escaped on 23 February 1962. Though the KPKK had reported serious cadre problems and local dissatisfaction in August, and a Bezirk level report of September had already identified the village as one of six in Kreis Worbis where there was no belief in the socialist perspective, the SED could not remedy the situation. Analyses produced after the mass escape highlight the party’s poor control of some areas. Only two SED members lived in Böseckendorf and were organised in neighbouring Bleckenrode’s party organisation. Due to ‘personal squabbles and arguments’, this performed no real work. One of the Böseckendorf members had ‘gone so morally to pot’ that he had to be expelled. The village LPG, founded late after harsh disputes, was cooperative in name only and dominated by big farmers unfavourably disposed to socialist agriculture. In the LPG’s first year, much farming work was deliberately neglected. Böseckendorf-Bleckenrode’s complacent SED mayor and SED teacher had done little to improve the party organisation and received little support from higher levels, notably not from the local party secretary who was later removed. Nor did all local DBD members, the strongest local party, support the new border regime. The SED’s position in Böseckendorf suffered further over irregularities in the disposal of goods belonging to the families who had left. Eventually the local mayor, teacher and policeman were arrested, even though the teacher had been solely responsible for achieving any SED presence or cooperative activity in the village at all.

Though the Böseckendorf example represents an extreme, it demonstrates that the SED had many problems to resolve in terms of coopting the general population and establishing firm structures within the party after the Wall’s construction. However, many of these problems predated the Wall.

Superficial stabilisation behind the Wall

After the ZK’s July resolutions (see page 184) and the border closures, the SED took a more offensive line within its own organisation, and more members were encouraged to conform to party statutes. Within a closed country with longer term prospects than before, membership of the leading party suddenly seemed more worthwhile. In the first days after the Wall’s erection, attendance at party meetings rose to 75% (though in at least one case a 6am emergency call was required to assemble otherwise unavailable members), and in Erfurt alone there were 94 applications to become SED candidate members between 13 and 28 August. Similarly, the Wall had the effect of galvanising ideologically weak teachers into acknowledging the SED.

Nonetheless, some comrades initially felt the Wall was a step too far and responded by refusing party work. Some Kampfgruppe members also refused duty, albeit with excuses about sick wives and time pressures. Meanwhile, some comrades failed to contradict comparisons of the GDR with a prison. In the Volkenroda potash works comrades compared the GDR unfavourably with the nazi era, and one member threatened to resign unless he received a visa. The DFD chairwoman elect in Mühlhausen refused to assume her post after the border measures. In training colleges, ‘despite the progress in the development of political consciousness, opportunistic, liberalistic, objectivistic and pacifist views have not been overcome among some training instructors’.

However, the Wall enabled the SED to cleanse its ranks and make examples of dissident forces, some of whom were expelled, such as the local policeman in Stöckey

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who refused his duties and eventually flung down his police book and pistol declaring he wanted his freedom. Similarly, a Brehme member who ‘imagined communism differently’ was expelled and recommended for resettlement away from the border.\(^\text{97}\) In all, four Kreis Worbis members, including one local party secretary, were expelled from the party for opposing the Wall, and various other members and non-members were arrested, imprisoned or expelled from the border area for dissident behaviour.\(^\text{98}\) Although some districts, like Nordhausen, had to be encouraged to take seriously the personnel review of border party groups,\(^\text{99}\) this was a clear disincentive to party members and the general population alike to oppose the new order. The SED’s rank and file could be in no further doubt about the need either resign membership, and risk personal disadvantages, or remain outwardly loyal.

The new border regime unmasked serious weaknesses within the Eichsfeld SED. The Kreis Heiligenstadt party numbered only 2,060 members and candidates (some 4.7% of the population, compared with 9.4% nationally), of whom fewer than half were traditional ‘workers’. This was barely more than the CDU’s 1,528 members. Seven of the district’s 63 communities, 10 of the 11 PGHs, 15 private firms and 73 of the 91 LPGs had no SED organisation. The LPG party organisations were anyway considered unreliable, as their members were mainly religious and influenced by their relatives.\(^\text{100}\) However, the SED profited from the border changes by attempting to strengthen its organisation. In line with ZK requirements, ‘aggressive debates’ were held with members and functionaries who ‘fulfilled their party duties unsatisfactorily’. As not all comrades could be persuaded to toe the party line (for instance, an Arenshausen comrade announced he would choose the church over the party if necessary) ‘cadre changes’ were made in some groups’ leaderships.\(^\text{101}\) By 11 October, 17 party secretaries,

\(^{97}\) 5 September 1961 report (note 67), pp.3-4.
14 mayors (including eight SED appointees) and 19 NF chairmen were removed in the district’s five kilometre restricted zone. A further 18 RdK staff were to be removed. The reasons were:

1. Wavering attitude to the implementation of party and government decisions.
2. Little contact to the population and weakly developed class consciousness.
3. 1st degree western contacts, particularly due to *Republikflucht* of closest relatives.
4. Relatively high proportion of members of former NSDAP and its organisations.
5. Immoral behaviour, sometimes repeatedly.\textsuperscript{102}

However, overall the Bezirk needed to replace 49 party secretaries, 24 mayors and 38 NF chairmen in border communities, but failed to supply the agreed replacement cadres to Heiligenstadt quickly.\textsuperscript{103}

The Heiligenstadt *Kreisleitung* was itself weak, giving inadequate help to local groups or even the RdK party group. Membership of the border police also made no lasting impression, as ‘due to marrying into Catholic families a large proportion of former colleagues give up their progressive attitudes and become keen churchgoers’.\textsuperscript{104} Thus the party’s ‘leading role’ was not assured in various border localities.\textsuperscript{105} Though these problems were generally more extreme in the Eichsfeld than elsewhere, their parallels existed across the Bezirk.

Against the background of these problems, and exploiting the September 1961 elections in particular, loyalists began claiming the upper hand in local SED groups. Thus, ‘discussions were held with comrades who have recently displayed liberal behaviour’ in Sondershausen, where some leading members were called to account. Similarly, a deputy party group leader in Erfurt was officially warned about ‘defeatist behaviour’

\textsuperscript{102} 12 October 1961 (note 77), pp.4-5.
\textsuperscript{104} 12 October 1961 report (note 77), pp.3, 6, 10.
after he neglected to persuade reluctant workers to sign a letter to Ulbricht. Pressure on members to conform became intense. For instance, a staff meeting at Langensalza district hospital in August was marred by ‘provocative’ activities. After ‘lengthy preparation’ the meeting was repeated in September by which time Dr. P., who had originally refused to sign a letter to Ulbricht, had become unusually loyal and written a personal declaration which was published in *Das Volk*. Some comrades with dissident views were returned to candidate status or removed from state posts. Aware of members’ continuing ideological weaknesses, and that not all party groups reacted independently or correctly to political events, the leadership insisted on ‘turning party organisations’ membership meetings into forums of instruction’.

However, the battle was not restricted to party members. Many offensives were waged against those who expressed dissident views. Thus a Sömmerda security officer was sacked for ‘extolling’ 17 June 1953. Similarly the party exposed an Eisenach builder who incited his colleagues to call strikes as a ‘fascist element’. The builder was arrested, his workmates forced to distance themselves from him, and the strike was averted. Elsewhere, the appearance of ‘Soviet comrades’ in key factories was a ‘significant help’ to the SED, presumably in dampening dissident discussions.

Regular consumers of western broadcasts were also attacked, as when an Erfurt DFD group dismissed its chairwoman for refusing to dismantle her aerial. The anti-western television campaign was particularly necessary in border areas. Here the party began dedicated, systematic campaigns after 13 August, particularly after six people escaped from Ecklingerode, all apparently influenced by western television. Outwardly, the campaign was proving successful by late September. For instance, 249 of the 280 television owners near the border in *Kreis Mühlhausen* agreed to alter their sets.

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However, continued complaints that there was nothing political with watching sport and music on western television suggested the argument had not been won. There was also evidence that aerials for western channels were reinstalled in attics after being removed from roofs.\textsuperscript{113}

NVA recruitment was a major battleground during 1961. In Weimar, more than 50\% of all youths between 18 and 23 signed pledges to enlist either immediately or after their studies.\textsuperscript{114} However, the continuing prevalence of comments such as ‘We want to live in peace and work, why do we need a National People’s Army?’ suggests that coercion rather than conviction had produced these successes.\textsuperscript{115} One youth sarcastically commented that the ‘freedom to join the army was exactly the same as voluntarily joining the LPG’.\textsuperscript{116} However, after 13 August the SED felt confident enough to demand ‘clear and concrete statements’ from each individual at meetings about joining the NVA. SED members not prepared to ‘defend the homeland with a weapon in the hand’ could expect intense, individual debates, and exclusion from the party if they still refused.\textsuperscript{117} The weak FDJ, many of whose functionaries refused to enter the NVA, was also targeted. FDJ Kreisleitung members was removed in Apolda and Worbis for this weakness. However, although pressure increased (for instance, SED members debated ‘very thoroughly’ with a Trebra youth until he ‘volunteered’),\textsuperscript{118} ultimately there was no alternative to introducing compulsory conscription in 1962. Young people avoided the meetings where they were expected to enlist voluntarily, and relatively few FDJ functionaries were loyal enough to implement the campaign, particularly at local level where they often preferred to avoid difficult debates.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{112} 27 September 1961 (note 99), pp.3-4.
\textsuperscript{114} RdB, ‘Einschätzung über die Durchführung der konstituierenden Sitzungen der am 17.9.61 gewählten Volksvertretungen’, 5 October 1961, ThHStAW, Vs/St 577, fol. 157-8.
\textsuperscript{117} SED BL, ‘Einige Bemerkungen über die Stärkung der Kampfkraft der Partei’, 31 August 1961, pp.4-5, LPA, BIV/2/5-041.
\textsuperscript{118} 13 September 1961 report (note 106), pp.3, 8.
\textsuperscript{119} 2 September 1961 report (note 116), pp.2-3, 6-8.
It also became quickly apparent that the new tough line within the party merely silenced
the loudest opponents, but did not significantly raise the party’s ‘fighting force’. After
the election campaign, party activity receded. The Mühlhausen Kreisleitung estimated
that ‘in all party organisations only some comrades stand up in public’ and that ‘the
work of the party groups in the local councils, state organs, mass organisations and NF
committees does not meet requirements’. ‘Liberalism’ was resurgent in Kreis
Heiligenstadt’s party organisation and party work at the border was still ‘particularly
weak’. The renewed debate about Stalin and the personality cult at the CPSU’s 23rd
Congress, culminating in the removal of Stalin’s body from the Red Square mausoleum
and of his name from numerous towns and street signs, further damaged the party’s
image, as some defended Stalin’s memories and others renewed comparisons with
Ulbricht.

In the wider population, the questions, problems and restrictions raised by 13 August
were not quickly forgotten (as the Berlin Wall’s opening in 1989 proved). In April 1962
Weimar’s population still hoped for speedy reunification and easier east-west travel.
The public exploited the principle of ‘peaceful coexistence’ to argue for compromise
between east and west. However, the more immediate problem of food supplies also
dominated much discussion. Some ironically wondered if West Germany’s prosperity
resulted from better weather, while others openly blamed the ‘LPG’s fast development’.
As 1961 ended, popular discussion again turned to material problems. Some felt that
Christmas supplies had never been so ‘dismal’ and that textiles and shoe supplies were
worse than ever. In one village a woman believed she would have to ask for potatoes
from the west in order not to starve. Farmers were again anxious about fodder as winter
set in. Slowly, these tangible problems displaced the Berlin Wall as the principal
focus of discontent.

121 SED BL, ‘Informationsbericht Nr.37/61’, 8 November 1961, pp.6-7, 13; ‘Kurzinformation
122 8 November 1961 report (note 121), pp.7-8.
Despite the efforts at socialist education, young people remained a particular concern to the SED. Some had begun talking of a ‘third way’,\textsuperscript{123} and most remained ignorant of the SED’s ‘National Document’. Those who knew of it felt it would change nothing, and some believed (despite the vigorous NVA campaign) that West Germany was not a militarist threat anyway.\textsuperscript{124} Pupils’ attitudes were partly explained by their teachers’ ‘false’ views, demonstrating that the SED had still not appointed entirely reliable teachers. Parents did much to undermine the political education which was dispensed. Despite the SED’s organisational advances in the Eichsfeld, there were ‘still many uncertainties and false views’ in practically all the border communities of Kreis Heiligenstadt. Many ‘underestimated’ West German militarism and some were unafraid to describe the GDR’s border soldiers as ‘murderers’, reflecting both the continuing antipathy towards the state, and the tolerance which the SED (and MfS) had to extend in the face of such sentiment.\textsuperscript{125}

In summary, although the Wall initially enabled the SED hierarchy to clamp down on the uncommitted and the oppositional, who suddenly found themselves unable to leave or threaten to do so, the shock of the Wall as a symbol of discipline quickly receded. Party efficiency resumed its normal, often indifferent, levels, and the expression of public dissatisfaction and apathy towards the regime’s political goals returned. Though the population had to make its peace with the GDR, the SED had also to find a modus vivendi with all those who remained in the country.

**The GDR in the 1960s**

During the 1960s, problems similar to those in the ‘pre-Wall’ era continued, but consolidation occurred to the extent that life became somewhat more routine. Many

\textsuperscript{124} FDJ BL, ‘Stimmung der Jugend zum nationalen Dokument’, 3 April 1962, pp.1-2, ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} SED Heiligenstadt, ‘Einschätzung der Stimmung...’, 6 June 1962, pp.6-8, ibid.
state functionaries, for instance, regarded preparations for the 1963 *Volkskammer* elections as routine and relatively unimportant.\(^\text{126}\) Similarly, voters turned out later and later in successive elections between 1961 and 1965,\(^\text{127}\) despite the SED’s exhortations to vote early and thereby snub detractors of the GDR’s electoral system. The sudden return to early voting in 1967 suggests a major SED offensive.

During the 1960s, political life increasingly settled into a routine, not only because of the Wall, but also because the GDR had existed for fifteen years by the mid-1960s, longer than the Third Reich. Between elections, political and ideological work with the population died away, just as in previous years. *Nationale Front* committees as high as *Kreis* level had to be reactivated for the 1963 election campaign.\(^\text{128}\) Similarly, although Erfurt boasted 6,250 political agitators, only half of the ‘agitation leaders’ attended their scheduled instruction meetings over December 1963/January 1964, and only around a quarter of the agitators attended their courses. Although ‘family conversations’ were a proven method of effectively influencing the population, these were held in only one ward in the town. For their part, Erfurt’s NF committees had no oversight of the local ‘house communities’. There were similar reports from Mühlhausen.\(^\text{129}\)

Thus, the parties’ and mass organisations’ efficiency remained far from satisfactory. In early 1965, for instance, the SED *Bezirksleitung* was dissatisfied with the work plans of the five *Kreisleitungen* it checked at random. Only one of these *Kreisleitungen* had attempted to match its agitation work to the actual state of ideological awareness in the population.\(^\text{130}\) The leadership quality of the FDGB, FDJ and DFD varied drastically from district to district, and many SED members were still not fully aware of their own


\(^{127}\) Cf. statistical records, ibid.


\(^{130}\) SED BL, ‘Einschätzung der Pläne der politischen Massenarbeit...', 5 February 1965, ibid.
party programme. Even in the state administration only around two thirds of SED members attended party meetings and participation in the party education programme was poor. Worryingly for the SED, even replacement leaders for the inadequate party groups seemed incapable of making improvements, and the work of many groups depended on only one or two people. In this respect, little had changed since the 1950s.

Although the Heiligenstadt district party organisation was particularly weak, its experiences during the 1960s illustrate the SED’s failure to consolidate its structures fully even after the Wall’s construction. The situation within the Heiligenstadt party deteriorated during the decade. There were reportedly poor relations between the leading comrades in the Kreisleitung, where the various departments failed to report to one another. Meanwhile, party groups in industry and agriculture prepared meetings inadequately and concentrated on local economic and administrative matters, rather than ideological growth. The local leaderships’ ideological uncertainties were reflected in ordinary members’ comments. In 1967 party inspectors noted that the Heiligenstadt SED was too self-satisfied and that its leaders did not check their work rigorously enough. Both the district secretary and his deputy worked apparently aimlessly and did not always draw the right conclusions for the problems they recognised. The party appeared to be on automatic pilot and merely keeping the local peace. By late 1967, the Bezirksleitung felt compelled to install a new Kreis secretary to reinvigorate the district party, though the deputy remained and worked as poorly as ever. Nonetheless, there was a wave of disciplinary procedures during 1967 when, for instance, 15 senior and

133 SED BL, ‘Information zur Situation in der KL Heiligenstadt’, 28 October 1966, LPA, BIV/2/5-349.
eight middle ranking party functionaries were called to account. These even included the RdK chairman, accused of ‘petit-bourgeois’ behaviour at his 33rd birthday party, and the party Kreisleitung’s economic department head, whose ‘damaging’ comments made him unacceptable as a party member.\textsuperscript{137} Even without dangerous challenges to its rule, therefore, the SED failed to govern as effectively as the Politbüro would have liked during the 1960s.

Although open opposition to the SED is recorded less often in the mid-1960s than before the Wall’s construction (a 1963 election campaign report noted only two significant incidents),\textsuperscript{138} the SED had not yet secured popular loyalty. The same types of political questions cropped up during the 1960s as in the previous decade. By 1963, workers, farmers and the intelligentsia had still not accepted the reasons for the Wall and the impediments to east-west travel. Few supported the GDR’s official stance on the German question. Throughout the decade, people doubted the dangers posed to peace by the Federal Republic,\textsuperscript{139} or commented that ‘the majority in West Germany has voted CDU, things can’t be so bad there’. There were also questions about the nature of GDR elections and why there was no opposition in the Volkskammer.\textsuperscript{140} More worrying were isolated comments in 1967, during the Six Day Arab-Israeli War, such as ‘Hitler wasn’t at all wrong to want to eradicate the Jews’.\textsuperscript{141} Though such views were rare, their expression at all revealed basic weaknesses in the SED’s ideological renewal of eastern Germany.

Beyond these political questions, complaints persisted about poor living standards. These often peaked before elections as people tried to bargain for material improvements in return for their votes. Despite the good intentions of policy makers to

\textsuperscript{137} KPKK Heiligenstadt, ‘Fernschreiben Nr.13 der BPKK...’, 10 January 1968, LPA, IV/B/4.06/100.
\textsuperscript{138} ‘Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse der Kontrolle über die Wahlvorbereitung...’, 7 October 1965, p.5, LPA, BIV/2/13-725.
\textsuperscript{139} 1963 report (note 126), pp.43-4.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid; ‘Information über einige Probleme der Wahlvorbereitungen...’, 28 September 1965, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/13-725.
\textsuperscript{141} ‘Information zu einigen Problemen der Partei- und Massenarbeit in Erfurt-Land...’, 13 June 1967, p.3, ibid.
resolve such problems, particularly to avoid electoral embarrassments, bureaucracy and even ‘heartlessness’ was commonplace in the local offices responsible for housing and other essential services. Functionaries were often regarded as lazy and held in extremely low esteem. The priest of Böseckendorf was moved to announce from the pulpit:

Thou shalt work for six days and on the seventh day thou shalt rest. On the seventh day they shall work who do nothing during the rest of the week.

A further sign of dissatisfaction lay in the surprisingly high level of Republikflucht, despite the tighter border regime. In 1965, for instance, 284 Bezirk Erfurt citizens succeeded in leaving the GDR and a further 578 made unsuccessful attempts. Nearly half these people came from the border districts, notably Kreis Worbis. In 1966, 193 crossed the border illegally, and a further 582 were arrested in the attempt. In both years fewer than a fifth of the total were over 25, suggesting a serious failure to convince teenagers and young adults of their prospects in the GDR. The motives recorded by the police include ‘some culprits’ poor opinion of the GDR’, particularly where this coincided with their parents’ attitudes, western radio and television making young people believe life was better in the west, frustrated job or career plans, poor school performance and fear of punishment for crimes. The party and police campaigns to improve border vigilance succeeded in reducing the successful breakouts along the Eichsfeld border between 1965 and 1967, but many citizens refused to help the authorities. In the Eichsfeld many adhered to the principle of ‘one Christian does not betray another Christian’.

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147 BdVP, ‘Halbjahresbericht über den Stand und die Erfahrungen bei der Durchsetzung der Direktive zur Sicherung der Staatsgrenze West...’, 22 January 1968, ibid, fol 9.
Reports of the mid-1960s reveal the same uncertainties and ideological problems during the non-crisis years as during exceptional periods such as 1961 and 1968, and as during the pre-Wall years. This can be demonstrated using the example of two sections of the population: those involved in education (young people, teachers and education officials), and agricultural workers.

Chapter Ten will discuss young people’s failure to absorb the official SED line during the 1968 crisis in Czechoslovakia. However, the questions posed by young people then were common throughout the 1960s. Why, they asked, was the GDR the ‘fatherland of all Germans’? Why bother with elections if there is no choice between the parties? Why must we study the classics of marxism-leninism?\(^{148}\) Is there any hope of implementing the party congress’s resolution for overtaking West Germany?\(^{149}\) Doesn’t our side represent everything too one-sidedly? In West Germany there’s no sign of the dangers of militarism! How could such discrepancies develop with China, especially since they started building their state on the foundations of marxism-leninism too?\(^{150}\)

Often, though, young people, particularly from working class backgrounds, attempted to avoid political discussions and thus hide their lack of basic socialist knowledge and politically unacceptable opinions.\(^ {151}\) It became apparent that ‘it is not just a small number of pupils whose class consciousness is insufficiently developed’ and that ‘civic education is not effective enough’.\(^ {152}\) ‘The fact that 80% of children were involved in groups to expand their knowledge of marxism-leninism reflected compliant behaviour,\(^ {153}\) but did not seem to influence young people’s practical political outlook particularly. Youngsters’ craving for western pop music alarmed the authorities, who attempted to encourage a greater interest in socialist pop and more traditional music.\(^ {154}\)


\(^{149}\) ‘Einschätzung über die Durchsetzung der staatlichen Jugendpolitik...’, 21 March 1963, ibid.

\(^{150}\) RdB, ‘Probleminformation...’, 15 March 1967, p.4, ThHStAW, V 223

\(^{151}\) RdB, ‘Analyse über den gegenwärtigen Stand der staatlichen Jugendpolitik...’, undated [summer 1964], p.6, ThHStAW, J 28.

\(^{152}\) Ibid, p.11.

\(^{153}\) RdB, ‘Berichterstattung der Abteilung Volksbildung...’, 1 August 1968, p.3, ThHStAW, V 249.

\(^{154}\) Undated report (note 151).
However, most participants at a youth forum in Ohrdruf during 1965 were unafraid to state openly:

We won't let anyone forbid us to watch western television. We need to be comprehensively informed.\textsuperscript{155}

Clearly, western television was not reserved for times of crisis. A 1967 Bad Langensalza report on youth attitudes recorded that all these political, ideological and cultural problems were as prevalent in the \textit{Kreis} as in the \textit{Bezirk} as a whole.\textsuperscript{156} This was particularly ironic given a 1958 \textit{Bezirkstag} resolution to make \textit{Kreis} Bad Langensalza the \textit{Bezirk}'s first 'socialist' district,\textsuperscript{157} and highlights how little popular convictions had changed by the late 1960s.

Although teachers were generally capable of explaining sensitive political issues, it was also noted that not enough of them used their initiative to represent the party line, and that not all studied party materials properly.\textsuperscript{158} Here, as throughout society, were signs of apoliticism. The routine, unthinking patterns into which many functionaries lapsed is also reflected in a report that:

some school functionaries consider the completion of comprehensive statistics and analyses more important than lively collaboration with educationalists in the schools.\textsuperscript{159}

We can conclude that young people's ideological problems during 1968 were not born of the Czechoslovak crisis, but had existed for years.

A brief survey of agricultural developments during the 1960s also demonstrates that some consolidation occurred, but that farmers' basic attitudes towards the GDR hardly changed despite the Wall. The party enjoyed little presence in the sector: only 7.1\% of LPG members belonged to the SED in early 1963, and only around a third of LPG chairman were also party members who could attempt to assert the SED's 'leading

\textsuperscript{155} SED BL, 'Kurzinformation Nr.10/65', 4 September 1965, LPA, BIV/2/5-383.
\textsuperscript{156} RdK Bad Langensalza, 'Analyse über die Durchsetzung der zehn Grundsätze unserer sozialistischen Jugendpolitik...'; 27 November 1967, ThHStAW, J 29.
\textsuperscript{157} Speech by Hossinger to the \textit{Bezirkstag}, 5 July 1958, ThHStAW, Vs/St 493, fol 8.
\textsuperscript{158} 15 March 1967 report (note 150), p.5.
\textsuperscript{159} 1 August 1968 report (note 153), p.9.
role’. As many as 45% of LPGs had no SED group at all. By 1966, the proportion of LPGs without SED groups was still 39%, and only around half of the existing party groups were capable of working independently. In the comparatively well functioning party group at the Weißensee LPG, for example, only 55-60% of members attended meetings.

Compared to 1962, when some LPG chairmen worked their own fields with their own machinery and ignored the rest of the cooperative, significant advances were made. Opposition on principle to the LPGs receded during the 1960s, and is rarely mentioned in contemporary reports. However, farmers still resisted SED attempts to develop socialist agriculture further. Just as individual farmers had defended their independence in 1960, now individual LPGs defended theirs from the new ‘cooperation treaties’ with which the SED attempted to introduce economies of scale. Although many LPGs did begin to adopt the new system, particularly in areas with relatively strong LPG party groups, profitable LPGs were reluctant to cooperate with unprofitable neighbours. Some farmers borrowed socialist terminology to decry the new ‘complex’ programme as an invasion of internal cooperative democracy. The ‘New Economic System’, which attempted to enshrine the concept of profitability into socialist economics, was implemented slowly in agriculture because:

leading cadres do not understand the problems theoretically, shy away from their increased responsibility, manage in a routine manner and do not sufficiently involve the cooperative farmers in planning and management.

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160 'Auszug: Jahresanalyse zur Mitgliederbewegung v. 25.1.1963...', LPA, BIV/2/7-550.
163 ‘Bericht der Arbeitsgruppe die in Arnstadt zur Ernte eingesetzt ist’, 10 September 1962, LPA, BIV/2/7-6.
165 SED Heiligenstadt, ‘Berichterstattung über Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse…’, 20 February 1968, LPA, IV/B/4.06/117.
167 SED BL, ‘Informationsbericht Nr.30/65’, 4 October 1965, p.8, LPA, BIV/2/5-383.
169 SED BL, ‘Vorlage für das Politburo…’, 5 October 1967, pp.5-6, ThHStAW, Vs/St 900.
Despite some successes, only 31% of the Bezirk's arable land was being farmed according to the new 'cooperation' principle by late 1968. The conversion rate depended on the efficacy of individual SED Kreisleitungen,\(^\text{170}\) again demonstrating that the party organisation often failed to implement the 'leading role' to which it aspired.

Finally, 1960s reports demonstrate that in some areas the SED was not in control, often because of internal failings. A 1963 report on Kutzleben-Lützensommern concluded that:

> the work of the parish administration and parish council are insufficient to implement state authority or to involve all inhabitants in the battle. The leading role of the party is ensured by the number of members in the parish council and parish administration, but not in the comrades' behaviour.\(^\text{171}\)

Hard on the border in Böseckendorf, scene of the mass escapes of 1961 and 1962, the situation had barely improved by the middle of the decade. Local rivalries between Böseckendorf and neighbouring Bleckenrode jeopardised the re-election of the mayor in 1965. For his part the mayor complained that although his village was regularly visited by all manner of agitators and functionaries, 'none of them gives concrete help'. The local party secretary had not worked out a plan for election work only weeks before polling day, and the local NF had been non-existent. The 'election helpers' had yet to meet and had received no training. The LPG chairman, an SED man, had no personal skills and resisted all criticism. Local residents called for the opening of the border, 'so that everything is normal again', and were sceptical about the GDR's avowed peace policies. Young people were particularly annoyed that all social activities had to finish by the 11pm border zone curfew, and were further frustrated when an initiative to form a photographic circle failed, due to a ban on photography in the border zone.\(^\text{172}\) Clearly Böseckendorf, where the SED had little hold over the population beyond the fortified

\(^{170}\) "Übersicht über die voraussichtliche Ertragsentwicklung im Bezirk...", 4 September 1968, LPA, IV/B/2/7-247.


\(^{172}\) 25 August 1961 report (note 143).
border, was an extreme example. However, these extremes do reflect symptoms which could be found to a greater or lesser degree in most parts of the Bezirk.

The aim of this brief survey of the GDR in the 1960s has been to demonstrate that although some consolidation occurred after the Berlin Wall’s construction in 1961, this should not imply that the SED had achieved all its ends. Though behaviour patterns were largely conformist, ideological commitment had not been achieved. Just as before the Wall was built, people concerned themselves with their daily tasks and made the professions of loyalty demanded of them, but otherwise remained relatively aloof from political life. Though the parties, mass organisations and state apparatus functioned at least well enough to maintain the system, their hold on power was mainly not challenged during this period and there were regular reports of functionaries’ failure to fulfil higher political goals. Life descended into a routine after the border closures, in which both rulers and ruled realised there would be no radical developments in the German question and accepted their respective roles. A temporary stability was achieved, but on the basis of imperfect control of a population which was unconvinced of its rulers’ legitimacy. This could not be a recipe for long-term stability, and the challenge of 1968, discussed in Chapter Ten, demonstrated how fragile the SED’s ideological hold on the population was.
PART III

THE CHURCHES BETWEEN
SOCIALIST STATE
AND PEOPLE
Whereas the chapters in Part Two presented a broad evaluation of developing social attitudes and administrative (in)efficiency in the first twenty years following the Second World War, Part Three examines one particular aspect of Thuringian society during this same period in closer detail via a case study of the Thuringian churches under SED rule. The churches merit particular attention as an example of a far older, alternative faith structure to that being constructed by the SED. In this sense, the new demands being made by the SED for popular loyalty were in competition with those made by the various churches. Conflict was made almost inevitable by the basic incompatibility of marxism and Christianity. However, the conflict was complicated for the SED by the fact that this avowedly antifascist party was politically bound to respect the beliefs of the mainly Christian population which it ruled. Thus, the SED had to desensitise the Christian population to its anti-church policies by trying to prove that socialism and religion were compatible, while simultaneously attempting to undermine the churches’ position in society.

The three chapters in this section consider in turn first the SED’s mechanisms and tactics for neutralising the churches as opposing societal forces, while also coopting the clergy’s support for socialism wherever possible; secondly the particular battle between churches and party for the hearts and minds of young people; and finally the moral controversy surrounding the Thuringian church’s policy of cooperating with the state from the early 1960s onwards in the hope of retaining some societal influence. Attention is paid in each of these chapters to the public’s response and the SED’s degree of success.

The fact that many individual clergy and the churches generally came to terms with SED hegemony has been one of the most controversial areas of GDR historiography since the Wende. Many authors have taken a ‘top down’ approach and principally

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investigated the SED's strategies for controlling the churches, often using the emotional language of 'totalitarianism' and 'stalinism', while neglecting to investigate the churches' response and their motivations. Other publications in the same vein have also aimed, not always from an academic perspective, to attach moral blame to the clergy who 'excused, played down and sometimes even praised real existing socialism', a system which 'has completely deformed untold millions'. Integral to this approach has been the fascination with the churches' involvement with the Stasi, and the cases of particular clerics such as Manfred Stolpe, the Brandenburg church's former consistorial president, who cooperated with the Stasi where he believed he could help individuals or his church's position. As the discussion in Chapter Nine highlights, however, the moralistic overtones of authors such as Gerhard Besier, who implies that the churches should have eschewed all contacts with the 'SED state', are based on particular political outlooks rather than any solid theological foundation.

More recently, attempts have been made to correct such one-sided and often politically motivated evaluations of the church's relations with the GDR state and the SED, and to investigate both the political and the social context of the churches' position. The following chapters also take this starting point and aim to make judgements on the role of individual personalities only within the context of the political and social situation in which the Thuringian churches found themselves between 1945 and 1968.

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4 Cf. Besier and Wolf.


7 Cf. the introduction to *Christen, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, ed. by Gert Kaiser and Ewald Frie (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1996), especially p. 15.
THE CHURCHES’ BASIS CHALLENGED

In order to achieve its aim of neutralising and undermining the churches as ideological competitors for popular support, the KPD/SED developed a number of strategies to control the churches and, wherever possible, to coopt their clergy to outward loyalty to socialism, thereby avoiding potentially damaging ideological confrontations in a society which was still predominantly religious at war’s end. This chapter outlines the churches’ organisation in Thuringia and the SED’s strategies for dealing with the churches as institutions and with particular clerics.

