

Chapter 11

# Producing the ‘Socialist Personality’? Socialisation, Education, and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behaviour

Angela Brock



This essay focuses on the ways in which two decades of socialisation in the education system of the GDR left their mark on young people growing up there from the late 1950s to the late 1970s.<sup>1</sup> It centres on the enigmatic concept of an ‘all-round developed socialist personality’, the ubiquitous formula of the SED used to describe its supreme aim and ideal: a new kind of human being endowed with impeccable traits of character on whose ardent socialist convictions rest the fate and future of socialist society.

What makes a personality in the first place? No man is an island, but lives within the framework of society. Children are born into ‘the smallest cell of society’,<sup>2</sup> the family, and initially tend to adopt their parents’ values, views, and behaviour. Growing up, however, other influences come into their lives: playground friends, kindergarten, school, first loves, first job. As the child passes through adolescence into adulthood, these influences are likely at first to rival, then to complement parental influences. This immediate social framework plus other aspects such as traditional morality, politics or culture surrounding them make up a unique cocktail of formative influences

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1. Angela Brock, The making of the socialist personality—education and socialisation in the German Democratic Republic 1958–71978 (unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2005).

2. This was the view prevalent in the GDR. Cf. *Familiengesetzbuch der DDR vom 20.12.1965* (Berlin, Staatsverlag der DDR 1970, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.), preamble, p. 13.

which, in addition to any innate character, give each human being his or her distinctive 'personality'. The flavour of this cocktail depends strongly on the kind of society into which one is born. In the socialist society of the GDR, the SED strove to be the greatest influence and attempted to shape young people's personalities by impressing upon them particular convictions and principles using the comprehensive education system, with the aim that they adopt these as their own.

This essay first introduces the concept of the 'socialist personality' within the GDR education system and then examines the extent to which it had any effect on young people for selected areas, focusing on the 1960s and 1970s, which, compared to the previous and following decade, were the calm and stable middle years of the GDR.

## The Evolution of the 'Socialist Personality' Made in GDR

Whilst the idea of a 'socialist' personality originated with Marx and Engels, there were a number of historical precursors in classical antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment that were seen as exemplary and progressive by the SED.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite paying tribute to these earlier ideals, GDR historiography emphasised that these had to remain exceptions in their own time, and concluded that 'only under the societal conditions of socialism can a personality fully and consistently blossom.'<sup>4</sup> This was related to the Marxist 'idea of a human being' (*Menschenbild*), which maintained that the future society of socialism and ultimately communism would yield a new type of human being who would possess the following characteristics: communist awareness, highest all-round education, constructiveness, harmony with society and fellow human beings, moral perfection, material wealth, and stable happiness.<sup>5</sup> The thoughts of Marx and Engels on education are widely scattered over their complete works,<sup>6</sup> but their central ideas may be summarised as follows: all children should benefit from free full-time education; educational privileges should be abolished and education made

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3. Cf. Johannes Irmscher, ed., *Das Ideal der allseitig entwickelten Persönlichkeit—seine Entstehung und sozialistische Verwirklichung*, Winkelmann Society Papers, vol. 2 (Berlin, Akademic-Verlag 1976).

4. Friedmar Kühnert, 'Zur Entstehung des Ideals der allseitig entwickelten Persönlichkeit im griechisch-römischen Altertum', in *ibid.*, pp. 9–15, here p. 15.

5. Cf. Michael Beintker, 'Marxistisches Menschenbild', in Rainer Eppelmann et al., eds., *Lexikon des DDR-Sozialismus. Das Staats- und Gesellschaftssystem der DDR* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1997), pp. 537–43, here p. 539f.

6. For an overview, see Siegfried Baske, 'Bildung und Erziehung bei Karl Marx und das Bildungssystem der DDR', in Konrad Löw, ed., *Karl Marx und das politische System der DDR* (Asperg, Meyn 1982), pp. 75–94.

accessible to all members of society; education should guarantee free all-round development and combine academic learning and physical education with productive work (polytechnic education); and finally, education should be free of the influence of religion and the state. When comparing these demands with the GDR education system, it is striking how much the latter stayed faithful to these principles, except in one notable point, the non-intervention of the state. The East German model of the ‘socialist personality’ was also influenced by Soviet pedagogy, especially that of Nadeshda Krupskaya and Anton S. Makarenko, where more attention was paid to shaping the personality on its path to future completeness and less to proclamations of having achieved this perfect all-round personality already, as was the case in the GDR of the 1970s.

After twelve years of fascist ideology, the watchword in 1945 (in both East and West) was ‘New Germany—New People’. Those Germans who happened to live in the Soviet Zone of Occupation were immediately exposed to a radically different ideology. The *homo sovieticus* supposedly existing in the Soviet Union served as the model for the new human being that was needed to build the new society. The main demands for the new personality were inextricably linked to the practical needs of moral and economic reconstruction of the time. These were above all: overcoming the fascist legacy left behind in people’s minds; the implementation of anti-fascist thinking; as well as fighting the economic problems of the black market and encouraging the work ethic.<sup>7</sup> During the phase of the anti-fascist and democratic school reform (1945–1949), discussions on the merits of the ‘new human being’ (not yet the ‘socialist personality’) outside pedagogical circles were rare. Instead, the educational aim of the ‘new democratic school’ was ‘to prepare our children and young people for a life in which they must be Hennecke activists’, and to educate them to become adults ‘who build up an anti-fascist-democratic order.’<sup>8</sup>

The actual term ‘socialist personality’ was coined during the second phase of the GDR school system, the ‘establishment of the socialist school’ (1949–1961), in connection with the SED’s proclamation of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* (establishing socialism). From then onwards, education in school had the objective of forming ‘socialist personalities’. At the 5<sup>th</sup> SED Party Congress in 1958, questions of ideology, morale, and personality finally took centre stage.

7. Cf. Irma Hanke, ‘Vom neuen Menschen zur sozialistischen Persönlichkeit. Zum Menschenbild der SED’ in *Deutschland Archiv*, May 1976 (9): 492–515, here p. 494.

8. Paper by ‘Kollege Siebert’, ‘Zur Konkretisierung des Erziehungsideals’, 15 February 1949, in Gert Geißler, Falk Blask, Thomas Scholze, eds., *Schule: Streng vertraulich! Die Volksbildung der DDR in Dokumenten*, vol. 1 (Berlin, Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, Basisdruck 1996), pp. 104f. NB: Adolf Hennecke (1905–1975) was a collier and initiated the GDR’s activists’ movement in 1948.

The party leadership did not own up to the fact that a socialist worldview had not yet gained currency on the desired massive scale. Instead, it was claimed that 'new societal relations between people and a new morale' had already developed.<sup>9</sup> In order to promulgate this new morale, the party leadership attempted for the first time to formulate default standards for the population's behaviour. Walter Ulbricht announced the 'Ten Commandments for the new socialist human being', intended to give shape to the moral countenance of GDR citizens. These moral values were very typical of the 1950s (not only in the GDR, but also in Adenauer's FRG), with their focus on strengthening the young fatherland, encouraging the workforce to greater productivity and continuing to stress 'good' Prussian values such as cleanliness and decency. They further purported that in socialism, personal and societal interests were identical. Those who might not have agreed with these guidelines must consequently have been opposed to socialism. For the rest, abiding by these commandments was meant to create pride in belonging to a morally superior community. From the end of the 1950s, the term 'socialist community' (*sozialistische Gemeinschaft*) began to make frequent appearances in the media and politicians' speeches. Initially it described work teams, but it was more and more employed as a reference to the whole of society, which was supposedly made up of socialist personalities. During the 5<sup>th</sup> SED congress, the party leadership also explained for the first time in somewhat more detail what the anticipated result of socialist education should be: an all-round developed personality of high theoretical and artistic general education, showing combative activity and being capable of acting in a collective and comradesly manner, harbouring a scientific worldview, and a high moral view of life.<sup>10</sup> Two of the busier years of innovations and issuing guidelines concerning the education system were 1958 and 1959, with the introduction of compulsory polytechnic instruction in September 1958 and the 'Law on the socialist development of the school system' (*Schulgesetz*) of 2 December 1959, which cemented the school's Marxist-Leninist orientation and increased compulsory schooling from eight to ten years.

The third phase of the school system (1961–1989) was until the mid 1960s characterised by vacillating education policies and experiments, but stabilised in the wake of the Act on the Integrated Socialist Education System (*Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungssystem*), which was passed on 25 February 1965 and remained in force until 1989. A further stabilising factor was the appointment of Margot Honecker as Education Secretary in 1963, a post she held until November 1989. The Education Act laid

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9. Monika Gibas, *Propaganda in der DDR* (Erfurt, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen 2000), p. 47.

10. Gibas, *Propaganda*, p. 47.

down moral and idealistic demands as well as the tasks and functions of all state-run educational institutions. The most famous of all definitions of the ‘socialist personality’ was stated in the first paragraph: ‘The aim of the integrated socialist education system is the high education of the whole people, the education and socialisation of all-round and harmoniously developed socialist personalities, who consciously shape societal life, change nature and lead a fulfilled, happy, humanely dignified life.’<sup>11</sup> In the 1960s, the notion of a ‘socialist personality’ was conceived more as a tool that helped mould society into the required socialist shape, rather than as the paragon of socialist morality that it had been in the 1950s. In the wake of the leadership change from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971, the focus moved away from community and social order to the ‘socialist way of life’ (*sozialistische Lebensweise*) led by ‘socialist personalities’, whose main attribute was now regarded to be ‘socialist awareness’ or ‘socialist consciousness’ (*sozialistisches Bewußtsein*). At the 8<sup>th</sup> SED Party Congress, Erich Honecker named the formation of the socialist personality as the party’s principal task of shaping societal order. He gave a much quoted new point of view of this creature:

One of the noblest aims  
And one of the greatest achievements  
Of socialist society  
Is the all-round developed socialist personality.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid 1970s, it was proclaimed that East Germans had by now developed socialist attitudes such as collectivity, congruity of interests between society and individual as well as the change from the attitude ‘this does not concern me’ to the new principle ‘I am responsible for everything’.<sup>13</sup> The new Youth Law of 1974 evoked once more young people’s connection with socialism and the fatherland.

