

Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic

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Introduction

Modernization, Modernity, and the Plan

All modern states plan. They seek to detect economic, social, demographic, and political trends, and to direct these developments in ways helpful to the state. These plans are formed and executed within very different political and economic contexts. The parliamentary democracy of France after 1945 produced a model of guided modernization characterized by an ongoing dialogue between private interests and public offices. The German state's planning during World War One, by contrast, operated largely outside of the constraints of representative institutions and allocated materials to reach concrete goals, such as increased production of shells. The United States planned for the direct economic transformation of underdeveloped regions in the 1930s; today it seeks to shape economic growth indirectly, through monetary policy and taxation. What links all these examples is the notion that conscious decisions can lead a society toward a better future (from the point of view of the state). Specific to state socialism was the quasi-metaphysical status of "the plan," a symbol around which the entire political and economic structure of that world was built.¹

In this book, I examine social thought and the plan in the German Democratic Republic's founding decades, from 1949 to 1968. I trace the development of economics, law, and political philosophy within state socialism, the political system of one-party dictatorship that was characteristic of the states in the Soviet sphere of influence. I argue that social thinkers began to confront the systemic challenges to state socialism already by the 1950s and that their technical criticisms of planning culminated in a critique of the

¹ Peter Rutland, *The Myth of the Plan: Lessons of Soviet Planning Experience* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), and Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). See also Bruce Caldwell, "Hayek and Socialism," *Journal of Economic Literature* 35 (1997), 1856–90. Not only Soviet-oriented states participated in the myth of the plan. See, e.g., the example of 1930s Belgium, as described in Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism, and Contingency in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 74–95.

party's claim to control social development from above. Most important, I trace the gradual transformation of intellectuals' idea of the plan, from a heroic means of bringing about a qualitatively different kind of world to a technical method – one among several – for organizing industrial production. The demystification of the utopian idea of the plan found its expression in the language of systems theory during the 1960s. Systems theory asserts that the economy, law, and academia have, as systems, their own internal logics. Technical experts began calling for greater self-regulation of individual systems already in the 1950s, against the logic of a conscious, centralized plan. The decentering of the plan, carried out in the nonsocialist world as the intellectual project of postmodernism, found its parallel under state socialism in real processes of institutional development, discussion of which the regulated, planned public sphere refused to allow.

In the GDR, the plan had three purposes: it was a technical means of organizing an entire industrial economy, a political ideal of the total governance of society, and a road map toward a qualitatively different world. Its comprehensive claims transformed East German social thought. Rather than conceptualizing society as a set of social systems following their own distinct logics, such as the market or the law, theorists viewed society as the object of a general plan of development. The economic system operated according to the central plan, for example; the legal system served to implement the plan. Indeed, economists, lawyers, and philosophers had to adapt their own scholarship to the plan, for their theories served as propaganda for it. The plan became the organizing symbol for the political culture of the GDR and other East Bloc states. It had a metaphysical status in the sense that within the planning regime the notion of the plan itself was immune to empirical criticism. It also contained certain metaphysical presuppositions: a subject who plans, an object of the plan, and a teleology. By way of an organized historical process, the plan was intended to move the object, society, from its present state to a future one. The subject of the plan was the party as the avant-garde of society; the object of the plan was the totality of social and economic relations; the goal of the plan was a transition from capitalism and fascism to socialism and democracy (as defined by the party).

The GDR, like state socialism in general, partook of a long European tradition that looked toward the state to transform society. Ever since the era of enlightened despotism, political thinkers imagined a strong state that would remake society in the name of modernization, development, efficiency, or utopia – what James C. Scott has referred to as an ideology of high modernism.² All of these attempts to reengineer social relations confronted similar problems, responded to these problems with similar strategies, and suffered from similar systematic contradictions. Given the ubiquity

² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

of planning in the modern world, the question arises of why one should examine the GDR as a particular example of the ideology of planning. Two apparently contradictory historical contexts make the case of the GDR interesting: the way planning served as a source of ersatz legitimacy in a Germany that was divided and faced a hideous past, and the way the GDR fit into an older German approach to state and society.

