

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/157195>

Copyright and reuse:

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

Ost Voices

Local Practices of the Transformation in Eastern Germany, 1989-1991

Jenny Helen Price

Doctor of Philosophy in History

Univeristy of Warwick

April 2020

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	4
Acknowledgements	5
Danksagungen	6
Declaration	8
Abstract	9
Abbreviations	10
 Prologue	 12
Introduction	12
Current state of research	16
Theoretical and methodological approach.....	22
Geographical Focus and Source Base.....	29
Thesis outline.....	37
 1. Finding Voice.....	 41
Exit and Voice	41
Using Voice	46
The Power of the People Outside	46
The Voices on the Square	59
Controlling Voice	68
The Peaceful Revolution? Crowd control in the GDR.	68
Stasi raus! The Secret Police and the Citizens' Guard.....	75
Power off the Streets	82
Channelling Voice.....	88
Stasi in the Brickyard.....	88
Conclusion	92
 2. Political Power	 97
Voice and Loyalty	97
Establishing Trust in Elections	104
The same procedure as every year?.....	104
The Western Voices.....	116
Party Time: Election Day in Practice	134
The New Establishment	143
In it to win it? The SED mutiny.....	143

Rewriting History	153
Formal Loyalty and Own Goals.....	156
Conclusion	159
3. The Tone of Voice	163
Print the truth!	163
Freedom of Expression.....	170
Journalism in Limbo	170
Bad Press	175
The National Summit of East German Council Leaders	178
No Room for Discussion	187
Draht zum Staat? Rewiring the role of the press.....	187
Streamlining critique	192
Breach of confidentiality	195
Conclusion	203
4. Devaluing the East	206
The Currency Unification	206
The Customer is King.....	210
The Voices on the Streets	215
The By-products of the Currency Union	226
Conclusion	237
5. The Sad State of the Unemployed	242
Ossi or Assi?.....	242
From VEB to RIP – The Automobilwerk Eisenach.....	247
Waiting for the Green Light.....	247
Time of Mourning	262
The Village of Stedtfeld vs. General Motors	279
Fulfilling the Plan in the Market Economy	279
Unlawful Democracy.....	283
No Room at the Inn.....	287
Conclusion	291
Epilogue	297
Bibliography	317

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Author's own photograph, Erfurt, 21 December 2017.	11
Figure 2: Thüringer Allgemeine, photograph of the inside of the Thüringenhalle by Roland Obst, 28 October 1989.	54
Figure 3: Stadtarchiv Erfurt, photograph of the outside of the Thüringenhalle by Christine Riesterer, 28 October 1989.....	54
Figure 4: Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach, 'Cartoon Treuhand', Der neue Motor, 31 January 1991.....	272
Figure 5: Stadtarchiv Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Automobil MUSEUM Eisenach', O. Damm, Thüringer Allgemeine, 11 April 1991.....	274

Acknowledgements

Writing these acknowledgements during a time of isolation only reminds me of how important the people are who have seen me through the last four years of this project. Fortunately, I have been surrounded by people who have given me support, guidance and 'sozialer Halt', making what could otherwise have been a very lonely time into one of new encounters, friendship and exchange. To everyone who has accompanied me along the way, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you.

To Prof Jan Palmowski and Prof Corey Ross for giving me structure, advice and direction throughout, for your patience, understanding and belief, for your flexibility and availability, for the wise words and the kind words, thank you.

To the Economic and Research Council and all the colleagues at the Doctoral Training Centre at the University of Warwick, in particular Navdeep Makh, thank you for funding not only my own expenses but also the transcription of the interviews I collected, which has helped me considerably and also made this source accessible for future research.

To the history department at the University of Warwick, the staff and fellow students that set me up for this project and kept track of how I was doing along the way and whilst I was abroad, especially Prof David Anderson and (Dr) Fabiola Creed, thank you for staying in touch.

To all the staff at the German Historical Institute in London, especially Anita Bellamy and Dr Tobias Becker, thank you for the organisation of the postgraduate conferences, your encouragement, support, emails and post.

To the friends and colleagues from far and wide that I have met along the way, thank you for sharing ideas and approaches, for your interest and openness.

To all my close friends and family in the UK, especially Nana for believing in all of us, thank you.

Danksagungen

Mein größter Dank und Respekt gilt vor allem den Menschen, die sich die Zeit genommen haben, mir ausführlich von ihren Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen aus der DDR und in der Zeit danach zu erzählen. Ihnen widme ich diese Arbeit. Für die Einblicke in "den Zeitgeist", für Hinweise zu Themen, Ereignisse und Bedeutungen, auf die ich sonst nicht gekommen wäre, für Ihre Offenheit, Gastfreundschaft und zu aller erst für Ihr Vertrauen und Ihre Geduld, haben Sie vielen herzlichen Dank. Ich bedanke mich bei Eckhard und Ute Lindner, Matthias Doht, Brigitte Korndörfer, Ulrike Quentel, Johannes Wallbrecht, Klaus Wuggazer, Franzisca Friedrich, Christian und Carola Herbst, Ute Lieske, Wolfgang Mühle, Joachim Thureau, Jürgen Stollenwerk, Ingrid Pfeiffer, Karola Stange, Steffen Kachel, Christian Köckert, Christhard Wagner, Hans-Peter Brodhun, Thomas Brohm und auch bei denen, die nicht namentlich genannt werden wollen, mir aber trotzdem sehr ehrlich, persönlich und eindrucksvoll von ihren Erfahrungen berichtet haben. Leider habe ich nicht alle unsere Gespräche direkt zitieren oder mit einarbeiten können, dennoch fließen sie in diese Arbeit ein; denn ich habe aus jeder einzelnen Begegnung sehr viel gelernt.

Für die Vermittlung an Gesprächspartner, für das Interesse an meinem Projekt, für die vielen Hinweise und Einsichten, und für das herzliche willkommen heißen in der Wartburgstadt Eisenach bedanke ich mich zunächst bei Claudius Kabus. Ebenfalls bedanke ich mich bei Anke Hofman-Domke für die Vermittlung in Erfurt. Die Zeitzeugeninterviews in kürzester Zeit und mit großer Genauigkeit zu transkribieren war eine besonders große Leistung. Dafür geht ein herzlicher Dank an Christina Zaubitzer.

Ein großer Dank gilt auch Manfred Beck vom Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach, Heidrun Pönitz, Christopher Launert und Dr. Reinhold Brunner vom Stadtarchiv Eisenach, Dr. Antje Bauer, Kerstin Richter, Astrid Rose, Kerstin Scholtiski und ihren freundlichen Mitarbeiter*Innen vom Stadtarchiv Erfurt, Theresa Schmidt und Jörg Filthaut vom Landesarchiv Thüringen in Weimar, Anne Scheffel vom Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv in Erfurt, Dr. Oliver Salten vom Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische-Politik in Sankt Augustin, Alexander Braune vom Archiv der sozialen Demokratie in Bonn, Robert Camp vom Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis in Berlin, Andrea Paul und Gerhard Zschau von der Bibliothek der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Berlin. Da ich sehr viel Zeit in Archiven verbracht habe, wäre diese Arbeit ohne Ihre Vorschläge und Hilfsbereitschaft nicht zustande gekommen.

Für die Genehmigung, ausgewählte Bilder und Fotografien in dieser Dissertation zu nutzen, bedanke ich mich nochmal herzlichst bei Jessica Elsner und Matthias Doht von der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach, bei Kerstin Richter vom Stadtarchiv Erfurt und bei Karina Schulz von der Thüringer Allgemeine.

Ein Ort, der in der Arbeit nicht vorkommt, für mich persönlich und wissenschaftlich aber eine zentrale Rolle gespielt hat, ist das grüne Paradies Jena. Für die Aufnahme als Gastdoktorandin am *Jena Center Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, für den Arbeitsplatz, den Bibliothekszugang und für die Möglichkeit, mich mit Kolleg*Innen regelmäßig auszutauschen sowie an der Doktorandenschule teilzunehmen geht mein besonderer Dank an Prof. Dr. Norbert Frei und Dr. Kristina Meyer. Bei allen am Historischen Institut, die mir in dieser Zeit zugehört oder Hinweise gegeben haben, möchte ich mich hiermit herzlichst bedanken. Auch für die Zeit am Graduiertenkolleg *Die DDR und die europäischen Diktaturen nach 1945* bedanke ich mich nachdrücklich bei Dr. Katharina Lenski und Veruschka Jähnert. Vor allem aber den Doktorand*Innen, die mich in so vieler Hinsicht unterstützt und in ihrem Kreis aufgenommen haben, vielen lieben Dank. Ein besonderer Dank gilt Jolin Diekmann und Christoph Renner für das Gegenlesen einiger Kapitel.

Für die Möglichkeit, meine Ideen und Ergebnisse vorzutragen, bedanke ich mich bei den Mitarbeitenden des Zentrums für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam, des Imre Kertész-Kollegs in Jena, der Thüringer Staatskanzlei, sowie bei Judith Mayer von der Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Andreasstraße in Erfurt, und Christiane Schneider vom Thüringer Institut für Lehrerfortbildung, Lehrplanentwicklung und Medien.

Für die Unterstützung in der Schlussphase und für das Abschlußstipendium bedanke ich mich außerordentlich bei der Stiftung Ettersberg, insbesondere bei Prof. Dr. Jörg Ganzenmüller, Christian Linde und Conny Bruhn. Die finanzielle Absicherung zum Ende meines Projekts hat mir nochmal die Kraft und Ruhe geboten, die ich benötigte, um die Abgabe sorgfältig vorzubereiten.

Somit sollte schon klar sein, dass eine Doktorarbeit bei weitem keine Einzelleistung ist, sondern auf der Unterstützung vieler beruht, auch wenn sie weitgehend unsichtbar bleiben. Dennoch darf man selbst nicht aufgeben. In dieser Hinsicht bedanke ich mich auch nochmal bei meinen Freunden, die mich mit Musik, Witz und guter Laune begleiteten und stets für gesunde Ablenkung sorgten. An die lieben Freunde meiner Eltern, die mich u.a. mit dem Titelvorschlag „Learning Bureaucracy“ aufgemuntert haben; vielen Dank!

Last but not least bedanke ich mich bei meiner Familie, hüben und drüben, für Eure Liebe und Geduld. Dass ich zu diesem Projekt gekommen bin hat wesentlich mit Euch zu tun - denn ein Stück weit ist dies ja auch unsere Geschichte.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

The sheer scale of the transformation in Eastern Germany was unprecedented. It encompassed unforeseen levels of political, social, economic and cultural change within the space of a few months. And yet, this unique period is understudied in remarkable ways. This thesis contributes to the existing literature on transformation and democratisation processes by providing a detailed study of local transformation practices in Erfurt and Eisenach from 1989 to 1991.

Concentrating on the communal level, it examines the interrelationship between protest, consumption, politics and economic restructuring, and how these changes are reflected in social practices. It highlights the agency of local actors by illustrating the pressure under which eastern Germans worked and the ways in which they dealt with both successes and losses. For introducing and developing democratic practices in times of social, political and economic instability is an incredible challenge. From the grassroots perspective, this thesis highlights previously underappreciated forms of input and proactivity, as well as the immense constraints faced by actors on the ground.

Running throughout the thesis, however, is also the story of citizens trying to find and use their voice; actively renegotiating roles and structures, determining new forms of communication and tone, defending their interests and values, creating meanings and making sense of the past. As well as relating to wider questions of recent German politics and history, this thesis demonstrates how times of political and social uncertainty can lead to practices of social and financial marginalisation that significantly redefine citizens' political agency.

Abbreviations

AA	Allgemeiner Anzeiger
ABM	Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen
ABS	Arbeitsförderung, Beschäftigung und Strukturentwicklung
ACDP	Archiv für Christliche-Demokratische Politik
AdsD	Archiv der sozialen Demokratie
AdSAWE	Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach
AG	Aktiengesellschaft
AGG	Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis
AWE	Automobilwerk Eisenach
BArch	Bundesarchiv
BStU	Der Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IGA	Internationale Gartenbauausstellung der DDR
NaSi	Nationales Amt für Sicherheit
PC	Private Collection
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus
RIP	Rest in Peace
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SDP	Sozialdemokratische Partei in der DDR
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
StA	Stadtarchiv
Stasi	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit
TLZ	Thüringer Landzeitung
VEB	Volkseigener Betrieb
WAZ	Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung



Figure 1: Author's own photograph, Erfurt, 21 December 2017.

Prologue

Introduction

Travelling into Erfurt, the first thing that catches the eye, even before embarking the train, are the words WILLY BRANDT ANS FENSTER.¹ Placed atop the former Interhotel opposite Erfurt's central station, the lettering invites locals, visitors and passers-through to recall the day of the West German chancellor's diplomatic visit to the GDR in March 1970. Willy Brandt, come to the window. The name of the SPD politician that introduced *Ostpolitik* and enacted *change through rapprochement* is familiar across the country. The fact that the first meeting to ease relations between the two German states took place in the current Thuringian capital is less well-known.²

Still, WILLY BRANDT ANS FENSTER are not the words of a high-profile politician but rather those of the crowds that gathered to see him, pushing past the barriers and policemen to fill the space adjoining the station and the hotel. The capital letters, installed by the artist David Mannstein in 2009, physically shout out across the square.³ They are the repeated cries of GDR citizens that called out long enough to get a reaction. But they also reference a third party: the East German government. By facing the crowds that day, Brandt risked causing a scene that could humiliate the Socialist Unity Party and dash his hopes of better relations to the East. The modern artwork, symbolically placed up high on the roof, uses four words to demonstrate the link between the top

¹ See Figure 1.

² For a detailed account of events, see Jan Schönfelder & Rainer Erices, *Willy Brandt in Erfurt. Das erste deutsch-deutsche Gipfeltreffen 1970* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2010).

³ Hanno Müller, 'Der Denkmalstreit von Erfurt', *Thüringer Allgemeine* (21 September 2015) <<http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/leben/detail/-/specific/Der-Denkmalstreit-von-Erfurt-513584068>> (accessed 25 November 2017).

and bottom of society, the East and West of the country, and the ability of ordinary citizens to influence politics from below.

This thesis looks at how social practices of making oneself heard shaped the historical changes in East Germany. In so doing, it not only offers new insights into the period from 1989 onwards, but also relates to wider political questions around social practices and political rights. How did East German citizens go about changing their society, and how did they experience the intense transformation of political, social and cultural life that has since taken place? What role did vocal protest and crowd gatherings play in the process? And how was political expression shaped by feelings of fear, regret, anger and grief during this emotional period?

In March 1990, twenty years after Brandt's appearance, councils in East Germany were preparing for new parliamentary elections, free and fair for the first time in forty years. The result would see a win for the conservative Alliance for Germany, the introduction of the free market system, and a currency union with the Federal Republic of Germany. East German districts were restructured into federal states, and by the end of the year, the former German Democratic Republic had joined the Federal Republic of Germany. Delegates got to work on implementing new procedures and structures, restoring the buildings and improving the infrastructure. Within just a few months, the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the GDR had changed altogether.

Brandt's state visit and his emphatic reception in 1970 has since been likened to the autumn demonstrations of 1989.⁴ These historical events are comparable on an audible level, for they both present moments in which 'the silenced populace heard itself again for the first time and in so doing gained self confidence'.⁵ Clearly, then, the dynamic of being silent or making oneself heard has the power to shape political and social processes, and by instilling confidence also influences understandings of the self, identities and cultures. The practice of asserting oneself publicly is therefore key to understanding the changes that took place in East Germany and its impact on the current day.

And yet, the memorial at Erfurt's main train station does not tell the story of the autumn revolution, Reunification, or Helmut Kohl's visit to Erfurt as part of the *Allianz's* campaign for the first free parliamentary elections. Instead, it recalls a moment half-way through the lifetime of the GDR. It is a reminder that citizens in Eastern Germany have their own history and their own experiences, formed over a period of almost forty years, that continue to shape contemporary Germany. Why did the citizens of Erfurt specifically choose to remember a moment in GDR history and how did eastern feelings of difference develop during the transformation period? Were East Germans able to assert their own wishes and plans during the unification process, or did the 'Ost' citizens essentially lose their voices during the transformation?

⁴ Michael Sontheimer, 'Willy Brandt in Erfurt. Politik aus dem Hotelfenster', *Spiegel Online* (12 March 2010) <<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/willy-brandt-in-erfurt-politik-aus-dem-hotelfenster-a-948767.html>> (accessed 25 November 2017).

⁵ 'Das zum Schweigen gebrachte Volk hörte sich auf diese Weise erstmals wieder selbst und gewann so Selbstbewusstsein', Gerhard Paul, 'In einem stillen Land. Soundscape DDR', in Gerhard Paul & Ralph Schock (Eds.), *Sound der Zeit. Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen. 1889 bis heute* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), p.470.

Of course, the memorial also highlights the unique relationship between East and West Germany. Valérie Lozac'h argues that the situation in East Germany from 1989 onwards is no 'exception', but is comparable to that in other eastern European states, on the basis that the new structures still needed to be decided and implemented locally.⁶ However, the close linguistic, historical and cultural relationship with the Federal Republic of Germany, which provided East Germans with the option 'to vote with their feet', certainly sets it apart from its neighbours and considerably impacted the pace and scope of the changes.⁷ In part, this took the shape of substantial financial and material backing of the restructuring process, the arrival of West German 'aid workers',⁸ and an exchange of ideas and practices. What role did this play during this period, and to what extent did the relationship with West Germany and its citizens influence the transformation process in the East?

Due to the speed and scope of the developments that took place in Eastern Germany from 1989 onwards, this period is a unique social and political case study that remains understudied by historians. By examining this process at a grassroots level, this thesis tries to understand how the ensuing social, political and economic changes manifested themselves in the daily lives of local

⁶ 'Sonderfall', Valérie Lozac'h, 'Das Erbe der Vergangenheit als Strategie. Die „Alten“ und der Verwaltungsumbau in den ostdeutschen Kommunen' in Sandrine Kott & Emmanuel Droit (Eds.), *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft. Eine transnationale Perspektive* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2006), pp. 215-216.

⁷ Włodzimierz Borodziej (et al.), 'Introduction', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanislaw Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 6.

⁸ 'Aufbauhelfer', Joachim Linck, *Wie ein Landtag laufen lernte. Erinnerungen eines westdeutschen Aufbauhelfers in Thüringen* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2010). Although this term is used more retrospectively, by western actors, the term 'Hilfe' (help) was used regularly in sources from 1989 onwards, by eastern and western actors, to refer to the involvement of western actors in political and communal work. The translation I have chosen is the widely accepted translation for this term in all its given contexts. All translations in this thesis are my own, but for clarity, I will always include the original language in the footnote.

citizens and looks for new insights into how people adapt and assert themselves during periods of swift change. In so doing, it provides a micro-historical case study of transformation processes and practices that relates to wider questions of recent German politics and history; namely, the extent to which eastern citizens shaped the proceedings in their local communities, how this process was influenced by previous historical and cultural experiences, and to what extent it was determined 'top-down' by the Federal Republic.

Current state of research

While the early release of state government documents has meant that research on the history of East Germany has been abundant, with historians focussing on the social and cultural aspects of life in the GDR and the structures of Stasi surveillance,⁹ the period post-1990 has received comparatively little academic attention. And yet, even just the first six 'intense, emotional' months of changes in the GDR were strong enough to cause 'psychological chaos' amongst younger citizens, thus signalling a widespread and sudden social shift that clearly begs further investigation.¹⁰ As voters, especially in the East, have swung to the left and the right in recent years, academics have now begun

⁹ To name but a few, see Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945 – 1989* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993); Alf Lüdtke & Peter Becker (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Konrad Jarausch (Ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a socio-cultural history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999); Thomas Lindenberger, *Volkspolizei: Herrschaftspraxis und öffentliche Ordnung im SED-Staat 1952-1968* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2003); Jens Gieseke, *Die Stasi: 1945-1990* (München: Pantheon, 2011); Katharina Lenski, *Geheime Kommunikationsräume? Die Staatssicherheit an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2015).

¹⁰ Anna Saunders, *Honecker's Children. Youth and patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979-2002* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 119, p. 136.

asking what they may have missed, arguing for a reinvestigation of 1989, from a perspective that addresses the 'many contradictory elements'.¹¹

Arguably, early research on the collapse of the GDR state focussed too heavily on the reunification of Eastern Germany as a joyous and successful occasion, thereby overshadowing the social tensions and other emotions that also define this period.¹² On the flipside, others foregrounded the way in which the western model was imposed on the GDR, even characterising it as a colonisation of the East.¹³ Many academics felt that such depictions undermined the agency of eastern actors in this period and subsequently delivered studies on the role and importance of eastern actors and initiatives; for example, the *Neues Forum* in promoting new forms of political debate,¹⁴ the round tables of the GDR in resolving conflict and preparing the elections,¹⁵ the final GDR government on preparing accession to the Federal Republic,¹⁶ and the GDR administration in changing their style of reporting.¹⁷

These accounts recognise the valuable efforts made by different actors to develop an 'open civic society' and enable the transformation, but also capture the complexities and difficulties of implementing structural changes.¹⁸ Indeed, later research demonstrates that the political system of the Federal Republic of

¹¹ Paul Betts, '1989 at Thirty: A Recast Legacy', *Past and Present*, 244 (2019), p. 274.

¹² Betts, '1989 at Thirty', p. 274.

¹³ See Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since unification: from colonization to nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

¹⁴ See Irena Kukutz, *Chronik der Bürgerbewegung Neues Forum 1989-1990* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2009).

¹⁵ See Francesca Weil, *Verhandelte Demokratisierung. Die Runden Tische der Bezirke 1989/90 in der DDR* (Göttingen: V&R, 2011) and Thoralf Barth, *Die Zentrale des Umbruchs von 1989/90. Meinungen über den Runden Tisch der DDR* (Berlin: Weißensee Verlag, 2009).

¹⁶ See Ed Stuhler, *Die Letzten Monate der DDR. Die Regierung de Maizière und ihr Weg zur deutschen Einheit* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2010).

¹⁷ See Tytus Jaskułowski, *Nachrichten aus einem Land, das DOCH existierte. Lageberichte aus den Bezirken für die letzte DDR – Regierung 1990*. (Berlin: Osteuropa Zentrum, 2012).

¹⁸ In particular, Stuhler, *Die Letzten Monate der DDR*, p. 223.

Germany was not simply copied but needed to be adapted and integrated, therefore relying heavily on the knowledge and commitment of former citizens.¹⁹ In her analysis of the town administration in Eisenhüttenstadt, Valérie Lozac'h even demonstrates how certain western models were outright rejected by the council in favour of own approaches.²⁰ Although this may not be representative for the whole of eastern Germany, it indicates that more historical research is needed on this period.

Questions remain about how the transformation worked in practice and was mediated in different realms of society, and about the time that followed Reunification. How were the political practices that shaped the changes in the GDR in 1989 carried through into the early 1990s? To what extent were political actors and citizens able to maintain agency in the face of new developing political and social dynamics? How was parliamentary democracy implemented, and did these new structures allow local actors to enact the desired changes in their communities? What role did the relationship to colleagues in Western Germany play in this process, and how did this change over the course of the transformation process?

As the thirtieth anniversary of German reunification approaches, and more state sources become available, more research is now turning to the period after 1989, with a special emphasis on bridging the gap between life and society in the GDR until 1989 and in unified Germany from 1990 onwards. At the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, projects looking for

¹⁹ Lozac'h, 'Das Erbe der Vergangenheit', pp. 215-216.

²⁰ Ibid.

continuities across the transformation period have focussed on the long-term effects of system change in housing policy, consumption, personal relationships, education and political culture.²¹ By beginning well before 1990, these studies try to show how practices that existed in the GDR or in some cases even under National Socialism continued or adapted over the transformation period, and to what extent the new system was accepted by citizens.²²

Research on the institutional level of the economic transformation, in particular in relation to the *Treuhand* Trust and their role in the transformation process, has also begun to address an issue which has long been a sore topic in Eastern Germany.²³ Marcus Böick's recent book presents an insightful look into the internal structures and practices of the trust, based on interviews with the members of staff.²⁴ However, the majority of remaining literature on this process is written by journalists or by *Treuhand* actors themselves.²⁵ In order to understand why the company is vilified in the public memory, historical studies will need to incorporate further sources that show how the trust acted and interacted with society, and why its name still evokes such strong emotions

²¹ See, for example, Kerstin Brückweh & Clemens Villinger, 'Sich nicht die Butter vom Brot nehmen lassen: ein Forschungsbericht zur Konsumgeschichte zwischen Alltag, Arbeit, Kapitalismus und Globalisierung', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 57 (2017), pp. 463-495; Anja Schröter, *Ostdeutsche Ehen vor Gericht: Scheidungspraxis im Umbruch 1980-2000* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2018).

²² Kerstin Brückweh, 'Wissen über die Transformation. Wohnraum und Eigentum in der langen Geschichte der »Wende«', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 16 (2019), <<https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2019/5677>> (accessed 10 March 2020).

²³ See Marcus Böick, *Die Treuhand: Idee – Praxis – Erfahrung: 1990-1994* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018) and the ongoing project at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin: 'Im Laboratorium der Marktwirtschaft. Zur Geschichte der Treuhandanstalt 1989/90 bis 1994', <<https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/aktuelles/themen/geschichte-der-treuhandanstalt/>> (accessed 12 January 2020).

²⁴ See Böick, *Die Treuhand*.

²⁵ See Norbert Pötzl, *DER TREUHAND KOMPLEX. Legenden. Fakten. Emotionen.* (Hamburg: Kursbuch Kulturstiftung gGmbH, 2019), Dietmar Grosser, Hanno Müller & Paul-Josef Raue (Ed.), *Treuhand in Thüringen. Wie Thüringen nach der Wende ausverkauft wurde* (Essen: Klartext, 2013), Dirk Laabs, *Der deutsche Goldrausch: die wahre Geschichte der Treuhand* (Munich: Pantheon, 2012), Birgit Breuel, *Treuhand intern: Tagebuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993).

in the East. The new project at the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin* on the history of the *Treuhandanstalt* will use company documents and correspondence, which will hopefully shed more light on the communication between the trust and individual companies and communities across eastern Germany.

The challenge for new research on this topic is to look closer at how different developments and actors were interlinked. For example, recent studies on the workers' protests of 1993 in, for example, Ilmenau, have described how chosen forms of protest were shaped by the growing uncertainty and job insecurity in the early nineties, causing many workers to opt for more restrained forms of protest than the famous strikes in the potassium mines of Bischofferode.²⁶ The new attention given to the strong protest culture in eastern Germany around the closure of firms and industries from 1992 onwards has highlighted the omission of these later large-scale demonstrations from popular historical narratives on protest culture, which generally end with the demonstrations of 1989.²⁷ Furthermore, work on the trade unions in the transformation process provides another angle by looking at the role and possibilities of other main lobbying actors.²⁸

However, many of these studies focus solely on the written word, excluding oral sources and records that often contradict or expand on what we

²⁶ For more on the protests in Ilmenau, see Till Goßmann, 'Proteste gegen die Treuhandanstalt am Beispiel der Aktivitäten zum Erhalt der Ilmenauer Glaswerke 1993–1994', *Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte: Zeitschrift für Historische Studien*, 19/1 (2020), n.p.

²⁷ See Detlev Brunner (et al.), *Gewerkschaften im deutschen Einheitsprozess. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen in Zeiten der Transformation* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).

²⁸ See Roland Issen, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen für Gewerkschaften im Verwaltungsrat der Treuhandanstalt' in Detlev Brunner (et al.), *Gewerkschaften im deutschen Einheitsprozess. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen in Zeiten der Transformation* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), pp. 131–150.

find on the page. Exceptions include Axel Doßman's work on the chanting voices during the demonstrations of 1989 and the ways in which acoustics and rhythm influenced the choice of slogans that in turn shaped the political debate.²⁹ Back in 1995, David Bathrick raised the need for intertextuality and a 'paradigm based on competing voices within a "semiotics of culture"', that looks at the 'complex interplay between institutions of power and the various modes of expression within the socialist public sphere'.³⁰ Such discourse analyses have since shed light on practices of critical subversion during GDR times, but are yet to be applied thoroughly to the transformation period and the variety of available linguistic sources, in particular audiovisual ones, available for this period. A focus on different actions and modes of expression during the unification process could help to identify the range of self-determination options available to ordinary citizens within the changing system.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on the transformation process by providing a detailed study of local political, cultural and social transformation practices at a communal level. This takes us away from the larger revolutionary cities and top-level politics and instead brings the analysis to the centre of the newly unified Germany. The study highlights the agency of local actors by illustrating the pressure under which they were working and the ways in which they dealt with both successes and losses. It does not look at fields in isolation, but rather demonstrates how protest, consumption, politics

²⁹ See Axel Doßmann, 'Wir sind das Volk! Von der Stimmgewalt im Herbst 1989 – und von Volker', in Gerhard Paul, 'In einem stillen Land. Soundscape DDR', in Gerhard Paul & Ralph Schock (Eds.), *Sound der Zeit. Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen. 1889 bis heute* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), p. 504.

³⁰ David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 14.

and economic restructuring went hand-in-hand, and how these changes were reflected in social practices. It recounts stories told and discussions had by those who experienced the events firsthand, and thereby tries to amplify the voices of local actors within the historical debate. Although the thesis looks across the bridge of 1989 to 1991, the short timeframe chosen helps to capture the pace and scale of the changes, and the significance of events that would set the course for the developments ahead.

Theoretical and methodological approach

The transformation in the German Democratic Republic and in its neighbouring countries was not brought about by a violent revolution, but by ‘self-conscious use of basic civil rights and liberties, such as the right to protest and freedom of expression’.³¹ By using their voice in public, then, citizens in East Germany were able to bring about significant political and social change. This, however, did not simply result in a change in government or political reforms, or the gradual system change seen in neighbouring eastern countries such as Poland. Rather, East Germany adopted and implemented an entirely new social, political and economic system within the space of a year.

Due to the close linguistic, cultural and historical ties to the Federal Republic, this process was enacted within the short space of eleven months, making it a historically unique example of the ways in which citizens deal with monumental social, economic and political change. How, then, should we

³¹ ‘die selbstbewusste Inanspruchnahme grundlegender Freiheitsrechte wie Versammlung- oder Vereinigungsfreiheit’, Hans Michael Kloth, *Vom „Zettelfalten“ zum freien Wählen. Die Demokratisierung der DDR 1989/90 und die „Wahlfrage“* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2000), p. 45.

approach this period to truly understand how citizens experience and enact system change and the extent to which they are able to maintain political agency during this process? How do they influence and structure the proceedings in their communities, and what can a specific focus on East Germany teach us about periods of political transformation and social change?

In the political sciences, the transformation process in Eastern Germany is often examined alongside developments in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia as a case study for the 'third wave of democratisation' of the late twentieth century.³² Central to this is the establishment of democratic institutions, freedom of expression and the right to vote.³³ Similarly, the historians Francesca Weil and Michael Richter speak of a double democratisation of the GDR, with the internal process later being replaced by imported structures from the Federal Republic.³⁴

However, whilst the establishment of new institutions and elections was clearly significant, the political process in East Germany was never set in stone. It responded to the changing mood of the citizenry, and continued, even after the main structures were in place. Moreover, the political events were accompanied by and intertwined with changes on a social and economic level. Even thirty years later, doubts remain about whether unification is complete, pointing towards an ongoing, dynamic and unfinished process. This thesis therefore proposes to look at this period from the perspective of the actors on a

³² Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 208.

³³ Jean Grugel & Matthew Louis Bishop, *Democratization. A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 91.

³⁴ Michael Richter, 'Die doppelte Demokratisierung - eine ostdeutsche Besonderheit der Transition', *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 3/1 (2006), p. 79, and Weil, *Verhandelte Demokratisierung*, p. 230.

grassroots level, examining the options available to citizens in their everyday lives, and the extent to which they were able to control the changes going on around them.

Combining approaches from social and political theory, Nick Couldry argues that 'the offer of effective voice is crucial to the legitimacy of modern democracies',³⁵ as citizens need to recognise that their voices matter and are taken into account. Voice is therefore the most concrete expression of citizenship, and democracies as a form of social cooperation should give ample opportunity and space for articulation.³⁶ Central to this is the aspect that voice 'needs to be acknowledged'.³⁷ Voice is therefore a socially grounded form of reflexive agency based on mutual recognition, which depends as much on language as on status.³⁸ This status is achieved by becoming visible 'in the sense of being regarded as relevant' by others.³⁹ Not all language or speech is therefore automatically voice, and equally, its form can also be silent or found in social actions and practices. Alongside spoken or written words, linguistic means of expression include 'actions, rituals, symbols, images'.⁴⁰ These, together, form the emotional regimes underlying all political systems.⁴¹

³⁵ Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters. Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010), p. 1.

³⁶ Terry Flew, 'The citizen's voice: Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* and its contribution to media citizenship debates', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31/6 (2009), p. 980.

³⁷ Couldry, *Why Voice Matters*, p. 1.

³⁸ Couldry, *Why Voice Matters*, pp. 7-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁴⁰ 'Handlungen, Rituale, symbole, Bilder', Ute Frevert, 'Vertrauen. Historische Annäherungen an eine Gefühlshaltung', in Claudia Benthien, Anne Fleig & Ingrid Kasten (Eds.), *Emotionalität. Zur Geschichte der Gefühle* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), p. 181.

⁴¹ Jan Plamper, *Geschichte und Gefühl. Grundlagen der Emotionsgeschichte* (München: Siedler, 2012), pp. 304-305.

From initial euphoria to supposed disappointment, emotions have long been used to describe this period and to shape historical narratives, and yet their integral purpose in this context has never come under closer scrutiny. By focusing carefully on the role and expression of various emotions over the course of the transformation, this thesis demonstrates how they interact with and influence other social dynamics as a cultural and linguistic form of expression. In so doing, it sheds light on a unique aspect of East German communicative culture.

In this thesis, I therefore examine the ways in which citizens exercised their voice during this fast-moving period, whilst also referring to the ongoing social, economic, political and cultural transformation of daily life. Although many different developments are acknowledged, they are not presented as completed or entirely separate events, but rather as dynamic, overlapping and ongoing processes that are constantly remediated by different actors in society. As the world of everyday life 'is the scene and also the object of our actions and interactions', it is only on this level, then, that we can really study the interaction of subjects and objects, and begin to understand the meanings behind social actions.⁴²

In order to gain insights into this period of East German history, this thesis therefore focuses on the experiences of local actors and examines the way in which these informed their decisions and interactions in everyday life during the transformation period. Using the concept of voice as central form of political

⁴² Alfred Schütz, quoted in Andy Lock & Tom Strong, *Social Constructionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2010), p. 33.

participation, a special focus will be laid on issues that provoked strong debate and divided opinions to see how this gave rise to new ideas and practices. Conflicts are moments in which different emotional regimes clash with one another, giving insight into the underlying emotional culture.⁴³ By looking in detail at these areas of disagreement in all their complexity, this study looks for insights into how voice is exercised in times of turmoil and how this shapes democratic social practices.

In so doing, it presents the history of everyday life, or 'Alltagsgeschichte', during the transformation in Eastern Germany, using a range of sources and a level of detail that brings to life how larger structures are experienced, managed and shaped at a local level. *Alltagsgeschichte* is a 'grassroots approach to history' that developed from social theory, anthropology and post-structuralism and examines the ways in which ordinary people acted with a sense of agency to shape and determine their everyday lives.⁴⁴ Central to this is Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Eigensinn*, which denotes 'how everyday citizens assert their own subjectivity and make meaning in their own immediate social worlds'.⁴⁵

Much like language and discourse, history is also a 'site of difference', which 'offers contexts of deconstruction' and a space for 'defamiliarizing our ideas and assumptions'.⁴⁶ By studying interaction between actors at a local level

⁴³ Plamper, *Geschichte und Gefühl*, p. 319.

⁴⁴ Sara Jones, '(Extra)Ordinary Life. The Rhetoric of Representing the Socialist Everyday After Unification', *German Politics and Society*, 114/33 (2015), p. 129.

⁴⁵ Katherine Pence & Paul Betts (Ed.), *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Geoff Eley, 'No Need to Choose: Cultural History and the History of Society', in Belinda Davis (et al.), *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), p. 63.

and pointing towards the complex or even contradicting elements, the history of everyday life therefore questions ordered accounts of history, sheds light on the ways in which different parts of society are connected, and demonstrates how actors in all parts of society can influence, and are in turn shaped by, larger processes. The key is to look not at daily life, 'macroeconomic structures or internal state politics' in isolation, but rather at the 'relationship between (GDR) state-level politics and the culture of everyday life'.⁴⁷

In her anthropological study of the border village of Kella in the early 1990s, Daphne Berdahl demonstrated that political transformations have markedly social aspects that intersect with politics, economy and identity, and that there is a lot to be learnt from the ways in which people experience and deal with political change in everyday life.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, historical studies of the period post-1990 have generally adopted approaches that do not consider the personal experiences of those that experienced the transformation first-hand.⁴⁹ And yet, Thomas Lindenberger raises the need to respect the experiences of East Germans and not simply equate their lives with political repression, in order to ensure that former GDR citizens can integrate their memories into the collective memory of a united Germany.⁵⁰ Similarly, the

⁴⁷ Pence & Betts (Ed.), *Socialist Modern*, p. 21, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (New York: University of California Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ See for example Jan Schönfelder, *Kirche, Kerzen, Kommunisten : die demokratische Revolution in Neustadt an der Orla 1989/90* (Weimar: Hain, 2006).

⁵⁰ Thomas Lindenberger, 'Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Das Alltagsleben der DDR und sein Platz in der Erinnerungskultur des vereinten Deutschlands', *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (2000), <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/25409/herrschaft-und-eigen-sinn-in-der-diktatur>> (accessed 24 October 2016).

commission on the memorialisation of the GDR argued that *Alltagsgeschichte* is needed 'in order to adequately encompass the self-perception of former GDR citizens and their children'.⁵¹

This approach has been applied thoroughly to the history of the German Democratic Republic. For example, Thomas Lindenberger's study of the way in which an *Abschnittsbevollmächtigter* (GDR community policeman) mediated his immediate social environment, based largely on oral history interviews, demonstrated that even those at the bottom of society were able to articulate their own interests and needs, however only so long as they avoided conflict with senior figures.⁵² Sandrine Kott, on the other hand, uses archival materials around work brigades to investigate how those GDR citizens that struggled to adhere to the social expectations and rules of working in a socialist state were driven to the fringes of society.⁵³ Both papers, although based on very different sources, describe how ordinary people were able to use agency and *Eigensinn* to determine their everyday lives.

In so doing, the history of everyday life combines 'structures of power and domination and social practice and experience' to focus on the agency not only of those in powerful positions but also of 'die Vielen' (the many).⁵⁴

Although these can be difficult to grasp and are therefore often left out, it is after all the masses that, in GDR times and otherwise, 'sustained the state "by

⁵¹ Jones, '(Extra)Ordinary Life', p. 120.

⁵² Lindenberger, 'Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur'.

⁵³ Sandrine Kott, 'Die „Arbeiterklasse an der Macht“: Die Geschichte der DDR aus der Randperspektive' in Belinda Davis (et al.), *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), pp. 458-473.

⁵⁴ Thomas Lindenberger, 'Everyday History: New Approaches to the History of the Post-War Germanies', in Christoph Kleßmann (Ed.), *The Divided Past. Rewriting Post-War German History* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 45.

widespread societal participation in its structures and functioning”’.⁵⁵ By applying this approach to the period post-1989 in Eastern Germany, it becomes possible to examine how local actors shaped the transformation process and developed new ideas and practices, but to also determine the extent to which they were constrained in their actions by political and social structures, or other influences. Writing the history of Eastern Germany and its transformation therefore means accepting the contradictions, indulging in the complexities, and exploring what they can tell us about the larger picture.

Geographical Focus and Source Base

With a view to providing ‘thick descriptions’⁵⁶ of everyday life at a micro-historical level, this thesis focuses on two Thuringian towns; the former GDR district capital and later state capital Erfurt; and the smaller nearby district town of Eisenach. Erfurt, as the district capital, was already an important political and administrative hub in the GDR before it gained further prominence as the state capital in 1990. In 1989, it was home to around 220 000 citizens, with a longstanding microelectronics and shoe production industry, infamously making around twenty-thousand *Jesuslatschen* sandals a day.⁵⁷ Politically, Erfurt’s first secretary in the 1980s was a known Socialist Unity Party ‘hardliner’, having already demolished parts of the city’s historic quarter by 1989 to advance the SED building programme.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Jonathan Grix, *The Role of the Masses in the Collapse of East Germany* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 23.

⁵⁶ See Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays* (New York: Perseus, 1973).

⁵⁷ Antje Bauer, *Erfurt. Bilder und Geschichte(n)* (Arnstadt: Kirschlager, 2017), p. 133.

⁵⁸ Steffen Raßloff, *Friedliche Revolution und Landesgründung in Thüringen 1989/90* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014), p. 26, p. 29.

Nearby Eisenach - formerly a small industrial town at the fringes of the GDR - was catapulted back into the heart of Germany with the opening of the border. Its lasting historical significance as the birth town of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach and the home of the Wartburg castle, where Martin Luther translated the New Testament and where official ceremonies for the Reformation have since been held, made it a place of pilgrimage and a symbolic axis of German national identity. With approximately 48 000 citizens in 1989, it was dwarfed by Erfurt and yet constituted an important administrative and industrial centre for its surrounding communities.

The state of Thuringia, with its former capital Weimar, was a stronghold of the National Socialist party and the site of one of the first and largest NS concentration camps. It is therefore a place of significant political and historical interest regarding not only how citizens practise politics, but also how they experience system change and develop or adapt political practices, including those of inclusion and exclusion. Nevertheless, historical accounts of 1989 have chosen to focus primarily on other eastern provinces and the cities of Berlin and Leipzig, due to the greater size of the cities and number of participants and demonstrations. As time passes, there is also a strong need to undertake more detailed studies of towns and cities outside of Leipzig, Berlin and Rostock before memories of the events there fade.⁵⁹

This thesis does so in capturing a broad mixture of textual and audiovisual sources, including original interviews, that are woven together to a

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Schuller, *Die deutsche Revolution 1989* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009), p. 15.

rich soundscape of this period. Examples from the two towns and their neighbouring villages are chosen and presented based primarily on their historical significance and the insights they offer in relation to larger developments. By focussing on one larger and one smaller town, links and networks in the region start to become clear, as well as continuities and differences. However, the thesis does not claim representativeness or attempt to compare, but rather presents detailed depictions of sometimes unique and very specific local situations, that nevertheless show up structural patterns connected to wider societal issues.

Although Erfurt and Eisenach were not at the forefront of the events of 1989, with demonstrations starting much later than those in the larger cities, they nevertheless played their part in setting an example to other communities; citizens of Erfurt were among the first to occupy their Stasi Headquarters, and Eisenach was home to the first *Runder Tisch* in the GDR.⁶⁰ As such, they present a strong case for studying the initiative and organisation of citizens in smaller communities. What is more, the geographical location of Thuringia at the border to Hesse, Bavaria and Lower-Saxony made it a first port of call for many western actors and organisations once travel restrictions had been lifted in 1989. These border towns and cities therefore provide ideal case studies for the transformation process, as they suddenly found themselves at the heart of the newly unified Germany.

⁶⁰ Marina Moritz & Horst Moritz, *Ein besonderes Jahr. THÜRINGEN: MAI 1989 / MAI 1990* (Erfurt: Museum für Thüringer Volkskunde Erfurt, 2009), p. 25.

Both Erfurt and Eisenach had longstanding historical links with their western partner towns – Erfurt with Mainz and Eisenach with Marburg –, which were recognised in a twinning exchange that began in the late 1980s and set the foundations for political, economic and social links between actors from East and West during the transformation process. In this sense, the two towns provide an ideal case study for East-Western relations during the transformation period. Whilst training and instruction for the new political actors often took place in the district capital of Erfurt, the relationships to their western partner towns and contacts made across the border would often prove more significant and influential.

While the two towns share many links and throw up similarities, they also differed significantly. For example, although both towns introduced mayors from the Christian Democratic Union in 1990, Eisenach's former mayor was a member of the Liberal party, whilst Erfurt's former mayoress was a staunch representative of the Socialist Unity Party. The citizenry therefore went into the transformation period with different relationships to their former political leaders in the 1980s, which could potentially influence the power of the SED/PDS in the 1990 elections. Furthermore, the difference in size and geographical location could – in theory – alter the degree of its impact. As we will see, however, the towns often faced similar strategic, political and structural problems, despite their differences. And yet, their size did impact the towns differently, for whilst Eisenach experienced a strong influx of visitors from the West after the opening of the border and was much more reliant on one single manufacturer, Erfurt's economy was more diverse.

Finally, a focus on the provinces can help to shed light on the extent to which the events in the larger cities were exceptional or part of a wider phenomenon.⁶¹ Many actors at the local level, especially within the political parties, were engaged in interregional committees spanning East and West Germany, and yet the political structures at the time meant that critical decisions during this period were largely taken by representatives in local communities. Only by looking at the work of local actors can we truly understand how change is implemented in practice.

The transformation process in these towns has been well-documented and a range of textual and audiovisual sources are available in the local archives. These include pamphlets from citizens groups, political organisations, and town and city council members, copies of speeches and records of meetings, photographs, films and audio recordings of events and discussions, as well as articles from the local press, highlighting the issues most important to the local community. The local archives also house collections from local figures who were active in their towns and who have donated their documents to the archive for research, providing insights into daily communication during this period and events deemed important by the actors themselves. The records available in the town archives do not always match up equally or allow for direct comparison, but they nevertheless show up important patterns, often supporting and complementing one another.

⁶¹ See Schönfelder, *Kirche, Kerzen, Kommunisten*.

To add another perspective, documents from the local archives are contrasted with materials from the Stasi Records Agency (BStU), as well as state government documents from 1990 to 1994, which provide insight into proceedings at a regional level and demonstrate how individual actions affected larger developments. The thesis also incorporates documents from three political party archives; the *Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis* (Alliance 90/The Greens), the *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie* (Social Democratic Party), the *Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik* (Christian Democratic Union), and from the library of the *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung* (The Left), to understand how political actors at a local and sometimes national level organised themselves and tried to enact changes on behalf of their constituents. The last chapter, with its case study of the car plant in Eisenach, relies heavily on materials now housed in one of the only remaining factory buildings and managed by the foundation *Automobile Welt Eisenach*.

Finally, recollections and insights from oral history interviews with political and social actors in Erfurt and Eisenach are woven into the analysis. These provide personal insights into the motivations of local people and the challenges that they faced. Although other micro-historical studies on this period have purposefully neglected to include eyewitness testimonies due to doubts about their credibility, this is missing an important point; the aim of an oral history interview is to consider the subjective experiences of local citizens and to take note of what they tell us. For the life stories relayed 'are complex and revealing narrative performances which can offer an insight into both identity formation and the relationship between that and larger historical

forces'.⁶² These narratives therefore need to be analysed as such 'in order to gain insight into the meaning, as opposed to the content of the interview'.⁶³ This thesis builds on an established tradition of oral history research in Germany, by providing a new collection of twenty-four unstructured, qualitative interviews with local actors about their experiences of the early transformation process, seventeen of which are cited in this study.⁶⁴ Interview partners were found through personal and professional recommendation, for which I am very grateful. Although an asserted effort was made to speak to a wide variety of citizens of different occupations, genders and political convictions, the focus on active political actors nonetheless means that the majority were in employment in the early 1990s, although this did not necessarily last much past 1993.

Many of the interviewees were in their early thirties when they took on new duties at a local level, as new political parties and organisations sought fresh faces that were unburdened by the past to instill new trust. However, I also had the opportunity to speak to older citizens who had already worked in high positions in the former state system when the structures broke down. Despite the high number of females in the workplace in East Germany, the majority of new positions were nevertheless taken over by men, meaning that this study is still weighted towards a male perspective in that respect. Nevertheless, the women interviewed for this study include politicians, activists, journalists, town council and administration staff, union

⁶² Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 33.

⁶³ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ For previous oral history projects in the GDR, see Lutz Niethammer (et al.), *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR; 30 biographische Eröffnungen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991).

representatives, election helpers, and health workers, who each in their own way took political action within their community.

Interview partners were given an overview of the project's historical timeframe, and possible topics of interest, and were invited to share their own impressions from this time, to talk of their experiences and to give insights into issues they deemed to be important. This resulted in a plethora of different exchanges in a range of settings, with each person beginning from their own personal starting-point and setting their own focus, thereby demonstrating how diverse and personal experiences of this period are.

Whereas many oral historians have focused on questioning constructed biographical narratives and delving into that which is not said,⁶⁵ the approach taken for this study has much rather been to listen and take note of that which is mentioned, in order to gain a greater understanding. This has not only led to interesting and enlightening anecdotes, as interview partners had the space and time to explain, but also made it possible to compare these with impressions from the archives, to reflect and to gain new insights on what might be important, how this plays a part, or what may have been missed. Overall, listening provided a chance for others, their voices and narratives to be heard and, where possible, for these to be incorporated into this work. Even though the interviews are not all directly quoted or referenced, each and every

⁶⁵ See Lutz Niethammer, 'Fragen – Antworten – Fragen. Methodische Erfahrungen und Erwägungen zur Oral History' in Lutz Niethammer & Alexander von Plato (Ed.), *„Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten“*. Auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1985), pp. 392-445.

conversation made a considerable impact on my own understanding of this period and has therefore greatly contributed to this thesis.

In this sense, oral history as a methodology celebrates subjectivity, inconsistencies and individual agency, and argues that this is important for understanding the discourses and structures that shape daily life.⁶⁶ For a thesis based on the experiences made during the transformation process and the meanings that emerged out of these intersubjective experiences, it is an invaluable source that adds further contours to the issues surrounding the transformation process and often points to otherwise unconsidered topics. Overall, by taking an approach that combines a range of archival and oral sources from different groups, institutions and members of society, the thesis tries to capture the complexities of everyday life during this tumultuous time.

Thesis outline

The thesis is structured chronologically and split into five chapters, which follow the shifting forms of voice across different fields of communal life and examine the ways in which citizens asserted themselves against new political, structural and economic developments, took control of their communities and made sense of their lives. In order to bridge the natural historiographical cut-off-point of 1989/1990, the thesis begins in the early autumn of 1989, with the first chapter focussing on the debates and demonstrations that fuelled the changes at a local level. What happens to voice when freedoms of movement, assembly and expression are reinstated? On the basis of original transcripts,

⁶⁶ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, p. 31.

sound and film recordings, this chapter explores how interactions between the state, citizens and members of the new political groups contributed to the breakdown of existing structures, and how control was consequently remediated between the new actors. How do citizens enact change, and how quickly do these dynamics shift? What does the instable situation mean for different groups in society and how does this influence power structures at the local level? The chapter considers the wider impact of dynamics such as the exit of East Germans from the GDR, how these events influenced proceedings in smaller communities, and what happens when structures disappear before new ones are introduced.

The second chapter turns to the new elections in 1990 to see how the emotions of the autumn were channelled into new formal structures after the old ones had imploded. These elections were of great significance, not only because of their strong symbolism in voicing political opinion, but also due to the social and political challenges they presented, as citizens were forced to put aside their divisions and come together to organise four elections in the space of nine months. By looking at difficulties that emerged as new actors struggled to logistically organise the elections in time, power structures and dependencies between former and new state actors and citizens in times of change come to light. The ensuing administrative crisis not only points towards cracks in social cohesion but also demonstrates how these were in part mended and in other cases deepened through the implementation of new political practices.

The third chapter runs parallel to the second; as conflicting communication styles emerge in public, how do members of the press, state and

public not only renegotiate forms of communication, but also their own roles within a new political, social and cultural system? How does this ongoing contest shape political structures and practices in the new political system? Through close analysis of the press and council meeting records from 1990 onwards, the chapter illustrates how the public, journalists and councillors responded to one another and redefined the shape and tone of the public sphere.

With the key decisions about the new political structures having been made, the fourth chapter turns to the sudden impact of the currency union in July 1990 and its immediate effects on East German workers and business to see how the new structures would withstand this first large test. It presents the currency union as the historical turning point of this period, and asks how the implementation of federal political, social and economic rules and standards three months before the formal unification of Germany was felt and appropriated at the local level. To what extent did the new economic structures impact on the ways in which citizens exercised their voices? Using examples from different fields of local industry, it demonstrates how the currency union swiftly devalued and marginalised eastern production, whilst also highlighting the agency and resilience of citizens who were determined to adapt their businesses, continue their work and find solutions.

As the transformation was not only social and political but also economic, the final chapter presents a case study of the car manufacturing plant in Eisenach as an example of the longer-term consequences of the union with the Federal Republic of Germany. What happens to political and civic action

when the region's largest employers are threatened? By focussing in detail on one large local company, it not only considers the wider ramifications of the closures of individual firms in Eastern Germany, but also emphasises the social aspects and personal experience of political, social and economic change. It asks how citizens and communal representatives responded to the new forms of competition and rising unemployment, and how they adjusted to new forms of social, political and economic power. A case-study of a Thuringian village that took on General Motors in order to protect their local environment, despite rising unemployment, demonstrates the scale of the challenges that local citizens faced, the extent to which they were able to maintain political agency, and how they prioritised issues during conflicting developments.

The examples of communal conflicts in Eastern Germany between 1989 and 1991 illustrate just how quickly the conditions on the ground changed, and how local actors were constantly forced to adapt to new situations and react to outside developments. Essentially, it demonstrates how difficult it was to introduce and develop democratic practices in times of social, political and economic instability, and how these dynamics were intertwined. Running throughout the thesis, however, is also the story of citizens trying to find and use their voice; actively renegotiating roles and structures, determining new forms of communication and tone, defending their interests and values, creating meanings and making sense of the past.

1. Finding Voice

Exit and Voice

On Sunday, fifth of June 1988, Wilhelm Kümpel finished playing the organ for the morning service in the Catholic cathedral in Erfurt and headed down the stairs.⁶⁷ Most of the congregation had already gone home, save for one row of young parents with their children. Even after the vicar had explained that the service was now over, the families stayed seated, declaring the grand *Dom* in the centre of the city as officially occupied. Kümpel, who had already left by this point, was refused entry to the cathedral over the next two days, as the site was cordoned off by the Ministry for State Security under the premise of urgent building work.

The fourteen adults and seven children from Sömmerda had travelled to nearby Erfurt that weekend publicly to protest the unfair treatment of East German citizens wanting to leave the country.⁶⁸ Over more than three years, their repeated applications to move West had all been declined; now they demanded to be driven over the border by bus from Erfurt. While the church staff and Caritas ensured that the families were provided with food and blankets, the GDR state deliberated how to best deal with this unexpected event without alerting the general public. A proposed forceful removal of the protesters was strongly rejected by the church; anyway, in the case of such a response, the families had already organised for friends to inform West German media and the United Nations. In the worst case, the occupiers threatened to

⁶⁷ Klaus Taubert, 'Erfurter Dombesetzung. Als die Orgel schweigen musste', *Spiegel Online* (01 July 2011), <<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/erfurter-dombesetzung-a-949234.html>> (accessed 10 May 2018).

⁶⁸ Taubert, 'Erfurter Dombesetzung'.

sound the *Gloriosa*, the medieval cathedral bell and largest of its kind in the world, which was usually reserved for special events and could be heard from far and wide.

What could therefore have been Erfurt's loudest protest, turned out to be one of its most silent and secret. On Tuesday evening, after complicated negotiations with lawyers and politicians in Berlin, including the head of state Erich Honecker himself, the families were brought home separately by taxi, with permission to leave the country within the next ten to thirty days.⁶⁹ One couple, however, was kept back and released much later, as assurance that the story would not reach the public. This succeeded, with all parties keeping quiet - the Catholic church included - so as not to allow these actions to set an example to others.

For these families from Sömmerda were not the only ones wanting to exit the GDR; in April 1988, 111,348 GDR citizens were registered by the government as actively seeking to leave the country, a trend that had been growing uncontrollably since the 1970s.⁷⁰ Unable to leave freely since the closure of the border and erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, East Germans sought other options, with some attempting to cross illegally, many applying formally to leave, and others choosing to stay abroad after a permitted visit to the West.⁷¹ Each attempt came with significant risks and consequences; even in the case of those applying to leave formally, many were subjected to intense

⁶⁹ Taubert, 'Erfurter Dombesetzung'.

⁷⁰ Bernd Eisenfeld, 'Ausreisen oder dableiben? Regulierungsstrategien der Staats-sicherheit', *Reihe B: Analysen und Berichte*, 1/97 (Berlin: BStU, 1998). <<http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421304316>> (accessed 03 June 2018), p. 110.

⁷¹ Eisenfeld, 'Ausreisen oder dableiben?', p. 16.

state observation, leading five thousand applicants in 1987 alone to quit their jobs or take lower paid positions in private companies as a direct means of escaping or reducing societal control.⁷² Those that left, did so in the knowledge that it would most likely have social and professional repercussions for their nearest and dearest.

The exponential number of applications to leave the GDR give a clear sign of the advanced dissatisfaction of the citizenry with their state. To explain declines in states by combining theories from politics and economics, Albert Hirschman identified the use of voice and exit as two ways in which citizens can put pressure on governments to enforce change. By exiting the country, the citizen 'sets in motion (...) forces that may induce recovery', whereas voice is an attempt 'to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs'.⁷³ In order to prevent decline, the state should provide channels of communication to enhance the use of voice, and then respond to the criticisms.

The occupation of the cathedral in Erfurt is a combination of both exit and voice, and an example of the way in which twenty-one GDR citizens presented their government with an ultimatum, asserting their right to exit through protection of the church. It also highlights, however, the complicated situation in East Germany, where both voice and exit were severely limited and criminalised. Public protests other than the official ones, organised by and in support of the state, were not permitted. Consequently, critique through

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 30.

written petitions became a tolerated and highly-used medium of communicating with the state, although many of these written requests were simply rejected.

Instead, the Socialist Unity Party in the GDR relied fully on a third concept, identified by Hirschman as a means of reducing exit and strengthening voice: the concept of loyalty.⁷⁴ By, for example, raising its citizens in the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, enforcing participation in socialist organisations such as the Free German Youth, and providing benefits to those who joined the SED or showed loyalty to the party, the state attempted to tie its citizens to a form of socialist identity. This should subsequently hinder them from choosing exit and make them more likely to use voice to engage constructively with the state and its politics. By removing exit, and criminalising any form of criticism that was deemed as against the state, the SED added another complication. For now, even those wanting to improve conditions and reform the state in ways other than those formally accepted, were excluded from the debate.

In this sense, East Germany presents a particularly interesting case for studying the relationship between the state, its structures and its people. What happens, when citizens are not given the opportunity to choose between voice and exit, and loyalty is essentially forced? Furthermore, how do they respond when these options are reinstated, and can this suffice to resolve past conflicts and reverse the decline in the state and society? In September 1989, East Germany was faced with this very question, as exit suddenly became a viable

⁷⁴ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 77.

option through the opening of the border between Hungary and Austria.⁷⁵ By the end of the month, twenty-five-thousand GDR citizens had taken this route westward, with hundreds more seeking refuge in the embassies in Prague and Warsaw, after border controls in Hungary were tightened.⁷⁶

Exit, however, is not an option for everyone, especially when it means leaving a country, a home, friends and family. Hirschman recognises that it can be incredibly 'unsettling to those who stay behind as there can be no "talking back" to those who have exited'.⁷⁷ Still, for those who do remain, the effectiveness of using voice becomes stronger, as the government is forced to listen in order to maintain a balance in society. This chapter examines the developments in East Germany from the autumn of 1989 onwards in light of this new situation. By focusing on communal conflicts in the district of Erfurt, it traces the ways in which citizens and state responded to the options of using voice and exit to understand how the existing structures were shaken up and remediated from within.

⁷⁵ Andreas Fraude, *Die Friedliche Revolution in der DDR im Herbst 1989* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014), p. 17.

⁷⁶ Fraude, *Die Friedliche Revolution*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁷ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 126.

Using Voice

The Power of the People Outside

On Saturday morning, the twenty-eighth of October 1989, a thick mist was slowly lifting. Local citizens began gathering in the *Thüringenhalle*, the largest event location in the town of Erfurt, for the latest citizens' forum. A notice had gone out in the local paper, *Das Volk*, inviting all citizens of Erfurt to a debate with the mayoress, albeit only one day in advance of the event, and in one brief sentence slotted in amongst other announcements.⁷⁸ Officially, the debate was meant to facilitate a dialogue between the citizens and their town representatives, but it had also come about in response to a large demonstration that had taken place two days earlier. The city council wanted to ensure that there would be 'no more action on the streets' and 'only in designated spaces'.⁷⁹ The walls of the *Thüringenhalle* were therefore meant to confine the public debate. Two events in the town hall the week before had failed due to a lack of space, hence this move now, to the largest events space in Erfurt.

Approximately two thousand chairs are said to have been erected, with many, of course, taken by members of the Socialist Unity Party.⁸⁰ Six microphones were set up along the aisle, at which queues of citizens were forming, all of whom wanted to make their voices heard.⁸¹ At the front, a stage had been constructed for the main speakers: The National Front, the Socialist Unity Party and Town Committee, the Free German Trade Union Federation,

⁷⁸ *Schließt Euch an. Die Friedliche Revolution in Erfurt. Eine Dokumentation* (Erfurt: Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte e.V., 2014), p. 164.

⁷⁹ 'künftig keine Aktionen auf der Straße, sondern nur in geeigneten Räumen'. *Schließt Euch an*, p. 164.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

representatives of the bloc parties and the People's Parliament, factory managers, as well as members of the newly-formed Democratic Awakening, New Forum, and the group Women for Change.⁸² The debate was meant to enable a real exchange on communal issues, to provide a chance to express ideas and worries, or to discuss problems. The central issue of conflict, however, was not a topic of local concern, but the very structure of the event itself.

First to speak after the mayoress was a local artist, now acting as a representative for the platform *Neues Forum*. His first remarks already showed signs of exasperation, as he asked the audience to quieten down and desist with the cheering, 'so that we can make some progress'.⁸³ He deplored that the city council had not kept to the agreements reached at their joint meeting three days beforehand and pointed out that the space provided was far too small for this event, as 'a thousand people' were still waiting outside.⁸⁴ Talk moved to the possibility of a second debate, to follow on afterwards, until the confirmation arrived that the debate was now being broadcast outside of the hall through loudspeakers.⁸⁵

⁸² These are my translations for the following organisations: *Die Nationale Front, die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland, der Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund, die Volkskammer, der Demokratische Aufbruch, das Neue Forum, Frauen für Veränderung*. From here on, the groups and organisations will be referred to in the German original.

⁸³ 'also wir wollen ja heute ein bißchen was erreichen', Stadtarchiv Erfurt (henceforth StA Erfurt), 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen-Bd.2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

⁸⁴ 'tausend Menschen', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The speaker was cut short, however, by calls for a debate, 'not a lecture!'.⁸⁶ At this point, the local priest jumped in to clarify the planned procedure and calm tensions in the audience. A key mediator between the town and the new political groups at previous events, he had refused to sit on the stage this time, on principal, as the agreement not to have a panel of speakers had been broken.⁸⁷ Whereas the previous debates had given him hope of a true and open dialogue, he expressed 'disgust' at the way this event was now taking place.⁸⁸ Facing the unruly audience, he explained:

It was agreed in the town hall on Thursday that (the speaker) would give a short introduction to today's event. This is not simply a commentary; it has been agreed in advance, and so he is not to be interrupted. The mayoress has spoken. And after this introduction we will move on to the discussion, which should consist of short and precise statements.⁸⁹

The clarification managed to calm the audience long enough for the member of the *Neues Forum* to finish his talk. Afterwards, another speaker claimed there were actually only 'about five-hundred people' standing in front of the building, but that they could not possibly be let in, 'for technical reasons'.⁹⁰ The speaker requested that they therefore continue waiting outside of the building. His claim was however swiftly countered by another citizen, who asserted 'as far as I can remember, the side aisles are regularly used as standing room at sports events, and so it should be structurally possible to let

⁸⁶ 'keine Vorlesungen', *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 165.

⁸⁸ 'Ich bin jetzt empört, wie das jetzt hier losgeht', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

⁸⁹ 'Herr [...] ist, das ist die Absprache am Donnerstag im Rathaus gewesen, ist gebeten wurden, daß er heute als Einstieg eine kleine Einleitung bringt. Das ist nicht nur ein Diskussionsbeitrag, das ist abgesprochen wurden und darum kann man jetzt nicht ihn [sic] unterbrechen. Frau Oberbürgermeisterin hat gesprochen. Und nach diesem Einstieg soll es eine Diskussion geben und da sollen kurze präzise Beiträge kommen', *ibid.*

⁹⁰ 'aus technischen Gründen', *ibid.*

more people in'.⁹¹ She joined others in insisting that the people waiting outside should be let in, 'immediately'.⁹²

Time and again, speakers referred to the people waiting outside of the building, until one person alerted the room to the fact that 'people are pushing against the door now!'.⁹³ Out of fear that the situation could escalate, pressure was mounted to agree an exact time and place for the next event, in order 'to regain control of the situation'.⁹⁴ Citizens suggested holding the next event on the cathedral square, the largest open space in the city centre, 'on Thursday'.⁹⁵ This idea was not new, however, as it had already been discussed during the town hall debate a few days earlier but was rejected in favour of using the *Thüringenhalle*.⁹⁶ Members of *Neues Forum* had warned the council that the indoor space would also be much too small for the expected crowds, but the council had refused to budge on their decision.⁹⁷

Spontaneously, written messages from the citizens standing outside started being passed inside and read aloud. One citizen cited:

Another point regarding the agenda. The discussions outside have concluded that this hall has a standing capacity of three-thousand-five-hundred people.⁹⁸

She pressed on, determinedly, despite interjections:

⁹¹ 'Soweit wie mir von früher bekannt ist, ist [sic] in diesen Räumen die Seitengänge üblicher Weise für Stehplätze bei Sportveranstaltungen genutzt wurden und die Statik müßte es hergeben', *ibid*.

⁹² 'sofort', *ibid*.