The focus on ideology within education continued into the fourth and last decade of the GDR. Behind a façade of official détente and international recognition, the atmosphere inside the country was one of increasing stagnation; and the inner stability of the regime began slowly and almost

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11. Kanzlei des Staatsrates der DDR, ed., *Materialien der 12. Sitzung der Volkskammer der DDR und das Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungswesen*, Heft 5 (Berlin, 1965) [henceforth *Bildungsgesetz*], pp. 83–133, here part 1, § 1, p. 88.

12. ‘Ergebnisse und Probleme bei der weiteren Durchführung der schulpolitischen Beschlüsse des VIII. Parteitagés’ (March 1975), Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin [henceforth SAPMO-BArch] DY30/IVB2/9.05/60.

13. Maria Elisabeth Müller, *Zwischen Ritual und Alltag: der Traum von einer sozialistischen Persönlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main & New York, Campus Verlag 1997), p. 35.

imperceptibly to crumble. Party and Pedagogical Congresses had nothing new to suggest on the achievement of the socialist personality and the education system. As the years progressed and the gap between the 'superior socialist camp' and the 'doomed-to-fail capitalist world' widened (in what was for the GDR the wrong direction), notably as far as economic success and living standards were concerned, it became ever harder for the propagandists of the regime to mould young people into the desired socialist shape. In 1974, the GDR's chief pedagogue Gerhart Neuner had declared that 'Wishful thinking of any kind is alien to Marxism-Leninism. The method of dialectical materialism demands a *concrete analysis of the actual societal processes*, which determine today's personality development.'<sup>14</sup> It seems that wishful thinking was exactly what the regime was doing: giving the outward impression that society's development was going to plan, whilst the numerous commissioned 'concrete analyses' in *Stasi* (State Security service) reports told a different story. The rigidity of the old guard and the ossified state apparatus meant that the necessary conclusions were not drawn from the reports and that eventually the old guard had to pay the price.

## End Product 'Socialist Personality'?

This essay does not aspire to show all of the possible facets of new patterns of behaviour that emerged as a result of socialist education. Rather, it wishes to examine the social history of the GDR as a history of mentalities (*Mentalitätsgeschichte*).<sup>15</sup> Trying to ascertain the effects of the education system on those growing up within its realms, however, means entering a highly controversial and difficult terrain. It means being faced with two problems: on the one hand, it is ultimately impossible to prove what went on in people's minds, since the majority of the East German population did not keep trustworthy diaries now available to historians. Thus, the suspicion that historiography reserves for studies that draw on surveys commissioned by and reports written for the SED as well as oral history interviews conducted retrospectively is understandable. On the other hand, it is very difficult to say how *the* education affected *the* young generation, given that every single East German experienced *the* GDR differently, lived his or her own life in a unique set of circumstances, and hence now holds different memories of the

14. (emphasis in the original). Wolfgang Eichler in Evemarie Badstübner, ed., *Befremdlich anders. Leben in der DDR*, 3d ed. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag 2004), pp. 552–75, here p. 568.

15. See Peter Schöttler, 'Mentalitäten, Ideologien, Diskurse. Zur sozialgeschichtlichen Thematisierung der dritten Ebene', in Alf Lüdtke, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt/Main & New York, Campus Verlag 1989), pp. 85–136.

GDR. It is indisputable that these experiences ranged the full gamut from carefree happiness to outright terror. These different realities of life in the GDR must not be forgotten. One must ask however, how reasonable a goal it is to give a true account that would satisfy everybody? Perhaps a more attainable goal would be to provide a new account that redresses certain imbalances of those preceding accounts by seeking to include alternative sources and thus being able to derive from a combination of facts and figures general conclusions that respect individual experiences.

Historians of the GDR cannot ignore sources such as the studies carried out by the ZIJ (Central Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig), MfV (Ministry for People's Education), and MfS (Ministry for State Security) files reporting on current moods and trends, oral history interviews, and contemporary literature.<sup>16</sup> Focussing exclusively on 'official' sources, for example, party decrees and resolutions, such as the proponents of a totalitarian view of the GDR often do, gives a crooked likeness of what life in the GDR was like for its population. In order to assess the changes in young people's mentality from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, I have drawn extensively on the above sources, and enhanced them by additional sources. Individual experiences were reflected in over forty detailed sets of answers to an in-depth questionnaire by people who experienced the education system during this period, be it as kindergarten children, pupils, parents, teachers or functionaries. Of course, forty partial stories do not prove anything, but the choice of my interviewees was made so as to guarantee a wide variety of regional origins, social, professional and age backgrounds, and political orientation, however, with all of them sharing the experience of the GDR's unified school system, which turned out not to be so unified after all. In the following, the effects of socialist education on young people are presented within five pivotal areas where new patterns of behaviour emerged.

### *The Foundation Stone of Civic Education: Anti-fascism*

Anti-fascism was an essential characteristic of a 'socialist personality'. It was the foundation stone on which the GDR was established, distinguishing it from the FRG and also representing a genuine desire to break with the national socialist past. By reference to the historical legacy of the anti-fascists, the SED leadership was able to stabilise the GDR and to legitimise their monopoly on power, not least because the biographies of the political leadership showed them to have been active anti-fascists and victims

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16. ZIJ = Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung; MfV = Ministerium für Volksbildung; MfS = Ministerium für Staatssicherheit.

of Nazi terror. Anti-fascism was particularly prevalent in education in the early decades, but never ceased to be a major cornerstone of the curriculum and inculcation in mass organisations.

Children were susceptible to the stories of unfaltering anti-fascist heroes, led by the air-brushed and very popular Ernst Thälmann, whose life and works were presented without any complexities and whom they affectionately called by his nickname 'Teddy'.<sup>17</sup> Anti-fascists were presented as intelligent, crafty, upright, partisan, altruistic, and fond of children. The powerful narrative of anti-fascism also struck an emotional chord with teenagers. Acquainting themselves with the sufferings and merits of anti-fascists by visiting former concentration camps and meeting real life anti-fascists deepened their attachment. Brigitte F., a primary teacher from Eisenach born in 1954, said, 'During the pioneers' meetings (*Pioniernachmittage*) we heard a lot about Ernst Thälmann and how he fought against fascism. I totally adored him and thought he was ever so brave. Workers veterans were also invited and told us about their struggle against fascism.'<sup>18</sup> This emotional attachment was supported by a wealth of songs, poems, and novels for children and young people about anti-fascists that were part of the school curriculum.<sup>19</sup> Songs in particular did not fail to impress. Dating mostly from the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s, they had as subjects the communists' fight against nascent and reigning Nazism in Germany and fascism in Spain, as well as the Soviet people's help in the anti-fascist struggle. The songs had emotional power that came from combining catchy dramatic tunes with simple, and often rather shocking words telling of bloodshed and historical situations, the meaning of which might have eluded some very young children.

Stories of the predecessors who paved the way for the communist anti-fascists in their battle for a better world such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Rosa Luxemburg were also represented in the literary canon, with the (highly embellished) story of Marx's exile in Britain, *Mohr und die*

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17. See Irma Thälmann, *Erinnerungen an meinen Vater* (Berlin, 1977); Fred Rodrian, *Paul und Jani finden Teddy* (Berlin, Kinderbuchverlag 1978); Ilsgard Gollus, *Teddy und seine Freunde* (Berlin, Junge Welt 1969). On the Thälmann cult and myth in the GDR, see René Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn! Das Thälmann-Bild der SED im Erziehungsalltag der DDR* (Bad Heilbrunn, Klinkhardt 2004); idem, *Ernst Thälmann als Leitfigur der kommunistischen Erziehung in der DDR* (Braunschweig: Universitätsbibliothek Braunschweig 2003); A. Nothnagle, *Building the East German myth. Historical mythology and youth propaganda in the GDR 1945–1989* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press 1999), chap. 3.

18. Brigitte F. questionnaire (8.3.2004). NB : The surnames of my interviewees have been abbreviated to protect their privacy and, where indicated by an asterisk, have been changed completely. The dates in brackets show the date when the responses were received by the author.

19. For example Bruno Apitz, *Nacht unter Wölfen* (Halle, Mitteldeutscher Verlag 1958); Dieter Noll, *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (Berlin, Aufbau Verlag 1960); Anna Seghers, 'Das Duell' in idem, *Die Kraft der Schwachen*. 9 Erzählungen (Berlin, 1994).

*Raben von London*, being a classic.<sup>20</sup> In later years, children's literature also distinguished itself by going beyond the focus on Communists as the only righteous people during the Nazi era by addressing the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> These empathetic works did not feature on reading lists at school, but had to be discovered and digested by the young readers themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Anti-fascists were also omnipresent in young people's environment thanks to the practice of naming schools, holiday camps, streets, factories, youth brigades, awards, and competitions in memory of those resting in the pantheon of resistance fighters (e.g. Arthur Becker, Hans Beimler, Rudolf Breitscheid). The oft-quoted legacy (*Vermächtnis*) of Ernst Thälmann in particular was perceptible throughout young people's life. It was an old tradition: during the Spanish Civil War, two battalions of the International Brigades named themselves after Ernst Thälmann, for example. His name was widely bestowed in the GDR: to the pioneers' organisation, to schools, to pioneer houses, and the 'pioneer palace' in Berlin Wulheide, to so-called 'memorial corners' in schools, to badges and banners for the best pupils, to research assignments for pioneers ('*Thälmanns Namen tragen wir—sei seiner würdig, Pionier!*'),<sup>23</sup> and to annual campaigns such as the *Thälmann-Subbotniks* in August, and naturally to the annual commemorations on 18 August 1944 of the eleven years he spent in solitary confinement and his death in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Erich Honecker in particular saw himself as his successor and liked to point out their similarities, such as the long time spent in jail and their personal fight against Nazism.<sup>24</sup> Under Honecker, the Thälmann myth occupied a much more prominent role in educating the young generations than under Ulbricht. An image that many young people had of Erich Honecker was that of a 'real' old anti-fascist fighter who liked to inspect military parades with his fist risen in the manner of the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* greeting (which was, not surprisingly, known as the *Thälmann-Gruß* in the GDR).

