

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POPULAR DISSATISFACTION – THE ROAD TO 1989

The 1980s began with a more self-critical attitude in the SED hierarchy concerning the previous course of agricultural policy. The death of Gerhard Grüneberg, who had played such a dominant role in shaping the direction of SED agricultural policy over the last twenty years, allowed some room for manoeuvre. The arrival of his replacement in the SED leadership, Werner Felfe, along with the new course set during the X SED Party Congress, promised some retreat from the worst excesses of the gigantism and overspecialisation of the previous five or so years. Importantly, too, new efforts to ensure that crop and livestock production were better coordinated seemed likely. Attempts to scale back the separation of crop and livestock production and price reforms certainly went some way to restoring the finances of farms on paper. However, it proved too little, too late. The financial burden on agriculture continued to be severe throughout the 1980s, limiting the extent of improvement possible in those farms that had so far been neglected in terms of investment, and seriously handicapping those industrialised farms that relied on fuel, fertiliser and machinery in plentiful supply. Not only did all LPGs find it increasingly difficult to maintain standards of productivity, there was also no foreseeable solution to the problems of running agriculture productively and efficiently given the GDR's economic problems. The conditions under which collective farmers had to live and work became increasingly fraught by difficulty and shortage. The worsening economic crisis which the GDR was facing by the mid- to late 1980s thus took a heavy toll on agriculture as well as rural society more broadly.

Popular Dissatisfaction: Pollution, Shortage and Neglect in Rural Society

By the late 1980s sustained shortfalls in investment across the economy were having a serious impact on living conditions in rural communi-

ties. Since the completion of collectivisation rural communities had undergone considerable changes. Particularly during the course of the 1970s, the industrialisation of agriculture had had a direct impact on the pattern of rural settlement, elevating the status of some villages while relegating others. The negative impacts of this process on rural communities were mitigated to some extent by improvements (or the promise of them in the near future) to the standard of living possible in other respects. The distance from the home to the workplace may have increased considerably and the status of the individual farmer within the collective farm might have been diminished; but increased incomes and access to a range of modern conveniences in the home were welcome improvements to the standard of living.

However, those villages that did not become centres of the newly industrialised agriculture were often left behind in the distribution of resources for the improvement of public amenities – transport and road networks, water and electricity supplies. By the 1980s the seriousness of the economic problems facing the GDR limited the potential for making up for this neglect. Popular dissatisfaction at, for example, the lack of a consistent running water supply was aggravated still further by new shortages in the supply of essential goods to villages – which again necessarily were less well supplied than towns. The extent of environmental pollution which had come with the (often incomplete or mismanaged) industrialisation of agriculture and the spread of industry (from 1980 brown coal-fired) into the countryside had a damaging effect on the health of the population as well as the reputation of the SED regime. By the late 1980s there was not only considerable disparity in the working conditions in different sites of agricultural production, there was also considerable disparity in the living conditions in rural communities. Worse still, perhaps, there appeared to be no immediate potential for improving the situation, as general economic decline and environmental pollution continued to worsen.

Environmental issues were central to the complaints of villagers about deteriorating living and working conditions. Complaints arising from the overexpansion of fields and the overuse of chemical fertiliser had been made sporadically since the 1960s, while concentrated livestock holdings had long been a source of irritation to those who lived close to them. As early as 1968 there was some anxiety that the land improvement schemes, which were developed as part of the drive towards a large-scale field system, threatened at the same time to undermine the ecology of the land. According to reports on the SED members' assemblies in the party organisations of the LPGs in Kreis Sömmerda, where land improvements were underway in February 1969, there were con-

tinual complaints from members that trees were being cut down but no new trees were being planted elsewhere. This, they claimed, would lead to a 'steppe-ification' of the countryside and would in the long run be damaging to agriculture.¹

A report by the Workers' and Farmers' Inspectorate on the state of the villages and farms of Bezirk Erfurt in April 1969 described poor conditions in a surprisingly high percentage of cases. In over half the villages in the Bezirk evidence was found of uncontrolled contamination of the water supply with muck or seepage from the silos. In Kreis Worbis this had led in a number of cases to contamination of swimming pools. Forty-four per cent of farms in the Bezirk were found on investigation to be unclean and disorderly in the vicinity of livestock holdings. Amenities for those working with livestock were also found to be lacking or inadequate in a large proportion of farms. Forty per cent of farms, for example, had no washrooms near the livestock sheds.² The regularity of such complaints increased considerably, however, as a result of the expansion of industrialised farming during the 1970s. The failure to deal with the negative side-effects efficiently was then seriously compounded by a shortage of resources in the 1980s.

