

Comment by a Female Teacher after a Lecture by Kurt Hager on the Situation in Schools (October 1960)

Abstract

This comment by a female teacher after a 1960 speech by the SED's chief ideologue, Kurt Hager, was unsparing in its description of the burdens imposed on GDR women by the demands of family and work. The diverse tasks and obligations associated with teaching could not be reconciled with family life and child rearing.

Source

If I were religious, I would have said: "Thank God, finally someone comes and asks how things are on the ground. That's why I was very happy to come here. And I have also taken it upon myself to say what is on my mind. It will either help or not, but I have to say it."

It was rightly said that the weakest point right now is how the teaching process occurs. That is a fact. It was also asked: Why? There must be a reason for it. In fact, there are various reasons. I think at least one of the reasons is clear to me and to many of my female colleagues as well. At the beginning of the school year, everything comes rushing at us again. I suddenly become aware again of all my duties. As the head teacher for the class, I am of course completely responsible for my class, and I also feel completely responsible. I am therefore obligated to work closely with my subject teachers [i.e. teachers of particular academic subjects]. It is also my responsibility to make sure that they fulfill their plans; that it works. However, I don't know how I can visit their classes, because I teach at the same time. I am also obligated to work closely with the parents' council, and to make parent visits. I am obligated – and this is my burning desire, and I am also continuing my studies – to keep educating myself. I am also obligated to work socially within the party and the union. I want to participate in the party study year. In fact, it has been said: "You are a comrade, of course you have to take part in the union training as a member of the FDGB [*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* or Free German Trade Union Federation]. You are an example, after all. There is no way around it."

My son is fifteen years old. I am a mother at home. I try, and I manage more or less. But I see my poor female colleagues who have three children and a sick husband, or a husband who also happens to be a teacher. What do you think the day looks like, then! They run through their apartments, pack their children off to the kindergarten, briefcase under one arm and off to school! I don't know if you can imagine the state in which such a woman arrives at school. Perhaps something doesn't work in the classroom – for example, discipline problems. She loses her patience much more quickly than a woman who gets to school rested, and already you've got problems. Perhaps she does something unfair. She's got her demerit.

If, by chance, there is no pedagogical council, no parent visits, no school, no meeting, she zips home. With the exception of washing day, she always has something to wash, anyway. Then she picks up her children. Maybe the child has a cough. Then she must continue her education; then she has to prepare for class. And I am honest: What comes last is always the classroom preparation. It extends into the night hours. If her son has no [clean] shirt, another load of wash has to be done, and so on. Classroom preparation is what has to be put off, because one can do it later. And then it gets to be 11, 12 o'clock. In our school, decent, nice colleagues have quit. One had very young children who came in quick succession. She said: "I like being a teacher, I would like to do it again later, but I can't do it with two

small children.” The other had grown children and a husband who was disabled in the war. She, too, said: “I can’t do it, and so I suffer the consequences. I cannot do something when I already know that it could go badly.”

Another female colleague has quit. She was not up to the task. She was very ambitious. She made herself sick, with a heart disease, a nervous disease. The doctor told her: “If you want to live a little longer, you must look for another job.” And so she quit. – All of that in one year!

Another had a serious nervous breakdown; she will probably not be able to work in our profession ever again. – And all of this at our school!

Source: PDS-Archiv, SED-Bezirksleitung Leipzig, IV 2/9.02/520 Bl. 167 f; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990. Texte und Dokumente zur Sozialgeschichte*. Munich: C.H. Beck 1993, pp. 481–83.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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