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The Party and the Filmmakers:

DEFA-SED Interactions 1945 to 1971

By

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Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation covers the interrelationship between the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and the filmmakers of the feature film studio at the German Film Corporation (DEFA) in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The interactions between the two from 1945 to 1971 reveal a great deal about the overarching cultural-ideological framework of the SED, and the ideological development of the GDR. As the sole ruling party of the GDR, the SED maintained a strong hold over the country, and developed an effective party-state, in which the party mirrored all state offices and maintained strong ties to every aspect of the state.

This dissertation is chronologically split between 5 chapters, each covering a separate five year period of time from 1945 to 1971. These years bookend the first era for the GDR, and go from its founding until the first head of the SED, and head of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht was removed from power in 1971. This period highlights the developmental era for the GDR, and its emergence as a stable political state. For DEFA this period covers its foundation through its most difficult moment in 1965, in which the leadership of the SED banned all 12 films produced by DEFA that year, and its years of renewed stability thereafter.

The use of a specific political era to define the chorological boundaries for this dissertation allows for a deeper comparative view, in which each chapter covers the

developments of film policy by the SED, then looks as how filmmakers at DEFA who were SED members interpreted the policy, and then covers an exemplar film from that specific period. When taken in combination the dissertation tells three distinct, but directly related stories, that of the development of film policy by the SED, the struggles of filmmakers to interpret and implement policy at their studio, and the shifts in filmmaking and ideology in film.

For the time being this dissertation will be embargoed, however if you would like to contact me about my research, or the contents of this dissertation you can do so at stepp.jonathan@gmail.com

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Introduction

The history of the East German Film Industry (German Film Corporation, Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) known by its acronym[DEFA] is inextricably tied to the political, economic, and cultural development of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Even before the creation of the GDR in 1949 the Socialist Unity Party (SED) identified the film industry as a crucial industry for both social development and ideological propagation. The history of this deep interconnection between the SED and DEFA is one of the party desperately trying to both control and work with the filmmakers. Simultaneously, the party's message to filmmakers was ever changing, and never clearly spelled out as a definite vision of the "good" film. The filmmakers, for their part, attempted to faithfully relay the party's beliefs, and made attempts to obtain clearer definitions of proper films from the party, but were never completely successful. This dissertation tells this story through an intertwined history of the SED's development and maintenance of film policy, on one side, and filmmakers' efforts to interpret SED film policy and implement it at DEFA, on the other. It focuses on the years 1945 to 1971, tracing the internal history of DEFA from its formation under the Soviet occupying forces up to the ouster of Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the Politburo of the SED by his protégé Erich Honecker. By limiting the story to the so-called Ulbricht years, I am able to analyze in depth the development of SED film policy and the interactions between party and filmmakers during its foundational era through the twists and

turns of the 1950s and 1960s in party decisions regarding film in general as well as specific films.

Exploring the relationship between the party and DEFA is an inherently complex task that involves not only sifting through layers of often obscure party language, but also the scattered breadcrumbs of written responses left by the filmmakers themselves as to how they interpreted the party's ideas and ideals. Unfortunately many of the most important records for this task remain sealed and inaccessible to researchers. The complete records of the activities of the Abteilungs Partei Organisations [Party Cells] (APOs) remain sealed at the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld (German Federal Archives at Berlin). However, I am able to reconstruct the story of how the SED interacted with DEFA from several types of sources. Typically the SED used major conferences to publicly communicate the overarching ideological framework of its cultural policies, on the one hand, and to disclose policy shifts, on the other hand. At the Party Days, Plenums, and cultural conferences the SED offered broad, often cryptic, pronouncements on cultural production and on how filmmakers were to "educate" the masses and display proper ideological modeling. The transcripts of these conferences provide a window, if often a rather opaque window, onto party policy and its reception. Off the public stage, the Central Committee (ZK) provided direct instructions to DEFA via letters, directives, and guidelines.

Sources from within DEFA are provided by written communications and transcripts of meetings of the APO and the Betriebs Partei Organisation [Industry Party Organisation] [BPO]. DEFA filmmakers, as members of these organizations,

continually strove to understand both the ordained, but vague, cultural perspectives and the more direct guidelines and to operate within the framework provided by the SED. In considering how and why they did so, it is important to keep four points in mind. First, their interpretation of party guidelines was not simply a matter of choice. Employment at DEFA and funding for their film projects were contingent on creating films that fell within the operational framework crafted by the party. One must qualify this point, however, by noting, second, that as members of the SED, filmmakers did not act out of pure obligation but as sincere believers in the cause of Socialism. Third, the interpretive task was far from easy even for the most dedicated party members. The effort to figure out party guidelines often involved parsing nearly impenetrable party-speak to determine what ideas should actually be presented in films. Much of this process took place within APO meetings, on the one hand, and BPO communications with members on the other. The BPO, which was the party organization for DEFA on an industry level, diligently carried out the task of presenting to its members the latest information from party conferences. Prior to a party conference the BPO would engage in a detailed process of crafting suggestions and film related ideas to be presented at the upcoming conference. The fourth point then, is that the BPO and APO did not just respond passively to information from on high. The BPO and APO routinely pushed the party line in officially non-party organizations at DEFA including the Künstlischer Rat [Arts Council] [KR] and the later Kultur Arbeitsgruppen [Cultural Working Groups] [KAGs]. However, the instructions coming from these groups were not always clear and did not always result in filmmakers carrying out the party line. Due to the

nature of the SED as a party that had accepted, albeit limited, democratic action, particularly among the lower party levels and amongst peers within the ZK, and of the various groups within DEFA there was a fair degree of pushback and debate as to how to implement the party's ideas. The party, by and large, recognized these debates as falling within the broad framework of acceptable discourse.

Through this complex process party thought about film as an artistic and political medium was diffused through the various organizations at DEFA, and interpreted by individual filmmakers. Their films themselves reflected, to varying degrees, the ideals of the SED. However, due to the broad and vague nature of the party's ideas about film, not to mention uncertainty about how to translate them into actual films, even the most politically committed filmmakers, never did nor could realize the SED's cinematic vision. Moreover, the decentralized organization and quasi-democratic functioning of the lowest levels of the SED allowed the filmmakers to filter the ideas of the party through their own interpretations of the SED's ideas. In combination, the vagueness of the SED's vision, and the room for interpretation gave agency to the filmmakers in the creation of films, and the ideas and messages within them.

This dissertation argues, then, that DEFA's cinematic products were largely shaped by its filmmakers despite the fact that they created art within a production system set up, overseen, and enforced by a ruling political party with strong ideas about the artistic form and political function of film in a socialist state Certainly, DEFA's filmmakers crafted films that, they hoped, would help construct and promote socialism. For the most part however, their films were the aesthetic

creations of the industry and its leading talents rather than vehicles of party propaganda.

Chapter Overviews:

Chapter 1 The Foundations of a New Film System: DEFA 1945-1949

DEFA came into being as a film studio in the spring of 1946 based on plans stemming from the Soviet occupying authorities, along with anti-fascist filmmakers living in the Soviet Occupied Zone (SBZ). DEFA emerged at the same time as the SED was formed from the merger of the Communist Party and Social Democratic Party in the SBZ. The relationship between DEFA and the SED originated at this time as well. From the beginning there was a party presence at DEFA, although it was extremely limited in the early years. The actual locus of power at DEFA resided within the non-party controlled KR. Within the KR DEFA filmmakers controlled the whole studio level and thus could determine the overall path of filmmaking and the filmic goals for their industry.

Early on the SED took a largely hands off approach to film guidance and film policy. While the leadership of the SED did make concerted attempts to craft a broad cultural line for filmmakers and other cultural producers to follow, they did not take many direct actions to enact the policy or to force filmmakers to follow through with it. During the Soviet occupation DEFA relied on Soviet and SED authorities for funding, and as a result of this patronage relationship, they did craft films that broadly fit with the ideological perspective of the Soviet authorities and the SED. However, as this chapter shows the key themes that had to appear in films

were anti-Fascist themes, rather than pro-Socialist and pro-Communist thought. For the average viewer the largest shift in a film going experience from the Nazi period to that created in the SBZ was one from fantastical and escapist films to more grounded realist productions that actively sought to reflect the real experiences of the audience in the aftermath of the war.

Chapter 2 The Emergence of the Party-State in the GDR from 1950 to 1955 and its Relationship with DEFA

After the foundation of the GDR in 1949 DEFA came to operate under a full party-state system. In a party-state a single party dominates the totality of a political system, and the political offices that exist within the state are fully mirrored in the party itself. In the GDR every state ministry had an equivalent office in the ZK and that ZK office directed ministerial planning. Members of the ZK were employed in high-level positions at the equivalent state ministries. In relation to DEFA, the most important state ministry, the Ministry of Culture [Ministerium für Kultur] [MfK] was created in 1955 and took over official oversight of DEFA from the DEFA Commission of the Politburo. Shortly after the creation of the MfK the Main Office for Film (HV Film) emerged with the explicit function of overseeing filmmaking at DEFA. This shift lessened the influence that individual party members could have at DEFA, in that party membership no longer conferred unique access to oversight bodies. Simultaneously, the creation of the HV Film, served to further the party's reach within state based organization as the head of the HV Film, Anton Ackermann, as a former ZK member and the former head of the Culture Office for the ZK.

In the early years the most important instance of high-level access was a series of face-to-face meetings between DEFA filmmakers and the members of the DEFA Commission of the Politburo that took place during the summer of 1952. As detailed in this chapter these meetings involved a contentious back and forth. Filmmakers openly challenged the party's methods of control over film production, but the party was unwilling to relinquish control and trust filmmakers.[1] These high-level meetings provided access to power, but they did not lead to more autonomy. These meetings came at a time of drastic changes in the cultural-ideological framework within which DEFA operated. At the 5th Day of the ZK in 1952 Fred Oelßner, the head of ideology for the SED, presented a fundamental inversion of the standard Marxist interpretation of cultural theory.[2] Film, and other cultural products, would no longer simply reflect the conditions under which they were created, but instead would serve to create new economic structures.[3] Filmmakers were thus tasked with the creation of socialism in the GDR, and film was thereby assigned a vital social, and political, role by the SED.

Chapter 3 Truffle Pigs and Industrial Labor: Pushback and Response 1956 to 1960

In 1956 the SED experienced a dramatic shock to its internal stability after Nikita Khrushchev's infamous Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress of the

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[1] BA DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 26.
[2] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 46.
[3] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 46.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which he denounced the crimes of Stalinism. This, coupled with the Hungarian Uprising in the fall of 1956, caused a massive shift in party thought and in public declarations of party belief. Despite these challenges and public denunciations of Stalinism the party structure was not altered. The situation affected DEFA in several ways. Alongside the stark shift in ideological projection that came with the de-Stalinization program, DEFA's oversight changed thoroughly as well with the creation of the Licensing Commission (Abnahmekommission) in 1956. The purpose of this commission was to review and provide licensing approval for each film, and to recommend changes to films prior to their release. As it was originally proposed, filmmakers would have minority representation on the commission, and would be significantly outnumbered by the other members, who would be drawn from every organization in the GDR. However, this original suggestion caused a major pushback from DEFA filmmakers over the fundamental ignorance of cultural theory and film production held by the members of the commission. In response the head of the HV Film, Anton Ackermann, altered the makeup of the commission and created a plan to have DEFA representatives get equal say on the licensing board.

This victory emboldened DEFA filmmakers, and set the stage for one of the most hostile interactions between DEFA and the SED in the history of DEFA. The KR, after the creation of the Licensing Commission produced a letter addressed to the ZK arguing that the oversight of film production was impossible to understand. In response to this letter the leadership of the SED gutted the KR, eliminated its abilities to oversee any aspect of filmmaking at DEFA, and removed its place as an

internal representative body for filmmakers. In its place the SED pushed a strong decentralization program, and established a series of KAGs at DEFA within which all filmmaking would take place.

The decentralization program, which began in 1958, coincided with the most decisive cultural-ideological meeting in the history of DEFA, the Bitterfeld Conference. The Conference, held in April 1959 built on earlier cultural interpretations and called for cultural producers to learn from, and deeply reflect the actual lived experiences of workers and farmers. In practice this would entail the filmmakers directly interacting with, and in a best-case scenario living and working alongside, farmers and average workers. From this conference emerged the so called Bitterfeld Weg (Bitterfeld Path) which was embraced by those who followed with the philosophy presented at the Bitterfeld Conference, and which became the dominant cultural theory in the GDR through the rest of the time that Walter Ulbricht ran the SED.

Chapter 4 The Path to the Kahlschlag DEFA 1961 to 1965

The building of the Berlin Wall ushered in the next political period and the accompanying emergence of greater political security for the SED, which no longer had to worry about East German citizens fleeing to the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]. Citizens no longer had an option about which regime they would live, under and therefore had to co-exist with the SED's political leadership. Feeling more secure, the SED made some concessions to popular tastes. In terms of cultural expression, this translated into a greater level of openness, and acceptance by the party of art that pointed out flaws in the GDR as a society. Ideologically this

stemmed from a conjunction of the Bitterfeld Weg, and the SED's declaration of the achievement of socialism in 1960. Walter Ulbricht explicitly approved of, and encouraged, this openness at the 5th Party Day of the SED in 1963.

Only a year later at the Second Bitterfeld Conference, the party reversed its position, and no longer encouraged filmmakers to point out the flaws in the GDR. This sharp reversal came with a harsh challenge to filmmakers, and a strong accusation that filmmakers were propagating anti-party beliefs. In quickly reversing their stance the party set up DEFA filmmakers for failure. Planned projects that had met with the explicit approval of Walter Ulbricht, suddenly were denounced as being anti-party. These changes culminated the following year with the infamous 11th Plenum, the banning of 12 feature films created by DEFA in 1965, and the harshest crackdown on film production in the history of the GDR.

At the 11th Plenum, the leadership of the SED came down incredibly hard on filmmakers, with tailored screenings of censored films, during which time party functionaries would verbally attack the films being screened. The Plenum itself was ostensibly to focus on the economic situation in the GDR, but in reality spent a significant portion of its proceedings focusing on the purported failures of DEFA filmmakers. The screenings of the censored films were combined with hours long discussions of the explicit failures of filmmakers, and the denunciation of DEFA as an industry. The attacks on filmmakers went so far as to have ZK functionaries demanding that DEFA representatives name all of those who participates in creating the films, and to aid in turning them over to the party for their supposed crimes. While no one was ever arrested for the films that were banned, the party leadership

sent a clear message to DEFA filmmakers, their time of openness was at an end, and no films could exist that cast any negative light on the party or its members.

Chapter 5: Political Upheaval and Cultural Stability: DEFA and the SED 1966 to 1971

After the 11th Plenum the SED did not continue to crackdown on DEFA, and instead engaged in a more back and forth relationship as it had in earlier periods. In part this stemmed from the party fundamentally believing that the message of the 11th Plenum had been clear enough that filmmakers would not create similar films going forward. This Politburo and ZK shifted away from their intense focus on cultural matters. At the lower levels of the party, however, the SED still had frequent interactions with non-party members at DEFA and continued its push for greater control over the film studio.

The only major assessment of culture at the whole party level came at the 6th Party Day in 1966. At the conference, the SED leadership came out fully in support of the two earlier Bitterfeld Conferences, and ensured that the Bitterfeld Weg would remain in place, despite the cultural pushback at the 11th Plenum. Functionally, the message was that the filmmakers should focus on the lived experiences of workers and farmers but at the same time were not to show any flaws or problems that could arise from this. This message contributed to the rise of the *Alltagsfilme*, or every day films, which focused on everyday lives of ordinary people. Most importantly, the SED embraced historical films as vehicles to deliver ideological messages to filmgoers.

The chapter demonstrates that, at the more localized level, the SED refrained from extremely harsh, and at times paradoxical, criticisms of DEFA, even as Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker accused filmmakers of holding and propagating anti-party beliefs. Honecker even attacked the very system under which films were produced, but he held that the filmmakers alone as responsible for problems with the system.

Despite this criticism from Honecker, the period following the 11th Plenum was generally characterized by a decline in focus from the top leadership of the SED on film. During this decline in emphasis on film a fundamental turn in filmmaking focus and style occurred at DEFA that pushed DEFA film into a new era. The foundational period of the history of DEFA and of film in the GDR ended with a shift in direction from which there was no return: filmmakers focused their films ever more on the day to day activities of common people and ever less on the earlier ideas of nation building and social change via film production.

Sources and Methodology

The bulk of my sources are housed in the *Stiftung Archiv der Partei und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv*[Archive of Party and Mass Organizations] (SAPMO) held at the *Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld* [German Federal Archives at Lichterfeld]. This collection holds the papers of the SED and all mass organizations in the GDR. This collection provided the basis of all of my party analysis and all party conferences that I assess. Also consulted were the papers of the Ministry of Culture [Ministerium für Kultur] [MfK] as a whole and, in particular, the Main Office for Film [Hauptverwaltung für Filmwesen] [HV] Film within the MfK.

MfK records (along with all GDR state records) are held at the *Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lictherfeld*. These two collections provided the party level and state based sources for my analysis. The other largest collection came from the collections of the *Volkseigene Betrieb DEFA Studio für Spielfilme* [People's Own Industry DEFA Feature Film Studio]. I also viewed and evaluated relevant feature films, which were accessed on physical format and via streaming through Kanopy.com.

I decided to limit the analysis of lower level party groups to either industry party-groups at DEFA, like the BPO, and the Feature Film Studio rather than examine the records of individual party groups or other film studios at DEFA. By focusing on the Feature Film Studio, and not the Documentary Film Studio and the Children's Film Studio, I can go into greater depth and cover every party action, rather than picking and choosing the records to assess. Unfortunately I was not given access to records of every APO or BPO meeting, as they are not yet available to scholars. The combination of available BPO, and APO, records, with the existing records of Künstlischer Rat [Artists' Council] meetings allowed me, however, to construct a clear picture of DEFA responses to cultural policy.

Methodologically I try to bring my source bases into conversation with each other toward the end of understanding how the SED conceptualized cultural policy, how it was presented to DEFA, how filmmakers internally understood the policies, and how the policies were then transmitted to the public via films themselves. This transmission process was, necessarily, top-down, but the very nature of the SED as a quasi-democratic organization opened up a degree of feedback from the bottom-up within the SED. My theoretical framework for approaching the source base is one in

which I accept the overarching concept of the party-state, as applied to the GDR and other Communist states, and use it to open up the nature of the SED-DEFA relationship. In practice I place a heavier stress on the party aspect of the party state, and present an argument that party membership circumvented state power structures and gave lower-level party members a greater degree of access to the party, than the average citizen of the GDR, and in effect the state, leadership of the SED and the GDR.

The party and DEFA, on the one hand, and the party in DEFA, on the other hand, are the central foci of my dissertation. My assessment traces change over time in *party* ideas and actions regarding film and the film industry. It does not address the internal workings of DEFA as a state institution or industry. I view cultural policy and film production through the lens of the party's perspective on film, its efforts to shape DEFA production, and the response of DEFA's party members to those efforts. Analysis of the party's words and deeds opens up a new, or at least wider, window on film production than one finds in existing studies. First, a focus on party speech allows me to reconstruct the SED's film theory and how it was presented to filmmakers. Second, a focus on party speech and actions allows me to investigate the actual effects of SED film policy on filmmaking. One must keep in mind, of course that the SED's theories existed, to some extent, within an echo chamber. The sources all come from the SED and must be critically interpreted to make sense of what exactly the SED meant at any given moment, and how its rhetoric and intentions were understood by DEFA workers. To open up the party-speak that permeates SED documents, I parsed the individual words used by the

party members to elicit a deeper meaning behind them. By comparing slight variations in the language used by party leaders to talk about film's ideological role to actual film policy, I am able to show that small differences in the wording of party directives often represented real changes in film theory and ideas. Using this comparative methodology, I traced the development of cultural thought and policy within the SED over its first two decades in power. I also relate t subtle differentiations in party directives put out in different years to the ever-changing political and economic situation in the SBZ and later GDR.

The transmission of SED of cultural policy came in two major ways, at cultural conferences, and within direct communication with DEFA. By comparatively investigating these two types of transmission within a singular interpretive framework, I can better reconstruct the emergence of party thought about film and about culture in general. From the perspective of the cultural conference, one gains insight into the evolution of broad ideas about film and cultural policy. From the perspective of communications with DEFA, one gains insight into how broad directives were translated into practical directives. Finally, in my analyses of select films, I reveal how theoretical discourse did and did not translate into cultural production. The path from party leaders' often coded directives to party communications with filmmakers at DEFA to the films they produced represents the road from idea to artist to product in SED cultural policy. Every chapter retraces this often-crooked path through a critical phase of film policy. The dissertation as a whole puts these segments together to tell a story about how film policy changed in theory and in practice from 1945 to 1971.

By engaging each film as a product of an underlying cultural policy, I functionally ground the cinema of DEFA within the reigning cultural-theoretical framework of that phase. Rather than approach the films from a more film-theoretical perspective, I consider them as products of the give and take between DEFA filmmakers and the SED about principles of socialist filmmaking. This perspective represents neither a rejection of film theory as a method of assessing DEFA products nor a claim that DEFA films exist outside of historical or contemporary film theories. Rather, it is an argument for localizing cultural production within specific historical contexts. The party's oversight of film production, on the one hand, and DEFA filmmakers' basic acceptance of socialist film theory, on the other, shaped each film, grounding it within the SED's thought at the time. My dissertation thus presents an institutionally and ideologically focused interpretation of DEFA films, while acknowledging that they were also unique cultural products that can be analyzed and theorized within the history of film.

My methodology thus draws heavily from political studies of the GDR and other party-states. I apply insights from them to interpret cultural production. In acknowledging the ever-present nature of the party-state within the GDR, I assess cultural theory as an inherent party-product and cultural works as inextricably tied to the party itself. This analytic method rejects the assumption of totalitarian theory that the party was omnipotent and omniscient. I recognize, however, that the party was omnipresent. As the ruling political force and the arbiter of culture in the GDR, the SED's preferences and ideas set the parameters of negotiations over films. Yet, despite its best efforts the leaders of the SED could not truly dictate film production.

The party had to work with filmmakers. If, as sometimes happened during the period covered here, filmmakers critically portrayed the SED as a party and the GDR as a state, the SED could, and did, crackdown on them. Nonetheless, the SED was perpetually reliant on the filmmakers to realize the SED's cultural concept for the film-going public. Party leaders could not simply fire all the workers in an ideologically important industry and maintain a film industry in the GDR, and party as a result, filmmakers had a degree of leverage in their relationship with the SED.

Historiography

My greatest contribution to the historiography of East German film production is the focus on the symbiotic connection between the SED and DEFA. The conjoined analysis of state and party film policy is new in the historiography and offers, I believe, an illuminating lens onto film production, and by extension cultural history in the GDR. I both build upon and challenge the ideas laid out by some of the foundational DEFA historians, including Danielle Berghahn in *Hollywood Behind the Wall,* Joshua Feinstein in *Triumph of the Ordinary*, Dagmar Schittly in *Zwischen Regie und Regime*, and Thomas Heimann in *DEFA Künstler und SED-Kulturpolitik*. Of these scholars, only Heimann explores the role of the SED. He paints it, however, in broad strokes within an overarching story about the SED's broad conception of film policy, and specific decisions about films, rather than offering a side-by-side analysis of the development of film policy and its interpretation at DEFA. Berghahn, Feinstein, and Schittly have written foundational histories of DEFA, but largely neglected the inherently unique nature of the party-state and its relationship with film production.

DEFA History To This Point

The historiography of DEFA is, despite the GDR having not existed for almost 30 years, largely underdeveloped. While in the past decade broader interest in the field has emerged, it has largely confined itself either to surveys or to film studies analyses of particular themes or topics in DEFA films. Missing from these is an in depth study of how films existed within any operative framework within the GDR. DEFA studies still largely exist as a subset of German Film Studies, while simultaneously not being fully studied by cultural historians of the GDR. The focus among historians has been both on the operation of DEFA as a film studio, and on the changing themes of films created. In their areas of focus, these studies have centered on DEFA as a studio with minimal relation to the party and state, or solely through its relationship with the state. Due to the very nature of the GDR as a party-state, the SED is, of course, addressed but largely in reference to the 11th Plenum.

Among the earliest English language studies of DEFA as a historical subject, and not an object of film studies, Sean Allan and John Sandford's edited volume *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946-1992* provided a much needed look into the production of DEFA as a studio, and the context within which films were produced. Each contribution was, of necessity, lacking in depth but the volume collectively presented what became that standard contextual narrative of DEFA's interaction with the state as one characterized by a back and forth process of thaws and freezes. It also presented DEFA films as inherently transnational films that were deeply tied to international filmic developments and trends.