The GDR was born in the half decade following World War Two. In the eyes of the GDR's founders, the entire German social and political order had been proven bankrupt by Nazism. More than merely a technical means for organizing production, the plan was, for the small band of Moscow-trained Communists who led the state, a way of transforming Germany from fascism to a people's democracy, from an irrational, war-mongering world of state-monopoly capitalism to a world in which society itself directly controlled production. The Socialist Unity Party, formed in 1946 from the forced merger of the Social Democrats and Communists under Communist control, claimed to plan in full consciousness of the laws of motion of the economy. It derived its right to direct social development from the claim that it represented the interests of the German people as a whole. That claim, common to all the state-socialist countries, was especially problematic in the German case, where outside powers, not the German people, had overthrown fascism and created the preconditions for the postfascist polities of East and West Germany. In a way, the people whom the dynamic, forward-looking party claimed to represent were not yet present; rather, they were forecast as the end product of a planned development. The political system possessed a shallow reservoir of legitimacy, even compared with other state-socialist countries. The GDR's internal legitimacy as a state in the final analysis rested on economic success, not national identity. After all, another Germany, a wealthier Germany, existed just over the border. The GDR was supposed to be the "better" Germany that had overcome barbarism – by means of the plan. When the precondition of the regime's existence, the Soviet empire, withdrew its support for the GDR, when an economic crisis rendered centralized planning impossible, the state itself disappeared. The GDR is an interesting case study because the idea of the plan justified its very existence.

National identity did, however, make its way back into intellectual life in the GDR. In theory, East German technical elites took their cues from the "friends," as internal party memoranda referred to the Soviets. In practice, in the first fifteen years following the war Soviet economists, lawyers, and philosophers had little to offer their counterparts in East Germany beyond vague and general propaganda. East German theorists, meanwhile, could claim Marx as a German thinker whose progressive, internationalist theories developed in a specifically German context. The philosopher Ernst Bloch, for example, offered up a reading of Marx rooted in the work of Hegel. The economist Fritz Behrens sought to adapt German management theory as developed before 1945 to the needs of state socialism. In law,

Heinz Such turned to German traditions of contract to conceptualize the new system of economic relations under the plan. In none of these cases could the Soviet Union offer a comparable thinker: no Soviet philosopher could understand Marx's philosophical background with the depth of a Bloch; no Soviet economist could offer a clear theory of the firm; no Soviet lawyer could make sense of the twists and turns in Soviet contract law over the preceding decades. An intellectual history of the plan in the GDR is more than a case study of one variant of Soviet ideology; it also reveals the deeper roots of state-socialist thinking in a Central European tradition.³

Party theorists asserted that the old, insoluble problems of so-called bourgeois European thought, such as the limits of knowledge or the nature of political representation, had lost their relevance in the new world of scientific socialist planning. But, in fact, state socialism could not escape all the old problems of modernity. The basic antinomies of modern social thought reappeared in East Germany. Economists found themselves torn between advocating generally binding rules that would allow individual firms to function according to their own needs and endorsing the direct intervention of the state in the economy to promote a certain kind of development. Legal theorists ended up defending both the inviolability of law and the extralegal authority of the party and its plan – what amounted to the “bourgeois” contradiction between rights and state power. Political philosophers could not escape the problem of how the individual and the collective, the part and the whole, related. At critical moments in the history of the GDR, these contradictions came to light: in 1949–50, when the Socialist Unity Party leadership began to bring the party-state into line with the Soviet model; in 1953, when a worker uprising forced the party leadership to retreat from its policy of forced transition to socialism; in 1956, in the wake of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union and challenges to state socialism in Poland and Hungary; after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, when party leaders sought a fresh approach to planning; and after 1965, as party leadership began to back away from reforms that strengthened technocratic elites at the expense of the party. At each moment, hard problems of economic organization, legal relations, and party control cast doubt on the idea of an orderly development toward socialism. The problems that the revisionists noted in the 1950s – problems of plan and market, plan and law, party and plural social interests – continued to plague the state-socialist project until its demise in 1989–90. The problems raised by the revisionists were not marginal to the