An essential question for rural communities throughout the latter part of the GDR's existence was the development of sewage removal and water supply systems. The development of internal plumbing in village houses was a sign of progress, with the proportion of homes with inside toilets marked in SED propaganda as a sign of the benefits of socialism. The issue of water supply and sewage, however, was fraught in the East German countryside as it was in rural communities throughout much of Europe. The connection of small communities to larger networks could not often be easily justified by the cost and the difficulty of doing so, particularly in a shortage economy. However, the need for a regularised system was becoming increasingly pressing with the development of industrial agriculture, which itself required an efficient water supply but also had the tendency in rural areas to pollute the drinking water from natural springs on which many villages relied. From the 1960s onwards considerable progress was made in the connection of rural households to a central water supply. Nonetheless the progress was again by no means comprehensive or universal and became a cause of considerable dissatisfaction in those communities which were neglected or suffered the consequences of contamination by agro-industrial production sites.

The problem of disposal of slurry caused particular difficulties for several of the livestock farms in Kreis Worbis, leading to mistakes with regard to where it was dispersed. In one case slurry from the LPG Teis-

tungen in July 1988 was mistakenly deposited on meadowland near the village of Jützenbach, leading to an Eingabe from an outraged villager because the smell had caused a number of children to be violently sick.³ In 1979 and 1980 a number of Eingaben were written from around the Bezirk complaining about the deliberate piping of slurry into rivers and lakes by LPG Ts, which lacked alternative solutions for disposing of their waste products. Although occasionally fines were imposed for such actions, the balance between economic necessity and the rhetoric of environmental protection were clearly heavily skewed in the former's favour.⁴ These complaints tallied with an analysis of the Eingaben dealt with by the Rat des Bezirkes' deputy for the environment and water in the Bezirk. Apart from a slight increase during the dry year of 1976, the number of complaints had remained stable between 1974 and 1980. The year 1981 saw the number of Eingaben in this area of government doubled and then trebled in 1982.⁵

By 1988 the level of connection to a central water supply was supposed to be 98 per cent across the Bezirk. However, in Kreis Erfurt-Land more than 10 per cent of the population remained unconnected despite many years of complaint and lobbying for improvements to be made. A report in October 1988 mentioned 'serious' discussions in public meetings in thirty villages in the district on the continued lack of a constant supply of drinking water, which compounded dissatisfaction at problems with the supply of basic foodstuffs in villages such as meat, bread and dairy products.⁶ In Kreis Arnstadt, where the district could boast a 99.7 per cent connection rate to a water supply, a number of villages continued to complain about the quality of the drinking water with which they were supplied.⁷ A report by the Rat des Bezirkes' representative for the environment and water management in Kreis Apolda noted that despite 99.1 per cent of the district being connected to a central supply of water, drinking water remained unsuitable for small children. Babies were to be supplied strictly with bottled carbonated water only.⁸

The negative consequences of agricultural transformation were felt broadly across rural settlements. The mistakes of overexpansion in agriculture and the breakdown in cooperation between crop and livestock production in the late 1970s, compounded by increasingly severe economic problems facing the GDR as a whole in the 1980s, served only to exacerbate popular dissatisfaction. Rural settlements were in many respects far worse hit than towns, receiving a lower priority in the provision and supply of a whole range of goods and materials which were considered by many basic essentials (rather than luxuries) of an adequate living standard.

There was some understanding for these shortages. Villagers did not expect to be able to purchase everything from the local shops. It was obvious too that the cost of supplying a few houses with running water or improving local roads or transport networks could not be always be covered immediately and that money would have to be collected locally. It was recognised by many, too, that those who lived in rural communities were often able to benefit from privately owned land and livestock and were able also to take advantage of the LPG's support to construct their own houses and carry out improvements to their communities. Nonetheless access to such benefits was limited and the standard of living in other respects still left much to be desired.

In 1978 a report on the quality of supply in Sömmerda district noted an unsurprising though important fact for rural communities: namely that the smaller the community the worse the provision of goods. Thus those villages with less than 800 inhabitants tended to have the worst level of plan fulfilment for supply. The report concluded: 'all in all the opinion and attitude of the people with regard to supply is not the best. Above all there is a lack of understanding for the fact that certain products are only being offered in the Bezirk and Kreis capitals.'⁹ This situation was made particularly clear during the cold snap of the winter of 1978 to 1979, which saw several villages in Kreis Sömmerda not being supplied with beer for weeks on end.¹⁰ In the 1980s shortages of consumer goods in rural shops became a more frequent occurrence, making more frequent trips to the towns an unwelcome and time-consuming necessity.