The SED's use of anti-fascism to gain people's allegiance, legitimise itself, and claim moral superiority for the GDR over the Federal Republic has

20. Ilse Korn, Vilmos Korn, *Mohr und die Raben von London* (Berlin, kinderbuchverlag 1962).

21. See for example Gisela Karau, *Der gute Stern des Janusz K.* (Berlin, 1972); Bodo Schulenburg, *Markus und der Golem* (Berlin, verl-Junge Welt 1987).

22. For a list of books 'which deal with the anti-fascist resistance fight, create in readers hate against fascism and neofascism and educate to proletarian internationalism', see 'Empfehlung von Literatur zur Unterstützung der patriotischen Erziehung' (5.10.1961), Bundesarchiv Berlin [henceforth BAArch] DR2/6765.

23. Loosely translates as: 'We carry Thälmann's name—pioneer, be worthy, bring not shame!'. Thus was the slogan for the Pionierauftrag [research assignment] of the Thälmann pioneers in the academic year 1971/72. Cf. 'Schuljahresarbeitsplan 1971/72' (ca. 1971), BAArch DR2/6487.

24. Cf. Thomas Wollschläger, review of René Börrnert, *Ernst Thälmann als Leitfigur* <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2003-3-110>> (accessed 12.8.2005) (page 1).

received a lot of attention by historians.<sup>25</sup> Critics have pointed out the deficiencies of this one-dimensional message glorifying the role of communists and neglecting other opponents of fascism. In the anti-fascist narrative as well as in the context of compensation and acknowledgement as *OdF* (Victims of fascism, *Opfer des Faschismus*), victims of Nazism such as Jews, Roma, and Sinti, disabled people, homosexuals as well as anti-fascist combatants from the ranks of Social Democrats and Christians were all given a subordinate role or completely left out.<sup>26</sup> The role of Stalinism was also written out of history after 1956.<sup>27</sup> The critics also argue that anti-fascism failed to convey its values, having been 'prescribed' from above. This sweeping statement, however, is contradicted by archival evidence. Certainly, there are a number of incidents recorded involving young people who daubed fascist slogans and symbols in their textbooks and on photographs of leading members of the government.<sup>28</sup> What is striking though is that the majority of these actions were not done out of fascist conviction. Instead, the status of anti-fascism as an 'untouchable' or taboo claim was used by young people in various ways: to underline their discontent with the government and political events (e.g., 13 August 1961 and 20 August 1968); to express a more general dissatisfaction with life; to shock their teachers; but often also in an utterly unthinking infantile way with pupils being unaware of the political provocation this daubing represented. The fact that anti-fascism was such a sacred cow for the SED could cause them to overreact to insalubrious but trivial behaviour. A father (and SED member) of a pupil who was relegated from school in 1978 for having shouted anti-Soviet slogans and singing the *Deutschlandlied* whilst drunk and watching a USSR vs. FRG boxing match with friends scoffed: 'Well, chewing chewing gum and wearing jeans are now indicative of fascist attitudes, aren't they?'<sup>29</sup>

25. See for example Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus—ein deutscher Mythos* (Reinbek, 1993); Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich, Bertelsmann Verlag 1993).

26. Cf. Annette Leo, Peter Reif-Spirek, eds., *Vielstimmiges Schweigen. Neue Studien zum DDR-Antifaschismus* (Berlin, Metropol Verlag 2001); Christoph Hölscher, *NS-Verfolgte im 'antifaschistischen Staat'. Vereinnahmung und Ausgrenzung in der ostdeutschen Wiedergutmachung 1945–1989* (Berlin, Christoph Links Verlag 2002). On the treatment of the NS past in the GDR, see also Jurek Becker's novel *Bronsteins Kinder* (Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp Verlag 1986).

27. Christoph Dieckmann, *Das wahre Leben im falschen. Geschichten von ostdeutscher Identität* (Berlin, Christoph Links Verlag 1998), p. 60.

28. See for example 'Kriminalstatistik Jugendlicher 1965–1967' (6.9.1967), Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, Berlin [henceforth BStU] MfS-HA IX 12011 MF; 'Abschlußbericht zur Aktion Jubiläum 30' (10.10.1979), BStU MfS-HA IX 18560, 3.

29. Cf. 'Relegierung von Schülern: Frank B., EOS „Hansa“ Stralsund' (June 1978), BArch DR2/A7361/5.

It is true, however, that anti-fascist education did not immunise everyone against genuine fascist ideas. While the GDR existed, some teenagers gathered in cliques, exalting Nazi leaders and ideas, vilifying the NVA (National People's Army, or *Nationale Volksarmee*) and Red Army and maintaining that fascism also had its 'good sides'.<sup>30</sup> These groupings largely kept to themselves and did not express their viewpoint in violent actions. It was only after the GDR's demise with the concomitant loss of authority and surveillance by the police and Stasi that East German neo-Nazi groups went public and resorted to violence. The attacks on foreigners motivated by racial hatred in the 1990s and, more recently, the success of far-right parties in the Eastern German federal states, are evidence that anti-fascist education in the GDR failed to reach everyone. However, it must not be forgotten that the post-1989 East German neo-Nazis were 'helped along' by right-wing extremist organisations hailing from West Germany, who 'proselytised' in the East and blamed existing problems like unemployment, uncertainty, and a sense of futurelessness on the foreigners now sharing their everyday life.<sup>31</sup> The resulting actions cannot be blamed exclusively on an overdose of anti-fascism in the GDR education system.

So did the education system produce dedicated young anti-fascists? In reports from the 1950s and 1960s, young people often told of their happiness about living in a state that proclaimed itself anti-fascist and their respect for the relatively recent exploits of resistance fighters.<sup>32</sup> By the 1970s and in the 1980s, the overblown and ever-same references to anti-fascists at school had resulted in widespread apathy.<sup>33</sup> The difficulty that young people were faced with was that anti-fascism seemed to be no longer relevant and, in any case, they had no means of proving their genuine commitment as anti-fascists: the Nazi era was long gone, travels to Western states infested with fascists, as they learned in civics classes, were impossible, the People's Police and the MfS kept a very close eye on any nascent fascist sounds coming from inside the GDR, so there was neither any need nor possibility for young people to

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30. See for example 'Bericht aus Halle' (March 1963), SAPMO-BArch DY30/IVA2/9.05/57; 'Information über die Aufklärung einer Gruppierung negativer Jugendlicher an der KJS Güstrow' (6.1.1966), BStU MfS ZAIG-Z 1164; 'Hinweise über gewonnene Erkenntnisse und Erfahrungen bei der operativen Bearbeitung und vorbeugenden Absicherung Jugendlicher des Bezirkes Erfurt' (11.4.1979), BStU Bezirksverwaltung für Staatssicherheit Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Worbis 516.

31. On xenophobia in East Germany, see Damian Mac Con Uladh, *Guests of the socialist nation? Foreign students and workers in the GDR 1949–1989* (unpublished PhD thesis, London, 2005); Jan C. Behrens et al., eds., *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR. Zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin, Metropol Verlag 2003).

32. 'Abschlußbericht der "Umfrage 69"' (ca. 1970), BArch FDJ B 6249.

33. 'Die Herausbildung der sozialistischen Lebensweise bei Schülern in der Freizeit und ihr Einfluß auf die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung' (December 1977), BArch DC4/366.

express their own anti-fascist convictions other than repeating slogans. Over the years, the anti-fascist founding myth had become as ossified as the real life anti-fascists in the Politburo. However, anti-fascism in East German education had real substance and was not just a name. The conviction that anti-fascism is good and fascism a bad thing stayed on in most people's minds, even after its 'prescription' from above had run out.

### ***'The Peace Dove Must Have Claws': Socialist Military Education***

Socialist military education (*Wehrerziehung*) did not begin in 1978 with the introduction of *Wehrkundeunterricht* (WКУ); it was only the last and most controversial insertion of military education into the curriculum. Its beginnings go back to the year 1952, with the militarisation of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* or FDJ (Free German Youth) ordered by Stalin, and the founding of the paramilitary *Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik* or GST (Society for Sports and Technology). The 1960s brought two principal innovations: a clause in the 1965 Education Act which bound all educational institutions to direct education towards the service of national defence<sup>34</sup> and the introduction of the FDJ '*Hans-Beimler-Wettbewerbe*' in 1968, which were annual competitions for pupils of years 8 to 10 involving sporting exercises, first aid, orientation running, and theoretical military knowledge. The 'increasing aggressiveness' of western militarism necessitated the intensification of military education in the 1970s, including the introduction of the *AG Wehrausbildung* for pupils of years 9 and 10 in 1973<sup>35</sup> and a clause in the Youth Law of 1974, obliging young people to gain pre-military knowledge and to serve in the army.<sup>36</sup>

Military education was supposed to instil values such as a sense of responsibility for the defence of socialism, patriotism, vigilance, discipline, courage, resourcefulness, endurance, and determination in young people. The adornment that the SED gave to Picasso's peace dove, 'the peace dove must have claws' (*die Friedenstaube muß auch Krallen haben*), encapsulates the contradiction inherent in the regime's policy of military education: it defined itself as peace-loving and anti-militaristic; but it crammed young people's lives with as many military components as possible. Whether in kindergarten, school or spare time, militaristic forms of organisation, rituals, and education were ubiquitous. The youngest played with 'peace toys', i.e., toy soldiers and tanks. They learned to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' soldiers; the former

34. Bildungsgesetz, § 5, section 2, p. 90.

35. Eng.: After-school club 'Defence Formation'.

36. Verfassung der DDR und Jugendgesetz (Berlin, Staatsverlag der DDR 1988), 14<sup>th</sup> ed., § 24, p. 33.

were there to protect their kindergartens, mum, and dad whilst the latter planned to invade their socialist homeland. At school, the curriculum was peppered with military references in nearly all subjects, from multiplying x-numbers of tanks in maths to throwing fake handgrenades in PE. Familial solidarity was employed when older brothers of pupils visited their school to tell them about the 'Honourable Service' (*Ehrendienst*) with the army (*Nationale Volksarmee*, NVA). Days out meeting NVA soldiers were 'an adventure', or at least 'a welcome change since there would be no school' for pupils, as Petra R.\*, a graphics designer from Berlin born in 1960, remembered,<sup>37</sup> when they wandered around army bases, tried out the scrambling wall and looked at the soldiers' barracks and weapons. Technically minded pupils could subscribe to two magazines dedicated to military topics: *Armeerundschau* (Army Review) and the GST magazine *Sport & Technik* (Sport and Technology). The Pioneer organisation and FDJ organised 'pioneer manoeuvres' that involved orientation with a map and compass, first aid, and sporting exercises. They were very popular with youngsters since they satisfied their sense of adventure and offered campfire romanticism, with Soljanka from the field kitchen (*Gulaschkanone*) fondly remembered by several of my interviewees.

