

Chapter 4

**Rural Functionaries and the  
Transmission of Agricultural Policy:  
The Case of *Bezirk* Erfurt from the  
1960s to the 1970s**

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With the completion of the campaign for full collectivisation in April 1960, an administrative milestone had been reached. Beyond the paperwork however, the situation was by no means so clear cut. The rural communities of the GDR were fraught with discord and many farmers continued to reject the agricultural collectives, refusing to take part in collective work, and in some cases abandoning their farms and fleeing the GDR altogether. Over subsequent years—particularly with the construction of the Wall in August 1961—the rural population then responded to the end of private farming (on more than a minute scale) by developing ways to safeguard their own interests in resisting, manipulating, but also participating in the new systems of rural organisation. At the same time the SED regime sought to bring its authority more comprehensively and more consistently to bear on the diverse mixture of rural communities, gaining tighter control over agricultural production via its further integration into the planned economy. The difficult task of mediating these two processes at the local level fell to the functionaries of the collective farms. Their developing relationships with one another and with the functionaries of the district state and party bureaucracy, acting and reacting at the crucial overlap of state and society, was a key element of the normalising of rule within the GDR during the 1960s. This essay seeks to highlight some of the characteristics of these relationships and their consequences

for the transmission of agricultural policy in the context of one region, *Bezirk Erfurt*.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1960s, the situation in the rural communities in *Bezirk Erfurt* was very complex. The establishment of agricultural collectives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*, or LPGs), organised according to three types of model statutes with varying degrees of collective ownership and collective farming practice, had been underway since the early 1950s—albeit only rapidly since 1958. By the end of the collectivisation campaign, a variety of LPGs of different degrees of longevity, financial solvency, and different structural types<sup>2</sup> thus existed side by side in rural communities. The conditions for farming in the various districts of the *Bezirk* were diverse, varying according to the nature and quality of the land, the quality and quantity of the livestock, draught animals and machinery available. Furthermore, the populations living in rural communities were equally diverse. Religious background,<sup>3</sup> levels of new settlers, and land distribution, as well as local personal and familial ties, defined loyalties and conflicts peculiar to each community. The proximity of urban and industrial centres, the quality of transport, and the patterns of nonagricultural employment all played a role in shaping local conditions. In these diverse circumstances, the SED leadership's project of consolidating collectivisation and bringing effective administrative control to agricultural production was by no means straightforward to implement.

Mass agitation, the use of force, and exemplary terror continued to be used particularly in the early 1960s to encourage participation in the collectivised farms. However, on their own, such approaches could have only limited success in the long term. More consistent and comprehensive means of transmitting agricultural policy were also required at a local level to ensure the ideals and theories of socialist agriculture were reflected to some degree in the actual adoption of new farming practices and the generation of greater productivity as a result. An effective chain of communication was required between farmers and farm workers on the one hand, and the upper echelons of the regime, on the other, which, although top-heavy, worked both ways.

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1. The GDR was divided from 1952 into 15 administrative regions or *Bezirke*.

2. Of essential importance were the Type I LPGs in which only arable land was necessarily farmed collectively, and the Type III LPGs in which all land, livestock, and machinery were used collectively.

3. Within *Bezirk Erfurt*, there existed Lutheran and Reformed protestant parishes as well as a concentrated community of Catholics in the Eichsfeld region largely within the *Kreise* Heiligenstadt and Worbis.

The regime's agricultural bureaucracy needed to be in a position, given the diversity of conditions on the ground in every sense, to consider and occasionally respond to local peculiarities. It had, of course, also to have the apparatus at its disposal to persuade and educate, as well as threaten and direct, farmers. Of crucial significance to this apparatus was the role played by the leading cadres of the collective farms. The level of LPG leaders' technical ability as farmers and economic functionaries, the degree of their political reliability, and their skills as managers of people defined how farmers' interests and those of the party and state functionaries charged with preparing the implementation of SED agricultural policy within the GDR's regions and districts were aligned at a local level.

## Conflict and Consolidation

As far as the SED leadership was concerned, the weaknesses of the structures in place for transmitting agricultural policy in the aftermath of collectivisation were enormous. The problems faced by the leading SED functionaries in the *Bezirk* directing the campaign for full collectivisation had put in relief just how far political unreliability and administrative inefficiency, if not incompetence, pervaded the state and party apparatus responsible for rural communities at a district and local level in the early 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Given the degree of hostility to collectivisation among farmers, it was no surprise that while the new LPGs existed on paper, there were few guarantees for the SED leadership that they existed in reality and functioned in accordance with the model statutes. Moreover, owing to the suddenness of the decision to complete collectivisation in a very short space of time at the end of the 1950s<sup>5</sup> and the rapid expansion in size and numbers of LPGs, there was a glaring absence both in the collective farms

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4. Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (ThHStAW) Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/2/2/322 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft an das Sekretariat: Bericht über die Vorbereitung der Organisationswahlen der VdgB und ihre Unterstützung durch die Partei. 12.3.1960, pp. 168–76; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/2/3/338 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokollauszug—Sekretariatsitzung: Brigade in Nordhausen, 18.7.1960, p. 22; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/2/3/348 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Brigade Nordhausen der Bezirksleitung Abschlussbericht über den Brigadeeinsatz im Kreis Nordhausen, 28.9.1960, pp. 77–87; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/2/3/328 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Vorlage, An das Büro der Bezirksleitung: Bericht über den Einsatz der Brigade der Bezirksleitung im Kreis Apolda, 2.5.1960, pp. 6–16.

5. See J. Schöne, *Frühling auf dem Lande? Die Kollektivierung der DDR Landwirtschaft* (Berlin, 2005) for the latest set of arguments on the subject of the timing and motivation for the completion of the collectivisation campaign.

themselves and the local and district state apparatus of suitably trained agricultural functionaries.

The new scales and patterns of production post-collectivisation required the skills and knowledge not only of new agricultural techniques, but also of man-management and 'socialist' administration. By 1960, insufficient preparation had been made to organise the qualification of sufficient numbers of such agricultural functionaries. A proportion of LPG leaders in the early 1960s were thus seen as deficient, lacking either knowledge of farming or sufficient credibility as leaders. Perhaps more seriously for the regime, very often those with the status in the village to take up leadership of the new collective farms were the least politically reliable or ideologically suitable candidates. The majority of the LPGs in existence in 1961 had adopted the statute of the Type I collective farm, opting for the minimum degree of collective ownership and collective farming practice. These were not only new and barely functional, but also dominated by farmers unenthusiastic about the collectivisation, who in many cases were the only realistic choices as LPG functionaries.