⁹³ 'drücken die Menschen draußen vor der Tür', *ibid*.

⁹⁴ 'können wir die Situation noch meistern', *ibid*.

⁹⁵ 'Mir wurde vorgeschlagen Domplatz, Donnerstag', *ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 1, 'Transkript Rathausdialog 25.10.1989', 25 October 1989.

⁹⁸ 'Nochmal zur Geschäftsordnung. Die Diskussionen draußen haben ergeben, daß dieser Saal eine Stehkapazität für 3 500 Menschen bietet', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

I am just reading out loud what has been passed on to us from outside, and I think the citizens outside have a right to be heard, at the very least. It's impossible to keep up with the debate outside. It is very hard to understand what is being said, hence this request, and I want to at least be allowed to read it out. Surely, that should be possible.⁹⁹

Further speakers demanded that questions from the citizens waiting outside were to be given equal priority to those coming from people inside.¹⁰⁰ By using their opportunity at the microphone to state exactly how many written messages had been passed down, they ensured that the questions from outside were answered by the panel, and not ignored.¹⁰¹ Consequently, questions from the people outside on issues such as town administration, amnesty for riot police, and free elections were all read out.¹⁰² Amongst these questions was another urgent request regarding the procedure, from the people outside: 'The panellists should introduce themselves', for they cannot be seen outside.¹⁰³ 'Those answering questions should therefore identify themselves, please, so that those standing outside can truly follow the debate'.¹⁰⁴

And so it continued; as with the debates in the town hall the week before, it was the crowd that stood outside of the building which determined the procedure inside.¹⁰⁵ Arguments against letting in more people were put into question and thereby undermined, ways of including those outside in the

⁹⁹ 'Ich lese nur vor, was von draußen an uns herangetragen wird und ich denke die Bürger draußen haben das gleiche Recht ihre Meinung wenigstens zu äußern. Die Diskussion sei draußen nicht möglich. Es ist alles schwer zu verstehen, deswegen kommt noch einmal die Bitte und ich möchte sie wenigstens vortragen. Das wird doch wohl möglich sein', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ 'Die Antwortenten möchten sich vorstellen', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ 'Diejenigen also die antworten, bitte vorstellen, dass der Dialog auch wirklich verfolgt werden kann'. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

debate were spontaneously suggested and put into practice; such as by broadcasting the debate through loudspeakers and by bringing in hand-written questions to be read aloud. Even the format of the answers given was altered to facilitate the participation of those outside, with an insistence on introductions and transparency. Although the people outside were not let in, the continuous pressure from the audience to do so shaped the discussion and ensured that the focus remained on the excluded citizens.

By questioning and circumventing the physical boundaries of the space, the citizens outside therefore deconstructed the walls of the *Thüringenhalle* and asserted their right to inclusion. In so doing, they countered attempts by members of the city council and Socialist Unity Party to limit participation by not putting up enough chairs and by restricting entry. In an effort by the state powers to determine the content of the discussion, local work brigades had been summoned to turn up early to the event, to ensure the audience would be made up of primarily of loyal state supporters.¹⁰⁶ These are to have arrived around eight o'clock, filling the spaces in the hall and meaning that the doors were firmly closed at half past eight, at the time that they were officially meant to have opened.¹⁰⁷ News of this had already spread by the time the event started and were addressed directly and publicly by the *Neues Forum*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 164.

representative. 'Is this true?', he asked the audience.¹⁰⁸ 'If so, I ask all brigade members to stand up. Let's make this really simple.'¹⁰⁹

By verbalising what they felt were injustices and directly addressing them in public, citizens tried to illuminate the undemocratic structures underlining the event, but they did not stop at party membership. For example, one citizen asked why those speaking up were all male, when there were plenty of women present. 'I don't want to listen a men's debate', she exclaimed. 'I summon all women here to take part. And I think there should be a quota. I'm always at the back of the queue'.¹¹⁰ Another asked where the younger citizens were, focusing attention on the unrepresentative median age across the audience.¹¹¹

Next to come under criticism was the panel of speakers at the front of the room. Albeit already a large panel, citizens asked why members of other official organisations were missing. Requests came in for representatives of the Free German Trade Union Federation, the Freethinkers, the Union of Artists and Actors.¹¹² Although some of these requests were for organisations closely affiliated with the state or even belonging to the Socialist Unity Party and could therefore be interpreted as attempts by SED-members to take ownership of the event, these comments nevertheless helped to bring the underlying structures to light, simply by verbalising them. As an extension of this argument around

¹⁰⁸ 'Entspricht dies der Tatsache?', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

¹⁰⁹ 'Wenn hier Kampfgruppenmitglieder sind, sollen sie doch aufstehen. Machen wir es doch ganz einfach', *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ 'Ich habe keine Lust hier nur Männerdiskussionen zuzuhören. Ich rufe alle Frauen auf, hier mitzureden. Und ich bin für die Quotenregelung. Ich stehe immer hinten an', *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

representation, it was not only the makeup of the panel that came under fire, but the very existence of the panel itself. 'I would have found it much nicer, if we had all sat down there together', argued one panellist in favour of a non-hierarchical set up, even though he acknowledged that this would have used up even more space, and possibly resulted in more people having to wait outside.¹¹³ 'Still', he said, 'I'm convinced'.¹¹⁴

In a series of photos taken that day, one striking image shows the panellists on the podium, but from behind, with their shadows and dark silhouettes set against the bright overhead lights (see Figure 2).¹¹⁵ Although the representatives of the state and new political groups are in the foreground, they are placed in darkness and their faces are hidden from view. Instead, the audience members sat behind are lit up and are also clearly recognisable in other close-up shots of the event. Not only does the use of light in the photo series suggest a traditional contrast of good and bad, but with the focus on the audience as active, visible citizens, the agency and subjectivity of the town representatives is diminished.

The carefully composed picture of the podium, that plays with the symmetrical shapes and lines of the ceiling panelling, shows a stand-off between the state and the citizens opposite them, but it also demonstrates that the people on the podium were clearly outnumbered. Even though the central aisle itself remains relatively wide and clear, the seats in the hall are all taken,

¹¹³ 'Ich finde das viel schöner, wenn wir alle da unten gesessen hätten', *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ 'Gut. Ich bin überzeugt', *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Andreas Dornheim, *Politischer Umbruch in Erfurt 1989/90* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1995), p. 121.

the balconies are brimming with people and the entrances are crowded. In the photo, the state actors are forced to face the public, which is positioned above them in the frame, thus emphasising their collective power.



Figure 2: *Thüringer Allgemeine*, photograph of the inside of the Thüringenhalle by Roland Obst, 28 October 1989.

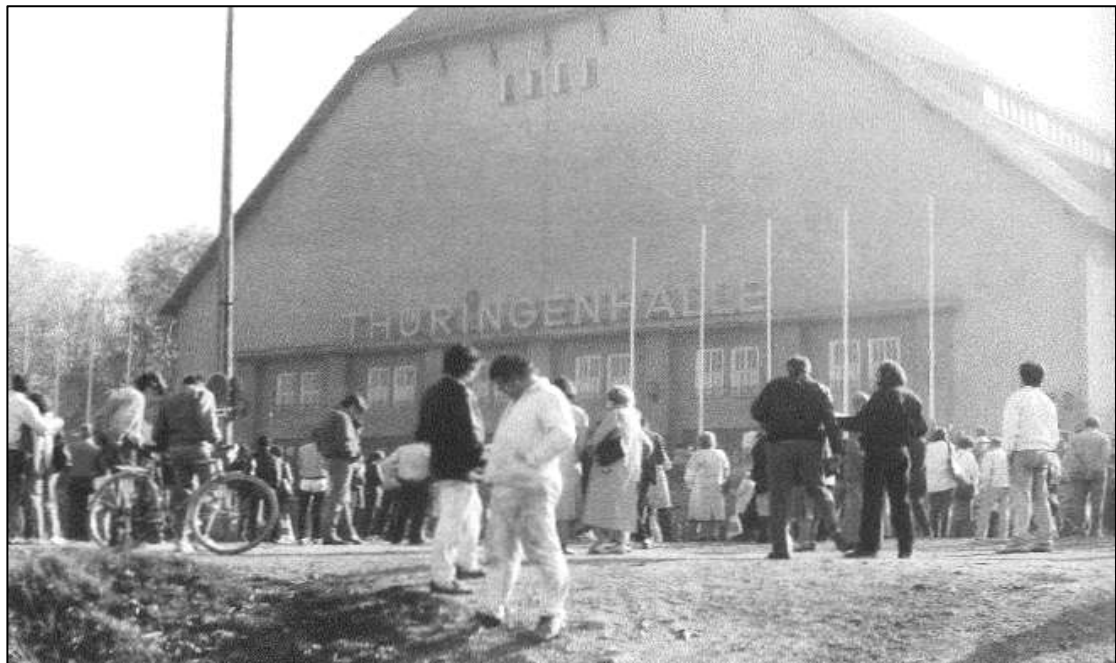


Figure 3: *Stadtarchiv Erfurt*, photograph of the outside of the Thüringenhalle by Christine Riesterer, 28 October 1989.

In his photo book, the historian Andreas Dornheim places the image of the panellists and the audience directly opposite an image taken outside of the hall, where the crowds of excluded citizens gathered (see Figure 3).¹¹⁶ The shot, taken from below, shows citizens waiting in a strip across the centre of the frame, that directly mirrors the row of panellists in the photo on the opposite page. The inside and outside of the hall also mirror one another, as does the semi-hexagonal shape of the building. In so doing, the historian places the excluded citizens outside of the hall on an equal level to the panellists sat on the podium inside, once again playing with the hierarchies and power structures that came to be challenged on this day. In making them little more than an object in the frame of his photo, Dornheim has deconstructed the power of the state and new citizens' groups, redistributing this to the citizens and thereby demonstrating how easily existing structures can be changed with a simple shift in focus.

The 'marathon' debate in the *Thüringenhalle* lasted for four hours that day, until the heated discussion around the structure of the event forced the organisers to bring it to a close 'with a happy song'.¹¹⁷ The surviving transcript of audio recordings may only cover a fraction of this, but it is a valuable source all the same, as it brings to light the ways in which citizens disrupted the order of the event by being present and by being vocal. As a written source, it is of course a subjective text, based on the selective choices of its author during the

¹¹⁶ Andreas Dornheim, *Politischer Umbruch in Erfurt 1989/90*, p. 120.

¹¹⁷ 'mit einem fröhlichen Lied', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Streitbarer Dialog der Vielfalt. Zum Vier-Stunden-Gesprächs-Marathon in der Erfurter Thüringenhalle', Das Volk, n.d.

transcription process. Nevertheless, it speaks volumes in the way that it reproduces the spoken word and inadvertently indicates where the speaker is responding to interjections from the crowd. Although these interjections are initially left out of the transcript, they become visible through the responses, as can be seen in the following section:

Thank you. I've had to wait quite a long time too. Forty years GDR, forty years. Oh, sorry. My name is (...). I consider myself a member of the citizen's group Neues Forum. I'm a power plant engineer, I work at the IGA,¹¹⁸ as a technical manager. Is that enough? Okay, so forty years GDR...¹¹⁹

The transcriber may have decided not to transcribe the voices coming from the audience, but their persistent calls for an introduction, including name and professional background, nevertheless become clear through the speaker's text. We can only assume how these voices will have increasingly dominated the room, as the transcript later begins to include these interjections in the official record.¹²⁰ Once again, the citizens had found a way to counter attempts to silence them; even the transcriber was eventually forced to include them in the record.

The transcript thereby highlights that the crowd has a force of its own, and one to be reckoned with. Albeit made up of individual voices, the crowd provides a structure through which citizens can take joint action against larger actors. In so doing, the transcript demonstrates that the crowd in many ways

¹¹⁸ The *Internationale Gartenbauausstellung* or International Garden Exhibition Centre of the GDR, located in Erfurt.

¹¹⁹ 'Danke schön. Ich habe auch schon eine ganze Weile gewartet. Vierzig Jahre DDR, vierzig Jahre. Ach so, Entschuldigung. Mein Name ist (...). Ich zähle mich der Bürgerinitiative Neues Forum zu-gehörig. Mein Beruf ist Ingenieur für Kraftwerkstechnik, ich arbeite auf der IGA, als Leiter in der Technik. Reicht ja? Also vierzig Jahre DDR (...)', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 2, 'Transkript Thüringenhalle 28.10.89', 28 October 1989.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

also hindered the aims of the new political groups, by disturbing their attempts at a formal debate. For that reason, the crowd gathered at the *Thüringenhalle* that day cannot simply be equated with the new citizens' groups, even though they may have supported them in certain aspects. It was also not fully made up of loyal but reformatory SED members, as the local press implied, even though party members did also take part.¹²¹

Rather, the crowd as a collective becomes an independent actor, separate to the state, the representatives of the church and the new political groups, but nevertheless a diverse body. This is evident in the efforts made by the organisers to calm the crowd, to deal with their interjections and their presence outside of the hall. The event may have come about in part through the good intentions of the new citizens' groups, but it was nonetheless orchestrated in cooperation with the state. This format, however, was outright rejected by the masses that day. By calling for inclusion, transparency and equality, the crowd took a stand, not against the new political groups per se, but against the continuation of a political culture based on hierarchical structures, division and exclusion.

This act was by no means a one-off. Three days later, far more people than planned turned up to the forum on education in the *Haus der Lehrer*.¹²² Despite announcements that this was only the first of many planned debates, and that the next one would take place the very next evening, the citizens

¹²¹ StA Erfurt, 3800/26 Zeitungen, 'Ein Aufregender Tag in Erfurt', *Das Volk*, 45/26, 13 November 1989.

¹²² StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 7, 'Stadtverordnetenversammlung', 06 November 1989.

outside insisted on entering the building. As a result, the organisers were forced to split up the debating panel and form three separate groups. The Chairman of the Committee for National Education explained that this gave the organisers a 'severe disadvantage (...) as it meant our most able staff were now split over three rooms'.¹²³

The disruption was also not unique to Erfurt; in Sondershausen, sixty kilometres north of Erfurt, a planned debate in the cinema on the twenty-sixth of October had to be cancelled after just forty-five minutes, due to 'loud, but solely verbal tumults'.¹²⁴ In this case, the *éclat* erupted because Sondershausen did not have the technical equipment to broadcast the debate outside of the building, meaning that those waiting outside were fully excluded from the debate.¹²⁵ By overwhelming the events with their numbers, the crowds were able either to disrupt the order of the event, influence the content, or halt it completely. Their presence was therefore not primarily a form of participation, but rather a way of rejecting and deconstructing the political structures.

Hirschman warns that the effect of penalising the use of voice and exit long term means that 'they will be engaged in only when deterioration has reached so advanced a stage that recovery is no longer either possible or desirable'.¹²⁶ At this point, 'voice and exit will be undertaken with such strength that their effect will be destructive rather than reformist'.¹²⁷ Was this the case in

¹²³ 'Diese Lösung erwies sich für meine Begriffe als ein sehr großer Nachteil (...), da wir unsere kompetenten Leute nun auf drei Räume verteilt hatten', *ibid.*

¹²⁴ 'Abbruch der Veranstaltung nach lautstarken, aber nur verbalen Tumulten', Sabine Bräunicke (et al.), *Die FRIEDLICHE REVOLUTION in Sondershausen* (Erfurt: Thüringer Landesbeauftragter für Stasi-Unterlagen, 2009), p. 8.

¹²⁵ Bräunicke (et al.), *Die FRIEDLICHE REVOLUTION in Sondershausen*, p. 8.

¹²⁶ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 121.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

the GDR in 1989? Was there any chance of reversing the decline of the state and restoring trust in the government to reform? How would the unpredictable force of the crowd develop? This chapter explores what happened when this momentum left the inner spaces and took to the streets. It also considers how state and people responded to these new dynamics and the sudden ability to use voice in public to express views and demand change.

The Voices on the Square

As proposed in the *Thüringenhalle* in late October, the next open debate between the state and citizens was indeed held on the cathedral square in central Erfurt, on Thursday, the second of November 1989. Attempts by the city council to block the use of this space by lifting the parking restrictions on the square had been unsuccessful.¹²⁸ But their fears were justified, for here there were no walls to control the number of attendees, and no rows of seats to help maintain order. The only structure separating the council from their citizens was once again the podium, set up this time on the cathedral steps.

Estimates suggest that forty-thousand citizens gathered down below that evening, holding banners and burning candles.¹²⁹ The protest march that started after the weekly prayers for peace had led them from four churches, through the city and to the cathedral square. Calls from the churches had focussed on maintaining a peaceful protest, and the activist that opened the debate beckoned those below to truly listen to the speakers, in an attempt to

¹²⁸ StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 7, 'Stadtverordnetenversammlung', 06 November 1989.

¹²⁹ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 175.

‘realise a piece of democracy’ here and now. By the time the mayoress took to the microphone, however, the crowd was no longer willing to listen.

The sound of the event at this point was closer to that of a football match, if at all comparable. Chants of ‘*Thüringenhalle*’ demonstrate that the citizens had not forgotten the way in which they were excluded from the debate a few days beforehand and suggest that this event had now become symbolic of a clash between the city council and its constituents. ‘What was the deal with the *Thüringenhalle*?’ shouted one protester.¹³⁰ Whistles and boos ensured that the mayoress was forced to raise her voice to the point where she was shouting her words out over the crowd. ‘I’m really asking myself, why aren’t you prepared to listen to me?’, she pleaded.¹³¹ ‘I was invited! I was invited’.¹³²

Her speech, which she adamantly continues with, was laced with empty phrases such as ‘dear citizens’, and ‘working together’, ‘for an improved socialism’, that had lost their meaning and were consequently met by sarcastic retorts from the crowds.¹³³ ‘You don’t know what it means to work’, shouted one; ‘Too late!’, cried another.¹³⁴ The local activist jumped in again and again to try to appease the crowd. ‘I find it a little too simple, to shout the speakers down’, she argued.¹³⁵ But the crowd could not be convinced. Chants of ‘Lies!’, ‘Shame!’ and ‘Step down!’ accompanied the remainder of the mayoress’s

¹³⁰ ‘Was war das mit der Thüringenhalle?’, StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, ‘Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger’, Studio B, 2000.

¹³¹ ‘Ich stelle wirklich die Frage, warum sind Sie nicht bereit, zuzuhören?’, *ibid.*

¹³² ‘Ich bin auf Einladung! Ich bin auf Einladung...’, *ibid.*

¹³³ ‘liebe Bürger’, ‘arbeiten (...) gemeinsam’, ‘für einen besseren Sozialismus’, *ibid.*

¹³⁴ ‘Du kennst das Arbeiten gar nicht’. ‘Warum nicht schon eher’, *ibid.*

¹³⁵ ‘Und ich find es ein ganzes Stück zu einfach, mit Sprechchören hier Leute rauszuschreien’, StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. .5, ‘Dialog auf dem Domplatz am 02.11.1989’, 02 November 1989.

address.¹³⁶ But the 'Iron Lady', as she was called by the crowd, persisted.¹³⁷ 'I am still standing here, in front of you!' she called out at the end.¹³⁸

Some of you are screaming so loud, you are surely misguided. We will oppose this! Yes, we will! On Monday we will discuss and agree the latest issues in the council meeting!¹³⁹

The recording of her speech on the cathedral square reflects the communication breakdown between the state and citizens. Whilst the local governors considered it their duty to continue in their roles, the citizenry felt it demonstrated the state's unwillingness to respect their wishes. Exasperated, the citizens were no longer prepared to show their representatives the respect of listening in return. The mayoress, who had agreed to begin holding regular meetings with representatives from select citizens' groups, remained undeterred by the deafening boos from the crowds. She delivered her speech despite vocal opposition, and similarly, insisted on continuing in her role.

This was not the first time that the mayoress had faced calls to resign. One week earlier at the forum in the town hall, a citizen, who identified himself as working at a military institution, had expressed his lack of confidence in her ability to introduce dialogue and reforms, after having failed to do so for so many years.¹⁴⁰ After asking whether she doubted her own capabilities or had even considered giving up office, he argued that a democratic government

¹³⁶ 'Lügen!', 'Schäm dich!', 'Abtreten!', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

¹³⁷ 'Eiserne Lady', *ibid.*

¹³⁸ 'Ich stehe immer noch da, vor Euch!', *ibid.*

¹³⁹ 'Dass einige von Euch hier so laut schreien, und sicher nicht gut beraten sind (...) dagegen stellen wir uns! Das machen wir! Am Montag wird die Stadtverordnetenversammlung die neuen Fragen beraten und festlegen', *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 1, 'Transkript Rathausdialog 25.10.1989', 25 October 1989.

would have stepped down of their own accord in response to such protests.¹⁴¹

The mayoress insisted, however, that it was her responsibility to lead the changes in society and politics. Her understanding of her role was to represent her constituents long-term, and quitting would thus have been a form of abandonment.

As one activist concluded at the demonstration on the third of November, 'the officially-enforced dialogue has failed'.¹⁴² Although the state parties supported and part-organised the dialogue events, these were understood by the citizens as a masquerade of democracy, and not as a true exchange of ideas. The term *dialogue* in this context was therefore associated with an attempt by the Socialist Unity Party to take ownership of the democratisation process and was thus rejected by the crowds through purposeful disruption of the events. The activist summarised this by pointing out that 'the people are already tired of dialogue'.¹⁴³ He spoke slowly and clearly as he announced in a statement directed more at the town representatives than to the crowd to which he was speaking, 'If the voice of the people in Erfurt says: "[...] out!", please listen to them.'¹⁴⁴ His message was a simple instruction to the SED from the *Neues Forum*, the self-described 'mouthpiece' of the people, in an attempt to mediate between state and citizens.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² 'Der amtlich verordnete Dialog hat sich nicht bewährt', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 5, 'Dialog auf dem Domplatz am 02.11.1989', 02 November 1989.

¹⁴³ 'die Menschen sind jetzt schon Dialogmüde', ibid.

¹⁴⁴ 'wenn hier die Stimme des Volkes in Erfurt sagt: „[...] weg!", bitte hört dies', ibid.

¹⁴⁵ 'Sprachrohr', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 6, 'Dialog auf dem Domplatz am 03.11.1989', 03 November 1989.

In the city council meeting on Monday, the mayoress commented on the event on the cathedral square only so far as to express her hurt at being called by her nickname by the angry crowds. The abbreviation, which she had previously perceived 'as a declaration of trust' from her citizens, was now being used against her.¹⁴⁶ Although she recognised the inherent loss of trust that this act reflected, she refused to accept it as defeat. Instead, she defiantly argued 'loss of confidence, sure, but shouldn't the town mayor be given a chance to work through the (...) implications? I am prepared to do so!'.¹⁴⁷

Although she received praise from her colleagues, not everyone within her circle was willing to support her. A visitor at the council meeting regretted that the mayoress had not responded to the clear opposition and the many calls for resignation coming from her constituents: 'That was the people speaking to you. The ones whistling and booing.'¹⁴⁸ Although he agreed that a shouting match was 'not the right way to hold a conversation', he struggled to understand how she could outright ignore the public opinion and urged her to use the opportunity in the council meeting to respond to the situation, no matter what her opinion on the matter.¹⁴⁹ After all, the public would expect to read about it in the press the next day, he warned.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ 'ein Stück Vertrauen dieser Stadt zu mir als ihren Oberbürgermeister', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 7, 'Stadtverordnetenversammlung', 06 November 1989.

¹⁴⁷ 'Vertrauensverlust ja, aber gibt man auch dem Oberbürgermeister dieser Stadt eine Chance um das Erkannte gemeinsam auch heute hier dargelegte an Konsequenzen in der weiteren Arbeit aufzuarbeiten? Ich bin dazu bereit!', *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ 'Das ist das Volk gewesen, das da zu Ihnen gesprochen hat. Die gepfiffen haben und die gebuht haben', *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ 'Ich bin der Meinung, daß dies nicht die rechte Form ist, in einem Gespräch miteinander zu treten', *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Indeed, the *Thüringische Landeszeitung*'s report on the meeting highlighted the contrast between the need for democratic reforms, as articulated on the cathedral square, and the severe lack of changes in the council meeting: 'everything here, save for a few changes, is business as usual'.¹⁵¹ The article deplored that the public's loss of confidence in the government was not put to debate, and that there was no serious attempt to present a thorough analysis of the existing situation. Instead, it argued that the council was trying to jump this step and look to the future, 'wearing the same clothes, but turned inside-out'.¹⁵²

The mayoress' refusal to respond to the calls from the crowds only served to further highlight the communication gap between the state and its people, but it also revealed how unprepared the governors were to deal with the new situation. By refusing to listen and by shouting down politicians at the events, the crowds in the GDR illuminated the practices of their communal representatives and built up societal pressure from the press and from critics within the party itself. The supposed 'dialogue' was exposed to be one-way, now from both directions, and the inexperienced communal leaders lost their credibility as a result.

One day later, on the ninth of November 1989, Günther Schabowski from the politburo in Berlin announced the new border regulations on live television, allowing all GDR citizens to travel west. On questioning, he stated that the new

¹⁵¹ 'hier ging, etwas modifiziert, alles so weiter wie bisher', *Thüringer Landeszeitung*, 08 November 1989, quoted in *Schließt Euch an*, p. 194.

¹⁵² 'im gewendeten Gewand', *ibid.*

rules applied with immediate effect.¹⁵³ Although procedures had been set out for citizens to apply formally for visas, this was not clearly communicated at the press conference and the announcement was therefore left open to interpretation. In the Erfurt city council meeting three days earlier, delegates had discussed the introduction of the new travel law, which had been published in the press that day.¹⁵⁴ Although welcoming the move, the district secretary warned that he strongly doubted that the police force 'would be able to manage these tasks with their current structure'.¹⁵⁵

The news of the open border seemed so unlikely to some, that it was not announced at the large demonstration in Erfurt, which took place on the evening of the ninth of November.¹⁵⁶ In Eisenach, those citizens that had heard the news on the television went to their local police station to check what was possible. One remembers the two policemen on duty around nine pm admitting, 'we don't know either, we have not had any information from Berlin'.¹⁵⁷ By midnight, the policemen stepped out again to announce to the gathered crowds that they were free to travel to wherever they liked.¹⁵⁸

As in Berlin, it was not only the vague announcement itself that led the border to be opened that very night, but the presence of large groups of citizens, who demanded to be let through. That very night, citizens would pass

¹⁵³ Fraude, *Die Friedliche Revolution in der DDR*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 7, 'Stadtverordnetenversammlung', 06 November 1989.

¹⁵⁵ 'Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, daß sie diese Aufgaben in ihren derzeitigen Strukturen bewältigen kann', *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 203.

¹⁵⁷ 'Und da hat der gesagt, „das können wir auch nicht sagen, das wissen wir jetzt nicht“, irgendwie, „Berlin hat da noch nichts ausgerichtet“', Interview with Franzisca Friedrich, Erfurt, 16 March 2018.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

through all along the former hard border between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, often finding that their neighbours in the nearby western towns and villages were fast asleep.¹⁵⁹

The next morning, long queues had formed in front of police stations and train stations in all towns and cities, where citizens waited to receive their official visas, despite the cold winter weather. Within three days, seventy-thousand people in Erfurt had their passports stamped in order to be able to travel west.¹⁶⁰ The option of exit was suddenly restored, without having to take the risk of travelling through another country. The manner in which it was announced, however, and the response in the smaller towns and cities, demonstrates how unprepared and overwhelmed the police and politicians were with how to manage this reinstated freedom.

This turn of events was enough to lead the mayoress of Erfurt to eventually step down on the tenth of November.¹⁶¹ The first district secretary, who had refused to face the crowds on the cathedral square, followed suit one day later.¹⁶² Both members of the Socialist Unity Party were out of their depth; they had failed to meet the demands of the crowds at the local demonstrations or to know how to deal with the masses, and the newly announced travel regulations created a further dynamic that they were simply unequipped for. Although many later feared that the Socialist Unity Party would regain power due to their networks, financial assets and infrastructure, the turn of events also

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Thüringer Landeszeitung, 15 November 1989, quoted in *Schließt Euch an*, p. 205.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 206.

signalised that they had lost control to such an extent, that it would be increasingly difficult to restore.

In his monograph on the events of 1989 in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, James Krapfl traces a similar dynamic regarding the crowds' power over political representatives, arguing that the parliament undertook reforms

not because its members had suddenly embraced democratic principles; it did so because it was **afraid** of the new power that had arisen as a result of the successful constitution of a community independent of the Party.¹⁶³

There too, the local square had become the 'seat of real power' and the 'sacred center of the new society', from where legitimacy proceeded primarily through vocal acclamation.¹⁶⁴ In the GDR, where the border to West Germany held such political and cultural significance, it would take the addition of mass exit to force the local government representatives to step down. Both events, however, were brought about primarily by crowd pressure and a growing fear of the masses.

Hirschman predicted that the strength of both voice and exit at such an advanced stage would be so great as to have a destructive, as opposed to reformist character. What Hirschman neglects to explore however, is what happens to this force after it has dealt its initial blow? Would the use of voice in the GDR allow for reforms and new practices to be introduced, or would it simply continue to break down the political landscape, and how? The following

¹⁶³ James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 154–155, my emphasis.

¹⁶⁴ Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face*, p. 155.

sections will trace this momentum in the following months, as the existing state structures broke away.

Controlling Voice

The Peaceful Revolution? Crowd control in the GDR.

Although the demonstrations in the GDR managed to avoid bloodshed, earning them the later title 'peaceful revolution', the fear that the events could turn violent was omnipresent, even after many peaceful demonstrations. With the Ministry for State Security and the People's Police present at the demonstrations in Thuringia, protesters and organisers alike were fearful that the slightest disturbance could lead the state to intervene. What happens and how do various actors respond if and when the crowd gets out of control?

In Erfurt, and across the GDR, the representatives from the churches and the new political groups used their roles as public speakers to remind the demonstrators to remain peaceful, calling out for 'no violence!'. Protesters walked together, holding hands, or holding candles, as a sign of peaceful protest. A former youth worker at the protestant church in Erfurt explains, 'If you're carrying a candle that you have to shield to stop it from blowing out, then you can't lash out.'¹⁶⁵ The fear was therefore not just that the military would take action, but that the crowds themselves could become violent. Although many protesters wanted to demonstrate peacefully, a crowd is nevertheless a body of individuals acting on their own motivations. The

¹⁶⁵ 'Wenn man eine Kerze in der Hand hat, und man das Licht auch schützen muss, damit es nicht ausgeht, dann schlägt man nicht zu', Matthias Sengewald, 'Befreiungsschlag gegen die DDR', *Gedächtnis der Nation*, <<https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/videos/4RpSX0cRncQ>> (accessed 10 May 2018).

combination of police presence and large crowds had therefore created a highly volatile situation.

A common measure employed by members of the citizens groups and churches to keep a peaceful atmosphere was the use of song, especially towards the end of a protest. The debate in the *Thüringenhalle* is just one example, where 'a happy song' was used to calm the crowds before they headed home.

At the end of the large event on the cathedral square on the third of November, a member of the organisation *Frauen für Veränderung* called on the people gathered to 'sing together the song of peacefulness; We Shall Overcome'.¹⁶⁶ This song, which rose to fame in the 1960s and as part of the American civil rights movement, repeats 'we are not afraid' and 'we shall live in peace', thereby emphasising peaceful actions and making the link to other successful political movements.

Three days later, song was once again used to break up the crowds in the Prediger Church in Erfurt, after the audience angrily expressed its discontent at the debate coming to a timely end.¹⁶⁷ The organiser tried to explain that the panellists had agreed to two hours, but that these had now passed, and that the speakers would therefore have to head home.¹⁶⁸ In the nearby Eichsfeld region, north-west of Erfurt, the patriotic and explicitly catholic 'Eichsfelder Sang' was

¹⁶⁶ 'Wir wollen gemeinsam das Lied der Gewaltlosigkeit: "We shall overcome" zusammen singen', StA Erfurt, 1-5/25559, Vol. 6, 'Dialog auf dem Domplatz am 03.11.1989', 03 November 1989.

¹⁶⁷ StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

sung at demonstrations 'as a hymn'.¹⁶⁹ Song provided a way of channelling the boos and chants into a peaceful, non-threatening action, but it also united the masses behind alternative national and regional concepts.

In some cases, however, the protesters that had gathered for the events did not head straight home, but continued demonstrating, after the organisers with their peaceful words of guidance had already left. The former youth worker recalls chancing upon such a group, that headed through the city and straight to the headquarters of the Ministry for Security in Erfurt, chanting 'Stasi out!'.¹⁷⁰ Placing their candles in a semi-circle around the entrance of the building, the protesters remained behind this line, shouting 'no violence' at the top of their lungs.¹⁷¹ The youth worker credits the candles in the doorway for ensuring that no one stepped forward to bang on the door, an action which may well have escalated the situation.

In Eisenach, protesters followed a similar route through their own town centre after the demonstration on Monday, sixth of November, laying candles down outside of the *Stasi* headquarters, the district council offices and the local police station. In this case, the burning candles caused actual damage to the door of the district council. The organiser of the *Neues Forum* in Eisenach later apologised to a member of the district council for the damage and asked whether the council would consider providing members of the *Neues Forum*

¹⁶⁹ 'im Sinne einer Hymne', Heinz Mestrup & Dietmar Remy (Ed.), "*Wir können ja hier offen reden*". *Äußerungen vom Politbüro-Kandidaten und Erfurter Bezirks-Chef Gerhard Müller* (Erfurt: Landesbeauftragter des Freistaates Thüringen für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 1997), p. 180.

¹⁷⁰ 'Stasi raus!', Matthias Sengewald, 'Befreiungsschlag gegen die DDR'.

¹⁷¹ 'keine Gewalt!', *ibid.*

with identification badges. These would help to identify them as official organisers from the *Neues Forum*, responsible for 'the preservation of public peace'.¹⁷² He explained that members of the *Neues Forum* had repeatedly been accused of working for the Stasi by demonstrators, and that this measure would help to maintain order and protect the town hall, the district council and the churches.¹⁷³ The district council member subsequently confirmed in his report to the Ministry for State Security that this request had been approved.¹⁷⁴

This form of crowd control was not unique to Eisenach, however; identification labels stating 'No violence! Artists of Erfurt' were also put in place to identify the security personnel at the artist's demonstration in Erfurt on the nineteenth of November 1989.¹⁷⁵ An announcement in the local paper in advance of the event explained the significance of the new ID badges and confirmed that the event had been organised in cooperation with the police.¹⁷⁶

Over the course of the autumn, artists and actors in particular had played a large part in organising the demonstrations across the GDR, and in setting up the *Neues Forum* platform.¹⁷⁷ Often having the courage and practice of speaking on stage, artists were used to dealing with crowds, unlike many other citizens. Their songs, poems and cabaret-style speeches interlaced the local politicians' spots at the regular demonstrations in Erfurt, breaking up the seriousness with comical and yet critical verses about the privileges of the elite, which were full

¹⁷² 'für Ruhe und Ordnung'. Stadtarchiv Eisenach (henceforth StA Eisenach), 41.9 Filmaufnahmen, 'MfS Bericht, Titelnnummer 2', n.d.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ StA Erfurt, 3800/26 Zeitungen, 'An die Bürger der Stadt Erfurt', *Das Volk*, 45/270, 16 November 1989.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Jolin Diekmann, 'Ein Provinztheater probt den Dialog. Das Rudolstädter Theater 1987 bis 1990', Master thesis, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Jena, 15 December 2017, p. 20.

of local references.¹⁷⁸ Performers employed satire, paraphrasing Heinrich Heine's *Wintermärchen*, for example, to create 'an autumn tale' for the GDR.¹⁷⁹ Others quoted Honoré de Balzac on the role of indecent people in society, highlighting how their lives were now anything but boring.¹⁸⁰ The tongue-in-cheek parodies capture the extreme nature of the ongoing changes in the GDR, which seemed so unlikely as to be unreal, and at the same time evidence a long-standing tradition amongst performers and audience members of using hidden references and comparisons for critical commentaries. If not song, speakers at the demonstrations often also used rhymes to give good-tempered guidance.¹⁸¹ Now, however, they too were worried about their own safety and the audience's growing anger.

During a live broadcast of the hessian television programme *horizonte* from an indoor location in Eisenach on the fourth of December 1989, a visiting cabaret group from Torgau presented a sketch entitled 'About ship! The course change of the SED, or the sinking of the Titanic', in which the Socialist Unity Party crew directs their ship straight into an iceberg, singing the national anthem as it sinks.¹⁸² The unique broadcast switches between the indoor programme for those watching from home, and recordings of the prayers in the *Georgenkirche*, and the demonstration on the streets; an invaluable audiovisual record of the demonstration in this small border town. On that evening in early

¹⁷⁸ StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

¹⁷⁹ 'ein Herbstmärchen', *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ As one 'Domplatzdichter' (Cathedral Square Poet) put it, 'Trotz Wut und Zorn in dieser Zeit, ich bitte um Besonnenheit' (Despite all the anger and frustration, I ask for your consideration), *ibid.*

¹⁸² 'Die Wende der SED, oder, der Untergang der Titanic', StA Eisenach, 41.9/313 Filmaufnahmen, 'horizonte', Hessischer Rundfunk, 04 December 1989.

December, the crowd outside was already focussed on their next project. As one churchgoer phrased it, 'we were motivated by the SED giving up its deceptive practices, and what moves us now is the possibility of German unity'.¹⁸³ The recently published paper 'For our country', penned by Stefan Heym and Christa Wolf, which spoke out for an independent GDR and was signed by thirty-one GDR activists and intellectuals,¹⁸⁴ was strongly dismissed by a speaker inside the church, followed by rapturous applause from the audience.¹⁸⁵

Other speakers on the televised show included the West German theologian Dorothee Sölle, the local Eisenach writer and political activist Margot Friedrich, a young filmmaker from the GDR television, and the West German cabaret artist Mathias Beltz. At various points during his televised appearance, Beltz seemed perturbed by the volume of the demonstrators outside, eventually cutting his performance short with the words

Now I'm really interested to know what they're singing outside. Let's put it this way, tonight, cabaret artist's commentaries are a load of crap. Film outside, I can't be bothered anymore.¹⁸⁶

Given one more chance to express his hopes for the new century ahead, he said, 'my only wish for the new year is for the chanting outside to be broadcast on live television'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ 'es hat uns bewegt, dass die SED ihre Machenschaften aufgibt, und jetzt bewegt uns vielleicht, dass wir die Einheit kriegen', *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ 'Für unser Land', Wolfgang Jäger & Ingeborg Villinger (Eds.), *Die Intellektuellen und die deutsche Einheit* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1997), p. 79.

¹⁸⁵ StA Eisenach, 41.9/313 Filmaufnahmen, 'horizonte', Hessischer Rundfunk, 04 December 1989.

¹⁸⁶ 'Jetzt interessiert mich doch wieder, was dort draußen gesungen wird. Sagen wir es einfach so, heute Abend, Kabarettistenkommentare sind auch Scheiße. Einfach raus! Ich habe keine Lust mehr', *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ 'Mein einziger Wunsch für das neue Jahr ist, dass der Sprechchor, der sich draußen gebildet hat, hier live im Fernsehen übertragen wird', *ibid.*

The unique recordings of this pivotal evening in Eisenach are exemplary in so many ways. Although clearly selected by the television crew, the film captures the variety of voices and spaces that made up the autumn events, from the select indoor spaces to the overfilled churches, the streets, and the squares. And it demonstrates the needs and wishes of the people in the smaller towns and cities away from the capital, who appeared to be moved less by the words of a few famous authors and more by the close presence of the inner-German border, and feelings of national belonging. Most of all, it is a clear audiovisual record of the ways in which crowds of people gathered outside frequently disturbed indoor events, and how their voices outdid those of others. Whilst the videos from inside the church showed people of all ages and genders, it was mainly adult men gathered outside afterwards. The video ends with their deafening chants: 'Deutschland einig Vaterland'.¹⁸⁸

By early December, it was the crowds outside that set the tone and that clearly had the upper hand. The introduction of identification badges for demonstration organisers evidences a growing fear amongst members of governmental organisations and an increasing need amongst members of the new political groups to manage the large gatherings and to also protect themselves from potential public aggression. The state organisations were now dependent on the new political groups and church leaders to control the crowds, as mediators between state and people, but these in turn relied on the state to keep them safe. That both groups, supported by the press, now worked

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

together to maintain legitimacy and order demonstrates just how strong the force of the crowd had quickly become.

Stasi raus! The Secret Police and the Citizens' Guard

With the border in Berlin now open and passable, and the people in the top political positions removed, the crowds in Erfurt and Eisenach focussed on bringing down the remainder of the political elite; the remaining members of the Socialist Unity Party and the staff at the Ministry for State Security.

Responding to the crowd's calls for State Security workers to be made to work in the factories, the district manager of the newly-renamed Ministry for National Security (NaSi), told the local paper that his staff had not only heard these chants, but had also received threats of violence from the public.¹⁸⁹ Although he claimed to understand why the fear that citizens felt towards state officials had now transformed into anger, he nevertheless blamed the government's security strategy for creating a culture of mistrust.¹⁹⁰

The article, which claimed that the omnipresent *Stasi* was now a democratically-led department, also printed that it was 'more like pure fantasy' to suggest that the former Stasi had kept individual case files on GDR citizens.¹⁹¹ The greatest truth in the interview is however the answer to the question, what had happened to files on the *Neues Forum*: the district manager

¹⁸⁹ StA Erfurt, 3800/26 Zeitungen, 'Von allgegenwärtiger „Stasi“ zum demokratisch kontrollierten Amt', *Das Volk*, 45/277, 24 November 1989.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ 'Das meiste gehört hier wohl eher in den Bereich der Phantasie', *ibid.*

explained 'they've been destroyed'.¹⁹² As the crowds on the streets grew in numbers and state organisations sensed they were losing control, they were quick to destroy evidence that could later be used against them.

Previously, the fear of an armed response had kept protestors from storming the Stasi offices, with good reason. For as they would discover, the Stasi-NaSi offices housed hoards of ammunition that could easily have been used against civil society. On the fourth of December 1989, however, whilst the *Hessischer Rundfunk* was preparing to film the protests in Eisenach, the citizens of Erfurt gathered the courage to go right up to the entrance of the NaSi headquarters and demand entry. Black clouds of smoke had been billowing out of the chimneys of their offices in Erfurt since the evening before; an unusual sight, as this building was known to have central heating. In the knowledge that this could only mean that the organisation was burning documents, four thousand flyers were printed overnight by members of the *Neues Forum* and distributed to local citizens, alerting them to the developments.¹⁹³

In the morning, on the initiative of members of the women's organisations, citizens gathered together to take action, with some blocking the entrances and exits of the building with their cars, and others seeking the advice of a lawyer about how to legally halt the work of the ministry.¹⁹⁴ By ten o'clock, three lawyers and the press had arrived and entered the building with a delegation of ten citizens, demanding to be given access to check all rooms.

¹⁹² 'Sie sind vernichtet', *ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Die Geschichte des Bürgerkomitees in Erfurt. Zeitzeugenberichte. Teil 2* (Erfurt: Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte e.V., 2010), p. 9.

¹⁹⁴ Andreas Dornheim & Stephan Schnitzler (Ed.), *Thüringen 1989/90. Akteure des Umbruchs* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 1995), p. 294.

Senior members of staff, however, are thought to have unashamedly tried to hinder the occupation by claiming not to have plans of the building and by refuting that there were any computers in the building.¹⁹⁵ It was not until the message arrived that another two-hundred citizens had stormed the grounds from the back, that the major general backed down and citizens began searching the building.¹⁹⁶

Looking back on the event, a church worker who was present described the fear in the faces of the young guards, who simply stepped aside when told to by the crowd. 'They could just as easily have been on our side', he noted.¹⁹⁷ As the crowds gathered below, the major general had called his lawyer for advice on what to do and whether to shoot.¹⁹⁸ A member of the *Neues Forum* credits the lawyer for preventing bloodshed that day, as he had instructed the major general to take all the weapons downstairs and let the people in. 'This time, we've lost', he said.¹⁹⁹ Once again, it was the presence of large groups of citizens, simply demanding entry, but also using the cooperation of the press and lawyers, that overwhelmed the ministry.

On discovering the extent of the surveillance equipment and the furnaces in which documents were being burnt, the citizens spontaneously formed a civic guard to secure the evidence. Although the new political groups would later consider destroying all the materials to prevent them from being reused by

¹⁹⁵ *Die Geschichte des Bürgerkomitees in Erfurt*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁷ 'Wahrscheinlich hätten sie genauso gut auf unserer Seite sein können', Matthias Sengewald, 'Schluss mit der Stasi', *Gedächtnis der Nation*, <https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/personen/zeitzeuge/matthias_sengewald/videos/84kLxkkEa38>, (accessed 10 May 2018).

¹⁹⁸ Dornheim & Schnitzler (Ed.), *Thüringen 1989/90*, p. 295.

¹⁹⁹ 'Diesmal haben wir verloren', *ibid.*

the next political leaders, the immediate aim was to secure the files as evidence and prevent them from being transported abroad.²⁰⁰ In total, the civic guard is said to have consisted of up to three-thousand members, which will of course have included some secret informers.²⁰¹ Together, they created inventories of all the rooms and took it in turns to keep watch over the entrances and exits, conducting identification checks to control who entered and left the building. Important rooms and cabinets were sealed off to prevent any tampering, and the other citizens provided the citizens' guard with food and drink.

On Erfurt's example, citizens in towns and cities across the GDR also demanded entry to their local Stasi-NaSi buildings, equally discovering stores of files, alcohol and weaponry.²⁰² In Thuringia, the district offices in Arnstadt, Eisenach, Gotha, Jena, Nordhausen, Saalfeld and Stadtroda were occupied the very same day.²⁰³ In Eisenach, a visiting film crew from West Germany recorded the clearing of the ministry's offices a few days later for their documentary about the town. Outside, local activists from the civil guard recalled the demeanour of the NaSi staff on the day they collected their belongings. The boss was described to have been so physically and emotionally drained that he was shaking and had to be sent home.²⁰⁴ On questioning from the West-German journalists, why they thought he was so exhausted, an activist

²⁰⁰ StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-15 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Pressemitteilung des Bürgerkomitees Erfurt an den Zentralen Runden Tisch', 15 February 1990.

²⁰¹ Dornheim & Schnitzler (Eds.), *Thüringen 1989/90*, p. 295.

²⁰² Ehrhart Neubert, *Unsere Revolution. Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/90* (München: Piper, 2008), p. 268.

²⁰³ Ehrhart Neubert & Thomas Auerbach, *„Es kann anders werden“. Opposition und Widerstand in Thüringen, 1945-1989* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), p. 240.

²⁰⁴ StA Eisenach, 41.9/315 Filmaufnahmen, 'Das Ende der Geschichte. Fünf Tage in Eisenach – ein deutsches Tagebuch', Hessischer Rundfunk, 18 March 1990.

explained: 'Because that was his existence. It was his life'.²⁰⁵ And how did it make him feel, seeing him like that? Without a second to pause, he asserted: 'I felt sorry for him'.²⁰⁶ The behaviour 'was very varied' however²⁰⁷; some staff came with their heads bowed, whilst the office secretary acted as normal, greeting everyone with a friendly 'Hello!' and a handshake.²⁰⁸ It was the younger, teenage workers who are said to have shown the least emotion, neither greeting anyone nor bowing their heads on arrival. 'No one knows what is going on in their heads' said the activist, with a hint of frustration.²⁰⁹

Perceptions of what the ministry staff were thinking and how they acted seemed to play an important role in determining how the public reacted to them. Those that showed great emotion, even though they were in the top positions, gained the empathy of the activists, whereas those that lied or showed little emotion left the locals feeling shocked or confused. These reflections show a moral superiority on behalf of those citizens, who were willing to forgive the former MfS workers if they showed remorse through emotional responses. Amnesty was to be granted only to those who admitted wrong doings and a willingness 'to break' with the past and make amends.²¹⁰

Not everyone, however, was as willing to empathise with the members of the former elite. On Monday, the eleventh of December, following the weekly prayers for peace in Eisenach's *Georgenkirche*, a conflict broke out at the

²⁰⁵ 'das ist seine Existenz, das ist sein Leben', *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ 'Er tat mir leid', *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ 'war sehr unterschiedlich', *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ 'Guten Tag', *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ 'Was in den Köpfen vorgeht, weiß man nicht', *ibid.*

²¹⁰ Sanya Romeike, *Transitional Justice in Germany after 1945 and 1990* (Nuremberg: International Nuremberg Principles Academy, 2016), p. 27.

local SED holiday home. The centre at Wilhelmsthal, ten kilometres south of Eisenach, was frequently host to children on summer camps and party members on holiday with their families. But suddenly it had become a symbol for the privilege of the GDR's elite, and a hot topic in the local debate on what should become of state-owned buildings and facilities.

A call went out during the church sermon, which was now frequently used for local announcements, summoning the congregation to join a protest march to Wilhelmsthal that very evening, to view the grounds and assess its possible uses. The most popular suggestion, put forward by local doctors, was for the complex to be turned into a rehabilitation centre for their patients. The protest was therefore intended as a display of public demand for the property to be officially handed over to the health service.²¹¹

It is not clear, what exactly happened that evening in Wilhelmsthal, with three readers' letters to the press each presenting a slightly different account. The first, from a local doctor and political activist, alleged that on arriving at the home, the peaceful protestors happened upon an angry mob, 'raging and screaming' for 'the fat cats and red pigs' to come out.²¹² This very nearly broke out into physical violence and was only kept under control thanks to the efforts of the peaceful protestors.²¹³

The second version contended that this was not a separate group at all, but that the conflict arose when only a small group from the protest march was

²¹¹ StA Eisenach, 40.2-25 Nachlass Hasse; Wilhelmsthal / Runder Tisch, 'Die Rolle der Evangelischen Kirche bei der Wende', Eisenach, 13. March 1990.

²¹² 'mit Geschrei und mit Getöbe', 'die angeblichen Bonzen und die roten Schweine', *ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

allowed into the grounds, and the rest of the demonstrators were forced to wait outside.²¹⁴ The local dentist went on to argue that the protest was peaceful, but should have been better-organised in advance, with the possibility for more people to attend the viewing.²¹⁵ After all, with the prominence of this topic in the media, it was to be expected that exclusions could quickly lead to feelings of hate and mistrust.²¹⁶

The third letter condemned the violence at the 'shameful event', at which protesters are said to have kicked the property.²¹⁷ This violence was reportedly part of a growing trend;

over the past three to four weeks, word in Eisenach has it that the gatherings at the Monday prayers and the protest marches through the town centre thereafter are not very peaceful anymore at all. On the contrary; it has become a stomping ground for hooligans, who can no longer be considered harmless.²¹⁸

She therefore lay the blame on the leaders of the march for organising the inappropriate 'Show-Demo' amid the growing tensions and argued that this should have been handled in an objective manner by an official delegation.²¹⁹

What appears certain, is that this event did not go as planned, and that the organisers were no longer in control of the situation. Furthermore, many witnesses saw the potential for an outbreak of serious violence. The guests at the holiday home that evening felt intimidated by the protesters on the grounds

²¹⁴ StA Eisenach, 40.2-25 Nachlass Hasse; Wilhelmsthal / Runder Tisch, 'Das Anliegen war friedlich. Aufklärung nach Jahren des Schweigens', n.d.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ 'beschämendes Ereignis', StA Eisenach, 40.2-25 Nachlass Hasse; Wilhelmsthal / Runder Tisch, 'Eine Abordnung hätte genügt. Guter Wille vieler beim Friedensgebet mit Füßen getreten', Eisenach, n.d.

²¹⁸ 'Seit etwa drei bis vier Wochen kann man in Eisenach immer öfter hören, daß die Zusammenkünfte beim Montagsgebet mit anschließender friedlichen Demonstration durch die Innenstadt so friedlich gar nicht mehr sind. Etliche Bürger besuchen aus Sorge darum die Veranstaltung nur noch ungern oder gar nicht mehr. Dafür wird sie zusehends Tummelplatz für Krawallmacher, denen man keineswegs mehr Harmlosigkeit zugestehen kann', *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Ibid.

and in the street, with one reporting a frightening confrontation with a crowd as she waited for the bus with her child.²²⁰ Five days later, the citizens' committee met with the town council to discuss the incident, with calls to ensure that security officers for crowd control were to be present at all future events.²²¹ The force of the crowd was out of control; now it was time to rein it in again.

Power off the Streets

From January 1990 onwards, the weekly demonstrations in Erfurt and Eisenach continued, but their numbers started waning as new structures progressed. Round tables had been established in both towns, where members of the new political groups and citizen's movements gathered together to discuss communal issues and advise the town council, essentially influencing their decision-making as a form of democratic control until the next formal elections, which were now planned for March 1990. In Eisenach, where the mayor was a member of the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany, the town councillors continued until March. In Erfurt, however, the city council was completely disbanded due to the huge dissatisfaction amongst the citizenry with their communal leaders in the SED, and an 'interim parliament' with representatives from all existing local political parties, movements and women's groups was

²²⁰ StA Eisenach, 40.7/102, Sammlung Wende, 'Meine Kinder haben nur noch Angst...', 15 December 1989.

²²¹ StA Eisenach, 40.6/114, 'Chronik zur Wende'.

formed instead.²²² Through this cooperation between the council and the round tables, a form of 'double rule' or dyarchy took hold.²²³

With the formation of the round tables, the citizens' committees, that had formed over the autumn and led the occupation of the Ministry for Security, were free to focus their efforts entirely on uncovering the extent of the surveillance culture in the GDR. The weekly demonstrations now became an opportunity to relay information to the citizens. On the eighteenth of January, a member of the *Neues Forum* updated the attendees on their plans for 'reconciling' former Stasi/NaSi workers:

Firstly, public naming of Stasi agents, including their titles! Secondly, immediate dismissal of Stasi/Nasi staff from sensitive areas of work, such as local committees, education, the postal service, telecommunications, news and taxi companies! We cannot stand by and watch as our children are taught by former members of the State Security!²²⁴

The crowd, which had been cheering all along, broke out into loud applause and began chanting 'Stasi out!'.²²⁵ Next, he relayed the organisation's demand for no former MfS staff to be employed in these areas in future, and the need for everyone to be cross-checked by the citizens' committee, with public disclosure of salary structures.²²⁶

²²² *Schließt Euch an*, p. 257-258.

²²³ Moritz & Moritz, *Ein besonderes Jahr*, p. 119.

²²⁴ 'Erstens: namentliche Nennung der Stasinasi Leute, mit Qualifikation! Zweitens: sofortige Entlassung der bereits angestellten Mitarbeiter der Stasinasi aus den sensiblen Bereichen, wie örtliche Räte und Bezirke, wie Volksbildung, Post und Fernmeldewesen, Nachrichtenwesen, Taxibetrieb! Wir können doch nicht ansehen, dass ehemalige Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit unsere Kinder in der Volksbildung unterrichten!', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

²²⁵ 'Stasi raus!', *ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Since occupying the NaSi headquarters, the members of the citizens' committee had been working through the documents to uncover who had been working for the organisation in their region and what buildings and secret apartments were owned and used by the ministry.²²⁷ This was done in cooperation with the local citizens, who called and wrote in to the citizens' committee, in many cases anonymously, to give clues and report their suspicions in regard to possible Stasi workers and property in their neighbourhood.²²⁸ Others begged for the help of the committee to prove their innocence after false allegations.²²⁹ Their reputation had been destroyed through unfounded accusations of collaboration, and they were now dependent on the work of the committee to prove the public otherwise.

A number of letters, however, also questioned the legitimacy of the committee in handling such sensitive data. Raising the issue of data security laws, they asked what control function had been put in place to select members of the citizens' committee and demanded that the members at least be introduced to the public.²³⁰ Letters also came in to counter false accusations in the press, such as that the postal service, which had been found to have surveillance rooms and equipment, was continuing to spy on its customers, asking for evidence.²³¹

²²⁷ StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-3 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Informationen zu MfS-Objekten und konspirativen Wohnungen', 1990.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-5 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Rehabilitierungsgesuche von Bürgern', March 1990.

²³⁰ StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-4 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Bürgeranfrage hinsichtlich der Legitimation des Bürgerkomitees', Erfurt, 04 April 1990.

²³¹ StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-4 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Zurückweisung falscher Aussagen in der TLZ durch den Leiter der Postdirektion Erfurt', Schulze, Erfurt, 09 January 1990.

The discovery of the Stasi files had produced a multitude of issues around data protection, and the spontaneously-formed committee found itself needing to formalise its structures in order to continue its work. In the meantime, a culture of guilty until proven innocent established itself in the communities, companies and councils, as everything and everyone was put into question. Members of political groups and parties began requesting cross-examinations for Stasi collaboration to ensure that no former secret informants were working in politics, as they prepared for the upcoming elections in March. As much as the exposure of Stasi structures in society was an attempt to create transparency and faith in the new system, it also shook the trust of the electorate in their communal leaders and government.

At the public announcements on the cathedral square, however, the crowds vocally supported the work of the committee and the exposure of the ministry's informants. At the end of January, Wolf Biermann, the influential East German singer who had been denaturalised in 1976 due to his critical songwriting, took to the stage to give his two cents on how best to deal with the former agents. 'I'm not in a position to give you any uncle-like advice', he joked,

but I'm no sweet Jesus! I'm no pastor! I love my fellow humans!
But I hate these people! They have done us too much harm.
They have humiliated us!²³²

²³² 'Natürlich war ich dreizehn Jahre weg, und ich bin nicht in der Lage, euch hier irgendwelche onkelhaften Ratschläge zu geben, wie es hier in der DDR weitergehen soll. Das weiß ich noch weniger als ihr, denn ihr lebt ja hier. Aber wenn ich hier eben höre das jemand dafür wirbt, dass die Stasi wieder eingebaut wird in das normale Menschenleben, dann will ich euch ganz offen sagen: ich bin kein Herzjesulein! Ich bin kein Pastor! Ich liebe auch die Menschen! Aber ich hasse diese Leute! Sie haben uns viel zu viel Leid angetan. Sie haben uns gedemütigt!', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

He was interrupted by loud shouts from the audience. 'No', he replied,
there won't be a pogrom.

But you have to speak the truth. And I for one am not going to agonize about how best to reintegrate them into normal society. I think these people are in big trouble now. And I'm glad they're in trouble. They've earned it. They really have earned it, over many years.²³³

Speak of pogroms and hate was not new. Studies have found archival evidence of over eight-thousand-six-hundred racially-motivated hate crimes in the GDR, going back many decades.²³⁴ In 1975, citizens in Erfurt had violently rounded up a group of Algerian workers; attacks on contract-workers' homes followed. Even before the opening of the border, hate speech in the city had been on the rise, and from November 1989 onwards, nationalist slogans were used with growing frequency at demonstrations across the GDR.²³⁵

In early November, the district secretary had informed the city council in Erfurt of new offenses. At the *Thüringenhalle* event in October, he had publicly praised a local priest for his work against fascism; the church in which the clergyman worked was subsequently defaced with swastikas and phrases such as 'Jews should be gassed' and 'Long live the SS'.²³⁶ Although the local administration expressed their shock and disgust, and gave the police their full support in finding the culprits, the crime was treated as a singular issue, with

²³³ 'Nein, das gibt kein Pogrom. Man muss aber die Wahrheit sagen. Und ich würde mir jedenfalls nicht den Kopf darüber zerbrechen, wie man sie möglichst elegant wieder jetzt in das normale Menschenleben einfädelt. Ich denke, diese Leute sind jetzt in Schwierigkeiten. Ich gönne ihnen diese Schwierigkeiten. Die haben sie sich verdient. Ehrlich verdient, in langen Jahren', *ibid.*

²³⁴ Steffi Lehmann, 'Rechtsextremismus in der DDR', in Sebastian Liebold (et al.), *Demokratie in unruhigen Zeiten. Festschrift für Eckhard Jesse* (Baden-Baden: Nomis, 2018), p. 104.

²³⁵ Lehmann, 'Rechtsextremismus in der DDR', pp. 104-105.

²³⁶ 'Juden müssen vergast werden', 'Die SS lebe hoch', StA Erfurt, 1-5/255559 Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen, Vol. 7, 'Stadtverordnetenversammlung', 06 November 1989.

no debate about the extent of the phenomenon or wider causes. Only a few minutes beforehand, the discussions had addressed the issue of the police being overburdened with the new travel regulations, raising the question of whether the force would truly have the time or capacity to thoroughly investigate new hate crimes. Hate speech was no by no means a new phenomenon, but with an overstretched police force, little resistance and new realms of expression, it was given the opportunity to flourish.

In mid-February, just a few weeks after Biermann's remarks, an activist from the local women's group announced the end of the weekly demonstrations in Erfurt's city centre.²³⁷ Although the space continued to be used for regular large events, the remainder of February and March was dedicated to the election campaign for the first, and last, free parliamentary elections in the GDR. She argued that there may still be a lot of work to be done, but that there was no need any more for the weekly demonstrations, as the party had stepped down, and the Ministry for State Security was in the process of being dismantled.²³⁸ The crowd was calm as she made her speech. Every now and then they applauded politely. Whereas the local square had been filled with the voices of local politicians and communal representatives, artists and songwriters, doctors, church workers and members of various trade unions,²³⁹ the voices heard in the coming months would be mainly political campaigners from East and West. The revolution on the street had come to an

²³⁷ StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

end, but the restructuring of society would continue in the companies and councils.

Channelling Voice

Stasi in the Brickyard

As the citizens' committees unearthed more of the workings of the Ministry for Security, individual companies started scrutinising their own structures. In Eisenach, the local brickyard held a general meeting to discuss what should become of two members of staff who had been working for the Stasi. A West-German camera team happened to be in town and was permitted to film. The former assistant director and driver were made to wait outside whilst their colleagues sat inside around tables of six, voting on their future. The journalists described the atmosphere in the room as 'menacingly hostile', even though the company director had urged his workers that everyone deserves a second chance.²⁴⁰ Afterwards, several workers spoke up to give their verdict on the secret informants. Although willing to keep them, they insisted that the two should now do the dirtiest work in the company.

They must prove to us, that they are really willing, that they are really willing, to help our country and our economy back on its feet. And I would really like to hear that they regret [what they have done].²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ 'Die Stimmung im Saal ist drohend feindselig', StA Eisenach, 41.9/315 Filmaufnahmen, 'Das Ende der Geschichte. Fünf Tage in Eisenach – ein deutsches Tagebuch', Hessischer Rundfunk, 18 March 1990.

²⁴¹ '(...) auf jedem Fall sollen sie uns jetzt den Beweis bringen, dass sie wirklich gewillt sind, dass sie wirklich gewillt sind, unserem Land wieder und unserer Wirtschaft etwas mit auf die Beine zu helfen. Und ich hätte dann auch ganz gerne mal gehört, dass sie eigentlich bereuen, diese Tätigkeit jahrelang ausgeübt zu haben, gutes Geld eingesteckt zu haben, wo Bürger, die eine harte Arbeit machen mussten, eine dreckige Arbeit machen mussten, vielleicht die Hälfte verdient haben', *ibid.*

The two workers, having entered the room, responded to the comments whilst sitting amongst their colleagues with their arms folded. 'I have a heart too', said the driver, before arguing that his skills would be better put to use in his former field.²⁴² The assistant director asked for a probationary period, insisting that he would demonstrate through his actions that he was willing 'to make a full break with my past'.²⁴³ Neither, however, later accepted the positions offered to them.

As before, the behaviour of the former Stasi workers and their ability to show remorse and regret played an important part in fellow citizens' willingness to accept them back. Until they did so, they were physically excluded from many areas of collective life, an experience that the two Stasi informers reflected on in a second interview: 'the best example being the general meeting'.²⁴⁴ This societal exclusion was their punishment, along with the supposedly life-long sentence to take on the hardest and most dangerous work in the company. The two men were expected to plead guilty, and then serve their time under their colleagues, in a realignment of power. It was a form of amnesty and punishment, rolled into one.

The two *Stasi* informants were clearly confused how it had come to this verdict, 'despite having shown readiness [to change]'.²⁴⁵ Even though they claimed to have learnt a lot in the recent weeks, with the driver even admitting 'we were without a doubt the ones executing the party's regime', they

²⁴² 'Ich habe auch nur ein Herz', *ibid.*

²⁴³ 'Ich will einen absoluten Schnitt machen mit meiner Vergangenheit', *ibid.*

²⁴⁴ 'das beste Beispiel war die Versammlung', *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ 'obwohl wir jetzt diese Bereitschaft zeigten', *ibid.*

nevertheless felt that they had been vilified.²⁴⁶ They raised what they considered to be 'irrationality' in the way that their colleagues decided to treat them, arguing that their unit was 'a small part of a larger structure. Very, very small', and that society as a whole carried a common responsibility.²⁴⁷ They appeared to have been hoping for a clean slate and a second chance; a kind of *Destasification*.

They were not the only ones in the room, however, to have felt that the decision reached was the wrong one. Another worker spoke to the journalists in his private apartment, arguing that the real criminals should be prosecuted, 'but you cannot prosecute every single comrade'.²⁴⁸ Despite having done time in an MfS prison himself, he sympathised with the difficult situation that the two Stasi informers, 'who first need to face the hate', now found themselves in.²⁴⁹ But he contended that they were still humans, and that it was therefore important to find a way to work with them, 'whether we like it or not'.²⁵⁰ His girlfriend chipped in to say that 'even if everyone says' everyone who worked for the *Stasi* should be lynched, that was not the way forward.²⁵¹ The new democracy needed to be learnt, but the brickyard worker warned that:

It must not be the way I experienced it in the general meeting, that there is a new kind of fear. A new fear amongst those who now think differently. (...) Say, for example, my opinion, which is still a socialist-communist opinion. I

²⁴⁶ 'Unter dem Regime der Partei waren wir sicherlich die Ausführenden', *ibid.*

²⁴⁷ 'Unvernunft', 'Ein kleines Stückchen vom Großen. Ein ganz ganz kleines', *ibid.*

²⁴⁸ 'Aber man darf nicht jeden einzelnen Genossen verurteilen', *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ 'die sich erstmal auch Haß stellen müssen', *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ 'Ob wir wollen oder nicht', *ibid.*

²⁵¹ 'Wenn jetzt jeder meint, hier, weil der nur bei der Staatssicherheit oder wo gearbeitet hat, deswegen müsste man ihn am Baum aufhängen. Also das ist mit Sicherheit nicht der richtige Weg. Ich meine, wir haben das ja alle mitgemacht in der Vergangenheit und haben dieses System alle mitgeschaffen', *ibid.*

should not be afraid to voice that opinion.²⁵²

‘Are you afraid?’, asked the journalist.²⁵³ ‘Yes’, he said, I am afraid’.²⁵⁴

The general meeting in the brickyard is an example of reconciliation on a communal level in the everyday of the GDR transformation. Sanya Romeike writes that the circumstances in the GDR in 1990 were ‘wholly different’ from that of Germany after 1945, as ‘the process of coping with the past was not guided or controlled “from outside,” but initiated by the East German people themselves’.²⁵⁵ The decision usually taken by the new government was being met by the citizens in small collectives in their places of work. Voting took place with a show of hands in front of colleagues, forms of punishment were suggested out loud, and those who thought differently dared not say so. Comments such as ‘the two men have both committed a certain sin, although we do not know the details’,²⁵⁶ demonstrate that under these specific circumstances, where evidence was not readily available, the jury relied on emotion to reach their verdict. What is more, the accused were excluded from parts of their own trial.