Older pupils, both boys and girls, were encouraged to join the GST, whose principal purpose was to secure long-service recruits for the army and prepare boys for the demands of military life and civil defence. The GST was able to offer a range of adventurous sports such as parachuting, shooting, diving, and radio communications, so it was popular with boys interested in technology and motor mechanics. There is little evidence that the military aspects left any impression: the majority of people most appreciated the opportunity to pass, cheaply or for free, a driving test for various vehicles and even boats. GST camps during the holidays were often simply seen as a pleasant contrast to the daily grind at school, although boys with little sporting ability dreaded the military-style exercises (going through the same emotions when called up for military service in the NVA). It is open to question whether the GST did anything to prepare young people for the defence of the socialist homeland: reports show that ammunition thefts increased following the events of 13 August 1961 and 21 August 1968,<sup>38</sup> whilst in the late 1970s, gliders and aeroplanes were stolen 'in treacherous attempts to leave the GDR'. The three such attempts made in 1979 were successful,<sup>39</sup>

37. Petra R.\* questionnaire (23.4.2004).

38. Cf. 'Abschlußbericht über Ergebnisse der Arbeit der GST 1961' (ca. 1962), SAPMO-BArch DY59/91; 'Einschätzung der besonderen Vorkommnisse im Jahre 1968' (18.2.1969), SAPMO-BArch DY59/136.

39. 'Bericht über besondere Vorkommnisse im Ausbildungsjahr 1978/79' (6.11.1979), SAPMO-BArch DY59/244.

which suggests that, if nothing else, GST training did instil initiative and some technical skills.

The introduction of WKU (military education classes) was hotly debated in the Western press<sup>40</sup> and by the churches in the GDR. Christian parents in particular petitioned for their children's exemption from classes,<sup>41</sup> which in year 9 amounted to about 90 lessons and in year 10 to 26, dedicated to theoretical questions of national defence and practical exercises (mainly shooting and military drill for boys and first aid for girls). The protests were unsuccessful and the SED sought to defuse complaints by pointing out that WKU would enable Christians to practice brotherly love (*Nächstenliebe*) in case of disaster and provide effective help to others in civil defence.<sup>42</sup> The repetitive and shallow rhetoric used in these lessons as well as in civics and FDJ and GST meetings rendered the whole issue of military education unattractive to young people. A fairly typical comment on young people's attitudes is this one dating from 1969: 'The aggressiveness of West German imperialism is often underestimated and the willingness for aggression of the *Bundeswehr* soldiers is often trivialised (*verniedlicht*)'.<sup>43</sup> Familial ties to the Federal Republic proved to be stronger than the negative propaganda about West German soldiers. Similarly, the notion of internationalism and brotherly feelings amongst people from the socialist camp still had a long way to go, as this highly symbolic incident recorded in July 1968 shows:

Students from Potsdam were violently threatened in a restaurant in Senec (USSR) by a group of male Czechs, because they were thought to be Soviet citizens. When the students revealed themselves to be from the GDR, the Czechs did the fascist greeting and sang the *Deutschlandlied*.<sup>44</sup>

Also, the more the SED painted the picture of a smartly shaven young man in uniform as the paragon of virtue, the more uncool this sort of personality was for teenage boys, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, when youth culture made it cool to have the longest possible hair and the scruffiest of clothes. It took great courage to refuse any aspect of military education and expose oneself to accusations of being hostile to the state and to peace. Surely, this argument was unanswerable. Consequences of such refusal

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40. Newspaper articles relating to military education in the GDR from 1976 to 1979 are collected in BStU MfS ZAIG 8844 and BStU MfS ZAIG 8845.

41. 'Einschätzung der Eingaben gegen bzw. zur Einführung und Gestaltung des Wehrunterrichts' (1978), BStU MfS-HA XX 4269, 74–101.

42. Ibid.

43. 'Abschlußeinschätzung der wehrpolitischen und wehrsportlichen Aktion "Signal 20"' (19.6.1969), BArch DY30/IVA2/12/167.

44. 'Informationsbericht' (1.8.1968), BArch DY30/IVA2/12/24.

depended on individual circumstances, but ranged from non-admittance to or relegation from the EOS to imprisonment for pacifists who did not take up the concession to serve as ‘spade’ or ‘construction’ soldiers (available from 1964), but refused military service outright.<sup>45</sup>

The introduction of compulsory military aspects into young people’s lives, notably conscription in 1962 and the WKU, was met without enthusiasm and some hostility by the majority of those whom it affected. In 1962, opinions voiced were, for example, ‘Now the national hymn has to be changed since it says there “No mother shall mourn her son ever again”’, or the question, ‘Why was conscription only introduced after the 13 August; if this had been done earlier, all young men would have bunked off to the West.’<sup>46</sup> The shocked reaction by a considerable number of young people, and to a lesser extent also by teachers, to the intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 also showed their disappointment at the way the dream of a ‘socialism without tanks’, as the dramatist Heiner Müller called it, had died.<sup>47</sup> In 1978, pupils and parents questioned mostly the regime’s credibility with regard to its much-vaunted policy of peace and détente, and the necessity to add yet another form of military education: ‘The GDR needs skilled workers, not soldiers.’<sup>48</sup>

By the late 1970s, young people were tired of educators clinging on to the old friend-foe way of thinking that disregarded the rapprochement between the two ideological camps. ZIJ studies undertaken in the late 1970s and 1980s underlined their satiation with small calibre shooting, military sports, and socialist national defence. Whilst in 1978, (only) 39 percent of 15- and 16-year olds had vouched their ‘willingness to defend the GDR risking my life’, 48 percent would do so ‘with reservations’, 10 percent ‘hardly’, and 3 percent ‘not at all’; for 1988, the corresponding percentages were 18, 39, 25, and 18 percent.<sup>49</sup> Contrary to the image presented in children’s books and songs, obligatory military service was mostly viewed as an unwelcome interruption in one’s life rather than ‘Honourable Service’. Those wanting to make a career in the NVA

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45. Between 1962 and 1989, the total number of conscientious objectors amounted to only ca. 6000. Cf. Bernd Eisenfeld, ‘Wehrdienstverweigerung als Opposition’, in Klaus-Dietmar Henke et al., eds., *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR* (Cologne, Böhlman Verlag 1999), pp. 241–50, here p. 242.

46. ‘Bericht aus Dresden’ (January 1962), Barch DR2/6966.

47. Reports and statistics on young people daubing slogans and producing pamphlets against the ‘supporting measures’ of the socialist states can be found in BStU MfS-HA IX 2670; BStU MfS-HA XX/AKD 804; BStU Bezirksverwaltung für Staatssicherheit Cottbus, AKG 026.

48. ‘Stand der Vorbereitung der Einführung des Wehrunterrichtes ab Schuljahr 1978/79’ (28.6.1978), BStU MfS-HA XX 3879.

49. Peter Förster, ‘Die Entwicklung des politischen Bewußtseins der DDR-Jugend zwischen 1966 und 1989’, in Walter Friedrich et al., eds., *Das Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung Leipzig 1966–1990* (Berlin, Edition ost 1999), pp. 71–165, here p. 155.

were not highly regarded by their classmates. The jingle referring to school grades and future prospects, '*Ob Eins oder Vier, wir werden Offizier*',<sup>50</sup> implied that high academic achievement was not required. Increasingly, career soldiers came from families where the father was already a member of the forces.

It is proper for any state to inform its young people on national defence policy and to motivate them to serve their country as soldiers. This was not only the case in socialist countries; the United Kingdom has the Cadet Force and the USA the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps. It is however morally wrong to use an ideological 'concept of the enemy' (*Feindbild*) as the core of the motivation, as was the case in the GDR. Most young people felt this instinctively. They saw no need for the peace dove to have claws; their *Feindbild* was an abstract one, since they had been lucky enough not to experience war, unlike the anti-fascist elders who had been responsible for setting up the system of military education. Ultimately, the attempts to motivate the youth of the GDR to defend their country were futile.

### *Educational Aspects of Changes in the Class System*

Whilst the primary aim of education in the GDR was to produce all-round developed socialist personalities, it had another role to play in changing society, and that was to ensure that the vestiges of the capitalist class system did not perpetuate themselves. It was not thought desirable that the children of aristocrats should all aspire to be good socialist diplomats and those of the bourgeoisie to aspire to good socialist doctors or planners, whilst the children of working class parents limited themselves to becoming factory workers, even if the pay was the same (which it was not, see below). With the end of inherited legal privilege, political control, and industrial control, there was officially no class system in the GDR, only class enemies, although objective observers using more subtle definitions than Marx's would have had no difficulty discerning one.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not the classes themselves could be said to still exist was a point of argument. For practical purposes, i.e., positive discrimination, they did, in a strictly non-hierarchical way: workers, peasants, intelligentsia, white-collar, or 'miscellaneous' (*Sonstige*)<sup>52</sup> was written

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50. 'Whether [we get] an A or a D, we will become officers.' From the questionnaire by Erika P., a teacher from Erfurt born in 1932 (10.5.2004).