The first years following the completion of the collectivisation campaign were marked in a number of LPGs by fluctuations in the occupation of leading functionary positions. In the first year after collectivisation, LPG chairmen, brigade leaders, and LPG board members resigned in protest as promises of freedom of action or financial support made by agitators during the campaign failed to be met. Beyond this, the willingness of farmers particularly to take on a management role sank when faced with the difficulties of the first years of collective farming. In their role as mediators between the demands of the state and the interests of members of the collective farm, LPG chairmen in particular were under considerable pressure from both sides. On the one hand, with agricultural production dangerously low (thanks in large part to the abandonment of land), failure to meet plan targets could potentially be regarded as a criminal act. On the other, LPG functionaries often found themselves exposed to the resentment of members of the LPG and in some cases even isolated in the community if they too obviously advocated the progress of collective farming.<sup>6</sup>

Collective farmers remained in many cases unconvinced of the positive advantages of implementing the new 'socialist' farming practices that came

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6. ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 BDVP Stab/Operativstab, Information 36/60, Einschätzung der Lage in der Landwirtschaft, 20.7.1960; Information über vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 19/60, 4.5.1960; BDVP 20.1/352 BDVP Operativstab, Information 62/61 Landwirtschaft, 5.8.1961, p. 43; BDVP 20/065 BDVP Stab/Operativstab, Auswertung der Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 20/60; RdB Erfurt L562 Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Abt. Landwirtschaft Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt, 5.10.1962.

with collectivisation, arguing for ‘traditional’ methods rather than the ‘modern’ industrial methods advocated by advisors from the district state bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup> Attempts to fix administratively the size and location of maize plantations as a feed crop and impose the construction of cheap ‘open’ cow sheds—famously criticised in Erwin Strittmater’s *Ole Bienkopp*<sup>8</sup>—remained points of contention in the LPGs well into the early 1960s. Local discussion of when to complete harvesting of different crops and, connected to this, whether outside help should be used to speed the progress of the harvest appeared to be driven all too often by district party and state functionaries’ need to assert their authority over LPG chairmen rather than from actual concern for high yields.<sup>9</sup> The justification of the administrative efficiency of an early harvest was not often well received at a local level.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these hindrances to the establishment of a stable body of LPG leaders willing and capable of not only maintaining production levels, but also of carrying out the effective administrative and practical organisation of collective farming, solutions did present themselves. Leaps forward in qualification levels in the agricultural workforce in 1960 and 1961 dramatically increased the number of farmers exposed to basic agricultural training conducted under the auspices of the socialist system, providing the basis for the development of future cadres. At the same time, it increased the number of college and university educated cadres equipped with sufficient technical know-how to lead the development of collective farming in the LPGs.<sup>11</sup> The

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7. Nevertheless, relations between farmers and the regime cannot always easily be interpreted in the context of a straightforward dichotomy of tradition and modernisation. Traditional elements of farming and the rural existence survived and in some respects were actively encouraged within the context of socialist agricultural policy. At the same time, farmers themselves were not opposed to certain aspects of modernisation where it was on their terms and could be shown to be of benefit to them, suiting a pragmatic as well as a moral understanding of farming as a profession and as a way of life. By the same token, SED agricultural policy was about more than modernising the methods of farming, but it was also defined by the practical requirements of administration (and repression) as well as radical goals of social transformation.

8. E. Strittmater, *Ole Bienkopp* (East Berlin, 1964).

9. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L1086 Brief an den Vorsitzenden des RdB Erfurt, 19.9.1962: Beschwerde über die Arbeit mit den Menschen durch den Direktor der MTS Apolda-Heusdorf; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht zur Erntesituation in den Kreisen, 5.9.1962, pp. 154–58;

10. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/2/3/345 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Einschätzung der Bürositzungen vom 2.9.1960 und Ablauf der Halmfruchternte, 13.9.1960, p. 86; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr. 29/62, undated, pp. 281–91.

11. The proportion of the agricultural workforce with the basic qualification *Facharbeiterprüfung* rose from 4.5 percent to 11.5 percent between 1960 and 1961; while the number of master farmers and those with technical college and university qualifications rose from 2 percent to 3.5 percent within *Bezirk* Erfurt. Statistisches Jahrbuch—Bezirk Erfurt, 1970, Teil I, p. 126.

political suitability of leading functionaries in the collective farms also began to improve. The erection of the Wall in August 1961 was of fundamental importance in reducing incidences of opposition to the collective farms. The end of flight to the west as a last resort for farmers, and subsequent growth in the use of exemplary punitive action against resistant members of collective farms, highlighted not only the futility, but also the dangers associated with even passive opposition to collective farming. It also encouraged acceptance of and adaptation to the new situation in agriculture.<sup>12</sup>

The improved reliability of LPG cadres was in part because of the targeted training of SED members involved in agriculture to enable them to take up management positions and the delegation of a number of functionaries from the district state apparatus, state-owned farms, and other stable LPGs as well as the Farmers' Mutual Support Union (*der Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe*, or VdgB).<sup>13</sup> A number of functionaries also became free to be delegated from the various branches of the state-run machine pools (*Maschinen-Traktoren-Stationen*, or MTS), which were in the process of being dissolved as machinery was transferred into the ownership of individual collective farms. It is perhaps testimony to the difficulty of the tasks facing LPG functionaries, however, that many eligible cadres sought to avoid delegation into a collective farm.<sup>14</sup>

In early 1963, analyses of the reasons for poor economic performance in a number of LPGs tended to blame the quality of the leading members of the collective farms and their lack of either political or technical credentials. To remedy the situation, functionaries in the SED district administration were directed by their superiors at *Bezirk* level to re-examine the reliability of the various cadres in the villages. Wherever they could be found, expe-

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12. The clamp down on resistant farmers is described in general terms in: SAPMO BArch DY30/IV 2/7/376 Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, Erfassung und Forstwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der Lage auf dem Lande in Vorbereitung der Wahlen zum 17.9.1961, pp. 65–70; Specific cases of exemplary punishment in Bezirk Erfurt may be found in: ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/4/59 SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen an die BPKK, Einschätzung über einige Erscheinungen im Kr. Sondershausen, 25.9.1961, p. 344; KPKK Erfurt-Land, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal, 25.9.1961, p. 222; KPKK Mühlhausen, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal, 26.9.1961, p. 300.; SED Kreisleitung Apolda an die BPKK, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal, 29.9.1961, p. 135.

13. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/043 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr. 8/62, pp. 149–157.

14. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/602 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Org./Kader Kaderpolitische Wertung der Qualifikations der Parteisekretäre in den LPG, 23.3.1963, p. 1–4; Abt. Landwirtschaft, Berufsausbildung, 26.7.1965, pp. 26–32; Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht an Gen. Lüddecke—Stand der Qualifizierung der Werk tätigen in der soz. Landwirtschaft, 27.10.1966, pp. 38–39.

rienced political and technical cadres were to be delegated into the LPG.<sup>15</sup> Despite the new economic and political stability given by the Wall to the SED regime in the GDR, the (for the time being) insurmountable shortage of sufficiently reliable cadres seriously limited the extent of regime influence over the practices of agricultural production.<sup>16</sup>

Despite loyalty and obedience to the party and state apparatus tempering the virulence of their response, leading cadres in the collective farms were openly reluctant to implement agricultural policies that seemed ill judged. Given the parlous financial conditions of many LPGs in the early 1960s, policies which threatened to reduce still further the incomes of members of the LPGs were bound to excite anger from collective farmers and opposition on their behalf from LPG functionaries. On this basis, LPG chairmen ignored harvest deadlines and rejected the use of machinery or the deployment of so-called harvest helpers as directed by local and district state authorities—not least in order to ensure their own members would not be deprived of working hours on which to claim their income.<sup>17</sup> Even after the building of the Wall, limits were thus set to the extent to which SED agricultural policy initiatives—as mediated by the managing functionaries of collective farms—were translated into agricultural practice at the local level.

## Beginning Economic Integration

The reorganisation of the state administration running agriculture with the creation of the new Agricultural Councils at national, *Bezirk* and *Kreis* level (*Kreislandwirtschaftsräte* or KLRs), marked a number of new departures for the relationship between collective farmers, LPG functionaries, and the

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15. As a consequence of the delegation of cadres into LPGs, particularly those Type III LPGs, which were financially unstable, not all LPG functionaries had close personal connections with the other members or with the areas in which they worked. No doubt this was reflected at times in their attitude towards implementing policy and how members responded to them. Functionaries of Type I LPGs were at least initially overwhelmingly selected from among local residents of long standing.

16. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/1/009 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der 5. Bezirksleitungssitzung Erfurt am 25.4.1963, p. 116–24; BIV/2/4/299 KPKK Mühlhausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der LPG “8.Mai” in Zella, 7.4.1964, p. 170.

17. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/044 Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader, 5. Informationsbericht über die Erntesituation in den Kreisen, 7.9.1962, pp. 163–67; Bericht über die Führungstätigkeit des Büros der KL Eisenach und des Staatsapparates im Kreis Eisenach, 10.9.1962, pp. 179–81; Informationsbericht Nr.29/62, p. 281–91; ThHStAW Nationale Front 172, Bezirkssekretariat, Antwort der Gemeinden des Bezirkes auf den Aufruf der Roblinger zu Ehren des 15. Jahrestags der DDR, 4.6.1964, p. 131; ThHStAW RdB L1068 Arbeiter und Bauerninspektion, Bezirksinspektion Erfurt, Ernteinformation, Kreis Gotha, 11.8.1964.

state apparatus. Above all, they promised to result in a better standard of leadership by the state in agricultural matters, with some limitation on direct interference in the production process of the LPGs.<sup>18</sup> The working style of the old agricultural departments of the *Rat des Kreises*, which had overseen the collectivisation process, was criticised for being too administrative and schematic. In contrast, the new Agricultural Councils promised actively to include members of the LPGs in the decisionmaking process at district and regional levels, with the intention of improving the flow of information into the administration from the collective farms themselves.<sup>19</sup> As now true members of the ‘Class of the Collective Farmers’, the reluctantly collectivised farmers were also now in theory to be seen less in terms of their potential for counterrevolution. Rather, due consideration was to be given to their abilities as productive farmers in addition to their rights (and obligations) as (albeit lesser) partners of the working class.<sup>20</sup> The stage was thus set for a renegotiation of the relationship between the state and farmers.

This renegotiation took place in the context of the completion of the transfer of the machinery from the MTS to LPGs, the announcement of the beginning of the industrialisation of agriculture, and the introduction of the first reforms of the New Economic System of Planning and Management (NES). As such, the rhetoric of reconciliation was certainly balanced by increasing demands on farmers to acquiesce to ever greater leaps forward in the ‘socialist’ modernisation of agriculture. With the introduction of the NES, it was hoped that LPGs would be encouraged to increase production through more flexible state planning and the construction of a system of economic incentives, which they would then pass on to their members. A new price system was introduced, which made increased revenue available to individual collective farms in order to encourage the development of more intensive mechanised farming of crops and to encourage the creation of collective livestock herds.<sup>21</sup> How this revenue was spent in practice

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18. SAPMO BArch DY 30 IV/A 2/2.023/15 Büro Grüneberg, Die besondere Beziehung zwischen genossenschaftlicher und staatlicher Leitung nach dem Produktionsprinzip bei der Verwirklichung des NÖSPL (undated 1964), p. 162.

19. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/3/51 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokollauszug von der Bürositzung am 8.2.1963.

20. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/2/38 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Referat Genosse Becker–LPG Söllnitz, p. 68.

21. Where previously production of crops had been encouraged with a dual price system which rewarded excess production, by the end of 1964 a unified price for crops came into effect, graded according to the quality of the produce. On the whole, this unified price was higher than the average of the two purchase and excess prices previously used, allowing the revenues of LPGs to increase. Thereby the means was put at LPGs’ disposal to balance the end of the state’s subsidisation

remained under careful control. District authorities—within the state administration, the district agricultural banks, and the party apparatus—exerted constant pressure on LPG leaders to ensure that a large proportion of their increased revenue was channelled into a capital fund with which LPGs could invest in the further expansion of industrialised production.<sup>22</sup> More than ever, the functionaries of the KLR pressured LPG managers to implement complex methods of stimulating productivity and to organise the conditions for industrialised agriculture. In these circumstances, the effectiveness of LPG functionaries at persuading their members to adopt new work ordinances came under closer scrutiny. Furthermore, their technical ability as economic managers at organising industrial style farming practice and their grasp of systems of economic levers and material incentives were exposed. As always, political willingness did not presuppose ability nor did ability presuppose willing.

During 1959 and 1960, disregard for the administrative documentation required by the state administration detailing the running of the imposed LPG structure was one means employed by some farmers to resist the actual implications of collectivisation.<sup>23</sup> Although such resistance was not sustained, in subsequent years, additional administrative requirements continued to be opposed to limit outside interference. Particularly, chairmen of Type I LPGs sought in the early 1960s to avoid drawing up the documents of ‘socialist competition’. The information contained within these documents provided, of course, the grounds for the state administration to demand increased productivity from LPG members. Chairmen publicly objected on the grounds that such ‘competitions’ were an extra burden of irrelevant paperwork and provoked unnecessary resentments between members.<sup>24</sup> On the same grounds, members of all types of LPG expressed opposition to

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of machinery and pay for the transfer of machinery along with tractor drivers to the LPG. As far as livestock production was concerned, despite the New Economic System, it was still considered necessary to maintain a dual price which favoured the Type III LPGs. Type III LPGs thus continued to receive a lower quota to be bought at purchase price than Type I and II LPGs, which encouraged the latter to merge with or form a Type III LPG, and thus transfer their livestock production from private to collective sheds.

22. For more on NES in agriculture see J. Roesler, *Zwischen Plan und Markt*, pp. 135–43.

23. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L590 Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der LPG des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt 6.7.1960.

24. ThHStAW RdB L599 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Analyse über die ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963, undated; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/382 Parteiorgane, Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht, Nr.12/65, 3.5.1965, pp. 116–28; BIV/2/5/044 Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader, Information, 25.7.1962, pp. 35–48; Abt. Org./Kader, Information 19/62, 30.7.1962, pp. 49–57.

forms of performance related pay.<sup>25</sup> Farmers put forward arguments to the effect that such measures were not only capitalistic and exploitative, but also wholly unnecessary.<sup>26</sup>

An information report on the implementation of the NES in *Bezirk Erfurt* from March 1965 pointed to some progress having been made in winning over LPG cadres. Following a series of lectures and a propaganda campaign to help LPG cadres understand the reforms, twice as many Type III LPGs had reached ‘an advanced stage’ in the implementation of the NES reforms.<sup>27</sup> Progress had even been made with a proportion of the Type I and Type II LPGs. By May 1965, 40 percent of Type I and II LPGs had implemented a system for sharing livestock fodder, which rewarded farmers who made the most available for sale. Of those, 42 percent farmed pasture land collectively and 72 percent had kept collective livestock.<sup>28</sup> It remained apparent, however, that LPG chairmen were by no means simple conduits of state power and that the process of implementing agricultural policy initiatives would be necessarily drawn out.<sup>29</sup> At the root of the conflict was the wish to resist the extension of administrative regulation—the bureaucratisation—of agricultural production through economic levers. Not only was the paper work considered unnecessary, it represented state interference by stealth in the very internal running of the LPG.

## Limitations on the SED’s Role

A major factor influencing the attitude of LPG functionaries and the development of the LPG overall was the degree of influence that the SED party organisation had within the agricultural collective. Despite some progress

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25. For example, work norms were set determining work units according to measures of quantity and quality of production as well as hours worked.

26. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/2/38 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Referat Genosse Becker—LPG Söllnitz p. 68.

27. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/3/112 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat—Produktionsleitung, Einschätzung der Kreisbauernkonferenzen im Bezirk Erfurt 29.3.1965, pp. 141–51; IV/A/2/3/112 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Einschätzung der Arbeitsgruppe der Bezirksleitung über die Führungstätigkeit des Sekretariats der Kreisleitung Nordhausen, pp. 100–119.

28. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht, Nr.16/65, 29.5.1965, pp. 181–191.