³ The issue of continuity of thinking among technical elites is addressed in Peter Hübner, “Menschen-Macht-Maschinen. Technokratie in der DDR,” in Peter Hübner, ed., *Eliten im Sozialismus: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 331–44. Camilla Warnke notes the political implications of connecting Marx with Hegel in “‘Das Problem Hegel ist längst gelöst’: Eine Debatte in der DDR-Philosophie der fünfziger Jahre,” in Volker Gerhardt and Hans-Christian Rauh, ed., *Anfänge der DDR-Philosophie: Ansprüche, Ohnmacht, Scheitern* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2001), 194–221.

history of the GDR. They defined its political goals in its founding years and the fundamental problems it faced in the years of decay and collapse. And they reflected the larger issues of modernity since the eighteenth century, in particular, the theme of the interventionist state and development.

Engineering a planned transition to a more developed, more modern social order required a clear sense of the path to follow. The official model for transition allegedly derived from the New Economic Policy of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. But that Soviet master plan for development remained at the level of vague propaganda, as indeed it had to following the eradication of genuine social theory (and theorists) in the Soviet Union during the 1930s.⁴ The idea of transition implies, on the one hand, a model of development, a definite script of historical progression from one moment to another, from one mode of production to another. On the other hand, transitions are necessarily messy; neither a pure capitalism nor a pure socialism is fully in effect. While a semiofficial party song proclaimed that “the Party is always right,” the language of transition, like the concept of democratic centralism, potentially allowed for intellectual experimentation. The Soviet model implied that the transitional period would eventually come to an end.⁵ But the question of when the new age would begin became ever less clear over the years. In the meantime, party dictatorship continued.

Contrary to the state-socialist vision, modernity is not a fixed thing, a goal; it is a condition, a set of challenges – a permanent state of transition. State socialism was one attempt to coordinate a complex and dynamic economy, to integrate an educated population, and eventually to usher in a new world organized around the plan. Its central institutions gave evidence of systemic problems already within the first decade of the GDR’s life. The often biting analyses of these problems by East German intellectuals indicate more than the system’s impending doom (it took some four decades, in fact, for the supposedly doomed system to finally expire). They offer insight into the fundamental contradictions of policy making within modernity: between planning and market, legal rules and political will, popular unity and social differentiation. And, perhaps most of all, the story of East German social theory bears witness to the difficult place of the intellectual in modern society, suspended between criticism and the demands of the organizations in which they operated.

But was the course of the GDR’s development really modern? For a number of scholars, the failure of state socialism proves the contrary: state socialism did not follow the right path of development, and it was not modern

⁴ Ralph Jessen, “Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus: Probleme einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995), 99, on the missing *Meisterplan*.

⁵ A canonical text of the Marxist-Leninist tradition had already asserted the necessity of a transitional period and of dictatorship: Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, in *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress, 1977), 2:300–13.

in the sense of being able to adapt to modern social forms and institutions.⁶ The GDR, according to this argument, failed to allow for social evolution. Evolution in this sense, as elaborated by Talcott Parsons, means the differentiation of specific social systems out of an originally undifferentiated unity – for example, the differentiation of the modern workplace from the household. Increasing differentiation, Parsons argued, permits an increasingly complex society. Such a society stabilizes at the level of social systems that have clearly defined, focused functions. As critics have noted, underneath the abstract description of social evolution associated with modernization theory lies a grand theory of human history; the language of systems and functions conceals a Victorian model of teleological development toward bourgeois, capitalist modernity.⁷ Whatever its ideological function in other contexts, however, modernization theory succeeds in naming the fundamental problems of state-socialist institutions. According to its argument, the GDR blocked modernization by impeding the development of autonomous, self-regulating social systems such as the economy or law. The factory, for example, combined multiple functions, operating as both a place for work and a place for the distribution of all sorts of things, from housing to food and other consumer items, and in all cases was subject to noneconomic influences.⁸ Consequently, social systems in the GDR were weak. As Ludwig von Mises warned already in the 1930s, the constant interventions of party or

⁶ Lucian W. Pye, “Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism,” *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990), 1–19, esp. 9.

