

SOVIET DISCIPLINE REGIMENTS EAST GERMAN WORKERS

As in all countries under Communist domination, the worker in East Germany has become a mere entity in the industrial production plan of the state. His wishes and political inclinations are completely disregarded as working conditions there evolve more and more according to the Soviet pattern. His sad lot became official by the decree of April 9, 1947, when the Soviet military administration made the individual worker responsible for attaining the goals set in the productivity drive.

Compulsion to work has been introduced for men and women between the ages of 15 and 60. The strictest discipline is maintained and Order No. 323 of November 20, 1946 provided for various punitive measures including reprimand, withdrawal of extra rations, cuts in vacations equal to the number of days absent from work without official justification and even criminal prosecution under the heading of acts of sabotage and diversion.

The grip of the government on the worker was "legalized" by the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic (DDR). Article 31 of that document discusses governmental economic planning and states explicitly that manpower falls within its regulations and is consequently treated as any other element in the production process.

The instrument for this subjugation of the worker is the so-called Free German Trade Union Federation (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund - FDGB). This association was developed as early as July 1945, formed by a number of unions which were organized on an industry basis, covering manual and non-manual employees. The FDGB is strictly centralized and all officials are appointed by the Central Council (Bundesvorstand).

The Federation, however, is a misnomer and far from representing the worker, it is nothing but an instrument for political control. With its help, the works councils were abolished in 1948 after elections had shown the growing disinclination of the German worker to vote for Communist representatives.

Political Oppression

The Hitler period trained the German workers along the lines of regimentation, exploitation and spying on each other, but the present working conditions in East Germany, with their terror and quota system, go far beyond the preceding totalitarian system. Control of wages, accompanied by the shortage of goods, has reduced the living standards of the average worker. Reliable reports have estimated that the buying power of the workers in the DDR has been reduced to less than 60 percent of prewar days.

The feeling of political oppression and economic exploitation is further aggravated by the workers' awareness that their living standards have deteriorated. The Soviet authorities and their German puppet agencies have so far, in spite of all their promises, done virtually nothing for the civilian population's supply of consumer goods. In the DDR roughly one-third of the industries produce goods for the general consumer, while the corresponding figure for Western Germany is above 60 percent.

The plight of the workers under Communist regimes is a well-established fact. The German worker, who was frequently accustomed to higher living standards and possessed greater skills than his counterpart in some of the captive countries, was deprived of more and reduced to relatively less. The worker in the Soviet Zone of Germany expressed his bitterness against working conditions in the revolt of June 17, 1953.

Denial of Rights

This spontaneous uprising was put down with great ruthlessness by the Communist regime. Thousands were arrested and summarily tried and, according to West German labor sources, many hundreds are still in prison today.

Although Article 14 of the labor Federation's by-laws actually says that the right to strike is recognized, it has in practice no meaning at all in view of the fact that the worker is required to respect the fulfillment of the work plan. Any gesture on his part against such fulfillment, such as a strike, is labeled "sabotage," and punished accordingly.

Despite all the propaganda, the worker in the DDR has nothing to say about the way his plant is run. This was clearly shown by the April 1950 Labor Law. It said: "The right of co-determination of the workers and employees regarding the management of the economy will be exercised by the organs of the State."

In this connection, there is recent evidence from East German press sources indicating that political work and worker morale, particularly in the brown coal and construction industries, have been poor. Hypocritically taking the worker's side, the press pretends to place the blame for poor production and morale on officials, particularly the "arrogant attitude" of managers who do not consult the workers. Other indications of poor worker morale are to be found in reports in the East German press complaining about the high number of hours lost as a result of sickness and accidents.

The Woman Worker

Article 7 of the Constitution of the DDR established equal rights of women. It means equal status for both sexes as an object of oppression and exploitation, but even this statement is not entirely correct because the fate of women in the DDR is in fact far worse than that of the men.

The Labor Law of April 19, 1950, cancels all existing legal restrictions for the employment of women and requires all agencies, federal as well as state, to create working opportunities for them. In actual operation it amounts to a requirement for women to work.

The Five Year Plan converted this "right" into an obligation and has forced women to accept occupations that used to be reserved for men, as for instance, mining. All legal restrictions such as night work or employment in heavy industries were canceled as being "contradictory to the equal rights of women." A law "for the protection of mother and child and for women's rights" (October 1, 1950) makes clear that "marriage must not interfere with professional education and occupational performances of a woman...even if it causes a temporary separation from her husband."