51. For a statistical overview, see Siegfried Grundmann, 'Zur Sozialstruktur der DDR', in Badstübner, *Befremdlich anders*, pp. 20–62.

52. The classification of white collar workers [Angestellte] was changeable; sometimes they formed their own category, sometimes they were part of 'Sonstige', but they were never counted as workers as this meant primarily industrial workers. 'Sonstige' included the few remaining 'capitalists' in the GDR, for instance, those who were self-employed, private entrepreneurs, tax advisors,

after each pupil's name in the school register to record the circumstances of the parents. But Ulbricht's '*sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft*' was basically considered a classless society, whilst under Honecker it was decided that, although class antagonisms had become smaller, classes as such still persisted: 'Although it is necessary to stress the similarities between classes and the stage of socialist circumstances reached, it is also important not to underestimate or obliterate the existing social differences.'<sup>53</sup>

It was the task of the educational establishment to work towards diluting these differences, and its aspirations were to a large extent laudable. The first twenty years after 1945 were a period marked by genuine concern and success in opening up education to the formerly disadvantaged social classes of workers and peasants by introducing a free, unitary school system that did not depend on parental wealth. During this period in particular, *Arbeiter-und-Bauernkinder* (children of workers and peasants) enjoyed positive discrimination, regardless of whether they actually wanted to climb the academic ladder or not. In the mid to late 1960s however, the effect diminished because a part of the first generation who had benefited were now the socialist intelligentsia and were not happy that their children should be discriminated against with regard to further education. The SED's simple solution to this problem was to extend the definition of 'workers' to such an extent that it included nearly everyone, from true industrial workers to functionaries and policemen. Whether one sees this as a sign of success (children all had the same opportunities), or failure (a new class asserting itself), it is a fact that, from the 1970s onwards, social origins played less of a role.

The ZIJ conducted several surveys on the influence of social origins on the formation of the socialist personality. Empirical data indicated that socialisation instances outside school, primarily the parental home, still decisively influenced the formation of young people's personalities. For example, children of SED party members, functionaries, and teachers 'judged ideologically much more positively than children of non-party parents'; and female students whose mothers were housewives had more 'conventional' ideas regarding family and the status of women in society.<sup>54</sup> Higher educated men chose higher educated women (and vice versa) who would then reproduce children with above-average academic results due to parental

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and those working within the Churches. Cf. 'Über die soziale Einstufung der Schüler' (ca. 1961), BArch DR2/6343.

53. Cf. Kurt Hager, *Der IX. Parteitag und die Gesellschaftswissenschaften*. Rede auf der Konferenz der Gesellschaftswissenschaftler der DDR am 25. und 26. November 1976 in Berlin (Berlin, Dietz Verlag 1976), p. 42.

54. 'Zur Persönlichkeitsentwicklung sozialistischer Studenten' (13.3.1975), BArch Bibliothek FDJ/1475, p. 28.

enthusiasm for learning. A corresponding pattern was noted for academic low achievers.<sup>55</sup> A study from 1975, which claimed to be representative for the overall age group of between 17 and 25 years, established that social origins still had a considerable influence on the thinking and attitudes of young people.<sup>56</sup> Those with a working class background were less likely to be influenced by their parents in issues relating to politics and ethics than those having intelligentsia origins.<sup>57</sup> Social origins also influenced the way young people chose to spend their spare time. Those with an intelligentsia background were less interested in owning a motorbike; more interested in a hi-fi unit than a tape recorder; more interested in spending their holidays abroad and camping compared to those with a working class background. Young people with a peasant background were not at all interested in owning cine or photographic equipment.<sup>58</sup> Those with an intelligentsia background were more atheistic and strove more towards a leadership position compared to those from workers' and peasants' families. On the subject of their willingness to defend the country, they showed the least disposition and 'a greater discrepancy between vague agreement (word) and concrete (deed) than young workers'.<sup>59</sup>

This supports my contention that those wanting to get ahead in the GDR were more likely to play to the tune of the party than to believe wholeheartedly. Working class children were often more honest with themselves and their environment when it came to ideological guidelines. Asked what he understood by the term 'socialist personality', one of my interviewees, Steffen S., an electrician from Spröttau near Erfurt born in 1966, from a true working class home with an electrician father and a postwoman mother, said: 'On leaving school you were a personality when you had something that others needed in this economy of scarcity. I became an electrician and my moonlighting was sought-after. Flag-carrying on Labour Day was not important in whether or not one was appreciated in society.'<sup>60</sup>

For all of its faults, the GDR was not a society riven by class antagonisms. According to the ZIJ, this was a consequence of the public ownership of the means of production,<sup>61</sup> but even if workers did not feel similar to the

55. 'Forschungsbericht "Schüler in Spezialzirkeln"' (June 1979), BArch DC4/368, p. 13.

56. 'Parlamentsstudie 1975. Zusatzbericht: "Zum Einfluß der sozialen Herkunft"' (June 1977), BArch Bibliothek FDJ/6283.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. Steffen S. questionnaire (18.3.2004).

61. Cf. 'Parlamentsstudie 1975. Zusatzbericht: "Zum Einfluß der sozialen Herkunft"' (June 1977), BArch Bibliothek FDJ/6283, p. 20.

managers of their factory, they did at least feel that inequality was being redressed. This was due to various factors. First, the gap between wages was much reduced; the ratio between the lowest and highest salary within an industry or profession was about 1:3.<sup>62</sup> Second, the consequence of the socialist housing policy was that people of all social backgrounds and with differing financial resources lived as neighbours in the *Plattenbauten* (pre-fabricated high-rise buildings). Third, the economy of scarcity meant that status symbols were limited; there were only two sorts of car, for example. And lastly, the education system was a major contributor to the great social mobility in the GDR by enabling children from any social background to make their way in society, so long as they ‘played by the rules’.

### ***Working for Society: Polytechnic Education***

In accordance with the Marxist emphasis on production, the education system had always taken care not only to develop pupils’ intellectual abilities, but also their practical ones. In the lower years, this was done through elementary courses in woodwork and metal work, gardening, and needlework. In 1958, following the example of the Soviet Union, polytechnic education lessons in the form of the ‘*Unterrichtstag in der Produktion*’ (UTP, Education Day in Production) were introduced into the curriculum. Every other week, pupils in years 7 to 12 had theoretical instruction lessons (*Einführung in die sozialistische Produktion*, ESP), technical drawing (*Technisches Zeichnen*, TZ) and a course of practical work in production (*Produktive Arbeit*, PA). UTP was intended to strengthen the bond between academic learning and the world of work, to familiarise pupils with the economic basics of socialist production, and to promote work-related virtues of a socialist personality, i.e., ‘a socialist attitude towards labour through close contacts between pupils and the teams of working people and through independent, responsible execution of production tasks’.<sup>63</sup> The contents differed according to geographical location, so pupils in industrial areas had their polytechnic lessons in local factories whereas pupils from rural areas went to their local LPG and MTS and learned about animal husbandry and agriculture as well as agricultural machinery.<sup>64</sup>

During an experimental phase unique in German educational history between 1962 and 1966, EOS pupils studying for their *Abitur* also

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62. Cf. Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin, Aufbau Verlag 1999), p. 179.

63. Bildungsgesetz, part 4, § 16, p. 99.

64. LPG = Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft [agricultural collective]; MTS = Maschinen-Traktoren-Station [tractor deposit].

received full vocational training. The 'class enemy' commented on this development 'These young people will become either bad sixth-formers, bad skilled workers, or probably both.'<sup>65</sup> Maybe the *Bonner Rundschau* was right because the idea was abandoned when it became obvious that the demands were too great intellectually and physically and contradicted the Education Act, which stated that the EOS was there to prepare pupils for university education.<sup>66</sup> 'To expect them to qualify as lorry-drivers or post-office technicians, when none of them is likely to pursue these occupations, is an over-generous interpretation of the principle of "linking the school with life".'<sup>67</sup> After this defeat, a subject called 'scientific-practical work' (*Wissenschaftlich-praktische Arbeit*, WPA) was introduced for EOS pupils in 1969, which continued polytechnic instruction but, as the name suggests, focused on introducing pupils to scientific research methods as a preparation for their further studies.

Meanwhile in the POS, UTP received both criticism and compliments. Comments made by parents at the time of its introduction illustrate that traditional notions with regard to girls' education still existed in the late 1950s and early 1960s: there were demands for a differentiation between polytechnic education for boys and girls ('Where are needlework classes for the girls? This is more important for them than metalwork.').<sup>68</sup> and calls for the inclusion of home economics and baby care into the curriculum.<sup>69</sup> Polytechnic instruction had a bad press in the Federal Republic initially, as the title of a lurid article in the *Berliner Morgenpost* from 1959 indicates: 'They have to toil in the kolkhoz "Dawn"—Children from East Berlin know no holiday bliss—Pupils must fulfil utopian plans—Dearth of workers in the Zone sees a return to 19<sup>th</sup> century practices.'<sup>70</sup> The western view of polytechnic education as inhumane child labour had moderated by the mid 1960s and changed to an attentive observation of the theoretical and practical implementation of the Marxist idea.<sup>71</sup> It was internationally recognised that, perhaps, this new ap-

65. 'Argumentationen in der Westpresse und NATO-Sendern zur Einführung der Berufsausbildung an den EOS' (5.12.1962), BArch DR2/6630.

66. Bildungsgesetz, part 4, § 21, p. 104.

67. Nigel Grant, *Society, Schools and Progress in Eastern Europe* (Oxford, Pergamon Press 1969), p. 221.

68. 'Stand der Diskussion über die neue Schulordnung' (24.12.1959), Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar [henceforth ThHStAW], Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, V02.

69. 'Beschwerdeanalyse Abt. Oberschulen 1.1. bis 15.6.1961' (19.6.1961), BArch DR2/6829.

70. 'Zeitungsausschnitte ("Lügenpropaganda") des VEB Zeitungsausschnittdienstes Globus', here: *Berliner Morgenpost* (6.8.1959), SAPMO-BArch DY25/1946.