It is a process that would be defined as a ‘transition from below’ in the political sciences; an important part of establishing the new democratic order.²⁵⁷

²⁵² ‘Und da darf es auch jetzt nicht wieder sein, wie ich das auch in der Versammlung erlebt habe, dass es eine neue Angst gibt. Eine neue Angst der Jetzt-Andersdenkenden. (...) Also, sagen wir mal, meine Meinung, die immer noch eine Sozialistische, Kommunistische ist. Das ich jetzt nicht Angst haben brauch, meine Meinung zu äußern’, *ibid.*

²⁵³ ‘Haben Sie Angst?’, *ibid.*

²⁵⁴ ‘Ja, ich habe Angst’, *ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Romeike, *Transitional Justice in Germany*, p. 43.

²⁵⁶ ‘Eine gewisse Sünde ist begangen worden, von beiden Herren, wo wir im Einzelnen nicht wissen, was das war’, StA Eisenach, 41.9/315 Filmaufnahmen, ‘Das Ende der Geschichte. Fünf Tage in Eisenach – ein deutsches Tagebuch’, Hessischer Rundfunk, 18 March 1990.

²⁵⁷ Brigitte Weiffen, ‘From Domestic to International Instruments for Dealing with a Violent Past: Causes, Concomitants and Consequences for Democratic Transitions’ in Aleida Assmann & Linda Shortt (Eds.), *Memory and Political Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 92.

Here, justice lies with the victims of the previous regime and the perpetrators are consequently prosecuted and punished. This can 'not only help to prevent future violations of human rights', but 'is also necessary to assert the supremacy of democratic norms and values and to encourage public belief in these'.²⁵⁸ However, this decision can also alienate wrongdoers and deepen cleavages in society.²⁵⁹ Granting amnesty, on the other hand, has generally been found to be more effective in stabilising new democracies.²⁶⁰

In this example from Eisenach, the consequences are clear, as neither of the two Stasi workers accepted the jobs offered to them as coal machinists, even though they were willing, in theory, to stay within the company. Taking on the new role would have meant accepting punishment, not from the government, but from their co-workers, and to continue to work alongside them in what would undoubtedly have been an unbearable atmosphere. Their only other option was to leave. In both cases, they were excluded from the society they were once a part of, and a culture of hate and fear was produced in the process.

Conclusion

When Albert Hirschman wrote his theory of voice and exit in 1970 as a way of gaining 'a more complete understanding of social processes',²⁶¹ East and West Germany were just starting to consider new approaches towards closer cooperation between the two states. Travel westward from the GDR was only

²⁵⁸ Weiffen, 'From Domestic to International Instruments', pp. 90-91.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 18.

possible under special circumstances, and public criticism of the state was a punishable offence. It would take another twenty years before the dissatisfaction of the citizens with their state structures reached breaking point, despite the lack of political channels. Forced to respond to the great numbers of citizens leaving the country, citizens and state actors started using voice in the public sphere.

By October 1989, the citizens in the district of Erfurt were no longer willing to accept the practices of their government and decided to turn these back on themselves. By insisting on participating in the official 'dialogue' events, which were intended more as a performance of democratic practice than a true debate, the citizens were able to unveil the power structures and methods of exclusion that had defined the official political sphere for so long. When the communal leaders preached their plans for reform, the citizens refused to listen, drowning them out with a cloud of noise, and exposing the unwillingness of their representatives to listen to them in return. Although this breakdown in communication and subversion of power is documented especially well in Erfurt, records point to similar occurrences in various towns across the region. The detailed transcripts in Erfurt therefore describe a much wider development in which citizens put existing structures into question and found innovative ways to enable participation in the political debate.

Through these demonstrations, the force of the crowd and its ability to take down structures through use of voice becomes very apparent. This force was able to generate positive change in removing unfair structures, but it also had a threatening aspect that divided the communities and created a new

enemy. By December 1989, the state and the new political organisations were struggling to maintain order, and to keep the balance between vocal political expression, intimidation and physical violence. As the peaceful effects of using song, candles and hand-holding waned, the parties relied on one another to establish a form of mediated crowd control.

From here on, governance was handed to the people until new formal structures were in place. Spontaneous groups formed to uncover past practices, expose the perpetrators and suggest ways of rehabilitation. This process was dominated by emotions, which were used to determine how guilty or remorseful former *Stasi* workers were, and public exposure and social punishment were the chosen form of sentencing. These practices were also scrutinised by the citizens, who questioned the democratic viability or fruitfulness of the exercise, but these criticisms were pushed into the private sphere, where they were expressed in anonymous letters or private interviews. The public sphere had been taken over again, with a new fear of expression evolving.

So far, the autumn of 1989 has always been framed as democratic and revolutionary, with the widespread public protest being seen as the active response of a politically enlightened citizenry. And while the demand for change was no doubt tied to democratic ideals, the strong use of voice at this late stage raises the question whether the autumn revolution in 1989 was indeed the democratic process based on reform and discussion that it set out to be, or rather overwhelmingly an exercise in crowd power and control. For without the right channels or structures to support it, the force of the crowds

that gathered quickly took on a course of its own and became increasingly difficult to control.

As the leaders in nearby Prague were similarly unable to control their citizens, 'they explicitly encouraged citizens to act on their own initiative', and to carry out reforms in their workplaces.²⁶² However, whereas the citizens in Czechoslovakia were tasked with implementing the existing constitution,²⁶³ the purge in the GDR did not follow any agreed procedures, and was rather decided locally and at whim. This quickly created a volatile situation in which impulsive decisions could easily be enforced through majority approval. It begs the question of whether use of voice is per se democratic, or rather, as Hirschman argues, potentially a strong and destructive force.

By exploring the events in East Germany through Hirschman's ideas on exit and voice, it becomes possible to see how the vigour of voice, when left unpractised, has the ability to derail and dismantle existing structures. It also sheds light on how larger developments like the departure of East German citizens and the opening of the border are interconnected with the voicing of opinion on a much smaller scale, and how these dynamics reinforce one another. Notably, a prolonged focus on voice and exit shows what Hirschman did not explore; how difficult it is to control freedom of speech and assembly over time, and how structures emerge and function out of urgent necessity.

²⁶² Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face*, p. 155.

²⁶³ Ibid.

In 1994, Erich Honecker would argue that the events in the GDR were simply put ‘a fight for power’.²⁶⁴ What appears clear, is that gaining, maintaining and using the power of voice to enact own wishes greatly overrode attempts at developing fair and inclusive structures and practices. For the ‘will of the people’ would continue to decide and divide even after new structures had been put into place. Just how difficult it would be to reconcile citizens and develop fair practices would become clear as new and old political actors braced to jointly organise the first free elections in the GDR. The next chapter explores how citizens dealt with the need to remediate this relationship and work around the new divisions after the experience of the autumn.

²⁶⁴ Erich Honecker, *Moabiter Notizen. Letztes schriftliches Zeugnis und Gesprächsprotokolle vom BRD-Besuch 1987 aus dem persönlichen Besitz Erich Honeckers*, Berlin 1994, p. 14, referenced in Martin Sabrow (Ed.), *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), p. 18.

2. Political Power

Voice and Loyalty

On the sixteenth of January 1990, the mayor of Erfurt penned a letter to the president of the East German parliament, asking for elections to be held as soon as possible.²⁶⁵ The new political parties and groups had refused to recognise the council representatives that had taken office after the falsified elections in May 1989; this 'tense situation' was making it increasingly difficult for the city council to reach any decisions, even in cooperation with the round table.²⁶⁶ The city council had already written to the East German parliament on the sixth of November 1989 with a similar request to hold an election in order to help stabilise politics, create trust and stop the work force from leaving the country.²⁶⁷

Two months on, the request had gained even more urgency, for the local CDU faction had officially withdrawn its support on the eleventh of January and gone into opposition. In the fear that other factions would follow suit, the mayor begged his superiors to hold a snap election.²⁶⁸ This, of course, was exactly what the CDU in Erfurt had intended. Their speaker told the press that the decision to leave the governing block had been taken due to the 'continuing domination' of the Socialist Unity Party in the city council.²⁶⁹ A row had

²⁶⁵ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/69 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Brief vom Oberbürgermeister von Erfurt an den Präsidenten der Volkskammer', Erfurt, 16 January 1990.

²⁶⁶ 'angespannten Lage', *ibid.*

²⁶⁷ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/68 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Brief an das Präsidium der Volkskammer der DDR', Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Erfurt, Erfurt, 06 November 1989.

²⁶⁸ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/69 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Brief vom Oberbürgermeister von Erfurt an den Präsidenten der Volkskammer', Erfurt, 16 January 1990.

²⁶⁹ 'noch immer (...) beherrscht werde', Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Republik (henceforth ACDP), 1/16/1-1 Presse-Archiv DDR Kommunalpolitik, 'CDU-Fraktion verließ Erfurter Stadtparlament', Deutsche Presse Agentur, 11 Januar 1990.

erupted after the council offered forty SED mandates to members of the new groups and political parties. The other groups rejected the offer, and the CDU faction labelled it an attempt to pacify the other actors and uphold a 'fake democracy'.²⁷⁰

On the twenty-eighth of January 1990, however, the decision was taken by the East German parliament to move the planned general election forward to March eighteenth.²⁷¹ Although the governmental decision was officially based on an agreement between the PDS and the SPD, this too was forced through by the CDU. The former bloc party had threatened to leave the government if the SPD did not join them in the new 'government of national responsibility', thereby stripping the SPD of their oppositional role.²⁷² Although this date gave the established parties a clear headstart, as the newer political parties had little time to prepare, the CDU and PDS were able to use the instability at regional and national level to push it through. The new political groups that emerged from the civic movement had refused to accept a long-term intermediary government made of established office holders, and yet the former political elites were able to use the uncertainty surrounding their own failure to regain control.

Within only a few weeks, local actors needed to organise free and fair elections. Whereas the campaigning was left to the political parties and groups, the practical organisation of the elections was split between the election

²⁷⁰ 'Scheindemokratie', *ibid.*

²⁷¹ Sebastian Richter, 'Der Weg zur freien Volkskammerwahl am 18. März 1990', in Klaus Dietmar Henke (Ed.), *Revolution und Vereinigung 1989/90. Als in Deutschland die Realität die Phantasie überholte* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2009), p. 333.

²⁷² 'Regierung der nationalen Verantwortung', Richter, 'Der Weg zur freien Volkskammerwahl', p. 333.

commission, which managed the political parties and the cost of the election, and the local election offices, which were responsible for the organisation and logistics of the event.²⁷³ Furthermore, in Erfurt, an election investigation committee was formed to review the manipulation of the last communal elections that had taken place in 1989.²⁷⁴ Would this be enough to free the act of voting from its political associations in GDR times and to restore trust in the system and its political leaders?

The last communal elections in May 1989 had caused a scandal that had quickly weakened trust in the government and put further pressure on the state to respond. As the elections in the GDR had only given the option to confirm the list of suggested candidates in the governing block, as opposed to selecting candidates, the act of voting had been more a display of loyalty, or 'political declaration',²⁷⁵ than an expression of choice. Party officials had therefore focussed on ensuring that as many people as possible went to vote, so that they could publish high numbers of attendance. As addressed in the first chapter, heightened loyalty can help to bind citizens to the system and, under normal circumstances, 'makes exit less likely'.²⁷⁶ The Socialist Unity Party had indeed invested heavily in the elections as a 'way of enhancing societal mobilisation

²⁷³ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/70 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll der 4. Sitzung des Interimsparlaments vom 04.04.1990 in Erfurt / Anlage Information zum Stand der Vorbereitung der Kommunalwahlen am 6. Mai 1990', Erfurt, 04 April 1990.

²⁷⁴ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/70 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll des 3. Interimsparlament am 21.03.1990 / Anlage Wahluntersuchungsausschuß der Stadtverordnetenversammlung Erfurt wegen Verdachts der Wahlfälschung im Mai 1989', Erfurt, 21 March 1990.

²⁷⁵ 'Politikbekenntnis'. Andrea Herz, *Wahl und Wahlbetrug im Mai 1989. DDR-Kommunalwahlen im Thüringer Raum* (Erfurt: Landesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, April 2004), p. 11.

²⁷⁶ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 77.

and integration'.²⁷⁷ However, in taking an active part in their society, loyalty amongst citizens also activates and increases the power of their voice.²⁷⁸

Knowing this, citizens had used the threat of not going to vote to bargain with the state. The clergy in Erfurt, which had requested to put independent candidates up for the elections in 1989 and was refused on the grounds that candidates had to be a member of one of the political parties or organisations listed on the SED-led 'unity list', had consequently threatened not to vote at all.²⁷⁹ In Langula near Mühlhausen, the mayor had received an anonymous letter from one street, in which all the residents refused to vote until the issue with the water supply had been rectified.²⁸⁰ Another street of citizens in Gotha had declined to vote due to the state of the environment.²⁸¹ Furthermore, the Ministry for Security suspected that some citizens, that had already applied to leave the country, were using their non-participation in the elections to force the state's approval.²⁸²

The head of the department at the microelectronics firm in Erfurt had also voiced his intent to cross out all the candidates due to the economic stagnation in the GDR and the failure to meet the demands of production and people. Further reasons reportedly given to refrain from voting included the election procedure, the stipulation of candidates, and various administrative

²⁷⁷ 'ein gesellschaftliches Mobilisierungs- und Integrationsmittel', Richter, 'Der Weg zur freien Volkskammerwahl', p. 329.

²⁷⁸ Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 77

²⁷⁹ Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv Erfurt (henceforth BStU), Eft BdL 980 Büro der Leitung; Politisch-operative Arbeit; Kommunalwahlen 1989, 'Information zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Durchführung der Kommunalwahlen 1990', Erfurt, 7 May 1989.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

rules that had ‘supposedly disenfranchised GDR citizens’ and contributed to ‘the broken relationship between the state and its people’.²⁸³ The MfS Major concluded the report by recognising that

The close assessment of these and other similar cases demonstrates that the failure of state and local organisations to keep their promises has led to the **in part justified** annoyance of the citizens and damaged the trust between state and people.²⁸⁴

A few days after the 1989 communal elections in the GDR, the news reached the public that the citizens’ groups in Erfurt had recorded more no-votes in a handful of polling centres than the official total published by the state for the whole town of Erfurt.²⁸⁵ Although few GDR citizens were surprised to hear that the result had been manipulated, the confirmation nevertheless undermined the legitimacy of the government. Citizens from other towns and districts began posting petitions questioning the election results.²⁸⁶ By statistically proving the election fraud, the citizens’ groups had dealt a blow to the state so strong as to erode any remaining trust amongst the people and effectively triggering the revolution.

One of the central demands at the autumn demonstrations in the district of Erfurt in 1989 was for free and fair elections. The failure of the government to respond to the wishes of the electorate had led some citizens to leave the country and others to take to the streets to voice their discontent, deepening

²⁸³ ‘die scheinbare Entmündigung des DDR-Bürgers’, ‘das gestörte Verhältnis zwischen Bevölkerung und Partei/Regierung’, *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ ‘Bei konkreter Bewertung dieser und anderer vorliegender Sachverhalte wird deutlich, daß bisher nicht realisierte Versprechungen staatlicher und örtlicher Organe zur **teilweise berechtigten** Verärgerung von Bürgern beitrugen und somit das Vertrauensverhältnis zwischen Bürger und Staatsorgan gestört wurde’ (my emphasis), *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 82.

²⁸⁶ See, for example, ‘Eingabe von Friedrich Schulz an den Kreistag Rügen’ in Katharina Kempken (Ed.), ‘Einspruch gegen die Gültigkeit der Wahl’ *Die Kommunalwahlen in der DDR im Jahr 1989* (Berlin: Metropol, 2015), p. 50.

existing divisions. But how would state and citizens in East Germany go about re-establishing trust in their structures and in one another? And what would the new form of voting in free and open elections mean for the power of voice in Eastern Germany? For the first time, citizens would have the opportunity to truly choose between candidates and therefore regain trust in the democratic system and their representation, but the act of voting would no longer have the primary function of expressing loyalty, and in return, the individual votes could potentially hold less political weight.

Would the introduction of democratic elections suffice to give citizens the feeling of empowerment and to help them to develop a new level of trust in the system? Daniele Allen demonstrates that democracies function through trust and sacrifice, with some voters always bringing sacrifices for the majority.²⁸⁷ Minority voters need to have enough trust in their fellow citizens and in the governing structures to accept outcomes and deal with political loss.²⁸⁸ The 'central feature of democratic politics' is therefore 'its commitment to preserving the allegiance of citizens, including electoral minorities, *despite* majority rule'.²⁸⁹ Subsequently, East Germany faced the task of reconciling members of the public so that they may accept the democratic decisions of the majority. How would these divisions play out in the heat of the upcoming election campaign?

²⁸⁷ Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers. Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. xvi, p. 47.

²⁸⁸ Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, p. 47.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

Historical studies of the final election in the GDR have so far been written from a national perspective, focussing on the political campaigns of the individual parties, or often placing the first free election at the end of the story of the autumn revolution.²⁹⁰ Others present the organisation of the parliamentary election as one of the greatest tasks and achievements of the national round table of the GDR.²⁹¹ In his detailed book on the central role of election law in the East German democratisation process, Hans Michael Kloth characterises the run-up to the parliamentary election as a 'fight' for 'equal opportunity', 'publicity', 'material equipment', 'access to the GDR media' and 'transparency'.²⁹² But how were these issues fought out in the everyday, in East German communities, and how did citizens find workable solutions in the space of just a few weeks?

Although the political effects of moving the parliamentary election forward have been addressed,²⁹³ the question of how this feat was organised logistically at a local level has received no attention. And not only that; the year 1990 would see East Germans face another three elections in the space of nine months, as a new communal, state and federal government needed to be appointed by the end of the year. Would the election marathon bring citizens

²⁹⁰ See, for example, Markus Trömmel, *Der verhaltene Gang in die deutsche Einheit. Das Verhältnis zwischen den Oppositionsgruppen und der (SED-)PDS im letzten Jahr der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002); Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (München: Beck, 2009); Rainer Eckert, *Revolution in Potsdam. Eine Stadt zwischen Lethargie, Revolte und Freiheit (1989/1990)* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsgesellschaft GmbH, 2017).

²⁹¹ See Uwe Thaysen, *Der Runde Tisch. Oder: Wo blieb das Volk? Der Weg der DDR in die Demokratie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), Thoralf Barth, *Die Zentrale des Umbruchs von 1989/90. Meinungen über den Runden Tisch der DDR* (Berlin: Weißensee, 2009), Francesca Weil, *Die Runden Tische in der DDR 1989/90* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014).

²⁹² 'Der Kampf um Chancengleichheit (...), Öffentlichkeit (...), eine materielle „Erstausrüstung“ (...), Zugang zu den DDR-Medien (...), Offenlegung'. Kloth, *Vom „Zettelfalten“ zum freien Wählen*, p. 14.

²⁹³ See Richter, 'Der Weg zur freien Volkskammerwahl', p. 336.

together, restore trust in the system and one another, and help to form a new kind of loyalty to the state? This chapter looks at these events to examine how communal actors organised the elections whilst also managing social divisions, renegotiating citizenship and finding ways of dealing with political loss.

Establishing Trust in Elections

The same procedure as every year?

The divisions of the autumn and the scandal around the Ministry for State Security had by no means created ideal circumstances for placing trust in fellow citizens. Against the backdrop of the elections in May 1989, new actors were needed to restore trust in the structures and procedures. One of the main aims of the local government was therefore to find ‘unbiased’ people, with no previous history of collaboration with the state, to run the new elections.²⁹⁴ However, ‘new democracies do not start with new citizens: they take what they get’.²⁹⁵ How would local representatives try to create trust without being able to replace the entire administration?

In Eisenach, it sufficed to simply put in place two new members of staff to oversee the district election office. ‘As far as I can remember, hardly anything changed’, said one of the new election leaders, a mechanical designer who had taken part in the local citizens’ committee and the round table, looking back.

²⁹⁴ ‘unbelastet’, Interview with Ulrike Quentel, Eisenach, 17 January 2018.

²⁹⁵ Anne Sa’adah, *Germany’s Second Chance. Trust, Justice, and Democratization* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 1.

It was the same old procedure, mayors, and route plans, (...) the same old machinery, the old technology. Just with the addition of a neutral person. It mirrors what I experienced in the district council, too. The whole organisation, structurally, continued as before. Except that we were put in place to ensure, to monitor, that everyone played by the proper rules, with no cheating.²⁹⁶

The new leader in Eisenach was put in charge of the Elections Team, a group made up of various council workers that came together at the same time every year to organise the election and had done so over many years.²⁹⁷ It was their responsibility to plan the logistics, timetables and routes for the day, as well as arranging the printing and distribution of the ballot cards. Their experience and insights were invaluable for the new election leaders, who had received training at the central election office in Erfurt, but who had no previous experience in the organisation of elections and needed to learn on their feet. The new team leader in Eisenach recalls needing to get to terms with the terminology and procedures, such as what a voting register was, and how it worked.²⁹⁸ Fortunately, the former head of the local election team had patiently explained the procedures and communication networks. 'If they had closed their desks and left ...' he says, looking back.²⁹⁹ Although the ending is left open, suggesting that the task would have been impossible, it is clear that the successful organisation of the elections depended heavily on the support and cooperation of the former election team.

²⁹⁶ 'Also nach meiner Erinnerung hat sich eigentlich fast nichts geändert, der ALTE Ablauf, die Bürgermeister, die Routenpläne, NUR dass eine Vertrauensperson mitkam. Also die alte Maschinerie, die alte Technologie blieb bestehen. Nur überall kam eine neutrale Person. Das spiegelte das wider, so wie ich mich auch in dem Rat des Kreises erlebt habe. Der ganze Apparat lief von der Struktur her so weiter. Nur wir waren eingesetzt, dafür zu sorgen, zu überwachen, dass es mit den ordentlichen, betrugsfreien Spielregeln läuft', Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ 'Wenn die ihre Schreibtische zugemacht hätten und gegangen wären', *ibid.*

Nevertheless, coming in to manage the old election team after the public response to the last election and the events of the autumn also posed some significant challenges. Even though their work had essentially been disgraced through the exposure of the electoral fraud in May 1989, the former election team was expected to continue working in the same role, but to new guidelines. Their years of experience were highly valuable, and yet the new management demonstrated that there was no full confidence in the administration's ability to conduct a democratic election. The workers were therefore going to be scrutinised in their work and procedure throughout the event. 'And the two of us (...) and the other youngsters overseeing the elections, we were the executors', said the new election organiser, figuratively speaking.³⁰⁰

The metaphor shows how negatively the presence of the new leaders could be perceived and how difficult the social relations were at this time. Power relations had shifted over the autumn, with the new actors now giving orders to the former elite. Not everyone was therefore willing to welcome or greet the new team leaders, as their arrival clearly signalled that things would no longer continue as before. Although the common aim was to democratise the elections, for some members of staff the changes nonetheless also meant an abrupt end to their careers, and in some respects their life stories. It also had the irony of both valuing the contribution and expertise of the former administration whilst at the same time devaluing their work.

³⁰⁰ 'Und wir beide (...) und die Jungspunde, die da noch so mit bei der Wahl rumsaßen, wir waren die Vollstrecker', *ibid.*

Fortunately, the new heads of the district election office had the full support of the head of the district council, a longstanding figure of authority in the region who had experience of managing people and helped to mediate between old and new actors.³⁰¹ All the same, managing the old team required a lot of tact and understanding. 'After all, we were dealing with people, with their biographies', said the new election leader, emphasising the need to consider the human level.³⁰² In order to enable peaceful cooperation, there were a few unwritten rules. He explained that 'we (...) never spoke backwards', meaning that the focus was on the present, and the election of 1989 was not to be discussed.³⁰³ Utmost importance was therefore placed on completing the task that had been set. Nevertheless, the tense situation and the short window of time would mean that the new organisers would face additional interpersonal challenges as they also depended on other actors.

For example, one of the main tasks assigned to the leader of the election team was to inform the public of the new voting procedure. Information events were organised in local inns and advice was printed in the local press.³⁰⁴ This included instructions on how to ensure you were registered to vote, how to mark your polling card and what the new layout of a polling centre would look like.³⁰⁵ Citizens were advised that there would be on average seven helpers present in each polling station, representing different political and communal groups. 'This (...) is a precaution, so that no one will protest by saying the

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² 'das waren doch Menschen, das waren ihre Biografien', *ibid.*

³⁰³ 'Wir haben, ich jedenfalls, nie rückwärts gesprochen', *ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Private Collection Johannes Wallbrecht (henceforth PCJW), 'Organisationstalent ist gefragt vor den ersten freien Wahlen', *Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger*, n.d. est. March 1990.

election has not followed legal procedure', the district election office leader in Eisenach told the press.³⁰⁶ In Erfurt, members of the local district round table also planned to strategically place 'trustworthy persons' in the polling stations, an offer which was gladly accepted by the election organisers.³⁰⁷

Detailed advance information around these plans was intended to create transparency around the procedures and foster understanding and acceptance of the new regulations. In the regional capital, however, cooperation with the local press was not successful, with the election leaders warning at the beginning of March that the possibilities for informing the general public about election procedure via the press was not being used to its full potential.³⁰⁸ On the twelfth of March, just six days before the election, the district election leader called the press coverage 'sparse' and urged the members of the election committee to approach local journalists directly.³⁰⁹ With the press unwilling to act as a mouthpiece for state organisations, the election organisers would have to find other ways of reaching the public.

For the desire to promote trust and transparency was not the only reason to ensure that citizens were well informed on election procedure. This time,

³⁰⁶ 'Mit dieser Mischung wollen wir von vornherein verhindern, daß Proteste kommen, die Wahl sei nicht legal durchgeführt worden', *ibid.*

³⁰⁷ 'Vertrauenspersonen', Landesarchiv Thüringen – Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (henceforth LATH – HStA Weimar), 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 – Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 12.3.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

³⁰⁸ LATH – HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 – Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Stützpunktbeauftragten des Wahlbüros am 1.3.1990', Wahlbüro der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

³⁰⁹ 'spärllich', LATH – HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 – Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 12.3.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

citizens would no longer be visited at work or at home and reminded to vote. Instead, they would need to take own initiative to ensure that they were registered to take part. Polling cards were sent out by post, but those citizens that did not receive a card were supposed to visit the town hall to check if they were listed on the register. This time, it would only be possible for GDR citizens to vote once each, and election organisers were to adhere strictly to the voting register to ensure votes were not duplicated. Many citizens had moved away, however, with some going to West Germany, and others leaving and then returning. Towards the end of February, the mayor of Erfurt reported that they were dealing with around five hundred changes to the voting register every single week.³¹⁰ Establishing a record of voters under these circumstances was therefore an especially difficult task.

During the election committee meeting in Erfurt, concerns were raised that GDR citizens that had moved away but had failed to give official notice of departure were still being issued with polling cards.³¹¹ The election committee accepted that those citizens living in West Germany, but whose main address was still in the GDR, were therefore likely to take part in the vote.³¹² A few weeks later, the news emerged that citizens that had moved away were planning coach trips to the GDR border region to be able to make use of their

³¹⁰ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll der 1. Sitzung der örtlichen Volksvertretung vom 21.02.1990 der Stadt Erfurt, Anlage. Bericht des Rates zur Lage in der Stadt Erfurt', Erfurt, 21 February 1990.

³¹¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 8.3.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 09 March 1990.

³¹² Ibid.

right to vote.³¹³ Others, that had already booked holidays abroad in March, called the elections offices to complain 'in a multitude of ways' that they would be unable to cast their vote due to the timing of their holiday.³¹⁴ The leader of the district election team in Eisenach recalls one citizen in particular that was outraged at not being able to vote on the day of the election. 'She wasn't on the register', he recalls.³¹⁵ 'She had simply missed the date, or not read it properly. But it just wasn't possible [for her to vote]. It wasn't possible'.³¹⁶ With society in upheaval, it was increasingly difficult for election organisers to create a stable record of eligible voters, whilst also fostering understanding for the new regulations, trust in the election procedure and, at the same, navigating social divisions.

Other issues began piling up. First, the venues, which had previously hosted the GDR elections, were no longer willing to provide their spaces for the upcoming elections. 'We are currently having some difficulties with restaurants and youth clubs', announced the mayor of Erfurt in late February, 'which are, and we have to say this very clearly, firmly opposing the establishment of polling stations on their premises'.³¹⁷ Finding other suitable venues at short notice and informing the local voters of its whereabouts would be tricky.

³¹³ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben von der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Wahl 4 - Bezirk Erfurt an das Wahlbüro der DDR Berlin', Erfurt, 09 March 1990.

³¹⁴ 'auf unterschiedlichste Art', *ibid.*

³¹⁵ 'Sie stand nicht im Wählerverzeichnis.' Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

³¹⁶ 'Sie hatte ja einfach das irgendwie verpasst oder nicht gelesen. Aber es ging eben nicht. Es ging eben nicht.' *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ 'Zur Zeit gibt es einige Schwierigkeiten mit Gaststätten und Jugendklubs, wir müssen das so deutlich sagen, die sich gegen die Einrichtung von Wahllokalen in ihren Einrichtungen sperren', StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll der 1. Sitzung der örtlichen Volksvertretung vom 21.02.1990 der Stadt Erfurt, Anlage. Bericht des Rates zur Lage in der Stadt Erfurt', Erfurt, 21 February 1990.

Undeterred, the council remained determined that they would manage to convince the establishments in time to let them hold the elections there.³¹⁸ As the spaces were technically available, this task mainly required interpersonal skills to appease the venue management.

However, other challenges involved material shortages, that nevertheless relied on social connections and brought communal power structures to light. For whereas the towns in the GDR were not short of ballot boxes, voting booths were in desperately short supply.³¹⁹ According to the Erfurt district council, there was only one voting booth available per polling station, which presented a problem, especially in the larger towns, now that citizens were to cast their vote in secret.³²⁰ Erfurt and other neighbouring towns began commissioning new voting booths to be built, which were to cost around five hundred GDR mark each.³²¹ In Erfurt alone, one-hundred-and-eighty new booths would be needed for the upcoming elections, a financial cost that the local councils were, however, unwilling to cover.³²² A few days later, it emerged that there was an additional shortage of material from which to build new voting booths.³²³ Luckily, the material shortage was solved, and the local council eventually agreed to allocate two thousand marks to the building of additional booths.³²⁴

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben an das Ministerium für innere Angelegenheiten der DDR, Zentrales Wahlbüro, Berlin', Erfurt, 20 February 1990.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll der 1. Sitzung der örtlichen Volksvertretung vom 21.02.1990 der Stadt Erfurt, Anlage. Bericht des Rates zur Lage in der Stadt Erfurt', Erfurt, 21 February 1990.

³²⁴ Ibid.

Nevertheless, two weeks later, on the sixth of March, the shortage of voting booths was back on the agenda at the election team meeting.³²⁵ With twelve days to go until the election, election organisers discussed an offer from the Christian Democratic Union in Thüringen to support the material realisation of the elections with the possibility of supplying some of the needed voting booths.³²⁶ The ensuing discussion brought to light that many councils had already struck deals with colleagues in West Germany to borrow voting booths from their partner towns.³²⁷ Two days later the team met again, and one member of staff alerted others to the fact that it was acceptable for empty rooms to be used as voting booths.³²⁸

But the successful organisation of the elections relied on more than just venues and voting booths. For, by the time of the election, each ward would need to have found enough volunteers to help man the polling stations and to form election committees. On the twenty-first of February, the dean of the local protestant church wrote to his clergy to ready them for the challenge. 'As we are all aware', he wrote, 'we are short of preparation time, and the organisation of the election committees will be especially difficult now that the National Front has gone'.³²⁹ Consequently, the local mayors had been asked to organise

³²⁵ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 6.3.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 07 March 1990.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 8.3.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 09 March 1990,

³²⁹ 'Es war uns allen klar, daß die Zeit der Vorbereitung viel zu kurz ist und damit die Organisation der Wahlausschüsse nach Wegfall der Nationalen Front sehr problematisch ist', Private Collection Christhard Wagner (henceforth PCCW), 'Brief vom Superintendenten an alle Pastorinnen und Pfarrer der Superintendentur Eisenach', Eisenach, 21 February 1990.

the election committees, and the church ministers were instructed to contact their local mayors to hurry things along.³³⁰

The mayors, however, were not willing to oblige. On the twenty-sixth of February, the election organisers in Eisenach wrote to the district election committee in Erfurt to explain that the local mayors had declined to take on the responsibility of organising the local election committees.³³¹ At a meeting on the twenty-third of February, they had argued that electoral law stipulated that the organisation of the election committees was not within their remit, but rather fell to the election commission.³³² Indeed, the new election law, passed on the twentieth of February 1990, stated only that the 'the election board in the local constituency' was tasked with establishing the committees.³³³ Consequently, the round table issued an urgent call for support in the daily press, summoning all citizens, political parties and organisations to come forward to help.³³⁴

Similar reports arrived in the central district office from the local election teams in Erfurt and Gotha, with almost half of the wards reporting problems in finding staff for the election committees, or no local initiative at all.³³⁵ On the

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben vom Rat des Kreises Eisenach Wahlstützpunkt an den Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt - Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt zum Thema Stand der Vorbereitung der Wahl im Kreis', Eisenach, 26 February 1990.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ 'Die Wahlkommissionen der Wahlkreise bilden (...) die Wahlvorstände der Stimmbezirke', Ordnung zur Durchführung der Wahl zur Volkskammer der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Wahlordnung), 20 February 1990 <https://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl_DDR1990_I_9.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2020).

³³⁴ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben vom Rat des Kreises Eisenach Wahlstützpunkt an den Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt - Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt zum Thema Stand der Vorbereitung der Wahl im Kreis', Eisenach, 26 February 1990.

³³⁵ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben vom Rat des Kreises Gotha, Stützpunkt Gotha des Wahlkreises 4, an den Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Sekretär der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt', n.d., early March 1990.

twenty-seventh of February, the electoral commission in Erfurt wrote to the head office in Berlin to explain that the lack of support from local mayors was a widespread problem, with many having withdrawn their support:

It is no longer a given, that the mayors will be willing and prepared to help organise and run the elections, and to take responsibility for this, as their future employment and career prospects are completely uncertain, and they see little hope for the future.³³⁶

As many of the smaller communities also had no political parties or organisations to fall back onto to take charge of organising the committees, there was no one to take responsibility for forming the committees in these communities.³³⁷

On the ninth of March, one day after the official deadline, the election leader in Eisenach reported that enough individuals had been found for the election committees, although the committees themselves were not formally established.³³⁸ A last-minute telephone campaign had succeeded in recruiting enough helpers for the committees and polling stations.³³⁹ Their training was to take place just in time, from the twelfth to the fifteenth of March.³⁴⁰ On the thirteenth of March, just a few days before the election, the central office in

³³⁶ 'Die Bereitschaft vieler Bürgermeister, sich für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Wahl verantwortlich zu fühlen, ist nicht mehr gegeben, da sie für sich keine Perspektive sehen, ihre künftige Arbeit bzw. berufliche Entwicklung völlig ungeklärt ist', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, an das Ministerium für innere Angelegenheiten, Wahlbüro der DDR Berlin', Erfurt, 27 February 1990.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben vom Rat des Kreises Eisenach Wahlstützpunkt an die Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt', Eisenach, 09 March 1990.

³³⁹ Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

³⁴⁰ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Fernschreiben vom Rat des Kreises Eisenach Wahlstützpunkt an die Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt', Eisenach, 09 March 1990.

Erfurt sent out a telegraph to the local election teams, advising them that for any committees that were still incomplete on election day, it would be possible to recruit members from the queue of first voters to arrive in the morning.³⁴¹ They added, however, 'under no circumstances should citizens be placed under any obligation to take part in the election committees before the day of the election', as this would not be not legal.³⁴²

The task of organising the first free parliamentary elections in the GDR was therefore a delicate tight-rope walk between introducing new actors and democratic control of the procedure, and still relying on the expertise and manpower of the former actors and election organisers. Fortunately, numerous state actors agreed to provide advice and knowledge of structures to the new district leaders. But by withdrawing their support in, for example, finding helpers and members of the election committees, publishing information in the press, offering up premises in which to hold the election, or providing financial backing of the election preparations, some former actors made their presence felt and highlighted the dependence of the new actors on their good will and cooperation in order for the upcoming elections to take place.

The actions of the former actors can be understood as a protest against the changes being introduced, but in many cases also as a response to the perceived devaluation of their role in society and their former contribution. It demonstrates an emotional rift between old and new actors, that takes place on

³⁴¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Probleme und Aufgaben in Auswertung der Beratung beim zentralen Wahlbüro', 13 March 1990.

³⁴² 'Auf keinen Fall ist es rechtlich möglich, bereits vor dem Wahltag Bürger für eine Tätigkeit als Mitglied des Wahlvorstandes zu verpflichten', *ibid.*

a personal level, but with the potential to block the democratisation process. Although the former government and state had been discredited and new leaders had been put in place, the new order would only take effect if it was indeed accepted by the majority. As such, the former actors had made their voices and their experience heard, not by speaking out, but by withdrawing their support. In order to gain their cooperation, it would mean respecting their biographies and focussing on the task ahead as opposed to discussing the mistakes of the past. During our interview, the district election organiser told me that 'democracy thrives on participation, not exclusion'.³⁴³ The successful organisation of the parliamentary elections in 1990 and the democratisation of the election procedure would therefore require not only new actors or democratic control, but emotional reconciliations and the coming together of all citizens around a common goal.

The Western Voices

'Helmut! Helmut! Helmut!', cried the masses on the cathedral square in Erfurt in late February.³⁴⁴ More than 130 000 citizens had made their way down to the square to greet the West German chancellor as part of the election campaign event for the Alliance for Germany.³⁴⁵ The electoral alliance was represented that day by Wolfgang Schnur, lawyer and founder of the Democratic Awakening, Hans Wilhelm Ebeling, vicar and founder of the DSU, Lothar de

³⁴³ 'Demokratie lebt vom Mitmachen und nicht vom Ausgrenzen oder sich Ausgrenzen', Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

³⁴⁴ StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Maizière, lawyer and chairman of the East German CDU, and Martin Kirchner, secretary-general of the East German CDU.³⁴⁶ The flyer advertising the event had listed those members as an aside, however, with the star speaker being the Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Kohl.³⁴⁷ Citizens even climbed on rooves and lined the windows around the square to get a better view of the stage.³⁴⁸

The event was a signature moment in the political campaign for the parliamentary elections in 1990, awakening images of the protests on the cathedral square but far outweighing the numbers that had come to the autumn demonstrations. As in March 1970, the presence of the West German chancellor in Erfurt attracted large crowds who expressed their support in their numbers and by shouting out his name. How would the relationship between East and West Germans influence the elections and renewed attempts at establishing trust within the political campaign?

As they waited for Kohl, Schnur, who would later be announced to have been a Stasi informant alongside Lothar de Maizière and Martin Kirchner, greeted the crowds, including 'the whistlers, who have not yet learnt what a democracy is'.³⁴⁹ Not everyone in the audience had come to support the Alliance, with oppositional groups reportedly jeering and throwing eggs in the direction of the stage.³⁵⁰ Time and again the speaker would refer to the

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl kommt!'.

³⁴⁸ StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Einheit Bald. Allianz für Deutschland. Zeitung der Allianz für Deutschland zur Volkskammerwahl am 18. März 1990'.

³⁴⁹ 'auch die Pfeiffenden, die noch nicht gelernt haben, was Demokratie ist!', StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

³⁵⁰ 'Es geschah...in Erfurt - Helmut Kohl und die Allianz für Deutschland starten in den Wahlkampf 1990', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, Länderreport, 19 February 2010 <<https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/es-geschah-in-erfurt-pdf.media.e18b948e2561b018dd91e619968ed6a7.pdf>> (accessed 04 February 2019).

whistling audience members in his speech, stylising them as examples of undemocratic behaviour.

Yes, we will make space for the whistlers too, so that they may learn that we can deal with victories and defeats, [for] we are democrats and we will stay democrats!³⁵¹

Whistling in opposition was publicly denounced as an undemocratic act, whilst cheering the West German chancellor was praised as exemplary behaviour.

'You are proof', Schnur told his supporters, 'that you are practising democracy, by cheering someone who deserves our utmost sympathy in a friendly manner'.³⁵²

The whistlers themselves are hardly to be heard on the tape recording, however, save for being referenced in the speaker's comments. Instead, large groups of audience members can be heard chanting 'Get the reds out!' to drown out the opposition.³⁵³ Every few minutes the speakers were interrupted as the audience started up a new chant to silence their opponents within the crowd.

'Dear Erfurters', Schnur said in response to the chants,

[the reds] are not really here anymore. The colours of the flag are what is important. The black-red-and-gold flag is going to be our flag for the whole of Germany!³⁵⁴

And indeed, a sea of federal flags was already awaiting the West German Chancellor as he took to the microphone to hold his speech on the need for a

³⁵¹ 'Ja, auch die Pfeiffenden werden bei uns einen Platz haben, damit sie dann lernen, dass wir mit Sieg und Niederlage umgehen können, wir sind Demokraten und bleiben Demokraten!', StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

³⁵² 'Sie sind der Beweis dafür, dass Sie Demokratie üben, in dem Sie freundlich und jubeln einem Menschen, der eine hohe Sympathie verdient (...)', *ibid.*

³⁵³ 'Rote raus!' *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ 'Liebe Erfurter, die sind doch schon gar nicht mehr da. Ihre Farben in den Fahnen wird das Entscheidende sein. Die Schwarz-Rot-Goldene Fahne wird unsere Fahne für ganz Deutschland sein', *ibid.*

unified Germany.³⁵⁵ The crowd broke out a new chant, with the fourth line of the GDR national anthem, 'Germany, united, fatherland', being shouted out across the square to highlight the citizens' enduring desire for a united nation, and its embeddedness in East German collective identity.³⁵⁶ 'We want one Germany and we are one Germany!', said Kohl, as the chanting got louder.³⁵⁷

Willy Brandt, Kohl announced during his speech, had proclaimed just one year earlier, that the unification of East and West Germany was 'a grand delusion'.³⁵⁸ The unification question was now no longer just a political issue, but also a leading campaign pledge, claimed and promoted by the Alliance for Germany. Their campaign materials for the parliamentary elections urged voters to 'think of our native land' and 'stand up for a unified, free and better fatherland', emphasising national pride with the specially formatted statement 'G e r m a n y i s b e a u t i f u l'.³⁵⁹ Central to this was also the reestablishment of the German *Länder*, which Kohl highlighted by referring time and again to 'this Land Thuringia' and the 'dear citizens of the Thuringian Land'.³⁶⁰

'Thuringia – the green heart of Germany', the *Allianz für Deutschland* campaign materials read, placing the once marginal region back in the centre of the map.³⁶¹

³⁵⁵ 'Es geschah...in Erfurt', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*.

³⁵⁶ 'Deutschland, einig, Vaterland', StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

³⁵⁷ 'Wir wollen ein Deutschland und wir sind ein Deutschland', *ibid*.

³⁵⁸ 'die Lebenslüge', *ibid*.

³⁵⁹ 'denken Sie an unsere Heimat', 'laßt uns für ein einiges, freies und besseres Vaterland eintreten', 'Deutschland ist wunderschön', StA Erfurt, 5/5, 'Liebe Bürgerinnen! Liebe Bürger!', CDU Erfurt, Broschüre zur Volkskammerwahl am 18.3.1990.

³⁶⁰ 'dieses Land Thüringen', 'liebe Mitbürgerinnen aus dem Thüringer Land', 'Es geschah...in Erfurt', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*.

³⁶¹ 'Thüringen – das grüne Herz Deutschlands', StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Einheit Bald. Allianz für Deutschland. Zeitung der Allianz für Deutschland zur Volkskammerwahl am 18. März 1990'.

Its name stands for many things of great importance in German history through to the present day. Thuringia, it stands for the places Wartburg and Weimar, for the poets Goethe and Schiller and the philosophers Fichte and Hegel. The people of Thuringia want to build on this former greatness and importance.³⁶²

By using the concept of Thuringia, Kohl not only spoke to supporters of a unified Germany, but also circumvented the use of GDR terms and structures. This was integral to the political campaign, which firmly rejected the continuation of the GDR. By using smaller, regional references, the alliance chose not to recognise the GDR as an autonomous state or country and thereby also accorded themselves the right to disregard GDR regulations and procedures. Furthermore, by selecting positive associations of Thuringian history from the nineteenth century, the campaign appropriated history to its advantage, using symbols of greatness, power and national identity without differentiating between its many associations. In his speech, Kohl highlighted the long history of 'this old town of Erfurt', 'where Napoleon and Goethe met'.³⁶³ 'I could give many examples of historical events', he continued, '[but] here I don't need to explain that we Germans are one nation'.³⁶⁴

Every mention of German unity and the Thuringian Land got loud cheers, applause, shouts of approval and chants of 'Helmut! Helmut! Helmut!' from the crowd in Erfurt.³⁶⁵ The local press played on the monarchical status of

³⁶² 'Sein Name steht für vieles, was in der deutschen Geschichte bis in die Gegenwart hinein hohe Bedeutung hat. Thüringen, das steht für die Orte Wartburg und Weimar, für die Dichter Goethe und Schiller und für die Philosophen Fichte und Hegel. An diese einstige Größe und Bedeutung wollen die Menschen in Thüringen wieder anknüpfen', *ibid.*

³⁶³ 'diese alte Stadt Erfurt', 'wo die Begegnung Napoleons mit Goethe statt fand', 'Es geschah...in Erfurt', *Deutschlandradio Kultur*.

³⁶⁴ 'ich könnte viele Beispiele historischer Begebenheiten erzählen, hier muss man nicht begründen, dass wir Deutsche ein Volk sind', *ibid.*

³⁶⁵ StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

the West German chancellor and the patriotic mindlessness of the crowds, parodying the 'waving, flag-waving, cheering' with the old phrase 'The King is dead, long live the King'.³⁶⁶ The journalists from the new paper in Erfurt also mocked the willingness of their fellow citizens to worship yet another leader figure, 'the (not yet our) chancellor will take care of it',³⁶⁷ and to fall again for empty promises, 'How many promises have the people been made over the last few years?'.³⁶⁸ The readiness of the masses to look once again to strong leaders after just having brought down the Socialist Unity Party led the journalists to give their article the headline 'Woeful Democracy' and to bemoan that 'the big ideals of our October and November Revolution have been forgotten'.³⁶⁹

However, the paper also warned that East Germans were being treated like 'cheap, submissive and buyable potential voters for the next federal election'³⁷⁰ and that it was 'worth remembering that the government of this country is still based in Berlin, not Bonn'.³⁷¹ The central round table in the GDR had decided that speakers from West Germany were not permitted to campaign for the parliamentary elections in East Germany in 1990.³⁷² Nonetheless, it was not only the Alliance for Germany that brought over western speakers, but indeed all political parties with western connections.

³⁶⁶ 'Winken, Fahnschwenken, Hochrufe...', 'Der König ist tot, es lebe der König'. StA Erfurt – 5/5 Parteien, 'Der totale Kohlstand', *nez. neue erfurter zeitung*, 22 February 1990.

³⁶⁷ 'der (noch nicht unser) Bundeskanzler wird schon dafür sorgen', *ibid.*

³⁶⁸ 'Wieviel wurde den Menschen in den vielen Jahren schon versprochen?', *ibid.*

³⁶⁹ 'Elend der Demokratie', 'Die großen Ideale unserer Oktober- und Novemberrevolution sind vergessen', StA Erfurt – 5/5 Parteien, 'Elend der Demokratie', *nez. neue erfurter zeitung*, 22 February 1990.

³⁷⁰ 'billiges, willenloses und käufliches Wählerpotential für die nächste Bundestagswahl', *ibid.*

³⁷¹ 'Dabei sollte man sich trotzdem vor Augen halten, daß die Regierung dieses Landes noch in Berlin sitzt, nicht in Bonn', *ibid.*

³⁷² Moritz & Moritz, *Ein besonderes Jahr*, p. 168.

One week after Kohl, on the twenty-eighth of February 1990, the political alliance of liberal parties in the GDR; the German Forum Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Free Democratic Party of the GDR, invited Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and Vice-Chancellor of the Federal Republic, as well as Joseph Grünbeck from the FDP in Bavaria to speak on the cathedral square in Erfurt for their political Ash Wednesday event.³⁷³ The Green Party of the GDR welcomed Joschka Fischer of the West German Greens to tour across Thuringia in early March, with stops in Eisenach, Gotha, Weimar and Erfurt.³⁷⁴ His aim, he explained, was not to 'drown out the market squares', as other western politicians had done, but to have 'an exchange of experiences at the local level'.³⁷⁵

The regional Green Party office in Erfurt confirmed in their monthly report in February 1990 that the cooperation with the West German Greens had indeed been 'highly collaborative', and 'not hierarchical as with the other parties'.³⁷⁶ The regional office in Erfurt had been cooperating closely with the Green Party in Hesse, which had provided them with typewriters and printers, paper, posters and brochures.³⁷⁷ These were then distributed from there to the district offices across the region. The party secretary, who would later be said to

³⁷³ StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

³⁷⁴ Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (henceforth AGG), C Thüringen I - LaVo/LGSt 3 Grüne Partei DDR; Kandidaten der Volkskammerwahl 1990, 'Deutschlandpolitische Erklärung der Grünen Partei Thüringen'.

³⁷⁵ 'Ich bin nicht gekommen, um hier dröhnend über die Marktplätze zu ziehen, sondern mir kommt es auf Erfahrungsaustausch vor Ort an', AGG C Thüringen I - LaVo/LGSt 3 Grüne Partei DDR; Kandidaten der Volkskammerwahl 1990, 'Wahlkampf ohne Parolen - Der Grüne Joschka Fischer in Weimar und Erfurt', Thüringische Landeszeitung, 08 March 1990.

³⁷⁶ 'überaus partnerschaftlich', 'im Gegensatz zu den anderen Parteien nicht hierarchisch', AGG, C Thüringen I - LaVo/LGSt 49 Ablage Post, gesichtet und erledigt durch den Landesvorstand, 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Bezirksgeschäftsstelle Erfurt der Grünen Partei Thüringen bis Ende Februar 1990'.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

have been working for the Ministry for State Security, explained in his report that two Green Party colleagues from Wiesbaden and Eschwege would now be coming two days a week to support them in organisation, as well as another colleague from Lorsch who would work with them throughout February and March to improve structures and boost publicity.³⁷⁸ The new election law passed that month however clearly stipulated that political parties were 'not permitted to accept donations or further financial support from another state or outside of the area in which this law takes effect'.³⁷⁹ The second half of the sentence was a clear reference to the fluid concepts of the German state and the ambivalent national situation underlining the GDR elections.

The regional secretary for the Thuringian CDU would later also be reported to have worked as a secret informant for the Ministry for State Security.³⁸⁰ Similarly, he had also quickly set up contacts in West Germany, especially to the CDU branch in Eisenach's partner town of Marburg, but also in Wiesbaden.³⁸¹ From these two towns, the Thuringian CDU received supplies of technology and literature to support their political activities.³⁸² By the tenth of

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ 'Eine Partei darf keine Schenkungen oder anderweitige wirtschaftliche Unterstützung von einem anderen Staat oder von außerhalb des Geltungsbereiches dieses Gesetzes annehmen', Gesetz über Parteien und andere politische Vereinigungen - Parteiengesetz, 21 February 1990 <https://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl_DDR1990_I_9.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2020).

³⁸⁰ ACDP, 05-016-356 Landtagsfraktion Thüringen - Diverse Sachthemen, Stasi 1990-1996, 'CDU Thüringen fürchtet Enthüllungen. Landesvorsitzender (...) zieht Konsequenz aus seiner Stasi-Vergangenheit', Die Tagespost, 21 July 1990.

³⁸¹ ACDP, 03-051-146 Landesverband Thüringen Generalsekretäre, Korrespondenz (alte Bundesländer) 1990-1993, 'Brief von Landesvorsitzender CDU Thüringen an Herrn Rechtsanwalt, Marburg', Erfurt, 30 March 1990; 'Brief von Landesvorsitzender CDU Thüringen an Herrn Rechtsanwalt, Wiesbaden', 19 March 1990.

³⁸² ACDP, 03-051-146 Landesverband Thüringen Generalsekretäre, Korrespondenz (alte Bundesländer) 1990-1993, 'Brief von Landesvorsitzender CDU Thüringen an Herrn Rechtsanwalt, Marburg', Erfurt, 30 March 1990; 'Brief von Landesvorsitzender CDU Thüringen an Herrn Rechtsanwalt, Wiesbaden', 19 March 1990.

February 1990, every town in Thuringia had been matched with a CDU partner organisation from West Germany to support their local CDU groups.³⁸³

Colleagues from Erfurt's twin town of Mainz also came to speak at the smaller Alliance for Germany campaign events, such as the presentation of parliamentary candidates on Erfurt's *Fischmarkt* square on the seventeenth of February, alongside CDU politicians from Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse.³⁸⁴ In advance of his visit to the *Fischmarkt* event, the district secretary of the CDU in Mainz wrote to his colleagues in Thuringia to inform them of his plans for yet another large CDU event on Erfurt's cathedral square. The East German CDU had originally reserved the site for the seventeenth of March to pre-empt the planned SPD campaign event two days later, but the date had gained greater significance since the parliamentary election had been moved forward to the eighteenth of March.³⁸⁵ The politician from Mainz was trying to gain prominent West German speakers for this date, which he intended to be a 'Closing event for the Alliance for Germany'.³⁸⁶

The East German Social Democrats also received notable backing from West Germany, although this was kept as quiet as possible. In November 1989, letters were sent out from the SPD department for former party secretaries in

³⁸³ StA Eisenach, 40.7/95 Sammlung Wende, 'Kreisgeschäftsstellen CDU Hessen Partnerverband', 10 February 1990.

³⁸⁴ StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Wir stellen uns vor. 17.02.1990, 15 Uhr am Fischmarkt', CDU Erfurt.

³⁸⁵ ACDP, 03-051-147 Landesverband Thüringen Generalsekretäre, Korrespondenz (alte Bundesländer) 1990-1994, 'Brief von MdL Kreisvorsitzender der CDU Kreisverband Mainz-Stadt, an die Christlich-Demokratische Union z.H. d Landesvorsitzenden in Erfurt', 12 February 1990.

³⁸⁶ 'Abschlußveranstaltung der „Allianz für Deutschland“', *ibid.*

Bonn to retired SPD politicians across West Germany.³⁸⁷ These began by explaining that the Social Democratic Party had been re-established in the GDR and intended to stand in the upcoming elections 'with their own candidates'.³⁸⁸ As organisational structures still needed to be put in place, the SDP would need substantial support for the upcoming elections. However, 'the SDP does not want the Social Democratic Party of Germany publicly to act as election helpers'.³⁸⁹ Consequently, this department had been tasked with recruiting helpers to go to the GDR for a significant period of time because

the members of our working group are no longer in full-time employment but are rather retired or approaching retirement. This means that the SPD would not officially be appearing in public.³⁹⁰

Whether this campaign succeeded remains unclear, as responses from retired members suggest that the placement of retired SPD politicians in East Germany, which was first to be managed by the association in Berlin, had been passed on to the overburdened groups in the East German districts, and that many were left waiting.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, the deliberate intentions of the West German SPD to bypass GDR election regulations is evident from this communication.

³⁸⁷ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (henceforth AdsD), 2/PVBK000744 SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation; Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt (1990), 'Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt', SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation, 1990.

³⁸⁸ 'mit eigenen Kandidaten', AdsD, 2/PVBK000744 SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation; Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt (1990), 'Brief von SPD Parteivorstand Abt I. Arbeitskreis ehemalige Parteisekretäre an H.G.', Bonn, 29 November 1990.

³⁸⁹ 'Die SDP möchte aber nicht, daß die Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands offiziell als Wahlhelfer in Erscheinung tritt', *ibid.*

³⁹⁰ 'Die Mitglieder unseres Arbeitskreises sind nicht mehr hauptamtlich Beschäftigte, sondern Rentner resp. Vorruhestandler. Dies bedeutet, daß damit die SPD nicht offiziell in Erscheinung tritt', *ibid.*

³⁹¹ AdsD, 2/PVBK000744 SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation; Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt (1990), 'Brief von H.G. an SPD Bonn, Betr: „SPD in der DDR vor Ort“', 05 April 1990.

The SPD planning for the political election campaign trail also took place under West German leadership, and in secret, during the night. The head of the Social Democratic Party in Eisenach was lying in bed in late December 1989 when a car pulled up outside the house at around eleven in the evening.³⁹² A few weeks before, he had been over to visit the SPD in Eisenach's partner town in Marburg after having just founded the local branch of the party. Convinced that the Stasi had come to visit him as a consequence of his trip to West Germany, the father of two sent his dog out first as he answered the door. The night-time visitor explained that he had been sent by Willy Brandt's minister of the chancellery to make contact with East German SDP/SPD members and organise an election campaign tour in the GDR; members of the SPD branch in Gotha, where he had just been, had passed on the address of the representative in Eisenach. Only on presenting his identification card, did the Eisenach SPD-man finally believe his visitor from the Federal Republic.³⁹³

The first visit of the former SPD chancellor in 1990 took place in Gotha and Eisenach at the end of January, to kick-start the SPD election campaign. Accompanied by 'droves of Hessian comrades', Willy Brandt spoke before large crowds before retiring to the restaurant on the Wartburg castle for a traditional meal with the families of local SPD politicians.³⁹⁴ Even the later CDU mayor remembers being impressed by Brandt's speech on the market square in Eisenach, arguing that 'Willy Brandt was highly regarded by almost all GDR

³⁹² Interview with Matthias Doht, Eisenach, 18 December 2017.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ 'Scharen hessischer Genossen', StA Eisenach, 40.7/93 Sammlung Wende, 'Exklusiv Willy Brandt in Eisenach und Gotha', Die Andere Zeitung, February 1990.

citizens', including himself.³⁹⁵ Assuming that the SPD would win the upcoming elections anyway, the CDU member agreed to stand in the elections. 'Okay', he told his wife, 'but I won't be elected anyway, because Willy Brandt was on the market square in Eisenach'.³⁹⁶

A few weeks later, on the third of March, Brandt finally returned to Erfurt to appease the crowds that had flocked to see him twenty years earlier as he had met with GDR representatives to discuss Ostpolitik.³⁹⁷ Information stands lined the cathedral square and entertainment was provided by musicians from Hesse.³⁹⁸ If Brandt should have come on the actual anniversary of his famous Erfurt visit on the nineteenth of March, then he would have been too late for the GDR elections, he joked.³⁹⁹ This time, on the main square, the atmosphere was calmer than at his last visit at the train station square, but also considerably calmer than at the Alliance for Germany campaign event a few weeks before. The audience listened attentively and clapped politely as Brandt discussed what had changed since his last visit in 1970. 'Back then we couldn't change much', he admitted, 'but we did not give up'.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ 'Willy Brandt war bei so gut wie allen DDR-Bürgern positiv besetzt', Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

³⁹⁶ 'Okay. Aber ich werde sowieso nicht gewählt werden, weil im März war Willy Brandt in Eisenach auf dem Marktplatz', *ibid.*

³⁹⁷ AdsD, 3/THLV000086 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Presse-Spiegel DDR; Sozialdemokratische Entwicklungskommission Hessen Thüringen (1990), 'Kundgebung mit Willy Brandt auf dem Erfurter Domplatz. „Der Zug zur deutschen Einheit ist auf dem Weg“', Thüringer Neueste Nachrichten, 05 March 1990.

³⁹⁸ AdsD, 2/PVBK000744 SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation; Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt (1990), 'Dokumentation über die Unterstützungsmaßnahmen für Oppositionsgruppen in Eisenach und die SPD in Erfurt Stadt und Land', Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland Unterbezirk Kassel-Land, May 1990.

³⁹⁹ StA Erfurt, 6-7, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger. CD Reihe 1-22'.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Damals haben wir wenig bewegen können, aber wir haben nicht losgelassen', *ibid.*

Would it be enough to counter the critique that he had received from Helmut Kohl weeks before, summoning loud boos from the crowds? Kohl had warned the citizens of Erfurt not to trust Brandt's position on German reunification, arguing that the turnaround of the Socialist Democratic Party meant that they had clearly earned themselves the derogatory nickname '*Wendehälse*' (political opportunists).⁴⁰¹ Alliance for Germany campaign materials argued that voting for the Social Democrats would lead to a left-wing block government, and that many former Socialist Unity Party members were finding their new home with the East German SDP, making it the 'rubbish bin for the Party of Democratic Socialism'.⁴⁰²

As well as communicating their own policies, CDU campaign materials were produced to expressly discredit the SPD or SDP by equating them with the Socialist Unity Party. Although the heading of one such a flyer reads 'Arguments for the election on the 18 March', these consisted chiefly of comparisons between the SPD and SED, who were said to have 'reached joint agreements' and to both be 'dreaming (...) of democratic socialism'.⁴⁰³ Other materials combined the acronyms of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and their predecessor the Socialist Unity Party (SED) with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to form 'PDSPDSEDSPDPDS'.⁴⁰⁴ By lumping the political parties together and warning, 'Never again Socialism!', Alliance for

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² 'SPD – Müllkübel der PDS', StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Einheit Bald. Allianz für Deutschland. Zeitung der Allianz für Deutschland zur Volkskammerwahl am 18. März 1990'.

⁴⁰³ 'Argumente zur Wahl am 18. März', 'gemeinsame Vereinbarungen geschlossen', 'träumen gemeinsam vom demokratischen Sozialismus', StA Eisenach, 40.7/95 Sammlung Wende, 'Argumente zur Wahl am 18. März 1990', CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle, Bonn.

⁴⁰⁴ StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Mit dem Teufel marschiert', Der Spiegel, 05 March 1990.

Germany materials used ideological argumentation to position their campaign against the other parties.⁴⁰⁵

The Social Democratic Party in East Germany had reformed with the name SDP and was therefore technically a new party on the political landscape. As such, the West German CDU used comparisons to the West German SPD to denounce the new political rivals in the East and explained to GDR citizens who this new party was and how they functioned based on the history of the West German SPD.⁴⁰⁶ The campaign materials themselves were not produced in East Germany, however, but were designed and printed by the CDU head office in Bonn for the Alliance for Germany CDU-DSU-DA.⁴⁰⁷ A feature in the Spiegel magazine in early March uncovered the 'dirty tricks of the Konrad-Adenauer-House', arguing that the many campaign materials equating SPD and SED were clearly West-German in origin and identifiable by the premium paper quality.⁴⁰⁸

The East German Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, highlighted the role of the Christian Democratic Union in the GDR in propping up the Socialist Unity Party as one of their 'old block party' allies during the 'CDU-SED era'.⁴⁰⁹ In retaliation against the allegations from the CDU, such as that 'Social democrats and Stalinists are one and the same' or that 'the head of the SPD (...) was in the Socialist Unity Party', the East German SPD tried to clarify

⁴⁰⁵ 'Nie wieder Sozialismus!', StA Eisenach, 40.7/95 Sammlung Wende, 'Argumente zur Wahl am 18. März 1990', CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle, Bonn.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ 'Schmutzige Tricks aus dem Konrad-Adenauer-Haus', StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Mit dem Teufel marschiert', Der Spiegel, 05 March 1990.

⁴⁰⁹ 'alten Blockpartei', 'Ära von SED und CDU', StA Eisenach, 40.7/110 Sammlung Wende, 'SPD Wir informieren: Die neuen Lügen einer alten Blockpartei'.

‘the truth’ with bullet points.⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, they countered the criticism by questioning the integrity and political alliances of leading CDU politicians, arguing that ‘CDU and DSU are running a smear campaign under the instruction of their mud-slingers in Bonn. They are lying in order to cover up their own past’.⁴¹¹

In the meantime, former members of the Socialist Unity Party had formed the new Party for Democratic Socialism, with others joining the United Left. Ironically, the PDS held their campaign event in Erfurt’s *Thüringenhalle*, the space in which the discussion event was held that had contributed to the downfall of the local SED in October 1989.⁴¹² While the PDS restyled themselves as the formal ‘strong left-wing opposition’ by targeting voters to give them their second vote,⁴¹³ the United Left also adopted the defamatory tactics of the other parties with caricatures of capitalists and anti-Kohl slogans.⁴¹⁴ Their campaign materials took a clear stance against German Reunification and grouped the CDU and SPD politicians together as ‘annexation politicians’.⁴¹⁵

A former Socialist Unity Party member who continued in the Party for Democratic Socialism recalled that their campaigning for the parliamentary

⁴¹⁰ ‘Sozialdemokraten und Stalinisten in einen Topf’, ‘SPD Vorsitzender (...) sei Mitglied der SED gewesen’, ‘die Wahrheit’, *ibid.*

⁴¹¹ ‘CDU und DSU diffamieren unter Anleitung ihrer Bonner Schlammwerfer. Sie lügen, um ihre eigenen Vergangenheit zu verwischen’, *ibid.*

⁴¹² *Schließt Euch an*, p. 297.