The FDGB

The workers in the East German zone, as already mentioned, are grouped under an organization with the appealing name of Free German Labor Union (FDGB), although it does nothing to defend their rights in the manner of western labor unions. The workers are completely organized, whether they like it or not. The Party, the government and industrial management all cooperate to make union membership virtually a prerequisite of employment.

There is an industrial union for each branch of industry such as metals, chemicals and transportation. These in turn are

organized and form the FDGB. The individual unions are named and organized in a manner to suggest a continuity with the old Social Democratic labor organization tradition. For this reason the pattern of FDGB organization closely parallels the industrial union organization of the West German Federation of Labor. This superficial similarity was intentional and has been used as a propaganda weapon for the massive penetration and subversion of West German labor.

FDGB officials support almost all strike actions in West Germany. But in their own zone the workers are forbidden to strike and the organization of a strike is legally a crime. The FDGB officials not only accept the proposition that it is illogical for workers to strike against the Worker's State, but they take stern action to prevent strikes from occurring and cooperate with the other state authorities in punitive action in the event a strike is threatened. The height of paradox is achieved in the matter of wages and hours of work. The official argument apparently is that since lower costs and higher productivity benefit the Worker's State, then lower wages and longer hours must benefit the worker.

In 1955, the FDGB held a congress at which it decided to recognize the policies of the East German Communist Party as the party of the German working classes. Under the leadership of the Party, the Federation is to work for the realization of socialism in East Germany. Another resolution that was adopted stipulated that all members of the Federation should obey the dictates of the Party.

The Federation, it was stated at that time, stands for the strengthening of the DDR "as a base for the fight for a united, democratic and peace-loving Germany and for the reinforcement of the worker's confidence in the State." The statement added that "every member of the Federation is required to defend the DDR and its accomplishments. It is the duty of every member to use all his strength for the realization of the economic plan." In plain language this means that every worker is solely an instrument to be used to consolidate the power of the Communist Party.

As in the USSR, the labor to be performed in different occupational groupings has been broken down into eight wage groups. The wage group rates were not established through collective bargaining, but through government decree without the right of co-determination by the trade unions. The rating of workers by management was frequently done, not from a labor point of view, but from that of SED Party politics.

The different varieties of the efficiency wage are intended to offer the most effective incentives for a maximum exertion of the worker's physical and intellectual strength. For this purpose the piece wage is the most suitable and is therefore applied in the majority of cases. The basis for piece wages in the DDR are the technical labor norms. These norms are established on the basis of the output of the most outstanding workers, working with the best machines under the best of conditions. However, these norms become binding for all workers. The main means of increasing output are contained in the collective contract. In this contract, the workers and employees undertake to fulfill concrete obligations and in the event of non-fulfillment, measures can be taken against the worker.

Among the coercive and punitive measures now being applied, the following deserve special mention: the registration and channeling of manpower, the binding of the worker to his place of work, the potential punishment for violations of labor discipline, the increased authority of foremen and managers and the establishment of commissions for labor and wages, charged with inspecting the workers and with urging them to fulfill the labor plans.

Work Brigades

The creation of so-called "Brigades of Socialist Work" was announced at the Fourth Plenum of the SED Central Committee in January 1959. On the basis of early press descriptions, this program appears to be a renewed attempt, couched in more expansive terms, to deal with the long-standing problems of increasing labor productivity, lowering production costs and improving work morale through an attempt to harmonize "material self-interest" and "socialist responsibilities." The movement has thus far consisted in a number of factory youth brigades competing for the title "Brigade of Socialist Work" by pledging themselves to the usual goals of increasing production. However, the new features of the competition include pledges involving brigade activity in other fields such as the educational, military, cultural and political. These innovations appear to have arisen as an attempt to cope with the entire question of worker motivation which has apparently not improved to the regime's satisfaction through the methods employed up to now.

Although there are no laws existing that actually sanction the enslavement of labor, the existing regulations are such that they are quite adequate to make sure that the worker observes the requirements for the fulfillment of the work quota and the regulations concerning his work. One such broad regulation stipulates that juridical proceedings will be taken against anybody who "knowingly perpetrates an infringement of labor discipline or who pretends to be sick."

