



Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

Report by the Central Women's Committee (Bergmann-Borsig) on the Tenth Anniversary of the Women's Committees (1962)

This report by the Central Women's Committee [*Zentraler Frauenausschuss*] of the Bergmann-Borsig enterprise criticized the lack of women in its middle and upper management – a lack that persisted despite the presence of qualified candidates. Evidently, in this East German enterprise, official propaganda had not succeeded in eliminating the traditional biases against women in industry. The directive that men and women be treated equally in the workplace was not being followed.

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Dear Colleagues,

We are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Women's Committees (January 8, 1962) at a momentous time – a few weeks after the world-historical XXIIth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1961).

At this Congress, the program for the development of the Soviet Union over the next twenty years was adopted. Among other things, this program envisions the following after the passing of two decades:

- free placement of children in educational institutions or boarding schools;
- free use of apartments as well as free use of municipal services;
- free use of municipal means of transportation;
- free use of a few kinds of other services;
- ever greater grants of assistance, for example, assistance for single mothers and mothers with numerous children;
- gradual transition to free meals in restaurants, that is, lunch in factories and so on.

This is an outlook that also inspires us women in the German Democratic Republic. [ . . . ]

Four [of our female] colleagues [here at Bergmann-Borsig] qualified for leadership positions, of those, colleagues AAAA and BBBB left, while colleagues CCCC and DDDD remained in the enterprise. However, neither of these women hold upper or mid-level positions in the enterprise.

Let the facts speak for themselves. There are only male directors in our enterprise; even their assistants are men. No women are to be found among the masters and department heads. Are

there no options in our enterprise for training women for leadership positions and employing them in this capacity?

We believe there are. Why should it not be possible for a woman to qualify as a master in mass-market demands or generator building?

Would it not be possible to train female masters in quality control or shovel milling? We think that it would most definitely be possible.

Have there been no qualified women at Bergmann-Borsig thus far who would have been employable in mid-level or leading positions? Reality proves otherwise. In the area of work administration alone there are two women with university qualifications as economists. One colleague earned her degree from the technical school as a labor economist, and one colleague is still completing her course of studies at the technical school. However, all group leaders are men – the division head and his second-in-command, how could it be otherwise – a man! And let it be noted merely as an aside that *neither* one of them has a university education. At a recent meeting, no one denied that these women have the political or professional ability for higher positions – there was only one thing they supposedly lack, and which their male colleagues naturally possess – namely, the ability to lead. We ask those responsible in the work administration, what is being done to change this situation?

Let us look at another example. Until 1961, the department of economic control had two women with a university degree as economists. One wanted a different task, since she saw no future in the job she had been doing up to that time. Consideration was given to making her assistant to the chief designer of generators. That failed. Then she was supposed to be put in the division for New Technology. That failed. The argument: “This colleague lacked the requisite technical knowledge.” Comrade Chief Accountant, don’t you think that it would have been worthwhile to equip this still-young colleague with the technical know-how? This young colleague has left our enterprise in the meantime.

[ . . . ]

These few examples alone clearly show that the economic, party, and union functionaries underestimate the role of women in socialist society.

How does the Bergmann-Borsig enterprise intend, for example, to get more women to train for a technical vocation if current practice clearly demonstrates that qualified women who are already here are left to rot?

In addition, we note that our [male] co-workers in leadership positions are engaged in cadre politics that run counter to the nature of our state. For example, when a “well-paid permanent position” has to be filled it is common practice to hire a man. And it matters nothing that he has come from an unrelated area of work. He is immediately given the corresponding salary. Instead of entrusting a long-time, work-experienced female colleague with this job and offering support,

this colleague has the honor of imparting her knowledge and experience to the person who knows nothing. What goes without saying for male colleagues with a university degree becomes a problem for women. [ . . . ]

A few more remarks about the activist movement. Over the past ten years, 24 female colleagues have received a state award – an activist award or a medal for outstanding performance. Among them are three colleagues, colleague T., colleague S., and colleague J., who received this award twice. And we can proudly report that colleague F. R. is already a six-time activist. She is also the one who, as the only representative of our enterprise in the highest organ of our state, the People's Chamber [*Volkskammer*], represents the interests of the workers as a deputy.

This stands in sharp contrast to the number of activist designations among our 456 male colleagues. This is truly a disgraceful balance sheet for the men. We most certainly cannot claim that our women and girls have no or fewer activist accomplishments. No, that is not the way it is. But why does one not see the performance of our female workers at the stamping press in the generator building or in the milling shop, women who work diligently and with a sense of responsibility in the shift system, who avoid waiting periods, do quality work, do not dawdle, who hold their own in the production crew, and take care of the household and the children? Surely only because a few male colleagues do not want to cast off the old attitude of seeing women only as “Kochtopfaspiranten” and “Latschwärmer” [cooking pot aspirants and slipper warmers] and who have not yet grasped the new, the great transformation of women in our socialist state.

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