

The Rise and Fall of a Socialist Welfare State

The German Democratic Republic (1949-1990) and German Unification (1989-1994)

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Social Policy in the German Democratic Republic

Manfred G. Schmidt

1 Introduction

This chapter describes, explains, and evaluates the social policy of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from the creation of that state on 7 October 1949 to the accession of its *Länder* (states) to the Federal Republic of Germany on 3 October 1990. What effects did the GDR's social policy have? How did it influence the social situation of the population and the stratification of the society in East Germany? How and how much did dictatorship and socialist statism mark social policy? What shape did social policy assume in the final year of East Germany's socialist state particularly after the fall of Erich Honecker¹ in October 1989 and that of his successor, Egon Krenz?² What did social policy of the GDR have in common with the critical junctures of social policy in pre-1945 Germany? At what point did it abandon old paths? Lastly, what distinguished the social policy of the GDR from that in other socialist states and from the welfare state in the Federal Republic of Germany prior to 1990? These questions guide the following analysis of the main features of social policy in former East Germany.

¹ Honecker (1912–1994) was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) from 1958 to 1989 and General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED from 1971 to 1989. As First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, he succeeded Walter Ulbricht in 1971. From 1976 to 1989, he chaired the State Council of the GDR. He resigned from all posts on 18 October 1989 and was expelled from the SED on 3 December of that year.

² Krenz was born in 1937 and was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED from 1983 to 1989. He succeeded Honecker as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED from 18 October to 3 December 1989 and as Chairman of the State Council of the GDR from 24 October to 6 December 1989. On 21 January 1990 Krenz was expelled from the SED, which was eventually renamed the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

1.1 *Political and Economic Structures of the German Democratic Republic*

The GDR saw itself as the state of the “*Arbeiter- und Bauern-Macht*,” that is, as a state manifesting the power of workers and peasants, as a “dictatorship of the proletariat,”³ or, in the official terminology, as a “socialist democracy” (Gesetzblatt der DDR, part 1, p. 432⁴; see also Mampel 1997; Roggemann 1989). But in contrast to a constitutional democracy of western European and North American origins, democracy in socialist East Germany meant unconstrained leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). It was no idle claim but rather stark constitutional reality that the society, the economy, and policy-making in the GDR bore the indelible stamp of SED supremacy and socialist statism until the end of the “Honecker era” (Glaeßner 1988).⁵

Outwardly, a system of “bloc parties” characterized the political landscape of the GDR.⁶ But the bloc-party system was controlled by the SED, the “state party” of

³ Programm der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands vom 22. Mai 1976 (1982, p. 75). The concept comes from the doctrine of Karl Marx (1890–1891/1970b), who referred to the transition period between capitalist and communist society as a “revolutionäre Diktatur des Proletariats” (revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat) (p. 24). To Engels (1891/1970, p. 453), the classic example of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the Commune of Paris (March to May 1871), the revolutionary regime set up in Paris after the insurrection by socialists and communists – the Communards – in the context of the armistice in the Franco-Prussian war. Marx celebrated the Commune in his *Political Writings* (e.g., Marx, 1890–1891/1970b). He saw its historical merit in its contribution to shattering the ancien regime’s class rule and in the Commune’s effort to replace the old regime with the supremacy of a “government of the working class” based on a direct democratic order and to striving for a new social order (Marx 1891/1970a, p. 490). Absolute supremacy of the political typified the GDR regime as well. But unlike the government of the working class as advocated by Marx, the political leadership in the GDR set store by “socialist democracy,” meaning – first and foremost – political hegemony of the SED.

⁴ Article 17 of the East German constitution of 6 April 1968, as amended on 27 September 1974 in the *Official Statute Register of the German Democratic Republic* (hereafter referred to as *GBl. der DDR*, part 1, p. 432), see Mampel (1997), Roggemann (1989).

⁵ On the change after Honecker, see Sect. 5.4. Unless otherwise expressly stated, the characterizations of the GDR in this chapter refer to the East German state from the time it was founded to the end of the SED regime in December 1989 and early 1990.

⁶ A system of bloc parties was the norm in the socialist countries of central and eastern Europe from the 1950s to the late 1980s, except for the Soviet Union, where the Communist Party of the Soviet Union remained the only party until the second half of the 1980s. Until the regime shift in the GDR in 1989–1990, the bloc known as the National Front consisted of the SED in coalition with the East German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPD), the National Democratic Party (NDPD), the Democratic Agrarian Party (DBD), and the mass organizations – The Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB), the Free German Youth (FDJ), the Cultural Alliance of the GDR (Kulturbund der DDR, KB), the Democratic League of Women (Demokratischer Frauenbund, DFD), and the Association for Peasants’ Mutual Aid (Vereinigung für gegenseitige Bauernhilfe, VgB). With the main rule being subordination to the SED, however, the scope that all other bloc parties had for action was extremely small. The number of seats that the bloc parties and the associations had in parliament was stipulated before elections. Of the 500

East Germany's socialism (Henkel 1994; Suckut and Süß 1997), and the bloc parties submitted to the SED's claim to leadership. The SED was beholden to the tradition of a Marxist-Leninist "combat party."⁷ It conceived of itself as a class-conscious vanguard of the working class (see Herbst et al. 1997). Its roots reached from the ideology, platform, and practice of the German Communist Party of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) to the ideas basic to the left-wing socialist currents in the interwar period and stretched deep into Soviet Marxist theory and practice, especially Leninism and Stalinism.

The degree of pluralism that the GDR permitted in interest articulation and interest aggregation was slight, even by the standards of the other socialist countries in central and eastern Europe. At the same time, the degree of the country's partisan politicization was unusually intense. Both conditions of political life have justifiably received a good deal of attention from scholars examining the GDR. These researchers have varied in their focus and their assessment of the nature of East Germany's socialism, however. One group, for the most part those observers versed in theories of totalitarianism, has stressed totalitarian facets (e.g., Jesse 1999; Seidel and Jenkner 1976). Others have seen the determinants of the GDR's structures to lie in the pervasive control of society (Kocka 1995), omnipresent and almost omnipotent political power (Schroeder 1998, pp. 633, 642, as opposed to Kocka 1995), or the limits of politicization, notably in idiosyncratic social developments (Huinink et al. 1995). These characterizations are not mutually exclusive. The GDR had them all. It definitely had inherent totalitarian traits (Schroeder 1998). Nonetheless, totalitarianism was not the only feature of East German socialism. Rule in the GDR rested on hierarchical control, command, and repression, but it also encompassed more convoluted interconnections to which both the rulers and the ruled contributed. The complex relations between "master" and "servant" included consultation and efforts by the rulers to legitimate themselves, except when they were obsessed with ruining people subject to them. Such forces of destruction, too, existed in East German socialism, one of them being politically motivated punitive judicature.⁸ But that blight never determined structures as much in the GDR as it had in the National Socialist state. Granted, the subjects of the GDR exhibited pronounced "submissiveness" (Niethammer 1997, pp. 314; see Niethammer et al. 1991) and an orientation to the collective, but there was individual willfulness, too (see Huinink et al. 1995). And willfulness sets limits even on dictatorial rule. Moreover, institutions

seats in the People's Chamber in September 1989 (i.e., before the regime shift), the SED held 127; the CDU, LDPD, NDPD, and DBD, 52 each; the FDGB, 61; the FDJ, 37; the DFD, 32; the KB, 21; and the VgB, 14.

⁷ The SED saw itself as "the party of the working class and the entire working population" and at the same time as "a Marxist-Leninist combat party" (Protokoll 1963, p. 299; see Herbst et al. 1997).

⁸ Between 1949 and 1989, an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 people were imprisoned in the GDR for political reasons. From 1945 to 1981, East German trial courts resorted to capital punishment as an instrument of politicized criminal law. In that period they handed down 372 death sentences (136 cases relating to charges of Nazi crimes), of which 206 were carried out (Deutscher Bundestag 1999k, p. 173). On politicized judicial power in the GDR, see Fricke (2000), for example.

changed considerably in the course of the GDR's history – politically, socially, and economically. Overlying the totalitarian elements of the GDR, above all in the post-Stalinist phase, was a tightly organized, ever watchful authoritarian state with “consultative authoritarianism” in some areas (Ludz 1970, pp. 35–36, 98–99, 324–325).⁹

The unusually extensive party politicization of East Germany enveloped the entire political, social, and economic machinery and infused it with a Marxist-Leninist ideology. In this respect, as noted by Kocka (1995), the SED “completely subjugated the state, sucked it dry as it were, and took its place” (p. 596). One may therefore justifiably classify the GDR as a developed party-state. And because of the SED's claim to leadership as well as the party's de facto supremacy, it is fully warranted to typify the GDR as an SED state¹⁰ though not all of its political and social structures are captured by that term.

As regards political power and political stability, the foundation of the SED state derived from the protection afforded by the Soviet Union and the Red Army troops stationed in the country, whereas the socioeconomic foundation of the SED state resided in the compulsory transition to a centrally managed socialist economy based primarily on state ownership, with ownership by collectives and production cooperatives playing a complementary role.

1.2 *Social Policy GDR Style*

The upheaval of the political, social, and economic order in the GDR, as in the Soviet zone of occupation that preceded it from 1945 through most of 1949, added yet another momentous regime change to the turbulent political history Germany had experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The consequences of that shift are probed in this chapter through the prism of social policy.

According to the philosophy of the government and its politically hegemonic party, the SED, the rise of socialism in East Germany was a blessing for the vast majority of the population. From the outset, the country's political leadership prided itself on great “social achievements,” many of which, in its view, had been accomplished by the nearly total suppression of private businesses and organizations and the development of a planned economy. Reinforced by this transformation, the East German political elite held the conviction, fed by Marxism-Leninism, that the socialist mode of production itself was the superior economy and society. The institutionalization of the right to work in the constitution of the GDR ranked as a further “historical achievement.” The leadership also usually extolled

⁹ See Schroeder (1998, p. 648), to whom the political history of the GDR illustrates a shift from a violent totalitarian system to a repressive late-totalitarian welfare state.

¹⁰ Schroeder (1998), see also von Beyme and Zimmermann (1984), Deutscher Bundestag (1999a, b, c, d, e, f, g, k), Fulbrook (1995), Kaelble et al. (1994), Malycha and Winters (2009), Pirker et al. (1995), Richter (2009), Ritter (1998, 2002), Stolleis (2009a), Weber (1999, 2000).

the comprehensive price subsidies it maintained for basic goods and services, including passenger transport and deliveries of electricity, gas, and water. These subsidies were, in a sense, the GDR's equivalent of the "politics of price stability" (Busch 1995) popular in the western part of Germany.

These persuasions and accomplishments and all the other aspects of social policy were regarded by the political leadership as the explicit manifestation of the aspiration to serve "the good of the people." This aspiration was anchored in East Germany's constitution of 1968 and in the constitution of 1974, in which the first sentence of Article 4 reads: "All power serves the good of the people."¹¹ Prevailing opinion in the GDR was said to leave no doubt that the SED state had met that claim. As Honecker reported at the Eleventh Party Congress of the SED (Berlin 1986), for instance, "We are guaranteed social security and safety, full employment, equal educational opportunities for all children of the people" (as quoted in Winkler 1989, p. 232). His words were a blend of description, palliation, and propaganda. But they expressed a view that much of the East German population shared. To this day, not a few citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany's new *Länder* regard the social policy of the former GDR, particularly job security, as its best aspect and as a beacon for policy in the united Germany (see BISS 1990; Grundmann 1993; Hanke 1995; Schöppner 1997).

1.3 Research Questions, Data Base, and Theoretical Frame of Reference

Is the positive assessment of the GDR's social policy appropriate? Or does it come from the transfiguring retrospective that makes yesterday's daily concerns look rosy compared to today's? Does the praise of social policy in East German socialism hold up under scientific scrutiny? And what remains of its glorification when its shortcomings as well as its merits are taken into account along with trade-offs between social protection and other goals such as economic performance (Okun 1975)? The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the principles of social policy in the GDR and to assess them for their strengths and weaknesses as far as the tools of research permit. The intention is to provide an overview, not a detailed description of sociopolitical developments in individual policy fields and phases of East German history.

This treatment is based chiefly on analyses of published documents and the literature on social policy and its societal and political setting in the GDR. A historical and international comparative perspective on the social policy of the GDR is taken where these sources allow it. The point of departure and academic

¹¹ The phrase – definitely meant in the sense of class struggle – applied to social policy as well, notably under Honecker (see Trümpler et al. 1980, 1986).

lens for inspecting the facts, analyzing the documents, and consulting the studies by other specialists is the empirical analytical school of comparative public policy research that has developed mostly in political science and is basically receptive to sociology, macroeconomic theory, and social law (see Schmidt 1993b, 2005a, b, c, d, 1997). This study is empirical in nature, but it also draws on hypotheses and theoretical components for the analysis and interpretation of the data. The work is guided by the expanded political-institutionalist approach,¹² which has proven to be especially powerful and compatible with observations and theories from other schools of thought in cross-national public policy research.

1.4 Structure of this Chapter

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section presents the conceptualization of East German social policy. The most important institutions of the East German welfare state are depicted in the second section. The features characterizing the discourse and decision-making process underlying that social policy are discussed in the third section. The fourth section explores social policy as a political process by going into selected stages and developments, including social policy in the GDR's final year, the period after what Glæßner (1988) calls the "Honecker era." The fifth section takes stock of the structure and the impacts of the socialist welfare state in East Germany and discusses the influence that social policy had on the East German population. Both topics are addressed with developments mainly through late 1989 and early 1990 in mind. This section also raises the question of whether – and to what extent – social policy accomplished the mission of bestowing legitimacy and instilling the motivation to work. The sixth section brings a comparative perspective to East German social policy during the years from 1949 to 1989–1990, that is, up to the crucial choices that led to Germany's unification. The final section outlines the continuity and discontinuity of social policy in the Soviet zone of occupation, the GDR, and the new *Länder* after the constitutional unification of Germany in 1990.

¹² It directs attention particularly to the relationship between policy output on one hand and policy input and its context on the other. Policy output includes social policy decisions, their results, and their sediments in the form of institutions of the social safety net. Policy input and its context refer mainly to the political process, the constitutional structures of the state, the distribution of power between social groupings and political forces, political culture, socioeconomic constraints of policy-making, and the impact of international and transnational factors (see Schmidt 2005d).

2 Socialist Social Policy

2.1 *Integrative Functions of Social Policy*

Social policy was understood in a very broad sense in the GDR, as in the other socialist states of central and eastern Europe (von Beyme 1975, pp. 233–284; Hoffmann and Schwartz 2005; Leenen 1985). It had functions of system integration and social integration.¹³ To promote system integration, social policy in the GDR strove to flank, shield, and stabilize the socialist social and economic order and its political sub- and superstructure. Another purpose was to raise the labor productivity of the “*Werkstätigen*,” that is, the “working population” by intensifying its motivation. As for social integration, the primary intent behind social policy was to protect the country’s population against impoverishment, to provide insurance against typical risks posed by an industrial society, and to supply “emergency aid against war-induced burdens” (Kleßmann 2003, p. 77). Protection was extended first to the working population, the priority being on those in the socialist enterprises and the quasi-socialist cooperative associations and production cooperatives. Specifically, it included coverage against risks of losing income as a result of age, disability, illness, maternity, or death of the breadwinner. Social policy in the GDR also aimed at reducing social inequality, particularly that between social classes and status groups. Minimum support sufficient for a livelihood at a meager level was part of the social policy goals. It included consumer-oriented social policy, notably the state’s subsidization of basic goods and services.

Social policy expanded above all in the 1970s (see Kleßmann 2006). The main additions included accelerated housing construction and a pronatalist policy designed to boost the birthrate by making maternity, child-rearing, and gainful employment mutually compatible. The government thereby sought to attain objectives of employment policy and population policy in one stroke. The status of company-based social policies and of social policy focusing on leisure time and recreation was upgraded, too. In the 1970s and 1980s, the price subsidies for basic goods and services, including rents, local public transport, and utilities (gas, electricity, and water), also gained importance and provided protection against material impoverishment especially for low-income groups (see Boyer et al. 2008; Steiner 2006, 2008; Winkler 1989).

¹³ System integration focuses on the integration of orderly or conflicting relations between subsystems, whereas social integration emphasizes the integration of individuals or collective actors (Lockwood 1971).

2.2 *Politico-Ideological Aversions*

The degree to which the far-reaching scope of social policy was taken for granted in East Germany in the 1970s and 1980s belies the fact that the term *social policy* had been suspect until the mid-1960s. Up to that point, one of the peculiarities of East German social policy was an incongruity between official party ideology and what the government actually did. Social policy had long played a role, but the term social policy remained peripheral in official party terminology in the 1950s and early 1960s (Winkler 1988, p. 21). That mismatch was odd, particularly because the SED had explicitly championed social policy in the Soviet zone of occupation (see Wengst 2001). For example, a key document on the planning of government responsibilities – the “Social Policy Guidelines” adopted by the SED on 30 December 1946 (*Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* 1948, pp. 131–135) – still called a spade a spade. In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, the SED and its sympathizers were inclined to disregard the concept of social policy.

Several things were responsible for this turn. In the SED and the state apparatus, the conviction was prevalent that the combination of a planned economy and full employment would essentially meet the population’s material and cultural needs. This stance appeared justified because planning also applied to wages and, together with job security, was intended to guarantee an income that ensured a basic livelihood. It thus seemed possible even to plan individual and social consumption. A separate, independent social policy would be unnecessary. Indeed, the planning experts feared that it might only interfere, especially because its imponderable risks eluded the precise accounting that went with a planned economy (Dr. P. Hübner, Center for Research on Contemporary History, Potsdam).¹⁴

Moreover, there was uncertainty about the correct ideological status of social policy. Not a few members of the SED associated social policy with the class adversary. In the 1950s, SED cadres with extraordinarily strict ideological leanings still thought of social policy for the most part as a “hospital ward for the victims of capitalism” (Ritter 1998, p. 162). To dogmatic SED members, the term social policy carried the tabooed connotation of “social democracy” or “social reformism.” It seemed advisable to many economists to downplay social policy rather than push for it, for it might otherwise undermine the priority of capital investment (or socialist *accumulation* as the term was known in the official vocabulary of the GDR) and thereby hamper the envisioned development and expansion of socialism.

Another issue enveloping the term social policy was the aversion to “harassing fire” from the “class enemy.” Was not social policy part of the old social question of the split between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie? Was social policy not an instrument with which the rulers sought to paper over class division within society and to co-opt the labor force? Should it be continued in the GDR, the very place

¹⁴ Personal communication, 4 April 2000.

where received doctrine held that socialism had been built up and that the social question had thereby been eliminated? Had not the grounds for old-style social policy all but vanished according to this ideology?

Ideology and practice are two different things, however, and East German social policy was no exception. Despite the SED's official vocabulary, the term social policy had been current among the administrators of social services in the 1950s, especially in general health policy, occupational health and safety, provisions for old age, and company based social policies (Boldorf 1998; Hübner 1995). And anyone who wished could see from the nomenclature used in the People's Chamber that the expression *social policy* was not disapproved of in principle. When the People's Chamber Committee for Labour and Health was divided into two separate bodies on 18 January 1957, the newly created one was named the People's Chamber Committee for Labour and Social Policy.

2.3 *The Upgrading of Social Policy as of the 1960s*

The reservations about the ideologically proper standing of social policy waned only little by little. The value attached to the concept and application of social policy did appreciate during the 1960s, before power passed from Walter Ulbricht¹⁵ to Erich Honecker (see Kaiser 1997a; Kleßmann 2006; Ulbricht 1965). Among doctrinaire members of the SED, capitalism's bequest of imperfections and social weaknesses that arise independently from the mode of production may have been the overriding justification for social policy's gradual ascendance. From this perspective it was plausible to interpret the expansion of social policy as an unprecedented social achievement, as one of the envisioned showcase projects in the competition with the western capitalist world. It was also recognized that typical problems with which social policy dealt – the risks accompanying old age, disability, illness, and maternity to name a few – did not stop at socialism's door. Ever greater administrative professionalization in the social services likewise sharpened the sense that the changes typical in the socialist countries were seeding new social tensions that called for a collective solution. The idea of “nonantagonistic contradictions” was an ideologically admissible phrase for these transformations. They encompassed, for instance, conflicts between the interest in preserving the status quo and adaptation to side-effects of economic trends such as technologically caused labor displacement, technologically caused redefinitions of jobs, and tensions between needs and ways to meet them (Lampert and Schubert 1982).

¹⁵ Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973) was Deputy Chairman of the SED (1946–1950), General Secretary (1950–1953), and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED (1954–1971). As head of state, he chaired both the State Council (1960–1971) and the National Defense Council of the GDR. He was replaced as leader of the SED by Erich Honecker in 1971.

Social policy's upgrade resulted from bottlenecks in the supply of consumer goods as well, like those from 1961 to 1963, and from plans for economic reform in the 1960s. Reform-minded SED leaders and planning experts hoped that these reforms would foster intelligent control of production and consumption and would enhance economic efficiency. They wanted to bring personal material interests to bear, by which they also meant that social policy was to make an independent contribution to productivity. The GDR leadership expected this approach to make substantial progress toward realizing the incessantly implored "increase in the material and cultural living standard of the working class and all working people," to quote a standard propaganda formula of East German socialism. Economic shifts, too, had their impact on social policy in the 1960s, with new home-made uncertainty being spawned by technology's elimination of jobs, by wage readjustment, and by anxiety about whether the GDR's scanty retirement pensions would be enough to live on in old age. Lastly, social policy benefited from the realization that it stood the best chance of pacifying a restive labor force and preventing a situation like that in Poland, where protests against hikes in food prices had escalated on 12 December 1970 and eventually toppled the head of the Polish Communist Party (see Kleßmann 2006, pp. 60–61). Succeeding Władysław Gomułka as party boss, Edward Gierek, unlike his predecessor, made social policy concessions to the population.

2.4 Social Policy and the "Work Society"

An astute observer once described the GDR as a state in which "the human being is apprehended as a laborer" (Richert 1966, p. 47). Without expressly drawing on this view, sociologists and historians later classified the GDR as an "*Arbeitsgesellschaft*," a "work society," as a society that puts priority on work and "*den Werktätigen*," the "working person" – the paragon of the citizen as both an agent of production and an owner of the means of production – and possesses in work the pivotal mode of structuring interests and institutions and of forming identity (Hoffmann and Schwartz 2004; Kohli 1994, p. 38; Thaa 1989). Of course, the GDR was more than just a work society. Nevertheless, the term is instructive for a better understanding of the GDR as a whole and for the exploration of social policy in particular, for East German social policy revolved around work and helped consolidate the country's character as a work society. Social policy was not tailored primarily to the citizen of the state but rather to the "*Arbeitsbürger*" (Götting 1998, p. 61), the "working citizen," and was designed to mobilize as many people as possible for work activity. Many different aspects were concealed behind this concept, including a tenet from the philosophy of history according to which salvation lay in gainful employment and the development of productive forces. Another aspect was an anthropologic vision that stressed the "sociality of man" (Lampert 1990, p. 15). Scarcely less central was the sheer lack of choice in the matter. The prevailing opinion was that the GDR, which working people had fled in droves until the Wall was built in August 1961, had to mobilize all its labor reserves – male,

female, young, and old – if it was to make any economic progress (see Hoffmann and Schwartz 2004).

Yet the social policy of the GDR did not focus predominantly on work and the well-being of the individual worker. The commitment was quite openly to *collective* well-being instead. The constitutional responsibility and motto of the SED's social policy, especially as of the 1970s, was to serve “the good of the people.” Doing so could come at the expense of segments of the population, such as applicants for an exit permit to West Germany and others who were regarded as politically wayward types.

2.5 Socialist Social Policy

The political leadership of the GDR explicitly strove to create a “socialist social policy”¹⁶ fundamentally different from “bourgeois social policy” in form, process, and substance.¹⁷ It succeeded spectacularly in that effort. The state monopoly on social policy was only the most obvious piece of the ample evidence demonstrating the aspiration for a genuinely socialist welfare state. Unlike private welfare associations in western Germany, those in East Germany played only a small part. Another distinction between the two approaches was the GDR's centralized organization of social policy, which was supplemented in the social insurance institutions through the incorporation of the Free German Trade Union Federation (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, FDGB). A closely related third difference was the profound abuse of social policy in East Germany, particularly its utilization for politically motivated state or party repression, exclusion, and inclusion.

The politico-economic objective was no less telling. In contrast to social policy in western countries, socialist social policy was not intended to protect against market forces or to constitute markets but rather to advance the economic plan and ensure the most ambitious implementation of the plan. Formally, the GDR's use of social policy to further national trade and industry was akin to western concepts that recommended social policy mainly as a vehicle for buttressing state power or laying the domestic foundations of an expansive foreign trade policy (as in Japan; see Seeleib-Kaiser 2001). Moreover, the disintegration of pluralist discourse and

¹⁶ An example is §274, par. 1 of the East German Labour Code, in which social insurance is specifically called an “important part of socialist social policy” (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, 1977, part 1, pp. 175–177)

¹⁷ The “bourgeois” attributes of this social policy had to do with its social function, which was generally seen in doctrinaire terms to be the stabilization of capitalist conditions. For example, Günther Thude (1965), director of the Social Insurance Administration from 1967 to 1989, wrote that the “substance of the social policy of the West German monopoly and the Bonn state is to secure, promote, and exalt the work capacity and exploitability of working people, to tie them tightly to the enterprise and to the entire capitalist system, to bury their class consciousness and prevent class struggles, to obscure vested interests and power relations, to atomize the working class, and to erect a bulwark against the influence of socialism and peace” (p. 48).

decision-making was also a testimony to the antibourgeois conceptualization of social policy in the GDR. The fact that law ranked third behind politics and social conciliation is worth noting as well (Lohmann 1996). For all the many legal guarantees and possibilities for protecting rights, there was a major gap in protection under East German social and labor law: the absence of a Constitutional Court and genuine administrative courts (Lohmann 1988).

The economic function of East German social policy was paramount. Western scholars describe it essentially as orientation to economic production, productivity, growth, and full employment (Lampert 1985; Leenen 1977; Lohmann 1996, pp. 125–126). According to this view, the highest responsibilities of social policy were to protect workers against work-related risks and to equip and mobilize the working-age population for economic activity. This thrust brought about biographical trajectories in which gainful employment figured prominently (Leibfried and Leisering 1995, pp. 239–244). Social policy in the GDR was thus to aid the development of the productive forces of the economy – another remarkable contrast to western social policy, which is often understood as protection against market forces, as a counterbalance to economic policy, or as a device for utilizing the economy for noneconomic purposes.

The interpretation of the economic function of social policy was not much different in the official canon of political economics espoused by the party and the state in East Germany. However, that doctrine did anchor the economic function in “the objective economic laws of socialism” (Programm der SED 1976, adopted version, section A). The “economic laws of socialism” did not mean immutable laws but rather, above all, obligations, goals, and motives geared to strengthen socialism. One of these “laws” was the so-called *Hauptaufgabe*, or principal task, the main long-term program for steering the society as a whole. The meaning and specific substance of that program differed from era to era. Stalin (1942/1952) had initially prescribed the principal task as “the guarantee of maximal satisfaction of the constantly growing material and cultural needs of society as a whole through unceasing growth and continuous culmination of socialist production on the basis of cutting-edge technology” (p. 41). In emulation of the Soviet Union, the main long-term program under Ulbricht was defined in even more ambitious terms, becoming associated with the goal of catching up with and even overtaking the West.¹⁸ The focus at that time was still on the economy, not on social policy. Under Honecker, though, the major long-term program was seen more and more to mean striving for economic and social policy equally.

¹⁸ As late as the Fifth Party Congress (1958), the SED defined the principal task mostly as catching up with and overtaking the West, specifically West Germany. In Ulbricht’s own words at the congress: “The principal economic task consists in developing the economy within a few years in a way that fully proves the superiority of the socialist social order vis-à-vis capitalist rule. That is why the working population’s per capita consumption must surpass that of West Germany’s total population for all important foods and consumer goods” (Protokoll des V. Parteitag der SED 1958, p. 1357, as quoted in Thomas 1974, p. 57).

The idea of linking the economic function of social policy to the *Hauptaufgabe* sprang from the hope that social policy and labor productivity were mutually remunerative. The expectation was that economic policy and social policy served each other and that together they functioned as a “driving force of economic and social progress” (Winkler 1985, p. 11; see also Lohmann 1996, p. 72). In this vein, it was hoped that social policy could provide “a motivation program” (Weinert 1995a, p. 298). It was supposed to rouse workers to increased work discipline and performance and thereby lift labor productivity. This effect would then benefit the funding of social policy. In 1971, after Honecker had taken over from Ulbricht, this concept found favor in the policy of the SED and state leadership. In 1976, the SED made it official when it promulgated the “*Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik*,” that is, the “Unity of Economic and Social Policy,”¹⁹ never touching it again until the demise of the GDR (see Sect. 5).

2.6 *Social Policy’s Contribution to the Class Struggle*

Warding off need, protecting against risks, and performing economic functions were not the only responsibilities of socialist social policy. It was also calculated to help spearhead class struggle (see, for instance, Fiedler et al. 1984; Winkler 1989).²⁰ Politically, that dimension was crucial, for in taking on the project of building socialism in East Germany the SED had embarked on a long, “unrelenting struggle” (Meuschel 1992, p. 19). In the official interpretation, social policy was designed to champion the party line in this struggle, to be serviceable to the SED and beneficial “to the interests of the ruling working class and its allies” (Manz and Winkler 1979, p. 26), that is, “of the peasants in a cooperative society, the intelligentsia, and the other working strata” (p. 26). It condoned the use of social policy against the “class adversary.” As long as employer-paid social contributions and the right to strike could be used as weapons in the fight against the remaining private enterprises, the SED state could easily live with both. The official interpretation was that the right to strike did become superfluous – even damaging – at the point those enterprises went under as socialism emerged. After all, why should the members of the working population strike against something they co-owned?

Guarding the flank of the regime change toward socialism likewise counted as one of social policy’s functions bearing on class struggle. Social policy was to abet the imposed convulsion of ownership structure, society, and politics in some

¹⁹ This formulation, first coined in 1975, appeared as the heading that introduced the details of economic policy laid out by the SED’s program in the version adopted at the Ninth Party Congress of the SED (1976). For the GDR’s point of view, see Miethe and Milke (1976) and Winkler (1989, pp. 153–155). From the perspective of research in West Germany, see Hertle (1996, p. 33).

²⁰ The “class linkage” or “class character” of social policy was emphasized in nearly every respect, as in Ulbricht (1965). As commonly assumed at that time: “a social policy indifferent to class does not exist” (Manz and Winkler 1979, p. 26).

domains and to cushion it in others. This radical overturn was to be supported by the centralization and standardization of social insurance. Nationalizing health care and undercutting or eliminating the property rights of physicians, dentists, and pharmacists went in the same direction. Such action included the dissolution of traditional ways in which the medical profession represented its interests, and it meant the integration of physicians and dentists into the FDGB, the East German trade union.

The task of coping with the heavy costs of class struggle also fell to social policy. Consequences of seismic change that were inimical to East German socialism, such as mass migration of specialists to western Germany, were to be prevented, or at least curbed, by promises and actions sanctioned by social policy (Ernst 1997; Hohmann 1997). Favoritism and discrimination lay within that scope. Members of the supplementary and special provisional systems were among the beneficiaries (see Sect. 3.5). Workers who stood by the SED and the SED state enjoyed comparatively great protection and assistance. Less went to those not belonging to the SED and the “proletarian nobility.” And whoever opposed the SED and could not qualify as a worker might go empty handed (Lohmann 1996, p. 124).

Leading the class struggle also meant instrumentalizing social policy for the purposes of shaping attitudes and convictions. The prime examples occurred in the 1950s, when national-socialist activists were disqualified from all support systems, including social welfare (Lohmann 1996, p. 125). In addition, university scholarships went first to students and doctoral candidates whose political attitudes and class affiliation were acceptable to the party, and substantial retirement bonuses were allotted to the members of the “Combat Groups of the Working Class” (p. 125). But the 1950s were not the only decade in which social policy was selectively wielded to punish or reward. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, for instance, East German citizens applying for permission to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany were penalized – on orders from above – through covert circumvention of their right to work (von Maydell et al. 1996, pp. 8, 73). In most cases, such retaliation meant ruin, for whoever lost the right to work plummeted a long way.

These examples reveal a general pattern illustrating that social policy in the GDR was enlisted – on a scale hitherto practiced in Germany only by the Nazi state – to “disadvantage political opponents and favor one’s own supporters, whether as reward for past conduct or as incentive for future conformity” (Lohmann 1996, p. 125).

2.7 Great Expectations of Social Policy: Recruiting Followers, Attracting Confederates, and Conferring Legitimacy

Like the political elites of other countries, the leaders of the GDR also sought to use social policy for their own ends, such as those of recruiting adherents, winning over confederates, and legitimating their rule. Given the weak legitimacy of the SED state, these objectives were critical. The SED state and its leadership lacked

commendable processes for office-seeking, voting political leaders into and out of office, and exercising power and control. To that extent, they did not have much basis for the legal type of legitimate authority postulated by Max Weber (1922/1978).²¹ Nor did they have any traditional and charismatic legitimacy. The GDR and its leaders thus possessed none of the classic resources that bequeath legitimacy. Furthermore, the goal of catching up with and overtaking the West economically, an Ulbricht-era guideline imitating megalomaniac projects pursued in Soviet economic policy under Khrushchev, became ever more remote with each passing year (see Sect. 6.4). It deepened the stain of being a laggard and underscored the economic inefficiency of East German socialism, chronically starving it of the output legitimacy that comes from strong economic performance and visible improvement in well-being. Social policy was supposed to countervail this defect, too.

The import of social policy functions differed over time. According to a periodization common in East German social policy research in the 1980s (Winkler 1989), social policy's function as a vanguard of class struggle played an outstanding role during Soviet occupation from 1945 to 1949 – the time officially christened as the “antifascist democratic upheaval” (p. 21) – and during the “creation of socialism's foundations” from 1949 to 1960 (p. 70). This aspect of social policy was much less salient in the 1960s and after 1971, the era of “shaping the developed socialist society” (p. 153), though the dimension of class struggle never did disappear in the latter two intervals. The economic functions of social policy were conspicuous throughout the history of the GDR. Even so, certain periods are distinguishable. For instance, the orientation to production rather than consumption received more attention before power passed from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971 than it did afterward. The significance of social consumption, including price subsidies, grew perceptibly after 1971, as did funding for housing construction, family assistance, and support for gainfully employed single mothers. The latter two programs were decidedly pronatalistic on the whole and were expanded particularly in the 1980s.