29. For example, ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/588 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische Führungstätigkeit zur Herausbildung von Kooperationsbeziehungen in der soz. Landwirtschaft des Kreis Sondershausen, undated 1965, pp. 476–84.

in recruiting collective farmers into the SED since the completion of collectivisation, and in particular since the building of the Wall, the proportion of SED members in each collective remained low.<sup>30</sup> This was in part because active participation in party life could have considerable social consequences in rural communities. The ‘reputation’ of SED members in the village was given as a reason by many for not wishing to join the party or to participate regularly in party life. Potential recruits rejected joining the SED with arguments such as: ‘we’re not joining the party, because the comrades are no model for us’; ‘Put your own ranks in order first’; ‘teach your comrades to work like we do first.’<sup>31</sup> Speaking to a gathering of leading party members in the *Bezirk* in 1964, the First Secretary of the SED *Bezirksleitung*, Alois Bräutigam, despaired at the number of LPGs without a functioning party organisation. He recommended overcoming the reluctance of potential candidates by persuading them all to sign up in alphabetical order so that: ‘no one takes the blame for being the first or for being the last; as that’s important in villages.’<sup>32</sup>

One of the central roles of the party organisation, led by the party secretary, was to advise the leading functionaries of the LPGs on how best to implement new elements of agricultural policy. However, even by the mid 1960s, the confluence necessary for the smooth implementation of new agricultural practices of a strong and numerous SED party organisation in the LPG and leading LPG functionaries loyal to the SED existed only in a minority of Type III LPGs. In most Type I LPGs, the SED party organisation (where one even existed) could bring little influence to bear unless the leading cadres of the LPG were also SED members. Even in these cases however, the predominance of non-SED members in other leading positions

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30. Between 1962 and 1966, the proportion of SED members in the LPG rose from 6.9 percent to 8.7 percent in *Bezirk Erfurt*. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, *Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/3/186 Abt. Parteiorane, Analyse der Mitgliederbewegung im Jahre 1966*, 9.1.1967, p. 142.

31. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, *Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/500 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Stand der Mitgliederbewegung, 12.10.1963*, p. 115. Some examples, from districts across the *Bezirk*, of the social conflicts caused in rural communities by SED membership: ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, *Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/4/107 KPKK Sondershausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der GO der LPG West-Greussen durch die KPKK, 15.8.1962*, p. 22; BIV/2/4/288 KPKK Bad Langensalza, *Bericht über die Untersuchungen der KPKK in der PO der LPG Hornsömmern, 20.5.1963*, p. 155; BIV/2/4/288 KPKK Mühlhausen, *Bericht über die Untersuchung der KPKK in der LPG ‘4. Parteitag’ in Ammern, 24.5.1963*, p. 162; BIV/2/4/299 KPKK Erfurt-Land, *Bericht über die Untersuchungen in der PO/LPG III “Karl Marx” Grossfahner, 26.10.1964*, p. 28.

32. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, *Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/2/042 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung, Büro für Landwirtschaft am 18.12.1964, Beitrag Genosse Bräutigam, 1. Bezirkssekretär*, p. 171.

and on the board of the LPGs often hindered the implementation of SED proposals.<sup>33</sup>

The running of an LPG depended not only on the LPG chairman but also on the cooperation of the governing board of the collective. Moreover, in theory, if not always in practice, the ratification by an assembly of LPG members was required before major decisions affecting the collective farm could be implemented. Some limits were thus set to what new practices could be introduced in an LPG without the persuasive efforts of a strong party organisation or the repeated persuasive intervention of staff from the KLR. Even where members of block parties and, in particular the DBD, occupied leading positions in the collective farm, their support for the implementation of new agricultural policy was not always forthcoming. Consequently, unless outside pressure was brought to bear on them, LPG farmers were not easily—nor routinely—persuaded to adopt new practices.

## Merger, Cooperation, and Forced Transformation

Parallel to the debate over the implementation of the new levels of economic administration in the LPGs was the contentious issue of establishing the conditions for more cost efficient mechanised production. By the mid 1960s, considerable improvements in the numbers and capacity of tractors, harvesters, and other machinery available in the GDR, made large scale mechanised crop production and the beginnings of large scale intensive livestock production possible. However, it was still not clear how individual collective farms ought to be encouraged to combine their resources. Solutions to these problems presented themselves in two forms: the merger of collective farms together to form a so-called ‘*Gross LPG*’, combining crop and livestock production on a larger scale under a single leadership; or the development of cooperative relations between groups of LPGs, who might work together as far as possible to make best use of the economies of scale. The adoption of one solution over another depended enormously in the 1960s on the balance of power between LPG leaders and their relationship with the district party and state apparatus.

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33. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7–588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Operativ, Erfahrungen und Schlussfolgerungen für die Entwicklung der Parteiarbeit in den Kooperationsbereichen auf der Grundlage der Untersuchungen der KL Erfurt-Land, 2.11.1965, pp. 1–11; Bericht über die politische Führungstätigkeit zur Herausbildung von Kooperationsbeziehungen in der soz. Landwirtschaft des Kr. Sondershausen, undated 1965, p. 476.

The tendency by some LPG leaders towards creating a (from one perspective excessively) large single LPG was not easily distinguished from the necessary rationalisation of production through merger. As a rule in the early 1960s, the creation of one LPG per *Gemeinde* or local administrative centre was regarded by the state administration as legitimate rationalisation. The tendency towards a merger of LPGs across a number of villages was thought however to smack of excess. Often there was considerable doubt in party circles whether the chairmen of such collective farms should have at their disposal resources far in advance of their proven political reliability or supposed position in the political hierarchy. Nevertheless, the steps that had to be taken on the way either to legitimate merger, excess expansion or the formation of extended cooperative partnerships between farms were outwardly one and the same.<sup>34</sup> Hence, in an analysis by the SED *Kreisleitung* in July and August 1964, discussions between the leaders of the LPGs in Tunzenhausen, Wundersleben, and Schallenburg were regarded with suspicion as indicating covert ('with a wink') intentions to merge.<sup>35</sup>

Some such giant amalgamations of farms nevertheless did indeed go ahead in the course of the 1960s at the insistence of leading LPG functionaries and with the support of the district party and state apparatus. On the whole, however, by the mid to late 1960s most LPGs were stable and independent enough for both their members and the leading cadres to wish to resist a merger with their neighbours. Furthermore, the argument that *Gross* LPGs threatened to limit the long-term possibilities for and the extent of large scale specialised production was increasingly dominant among the SED's agricultural experts. Rationalising production, it was assumed, was best achieved through the extension of cooperative relations between LPGs. As an idea, however, the *Gross* LPG did not disappear, not least because many farmers and agricultural functionaries at all levels struggled to countenance the notion of the administrative separation of crop and livestock production, which cooperation appeared to propose.<sup>36</sup>

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34. Namely, establishing greater uniformity of pay and organisation and greater exchange of resources and information between LPGs.

35. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Sektor Parteiinformation, Einschätzung der MV im Monat Juli und August, 1.9.1964, pp. 120–30.

36. Examples of LPG members' opinions to this effect may be found in ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/2/022 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung zu den Fragen und Aufgaben der soz. Landwirtschaft am 7.3.1968 Beitrag Genossin Zessin, p. 103; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/13/378 Einschätzung über das Einwohnerforum in der Grenzgemeinde Berka/Werra Kr. Eisenach, 27.1.1969, p. 1.

LPGs had already started in the early 1960s to combine their construction workers in mutual organisations and collaborate on joint land improvement projects. As the decade went on, LPGs were encouraged to expand their participation in local cooperative projects particularly with regard to the use of land and machinery. While few farmers objected in principle to cooperation where there was mutual benefit, there was however growing suspicion of what loss of individual independence cooperation might lead to. By 1965, after a series of (often reluctant) mergers, many collective farmers were anxious not to have control over the finances and land which they had contributed to their LPG diluted still further. Their suspicion was exacerbated too by a desire to consolidate and a growing sense of identification with and possession of the LPG among its members, which rejected the prospect of their LPG losing independent control over its wealth, land, and machinery.

