

# Conclusion

In this book I wanted to explore the concepts of society with which working people in East Berlin enterprises embraced the fall of the Berlin Wall. I have shown how ideas about changing the structures and mechanisms of real existing socialism emerged beyond the official ideology and what effect they could have in the transformation of East German society. My second purpose was to analyse the power structures in the enterprise and place them in relation to the mechanisms of ideological control in the planned and market economies.

The following points sum up how ideological control worked in GDR enterprises: in the planned economy plan fulfilment served to secure political dominance. Political conformity of the population had priority over economic results. In socialist competition the official ideology had to be formally reproduced. Individual opinions were undesired and not asked for. However, testimonies to ideological submission were not supposed to be simply copied or repeated, but actively created. The authors of wall newspapers and brigade diaries were meant to write their own texts masqueraded as presenting their own opinion, without having the possibility of expressing criticism.

The people I met in the East Berlin enterprises were, however, mostly self-reflecting, critical individuals, who contemplated right and wrong in society and their own part in it. While they reproduced the official ideology to the outside world, they also had an alternative version to the official visions of the world. They tried to assure themselves of their *Eigensinn*, their own ways of thinking and to reveal the perversion of those in power by exposing the failings of the infallible, the faith of the atheists and the ignorance of the know-it-alls. Yet the reluctant performance of socialist uniformity was efficient. Even if they were not convinced by the official ideology, their ritual subordination demonstrated that they did not see any realistic alternative to the prevailing dominance (Scott 1990: 66). The small individual escapes

did not change social reality. The hidden critical discourses needed an audience in order to become a means of resistance (ibid.: 118).

While spontaneous utterances of discontent, ironic comments and political jokes had been an inherent component of socialist life in the enterprise, political debates, which had hardly existed previously, became more open and explicit from 1988. Some claimed from the official social organisation their right to a different opinion and withdrew because they were no longer prepared to devote themselves to a political order that did not trust them if they dared to think for themselves. They wanted to make themselves heard and acquire their own image of the world beyond the walls of the GDR. The slogan: 'We are the people', which inspired the Monday demonstrations (*Montagsdemonstrationen*) in Leipzig in autumn 1989, emphasizes the essence of their plea. Instead of believing in absolute truths laid down for them by the party, the citizens now wanted to participate themselves in the decisions which shaped their lives. The hidden discourses had gone public.

In this phase of rapid social transformation, the experience gained by the employees from the routine of socialist everyday life scarcely enabled them to judge the far-reaching consequences that their decisions would have in the market economy. Since the parameters of their actions changed constantly, they developed strategies, which were meant only for the short term, but which could nonetheless bring about consequences with a much wider impact.

The moment of action, even during the most radical social upheavals, is also always a moment when the current contexts of social life are replicated (Giddens 1987: 76). This perspective is already contained in the much-cited observation by Marx: 'People make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1969). In their actions, people can rely on experiences that they may have had in the past, and are limited by the conditions that they have created themselves through their actions. This does not mean that they cannot also react innovatively and creatively to new situations. Even patterns of behaviour appearing to be 'socialist heritage' or 'culture' are frequently in fact direct responses to new social situations (Burawoy and Verdery 1999: 1–2). Whenever people in East German enterprises used language and symbols from the socialist period, it did not necessarily mean that they were clinging to the past, but they were applying concepts with which they were already familiar in their daily actions to new purposes and endowing them with new meaning.

Although the ambitions and preconceptions of the employees in the enterprise were initially developed from actual socialist practice, these ideas also reached beyond this practice. They linked their own experiences to notions of social justice and order, which referred to a wide spectrum of social theories that they directly or indirectly came into contact with. Among these theories were those conveyed in schools of Marxism-Leninism about the role of production workers in the GDR, or the wisdom attributed to the American Plains Indians, which were popular in GDR youth groups, or the teachings of the Catholic Church. These theories do not necessarily provide a framework within which people think (Sabel 1982: 18), but out of various, often even contradictory theories, a 'little tradition' (Tambiah 1970) develops which responds to concrete life situations. The spectrum of these theories expanded markedly with the opening up of East German society.

The preconceptions of the market economy that circulated in East German enterprises before the fall of the Wall had very little to do with the world beyond the GDR. Most workers believed their enterprise could survive in the Western marketplace if the deficiencies of the planned economy were put right, productivity increased, and product quality improved. Even as late as 1990, a scarcity of goods and high demand were taken for granted. A saturated market was inconceivable before the *Wende*, and at first no rational explanation could be found for the sudden disappearance of product demand. This lack of orientation, expressed in the frequently heard sentence: 'We need someone to come in and change it all round', arose out of this discrepancy between conception and reality. At the same time, the employees criticized the fact that the initiative had been taken away from them and that the new instruments of control were now back in the hands of the old rulers. They had the feeling, that time was flying by much too fast for them to be able 'to build upon what had been achieved'.

