

ical production were allowed to take priority over investment in health and safety measures.

Contamination effect? Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. For years, Western tobacco manufacturers and asbestos companies knew about the links between smoking and death from lung cancer and heart disease, and between exposure to asbestos and death from asbestosis and mesothelioma; but they continued to promote smoking, to expose workers to asbestos and other dangerous substances, and to advertise their products. Even government attempts at deterrence (health warnings on cigarette packets and advertisements) have been hampered by economic interests in tax revenues and donations. If mass public health was the agreed humanitarian goal in both capitalist and communist systems of the later twentieth century, perhaps it is again – at least from the point of view of the vulnerable and the victims of any system – a case of 'a plague on both their houses'.

Chapter Six

Youth

Creating a new kind of society required the creation of a new kind of human being, ideally not the competitive individualists of rampant capitalism, encouraged by the system to pursue personal goals of 'self-fulfilment' even at the expense of others, but rather human beings who would put themselves out for the wider community, who would subordinate individual wishes to the collective good. To do this, it was not sufficient merely to transform the relations of production; it was necessary also to instil in young people from their earliest years the sense of belonging to a larger community, having wider responsibilities for a collective future.

The 'socialist personality' was the key link between the 'individual' and the community. In its mid-1970s model, the 'socialist personality' was officially defined as:

an all-round, well-developed personality, who has a comprehensive command of political, specialist and general knowledge, possesses a firm class outlook rooted in the Marxist-Leninist world view, is notable for excellent mental, physical and moral qualities, is thoroughly imbued with collective thoughts and deeds, and actively, consciously and creatively contributes to the shaping of socialism.¹

Far from being the 'uniform' robots caricatured by Western 'imperialist ideologues' for the purpose of 'discrediting' socialism, such personalities would be characterised by 'creative autonomy' and initiative, facing the future with openness and optimism.² Only in socialism were the preconditions allegedly present for the development of this paragon of virtue, who would make a full and active personal contribution to the construction of socialism and the cause of world peace.

Notions of active citizenship and community spirit are, of course, not unique to communist states; capitalist states also on occasion force citizens to prioritise the 'national interest' over individual concerns in times of warfare,

and encourage a concern for collective welfare in regular community service activities or charity donations. But the GDR took this to particular extremes: mobilisation against the 'class enemy' was more or a less a constant feature of life, and, with variations in degree at different times, the weapons of the class enemy could be seen in the most absurdly trivial aspects of dress and behaviour; in addition the SED had a near monopoly of community activities and institutions, challenged only in part by the Churches. The GDR was thus not merely a state in which collective goals took priority over individual wishes, it was one in which at times even the most apparently personal and private questions of morality and lifestyle, fashions and hair length, were seen not merely as ethical questions but also as political matters to be dealt with at the highest levels.

Historians have tended to focus on educational and social institutions and official policies towards young people, and have highlighted the ways in which that minority of 'deviants' whose behaviour earned them a place in the archives were categorised and maltreated.³ But histories of official youth policies tend to shed less light on the activities and interests of young people who neither participated actively nor rebelled vociferously. It is often only possible to trace official conceptions and initiatives, and explicit battles over the souls of the rising generation, while gaining only more fleeting impressions of the attitudes and experiences of successive cohorts of conformist young people within the GDR. Even so, some generalisations are possible.

As with so much else in the GDR, different official aims and challenges proved difficult to reconcile with each other; and changing SED policies were in any event but one element in a far wider set of social and cultural trends affecting the patterns of attitudes and behaviour among East German citizens over the forty years of the GDR's existence. Ultimately, patterns of individualism (ironically in part fostered by the SED's own policies) and participation in international cultural trends proved more powerful than the attempted collective production of 'socialist personalities' who were one hundred per cent committed to the construction of 'our GDR'. Even the deeply moralising tone on the part of the SED power elite in the early years gave way to greater moral relativism and even a partial if suspicious toleration, within controlled limits, of an increasingly pluralistic youth culture by the later 1980s.

The young people of one decade were the Party functionaries, factory workers, miners, engineers, doctors, dissidents, teachers, collective farm chairmen and, indeed, parents of the next. The 'youth' of the 1950s were the adults of the 1970s; and the influences of school and socialisation are inextricably intertwined with the wider historical context and formative experiences of the period, as becomes evident when looking more broadly at different

generations in the GDR. Furthermore, 'youth' is not merely an age category imposed by an outside observer, but is also a social construct at a specific historical time and place. If the notion of 'teenagerhood' was something of a historical invention of later twentieth-century affluent consumer societies, particularly in the 1960s with the growth of mass markets for teenage fashions and pop music, then the SED's concept of 'youth' to cover those aged between fourteen and twenty-five (and sometimes well beyond, in the case of functionaries) was even more extended, but for rather different reasons. Here, however, 'youth' is interpreted in the broadest sense, to cover the whole period of socialisation from birth to young adulthood.

The 'smallest cell': The family

Both changing family forms and expectations of intimate relationships were profoundly affected by GDR social policies and economic conditions. Like so much else, it is simply ahistorical to talk of the family as a 'niche', as though it were some unchanging little cell to which one could escape from the big bad world of politics.⁴ Family size and form, the duration of family bonds, the character of inter-personal relationships, were all as profoundly affected by the changing socio-economic and political environment in the GDR as they have been in capitalist societies. And the family remained of great importance for young people growing up in the GDR, though not necessarily always in the ways officially intended.

The family in the GDR was officially seen as the smallest unit or 'cell' of the collective socialist whole, rather than (as in prevalent Western ideals of the late twentieth century, if not always in practice) merely a 'private sphere' of mutual love, protection and retreat from the pressures of outside life, an arena for 'authentic' relationships and the transmission of independent moral traditions. In this, there are remarkable formal similarities between SED views of the family and official conceptions of the role of the family under National Socialism, though of course under very different ideological colours. The family was held to be the primary instance of socialisation of the 'socialist personality', for the formation of which 'education in the family, in the state educational institutions, in the FDJ and its Pioneer organisation "Ernst Thälmann" are of the utmost importance'.⁵

The role of the family was enshrined even in the Law on the Unified Socialist Education System of 1965, in which parents and the family were singled out as being given 'a new moral and educational role'.⁶ As Alexander Abusch, Deputy Prime Minister and Chair of the State Commission for

Formation of a Unified Socialist Education System, put it in his introductory remarks on the new law:

Here [*bei uns*], the interests of the family and of society are not in contradiction to one another . . . Our socialist society, surely like every good family, wants to bring up and educate young people as well as possible for a secure, peaceful and happy future. The higher ethical-moral significance of the family as the smallest cell of our new society results from the fact that it has been liberated from the destructive influences of capitalism.⁷

Yet the family, thus 'liberated', developed in rather different ways than those Abusch had anticipated.