Kaufmann (1994) has characterized the welfare state as “the institutional result of the abiding political aspiration to provide through legislative means the foundations for the individual well-being of all members of a nationally defined society” (p. 357). That summation superbly captures the fundamental nature of the developed democratic welfare states. To grasp the case of social policy in the GDR, however, one has to adapt the concept of the welfare state. The East German welfare state was the institutional result of the abiding political aspiration to provide through legislative means – but also through nonformalized authority,

²¹ The legal type of legitimate authority rests on the legitimacy bestowed by commendable procedures of the exercise of political power – as opposed to legitimation through charisma (the imputation of extraordinary qualities to the leader) and legitimation through tradition (Weber 1922/1978, pp. 124–148, 611–612).

through power in Max Weber's terms,²² and, if necessary, through the exclusion of "wayward types" – the foundations for the collective well-being of a people as defined by criteria of class struggle. East German social policy was not programmed only for employment, social security and social services, and aid. It was also highly "politicized" and "policy-oriented," to quote from Ulrich Lohmann's review of the GDR's social law (Lohmann 1986, 1996). This fact was true in three ways, first, as a location compatible with the SED; second, in connection with linking social policy to class struggle; and third, in terms of the educational and disciplinary functions of social policy. Social policy was also expected to promote a certain model of "the good life" (Lohmann 1996, p. 125), the socialist way of life. Occasionally, though, the essence of the model was defined quite prosaically as "conscientious, honest, socially useful work" (Autorenkollektiv 1977, p. 9)²³ and sometimes simply only as diligent, disciplined work and good political conduct (Lohmann 1996, p. 125).

2.8 *Constitutional Foundations of East German Social Policy*

Constitutionally, social policy in the GDR rested broadly on a bedrock of basic social rights. They included the "right to work" (Art. 24, par. 1 of the East German constitution of 1968 as amended in 1974). The right to work was regarded as a "foundation" (Götting 1998, p. 62) of the socialist welfare state and was the show-piece of social achievements on which the SED state prided itself. However, like the other basic social rights formulated in the East German constitution, the right to work had the status of a pledge of protection and a "self-commitment by the state" (Götting 1998, p. 59), not that of an actionable legal entitlement (Hachtmann 1998, p. 40). The GDR's constitution of 1949, too, had contained passages about the right to work. But it was qualified by the proviso that the citizen would "be provided for in his necessary livelihood" in the event that an "appropriate opportunity to work cannot be shown to exist" for that person (Art. 24, par. 2, sentence 2 of the East German constitution of 1949; see Mampel 1997, pp. 657–675). The Constitution of 1968 and that of 1974 set forth the right to work more precisely as the "right to, and free choice of, a job." Two constraints existed, though, in that the freedom of choice was to be "commensurate with societal requirements and personal qualification"

²² Weber (1922/1978) defines power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (*die Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegenüber Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel, worauf diese Chance beruht*) (p. 53).

²³ A later version of this definition added that the socialist way of life was also characterized by "relations of comradely cooperation and mutual aid, equal rights, freedom, social security, and the increasingly active participation of all citizens in the management and planning of social responsibilities in all areas of life" (Autorenkollektiv 1977, p. 9).

(Art. 24, par. 2, sentence 2 of the East German constitution of 1968 as amended in 1974). This limitation was susceptible to political intervention, for “personal qualification” could be defined as good political conduct, and “societal requirements” were ultimately defined by the state’s ruling party, the SED. Moreover, the pledge to protect the right to work was tied to the “honor-bound duty to work” (Lohmann 1987a, p. 17): Article 24 promised every East German citizen the right to work but in the same breath held that individual to the “obligation to work.” In the GDR this simultaneous fostering and demanding repeatedly surfaced in the tie between special social benefits and politically correct conduct. For example, particularly attractive training scholarships went to candidates who toed the party line especially well (Lohmann 1996; von Maydell et al. 1996), and new apartments or houses were preferentially allocated for outstanding accomplishments that strengthened, consolidated, and protected the GDR. It was mostly the functionaries who profited from these practices (Schildt 1998, p. 180).

The right to work was not the only basic social right granted by the GDR’s constitution. Every East German citizen had the right “to the protection of his health and capacity to work,” a provision that was anchored in Article 35, paragraph 1, of the GDR constitution of 1968 as amended in 1974. The same article also guaranteed “material security, free medical assistance, pharmaceutical preparations, and other medical services in kind based on a system of social insurance . . . in cases of illness and accidents.” Article 36, paragraph 1, of that document gave each East German citizen “the right to society’s care in advanced age and in the case of disability.” According to Article 38, paragraph 1, “Marriage, family, and maternity stood under the special protection of the state.” Paragraph 3 of the article encompassed the social protection of mother and child by affording “maternity leave, special medical care, material and financial support for births, and a child benefit.”

Additional basic social rights were the right that every East German citizen had to an education (Article 25) and the right to leisure time and recreation (Article 34). Article 37, paragraph 1, endowed every citizen “and his family” with the “right to living space . . . commensurate with the nation’s economic capacities and local conditions” and with the state’s obligation “to uphold [this right] by funding housing construction, maintaining the value of existing housing, and publicly supervising the fair distribution of living space.”

The constitutional parameters of social policy were spelled out in legal statutes, of which the key ones had their normative basis in numerous ordinances, directives, and implementing regulations (see Mampel 1966; Lohmann 1987a, b, 1996; Thiel 1997).

Like the constitutions of the other socialist countries of central and eastern Europe, the East German constitution and the legal statutes bearing on social policy promised the guarantee of a comprehensive social safety net (Götting 1998, p. 58). Uppermost in the minds of its framers was comprehensive security for the working population and, hence, for all working citizens (p. 61). However, exceptionally high rates of labor force participation in the socialist countries and the extension of social protection to persons on retirement pensions, dependents of social insurance clients,

and survivors brought about coverage akin to national insurance, largely bridging the gaps of a welfare state conceived only for workers.

The preceding explanations of the constitutional foundation of East German social policy are subject to two qualifications. First, constitutional reality in the GDR widely diverged from the country's constitution in many respects. Second, basic social rights in the GDR had a major loophole – they were tailored to paternalistic state assurances of protection. The constitution excluded liberal basic rights, above all the right to unhindered articulation, aggregation, and organization of interests in free associations and political parties.

3 The Institutions of Social Policy in the GDR

The GDR was founded as a state on 7 October 1949. However, an exploration of the mark that socialist economic governance and the political structures of the SED state left on the GDR's social policy institutions must go back to the time before 1949. Just as the political and economic order in Germany's western zones had been extraconstitutionally predetermined during the years of occupation before 1949, the institutions in the Soviet zone of occupation had been subject to a similar process. It was shaped by the Soviet occupation power and its coalition partners within East German society, especially the SED (Hoffmann 1996; Wengst 2001). The course was set – albeit not yet irrevocably – for a fundamental regime shift leading from a private to a planned economy, and from the dictatorship imposed in the Soviet occupation zone to the SED state (Hoffmann and Wentker 2000; Malycha 2000). At the GDR's birth in October 1949, the institutions of social policy in East Germany likewise bore the stamp of the regime shift wrought by rulings of the Soviet occupation power for the purpose of completely revamping the structure of social insurance and other social policy programs in its zone (Frerich and Frey 1993a, b). These decisions were generally backed by its partners, especially the reregistered political parties. The road for this process had been paved on 10 June 1945, when Order No. 2 of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) authorized the union organizations to form social insurance funds. Immediately after the East German state's trade union, the FDGB, was created in February 1946, it endorsed the introduction of a unified social insurance system. SMAD Order No. 28 of 28 January 1947 then laid down the principles for a unified structure of social insurance.

In addition to the critical junctures in the emergence of social policy up to October 1949, the profound changes in the years after the GDR was founded deepened, radicalized, and consolidated the conversions that had taken place from 1945 through 1949. They gave rise to five partly overlapping and partly complementary rings of social policy (Hoffmann and Schwartz 2004; Kleßmann 2006; Boyer et al. 2008). The first of them created a new foundation for social policy – the right to work and the translation of that right into de facto job security that, judging from the claim, was coupled with remuneration guaranteeing a basic

livelihood. The second ring resulted from a fundamental “reorganization of social insurance” (Hoffmann 1996). Nationalization supplanted the combination of public social policy of central government and self-government, centralization replaced the decentralized systems of social security, and unified insurance (under FDGB aegis for the most part) superseded the differentiated insurance systems. This reorganization also substituted sole administration by the FDGB for self-administration based on parity between the representatives of capital and labor in social insurance. The third ring of social policy after 1949 resulted from the redesign of existing institutions and the introduction of new ones. For instance, support for families, working women, and single mothers was inaugurated and expanded, the main purpose initially being to mobilize labor; later, to promote a higher birth rate. Other innovations were the subsidization of goods and services for the population and, as of 1971 in particular, housing policy. The fourth ring, the company-based welfare state, was generated by the wholesale expansion of occupational fringe benefits. The fifth and final ring of social policy in the GDR comprised the supplementary and special provisionary systems for politically eminent groups in the state and party apparatus and in the so-called mass organizations of the GDR. Contravening the otherwise preferred policy of equalization, this layer of social policy forged a new stratification pattern, one of the regime’s own making.

3.1 The First Ring: The Right to Work

The first ring of social policy in the GDR consisted of the right to work and the implementation of policies designed by the government and the enterprises of the East German economy to fulfill this promise of protection (Hübner 2008). The right to work was brought about by means of job security for the bulk of the working-age population, that is, through the guarantee of a job and an earned income that, flanked by minimum-wage regulations (and possibly other sources of social income), prevented the worker from plunging into poverty. The right to work was intended as the basis of all other components of the socialist welfare state in East Germany. For some time, the GDR leadership had conceived of the right to work as the very centerpiece of social policy. It was supposed to shelter the members of the working-age population (and indirectly their dependents) from the risk of unemployment and to be a reliable shield against the loss of income and the existential threat that accompanied joblessness. That protection alone was seen as a historic social feat. The provision of a wage that ensured a livelihood was claimed as a second safeguard of the working population’s existence. Purportedly, full employment and wages that guaranteed at least a minimum level of living rendered many other social benefits unnecessary or less costly and therefore kept the economic burden of social responsibilities within limits.

Indeed, the GDR went to great lengths and spared few costs to employ as many people of working age as possible. Full employment policy seriously benefited from the decline in the size of East Germany’s population – from 19.1 million in 1950 to

16.6 million in 1989 according to estimates (Fischer Chronik Deutschland 1999, p. 623) – that resulted mainly because many East German citizens of working-age migrated to the West. Authoritarian labor management initially also played a role, though not a dominant one, in the effort to mobilize labor and reach full employment (Thiel 1997; Vollmer 1999b, p. 341). The tacit pressure to earn one's living by working was more important, as were the wage- and social-policy incentives to take a job. Monetary support and the time that working mothers gained from the help they received from day-care centers, all-day preschools, and other facilities added incentives to improve ways of combining paid employment and family obligations.

By achieving the right to work and an unusually high labor force participation rate among men, East German social policy had fulfilled an old goal of the workers' movement. By doing the same for women, it had also met an objective of the socialist women's movement.²⁴ The leadership of the GDR saw these results as an especially pioneering social accomplishment and in this respect could count on broad popular consensus, a rarity in East Germany (Grünert 1997; Niethammer 1993, p. 145).²⁵

The responsibility for putting the right to work into actual practice fell chiefly to the socialist enterprises (where it increasingly came to mean the guarantee of *a* job, not *the* job). Economic planning targets and the workers' extensive protection from dismissal obliged the enterprises to cooperate on employing all job-seekers. The Labour Code of 1977 stipulated that an employment contract could be dissolved only by a contract of annulment, that is, by agreement between the working person and the enterprise or by a transfer of that person to a different enterprise by mutual assent. This regulation reinforced the legal job protection granted to employees. Before an employment contract could be annulled, the enterprise had to have offered the employee a different job that he or she could reasonably be expected to perform, and the employee had to have refused the offer. Dismissal was permitted – with 2 months notice – only if no annulment contract had been settled on and if certain other requirements had been met. Even then, dismissal depended on concurrence of the union representatives in the enterprise. In addition, the employee in question had the right to appeal to the enterprise's conflict committee or to the Chamber of Labour Law.

²⁴ According to the Statistical Office of the GDR (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, pp. 130, 390), the employment rate for women (i.e., gainfully employed women as a percentage of the female population between 15 and 60 years of age) stood at 82.3% on 30 September 1989. This level surpassed that in the other socialist countries and was about equal to or slightly lower than that in Sweden, depending on the basis of calculation (International Labour Organization 1989, 1991; Schmidt 1993a).

²⁵ The employees were not the only ones interested in job security. The management of an enterprise, too, had systemic reasons to hang onto regular workforces and hoard labor (see Götting 1998, pp. 65–67). Moreover, many managers were receptive to the idea of social equalization and guaranteed employment (see Grünert 1998, p. 18).

The right to work in the GDR was out of kilter, however. Job security carried a high price, such as overstaffing and the paternalistic treatment of the workforce, whose members were denied autonomous representation of their interests (Materialien zur deutschen Einheit 1997, p. 87; Vogler-Ludwig 1990). It eventually led to the slacking that full employment evidently abetted (see, for example, Mertens 1990; Niethammer et al. 1991, pp. 403–405), and the policy of job security at any cost sapped the national economy's productivity (Vollmer 1999a, pp. 279–280). The almost absolute protection against dismissal vastly inflated operating costs. But socialist enterprises were largely sheltered from competition and pressure to adapt. This immunity was the only way they could perform their assigned employment tasks – largely regardless of the real costs that the right to work involved.²⁶

3.2 The Second Ring: Social Insurance of Workers and Salaried Employees and Social Insurance with the GDR's State Insurance

When the reorganization of social insurance had been completed, the GDR had centralized, unified social insurance schemes for old age, disability, and health for nearly all working people and their dependents. One of its main organs was the Social Insurance of Workers and Salaried Employees (SVAA). When the Government Ordinance of 2 March 1956 named the FDGB as the sole carrier of the SVAA, it simultaneously established a second organization, the German Insurance Agency (DVA), to cover self-employed persons, the farmers, and the artisans, for they were not members of the FDGB. Members of these groups were later covered by the “Social Insurance with the GDR's State Insurance” (branch of the GDR's State Insurance). Additionally, there was the special case of the enterprises belonging to the Soviet-German joint-stock company, WISMUT, which was responsible for mining uranium ore and which employed more than 40,000 people. Like a state within a state (Niethammer et al. 1991, p. 58), WISMUT had its own program of social insurance and health care, which was funded directly from the state budgets of the GDR and the Soviet Union.

The largest social insurance institution of the GDR was the SVAA. It was administered by the FDGB and run by that organization's national management board, by regional and district management boards, and by the heads of the trade union at the enterprise level. The primary members of the SVAA were workers and

²⁶ When asked from which pot the new social policy measures adopted at the Eleventh Party Congress of the SED were funded, the director of Zeiss Jena at that time responded as follows: “There were few adequate statistics on the costs of social policy carried out by the enterprises. It just all came out of and ultimately went back into one ‘big pot’ . . . We did not calculate it at all; it simply accrued” (Schmähl 1992a, p. 33). See also Pirker et al. (1995) and Kopstein (1997, pp. 131–153, 197), whose term “campaign economy” (*Kampagnen-Ökonomie*) drew attention to the unusually great degree to which the SED politicized economic activity, especially through local party cadres.

salaried employees – the “working class,” as they were officially known in the GDR. But physicians, dentists, and veterinarians with private practices were also insured through the SVAA along with artists and others engaged in the cultural sector. In 1989, the SVAA covered approximately 90% of the resident population. That figure represented 10.3 million persons on compulsory social insurance, of which 7.9 million alone were workers and salaried employees and 2.2 million were persons on full retirement. The organization covered 4.4 million dependents as well (Frerich and Frey 1993a, Table 49, p. 271; this source also shows the data for 1949 through 1989).

The reorganization of social insurance coincided with the establishment of near-universal insurance and the reduction of differences in social security between occupational status groups. Both changes were the outcome of exclusion and inclusion that had serious consequences. Even before the founding of the GDR, civil-servant status had succumbed to the policy of class struggle pursued by SMAD and the SED. Social insurance was extended to former civil servants under the terms of the SVAA. Some groups were not covered. Clergy and members of religious orders were not required to have social insurance. Former members of the NSDAP, the Nazi party, were disqualified if there was evidence of their having perpetrated Nazi crimes.

Self-employed persons with more than five employees were also denied public social insurance. They had voluntary insurance, however, as first foreseen in the years from 1947 to 1949. In 1956 the DVA became responsible for the social insurance of the members of cooperatives and collectives as well as the self-employed, who were all released from the compulsory insurance for workers and salaried employees in the SVAA. The DVA was later renamed the Social Insurance with the State Insurance of the GDR (SV-StV). At the end of the 1980s, it covered 1.1 million compulsory members and 400,000 dependents, about 9% of the resident population (Frerich and Frey 1993a, Table 51, p. 285; von Maydell et al. 1996, p. 186).

At first, most of the fiscal resources of the social insurance funds came from contributions paid equally by the insured worker or salaried employee and the enterprises. However, the door to ever greater reliance on government money was opened when the budgets of the social insurance organizations were integrated into the state budget. Ultimately, expenditures for social insurance were financed through a pay-as-you-go system, with payroll tax contributions from covered workers and salaried employees as well as employers on the one hand and state subsidy on the other. By 1989, the state subsidy had increased to the point that it equaled 47% of the expenditures reported by each of the two social insurance institutions (calculations based on the figures in Mrotzeck and Püschel 1997).

The social insurance contribution had two components after the reforms of 1968 and 1971, which introduced voluntary supplementary pension insurance. The first component consisted of compulsory insurance up to an assessable income ceiling of 600 Eastmarks and, initially, a contribution rate of 10% for employed persons and 10% for employers. As of 1 January 1978, the employers had to cover 12.5%. Freelancers and self-employed persons paid a compulsory contribution rate of 20%. The second pillar of social insurance as of 1968 was the voluntary supplementary

pension insurance beyond the assessable income ceiling of 600 Eastmarks up to 1,200 Eastmarks a month or up to one's entire monthly income from wages or salary. The basis was a contribution rate of 10% for workers and salaried employees and 20% for freelancers and the self-employed, with optional ceilings of up to 2,400 Eastmarks a month. A free-lancer's maximum contribution was thus 480 Eastmarks a month (20% of 2,400 Eastmarks).

Social insurance afforded an array of benefits, especially for old age, illness, maternity, preschool child care, care of sick children, occupational accidents and occupational diseases, disability, death of the breadwinner, and burial (for details on the benefits in April 1990 see Hoffmann 2008; Lohmann 1996, appendix). The major benefits were pensions for disability, old age, or surviving dependents if the policy holder was prematurely incapacitated or had reached retirement age, or in the case of death of the breadwinner. Out- and in-patient treatment, dental treatment, medication, therapies, adjuvants, and dentures were among the health benefits. The catalogue contained cures and rehabilitation measures as well. Sick pay and indemnities were paid in cases of illness, accident-related temporary disabilities, job-related health damage, and quarantine. Mothers were entitled to a maternity and postnatal allowance and to care of sick children or of spouses who were not gainfully employed.

3.3 The Third Ring: Social Policy for the Sphere of Reproduction—Subsidies for Basic Goods and Services, Support for Families, Working Mothers, and Single Mothers, and Housing Policy

Most of the basic services that a mature western-style welfare state provides were included in the GDR's social policy. However, the latter did have a typically different set of focal points and discontinuities that were largely due to the nature of its political regime and the lower level of productivity of the East German economy. That divergence manifested itself in the East German government's previously mentioned commitment to job security at any cost. A second element of the difference was family policy, the specifics of which were conceived partly to bring additional people into the labor force, primarily women of working age (Helwig and Hille 2006, 2008). Simultaneously, family assistance in the GDR, like French social policy, was intended to encourage population growth and thereby help relieve a serious issue in East German society – its labor shortage. In fact, the population of the GDR was shrinking, mainly from the emigration of young East Germans to West Germany but also from a birth rate usually below that in other socialist countries. Together, these two trends had bequeathed the East German population early on with a comparatively high proportion of senior citizens (Reimann 1975). By 1980, their share as a percentage of the total population had risen to 17.9% (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, p. 356), which was very high for a country like the GDR, whose level of economic development was relatively

modest. A third regime-specific difference between the social policy of East Germany and that of western countries was that unemployment insurance played no notable role in the GDR for most of that state's existence. Indeed, its vestiges were eliminated altogether in 1977, and no unemployment insurance was reinstated until 1990 (Kinitz 1997).

Social compensation, including indemnification, and social policy relating to displaced persons, refugees, and expellees, posed a problem in the GDR (see Schwartz and Goschler 2008), except for persons who were politically accorded special honor, such as "those persecuted under National Socialism." Any idea of establishing an independent pension to look after victims of the war evaporated in East Germany after SMAD said "No" once and for all. And matters unimportant to growth either in production and employment or in the population – like the needs of the infirm or of people with disabilities – went mostly unmet by social policy in the GDR (Boldorf 2008a, b; Kohnert 1999).

However, the GDR's social policy did focus intensely on ensuring basic security. Above all, the state subsidized the prices of basic goods and services for the population (Steiner 2008). The price supports encompassed all state-funded measures needed to cover the costs of the government's fixed-price policy on the following consumer goods or services: (a) food; (b) selected industrial goods important for social policy, like domestic fuel, infant and children's clothes, children's shoes, school articles, textbooks and other teaching materials, and occupational apparel; (c) fares for local and long-distance public passenger transport; (d) low sales prices for drinking water and low fees for waste-water purification; and (e) low prices for selected repairs and craft services rendered for private households (see Boyer 2001; Manz 1990a, b; Steiner 2008).

The price subsidies for basic goods and services were hefty. It is estimated that these prices would have had to be raised between 30% and 100% to free them of subsidization; those for energy, approximately 200%; and those for transport fares, about 400% (Lampert 1990, pp. 26–27). The practice of resorting to price subsidies on a large scale has been viewed as a trademark of social policy in the GDR (see Trümpler et al. 1986), though it figured in the consumer-oriented social policies of other central and eastern European states as well (Lohmann 1991a, b). In any case, the price subsidies for basic goods and services was the GDR's equivalent of a social assistance scheme with guarantees against impoverishment, a kind of social welfare that remained marginal in East Germany (Boldorf 2008b; Wienand et al. 1997).

Minimum wages and minimum pensions were also part of the basic security package. The enterprises and, indirectly, the state budget were responsible for the minimum wages; the social insurance contributors and the state budget, for the minimum pensions.

Lastly, housing policy likewise bore the indelible traces of the regime shift in East Germany (Buck 2004). One of the fundamental tenets of the GDR's brand of socialism held that housing must never be treated as a commodity. This conviction brought about the drastic curtailment of residential property rights and of the control that the remaining owners could exercise over their dwellings (von Beyme 1987). The enterprises had jurisdiction over some housing, mainly the

living quarters that belonged to them. But housing policy was largely a state matter and was pursued with particular urgency under Honecker.

3.4 The Fourth Ring: The Company-Based Welfare State

As the preceding diagnosis has shown, the socialist states of central and eastern Europe embodied work societies. The enterprises therein were loci of economic and social life. They performed a crucial function in social policy, too (Götting 1998, pp. 69–76), particularly in the GDR (Hübner 2004a, 2006a, b, 2008) but also in the Soviet zone of occupation that preceded it, where SMAD Order No. 234 of 9 October 1947 had prepared the ground for a broad social policy administered through the enterprises of the socialist economy. The document is regarded as having inaugurated the East German occupational fringe benefits, the foundation of what became later a company-based welfare state. Within the context of the company-based welfare state, the responsibilities of the socialist enterprises were fourfold. The first and most important one was the “economic function”; the second, “a social supply unit”; the third, “an ideological-educational function”; and the fourth, “the monitoring of the workers’ conformance to the state” (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 126). Accordingly, the aim was not only to seek progressive efficiency-oriented instrumentalization of the enterprises but also to assign them additional social responsibilities (Lutz 1995).

The introduction and elaboration of occupational fringe benefits and the rise of the company-based welfare state occurred mainly in the socialist sector of the economy, especially in the major enterprises. The social organs within these organizations were slow to take shape at first, but the GDR leadership stepped up the pace especially after the uprising of 17 June 1953. By the early 1960s, the progress was impressive (Deich and Kohte 1997, pp. 15–18).

Under Honecker, occupational fringe benefits even became a “main pillar of general social policy” (Hübner 1999b, p. 70), sharing responsibility for making the right to work a reality, including employment for social reasons and care for the employees after they retire. Occupational fringe benefits also carried powerful performance incentives. This framework of social policy determined wage-related perks, especially bonuses and other kinds of extra pay as well as privileges in the social insurance system, such as voluntary supplementary pension insurance, additional old age pension plans, and extra pensions for lengthy service in the enterprise. The purview of occupational fringe benefits extended even further to what was officially termed “care for the working population” and to help with the incidental and less incidental concerns of everyday life (Autorenkollektiv 1988; Deich and Kohte 1997; Hübner 1999b). The preeminent fields of this brief related to “support of the workers,” “development of the intellectual and cultural life of the workforce,” “health and social care for the working class,” “sports activities and youth services,” “child care,” “vacation arrangements and local recreation,” and “housing management” (Directive of 28 March 1972 on the Funding of Enterprise

Institutions and Measures for the Care of the Workforce – Funding of Occupational Care, *Gesetzblatt der DDR*, 1972, part 2, no. 19, pp. 225–230).

Company-based social policies were a multifaceted, often even indispensable instrument for eking out one's livelihood, easing practical everyday life, and facilitating shop-floor management. Politically, their salience stemmed from the widely held perception that they were "means of [building] employees' identification and measures preventing future crises and unrest" (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 19), and they were used for these purposes with some success (Hübner 2008). Occupational fringe benefits were scarcely less important for coping with everyday life. They expedited the organization of daily affairs, from feeding the employees to offering what was otherwise something of a rarity in the GDR – a wide assortment of goods²⁷ and services of every kind, including those that in western countries were provided mainly by local communities, welfare associations, or private institutions. Among these goods and services were not just social services but also shoe-making, sewing, and needlework, which had become uncommon since the decimation of the private economy and the harassment of the independent single proprietorships (Deich and Kohte 1997, pp. 39–40). Occupational fringe benefits often also involved "subsidiary enterprises, such as slaughterhouses and vegetable farms, maintained for the efficient use of wastes or in the interest of improving supply" (as quoted in Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 25). Special emphasis was placed on the health-care institutions of the enterprises – the polyclinics, out-patient facilities, and wards for sick children of working mothers.

The ring of occupational fringe benefits did not end there. Its scope usually extended also to day- or weeklong infant care, long-term boarding of infants and young children, vacation camps for children, "pioneer camps," as well as holiday and recreation facilities such as "weekend lodges" and campgrounds. One could occasionally also rent tents and house trailers through these programs (Deich and Kohte 1997, pp. 25–26).

Occupational fringe benefits had advantages for management, too. They were systematically used for purposes of personnel policy and business management, particularly to produce and retain a core workforce, hoard labor, and fill in various chronic cracks in the planned economy. An enterprise's fringe benefits lent themselves also to bartering between enterprises or between an enterprise and the local community. For instance, food for the enterprise's kitchen could be swapped for places at a holiday camp; vacation residences, for work by a team of maintenance or repairmen; and chances to receive enterprise-sponsored housing, for plots on which to build one's own home (Deich and Kohte 1997, pp. 68–70). An enterprise might also accord social services to people not on its payroll in exchange for municipal services preferentially rendered to the enterprise (Hübner 1999b). Such exchange transactions were nothing out of the ordinary (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 69).

²⁷ The big socialist companies, the *Kombinate*, "tended to surpass state retail trade in the ability to obtain the appropriate range of goods and guarantee their timely and efficient sale" (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 39).

Why did occupational fringe benefits play so great a role in the GDR? Part of the explanation lies in their vital contribution to meeting the responsibilities mentioned above. Another part had to do with needs arising from the high percentage of working women in the country's labor force. Because they, too, were engaged in paid work, some aspects of running a household and raising a family could not be readily tended to, so fringe benefits were supposed to bridge the gaps. Hence the importance of the cafeterias and the other kinds of backup the enterprises made available to their personnel. These circumstances also explain the massive efforts that were undertaken to arrange working hours so that working mothers could combine job and family as easily as possible. Yet another intention behind occupational fringe benefits was to instill the working population's sociopolitical commitment and to solicit recognition. "The enterprises, in particular the major industrial ones, were to present themselves to the employees not only as utilitarian institutions but also as group-forming life worlds" (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 64). Some enterprises did in fact become a "safe haven" (Hübner 1994, p. 181) for many people, occasionally even a "surrogate family" (Hachtmann 1998, p. 51). Not least, there was a political motive for promoting occupational fringe benefits: "This policy should enable the state behind the nationalized enterprises to cast itself as one that provides for and cares about the individual" (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 64).

Occupational fringe benefits in the GDR did not break completely new paths. In some respects it "conserved and continued classical social policy" (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 64) that had been prevalent mostly in Germany's mining sector and heavy industry before 1945. Unlike the occupational fringe benefits at that time, however, those in the GDR blended the classical social policy of autonomous enterprises with a government social policy channeled through them (Hübner 1999b, p. 64).²⁸ For the most part, in other words, the occupational fringe benefits in the GDR were not of an autonomous decentralized character; they came under national planning and state-led governance, as provided for in the East German constitution. The socialist enterprises were not autonomously operating units. As stated in Article 41 of the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic of 6 April 1968, as amended on 7 October 1974, they were instead "communities acting on their own responsibility" but "*in the framework of state control and planning*" (my italics).

²⁸ This mix reinforced socialist society's peculiar preoccupation with enterprises. Hübner (1999b) continues, however, by observing that potential for tension nevertheless remained. The differences between the government's approach to social policy and that of business management resulted "essentially from the macropolitical concern with legitimating and stabilizing the SED regime also with the help of social policy, whereas the management in the enterprises tended to focus on offering the employees performance incentives and care" (p. 64).

3.5 *The Fifth Ring: Supplementary Old-Age Pension Systems, Special Pension Schemes, and “Honorary Pensions”*

Distinctions between occupational status groups, like those between wage earners and salary earners or between them and civil servants, were evened out early on in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR. However, such leveling was not the only result of socialist social policy. It generated new patterns of stratification typical of the regime, segregating pensions into regime-specific “transfer classes” (Lepsius 1979, pp. 179–182). These classes emerge when the level of social benefits and the access to public goods and services differ. The most important lever bringing these classes about in the GDR was the establishment and expansion of preferential pension schemes for the members of selected occupational groups. These privileged arrangements for retirement were known as the supplementary old-age pension and special pension schemes (see Bundesversicherungsanstalt für Angestellte 1997; Hoffmann 2008, pp. 356–360; Mutz 1995, 1999). By the time of the GDR’s demise they covered approximately 4% of the resident population (von Maydell et al. 1996, p. 186), and their full scope was not fully known during the planning of social policy in anticipation of German unification. Many different motives played into the creation of the supplementary and special provisionary systems. One of them was to compensate for excessive wage equalization and to improve the attractiveness of public service jobs (Mohn 1993, p. 438).²⁹ Even more important was the endeavor to use the privileged status of participation in the supplementary and special provisionary systems “to bind [the target groups] more closely to the political system of the GDR” (Mohn 1993, p. 438) and especially to keep them from emigrating to the West.

Preferential entitlement went particularly far in the special pension schemes, which were introduced to guarantee public employees independent, favored protection in old age outside the social insurance system. They were meant for figures crucial to the state apparatus. The first people to enjoy this privilege were the members of the Ministry for State Security and the Office of National Security, for whom a special pension scheme was put into place in 1953. The members of the East German People’s Police, the fire department, and the correctional system followed at relatively brief intervals in 1954. In 1957 so did the members of the National People’s Army, which was created in 1956. The employees of the customs administration joined this distinguished circle in 1970 (Mohn 1993, p. 438).

²⁹ The salaries of the highly qualified experts in the GDR only occasionally rose to a modest level. Bienert (1993) asserts that East German wage policy “always disadvantaged” that group (p. 350) and that the salaries of its members were never commensurate to their merits. “A master earned less than the skilled workers he was in charge of. Until well into the 1980s, the starting salary of a doctor or teacher was less than the wage level of most workers; and even the monthly salary of 3,500 Eastmarks received by university professors as of 1985 can hardly be called excessive” (p. 350).

The special pension schemes were social safety nets having the character of comprehensive care (Bundesversicherungsanstalt für Angestellte 1997). The retirement pensions they granted far exceeded those of social insurance, guaranteeing the beneficiary a fixed percentage of the last earned income, in most cases 90% of the net pay. Usually, the insured groups of persons had to pay premiums amounting to 10% of their total remuneration to the corresponding special system. They received their retirement benefits solely from these schemes. As of 30 June 1990 the beneficiaries of the special pension schemes numbered about 120,000 (Mohn 1993, p. 438).

Unlike the special pension schemes, the supplementary old-age pension systems were not intended as independent old-age insurance systems but rather as complements to the retirement pay received through social insurance. Another difference between the special pension schemes and the supplementary old-age pension systems was that the members of the latter also belonged to one of the two social insurance agencies of the GDR. As with the special pension schemes, the supplementary types were supposed to guarantee total coverage at a high level. As a rule, they guaranteed the entitled person a retirement pension based on a fixed percentage of his or her last earned income. Technically, the wherewithal for this arrangement came from increases in the social insurance pensions. Generally, the idea was to make certain that the supplementary benefit and the social insurance retirement benefit added up to about 90% of the entitled person's last net income.

The terms of both the premium and the coverage differed considerably from one supplementary old-age pension system to the next. In mid-1990 these systems were shut down in accordance with the Treaty on the Creation of a Monetary, Economic, and Social Union between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter also referred to as the First State Treaty [Vertrag über die Schaffung einer Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion] 1990, see Sect. 5). At that point approximately 230,000 people were receiving benefits from supplementary old-age pension systems (Mohn 1993, p. 439), the number of which was estimated to be about 60.³⁰ The number of persons with accrued rights to a supplementary old-age pension was estimated to be approximately one million at that time (Reimann 1991, p. 282).