⁷ See the thoughtful and sympathetic critique by Klaus Müller: “‘Modernizing’ Eastern Europe: Theoretical Problems and Practical Dilemmas,” *Archives européennes de sociologie* 33 (1992), 114–17, and the remarks by Vicky Randall and Tobin Theobald in *Political Change and Underdevelopment: A Critical Introduction to Third World Politics*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 20–26. Modernization theory is not, however, reducible to a false representation of reality; it arose as a response to the real problems posed by industrialization and mass democracy. See, e.g., Cyril E. Black’s Introduction in *Comparative Modernization: A Reader* (New York: Free Press, 1976), 1–8, focusing on the multiplicity of ways societies may react to challenges of modernity, especially technology and economic relations; similarly, Wolfgang Zapf, “Die Modernisierungstheorie und unterschiedliche Pfade der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung,” *Leviathan* 24 (1996), 63–77; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte” (1975), repr. with minor changes in his *Die Geschichte als Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), 13–59.

⁸ Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 26–27; on the combination of production and consumption functions within the GDR workplace, see Martin Kohli, “Die DDR als Arbeitsgesellschaft? Arbeit, Lebenslauf und soziale Differenzierung,” in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr, ed., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 31–61. Parsons sought to put these differentiations into a universal historical schema that culminated in an Anglo-American social and political system: “Evolutionary Universals in Society,” *American Sociological Review* 19 (1964), 339–52. Parsons’s reading of Max Weber is central to contemporary attempts to understand the failure of state socialism in terms of a blocked modernization; see, e.g., Ilja Srubar, “War der reale Sozialismus modern? Versuch einer strukturellen Bestimmung,” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 43 (1991), 415–32.

planner into economic activity hindered the workings of supply and demand and undermined the ability of economic actors to gather information about the economy, that is, to “know” the world in which they acted.⁹ As Sigrid Meuschel argued in her important work on the GDR, such impediments resulted in the “withering-away of society” in the East German state, in the sense that social systems lost their internal coherence.¹⁰ Modernization theory shows why social institutions in East Germany failed to develop as successfully as those in, for example, West Germany.

The concept of society with which modernization theory operates is primarily intended to explain big structures, institutions, and systems. It sets aside those elements of society that operate on a local level, such as the interactions, accommodations, and resistances that make up the texture of everyday life.¹¹ Without understanding them, the Revolution of 1989 is incomprehensible.¹² At the same time, though, modernization theory grasps a key aspect of state socialism: its attempt to subordinate social systems and institutions to a political logic. Indeed, that state socialism impeded the development of independent social systems would not have surprised the founders of the GDR. That was, after all, the point: to grasp the functioning of economics or law or education or the arts, and then to stand above and guide social systems, consciously. The proponents of state socialism considered dictatorship via the plan to be an appropriate response to the challenge of modernization. Like Western modernization theory of the

⁹ See Ludwig von Mises, “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Society,” in F. A. von Hayek, ed., *Collectivist Economic Planning: Critical Studies on the Possibility of Socialism* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1935), 87–130. Of course, capitalist economics also faces the problem of imperfect information. See Joseph G. Stiglitz, *Whither Socialism?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

¹⁰ S. Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR, 1945–1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 10; Detlef Pollack, “Das Ende einer Organisationsgesellschaft: Systemtheoretische Überlegungen zum gesellschaftlichen Umbruch in der DDR,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 19 (1990), 292–307; idem, “Modernization and Modernization Blockages in GDR Society,” in Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 27–45, esp. 30–31. An excellent case study of the fate of professions in East Germany on these lines: Florian Kreutzer’s *Die Institutionenordnung der DDR: Zur Widersprüchlichkeit des Berufs im Staatssozialismus* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher, 2001).

¹¹ On the possibilities of a social history of the GDR that does not remain fixated on political form, see esp. Alf Lüdtke, “Die DDR als Geschichte: Zur Geschichtsschreibung über die DDR,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 36 (1998), 3–16. Not all modernization approaches completely exclude the issues Lüdtke raises; see, e.g., Zapf, “Modernisierungstheorie.”