⁴¹³ ‘eine starke linke Opposition’, StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, ‘In ihrem eigenen Interesse’, PDS, 1990.

⁴¹⁴ StA Eisenach, 40.7/94 Sammlung Wende, ‘Lieber rote Rüben als Kohl von drüben!’, Vereinigte Linke Erfurt, 1990.

⁴¹⁵ ‘Anschlusspolitikern’, StA Eisenach, 40.7/94 Sammlung Wende, ‘Wer 66% in der Volkskammer hat, kann mit uns machen was er will !!!’, Aktionsbündnis Vereinigte Linke, 1990.

election in Erfurt mainly took place in the night-time, as they received too much verbal abuse if they campaigned during the day.⁴¹⁶

Quietly and secretly we set off through the new housing developments to put up posters in the corridors and fill letterboxes, but we would also remove stickers from right-wing parties (...). So, as well as doing our local election campaign, we would of course also get rid of the things, that didn't suit us politically, so to say.⁴¹⁷

These election campaign tactics did not go unnoticed, however, with the CDU in Erfurt applying for the PDS to be issued with a warning for bad campaign practice in the town's interim parliament on the seventh of March.⁴¹⁸ The motion was however withdrawn during the meeting, after the PDS faction apologised for having covered up Alliance for Germany election posters. After doing some research into the circumstances, the PDS faction later explained to the local newspaper that their helpers had stuck PDS posters on advertising pillars on the sixth of March, only for these to be covered up by CDU posters, and consequently recovered with PDS materials. 'If you want a fair election campaign', they concluded, 'then you should run a fair campaign yourself!'.⁴¹⁹

Similar controversies in Eisenach had led to a public debate on 'Decency and Honesty in the Election Campaign 1990', organised by the local SPD branch on the twenty-third of February 1990 in the Old Post Office.⁴²⁰ The worded agreement produced afterwards asserted that: statements about others in

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Karola Stange, Erfurt, 14 September 2018.

⁴¹⁷ 'Also sind wir still und heimlich losgezogen durch die Neubaugebiete und haben Plakate in Hausflure geklebt, haben Briefkästen vollgemacht, haben aber auch Aufkleber entfernt von rechten Parteien, die auch unterwegs waren, ja. Also wir haben sowohl Wahlkampf aktiv vor Ort gemacht, aber auch sozusagen natürlich die Dinge weggemacht, die uns politisch nicht in den Kram passten', *ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ StA Erfurt, 1-5/10-9196 Unterlagen zu den Beratungen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung, 'PDS und Plakate', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 16 March 1990.

⁴¹⁹ 'Wer fairen Wahlkampf einfordert, sollte auch selbst fairen Wahlkampf führen!', *ibid.*

⁴²⁰ StA Eisenach, 40.7/95 Sammlung Wende, 'Fairnessvereinbarung zum Wahlkampf 1990', Eisenach, 26 February 1990.

political publicity materials should be based on verifiable sources; representatives of other political parties should not be insulted; political parties and groups are responsible for the content and mounting of their election posters; posters of other parties or groups should not be removed or covered up; poster boards are marked with ownership details and should not be used by other parties and groups; public poster spaces are available to everyone; any disagreements should be negotiated between the political parties and groups, or in the presence of all parties if necessary.⁴²¹

Looking back on the campaign, a West-German SPD politician who came to Erfurt in December 1990 to support the local political organisation, concluded that

the parliamentary election campaign was in no way a GDR election campaign. Rather, it was an FRG election campaign on GDR territory. That applies to all political parties, some more and some less.⁴²²

Although he had been welcomed with open arms and had felt sure that he was doing the right thing on arriving in Thuringia in 1989, this had changed from February 1990 when the political campaign had gotten underway. He argued that it was the slanderous political campaign that had divided the spirit of solidarity amongst the opposition and the general public in the GDR.

What remains clear, is that the political campaign for the parliamentary election in the GDR in 1990 was not only supported by West German political

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² 'Der Wahlkampf zur Volkskammerwahl war auch nicht in Ansätzen ein Wahlkampf der DDR. Es war vielmehr ein bundesdeutscher Wahlkampf auf DDR-Gebiet. Das gilt für alle Parteien, wenn auch für die einen etwas mehr und die anderen etwas weniger', AdsD, 3/THLV000091 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Korrespondenz und Materialien (1990), 'DDR und Bundesrepublik. Politische und wirtschaftliche Strukturen einer neuen Gemeinschaft', n.d. est. April 1990.

partner organisations in terms of providing advice, but that there was also significant financial, material, organisational and strategic backing that determined the shape and style of the election campaign, despite clear instructions from the round table of the GDR that there should be no West German involvement. Campaign materials were largely produced in West Germany and speakers from the Federal Republic toured the market squares in the run up to the election. If there is any question when the East German government lost control or at what point the GDR state ended, it is worth noting that even before the general election, the state, its structures and regulations were no longer recognised by vast swathes of the population.

In January 1990, an alternative newspaper in Eisenach had published an article on 'Equal opportunities' on its front page, arguing that more than anything else, elections rely on fairness and a level-playing field for all political groups and parties.⁴²³ At the time, the article, penned by the local SPD leader, criticised the unfair advantage of the 'SED-PDS', who benefitted from structural support and connections from former times.⁴²⁴ Albeit that the West German support in the weeks that followed may have been intended to counteract the advantage of the PDS, the result was a highly-pressured election campaign in which inexperienced parties were highly dependent on links with West German political partners in order to stay in the running against their competitors.

⁴²³ PCCW, 'Chancengleichheit?', *Die andere Zeitung*, January 1990.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

Party Time: Election Day in Practice

In Arnstadt, a few miles south of Erfurt, a group of friends had gathered to celebrate a birthday in early March 1990.⁴²⁵ With the first free elections only weeks away, the gathering provided an apt opportunity to practice for the big day, and so a trial parliamentary election was included in the programme of party games. Here too, there was a polling booth shortage, but the birthday guests had come up with an easy alternative. As they took it in turns to vote, a large towel was passed around the table, under which they would each write down the name of their preferred political party on scraps of paper. A refunctioned chocolate box with a slit in the top was the official ballot box, and the guests proudly posed for the camera as they posted their votes.⁴²⁶

Once every guest had cast their vote, the counting began, with individual votes being opened together and recorded. Surprise filled the room, as it turned out that one guest had voted for the PDS, formerly the Socialist Unity Party, so soon after the events of the autumn.⁴²⁷ At the time, it remained unclear who had chosen to vote this way, causing great uncertainty amongst the friends. A few weeks later, after the real election, they would realise that the distribution of their votes was statistically almost identical to the official result of the parliamentary elections. In so far, the trial election was not just an opportunity to practise voting in private and under new conditions, but to also learn to accept the outcome and the plurality of political opinions.

⁴²⁵ Interview with D.D., Arnstadt, 24 February 2019.

⁴²⁶ Private collection D.D.

⁴²⁷ Interview with D.D., Arnstadt, 24 February 2019.

The birthday party election demonstrates, first and foremost, the cultural and ritual significance of the act of voting. After years of *Zettelfalten*, as the practice of publicly folding and handing in the ballot papers in the GDR was ironically called, GDR citizens enthusiastically prepared to vote in secret for the first time. And yet, even in GDR times, elections had a symbolic and cultural function that was central to East German citizenship. For 'taking part in the elections of pretence' in the GDR was a way of performing loyalty to the state and a central aspect of the so-called social contract between the state and the citizens.⁴²⁸ This foresaw that in exchange for and conforming outwardly to the political ideals, the state would provide citizens with social welfare, guaranteed employment, subsidised foodstuffs and a degree of privacy.⁴²⁹ As such, the excitement around the act of voting can therefore also be seen as an expression of a new form of citizenship and a celebration of the democratised political system. The parliamentary election should therefore bring the country together as a public performance of citizenship. Would this succeed, or would the event simply deepen the existing rifts in society?

Election organisers and helpers had been warned that there would be plenty of election watchdogs present to observe the procedures, including observers from the European Parliament and the European Council.⁴³⁰ These observers should however identify themselves and were not to disturb the election procedure.⁴³¹ Similarly, members of the press would need to carry

⁴²⁸ Grix, *The Role of the Masses*, p. 25.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ StA Eisenach, 12-2386 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Volkskammerwahl 1990, 'Bekanntmachung der Schulung der Wahlvorstände', Stützpunkt Eisenach der Wahlkommission, n.d.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

identification and were not to use the telephone or to conduct any interviews within one hundred metres of the polling stations.⁴³² 'Nobody here will be approached or questioned', asserted a firm committee member in Erfurt who swiftly showed the visiting journalists to the door with a wave of his hand.⁴³³

The district election organiser in Erfurt had warned all election organisers at a local meeting: 'The press knows very well that they will not get any information'.⁴³⁴ Nevertheless, there would still be journalists willing to try their luck. The district election organiser for Eisenach recalls his shock at being offered eighty to one-hundred West German Mark in exchange for advance notice of the election result.⁴³⁵ 'I was flabbergasted', he recalls.⁴³⁶ 'I was rocked to the core and thought, (...) we want to establish a democracy and get rid of corruption. And then I get this dubious offer from the alleged good side'.⁴³⁷ Although the offer was consequently turned down, it had left a lasting memory. 'I have not forgotten it. I have not forgotten that', he repeats.⁴³⁸

The election committee for Erfurt had decided that there was to be no election propaganda within one hundred metres of the planned polling stations

⁴³² LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Stützpunktbeauftragten des Wahlbüros am 1.3.1990', Wahlbüro der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

⁴³³ 'Hier wird keiner angesprochen und keiner ausgefragt', Private Collection Christian Herbst (henceforth PCCH), 'Die ersten freien Wahlen sollten durch nichts behindert werden', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990.

⁴³⁴ 'die Presse weiß, daß sie nichts erfahren können', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Stützpunktbeauftragten des Wahlbüros am 1.3.1990', Wahlbüro der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

⁴³⁵ Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

⁴³⁶ 'Ich fiel da aus ALLEN WOLKEN', *ibid.*

⁴³⁷ 'Ich war also in meiner Grundfeste so erschüttert und ich dachte, ja, ich will nicht sagen die Bösen, aber wir wollen ja nun grade Demokratie und die Manipulation überwinden. Und dann kriege ich von der vermeintlich guten Seite so ein unseriöses Angebot', *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ 'Ich habe es mir gut gemerkt. Ich habe mir das gut gemerkt', *ibid.*

in advance of the election.⁴³⁹ One day before the election, the local paper had also warned that any endorsement or criticism of a political party or group, whether that be 'spoken, said, pictorial or textual' within the same perimeter was strictly forbidden.⁴⁴⁰ Other election office guidelines had included how to furnish the polling stations.⁴⁴¹ While the electoral law, rules and procedures were to be clearly displayed, the decision on how to decorate the stations, for example with or without a GDR flag, was left to the individual election boards.⁴⁴² Nevertheless, official advice was to use neutral colours for table cloths.⁴⁴³ In Eisenach, one local activist come election helper had other ideas. First of all, the polling station was decorated with flowers and secondly with Thuringian flags.⁴⁴⁴ At the door, she had placed GDR money and a 'border fence' to create a symbolic entrance space.⁴⁴⁵ 'I wanted to place a candle, but I wasn't allowed', she explained remorsefully.⁴⁴⁶ The candle, which was intended 'as a symbol of the peaceful revolution' with a green ribbon from the demonstration to protect the old town of Eisenach, was not to be lit, the local paper confirmed, due to fire safety.⁴⁴⁷

⁴³⁹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Wahlkommission am 27.2.1990', Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 05 March 1990.

⁴⁴⁰ 'Wort, Ton, Bild oder Schrift', PCCH, 'Laß uns Dir zum Guten wählen', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 17 March 1990.

⁴⁴¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Stützpunktbeauftragten des Wahlbüros am 1.3.1990', Wahlbüro der Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises Bezirk Erfurt, Erfurt, 14 March 1990.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Brigitte Korndörfer, Eisenach, 19 December 2017.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ 'Und dann wollte ich die Kerze hinstellen, das durfte ich nicht', *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ 'als Symbol unserer friedlichen Revolution', PCCH, 'Selbst viele Renter sind doch Erstwähler. Kerzen im Lokal verboten: „Offenes Feuer“', Oberhessische Presse, 19 March 1990, p. 7. See also Interview with Brigitte Korndörfer, Eisenach, 19 December 2017.

The efforts of the election helpers to not only volunteer for the elections but to also decorate their polling stations demonstrates the emotional, political and ritual significance of the election event. Not only the result was of importance, but the very act of going to vote under fair conditions and rigorous procedures seemed 'unbelievable' to those who had grown up in the GDR.⁴⁴⁸ One of the election helpers in Eisenach recalls that the people entering the polling station were 'beaming' at the opportunity to finally be able to vote freely.⁴⁴⁹ Nevertheless, some still struggled to shake off old habits, with election helpers recalling having to repeatedly ask voters to use the polling booths and to mark their ballot cards in private. 'I had a funny phrase', explains one helper: 'Even if you've been married for thirty years, I need you to separate for these three minutes'.⁴⁵⁰ Voters argued back that they had no secrets from one another, or that they were short of time and wanted to fill it out very quickly here and now.⁴⁵¹

The high overall voter turnout of 94.15 percent in the region of Erfurt, despite the lack of pressure to vote, reflects a strong will amongst East Germans to vote and to have played their part.⁴⁵² The local paper gathered motives from local citizens who argued that 'not voting was not an option (...) after such a long break', and that the experience was 'different, (...) somehow free and unforced', 'uplifting', and 'glorious', emphasising the emotional attachment to

⁴⁴⁸ 'unglaublich', 'unfassbar', Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018.

⁴⁴⁹ 'strahlend', *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ 'so einen lustigen Spruch', 'Wenn Sie schon 30 Jahre verheiratet sind, für diese drei Minuten müssen Sie sich mal trennen', Interview with Ulrike Quentel, Eisenach, 17 January 2018.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² 'Vorläufiges Ergebnis der Wahl zur Volkskammer am 18. März', *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, 21 March 1990, in 'Schaukosten Folge 19', Bettina Fischer, *Landesarchiv Thüringen*, <https://www.thueringen.de/mam/th1/staatsarchiv/sk/folge_19.pdf> (accessed 01 March 1990).

the event.⁴⁵³ Nevertheless, a familiar feeling of distrust was also still present, giving even more reason to ensure that the procedure was transparent.⁴⁵⁴ The election organiser in Eisenach explains that

I don't want to suggest that the result was irrelevant, (...) but what mattered to me was that the procedure was correct (...) and that the people really had the opportunity (..) to vote.⁴⁵⁵

Despite great caution, voters reported that they trusted the election helpers, who appeared 'friendly', and were often recognisable as church-goers.⁴⁵⁶ In the evening, these helpers would begin to count the votes in the presence of the general public.⁴⁵⁷

The great emotional significance of the act of voting was however accompanied by hopes and expectations for the outcome.⁴⁵⁸ Looking back, local citizens recalled their surprise at the result of the event. The largest surprise was not however, as in Arnstadt, that certain citizens would vote for the former SED, but rather the extent of the success of the Christian Democratic Union. A former vicar from near Eisenach explained that some still believed there was a possibility 'that the SED-PDS could get the reins back, albeit with democratic

⁴⁵³ 'Nicht wählen kam für mich nicht in Frage (...) nach so langer Ruhepause', 'ein erhebendes Gefühl', 'ein herrliches Gefühl', PCCH, 'Die ersten freien Wahlen sollten durch nichts behindert werden', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990; 'ein ganz anderes Gefühl, (...) irgendwie frei und ungezwungen', PCCH, 'Selbst viele Renter sind doch Erstwähler. Kerzen im Lokal verboten: „Offenes Feuer“', Oberhessische Presse, 19 March 1990, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁴ PCCH, 'Die ersten freien Wahlen sollten durch nichts behindert werden', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁵⁵ 'Ich will nicht sagen, dass mir das Ergebnis egal war (...) aber mir war so wichtig, dass das Verfahren stimmt (...), dass die Menschen wirklich die Möglichkeit haben (...) mal wirklich zu wählen', Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

⁴⁵⁶ 'nett und freundlich', PCCH, 'Selbst viele Renter sind doch Erstwähler. Kerzen im Lokal verboten: „Offenes Feuer“', Oberhessische Presse, 19 March 1990, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁷ PCCH, 'Die ersten freien Wahlen sollten durch nichts behindert werden', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

backing and playing by different rules'.⁴⁵⁹ Others expected the SPD to win, or at least to gain a much larger percentage of the vote.⁴⁶⁰ In particular, it was the overwhelming and 'clear' majority by which the CDU won the vote that surprised citizens.⁴⁶¹ Many spoke of 'shock' at the CDU's 'clean sweep', while a former PDS politician called it a 'misjudgement', which consequently brought his party 'back down to earth'.⁴⁶²

Others describe being 'stunned' at the distribution of votes in general,⁴⁶³ not only because of the success of the CDU but also due to the negative and 'disappointing' turnout for the new East German movements and the Green Party, which had been considered the leaders of the autumn revolution.⁴⁶⁴ Even members of the CDU admitted 'feeling sorry' for the members of the *Neues Forum*, whom they had admired for their bravery during the autumn.⁴⁶⁵ For those counting themselves to the new movements, on the other hand, the bad outcome felt 'personally insulting'.⁴⁶⁶ Reports from Erfurt describe a young couple who had come to observe the counting of the votes in tears and clearly distressed at the result, whilst others celebrated alongside them.⁴⁶⁷ 'It scares me', said the young man, 'what is going to happen next?'.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁵⁹ 'dass die SED-PDS gegebenenfalls das Zügel noch mal in die Hand kriegt, sei es dann auch demokratisch gewählt und mit vielleicht anderen Spielregeln', Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018; Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

⁴⁶¹ 'so eindeutig'. Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

⁴⁶² 'Schock', 'abräumen', 'eine Fehleinschätzung', 'auf den Boden der Realität geholt', Interview with Wolfgang Mühle, Erfurt, 13 August 2018.

⁴⁶³ 'Verblüffung', Interview with Christhard Wagner, Erfurt, 12 October 2018.

⁴⁶⁴ 'enttäuschend', Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018.

⁴⁶⁵ 'leidgetan', Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

⁴⁶⁶ 'persönlich beleidigt', Interview with Christhard Wagner, Erfurt, 12 October 2018.

⁴⁶⁷ PCCH, 'Sensation der DDR-Wahl: CDU siegt klar, SPD abgeschlagen', *Oberhessische Presse Eisenacher Presse*, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Es erschreckt mich, wie soll es jetzt weitergehen?', *ibid.*

The local press, on the other hand, emphasised the 'sensational victory' of the Alliance for Germany, describing it as a 'victory for Germany' or 'for the whole of Germany', not just the GDR.⁴⁶⁹ The overwhelming success of the centre-right parties was not taken solely as a vote for the party to run the East German government, but also interpreted as 'a rejection of each and every variety of socialism' and as a clear vote 'for a swift German unification'.⁴⁷⁰ The especially high election result for the Alliance for Germany in Thuringia, where the CDU had reached 53.6 percent on its own and 60.5 percent together with its alliance partners,⁴⁷¹ led the head of the CDU in Eisenach to state in the local paper that 'Thuringia should set an example to the rest of the republic and join the Federal Republic of its own accord'.⁴⁷²

The parliamentary election was therefore imbued with great emotional value and numerous layers of significance. Talk of a 'victory for Germany' indicated that the result would affect not only the future of East Germany but also that of the citizens of the Federal Republic. A mark for the Alliance for Germany, it was reported, was not just a vote for a political party but also for the future economic model, for a currency union, for the reunion of the two German states, and for quick progress.⁴⁷³ What this would look like, how and when it would take place, was however not yet clear. Newspapers talked of 'interpreting' the vote, suggesting that the vote for the political alliance

⁴⁶⁹ 'sensationellen Wahlsieg', 'für ganz Deutschland', 'Die „Allianz“ siegte für Deutschland', PCCH, 'Allianz siegte für ganz Deutschland', Erfurter Tagespost EXTRABLATT, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Absage an jedwede Spielart des Sozialismus', 'Abstimmung zugunsten der raschen deutschen Einheit', *ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ PCCH, 'Wahlergebnisse aus den Regionen – Porträts der Sieger', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁷² 'Thüringen sollte ein Zeichen für die ganze Republik setzen und alleine in die BRD eintreten', PCCH, 'Die ersten freien Wahlen sollten durch nichts behindert werden', Erfurter Tagespost, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁷³ PCCH, 'Votum für kurzen Prozeß', Thüringische Landeszeitung, 20 March 1990.

encompassed various demands and expectations that were nevertheless fluid, and that the analysis was furthermore influenced by the unbalanced distribution of votes amongst the various parties.

Equally disparate, however, were the reactions of the voters to the result. As described in the local paper, 'Thuringia's constituents' had 'voted with their head and their heart', with both the act of voting and the result of the election being highly emotional.⁴⁷⁴ For some citizens, the elections had changed nothing at all, for they were once again 'living in a system that [they did] not like'.⁴⁷⁵ For others, the election marked a new set of living conditions, as one former GDR citizen recalled no longer feeling the need to hoard the daily newspapers that he nevertheless still read but no longer kept.⁴⁷⁶ The parliamentary election was clearly a turning-point, marking the culmination of a long process and the establishment of a new democratic order and trust in its structures.

Nevertheless, the result of the election had come as a great surprise, with the reports on the 'victory' dividing the country into winners and losers. The power in society had shifted once again, with both the former elites that had ruled the GDR and the new political groups that had led the autumn demonstrations and transitional committees being voted out by the silent majority. How the losers would respond to the political loss would become evident in the weeks that followed, as citizens prepared for yet another election in early May.

⁴⁷⁴ PCCH, 'Thüringens Wähler entschieden mit Verstand und Herz', Thüringische Landeszeitung, 19 March 1990.

⁴⁷⁵ PCCH, 'TLZ-Umfrage nach den ersten demokratischen Wahlen in der Geschichte der DDR. „Was kommt jetzt wohl auf uns zu?“, Thüringische Landeszeitung, 20 March 1990.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018.

The New Establishment

In it to win it? The SED mutiny

Two days before the parliamentary election, the citizens committee in Erfurt had announced in the local press that their research in the files of the Ministry for Security had indicated that former secret informants were amongst those being voted into the East German parliament. The reason for the announcement so close to the day of the election was reportedly due to having found a relevant file on the Friday before, and not intended to destabilise the election process. Nevertheless, the announcement was a blow to the political parties and election organisers who were desperately trying to re-establish trust in political structures and representatives.

In the weeks that followed, senior politicians from the East German CDU and SPD would step down from their positions to allow for investigations into their alleged *Stasi* past.⁴⁷⁷ Many politicians, including those that had shared a stage with West German politicians on the squares of Erfurt and Eisenach, were publicly suspected of collaboration.⁴⁷⁸ In some cases, party members were asked to step down as a precaution, to avoid bad press in the run up to the communal election. It was then reported that the politicians had stepped down 'for personal reasons'.⁴⁷⁹ In other cases, the parties issued statements in support of their politicians, arguing that the accusations were simply an attempt by *Stasi*-workers to discredit their politicians, 'spread uncertainty (...) and

⁴⁷⁷ 'Es muß alles raus', *Der Spiegel*, 16 March 1990 <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13499332.html>> (accessed 29 March 2019).

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ AdsD, 3/THLV000086 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Presse-Spiegel DDR; Sozialdemokratische Entwicklungskommission Hessen Thüringen (1990), 'Nach Rücktritt des Thüringer SPD-Chefs Widersprüche um Gründe', *Deutschland Extra*, Nr. 73.

destabilise the country'.⁴⁸⁰ Intended or not, the changes in the top ranks of their parties 'caused great confusion' for new political actors at the communal level, leading local political groups to write to their superiors to demand better communication on the subject.⁴⁸¹

Politics at the top and bottom of GDR society was in disarray on how to proceed regarding previous involvement with the former Ministry for State Security. In the monthly interim parliament meeting in Erfurt on the fourth of April, a *Neues Forum* representative informed those present that five members of the citizen's guard, who had occupied the *MfS* headquarters in December, had gone on a hunger strike on the twenty-eighth of March after the East German government had deemed background checks on election candidates unlawful.⁴⁸² Their demands, which had been published in an open letter to the East German parliament on the second of April, demanded that all parliamentary candidates agree to be screened by an independent panel for *Stasi* collaboration.⁴⁸³

A few days later, the investigation committee would write again to the East German parliament, 'out of deep concern for our young democracy'.⁴⁸⁴ The letter, which claimed that secret informants had been instructed to infiltrate the

⁴⁸⁰ 'daß (...) Unsicherheit in die Bevölkerung getragen und damit das Land destabilisiert werden soll', AdsD, 3/THLV000086 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Presse-Spiegel DDR; Sozialdemokratische Entwicklungskommission Hessen Thüringen (1990), 'Pressemitteilung der SPD vom 26.03.1990', 26 March 1990.

⁴⁸¹ 'Große Verwirrung (...) hervorgerufen', AdsD, 2/SDPA000172 SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand; Bezirke Erfurt, Frankfurt/Oder und Gera – Korrespondenzen und Materialien (11.1989-09.1990), 'Brief Sozialdemokratie Partei in der DDR Ortsgruppe Eisenach-West, an Parteifreunde', Eisenach, 18 April 1990.

⁴⁸² StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000/70 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990, 'Protokoll der 4. Sitzung des Interimparlaments vom 04.04.1990 in Erfurt', April 1990.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ 'in tiefer Besorgnis um unsere junge Demokratie', StA Erfurt, 5/783/G-7 Bürgerbewegung Sammlung, 'Schreiben des unabhängigen Untersuchungsausschusses Erfurt an die Volkskammerabgeordneten', 10 April 1990.

political parties, argued that it was in the interest of the politicians to agree to the checks in order to regain the trust of their voters, and that their protest was based not on suspicions but on hard evidence from their research in the *Stasi* documents.⁴⁸⁵ On having informed the East German government of their findings in advance of the Parliamentary Election, the government had responded by imposing a ban on the investigation committee, which they demanded be lifted immediately.⁴⁸⁶

The public protest of the citizen's guard in Erfurt 'against the OLD and NEW crooks' managed to attract attention to their cause, with outpourings of solidarity from groups and individuals across the country.⁴⁸⁷ The mayor of Berlin consequently visited the protesters to discuss the modalities and planned procedure for the background checks of elected representatives.⁴⁸⁸ The interim parliament in Erfurt also passed a motion on the fourth of April, agreeing that candidates from all political parties and groups were to sign a personal agreement in advance of the communal election, allowing for their background to be checked for *Stasi* collaboration.⁴⁸⁹ The decision, which was made 'on the basis of the experience gathered during the parliamentary election', was to protect communal representatives from suspicions, accusations and blackmail in the upcoming elections.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ 'gegen die ALTEN und NEUEN Betrüger', 'Flugblatt des Bürgerkomitees mit Aufruf zur Unterstützung des Hungerstreiks am 5.4.1990' in *Schließt Euch an*, p. 306; StA Eisenach, 40.7/100 Sammlung Wende, 'Das Bürgerkomitee solidarisiert sich mit den Hungerstreikenden der Bürgerwache Erfurt und schließt sich den Forderungen an', Bürgerkomitee Eisenach, n.d.

⁴⁸⁸ *Schließt Euch an*, p. 305.

⁴⁸⁹ StA Erfurt, 1-5/10-9196 Unterlagen zu den Beratungen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung, 'Überprüfung aller Kandidaten zur Kommunalwahl 1990', Erfurt, 04 April 1990.

⁴⁹⁰ 'In Auswertung der Erfahrungen zur Volkskammerwahl', *ibid.*

On the twenty-fourth of April 1990, the regional election committee came together to discuss the latest developments regarding *Stasi* informants and the upcoming communal election.⁴⁹¹ In Arnstadt, the district election office had announced at the start of the month that they would not continue their work unless all election candidates were cross-checked for *MfS* collaboration.⁴⁹² The deputy leader of the election office in Arnstadt, who was present at the meeting, explained that his team had acted on a moral duty to ensure that their parliaments would 'not again' be infiltrated by spies, and reiterated that they were only planning to strike if the candidates refused to agree to the screening.⁴⁹³ This statement had been picked up by the citizen's committee in Erfurt, who had forwarded it onto all local election committees.⁴⁹⁴

The regional election office secretary explained that this 'problem' of the original protest and its 'misuse' by the citizen's committee had been reported to the central election committee and the district lawyer, as it 'posed a real threat to the elections'.⁴⁹⁵ The secretary asserted that the election office was a nonpartisan body, whose job it was to adhere to electoral law in organising the elections, and that screening for *MfS* collaboration was the business of election candidates only.⁴⁹⁶ As the public appeal to other election teams to also give up

⁴⁹¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Bezirkswahlkommission vom 24.4.1990', Bezirkswahlkommission, Erfurt, 26 April 1990.

⁴⁹² LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Bezirkswahlkommission mit den Vorsitzenden der Kreiswahlkommissionen vom 3.4.1990', Bezirkswahlkommission, Erfurt, 05 April 1990.

⁴⁹³ 'nicht wieder', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Bezirkswahlkommission vom 24.4.1990', Bezirkswahlkommission, Erfurt, 26 April 1990.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ 'das Problem, welches eine echte Behinderung der Wahlen darstellt', 'mißbraucht', ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

their work had been publicised in the press and on the radio, this amounted to an attempted boycott of the elections.⁴⁹⁷ The regional secretary was therefore willing to take legal action against the protesting election office and the citizen's committee, arguing that their behaviour put the upcoming elections at risk and that there was no legal basis for a strike.⁴⁹⁸ As a result of the ensuing discussion, the regional election team eventually decided not to take legal action, but to instead publish an official response in the press, asserting that Stasi checks did not fall within the remit of the work of the election organisers, and summoning all election teams to continue their work responsibly.⁴⁹⁹

Nevertheless, election offices faced great difficulties in preparing for the upcoming communal elections on the sixth of May. The secretary for the district election office in the city of Erfurt reported that it was much harder to form election committees this time around, with many volunteers withdrawing their support at short notice.⁵⁰⁰ Appeals for helpers, which had been published in the press in early April, had received little response.⁵⁰¹ The election secretary for Erfurt had called on the political parties to help recruit the one-thousand-two-hundred election helpers needed for the local committees, for 'otherwise, the democratic realisation of the elections was in danger'.⁵⁰² In the end, it was the 'state of emergency-like deployment' of one-hundred-and-sixty teachers and

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ StA Erfurt, 1-7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Protokoll der konstituierenden Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung vom 30. 05. 1990 der Stadt Erfurt', app. 'Abschlußbericht der Stadtwahlkommission', n.d.

⁵⁰¹ StA Erfurt, 1-5/1000 Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990-70, 'Protokoll der 4. Sitzung des Interimparlaments vom 04.04.1990 in Erfurt', April 1990.

⁵⁰² 'Sonst ist die demokratische Durchführung der Wahlen gefährdet', *ibid.*

around one hundred town officials that ensured that the election committees were complete on time.⁵⁰³

Reports from the regional election team suggest that this was once again a wide-spread problem, with many districts across the region failing to recruit enough helpers to the election committees, despite there being considerably fewer polling stations than for the parliamentary election.⁵⁰⁴ In Eisenach, where there were fourteen fewer polling stations needed this time around, support for the elections was particularly low.⁵⁰⁵ An announcement in the press on the twenty-seventh of April, just nine days before the election, called for urgent support from local citizens.⁵⁰⁶ But interest from citizens for the upcoming elections was waning altogether, with only around thirty people having attended a discussion event with communal candidates in the local cinema in Eisenach.⁵⁰⁷

As the month of the communal elections approached, the leader of the election team in Eisenach made one last attempt to recruit the helpers needed for the election committees. Knowing that there would be a large rally on the market square in Eisenach for the Labour Day celebrations on the first of May, he approached a colleague from the election team who was also active in the

⁵⁰³ 'notstandartigen Einsatz', StA Erfurt, 1-7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Protokoll der konstituierenden Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung vom 30. 05. 1990 der Stadt Erfurt', app. 'Abschlußbericht der Stadtwahlkommission', n.d.

⁵⁰⁴ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 - Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990), 'Protokoll über die Sitzung der Bezirkswahlkommission mit den Vorsitzenden und den Sekretären der Kreiswahlkommission', Bezirkswahlkommission, Erfurt, 03 May 1990.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ StA Eisenach, 12-2386 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Volkskammerwahl 1990, 'Noch immer fehlen Wahlvorstände: Unterstützung aus der Bevölkerung notwendig', Eisenacher Tagespost, 27 April 1990.

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018.

local PDS group that was organising the event. 'I need a ten-minute slot. I want to be there. We need helpers for the election', he told his colleague.⁵⁰⁸ Although the election team leader took his non-partisan role very seriously, attending events to publicise the election procedure but staying largely out of the political campaign, the motivation behind this appearance was a different one. 'I was convinced', he explained, 'that in the follow-up to the GDR, democracy should include everyone (...). Even those, who felt side-lined'.⁵⁰⁹

'It was exciting', he recalls, stepping out onto the stage in front of the crowds and asking them for their help.⁵¹⁰ There was no need to introduce himself this time, as he was already well-known in the town. The election organiser asked those gathered for the PDS event to help in the election committees, arguing along the lines of 'those who take part, are in the know (...) [and] can see for themselves'.⁵¹¹ Afterwards, his colleague would tell him that he had talked for much too long. 'That might be so', he admitted, 'but I had made the decision on my own and it worked'.⁵¹² In the nick of time, and with the support of the crowds gathered for the rally on the first of May, all remaining positions in the election committees in Eisenach were filled.

His decision to reach out to potential PDS voters can be read in a number of ways. Overall, however, it demonstrates an attempt to reunite different parts of society around a common cause, and to mediate between those trying to

⁵⁰⁸ 'Ich brauche zehn Minuten Redezeit. Ich will da hin. Wir brauchen Wahlhelfer', *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ 'das war mir auch so eine Überzeugung, dass in der Nachfolge von der DDR (...) die Demokratie alle beinhaltet', *ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ 'das war spannend', *ibid.*

⁵¹¹ 'Wer dabei ist, weiß was ist. (...) Der kann sich selber ein Bild davon machen', *ibid.*

⁵¹² 'Das kann natürlich sein. Aber die Entscheidung hatte ich selber getroffen und es hat dann funktioniert', *ibid.*

build a new order and those who may have felt they were being blamed for the failure of the last one. By taking the decision to attend an event that was so significant in GDR times, the election organiser had already met these citizens half-way. Whereas announcements in the press had failed to drum-up the necessary support, this personal yet public approach succeeded in convincing these citizens to engage with the new structures whilst also valuing their contribution.

It was not the first time, however, that the election organiser in Eisenach had been made aware of feelings of rejection amongst former state actors. In April 1990, a group of local mayors in the district of Eisenach had threatened to withdraw their support for the communal elections out of fear that they were about to lose their jobs.⁵¹³ 'If you want to do everything differently, then do it yourself', they had told the election organiser at the routine briefing event.⁵¹⁴ Unsure of what to do, the election organiser had simply continued explaining the procedure for the upcoming communal election, in which local mayors would be expected to stand for re-election. These, however, were no longer willing to do so, threatening the stability of the local elections, as the mayors were not only needed as candidates but were also instrumental in the organisation of local election committees and venues due to their local knowledge.

In the end, it was the reassuring words of the head of the district council that convinced the mayors to take the risk of standing in the local elections.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ 'Wenn ihr schon alles anders machen wollt, dann macht es doch selber', *ibid.*

Speaking second, after the election organiser, the head of the district council urged the local mayors to take part and to await the result of the election before jumping to any premature conclusions. After all, they knew their constituents better than anyone else, and they could build on their accomplishments in the years before. In the end, he would be right, for although some would lose their jobs, many of the mayors in the smaller communities would indeed be re-elected and keep their positions.

The mayoral strike in Eisenach did not last longer than half an hour, but it succeeded in highlighting the reliance of the new actors on the cooperation of former state actors, and of the subtleties of mediating such conflicts. 'I dread to think what would have happened, if it had been picked up by the press', says the former election organiser, as he retells the story of the mutiny.⁵¹⁵ He argues that it was in part the tone of the head of the district council, who was very firm, and on personal terms with the mayors in question, but in part also the 'good argumentation' that managed to save the day.⁵¹⁶ In any case, the example shows how important personal relations, arguments and tone were in helping disheartened actors to engage with and accept the new structures and the personal consequences.

While the election organisers fought the clock to overcome numerous logistical und personal hurdles, the political parties gathered all their strengths for yet another election campaign. Whereas the centre-right parties had received ample support from political colleagues in the Federal Republic for the

⁵¹⁵ 'Ich weiß nicht, was dann geworden wäre, wenn das in die Presse gekommen wäre', *ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ 'das richtige Argument', *ibid.*

parliamentary election, calls for support from CDU members in Erfurt to their partners in Wiesbaden had gone unanswered this time around.⁵¹⁷ Although the Christian Democrats in Erfurt had wanted to run the election campaign on their own on this occasion, time pressure led them to recycle left-over election materials from the parliamentary election.⁵¹⁸

Similar measures were reported amongst the local SPD groups, who also redistributed the materials previously printed for them in Hesse.⁵¹⁹ The SPD and Green Party events for the communal elections were well-supported by Hessian partners, however. In some cases, Hessians were even reported to make up fifty percent of the event attendees, whereas locals showed growing disinterest in the political campaign.⁵²⁰ In Eisenach, a friendly letter from the SPD mayor of the partner town of Marburg, printed on pink paper, was posted to local constituents, encouraging them to vote for their local SPD politicians.⁵²¹ Although the election campaign had by all means been professionalised, with all party manifestos now printed on glossy paper, the endorsement from West Germany still played a large role, and eastern political groups struggled, even by May 1990, to independently organise their campaigns amid other pressures.

⁵¹⁷ AdsD, 3/THLV000091 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Korrespondenz und Materialien (1990), 'Ohne Hilfe aus Hessen läuft kaum etwas. Auch vor den Kommunalwahlen mischen Wiesbadener Parteien wieder mit', Hessische Landeszeitung, 03 May 1990.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ AdsD, 3/THLV000091 SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Korrespondenz und Materialien (1990), 'Müder Kommunalwahlkampf in Thüringen. Parteien in Lauerstellung vor dem Endspurt', Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 03 May 1990.

⁵²¹ StA Eisenach, 40.7/110 Sammlung Wende, 'Brief von Oberbürgermeister der Universitätsstadt Marburg und Landrat des Landkreises Marburg-Biedenkopf an liebe Bürgerinnen und Bürger in Stadt und Kreis Eisenach', SPD Marburg Biedenkopf, Marburg, 29 April 1990.

Rewriting History

On the twenty-eighth of June 1990, the newly elected town council in Eisenach met for their monthly assembly. A fresh communal government had been elected, and structures were being established, with advice from colleagues from their West-German partner town. The SPD faction put forward a proposal, calling for the removal of the acting town chronicler from his position.⁵²² The meeting protocol claimed that his 'role in the distortion of the history of the town of Eisenach is no longer tenable'.⁵²³ The reasoning behind the proposal was presented verbally by the SPD delegate, leading to a decision by the town assembly to remove the town chronicler from his role and re-advertise the position.

In a written public defence, the former chronicler responded to the accusations made against him, stating that he was given no other opportunity to do so.⁵²⁴ He explained that he had first learnt of his dismissal in the newspaper, despite having been present at the town assembly meeting up until the first break.⁵²⁵ The proposal for him to be removed from his role was made afterwards, and without any former consultation.⁵²⁶ Not even the mayor had addressed the issue with him, leading him to think that he too must also have

⁵²² StA Eisenach, 21.2-247 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1989-1990, 'Niederschrift über die 2. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 28. 6. 1990', Büro des Stadtverordnetenvorstehers, Eisenach, 03 July 1990.

⁵²³ '(sein) Anteil an einer Verfälschung der Geschichte der Stadt Eisenach ist nicht mehr tragbar', StA Eisenach, 21.2-247 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1989-1990, 'Niederschrift über die 2. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 28. 6. 1990', Büro des Stadtverordnetenvorstehers, Eisenach, 03 July 1990.

⁵²⁴ StA Eisenach, 40.7/97 Sammlung Wende, 'Öffentliche Erklärung zu Form und Inhalt meiner Abberufung als Stadtchronist', Stadtchronist s. D., Eisenach, 11 July 1990.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

been unaware of the plans until the point that the proposal was heard.⁵²⁷

During the debate, one local representative had proposed holding a small meeting with the town chronicler first, in which he was prepared to act as a mediator, but this too was rejected in favour of going straight to a vote.⁵²⁸

The Hessian newspaper, which covered the story on the thirtieth of June 1990, gave it the headline: 'SED-past costs town chronicler his job'.⁵²⁹ 'That's true!', writes the chronicler, pointing out that the allegations made against him related to his previous position as a civics teacher at the local secondary school, and not to his ability to work as a town chronicler.⁵³⁰ Having now left the party and shown 'willingness to learn from past mistakes and to apply these new insights to my personal life and in dealing with history', he argued, 'my competence as a *Heimat*-historian has surely not been diminished'.⁵³¹

Furthermore, he claimed that the arguments put forward against his continuation were not backed up by sufficient proof; regarding the claim that he penalised Christian students while working as a teacher, the SPD delegate had presented her daughter's school report, in which he had simply given her the mark 'good'.⁵³² Regarding a referenced publication on the worker's movement, he pointed out that he was not among the listed authors.⁵³³ His work as a chronicler, he argued, was not to write history, but to collect

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ 'SED-Vergangenheit kostet Stadtchronisten den Job', *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ 'Mit meiner nachgewiesenen Bereitschaft, aus den Fehlern der Vergangenheit zu lernen und die neuen Erkenntnisse im persönlichen Leben wie im Umgang mit der Geschichte anzuwenden, hat sich meine Kompetenz als Heimathistoriker sicher nicht verringert', *ibid.*

⁵³² 'gut', *ibid.*

⁵³³ Ibid.

documents.⁵³⁴ The resulting collection on Eisenach's town history, 'his life's work', and the largest collection of its kind in the GDR, was a valuable resource that had been made available to the public for historical analysis.⁵³⁵

The case made by the SPD delegate to the town assembly was clearly based largely on emotive language and subjective argumentation. Nevertheless, it managed to convince an assembly of elected representatives to remove a person from his position and re-advertise the role without any former consultation. The town chronicler contended that he was not speaking out for the sake of being right, but in order to insist on

truth, humane treatment of affected citizens, respect for human dignity, a right to a fair trial, recognition of professional competence without political vilification, and last but not least, real parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; all human rights promised under our new political system, but which have been violated during my dismissal.⁵³⁶

In any case, he argued that the town assembly had no right to dismiss him.⁵³⁷

As the role of the town chronicler was created by the district council, the right to employ and therefore also dismiss a member of staff remained the task of the district administrator, and not that of the town assembly.⁵³⁸

The failure to discuss concerns with the accused in advance of the public debate speaks for a time during which former procedures and structures had been rejected, but new ones had not yet been fully consolidated. Instead of

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ 'mein Lebenswerk', *ibid.*

⁵³⁶ 'Wahrheit, menschenlichen Umgang mit betroffenen Bürgern, Achtung vor der Würde des Menschen, sein Recht auf Anhörung und Verteidigung, um Anerkennung der fachlichen Kompetenz ohne politische Verunglimpfung und nicht zuletzt um echte parlamentarische Demokratie mit ihrer Rechtsstaatlichkeit, alles versprochene Menschenrechte unserer neuen Ordnung, die in Zusammenhang mit meiner Abberufung mißachtet wurden,' *ibid.*

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

questioning or cross-checking evidence, personal testimonies were accepted and decisions were taken on the basis of group consensus. According to the town chronicler, this misconduct and disrespect for protocol led to severe public pressure and had negative repercussions for his career, his health and his family.⁵³⁹ The decision of how to deal with the former party members is an intricate one, and of great importance when trying to establish a new political order. Nevertheless, even after new representatives had been elected at the local and national level, the practices through which the new order was being implemented were not yet in keeping with the proposed values.

Formal Loyalty and Own Goals

In late August 1990, the new mayor of Erfurt began preparing for the upcoming elections in October and December, by writing to previous election helpers to ask for their support. The autumn would see yet another two rounds of political campaigning, firstly for the Thuringian State elections on the fourteenth of October, and then again for the first joint federal elections after German Reunification, on the second of December. After the troubles of communal elections and adding to the voter fatigue of the past months, it was crucial to ensure that election committees and helpers were on hand well in advance.

Unfortunately, the first response to come back on the second of September was negative. The former election helper had attached the mayor's original letter to his response, on the assumption that he clearly must have

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

forgotten to read the badly phrased communication before signing it off.⁵⁴⁰ The mayor's letter, which began by thanking the citizen for his help with the parliamentary and communal elections in 1990, had continued by confirming that the council was relying on his help for the upcoming election on the fourteenth of October. 'As per state law', it stated, 'the work on the election board is voluntary'.⁵⁴¹ Quoting paragraph 10 of electoral law, the letter then explained 'It may therefore only be turned down for important reasons'.⁵⁴² 'It is not tactful', the citizen replied, 'that especially election helpers like myself, who have volunteered for the past two elections, should now be pressured in this way'.⁵⁴³

One week later, the next rejection arrived in the mayoral office. 'I found your ultimatum-like demand incredibly disconcerting', explains the former helper.⁵⁴⁴ The phrasing of the letter, with the reference to electoral law, was 'incapacitating' and 'fatally reminiscent of the practices of the past forty years', which the citizen argues the mayor's government had supposedly wanted to put an end to.⁵⁴⁵ Although the citizen was indeed without work, she explained that 'having legally investigated the above-mentioned §', she would be unable to help due to family commitments.⁵⁴⁶ The next letter, to arrive the very same

⁵⁴⁰ StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an den Herrn Oberbürgermeister', Erfurt, 02 September 1990.

⁵⁴¹ 'Die Tätigkeit im Wahlvorstand ist im Ländergesetz vom 22.07.1990 als Ehrenamt (...) definiert', StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief vom Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Erfurt an C.H.', n.d.

⁵⁴² 'Es darf daher nur aus wichtigen Gründen abgelehnt werden (§10 der Wahlordnung)', *ibid.*

⁵⁴³ 'Ich finde es nicht taktvoll, daß gerade Wahlhelfer die, wir ich, die beiden letzten Wahlen mit bestritten haben, so vergattert werden', StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an den Herrn Oberbürgermeister', Erfurt, 02 September 1990.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Ich habe Ihre ultimative Aufforderung (...) mit äußerster Befremdung zur Kenntnis genommen', StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an Werter Herr R.', Erfurt, 11 September 1990.

⁵⁴⁵ 'entmündigend', 'erinnert mich fatal an Verfahrensweisen einer 40-jährigen Vergangenheit', *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ 'Nach juristischer Prüfung des o.g. §', *ibid.*

day, concurred with the first letter, although the explanation for turning down the work spanned two densely handwritten pages and was justified by the disappointment the citizen had experienced over the course of the year.⁵⁴⁷

Whereas the former volunteer had been happy to support 'the young progressive powers' in March and May, this feeling had soured on finding that 'the same old comrades' were still in all the high offices.⁵⁴⁸

Earlier that day, the district election committee for Erfurt had discussed the first letter during their meeting.⁵⁴⁹ Having agreed that they would not take legal action against the election helper this time, another member of staff was given the task of drafting a reply to the citizen who had felt pressurised by the city mayor.⁵⁵⁰ The template, which was eventually sent out to all those that turned down the request for help, was only a few lines long, and simply acknowledged their refusal to help.⁵⁵¹ The unfortunate phrasing, and the various reasons given by the citizens were not responded to, nor was any sign given that the mayor regretted the wording of his letter.⁵⁵²

The final letter in the collection, dated the eighteenth of September 1990, described 'the threat with the state and electoral law, nonetheless spanning two paragraphs of your letter' as 'tactless, to put it mildly'.⁵⁵³ Although the two

⁵⁴⁷ StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an den Herrn Bürgermeister', Erfurt, 11 September 1990.

⁵⁴⁸ 'den jungen progressiven Kräften', 'die alten Genossen', *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ StA Erfurt, A31721 Stadtentwicklungsamt Bereich Statistik und Wahlen, 'Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Kreiswahlausschusses Erfurt-Stadt vom 11. September 1990', Kreiswahlausschuss Erfurt-Stadt, Erfurt, 17 September 1990.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵¹ StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an Wahlhelfer', Erfurt, 24 September 1990.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ 'Die Drohung mit dem Ländergesetz und der Wahlordnung, die immerhin über zwei Absätze Ihres Schreibens geht, ist gelinde gesagt taktlos', StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an den Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Erfurt', Erfurt, 18 September 1990.

former election volunteers would have considered such approaches democratically legitimate if they had been chosen at random, they accused the mayor of 'sheer complacency' and warned that such practices would lead to citizens' duties 'once again' becoming that of election officials.⁵⁵⁴ Across the top of the letter, the reader had scribbled '! One own goal after another!'.⁵⁵⁵

The written exchange with local citizens on behalf of Erfurt's new mayor reflects the general mood after a long year of political work. The hopes and expectations that had inspired citizens in the first half of the year had given way to disenchantment amongst those who felt that the political changes had left them feeling 'on the one hand liberated and on the other hand dispossessed'.⁵⁵⁶ The communal representatives had begun to work with new structures and regulations, but still faced the same problem of mediating between different groups of the electorate to gain backing for the new political system. The citizens however looked closely at political language and practices, accepting the new structures in principal but rejecting a culture that did not respect their right to autonomy and their personal and intrinsic value.

Conclusion

On the first page of her book on political reconciliation, Anne Sa'adah asserts that

A democratizing regime may execute or imprison or temporarily disenfranchise some figures from the preceding dictatorship, but it will not be able to exclude

⁵⁵⁴ 'großer Bequemlichkeit', 'wieder', *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ '!Ein Eigentor nach dem Anderen!', *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ 'zwar einerseits befreit aber andererseits auch enteignet fühle', StA Erfurt, A16883 Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992, 'Brief an den Herrn Oberbürgermeister', Erfurt, 02 September 1990.

all individuals who supported the fallen regime.⁵⁵⁷

On examining the first year of free elections in the GDR, this statement rings true. For while citizens set about establishing new structures, it would take the cooperation of all members of society and mutual trust for those new structures to succeed. In particular, the elections, which were to take place under intense conditions and a tight time frame, depended on the knowledge and expertise of the former state administration. These actors, although willing in principal to support the implementation of new structures and procedures, nevertheless had the opportunity to reassert themselves in instances where they felt their own contribution was being devalued. As such, the organisation of the elections became a delicate negotiation between new actors, who came in with good intentions but little experience, and the former state administration that already suspected that they would soon be replaced.

Although different groups were therefore reliant on one another, their means were not equally weighted. In the political campaign, citizens feared that the successor groups to the Socialist Unity Party would use their political capital to regain control of the country. In support of the eastern 'opposition', western politicians blatantly ignored the rules set by the East German parliament for the upcoming election and supplied their political counterparts with financial, material, strategical and personnel support throughout the election campaign. Consequently, the power balance shifted, but this time it was the wealth of the western backers that would greatly determine the chances

⁵⁵⁷ Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, p. 1.

of the eastern political groups in the parliamentary elections. Genuine fears that old networks were still active and influencing the new elections were played out and politicised as part of the election campaign, with the *Stasi* past being appropriated to influence voting behaviour. Nationalistic identity concepts and promises of financial opportunities were used to win voters during times of great instability.

All the while, citizens navigated a new political culture and new formal rules and regulations. As well as being faced with an array of information and having to decipher new campaign tactics, citizens prepared to vote under new conditions, in many cases, for the very first time. This experience was a significant landmark in the lives of GDR citizens and was therefore accompanied by strong feelings of joy, excitement and expectation. The result of the election, on the other hand, would counter this feeling of progress and accomplishment by demonstrating how divergent the views of the electorate were, and by essentially dividing the country into winners and losers.

In the communal elections, the focus on *Stasi* structures was intended to create transparency but instead reaped further distrust amongst citizens and towards the newly elected representatives. Although this investigation presented an opportunity to re-establish trust in society, the way it was negotiated between national and local groups and politicised as part of the election campaigns only helped to spread suspicions. As such, the polity became increasingly disengaged and communal actors feared personal repercussions if they were to continue in politics.

The repercussions for former elites continued, with the focus shifting to former party members. Even when new parliamentary structures had been introduced to facilitate discussion and decision-making, the peer pressure that had evolved through the season of demonstrations still had the power to convince groups of elected officials. The practices of exclusion that were undermined in the autumn were turned around, and citizens with former links to the Ministry for Security or Socialist Unity Party were ousted from their positions and banished from public life using the new political procedures. Strong emotions stoked the divisions in society, despite the urgent need to work together over the transformation process.

By the end of 1990, new structures and practices had been established and consolidated, but the communicative culture had not grown with it. A new political party was in power and accordingly, there were new political rituals to adhere to. But to some, the tone of communication and the need to conform was reminiscent of former times and showed little change. By silently withdrawing their support, citizens staged a kind of mute-iny, by refusing to obey and execute orders from above. In this sense, this chapter has demonstrated how purposeful silence can be implemented to express feelings of bitterness and dissatisfaction, but also to reassert the importance of respectful communication and appreciation of others. As political participation and freedom of expression was channelled from the streets into new structures, the next chapter will look more closely at how new styles of political communication were negotiated in public.

3. The Tone of Voice

Print the truth!

On the eighteenth of January 1990, the new chief editor of the district newspaper took to the podium outside the cathedral in Erfurt to address the crowds. The masses continued to gather on the square every Thursday, as they had done during the autumn, but the gatherings had changed from political demonstrations to information events about the state of the country and the work of the local representatives and the new political groups. Although the events would wane in the weeks to come and would be replaced by political campaigns for the upcoming elections, they were the culmination of a process in which information had been taken from the closed rooms and state-approved publications to the streets and open spaces, where they could be heard and responded to by all, in public.

As the editor announced that he was from 'the new *Thüringer Allgemeine*', the paper that was formerly named *Das Volk* and officially the mouthpiece of the Socialist Unity Party in the region, he was greeted by rapturous applause.⁵⁵⁸ 'I'm grateful for the applause', he said, 'because I assume it means we will receive the solidarity we need to go down the new path that the paper has recently chosen.'⁵⁵⁹ The crowd confirmed his interpretation with more applause and shouts of agreement. He must have been slightly relieved, for speakers from state organisations had received a very different welcome to the stage in the weeks

⁵⁵⁸ 'Ich komme von der neuen Thüringer Allgemeinen', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000

⁵⁵⁹ 'Ich freue mich über das Klatschen, weil ich vermute, wir bekommen die nötige Solidarität um den Weg zu gehen, den wir diese Tage mit dieser Zeitung eingeschlagen haben', *ibid.*

before. In October, demonstrators in Erfurt had marched past the newspaper's headquarters shouting 'Print the truth!'.⁵⁶⁰ At that time, two thirds of the editorial team still saw no reason to distance themselves from the Socialist Unity Party, and it would take another two months and significant pressure from local activists before they would eventually change their minds.⁵⁶¹

The editor's next message, self-proclaimed as being of utmost importance to his listeners, was: 'I am independent (not in a political party), and I was before October too!'⁵⁶² Again, the crowds approved and encouraged him to continue. Crucially, it was the newspaper itself that had decided to cut ties with the Socialist Unity Party a few days beforehand, leading the way for other papers in the country.⁵⁶³ The 'independent' badge would soon adorn the cover pages of all papers in the region, to draw the line between the previous affiliations of the press in the GDR and its new secular role in society. Although the new editor had been working for the paper since 1971, his lack of party membership was enough to gain the support of the people.

He went on to explain the developments of the preceding weeks, as members of the organisation had tried to reach a compromise with the Socialist Unity Party to buy the newspaper's freedom. The symbolic transaction, originally set at one Mark – 'East or West' – had angered the party leaders, who

⁵⁶⁰ 'Schreibt die Wahrheit!', Christiane Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung: Die Unabhängigkeitserklärung', *Thüringer Allgemeine* (02 January 2016) <<https://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/leben/vermisches/die-geschichte-einer-partezeitung-10-die-unabhaengigkeits-erklarung-id221428113.html>> (accessed 10 July 2019).

⁵⁶¹ Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung'.

⁵⁶² 'Ich bin parteilos und das nicht erst seit dem Oktober', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000

⁵⁶³ Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung'.

had been hoping to use the paper to campaign for the planned elections in March.⁵⁶⁴

Right until the end, they tried to blackmail us. We weren't to get any paper. Like everyone else in this country, you all know that you can't have a newspaper without paper.⁵⁶⁵

Through his detailed descriptions of the negotiations around paper supplies and finances, the editor offered the audience insights into the complexities of renegotiating independence for the press, and the intricate links and dependencies between different state organisations and suppliers.

All this, he said, was worth it to ensure that the press would serve the people as 'a critical companion on political events'.⁵⁶⁶ This statement was met by the greatest applause of the evening, although he was quick to rein it in. 'I think you are clapping too soon. It's not that easy, and it won't change through clapping. It's going to take a lot of hard work'.⁵⁶⁷ He argued that the change would require a change on behalf of the people as well. 'Not overnight', he said, for it would take time.⁵⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it would be necessary for the journalists to find new topics and approaches, and for the citizens to recognise and honour this by continuing to read the paper. In so saying, the editor stressed the

⁵⁶⁴ 'eine Mark, Ost oder West', 'Der Thüringen Talk mit Sergej Lochthofen: Die Presse nach der Wende', Podcast, *Antenne Thüringen*, 28 August 2018 <<https://www.antennethueringen.de/blog/hashtag/antenne-thUeringen-podcasts-368226>> (accessed 16 November 2018).

⁵⁶⁵ 'Bis zuletzt hat man versucht, uns zu erpressen. Wir sollten kein Papier kriegen. Sie wissen wie alle in diesem Lande, kann keine Zeitung ohne (...) Papier (...) erscheinen', StA Erfurt, 6/7 Tonbandaufnahmen, 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000.

⁵⁶⁶ 'als kritischer Begleiter der politischen Ereignisse', *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ 'Ich glaube Sie klatschen zu früh – das ist nicht so leicht, das lässt sich nicht hier mit Klatschen machen. Wir werden viel daran arbeiten müssen', *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ 'nicht (...) über Nacht', *ibid.*

interdependence of the citizens and their institutions and called for greater patience and compassion.

In the last part of the recording, the editor thanked the staff at the paper's printing house *Fortschritt* for providing the new editorial team with the support and solidarity that they needed to continue with the paper, and for thereby countering attempts to blackmail the new committee. The message was clear: change will only come by working together and supporting one another through the hurdles. The printing houses had played a vital role in reforming the GDR press landscape, leading the way for new public discussions. The former SED agitprop secretary remembers attending an extremely 'stinging and contrary' workplace debate with staff at *Fortschritt* in September 1989 that left such a marked impression that it forced the SED secretaries in Erfurt to begin talks amongst their own ranks.⁵⁶⁹ Later, it was the printing houses that first challenged the continued affiliation of the papers with the SED, with the print staff in nearby Suhl going on strike on the sixth of January 1990.⁵⁷⁰ On Saturday, thirteenth of January, two hundred members of the *Fortschritt* staff in Erfurt gathered for a six-hour debate, voting against their district manager to cut ties with the Socialist Unity Party, and not 'to go down with them', as he had suggested.⁵⁷¹

As demonstrated by the editor's speech, the media, the state and citizens were all connected and interdependent on one another. The citizens were now demanding that the press function by a different set of values to before, but it

⁵⁶⁹ 'scharf und konträr', Interview with Wolfgang Mühle, Erfurt, 13 August 2018.

⁵⁷⁰ Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung'.

⁵⁷¹ 'mit der Partei in Ehren unterzugehen', *ibid.*

would take patience and commitment from all to succeed. What role would these connections play in the following months, as the East German press attempted to enact the democratic transformation requested by the citizens? How would the different actors react to the new forms and styles of communication, the new tone of voice and the inherent set of values? To what extent would free journalism encourage the use of voice?

Bernd Weisbrod argues that in order to analyse medialisation historically, it is important to focus not just on the institutions and actors, but precisely on the space in between.⁵⁷² Political medialisation is 'a process of configuration and valuation of political publics'.⁵⁷³ These public discourses can be channelled, but they are in no way fixed.⁵⁷⁴ Rather, medialisation takes place when these discourses enter the public space to be negotiated. Through this ongoing renegotiation, a 'communicative consciousness' develops, which in turn 'strengthens and opens' the political public sphere.⁵⁷⁵ By focussing on communication conflicts in detail, it becomes possible to examine how political norms and values are asserted and negotiated in public. Especially during times of transformation, when former norms are rejected as they were in the autumn of 1989, new possibilities emerge. Nonetheless, a new communicative culture still needs to be negotiated in what becomes an ongoing process of practising voice. The citizens gathered on the cathedral square in Erfurt in January 1990 called for an independent press, but how would they react to the new style of reporting

⁵⁷² Bernd Weisbrod (Ed.), *Die Politik der Öffentlichkeit – Die Öffentlichkeit der Politik. Politische Medialisierung in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), p. 19.

⁵⁷³ 'Prozeß der Konfiguration und Inwertsetzung politischer Öffentlichkeiten', *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ 'des kommunikativen Bewusstseins', 'zusammenhält und gleichzeitig potentiell öffnet', *ibid.*

that would develop over the years to come? What effect would these new forms of communication and information sharing have on the other interdependent actors?

Although the Socialist Unity Party had instructed the regional newspapers to continue reporting for the party until June 1990, *Das Volk* in Erfurt was one of the first papers to take the decision to change its name and profess independent reporting.⁵⁷⁶ Internally, many eastern papers elected new editors from within their ranks, and *Stasi*-informers were made to leave, but the majority of journalists continued in their roles.⁵⁷⁷ From early 1990, daily and monthly local newspapers proliferated in the region, as demand for new journalism and up-to-date information rocketed. These were accompanied by the arrival of various West German formats, from *Bild* to *taz*, and new papers from the eastern political parties.⁵⁷⁸

For a brief period, these new startups were able to break the monopoly of the SED-papers, but this was shortlived. Due to widely practised 'price-dumping' by western papers, smaller eastern startups soon died out again, unable to keep up, financially, with the competition.⁵⁷⁹ At this point, there were no official guidelines for the press from the East German government under

⁵⁷⁶ Ulrich Erzigkeit, *Selbstbefreiung. Wie aus dem SED-Blatt „Volksrecht“ die unabhängige Regionalzeitung „Ostthüringer Zeitung“ (OTZ) wurde* (Essen: Klartext, 2015), p. 22.

⁵⁷⁷ Ilona Wuschig, *Anspruch ohne Wirklichkeit. 15 Jahre Medien in Ostdeutschland* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), p. 164.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁵⁷⁹ 'Dumpingpreise', a term referring to the practice of western papers selling their newspapers at the same price in the East, but in GDR Mark, before the currency union; *ibid.*, p. 162.

Hans Modrow, and with the Thuringian state government not yet being in place, it would take longer for the federal rules on the media to be implemented.⁵⁸⁰

Just a few years later, from 1993 to 1996, all Thuringian papers – aside from the *Freies Wort* newspaper in Suhl – would be bought up by the *Thüringer Allgemeine*, formerly the Socialist Unity Party paper *Das Volk*, and eventually sold to the umbrella company WAZ (Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung), now Funke Mediengruppe,⁵⁸¹ by the Treuhand trust.⁵⁸² Although researchers with private contracts have been given access to write the history of the regional paper,⁵⁸³ I was told by the editorial board that the archive no longer exists.⁵⁸⁴ This chapter therefore relies on sources from town and city council records, newspaper articles and oral history interviews. It looks at communication conflicts in the space between the media, the state and the citizens in Erfurt and Eisenach to understand how the press was used as a form of voice in the public sphere from 1990 onwards. In so doing, it looks at the press, not in isolation, but rather as a central actor in the creation of a new, open public sphere, and asks how print journalism influenced this discursive process.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁸¹ Christiane Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung: Die Unabhängigkeitserklärung'.

⁵⁸² Wuschig, *Anspruch ohne Wirklichkeit*, p. 159.

⁵⁸³ See the ten-part series by Christiane Baumann, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung'.

⁵⁸⁴ Email reply from the chief secretary of the Thüringer Landeszeitung on 07 August 2018, in response to a request sent on 13 March 2018 for access to documents relating to the Thüringer Allgemeine, the Eisenacher Presse, the Thüringer Tagesblatt, the Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine and the Thüringer Tagespost from 1990 onwards.

Freedom of Expression

Journalism in Limbo

Looking back at his first few months as chief editor of the *Thüringer Allgemeine*, the editor admitted that it proved difficult to introduce the desired reforms at the local paper.⁵⁸⁵ Many of his colleagues were unwilling to make the transition from partisan journalism to independent reporting and trying to recruit fresh faces to their newspaper brought mixed experiences. Furthermore, the technical structures at the paper were outdated, with delivery via the East German postal service failing to reach their customers on time. 'Trying to regain trust and credibility under these circumstances was the biggest challenge', he added.⁵⁸⁶ And then there was the competition.

In 1990, the demand for news and information in Thuringia was so great, that a disproportionate total of seven local papers had been established in the town of Eisenach by the end of the year.⁵⁸⁷ Newspaper outlets wanting to stock the full range of available newspapers were so short of space that papers and magazines started piling up on the shop floors.⁵⁸⁸ In Erfurt, two sales people from the newly founded *Thüringer Anzeiger*, 'Newspaper for Business, Politics and Culture' sold two-thousand copies of their new paper within two hours outside of the main train station in January 1990.⁵⁸⁹ A further five-hundred

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with Sergej Lochthofen in Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Unter Druck!: Medien und Politik* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2014), pp. 156.

⁵⁸⁶ 'In dieser Situation für Vertrauen zu werben und Glaubwürdigkeit zurückzugewinnen war die größte Herausforderung', *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, 10 February 2018.