The churches’ postwar framework

Whereas the churchgoing population in most GDR Bezirke belonged mainly to just one church, the SED’s Erfurt Bezirksleitung had to deal with three major denominations, which precluded a single church policy and consumed greater effort. Besides the Catholic church there were two Protestant churches. Two thirds of the Bezirk’s Protestant churchgoers belonged to the Thuringian Church, based in Eisenach, while the formerly Prussian territories belonged to the Evangelical Church of the Church Province of Saxony (Magdeburg). Though both churches belonged to the umbrella association of evangelical churches in Germany (EKD), they could each determine their own policies, and were divided theologically. While the Eisenach church observed the Lutheran tradition, which generally respected secular authority as the source of worldly peace,

Cf. Map 6. The much smaller churches (e.g. Methodists, Baptists, Mormons) played no significant role in GDR church policies, though the small number of Jehovah’s Witnesses were persecuted for refusing participation in political life.

Additionally, nine parishes in Kreis Nordhausen belonged to the Hanover Evangelical-Lutheran Church: RdB, ‘Bericht des Ref. Religionsgemeinschaften...’, 1 October 1953, ThHStAW, Ki 3, fol 52.

the Magdeburg church belonged to the ‘reformed’ movement, which believed that the
state, like the churches, should be ‘a good and holy institution appointed by God
himself’. Magdeburg and Eisenach regularly disagreed on the most appropriate stance
to take towards a state whose socialism both instinctively rejected.

The Thuringian government attempted as early as 1947 to simplify the Protestant
structures and thereby church-state relations. The government, concerned to achieve
administrative ease, cared little for denominational and theological differences, and
proposed that all Thuringia should come under the Eisenach church. The Thuringian
SED would have been spared much had the Magdeburg church surrendered its Erfurt
diocese. However, the Magdeburg church authorities refused. This failed intervention in
church affairs overshadowed the Thuringian state’s relations to this church from the
outset.  

Although most Thuringians claimed membership of one church or another, statistics of
the number of believers do not alone reveal the extent of religious life. Immediately
after the war the churches played an important role, particularly for the many settlers
from the east (mostly Catholics). During the early 1950s faith was still so widespread
and deep that the first concerted attacks on the church caused great resentment. Bishop
Mitzenheim of the Eisenach church toured his diocese to denounce the moves and call
for a united response from believers, often speaking to packed churches. The churches’
complaints to the state often noted the great moral dilemmas Christians faced when
confronted with a choice between obedience to the state or their faith.

The Eichsfeld’s Catholic community was (and remains) exceptionally devout, perhaps
due to its position as an island in a Protestant see. Otherwise, a 1953 report noted that

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4 Ernst Troeltsch, cited in ibid, p.17.
5 Cf. correspondence of January 1947, ThHStAW, BdMP 863, fols 35, 37, 50.
6 Some people happily mixed religious superstition with political dissidence. One Hindfeld lady
believed God would have saved Hindfeld from the Russians if her village had followed the example of
nearby Breitensee (in the west) and prayed in church every day: Aft, 'Bericht Nr.256', 1 June 1951,
ThHStAW, BdMP 238, fol 181.
religious influence was generally stronger in rural areas. However, there were exceptions: in the rural Kreis Erfurt-Land, church attendance was reportedly extremely weak. One farmer felt the church was a ‘necessary evil’, and another said villagers paid no attention to sermons but liked to uphold traditions. Though such attitudes may explain the growth of church choirs (from 200 with 5,000 singers in 1945 to 750 with 20,000 singers in 1953), this lack of theological interest was potentially a great weakness for the churches.

In this situation, the SED pursued two major aims in church policy in the 1950s. These can be identified from the history of church-state relations in Bezirk Erfurt. First, the churches were not to present any alternative to the SED and socialism; the churches’ influence was to be limited to non-political spheres, unless the churches or clergy could be persuaded expressly to support SED policies. The SED always regarded the latter option as particularly desirable, thereby acknowledging the population’s considerable respect for the churches. Secondly, the churches were to lose most of their social functions and be entirely excluded from the education system to prevent them bringing up new generations of believers.

The realisation of these aims was facilitated by various constitutional measures open to different interpretations. Although Land Thüringen’s 1946 constitution, based mainly on an SED draft, guaranteed the ‘unhindered practise of religion’ and recognised Sundays and other holidays as ‘days of rest from work and of spiritual elevation’, the same document outlawed the ‘abuse of the church and of religious practise for party political purposes’. Similarly Article 41 of the 1949 GDR constitution unclearly stated:

Institutions of religious communities, religious services and religious education may not be misused for anti-constitutional or party political purposes. However, the religious communities retain the uncontested right to express their opinion on matters concerning the life of the nation.

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7 1 October 1953 report (note 2), fol 57.
9 Raabe, p.252, also notes this dual policy.
This right was not easily compatible with articles such as 4(2) ('Every citizen is obliged to act in accordance with the constitution'), given that the constitution was increasingly interpreted according to the SED's anti-church definitions, or 6(2) ('Incitement to boycott and malicious propaganda against democratic institutions and organisations is a crime against the Penal Code').\textsuperscript{11} In practice, apparently generous, politically acceptable wordings allowed the state great political flexibility. Thus in 1957 the Magdeburg church was informed that distributing a text based on western arguments opposing the impending GDR elections would be illegal and anti-constitutional.\textsuperscript{12} The state subjected even the seemingly clear 'right of the church to give religious instruction in school rooms' (Article 44 of the GDR's first constitution) to highly restrictive interpretations.\textsuperscript{13} The churches sometimes tried to exploit these rights themselves, as in 1953 when Bishop Mitzenheim protested to the Rdb chairman, Willy Gebhardt, that an Fdj booklet entitled \textit{Kommunistische und religiöse Moral} was an offence against Article 6 of the GDR constitution as it equated religious morals with exploitation.\textsuperscript{14}

The multifaceted means by which the SED attempted to influence and control the churches well illustrates the party's institutional thoroughness and the advantages of the multiparty system.\textsuperscript{15} Centrally, a Minister for Church Affairs regulated church-state relations from 1957. Regionally, a department for 'church questions' was responsible to the Thuringian prime minister until 1952, and thereafter was attached to each Bezirk's Internal Affairs department. The SED ensured its leading role in church policy through parallel party departments at Bezirk and Kreis level. The SED organs determined and implemented a binding policy for all state and party offices which dealt with the churches. Additionally, they closely observed the churches' activities and intervened when required. These various organisations could also call on the religious department

\textsuperscript{12} Undated telex from Gebhardt, ThHStAW, Ki 3, fol 150.
\textsuperscript{13} See Chapter Eight.
\textsuperscript{14} Mitzenheim to Gebhardt, 14 December 1953, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 15-16.
\textsuperscript{15} The system is described more fully by Raabe, pp.49-92.
of the MfS, which spied on and influenced church officials. Some MfS staff and informers were smuggled into the churches, while others came from the churches themselves.

Apart from this triple control over the churches, other institutions aimed to win the Christian population’s support, and particularly the clergy’s. As a party committed to atheism, the SED could not fulfil this role credibly itself and instead utilised other, apparently independent, organisations. The CDU was prominent in this work. After acknowledging the SED’s leading role in 1952, its remaining task was to present socialism to the Christian population. For those who were sceptical about all political parties there existed the *Christliche Kreise* (‘Christian Circles’), working groups of the ‘non-party’ *Nationale Front*, which held discussions with clergy and active Christians to win their support for the GDR’s goals. Activity increased before elections, and often centred on winning these groups’ support for the common denominator of the GDR’s official peace campaigns. Public endorsements of state peace policies by religious leaders could be presented to a wider, sceptical public as a general acceptance of the socialist state by the churches. Additionally there were various, usually shortlived, groups such as the ‘Christian Working Group for Peace’. Other bodies involved in GDR church policy included the Ministry of Education and its regional and local authorities, and the FDJ, which combated the religious *Junge Gemeinde* (‘Young Congregation’). The Soviet authorities were regularly informed of church activities well into the 1950s. In short, the SED created various authorities to control the churches from above, and others to enable Christians to support party and state from below.

The SED’s ultimate aim of building atheist socialism in the SBZ/GDR made a church-state conflict practically inevitable, especially as the party would not except the

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18 Examples of *Christliche Kreise* activities in ThHStAW, Ki 11.
19 See Chapter Eight.
churches from its total claim on society's support. An SED functionary confirmed this in 1951 by exhuming Bismarckian terminology:

Even if it is a decisive task to prevent the church unleashing a *Kulturkampf*, the respective state organs must once and for all make it clear to the church leaderships that the church today is no longer a free state within the state and that it cannot simply make use of its rights, but that each and every cleric is also duty bound to fulfil his duties as a citizen of the GDR...  

By the late 1940s there were already signs that the churches would not simply surrender their societal role. During the discussions on the 1946 Thuringian constitution, Bishop Mitzenheim demanded the religious communities' rights be guaranteed.

The church derives the right and the duty to make this appeal not only from its intrinsic nature and role, but also from the fact that during the past twelve years of repression and moral constraints it opposed terror and rape in every form and stood for freedom and humanity under the constant risk of martyrdom.

Mitzenheim was not merely clarifying his church's refusal to accept 'repression and moral constraints'; he also represented a danger for the SED by claiming for the churches the party's own antifascist legitimation to play a role in shaping society.

The first postwar years brought no major conflicts between the state or party and the churches, as the SED still had other priorities than a systematic battle against religion. Furthermore, the decision to 'sovietise' the SBZ was taken only around 1948. However, the friction of the 1950s had its precursors in the late 1940s. The Magdeburg church, for example, protested in 1947 about compulsory shifts, political meetings and early morning cultural events arranged for Sundays.

We remember that under the national socialist regime Sundays were deliberately abused and that the battle against the Christian religion was waged with great ferocity in this field.

The protest was ignored. If meetings were not held on Sundays, then harvest brigades were dispatched, fields inspected or Colorado beetles hunted to keep the population from the churches. The clergy felt increasing pressure in the late 1940s. The vicar of
Marksuhl, for instance, introduced a compulsory stamp to prove church attendance and would only confirm children who could produce at least 20 stamps. The state launched investigations into reports of such clergy.\footnote{Undated, untitled report, ibid, fol 184.}

The battle with the churches intensified after the GDR’s founding as the socialist course became more pronounced. Rejecting religion was one means by which the population was increasingly required to welcome and confirm the SED’s almost uninhibited rule. The churches reacted to GDR legislation and the SED’s methods of enforcing popular obedience with much harsher criticism. They aimed not only to protect their own vested interests, but also to expose and undermine the conditions the SED was creating. For instance, Bishop Müller (Magdeburg) complained to Prime Minister, Werner Eggerath:

We can see a totalitarian claim arising as it existed in the national socialist period. Anyone who does not submit is defamed as a traitor to the fatherland, as an American agent, and his very existence is threatened.\footnote{Meeting between Bishop Müller and Eggerath, 4 April 1950, ibid, fol 202.}

The churches also complained about the situation of German POWs in the USSR, the Soviet ‘special camps’ in the GDR (among them Buchenwald, which operated until 1950), and the USSR’s expulsion of Germans from former eastern territories. This criticism extended to the vexed question of the Oder-Neiße border.

This developing conflict was the backdrop for the SED’s attempts to marginalise the churches while coopting as many clergy as possible to its own policies. The following sections examine the party’s policies towards the churches’ leaders and the parish clergy.

The SED and the church leaderships

The SED’s early difficulties with Bishop Müller of the Magdeburg church have already been noted. Much of the discord between the SED and the Magdeburg church
concerned state youth policy, and is discussed in Chapter Eight. The first phase of this discord peaked in mid-1953 and was ended only by the ‘New Course’ and the uprising of 17 June. Some clergy saw the relaxation of the state’s anti-church campaign as a ‘divine miracle’. In Berlin, Bishop Dibelius described the state’s concessions as a ‘blessing’. As head of the reformed churches, he hoped the churches could now rebuild their position without state interference and proposed door to door visits reminiscent of SED and NF techniques to win over Christians and non-Christians for the church. A committee was to be established in each parish to coordinate the campaign. The plan, which in Thuringia principally affected the Magdeburg church, worried the state authorities enough to alert the SED, the MfS, the police and the Soviet ‘friends’. In the following months the churches attempted to target the working class with special meetings and sermons designed to weaken their confidence in marxism. In November 1954 a conference of the Protestant churches planned to establish religious factory cells alongside the SED groups. These initiatives were clearly attempts to beat the SED at its own game, but appear to have produced few tangible results. Despite Dibelius’s optimistic plans, more clergy responded cautiously to the new situation. Catholics in particular maintained that only church matters concerned them. The Magdeburg church’s consistorial president concluded in September 1953 that the ‘state’s change of course vis-à-vis the church represented merely a breathing space, but that the enemy’s aim remains the same’.

Though the consistorial president was later proved right, the shock of the New Course and the 17 June uprising initially disturbed the state and party’s efficient control of the churches. Kother, head of the RdB’s religious department, complained in December 1953:

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25 Cf. Dibelius’s letter to all evangelical parishes in Germany, 12 June 1953, ThHStAW, Ki 3, fol 30.
27 9 November 1953 report (note 8), fol 67.
29 RdB, ‘Einstellung der Religionsgesellschaften…’, 7 December 1953, ThHStAW, Ki 18, fol 47. An RdB report to the Erfurt SKK, interestingly compiled more than a month after the SKK’s abolition, also documents clerics’ caution: ‘Auszüge aus Predigten…’, 29 June 1953, ibid, fol 81.
the hitherto regular discussions with the party, the police and the State Secretariat for State Security have almost disappeared since the [10 June] communiqué. This has led to the situation that everyone is registering information for themselves, and also informing the other organs, but that measures are not being implemented.\[^{30}\]

A Heiligenstadt report of 1954 showed that efficiency had barely increased over a year later.\[^{31}\] However, the structures remained intact and were progressively reactivated.

\[\text{a)}\] Moritz Mitzenheim

The Magdeburg church’s general unwillingness to compromise led the SED to concentrate its attention on the Eisenach bishop, Moritz Mitzenheim. Mitzenheim merits attention for two reasons. First, the SED’s relatively successful contacts to him illustrate the party’s preferred church policy. The party effectively tried to play off the other bishops against Mitzenheim, and this influenced relations with the Magdeburg church. Secondly, Mitzenheim’s readiness to cooperate with the SED exemplifies the churches’ dilemma over the correct response to a political system based on atheism. Some have criticised Mitzenheim’s compromises with the SED as a betrayal of the church,\[^{32}\] while others believe that his actions secured the church’s continued influence. While Mitzenheim certainly attempted coexistence with the socialist state, his criticisms of SED policies in areas which threatened theological positions are often overlooked.\[^{33}\]

Mitzenheim strongly opposed the German Christian nazi sympathisers who dominated the Eisenach church during the Third Reich,\[^{34}\] and as bishop after 1945 was naturally more prepared to cooperate with a political system based on anti-nazi policies. Despite uncompromising views on theological questions, the state recognised in Mitzenheim a potentially ‘progressive’ ally with whom they could cooperate. Given other Protestant leaders’ open hostility, the SED imitated Mitzenheim’s own pragmatism and ignored

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\[^{30}\] 7 December 1953 report (note 29), fols 51-52.
\[^{33}\] Many of these concerned youth policy: cf. Chapter Eight.
his attacks on certain SED policies while encouraging his general support. Mitzenheim was flattered by invitations to visit other socialist countries. While nurturing good relations with Mitzenheim, the SED attempted to weaken the churches’ unity by discriminating against the more intransigent Magdeburg church and refusing to deal with leaders such as the virulently opposed Dibelius.\(^{35}\) By 1950, Mitzenheim had apparently ‘distanced himself’ from the Magdeburg leadership.\(^{36}\)

Werner Eggerath strengthened this ‘divide and rule’ policy as Secretary of State for Church Affairs after 1957. Though church-state relations had reached a nadir over youth policy (see Chapter Eight), Eggerath, as the former Thuringian premier, played on his contacts with Mitzenheim before 1952, and the two met privately twice in April 1957.\(^{37}\) Mitzenheim agreed to support a meeting between Eggerath and all the GDR’s Protestant bishops, excepting Dibelius, whose signing of the Military Chaplaincy Agreement with the FRG’s Bundeswehr had made him politically unacceptable to the SED. However, the bishops, including Mitzenheim, deferred to Dibelius’s protests, and the meeting fell through.\(^{38}\)

Eggerath then conceived a policy of meeting church leaders at regional and district level, rather than centrally where Dibelius might sabotage meetings. Eggerath planned to play off the churches against one another and felt that keeping in close and constant touch with Mitzenheim and the ‘relatively positive’ members of his staff was a ‘national priority’ (as a means of strengthening the GDR). He instructed the Erfurt RdB to arrange an initial meeting with Mitzenheim to explain the implications for the churches of the new local government law, to dissuade them from disrupting the election campaign, and to warn Mitzenheim that his recent sermons criticising state youth policy could not be ignored indefinitely.\(^{39}\)

\(^{35}\) ‘Niederschrift über den Besuch des Landesbischofs Mitzenheim...’, 12 April 1950, ThHStAW, Ki 8, fols 111-112.
\(^{36}\) Ibid, fols 109-111.
\(^{37}\) Ibid, fols 66-69; Eggerath to Gebhardt, 4 May 1957, ibid, fols 87-88.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, fols 87-90.

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A meeting was quickly arranged at which Mitzenheim was reminded that the state desired harmonious relations with the churches, but that this was only possible if the churches respected the GDR's laws. He retorted that the state should respect regulations concerning payments to the churches and the levying of church taxes, and also criticised the form of GDR elections. However, new procedures for church payments and a vicar's arrest for removing election posters placed Mitzenheim on the defensive in a further meeting. The state countered complaints about the levying of church taxes by arguing that the bishops themselves had refused to meet Eggerath. Mitzenheim apparently failed to raise the youth policy controversy at either meeting.

Meanwhile Gebhardt, as RdB chairman, also informed the Kreis party organisations of the new policy. The Mitzenheim/Dibelius split was to be exploited and attacks on Mitzenheim and the Eisenach church avoided wherever possible, or at least approved by the SED Bezirksleitung or RdB. The Eisenach church should be treated more generously in future, and visibly more so than the Magdeburg church. Mitzenheim's policy of conditional loyalty was paying his church dividends. Lest anyone misunderstand, however, Gebhardt clarified the situation:

"We are not interested in any extension of the churches' life in the GDR, but, just as before, want a restriction of church politics."

Perhaps flattered by the attention, and despite the disagreements, Mitzenheim pragmatically maintained positive attitudes towards the state whenever possible, and within weeks rearranged his schedule to meet Czech and Hungarian theologians. He carefully avoided mentioning the 1956 events in Hungary and displayed a 'loyal' and 'conciliatory' attitude, despite criticising the state's failure to fulfil its financial commitments to the churches. The meeting was principally designed for the Czech and

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40 RdB, ‘Bericht über die Besprechung mit Landesbischof D. Mitzenheim...’, 6 June 1957, ibid, fols 84-86.
41 RdB, ‘Bericht über Besprechung mit dem Landeskirchenrat Eisenach...’, 7 August 1957, ibid, fols 76-78.
Hungarian theologians to persuade Mitzenheim to call for peace at the imminent World Churches Conference in America. Mitzenheim readily shared his visitors’ views. Like many others of various political persuasions, he regarded the SED’s official peace policy as a common denominator.\footnote{Some clergy viewed the peace campaign differently, typically claiming that God determined war and peace, while humans could only pray: 7 May 1951 report (note 20).} The RdB was highly satisfied and felt such talks helped to distance the Eisenach leadership from NATO sympathisers.\footnote{RdB, ‘Bericht über eine Aussprache mit dem Landesbischof Mitzenheim/Eisenach’, 12 August 1957, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 73-5.}

Mitzenheim’s readiness to compromise with the state was central to the next major development in church-state relations, the signing of a communiqué between the Protestant churches and the GDR government in July 1958.\footnote{On Mitzenheim’s role, cf. Besier, pp.261-291.} This developed from talks the churches initiated after the West German military chaplaincy agreement and a restrictive decree on religious education seriously harmed church-state relations. In the communiqué the GDR’s Protestant churches for the first time officially recognised the GDR as a state and, crucially, announced that they respected its socialist path and would fulfil their civil duties. In return, every citizen’s right to freedom of belief and conscience was restated, and an undertaking given to review the controversial decree.\footnote{The communiqué is reproduced in ibid, p.280.}

The communiqué represented a major concession for the churches, which had now expressed considerable loyalty to the GDR and distanced themselves from the West German churches. The GDR government hoped this trend would continue as Germany’s division grew more permanent.

However, within months the GDR’s Protestant bishops, including Mitzenheim, expressed their disappointment at the state’s failure to respect its promises (and the constitutional guarantees), and complained bitterly at the continuing campaign to force children to swear loyalty to the state against their will.\footnote{Protestant bishops to Grotewohl, 21 November 1958, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 203-206.} Mitzenheim nonetheless persevered with an increasingly positive attitude towards the state, typified by his...
speech on the GDR’s tenth anniversary.\textsuperscript{48} By this point he had come under the influence of his secretary Gerhard Lotz, also a Stasi agent, whose role is discussed in Chapter Nine.

Mitzenheim effectively won the Thuringian synod’s backing in January 1960 for his policy of upholding the 1958 communiqué. A state report noted that ‘good preparation’ had achieved this success. This preparation included collaboration with Lotz, who influenced synod members to toe the pro-state line.\textsuperscript{49} By now, Mitzenheim was promising that the church would assist in the GDR’s development.\textsuperscript{50} However, he could not rely on total support. Although bishop for life in Eisenach, in February 1961 Mitzenheim was not re-elected to the all-German council of Protestant churches (EKD), almost certainly because of GDR synod members’ votes, including that of Superintendent Pabst of Gotha. A Hanover representative, Erwin Wilkens, believed Mitzenheim fell because he was too closely identified with the 1958 communiqué which the state had failed to respect.\textsuperscript{51} Mitzenheim’s defeat cost the SED a loyal representative on the EKD council, but arguably also marked the beginning of the EKD’s division into separate councils for east and west.

On Mitzenheim’s 70th birthday, 17 August 1961, just days after the Berlin Wall’s construction, the SED recognised his positive stance, and especially his agreement to the 1958 communiqué. Senior state officials congratulated Mitzenheim in Eisenach, but the day’s climax came when Ulbricht decorated Mitzenheim with the GDR’s highest honour, the ‘Patriotic Order of Merit’ in gold. Mitzenheim’s speech gave further insight into his motives for cooperating with the state. He had seen his duty in 1958 as contributing to a normalisation of church-state relations, and saw in his decoration a sign that the state also valued an ‘ordered relationship’. Referring to the 1958

\textsuperscript{50} RdB, ‘Information über den Verlauf der Synode...’, 6 December 1960, ThHStAW, Ki 20, fol 47.
\textsuperscript{51} Besier, p.355.
communiqué, Mitzenheim declared that 'the Christian who enjoys protection of his faith will also recognise his duty of loyalty to the state'. He rebuked those in the church who politically rejected the GDR and the churches’ tolerance of socialism, by underlining that:

the church is not wedded to a particular economic and social system, neither to the feudal, nor the capitalist, nor the socialist system.

However, Mitzenheim also publicly pleaded for state tolerance, in particular towards young Christians who should be able to ‘live their faith’ without fear of discrimination, a clear reference to the controversies discussed in Chapter Eight. Unable to ignore the changed border situation, Mitzenheim concluded by praying for a solution of the German question and that ‘our people’ should no longer be divided by ditches and borders.52 However, Mitzenheim’s opponents condemned his acceptance of a medal from an ‘atheist government’.53

In June 1962 Mitzenheim failed to be re-elected deputy chairman of the ‘Conference of Evangelical Church Leaderships in the GDR’. The SED had largely split the various churches by recognising Mitzenheim as the only bishop they would deal with, irrespective of the conference’s vote. Mitzenheim’s failure resulted from his support of SED attacks on the conference’s president, Krummacher, whose speeches implicitly attacked the GDR’s defence and ‘peace’ policies.54 On reporting his defeat to the 1963 Thuringian synod, Mitzenheim felt constrained to justify the Thuringian church’s good relations with the state. He noted, for instance, that circulation of the church’s newspaper, Glaube und Heimat, had been allowed to rise from 30,000 to 35,000. Nonetheless, Mitzenheim also criticised the state schools’ atheistic curriculum.55

52 Mitzenheim’s 17 August speech is in: Auf dem Wege zur gemeinsamen humanistischen Verantwortung, ed. by Horst Dohle and others (Berlin: Union Verlag, 1967), pp.369-370.
Those who attack Mitzenheim’s dealings with the state as a betrayal of the church forget too readily his public assaults on the developing socialist system. In 1952 and thereafter he frequently and very publicly attacked the state for deporting residents from the border zone.\textsuperscript{56} His interventions for Buchenwald prisoners before 1950 and for German POWs in the USSR were equally impassioned.\textsuperscript{57} In November 1956 he preached that young people belonged in the \textit{Junge Gemeinde}, not the FDJ, and called on his congregation never to allow state education to become a ‘marxist-leninist institution’. He complained at the state’s empty promises and failure to respond to church protests, and prayed for the release of political prisoners. His tours of other socialist countries enabled him to expose the GDR as the only socialist state with a secular, socialist coming of age ritual, hardly the loyal reward the SED had desired for its invitations.\textsuperscript{58} Into the late 1950s, Mitzenheim regularly delivered sermons of this type, designed to rally the faithful against the SED’s encroachments.\textsuperscript{59} Mitzenheim compromised on none of these topics. However, pragmatically he felt he would not progress with these issues by breaking off relations to the state over them.

In the 1960s, under the increasing influence of Gerhard Lotz, the ageing Mitzenheim adopted a more pro-state stance, even signing an appeal to the Christian population to support the 1963 election.\textsuperscript{60} The SED had successfully coopted Mitzenheim through a mixture of flattery and making an example of the Magdeburg church. However, the reasons for Mitzenheim’s compliance are more complex than just the SED’s manipulation, and are considered at greater length in Chapter Nine.

\textsuperscript{57} Mitzenheim refused an invitation to Moscow in 1952 on these grounds: Eggerath to Mitzenheim, 2 May 1952, ThHStAW, BdMP 864, fol 124.
\textsuperscript{58} VPKA Sondershausen, ‘Gottesdienst in der ev. Kirche in Greußen...’, 8 November 1956, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fol 49.
\textsuperscript{59} Cf. various letters and reports of 1955, ThHStAW, Vs/St 517.
\textsuperscript{60} ThHStAW, Ki 11, fol 90.
b) The Catholic hierarchy

The state was equally keen to find ‘loyal’ Catholic servants, particularly in areas with relatively large Catholic populations such as Erfurt and especially the Eichsfeld. However, the SED was hampered in its dealings with the Catholic church by both the great devotion of believers and the church’s strong hierarchical control. Just as the NSDAP’s policies towards Catholicism were more cautious than towards Protestantism, Siebert postulates that the Catholic church received easier treatment than the Protestant churches because it was an international church under a recognised head of state.61

The party was nonetheless particularly successful in coopting Provost Josef Streb of Heiligenstadt, the episcopal commissioner for the Eichsfeld from 1945-1967, repeatedly cited in SED and state reports for his ‘positive’ attitude and his sermons calling for peace.63 After seeing several fellow Eichsfeld priests fall victim to nazi purges, peace underpinned Streb’s conciliatory line towards the SED and socialism.64 In this he typified many who believed the preceding fascist regime necessitated building a new society. Through a policy of regular contacts with the state, rather than an uncompromising war against it, Streb succeeded in preserving many (though not all) features of the Eichsfeld’s devout Catholic life. Although the 1949 papal ban on Catholics belonging to communist organisations and the instructions of the immediate church hierarchy prevented him from joining a political party, Streb remained close to the CDU. He nonetheless joined other religious leaders in forcefully attacking state youth policy on religious grounds.65 Beyond holding regular discussions with Streb, the state also attempted to flatter him, like Mitzenheim, as in 1963 when Streb received

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61 Siebert, p.217.
62 Cf. Franz Gerth, Zeugnis und Beispiel: Josef Streb, Christ in der Welt, 44 (Berlin: Union Verlag, [n.d.]).
64 Cf. Gerth, p.9.

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the GDR’s ‘German Peace Medal’. However, even in the 1960s Streb still deferred to the Catholic hierarchy and was noticeably cooler to the state authorities after they broke off talks with Bishop Aufderbeck in Erfurt. The other influential local Catholic for most of the period under review, Dr Freusberg (suffragan vicar of Erfurt, 1953-64), initially joined the CDU but quickly became an inactive member. A 1953 report described Freusberg’s position on the state as neutral, though he recognised secular authority in the same way as the Lutheran Eisenach church. However, when the papacy hardened its anti-communist line in the late 1950s, Freusberg readily upheld it. He had already prevented priests from meeting Eggerath. His priests, who otherwise faced being moved to a different parish, pliantly accepted. The SED noted differences between Freusberg and Streb over the issue, but regretfully concluded:

As, however, the Catholic church’s traditions of belief outweigh personal differences, no political advantage could be drawn from this situation.

Though polite in his dealings with state officials, Freusberg’s successor, Aufderbeck, excused local Catholic priests’ inability to support election campaigns with instructions from Cardinal Bengsch in Berlin. By the late 1950s, the SED’s failure to coopt the Catholic leadership was clear, and forced a more conciliatory policy.

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67 Gerth, p.9.
68 RdB letter, 13 September 1965, ThHStAW, Ki 66.
69 1 October 1953 report (note 2), fol 53.
72 March 1958[?] report (note 71), ThHStAW, Ki 3, fol 187.
74 See Chapter Nine.
The state and the clergy

Apart from attempting to win church leaders’ sympathies, the state also tried to influence local clergy. Initially, the SED and state organs attempted to intimidate individual clerics into saying nothing against SED policy in their sermons. Observers were regularly sent into the churches to report what was said. Mitzenheim complained in 1950 that some Eichsfeld churches were being watched by undercover FDJ members:

It is more than alarming [...] that our youth is being systematically misled into spying activities and provocative machinations just as during the era of the Hitler regime.\(^7\)

In response the churches took precautionary measures, sometimes posting ‘guards’ at entrances.\(^6\) When vicars criticised state and party policies from the pulpit, the MfS was informed and other measures taken. Often discussions were held with them by SED and/or NF agitators. In at least one case an Erfurt vicar had to answer to Prime Minister Eggerath after being overheard condemning the 1951 referendum, which the Magdeburg church refused to support.\(^7\)

State and party files contain many reports of ‘enemy’ sermons from the early 1950s. Thus the vicar of Pappenhaim borrowed SED terminology just before the SED’s Second Party Conference to declare that there was only one ‘party badge for the Christian’, namely:

Jesus Christ. [...] At the end of world history there will be two opposing parties, the Christians’ party and the murderers’ party. Victory will belong to the Christians’ party.\(^8\)

Similarly, the vicar of Schernberg was reported for the apparently treacherous view that the ‘present times are characterised by insecurity, need and poverty’.\(^9\) However, given the large number of sermons delivered every week in Thuringia/Bezirk Erfurt, the

\(^{75}\) Mitzenheim to Eggerath, 23 February 1950, ThHStAW, BdMP 863, fol 198.
\(^{76}\) Afl, ‘Bericht Nr.554’, 12 October 1950, ThHStAW, BdMP 233.
\(^{77}\) Meeting between Eggerath and the vicar, ThHStAW, BdMP 864, fols 87-96.
\(^{78}\) SED Landesleitung, ‘Informationsbericht Nr.118/52’, 24 June 1952, ibid, fol 358.
\(^{79}\) This example is drawn from a seven page report covering the last months of 1954, ‘Feindliche Äußerungen durch Pfarrer...’, undated, LPA, BIV/2/14-006.
number of these reports is relatively small. As in other areas, the SED’s paranoia about the churches was mostly unnecessary. Although the SED recorded as suspicious even sermons about God’s omnipotence, ‘most clergy address only religious themes in their sermons’. Nevertheless, well into the 1950s politically minded clergy were not intimidated by SED observers. Thus the government had to expect an increase in oppositional sermons on occasions such as the evacuations along the border to the FRG, election days, and prior to 17 June 1953. Magdeburg clergy in particular sometimes used the pulpit for political resistance, exercising their constitutional right to speak on issues affecting the people. Thus, in 1951 many clergy read a pastoral letter attacking agricultural developments which made common cause with farmers by identifying both church and agriculture as institutions under threat. Occasionally SED functionaries’ enthusiasm caused farcical incidents in the early period, as during the 1951 referendum when the party’s Eisenach district secretary refused to turn off the town’s public address system during church services. In response, the church choir sang ever louder, while the loudspeakers were turned up louder in renewed competition. The SED man remarked afterwards: ‘We showed the church who’s stronger!’