Divorce rates were relatively high in the early post-war years and on into the early 1950s. Many couples, on being reunited after separation during or after the war, found that periods of military service, incarceration as prisoners of war and the heightened stresses of living in ruins and trying to rebuild shattered lives had wrought far-reaching changes in their expectations and behaviour patterns; for many, attempts to readjust in this period of upheaval proved too great a strain on their marriage. During the course of the later 1950s and '60s, the divorce rate steadily declined; but with changes in the position of women – notably their increased legal and economic independence – and with the social policies of the Honecker period, more and more people came to view marriage as a temporary arrangement between consenting adults, rather than a partnership for a lifetime. The overall rise in the divorce rate is in part related to the fact that there was simultaneously a significant rise in the proportion of divorces instigated by women: by 1989 more than two thirds (69 per cent) of divorce proceedings were initiated by the female partner. The divorce rate rose from 14 divorces per one hundred new marriages in the early 1960s, to 38 in 1989; the greatest rise was in the Honecker period when, in a context of rising female employment and enhanced state-run childcare facilities, divorce rates effectively doubled.⁸ And, alongside the inhabitants of East Berlin, 'capital of the GDR', it was ironically the residents of the socialist new towns – which had been precisely designed to facilitate the development of the new 'socialist personality' – who displayed the highest rates of marriage breakdown. There were similar differences between older residential areas and new housing estates; thus in the later 1980s people living in the vast new housing estates, such as Marzahn and Hellersdorf, were around twice as likely to sue for divorce than were residents of older areas such as Köpenick and Lichtenberg.⁹

Alongside rising divorce rates there were nevertheless high rates of remarriage: East Germans clearly expected the relationship of marriage to be one of a life partnership, and were prepared to re-embark on such an enterprise even

after previous attempts had failed. But the relationship between adults did not necessarily have to be tied to parenting: there was an ever-growing tolerance of giving birth outside the relationship of marriage – frequently having the first pregnancy and child before marriage – and of single parenting even when cohabiting with a new partner. Thus the traditional family bonds – while still, it should be remembered, of a conventional character among perhaps half the population – were dissolving among the remainder of the population. The stigma previously attached to statuses such as 'divorcee' or 'illegitimate' ('bastard') collapsed along with the changing patterns and habits of increasing numbers of East Germans.

Given that children were no longer seen by many East Germans as a reason to try to keep a failing marital relationship at least formally together, more and more children were affected by parental divorce. With the expansion of crèche and kindergarten provision, more and more children were also socialised within a wider context than that of the conventional 'housewife at home' model. The effects on personality have been much disputed: psychotherapists have arguably grotesquely exaggerated the consequences of such a socialisation context for the vast majority of those well-balanced and functioning East Germans who did not make their way into a psychoanalytic surgery. While for some commentators 'deformations' within the socialisation process 'reproduced in the family situation the pathology that would later be required for the integration and maintenance of an abnormal social situation', other scholars have suggested that the family remained a 'private niche' within which East Germans could escape for love, comfort and authenticity.¹⁰ Neither pole of these polarised views quite encapsulates the situation adequately.

The family was not an 'escape'; it was where one started from. Family background had, in the GDR as in contemporary Western societies, an enormous influence on young people's attitudes, behaviour, ways of speaking and thinking, aspirations and chances in life. At the same time it is clear that, whether East Germans were aware of it themselves or not, the character and structure of the family unit changed in significant ways, and these changes were arguably more the result of East Germans' own choices about the structure of their lives and relationships in a changing employment and social policy context than they were of the official conceptions of the role of the family as the 'smallest-cell' of socialist society. But such changes did not necessarily entail the denial of love and care to offspring, whether born within or (increasingly) outside the institution of marriage, born to older or (increasingly) younger parents, or raised by a cohabiting couple or (increasingly) a single parent. And the insecurities of upbringing in the 1970s and '80s may have been different from, but were arguably no more disturbing than, the very

different insecurities of birth and socialisation within the devastated family conditions of the Second World War and shortly thereafter. There is considerable evidence to suggest that, despite – or even perhaps because of – the deprivations of the wartime and post-war period, children in the 1950s and '60s had good relationships and a great deal of empathy with their (remaining) parents. Generational conflicts in the later 1960s were not carried out within families, whether as 'teenage rebellion' in the cultural sense, or political critique of parental pasts and politics, but rather in the wider sphere of the workplace or politics. Often there was, in contrast to the Western generational conflicts of the time, considerable solidarity within individual GDR families in respect of difficulties faced by their members in the outside world.¹¹

Education and training

On the appropriate education and training of young people rests the future of any modern state; all advanced industrial states rely on the fostering and development of relevant technical expertise and an enhanced capacity for flexibility and innovation. As a modern industrial society, the GDR needed a degree of individual initiative and enterprise, for scientific and technological innovation, for finding new solutions to problems, for economic efficiency and organisation, and for cultural creativity and inspiration. But there were, too, far wider political aims with respect to youth. Young people were particularly crucial to the communist project, as the SED sought to capture the hearts and minds of a new generation untainted by the compromised Nazi past, to protect them from the allegedly adverse moral and political influences of the 'class enemy' in the West, and to select and train a new cadre of potential leaders of the future. The core problem, through every area, was that of the balancing and the fostering of individual initiative with conformity and commitment to officially prescribed goals – a problem that never was, and arguably in principle never could be, resolved. Youth policy in the GDR was thus repeatedly characterised by tensions between attempts at control from above, and a degree of insight into and recognition of the fact that young people could never mature into the desired 'socialist personalities', or independent and creative adults capable of constructing socialism, if they were not given a degree of freedom and initiative.

The education system was geared to the transformation of both individual personality and the structure of the wider society. The old German system, in which the children of the upper classes and professionals would go to the so-called 'Gymnasium' – a form of grammar school – marking them out for university study and the reproduction of privileged status, was replaced by a

system intended to give more advantages to children from all backgrounds, and particularly to those from peasant and working class families. There was a series of major reforms of the education system in the period of real social revolution in the first two decades after the war, starting already in the occupation period. The 1946 Law for the Democratisation of German Schools was the first step in a process of removing the influence of both religion and of inherited wealth and privilege from schools. This was followed by a series of reorganisations of the education system in the 1950s, providing a comprehensive education system for the vast majority of East German children; in addition, a small minority were selected for specialised or elite schools designed to foster and indeed force particular talents, particularly in the area of sports, but also in science, maths and languages. Finally, the Law on the Unified Socialist Education System of 1965 provided a unified structure and philosophy of education running more or less from infancy to senility. The education system under the long-serving Education Minister Margot Honecker (Deputy Minister from 1958, then Minister for the People's Education from 1963 to 1989) was fundamentally related both to the perceived 'needs of society' and to an individual's political conformity.