Meanwhile Sabine Hake in her seminal work *German National Cinema* brought the concept of East German film, as film, to the fore. Her work comprised an overview of 20th Century German Film, and was one of the first to compare East and West German films to one another, and to treat equally. This analysis presented the basic concept that DEFA films were, fundamentally, no different from the films produced in the FRG. Hake strove not to decontextualize the film production, but also due to the very nature of her work did not provide much historical context for the production of DEFA films. Her greatest contribution, thus, was to simply posit the idea that, in fact, DEFA films were films, and not mere propaganda tools of a totalitarian regime. Importantly tied to this was the idea that the ultimate context for DEFA production was a national one, and that DEFA films were one part of German cinema as a whole, and not uniquely separated from the films produced simultaneously in the FRG, or films created before or after the GDR.

Daniela Berghahn's *Hollywood Behind the Wall* treats DEFA film production as a normal, and diverse, film industry. Berghahn presents DEFA films as film, and not as propaganda products of an all-controlling state system. DEFA, she posits, created films of all genres, that attracted and appealed to a variety of audiences. The titular comparison to the leading site of Western film production is one that stays throughout the work and provides a guiding interpretive framework for Berghahn. Berghahn does approach DEFA production as occurring under a unique system of control, but of control through the Ministry of Culture not by the party. Outside of the 11th Plenum, the SED is largely absent in Berghahn's assessment of the control structures under which DEFA operated. Berghahn, however, does make significant

contributions to the overall historiography of DEFA, and presents one of the earliest English language histories of DEFA as a film studio, and of DEFA films as cultural products. Her thematic overview of DEFA productions provides a chronological look into how DEFA developed from singularly anti-Fascist films, to producing genre films, and films for general audiences. Berghahn's use of specific films to highlight thematic shifts in production sets up a window into how filmmakers specifically attempted to portray ideas to East German audiences. In this sense Berghahn offers a bottom-up approach that focuses far more on the filmmakers themselves than on the system within which they operated.

Within the German historiography of DEFA, Thomas Heinmann's seminal work *DEFA Künstler und SED Kulturpolitik* provided a foundational study of the cultural-political framework under which films were created in the GDR. Heinmann discussed the film theory produced by the SED, and the ways in which film theory and policy changed over time. He paired this with an overview of DEFA's operations and how filmmakers produced films during the course of the GDR's history. Heinmann then offered a look into how film theory existed in the GDR, and how DEFA produced films. His analysis, which ends in the late1950s, does not offer any meaningful insight into the responses of filmmakers to SED cultural policy, and largely interprets policy as something that happened to filmmakers, rather than something with which they interacted. Heinmann's assessment, however, does provide a strong foundational analysis of the development of SED Cultural Policy, and the shifting structural frameworks that supported it. Ultimately, Heinmann

views the period as one of top-down stabilization, and sees a parallel between the development of the GDR as a whole, and the rise of DEFA as an institution.

Similarly Dagmar Schittly's *Zwischen Regie und Regime* focuses on how filmmakers interacted with the state in the GDR, and in particular on the emergence of the MfK as a major factor in film oversight. Schittly investigates the relationship between the party and DEFA, but largely through the lens of the state as a mediator for cultural production and oversight. Much like in the more foundational works of DEFA history, the party exists largely in the shadows in Schittly's analysis, acting all but exclusively through state institutions.

Schittly does, however, provide an overview of the party conferences that created a base framework within which filmmakers operated. Her assessment covers the major meetings including the 1958 Film Conference, both Bitterfeld Conferences, and the 11th Plenum. These analyses demonstrate the shifting nature of SED thought, albeit from an almost exclusively top-down view. Most notably Schittly shows how the 20th Party Congress in 1956, and Soviet de-Stalinization fundamentally altered the way in which films could be presented and how messages were aimed to the audience. Schittly also details the infiltration of DEFA by the Ministry of State Security (MfS or Stasi) in the 1970s and 1980s. The rise of Stasi control effectively made the state less trusting of DEFA filmmakers. Schittly, thus, tracked the increased use of coercive measures to ensure proper film production during the Honecker era.

Feinstein's work, *Triumph of the Ordinary* offers a thematic history of DEFA, which traces the overarching shift in film focus and style through the 1960s.

Feinstein's argument that DEFA shifted from overtly political films to films about every day life helped to shape the current historiography of DEFA. Feinstein provided a more careful approach to blending the study of DEFA with the political and theoretical framework within which it operated. Nevertheless, outside of three major conferences, he largely conflated party actions with state actions. He did distinguish between the party and the state in his discussion of the 11th Plenum, but he presented it as a drastic alteration from the earlier actions of the party, and as a singular moment in the history of DEFA. Feinstein did, though, provide an overarching analysis of two prior cultural conferences, the two Bitterfeld Conferences, as a means to asses the shifting filmic focus away from more historical and explicitly political films, towards films that more clearly present the lives of average people.

Feinstein's pairing of a chronological assessment of the development of DEFA prior to 1971, and the shifts in thematic content of DEFA films, provides a strong basis for interpreting the broader factors behind these changes. The changes in film topic and style are paired with discussions of the development of the GDR as a state, and the mechanisms of control that oversaw film production. However, Feinstein does leave most of this analysis within the realm of state offices, and largely saves his assessment of the role of the SED for the two Bitterfeld Conferences and the 11th Plenum. Positing these as the primary sites of party interaction with DEFA does, to a degree, limit the interpretation of the function of filmmakers from an ideological perspective, and the place of film for the party. Despite this, Feinstein does provide

a strong interpretation of the overarching place of film as an ideologically necessary cultural product, and filmmakers as necessary actors in the eyes of the SED.

Sebastian Heiduschke's recently published *East German Cinema: DEFA Film and History* focuses more on the content of films themselves, and their place in international cinema, than on the overall political context of film production. However, he further develops the story of DEFA productions as films, just like films created in any other country, and not as propaganda tools. By highlighting genre films, and how audiences interacted with them he illuminates the actual outcome of the film policies created by the SED and the MfK.

Ingrid Pross's work *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA* presents a minimally analytic overview of the history of DEFA through its films. Pross discusses DEFA's seminal films, including how they were created. By profiling the filmmakers, the work gives the reader a good understanding of the linkages between various figures on the films created by DEFA. While acknowledging the co-equal roles of party and state in overseeing film production, Pross provided a largely DEFA sided perspective.

Together these works represent the cornerstones of DEFA historiography as well as newer contributions to the field. Notably absent among these studies is any serious consideration of whether and how the SED had a different relationship with DEFA than other industries on the one hand, and if the place of film in SED ideology offered particular benefits to DEFA, on the other. Attention to the SED in these works has been on the 11th Plenum and the Bitterfeld Conferences as unique events in the history of DEFA that in effect landed on it from above. Heinmann does

address film theory and the application of cultural policy to DEFA over time, but only looks at the 1950s.

This dissertation builds on the existing historiography, while also adding to it and bringing a new perspective to the fore. The main contributions of my work to the historiography of DEFA are a complete overview of the film centric cultural policies developed by the SED from its foundation in 1945 through the removal of Walter Ulbricht as head of the party in 1971, and a presentation of how SED members at DEFA responded to the developments and changes in these policies. This work focuses on the SED's interventions both from without and within DEFA, treating them as distinct, if not necessarily different in aim or content than state intervention through the Ministry of Culture. I also highlight party work inside DEFA and how DEFA filmmakers interacted with the party and its directives. It reveals that pro-SED filmmakers at DEFA, largely drawn from the ranks of SED members at the studio, fundamentally sought to produce films that were in line with the ideals of the party, but in many cases they did not produce the film that the party wanted because of the impenetrability of the SED's directives.

By looking at the party's actions at DEFA, in conjunction with the film policies created by the party, the full picture of the structures surrounding film production comes into view. I posit the necessity of interrogating party thought to understand fully the place of film production in the GDR, and of how DEFA created films. Only through investigating how the party presented its thought on film to filmmakers, can a complete view of the circumstances filmmakers faced in crafting their works be seen. Filmmakers had to operate under the SED's film policies, and with that in

mind, it is imperative to have an accounting of the SED's policies to interpret the situation at DEFA for filmmakers. The presentation of the development of the SED's film policies to the entirety of the party, and not only to the highest level party functionaries, places the Bitterfeld Weg and 11th Plenum into a broader, and richer, context than previously shown, and challenges the notion that the party only intermittently put forth policies for film production.

Conclusion

This dissertation will present the history of DEFA from its founding in 1945 through 1971 alongside the development of film policy by the SED through the same time period. The combination of the two will show how the SED's cultural thought was thoroughly interwoven through DEFA productions, while at the same time the unique place of film in SED thought provided filmmakers with an ability to push back against the party. Paradoxically, the impenetrable language of SED cultural policies at times provided filmmakers to gain with some maneuvering room for their film production, in that the very vagueness of the directives and policies allowed for a significant range of interpretation. However, there was no carte blanche for filmmakers to produce any film that they liked. The policies of the SED were enforced both through party control mechanisms in the latter 1940s and early 1950s, and then through the MfK. Control structures were, however, tempered by the SED's reliance on films to realize the SED's ideology and by the limited numbers of filmmakers who could potentially even work at DEFA. As a result, the SED needed filmmakers to help meet the party's goals, and the SED and DEFA developed a close relationship in which DEFA's films developed an increasingly important

ideological role in the SED's thought. It was only in 1965 at the 11th Plenum that the SED full out attacked DEFA films. This unique attack was precipitated by the production of films that did not seek to produce a new society but to reflect existing society. The crackdown, however, was not an end point, but instead another beginning, with the SED redoubling its efforts at DEFA to bring filmmakers closer to the party, while simultaneously demonstrating explicit support for the studio and its works. The complicated relationship between the SED and DEFA developed within a dictatorial state that had huge power and aimed for control over culture Simultaneously, the party that controlled that state was itself a semi-democratic institution that allowed for some level of internal criticism. Moreover, interpretive leeway for filmmakers resulted from the party's vague directives. The interplay between control and limited freedom provided context in which the history of the relationship between DEFA and the SED developed.

Chapter 1:

The Foundations of a New Film System: DEFA 1945-1949

The cultural policies of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) predate its founding in 1949. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) created the earliest cultural guidelines in cooperation with Soviet authorities in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ), with the eventual goal of using these guidelines to establish a new culture in Germany.[4] These early guidelines defined culture in a broad sense, and focused on all forms of cultural production. However, one of the most important factors for SED authorities was the role that film could, and would play, within the new Germany. Within the ideology of the SED, film played a unique role as a cultural medium that could reach the masses quickly, and could appeal to all levels of society. The SED's interpretation of the function and role of film in society derived directly from Vladimir Lenin's assessment of the place of film in Bolshevik Russia. As Lenin argued, "You must remember always that of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema."[5] In order to use film as a means of promoting a socialist culture, one had, of course, to have a functioning film industry.

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[4] The SED emerged from a union between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) on April 21, 1946.

[5] Lenin, Vladimir Ilych. Conversation with A.V. Lunacharsky originally printed in *Sovietskoye Kino* No. 1-2 1933, reprinted in *Lenin Collected Works*: Moscow, Russia: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 389.

In the SBZ and later GDR, the film industry existed almost exclusively within the structures of the German Film Corporation (DEFA) studios.[6] DEFA, it is important to point out, existed both outside of and within the SED. In DEFA's earliest years, oversight over film production was exercised by two offices, one within the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) and the other within the SED's Central Secretariat (ZS), which was replaced by the the Central Committee (ZK) in 1948. The ZS (and ZK) sat at the peak of the party hierarchy and made its most important decisions. DEFA was thus, from the beginning, joined to the SED, and never moved outside of the auspices of party supervision. Party directives concerning the nature of film production and how to realize cultural theory in films, became the guiding principles for film production at DEFA.

Simultaneously, the close ties between the studio and the SED meant that filmmakers, particularly those who were members of the SED, enjoyed a level of freedom not found in other industries. In particular this played out through interactions between ZK members and filmmakers at DEFA, as well as the involvement of filmmakers in party conferences. The frequent participation of filmmakers, namely Kurt Maetzig, Slatan Dudow, and Konrad Wolf, in high-level party decision-making, gave filmmakers at DEFA a voice within the party that simply did not exist in most industries. These connections undergirded the relationship between the party and DEFA filmmakers throughout the history of the

[6] The only non-DEFA film studio which existed ,other than the studio system behind television programs, was the (in)famous Heinowski and Scheumann studio, which was dedicated to making documentaries about the West. This studio existed from the mid-1960s until the end of the 1970s when it was brought under the auspices of television production the GDR.

SED and DEFA, and in many respects will be the focus of both this chapter and this dissertation as a whole. This chapter will show how this relationship originated at the very moment of the founding of DEFA, and how it developed from interactions between party loyalists who sat on the founding board of DEFA to a fully functional system of management by ZS members. [7]

At the same time this chapter will reveal that the uncertain political future of the SBZ, combined with the initially tenuous political situation of the SED, meant that the party did not exercise as clear authority over DEFA as it would in later years. Functionally this meant that the ZS would often issue directives and make proclamations that were coded in such a way to imply support for socialist ideology, while publicly declaring a belief in openness and democracy. The dualities of party speak, particularly in this period, make it difficult to offer a clear picture as to how filmmakers understood their relationship with the SED. My analysis of the party documents produced by DEFA filmmakers indicates a broad support for the general line of the party, but a more tentative backing of more specific policy proposals made by the ZS. While the records at DEFA only provide the views of a fraction of the total employee base within the studio, they nevertheless provide insight into the incomplete control that the ZS exercised over film production. The desire on the part of the SED to dominate film production existed from the foundation of DEFA, but, as I will show in this chapter, never fully developed in this period. Instead, the insecure status of the SED was reflected in a series of attempts to win over the

[7] The ZS of the SED was the highest body within the party's structure, and evolved into the Central Committee (ZK) after the foundation of the GDR in 1949.

majority of the intelligentsia to the side of the party, on the one hand, and increased efforts to exert control over film production, and society as a whole, on the other.

This chapter tells the story of the creation and early years of DEFA as well as the development of the relationship between DEFA and the SED. The first section outlines the political background to DEFA's early years, including the SBZ, its structures, and the push towards the creation of the GDR. The second section discusses the series of cultural conferences held by the SED in the SBZ. These conferences helped to establish the overarching cultural-ideological line of the SED, and to create a framework within which cultural production occurred. This section also looks at interactions between the SED and DEFA that occurred both at DEFA as well as at lower levels of the party's hierarchy. The third section focuses on the film *Unser Täglich Brot* [Our Daily Bread] (1949). Examining its ideological content, the section explains how that content related to the cultural thought emanating from the SED in this period. This film is important to review not just because it was directed by a dedicated party member, Slatan Dudow, but also because it offers a realistic view into the troubles of the ordinary civilian in the SBZ at the time. Moreover, it was a film that the party supported and that was well-received by East German audiences.

The SBZ and the Creation of DEFA: 1945 to 1949

In response to the need for a film industry in the SBZ, the Soviet authorities, alongside SED members, created the DEFA in May 1946. The very creation of the studio was an overtly political, and implicitly propagandistic, action. SMAD authorities exerted their political control by aiding in the creation of an engine of

cultural production and ideological distribution. DEFA's history predates its creation by several months, and came about largely due to the efforts of both members of the German film industry and Soviet officials. Plans for the creation of a film industry in the SBZ originated in the fall of 1945. Soviet occupation officials came up with an overview of the studios that were to be created, as well as the means by which they would take over the already existing facilities at Babelsberg in Potsdam and Johannisthal in Berlin. The plans by Soviet officials were not done in isolation, but rather in conjunction with German artists. Those who were involved in the creation of DEFA, such as Alfred Lindemann and Kurt Maetzig, boasted not just strong artistic credentials, but also strong party resumes.[8] Possession of a party resume, as well as experience of oppression under the Nazis provided for elevated social status in the SBZ, and offered greater opportunities for involvement in the projects of the SED.[9]

In December of 1945 the Educational Office of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) created a plan for the preparation and creation

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[8] Alfred Lindemann detailed his party history and support for the KPD in an attempt to regain his job after his removal in 1947. Among his credentials were that he joined the KPD in 1931, as well as that he was interned in Sachsenhausen from 1933 to 1938. Functionally this served to establish his status as a victim of the Nazis, as well as an anti-fascist resistance fighter. For more detail on Lindemann see SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 Erklärungs Brief von Kurt Netball 9 May 1947. Likewise Maetzig was an established party member prior to the creation of DEFA, and emerged as one of the founding members of the production company in 1946.
[9] Epstein, Catherine. *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century*. Camridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 106.

of a film corporation in the SBZ.[10] The plan was not just structural, but also schematic, with the ultimate function of creating a semi-independent series of studios that would produce both feature and educational films. Soviet authorities estimated that they would create 12 feature films over the course of 1946, and budgeted 1 million RM per film for the year.[11] In addition, the Soviet authorities created an annual budget, and set aside 30 Million RM for the creation and funding of the first year of DEFA.[12] The size of the budget reveals both the importance of DEFA within the broader SMAD plan for the SBZ and the cost of creating a fully functional film industry at the time. The vast amount of money necessary for film production necessitated a close relationship with occupation authorities, and as a result from the very beginning DEFA depended on the governmental bodies that created it. This close relationship stemmed, for the most part, from the prominent role of Soviet officials in economic decision making in the SBZ. Unlike other artistic endeavors, such as writing or painting, filmmakers were uniquely dependent on funding first from the Soviets and eventually from the GDR due to the cost of producing a film. In addition to the cost of making a film the limited amount of

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[10] BA/DR 2 8254 Vorschläge für die Wiederrichtung einer Deutschen Filmproduktion und Gründung einer deutshcen Filmgesellschaft 31 December 1945 p. 7.

[11] BA/DR 2 8254 Vorschläge für die Wiederrichtung einer Deutschen Filmproduktion und Gründung einer deutshcen Filmgesellschaft 31 December 1945 p. 8. In reality only one feature film *Die Mörder sind Unter uns* (The Murderers are Among Us) was created in 1946.

[12] BA/DR 2 8254 Vorschläge für die Wiederrichtung einer Deutschen Filmproduktion und Gründung einer deutshcen Filmgesellschaft 31 December 1945 p. 8.

cameras, film stock, and studio space meant that producing a film outside of the occupation apparatus was all but impossible during the 1940s.

The relationship between SMAD and DEFA was one of funding as well as censorship and ideological control. The earliest series of DEFA films, which included educational, feature, and short films, were approved in the early spring of 1946.[13] Soviet censors looked through proposed screenplays and topics for film production and approved the concepts, rather than the final produced films. This system functioned in such a way that the earliest film treatments went through a censorship system before they were given approval for production, therein ensuring that money was not spent on films which were oppositional to Soviet ideology. Soviet ideology, thus, provided the broad framework for the earliest DEFA films and helped to ensure that those who consumed the films also consumed SMAD approved views. In practice, this meant a strong focus on anti-Fascism, with few overt mentions of socialism. Partly this stemmed from the uncertain future of the SBZ, as well as from the desire of Soviet, and SED, authorities to work alongside the largest segment of German society as possible. The goal of this was to, at least in the views of SED authorities, educate the German populace as to the new anti-Fascist social order in the SBZ as well as to encourage them to embrace this new order. SED officials stated that, "film is, next to press and radio most effective means of

[13] BA/DR 2 8255 Zusammenfassender Bericht über den Stand der vorbereitenden Arbeiten zur Gründung der DEFA für die Zeit vom 1. Januar bis 21. März 1946 p. 47.

spreading new ideas."[14] For Soviet authorities the spread of "new ideas" was not merely a discussion of informing the populace of current events, but rather of implicitly spreading socialism and anti-fascism to the populace.

This goal remained with the leadership of the SED after the creation of the GDR, and became a recurring theme of East German cultural conferences and film conferences. A secondary characteristic of DEFA produced films at the time was that they were to ensure that "the poison of UFA films will no longer be potent."[15] For the ZS authors of this statement, the purported poison of UFA filmmaking stemmed not from explicit Fascism, but rather from its escapist focus, and its portrayal of life in explicitly non-political ways. Early films in the SBZ, and the later GDR, had the dual function of educating the populace about the benefits of the new society, and of acting as a denazification tool. The belief that film was a tool of both information propagation and ideological indoctrination became a cornerstone of GDR film policy, and came from SMAD officers.[16]

The nature of film within the broader ideology of the SED and of Soviet officials was inherently educational. As Daniele Berghahn argues, SED authorities saw film as "…an instrument of enlightenment and education, and not of mass

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[14] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erziehung Berlin, November 1946 An alle Landes-und Provinziallsitzungen der SED Betrifft: Filmpropaganda p. 7

[15] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erziehung Berlin, November 1946 An alle Landes-und Provinziallsitzungen der SED Betrifft: Filmpropaganda p.7

[16] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erziehung Berlin, November 1946 An alle Landes-und Provinsiallsitzungen der SED Betrifft: Filmpropaganda p. 8.

manipulation."[17] This distinction is, and was, important in that it allowed for SED and SMAD authorities to push for ideologically centered films while, at least according to their own internal logic, not participating in Naziesque propaganda. From an outside perspective the distinction between propagandistic films sponsored by party authorities, and films designed to educate the populace about the beliefs of the SED seems to fade away. Because the SED authorities believed that films that, in their eyes, educated the populace about necessary social issues did not constitute propaganda, they did not shy away from pushing for strong party influences of filmmaking, and over the final film products themselves. The contrast between art created in the SBZ and under Nazism was intentional and driven by the very nature of Nazi feature film. Rather than portraying the day-to-day realities of life in the Third Reich, Nazi film focused on escapism and rarely mentioned Nazism.[18] In comparison, SED authorities pushed for films that explicitly focused on the nature of life in the SBZ and later GDR. One motivation to portray life in the SBZ/GDR derived from the theoretical approach towards cultural production: that being Socialist Realism. According to this aesthetic theory, art, including film, had to represent the lives of average people in circumstances that filmgoers could understand. Simultaneously these depictions were to encapsulate the idealized lives of the average person, fully creating a model for how they were to live and act. The lack of escapism in the films thereby reflected the overall philosophical

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[17] Berghahn, Daniela. *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 20.
[18] Rentschler, Eric. *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1996, p. 6.

direction of the party, on one hand, and the rejection of Nazi filmic styles, on the other. Socialist realist film was to sharply contrast with Nazi cinema.

To transition away from the Nazi past of filmmaking the SED had to ensure the full compliance of the intelligentsia. The SED aimed to work alongside all layers of society and to make sure that the party had a presence in every social class and group, but favored members of the working class from urban areas. From 1945 to the formation of the GDR in 1949, the SED worked to win over social groups. In order to secure legitimacy among the masses the SED presented itself as the basis of a broad anti-fascist coalition. This bloc became the central political force in the SBZ and later in the GDR.[19] The SED, however, failed to secure any legitimate electoral victories in the early years of the SBZ, and as a result turned to more and more authoritarian measures, often in direct coordination with Soviet authorities.[20] The actions of the SED became more coercive over time, and by 1949 functionally dictatorial. The SED, however, couched their actions in the language of democratic renewal and democracy.[21] This language functioned as a way in which the SED could attempt to appeal to those who believed in a new democratic Germany. Simultaneously, the SED's discussions of democratic renewal came from the internal belief that the positions of the SED represented an authentic form of democracy that did not exist under other parties. These overtures, and the use of the appeal of

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[19] Schroeder, Klaus. *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat, und Gesellschaft 1949-1990*. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998,, p. 48.
[20] Allinson, Mark. *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-1968*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 15.
[21] Pike, David. *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Occupied Germany 1945-1949*. Paolo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press 1993, p. 44.

democracy, were not a means of manipulation by the SED, but instead a way that, despite a very different definition of democracy than those outside the party, the party reached out to those who were not active supporters.

The internal democratic nature of the SED led to a degree of openness and debate within the party. The 1940s were a period in which both internal and external debates were frequent, and in which the ideology of the SED slowly became more stable and homogenous. [22] The first few years of the SBZ were ones in which cultural ideas, and the very concept of what the future Germany would look like, were open for debate. The two major schools of thought were those that supported the creation of a Germany that was modeled on the Soviet Union, and those who believed in an independent and unique path to a socialist Germany. Walter Ulbricht represented the first, and ultimately triumphant, school of thought and Anton Ackermann was the champion of the second school.[23] Walter Ulbricht, the former head of the KPD in Berlin, who later fled to Moscow in the early 1930s, emerged during the early 1940s as one of the most important German Communist exiles. He, alongside Anton Ackermann, were the two point men on the ground for Soviet authorities in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Ackermann, likewise a German Communist exile, headed the Soviet backed anti-Fascist groups in Saxony in the days following the surrender of Nazi forces, and quickly emerged as one of the

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[22] Epstein, p. 104.