⁵⁸⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Seit Wochen unüberschaubare Zeitungsflut in den Kiosken – DDR-Blätter nicht mehr so gefragt bei den Kunden', *Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger*, *Tagespost*, 129, 09 August 1990.

⁵⁸⁹ StA Erfurt, 3800 50.3/39 Zeitungen, 'Bevölkerung freut sich riesig über „Thüringer Anzeiger“', Wilfried Schnitker, *Thüringer Anzeiger*. 2/1, 9 February 1990.

copies, which had been delivered to the local book shop *Peterknecht*, were also gone within minutes.⁵⁹⁰

In Eisenach, a local tradesman had organised for the *Oberhessische Presse* to be sold in his home town, complete with a special section on local news from Eisenach. He had met the managing director of the daily newspaper in the West German partner town, Marburg, through the town twinning programme and arranged with his boss at the GDR Trading Organisation *HO* (*Handelsorganisation*) for their shops to stock the Eisenach offshoot of the paper in exchange for a thirty percent share in revenue.⁵⁹¹ On the eighteenth of January 1990, he collected thirty-thousand copies of the *Oberhessische Presse* in person from Marburg, totalling twice the amount usually sold in West Germany.⁵⁹² As he turned onto the market square in Eisenach with his delivery, he caught sight of the thousands of citizens that had gathered there in anticipation. The demand for the first cross-border-newspaper was so great, that the first copies would never make it to the shop; they were sold directly from the van.⁵⁹³

Although the interest in non-partisan news was great, new papers starting out faced significant infrastructural challenges that shaped their day-to-day business. The lack of telephone lines meant that journalists would have to go out and speak to people in person in order to gain information and advice

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Klaus Wuggazer, 'Zeuchner und die erste deutsch-deutsche Zeitung', *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 06 February 2015 <<https://www.thueringerallgemeine.de/leben/land-und-leute/25-jahre-thueringen-zeuchner-und-die-erste-deutsch-deutsche-zeitung-id220688753.html>> (accessed 05 January 2020).

⁵⁹² Wuggazer, 'Zeuchner und die erste deutsch-deutsche Zeitung', p. 3.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

on possible news stories. This cultivated a style of journalism that a journalist, formerly of the *Eisenacher Presse*, describes as ‘going out, looking, smelling, tasting, feeling, listening, speaking with people, digging deep down into topics and then writing it up.’⁵⁹⁴ ‘It’s an ideal world’, he said.⁵⁹⁵ ‘Hard work though’.⁵⁹⁶

Fortunately for this journalist, citizens and state workers alike were open and willing to talk to him and provide him with information and insider know-how. In advance of a meeting with a village mayor, for example, the Swabian journalist would ask local contacts for background information on the person.⁵⁹⁷ Similarly, conversations with locals as part of his investigative journalism allowed him to familiarise himself with aspects of GDR culture, as contacts readily explained linguistic terms and the former structures around communal life.⁵⁹⁸ This allowed him to ‘feel at home’ very quickly, as he ‘inhaled’ the local way of life.⁵⁹⁹ It also demonstrates, however, how different the culture and structures in the GDR were, and how important such insights were in order to understand the issues determining the every day.

These insights also informed his journalism, leading him to discover interesting stories, as interviewees readily ‘recounted a load of stuff’.⁶⁰⁰ In some cases, however, the locals’ willingness to talk and openly share information

⁵⁹⁴ ‘Das war rausgehen, gucken, riechen, schmecken, fühlen, hören, mit Leuten reden und sich dann wirklich tief reinarbeiten in die Themen und dann schreiben’, Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, 10 February 2018.

⁵⁹⁵ ‘Das ist der Idealfall halt’, *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ ‘Anstrengend, aber (...)’, *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ ‘Und drum bin ich sehr schnell hier heimisch geworden auch, weil ich am Anfang das alles so inhaliert habe, also in mich reingesogen hab, wie man hier gelebt hat’, *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ ‘Dann ist man zu dem, dann hat der ein Haufen Zeug erzählt’, *ibid.*

startled the West German journalist. Especially new members of the local town administration, who were not used to working with a free press, would not hesitate to speak to him.

I thought, 'oh wow, I really am a lucky journalist (...)
he does not think before he speaks, he is telling me everything'.⁶⁰¹

As formal structures for dealing with the press had not yet been established, journalists would simply walk into a company or office and demand to be shown around.⁶⁰²

Although he was quite aware that such practices would not have been possible in West Germany, the journalist readily made use of the informal structures.

I thought it was great, that you could go up to anyone and have a chat. Or with many people, at least, that many recounted information that would be very hard to come by in West Germany.⁶⁰³

Nevertheless, the journalist explained that he would 'protect' lower-ranking individuals who had passed on information by not printing their names in the article, for fear that it could cause them trouble at work.⁶⁰⁴

When structures were introduced in the second half of 1990, the journalist protested by writing articles about the 'censure' of free speech in the communal and regional structures, and the 'undemocratic obstruction of a free

⁶⁰¹ 'wo ich gedacht habe "Ohohoh, ich habe richtig Glück als Journalist (...)" der denkt nicht nach, der erzählt mir alles"', *ibid.*

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*

⁶⁰³ 'Ich fand das toll, dass man zu jedem hingehen konnte und einfach mit dem quatschen konnte. Oder mit vielen jedenfalls, dass viele Sachen erzählt haben, die man im Westen nur ganz schwer und mit sehr viel Umwegen erfahren hat', *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ 'geschützt', *ibid.*

press'.⁶⁰⁵ Even though he knew that such structures were commonplace in West Germany, he had relished the opportunities that the lack of regulations had brought for journalism. He noted that people made particularly good use of political debates around this time, and that there was a great deal of 'freedom of speech, freedom of opinion'.⁶⁰⁶ He would publish thoroughly on these debates, recounting who had said what or presented which arguments. Not everyone, however, shared his passion for political debates, with some colleagues apparently referring to them instead as 'political quarrels'.⁶⁰⁷ The perception of these new forms of political communication were therefore not wholly positive, with some journalists not seeing it within their remit or in the interest of the readers to report on divergent opinions, or at least not in this format.

While the western journalist considered the role of the press to be 'to explain democracy' and provide 'critical reports', the readers demanded other information.⁶⁰⁸ In response to growing unemployment, the newspapers turned to giving regular legal advice, offering 'clear and easy to understand' printed materials on employment law in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁶⁰⁹ Another important issue in 1990 was consumer information, as readers asked for help on what to do with unnecessary insurances and other products that had been bought under false marketing.⁶¹⁰ Next, they began requesting price comparisons for produce, as prices soared. On the third of August 1990, for

⁶⁰⁵ 'Zensur', 'und quasi undemokratisch hier versucht, die freie Presse zu behindern', *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ 'Redefreiheit, Gedankenfreiheit', *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ 'Politische Streitereien', *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ 'Demokratie erklären', 'kritisch berichten', *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ 'klar und verständlich'. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Aktuelles Arbeitsrecht der BRD', Oberhessische Presse / Eisenacher Presse (27-28 Juli 1990).

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, 10 February 2018.

example, the *Eisenacher Presse* printed a full-page article entitled 'What's the cost of bread and butter?', comparing the price of groceries in the West and East German partner towns.⁶¹¹ This was a first, the journalist explained. 'Never before, and never again did I see anything like it'.⁶¹²

Whereas readers readily served up information and stories that journalists could use for investigative journalism, the demand from customers in 1990 was for advice and information on how to deal with the many new aspects of political, social and economic life. The newspapers were to serve the main function of providing reliable information, and the journalists found themselves unable to avoid succumbing to these demands. Nevertheless, critical articles on communal issues would continue to be printed in the local press, leading to conflicts with the town council.

Bad Press

In some cases, the pressure from the press and the general public impacted heavily on the work of the local council. In January 1990, a member of the citizens' group *Neues Forum* in Eisenach published an article in *Das Volk*, criticising the decision of the mayor to employ the former director of the *Handelsorganisation* on an honorary basis.⁶¹³ Suggesting that the mayor could be acting on personal interests, he questioned why money had been found for

⁶¹¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Was kosten Butter und Brot? OP/Eisenacher Presse vergleicht die Preise in Eisenach und Marburg', *Oberhessische Presse / Eisenacher Presse* (03 August 1990), p. 11.

⁶¹² 'das habe ich noch nie erlebt, nie vorher und nie hinterher', Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, 10 February 2018.

⁶¹³ StA Eisenach, 12-2298 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Neuverteilung von Gebäuden, 'Gegen einen Ausverkauf. Fragen zu zweifelhaften Verhandlungspraktiken des Rates der Wartburgstadt mit Firmen aus der Bundesrepublik', *Das Volk*, 4 January 1990.

‘non-transparent manipulation’, but not for the opening of the local museum and the tourist information.⁶¹⁴ The article concluded ‘We are against the sell-out of the GDR and our home town Eisenach. This sell-out must be stopped immediately through the governance of the mayor and the town council. Even the town council must seek approval from the Round Table before taking any decisions that go against the interests of the citizens of Eisenach’.⁶¹⁵

Four days later, the mayor responded with a letter to the press, asking for unedited publication.⁶¹⁶ In response to the article, he asked what exactly he believed was being sold off; the ‘disfunctional sewerage system’, the ‘insufficiently’ sized gas pipelines, the ‘delapidated’ hospitals, industry with its ‘decades-old technology’, or the ‘veteran public transport buses’?⁶¹⁷ By giving details of the condition of much of the town’s infrastructure, the mayor argued against the concept of a sell-out and asserted that the town was in need of all the help it could get.

Describing how the council had been inundated with offers from companies in the Federal Republic, the mayor explained that the town was in need of someone with knowledge of economics and business, in order to manage these contacts and determine which offers would best benefit the town.⁶¹⁸ He

⁶¹⁴ ‘undurchsichtige Manipulationen’, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ ‘Wir sind gegen einen Ausverkauf der DDR und unserer Heimatstadt Eisenach. Dieser Ausverkauf muß sofort durch die Kontrolle des Bürgermeisters und den Rat der Stadt gestoppt werden. Auch ein Rat der Stadt hat ohne Zustimmung des Runden Tisch keine Entscheidungen, die gegen die Interessen der Bürger Eisenachs sind, zu treffen’, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ StA Eisenach, 12-2298 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Neuverteilung von Gebäuden, ‘Brief vom Bürgermeister an den Kreisredakteur, DAS VOLK Kreisredaktion Eisenach’, 08 January 1990.

⁶¹⁷ ‘das nicht mehr funktionstüchtige Abwasserungssystem’, ‘nicht ausreichender Leitungsquerschnitte’, ‘schlechten baulichen Zustand’, ‘jahrzehntealter Technik’, ‘die Busse des Kraftverkehrs, die Veteranenalter erreicht haben’, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

explained that the new member of staff was not given free reign over these decisions, but had to run every step past the mayor.⁶¹⁹ As a result of the accusations against him and the bad press, the member of staff had however decided to step down, meaning that this project was now at a standstill.⁶²⁰ In a press statement, which the *Thüringer Landeszeitung* gave the headline 'Sensitive reactions in sensitive times', the former HO worker explained that he was not the 'Coordinator for Cooperation with the FRG', as the paper had claimed, and called for journalists to avoid propagating misconceptions.⁶²¹ As a result of the media reaction, he had decided only to work in areas where he could be judged on his professional competency, and not on biased speculations.⁶²²

The exchange presents two important issues influencing the transformation process at this point in time; namely, a distrust of new officials and fear of exploitation, and ever closer scrutiny of democratic procedures, communicated in the press through the provocative narrative of a sell-out of the GDR. Although this in no doubt complicated the work of the town officials and led people to step down to escape the unwanted attention, these disputes were nevertheless crucial to the creation of more transparency by sparking further clarification. The members of the Round Table in Eisenach, whose role was to examine the work of town officials and present working proposals, often had to

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ 'Koordinator für die Zusammenarbeit mit der BRD', StA Eisenach, 12-2298 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Neuverteilung von Gebäuden, 'Sensible Reaktion in sensiblen Zeiten', *Thüringer Landeszeitung*, 09 January 1990.

⁶²² Ibid.

insist on their own authority, but in so doing reminded the new political leaders of the need for democratic scrutiny.

The misunderstandings arising around the work of the town council therefore pointed towards areas where procedures still needed to be made more transparent. With growing economic problems and business pressures, the town council however had little time to devote to such causes. As such, instead of aiding transparency, the public conflicts and the reactions to them obstructed and delayed the work of the council, as members of staff struggled to cope with the public criticism and scrutiny.

The National Summit of East German Council Leaders

On Friday, the fourteenth of September 1990, a few weeks before the official reunification of East and West Germany, the city council in Erfurt held a summit to discuss the new communal constitution, which was due to come into effect from October. Invitations had gone out across East Germany, with positive replies from councils in Suhl, Gera, Magdeburg, Rostock, Frankfurt an der Oder, Cottbus, Potsdam, Chemnitz, Leipzig and Dresden. All thirteen confirmed participants – all of them council leaders or deputies, save for one press secretary - turned up to meet with their peers from Erfurt.

The mobilisation of eastern council leaders was in part a response to the establishment of new state parliaments across the regions, and a 'political advisory panel' in Thuringia. The fear that these new structures would limit the powers of the local councils, or that the eastern experience of democratisation would be dismissed as western influences gained hold, was at the forefront of

discussions. Furthermore, suggestions that the role of council leader would be removed under the new structures meant that their own positions were at risk. Speakers stressed the importance of 'shaping public opinion'.⁶²³

For the times when things are rushed, from above, and then it's confirmed and then it's over, these times should be over. Everyone should be involved in the process of developing the state and communal constitutions.⁶²⁴

However, the meeting was also to serve as a chance to share experiences from the past hundred days of council leadership, and to consider how the newly developed good practice could be protected and used to shape the future constitution. Aspects of their work such as 'closeness to citizens' and 'non-partisanship' were considered particular strengths of the eastern councils.⁶²⁵ In order to ensure that the voices and practices of eastern colleagues would be safeguarded in future, it was decided early on to document the meeting. The surviving audio record now gives insight into the issues, ideas and mood in East German communal politics in the run up to Reunification.

On the second day, after introductions and reports from all the delegates about the names and structures of their councils, lengthy discussions on how to influence legislation made at state level, and the cooperation of the various political factions, the topic turned to the much-awaited subject: public relations. 'How do the councils in the various towns reach the public?', asked the speaker

⁶²³ 'dass wir auf den Meinungsbildungsprozess Einfluss nehmen', StA Erfurt, 6-7/A11, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 14./15. September 1990 -Tagung bzw. Informationsveranstaltung des Rates der Stadt Erfurt zur Kommunalverfassung', 14-15 September 1990.

⁶²⁴ 'Denn, die Zeiten wo also, so schnell gekocht, von oben und so, dann wird das bestätigt und dann ist Schluss. Die sollten vorbei sein. Es sollte wirklich über die Länderverfassung und über die Kommunalverfassung wirklich gründlich mit allen beraten werden', *ibid.*

⁶²⁵ 'Bürgernähe', 'Überparteilichkeit', *ibid.*

from Erfurt.⁶²⁶ He began by detailing the lengths the council in Erfurt had gone to to publish their decisions, including by issuing an 'official gazette' for every household that cost the council twenty-thousand marks a month, soon to double in price.⁶²⁷

Astonishment filled the room, as delegates questioned where the city council in Erfurt got the money from. The president of the city council of Magdeburg said he requested the discussion on public relations because he had also considered issuing an official gazette, 'but there's simply no money. We knew we should do it, but we don't have the money for it, and so the council can't do it'.⁶²⁸ Consequently, the council in Magdeburg kept the wording of their municipal charter as vague as possible: 'the citizens are to be informed about important issues in an appropriate manner'.⁶²⁹ 'In an appropriate manner', he repeated.⁶³⁰ 'A piece of paper on a noticeboard in the town hall is not appropriate for a city, though, is it?'.⁶³¹

Whilst other delegates agreed that the cost was keeping them from publishing an own paper, the President of Rostock Parliament doubted the efficiency of printing a paper in such large numbers. 'Is it really worth it?' he asked the representatives from Erfurt.⁶³² He pointed out that not everyone would be interested, and citizens were already being overwhelmed by the flood

⁶²⁶ 'Wie (...) kommt die Ratsversammlung an die Öffentlichkeit, in den einzelnen Städten?', *ibid.*

⁶²⁷ 'Amtsblatt', *ibid.*

⁶²⁸ 'es ist einfach kein Geld da. Wir wussten, dass wir es eigentlich machen müssten, wir haben aber kein Geld dafür, das zu machen, und deswegen hat es das Magistrat auch nicht machen können', *ibid.*

⁶²⁹ 'auf geeigneter Weise ist die Bevölkerung von wichtigen Dingen zu berichten durch den Magistrat', *ibid.*

⁶³⁰ '(...) auf geeigneter Weise', *ibid.*

⁶³¹ 'Ein Blatt im Rathaus ist ja keine geeignete Weise für eine Großstadt', *ibid.*

⁶³² 'Ob sich das denn lohnt?', *ibid.*

of daily papers. Although he admitted that he would like to produce an official gazette, he argued that there would only be enough copies for those who wished to pick up a copy themselves from the town hall. 'I like the idea', he said, 'that people who want to be informed have to take the steps themselves. That they come and collect it'.⁶³³

'Well we think it's a price we should be willing to pay', argued the speaker from Erfurt early on during the discussion.⁶³⁴ 'After all, we desperately want to make our work transparent'.⁶³⁵ Only a few sentences later, he went on to explain the real reason the paper was brought out, and the city's qualms with the local press.

Unfortunately, if I'm honest, the cooperation with the general press in Erfurt is not particularly good. They hardly report on the work of the council, and if they do, then in a rather very biased and contrary way that we don't like at all. For this reason, we said, well, if the press doesn't want to do it, then we'll do it ourselves. And so, that's how the official gazette came about, fortnightly.⁶³⁶

As an example, he explained that the city council in Erfurt had recently changed the name of their parliament from *Rat der Stadt* to *Magistrat*, as well as renaming its leading positions, but the press had neglected to report this important detail in the papers. 'Not one mention. Nothing'.⁶³⁷

A chuckle went around the room as the representative from Magdeburg described an article in their local tabloid, labelling one of his councillors as

⁶³³ 'Und mir gefällt diese Idee, (...) wenn Leute Informationen haben wollen, dass sie selber einen Schritt machen dabei. Dass sie sich das holen dann', *ibid.*

⁶³⁴ 'Aber wir sind der Meinung, das muss es uns wert sein', *ibid.*

⁶³⁵ 'Wir wollen ja unbedingt unsere Arbeit transparent machen', *ibid.*

⁶³⁶ 'Leider, und das muss ich ehrlich sagen, klappt es mit der Allgmeinpresse in Erfurt nicht besonders gut. Es wird sehr wenig über das Parlament berichtet und dann meistens auch ein bisschen sehr tendenziös und in eine Gegenrichtung, die uns gar nicht gefällt. Und aus diesem Grunde heraus haben wir eben dann gesagt, also wenn die Presse nicht will, dann machen wir das selber, und so ist letzten Endes dieses Amtsblatt erschienen, oder erscheint. 14-tägig', *ibid.*

⁶³⁷ 'davon hat die Presse überhaupt keinen Text verfasst. Gar nichts', *ibid.*

'THE LAZIEST COUNCILLOR!' for taking a two-week break.⁶³⁸ 'If that's the case', he laughed, 'then we're all lazy, because the laziest can only be one of many'.⁶³⁹ The delegate from Chemnitz seconded his story:

'We have a lot of tabloid-like press too. I have a shock every time I open the paper in the evening. They're pretty good at twisting things, aren't they!'.⁶⁴⁰

Other delegates confirmed that their local press had the same tendency to write in a way that was 'not necessarily pro-council', although they admitted that it varied from paper to paper.⁶⁴¹ 'But we can't control it, after all, there is this freedom of the press now'.⁶⁴²

A heated discussion on problems with the press ensued, as councillors shared their methods for dealing with issues and misunderstandings. One of the more common conflicts centred around the publication of false or misleading statements in the local papers. Town and city councils across East Germany tried to counter this by providing the press with timely information, copies of documents, and by holding regular press conferences to discuss developments. Many councils agreed that they were requesting daily newspaper roundups from their staff to allow them to correct any misinformation as and when it was printed.

One delegate explained that they were unsure at what point council decisions should be made available to the public. Their charter stated that key decisions should be on display in the town hall for two weeks before being

⁶³⁸ 'DER FAULSTE STADTRAT', *ibid.*

⁶³⁹ 'Da haben wir gesagt, da sind wir ja alle faul, denn der faulste ist nur einer von faulen.' *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ 'Wir haben zwar auch so ein Bildabklatsch mit dabei, das ist dann wunderbar, da trifft mich jeden Abend der Schlag wenn ich das aufschlage. Die verdrehen die Vorlagen auch sehr schön, ne', *ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ 'das jetzt nicht unbedingt Stadtverordnetenfreundlich berichtet wird', *ibid.*

⁶⁴² 'Man kann's ja jetzt nicht in der Hand haben, es ist ja diese Pressefreiheit gegeben', *ibid.*

confirmed at the next council meeting, so long as there are no objections. Until that point, however, it remained unclear whether the motion would be passed. Even then, due to numerous amendments, the council often needed the help of lawyers to determine the exact wording of the document. The resulting resolution was then written in such technical language, that it was not comprehensible for the general public. 'We need to find someone who can rephrase the main content in a way that people will understand'.⁶⁴³

Although there were ten to twelve journalists present during the meetings, their summaries were 'individually' very different, or they were passed on by telephone to the head office.⁶⁴⁴ In the worst case, journalists left before the end of a meeting or simply reported what was written on the programme without realising that the motion had been delayed or changed. This often resulted in 'illogical' and 'silly things' being published in the local press.⁶⁴⁵

This turned out to be a common concern, as other delegates shared their own experiences with the discrepancy between the working hours of the press and the council. The local press in Magdeburg, for example, had also published draft proposals as supposed legislation, despite numerous press conferences to ensure that the journalists were kept up-to-date. 'I have to keep telling them', said the president of the council of Magdeburg, 'what we gave you was just a proposal. In the olden days it would go through', he laughed, 'but not anymore.'

⁶⁴³ 'Dass wir jetzt noch einen Partner finden, der das, ja den wesentlichen Inhalt dann aber allgemeinverständlich formuliert', *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ 'so ganz individuell', *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ 'ungereimt', 'ganz dumme Sachen', *ibid.*

Not with us.’⁶⁴⁶ In response, the journalists asked the city council to provide them with written copies of all proposals in advance, so they could be better informed, but the council refused, on the grounds that it caused constant confusion for the citizens, if ongoing motions were published in the press. This resulted in hefty arguments between the town and people; as the president explained, ‘I told them, if you can’t keep up during the council meeting, then you’re not a journalist’.⁶⁴⁷

The councillors from Chemnitz voiced similar issues but explained that they had reached a good understanding with their colleagues from the press. ‘We don’t send them the drafts, because there are newspapers that simply aren’t interested. They don’t come [to the town hall]’.⁶⁴⁸ For those that did, the city council provided copies of motions, but only if they were not longer than a few pages. In the case of a fifty-page pamphlet on town development that drew a lot of attention, the town refused to copy it due to the cost. ‘The press is quite understanding in those situations’,⁶⁴⁹ she explained. After considering whether or not to send information to all the papers, the town reached the decision that it was not financially viable, as they could not be sure that the information would be published. Instead, they took the approach that those papers that wanted information to sell their papers and boost sales would have to work for

⁶⁴⁶ ‘Und ich muss ihnen dauernd sagen, das was wir Ihnen nun vorgeben, das war der Vorschlag. Das war früher so, dass das auch so durchging. (Lacht) Bei uns geht das nicht mehr so durch, ne’, *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁷ ‘ich habe dann gesagt, wer nicht in der Lage ist nachkommen in der Sitzung selber, der ist für mich nicht Journalist’, *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ ‘dass wir ihnen nicht die Vorlagen zugeschickt haben, weil es Pressen gibt, die interessiert das ganz einfach nicht. Die kommen nicht,’ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁹ ‘(...) die haben durchaus auch Verständnis für solche Situationen,’ *ibid.*

it by coming to the town hall themselves. 'After all, it is a free market', she added.⁶⁵⁰

Another delegate explained that he asked his staff to hand out copies of motions to the press at the start of the council meeting, 'so they can't distort it'.⁶⁵¹ If the press were to publish something that was not confirmed then they would be simply be making a fool of themselves, he said. Nevertheless, he also raised the issue of equal treatment of all papers, and the need to counteract the 'hierarchy' amongst the press.⁶⁵² Handing out information directly to the journalists was a matter of 'equality', he argued.⁶⁵³

Regulating what information reached the press, and when, was not simple to manage. The president of the town council in Potsdam spoke of complaints he received from councillors who had first heard of important information through the press. As a result, he considered changing the charter to include a pledge that information should not be passed onto the public in advance of the council meeting. Consequently, he was approached by a councillor whose son worked for the local press. Now he faced a dilemma of how to manage the circulation of information amongst family members.

Towards the end of the discussion, a delegate from Erfurt jumped in to make an announcement: 'By the way, on the topic of the press, we have agreed to give a statement at eleven o'clock. (...) Is anyone willing to go along?'.⁶⁵⁴ A

⁶⁵⁰ 'Ist ja auch eine Marktwirtschaft', *ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ '(...) da können sie sie nicht entstellen', *ibid.*

⁶⁵² 'Stufenordnung', *ibid.*

⁶⁵³ 'Parität und Gleichberechtigung', *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ 'Ich muss mal hier unterbrechen, wir haben, wir sind beim Stichwort Presse, wir haben zumindest die Presse informiert und um 11 Uhr, ob jemand kommt, weiß ich nicht, aber davon ist auszugehen. (...) Wer wäre denn bereit, mal mitzugehen?', *ibid.*

new debate began about what to tell the press and how to present it, with requests for a written summary of the key meeting points. The suggestion was made to use the opportunity to emphasise the importance of the council leader role and to express the commitment of all participating councils to maintaining these positions under the new communal constitution. Arguments gathered included the importance of the council leader role for strengthening democracy, for scrutinising the work of the mayor and councillors, and for its special non-partisan role. A final suggestion from another member was not to formalise it with a written statement, but to simply emphasise the importance of the role in a positive way: 'there's no need to be defensive'.⁶⁵⁵

The record of the council leaders' discussion on how to deal with a free press and ensure transparency gives insight into the ways in which both parties shaped the work of the other. For example, conflicts around misinformation in the local press put pressure on the councils to change their meeting times, to hold press conferences, to appoint press secretaries and to start producing information materials. Equally, the individual choices of the town and city councils across East Germany regarding how they disseminated information to the press, meant that journalists had to adapt to the local practices when trying to collect information. This also brought about a cultural shift, as reporting mistakes shone a light on the new decision-making practices in communal politics.

⁶⁵⁵ 'nicht auf defensiver Art', *ibid.*

However, the meeting also reflects the varying attitudes of council leaders to working with a free press. While all agreed that the reporting style of some papers was unpleasant and, in some cases, frustrating, some were willing to simply laugh it off, whilst others looked to speak openly and constructively with the press to find solutions. For some councils, however, it was hard to accept that the papers should present their work in such individual, critical and contrary ways. There was a clearly an expectation for the press to disseminate news from the city council in ways that supported the work of the councillors and their staff. Eventually, recognition of the fact that the press was not obliged to report what the town told them to, or in the same manner, led the city councillors in certain towns to develop their own platforms for disseminating information to the press and the general public.

No Room for Discussion

Draht zum Staat? Rewiring the role of the press

One month before the summit in Erfurt, the city mayor had given an interview for the newest local paper. The *Allgemeiner Anzeiger*, which appeared on the first of August 1990, was not that new, however.⁶⁵⁶ A newspaper with the same name was first founded in Erfurt on the first of May 1849, in association with the ratification of the Frankfurt Constitution.⁶⁵⁷ After changing hands a number of times, it became the *Thüringer Allgemeine* and *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* in February 1919, with the *Anzeiger* covering the names and addresses of local

⁶⁵⁶ StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'AA Allgemeiner Anzeiger Erfurt', (01 August 1990).

⁶⁵⁷ StA Erfurt, 3-800/10, Erfurter Allgemeiner Anzeiger / Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung 1849-1944, collection description.

businesses in the region of Thuringia until 1944.⁶⁵⁸ Forty-six years later, after the East German government stepped down in 1989, the local SED paper *Das Volk* changed its name to that of its regional predecessor *Thüringer Allgemeine* as part of its internal reform. With the re-establishment of the sister paper *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* half a year later, two familiar names from former times, reminiscent of previous attempts to create a federal German state, were back on the regional press landscape.

Under the subtitle 'Making the work of the city council transparent', the mayor set out his plans for the paper and its cooperation with the city council. The council was to have its own dedicated section, 'offering us the possibility of 1:1 information, unedited, quick and direct'.⁶⁵⁹ The interview asks why the mayor had stressed the word *unedited*, to which he responded;

I used to have issues with the press, because of the non-existent freedom of the press. But I still do today, too. Some people mistake freedom for generosity, only publishing parts of a story, which means it turns out skewed, and they don't do enough research.⁶⁶⁰

The *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* was to put an end to 'skewed' press reports, and to provide a direct link between the citizens and their communal representatives. The mayor explained that he received visits from one hundred citizens a week; a number that was simply not manageable.⁶⁶¹ For the future, the citizens would

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ 'die Möglichkeit der 1:1-Information (...), ohne journalistische Bearbeitung, schnell und direkt.' StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Exklusiv: OB-Interview zum Start des Allgemeinen Anzeigers', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (01 August 1990).

⁶⁶⁰ 'Ja, ich hatte früher meine Probleme mit der Presse. Hervorgerufen durch die nicht gegebene Pressefreiheit. Aber auch heute. Manche verwechseln Freiheit mit Großzügigkeit, veröffentlichen nur Teile einer Information, die dann verzerrt erscheint, recherchieren nicht genügend', *ibid.*

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

have to develop trust in their elected officials, and the press should help in this respect.⁶⁶²

Within half a year, the paper had doubled from eight to sixteen pages, including interviews with various councillors, pages with council announcements, and a section of readers' letters.⁶⁶³ The letters to the editor give some insight into the kind of enquiries the council was dealing with on a weekly basis, but also into the misunderstandings that arose as citizens found their way within the new system. For example, in August 1990, a citizen complained about the local variation in prices for 500g of frozen chicken: 'This is extreme, and not what is meant by free market, surely?'.⁶⁶⁴ The editor responded: 'Maybe it is; certainly, in its infancy'.⁶⁶⁵ Citizens also wrote in to ask for help with their telephone provider, for the address of a local society, to report a missing dog, to look for work, or to request advice on dealing with sales of faulty products or incorrect bills. The letters were printed with commentaries from the editor, formerly a lecturer in Journalism at the University of Leipzig. In some cases, the newspaper would put the citizens in touch with the right contact point, but in other cases, it would simply print advice. As such, the paper became a redirection service for communal enquiries and a signpost for the new political, social and economic structures.

However, in publishing the letters with commentaries, the readers were also made to look foolish for turning to the paper for help, or for failing to

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, Allgemeiner Anzeiger (15 August 1990).

⁶⁶⁴ 'Ich finde, das ist Wucher und hat mit Marktwirtschaft nichts mehr zu tun. Oder?', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Betr. AA Nr. 1 1.8.90', Allgemeiner Anzeiger (15 August 1990).

⁶⁶⁵ 'Vielleicht doch; vor allem mit den Anfängen', *ibid.*

understand the new system. For example, a complaint from a reader that 'the last collection of bulky waste did not take scrap',⁶⁶⁶ despite the local housing organisation having been informed about rubbish piling up, was countered with the explanation:

Scrap was not collected for good reason, because, unlike washing machines and refrigerators, it does not count as bulky waste, but as scrap or special waste. Unfortunately, there are no pills to cure stupidity.⁶⁶⁷

The junk discussion continued, as another reader suggested the city council issue a recycling guide for special waste, to which the editor replied:

A special waste collection lorry was recently parked in your area for two hours. As displayed in the town hall, special waste collection is to become a regular service. The collection points will be announced in advance in the press.⁶⁶⁸

Whereas GDR citizens frequently wrote letters to their communal representatives to complain or petition for changes, the onus was now placed on the individual to organise their own lives and to seek the correct information before contacting the local press and council. Those who failed to adapt to the new system and continued to rely on others were humiliated publicly for all to see. Although the press utilised the old tradition of letter-writing in order to redirect citizens to the new channels, they chose to do so in a way that deterred readers from asking again in future. Attempts to use letters to the editor to put pressure on companies and to gain special treatment were struck down immediately:

⁶⁶⁶ 'Bei der letzten Sperrmüllaktion wurde kein Schrott mitgenommen', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung: Unschöne Ansicht', Allgemeiner Anzeiger (08 January 1992).

⁶⁶⁷ 'Schrott wurde zurecht nicht abgeholt, weil er wie Waschmaschinen und Kühlschränke kein Sperrmüll ist, sondern als Schrott bzw. Sondermüll zählt. Leider gibt es gegen Unvernunft noch keine Pillen', *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ 'Umlängst hat ein Sondermüllabnahmeauto für zwei Stunden ganz in Ihrer Nähe gestanden. Wie im Rathaus zu vernehmen war, soll die Sondermüllfassung zu einer regelmäßigen Einrichtung werden. Über die Standplätze wird rechtzeitig in der Presse informiert', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung: Sondermüll', Allgemeiner Anzeiger (11 March 1992).

We have passed on these letters to the right address, namely the customer relations department. (...) But we don't want to raise any false hopes that a letter to the 'AA' will speed up the process of getting a telephone connection. Telekom has the last say.⁶⁶⁹

Similarly, a central aspect of this re-education campaign was the topic of anonymity. An angry postcard from 'retail staff' was countered with a sarcastic commentary and the regretful sentence: 'unfortunately the postcard did not say who the retail staff are'.⁶⁷⁰ Other anonymous letters were not printed at all, because 'we should be able to call ourselves and everything else by its right name'.⁶⁷¹ When readers explicitly requested that their names and addresses were not to be published, the paper was particularly unforgiving, printing them anyway and arguing, 'We have a problem with anonymity. If you do not want your name to be printed in the paper, then don't write to us.'⁶⁷² One year later, the paper explained that they would only publish letters that were submitted with the full name and address of the sender, although they were indeed entitled to ask for their name to be anonymised.⁶⁷³

As much as reporting on the work of the council and ensuring the citizens were provided with information, the *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* was therefore also a medium for renegotiating the role of the citizens, the council and the press within the new structures. Old practices and dependencies amongst

⁶⁶⁹ 'Wir haben diese Post an uns an die richtige Adresse, nämlich an den Privatkundenvertrieb von Telekom, weitergegeben. (...) Damit möchten wir jedoch bei niemand die falsche Hoffnung wecken, durch einen Brief an den „AA“ kommt der ersehnte Telefonanschluß schneller. Das letzte Wort hat Telekom', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung: Wieder Telekom', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (08 January 1992).

⁶⁷⁰ 'Leider sagte die Postkarte nicht, wer sich da als „die Mitarbeiter des Handels“ erklärt', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Der Leser hat das erste Wort (und wir das letzte)', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (15 August 1990).

⁶⁷¹ 'Wir sollten uns und alles beim Namen nennen', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung: P. S.', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (15 August 1990).

⁶⁷² 'Wir haben was gegen Anonymität. Wer seinen Namen in der Zeitung nicht lesen will, sollte uns gar nicht erst schreiben', StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung: VS reaktiviert', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (08 January 1992).

⁶⁷³ StA Erfurt, 3-800/34, 'Lesermeinung', *Allgemeiner Anzeiger* (06 January 1993).

citizens were subverted by derisive responses from the papers, relieving the press and the council of their parenting responsibilities, as the citizens were forced to take charge of situations and navigate the new structures independently. This discourse is therefore not simply about learning where to turn to for help, but also brings about a cultural shift in the perceived role of common institutions.

Streamlining critique

Although the new town council paper could serve to bypass other media outlets and renegotiate the relationship with the citizens, it would not be enough to prevent the press from writing critical pieces on the work of the town council. As such, the council started introducing various measures to streamline the amount and type of information that was able to reach the press. As well as appointing press secretaries to manage communication with the press and holding regular press conferences in which the mayors would update the local journalists on their work, the structures of the town council meetings would also have to change.

These monthly meetings, which regularly ran into the night and were complemented by additional meetings if agenda items were not covered in time, were open to the public. As this proved more and more problematic, non-public meetings were introduced to discuss topics such as property ownership and sales in private. This was necessary for data protection, but also meant that the town magistrates were able to handle these cases without objections from the public and political parties. In certain cases, however, news of conflicts

would still reach the press, mounting pressure on the council to comment on the meetings that had been held in secret.

In October 1990, for example, councillors from the *Neues Forum* and SPD raised the issue of housing evictions in the monthly council meeting. The SPD delegate requested an emergency motion:

I ask you to check whether the press reports on the Operation Oststraße, for example in the *Thüringer Allgemeine*, match that which the parliament agreed last week in the secret hearing and secret ballot.⁶⁷⁴

The buildings in the north of Erfurt, which had been occupied by local citizens' initiatives for communal, social and cultural projects, had been cleared in a supposedly forceful police operation. A representative of the *Neues Forum* and Green Party asked for the magistrate for Order and Safety to give a detailed account to justify the money and resources spent on the evacuation efforts. He explained that even if there was no time to discuss the issue in the current meeting, certain statements in the press needed to be corrected and clarified. 'For example, this eviction was never ordered by the town council', he announced to loud applause.⁶⁷⁵ The SPD councillor further asked for the full text and exact wording of the CDU councillor to be printed in the local paper, to give context to the published quotations.⁶⁷⁶

Although all meetings were recorded and then transcribed and summarised, the written minutes would often omit debates and discussions, or simply refer to the tape recording for information, meaning that there was no

⁶⁷⁴ 'Ich bitte darum zu prüfen, ob die Darstellungen der Aktion Oststraße in der Presse, zum Beispiel die in der *Thüringer Allgemeinen*, dem entsprechen, was das Parlament letzte Woche in geheimer Debatte und Abstimmung beschlossen hat', StA Erfurt, 6-7/A14, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt', 24 October 1990.

⁶⁷⁵ 'Zum Beispiel hat nie der Rat der Stadt diese Räumung beschlossen', *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

remaining written record of these communal conflicts. With time, the council meeting presidents also stopped vocalising the results of the votes, choosing not to state the number of votes for and against a motion, but simply the result; 'accepted' or 'rejected'. Consequently, dissenting behaviour or matters of controversy became much harder to identify.

As the structures in the council meetings were formalised, debates and discussions moved from the monthly public meetings into the various subject-specific committees. The town council meetings were reserved simply for casting votes on motions, which were submitted in writing in advance. The person submitting the motion was then able to give a short statement, and a representative from the local party factions could comment briefly on the motion, although time limits applied to all speakers and were rigorously adhered to. Any further requests or motions were generally passed back to the committees.

Although this approach streamlined the work of the town council and enabled the council and the committees to be much more efficient in tackling large numbers of motions, open discussions and debates disappeared from the council meetings. Elected councillors were still able to cast a vote and suggest motions but were far less likely to discuss these in the public arena. Increasingly, the political parties began publishing their own communal papers, giving their own take on the important issues and their own efforts to influence the work of the town magistrates.

In November 1990, the PDS faction in Erfurt, unable to rely on the *Thüringer Allgemeine*, issued the first issue of their local paper in Erfurt, symbolically named 'Transparent Town Hall'.⁶⁷⁷ It began with the statement:

Communal politics must be transparent. Only those who are well informed can take responsible decisions and form expert opinions. Unfortunately, it keeps happening that motions passed by the freely elected parliament are not realised as agreed, or that motions are implemented on a Monday, in advance of a vote on Wednesday.⁶⁷⁸

Their paper, they argued, would ensure that the public would be informed of any cases in which the interests of business were placed over those of the citizens, if social matters were neglected or election promises were broken.⁶⁷⁹

Although the town council was focussed on trying to make their work transparent and thereby trying to promote trust in the communal representatives and structures, statements like these would counter these attempts by questioning the motives of the town's decision makers and their adherence to structures. As such, the increasing publication of alternative newspapers was not primarily a sign of plurality of opinion, but rather a symptom of an ever-growing and outwardly mediated distrust in the existing structures, be that the local press or the town council.

Breach of confidentiality

On the tenth of July 1991, the by now very orderly and structured council meeting in Erfurt turned loud and passionate once again, as old emotions were

⁶⁷⁷ 'Gläsernes Rathaus'. StA Erfurt, 5/5 Parteien, 'Gläsernes Rathaus', 1, 27 November 1990.

⁶⁷⁸ 'Kommunalpolitik muß durchschaubar sein. Nur wer informiert ist, kann verantwortlich mitentscheiden, kann sich sachkundig eine Meinung bilden. Leider kommt es schon wieder vor, daß die Entscheidungen des frei gewählten Parlamentes nicht so umgesetzt werden, wie sie beschlossen worden sind, daß Montag realisiert wird, was Mittwoch erst beraten werden soll', *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

reawakened. As part of his monthly report, the mayor explained that he wanted to ask a question, in a deviation from general protocol.⁶⁸⁰ It had come to his attention that a letter detailing possible breaches of duty amongst councillors had been delivered to the *Neues Forum* and Green Party office. The subsequent uproar was not due to this letter, however, but because the letter had come to the attention of a member of the PDS faction, who had consequently passed the information onto persons named in the document.

I want to know: (...) why did you pass this information on to people, whose names I will read out in a minute, instead of contacting me as head of the administration?.⁶⁸¹

As the names of former high-functioning SED secretaries were read out, the room erupted in outrage.

The astonished councillor took defence, explaining that he had simply contacted one colleague to ask whether the accusations against him, that he had supposedly used vehicles belonging to the environment agency for personal use, were true or not.

So that I, as party representative, can comment on the issue, should it come up in the main committee meeting, as other personal matters have in the past. Our faction is not trying to protect former SED-officials if they are guilty of an offense, but we also see no reason not to protect them, if these anonymous accusations are found to have no basis in truth.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁸¹ 'Für mich die Frage: (...), warum haben Sie diese Information an Personen, deren Namen ich nachher noch nenne, gegeben und nicht an mich als Chef der Verwaltung?', StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁸² 'Für den Fall, daß das Ganze später einmal so wie andere Personalangelegenheiten im Hauptausschuß behandelt werden ich zu diesem Punkt bzw. der Vertreter meiner Fraktion zu diesem Punkt Stellung nehmen kann und dazu was sagen kann. Es ist nicht Sinn unserer Fraktion hier ehemalige SED-Funktionäre zu schützen, wenn sie sich solcher Verfehlungen schuldig gemacht haben aber wir sehen auch keinen Grund sie nicht zu schützen, wenn solche anonymen Beschuldigungen ihrer Grundlage entbehren sollten', StA Erfurt, 1-7/7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Problematik Ratsmitglied (...), Ratsversammlung 10.7.91', 10 July 1991.

The assembly was not interested in his justification, however, as it only confirmed that he had indeed passed on information.

The mayor was also 'not interested in determining whether or not the letter had purposely been brought to (his) attention'.⁶⁸³ Calls from the room however asked how he had gotten hold of this information.⁶⁸⁴ The representative of the *Neues Forum* explained that the letter had arrived that very morning, for which reason it had still been lying on the desk.⁶⁸⁵ The PDS delegate had asked to use their telephone, because his office was closed. The said information about the vehicles was towards the end of the three-page letter, however, meaning that he must have actively turned the pages. The PDS member refuted this claim, arguing that the letter was laid out in front of him, 'I didn't have to move a finger', and that he simply skimmed the letter while another member of staff was sat opposite.⁶⁸⁶

Pressure mounted for a vote on the situation, with vocal support from the room. The mayor insisted that the council member, in discussing the content of the letter with the named persons, had not acted according to his communal responsibilities. As he was also member of several committees, namely the central committee, the financial committee, the property committee and the board of management for the local bank, this behaviour also put his ability to keep his obligation to non-disclosure into question and was therefore to be seen

⁶⁸³ 'Dieses Schreiben kam nun beabsichtigt oder unbeabsichtigt, das möchte ich nicht prüfen, Herrn (...) von der PDS zur Kenntnis', *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁴ StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁸⁵ StA Erfurt, 1-7/7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Problematik Ratsmitglied (...), Ratsversammlung 10.7.91', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁸⁶ 'daß ich keinen Finger rühren mußte', *ibid.*

as a breach of conduct. 'Especially, as (the contacted person) is not a member of the PDS', he added.⁶⁸⁷ 'I think this proves that old networks still exist'.⁶⁸⁸

Consequently, the mayor proposed a vote of no-confidence, and that the PDS member was to be removed from all previously held committee positions.⁶⁸⁹ The accused asked to take another look at the letter, but the president went straight to planning the vote, which was to take place after the break. An objection from the room insisted that 'the motion should be dealt with immediately', as the issue needed to be sorted, or 'cleansed', as soon as possible.⁶⁹⁰ As this was now a motion regarding the procedure of the meeting, it was treated as urgent and votes were placed whether to deal with the mayor's motion immediately. It went straight onto the vote on whether to remove him from all committees, with council members raising cards. The president counted the votes and announced: 'I think, the result is very clear'.⁶⁹¹

Within just ten minutes, the atmosphere in the otherwise orderly assembly had become raucous, with loud remarks of disgust interjecting the speakers.⁶⁹² The transcript fails to include all interruptions, but the uproar in the room is clearly audible on the tape recording. As the heated meeting continued, more motions were introduced to remove not only the PDS member in question, but the entire faction from their committee duties. The head of the PDS faction asked for concrete examples of misconduct by other members of

⁶⁸⁷ 'zumal Herr (...) kein Mitglied der PDS ist', *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁸ 'Ich glaube, das ist der Beweis alter Seilschaften', *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁰ 'Ich stelle den Antrag, daß dieser Antrag sofort behandelt wird ... und unbedingt diese Situation bereinigt werden muß', *ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ 'Ich glaube, das ist eindeutig', *ibid.*

⁶⁹² StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991', 10 July 1991.

the party, that would justify disqualification from these committees. The head of the CDU faction responded that 'it's not a personal issue', but a general one, 'because we see a danger' that issues will not be handled confidentially.⁶⁹³ 'For security reasons, I want things that are being discussed to stay within these four walls. So that these people are not placed in danger'.⁶⁹⁴

After the assembly voted to consider this motion immediately, the *Neues Forum* member and church youth worker addressed the room. 'Well you really cannot possibly accuse me of wanting to support the PDS', he said,

but I feel very uncomfortable about finalising a vote on this issue in such an emotionally loaded situation. I don't think that this is in the interest of our still very young democracy, with which we do not yet have a lot of practice, and I would like to urgently request that we at least wait until after the break, so that the council of elders can have a chance to discuss how to proceed.⁶⁹⁵

Although the president argued that the decision to vote on the issue immediately had already been taken, he nevertheless agreed to allow a show of hands on postponing the motion, and the vote was delayed until after the break. He too was quite aware of the emotions in the room, as he suggested they 'try to keep our emotions in bay and focus on the next agenda items'.⁶⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the accused PDS member was given the opportunity to speak

⁶⁹³ 'es geht hier nicht um die Person sondern es ist eine generelle Frage, da wir hier eine Gefahr sehen', StA Erfurt, 1-7/7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Ausschluß der PDS aus der Kommission zur Überprüfung der Fragebögen der Mitarbeiter des Magistrats', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁹⁴ 'ich möchte das ganz einfach aus Sicherheitsgründen, daß den Leuten, die dort gemeinsam beraten, daß das auch in diesem Kreis bleibt. Und damit sie nicht irgendeiner Gefahr ausgesetzt sind', *ibid*.

⁶⁹⁵ 'Also ich stehe nun wahrlich nicht in dem Verdacht, der PDS was Gutes tun zu wollen oder alte Seilschaften zu retten. Ich habe trotzdem meine ganz großen Bauchschmerzen in einer so emotionalisierten Situation eine Sache so zu verhandeln und gar noch abschließend zu beraten. Ich halte das im Interesse unserer noch jungen Demokratie, wo wir alle noch nicht sehr viel Übung haben, nicht für gut und ich möchte dringend darum bitten, das mindestens bis zur Pause zu verschieben, in der Pause den Ältestenrat zu der Sache nochmal zusammenkommen zu lassen, daß der einen Vorschlag macht, wie nach der Pause damit verfahren werden soll', *ibid*.

⁶⁹⁶ 'Können uns nun bei allem versuchen, die Emotionen raus zu nehmen, und nun den Tagesordnungspunkten die folgen zuwenden', StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991' (10 July 1991).

before the break, stating that, on reflection, he would like to apologise for his actions.⁶⁹⁷

After the break, the head of the PDS faction used the allotted space for political factions to speak on the motion to distance himself and his party from the actions of his colleague. 'However', he says, 'this is not generally a problem'.⁶⁹⁸ He explained that he and his colleagues were all very aware of their responsibilities as councillors, more so, he argued, because of the lessons of the past.

Just like everyone else, we have all kept our duty of confidentiality in keeping with the communal constitution. So why are we suddenly putting into question, in advance, whether a member of our faction, or any other faction in this high house, can keep their duty of confidentiality or deal responsibly with the (...) information?⁶⁹⁹

Arguing that the PDS had a mandate from the citizens to represent them in the committees, he asked the head of the CDU faction directly, 'on what legal basis do you have the right to exclude us from these committees?'.⁷⁰⁰ He also appealed to all other councillors to consider, when casting their vote, what impact it would have if a democratically elected party were to be suspended from all committees.

The CDU faction head answered the question with another question: 'On what legal basis should you have the right to be on this committee?'.⁷⁰¹ A shout

⁶⁹⁷ StA Erfurt, 1-7/7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Ausschluß der PDS aus der Kommission zur Überprüfung der Fragebögen der Mitarbeiter des Magistrats', 10 July 1991.

⁶⁹⁸ 'Aber das ist eigentlich nicht das Problem', *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ 'Woher kommt dann also diese Frage, von vornherein in Zweifel zu stellen, daß eine (sic) Angehöriger dieser Fraktion oder ein anderer Angehöriger dieses hohen Hauses von vornherein in den Verdacht gerät, er würde nicht schweigen können, er würde nicht verantwortungsbewußt mit dem ihm zur Kenntnis gelangten Verhalten umgehen', *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ 'welche rechtlichen Grundlagen für den Ausschluß einer Fraktion aus der Mitarbeit in einer Kommission können Sie aufführen?', *ibid.*

⁷⁰¹ 'Welche rechtlichen Grundlagen gibt es, daß Sie sich an dieser Kommission beteiligen dürfen?', *ibid.*

from within the room answered with: 'the communal constitution'.⁷⁰² The president jumped in to say that the PDS had made their point clear, that they want to have this procedure legally checked. 'Nevertheless', he said, 'it is still possible to go to a vote'.⁷⁰³

Although the anger at the possible breach of conduct is understandable, especially given the historical context, the reaction of the town council to the event and the subsequent suspension of the PDS from all committees appears sudden and impulsive to the outsider. As acknowledged by others in the room, the procedure was emotionally driven, and councillors were given little time to consider the case or collect extra evidence before casting their votes. The PDS was guilty until proven innocent, demonstrating that even after more than a year of business in the democratically elected town council, trust in the party and its representatives was low, and previous tensions from GDR-times persisted. Although the town council meetings were now neatly structured with clear rules to ensure efficient business, these could also be used to quickly push through a series of motions under the pretext of needing to reach a quick decision.

Two months later, a new PDS candidate was put forward to replace the one expelled from his position on the management board of the local savings bank, 'as it was stressed that this decision was made in relation to his person, and not the entire party faction'.⁷⁰⁴ His suggested replacement had studied

⁷⁰² 'Kommunalverfassung', *ibid.*

⁷⁰³ 'ungeachtet dessen ist es möglich abzustimmen', *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁴ 'im Zusammenhang mit dieser Abstimmung wurde betont, dass es sich um eine Person und nicht um eine Entscheidung für die Fraktion handelt'. StA Erfurt, 6-7/A24, 'Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991', 10 July 1991.

business management in Moscow, before writing a thesis on finance and eventually lecturing in business management in Ilmenau. 'Socialist business management, not business management!' shouted a CDU councillor.⁷⁰⁵

The *Neues Forum* and Green Party faction argued that the management board positions were not allocated per party, and that they should therefore also be able to put forward a candidate for this position. Their candidate was a mechanical engineer and on the audit committee, although he had no professional work experience in finance. Nevertheless, he managed to gain ninety-two votes from the councillors in the secret vote, winning a majority, while the PDS candidate received just twenty-five votes. From here on, the PDS were no longer represented on the management board of the local *Sparkasse*.

On comparison, the exclusion of the PDS in Erfurt appears very similar to the story explored in the previous chapter of the removal of the town chronicler in Eisenach. In both cases, groups of elected representatives were moved to rash collective action on the basis of little or conflicting evidence. Despite different political leadership traditions in the two case study towns, examples have shown us how citizens in different communities were still subject to similar emotional outbursts that affected their political practices. These individual local examples therefore speak for a much greater and general behavioural pattern that is likely to have been found across the GDR during this period. For almost one year after the upheaval in the GDR, associations with

⁷⁰⁵ 'sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft, nicht Betriebswirtschaft', *ibid.*

former elites and accusations of *Stasi* collaboration still elicited a strong emotional response and could therefore be used as a tool for political action.

Conclusion

When the newspaper editor addressed the crowds in Erfurt in Januar 1990, it was the calls for critical reporting that received the greatest support. As old and new papers in the region tried to introduce a new style of journalism, the need for clear information on how to deal with the many new aspects of political, social and communal life nevertheless took priority and newspapers were forced to respond to the needs and wishes of their readers.

By publishing critical letters or contrasting opinions, the press was able to pressurise the representatives of the new town and city councils to make their work more transparent by responding to articles and clarifying their actions and decisions. These critical pieces addressed gaps in communication and pushed for more dialogue between the town and its citizens. However, with staff under increasing pressure to solve communal problems, this further scrutiny could have negative effects, with some town employees reacting strongly to defamatory opinion pieces and withdrawing from the public sphere in protest.

The city council, frustrated by the new style of journalism that would not print all statements word for word or report on every new change in the council, began issuing their own publications. These costly new projects were to ensure that the council fulfilled its pledge to inform the citizenry, but also bypassed the critical commentaries of the local press. In comparison with their

East German counterparts, the council representatives in Erfurt were particularly unwilling to accept contrary attitudes from the local press or to deal with false or misleading statements.

The new council paper, which was to provide the citizens with information on the most important aspects of communal decision-making, also served another purpose. By publishing readers' letters with sarcastic and unforgiving commentaries, citizens were shamed for writing in with ill-informed criticisms or questions. The public humiliation was to serve as a lesson not just for those writing-in, but also other readers who would learn that they could no longer turn to the council for every problem but would have to become more independent in navigating the new communal structures.

This alone, however, would not suffice, and the council set about also streamlining their meetings and the amount and type of information that was able to reach the public. By limiting the amount of time for speakers during council assemblies and moving the majority of the work into subject-specific committees, business was swifter, but public discussions were moved out of the public meetings and behind closed doors. Eventually, even the language used within the meetings meant that written records would no longer indicate issues of controversy.

These new structures for efficient decision-making and limited public discussions could also be used to push through motions without much deliberation. When a PDS member was found to have breached conduct, councillors were not willing to give the situation much consideration, and went straight to a vote on his future, suspending him and his party from all positions

of influence. While the work of the council was now formalised, the old divisions had not healed, and new procedures were used to limit the influence of former elites.

As other everyday pressures mounted, the open debates and discussions that had characterised the autumn of 1989 quickly disappeared. However, more than just streamlining practices, citizens and state appear to have struggled to agree on a common tone of communication. As in the written communication around the election events, it is not so much what is said but how it is said and communicated that forces many actors to withdraw or to develop their own platforms. The immediate need to solve everyday economic problems cost too much time to continue the indepth discussions that had begun in the autumn, however the divisions that had emerged continued nonetheless, only to be fought out through the new structures. The next chapter examines how actors in the local political and public sphere would deal with the next big rupture, as new economic and social regulations were introduced.

4. Devaluing the East

The Currency Unification

On the evening of the first of July 1990, a nurse in Eisenach sat down to summarise the event in her diary. 'The Day of the Currency Union', she wrote, next to the date.⁷⁰⁶ That this day was of historical significance was clear from the subtitle, but also from the descriptions of the atmosphere in town. She had spent the night before sitting outside with her husband and old friends, listening to the celebrations and watching the fireworks as the clock struck midnight.⁷⁰⁷ The pyrotechnic display, which was usually reserved for New Year's Eve, marked a turning point, as East Germans in their streets and gardens welcomed in a new era.

'As of today, from midnight', she had written, 'the DM is the only valid currency in the whole of Germany. A strange feeling'.⁷⁰⁸ The introduction of the West German mark to replace the DDR-Mark was to set the path for a speedy transition from planned economy to a social market economy. For East German citizens, the conversion rate of 1:1 was symbolic of their demand for the same standard of living as their western neighbours, and for their savings and accomplishments to be given equal value and recognition to those of Germans on the other side of the former border. It had been one of the demands voiced during the autumn demonstrations in Leipzig, and an election promise from Helmut Kohl.

⁷⁰⁶ '1. Juli, Tag der Währungsunion', Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ 'Ab heute null Uhr gilt die D-Mark als einzige Währung im gesamten Deutschland. Ein eigenartiges Gefühl', ibid.

As if by magic, the nurse describes how the town of Eisenach had transformed overnight and taken on a 'western feeling'.⁷⁰⁹ Repeated use of the word 'sudden' in the diary entry underlines the speed of the changes taking place in everyday life.⁷¹⁰ Squares that were once empty now hosted stands from the commerce bank and a Mazda car exhibition; others piled up with abandoned or used cars that were no longer wanted. Shop windows that had long been boarded up were now sparkling clean, bursting with colour and full of products from the Federal Republic. A large sign outside the department store, reading 'After forty years, we're back!', signalled that the former owners had taken over the business again.⁷¹¹ There was a new pace about the place, as shop staff busied themselves by stocking up the shelves and repricing goods, and the streets were filled with people, even in the evenings, as locals walked through the town centres window shopping.

The focus and interest in the shop windows is a key detail in the nurse's description of the historic day. For while the introduction of the Deutsche Mark was to ease trade between East and West Germany and rebalance relations, for citizens, the desired immediate effect was to have a better supply and range of affordable convenience goods.⁷¹² Much like advertisements, shopfronts are symbolic texts, representing a changing material culture and shaping impressions of economic progress and prosperity.⁷¹³ As GDR citizens gathered

⁷⁰⁹ 'westliches Fluidum', *ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ 'urplötzlich', 'plötzlich', *ibid.*

⁷¹¹ 'Nach 40 Jahren sind wir wieder da', *ibid.*

⁷¹² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Währungsunion mit DDR vollzogen/Kohl in Fernsehansprache: „Großer Tag“ für Deutschland', *Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine*, 02 July 1990.

⁷¹³ Katherine Pence, 'Schaufenster des sozialistischen Konsums: Texte der ostdeutschen „consumer culture“' in Alf Lüdtke & Peter Becker (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 91-92.

to inspect the new range of products, assessments of the country's wealth and expectations for the coming months were created and formed by the goods on offer.

Following the Second World War, shop windows had quickly become interpretive spaces for creating comparisons between the two halves of Germany, showcasing economic strength and lifestyle improvements, which in turn shaped perceptions of political success.⁷¹⁴ After the currency reform of 1948, shop windows in the West were filled with new products to represent the economic boom, whilst eastern storefronts struggled to keep pace with western standards.⁷¹⁵ The constant competition in consumer products undermined eastern politics, as citizens quickly saw the difference between the prosperity suggested in the shop windows, especially in the capital city, and the reality of living with continued material shortages.

As the Deutsche Mark arrived in the East in 1990, the shop windows once again presented a vision of prosperity reminiscent of the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the West thirty to forty years earlier. This again had a political function, fostering support for the new system and promising a brighter future. The monetary union was just one part of the state treaty, however, signed off in May 1990, which united the economic and social systems of East and West Germany and came into effect from July.⁷¹⁶ Aside from the currency union, the agreement would also see the implementation of West German standards in

⁷¹⁴ Pence, 'Schaufenster des sozialistischen Konsums', p. 92.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁷¹⁶ 'Die Währungs- Wirtschaft- und Sozialunion 1990, 1. Juli 1990', *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung online*, <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschland-chronik/132256/1-juli-1990>> (accessed 21 March 2019).

environmental protection, as well as West German rules on pensions, employment law and social care.⁷¹⁷ How, however, would these changes play out in the border region? How would citizens' experiences with supply in the GDR influence consumer behaviour in the free market and what knock-on effect would this have for the East German economy?

This chapter looks at conflicts that emerged around the introduction of the new structures on the local level and tries to understand how these impacted everyday lives. Historical studies of this period have largely focussed on the privatisation of East German businesses from an economic or institutional perspective, often arguing for the necessity and inevitability of the measures.⁷¹⁸ Although these studies recognise the resulting repercussions for citizens, their experiences during these changes are mentioned only as an aside.⁷¹⁹ Sociological studies, on the other hand, argue that markets are social constructions, created through interactions and practices.⁷²⁰ In this sense, the introduction of the free market and the privatisation of the East German economy was primarily 'a psychological challenge'.⁷²¹ How did citizens deal with the sudden changes in society and the admittedly speedy transfer of systems? How did they cope with the loss of familiar structures and the

⁷¹⁷ 'Die Währungs- Wirtschaft- und Sozialunion 1990', *BpB Online*.

⁷¹⁸ See Franz Schuster, *Thüringens Weg in die Soziale Marktwirtschaft. Privatisierung, Aufbau. Eine Bilanz nach 25 Jahren* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2015); Marcus Böick, *Die Treuhand: Idee – Praxis – Erfahrung 1990-1994* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).

⁷¹⁹ Schuster, *Thüringens Weg in die Soziale Marktwirtschaft*, p. 26.

⁷²⁰ See Jens Beckert, Rainer Diaz-Bohne & Heiner Ganßmann (Eds.), *Märkte als soziale Strukturen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), p. 197, 255.

⁷²¹ 'eine(r) psychologischen Herausforderung'. Dirk Laabs, *Der deutsche Goldrausch. Die wahre Geschichte der Treuhand* (München: Pantheon, 2012), p. 342.

difficulties of navigating the new ones? How would their experience of the free market live up to their expectations?

Whilst narratives on this period diverge between depictions of a top-down takeover of East Germany that wiped out its industry, or the unfortunate result of years of socialist economic policy, history shows us that such processes are generally much more complicated. By looking at the actions of East Germans in their communities, this chapter explores the possibilities available to them during the privatisation efforts and considers to what extent they were able to simply respond or indeed take control of the situation. In so doing, it highlights the power structures at play during the transformation and the agency of the citizens living amidst the changes.

The Customer is King

Two weeks before the currency union, the nurse's diary entry described a markedly different atmosphere. At this time, the town was 'in complete chaos'.⁷²² As the country readied itself for the changes ahead, the shops were 'almost empty', with goods having been sold off with price cuts of up to ninety percent, leaving only the bare essentials for sale.⁷²³ Meat, cheese and other local produce was no longer to be found and washing powder was in short supply. Instead, shops had begun selling long-life milk in cartons and other western goods. Huge queues of people gathered outside the banks, as everyone hurried to transfer their savings across accounts and apply for their money to be

⁷²² 'In der Stadt Chaos', Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018

⁷²³ 'wie leer gefegt', *ibid.*

converted into Deutsche Mark. Everything was 'incredibly hectic', the diary reads.⁷²⁴ Most noticeably, this was reflected in the family's evening routine, as the nurse laments that they had 'sat outside on the terrace twice at most' that summer.⁷²⁵ 'We used to do that every evening', she noted.⁷²⁶

The local newspapers reported on the 'dramatic situation' regarding the supply of goods in the district, and of 'growing unrest amongst citizens'.⁷²⁷ Photos of empty supermarkets demonstrated that the only reminder of the goods that had once been on offer were the product signs hanging from the ceiling.⁷²⁸ An appeal from the head of the district authority urged citizens to remain calm in the last week before the currency union.⁷²⁹ Special powers had reportedly been assigned to district officials by the GDR government to ensure continued supplies, and the papers promised additional meat deliveries.⁷³⁰ The country was essentially in a state of emergency.

The supply of goods in the district of Erfurt had been an issue of contention since the unexpected new travel regulations in November 1989. In January 1990, the mayor of Eisenach had written to the Minister-President of the GDR to ask for assistance in supplying citizens in the border region.⁷³¹ The

⁷²⁴ 'Irgendwie ist alles furchtbar hektisch', *ibid.*

⁷²⁵ 'Wir saßen höchstens zweimal bisher abends auf der Terrasse', *ibid.*

⁷²⁶ 'Das haben wir früher jeden Abend gemacht', *ibid.*

⁷²⁷ 'dramatische Versorgungslage', 'Die Unruhe unter den Bürgern wächst', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dramatische Versorgungslage im Kreis Eisenach', Eisenacher Presse, 22 July 1990.

⁷²⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Gähnende Leere in der Kaufhalle an der Stadtfelder Straße', Eisenacher Presse, 22 July 1990.

⁷²⁹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dramatische Versorgungslage im Kreis Eisenach', Eisenacher Presse, 22 July 1990.

⁷³⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dramatische Versorgungslage im Kreis Eisenach', Eisenacher Presse, 22 July 1990.

StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Landrat greift hart durch. Chaos vor 1. Juli verhindern', Eisenacher Presse, 22 July 1990.