With the introduction of a fully comprehensive school system, the majority of children went through a 'polytechnic' school (Polytechnische Oberschule, or POS) after their primary schooling together until, in the final two years, vocational and academic paths began to diverge. The more academically inclined would go on to an 'extended upper school' (Erweiterte Oberschule, or EOS) in which they could take the final academic school leaving exams, the *Abitur*, which was the academic prerequisite for university study. It was also possible to arrive at this point by other routes, such that further educational development was never closed off for those with the appropriate motivation and intelligence. But academic success alone was not enough. Political conformity, the appropriate family background, lack of religious commitment, willingness to play a full role in the life of the FDJ, and similar considerations were equally important to ensure the opportunity for future study. Although having come through this system university students had at least learnt to appear conformist, it remained important at this level to ensure that a watchful eye was kept on potentially independent-minded young people: the system of Stasi informants was thus relatively thick on the ground, particularly in highly sensitive areas of university study, but also even among schoolchildren.¹²

Education was, of course, not merely about instilling political conformity, but also about producing a highly skilled workforce for a modernising industrial society. Ever closer links were to be developed with the world of work and

industry through 'twinning' agreements between schools and industrial enterprises (*Patenschaften*), and through the annual *Messe der Meister von Morgen* ('Fair of Tomorrow's Masters'), the first of which took place in Leipzig in 1958, and which continued to play a major role right through to the 1980s.¹³ While this latter seems to have encouraged many young people into careers as engineers, technical experts or 'inventors' in the widest sense, the twinning arrangements seem to have been somewhat more mixed in their consequences. Children were taken to their partner economic enterprises not merely to gain exposure to the atmosphere of adult life and to encourage a sense of positive identification with the heroised industrial worker, but also to give real assistance in reaching production targets. Recent research suggests that while on the one hand teachers were often happy to gain additional materials (and even food) from the enterprises with which their classes were twinned, reactions among schoolchildren on occasion consisted of boredom, disillusionment and a degree of shocked surprise at the dirty conditions and prevalent drunkenness that were characteristic of some East German workplaces.¹⁴ Yet the rather dirigiste attitude to encouraging children into certain future career paths (*Berufslenkung*), with guaranteed apprenticeships and workplaces, was seen in a rather more positive light.

Huge emphasis was placed on the possibility of continuous education and training, and the acquisition of further qualifications throughout life, with evening courses and periodic Party schools. The latter in particular were often experienced as both demanding and dull, a strain, and a large demand on 'private' time, putting many people off the idea of 'promotion' or taking a position of further responsibility. Furthermore, by the 1970s the system of further and higher education had expanded so much that more qualified graduates were being produced than there were appropriate workplaces for such a skilled labour force. Many over-qualified people thus felt they were working below the level for which they had been prepared. Political commitment was hence the price to be paid for further promotion in this situation.

In principle many of the goals and the underlying philosophy sounded not only idealistic, but even highly laudable from any political perspective: removing barriers to educational opportunity rooted in inherited wealth and privilege, providing opportunities for further and higher education at any age to anyone capable of benefiting. But there were two major problems in practice: first, the massive gap between ideals and realities rooted in problems of inadequate material and human resources; and secondly, the huge ideological pressure for political conformity, with an enormous price to be paid by those 'who thought differently' (to use a phrase from the Rosa Luxemburg quotation about freedom that so irritated the authorities when displayed on a banner by

dissidents in January 1988). Many accounts see the GDR education system almost entirely in terms of 'breaking one's backbone', or as an 'educational dictatorship'. Others are more nuanced, and many East Germans remember with some fondness the lenience of individual teachers. Furthermore, for those who wanted to train to be a specialist in pig farming or to be a tractor mechanic, or had no real idea of what they wanted to do, there were enormous opportunities: no young person need fear lack of a place to gain further qualifications, or an appropriate apprenticeship and eventual job. This aspect was remembered particularly fondly by East Germans after unification, when their own sons and daughters had immense opportunities and individual choice, but in a situation of strong competition and high unemployment. But for those who wanted to go on to higher studies, particularly in politically somewhat sensitive areas, the position was a great deal more problematic in terms of the pressure for expressing an ideologically appropriate worldview.

Battles for the soul: Religion and militarisation

Inevitably, the focus not merely on training but also on claiming the souls of youth meant clashes of values between those of the state and those of some families, particularly where the private values in question were strongly held religious beliefs.

The widespread strength of religious belief and practice in the early 1950s may be hard to gauge in retrospect, but in some areas it was clearly very great. One report from Kreis Salzwedel estimated that over 50 per cent of children in the Jahn-Oberschule, and over 60 per cent in the Heinrich-Heine Schule were active participants in the church youth group.¹⁵ One major campaign seeking to deal with the continuing power of religion was the introduction – or rather resuscitation – of an older secular ceremony for youth, the *Jugendweihe*, in 1954. This caused major confrontations through the 1950s between the churches and individual religious families on the one hand, and the state authorities on the other. It only began to die down as an issue at the grass roots in the course of the 1960s, when more and more families began to interpret the avowedly atheist *Jugendweihe* as not inherently incompatible with religious belief and practice, and when in any event the numbers of committed and practising Christians began to decline.

For those who accepted the *Jugendweihe* as a normal part of life, it functioned as a fairly routine version of what in Western capitalist societies goes by a variety of names, such as the sessions in 'personal, health and social education' (PHSE) in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century. By the end of the 1960s, most East German children participated in the *Jugendweihe*, with only

one or two exceptions in any given class. High points of the programme generally included a visit to a former Nazi concentration camp (possibly Sachsenhausen, in addition to the effective 'national shrine' of the GDR, Buchenwald), as well as cultural visits (the German classics, with Goethe and Schiller in Weimar, perhaps a theatre production and discussion with an actor), and links with local industry involving visits to and twinning with specific factories. Files on the preparation for the final celebrations at various schools in the early 1970s illustrate the way in which a standard speech, which varied little from year to year, could be adapted for particular anniversaries – whether the 25th year since the 'day of liberation', or the 25th anniversary of the GDR, or something vaguely to do with Lenin's birthday when all else failed – and into which the changing names of pupils deserving special mention could be inserted by their class teacher. The speech was wilfully religious in phraseology and referencing (though it is hard to translate the resonance of phrases, which almost leap straight from Biblical originals): 'In a short time you will belong to those people from whom much will be demanded by Society, for much has been given to you by Society . . . Dear young friends, your whole life shall be a confession of faith [*Bekennnis*] in socialism. Give to this life your reason and your strength, give the power of your hearts . . . In this spirit let us take the oath.'¹⁶ A more naked demonstration of the Durkheimian interpretation of religion as commitment to society could hardly be imagined. And it has to be emphasised that the vast majority of young East Germans went through this aspect of their socialisation in the GDR almost unthinkingly.

For those dwindling numbers who still saw the *Jugendweihe* as being in contradiction with their own religious beliefs and practices, however, it continued to pose a major problem, as was the case for the pastor in Schlöben, Bezirk Gera, who complained in early 1962 that undue moral pressure was being exerted on parents and children. In Rostock, it was claimed in the early 1960s that religious observance was actually rising, and that pastors were refusing to give religious burials to anyone who had taken the *Jugendweihe*.¹⁷ And although the *Jugendweihe* as such began to wane as an issue, religiously rooted dissent in schools did not. In 1980, for example, eleven students at the Forstborn-Oberschule in Leipzig, who were members of a church youth group (the *Junge Gemeinde*), were – apparently influenced by their pastor – able to organise a successful 'boycott' of a citizenship lesson by persuading the class to engage in total silence from a specific moment on in the lesson.¹⁸ This minor incident was but part of a far wider pattern of developments characteristic of the in part religiously influenced growth of grass-roots political activism in the 1980s.¹⁹