'Customers', it was reported in March 1983 by the SED Kreisleitung, Sömmerda, 'are abusive towards the sales' girls because those whose wishes cannot be fulfilled accuse the staff of wrong doing. These are above all customers from the villages for whom the purchase of certain household goods is barely possible at all anymore.' These issues, as well as the ongoing shortage of protective work clothing, had begun to become a regular topic of discussion in assemblies of LPG members. The report writer put the blame for the lack of supplies (with perhaps a hint of ironic detachment) on the 'rationalisation measures in bulk trade', which had led to 'the range and number of goods on offer in towns and villages continually worsening.' The concentration of shopping facilities in urban and industrial centres had also led to the closure of many rural shops whose range of goods and level of turnover no longer justified their existence. 'The rural population', the report concluded, 'is very irritated by this.' Over the following months the lack of a number of popular cigarette brands led to questions being asked in assemblies of LPG members and the lack of availability of non-alcoholic (!) drinks in the villages owing to transport problems was a cause of further complaint.¹¹

The problems of access to certain goods presented here were compounded by the belief that prices were rising beyond the capacity of certain sections of the community to pay for them. Reports from the DBD organisations in Bezirk Erfurt recorded some popular acclaim for new measures introduced to improve conditions for vulnerable members of the population in the mid-1980s. Increases in the net incomes of families with more than three children, and of pensioners, were welcomed; however, it was also felt that these measures should have been taken earlier. The increasing prices demanded for certain goods had long made themselves felt, it was argued, not least because they were often no longer available in the standard *Konsum* shops but were only on sale at an inflated price in the luxury *Delikat* shops.¹²

The sense of rural neglect was added to still further by the failure of simple improvements to be made to what many people now considered basic infrastructure throughout the Bezirk. In public meetings in Kreis Apolda the lack of road building was a common source of criticism voiced by villagers, as was the ever-worsening provision of transport for workers. In Niederroselar the comment was made that: 'the workers get driven to work alright, but whether they ever get home, doesn't bother anyone'. In Sonnendorf, Kreis Bad Langensalza a number of complaints were made by villagers, that theirs was a 'forgotten village', owing not least to the lack of improvement to the access road, the lack of bus transport and the lack of repairs carried out to the path to the school in Grossheringen. On these issues, however, as well as the long-standing supply problems to the village, the inhabitants had reportedly ceased to expect much improvement.¹³ Similar feelings of resignation were expressed in the village of Friedrichsrode in Kreis Sondershausen, where the lack of transport connections and the lack of work other than in the turkey farm of the LPG T Immenrode had led to rapid depopulation. All previous Eingaben had failed to have an impact, as there was simply not enough economic justification for investment to transform the prospects of this rural community.¹⁴

The rhetoric of progress espoused by the SED leadership consistently throughout the 1960s and 1970s as justification for the radical transformation of conditions in the countryside, with the collectivisation and subsequent industrialisation of agriculture, had burdened functionaries in the LPGs and the district party and state administration by the 1980s with great expectations of improvement among collective farmers and villagers more generally. Their consistent failure to provide the promised improvements to quality of life in some rural communities, along with ever more critical working conditions in the LPGs, rendered the SED regime's claims to legitimate authority increasingly hollow. The majority of farmers were earning considerably better money than

they had ever done before; however, there was little to spend it on and little prospect of actual improvement to either living or working conditions as the basic financial bankruptcy of the GDR under the present SED leadership became ever more tangible.

Agricultural Reform

In 1981 the future did not look good for agriculture in Bezirk Erfurt as in the rest of the GDR. In September that year the agriculture department at the ZK received with dismay the latest demands of the State Planning Commission for a further reduction in the levels of grain imports into the GDR above and beyond the previous target. The SPK intended that, by 1985, instead of the 3.1 million tonnes of grain previously planned, only 0.5 million tonnes would be imported. As a consequence the amount of grain available for livestock feed from domestic production as well as imports was expected to sink. Alongside this quantitative reduction, it was also expected that there would be a qualitative reduction in the feed available with the purchase of cheaper, less nourishing varieties. Under these conditions it seemed unavoidable that the level of meat and dairy production would have to be scaled back considerably, with consequences not only for farmers but also for the supply of certain foods to the domestic population. There was an obvious agenda in the agricultural department's presentation of a worse-case scenario. No department relished the prospect of cuts to the budget it was allocated. Nevertheless, a drop in grain imports was certain to have a far-reaching social and economic effect.