71. Subject to revision: Writing in 2002, John Rodden, for example, described the GDR's polytechnic school system as 'a faceless, hulking, centralised bureaucracy mired in inefficiency and incompetence'. John Rodden, *Repainting the little red schoolhouse. A history of Eastern German Education 1945–1995* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2002), p. 15.

proach was the way forward in a ‘technological age’,<sup>72</sup> and the GDR was seen to be in the vanguard of polytechnic education in the eastern bloc.<sup>73</sup> So much as far as theory was concerned. For those on the receiving end of UTP, it was experienced primarily as a welcome and mildly exciting break from sitting on the school bench and was inevitably subject to the law of unintended consequences. Regine H., an actress from Weimar born in 1951, said:

UTP was for us pupils hardly inspiring, but we learned to work with different materials, to make something with our hands, and perhaps also unconsciously to appreciate what dirty and boring jobs those people, especially the women, were doing day-to-day. I am glad that I experienced it though, if only to know that this will never be my life.<sup>74</sup>

Dietrich E., a church musician from Guben born in 1957, mentioned another aspect: ‘Partly, we experienced socialist production in all its absurdity and paltriness, also in its slackness—workers playing skat all morning! Overall rather repugnant. But at times also humanely impressive or enthralling for those boys interested in technology.’<sup>75</sup> Steffi K.-P., a copywriter from Orlamünde born in 1959, pointed to another problem of the planned economy, saying that during UTP, she met many ‘normal workers’ with whom the idea of the ‘FDJ as the vanguard of the Party’ did not wash. ‘They were more interested in knowing why there weren’t any power points available once again.’<sup>76</sup> These examples explain why UTP was also known amongst pupils as ‘*Unterschied zwischen Theorie und Praxis*’ (difference between theory and practice). Another criticism was that pupils were often made to do menial jobs, for example, boxing bicycle dynamos or filing the tips of soldering irons, which the factory manager was glad to be able to pass on to the youngsters instead of using his paid workforce to do it, with no regard for educational value. Ottokar Domma, a character from a well-known children’s book, satirised it thus: ‘At the moment we are making key boards. But there aren’t enough keys around for the number of key boards that we’re making. . . . Our teacher said that he always has to think of the Soviet cosmonauts and that one can’t conquer space with key boards.’<sup>77</sup> Whilst not

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72. A.J. Peters, ‘The changing idea of technical education’, in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, no. 2 (November 1963): 142–66. Quoted in Oskar Anweiler, *Schulpolitik und Schulsystem in der DDR* (Opladen, Verlag Leske und Budrich 1988), p. 59.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

74. Regine H. questionnaire (14.2.2004).

75. Dietrich E. questionnaire (22.5.2004).

76. Steffi K.-P. questionnaire (24.2.2004).

77. Ottokar Domma, *Der brave Schüler Ottokar* (Berlin, Eulenspiegel Verlag 1982, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 31.

quite building space craft, sometimes pupils would be entrusted with 'carrying out repairs for customers' in retail and trade, as was the case for the UTP course in electrotechnology and car mechanics in Gotha.<sup>78</sup> And there are even reports of pupils actually enjoying their productive day out: 'We like working here because we can see that we can actively help to fulfil the *Wohnungsbauprogramm* (housing construction programme) with the results of our work. Apart from that, we enjoy the work because we are respected by the colleagues and can prove what we have to offer.'<sup>79</sup> When a survey was carried out by the *Institut für Schulentwicklungsforschung* of the University of Dortmund in 1991, polytechnic instruction received strong approval, 'with only 13 percent of East German parents who were asked saying that it had *not* proved its worth'.<sup>80</sup>

Another way of introducing pupils to societal life and work was through the partnership of every school class with a '*Patenbrigade*', a team of workers from local factories, cooperatives or an army base. They were supposed to have a positive influence on pupils' career choices, pupils visited their place of work, prepared cultural programmes, and sent congratulatory cards on their partners' official honourable day. This idea initially met with little sympathy and a great deal of incomprehension on the part of workers, who were unsure of their role as 'godparents' to the children. The bosses also had problems accepting their workers' engagement as *Patenbrigaden*, as in this example from 1962: 'The EOS "Heinrich Mann" in Erfurt informed us that the director of their *Patenbetrieb*, the Bau-Union Erfurt, stands against the formation of friendship contracts, giving as a reason that the strain would be too large due to production requirements that need fulfilling'.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, over the years the idea of *Patenbrigaden* became an integral part of the socialisation process, but the usefulness of this partnership varied widely. Not only were there workers' brigades whose behaviour made them unsuitable as role models for pupils; the joint activities undertaken also depended on the enthusiasm of individual members. In general, the *Patenbrigaden* were most appreciated in their capacity of presenting book vouchers to the best pupils and financing class excursions or Christmas parties. The effect on pupils' career choices was limited, as Ulla M., a kindergarten teacher from Eisenach born in 1950, summarised: 'We had

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78. 'Schuljahresanalyse 1960/61 der Abt. Volksbildung, Rat des Kreises Gotha' (ca. 1961), ThHStAW, Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes, V41/1.

79. 'Bezirkstag Erfurt, Ständige Kommission Bildung und Erziehung: Stand und Probleme der Produktiven Arbeit' (1977), BArch DR2/D129, vol. 1.

80. (My emphasis). Rosalind Pritchard, *Reconstructing education. East German schools and universities after unification* (New York, Berghahn Books 1999), p. 34.

81. 'Einschätzung der Arbeit an den EOS unseres Bezirkes' (15.1.1962), ThHStAW, Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, V139.

a very good relationship with our *Patenbrigade*, but no one in our class became a tram driver.<sup>82</sup> An official assessment of the *Patenarbeit* in 1976 covered all of the above aspects and noticed something else too. Schools in the Thuringian countryside were having difficulties in finding partners for the higher years, with LPG brigades citing ‘formal reasons’ (hygiene and contagious disease guidelines) for being unforthcoming.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps this was the truth, or perhaps the peasants were simply too busy or too lazy to engage in societal activities. But it seems odd that they only objected to older pupils. Could this be an indication that the peasants had inhibitions about meeting the higher-educated young generation?

With productive work being a cornerstone of GDR society, there was absolutely no question that any pupil would not earn a living after leaving school. The SED claimed: ‘A formulation that expresses the capitalist work ethic like *“Arbeit adelt, aber wir bleiben bürgerlich”* undermines the dignity of a socialist worker.’<sup>84</sup> In this light, the SED’s policy to send unruly pupils to ‘work in production to prove their worth’ (*Bewährung in der Produktion*) seems very strange: equating work with punishment?<sup>85</sup> The Party failed to make traditional, ‘true working-class’ jobs involving hard physical labour, at an open cast mine or blast furnace for instance, seem attractive. Agriculture in particular was extremely unpopular with both pupils and parents. In 1963, the reason for this was seen to be that they let themselves be guided by ‘prejudices against professions in animal and plant production and not by the true perspective of socialist agriculture’.<sup>86</sup> Especially in the 1950s and 1960s, pupils were encouraged to see it as ‘an honourable task’ to take up an agricultural profession.<sup>87</sup>

When it came to choosing a career generally, it was inevitable that economic requirements did not coincide with young people’s aspirations. The workforce tended to be recruited where it was needed and this caused much frustration. For those young people who fled to the West before 1961 or tried to do so afterwards, this was a principal factor in their desire to leave the GDR. Although career guidance staff tried their best to interest pupils

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82. Ulla M. questionnaire (22.2.2004).

83. ‘Information über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Betrieben, Kombinat, LPG und Schulen bei der klassenmäßigen Bildung und Erziehung der Jugend’ (15.3.1976), ThHStAW, Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Nr. 013785.

84. Eng.: ‘Work makes you noble. We prefer to remain middle-class.’ (Source): Peter-Bernd Schulz, ‘Sozialistische Arbeit, Menschenwürde und Persönlichkeit’ in DDR Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen, Berliner Ausgabe, Supplement, 30.11.1957 (newspaper article).

85. ‘Pupils who show such wrong political attitudes have no right to prepare themselves with the Abitur for responsible tasks in state and economy. They have to prove themselves in the socialist production.’ Cf. ‘Relegierung von Schülern’ (June 1978), BArch DR2/A7361/5.

86. ‘Eingaben an das Ministerium für Volksbildung im II. Quartal 1963’ (6.9.1963), BArch DR2/7783.

87. See for example ‘Argumentation für die Berufswahl der Absolventen der EOS’ (19.3.1962), BArch DR2/6978.

in careers as toolmakers or a long-term career in the army, the ZIJ stated in 1973 that 'in lots of areas, personal career aspirations and societal requirements have not coincided for many years now'.<sup>88</sup> Pupils continued to have 'unrealistic' ideas of taking up 'fashionable' or 'dream' careers as doctors, pilots, actresses or were 'wrongly' influenced by parents and friends to make their choices on 'wrong criteria': 'gaining kudos, having an easy life, earning lots of money, having a clean job and learning skills that were "useful" in life outside work in household and family'.<sup>89</sup> A large number were disappointed with the world of work; about one in three young people followed a 'vocation' for which they had no personal interest,<sup>90</sup> resulting in deception, discontent, and later, regular changes of jobs.<sup>91</sup>

### ***'Boys Shouldn't Always Think That We're Incapable': Girls Growing Up***

The issue of gender in relation to the concept of the 'socialist personality' is remarkable insofar as it is completely absent. None of the definitions or literature on the subject refers to any difference, or differentiations to be made, between boys and girls. Nevertheless, a section on girls is included here since socialist education and socialisation did contribute to the emergence of a new breed of women and mothers, which one of my interviewees, Jan S.\*, a physician from Bad Salzungen born in 1959, described thus:

In the GDR, the mother was a hybrid of a Red Guards woman, Madame Curie, Annemarie Brodhagen, activist and mother sow, i.e. there *were* endeavours to overcome the classical role understanding. Indeed the demand was for children (plenty), but at the same time the woman was also supposed to be employed, spruce and sensual, with a steadfast class standpoint and able to knock up tasty cabbage dishes'.<sup>92</sup>

Right from the start, the education system was co-educational, thus opening up the same career prospects for both girls and boys. From the school's side, everything was done to enable and encourage girls to pursue academic excellence. It took a little more than a decade before girls were academically on a par with the boys, who were traditionally favoured by education and so,

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88. 'Probleme der Berufsvorbereitung und Berufswahl bei Jugendlichen' (1973), BArch Bibliothek FDJ/6291, p. 3.