[23] Grieder, Peter. *The East German Leadership 1946-1973: Conflict and Crisis.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 16. Anton Ackermann, it should be noted was one of the foremost KPD officials in the SBZ arriving in early May 1945 and heading one of two KPD groups in the SBZ. His role as a counterpoint to Ulbricht was thus one of almost equals positing alternate visions for a new Germany. For more information see Epstein, p. 127-128.

two most influential men in the SBZ. These two men, who were allies in the beginning, became rivals towards the end of the 1940s, with Ackermann pushing for a fully independent German path to socialism, and Ulbricht advocating a path modeled on the Soviet experience. Ackermann's independent path was not completely opposed to the Soviet model; it necessitated broader input from the German populace and called for a more democratic approach to the socialist project than the Soviet model.[24] Rather than calling for a top down party system, Ackermann wanted a more authentic democratic approach to the socialist project that would incorporate German cultural values and political heritage in a model that was not compatible with the Soviet system. [25] While it was not until the middle of the 1950s that the debate was finally settled, by the time that the GDR was founded in 1949 it was clear within the party that the GDR would be, by and large, a Soviet style state. Moreover, while it was not a foregone conclusion from the beginning that a Soviet modeled system would be adopted, the control exercised by the Soviets within the SBZ heavily favored those backing a Soviet style system.

The Sovietization of the SBZ and the SED during the pre-GDR period created the structures that later allowed the SED to exert absolute political control over the GDR. The process, however, was far from a simple one. Anton Ackermann's push for a uniquely German path to socialism had broad support, and represented a viable alternative to the Soviet style system backed by Ulbricht and SBZ authorities. Ackermann's initial position, abandoned in 1948, was one of democratic renewal in

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[24] Grieder, p. 10.
[25] Grieder, p. 10.

Germany in a much more literal sense than existed in SED appeals to the masses. For Ackermann, the goal was the creation of a socialist Germany via a strongly and openly democratic process.[26] Ackerman argued that through organizing on the ground the SED could appeal to the masses and therein allow the people of the SBZ to voice their opinions in regard to how to achieve socialism. Ackermann's intent, thus, was not to dictate the methods of achieving socialism, but rather to allow the populace to create it alongside, rather than under, the leadership of the party. This system presupposed that the party was not inherently correct in its assertions as to how to achieve a socialist reality, but rather had one path that could, and possibly should, be altered through input from average Germans. Ulbricht, however, roundly rejected this belief as weak and unable to achieve the national unity that came from a strong party.[27] Moreover, this debate came immediately before Tito's split from the Soviet bloc. Opinion quickly shifted as the majority of the SED leadership encouraged Ackermann, and those who agreed with him, to follow Ulbricht's line.[28]

By 1948 the pro-Sovietization side had won out and the SED followed the general path laid out by Moscow. This is not to say that the Soviets laid out clear plans for the SED to follow, but instead that the SED modeled itself on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and that the leadership of the SED intended any future SED led state to follow the example of the Soviet Union. The SED would follow the basic structures of the Soviet style party-state, and the party would have significant control over all national policies in any future SED run state.

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[26] Epstein, p. 127.
[27] Grieder, p. 16.
[28] Epstein, p. 128.

This decision further involved a theoretical assessment of the place of the SBZ in relation to Communism, and the degree to which the German populace could move along a revolutionary path.[29] An important distinction here needs to be made between following the general path of the leadership of the USSR and receiving directives from its leadership.

The heads of the SED, at least in terms of internal policy, had a broad range of action and were able to make decisions largely independent of input from Moscow. While under the SBZ the leadership of the SED largely followed along with the policy parameters laid out by Soviet officials, this was not so much the case after the creation of the GDR. As the GDR was established and developed, its policies strayed further and further from those that existed in the USSR, and by the 1960s the GDR's cultural policies stood in sharp contrast to those of the Soviets. As suggested by Hope M. Harrison this very well may be the result of "the tail wagging the dog" and the GDR taking advantage of its position on the frontlines of the Cold War.[30] Ironically the situation on the ground in the SBZ and later GDR allowed for the creation of a uniquely German path to socialism that allowed Ulbricht to create and maintain a political and cultural line that existed independently of approval from Soviet leaders and in direct opposition to the actions of fellow Eastern Bloc

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[29] Epstein, p. 128.
[30] Harrison, Hope M. *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet- East German Relations 1953-1961*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 7.

countries both in terms of cultural policy and in Ulbricht's maintenance of a strong cult of personality well after destalinization in the rest of the Eastern Bloc.[31]

The SED and DEFA Emerge: Conferences and Interactions 1946 to 1949

The highest level of interaction between the SED and DEFA always took place at cultural conferences, which convened intermittently from the 1940s through the 1980s. These conferences were not open to the public, but rather were restricted to SED members and DEFA employees. They functioned as a means by which the SED dispersed ideology to DEFA and offered both direct and indirect guidance to filmmakers. From 1946 to 1949 the SED held a number of cultural conferences, all of which aided in the creation of a basic cultural line for the SED, and for cultural producers in the SBZ. Together these conferences allow the historian to see the outline of the basic conception of cultural control offered by the SED. They lay the framework for later, more articulated, cultural ideology of the SED. These early conferences, thus, provide a critical window for observing, and analyzing, the initial development of cultural policies by the SED. In addition to developing at cultural conferences, the policies of the SED further emerged through continuous interactions with DEFA. These interactions, at both the physical sites of DEFA, as

[31] An example of this is the lack of a true "New Wave" cinematic movement in the GDR, unlike the rest of Eastern Bloc cinema. Unlike in the rest of the Eastern Bloc, most notably within Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the USSR, the GDR's film never engaged in the stylistic shifts that are emblematic of New Wave Film. Rather, the styles of the 1960s, when other countries film industries embraced New Wave film, the GDR only underwent minor changes in style. However, it should be noted that some film scholars, notably Sebastian Heiduschke and Ralf Harhausen contend that the censored films of the mid-1960s were in fact the GDR's version of New Wave cinema.

well as through ZS and later ZK reports, represent the other half of the equation for cultural policy. When evaluated in conjunction with the proceedings of the cultural conferences of that period, these less public interactions provide full insight into the development of, and response to, cultural policies under the SED in the SBZ.

1946: The Birth of SED Cultural Theory

Film production in the SBZ and later GDR existed in a close relationship with other cultural industries, and most importantly for the party, with the intelligentsia who were responsible for cultural production. The SED looked to the cultural intelligentsia for support in creating a new Germany. In June of 1946 the leadership of the SED held a conference that discussed the role of the intelligentsia in the SBZ and the new Germany. This conference, the third in SED history, discussed the importance of the intelligentsia for the leadership of the party, and the means by which the party planned on winning over the intelligentsia. For the leaders of the SED, the cultural producers, and other educated members of German society, were not inherent allies, but rather a group that existed outside of the proletariat-bourgeoisie dichotomy that underscored their Communist interpretation of the world.[32] As explained at the conference itself the intelligentsia was divided between those who supported the bourgeoisie and a smaller number who supported the proletariat.[33] Those who backed the bourgeois ruling class, however, could be won

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[32] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5. Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p 35.
[33] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 35.

over to the side of the workers. Anton Ackermann, then the head of the office of culture of the ZS, in a speech at the conference, argued that it was the goal of the party to either win over or drive out those who supported the bourgeoisie under previous regimes in Germany.[34] This statement established clear divisions among the intelligentsia, and sent a powerful message. Those who had collaborated with, or who were accused of ideologically backing, any past German regime were deemed threats to the party and were to be dealt with. The only way that these members of the intelligentsia could hope to remain in the SBZ with the SED's approval was to fully convert to support for the party.

Given that the intelligentsia was not part of the proletariat, according to Ackermann, its individual members would be investigated in order to determine the level of their loyalty and their willingness to support the proletarian cause.[35] The concept of a neutral social/economic group did not exist within SED ideology, and as such the members of the intelligentsia had to openly pick a side, and if they chose the proletariat, then they had to prove their loyalty to that group. Ackermann clearly spoke for the leadership of the newly formed SED when he argued that the cultural intelligentsia had a key role to play in the creation of a new German society

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[34] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 36.
[35] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 37.

once they proved their loyalty to the cause of the working class.[36] Ackermann declared that, "Without intellectual culture and art the rebuilding of Germany is unthinkable."[37] The link between the cultural and the intellectual was clear for Ackermann and the rest of the ZS, and as such they perceived the intelligentsia as being critical to the development of socialism. As a result, at least for the leadership of the ZS, the intelligentsia was indispensible, and needed to be won over to the cause of socialism. It bears repeating that at this point the SED presented a very different face publicly compared to internally, as it worked alongside a pluralistic anti-fascist coalition, which included a number of smaller political parties including the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). It was only internally that the party explicitly linked progress towards a new German society with the acceptance of socialism as the only way forward.

Despite the public discourse of democratic renewal, the internal SED belief was that the intelligentsia needed to move beyond anti-fascist democracy, and to do that they had to be, in the words of Ackermann, "for the party, for Marxism, and for socialism and not just anti-fascist democracy".[38] The question was: to what extent could the intelligentsia be won over to Marxism and how best could the party attain that goal? Speaking for the party leadership, Ackermann contended that it would be

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[36] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 37.
[37] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 38.
[38] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946 p. 38.

easier to convince the intelligentsia of the correctness of Marxism if intellectuals were first won over to anti-fascist democracy.[39] Ackermann recognized-and presumably so did other party leaders- that not every member of the intelligentsia would accept socialism, and that even those that did would take time to come around to the party line of the SED. The willingness to accept steps in the direction of the party line, rather than mandating wholesale acceptance from the beginning, reveals the degree to which the leadership, at that time, understood the difficult path that they faced in regard to bringing the whole of society into line with the beliefs of the party.

Winning people over to the cause of the party remained central to the SED's thought throughout this time period, as well as after the creation of the GDR. The SED sought to do this through education. From the perspective of the SED, however, education could come in many forms, and among them was cultural production. The end form, as well as content, of cultural products needed to not only reflect the potentials of socialism, but also to educate the audience and encourage them to support socialism, as well as anti-fascism. The theory behind this belief was that art could both reflect and create social conditions. For the leadership of the SED this meant that art, which contained a socialist message, was capable of producing a socialist society by helping to encourage people to embrace socialism and act as socialists, which were both the products of, and necessary precursors to, a socialist

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[39] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 5 Stenographische Niederschrift der ersten zentralen Arbeitstagung der Abteilung Werbung und Schulung, Kultur und Erziehung, Presse, Rundfunk und Information von 5. Bis 8. Juni 1946, p. 38.

society.[40] The socially creative potential for art put it in a heightened theoretical place for the SED, and in turn meant that artists had a higher social standing than did less ideologically important groups within the SBZ and future GDR.

The ideological status of artists within both the SBZ and the GDR derived directly from the status of cultural products within the theories of the SED. The ability of socialist art to contribute to the creation of a socialist society meant that artists who created socialist cultural products were thereby partial authors of a socialist society. It bears mentioning that the SED did not officially announce a move towards socialism until 1952, and that they did not believe that they had achieved socialism until 1961. During the latter 1940s the party internally spoke of the need for the creation of socialism, but externally worked towards anti-Fascism. It was only in the 1950s that the SED began to openly push for the creation of socialism, and openly spoke of actions that would, in the eyes of the party, create the necessary preconditions for the emergence of socialism. In practice this involved the greater nationalization of industry alongside strong pushes for the greater collectivization of the countryside and farmland. This in turn raised art to an even

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[40] Fred Oelßner, a key SED ideological figure and at the time the head of agitation for the ZK, clarified this seemingly contradictory stance in 1951, at the 7th ZK Plenum. He stated that according to Stalin all superstructural relations that focused on class inequality became part of the base, and thus were capable of creating social realities, rather than merely reflecting them. From this the members of the SED were able to argue that culture was a reflective and creative force, allowing it to hold a prominent place in the SED's theoretical approach to society. From this stance artists were raised to a higher social level, in that their art became a necessary factor in creating socialism. For more information see SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 45

higher level, in that its creative capabilities were necessary for speeding up the process of creating pre-socialism and finally socialism.

The place of art and artist within SED ideology helps to explain the focus of the party on gaining followers among the intelligentsia as a whole, and among artists in particular. This process, however, was a long and complex one, and in the end while there were a number of socialists and Marxists among the artists in the SBZ, those who were party loyalists were few in number. This was an oft-lamented fact that the SED worked to change well into the 1960s.[41] Even those who were party members and who publicly professed support for the SED did not always follow the party line, and at times challenged the party leadership and the party structures themselves.[42] These challenges, in and of themselves, were never significant to the power of the party, but they do reveal the degree to which the party leadership was able to control, and not control, groups of people, as well as spaces within the party in which the party leaders had to negotiate their relationships with those on lower rungs of the organization. In part these challenges emerged from the very structure of the party itself.

The party was organized in a hierarchical manner with each cell responding to a higher group. At the bottom were party cells (APO) that responded to industry party groups (BPO). These BPOs would have leadership groups (BPL) who would in

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[41]SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, 24 4 1962, p. 345. This document from the party leadership within DEFA laments the underdeveloped nature of party activities among party members at DEFA.

[42] These challenges became more frequent during the 1950s and 1960s, but were always present in the relationship between the SED and artists.

turn respond to regional party organizations (BPO) that had leadership committees (ZPL). The ZPL in turn was responsible to the central committee (ZK) that answered to the Politburo. DEFA, however, operated somewhat outside of the normative party structures. While DEFAs BPO officially responded to the regional party organization, the reality was that its reports often went straight to the ZK rather than to lower levels of the party. In part this was due to the presence of ZK members in the DEFA BPO, as well as the unique and privileged nature of the company in the GDR as a whole. The head of the Politburo, Walter Ulbricht, ran the party, and in effect ran the GDR after its creation, although he did so as party secretary and in conjunction with the other members of the Politburo. Information and decisions worked their way from the top to the bottom of the organization. Each level would discuss and debate the information that came down from above. This practice, in turn, created spaces for argument and critique within the party structure itself. The goal of discussion at the level of the party base and among its members was to encourage so-called criticism and self-criticism.

The Marxist-Leninist practice of criticism/self-criticism was designed to clarify party goals and to help individuals, and groups, to overcome past errors.[43] The reality of the system as I will reveal throughout this dissertation, however, was at once more controlled and less controlled than the ideal suggests. Criticism/self-criticism allowed the party hierarchy to identify supposed errors and purge those who represented them, on the one hand, and allow those at the bottom to critique

[43]Monika Gibas "Ideologie und Propaganda" in *Die SED: Geschichte-Organisation-Politik Ein Handbuch*. Ed. Andreas Herbst, Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, Jürgen Winkler. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1997, p. 250.

the beliefs of those at the top of the party on the other.[44] This process was not new, but rather dated back decades. Within the Soviet Union, the 1937 Plenum of Central Committee decreed processes of upward criticism and analysis.[45] While in the Soviet Union this set off a major purge and was used as a means of destroying enemies of Stalin, the process within the SED did exist in a similar manner. Lower levels of the party would engage in self-critical assessments while analyzing other members and their supposed failures.[46] Functionally, this served a dialectical process, which would allow party members to educate themselves, and to learn from past mistakes.[47]

1947: Promoting DEFA Produced Films

The structures of DEFA were not that dissimilar to that of the party. As an industry, DEFA's structure and power distribution involved a board of directors that oversaw all of the studios, and a director for each individual studio. These directors, at least officially, were nominated from within the studio and were seen as democratic representatives.[48] However, the various studios at DEFA also had power structures that had direct ties to the ZK, therein allowing them to bypass the industry and have a direct working relationship with the highest levels of power in

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[44] While purges were rare in the SED, there were two major instances in which the party quickly eliminated those who were viewed as threats. The most significant case came in response to the failure of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, after which Walter Ulbricht organized the arrests and trials of a number of SED functionaries.
[45] Goldman, Wendy. *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 110.
[46] Goldman, p. 111-112.
[47] Monika Gibas "Ideologie und Propaganda" in *Die SED ein Handbuch*, p. 250.
[48] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 201 Protokoll Über die Sitzung des Aufsichträtes der Deutschen Film G.b.m.H 11 November 1947, p. 11.

the SBZ and later GDR. At the feature film studio the head worked alongside a variety of committees. The head of the DEFA Babelsberg studios, which was above that of the feature film studio, worked alongside the Planning Committee for Film, the Economic Office, and the Press Office.[49]

These offices, however, existed alongside the parallel party offices within the studio that were the equivalent of party offices in all industries. The BPL for DEFA overlapped with the studio leadership. As a result, the heads of the studio were expected to function as both studio employees and party functionaries. This duality permeated all of the studio offices at DEFA, and developed alongside the studio itself. The inclusion of party members in the running of DEFA was there from the beginning. All of the founding members listed in license for the creation of DEFA issued by the SMAD cultural office were SED members.[50] Moreover, future DEFA Feature Film studio heads were all active party members. Hans Rodenberg, the studio head starting in 1952 was a former Politburo member and active ZK member when he took charge of the studio. The purpose of this change was to guarantee that party loyalists ran the studios, and thereby to ensure that the ideals of the party were implemented at the studio, and that its films, would thus reflect the ideology of the SED.

The ties between DEFA and the SED were critical to the distribution of ideology to the masses in first the SBZ and then the later GDR. At the SED's Cultural Conference in 1947 Richard Weimann, one of the leading cultural theorists for the

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[49] BA/DR2 8258 DEFA Organizational Chart 1946.
[50] BA/DR 117 21739 Abschrift Sowjetische Militäradministration in Detuschland Informations-Abteilung 16 December 1947.

party, and a member of the ZS, discussed the importance and function of film. He described film as, "a powerful medium of ideological influence."[51] He stated this fact as self evident, and further argued that film was "the theater of the masses" and that its message moved among broad swathes of the populace.[52] In order to fully realize the power of films that presented proper themes, Weimann argued that the SED and its members needed to prepare the way for the films.[53] For Weimann, the SED had a powerful role to play in guaranteeing that the public was exposed to, and embraced, films that were realistic, true to life, that discuss problems, and reflect the knowledge of contemporary people.[54]

Weimann's exhortations to the attendees of the conference reflect the function of film within SED ideology, and the place of film in the broader plans of the party. Films themselves were, for the party, necessary aspects of ideological distribution, and as such the party had a duty to guarantee the success of films produced by DEFA. This desire manifested itself in pushes by the party to guarantee that people went to screenings of both *Die Mörder sind unter Uns* (The Murders are Among Us) and *Irgendwo in Berlin* (Somewhere in Berlin).[55] The party's goal was to ensure that these two films, which fell into line with the anti-fascist ideals of the

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[51] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 33 Stenographische Niederschrift über die SED Kulturkonferenz am 28./29. Januar 1947 p. 187.
[52] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 33 Stenographische Niederschrift über die SED Kulturkonferenz am 28./29. Januar 1947 p. 188
[53] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 33 Stenographische Niederschrift über die SED Kulturkonferenz am 28./29. Januar 1947 p. 188.
[54] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 33 Stenographische Niederschrift über die SED Kulturkonferenz am 28./29. Januar 1947 p. 189.
[55] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abetilung Kultur und Erziehung Berlin, Oktober 1946 An alle Landes-und Provinsialleitungen der SED Betrifft: Der neue Defa-Film „Die Mörder sind unter uns" October 1946, p. 2.

party, were highly successful. [56] The belief of the party was that the more people that went to the films, the more that would be exposed to the broad values of the party, most importantly anti-fascism, and thereby would agree with the party. Ackermann's discussion the previous year, as to the path from anti-fascism to Marxism, explains the party's willingness to promote films that had anti-fascist themes, and which did not deal with the subject of socialism. While the SED was not the singular cause of its success, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* was wildly popular, and perfectly reflected the situation on the ground in Germany at that time.[57] For the SED, this success was a victory for the party, in that those who went to the film were exposed to ideas that the party supported.

Weimann clarified that not all of the films that were supported by the party would appeal to the entire populace, and in his discussion he argued that those who would not enjoy the films preferred "kitsch-painted sweets of the past."[58] He felt that the stark portrayals of reality found in early DEFA films would upset those that clung to the Ufa films of the 1930s and early 1940s, which were often disassociated with the realities of life in the Third Reich and instead focused on pleasant stories. In doing this Weimann sought to reaffirm the evolution of Ufa into DEFA within the

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[56] *Die Mörder sind unter Uns* covers the relationship between Berliners returning from the war. The central conflict of the film revolves around the desire for personal vengeance versus the need to support legal structures to punish war criminals. The resolution of the film encourages the viewer to support the choice for using the legal system to punish those who committed crimes during the war, rather than to seek personal vengeance, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the nascent criminal justice system in the SBZ.

[57] Brockmann, Stephen. *A Critical History of German Film.* Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010p. 201.

[58] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 33 Stenographische Niederschrift über die SED Kulturkonferenz am 28./29. Januar 1947 p. 188.

SBZ. It was not just the studio that changed, and was to continue changing, but also the very nature of the films themselves. Weimann's intent here echoed Anton Ackermann's 1946 discussion of the development of cultural production in the SBZ. Ackermann's harsh declaration of Ufa films as a poison was softened in Weimann's discussion. He denounced them as kitsch, rather than something that was totally socially destructive. From a place of ideology, Weimann's critiques fit well within the then developing SED response to Socialist Realism. Filmmakers were to, within this theory, present life in a realistic fashion, while simultaneously promoting the cause of socialism. Functionally this meant that films should present issues that related to the cause of socialism, to present viewpoints that supported socialism, and to critique capitalism, while doing so in a recognizable fashion by filmgoers.

The evolution of the discourse regarding the place of Ufa films within the SBZ, and their overall effect on the populace, represents the ideological reaction of the SED to all cultural products created under Nazism. Unless the cultural product directly rejected Nazi values, it was reflective of them, and as a result was antithetical to the society that the SED was working to create. In the SED's opinion the, at least partially, reflective nature of all cultural products meant that even innocuous films produced under Ufa auspices could not be embraced if they were produced during the period of Nazi rule. This view, however, did not apply to all films produced under capitalist conditions, and as a result some Western produced films could be, and were, shown within the SBZ and later GDR. While there were no American films licensed in the 1940s, later SED authorities did approve the release

of American films in the GDR.[59] The main reason for the allowance of some American films was the acceptance by SED theorists of the possibility of producing art under capitalism that reflected the values and interests of the working class. For SED theorists, critical realist art could, and was, produced under capitalism, and thus was acceptable for the masses to experience.[60]

The effects of this policy were such that the populace of the SBZ had no official access to Western cultural exports. In practice, however, those who lived in Berlin routinely consumed Western culture via their easy access to the Western occupied zones in the city. The accessibility of Western films, combined with ease with which Western radio signals penetrated the SBZ meant that the planned isolation of the populace from purported corrupting influences failed. Citizens in the SBZ and later GDR consumed, with varying degrees of regularity, Western produced cultural products. Western-produced films presented a challenge to both SMAD and SED authorities, in that audiences appeared to like them more than Soviet produced films.[61] Ideologically speaking this was deeply problematic, in that it countered the educational lessons of Soviet and DEFA films, and instead exposed German filmgoers to fantasy and escapism.[62] SED and SMAD authorities viewed escapist films as detrimental to proper social and individual formation. Instead of

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[59] Poiger, Uta. *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, p. 32.
[60] One of the major theorists of the acceptability of critical realist art was the Hungarian Marxist theorist Georgy Lukács who fell out of favor in the Eastern Bloc after the failure of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. For more information see Brockmann, Stephen *The Writer's State: Constructing East German Literature 1945-1959*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015.p. 312-319.
[61] Poiger, 32.
[62] Poiger, 32.

confronting and assessing the challenges of life, the viewers of escapist films would remove themselves from their realities for a period of time.

1948: A Purge at DEFA

SED actions in this period were not just targeted toward external ideological oversight over the populace, but also internal party control. The most glaring example of SED power over film was the removal of Alfred Lindemann as the head of DEFA by Anton Ackermann. In response to his elimination from DEFA Lindemann reached out to Ackermann and appealed, specifically to him, to reinstate him to the party, as a member in good standing, and to allow him to resume control over DEFA.[63] It was not just Ackermann's authority within the ZK that led Lindemann to approach him; Ackermann was named by Fritz Dahlem as the man behind the purge and the one who controlled the fate of Lindemann.[64] An internal SED memo from August of 1948 further names Ackermann as the party responsible for Lindemann's removal, but also clarifies that Otto Grotewohl passed a note to Ackermann at a committee meeting stating that Lindemann, "should be removed from the party".[65] Grotewohl thus used Ackermann, who was clearly trusted by Lindemann, to depose Lindemann, whom according to Gniffke, a ZK functionary and former assistant to Grotewohl in the SPD, Grotewohl disliked.[66] Publicly, however,

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[63] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An die Personal-Abteilung beim Vorstand der S.E.D. (Durchshlag an den Gen. Franz Dahlen) 15. September 1948, p. 88.
[64] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 Abtlg. Personal-Politik 17 9 1948 p. 89.
[65] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An Gen. Dahlem, Gen. Gniffke 20 August 1948, p. 90.
[66] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An Gen. Dahlem, Gen. Gniffke 20 August 1948, p. 91, and for more information on Gniffke see Reimann, Olaf. *Wer war Wer in der DDR?*. Berlin: Ch. Links, Verlag, 2006, p. 307.

SBZ authorities were blamed for the removal of Lindemann, and Neues Deutchland reported that Soviet authorities removed Lindemann as head of DEFA as part of a crackdown on corruption.[67] This series of events exemplifies the SED's ability to control matters at DEFA, and further illustrates the precarious situation of DEFA functionaries.