Given such grain shortages, it made sense to allocate resources to those farms that produced most efficiently at the expense of other, less efficient production sites. However, it was not entirely clear which of the GDR's farms were the most efficient producers. In theory, the modern concentrated production facilities were the most productive. This, however, did not always prove to be the case in practice, given their fuel consumption and problems with disease as well as waste disposal. Closing or reducing the capacity of such facilities was tantamount to a public admission of economic crisis and implied that the SED policy of industrialisation of agriculture had, as many farmers had predicted, been at best mis-implemented, if not fundamentally ill-conceived. Continuing to supply them at the expense of other smaller LPG Ts, which had been denied the chance to develop but had nonetheless maintained production levels, was potentially counterproductive and was bound to anger the farming population. The ideology of progress on which

socialist agriculture and socialist ideals of rural development had been built and justified to the rural population was thus seriously under threat from the dire economic straits in which the GDR was increasingly finding itself from the early 1980s onwards.¹⁵

At the start of 1982 there was an increasingly clear imbalance between the financial solvency of the LPG Ps compared with that of the LPG Ts. Eleven times as many livestock farms as crop farms were found to be struggling to maintain production levels. Given that livestock farms were dependent on the crop farms for their ability to produce effectively, there was a clear issue of cooperation to be addressed.¹⁶ In the face of this imbalance and with the prospect of a reduction in imported feed supplies, there was strong support within the state and party apparatus as well as amongst farmers for a return to a more traditional, symbiotic style of relationship between crop and livestock production. As early as February 1980 a Politburo resolution had been published in the *Neue Deutsche Bauernzeitung* (The New German Farmers' Newspaper), calling upon LPGs to form cooperative councils to coordinate relations between crop and livestock production. This call was reiterated during the X SED Party Congress in 1981. An analysis of the district farmers' conferences held in 1982 prior to the XII German Farmers' Congress noted widespread support for attempts to strengthen cooperative councils. Farmers were clearly motivated by the realisation that the mutually (if not equally) dependent relationship between crop and livestock production needed to be better managed.¹⁷ Reports on the situation in agriculture in the various districts of the Bezirk referred again and again to the damage done to LPG Ts by the irregularity in the yields and delivery of fodder by the LPG Ps.¹⁸

Following the XII German Farmers' Congress (13–14 May 1982) and the promulgation of a new LPG Law in 1982 giving a clear legal basis for cooperation between LPG Ts and LPG Ps, effective action was taken to organise cooperative councils containing delegates from LPG Ps and one or more of their neighbouring LPG Ts. The composition of the re-established cooperative communities in many respects reflected partnerships of previous standing between LPGs and KAPs, although this was not always the case given the pattern of mergers over the previous few years.

The tasks of the cooperative council and the central elements of the cooperation between the LPGs were laid out according to a clearly defined and largely uniform pattern.¹⁹ The effectiveness of the actual cooperative relations between LPG Ps and LPG Ts varied, however. In theory the contracts drawn up to regulate the cost, quantity, quality and delivery of feed which the LPG Ps were to provide livestock farms were

binding. In practice, however, recourse to the courts to claim restitution for breach of contract was unheard of. The settlement of disputes came down in no small part to the relative strength, characters and connections of LPG chairmen in their respective LPGs.

How well the cooperation functioned and competition between LPGs was managed depended to a large extent, therefore, on the abilities of the honorary chairman of the cooperative council. The KOR chairman was usually one of the heads of the constituent farms and remained in his position usually for a period of three years or until he was deemed no longer able to cope with his workload. As the state administration devolved considerable powers on to the KORs to coordinate the economic and social development of rural communities within the cooperation, the significance of the KOR chairman increased. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this development provoked new discussion of the problems of the separation of crop and livestock production. In DBD members' assemblies in Bezirk Erfurt, farmers now asked hopefully whether the LPG Ps and Ts would in practice be merged together again.²⁰

In essence the Politburo resolution entailed the transfer of a range of powers to the cooperative council to enable it actively to plan and coordinate agricultural production by the various farms within the cooperative over an extended period of time. Without actually cancelling the separation of crop and livestock production, the enhanced standing given to the cooperative councils also enabled cooperating LPG Ps and LPG Ts to be regarded for administrative purposes as single entities. The acquisition of these extended powers and enhanced status took place gradually, however. Only by the start of 1986 were all farms within the purview of a newly empowered KOR. Extending the powers of these councils was intended to enable in future more effective use of funds with which to develop production facilities and organise recruitment and qualification measures territorially. As before, however, the extent to which KORs fulfilled fully the additional administrative tasks required of them varied considerably.²¹ Despite the efforts of the SED leadership to recreate the administration of a coordinated crop and livestock production, fundamental imbalances remained. These imbalances only aggravated the impact of the ever-worsening economic climate on the experience of life and work in agriculture and rural society.

Managing Mis-industrialisation

The shortage of heavy machinery and spare parts, fertiliser as well as manpower, rendered agriculture on an industrial scale increasingly

fraught with crisis. No less worrying for farmers was an apparent drop in the fertility of the land in some LPGs, thanks to wind damage over the unbroken expanses of oversized fields and soil exhaustion as a result of intensive monocultural plantations. Together these factors rendered the achievement of consistently good yields almost impossible and in so doing prevented the realisation of one of the primary goals of the socialist transformation of agriculture: namely the achievement of consistency, predictability and thus plan-ability in agricultural production.