¹² See Thomas Lindenberger’s critique of Meuschel on this score: “Die Diktatur der Grenzen: Zur Einleitung,” in Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigensinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaft der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 13–44, esp. 32; Jessen, “Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus,” 96–110; Detlef Pollack, “Die konstitutive Widersprüchlichkeit der DDR – Oder: War die DDR-Gesellschaft homogen?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1997), 110–31.

1950s and 1960s, Marxism-Leninism had a model of development, in this case the Soviet Union. And like Western modernization theory, it apologized for aggression in the name of an ultimate freedom.¹³ State socialism made no attempt to cover up its status as dictatorship: the party made use of the state to impose its conscious control on society. And as a result, the party stymied any change that might have undermined its role as conscious director of social development. By strengthening itself, the party systematically weakened the ability and willingness of social actors to mobilize and act creatively in defense of their own institutions.

The history of the GDR during its first two decades thus saw the intentional establishment of dictatorship, the consolidation of the party's power through economic transformation, and the failure of substantive reforms whenever they started to challenge party power. The history of the Socialist Unity Party in a way embodies the history of the GDR itself.¹⁴ The chapters that follow show the repeated efforts of party authorities to silence intellectuals whose ideas challenged the control of the dictatorship over social systems. There is a danger, however, in reducing the history of the GDR to the story of repression by the party-state. After all, both party and state were also always under construction, in a state of transition. East Germans interpreted their new state in divergent ways during the 1950s, a period of frenetic work and reconstruction. While by and large in agreement on the need for a party dictatorship, party intellectuals differed about the role of the market in the economy, about the subordination of the state to law, about the claim of the party to fully know the laws of history. The story of

¹³ The Soviet Union often served as an example of alternative, late modernization; as one of many examples, see the older work by Theodore H. von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? A Reappraisal of the Russian Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964). Even the modernization theorists of the 1960s and 1970s did not universally maintain that representative democracy was part of modernization, a fact that seems to have disappeared from much of the discussion of the GDR as an example of failed modernization. See James O'Connell, "The Concept of Modernization" (1965), repr. in Black, ed., *Comparative Modernization*, 15; more radical association of modernization and terrorism in Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Detlev Peukert, "The Genesis of the 'Final Solution' from the Spirit of Science," in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan, ed., *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1993), 234–52. U.S. modernization theory has been subjected to numerous criticisms for its blindness to other societies. See, among many others, Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective" (1973), repr. in Black, ed., *Comparative Modernization*, 62–88, and more recently Jonathan Nashel, "The Road to Vietnam: Modernization Theory in Fact and Fiction," in Christian P. Appy, ed., *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 132–54.

¹⁴ An important strand of historiography concentrates on this story: most comprehensively Hermann Weber, *Die DDR 1945–1990*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999); idem, *Geschichte der DDR*, 2nd ed. (Munich: DTV, 1999); and also Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft*. In English, see esp. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *Germany from Partition to Reunification* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

economics, law, and political philosophy in the GDR was a story of battles over what the party actually stood for, battles whose outcomes were not determined in advance. Walter Ulbricht put a stop to revisionism in economics when it seemed to challenge the power of the party in 1957, for example, but only a few years later he set up the economic reforms of the New Economic System with the aid of some of the economists he had previously attacked.

The correctness of certain economic or legal doctrines depended on political contexts. As the social theorists who brought their ideas into the state-socialist public sphere knew, there were risks involved with articulating positions in a dictatorship. At the same time, the state-socialist dictatorship assumed some kind of public discussion. It described a party-directed public sphere with the term “democratic centralism.” Already in Lenin’s time, the concept had shrunk into an assertion of the guiding role of the party and a ban on factions.¹⁵ By the time of the GDR, democratic centralism amounted to little more than the claim that the actions of the party leadership were in agreement with the interests of the masses. But even this orthodox conception focused attention on the relationship between part and whole within the system and thereby implied some degree of give and take. Insofar as democratic centralism claimed that a relationship existed at all, it provided language through which the interests of social groups, institutions, and individuals could surface. Applied to economic organization, for example, democratic centralism asserted that the central plan’s imperatives reflected the information and initiative of local firms.¹⁶ Applied to law, democratic centralism could account for not only the extralegal rights of the party but also the written rights and duties of individuals or groups.¹⁷ A dictatorship and a one-party state, the GDR was nonetheless