The reasons for Lindemann's purge given in later published documents differ from those given in internal SED reports at the time. In his history of DEFA published in 1971, for example, Alber Wilkening, a major figure at DEFA from the 1940s through the 1970s, and who eventually headed its Feature Film Studio, reported that Lindemann was removed for lack of political and personal self-improvement.[68] The American historian Joshua Feinstein interprets Wilkening's account of Lindemann's purge as unwillingness on the part of Lindemann to properly run the studio in a socialist manner.[69] Feinstein, building on Wilkening's portrayal of the events, portrays Lindemann's removal as an example of the party intervening in order to strengthen DEFA. He assumes that all party interactions were based on logical decisions, and that personal feelings did not come into play when making important decisions. The SED documents, however, reveal that the purge had a strong personal element based on Grotewohl's dislike of Lindemann.

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[67] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An Gen. Dahlem, Gen. Gniffke 20 August 1948, p. 91.

[68] Wilkening, Albert. *Betriebsgeschichte des VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme*, p. 71.

[69] Feinstein, Joshua *Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in East German Cinema 1949-1989.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, p. 29. A similar interpretation is presented by Dagmar Schlitty in *Zwischen Regie und Regime*, and Schlitty goes so far as to argue that the reasons behind Lindemann's purge are only found in Wilkening's work and that explanations are never found among SED documents.

Moreover, the role of Ackermann in the removal of Lindemann serves to show the importance of ZK offices within the SED hierarchy, and within the functional power structures of the SBZ. The party could, if it so chose, remove a significant figure from an institution that was, at least in technically, not run by the party. Thus, while the SMAD officially acknowledged all parties within the SBZ, it is clear that the SED could, within some boundaries, act as the leaders of the SBZ by this point.

The purge of Alfred Lindemann for largely arbitrary reasons underscores the spreading power of the SED within the SBZ and within cultural institutions, such as DEFA, created after 1945. The Party collaborated with Soviet authorities to tar Lindemann as corrupt before arresting him and removing him from power, but in reality orchestrated the purge, at least in part because Otto Grotewohl did not like Lindemann. The corruption charges were entirely fabricated and Lindemann was actually responsible for DEFA's early financial successes. [70] In fact, despite his supposed corruption, only a few months later in January 1949 Lindemann was later put in charge of the financial offices of the publishing house Culture and Progress, which was the publishing arm of the Society for German and Soviet Friendship.[71] As Norman Naimark argues, the Society for German and Soviet Friendship played a critical role in the eyes of Soviet authorities.[72] Given the extremely important political role vis-à-vis the SED and Soviet occupation authorities, it is clear that

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[70] SAPMO BA/ DY 30 IV 2 9.06 201 Protokoll Über die Sitzung des Aufsichträtes der Deutschen Film G.b.m.H 11 November 1947, p. 10.
[71] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An den Genossen Anton Ackermann Zentralsekretariat der SED von Alfred Lindemann, 3 January 1949 p. 103.
[72] Naimark, Norman. *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation 1945-1949*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 416.

Lindemann had to have the trust of the highest levels of the SED and SMAD in order to take over the financial offices of the publishing firm tied to this group. The trust placed in Lindemann suggests that neither alleged corruption, nor alleged political inadequacy, explains why he was deposed from his DEFA post in 1948.

Having accepted this new post Lindemann did not give up on his attempt to regain his old one. He wrote to Ackermann in an effort to prove his loyalty to the party. From his new position at the publishing house Lindemann explained he would, "put great value on ensuring the health of the economic conditions of the publisher, and that the economic leadership will be free of dissent."[73] Lindemann's emphasis here on his hard work for the party in this new (arbitrary) position was clearly intended to underline his loyalty and suggest his worthiness to return to his former position.

The theme of removing figures from prominent positions and pushing them to a lower level, but still functionally important, roles is one that repeated itself time and again during the Ulbricht era. As I will show later, the dismissal of Anton Ackermann from the ZK in 1948, the imprisonment of Walter Janka in 1957, and the blackballing of Frank Beyer in 1965 all followed the same pattern. The disgraced and demoted former functionary and/or artist was moved to a position that utilized his skills at a lower level and in a less public role. This back and forth between pushing a figure out of power and of then bringing him back into the fold of the party, but with reduced influence, shows that the party was unwilling to go as far as

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[73] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 An den Genossen Anton Ackermann Zentralsekretariat der SED von Alfred Lindemann, 3 Januar 1949 p. 103.

Stalin in his effort to control cultural production and purge "errant" cultural creators and functionaries. The SED deposed, but only to a lower level, not absolutely. It still tried to take advantage of skills and expertise that were critical for the interests of the party. Functionally this served to remind anyone, outside of Ulbricht himself, that they were expendable and that they could be removed for any reason the party produced. These strictures remained in place for the rest of the history of DEFA, and served as a permanent reminder to filmmakers, and party officials, that they served in a precarious situation.

Ackermann, after his dismissal from the ZK Culture Office, became a prominent functionary at the Ministry of Culture (MfK), and for a time ran the film office there. Walter Janka, after his release from prison became a dramaturge at DEFA. Frank Beyer, despite being blacklisted from directing after the 11th Plenum returned to direct one of East Germany's most successful, and most critically acclaimed, films *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar). These rehabilitations are all examples of the necessary balance between the desire of party heads, most notably Ulbricht and Grotewohl, to eliminate opponents or those who they felt had inappropriately challenged the party, and the dearth of people in the SBZ and later GDR with particular skills.

Lindemann's purge from DEFA is notable for another reason. It shows the direct connection between DEFA and the ZK. While officially existing as an independent and later government controlled studio the reality was that DEFA policy emanated directly from the ZK, and during the period of the early 1950s from

the Politburo.[74] The ability of the ZK to directly influence the hiring and firing of studio heads, as well as the effective blacklisting of directors, reveals the status of DEFA as an arm of ZK policy.[75] While DEFA made films without having to directly consult with the ZK, the overall direction of the studio, as well as the broad policies that guided the studio all came from the ZK, and no films were kept in distribution that were opposed by the majority of ZK members.[76] As a result the political and ideological foundations of the SED were directly related to early DEFA films and the structures of DEFA at its foundation.

Party control over the production process extended to ideological oversight over the content of films. The values of SED and SMAD authorities stemmed from their disapproval of apolitical interpretations of art, and their ideals came through via an important cultural conference. During the First Cultural Day of the SED in May 1948 Prof. Deiters, an SED theorist, criticized the existence of apolitical members of the intelligentsia.[77] Building on the concepts first laid out in the 1946 conference regarding intelligentsia, the speakers at the 1948 Culture Day stressed the need for political culture, and a politicized intelligentsia. Ackermann reiterated his argument about the division between the intelligentsia and the working class

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[74] DEFA was founded as an independent stock company, but was reorganized in 1953 into a People's Owned Industry (VEB) and thus was fully under the control of the GDR. DEFA answered to the Politburo's Film Commission from 1949 until 1954. For more information see *Film und Lichtspielwesen in der DDR* by Günter Jordan Berlin: DEFA Stiftung, 2008.

[75] Frank Beyer's blacklisting from work at DEFA came as a direct result of the ZK's response to his 1965 film *Spur der Steine* (Trace of the Stones).

[76] Films such as Beyer's *Spur der Steine* received limited releases before being pulled by the ZK.

[77] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 92.

that he first discussed in 1946, "reactionary measures, have in the past, driven a wedge between the working class and the intelligentsia."[78] Ackermann further argued that it was the Marxist working class that had the desire, and ability, to permanently close the divide between the working class and the intelligentsia.[79] These two premises, that in the past the intelligentsia has promoted "reactionary" ideals and that only a Marxist working class could unify the workers and the intelligentsia, pushed a clear message to the listener. That is, that the intelligentsia was not to be trusted, in that all "reactionary" thoughts stemmed from an inherently anti-socialist thought process. This served to clamp down on ties with intellectuals who did not openly embrace the party's methods, and simultaneously to encourage all members of the working class to fully embrace the party's platform. Additionally to further the success of the closure of this divide, the intelligentsia had a role to play as well. Introducing concepts that would eventually become a major policy of the GDR, Ackermann called on the intelligentsia to visit factories and worksites and to learn from workers there.[80]

Ackermann's goal was, in broad terms, echoed by the 1959 Bitterfelder Weg, that called on artists to go to factories and farms in order to lean from the sources of culture in the GDR. At the same time, the desire to have the intelligentsia model their actions on those of workers, and to directly interact with workers in order to

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[78] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 40
[79] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 41.
[80] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 52.

learn from them and to thereby produce socialist culture derived from earlier Soviet cultural experiments. The cooption of the radical Proletkult movement by Soviet authorities in 1926 led to the incorporation of some of its more acceptable ideals. [81] The key concept was that proletarians were the primary source of authentic socialist culture within society. The Proletkult movement itself, however, pushed too far by arguing that proletarians were the sole source of authentic culture.[82] Soviet authorities, in their incorporation of the Proletkult movement into the emerging state cultural institutions, promoted the concept of proletarians as the primary source of authentic culture. However, they argued that both the intelligentsia and peasants were capable of producing socialist culture, and that in working alongside proletarians these groups would help to produce culture that would reflect the realities of socialism in the USSR. [83] These values outlived the 1920s era, and continued to be the source of class analysis for the function of culture in the USSR. Ackermann, who went to party school in Moscow in the 1930s, experienced these values and repeated them, with some adjustments, in the 1948 Cultural Day.

It is far from surprising that the SED built on Soviet cultural policies and ideology given that many of those who led the party in the 1940s went into exile in the USSR after the rise of the Nazis, and as a result were trained in Soviet party schools. The transfer of Soviet ideology to the SBZ, and eventually the GDR, thus

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[81] Mally, Lynn. *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1990, p. 230.
[82] Mally, 229.
[83] Mally, 230.

originated with the experiences of SED leaders in Soviet party schools in the 1930s and 1940s. In bringing Soviet ideology into the SBZ SED officials did not parrot Soviet authorities, but rather acted on their own beliefs and ideas, as they were informed by experiences in the USSR. Thus, Ackerman's discussion of the necessity of the intelligentsia working alongside proletarians was not an imitation of Soviet policies, but rather stemmed from his own beliefs. The similarity between his ideas and those common in the Soviet Union was informed by his experiences there, and was not the result of Soviet authorities mandating policy for the SED. Instead, the leadership of the SED acted on their own interpretations of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin as they implemented, and crafted cultural policies for the SBZ and the later GDR. In sum, the leading ideological figures within the SED took their training in the Soviet Union and applied it to the realities of the SBZ, and later GDR, and in so doing crafted a similar, albeit independent, line of cultural thought.

Ackermann presented the necessity of the intelligentsia working alongside the proletariat as a natural occurrence, one that came from the very nature of cultural production. He argued that, "cultural goods are nothing more than the products of solidified and preserved manual and intellectual work."[84] In practical terms this meant that manual and intellectual labor underlay the production of cultural goods, and that thereby cultural work could not exist without manual and intellectual labor, and should be viewed as inherently linked to both. Ackermann hereby unified base and superstructure within Marxist theory, and stated that

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[84] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 32

cultural goods did not reflect the material conditions within which they were produced, but instead material work actually produced cultural goods. This in turn made cultural goods, and cultural workers, part of the base rather than the reflective superstructure. Cultural producers were, thereby, workers in the same sense that factory workers were. The only difference, for Ackermann, was that cultural producers worked primarily with their intellect to produce whereas other workers produced primarily as a result of physical labor. Both, however, were labor and as a result the intelligentsia that was responsible for cultural products were laborers. This conclusion follows from Ackermann's definition of culture as "the physical and intellectual activities and those material and non-material goods that are acquired from excess labor, furthermore those societal institutions that serve the greater development of humanity."[85] The key term in this definition is "excess labor" in that Ackermann delineates between standard labor, that which builds society materially, and excess labor, which builds society spiritually and intellectually. Culture thus would, for Ackermann, act in a complimentary role to manual labor. When combined with his prior discussion of cultural products, a clearer definition of culture, from the perspective of the SED, emerges. Culture, thus, would be that which emerged from the product of excess [überschüssiger] intellectual and manual labor, and would not be a necessary act of labor, but still one that was part of the process of labor. While complex, Ackermann's assertion was essentially that culture exists on both an intellectual and material level. He furthered this discussion later

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[85] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 33

when he argued that culture had a very real material basis in society.[86] Moreover, Ackermann's discussion of culture inherently serving the betterment of humanity provided a basis for critiquing and attacking capitalist culture as not actual culture. This allowed for SED theorists to better juxtapose their cultural products against those from the West and to denounce the escapist culture of Western society as inauthentic, insofar as it does not serve the betterment of mankind. Ackermann's definition also served to provide a broad guideline for cultural producers within the SBZ and later GDR.

Within the context of the SBZ in 1948 Ackermann's statements served as foundational definitions for cultural production. They helped to further the discussion as to what exactly culture would look like and how it would function within the SBZ. Ideologically speaking this was an important task, in that the SED needed to provide a framework within which cultural producers could act. In defining culture Ackermann both provided that framework, and ensured that producers were aware of the material basis for culture within the SED's ideology. The ideological framework provided by the party, however, remained vague and allowed for broad creative spaces for cultural producers, in part due to the ongoing debates among the leadership of the party as to the nature of the party's values and goals. This vague definition, alongside the party's perpetually unclear discourse on the nature of Socialist Realism, proved to be a thorn in the side of DEFA filmmakers well into the 1960s. While Ackermann provided a somewhat clear definition of

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[86] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 33.

what culture was, he did not make it clear enough to provide direct boundaries for cultural producers. Instead the definition of culture as an excess of labor that provides service to humanity allowed for the party to determine the validity of cultural products on an individual basis, and thus could couch their criticisms of particular products within the broad definitions of culture. The broadness of this definition was critical for the party in its control over DEFA and of cultural production as a whole, insofar as the party itself never had a completely clear internal definition of proper culture.

Moreover, the emergence of this definition as early as 1948 indicates that the SED desired, from the beginning, to define acceptable parameters for cultural production. The nature of the SED's ideology necessitated defined, or at least semi-defined, boundaries for acceptable cultural production. The reason for this was that the SED could not simply state that cultural production should exist, but rather due to the belief within their own ideology that the party could, and should, guide society, the party had to provide this "guidance" in terms of cultural production. Their definition of proper cultural production allowed for a dichotomous juxtaposition with capitalist cultural products. In turn, this would allow the party to attack works that it viewed as suspect or improper under the guise of "guidance" and "support", while simultaneously upholding a borderline unknowable standard. Furthermore, it helped to encourage cultural producers to act in such a way as to create products that would serve the further creation of a new society. As such, the definition provided a framework for cultural production, and ensured that approved cultural products served the needs of the emerging socialist society and future state.

This definition additionally worked to establish proper cultural production in such a form as to move beyond an antithetical relationship with Nazi art, and into a more self contained place within SED ideology. This would mean, for the SED and for DEFA filmmakers, that proper art could not just be that which was not Nazi art, but instead that which met the standards of the party.

In setting up what culture should do, rather than simply what it was not, Ackermann helped to establish a semi-functional cultural framework for cultural producers in the SBZ that carried over into the GDR after its founding the following year. In discussing and defining culture Ackerman established and publicized already accepted and understood SED norms in regard to the role and function of culture within society.[87] The inherent link between authentic culture and positive social activities grounded itself in productive relationship between culture within socialism and the future socialist society. For culture to have a productive basis and nature it would, per SED ideology, have to break with the classical Marxist-Leninist definition of culture as superstructural, and thereby reflective, rather than productive. As I have shown earlier, however, the necessities of constructing a socialist society, while simultaneously producing authentic socialist culture meant that the works had to be viewed as socially productive.

Building on his discussion of culture and the relationship between cultural producers and the intelligentsia, Ackermann further discussed the nature of freedom as it existed under socialism and capitalism. He argued that freedom under

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[87] The fact that Ackermann's discussion took place at a major event indicates that the concepts were preapproved within the party, and did not deviate from accepted party beliefs.

socialism, and within the context of Marxist-Leninist ideology was an authentic form that merges the freedom of the individual with the freedom of the society.[88] In so doing Ackermann delineated between socialist and capitalist freedom through the lens of the relationship between the individual and society. In linking individual and social freedom Ackermann worked to promote, and present, a belief in the need to focus on societal good and the needs of society as a whole. This was presented as a counter to the "decadent" capitalist focus on limited freedom of the individual.[89] For the historian David Pike, individual versus social freedom was a false comparison, and is in turn representative of the SED's desire to constrain artistic action and part of a broader desire to control the populace.[90] Pike links this discourse to the broader push for political centralization in 1948, and as a part of the SED's attempt to control the populace.[91] Pike's assessment of the policies stemming from the 1948 Cultural Day as largely rooted in political centralization and control fails to address the policies on their own terms, but rather overlays the theoretical approach of totalitarianism over the policies. In doing this Pike ignores the perception of freedom that existed for the SED and its supporters, and does little to truly address how freedom existed conceptually within the SBZ. For Ackermann, and the rest of the SED leadership, the production of, in their view, authentic culture was both a social good and a social necessity.

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[88] SAPMO/ DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 28
[89] SAPMO/ DY 30 IV 2 1.01 89 Stenographischen Niederschrift den Ersten Kulturtag der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei 5. Mai 1948 p. 29.
[90] Pike, p. 458.
[91] Pike, p. 448.

Socialist culture was not simply the product of party planning and declarations made at conferences and meetings, but rather something that, at least in part, emanated from the desires of cultural producers in the SBZ and later GDR. These efforts provided the fundamental basis of most cultural products in the SBZ and GDR, and are necessary for fully understanding the nature of said products. In addition to the existence of party cells throughout various cultural institutions, there were also independent groups of socialist individuals that worked to produce socialist art. The largest of this was the *Kulturbund zur Demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (The Cultural Federation for the Democratic Renewal of Germany), which had close ties to the SED, but which remained partially independent from the party.[92] In addition, particularly under the SBZ and in the early years of the GDR, there were smaller semi-independent groups that formed in order to address the production of socialist cultural products.

1949: The Party's Cultural Influence Grows

In February 1949 the members of the working society of socialist artists at DEFA held a meeting in order to discuss recent successes and failures as well as the production plan for that year. Slatan Dudow, Walter Janka, Kurt Maetzig, and Albert Wilkening among others attended the meeting.[93] The record of the meeting, while not a stenographic report, nevertheless provides some evidence of how those in attendance responded to the issues discussed. In their discussions of three recent films, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), *Träum nicht Anette*(Do not dream Anette), and *Das*

[92] Brockmann, *The Writer's State,* p. 42-43.
[93] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Protokoll der Sitzung der „Arbeitsgemeinsschaft sozilisitsicher Künstler" der DEFA von 16. Februar 1949 p. 36.

Mädchen Christine (The young girl Christine), the members of the group openly paid attention to the values of the party and the party's reactions to the films.[94] Maetzig worried about the negative reactions to the quality of the three films by the public and how it would reflect on the values held by DEFA filmmakers in the eyes of the party leadership, acknowledging that, "we cannot offer a guarantee that we will make good films".[95] Maetzig said that the central problem was the lack of competent directors. He added, "we could not find anyone who wanted to make the film [*Die Brücke*], unfortunately the writer had to film it himself".[96] Again, here one sees evidence of the difficulties in finding competent experts in various industries. While the practical issues that were identified by the members at the meeting largely stayed within DEFA, the ideological and political ideas that they identified were also noted by the ZK, and were, at least in part, addressed in a communiqué to DEFA.

Communication through communiqués between the ZK and DEFA occurred throughout the history of DEFA. The function of these communiqués was to provide DEFA with more direct guidance for its work. The ZK took, at least to some degree, a hands-on approach to overseeing production at DEFA. Members of the ZK communicated with DEFA supervisors about the nature of DEFA films, as well as important issues regarding the ability of DEFA to properly produce ideologically

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[94] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Protokoll der Sitzung der „Arbeitsgemeinsschaft sozilisitsicher Künstler" der DEFA von 16. Februar 1949 p. 37.
[95] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Protokoll der Sitzung der „Arbeitsgemeinsschaft sozilisitsicher Künstler" der DEFA von 16. Februar 1949 p. 38
[96] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Protokoll der Sitzung der „Arbeitsgemeinsschaft sozilisitsicher Künstler" der DEFA von 16. Februar 1949 p. 38.

sound anti-fascist and socialist films.[97] The closeness of this relationship contradicts the control mechanisms that were laid out by David Bathrick in 1995. Bathrick posited that control, and importantly censorship, existed on four key levels including the "highest anonymous reaches of power."[98] This schema suggests that the artists were out of touch with high governmental officials who were making major decisions regarding censorship. This, however, was not the case, as is shown by the ZK directly contacting managers at DEFA in order to discuss their opinions about film production in general and about particular films. Throughout the lifespan of DEFA filmmakers were routinely in touch with the ZK, and at some points with the Politburo, as a means of discussing their role in regard to socialist and anti-fascist film production. In part this direct contact came from, as I already discussed, the nature of party structures at DEFA wherein ZK members were always involved in running the studio as a whole, and in particular the feature film studio. Moreover, the nature of the studio in which the heads of the various individual studios and of DEFA as a whole met with groups of artists to discuss plans for years, and certain films in particular, meant that filmmakers maintained close working relationships with high party officials.

The relationship between the ZK and DEFA was not just one of issuing instructions, but also of clarifying roles. The communiqué from the Cultural Office of the ZK in 1949 defined the role of filmmakers, stating that screenwriters were on

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[97] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erziehung gez. Heymann/Kaufmann Berlin, Juli 1949 p. 49.
[98] Bathrick, David. *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 38.

"the frontline of the resistance against enemy influences…"[99] Furthermore, the ZK authors charged screenwriters with focusing on new and successful developments in their society and reminding them that, "filming Marxist movies means creating films that correspond with societal truth." [100] The ZK further defined the role of dramaturges in regard to developing successful authors at DEFA.[101] Coming as part of a list of tasks and duties that included the two previous comments on the role and function of screenwriters, one can see the implicitly ideologically important role of dramaturges in the eyes of the ZK. The party assumed the dramaturgical task of producing successful works to involve creating works that were Marxist in nature and which would protect against the influences of imperialist sources outside of the SBZ. This assumption meant that dramaturges were assigned an important practical, and ideological, role in DEFA. In effect they are the ideological watchdogs of the party, or at the very least they are designated as ideological guides, in addition to their normative roles as aiding screenwriters and directors in the production of films.

In defining and establishing a set group that would serve in guiding the ideological production of films the party worked to create more normative structures for information and value transference. Establishing ideological guides turn served to aid in the full normalization of the political structures that existed

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[99] SAPMO DY 30 IV2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erzihung gez. Heymann/Kaufmann Berlin, Juli 1949 49.
[100] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erzihung gez. Heymann/Kaufmann Berlin, Juli 1949 p. 50
[101] SAPMO DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Zentralsekretariat der SED Abteilung Kultur und Erzihung gez. Heymann/Kaufmann Berlin, Juli 1949 p. 50.

within, and alongside of, DEFA. Establishing these roles was important, particularly by July 1949, due to the changing political climate within the SBZ. With the emergence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as an independent state in May 1949, the creation of a Soviet backed state in the East was only a matter of time. In early September the leaders of the SED, including Walter Ulbricht, had met with Stalin in order to discuss the creation of an independent state in what was then the SBZ.[102] The purpose of these discussions was to figure out not just the means by which a state would be created, but also the ways in which the SED would work alongside Soviet authorities to sell the state to those living in the SBZ.[103] In many ways the very existence of this state came in response to both the creation of the FRG, as well as the election of Konrad Adenauer as the chancellor of the FRG. The emergence of the GDR from these discussions in October 1949 elevated the SED from the party that had the closest ties to the Soviet authorities in the SBZ, to the ruling party of an independent state. Practically speaking, these changes did little to alter the relationship between the SED and DEFA.

Shortly before the foundation of the GDR the status of DEFA as an officially independent organization was altered. In September of 1949 DEFA went from being a joint stock company to a party owned *Zentrag*, thus ending its semi-official independent status.[104] In reality, the creation of the GDR altered DEFA's status only

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[102] Loth, Wilfred. *Stalin's Unwanted Children: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*. New York, NY: Palgrave Press, 2002, p. 118.
[103] Loth, p. 118.
[104] Heimann, Thomas. *DEFA, Künstler und SED-Kulturpolitik: Zum Verhältnis von Kulturpolitik und Filmproduktion in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1959*. Berlin: Vistas Verlag Gmbh, 1994, p. 105.

nominally in that the creation of the *Ministerium für Volksbildung* (Ministry for National Education) that controlled cultural policy for the emerging GDR, replaced the *Abteilung für Volksbildung* (Office for National Education) that existed in the SBZ. This transition was, in reality, a merely formal transition from an office that was run by the SED to a government office run by loyal SED members, and which answered to an SED run government. Despite the lack of functional changes in regard to DEFA's status, the ZK saw this as a moment to assert their control over the studio and to reaffirm the role of DEFA within the broad plan for the creation of socialism in the GDR. In part this was the result of the desire for the ZK, and the SED as a whole, to assert their authority over the nascent GDR.