A study of the extent of mechanisation in Kreis Eisenach in August 1982 revealed that the LPGs had reached the limit beyond which any further reduction of the workforce would have a serious negative impact on the ability of farmers to maintain agro-technical deadlines. At the same time, it was noted that measures to prevent further erosion of the soil in large parts of the district were urgently required.²² Ongoing plan shortfalls along with 'unjustified' variation in yields between similarly situated districts in Bezirk Erfurt also continued to be reported in 1983.²³ If yields were inconsistent this could only have a negative impact on livestock production. In Bezirk Erfurt there had been a drop in the gross turn over in livestock production between 1980 and 1983, with a notable decrease, for example, in the quantity of milk produced per cow. In 1982 seventy livestock farms had herds producing no more than 2,500 kg per cow, a figure embarrassingly low considering that 3,000 kg had been considered an attainable target at the start of the 1960s.²⁴

Shortages of fuel were becoming increasingly problematic for agriculture during the course of the 1980s. This was in small part because the quantity of fuel allowed the LPGs was often spent on carrying out other tasks within the local community (such as rubbish collection or road repairs). More seriously, however, the fuel requirements for transport of manpower as well as crops had been increased considerably, exacerbated by a non-territorial organisation of production, and were now unsustainable given the price of oil.²⁵ With growing uncertainty about how to sustain industrial-style agriculture at a reduced cost and with reduced inputs of key raw materials – in particular fuel – new consideration was given to the optimum organisation of crop production. Plantation sizes had reached averages of over 50 hectares for grain, 40 hectares for potatoes and 57 hectares for sugar beet in the GDR as a whole. In some parts of the GDR, plantations had expanded to as much as 250 hectares. Opinion was growing, however, that such expanses were not sustainable in practice and indeed could have a deleterious effect on productivity.²⁶

Moreover, there was growing concern that productivity was being compromised by the lack of personal connection and responsibility felt by the LPG farmer with regard to the land he now worked on. It was argued that the fields should be of a reasonable size to allow those working on them to develop a sense of responsibility for the soil and the yield produced there. This was, of course, not simply a question of the size of the fields but how the farmer was deployed to work on them. LPG Ps had long been encouraged to increase the number of LPG members organised in brigades with specific skills or specific technical responsibilities, rather than with specific territories.²⁷ Brigades located in and responsible for a particular territory within an LPG now seemed far more preferable. Having greater local knowledge of the land and the range of work which could be done on it at any given time of the year enabled such brigades to respond to sudden shortages or crises at short notice, reducing down-time caused by delays beyond their immediate control. Arguably, too, the reinvigoration of local pride associated with territorial brigades gave added incentive to farmers to devote themselves to improving production.

Mis-industrialisation or Sabotage?

The seriousness with which the SED leadership were taking the problems of East German agriculture can be seen in the renewed interest shown by the Ministry for State Security in the LPGs during the early 1980s. In August 1983 a report on the situation in agriculture in Bezirk Erfurt by the head of the responsible department in the Bezirk administration of the Stasi called for plans to be made to counter suspected economic sabotage in the LPGs.²⁸ Judging by the list of recommendations for improvements to the work of the Stasi necessary in future, the extent of operations in agriculture had up to this point been greatly limited. This was arguably because of the lack of flashpoints of overt hostility to SED policy in the sphere of agriculture during the later 1970s, since the transition to separate large-scale crop production had effectively ended the existence of the remaining Type I LPGs.

In the Stasi's district administrations the staff responsible for agriculture tended to be responsible for general matters for the whole rural area, with the result that the networks of informers already recruited were not necessarily well focused on centres of agricultural production. In 1983, in a number of industrial livestock production facilities such as the major pork production centre in Neumark, Kreis Weimar not a single informant (*'Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter'* or IM) was fully opera-

tional. Quality of information gathering and reporting varied across the Bezirk. While the Stasi administrations in Kreis Weimar and Kreis Gotha were praised for being effective at organising cells of informers to infiltrate agriculture, in Kreis Nordhausen and Heiligenstadt no such cell had been formed. The district Stasi offices in Heiligenstadt, along with those in Apolda, Eisenach and Erfurt, were also criticised for failing to provide sufficient information to the Bezirk authority on agricultural affairs.