Members of the enterprises Taghell, Stanex and Hochinauf were present in autumn and winter 1989–90 as active individuals or as groups who voiced differences in opinion in the enterprise. They primarily targeted representatives of socialist power, the enterprise directors, party secretaries and trade union committees of the enterprise. Nevertheless, their conceptions of democracy and participation quickly lost touch with reality when the institutional restructuring of East German society headed towards the West German model and democratization effectively stopped at the factory gates. The trade unions did not represent East German workers effectively in the privatization process, especially in the

decisive year 1990. If they did not resign immediately from their posts under pressure from the workforce in the first weeks after the fall of the Wall, the socialist directors were officially granted managerial positions by the Treuhand. The 'comrade' (*Genosse*) directors of the planned economy became managers or even owned enterprises in the market economy, often helped along by good personal connections with employees in the Treuhandanstalt.

At this point the link between property and power becomes crucial. Property is institutionalized dispensation of power, which following the Wende was handed over through the state-owned trust company Treuhandanstalt from the 'people' to various private institutions as well as private individuals. In the first few months following the fall of the Wall, the employees and also the directors considered the people-owned enterprises they worked in as something they owned. When the property rights were transferred to private individuals, they conferred numerous instruments of power, which the employees in East German enterprises soon recognized to be to their disadvantage. The instrument for acquiring power over others was now no longer one's position in the political hierarchy, but ownership of property or an alliance with the owners.

In East Germany only a handful of enterprises were taken over by the employees and an even smaller number of these actually continue to exist today. Although the Treuhandanstalt was receptive whenever employees presented concepts for financing the takeover of their enterprise, most of them did not even try. To all but a few of the employees, ownership of a company in an entirely unfathomable economic situation hardly seemed worth fighting for – yet many of the enterprise directors saw the struggle as thoroughly worthwhile. The old rulers infused the new institutions of the market economy with their personal affairs: the director of Stanex by creating a political niche for himself in the company, the director of Taghell by going on wild capitalist ventures. Any power in the hands of the workers' committees, which were still weak and inexperienced in representing the interests of the workforce, was rapidly taken away. Workers' representatives were promoted to become heads of personnel resource management or, alternatively, to head of production and then had to deal with laying off the same staff they had previously defended. The employees, who had sought a fundamental transformation in East German society and had enthusiastically welcomed the market economy, were unable to redress the influence of those who held institutional power at the time of the GDR and who resisted any attempt to weaken their status.

Institutional innovation in the enterprise, the transfer of people-owned enterprise assets into private ownership, production for the free market, separating politics from economics, the removal of the social role of the enterprise, the introduction of accounting procedures that assessed the activities in the company according to profit criteria – these were the consequences of the *Wende*. They affected the workforce in completely different ways depending on their level of education, on their status within the enterprise, their age, their political convictions, their position in the hierarchy and on the particular moment when the assessment was made.

Those who saw advantages in an institutional renewal, expected performance-related pay, technological and organisational conditions for high-quality work, and solutions to blockages caused both by bad planning and by irregularities in production flow (*Stürmen und Warten*). They wanted rational planning, the end of political control and paternalism, of reproducing socialist ideology in socialist competition and the deposition of the socialist leaders and of the party organs in the enterprise. They were convinced that they would be able to show their true abilities, once the inflated administration by elite party members had been removed from power.

In the years following unification, however, there was a rise in the number of workers who were sceptical about the consequences of institutional change, some even to the extent of rejecting it. They regretted the loss of job security and were frightened of finding themselves unemployed or of the entire company going bankrupt. The well-qualified production workers rejected the more pronounced differentiation between technicians and production workers. Tighter control at the workplace, particularly in time management, replaced the socialist pact for plan fulfilment between management and production workers and was felt as an encroachment upon personal freedom. As a result of the highs and lows of incoming orders, phases of heavy production pressure, followed by quiet periods of short-time work, still continued to alternate. This frustrated those who had believed that such fluctuations in the workflow had been overcome with the end of the planned economy. Competition and exclusion, justified by the ideology of losers and winners, contradicted the conceptions many employees had of fairness. They felt it was unfair that 'socialist leaders' could become owners or managing directors and that in such positions they had the means to rule over the enterprise in a more authoritarian manner than ever before. Some employees were surprised about the loss they felt with the disappearance of their political and ideological significance as

*Werkstätige* (the working people) who have an important contribution to make in society. Many who feared for their jobs had the impression of being superfluous in the new society.

Along with losing their job security, the workers also lost a certain freedom to do what they wanted in the enterprise. In the planned economy, they were mainly interested in expanding their margin of freedom in the enterprise, while in the market economy they were predominantly occupied with securing their jobs. The extent to which discipline had penetrated the enterprises in the GDR was not as deep as in the Federal Republic of Germany. The employees had not internalized the production discipline to the same degree – this was also because many did not regard the system of the planned economy as a rational one, and hence repeatedly tried to escape from it. The forms of surveillance and control in the GDR enterprise were more authoritarian and more hierarchical than in the Federal Republic, but they were less efficient too. At Stanex and Taghell the directors could use their new positions of power as company managers to be even more authoritarian than before.