Politically this authority was a necessity for the SED. Their disappointing results in all of the elections that were held in the SBZ, meant that they needed to show the citizens of the new GDR that they were the leaders of the state and society.[105] SED leaders understood that at the local level they did not have complete support, and as a result had to, at least to some degree, win over the populace to their side. This was, in the political realm, the continuation of a series of policies that originated in late 1945 and continued into the 1950s. As historian Mark Allinson has shown, there was limited direct political support for the SED in the 1940s and early 1950s.[106] This situation meant that the SED had to work to ensure their control over the territory of the GDR, as well as to guarantee that those who

[105] Schroeder, p. 78.
[106] Allinson, p. 49.

worked in official, and semi-official, state capacities were loyal to the plans of the party.

The guarantees of party loyalty were based in the ideology of the SED, and the desire of the party to guide the people of the GDR. Much like as existed in the SBZ the guidance of the SED penetrated all levels of the GDR's society and was found in all social categories and groups. Disseminating guiding principles and policies was critical for the SED in their push not only to establish legitimacy internally, but also to challenge the legitimacy of the FRG. Information and ideological direction coming from the SED served a secondary purpose of working against remnants of Nazi thought found among the populace. Allinson argues that the most pressing ideological issue facing the SED at the time was the disillusionment and indifference of the populace in regard to the party.[107] Ideologically speaking political neutrality was completely unacceptable and represented a direct threat to the success of the party. As I have previously shown the party was extremely concerned with the nature of political neutrality, and even explicitly rejected the concept of neutrality in regard to the struggle with imperialism. From this is it clear that the indifference of the masses in regard to the party was a troubling development that, both ideologically and practically, had to be dealt with by the SED.[108] It must be noted that, while the SED sought the full penetration of all social groups and organizations in society it did not, at least in the 1940s, desire to do so, or attempt to do so, via violence. The dictatorship that emerged in the GDR in the 1950s and later on was

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[107] Allinson, p. 49.
[108] Schroeder, p. 79.

one of violence, but of a restrained version of violence particularly when compared to other states in the Eastern Bloc in the 1950s and 1960s. This is not to excuse the crimes committed by the GDR, or in the SBZ by the SMAD, but rather to contextualize the methods of control utilized by the SED before they had complete independent control.

In order to fully ensure proper loyalty to the party and its programs, both internally and externally, the leadership of the SED came up with a series of directives to ensure proper order and organization within the party down to the lowest party cells. Only weeks after the creation of the GDR the small secretariat of the ZK met in order to discuss problems with party loyalty and the degree to which party members, in particular those who had lived in the West during the war, could be trusted to disseminate and support ideology. The small secretariat, whose members included such party heavyweights as Walter Ulbricht, Fritz Dahlem, Fred Oelßner, and Hermann Axen, decreed that all party members, state employees, and members of mass organizations who had spent more than three months in the West or Yugoslavia during the war had to undergo a review from the regional control commissions.[109] This review process underscores the distrust of the SED leadership for anyone who was, for an extended period of time, exposed to ideology different from that of the party. While the same could be said about everyone who stayed in Germany during the war, the implicit fear on the part of the party is not just that

[109] SAPMO DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Protokoll Nr. 57 Der Sitzung des Kleinen Sekretariats am 17. Oktober 1949. The reason for Yugoslavia being included in the list alongside all Western countries is the split between Tito and Stalin that emerged in the latter portion of the 1940s.

these people were exposed to ideas other than those approved by the SED, but that they were turned explicitly against the party and its allies in the USSR, and thus could act as agents of purported imperialist powers. The same cannot be said for those who were exposed to Nazi ideology, insofar as there was no longer a Nazi state to which these individuals could answer.

These statements by the small secretariat were part of a broader conceptualization by the party that anyone who had not always been a loyal member of the SED, or earlier of the KPD, was a potential threat to the party. While the former KPD leaders of the SED had always held these sentiments, they came to the fore once the SED had a secure hold over the SBZ and was ensured of power in the zone. This extended not just to those who had lived in the West or Yugoslavia during the war, but also to all former members of the SPD. In effect, this meant that a significant number of party members, as well as those who were supportive of the ideals of the party, were deemed potential threats by the party leadership. For filmmakers at DEFA, these policies set an, at times, impossible to meet standard in that past decisions of view of the filmmakers could be used against them in their then present circumstances. This operated as a means of containing the activities of filmmakers, and others in the GDR, by using past activities as leverage against those who pushed against the boundaries of acceptable behaviors and ideas.

Further, the small secretariat declared that it was the function of the party organization to raise the ideological status of members and candidates in order to,

"improve the operation of the governmental apparatus".[110] By linking ideological understanding with the proper function of the state the SED leadership was providing a practical measure for encouraging the study and understanding of the ideas and beliefs of the party. To fully establish the link between ideology and the success of the state, the small secretariat further declared that party members were responsible for correcting errors in governmental ministries and with the creation of party schools within the upper levels of ministries and government organizations.[111] Taken alongside the exhortation from the small secretariat that the party must establish cells in every ministry and industry in the GDR, one can see how the party worked to guarantee that it had a presence throughout the GDR.[112] The desired combination of omnipresent party cells, as well as party schools at the highest levels of ministries, set up the SED to bring the masses into the party, with the aim of eliminating the indifference of people towards the party. The approval of the populace would, in turn, hopefully serve to eliminate the existence of politically neutral individuals in the GDR, particularly within the government and in key industries.

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[110] SAPMO DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 57 vom 17. Oktober 1949
Richtlinien für die Arbeit und den Aufbau der Parteiorganisation im Regierungsapparat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik no pagination
[111] SAPMO DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 57 vom 17. Oktober 1949
Richtlinien für die Arbeit und den Aufbau der Parteiorganisation im Regierungsapparat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik no pagination.
[112] SAPMO DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 57 vom 17. Oktober 1949
Richtlinien für die Arbeit und den Aufbau der Parteiorganisation im Regierungsapparat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik no pagination.

As a means of further ensuring the proper ideological development of the members of governmental ministries, the small secretariat established a relationship between the ZK and all of the state ministries. The small secretariat laid out a scheme by which each governmental ministry would be tied to a specific department of the ZK, therein allowing party leaders who possessed backgrounds related to state ministries to work alongside state employees.[113] In so doing, the SED established the necessary structures for the creation of a fully functional party-state. These ties allowed the party to oversee all state operations and to, at least in theory, guarantee that the state operated within the parameters established by the party leadership.

The dual structures found in the party-state were directly mimicked in the control structures found at DEFA. After shifting from officially a joint stock company to a party run institution, DEFA fully fell under the auspices of the party-state. Studio heads, who were almost invariably ZK members, had to listen to the ZK in regard to the creation of films, as well as to state institutions, initially the MfV and later the MfK. These state institutions exercised official control over DEFA, and to some degree did control what occurred in its studios. However, these decisions were made by active, and often high ranking, party members, and never contradicted the ideas that emanated from the ZK. The implication of this for film production at DEFA was extremely important. Those who approved films and who

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[113] SAPMO DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 57 vom 17. Oktober 1949
Richtlinien für die Arbeit und den Aufbau der Parteiorganisation im Regierungsapparat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik no pagination.

played important roles at all stages of production were expected to be party members, or at minimum to express loyalty to the party. While it is true that the SED complained well into the 1960s about the lack of proper party education at DEFA, the very structure of the film industry in the GDR was one that sought to coordinate production with the will of the party.

Structurally, and functionally, this would serve to create a system in which filmmakers could be trusted to create films without direct party interference. Rather, the filmmakers themselves would serve to act in the interests of the party, and the state, out of a sincere belief in the correctness of the party and its values. This goal, however, was never fully realized, and bureaucrats and high party officials often treated even loyal party members at DEFA with suspicion. Mistrust between party officials and filmmakers, who in many cases acted as low-level party officials, hindered film development beginning in the 1940s and lasting well into the 1960s. The basis of these trust issues was the way that the party-state interacted with DEFA, and the state institutions that oversaw film production. Initially, DEFA responded to the Politburo Film Commission, and only secondarily to the MfV. As a result, the party viewed itself as the ultimate arbiter on film issues, and effectively removed DEFA from the emerging state cultural apparatus. After the founding of the MfK in 1954 DEFA was officially under the purview of a number of different film offices, but simultaneously still had to respond to the ZK.

From its very founding DEFA operated largely under the auspices of the party, and in particular by 1949 DEFA was fully responsible to the SED. While there were many instances of clashes between DEFA and the SED, there were no

functional cases of outright rebellion in which DEFA worked to act fully outside of the control of the party.[114] Yet the historiography about these structures, however, largely ignores the place of the ZK, and thereby the party, in DEFA, and instead describes it as a state-run institution and focuses on the role of individual filmmakers in their struggles with the state.[115] The interrelationship between the ZK and DEFA has, effectively, been written out of much of the historiography in favor of analyses that focus on the role of individual filmmakers and the relationship between DEFA and the state. [116] The absence of the ZK, in particular in light of the emergence of the party-state in 1949 with the creation of the GDR, is glaring and effectively limits current scholarship in regard to its ability to fully explore the nature of DEFA film. Importantly while the party and the state were merged, and the party-state did exist, the function and role of the party, outside of the state, allowed for individuals within the party to experience privileges and positions of power that did not exist for those within the state. For DEFA filmmakers this meant that they could join the party and work within the party to express themselves in ways that they could not had they taken up state posts. It is thus necessary to delineate, to the degree possible, between party and state interactions with DEFA, and to highlight the continuous interactions between the party and DEFA. The end of 1949 was, for

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[114] While the 1940s went without any points of serious contention, the 1950s and 1960s saw numerous instances of contention between DEFA and the SED that I will detail later in my dissertation.

[115] See discussions of DEFA control structures in Berghahn, Feinstein, and Schittly, Dagmar. *Zwischen Regie und Regime: die Filmpolitik der SED im Spiegel der DEFA-Produktionen*. Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2002.

[116] Even works like Schittly's which ostensibly focus on the role of the regime and directors at DEFA put a greater emphasis on the state than it does on the party.

DEFA, an important and exciting time. The actions of the Small Secretariat served to ensure the emergence of a fully functioning party-state broadly modeled on that which existed in the USSR. As a critical state, and party, institution DEFA was placed at the nexus of party-state plans. Existing under the auspices of both a state ministry and the ZK, as well as offices of the Politburo, ensured that DEFA would act in accordance to the strictures of the party-state.

By the end of 1949 it was clear that DEFA would, albeit loosely, follow along with the emerging guidelines of the state and the party. How this would fully play out, however, was not clear. The degree to which the party would exert active control over film production, rather than the loose control that it exerted in the SBZ was up for question. Moreover, the willingness of party members at DEFA to fully embrace the often vague ideas emanating from the ZK and Politburo was not yet understood. It was also not clear, particularly to those who worked at DEFA, how the Politburo would guide and control production and production schedules at DEFA. These issues, especially the role of the Politburo at DEFA would come to a head in the first few years of the 1950s as the GDR, and the SED, worked to create a functioning socialist society against the backdrop of a still partially destroyed society and the emerging Cold War between the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

***Unser Täglich Brot*: Ideology in Action**

Slatan Dudow's 1949 film *Unser Täglich Brot* [Our Daily Bread] offers a case study of the relationship between SED ideology and DEFA around the time of the formation of the GDR. Dudow was a well-known SED member, and as well as an active participant in socialist cultural groups, including the Working Society of

Socialist Artists at DEFA.[117] His participation in, and presence at, that organization's meeting in February 1949 indicates that he was exposed to, and presumably aware of, the movement of SED thought to DEFA filmmakers, in particular via the discussion of value content of films. While Dudow did not write the script, that was not necessary in order for him to have a major influence on the values propagated by the film. The SED's discussion of roles at DEFA had made clear to DEFA artists in all production roles that the values within films came through via the actions of directors.[118] Thus it is not surprising that Dudow's support for the party and its goals came through in the film. Dudow could expect to be credited for the correct content of his films and faulted for any putative ideological inadequacy.[119]

Set in 1946 *Unser Täglich Brot* follows the Weber family in the ruins of Berlin. The central characters represent the distinction between the younger and older generations of Germans in the wake of Nazism's defeat. Karl Weber, the patriarch of the family, was the treasurer at a factory consortium for decades prior to the war,

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[117] Dudow was also known as the director of the 1932 film *Kühle Wampe oder Wem gehört der Welt* [Kulhe Wampe or who owns the world], a production in which he worked with both Hans Eisler and Bertolt Brecht. His support for Communist thought prior to the rise of Nazism meant that Dudow existed in a privileged level of an Old Comrade after the war.

[118] This comes through not just in internal SED and DEFA discussions of the role of various positions at DEFA, but also through the implications of censorship of later films. The key targets of censorship activities, and those held most responsible for their actions, were the directors. Frank Beyer's removal from DEFA in 1965, as well as Konrad Wolf's interrogation by party officials after the creation of *Sonnensucher* in 1958, reveals that, for the party, the ideological content of the film came primarily from the director, and it is because of this that I will focus on the role, position, and beliefs of directors when I discuss films.

[119] While the party never directly targeted Dudow's work, his later film *Frauenschicksale* [Destinies of Women], 1952, was heavily criticized by citizens in the GDR for its portrayal of women.

and his attitudes represent the views of those who supported the economic structures of the past. His backward-looking attitudes are expressed less extremely by him than by his children. One son, Harry, who begins the film wearing a smoking jacket and lamenting his living situation and Marie who insists on going by the Anglicized Mary and will do anything to obtain luxury goods. Both Harry and Marie long for the luxuries of the past and eventually descend into depravity and criminality. Mary trades her body for luxury goods from men, and in a rejection of the ideological values of the SED, rejects labor or relationships. Harry attempts to get by via working as an assistant to an investor, who hoards necessities in an attempt to gain more money through inflating their value. Harry's association with someone who directly profits off the misery of others eventually falls apart when Harry cannot generate enough money. As a result Harry becomes destitute to the point that he mugs his own father for a loaf of bread.

Juxtaposed with these characters are those of Ernst and Inge. Ernst leads the reconstruction of the factory where his father used to work. After being fired from another factory for demanding wages that she was promised Inge ends up working alongside Ernst. Ernst, throughout the film, engages in ideological debates with his father, Karl. For Ernst the reconstruction of the factory is an act of collective production, in which the workers are able to, through their own manual power, produce goods without any capital backing. His theories represent the values of the SED, and his place in the film is that of a stand-in for an ideologically aware worker. After the workers finally rebuild the factory they face a new struggle as they try to gain enough raw materials and plans to build useful products. In the end, they are

supported by “the union”, a clear representation of the nascent Frei Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund [Free German Labor Federation], the official union of the GDR. With this material support, and through the additional aid of an engineer who lived with the Webers, they are able to produce tractors, and achieve their goal as an economically viable and useful factory.

As a film product, the film functions as a classic socialist realist film with a focus on the need for production. The need for, and correctness of, socialist production methods comes through throughout the film, but in particular in the debates between Karl and Ernst. Ernst’s representation of the working class goes so far as to include him paraphrasing Marx, and declaring that his father’s generation is buried and that all is needed is the coffin lid. This statement clearly references Marx’s comments that the proletarians are the gravediggers of the capitalist class. Karl, at the same time, wears fancy clothes, carries a pocket watch, and laments the collapse of his former industry. Ideologically he proposes a return to capitalism, and he mocks Ernst’s project, declaring that it is not possible to create a factory without massive capital financing. The success of the factory in the end, and the fact that Karl accepts a job as an accountant there, shows both the correctness of Ernst’s position, but also of the ability to incorporate elements of the former system into the new one, as long as they are willing to admit their incorrectness. It should be noted here, that while Karl laments the end of capitalism in the SBZ he never laments the collapse of the Nazi regime. His link to the past is thus a purely economic one, and not an ideological association with Nazism.

As a cultural product, the film functions as an educational discussion of the path of the SBZ and the ability of the workers to construct something new without the aid of outside groups. The viewer is encouraged to take the position of Ernst and to believe in the possibilities of a new system, and a new society, crafted by the workers for their own interests. Separation between the proletarians and the bourgeoisie comes through via the distinction between Karl and Ernst, as well as through the juxtaposition of Ernst and his brother Harry. Karl, in effect, is the ignorant, but not malicious, supporter of capitalism. It was the only system that he ever knew, and he applied its rules and logics to the situation, and as a result did not have any faith in Ernst. However, after seeing the success of the factory he admits his incorrect views and takes up support for the cause and works, in his own way, towards the success of the factory, and thereby for the workers there. The ignorant capitalist, in particular those with expertise, were thus seen as not inherent enemies. On the other hand, Harry, remains unrepentant at the end, and exists outside of the system. His greed stands for a malicious variation of capitalism that cannot coexist with the peaceful creation of a new society. He and, to a lesser degree, Mary are those who could not be trusted and welcomed into the new society under construction.

Filmically *Unser Täglich Brot* fits with the styles of 1940s German film production. There were no major stylistic shifts, and instead many of the same camera techniques and lighting styles that were popular in late Ufa productions, as well as early DEFA productions are found in the film. Fundamentally the reason for this is that many of the behind the scenes staff at DEFA came from the former Ufa

studios, and that while SBZ officials sought to denazify workspaces, there were only so many competent film workers available, and as such many who worked at Ufa remained employed at DEFA. That being said, the use of the rubble of Berlin for the film help to ground it in a more realistic aesthetic than was found in the kitschier late Ufa productions. Rather than pull the viewer away from reality, Dudow sought to ground the viewer in uncomfortable experiences. Stylistically this fit within the goals of DEFA productions, and represents the sharpest transition from Ufa production, and serves to delineate DEFA products of this era from their Ufa predecessors.

While the highest layers of ideological content were obvious from the actions and words of the main characters, there are deeper levels of content found when interpreting the film through the lens of cultural conferences and directives of the period. The role of Ernst, for example, takes on greater meaning when taken alongside the discussion of Anton Ackermann at the First Cultural Day of the SED. His directive that artists should present the ideas of workers and farmers after living along with them takes on greater implications when looking at the portrayal of workers in the film. In taking the perspective of workers seriously, the film represents a proto-productivist approach to the realities of life in the SBZ. While the portrayal is still, by and large, a fictionalization of the lives of workers, it nevertheless posits a less positive version of how events happened in the immediate aftermath of the war. The very real struggle of workers to find materials and to physically rebuild the economic situation in the SBZ comes across clearly in the film. Viewers would recognize the destruction as well as the lack of materials, and the

food scarcity of the immediate post-war years. The deeply realist portrayal of the struggles, and the disillusionment of many workers with the economic situation in the SBZ provides insight into the willingness of DEFA filmmakers to deal with uncomfortable topics even in the 1940s.

By portraying elements of the belief system of the SED, while simultaneously not mentioning the party by name at any point, *Brot* serves to disseminate SED ideology outside of the context of the party itself. Rather than reference the party as an entity, the film portrays "the union", presumably the FDGB, as providing the material support for the success of the workers. Moreover, the film depicts the successes of worker led movements, implying the need for, and validity of, workers' movements in the SBZ. In so doing it provides the viewer with a primer on the economic thought of the party, while simultaneously putting these thoughts in the mouths of workers. The working class thus became the producer of socialism, and of socialist thought, rather than the party. Rather than functioning solely as a propagandistic distribution of SED thought, the portrayal of socialist economic thought comes across as a point of debate that is only clarified by the end of the film. Triumphalist portrayals of the ability of workers to create their own factory, and thus to craft socialism without external backing served to further the basic understanding of the creation of socialism in the SBZ. Putting basic economic principles in the mouths of factory workers allowed the filmmakers to portray the views of the SED in a relatively appealing and understandable light.

When interpreted through the lens of the goals of the SED from 1946 to 1949 the film takes on a completely new meaning. The character of Ernst goes from a

representation of the views of the party to a full model of the working class. Viewers who were workers were meant to identify with his struggles and to take them up for themselves, and thereby to embrace his struggle as their own. Likewise female viewers were to identify with Inge and to embrace their role in society. Most importantly, however, the role of Bergstetter provided an idealized model for the intelligentsia. As an engineer he represented the educated class and their initial indifference to the socialist project. The hopes of the SED, much like those of the factory workers rested in his willingness to support their project out of respect for their enthusiasm. The two engineers at the factory site who abandon the workers are indicative of the intelligentsia who care more about their own success than that of the socialist project. The representation of all social groups in the SBZ, thus includes both positive and negative examples. The push for the audience to identify with the positive examples functions in a manner such that the viewer identifies with these portrayals. If successful the viewers would then follow through with this identification and see these characters as proper models for their lives.

Unser Tächlich Brot thus functioned as a representation of the values of the SED in this period. From the fear of, and desire to win over, the intelligentsia to the recognition of the economic hardships faced by average workers, the film covered the major issues facing both common people, and the party, in this period. The character modeling contained in the film served to provide for the examples necessary to produce socialism in the SBZ and to convince the populace of the correctness of the socialist path. Realistic portrayals of the struggles of common people aided in crafting understandable characters and situations, thereby

strengthening the educational aspects of the film. As an exemplar of the SED's thought in this period, the film highlighted necessary social and economic developments while countering the Western narrative of the impossibility of production without capital. Encouraging viewers to accept the possibilities of socialism helped to pave the way for the next period of development for those in the SBZ, and later GDR, as well as those at DEFA and in the SED.

Conclusion

The SBZ period laid the foundations for many later developments in the relationship between the SED and DEFA. Party-DEFA interactions began with the creation of both in the spring of 1946, and quickly emerged as a back and forth relationship. While the SED exerted great influence of internal SED structures, namely with the elimination of Alfred Lindemann as the director of the studio, it never exercised total control over film production. Instead, the filmmakers at DEFA voluntarily engaged with the party to craft, in this period, anti-fascist films, some of which, namely *Unser Täglich Brot*, openly supported a path towards socialism. Given the internal debates, and uncertainty as to the future nature of party leadership in the SBZ and later GDR, the culture of this period was openly anti-fascist and at best, only implicitly socialist. Internally, the goals of the party, however, were that cultural producers would embrace socialism and would join with the party in crafting a new, socialist, society. This dynamic, one of the party internally expressing a desire for cultural producers to act in a certain way, while externally proposing different values, continued into the earliest years of the GDR, and the emergence of the new party-state in the early 1950s.

Chapter 2:

The Emergence of the Party-State in the GDR from 1950 to 1955 and its Relationship with DEFA

During the period from 1950 to 1955 a close relationship between DEFA and the state institutions of the GDR emerged. Concurrently these state structures, as was the nature of the party-state, were thoroughly integrated into the already existing party offices of the SED. At the same time, however, the creation of new state institutions shifted power away from purely party led offices to ones that were not directly part of the party. This distinction while, in many ways minor, is still important for clarifying the positional relationship of power structures in the GDR. Most importantly for DEFA direct oversight over the film industry shifted from the DEFA Commission of the Politburo to the Ministry of Culture (MfK) in 1956. While ex-ZK member Anton Ackermann headed the Main Office for Film (HV Film), it was nevertheless a non-party institution. This distinction was critical in that within purely party institutions party members from DEFA carried greater authority than in state institutions. The clearest example of this came in the debates within the BPO at DEFA, as well as the interactions between members of the DEFA Commission and DEFA filmmakers. Meetings between the DEFA Commission and representatives from DEFA came in the summer of 1952 and provide valuable insight into the control structures under which DEFA operated at the time.

When these meetings are brought into conversation with the political developments in this period, the complexities of the emergent party-state become clearer. At the time of the DEFA Commission meetings only nominal, and effectively

weak, state oversight existed over DEFA productions. The Ministerium für Volksbildung (Ministry of National Education) [MfV] technically had oversight over cultural activities, but in reality did not exercise authority over DEFA. In practice this left control over DEFA to the Politburo and the ZK. The strongest shift in power control over DEFA during this period, and in the history of DEFA, came with the foundation of the MfK in 1956. It was at this point that DEFA went from singular party oversight to joint party and state control.

This joint control shifted structures of oversight in such a way that the party members within DEFA did not carry as much direct influence as they did during the pre-party-state period. The mediation of party control through state institutions served to dissipate the direct influence of the highest levels of party members over DEFA. It is from this dissipation that the greatest changes to DEFA controls emerged, and where my analysis will contribute the most to the ongoing study of film structures in the GDR. While subtle, the differences between sole SED control and joint party-state control had very real consequences for DEFA filmmakers and their interactions with oversight groups.

The relationship between DEFA and the SED was tense during the years of Politburo oversight. As the chapter will show DEFA filmmakers explicitly questioned the ability of the Politburo to effectively oversee film production.[120] In so doing, the filmmakers representing DEFA did not reject the concept of SED control over DEFA, but rather questioned the experience of party leaders in regard to filmmaking and the clarity of the instructions given by party leaders. These tense meetings were the

[120] BA/ DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission Sitzung 7 5 1952, no pagination.

beginning of a series of back and forth discussions that lasted throughout the decade. Between 1950 and 1955 DEFA developed in a way that was not fully subservient to the SED, but rather worked alongside it, and, in many cases, shared the same goals as the party.