In order to rectify the situation, IM and so-called 'security deputies' in key positions in the administration of agriculture and the collective farms were to be recruited. These recruits were to keep a look-out in particular for evidence of illegal activity among LPG managers. The district administrations in Worbis, Bad Langensalza and Sömmerda had all already begun investigations into leading functionaries in a number of LPGs for a variety of reasons. Reports of 'negative comments about socialist agricultural policy' and active contacts in the West naturally provoked suspicion. However, serious investigations were also pursued against those who were thought to be maintaining too many private livestock or to be involved in 'criminal trade, above all in stolen livestock feed'. 'Official and unofficial information' collated by the Stasi also caused agricultural functionaries in the state apparatus in a number of districts to come under suspicion for involvement in a similar selection of illegal activities. Ultimately, however, investigations by the Ministry for State Security were most often prompted by obvious economic failure in an LPG.

At this point, while most of the LPG Ps in the Bezirk were able to maintain financial solvency, there were at least thirty LPG Ts considered to be struggling, with low production levels. Such was the prevalence of high rates of livestock mortality among those LPGs which were struggling financially, this was taken to be the consequence of economic sabotage or at least criminal negligence. Premature deaths among livestock were caused on the whole by a lack of sufficient feed and overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions for the animals. In some cases there was undoubtedly some mistreatment of livestock and dereliction of duty by those working in the LPGs. Some LPG Ts were no doubt mismanaged. Nonetheless it was clear that in most struggling LPG Ts, the basic cause for low productivity levels and high mortality rates lay in insufficient financial and material investment over a number of years.

Rather than exposing widespread 'hostile' activity, the Stasi investigation illustrated the extent to which the system for scrutinising and taking action to improve the state of affairs in LPGs had consistently

failed to have an impact over the course of several years. Officially, agricultural functionaries in the district state apparatus were criticised for failing to take action to find solutions to the dire situation some LPG Ts found themselves in. At the same time, LPG cadres were blamed and in some cases removed from their posts for failing to take action against irresponsible and negligent work by LPG members. It was nevertheless apparent even from the Stasi report that disparity in the performance of LPGs was the consequence of the state's economic inadequacy and long-running prioritisation of resources.

LPG P cadres, too, came in for criticism and suspicion if the amounts of produce their farm made available to the state or the quantity of feed they made available to their neighbouring LPG Ts were considered inadequate. The LPG P Isseroda in Kreis Weimar and the LPG P in Stockhausen Kreis Eisenach were found to be showing particular shortfalls in production. In these cases the heads of the LPG were criticised for mismanaging the farms, though not accused of actual sabotage – in the case of Isseroda low yields were very likely the result of soil exhaustion. There was, however, also suspicion of LPG cadres in general, many of whom were thought to be involved in deliberate misrepresentation of the LPG's actual yields during the harvest, with the intention of building up an unregistered reserve supply of produce. Stocks, particularly of grain, were at a premium in the 1980s, giving LPGs added incentive to seek to keep control of the amounts they gave up and the payment they received for it.

The shortage economy and the half-achieved industrialisation had made it necessary for LPG chairmen to pursue every avenue available to them – including ones which subverted the system – to sustain the levels of profit and production expected of them, by the state on the one hand and the members of the LPGs on the other.

Financial Reform

At the heart of support for a return to 'joined-up' crop and livestock production was the hope, particularly among farmers in LPG Ts, that working conditions and incomes would be improved as a result. Better relations with the LPG P would bring reduced feed and transport costs and greater financial and material resources with which to develop more efficient, less labour-intensive production facilities. Given the shortage of manpower in agriculture, farmers were already having to perform very high numbers of overtime hours during the late 1970s and 1980s in order to maintain production. Information collected by the

Agriculture Department of the ZK on the level of overtime being carried out in LPGs revealed just how different conditions in agriculture were to those in industry.

Responding to a query from the chairman of the LPG P Gamstädt, Kreis Erfurt-Land, the ZK Agriculture Department noted that in 1980 more than 250 extra hours per fully employed member of the production personnel were being carried out on average in LPGs in the GDR each year. In the LPG Ts the average was considerably higher at 317 hours. This compared unfavourably with workers in industry who performed on average only fifty-seven hours of overtime a year. Thus while each person working in agriculture earned only slightly less than an industrial worker in total, they had to do longer hours. On average the income per hour of an agricultural labourer and member of the LPGs remained at only 88 per cent of that of an industrial worker.²⁹ As a further reduction of the agricultural workforce became increasingly unsustainable as a result of the lack of machinery and spare parts, there was a clear need to make agriculture attractive enough a job prospect to retain sufficient manpower. Given the ongoing gap in the incomes of farmers and industrial workers, this was a clear area for possible improvement.