Moral issues proved to be of far wider resonance among East Germans, beyond the circles of conventional church-goers. A particular problem was

that of the continuing, and growing, militarisation, about which relatively large numbers of East Germans felt strongly. Young men who, following the introduction of conscription in 1962, chose to take advantage of the introduction two years later of alternative military service as 'construction soldiers' (*Bausoldaten*), not bearing weapons, drew attention to themselves as political nonconformists with serious consequences for their future education and careers. Many found they could only pursue a livelihood in the environs of the church. And while individual Christians continued to be discriminated against, the issue of the militarisation of education and mentalities more generally was a far wider pressure. Large numbers of East Germans were so incapable of understanding why they should view friends and relatives in West Germany as their enemies that this issue repeatedly crops up in just about every kind of archival record, from parents' meetings at schools in the early 1960s, through the orchestrated 'discussions' of the National Document of 1962 or the new constitution of 1968, to the more informal discussions of a whole range of policy issues in the 1970s. In Erfurt in late January 1962, young people were claiming that conscription was merely a means of saving money; parents who walked out of school meetings as a protest or made 'pacifist' comments along the lines of 'we will not shoot on our brothers' were greeted with much applause.²⁰ Interestingly, in a series of school-based discussions of the National Document in May 1962 – less than a year following the erection of the Berlin Wall – it was only in a boarding school, the *Erweiterte Oberschule* in Ludwigsfelde, where the supervision and influence of teachers were far greater than in normal day schools, that politically 'correct' answers were given.²¹ For those young people exposed to a wider range of influences, including those of family, friends and neighbours, 'lack of clarity' and 'false opinions' remained 'still' rife; report writers were at least linguistically extremely optimistic, copiously qualifying the less-than-satisfactory news with the word 'still' (*noch*), as though the passage of time and further 'discussions' would eventually rectify the situation.

This hoped for rectification did not, however, materialise according to plan. It is true that some young people did come to take military service for granted. But a wide-ranging report on developments in the 'consciousness' and behaviour of youth in the later 1970s, based largely on surveys carried out in 1976 and 1977, found evidence of an 'underestimation or an as yet [*noch*] insufficient recognition of the essence of Imperialism', with too positive an image of West Germany and the US. There was a danger of a 'depoliticised' or 'de-ideologised' attitude to life; and, quite apart from those sections of youth that remained religious, a further significant number had 'consciously or unconsciously religious or irrational conceptions . . . (for example, around one

quarter of them more or less believe in life after death). While they understood that the GDR offered 'social care and security' ('soziale Geborgenheit und Sicherheit'), they 'still' had 'many illusions' about the Federal Republic of Germany.²² Such 'uncertainty' was demonstrated by the inadequate numbers of recruits for the armed forces. The introduction of Military Education (*Wehrerziehung*) as a separate subject in schools in 1978 failed to produce an increase in numbers of willing and committed recruits.²³ Rather, it prompted a further wave of unrest and protest, and played an important role in the development of wider sensitivities and fears about threats to peace in the 1980s.

A study of 1,600 young people aged between sixteen and nineteen in 1986 revealed a wide range of negative expectations and fears about military service. Comments of young people covered the full gamut of aspects of life in the Army: they were worried about 'physical exertion, tricks being played on you, being subjected, being ordered around, stinking toilets, no money, being humiliated . . . no alcohol'; distance from friends and family, worries that relationships with steady girlfriends would not last the separation; 'fear of accidents and death in exercises and manoeuvres, fear of having to shoot at a person, if it came to the real thing, fear that during the period of service a war could break out'; 'fear of having to serve on the border, because I am afraid of dying'; and 'it's all pointless anyway, when the atom bombs go off it's all over'.²⁴ Those demonstrating more positive attitudes were generally those in the academic upper schools (EOS) who were hoping to get a place to study the subject of their choice; even some of these had doubts about losing 'the best three years' of their life, but nevertheless felt the chance of studying was worth volunteering for the extended three-year service.²⁵ A few produced precisely the sort of ideological statements about defence of the fatherland that would be expected of them; presumably they had been well trained in the art of conformity. Religious people were least likely to have a positive view, though one, who had opted for alternative service, had a surprisingly measured approach:

I am going to be a *Bausoldat*, and I am sure I will feel good there. First, because of my faith. And secondly, because I have got to know people who became *Bausoldaten*, whose behaviour and character I really liked. I feel better around people who are honest, who have understanding, and who don't make themselves out to be more than they are or throw their weight around. I often experienced this when I worked in a barracks. And this is why I have no fears about being a *Bausoldat*, no worries and problems.²⁶

For many others, negative comments were based on the reports of elder brothers and friends who had already done military service, rather than on any published material, which all painted the army experience in a far rosier light.

The vast majority of young East German males did in the end perform their military service, with effects on their attitudes and behaviour as adults that warrant further investigation. Many simply conformed and then got on with 'normal' civilian life; some joined the paramilitary 'combat groups' (*Kampfgruppen*) of their workplace; and a minority even opted to make a career in the National People's Army. These latter groups have until recently received remarkably little attention from historians more interested in dissent and opposition.²⁷ But the issue of militarisation remained high on the conscious agenda of many others. By the later 1980s, fears about peace were highest on the agenda of young people's concerns. As Walter Friedrich, Director of the ZIJ, reminded a meeting of the Scientific Council for Youth Research in October 1987, fifteen to twenty year olds of 'today' were born just before or after the Eighth Party Conference, and thus were well and truly products of the GDR. Yet the research showed that young people constantly registered discrepancies between 'textbook truths [*Schulbuchweisheiten*] and everyday experiences'. The very top issue for young people was the 'acute intensification of the threat to peace, real danger of self-destruction'; second on the list came 'global environmental problems'.²⁸

Socialisation and leisure: Organised youth

There were constant efforts to control and direct the energies of young people through state-organised leisure activities. Among the most important of the mass organisations were the groups catering for this group: the Ernst Thälmann Young Pioneers (ages six to ten) and the Ernst Thälmann Pioneers (ages ten to fourteen), and the FDJ for those aged from fourteen to twenty-five. These were systematically designed to socialise, co-opt and channel youth in certain politically specified directions.

The FDJ was there not only to socialise and educate the rising generation, but also to provide a training ground and selection stadium for future leadership positions (the cadre reserve); its importance was further underlined by the fact that two of the three SED General Secretaries, Erich Honecker and Egon Krenz, cut their political teeth as head of the FDJ. Founded in March 1946, the FDJ was the only permitted youth group in the Soviet zone.²⁹ Initially characterised by a relatively high degree of grass-roots democracy,

from 1947 onwards it was steadily 'co-ordinated' such that from the early 1950s onwards it was firmly under the control of the SED leadership. Participation and membership figures for the FDJ have to be treated with a little caution, and indeed, not all functionaries agreed in any event whether the aim was to capture (a totally unrealistic) 100 per cent of young people in the age range, or merely to encompass and harness the most willing. In the event, the best estimates of membership figures can show tendencies, if not exact and totally accurate numbers.³⁰ These figures, when treated with all due caution, suggest that over two thirds of the age group were 'organised' in the FDJ by the winter of 1952, but that this fell sharply to little over 40 per cent in the upheavals of the following summer of 1953. Membership continued to be bumpy at best during the 1950s, with particular troughs in 1959 and 1962 (the year when compulsory conscription was introduced), but then climbed steadily thereafter. From the later 1960s through to the later 1980s, membership appears to have been continually slightly rising, until a decline set in again from late 1987, interestingly mirroring the increased political unrest and growing repression characteristic of the last two years of GDR history before the fall of the Wall.