These shared goals, however, did not permeate the entirety of the industry, but rather largely stayed at the highest levels. Many filmmakers who were not also high-level DEFA officials focused more on the artistic nature and quality of their films than on the overt ideological content.[121] Filmmakers who were active party members, however, did focus on, and care about, the ideological message and content of their films, and the degree to which their films represented socialist values. Differences between these groups at DEFA did not lead to internal conflict, but were noted by SED authorities, and were the subject of a number of meetings and conferences held by the highest levels of the party. ZK leaders worked to bring into the fold those DEFA filmmakers who focused primarily on artistic content and secondarily, if at all, on ideology. The ZK encouraged them to embrace the necessity of ideological propagation via film. These attempts built on early SED conceptions of the need to build strong ties between the party and the intelligentsia. SED spokesmen linked their criticism of filmmakers who worked outside of the prescribed definitions of the party to the growing cultural threat of formalism. They

[121] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkung zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.

came to view the work of apolitical filmmakers as antithetical to authentic socialist art.[122]

Close control over DEFA films, and oversight over the production process, was still being developed during this period. The degree to which the ZK and high SED officials paid attention to, and controlled, DEFA production was affected by other claims on officials who had to deal with shortages, supply problems, and worker discontent in other industries, and in society as a whole. Due to the dire material conditions in the GDR in the first half of the 1950s, most officials combined responsibility for cultural affairs with their work on other issues, many of which were related to the physical reconstruction of GDR territory. Thus, DEFA was, for periods of time, largely left alone and filmmakers were able to focus on creating films without direct intervention from state and party authorities.

The chapter will show the consolidation of the state and its articulation in the form of decision-making bodies, ministries and other institutions initially did not change the status of DEFA as a party-run organization. Only with the creation of the Ministry of Culture [MfK] in 1956 did the oversight over DEFA change, becoming more stable through the normalization of party-state control over film production. Before 1956, the relationship between the SED-state and DEFA was somewhat unsettled. There occurred a series of debates and tensions around the question of what defined proper socialist-realist art. These debates were about artistic

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[122] BA/ DR 117 21739 Bericht über die Entwiclkung des Filmwesens in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR auf der Grundlage des Potsdamer Abkommens. 13 June 1951 no pagination.

production broadly conceived, including literature, visual art, and film. This chapter will focus on how SED authorities attempted to communicate the nature of socialist-realist art to DEFA filmmakers, and how those filmmakers understood this communication. First I will outline the political shifts during this period, most notably those linked to the June 1953 uprising, as well as the attempts by the GDR to legitimize itself as a new state. Then I will cover cultural conferences in this period and how the SED used these conferences to define art within the new GDR. Next this chapter will go over the interactions between the SED and DEFA at the lower levels of the party hierarchy and within DEFA. It is at this level that one sees most clearly how DEFA filmmakers understood SED thought. Lastly, I will consider the Slatan Dudow film *Roman einer Jungen Ehe* [Story of a Young Marriage] as a case study of the key ideological themes of this period and how they were expressed in aesthetic practice. I will assess the overall message of the film, as well as how its characters presented models for life to viewers in the early GDR. When combined with my earlier assessments, this section will present a clear window into how party filmmakers at DEFA presented ideology to the masses.

The Birth of the Party-State: Politics 1950 to 1955

Interactions between DEFA and the GDR in late 1949 and 1950 were limited, and in the end the SED largely let the studio run itself during 1950. The lack of direct intervention into the studio, and the fact that most cultural matters were put on hold during 1950, at least in regard to major party decision making, reflects the party's focus on the creation of a functional state more than any lack of concern for

the details of cultural production. 1950 was a vital year for the SED in firmly establishing control over the territory of the GDR, and in working to establish itself as a legitimate political leader that had the support of the populace.[123] While the process of state building continued well beyond 1950, it was especially intense in the state's first full year of existence. It is hardly surprising that, for the most part, the SED did not address issues of film and cultural production during this year.

Outside of cultural production the SED faced a much larger challenge: that of functionally establishing its authority over an independent state as opposed to an occupied territory. In contrast to its earlier experiences, the SED now had to fully control the GDR, rather than act as a junior party to Soviet occupation authorities in the SBZ. This process challenged the skills of SED administrators as they laid the groundwork for the crafting of a new state under SED authority. It worked simultaneously to introduce social and economic policies that would later form the foundation of the welfare-dictatorship that the GDR became.[124] This development occurred alongside tentative steps toward the socialization of landholding in the wake of postwar land reform, the socialization of many industries, and an intense effort to expand industrial production. On top of the rapid social and economic change, the SED decided in 1952 to push towards the achievement of socialism.

Politically, the SED actively worked to establish functional state institutions to mimic the political departments that existed within the ZK. Although many

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[123] Schroeder, p. 99.

[124] Jarausch, Konrad. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 1999, p. 60 and Harsch, Donna. *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 15-16.

ministries were created along with the new state in October 1949, others were formed –or their responsibilities were expanded- later. The Ministierum für Volksbildung [[Ministry for People's Education] [MfV] expanded and was eventually split into the MfK in 1954.[125] The formation of the MfK solidified the high status of cultural production under state auspices, on the one hand, while, given the intertwined nature of the party-state, further entrenching the party's oversight over cultural products and cultural production, on the other. This dual system of state and party institutions characterized all structures and policies in the GDR, and ensured that the SED would have final say over all state decisions.[126]

As a direct result of the transition from an anti-fascist state toward a socialist one, people's/publicly owned companies [VEBs] became the norm for all major industries. These nationalized corporations were held in the name of the people of the GDR, and functionally allowed the SED to wield vast economic power.[127] At the same time, the party pushed for, and successfully began the process of replacing individual farms with collective farms.[128] The ability of the SED to craft economic policies and implement them successfully allowed for the party to functionally increase its control over society, and in so doing create more demands on workers. This influence coincided with a greater public emphasis on the need for socialism and the need to meet work norms established by the party. The party called for

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[125] Von Richthofen, Esther. *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control and Compromise in the GDR*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2009 p. 39.
[126] Jürgen Winkler "Zum Verhältnis von Partei und Staat in der DDR" in *Die SED: Geschichte Organisation Politik- Ein Handbuch*, p. 169.
[127] Steiner, Andre. *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR.* New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2010, p. 51.
[128] Steiner, p. 53.

more demanding work quotas and pushed workers to produce well beyond their current level of production if they wanted to make higher or even the same wages This productivist policy and its implications for the work norms and living standards of workers came to a head in the spring and summer of 1953 with the June 17th uprising.

In the spring and summer of 1953 discussions and debates surrounding shifts in labor norms boiled over into social tension, and in June of 1953 open rebellion against the state. The uprising on the 17th of June 1953 came in direct response to a sharp increase in production demands across the economy of the GDR. While DEFA filmmakers did not participate in the uprising, the conditions present in factories were, to some degree, mirrored within DEFA. Stress on workers to produce more and more to meet the demands of the growing economy, while not altering working conditions, was met with open violence and protests. No publicly available records exist recording the reaction of filmmakers at DEFA to the uprising, however the reactions from other cultural producers and institutions are likely indicative of the spirit at DEFA. The German Academy of Art (DAK) released a statement on the 18th of June, immediately following the uprising, expressing solidarity with, and faith in, the state. Likewise members of the Kulturbund, which was a federation of pro-democratic and pro-socialist artists that existed outside of party control, released supportive statements.[129] These public proclamations, however, cannot be interpreted as singular statements in favor of the state, but rather broad appeals for support in the project of the SED, rather than blind faith in

[129] Brockmann, *The Writers' State.* p. 224.

its ability to lead.[130] The critical nature of the relationship between the cultural intelligentsia and the SED that existed prior to the summer of 1953 is more indicative of the reaction to the uprising, than the public proclamations released after the uprising was crushed by a combination of GDR police forces and Soviet tanks.[131]

After the eruption of June 17th, however, the GDR returned to a period of stability. The General Secretary of the Politburo, Walter Ulbricht, managed, after a few harrowing days, to turn potential disaster into a consolidation of his personal power within the Politburo and, thus, with the SED as a whole- and of the SED's power in the GDR. Protests like that of the 17th of June never happened again. Instead, the party placated the populace, and gradually created a relatively quiescent society. This stability hid the fact that by 1955 the GDR began to experience a growing demographic crisis as thousands fled to the FRG every year.[132] This pressure, however, did not lead the SED to make any drastic policy changes, but instead the party stayed the course and maintained a relatively similar policy line between the summer of 1953 and the end of 1955. Policy stability became the hallmark of the SED in this period. Rather than sudden shifts in policy, the part followed a path of slow changes as it developed the political system.[133] Practically speaking this meant that after the rollback of production reforms in response to the

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[130] Brockmann, *The Writers' State.* p. 223.
[131] Dennis, Mike. *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic 1945-1990*. Essex, England: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000, p. 70.
[132] Harrison, p. 50-51.
[133] Port, Andrew. *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 98.

1953 uprising, the SED did not push for any major changes and instead went in favor of slowly adjusting the political structures of the GDR more in favor of long term party-state rule, chiefly with the development of state institutions. [134] As we will see, however, the SED ramped up ideological and economic intervention into DEFA after the uprising rather than pulling back as it did in other industries.

Stability and development thus were the best interpretive models to understand the political situation in the GDR in 1955. The SED sought, and achieved, a more complete political structural development of GDR state institutions. At the same time the party recognized the limits of its control over the populace, and instead of violently compelling the citizenry, pushed towards compromise. This policy of working with, rather than against, the people characterized much of the SED's decision making during the Ulbricht era. While the SED maintained a tight grip over the political process in the GDR, the party nevertheless recognized the need to respond to the demands of the masses, lest the party experience another uprising. At the same time, by the end of this period the SED, with the development of the GDR as a more functional state, exerted far greater authority through the creation of national offices, as well as the establishment of a military, headed by party members and loyalists. This gradual state development provided the background for significant shifts in cultural production and reception during this period.

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[134] Dennis, p. 78.

Inversions and Control: Conferences 1950 to 1955

The ZK and an Emerging Cultural Policy: 1951

1951 proved an important year for DEFA in its relationship with the ZK. While in 1950 the party largely allowed DEFA to run itself, in 1951 the ZK openly called for changes in the studio, and openly discussed the acceptability of films. This was not a new series of actions by the ZK, but rather was a return to interactions between it and DEFA that were more common in 1947 and 1948. There were no important structural changes that laid the background for these renewed connections; instead they functioned as part of a broad push by the ZK to establish its leadership in the GDR. SED leaders, at the Fifth Day of the ZK in March 1951, addressed a number of significant topics, including issues related to cultural production.

Theories surrounding cultural production at the time centered on the debate regarding the nature of formalism and how it functioned as the antithesis to authentic socialist cultural production. The formalism debates that took place throughout the 1950s focused on what was most important within an artistic work, the form or the content. For SED theorists, who supported socialist realism as the only proper artistic form, content was the most important arbiter, and thus placing form above function was interpreted as a decadent capitalist approach to cultural production. Formalism was denounced routinely during this era in the GDR (as well as in the USSR), and efforts were taken to prevent formalist works from appearing in the GDR. Artists were encouraged to act against formalist trends in their

respective industries, and many engaged in intellectual campaigns against formalism. Kurt Maetzig the prominent DEFA filmmaker and SED party member, argued at the Fifth Day of the ZK that formalist art moved ideas behind the content of works, and that in so doing worked against the spirit of the unified working class.[135] Maetizg here set formalism against the fundamental nature of the SED and socialism as a theory. He used this in order to provide a theoretical weight to his rejection of formalism as an artistic theory. By setting formalists against the goals of the working class, Maetzig added strength to his oppositional definition of acceptable cultural production.

During this period correct cultural production was, at best, loosely defined. Both Hans Lauter, a party theoretician and Politburo member then serving on the Film Commission of the Politburo, and Kurt Maetzig argued at the Fifth Day of the ZK that cultural products in the GDR had to be steeped in "humanism" and staunchly democratic.[136] They never described, however, what such products would actually look like. Instead the only functional guidance given to artists came from listing authors and films that were deemed good exemplars of proper art. Among the authors listed as good examples were Anna Seghers, Kuba, Johannes R. Becher, and Bertolt Brecht, while the films that were listed were *Unser Täglich Brot* [Our Daily

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[135] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 93 Stenographische Niederschrift über die 5. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 15., 16. Und 17. März 1951, p. 362.

[136] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 93 Stenographische Niederschrift über die 5. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 15., 16. Und 17. März 1951, p. 263 and 364.

Bread] and *Rat der Götter* [Council of the Gods].[137] It is not a coincidence that of the authors listed, three Seghers, Kuba, and Becher, were active ZK members, and Brecht was one of the most celebrated cultural theorists and artists in the GDR. By listing both politically and artistically important authors as exemplars, while placing them alongside two vitally important films, Lauter worked to provide a theoretical grounding to delineate between acceptable and unacceptable cultural works. However, these examples were explicitly only that, and as such films could exist outside of the model provide by *Unser Täglich Brot* and *Rat der Götter* while still being ideologically and artistically acceptable in the eyes of the party. Thus, the examples did little to clarify the situation in regard to how films could follow the suggestions of the party.

The party itself felt that cultural production and reaffirmation were critical in this era. At the Third Party Day, the SED leadership declared that the culture of the GDR should focus on democratic renewal.[138] Lauter read this focus as critical to the full development of the GDR as a nation, and argued that "the new democratic German culture will help all of the working people to pursue, the path to peace, and the successful democratic unity of Germany."[139] In stressing the national function of proper cultural production Lauter moved proper culture from a theoretical and

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[137] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 93 Stenographische Niederschrift über die 5. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 15., 16. Und 17. März 1951, p. 266.
[138] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 93 Stenographische Niederschrift über die 5. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 15., 16. Und 17. März 1951, p. 264.
[139] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 93 Stenographische Niederschrift über die 5. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 15., 16. Und 17. März 1951, p. 264.

ideological question, to one of a pragmatic role in the political structures of the GDR. With proper cultural production linked to the success of the GDR in creating a peaceful and democratic state, improper production became a means of disrupting this process, and thus as an attack on the GDR as a state. This linkage served to provide actual weight to issues of theory as it related to artistic production. One could not just produce art as one saw fit, but rather had to follow through with the guidelines of the party if the GDR were to succeed as a state.

At the same time as it focused on the development of the state the ZK leadership embraced the development of both the party and DEFA and issues of ideological dissemination remained important in 1951. Fred Oelßner, the head of agitation for the ZK, argued at the 7th Plenum in 1951 that ideological dissemination was critical for the development of the SED.[140] This argument was not new within the SED, but it was significant that Oelßner used it toward the obvious aim of redefining critical relationships in SED and Marxist-Leninist theory. Oelßner argued that superstructure, when it acted in defense of, and alongside, base effectively transformed into base, and thereby had productive, rather than just reproductive properties. He clarified that, as Stalin had shown, "superstructure in no way passively reflects base."[141] By doing this Oelßner challenged, and upended, classical Marxist-Leninist theory in regard to culture, in that it no longer merely reproduced the conditions under which it was produced, but rather was able to

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[140] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 5.
[141] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 45.

produce necessary base conditions. Under this theory culture went from the product of socialism to, when properly done, a creator of socialism. Defining cultural production in this way was critically important for the creation of socialism in the GDR due to the transition from the capitalist conditions of the Nazi era. With culture as an officially productive force in relation to socialism, pressure for ideological dissemination could be strengthened and justified. It was not enough for culture to reflect the developing nature of socialism in the GDR, but it also had to take an active role in producing socialism. This came through cultural products focusing on economic and class relations and working towards the elimination of class differentiation in the GDR. In working towards the proper spread of SED ideology, culture, thus, aided in the creation of socialism and became base rather than superstructure.

The changes in this relationship, as Oelßner saw it, were critical for the place of culture in the GDR, as well as within SED ideology. Oelßner further linked this to important economic developments of the first Five-Year Plan, as well as to the creation of a new cultural stage among the populace. For Oelßner these three went hand in hand, and were necessary for the complete and full development of the GDR.[142] Oelßner argued that focus on culture was necessary for the SED stating that, "if we only focus on state economic issues then we leave behind the foundational principles of Marxism."[143] Oelßner furthered his argument by stating in the GDR,

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[142] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 46.
[143] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 197 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 41.

"superstructure had not kept up with base", and that the "ideas of the people have stayed behind those of the political and economic developments."[144] Within the context of SED thought, this was a harsh criticism leveled at all who were involved in what were, ostensibly, superstructural products. Implicitly all cultural products were called into question for their purported inability to keep up with economic developments. This contrasts sharply with his prior remarks on the need for superstructure to create base, and implies simultaneously that cultural products were behind economic developments, yet needed to actively create the conditions for economic development. These harsh critiques of cultural producers, and the intelligentsia as a whole, were couched within encouragements and reminders of the essential role of superstructural products within the ideology of the SED. The criticism and reminder was typical of the SED's carrot and stick approach to cultural products, and their producers, a seeming continual reminder of past failures alongside encouragement for future success.

The place of cultural products within the SED's ideology was strengthened and further clarified through this meeting, and most importantly Oelßner's speech. He argued that focusing solely on economic issues would not solve the problem of the populace, and the superstructure, lagging behind the achievements of the base, and as such changes needed to take place. Central to the redefinition of culture in relation to superstructure and base, were the changes in the nature of superstructure, such that superstructural products, such as culture, would go along

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[144] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 97 Stenographische Niederschrift der 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED am 17., 19., 20. Oktober 1951, p. 46.

with base via a focus on the changing nature of base in the GDR. From the perspective of the SED, this would mean that cultural products should focus on economic issues, economic and labor structures and conditions, and the then present life in the GDR, at least how the SED interpreted life in the GDR that is. A refocusing on life in the GDR, as well as on economic struggle would thus, for party theorists, allow for cultural products to become base and produce socialism in the GDR. Within the structures of this theory the repeated, and frequent, urgings by the ZK for DEFA to work closely with other party organizations as well as to work to promote SED ideology become clearer. Ideologically speaking, these requests came from a desire to reform superstructural products such that they would align fully with base and thereby produce socialism. From the perspective of the SED this push would result in the benefits of socialism being fully realized in the GDR, via cultural products that believed in the system as well. At times, however, the desire of the party heads to see DEFA fully follow along with the party plan led to restrictive actions against DEFA employees. As this and later chapters will show, the SED did not hesitate to clamp down on DEFA when party leaders suspected dissent. The party only rarely directly acted against DEFA employees, and instead focused on maintaining open lines of dialogue between its highest offices and DEFA, such as the meetings between the Film Commission of the Politburo and DEFA representatives, as well as the inclusion of DEFA filmmakers at all major discussions of cultural policy.

The Film Conference: 1952

While in 1951 the SED focused on broad ideological issues, in 1952 it changed its focus to a more explicit analysis of film. That year the SED and DEFA jointly held a conference on the nature of film production in the GDR. In planning for the conference the ZK worked to guarantee that all organizations involved in film production and distribution took part. A ZK cultural sector document from the week before the conference in September 1952 listed the major film organizations, including the Künstlerischer Rat and party organizations at DEFA, and ensured that they convened before and after the conference.[145] The goal here was to guarantee that information from the conference was appropriately distributed to the workers at DEFA.[146] Confirming proper information distribution was critical to the goals of the conference, as well as to the ZK's overall goals of providing guidance to DEFA. Further, in guaranteeing the quick distribution of the decisions of the conference to all groups involved with the filmmaking process, the ZK ensured that there was no delay in acting on the information of the conference. There was a secondary benefit here of also protecting against the spread of rumors and misinformation, in particular in regard to anything directly related to film production and ideological distribution.

The conference, held on the 17th and 18th of September, included speeches from the most important individuals in filmmaking and film control. Members of

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[145] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Plan der Auswertung der Filmkonferenz des Zentralkomitees von 12. Und 18. September 1952, p. 232.
[146] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 203 Plan der Auswertung der Filmkonferenz des Zentralkomitees von 12. Und 18. September 1952, p. 232.

the DEFA Commission, as well as leading directors, writers, and dramaturges, presented on the status, and future, of film production. Functionally the conference brought together people from all areas of film production in order to create a more unified plan for film, as well as to bring everyone into the ideological fold of the SED. Creating an official national plan for film production, and ensuring its quick distribution, elevates this film conference above earlier film discussions. Not only did it occur in a semi-public manner, but it also was intended for quick public distribution to all of those concerned with film. When contrasted with the DEFA Commission meetings from the prior summer, it becomes clearer that the conference was an important milestone in the relationship between DEFA and the SED. As a joint ZK-DEFA product, the conference supplanted earlier cultural meetings of the ZK, and in particular earlier conferences related to the ideological inclusion of the intelligentsia. For the first time the ZK was directly working with DEFA to ensure that production fit within specific frameworks. In his speech at the conference Sepp Schwab, a member of the Film Commission of the Politburo, argued that the conference was to build on the ideas of the Politburo in regard to what the weaknesses of DEFA film were.[147]

Schwab, however, focused not on the ideological weaknesses in films, but rather on other issues, such as on quality and quantity.[148] Schwab here reiterated criticisms that were brought up in the DEFA Commission meetings that summer. He

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[147] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 36.
[148] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 36.

also presented structural changes to the control over DEFA that would bring the studio under greater state control, as well as alter the organizational structures within DEFA.[149] By focusing on these issues as critical to the development of DEFA Schwab implicitly supported the ideological quality of DEFA films, in that he did not list any major ideological shifts as necessary for the proper development of DEFA. Kurt Maetzig, in his speech after Schwab, reinforced the interpretation of DEFA as acting in an ideologically correct fashion. He argued that creating films without the guidance of Marxism-Leninism would be the same as a chemist attempting alchemy.[150] Maetzig based his critique on the conceptualization of Marxism-Leninism as a scientific interpretation of reality, and that using it as a guiding principle for cultural production would create the most accurate depiction of reality. Within the context of Maetzig's critique, filmmakers who did not follow Marxism-Leninism were not just incorrect, but also completely out of touch with reality. These filmmakers, as well as all of those in the capitalist West that rejected the interpretive framework of Marxism-Leninism, were attempting to use magic to create their art, rather than a scientific framework that observed reality.

Maetzig argued, further, that the use of socialist realism as a guiding principle for DEFA film was a necessity.[151] Through the socialist realist lens DEFA filmmakers would be able to accurately produce a realistic depiction of the GDR, and therein to

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[149] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 37.
[150] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 41.
[151] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 42.

continue with their task of acting as co-creators of socialism.[152] Production of socialism was thus clearly connected to the nature of socialist realist art. The art itself had an ideological place as a productive force for socialism, but at the same time socialist realism acted as the guiding force that ensured that art followed through with this role. As a studio DEFA had to ensure the creation of socialist realist films, and thereby to produce socialism. In part this guarantee came from the state and party control structures that oversaw DEFA, and that were reaffirmed at both the DEFA Commission meetings, as well as at the conference.

Not only was film to act it the name of the creation of socialism, but also it was, according to Maetzig, to work against the enemies of the GDR. He argued that, "in this fight our productive workers and farmers, with the intelligentsia, stand against the monopoly capitalists, the colonial oppressors, against the imperialists, the high peak of American imperialism."[153] Within this context DEFA, as a part of the cultural intelligentsia, had a very clear role in standing as a bulwark against foreign thought within the GDR, and to act against capitalist culture. It should be noted, however, that at the time people in Berlin often crossed to the Western side to view Western, typically American, films. [154] This trend clearly concerned DEFA, and presumably the SED as well. The inclusion of the fight against American imperialism in Maetzig's speech was not just a nod to the broad SED line in regard to opposition to the US, but also in response to the willingness of East Germans to

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[152] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 42.
[153] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 44.
[154] Poiger, p. 92-93.

consume American culture, and in particular American film. Opposing monopoly capitalism was similarly not just a reference to the SED's political opposition to capitalism, but also a nod to the most popular films viewed by East Germans, those being American gangster films that, in the eyes of the SED, often focused on the pursuit of profit and individual wealth at any cost.[155]

Maetzig continued his discussion of the utility of film by pointing out the practical applications that it has in regard to the development of socialism. He stated that, "the active participation of artists in the development of socialism helps them to master the economic theory, and this qualifies them, with their artwork to immediately grasp the social praxis."[156] Maetzig, here, established a duality through which active participation in the processes of the development of socialism granted understanding of economic issues, while at the same time the very participation in the production of socialism implicitly necessitated these economic understandings. Producing socialist realist art could not happen without, at minimum, a basic understanding of the economic structures that existed, or were to exist, under socialism. Yet the understanding of socialist economic structures came, for Maetzig, from the active desire to partake in the construction of socialism. For him the desire to create, and the actual creation of, socialist artworks, was the means by which one achieved economic understanding. This seeming mental gymnastics was not uncommon in the GDR and fit with the broader cultural dictums that had been

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[155] Poiger, p. 92-93.
[156] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 44.

established, most notably the inversion of base and superstructure that had occurred the prior year.