89. Ibid., p. 3.

90. Ibid., p. 4.

91. Ibid. Cf. also 'Zum Problemlernen von 17jährigen Jugendlichen' (1974), BArch Bibliothek FDJ/6293, p. 3.

92. (Emphasis in the original). Jan S.\* questionnaire (3.2.2004). NB : Annemarie Brodhagen was a popular GDR television presenter.

initially, better achievers at school. In 1961, the girls of a POS were asked to write an essay on the question: ‘What do you expect from the boys in your class as part of the completion of the societal demand for the sexual equality of women?’ Most demands were for respect, comradely attitudes, and helpfulness: ‘The boys should carry the heavy boxes in UTP’. ‘They should stop treating us like little girls, but they should also support us when we can’t advance in certain subjects like physics.’ ‘They shouldn’t put things past us. Even if many things are easier for them, they should be proud when we work hard to understand the subject matter. The boys shouldn’t always think that we are incapable.’<sup>93</sup> The radical changes in traditional thinking that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s are apparent from these essays. Thanks to the approach of the school system, girls became academically very strong and consequently more self-assured. In fact, girls did so well at school and applied so numerously for the EOS that often boys with lower marks were taken in simply to keep parity in numbers. Long-term studies by the ZIJ found that many girls showed better attitudes to learning than boys, more willingness for self-improvement, and later as women, more energy in order to accommodate and accomplish all demands in the best possible way.<sup>94</sup>

By the early 1950s, it was taken for granted that after graduation from school, girls would either learn a trade or go on to gain higher qualifications. In most cases, their profession was not just seen as an interim solution until marriage. Sonja Walter asked in 1958: ‘What would one be without work? Nothing. One would not even exist. . . . Yet the technical revolution cannot be accomplished with the professions preferred by many girls. . . . We cannot leave it solely to the boys to shape the future, can we?’<sup>95</sup> Whilst the problem that girls were influenced by their parents to learn a traditional female vocation and themselves preferred areas such as administration, retail, and education persisted throughout the four decades, by the 1960s girls increasingly also took up atypical jobs as construction engineers or crane operators, although by no means to the extent desired by the SED. The equalisation of gender roles, however, took a back seat to economic requirements, demonstrated by the fact that men were missing from typical female professions and that there continued to exist badly paid female labour in spinning mills

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93. Cf. ‘Schüleraufsätze POS Glashütte’ (March 1961), BArch DR2/6772. NB: There was no indication as to the age of the girls.

94. ‘Forschungsbericht: Zu Fragen der sozialistischen Persönlichkeitsentwicklung von Mädchen und jungen Frauen in der DDR’ [henceforth *Frauenstudie*] (June 1975), BArch DC4/234, p. 15. For an overview of ZIJ results on gender issues, see Uta Schlegel, ‘Geschlechter- und Frauenforschung’, in Friedrich, *Das Zentralinstitut*, p. 373–91.

95. Sonja Walter, *Zwischen vierzehn und achtzehn: ein Buch für junge Mädchen* (Berlin, Verlag Neues Leben 1958), pp. 16f. and 31.

or the textile industry generally. Also, there were far fewer women in higher positions; Margot Honecker being an exception as the *Volksbildungsminister* (Minister for Education; note that the masculine version was her official form of address, lacking the feminine suffix *-in*). An opinion expressed by a girl in the above-mentioned essays underlines the difficulties that girls had in being accepted in a managerial capacity: 'I think that with sexual equality, a girl could be elected to become FDJ secretary, too. But only if she has the knowledge necessary for that.'<sup>96</sup>

In comparison to the education system, it was socialisation in the family that clung on to patterns handed down from one generation to the next. Parents usually granted sons greater autonomy in their spare time at a younger age than daughters, acting out of an 'awareness of greater responsibility for adolescent girls regarding sexual challenges'. Daughters were more strongly integrated into household chores than sons, in anticipation of their future double role as mothers and working women. Sons not only benefited from an advantageous allocation of household tasks, but also from receiving more presents and pocket money. The father as the role model was regarded as crucial to educating socialist personalities at home, and in this respect the ZIJ spoke of a 'success of a socialist reconfiguration of norms', for in two thirds of families, both parents made joint efforts to bring up their children instead of leaving the bulk of this task solely to the mother.<sup>97</sup>

Images of 'women as competent tractor drivers, far-sighted mayors and skilled engineers which populated East German newspapers, DEFA films and novels', to quote Gunilla-Friederike Budde,<sup>98</sup> were not merely propaganda creations, but reality. Already by the mid 1950s, half of all the women in the GDR had a job; and this proportion increased by about ten percent in each following decade, so that by the late 1980s, 91.2 percent of working-age women were in the equivalent of paid employment.<sup>99</sup> But a closer inspection of the GDR media images might reveal another characteristic of these East German 'super-women'—how tired they looked. Despite the state's provision of industrial laundries, factory, and school

96. 'Schüleraufsätze POS Glashütte' (March 1961), BArch DR2/6772.

97. Cf. *Frauenstudie* (1975), p. 69. Studies undertaken between 1965 and 1970 showed that on average, women spent 37.1 hours per week on household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and shopping. Whilst 'traditional housewives' worked 51.5 hours per week, full-time employed women worked only (!) 30.8 hours for their families. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

98. Gunilla-Friederike Budde, *Frauen arbeiten. Weibliche Erwerbstätigkeit in Ost- und Westdeutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen Verlag Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997), p. 11.

99. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10. NB: This figure is inclusive of female students and apprentices. Less those, the figure stands at 80 percent.

canteens (and very modern ideas such as a shopping service and meal-delivery services existing in the early 1960s)<sup>100</sup> that were supposed to alleviate women's and particularly mothers' workloads, throughout the lifetime of the GDR it was the case that women bore the brunt of everyday organisation of family life. So it should have been no surprise for the ZIJ researchers that whilst young men went in for sports in their spare time, women preferred to sleep and rest.<sup>101</sup> And yet, for women as well as for men, working in the GDR was more than a way of earning money. The community spirit of a *Kollegienkollektiv* (colleagues' collective) played a role here, but also the fact that, as Adelheid K., a teacher from Orlamünde born in 1934, mentioned: 'There was no special "mother role" in most families. After having children, mothers quickly took up their work again, i.e. they *wanted* to work again. Work for women was not only important as an income source, but they worked because it added to their sense of self-worth.'<sup>102</sup> An indication of how far emancipation had progressed is that by the 1970s, two thirds of divorce petitions were filed by women, suggesting that women were financially independent from their husbands and did not need to fear material disadvantages.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the high demands made of them by societal life, women generally responded more positively to political demands and the realities of life than men: a more pronounced pride in the GDR, acceptance of the leading role of the SED, a better relation to the Soviet Union, and a better attitude to the FDJ and societal involvement.<sup>104</sup> In this respect, the state's endeavours to improve women's societal standing by means of legislation and material help, most notably in the form of free pre-school education, bore fruit in ensuring women's loyalty. The first generation of women who had been socialised solely under socialist conditions had internalised new mindsets and attitudes by the late 1960s. Halfway through its lifetime, the GDR had made great societal progress, which, according to Marx, can be 'measured exactly by the societal status of the fairer sex, including the ugly ones'.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, from the mid 1970s onwards, fewer children were being born, resulting in a declining population; and this prompted the SED to improve its social policies to take account of a woman's family life and her societal duties, for example, by a rise in child benefits and maternity leave

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100. Helga Ulbricht et al., *Probleme der Frauenarbeit* (Berlin, Verlag Die Wirtschaft, Schriftenreihe Arbeitsökonomik, Heft 7 1963), p. 13.

101. *Frauenstudie* (1975), pp. 10 and 15.

102. (Emphasis in the original). Adelheid K. questionnaire (24.2.2004).

103. Cf. *Frauenstudie* (1975), p. 82.

104. Along with those positive positions, the ZIJ also stated that beliefs in 'fate' and 'talismans' still persisted in women. *Ibid.*, 7.

105. Marx in a letter to Dr Kugelmann (1968). Cited in *Frauenstudie* (1975), p. 94.

for the second child.<sup>106</sup> Despite the success of 'emancipation' with regard to overcoming traditional patterns in both professional and private life, the ZIJ was realistic enough to estimate that in socialism, only an 'extensive approximation to full sexual equality' was possible, full equality only being obtainable in the future classless society of communism.<sup>107</sup>

### Conclusion: Emergence of the *Homo Germanicus Orientalis*

Growing up in the socialist education system of the GDR could not fail to leave traces on young people. The experiment of trying to mould young people into utopian socialist personalities did not and could not succeed on all fronts; yet the outcome was indeed a particular type of 'East German human being'. The 'end products' of the GDR education system were much more manifold than the woodcut-like model of the intended socialist personality. The point in time when distinct East German 'new human beings'—albeit not the envisaged one hundred percent socialist ones—began to appear can be placed in the mid 1960s. It is hardly surprising that this coincides with the time when the first generation socialised solely in the GDR reached maturity. They grew up exclusively in a socialist world and acquired their ideological and general attitudes under stabilised political conditions. They took for granted their country's orientation towards and connection with the socialist camp with the Soviet Union at its helm. They were more likely to cheer for the East German than the West German football team. Up until the 1970s, to some extent the international situation with the worldwide liberation movements seemed to follow what they learned at school about the 'natural laws of history' and humanity's development towards socialism. Archival evidence such as this contemporary report by a British observer summarises this change: 'To the young who have never known anything but the present regime, the years of living in a different social system with a different vocabulary, different political principles and a different economic organisation are beginning to create a feeling of separateness.'<sup>108</sup> Those who were teenagers in the early 1960s displayed an

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106. Simone Tippach-Schneider, 'Sieben Kinderwagen, drei Berufe und ein Ehemann. DDR-Frauengeschichten im Wandel der Sozialpolitik', in Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR, ed., *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn. Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR* (Berlin, Christoph Links Verlag 1999), p. 129.