⁷³¹ StA Eisenach, 12-2203 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Allgemeiner Schriftverkehr des Bürgermeister 1989-1990, 'Brief vom Bürgermeister an den Ministerpräsident', Eisenach, 11 January 1990.

town's geographical location, only a few kilometres from the border to West Germany, had brought about particular challenges. The mayor explained that the daily influx of around eight thousand citizens from the Federal Republic, who were able to pay in D-Mark at good rates, had led to essential goods such as bread being in short supply for locals.⁷³² Moreover, the movement of GDR citizens westward had created a precarious staffing situation in the key industries, which was in turn influencing production.⁷³³ Having been summoned to action by his constituents, the mayor appealed to the government for assistance in regulating sales and supplies.⁷³⁴

As the eastern councils tried to satisfy their citizens and keep people from moving westward, agreements were reached with western firms to start selling their products in the East. As the presence of companies from the Federal Republic grew, however, fears that public GDR property was being sold off started making the headlines in the local press. In March 1990, the arrival of the western coffee and household chain *Tchibo* in Eisenach caused a press scandal that stoked divisions but also pointed to the ways in which legal procedures were disregarded and the political situation was potentially being exploited. The branch in Eisenach was the first of its kind in the East and was welcomed by crowds of interested shoppers.⁷³⁵ The firm, which had opened up in the central shopping street in the town, had, however, modified the front of

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ StA Eisenach, 40.7/101 Sammlung Wende, 'Hin und her um Tchibo. Unkommentiert gibt der WARTBURG KURIER zwei Erklärungen an Sie, lieber Leser, weiter', Wartburg Kurier, 12, 1990.

the listed building in order to mount its shop logo, but without the correct authorisation to do so.

The newspaper reported that although the company's lease contract declared that the company was permitted to make alterations to the shopfront, it also clearly stated that it was responsible for getting the necessary permits.⁷³⁶ The required permit for building work was however only requested once the work had already begun, and the company had failed to request permission from the building owner until one day before opening to the public.⁷³⁷ Although this was indeed approved, the modification of the listed building had been started without authorisation. Furthermore, the local *HO* trade organisation, which had permitted *Tchibo* to rent the shop, had signed a contract with the housing administration that owned the building in which it was named as the tenant. This did not, however, give the trade organisation the right to sublet the building to other companies.⁷³⁸ As a result, the lease contract between *Tchibo* and the *Handelsorganisation* was in fact invalid from the start.⁷³⁹

In the news report, the branch sales manager at *Tchibo* argued that the new façade design, which had caused uproar because of its large sign, had been discussed and authorised in a meeting with a town representative, 'who gave us reason to believe she had decision-making powers'.⁷⁴⁰ The responsibility for the unauthorised modification was therefore given to the local council, even though such endeavours would not have been acceptable in the Federal

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ 'die uns gegenüber Entscheidungskompetenz zu besitzen vorgab', *ibid.*

Republic. The representative of the West German chain insisted they had acted in good faith, and that the problems had arisen due to the 'present loose legal and contractual relationships between the trade organisation and the town of Eisenach'.⁷⁴¹ The company finished by stating that their customers were always their highest authority and that it would be up to them to judge the situation.⁷⁴² The citizens' consumer choices were therefore given precedence over the existing GDR regulations.

The news coverage included a statement from the local mayor, who detailed the areas in which *Tchibo* had disregarded official procedure, and insisted that whilst the town was interested in attracting good business partners, these must always abide by the rules and regulations.⁷⁴³ Furthermore, he reaffirmed that the town would favour GDR citizens in the allocation of business and shop space.⁷⁴⁴ By ending with a pledge to give priority to small business owners in the GDR, the mayor referenced the underlying discourse in which town officials were seen to be cooperating with firms from West Germany and fears that they were planning to buy out the GDR. Shop premises officially still counted as public property, and yet these were being allocated to foreign investors without a clear and transparent process. The public outcry around the *Tchibo* chain highlighted the need for all businesses to adhere to the same rules and procedures.

⁷⁴¹ 'in den derzeit ungenauen Rechts- und Vertragsverhältnissen zwischen der HO und der Stadt Eisenach', *ibid.*

⁷⁴² 'Maßstab für unser Handeln ist immer der Kunde. Diesem möchten wir das Urteil überlassen', *ibid.*

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The statements from the *Tchibo* branch manager and the mayor of Eisenach were published side-by-side in the local paper without commentary.⁷⁴⁵ The report, which invites the reader to critique the two statements by refraining from providing a press commentary, presented the branch manager of *Tchibo* and the mayor of Eisenach as opposing forces, even though the mayor claimed to agree in principle with the statement made by the store manager.⁷⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it also highlighted the complicated legal situation in the town, and the grounds on which the concerns were based. GDR regulations were technically still applicable, and yet the unprecedented developments and the new circumstances meant that these were being ignored or disregarded in order to please consumers and attract businesses to the town. As the disrespect of existing legal regulations undermined public trust in the local council, there was a growing need for new and clear regulations that would structure business relations and protect eastern actors.

The Voices on the Streets

In July 1990, shortly after the currency union, a journalist in Eisenach received a call urging him to come quickly to the dairy factory in the east of the town. 'Everything is being destroyed', the caller had told him.⁷⁴⁷ On arrival, he found the workers throwing glass milk bottles into a truck and smashing them with metal poles.⁷⁴⁸ On questioning, the staff refused to answer and instead fetched their factory manager, who explained, "'No one at all wants to buy our milk

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ 'Die schlagen hier alles kaputt', Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, Eisenach, 10 February 2018.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

anymore. They think it's unhygienic. The people don't want to buy it'''.⁷⁴⁹

Aware of the need to renew their machinery and switch to different packaging in order to continue their business, staff had taken it onto themselves to dispose of the glass, which they felt had been rendered useless.

Similar issues faced the beer brewing industry, although their problem was not the glass bottles themselves. Although customers were still buying beer in bottles, they preferred the beer in the brown bottles, often shipped in from West Germany, over the beer in the green bottles.⁷⁵⁰ Green bottles, which let in more light, were seen as lower quality, as the contents would not keep as long as in the darker bottles. After the local supply crisis in June, customer habits had switched to choosing longer lasting produce. Consequently, over three hundred thousand empty bottles piled up in a 'bottle graveyard' at the local brewery in Eisenach, as the green bottles simply could not be sold, and western bottles that had been returned to the GDR firms were harder to clean and recycle.⁷⁵¹

The fresh competition from western suppliers presented the local farming and food industry with a growing problem. Many local industries now struggled to sell their goods because citizens were choosing newly-imported western goods over GDR produce. As supermarkets consequently ceased to trade with the local industry, businesses took to selling their produce

⁷⁴⁹ '''Kein Mensch kauft mehr unsere Milch. Das ist unhygienisch, gilt als unhygienisch, diese Aludeckel. Die Leute kaufen das nicht mehr''', Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, Eisenach, 10 February 2018.

⁷⁵⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dank neuer Hefe sind Hopf und Malz noch nicht verloren', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 27 July 1990.

⁷⁵¹ 'Flaschenfriedhof', *ibid.*

themselves outside of the said supermarkets,⁷⁵² on their own premises or directly from delivery lorries.⁷⁵³ In south Thuringia, dairy farmers staged protests outside supermarkets, where they proceeded to empty bottles of milk into the gutter to draw attention to the decision of their customers to invest in West German milk over East German dairy, and the effects this was having on business and jobs.⁷⁵⁴

Producers also appealed to local citizens to support their cause and to recognise the long-term consequences of buying from their competitors. Self-made signs, reading

we are fighting for our jobs.

FOR THAT REASON!

WE ARE SELLING OUR PRODUCE

O U R S E L V E S

hung above the stacked cases of bottles.⁷⁵⁵ However, unable to match the prices and packaging of western goods, and with supermarkets gradually choosing other suppliers, the East German industry was at a severe disadvantage.

Although the glass bottles and milk surely still had a certain value, the workers' act of destroying their property and tipping away their produce was symbolic of the industry's perceived loss of worth. The newspapers blamed the

⁷⁵² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Vernichtung von DDR-Landwirtschaftsprodukten ist keine Lösung. Thüringer Milch ohne Chance?', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 21 July 1990.

⁷⁵³ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Brauerei-Chef (...): Billiger als „Westbier“', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 18 July 1990.

⁷⁵⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Vernichtung von DDR-Landwirtschaftsprodukten ist keine Lösung. Thüringer Milch ohne Chance?', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 21 July 1990.

⁷⁵⁵ 'Wir kämpfen um unsere arbeitsplätze. DESHALB! VERKAUFEN WIR UNSERE PRODUKTE S E L B S T', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Recht zufrieden sind die Brauereimitarbeiter mit den Ergebnissen ihrer Selbsthilfeaktion. Der Verkauf eigener Produkte geht weiter', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 25 July 1990.

customers for not choosing local produce, even though this was more expensive.⁷⁵⁶ In many cases, the press and the East German trade organisation had had their part to play in reducing public trust in East German products. In regards to the beer from the local brewery, the head of the former *Handelsorganisation* in Eisenach had argued in the newspaper that it was impossible to put 'unclean bottles, with wonky or missing labels, and a short shelf life' out for sale, and that these products would therefore be returned to the manufacturer.⁷⁵⁷ In so doing, the western products were stylised as superior products due to their packaging, their seals that suggested better hygiene, and the longer use-by dates; criteria that were easily applicable to a large range of products. The trade organisation representative added that it was unfathomable to expect the customer 'to choose (...) a worse and dearer product, simply because it is regional'.⁷⁵⁸

Furthermore, the *Handelsorganisation* defended their decision to switch to using western suppliers as a necessary step to 'satisfying our customers'.⁷⁵⁹ On ideological terms, it was now 'the customer, and not the planning committee', that would determine which products would succeed.⁷⁶⁰ The customer was presented as the holy grail of the new society, whose needs would come first,

⁷⁵⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Brot, Butter, Blumenkohl – Eisenacher eßt eisenachisch! Lebensmittelbranche: Lage dramatisch. Stadt fördert Direktverkauf', Oberhessische Presse, 27 July 1990.

⁷⁵⁷ 'unsauberen Flaschen, schiefen oder gar keinen Etiketten sowie der geringen Haltbarkeitsdauer', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'HO Pläne / Schwierigkeiten bei Start in die Marktwirtschaft', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 05 July 1990.

⁷⁵⁸ 'Daß dieser ein schlechteres und teures Produkt konsumiert, nur weil es aus der Heimat stammt, wird man kaum verlangen können', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Harte Konkurrenz im Kaufhallenregal. HO aufgelöst – Thüringer Handelsgesellschaft mbH Eisenach', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 07/08 July 1990.

⁷⁵⁹ 'Wir suchen uns Partner von drüben, um unsere Kunden zufrieden zu stellen', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'HO Pläne / Schwierigkeiten bei Start in die Marktwirtschaft', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 05 July 1990.

⁷⁶⁰ 'Fortan wird nicht die Plankommission, sondern der Kunde entscheiden, welches Erzeugnis sich durchsetzt', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Harte Konkurrenz im Kaufhallenregal. HO aufgelöst – Thüringer Handelsgesellschaft mbH Eisenach', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 07/08 July 1990.

above those of the suppliers. As such, the trade representative explained that 'the customer has first priority, not the industry, even if that means endangering jobs'.⁷⁶¹ And yet, the citizens of East Germany were both customers and workers in one. By separating the shopper from the citizen, it became possible to argue on market terms without considering the repercussions for the businesses that paid the wages. At the same time, the customers were held responsible for the failing local industry due to their choices as consumers.

After the supply crisis in late June, where grocery shops had faced shortages across the board, it is understandable that citizens would thereafter reach for products with a longer sell-by date in order to be fully prepared for other emergency scenarios. Although the fresh GDR products were by no means worse quality simply for being fresh, producers were forced to reduce their prices to compete with the longer-lasting products now on the market. After their sales had dropped by sixty percent, the brewery in Eisenach, for example, was forced to reduce their prices from ninety cents per bottle to seventy-five, below that of the western beers.⁷⁶² Only then, did the local shops begin selling their products again.⁷⁶³ As this, however, would no longer suffice to keep the brewery going, it continued direct sales as well.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶¹ 'Für ihn habe der Kunde Vorrang und nicht die Industrie, auch wenn das zum Teil die Arbeitsplätze gefährde', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'HO Pläne / Schwierigkeiten bei Start in die Marktwirtschaft', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 05 July 1990.

⁷⁶² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dank neuer Hefe sind Hopf und Malz noch nicht verloren', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 27 July 1990.

⁷⁶³ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Brauerei-Chef (...): Billiger als „Westbiere“', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 18 July 1990.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

A letter from one of the readers of the *Thüringer Landeszeitung*, printed on the eighteenth of July, had countered the arguments presented in the press by the trade organisations. The problem, as he saw it, was not that the regional firms were demanding too high a price, as butter from the local creamery was available to the supermarkets for just fifty cents apiece.⁷⁶⁵ Rather, he argued that the issue was that the supermarket chain REWE, which had bought up a group of shops across Eisenach, was working to order forms which did not list GDR firms.⁷⁶⁶ The expansion of the chain across the town meant that the western firm was now 'dictating the prices', not allowing for healthy competition, and 'overriding the mechanisms of the free market'.⁷⁶⁷ The reader called upon the town and district council to take immediate action.⁷⁶⁸

In the district capital of Erfurt, the city council had done just that, calling an extraordinary session on the eighth of July; the end of the first week after the currency union.⁷⁶⁹ All local producers, distribution firms and wholesalers in the city had been invited to the meeting, which gave an opportunity to discuss the topic of pricing levels for food and drink.⁷⁷⁰ The very next day, the delegations met again, and decided to reduce prices by fifty percent and set flat rates for certain goods.⁷⁷¹ In his report to the council on the eighteenth of July,

⁷⁶⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'REWE und seine ,Sprößlinge'. Kritische Lesermeinung zum TLZ-Bericht über die Eröffnung des KONTRA-Marktes – Furcht vor Preisdiktaten', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 18 July 1990.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ 'Preisdiktat', 'Die Mechanismen der freien Marktwirtschaft sind dadurch außer Kraft gesetzt'. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'REWE und seine ,Sprößlinge'. Kritische Lesermeinung zum TLZ-Bericht über die Eröffnung des KONTRA-Marktes – Furcht vor Preisdiktaten', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 18 July 1990.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ StA Erfurt, 1-7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Protokoll der 4. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 18.07.1990', 18 July 1990.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

the mayor of Erfurt confirmed that the prices had indeed gone down.⁷⁷² The East German trade organisation had been instructed to keep their prices low, as the city was planning to bring discounter chains onto the market. Although this measure was intended to ensure competitive prices for consumers, the mayor admitted that it was not necessarily beneficial to local production firms:

Aldi will not buy from the meat combine, and they won't buy their baked goods in Erfurt. They will of course use low-cost suppliers, and so we will be putting these jobs at risk. For that reason, this is really our last resort.⁷⁷³

As the mayor of Erfurt had anticipated, the new supermarket chains in the region did not choose to use East German suppliers. At the end of July, the head of the district authority also brought representatives from the local agricultural food production and trade groups together around a table for talks.⁷⁷⁴ Press coverage suggests that the discussion was 'animated', and especially 'informative for the factory managers'.⁷⁷⁵ What points to a heated and yet unbalanced debate, is confirmed in the outcome of the negotiations; for while the members of the West German supermarket chain *REWE* and the successor to the East German trade organisation *THE* are to have agreed to start selling local produce, they stated that they would only do so on the condition that the produce matched their set standards of price and quality.⁷⁷⁶ The machinery and packaging used in GDR food production was, however,

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ 'Sie haben den Nachteil, das muß ich hier ganz deutlich sagen, Aldi kauft dann nicht im Fleischkombinat, sie kaufen auch keine Backwaren in Erfurt ein. Sie kriegen das von Billiganbiestern natürlich mit und damit gefährden wir natürlich auch wieder diese Arbeitsplätze. Deshalb wird das das letzte Mittel sein, um hier irgendwo gegenanzugehen', *ibid.*

⁷⁷⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Brot, Butter, Blumenkohl – Eisenacher eßt eisenachisch! Lebensmittelbranche: Lage dramatisch. Stadt fördert Direktverkauf', *Oberhessische Presse*, 27 July 1990.

⁷⁷⁵ 'angeregt und für die Betriebsdirektoren wohl auch recht lehrreich', *ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.

considered inferior to the modern West German production and therefore deemed below standard. As the supermarkets now set the standards and were permitted to import western goods, local firms were expected to face the competition despite their disadvantage.

The only suggested 'solutions' during the discussion were for East German firms to reduce their range of goods, improve their quality and find ways of reducing costs.⁷⁷⁷ The head of the district authority simply appealed to the local factories to, if they were to cut jobs, look at reducing office jobs over jobs in the production line.⁷⁷⁸ On the communal level, the mayor of Eisenach issued permits to bakers and farmers to sell their produce directly to the customers on the town's streets and marketplaces, with flexible standpoints.⁷⁷⁹ These permits, which would be issued to local business only, would need to be collected from the town council and be clearly visible on the stands.⁷⁸⁰ East Germans had taken to the streets again, but this time, because they were excluded from the supermarkets. As well as facing tougher competition and a different playing field, local businesses were now expected not only to produce and deliver the goods, but to take responsibility for sales as well.

In the dairy industry, one local firm chose to remain with their original packaging, choosing instead to design a new lid for their glass bottles that was stronger and sealed with a quality label, as an attempt to adapt their packaging

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Bauern und Bäcker können jetzt auf den Straßen verkaufen', Eisenacher Bürgerblatt, 02 August 1990.

to the customers' preferences.⁷⁸¹ Many firms, however, entered contracts with western companies. Farmers in the south of the region decided instead to ship their milk to Bavaria to be processed in modern plants before being sold back into Thuringia with a regional label via the West German dairy industry.⁷⁸² The milk would be packaged in the desired cartons, even though these were non-recyclable.⁷⁸³ Similarly, creameries in Eisenach, Gotha and Mühlhausen formed a joint corporation with the dairy company in Kassel, allowing them to 'ensure quality'.⁷⁸⁴ In this case, quark, yoghurt, cheese and cream was sent to West Germany to be filled into plastic pots and sold back into East Germany under a different brand name.⁷⁸⁵ Each of the three eastern creameries would specialise in a different type of product.⁷⁸⁶ Although the papers reported '300 new jobs',⁷⁸⁷ the cooperative in Eisenach reduced their administrative staff by installing a computer to manage purchase orders and accounts in the future.⁷⁸⁸ This was linked to the dairy headquarters in Hesse, which had provided the software.⁷⁸⁹ A dairy farm in Berka/Werra received the support of a Danish firm, which agreed to supply new machinery to improve cheese production.⁷⁹⁰ Similar

⁷⁸¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Vernichtung von DDR-Landwirtschaftsprodukten ist keine Lösung. Thüringer Milch ohne Chance?', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 21 July 1990.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ 'die Qualität (...) abgesichert', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'DDR-Produkte / Zusagen des Handels. Abnahme, wenn Qualität stimmt', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 31 July 1990.

⁷⁸⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Aktiengesellschaft zwischen Molkereien in Hessen und Thüringen wurde gegründet. Es geht weiter: 300 Arbeitsplätze und neue Produkte', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 26 July 1990.

⁷⁸⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Molkerei-Chef (...): "Getarnter" DDR-Joghurt', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 18 July 1990.

⁷⁸⁷ '300 neue Arbeitsplätze', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Aktiengesellschaft zwischen Molkereien in Hessen und Thüringen wurde gegründet. Es geht weiter: 300 Arbeitsplätze und neue Produkte', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 26 July 1990.

⁷⁸⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Neue Technik für Molkereigenossenschaft', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 25 July 1990.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

decisions faced the beer brewing industry, where a cooperation with 'potential partners from the Federal Republic' was presented as 'the only chance of survival'.⁷⁹¹

After announcing at the regional CDU party conference that the western chain *REWE* 'has complete control over Eisenach', the head of the district authority made an effort to support local businesses and break up the monopoly of chains in the region; a number of business premises, formerly belonging to the local trade organisation, were now offered to local business people to run.⁷⁹² In particular, the call, which also went out in the local press, was aimed at former shop managers who had worked in the premises over the past years and were now willing to take it over independently. They were to be given priority over other applicants, with business spaces being allocated by a committee. The local trade organisation also agreed to hand over some of their shops, offering up the smaller premises. 'This', however, would 'not be enough', the head of the district authority asserted.⁷⁹³ His aim was to ensure that the town allowed a range of businesses to compete against one another, which, in turn, should guarantee a broad range of goods and fair prices for consumers.⁷⁹⁴

These developments had all taken place within a month of the currency union. The experience of food and money shortages during the transition and

⁷⁹¹ 'Nur so die Chance zum Überleben', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Betrieb, Stadt und Kreis sind sich einig: Brauerei Eisenach wird aufgeteilt', Oberhessische Presse, 27/28 July 1990.

⁷⁹² 'habe Eisenach hundertprozentig im Griff', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Entflechtung von HO und Konsum / Kreis sucht Bewerber. Handelsobjekte sollen "unters Volk!"', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 24 July 1990.

⁷⁹³ 'das wird uns aber nicht reichen', *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

the arrival of long-desired western goods had influenced the shopping habits of locals, but the effect of their choices for local businesses had soon become visible. To raise awareness of their situation, but also to express the levels of personal devaluation that these workers felt, staff took to destroying their assets and publicly tipping away their produce. Nonetheless, the fate of the food and drink industry in East Germany was not just in the hands of their customers. Bad press and strong competition from large western firms, that undercut eastern goods by offering longer use-by dates, had made it difficult for eastern businesses, as these would need time and investment in order to update their production and packaging processes. By this time, western chains and products had already established themselves and local companies were forced to reduce costs by cutting jobs.

The East German trade organisation and the district authority allocated the blame for the failing sales to the citizens themselves for choosing to buy western products, or to the workers for failing to produce goods that would meet the market demands, despite the uneven playing field. And yet, eastern businesses had demonstrated clear initiative and strong efforts, as confirmed during a review by the district authority, to ensure ongoing trade by taking up direct sales on the streets and looking for ways to adapt their product. However, due to the need to adapt quickly, firms were pushed to enter co-operations with businesses from across the border in order to stay afloat. The next section will look at knock-on effects in different sectors of communal life and how local citizens responded to the crises in their companies.

The By-products of the Currency Union

The introduction of western goods in July 1990 had another consequence, which would make a visible impact on the towns and communities across the region. Within days, the rise in household waste, due to the 'unaccustomed variety' of packaging materials had reached 'almost catastrophic' levels.⁷⁹⁵ Rubbish bins across the town of Eisenach were overflowing, the streets were strewn with drinks cans and house entrances were blocked by towering piles of boxes.⁷⁹⁶ Glass jars, cardboard and newspapers started heaping up around the town and its surrounding villages.⁷⁹⁷ As these failed to be collected, dissatisfied citizens started raising concerns.⁷⁹⁸

The local public utilities organisation admitted that it was struggling to keep on top of collecting household waste and emptying stationary bins across the town.⁷⁹⁹ Whereas bins had needed emptying three times a day in June,⁸⁰⁰ the company director reported that this had risen to every two hours in July.⁸⁰¹ Although the public utilities company would have liked to simply erect more bins, it did not have the funds to do so.⁸⁰² Furthermore, as the company was in public ownership, such decisions would first have to be debated and signed off

⁷⁹⁵ 'bisher unbekannter Vielfalt', 'fast katastrophal', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Sorgen mit der Müllentsorgung', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 09 August 1990.

⁷⁹⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Papierkörbe quellen über – Verpackungsflut hat Folgen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 11 July 1990.

⁷⁹⁷ Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Papierkörbe quellen über – Verpackungsflut hat Folgen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 11 July 1990.

⁸⁰⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Betriebsjubiläum – Grund zu Feiern?', Eisenacher Allgemeine, 21 June 1990.

⁸⁰¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Sorgen mit der Müllentsorgung', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 09 August 1990.

⁸⁰² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Papierkörbe quellen über – Verpackungsflut hat Folgen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 11 July 1990.

by the town council, leading to further delays.⁸⁰³ Overall, newspapers reported that rubbish in the district had doubled since the currency union.⁸⁰⁴ Although the rise in tourism was considered a likely contributor to the growing rubbish, the district authority estimated that a twenty to thirty percent rise in rubbish had come from new forms of packaging alone.⁸⁰⁵ Consequently, the council began urging local citizens to take preventative measures by considering these by-products when buying goods.⁸⁰⁶

According to the press, the sight of the market square after hours was particularly 'disgraceful', as cartons and rubbish were left behind after the stalls had been packed away.⁸⁰⁷ Tradesmen argued that the town council was responsible for collecting the rubbish, whilst the local newspapers reported that this was not the case.⁸⁰⁸ 'Normally, the removal of rubbish is the responsibility of the market traders', explained the director of the public utilities company.⁸⁰⁹ The town council was still covering the costs of removing leftover rubbish, but in future this service would have to be included in the trader's stall fees. Until these new market rules were to be introduced later in the year, however, individual salespeople were technically still responsible for collecting, recycling or disposing of their boxes and packaging.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Versuche der Stadtwirtschaft. Hausmülleerung (sic) zweimal und Altpapiersammlung', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine West-Thüringen, 7 August 1990.

⁸⁰⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Müllabfuhr: Nulltarif für Bürger ist passé', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 30 July 1990.

⁸⁰⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Betriebsjubiläum – Grund zu Feiern?', Eisenacher Allgemeine, 21 June 1990.

⁸⁰⁷ 'ein erbärmliches Bild', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Papierkörbe quellen über – Verpackungsflut hat Folgen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 11 July 1990.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ 'Normalerweise sind die Gewerbetreibenden für die Entsorgung des Mülls selbst verantwortlich', *ibid.*

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

Previously, waste removal and recycling in the GDR had been paid for and heavily subsidised by the state, with waste management managed at the communal level, and recycling at a district level. Now, however, the organisations, which were still under state ownership but in the process of adapting to the free market, were unable to cover the rising costs. In future, taxes would have to be introduced to pay for the services, but these structures were not yet in place. In July, the publicly-owned utilities company in Eisenach had turned into a limited company, named *Stadtwirtschaft Eisenach GmbH in Aufbau* (Public Utilities Ltd under construction).⁸¹¹ The addendum to its name was meant to demonstrate that the limited company had been formed solely as an 'interim solution', as its staff expected that, 'sooner or later', the company would be returned into public ownership.⁸¹² Workers were confident that the company's future was safe, as there was 'well-founded hope', due to the rise in waste, that they would be able to keep all existing jobs whilst also creating new ones.⁸¹³

Similarly, the former *SERO* (secondary raw materials) organisation in the district had reformed as *Thüringen Recycling GmbH*, with a branch in Eisenach. Just a few weeks on, however, this company was struggling not only to manage the recycling, but also to pay its staff's wages.⁸¹⁴ The district council had announced that it was unable to continue covering their costs, as the value of

⁸¹¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Stadtwirtschaft vor dem zweiten Frühling', Eisenacher Tagespost, 30 June / 01 July 1990.

⁸¹² 'Übergangslösung', 'über kurz oder lang', *ibid.*

⁸¹³ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Betriebsjubiläum – Grund zu Feiern?', Eisenacher Allgemeine, 21 June 1990.

⁸¹⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dosen, Plastikflaschen, Altpapier ... Wohin mit den Sekundärrohstoffen? – Lösung in Sicht', Thüringer Tageblatt, 28 July 1990.

paper and glass had fallen, and the company was therefore failing to make any profit.⁸¹⁵ Recycling these materials alone was no longer a financially viable business model.⁸¹⁶ Although the company had tried to negotiate with glass and paper companies, which were willing to accept the materials in principle, these were not prepared to pay for the transport, and so the recycling company continued to work at a loss.⁸¹⁷

Although local industry was no longer willing to accept returned materials, with many shops also turning down recyclables and refusing to pay the refundable deposit, there was still the option of transporting these to recycling plants. First however, the recycling organisation would need to install recycling containers to collect tins and bottles.⁸¹⁸ Due to its growing losses however, the recycling company was unable to finance this investment.⁸¹⁹ Instead, materials that would otherwise have been recycled, ended up piling up or being disposed of as normal household waste, thereby creating more work for the local public utilities company.⁸²⁰

Although waste management was indeed profitable, the *Stadtwirtschaft* company equally did not have the technology and facilities to cope with the new quantities of household waste. This, again, would require significant

⁸¹⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Recycling GmbH ist zu teuer: West-Entsorger soll aushelfen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 14/15 July 1990.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Kein Geld mehr für Altstoffe. Recycling GmbH in schwerer finanzieller Krise – Baldiger Zusammenbruch droht', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 24 July 1990.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dosen, Plastikflaschen, Altpapier ... Wohin mit den Sekundärrohstoffen? – Lösung in Sicht', Thüringer Tageblatt, 28 July 1990. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Versuche der Stadtwirtschaft. Hausmülleerung (sic) zweimal und Altpapiersammlung', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine West-Thüringen, 7 August 1990.

financial investment in order to buy new lorries to transport the waste or install new facilities to manage the waste. The landfill sites in Eisenach-Moseberg and nearby Ruhla were already nearing capacity, and so the company would soon need to pay higher costs to have the rubbish transported sixty kilometres further to the next site across the former border, in the Hessian town of Buchenau.⁸²¹

Ironically, the Federal Republic of Germany had been disposing of their waste in GDR landfill sites since 1978.⁸²² By transporting their rubbish abroad, western firms were able to save money by circumventing federal regulations on proper disposal. The East German state, on the other hand, was keen to make money from the transaction and accepted to take the waste materials, without consideration for the ensuing risks for the local population. Now that the state had collapsed, citizens' groups and independent journalists started unearthing the truth of the 'rubbish colony' in eastern Germany.⁸²³ However, as the country faced new levels of rubbish, it was more preoccupied with finding a solution to its own waste management.

As it was only the Thuringian recycling company, which had 'collapsed',⁸²⁴ the local business magistrate set about trying to find a western firm that could handle the ever-growing heaps of recycling in the district.⁸²⁵ In theory, recycling was the responsibility of the state, but this did not yet exist,

⁸²¹ Ibid.

⁸²² Matthias Baerens & Ulrich von Arnswald, *Die Müll-Connection. Entsorger und ihre Geschäfte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993), p. 20.

⁸²³ Baerens & von Arnswald, *Die Müll-Connection*, p. 131.

⁸²⁴ 'zusammengebrochen', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Müllabfuhr: Nulltarif für Bürger ist passé', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 30 July 1990.

⁸²⁵ Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

and ministries for the environment were also still being established. At the end of July 1990, the local environment office in Eisenach had just one member of staff - a former social studies teacher - but not its own financial budget.⁸²⁶ Consequently, old cars that had been left at the side of the road could not be removed and scrapped by the town, and simply stayed where they were, rusting away.⁸²⁷ The head of the district office for the environment argued that cooperating with a western partner was 'the only means to survival' for the local recycling company.⁸²⁸

Much to the surprise of the magistrate in Eisenach, western firms were not at all interested in taking over the recycling industry, with its limited opportunity for profit-making, on its own.⁸²⁹ In the Federal Republic, waste management and recycling were not separated into two separate organisations, and so the town was unable to find a buyer for the recycling firm as a stand-alone entity. The western firms were only interested in taking on the profitable sides of the waste management business, and so it would mean selling all or nothing. The head storeman of the recycling facilities in Eisenach announced in July that he assumed a western enterprise would soon take over all of the waste management services in Eisenach.⁸³⁰

By the time the eastern delegates had understood the reasons for the disinterest, the company *Edelhoff-Münster* from Bad Hersfeld had already fully

⁸²⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dosen, Plastikflaschen, Altpapier ... Wohin mit den Sekundärrohstoffen? - Lösung in Sicht', Thüringer Tageblatt, 28 July 1990.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ 'Als einzige Überlebenschance', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Recycling GmbH ist zu teuer: West-Entsorger soll aushelfen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 14/15 July 1990.

⁸²⁹ Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

⁸³⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Recycling GmbH ist zu teuer: West-Entsorger soll aushelfen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 14/15 July 1990.

taken over services in one local community.⁸³¹ Whereas eastern towns were reliant on the investment of western firms in upgrading their facilities, the town Eisenach was wary of handing over all waste management services to companies from the Federal Republic, as had already taken place in the nearby districts Bad Salzungen and Bad Langensalza.⁸³² In these cases, where the town administration had failed to maintain stakes in the sector, it was to be expected that the 'West German contractors (...) would gradually drive out the municipal businesses', leading to the collapse of a 'largely well-functioning but technically outdated municipal enterprise'.⁸³³

As an interim solution, the *Stadtwirtschaft GmbH in Aufbau* began cooperating with the company *Münster* from Bad Hersfeld in West Germany.⁸³⁴ *Münster* would send larger vehicles that could collect more waste and flatten it during transportation as well. 'This allows us to save time', explained the director of the waste firm in Eisenach.⁸³⁵ The western company would also collect cardboard and paper, which would be sent to the pressing plant in Bad Hersfeld.⁸³⁶ During its first week, the company collected over three hundred

⁸³¹ Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

⁸³² StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Beschluß über die Zustimmung zur Gründung einer Beteiligungsgesellschaft mbH für die Entsorgung 49% Beteiligung der Stadt Eisenach 51% Beteiligung der Firma Edelhoff-Münster, Bad Hersfeld', Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Eisenach, 05 September 1990.

⁸³³ 'daß die (...) westdeutschen Entsorger (...) nach und nach die Stadtwirtschaft verdrängen würden. Dies würde den Niedergang des an sich gesunden, aber technisch überalterten städtischen Stadtwirtschaftsbetrieben bedeuten', *ibid.*

⁸³⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Sorgen mit der Müllentsorgung', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 9 August 1990.

⁸³⁵ 'So sparen wir Zeit', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Versuche der Stadtwirtschaft. Hausmülleerung (sic) zweimal und Altpapiersammlung', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine West-Thüringen, 7 August 1990.

⁸³⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Sorgen mit der Müllentsorgung', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 9 August 1990.

tonnes of paper from the district of Eisenach.⁸³⁷ Despite this cooperation, which started in mid-August 1990, the company director played down the long-term chances of success: 'To think that we can radically update our technology within two years is an illusion, even with the help of a strong partner from the Federal Republic'.⁸³⁸

At the end of August, the director of the public utilities company in Eisenach put forward a written statement on the future of the business to the town council.⁸³⁹ Although there would inevitably be job cuts in certain areas, he was confident they could be replaced by bringing in new services, such as organic composting or hazardous waste disposal.⁸⁴⁰ What remained certain however, was that the company, as it was at the time, was 'not able to provide the required new services independently'.⁸⁴¹ The management board consequently worried that their dependence on financial support would gradually drive the business back, forcing it to hand over services in the surrounding area.⁸⁴²

As such, they argued that uniform rules should be brought in across the district, to make it easier for the public utilities company to work across the

⁸³⁷ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Niederschrift über die 4. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 5. 9. 1990', Büro des Stadtverordnetenvorstehers, Eisenach, 6 September 1990.

⁸³⁸ 'Es ist eine Illusion zu glauben, daß wir in zwei Jahren unsere Technik grundlegend erneuern könnten, auch nicht mit einem starken Partner aus der Bundesrepublik'. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Versuche der Stadtwirtschaft. Hausmülleerung (sic) zweimal und Altpapiersammlung', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine West-Thüringen, 7 August 1990.

⁸³⁹ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Stellungnahme zum Beschlußentwurf der künftigen Wirtschaftsform der Stadtwirtschaft Eisenach GmbH i.A.', Eisenach, 24 August 1990.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ 'kann die derzeitige Stadtwirtschaft Eisenach GmbH i.A. die geforderten neuen Leistungen im Bereich der Abfallwirtschaft nicht selbstständig erbringen', *ibid.*

⁸⁴² Ibid.

area.⁸⁴³ Their first choice would be for all waste management services to be brought together as a district business, with subsidiaries for the individual towns.⁸⁴⁴ Failing that, the management would consider offering shares to a West German company.⁸⁴⁵ The staff committee had already voted with a large majority for a cooperation with a western firm on the fourth of July 1990, and again on the twentieth of August 1990.⁸⁴⁶ In any case, however, management stressed to the town council that it was of utmost importance to ensure the town council maintained a large stake in the business.⁸⁴⁷

In September 1990, the town council struck a deal with *Edelhoff-Münster*, in which they would manage the recycling and waste disposal for the whole district together as a joint venture.⁸⁴⁸ First, however, the *Thüringer Recycling GmbH* branch in Eisenach would need to become independent, in order to merge with the communal waste management company.⁸⁴⁹ As demanded by the public utilities company, the negotiators had ensured that the town of Eisenach maintained a forty-nine percent stake in the company.⁸⁵⁰ The former business magistrate for the town looked back on this move as one of the best

⁸⁴³ Ibid; StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Versuche der Stadtwirtschaft. Hausmülleerung (sic) zweimal und Altpapiersammlung', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine West-Thüringen, 7 August 1990.

⁸⁴⁴ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Stellungnahme zum Beschlußentwurf der künftigen Wirtschaftsform der Stadtwirtschaft Eisenach GmbH i.A.', Eisenach, 24 August 1990.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Beschuß über die Zustimmung zur Gründung einer Beteiligungsgesellschaft mbH für die Entsorgung 49% Beteiligung der Stadt Eisenach 51% Beteiligung der Firma Edelhoff-Münster, Bad Hersfeld', Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Eisenach, 05 September 1990.

⁸⁴⁹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Recycling GmbH ist zu teuer: West-Entsorger soll aushelfen', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 14/15 July 1990.

⁸⁵⁰ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Beschuß über die Zustimmung zur Gründung einer Beteiligungsgesellschaft mbH für die Entsorgung 49% Beteiligung der Stadt Eisenach 51% Beteiligung der Firma Edelhoff-Münster, Bad Hersfeld', Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Eisenach, 05 September 1990.

achievements of the period, as by founding an associated company, Eisenach was able to solve its waste management and recycling problems whilst keeping a large stake in the business and securing jobs.⁸⁵¹ The cooperation between the town of Eisenach and *Edelhoff-Münster* was said to have worked well due to a good mutual understanding, and also provided an opportunity to learn how to set up a *GmbH*, as a model for future projects.⁸⁵²

The success of the project was not, however, a given. In June 1990, the business magistrate had stressed to fellow councillors the importance of ensuring that communal businesses complied to the new legal system after the first of July, to secure the seamless running of accounts.⁸⁵³ Councillors had gone to great efforts to make sure they were well-informed on the new regulations and possibilities, having exchanged ideas and experiences with other towns in the GDR and the Federal Republic.⁸⁵⁴ Nevertheless, despite considerable preparation, the new councillors were barely managing to keep on top of things. At the end of his report to the town council in June 1990, the business magistrate had planned to explain that,

work in progress predominates at the moment, leaving little time to work on the future. We have taken over the department and taken up office. At the same time, we have quickly come to realise that the tasks at hand require new staff and new approaches.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

⁸⁵³ StA Eisenach, 21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990, 'Bericht über die Arbeit im Dezernat VI im Monat Juni 1990', Magistrat der Stadt Eisenach, Dezernat für Wirtschaftsverwaltung, Eisenach, 26 June 1990.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁵ 'Abschließend kann man zur Tätigkeit im Monat Juni sagen, daß die laufenden Arbeiten derzeit überwiegen und wenig Zeit für Zukunftsaufgaben lassen. Das Dezernat wurde übernommen, die Amtstätigkeit aufgenommen. Gleichzeitig reifte jedoch die Erkenntnis, daß die anstehenden Aufgaben neues Personal und neue Arbeitsmethoden erfordern', *ibid.*

Although the paragraph was crossed out and removed from the speech, it demonstrates just how overstretched the local councillors were. On one occasion, the business magistrate's wife had even called the police, as he had failed to come home at night.⁸⁵⁶

The town council and local businesses found themselves in a highly pressurised and fast-paced situation, with new challenges emerging where old rules and structures no longer applied, but new ones were not yet in place. At the end of July 1990, the local paper in Eisenach had noted, 'The old disposal system no longer exists, a new one is still in the planning process'.⁸⁵⁷ Tasks that would otherwise be managed by larger regional bodies, were left to newly appointed magistrates. In the meantime, experienced firms from West Germany had the upper hand, with the discontinuity working to their advantage. Constrained by the need to solve pressing issues and respond to western influences, councillors and companies in Eisenach nevertheless managed to navigate the new legal system whilst ensuring, as best they could, that the interests of local people were protected.

The city of Erfurt followed a similar course, also founding a limited company to manage public utilities and secure 'the independence of the city in ecological, social, administrative, financial and economic terms' in July 1990.⁸⁵⁸ In particular, the council in Erfurt had argued for the importance of including

⁸⁵⁶ Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017.

⁸⁵⁷ 'Das alte Entsorgungssystem gibt es nicht mehr, ein neues ist erst geplant', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Dosen, Plastikflaschen, Altpapier ... Wohin mit den Sekundärrohstoffen? - Lösung in Sicht', Thüringer Tageblatt, 28 July 1990.

⁸⁵⁸ 'die kommunale Selbstständigkeit unter stadtökologischem, sozialem, verwaltungs- und finanztechnischem und wirtschaftlichem Aspekt', StA Erfurt, 1-7 Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990, 'Gründung eines wirtschaftlichen Gesamtunternehmens Stadtwerke Erfurt', Erfurt, 4 July 1990, in 'Protokoll der 4. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 18.07.1990', 18 July 1990.

energy as part of the business, as this area provided good profit-making opportunities and could support weaker services.⁸⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the topic of waste management had also caused hefty debates in Erfurt, even within political factions, as communal actors argued for the cheaper providers in order to save money.⁸⁶⁰ Economic arguments had taken the upper hand and were rated as essential for securing survival and therefore more valuable than voice. As financial pressures increased, and councillors tried to find quick solutions to pressing issues, it was not self-evident that they would choose options that secured the city's long-term interests.

Conclusion

Historically, the fall of the Wall on the ninth of November 1989 and the reunification of Germany on the third of October 1990 are often presented as turning points in the rapid transformation of East Germany, enacted within the short space of a year. And yet, on closer inspection, the introduction of the new market system on the first of July, just three and a half months after the first free elections in the GDR, brought about changes that affected the most crucial parts of the eastern everyday experience; work and social life. As such, the transformation of the economic, political and social system was even swifter than it at first appears, with local citizens having to adapt quickly to the new structures before the old ones had even been fully dismantled. In social terms,

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Interview with Wolfgang Mühle, Erfurt, 13 August 2018.

this made the currency union and the transition to the free market the central experience of the transformation period.

The collapse of the state in 1989 had created an unprecedented situation in which the former rules were no longer respected or adhered to, and yet new ones were not yet in place. Up until the summer of 1990, this ambiguous political situation provided opportunities for businesses that wanted to set themselves up quickly to do so at a time when there were few bureaucratic hurdles holding them back, but disregard for the existing rules and regulations also questioned the ownership and decision-making rights of citizens in their own communities.

Local councils faced the tough task of attracting new businesses and establishing some form of stability whilst at the same time ensuring that the public did not lose trust in their authority. Mistakes made in legal affairs were blamed on the political situation, resulting in a widespread lack of accountability. As collective laws fell away, it was left to individuals as customers to decide what was acceptable or not. As such, market choices now ruled society and the political and social system was restructured around citizens' consumer preferences. The strong demand amongst eastern citizens for a new range of products and a consumer voice needed to be met whilst at the same time protecting local businesses and livelihoods.

As consumer-citizens, East Germans had the opportunity to take political action through their choice of products. And yet, consumer preferences were strongly shaped by the same instability and the lived experience of the

preceding months. The problems around the supply of basic goods in the run up to the currency union led citizens to subsequently opt overwhelmingly for long-lasting products hailing from West Germany. The knock-on effect was felt by local businesses, but their losses were presented publicly as the result of inefficient and outdated production methods. Firms suddenly needed to compete with western businesses without prior preparation or time to adapt to the new system. On a district and communal level, preferential conditions were given to western firms on the basis that their businesses were more viable and that their products were of a higher standard.

For eastern citizens, whose place of work formed the core of all social interactions, the economic changes were felt not only at the bureaucratic level, but also personally, affecting interactions, cultural practices and understanding of self-worth. This comes to light through the symbolic actions that citizens used to express personal feelings in the face of systematic changes. Starting with the emptying and smashing of milk bottles in July 1990, workers demonstrated the perceived devaluation of their own produce and goods, but inherently also of their own self-worth.

The direct competition with western goods and the public discourse on quality differences between East and West cemented the hierarchy between the two halves of Germany. The lower status of the East became clearly visible, as eastern produce was reduced in price and forced out of the supermarkets and onto the streets. Press coverage heightened feelings of shame at the quality of East German work and produce. The new pecking order was then further reinforced by the financial conditions of the system change, which meant that

eastern companies relied on the investment and cooperation of western firms in order to transform their businesses, giving the wealthier partners the upper hand in all negotiations.

The examples show up the geographic distribution of power during this political, social and economic union. Representatives from higher state and national structures appear to have been paralysed in the face of the new competition, unable to withstand or counter the wishes of larger western chains or to enact general policies to support eastern businesses through the transition. Rather, local mayors, politicians and citizens were left to their own devices, forced to come up with own, local solutions to the growing sea of problems. It confirms what Landolf Scherzer described in his novel *Der Zweite*, a tale of the scope of the head of the district authority in nearby Bad Salzungen after 1990, demonstrating that his microhistorical insights do indeed speak for a larger development.⁸⁶¹

Nevertheless, local actors navigated the new system and reacted to the changes going on around them, using contacts and good judgment to protect their own interests where possible. All the same, the original expectations of higher living standards and economic prosperity associated with the currency union were met by the reality of business closures and the social and financial devaluation of local production. Whilst the majority of citizens enjoyed their new consumer rights, another part of society soon realised that consumption

⁸⁶¹ See Landolf Scherzer, *Der Zweite* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1997).

comes at a considerable cost. The next chapter looks at what happened when these structures were rolled out to larger businesses across the East.

5. The Sad State of the Unemployed

Ossi or Assi?

When the new deputy director of the job centre in Eisenach took up office in June 1990, one of his first training sessions would be on how to complete the new forms for registering as unemployed. Just a few days later, he and his staff would be standing in sports and congregation halls, explaining the procedure and enrolling long queues of former workers for unemployment benefits. 'It was backbreaking work', he recalls.⁸⁶² 'High volume and incredibly demanding, emotionally'.⁸⁶³ The time of the mass redundancies had begun.

As scores of GDR citizens awaited instruction on how to apply for social support for the first time in their lives, it was important that everyone kept a cool head and stuck to the protocol. The deputy director of the job centre explains, 'There was no time for animosities. It was essential that staff functioned, that you functioned, that it ran smoothly, and that there were no verbal blunders'.⁸⁶⁴ And yet, tensions were also high amongst the staff themselves, with the team having called a strike on the deputy director's first day of work to protest his appointment to the role.⁸⁶⁵ The recruit was well-known in the region for having overseen the parliamentary elections earlier that year, and job centre staff feared that his appointment now spelled greater scrutiny and further restructuring in their own field of work. As the team

⁸⁶² 'Das war Knochenarbeit', Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Jena, 09 November 2018.

⁸⁶³ 'Massenarbeit, emotional sehr, sehr anstrengend', *ibid.*

⁸⁶⁴ 'Da bleibt für Animositäten überhaupt nichts mehr übrig. Da kommt es drauf an, dass die Mitarbeiter funktionieren, dass man selber funktioniert, dass das gut abläuft, dass es keine verbalen Entgleisungen gibt', *ibid.*

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

prepared to manage unforeseen levels of unemployment in society, existential fears and interpersonal conflicts extended to their own daily lives.

However, the Ministry for Work and Wages in the GDR had already seen significant changes in the last few months. As the country switched systems from planned economy to free market, redundancies were taking place in greater numbers, as firms desperately tried to reduce their outgoing expenses.⁸⁶⁶ With the currency union on the first of July, the number of people seeking work instantly doubled.⁸⁶⁷ Anticipating that the existing structures would no longer be sufficient, the GDR government had founded the Central Agency for Work Administration on the eighth of March 1990 to oversee the national restructuring of the job centres in cooperation with the Federal Labour Office, and to manage the introduction of the new Employment Promotion Act from the first of July 1990.⁸⁶⁸

The scale of the operation and the speed with which the job centre staff were expected to learn and enact the new processes for managing unemployment highlight how monumental the changes were across the country. Not only were there new rules and forms to complete; the whole concept of unemployment was unfamiliar to the citizens as well as to the members of staff. East German citizens, who had always been guaranteed a place of work and regular income now faced the uncertainty of unemployment, short-term contracts and therewith the loss of routines and networks that had

⁸⁶⁶ Bundesarchiv (henceforth BArch), DQ 3/1885 Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne (SAL), 'Arbeitsmarktbericht der Zentralen Arbeitsmarktverwaltung der DDR', July 1990.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ BArch, DC 20/I-3/2953 6. Sitzung des Ministerrates vom 16. Mai 1990, 'Bericht des Ministerrates zur Strukturreform der Arbeitsämter', 16 May 1990.

structured their daily lives for decades. Just as the fears for the future had unsettled the job centre staff, the structural changes now threatened interpersonal disputes on a massive scale, as citizens were reclassified by income and employment status.

The social function of work and employment in the former Workers' and Peasants' State is not to be underestimated. As described by Alf Lüdtke, the concept of 'quality work' developed out of a long tradition of independent problem-solving to become a strong identity marker in communities in both East and West Germany, but also a socially valuable form of honour.⁸⁶⁹ In 1989, the term was used again by the GDR head of state to appeal to workers and stabilise political tensions, demonstrating that the idea of quality work still held great sway.⁸⁷⁰ Despite the development of a new cultural norms of work under socialism, where employment status was no longer dependent on quality work, the identification with high work performance had persisted.⁸⁷¹

In a similar vein, Dorothee Wierling identifies *Tüchtigkeit* as a fundamental East German value that structured social practices in the GDR.⁸⁷² The term, which encompasses characteristics such as efficiency, resourcefulness, and a hardworking, diligent attitude to work, is presented as particularly female trait, as women in the GDR were expected to manage both work and family life amid supply shortages.⁸⁷³ The wide-spread uptake of work amongst

⁸⁶⁹ Alf Lüdtke, 'The World of Men's Work, East and West', in Katherine Pence & Paul Betts (Ed.), *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 234.

⁸⁷⁰ Lüdtke, 'The World of Men's Work', pp. 234-252.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., p. 236.

⁸⁷² Dorothee Wierling, 'Das weiblich-proletarische Tüchtigkeitsideal der DDR' in Peter Hübner & Klaus Tenfelde (Ed.), *Arbeiter in der SBZ - DDR* (Essen: Klartext, 1999), p. 843.

⁸⁷³ Wierling, 'Das weiblich-proletarische Tüchtigkeitsideal', p. 843.

women in the GDR is further understood by the sociologist Wolfgang Engler as having undermined common understandings of masculinity, leading to a stronger focus on the male body and masculine body language in East Germany, as men tried to compensate for their perceived diminished role in society.⁸⁷⁴ Work was therefore a medium through which social power and gender roles were negotiated.

Engler argues that work, or jobs in particular, were the 'foundation of social property' in the GDR; a public and personal good, owned by the workers and thereby enhancing their own value in a similar way to honour.⁸⁷⁵ For example, as jobs were secure per se, workers 'let themselves be asked to come to work', especially at peak times, thereby heightening the recognition of their own contribution.⁸⁷⁶ By managing tasks and supply within the collective, workers were able to increase general respect for the role of the worker and therewith their own power and agency. Work in the GDR was therefore greatly influenced by the state structures, but in turn shaped the cultural values, social norms and interactions of citizens.

And yet, the strong value of work and good workmanship also had a flip-side, for as well as promoting state-endorsed attitudes to work, the GDR state actively discouraged its citizens from choosing to work outside of common forms of employment. After discussions reaching back to the beginning of the decade, the criminal code book of 1968 defined 'withdrawal

⁸⁷⁴ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1999), p. 201.

⁸⁷⁵ 'die Grundlage des Sozialeigentums', Wolfgang Engler, 'Notizen zur Arbeitswelt der DDR. Arbeit als Grundlage des Sozialeigentums' in Andreas H. Apelt, Robert Grünbaum & Jens Schöne (Eds.), *Erinnerungsort DDR. Alltag – Herrschaft – Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Metropolis, 2016), p. 45.

⁸⁷⁶ 'so ließ man sich zur Arbeit bitten', Engler, 'Notizen zur Arbeitswelt der DDR', p. 49.

from regular employment' as the prime example of antisocial behaviour and deemed it punishable by law with a two-year prison term and the possibility of stronger sentences.⁸⁷⁷ Not only was unemployment therefore criminalised in East Germany, but 'bad work behaviour' such as the avoidance of 'honest and steady work', was presented as an immoral lifestyle that would ultimately lead to criminality.⁸⁷⁸ Furthermore, rehabilitation through industrial work was implemented as a corrective measure, reinforcing the association of irregular work with its negative connotations and regular work with strong positive values and reformative effects.

The change from guaranteed work to unemployment in East Germany from 1990 onwards would therefore cut much deeper than simple economics, as concepts of work and unemployment structured social interactions, gender roles, self-understandings and moral values. How would citizens process this change on a personal and cultural level and what would it do with their own sense of self-worth? Would the fear of and arrival of mass unemployment restructure gender relations and social hierarchies? How would the very real threat of unemployment be perceived and handled by communal actors and to what extent would they be able to take control of the situation to regain a sense of agency?

Whereas historical research has recently begun to focus more closely on the process of privatisation in the companies and communities in East Germany

⁸⁷⁷ 'sich einer geregelten Arbeit hartnäckig entzieht', Sven Korzilius, *"Asoziale" und "Parasiten" im Recht der SBZ/DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), p. 378.

⁸⁷⁸ 'Schlechtes Arbeitsverhalten', 'ehrliche Arbeit und dauerhafte Arbeitsbeziehungen', Korzilius, *"Asoziale" und "Parasiten"*, p. 323.

during the transformation period, it still favours the institutional perspective of ‘managers, civil servants and cadres’ in charge of restructuring from above.⁸⁷⁹ The work of the *Treuhand* trust tasked with managing public property during the transformation has been identified as an extremely ‘problematic’ aspect of transformation politics that continues to shape and polarise collective memory in unified Germany.⁸⁸⁰ Despite ‘critical perceptions of the Treuhand’ across the East, the experience of citizens and communities that cultivated these meanings have not yet been sufficiently analysed and contextualised by historians.⁸⁸¹ By looking at the interactions between workers, employers, communal actors and politicians in Eisenach, this chapter tries to shed light on the citizens’ experience of privatisation, unemployment and a changing work landscape in East Germany from 1990 onwards, and how these experiences were expressed through political activism.

From VEB to RIP – The Automobilwerk Eisenach

Waiting for the Green Light

That the currency union and the switch to a free market economy would carry the consequence of new levels of unemployment was no surprise to the people of Eisenach. In March 1990, the local paper had already begun reporting on efforts to counter the effects, with the local job centre planning further training

⁸⁷⁹ ‘Manager, Beamten und Kader’, Böick, *Die Treuhand. Idee – Praxis – Erfahrung*, p. 17.

⁸⁸⁰ ‘problematisch’, Constantin Goschler & Marcus Böick, *Studie zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung der Treuhandanstalt* (Bochum: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2017), <<https://omp.ub.rub.de/index.php/RUB/catalog/book/103>> (accessed 25 February 2020), p. 13.

⁸⁸¹ ‘kritischen Treuhand-Deutungen’, Goschler & Böick, *Studie zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung der Treuhandanstalt*, p. 32.

programmes to ensure workers had the skills needed to meet the demands of the new industry.⁸⁸² Alongside foreign languages and business management, courses on offer through the job centre included electronics and automobile engineering, giving hope to the continuation of a long tradition of automobile manufacturing in the region.⁸⁸³ Of the fifty-nine-thousand workers in the district of Eisenach, one in seven worked in the local car production plant that made the iconic *Wartburg* car, with others employed by suppliers: factories providing car parts, components, couplings and electronics.⁸⁸⁴ As the country prepared to enter the free market, all hopes were therefore pinned to the successful transition of this one large local employer.

Towards the end of 1989, the *Automobilwerk* had started exploring possible partnerships with the big car companies in West Germany; Volkswagen, BMW and Opel.⁸⁸⁵ As Eisenach was the home of BMW production from 1928 to 1945, the Bavarian car manufacturers had the right to reclaim the production plant as their own, but had just opened new sites in the West.⁸⁸⁶ Similarly, Volkswagen chose Zwickau as their main production base in the East, meaning that a substantial investment from them in Eisenach was unlikely. Although VW had signed a joint-venture contract with the automobile combine in the GDR, to which the *VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach* also belonged, the director of the local car plant remained unconvinced that the VW-partnership

⁸⁸² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Enorme Belastung für das Eisenacher Arbeitsamt. Drohender Arbeitslosigkeit bereits im Vorfeld begegnen', *Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger*, 24/25 March 1990.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁴ Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach (henceforth AdSAWE), 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Schreiben an Bundeskanzler Kohl', *Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH*, Eisenach, 27 September 1990.

⁸⁸⁵ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Textentwurf zur Entwicklung der Joint-Venture AWE-Opel'.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

could secure the long-term future of the factory.⁸⁸⁷ Consequently, he applied for the AWE to leave the automobile combine, as the first large GDR factory to do so, although his request was originally declined and met by a ban on foreign travel and discussions with other investors.⁸⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the director persisted, hosting both Opel and VW at the plant in March 1990. The higher offer from Opel, to produce up to two-hundred-thousand cars in a brand-new factory, led the factory staff to vote overwhelmingly for a cooperation with Opel.⁸⁸⁹

Although this was widely considered a success for the town, the AWE staff newspaper argued that essentially, 'the company has no choice. Either Opel takes over, or it means the end to car production in Eisenach'.⁸⁹⁰ Opel was known for its bad employment terms in West Germany and was therefore by no means a first choice. However, the lack of serious interest from the other two West German car manufacturers meant that the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* had little choice but to try to woo the Opel giants to invest in their region. Realising how important it was to attract strong investors to the region, the town mayor and the head of the district council quickly offered their full support to the western firm. 'We more or less said, "please come, we're waiting for you. We'll do whatever we can so that you can settle here quickly and create jobs"', the

⁸⁸⁷ 'keine Klarheit zum Produkt, zur Stückzahl und zur Komponentenfertigung'. AdSAWE, No ref., 'Report des Betriebsdirektors', Der neue Motor, 26 February 1990.

⁸⁸⁸ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Textentwurf zur Entwicklung der Joint-Venture AWE-Opel'.

⁸⁸⁹ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Chronologischer Überblick zu OPEL in Eisenach', 1992.

⁸⁹⁰ 'Der Betrieb hat keine Alternative. Entweder Opel zieht ein oder das Ende des Eisenacher Automobilbaus ist absehbar', AdSAWE, No ref., 'Springt Opel bei uns ein?', Der neue Motor, 12 March 1990.

mayor recalls, as securing jobs was their top priority.⁸⁹¹ At the time, before the State of Thuringia had formally been established, it had been easier for local politicians to take such decisions, in what they had jokingly called ‘The Head-of-the-District-Council and Mayors’ Republic’.⁸⁹²

Whether Opel would definitely decide to invest in the hometown of the *Wartburg* car, would remain to be seen, however, as the company kept its options open. The wording of the agreement for the founding of the joint company *Opel AWE GmbH*, signed in March 1990, was particularly vague, stating that Opel ‘intends’ to build a new factory in Eisenach and would take on the existing AWE staff ‘if possible’.⁸⁹³ Even the land on which the new factory for body framework, paint and final assembly was to be built was ‘still to be acquired’ and not yet in the ownership of the AWE or Opel.⁸⁹⁴ Although the agreement was meant to deter local workers from increasingly heading westward in search of work, the vague wording did little to offer them a sense of security.⁸⁹⁵ Three months later, the boss of the West German firm hinted in the press that he was considering other possible locations for a new production plant, based primarily on cost.⁸⁹⁶ He argued that the project would ‘not be worth the investment’ if the workers’ unions in the GDR were to demand the

⁸⁹¹ ‘Wir haben den Unternehmen quasi gesagt, „Kommt, wir warten auf euch. Kommt. Wir machen, was wir machen können und was wir machen sollen, damit ihr möglichst schnell hier ansiedelt und Arbeitsplätze schafft“’, Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

⁸⁹² ‘die Landräte-Bürgermeister-Republik’, *ibid.*

⁸⁹³ ‘Opel beabsichtigt’, ‘möglichst’. AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, ‘Entwurfsfassung zum Joint Venture Vertrag zwischen OPEL und AWE, als Kopie der notariellen Ausfertigung’, March 1990.

⁸⁹⁴ ‘auf einem noch zu erwerbenden Werksgelände’, *ibid.*

⁸⁹⁵ Jessica Elsner, ‘Soziale Ungleichheit auf betrieblicher Ebene in der Transformationszeit 1989/1990 am Beispiel des Automobilwerkes Eisenach (AWE)’, *Geschichte der Arbeitswelten und der Gewerkschaften*, 10. Kolloquium, Augsburg, 22 February 2019, p. 5.

⁸⁹⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, ‘Opel-Werk in Eisenach noch unklar’, *Thüringer Tagespost*, 18 June 1990.

same levels of pay as in the Federal Republic, and a 35-hour week.⁸⁹⁷

Ultimately, Opel would choose 'what is best for us' at the end of the day.⁸⁹⁸

The executive director's statement demonstrates the power of Opel in these negotiations. Although the currency and social union had seen the introduction of the same workers' rights as in West Germany, the eastern workers were in this instance being told to willingly settle for less pay and longer hours. The direct competition with western firms, linked with the necessity to attract strong investors in order to fund the company's redevelopment, had created an unlevel playing field, in which East Germans were dependent on the cooperation of western companies, who consequently set their own terms. From a social perspective, however, it was not only the firms and factories that were now worth next-to-nothing, but also the workers in East Germany who had been symbolically devalued. This new form of dependency had put East and West Germans in direct but unequal relation to one another and heightened collective and individual feelings of loss of self-worth in the East.

Opel's approach and the ensuing uncertainty around the future of the company was causing severe stress for the local community, as statistically, every family included or was connected to someone affected by the changes at the *Automobilwerk Eisenach*. At the end of May 1990, union members working in car assembly in Eisenach had written to the Prime Minister of the GDR, Lothar

⁸⁹⁷ 'rechnet sich das Projekt nicht', *ibid.*

⁸⁹⁸ 'Am Ende würde aber „die für uns günstigste Lösung“ gewählt.' *Ibid.*

de Maizière, to ask for his assistance in bridging the transformation period. 'The situation in our factory is depressing', they explained.⁸⁹⁹

Our older colleagues' world will fall apart if the car factory dies.
Mothers and fathers are plagued by constant existential worries.
Students and apprentices, who will not be kept on, have begun to give up.⁹⁰⁰

For the employees, their place of work was much more than just that. As the sociologist Wolfgang Engler points out, the huge GDR enterprises, with their children's nurseries, surgeries and orchestras were 'no normal workplaces, but rather complete copies of the larger structure in miniature'; microcosms of society that 'brought public and private life together'; the hubs of the East German social networks.⁹⁰¹ The *Automobilwerk Eisenach* was no exception, with sport and cultural groups, youth and social clubs, restaurants, holiday homes and medical practices all under the umbrella of the firm.⁹⁰² As articulated in the letter, if this structure were to break away, it would mean the end to the world as they knew it for the members of staff, as the place of work, or *habitus*, was like a vital organ that integrated the material, cultural and social aspects of a person's life and shaped their perceptions and actions.⁹⁰³ In this sense, the changes at work were of much greater significance on a personal level than the

⁸⁹⁹ 'Die Situation im Betrieb ist deprimierend', AdSAWE, 30.8.1/RO9-1.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Brief an den Ministerpräsidenten der DDR', Eisenach, 22 May 1990, in 'IG-Metall Sitzungsprotokolle 1990'.

⁹⁰⁰ 'den älteren Kolleginnen und Kollegen bricht eine Welt zusammen, wenn das Automobilwerk stirbt. Mütter und Väter läßt die Existenzangst nicht mehr zur Ruhe kommen. Die Studenten und Lehrlinge, die nicht übernommen werden, fangen an zu resignieren', *ibid.*

⁹⁰¹ 'Die ostdeutschen Betriebe waren keine gewöhnlichen Arbeitsstätten, sondern vollständige Abbildungen des Großen im Kleinen (...), sie setzten die Menschen in den Stand, Beruf und Familienleben miteinander zu verknüpfen, regten ihre kulturellen Interessen an und trugen den sozialen Austausch weit über die engen Grenzen der Arbeitswelt hinaus', Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen als Avantgarde* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2004), p. 117.

⁹⁰² AdSAWE, 30.8.2/1244 Werksarchiv, 'Entflechtungskonzeption der AWE GmbH', 1990.

⁹⁰³ Rainer Diaz-Bone, 'Habitusformierung und Theorieeffekte: Zur sozialen Konstruktion von Märkten', in Jens Beckert, Rainer Diaz-Bone & Heiner Ganßmann (Ed.), *Märkte als soziale Strukturen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), p. 225.

changes at the top of society and are therefore 'a central part of the transformation experience'.⁹⁰⁴

The developments as part of the privatisation in eastern Germany also give insight into the ways in which social roles and power structures were renegotiated within the context of the social and economic transformation.⁹⁰⁵ The state enterprise in Eisenach officially belonged to the workers, but as their property, it also functioned symbolically to mediate relationships between the company and the people.⁹⁰⁶ The focus on the company gives insights into the ways in which relationships were renegotiated between eastern Germans and towards western Germans as part of unification process. It also reveals, however, to what extent longstanding structures persisted or changed during the transformation.

For example, the letter detailed how all ages and social groups were affected by the situation, but it also described how the uncertainty had started dividing the community, as 'foreign workers' were now 'seen as competition, fuelling even more tensions in the company'.⁹⁰⁷ Indeed, in July, the papers had reported that AWE-workers from Cuba and Mozambique had been made redundant and would 'soon be going home'.⁹⁰⁸ Foreign workers were the first

⁹⁰⁴ 'das zentrale Feld der Transformationserfahrung', Werner Schmidt & Klaus Schönberger, *„Jeder hat jetzt mit sich selbst zu tun“*. Arbeit, Freizeit und politische Orientierungen in Ostdeutschland (Konstanz: UVK, 1999), p. 24.

⁹⁰⁵ Birgit Müller, *Die Entzauberung der Marktwirtschaft. Ethnologische Erkundungen in ostdeutschen Betrieben* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002), p. 116.