The supplementary old-age pension have been likened to company pension schemes in West Germany, with parallels drawn particularly to the supplementary pension for public employees (Reimann 1991, p. 282). That comparison falls a bit short. The diversity of the supplementary old-age pension systems, the privileges they granted, and their politically selective patterns of exclusion and inclusion resembled less the Federal Republic of Germany's supplementary pension for public employees than the practice in many Latin American countries of

³⁰ The lack of clarity owed to the nature of the systems. In the 1950s the supplementary old-age pension systems were properly named in the Official Statute Register of the German Democratic Republic, but the government of the GDR strayed from this practice in the following decades: "Some supplementary old-age pensions were based on resolutions of the Council of Ministers; others were apparently arranged individually" (Mutz 1999, p. 510).

concentrating social policy on politically key groups (see Mesa-Lago 1985; Wachendorfer 1986).

The principal beneficiaries of supplementary old-age pensions were the country's intelligentsia, as this circle of highly qualified experts was officially called. In the 1950s its arc spanned the "supplementary retirement pensions of the technical intelligentsia" (introduced in 1950), the "retirement pensions of the intelligentsia at scientific, artistic, educational, and medical institutions" (as of 1951),³¹ and the retirement pensions and voluntary supplementary pension schemes for physicians, dentists, and veterinarians (1959). With these benefits and others, such as pay increases, the SED state wooed especially qualified able-bodied persons – most of all, those whom the state was anxious to keep from migrating to the West. Such preferential treatment vividly shows just how important the "co-optation of the intelligentsia" was in East German socialism.

The first wave of supplementary old-age pension systems and the creation of almost all the special pension schemes were products of the Ulbricht era. A second wave in the introduction of supplementary old-age pension systems, which took place chiefly after power shifted to Honecker, lasted until 1976. It, too, was about patronage, which henceforth extended predominantly to the members of the state apparatus, the parties, the mass organizations such as the National Front, and the FDGB. In the third and final phase of expansion – from 1986 to 1988 – supplementary pensions were arranged for other special occupational groups, such as artists and authors, chairmen of the Agricultural Production Cooperatives, and general managers (Mohn 1993, p. 438).

Politically selective improvements in retirement pensions were also made for persons who had been persecuted under National Socialism, for the "Fighters against Fascism," and for members of the "Combat Groups of the Working Class," as they were officially called in the GDR. Unlike social policy in the Federal Republic of Germany, that in East German socialism refrained from according compensation for wrongs perpetrated under National Socialism. An exception that East German social policy made to this guideline was that persons persecuted under the Nazi regime continued getting special benefits they had already begun receiving immediately after the war. Other extensive improvements came from the Directive of 5 October 1949, which defined the legal status of victims of Nazi persecution (*Zentralverordnungsblatt* 1947–1949, p. 765). The benefits, however, were tied to the obligation to support the SED politically. As stipulated in the guidelines of 10 February 1950, benefits went only to those victims of Nazi persecution who had backed the SED after 1945.

Special political loyalty was rewarded with "honorary pensions," which were introduced by the Ordinance of 28 August 1952 (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, 1952, part 1, no. 122, pp. 823–824). They granted "substantial privileges" (Frerich and Frey

³¹ Ordinance of 12 July 1951 on the Retirement Pensions of the Intelligentsia at Scientific, Artistic, Educational, and Medical Institutions of the GDR (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, 1951, no. 85, pp. 675–677); see U. Lohmann (1996, pp. 56–57).

1993a, p. 360). The motive behind the honorary pensions was solely political. They were bestowed for many years of “outstanding performance in the struggle for peace and socialism.” Entitled women usually began receiving them at 60 years of age; men, at 65. The monthly benefit of 600 to 1,500 Eastmarks from the honorary pensions exceeded the customary retirement pensions by a more or less wide margin. Later changes in the law further enhanced the social security of those people receiving honorary pensions and their survivors.³²

Political motives lay also behind the bonus allotted to the retirement pension for members of the Combat Groups of the Working Class and for their survivors.³³ For each working person who had been a member of a combat group for at least 25 years, this rule provided for a monthly payment of 100 Eastmarks over and above the annuities for old age, disability, and accident. The circle of beneficiaries receiving preferential treatment was small, though. At the end of 1989, “combat group bonuses” were paid for approximately 4,000 pensions (Frerich and Frey 1993a, p. 362).

4 The Politics of Social Policy Under the Socialist Regime

4.1 *Great Latitude of the Political Leadership and High Levels of Politico-Administrative Fragmentation*

One of the institutional characteristics of East German social policy was its peculiar configuration: centralization, unitary governance, and the sole jurisdiction of the state under SED control. The power at the disposal of the political decision-making center of the GDR was nearly absolute as long as fundamental interests of the Soviet Union did not dictate otherwise. There were no noteworthy checks and balances of the kind known in western constitutional democracies to challenge actions of the SED leadership. Few limits were set by the legal system or the economy, both of which were subordinated to politics, or by the separation of powers, which was completely overshadowed in East Germany by the supremacy of the SED. No veto positions or veto players were in sight (except, again, for the Soviet Union). There was neither coalition government nor a federal state, nor were there autonomous associations or industrial partners authorized to deal with wage and labor issues on their own. No institutions of self-government and no independent media existed.

³² Examples are the Ordinance of 8 April 1965 on Honorary Pensions for Fighters against Fascism and for Victims of Fascist Persecution and Their Survivors and the unpublished 1976 Directive by the GDR Council of Ministers on Honorary Pensions for Fighters against Fascism and for Victims of Fascist Persecution and Their Survivors (Frerich and Frey 1993a, p. 361).

³³ Directive of 17 September 1974 on the Provision of a Bonus to the Pension for Working People Who were Members of the Combat Groups of the Working Class and to Their Survivors (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, 1974, part 1, pp. 465–466).

And there were no supranational organizations with direct influence on member states as in the European Union today. These voids granted unusually great latitude to the political leadership, whose decision-making center for both foreign and domestic policy, including social policy, consisted of the Politburo, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, and the SED apparatus (see, for example, Herbst et al. 1997; Malycha and Jochen 2009; Siebs 1999).

Nevertheless, social policy formation was fragmented in the GDR, though for the most part horizontally rather than vertically as in a federal state. East German social policy was restricted politically, too, some of the factors being the strong external pull of Soviet policy and the ramifications of self-inflicted crises, such as the uprising in East Berlin and in many other cities in the GDR on 17 June 1953. This politico-administrative fragmentation of the East German welfare state has not always received the attention it actually deserves. Scharf's studies have been among the few to inquire into this aspect, noting a bewildering diversity of administrative arrangements, "no central government ministry for social policy" (Scharf 1989, p. 21), "no central agency – and consequently, no pool of career professionals with an interest in asserting an integral approach to social problems" (Scharf 1989, p. 22), and a "certain amount of administrative disorder" (p. 23) in social policy. Scharf was justifiably surprised by the lack of administrative resources for the overall planning of social policy.

Oddly, the East German state had no separate central ministry overseeing all facets of social policy, despite their strategic importance. The competencies relating to that field were assigned to various institutions – not just to the party and the state, as in every other area of policy, but to a number of entities within the SED and the state apparatus (Hertle and Stephan 1997b; Lepsius 1995; Scharf 1988; Thomas 1974; on the administrative dimension of social policy's history in the GDR, see Krause and Hoffmann 2001). This circumstance was astonishing, particularly in view of the country's predilection for statist planning, centralization, and concentration of power resources. The phase of numerous changes in East Germany's politico-administrative structure essentially ended in the early 1970s, but social policy remained split up across an array of institutions until the end of the Honecker era (for the changes under de Maizière, see Sect. 5.4). After the dissolution of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in 1958, the Ministry of Health was the only ministry with a clear-cut focus on one major social policy area. At the end of the Honecker era, all other concerns of social policy were incumbent on undersecretaries and state offices, especially the Undersecretary of Labour and Wages (as it was called beginning in 1972), the Bureau of Prices, and, albeit less important, both the Undersecretary of Occupational Training and the Bureau of Youth Affairs. Major decision-making on social policy lay largely with the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Erich Honecker. This preponderance of authority left a gap filled by neither centralization nor the usually energetic support of Honecker's social policy by G. Mittag³⁴ in the Politburo. It merely saddled the fractured

³⁴ Günter Mittag (1926–1994) was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED (1966–1989) and Secretary of Economy of the Central Committee of the SED (1976–1989). In the latter capacity, he was also the Politburo's point man for social policy. Mittag was expelled from the SED on 23 November 1989.

decision-making structure with the dynamics associated with the primacy of politics and the neglect of cost issues (Skyba 2002, pp. 52–53, 78; Steiner 1999).

The politico-administrative fragmentation of social policy in East Germany's state apparatus meant that the perception and treatment of the problems were also susceptible to segmentation. The big picture, including the cross-sectional obstacles and serious trade-offs between social protection and other objectives, usually went unrecognized. The SED's apparatus, too, unmistakably exhibited this kind of myopia. The people most accountable for social policy in the SED were the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and, further down the line, a small group of Politburo members, notably the person in charge of economic policy. Various Central Committee departments of the SED were likewise concerned with social policy (see Sect. 5.4). Remarkably, the Central Committee had no secretariat for social policy. In the Central Committee secretariat for economic policy, the department of social policy was actually one of eight departments, whose apparently high degree of mutual compartmentalization sacrificed most of the opportunity for interdepartmental linkages. Moreover, social policy, like other policy fields in the GDR, was subject to the SED's "claim to universal jurisdiction" (Raphael 1998, p. 250). This prerogative overlaid all statist decisions on the merits of a matter and all personnel decisions. Exceptions were made for politically "unsuspicious" facets of social policy. They included technical questions of occupational safety and health or medical care and microlevel decisions of the kind bearing on the minutia of running the company-based welfare state (on the last point, see especially Hübner 1999b). The SED held sway on everything else, even more so under Honecker than under Ulbricht, for Honecker sought expert counsel less than his predecessor had (Raphael 1998).

4.2 *Segmentation of the East German Welfare State*

The SED's claim to authority over all areas in no way overcame the fragmentation of social policy and the segmentation rooted in it (Pirker et al. 1995). The strict hierarchy of the decision-making structures in the SED, the conservative and stultifying ban on political factions, and the detachment of the SED General Secretary only exacerbated the problems of fragmentation and segmentation. The complications were manifested in a number of ways, such as unsatisfactory coordination between social and economic policy and delayed or complete lack of reaction to obvious pathologies of social policy. Because Honecker as the General Secretary additionally tended to see everything ideologically and to tune out information about impacts and side effects of decisions and about alternatives, a potentially dangerous mechanism arose. Its existence has been substantiated above

all by the course that the formation of economic policy took under Honecker,³⁵ and it seems to have determined social policy as well (see, for example, Boyer et al. 2008; Hockerts 1999; Raphael 1998; and the sources cited in this chapter). According to Hertle and Stephan (1997a),

policy formation in the Politburo was extremely fragmented and personalized. Strictly ministerial or departmental thinking had priority. The members of the Politburo walled off their areas of competence from each other, confining their claim to authority to their own areas. The same thing applied to the apparatus of the Central Committee, with communication across areas or departments being tacitly prohibited in the absence of instructions to the contrary. Members of the Central Committee conformed to the military principle by which each person received only the information absolutely required in order to carry out his or her duty. This strict departmental demarcation strengthened the role of the General Secretary . . . Honecker himself practiced the strategy of farming out important task areas to small work groups of the Politburo. He headed them personally or assigned them to Günter Mittag[. . .] There were also the so-called tête-à-têtes, most often presumably with Günter Mittag and Erich Mielke.³⁶ The Council of Ministers . . . was restricted mainly to the role of an administrative organ (p. 30; see also the interviews with East German economic functionaries as reported in Pirker et al. 1995).

Similarly, the Council of Ministers had only a managerial part to play in economic policy (Pirker et al. 1995, p. 353).

The Central Committee of the SED had even less influence on policy as a whole than the Council of Ministers did. Under Honecker, it had been demoted to the status of the Politburo's "recipient and transmitter of orders from above" (Stephan 1997, p. 89). All in all, the role of the Central Committee of the SED in social policy seems to have suffered an identical fate. As G. Meyer (1991b) states in his study on the East German leadership, the Central Committee was an advisory and discussion organ without autonomous discretionary power in matters of policy; it was dominated by the Politburo and secondarily by the Central Committee apparatus. The political process, too, was encrusted:

Under Honecker, there was no longer any open discussion in the general assembly of the Central Committee. The self-concept of the Central Committee's members and candidates was deeply marked by the principles held by a Marxist-Leninist party of a "new type." They owed to "the Party" everything they had become (Hertle and Stephan 1997a, p. 31).

Open discourse had no place in this context. Other shackles on the open exchange of ideas were the dictate of maintaining party unity and the fear of being accused of forming factions and failing to toe the party line. Such impositions, however, thwarted understanding of issues that went beyond

³⁵ Pirker et al. (1995) and Skyba (2002) are particularly instructive on this point. Kaiser (1997a, b) holds that the process of shaping economic and social policy under Ulbricht, especially in the 1960s, had been more open to divergent views, clashes of opinions, and advice from experts than it was under Honecker.

³⁶ Erich Mielke (1907–2000) was Minister of State Security of the GDR (1957–1989) and a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED (1976–1989).

departmental boundaries (Stephan 1997, p. 89). The result was a perpetuation of the structures based on fragmentation and segmentation.

Autonomous institutions capable of mediating between society and the political leadership were missing elsewhere, too. Another example was the People's Chamber, which, according to the constitution of the GDR, was the state's supreme organ of power and the only constitutional and legislative institution in the country. In practice, however, things looked different. Until the first free election of the People's Chamber on 18 March 1990, it was an acclamatory body elected in pseudodemocratic balloting based on a single list of names (a "unity list") presented by the National Front of the GDR under the aegis of the SED. In the People's Chamber, what was true of budgetary policy until the end of the Honecker era was also true of social policy:

At no time was there ever a controversial debate on the budgetary policy of the East German government. Throughout the 40-year existence of the GDR, all the state budget plans that the government submitted to the People's Chamber were passed unanimously (Buck 1999, p. 1015).

4.3 *Authoritarian Corporatism in the GDR*

What about the FDGB? Did not the East German state's trade union represent the interests of the employees? Did it not act as a "driving belt" between the SED and the working class, as taught by official doctrine, steeped as it was in the spirit of Leninism? Did not the FDGB administer social insurance, a core area of social policy? And did it not thereby bring about the desired "mesh or overlap between the activities of the state and society" (Lohmann 1996, p. 18)? Did not the FDGB have substantial rights to monitor the area of occupational safety and health? Was not the organization consulted on matters of wage policy? And was not the union federation a long-standing "co-conceptualizer" (Sander 1997, p. 17), sometimes a "quasi legislator" (p. 17), and "to a major degree a legislative, executive, and judicial organ all in one" (p. 19)? Did the FDGB perhaps embody the crucial intermediary institution?

For the most part there is little basis for affirmative answers to these questions. The upgrading of the FDGB's importance is nonetheless clearly evident in the articulation and administration of social policy during the Honecker era. The change is inferable from the FDGB's increased involvement in public policy after power passed from Ulbricht to Honecker. Under the latter, there emerged an authoritarian corporatism tilted heavily toward the party-state. The chairperson of the FDGB received the standing of a Politburo member. This figure, at that time Harry Tisch,³⁷ and the deputy chairperson, Johanna Töpfer, were also members of

³⁷ Harry Tisch (1927–1995) was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED (1975–1989) and chairman of the national management board of the FDGB (1975–1989). He was expelled from the SED on 12 December 1989.

the State Council of the GDR until the upheaval in the autumn of 1989. In addition, a 1972 law committed the East German government to coordinate its policies with the national management board of the FDGB. The local and regional organs of state also came under this stipulation the following year (Gill 1991, p. 62). The rise in the FDGB's status showed in the practice of naming the FDGB leadership as one of the three institutions primarily responsible for decisions on social policy, the other two being the Central Committee of the SED and the Council of Ministers of the GDR. The SED's dominance in social policy was thereby constantly buttressed by a peculiar tripartite arrangement consisting of a hegemonic party, the state, and the union, which issued "Joint Resolutions" in the names of the Central Committee of the SED, the GDR Council of Ministers, and the FDGB.³⁸

Prevailing doctrine in the GDR held that one of the FDGB's most important tasks was to serve as a driving belt between the SED and working class. This relationship was prescribed by Leninist theory, which was followed in the GDR. Acting as a driving belt meant representing the interests of the workforces in homeopathic doses. The FDGB did so partly through its monitoring of occupational safety and health standards and its administration of the working class's social insurance. These activities were indisputably an important purview that afforded the FDGB a degree of latitude in the phase of policy implementation as well as in the political process of shaping social policy decisions. It was not only about hierarchical decision-making structures and conflict but also about "conflict, consensus, and compromise" (Hübner 1995).

It was occasionally suggested in FDGB circles that the union functionaries were, or should be, "shop stewards of the working class, not the assistants of the plant managers" (as quoted in Hachtmann 1998, p. 38). However, the FDGB did not have what it took for that position of trust: the authority to conclude wage contracts separately from the dictates of the SED-governed state apparatus and those of the SED. On the whole, even the FDGB had only a minor part in consultations and discussions about wage policy. And any attempt to establish politically divergent labor unions was punishable under the East German penal code (Sander 1997, p. 59). Besides, the FDGB had subordinated itself to SED supremacy. It worked in fact largely as an extended arm of the state and party apparatus. The FDGB's contributions to social policy were thus mostly those of a "state-controlled union" (Weber 1999, p. 340) incorporated into an authoritarian framework and relegated to the status of a statutorily subservient association (see Gill 1989, p. 1991). "As a kind of party and state executive government, [it] linked the functions of legitimation

³⁸ The SED-dominated tripartite approach also surfaces in the statute books. For example, the preamble to the Second Ordinance on the Provision and Calculation of Pensions of Statutory Social Insurance of 26 July 1984 (Second Pension Ordinance) reads: "In execution of the Joint Resolution of the Central Committee of the SED, the National Management Board of the FDGB, and the Council of Ministers of the GDR of 22 May 1984, on the additional increase of minimum pensions and other pensions, the following . . . is decreed in agreement with the National Management Board of the Free German Trade Union Federation" (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 23, pp. 281–283, citation, p. 281).

and control to a focus on pseudoalternative interest representation and value orientations” (Weinert and Gilles 1999, p. 22) and was responsible for public “stagings of mass trust in party and state while institutionalizing distrust at the same time” (p. 22).

Incorporation into the administration of social policy transformed the FDGB. The union henceforth had additional duties relating to the distribution of desired goods. Aside from heading and administering social policy, helping to mobilize labor, organizing the payment of wages and bonuses, and participating in numerous consultations, agreements, and approvals in the enterprises (Gill 1989, pp. 332–382), the FDGB was “by far the biggest travel agent in the GDR” (p. 69). Spending on travel services accounted for approximately one third of the FDGB’s entire budget (Hachtmann 1998, p. 37, note 27). The union likewise had a hand in housing assignments and was the key player in cultural affairs at the enterprise level. The FDGB also granted its members special financial assistance, such as support in cases of lengthy illness, loans from a “mutual-aid fund” (Gill 1991, p. 69), and a death benefit. In short, the FDGB became an actor whose involvement in regulating access to and disqualification from public benefits gave it direct or indirect influence on the GDR’s structure of transfer classes. The union thus grew to be the welfare state’s “titan” (Gill 1989, p. 69), exercising power and dominion through its administration and distribution of goods and services.

Most members of the working class, too, saw the FDGB for what it had indisputably become: an institution that was important also to the way they led their lives. They perceived the union primarily as a service agency and developed a “detached, instrumental relationship” to it (Hachtmann 1998, p. 37, note 27). However, involvement in social policy in a managerial and administrative capacity had put the FDGB in a predicament (Mrotzeck and Püschel 1997, p. 225). The organization became a dependent variable of the SED leadership, was not infrequently overtaxed by all that it had to do, and often responded bureaucratically. For all the legal paragraphs about union management of social insurance, the FDGB’s role was a “relatively formal one” (p. 228). The union’s so-called power to initiate legislation was a dull sword as well, for the initiative and legislative jurisdiction really lay with the government, especially the decision-making centers of the SED. Union involvement in regulating social and labor policy was permitted only in work groups or joint committees. In those areas, the Undersecretary of Labour and Wages usually took the lead – in fiscal matters, it was the finance ministry – all under supervision by the Central Committee of the SED (p. 228).

4.4 The Politburo: Hub of the Decision-Making Process

The locus of both the decisions and nondecisions on social policy in the GDR thus lay essentially at the very center of the SED-state’s political leadership. And from the birth of the GDR to the end of the Honecker era, that center was the Politburo. Under those conditions, the General Secretary of the SED and a small circle of other

Politburo members and outside advisors had the pivotal voice in decisions and nondecisions on social policy. This finding rests not only on observations by experts. People who lived through those times have reported the same thing. One of them is Claus Krömke, long the personal assistant to Günter Mittag (Pirker et al. 1995). According to Krömke, “the directives for social policy were always the domain of the respective general secretaries and [were] Honecker’s express concern” (p. 63).

Social policy formation in the GDR thus contained peculiarities unmistakably owing to the regime of the SED state. Comparison between social policy in East Germany and that in constitutional democracies confirms this impression. Whereas the process of formulating social policy in western countries has been typified by institutionalized conflict and cooperation between myriad parties and associations, that kind of setting was unknown to the policy-formation process in the East German welfare state, which had no public free speech, either. If any representation of interests took place, it was dominated chiefly by the SED (Schroeder 1998) and was usually unofficial, that is, not formalized (Hübner 1995, p. 10). Nor did elections and election dates have any role similar to that in western democracies. However, important anniversaries and party congresses did lend regularity to the ebb and flow of action that the GDR’s leadership took on social policy, bringing about a rhythm that formally resembled the electoral cycle common in democracies. The SED party congresses or their related activities often served as the occasions at which social policy reforms (usually improvements) were delivered. But these reforms were defined ad hoc, as concessions or gifts, not as a rule or as a legal social right. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, developments in social policy conformed to the rhythm of the SED party congresses more than previously, but it was not the only pace-setter. Another one was the schedule of the GDR’s special anniversaries. For example, the 40th anniversary of the state’s creation was marked by the decision to increase retirement pensions more than ever before as of 1 December 1989 – although the country was grappling with severe economic hardships (see Bonz 1989).

Despite regime-specific cadences of social policy, such as the reforms timed to coincide with party congresses and anniversaries, the process of social policy formation was less complex in the GDR than it had been before 1933 and was simpler than that in the Federal Republic of Germany. It was also less transparent. The GDR lacked the features of social policy characteristic of the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic: the give and take between federal or imperial organs, states, social insurance agencies, organs of self-administration, associations of statutory health-insurance physicians, federal offices with special task areas, and autonomous Social Courts (those parts of the judiciary specializing in social law). These institutions derive from a state based largely on a balanced separation of government power into three separate branches – the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary – and on the delegation of public tasks to societal associations. They and their built-in barriers to excessive intervention by the welfare state were eliminated in East Germany partly before and partly after the advent of the GDR, a period when social and political structures were toppled and social policy was reorganized. Between 1945 and 1949, SMAD and then the SED virtually dissolved

social policy's traditional "nuclei of interest formation" (Hockerts 1994a, p. 522) along with the distinctions between wage earners and salary earners and between them and civil servants. Early on, the unified structure of social insurance had not only provided for uniform benefits but had removed the basis for the decentralized articulation and formation of interests in social policy, as shown by the dissolution of the company and guild health insurance funds. The reorganization of social policy before 1949 had also destroyed the pillars supporting the medical community's professional interests. In other words, the structure and distribution of power in social policy had changed totally. Hockerts aptly describes the situation by pointing to the health system: "When the multiplicity of health insurance funds disappeared, so did a factor of the physician's negotiating power; when compulsory insurance was expanded and private insurance companies were banned, the private patient vanished as a societal figure" (p. 523). That transformation was in line with the endeavor to move toward the "political objective of systematically 'narrowing the differences between the strata and classes' by standardizing the access to social insurance benefits" (p. 523).

Achieving this goal further broadened the vast potential range of policy action by East Germany's party and state leadership. With few, if any, institutional checks and balances to restrain it, the discretionary latitude it enjoyed was immense even compared to that of western centralized unitary states with weak formal institutional constraints on incumbent parties (as in the United Kingdom and Sweden). This constellation improved the opportunities of the East German government to shape policy but also escalated its risks of making mistakes. As shown in the following sections, both aspects ran prominently through the political history of the GDR.

4.5 Restrictions: Foreign Control and the Enduring Repercussions of 17 June 1953

The range of options was not as large in East German social policy as it may seem, however. Three things curbed it: (a) the Soviet Union's foreign control over the GDR, (b) the indirect foreign control exerted by the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany, and (c) the trauma of 17 June 1953.

The political process in the GDR and in the Soviet zone of occupation that had preceded the creation of the East German state was molded by external forces to an extraordinary degree – predominantly by the Soviet Union, the power protecting the SED state (Foitzik 1999; Frerich and Frey 1993a; see also Riegel's (1994) thesis of the "client state"). Considerable Soviet influence on East Germany continued even after the GDR was founded. Sometimes it was direct, as when the uprising of 17 June 1953 was put down. At other times it was indirect. Until Mikhail Gorbachev took office as head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985, East Berlin usually adapted to changes in Moscow's political compass immediately. Social policy was never free of these outside influences, though the maneuvering room for it was likely wider than in the especially sensitive

fields of foreign, judicial, and military policy. In any case, harmony with Soviet economic and social policy was more advantageous than disharmony, and the acceleration of social policy after Honecker took office as the head of the SED reflected these realities. Honecker had received the backing of the head of the CPSU at that time, Leonid Brezhnev, whose upgrading of social consumption vis-à-vis the investment-oriented economic policy of the Khrushchev era paved the way to the expansion of the East German welfare state as well (Hockerts 1994b, pp. 793–794).

A second far-reaching external constraint on the social policy of the GDR was the presence of its western neighbor, the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly its great wealth. The SED leadership found it especially hard to cope with “the influence that West Germany exerted passively, by virtue of its very existence, prosperity, freedom, openness etc” (Ash 1993, p. 135). The leaders of the SED in the 1950s regarded the Federal Republic as the incarnation of a hostile society in the grip of the class enemy and classified that country’s social policy under terms such as bourgeois, deficient, and historically obsolete (see Thude 1965).³⁹ Moreover, the SED leadership of the 1950s expected that the GDR, upon achieving the seven-year plan, would become “the inviting example for the working class and the entire population of West Germany” (Hübner 1999a, p. 35). But nothing came of this prospect, a fact the GDR leadership was late to register. As Ulbricht commented in an internal discussion in 1965: “We’re pressed by the competition with West Germany.” He further pointed out that what “we were saying just 10 years ago, that we are superior, pensions, health insurance, has reversed. West Germany is better, even in health insurance” (Schmidt 1996, as quoted in Hockerts 1998, p. 24).⁴⁰ Indeed, even the unemployed and the recipients of public assistance in the western part of Berlin did not migrate to East Berlin. By contrast, the bulk of the East German population saw the Federal Republic as the attractive reference society (Ebert 1997, p. 109; Ritter 1998, p. 157). As Harry Tisch put it: “Our people want the social safety net, security, steady jobs, and training from us and the department stores from the F[ederal] R[epublic of] G[ermany]” (as quoted in Hertle 1995, p. 342). This situation forced the hand of the East German leadership, which tried to respond by expanding its welfare state (Hockerts 1998, p. 24). Social policy did in fact expand more under Honecker than it had previously.⁴¹ The leaders of the GDR held to this course even when social policy had already long since proved too great a burden on the country’s economic and financial resources.

³⁹ Lauding East Germany’s social policy, this agitprop criticized West Germany’s social policy as lagging qualitatively and quantitatively far behind in the interest of monopoly enterprises and the state apparatus (Thude 1965, p. 48). Ulbricht (1965) spoke for many others in leaning toward this assessment.

⁴⁰ The statements are taken from a transcription of consultation between party and government delegations of the GDR and the Soviet Union on 18 September 1965.

⁴¹ It is not altogether clear from the material analyzed by this author whether the increase was also an indirect reaction to the participation of West Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the conduct of the federal government’s affairs as of December 1966.

However, measuring the GDR against West Germany in ideologically proper doses did sometimes help everyday East Germans successfully claim their rights, as illustrated by a look at the relation between citizens and the courts in the GDR. One plaintiff in civil court stated: “I’m worse off here than an unemployed person in the FRG.” The court granted his petition; a notation on the cover of the file read: “Grounds recognized” (Markovits 1999, p. 317).

In addition to external influence, there was a domestic factor that outstripped all others. East German social policy cannot be understood without an appreciation of how traumatized the SED leadership had been by the events of 17 June 1953, when nationwide protests against government practices and the SED and the demand for a liberal regime had to be crushed by the Red Army troops stationed in the GDR (Schroeder 1998, pp. 119–130). Many observers agree that the subsequent guidelines for government practice bearing on social policy included the dictum of avoiding anything that could come even close to triggering a similar situation (see, for example, Bienert 1993, p. 352; Brie 1996; Ritter 2005; Weinert and Gilles 1999, p. 20).

5 The Welfare State as a Political Process: From Ulbricht to Honecker to German Unification

5.1 Disequilibrium Between Economic Performance and Social Policy

The events of 17 June 1953 stemmed not only from pervasive dissatisfaction with the GDR’s political regime but also from discontent over falling wages and salaries, rising production quotas, and cuts in social benefits. The SED leadership had hoped that prolonged belt-tightening would enable it to put priority on investment in order to accelerate the development of socialism. But the resulting mid-June uprising and its political impact on the SED state induced a change of direction, though at first only a temporary one. Wage reductions and escalations in production quotas were mostly rescinded (Hoffmann 1996, p. 304).

5.1.1 Social Policy of the 1950s and Early 1960s: Priority on Capital Investments and Social Investments

Although the SED continued keeping a tight rein on the primarily consumption-oriented components of the East German welfare state until well into the 1960s, the restrictions were still loose enough to permit measured development in priority areas of social policy. Social insurance, for example, was made universal in scope. Thereafter, employment-promoting social policies and those measures intended to benefit production and stimulate growth were expanded (Lampert 1985,

pp. 100–102).⁴² To aid production and growth, there were measures to enlarge the entire educational system, including kindergartens and senior high schools. For reasons of both family policy and employment policy, the SED also set up day-care centers and augmented the space available in nursery schools. The latter two institutions were both supposed to provide “ideological education” conforming to the system and to support women’s participation in the workforce so as to help relieve the chronic labor shortage that hampered the GDR’s economy. All of East Germany’s social policy put a good deal of emphasis on “securing and building labor potential” (Lampert 1996, p. 102). In the 1950s and 1960s, fostering and mobilizing human resources was even its foremost objective. It was also the purpose behind the state’s health policy based on prevention and follow-up care (e.g., expansion of the polyclinics, out-patient facilities, and workplace health services), rehabilitation, and occupational safety programs (see Lampert 1985, pp. 101–103).

5.1.2 Subordinate Social Consumption and Low Retirement Pensions

The priority that social policy placed on work, production, and growth put social consumption at a disadvantage. Moreover, a gap opened between the social safety net for the working classes and social policy for people who were not gainfully employed. This problem arose especially among retired persons, whose pensions from social insurance were far below earned incomes, which were not generous to begin with (Hoffmann 2004b; Ritter 2005). The differential was evident, for example, from the average level of social insurance pensions received by workers and salaried employees in 1960. It amounted to only 27.3% of the average gross earned income of a full-timer working at a nationalized enterprise and had risen to only 33% by 1970.⁴³ The average retirement annuities in the Ulbricht era were low even in comparison to the system’s minimum wages, coming to 70.1% thereof in 1970.⁴⁴

Retired people were not the only ones having to cope with the thorny problem of small pensions; so was the SED state. The trifling payments offended and unsettled the older members of the working population and signaled to people in the labor force that old age could well mean impoverishment. The intra-German comparison made this picture especially dire, for most East Germans knew that West Germany had experienced an economic upswing and had expanded its social policy, particularly through the pension reform of 1957 (Hockerts 1980). The new arrangements

⁴² The second period, during which the focus on consumption-oriented social policy intensified, is discussed in Sect. 5.

⁴³ The calculations are based on the data in Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (1996, Tables 10.15 and 10.7). Estimates based on Winkler (1989, pp. 375, 398) show that the disparity in 1955 was even greater than those for 1960, with the 1955 figures being an average of 21.8% of the income of a full-time employee.

⁴⁴ These calculations are based on Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (1996, Tables 10.15 and 10.7) and the minimum wage rates reported in Winkler (1989, p. 376).

had substantially raised the living standard of people on retirement pensions in the Federal Republic, and East Germans subsequently expected the same of their state, too.

5.1.3 Revaluation of Consumption-Oriented Social Policy

The party and state leadership of the GDR responded to the need for action on social policy, albeit with a long delay.⁴⁵ In one common interpretation, the shift toward attaching higher value to consumption-oriented social policy came about in 1971, chiefly after power had passed from Ulbricht to Honecker (see, for example, Lohmann 1996, p. 71, and especially Winkler 1989, pp. 153–154). However, this view is a simplification reflecting lax acceptance of the way the SED leadership wanted to be perceived under its new party chief, Erich Honecker, who in fact propagandistically and programmatically upgraded social policy. It sees a turning point where precise investigation of social history documents “more continuity than change” (Hockerts 1994b, p. 792; Klinger 1989).

Be that as it may, self-portrayal and the reality of running a government and an administration are not the same thing. In practice, the SED leadership had begun to broaden social policy even before Ulbricht had left the scene (Boyer 1999), though with far less expense and fanfare than under his successor, Honecker. This build-up of social policy started around the mid-1960s, when the economic situation created a degree of leeway for the social policy agenda and thus offered an opportunity to ease away from the unpopular priority of investment over consumption. Transition to the 5-day work week, an increase in the minimum wage in 1967 from 220 to 300 Eastmarks a month,⁴⁶ and a modest appreciation in the child benefit were initial signs that the quality of social policy was rising. At the Seventh Party Congress of the SED (1967), Ulbricht, the party chief of the SED and the head of state at that time, announced improvements in social policy for 1968, by which he also meant bigger pensions. The various subsequent corrections in old-age insurance plans were rated by West German experts, too, as a “perceptible enhancement of the retiree’s material situation” (Frerich and Frey 1993a, p. 336).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The rates of social benefits, among other things, indicate the relatively minor part that social policy had initially played in the GDR even when compared to that in other socialist countries (see International Labour Organization 1988, pp. 74–76, 1996, p. 75).