The GDR only occasionally imprisoned clerics. A rare example was on 17 June 1953 when Edgar Mitzenheim, the vicar of Eckolstädt and brother of Bishop Mitzenheim, and Gerhard Sammler, the superintendent in Bad Tennstedt, called for an uprising against the government and the SED. (The clergy were otherwise ‘conspicuously restrained’ on this day.) Other exceptions were a Heiligenstadt catechist sentenced to three months’ imprisonment in 1958 for distributing a West German article criticising the Oder-Neiße border, and the arrest of a Protestant youth vicar in Weimar, Giersch, who removed posters and other publicity before the 1957 elections. Bishop

80 1 October 1953 report (note 2), fol 60.
82 AfI, ‘Bericht Nr.273’, 6 June 1951, ThHStAW, BdMP 238, fol 150.
83 BdVP, ‘Übersicht über die Lage...’, 26 June 1953, ThHStAW, MdI/20, 66, fol 310.
Mitzenheim readily distanced himself from Giersch’s activities to preserve harmonious church-state relations, emphasising that this was an isolated incident. Apart from occasional cases of clergy imprisoned to make an example, the SED and the state authorities behaved cautiously. An Eichsfeld historian, Heinz Siebert, believed this was because they wanted to refute claims of a battle with the churches. Most legal problems concerned property rights and the clergy’s failure to register church events, but were often settled privately between the state and the churches. The churches frequently made concessions. Thus a Klettbach priest who insulted the CDU and the socialist development was not charged under Article 6 of the constitution but suspended by the church and removed from the parish. Such settlements protected the state’s reputation.

The SED’s contacts with parish clergy were sometimes attempts to influence the church leaderships. Signs of improving relations with some Magdeburg church clergy led the party to recommend more contacts with them, in the hope of similarly coopting the leadership. Equally, as relations with Catholic leaders were ‘tense or unbending’, the NF, CDU and leading personalities were required to approach Catholics individually, and the ‘Christian population’ working group was to invite important Catholics to forums. The aim was to break Catholics’ centrally ordained resistance by the familiar ‘divide and rule’ method. Meanwhile, every priest who still attacked the state in sermons or broke the law would be summoned to the RdK and ‘instructed’ as required. By making examples of good and bad behaviour in this schoolmasterly way, the SED hoped clergy at all levels would take note.

The state also attempted to impress clergy with displays of temporal authority. Apart from general discussions and summoning recalcitrant vicars for admonitions, the state...
also used coercion. Thus the RdB invited a senior church official, Säuberlich, for private talks before the Thuringian synod discussed revising its confirmation policy. State officials raised the question of Säuberlich’s son, who had been studying in the FRG but wished to continue his studies in Meiningen. Säuberlich, either from conviction or personal interest, agreed to support the conciliatory motion.

Elections posed a double challenge to the SED. The clergy had to be persuaded to vote for the NF candidates, but also, as they were perceived to have significant influence over churchgoers (still a large proportion of the population in the 1950s) as leading national, diocesan or parish personalities, they were encouraged to declare their support openly. Where clergy failed to vote or even criticised the candidates and their policies, the SED feared they might spark wider opposition. Thus, the SED, CDU and NF used all possible means to encourage the clergy’s active support before elections. In urging priests to use their pulpits to call upon their flocks to vote on election (Sun)days, they tacitly recognised the churches’ continuing influence. The clergy’s voting behaviour is one yardstick for gauging the success of the SED’s church policies, though unfortunately the first precise records date from 1957.

The churches’ influence was already clear during the ‘ban the bomb’ petition of May 1950, when the poorest results in the Eichsfeld were in villages where the priest had not signed. Despite the SED’s best efforts, difficulties were still apparent before the first Volkskammer elections. By July 1950 the churches’ anti-state and anti-election comments filled a ten page report. Only six of the 80 personally invited clergy attended a meeting with the Thuringian prime minister on 2 October 1950,

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90 Cf. Besier, p.497, who believes the state preferred to hold private discussions to delay conflicts with the church and keep them out of the public eye.
demonstrating the churches’ reluctance to involve themselves in politics. Some clergy claimed they could not attend without their superiors’ official approval.⁹⁴

Despite the SED’s self-congratulatory language, the major operation to persuade the clergy to support the elections openly and encourage their congregations to vote produced few positive results.

A large number of the clergy was won over. Four comrades have visited hundreds of clergy, over 30 clergy have declared themselves in writing for the aims of the National Front and for the election on 15 Oct.⁹⁵

That only 30 Thuringian vicars or priests welcomed the elections could hardly be counted as satisfactory. Internally the SED admitted the serious problems the churches and their supporters had caused:

The most active on election Sunday were the church and the sects. Half of the comments written on voting slips were of a religious nature. Political opponents [wrote] different comments and fewer of them.⁹⁶

It is unclear how many Catholic clergy voted in the 1950 election or the 1951 referendum. Eichsfeld reports claimed that most voted openly, unlike the Magdeburg church’s local vicars, and that the Catholic priest of Faulungen made positive references to the elections during his service. Though Catholic leaders remained generally aloof, most Catholics felt beholden to respect secular authority (via elections) on biblical grounds and saw no conflict with their stiff resistance to specific measures such as the secularisation of education. Nonetheless, most people in the Eichsfeld voted after the morning service, ignoring the SED’s entreaties to vote early as a clear rejection of the western ‘don’t vote’ campaign.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ ‘Protokoll der Sekretariatssitzung der Landesleitung Thüringen der SED am 19.10.1950’, p.4, LPA, IV/L/2/3-047.
⁹⁶ Ibid, p.5.
Catholics' early positive response to GDR elections, while the Protestant churches still generally opposed the state and its institutions, set a trend which continued for decades, despite the papacy's bitter opposition to communism. The pressure to conform to the state's demands was particularly keenly felt in the Eichsfeld after the expulsions from the border areas in 1952 and 1961. The desire to avoid resettlement may well explain Catholics' generally good voting record in this area. A 1951 report noted how the Catholic church set great store by 'not placing itself in a position of open contradiction to the state'. Only one Catholic priest refused to vote in Kreis Heiligenstadt in 1954. In 1961 the SED believed that the Catholic clergy's high turnout reflected an 'extremely clever tactical variant of the Catholic leadership' designed to avoid a deterioration of church-state relations. These had recently been harmed when the newly appointed Catholic bishop of (Greater) Berlin, Bengsch, discovered an MfS bug in his flat. However some clergy were exceptions: before the 1958 elections the priest of Steinbach, who did not vote, told RdB officials that he had nothing against the state but objected to atheist propaganda. Meanwhile, some clergy cleverly exploited the SED's exhortations to vote. Probably the most expensive vote cast was that of the Catholic dean, Lerch, in Siemerode, hard on the border. Lerch promised the District Peace Council to call on his congregation to vote, but added that his dearest wish was to see a steeple built on his new church. The peace council ensured that he received DM 15,000 before election day. This outlay was rewarded when the dean and the parish nuns all voted openly and publicly thanked the state.

Meanwhile, without forming a united block, the Protestant clergy took a 'more negative stance' to elections and referenda than their Catholic counterparts. The Magdeburg

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99 'Analyse der Volksbefragung vom 3.-5.6.1951...', undated, p.44, LPA, AIV/2/4-123.
100 21 October 1954 report (note 29), fol 22-25.
101 'Wahlanalyse über die Beteiligung der christlichen Bürger...', undated [1961], p.4, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
103 21 October 1954 report (note 29).
The church regarded elections as an opportunity to demonstrate sharp opposition to the state. In 1951, for example, it refused cooperation in the referendum because of the GDR’s defamation campaign against the west, and complained against official calls to vote openly and the suspicious treatment of those who voted secretly. Whereas the Eisenach church allowed its clergy to decide for themselves whether or not to vote by the mid 1950s, in 1957 the Magdeburg church planned a pastoral letter calling on worshippers not to vote and arranged bus trips and other events to keep churchgoers away from polling stations. (The Eisenach church had planned similar diversions to coincide with the 1951 referendum, but was even then persuaded not to implement them.)

Though many Protestant clergy remained neutral, in 1951 the SED had to conclude that the ‘progressive’ evangelical pastors were not yet a majority. Though precise figures are unavailable for the 1951 referendum, by the second of the three voting days only five of the 36 Protestant clergy in Erfurt, a Magdeburg church heartland, had voted. No great change occurred by 1954. Despite numerous conversations with church officials:

- Only a few clergy, already known to be progressively minded, have called upon their parishioners to vote for the National Front candidates on 17 October. [...] The church leadership was far more successful on the Sunday prior to the election in influencing the majority of clergy not to speak positively about the election in any way.

However:

- ...enemy church activities have not dominated. [...] The vast majority of the clergy remained loyal and made no mention of the elections and party and state policies.

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104 Copy of the Magdeburg church letter to the prime ministers of Thuringia and Sachsen-Anhalt, 23 May 1951, LPA, AIV/2/4-123.
106 Undated report (note 99), p.44.
107 Ibid, pp.43-44.
Nonetheless, the SED was concerned that clergy voted rather than remaining passive. One report claimed that ‘a large proportion’ of the clergy disobeyed Magdeburg’s instructions and voted with their congregations to avoid appearing isolated from the large numbers of believers active in NF committees, but named only one vicar. In contrast to Catholic clergy, most of Kreis Heiligenstadt’s Protestant clergy (mainly Magdeburg church) stayed away, some deliberately going away for the day. Those who remained at home but did not vote were subjected to repeated visits and hours of discussions with election agitators. These generally proved fruitless. The SED also discovered that pressurising clergy shortly before elections sometimes produced negative results.

The Magdeburg church’s continued defiance, and the discipline it exerted over its clergy, are reflected in the turnout figures of the various denominations’ clergy in successive elections.

<table>
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<th>1958</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1963</th>
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<td>96.4%</td>
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</tbody>
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The 1957 elections marked a breakthrough for the state authorities with the Eisenach church. Even Bishop Mitzenheim voted (albeit in the privacy of the booth), and many other leading figures followed suit. The Catholic suffragan bishop of Erfurt, Dr. Freusberg, did not himself vote, but did alter the date of the Corpus Christi procession to avoid clashing with the election.

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Apart from denominational differences in voting patterns, clergy in small rural areas usually reacted more positively to SED policies at election time than those in urban centres. The state authorities speculated in 1951 that clergy in small villages were more worried about isolating themselves from their parishioners over the ‘war or peace’ question. Equally, village priests were further removed from the influence of leading clergy and more easily preyed upon by local party functionaries.

Over the years, the clergy and the churches largely came to terms with the GDR and were prepared to support the elections as the highest symbol of their cooperation. By 1961, when even Dr. Freusberg voted, in common with the entire local Catholic leadership and that of the Eisenach church, most of these churches’ clergy also participated. Two Eichsfeld priests and some Arnstadt vicars even appealed to the population to vote early for the NF candidates, and the vicar of Breitenbach served on the Bezirk election commission in 1963. Other clerics also had official functions. Only the Magdeburg leadership maintained its defiance. In both 1961 and 1963, following the church’s instructions, only one of the eight Magdeburg superintendents in Bezirk Erfurt voted, though even he struck through the names of all but two candidates. The relatively low turnout among Magdeburg clergy suggests the leadership’s influence remained strong.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that the churches had been subjected to comprehensive attempts at state control by the late 1950s, even excluding the MfS’s role (discussed in Chapter Nine), and that the SED’s ‘divide and rule’ policy had been successful enough to detach Bishop Mitzenheim at least partially from the common stance adopted by his fellow bishops. However, SED tactics had not been sufficient to

113 6 June 1951 report (note 82), fol 148.
induce widespread loyalty from the Magdeburg or Catholic churches, nor from all the Eisenach clergy by the late 1950s. The failure to coopt the churches more fully by this point mainly resulted from the party’s policy towards the religious instruction of young people, a point on which the SED was not prepared to compromise, and which is discussed in the following chapter.
8

THE BATTLE FOR YOUTH

As the 1950s progressed, the greatest disputes between the churches and the SED concerned the upbringing of young people. In the party’s view, the SED’s longterm future depended on new generations being raised as socialists with exclusive faith in the working class movement and its marxist-leninist party. Young people were not to be distracted by supernatural beliefs, especially as the churches were connected with the SED’s political opponents, principally the West German CDU/CSU, and more generally western capitalism. Equally, the churches’ longterm future depended on new generations growing up believing in God and rendering institutional loyalty to the churches.

The incompatibility of these two mutually exclusive demands on youth quickly provoked a war of attrition between state and churches. The SED attached such significance to winning over young people to socialism that the campaign began very early in the GDR’s history, and was well established even before Walter Ulbricht announced the building of socialism in 1952. Initially the battle centred on religious education in state schools, and on the SED’s opposition to the *Junge Gemeinde*, (‘Young Congregation’). The SED felt this informal church association of young believers threatened the FDJ, which was designed to bring together all young people to support the socialist state and secure the SED’s future. The later phase of this existential fight, the introduction in 1954 of the *Jugendweihe* as a secular and essentially socialist confirmation ceremony, also predates crucial socialisation measures such as the completion of agricultural collectivisation (1960) and the nationalisation of the smaller private companies (1972).

This chapter considers the methods with which the SED achieved its goals in youth policy during the 1950s to the point where religious education was removed from state
schools and marginalised in society, and where most young people instead publicly pledged themselves to the SED’s goals. The relative speed with which these objectives were realised reflects the SED’s strength in implementing policy, even though the party rank and file was often weak (as earlier chapters demonstrated), and demonstrates the population’s increasing preparedness, even before the Wall’s construction, to conform to the expected patterns of outward behaviour. However, this chapter also highlights the different churches’ varying responses over time to these pressures, and church leaders’ dilemma between conforming to preserve their influence and resisting at the risk of losing their foothold in society.

Youth policy before 1953

In education, the SED had two main aims: first, to remove religious education from the classroom and hinder it elsewhere, and secondly to restructure the syllabus so that children were imbued with a purely materialist outlook as a basis for complete faith in SED policies. While the churches believed religion was ‘not one subject among others but the fundamental principle of all instruction’,¹ the SED accorded materialist principles and instruction in marxism-leninism the same importance. The churches quickly realised the scale of the longterm threat to their position these policies implied.

The Eisenach church negotiated with the SMATh about the importance of religious education as early as October 1945. Bishop Mitzenheim optimistically told Kolesnitschenko, the SMATh’s first head of administration, that all education rested on Christian foundations, and that, as more than 90% of Thuringia’s population belonged to a church, Christian schooling was democratically legitimate. The Soviet general pointed out that Christian schooling had not prevented the Third Reich and insisted on a clear division between church and state, underlining that religious education was purely

a church matter. The Eisenach church also hoped to include a guarantee that ‘religious education is a subject with equal rights and the concern of the religious institutions’ in the 1946 Thuringian constitution. Article 72 merely guaranteed the churches’ right to give religious instruction, without requiring state assistance. Rather, schools were to educate young people ‘to real humanity in the spirit of the peaceful and friendly coexistence of the nations and of a true democracy’. Article 74 insisted that no-one should be compelled to participate in any religious activity, including religious education, while more mildly adding that no-one should be prevented from participating, other than on legal grounds. This last provision allowed the legislator, in practice the SED, to define when pupils should be prevented from receiving religious education. The stipulation in Article 37 of the GDR’s 1949 constitution that schools would ‘educate young people in the spirit of the constitution’ again depended on how and by whom this was defined. The GDR’s constitution did, however, guarantee the churches’ right to dispense religious education in state classrooms and to choose their own teachers. As in Thuringia, no-one could be forced to attend or prevented from so doing, but Article 48 ensured that parents could not insist on children attending religious education beyond their 14th birthday.

The Magdeburg church quickly realised the threat of the new legal framework. Bishop Müller protested in April 1950 about the monopoly enjoyed by the materialist ideology in schools. A pastoral letter specifically complained that schools, colleges and the FDJ pressurised children to speak and write in contradiction to their own feelings, that the Christian religion was being presented as ‘contemptuous’ and that teachers were trying to convince pupils that Christ had never lived.

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2 Siebert, pp.185-6, gives various examples of early SMA involvement in religious education matters.
3 Mitzenheim to Frölich, 18 December 1946, ThHStAW, BdMP 863, fol 10.
6 Ibid, pp.264-5.
7 Eggerath’s meeting with Müller, 4 April 1950, ThHStAW, BdMP 863, fol 203.
Even before the real battle began, the state’s refusal to support RE (even though classes were held in state school buildings) caused administrative difficulties for the clergy giving the lessons. These problems were often compounded by bad discipline as teachers encouraged children to regard RE as an unnecessary extra. At a 1951 parents’ evening held by a Mühlhausen church, a catechist noted:

The children are highly undisciplined because the RE lessons are no longer organised as part of the timetable.

Another described chaotic circumstances:

The children’s behaviour is quite dreadful. We have literally to drag the children back from the toilets when it is time for the RE lesson. And while we are rounding up the last ones, the first ones have already got up and gone again. This is because we find so little sympathy among the teachers.

Another catechist said teachers helped him, but knew this was against their instructions.\(^9\)

The churches also protested at the pressure exerted on children to join the Young Pioneers or the FDJ against their conscience. The evangelical superintendent of Erfurt complained that many cases of ‘spiritual disturbance’ resulted from this pressure. Some people gave into pressure and were ashamed of themselves. Others despised those who were won over by promises of outward advantage. However, many grew apathetic and were prepared ‘cold bloodedly’ to assume any disguise.\(^10\) Here, arguably, lay the origins of the ‘niche society’ to which many of this first GDR generation subscribed in adulthood twenty and thirty years later.\(^11\) Inculcating behaviour patterns which lacked ideological foundations, and suppressing opposition to the state and/or natural allegiances to alternatives such as religious belief, ultimately did not guarantee SED

\(^10\) Afl, ‘Bericht Nr. 743’, 29 December 1950, ibid, fol 311.
hegemony. However, the indifference that took root in this early period was sufficient in the long term to undermine traditional support for religion in eastern Germany.

The Protestant churches used the Junge Gemeinde to try to combat the encroachment of FDJ and Young Pioneer activities on their traditional position among young people. The Junge Gemeinde greatly concerned the SED throughout the 1950s and 1960s. During the early 1950s in particular, the state regularly protested that the Junge Gemeinde constituted an unauthorised organisation. The churches maintained this was not so, rather that the Junge Gemeinde merely represented a grouping of the youth of each parish. While most Junge Gemeinde groups had no membership cards or books, young believers did wear badges proclaiming their affiliation. The practical difference between formal organisation and informal grouping was minimal.

Much of the ‘war’ between state and churches was waged by proxy via the FDJ and Junge Gemeinde. Vicars and priests made great efforts to provide exciting entertainments and opportunities for young people to entice them away from the FDJ. These often had only minimal or auxiliary religious association. An Erfurt vicar even made himself popular by telling his youth group ghost stories.* Church holiday camps, voluntary work missions, sports festivals and amateur dramatics were also organised in competition with similar FDJ activities, often attracting FDJ members and generally higher attendances than the ‘unity’ organisation achieved. Faced with the Junge Gemeinde’s overwhelming popularity, the party employed its own underhand tactics. SED members in the police were instructed to observe events carefully and intervene if

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14 The Catholic Pfarrjugend ('parish youth') played a similar role.
meeting rooms became overfilled in breach of fire regulations. A report to the MfS revealed that an Apolda headmaster and the SED and FDJ Bezirksleitungen had arranged for two committed FDJ members to join the Junge Gemeinde to ascertain its plans.

Both sides engaged in blackmail attempts: one primary school headteacher told FDJ members who also sang in the church choir that they would be unable to participate in FDJ events in the future. The children left the church choir and stayed with the FDJ. Meanwhile, the vicar of Plaue told confirmation candidates who had signed a greeting to Stalin that they must cross off their names or not be confirmed. The Catholic priest in Hüpstedt outdid the Young Pioneers when several members left to become altar boys. A Langensalza vicar played on international uncertainties by warning the parents of Christian children in the Young Pioneers’ choir that the church could not allow children to belong to communist organisations: the Americans would arrive soon and discover everything.

At a time when the churches generally maintained orthodox teaching on the Creation, biology classrooms were also central to the state’s battle against religion. The state insisted that only the scientific theory of evolution was taught. Clerics regularly provided children with counter arguments for biology lessons, and taught biology and history in RE classes to undermine the teachers’ position. The Catholic priest of Hüpstedt attacked the local biology teacher from the pulpit, while a Langensalza priest reportedly incited Catholic schoolgirls to accuse a biology teacher of indecent behaviour on a school outing. The teacher was imprisoned for six weeks before the girls withdrew the allegation.

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17 Cf., e.g., SED Bad Langensalza, ‘Tätigkeit der sogenannten Jungen Gemeinde’, 1 December 1952, LPA, BIV/2/14-003.
The comprehensive report containing these examples is typical of many, and foreshadowed increasing tensions between state and Junge Gemeinde after Walter Ulbricht proclaimed the building of socialism and the ‘unavoidable’ intensification of the class struggle. An integral part of the ‘struggle’ was that against the churches and in particular against the Junge Gemeinde, seen as a serious threat to the FDJ. One strategy was to exchange FDJ membership books in early 1953, a move similar to the SED’s purge of untrustworthy members in 1950/51. A discussion was held with every FDJ member about ideological commitment, with clear implications for members who also participated in Junge Gemeinde activities. Those who refused risked losing FDJ membership and thereby attracting personal disadvantages.

Meanwhile the SED’s Politbüro began a campaign to remove pupils with bourgeois backgrounds and known Junge Gemeinde activists from the high schools (Oberschulen). The ZK estimated that fifty to seventy per cent of Oberschule pupils were involved in the Junge Gemeinde and that numbers were rising. Apart from splitting youth and hindering the FDJ’s growth, the Junge Gemeinde was seen as dangerous and subversive. Members had, for instance, perpetrated such ‘anti-republic’ activities as disrupting SED-inspired protests at an Erfurt Oberschule against western Europe’s ‘General War Treaty’. The campaign against the Junge Gemeinde, presented as a hotbed of West German and American agents, was coordinated by FDJ chairman

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21 18 months later, for instance, the Weimar FDJ invited members and non-members to special outings, dances and sports days over Easter to counter planned Junge Gemeinde events, notably rallies in West Berlin and Eisenach. During this period further education teachers’ holiday applications were refused. No buses were made available and extra inspections on trains aimed to dissuade young people from travelling to church events: SED BL, ‘Kurzinformation Nr.22/53’, 31 March 1953, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.

22 According to a resolution of the Second Party Conference, Dokumente der SED (Berlin: Dietz), IV (1954), 73.

23 The official FDJ history refers to the Junge Gemeinde merely by noting that socialism’s enemies played on young people’s religious loyalties: Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend, ed. by Karl Heinz Jahnke, 2nd edn (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1983), p.255.

24 FDJ BL, ‘Bericht über den Abschluß des Umtausches der Mitgliedsbücher...’, 20 July 1953, LPA, BIV/2/16-017.


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Erich Honecker and intended as a ‘strong ideological battle’. The pupils’ energies were to be diverted into the FDJ, which still appeared weak in March 1953. The campaign led to a number of Oberschule pupils being expelled that spring.

It would be mistaken to see these expulsions as primarily religiously motivated. In this early stage of the struggle with the Junge Gemeinde they affected politically active Christians who were seen to be agitating against the GDR and its developing socialist order. In the first instance the state was keen to neutralise the ringleaders, such as those being investigated by the MfS in Teistungen for preparing to sabotage 1 May celebrations. The fervour and ideological commitment with which the campaign was waged in some Oberschulen, and the reluctance with which it later had to be abandoned, demonstrate the extent to which the SED had established a functioning hierarchy with unquestioning party discipline by 1953, and the existence of ‘class struggle’ in the first phase of Ulbricht’s construction of socialism.

Documentation survives of the witchhunt at the Buttstädt Oberschule in Kreis Sömmerda. Here, three sixth formers with strong Junge Gemeinde connections, and another who had cofounded the school’s Edelweißpiraten group, were expelled on 17 March 1953, despite the one CDU teacher’s protests. The school’s FDJ organisation was virtually non-existent, while the Junge Gemeinde was very strong, boasting a display board in the town with slogans designed to embarrass the SED, such as: ‘We

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28 Dokumente der SED, III (1954), 279-292.
31 The Edelweißpiraten was also the name chosen by some opposition youth groups during the Third Reich: cf. Detlev Peukert, Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life (London: Penguin, 1989), pp.154-165. The Buttstädt students clearly perceived that SED rule closely resembled NSDAP rule.
must all wear masks, only the Lord God can see into our hearts'. An investigative commission of nine SED members (including three functionaries) questioned several pupils and based its conclusions on allegations made by Junge Gemeinde opponents, in particular one SED pupil. They reported that a Junge Gemeinde newspaper, Die Stafette, published in 'imperialist' West Germany, was used in meetings, and that the local priest and a catechist were undermining and 'correcting' certain school lessons. As before, the Junge Gemeinde's status was queried. While those involved claimed it was not an organisation as it collected no dues and issued no membership cards, and was therefore legal, one pupil added that money was collected to support 'Christian teaching'. Though these and other complaints (pupils had rejected an FDJ ball scheduled for Holy Week) might appear mild, the SED commission viewed them as of great potential danger in the charged atmosphere of the Cold War, as reflected in the report's sharp language:

They [the members of the Pedagogical Council] uphold the expulsion of the elements who have consciously dragged the mass of the young people through the quagmire of political terrorist work through their active work in the Junge Gemeinde. [...] Comrade schools inspector R. [demonstrated] that the Junge Gemeinde is a front organisation of Anglo-American monopoly capitalism.32

This tone was similar to an article in the FDJ paper, Junge Welt,33 which had described the Junge Gemeinde's 'sabotage work'.

A Buttstädt catechist, the father of an expelled pupil, subsequently complained to the RdK. He protested that the commission had breached his understanding of Articles 42(3), 40 and 44 of the GDR constitution and noted that as the Junge Gemeinde was not an organisation, his daughter could not have been a functionary in it, as charged. The letter also revealed his daughter's record as an FDJ functionary, for which she had won a medal in 1950. This suggests that the action was designed not only to remove a committed Christian pupil from the school, but also to intimidate the catechist father and through him warn others.34

32 18 April 1953 report (note 30), fols 49, 50.
33 Cf. Stappenbeck, p. 151.
Although the GDR’s interior ministry formally banned the Junge Gemeinde on 28 April 1953,\(^{35}\) the Buttstädt case had a surprising outcome which casts light on far wider matters. Though the catechist’s protest had no effect itself, two of the four expelled pupils were reprieved in early May and sent to a different Oberschule (where they would be carefully observed) after the intervention of the local Soviet commandant, who summoned the Kreis education director for talks. Though the decision possibly resulted from the Soviet connections of one pupil’s father, the intervention may be an early indicator of the more relaxed Soviet policy towards the GDR’s building of socialism following Stalin’s death, and of the direct intervention at the highest levels which led to the effective Soviet imposition of the ‘New Course’ in early June. In any event, the influence still enjoyed by the Red Army in the GDR’s domestic affairs in May 1953 is very evident in the education director’s meek acquiescence to the commandant’s view. Consequently the Sömmerda RdK requested the RdB to ensure no further action was taken in the case.\(^{36}\)

The locally initiated reprieve for two of the Buttstädt pupils anticipated a general amnesty for other expelled students in the SED’s more moderate ‘New Course’, introduced on Soviet orders in early June 1953 as an (unsuccessful) attempt to defuse growing social discontent. Measures taken against teachers during the Junge Gemeinde ‘investigations’ were also to be reversed. Furthermore, all ‘special measures against church institutions’ were to be halted; ‘democratic legality’ was to be ‘guaranteed’, an admission that it had not been beforehand.\(^{37}\) This U-turn, integral to the ‘New Course’, was directly linked to the meeting between government and church leaders on 10 June. It is indicative of the level of public and church opposition to measures against the Junge Gemeinde and religious education during 1953 that this meeting was the first practical action to follow the SED’s announcement of the ‘New Course’ the previous

\(^{35}\) Spittmann and Fricke, p.9.
\(^{36}\) RdK Sömmerda to RdB, 5 May 1953, ThHStAW, V 15, fol 53.
\(^{37}\) ‘Maßnahmen auf dem Gebiete der Volksbildung...’, (undated), ibid, fol 58.
day. Even as these momentous policy changes were being announced, however, on 9 June the Sömmerda Oberschule’s Pedagogical Council was discussing the 9th form’s essays on the Junge Gemeinde. The meeting unanimously decided to expel an actively Christian pupil who had disputed the Junge Welt reports and preferred to trust the version presented in the West German Stafette. The pupil’s behaviour was felt to ‘greatly damage the respect of our democratic school and to hinder its social development’. The pupil’s continued attendance would be ‘incompatible with our educational aims’. 38

As the Sömmerda example suggests, the Junge Gemeinde campaign could not simply be reversed by decree. Some pupils had already ‘fled the republic’. At the Bad Berka Oberschule two of fifteen expelled or suspended pupils were not asked to return as they were ‘decided enemies who have carried out planned attacks against the occupation power and the Soviet Union’. Similarly, pupils in various classes at the Nordhausen Oberschule opposed the return of students expelled for Junge Gemeinde contacts. 39

Such cases illustrate the differences between central regulations and local realities, but also that the SED’s basic outlook towards the churches remained constant, even though the New Course had forced a premature end to the first phase of the party’s efforts to restrict religious influence over youth.

**Battle rejoined: religious education and the introduction of the Jugendweihe**

As the SED regrouped and shook off the restraints of the New Course, the breathing space forced on the state by June 1953 proved to be of short duration for the churches, as for other parts of society. However, as openly aggressive attacks on religious organisations and individuals were no longer politically acceptable, the state and party

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38 ‘Sitzung des Pädagogischen Rates der Oberschule Sömmerda am 9. Juni 1953’, ibid, fol 88. The essays are in ibid, fols 60-82.
introduced new tactics which less obviously but far more effectively undermined the churches and in particular their appeal to the younger generation. The SED’s innovations in this period were the administrative difficulties placed in the path of religious education in state schools, and the introduction of the Jugendweihe.

As noted above, the churches had already encountered problems in giving religious education in schools during the early 1950s. The 10 June 1953 church-state agreement stipulated that the restrictions of 1 January 1953 concerning religious education in school buildings would be reviewed. The education ministry’s new regulation of 3 August stated:

Religious education may not be given before the beginning of timetabled education (8am). [...] Otherwise it can be given directly after the timetabled lessons of individual classes.

Within months, though, there were complaints about the order’s interpretation. In practice schools refused to permit RE to be taught to classes whose timetabled lessons began well after 8am, or to classes when their timetabled lessons were complete if classes elsewhere in the school were still being taught. One complainant understandably refused to accept an oral decision from the ministry that the entire school’s timetable had to be complete first, as this represented a significant change to the issued regulation. At the Theo-Neubauer-Oberschule in Erfurt, rooms were not made available for RE until 3pm. Headteachers regularly decreed that children should rest before extracurricular lessons, and that RE periods held immediately after timetabled lessons interfered with school needs such as detentions. Religious instructors found it difficult to persuade children to wait for lengthy periods after their lessons for an RE class, especially in rural areas where children might have to travel several miles home and then return to school. As the fundamental differences continued between the

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42 Ibid.  
churches' interpretations of human development in RE lessons and the version taught by school biology and history teachers, the conflict could only deepen.\(^{44}\)

The dispute persisted for years. In February 1956 the RdB submitted a draft directive to Berlin designed to effectively outlaw RE in state schools. The RdB proposed that at least two hours should elapse between the end of schools' timetabled lessons and the start of RE classes, apparently to avoid overburdening children. Even consideration of transport availability for pupils in outlying villages would not be permitted to overrule this provision. On the pretext of ensuring traffic safety, teachers were to accompany their charges out of the building and as far as the school gate after lessons, effectively meaning that the RE instructor would have to attempt to assemble the class again later. Even more restrictively for the churches, the decree stipulated that any extracurricular teachers must be suitable and have a 'positive attitude towards the workers' and peasants' state'. The decision about suitability would fall to the (invariably SED) Kreis education director. Such teachers would require a permit, renewable every three months, which could be revoked without notice.\(^{45}\)

On 12 February 1958, the GDR's education ministry issued a directive very similar to the Erfurt proposal. The so-called 'Lange decree' caused indignation and protest from the churches.\(^{46}\) Clergy faced a dilemma. If they obeyed their churches' instructions to disregard the directive, they would lose their influence in the schools. However, on the point of inspection of RE classes by the headteacher, many clergy followed church instructions and immediately stopped the lesson when the head was present. No outcome could have pleased the SED more.\(^{47}\)

\(^{44}\) An Erfurt vicar told one class that he regarded God as the highest being, while others believed this role was filled by 'some SED functionary or other': untitled report [spring 1954?], ibid, fol 119.