The power of plant directors and of foremen has been reinforced in order to make sure that discipline is maintained and performance improved. Directors and foremen are fully responsible for their fields of operation and to help them they have been given broad powers. They can, of course, try to improve production through the use of bonuses, but at the same time they are empowered to take disciplinary action where they deem it necessary. Thus, according to the regulations, the chief of a section decides the employment and the firing of the worker. He has the right to promote those he thinks are working satisfactorily and to punish those who do not.

Stakhanov Pressure

The incessant demands for more work for the same amount of money are not only a source of irritation to the workers, but also to management which finds itself charged with the responsibility for achieving supplementary production. As the West German labor organ Freies Wort has remarked, "this insane system can hardly be called a worker paradise and makes life impossible. The only result is that it kills any incentive to work and even kills the joy of living."

The East Zone regime has attempted to spur production through the introduction of a number of Stakhanov-type competitions. The first Stakhanov in the East Zone was a coal miner named Adolf Hennecke who, in 1948, produced 380 percent above the norm on a single occasion. As a result, his admiring fellow workers smashed all the windows in his house and ostracized him, while the regime rewarded him with a soft job in a ministry.

There has also been a "100,000 Kilometer Movement," to which truck drivers may belong who have covered that distance without requiring a major overhaul of their vehicles.

Then there is the Nina Nasarowa Movement. This movement is named after a Russian textile worker who promised to keep her machine in working order on her own time. As a result of this, the East German regime instituted the movement in their zone. It means that workers now have to be at their post 15 minutes before shift time to clean their machines.

There have been any number of similar movements in East Germany. One of the most fascinating, at least from a Western point of view, is the "50-Watt Bulb Movement." Those who belong to this movement undertake not to burn at one time any more than a single 5-watt bulb in their homes in order to conserve power.

There is also the "3,000-Liter Movement," according to which each cow is supposed to be induced, so far as is possible, to produce 3,000 liters of milk a year.

However, these weird aids to stimulate production have not been too successful and SED leader Walter Ulbricht had to admit that 59 percent of plants in East Berlin are working at a loss, while the deficit for all plants throughout the Eastern Zone is 25 percent.

Poor Planning Irks Workers

In East Germany, as in Russia, the Communist government has tried to "plan" everything and control the output of every single plant. Every minor decision has to be made in East Berlin. This scourge of bureaucracy is a constant topic for complaint throughout East Germany. Workers prefer to work in small plants still under private direction, rather than in the big socialized plants, because private enterprises are more efficient and human relations better. The Communist leaders recognized this attitude in their "reforms" which followed the 1953 uprising. For a while, private business was given some leeway. Private firms up to medium size have been permitted to continue in some fields. But the squeeze is being put back on private enterprise this year through stiffer taxes and a forced draft of privately employed workers.

East Germans also are irked because most of the goods they manufacture are exported to the East and the German workers see no equivalent in return. New railroad cars are an example. Many are built in East Germany, but none has been put into service on the railroads there. Details of East Germany's foreign trade are withheld from the public. The East Germans know, however, that much of their output goes to Russia and the Satellites.

Workers resent the constant increasing of production quotas which amount to repeated wage cuts. Real wages in East Germany now are calculated to average only about 60 percent of those in West Germany.

The Farmer

It is much more difficult to organize farm populations than urban groups and it is harder to enforce the delivery of farm goods than industrial products. The first step taken by the Soviet authorities in the DDR was a land reform that was supposed to win friends by giving land to those who were without property. About 20 percent of productive land was taken

away from some 11,000 landowners and 210,000 new ownerships, mainly from the ranks of laborers and refugees, were created. During this process a complete dependency of the farmer was established. Machinery had to be loaned from fixed centers, financing and sale were taken over by combines, and cooperatives were absorbed by the state. The allegedly voluntary pooling in varying degrees of land, animals and equipment in the form of cooperatives was ruthlessly enforced with the obvious objective of introducing a total collectivization of agricultural production.

The obligatory delivery quotas, particularly for the larger farms, were intentionally fixed beyond the potential of the farms and could not be met. Eventually, the choice for the peasant was arrest for sabotaging the Five Year Plan or escape to the West.