⁴⁶ The latter figure corresponded to 44.8% of the average income of workers and salaried employees at nationalized enterprises in 1967 (calculations based on the data in Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1996, Tables 10.15 and 10.7).

⁴⁷ In 1968 social insurance pensions, for instance, were recalculated upward for many persons on retirement pensions, and minimum pensions rose from 120 Eastmarks to 150 Eastmarks. The spouse’s bonus for retirement pensions and the sickness benefit for working persons with two or more children were augmented as well.

The introduction of voluntary supplementary pension insurance in 1968 was particularly significant.⁴⁸ It was intended to flesh out the lean provisions for old age through voluntary insurance with guaranteed benefits in proportion to the premiums paid by the policy holders. Technically, the advent of voluntary supplementary pension insurance was the equivalent of hiking the assessable income ceiling for setting old-age insurance premiums, a change that had long been due. Voluntary supplementary pension insurance also undoubtedly served the macroeconomic desire to absorb purchasing power. But its importance in terms of social policy is unmistakable. By bringing in voluntary supplementary pensions, the SED leadership spectacularly deviated from the hitherto preferred approach of destratifying compulsory social insurance.

Opting for voluntary supplementary pension insurance, which was greatly improved in 1971, temporarily defused a stormy dispute in the SED about the future path of social policy. Addressing the Party Congress of 1967, Ulbricht intimated that the proposal to better the paltry pensions by increasing the premiums had been rejected and that he therefore advocated relaxing the strict limits on pension insurance benefits by creating voluntary supplementary insurance under the roof of social insurance (Frerich and Frey 1993a, pp. 335–336).⁴⁹

5.2 *Social Policy After the Change in Power from Ulbricht to Honecker*

After Honecker succeeded Ulbricht as head of the SED, the standing of social policy rose in the official propaganda of the party and state (Bouvier 2002; Boyer et al. 2008). A new rationale was adopted, too. The population was no longer consoled with prospects of achievements belonging to some distant, redeeming future; the efforts of the present were to be honored here and now. The SED leadership thereby embarked on a momentous change, completing the break with a social policy whose main thrust had been to cushion the consequences of the economic change in the GDR. Social policy was thereafter cast as a comprehensive

⁴⁸ Regulation on Voluntary Insurance for Supplementary Pension from Social Insurance (15 March 1968), *Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 2, no. 29, pp. 154–160. Voluntary Supplementary Pension Insurance was reorganized a few years later and made considerably more attractive. For details, see Frerich and Frey (1993a, pp. 338–342).

⁴⁹ The architects of the voluntary supplementary pensions were not thinking only about the downward social mobility that threatened many insured persons when they reached the retirement age. These types of pensions also had macroeconomic merit, not to mention advantages for fiscal policy. Planners hoped that the new pensions would strengthen the funding of social insurance, especially in the phase when they were being built up. When people paid huge sums into this system, it was able to help shrink the menacing inflationary surplus purchasing power of the East German economy.

policy of securing living standards and a distributive device based on both income from work and the supply of subsidized consumption goods.

5.2.1 Revaluation of Social Policy: Discontinuity and Continuity

Although the Eighth Party Congress of the SED (1971) took place shortly after power had passed from Ulbricht to Honecker, interpreting it only as a profound shift in social policy would underestimate the continuity it represented. Nonetheless, the congress was important in determining where social policy was headed. It spelled out the responsibilities of what was officially called “shaping the developed socialist society in the GDR,” the declared principal task being to “elevate the material and cultural level of the nation’s life through constant growth of production and productivity” (Lexikonredaktion 1982, as quoted in Pankus 1986, p. 21). This main long-term program encompassed a far-reaching social policy program. It rendered the consumption-oriented variant of social policy acceptable in official party terminology and propaganda. This commitment and its codification in so-called joint resolutions of the Central Committee of the SED, the GDR Council of Ministers, and the FDGB leadership, in the following two years tangibly raised the status of social policy.⁵⁰ It did so not in the sense of fundamentally abandoning past policy but rather of accelerating the journey on a road that had already been steered onto and that was now being widened.

This watershed had palpable results in social policy in the years after the Eighth Party Congress. The party and state leadership increased minimum wages and minimum pensions more than it had in the past, boosted retirement pensions several times, and extended minimum vacation time. Maternity and women’s employment were henceforth rewarded more than had previously been the case. An ambitious housing program was inaugurated as well. The SED’s program of 1976 was conceived of as the “core of social policy” in the GDR (Programm der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1976, adopted version, section A.6). The SED leadership wanted to use it to solve the question of housing as a social issue by the end of the twentieth century, as it was especially pressing in the GDR for many reasons (see Buck 2004; Siegrist and Straht 1996) and gave rise to innumerable complaints (Merkel 1999, pp. 317–319). The Law on the Five Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the GDR, 1971–1975, promulgated on 20 December 1971, stipulated that 500,000 dwellings were to be built or brought up to standard (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 10, p. 175). In 1973 the Central Committee of the SED formally set its targets even higher, with 2.8 to 3 million dwellings to be built or brought up to standard by 1990.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the Law on the Five Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the GDR, 1971–1975, of 20 December 1971 (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 10, pp. 175–177, and 186–189).

5.2.2 Unity of Economic and Social Policy

The new social policy stance of the Ninth Party Congress (1976) came to be anchored in a principle referred to as the “unity of economic and social policy.” From that time on, the leadership of the GDR regarded the unity of economic and social policy even as the “trademark” of its socialist regime (Günter Mittag as quoted in Hockerts 1994b, p. 794; Manz 2001). No matter how troubled the waters later became, the leadership never strayed from it (see Schürer 1999b, for example). From then on, social policy was no longer subordinated to economic policy as it had been under Ulbricht; the two areas were accorded the same rank. As a concept, however, the so-called unity of economic and social policy remained elastic. Some observers believed it to mean the revaluation of social policy or the equal standing of social and economic policy. Others interpreted it as giving social policy priority over economic policy.⁵¹ To a third group – the economic policy-makers in the state and party apparatus, especially the planning experts – it was the dictum of consuming only as much as what had been produced beforehand (see Schürer 1992). To this extent, some of the advocates of the unity of economic and social policy sought to counter inflated expectations of social policy (see Spittmann and Helwig 1990, p. 47).

Many people, however, understood the unity of economic and social policy to mean a free pass for an expansive policy promoting social benefits. In practice, this interpretation gained ascendancy (see Boyer and Skyba 1999a, b; Hockerts 1994a, b; Ritter 1998), and that with Honecker’s full backing. Social policy subsequently moved further than ever before toward “consumer-oriented socialism” (Staritz 1996, p. 281; see also Boyer et al. 2008). The pace was particularly rapid in the 1970s until the Ninth Party Congress of the SED. It slowed afterward, not least in response to an already evident deterioration of foreign trade. Shocks to foreign trade, especially the first worldwide leap in oil prices (1973–1974), jeopardized the 1971–1975 Five Year Plan. Some of the East German leadership anxiously registered the “extraordinarily difficult conditions of foreign trade” (Trümpler et al. 1980, p. 24). But most of the SED leadership was still lulling itself into believing in the unity of economic and social policy. To be sure, the Ninth Party Congress of the SED revolved less around social policy than had the Eighth Party Congress. The later congress was marked instead more by social policy’s preoccupation with projects designed to stimulate the economy. That focus was evident, for example, in the resolution to upgrade meritocratic components of remuneration. On the whole, though, the SED and the state leadership largely saw the signs as still relatively auspicious. The housing policy seemed to show the desired success, too.

⁵¹ This position tended to be held by those who advocated a shift from a policy of putting accumulation (i.e., capital investment) first to one of improving the balance between economic and social concerns. For this interpretation of the unity of economic and social policy, see Schluchter (1996), Staritz (1996), and Wettig (1996). It describes the actual course far better than the alternative accounts.

Official statistics stated that the one-millionth dwelling since the Eighth Party Congress of 1971 was completed in 1978 (Fischer Chronik 1999, p. 645; but see the first part of Sect. 5, below). Progress on the regulation of working conditions and industrial relations was also reported. The labor code was adopted on 16 June 1977 and went into effect on 1 January 1978. It introduced improvements for women with children, among other groups, and extended employment protection (Fischer Chronik 1999, p. 618). Lastly, the self-assessment of the social program adopted in the 1976–1980 Five Year Plan bore witness to sustained optimism. The foreword to the retrospective on the SED’s social policy program from 1971 to 1978 hailed the social program as the “most sweeping yet” in the history of the GDR (Trümpler et al. 1980, p. 32). The achievements were said to be of historic dimensions:

The result of the unity of economic and social policy as the course charted by the SED and accomplished under its leadership is that the citizens of the GDR have bettered their social position to an unprecedented degree. This expresses the historical superiority and tremendous social progress of socialism in comparison to imperialism (Trümpler et al. 1980, p. 35).

However, the costs of the new social policy mounted ominously, as did the costs of following through on earlier key decisions of social policy. The price of subsidies for basic goods and services were an especially great burden on the books. The unwavering retention of the right to work had its rising price as well. Partly in response to the country’s declining birth rate, family and women’s policy, too, kept expanding in the second half of the 1970s, particularly in ways likely to encourage population growth. The main vehicles were the “measures of continued support for working mothers,” which were announced one week before the opening of the Ninth Party Congress of the SED. Support for working mothers was granted as of 1 May 1977 through numerous regulations intended to foster the compatibility between family and work. They included the introduction of the “baby year,” that is, paid leave of absence for mothers after postnatal maternity leave until the end of the infant’s first year of life (Frerich and Frey 1993a, pp. 416–417).

But concern about the escalating costs of social policy had to take a backseat to party logic, as shown by an instructive example reported by Gerhard Schürer, who chaired the State Planning Committee of the GDR from 1965 to 1989. Given the unfavorable trend in the balance of payments in 1977, he proposed to the SED and state leadership major cuts in social expenditure. The idea was rejected, however. An especially enlightening glimpse into the party’s doctrinaire political thinking on the subject was the argument that Minister President Willi Stoph⁵² used against Schürer: “It is not the balance of payments that has to be the basis of our decisions; it is the unity of economic and social policy that matters” (Schürer 1998, p. 171).

⁵² Stoph (1914–1999) was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED (1953–1989) and Chair of the Council of Ministers of the GDR (1976–1989).

5.2.3 Interim Appraisal: Results of Social Policy in the 1970s

It is time to take stock of the social policy output and outcome at this midpoint. What did the reevaluation of social policy in the 1970s bring about? Most of the indicators of the GDR's welfare state reveal what was at times considerable growth in that decade (see Lampert 1996, pp. 101–102; Winkler 1989). Measured by the criteria of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the share of the gross domestic product (GDP) spent on social transfer and services climbed from 12.7% in 1970 to 16.1% in 1973, peaking at 16.8% in 1978 (International Labour Organization 1988, pp. 74–75, 1996, p. 75). However, social expenditures according to the ILO data accounted for only part of the GDR's social policy (mainly the spending on the provisions guarding against risks of old age, illness, and disability). The GDR's direct and indirect spending on job security, for instance, was not counted. In contrast to practice in western countries, this protection did not come primarily from unemployment insurance benefits. Indeed, the revised labor code altogether eliminated that strand of unemployment insurance in the GDR as of 1 January 1978.⁵³ Furthermore, the ILO figures on the share of GDP spent on social services did not contain the state subsidies specifically related to social policy, either. In particular, they left out the price supports for basic goods and services and the subsidization of rents (Trümpler et al. 1986, pp. 329, 333, 338), which devoured vast sums in the 1970s and particularly the 1980s. All these expenditures created a double-edged sword. Politically, the price supports were supposed to help close the gaps in the social insurance systems and to offer legitimation. Economically, however, the supports had serious consequences. Even East German economists repeatedly deplored the flaws – such as waste, environmental pollution, and the idea of trying to give everyone a slice of the budget – and unsuccessfully recommended that the subsidization policy change direction.

The remuneration of the working population was also higher at the end of the 1970s than it had been in the preceding decade, thanks in part to the rise in the monthly minimum wage from 300 to 350 Eastmarks in 1971 and to 400 Eastmarks 5 years later. Working hours were gradually reduced as well, and the number of vacation days was raised. Moreover, broad labor protection against dismissal was retained, a decision that turned East Germany's employment relations into de facto job security for the entire working population (Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen 1987, pp. 232–240, 591). Enhancement of the provisions for old age since 1968 gradually bore fruit, too. Although the level of pensions in the GDR was still no match for those in the Federal Republic of Germany (pp. 566–580), the difference between pensions and average wages had narrowed, as had the discrepancy between minimum pensions and minimum wages (calculations based on Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990; Winkler 1989, pp. 376, 397). Breaking with the GDR's typical inclination toward destratification, the reforms of provisions

⁵³ The new situation that arose in 1990 is examined in the final part of this section.

for old age henceforth eventuated in widening differences between retirement benefits. The social income of people who drew a normal pension and a pension from the voluntary supplementary pension insurance system, which was the case for more and more retired persons,⁵⁴ generally exceeded the minimum wage appreciably. And the higher the recipient's contribution to the voluntary supplementary insurance was, the greater the margin. But people who received only the social insurance pension (i.e., without supplementary retirement benefits) ran the risk of receiving less than the minimum wage. Once again, the exceptions were the generous annuities paid by the special pension systems for certain politically important people working for the state apparatus (such as the full-time employees of the state security service) and by the supplementary old-age pension systems.

The upgrading of social policy in the 1970s left definite traces in family policy as well (Schulz 1997; Trappe 1996). Lampert (1996) has described the most important of them:

The years from 1972 to 1977 saw the adoption of myriad family measures, beginning with loans to promote marriage, basic scholarships for married students, and nonrecognition of nonmarital cohabitation as equal in standing to a conjugal community. They encompassed a 6-week prenatal and 20-week postnatal maternity leave with weekly unemployment benefits equal to [the women's] net income; the entitlement to a leave of absence from work until the end of the child's first year of life in conjunction with support payments; extension of annual vacation for mothers; guaranteed child care in nursery schools and preschools; work release to care for sick children; increased protection from dismissal; support for basic training and further training of women and mothers; bonuses for child-birth; child benefits; income assistance to meet special contingencies in life, such as for mothers working as teachers or studying; welfare benefits keyed to the number of family members and children; tax relief, and price reductions. They went as far as nonmonetary support measures such as child-rearing assistance, social services provided by the enterprise, and special criminal prosecution of "offenses against youth and family." Families with three or more children received additional support⁵⁵ (Lampert 1996, p. 106).

5.3 *The East German Welfare State in the 1980s*

5.3.1 Social Policy in a Period of Economic Recessions

The professed unity of economic and social policy was grounded in the assumption that the trade-off between social protection and economic performance could be bridged or overcome by shrewd coordination. But the world economy and, indirectly, the economy of the socialist countries had been swept into the vortex of severe recessions, structural crises, and adaptive reactions as early as 1973.

⁵⁴ Around the mid-1980s, this group made up 80% of the persons entitled to benefits (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung 1987, p. 579).

⁵⁵ Family assistance also included augmentation of the child benefit (1969, 1981, and 1987).

The 1980s brought a protracted phase of high-interest policy, rising costs of foreign debt, and intensified world economic competition. Matters became even more problematic during that decade when the Soviet Union ceased according East Germany favored status in foreign trade and began billing deliveries of commodities, above all crude oil, in western currency at world market prices, exacerbating the external burdens on the GDR and, indirectly, its social policy. These dislocations in international economic relations hit the GDR particularly hard, for by the late 1980s foreign trade contributed fully 50% of its national income. That share was greater than almost any other east or central European country. To make things worse, the GDR's most important foreign trade partner was the Soviet Union, which passed on the spiraling costs of crude oil to the GDR (Küchler 1999, pp. 123, 108). The second oil price shock (1979–1980) dealt the heaviest blow to the GDR. The rise in real interest in the 1980s became especially onerous because half of East Germany's trade with the OECD countries was denominated in U.S. dollars (p. 121) and because the GDR had accumulated a significant volume of public debt in hard-currency countries of the "NSE," or Nonsocialist Economies. At the same time, trade was stagnating between the member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, more commonly remembered in the West as COMECON).⁵⁶ The public debt of the GDR thus became critical.

The economic policy experts and East Germany's political leadership alike argued over whether the expansive route of social policy should be sustained under such adverse conditions (Hertle 1996, pp. 66–68; Schürer 1998; Trümpler et al. 1986).⁵⁷ Representatives of the State Planning Committee, for instance, had repeatedly pointed out tensions between ambitious social policies and economic performance and had cautioned that it needed to be addressed (Przybylski 1992a, p. 121, b, pp. 49–50, 55–56; see also Hertle 1995, p. 322; Pirker et al. 1995, p. 119; Schürer 1998; Wenzel 1998, pp. 10–11).⁵⁸ But the SED regularly viewed warnings about disastrous economic impacts of overambitious social policy as politically unwise.

⁵⁶ COMECON was created in January 1949 to promote economic development in the eastern European countries of the Soviet bloc.

⁵⁷ Schürer, the chief of the State Planning Committee, later stated that this conflict between the social policy goals and other objectives of economic policy were easily recognizable by 1972 (see Schürer 1999b, p. 167).

⁵⁸ The "tightrope walk at the edge of the abyss" described by Hertle (1995, p. 322) is corroborated by numerous sources, including official ones. See, for instance, reports by the State Planning Committee, such as the document of 30 October 1979, for the Politburo, "Analyse zur Effektivität der Investitionen in der Volkswirtschaft der DDR" [Analysis of the effectiveness of the investments in the economy of the GDR] (SAPMO-BArch, ZPA-SED, J IV 2/2A/2269, vol. 1) and Hertle (1995, p. 339). From these reports and articles, however, one also gathers that social policy had indeed caused some – but not all – of the GDR's desperate economic situation.

Admonitions were shrugged off,⁵⁹ rejected as overwrought,⁶⁰ and actually branded outright as potentially subversive scaremongering. In effect, the GDR's political leadership stuck by the social policy conceived in 1971, which meant retaining or further expanding it and trusting that social protection and economic policy were mutually enriching and stimulating. The rationale, though it clearly hinted at the difficult conditions framing it, was that this approach could be financed through an adequate effort on the part of the labor force, especially by boosting productivity and the volume of exports (Trümpler et al. 1986).

The reason for persisting in the ways of the old social policy derived mostly from the conviction that the instruments of the planned economy were powerful and flexible enough to master even tough challenges posed by the international economy. Other grounds for holding course were the stalwart hope that labor productivity would improve to the required degree and the delusion that the GDR was one of the ten wealthiest industrial countries in the world and had sufficient reserves. That opinion was a crass mistake, as became plain by 1989 and 1990. To judge from the makeup of the economic sectors and the degree of industrialization, the GDR was an industrialized country. But in terms of economic productivity, it was only an emerging economy with moderate productivity levels. Undeniably, the GDR was economically more developed than its fraternal socialist states. The GDR led the central European socialist countries in labor productivity, exceeding the average of the COMECON countries by some 20 percentage points (Küchler 1999, p. 192) and thereby approximating the average labor productivity in the Soviet Union. In the West, however, the GDR stood on a par with Greece and Portugal at most (Heering 1999, p. 2265).⁶¹ The GDR, an economy with a moderate level of productivity, was indulging in a social policy that had already reached a very high standard by the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in light of the price supports for basic goods and services, housing, and job security. That policy pushed up the costs of the country's enterprises and drastically curtailed their ability to adapt to the changing economic environment.

⁵⁹ Commenting on the tension between social policy and growing foreign debt, FDGB chief Harry Tisch is said to have stated: "This debt thing shouldn't be exaggerated. I sincerely doubt whether there is any country without debts in the world" (Mittag 1991, p. 319).

⁶⁰ Ulbricht himself is reported to have repeatedly rebuked his crown prince, Honecker, for superficiality in economic matters, saying "You never see problems" (Przybylski 1992b, p. 45).

⁶¹ On estimations of the GDR's level of economic productivity, see also Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (1971), Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (1987, pp. 345–350, 389–393), and Summers and Heston (1984). For an overview see Gutmann and Buck (1996). According to the First Report of the Federal Government on German Unification, the average level of productivity in the East German economy had fallen by the late 1980s to just under a third that of the West German economy (see Materialien zur Deutschen Einheit und zum Aufbau in den neuen Bundesländern 1997, p. 87). Taking stock of the GDR's economic strength in late 1989, Heering (1999, pp. 2264–2268) reports that the 1991 estimate of East Germany's labor productivity in 1990, the year of Germany's unification, came to just under 33% of the corresponding figure for West Germany. In 1985 it is reported to have been 36%; in 1950, even as high as 50%.

5.3.2 The Course of the East German Welfare State in the 1980s

What direction did East German social policy take in the particularly difficult years of economic hardship after 1980? Experts usually answer this question first by venturing that social policy had just about come to the end of the road (e.g., Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung 1987; Frerich and Frey 1993a, pp. 153–154; Schneider 1989; Vortmann 1989). From 1980 on, they contend, it was about the consolidation of social policy, about a policy that at best expanded on existing regulations but offered few, if any, new concepts and indeed occasionally cut benefits. But this line of thought captures only part of the GDR's social policy. It does not distinguish adequately by sector and period of social policy. In particular, it underestimates the increasing importance of the funding that flowed into family support and social policy in the broad sense, that is, including price supports, subsidies for rents, and the costs involved in maintaining the right to work. It also fails to see that the GDR's political leadership clung to social policy in a bid for legitimacy and a continued hold on power. The leadership affirmed and reinforced social policy, even widening it by selectively avoiding decisions despite the additional costs it incurred (see Boyer et al. 2008).

By the criteria of the ILO, the expansion of social policy in the narrow sense had in fact essentially gone as far as it could, with a few exceptions to be discussed below. The rates of public spending on social transfers and services had settled at a level under 16%, that is, lower than in the late 1970s (International Labour Organization 1996, p. 75). Such expenditures in the narrow sense shrank from 21.9% (1980) of the state budget to 21.2% (1989).⁶² The legislative and regulatory activity related to social policy also ebbed in the 1980s compared to that in the first half of the 1970s, as is evident in the Official Statute Register of the German Democratic Republic. Provisions for old age, which had been upgraded earlier, likewise seemed to lose ground to other fields of social policy. Some of the relevant scholarly literature has interpreted these trends too generally as an expression of concealed fiscal retrenchment (see Klinger 1989, p. 23). That assessment is based on the observation that pensions began to lag behind wages again in the 1980s. For instance, the relation between the average level of retirement pensions and the income of a worker or salaried employee in a nationalized enterprise shrank from 33.3% in 1980 to 29.8% in 1988 (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1996, Tables 10.15, 10.7). As of the mid-1980s, retirement pensions, too, lost ground in comparison to family assistance, especially support for families with children (calculations based on Winkler 1989, pp. 362–364). Retirement pensions did somewhat catch up with minimum wages, however, particularly after 1 December, 1989, when average retirement pensions jumped to an unprecedented level equaling 34.1% of average wages – a boon timed to coincide with the GDR's fortieth anniversary.

⁶² The calculations are based on the percentage of the GDR public budget that was spent on housing and on health care, social security, and family support (see Buck 1999, pp. 1215–1223).

This financial realignment of retirement pensions is consistent with the argument that East German welfare state of the 1980s was not just about consolidation and rollbacks but also about continuity. Despite a deterioration in overall economic conditions and an urgent need to adapt, the government accepted high hidden unemployment – approximately 15% of the total labor force (Vogler-Ludwig 1990) – rather than touch the right to work. The value attached to some fields of social policy actually appreciated in the 1980s, as was the case with the company-based welfare state provisions (Autorenkollektiv 1988; von Maydell et al. 1996; Winkler 1989) and the supplementary old-age pension systems, which were expanded by ten additional ones in the 1980s. The minimum pension grew as well (1984). Family policy was expanded, especially its pronatal components. As of 1 May 1987, this policy included a substantial enlargement of the child benefit, a change that SED General Secretary Erich Honecker had announced at the Eleventh SED Party Congress (1986).⁶³ It indicates that the formation of East German social policy in the 1980s kept following the cycles of those events and national anniversaries. At the congress, Honecker stated that the hikes in the child benefit and other spending, such as that on childbirth grants, had the objective of perceptibly moderating the disparity between the per capita income of households without children and those with children (see Buck 1987, p. 394). The revaluation of family policy that was planned with these changes in mind has been interpreted in the literature as part of the competition between the systems, as “a new round in the contest with the Federal Republic of Germany for the socially superior system of protection” (p. 395).

Disregarding all economic bottlenecks, the GDR’s political leadership adhered to its expansionary housing construction policy of the 1980s, although the need for investment was pressing in other areas such as transport and telecommunication. The policy on housing construction therefore does not convincingly bear out the assertion that social policy was curbed in the 1980s (see Siegrist and Strath 1996). Pension policy does not corroborate it, either. As mentioned earlier, retirees were given their turn again in 1989 after years of falling behind other groups in social policy. The Fourth Pension Regulation of 8 June 1989 increased their retirement pensions by an unprecedented amount near the end of the year (Bonz 1990; Fischer Chronik 1999, p. 852; GBl. der DDR 1989, part 1, no. 299, pp. 229–231). The change applied to minimum pensions and minimum benefits paid as retirement, disability,

⁶³ The monthly child benefit paid by the state rose from 20 to 50 Eastmarks for the first child, from 20 to 100 Eastmarks for the second child, and from 100 to 150 Eastmarks for each additional child thereafter. Other family assistance was provided through paid leave granted to working mothers who cared for sick children, a policy that was extended after 1 May 1986 to all working mothers with two or more children. As of May 1986 one year of paid leave was granted even upon the birth of the first child.

and accident pensions.⁶⁴ Pension entitlements were recalculated as of 1 December 1989. New, higher fixed sums were applied to retirement and disability pensions, to “Additional Old-age Provisions of the Intelligentsia,” and to the pensions for surviving dependents of accident victims. This regulation was not signed and put into effect until the “gentle revolution” in the GDR had already almost completely eroded the SED’s monopoly on power.

Nor does the relevant evidence on East Germany’s company-based welfare state support the proposition that it stagnated or was systematically dismantled in the 1980s (Bonz 1989; Hübner 2008). In that decade more than in previous ones, the company-based social policies were confronted with tasks that by nature came primarily under manpower and employment policy. The main reason for this expansion of responsibility was that the change in economic structures and the stepped-up efforts to achieve efficiency reduced the number of job vacancies, displacing labor on a major scale. In the context of the GDR’s economy, the enterprises were the organizations most responsible for coping with the attendant problems. Workers affected by streamlining and labor displacement were supposed to be provided with or retrained for a different job in the same enterprise (on amended contracts) or some other one (on transitional contracts). For the most part, this arrangement seems to have succeeded until the late 1980s, keeping the GDR’s frictional unemployment negligible in those years.

Another notable aspect is that the expansion of existing social policy, particularly those elements not recorded in the ILO’s figures on the share of GDP spent on social services, devoured an ever greater proportion of the state budget. Aside from the costs of job security, they encompassed mainly the growing state allocations for subsidizing housing rent, staple foods, industrial goods significant for social policy (e.g., educational articles and baby apparel), and important services such as those charged to the population for local passenger transport and basic utilities (Buck 1987, 1988, pp. 32–35).

On the whole, there is little evidence to suggest that the East German welfare state began retracting parts of the social safety net in the 1980s. On the contrary, this analysis underscores the high degree to which the net was maintained during that decade. Spending on social benefits actually accelerated in especially cost-intensive areas. The same was true of support for women and families in those years.

⁶⁴ The minimum pensions grew by 30 Eastmarks. Retired persons having had 15 or more years of service were granted additional increases. For women who had had five or more children and who were entitled to a retirement or disability pension owing to an activity requiring insurance coverage, the minimum pension benefit went up from 370 to 470 Eastmarks. Accident pensions were also improved. The minimum disability benefit received by beneficiaries with a physical injury leaving them at least two-thirds impaired was likewise increased from 370 to 470 Eastmarks. Other retirement, disability, and accident pensions were increased, too, as were pensions for surviving dependents, from voluntary insurance with the State Insurance of the GDR, and for disabled war veterans. There were increases in regular support payments (from 270 to 330 Eastmarks) as well as in spouse and child benefits, the former going up from 50 to 200 Eastmarks and the latter to 60 Eastmarks.

Even training programs, an area that one might presume to have been marginal, were expanded. Scholarships were increased and generalized for all students in the GDR and, in contrast to the period before 1980, granted regardless of the income level of the parents (Lohmann 1996, pp. 85–86).⁶⁵

All these benefits must be considered against the deterioration in GDR's economy and its export performance in the 1980s (Maier 1997, pp. 57–59). The competitiveness of the East German economy kept diminishing, and the foreign and domestic debt rose. Furthermore, the country's economy stagnated or shrank in 1980, 1982, 1986, and 1987 according to West German calculations (Fischer Chronik 1999, pp. 691, 730, 805, 831), based on DM prices of 1989.⁶⁶ The public infrastructure was already in a sorry state. Suffering as it did from lack of investment, it was no better off than the socialist enterprises with their depreciated, obsolete capital stock (see Gutmann 1999, for example). In the 1980s the GDR sank deeper and deeper into hard choices, particularly between high and rising consumption and decreasing investment and between expensive social protection and waning economic strength.

5.4 *Social Policy in the Final Year of the GDR*

Did the Honecker era come to a close even before Honecker was replaced as General Secretary of the SED by Egon Krenz? Or did it end with Honecker's fall in October 1989? Did it persist until the onset of the GDR's restructuring, which gathered momentum under the Modrow government⁶⁷ and which was rerouted, accelerated, and prepared for reunification by the de Maizière government?⁶⁸ Was it finally eclipsed when the *Länder* (federal states) that were reestablished in the GDR in July 1990 acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, Honecker's fall in October unmistakably marks a decisive moment in the history of the GDR. It ushered in the final year of the GDR, a period of fundamental change – in the constitution, the structure and functioning of the political institutions, and the direction and substance of public policy. The scope of this transformation was reflected by the Law on the Change of the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic (1 December 1989), which deleted the clause on the leading role of the SED (Gesetzblatt der DDR, part 1, no. 25). Eleven other constitutional changes followed, establishing instead the principles of

⁶⁵ The foundation was laid by a regulation adopted by the Council of Ministers on 11 June 1981. The basic monthly scholarship was 200 Eastmarks (215 Eastmarks in Berlin), with a deduction of 10 Eastmarks for a place in a dormitory.

⁶⁶ However, East German statistics based on the economic accounting of the socialist planned economy showed abidingly positive rates of growth in the “material product.”

⁶⁷ Hans Modrow (1928) chaired the Council of Ministers of the GDR from November 1989 to March 1990.

⁶⁸ Lothar de Maizière (1940) was Minister President of the GDR from 12 April to 2 October 1990.

a “liberal, democratic, federal, social, and ecologically oriented state based on the rule of law” and opening the constitution to the First State Treaty as “constitutional law.” The latter enactment created the legal foundation for the monetary, economic, and social union between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany on 1 July 1990. The change also reshaped the structures of the state. East Germany’s unitary system gave way to federalism when the *Länder* were reinstated on the territory of the German Democratic Republic on 22 July 1990 (Mampel 1990, 1997).

In terms of constitutional reality as well, the SED and its successor organization, the Party of Democratic Socialism (“SED/PDS” or “PDS” since February 1990), lost its monopoly on the political process. In addition, the First State Treaty between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (the Treaty on the Creation of a Monetary, Economic, and Social Union between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany of 18 May 1990), which went into effect on 1 July 1990 (Gesetzblatt der DDR, 1990, part 1, no. 34, pp. 332–356), and the Unification Treaty of 31 August 1990, which went into effect on 3 October 1990 (Gesetzblatt der DDR, 1990, part 1, no. 64, pp. 1627–1985) paved the road for a rapid transition from the socialist regime to a Western democracy based on a market economy.

This section discusses how social policy was affected by the social and political change in the GDR during its final year. Just like science policy, social policy, too, was characterized by “reorientation and attempted self-renewal” (Lepsius 1993, p. 305) in the beginning. And just like science policy, social policy, too, underwent a radical shift toward the West German model, especially after the election of the People’s Chamber on 18 March 1990 (Ritter 2007b). The development of labor law as of October 1989 exemplifies a larger pattern. It underwent three phases in the GDR’s last year. The first phase was defined by the unrestricted application of previous socialist labor law, which remained on the books until the end of 1989. The second phase manifested the “emergence of reform-minded democratic labor law and codetermination of East Germany’s own provenance in the months from January through May 1990” (Sander 1997, p. 68). The third phase was stamped by the “actual transitional law of a predominantly metalegal nature [that applied] from the signing of the First State Treaty on 18 May 1990 until 3 October 1990, when the unification treaty went into effect” (Sander 1997, p. 68; see also Lohmann 1996).

At first, however, social policy remained as it was. Honecker’s successor, Krenz, retained the social policies that the previous government had already agreed on, including the improvement in pensions as of 1 December 1989 and in social welfare (von Maydell et al. 1996, p. 29). The social policies pursued by the Modrow cabinet were even more ambitious. On 13 November 1989, Modrow, hitherto the First Secretary in the Dresden SED district, was elected by the People’s Chamber to chair the Council of Ministers of the GDR (for the context see Moreau et al. 1999). One of the declared goals of the first Modrow government was to examine the pricing and subsidization policy with an eye to consolidating state finances (p. 2017). But the government, convinced that cuts in social benefits and basic public services could be highly unpopular and hazardous to its political survival, did not dare tackle this project earnestly. There was also the belief that the “historical

achievements” of East Germany’s socialism had to be protected and, if possible, expanded – even beyond the development of the West German welfare state if need be (p. 2169).