Fundamentally the reason for this was that the majority of artists in the GDR did not have backgrounds as socialist, or communist, activists and thus did not have a strong understanding of socialist economic theory. As a result, the party could either discourage all but the most dedicated Marxists from creating art, and thereby destroy the nascent cultural production of the GDR, or find a theoretical means by which artists without the proper background could still create socialist art. The theoretical method thus became the explanation by which the party could authorize artists in the GDR to create art regardless of their background, while still meeting their own strictures for the theoretical means by which socialist art could be created. It was thus a pragmatic, but complex, means to an end for the party leadership and party theorists.

Maetzig finished his speech by encouraging filmmakers to embrace Marxism-Leninism and to study it, stating that, "it helps you to recognize the new, it lives to win and to value, and ardently to enter into your defense."[157] Here Maetzig placed filmmakers within the broader cultural intelligentsia in arguing that Marxism-Leninism works in their defense. He echoed numerous earlier comments by SED cultural theorists who linked Marxism-Leninism to the propagation, and defense of, the interests of the intelligentsia. Maetzig further tied the study of Marxism-Leninism to the ability to accurately portray and to fully understand the lives of the

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[157] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 47.

ordinary people.[158] Behind both of these comments we see that Maetzig pushed for his fellow filmmakers to do more to align themselves with Marxism-Leninism, and to more fully incorporate it within their art. Underneath this encouragement laid the reality of not all filmmakers fully embracing Marxism-Leninism. Maetizig's encouragement functioned in such a way as to both admonish and support. The function of this criticism and praise fits within the broader SED line of attacking cultural producers for perceived failures, while simultaneously offering the option of following the party's line. His statements thus did not simply encourage filmmakers to go along with the party, but also heavily critiqued those who had not and would not follow along.

Speaking next, Schwab built on Maetzig's discussion of the problems with filmmakers at DEFA. Presumably to calm the fears of those being criticized, Schwab made the point that criticism, and in particular, the process of critique and self-critique did not reflect personal animosities and disagreements, but were a tool for the creation of proper films.[159] By interpreting criticism and self-criticism as necessary processes, Schwab further aimed to normalize this Marxist-Leninist task as inherent to film production. For Schwab this process instead focused on negotiating the individual's relationship with ideology. The importance of criticizing artists' relationship to ideology had been downplayed in the past but would not happen again, he warned "our own underestimations of these criticisms in the past

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[158] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 47.
[159] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 55.

was a great error, and in the future we will not allow these mistakes to be continued to be made by our artists."[160] Schwab here admitted his own errors, and the errors of the party, and in so doing engaged in a very public act of self-criticism. His reference to errors was intentionally vague, in that he was not labeling singular events, but rather opening himself up to criticism for any action that went counter to the then current party interpretation of proper action. He laid it on DEFA, and party, officials for their inability to stop criticisms of the party's ideology from filmmakers. He further presented this weakness as something that came from the inability of the party and DEFA officials to understand the nature of what the party perceived to be rejection of SED thought within DEFA, stating that, "the inadequate place of criticism within DEFA must, likewise be responded to by me". [161] This statement provides a window into the nature of the party in DEFA, and how the party responded to what they believed were rejections of the ideas of the party. Given that it was an issue raised by a Politburo member at a major conference, it is clear that the possibility of rejection of party thought at DEFA was a major concern for high party officials.

Emerging State Agencies: 1955

The ability and willingness of DEFA officials to support the beliefs of the party remained a concern for the ZK throughout this time period. The development of new means of oversight, most notably the creation of the Main Film Office [HV

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[160] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 56.
[161] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 203 Stenographische Niederschrift der Konferenz der Filmschaffenden in Berlin am 17. Und 18. September 1952, p. 56.

Film] at the MfK, only served to, in the eyes of the ZK, reflected the need to guide DEFA filmmakers. The 23rd Plenum of the ZK in June 1955 established a list of issues related to the HV Film that the office was to address in the following year. The HV Film was to ensure that films focused on "defense of the homeland" and positive portrayals of state security forces, such as the newly formed National People's Army (NVA) and People's Police (Volkspolizei).[162] The focus on the military and police forces was clearly politically motivated and was seen as critical for the propagation of values in the GDR. The creation of the NVA in 1954, after years of political statements about peacefulness and rejection of militarism, necessitated a shift in the political stance, as well as the public discourse surrounding the military. Here again the place of DEFA on the frontlines of dissemination of ideology is revealed, with the new emphasis on positive portrayals of the military and police forces.

In addition to altering the focus of DEFA films, the HV Film was assigned a number of tasks in order to reform its leadership. Among these was the creation of regular meetings between the HV Film leadership and MfK and regional governmental officials.[163] The ZK considered infrequent meetings between these groups to be the core cause of the weakness at the HV Film, and behind inefficiencies within the office as well.[164] Closer ties between all aspects of the film industry and state institutions, even stretching outside of the MfK, were part of the broad attempt by the SED to politicize state institutions as a whole. The creation of

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[162] BA DR 1 8293. 23rd Plenum des ZK 2 June 1955 p. 4.
[163] BA DR 1 8293. 23rd Plenum des ZK 2 June 1955, p. 5.
[164] BA DR 1 8293. 23rd Plenum des ZK 2 June 1955, p. 5.

the HV Film, and the transition of reports from the DEFA Commission to the HV Film came as part of the same process that later necessitated close ties between the HV Film and regional authorities. Normalization of state control over cultural practices and products contributed to a decreased level of influence of regional authorities to the point where they needed ties to the HV Film in order to have a say in film production. In part, this was a practical solution given the nature of domestic film production, and a close relationship between the HV Film and regional authorities would allow for greater ease in procuring filming locations, as well as materials for filming that were not centrally distributed.

Slowly Increasing Control: DEFA and the SED 1950 to 1955

Assessing the Place of Film in the SED: 1951

The success of the GDR was in theory linked to the ability of DEFA, and other cultural producers, to create art that was in line with socialist thought. Theoretically this assumption seemed to suggest a relatively simple process of coordination. In the eyes of the Film Commission of the Politburo, however, this was a difficult thing to achieve. In March 1951, shortly after the Fifth Day of the ZK, the Film Commission decried the lack of quality films that were produced by DEFA.[165] In focusing on issues of quality the Film Commission linked broader issues to specific complaints about film production. Moreover, they used this as a means of encouraging filmmakers to follow the ideology of the SED by implicitly linking film quality with ideological issues. The commission further called on DEFA to rectify its

[165] BA/ DR 117 21739 Beschluss der DEFA Kommission 16 March 1951, no pagination.

past errors in terms of film quality and to ensure that the problems never again took place.[166] Coming on the heels of the Fifth Day of the ZK this directive clearly showed that while some DEFA films were acceptable, and even praise worthy, that was not the case for the totality of production. When read in conjunction with the messages sent by the ZK it is clear that DEFA, in the eyes of the party, only partially fulfilled its mission of producing the quality films that were, for the SED, necessary for the development of the GDR and the creation of socialism.

The place, and ideological space, of DEFA as a physical industry within the GDR was also under review during 1951. That summer an internal report produced by DEFA established, and explored, the anti-fascist credentials, and history, of DEFA. The authors of the "Report on the Development of Film in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and the GDR on the Basis of the Potsdam Treaty" put forward in it a brief semi-official history of DEFA from its founding, and in relation to the Potsdam agreements.[167] Functionally this history aimed to establish DEFA's credentials as a democratic anti-fascist organization. The report also included an overview of feature film production since the founding of DEFA. As an internally produced and distributed report, it can be read as a statement about how DEFA understood its role in the process of democratization, on the one hand, and the degree to which DEFA officials embraced their role as was defined by the SED, on the other. This report

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[166] BA/ DR 117 21739 Beschluss der DEFA Kommission 16 March 1951, no pagination.
[167] BA/ DR 117 21739 Bericht über die Entwicklung des Filmwesens in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR auf der Grundlage des Potsdamer Abkommens, 13 June 1951, no pagination.

indicates that, at minimum, DEFA embraced its function as a democratizing and anti-fascist force and, thus, by extension allied DEFA with the SED's understanding of the development of socialism in the GDR. The language of the report further shows the incorporation of the broad language of early SED commentaries on life in the GDR, and implicitly how the GDR functioned against the FRG and the former Nazi regime.

The embrace of SED language by some DEFA members did not, however, mean that this stance was universal within DEFA, nor that DEFA as an institution was filled with party members. Günter Klein, a ZK member and DEFA official, alleged, in 1951, the existence of growing "factionalization" at DEFA, particularly between former KPD and SPD members.[168] Klein argued that those who were former SPD members were not fully loyal to the state, and should not be trusted with working on films, despite their roles in creating important films such as *Roman einer Jungen Ehe* [Story of a Young Marriage].[169] Klein held up past party affiliations as indicators of the trustworthiness of individuals. Thus, Klein engaged in the "factionalization" that he condemned.

Klein's attack on former Social Democrats was part of a broader pattern of former KPD members targeting former SPD members in DEFA. Tensions between former SPD and KPD members were, moreover, not limited to DEFA but

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[168] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 Abschrift von Günter Klein 10 September 1951, no pagination.
[169] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 Abschrift von Günter Klein 10 September 1951, no pagination.

existed throughout the SED. [170] The old enmities between the KPD and SPD did not suddenly disappear with the (forced) merger of the KPD and part of the SPD in the SBZ in 1946. Many former Communists at every level of the party doubted whether former Social Democrats could be trusted. Until 1948, the party leadership did not endorse these suspicions. In 1949, however, as the SED became increasingly Stalinized, SED leaders took up the attack on former Social Democrats. Thousands of former Social Democrats were purged from the SED over the next several years.

Meeting the DEFA Commission: 1952

In the summer and fall of 1952 the channels of communication between DEFA and the party were put to the test when DEFA filmmakers brought their displeasure with a number of SED actions and ideas before the DEFA Commission of the Politburo. At the time the DEFA Commission oversaw film production in the GDR.[171] Its members were composed of the highest level cultural and film officers in the SED, and included one future DEFA feature film studio head. Meetings between the Commission and filmmakers were extremely important, as well as rare. The meeting of DEFA Commission members with representatives from DEFA, comprised of individuals involved in varying aspects of film production, shows that the highest reaches of party power had contact and communication with lower level party members, as well as non-party members, in DEFA.[172] These meetings suggest that

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[170] Thomas Klein, "Zu Opposition und Widerstand in der SED" in *Die SED Ein Handbuch*. P. 199.
[171] Heinmann, 103.
[172]Heinmann, 172 and Schittly, p. 63.

engagements between high party officials and filmmakers to a limited degree tempered the Politburo's active control over film production.

The first meeting between members of the DEFA Commission and DEFA took place on May 7, 1952. DEFA was represented by Slatan Dudow, Joachim Hellberg, and Wolfgang Staudte, among other directors. The meeting began with Hans Lauter stating that the Commission was interested in hearing the complaints of the DEFA representatives and sympathetic to the problems that they were facing in producing films.[173] Lauter thus encouraged the DEFA representatives to open up about their issues. He also let them know that no decisions would be made at the meeting, because the entirety of the Commission was not present at that time.[174] Joachim Hellberg thanked the Commission for being willing to meet with them, and stated that, "other colleagues have felt that the DEFA Commission always floated above the clouds."[175] Hellberg's portrayal of an inaccessible and powerful party commission seems to confirm the scholarly view of relations between the SED and DEFA.[176] Yet, the very fact of the meeting shows that it was possible for DEFA to meet with the powerful members of the Politburo's DEFA Commission and air their concerns and even criticisms about the production of films in the GDR.

DEFA representatives complained about an unwieldy bureaucratic structure at DEFA that, according to them, slowed down the production of films and

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[173] BA DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 22.
[174] BA DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 22.
[175] BA DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 22.
[176] Bathrick, p. 38 and Berghahn 26-27.

prevented their quick release.[177] The representatives also questioned the distribution of ideological credit between directors and writers.[178] These criticisms cut to the core of DEFA as a production and distribution site for SED ideology. Thus, DEFA representatives turned critiques of poor production schedules from the SED and ZK back against them by showing that the bureaucratic structures that the party established were ultimately at fault for slow production schedules. This then brought up issues regarding how to actually alter production schedules and rates, in that for DEFA filmmakers the bureaucratic structures of filmmaking were both unalterable, and the center of production problems. The process of having films reviewed by a number of individuals at varying levels of DEFA allowed for closer supervision of the resulting films, but at the same time did result in delays in film release. The need for greater production clashed with these structures.

While they did critique some of the structures that were established by the party, the filmmakers were careful to engage in self-criticism of the actions of filmmakers at DEFA. According to Wolfgang Staudte, after early progress in producing good films, the quality of DEFA films had been in decline for a year and a half, "I have to state, unfortunately, that DEFA has lost this great leap forward", Staudte conceded.[179] His criticism of production quality at DEFA mirrored the critiques that came from the Fifth Plenum, as well as commentaries by Oelßner in regard to the status of superstructural products in the GDR. The open dialogue regarding the quality of DEFA films worked alongside the discussion of quantity.

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[177] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 23.
[178] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 23.
[179] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 29.

Even more significantly, Hellberg addressed the issue of political values as they were expressed in film. He acknowledged the political quality of films was low , and that filmmakers at DEFA were not creating films of great political import.[180]

DEFA representatives also presented the commission with a series of major questions and requests, including the requests that directors, writers, and dramaturges could be present at all DEFA Commission meetings that related to a film on which they had worked.[181] The DEFA representatives couched this request within a broader discussion of ways to improve the relationship between DEFA and the DEFA Commission. They argued that allowing those who made a film to be present when the commission discussed the film would serve to clarify issues while at the same time removing fear of the commission.[182] They also requested that the commission go over scripts with directors and writers, before passing judgment on the acceptability of the script.[183] These two issues were the source of major disagreements between the commission and filmmakers at DEFA. Requests from DEFA to end these practices were, by and large, accepted by the commission.[184]

The filmmakers, thus, engaged in the process of criticism and self-criticism that was the SED's political modus operandi during this era. They did so, one assumes, in order to win policy changes from the DEFA Commission., Using this strategy, the filmmakers turned the meeting into a negotiation over DEFA issues

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[180] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 30.
[181] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 30.
[182] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 30.
[183] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 28.
[184] DR 117 21738 DEFA Kommission, Sitzung am 7.5.1952, p. 30. It is worth noting that similar issues would be addressed only a few years later during the creation of a licensing committee in the film office of the Ministry of Culture.

that concerned both the filmmakers and the commission. Openness about perceived failures at DEFA evidently convinced Commission members to accept policy changes in how it investigated films and interrogated filmmakers about their films. In being open about the failures at DEFA, its representatives were able to secure greater rights for all filmmakers vis-à-vis the commission.

The next meeting of the DEFA Commission that was attended by DEFA representatives, on July 2, 1952, focused ostensibly on production schedules and planning. In fact, however, it pushed back against the atmosphere of give and take at the previous discussion with DEFA representatives by emphasizing the politics of film production. Hermann Axen, a cultural theorist with strong ties to DEFA, talked about the 14 movies that were planned for 1952 and broadly discussed changes that needed to be made to the overall cultural-political line in the GDR. He argued that film producers in the GDR needed to put greater emphasis on opposing industrial and political espionage and in protecting industry from spies.[185] Here Axen prioritized the political message of cultural products. Kurt Bordfelt sharpened Axen's political criticism by claiming that, even the most politically aware DEFA members, such as Konrad Wolf, were unaware of the need to highlight and expose espionage.[186] Their comments effectively undermined the earlier agreement to involve DEFA filmmakers in discussions that directly impacted them. Moreover, it revealed that the priorities of the DEFA Commission were the political goals of the SED and the GDR as a state.

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[185] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 2.7.52, p. 60.
[186] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 2.7.52, p. 66.

The emphasis on state politics at this meeting reveals a shift from earlier ideological discussions that focused on culture. Rather than guide cultural production towards an analysis of current economic and structural conditions, the commission instead focused on the Cold War issues of alleged spies and protection of industry as the proper topics for DEFA. Simultaneously the commission realized that altering the focus of films would not be a guarantee to solve the more important problems of lack of quantity and quality in the films produced at DEFA.[187] The Commission's connection of film quality and quantity to the purported threat of spies created greater pressure on DEFA to reform and change its production styles and rates. Changing the nature of film production could not be created with minor changes, but rather would involve large structural changes were DEFA to be able to fundamentally alter its production rate and style so as to produce films on the topics demanded by the commission, while guaranteeing high quality in regard to the films.

At this meeting, members of the Commission also brought issues that put considerable pressure on DEFA to reform itself politically. One speaker raised historical issues as they related to the foundational nature of GDR culture, noting that they were "especially conspicuous in regard to the historical line."[188] Another wanted dramaturges to fall in line with the Commission's suggestions.[189] Ideologically the place of dramaturges here was reified, particularly in light of how

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[187] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 2.7.52, p. 67.
[188] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 2.7.52, p. 67.
[189] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 2.7.52, p. 67.

dramaturges were discussed in the earliest party documents after the establishment of DEFA.[190]

Linking highly politicized policy matters such as the espionage question DEFA's cultural tasks put greater pressure on DEFA to follow through with the ideas that were presented by the party. Dramaturges, if they wanted to take part in the foundation of culture in the GDR, could not take the ideas of the party as mere suggestions or options. As a central cultural institution, DEFA was also a political force and, as such, had to follow the ideological direction of the SED. That was already established. What was new to the Commission's discussion was its specific focus on dramaturges as important players in the film production process and, thus, under obligation to implement the ideas of the party.

At the next DEFA Commission meeting on August 20, 1952, the commission heightened the pressure on DEFA by reaffirming that DEFA must follow the line of the party, on the one hand, and regretting that party membership was not higher in DEFA, on the other. Axen asserted that filmmaking was not a choice between art and party membership.[191] Axen recognized that filmmakers did not have to belong to the party to make art but argued that an increase in party membership was was integral to the development of the GDR.[192] Mass party activity was, for Axen and the

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[190] The Cultural Office of the Central Secretariat of the SED, the predecessor to the ZK, clarified the role of dramaturges in 1949 as being ideological watchdogs and implementers at DEFA.
[191] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 85.
[192] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 85-86.

Politburo, linked to the class struggle, and its proper display via DEFA.[193] Rather than ignoring the very real problems of low party membership, the Commission members acknowledged the failures of the party to bring large numbers of DEFA employees into its ranks. The continuance of these problems into the early 1950s echoes issues that were addressed by Allinson in the late 1940s with low turnouts in favor of the SED at elections.[194] Many average citizens in the GDR simply did not see a reason to join the party or to fully embrace it.

Problems with party development were extremely important for the SED leadership, in that without a mass party, they could not hope to fully and properly develop socialism in the GDR. Mass party activity was, for Axen and the Politburo, linked to the class struggle, and its proper display via DEFA.[195] Sepp Schwab, a major political figure in the SED and a prominent figure at DEFA, argued that the achievement of the goals of the commission could only happen if it maintained a strong role as the highest body in regard to film in the country.[196] He insisted that the DEFA Commission not be made subordinate to a planned state committee.[197] Here the party was exerting its primacy over the state by clearly showing its desire to control cultural issues at the highest levels of the party, rather than subordinating them to state groups. The balance between the party and the state that was an integral aspect of the party-state was clearly pushed to the side of the party in this case. Maintaining control over culture was in the best interests of the party, in that

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[193] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 86.
[194] Allinson, p. 16.
[195] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 86.
[196] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 86.
[197] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission am 20.8.52, p. 86.

without clear SED control DEFA could not be fully trusted to produce ideologically correct films.

Clearly, all Commissioners agreed that the control and distribution of cultural products were critical to the state development process. Depending on their background, however, commissioners differed about how closely control had to be exercised. Axen put considerable faith in DEFA, and its ability to produce ideologically acceptable films. Schwab, who was closely linked with foreign policy decision making in the GDR, had much less faith in the filmmakers to follow along with the SED's line. Their differences remind us that the differences of opinion about the relationship between art and the party/ideology ran all the existed even within the Politburo. More culturally inclined party leaders had greater faith in the ability of cultural producers to work with the party than did those who were not as close to the producers.

Schwab wanted to keep oversight of DEFA within the Politburo because he did not think a minor state committee could or should oversee an industry of such cultural significance as filmmaking. Bureaucrats were not trusted to be fully steeped in party thought, and thus able to make decisions in regard to the ideological content and value of films. Distrust in state officials was not new for high party members in the SED. In October 1949 the small secretariat of the SED issued instructions that party members were to actively seek to guarantee that state officials acted in line with the party.[198] The party, thus, did not presuppose the

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[198] SAPMO BA DY 30 J IV 2 3 57 Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 57 vom 17 October 1949, no pagination.

conversion of state officials to its ideology, but instead proposed that the willingness of government officers to follow party ideology had to be developed through actions of party members. Even by 1952 the party-state was not fully developed, but rather the SED continued to establish its full oversight over state offices. Schwab's implicit distrust of a state commission to handle film oversight was presumably shared by others in the party leadership.

A week later, at the Commission's next meeting, Schwab reaffirmed the ideological significance of DEFA, on the one hand, and the SED's control over the message sent by its films, on the other. He insisted that in 1953 DEFA's films must focus on the development of socialism.[199] Hans Rodenberg supported him with the argument that the commission should not just evaluate films that had been made but should take a strong role in the thematic planning process and also work with scripts before they were filmed.[200] The strong interest in filmmaking as a cultural industry of great importance and, therefore, object of necessary control was tied to the SED's decision in 1952 to build socialism immediately. Oelßner's theory in regard to the ability of superstructural products to achieve base status provides the background justification for necessitating a focus on the production of socialism in DEFA films in 1953. Furthermore the focus on economic shifts, and realities, in film comes from the emphasis on Socialist Realism on the part of the SED, and was an aspect of its broader push against the existence of Formalism.

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[199] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission zum 27.8.1952, p. 103.

[200] BA DR 117 21738 Protokoll der Sitzung der DEFA Kommission zum 27.8.1952, p. 103

Not only the DEFA Commission but also DEFA itself discussed the question of the relationship between the party and DEFA, and how DEFA would portray the party's beliefs. During the BPO meeting in August 1952, members, including Sepp Schwab, a member of the DEFA Commission, talked about party loyalty and how to relate to the party. Harnack, a high party member, discussed the issues relating to presenting the party and socialism to the people of the GDR. He stated that, "I view it [using art for political persuasion] as political Romanticism."[201] There were no true depictions of the party and the development of socialism in film, he postulated, but rather DEFA filmmakers were creating false images. Schwab countered and said that film depictions were accurate, and that the party had not changed over time, but rather had remained as a dedicated Marxist-Leninist party throughout its history.[202] Differing opinions in regard to the party were here delineated by party status. Schwab a dedicated party member, and part of the DEFA Commission, viewed the party as completely unchanged, on the other hand Harnack, a lower level party member challenged the notion of an unchanging party when he focused on its presentation to the masses. The problems within the party were, for Harnack, hidden and replaced with a romanticized interpretation of what the party was and what it did for the people of the GDR. He, implicitly, did not trust the party to act the same way as it was presented in the films that DEFA created.

These disagreements and problems were important for understanding how DEFA functioned as a dual organization of the party and the state. Criticism of the

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[201] BA DR 117 21874 Protokoll Der Parteileitungs-Sitzung vom 11.8.52, p. 10.
[202] BA DR 117 21874 Protokoll Der Parteileitungs-Sitzung vom 11.8.52, p. 10.

party, and of aspects of the party led process, was acceptable within the confines of the BPO. While Schwab, who was both in DEFA and on the DEFA Commission, criticized Harnack for his commentaries on the party, Harnack was not attacked in any way that would suggest that he had acted outside of the accepted norms of party discourse. Moreover, Harnack reminded BPO members that discussions about how to implement ideas of the party, in particular in regard to the party's leadership of cultural production, had already been brought up at the Künstlerischer Rat.[203] For Harnack this acted as justification of the legitimacy of his critiques, and it also provides a window into understanding the openness of discussions at DEFA. Harnack further argued that if he were presented with an interpretation of a film that he supported, but that was rejected by the party, he would do his best to understand the perspective of the party.[204] Harnack, thus, argued that the party's interpretation of films was not inherently the correct one, but at the same time showed that even if he disagreed with the party, he would still try to embrace its ideas. Harnack's position, while not completely representative of all DEFA employees, provides insight into the differences in opinion that existed within the studio, as well as between high party officials, such as Schwab, and lower members. Arguments between different levels of the party hierarchy are important, in that they show how the party both offered a space for debate and encompassed different opinions. The argument between Harnack and Schwab goes against interpretations

[203] BA DR 117 21874 Protokoll Der Parteileitungs-Sitzung vom 11.8.52, p. 9.
[204] BA DR 117 21874 Protokoll der Parteileitungs-Sitzung vom 11.8.52, p.10.

of the lower levels of the party hierarchy functioning only as echo chambers of the party hierarchy, such as was posited by Sandrine Kott.[205]

Interpreting the BPO as an arena of debate provides important insight into the dualities of the party-state and how within the GDR in particular the party aspects allowed levels of discussion. Within the political structure of the GDR at the time, DEFA was still under the auspices of the MfV. At the same time, however, it was not yet a VEB meaning that it was only partially owned by the state, but still was, practically speaking, a nationalized industry under the auspices of state control and direction. Given the nature of the party-state in the GDR, the BPO presented a link to the leadership of the party, and state, that circumvented normal state control measures, particularly in this period. Rather than being completely linked to the MfV DEFA was tied to the ZK, and the DEFA Commission, via the BPO. The BPO meetings thus offered a space for ideological and production control, which took the place of normative state control over film production that would later exist under the auspices of the MfK. What distinguished this control structure from other ones, such as the steel industry, within the GDR was that, rather than being under the auspices of the regional party leadership, DEFA's instead was directly tied to the ZK.[206]

The BPO meeting in the summer of 1952 occurred concurrently with the DEFA Commission meetings. It also took place as did the planning of the upcoming DEFA Conference that would occur that September. Discussions about the need for

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[205] Knott, Sandrine. *Communism Day-To-Day: Sate Enterprises in East German Society.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014, p. 24.
[206] For more information about normative party structures se Kott, p. 22-27.

a DEFA Conference date back to 1951, but planning did not fully take place until 1952. By September 1952 the ZK was in the process of its final planning for the conference, and in particular of the themes that would be presented. As a joint conference between DEFA and the ZK, it represents the close ties between the studio and the leadership of the party. The conference and the ideas that were presented at it should be interpreted through the lens of the party-state, on the one hand, and the existing relationship between the studio and the party, on the other. The desire of the ZK to have a conference to guide film production, and to deal with issues related to film production, comes from this relationship.