For most of the Honecker period, at least formal (if not active) membership encompassed between two thirds and four fifths of the age group. Although membership was not compulsory, the penalties for conspicuous nonconformity were a consideration for those with serious career aspirations. Membership was highest among schoolchildren for whom the organisation was school-based, since groups were often run by class teachers, and meetings seemed simply a routine part of the weekly timetable; it remained relatively high among university students with politically relevant career aspirations, but fell off among apprentices and young workers who were often, in any event, by this time in the FDGB and other organisations of adult life; and membership was lowest among young people working on the land.

The FDJ was designed not merely to socialise young people, but to train them and harness their energies into projects of strategic importance to the GDR. From 1952, learning to shoot was part of the increasingly militarised programme of the FDJ, despite some unwillingness on the part of young people. In the same year, the misleadingly entitled Society for Sport and Technology (GST) was founded as an essentially paramilitary organisation and pre-military training ground; in addition to paramilitary education, this offered unique opportunities for specialist activities such as sailing, gliding, amateur radio and obtaining a driving licence, thus making membership particularly attractive.³¹ From the late 1950s, some FDJ members assisted the state police and security services in maintaining domestic security and social

disciplining through membership of the 'FDJ disciplinary squads' (FDJ-Ordnungsgruppen), which dealt with a range of moral transgressions from 'Rowdytum' or listening to Western media channels, through being work-shy or under the 'influence of the class enemy', to engaging in shady dealings and criminal activities. Members of these groups were, for example, instrumental in the 'Ox Head' (*Ochsenkopf*) campaign of September 1961, swivelling the antennae of television aerials away from receipt of Western television channels.

Young people's labour power was also harnessed to more obviously useful economic tasks. For a few months from the summer of 1952 until February 1953, the so-called 'Service for Germany' (Dienst für Deutschland) sought with little success to harness the labour power of young people to the mammoth task of sudden rearmament. In the later 1950s, other campaigns took over, including the 'Activists' Movement' (Aktivistenbewegung) and the 'Fair for Tomorrow's Masters'. Young people were also entrusted with particular 'youth projects' (*Jugendobjekte*), such as the construction of the oil pipeline and oil processing works in Schwedt, and construction works on the East Berlin Schönefeld airport. Youth projects were officially defined as 'precisely measurable and time-limited tasks for the completion of which a Youth Collective is given responsibility ... [An] effective means for the socialist education of the young generation, and the development of their socialist consciousness.'³² In 1959, young people were employed on around 700 such projects, a figure that had risen to no fewer than 68,370 projects, involving 854,912 young people, by 1974. The largest of these was work on the 550-kilometre-long natural gas pipeline between the Soviet Union and the GDR, a project decided on by the Politburo in 1974. Thus those young people who were willing – and there were hundreds of thousands of them – were repeatedly absorbed into and affected by the activities of the official state youth organisation.

Many young people simply accepted the routine activities of the youth organisations, most of which took place on school premises as a regular part of the school calendar, without much thought. Memories consist of being lined up in the playground for a flag ceremony, of excited anticipation of reaching the age to be awarded the scarf of the next age group up the youth-organisation ladder, of having fun – or getting bored – listening to stories or singing songs together at a regular meeting on school premises, taking the roll-calls (*Appelle*) with a pinch of salt, and not thinking much about the words to the songs they sang. If there were organised activities away from home, many enjoyed going to camps, learning how to shoot, having camp fires, and generally having time off with friends in often-pleasant surroundings in the countryside. Many former *FDJler* speak of how they remember such times as

'fun', although the compulsory May Day parades were more a matter of boredom and going through the essential motions. More politically aware East Germans, particularly those coming from a religious or other dissident background, were more conscious of the differences between the youth organisation's aims and their own values; yet even so, the Young Pioneers and the FDJ were often seen as simply 'normal', routine aspects of everyday life, just like going to school.³³ On the other hand, it is also clear that the FDJ was totally incapable of dominating the lives of most young people, most of the time.

Support and subversion: Youth subcultures

The conflicts between the more stridently educational and political purposes of organisations targeted at the rising generation of 'socialist personalities' and the ways in which East Germans reacted to, participated in and used (or ignored) these initiatives become clear even through only a cursory sampling of the records. The picture is, however, more complex than the story that is most easily recounted: that of straight battles between (a frequently heroised) dissident youth culture and a (readily demonised) repressive state that conceived of youth as the 'enemy within'.³⁴ This was of course the case at certain times and with respect to specific incidents, such as the notorious clash between young people and the authorities in Leipzig in late October 1965, providing a foretaste of the crackdown in the Eleventh Plenum a few weeks later. But the wide diversity and range of youth subcultures across the forty years cannot be simply summarised in the terms appropriate to this particular, politically significant confrontation.

The Leipzig incident has aroused considerable interest among historians, not least because it symbolised a key moment in the transformation of state policies towards young people, bringing to an end an extraordinary and controversial brief period of partial liberalisation and reform.³⁵ Somewhat critical of the shortcomings of the FDJ, in 1963 Ulbricht, along with his newly appointed and relatively liberal Chair of the Youth Commission, Kurt Turba, sought ways of gaining a greater involvement and genuine enthusiasm on the part of young people in the GDR. In the wider context of the economic modernisation drive of the New Economic System (NÖS) and the focus on science, technology and creativity, the new youth policies unleashed a climate of debate and widespread discussion of reforms. The Youth Communiqué of 1963 promised in its very title to 'give youth trust and responsibility' ('Der Jugend Vertrauen und Verantwortung'). A high point was reached with the third 'Germany Meeting' (Deutschlandtreffen) of 1964, a gigantic international youth festival in Berlin, with a full programme of not merely dull

political speeches but also genuinely popular events, music, dances and films – essentially an enormous street festival involving over half a million young people. A new radio station, DT64, was set up to relay popular music (subject in due course to a 60:40 ratio of indigenous to Western tunes), and in the following months young peoples' music-making was encouraged through the 'guitar movement' and a 'guitar competition' initiated by the FDJ. This liberalisation had, however, always had its enemies: Erich Honecker, in particular, was strongly opposed to this Western 'decadence of the worst sort' and 'the introduction of the American way of life', which he perceived as entering the GDR in this way. In the summer and autumn of 1965, Honecker took the initiative to change course; massaging and greatly exaggerating youth criminality figures, he began to portray matters in a very different light. On 11 October, at an extraordinary meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, in the absence of Walter Ulbricht, Honecker succeeded effectively in reversing the whole thrust of youth policy, terminating the guitar movement, and withdrawing licences to play.³⁶

It was in this context that the demonstration of 30–31 October in Leipzig against the 'Beat-Ban' (Beatverbot) took place. With the change of policy, no fewer than 44 of the 49 bands active in the Leipzig area had been forbidden to play, shattering the whole Leipzig youth scene. Around 2,500 young people came together in the town centre to demonstrate against the ban; police intervened brutally, equipped with tanks, water hoses, truncheons and bloodhounds; 267 young people were peremptorily arrested, and many sent to work camps for punitive correction sentences. Local newspapers seriously distorted the event in 'reporting' it, contributing further to the generational conflicts that the Honecker faction wished to unleash. It has been suggested that even this event – which supposedly 'proved' youth criminality – was not simply a matter of spontaneous demonstrations of protest on the part of young Beat fans. It was indicative that perhaps only somewhere between one fifth and one third (500–800) of the demonstrators were genuine supporters of Beat groups; the majority of 'demonstrators' were apparently members of the SED, the FDJ and the Stasi, determined to provoke an incident that could then be used to justify the policy changes that had already been decided on.³⁷ In any event, it inaugurated the new phase of cultural crackdown that was to characterise the period from the Eleventh Plenum of December 1965 through to the Honecker era and the surprising announcement of renewed liberalisation in the early 1970s with the policy of 'no taboos'.