Modrow expressly stated in his first governmental declaration (on 17 November 1989) that his government was striving for “good socialism.” He later also stressed that he sought “a democratic reorganization of socialism and the continued existence of the GDR while recasting its relations with the F[ederal] R[epublic of] G[ermany]” (Modrow 1991). The main objective of the Modrow government consisted in preserving the GDR’s sovereignty and modifying the socialist social order along the lines of democratic, socialist reform under the leadership of the SED (later the PDS).

These goals also determined the Modrow government’s plans for fairly wide divergence from social policy’s path, particularly those considered by the actors of the old regime and of the opposition gathered at the “Round Table” beginning in January 1990 (Jäckel 1995; Siebenmorgen 1995; Thaysen 2000a, b, c, d, e; Winters 1995). Three projects deserve special mention in this context: new departures in labor law, the social charter, and trade-union law as formulated in the Law on the Rights of the Trade Unions in the German Democratic Republic (hereafter the Trade Union Act of 1990; *Gesetzblatt der GDR*, part 1, no. 15, pp. 110–111).

The first steps in adapting labor law to the changes in East German employment relations as of late 1989 followed in February 1990 in response to the mounting trouble with the policy on job security. Since the regime shift in autumn 1989, many enterprises had had to adjust economically and entire sectors of government administration had been dissolved, such as part of the apparatus for surveillance and repression. These upheavals had triggered labor displacement on a scale that simply overwhelmed the GDR’s traditional instruments of job security. A demand for labor market policy developed, and the Modrow government wanted to meet it with measures providing for early retirement, retraining, and a safety net for unemployed persons (Kinitz 1997, p. 71; von Maydell et al. 1996, pp. 304–305).

By February 1990, the Modrow government had taken its initial measures to deal with unemployment. They consisted basically of state-funded benefits as stipulated in the Ordinance Granting State Support and Company Compensation Payment to Citizens During the Period of Job Placement, 8 February 1990 (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 7, pp. 41–42). Additional relief came from an analogous legislation, the Ordinance Granting Early Retirement Allowance, 8 February 1990 (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 7, p. 42). Lying well above the hitherto customary level of the social benefits in the GDR, the unemployment payments matched the recipient’s previous net earnings up to a ceiling of 500 Eastmarks. Up to 70% of the difference (again, up to 500 Eastmarks) between that sum and the recipient’s previous net earnings was covered by supplementary compensation paid by the enterprise that dismissed the person. The First State Treaty (1 July 1990), which regulated the monetary, economic, and social union of East and West Germany, stipulated that the GDR was to arrange for unemployment insurance and employment promotion in a manner in keeping with West Germany’s Employment Promotion Act.

By majority vote, the People's Chamber duly passed the Employment Promotion Act of the GDR on 22 June 1990 (which was superseded by the West German Employment Promotion Act when the two countries united). Before the monetary union, the GDR's offices that oversaw employment started being transformed into organs of a public employment service patterned on that of the old Federal Republic. The GDR's Employment Promotion Act of 1990 also contained special regulations and raised the level of benefits, particularly regarding the payment of an allowance for short-time work even in cases where the reduction in work was due "to structural changes in operations or to operationally related organizational measures having to do with the creation of an economic, monetary, and social union with the Federal Republic of Germany" (§ 63, Par. 5 of the Employment Promotion Act of the GDR; see Hauser et al. 1996, pp. 54–56).

The Modrow government's aspirations for a welfare state became especially clear in the social charter passed by the Round Table on 7 March 1990, shortly before the elections to the People's Congress on 18 March (Volkskammerdrucksache 1990). The intention behind the social charter was to spell out the GDR's position in the negotiations on an monetary, economic, and social union with the Federal Republic. The social charter provided for an ambitious program of welfare state policies that far surpassed even East Germany's brand of socialism. The Round Table also aimed to expand the catalogue of basic social rights spelled out in the East German constitution. The right to work, the right to gender equality and child-rearing, the right to basic training and further training, and the right to a system of social insurance were expressly listed. This stance was remarkable. It was disproportionate to the GDR's grave economic and funding problems and would have inflated them and the costs of restructuring the country – not the least of the reasons that the social charter drew harsh criticism from the West German side. (Horst Seehofer of West Germany's Christian Social Union, for example, called the social charter "the Round Table's rotten egg," as quoted in Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994, p. 35.) The Modrow government never once spoke of trade-offs between social and economic policy. Not a word was said about ways, means, or limits of financing ambitious social policy or about the sense and nonsense of aggrandizing social policy in a country of only modest economic means. Instead, the social charter's express rationale, as stated by Modrow government's Minister of the Economy, Christa Luft,⁶⁹ was the goal of reining in a runaway market economy (Moreau et al. 1999, p. 2170).

The spirit of the social charter also suffused the Law on the Rights of the Trade Unions in the German Democratic Republic (Gesetzblatt der DDR, part 1, no. 15, pp. 110–111), which was passed on 6 March 1990, likewise shortly before that month's elections for the People's Chamber. It had the thinly disguised objective of defining the framework for the legislature that would emerge from the first democratic

⁶⁹ Christa Luft (1938), served as deputy chair of the Council of Ministers of the GDR and as Minister of the Economy from October 1989 to March 1990. From March to October 1990, she was a PDS representative in the People's Chamber.

elections for the People's Chamber. Flanking the envisaged further expansion of social transfer and social services, the Trade Union Act of 1990 was supposed to take the trend of democratization forward yet restructure employment relations so as to invest the unions with the sole authority to represent the workforce and to create structures of a state dominated by trade unions. In particular, the idea was to broaden the opportunities of trade unions to participate in state decisions. The Trade Union Act provided for the privileged participation of the trade unions in the deliberations on and the adoption of labor laws and social legislation. Its strike regulations (e.g., guaranteed right to strike), its injunction against lock-outs, its exclusion of claims for damages resulting from strikes, and its legally mandated continuation of wage payments even during indirect strike-related disruptions of production were exceedingly favorable to trade unions. This legislation aimed to introduce the right of the union management in an enterprise to conclude the works agreements and to veto all company decisions that disregarded the right of codetermination. Another purpose of this law was to establish sweeping rights of industrial democracy for "basic trade union organizations in all operational questions that concern the working and living conditions of the working population" (Trade Union Act of 1990, §11).

At critical places, however, the Trade Union Act lagged behind developments. The sole claim to represent the interests of the workers and employers was already outdated, for the country's enterprises meanwhile had works councils, works control councils, and works management councils that supplanted the enterprise's old union-controlled boards in the articulation of employee interests (Sander 1997, pp. 73–75). Only a few days after the law was passed, it was worthless in any case. The elections for the People's Chamber on 18 March 1990 produced a government coalition of the Alliance for Germany, Social Democracy, and Liberals. It did not seek a union-dominated state but instead changed course and steered toward reunification essentially on the terms of West German economic, labor, and social law.

The head of this government coalition was Lothar de Maizière of East Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), with Regine Hildebrandt of East Germany's Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.⁷⁰ The de Maizière government, unlike its predecessor, did not lean toward preserving and reforming the GDR but rather on having it accede to the Federal Republic of Germany (Schröder and Misselwitz 2000). This fundamental switch of direction affected social policy as a whole. The way was cleared for reunification that was to have the GDR adopt most of the laws and institutions of the West German welfare state. The de Maizière government prepared the country for

⁷⁰ This coalition survived scarcely 4 months. De Maizière dismissed Ministers Walter Romberg (SPD), Peter Pollack (independent), Gerhard Pohl (CDU), and Kurt Wünsche (independent at that time but a member of the Bund Freier Demokraten until the mid-1990s) on 15 August 1990. The SPD withdrew from the coalition on 19 August 1990. The remaining SPD ministers resigned their portfolios the next day.

politico-administrative accession as well, setting up a ministry of labour and social affairs patterned largely on West Germany's Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Order. However, responsibility for health insurance was moved to the Ministry of Health as a result of political arrangements within the party and the coalition, whereby the Ministry of Health was assigned to the CDU and the Ministry of Labour to the SPD.

Two other laws crucial to social policy were the First State Treaty and the Unification Treaty.⁷¹ Soon after the elections to the People's Chamber on 18 March 1990, the West German government and the de Maizière government agreed on the principles of a state treaty providing for a monetary, economic, and social union between the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR. The treaty was signed on 18 May 1990 and went into effect on 1 July 1990, after ratification by the parliaments of both German states.

The First State Treaty and the laws flanking it, such as the Social Insurance Act of 28 June 1990, and the reform of the East German labor code, which abolished the main component of socialist labor law, fundamentally altered social policy in the GDR. For the most part, the institutions of the East German welfare state were replaced by those of the West German system, with transitional regulations applying in some cases (see Ritter 2007a, b).

The institutional transfer from West to East Germany was an impressive technical and organizational feat. The unusually quick, efficient introduction of a complete social safety net modeled on West Germany's system, was justifiably lauded as a "great feat of West Germany's social policy" – "a *Sozialstaats-Kunststück*," to quote the responsible Federal Minister of Labour and Social Order at that time, Norbert Blüm (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1994, p. 6).

The change brought about by the First State Treaty and cemented by the Unification Treaty shook all the mainstays of the East German welfare state from top to bottom. The right to work, its first pillar, yielded to West German labor law, active labor market and employment policy, and, in case of unemployment, the benefits of passive labor market policy. The function of social insurance, the second pillar of the GDR's welfare state, passed to the multifaceted arrangements of West Germany's social insurance. In contrast to the benefits paid under former East German practice, those in the West German system were regularly adjusted to wage development and were financed mostly through social contributions (at much higher rates). Part of the third pillar of East German social policy, price subsidies for basic goods and various services, was dissolved by the State Treaty. In their stead came special programs such as a rent allowance, funding for housing construction, and public social assistance, the means-tested basic income system in West Germany's welfare state, too. With few exceptions, other parts of the third pillar – such as support for working and single mothers – were swept away by

⁷¹ Law on the Treaty on the Creation of a Monetary, Economic, and Social Union between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany of 18 May 1990 (Constitution Act) (*Gesetzblatt der DDR*, part 1, no. 34, p. 331).

family policy of West German conception, which differed from the East German policy that had been keyed to policies on employment or population growth. Part of the fourth pillar of East German social policy – the company-based welfare state, especially job security and the social institutions that were intended to improve the supply of consumer goods and services – fell victim to the change in economic structures and the impact of the GDR's serious economic crisis. Another part of the fourth pillar was taken over by more highly specialized institutions of West German social policy such as those seeing to company provisions for old age, miscellaneous social services of West German companies, and the local communities (Schmähl 1999). The fifth and last pillar of East German social policy, the supplementary old-age pension systems and special pension schemes, were dismantled. The parties to the First State Treaty ruled that existing arrangements of these types be terminated on 1 July 1990, that hitherto acquired claims and entitlements be transferred to pension insurance, and that benefits be examined under special regulations to eliminate unwarranted expenditures and reduce excessively generous provisions. These terms were carried out, compliance that frequently prompted bitter lawsuits in subsequent years (see, for example, Mohn 1993; Mutz 1999; Reimann 1991).

The institutional transfer from West to East considerably benefited many East German citizens because the Federal Republic's welfare state offered far more comfortable conditions than those in the GDR, especially in matters of social transfers and social services generally.⁷² Moreover, West Germany's approach to industrial relations included broad rights of codetermination for employee representatives. Social needs beyond the sphere of production or population policy were accommodated far more generously by the Federal Republic, and the West German welfare state enjoyed much greater prosperity. However, it lacked an equivalent of the right to work, an entitlement that was now slipping away. Given the severe employment crisis in the new *Länder* (the territory of East Germany) that loss was especially painful to many people and often gave rise to heated criticism of the social and economic policies in the united Germany.

6 Outcomes of Social Policy

What were the strengths and weaknesses of social policy in the GDR up to the end of the Honecker era?⁷³ How did it affect East Germany's social structure? To what type of welfare state policy did the East German brand of social policy belong? And what sociopolitical legacy did the new *Länder*, the East German states, bring with

⁷² There were also losers in the institutional transfer, though. They tended to be people who had been privileged by East German social policy, primarily former recipients of benefits from the supplementary old-age pension systems or special pension schemes.

⁷³ Social policy from that point in history to the GDR's accession to the Federal Republic of Germany on 3 October 1990 calls for its own appraisal. See the final part of the preceding section.

them into reunified Germany? These questions guide the discussion in this section and the two following ones.

The propaganda of the SED state presented the government's social policy as a complete success, as it did all other policies in the *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*, or "workers' and peasants' state" (see the foreword and documents in Trümpler et al. 1986).

Because of the development of productive forces and the conditions of socialist production, our people have attained a living standard unprecedented in their history. Unemployment is to us a term from another, alien world. We are guaranteed social security and safety, full employment, equal educational opportunity for all children of the people (Honecker 1986; as quoted in Winkler 1989, p. 232).

This excerpt from Honecker's speech at the Eleventh Party Congress in Berlin (1986) is only one of many declarations of success. East German textbooks on social policy usually contained similar accounts, with one qualification or another. Some of the publications focused chiefly on housing policy, family policy, the efforts to improve working conditions, and the subsidies for basic goods (e.g., Manz and Winkler 1979; Winkler 1989; see also Autorenkollektiv 1975a, b, 1977, 1988). Were such claims justified or exaggerated?

On the whole, the GDR had indisputably created a prodigious welfare state. And without doubt, the job security enjoyed by a very large part of the working-age population was a popular achievement of East German social policy. But it is also certain that the East German welfare state was trapped in a massive conundrum. When it came to preserving, cultivating, and mobilizing labor capacity, the state was especially dedicated. It also went to great lengths to encourage population growth. But beyond those two prime concerns – labor and population policy – it neglected nearly all other fields of social policy, including "human resources" (Kaufmann 1994, p. 371). There were also issues with social integration and system integration. Social policy actively contributed to change in the social structure and to the emergence of the social fabric of a socialist industrial society with new assets and liabilities. But the legitimation sought through social policy did not go as far as had been hoped (see Sect. 6.3). Moreover, the hope that generous welfare state provisions could maximize the performance of the working population and thereby appreciably improve labor productivity proved illusory. The East German welfare state ultimately became too large for the country's economic strength, which was only moderate, and that imbalance caused substantial economic hardship (see Sects. 6.4 and 6.5).

The East German welfare state therefore experienced wide discrepancy between particularist interests on the one hand and collective rationality on the other (see Kaufmann 1994, pp. 364–365). Neither East Germany's leadership nor the broad mass of the population properly acknowledged this discrepancy, the backwardness of the country's social policy, its demonstrated shortcomings and trouble spots, and the tensions between it and other important objectives.

6.1 Areas of Social Policy

6.1.1 Basic Security

The political leadership of the GDR nonetheless justifiably vaunted the protection that its social policy granted almost all citizens against material impoverishment. It extended to all citizens, except persons officially or unofficially counted among those threatened with or condemned to exclusion as “class opponents” – above all, East German citizens who had officially applied to emigrate from the GDR, “fugitives of the Republic” (GDR citizens who had emigrated to West Germany), persons who had once been particularly active Nazi combatants, and politically prominent dissidents. The welfare state of the GDR guaranteed cradle-to-grave basic support covering education, working life, and a tightly woven net of social provisions in case of illness, accident, or old age. The guaranteed basic livelihood was relatively low, however, sufficing only because basic goods, housing rents, and various services were subsidized. The costs of these subsidies soared in the 1980s, escalating the already high tension between the twin goals of ensuring social protection and maintaining economic strength. Furthermore, basic care became less and less able to satisfy the expectations of the great majority of East Germans, who coveted the prosperity, elevated life style, and higher consumption level in western Germany.

6.1.2 Provisions for Old Age

East German social policy was riven by internal tensions, too. Providing for old age was a perennial quandary for the SED state. Despite the many corrections that were made in this area as of the late 1960s, a fairly large share of retirees still found themselves socially disadvantaged in the late 1980s, not infrequently living at or beneath the poverty line (Manz 1992). True, the voluntary supplementary pensions and the higher wages of the post-war generation had increased the retirement pensions. The voluntary supplementary pensions would have had quite some effect as of the 1990s, but by that time the GDR had already acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany, reuniting the nation. As late as the second half of the 1980s, only about one third of the retirees had a supplementary pension to draw on. On average, this kind of pension did not exceed the customary retirement annuities by more than 100 Eastmarks a month anyway. The overall outcome of old-age pensions, above all, overt destratification and meager pensions, was thus not fundamentally changed. For example, the average monthly retirement pension from the SVAA in December 1989 was 446.62 Eastmarks – or 555.42 Eastmarks if the benefit from voluntary supplementary pension insurance was counted in (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, p. 384). The first figure corresponded to 39% of the average net earned income of full-time workers and salaried employees in nationalized enterprises; the second, to 49% (calculation based on Statistisches

Amt der DDR 1990). Until the demise of the SED state, pensions for most elderly retirees living alone left little or no room for maneuver.⁷⁴ Things were better for younger retirees, especially those of age groups receiving higher retirement pensions because of longer training, better pay, and more favorable insurance terms.

Members of the FDGB national management board, which was responsible for administering social insurance, conceded that East German policy on old-age pensions was badly flawed in general. On 24 November 1989, the board's organ, the *Tribüne* (East Berlin), tellingly called for a "genuinely fair pension system" in which "each is entitled by social insurance to expect that his pension will be calculated according to his income, number of years worked, and premiums paid; that special regulations will thereby become needless; and that pensions will always keep pace with the trend in wages and prices." This demand was enlightening, for it took the pension insurance of the Federal Republic of Germany as a model and found the East German provisions for old age wanting.

6.1.3 Care for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

As noted just above, providing for old age remained a weak link in East Germany's system of social benefits. But contrary to common opinion (e.g., Wolle 1998, pp. 181–182), it was not the most fragile one. Even less protection came from social welfare (Boldorf 1998, 2008b; Rudloff 1998; Wienand et al. 1997). The situation was no better with care for the elderly and the policy on persons with disabilities (Kohnert 1999; Hoffmann 2008), not to mention the policy on refugees and expellees (Schwartz and Goschler 2008). The approach taken to the elderly in need of care and to persons with disabilities was "an especially problematic chapter in the history of the GDR" (Kohnert 1999, p. 1726). Many of them stayed "a marginal group in society" (p. 1727) even when the GDR's economic situation began to improve. In principle, nothing changed until 1990. As noted by Kohnert (1999): "Maintaining the fiction that old people and persons with disabilities had a safe and secure existence remained . . . part of the policy" (p. 1779). But the reality was an

utterly deficient system of medical, nursing, and social care with out-patient services, homes, government administration of the health and social services, social organizations, and volunteers. Buildings, technical equipment, and vehicles did not meet the necessary qualitative and quantitative standards, so many people in need of care and many with disabilities received inadequate assistance, if any (p. 1779).

⁷⁴ According to my analysis of Survey S 6344 conducted by the Berlin Institute of Social Science Studies (BISS 1990), just under 50% of East German retirees (persons pensioned for reasons of age, disability, or early retirement) received a monthly income of up to 500 Eastmarks. A further 24% had an income ranging between 500 and 600 Eastmarks. Just under one third of all retirees received additional income from such sources as interest, housing rent, or leases. Most of those respondents (24% of all retirees) reported additional income of up to 500 Eastmarks in 1989. A very small percentage of the respondents reported additional income greater than that.

6.1.4 Health Care

Observers in the GDR (e.g., Mecklinger 1999a, b, c, d)⁷⁵ as well as those in West Germany rate the East German health system more highly than they do the three areas of social policy just discussed (e.g., von Beyme 1975, p. 261; Meyer 1997). The vision guiding the East German health care system was “the state-paid physician of a factory polyclinic as the representative of a work-oriented, paternalistic health regime that coupled comprehensive state care to rigid behavioral expectations” (Süß 1998, p. 97). By contrast, the vision offered by the West German health care system was the self-employed medical specialist working in a complexly structured, predominantly government-funded health system whose organs of self-administration buffered it from direct political control. Many experts were particularly taken by the company health services in the GDR, the close coordination between out- and in-patient care, and the link between prophylactic and curative medicine (e.g., von Maydell et al. 1996, pp. 293–295). The preventive orientation of the East German health system was internationally acclaimed (Knieps 1990), as was the prenatal care it rendered. To judge from the standard indicators of the population’s health, the health policy of the GDR had great merit compared to that of other socialist states. Given this health system, people in the GDR were convinced for some time of having “long ago definitely surpassed” the West, specifically West Germany, to quote Ulbricht at the Sixth Party Congress of the SED (1963) (Süß 1998, p. 59, note 14).

But the strengths of East German health care were accompanied by grave weaknesses, too (Wasem 1997; Boyer 2008a, b). The revolutionary reorganization of the health system had incurred serious damage. As formulated by the director of the SMAD health department, the underlying philosophy of those measures held that the “working population [had to be] liberated from the dependence imposed by private health care” (as quoted in Süß 1998, p. 87) and that its leading exponents were to be sought among the private doctors and owners of hospitals and other medical facilities. The radical restructuring of out-patient care, however, was one of the reasons for the massive emigration of physicians to western Germany and for the resulting shortage of them in the GDR. Between 1946 and 1961, around 7,500 physicians, or approximately half of the GDR’s entire contingent in 1960, left the country. This number included a disproportionately high number of young doctors (p. 89).

Overall, the population’s health status improved more slowly than in western countries (Hockerts 1994a, pp. 528–529; Rowland 1991; Wiesner 1990). Life expectancy rose in the Federal Republic of Germany, but the trend was downward in the GDR from the early 1980s on. The mortality rate due to curable diseases was 4.6 times higher in the GDR than in the Federal Republic of Germany, primarily because of poor diagnostics and therapy. These circumstances likely stemmed at

⁷⁵ Ludwig Mecklinger was the GDR’s Minister of Health from 1971 to 1989.

least in part from the GDR's scant material resources for health care (Thiele 1990) – with adverse working conditions, old and poorly maintained buildings, a scarcity of requisite medical supplies, and low pay all complicating work in the health sector (Oertel and Ziesemer 1992, p. 291).

Another source of reproof was the solicitous, paternalistic style of the health care system (Süß 1998, p. 95). “The work-centered focus of health care policy” (p. 95) also had a flip side: the relative reluctance to include cases outside the production process. In addition, health policy, like many other political institutions in the GDR, tended to avoid addressing faults, such as alcohol-related illnesses and causes of death (Schieritz 1990).

6.1.5 Housing Policy

Housing policy has been variously rated. Housing, too, was profoundly marked by the political changes after 1945 (Topfstedt 1999). State management of housing, regulations that froze rent on old residential buildings at 1936 levels and redistributed living space at the owners' expense, and suppression of owners' power of disposal over their residential property exacerbated the grievous quantitative and qualitative shortcomings of the dwellings on offer, only worsening the already dire initial circumstances (Schildt 1998, pp. 179–189). Housing construction long remained sluggish, aggravating the great housing shortage, especially the need for new buildings. Things eased in the 1950s chiefly because of a decline in the number of inhabitants, though the number of households did not fall. Existing buildings were very old, the residential structures in the GDR being an average of 63 years old in 1958 as compared to only 45 years in the Federal Republic of Germany (p. 181). East German housing policy was indeed a ticking “time bomb” (p. 181).

At the Fifth Party Congress (1958), the SED announced a housing program that seeded great expectations. The aim was to solve the housing bottleneck by the mid-1960s, “eliminating the centuries-long housing shortage of the working masses in the historically shortest amount of time” (Walter Ulbricht as quoted in Schildt 1998, p. 184). New housing construction fell far short of the target, though (p. 184).

Housing moved forward more energetically after power passed from Ulbricht zu Honecker, with the failings of Ulbricht's policy being rebuked in the process (p. 185). Nevertheless, housing policy under Honecker, too, kept lagging well behind the ambitious plans, a fact that the government's wildly euphemistic statistics could not hide. Housing construction never came close to fulfilling the goals and living up to what was reported in the propaganda. As detailed research has revealed, the number of units actually built or modernized in the years from 1976 through 1990 came to only about 1.7 million instead of the 2.8 million reported in the official East German statistics up to 1989 (see Buck 2004; Hoscislawski 1996). Total housing between 1971 and 1990 grew by only about 946,000 units, for the number of new buildings did not keep pace with either the rate at which old ones decayed or the demand for high-quality living space (Bouvier 2002, pp. 200–201).

These gaps figured among the reasons for widespread criticisms of East German housing. In common parlance, the quality of housing was derided in a takeoff on the opening phrase of the GDR's national anthem. Instead of "Risen from ruins and facing the future," they turned the line into "Given to ruins and facing the future." The GDR's housing policy was fundamentally beset by what were "usually outdated reactions, disregard of the experts, and the rigid adherence to low rents" that neither covered costs nor permitted maintenance (Manz 1992, pp. 57–58). In many places Honecker's housing construction program also became mired purely in the ideology that more is better. The opportunity costs of the program were onerous as well: "The concentration on construction of new housing has simultaneously led to the dilapidation of old structures because desperately urgent repair work has been put on hold" (Hertle 1992, p. 1022, based on Schürer's crisis analysis, 1992).

Still, quantitative success of the housing construction program was undeniable. The policy of the 1970s and 1980s in this area did add to the number of units on offer, with prestige projects even demonstrating qualitative improvement. It also had more to show for itself under Honecker than under Ulbricht. For instance, the number of new buildings (and the total number of units completed) after Honecker succeeded Ulbricht was higher each year than it had been before 1972. Compared to the lofty housing targets that were set, the outcomes of this purported "heart of social policy" were not a success. But relative to the inattention to housing construction before 1970, they were a step forward.

6.1.6 The Right to Work

Until late 1989 and early 1990, job security was thought of as the jewel of East German social policy. The great bulk of the population applauded this "achievement," though its true value did not really become apparent until many people had lost their jobs. The guarantee of employment, though not of a specific job, was a benefit with which the GDR surpassed most western industrialized countries. But in the long run, East German citizens would not have been able to enjoy full employment. It was bought with hidden unemployment, which under the customary conditions of East German production and sales was estimated to have been approximately 1.4 million employees. An additional 1.6 million working persons were superfluous as measured by the production and sales conditions of a market economy (see Vogler-Ludwig 1990). Full employment's productivity-reducing effects, especially job security's erosion of initiative and the incentive to work, must also be figured in to the extent they have not already been accounted for. Lampert (1996), for example, concludes that the GDR's absolute priority on the right to employment no matter what the cost is judged to have been "one of the most important causes of the entire system's economic inefficiency" (p. 108). One must also bear in mind the costs of operational ossification that rigidly sheltered employment imposed on the country's enterprises, all but precluding flexible adaptation to changed production and market conditions (Grünert 1997, pp. 99–101).

6.1.7 Family Policy

Until the mid-1960s, one count against the GDR was the “absence of an independent family policy” (Obertreis 1986, p. 3). After that time, however, family policy became a tightly woven program (Helwig and Hille 2004, 2006, 2008). Its leading instruments included classical elements such as maternity leave and a progressive child benefit based on the number of children.⁷⁶ Many other elements existed as well. In the late 1980s, for instance, health insurance and pension insurance provided a number of social benefits oriented to families and keyed to the number of children (e.g., the early crediting of periods of child-rearing as time legally recognized by pension insurance). There was assistance for families with children and for single parents; ample options for the care of preschoolers, kindergartners, and school-aged children; family-oriented educational, training, and counseling measures; and basic and postbasic training specifically for women (including mothers). Through housing policy families received support such as rent subsidies and priority housing assignments. Interest-free marriage loans, basic scholarships for married students, and a moderation of working hours for employed mothers and for fathers raising a child alone were further measures supporting families and single parents (Lampert 1990, pp. 75–76).

The family policy of the GDR was widely seen as particularly effective, and not just by East German authors or western observers advocating high rates of women’s participation in the labor market (e.g., Lampert 1990, pp. 75–76, 1996, pp. 105–106; Speigner 1989; for critical reviews see Helwig 1995, 1996; Helwig and Nickel 1993; Meier 1989; for feminist critique of East German women’s policy, with emphasis on the persistence of income disparity between women and men, see Sørensen and Trappe 1995). For instance, family policy reaped praise for being “more comprehensive and differentiated and, relative to the GDR’s economic strength, overall more positive than the family policy of West Germany” (Lampert 1996, p. 106). It was extolled, too, for largely meeting its aims with a “well coordinated system of resources” (Lampert 1990, p. 78; for comparison of family policy as it was in the two German states in 1989 to 1990, see Schuster and Tügel 1990). At times these views also applied to the objective of stabilizing the birth rate (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung 1989; Lampert 1996, p. 106), which in the GDR was lower in most years than in other socialist states (Reimann 1975, pp. 107–108). Many people saw family policy epitomizing an appropriate design of instruments expressing the so-called unity of economic and social policy (Lampert 1996, p. 106). For instance, the GDR had recognized child-rearing periods as being relevant to pensions approximately 15 years earlier and on a greater scale than West

⁷⁶ In the late 1980s the progressive child benefit amounted to 95 Eastmarks a month for the first child up to 12 years of age and 115 Eastmarks from then until lapse of the child’s eligibility. The corresponding figures for the second child were 145 Eastmarks and 165 Eastmarks; for the third and each additional child, 195 and 215 Eastmarks. Compared to the minimal pension (350 Eastmarks), the child benefit rates were significant.

Germany had. Moreover, this incentive was linked to the further stimulus of increasing the retirement pensions for women who had worked the maximum number of years. There is no doubt that this family policy substantially facilitated women's employment. The result satisfied people to whom the only "good mother" (Schmidt-Kolmer and Schmidt 1962, p. 99) was a working mother⁷⁷ and abetted those who sought to distinguish themselves through a "sometimes fanatic campaign for equal opportunity" (Helwig 1971, p. 141). Opponents of a family-centered vision of the mother were discontented, however.

The high number of women in the labor force changed surprisingly little in the gender structure of East German society. Helwig (1996) observed that "a remarkable range of public child care and generous special regulations for working mothers" (p. 208) eased the dual burden of combining family responsibilities and a job outside the home, but "entrenched the conventional division of labor" between women and men (p. 208; see also von Maydell et al. 1996, p. 322; on time budgets, see Merkel 1999, pp. 351–352). This argument surfaces frequently, as in a study on the GDR's power elite, which attributed a pattern of "paternalistic care" to family policy (Meyer 1991a, pp. 345–346). Feminist and nonfeminist circles perceived a "bourgeois differentiation between gender roles" (Huinink and Wagner 1995, p. 150) that was common in the East German family and the family policy of the GDR. Housework and child-rearing was seen for the most part as the responsibility of women. Sociological studies on families in East Germany and contemporary novels reflected that the upheaval in social conditions had not done much other than double the load for women in many cases (Schulz 1998). Objections to the excessively long working hours, the lack of time for the children, and the constraints on providing for the family were standard fare in those publications (Gysi 1989). Numerous commentators found that family policy and support for women were not particularly sympathetic to women:

General doubts about the success of the SED's women's policy . . . are warranted. It neither contributed to the economic independence and equality of women nor stabilized the family. The GDR's divorce rate was . . . one of the highest in the world. Women's policy scored successes solely as an instrument for promoting the birth rate (Mocker et al. 1990, p. 1703).

Such findings only added to the evidence prompting feminist critics to view East German family policy as a "patriarchal system" in operation (Diemer 1994, p. 221).

Family assistance and support for working mothers and single mothers generated new social tensions as well. The repeated expansion of support for single parents and families with children was bound to offend a person drawing an average retirement pension at most. Considerable conflict did grow between the child-rearing

⁷⁷ The entire passage reads: "A good mother today . . . is a working mother who stands alongside the father on an equal footing and with equal qualifications."

cohort on the one hand and members of the older generation on the other (Hockerts 1994a, p. 531; Niethammer et al. 1991, pp. 447–448).⁷⁸

6.1.8 Price Subsidization as Social Policy

The subsidization of prices was another policy that was welcomed and opposed alike (Weiß 1998). It appealed to defenders of the basic security that it ensured. Subsidization had a sizable effect. It is estimated that basic goods in the GDR were subsidized at a monthly rate of about 250 Eastmarks per person, or more than half an average pension. These figures mean that approximately one third of the average consumption of persons on retirement pensions was financed in advance across the board (Lohmann 1991b). The share of the state budget accounted for by price subsidies also spoke volumes; it rocketed from 11.6% in 1980 to 20.1% in 1989. In the latter year it devoured almost as much of the state budget (21.2%) as did government spending on health care, social security, family policy, and housing combined (calculations based on Buck 1999, pp. 1215–1223).

The advocates of price subsidies, such as Jürgen Kuczynski, conceded that the policy was inefficient and potentially wasteful. But, they countered, those drawbacks were secondary “to the unique success of socialism in our republic, the assurance of a minimum standard of living for all” – which had been accomplished by the policy of subsidizing prices (*Neues Deutschland* 22 December 1989 and 28 January 1990; as quoted in Spittmann and Helwig 1990, p. 152). This group argued that the least well-off strata of the population were impoverished wherever price stability for basic needs had been abandoned in socialist countries. Otto Reinhold, Rector of the Central Committee of the Academy of Social Sciences, sounded the same horn, saying that price reforms had brought about more economic effectiveness, even more prosperity, in the GDR than in any other country. According to him, scrapping the subsidies would likely compound difficulties in four crucial ways. It would (a) cause steep price rises, (b) set off a wage-price spiral, (c) foil the policy of ensuring affordable housing rents, and (d) devalue savings (*Neues Deutschland*, 14 February 1990; as summarized in Spittmann and Helwig 1990, p. 152).

The picture looked similar within the GDR’s political leadership, which additionally emphasized the political functions of stabilizing the price subsidies. The assertion was that subsidies not only stabilized prices for especially important goods, which the East German population appreciated just as much as the West Germans did, but also gave an edge in the contest between East and West. “Given the price hikes on the world market and in the capitalist countries, the fact that the prices for basic goods and services, housing rents, and transport fares had been kept as low as before stood out as one of the most valuable achievements of the GDR’s

⁷⁸ The poles of West Germany’s social policy are the reverse, with people who draw retirement pensions generally being better off than young families with children.

working population” (Trümpler et al. 1986, p. 23). The East German leadership was also persuaded that subsidizing prices had a socially integrative effect. In a speech as General Secretary of the SED at the Tenth Conference of the Central Committee (20 June 1985), Honecker lauded the stable consumer prices, describing them as “essential to the climate of social security and safety” and saying they were “a major attainment of socialism as practiced in the GDR” (as quoted in Trümpler et al. 1986, p. 316). The price subsidies for the population’s basic goods and services counted as insurance against political crisis. Schürer (1998) reports that Honecker’s position had always been “that all political trouble in other socialist countries had begun when retail prices were raised and [that] the GDR must not risk its good path by committing such ‘foolishness’” (p. 77; see also Meyer 1991a, p. 392).