\(^{45}\) RdB, 'Entwurf einer Anweisung zur Sicherung von Ordnung und Stetigkeit...'; ThHStAW, V 15, fols 237-9; covering letter, 23 February 1956, ibid, fol 236. In 1968 all 15 Kreis education heads were SED members: 'Gesamtanalyse der politischen und fachlichen Qualifikationen...', 22 March 1968, ThHStAW, Ka 133.

\(^{46}\) The 'Lange decree' of 12 February 1958 is discussed by Besier, p.253.

\(^{47}\) SED BL, 'Informationsbericht Nr.12/58', 4 June 1958, pp.7-8, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
In the following years, after the renewed church-state rapprochement of 1958, there was some local easing of the situation. In Eisenach discussions with the clergy produced an dispensation for the two hour wait to be waived in schools where children would need to make a long journey back. Catechists were still, however, not permitted to collect entire groups at their classroom or the school gate. Such concessions reflected a more rational approach by the SED, but also suggest a growing confidence that unpopular, hardline, class struggle policies were less imperative given the progress already made in undermining the churches' mass following. However, the Eisenach arrangement was unusual. Although Mitzenheim could announce in 1960 that it was becoming easier for the religious instructors to teach in state schools again, the Lange decree's administrative obstacles succeeded in driving RE out of most schools and into church buildings. This robbed the churches of their captive audience of the entire youth of a locality in compulsory lessons, and made them dependent on first attracting young people into the presbytery, or persuading their parents to send them. As contacts with the churches were frowned upon, and as a new generation of parents lacked religious education themselves, the churches' position was seriously undermined.

Despite this defeat, the churches were even more concerned by the Jugendweihe. Before the Third Reich the Jugendweihe was a secular, atheist alternative to Christian conformation, a coming of age ceremony in the German humanist, freethinker and socialist tradition. It re-emerged in the GDR in November 1954 with the foundation of a 'Central Committee for Jugendweihe', theoretically independent but in practice established at the SED's behest and fully supported by state leaders and institutions. In its first form, participants vowed to fight for and defend peace and a peaceful, democratic, independent Germany, and to work for progress in the economy, science

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49 Mitzenheim to the synod, 'Der Stand des kirchlichen Lebens in Thüringen', 2 May 1961, ThHStAW, Ki 20, fol 173.
50 This conclusion relies on oral information provided by Thuringians after 1989.
51 Cf. Pollack, p.281.
and art. By 1958, reflecting the GDR’s stabilising international position, the oath had changed: young people, addressed as ‘faithful sons and daughters of our workers’ and peasants’ state’, were entreated to invest all their energies into the great and noble cause of socialism and to join the Soviet and all other peaceloving peoples in securing world peace. The aspects of the oath which emphasised the participant’s membership of the socialist community were enhanced in later years.

While Hermann Weber sees the role of the Jugendweihe in strengthening young people’s atheism, he also defines the new institution as a way of instilling them with a sense of GDR identity rather than as an attack on the church. Though the strengthening of GDR identity was certainly important, the overtly atheist nature of the preparation for 13-14 year olds before the officially voluntary ceremony clearly indicates that the SED also intended the Jugendweihe as part of its armoury against the churches. To belittle the churches’ view of the Creation and related topics, the preparatory course for the Jugendweihe ceremony covered themes such as ‘the start of life on earth’ and ‘the development of humankind’.

Whereas the churches had previously confronted only individual biology and history teachers, they were now faced with a state-sponsored scheme designed to spread atheist views amongst all 14 year olds. By December 1954, the Catholic Bishop of Berlin, Weskamm, had already insisted in a pastoral letter that the Jugendweihen now being planned can never be considered by a Catholic. Both Weskamm and his Protestant counterpart, Dibelius, already the SED’s declared enemy, were equally firm in rejecting

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53 Dohle, p.312.
54 DDR Handbuch, I, 693.
56 Dähn, Konfrontation oder Kooperation?, p.54.
57 Cited by Lange, p.73.
any compatibility of the atheist Jugendweihe with the confirmation ceremony.\textsuperscript{38} As a secular ceremony, in which young people committed themselves to materialist atheism, the churches viewed the Jugendweihe oath as a rejection of God. The scene was set for a resumption of the bitter church battle.

Though the Thuringian bishop, Moritz Mitzenheim had (and retains) a reputation as the 'red bishop' for attempting to find a non-confrontational role for the church, he nevertheless quickly commented on the theological implications of the new secular ceremony. He emphasised the common church line on the Jugendweihe in his 1955 New Year message. While pointing out that the church took seriously Luther's words that the 'church should not be turned into the town hall and the town hall should not be turned into the church', Mitzenheim emphasised that parents' decision about sending their children to the Jugendweihe was a matter of conscience rather than politics and therefore protected by the GDR's constitution.\textsuperscript{39} Mitzenheim complained to the RdB chairman, Willy Gebhardt, about the Jugendweihe's atheist character and declared that its obligatory nature meant the state had abandoned religious neutrality and toleration. Though Gebhardt insisted the Jugendweihe was an entirely voluntary, independent institution, Mitzenheim cited examples of state schools actively promoting the Jugendweihe and of pupils who had been told they could only attend the Oberschule if they took the Jugendweihe oath.\textsuperscript{40} In a further letter, Mitzenheim cited a notice from the Weimar education department about an obligatory teachers' conference to discuss supporting the Jugendweihe.\textsuperscript{41} The movement's officially independent status was undermined by the fact that the Central Jugendweihe Committee's temporary address was the GDR's culture ministry, and that an SED directive called on education

\textsuperscript{39} 'Wort des Landesbischofs zum neuen Jahr', Glaube und Heimat, 2 January 1955. Copy in ThHStAW, KI 19, fol 41.
\textsuperscript{40} The January/February 1955 correspondence is cited by Dähn, Konfrontation oder Kooperation?, p.56.
\textsuperscript{41} Mitzenheim to Gebhardt, 18 February 1955, ThHStAW, V 15, fols 137-8, RdK Weimar circular to schools, 2 February 1955, ibid, fol 13.
functionaries to involve teachers and headteachers in the Jugendweihe movement.\textsuperscript{62}

Regionally, the campaign was implemented almost entirely by the SED’s culture department and the RdB’s education department.\textsuperscript{63}

During 1955 Mitzenheim’s sermons often carefully elucidated why religion and the materialist ideology were irreconcilable and how a proper understanding of science should lead to greater reverence for God rather than a renunciation of religion. On this basis, and stressing parents’ responsibility for raising their children as Christians, he declared unambiguously that Jugendweihe participants could not be confirmed, as the Jugendweihe oath represented a rejection of the church. The choice, Mitzenheim insisted, was simply either confirmation or Jugendweihe. On this point, he claimed, all clergy were united. He emphasised that no-one would lose by refusing the secular oaths and compared the situation in 1955 to that two years earlier, when young people and the church had also been pressurised. Then, the churches urged believers to stand united in prayer. Their prayers were answered with the agreements of 10 June 1953. Now, the church, parents, children and especially teachers must again unite to achieve the churches’ aims.\textsuperscript{64}

Apart from initial popular apathy towards the Jugendweihe, and signs that rural populations would need far more convincing (‘...they’ll have a tough fight on here in the country!’), early in the campaign there was instinctive deep concern in some religiously minded children. Thus a group of Mühlhausen schoolgirls feared that participation in the Jugendweihe would deny them a church burial.\textsuperscript{65} Some young people’s religious attachment is clear from a state report on the 1954 Evangelical Church Congress in Leipzig which bitterly noted that young people who apparently had no time for social

\textsuperscript{64} ‘Aus der Rede von Moritz Mitzenheim am 19. März 1955 in Gotha’, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 91-8. Several similar sermons are recorded in ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} SED BL, ‘Bericht über den Stand der Vorbereitung der Jugendweihe... ’, 13 December 1954, pp.4-5, LPA, BIV/2/9.02-021.
(i.e. SED/FDJ) activities had been selling church badges and performing other such duties with a ‘hardly imaginable stamina’. The SED’s perception of these religious affiliations in young people as a threat to the party’s own longterm existence largely explains the great efforts invested in the Jugendweihe campaign. Additionally the party felt constrained to use the Jugendweihe to combat the Junge Gemeinde which in 1955 still involved 8,236 young Protestants in Bezirk Erfurt. The Catholics’ parallel Pfarrjugend had 4,783 adherents. Though the proportions of Junge Gemeinde activists were fairly insignificant in some districts, the movement had strengthened somewhat since 1953. The SED worried about the churches’ continued use of ruses, such as blackmail against confirmands involved in Young Pioneer events and outings designed to clash with FDJ occasions.

Once the Jugendweihe campaign began in earnest, the churches’ influence became decisive in many areas as clergy followed their bishops’ lead by fighting a war of attrition at parish level. Rarely had the church been so united. Reports flooded in of clergy threatening to exclude Jugendweihe participants from confirmation ceremonies, in line with the bishops’ decisions; some clergy went from door to door collecting signed declarations from parents that their children would not attend the secular ceremony. Church influence was particularly apparent in Teistungen (Kreis Worbis), where seven residents formed a Jugendweihe committee on 20 November 1954. After pastoral letters were read in the Catholic and Protestant churches, only one (SED) committee member was prepared to continue, and no parents agreed to the plan. The priest of Haynrode (also Kreis Worbis) declared that the Jugendweihe was only for the godless and that it was tainted with the swastika. By 1956 the Magdeburg church also attempted to stigmatise the Jugendweihe by insisting that confirmands or their parents

declared to the church in advance if the confirmand would be attending the state ceremony. In such cases, the child’s suspension from confirmation classes signalled the incompatibility of the two events.\textsuperscript{70}

In the face of such fierce church opposition, the CDU, a theoretically loyal bloc party but also ostensibly a party for the Christian population, not surprisingly refrained at grassroots level from actively supporting the \textit{Jugendweihe}.\textsuperscript{71} The CDU’s position had not changed by late 1955 when \textit{Jugendweihe} committees were formed for 1956. No CDU members served on the \textit{Bezirk} and \textit{Kreis} committees, and only two CDU members were known to belong to a local committee.\textsuperscript{72} When the \textit{Bezirk Jugendweihe} committee declared in 1956 that anyone who refused to swear the \textit{Jugendweihe} oath was ‘against the unity of our German fatherland and against peace’, the CDU responded that the party and non-party Christians regarded this as a great insult to non-participants.\textsuperscript{73} Such reactions reinforce the view expressed in Chapter Three that the CDU (at least below the national leadership) was not entirely \textit{gleichgeschaltet} by the mid-1950s.

The results of the first \textit{Jugendweihe} campaign must have disappointed the SED, and clearly illustrate the churches’ continuing influence even after ten years of socialist construction,\textsuperscript{74} as only 19.2\% of \textit{Bezirk} Erfurt’s Form 8 pupils participated. In the Eichsfeld the results were far worse (2.9\% in \textit{Kreis} Heiligenstadt and 5.2\% in \textit{Kreis} Worbis; the adjoining \textit{Kreis} Mühlhausen was also below average at 14.5\%).\textsuperscript{75} However, the churches’ influence was not total, as a proportion of \textit{Jugendweihe} participants had also been confirmed, despite the churches’ insistence on the two ceremonies’

\textsuperscript{70} Magdeburg church, ‘Rundverfügung Nr.30/56’, 3 February 1956, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fol 123.
\textsuperscript{71} 13 January 1955 report (note 63).
\textsuperscript{73} SED memo, 22 May 1956, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
incompatibility. In Kreis Sondershausen as many as 91% of those who took the secular oath had also been confirmed. Generally the churches did not immediately implement their threats to exclude Jugendweihe participants, though some cases were reported from Sömmerda and Nordhausen districts. Thus one young Lipprechterode churchgoer was denied rights received through confirmation, such as communion and church marriage, but was told that devout attendance at services until the age of 18 would allow a review of the case. Ironically, the SED profited from such examples by accusing the churches of inflicting moral pressures on young people and preventing freedom of expression.76 In fact, both the churches and the SED were using such pressures, though neither side accepted that the other was entitled to.

When campaigning began for the following year’s Jugendweihe in late 1955, the churches responded immediately. Various reports noted the continuing greater reluctance in rural communities, where the churches were generally stronger. Apart from proven tactics such as anti-Jugendweihe declarations, some clergy spread rumours that, for instance, no Jugendweihe present would be distributed this year. The vicar of Schönstädt sent every 1955 Jugendweihe participant a form with which they could renounce their secular oath.77 The churches also used bribery. In Diedorf, where the priest forbade pupils who visited an exhibition entitled ‘Agents, Saboteurs, Spies’ to serve as altar boys, most of the population turned against the Jugendweihe and the school.78 The churches’ influence was also visible in the negative responses to the Jugendweihe of various teachers and even SED comrades, some of whose wives refused to allow them to serve on Jugendweihe committees.79 Mitzenheim wrote personally to all Protestant teachers in his diocese in 1955 to highlight the Jugendweihe’s atheist nature, to warn of the consequences for confirmed participants, and to emphasise that assisting the Jugendweihe campaign was not an act of loyalty.
towards the state, given the ceremony’s voluntary nature, despite the confusion the SED was trying to sow. Mitzenheim warned that teachers who persuaded pupils to participate in a ceremony which must be rejected on religious grounds would lose their respect.\footnote{Mitzenheim, ‘An die evangelischen Lehrer...’, 20 October 1955, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fols 149-50.}

An SED report noted functionaries’ ‘lack of faith’ in the party’s strength over ‘more aggressive’ vicars, indicating that even those responsible for building socialism doubted they would succeed.\footnote{[SED BL], ‘Gegenbericht zur Berichterstattung der Genossen des Bezirksausschusses...’, 17 October 1955, p.3, LPA, BIV/2/9.02-021.}

The SED and the Jugendweihe committees it dominated and sustained increasingly concentrated their efforts on splitting and undermining the churches’ opposition. An October 1955 report called for greater attention to ‘loyal’ clergy and parish council members and for stronger public protests against ‘reactionary’ vicars.\footnote{Ibid.} A letter from the Bezirk Jugendweihe committee attempted to isolate parents from the churches by claiming that many parents wanted their children to participate in both confirmation and the Jugendweihe. The committee backed this view and attacked the ‘impatience’ of some clergy, whose view of the secular ceremony was denounced as creating ‘conflicts in the hearts of the faithful’. However, the letter could cite only two clergy, neither of them from Bezirk Erfurt, who supported the Jugendweihe.\footnote{Bezirksausschuss für Jugendweihe letter, 1 February 1956, LPA, BIV/2/9.02-021.}

Bishop Mitzenheim proved central to the SED’s approach. Despite his continuing theological aversion to the Jugendweihe, he failed to recognise the churches’ strength in 1955 and, presumably seeing the SED’s plans as unstoppable, even then attempted to preserve a climate in which the churches could retain influence among young people by beginning to equivocate on the incompatibility of confirmation with the Jugendweihe. On 23 November 1955 his sermon in Weimar attacked marxism-leninism, but included an assurance that participation in the secular ceremony would prevent churchgoers only from becoming godparents, holding church office and taking part in church elections,
rather than denying them all church rights. 'No-one can say this is an intolerant and impatient attitude,' declared the bishop. 'Everyone must admit that this is a generous and charitable ruling which takes account of our young people’s characters.'

Though this reaction was arguably premature at a time when the Jugendweihe was not yet a standard part of young people’s development and when the churches’ battle against the new institution still enjoyed wide support, Mitzenheim had perhaps accurately recognised that in the long term the churches would be powerless to prevent the SED’s success, given the party’s domination of youth through the education system and the FDJ, and its control of young people’s careers. By the late 1950s, these factors turned the Jugendweihe into an accepted milestone in young people’s lives. Mitzenheim’s Weimar sermon foreshadowed the debate which split the church between those who firmly believed the churches should (indeed could) not alter their theological position, and those who, like Mitzenheim, looked beyond the Jugendweihe issue in their concern for the churches’ overall position and preferred to make some concessions rather than face probable extinction over their own ‘either/or’ dogma. The SED, which pursued a ‘divide and rule’ policy wherever possible, only benefited from these controversies. The internal wrangles undermined the churches in the public eye and enabled believers to salve their consciences when bowing to the growing pressures on their children to conform by taking the Jugendweihe oath.

Generally, Mitzenheim pursued a dual policy, trying to preserve both peace with the state and defending his theological positions on the Jugendweihe and confirmation. During the late 1950s he was attacked by the western press and many within the churches for his pragmatism and readiness to compromise, and by the SED press for fulfilling his role as bishop. Eventually, faced with realities, his pragmatic desire for an arrangement with the state won over. In the meantime, despite indicating his readiness to compromise a little in November 1955, Mitzenheim continued to fight the

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85 Cf. FRG and GDR press cuttings about Mitzenheim, ThHStAW, Ki 19.
Jugendweihe. In October 1956 he wrote privately to Paul Wandel, the SED’s culture and education secretary, to protest that the state was using all possible means to promote the Jugendweihe, although it was supposedly an independent, voluntary institution. He referred to the campaigns being waged even within children’s holiday camps, and complained that newly printed family bibles omitted space for confirmation details, but left plenty of room to record the Jugendweihe. Mitzenheim appealed for the pressure and conflicts of conscience heaped on young people to end, and warned that the churches’ position would not change. Instead he suggested the state could introduce a different ceremony for all school leavers which was neither atheistic nor anti-Christian and did not clash with confirmation. If such a ceremony had no oath and a different name, he promised the church would reconsider its position. The state, aware that the Jugendweihe was slowly taking root and undermining the churches in an increasingly secular world, and no doubt fearful of humiliation, refused to make such a major retreat.

Thus, Mitzenheim’s pragmatism did not extend to significant theological shifts. In a 1957 letter to clergy, Mitzenheim responded to a speech by Ulbricht in Sonneberg by again denouncing the Jugendweihe and swore that the church would always protest against the ceremony’s state support. However, his general position gained ground within his diocesan church and ultimately it was the Eisenach church which, during a synod meeting of January 1958, took the first moves towards compromising with the state over the Jugendweihe. Ironically, given his reputation as an SED sympathiser, Mitzenheim himself was reportedly ‘disappointed’ by his failure to impose on his church the same firm anti-Jugendweihe stance as Bishop Dibelius. The vote exposed the gulf within the Eisenach church between those who favoured some loyalty to the state and those who followed the Dibelius line: 21 synod members voted for the Jugendweihe compromise, eleven against and six abstained. The election of a new synod member produced an even more polarised view: 25 voted for a hardliner, and 23 for a candidate of whom the state approved. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of parish members advocated for a different ceremony.

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86 Mitzenheim to Wandel, 27 October 1956, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 44-46.
clergy were prepared to cooperate with the state, reflecting widespread support of the more moderate synod line.88

The synod's January 1958 vote, which followed a change in the wording of the Jugendweihe oath, was a major departure from previous policy as it allowed all children to attend religious preparation classes and be confirmed, irrespective of Jugendweihe participation. However, the confirmation ceremony was altered to exclude first holy communion, which was held separately a few weeks later. For 1959 the rules were again altered: now confirmands were only excluded from communion if they used the Jugendweihe deliberately to reject Christian teaching. Even so, vicars were advised to reject intending communicants only after consulting the parish council and the local superintendent.89

Although the causal relationship was circular to some extent, it is hard to escape the conclusion that it was rising levels of Jugendweihe participation during the late 1950s as the SED's organisational and persuasive techniques improved (see graph) which forced the church's eventual changes of principle on the incompatibility of confirmation and Jugendweihe, rather than the other way around. As Mitzenheim had realised, the churches had little option other than to react to the SED's success if they wished to retain any influence with the young. He upheld this view even though confirmation figures fell as quickly in Thuringia as in Länder where the churches still rejected the Jugendweihe.90 Nevertheless, in the few areas where the churches' influence remained dominant, the SED had little success in introducing the Jugendweihe. This was notably the case in the Catholic Eichsfeld throughout the 1950s, where even many SED members did not enter their children.91 In response, by 1957 the state education service

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89 Cf. 'Anordnung zur Durchführung des Synodalbeschlusses...'; 22 December 1958, ThHStAW, Ki 20, fols 48-50.
91 Cf. ThHStAW, NF 183, fol 38.
Jugendweihe participation
Selected Kreise, 1955-1960

Source: Annual reports in LPA, BIV/2/9.02-021.
attempted to improve youth indoctrination by cooperating with the SED on cadre policy in the Eichsfeld's schools, where there were 'too many' CDU headteachers. Heads and other teachers were to be replaced with SED staff over a two year period to ensure the implementation of 'socialist education aims' and to 'strengthen and more successfully structure ideological education'.

Like the Catholic church, and in contrast to the Eisenach diocese, the Magdeburg church outwardly retained its harsh stance throughout the 1950s. A letter from the Magdeburg bishop to parents of confirmands in January 1959 not only re-emphasised his church's 'either/or' position, but sought to embarrass the SED in much the same way as the party tried to embarrass the churches. The technique was to quote prominent comrades who had departed from the official constitutional ground of religious toleration, such as Werner Neugebauer, the SED's education chief, who publicly announced:

We marxist-leninists [...] are firmly convinced there is no God. But when the religious believers repeatedly proclaim their religious teachers and speak of God, sometimes our feelings are also hurt...

His colleague Kurt Hager was also quoted as saying that Jugendweihe preparations enabled 'young people to see the world as it really is, free of any superstitious and mystical beliefs'. Most notably the Magdeburg church responded to Ulbricht's Sonneberg speech on 29 September 1957, when he launched the 1958 Jugendweihe preparations, by writing to all parishes highlighting the speech's implicit attacks on the churches and on Christian beliefs.

However, even the Magdeburg church was forced to acknowledge the Jugendweihe's ubiquity by the late 1950s, and to respond to the challenge, rather than placing parents

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92 See various correspondence and plans in: ThHStAW, V 15, fol 273 ff.
93 Bishop of Magdeburg to parents of confirmands, January 1959, pp.1-2, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fols 53-4.
in an impossible position between the intransigence of both state and churches. The Eisenach church’s lead also embarrassed Magdeburg into change. Thus, while urging parents and young people to refuse the Jugendweihe, the Magdeburg church attempted to avert mass disobedience by effectively fudging the issue. Returning to the pre-Jugendweihe position, all children were to receive confirmation classes, thus preserving Christian influence on them for as long as possible. Recognition would be given to all children who completed the course. This recognition would not, however, be equivalent to confirmation, which would be reserved for those children who had not attended the Jugendweihe. Those who participated in the secular ceremony would not, however, be excluded from communion forever, let alone excommunicated, despite some earlier threats. The church realised that those who attended the Jugendweihe needed most spiritual guidance. Therefore, these young people could be received fully into the church providing they proved they really belonged to their parish, rejected the anti-Christian, atheist path for about a year, and accepted Junge Gemeinde help. The new procedures would remain in force until a ‘final resolution of the confirmation question’. This compromise also amounted to a victory for the SED as even the Magdeburg church had tacitly recognised the socialist state’s claim to instil dialectical materialism into children. The church leadership was perhaps reacting to signs that some Magdeburg vicars, faced with the problems of practical ministry, were increasingly prepared to deal with state authorities despite instructions to the contrary.

This compromise, though a major concession for the Magdeburg church, still did not satisfy everyone. This quickly became clear in Bleicherode when confirmands’ parents refused to accept that their children must wait an entire year for confirmation just because they had attended the Jugendweihe. Some parents threatened to leave the church altogether because of the new arrangement, surely questioning the depth of their religious convictions. The dissent in the parish forced the superintendent to introduce a

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95 January 1959 letter (note 93), pp.3-4.
96 Magdeburg church, ‘Rundverfügung Nr.131/58’, 27 November 1958, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fol 111.
local compromise, in which all children would receive a special blessing on the traditional confirmation date. Those who had not attended the Jugendweihe would be confirmed on Ascension Day, while Jugendweihe participants could be re-educated by the church and prove their religious devotion in time for a confirmation ceremony by the end of the school year. The superintendent, Dr Schack, defended himself by saying:

The individual pastor’s Christian conscience must take precedence over the church authorities’ regulations in times of complex conflicts and difficulties.98

Such a comment reflected a great, if reluctant, change of heart in Schack who in 1950 had continually referred to communism as a form of ‘organised theft’ and compared the GDR’s development to the Third Reich’s.99 Elsewhere, the Magdeburg church’s insistence on upholding its regulations about confirming Jugendweihe participants caused problems well into the 1960s, and highlighted citizens’ readiness to conform to the norms demanded by the state, even at the expense of their own religion. This enabled the state to attack the Magdeburg church and pressurise clergy to abandon their stance. The state was thus practically encouraging children to demand confirmation to embarrass the church. The state also attacked the Magdeburg church with the ‘good’ example of its Eisenach counterpart.100

The Catholic church’s unequivocal resistance to the Jugendweihe can be quickly sketched. Initially, while leaving individuals to make their own choice, the suffragan bishop of Erfurt, Freusberg, decreed that neither those who swore the Jugendweihe oath nor their parents could enjoy the sacraments until an official recantation supported by two referees was given in a priest’s presence.101 Later in 1955, a pastoral letter from Freusberg to all Thuringian Catholics warned that participants faced excommunication as the Jugendweihe’s organisers regarded Christianity as a fairy tale and did not observe the event’s officially voluntary nature. Like other church leaders, Freusberg emphasised

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98 Schack to clergy, 7 March 1959, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fol 99.
100 See, e.g., RdK Eisenach, ‘Niederschrift’, 2 February 1962, ThHStAW, Ki 9, fols 70-3; ‘Protokoll über eine Aussprache in Rothenberg...’, 19 April 1961, ibid, fol 80.
this voluntary nature in the hope that citizens would have the courage to resist the pressure being exerted in the schools and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{102} Local priests shared the bishop's hardline stance. The depth of feeling is illustrated by the Martinfeld priest (Kreis Heiligenstadt), who reportedly said he would rather deal with a dead child than one who had been to the Jugendweihe.\textsuperscript{103} However, there were some signs of Catholics leaving the church over the Jugendweihe, forcing the church to allow Jugendweihe participants to take communion six months after the state ceremony.\textsuperscript{104} Overall, though, participation rates remained low in the Eichsfeld, bucking the trend elsewhere. Even in 1963, the state had to use underhand means to involve Eichsfeld children in the state ceremony, for instance by announcing that a school trip to a factory had in fact been the first preparation lesson.\textsuperscript{105}

In conclusion, the SED had succeeded in removing most young people from the churches' influence by 1960 through the administrative expedients employed against religious education in state schools and the introduction of a ceremony which effectively countered confirmation. The Jugendweihe appeared relatively innocuous to most young people and their parents, and many perceived that the potential disadvantages of non-participation to career prospects far outweighed any theological considerations. Confirmation numbers quickly fell in response, and when this generation had children of its own in the 1960s and 1970s, across the GDR far fewer of them were baptised than in the early 1950s.\textsuperscript{106} However, the SED's success in reducing the churches' influence did not heighten young people's enthusiasm for socialism, as became clear in 1968.\textsuperscript{107} For many young people, the Jugendweihe was merely an outward ritual to achieve societal acceptance, and with the immediate incentive of material reward in the way of Jugendweihe presents or money. The Protestant leaders were themselves partly responsible for allowing their churches' influence to wane, but

\textsuperscript{102} 'Aktennotiz', 25 October 1955, ThHStAW, Ki 19, fol 118a.  
\textsuperscript{103} 'Aktennotiz', 3 February 1958, ThHStAW, V 15, fol 343.  
\textsuperscript{104} Raabe, pp.202, 207.  
\textsuperscript{105} VPKA Heiligenstadt, 'Lageeinschätzung...', 27 April 1963, ThHStAW, Mdl/20.1, 485, fol 40.  
\textsuperscript{106} 2 May 1961 speech (note 49); Pollack, p.278.  
\textsuperscript{107} See Chapter Ten.
their congregations' insistence on combining their temporal and secular duties forced them into compromises.

Clearly, Protestant parents were not prepared to go to the cross to protect their children from atheist influence. Catholic leaders, however, felt no such pressure to conform from their adherents and steadfastly resisted the Jugendweihe. Here was a clear example of the limits of SED hegemony. It is against these social currents, as well as from theological starting points, that one must evaluate the actions of church leaders in their relations with the SED. This issue in particular is discussed in the following chapter.
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THE CHURCHES FROM THE 1950s TO THE 1960s: SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL?

The previous two chapters discussed the actions of church leaders and local clergy during the 1950s, and the reactions of Thuringian Christians to the SED’s various efforts to undermine religion as a societal force. This final chapter evaluates the level of institutional and societal strength retained by the churches by the late 1960s and, particularly in light of the historiographical and political controversies noted in the introduction to Part Three, assesses the extent to which the churches’ various degrees of accommodation with the SED and GDR can be justified as pragmatic attempts to retain some influence, or condemned as immoral treachery. Attention is paid in this context to some clerics’ association with the Stasi.

The churches in the 1960s

By the mid-1960s, the state felt far more secure in its relations with the churches. Having won the battles of the 1950s, there were no signs that church influence was regaining ground. Though various opponents still demanded the state’s attention, some of the church leaders whom the state perceived as a threat had moved or retired. The Thuringian synod’s support for Mitzenheim increased following the election of several new members. Various church events designed to initiate a more active parish life, particularly aimed at the young, suggest that the scale and societal importance of church life had dramatically diminished since the 1950s.

One sign of this was that many officially left the church (admittedly more important in the German context because of church taxes) rather than simply letting their faith lapse. The trend was visible even among the generally more devout Catholic population: while only 255 Catholics in the future Bezirk Erfurt left their church in 1948, 1284 did so in 1954. In the first nine months of 1955 alone, 7,250 people in the Bezirk had left the churches.\(^2\) Altogether, 142,000 people actively left the Eisenach church between 1948 and 1960, compared with 20,600 who joined. Mitzenheim noted that the highest rates were in years when the state fought the churches most actively,\(^3\) a reflection which may have influenced his conciliatory policy to avoid further attacks. It was also reported that the SED was pressurising people to leave the churches, principally its own members,\(^4\) but even groups such as firemen.\(^5\) Furthermore, Republikflucht robbed the Thuringian church of many believers and created a proportionally more secular society.

Church attendances were also poor. Spot checks in 1962 showed that well under 5% of the population attended Sunday services in rural districts and even fewer in the towns.\(^6\) Not surprisingly, the situation was significantly different in Kreis Heiligenstadt where some 23% of the whole population (around 30% of church members) attended Sunday mass in Heiligenstadt and Ershausen, and as many as 57.6% (63.1%) in Uder. Churchgoers were predominantly female, usually young or old but not of working age, and often from ‘bourgeois’ backgrounds. As Sunday services apparently had a ‘minimal’ influence on the population, the churches also

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\(^3\) Mitzenheim to the synod, ‘Der Stand des kirchlichen Lebens...’, ThHStAW, Ki 20, fol 171.
\(^4\) RdS Erfurt, ‘Niederschrift über eine Aussprache mit evangelischen Geistlichen...’, 11 December 1962, ThHStAW, Ki 9, fol 94.
\(^6\) Even in 1908 average attendance had been only 10-15%, so the longterm decline was not dramatic: Kurt Nowak, ‘Staat ohne Kirche? Überlegungen zur Entkirchlichung der evangelischen Bevölkerung im Staatsgebiet der DDR’, in Christen, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR, ed. by Gert Kaiser and Ewald Frie, pp.23-43 (p.25).
used other means, including personal visits, to reach the population. In 1960 Mitzenheim reported that the Eisenach church’s position was stabilising in rural areas (presumably in response to the church’s resistance to agricultural collectivisation) after a period of stagnation. However, no ground could be won amongst the working class. Church choirs were also still active in 1961, though the number of singers had dropped to 14,500. The church’s popularity in villages often depended on local clergy.

Though by 1960 religious education was again permitted at acceptable times in state schools, attendances had fallen. Mitzenheim blamed parents for this. He reported that in many rural parishes between 90 and 100% of baptised children attended these classes, but only 50% in the larger towns and around 30% in industrial centres. However, as over half of the Bezirk’s population lived in urban communities by 1964, and as the proportion of baptised children fell by nearly two thirds in the Thuringian diocese between 1950 and 1965, a decline in RE attendance seemed inevitable. Confirmation numbers were also falling, even allowing for somewhat smaller year groups. Meanwhile, Jugendweihe figures grew steadily during the 1960s. 16,043 youngsters (some 83% of this age group) attended the ceremony in 1965.