The modern Western management ideology, as it was disseminated at Hochinauf, aimed at having the employees identify themselves with the company's interests and commercial goals and internalize the necessary work discipline. In modern Western factories, over the last thirty years, workers have been given more responsibility for the way they structure their own work. They were to be convinced and not forced to achieve a better performance at work (Burawoy 1979: 182, Kern and Schumann 1990). The ideology of harmony in the company masks, however, both the divergence of interests within the company and the stubborn individuality of the workers. Normalization – the process where a strict work discipline becomes part of everyday life in the company – was not the result of the management's and workforce's discovery of a common interest in keeping the company going. It was the outcome of a long tradition of surveillance and punishment, which in modern industrial societies has become more and more subtle and created an unspecified feeling of fear among those under surveillance (Foucault 1986: 241). Fear did not arise through direct repression, but through an atmosphere of general uncertainty about jobs and the future of the enterprise. At the same time, the model of the winner implied that the key to success was the belief in success. This model created the illusion that the individual in the company would master his/her own fate as long as he/she relentlessly pursued the interests of the company and motivated colleagues to do the same.

Just like the official ideology during the time of the planned economy, this homogenous model offered by the multinational corporation was accepted, changed or possibly rejected by its employees. Yet, it did not function in the same way. Whereas the reproduction of real socialist ideology in socialist competition was primarily calculated to elicit lip service from the employees to their political conformity, the company philosophy was intended to influence and control actions and decisions that were economically significant. Money, success and power played a part in gaining acceptance of the 'winner's' model of identity in the market economy. Fear for one's livelihood and insecurity complemented their effect.

The corporate philosophy of the multinational firm was oriented most of all towards increasing productivity in subsidiary companies in Eastern Europe. Employees in competition with all other manufacturers both within and outside of the company were meant to see themselves as winners who could achieve the highest productivity and the best results. The arguments and strategies, though, which the multinational enterprises used to try and maximize productivity while minimizing labour costs, contradicted the socialist idea of productivity as an objective, scientifically determinable category that took into account both the performance of the worker and the technical equipment at their disposal. Productivity had been a key word in the planned economy too. Hence, the imperative for ever-increasing production within an ever-diminishing time span was nothing new for the workers and the employees. In the planned economy, however, raising the level of productivity had a political-moral dimension of being a collective contribution of the workers to socialist society. Yet, in the multinational enterprise 'productivity' was a benchmark whereby the 'value' of the individual to the enterprise could be measured. On the one hand, the company philosophy aimed at the abstraction from personal relationships, passions and identities and reduced those who worked in the enterprises to nothing more than their role as part of the workforce. On the other hand, it placed the individual will of the employees, which was supposed to be directed towards – and be instrumental to – the interests of the enterprise, at the centre.

The company philosophy affected all the groups, albeit in different ways. It acted as a threat of exclusion. It acted as a model for the mental code of conduct and as a means of legitimizing a system of competition where everyone was pitted against everyone else. The message was: 'Whoever does not believe in being the winner, has only themselves to

blame.' Whoever failed had not believed firmly enough, was not good enough and therefore could only blame him/herself for being rejected.

Faced with the individualistic model of the market economy, which emphasized competition and responsibility, the employees tried to apply a 'We model' that provided them with authentication. While the social structures were undergoing radical changes, they were attempting to remain consistent in their own beliefs. In contrast to the collapse of national socialist society, which had to be enforced from the outside and where the Germans were the ones who had to change, the central problem throughout the process of German unification was 'remaining who you are' in a society that was rapidly changing. In this regard, the workers I talked to construed West Germans as 'others', who were radically wrong in their judgement of East Germans. This construction of a capitalistic archetype of Wessi allowed for many inconsistencies. In the fictional dialogue with the 'other', the fact could be underlined that the Osis were not lazy and incompetent, as a fictive Western counterpart would have insinuated, but represented serious competitors, and besides this they did not strive for competition like the Wessis, but for 'a sense of community and fraternity'.

Socialism in the GDR had failed, and along with it a tightly connected model of society, which claimed to represent an absolute truth. With its emphasis on the mechanisms of selection in the market economy, the new social system of the Federal Republic likewise concentrated on a simple truth, which, for the sake of economic rationality, 'colonized' the network of communicative relationships in a more penetrating and crippling manner (Habermas, quoted in Gorz 1990: 153). However, we have not reached the end of the story. Even if the dominant economic rationality manages to penetrate as far as the everyday world of those who are excluded from a life in employment, new open or hidden alternative discourses develop. During excursions and drinking in the pub, the colleagues and former colleagues, like at Stanex, continue to debate – in an endless search for a society that not only permits different opinions, but also gives those opinions that are distinct the chance to make a difference.