Experts warned against prolonging the price subsidies, however (see Weiß 1998; Steiner 2006, 2008). To many people the dizzyingly mounting cost of subsidization was not the only concern; there was also the conspicuous waste it induced. For instance, people were feeding animals with subsidized bread in order to save on expensive fodder. Per-capita energy consumption was inordinate, too, exceeding that of the Federal Republic of Germany even though that country was far more economically developed than the GDR. The low price of electricity (0.08 Eastmark per kilowatt hour) was partly responsible for this imbalance, which veritably invited profligacy. Over and above these misgivings came grave doubts about the unselective nature of price subsidies. They benefited everyone, not just the needy.

6.1.9 Company-Based Social Policy

What effects did company-based social policy have by 1990?⁷⁹ The hope had been that it would aid in solving economic problems, mainly by combatting labor shortages, boosting the rate of women’s participation in the labor force, forming regular workforces, battling employee absenteeism, and increasing labor output. The available studies find that company-based social policy came closer to meeting the first three goals than it did the last two (see, for example, Deich and Kohte 1997; Grünert 1997, pp. 76–77; Hübner 1999a, b, 2008). In particular, it went a long way to mobilizing female labor. It also promoted the training of regular workforces, though the habituation effects were great.

East German company-based social policy certainly had much that was attractive to the working population. In many cases it made the enterprise into a “social place” that “to many workers was more important as an organ for distributing fringe benefits than the work process, which was not pivotal to the pursuit of subjective interests” (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 107). Primarily, however, company-based social

⁷⁹ Development after the elections to the People’s Chamber on 18 March 1990 already heralded unification. From that point on, the company-based welfare state began undergoing a transformation in which it was partly communalized, partly privatized, and partly eliminated (Deich and Kohte 1997, pp. 71–73; von Maydell et al. 1996, pp. 383–385).

policy helped prevent economic issues from suddenly tipping into political crises, notably in the 1980s. Especially impressive support for this argumentation comes from Hübner (1995, 1999b, p. 71, c, p. 347), according to whom company-based social policy reduced the social costs of the centrally planned economy and enhanced the social cohesion of East German society.

The deficiencies of this economic system – the bloated administrative costs; the careless investment planning; the poor organization of work; the inadequate exploitation of raw materials, auxiliary resources, and fuels; the waste of labor; the squandering of public money; and the often lax work discipline – were not eliminated by company-based social policy. But it surely had some success at recouping this complex flaw into cohesion between the workforces of the plants (Hübner 1999b, pp. 73–74).

Company-based social policy was thus not just a soft stabilizing factor. It counted as “one of the most effective stabilizing factors” (p. 74) in the GDR. Social policy at that level thereby came to have “effects of political stabilization”, though the SED “gained little lasting legitimation” from them (p. 74).

However, stabilization demanded a high price, including “exhaustion of economic resources and . . . the burying of initiative” (Hübner 1999b, p. 74). The inherent dynamics of the company-based social policies must be borne in mind as well. Analyses have shown that it was nearly impossible to abolish or at least restrict measures or institutions once they had been introduced (Deich and Kohte 1997, p. 67). These policies were thus soon perceived more as “legal custom” (Hübner 1999b, p. 67) than as an incentive for additional effort. This aspect must also be figured into the price of company-based social policy. By augmenting the tension between government planning and egoistic action taken by the plants, it added to the forbidding burden on the economy (Götting 1998, pp. 65–68; Hübner 1999b).

6.2 *The Impact of Social Policy on Social Structure*

6.2.1 *Equalization and New Inequality as Results of Social Policy*

Studies on the social structure of the GDR unanimously report that social differences were evened out far more in East Germany than in the Federal Republic of Germany (e.g., Adler 1991a, b; Belwe 1989; Geißler 1996; Grundmann 1997; Hauser 1992; Szydlík 1992; Vortmann 1985). This observation applies to the distribution of wealth, which was largely equalized by expropriation and forced collectivization, as well as to the housing conditions, training, and income distribution. Social policy had neither the sole nor even the main role in flattening out social differences, but it did help.

The leveling of income distribution, for instance, was partly brought about and partly intensified by selective social policy. For ideological reasons, the means to that end were the mandated narrow spread of earned income; measures for ensuring a basic livelihood (e.g., minimum wage and subsidized basic goods), and the ordinance restricting differences between the retirement pensions received by the

vast majority of retirees, the exceptions being the beneficiaries of the supplementary old-age pension systems or special pension schemes.

Social policy was not only about leveling, however. It also fostered regime-specific disparities. At times, as with consumption-related social policy in general (Merkel 1999, p. 15), it was supposed to favor some people and discriminate against others. The social benefits were differentiated according to the importance that the recipients had for production and procreation. The leadership of the SED and its mass organizations, for example, were treated with particular deference when it came to health care, provisions for old age, and, usually, housing. Social policy looked after the workers more than it did towards people who were not gainfully employed (insofar as members of the latter group received any benefits at all). It especially rewarded working mothers to an ever greater extent. Foreigners, however, were legally subject to exceptions from the preferential treatment enjoyed by the working population. True, resident aliens having a permanent address in the GDR were almost on a par with native East Germans. But foreigners with temporary residence permits had only a limited right to work, freedom of movement, social benefits, and training (Roesler 2008b, pp. 633–640). In the 1980s this group came to encompass more and more persons whose skin color identified them as “visible minorities” from the Third World states.

The social policy of the GDR went much further than that of western countries in distinguishing between the political significance of the target groups. Below the level of the political leadership, too, this practice was apparent from the privileged status that the supplementary old-age pension systems and special pension schemes gave the intelligentsia and people of special political importance to the state apparatus. The rewards of social policy were also bestowed for active political involvement on behalf of the SED, as illustrated by the relatively high scholarships for students especially loyal to the party line and world view. These examples, like others, clearly bring out the links between social policy’s orientations and socio-structural stratification in the GDR.

6.2.2 Class Structure of the GDR

Class structure set the GDR sharply apart from the western industrialized countries (Wehler 2008, pp. 216–234). The propertied class in Max Weber’s sense of a class whose livelihood rests principally on the utilization of the capital or land they own had no importance whatever. It had withered under socialism. The dominant classes by income classification were gainfully employed people, that is, social classes whose livelihood rested mostly on the utilization of their labor and qualifications. But they did not determine the structure of East German society. The party-state’s omnipresence in society, the economy, and political life blocked that possibility. To gauge from the country’s socioeconomic stratification, the GDR was nevertheless a work-centered, factory-oriented society with a fairly narrow range of differentials. However, “lack of prosperity, the flattening of society, and the relatively advantageous social circumstances of workers and peasants” had also contributed to

making East German society “a society of workers and peasants equalized downward – not toward the middle” (Geißler 1996, p. 63). Aside from the propertied classes, the victims included the self-employed and the old small business sector. Social policy played a part in this upheaval as well, especially by virtue of its focus on working people and the massive leveling of wages and pensions.

Though East Germany’s socioeconomic differences had become fairly flat, the distribution of political power in the GDR was highly uneven, particularly because of its concentration in the *nomenklatura* – the political leaders of the SED state. It was they who constituted the hub of political power, the strata that determined the structures of society. Together, destratification and the regime-specific, new inequality of social structure produced a structure in which the lower range of income was only slightly more evenly distributed in East Germany than it was in West Germany and in which equalization at the top of the income hierarchy was significant (Geißler 1996, p. 63). The difference between the remuneration of university graduates and nonuniversity graduates, for instance, was much smaller in the GDR than in the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time, the system spawned a new kind of schism: the “two-class society” (Merkel 1999, p. 245) consisting of people who had western currency and those who did not.

Differences in wealth contracted discernibly. This convergence came about chiefly through expropriation, socialization, collectivization, state-sanctioned devaluation of real estate as a result of the decay or destruction of privately owned residential property, and the high taxation and onerous premiums levied on income from self-employment.

Social disparities had been fundamentally changed in education also. The system evened out traditional class-specific differences mostly by qualifying persons from social strata customarily without strong educational backgrounds (Geißler 1996, pp. 264–265). The mobilization of daughters and sons of workers and peasants to attend training schools and universities and subsequently to assume middle-management positions in the East German “workers’ and peasants’ state” put many on the path to social ascent, especially until about the mid-1960s. These options were particularly open to people from the “right” class – best of all, the ranks of the workers or peasants – and to especially committed persons who toed the party line closely (Solga 1995). Conversely, sons and daughters from the old middle and upper class often faced obstacles to advancement. If a middle- or upper-class origin was combined with political dissent, the downward slide of the individual in question was preprogrammed – or flight to the West was the escape.

Studies on mobility show that generational affiliation also had a bearing on a person’s chances of moving up or down (Meyer et al. 1997; Solga 1995). Ritter (1998) states that the winners in the GDR’s formative years, notably the 1950s and 1960s, mainly included “the generation of people who came from the lower classes, grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, and did not seek their way to the ‘West’ – as so many of their peers did – but rather pledged their allegiance to the new state” (p. 177). The East German state offered this group possibilities for identification despite massive restrictions on political freedom. Working-class children in particular were offered the prospect of education and upward mobility, and many of them

were able to move up to positions in middle and senior management. The top echelons in those years were reserved for the communists who had been trained in Moscow while in exile and for members of the communist resistance in Germany. That arrangement deteriorated perceptibly for the following generations, though. Their opportunities for upward mobility narrowed drastically (pp. 177–178).

East German socialism pursued the project of evening out social differences on a grand scale. The aspirations to broaden social equality also found expression in women's possibilities for sharing in it, one example being the high percentage of gainfully employed women. Social policy had created jobs for women in the administration of social policy, in social services, and in education and had facilitated the participation of mothers in the labor market by providing incentives and beneficial policies on work schedules. To some observers, these outcomes mean that East Germany had a "lead in equal opportunity" (Geißler 1996, p. 298), arguing that gender discrimination surrounding qualification, occupations, advancement, income, and political participation were reduced more in the GDR than in the Federal Republic of Germany (p. 298). They have also contended that the traditional division of labor in families was loosened to a greater degree in East Germany. But that line of reasoning deserves to be challenged as far as gender differences are concerned. Except for the gainful employment of women, the division of labor between women and men in the GDR remained marked by a traditional, conservative pattern that left most women with the double yoke of working a paid job and shouldering the brunt of the responsibility at home (Diemer 1994; Gysi 1989; Schulz 1998).

Many other observers of the GDR's social structure have documented the coexistence of equalization and inequality (e.g., Adler 1991a; Frick et al. 1991; Geißler 1991, 1993; Huinink et al. 1995; Kretzschmar 1991a, b). Indeed, research has justifiably stressed that leveling and social inequality were outright structural characteristics of the GDR, though the latter was rather tabooed (Mertens 2000). Adler (1991a), for instance, has corroborated the assertion that the scale of social inequality in the GDR was "comparatively small" but that political power was "unequally distributed" in the extreme (p. 154). As regards income distribution, he adds, the largest disparity (about 1:3) existed between retired women on the one hand and the intelligentsia on the other. According to Adler, the most important determinants of opportunities for income were employment status; managerial responsibilities, especially those of a political nature; the level of occupational qualification; and gender.

Housing conditions also attested to considerable equalization and divergence. Comparison across different strata shows that "unskilled and semiskilled laborers lived in the least favorable housing. The groups with the largest dwellings (retirees, peasants, middle managers, and self-employed persons) and the greatest comfort (senior managers and the intelligentsia)" enjoyed "living conditions 'one third more favorable'" at most (Adler 1991a, pp. 157–158).

Reflecting primarily the difference between essentially manual or non-managerial activities and mostly intellectual or managerial ones, the distribution of working conditions overlapped with this pattern of inequality. Unskilled and semiskilled

workers had the least beneficial situation; persons performing managerial functions or mental work, the most advantageous (Adler 1991a, p. 158).

6.2.3 The Stratification Pattern of Society in the GDR

Keeping in mind this distribution of income, working and living conditions, and political influence, one finds a social structure made up of three main strata: low, high, and middle.

The lower social stratum consists mostly of persons on small pensions and employed persons with the lowest level of education and qualification . . . Women tend to be found here more often than men. An especially problematic situation confronts retirees in need of nursing care, handicapped persons unable to work, and persons with a concentration of certain attributes (single, female, with child(ren), poorly qualified). In any case, however, the elementary needs were met (work, shelter, basic medical care, food, etc.) (Adler 1991a, p. 159).

The highest social stratum encompassed mostly (a) persons with managerial responsibilities or functionaries in the party, state, and security apparatus and the major enterprises; (b) leading representatives of the intelligentsia; and (c) some of the self-employed.

By contrast, the middle social stratum had more layers than either of the other two. Its lower region was populated mostly by persons on relatively sizeable pensions, low-skilled salaried employees and semiskilled workers. The intermediate region accounted for most of the skilled workers and the peasants of cooperatives along with the junior executives. The upper region of the middle social stratum mainly comprised the graduates of universities and technical colleges, mid-level managers, and some of the self-employed (Adler 1991a, p. 159).

The pattern of stratification was flexible rather than rigid, however, and the processes of moving up and down differed from period to period and generation to generation. Analyses of class positions in the GDR and of the shifts between them have yielded a number of findings (see, for example, Solga 1995, pp. 208, 212). First, structural mobility, particularly collective class mobility, waned after the establishment of the state socialist order in the GDR. Second, the risk of downward mobility into the working class also declined, as did the chances of upward mobility into the socialist service class, and ways for children of members of the service class to remain in that stratum later improved. Third, traditional marriage patterns persisted, with people usually choosing partners of the same social origin. Fourth, the number of women's independent occupational trajectories on a par with men's careers multiplied. Fifth, earlier studies showing loyalty to the system to be crucial for successful careers in the socialist service classes have been borne out.

These data support the proposition that a "state socialist class society" (Solga 1995, p. 208) emerged in the GDR (Wehler 2008, pp. 216–229). They also validate the hypothesis that the social structure in the GDR was molded in great part by political influences, including social policy. Moreover, such research has proven that the privileged classes reproduced themselves in the GDR as well and that the young

generations thereby encountered more and more career obstacles, especially in the 1980s. Entries to managerial functions were also affected by a rigid political selection process, the key factor being demonstrated loyalty to the SED regime and active participation in the SED and society's mass organizations. Analysis of the GDR's class structures also confirms that gender differences were curbed, mainly through the effects of economic, educational, and family policy (pp. 207–209).

The analysis of the social structure of East German society has also brought to light a high degree of status inconsistency. Key characteristics of the social structure such as income, performance, qualification, consumption opportunities, status, and mobility “had no consistent, correlative relationship; instead, they were a function of political positions and decisions and of informal relations” (Meuschel 1992, p. 227). This scale of status inconsistency was a two-edged sword. It could serve to stabilize rule, and to that extent it was welcome in the eyes of the political leadership. But it was inimical to a meritocratic orientation to one's occupation and thus diminished initiative and drive.

In addition, studies on the social structure of the GDR show that the reduction of old inequalities and the creation of new ones rested on relatively modest and incoherent prosperity on the whole. Taking stock of the material living conditions in the GDR, Schwartau and Vortmann (1989), for example, have pointed out ambiguous outcomes. Things were more or less satisfactory in a quantitative sense. No one had to go hungry, and consumption was steadily rising. Qualitatively, however, supply left much to be desired. Nonbasic consumption goods, including luxury items, were scarce or unduly expensive and inordinately hard to come by. Environmental impacts were high as well. In particular, the use of brown coal (lignite) in the 1980s had increased to hazardous levels, even becoming intolerable in some regions. The public infrastructure languished, with streets and railroads in poor shape and the utilities and waste disposal systems prone to breakdowns. The telephone network was not up to standard and did not lend itself to advanced telecommunication technologies. The tourist industry lacked quality, and housing was still plagued by dilapidated old buildings. The cause of this neglect lay not only in the mediocre economic strength of the socialist planned economy. The demise of basic public services outside the realm of social policy also mirrored the fact that resources were siphoned into the structures of the planned economy and the disproportionately large welfare state.

The social policy of the GDR contributed to the differentiation of social positions, too, and even more so to their destratification. In the end it actually all resulted in what tended to be “a modernity of little people” (Merkel 1999, p. 15; see Ritter 1998, p. 186, who speaks of a “society of ‘little people’”) rather than a society structured along new status distinctions. But it was a “modernity” with an autocratic political leadership.

The upward and downward mobility to which East German social policy gave rise came not only from the creation of jobs and managerial functions in the welfare state's countless institutions but also from the conferral of or exclusion from privileges, as with training programs, or from distinction between social benefits.

The party-state's official view on social structures and classes could not explain these processes. The perpetual differentiation between the "ruling working class" and its allies – chiefly the "intelligentsia," "the peasants in a cooperative society," and other "working strata" (see Grundmann et al. 1976; Manz and Winkler 1979, 1988; Weidig 1988) – did not give great insight into social policy's distributive effects and the stratification of East German society. Without question, living conditions had been equalized more than ever before in Germany. The avenues of upward mobility were indisputably numerous among politically loyal and especially committed workers and children from the homes of workers, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. But there was little visible of the "rule of the working class," as it was officially called. The people of the GDR were not oblivious to that discrepancy, however. They clearly saw that the working class, purportedly the "ruling class," did not occupy the upper part of the stratified pyramid but rather the bottom. As one quip put it, the path of someone relegated to the production sphere was called "the plummet into the ruling class" (Niethammer et al. 1991, p. 44).

6.3 Legitimizing and Delegitimizing Functions of Social Policy in the Honecker Era

6.3.1 "Eternal Progress": The Official View of Social Policy in the GDR

The top ranks of the GDR's party and state leadership had hoped that social policy would bring huge economic and political benefits. It was supposed to pave the way to economic performance, spur it on, and serve as socialism's watchword both at home and abroad. Other hopes were that social policy would strengthen the population's compliance, win confederates for the SED, and – as found by nearly all western researchers on the GDR – impart legitimacy to compensate for the SED regime's structural want of it (see, for example, Meuschel 1992; Pollack 1997; Schroeder 1998). Indeed, Pollack (1997) maintains that the "central issue" with the SED state was its "dearth of political legitimation" (p. 131). Were these goals achieved?

The state and the party claimed that East German social policy was an everlasting success. Messages to that effect commonly contained formulations like "the developmental trends of social insurance in socialism are always in harmony with society's development as a whole" (Scheel 1975, p. 27). That statement may simply have been written without much thought. It may also have had its share of propaganda and may have resulted from unshakable faith in a never-ending correctness of socialist policy. But it was no exception. The reflex of many East German scholars was to certify that the social policy of the GDR was a success. According to one text authored by a group of experts from the GDR, "measures and activities of social policy promote the working population's identification with the objectives of the SED's policies and lead to new initiatives, especially in socialist competition" (Autorenkollektiv 1975b, p. 11), resulting in the desired improvement of

labor productivity. This unsubstantiated, categorical, and blinkered pronouncement stands for many more. To believe this tract and a host of others like it, social policy seemed to have no serious gaps, failures, side effects, or troublesome repercussions.

The documents suggest that the great majority of the functionaries in the SED state were genuinely persuaded that its social policy was a success. Few officials expressed themselves as reticently as former SED Politburo member Günter Schabowski has.⁸⁰ Looking back on East German social policy, he commented that it “was the only thing the GDR had to offer . . . with which it could define its socialist character” (G. Schabowski, interview, *Bremer Nachrichten*, 30 September, 1992, p. 3, as quoted in Schmähl 1992a, p. 41). Other people, including representatives of the bloc parties, spoke with greater conviction. For instance, Manfred Gerlach,⁸¹ the chairperson of the Liberal Democratic Party of Germany (LDPD) in the GDR, retrospectively lauded the social policy of the GDR:

What is said today as a reproach – justifiably in many respects – that the state in the GDR provided for everything from the cradle to the grave was to my mind a tremendous asset. The right to work, housing, education, free health care, nursing care in old age and in case of disability – those were not just constitutional principles on paper. There were no unemployed people, no homeless persons, no children without prospects for training or advancement for want of parental money, no sick people whose chances for treatment were restricted for financial reasons, no old or handicapped persons without any kind of security. There were no drug addicts, no AIDS problem, and no prostitution to speak of. The GDR was one of the countries with the lowest crime rate. There was steady income from wages and salaries at what for a long time were low prices, low housing rents, [and low charges for] basic goods and services. Millions of new housing units were built, though old buildings did decay. There was the network of day-care centers and nursery schools, the generous financial and material support of general and higher education. There were medications and treatments, including cosmetic interventions, available at no charge. There was the accommodation of the aged in retirement and nursing homes at low rates with medical care and cultural activities (Gerlach 1991, p. 368).

Gerlach was not the only one to praise social policy. Niethammer (1993), too, notes that the right to work enjoyed particularly great respect, as reflected by the fact that the policy of job security was cited positively also by most visitors. Commenting on the findings of an oral history approach, he states: “For all the criticism of other dimensions of life, there was no one in the GDR who did not extol job security as the main advantage of socialist society” (p. 145). In principle, most of the population prized social policy, an opinion known from demographic surveys in the GDR (though the utility of their findings is usually compromised by inappropriate methodological foundations and distorted interview settings). For example, social policy was usually rated better than other policy areas. And on the item inquiring about where socialism was superior to the system in the West,

⁸⁰ Günter Schabowski (1929), editor-in-chief of the SED’s central organ, *Neues Deutschland* (1978–1985) and member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED (1984–1989).

⁸¹ Manfred Gerlach (1928), born in Leipzig. He also served as Chairman of the State Council of the GDR (6 December 1989–5 April 1990).

respondents put social policy ahead of all other policy fields (see Niemann 1993, pp. 49, 406; Ritter 1998, p. 163).

6.3.2 Stabilization Effects of Social Policy

For the most part, social science research in the West, too, has meanwhile tended to argue that social policy in the GDR helped stabilize the SED regime (e.g., Meyer 1989, p. 426, 1991a; Niethammer 1990, p. 65, 1993, p. 145; Schulz 1997). Many observers trace that stabilization mostly back to the 1970s (e.g., Boyer and Skyba 1999a, b). They state that social policy brought about or reinforced compliance and consumption-oriented adaptation by providing goods and services that protected against income loss due to major risks, such as sickness or invalidity, and by guaranteeing at least a minimum livelihood. The stabilization theory is occasionally corroborated in these terms. Other commentators agree that social policy at least intermittently succeeded at building a more solid bridge between the rulers and the ruled (e.g., Hübner 2008; Meyer 1991b; Michalsky 1984). They usually point to the generally positive reception of social policy's upgrading in the 1970s, the recognition of social insurance, and the esteem in which company-based social policy was held (as discussed at the outset of this section). In their studies, too, the right to work is seen as a prime source of legitimation, with most of the population deeming it an outstanding triumph.

It is to the credit of East German social policy that it compared well on average to that of other socialist states in central and eastern Europe (von Beyme 1975, 1984) – a result that was a source of pride to many people in the GDR (Niethammer 1990, p. 65). The East German leadership pointed out these merits to anyone – such as the reformers in the Gorbachev era – who wanted to sweep away the long-standing achievements and to risk innovations. It was declared that reforms were not needed, for East Germans had managed better than those who now sought their deliverance in rash reforms. Besides, so went the argument, social inequality was greater, and the political situation less stable, in the countries that had pursued the most radical reforms, specifically Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Poland (see Meyer 1991a, p. 329).

6.3.3 The Two Faces of East German Social Policy: Legitimation and Delegitimation

In-depth studies also stress the limits of the legitimation afforded by social policy in the GDR. East German social policy had contradictory effects, fostering recognition, inciting protest, and leading to apathy. Sociologists and social historians who have studied the East German welfare state have shown that both legitimation and delegitimation have to be weighed (see especially Boyer et al. 2008; Hockerts 1994a, b; Hübner 1999b; Lepsius 1994a, b; Ritter 1998; Wehler 2008, pp. 342–346). On the whole, “socialist achievements” such as full employment and health care were accepted by the population. But they were less robust in propping up authority

across the board than the rulers had hoped. Not that the SED state lacked backing; its confederates and followers added up to an impressive array of adherents. The nucleus of this group consisted of more than two million SED members, first and foremost the party cadres, the functionaries of society's mass organizations, the members of the security organs and the military, not to mention most of the dependents of these groups. The roots of the SED state and its brand of socialism were no doubt strongest in this part of society. Beyond it, however, the bonds between state and citizen obviously weakened and became brittle. The "submissiveness" (Niethammer 1997, p. 314) of the East German population at large may well have usually been mistaken for legitimacy of the SED state.

The counterproductiveness of the GDR's social policy, as opposed to the stabilization that was sought, must also be remembered. It elicited approval and vehement protest alike. Confrontation with cases of social policy's blatant underperformance fed discontent, as attested by the high number of petitions related to matters of social policy (see Bouvier 2002, pp. 313–327). Suggestions, notices, concerns, and complaints were constitutionally legal and legitimate ways to communicate interests to representative bodies, their members, or state and economic organs. Such petitions were a kind of partial surrogate for the administrative court system that had been abolished in 1952. They were more than just constant carping and frequently centered on working and living conditions. Housing was another inadequately met social responsibility. So were the provisions for old age, with the usually low, extremely leveled retirement pensions spawning immense frustration. Many pensioners and working people in the upper age brackets were galled by the inattention to life circumstances and risks such as those endured by many aged retirees and other groups not (or no longer) related to the production and reproduction process of East German society. Their displeasure stemmed also from the preferential treatment that the GDR's pronatal population policy and employment policy gave single parents and families with children. In many cases people saw such favoritism to be illegitimate *Sozialpolitik ohne Vorleistung*, or "handouts as social policy" (the argumentation and the expression are from Dr. P. Hübner, personal communication, 4 April 2000).

According to Lepsius (1994b), the East German welfare state suffered from "waning cohesive strength" (p. 24). Analyses of the petitions bearing on social policy support this view. Those filed during the 1980s in particular reflect dwindling faith in the accuracy of the SED's official avowal of its success in social policy (Bouvier 2002, p. 321). This loss of cohesion had several reasons. For example, social policy did meet basic needs but not the rising demand for nonbasic consumption goods. And the older East German socialism grew, the stricter the standards became against which it was measured. These trends lay at the bottom of the complaint widely heard in the late 1960s and early 1970s: "And that after 20 years of the GDR!" (Boyer 1999, p. 40, note 8). People could point out the flaws all the more emphatically in the GDR's third and fourth decade. They were one of the grounds for the perceptible "sullen loyalty" (Lüdtke 1994) among the industrial workers of the GDR. In addition, social policy of the GDR since the 1970s required more legitimization than before. One reason was the higher priority put on the idea of social

protection after the change of power from Ulbricht to Honecker. Another was the government's policy vis-à-vis West Germany, which was enhancing the chances of travel to the Federal Republic of Germany⁸² and thereby tending to raise the standards applied to social policy in the GDR rather than keep them constant. A third mechanism wearing away the cohesive strength of social policy was the fact that most of the population no longer perceived low housing rent, reasonably priced basic goods and health services, and other positive aspects of social policy as an achievement of economic and social policy. According to Siegfried Wenzel, former Deputy Chairperson of the State Planning Committee of the GDR, people "consumed" these benefits "as something taken for granted, coveting instead the superior quality, wider range, and sometimes lower prices of consumer goods offered in the [West German] market economy" (interview, as quoted in Pirker et al. 1995, p. 119). The population had become accustomed to the social benefits, thought of them as an automatic part of what they considered fair wages, and no longer saw reason to acknowledge them in particular. What is more, the persistent scarcity of consumer goods plainly signaled to the East German population every day that the economic power of socialism was not all it was said to be.

These shortcomings of the GDR's social policy were hardly conducive to legitimacy, yet they were not the only ones limiting it. Still another was something researchers have discussed primarily as the intensified emphasis on socialist paternalism: the fact that social policy consigned its citizens to the role of policy recipients far more than was the case in western countries (see especially Meyer 1991b, *passim*; Opp de Hipt 1989, *passim*). To the extent that this status robbed the citizen of opportunities to take personal initiative (which was resisted as undesirable insubordination), the leaders of the GDR could see their social policy as compatible with their system and ideology. But such disempowerment simultaneously fostered passivity and a mentality of entitlement. More than anything, it thwarted what the party's official ideology alleged to be the actual purpose of social policy in the GDR: to develop virtues fitting for a politically loyal, economically productive, and socially constructive, cooperative "socialist personality" (Meyer 1991b). However, there was hardly any evidence of such a personality, a vacuum all the more ominous because the much ballyhooed unity of economic and social policy was only a rubber check.

The legitimacy of social policy in the GDR was also perilously thin compared to that of social policy in western countries, especially the Federal Republic of Germany. It was the Achilles heel of East German socialism. Although the GDR's social policy usually held up well against that of other socialist countries

⁸² Travel from the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany consisted mostly of retirees. From 1967 on, the annual number of these journeys exceeded one million, with the trend increasing. The tally in 1987 was 3.9 million journeys; in 1988, 6.75 million. In most years, the number of trips from the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin to the GDR or East Berlin surpassed those in the opposite direction. In 1979, for example, 7.4 million crossings were counted (Grosser et al. 1996, p. 259).

(Meyer 1991a, p. 392), East–West comparisons left many East German citizens feeling that their country’s social accomplishments, including the social benefits, were mediocre, often unsatisfactory and unattractive, or simply inadequate. Much of the social and private consumption in the GDR was not up to the mark: backward technology, poor-quality service, low purchasing power of wages and social income, and the quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient range of nonbasic consumer goods (see Merkel 1999, *passim*). Moreover, the GDR economy’s mediocre level of productivity left national prosperity – including the level of private and public consumption – far behind that of the advanced western industrial countries, such the Federal Republic of Germany. This lag depreciated the social achievements of the SED state to charitable acts that the vast majority of East German citizens willingly accepted – yet ultimately traded in at the first chance in order to share fully in the benefits of West Germany’s social market economy. In this sense, the stability of the GDR proved illusory (see Hürtgen and Reichel 2001; Vollnhals and Weber 2002).⁸³

Social policy did not free the GDR from its “legitimation trap” by the close of the Honecker era (Brie 1996, p. 44). It was not strong enough to bestow a relatively high, stable degree of output-centered legitimacy beyond the followers and most important confederates of the SED state. And in much of the population its intended educational contribution to the “socialist way of life” degenerated into mere materialism. Social policy did little to strengthen the “socialist morals” supposedly based on the ten commandments of socialist morals propagated at the Fifth Party Congress of the SED (1958).⁸⁴ The fragility of rule in the SED state aggravated the situation. This state could not invoke traditional grounds for legitimacy (all of which had been eliminated during the march to socialism). Nor could it lay claim to a rational, legal type of legitimate authority (which was superseded by the supremacy of the SED). It could not draw legitimacy from charisma, either (which was ruled out by the mediocrity and incompetence that was largely typical of the

⁸³ Special studies point in a similar direction. On youth policy, for example, see Skyba (2000).

⁸⁴ The ten commandments, which were formally adopted at the Sixth Party Congress of the SED [1963], read: “1. You shall always champion the international solidarity of the working class and all working people as well as the steadfast bonds of all socialist countries. 2. You shall love your Fatherland and be prepared at all times to invest all your strength and ability to defend the power of the workers and peasants. 3. You shall help eradicate the exploitation of humans by humans. 4. You shall do good deeds for socialism, for socialism leads to a better life of all working people. 5. In building socialism, you shall act in the spirit of mutual aid and comradely cooperation, respect the collective, and take its criticism to heart. 6. You shall protect and increase national property. 7. You shall strive to improve your performance, practice thrift, and strengthen socialist work discipline. 8. You shall raise your children in the spirit of freedom and socialism to be broadly educated and physically steeled persons of solid character. 9. You shall lead a clean, decent life and respect your family. 10. You shall act in solidarity with the peoples struggling for their national liberation and defending their national independence.” (Minutes of the proceedings of the Sixth Party Congress of the SED [1963], pp. 297–298, as quoted in Thomas 1974, p. 136).

country's leadership). The GDR therefore remained a predicament for the political leadership, a polity without sufficient loyalty and legitimacy, or, in the language of Aristotle's theory of the state, a state with a relatively small rule by friends and "full of enemies" (Aristotle 1990, III, 11, 1261b, 30).⁸⁵ The social policy pursued throughout the Honecker era mitigated this flaw but changed nothing essential in it. As of the first quarter of 1990, the GDR's new social policy, which was designed with German unification already in mind, no longer focused the population's expectations on the old GDR state but rather on a fundamentally different model, the West German welfare state.

6.4 *The Lost "Unity of Economic and Social Policy"*

6.4.1 The Repressive Welfare State

Unlike the expansion of social policy in the countries of the West, that in the GDR coincided with persistently high government spending on the military and with mounting expenditures for domestic surveillance and repression within society (Buck 1999, pp. 1211–1212, 1215–1223). Having committed itself to achieving both greater social security and more "state security" (see Schroeder 1998, pp. 643–646; Suckut and Süß 1997), the GDR turned out to be a repressive welfare state (Schroeder 1998, pp. 643–648; Vollnhals 2002). That outcome alone put a twofold strain on the state budget and the economy. A second determinant was even more important – the fact that social policy was stretched thinner and thinner between the "promise of consumption and the pressure to innovate" (Steiner 1999, p. 153) and between competing goals of social protection and economic efficiency. Some of the reasons owed to social policy itself (e.g., the growing costs of job security and strict protection from dismissal); others, to deteriorating external conditions (Gutmann 1999; Maier 1997, pp. 62–64, 78–97; Wiards 2002).