¹⁵ Firuz Kazemzadeh, “Democratic Centralism,” in C. D. Kernig, ed., *Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 2:337–40; c.f. Neil Harding, *Leninism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), esp. 186–87, who argues that democratic centralism in its most authoritarian form was fully developed by Lenin even before the specific crises that produced Lenin’s most authoritarian statements on the matter.

¹⁶ See, e.g., the article by Gerhard Ziller, the secretary of Economics of the Central Committee of the SED, “Gegen die Gefahr des Abgleitens auf revisionistische Positionen in der Wirtschaftswissenschaft,” *Die Wirtschaft* 12 (Jan. 24, 1957), 5: “[Behrens] apparently does not understand that democratic centralism, which characterizes our political and economic work, includes centralization *and* decentralization in comprehensive social life.” Ziller was to commit suicide in January 1957 after disputes with Ulbricht over economic policy, as described by Ziller’s fellow party leader Karl Schirdewan, *Aufstand gegen Ulbricht: Im Kampf um politische Kurskorrektur, gegen stalinistische, dogmatische Politik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1994), 132–38.

¹⁷ E.g., Karl Polak, “Über die weitere Entwicklung der sozialistischen Rechtspflege in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” (1961), repr. his *Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Staatsverlag, 1968), 404–57.

subject to the tension between rule and freedom that marked political discussion during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and the world.

A concrete example illustrates the point. The party group of the Oberspree Cable Works in Berlin called workers together on January 28, 1963, to discuss ways of increasing efficiency. Since the firm was a “people’s own firm” (*Volkseigener Betrieb*), the people – the workers – were to be involved in realizing the aims of the plan at the local level. The meeting to promote greater efficiency took place only eighteen months after the Berlin Wall had been built to halt the flow of laborers from East to West Germany. The factory party organization reported on the discussion that ensued: “During explanations of measures to save energy a remark was made in the wire factory: ‘Turn off the lights on the Wall.’” The party quickly responded: “At this point the party group explained the significance of the antifascist-democratic protective wall.”¹⁸ The requirement of “democratic” participation at the firm opened the space to remarks on other decisions of the party leadership. After all, the issue of saving energy in the “people’s state” had ramifications for the whole GDR, so suggesting ways to save energy was appropriate. Yet the suggestion that the party save energy by switching off the nighttime illumination of the Wall came close to contradicting the party’s strategy for maintaining state socialism in East Germany.

The party intellectuals this book examines accepted, by and large, the principle that dictatorship was necessary for socialism to succeed, although they disagreed about where the limits to freedom should be placed. Dictatorship was necessary to ensure that modern society avoided a detour into political anarchy, economic disintegration, and militarism.¹⁹ The party became, in Marxist-Leninist ideology, an entity that stood above all other systems, consciously steering them in accordance with necessity. The assertion that the party was more than just one social system among others underlay all the intellectual crises of state socialism. The gradual disintegration of that article of faith meant the intellectuals’ gradual loss of faith in the state-socialist experiment.

A planning dictatorship affects social thought in a complex, modern society. In this study I approach East German social thinkers as figures seeking to comprehend a particular variety of industrial society from their own institutional positions, positions that were directly involved in that society’s functioning. One implication of my approach is that state socialism and

¹⁸ Report of the SED Betriebsparteiorganisation, VEB-Kabelwerk Oberspree, Feb. 2, 1963, on meeting of Jan. 28–29, 1963, in LAB IV A/7.022-20, p. 3.