So strong was this sentiment and suspicion that even where it was not shared by LPG chairmen, they found it hard to resist. During the harvest in 1965, the few attempts in *Bezirk* Erfurt at the integrated deployment of machinery by groups of LPGs tended to be halted prematurely. LPG functionaries and their members, it was reported, were too anxious to see to their own concerns before helping their ‘partners in cooperation.’<sup>37</sup> Arguments used by district state agricultural functionaries to persuade LPG chairmen of the value of cooperation as a policy inevitably echoed those used to persuade individual farmers during the collectivisation campaign. Cooperation was put forward as the key to rationalising production while maintaining the rights of the individual farmer, just as collectivisation had been. Again, just as they had with collectivisation, many farmers regarded this process, however, as yet another means of restricting their independence.

In contrast to the spring of 1960, however, establishing cooperation by force was not a practicable option. Rather, the transmission of SED agricultural policy relied heavily on the willingness and ability of LPG leaders to explain it and persuade LPG members of its value to them as well as to the society at large. It became clear however that LPG leaders remained themselves more often than not unconvinced of the benefits of further change to the structure of agriculture. The establishment of ever more advanced degrees of cooperation between collective farms was by no means recognised as the panacea for East German agriculture that it was touted to be. Furthermore, the attainment of a reasonable level of profitability in numerous

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37. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/2/42 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965, p. 160.

collective farms, which enabled LPG members to receive satisfactory incomes, had brought a degree of social harmony and stability to collective farms not seen since the start of the collectivisation campaign. There was thus understandable desire on the part of collective farm leaders, ordinary members, and even members of the state and party administration in some districts not to rock the boat with further change. This attitude was critically dismissed in the rhetoric of party sources as ‘the theory of mediocrity’, which derided resistance to further change on such grounds as merely signs of incompetence or cowardice among LPG cadres and ideological backwardness among their members.<sup>38</sup>

After the failure of cooperation during the harvest in 1965, the SED *Bezirk* leadership were explicit in their criticism of LPG managers as the weakest links in the chain of policy implementation in agriculture:

A whole range of leading cadres in the collectives, chairmen as well as crop and livestock brigadiers are not getting to grips with the current problems of society’s development. This the result of their level of qualification, even though many of them are themselves state approved farmers or master farmers. . . . In most cases the functionaries appear to be the progressive party in the collective. But already in the boards of the collectives these leading cadres often do not find sufficient support in order to realise the tasks in the collectives individually.

Worse still, many LPG cadres clearly had no desire to continue in a position where they were under constant pressure to push through policies that the majority of their fellow farmers rejected. The report continued:

In all the districts in which new elections are being held there are problems with filling the posts of chairmen and board members. They refuse to be candidates using in part paper thin arguments. They claim not to understand the integrated deployment of machinery and cite among other things internal difficulties in the collectives, health reasons, age, unreasonable state demands for grain delivery, poor support from the board, differences within the LPG. The real causes lie however not in these arguments but are rather to be found in the fact that these chairmen shy away from confrontations with LPG members over the implementation of the decisions of the party and the government.<sup>39</sup>

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38. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/5/382 Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht, Nr.16/65, 29.5.1965, pp. 181–91.

39. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarhiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/565 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzungen über die Vorbereitungen der Neuwahlen bzw. Ergänzungswahlen in den Genossenschaften des Bezirkes Erfurt, 10.12.1965, pp. 206–9.

Even where LPG chairmen did seek to respond to the demands placed upon them by the KLRs and sought to set up cooperative arrangements with their neighbours, mid-level cadres such as work brigade leaders and members of the board continued to put up effective resistance. Without an active party organisation to back them up, LPG chairmen had little choice but to back down, or lose the support and confidence of their subordinates and fellow farmers.<sup>40</sup> In Type I LPGs in particular, LPG chairmen were reluctant even to broach this issue in public discussions.<sup>41</sup> By August 1966, at least on paper, the persuasive efforts largely of agricultural functionaries in the KLR appeared to have paid some dividends. All but 20 of the *Bezirk's* 1062 LPGs were recorded as having joined a so-called cooperative community (*Kooperationsgemeinschaft*, or KOG<sup>42</sup>) with other LPGs. However, the nature and extent of cooperative relations varied considerably in these KOGs. Meanwhile, LPG cadres were still found to be reluctant or unsuccessful at winning their members' support for cooperation.<sup>43</sup>

For cooperation to develop, LPG chairmen and other leading cadres were being asked to do more than just persuade their members; they had also actually to form effective working relations with colleagues in other LPGs. Each KOG formed a cooperative council, in which each LPG was represented, generally by its chairman. In theory, regardless of party membership, LPG chairmen were to be committed to the goals of the SED regime first and foremost. In practice, the content of the discussion of the cooperative councils was still defined to a large extent by LPG functionaries' loyalty to the interests and the wishes of the members of their own LPGs. If, in the reports of the district and *Bezirk* administration, the implementation of the NES was being hindered by a lack of ambition

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40. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Parteieinfluss im Kooperationsbereich Grossengottern, 5.10.1966, pp. 155–61; BIV/2/7/588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Operativ, Erfahrungen und Schlussfolgerungen für die Entwicklung der Parteiarbeit in den Kooperationsbereichen auf der Grundlage der Untersuchungen der KL Erfurt-Land, 2.11.1965, pp. 1–11; BIV/2/5/173 Parteiorgane, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Faktenmaterial für die Parteiaktivtagung der Kooperation Schillingstedt, Kreis Sömmerda am 25.8.1971, 23.8.1971.

41. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/3/150 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Entwurf des Berichtes an das Sekretariat des ZK über 'Die Erfahrungen der Parteiarbeit speziell zur Lösung der ideologischen Fragen bei der Entwicklung von Kooperationsbeziehungen', pp. 37–55.

42. *Kooperationsgemeinschaft* or KOG was the collective term for two or more LPGs contractually bound to cooperate with one another in some aspect of agricultural production.

43. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/A/2/3/169 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht, Nr 19/66, 24.8.1966, p. 31ff.; IV/A/2/3/169 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung des Standes des soz. Bewusstseins der Bevölkerung unseres Bezirkes, 8.9.1966, pp. 79–115.

among LPG chairmen, selfishness was often cited as being at the root of the failure of cooperation.<sup>44</sup>

The tendency for LPG cadres to advocate the interests of their collective farm at the expense of implementing the party's agricultural policy was critically dismissed as selfishness and an inability to see the larger picture of overall agricultural (and social) development which cooperation would bring. However, LPG cadres, particularly in Type I LPGs, regarded themselves no less responsible to the membership of the LPGs than they were obliged to follow instructions from the KLR. Not only did no LPG chairman wish to be seen to be the dupe of his neighbour, the day-to-day opprobrium from collective farmers towards LPG functionaries who had failed to safeguard their interests was motive enough to resist cooperation. In several cooperative communities, it became clear in the mid 1960s that relations between chairmen could rapidly deteriorate resulting in the collapse of any real cooperation between LPGs, even where the LPGs involved were supposed to be models of progressive implementation of policy.<sup>45</sup> Within the LPG and the KOG Walschleben, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, clashes of personalities became a serious problem between 1965 and 1967. At one point, members of the LPG Gebesee were reportedly accusing their chairman of being so subservient that he was little more than the coach driver of the chairman of the LPG Walschleben.<sup>46</sup> As long as there was mutual suspicion between LPG functionaries based on bad experiences in the past, the prospects for developing cooperation were small. Thus it was that a working group from the SED *Bezirksleitung* monitoring the harvest in 1967 in *Kreis* Apolda found a number of LPG chairmen refusing to allow their harvesters to be used in combination with those of other LPGs. One LPG functionary offered the argument: 'last year we were conned by the integrated deployment of machinery. We gave up our harvesters when the weather was good and then all we received was wet grain.'<sup>47</sup>

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44. For a dramatic rendering of such conflicts of interest between LPG see: H. Sakowski, *Daniel Druskat*, (E. Berlin, 1976).

45. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Protokoll über den Erfahrungsaustausch am 28.3.1967 in Heringen, 11.4.1967, pp. 320–48; BIV/2/7/588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information an Genosse Lüdecke, 13.11.1967, pp. 373–75.

46. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/550 Abt. Parteiorgane Erfahrungen und Schlussfolgerungen, 3.11.1965, p. 100; BIV/2/5/384 Parteiorgane, Information, 27.9.1966, p. 256–58; BIV/2/7/588 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung des Kooperationsbereiches Walschleben 6.7.1966, pp. 145–54; Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Parteiorgane, Faktenmaterial zu einigen Problemen der Partei und Massenarbeit der PO der Kooperationsgemeinschaft Walschleben, 23.11.1966, pp. 174–77.

47. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/7/557 Abt. Landwirtschaft der Bezirksleitung, Bericht über den Einsatz im Kreis Apolda, 9.8.1967, pp.

While the numbers of SED members in leading positions in LPGs had increased, the KLRs were still reliant on a considerable proportion of mid-level managers in the collective farms who had not joined a party or who were members of one or other of the block parties (primarily the DBD) to implement agricultural policy. Despite the proclaimed loyalty of the DBD to the SED agenda, at the grassroots there was still mutual antagonism between SED members and members of the DBD, who often claimed greater technical expertise. The *grüne Genossen*<sup>48</sup> of the DBD were thus regularly suspected by both the SED and DBD hierarchy of acting primarily in either their own self-interest or the pragmatic interests of their collectives to the detriment of the evolution of socialist agricultural policy. The lack of clarity among such collective farm managers as to what was intended by ever-deeper forms of cooperation was at the core of their inability to persuade their members or, indeed, even agree with one another.

As with the use of the NES reforms in the LPGs, while the positive benefit of cooperation remained unclear, it was dismissed as at best the latest unnecessary fad of policy or suspected of being yet another stealthy method of depriving farmers of control over their own resources.<sup>49</sup> For many LPG members actively involved in the management of the collective farm, the old debate of received farming wisdom and traditional practice versus the SED's progressive agricultural policy was thus recast as pragmatic conservatism in the LPG versus change for change's sake.

## Normalisation Tested

By 1968, the gradual implementation of socialist agricultural policy transmitted via the district agricultural councils and the LPG leadership had made some limited progress, as the top-heavy process of communication took its effect. The number of Type I LPGs had been reduced to less than the number of Type III LPGs in most of the districts of the *Bezirk*. Levels of qualification had risen significantly among both leading cadres and

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72–76; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV, 10.9.1967, pp. 50–57; 5.10.1967, pp. 58–63; 27.11.1967, pp. 74–81.

48. 'Green comrades' was a nickname for DBD members among some SED members.

49. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt BIV/2/3/278 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Kreisleitung Mühlhausen Monatliche Berichterstattung an den 1. Bezirkssekretär, Monat November 1967, 15.11.1967, pp. 392–96; IV/B/2/5/247 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der auf der Grundlage einer Konzeption durchgeführten Untersuchung zu Entwicklungsproblemen in den LPG Typ I des Kreises Eisenach, 12.8.1968, pp. 39–53.

the agricultural workforce as a whole.<sup>50</sup> Much also had been achieved in establishing the conditions for mechanised production on a large scale, with mergers and some forms of cooperation taking effect. While concessions continued to be made to farmers in the form of small private plots and livestock, working conditions had also changed considerably. Many (although not all) residual elements of private farming had been replaced with a collective working culture.<sup>51</sup> Despite resistance to other economic reforms, in most LPGs, performance related pay, bonuses, and detailed accounting of costs and profits had become an accepted part of the production process.

However, impatience was growing in some quarters of the SED leadership with the lack of progress towards the full incorporation of agriculture into the GDR's industrial economy. In particular, the limited adoption of a standardised system of socialist business management (*sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft*<sup>52</sup>) by all LPG chairmen seemed to be holding back progress towards specialisation and industrialisation of production as well as agriculture's integration into the food processing industry, within the New Economic System's flexible planned economy.<sup>53</sup> As with earlier reforms to the economic organisation of the collective farms, LPG functionaries found themselves walking a tightrope between the insistence of the state and party apparatus and the inertia or resistance of their mid-level cadres and members. The failure of chairmen to implement reforms in their collective farms—despite publicly expressing support for them—was noted by the party as a serious obstacle to progress. Without reform, the necessary cooperative relations between farms and the food industry crucial to the further specialisation and industrialisation of agriculture could not be developed.<sup>54</sup>

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50. By 1968, the proportion of the agricultural workforce with the basic qualification *Facharbeiterprüfung* was at 47 percent. The proportion of those qualified as Master farmers, or with a technical college or university qualification, was at 7.8 percent.

51. Private household production (*individuelle Hauswirtschaften*) remained central to life as a collective farmer and was a crucial means of supplementing income for farmers. It came also to be essential to the production of certain items of produce for the GDR as a whole from the late 1970s. See for an example of the meaning of the *individuelle Hauswirtschaft* to members of an LPG, B. Schier, *Alltagsleben im 'Sozialistischen Dorf'* (Munich 2001), pp. 223–37.

52. *Sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft* was a system of accounting and incentive measures designed to improve the efficiency of financial planning under the terms of the New Economic System.

53. BAArch, DK 1 VA Neu 2846, Landwirtschaftsrat der DDR, Zu einigen Problemen der Arbeit der betriebswirtschaftlichen Beratungsdienste, Berichte der Bezirksleitungen, 13.3.1968.

54. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/197 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 3. und 4. Mai 1968, Diskussionsbeitrag H. Reise, LPG Grossbrennbach, pp. 104–8, Diskussionbeitrag R. Müller, LPG Bachra, pp. 119–23.

In these circumstances, a fine line had to be trodden by the staff of the district agricultural councils as well. LPG functionaries, responding to the concerns of their farmers, were largely loath to develop what they considered unfair cooperative relations either with other farms or with the major food processing plants. At the same time, if cooperation was administratively imposed and organised, it was likely that there would be negative consequences for production levels as well as personal antagonisms, which would sour relations among LPG chairmen and district functionaries of party and state. Moreover, the disruption that would come with industrialisation and specialisation of agriculture via cooperation would be a bitter enough pill to swallow for rural communities if gradually introduced, let alone if imposed.<sup>55</sup> In some respects, the confusion created by an administrative imposition of cooperation threatened to be more severe than had been the case with collectivisation. As the LPG chairman in Vehra put it in June 1968,

the step to a common crop production [between LPGs in a KOG] and the development of various cooperative relations is comparable to the step from being a private farmer to being a collective farmer. But back then there was a clear statute which indicated to each person what his rights and obligations were and everyone knew exactly, from their neighbours experience too, how things would proceed and what awaited them. With the common crop production there is still a great deal unclear and we can't give concrete answers to the questions members pose.<sup>56</sup>

At the seventh Party Congress of the SED and the tenth German Farmers Congress in 1968, what appeared to be a new uncompromising agenda for the rapid development of industrialised farming in the GDR was, however, laid out. The apparent advocacy of immediate specialisation in crop production, and greater integration between agriculture and the food processing industry sparked some party zealots—both in LPGs and in the district and *Bezirk* administrations—into action. Pressure was stepped up on collective farms to accept new advances (prematurely) in the extent of their cooperation with one another in crop production. Rumours spread of separate cooperative crop production units being established without due consultation and ratification from LPG members' assemblies. The individual collective

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55. SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A/1/7/139 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Erfahrungen und Probleme der Arbeit der Partei bei der Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des VII. Parteitages und des X. DBK. 30.8.1968.

56. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/7/268 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Faktenmaterial zu Aktivtagung der KOG Strausfurt am 26.6.1968, p. 47.

farm appeared as a result increasingly redundant as an autonomous administrative unit, and fears grew among farmers and LPG chairmen that an administrative expropriation of collective farmers was imminent, as collectivised farming was relegated to a branch of the food processing industry.

Having been made aware of the widespread concerns of those in agriculture at this development, Walter Ulbricht himself sought to allay fears, roundly denouncing any such premature moves in this direction in his concluding remarks at the tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in April 1969. Certain aspects of the party line had, he claimed, been misinterpreted: firstly, too much power had been given to administrators in the food industry and undermined the independent status of LPGs; and secondly, a minority of LPGs in advanced states of cooperation had gone too far too quickly in the development of independent crop production and ought consequently no longer to be considered as models for other LPGs.<sup>57</sup> Central to his comments was the notion of the inviolability of the LPG as an economic unit, in which the principles of collective democracy were to be meticulously implemented. Ulbricht argued that the development of cooperative relations in crop production must and could only occur gradually in consultation with LPG members.

Rather than prompting a return to order and calm, this pronouncement from on high, however, caused considerable disruption. In *Bezirk* Erfurt, in the immediate aftermath of the tenth Plenum of the Central Committee, there was a degree of rebellion in the air as well as considerable confusion among collective farm managers and district agricultural functionaries as to quite what the import of Ulbricht's remarks was.<sup>58</sup> The members of the LPG Lützensömmern in *Kreis* Bad Langensalza took the opportunity to object publicly to their treatment at the hands of the cooperative council and the district agricultural council, suggesting that they were always being forced to accept *faits accomplis*. In *Kreis* Arnstadt as well as Bad Langensalza, some collective farmers suggested that they had been right all along to reject initiatives towards establishing cooperation, going so far as to question the future existence of cooperation between LPGs at all. The chairman of the LPG Kalteneber in Heiligenstadt expressed his confusion and disillusionment:

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57. SAPMO BArch DY30/IV 2/1/395 Tagungen des ZK–10. Plenum des ZK, 24.4.1969, Schlusswort des Genossen Ulbricht, pp. 211–21.

58. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/5/183 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation 21.5.1969 Abt. Parteiorgane; IV/B/2/7/267 Abt. Landwirtschaft Information über den Stand der Entwicklung der Kooperationsbeziehungen im Bezirk Erfurt und die sich daraus ergebenden Schlussfolgerungen. . . , 19.1.1970, pp. 79–95.

the question which concerns me is whether agricultural policy has changed since the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenum? There are currently many discussions, cooperation is going to be broken up, or cooperation is leading to the liquidation of the class of the collective farmer. I'm not against new things, but it's not so easy for us up here as it is in the lowlands. . . We're losing the will to work.<sup>59</sup>

Reports, compiled by the DBD during May 1969 just after the tenth Plenum, on the mood in LPGs in the *Bezirk* highlighted the sense among LPG members that recently they had been rather bullied into things. In Erfurt-Land in particular, DBD members complained about the damage done to the independence of their LPG by the district authorities.<sup>60</sup> In later reports, it was clear that DBD members were still struck by uncertainty about how to proceed, not least because LPGs were reportedly no longer receiving guidance from staff from the SED *Kreisleitung* or the district 'agricultural council', who themselves no doubt were unclear what the correct path ought to be. In Steinrode, *Kreis* Worbis, some DBD members pointed out that representatives of the district authorities used to participate in every meeting of the cooperative council (*Kooperationsrat*, or KOR<sup>61</sup>), but had not turned up since the tenth Plenum.<sup>62</sup> In *Kreis* Heiligenstadt, as in *Kreis* Mühlhausen and *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, SED *Bezirksleitung* reports complained, the district agricultural councils were now unaware of what was going on in the LPG assemblies.<sup>63</sup>

A meeting of the SED *Kreisleitung* Sömmerda in July 1969 to discuss Ulbricht's concluding remarks heard a report on the reaction of farmers in the district. It was claimed hopefully that the majority of the collective farm members understood correctly that the tenth Plenum did not mean a correction of agricultural policy, but was rather a continuation of the resolutions

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59. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/5/183 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation, Stimmen von Genossenschaftsbäuerinnen und-bauern. . ., 21.5.1969, p. 326.

60. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/5/410 DBD Bezirksverband, Bericht an den 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED ,23.5.1969, p. 174–80.

61. The *Kooperationsrat* or KOR was a body comprised of delegates from each of the LPGs in the cooperative community (KOG), usually the LPG chairmen, but also other leading members of the LPG, including brigade leaders or SED party secretaries. The primary purpose of the council was to arrange and agree upon the terms on which LPGs, and later the so-called LPG *Pflanzenproduktion* and LPG *Tierproduktion* cooperated with one another.

62. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/5/410 DBD Bezirksverband, Auswertung der Berichte der Kreisverbände über Meinungen unserer Mitglieder zum 10. Plenum des ZK der SED und unserer 5. Parteivorstandssitzung, undated, pp. 181–86.

63. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/5/183 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation über den Stand der Durchführung. . ., 17.7.1969, p. 392.

of the seventh SED Party Congress, with the reminder that this process must not be destroyed through impatience. In the first days and weeks after the tenth Plenum, however, mid-level cadres were marked out as being particularly problematic by spreading the opinion that ‘thanks to the 10<sup>th</sup> Plenum that they could all now take their time and that cooperation would be scaled back.’ More seriously, it was reported that LPG functionaries were now questioning the connection between collective democracy and democratic centralism. Ulbricht’s remarks were thus being interpreted as a license for collective farms to assert their individual independence from outside interference, be it from other LPGs or the state apparatus.

One chairman of an LPG was reported to have collected all of the newspaper articles he could find on the subject of collective democracy, in order, at the given moment, to be able to back up his opposition to cooperation.<sup>64</sup> The wishes of the members of LPGs rather than the directives of the district state authorities were seen now in some quarters as the central consideration in a LPG chairman’s decisions. In *Kreis Sömmerda*, it was reported that in a number of LPGs, the attitude of the members was that the cooperation in crop production should be broken up and LPGs should be allowed to be independent again. In a letter sent by the chairman and party secretary of the LPG ‘Neuer Weg’ Kölleda to the chairman of their cooperative community, they explained the decision of the LPG’s board to withdraw from cooperative crop production. The letter concluded with the chairman and party secretary expressing their regret at this decision having been reached. They pointed out however that even they could not get around the words: ‘the farmers decide’.<sup>65</sup>

Although by the end of the year, claims were made by the district agricultural council that clarity had been achieved as to the meaning of the tenth Plenum, the issue of how to proceed with cooperation in crop production was not resolved in all LPGs for several years.<sup>66</sup> During 1970, *Kreise Worbis*, *Sondershausen*, and *Erfurt-Land* were found to have made no headway in restarting developments in cooperative crop production. Worse still, in a number of existing cooperative crop production partnerships, there was serious disillusionment

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64. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/190 SED Kreisleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisleitungssitzung, 3.7.1969, pp. 136–55.

65. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Probleme der Kooperation–Politbüro Beschluss vom 25.7.1969, pp. 150–59; Information über Beratung der Produktionsleitung am 14.8.1969, pp. 160–62; LPG ‘Neuer Weg’ Kölleda an den Vorsitzenden der KOG Kölleda, 28.8.1969, p. 163.

66. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/70 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Protokoll über die Schrittmacherberatung am 11.9.1969 in der Kreisleitung, 12.9.1969, pp. 3–6.

with the whole project.<sup>67</sup> As late as 1972, the leading cadres of a number of LPGs in *Kreis Sömmerda* expressed their doubt over the value of developing another cooperative crop production partnership, as they were not sure that there would not soon be ‘another 10<sup>th</sup> Plenum’, which abandoned the administrative separation of crop and livestock production.<sup>68</sup> The response to the tenth Plenum had clearly highlighted the dangers of any neglect of the chain of communication at the local level. The SED regime’s authority in agriculture continued to depend on the mediation of LPG chairmen.

## From Ulbricht to Honecker: Regaining the Initiative

The Eighth Party Congress in 1971 marked the final transition of power from Ulbricht to Honecker. There was, however, no u-turn in agricultural policy, with gradual development of greater cooperation in crop production still at the heart of the industrialisation of farming. This was in large part because Gerhard Grüneberg<sup>69</sup> remained the central figure in the formation of agricultural policy in the *Politbüro*. Reports on the situation in *Bezirk Erfurt* in 1971 made clear, however, that there was little chance of a new structure of agricultural production being established without at least some consultation. While in the *Sömmerda* and *Apolda* districts more than 70 percent of land was being farmed cooperatively, this was the case for only 20 percent of land in *Worbis* and *Sondershausen* districts, where a number of the remaining Type I LPGs continued to resist cooperation.<sup>70</sup>

Over the course of the next five years, the remaining Type I LPGs in the *Bezirk* that had retained their independence, allowing their members to continue to keep their livestock privately, were threatened with severe financial penalties unless they abandoned private livestock holding and transferred to Type III status or agreed to merge with a neighbouring Type III LPG. Objections to mergers by Type I farmers were mitigated by their

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67. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/7/267 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Stellungnahme zur Information der Produktionsleitung des RLN (B). . . , 11.12.1970, p. 239.

68. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/171 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Zuarbeit zum Informationsbericht über das Thema ‘Erfahrungen und Probleme der Kooperation in der Pflanzenproduktion. . .’, 26.09.1972, pp. 50–56.

69. Gerhard Grüneberg (1921–1981), from 1960–1980, was Secretary for Agriculture in the Central Committee of the SED and from 1966, a member of the *Politbüro* of the ZK.

70. BArch Abt. DDR, DK 1 VA neu 2464 Ministerium für LFN, Probleme der Führungstätigkeit im Bereich der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft im Bezirk Erfurt, 1971; Abt. Wissenschaftliche Führungstätigkeit und Inspektion, Bericht—Erfurt, 1972.

being allowed in some cases to continue to keep the same amount of livestock privately as they had before, despite now being part of the Type III.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the re-education of the agricultural workforce continued to advance rapidly.<sup>72</sup> Between 1967 and 1971, as the numbers of those working in agriculture dropped, the proportion of farmers in *Bezirk* Erfurt holding a technical qualification rose from 48.6 percent to 76.5 percent,<sup>73</sup> rising again by 1975 to 82.6 percent.<sup>74</sup> In line with this development, the workforce became increasingly specialised and used to an industrial style work pattern, with shift work being widely introduced.<sup>75</sup> As a consequence, the level of resistance to the development of cooperation reduced steadily among the LPG membership who themselves were increasingly specialised.

At the same time, LPG cadres who had not supported the development of industrial style production and the formation of specialised crop production units began to be excluded from leading positions in LPGs, either through merger or through the reorganisation of management of crop production. As far as the SED Bezirksleitung was concerned, the failure of LPGs to advance with establishing cooperative crop production following the tenth Plenum was the continuing lack of sufficient SED presence on the cooperative councils or among LPG leaders in general.<sup>76</sup> Certainly, DBD members in cadre positions were reported in a number of cases to be at the root cause of opposition to the development of independent crop

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71. D. Gabler *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der ehemaligen DDR* (Berlin, 1995), p. 227; The number of Type I/II LPGs decreased from 121 in 1970 to 49 in 1974. Statistisches Jahrbuch—Bezirk Erfurt, Teil I, p. 173.

72. As part of a poll of farmers by the Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK in 1970, the following question was asked: ‘When you consider the development of your LPG in last years, which are the main changes which have occurred among the people?’ The most popular response by some margin was: ‘The increase in technical qualification’. SAPMO BArch DY30 IV/A/2.023/83 Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Lehrstuhl marxistisch-leninistische Soziologie, Die Entwicklung des politischen Verantwortungsbewusstseins der Genossenschaftsbauern. . . , Frage 15, 17.2.1971.

73. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/C/2/7/344 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse der Probleme der Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens in den Gemeinden des Bezirkes, pp. 14–35.

74. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/C/2/7/344 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Rat des Bezirkes, Stellv. Vorsitzende für LFN, Bericht über die Verwirklichung des VIII. Parteitages und der Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz der SED in der LuN des Bezirkes, Jan. 1976, pp. 192–201.

75. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/C/2/3/164 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Material für die Mitarbeiterberatung am 27.8.1973, 23.8.1973, pp. 184–207.

76. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/2/4/123 BPKK, Analyse über die Parteiverfahren im 2. Halbjahr 1970 und Probleme die sich aus der Tätigkeit der KPKK Weimar ergeben, 2.12.1970, p. 86; Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/078 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Bericht über die Arbeit der PO der KOG Strausfurt, 7.6.1971, pp. 44–47.

production partnerships and the resurgence of arguments in favour of the large-scale mixed crop and livestock production of the *Gross LPG*.<sup>77</sup> Those who were not a member of any political party increasingly could not expect to rise beyond the position of work brigade leader, nor would they have access to the highest qualification levels possible without party membership. Although DBD members did occupy some top positions in collective farms, the DBD became the party of mid-level agricultural cadres in the 1970s and 1980s. From the mid 1970s, for those that wished to rise higher, SED membership appeared to be a prerequisite.<sup>78</sup> With these developments, the means for communicating and implementing SED agricultural policy had achieved unprecedented consistency and coherence.

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The nature of SED rule in East Germany is by no means easily characterised. Certainly in the sphere of agriculture, the manner in which the SED leadership communicated its authority was neither static nor monolithic. The transformative effects of industrial and technological development played an integral part in shaping the experience of dictatorship in the East German countryside. Against this background, it is however possible also to trace an, albeit heavily skewed, process of conflict and compromise at the grassroots of agriculture in the GDR. It is in the light of this process that the unprecedented stability and coherence of the Honecker regime in the 1970s must be seen. A normalisation of rule had taken place in agriculture. However, as the economic decline of the 1980s would demonstrate, it could not protect against the decay of the material and epistemic bases of the SED regime's claim to legitimacy.

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77. SAPMO BArch, DY60/2973 DBD Parteivorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Wertung des Weiteren Verlaufs der Diskussionen zur Vorebreitung des Perspektivplanes; DBD Bezirksverband, Parteiinformation, 11.8.1970; DBD Bezirksverband, Abt. Parteiorgane, Neuwahlbeschlussbericht, 21.1.1970; ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/B/4.10/198 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 4. und 5.3.1970, Diskussionsbeitrag K. Schwarz, LPG Mannstedt, p. 157–65; IV/B/2/5/165 Abt. Parteiorgane Erste Einschätzungen der Kreisleitungssitzungen zur Auswertung der 14. Tagung des ZK, 19.1.1971, pp. 568–74.

78. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt IV/C/2/15/517 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Befreundete Parteien, Aktennotiz, Dec. 1972, p. 39.