⁹⁰⁶ Müller, *Die Entzauberung der Marktwirtschaft*, p. 116.

⁹⁰⁷ 'Ausländische Arbeitskräfte werden als Konkurrenten um Arbeitsplätze gesehen, dies heizt die Stimmung im Betrieb noch mehr an', AdSAWE, 30.8.1/RO9-1.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Brief an den Ministerpräsidenten der DDR', Eisenach, 22 May 1990, in 'IG-Metall Sitzungsprotokolle 1990'.

⁹⁰⁸ 'werden bald die Heimreise antreten', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Arbeit geht in der DDR nicht aus', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 25 July 1990.

to be hit by the unemployment measures, with all being forced to leave the company by the end of the year.⁹⁰⁹ Second, older workers were pushed into early retirement in what was termed a 'social offer'.⁹¹⁰ The changes, which took place in stages, divided workers into social categories and turned them against one another, as opposed to uniting them around the same cause.

Nevertheless, determined individuals got together to try to counter the trend and alert the authorities to the problems on the ground. In their letter, the members of the Industrial Union of Metalworkers had questioned how factories, that were 'worthy of redevelopment', could be left in ruins, when the Socialist Unity Party had reportedly been sitting on an estimated wealth of one billion Deutsche Mark.⁹¹¹ Their request to the government was not to be given 'never-ending subsidies', but to receive just enough funding to tide them over, tied to a specific business plan, which they had ready.⁹¹² Although they approached the Minister 'with hope and trust', they also warned that calls for a workers' strike were getting louder.⁹¹³

Sigrid Meuschel argues that although the GDR was officially a classless society, socio-structural differences did exist.⁹¹⁴ Nevertheless, key conflicts did not develop between technocrats and ideologists, but rather along the lines of social imbalances in society.⁹¹⁵ In the responses of the workers in Eisenach to

⁹⁰⁹ Elsner, 'Soziale Ungleichheit auf betrieblicher Ebene', p. 5.

⁹¹⁰ 'Sozialangebot', *ibid.*

⁹¹¹ 'sanierungswürdige Betriebe', AdSAWE, 30.8.1/RO9-1.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Brief an den Ministerpräsidenten der DDR', Eisenach, 22 May 1990, in 'IG-Metall Sitzungsprotokolle 1990'.

⁹¹² 'keine endlosen Subventionen', *ibid.*

⁹¹³ 'Mit Hoffnung und Vertrauen', *ibid.*

⁹¹⁴ Sigrid Meuschel, 'Revolution in der DDR. Versuch einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Interpretation', in Hans Joas & Martin Kohli (Eds.), *Der Zusammenbruch der DDR. Soziologische Analysen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 96.

⁹¹⁵ Meuschel, 'Revolution in der DDR', p. 98.

the changes in society and in the workplace, it was precisely these social injustices that caused the most anger and upset, as staff were quick to recognise the differing conditions for management and staff, political elites and ordinary workers, or eastern and western Germans. By using their own initiative to develop ideas and by approaching the top level of authority, the workers at the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* used familiar processes to draw attention to their cause and to try to enact change. However, as the value of their labour within the new system had fallen, the tried and tested methods of writing complaints or threatening to strike no longer had the same impact, rendering the democratic structures available to them meaningless and contributing to feelings of hopelessness.

In particular, the fear of losing their jobs negatively influenced workers' willingness to take action, as 'feelings of powerlessness' spread amongst the affected staff and complicated the decision of choosing between economically and socially viable solutions for their firm.⁹¹⁶ On the twelfth of July 1990, hundreds of citizens gathered on the market square in Eisenach to support the metalworkers' union and their demands for a shorter week, higher wages, employment guarantees, and a social policy based on retraining instead of redundancies.⁹¹⁷ Although the demonstration was well-attended, the union chief reported that 'the situation in the workplaces is so uncertain that many workers are too scared to demonstrate. Employers are playing with their

⁹¹⁶ 'Ohnmachtserfahrung', Schmidt & Schönberger, „Jeder hat jetzt mit sich selbst zu tun“, p. 50.

⁹¹⁷ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Weiterbildung oberstes Ziel. Kundgebung der IG Metall', Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger, 14/15 July 1990.

fears'.⁹¹⁸ The unionist argued that this needed addressing quickly, for 'those who don't fight, have already lost'.⁹¹⁹ A few days later, the unions reached an agreement with local companies in the region to guarantee employment until June 1991 in order to allow companies time for restructuring.⁹²⁰ For members of staff that would need to have their hours reduced, the state would cover the remaining pay, with effect from the twenty-third of July.⁹²¹

On that very day, less than four weeks after the currency union, the *Automobilwerk* announced the introduction of short-term contracts from August 1990 onwards.⁹²² As the AWE-worker and later head of the staff council explained, 'eventually, it was cheaper to pay the people not to produce a single car'.⁹²³ The new measure, which meant that two-thousand-five-hundred members of staff, who were no longer needed, would remain employed but would not need to turn up to work, was intended as an alternative to registering as unemployed, and a way to keep the staff within the company until more jobs could be created.⁹²⁴ The move was in line with the AWE's business development plan, which had been submitted to the government in Berlin in May, and again in June 1990, and relied on an investment of 156.3

⁹¹⁸ 'in vielen Betrieben sei die Unsicherheit in Sachen Arbeitsplätze so groß, daß Beschäftigten nicht wagten, zu demonstrieren. Die Arbeitgeber betrieben ein Spiel mit der Angst', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Metaller-Massen auch auf Eisenachs Straßen', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 14 July 1990.

⁹¹⁹ 'wer nicht kämpft, hat schon verloren', *ibid.*

⁹²⁰ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Die IG Metall ist zufrieden', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 18 July 1990.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*

⁹²² StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Ab August müssen 2500 bei AWE kurzarbeiten. Eisenach: Warten auf Millionen-Hilfe', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 25 July 1990.

⁹²³ 'Irgendwann war es billiger, die Leute zu bezahlen, ohne dass auch nur ein Auto das Band verließ', Dietmar Grosser, Hanno Müller & Paul-Josef Raue (Eds.), *Treuhand in Thüringen. Wie Thüringen nach der Wende ausverkauft wurde* (Essen: Klartext, 2013), p. 84.

⁹²⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Ab August müssen 2500 bei AWE kurzarbeiten. Eisenach: Warten auf Millionen-Hilfe', Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine, 25 July 1990.

million Deutsche Mark.⁹²⁵ To date, the company was, however, still waiting on the funding and approval from Berlin.

The announcement coincided with a visit from federal business minister Helmut Hausmann, who promised to put in a word with the top executives at General Motors in the USA, to ensure that the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* would still be around to see its centenary celebrations in 1996.⁹²⁶ Hausmann's visit in Eisenach was his first visit to a GDR firm since the currency union and therefore considered as a positive sign.⁹²⁷ Not everyone at the plant, however, was impressed with the speech of the business minister, who reportedly ended almost every sentence with 'but', 'only', or 'unfortunately'.⁹²⁸ 'God help us!', exclaimed one frustrated woman in the audience, as the West-German VIP reminisced about having drawn a Wartburg car as a child.⁹²⁹ Empty promises and childhood anecdotes were neither comforting nor appropriate as the staff came to terms with their new working conditions and desperately awaited good news about the future of their firm.

As he continued, Hausmann's speech took an even more patronising turn, as the business minister explained that he was not 'Father Christmas with a sack full of money', and that it would not be possible to turn the 'lame

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Ibid.

⁹²⁷ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Bonn unterstützt den Automobilbau in Eisenach', Thüringer Allgemeine, 24 July 1990.

⁹²⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'TLZ-Kommentar zum Hausmann-Besuch im Gries „Arbeiten möchten alle hier“', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 26 July 1990.

⁹²⁹ 'Es ist zum Gotterbarmen!', *ibid.*

planned economy' into a 'dynamic market economy' overnight.⁹³⁰ 'We all want to work', retorted the welder, who had been at the car production plant for thirty-two years, after the minister lectured the staff that 'if you want good money, you have to work hard for it'.⁹³¹ As the AWE staff were forced once again to wait for subsidies or investments from above, whilst being told that they needed to work harder, wits and patience were beginning to run dry. 'We don't want to beg for work', explained the unionist, 'but rather show what we're capable of'.⁹³² The rhetoric adopted by the western minister towards the eastern workers not only ignored the situation they were facing but also inversely suggested that easterners were undeserving of equal or fair pay. This public discourse also spread abroad, as top staff in the automobile industry repeatedly had to reassure foreign investors that the technical capabilities of eastern workers were no lower than those of their western counterparts.⁹³³

Three months later, on the fifth of October, the chancellor of the Federal Republic, Helmut Kohl, would be the next to visit the site to celebrate the production of the first *Opel Vectra* in Eisenach.⁹³⁴ This initial investment in Eisenach from Opel, was an important 'first step' in continuing the town's

⁹³⁰ 'Von einem Bundeswirtschaftsminister kann niemand hier erwarten, daß er der Weihnachtsmann mit den Milliarden im Sack ist, der über Nacht aus der lahmen Planwirtschaft eine dynamische Marktwirtschaft macht', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Spruch des Tages', Thüringer Allgemeine, 24. Juli 1990.

⁹³¹ 'Arbeiten möchten alle hier', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'TLZ-Kommentar zum Haussmann-Besuch im Gries „Arbeiten möchten alle hier“', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 26 July 1990; 'wer gutes Geld will, muß gut dafür arbeiten', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Opel-Chef Hughes und Minister Haussmann: Auto-Ehe soll ein Erfolg werden', Thüringer Allgemeine, 24 July 1990.

⁹³² 'Wir wollen nicht um Arbeit betteln, sondern zeigen, was wir können', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'TLZ-Kommentar zum Haussmann-Besuch im Gries „Arbeiten möchten alle hier“', Thüringer Landeszeitung, 26 July 1990.

⁹³³ Peter Kirchberg, *Plaste, Blech und Planwirtschaft. Die Geschichte des Automobilbaus in der DDR* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), p. 704.

⁹³⁴ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Schreiben an Bundeskanzler Kohl', Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH, Eisenach, 27 September 1990.

tradition of automobile engineering, said Kohl during his speech.⁹³⁵ The AWE company director emphasised that this development was particularly important to protect jobs in the area, even though the substantial larger investment in the new plant had still not been confirmed.⁹³⁶ For the local photographer, who had been called in to document the historical event, it was not only the first-hand meeting with the German chancellor, but the smugness of the western television reporter that would make a lasting impression. 'The mayor has requested I pronounce his name correctly', the presenter quipped to the cameras, as he went on to spell out the many possible variations.⁹³⁷ 'That was below the line', the local photographer recalls.⁹³⁸ Although he admits that he was maybe a bit sensitive, it was humiliating moments like these, with 'a whiff of arrogance', that gave easterners the feeling of being degraded.⁹³⁹

One week before Kohl's visit, the managing director of the *Automobilwerk* had written to the chancellor, to make him aware of the pressing situation. Together with the district council, the AWE had taken various measures to adapt to the free market; shifting their focus to exporting their cars to Eastern Europe, reducing staff costs through early-retirement and retraining programmes and attracting other electronics companies to the region to take over staff from the plant's former suppliers.⁹⁴⁰ 'Of vital importance', however,

⁹³⁵ 'den ersten Schritt', AdSAWE, No ref., '1. Vectra Made in Eisenach', *Der neue Motor*, 15 October 1990, p. 3.

⁹³⁶ Ibid.

⁹³⁷ "'Der Bürgermeister bittet darum, dass ich seinen Namen richtig ausspreche'", Interview with Joachim Thureau, Eisenach, 22 August 2018.

⁹³⁸ 'Unter der Gürtellinie', *ibid.*

⁹³⁹ 'so ein Hauch der Überheblichkeit', *ibid.*

⁹⁴⁰ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Schreiben an Bundeskanzler Kohl', *Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH*, Eisenach, 27 September 1990.

was the arrival of Opel in the town and its decision to build a new car production plant, as this 'would determine the overall structure'.⁹⁴¹ The managing director appealed to the chancellor to ensure the GDR government approved the erection of a new Opel plant, and the funding to support the region in the meantime. This funding would be especially important to keep the skilled workers for the new plant and to prevent them from moving westward in search of work.⁹⁴² However, two months later, in December 1990, the funding and support from the *Treuhandanstalt* had still not been confirmed, even though a decision paper produced by the trust had found it to be cheaper to continue financing the production of Wartburg cars than to cover the costs arising from mass unemployment.⁹⁴³

On the tenth of January 1991, the mayors of the district of Eisenach published an open letter to the chancellor Helmut Kohl, claiming that the government did not understand the problems facing local mayors and town representatives in the East, and that a lack of rules and regulations from above was making it impossible for them to implement changes.⁹⁴⁴ Problems that they were unable to tackle at present due to the lack of clear rules and various bureaucratic hurdles included the sale of property to attract new investors, the privatisation of residential buildings for redevelopment, self-management of public utilities, the annual budget, and the establishment of a new

⁹⁴¹ 'Von entscheidender Bedeutung', 'die Gesamtstruktur bestimmen wird', *ibid.*

⁹⁴² AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Entscheidungsvorlage für den Vorstand der Treuhandanstalt', Berlin, 05 December 1990.

⁹⁴³ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Entscheidungsvorlage für den Vorstand der Treuhandanstalt', Berlin, 05 December 1990.

⁹⁴⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Kommunen sind nahe der Ohnmacht. Offener Brief an Bundeskanzler', *Eisenacher Allgemeine*, 11 January 1991.

administration. Much like the local car plant, which had been waiting for six months for an answer regarding its future funding, the mayors were also stalling due to a lack of clarity from above. 'Out of great concern for the development of the young democracy' and the effect these restrictions would have on public trust in the new councillors, the mayors now appealed to the highest level of authority for new laws to be passed and financial support to be provided as soon as possible.⁹⁴⁵

As the uncertainty continued, the local newspaper summoned all those who shared the 'sorrow' at the developments in eastern Germany to wear a green ribbon.⁹⁴⁶ The initiative was to raise awareness of the problems eastern citizens had faced since reunification and to express solidarity with one another, especially with those facing unemployment or struggling to get by. Just a couple of years earlier, GDR citizens that had applied to leave the country had worn white ribbons to state their intentions, whilst those that had their applications declined consequently switched to black ribbons.⁹⁴⁷ In December 1989, the people of Eisenach had held onto purple ribbons as they demonstrated to save the old town centre. The subtle action had previously been enough to gain the attention of their government and now presented a familiar ritual to unite the community and provide a sense of hope. Whilst the six locals featured in the newspaper in 1991 all expressed their support for the new initiative and the importance of drawing attention to the rising levels of unemployment and

⁹⁴⁵ 'In großer Sorge um die Entwicklung der jungen Demokratie', *ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ 'Trauer', *StA Eisenach*, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Grüne Bänder tragen – Was erhoffen sich die Bürger von dieser Initiative?', *Eisenacher Stadtanzeiger*, 11 January 1991.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the growing disappointment, the project failed to catch on. 'Can you blame them?' asked another journalist.⁹⁴⁸ As citizens focussed on keeping their jobs for as long as possible and supporting their families, few were still willing to make political statements in public.⁹⁴⁹

Time of Mourning

To mark the day of German Reunification in October 1990, a local couple, who had been active in the citizen's committee in the autumn of 1989 and volunteered as election helpers in March 1990, organised a symbolic funeral and wake for the German Democratic Republic, with no expenses spared. A black coffin was commissioned especially and filled with keepsakes, ranging from an application for a car and a GDR number plate to a map and telephone book, the national flag, ribbons from the autumn demonstrations, a customs declaration and a postcard of the Wartburg castle, signed with condolences.⁹⁵⁰ Even the details had been carefully thought out; the coffin of a country so opposed to religion was not to have a cross but instead bore a hammer and sickle, taken from an army cap.⁹⁵¹ 'Well, today is the day the GDR dies!', the activist explained to anyone who asked.⁹⁵² The satirical episode was no sad event, however. Rather, family and friends from East and West were invited to celebrate the death of the GDR and to take part in the burial ritual, with a

⁹⁴⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Kommentiert', Thüringer Tageblatt, 12 January 1991.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁰ Private Collection Brigitte Korndörfer (henceforth PCBK), 'Die DDR war nicht in der Kirche. Brigitte Korndörfer spricht über die Beerdigung der DDR und die Besetzung der Stasi-Zentrale', Thüringische Landeszeitung, 06 September 2014.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid.

⁹⁵² 'Na (...), heute stirbt doch die DDR!', Interview with Brigitte Korndörfer, Eisenach, 19 December 2017.

special plot designated in the couple's garden. As western reporters, who had been lodging with the family, heard of their plans, they asked to film the interment for their documentary and were told to come at three thirty in the afternoon, for the routine time of coffee and cake.⁹⁵³ When they eventually appeared at dusk, the GDR was already in the ground. 'It had to be dug up again', the organiser recalls with glee, taking great pleasure in the symbolism.⁹⁵⁴ 'Altogether the GDR was buried three times', she says, laughing.⁹⁵⁵

On retelling the event, the activist says little of the meaning, other than that it was 'simply symbolic', instead recounting the individual steps in great detail.⁹⁵⁶ It is the staging of the funeral and the recounting that appears to provide the greatest sense of comfort, as a way of speaking about that which cannot be said. Significantly, one condition for the filming was that the scene was to be aired without commentary, once again suggesting that the symbolic act of burying the GDR could express that which words could not.⁹⁵⁷ On watching the show, however, the activist realised that the crew had not followed her orders, as the voice over announced that 'the family (...) has buried the GDR in their garden'.⁹⁵⁸ The next remark, however, would send a shiver down her spine. 'Be careful', they announced, 'for the corpse is still warm'.⁹⁵⁹ The comment was clearly meant to suggest that the GDR could still be resurrected, although this was harshly dismissed by the activist. 'But it was not

⁹⁵³ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁴ 'Also haben wir (...) die DDR ausgegraben', *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁵ 'Also praktisch ist die DDR dreimal beerdigt worden', *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁷ 'Das war nur symbolisch', *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁸ 'die Familie (...) hat in ihrem Garten die DDR beerdigt', *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁹ 'Vorsicht, der Leichnam ist noch warm', *ibid.*

possible, after all, the (state) treaty and all that was already there. So, it was not possible anymore', she reasserts.⁹⁶⁰ The funeral for the GDR on the third of October 1990 was intended to be final, and 'now it must be left in peace'.⁹⁶¹

The fake funeral was not to be the last of its kind in Eisenach, as feelings of loss and powerlessness increased. On the eighth of January 1991, the *Treuhandanstalt* announced that it was unwilling to fund the transition period at the *Automobilwerk*, dismissing the bid first put forward by the plant in May 1990 as 'no longer viable', and instructed the company directors to end the production of the *Wartburg* car 'immediately'.⁹⁶² Just a few weeks earlier, the president of the *Treuhandanstalt*, the managing director of the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* and the executive director of the *Adam Opel AG* had signed a basic agreement for the AWE to sell its land to Opel by the thirtieth of June 1991, with the *Treuhand* trust acting to manage the transaction.⁹⁶³ This contract was considered the basis for Opel's investment of over one billion Deutsche Mark in a new automobile assembly plant in the West of Eisenach, as it guaranteed them the necessary plots of land.⁹⁶⁴ At this time, the development plan for the car plant had still received vocal support from the director of the *Treuhandanstalt*.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶⁰ 'Aber das ging ja nicht mehr, war ja der Vertrag und das war ja alles schon da. Also das ging ja alles gar nicht mehr', *ibid.*

⁹⁶¹ 'Aber jetzt muss sie in Ruhe gelassen werden', *ibid.*

⁹⁶² 'nicht mehr tragfähig', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Hans-Werner Manegold: Hinter den Zahlen stehen Menschen', Eisenacher Presse, 11 January 1991.

'die sofortige Einstellung der Wartburg-Produktion', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'AWE: Treuhand will nicht mehr zahlen. Liedke muß Konzept überarbeiten', Eisenacher Presse, 11 January 1991.

⁹⁶³ LATH – HstA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Telefax-Brief von Adam Opel AG für Opel Eisenach GmbH an den Bürgermeister der Gemeinde Stedtfeld', 20 June 1991.

⁹⁶⁴ StA Eisenach, 40.6-114, 'Chronik der Eisenacher „Wende“, 1989-1991'.

⁹⁶⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Hans-Werner Manegold: Hinter den Zahlen stehen Menschen', Eisenacher Presse, 11 January 1991.

Although Opel's investment seemed certain to go ahead regardless, the hopes for funding to tide the company over until the end of the year had been destroyed, leaving over three-thousand local workers now facing imminent unemployment.⁹⁶⁶ In regard to the plant's many suppliers, the overall number of consequent job losses were likely to rise to around forty-thousand.⁹⁶⁷ The chair of the staff council feared that this development would have a knock-on effect, putting off investments from other companies in the automobile industry that had been looking to take over the remaining staff, as it could no longer be guaranteed that the workers would stay in the region. The manager of the local handball team also warned that this news had ruined their chances of joining the national league.⁹⁶⁸ Although the AWE-funded club had tried to find other sponsors, western firms such as Opel were only interested in funding larger sports clubs, leaving the eastern teams at a severe disadvantage.⁹⁶⁹

As grief struck, the announcement about the plant closure was met with disbelief by the local mayor, who could 'not imagine that the *Treuhand* would risk closing down the plant half a year before Opel was to take hold'.⁹⁷⁰ Similarly, the company directors refused to accept the ultimatum from above, asking instead for extra time to submit a revised development plan by the end of June 1991.⁹⁷¹ As the announcement was communicated to the metal workers'

⁹⁶⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Trauer und Wut: „Die machen uns unser Leben kaputt“. Unter den AWE-Arbeitern grassiert die Angst vorm Stempeln', Eisenacher Presse, 12 January 1991.

⁹⁶⁷ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Telegramm an die Treuhand Berlin: „Wir lassen uns nicht platt machen“', Thüringer Tageblatt, 12 January 1991.

⁹⁶⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Schließung wäre eine Katastrophe', Eisenacher Presse, 11 January 1991.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁰ 'nicht vorstellen, daß die Treuhand es riskiert, das Werk ein halbes Jahr vor dem Opel-Einstieg dichtzumachen', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Hans-Werner Manegold: Hinter den Zahlen stehen Menschen', Eisenacher Presse, 11 January 1991.

⁹⁷¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Entscheidung der Treuhand schockierend', Thüringer Tagespost, 12/13 January 1991.

union, it was said to be met by silence at first, followed by the response; 'we refuse to accept this decision'.⁹⁷² Together with the metal workers' union and the staff committee, the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* wrote to the head of the *Treuhand* trust to question the decision and warn again of the consequences.⁹⁷³ Further talks between the *Treuhandanstalt* and the AWE were subsequently arranged for the end of the month.⁹⁷⁴

The disbelief amongst the leading figures quickly turned to action amongst those directly hit by the planned closure. Just a few days later, the unions called on plant workers to take part in a company-wide strike on the seventeenth of January 1991, to try to force a delay in the end of production.⁹⁷⁵ Around six-thousand workers gathered at the factory gate at half past twelve in the afternoon and walked down to the square outside the main train station, where they were joined by metal workers from the car plant in Gotha.⁹⁷⁶ Banners urged politicians to keep their election promises and spoke of the death of the plant and of the whole region.⁹⁷⁷ Puns on the names of the Federal chancellor and the head of the *Treuhandanstalt* expressed a lack of trust in the top political figures and suggested they were not acting in the people's interest.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷² 'Diese Entscheidung nehmen wir so nicht hin', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'IG Metall will „Aus“ nicht hinnehmen', Zeitung für Eisenach, 22 January 1991.

⁹⁷³ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Telegramm an die Treuhand Berlin: „Wir lassen uns nicht platt machen“', Thüringer Tageblatt, 12 January 1991.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Streik: Am Donnerstag stehen in dem Wartburg-Werk alle Räder still', Eisenacher Presse, 15 January 1991.

⁹⁷⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Über 6000 forderten den Weiterbau des Wartburg 1.3 bis Jahresende', Eisenacher Presse, 18 January 1991.

⁹⁷⁷ StA Eisenach 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Eisenacher Autobau darf nicht sterben', Thüringer Allgemeine, 18 January 1991. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Über 6000 forderten den Weiterbau des Wartburg 1.3 bis Jahresende', Eisenacher Presse, 18 January 1991.

⁹⁷⁸ AdSAWE, 30.8.2, 'A11278 (Tasche 1)'.

As the demonstrators gathered, local representatives took to the stage to address the crowds.⁹⁷⁹ 'No matter what we said', the former mayor explains, looking back, 'we were always booed, even if we said, "Opel is coming"!'.⁹⁸⁰ The citizens of Eisenach in January 1991 were not interested in assurances for the future or comparisons with other regions that were less well-placed to manage the transition to the free market. Instead, they demanded answers to more immediate questions regarding the coming days and weeks. Standing there, on the stage in front of the AWE and metal workers, who were scared for their jobs and futures, was the first time that the newly elected mayor 'suddenly felt the weight of the responsibility' he now held.⁹⁸¹ And yet, the mayor felt there was 'nothing at all we could do' other than taking part in the negotiations with the *Treuhand* and Opel and working closely with the workers' union and staff committee.⁹⁸² On the very same day, the head of the district authority had travelled to Bonn to discuss possibilities for the plant with the Hessian and Thuringian business ministers.⁹⁸³ Criticism from workers and speakers was also aimed at the state government, whose representative was however not present.⁹⁸⁴

On the twelfth of January 1991, a psychologist from the car plant's polyclinic had written to the federal chancellor, the head of the *Treuhandanstalt*,

⁹⁷⁹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, '6000 AWE-Arbeiter demonstrierten gestern in Eisenach gegen Treuhand-Pläne', Eisenacher Presse, 18 January 1991.

⁹⁸⁰ 'Egal, was wir sagten, wir wurden immer ausgepiffen und ausgebuht, auch wenn wir dann gesagt haben, "Opel wird kommen"', Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

⁹⁸¹ 'wo ich Verantwortung plötzlich gespürt habe', *ibid.*

⁹⁸² 'wir konnten ja gar nichts tun', *ibid.*

⁹⁸³ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Piffe gegen Bürgermeister', Zeitung für Eisenach, 18 January 1991. StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Über 6000 forderten den Weiterbau des Wartburg 1.3 bis Jahresende', Eisenacher Presse, 18 January 1991.

⁹⁸⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Piffe gegen Bürgermeister', Zeitung für Eisenach, 18 January 1991.

and the head of the Thuringian state, to make them aware of the situation in the border town since the *Treuhand*'s decision to end production of the Wartburg.⁹⁸⁵ Having praised how transparent and 'exemplary' the efforts of the managing committee had been in attracting investors and communicating developments to staff, she explained that the decision to close the plant had been met by 'a complete lack of understanding and heavy resistance', not only by its staff but by their fellow citizens as well.⁹⁸⁶ The behaviour of the *Treuhand* decision-makers was considered 'disappointing, two-faced, patronising'.⁹⁸⁷ According to the psychologist, the citizens were under the impression that the *Treuhand* was incompetent and had failed to consider the details and the long-term structural ramifications for the whole region. Most of all, however, people felt that the decision demonstrated 'West German ignorance and (...) arrogance' towards East Germany.⁹⁸⁸ Citizens had expressed feelings of 'powerlessness, (...) humiliation, "occupation" (like after a war, but under the cover of "aid") and of feeling dispensable'.⁹⁸⁹ The growing uncertainty was leading many, who had firmly chosen to stay in the region during the upheaval of 1989, to now move away. The psychologist warned not only of the 'resignation and lethargy' that these developments had brought about, but also of the 'significant potential for protest and aggression'.⁹⁹⁰ The decision to close the plant was 'fuel for conflict'

⁹⁸⁵ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen, 'Brief an H. Kohl - Betr: Strukturanpassungskonzept Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH', 12 January 1991.

⁹⁸⁶ 'beispielhaft', 'auf massives Unverständnis, auf Widerstand', *ibid.*

⁹⁸⁷ 'enttäuschend, wortbrechend, verhöhnend', *ibid.*

⁹⁸⁸ 'west-deutsche Ignoranz, gepaart mit Überheblichkeit gegenüber der ehemaligen DDR', *ibid.*

⁹⁸⁹ 'Inzwischen wird von vielen Menschen und immer öfter ein Gefühl der Ohnmacht artikuliert, auch von Erniedrigung, von „Vereinnahmung des Gebietes“ (wie nach einem Krieg, aber unter dem Schutzmantel der „Hilfeleistung“), vom Gefühl des „Überflüssigseins“ gesprochen', *ibid.*

⁹⁹⁰ 'Resignation und Lethargie', 'ein erhebliches Protest- und Aggressionspotenzial', *ibid.*

and could lead to an 'avalanche' of anger across the East.⁹⁹¹ In light of the growing unrest, she strongly criticised the actions of the *Treuhand* trust and called on the chancellor, the state minister and the head of the trust to approve the bid put forward by the company in order to preserve peace and protect the region.⁹⁹²

Although her letter received a reply from the regional bishop, who expressed his support, and from the state minister, who argued that 'with all respect (...) economic arguments are of utmost importance', it was left unanswered by Kohl himself, and failed to convince the *Treuhand* decision-makers.⁹⁹³ At the discussions with the *Treuhand* on the twenty-first of January 1991, the trust confirmed that production was to be stopped from the end of the month, giving the plant exactly ten days to wrap the company up.⁹⁹⁴ Instead of funding the continuation of car production until Opel were to start up, the *Treuhand* proposed to invest in retraining for the tens of thousands of staff, even though this had been proven to be more costly.⁹⁹⁵ However, the suggested redundancy and retraining programmes were not yet available and would need

⁹⁹¹ 'Zündstoff', 'Lawine', *ibid.*

⁹⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹⁹³ 'Bei der Bestandsaufnahme wie auch der Zukunftsprognose der Existenzfähigkeit eines Betriebes müssen - in aller Offenheit (...) - betriebswirtschaftliche Grundlagen die entscheidende Rolle spielen', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen, 'Brief an H. Kohl - Betr: Strukturanpassungskonzept Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH', 12 January 1991. AdSAWE, No ref., 'Brief an Bundeskanzler', *Der neue Motor*, 14 February 1991; LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen, 'Briefentwurf', 24 January 1991.

⁹⁹⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Nächste Woche kommt Aus für den Wartburg', *Eisenacher Presse*, 22 January 1991.

⁹⁹⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Umschulung für alle. Damit will Treuhand AWE-Facharbeiter halten', *Eisenacher Presse*, 22 January 1991.

to be developed in the nick of time.⁹⁹⁶ The local job centre reported that it was completely unprepared for the supposed closure of such a large firm. The AWE company director and head of the staff committee criticised the decision, accusing the trust of 'arrogance and pretentiousness', as they had clearly already made their decision before the director was due to present his latest development plan in Berlin.⁹⁹⁷

As the news broke in Eisenach, workers started a car procession using private and company cars, driving through the town at the end of the working day before ending on the market square, where the drivers beeped their horns and called on locals from all industries to support the car plant.⁹⁹⁸ Three days later, workers from the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* together with the metal workers' union and supporters from other local firms forced a complete closure of the nearby motorway in both directions for a full hour at midday.⁹⁹⁹ Beginning at the symbolic time of five to twelve, citizens stood along the motorway itself, filling the slip roads and looking down from the bridge that crossed the six lanes of traffic.¹⁰⁰⁰ A banner reading 'The disaster area starts here!' was strung across the western side of the bridge, where all visitors driving into the eastern states would be able to read it.¹⁰⁰¹ As such, the metal workers in Eisenach used their specific location at the border to western Germany to raise awareness and

⁹⁹⁶ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Keine geordnete Schließung. Dr. Liedtke beklagt fehlenden Sozialplan für die Wartburg-Arbeiter', Eisenacher Presse, 23 January 1991.

⁹⁹⁷ 'Arroganz und Überheblichkeit', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'AWE baut, bis die Lager leer sind. Liedtke wirft Treuhand „Arroganz“ vor', Eisenacher Presse, 23 January 1991.

⁹⁹⁸ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'AWE muß leben!', Süd-Thüringer Zeitung, 23 January 1991.

StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Keine geordnete Schließung. Dr. Liedtke beklagt fehlenden Sozialplan für die Wartburg-Arbeiter', Eisenacher Presse, 23 January 1991.

⁹⁹⁹ AdSAWE, 'AWE-Arbeitnehmer starteten Autobahnblockade', Der neue Motor, 31 January 1991.

¹⁰⁰⁰ AdSAWE, 30.8.3 Bildarchiv, 'A11298'.

¹⁰⁰¹ 'Hier beginnt das Notstandsgebiet', *ibid.*

attract media attention not only for their own situation but for that of all the other communities across the East. Further demonstrations followed, where factory workers were joined by workers from other local firms, who had gathered to show their support and solidarity.¹⁰⁰² The unions hoped that as well as bringing people together, the large demonstrations would put pressure on politicians to take action in order to appease their disappointed electorate, in the hope that their staff at the very least still held political power as potential voters.¹⁰⁰³

At the end of January, the managing committee of the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* put forward a proposal to use up all the remaining materials, which was approved by the *Treuhandanstalt*. This last-minute measure meant that production would not have to stop on the thirty-first of January and provided enough work to keep the company going for a further two months.¹⁰⁰⁴ In the meantime, the boss of Opel and the minister president of Thuringia ceremoniously laid the foundation stone for the new plant that was to be built in West-Eisenach.¹⁰⁰⁵ Still, production of the Wartburg car was due to end at the end of March 1991, and with the *Treuhand* unwilling to approve the bid for transitional funding, the date for the factory closure grew ever closer.

¹⁰⁰² AdSAWE, No ref., 'Bilder, die die Region bewegten', *Der neue Motor*, 14 February 1991.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁴ StA Eisenach, 40.6-114, 'Chronik der Eisenacher „Wende“, 1989-1991'.

¹⁰⁰⁵ AdSAWE, No ref., 'Bericht von der Grundsteinlegung. Das gesprochene Wort gilt', *Der neue Motor*, 14 February 1991.



Figure 4: Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach, 'Cartoon Treuhand', *Der neue Motor*, 31 January 1991.

The January issue of the car plant's staff newspaper featured an anonymous cartoon that clearly reflected the mood amongst its workers but also acknowledged that the plant had no chance of survival (see Figure 4). Crowds of sombre men wearing black ribbons on their arms as a symbol of mourning are depicted carrying a coffin bearing the letters AWE to a freshly-dug grave.¹⁰⁰⁶ From above, an arm, labelled 'Treuhand', extends out of a black cloud to push a wooden cross into the ground.¹⁰⁰⁷ Perched on top, the German eagle symbolises the involvement of the federal state.¹⁰⁰⁸ The cartoon was a

¹⁰⁰⁶ AdSAWE, No ref., 'AWE-Arbeitnehmer starteten Autobahnblockade', *Der neue Motor*, 31 January 1991.

¹⁰⁰⁷ AdSAWE, No ref., 'Cartoon Treuhand', *Der neue Motor*, 31 January 1991.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid.

direct response to the announcement to end production at the car plant. For the people of Eisenach, this was perceived as a 'death blow', dealt by the *Treuhand* and the new federal government, and calling for 'an hour of mourning'.¹⁰⁰⁹

On the twenty-seventh of March 1991, the head of the *Treuhandanstalt*, Detlev Rohwedder, wrote to the *Automobilwerk* with a written warning regarding the submission of 'unsatisfactory' documentation.¹⁰¹⁰ The director argued that the trust was in fact willing to fund the company on its way to the free market, 'on the condition that there is a viable business plan'.¹⁰¹¹ Although the plant had submitted various plans, Rohwedder claimed that these had either not contained enough documentation or had failed to sufficiently answer the relevant questions.¹⁰¹² The details of how the AWE had failed to satisfy his expectations are unclear, however, and point towards longstanding misunderstandings regarding the business aims of the trust and the car plant. Whilst the *Automobilwerk* had accepted that the Wartburg-car had no future, their focus had been on continuing sales to eastern Europe until the plant was able to begin producing Opel cars. As negotiations with western firms were well underway, the funding requested was solely to bridge this gap. The *Treuhand*, however, appeared to base their assessments on the economic viability of the car plant as it was, and the future production of Wartburg cars. The director asked the committee of the car plant in Eisenach to engage more proactively with the trust, in order to allow them to take the necessary

¹⁰⁰⁹ 'Todesstoß', 'Trauerstunde', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Der letzte Wartburg rollt heute vom Band. Gedrückte Stimmung bei AWE', Eisenacher Presse, 10 April 1991.

¹⁰¹⁰ 'nicht befriedigend', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Mahnschreiben zur Abgabe der angeforderten Unterlagen', Berlin, 27 March 1991.

¹⁰¹¹ 'unter der Voraussetzung eines tragfähigen Unternehmenskonzepts', *ibid*.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid*.

decisions, suggesting that the *Treuhand* was as dependent on the car plant as it was on them.¹⁰¹³ The letter would be one of his last, however, as the director of the *Treuhandanstalt* was killed in his apartment in Düsseldorf just four days later.

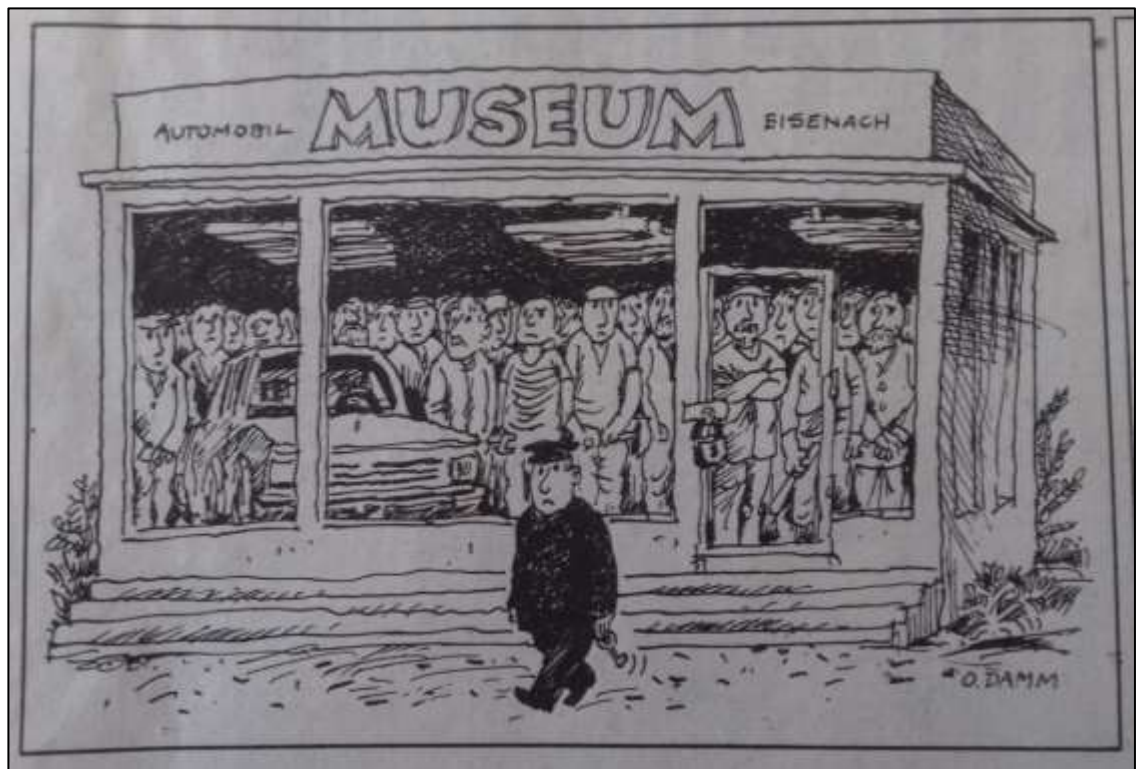


Figure 5: Stadtarchiv Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Automobil MUSEUM Eisenach', O. Damm, Thüringer Allgemeine, 11 April 1991.

On the tenth of April 1991, the last Wartburg car finally left production, only to be driven directly into the newly established car museum. A cartoon in the regional newspaper by one of the most renowned caricaturists in the GDR depicted the car being locked away inside the museum, along with the factory workers (see Figure 5).¹⁰¹⁴ The sketch demonstrates that the final Wartburg car symbolised much more than the material object itself, and that the end of

¹⁰¹³ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁴ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Automobil MUSEUM Eisenach', O. Damm, Thüringer Allgemeine, 11 April 1991.

production also spelled the end to a whole community and its way of life in the town of Eisenach. It was a reminder of the people behind the numbers, and the personal fates that many citizens felt had been disregarded during the *Treuhand* negotiations. From one day to the next, the factory had become history, but the people that had built it over generations still had no clear future. The car itself and the plant may have ceased to exist, but the people were still there. They appear to be waiting, unable to move forward, and slightly forgotten.

Originally, the plan had been for the new mayor of Eisenach to drive the car into the museum, of which the town council now had ownership.¹⁰¹⁵ On the day, however, he chose not to, arguing that it would be more suitable for one of the members of staff that had built the Wartburg to drive the car away.¹⁰¹⁶ The workers themselves decided, however, to push the car for its first few metres, out of respect. The event, which had been planned as a celebration of the Wartburg, and featured various older models as well, was more solemn than festive. Newspapers reported of the 'funeral service for the AWE', complete with memorial speeches and black suits.¹⁰¹⁷

Suitably, on the tenth of April, the bright red final Wartburg had been decorated like a coffin, with reefs and ribbons bearing the words 'A final farewell (from) the workers of the VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach'.¹⁰¹⁸ Two workers in aprons walked ahead carrying a black sign with a cross and the date

¹⁰¹⁵ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, "'Trauerfeier'" in der Wartburgstadt: Das letzte Auto in der Fertigmacherei', Eisenacher Presse, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁷ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Eklat bei der "Trauerfeier für AWE"', Zeitung für Eisenach, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰¹⁸ 'Letzter Gruß - Die Werktätigen des VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, "'Trauerfeier'" in der Wartburgstadt: Das letzte Auto in der Fertigmacherei', Eisenacher Presse, 11 April 1991.

'10.4.91' etched in, before laying it down on the engine bonnet.¹⁰¹⁹ On the back of the car, a sign reading 'No visit of condolence please, Kohl' covered the rear windscreen.¹⁰²⁰ The day was not to be a repeat of the grand event in October 1990, when the German chancellor had travelled to Eisenach to celebrate the new cooperation with Opel. Coincidentally, both Kohl and the minister president of Thuringia, who had originally been scheduled to make an appearance, had chosen to instead attend the state memorial service for the director of the *Treuhandanstalt* in Berlin, which had fallen on the same day.¹⁰²¹ As the AWE staff gathered to pay their final respects to the car that had provided them with over forty years of work, it was treated as a highly personal event, and the media and politicians, although present, were not wanted; their presence only served to exacerbate an otherwise already tense atmosphere.

Nevertheless, almost all television channels arrived to broadcast the event, with speeches from the AWE company director, the head of the staff council and the Thuringian business minister.¹⁰²² One image of the event, which was plastered across all the papers the next day, was of a worker who had broken down in despair during the company director's speech. The twenty-nine-year-old, who had always been at the front of the demonstrations against the closure of the plant in January, was now inconsolable. 'The GDR is the new poor house', he screamed at the cameras, pleading for a chance to work and

¹⁰¹⁹ AdSAWE, 30.8.3 Bildarchiv, 'A11304'.

¹⁰²⁰ 'Bitte keine Kondolenzbesuche, Kohl!', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Da rollt auch ein Stück Identität mit fort', Südthüringer Zeitung, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰²¹ StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, "'Trauerfeier'" in der Wartburgstadt: Das letzte Auto in der Fertigmacherei', Eisenacher Presse, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰²² StA Eisenach, 40.6-114, 'Chronik der Eisenacher „Wende“, 1989-1991'.

provide for his family.¹⁰²³ 'Everyone is just standing around like lambs, waiting to be slaughtered', he argued, summoning the other workers to say something.¹⁰²⁴ As the emotions poured out and other workers began booing and whistling, the company director, who had previously received the full support of his staff, was forced to end his talk and step down from the podium.

The ceremony in the car production plant bore many similarities to the funeral for the GDR that had taken place locally just a few months earlier, and yet the workers took no joy in marking the closure of their factory. In both cases, however, the ritual provided the chance to say a final farewell and find a sense of closure from a country and a company that had markedly structured their lives up until that point. The fatalistic language used across the local press in early 1991 captured the overwhelming sense of loss and grief that accompanied the gigantic changes for citizens, and the feelings of powerlessness amongst the workers.¹⁰²⁵ That the Wartburg car was not a viable business model for the future was clear to many, with the papers having labelled it the 'no-chance car' earlier that year.¹⁰²⁶ Even the former mayor had noted at the time that continued export to eastern European countries was not

¹⁰²³ 'Die DDR ist das Armenhaus – so sieht's aus!', 'Die Wartburg-Story', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAnsHGSPsCg&t=1228s>>, (accessed 20 May 2019).

¹⁰²⁴ 'Alle stehen sie hier und lassen sich schlachten wie die Lämmer', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Automobilwerk sucht nun nach neuer Identität', Thüringer Tagespost, 11 January 1991.

¹⁰²⁵ See StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Vorzeitiges "Aus" für Wartburg', Zeitung für Eisenach, 11 January 1991; StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Ein schwarzer Tag. Begräbnisstimmung beim AWE-Aus', Thüringer Allgemeine, 11 April 1991; StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Der Wartburg ist tot – es lebe der Opel', Südthüringer Zeitung, 10 April 1991; StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, '"Trauerfeier" in der Wartburgstadt: Das letzte Auto in der Fertigmacherei. Symbolische Abschiedsfeier für den Wartburg 1.3. Angespannte Stimmung bei Arbeitern', Eisenacher Presse, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰²⁶ 'Auto ohne Chance', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Treuhand: Auto ohne Chance. Ende Januar Aus für "Wartburg"', Zeitung für Eisenach, 22 January 1991.

guaranteed, as the region was facing similar levels of upheaval and uncertainty.¹⁰²⁷

Nevertheless, the decision to send thousands of local people into early unemployment despite the promising developments with investors was incomprehensible to the workers in Thuringia. Neither the company nor the local politicians appeared to have any influence over the decisions of the *Treuhand* and *Opel*. The people had shown patience and determination in using the democratic avenues available to them, and yet it was not enough to counter the economic developments that had such a profound impact on their local community. Despite their efforts via the managing committee, the workers' council and the union, they had been unable to change the outcome of the negotiations and now appeared to be at the mercy of the federal organisations.

Much more than expressing positive or negative emotional attachments to the former, the staged funerals served as a way of marking the huge changes in the citizens' daily lives and as a means of publicly addressing and processing the transition from one system to another. It presented a chance to take charge of a situation that was above and beyond their control; in the case of the GDR burial, the local citizens organised a funeral for a state that had determined all aspects of their daily lives, whilst at the car plant the workers took control of a development that had gone ahead against their wishes and despite all their efforts to change the course of events. In this respect, the symbolic acts

¹⁰²⁷ Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

demonstrate the agency of local citizens to assert themselves and make meaning at a time when they had little power otherwise.

The press spoke of the need to find 'a new identity' for 'a factory in which thousands had earned their bread and butter, and in which families had worked over many generations'.¹⁰²⁸ And yet, the performance rituals speak of a strong collective identity and of a group of citizens that was determined to find a way to incorporate the ongoing changes into their joint narrative. Nevertheless, as the former car plant workers prepared for retraining, retirement or unemployment, all hopes were pinned to the success of Opel's new factory as the town's only feasible way of continuing the automobile tradition that was such an integral part of their sense of self.

The Village of Stedtfeld vs. General Motors

Fulfilling the Plan in the Market Economy

On the twenty-eighth of May 1991, the private attorney for the *Adam Opel AG* wrote to the head of the district council of Eisenach to explain that he feared the long-term plans for the Opel site in Eisenach were 'at severe risk'.¹⁰²⁹ The company had chosen to build their new plant in Eisenach 'because they had been assured (...) that all the necessary conditions for the erection and

¹⁰²⁸ 'neuer Identität', 'Ein Werk in dem Tausende Arbeit und Brot fanden, in dem Generationen von Familien tätig waren', StA Eisenach, 50.3 Zeitungen, 'Automobilwerk sucht nun nach neuer Identität', Thüringer Tagespost, 11 April 1991.

¹⁰²⁹ 'erheblich gefährdet', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen, 'Brief vom Beauftragten der Adam Opel AG für die Opel Eisenach GmbH, an den Landrat des Kreises Eisenach', 28 May 1991.

expansion of the new plant would be met'.¹⁰³⁰ Now, however, the Adam Opel AG was struggling to go ahead with its plans, as the village community of Stedtfeld, where the new plant just outside of Eisenach was to be built, refused to approve the westward expansion of the car production site.¹⁰³¹ 'Everywhere in Europe, where Adam Opel AG has chosen to invest, we have always received unconditional support for our investment projects', the attorney clarified.¹⁰³² 'But unfortunately, this is not the case in Stedtfeld'.¹⁰³³ A meeting had taken place two weeks earlier between the car giant and the community of Stedtfeld, but the negotiations had not satisfied the village representatives, who argued that 'the Adam Opel AG had not yet managed to reach the point of constructive negotiation'.¹⁰³⁴

The opposition to the development of the car industry in the village was not new; an expansion of the existing site had already been planned by the Socialist Unity Party in GDR times. Locals had heard of the plans, as a large wooden relief of the future factory had been mounted in the *Automobilwerk* offices, showing the plant expanding right into the neighbouring village.¹⁰³⁵ Due to 'a lack of production space' at the site in central Eisenach, which was restricted by the surrounding railway and roads, the state-owned company had

¹⁰³⁰ 'weil ihr von politischer Seite die Erfüllung aller für die Errichtung und Erweiterung des geplanten Werkes notwendigen Rahmenbedingungen zugesichert worden sind', *ibid.*

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰³² 'Überall in Europa, wo die Adam Opel AG investiert hat, haben wir volle Unterstützung unserer Investitionsprojekte erhalten', *ibid.*

¹⁰³³ 'In der Gemarkung Stedtfeld ist das leider nicht der Fall', *ibid.*

¹⁰³⁴ 'Es ist bedauerlich, daß die Adam Opel AG noch nicht am Punkt einer konstruktiven Abarbeitung der Problematik angelangt ist', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen, 'Brief von der Gemeinde Stedtfeld Kreis Eisenach an den Beauftragten der Adam Opel AG', 07 June 1991.

¹⁰³⁵ Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

planned to move the majority of its manufacturing to the new site in West Eisenach by the early nineties in order to increase production.¹⁰³⁶ This would have to include a new press line, heating plant, and roads, as well as a four-shift work pattern that would ensure cars would be produced day and night.¹⁰³⁷ During the changes of 1989, the villagers of Stedtfeld rightly began to wonder what would happen to the planned site under new political leadership.¹⁰³⁸ When the AWE director announced in the local paper that the local village would soon be a conveyor belt for new cars, the alarm bells started ringing.¹⁰³⁹

In early 1990, both the director of the car production plant in Eisenach and the citizens committee of Stedtfeld had been invited to the district round table to discuss plans for the land.¹⁰⁴⁰ Whereas the automobile factory was instructed to discuss the building plans and environmental issues in detail with the citizens and farmers in Stedtfeld,¹⁰⁴¹ the village committee subsequently issued a written statement expressing their 'surprise and displeasure' at the AWE director's suggestion that they had approved of his plans.¹⁰⁴² On the contrary, they pointed out that the land on which the *Automobilwerk* planned to erect the new site did not belong to the firm, and that environmental assessments were needed regarding air quality, sewage and the possibility of erecting an elevated water tank.¹⁰⁴³ Furthermore, the company had failed to

¹⁰³⁶ 'fehlende Produktionsfläche', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Konzeption zur Entwicklung des VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach für den Zeitraum 1989 bis 1995 und danach', 18 August 1988.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁸ Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁰ 'Protokoll des Runden Tisches vom 27. Februar 1990' in Margot Friedrich, *Eine Revolution nach Feierabend. Eisenacher Tagebuch der Revolution* (Marburg: Eisenacher Presse, 1991), p. 86.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴² 'Mit Befremden', StA Eisenach, 40.7 Sammlung Wende-98, 'Einige noch offene Probleme in Sachen AWE-Weiterbau auf dem Gries', Stedtfeld, 05 March 1990.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid.

produce any clear plans on future traffic management for an expanded site.¹⁰⁴⁴

The citizens of Stedtfeld were 'shocked' at the thought of living directly next to such a large industrial estate.¹⁰⁴⁵ Until the requested plans were provided, they explicitly refused to approve any expansion into their village.¹⁰⁴⁶

Regardless, the *Automobilwerk Eisenach* signed an agreement with Opel and the *Treuhand* in December 1990 that stipulated that Opel would receive all of the land it needed, including land of which the AWE did not have ownership.¹⁰⁴⁷ In the meantime, however, the village of Stedtfeld had bought up almost all of the plots of land that surrounded their village and that had formerly been in private or public ownership by making good use of their personal connections.¹⁰⁴⁸ This way, any future building work and expansion of the car plant on their land would first have to be checked with and approved by the villagers. Over the summer of 1990, the village committee had formed smaller working groups, developing possible plans for their village, addressing environmental issues and putting in a successful bid for regional funding for a new business park.¹⁰⁴⁹ The head of the local district and member of the former Socialist Unity Party had provided connections to an urban planning firm in Kassel, which reliably advised the villagers on water and sewage management. The local forest ranger, who was also active in the village committee, was also

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁵ 'erschrocken', Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰⁴⁶ StA Eisenach, 40.7/98 Sammlung Wende, 'Einige noch offene Probleme in Sachen AWE-Weiterbau auf dem Gries', Stedtfeld, 05 March 1990.

¹⁰⁴⁷ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Telefax-Brief von Adam Opel AG für Opel Eisenach GmbH an den Bürgermeister der Gemeinde Stedtfeld', 20 June 1991.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid.

able to give sound advice on environmental considerations and land management. Most importantly, the wife of a committee member had a high position in the land registry office and provided the group with exact plans of the village and the plots of land it owned or would need to acquire. As such, the village was able to apply for the land which was being managed by the *Treuhand* to be returned to their ownership at a time when this was still relatively simple.

Their ideas for the land around the existing car plant included the establishment of a new leisure and nature centre and new housing development projects.¹⁰⁵⁰ As well as blocking a further expansion of the car production site, the alternative plans were to ensure that the village brought in revenue and remained financially independent and sustainable, whilst protecting the local environment and guaranteeing that the village remained a pleasant place to live. The regional funding for the business park, which was transferred in advance by the local ministry, provided financial security for the village council and allowed them to take actions without being dependent on the backing of larger donors.

Unlawful Democracy

In March 1991, the local priest and acting head of the village committee travelled to the *Treuhand* branch in Erfurt to sign the contract to buy up the remaining plots of land. On arrival at eleven o'clock, the trust representative explained that she had received an urgent fax from the head office in Berlin that

¹⁰⁵⁰ Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

very morning, instructing them to delay the sale. Although the negotiations had long been finalised, the sale would never go through, as Opel had caught wind of the actions of the Stedtfeld village committee and used their links to the top levels of the *Treuhand* organisation to block the sale. Nevertheless, the village had already acquired enough land to force the car company to engage with them directly. At this time, however, they still knew nothing of the agreement reached between Opel, the *Treuhand* and the Automobilwerk regarding the arrangements for plots of land in their village.

Following on from the correspondence in May, the Opel AG wrote to the vicar of Stedtfeld, who had since become the village mayor, on the twentieth of June 1991, instructing him to send over a draft contract for the sale of four plots of land.¹⁰⁵¹ As the agreement with the *Treuhand* stated that Opel should have received this land by the thirtieth of June 1990, and the company was keen to complete the transaction by that date, Opel promised 'to discuss the details afterwards'.¹⁰⁵² As the mayor refused to comply without having first seen plans of the company's expansion, the company turned to the state ministry for business to take urgent action against the village representatives.¹⁰⁵³

In August 1991, Opel threatened to take legal action against the village mayor, arguing that this 'presents a good way of finding a solution to the

¹⁰⁵¹ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Brief vom Beauftragten der Adam Opel AG an die Gemeinde Stedtfeld', 20 June 1991.

¹⁰⁵² 'einer anschließenden Besprechung', *ibid.*.

¹⁰⁵³ LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'TELEFAX OPEL Eilt sehr! Von Adam Opel AG an Minister für Wirtschaft und Technik des Landes Thüringen', 21 June 1991.

problem in the Stedtfeld area'.¹⁰⁵⁴ As the mayor had 'failed to realise his blatantly unlawful political intentions', it would be necessary to 'use all available means to bring (him) to his senses'.¹⁰⁵⁵ According to Opel, the village mayor and former clergyman had 'fraudulently and unlawfully' obtained the plots of land, which he was now 'unlawfully withholding'.¹⁰⁵⁶ They argued that he had 'exceeded his authority' by issuing a suspension of building work in the village and was now 'unlawfully trying to block one of the most important investments in the five new *Bundesländer*'.¹⁰⁵⁷ By repeatedly insisting on the supposed illegality of the villager's actions, the language used in the correspondence tries to paint the local mayor as a criminal who needed to be dealt with forcefully.

Furthermore, the village of Stedtfeld was 'refusing to give consent' for groundwork on a two-hundred-metre strip of their land. Without their permission, Opel would be unable to obtain the necessary building permit. As the mayor was acting 'extremely recklessly and irresponsibly' towards his constituents, Opel justified the need to 'put him under legal supervision' and to use 'executive powers from regulatory authorities' to buy the land, calling upon the minister president of the state of Thuringia and the head of the district

¹⁰⁵⁴ 'sieht hier eine gute Möglichkeit, die Problemsituation in der Gemarkung Stedtfeld zu klären', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Brief vom Beauftragten der Opel AG an den Ministerpräsidenten des Landes Thüringen in Erfurt', 14 August 1991.

¹⁰⁵⁵ 'sich nicht in der Lage sieht, seine Vorstellungen politisch durchzusetzen, die in eklatanter Weise gegen Recht und Gesetz verstoßen', 'mit allen gebotenen Mitteln zur Vernunft bringen', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Brief vom Beauftragten der Opel AG an den Landrat des Kreises Eisenach', 14 August 1991.

¹⁰⁵⁶ 'in rechtswidriger Weise erschlichen', 'rechtswidrig zurückhält', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁷ 'in Überschreitung seiner Kompetenzen', 'in rechtswidriger Weise eine der wichtigsten Investitionen in den fünf neuen Bundesländern zu verhindern versucht', *ibid.*

council for political support.¹⁰⁵⁸ As the mayor's behaviour was supposedly 'breaking civil law', he was 'fully responsible for the damage', and they intended to charge the village for the costs.¹⁰⁵⁹

And yet, the village representatives had confirmed in writing on the nineteenth of April 1991 that they would approve the use of their land by the company, 'on the condition of a notarially-certified sales contract' and a clear urban development plan.¹⁰⁶⁰ The villagers simply wanted to ensure that environmental considerations in their village had been accounted for, and ideally ensure that a ring road around the village would connect the car plant to the nearby motorway, to reduce traffic. According to the villagers, it was the car giant that was impeding the sale by not engaging with them. Should Opel not comply, the village had already stated it would 'take necessary action to safeguard its interests'.¹⁰⁶¹

In September 1991, the ministry of internal affairs arranged a meeting with the Opel representatives to discuss the problems.¹⁰⁶² The car company, which brought along the former Senator for the Interior for Berlin as their lawyer, met with members of the ministry and a representative of the district

¹⁰⁵⁸ 'im höchsten Maße rücksichtslos und verantwortungslos', 'im Wege der Rechtsaufsicht auf (...) einwirken', 'im Wege der Ersatzvornahme von der Rechtsaufsichtsbehörde', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁹ 'verstößt nicht nur gegen Zivilrecht', 'für diesen Schaden verantwortlich', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶⁰ 'vorbehaltlich des Abschlusses eines notariellen Kaufvertrages', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Brief von der Gemeinde Stedtfeld an den Beauftragten der Adam Opel AG', Eisenach, 19 June 1991. AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Hughes winkt mit Millionen', *Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine*, 23 September 1991.

¹⁰⁶¹ 'wird die Gemeinde alle Schritte in die Wege leiten, die erforderlich sind, ihre Interessen zu wahren', LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt), 'Brief von der Gemeinde Stedtfeld an den Beauftragten der Adam Opel AG', Eisenach, 19 June 1991.

¹⁰⁶² LATH - HStA Weimar, 6-82-3001-1304 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Standortfragen zur Ansiedlung der Industrie in Thüringen, 'Produktionsanlagen der Firma Opel AG/ Abstell- und Erweiterungsflächen', Erfurt, 11 September 1991.

council of Eisenach to debate how best to proceed.¹⁰⁶³ The local urban development officer for Eisenach explained that 'the community feels overlooked' and that it would be 'reasonable to ensure that the community is fully informed and to negotiate directly with them'.¹⁰⁶⁴ Conversely, the car company's decision to involve state institutions had only hindered the process.¹⁰⁶⁵

No Room at the Inn

Nevertheless, the talks between Opel and the community of Stedtfeld failed to proceed during the month of September 1991. As Opel threatened to abandon their plans in Eisenach, criticism of the 'stubbornness' of the people of Stedtfeld filled the local press, and the district politicians called for a 'Pro-Opel Strike' on the theatre square on the twenty-fifth of September 1991.¹⁰⁶⁶ Even in the village of Stedtfeld, opposition to the actions of the village committee was growing, especially as the village got a name for blocking the multimillion investment that was thought to solve the issue of the growing unemployment in the region. The local press compared the situation to the battle between David and Goliath, as 'a small unimposing community with a handful of environmental activists' took on 'a cash-rich global corporation'.¹⁰⁶⁷ Despite recognising that the village

¹⁰⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁴ 'die Gemeinde sich überfahren fühle und es sinnvoll sei, diese umfassend zu informieren und mit ihr zu verhandeln', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁶ 'Stedtfelder Sturheit', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technische Archiv, 'Bricht Opel Stedtfelder Sturheit?', *Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine*, 23 September 1991; AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Klarstellung nach dem Schock. Demonstration „pro Opel“: Der Standort ist nicht gefährdet', *Eisenacher Tagespost*, 25 September 1991.

¹⁰⁶⁷ 'eine kleine unscheinbare Gemeinde, die allenfalls ein paar Umweltschützer hinter sich vereinigt', 'ein kapitalkräftiger Weltkonzern', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Kommentare: Keine Chance für David', *Mitteldeutsche Allgemeine*, 25 September 1991.

was demonstrating that 'the times in which economic motives crushed all opposition' were over, they argued that the villagers should give in, to spare the rest of the population their worries.¹⁰⁶⁸

The biblical metaphor of David's conquest against the giant Goliath seems fitting on numerous levels, not least as that too had been a fight over land. In this Thuringian rendition, the part of the strong philistine giant is given to the cash-laden corporation boss, whilst the unlikely and unarmed challenger is the village mayor and former vicar. The parallels are not only found in the financial or physical strength of the contenders, but also in the language that shapes the conflict; in the book of Samuel, Goliath speaks down to David and holds him in contempt, much like the Opel representatives had not taken the villagers of Stedtfeld seriously, questioning their legitimacy and vilifying the mayor for opposing their plans. GDR citizens may also have been familiar with a comedy version of the age-old story, aired in 1962, in which a lowly bank worker wins the lottery and is hounded by the local brewery owner, who tries to beguile him to hand over his money with lavish displays of hospitality, free alcohol and entertainment.¹⁰⁶⁹ Here too, finances and land ownership structure the conflict, although the main focus is on the character traits of the two rivals. Although the bank worker does not defeat the brewery owner in the biblical way, he eventually wins out by showing him up for his selfish motives and false generosity.

¹⁰⁶⁸ 'die Zeiten, in denen ökonomische Motive alle Gegenargumente per se niederwalzten, scheinen (...) endgültig der Vergangenheit anzugehören', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶⁹ 'David und Goliath, 1962, Fernsehinszenierung einer Komödie von Georg Kaiser', *Online Lexikon der DDR-Fernsehfirme, Fernsehspiele und TV-Inszenierungen* <<http://www.fernsehenderddr.de/index.php?script=dokumentationsblatt-detail&id1=17227>> (accessed 25 June 2019).

Much like David in the Bible, the mayor of Stedtfeld not only faced an unequal rival, but was also challenged by his own townsmen, who discouraged him from taking action against Opel. Whereas the press had originally focussed its criticism on the village representatives for blocking developments, other villagers had soon found themselves stigmatised by people from the neighbouring area. Those that travelled to nearby towns for work were told they were 'stealing jobs' from locals and threatened with violence.¹⁰⁷⁰ As the fears around unemployment grew and pressure mounted, local support for the self-asserting actions of the village council dropped significantly.

On the twenty-sixth of September 1991, a citizen's gathering in the inn in Stedtfeld was filled to bursting with locals, desperate to let their mayor know how they felt about his actions against Opel's investment.¹⁰⁷¹ A local petition supporting the expansion of the Opel-site had been signed by two-hundred villagers, leading one citizen to argue that 'the absolute majority' was now for the development.¹⁰⁷² The debate, which lasted until well after midnight, gave an opportunity for the locals to express their opinions and release strong emotions. 'Let them build all the way to Herleshausen!', exclaimed one citizen, in favour of ensuring that Opel would create as many jobs as possible.¹⁰⁷³ The Senator for the Interior, who had also decided to attend the village meeting on behalf of Opel, stood up and gave a passionate speech about why it was unacceptable to treat Opel in this way.¹⁰⁷⁴ Even the union representative, who usually argued

¹⁰⁷⁰ 'Ihr klaut uns unsere Arbeitsplätze', Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰⁷¹ AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Ganz Stedtfeld ist sich einig: "Wir stehen alle zu Opel"', Eisenacher Presse, 28 September 1991.