¹⁹ The problem they articulated remains an important one: how to connect social systems – how to provide “structural couplings” – in order to avoid catastrophe, a problem articulated in more abstract terms by Niklas Luhmann, using the example of eighteenth-century constitutionalism: “Verfassung als evolutionäre Errungenschaft,” *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 9 (1990), 176–220.

capitalism are, at least in certain respects, comparable systems.²⁰ The East German discussion of the transition to socialism in the 1950s, even if resplendent with ideological phrases, contained a number of economic goals that are rational from the point of capitalist modernization theorists: the development of a functional and growing economy, of usable channels of information from bottom to top to facilitate planning, of a disciplined and self-disciplined workforce paid according to individual performance, and of stable institutional and legal structures compatible with rapid change. These are the goals of contemporary liberal reformers in Eastern Europe as well. And it is notable that the discussion of economic modernization in the capitalist world has not been free from antidemocratic tendencies – what some economists have called, for example, the “Pinochet model” of modernization through dictatorship.²¹ The modernizing dictatorship continues to play a role in the world after the Cold War, where it may appear in the form of a businesslike community (Singapore) or a presidential dictatorship legitimized by occasional votes (Fujimori’s Peru).

²⁰ In von Beyme’s terms, the systems are functionally comparable in that methods and institutions develop in each to respond to the basic challenges of industrial society: *Economics and Politics within Socialist Systems: A Comparative and Developmental Approach*, tr., Barbara Evans and Eva Kahn-Sinreich (New York: Praeger, 1982). Against this approach and stressing the greater usefulness of comparing dictatorships than industrial societies, see Eckhard Jesse and Günther Heydemann, “Einführung,” in their *Diktaturvergleich als Herausforderung: Theorie und Praxis* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1998), esp. 7–9, criticizing the work of von Beyme, Glaessner, and Ludz; Günther Heydemann and Christoph Beckmann, “Zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des historischen Diktaturvergleichs,” *Deutschland Archiv* 30 (1997), 12–40. The analysis of the GDR as a form of modernizing dictatorship allows researchers to focus on issues of repression and undemocratic politics while avoiding some of the pitfalls associated with the concept of totalitarianism: see esp. Jürgen Kocka, “The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship,” in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 17–26; Jarausch, “Care and Coercion,” in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 52–54; Weber, *Die DDR 1945–1990*, 140; and esp. Ralph Jessen, “DDR-Geschichte und Totalitarismustheorie,” *Berliner Debatte Initial* 4/5 (1995), 17–24. Of the recent surveys of the literature on totalitarianism, see Eckhard Jesse, *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999), 9–40; idem, “War die DDR totalitär?” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 40 (1994), 12–23. In general on the entire debate: Klaus Müller, “Totalitarismus und Modernisierung: Zum Historikerstreit in der Osteuropaforschung,” in Achim Siegel, ed., *Totalitarismustheorien nach dem Ende des Kommunismus* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 37–79.

²¹ Leaving aside the idealism that views a dictator as strong, free from social pressures, and willing to listen to economists with the “right” answer to the problems of transition, the crucial question is whether there really was a coherent Pinochet model of neoliberal reform under conditions of dictatorship in the first place. See Angelo Codevilla, “Is Pinochet the Model?” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993), 127–40; Arturo Valenzuela, “The Chilean Miracle: Lessons of South America’s Success Story,” *Harvard International Review* 19 (1997), 24–27, both of which do much to undermine the claim that Pinochet’s reformers operated with a clear road map. On the “Chicago Boys” social engineering pretensions: Juan Gabriel Valdés, *Pinochet’s Economists: The Chicago School in Chile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). More generally on the “politics of order”: Randall and Theobald, *Political Change and Underdevelopment*, 86–119.

In light of the foregoing, the GDR is not necessarily an aberration in twentieth-century history. One element of the GDR's official ideology seems to have disappeared in the contemporary world, however: the belief that top-down planning by an ideologically trained elite will usher in a world qualitatively different from and beyond capitalism. State socialism itself helped destroy belief in a world of free producers; its own functionaries meanwhile increasingly viewed their work as day-to-day crisis management, removing the teleological ideal of the planned society. When state socialism finally collapsed, its social ideal had already long since died.