The FDJ could also claim by 1959 that many young believers were actively involved in the official youth organisation, despite a hard core whose religious affiliations prevented them endorsing even the official peace policy and who preferred to

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7 Rdb, ‘Kontrollmaßnahmen am 18.3., 25.3., 1.4., und 8.4.62...’, 14 April 1962, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
8 Rdb, ‘Information über den Verlauf der Synode...’, 5 December 1960, ThHStAW, Ki 20, fol 46.
9 Mitzenheim’s speech (note 3), fol 173.
10 E.g., the new chaplain in Uder significantly raised numbers of children attending church activities: Rat der Gemeinde Uder, ‘Einschätzung über die Gottesdienste am 23.12.62...’, 3 January 1963, ThHStAW, Ki 27, fol 144.
12 Mitzenheim’s speech (note 3), fol 172.
believe that God controlled the nuclear trigger. A larger group was concerned with such matters as the compatibility of religion and socialism, and of the church and the FDJ.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, by 1959 very few young believers felt compelled to leave the FDJ on religious grounds.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{Junge Gemeinde} and \textit{Pfarrjugend} had never recovered from the 1953 campaign. Despite boasting some 14,000 regular attenders between them in 1959,\textsuperscript{16} this represented only 6.25\% of Bezirk Erfurt's 14-25 year olds. The \textit{Junge Gemeinde} contracted to 7,500 followers in 1960,\textsuperscript{17} and 14-16 year olds proved increasingly difficult to attract. Nevertheless, the state permitted bible study holidays after the churches' 1958 concessions, and young people's missions (\textit{Jungmänner-/mädchenwerke}) were also active. Although these activities were not threatening, the FDJ was worried enough to produce a 34 page report.\textsuperscript{18} The FDJ was particularly concerned that the Protestant churches' youth work was often directed by the less 'progressive' clergy. As many as 90\% of church youth functionaries apparently supported 'atom bishop' Dibelius.\textsuperscript{19}

The churches were not content to watch their influence and future simply disintegrate and by 1962 were redoubled efforts to recruit young people by organising dances, sports days and the like, while playing down purely religious themes. The FDJ was reputedly 'on its knees' in some areas.\textsuperscript{20} However, the churches did little to resist the introduction of conscription in 1962 and religiously minded young people enlisted normally.\textsuperscript{21} Despite the SED's paranoid reactions, young people's marginally increased interest in religion still did not existentially threaten the well established FDJ in most areas, let alone imply that a theocracy was

\textsuperscript{14} FDJ BL, 'Bericht über die Arbeit mit der religiös gebundenen Jugend...', 17 October 1959, pp.3-4, 6-7, LPA, BIV/2/14-003.
\textsuperscript{15} In a rare example a Worbis 'friend' left after \textit{Junge Welt} declared: 'Religion is superfluous and dangerous for the proletariat.': ibid, p.33.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, pp.1, 23; SED BL, 'Zur Information', 20 October 1961, LPA, BIV/2/5-042.
\textsuperscript{17} Mitzenheim's speech (note 3), fol 173.
\textsuperscript{18} 17 October 1959 report (note 14).
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, pp.1, 23.
\textsuperscript{20} Analysierung der Tatigkeit konfessionell gebundener Jugend...', 12 May 1962, LPA, BIV/2/14-003.
\textsuperscript{21} BdVP, 'Information 28/62', 9 March 1962, ThHStAW, Vs/St 571, fol 75.
imminent. For most church communities, the 1960s were a period of stability yet steady decline.\textsuperscript{22} The state’s interest in steadily coopting Christians via the *Christliche Kreise* and similar groups waned in some areas, perhaps reflecting a lost sense of urgency once the tide had been turned. Although some vicars attempted to retake the initiative, as in Bleicherode,\textsuperscript{23} in most areas religion was not a dominant part of everyday life by the 1960s.

An exception was the Catholic Eichsfeld, which remained devout. Here the SED very noticeably changed its policy, and recognised Catholicism’s strength. Local propaganda emphasised the 1959 ‘Call from the Eichsfeld’, which symbolised the party’s more realistic policy after the earlier, mainly fruitless class struggle. The ‘Call’ was made by about 120 local Catholics at an NF meeting, and urged Catholics throughout the GDR to work for peace (the lowest common denominator) and collaborate in building ‘our social order’ which would give Christians, as other groups, a ‘secure existence and future’. One Catholic at the meeting summed up the Eichsfeld’s peculiar mixture of strong religious tradition and enforced deference to state authority (especially in the border area) by saying:

...there can be no coexistence between the ideology of Christians and atheists, but this must not and cannot prevent either Christians or atheists constructing socialism jointly in our German Democratic Republic.\textsuperscript{24}

In other words, both sides would ignore their differences in a situation which could not be changed: both Catholics and the GDR were there to stay. This new line essentially marked the SED’s recognition (via the NF and CDU) that it could not hope to establish the same degree of control in the Eichsfeld as elsewhere.

The SED still attempted to gain ground in the Eichsfeld within this framework, and the church’s accommodation with the secular power did not prevent it from

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Pollack, pp.272, 276-7.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23} ‘Information zu einigen Problemen...’, 30 September 1965, pp.3-5, LPA, BIV/2/9.02-654.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} ‘Einschätzung der Beratung mit katholischen Bürgern...’, 29 September 1959; ‘Ruf vom Eichsfeld’ [28 September 1959], LPA, BIV/2/14-002. A less convincing ‘Appell aus dem Eichsfeld’ of 30 August 1961 welcomed the Berlin Wall: copy in ibid.}
defending its position when this seemed necessary. However, the dye of mutual
toleration was essentially cast. Providing the faithful were generally working for
socialism (at least outwardly), or at least not working against it, the party was
satisfied and concentrated only on undermining those ‘reactionary religious
influences’ who seemed particularly dangerous. Meanwhile, ordinary Christian
citizens would not be ‘insulted, disparaged or presented as morally substandard
people or bad citizens’. Tact would underpin the ‘atheist Enlightenment’.\(^{25}\) The
Eichsfeld party had little practical alternative, as many functionaries were
themselves committed Catholics, prepared to overlook church events which would
not have been so easily tolerated elsewhere.\(^{26}\) Many other Eichsfeld SED members
were not natives of the area, but had moved or been moved there.\(^{27}\) This must have
appeared to locals as colonial masters. Overall, though, ‘ideological subversion’ by
the clergy declined markedly in the new climate.\(^{28}\)

The new toleration encouraged the Catholic church to increase its religious
activities. Sometimes this had political consequences. Following Bishop Freusberg’s
visitation to \textit{Kreis} Mühlhausen, during which he was attended by large numbers of
the faithful and railed against state education and the \textit{Jugendweihe}, children refused
to sing pioneer songs and DFD attendances fell sharply.\(^{29}\) More tellingly, SED
members without their party badges joined those welcoming Freusberg in some
areas.\(^{30}\) Similarly, visits by Freusberg’s successor after 1964, Hugo Aufderbeck,
became major events in specially decorated Eichsfeld villages. The bishop was
given a motorcycle escort to the church and welcomed by the church choir.\(^{31}\) By

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\(^{25}\) ‘Die Politik der Partei in Kirchenfragen...’, 9 October 1958, LPA, IV/4.06/150.
\(^{26}\) Cf. ‘Auswirkungen des politischen Klerikalismus...’, undated [late 1959?], especially p.3, LPA,
BIV/2/14-002.
\(^{28}\) Staatsanwalt des Bezirkes, ‘Bericht über die Tätigkeit der katholischen Kirche’, 7 July 1962, p.1,
LPA, IV/4.06/150.
\(^{29}\) Staatsanwaltschaft des Bezirkes, ‘Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der kath. Kirche...’, 10 July 1962,
pp.2-3, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
\(^{31}\) RdK Heiligenstadt, ‘Vorläufige Einschätzung über die kirchlichen Handlungen...’, 13 September
early 1968, no priests and few parish council members were prepared to participate in the Christliche Kreise.\textsuperscript{32}

The Eichsfeld's many church festival parades were tolerated by the party, providing they were orderly and purely religious in nature.\textsuperscript{33} The events were carefully discussed with the state authorities in advance, effectively a tacit state blessing on the ceremony.\textsuperscript{34} They remained major public events throughout the 1960s, attracting, for instance, 3,400 to the 1966 Palm Sunday procession in Heiligenstadt, and some 9,000 to the Klüschen pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{35} The state bitterly noted that the population showed much more spontaneous initiative on such occasions than on state festivals, but attendances kept rising.\textsuperscript{36}

However, the question of legal recognition for church holidays remained an area of controversy between the Catholic church and the state throughout the 1960s.\textsuperscript{37} In 1966 only 41% of pupils attended school on All Saints.\textsuperscript{38} Though the situation improved in the following years, in 1968 only 70% of Kreis Heiligenstadt schoolchildren arrived at school punctually on All Saints. Most of the remainder arrived only after mass. In some villages, however, around three quarters of schoolchildren were late. In Reinhetterode only 3.7% attended on time, and in Birkenfelde there were no lessons before 8.20am. In one Heiligenstadt school not even all staff were present.\textsuperscript{39} Though this is an area which requires further research, even this brief resumé demonstrates that such conflicts of authority continued into

\textsuperscript{32} CDU Heiligenstadt, ‘Informationsbericht’, 9 January 1968, p.6, LPA, IV/B/4.06/216.
\textsuperscript{39} RdK Heiligenstadt, ‘Wertung über den Ablauf des 01.11.1968...’, 4 November 1968, pp.2, 4, ibid.
the late 1960s and beyond, here centring on an issue of great emotional sensitivity to local Catholics.

The SED’s failure to coopt the Eichsfeld fully is perhaps clearest from Jugendweihe statistics the 1960s. In 1965 only 221 young people took the state oath in Kreise Heiligenstadt and Worbis combined. This represented only 1.4% of participants in the Bezirk, although the two Kreise represented 8.8% of the Bezirk’s population.40

The SED was undoubtedly right to conclude in 1962 that though

...the great majority of the Eichsfeld Catholics remain loyal to their church, as GDR citizens they carry out the duties required for the strengthening of the GDR in a disciplined way.41

By 1978, when the SED made its general pact with the (Protestant) ‘church in socialism’, the party had perhaps learnt from the Eichsfeld example that the socialist order was not threatened by even an active church. Though the party had not won hearts and minds, it had, crucially, won its citizens’ obedience and could achieve better results by cooperating with the churches rather than seeking to crush them.

The constitutional debate of 1968

The final episode in church-state relations in this period concerned the new, ‘socialist’ constitution of 1968, adopted at Walter Ulbricht’s instigation.42 Whereas the 1949 constitution devoted eight articles to religion, the new draft referred specifically only once to religious freedom, and omitted the explicit right to freedom of belief and conscience. Though the draft did not rescind the churches’ specific

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40 Ein Jahr Jugendgesetz, p.43; Statistisches Jahrbuch 1966: Bezirk Erfurt, p.3.
41 ‘Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der katholischen Kirche...’, 13 July 1962, LPA, BIV/2/14-002.
42 The constitutional debate is discussed fully in Chapter Ten. This section considers only the constitution’s implications for religious life and the churches’ response.
The by now almost entirely compliant Mitzenheim felt no need to criticise the draft constitution. In the CDU's Neue Zeit he declared himself fully satisfied with the proposed text. Nor did he urge changes at a public meeting on the constitution attended by Ulbricht. Other senior Protestants, however, did attempt to protect church rights. Mitzenheim initially tried to block their moves, and refused to sign a letter by the bishops to the government requesting constitutional concessions, even though the letter emphasised the churches' loyalty to the socialist order. Mitzenheim's secretary, the Stasi agent Gerhard Lotz, may well have influenced him to distance himself from the other bishops. Perhaps because of Mitzenheim's acceptance of the new constitution, protests from the Eisenach church's followers were rare, individual and isolated in nature. Thus some complaints were reported from Kreis Apolda, and individual Christians had fears about the new settlement in Gotha, but in Kreis Eisenach there were apparently 'as good as no reservations'. The archives do not reveal any particularly greater opposition from Magdeburg's followers beyond agitation by several of its Eichsfeld vicars.

Despite most vicars' reticence, the remaining strength of religious feeling amongst the general public was very apparent in the constitutional debate of spring 1968. It was principally Catholics who criticised the new draft, fearing that the absence of

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43 The draft articles concerning the churches and religious affairs are cited in Besier, pp.651-2.
44 These two statements are reproduced in Moritz Mitzenheim, Aus christlicher Verantwortung: Beiträge zu einer humanistischen politischen Diakonie, ed. by Gerhard Lotz (Berlin: Union Verlag, 1971), pp.46-56.
45 On the background to the Protestant bishops' moves, cf. Besier, pp.653-660. Lotz's role is discussed below, pp.281-5.
46 NF Apolda, 'Information zum Stand der Volksaussprache...', 6 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 3.
47 NF Gotha, 'Informationsbericht...', 21 March 1968, ibid, fol 259.
specific guarantees seriously threatened religious life. Catholics’ complaints increased in the Eichsfeld after pastoral letters were read in the churches. The state authorities noted there had been little discussion of the question before the church’s intervention and that the church had obviously carefully organised the popular campaign, which involved petitions and directions from the clergy to write personal letters and to ask questions at meetings. Nonetheless, the population readily supported the church’s entreaties. The Heiligenstadt RdK found it easier to note the public meetings which had not discussed the controversial Article 38, the single replacement for the eight articles of 1949. In most places, however, the religious provisions were the main topic of discussion. At some meetings the church’s organised campaign was supported by the grassroots of the supposedly loyal CDU, despite the party leadership’s clear line. Questions were also raised in other forums, such as meetings of the Eichsfeld NDPD and DBD. In Eisenach two senior district CDU members failed to intervene in a negative public discussion organised by a Catholic chaplain.

The draft constitution’s cursory references to the churches caused general confusion on various issues such as the freedom of conscience, religious education, and the right of bishops outside the GDR to control the parts of their dioceses in the country, as well as more practical matters such as religious holidays and church taxes. Some citizens asked why the existing regulations could not simply be retained.

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52 Cf. Gerald Götting’s speech supporting the draft constitution at a CDU executive meeting on 8-9 February 1968, in Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Dokumente/Kommentar, ed. by Klaus Sorgenicht and others, 2 vols (Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1968), I, 108-112. However, Götting had privately attempted to include specific religious guarantees: Besier, pp.652-653.
55 27 March 1968 report (note 51).
Across the GDR, some 40% of suggested amendments to the draft came from religious circles. In particular, various clergy individually proposed the constitution should reiterate the church-state division.

Though the churches failed to preserve the existing constitutional guarantees, the strength of popular feeling, especially in Catholic areas, both among the general population and, more importantly, among key members of society (such as leading CDU members, LPG chairmen, etc.) ensured that two demands were incorporated into the final version of the constitution before it was put to a plebiscite. Article 38 was slightly altered to suggest greater independence for the churches to decide their own affairs, while Article 19 was extended to include specific guarantees of freedom of belief and conscience, and equality of religious and ideological beliefs.

Mitzenheim, who had done least to achieve these concessions, said they justified his hopes that Christians would vote ‘Ja’. Ironically, the SED attributed the modifications to the Eisenach church’s requests.

All of the Catholic clergy in Kreis Heiligenstadt voted on 6 April, most of them openly and Provost Streb (now retired) with a very public ‘Ja’. However, numerous clergy, and most nuns, voted ‘Nein’. ‘Ja’ votes were also fewer in the Eichsfeld (91.56% in Kreis Heiligenstadt, 88.82% in Kreis Worbis) than the Bezirk average (94.72%), suggesting Catholics disliked even the revised text. Though the Eichsfeld population was also influenced by the border restrictions which the new

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57 E.g., ‘Vorschläge zur Veränderung des Verfassungsentwurfs, Rat der Gemeinde Thal Einwohnerversammlung vom 5.3.68’, ibid, fol 51; NF Mühlhausen, ‘Anträge und Vorschläge zum Entwurf...’, 6 March 1968, NF 560, fols 61-62; Besier, p.660.
58 ThHStAW, NF 560, fol 218.
59 The final version of the 1968 constitution is in Sorgenicht. Draft articles 19 and 38 were renumbered 20 and 39.
60 ‘Sache des ganzen Volkes’, in Mitzenheim, Aus christlicher Verantwortung, pp.57-61 (p.61).
61 ‘Schriftlicher Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Volksaussprache...’, in Sorgenicht, I, 171.
63 ‘Schlußberichte’, ThHStAW, OI 942, fols 51, 53. In Gemrode and Holungen (Kreis Worbis) only 64.11% and 69.9% respectively voted ‘Ja’: RdB, ‘Bericht über die Durchführung des Volksentscheides...’, 9 April 1968, ibid, fol 27.
constitution seemed to reinforce, some Catholic districts in Erfurt also recorded noticeable proportions of ‘Nein’ votes.64

The conclusions from the constitutional debate are clear: by 1968 the Protestant leadership had been won over to a position of loyalty in the case of the Eisenach church and of only mild opposition in the case of the other evangelical churches (including Magdeburg). Lacking a lead from above, the Protestant community generally accepted the new religious settlement and worried about other more worldly matters affected by the draft.65 Compared with the bitter struggles of 1952/3 and the earlier Jugendweihe battles, this represented a major advance for the SED. However, the Catholics, usually compliant within socialism, retained enough religious devotion to complain bitterly when their church or beliefs were attacked.66 This acted as a salient reminder to the SED that at least in Catholic areas there was no alternative to tolerant coexistence. The SED recognised this in the constitutional amendments. However, despite their importance in the Eichsfeld, the Catholics’ overall minority status in the GDR meant that even their bitter opposition to measures such as the new constitution failed to rock the state’s foundations. Had the Protestant churches opposed the 1968 constitution so fiercely, a serious open breach might have emerged between party and people. As it was, the Protestant leadership, particularly in Thuringia, had already effectively accepted the GDR and a socialist future, and lacked the will to resist.

It is unlikely that Ulbricht had intended the constitutional changes to initiate a new church struggle, for which there was patently no need by 1968, or to undermine the church’s position. The more probable intention was simply to treat the churches as insignificant organisations by largely ignoring them in the new constitution. Thus

64 NF Erfurt, ‘Analyse über die Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen...’, 18 April 1968, ThHStAW, NF 558, fol 96.
65 See Chapter Ten.
the minor modifications cost the party little but greatly improved sentiment among those upon whom the system relied for support, and were exemplary in foreign relations. Perhaps the proposed Article 38 was deliberately intended to provoke the criticism which overshadowed discussion of political structures.

The role of the Stasi and the case of Gerhard Lotz

Before drawing conclusions about the Thuringian churches' changing role and influence between 1945 and 1968, we must examine one further issue which is integral to any discussion of the moral dilemma they faced under SED rule. Chapter Seven briefly noted the MfS's conspiratorial assistance in controlling the churches. However, the MfS's effectiveness was greatly increased by the assistance provided by some clergy. For many commentators since the Wende, this was a clear case of an accommodation too far with the state.

The activities of Gerhard Lotz, Bishop Mitzenheim's secretary and chief advisor, have become an infamous case in point. Lotz played a major role in manipulating Mitzenheim on the SED's behalf, and eventually in choosing Mitzenheim's successor. He became an MfS 'informal colleague' (IM) codenamed 'Karl' in 1955, and thereafter provided the ministry with much important information.\(^{67}\) Lotz also passed detailed information to the RdB on internal church matters such as the composition and views of the Eisenach hierarchy, either via his MfS controllers or in direct talks with the state authorities.\(^{68}\) As Lotz had access to important documents from the Eisenach and the other Protestant churches, the MfS and the

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\(^{68}\) Cf. RdB, 'Information', 19 December 1959, ThHStAW, Ki 7, fols 136-137; minutes of 1957 and 1958 discussions between Lotz and RdB staff, ThHStAW, Ki 8, fols 202, 213, 217, 236.
government also regularly saw internal church documentation, enabling them to plan their tactics more effectively.

Lotz was first noted as a sympathiser with the developing socialist system in the early 1950s. As a CDU member, Lotz’s position brought him into contact with the party’s leaders, one of whom recorded Lotz’s interest in ‘leninist marxism’ in 1952. His attitude to socialism was ‘fully positive’. These notes reveal Lotz’s motives for his later role in leading the suggestible Mitzenheim and the Eisenach church towards a pro-GDR stance:

Lotz has come to the view that our churches must learn from the development in the people’s democracies. In Lotz’s view, which Mitzenheim is coming to share, it is necessary that we spare our churches the suffering endured by the Russian Orthodox Church in the USSR. On this basis the Landeskirche in Thuringia has decided to arrange a concordat with the GDR if possible.69

Publicly, Lotz had already contributed to shaping the Eisenach church’s equivocal stance on the 1951 referendum, which the Magdeburg church entirely rejected, in an article which left believers to decide for themselves on how to vote.70 The following year he met Gerald Göttling, the CDU’s General Secretary, and offered him the Thuringian church’s complete loyalty. Lotz was prepared to pack the Thuringian synod with ‘loyal’ members, and was considering a separate path for the GDR’s Lutheran churches to end their association with the reformed Protestant churches under Dibelius.71 By 1954 the MiS recorded:

Lotz has been on the side of progress since 1945 and recognises the government’s measures.72

His misplaced loyalties were clear when he comment in 1958 that it was ‘tactically very good indeed’ that a vicar had been arrested for damaging election posters, as ‘he ought to get three years’.73

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69 Cited in: Besier, p.110.
71 Besier, p.111.
72 Vollnhals, p.333.
In 1955 the MfS, anxious for internal details of the Eisenach church, chose Lotz as a contact because of his known loyalty to the state. His controller soon noted that Lotz felt opposing the state was useless. In the following years Lotz’s cooperation enabled the MfS to manipulate the Eisenach church in the SED’s favour. Lotz even gave his Stasi officer a key to the bishop’s offices so that bugs could be installed. Lotz agreed to influence Mitzenheim, for instance by writing his loyal statement during the 1958 talks with the government, and to coordinate and manipulate church cadre policies. Lotz and his controller regularly discussed how ‘loyal’ churchmen could be installed in leading positions, and conceived a plan to reduce Mitzenheim’s influence gradually and eventually replace him with the loyal Ingo Braecklein, a Stasi informer since 1960. Braecklein duly became bishop in 1970. This apart, Lotz persistently attempted to convince his fellow church officers to accept and/or support SED policies. More directly, Lotz distanced Mitzenheim from the GDR’s opponents, such as Dibelius, through his control of much of Mitzenheim’s paperwork. Such tactics encouraged the Thuringian church to abandon its opposition to state youth policies and break the institutional links with the western churches. The ‘Weimar Circle’ of young, ‘progressive’ clergy Lotz fostered after the mid-1950s (run by Braecklein) received a privileged status in the Thuringian synod’s new statutes, written by Lotz in 1960, thus ensuring easier passage for pro-GDR policies within the church.

Lotz’s motives were not entirely based on political conviction. He had, after all, informed on clergy during the Third Reich, and strongly supported the Thuringian ‘German Christians’. Lotz’s Stasi information was sometimes linked to personal requests. In 1958 he complained that his daughter had not been admitted to Jena

74 ‘Opposition bringt nichts’ (note 67), p.122.
75 Besier, p.268.
76 Besier and Wolf, pp.18-19, 922-923.
university, an incident which, he warned, could only strengthen ‘disloyal forces’. The daughter was later allowed to study in Leipzig.\(^77\) The following year, Lotz attempted to leave the church’s service to become lord mayor of Weimar. The SED blocked the move as the RdB recognised the importance of his influential role within the church.\(^78\) He nonetheless served on the CDU’s central executive from 1956 to 1976 and was a *Volkskammer* member from 1968 to 1976. There were other compensations: from the late 1950s onwards Lotz regularly received presents and money from the MfS and was awarded NVA and MfS decorations in the 1970s.

Lotz’s religious convictions must also be queried. Lotz had trained as a lawyer, and his church role primarily concerned administrative and policy matters rather than theology. Was the church simply a good career move for Lotz, in the same way as might have been the civil service? Or had Lotz sincerely attempted to preserve the church’s position with unwavering loyalty to both the Third Reich and the GDR? On the available evidence, it would be unwise to condemn Lotz for a biography shared by many Germans this century. Many Germans believed they could atone for nazism by embracing the SED’s antifascist socialism, and the MfS successfully recruited many other Thuringian churchmen at various levels as informers.\(^79\) Lotz differed from other *Stasi* collaborators in his influence over Bishop Mitzenheim, which partly determined the Eisenach church’s policy towards the state. Ultimately, however, Mitzenheim must remain responsible for his own actions. Though Lotz fervently supported the idea of a loyal church in socialism, partly because of his own political standpoints (at least after 1945), he represented little more than the advance party of a general movement in that direction by church leaders and other social groups. It is noteworthy that though Lotz was unpopular with some Eisenach clergy (his position on the GDR if not his MfS associations were well known), 59 of the 60


\(^{78}\) RdB, ‘*Aussprache mit Herrn OKR Lotz am 26.10.1959...*,’ ThHStAW, Ki 8, fol 236.

\(^{79}\) Cf. Vollnhals, p.336.
members nevertheless re-elected him President of the Thuringian synod in December 1960.80

A question of morals? The churches and the SED

These chapters have attempted to cover the most important aspects of church-state relations in Bezirk Erfurt between 1945 and 1968. There has been no room to include various other battlegrounds between the two, such as the church’s position in border areas, church kindergartens, seminaries, church taxes, building permits and finances, and the abolition of religious festivals as state holidays. However, the following conclusions about the churches as institutions and the SED’s success in transforming the nature of society can be drawn from this limited survey.

Institutionally, the SED achieved its desired goals, namely that the churches recognised the socialist development, initially in the 1958 communiqué,81 and that they distanced themselves from the western churches, with their close links to the FRG state, and thus gave the GDR the full recognition of statehood it desired.

A key, recurring issue concerns the policies with which the churches and their representatives responded to the SED’s challenge, ranging from total opposition to the total subordination of Gerhard Lotz. However, the terms of reference must be carefully defined before this issue can be usefully discussed. What role could or should the churches have played when confronted with a state and party system which desired to see its own ideology triumph at the expense of religion? The argument over how, and very often the failure, to define these terms of reference caused much of the conflict within the churches during the 1950s and 1960s. The

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81 Goeckel characterises the 1958 communiqué as a ‘markstone on the way to the church’s self-definition as a “church within socialism”’: Goeckel, p.54.
dispute was symbolised by the diverging opinions and policies of Bishops Mitzenheim and Dibelius, and still underpins much current historical, theological and even litigious debate.\textsuperscript{82}

Specifically, the argument focuses on the extent to which the churches owed loyalty to or should have opposed secular authority. As we have seen, Mitzenheim’s Lutheran church took a very different attitude to the reformed churches under Dibelius.\textsuperscript{83} On the one hand, Mitzenheim believed his duty was to respect secular authority from a politically neutral standpoint, while fighting for the churches’ rights within this framework, and pragmatically hoping to make further advances from a conciliatory rather than a confrontational standpoint. During a sermon in 1955, at the height of the \textit{Jugendweihe} dispute, Mitzenheim explained the Eisenach church’s attitude towards the state:

\begin{quote}
Luther said: ‘God has installed two regiments, the secular and the spiritual.’ The state is responsible for maintaining law and order, etc., even if it is ideologically based. The church’s role is to proclaim the Gospel. If the boundaries which God has set are crossed, for instance […] if the state uses its powers to intervene in the area of faith and conscience and perhaps forces Christians into something which goes against their conscience and the Gospel, then we are guided by the principle that one must obey God more than men, then there are tensions and disputes and we Christians have then simply to carry on the fight. But not with the means of this world, not with tricks and lies and deception and violence, but with the spiritual weapons which have been given to us: the word of God, prayer, testaments of faith, the profession of Christianity, suffering injustice quietly. Those are the weapons which have been given to us for such disputes.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Certainly, Mitzenheim’s neutrality towards the GDR as a political entity became increasingly sympathetic. Many other clergy pursued a similar course. Mitzenheim was encouraged by the open support for the GDR of his closest advisor, Gerhard

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\textsuperscript{82} One vicar’s legal fight to retain his parish after his \textit{Stasi} contacts were exposed is documented in: Wolfgang Richter, ed., \textit{Kirche im Sünderfall: Als Pfarrer in Kapellendorf}, Weissbuch: Unfrieden in Deutschland, 4 ([Berlin?], GNN-Verlag Sachsen/Berlin, 1995).
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. introduction to Chapter Seven.
\end{flushright}
Lotz. This led Mitzenheim to cooperate more closely with the GDR than a policy of strict neutrality might have suggested.

On the other hand, the reformed church leaders saw in the GDR a state which, in their subjective judgement, did not conform to this religious conception. Still conscious of the churches' complicity in the Third Reich, they opposed the GDR because they felt it to be at least as illegitimate and ungodly as the Third Reich. The dogma of leaders such as Dibelius, and Müller in the Magdeburg church, did not demand neutrality. They rejected the GDR's political legitimacy and ideology, and consequently generally refused to deal with the SED. The reformed churches' theological standpoint enabled Dibelius and many other church leaders, mainly in the FRG, to make political choices. Thus they opposed the GDR openly while reaching arrangements such as the Military Chaplaincy Agreement with the FRG, with whose politics they sympathised. Hence, the division between the Protestant churches was not only theological but also rested on the political perceptions and sympathies of influential church leaders. During the Cold War, and in a post-\textit{Wende} historiography in which that period's fault lines are still clearly discernible, such ostensibly religious differences had, and have, significant political ramifications.

Though the Eisenach church initiated a 'Thuringian way' in church-state relations, it would be far too simplistic to make Bishop Mitzenheim solely responsible for what the GDR's hardened opponents see as a 'sell out' by the churches to the state. Certainly, Mitzenheim recognised early on that the churches would need to reach an accommodation with the state. Even in 1952, Mitzenheim called for a treaty with the GDR.\footnote{Cf. Sam Dahlgren, \textit{Das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der DDR während der Jahre 1949-1958}, Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae, 26 (Uppsala: CWK Gleerups, 1972), p.138.} However, during the 1950s other church leaders, such as \textit{Generalsuperintendent} Günther Jacob and the lecturer priest Johannes Hamel, also formulated theories which advocated the churches' acceptance of the GDR state. Jacob noted that the old alliances between states and churches were breaking down
as states generally now regarded religion neutrally, robbing the Christian churches of their role as the basis of a state ideology. He argued that the churches must accept this and act within the laws of the land, demanding only as much freedom as they required for their religious duties. The churches could not relax their demands on this fundamental latter point, but even a state which was deemed not to provide the churches with enough freedom for their inherent tasks did not cease to represent a secular authority. According to the Bible,\(^{86}\) secular authority must be obeyed, though 'not at the cost or offence of the word of God'.\(^{87}\) On this theological basis, the churches had no right to act as political opponents of the GDR. They could merely resist the state when it infringed upon Christians' general or human rights. Not to have recognised the GDR as an existing state would have represented purely political opposition. By the same token, such a recognition did not prevent the churches, in theory or practice, from continuing their religious activities, from requesting concessions from the state, or from complaining at state measures with which the churches could not agree on religious grounds.

Thus, Mitzenheim's arrangement with the SED rested on a wide body of opinion. This was shared by a majority in the Thuringian synod and made more compelling by the practical difficulties faced in the 1950s by believers caught between the unbending and yet diametrically opposed demands of both state and churches. The realities of believers' everyday lives would not be alleviated by a hardline stance from the churches. Reports suggested that many Protestant churchgoers, subjected to massive pressure and the threat of recriminations, would rather leave the church than defy the state over the *Jugendweihe*, the full theological implications of which may not have been seen by all. Closely linked to these considerations and their potential for undermining the churches' broad appeal, Mitzenheim believed (perhaps influenced by the worse treatment of the more recalcitrant Magdeburg

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\(^{86}\) 'Everyone is subject to the authority which has power over him': St. Paul's letters to the Romans, 13.

\(^{87}\) Dahlgren cites both Jacob (pp.143–4) and Hamel (pp.150-1).
church) that the churches would enjoy greater freedom in a climate of mutual respect with the state. He remained committed to his duties as a Christian bishop and could not jeopardise these for a position of political opposition which was in some interpretations theologically indefensible. The fact that this position coincided entirely with the state’s desire for loyalty from the churches, as from all its citizens, did not alter its theological underpinning. A similar line was pursued for pragmatic reasons by Provost Streb of Heiligenstadt, the leader of Thuringia’s largest Catholic community.

It is difficult to postulate the churches’ likely position had they not recognised the GDR in the 1950s and thereafter largely restricted themselves to purely religious matters. While the churches certainly lost ground during the late 1950s, and in particular during the 1960s and 1970s as older believers died away unreplaced, there can be no certainty, indeed only doubt, that the churches would have fared any better by retaining and sharpening an aggressive stance towards the SED in the European political climate of the era, when even the FRG, the USA and NATO responded to the Berlin Wall with nothing more than rhetoric.

There is, perhaps, greater opportunity for ethical discussion about churchmen like Gerhard Lotz who did not merely follow biblical interpretations to obey the state, but effectively crossed the church-state divide to work for the Stasi. Though Lotz, too, undoubtedly had deep religious convictions, and apparently felt his actions benefited the church, in practice he speeded developments and eased the SED’s task by influencing other church leaders to pursue his line and providing the state with full details of the church’s internal workings, plans and conflicts. The case that Lotz betrayed the churches and worked against their best interests is far more easily proven than that against Manfred Stolpe, a senior church official and post-GDR premier of Brandenburg. Stolpe’s Stasi contacts, though often questionable in nature, seem generally to have been based on a desire to help Christians in practical
difficulties and to maintain the position of the ‘church in socialism’. Yet, despite Lotz’s machinations, it is unlikely that they significantly determined the GDR churches’ fate. The Stasi does not alone explain and did not originate the SED’s religious policies, whose ideological origins lie in the nineteenth century. The MfS simply helped to implement these policies, making use of willing and compliant tools such as Lotz to neutralise resistance and win battles within the churches.