In resolutions made by the Politburo in October and then by the Ministerial Council in November 1982, the intention to carry out a price reform in two years' time largely to the benefit of agriculture had been settled, predominantly in response to the ever-worsening balance between costs and gross production in collective farms across the GDR. Until the price reforms came into effect, in Bezirk Erfurt thirty-one LPG Ps and eighty-nine LPG Ts were not expected to be able to reduce their costs without scaling back production. Indeed a number of LPG Ts were expected to sustain severe financial losses of several hundred thousand Marks.³⁰

The price reform, it was hoped, would explicitly appeal to 'good farming traditions of clever calculation'. Moreover, it was intended to put a 'more correct' value on agricultural production in the GDR and in so doing increase the income of the individual farmer.³¹ The report by the Rat des Bezirkes on the consequences of the 1984 price reforms for the SED Bezirksleitung in Erfurt predicted considerable improvements in the financial stability of the LPGs. The monetary increase in value of the gross product of LPGs in the plans for 1984 would – after the reforms – far outstrip increases in costs. This in turn was expected to be reflected in the level of personal income per full-time member of the agricultural workforce, which would rise to a planned level of over 10,000 Marks in both crop and livestock farms. The expectation was that there would no longer be any LPGs operating at a loss.³² This expectation

appears to have been borne out. A report on the state of the finances of the LPGs in the Bezirk in 1988 pointed out that the number of LPG Ts that were counted among those with a low production level had been reduced since the early 1980s, and only two LPG Ts were found to be operating at a loss. This rebalancing of the figures could, however, only have limited immediate impact on the quality of working conditions in agriculture.³³

Despite the apparent skew in favour of agriculture the new prices were also designed to accommodate changes in industrial prices, which would eventually increase costs to the LPGs.³⁴ Moreover, although the price reform in theory would enable LPGs to be able to afford to pay for machinery, fertiliser and fuel which they so badly needed, and maintain the incomes of the farmers at the levels now expected, there was no guarantee that these resources would be available to purchase. A report on the members' assemblies of the DBD in July 1984 suggested that despite the price reforms farmers were sceptical of the possibilities for increased production given the actually reduced amount of fuel, materials and spare parts available.³⁵

Throughout the late 1980s farmers complained of shortages of vital machinery and equipment. At the district farmers' conferences in 1985 there were widespread complaints about a lack of sufficient machinery for use in the harvest of nearly all main crops, for use in livestock sheds, as well as in the transport and loading and unloading of produce. Shortages of protective clothing, of spare parts, tyres, fertiliser and pesticides were all cause for complaint as well. The situation had become so severe, farmers argued, that even with the greatest care and continual repair of the machinery available it was impossible to harvest within agro-technical deadlines. Regardless of the quality of the yield that year, losses of produce were therefore bound to occur.³⁶

One of the other impacts of the price reform was to encourage private production.³⁷ Information from the Ministerial Council on the effects of the price reform in May 1984 noted above all a positive impact on individual – i.e. private – production, with a rise in profits in this branch of agriculture.³⁸ By 1989, in the GDR as a whole, household plots and livestock accounted for 34 per cent of eggs, 15 per cent of animals for slaughter, 22 per cent of fruit and 14 per cent of vegetables supplied to the state.³⁹ The price reforms thus succeeded in encouraging a considerable increase in private entrepreneurship in rural communities. Although this was a practical solution to the GDR's various problems of production, it was nonetheless another ideologically retrograde step. Moreover, it added to the disparities of wealth between individuals and families within a community, who were either more or less capable

of exploiting their political and social connections to gain access to resources. Honecker's brand of socialism appeared to be working against, not for, social equality.

Despite the formation of the KORs and the price reforms, agriculture in the Bezirk as in the country as a whole was still racked with conflict and crisis. The economic performance of LPG Ts remained precarious (even after the price reforms). The worst cases had had long histories of poor production results, having failed to transform the conditions of production over the years.⁴⁰ LPG Ps too continued to vary considerably in productivity.⁴¹ In spite of the price reforms of 1984 there was still considerable variation in the profitability between LPGs. As the first waves of mass protest began to gather strength in the GDR in September 1989, the Rat des Bezirkes in Erfurt could not paint a rosy picture of the state of collective farming.⁴²

Conclusion

During the autumn of 1989, the proportion of collective farmers who participated in demonstrations showing their open rejection of the SED regime was not recognisably very high. Nonetheless it was clear that the SED leadership was considered morally as well as financially bankrupt in the villages as elsewhere in the GDR. Loyalty remained in many cases to the LPGs and also to LPG functionaries regardless of their party affiliation. In 1989 and 1990, the LPG Ts and the LPG Ps still remained at the heart of village life and, given the enormous lack of certainty about the future, the prospects for the individual remained bound up closely to the prospects for the collective farm to which they belonged. Leading functionaries of LPGs often fought hard to maintain some viable form of large-scale agricultural production in which to employ as many as possible of the members of the LPGs. However, loyalty to the SED regime as a whole evaporated in the countryside as quickly as elsewhere in the GDR. In many villages in Bezirk Erfurt, the church had remained of central importance, particularly to the older generations who continued to make up a large proportion of the village's population. SED membership and DBD membership had certainly become more commonplace among farmers in the thirty years since collectivisation had got underway; however, party groups remained relatively small and weak in comparison to their counterparts in industry. The breakdown of the SED regime was therefore not mourned immediately by many.

