

Preface

In contrast to the enthusiastic official discourse of the Kohl government, I had a sceptical attitude to the rapid political unification of both German states. Educated by teachers from the 1968 generation, I lacked a feeling of national pride or even a feeling of German national identity. Although I had lived in West Berlin from 1982 I felt closer to France (where I had studied) or to Austria (where I spent part of my childhood) than to the GDR (German Democratic Republic). The wall that surrounded West Berlin, the strict border controls and visa requirements were effective in dissuading me from visiting the beautiful surroundings of Berlin. I started to discover East Germany only at the end of the 1980s when contacts with East Germans became easier. I became interested in the efforts of the newly awakening opposition movement to develop alternatives to the GDR regime. With many West Berlin activists and intellectuals I shared in 1989 the hope that a discussion about social alternatives could emerge that would bring new momentum to social movements in West Germany. When real existing socialism collapsed and the opposition in East Germany declared that it did not want to fall immediately into the wide-open arms of capitalism, expectations were high. However, this hope was rapidly thwarted by what Habermas called the 'chubby-cheeked DM nationalism' (1990: 205).

Ever since my research in West Berlin collective enterprises in the first half of the 1980s I had wanted to do research in a 'real' people's owned enterprise. When the Wall fell, I was curious to find out how working people in the GDR would experience the market economy and what ideas they would approach it with. When I finally fulfilled this wish in the spring of 1990, people-owned enterprises had almost ceased to exist. However, memories of the planned economy were fresh and the people working there were keen on sharing them with me. I began my explorations together with the students from the research seminar 'Transformations of the Culture of the Everyday in East Germany' that

I organised from April 1990 to July 1991 at the Institute of Ethnology at the Free University of Berlin. Rainer Bachmann, Gregor Noack, Hildegard Weber, Dagmar Heymann, Christina Katzer, Britta Heinrich, Thomas Hammer and Katrin Arndt took part in the first heated debates. I shared with Katrin Arndt the highs and lows of doing fieldwork at Taghell¹ and the interviews and fieldnotes.

I would like to thank all employees at Taghell, Stanex and Hochinauf who shared with me their good and sometimes disagreeable memories and had long talks with me about their appraisal of the present and their expectations for the future. I often stood in their way when they tried to work and they allowed me nevertheless to look over their shoulders. My special thanks are for Mr Stolz, who did not hesitate, in sharing his unvarnished opinion with me.

The German research foundation DFG provided me with a generous research grant that made it possible, not only to carry out research in Berlin, but also to continue it later in Moscow. I started writing the book at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin and continued it at the CeFRoS in Prague. Discussions with my colleagues of the LAIOS in Paris, Marc Abélès, Catherine Neveu, Irène Bellier, Jean-François Gossiaux und Pierre Bouvier helped me digest the material collected.

Many discussions with colleagues and friends have encouraged and helped me with this manuscript. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Emmanuel Terray, Simon Clarke, Claire Wallace, Michal Bodemann, Miklos Hadas, Michel Pialoux, Sighard Neckel, Helmuth Berking, Richard Rottenburg, Ivana Mazalkova, Ed Clark, Anna Soulsby, Pavel Romanov, Veronika Kabalina, Albert Hirschman, László Bruszt, Effi and Ewald Böhlke. Long conversations with Wolf Schäfer helped me to understand everyday life in GDR enterprises. Horst Froberg contributed his poems and his ironic view on things. Discussions with my father helped me to understand the inner life of a multinational corporation. Claus Offe went through the entire manuscript and sent me suggestions I could act on. My friend Henk Rajer did as much as anyone to see the German version of the manuscript through to completion.

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I wish to thank my partner Terry Boehm for the keen interest he took in the planned economy while helping me revise the English translation. It is a particular pleasure for me that my daughter Nora, born in 1989, started to read the book when she chose as a school research project ‘memories of real existing socialism’.

Notes

1. All names of persons and enterprises in this book are pseudonyms.