Naturally, we should not ignore Lotz’s political motivations. He was a religious man who also became committed to the socialist GDR, and worked with the Stasi, the state authorities and the CDU towards this end. Though some may be tempted to condemn him politically and even morally for this, the historian can only note that clergymen of other political persuasions have felt no more constrained by their positions than Lotz to pursue different political ends.

Having examined the churches’ responses, how successful was the SED in transferring the public’s loyalty from the churches to itself? In 1945, the SBZ had a largely churchgoing population with a traditional respect for the churches, their rites (e.g. confirmation) and demands (e.g. church taxes). Most of the population was devoutly, actively or at least passively religious, and in the difficult situation after the war many looked to the churches for guidance and as a point of stability. By 1968, although the churches still enjoyed wide support, GDR society was far more secular in outlook and particularly in behaviour. In particular, young people had not declared their allegiance to the faith in such substantial numbers as in previous generations. Instead, the vast majority, whatever their true feelings for either state or church, participated in the secular Jugendweihe, while relatively few attended religious education, were confirmed, or displayed an active interest in religion.

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89 Apart from many West German clerics’ close links to the western CDU, one could equally cite GDR pastors involved in the political opposition movements of the 1970s, notably Rainer Eppelmann, more recently a CDU Bundestag member and chairman of the enquiry commission cited in Chapter One, who will doubtless principally be remembered for his highly partisan political activities.
Though religion retained its significance (even for young people) in certain traditionally very devout regions, such as the Catholic Eichsfeld, the vibrancy of church life generally dissipated and religious concerns lost their importance for large parts of the population. Opinion reports of the 1960s rarely mention religion.\(^90\) Even though many of the remaining active Christians felt they had no secure place in the GDR by 1968,\(^91\) they seemed resigned to this.

Many of the specific causes for this development resulted from the SED’s vigorous efforts to involve the population in the building of socialism and, less successfully, to inculcate young people with the principles of marxism-leninism, to divert them from religious principles, presented as ‘unscientific’ and ‘old fashioned fairy tales’, and offer secular alternatives such as the Jugendweihe and Ulbricht’s ‘Ten Commandments of socialist morals’.\(^92\) However, it must not be forgotten that religious beliefs, morals and patterns of behaviour had also become less widespread in the FRG, as in other many other western states, by the late 1960s, despite the lack of anti-religious campaigns in these countries.\(^93\) The trend had its origins in social developments such as the continuing urban concentration, which distanced individuals from the clergy’s influence, and the emergence of the postwar ‘permissive society’, which arguably reached its zenith in the 1960s (and was frowned upon in the generally prudish GDR).

The SED welcomed the trend away from religion, and saw in it at a vindication of its ideology. However, the party did not achieve its wider, generally unspoken, aims of completely breaking the churches’ power and influence by turning the entire population away from them. Indeed, since the GDR’s legitimacy as a state largely

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\(^90\) E.g., religion is noticeably absent from a wideranging report, SED BL, ‘Informationsbericht 31/63’, 15 October 1963, LPA, BIV/2/16/737.


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depended on not following the fully repressive path of countries such as Albania and outlawing the church completely, the SED could never hope to persuade every believer to leave the church or to destroy all the popular traditions of Germany’s religious heritage. The less apparent (and brutal) but more insidious means used by the GDR’s state and party apparatus succeeded in limiting the churches’ sphere of influence but not in rendering them obsolete. As human civilisation has never yet produced an entirely secular community, it is highly unlikely that such an aim could ever have been realised. Deep religious beliefs have been integral to human nature since the dawn of time, and the Christian churches have, by way of proof, already survived almost two thousand years of often difficult coexistence with many different temporal authorities. The SED had only forty years to pursue its policies. It would take far longer than this for the generations raised in the Christian tradition to die out and for the churches’ influence to be successfully, let alone irreversibly, countered. Even after very severe repression, many Albanians reverted to religious observance after 1992, and after over seventy years some Russians remembered their upbringing in the Orthodox Church and strove to raise their own families in the same traditions. Today, the former USSR’s churches again represent an important social factor. The very fact that opposition to the GDR churches came from a state and party with whose basic tenets many people disagreed also meant that the alternatives presented to religion were quickly discounted.

Furthermore, the GDR’s churches were strengthened by the existence of a far stronger church in the FRG. Particularly before the EKD’s split in 1969, many unwilling GDR citizens who remained committed to the German nation regarded the churches as pan-German rallying points. As opposition became primarily ideological in the 1970s and 1980s, the SED’s inevitable failure to undermine the

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94 Deutscher Bundestag, Bericht der Enquete-Kommission, p.176.
churches entirely during the earlier committed 'class struggle' left intact the only independent centre from which any opposition to the SED could be organised.\footnote{This argument about post-1969 developments is convincingly presented in Fulbrook, \textit{Anatomy of a Dictatorship}, Chapter 4.}
PART IV

CONCLUSIONS:
THURINGIAN STATE AND
SOCIETY IN 1968
THURINGIA BETWEEN SOCIALIST CONSTITUTION AND PRAGUE SPRING

This dissertation has considered both the institutional measures designed to establish SED rule in Bezirk Erfurt, and the party’s growing popular acceptance. This penultimate chapter attempts to determine the extent of political and social stability by 1968, seven years after the Berlin Wall was constructed to stabilise the GDR.

1968 allows us to gauge popular reactions to two contradictory developments: the adoption of a new, ‘socialist’ constitution following a lengthy public debate (Volksaussprache) and plebiscite, and the events surrounding the ‘Prague Spring’ and subsequent WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Both events tested GDR citizens’ loyalty, over two decades after the SED assumed power. The plebiscite required them for the first time explicitly to recognise and legitimise both Germany’s longterm division and the socialist system. The socialist states’ response to the Prague Spring, meanwhile, demanded not merely their tacit acceptance of the SED’s own system, but active rejection of the Czechoslovaks’ ‘third way’ alternative. While the Berlin Wall’s construction represented a physical watershed in the GDR’s development, 1968 was its ideological equivalent and a new test of the SED’s progress in socialising its subjects and its own ranks. If the late 1960s and early 1970s were the zenith of the GDR’s stability, the snapshot of 1968 can help to determine its true extent. However, 1968 alone did not determine the GDR’s ultimate fate. This depended on other, later factors, not least international economic developments and Ostpolitik, which fall outside this dissertation’s remit. Nevertheless, the extent of popular acceptance or otherwise of SED policies in these two crucial areas may indicate the extent to which the SED had consolidated its power and influence by 1968.
The constitutional debate

In 1967 the SED decided to draft a new constitution which would unambiguously commit the GDR to socialism and delineate restricted criteria for re-establishing German unity. Beyond formally codifying political reality and constitutionally enshrining the SED’s leading role, the new constitution also reflected shifting international sands. The FRG’s emergent Ostpolitik and cautious superpower détente encouraged the SED leadership to strengthen the symbols of GDR sovereignty and ensure that the ‘German question’ would not be solved by dissolving the GDR and disempowering the SED.\(^1\) Thus the Volksaussprache in February and March 1968 and the plebiscite which approved the amended draft were designed to demonstrate that the GDR’s population had exercised self-determination in confirming SED rule. Article 8(2) of the new constitution essentially declared that German unity could only occur if the FRG acceded to the socialist GDR, though the party was careful (until the 1974 amendments) to maintain German unity as a longterm goal for fear of alienating public support.\(^2\)

Given the short duration of the Volksaussprache, and with merely a fortnight for the hastily announced plebiscite,\(^3\) the parties and mass organisations began a concentrated period of heightened activity. Prior to the plebiscite, 716,077 (57\%) of Bezirk Erfurt’s citizens attended 34,054 special, mainly differentiated events between 28 March and 3 April alone.\(^4\) The DFD, for instance, organised 902 meetings attended by 48,172 women in March, and approached 11,285 further people in 5,781 personal discussions or house

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\(^3\) The plebiscite was possibly organised so quickly to ensure the new constitution took force before unfavourable comparisons could be made with Czechoslovakia’s liberalisation moves. Cf. Peter-Claus Burens, *Die DDR und der “Prager Frühling”*, Beiträge zur Politischen Wissenschaft, 41 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1981), pp.103-6.

meetings. In Kreis Bad Langensalza almost 20,000 participated in NF ‘family discussions’, while 2,261 NF events involved 58,362 participants. Considering the Kreis electorate numbered 34,362, NF activities alone represented blanket coverage. The Volksaussprache also involved the usual pledges to join the SED or NVA, and attracted 34,000 productivity pledges valued at 32,000,000 marks. Despite the apparent organisational efficiency, many local party members and functionaries could not explain the constitution’s ideological message and required assistance from higher authorities. A large event was held in Heiligenstadt to ensure that district SED and bloc party functionaries all argued the same case. When the Polish disturbances and the Prague Spring began, many local SED secretaries were again unable to provide suitable explanations without guidance.

Common reactions and concerns about the constitutional draft recur in reports compiled by various sources about the Volksaussprache and the plebiscite preparations, and permit fairly clear conclusions about popular attitudes.

Comments on the political system itself were surprisingly scarce. Though commentators regard the constitutional enshrining of the SED’s leading role as the key innovation, the numerous NF and RdB reports never specifically mention this point. However, private discontent was perhaps reflected in a vicar’s cynical comment that Article 2 was wrong to claim that the people rather than the SED exercised all power. A Förtha teacher’s proposals that the electoral system be constitutionally defined could be construed as an attempt to reduce SED power or embarrass the party, but were
apparently unique in the Bezirk.\textsuperscript{16} Although NDPD members expressed interest in raising such matters before the draft's publication,\textsuperscript{17} and despite occasional queries about the reduced minimum voting age and the status and role of the bloc parties and the NF, the GDR's power mechanisms were rarely mentioned. The SED's virtual power monopoly was widely regarded as unalterable and any querying of it taboo by 1968.

However, worries and complaints about other matters raised during and after the Volksaussprache suggest continuing widespread dissatisfaction with SED rule on significant policy matters, even though the party's hegemony was not directly attacked. Three topics of direct existential relevance to the GDR were repeatedly raised, namely the 'German' question, travel restrictions and socialist economics. Personal freedom, freedom of the press, religious tolerance and a range of personal material problems were other regular topics. These are discussed in turn below.

The organisations' and parties' reports regularly speak of commitment to the GDR as a socialist fatherland, and note a wide understanding of the true, imperialist nature of the Bonn republic. However, questions such as 'Is there still a German nation?' also featured regularly. One assessment noted an 'insufficiently class-based standpoint' on this issue, revealed in frequent comments such as: 'The constitutional draft will deepen Germany's division'.\textsuperscript{18} Many citizens used Volksaussprache meetings to ask why Germany was divided, possibly seeking to embarrass agitators, or to suggest the GDR make compromises for German unity to match the compromises of the FRG's developing Ostpolitik. Some citizens queried which Berlin, constitutionally, was capital; others maintained that West Germans wanted peace as much as the GDR. Less frequently, more thoughtful citizens wondered whether the new preamble, which spoke of 'leading the entire German nation to a future of peace and socialism',\textsuperscript{19} suggested a

\textsuperscript{16} 'Vorschläge zum Verfassungsentwurf, Rat der Gemeinde Förtha', ibid, fol 51.
\textsuperscript{17} NDPD Bezirkivorstand, 'Halbmonatsmeldung Nr.24/67', 20 December 1967, ThHStAW, NF 835, fol 194.
\textsuperscript{19} Sorgenicht, p.43.
GDR Alleinvertretungsanspruch ('sole representation claim') for the German nation to match the west's. Was this interference in the FRG's internal affairs, they wondered. Others felt the GDR had little opportunity of changing the FRG's politics, implying that unification would not be achieved via SED socialism. Embarrassingly, a young Gotha worker felt unification meant no new constitution was required.

Among the bloc parties, LDPD and NDPD members most frequently raised doubts about the SED's national policy. Some older Liberal Democrats in particular doubted that socialism could achieve German unity and advocated more compromise on both sides. In Heiligenstadt, CDU members and farmers specifically criticised Ulbricht's comments on the 'constitutional treason of the West German bourgeoisie' and insisted that even the FRG's monopoly firms allowed their workers good wages. Despite years of propaganda, the SED had failed to convince much of the population of the strength of the 'socialist world system', or the dangers posed by the FRG, and thus legitimise Germany's division and its own rule.

The related question of freedom of movement was also frequently raised, often in connection with the article (18[2]) guaranteeing 'personal freedom'. The discussion centred both on the right to travel to the west, widely discussed, particularly among young people, and the restrictions on travel into and within the border zones. This latter topic was raised particularly, but not exclusively, in the border Kreise, often in connection with Article 28. Border issues provoked lengthy discussions following a staff meeting at the Erfurt railway goods depot. While the main meeting discussed less

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20. NF Weimar telephone message, 8 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 560, fol 215; 4 March report (note 18), fol 223.
23. 15 January report (note 11).
26. E.g. NF Gotha, 'Informationsbericht zum 20.3.1968', ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 259.
controversial matters, the real concerns were expressed informally afterwards, with searching questions about regulations concerning visitors from West Berlin and the FRG. These deep concerns had not, however, prevented the main meeting from unanimously endorsing the new constitution in a public resolution, highlighting the well internalised understanding of the difference between public and private opinions by the middle GDR period.

While the SED’s leading role was not directly attacked, many of the party’s ideological and economic policies were. Sometimes the constitution’s wording was criticised: NDPD and DBD members wondered whether formulations such as ‘in accordance with the law’ were designed to restrict constitutional guarantees, while a proposal to formally designate the new text as the ‘socialist constitution’ perhaps aimed to create unrest rather than express support. The true extent of personal freedom produced ‘extremely lively’ discussions throughout the population. The FDJ had to curtail one meeting because young people complained so bitterly about their lack of freedom. Elsewhere young people insisted real freedom would only come if they were allowed beat music. The absence of a constitutional right to strike also provoked criticism, with some craftsmen seeing strikes as a legitimate way of fighting for higher wages. They clearly failed to recognise the SED’s argument that workers struck only against themselves in a workers’ state.

The emphasis on socialist forms of ownership and production in the draft constitution, though central to SED policies, produced much worried reaction among craftsmen,

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29 14 March report (note 8), fol 124.
31 NF Sommerda, untitled, undated report, ibid, fols 159-160.
small businessmen and cooperative farmers. The NF devoted great attention to pacifying these population sectors. Many artisans feared the development of PGHs would now inevitably be accelerated, and claimed only continued private competition could ensure the PGHs produced quality output.\(^{34}\) In agriculture, fears were widespread that LPG land would cease to be privately owned and that inheritance rights were endangered.\(^{35}\) Understandably, there was much uncertainty and scepticism in the NDPD, whose members would be among those most affected by further socialisation measures.

The draft constitution raised many other issues. The concept of equality led to numerous queries, debates and complaints. While some women complained they still felt unequal, a Heiligenstadt DFD member raised the prospect of female conscription in the interests of equality, presumably to provoke unrest.\(^{36}\) The article guaranteeing personal freedom sometimes led youngsters provocatively to suggest they should have the right to ‘mess around’ (gammeln),\(^{37}\) but more often provoked questions about freedom of expression. Schoolchildren sometimes asked if this existed at all.\(^{38}\) Article 23, which guaranteed press, radio and television freedom, similarly encouraged demands to hear and watch western media freely.\(^{39}\)

All these points raised existential questions about the GDR’s socialist order, albeit sometimes indirectly. However, two social policy issues, religion and education, also caused much debate and thereby effectively diverted attention from the purely political aspects. The controversy surrounding the restricted guarantees of religious freedom has already been discussed in Chapter Nine. Perhaps the proposed Article 38 was

\(^{34}\) Ibid; NDPD Bezirksvorstand, ‘Halbmonatsmeldung Nr.6/68’, 20 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 152.

\(^{35}\) NF Mühlhausen, ‘Informationsbericht über die Volksaussprache...’, 11 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 560, fol 78; Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat report, 6 March 1968, ibid, fol 249.

\(^{36}\) 14 March report (note 30), fol 271.

\(^{37}\) NF Erfurt, ‘Informationsbericht vom 4.3.68’, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 84.

\(^{38}\) E.g. NF Erfurt, ‘Informationsbericht’, 19 March 1968, ibid, fol 139.

\(^{39}\) 14 March report (note 30), fol 269; 4 March report (note 18), fol 210; 14 March report (note 8), fol 124.
deliberately designed to provoke such reactions. In the Eichsfeld it dominated the *Volksaussprache*, and was a major topic elsewhere, while the new political structures were relatively neglected. When the SED amended the article’s wording, it achieved much greater support from the religious communities than might have been achieved had the original text included the amendment. The Worbis CDU reported that its own members and non-party Christians welcomed the changes.\(^\text{40}\) Whereas some clergy had threatened not to vote, in the event some did for the first time. Only four clergy in Kreis Nordhausen abstained.\(^\text{41}\)

The raising of compulsory school age from 14 to 16 created foreseeable, normal reactions. Clearly children in classes seven and eight disliked the prospect of two extra school years, but agitators often needed persistence to explain the new requirement to parents too, though most teachers were in agreement.\(^\text{42}\) Some success in ideological education was achieved, however: a working class schoolgirl said she could never have gone into higher education under capitalism.\(^\text{43}\) The issue was the main topic at DFD meetings, which attracted numerous non-members.\(^\text{44}\) Some mothers were concerned that two additional school years would financially disadvantage families which needed an extra wage earner.\(^\text{45}\) Other parents feared their children simply would not cope or that the entire scheme was financially unviable.\(^\text{46}\) There was also discontent about the new constitutional requirement for all young people to learn a trade, partly because the unskilled were said to earn more,\(^\text{47}\) and, more commonly, because there was little free

\(^{40}\) CDU Bezirkssekretariat, 27 March 1968 letter, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 197.
\(^{43}\) 11 March report (note 21), p.2.
\(^{45}\) 19 March report (note 38), fol 137.
\(^{47}\) Konsumgenossenschaftsverband Bezirk Erfurt report, 12 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 108.
choice of profession, despite the constitutional guarantee of personal freedom. These fears notwithstanding, many others supported higher educational achievement. An LDPD report noted growing support. Nevertheless, the government heeded certain concerns raised during the Volksaussprache, and the revised Article 25 permitted some children to complete their education as apprentices rather than in school.

Finally, alongside questions of political or social principle, many saw the Volksaussprache as an opportunity to complain about personal and material worries, mostly linked only vaguely to the new constitution. Would the constitutional right to work ensure adequate crèche provision in Apolda? Why was land inheritance dependent on joining an LPG? Why, given constitutionally guaranteed equality, did wage levels vary between towns, and why should the intelligentsia receive better treatment? Why did child benefit levels vary between categories of workers? Why did parcels from the west go missing if postal secrecy was protected? All of these important day-to-day problems were raised, along with continual complaints about housing shortages.

The wide participation in the constitutional debate has already been noted. However, some felt there was little point making proposals, or that ordinary people could make few sensible suggestions about a document which experts had already discussed. While some NDPD members welcomed the plebiscite as a sign of true democracy, others viewed the whole Volksaussprache as a 'democratic mirage' (Scheindemokratie). These attitudes reflected both cynicism about the nature of socialist democracy and a persistent deference to higher authority. Although debate on the legitimacy or otherwise of SED rule was not encouraged or permitted by the

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48 Cf., e.g., NF Erfurt, 'Informationsbericht', 12 March 1968, ibid, fol 116. NDPD members in various districts also raised the issue in these terms: 20 March report (note 34), fol 144. LDPD members' similar views: 20 March report (note 22), fols 162, 171.
49 20 March report (note 22), fol 162.
50 Various reports in ThHStAW: NF 558, fol 15; NF 559 (especially fols 2, 3, 28, 48, 78-80, 152-3); NF 560 (especially fols 153-4, 221, 224, 208).
52 NDPD Heiligenstadt, 'Halbmonatsmeldung 7/68', 5 April 1968, LPA, IV/B/4.06/218.
authorities, it was also generally not attempted by the population. The points of complaint and query raised skirted wider issues, and though an NDPD report regretfully noted a tendency to *Artikeldiskussion*, the lack of an existential discussion on the GDR’s future undoubtedly spared the SED much pain. Nevertheless, despite publications, such as Karl-Wilhelm Fricke’s, which highlight the reprisals for expressing dissatisfaction and opposition, contemporary reports suggest a population, including the supposedly loyal parties’ and mass organisations’ rank and file, still ready to discuss matters of concern publicly in 1968, albeit within the limits of the SED’s framework.

The examples above focus mainly on the negative and doubtful comments. However, the files also document many positive reactions and a distancing by many citizens from the FRG, which in 1968 seemed to many, in both east and west, to have abandoned the moral highground in its support for American aims in Vietnam and its attempts to introduce ‘emergency legislation’. Few believed that SED socialism could achieve German unity, and many regretted the apparent final nail in the German nation’s coffin, particularly with the first signs of *Ostpolitik* appearing, but crucially many were still prepared to accept the GDR’s continued existence. The *Volksaussprache* records suggest no attempts to identify alternatives. The unspoken truth behind the *Volksaussprache* remained that the USSR still underwrote the SED’s hold on the GDR. However, within this framework the SED used the *Volksaussprache* to achieve a more acceptable *modus vivendi* with the population, and the various sectors of the population accepted this opportunity, either to improve the aspects of socialism with which they agreed or (often successfully) to reassert their existing rights. In this sense, the SED’s ‘dictatorship’ was qualified by a recognition of the need to respond to at least some public demands and suggests a certain attempt at paternalism, despite the local inefficiencies in providing adequate housing and supplies, noted earlier.

54 20 March report (note 34), fol 143.
Voting in the plebiscite on 6 April 1968 was mainly uneventful in Bezirk Erfurt, despite the appearance of graffiti and leaflets calling for a ‘No’ vote in Gotha, the work of disgruntled youths, and incidents such as vandalised plebiscite posters in several areas. Some complained that the plebiscite was arranged hastily to force through the constitution; others commented, as before all GDR elections: ‘We’re going to vote to get some peace’. The plebiscite was a novelty in that for the first time since 1949 voters were required to mark the voting slip by marking either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ box. As the SED’s First Bezirk Secretary, Alois Bräutigam, noted: ‘This time everyone must decide, yes or no’. In the bloc meeting at which he was speaking, the minutes record only that the SED dictated its instructions. It appears that no other members spoke, suggesting the SED had by now achieved total control over the other organisations and that reliable supporters were installed.

94.49% of the GDR’s population approved the constitution. Even excluding Berlin, where the result dropped to 90.96%, the provincial average was only slightly higher at 94.75%. The Bezirk Erfurt average only just underperformed this (94.72%) on a turnout (98.51%) which was the highest anywhere and reflected much preparatory work with individual voters. Only 0.27% of cast votes were invalid. As noted in Chapter Nine, a lower proportion actively voted ‘Yes’ in the Catholic areas, reflecting remaining dissatisfaction over the religious settlement and, in the Eichsfeld, with the border situation. Mühlhausen and Gotha districts both recorded relatively high absolute numbers of ‘No’ voters (3149 and 3708 respectively, albeit without reducing their averages much below the Bezirk average). Even 125 NVA troops based in Erfurt voted ‘No’. Although this figure represented only 2.67% of those entitled to vote, it

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56 4 April report (note 4), fol 29; 20 March report (note 34), fol 142.
58 4 April report (note 4), fols 25-6.
59 ‘Protokoll der Blocksitzung am 27.3.1968’, p.4, ThHStAW, OI 941.
60 Tables compiled from Sorgenicht, p.191; 4 April report (note 4), fols 27-30.
61 Schlußbericht’, ThHStAW, OI 942, fol 34.
62 Schlußberichte’, ibid, fols 35, 42, 44.
demonstrated independent thought even within this most regimented of GDR institutions.

Nonetheless, overall most people still voted as required, even under slightly freer conditions. However, the high degree of ritual conformity involved is suggested by some NDPD members’ comments, adjudged fair by Bezirk level functionaries, that no-one should directly deduce individual citizens’ political attitudes and morale from the percentage of ‘Yes’ votes. An Apolda member claimed many people nodded approval during the Volksaussprache without daring to discuss particular problems, or were simply ignorant of the SED’s proposals. Given the level of dissent already recorded in the Volksaussprache, this evidence of more, unexpressed problems suggests three preliminary conclusions. First, the population had merely learned the outward forms of obedience by early 1968; secondly, many nonetheless inwardly rejected either the division of Germany, SED rule, or both; thirdly, some were still heavily influenced in their politics by the churches. For the SED, in the short term at least, only the first of these points was significant.

Prague Spring and Thuringian autumn

As indicated, the new constitution was debated against a tense background in eastern Europe and in east-west relations. Specifically the leadership change and adoption of liberal socialist policies in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, alongside student protest in Poland, worried the SED leadership for two related reasons. First, the SED feared Czechoslovakia’s rapprochement with the FRG, as it potentially threatened the GDR’s border regime and the GDR’s diplomatic position. Secondly, and potentially more

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dangerous, was the fear that the Czechoslovak party’s reformist ideas might also inspire SED members and the general public.

Alexander Dubček’s reform process was already underway in Czechoslovakia during the Volksaussprache. Nevertheless, the Prague Spring hardly impacted on the constitutional debate, beyond tacit comparisons between the ending of the GDR’s constitutional right to strike and the strikes permitted in Czechoslovakia and Poland.65

Nonetheless, early and mid-1968 saw much general discussion about developments in Czechoslovakia. Although many feared and denounced the threat to Czechoslovak socialism, and voiced surprise that people in a socialist country were attracted by the west,66 there were also worrying signs for the SED, despite the BL’s resolution to ‘unmask the FRG’s counterrevolutionary machinations against Czechoslovakia more offensively’.67 By May many citizens believed that socialism’s days were numbered in Czechoslovakia, and that a ‘bourgeois’ constitution was imminent there. People are frequently reported as failing to understand how this situation could arise in a socialist country. Those committed to the cause or with a personal stake in the system mainly hoped that ‘the Czechoslovak working class will succeed in defending socialist conditions’.68 This category saw the dangers of a repeat of Hungary 1956 and hoped for quick action lest ‘comrades’ blood flow uselessly in Czechoslovakia’. However, most Eisenach SED members expected that Czechoslovakia would not be allowed to return to ‘bourgeois conditions’.69 After June 1953 and the Hungarian invasion of 1956, they presumably felt the status quo was assured. With uncanny accuracy, Heiligenstadt members predicted the socialist states would intervene to crush the counterrevolution at

the invitation of a group of loyal Czechoslovak comrades. Such opinions were not restricted to those with a stake in the system who hoped for this outcome. The expectation of such a development in Czechoslovakia was fairly widespread. Workers in a Nordhausen firm warned in May that Czechoslovakia was a free country and that the USSR and the GDR had no business to intervene. By late July, many people expected Soviet military intervention. Such attitudes naturally dissuaded GDR citizens from attempting a similar course. Real anxieties about war existed before the socialist states appeared to reach agreement with Dubček on 3 August.

Nonetheless, worrying signs mounted. By May, many GDR citizens found the Prague Spring's ideological innovations attractive. Workers greeted the concepts of democracy and freedom, the latter as an opportunity to travel. Some expressed the opinion that the GDR was too closely allied to the USSR and should build its own socialism as the Czechs and Yugoslavs were doing. Young workers, meanwhile, were attracted to the Czechs' concept of a market economy. A certain anti-Russian feeling was also expressed in rejections of 'Russian communism' in favour of the Czechoslovak version. By late May the SED concluded:

There is currently wavering among all sections of the population. [...] The so-called 'democratisation' and the demands for 'freedom' are meeting sympathy among some citizens of our Bezirk. This is especially true of a number of young people, members of the intelligentsia and some craftsmen and traders. [...] Some citizens consider Czechoslovakia's liberalisation process is appropriate in the GDR too.

As this report subtly indicated, similar problems existed within the SED's own ranks, partly because members' faith was shattered by the developments within the KPC.

70 SED Heiligenstadt, 'Kurzinformation...', 21 May 1968, LPA, IV/B/4.06/119.
71 20 May report (note 68), p.3.
72 SED BL, 'Information über die Stimmung...', 30 July 1968, pp.4-5, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183.
73 E.g., RdK Eisenach, 'Informationsbericht über Stimmungen...'. 20 August 1968, ThHStAW, I 127, fol 155; RdS Erfurt report, 6 August 1968, ibid, fol.188.
74 SED BL, 'Information über Stimmung...', 17 May 1968, p.4; (same title) 21 May 1968, pp.3-4; (same title), 11 June 1968, p.5, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183.
76 SED BL, 'Wertung der Diskussionen...'; 28 May 1968, p.2, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183.
Which were the right comrades and which the false, members wondered.\textsuperscript{77} A picture of similarly inadequate SED party work emerged as many problems were blamed on poor communication of the ZK’s explanations of the situation. In Gotha, for instance, local groups reported meetings which had not occurred and neglected party education programmes.\textsuperscript{78} However, the SED’s ideological problems generally had far more serious causes than poor administration. Instead they reflected individuals’ lack of conviction in ZK policies and often opportunistic reasons for party membership. These failings revealed themselves in numerous incidents. For instance, three SED cooperative farmers commented that the Czechoslovaks wanted freedom of speech and the press and not the pressure which existed in the GDR.\textsuperscript{79} Similarly, an SED economist in Sömmerda announced he favoured Czechoslovakia’s free market economy and would now rejoin the church as that was again possible in Czechoslovakia. At worst a young engineer commented: ‘Dubček’s doing the only right thing, and it must be possible here too.’ He continued: ‘I have nothing in common with the SED, can’t I resign?’\textsuperscript{80} Despite many resolutions of support for the ZK line, the SED was clearly not united behind its leadership over the existential problems raised by the Prague Spring. The state official who escaped to the FRG from Osterburg-Altmark was clearly right to note that the desire to democratise socialism still existed among SED members as among the rest of the population.\textsuperscript{81}

Bloc party members also displayed independence of thought before the invasion, demonstrating that the SED had not yet fully achieved its ideological goals with these groups either. Reports of NDPD discussions demonstrate this point. Some members were committed to the system and felt that the mistakes revealed by Dubček in Czechoslovakia had not been made in the GDR. These members feared the Czechoslovak developments might be repeated in the GDR. Others, however, doubted

\textsuperscript{77} SED BL, ‘Information über Stimmung...’, 11 June 1968, pp.3,5, ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} SED BL, ‘Information über Aufweichungserscheinungen...’, 13 June 1968, p.2, ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} 30 July report (note 72), p.7.
\textsuperscript{80} 13 June report (note 78), pp.2-3. This document includes further similar examples.
\textsuperscript{81} Cited in Burens, p.78.
the SED’s wisdom and extended the criticism made of the KPC’s practice of alliance with other sectors of society to circumstances in the GDR. Some NDPD members even felt the Warsaw demonstrations represented true democracy of a type impossible in the GDR, a state which pursued policies with which they did not always entirely agree. On the eve of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, some NDPD members felt they would do better without Russian interference and gleefully wondered whether they had founded their PGHs too early as socialism’s future now seemed in doubt. Workers, too, began asking embarrassing questions: why had Šejna, a long serving senior Czechoslovak defence official, been revealed only now as an American agent? The first signs of ideological spillover also appeared as NDPD artisans, who had just approved the GDR’s constitutional stipulations on ownership rights, supported Czechoslovakia’s economic liberalisation, while three of the party’s district organisations reported that members saw the new Czechoslovakia as a model for the GDR, especially in cultural policy.

