



Volume 9. Two Germanies, 1961-1989
Economic and Social Policy at the Local Level (1986)

In a book that became a GDR bestseller, Landolf Scherzer reports on the difficulties of party politics at the local level. In this account, the first district secretary of the SED in Bad Salzungen asks, among other things, whether East Germans who demand better services from the state would be willing to work harder to make them a reality.

Tuesday, December 2 Yellowed Slogans

The mild autumn days are over. This morning the rain froze into a transparent icy skin.

HDF¹ and I go slipping and sliding through the city. The party leadership is meeting in the cold rolling mill in the Salzungen plant, which, according to the “state plan project,” will be enlarged twice in the coming years. It contains one of the most modern roll stands of the COMECON and the production of extremely thin sheet steel is supposed to increase 100 percent ...

Horst Gubitz, party secretary, meets us by the gatekeeper. He’s beaming.

The First² asks why he is so happy. (Maybe happy people who are full-time party secretaries are suspicious – with the exception of the party at the Kissel,³ I hadn’t seen any happy ones in four weeks).

The plan has been exceeded, Horst Gubitz says, and besides that the party’s program [*Kampfprogramm*] for 1987 is finished ...

HDF offers praise and then says: “But look, above the gatehouse and over there at the administration building ...”

White writing, already illegible, on red fabric. He recently counted seventeen of these slogans in the plant, HDF says, every one of them “from crooked to slanting.” He asks if the workers work better if for five years they keep reading that the decisions of the 11th Party Congress have been fulfilled, and if afterwards the 11 is replaced with a 12 ...

¹ Reference to Hans-Dieter Fritschler, main protagonist of the report – eds.

² Reference to Fritschler’s role as First Secretary in the SED county leadership of Bad Salzungen – eds.

³ Lodge and Restaurant Kissel in the Thuringian Forest – eds.

[. . .]

The program [for the company party leadership] is not rolled thin, it is eighteen pages altogether; ... 95 percent of all apprentices are supposed to do the work of a skilled tradesman right after they finish their training ... the production must be computer-controlled ... fifty percent of the workers are supposed to participate in the innovation process, exactly 72 percent of them young people; ... exports are supposed to increase 200 percent, ... rejects lowered ten percent ... Q production raised 80 percent ...

Behind thirty-six combat positions it says: Responsible – BD (that means *Betriebsdirektor*, plant director). Deadline – ongoing.

The BD cannot participate in the party leadership meeting; he was called to Berlin on short notice by the minister. I try to imagine how many work days he alone would need to control and analyze all thirty-six of his positions once a month and give instructions....

[. . .]

Three years ago it was still possible to run through the cold rolling mill in ten minutes. Today you need three-quarters of an hour for it. Longer than for the entire town center of Salzgungen, says HDF. The party should think in that kind of magnitude when they work out programs ...

[HDF continues]: As casually as the economic strategy of the party – the unity of economic and social policy – is repeated before every talk, every discussion, it is not all that easy to implement in practice. To assert the economic policy here in the cold rolling mill – two-digit increase rates are to be achieved with new technology – that’s a reasonable, calculable, and, despite all the problems, solvable task. The social policy, too, the improved working conditions, a new cafeteria ... everything in this case could be planned and is a familiar quantity. It would even be relatively simple to explain the unity of economic and social policy in such a way that everyone understood: The faster and cheaper the production in the factories, the more apartments that can be built and the more daycare facilities there could be. Even with the slogan: “We are accomplishing something, we’re accomplishing something *for ourselves*,” it would be generally possible to argue very convincingly, says The First, and then continues: But as soon as things get concrete, in the basic organization and with each and every comrade in the factory – where all strategies are first implemented – things are more complicated. People like to talk and write about the “We are accomplishing something for ourselves”: the new apartment, the new youth club, the color TV. But not everyone would be prepared to talk openly and honestly with the same enthusiasm about what each one, really each individual, does in return. But only there do we finally come full circle: with the work of the individual, the connection between economic and social policy. That is why the programs of the party, which were put together in these days, included not only economic tasks, but especially also questions of ideology, openness, honesty, criticism and self-criticism. Just like the party decided ...

Source: Landolf Scherzer, *Der Erste. Eine Reportage aus der DDR* [*The First. Reportage from the GDR*]. Cologne, 1989, pp. 196-200.

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