107. *Frauenstudie* (1975), p. 5.

108. Major General Peel-Yates, General Officer Commanding, British Sector, Berlin: 'Report on the present mood of East German population' (14.8.1965), PRO FO 371/183002 RG1016/31. Thanks to Merrilyn Thomas for this information.

identity that was utterly different from that of the previous generation, who had still been marked by post-war scarcities and stronger moral constraints. Young East Germans did not necessarily 'ape any rubbish that came out of the West', to paraphrase Ulbricht, nor did they dismiss everything that was homegrown in the GDR as 'rubbish'. The new generation was confident enough to decide for themselves how they wanted to live, albeit within the limits given by the regime.

The appearance of a distinct East German identity, however, did not indicate that young people had been moulded as the SED had hoped; nor did it encompass everyone. With regard to the civic demands made of them, many strongly rejected the day-to-day presentation at school of a black and white world-view on the grounds that both familial connections to West Germany and, increasingly from the mid 1960s onwards, western television put claims about the evil enemy on the other side of the border into question. Parental opinion also prompted pupils to have their doubts as to the validity of these claims. A joke was told behind closed doors: 'A GDR citizen asks for permission to leave the country: he wants to go to the GDR portrayed in the newspaper.'<sup>109</sup> The GDR's own media and textbooks gave an over-rosy portrayal, which denied and suppressed the problems and conflicts existing in socialist society as well. By adding to this the practice of penalising those who dared to speak out, the regime produced generations of Janus-faced young people.

The ZIJ undertook numerous studies of young people's mindsets regarding their 'political-ideological awareness'. They reveal that positive attitudes towards socialism reached their peak in the mid 1970s, but this result might be deceptive. It is often forgotten that the ZIJ first conducted their surveys in 1966, and hence that there is no comparative basis for the early Ulbricht years. Asked when they felt most happy in the GDR and at ease with its political system and everyday life, the answers of my interviewees could not have been more diverse. Numerically, both the 1960s and 1970s came out on top, but there were also some who named the period after Stalin's death and the abolition of food tokens until the building of the Wall as the most liberal and enjoyable period, when post-war hardship had gone, people's expectations were still modest, and the freedom to travel to the West still available. The 1980s were nominated very rarely as an enjoyable period, although some felt that by then the regime had slackened the reins regarding issues such as reception of the western media. A feeling of happiness is of course not only related to societal circumstances, but perhaps

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109. Erika P. questionnaire (10.5.2004).

primarily to personal life experiences; so any attempt to pinpoint a 'golden age' for the GDR is futile.

To form young Christians according to the socialist image was a particular challenge for the SED. Officially, the Party took the same line as Frederick the Great who supposedly said, 'In my state everybody may go to Heaven in their own way, but the Church is not to meddle in state affairs.'<sup>110</sup> However, given the clash between Marxist-Leninist principles and Christian teachings, the SED attempted to steer young people away from competing convictions. The 1950s were a confrontational phase that had both the Party and churches engaging in a tug of war. Although church youth work often catered better to young people's interests than that of the FDJ and was more readily adopted, by the early 1960s, to the chagrin of the churches, most young Christians too had internalised the norms that were required of them in order to get ahead in the system. Being societally active and showing proof of one's commitment to the GDR via participation in socialist rituals such as the *Jugendweihe* and membership of the youth organisation had become second nature to them as well. Those who were so committed to their faith that they would not compromise in any way suffered the hard grip of the state authorities and were forced either to live their lives within the confines of the church or to apply for permission to leave the country. The slogan from the Ulbricht days 'Ohne Gott und Sonnenschein fahren wir die Ernte ein' (Without the Lord or rays of sun, we will get the harvest done) sums up the SED's attitude towards religion: derision, arrogance, animosity, and the conviction that their own progressive attitude would triumph over belief. To be a good socialist citizen and a Christian was an equation that for the SED could not be balanced. By holding on to the image of the church as an old foe, the Party often deprived itself of young people who were both Christian and proponents of socialism. The church itself also had problems accepting the state's attempt to attach the character of people's personality to class struggle, ideology, and politics. It disagreed with the goal of the 'socialist personality', because it implied that a human being's personality was valued in terms of its ideological conviction and that an individual's interests must agree with those of society. According to Christian belief, human dignity is inherent and not bestowed by society, hence the church opposed the state's exertion of influence in spheres of human life that were none of its business. Eventually the majority of young Christians were able to cope well with having two worldviews, one for home and one for school. Whilst the SED did not quite destroy Christianity in the GDR, it did succeed in the atheisation

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110. Popularly attributed.

of large parts of the population. In 1989, only 11 percent of all pupils still said they were Christian.<sup>111</sup> The notion of an active, powerful Christian community in the GDR had by then become only the wishful thinking of the church leadership and the paranoid thinking of the SED, rather than reality. At that time, the State Secretary for Church Questions, Klaus Gysi, had told West German journalists: ‘In the GDR, the true Christians are, with 3 million people, a marginal phenomenon on the one side, but the true Marxists are, with 2.5 million people, a marginal phenomenon on the other. Most people believe neither in Marx nor in God.’<sup>112</sup>

Several determining factors would have been necessary for young people to live up to the idea of the ‘socialist personality’: parents with a socialist and atheist worldview; no ‘contamination’ with a different worldview through relations in the FRG or Western media; ideologically sound teachers; peers coming from a similar home; success at school; and plenty of positive distraction in their spare time in order to prevent them from straying from the path. The ingredients of this ‘recipe’ for a socialist personality are by no means exhaustive, but give an idea about the complexity of factors involved in making the outcome successful. My interviewee replies also showed that school in the GDR was just one of many factors of socialisation, the potency of which is often overestimated. A number of them however said that they had not experienced any ideology in their education, which is perhaps an indication of success in the socialisation process: it went unnoticed because it saturated all areas of life, and its consequences remain unnoticed even till this day, for example, with regard to limited freedom of movement. Doris P., an administrator from Spröttau near Erfurt born in 1955, said: ‘We lived a quiet life in our village. I never felt constricted. As far as the freedom to travel is concerned, we never had any money for holidays anyway because we built our house.’<sup>113</sup>

An important point with regard to civic attitudes must not be forgotten: age played a crucial role. Most young children accepted political indoctrination, unless parental opinion prompted them to do otherwise. For the most part, they did not call into question the world-view presented in school, and they also enjoyed the activities offered by the pioneer organisation and thought military education in the form of mock manoeuvres and visits to the local army base exciting. The onset of puberty, which roughly coincided with

111. Cf. Ilona Schneider, ‘Kinder aus christlichen Familien in der DDR’, in Deutsches Jugendinstitut, ed., *Was für Kinder. Aufwachsen in Deutschland* (Munich, Kösel Verlag 1993), pp. 317–21, here p. 317.

112. Arnold Freiburg, ‘Schüler, Ordnung und Disziplin. Deutsch-deutsche Fakten und Überlegungen zur Erziehung und zum Schulalltag’, in Barbara Hille, Walter Jaide, eds., *DDR-Jugend. Politisches Bewusstsein und Lebensalltag* (Opladen, Verlag Leske und Budrich 1990), pp. 276–80, here p. 279, n 1.

113. Doris P. questionnaire (21.3.2004).

admission to the FDJ, meant however that many adolescents began to have other interests—and thus lost their infantile enthusiasm—and regarded their collective organisation as a necessary evil or a waste of valuable spare time.

Although it is extremely difficult to make generalisations, it may be concluded that socialist education was most successful in reaching young people's hearts and minds when it came to sweeping across-the-board values and qualities such as love of peace, anti-fascism, solidarity, helpfulness, and collectivity. A majority of them did internalise the 'good' moral and societal values inherent in socialism as a theory; they honestly participated in societal life as proposed by the state beyond a simple outward conformity, whilst stubbornly refusing to be used by the SED for ends other than those they desired for themselves, especially so in their private lives once they had left the education system with its many constraints. By the early 1960s, young people had learnt to play by the rules imposed on them in order to get ahead or to be left alone. Least successful were the SED's attempts at instilling 'civic' values, namely the politicisation and militarisation of young people. This can be deduced from the fact that at no point in time during the forty years of the GDR's existence did the SED feel that it could release the pressure of civic education on young people. It was never confident that they had sufficiently internalised the values of political-ideological education and militarisation for it to do so.

For most people born after 1945, the GDR became not only their geographical, but also their emotional *Heimat*. To the proponents of the thesis that the GDR never did, and never could, become the 'home' of a people imprisoned by mental and physical borders, I put the counter-argument that the majority of people did not feel as if they were living a daily nightmare in a dictatorship because, increasingly, they knew no other form of government. True, there were young people who came to feel the iron fist of the state, because they openly voiced their opposition to the regime, and they then got to know the ugly side of the GDR, which involved unpleasant confrontations with the Stasi or the police. I do not want to whitewash this aspect of the GDR by any means. For the great majority of the GDR's populace at any time in its four decades of existence, however, the following principle applied: those who do not move do not feel their chains.<sup>114</sup> This explains why so many people have rosy memories of life in the GDR, despite it being undeniably a dictatorship. With hindsight, many former GDR citizens have asked themselves, 'How was it possible that we ever

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114. Original: 'Wer sich nicht bewegt spürt auch keine Ketten.' Popularly attributed to Rosa Luxemburg.

lived in these conditions?', but at the time of living in the GDR, this question simply did not arise.

The inherent construction defect of the concept of the socialist personality was that for real human beings, it could only be an unobtainable ideal personality designed to live in the halcyon days of a future communist society. The SED had succeeded in achieving young people's outward compliance to its plans. Beyond this, genuine enthusiasm for the social engineering project of the new human being in a new society remained what the idea had been all along—a utopia.