The Leipzig incident is clearly of major symbolic and political importance. But it should not serve entirely to obscure the more complex picture of less clear-cut realities for most people most of the time. For long periods, for very

many young people – arguably a majority, given the tiny numbers of active dissidents and of those who for various reasons became embroiled in serious trouble with the Stasi and police – the interactions were far more fuzzy, with grass-roots initiatives at times flourishing irrespective of, at times with the support of, state authorities. And far larger numbers than those involved in by-now-notorious protest incidents were involved in the more mundane activities of youth clubs, which were neither entirely under the control of the FDJ, nor fountainheads of teenage rebellion and protest.

The leisure activities of young people frequently took place in the context of clubs that were both supported by, and yet simultaneously appeared often to be somewhat out of the control of, the SED and the FDJ. A glance at myriad semi-organised leisure activities at the grass roots reveals a characteristic mixture of the well-meaning and the boring, the inspirational and the disruptive, the facilitative and the repressive. Although the political context and ideology were very different, some of this complexity – not easily plotted into a coherent story – is very reminiscent of contemporaneous developments in Western European societies.

On the one hand, grass-roots clubs and organisations could certainly be used for a range of activities, some more and some less political, initiated by well-meaning adults. Thus a programme targeted at girls in 1956, for example, included sessions on supposedly traditional 'female' interests such as cooking, sewing, cosmetics and fashion, as well as 'Sexual problems of newly-weds', 'Abortion and its consequences' and 'Does having a child mean you have a duty to get married?', alongside 'Summer Night Ball with a Fashion Show from the Baltic Lands'.³⁸ In 1963 a new youth group was set up associated with the Rostock Folk Theatre (Volkstheater), which attracted a membership of 231 young people, mostly aged fourteen to eighteen (64 boys and 157 girls). The success of this group contrasted rather sharply with that of the one associated with the Rostock Music Conservatory, where 12 *Dozenten* (junior teachers) turned up to find an audience consisting of only two children – both private pupils of one of the *Dozenten* – present and demonstrating any interest in what they had to offer.³⁹ Meanwhile, the youth club attached to the Dessau Theatre found that the 'Twist' and the music of Gershwin brought large audiences. The conclusion drawn by the SED was, at this time, that one had to start from the interests of the young people themselves, in order to 'lead them forwards'.

A report of December 1963 on the activities of young people in Potsdam, however, gives a rather different view of activities in the 19 youth clubs of this area.⁴⁰ The average number of young people attending those clubs where relatively little was going on was around 30; the Schopenhauer Straße Youth Club attracted around 80 young people with its variety of events including dances,

sport, lectures and debates, while the highest attendance figure, of around 500, was scored by the students' club at the Pädagogische Hochschule for a lecture by Prof. Dr Neubert of Jena on matters to do with sex. Lectures held by functionaries on less obviously riveting topics such as 'The Development of the Workers' Movement in Potsdam', 'The Balance of Powers and Western Military Strategy', or 'What has Dance Music got to do with Politics?', all billed on the programme for November 1963, appear to have been considerably less successful than sex in drawing the crowds.

SED dissatisfaction was evident in another more general report on the development of cultural life in Potsdam the same year.⁴¹ While the work of many of the youth clubs was held to be good, prevailing interests in many clubs were not in line with the 'cultural-political demands' of the SED. Some clubs were refusing offers of a cultural programme (presumably featuring talks along the lines detailed above), because they wanted to develop their own initiatives. Meanwhile, there existed a quite startling richness and variety of cultural activities involving people across the whole age range and life spectrum, strongly reminiscent of the organisation of cultural life in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, with around 110 groups including choirs, instrumental music, ensembles, dance, writing, entertainment, cabaret, amateur dramatics and amateur film groups. Much of this grass-roots cultural activity was strongly fostered by SED support. Some of it was equally clearly resistant to SED control (although it was noted that even some of the choirs with more elderly members were being persuaded to learn a few socialist songs), while the attempted development of 'workers who do creative writing' in factories and residential areas was 'totally unsatisfactory'. Youth subcultures need to be set in this wider context of grass-roots leisure pursuits.

The record of youth clubs in 1965 in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district – an area that became well known in the 1980s as the centre of an 'alternative scene' and dissident poetry – was, according to the SED, even worse. Young people attending the seven clubs in this district appeared to be interested only in dancing and getting drunk, televisions and radios were tuned into Western stations, and there was no attendance at all at political lectures.⁴² Whether this total absence of an audience was preferable to the experience of a speaker at the Jugendclub 'Friedrich Ebert', Berlin, on 29 November 1964, whose attempt at giving a lecture on 'July 1944 and the NKFD' was systematically disrupted by a youthful heckler, is another matter. The heckler appears to have prepared a rather more interesting speech than the official lecturer (who was, interestingly, a former German Wehrmacht General): the youthful protestor delivered a well-prepared critique of the GDR, the SED, Walter Ulbricht, the crimes of Stalin, the departure of Khrushchev, and the question of why the East

German population was never honestly informed on anything.⁴³ Meanwhile, there were complaints about the youth club in Berlin-Grünau where the FDJ had 'as good as no influence', and where there were 'hot' discussions about the issue of long hair. Political views among the young people here appear by contrast to have verged on the nationalist. While they were able to repeat accurately the arguments they had been taught at school, if talking about the Second World War, they appeared far more likely to show the influence of older work colleagues, were much influenced by nationalist arguments, and felt their national pride was 'wounded' by presentations of German soldiers in films and books.⁴⁴

In Rathenow, a little over 50 kilometres west of Berlin, the so-called 'Club 64' was founded on 27 December 1964 as the 'Club of Modern Art', intended to be 'a communal association for the meaningful use of free time and the education of its members'.⁴⁵ It appeared to cater largely for the young intelligentsia of the area and included among its activities a variety of amateur guitar groups. The FDJ struggled in vain to control and coordinate its activities, and to throw out those who were considered to be 'trouble-makers'. But the troubles in Rathenow appear to have extended far beyond the walls of this club. In 1965 the singer Heinz Quermann fell out with a Rathenow amateur guitar group, 'The Fellows', during a test for a television recording; local school-children intervened with a petition and signatories. The affair blew up and rumbled through the local newspaper, the *Märkische Volksstimme*, from August through October, and by November even Ulbricht, Honecker, Hager and Norden had to be informed.⁴⁶