6.4.2 The Increasing Trade-Off Between Social and Economic Policy

One of the now widely established research findings on the GDR is that the desired unity of economic and social policy receded into a remote future and gave way to an ever more fixed trade-off between social protection and macro- and microeconomic performance (see, for example, Steiner 2003, pp. 253–257; Wehler 2008, pp. 88–107). The number of people who concur is large, though the reasons differ. To Schürer, as the chairman of the State Planning Committee of the GDR, social and economic policy

⁸⁵ In Aristotle's treatise, this kind of state is one whose many poor people are excluded from public affairs and therefore potentially become enemies of the ruling structure and destabilize the state.

under Honecker was “contradictory from the outset and inherently carried the seed of bankruptcy” (Schürer 1998, p. 151). Schürer later put it more pointedly, as in the 29th session of the German Bundestag’s Inquiry Commission on Overcoming the Impacts of the SED Dictatorship in the Process of German Unification (12th German Bundestag). He explained that it had been clear as early as 1972, after presentation of the SED’s social policy program to the Politburo, that the primacy of politics over the economy from the Ulbricht era had survived intact, the only difference being that Honecker and his team wanted to distribute more than could be produced (Schürer 1999a, b, p. 167).⁸⁶ This view was basically borne out by some members of the SED’s leadership apparatus, such as Carl-Heinz Janson, who was for many years a department head in the Central Committee of the SED and a subordinate of Günter Mittag. Janson (1991) saw “the oversized social policy” (p. 63) as one of the main causes of the widening gap between consumption and investment. Others judged the situation similarly. Social policy had come at the expense of investment (S. Wenzel, interview, see Pirker et al. 1995, p. 119). The polarity between “an economy of scarcity” and “consumption policy,” including ambitious social policy, had become greater and greater (e.g., Kaminsky 2002, p. 81; on the context from the perspective of an economic historian, see Steiner 2003). Schalck-Golodkowski⁸⁷ (1995) tersely stated that the highly touted unity of economic and social policy had been “the nail in the GDR’s coffin” (p. 169; see Przybylski 1992b, pp. 49–50).

Economic analyses show that planning and economic policy experts were not the only ones in the GDR to point out severe goal conflicts between economic and social policy since the early 1970s or 1980s. Hübner (1998), citing a multitude of concurring interpretations, spoke of “social policy eating away at real assets” (p. 74). Previous analysts of social structure had also seen the unsolved “social question” of East German socialism to be an eminent cause of the GDR’s economic plight and of the rising tension between social protection and the economy (Adler 1991a, p. 171). To these observers, the trouble lay in the country’s diminishing economic efficiency, which reduced the legitimating effect of personally tangible improvements, the scope for paternalistic pacification of society, and trust in the future ability to master difficulties. There is also substantial agreement that East German social policy was inimical to meritocratic principles (Niethammer 1997, p. 327). Another common opinion was that the growth in the living standard in the 1970s came about “at the cost of economic opportunities in the 1980s” (e.g., Ritschl 1995, p. 42) and that social policy had overtaxed the economy (Boyer and Skyba 1999a, b). Many observers subscribed to the view that there existed a policy of

⁸⁶ On the primacy of politics in the Ulbricht era, see Hoffmann (2003), the subtitle of whose book aptly captures the dialectic of the supremacy of politics: “Forced restructuring and abortive modernization.”

⁸⁷ Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, head of the Agency for Commercial Coordination in the Ministry of Foreign Trade (1966–1989) and Undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Trade (1975–1989).

unsecured social benefits (Kaiser 1997a, p. 456; Wolle 1998), a standpoint that had already been developed by sociologists (see especially, Lepsius 1994b, pp. 23–24; 1996) and social historians (particularly Hockerts 1994a, b, 1998, 1999). The hypothesis of an escalating conflict between social and economic policy was supported by assessments written more than a decade apart. The strategy of material pacification through social policy had undermined its own economic foundations. The process undermining the economic foundation of social policy was reinforced by the very strategies that were supposed to help achieve the so-called principle task. Despite warnings from experts that the social and employment policies were incommensurate with the strength of the economy, the measures were retained even after they began eroding the capital stock (Skyba 2008a; Boyer 2008a).

The data on the structure and trends of investment and consumption in the GDR from 1949 through 1989 confirm the continued neglect of investment (Baar et al. 1995, p. 66). The GDR's own official statistics stressed the critical situation surrounding social policy. The upgrading of social policy in the 1970s was accompanied by a rate of capital investment (i.e., accumulation rate) that had been declining since 1970 and by consumption, which accounted for a growing share of the national income (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, p. 106). Obviously, social consumption, especially social policy, had gained importance from the 1970s on. And the investment rate was falling in a manner that Marxist political economists said should actually happen only to the profit rate in the capitalist West. Furthermore, the new information and communication technologies showed no sign of catching up. In other words evidence abounds that a serious trade-off had indeed evolved between social protection and economic strength in the GDR.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to check carefully whether this argument holds up under scrutiny. Do the findings conclusively show that the aspirations of the SED in the field of social policy were solely, or at least mainly, to blame for the country's economic woes? How compatible is this judgment with the findings on social policy in the narrow sense (i.e., social benefits in the classical systems shielding against income losses due to accidents, illness, disability, age, and death of the breadwinner)? They show that East German social policy was riddled with holes. The SED-state did not prove itself generous in key areas of social insurance. Provisions for old age were underfunded. The share of the state's net material product represented by government expenditures on old age in general was not lavish, either – less in the GDR than in Czechoslovakia from the 1960s on (calculations based on International Labour Organization 1996, p. 75). The situation looked even worse for people needing nursing care and for persons with disabilities.

The comparable international data relating to the GDR's efforts in social policy, as measured against the ILO rates of public spending on social services, for instance, also fail to deliver outright proof that social policy overtaxed the economy. Despite widespread opinion in the East German scientific community (e.g., Manz 1992, p. 14; Brie 1996, p. 96), figures from the International Labour Organization (1996, p. 75) show that the GDR's rates remained at an intermediate level: 15.6% of the country's net material product, a figure plainly above those of the Soviet Union (10.8%) but far below Czechoslovakia's (21.8%). Although the GDR

had an above-average percentage of senior citizens⁸⁸ and both a higher percentage of people at work and greater economic strength than the other socialist states, the share of East Germany's GDP accounted for by social service expenditures was – remarkably – not even above average. Compared to the prevailing international trend, it was even a few percentage points too low (see Schmidt 1989, 2005d, pp. 236–244).⁸⁹

Without further explanation, none of these facts is consistent with the notion of tension between social protection and economic strength. This mismatch by no means weakens the thesis that the GDR had maneuvered itself into a tough trade-off between social policy and economic performance. But it does need to be spelled out with greater precision. Social policy in the narrow sense was not extravagant in East German socialism. The cause of the undue strain on the GDR's economy lies elsewhere. The overload on the economy stemmed from the cumulative weight of the GDR's welfare state, namely, the interaction between (a) social insurance policy, (b) the profligate subsidization of basic goods and services, (c) the costs and subsequent financial impacts of defending the right to work through rigid job security, (d) the inflation of labor costs because of the company obligation to design work schedules favoring mothers and children-rearing, and (e) the excessive equalization of wages, which reduced productivity, and its attendant reinforcement of the mania for egalitarianism.

The East German welfare state did in fact steer itself into a trap with these social policies. They were expected to achieve too much at once – job security, social protection, wage equalization, and stable prices for basic goods – and the concomitant trade-offs with macro- and microeconomic performance were disregarded.

6.4.3 Welfare State on Credit: The GDR's Foreign Debt Predicament

Additionally, the GDR found itself ever more ensnared in domestic debt. The country could still have managed the situation in an emergency, but the entrapment in foreign debt, especially that pegged to hard currencies, was a thorny matter. The Politburo was informed of the problem early on but usually ignored it or dismissed it as exaggerated (see the strong case made in Pirker et al. 1995). However, the Politburo was alarmed on 31 October 1989, by a document that Egon Krenz, the SED party chief at the time, had requested from Gerhard Schürer, the chair of the State Planning Committee. It contained a revealing sentence: “More was consumed than we had produced ourselves” (“Schürers Krisenanalyse” 1992, p. 1114). Schürer added that overindulgent consumption had come primarily at

⁸⁸ Though the share of the population at retirement age in 1989 (16.2%) was less than its peak of 19.5% in 1970 (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, p. 64), this figure was very high by international standards.

⁸⁹ This finding is based on international comparative analyses with bivariate and multivariate test models and is not weakened by the accurate observation that the GDR, unlike western countries, had no notable social insurance expenditures on unemployment.

the price of debt in the nonsocialist economic region (the GDR's official term for western countries) and that this debt had swelled from to 2 billion "valuta-marks" (nearly U.S. \$1.09 billion)⁹⁰ in 1970 to 49 billion (U.S. \$26.6 billion) in 1989. In other words, as explained in Schürer's paper, "social policy since the Eighth Party Congress [1971] has not rested entirely on our own output but has instead led to growing debt in the non-socialist economic region" (p. 1114). Schürer's picture of the GDR's disastrous economic situation culminated in the widely quoted sentence: "Capping the debt alone would require a 25–30% reduction in the living standard in 1990 and would make the GDR ungovernable" (p. 1119). But, wrote Schürer, even if such sacrifice were to be demanded of the population, it would not be possible to achieve the export surpluses necessary to remain solvent.

Schürer's diagnosis in October 1989 held that the GDR's economy and social policy could not be maintained for long without a drastic change of course and the serious repercussions it would entail for the state and the economy. In his opinion, the prospects for the country's population were gloomy. Overall, this conclusion is correct, though recent calculations indicate that the scope of the debt was considerably less dramatic than Schürer had assumed. According to retrospective estimates by the Central Bank of Germany (Deutsche Bundesbank), the GDR's foreign debt in the non-socialist economic region had indeed surged – to 19.9 billion valuta-marks (US \$10.8 billion), not 49 billion (Deutsche Bundesbank 1999; Volze 1999a, b). Moreover, one must distinguish between risky and less risky foreign debt. The crux of the problem was not the debt to the non-socialist economic region as a whole, for that figure included both the less menacing sum owed to developing countries and the loans the GDR received through intra-German trade. The really exposed risks lay with "hard-currency debt and the liquidity in convertible currencies" (Volze 1999a, p. 163). East Germany's leadership had embarked on a treacherous "adventure" with them (p. 163), one whose hazards had already been apparent in the 1970s (Skyba 2002; Steiner 1999, 2003) and had become greater in the 1980s. One of its major causes is the fact that the course of social policy did not change.

Was the GDR bankrupt by the end of the 1980s? Certainly not in the short term, for it had been able to contain the liquidity crisis. The room for maneuver in late 1989 was initially larger for the East German economy and for social policy than Schürer's balance sheet would have one believe. But the end was in sight. The GDR forestalled the liquidity crisis only with a Pyrrhic victory: generating sales on foreign markets at a growing loss (Volze 1999a, p. 161). The future held no prospect of improvement in the country's innovation, labor productivity, or foreign trade. The tension between economic and social policy had irrefutably reached a critical level. The bid for unity of economic and social policy in the GDR had failed once and for all.

⁹⁰The *valuta-mark* was a statistical unit of calculation that the GDR had used for all its foreign trade accounts since the mid-1960s. Its exchange rate derived from a certain relation to the "transfer ruble." The exchange rate in relation to western currencies fluctuated with the changes in parity values between the ruble and the convertible currencies.

Like a *deus ex machina*, however, a way out of the crisis appeared a few months later – the monetary, economic, and social union with the Federal Republic of Germany on 1 July 1990 and the accession to that state three months thereafter (Ritter 2007a, b).

6.5 *Political Causes of the Trade-Off Between Social Protection and Economic Performance*

Why did the GDR's political leadership never veer from its soft, rather populist course in social policy, though it did not shrink from trampling on the interests and even the rights of the population in other policy areas? Why did it not dig in its heels and massively cut back on social policy, even against the will of the people if necessary? Despite the most egregious economic inefficiencies, the SED leadership flinched from making the necessary changes. This astonishing inaction calls for explanation.

6.5.1 The Long Shadow of 17 June 1953

All observers agree that this aversion was partly due to the traumatic repercussions of uprising in East Berlin and in many other cities in the GDR on 17 June 1953. Any political decisions that could retrigger events like the ones experienced on that day were shunned by the SED like the devil shuns holy water. The leadership exercised particular caution when dealing with bread-and-butter issues, especially wage and social policy: "After June 1953, the SED cadres who had risen from the ranks of the workers never again dared test how those they had left behind at the workbench would react to wage cuts" (Niethammer 1997, p. 327). This argument, which encapsulates innumerable findings of similar tenor, applied to social policy as a whole from the 1970s on.

6.5.2 The Program's Inherited Burdens

Both the legacy of past policies and programs and the SED's resulting interpretation of reality precluded a firmer stance on social policy than the one the party took. After all, the SED was, by ideology, platform, and organization, a party rooted in the tradition of the socialist and communist wing of the German workers' movement. It saw itself as striving to build a "better society," which, as a long-term objective, was understood to mean a society unfettered by destitution, unemployment, or differences between classes or status groups and marked by a culmination of productive forces. That vision was not just propaganda; it was also a utopian history of salvation inspired by Marxism-Leninism (Bender 1991; 300). It grew

from the experience of precarious existence that shaped most of the SED leadership under Ulbricht and Honecker and predisposed them to a social policy guaranteeing security.

Furthermore, the East German leaders had increasingly become prisoners of their own tenets when it came to social policy. Anyone who constantly calls for the benefit of the many finds it hard to reduce or eliminate social or economic benefits once they have been granted. Despite immense foreign-trade complications, the leadership felt itself confirmed in its convictions by the Central Committee's rationale for "steadfastly pressing on" with the economic and social policy adopted at the Eighth Party Congress (1971): "The fundamental political lesson that the level of social policy, once achieved, must never be abandoned" (Trümpler et al. 1980, p. 24).

6.5.3 Socialism in Half a Country

The thought of sharply cutting back on the benefits of social policy was bound to come even harder to anyone who, like the GDR's political leadership after 1971, had expressly *not* consoled the people with blessings of a distant communist future but who had sought instead to satisfy their immediate material interests. It was especially difficult for anyone presiding over "socialism in half a country" (Birke 1989, p. 408) and having an economically powerful and socially attractive neighbor (the Federal Republic of Germany) that one impatiently wished to "catch up to and overtake" – or "leapfrog beyond," as it was later cunningly formulated. That lot, too, fell to the political leaders of East Germany.

More forbidding still was the competition with the western part of Germany, in which the SED saw a "social democratic peril" (Stephan 1997, p. 66). As a coalition partner in the Federal Republic's federal government from 1966 to 1982, West Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) had sought *détente* toward the socialist states and had worked to expand the welfare state. To the East German leadership, though, the SPD was a particularly treacherous opponent, not least because much of the GDR's population had a liking for social democracy. That partiality, too, put pressure on the East German leadership, which could not afford to retrench social policy in any major way as long as the Federal Republic of Germany was governed by Social Democrats. Even after West Germany's federal government passed in 1982 to Helmut Kohl and his coalition comprising the CDU, the Christian Social Union (the CDU's Bavarian sister party, CSU), and the liberals (the Free Democratic Party, FDP), East German party politics alone essentially ruled out a restrictive social policy in the GDR. It would have made the East German government guilty of what it reproached Kohl's government for, albeit in grossly exaggerated terms. Namely, the GDR would have been seen as resorting to *Sozialabbau* (the dismantling of the social welfare), the belligerent term that East German propaganda all too gladly adopted from West German Social Democrats and union dissenters decrying the coalition's social policy in the Federal Republic

of Germany. (The diagnosis was erroneous on both sides of the border, however; see Schmidt 2005a, b, c).

The interaction of social policy and the aspiring foreign policy aims of the GDR leadership, above all the General Secretary of the SED, Erich Honecker, should not be underestimated, either. A salient objective of Honecker's national policy was to make the GDR presentable on the international stage. He was persuaded that it was possible. Had not the GDR gained international recognition – and to a degree previously not thought possible – shortly after Ulbricht's departure from the scene? Had not diplomatic relations with other countries reached an all-time high, with 24 countries recognizing the GDR in 1972? Had not that total climbed to 43 (including the United Kingdom and France) in 1973 (Fischer Chronik 1999, p. 509)? These successes and social policy had enabled Honecker to close in on his greatest goal, much later described by Schalck-Golodkowski (Schalck-Golodkowski 1995): “Honecker's greatest ambition was to win international respectability for the first workers' and peasants' state on German soil and prove it possible as it were, specifically in Germany, to put forward such a model of society internationally at a high industrial and sociopolitical level and thereby highly motivate the people [of the GDR]” (p. 165). But given the GDR's rich neighbor, the Federal Republic of Germany, that design made sense only if East Germany managed to raise the performance of its economy and its society to a point approaching that of West Germany. Hence, the leadership of the GDR strove to catch up with, surpass, or even leapfrog past the West (p. 165). Taking this train of thought further, one can see how there was no reason – especially in the minds of communist revolutionaries who wanted to bring heaven to earth⁹¹ – to give ground even in economically rough times like the 1980s.

6.5.4 Paralysis and Inability to Correct Mistakes

Was not paralysis also at work? Was not the GDR's leadership too old? Was there not a paucity of qualified young leaders feeding into the system? Was not the “Central Committee attended by ever more comrades with hearing aides,” as a former member of the Central Committee quipped (see Hertle and Stephan 1997a, p. 25)? The average age of the Central Committee's members under Honecker – 60 years in 1989 – exceeded that of previous years; in the Politburo it was more than 66 years. There were few, if any, innovation-minded elites coming up through the ranks. This scarcity stemmed mainly from the GDR's only mechanism for building elites, the principle of *nomenklatura* – the system of state-party controlled

⁹¹ The formulation is a variation on Wolf Biermann's impressive one-line portrait of Honecker over the Phoenix television broadcast station on 30 September 2003, 8:15 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.: “He wanted to bring heaven to earth.”

patronage to senior positions in the bureaucracy.⁹² The consequences constituted yet another basic factor leading to a rigid policy that was oriented to the status quo:

Physically, the older generation of the communist party functionaries from the Weimar period had reached the end of the road in 1989, [and] the generation of the Hitler youth and flak auxiliaries was about to retire. The first age group shaped by the GDR had been kept away from the levers of power. There were hardly any innovative young elite (Hertle and Stephan 1997a, pp. 25–26; see also Meyer 1991a).

No less revealing was the GDR's underdeveloped ability to correct mistakes, an obstacle common to all autocratic regimes (Schmidt 1999). Such states, with their predominantly hierarchical political processes, have little or no advance warning of mortal danger. The political leadership in these states is usually so powerful that it lulls itself into the false hope of not having to learn. It can then inflict heavy damage on society, the economy, and, indirectly, itself by overregulating, overreaching, and thereby further weakening its legitimacy and stability, which are fragile to begin with.

These factors played themselves out in the GDR as well. The country's political system was not equipped with the rules and institutions of constitutional democracy. It therefore did not "accommodate diversity and . . . techniques for periodically reviewing policy" (Zacher 1998, p. 511), which in functioning democracies are more or less guaranteed by a political opposition, the mass media, and a wide variety of interest associations. In other words, the system lacked the "due process and institutions allowing for the toleration and the clash of different viewpoints" that compel people to correct and learn from mistakes (p. 511).

6.5.5 A Disconnect Between Politics and Economic Considerations

Three additional powerful factors determined the inability to alter social policy appropriately. First, the party and state leadership of the GDR saw itself as the "executor" (Stephan 1997, p. 88) of a historic mission. This self-concept made perseverance an obligation, particularly under adverse conditions. Second, the leadership's profoundly politics-centered world view fortified that commitment. Third, this world view was coupled with untrammelled faith in the steering capacity of policy-makers and in the controllability of society. The optimism about control was manifested not only in the idea of being able to ensure long-term full employment, competitiveness, and even development higher than that in western countries. It also came through in the belief that all vital issues of society and the economy

⁹² This system precluded election, market success, and heredity as alternatives. The procedure of filling the listed posts therefore always depended on the consent of the SED department responsible for the corresponding lists of appointees. "In terms of ideological qualification, there emerged a relatively homogeneous functional elite whose characteristic trait [was] its immobility" (Weinert 1999, pp. 66–67). Another factor was upward social mobility based on the specific opportunity structures in the newly created workers' and peasants' state.

could eventually be aligned and managed as desired if one only had the will to do so (Schönebeck 1994, p. 98).

This belief in political feasibility was accompanied by the circumstance that economic considerations were alien to Honecker's policies (Weinert and Gilles 1999, p. 41). Having claimed the primacy of policy, Honecker and the leaders around him imagined themselves at the commanding heights of government, society, and the economy. All of them colossally overestimated the resilience of the economy and society. In the early 1970s, experts warned Honecker against overextending social policy and about the undue burden it would place on the economy, but he and his followers threw caution to the wind (see Skyba 2002, pp. 52–54, 78; Steiner 1999, p. 164). Warnings against dependence on international economic relations received the same response. Foreign debt? What state was without it (see Tisch 1995)? Indebtedness to western countries? It was not nice and was no doubt politically risky should Moscow ever suspect it to mean too much dependence on the West.⁹³ But where was the supposed problem in economic terms? Was it not instead that the GDR was leading the “class enemy” in the West by the nose with foreign debt? Foreign debt actually had the charm of making it possible to outmaneuver the class enemies with their own money (see Przybylski 1992b, p. 49, where the statement is attributed to Honecker).

The reverse side of the SED's megalomania was its political vulnerability. Because the SED professed it had overall responsibility for society and the economy and supreme jurisdiction over policy, all the concerns and needs of the population were addressed to it. The SED thereby became largely answerable for the major offenses and the minor nuisances alike – for political repression, absence of freedom to travel, and inadequate pensions as much as for the burst water pipe (see Scherzer 1989). This psychological condition made the SED highly sensitive to expressions of displeasure, protest, and overt or covert renouncement of allegiance. It was especially ominous because the SED had no notable, reliable reserves of legitimation beyond its immediate followers and confederates in the state apparatus, the party, and the mass organizations. For all the authority of the ruling party and the SED state, they stood on thin ice, and the political control by the party and state apparatus was amazingly inflexible on occasion (Kaiser 1997a, p. 455). The events of 17 June 1953 had taught that lesson. That crisis had intensified the deep insecurity of the GDR leadership and had exacerbated its predilection for “paternalism and paranoia” (Fulbrook 1995, p. 22). The SED was utterly bent on preventing a repetition of what happened on 17 June 1953 (see Weinert and Gilles 1999, p. 20;

⁹³ Parts of the SED leadership did in fact take exception to the procurement of money from Western countries. Members of the Politburo commented critically on this practice (probably also to Soviet leaders). One of them was Werner Krolikowski (member of the Politburo from 1971 to 1989), who had an eye on the Tenth Party Congress (1981) when he accused the SED leadership of having succumbed to the “abominable practice of ideological coexistence” (Przybylski 1992b: 60). He charged that the leadership was pursuing “a policy of calling an ideological truce with the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States for stinking money” (p. 61).

Malycha and Winters 2009), which was officially called a “counterrevolutionary putsch attempt” (Lexikonredaktion 1982, as quoted in Panskus 1986, p. 21). The strict continuation of social policy was intended to serve this purpose as well.

The SED’s own doggedness – Meuschel (1992) justifiably refers to the “SED’s immobility” (p. 14) – inflicted the party with paralysis and an inability to reform, sapping the country’s economic strength more and more. Even dictatorial rule hits limits, and the GDR was no exception (Bessel and Jessen 1996). As the East German welfare state demonstrated, these limits included self-overestimation and structural incapacity to correct mistakes.

7 The GDR in Comparative Perspective: A Socialist Work and Welfare State

The East German welfare state up to the end of the Honecker era⁹⁴ is difficult to equate with any of the types derived from comparison of western industrialized countries, whether one speaks of the institutional redistributive model of the welfare state, the social insurance model, and the residual welfare state or, as Esping-Andersen (1990) does, of liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare state regimes. Attempts to classify the East German variety founder on the considerable heterogeneity of its welfare state, its special focus on job security and price subsidization of basic goods, and its embeddedness in an authoritarian state with a state-controlled union (the FDGB) as the authorized implementation agent of social policy.

In short, the GDR had given rise to a heterogeneous, expansive, highly interventionist welfare state (Hockerts 1994a, b; Polster 1990; Scharf 1988; Vortmann 1989) with a social policy far more fragmented than that of the Federal Republic of Germany (Manow-Borgwardt 1994). Based on employment and the earned income of as many people as possible, the welfare state of the GDR paternalistically guaranteed basic security for almost all East German citizens from cradle to grave at a low level on the whole. This description seems compatible with Hockerts’s (1998) suggestion that the social policy of the GDR added up to an authoritarian “caring state based on a planned economy” (*Versorgungsstaat*, p. 7).⁹⁵ But the East German welfare state also featured discrimination and favoritism, such as the privileged old age-pension schemes that beneficiaries of the supplementary and special provisionary systems could take advantage of. The system was marked by coercion, exclusion of politically undesired people, and repression, too,

⁹⁴ Changes in priorities and course as Germany headed toward unification are not discussed in this section. See Sect. 5.4 for further information.

⁹⁵ By contrast, Bouvier (2002) accentuates the supply-related character and dictatorial form of the GDR’s social policy by arguing that it be conceptualized as a *Versorgungsdiktatur* (p. 337), an autocratic caring state that treats its clients as objects, not as autonomous citizens.

examples being the major inequalities in, or exclusion from, access to social benefits generated by the political instrumentalization of social policy.

Unlike the welfare states of western countries, the one in the GDR was flanked by an unusually large apparatus for surveillance and repression. The heterogeneity of social policy and its coexistence with the police state as a whip have done much to shape the conceptualization of the East German welfare state. Schroeder (1998) has called attention to the “duality of care and surveillance” (*Dualität von Versorgung und Überwachung*, p. 646). Jarausch (1998) proposes that the GDR’s dual sense of security (meaning both social and state security) be seen as a “provident dictatorship” (*Fürsorgediktatur*; Jarausch 1998). Indeed, “the GDR’s security complex” consisted of both “welfare state and police state” (Niethammer 1997, p. 318).

7.1 Social Policy in East and West and Across the Eastern European Nations: Commonalities and Differences

Experienced cross-national researchers have revealed similarities between elements of social policy in the GDR and the welfare state of other countries (Kaelble 1994). Some of these analysts believe that the East German variety tended strongly toward “Sovietization.” The health system, particularly its nationalization, repeatedly serves as a case in point (Frerich and Frey 1993a, pp. 29, 205, 209), as do the weight attached to the company-based welfare state, and the travel bookings, vacation arrangements, and other popular services that the unions saw to for workers and employees. Other commentators assert that the primary influence on the GDR’s social policy was the resort to traditions of the Weimar era’s leftist parties, especially to platforms of groups associated with the communist party, the Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD), and the left wing of the SPD.

7.1.1 Sovietization and Domestic Roots of Social Policy in the GDR

The dispute over whether East German social policy harked back mainly to Soviet practices or to the Weimar Republic does not lead very far. Both strands were present, both were operative in the SED, and both figured in the process of shaping social policy (see Frerich and Frey 1993a; Hockerts 1998; Hoffmann 1996; Jarausch and Siegrist 1997; Kleßmann 2000). However, research results do suggest a definite ranking of their priority. Building on the patterns of social and economic policy that had been shaped by the socialists and communists of the Weimar Republic was more important than Sovietization (see Hockerts 1998; Jarausch and Siegrist 1997). Traditions going back to the 1880s played a surprisingly significant role as well. For instance, formal retention of the social insurance precept in the GDR “was a legacy of Bismarckian social legislation, with its

principle of the group and of insurance” (Lohmann 1987b, p. 281). Whereas social policy in the Soviet Union had long clung to the “heritage of czarist Russian culture of officialdom and bureaucracy, with its patriarchal-paternalistic principle of care” (p. 281), the social policy decision-makers in the GDR only partly followed suit. They established welfare state policies that only occasionally emulated Soviet precedents, avoided Soviet-style pigeon-holing (Stiller 1983), and relied more on funding social policy by means of premiums.

Another practice more important than Sovietization was that of borrowing from the Weimar Republic’s plans for social reform. The GDR’s polyclinics, for instance, descended from the treatment centers that had been set up by the local public health insurance offices of several cities governed by the Social Democrats in Germany of the late 1920s. Both the rent freeze at 1936 levels and the almost full protection of tenants were rooted mainly in the platform of the communist workers’ movement of the Weimar Republic (Schildt 1998, pp. 178–186). Such regulations justify skepticism about the preeminence of Sovietization in the GDR’s social policy. Many changes in the social policy pursued in the Soviet occupation zone and, later, the GDR were based on what until then had been non-dominant, rather alternative lines of custom that had earlier influenced health care in the Soviet Union. Some of the changes can therefore be seen as “re-imports,” but most of them selectively continued German strands of policy (Süß 1998, pp. 96–98).

7.1.2 The East German Welfare State Compared

Parallels existed between East German social policy and the welfare state in some of the Western countries, such as France, particularly with respect to family policy that encouraged population growth. But pro-birth family and educational policy in France, unlike that in the GDR, was not driven chiefly by ambitious employment policy.

Observers familiar with the German case have also seen parallels between the pronatal intentions of the GDR’s family policy and the demographic objectives of social policy under Nazi dictatorship. And in underscoring full employment and the mobilization of labor, East German social policy arguably had certain facets in common with Soviet development on the one hand and the aspirations behind the Swedish welfare state’s employment policy of the 1970s and 1980s on the other. Sweden, however, set store by public and private employment, whereas the employment policies of the GDR and of the Soviet Union were geared solely to the economic sector of state socialism and the production cooperatives.

Parallels existed in the realm of health care, too, with the East German system and the United Kingdom’s National Health Service both marked by a high degree of nationalization. It was even more pronounced in the GDR than in the United Kingdom, though.

The GDR’s meager social insurance pensions and community care corresponded to the parsimonious welfare benefits granted by a largely liberal welfare state regime of the type described by Esping-Andersen (1990, pp. 69–78). Both models

coupled welfare (state benefits without direct reciprocation) and workfare (the taking of individual responsibility, especially the obligation to take a job). Yet in contrast to the liberal welfare states, the GDR's social policy guaranteed the working-age population the right to work.

The GDR's company-based welfare state, too, had parallels elsewhere. The enterprises played a prominent part in East German social policy by maintaining full employment policy, allocating housing, arranging weekend and local recreation activities, helping to manage family conflicts, and providing child care at the place of work. Some of these functions had counterparts in the corporatist dimension of Japan's social policy (Seeleib-Kaiser 2001, pp. 155–187) and the social benefits afforded by big Soviet enterprises, to mention just two examples. This role also tied into traditions of social policy in key enterprises of the German Empire of 1871 – first in the period from 1871 to 1918 and, subsequently, under the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933.

7.1.3 Social Policy in the GDR and the COMECON States

Comparison between the social policy of the GDR and that of other East-bloc states shows that some of their attributes, too, are the same. The socialist countries were more statist in their social policy than the vast majority of western welfare states were. Moreover, all East-bloc states adopted an ambitious social policy – measured by the rate of public spending on social services and by the share of the total population protected by social policy – upon reaching only a moderately advanced level of economic development. Multivariate analyses of the rate of public spending on social services in western, socialist, and Third World countries show that membership in the socialist bloc of states was among the important determinants of expansive social policy. Other critical determinants included the level of economic development, the percentage of senior citizens in the total population, and the degree of institutional constraint on national government policy-making. The GDR was no exception (Schmidt 2005d, pp. 241–244).

Analysis of social policies in the former East bloc turns up more than just commonalities. Notable dissimilarities existed as well, such as the circumstances framing social policy. Although macroeconomic data generally overestimated the economic strength of the socialist countries, the ranking of the countries by their level of economic productivity per capita can be regarded as sufficiently reliable. According to those data, the level of East Germany's economic development exceeded that of all the socialist countries (Maddison 1995, pp. 131–132, 139–141, 174–175).

The Soviet zone of occupation and, subsequently, the GDR were affected more strongly and less favorably by the consequences of World War II and the Cold War than were the other socialist countries. This difference owed partly to the extensive reparations to the Soviet Union and partly to the GDR's exposed geopolitical location at the iron curtain between western and eastern Europe. Under the conditions of the Cold War, this site and the division of labor within the East

block exacted a heavy toll in terms of security and military policy. These burdens were compounded by the GDR's self-inflicted problems. The SED-state's radical policy of class struggle did much to provoke the emigration of more than 2.4 million East German citizens in the years up to 1961 alone.⁹⁶ Wholesale emigration hit the GDR hard, partly because the country lost qualified labor. On top of that problem came the dislocations that the mass migration caused in the age structure of East Germany's population. It inflated the percentage of senior citizens, an age bracket that had swelled early on to unusual size by international standards.

Given the relation between the level of economic development and the share of the East German GDP spent on social services, one also finds that outlays for the principal institutions of social policy were more frugal in the GDR than in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. For instance, the extra spending incurred in the GDR by the country's substantial proportion of senior citizens was somewhat offset by a late retirement age and quite restricted retirement pensions (Voirin 1993). Furthermore, the unusually high percentage of the East Germany's total population participating in the labor force reduced the share dependent on social benefits. In states with a fairly low percentage of their population in the labor force (and, hence, less earned income with which to cover living costs), the dependence on assistance from the government, family, or other source rises as a rule.

In some ways the GDR likewise trailed other socialist countries in housing policy, to which the East German leadership had attached special importance since 1971. True, housing in East Germany, for all its obvious defects, was superior to that in the other socialist countries by quantitative standards such as surface density and dwellings equipped with running water and built-in toilets (von Beyme 1975, p. 264, 1984, p. 304). But it was not as good as that in the western industrialized states. As for long-term housing construction, even Czechoslovakia was a serious rival within COMECON (Siegrist and Straht 1996; von Beyme 1975, pp. 263, 265). The GDR did not lead the COMECON countries in the scope of its university-level education and training, either. The number of university students per 10,000 inhabitants in the GDR (76.0) was still at the lower end of the scale in the late 1970s.

Another fact brought to light by this analysis of the COMECON countries is that the GDR had the most upward and downward mobility in the East Bloc. This distinction stemmed mainly from the extreme turnover of elites in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR. In addition, the GDR was "Europe's most female work society" (Niethammer 1993, p. 135) – that is, Europe's socialist society with the highest percentage of women in its labor force. This profile resulted mostly from an especially active mobilization of labor in conjunction with policies promoting

⁹⁶ From 1950 to 1961, 2.7 million people left the GDR (Hoffmann 2003, p. 189). Migration in the opposite direction occurred, too, however. In the same years, approximately 603,000 West German citizens settled in the GDR (p. 189). From 1962 to 1988, 625,000 people were recorded as having relocated from the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany. Around 10% of the East Germans who fled to West Germany have since resettled in the former territory of the GDR (Geißler 1996, p. 350).

families, women's advancement, population growth, and employment; tight-fisted provisions for old age; and a late age for retirement. All these aspects set the GDR apart from the other socialist states.