The Prague Spring also highlighted the desire of many, particularly young people, to leave the GDR. The possibility of eased restrictions at Czechoslovakia’s western border provoked much discussion, and an increase of applications to visit the country in case exit to the west became possible. In May 1968 there were 3,556 private trips to Czechoslovakia from Bezirk Erfurt, compared with 2,492 in May 1967, a rise of 42.7%. Most applications were made by young people, but four vicars from Kreis Eisenach also applied in August. Worbis staff noted a sharp rise in the number of trips made at short notice, and reacted to several escapes via Czechoslovakia by cutting the number of visas by two thirds. SED loyalists also understood the potential for a new

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82 20 March report (note 34), fols 145-6.
84 FDGB Bezirksvorstand, ‘Information über die Stimmung...’, 21 March 1968, ThHStAW, NF 559, fol 221.
86 E.g., BdVP, ‘Informationsbericht...’, 31 May 1968, p.3, ThHStAW, MdI/20.1, 81, fol 150.
87 E.g., 4 April report (note 4), fol 28.
89 ‘Information über Stimmungen...’, 8 August 1968, pp.4-5, ThHStAW, Vs/St 1076.
90 8 August report (note 75), fol 179.
escape hatch and suggested restrictions at the border with Czechoslovakia to avert the
danger.\footnote{SED BL, ‘Information...’, 12 May 1968, p.2, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183; 20 May report (note 68), p.3.}

It would be wrong to assume that the GDR was gripped with enthusiasm for Dubček’s
liberal socialism. Indeed, some traditional German prejudices emerged among those
who felt Czechoslovakia and Poland’s problems reflected economic backwardness.\footnote{NF Sömmerda, undated, untitled report, ThHStAW, NF 560, fol 160.}
However, doubts grew about the socialist bloc’s cohesiveness and strength,\footnote{E.g. 20 March report (note 34), fol 145.} with
implications for the credibility of the SED’s incantation that socialism would triumph as
the world’s strongest political force. Some felt that Czechoslovakia must decide its own
future,\footnote{Undated report (note 93), fol 159.} a view with ominous implications for the GDR. There were also widespread
complaints about the poor reporting of Czechoslovak developments in the GDR media.
Most dangerously, people who had visited Czechoslovakia, received visits from
Czechoslovaks or listened to Radio Prague’s German broadcasts rejected the SED’s
condemnation of the Prague Spring and viewed the reforms favourably.\footnote{SED BL, ‘Information über Stimmung...’, 11 May 1968, pp.4-5, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183.}
The SED was particularly anxious about Czech workers attached to VEBs who spread the new
message among GDR workers and even described the GDR as ‘stalinist’.\footnote{RdB, ‘Probleminformation...', 17 July 1968, ThHStAW, V 223.}
School exchange groups also concluded from Czechoslovak contacts that the GDR’s
information was wrong.\footnote{Cf. Peter Bühner and Klaus Itau, ‘Dubček-Rufe auf dem Steinweg’, Mühltäuser Beiträge zu
Geschichte, Kulturgeschichte, Natur und Umwelt, 16 (1993), 141-143, (p.142).}
In summary, the ideological content of the Prague Spring
made a significant impact in Bezirk Erfurt.\footnote{Burens, pp.81-2.} Though Burens suggests the population’s
interest was stimulated by Czechoslovakia’s developing rapprochement with the
FRG,\footnote{Burens, pp.81-2.} this is a partial view as many GDR citizens were critical of West Germany’s
capitalism and alliance with the aggressor in the Vietnam War.

\footnote{311}
Against this already unsettled background, NVA troops participated in the invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20-21 August 1968. The invasion must have been planned to counter the mounting dissatisfaction, described above, which the Czechoslovak reforms had encouraged in countries such as the GDR, as well as to remove Dubček from power. Both results were crucial to maintaining Moscow’s hold over its satellites. The crushing of the Prague Spring had immediate and far reaching ramifications for GDR popular opinion, but also demonstrated how effective the SED’s control mechanisms had become by 1968.

Leading RdB staff met at 3am on 21 August to determine and implement emergency control measures. Various other staff spontaneously arrived by 5.30am to assist. Over eighty Bezirk staff were sent into the districts and key firms to direct political work. Special emphasis was placed on the border districts. Early meetings also convened in the district councils, whose staffs were dispatched to the localities. State functionaries and party executives met during the day, and all mayors were informed of events and instructed to staff their offices continuously. The SED also informed the bloc party district leaderships early on 21 August; the CDU and LDPD Bezirk executives assembled their respective district secretaries that afternoon. Meanwhile, attempts were made to acquaint the wider population with the official line on Czechoslovakia by organising workplace gatherings to hear broadcasts of the official statements. Workplace meetings, some led by SED BL members, were still being organised more than a week after the invasion.

The state authorities remained on special alert for a fortnight, and initially submitted several reports daily. The regional SED generally received more detailed reports than

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102 Various district reports, 21 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
central government, for which negative aspects were omitted or understated. On 23 August, the RdB chairman, Gothe, reported that still more Bezirk staff had been sent into the districts and that the regional councils for economic affairs and agriculture had been given political tasks. Political discussions were to be held systematically with all sections of the population in every district, particularly at the border, while the RdKs were to encourage young people to assist in building works, and thus keep them occupied and less likely to revolt. To encourage popular restraint, an extra 190 tons of meat were made available for the first crisis weekend. Party and state officials were available over the weekend for political discussions with the population as required. In Weimar, all major events were ‘secured’ to prevent their use as ‘platforms for enemy agitation’. RdB members and staff were also present at parish council, factory committee and NF meetings to intervene if necessary. In the key area of education, district SED leaders attended special headmasters’ conferences on 23 August. By 29 August every school’s ‘Pedagogical Council’ had met to ensure teaching staff toed the ideological line. 52 staff from the RdB’s education department supervised these meetings in the districts. Many Bezirk staff remained in schools to check lessons and FDJ meetings once term began. So comprehensive was political control by 1968 that time was even found to remove film of Dubček from the current newsreel. This level of control was only possible because so many people’s careers by now depended on maintaining the status quo.

105 Cf. RdB reports to the Ministererrat, ThHStAW, Vs/St 919.
112 ‘Information über die Situation im Bereich der Volksbildung’, 30 August 1968, p.1, ThHStAW, Vs/St 918.
113 6 September report (note 110), p.3.
The authorities aimed to ensure outward acceptance of the invasion by forcing people to give their opinions. However, the authorities' comprehensive approach could not prevent widespread negative reactions. Most significant were the cases of open protest. Ominously, even before the invasion there were unusual gatherings of young people playing western music on transistor radios in Mühlhausen on 19 and 20 August. Following the invasion 200 people assembled in the town on 21 August for a ‘silent march’ following an FDJ meeting attended by only 40 at which ‘provocative questions’ were asked. Twenty arrests were made after this spontaneous demonstration was disbanded by police and Soviet soldiers, an incident which blighted some participants’ careers. Similarly, 200 young people gathered in Erfurt on 22 August, including some from Gotha and Weimar. Of the 36 arrested, two were SED members. Although the gathering appeared essentially unplanned, and most participants were attracted by the music, as in Mühlhausen, and as in 1953, the first chance occurrence inspired copycat actions. 250 youths gathered on 23 August, of whom only five were arrested for provocative behaviour. The authorities finally regained control on 24 August when a further gathering was prevented. Twenty-five people were arrested. The city authorities employed intimidation by holding direct talks with the families and employers of 64 young people involved in the Erfurt gatherings. Though peace resumed, these incidents were not forgotten. Some Erfurt workers drew consequences about GDR society by commenting that arresting youngsters was not ‘freedom’. Similar questions were raised in Arnstadt.

115 A Bad Langensalza ‘Bericht über die Aussprachen in den Betrieben’, 28 August 1968, records that people were asked their opinion repeatedly: ThHStAW, Vs/St 918.
116 ‘Information über die Vorkommnisse durch Jugendliche in der Stadt Mühlhausen...’, 21 August 1968, ThHStAW Weimar, I 262. Similar events were reported in Prenzlauer Berg (Berlin): Mitter and Wolle, p.393.
117 ‘Information Kreis Mühlhausen...', 21 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 1076; undated Kreis reports in ThHStAW, I 262.
118 Bühner and Itau, pp.141-143.
120 24 August report (note 107), p.4.
121 RdS Erfurt, Informationsgruppe report, 25 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
The detailed RdB files do not record the marches which westerners claimed had occurred in Eisenach (allegedly with three or four thousand participants), Gotha and elsewhere, but there were numerous other examples of open, individual protest, such as the Sommerda youth arrested for running around in a jumper showing the West German eagle, the Apolda brick-firer who downed tools, and the applause by Nordhausen theatre’s staff whenever the director mentioned Dubček’s name in his explanatory speech. Other isolated incidents included the intimidation of SED members who were required to remove their party badges on Erfurt station, and the drunken youths outside Bad Berka town hall (whom the FDJ encouraged instead to perform voluntary community service the following day). The only signs of organised protest were in Weimar, where leaflets called for a sit down strike, and young people encouraged passers-by to participate.

Unlike 1953 and 1989, however, August 1968 was principally characterised by the many anonymous actions. Leaflets and graffiti, mainly supporting Dubček and calling for the Russians to leave, were found in most districts from 22 August onwards. Thuringia seems to have been a centre of protests; compared to 272 slogans in East Berlin between 21 August and 8 September, 56 slogans were daubed in one night in central Erfurt alone, and most visibly the words ‘Long live Dubček, Russians out!’ were painted on the steps of a Weimar school. Conversely, anti-Ulbricht slogans were rarely reported. Most leaflets were handwritten, but in Arnstadt they were mass

125 Mitter and Wolle, p.461; Burens, p.72.
126 RdK Sömerda report, 25 August 1968, 1145, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
127 23 August report (note 106).
128 24 August report (note 107).
129 Erfurt-Land report, undated [22 August 1968?], 1300, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
130 Weimar-Land report, undated [22 August 1968?], 1240, ibid.
131 Weimar-Stadt report, undated, ThHStAW, I 262; RdK Weimar-Stadt telephone message, 29 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 918.
133 25 August report (note 121).
135 Informationsgruppe report, 28 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 918. However, FDGB reports elsewhere in the GDR did record them: Fulbrook, Anatomy of a Dictatorship, p.197.

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produced,\textsuperscript{136} and large numbers ('Freedom for the ČSSR with Dubček!') were also seized in Erfurt. Villages were also affected.\textsuperscript{137}

It is nonetheless important to remember that Bezirk Erfurt was outwardly quiet and people worked normally during the crisis, notwithstanding the incidents noted above. In the period immediately following the invasion, the Bezirk's police recorded only 122 connected 'incidents', including 48 of 'libel of the state'.\textsuperscript{138} Meanwhile, over 200 mainly young people demonstrated their loyalty by joining the SED in the fortnight following the invasion.\textsuperscript{139} There was practically no panic buying (though \textit{Neues Deutschland}'s sales increased) and business remained normal, albeit with fewer bank deposits immediately after the invasion.\textsuperscript{140} Despite general fears of war, especially among older residents,\textsuperscript{141} and the concerns of those with relatives in the NVA,\textsuperscript{142} cynical comments such as 'The next butter will come on ration cards'\textsuperscript{143} and 'Wars always start in September' were extremely rare.\textsuperscript{144}

Despite little outward protest, the RdB's special ‘ČSSR information group’ discovered that the disorganised minority's actions reflected widespread opinions. Well into September, critical viewpoints were heard throughout the Bezirk and across the population, especially among younger people.\textsuperscript{145} Most frequently people complained that the action was reminiscent of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, and that therefore German troops should not be involved, views which struck at the heart of the GDR’s (and socialism’s) antifascist legitimation. As no names were published, there

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{136} '16.00 Uhr, Arnstadt', undated [21/22 August 1968?], ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
\bibitem{138} Undated, untitled police speech [autumn 1968?], ThHStAW, MdI/20.1, 81, fols 26-7.
\bibitem{140} Apolda reports, untitled, undated [22/23 August 1968?], ThHStAW, Vs/St 917; BdVP, ‘Bericht Nr.10/68’, ThHStAW, MdI/20.1, 139, fol 244.
\bibitem{141} RdB, ‘Information zur politischen Situation’, 22 August 1968, 0900, p.3, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
\bibitem{143} Bad Langensalza report, untitled, undated [22 August 1968?], ibid.
\bibitem{144} RIPN, ‘Informationsbericht, 22 August 1968, p.2, ibid.
\bibitem{145} Unless otherwise noted, these negative reactions are from various reports in ThHStAW, Vs/St 917, 918.
\end{thebibliography}
was great scepticism about which Czechoslovak leaders, if any, had called for intervention. One SED man doubted the legitimacy of such an appeal anyway, by noting that counterrevolutionaries could just as easily have appealed to the western powers for assistance. Related complaints that Czechoslovakia’s sovereignty had been violated were widespread. The socialist camp’s much vaunted unity was also queried, as Romania and Yugoslavia had not participated, leading some to ask why Czechoslovakia should not go its own way as Yugoslavia, Albania and China had done. Many felt that Dubček should have had more time to comply with the socialist camp’s requirements. Some wondered if the NVA’s participation meant the GDR had little independence either. Defenders and opponents of the action alike asked how the Czechoslovak situation could have arisen after so many years of socialist development there.

All these general questions highlighted the inconsistencies of the SED’s ideological position in the world socialist camp and undermined the concept of the inevitability of socialism developing according to marxism’s natural laws. Some individual questioners tried to embarrass party activists with trickier questions. Would the GDR or USSR also march into Yugoslavia and Romania, or even China, if called upon? Was there any difference between the WTO’s actions in Czechoslovakia and America’s in Vietnam? Supposing an imperialist Czechoslovak government had called for help from the west? Was the USA equally entitled to occupy Cuba? Could a country leave the WTO to pursue its own path to socialism? As the days passed, the contradictions worsened. Why had Dubček, yesterday’s traitor, been restored to power? Deep cynicism was reflected in occasional outbursts, such as the misquoting of a socialist slogan as: ‘Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein, so schlag ich dir den Schädel ein’ (approximately: ‘If you won’t be my brother, then I’ll smash your head in.’)

147 Undated report (note 143), 19 September report (note 134), IV, p.3.
152 Nordhausen report, untitled, undated [27 August 1968?], ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
Despite the SED's administrative efficiency, the party's rank and file was as affected by the invasion as the rest of the population. Although the party's weaknesses are generally sparsely reported, this is clearly the implication of repeated comments that 'all sectors of the population' had doubts or rejected the invasion. However, in one frank report the SED noted that some members were 'softening'. One member felt the GDR should be ashamed of participating, while another compared the invasion to Hitler's. SED railwaymen in Nordhausen refused to attend party meetings because of the invasion, and complained: 'We can't say anything in meetings because the police is there too.'

Various problems in the Eichsfeld illustrate the party's difficulties. There, the Lindewerra party secretary told a public meeting that he disagreed with the invasion, which he regarded as unconstitutional. He was supported by a visiting NDPD Kreis official. In Marth, two known dissident comrades bought other colleagues brandy to encourage them to make negative comments. In Heuthen, only four members attended an extraordinary meeting on 27 August while their comrades were drinking in the LPG. But although many members expressed significant doubts about the invasion or rejected it, the Kreis Heiligenstadt party felt only 17 members had made comments requiring further investigation. Doubts and wavering were not classified as damaging or opposed to the party line. Many members who had spoken too freely were also prepared to conform once party authorities began to intervene. By not taking more rigorous action, the SED leadership seemed to be tacitly admitting that it could not expect the entire membership's unequivocal support. A 'party check' as rigorous as that of 1950/51 would have significantly weakened the party, and therefore SED hegemony, had it removed all those with any doubts about the correctness of the intervention in Czechoslovakia. It is also important to note that some SED members went on the offensive in party meetings against those who echoed arguments from the western

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153 SED BL, 'Information über die Stimmung...', 24 August 1968, pp.5-6, LPA, IV/B/2/5-183.
155 KPKK Heiligenstadt, 'Informationen an die BPKK Erfurt', 29 August 1968', ibid.
156 KPKK Heiligenstadt, 'Einschätzung über die in unserem Kreis aufgetretenen Erscheinungen ...', 4 November 1968, ibid.
media. The existence of a strong core of loyalists who supported official policies either out of conviction or as a pragmatic opportunity to display their loyalty undoubtedly strengthened the SED’s ‘leading role’ in the localities.

Bloc party members also generally posed the same awkward questions as the rest of the population, and made as much use of western media. CDU members seemed particularly reserved on the topic. The Weimar organisation implied that most members still disagreed with the measures almost a week later. Three weeks later the regional leadership felt clarity on the need for the measures was increasing, but presumably, therefore, still incomplete. Many Heiligenstadt members also felt papal condemnation rendered the invasion illegitimate. However, some CDU members were also prepared to sign supportive resolutions and to defend the measures to their colleagues. Similarly, not all LDPD members were convinced of the counterrevolutionary situation in Czechoslovakia by September and were also ‘influenced’ by western media. One report claimed the Czechoslovaks’ liberalisation measures had no support among LDPD members, but also noted ideological uncertainties and that old anti-Soviet sentiments had been strengthened.

Many NDPD members also shared the general concerns, and avoided discussions of Czechoslovakia in their meetings. In some cases supportive resolutions were adopted without discussion, but concrete pledges of economic performance were more difficult to obtain. Official resolutions apart, first reactions, when expressed, ranged from total rejection of the military intervention to conditional, but not total, support. Many were still unconvinced in early September that the Czechoslovak issue was

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162 27 August report (note 159), fols 105-107; 27 August report (note 123).
164 NDPD Bezirksvorstand, ‘Stimmungen und Meinungen...’, 22 August 1968, ThHStAW, NF 836, fol 120.
resolved. Still more significantly, some members of the town leadership in Gebesee and the district leaderships in Erfurt-Land and Heiligenstadt wavered in their support, causing the loyal regional executive to intervene.165

In summary, bloc party members shared the general doubts, but these more politically minded citizens' energies were consumed by parties whose leaderships loyally supported SED policies and intervened on the rare occasions when it became necessary to ensure that lower party organs conformed.

Young people were the most mutinous and unreceptive population group. Even the SED recognised that they had most 'ideological uncertainties',166 despite the GDR's emphasis on ideological education. After 21 August, Erfurt-Land officials reported young people's great interest in developments but neglected to claim they showed support,167 an unusual omission in these sources. Most school pupils demonstrated the enforced dual personality common to many GDR citizens. On one hand they displayed outward conformity by arriving at school in FDJ or Young Pioneer uniforms. Even the older, more rebellious students changed out of their western jeans and into FDJ garb in school toilets for FDJ gatherings and changed back before resuming their private lives.168 On the other, they posed the usual unanswerable questions. Some particularly asked why the GDR permitted only one youth organisation.169 By 23 August one reporter concluded that extra political work was required with young workers who were 'asking questions resulting from failure to recognise the context'.170 A brigade of young workers in Bad Langensalza said openly what others hinted at: 'We are not interested in politics, but in other things, and we condemn the invasion.'171 It is perhaps significant

165 NDPD Bezirksvorstand, 'Halbmonatsmeldung Nr.17/68', 2 September 1968, ibid, fols 127-133.
166 'Entwurf zur Geschichte der Bezirksparteiorganisation Erfurt der SED, 1945-1985', Chapter 6, p.106.
167 Erfurt-Land report, undated, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.
168 Büchner and Itau, p.141.
171 RdK Bad Langensalza report, 28 August 1968, p.2, ThHStAW, Vs/St 918.
that the ideologically dissatisfied teenagers and young adults of 1968 were at the vanguard of the *Wende* in 1989.\(^{172}\)

Young people’s questions were resolved, according to the reports,\(^ {173}\) but the responsible teaching staff often seemed uncertain or unconvinced of the official line themselves. This was undoubtedly a contributory factor to young people’s ideological confusion. Though very few teachers outwardly protested, and some demonstrated great loyalty,\(^ {174}\) numerous teachers expressed doubts or raised the usual questions in ‘Pedagogical Council’ meetings; ‘repeated discussions’ were necessary with some colleagues, while some meetings attempted to avoid the Czechoslovak issue altogether. Despite the presence of RdK members at such meetings in Arnstadt, some questions remained unresolved, suggesting that even district state officials were overtaxed.\(^ {175}\) In 1968 the minority of committed teachers and the direct political pressure from the attendant state and party officials ensured teachers’ conformity once term began, but the level of ideological support from those entrusted with securing future generations’ loyalty to socialism was clearly inadequate. By contrast, unreliable FDJ officials are rarely reported, and few members resigned.\(^ {176}\)

The Czechoslovak crisis demonstrated that the churches had been somewhat tamed, perhaps by their partial victory in the constitutional debate. The RdB’s comprehensive reports make no mention of turbulent priests damning the Czechoslovak invasion from the pulpit. Rather, most clergy, parish councillors and churchgoers exercised great reserve and remained silent unless asked.\(^ {177}\) This silence was similar to that on 17 June

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\(^{172}\) This conclusion is also drawn by Mitter and Wolle, p.370.

\(^{173}\) Practically all GDR reports note that questions and uncertainties were cleared up, but they rarely state how.

\(^{174}\) A *Kreis* Sömmerda teacher announced his lost confidence in the socialist states immediately after the invasion. He was later dismissed: RdB, education department, ‘Information’, 24 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 917.

\(^{175}\) ‘Information über die Situation im Bereich der Volksbildung’, 30 August 1968, ThHStAW, Vs/St 918; RdK Arnstadt, ‘Informationsbericht zum 30.8.1968, 8.00 Uhr’, pp.3-4, ibid.

\(^{176}\) A rare example concerned three members in Witterda: RdK Erfurt-Land report, 2 August 1968, p.2, ibid. The upward membership trend is confirmed by figures in Zilch, pp.40, 53.

1953, but otherwise marked a great victory for the SED compared to the churches' earlier public campaigns over other issues. The churches' silence did not, however, signify acceptance. The NF and CDU carefully organised explanatory discussions on Czechoslovakia with clergy, either individually or via the Christliche Kreise, but vicars typically regretted or condemned the invasion, or saw it as inevitable. More significant to the SED than these privately expressed views, however, was the highly supportive and morally upstanding public statement issued by the vicar of Altenbergen (Kreis Gotha), a member of the CDU's regional executive.

The most significant casualty of the Czechoslovak invasion on GDR soil was, again, the SED's credibility. The population's doubts and questions were not resolved by the armies of party and state instructors, though their presence perhaps dampened open discussion and dissent. As the GDR's media were slow to provide any information (accurate or not) about the Czechoslovak crisis, the population turned en masse to western information sources. This was nothing new: the western media had undermined the SED for over twenty years. However, the perceived scale of the crisis encouraged many citizens to say that GDR news was not credible, and that they were forced to use western sources once the crisis began. Local functionaries in Dienstedt shared their view. As the crisis deepened, so the audience for western news grew. Reports that western stations were turned up loud in public suggest that the population did not perceive repression as total. Although the official political 'instructors' could claim the moral highground by insisting that the public was being influenced by western imperialist propaganda, it was hard to counter young workers' cynical questions about

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179 22 August CDU report (note 103), p.3.
180 This trend is reflected in most reports of popular reaction to the Czechoslovak crisis. Burens, pp.66-7, suggests up to 95% of the population regularly watched western television news.
181 22 August CDU report (note 103), p.2.
182 E.g., 20 March report (note 34), p.7.
what GDR television had to hide by showing less footage from Czechoslovakia, or an NDPD member’s comment that the west’s pictures ‘speak for themselves’. The Czechoslovak crisis finally established the bankruptcy of the GDR’s own media in the public’s perception and confirmed the longstanding trend towards reliance on western broadcasts, another highly significant factor before and during the 1989 revolution.

Beyond all other reactions, the most dominant was reserve. Most people were reluctant to comment on the invasion, and noticeably ceased conversation if functionaries approached. In many public meetings, only functionaries spoke. Life remained mainly normal. Most people wanted simply work and then go home to normal life. Though the spectre of 1953 is not mentioned in the reports, comparisons were drawn to Hungary in 1956 and this renewed repression seemed to preclude any alternative to building socialism in the GDR. Therefore most people kept quiet, publicly pledged themselves to work harder for the cause, and life continued. Only in isolated incidents did people refuse to sign party resolutions, despite claims that ‘in Saxony and Thuringia alone tens of thousands of workers refused to agree resolutions supporting the intervention at their workplaces’. However, their difficult questions and unwillingness to accept official explanations clearly show that the SED had failed to win the masses’ support for marxist dogma by 1968. Indeed, ideological doubts were inevitable for a party which claimed a scientific understanding of political developments but was unable to provide a clear analysis of the Czechoslovak situation. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the SED had established patterns of societal conformity by 1968 which few actively opposed, and that the state and party apparatus had so perfected its techniques by 1968 that it could easily quell any real or potential dissent. Equally,

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189 Burens, p.73.

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practically all state and party functionaries could be relied upon to uphold the existing order, whether from conviction or vested interest. Though the bases of this compromise between party and people were somewhat unstable, they at least ensured regime stability for as long as the external parameters remained unaltered.
CONCLUSIONS

As Mary Fulbrook notes in the conclusion to her *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, an examination of the history of the German Democratic Republic either uniquely from above or from below cannot alone provide a rounded explanation of why the GDR operated in the way that it did, and why its population allowed it to do so. Although the temptation at the end of this thesis is to attempt a full examination of all the large questions of interpretation of GDR history, such an exercise would clearly be inappropriate on the basis of the material presented above. The wider political framework of the GDR's existence was dictated in Berlin and Moscow, sometimes in response to policies pursued by Bonn, Washington, London and Paris. The fortunes of the GDR's economy depended on all these players and other factors such as climate and world recession. The GDR's ultimate collapse, the short term product of the opening of the Berlin Wall, resulted from all these ingredients and others besides, rather than just the societal structures and the efficacy of regional and local functionaries discussed above.

This thesis does not, therefore, presume to produce answers to all the unanswered questions about the GDR. However, the conclusions which can be drawn from the above examination of popular opinion and the examples of the internal dynamics of power structures may contribute to a better understanding of the national whole from the perspective of the local part.

The questions posed in the introduction to this thesis were underpinned by an attempt to define and categorise the nature of the GDR's societal and political forms. What sort of a country was the GDR? What sort of lives did its citizens lead? The perhaps surprising principal answer to these questions is that the GDR was quite a normal country, despite

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its unusual international and domestic political setting, and that its citizens mainly led normal lives, dominated as in most countries by family life and concerns about work and material welfare. Naturally, Thuringians were directly affected by shortages and hardships in the initial postwar period. They then experienced the uncertainties and fears of the Cold War and their lives were also affected by the SED’s political and economic objectives, such as the land reform and nationalisation. However, many of these conditions and fears were common, albeit with specific variations, throughout the Northern Hemisphere after World War Two. For instance, West Germans were similarly affected by the introduction of the ‘social market economy’ and Britons by the radical innovations of the landslide 1945 Labour government.

As the Cold War division of Europe persisted, so Thuringians grew as accustomed to their lot as Bavarians, South Tyroleans or Britons, and led their lives within this new, postwar framework. None of these populations was necessarily entirely satisfied with the situation in which they found themselves as, for instance, Bavarian independence remained unattainable, Italian rule persisted in the Austrian Tyrol, and the British Empire receded. But despite these frustrations, the tangible needs and worries of everyday life dominated most Europeans’, and Thuringians’, experience of everyday life. This is most immediately obvious in the way that life quickly returned to normal after each of the political upsets discussed in this thesis, and discussed in Part Two and Chapter 11. Though the sealing of the borders and the deportations of some citizens away from the border areas were unusual political events, they did not dominate the overall experience of life in the GDR, even if they were highly influential in forming individual citizens’ perceptions of the state and its ‘leading party’, the SED.

Though these comments may stand to reason, they bear repetition as the GDR is often considered to have been a somehow ‘abnormal’ state, particularly as it was dismantled after forty years. In fact, the GDR’s fate was not particularly unusual: change is the norm. Since 1806, few German state forms have lasted as long as the GDR. In the wider perspective, there are few states anywhere in the world which exist now in the same
form as a hundred years ago. However, within the flux of political development, individuals’ lives continue.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of approval and/or disapproval, this framework of general normality presupposes a general acceptance of the GDR by its citizens, a view reinforced by the general lack of concerted opposition to SED rule before 1989, especially since even the uprising of June 1953 was supported only partially in Bezirk Erfurt. Conditions were made favourable for popular acceptance of almost any postwar German regime by various factors which were entirely independent of SED activities. Chief among these was Germans’ awareness of being a defeated nation at the allies’ mercy. The perception of being unable to control their own destiny underpinned many political outlooks well into the 1960s, and was reflected in the apathy which met the SED’s repeated initiatives to swing public opinion behind campaigns to remove the western powers from Germany and to reunite the country in a form acceptable to Moscow. Thuringians remained well aware that Germany’s destiny depended on the western powers too, and that the ‘small man’ would achieve nothing no matter how many petitions were signed, unless the allies and Germany’s leaders, both east and west, agreed. Although the party regretted the apathy which greeted its rallying calls, in the early years it was also this political apathy which eased the transfer of power into the SED’s hands. Though the common epithet of the SED as ‘the Russian party’ was not intended to be complimentary, it signified that most Thuringians accepted they could do little but accept their new masters, however cynical they remained about the SED’s claims to popular legitimacy.

The perception of being powerless cogs in a larger system had roots which went back further than the war. Apart from the Gleichschaltung of the nazi period, when local power had been removed to the Führer in Berlin and his NSDAP party subordinates, Thuringians had also experienced the removal of the democratically based SPD-KPD coalition Land government by Reich forces in 1923, and the progressive disintegration of the Weimar Republic’s supposed democracy into effective rule by unelected
bureaucracy by 1930. An older generation could remember the Kaiser's similar regime. After 1945 there was little incentive to believe that a defeated nation would be permitted democratic self-rule. After the SED emerged from a propaganda campaign reminiscent of the tactics of 1933, and once the principle of 'unity list' elections was in place after 1950, many Thuringians must have perceived that the status quo ante had been restored.

Furthermore, the harsh material conditions which prevailed at the end of the war also facilitated the ease with which the SED assumed power. The mass of the population had to contend with uncertain food and fuel supplies, while the many settlers from the lost eastern provinces had to make an entirely new life with few possessions and usually in accommodation rented from unwilling locals. In this situation, many people had neither the time nor the inclination to take a great interest in the developing political landscape, which seemed to many to be beyond their own control anyway. Thus relatively abstract events of the early years, such as the founding of the SED and the creation of the GDR, passed almost unnoticed by many Thuringians. This general disinterest caused the SED some problems in establishing political and societal structures at the grassroots, where, for instance, the mass organisations and bloc meetings were often slow to begin meaningful activity, but it also enabled the party to seize the key levers of political control without much organised domestic opposition. Such serious opposition as was mounted often had, or appeared to have, western roots and could be dismissed or countered by the SED for this reason alone in the worsening international climate of the Cold War.

Finally, the KPD/SED's takeover of power was facilitated by the considerable moral legitimacy which many believed had accrued to the party as a result of nazi rule. The communist and social democratic martyrs of the Third Reich, not least Ernst Thälmann, murdered in Buchenwald, but also the Thuringians Theodor Neubauer and Magnus Poser, served as potent symbols of both the evils of fascism and the socialist forces which existed to ensure nazism never returned. In the black and white political
landscape of the crucial initial postwar phase, during which the key structures were established, the KPD/SED effectively used these symbols to maximum advantage in its publicity and propaganda work, deepening the convictions of those already sympathetic to socialism, and winning new adherents, particularly those who had once represented alternative political courses but who now pursued the goals of socialist unity from within the allied bloc parties.

These various factors combined to galvanise the pro-socialist sections of society and to neutralise much of the rest of popular opinion once the SMAD began favouring the KPD/SED. Thus we can to a certain extent relativise the role of the Soviet occupying power in achieving the stability of the developing socialist system in the SBZ/GDR. Clearly, the Soviet Union dictated the parameters of its zone’s development and increasingly enabled the SED to become the leading political force as the option of uniting Germany on terms favourable to the USSR receded. The Soviet forces also intervened at decisive moments and in decisive places to ensure that its favoured path was not threatened. Examples of this are easier to find at zonal level (for instance, the removal of the CDU’s leaders in 1945 and 1947) than regionally or locally, though clearly the deposing of certain Landrätte by district commandants in the early years and the clear Soviet military presence at striking factories in June 1953 fall into this category. A further example would be the favouring of the SED over the other parties with newsprint and other supplies. However, the Soviet Union’s direct interventions as an occupying power to ensure SED hegemony in society were surprisingly rare. Indeed, as the years progressed the Soviet Union intervened more frequently to ensure that the SED’s central leadership fulfilled its allotted tasks in domestic and foreign policy than to exert pressure on the GDR’s population to conform.

To a very large extent, the GDR system was created and maintained by Germans themselves rather than by the Soviet Union, the latter having withdrawn to a supervisory role. From the first KPD meetings in Buchenwald and the first SPD gatherings in private houses, German communists and social democrats laid the foundations for the
state which emerged in 1949. Albeit with Soviet approval, they made the key personnel decisions for the developing party and state apparatus, established the mass organisations and took policy initiatives. Early police records, for instance, show quite clearly that German officials, mainly communists, established the new force themselves. The Soviet Union had no shortage of willing helpers in Germany who took advantage of the unique opportunity to create the socialist system both sides desired.

As the system grew and stabilised over time, more and more Germans became involved in the maintenance of SED hegemony, either directly through their membership of the party and consequent acceptance of its statutes, or indirectly through membership of the Nationale Front or one of the mass organisations. On election days only a very small proportion of the population refused to vote or voted ‘No’. These voters were not marched into the polling stations at gunpoint by Soviet soldiers. Most went compliantly, signifying either acceptance of, or an accommodation with, the prevailing political system. A few had to be sought out and persuaded to vote, but this political pressure was exerted by fellow Germans with an interest in preserving the system. From a variety of motivations, east Germans themselves created and perpetuated SED hegemony while the Soviet forces normally remained at a distance.