Conflicts often involved young people not only from the local community, but also those travelling from wider areas. In 1967, for example – in the period after the 1965 Plenum, when attitudes towards youthful self-expression and musical exuberance were far less sympathetic than they had been in the brief period of 'liberalisation' from 1963–5 – a 'Beat-Kapelle Wettstreit' (competition between Beat bands) was organised by the Dorfklub Waßmannsdorf, Kreis Königswusterhausen, in conjunction with the Seebad-Casino of Rangsdorf, Kreis Zossen, south-east of Berlin.⁴⁷ Despite being forbidden by the Cultural Department of Kreis Zossen, the organisers continued to make their arrangements, and to publicise the event, including displaying posters in Berlin. As well as three Beat groups, one of which had been expressly forbidden to perform in Berlin, around 500 young people had already turned up by the scheduled opening time of 19:30, of whom 60 per cent were estimated to have travelled out from Berlin. With news that more were travelling out on the S-Bahn, around 60 'active comrades of the Rangsdorf local party organisation'

had to be mobilised to go in and attempt to swamp the audience. Their appearance among the long-haired 'dirty and poorly clad' youngsters, whose appearance 'clearly showed the influence of capitalist lifestyles' must have been somewhat disconcerting, but it was apparently not sufficient to suppress the event entirely, although only one Beat group was allowed to perform.

The hardline policies announced from on high in 1965 were never completely translated into consistent practice on the ground, and by the later 1960s a relaxation in practice was already widely evident. In the 1970s and '80s, the official policy became one of attempted cooption of a somewhat more pluralist scene, although it is notable that differences between hardliners and pragmatists continued both in the higher ranks of the SED and among local functionaries.⁴⁸ Watching Western television, strictly forbidden in the 1960s, was finally permitted in 1972. Listening to Western music, ambivalently permitted in the 60:40 ratio to the benefit of home-grown communist music, was never fully under state control and even this ratio was often not adhered to even by the official radio stations. Guitar movements that had been briefly supported by the state were briefly clamped down on and displaced in 1966 by the 'singing movement' (*Singebewegung*) and singing competitions in the later 1960s; but by the later 1960s and '70s, a shift in atmosphere fostered a GDR-version of home-grown Beat. A Central Studio for Entertainment Art was opened in 1968 and transformed into a 'Committee for Entertainment Art' in 1973, providing something of a springboard for artists who later became internationally quite well known, such as Nina Hagen. Popular music-making was sufficiently fostered in the 1970s and '80s to produce some East German bands of genuine talent, originality and popularity, most notably perhaps the Puhdys, who provided music for the highly popular 1973 film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. The development of a distinctive style of GDR Rock in the 1970s was not merely officially tolerated, but actively supported at organised events such as the FDJ 'Workshop Week' on 'Youth dance music' in 1972, and on a far larger – indeed massive – scale in the tenth 'World Festival' (Weltfestspiele) of the summer of 1973 in Berlin. An annual rock festival under the title 'Rock for Peace' ('Rock für den Frieden') was organised by the FDJ from 1982 to 1987 in the Palace of the Republic in order, as Kurt Hager put it, to develop 'our' rock music 'as a constituent part of socialist national culture'.⁴⁹

At the same time, a wary eye was kept on subcultural tendencies that appeared politically subversive. The emergent punk scene of the 1980s was treated with hostility and open repression, as well as considerable infiltration by Stasi informers. The tensions between neo-Nazi skinheads and punks were exploited, with skinheads being given free rein by the GDR security forces to

beat up punks emerging from a dissident musical event at East Berlin's Zionskirche in October 1987.⁵⁰ Uncertain how to deal with the proliferation of minority youth subcultures, including 'grufties' and heavy metal fans alongside peace activists, environmentalists and people simply wanting to engage in GDR variations on the theme of 'dropping out', the Politburo in the later 1980s sought unsuccessfully to persuade the FDJ to take firmer control of the youth 'scene'.

The wider international cultural context was also omnipresent, with its political implications for an increasingly beleaguered GDR regime. By the 1980s, watching Western television and listening to Western music in the privacy of one's own home was no longer controlled, but attempts to listen to Western rock concerts, with famous bands playing in the open air next to the Reichstag in West Berlin on the occasion of Berlin's 750th anniversary celebrations in 1987, were quite another matter. This required major efforts on the part of FDJ functionaries and security forces to try to prevent young people from gathering in East Berlin's central avenue, Unter den Linden, and congregating right up against the Wall in the vicinity of the Brandenburg Gate to listen to the sounds of the decadent West. Eberhard Aurich, First Secretary of the FDJ Central Council, wrote to Egon Krenz, then in charge of security matters, proposing that 1,000 members of FDJ 'disciplinary squads' (Ordnungsgruppen) and 1,000 FDJ functionaries and students should be sent to infiltrate the crowds as 'agitators', and a further 1,000 should be sent to the concert itself. The Brandenburg Gate area should be physically sealed off, 'on the pretext of a planned provocation on the state borders'; Aurich requested Krenz's blessing on this plan so that he could proceed with the necessary preparations.⁵¹ The SED authorities nevertheless also went to the Western concerts to learn; planning their own mass open-air events in some competition, they took close notes of key technical details (including the average queue length and waiting time for temporary toilet cabins), and went on to facilitate the open-air performances of politically acceptable Western stars such as Bob Dylan (who was allegedly disappointed by the slow sale of tickets for his planned concert in the West) and Bruce Springsteen in the late 1980s.⁵²

It is arguable that even these notable events still only affected a minority of East German youth. The number of youth clubs fluctuated as clubs were opened and closed according to political evaluations of their reliability or potentially subversive nature, most evidently in the 1960s, as we have seen. But their activities appear both to have expanded and to have become somewhat more routine in the course of the 1970s and '80s. Growing largely as an initiative of the early 1960s in the larger towns and cities, by 1963 there were over 800 youth clubs.⁵³ The figures for May and December 1972 were 1,025 and

2,378 respectively; in December 1972, there were allegedly 60,973 participants in these youth clubs.⁵⁴ By the late 1970s, uncertainty remained over the exact number of youth clubs, though one study guessed that there were by this time somewhere between 5,000 and 6,200 clubs, with between 500,000 and 750,000 young people attending on a more or less regular basis, and around 70,000 young people genuinely active in the committees steering the activities.⁵⁵ In 1979, it was estimated that there were just over 3,000,000 East Germans aged between fourteen and twenty-five; thus perhaps around a quarter of the population in the relevant age group attended a youth club fairly regularly in the later 1970s.⁵⁶ In the mid-1980s, 85 per cent of young people surveyed in a cross section of communities of different sizes lived in a place where there was a youth club; while 46 per cent claimed they 'seldom or never' went to it, this nevertheless meant that by the mid-1980s, perhaps around half the population of young people did attend such clubs, and more than one in ten were very active members performing one or another function in the activities and programme of the club.⁵⁷ While 83 per cent in the mid-1980s thought discos should 'definitely' be on the programme, only 22 per cent were as enthusiastic about 'political discussions and lectures'.⁵⁸ Higher numbers were almost always involved on occasions such as dances and concerts, when conflicts within communities and between subsections of the community and the authorities were most likely to occur. To write the history of the mundane activities and experiences of young people in these clubs is more difficult than to focus on the moments of conflict and protest. But it is worth gaining at least a sense of the extent of the less eventful hinterland beyond the clashes that have so far hit the historical headlines.