This book consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 examines the relationship between plan and market in East German economics. Not only the economic plan but also the market were integral parts of the so-called transitional period between capitalism and socialism. The plan–market distinction reiterates that between state and society, a distinction that guided European social and political thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Nazi experience, however, showed that simply replacing the “anarchy” of social self-regulation (the market) with the “conscious,” central control of the state (the plan) did not amount to emancipation. After all, the Nazis also exercised ever more control over the economy. After Stalin's death in 1953, some economists in the GDR began to question the Soviet model of planning; their line of thought led them ultimately to compare the Soviet-style planning regime with Nazi despotism. At the end of 1956, party conservatives fought back, silencing those economists who had sought to raise hard questions about the nature of socialism. By the end of the GDR's first decade, then, economists had raised many of the most important problems of state socialism.

Chapter 2 shows how another discipline, law, confronted the inherent conflicts of state socialism. How was the state's right to take measures that violated written law to be reconciled with the continuing need for a predictable, fixed set of legal rules? This problem also had a long European past, posed in terms of *raison d'état*. As in continental Europe generally, in the GDR the state appeared as a conscious actor capable of direct intervention, while law was nonetheless conceptualized as a set of generally binding rules. Once again, the Nazi legacy raised difficulties for GDR debates. Legal theorists began asking in the 1950s how the legal system in the GDR, characterized as it was by a one-party state armed with extraordinary powers, differed from the pseudolegality of National Socialist Germany. Legal scholars' challenge to the state-socialist order was less polemical than that of economists but had the same result: in 1957–58, party conservatives announced that their critics had violated the basic rules of the socialist political system. The critical lawyers, like the critical economists, were excluded from public discussion.

Chapters 1 and 2 show that economists and lawyers in the GDR confronted centuries-old dilemmas. But they did so in a context in which the

answers to the dilemmas were preformed by the party, and approaching them independently posed a threat to the regime. The party claimed the ability to resolve these dilemmas from above, by means of its higher consciousness of the world. It claimed that it knew the world scientifically, knew how society worked, and was thereby able to direct social development consciously. A notion of consciousness was the very cornerstone of the ideology of planning in state socialism.

Chapter 3 takes up that key idea of consciousness within East German political philosophy, especially in the work of Ernst Bloch, which alternated between simplistic propaganda for the party and serious discussions of the dialectical relationships among subject, object, and history. Bloch showed how history created conscious subjects, how the subject's understanding of the world was always situated. After 1957, official party philosophers turned their wrath on Bloch and others who raised speculative questions that threatened the party's claim to a higher, conscious knowledge of the world and its self-identification with the higher interests of the people. A new catechism of party power replaced serious political philosophy. By the end of the 1950s, party hacks had put an end to critical thinking in the disciplines of economics, law, and political philosophy, labeling it "revisionism" that contradicted the fundamental tenets of Marxism-Leninism.

Chapter 4 takes up East German social thought after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In the 1960s, a decade in which the GDR was in effect refounded, the regime sought to ground its legitimacy in technological progress. Technology was to render old questions of theory irrelevant. The theme of antifascism – quelling the Nazi ghost – receded from discussions of economics, law, and political philosophy and was relegated to the realms of literature and memory. But the technical problems of the planning regime that the revisionists had raised remained. Indeed, leading figures in these disciplines continued to discuss the problems of how state economic planning and social actors related, of the extraordinary place of the party and its relationship to the rule of law, and, most important, of how the party could claim to have a higher consciousness of society in the first place. However, these 1960s thinkers did so in the ostensibly neutral language of cybernetics. They had learned the lesson of the 1950s revisionists well: they refrained from showing how the theory of complex systems challenged the party's claim to know the laws of society and to plan development beyond capitalism, and even the emancipatory ideal of state socialism. Nevertheless, the proliferation of cybernetic theory ended up undermining the assumptions of the planning regime and even the utopian content of state socialism itself. The justification of state socialism as a way to usher in a new, fully modern world by means of extraordinary state action fell apart as well: the brave new world of systems and environments showed the limits of consciousness and knowledge in the face of complex systems and environmental risks.