What were these motivations? For some, there was a sincerely held conviction that the SED was pursuing the correct policies towards a desirable goal. Such sympathies were particularly important in creating a sizeable core constituency of favourable opinion during the initial phase of constructing the state and party apparatus. Among and alongside the true believers were those whose careers depended on loyalty to the party and state apparatus they served. For these groups preservation of SED hegemony was akin to self-preservation. This was increasingly the case the longer the system persevered, but also as public dissatisfaction with these officials increased. The obvious reaction of functionaries faced with reports of citizens preparing trees to hang them from, as in 1956, was to redouble their efforts to preserve the system. However, the

\[^2\] Cf., e.g., records in ThHStAW, MdI/5, 19 and 96.
degree of ideological commitment as opposed to personal material interest of the functionaries in the system was doubtful in many cases. These were the so-called 'wallet communists'. This became particularly apparent after the *Wende* of 1989 when the SED/PDS could no longer afford to maintain its party functionaries. In Mühlhausen, and no doubt elsewhere, even *Kreisleitung* staff resigned their membership of the party once it no longer provided them with a job.¹

The fact that the voluntary work required to establish and maintain the various organisations was usually concentrated in very few, overworked hands, suggests that only a minority of the population actively supported the system, irrespective of the high proportion of SED members in the population (one seventh by 1968). For far more people, the motivation for allowing the political regime to continue was the desire to lead a quiet life in a situation which they (correctly) perceived to be unalterable. In some cases this motivation was born of fear of repression by the Soviets dating back to rapes and other crimes of the SBZ period. In other cases, personal fears of reprisals were related to the examples of persons deported from the border zones or arrested and imprisoned for misdeeds such as embezzling materials during the early years of extreme shortages or failing to implement the land reform correctly. But for the majority of the population, political stability also meant personal economic stability. The memories of war and economic depression were still recent enough to act as a powerful disincentive against provoking further radical change, particularly in a situation characterised by two well armed opposing camps. The persistent and general expectation of war in the 1950s and the comparisons between Czechoslovakia 1968 and Czechoslovakia 1938 certainly represented popular discontent with the prevailing political situation, both domestically and internationally, but were also symbolic of several generations' urgent desire to avoid renewed conflict, even at the cost of maintaining a regime with which few were particularly satisfied.

To return to the question of the extent and nature of popular approval or disapproval of the GDR, the local materials discussed here entirely bear out Mary Fulbrook's assertion that the GDR 'failed to produce a new, intrinsic legitimacy of its own', thus undermining the state's stability. Despite the existence of a section of the population which was entirely or mainly sincerely committed to fulfilling the central leadership's official policy goals, and despite the general conformity to the behaviour norms expected of the population by the state and party organs, the records of popular opinion between 1945 and 1968 unambiguously show that the SED never succeeded in persuading the masses that socialism in the colours of the GDR was the only scientific and morally acceptable way forward; that it was legitimate to pursue socialism in only one part of Germany, cut off from the other; that the 'progressive, peace loving' Soviet Union was the GDR's greatest friend and protector rather than a somewhat backward country with unjustifiable imperialist and militarist ambitions; that the SED and in particular its Politbüro and First Secretary were entitled to rule; and that unity list elections were the most democratic way of securing Germany's future, to name only a few of the SED's more prominent assertions which the majority of the population never accepted. To judge by the range of opinion reports, belief in these principles of SED rule barely increased between the GDR's founding in 1949 and the adoption of the new socialist constitution of 1968.

Rather, and ironically given the bombardment of political propaganda in practically all the media and the importance attached to ideological education and outward displays of political symbolism, most of the GDR's population became essentially apolitical where internal GDR politics was concerned. This was reflected in the propensity of standard responses to milestones and initiatives in the GDR's political life, generally comments which sounded loyal but meant little, and the cynical comments of the smaller number who preferred not to express the standard lines of support. Popular opinion reports contain many loyal statements, but surprisingly few examples of comments where the

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speakers are truly engaging in reflective thought about the latest developments in political life. This was hardly surprising as most developments in the GDR’s annual political round merely concerned yet another Soviet peace proposal or still more calls to raise productivity and overfulfil the state plan. Apoliticism is also, for instance, reflected in the sparsity of comments on the proposals for political structures in the 1968 draft constitution.

The general abandonment of political interest in the running of the GDR by the mid-1950s and up to at least 1968 was symptomatic of a widespread readiness to relinquish political control to the SED, thereby facilitating the party’s implementation of its ‘leading role’, but also of an essential failure in wide sections of the population to identify with the GDR as their own state. Notwithstanding this lack of interest in internal affairs, the population remained keenly interested in international developments, even though in early 1967 nearly 60% of Bezirk Erfurt’s inhabitants believed there would be no developments in the German question for some time. Such interest can be interpreted as hope that a change might one day occur which would at least allow travel to and from the west, if not German unification, another indication of the population’s failure to identify with the GDR state by the late 1960s.

If it is clear that GDR citizens failed to identify with their state, it is also clear that they generally failed to take decisive action to undermine it. The widespread grumbling and cynicism translated into strike action relatively rarely, and into political opposition, as for instance expressed through boycotts of elections, hardly ever. During the 1950s and 1960s opposition was not systematically organised even at local level, so that even widespread grievances did not threaten the SED’s grip on political life. The churches, which could potentially have rallied a significant proportion of the population, generally chose not to oppose the state on purely political grounds, and discovered that religious conflicts, such as that concerning the Jugendweihe, did not inspire the masses to resist

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the SED. Instead, most of the population participated in the mass organisations (even if they did no more than carry a membership card) and marched in parades to demonstrate their loyalty to the socialist course as required.

This combination of often contradictory factors suggests that most of the GDR’s citizens did not particularly support their political system. Equally, however, to say they merely tolerated or suffered it would be to paint too negative a picture. The degree of participation in the GDR’s social and political structures without the open application of force suggests at the very least a willingness to make the best of a bad job. Particularly in the years considered in this thesis, before the stagnation of the late 1970s and 1980s set in, many contributed willingly to help make postwar Germany a success, either through specifically political or organisational activities or through schemes such as village enhancement programmes.

Despite the limited scope of a regional study in answering larger questions, the material in this thesis does allow some contribution to the wider debates concerning GDR history. The question of whether the GDR was always or from an early point doomed to failure has concentrated many minds since the Wende, particularly since the publication of Mitter and Wolle’s important book on the topic, Untergang auf Raten. As Mary Fulbrook notes, the question is inextricably linked to the wider question of the viability of ‘real’ communist systems per se, and as such cannot be fully answered here. However, the material discussed in the chapters above suggests that the GDR was not on an inevitable downward curve from June 1953 onwards, after the attempt at revolt failed. Instead structures stabilised and popular tolerance and acceptance of the GDR grew in tandem with an increased preparedness on the part of many citizens to be coopted or gleichgeschaltet to the prevailing political and societal forms. The fact that complaints on all manner of topics continued throughout the period under review did not necessarily mean that the GDR would collapse. Widespread societal discontent does

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6 Fulbrook, Anatomy of a Dictatorship, p.269.
not necessarily translate into radical political upheaval, as even a cursory glance at recent British political history reveals.

One could say that the quick resumption of ‘normal’ life after the events of June 1953 means that the GDR was essentially stable by this point, though this stability was still underpinned by the open escape hatch to the west. By the time this was closed in August 1961, the absence of significant oppositional reaction to even the radical move signified by the building of the Berlin Wall suggests that regime stability was a well established phenomenon.

However, the issue of stability is perhaps more complex. Given the SED’s underlying failure to ‘win the argument’, outlined above, it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a situation of ‘stable instability’. In other words, the population was by and large prepared to accept its lot for the foreseeable and perhaps unforeseeable future, but nonetheless remained alive to the idea that the GDR’s existential parameters were abnormal and might be changed if a number of external factors altered. Here the comparison to the United Kingdom breaks down. Despite the dissatisfaction felt in many quarters with successive British governments of various compositions, few questioned the legitimacy or overall constitutional framework of the United Kingdom’s political system. This has tended to be an issue reserved for academics and a small proportion of the educated middle classes. In the GDR, by contrast, the majority of the population perceived a question mark to be hanging over the state and the SED’s hegemony, irrespective of whether they personally wished SED rule to continue or not. Such perceptions were inextricably linked to the Central European fear and expectation of international upheaval and war, noted earlier. This is reflected both in the immediate rumour mongering and cynicism which accompanied every Soviet bloc crisis or superpower summit meeting, and in the removal of party badges by SED members if things appeared difficult.
The notion of stable instability also calls for a re-evaluation of the normal periodisation of GDR history. The traditional view has been that the GDR remained unstable, particularly economically, until the closure of the borders in 1961, but that the erection of the Berlin Wall enabled a significant consolidation of the country’s structures and of popular behaviour. While the economic aspect of this interpretation seems statistically unquestionable, but also beyond the remit of this thesis, the materials in the Thuringian archives call for some qualification of the theory of post-1961 political consolidation. On the one hand, the absence of serious political threats other than Republikflucht after 1953 suggests that the process of political consolidation and cooption of the population had long since begun and had already succeeded in cementing SED rule. On the other hand, the continued failure long after 1961 to recognise the ideological legitimation claimed by the SED, the opposition of groups such as farmers to particular measures, the resistance of young people to the behavioural norms expected of them and the existential questions raised by the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968 all suggest that political stability within the population was not significantly greater than it had been before the Wall. Indeed, the strict border regime was inevitably an additional focus of discontent which undermined the SED’s political message and claim to legitimacy. In terms of political consolidation, then, the importance of the Berlin Wall as a watershed in the GDR’s domestic history must be relativised.

In summary, the GDR was not doomed to failure by societal discontent. There were, for many, enough reasons and even incentives to accept the GDR system from a very early point, and these increased over time. These included the dependency on the SED and the GDR’s structures for employment and career progression, themes which have not been discussed at any length above due to space constraints. However, from the outset there simultaneously existed a number of public perceptions about SED rule and the GDR’s place in the international context which could potentially undermine the entire system. From our post-Wende perspective, it appears that it was the flux of external rather than internal forces that determined which was the dominant set of societal forces at a given time.
Another major concern in GDR historiography has been to define and categorise the state as a political system. It would be inappropriate on the basis of the regional material considered in this thesis to embark on a lengthy comparison between the GDR and regimes such as the Third Reich, but the local perspective does permit some contributions to the wider debate. First, it seems clear that the notion of ‘totalitarianism’ should be applied extremely cautiously to the GDR. While the SED initially attempted to claim total acceptance by the entire population, and to exert total control, this ‘totalitarian’ desire was significantly relaxed by the later 1960s, when the insistence on participation in neighbourhood Nationale Front groups and the campaigns against churches and the western media had been scaled down. Instead, the SED increasingly contented itself with the opposite approach, a total ban on opposition rather than a demand of total loyalty. This trend, already apparent by 1968, became the norm during the 1970s and 1980s as the ‘niche society’ became more acceptable. This subtle but significant alteration of SED demands reflected the party’s failure, repeatedly recorded in this thesis, to achieve total allegiance among the population. The fact that so many citizens were prepared to voice their disagreement with or rejection of SED arguments openly, the stuff of so many of the reports referred to in this thesis, is a further indication that the SED did not attempt a totalitarian claim to the extent of silencing all opposition or dissent.

The notion of ‘SED dictatorship’ is also problematic, as it makes various assumptions about the nature of the SED itself. Who or what was the SED? While it is indisputable that the SED dominated the GDR’s governmental and institutional structures, it would be wrong to imagine that the SED consisted entirely of dedicated socialists all eager to do the Politbüro’s bidding in the regions and localities. As has become apparent at various points in this thesis, the SED was itself a broad church whose members had joined the party from a range of different motivations. The party resources devoted to policing the opinions and actions of rank and file members, particularly in the early period, are testimony to the level of both divergent thought within the party and the
inability of many of its functionaries to achieve political results, particularly in inculcating the population with socialist thought. Many of these problems undoubtedly resulted from the large influx of non-socialists into the party once it became clear that the SED would become the major patron of eastern Germany's civil service. If there is any moral basis for discussions of guilt in respect of the GDR’s history, other than for specific events such as the shootings at the Berlin Wall, then it would seem inappropriate to judge complicity in maintaining SED rule solely on the criterion of SED membership. Conversely, many of those who actively maintained SED rule did so from within the bloc parties. Some of these loyalists retained important government positions in the eastern Länder of united Germany after 1990, but hypocritically harangued their erstwhile SED colleagues for having belonged to the ‘leading party’.

The term ‘SED dictatorship’ also assumes a high degree of efficiency in the party’s administration of the GDR. This presumption also needs serious qualification, at least insofar as it refers to most of the years covered by this thesis. Although specific police tasks such as clearing the border zones of suspected subversives on particular days were normally completed to order, much was lost in the translation of the more routine requirements of political and economic administration between the SED’s Central Committee or ministry in Berlin and the district or local party headquarters or local mayoral office. Thus the incidence of illegal border crossing remained high during the 1950s and there was a surprisingly high rate of Republikflucht even after 1961. Membership drives normally failed to meet their targets, the FDJ Bezirksleitung and Kreisleitungen were rarely informed of their local groups’ activities (if any) and speakers at village meetings could not always be relied upon to say the right thing. Although matters generally improved during the 1960s, especially in respect of internal party discipline, the consolidation of power structures was still incomplete by 1968. This improvement in efficiency in part resulted from the lower performance levels

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expected by the SED compared to the 1950s. However, despite the failure to fulfil the
leadership’s political and administrative goals completely, the high levels of compliant
behaviour in society noted above combined with the administrative success which was
achieved were enough to ensure that regime stability was preserved, even in the face of
challenges such as June 1953 or October/November 1956.

Beyond the confines of the party system, as we have already noted many Thuringians
from all manner of backgrounds played their part in maintaining SED rule, often simply
by failing to object to it and by perpetuating it at the ballot box. While Ulbricht and in
his turn Erich Honecker clearly dictated the outlines of the GDR’s reality, this was a
dictatorship in which most East Germans participated in their daily lives, despite their
lack of faith in the very system which they were passively upholding. Even in the
Eichsfeld, where the unusual circumstances of a tightly knit community with its own
alternative legitimacy made a special type of accommodation necessary between rulers
and ruled, SED rule was not openly challenged once the ground rules of mutual
toleration and respect between the local Catholic church and the SED had been
established. In summary, the notion of ‘dictatorship’, let alone ‘totalitarian dictatorship’,
must surely be qualified by the widespread preparedness to participate in the forms of
the dictatorship, either by publicly declaring an allegiance which did not necessarily
exist, or by staffing, often in a voluntary capacity, the state, party and mass organisation
offices at all levels which implemented and perpetuated the dictatorship of the
Politbüro and the Kremlin. The role of the armies of Stasi informers can also be
mentioned in this context.

‘Faith, Hope and Apathy’. All three of these forces existed in the GDR, and each of
them was responsible for shaping the characteristics of the state. For many the GDR
was in itself an article of faith in the future, constructed on the ruins of Hitler’s nazi
state. But their faith in socialism was tested by the continued existence of the much
older Christian faith which provided a convenient refuge for those who opposed the
imposition of socialism. However, with the exception of the Eichsfeld, the general
experience of the GDR’s first twenty years was of a general loss of faith in either socialism or religion. As Chapters Eight and Nine demonstrated, most people were prepared to make significant theological concessions to ease their temporal lives. Churchgoing and religious activity were in sharp decline by the 1960s, without being replaced by any serious faith in the future of socialism. The SED’s success was, therefore, not only partial, but also negative.

The hope of better times did remain, not least in the rumours which persisted into the late 1960s that the Americans would one day return to claim Thuringia as their own. Each new international conference was seized on by those who hoped for German unity, if only as a means of attempting to delay the imposition of measures such as collective farming. However, the hope of change was overcast by fear that the means of change would be war. Internally, although material conditions did improve, particularly during the 1960s, the very obvious failure of socialist economics to catch up and overtake the living standards achieved in the GDR’s more prosperous western neighbour dampened any remaining hopes that socialism might somehow triumph as Marx had promised.

However, the ultimately defining characteristic of the GDR was apathy. The GDR seemed to be an accident of history, a temporary solution to the knotty problems of the postwar settlement, based on an ideology which found only limited sympathy with the mass of the population. In this situation only a minority showed the necessary commitment to make the new state a success. The frequent absence of systematic party work plans, the recurrent necessity for replacement cadres in party and state offices, the poor ideological level of members of the SED and the other parties, all suggest that apathy was almost as prevalent in the structures which were supposed to uphold the system as in the population at large, from which, ultimately, the cadres were drawn. This apathy was the basis of the ‘stable instability’ which underpinned Thuringia’s experience of socialist rule between 1945 and 1968.
ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF GERMAN TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| AfI          | *Amt für Information*  
Information Office (of *Land Thüringen*) |
| *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* | ‘sole representation claim’ for the German nation, exercised by the FRG in the 1950s and 1960s |
| BDS          | *Bund demokratischer Sozialisten*  
League of Democratic Socialists  
(Hermann Brill’s Thuringian social democratic movement, 1945) |
| BdVP         | *Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei*  
Regional Authority of the German Police |
| *Bezirk* (plural *Bezirke*) | county (GDR administrative region, 1952-1990) |
| *Bezirksleitung*  
(plural *Bezirksleitungen*) | regional leadership/headquarters |
| *Bezirkstag* | regional parliament |
| *Bezirksvorstand* | regional executive |
| BL           | see *Bezirksleitung* |
| *Block*      | see *Demokratischer Block* |
| BPKK         | *Bezirksparteikontrollkommission*  
regional party control commission |
| BPO          | *Betriebsparteiorganisation*  
workplace party organisation |
<p>| <em>Bundestag</em>  | lower house of parliament (FRG) |
| <em>Bürgermeister</em> | mayor |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich-Demokratische Union</td>
<td>Christian Democratic Union (unless specifically stated, in this thesis reference is being made to the CDU in the GDR rather than the party in the FRG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christliche Kreise</td>
<td>NF association for Christians to promote loyalty to the SED</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ČSSR</td>
<td>German abbreviation for Czechoslovakia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DDP</td>
<td>Deutsche Demokratische Partei</td>
<td>German Democratic Party (Weimar Republic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demokratischer Block</td>
<td>Democratic Bloc (coalition of the GDR parties)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFD</td>
<td>Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands</td>
<td>Democratic Women’s League of Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSF</td>
<td>Gesellschaft für deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft</td>
<td>Society for German-Soviet Friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td>DWK</td>
<td>Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission</td>
<td>German Economics Commission (proto SBZ government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EKD</td>
<td>Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland</td>
<td>Evangelical Church in Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDGB</td>
<td>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</td>
<td>Free German Trades Union League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDJ</td>
<td>Freie Deutsche Jugend</td>
<td>Free German Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gestapo</td>
<td>Geheime Staatspolizei</td>
<td>Secret State Police (Third Reich)</td>
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<tr>
<td>gleichgeschaltet</td>
<td>‘coordinated’ (see Gleichschaltung)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gleichschaltung</td>
<td>'coordination': term often used to describe the coordination of state, political and societal structures with the NSDAP in the Third Reich</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPG</td>
<td>Gärtnersche Produktionsgenossenschaft&lt;br&gt;market gardening production cooperative</td>
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<td>HO</td>
<td>Handelsorganisation&lt;br&gt;(GDR state) Trade Organisation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HSB</td>
<td>Firma mit halbstaatlicher Beteiligung&lt;br&gt;firm with 50% state ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Informeller Mitarbeiter&lt;br&gt;'informal colleague' (informant) of the MfS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junge Gemeinde</td>
<td>informal parish grouping of Protestant youth</td>
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<td>Junge Welt</td>
<td>FDJ newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kampfgruppen</td>
<td>working class 'fighting groups', trained to support SED rule</td>
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<tr>
<td>KL</td>
<td>see Kreisleitung</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPČ</td>
<td>Communist Party of Czechoslovakia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands&lt;br&gt;Communist Party of Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPKK</td>
<td>Kreisparteikontrollkommission&lt;br&gt;district party control commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPO</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Opposition</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kreis (plural Kreise)</td>
<td>district</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kreisleitung (plural Kreisleitungen)</td>
<td>district leadership/headquarters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kreisstadt (plural Kreistädte)</td>
<td>administrative centre of a Kreis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kreistag (plural Kreistage)</td>
<td>district parliament</td>
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KVP  
*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*  
People's Police in barracks  
(paramilitary police, forerunner of the NVA)

*Land* (plural *Länder*)  
province/state  
(SBZ/GDR administrative unit, 1945-1952)

*Landbund*  
Agricultural League (Weimar Republic)

*Landesamt* (plural *Landesämter*)  
provincial/state department (often of a ministry)

*Landesleitung*  
*Land* leadership/headquarters

*Landesvorstand*  
*Land* executive

*Landkreis* (plural *Landkreise*)  
rural district

*Landrat*  
rural district executive (rural equivalent of mayor)

*Landtag*  
provincial/state parliament

*LDPD*  
*Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*  
Liberal Democratic Party of Germany

*LPA*  
*Landesparteiarchiv Thüringen der PDS*  
PDS Thuringian Party Archive

*LPG*  
*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft*  
aricultural production cooperative

*LPKK*  
*Landesparteikontrollkommission*  
regional party control commission

*LV*  
see *Landesvorstand*

*Mdl*  
*Ministerium des Innern*  
Interior Ministry

*MfS*  
*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*  
Ministry for State Security  
(otherwise known as the *Stasi*)

*Ministerpräsident*  
prime minister

*Ministerrat*  
Council of Ministers (GDR cabinet)

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>MTS</td>
<td>Maschinen-Traktoren-Station</td>
<td>agricultural machinery/tractor pool</td>
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<td>Nationale Front</td>
<td></td>
<td>see NF</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
<td>see Neues Deutschland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
<td></td>
<td>SED national newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>Nationale Front des demokratischen Deutschland</td>
<td>National Front of the Democratic Germany (organisation to sponsor GDR 'unity list' election candidates)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKFD</td>
<td>Nationalkomitee »Freies Deutschland«</td>
<td>National Committee 'Free Germany'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKVD</td>
<td>Soviet People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs</td>
<td>(forerunner of the KGB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</td>
<td>National Socialist German Workers' Party (nazi party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVA</td>
<td>Nationale Volksarmee</td>
<td>National People's Army (GDR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWDR</td>
<td>Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk</td>
<td>Northwest German Radio (FRG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberbürgermeister</td>
<td></td>
<td>lord mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberschule</td>
<td></td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberstaatsanwalt</td>
<td></td>
<td>public prosecutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostarbeiter</td>
<td></td>
<td>eastern workers (forcibly imported 'slave workers' in the Third Reich)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostpolitik</td>
<td></td>
<td>'eastern policy': here, the western European policy of building bridges to the socialist states of eastern Europe introduced during the late 1960s/early 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDS</td>
<td>Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus</td>
<td>Party of Democratic Socialism (successor party to the SED, founded 1989/90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pfarrer**

priest/vicar

**Pfarrjugend**

informal parish grouping of Catholic youth

**PGH**

Produktionsgenossenschaft des Handels

commercial production cooperative

**Politbüro**

Politburo

(in practice the highest body of the SED/CPSU)

**POW**

prisoner of war

**Rat des Bezirkes**

regional council

**Rat des Kreises**

district council

**Rat der Stadt**

town council

**RdB**

see *Rat des Bezirkes*

**RdK**

see *Rat des Kreises*

**RdS**

see *Rat der Stadt*

**RE**

religious education

**Reichstag**

lower house of German parliament until 1945

**Republikflucht**

‘fleeing the republic’ (GDR)

**RfIPN**

Rat für landwirtschaftliche Produktion und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft

Council for Agricultural Production and Food Trade

**Rias**

Radio im amerikanischen Sektor

Radio in the American Sector (West Berlin broadcaster)

**SA**

Sturmbteilungen

stormtroopers (NSDAP)

**SBZ**

Sowjetische Besatzungzone

Soviet Zone of Occupation

**SED**

Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SKK  
*Sowjetische Kontrollkommission*
Soviet Control Commission (1949-1953)

SL  
*see Stadtleitung*

SMA(D)/(Th)  
*Sowjetische Militäradministration (Deutschlands)/ (Thüringens)*
Soviet Military Administration (in Germany)/ (in Thuringia)

SPD  
*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
Social Democratic Party of Germany

SS  
*Schutzstaffeln*
‘protective echelons’ (NSDAP)

*Staatsrat*  
Council of State (GDR, 1960-1990)

*Stadtleitung*  
town leadership/headquarters

*Stasi*  
*see MfS*

*Stunde Null*  
‘zero hour’ (Germany in April/May 1945)

ThHStAW  
*Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar*
Thuringian State Archives, Weimar

*Thüringen*  
Thuringia

*Thüringer Tageblatt*  
Thuringian CDU newspaper

*Thüringer Volk*  
Thuringian SED newspaper (1946-1952)

*Torschlußpanik*  
last minute panic (literally: that the doors will close)

TVZ  
*Thüringer Volkszeitung*
Thuringian People’s Newspaper (KPD 1945-6)

*Unionsfreund* (plural, -e)  
‘friend of the Union’ (CDU member)

USPD  
*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (1917-1922)

USSR  
Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VdgB</td>
<td>Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe (Association for Mutual Farmers’ Assistance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEB</td>
<td>Volkseigener Betrieb (People’s Own Firm (nationalised company))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das Volk</td>
<td>Bezirk Erfurt SED newspaper (1952-1990)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Volksaussprache | public debate  
(particularly prior to the adoption of the 1968 constitution) |
| Volksfront | Popular Front |
| Volkskammer | People’s Chamber (GDR parliament) |
| Volkspolizist | people’s policeman |
| Volkssolidarität | People’s Solidarity (GDR charity organisation) |
| Volkssturm | civil defence organisation (Third Reich) |
| VPKA    | Volkspolizei-Kreisamt (district police office) |
| VVN     | Verein der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime) |
| Wehrmacht | German army before 1945 |
| Werwolf | ‘werewolf’ (nazi terrorist groups active after the Third Reich’s defeat) |
| Wende   | ‘change’, term often used to describe autumn 1989 when SED power collapsed |
| WTO     | Warsaw Treaty Organisation |
| Zentralausschüü | Central Committee (SPD, 1945-1946) |
| Zentralkomitee | Central Committee (KPD, SED, CPSU) |
| Zentrum(spartei) | Centre Party (Weimar Republic) |
| ZK      | see Zentralkomitee |
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A note on the archives used:

Since the principal research work for this thesis was completed, the Erfurt archive of the Thuringian PDS (which essentially contained the holdings of the former SED archive for Bezirk Erfurt) has been transferred to the Thuringian state archives in Weimar, where it forms a separate collection. The footnotes in the text and the arrangement of this bibliography reflect the clear distinction between the two archives at the time of my research. Those wishing to consult files of the PDS archive within the Thuringian state archives will find that their arrangement and classification remains unchanged at Weimar.

Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Weimar, ThHStAW:

LAND THÜRINGEN 1945-1952:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Reg.No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amt für Information (Afl)</td>
<td>86, 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Büro des Ministerpräsidenten (BdMP)</td>
<td>228, 229, 233, 238, 271/34, 513, 645, 647, 658, 659, 660, 664, 666-673 [one file], 674, 674/1, 863, 864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landrat Worbis</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landtag (LT)</td>
<td>1, 200-201 [one file]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerium des Innern (MdI)</td>
<td>4, 69, 100, 203, 263, 273, 274, 305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberlandesgericht Weimar (ObLW)</td>
<td>12, 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MINISTERIUM DES INNERN, LANDESBEHÖRDE DER DEUTSCHEN VOLKSPOLIZEI (LdVP)

| Bestand Nr. 5                                    | 18, 19, 96, 386 |
| (cited in footnotes as MdI/5)                    |               |
BEZIRKSTAG/RAT DES BEZIRKES ERFURT 1952-1990

Inneres (I) 127, 262
Jugendfragen (J) 8, 28, 29
Kader (Ka) 133
Kirchenfragen (Ki) 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20, 27, 66.
Organisation-Instrukteur (OI) 108, 109, 271, 272, 273, 274, 940, 941, 942
Sekretär (S) 515, 542, 547
Volksbildung (V) 15, 34, 36, 137, 223, 249
Vorsitzender/Stellvertreter (Vs/St) 335, 336, 493, 517, 534, 545, 571, 577, 596, 656, 701, 707, 708, 712, 713, 734, 900, 917, 918, 919, 1076

MINISTERIUM DES INNERN, BEZIRKSBEHÖRDE DER DEUTSCHEN VOLKSPOLIZEI ERFURT (BDVP)

Bestand Nr. 20
(cited in footnotes as MdI/20) 66, 73
Bestand Nr. 20.1
(cited in footnotes as MdI/20.1) 81, 82, 122, 139, 146, 479, 485

NATIONALE FRONT DER DDR, BEZIRKSSEKRETARIAT ERFURT (NF)
180, 183, 209, 210, 558, 559, 560, 831, 835, 836, 839

Landesvorstand Thüringen der PDS, Landesparteiarchiv Erfurt (now a separate collection within the Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Weimar), L.PA:

KPD collection I/1-001, I/2-002, I/2-005

SED collection:
Landesleitung Thüringen IV/L/2/3-030, IV/L/2/3-031, IV/L/2/3-032, IV/L/2/3-033, IV/L/2/3-034, IV/L/2/3-035, IV/L/2/3-036, IV/L/2/3-037, IV/L/2/3-038, IV/L/2/3-043, IV/L/2/3-045, IV/L/2/3-047, IV/L/2/3-048, IV/L/2/3-051, IV/L/2/3-057, IV/L/2/3-078, IV/L/2/3-079, IV/L/2/3-080; AIV/2/4-119; AIV/2/4-123, AIV/2/4-127; AIV/2/4-139

350
Bezirksleitung Erfurt
IV/2/1-076, IV/2/3-323, IV/2/3-387;
BIV/2/4-48, BIV/2/4-52, BIV/2/4-56,
BIV/2/5-025, BIV/2/5-026, BIV/2/5-027,
BIV/2/5-039, BIV/2/5-041, BIV/2/5-042,
BIV/2/5-050, BIV/2/5-060, BIV/2/5-066,
BIV/2/5-190, BIV/2/5-349, BIV/2/5-383,
BIV/2/7-6, BIV/2/7-24, BIV/2/7-550,
BIV/2/9.01-13, BIV/2/9.01-654, BIV/2/9.02-011,
BIV/2/9.02-021, BIV/2/10-008, BIV/2/12-009,
BIV/2/13-006, BIV/2/13-007, BIV/2/13-008,
BIV/2/13-010, BIV/2/13-725, BIV/2/13-726,
BIV/2/14-002, BIV/2/14-003, BIV/2/14-006,
BIV/2/15-001, BIV/2/15-733, BIV/2/15-734,
BIV/2/15-735, BIV/2/16-017, BIV/2/16-737,
BIV/2/17-006, BIV/2/23-13;
IV/B/2/5-183, IV/B/2/5-190, IV/B/2/7-247,
IV/B/2/15-407, IV/B/2/15-410

Kreisleitung Gotha
IV/4.05/122, IV/4.05/123

Kreisleitung Heiligenstadt
IV/4.06/095, IV/4.06/096, IV/4.06/108,
IV/4.06/116, IV/4.06/120, IV/4.06/121,
IV/4.06/122, IV/4.06/131, IV/4.06/144,
IV/4.06/145, IV/4.06/149, IV/4.06/150,
IV/4.06/162;
IVA/4.06/140;
IV/B/4.06/002, IV/B/4.06/100, IV/B/4.06/101,
IV/B/4.06/117, IV/B/4.06/119, IV/B/4.06/216,
IV/B/4.06/218

Kreisleitung Bad Langensalza
IV/4.07/197, IV/4.07/198

Kreisleitung Mühlhausen
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Kreisleitung Nordhausen
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Kreisleitung Sömmerda
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Kreisleitung Sondershausen
IV/4.11/263, IV/4.11/266, IV/4.11/268

Kreisleitung Weimar
IV/4.12/206, IV/4.12/207

Stadtleitung Weimar
IV/4.12/1-227, IV/4.12/1-228

Kreisleitung Worbs

351
Stadtleitung Erfurt

IV/5.01/137, IV/5.01/144, IV/5.01/145, IV/5.01/167

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V/1/55, V/1/78, V/1/133, V/1/139

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Nachlaß August Frölich

V/6/5-048

Nachlaß Heinrich Hoffmann

V/6/6-15, V/6/6-16, V/6/6-29, V/6/6-30

Nachlaß Georg Schneider

V/6/14-002, V/6/14-003

Nachlaß Adolf Helbing

V/6/19-002

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