Terror was used against the peasants by brigades of Communist workers, who were sent out to the country searching and arresting, "legalizing" their criminal behavior by bringing with them "special mobile courts" for the trial on the spot of farmers for non-fulfillment of delivery quotas.

These efforts by the DDR regime failed, however, as proved by its appeal in June 1953 to the farmers who had escaped to the West, to return, repossess their property and "live in peace." As experience in the Soviet Union and in the Satellites has shown, it is hard to convert farmers to Communism. So far, the Communists have broken the estates, but not the farmer in the Eastern zone.

The Great Exodus

As a result of the Communist pressures on the population, there has been a huge exodus of people from the Eastern zone over the years. More than 1,000 doctors have fled East Germany this year compared with 296 last year. Authorities in West Germany estimate that there is now one doctor for every 1,700 population in the East against one for 750 in West Germany. Polish and Czech doctors have been called in to help staff East German hospitals and some institutions have had to close their research departments for lack of personnel.

Nor are doctors the only group in the new flow of refugees who have been streaming towards the West. The number of school teachers, students and other intellectuals has increased by similar proportions. More than twice as many university professors fled in the first nine months of 1958 than in all 1957. Grade school teachers, dentists, veterinarians, students and engineers have brought the number of professional people among the refugees

to double what it was a year ago. There were 21,107 in September, an average of 703 people every day. This is not a record. There was a period in 1953 when 2,000 left their homes and moved West each day. West German officials estimate that 3,000,000 East Germans have joined their population since the Bonn government was set up in 1949.

In the early days there was a preponderance of peasants and businessmen, but now there are more intellectuals. Both the East German and West German Governments have become increasingly distressed, although not entirely for the same reasons. Aside from the political and prestige loss, East Germany now faces a serious threat to its economic plans for lack of skilled manpower. When Khrushchev visited East Germany last July, he lectured at length on the need to pay their intellectuals well and to treat them nicely even if they did not accept Communism. "Leave political convictions out of the picture," he urged.

The greatest impetus to the flight of intellectuals seems to have been the program approved by the last congress of the East German Communist Party. It laid down plans for what the West Germans call "Sovietization" and sought to put down unrest among youth and intellectuals with new stern measures. Several retreats have been made from this program in a belated effort to slow down the new flood of refugees it loosed. A rule forbidding the children of professional people admission to universities was canceled; doctors were promised they would once again be allowed to visit West Germany.

Red Threats

Communist authorities try to halt the westward flights by threats and restrictive measures. Any East German resident must apply to the police for a permit to travel, particularly to the West Zone. Travel abroad is restricted mainly to official propaganda delegations which can be watched.

Even East German scientists who want to attend scientific meetings outside East Germany must first attend trials of men who have tried to obtain jobs in another country. Trying to get work abroad is a "crime" punishable by sentences up to life imprisonment.

Police terrorism is an old story to East Germans. Police are everywhere. They check travelers in trains and railroad stations. They check workers at the factory gates. They inspect hotels and

dance halls and each apartment house has its Communist warden who informs police of all suspicious activities.

Another element of discontent among workers in the East Zone is the pressure used to prevent any contact with friends and relatives who live in the Western areas. The West Berlin publication Freies Wort, which is dedicated to labor affairs, has summed this up in the following words:

"The uncertainty of one's personal life is unfortunately one of those things which cannot be explained to those who live in West Germany....a worker can go on doing his duty for years and when a little thing happens such as a trip to West Germany, the person in question is hurled into the depths and even membership in the Party is not always enough to rescue him. The staff is broken across his back and he sees himself branded in the local press."

The frantic efforts the East German regime makes to hinder the movement of people between East and West Germany are all the more unpopular inasmuch as they are a flagrant denial of the terms of the so-called Constitution. Paragraph 8 of that document says that "personal freedom, the inviolability of the domicile, the secrecy of postal communications and the right to live in any place, are guaranteed."

The truth is that in the East Zone nothing is guaranteed and as in all Communist regimes there is no question of personal liberty. Furthermore, Article 10 states that any citizen may leave East Germany if he desires. This hardly concords with the thousands of special police who patrol the border between the two Germanies or with the hundreds of frontier watch towers and their machine guns or with the hundreds of miles of electrified barbed wire which keeps those of the Eastern zone separated from their brothers in the West.