¹⁰⁷² 'die absolute Mehrheit', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷³ 'Wenn es sein muß, sollen sie doch durchbauen bis Herleshausen', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁴ Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

against the employer, now supported the corporation. 'Why don't we let the people vote on it?' she asked.¹⁰⁷⁵ 'Because we have a communal constitution', replied the mayor.¹⁰⁷⁶

All of a sudden, the boss of the West German corporation stood up from where he had been sitting behind one of the beams and delivered an emotional speech about the very first cold and wet winter morning in January 1990, on which he had first set eyes on Eisenach.¹⁰⁷⁷ As they arrived all the way from Rüsselsheim, the Wartburg had been encased in a thick fog, and a dark smog lay over the town. Nevertheless, he had seen the potential beauty of the town and had told his colleagues 'We have to do something!'.¹⁰⁷⁸ After detailing their plans for the town and how this would be a blessing for the region, the company boss bought two rounds of beer for everyone in the room. The inn erupted in applause.

At the end of the evening, the mayor of Stedtfeld thanked everyone for the debate and announced that they would discuss this at the next council meeting and possibly reconsider their stance.¹⁰⁷⁹ 'No, you have to decide here and now!', argued the public.¹⁰⁸⁰ Sticking to the democratic procedure, the mayor declined and left the citizens to enjoy the free beer. 'That was living democracy', remarked one attendee at the end of the event.¹⁰⁸¹ At the next

¹⁰⁷⁵ 'Warum nicht das Volk abstimmen könne', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Ganz Stedtfeld ist sich einig: „Wir stehen alle zu Opel“', Eisenacher Presse, 28 September 1991.

¹⁰⁷⁶ 'Weil die Kommunalverfassung das nicht vorsieht', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid*; Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 'Hier müssen wir etwas tun', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁰ 'NEIN, das müsst ihr jetzt hier', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸¹ 'Das war gelebte Demokratie', AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Ganz Stedtfeld ist sich einig: „Wir stehen alle zu Opel“', Eisenacher Presse, 28 September 1991.

council meeting, the village representatives passed council orders regarding noise pollution, which ensured that Opel would need to conduct environmental assessments before building and would have to install noise protection along the main road.

In the end, due to the opposition from the village of Stedtfeld, Opel changed their plans to use much less land than originally proposed and approved the ring road around the village. In any case, the villagers had succeeded in forcing a large corporation to attend their village meeting before going ahead with their plans. 'We just want them to talk to us and not to go above our heads' the mayor had explained to the Thuringian minister during a mediation session.¹⁰⁸² 'And we want to know what's going on'.¹⁰⁸³ In so doing, the village had questioned the power structures between the small East German communities and the large multinational corporations, using the democratic avenues available to them to demonstrate that developments are not always predetermined from above.

Conclusion

In comparison with the privatisation and liquidation of other state-owned factories in the GDR, such as the high-profile closure of the potassium mine in Bischofferode in 1993, the story of car production in Eisenach is often hailed as a success story of the transformation. The town even earned itself the nickname

¹⁰⁸² 'Wir wollen doch nur, dass mit uns geredet wird und nicht über unsere Köpfe hinweg entschieden wird', Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018.

¹⁰⁸³ 'Und wir wollen wissen, was hier passiert', *ibid*.

of 'boom-town' for having attracted Opel, making it the envy of the region.¹⁰⁸⁴ And yet, 'the new Opel plant in West Eisenach was never thought out to be a continuation of the AWE, but simply presented a means of tapping into the tradition of car production in Eisenach'.¹⁰⁸⁵ The original plant in the north of the town centre, with its various production halls, power plants and administration offices, was almost entirely demolished in the mid-1990s. Of the ten-thousand members of staff at the AWE in early 1991, only two-thousand-six-hundred would eventually find work in the new plant.¹⁰⁸⁶ Although different arms of the company broke off to become independent companies, thousands of workers in the car plant and its many local suppliers were nevertheless plunged into sudden unemployment measures by the closure in 1991 of such a large firm.

It is therefore worth putting into perspective that even those communities deemed a success were faced with great structural and social change. The uncertainty around the *Automobilwerk Eisenach*, brought about in great part by the lack of clarity from the government organisations, and the negotiating tactics of Adam Opel AG, took its toll on the local citizens, causing divisions amongst the workforce and forcing staff into submission. As the changes were rolled out, the worker collectives were forced to wait for decisions to be taken on their behalf. Only when the closure of the plant was

¹⁰⁸⁴ Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018.

¹⁰⁸⁵ 'Das neue Opel Werk sollte keine Weiterführung des AWE darstellen, sondern lediglich ein Anknüpfen an die Automobiltradition Eisenachs', AdSAWE, 30.8.2/R22-B1499-Ma01, 'Diplomarbeit: Der wirtschaftliche Wandel nach der Wende, dargestellt am Beispiel des Automobilbaus in der Region Eisenach', Katharina Rimbach, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät, Lehrstuhl für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, 22 July 2008, p. 46.

¹⁰⁸⁶ AdSAWE, 30.8.2/1244 Werksarchiv, 'Konzept einer wirtschaftlich und sozial verträglichen Lösung des Auslaufes der Wartburgproduktion', Automobilwerk Eisenach GmbH, Eisenach, 21 January 1991. AdSAWE, 30.8.1 Technisches Archiv, 'Bürgermeister von Eisenach bremst den Aufschwung. Tennis-statt Arbeitsplätze', Bild Thüringen, 28 September 1991.

formally announced, did staff dare to take action again, using symbolic timings of demonstrations, for example at five to twelve, to express the perceived death of the company. The unwillingness of the staff committee and unions to accept the final verdict speaks of expectations so different to those of the trust tasked with privatising the business, in terms of decision making and moral priorities, once again bringing to light the stark cultural aspects of a seemingly bureaucratic process.

The deeply engrained negative connotations of joblessness in the GDR made the prospect of losing one's position even more daunting. The social stigma around being out of work was felt personally and was further heightened by the consequent closure of associated leisure organisations, resulting in an outright exclusion of former workers from the main structures of social life in Eastern Germany. The effects of the privatisation measures in the East are therefore not to be regarded simply as perceived disappointment with the outcome of the process or the unsustainability of the eastern companies, but should be recognised foremost as practices of social restructuring, devaluation and exclusion. The unwillingness of top-level representatives in politics and business to value the personal experiences of citizens above economic decisions gave citizens the feeling that they were not only being ignored, but that voice was ineffective. The further loss of fellow citizens who then moved westward in search of work heightened feelings of loneliness and segregation.

Forced to come to terms with the closure of the plant, citizens used common rituals to express the magnitude of the changes and their personal experience of loss. These familiar practices provided structures for processing

loss and transition where words could not convey the intensity of their feelings and brought the citizens together in solidarity with one another. It also provided an opportunity to take charge of a development that was otherwise beyond their control and to thereby hold onto a sense of dignity. For of all the experiences of the early 1990s, the strongest appears to be the overwhelming sense of loss of self-worth, loss of agency and deep humiliation.

This may sound unusual for a time when democratic rights such as the freedom of speech, assembly and travel had just been reinstated and free elections were being held. Nevertheless, the move from one political system to another also meant readjusting to different forms of political power. As demonstrated by the historical literature on *Eigensinn* in the GDR, East German citizens were able to use the restrictive social and economic structures and expectations of state loyalty to gain political agency within their daily lives. In switching to another system, citizens now had the right to express their opinions in public, but doing so no longer carried the same weight. Even protesting and striking did not have the desired effect when the companies paying the wages were essentially already bankrupt.

Although the autumn of 1989 had given many citizens a strong sense of power and originally opened up an array of possibilities, as existing structures and regulations were taken down, it was followed by a prolonged period of instability and insecurity. Citizens were repeatedly required to navigate uncharted territory, to adapt to new practices and to be judged by new standards. The dawn of a new era had seen many citizens come forward to take on new responsibilities and work flat out to develop solutions for the

transformation period. For many citizens, however, these changes in everyday life and politics were existential ones, and resulted in widespread fear and disorientation that was divisive and politically debilitating.

And yet, in the small village of Stedtfeld, just outside of Eisenach, the local vicar-cum-mayor, who had spent years countering the plans and practices of the Socialist Unity Party, was not ready to submit to a large corporation. As a seasoned public speaker, he had the practice, confidence and will to take on larger players and to see through his plans, even against strong opposition. Unlike other local citizens in more precarious or political fields of work, his occupation provided a stable basis from which to take on this demanding project, even though this was not without risk. Although his role as vicar and mayor placed him at the heart of the community, his political boldness meant that he was not accepted in the party most closely aligned to his environmental ideals. This outsider perspective nevertheless allowed him to use the available structures and opportunities to act on his own terms.

Once again, local contacts, quick planning and good judgment played an important part in ensuring that the villagers gained hold of the land that would protect their democratic rights and allow them a voice in determining the future of their community. In comparison with the outcome of the car plant demonstrations in Eisenach, it is clear that the financial capital of owning the land in their village proved to be more valuable and effective than the right to free speech or protest on its own. However, the fears around mass unemployment and social stigma, heightened by an intense media spectacle, caused the villagers themselves to withdraw their support for their

representatives. This showcases just how integral social and financial security is to political power and citizens' voice, and how important the social and economic transformation in Eastern Germany is when looking at processes of democratisation.

When *Opel* and the *Treuhandanstalt* realised that the village council was demanding a say in the development, they attempted to block their influence by order from above, only to be forced to eventually attend the village meeting and speak face to face with the villagers. In so doing, the mayor succeeded in rebalancing the relations between the larger and smaller actors, reasserting the democratic rights and voice of the villagers despite hefty local opposition, and ensuring a say in future urban developments. Most importantly, however, the endeavour was about resetting the tone of communication between the different parties and demanding respect where so much had already been lost.

Epilogue

About ten kilometres from the border between Thuringia and Hesse, in the grounds of a former palace, lies the hotel *Schloss Hohenhaus*. In the early nineties, a pharmaceutical company had chosen to hold their monthly in-house training courses at the venue and contacted a nearby photographer, across the border in Eisenach, to ask for his services in capturing group photos at the end of every session. 'Are you even able to produce a quality photograph?', they began.¹⁰⁸⁷ Despite their original doubts, the experienced eastern photographer was commissioned to produce the staff photographs at their regular events.

As a result, he would cross the former border at least twice a month, on his way to and from the hotel. Having grown up in the region, the frontier had long been a regular part of his everyday experience. During the GDR he had needed a permit to attend dance classes or run errands in the area close to the border. The streets directly next to the border strip had been cleared, however, and were overgrown after years of separation. Behind these were the watchtowers and border installations, and the area known as the death-strip, where those who crossed without permission were to be shot at. Even twenty, thirty years after the fall of the Wall, the memory of this border and the lengths the state had gone to in order to counter the citizens' will for freedom was deeply engrained on his conscience.

¹⁰⁸⁷ "'Können Sie denn das in einer bestimmten Qualität überhaupt machen?' fing es an', Interview with Joachim Thureau, Eisenach, 22 August 2018.

By the early nineties, the installations had been dismantled and the roads were reopened again, linking the two states and the former halves of the country to one another. All that remained of the segregation was the original border mark on the ground. Not the installations, and towers, and barriers, but the line drawn across the road in yellow paint. It was not a straight line, but rather zigzagged, following the exact route of the German-German border as it crossed the road. After just a few years, it was now the only visual reminder of the border in this area, but it too was fading with time.

As the photographer drove to and from his home to the nearby hotel to photograph the western colleagues, he would stop his car and pause at the former border, taking the time to remember and reflect on the significance of the line on the ground. The 'minute of remembrance', as he called it, was not a one-off, but gradually became routine, over the course of many years.¹⁰⁸⁸ When he had finished his minute of silence, he would secretly get out a tub of yellow paint and repaint the line on the ground, as a way of holding on to the memory of what had been, and of that which had now gone.

Years later, he admitted his actions to a local mayor from a town just across the border in Hesse. 'I had the exact same idea!' he exclaimed in response, 'but I was not allowed!'.¹⁰⁸⁹ Had the western mayor been caught repainting the border line, he would most certainly have been accused of wanting to reinstate the border between the two halves of Germany, and of attempting to re-separate from his eastern relatives. And yet, the act was not

¹⁰⁸⁸ 'Gedenkminute', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁹ 'und da sagt er "Ich hatte auch den Gedanken. Nur ich DURFTE nicht"', *ibid.*

meant as a political symbol for the future, but rather one that was about the importance and relevance of the past in the present.

The experience of the separation of East and West Germany was one that was deeply rooted in the conscience of those that had experienced it and that had lived with the border. Time and again, the photographer spoke of the ways in which the memory of the border still hit deep and had the power to unravel the soul, even after all these years. Comparable only to the death of a family member, the experience of living with the separation had been so profound, he explained, that it would take many years, if not decades, to come to terms with. And yet, the photographer argued that this experience was not unique to those directly at the border but was just as pertinent for GDR citizens who had grown up further East as well. Equally, the mayor from West Germany had reportedly shared the photographer's desire to repaint the line and to hold onto the memory of what had been. Despite having lived on the western side of the line, with relative freedom of movement, the border and its ramifications for citizens of Germany had also determined his life.

The story of the border line demonstrates not only how deeply rooted the experience of the separation was in the everyday lives of citizens in East and West, but also how experiences and emotions endure when material structures have long disappeared. During his regular visits, the photographer would collect remnants of the former border, such as metal sheeting, which was later used for local art and history exhibitions. Bit by bit, the bars and metal that had fortified the border were removed, but the memory of driving along the damaged road again for the first time after it was reopened, with its many

potholes, to visit friends and family in the next state, was still as vivid as it was then. Although the citizens were no doubt glad to be able to cross the border, there was a significant disparity between the visible remains of the border and the lasting effects of the lived experience.

As I tried to understand the significance behind this clearly symbolic act, the photographer explained that repainting the border line was important for his personal remembrance: 'So that I could stand there again and see that it was still yellow. For it was slowly fading - the yellow - wasn't it'.¹⁰⁹⁰ Being able to express your lived experience so that others will hear, recognise and consider it in making group decisions is essential for political participation. Alana Mann writes that 'to deny the capacity to possess and share one's narrative' is therefore to deny citizens their potential for voice.¹⁰⁹¹ And yet, the story of the border line in eastern Germany and the photographer's efforts to hold onto it suggests that voice needs not only language and status, but also objects and spaces that can hold or illustrate that narrative.

In the early 1990s, as factories began to close, these too would disappear from the 'blossoming' landscape. The workers that had spent their lives in these buildings faced a choice between redundancy, early retirement, zero-hour contracts, further training, and *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen* (temporary work 'creation' measures), essentially all forms of joblessness. Those who attended training in Erfurt were taught by the former secretary for *Agitation und*

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'Das ist für mein Gedenken, einfach da wieder zu stehen, dass es immer noch gelb ist. Denn es lies ja langsam nach, das Gelb, nicht', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹¹ Alana Mann, *Voice and Participation in Global Food Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 3.

Propaganda, who was offered work at the centre after ensuring all his other colleagues had found suitable employment.¹⁰⁹² In Eisenach, former AWE workers who had received temporary work placements were tasked with archiving the company documents, emptying the offices in which they had sat only a few days or weeks beforehand, and knocking down the structures to ideally make way for new developments.¹⁰⁹³

As the factory halls and buildings disappeared, and documents were either archived or destroyed, citizens realised that the knowledge of what their factories had looked like, how they had lived and worked, would also soon be lost. In an attempt to ensure that the masses of technically skilled people that had worked in the car plant and in the nearby electronics and clock factories could practise their handiwork skills, staff at the newly established 'Association for the Promotion of Work Creation, Employment and Structural Development' (ABS) developed a project to build small scale models of the factory sites, documenting all the former offices, production halls and warehouses, and thereby the processes and infrastructure of the former centres of East German life.¹⁰⁹⁴ 'This is what the AWE looked like in 1990, when the last Wartburg left production', they could say, demonstrating how GDR production had managed the whole 'complicated', sometimes 'convoluted' and 'ecologically unfriendly' process, from beginning to end.¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁹² Interview with Wolfgang Mühle, Erfurt, 13 August 2018.

¹⁰⁹³ Interview with Thomas Brohm, Ruhla, 15 February 2019.

¹⁰⁹⁴ 'Gesellschaft für Arbeitsförderung, Beschäftigung und Strukturentwicklung', AdSAWE, 30.8.2 Werksarchiv, 'Gesellschaft zur Arbeitsförderung, Beschäftigung und Strukturentwicklung mbH Eisenach (ABS)', Eisenach, 19 July 1994.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'so sah das Automobilwerk 1990 aus, als der letzte Wartburg vom Band lief', 'kompliziert', 'verschachtelt', 'ökologisch bedenklich', Interview with Thomas Brohm, Ruhla, 15 February 2019.

Further larger projects followed, with the developers considering copying other model villages in Austria and Germany that showcased world wonders. Instead, they decided to build tiny replicas of historical buildings from across Thuringia in what would later be called *Miniathür*.¹⁰⁹⁶ The small park nestled in the valley of Ruhla near Eisenach 'was an attempt to counter (feelings of hopelessness), to bring history back to life for a while, so that the factory still exists, somehow, it is still sort of there'.¹⁰⁹⁷ It was one of many community projects designed by local people during this time to do something for their area and their own sense of pride. And it worked; for at the end of the day, when everyone headed down to the local pub, it was clear who was doing an ABS placement; they would have kept their uniforms on.

Even though some projects did indeed develop into limited companies, working independently or under management of the town, the name of the federal placement funding was greatly misleading. The work 'created' for local citizens in the East consisted heavily of boxing up, tearing down, disposing of, partly conserving and mostly historicising the companies and structures of the German Democratic Republic. The director of the ABS Association argues that this did not necessarily help local citizens to deal emotionally with the changes, but it certainly brought them home. While some would still try to 'repress' or deny what was happening, pulling down their old workplaces made one thing clear: 'it's over'.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'Und deswegen, es war so der Versuch, so einen kleinen Gegenpol zu machen, so die Geschichte noch mal zu sehen, aufleben zu lassen, das Werk, das gibt es noch irgendwie, es ist noch irgendwo was da, ja', *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'verdrängen', 'jetzt ist Schluss', *ibid.*

The story of 'work creation' in Eastern Germany is a whole chapter of post-1990 history that is yet to be written in detail,¹⁰⁹⁹ but which again exemplifies the resilience and *Eigensinn* of eastern citizens in the face of extraordinary structural changes. Within just a couple of years, their society had changed beyond recognition. And yet, this thesis has demonstrated that, despite the odds, citizens would always find new ways to actively respond to the changes going on around them and to gain control of their lives. By describing the effects these changing dynamics had on everyday situations from rubbish collection to job security, this study has also shown just how intense and exceptional the speed was at which East Germans were required to adapt.

The years from 1989 to 1991 constituted a period of radical changes affecting all spheres of public and private life and was accompanied for many by strong experiences of loss, dis- and re-orientation. As well as record levels of unemployment, the eastern states experienced an 'exodus' of citizens after 1990, with long-term repercussions for the social infrastructure and birth rates in the East.¹¹⁰⁰ Following how voice is negotiated during this period exemplifies how political agency is claimed, used and lost, but also highlights the integral social and emotional component. Looking at the way in which these processes are

¹⁰⁹⁹ For an excellent overview written at the time, see Matthias Knuth & Ulrich Pekruhl, 'Der Beitrag von ABS-Gesellschaften zur Bewältigung des Transformationsprozesses' in Wolfram Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Regionen unter Anpassungsdruck. Zu den Schwerpunkten des regionalen Handlungsbedarfs* (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1993), pp. 95-126.

¹¹⁰⁰ Christian Bangel (et al.), 'East-West Exodus. The Millions who left', *Zeit Online*, 30 May 2019, <<https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-05/east-west-exodus-migration-east-germany-demography?print>> (accessed 06 October 2019).

experienced and recounted brings to light the social and emotional dynamics of the transformation and system change.

In the GDR, citizens' voice was limited because individual opinions were not given space to be expressed in the official sphere or were threatened with repercussions, forcing self-expression into other outlets such as literature, music and fashion and creating a unique kind of GDR double-speak.¹¹⁰¹ Pressure to conform to expectations of loyalty towards the state left citizens wrought with inner conflicts, disillusionment and despair. Eventually, many saw no other way but to choose exit. For those who remained, their voices gained importance, as exit had suddenly become a realistic option. The recordings of the demonstrations and dialogue events in the autumn of 1989 document nervous citizens, stumbling over their words as they begin to practise public speaking. And yet, the words they choose and the statements they make hold a lot of weight. It is the process of finding voice as individuals, and of becoming visible as a collective. The *Neues Forum* as a platform for discussion was conceived to foster exactly this.

However, the reintroduction of public platforms for debate also requires a social and political infrastructure to support it. Whilst this was clearly a very creative and liberating time, the difficulties of managing new expressive freedoms would soon become clear. For as much as the citizens were unversed in public speaking, the authorities and structures were equally unprepared to

¹¹⁰¹ See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall. East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 157, or Alf Lüdtke, 'Sprache und Herrschaft in der DDR. Einleitende Überlegungen' in Alf Lüdtke & Peter Becker (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 11-28.

deal with and structure the suggestions coming from the citizenry. The chaos that appears to ensue at a national level with the opening of the border is equally evident on a local level across all organisations, with communal events descending into disarray and overstretched authorities failing to communicate new procedure. As the government lost face, the churches and new political groups, with their better standing in society, were endowed with power and responsibilities, however the status this gave them was temporary and intended only for the time until new structures were put into place.

Restructuring politics and rechanneling the exercise of voice is an incredibly difficult task. This would prove to be especially so whilst the country was in disarray, for the sudden and strong use of voice in the autumn had destabilised the government and the society, with many describing a new sense of fear, be it of the crowds on the market places, the work colleagues, or the possible personal repercussions of the changing political landscape. This in turn created an environment in which existing rules and regulations no longer applied, were disregarded or were left open to interpretation. For some, this period was therefore one of great power and opportunity, as decisions could be taken swiftly and with little resistance. On the flipside, however, the instability also fostered aggression and division amongst the population, as different actors used the uncertainty to discredit others or to gain influence. This period formally lasted until the introduction of new laws in July 1990 and the formal reunification in October 1990, but the practices and tactics developed during this time often persisted afterwards.

Over the course of just a few months, the power relations in the GDR shifted from members of the Socialist Unity Party to the citizens' groups and churches, to the newly-formed Alliance for Germany, and on again to the federal Christian Democratic Union. Equally, in the workplaces and parliaments, the rule of the majority would favour those who spoke loudest and most passionately. In particular, the former GDR elites and party members were hit by pent-up anger from local citizens who had now gained powerful positions in their communities. For some former elites, the social stigma would lead to seclusion and even suicide, whilst for others, it would allow them to move into new positions in the business sector early on in the transformation process.

However, the continual transferring of power and shifting hierarchies were both tiring and unsettling in the long run. As citizens penalised one another for past offences and the people in power changed, it was unclear who would indeed be targeted next. The instability within the government and society therefore increased the need for quick and clear new rules, structures and regulations. As such, the internal process of coming to terms with the past was not granted time to develop slowly and organically, because of prevailing pressures to create social and political stability. Similarly, there was little time to truly consider or develop all the new concepts or approaches that had been developed, leading political representatives to reach for ready models provided by their western neighbours.

And yet, implementing new structures would also prove difficult. Not only could western structures not be applied directly to GDR structures, causing more uncertainty as citizens sought interim solutions, but these mammoth tasks would require the cooperation of all citizens, including those that had been publicly named and shamed over the autumn. The elections of 1990 would be significant in rebalancing these social dynamics within local politics and administration, as various actors withdrew their support and bartered with one another for social recognition. It demonstrates that voice is about making oneself heard and acknowledged, be that vocally or through silent protest.

Even as citizens held democratic elections and set up a free press, the challenges of adapting to the new system and of managing the system change would again create further pressures on communal representatives. As such, the free debates and discussions that had defined the autumn but often lasted into the early hours were curbed in order to be able to implement new protocol. Overwhelmed by the scale of the tasks ahead of them and the difficulties of dealing with a free press, local councils redefined their own roles and responsibilities towards their constituents, who now needed to seek information independently. Freedom of speech was given, but with separate platforms and private committees, different opinions no longer needed to be exchanged or negotiated in order to pass political motions.

As new market forces came into play, threatening the existence of East German firms and livelihoods, economic arguments were prioritised and

created further pressures and dynamics that quickly overtook the internal restructuring process. The financial insecurity and shame that accompanied the currency and social union had a clear influence on citizens' readiness to use voice and protest to protect their interests. Without the certainty of a steady income, citizens were not as willing to take risks, express solidarity or to protest loudly and instead focused fully on their own existence and hopes of new investment.

Those who did choose to counter developments in the name of self-determination would face strong opposition from all around. Holding onto their democratic and, more importantly, ownership rights, allowed the citizens of a small village in Thuringia to determine their own future, but only because of the financial security they had achieved through business development funding prior to beginning negotiations, and the actions of certain individuals. The lengths that big business, politicians, the press and the *Treuhand* trust went to just to enable the investment in a new plant once again demonstrates how significantly financial means affect the effectiveness of voice.

From March 1990, citizens in eastern Germany were able to use their votes to elect political representatives, they could use their buying-power to influence the choice of goods on the market, and they could express their opinion in public as and how they chose to. Why, then, did citizens still feel disempowered by the new system? As illustrated throughout this thesis, political agency needs some form of bargaining power with which to negotiate one's own position. In the autumn, citizens' political loyalty held enough weight to enforce far-reaching changes, and social stigma was used to gain new

powers or to oust people from political positions. In the spring, offering or withdrawing material and financial support could influence power hierarchies in the organisation of the elections. And in the summer, land ownership proved to be a valuable good in the transformation of eastern industry and the determination of smaller communities. In all cases, the use of *Eigensinn* and own initiative would be significant. These actions alone however would not suffice, for negotiation relies on social recognition by others.

However, in losing their jobs and social networks, many citizens not only feared for their livelihoods, but also lost a lot of their own self-worth. What, then, is the value of their voice? As this thesis has demonstrated, the scope of voice fluctuates depending on the circumstances and can be severely influenced by the actions and emotions of others. The new rights accorded to East Germans in the Federal Republic are generally understood and appreciated, but they do not make good the experience of humiliation, loss and dispossession that accompanied the changes and affected large swathes of the population in eastern Germany. The popular discontent around the transformation process therefore has little to do with dissatisfaction at the outcome of the political process or disappointment at unfulfilled expectations but is rather symptomatic of the systematic and emotionally enforced exclusion and marginalisation of citizens from various realms of public life.

As illustrated in the story of the photographer's longstanding preoccupation with the border, the sudden changes that took place in 1989 and the extended period of financial and social insecurity that followed cannot be overcome simply by implementing new structures and procedures. Even when

these have been practised and accepted, the experience of the upheaval and the associated loss of familiar routines, spaces, behaviours and structures continues to shape the people it affected. Without the possibility of expressing, acknowledging or sharing the emotional side of the transformation, citizens are essentially prevented from reforming and consolidating their identity within the new society. Not having the narrative resources or space to build an own account of your life 'represents a deep denial of voice', forcing citizens to continuously look at themselves 'through the eyes of others'.¹¹⁰² Consequently, citizens feel othered and begin to present or understand themselves accordingly.

And yet, 'facing and naming those losses' can provide a way of developing counter narratives that will, in time, generate new directions for politics, and in the short-term help to get through times of uncertainty and loss.¹¹⁰³ This is evident throughout this period, beginning with the activist's burial of the GDR in her back garden as a way of defining her past and of closing a chapter of her life. Her insistence that the burial should not be commentated and that it would speak for itself, and her shock when this request is not respected, speaks for the strong need to be allowed to create an own narrative, an own account of her experience.

Later, the car plant workers who felt that their voices had not been listened to and that their social contract had been broken also used funeral rituals to mark and process the loss of their social reality. The silence that

¹¹⁰² Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters. Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010), p. 10.

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

accompanies these ceremonies speaks volumes. Finally, as citizens were tasked with archiving their companies and ripping down the factories, they chose to use the financial resources for temporary work to document their workplaces and their own regional heritage so that future generations may be able to see what had been there before. It is not voice per se, but it provides a basis for those narratives to be voiced in the future, a kind of shared inner voice.

Even amidst severe social and economic imbalances, citizens continue to find ways to negotiate their lives and create meaning. Unable to express their voices as they would have wished to, they appropriate a range of spaces outside of the strictly political sphere, using symbols, gestures and silence. And yet, these practices are not new. In 1988, citizens in Erfurt had staged a silent sit-in in the cathedral, threatening to sound the loudest bell in the city. Unable to voice their demands through open structures in the GDR, they had sought other outlets as room for expression and negotiation. A couple of years later, activists whose calls for cross-checking of political candidates had been largely ignored by the government had held a hunger strike in the occupied Stasi building. The voicelessness of citizens in the GDR had briefly given way to open spaces for voice, only to be replaced again by alternative forms of voicelessness.

What is sometimes referred to as a 'democracy deficit'¹¹⁰⁴ in Eastern Germany could therefore be interpreted as exactly that – not on behalf of the citizens' ability to grasp democratic structures and concepts, however, but

¹¹⁰⁴ See Micha Brumlik, 'Postkoloniale Gesellschaft oder posttotalitäre Kultur? Das Demokratiedefizit der ostdeutschen Länder', in Sabine Andresen (et al.), *Vereintes Deutschland – geteilte Jugend. Ein politisches Handbuch* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), pp. 283-298.

rather regarding a deficit in the scope for citizens to be able to voice their opinions. By 1991, East Germans had the opportunity to express their voice in public, through a transparent voting system, in the free press or on the streets. And yet, this thesis has shown that this clearly did not suffice. The ability and willingness of citizens to use their voice is subject to a range of dynamics, from the exit of fellow citizens to existential fears and feelings of shame and inadequacy. Even where platforms and spaces were created to allow for discussions and freedom of expression, these feelings of inadequacy, alongside time pressures relating to the upcoming elections and pressing issues around the currency union, meant that East Germans' voice was purely reactive, as opposed to having the time and space to be voiced actively. As the mayor of Eisenach announced to the town council in February 1990, 'the situation is changing by the hour, and so we are also forced to react to the changes on an hourly basis'.¹¹⁰⁵ Local politicians and citizens alike were in overdrive simply trying to keep up with the pace of the changes.

However, citizens' ability to continually seek new realms of expression speaks for their strong sense of agency. As this thesis has shown, the people of Erfurt and Eisenach maintained agency throughout the transformation process, shaping the outcome through their actions and their own historical experiences. The 'reunification' process was in this sense by no means imposed, but rather an intricate process of negotiation in the everyday. And still, despite their

¹¹⁰⁵ 'Nur an dem Beispiel will ich sagen, daß sich die Situation stündlich ändert, und wir auch stündlich auch auf die neue Situation reagieren müssen', StA Eisenach, 21.2-247 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1989-1990, 'Niederschrift zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung Eisenach', 21 February 1990.

incredible will and readiness to act, citizens' agency was severely limited by their financial means, social marginalisation and competing dynamics that sped up the pace of the changes and undermined citizens' ability to adapt.

What do these divergent experiences in the early 1990s mean for the overarching German narrative? How long will it take for citizens in the East and those that have left to process these experiences? And, as eastern Germany continues to see lower rates of pay and social equality, to what extent does social and financial standing continue to determine citizens' ability to actively participate in the political system? Academics speak of it being a matter of needing time for democratic practices to be consolidated in the East, arguing that the longstanding totalitarian regime in the GDR gave no opportunity for 'stable democratic approaches' to take root.¹¹⁰⁶ And yet, as this thesis has shown, voice is determined by a range of socio-economic and cultural factors. What stands out in East Germany, however, is the unbeatable pace at which the new structures were implemented and the speed at which citizens were forced to adapt.

The silent rituals and symbolic practices described throughout this study evidence a strong need to create and express own narratives. As demonstrated, the period from 1989 to 1991 was an incredibly emotive one, and these raw emotions provide easily exploitable resources to popular movements. So long as the perceived injustices stemming from the transformation are not

¹¹⁰⁶ 'Woher sollen tiefverwurzelte und krisensichere demokratische Einstellungen kommen?', Micha Brumlik, 'Postkoloniale Gesellschaft oder posttotalitäre Kultur?', p. 296; see also Tytus Jaskułowski, 'The Party System and Democratic Consolidation – Poland and East Germany in Comparison', in Uwe Backes, Tytus Jaskułowski & Abel Polese (Eds.), *Totalitarismus und Transformation. Defizite der Demokratiekonsolidierung im Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p. 220.

recognised and addressed by historians and official institutions, and are simply dismissed as *Ostalgie*, populists will likely continue to gain support, simply by recognising and naming these experiences, albeit often in equally slanderous, exclusionary, and historically inaccurate ways. By offering collective narratives and social networks to replace those that were quickly demolished in 1990 or not given due time to develop, these movements are essentially thriving on the common experiences of marginalisation amid system change.

However, the political swing to the right and left in recent years is mirrored by developments in other eastern states.¹¹⁰⁷ To what extent is Eastern Germany therefore a unique story? We will not know the answer to this until historical research on this period also addresses the significant effect of emotions and pace on the political process, for it is highly likely that this is a unifying and telling feature. After all, case studies so far have demonstrated how unprepared virtually all of the governments in eastern Europe were for the sudden changes, resulting in power vacuums and instability as seen in East Germany,¹¹⁰⁸ albeit with varying outcomes; in the Polish People's Republic, demands for reforms created a 'cacophony' of voices, all searching for new – national – narratives,¹¹⁰⁹ whilst former Yugoslavia descended into a bloody war of dissolution.¹¹¹⁰ The significance of different social and cultural practices

¹¹⁰⁷ Betts, '1989 at Thirty', p. 303.

¹¹⁰⁸ Włodzimierz Borodziej (et al.), 'Introduction', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanisław Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 3.

¹¹⁰⁹ Włodzimierz Borodziej, 'Poland and the Collapse of the Patron 1989-90. As seen from the Polish Embassy in Moscow', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanisław Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 49.

¹¹¹⁰ Marie-Janine Calic, '1990. Building Democracy in Yugoslavia and the Danger of War', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanisław Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 164.

on the use of voice could therefore help to better understand the various trajectories and ways of maintaining relatively peaceful and stable government during transitions.

Whilst East Germany was surely unique due to its relationship with West Germany, which significantly affected the migration of citizens, the election campaigns and the restructuring of businesses, similarities nevertheless exist in the incongruous experiences of the years after 1989 and official memory regimes across eastern Europe. In Hungary, the 'depressing aftermath' of 1989 is also at odds with the joyous memory of the original rupture,¹¹¹¹ and in Bulgaria, images of long supermarket queues that evoke associations with communist times, but were actually taken to capture the everyday of life in the new market system, highlight inconsistencies in historical narratives and lived experience.¹¹¹² There is therefore a desperate need to present more historical narratives regarding the interplay of state structures and society in the years after 1989, in order to identify how these different factors played out.

Paulina Sekuła writes that 'the impact of other variables on the political culture of post-communist societies' is necessary to understand cultural aspects of democratic consolidation.¹¹¹³ Whilst exit and loyalty have been shown to have had a clear impact on the transformation process,¹¹¹⁴ this only sheds light on two variables of the dynamic. We still know relatively little about the

¹¹¹¹ Borodziej (et al.), 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹¹¹² Martina Baleva, 'Menschen in der Reihe. Ein visueller Topos der bulgarischen Wende', *Die revolutionären Umbrüche in Europa 1989/91: Deutungen und Repräsentationen*. 18. Internationales Symposium der Stiftung Ettersberg, Weimar, 01 November 2019.

¹¹¹³ Paulina Sekuła, 'The Role of Political Culture in the Consolidation of Eastern and

¹¹¹⁴ See, for example, Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

interaction of other social and cultural practices that structure our political everyday life. In order to truly understand the influence of 1989 on the current political situation in Thuringia and farther afield, and to examine how power is transferred in our society, historians should therefore look more closely at the symbolic actions of citizens in their communities, recognise the variety of ways in which voice can be exercised, and listen to the silences.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP)

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1/16/1-1 | Presse-Archiv - DDR Kommunalpolitik |
| 03-051-146 | Landesverband Thüringen - Generalsekretäre, Korrespondenz (alte Bundesländer) 1990-1993 |
| 03-051-147 | Landesverband Thüringen - Generalsekretäre, Korrespondenz (alte Bundesländer) 1990-1994 |
| 05-016-356 | Landtagsfraktion Thüringen - Diverse Sachthemen, Stasi 1990-1996 |

Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD)

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 2/SDPA000172 | SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand; Bezirke Erfurt, Frankfurt/Oder und Gera – Korrespondenzen und Materialien (11.1989 09.1990) |
| 2/PVBK000744 | SDP/SPD-Parteivorstand Referat Organisation; Sozialdemokraten helfen Sozialdemokraten. Unterstützung des Unterbezirk Kassel-Land für SPD-Eisenach u. Erfurt (1990) |
| 3/THLV000086 | SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Presse-Spiegel DDR; Sozialdemokratische Entwicklungskommission Hessen Thüringen (1990) |
| 3/THLV000091 | SPD-Landesverband Thüringen, Korrespondenz und Materialien (1990) |

Archiv der Stiftung Automobile Welt Eisenach (AdSAWE)

- | | |
|---------|--------------------|
| 30.8.1 | Technisches Archiv |
| 30.8.2 | Werksarchiv |
| 30.8.3 | Bildarchiv |
| No ref. | Der neue Motor |

Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (AGG)

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| C Thüringen I – LaVo/LGSt 3 | Grüne Partei DDR; Kandidaten der Volkskammerwahl 1990 |
| C Thüringen I – LaVo/LGSt 49 | Ablage Post, gesichtet und erledigt durch den Landesvorstand |

Bundesarchiv (BArch)

DQ 3/1885 Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne (SAL)

DC 20/I-3/2953 6. Sitzung des Ministerrates vom 16. Mai 1990

Landesarchiv Thüringen – Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (LATH – HStA Weimar)

6-62-0001-302 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt; Wahlkommission des Wahlkreises 4 – Bezirk Erfurt (Volkskammerwahl: 18. März 1990)

6-82-1001-1402 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Arbeitsmarktsituation, Schaffung und Abwicklung von Arbeitsplätzen und Einrichtung von Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM): Programme, Eingaben, Beschwerden, Statistiken und Stellungnahmen

6-82-1001-1304 Thüringer Staatskanzlei; Standortfragen zur Ansiedlung der Industrie in Thüringen

6-82-3001-256 Thüringer Wirtschaftsministerium; Treuhandangelegenheiten, Gemeinden E (ohne Erfurt)

Stadtarchiv Eisenach (StA Eisenach)

12-2203 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Allgemeiner Schriftverkehr des Bürgermeister 1989-1990

12-2298 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Neuverteilung von Gebäuden

12-2386 Städtische Akten bis 1990; Volkskammerwahl 1990

21.2-247 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1989-1990

21.2-361 Protokollbücher; Stadtverordnetenversammlung 1990

40.2-25 Nachlass Hasse; Wilhelmsthal / Runder Tisch

40.7 Sammlung Wende; Die andere Zeitung, Wahlmaterial Vereinigte Linke, Wahlmaterial CDU, Abberufung Stadtchronisten, Diverse Unterlagen Wendezeit, Diverse von Christhard Wagner, Verschiedene Zeitungsartikel, SPD-Ortsgruppe Eisenach; Chroniken der Wende.

41.9 Filmaufnahmen

50.3 Zeitungen; Lokalzeitungen 1990 (Band I, Band II), Lokalzeitungen 1991 (Band I, Band III)

Stadtarchiv Erfurt (StA Erfurt)

A16883	Oberbürgermeister Schriftverkehr 1990-1992
A31721	Stadtentwicklungsamt Bereich Statistik und Wahlen
1-5/1000	Stadtverordnetenversammlung und Rat der Stadt 1945-1990; Protokolle Stadtverordnetenversammlung, Februar - November 1989, Januar - März 1990, März - April 1990
1-5/10-9196	Unterlagen zu den Beratungen der Stadtverordneten- -versammlung
1-5/255559	Protokolle von Dialogen und Aussprachen; Dialog 25.10.1989, Dialog in der Thüringenhalle 28.10.1989, Dialog auf dem Domplatz 02.11.1989, Stadtverordnetenversammlung 06.11.1989
1-7	Stadtverwaltung Erfurt ab 1990
3800	Zeitungen; Neue Thüringer Illustrierte, Das Volk (1989), Allgemeiner Anzeiger, Wochen-Spiegel Erfurt
5/5	Parteien
5/783	Bürgerbewegung Sammlung
6/7	Tonbandaufnahmen; 'Die Wende in Erfurt 1989/90, Eine Tonbanddokumentation von Manfred Boettger', Studio B, 2000, Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 14./15. September 1990, Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 24. Oktober 1990, Versammlung des Rates der Stadt am 10. Juli 1991

Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv Erfurt (BStU)

Eft BdL 980	Büro der Leitung; Politisch-operative Arbeit; Kommunalwahlen 1989
-------------	---

*Private Collection Christhard Wagner (PCCW)**Private Collection Johannes Wallbrecht (PCJW)**Private Collection Brigitte Korndörfer (PCBK)**Private Collection Christian Herbst (PCCH)**Private Collection D.D. (name changed)*

Oral History Interviews

- Interview with Thomas Brohm, Ruhla, 15 February 2019
- Interview with D.D., Arnstadt, 24 February 2019 (name changed)
- Interview with Matthias Doht, Eisenach, 18 December 2017
- Interview with Franzisca Friedrich, Erfurt, 16 March 2018
- Interview with Carola and Christian Herbst, Eisenach, 04 July 2018
- Interview with Christian Köckert, Stedtfeld, 05 October 2018
- Interview with Brigitte Korndörfer, Eisenach, 19 December 2017
- Interview with Eckhard Lindner, Eisenach, 3 March 2017
- Interview with Hans-Peter Brodhun, Eisenach, 11 October 2018
- Interview with Wolfgang Mühle, Erfurt, 13 August 2018
- Interview with Ulrike Quentel, Eisenach, 17 January 2018
- Interview with Karola Stange, Erfurt, 14 September 2018
- Interview with Joachim Thureau, Eisenach, 22 August 2018
- Interview with Christhard Wagner, Erfurt, 12 October 2018
- Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Berlin, 09 February 2018
- Interview with Johannes Wallbrecht, Jena, 09 November 2018
- Interview with Klaus Wuggazer, 10 February 2018

Published Books

- Abrams, Lynn, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016)
- Allen, Danielle S., *Talking to Strangers. Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004)
- Baerens, Matthias & von Arnswald, Ulrich, *Die Müll-Connection. Entsorger und ihre Geschäfte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993)
- Bartee, Wayne C., *A Time to Speak Out. The Leipzig Citizen Protests and the Fall of East Germany* (Westport: Praeger, 2000)
- Barth, Thoralf, *Die Zentrale des Umbruchs von 1989/90. Meinungen über den Runden Tisch der DDR* (Berlin: Weißensee Verlag, 2009)
- Bathrick, David, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995)

- Bauer, Antje, *Erfurt. Bilder und Geschichte(n)* (Arnstadt: Kirschlager, 2017)
- Beckert, Jens, Diaz-Bohne, Rainer & Ganßmann, Heiner (Ed.), *Märkte als soziale Strukturen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007)
- Berdahl, Daphne, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (New York: University of California Press, 1999)
- Böick, Marcus, *Die Treuhand: Idee – Praxis – Erfahrung: 1990-1994* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018)
- Bräunicke, Sabine (et al.), *Die FRIEDLICHE REVOLUTION in Sondershausen* (Erfurt: Thüringer Landesbeauftragter für Stasi-Unterlagen, 2009)
- Breuel, Birgit, *Treuhand intern: Tagebuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993)
- Brooker, Paul, *Non-Democratic Regimes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- Brunner, Detlev, Kuhnhenne, Michaela & Simon, Hartmut, *Gewerkschaften im deutschen Einheitsprozess. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen in Zeiten der Transformation* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018).
- Cooke, Paul, *Representing East Germany since unification: from colonization to nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005)
- Couldry, Nick, *Why Voice Matters. Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010)
- Die Geschichte des Bürgerkomitees in Erfurt. Zeitzeugenberichte. Teil 2* (Erfurt: Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte e.V., 2010)
- Dornheim, Andreas, *Politischer Umbruch in Erfurt 1989/90* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1995)
- Dornheim, Andreas & Schnitzler, Stephan (Ed.), *Thüringen 1989/90. Akteure des Umbruchs* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 1995)
- Eckert, Rainer, *Revolution in Potsdam. Eine Stadt zwischen Lethargie, Revolte und Freiheit (1989/1990)* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsgesellschaft GmbH, 2017)
- Engler, Wolfgang, *Die Ostdeutschen als Avantgarde* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2004)
- Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1999)
- Erzigkeit, Ulrich, *Selbstbefreiung. Wie aus dem SED-Blatt „Volkswacht“ die unabhängige Regionalzeitung „Ostthüringer Zeitung“ (OTZ) wurde* (Essen: Klartext, 2015)
- Fraude, Andreas, *Die Friedliche Revolution in der DDR im Herbst 1989* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014)

- Friedrich, Margot, *Eine Revolution nach Feierabend. Eisenacher Tagebuch der Revolution* (Marburg: Eisenacher Presse, 1991)
- Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays* (New York: Perseus, 1973)
- Gieseke, Jens, *Die Stasi: 1945-1990* (München: Pantheon, 2011)
- Grosser, Dietmar, Müller, Hanno & Raue, Paul-Josef (Ed.), *Treuhand in Thüringen. Wie Thüringen nach der Wende ausverkauft wurde* (Essen: Klartext, 2013)
- Grix, Jonathan, *The Role of the Masses in the Collapse of East Germany* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000)
- Hacker, Michael (Ed.), *Dritte Generation Ost. Wer wir sind, was wir wollen* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2015)
- Hensel, Jana, *Zonenkinder* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2002)
- Herz, Andrea, *Wahl und Wahlbetrug im Mai 1989. DDR-Kommunalwahlen im Thüringer Raum* (Erfurt: Landesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, April 2004)
- Hirschman, Albert O., *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970)
- Hünniger, Andrea Hanna, *Das Paradies. Meine Jugend nach der Mauer* (Stuttgart: Tropen, 2011)
- Jäger, Wolfgang & Villinger, Ingeborg (Eds.), *Die Intellektuellen und die deutsche Einheit* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1997)
- Jarausch, Konrad (Ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a socio-cultural history of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999)
- Jaskułowski, Tytus, *Nachrichten aus einem Land, das DOCH existierte. Lageberichte aus den Bezirken für die letzte DDR – Regierung 1990* (Berlin: Osteuropa Zentrum, 2012)
- Kempken, Katharina (Ed.), *„Einspruch gegen die Gültigkeit der Wahl“ Die Kommunalwahlen in der DDR im Jahr 1989* (Berlin: Metropol, 2015)
- Kirchberg, Peter, *Plaste, Blech und Planwirtschaft. Die Geschichte des Automobilbaus in der DDR* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000)
- Kloth, Hans Michael, *Vom „Zettelfalten“ zum freien Wählen. Die Demokratisierung der DDR 1989/90 und die „Wahlfrage“* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2000)
- Korzilius, Sven, *„Asoziale“ und „Parasiten“ im Recht der SBZ/DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005)

- Kowalczyk, Ilko-Sascha, *Endspiel. Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (München: C.H.Beck, 2009)
- Krapfl, James, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013)
- Kukutz, Irena, *Chronik der Bürgerbewegung Neues Forum 1989-1990* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2009)
- Laabs, Dirk, *Der deutsche Goldtausch. Die wahre Geschichte der Treuhand* (München: Pantheon, 2012)
- Lenski, Katharina, *Geheime Kommunikationsräume? Die Staatssicherheit an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2015)
- Linck, Joachim, *Wie ein Landtag laufen lernte. Erinnerungen eines westdeutschen Aufbauhelfers in Thüringen* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2010)
- Lindenberger, Thomas, *Volkspolizei: Herrschaftspraxis und öffentliche Ordnung im SED Staat 1952-1968* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2003)
- Lock, Andy & Strong, Tom, *Social Constructionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2010)
- Lüdtke, Alf & Becker, Peter (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997)
- Maier, Charles, *Dissolution. The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)
- Major, Patrick, *Behind the Berlin Wall. East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)
- Mann, Alana, *Voice and Participation in Global Food Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019)
- Mestrup, Heinz & Remy, Dietmar (Ed.), „Wir können ja hier offen reden“. *Äußerungen vom Politbüro-Kandidaten und Erfurter Bezirks-Chef Gerhard Müller* (Erfurt: Landesbeauftragter des Freistaates Thüringen für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 1997)
- Meuschel, Sigrid, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945 – 1989* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993)
- Moritz, Marina & Moritz, Horst, *Ein besonderes Jahr. THÜRINGEN: MAI 1989 / MAI 1990* (Erfurt: Museum für Thüringer Volkskunde Erfurt, 2009)
- Müller, Birgit, *Die Entzauberung der Marktwirtschaft. Ethnologische Erkundungen in ostdeutschen Betrieben* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002)
- Muszynski, Bernhard (Ed.), *Deutsche Vereinigung. Probleme der Integration und der Identifikation* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1991)

- Neubert, Ehrhart, *Unsere Revolution. Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/90* (München: Piper, 2008)
- Neubert, Ehrhart & Auerbach, Thomas, „*Es kann anders werden. Opposition und Widerstand in Thüringen, 1945-1989* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005)
- Niethammer, Lutz, von Plato, Alexander & Wierling, Dorothee, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR; 30 biographische Eröffnungen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991)
- Pence, Katherine & Betts, Paul (Ed.), *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008)
- Pfaff, Steven, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006)
- Plamper, Jan, *Geschichte und Gefühl. Grundlagen der Emotionsgeschichte* (München: Siedler, 2012)
- Pötzl, Norbert, *DER TREUHAND KOMPLEX. Legenden. Fakten. Emotionen.* (Hamburg: Kursbuch Kulturstiftung gGmbH, 2019)
- Poiger, Uta, *Jazz, rock and rebels: cold war politics and American culture in a divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)
- Raßloff, Steffen, *Friedliche Revolution und Landesgründung in Thüringen 1989/90* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014)
- Romeike, Sanya, *Transitional Justice in Germany after 1945 and 1990* (Nuremberg: International Nuremberg Principles Academy, 2016)
- Rusch, Claudia, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2003)
- Sabrow, Martin (Ed.), *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012)
- Saunders, Anna, *Honecker's Children. Youth and patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979-2002* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
- Scherzer, Landolf, *Der Zweite* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1997)
- Schließt Euch an. Die Friedliche Revolution in Erfurt. Eine Dokumentation* (Erfurt: Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte e.V., 2014)
- Schmidt, Werner & Schönberger, Klaus, „*Jeder hat jetzt mit sich selbst zu tun*“. *Arbeit, Freizeit und politische Orientierungen in Ostdeutschland* (Konstanz: UVK, 1999)
- Schönfelder, Jan, *Kirche, Kerzen, Kommunisten : die demokratische Revolution in Neustadt an der Orla 1989/90* (Weimar: Hain, 2006)
- Schönfelder, Jan & Erices, Rainer, *Willy Brandt in Erfurt. Das erste deutsch-deutsche Gipfeltreffen 1970* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2010)

- Schroeder, Klaus, *Die veränderte Republik: Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Stamsried: Ernst Vögel, 2006)
- Schröter, Anja, *Ostdeutsche Ehen vor Gericht: Scheidungspraxis im Umbruch 1980 2000* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2018)
- Schuller, Wolfgang, *Die deutsche Revolution 1989* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009)
- Schuster, Franz, *Thüringens Weg in die Soziale Marktwirtschaft. Privatisierung, Aufbau. Eine Bilanz nach 25 Jahren* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2015)
- Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Unter Druck!: Medien und Politik* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2014)
- Stuhler, Ed, *Die Letzten Monate der DDR. Die Regierung de Maizière und ihr Weg zur deutschen Einheit* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2010)
- Thaysen, Uwe, *Der Runde Tisch. Oder: Wo blieb das Volk? Der Weg der DDR in die Demokratie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990)
- Trömmer, Markus, *Der verhaltene Gang in die deutsche Einheit. Das Verhältnis zwischen den Oppositionsgruppen und der (SED-)PDS im letzten Jahr der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002)
- Weil, Francesca, *Die Runden Tische in der DDR 1989/1990* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2014)
- Verhandelte Demokratisierung. Die Runden Tische der Bezirke 1989/90 in der DDR* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2011)
- Weisbrod, Bernd (Ed.), *Die Politik der Öffentlichkeit – Die Öffentlichkeit der Politik. Politische Medialisierung in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003)
- Wilson, Geoff A. & Wilson, Olivia J., *German Agriculture in Transition. Society, Policies and Environment in a Changing Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001)
- Wulf, Torsten & Hungenberg, Harald, *Transition Strategies. Cases from the East German Industry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)
- Wuschig, Ilona, *Anspruch ohne Wirklichkeit. 15 Jahre Medien in Ostdeutschland* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005)

Chapters in Edited Books

- Borodziej, Włodzimierz (et al.), 'Introduction', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanislaw Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1-9

- Borodziej, Włodzimierz, 'Poland and the Collapse of the Patron 1989-90. As seen from the Polish Embassy in Moscow', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanislaw Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 32-49.
- Brumlik, Micha, 'Postkoloniale Gesellschaft oder posttotalitäre Kultur? Das Demokratiedefizit der ostdeutschen Länder', in Sabine Andresen (et al.), *Vereintes Deutschland – geteilte Jugend. Ein politisches Handbuch* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003), pp. 283-298
- Calic, Marie-Janine, '1990. Building Democracy in Yugoslavia and the Danger of War', in Joachim von Puttkammer, Włodzimierz Borodziej & Stanislaw Holubec (Eds.), *From Revolution to Uncertainty. The Year 1990 in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 164-181.
- Diaz-Bone, Rainer, 'Habitusformierung und Theorieeffekte: Zur sozialen Konstruktion von Märkten', in Jens Beckert, Rainer Diaz-Bone & Heiner Ganßmann (Ed.), *Märkte als soziale Strukturen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), pp. 253-266
- Doßmann, Axel, 'Wir sind das Volk! Von der Stimmgewalt im Herbst 1989 – und von Volker', in Gerhard Paul, 'In einem stillen Land. Soundscape DDR', in Gerhard Paul & Ralph Schock (Eds.), *Sound der Zeit. Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen. 1889 bis heute* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), pp. 498-504
- Eley, Geoff, 'No Need to Choose: Cultural History and the History of Society', in Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger & Michael Wildt (Ed.), *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), pp. 61-73
- Engler, Wolfgang, 'Notizen zur Arbeitswelt der DDR. Arbeit als Grundlage des Sozialeigentums' in Andreas H. Apelt, Robert Grünbaum & Jens Schöne (Ed.), *Erinnerungsort DDR. Alltag – Herrschaft – Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), pp. 45-52
- Ute Frevert, 'Vertrauen. Historische Annäherungen an eine Gefühlshaltung', in Claudia Benthien, Anne Fleig & Ingrid Kasten (Eds.), *Emotionalität. Zur Geschichte der Gefühle* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 178-197
- Issen, Roland, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen für Gewerkschaften im Verwaltungsrat der Treuhandanstalt' in Detlev Brunner (et al.), *Gewerkschaften im deutschen Einheitsprozess. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen in Zeiten der Transformation* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), pp. 131-150.
- Jaskułowski, Tytus, 'The Party System and Democratic Consolidation – Poland and East Germany in Comparison', in Uwe Backes, Tytus Jaskułowski & Abel Polese (Eds.), *Totalitarismus und Transformation. Defizite der*

Demokratiekonsolidierung im Mittel- und Osteuropa (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), pp. 209-221

- Kott, Sandrine, 'Die „Arbeiterklasse an der Macht“: Die Geschichte der DDR aus der Randperspektive' in Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger & Michael Wildt (Ed.), *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), pp. 458-473
- Knuth, Matthias & Pekruhl, Ulrich, 'Der Beitrag von ABS-Gesellschaften zur Bewältigung des Transformationsprozesses' in Wolfram Pfeiffer (Ed.), *Regionen unter Anpassungsdruck. Zu den Schwerpunkten des regionalen Handlungsbedarfs* (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1993), pp. 95-126.
- Lehmann, Steffi, 'Rechtsextremismus in der DDR', in Sebastian Liebold, Tom Mannewitz, Madeleine Petschke & Tom Thieme (Ed.), *Demokratie in unruhigen Zeiten. Festschrift für Eckhard Jesse* (Baden-Baden: Nomis, 2018), pp. 99-108
- Lindenberger, Thomas, 'Everyday History: New Approaches to the History of the Post-War Germanies', in Christoph Kleßmann (Ed.), *The Divided Past. Rewriting Post-War German History* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 43-67
- Lozac'h, Valérie, 'Das Erbe der Vergangenheit als Strategie. Die „Alten“ und der Verwaltungsumbau in den ostdeutschen Kommunen' in Sandrine Kott & Emmanuel Droit (Ed.), *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft. Eine transnationale Perspektive* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2006), pp. 215-216
- Lüdtke, Alf, 'Sprache und Herrschaft in der DDR. Einleitende Überlegungen' in Alf Lüdtke & Peter Becker (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 11-28
- 'The World of Men's Work, East and West', in Katherine Pence & Paul Betts (Ed.), *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp. 234-249
- Meuschel, Sigrid, 'Revolution in der DDR. Versuch einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Interpretation', in Hans Joas & Martin Kohli (Ed.), *Der Zusammenbruch der DDR. Soziologische Analysen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 93-114
- Niethammer, Lutz, 'Fragen – Antworten – Fragen. Methodische Erfahrungen und Erwägungen zur Oral History' in Lutz Niethammer & Alexander von Plato (Ed.), *„Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten“. Auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1985), pp. 392-445

- Paul, Gerhard, 'In einem stillen Land. Soundscape DDR', in Gerhard Paul & Ralph Schock (Eds.), *Sound der Zeit. Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen. 1889 bis heute* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), pp. 465-471
- Pence, Katherine, 'Schaufenster des sozialistischen Konsums: Texte der ostdeutschen "consumer culture"' in Alf Lüdtke & Peter Becker (Ed.), *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 91-92
- Richter, Sebastian, 'Der Weg zur freien Volkskammerwahl am 18. März 1990' in Klaus Dietmar Henke (Ed.), *Revolution und Vereinigung 1989/90. Als in Deutschland die Realität die Phantasie überholte* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2009), pp. 329-342
- Weiffen, Brigitte, 'From Domestic to International Instruments for Dealing with a Violent Past: Causes, Concomitants and Consequences for Democratic Transitions' in Aleida Assmann & Linda Shortt (Ed.), *Memory and Political Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 89-111
- Wierling, Dorothee, 'Das weiblich-proletarische Tüchtigkeitsideal der DDR' in Peter Hübner & Klaus Tenfelde (Ed.), *Arbeiter in der SBZ - DDR* (Essen: Klartext, 1999), pp. 831-848

Journal Articles

- Betts, Paul, '1989 at Thirty: A Recast Legacy', *Past and Present*, 244 (2019), pp.271-305
- Brückweh, Kerstin & Villinger, Clemens, 'Sich nicht die Butter vom Brot nehmen lassen: ein Forschungsbericht zur Konsumgeschichte zwischen Alltag, Arbeit, Kapitalismus und Globalisierung', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 57 (2017), pp. 463-495
- Bruen, Jennifer, 'From Dictatorship to Democracy? The Impact of the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on Political Education in its Schools', *Journal of Political Science Education*, 10/3 (2014), pp. 315-330
- Flew, Terry, 'The citizen's voice: Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* and its contribution to media citizenship debates', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31/6 (2009), pp. 977-994.
- Goßmann, Till, 'Proteste gegen die Treuhandanstalt am Beispiel der Aktivitäten zum Erhalt der Ilmenauer Glaswerke 1993-1994', *Arbeit - Bewegung - Geschichte: Zeitschrift für Historische Studien*, 19/1 (2020), n.p.
- Jones, Sara, '(Extra)Ordinary Life. The Rhetoric of Representing the Socialist Everyday After Unification', *German Politics and Society*, 114/33 (2015), pp. 119-134

Richter, Michael, 'Die doppelte Demokratisierung - eine ostdeutsche Besonderheit der Transition', *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 3/1 (2006), pp. 79-97

Online Sources

Bangel, Christian (et al.), 'East-West Exodus. The Millions who left', *Zeit Online*, 30 May 2019, <<https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-05/east-west-exodus-migration-east-germany-demography?print>> (accessed 06 October 2019)

Baumann, Christiane, 'Die Geschichte einer Parteizeitung: Die Unabhängigkeitserklärung', *Thüringer Allgemeine* (02 January 2016) <<https://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/leben/vermisches/die-geschichte-einer-partezeitung-10-die-unabhaengigkeitserklaerung-id221428113.html>> (accessed 10 July 2019)

Brückweh, Kerstin, 'Wissen über die Transformation. Wohnraum und Eigentum in der langen Geschichte der »Wende«', *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 16 (2019), <<https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2019/5677>> (accessed 10 March 2020)

'David und Goliath, 1962, Fernsehinszenierung einer Komödie von Georg Kaiser', *Online Lexikon der DDR-Fernsehfilme, Fernsehspiele und TV Inszenierungen* <<http://www.fernsehenderddr.de/index.php?script=dokumentationsblatt-detail&id1=17227>> (accessed 25 June 2019)

'Der Thüringen Talk mit Sergej Lochthofen: Die Presse nach der Wende', Podcast, *Antenne Thüringen*, 28 August 2018 <<https://www.antennethueringen.de/blog/hashtag/antenne-thueringen-podcasts-368226>> (accessed 16 November 2018)

'Die Wartburg-Story', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAnsHGsPsCg&t=1228s>> (accessed 20 May 2019)

'Die Währungs- Wirtschaft- und Sozialunion 1990, 1. Juli 1990', *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung online*, <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschland-chronik/132256/1-juli-1990>> (accessed 21 March 2019)

Eisenfeld, Bernd, 'Ausreisen oder dableiben? Regulierungsstrategien der Staatsicherheit', *Reihe B: Analysen und Berichte*, 1/97 (Berlin: BStU, 1998) <<http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421304316>> (accessed 03 June 2018)

'Es geschah...in Erfurt - Helmut Kohl und die Allianz für Deutschland starten in den Wahlkampf 1990', *Deutschlandradio Kultur, Länderreport*, 19

February 2010 <<https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/es-geschah-in-erfurt-pdf.media.e18b948e2561b018dd91e619968ed6a7.pdf>> (accessed 04 February 2019)

'Es muß alles raus', *Der Spiegel*, 16 March 1990 <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13499332.html>> (accessed 29 March 2019)

'Gesetz über Parteien und andere politische Vereinigungen – Parteiengesetz', 21 February 1990 <https://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl_DDR1990_I_9.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2020)

Goschler, Constantin & Böick, Marcus, *Studie zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung der Treuhandanstalt* (Bochum: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2017) <<https://omp.ub.rub.de/index.php/RUB/catalog/book/103>> (accessed 25 February 2020)

'Im Laboratorium der Marktwirtschaft. Zur Geschichte der Treuhandanstalt 1989/90bis 1994', *Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin*, <<https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/aktuelles/themen/geschichte-der-treuhandanstalt/>> (accessed 12 January 2020)

Lindenberger, Thomas, 'Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Das Alltagsleben der DDR und sein Platz in der Erinnerungskultur des vereinten Deutschlands', *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (2000), <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/25409/herrschaft-und-eigen-sinn-in-der-diktatur>> (accessed 24 October 2016)

Müller, Hanno, 'Der Denkmalstreit von Erfurt', *Thüringer Allgemeine* (21 September 2015) <<http://www.thueringer-allgemeine.de/web/zgt/leben/detail/-/specific/Der-Denkmalstreit-von-Erfurt-513584068>> (accessed 25 November 2017)

'Ordnung zur Durchführung der Wahl zur Volkskammer der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Wahlordnung)', 20 February 1990 <https://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl_DDR1990_I_9.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2020)

Sengewald, Matthias, 'Befreiungsschlag gegen die DDR', *Gedächtnis der Nation*, <<https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/videos/4RpSX0cRncQ>> (accessed 10 May 2018)

'Schluss mit der Stasi', *Gedächtnis der Nation* <https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/personen/zeitzeuge/matthias_sengewald/videos/84kLxkkEa38> (accessed 10 May 2018)

Sontheimer, Michael, 'Willy Brandt in Erfurt. Politik aus dem Hotelfenster', *Der Spiegel Online* (12 March 2010) <<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/willy-brandt-in-erfurt-politik-aus-dem-hotelfenster-a-948767.html>> (accessed 25 November 2017)

- Taubert, Klaus, 'Erfurter Dombesetzung. Als die Orgel schweigen musste', *Der Spiegel Online* (01 July 2011), <<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/erfurter-dombesetzung-a-949234.html>> (accessed 10 May 2018)
- 'Vorläufiges Ergebnis der Wahl zur Volkskammer am 18. März', *Thüringische Landeszeitung*, 21 March 1990, in 'Schaukosten Folge 19', Bettina Fischer, *Landesarchiv Thüringen*, <https://www.thueringen.de/mam/th1/staatsarchiv/sk/folge_19.pdf> (accessed 01 March 1990)
- Klaus Wuggazer, 'Zeuchner und die erste deutsch-deutsche Zeitung', *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 06 February 2015 <<https://www.thueringerallgemeine.de/leben/land-und-leute/25-jahre-thueringen-zeuchner-und-die-erste-deutsch-deutsche-zeitung-id220688753.html>> (accessed 05 January 2020)

Unpublished Sources

- Baleva, Martina, 'Menschen in der Reihe. Ein visueller Topos der bulgarischen Wende', *Die revolutionären Umbrüche in Europa 1989/91: Deutungen und Repräsentationen*, 18. Internationales Symposium der Stiftung Ettersberg, Weimar, 01 November 2019
- Diekmann, Jolin, 'Ein Provinztheater probt den Dialog. Das Rudolstädter Theater 1987 bis 1990', Masters dissertation, Historical Institute, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Jena, 15 December 2017
- Elsner, Jessica, 'Soziale Ungleichheit auf betrieblicher Ebene in der Transformationszeit 1989/1990 am Beispiel des Automobilwerkes Eisenach (AWE)', *Geschichte der Arbeitswelten und der Gewerkschaften*, 10. Kolloquium, Augsburg, 22 February 2019