

Economic and Social Policy at the Local Level (1986)

Abstract

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

Source

Tuesday, December 2

Yellowed Slogans

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

HDF^[1] and I go slipping and sliding through the city. The party leadership is meeting in the cold rolling mill in the Salzungen plant, which, according to the “state plan project,” will be expanded twice in the next few years, will receive one of the most modern rolling stands in the COMECON, and will see a 100 percent increase in the production of extremely thin steel plates...

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

The First^[2] asks why he is so happy. (Maybe cheerful full-time party secretaries are suspicious—with the exception of the celebration at the Kissel,^[3] I hadn’t seen a cheerful person in four weeks).

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

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

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

[...]

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

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

The BD cannot participate in the party leadership meeting; he was called to Berlin by the minister on short notice. I try to imagine how many workdays he alone would need to control and analyze all thirty-

six of his positions once a month and give instructions....

[...]

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

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

NOTES

[1] Reference to Hans-Dieter Fritschler, main protagonist of the report—eds.

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

[3] Lodge and Restaurant Kessel in the Thuringian Forest—eds.

Source: Landolf Scherzer, *Der Erste. Eine Reportage aus der DDR*. Cologne, 1989, pp. 196–200. Republished with author permission.

Translation: Allison Brown

Recommended Citation: Economic and Social Policy at the Local Level (1986), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-914>> [April 29, 2025].