This study does not seek to give a full explanation for the collapse of the GDR or the SED regime. If one were to explain all the causes

of the collapse of the SED regime in 1989, one would not necessarily dwell very long on the problems of agricultural production, the failure to improve living conditions in villages or the crisis conditions in some LPGs. Nonetheless, the growth of popular dissatisfaction with the SED regime and discontent, too, among party members and functionaries of the state administration (as the possibilities for countering the consequences of the worsening economic crisis during the late 1980s diminished) was part of a complex of causes and consequences which prompted the end of the SED dictatorship.

The growth in the extent of popular discontent lent increasing strength to the public calls for change begun by small opposition groups, whose numbers swelled rapidly during the early autumn of 1989. The apparent bankruptcy of the GDR and the withdrawal of Soviet economic and ultimately political support not only prompted popular dissatisfaction and its virulent public expression but also ensured these public demonstrations had a deep impact on the SED leadership. By the time the borders to West Germany were opened there was little prospect of sustaining the GDR's existence. The majority of the population looked now to the West for economic salvation, rejecting the economic failure and social and political control of the SED dictatorship.

Notes

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Auswertung der Einwohnerforen mit dem Bezirksreferentenkollektiv vom 17.8.1988, 31.10.1988.

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9. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/149 SED Kreisleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation, 12.10.1978, p. 107.
10. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/150 SED Kreisleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation, 13.2.1979, p. 36.
11. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Kreisleitung der SED Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/152 SED Kreisleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation, 16.03.1981, p. 42; Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation, 15.5.1981, p. 63; Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation, 16.6.1981, pp. 66–67.
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16. ThHStAW Bezirksparteiarchiv der SED Erfurt, Bezirksleitung der SED Erfurt Nr. 3865 Übersichtsstatistik Stand, 1.10.1982.
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19. D. Gabler, *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der ehemaligen DDR*, Berlin, 1995, pp. 300–4.
20. SAPMO BArch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Dezember 1983, 8.12.1964.
21. Gabler, *Entwicklungsabschnitte*, pp. 363–71. Diethelm Gabler devotes considerable space in his book to the constitution of the cooperative councils in Bezirk Erfurt, reproducing a number of documents which describe the

- duties and responsibilities required of them and the varying extent to which the KOR claimed to have fulfilled them. It is not clear how far the KOR were able, or needed, to fulfil all these duties and responsibilities in practice. Some cooperations were clearly much more successful than others, although this had as much to do with the productive capacities of the constituent farms as with the competence of the KOR.
22. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L041358 Wissenschaftlich-technisches Zentrum der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt, Analyse des gegenwärtigen Standes der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion und Schlussfolgerungen zur weiteren Intensivierung der Produktion im Kreis Eisenach Juli/Augst 1982.
 23. SAPMO BArch DY30/141 Büro Werner Felfe, Berichterstattung im Politbüro, Material zu einigen Problemen der Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt, 15.5.1983.
 24. SAPMO BArch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Monatsbericht über die Ergebnisse der Parteiarbeit im Monat November 1984, 8.12.1984.
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 26. SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1512 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information zu Schlaggrößen sowie ihr Einfluss auf den effektiven Einsatz der Technik und geringe Transportentfernungen, 16.11.1981, p. 395.
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 29. SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1926 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Standpunkt zur Eingabe des Genossen O., Vorsitzender der LPG P Gamstädt, Kreis Erfurt, 17.11.1981, p. 393.
 30. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L041333 Rat des Bezirkes, Bericht 'Auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses des Politbüros ...' (undated).
 31. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L041325 Ministerrat der DDR, Beschluss über die Durchführung der Agrarpreisreform, 11.11.1982.
 32. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L041333 Rat des Bezirkes, Leiter des Fachorgans für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Bericht an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung der SED über die Auswirkungen der Agrarpreisreform auf die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft im Bezirk, 23.5.1984.
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 34. ThHStAW RdB Erfurt L041333 SED Bezirksleitung, Stellungnahme zum Bericht des Rates des Bezirkes Erfurt über die Auswirkungen der Agrarpreisreform am 31.5.1984.

35. SAPMO BArch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Juli 1984, 9.8.1984.
36. SAPMO BArch DY30/32 Büro Werner Felfe, Information für das Politbüro des ZK der SED über die wichtigsten Ergebnisse der KBK 1985, 22.4.1985.
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