The conspicuous degree of upward and downward mobility and the high share of women in the labor force in the GDR had to do with another striking result of this cross-national perspective on the COMECON countries. No other socialist country lost as many of its citizens through emigration to the West as East Germany did. They left not least because of the relentless policy of class struggle against anyone obstructing the project of building socialism – entrepreneurs, the middle class, the self-employed, and people who for whatever motives kept their distance to the SED state. This circumstance explains why the GDR was in fact an “emigration society” (Niethammer 1993, p. 135) deserted by many members of its labor force, bereft of male reserves for the domestic working population, and therefore forced to recruit women for participation in the labor market.

7.1.4 Social Policy in the GDR and in Western Countries

How does the social policy in the GDR fare alongside that in western countries? To answer this question, it may be helpful to consider the yardsticks used to help construct typologies of welfare states. One such typology is Esping-Andersen's (1990) commonly cited distinction between three main forms of welfare state regimes: (a) the liberal type, which is rather reserved with social policy (e.g., the United States); (b) the social democratic type (e.g., Sweden's social policy of the early 1980s); and (c) the conservative type (e.g., the Federal Republic of Germany). How does the GDR's social policy measure up when examined for the indicators of these types of welfare states and for complementary characteristics? And what differences surface when the social policy of the GDR is seen beside that of the Federal Republic of Germany (see Table 1).

East German social policy proved amazingly ambitious when it came to employment objectives. The government spared no cost in the effort to ensure the right to work, which amounted to “job security approaching the guarantee of employment” (von Maydell et al. 1996, p. 58). That goal was its foundation. The political leadership of the GDR steadfastly pursued it to the end – literally at any price. The difference between this commitment and that underlying the social policy of western countries in this respect was enormous. Nothing like it existed in the West – and does not to this day. Even Sweden, the most venturesome of all western industrialized countries in matters of labor market and employment policy, was unable to sustain its full employment policy indefinitely. West Germany's balance sheet in that policy area was far weaker than Sweden's. The period of full employment ended in West Germany with the oil price shock of 1973–1974, despite the fact that the country's funding of its expansive welfare state was facilitated by a highly productive economy created with what by international standards was only a moderately high rate of the population's participation in the labor market.

Table 1 Welfare state regimes and social policy in East and West Germany

Characteristic	Social policy in East and West Germany		Ideal-type welfare state regime		
	GDR: authoritarian, socialist workfare and welfare state	Federal Republic of Germany: centrist welfare state	Liberal	Conservative	Social democratic
Full employment guarantee	Yes (intended and actual)	No	No	No	Yes (intended)
Social rights or relief of the poor	Primacy of politics over social rights	Social rights	Relief of the poor	Social rights	Social rights
Private social spending	Low	Average	Relatively high	Average	Low
Percentage of social expenditure funded by premiums	Average with a downward trend	Large	Average	Large	Average
Percentage of social expenditure funded by the state	Large and increasing	About 40%	Average	Small	Large
Differentiation of benefits by occupational group	Slight for most people; privileged status for groups of special political importance	Average	Slight	Large	Slight
Pension's level of wage substitution	Low (but high for supplementary and special provisionary systems)	Average to high	Low	High	High
Level of standard net pension	Low (but high for special provisionary systems)	Average to high	Low	Average to high	Average to high
Required number of years of paid premiums to qualify	Relatively few	Average	Many	Average	Average
Size of group covered by social policy	Citizens	Almost all citizens, universal means-tested public assistance	Small	Large	Citizens

Subsidization of basic goods and services	Yes, increasing	Low	No	Low	Low
Redistribution	Large	Relatively large	Relatively large among narrowly defined target groups	Relatively slight (priority on status preservation)	Large
Nature of family policy	Designed to promote employment and population growth	Between conservative and egalitarian gender order	Market-oriented	Focus on traditional division of labor between women and men	Focus on egalitarian division of labor between women and men
Social spending as percentage of GDP ^a	Average (narrowly defined), high (broadly defined)	High	Low	High	High
Protection against market forces	Extremely strong	Strong	Weak	Average	Strong
Incentive or obligation to work	Very strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Weak
Wage policy	Dominated by the state, little difference in wages	Based on social partnership, moderate wage spread	Low minimum wage, usually company-specific arrangements, large wage spread	Based on social partnership, average wage spread	Based on social partnership, usually moderate wage spread
Existence of basic income maintenance scheme	Yes, especially through minimum wage, minimum pensions, and price subsidies	Yes, through means-tested public assistance for citizens and benefits for asylum-seekers	None	Public assistance	Yes, especially through employment policy and public assistance
Type of labor relations	Authoritarian-consultative	Liberal-corporatist social partnership	Liberal	Liberal-corporatist social partnership	Liberal-corporatist social partnership

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Characteristic	Social policy in East and West Germany		Ideal-type welfare state regime	
	GDR: authoritarian, socialist workfare and welfare state	Federal Republic of Germany: centrist welfare state	Liberal	Conservative
Relation between state and societal associations	Statism and authoritarian corporatism	Partly liberal-corporatist, partly pluralistic	Pluralistic	Liberal-corporatist
“Carrot” and “stick”	Both increasingly used	Increasing role of carrot, decreasing role of stick	Small, but increasing, role of the carrot; decreasing role of stick	Increasing role of carrot, decreasing role of stick
Level of per capita benefits	Moderate	Very high	Average	High
				Very high

Note: The characterizations of East German social policy apply to the period through the end of the Honecker era. Those of West German social policy are based particularly on Kaufmann (2012), Leisering (2003), von Maydell et al. (2003), Schmidt (2005e), Zacher (2013). The distinction between three welfare state regimes – liberal, conservative, and social democratic – is taken from G. Esping-Andersen (1990). Changes that took place in East German social policy as German unification approached are not considered in this table. See instead Sect. 5.4 in this chapter.

^aGross domestic product.

Social benefits in the GDR were a social right, not alms (for a synopsis, see Lohmann 1996). But they were overshadowed by policy prerogatives much more than was the case in constitutional democracies like the Federal Republic of Germany. This picture, too, illustrates the difference between the social policy of an authoritarian state and that of a democratic one. The GDR's lack of rules for adjusting social benefits to the development of wages and salaries and the state's ad hoc approach to the improvement of those benefits both fit this pattern. By contrast, most social benefits in the western part of Germany (and in most western countries) were adjusted to the development of earned income at regular intervals. The politically very sensitive systems providing for old age were adjusted annually by law in a fixed pension schedule that predictably and verifiably linked income growth of retirement pensions to developments in the earned income of the contributors. In the GDR, however, there was no standard progression of social benefits, and innovations in social policy came abruptly. As pointed out earlier, both kinds of change usually coincided with an SED party congress or an especially important national anniversary. In other words, the GDR's political system did fall back on populist measures with a certain regularity, though it was hard to calculate which of them would come when.

Unlike West Germany's relatively large sector of private insurance against social risks, private spending on social benefits constituted only a small percentage of all expenditures in that field of policy in the GDR. It is true that the GDR did have private life insurance, with 11.3 million policies based on premiums totaling nearly 3.8 billion Eastmarks in 1989 (Statistisches Amt der DDR 1990, p. 304). This form of providential coverage did not extend far, however. Only marginal areas lay outside East Germany's state monopoly on social policy, which, aside from the company-based welfare state, was completely unitary and marked by pronounced centralization. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the statist component of social policy was at least to a limited degree decentralized among the individual *Länder* (federal states) and accompanied by a much stronger corporatist component that consisted primarily of self-administration and indirect government administration through the social insurance carriers, with complementing social policy provided by local government and private welfare associations.

Funding, too, bore witness to the statist design of social policy in the GDR and differed sharply from the approach taken in the Federal Republic of Germany, where statistics from the federal government and the OECD show that up to two thirds of the government's social expenditures were financed by social insurance premiums paid by employers and employees (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1998, pp. 292–293; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1999). In the GDR, about half the revenues for social security (in the narrow sense) came from taxes alone. Most of the social benefits in the wide sense, including the price subsidies for basic goods and services, were financed almost solely from taxes. Taxes also financed the costs of the right to work.

The social policy of the GDR had been instrumental in dissolving the class and status divisions of the period before 1945. However, it also gave rise to the regime's own brand of entitlement. It resulted principally from the introduction and

expansion of the many supplementary old-age pension systems and special pension schemes. They constituted a labyrinth of partiality and privilege that left the nomenklatura and other groups of followers eminently important to the SED state much better off than the rest of East German society – much to the annoyance of many people. Moreover, East German social policy had a particularly steep gradient distinguishing economically and demographically important and unimportant risks and life circumstances. Unlike West Germany's social policy, the GDR's was thus skewed toward special support for families, above all those with several children, and the relative discrimination against persons living on retirement pensions.

The difference between West and East Germany was massive in this way as well. Let there be no mistake, social policy in the Federal Republic of Germany favors some groups over others to this day, too. Provisions for old age and health care are still as lavish compared to social policy for families with children. Privileges are granted within individual branches of social policy as well. Because a person's retirement income from statutory pension insurance funds depends on the premiums the beneficiary has paid into the system, the differences between the sizes of retirement pensions far exceeds the divergence that existed in the East German system. The fringe benefits differ, particularly the company pension schemes. Generous pensions also go to former parliamentarians, undersecretaries, and state ministers. Given the differences in wages and salaries and the considerable span between the lower and the upper income groups (not to mention the top salaries in the private economy), the range of privileges accorded in the Federal Republic of Germany is much broader than it was in the GDR. In the Federal Republic, however, they are distributed across government, society, and business, not concentrated on the policy-making community and the state apparatus as they were in East Germany.

To judge from the degree of equalization, East German social policy excelled in many areas. Two instructive examples were the small wage differential and the pronounced leveling of retirement pensions from social insurance. Still, equalization had its gaps, and occasionally the political leadership of the GDR cautiously bucked the trend, as when it introduced voluntary supplementary pension insurance in 1968 and 1971 and mildly accentuated its emphasis on wage differences beginning in the mid-1970s. Particularly obvious divergence in provisions for old age resulted from the preferential treatment that the supplementary and special provisionary systems gave.

Many people think that the GDR had reached a particularly high degree of equalization by virtue of its social policy and that the western part of Germany had not. The first belief is largely correct; the second is wrong. In the Federal Republic of Germany that existed before 3 October 1990, social policy and tax policy together had brought about a good deal of redistribution, both between the income groups and between the generations (Barr 1992; Wagschal 2001). Even so, wage and salary differences have always been much more perceptible in the Federal Republic than they were in the GDR.

Compared to average earned income, many social benefits in the GDR were modest, as illustrated, first, by the fairly limited average state income support

received from retirement pensions paid through social insurance and, second, by the government's paltry public assistance. Guaranteed existence at a subsistence level for everyone was the watchword. It meant national insurance and basic care at a level based on the standard of consumption and the life style of a worker's household before World War II, supplemented by job security for the working-age population. In the Federal Republic of Germany, too, public assistance (and, since 1994, the benefits for asylum-seekers, which are smaller than those of standard public assistance) has afforded basic – if means-tested – security at a level at which no one will get rich. Nonetheless, public assistance suffices to ensure a livelihood at present standards, not those of 1938. In the Federal Republic, welfare state benefits of quite different levels and scope arch over the basic security from public assistance. As old-age insurance plans demonstrate particularly well, the West German system has achieved a far higher level of social benefits than East German social insurance did.

It is well known and frequently documented that the level of benefits providing for security in old age was rather low in the GDR. In 1989 the estimated average pension for a person insured for 40 years came to about 40% of the average of the beneficiary's net wages or salary as opposed to nearly 65% in the Federal Republic of Germany at that time (Kleinhenz 1997, p. 51).⁹⁷ The mediocre size of the GDR's average retirement pensions owed partly to the small wage spread and the relatively low minimum pension.⁹⁸ Another factor was the income ceiling for the assessment of pension insurance premiums. It was set at 600 Eastmarks per month and, unlike the corresponding figure in the Federal Republic of Germany, was never adjusted to wage increases. The pensions in the GDR were not adjusted either, except on the occasion of key political events such as a congress of the SED. East German retirement pensions could therefore wind up lagging further behind rising wages and salaries than was the case with a process that indexes retirement pensions to prices or to gross or net wages.

Another characteristic of the East German welfare state was a family policy designed to encourage population growth. It aimed (with moderate success) to increase both the birth rate and (with great success) the number of women in the labor force. The difference between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany becomes apparent in this respect, too. In western Germany, measures to promote the birth rate have been frowned on since the end of the National Socialist era, and for a long time the architects of family policy in the Federal Republic would not

⁹⁷ A person who had paid into the GDR's voluntary supplementary pension scheme, however, could expect a larger pension.

⁹⁸ At the end of June 1990, the minimum monthly pension from the GDR's pension insurance was 330 Eastmarks. Persons could file for the pension and receive it if they had worked fewer than 15 years and if they were entitled to a retirement pension. They had therefore normally qualified by paying voluntary premiums. For persons who had worked 15 years or more, the amount of the minimum retirement pension benefit rose according to the number of years worked. It came to 340 Eastmarks for 15 to under 20 years of work, 390 Eastmarks for 30 to under 35 years, 430 Eastmarks for 40 to under 45 years, and 470 Eastmarks for 45 years or more.

hear of mobilizing women for the labor market. Particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, they designed family policy to promote families as part of a division of labor that accorded the man the role of breadwinner and the woman the task of keeping house and rearing children. Family policy later shifted toward the objective of widening options to accommodate a choice between employment outside the home and family-centered activity. But the difference between West German family policy and the East German family policy of underlining employment and population growth remained immense.

From 1970 through 1989 the GDR's rate of public spending on social services in the narrow sense, as reflected in the corresponding ILO figures, was substantial but not inordinate, climbing to 12.7% in 1970 and 16.8% in 1978 (International Labour Organization 1992, pp. 77–78, 1996, p. 75). In view of the country's high percentage of senior citizens, the share of the national product accounted for by expenditures on support for the aged was even fairly low. These statistics, too, bear witness to the backwardness of the approach to providing for old age in East Germany. However, the ILO statistics on the percentage of GDP spent on social services do not convey the entire scope of the GDR's efforts as a welfare state. Nor does the ILO data on social spending record all (if any) of the generous social benefits yielded by the special provisionary systems. Keeping this fact and the costs of job security in mind, one arrives at a far higher, though not precisely quantifiable, rate of social spending in East Germany.⁹⁹ Indeed, it was excessive in relation to what in other states were the usual trends and linkages between the level of social spending and the economic, social, and political variables of social policy.¹⁰⁰

7.2 Social Policy in the GDR in an Expanded Comparison of Welfare State Regimes

To grasp East Germany's social policy in its entirety, one must go beyond the types of welfare states discussed in the highly regarded book "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" (Esping-Andersen 1990) or related typologies. They do not take account of wage policy – traditionally an especially important branch of social policy – or of social policy measures providing for basic security (e.g., public assistance). Nor do these typologies capture most social policy associated with labor relations, occupational health and safety, or legally mandated job protection. Concentrating on democratic welfare states, the customary typologies ignore both

⁹⁹ The expense of subsidizing the prices of basic goods, housing rents, and transport fares suggests that the actual percentage of East Germany's GDP spent on social services in the late 1980s was about double the figure based on ILO criteria (e.g., International Labour Organization 1996, p. 75). That level of social policy, however, no longer lay within the GDR's economic capacity.

¹⁰⁰ This comparison is based on the previously mentioned model for explaining the rates of social benefits in rich and poor countries (see Schmidt 2005d, pp. 241–244).

the meaning that democracy has for social policy and the degree of freedom (or absence thereof) in the social order. Welfare state typologies also tend to overlook two more dimensions of social policy and its context: (a) the nature of the link between the carrot of social protection and the whip of repression and (b) the purchasing power of per-capita social benefits.

Adding these components to the typologies of social policy and the comparison with East German social policy helps focus the resulting picture. Two features of the GDR's wage policy stand out. First, it was mostly dictated by the state, though generally in consultation (and sometimes in agreement) with FDGB representatives (Schwarzer 1996, pp. 359–360). This practice clearly distinguished wage policy in the GDR from that in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the representatives of the employer and employee organizations autonomously negotiated wages and salaries. The fact that various wage incentive systems (typically company bonuses or fringe benefits) corrected for the centralized wage policy in the GDR has little effect on this elemental difference (Hachtmann 1998, p. 46). The second striking attribute of East German wage policy was the exceptionally advanced leveling of wages. Wage policy underscored this equalization and exacerbated the tensions that already existed between the twin goals of social equality and economic performance in the GDR.

Basic security, one more dimension that the customary typologies of welfare states gloss over, was mentioned earlier. The East German welfare state guaranteed basic security from cradle to grave – albeit at a modest level. It is estimated to have included relative poverty on a grand scale. The assumption is that 10% of all households in the GDR in the late 1980s, and 45% of its households living on pensions at that time, received less than 50% of the average household income (Deutscher Bundestag 1999k, p. 538).

Researchers have repeatedly mentioned a particularly important characteristic of East German social policy's orientation to labor policy: the right to work and its manifestation as a guaranteed job for the bulk of the working-age population. Relatively broad occupational health and safety also existed (Lohmann 1996, pp. 90–91), as eventually borne out by such evidence as a declining number of industrial accidents and recognized occupational diseases (Frerich and Frey 1993a, p. 139). Another notable aspect was that the standard formal employment relationship in the East German economy rested on the work contract. It did not ordinarily come about by appointment, through choice, or – as with authoritarian labor allocation in some places during the Soviet occupation and the early 1950s – by command (Mampel 1966, p. 197; Thiel 1997). The approach to industrial relations, however, derived from the conviction that the personal and collective interests of the working population were fundamentally identical and that the members of the working population, according to prevailing doctrine, were both the producers and the owners of the socialist economy (Hachtmann 1998, p. 36; Lampert and Schubert 1982; Lohmann 1987a; Sander 1997; for a dissenting view, see Kuczynski 1972). Institutionally, labor relations persisted along consultative authoritarianism lines. The working population's rights to have a say in running the economy were not framed by liberal freedom of association and opportunities

for involvement. They were decided instead essentially by a party-dominated consortium of the SED and the state apparatus on the one hand and the FDGB as the state trade union on the other. Unlike the liberal-corporatist setting in which the social partners operated in the Federal Republic of Germany, labor relations in the GDR were molded by the authoritarian corporatism of the party state and its occasional statist command.

Another point was the fragility of due process in the GDR compared to the legal processes in the Federal Republic of Germany, where the jurisdiction of the labor, social, and administrative courts, the Constitutional Courts in the *Länder*, and the federal Constitutional Court gave, and still gives, nearly complete legal protection in all matters of social policy. The GDR did have an abundance of legal guarantees and rules on due process in questions of social and labor law, but, crucially, it lacked a court responsible for judicial review of administrative acts and a Constitutional Court (Lohmann 1987a, 1996).

Analysis of East German social policy and its context reveals an additional issue. The welfare state of East German socialism had two sides to it. Social policy was the carrot alongside the stick of repression. It was both the counterpart and the complement of the police state. This constellation was not entirely new. But the especially remarkable thing about the GDR was that the introduction and expansion of social policy coincided with an equally energetic introduction and expansion of a mammoth apparatus for observation and repression. At the same time the GDR built up one of the world's more elaborate military systems (von Beyme 1984, pp. 306–307). Combined with paramilitary training facilities, it thoroughly disciplined and regimented everyday life (Niethammer 1997, p. 324) and turned many citizens at least temporarily into soldiers (Niethammer 1997). This development was yet another outstanding difference between social policy in the GDR and that in the western industrialized countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany. Granted, the West, too, had militaries, armaments, secret services, and domestic security agencies. But in contrast to the situation in the GDR, the percentage of public spending on these policy areas on these fields of policy shrank, whereas the percentage allotted to social expenditures continued to grow (Keman 1988; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1999).

Lastly, the GDR had nowhere near the economic strength of the western industrialized countries. East German labor productivity in the year of reunification (1990), for instance, was estimated to be just under one third that of West Germany. It had been 36% 5 years earlier and as high as 50% in 1950 (Heering 1999, p. 2265). All efforts to increase labor productivity through social policy had evidently come to little (Tisch 1995, p. 135). Responding in an interview to Professor Rainer Lepsius's question of how leaders in the GDR had hoped to achieve that aim, the former head of the FDGB explained: "We naturally concentrated intensely on the awareness factor" (p. 135). Lepsius's reply deserves to go down in the history books: "But that is turning Marx on his head! You governed the GDR with Schiller, not Marx" (Pirker et al. 1995, p. 135).

The failure of the efforts to raise labor productivity by means of social policy affected the level of social benefits per capita as well. It was not high in the GDR, as many East German citizens knew from experience, especially when a trip to the western part of Germany or a visit from West Germany drove home the difference between the purchasing power of the East Germany's currency and that of West Germany's. The social policy of the Federal Republic of Germany thus had a further advantage that East German social policy could not match: a very high level of per-capita social spending (Schmidt 2001a).

Keeping the narrow and the broad senses of social policy in mind, one arrives at the following conclusions. The welfare state in which the GDR indulged was extensive, even disproportionate given the country's only moderate economic strength. Rushing from "plan to plan" (Steiner 2003), the leaders had sought the salvation of their entire economic policy in the planned economy. It had thus become vital for their social policy to mobilize and protect the work capacity of the working-age population. To this end, the East German welfare state had entailed both the right and the obligation to work coupled with strong incentives to engage in paid work in the planned economy – even for persons of retirement age, and especially women.

These circumstances and the East German welfare state's preoccupation with social positions and risks affecting the process of production and population growth suggest that the social policy of the GDR be classified as an example of a unique dual-track welfare state. First, it was a comprehensive welfare state of the authoritarian-paternalistic variety. It provided shelter from market forces, assured the basic livelihood of almost all its citizens, and protected persons and groups it especially wooed, all in a hierarchical and authoritarian manner subordinated to the primacy of policy. Second, this welfare state made a point of mass-mobilizing the capacity to work – partly through family policy that energetically encouraged population growth – and guaranteeing job security in the socialist planned economy even if it meant gross economic inefficiency. To that degree, East German social policy blended the welfare state and the workfare state. It was a mix between a socialist-authoritarian welfare state and a workfare state. This authoritarian, paternalistic work and welfare state distinctly differed from West Germany's welfare state, which occupies a position all its own between the conservative and the social-democratic models (Schmidt 2005d), and was far removed from the liberal, conservative, and social-democratic types of welfare state (see Table 1).

Ultimately, the path of social policy in the GDR did not lead to a viable welfare state but rather to a huge welfare state on credit, which drained economic strength and mortgaged the future. In this sense, one lesson of East German social policy is that an industrialized society with only moderately high labor productivity and an ambitious welfare state will overreach and eventually bankrupt itself unless it takes corrective action.

8 Continuity and Discontinuity in East Germany's Social Policy

By 1990, failure of the GDR's leadership to redress the imbalance between the size of the East German welfare state and the country's micro- and macroeconomic performance had contributed to bringing the country to the brink of collapse. A way out did present itself, however. Germany's reunification presented the opportunity to solve the self-created problems of social policy in the GDR, and it was seized. The institutions and regulations of the West German welfare state were transferred to the "new *Länder*," the states that were reestablished in the GDR shortly before its accession to the Federal Republic of Germany. The costs, along with the debts of the East German welfare state, were passed on to the taxpayers of united Germany and all its people obliged to pay social insurance premiums, especially those living in the economically prosperous West German *Länder*. The most important stages of this transformation were the monetary, economic, and social union, which went into effect on 1 July 1990 as set forth in the First State Treaty of 18 May 1990 (Deutschland-Archiv 1990), and the constitutional unification of Germany on 3 October 1990 along with the execution of the transition arrangements spelled out in the Unification Treaty of 31 August 1990.

All these developments triggered a massive wave of legislation in the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR before July 1990. The result was an unimagined quantitative and qualitative boom in social policy legislation during the final year of the GDR (see Sect. 5.4). As one gathers from the Official Statute Register of the German Democratic Republic, lawmakers were busier with social policy in 1990 than in any other year. After the election to the People's Chamber in March 1990, the de Maizière government, with the support of a large parliamentary majority and in consultation with experts from West German ministries, put in motion the second great reorganization of social policy on East German territory. Unlike the first one after 1945, which proceeded without democratic legitimation and bequeathed the authoritarian socialist work and welfare state, the reorganization in 1990 moved democratically toward the West German model of a comprehensive welfare state of the West European tradition.

8.1 *The First and Second Reorganization of Social Policy on East German Territory*

The reorganization after 1945 and the one begun in 1990 were distinguished by discontinuity and continuity. The political leadership in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR had changed social policy more radically than any other regime in Germany before 1945. The sea change in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR shaped the form, the political processes, and the results of social policy. It achieved in social policy what no previous regime in Germany had brought about: On the whole, it shed the inherited burden of previous social policy, broke with the constraining patterns of the past, forged its own way in social policy, and established that path by means of pronatalist family policy, job security, and

extensive price subsidies for basic goods and services, to mention only some of the major measures. The change during the soft revolution that engulfed the GDR in 1989 and 1990 was scarcely less profound, however, and led to the accession of the new *Länder* to the Federal Republic of Germany on 3 October 1990.

The argument that far-reaching change took place in social policy after 1945 and again as of 1990 is borne out by detailed exploration of the discontinuity in the five rings of East German social policy discussed in Sect. of this chapter and by the processes of shaping it (see Table 2). But the picture remains

Table 2 Continuity and discontinuity of social policy in the Soviet zone of occupation, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the *New Länder* (States) in East Germany

Area of social policy	1945–1989 compared to the pre-1945 period	Social policy in the GDR in 1990 and in the new <i>Länder</i> in East Germany compared to 1949–1989
First ring: right to work	Discontinuity	Discontinuity
Second ring: social insurance	Continuity and discontinuity	Continuity and discontinuity
Third ring: family policy, price subsidies for basic goods, housing policy	Discontinuity	Discontinuity
Fourth ring: the company-based welfare state	Continuity and discontinuity	Continuity and discontinuity
Fifth ring: supplementary old-age pension systems, special pension schemes, and “honorary pensions”	Discontinuity	Discontinuity
Social policy formation process	Discontinuity: centralization, hierarchization, homogenization, and party-state pervasion of consensus-building; destruction of pluralistic interest mediation; delegation of government responsibilities to the FDGB ^a ; supremacy of the SED ^b ; consultative-authoritarian mitigation of regulation of labor relations; policy of fusing powers, which permits only fragile, erratic legal protection	Discontinuity: transition to multifaceted social safety net and to pluralistic system of parties and associations; state consisting of many co-governing actors and veto players; delegation of government responsibilities to social partners and social insurance carriers; protection of property rights; transition to labor relations based on social partnership and to systematic separation of powers

^a*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union Federation), the state trade union in the GDR.

^b*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the ruling political party in the GDR, 1949–1989).

incomplete until continuity, too, is duly recognized in both the static and dynamic senses.¹⁰¹

Establishing the right to work, the first ring of the GDR's social policy, broke with the past to meet an old demand of the communist and social democratic workers' movement: job security for as many people as possible. This change was radical, though actually achieving job security was greatly facilitated by the emigration of innumerable members of the workforce to the western part of Germany. No less sweeping was the change that took place in 1990, when West Germany's institutions of social and labor policy were transferred to the new *Länder*. Unified Germany offered no right to work, aside from perennially vague government objectives in the constitutions of some *Länder* (e.g., Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hesse, and North Rhine-Westphalia). And given the many imponderables on which it depended and West Germany's already high level of unemployment, there was little probability of achieving full employment, let alone of guaranteeing jobs.

Breaks in continuity also characterized the second ring of social policy in the GDR – social insurance. It was fundamentally restructured in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR. Specifically, it was centralized, standardized, largely absorbed into the national budget, and entrusted mostly to the FDGB for administration. Retention of old features somewhat bridged over this hiatus, however. Social insurance was not abolished. The funding of social insurance from premiums paid by the persons insured and by the enterprises survived as well, though this portion of the financing ultimately accounted for only about half of the spending on social insurance. In principle, social insurance benefits went on being linked to gainful employment, albeit in a significantly looser fashion because dependents were coinsured. Discontinuity upended social insurance during the transition to German unification, too. The social insurance of the former GDR was replaced by the Federal Republic's multifaceted system, which had been shaped by the structural principles of the "social insurance state" far more than had been the case with East German social policy (Jochem 2001; Riedmüller and Olk 1994).

The third ring of East German social policy, too, went through upheaval after 1990 and the following years. The exorbitant price subsidies for basic goods and services – all of which had been a special trademark of GDR socialism – fell victim to unification policy. The monetary, economic, and social union of the GDR and Federal Republic of Germany did away with the subsidies for food, clothing, and utility goods. Reduced rates for electricity, fuels, water, and transport fares were maintained, however. Housing rents remained stable until the end of 1990, after which point they were gradually raised to market prices. This shift ended the exorbitant rent subsidies, which themselves had meant a departure from past practice in their day.

¹⁰¹ The useful distinction between static and dynamic continuity stems from Lepsius (1983, p. 16). He states that static continuity is marked by the consistency of substance over time; dynamic continuity, by the constancy of the direction and pace of change. Exponents of the continuity thesis focus on what persists. But what persists can also mean steady change.

Family policy underwent massive changes as well. Its pronatal and proemployment thrust and the state monopoly on this policy area in East German socialism had not parted altogether with practices of the National Socialist era (1933–1945) and traditions predating it but, together, did chart quite a different direction. Much of this reorientation, especially the components bearing on population growth and employment, was reversed on the way to and after the constitutional unification of Germany. The same fate befell the GDR's rather liberal, permissive statutory regulation on abortion.

Discontinuity and continuity were, in turn, a feature of the company-based welfare state. The idea of occupational fringe benefits, which had such a prominent role in East Germany's economy and society, was not wholly new. Some of the encompassing benefits provided through the enterprises had already existed in the big companies under the German Empire of 1871, the Weimar Republic, and the Nazi state, especially in the war years, when the country mobilized all its labor reserves. But the company-based East German welfare state unmistakably bore attributes specific to the regime, such as the fact that the occupational fringe benefits provided goods and services on a massive scale just to make ends meet.

The change of course in 1990 had a seismic impact on the company-based welfare state in many respects. It transferred the West German institutions of economic governance and labor-management relations to the new *Länder*, requiring at the enterprise level a social policy apparatus leaner than that of East Germany's socialism. Many of the tasks hitherto taken for granted as part of the occupational fringe benefits provided by East Germany's large enterprises passed wholly or in part to other agents. Preschool child-care, for example, moved into the purview of local government and social welfare associations or disappeared completely. In short, discontinuity was evident in this field as well even though certain established institutions of the company-based welfare state carried on.

Lastly, the supplementary old-age pensions and special pension schemes were arrangements that existed only in East German Socialism. Technically, all these systems were shut down as of 1 July 1990 under the First State Treaty, under whose terms generous benefits paid by them were to be examined and possibly reduced by future legislation. Action to this effect ushered in an often painful and litigious adjustment process, whose analysis, however, falls outside the period under review in this chapter (see Mutz 1999, p. 510).

The transformation of social policy after 1945, after the birth of the East German state in 1949, and in 1990, the year of German unification, were all beset by discontinuity. The road to the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR had been paved by centralization, hierarchization, homogenization, the party-state's pervasion of the political process, and the destruction of the pluralistic articulation of interests. State responsibilities were delegated to the FDGB, the SED ruled supreme, and labor relations came under authoritarian state management. The regime's fusion of powers also precluded the jurisdiction of constitutional and administrative courts, impairing the protection under social and labor law at its key points.

The break in continuity in 1990 and subsequent years led to a multifaceted system of social protection, a pluralist system of parties and associations, a state with many co-governing actors, the delegation of some of the welfare state responsibilities to the associations of capital and labor on the one hand and social insurance institutions on the other, the protection of property rights, an industrial relations system based on cooperative relations between capital and labor, and a separation of powers that also included autonomous administrative courts and an autonomous Constitutional Court.

8.2 *Regime Shift and Continuity*

The transformations in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR and the transition from the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990 left deep traces in the political process and thoroughly recast public policy in substance and direction. This finding supports the hypothesis of a close causal relation that comparative research on political systems has formulated in the law of regime shift: If the political order and the nature of the political process change, so do the direction and substance of public policy. Both the rise and the fall of social policy in East German socialism corroborate this law.

Yet another feature of the restructuring in 1990 and the subsequent years is noteworthy. For all the discontinuity in united Germany's new *Länder*, one tenet of Alexis de Tocqueville's seminal work "The Old Regime and the French Revolution" (1856/1955) also applies to the shift from the East German to the West German welfare state – every change is accompanied by considerable continuity. Tocqueville had the French state's high degree of centralization before and after the revolution of 1789 in mind. The continuity represented by the unification of the two German states lies in the high and enduring tension between comprehensive social protection and a lagging economy. The gap between them had increasingly turned the East German welfare state into a major risk. In the new *Länder* of reunified Germany, that conflict has now been vastly reduced, though not defused, because social policy is financed predominantly by workers, salaried employees, and other taxpayers of the economically wealthier *Länder* in the western part of the country. The percentage of Germany's GDP accounted for by spending on social transfers and services indicates how wide the chasm has initially been between the abidingly weak economic base of the new *Länder* and the developed, expensive West German style of welfare state. Rising as high as 66.8% in 1992, the proportion of Gross Domestic Product spent on social expenditure in the new *Länder* settled at 54.5% in 1997 (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung 1998, p. 279) and declined to a less spectacular level thereafter. This picture sharply contrasts with the commonly held opinion in the new *Länder* that they are not receiving their fair share of social policy pie and not enough state support in general. The reality is different. Nowhere in the western industrialized countries, not even in Italy's Mezzogiorno, has the discrepancy between ambitious social policy and lagging

economic performance reached the scale witnessed in the new *Länder* since German reunification. Only during the era of state socialism was there anything approaching it, namely, the mismatch between overwrought social policy and underperforming economies in the socialist states of central Europe, including the German Democratic Republic.

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* Note on changes in the name of the Federal Ministry of Labour in the Federal Republic of Germany: The *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung* (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Order) was split into the *Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und soziale Sicherung* (Federal Ministry of Health and Social Security) and a section of the *Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit* (Federal Ministry of the Economy and Labour) in October 2002, to be merged again in November 2005 under the name *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales* (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs).

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