'Socialist personalities' and East German individualism

A vision of individuals as constituted by, participating in and contributing to wider collective entities and forces permeated the whole of the official Marxist-Leninist world view in the GDR. It was a key strand running through the published sociological literature discussing questions of social structure, productivity, scientific and technological progress, and the continued road to a better society. It pervaded politically driven historical writing (and Marxist historiography more generally), in which the key actors were not individuals, with their unique quirks and motives, but rather collective class actors – the 'imperialist capitalist bourgeoisie', the oppressive landowning classes, the proletariat and so on – who were occasionally given a political twist when, clouded by 'false consciousness', they failed to act appropriately and required a little help from the 'vanguard party' of the working class. It pervaded the

teleological view of history as all driving towards one Goal, the ultimate (and effectively predetermined) ends justifying the use of forceful and repressive means, which would dispose of awkward individuals who stood in the way of Progress. It informed much of policy making, which was targeted at groups rather than individuals; social policy was oriented towards collective security and an almost religious sense of safety, being looked after and cared for in a paternalistic state, encapsulated in the notion of *Geborgenheit*, rather than fostering a Western-style enterprise culture of individualism. And it made life extremely uncomfortable for any individual who went beyond the category of being 'still hovering' or plagued by 'uncertainties' ('*noch schwankend*', '*Unsicherheiten*') to being under the influence of the 'class enemy', that mysterious and unseen force who more or less enjoyed the status of Devil in certain official GDR discourses. The question of whether the individual pursuit of happiness as conceived by Western liberals (from J. S. Mill to American mainstream popular culture) was intrinsically in conflict with, and should be subordinated to, notions of the collective good, was one that, if at all, could be discussed only obliquely in the realms of creative literature and film.

Yet it rapidly became clear that the mere formal transformation of the social relations of production would not be sufficient to transform people's personalities over night. Thus the system of education, youth organisations, and facilities for organised leisure, were all subjected to intense political scrutiny and control. But all the effort and thought put into the design of policies and institutions aimed at the achievement of 'socialist personalities' was ultimately undercut by far wider trends, not merely common across the Western industrialised world of the later twentieth century, but also to a degree facilitated by the SED regime itself.

There is of course a dramatic difference in the ways in which citizens were involved in social, cultural and political processes in the Western democracies and the communist states of the later twentieth century. But every society has a framework of institutions and social processes in the context of which people make their lives. Different societies simply have different criteria for the kinds of behaviour they reward and suppress, encourage and constrain. Even the notion of the free-standing 'individual' outside of 'society' is very much a product of a particular type of Western philosophy in a capitalist society – and a historically erroneous notion at that. 'Individualism' as expressed in variations on current fashions in capitalist consumerism is as much influenced – if less consciously so – by prevailing cultural, economic and political circumstances as were the notions of collective in the GDR, and as accompanied by conflicts and contested identities, though played out in terms of very different rules and with very different kinds (and degrees) of penalty attached.

Tendencies towards 'individualisation' among young people in the 1980s, despite all the best efforts of the SED over nearly four decades, were registered by researchers at the ZIJ. A summary given by Guenther Lange in April 1988 claimed that, in comparison to previous years, studies revealed

an increasing tendency to emphasise autonomy, personal independence, individuality and a high degree of self-confidence among young people. At the same time there is a weakening of societal engagement, of identification with the goals of socialism, with our state and also with the Soviet Union. Today's young people are genuinely interested in matters political . . . On the other hand, many young people express dissatisfaction about the manner and level of political information and discussion in daily life.⁵⁹

A lecture by Lange's ZIJ colleague Peter Förster reported that fully half (50 per cent) of those who were not members of the FDJ claimed that it did not represent their interests at all; more shattering news for his FDJ Central Council audience were the accompanying findings that nearly a third (31 per cent) of members of the FDJ were of the same opinion, as were a staggering 16 per cent even of FDJ functionaries. A mere quarter (25 per cent) of FDJ functionaries professed to be in full agreement with the statement that the FDJ did represent their interests.⁶⁰ Most of the employed young people among those questioned also felt they did not have much of a say in the affairs of their factory. These were hardly, then, the model citizens or 'socialist personalities' of the future.

Ultimately, the SED failed in its attempt to create 'socialist personalities' committed to building socialism. Consumerism, global culture and tendencies within East German society itself contributed to an individualism that was also characteristic of Western societies in the 1980s. A sense of individual competition in the economic sphere might have gone, in contrast to the capitalist West, but there was still the emergence – or continuation – of trends towards individualisation rooted in private leisure patterns and consumerism. In conditions in which there genuinely appeared to be greater political choice or the possibility for change, this individualism could have political implications. Yet this was not necessarily always in opposition to the state or its representatives in terms of functionaries on the ground. It is crucial to remember when trying to understand the notion of 'ordinary lives' in a highly intrusive state, that most East Germans managed to do two things that are usually missed from 'top-down accounts' couched in terms of SED policy and effects: they lived vast areas of their lives outside of formal Party and state organisations and they were able to take initiatives that were at times fostered by, at times coincided with, and only sometimes clashed with, top-down initiatives. At the same time, many individuals in the GDR developed a high sense of

moral responsibility – for peace, for the environment, for the nature of their own society and its future. If not quite the 'socialist personality' of official propaganda, there were nevertheless distinct traces of socialist idealism as well as Western consumerism to be found among East German citizens.

Chapter Seven

Gender

Official conceptions of masculinity changed very little during the forty years of the GDR. The rather muscular ideal of the 'traditional' working-class male, characterised by physical strength and stamina, and widely prevalent in the official imagery of the 'workers' and peasants' state', was not greatly affected by the long-term shift towards more white-collar and professional jobs: the symbols of suit, tie and briefcase that proliferated in West German marketing imagery did not manage to displace the blue overalls and hard hats of East German propaganda. Those East German men who found themselves challenged to rethink their domestic roles or develop notions of the 'new man' did so largely out of necessity: the growing participation of women in the paid labour force, and in particular the demands of shift work, led many men to take on greater responsibilities for childcare and household duties. If East Germany was a more 'working class' society in its official imagery and rhetoric than West Germany, then it was also in many respects more 'male' in a very traditional construction of masculinity.

But the gendering of propaganda images did change in one crucial respect. Women were pictured, too, in overalls and hard hats, driving trucks, cranes and operating heavy machinery. This signified one crucial area of change in gender constructions in 'actually existing socialism'. At the same time it became ever more clear that gender roles cannot be transformed by focusing on one side of the relationship alone. The alleged 'emancipation of women' in the GDR was for all sorts of reasons at best lopsided and partial. There were very radical changes in the public roles and professional aspirations of women, and only minimal changes in assumptions about what was 'normal' for men. Policies were often out of line with practices, professed ideals out of line with ingrained attitudes. In any event, the notion of 'emancipation' would require far wider rethinking to encompass questions of freedom of choice and equality of opportunity for all – a discussion going way beyond the question