After the conference, members of the ZK further developed the ideas posited by Schwab. Wernard Kohler a member of the ZK, in a memorandum written on behalf of the cultural sector of the ZK to the rest of the ZK, criticized average filmmakers at DEFA for not being as ideologically devoted as their leadership.[207] Over the course of his discussion of the importance of DEFA, Kohler declared, "film is one of the most important propaganda tools of our state."[208] Linking DEFA to the propaganda of the state was critical. It provided a baseline necessity for DEFA to function, as well as to ground its productions in the eyes of the state, and under the auspices of socially necessary production. Propagating state values via film was a necessity and the place of DEFA as a propaganda tool, at least in the eyes of the state, meant that close observation over DEFA was necessary. As Kohler argued,

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[207] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[208] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.

errors had been made by DEFA and were thus propagated to the populace, and these errors had to be prevented in the future.[209] Kohler's arguments mirror those posed by Schwab at the DEFA Conference. These observations by well-connected party officials are important for understanding the place of DEFA both ideologically, and practically, in the GDR at this time.

The determination to ensure that DEFA effectively communicate party ideology also led to concern about ideological errors made by filmmakers who were not perceived to be fully loyal to the SED. Kohler argued that the ideological errors were directly tied to artistic failings by the filmmakers. Whatever their source, they "turn[ed] the viewers against the films" and, thus, against the art of the GDR.[210] Kohler built on earlier criticisms voiced by party leaders and the DEFA Commission. He focused on specific issues such as having too many plotlines, and being confusingly written.[211] Rather than examples of poor filmmaking, in Kohler's mind these errors indicated an inability on the part of DEFA to fulfill its role as a key propaganda instrument. Filmmaking as a whole thus became highly politicized with the SED targeting films that it deemed as ineffectual or problematic.

Kohler's "critical remarks on the work of DEFA" were not limited to fault finding but included suggestions for fixing the errors that he found at DEFA. These suggestions ranged from the practical to the highly impractical. Among the less

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[209] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[210] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[211] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.

pragmatic solutions offered by Kohler, was that the films should be measured for ideological errors during production and if they were found to have any errors, the making of the film should be completely restarted.[212] This suggestion was wildly impractical from the perspective of filmmakers, and would have led to blatant censorship. Any errors, even if minor, would lead to months of wasted time, and millions of wasted Deutsch Marks. This suggestion reveals one of the major problems in the control structure of DEFA: not all officials involved in the structures were fully familiar with the realities of filmmaking. Not just were the officials censoring film production and controlling content of films, they were fundamentally sabotaging their own goals by applying impossible to meet standards, rather than working with filmmakers, they were working to control them. At the same time, however, Kohler showed his familiarity with the distribution process, by arguing that a major problem with distribution was the uneven and rigid schedule. Any number of films were shown for only short periods of time, regardless of popularity.[213]

Kohler balanced his criticisms with some praise for DEFA. DEFA, he believed, did a good job of representing the day-to-day lives of the average people in the GDR.[214] This praise showed that DEFA was, at least to some degree, fulfilling its mission in the eyes of the state, as well as fulfilling its ideological directives in

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[212] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[213] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[214] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.

producing accurate socialist realist films. He described this as a slow process, but one of the greatest accomplishments of the democratic order in the GDR.[215] However, Still, Kohler wished that DEFA films were more focused, rather than developing both a major plotline and subplots.[216] Presumably, the party leadership assumed that simple films would convey a coherent and comprehensible message, which would allow for the easier dissemination of values and ideology to the people.

Finally, Kohler called for structural changes to DEFA so that the studio could properly function as a People's Own Industry (VEB could integrate lower level employees into the command and control structure.[217] Kohler suggested that the production leader for each film should be a cultural-political leader in good standing with the party who would have broad authority over the cultural direction of the film.[218] This person would ensure compliance with legal statutes, adherence to the studio plan, and, tellingly, the leadership of affiliated party organizations.[219] This hypothetical role would function as a joint source of party and state oversight. Combining these two aspects of oversight into a single role allowed for a streamlined oversight over individual films. Moreover, this desire to attach this position to every single film would necessitate a large pool of qualified and trusted

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[215] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[216] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[217] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[218] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.
[219] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Kritische Bemerkungen zur Arbeit der DEFA 1952, no pagination.

individuals. Despite the fact that Kohler's long list of suggestions were sent to Ulbricht's office, there is little evidence of their implementation. Instead, they provide a window onto how party officials understood the problems at DEFA in 1952, and the solutions that they desired to implement.

While Kohler's list of suggestions did not lead to direct changes at DEFA, some changes did occur in the fall of 1952, most importantly efforts to reorganize and restructure the Künstlerischer Rat. One of the major reorganizational changes determined that the Künstlerischer Rat should collect all thematic plans for each production year from the heads of dramaturgy and in conjunction with the DEFA Commission, ensure that the themes for the year were acceptable.[220] After determining the correctness of film themes for the year, the Künstlerischer Rat would disseminate the themes back to the dramaturges and to writers for incorporation into films for that year.[221] The Künstlerischer Rat would also be responsible for reviewing all scripts before passing them on to the DEFA Commission.[222] These changes altered the nature of the Künstlerischer Rat in such a way that it went from primarily reviewing finished films, to having a determining role in the nature of all films produced at DEFA prior to their production. Given the nature of the Künstlerischer Rat as a representative council made up of DEFA filmmakers, albeit primarily of party loyalists, its reorganization into a more

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[220] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[221] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[222] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.

powerful committee is indicative of greater trust in DEFA filmmakers. In effect, this reorganization gave SED loyalists who stood outside of the official party structure a role in censoring film production in such a way that it did not overly appear to be party intervention. The party allowed the members of the Rat to make critical decisions for the production of DEFA films, and to have a large degree of oversight over filmmaking for the GDR. On the other hand, the reorganization created a stronger tie between the party, namely the DEFA Commission, and the Künstlerischer Rat than had existed previously.

In addition to strengthening the pre-production role of the Künstlerischer Rat, the reorganization reaffirmed its post-production role. The Künstlerischer Rat, in conjunction with the DEFA Commission, reviewed all of the feature films produced at DEFA.[223] The key difference between this and earlier structures of the Künstlerischer Rat was that, at least initially, they would review films before the films left DEFA. After these changes the Künstlerischer Rat was no longer an internal firewall protecting DEFA films from too much criticism from the party by clearing them before outsiders saw them, but was now a body that viewed films alongside the DEFA Commission. The Künstlerischer Rat, which had been the most powerful independent body at DEFA, became, via these reforms, closely tied to the DEFA Commission. Bringing the Künstlerischer Rat closer to the DEFA Commission was both an act of control by the party hierarchy and one of trust. Without significant levels of faith in the abilities of the Künstlerischer Rat to act on the values

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[223] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.

of the party, this closer relationship could not have functioned and would have been, from the beginning, effectively useless. Instead the DEFA Commission had enough faith in the Künstlerischer Rat to accept its larger role in the production process.

A Künstlerischer Rat meeting from November 1952 gives insight into the effects that these reforms had on the council. The meeting begins with the clarification of the important role of the council, declaring that without strong action from the council, and leading cultural figures at DEFA, the themes "in defense of peace, democracy, and national independence" could not be implemented.[224] At the meeting a link was drawn between propagating the values of the party, and defending the ideals of both party and state, with an increase in film production, as well as film quality.[225] In describing their tasks the members of the Künstlerischer Rat stated that they needed to work closely with the head of the feature film studio, as well as to go through every script and treatment of films that were produced at the feature film studio.[226] These tasks as outlined by the council necessitated close relationships with the major figures within the feature film studio. Simultaneously they reveal a real concern for the ideological directives given by the DEFA Commission, as well as the critiques raised at the DEFA Conference. These issues are important for understanding the degree to which information presented at the DEFA Conference, and at DEFA Commission meetings, was in fact received by

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[224] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[225] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[226] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.

individuals at DEFA. While the Künstlerischer Rat operated as a high level organization at DEFA it is still indicative of information transference and presents a window into the knowledge possessed by lower level figures at DEFA.

The Künstlerischer Rat focused on more than just the concerns of the party in establishing its tasks. The artistic council laid out its role in cultural production stating that, "the works of the council must be for the achievement of a raised cultural level for all workers [at DEFA]."[227] Here the council established itself, via its new structures, as a leading body at DEFA. The cultural stages reached by filmmakers at DEFA were, in the eyes of the council, its responsibility. From the perspective of the council this did not mean the creation of an authoritarian system, or even a strictly hierarchical one, but rather that they would work alongside filmmakers in order to guide them. Functionally, however, this was a system in which powerful figures within the studio system, all of whom had ties to the party, were able to guide and influence film production. The council stated that at the core of its function was to listen to the concerns and problems of workers at DEFA.[228] Reaffirming, and maintaining, its earlier functions of supporting filmmakers at DEFA was key for the council after its reforms. Here the council acknowledged the necessity of close ties to other filmmakers, and a concern for their problems.

Through its restructuring and reforms in the fall of 1952 the Künstlerischer Rat at DEFA took on a more powerful role. Its ties to the DEFA Commission, and

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[227] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[228] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.

therein the highest levels of the SED, were strengthened. It was granted greater authority and powers, with the goal of allowing the council to, to a large degree, effectively control production at DEFA. As a result of these changes and increased authority the Künstlerischer Rat sacrificed aspects of its autonomy. Primary among these was that the members of the council, while still elected at DEFA, had to be approved by the newly formed State Film Commission.[229] The subordination of the council to a state body was a first for DEFA. While DEFA had had loose ties to state ministries, its primary oversight had always come from the party. With this change DEFA was for the first time, at least in terms of real relationships, under the auspices of the state half of the party-state.

The creation of the state film commission in the early autumn of 1952 signified a small, albeit important, shift toward DEFA responding more to state bodies. This coincided with an overall strengthening in state bodies in the GDR. In the fall of 1952 and spring of 1953 the SED pushed to organize society more around the structures of state institutions, and to ensure that people followed along with the values and ideals of the party.[230] The emergence of stronger state institutions in this period came from the declaration by the SED that the construction of socialism would be the product of the state. [231]This period also saw greater economic controls, and pushes to increase production across the economy. Both the party and the state encouraged increases in production, and as a result rejection of these shifts came in

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[229] BA DR 1 4585 Babelsberg den 8.11.1952 Über die Arbeit des Künstlerischen Rates, no pagination.
[230] Bruce, Gary. *Resistance with the People" Repression and Resistance in Easter Germany 1945-1955*. New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, p. 159.
[231] Bruce, p. 159.

the form of rejection of and anger against both institutions. Within this context it was important for DEFA, a nominally state institution, to engage with state structures, and not just with party institutions. Closely binding DEFA to a state institution would also reify the nominal structures and in so doing create a system where cultural production was not just a creation of the party. On top of this the existence of a powerful state film institution would alter the understanding of cultural production from the viewpoint of DFEA filmmakers as well.

The Party and the State Intervene: 1953

From the beginning the state film commission worked alongside, and above DEFA. Reports from commission meetings were circulated at DEFA, in particular among party members and leaders. In February 1953 the party leadership of DEFA issued a report to the commission regarding a party conference at DEFA. This report served to ensure that the commission had a strong insight into the workings at DEFA, and in particular the party's actions. Here again is evidence of the actualization of the party-state duality at DEFA. The contents of the conference report themselves reveal the details that were delivered to the commission. The only significant change or suggestion that came from the conference was the declaration of the necessity of licensing officials taking a greater role in the artistic side of DEFA.[232] Participants at the conference also called for greater unity between the varying studios, and in particular the studios that were not located in

[232] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 SED Parteileitung der DEFA Betriebe Sekretariat 17.2.1953, no pagination.

Babelsberg.[233] Messages of unity between varying studios at DEFA were, by and large, a recent phenomenon. Before 1952 DEFA was organized as a single studio with varying functions, but in 1952 the varying film types were broken down into independent studios, most of which were located in Babelsberg.[234]

The reorganization of DEFA was designed to increase efficiency and production at the studio. By splitting the single studio into a larger grouping of smaller and more focused studios, the reorganization would allow for DEFA to produce higher quality films at a greater speed than before. This process was also directly tied to the legal shift in the status of DEFA into a VEB. In becoming a fully state owned, and operated, industry DEFA's direction was more closely linked with the desire, and need, for productive efficiency. Economic constraints, and dictums, while always a factor at DEFA became more important once it was officially a nationalized production site. Productive capacity and rate were vital in this period of the GDR's history. Documents related to the official creation of DEFA as a VEB directly reference issues of efficiency and production rate.[235] Efficiency could, in the eyes of the state and party, be increased by splitting DEFA into semi-independent sub-studios through the ability of each studio to focus on a particular type of filmmaking, thereby freeing up the heads of DEFA to focus on broader issues relating to film in the GDR as a whole. The control and command structures that I

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[233] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 SED Parteileitung der DEFA Betriebe Sekretariat 17.2.1953, no pagination.
[234] Schittly, p. 53.
[235] Schubbe, Ellimar. *Dokumente zur Kunst, Lituratur, und Kulturpolitik der SED*. Berlin: Seewald Verlag, 1972. 288.

have discussed so far were transferred from DEFA as a whole to the nascent DEFA Studio for Feature Film (SFS).

Reorganizing DEFA was not merely a matter of instilling productivist values into the studios and encouraging an increase in production rate, but also of working to ensure that people who were more qualified to oversee a particular type of film production were in charge. The creation of a series of studio heads, in addition to the head of DEFA allowed for more effective oversight. Greater organization and oversight in relation to film production was crucial for ensuring that films were produced in the proper quantity and quality. The structure and nature of the reorganization came from the newly created State Film Committee, and represents a demonstration of its power and authority at that time. The committee, rather than deferring to the DEFA Commission, took charge of the reorganization and worked to address the complaints about the structure of DEFA. These changes, while coming from state institutions, were not inherently top down, but rather granted greater autonomy to the newly created studios.

Coming in the winter of 1952/1953 these reforms, however, took on greater importance. Not only were they clearly a direct response to the critiques of the previous summer, but they were also in line with the push from the party and state in that time. In the summer of 1952 at the Second Party Congress the SED announced that the time for the creation of socialism had arrived in the GDR. This declaration fundamentally altered structural productive relationships in the country. Movements towards increased production rates stemmed directly from this announcement. In the eyes of the party leadership the path to socialism

involved not just structural societal changes, but also concrete steps to improve the economy and national production. These policies, and steps, ranged from raising production quotas across the economy, to encouraging, and enforcing, frugality. State institutions were the driving force behind enforcing, and realizing, these ideals, and as such took a much larger role at this time than they had in prior years. For DEFA this meant increased interactions with the State Film Commission. (SKF). It is important to note the overlapping roles of members of the SKF. At the time the head of the SKF was Sepp Schwab, who was a sitting member of the DEFA Commission in the summer of 1952. Overlap between the two governing bodies of DEFA ensured that the state organization fully carried out the party's directives.

In May of 1953 the SKF sent a "brigade" (an activist group of dedicated and trusted party members who, whatever the current SED campaign, carried it into industry) and pushed for its goals to DEFA in order to investigate the state of frugality. The tone of the SKF's report was a mixture of the positive and the negative. On the one hand, it emphasized the good interactions that the representatives of the SKF had with filmmakers at DEFA. On the other hand, it referred to problems at DEFA that needed to be rectified. Most ominous among the supposed problem areas mentioned by the SKF members was that "the class enemy works at the feature film studio."[236] This charge carried extreme weight at the time, and indicated that not only did the SKF not trust DEFA employees, but explicitly identified some of them as absolute enemies of the party and the state. The charge

[236] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für Filmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.

of being a "class enemy" could lead to very serious consequences, including arrest and prosecution In addition to the charges of, in effect, treason, the report focused on the combination of politics and economic issues. However, despite this charge being leveled against DEFA employees, there were no actions taken against DEFA, and no purges or mass arrests occurred. The title of the report, "Analysis of the assignment of a brigade of the State Film Commission in the VEB DEFA Feature Film Studio to evaluate the implementation of the campaign for strict frugality", reveals the ultimate goal and mission of the delegation. The ability of the feature film studio to produce films at, or under, budget was of vital importance for the SKF.

While economic issues were addressed, ideological ones merited enough importance to take up the first third of the report. The authors of the report tied the existence of the class enemy at DEFA to the close ties between those at the feature film studio and artists in West Berlin.[237] The representatives of the SKF proposed a series of meetings at the feature film studio in order to fully explain the dangers of working with those living in the West.[238] In addition to meetings regarding how to avoid contact with the class enemy, the report called for greater ideological development of the BPO at DEFA.[239] In fact the SKF proposed explicit indoctrination

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[237] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für FIlmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.
[238] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für FIlmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.
[239] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für FIlmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.

of filmmakers to keep them from working with purported class enemies and to ensure that they would limit their contact with the West.

Control over film in 1953, as represented by the investigation by the SKF into frugality at DEFA, took on a more politically charged and direct nature than had earlier control structures. The insertion of, at least nominally, state run institutions into the control system was critical for these shifts. On top of ever-present ideological investigations and safeguards by the party were added a state focus on economics, including costs and, especially, production rates. A stronger focus on economic issues, and the overall costs of running the feature film studio, became a recurring theme of interactions between the feature film studio and all of its state overseers well into the 1960s. At the core of these issues was the concern on the part of state organizations that the feature film studio was not producing films quickly enough and at a low enough cost to justify the budgets for these films.[240]

A major point of concern for the investigation was the degree to which the average member knew of, and understood, the quarterly production plan. The representatives of the SKF stated that there needed to be greater concern for propagating and explaining the quarterly plan to those working at the feature film studio.[241] Brigade members saw this as the critical piece missing in ensuring proper

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[240] An example of this came in the production notes attached to all films beginning in the 1950s. These notes covered the allotted materials and timespan for film production, and then compared them to the materials used and length of production to give a grade to films. The highest grades went to films that were significantly under budget and under production time.

[241] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für FIlmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.

frugality and economic planning.[242] Distribution, and explanation, of quarterly plans for the studio was a pragmatic response to the perceived lack of knowledge and understanding. Creating functional, and pragmatic, quarterly plans was thus essential to the proper functioning of the feature film studio, and of DEFA as an institution. Given the planned nature of the GDR's economy these plans fit into a larger production scheme for the entirety of the country, and were thereby important for the totality of the economy.

The organization of work at DEFA around quarterly production schedules was critical for ensuring the ability of the films to actually be produced. In large part this came from the nature of the distribution of materials across the GDR. Centralization of the totality of yearly production planning through a central governing body limited the ability of filmmakers to ensure the presence of the proper amount of raw materials for filmmaking. The limited amount of materials that would be disbursed for the creation of each film linked to the problems of centralized planning. Planners at DEFA would coordinate with state planners to attempt to ensure that materials were available for filmmakers. This process would then be used to create quarterly production schedules for the distribution of materials. Simultaneously the production schedules would be used to create release schedules for films and were then linked to schedules for screening films.

The planned economy of the GDR linked the production of films to the entirety of the GDR's economic structure. Many of the materials used for films were

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[242] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 213 Analyse über den Einsatz der Brigaden des Staatlichen Komitees für FIlmwesen in den VEB DEFA-Studios zur Überprüfung der Durchführung des Feldzuges für Strengste Sparsamkeit 27 May 1953, no pagination.

purchased from abroad, and this in turn necessitated proper trade and currency reserves in order to allow for the materials to be obtained. Connections between the planning of DEFA production to the entirety of the GDR's economic production meant that alterations to production schedules and norms in other economic sectors had a direct impact on production at DEFA. These connections were also seen via the arrival of production norms at DEFA. The quarterly plans not only ensured the distribution of materials, but also were critical for ensuring increased production at DEFA. The ever-increasing production quotas not only addressed the concerns raised by the DEFA Commission and at the DEFA Conference, but also put DEFA into the same conditional categories as the rest of the GDR. Even though DEFA remained important cultural institution, it was not exempt from very real production quotas that the feature film studio was expected to not only meet, but also to exceed.

These pressures for higher production throughout the economy caused increasing fury among workers that boiled over in the June 17th uprising that shut down many factories throughout the GDR and led to major street demonstrations in Berlin. As an industry, DEFA was not directly impacted by the revolt and did not offer any response to it. Contextualizing the non-response from DEFA is important for understanding the impact of the June 17th uprising on the film industry in the GDR. The SED intervened more, not less, in DEFA after the uprising, rather than pulling back as the party did with other industries. In the fall of 1953 a report was issued to the ZK regarding efforts to decrease the cost of films while simultaneously increasing the quantity of films produced. This demand echoed the calls in the summer of 1952 for DEFA to wrangle ballooning production costs and to find a way

to ramp up production. The report described a leadership of the feature film studio that was, in the opinion of the author, disinterested in the task, and sought to avoid important meetings regarding working to reduce the cost of films.[243] These complaints are important in understanding the interrelationship between party officials and DEFA leaders, particularly in regard to attempts to maximize production efficiency and minimize cost at the studio.

Differences, in terms of level of focus, between the ZK representatives and DEFA leaders represent the two sides of the discussion of the importance of finances in regard to film production. The complaints about the lack of attention to costs by the leaders of DEFA were tied to improper functioning on the part of the BPO at DEFA.[244] The report called for further structural changes to the BPO and to the feature film studio both of which would "represent a step forward for the leadership of economic accountability."[245] Alterations to party structures were thus seen not just in ideological terms, but also in economic ones. The inability of the BPO to provide proper leadership at DEFA allegedly risked the economic stability of the

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[243] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Einführung der Plankostenrechnung im VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme und Strukturänderungen zum Zwecke der besseren Betriebsorganisation entsprechend dem Bericht über eine betriebswirtschaftliche Untersuchung und Revision beim VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme, 14 12 1953, no pagination.

[244] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Einführung der Plankostenrechnung im VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme und Strukturänderungen zum Zwecke der besseren Betriebsorganisation entsprechend dem Bericht über eine betriebswirtschaftliche Untersuchung und Revision beim VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme, 14 12 1953, no pagination.

[245] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Einführung der Plankostenrechnung im VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfime und Strukturänderungen zum Zwecke der besseren Betriebsorganisation entsprechend dem Bericht über eine betriebswirtschaftliche Untersuchung und Revision beim VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme, 14 12 1953, no pagination.

studio, as well as challenged the ability of the quarterly plans to be successfully implemented. Failure to oversee, and to demonstrate proper focus on, the quarterly plans were signs of inability on the part of the BPO.

The Emergence of the SKF: 1954

Reports from that following spring regarding the ability of the party at DEFA to properly operate within DEFA were, for the party, directly related to purported problems at DEFA. A report issued to the SKF lamented the low number of party members at DEFA stating that only 264 of the 1950 employees of the feature film studio were party members.[246] The report retrospectively details the problems with fundamental reorganizations of DEFA prior to the arrival of Hans Rodenberg in 1952.[247] Rodenberg's arrival paved the way for limited reforms, but even after he became the head of the feature film studio, there were still major problems with the party work at DEFA. Low attendance in party meetings and educational talks were major points of concern for the authors of the report.[248] This report linked longstanding issues with the party's activities at DEFA to both the reforms that created new studios and the economic issues that the studio faced. Low membership totals and poor morale among members were symptomatic of larger issues at the studio.

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[246] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Über die politische Lage in den Filmbetrieben außer den Staatlichen Komitee für FIlmwesen 1 March 1954, no pagination.
[247] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Über die politische Lage in den Filmbetrieben außer den Staatlichen Komitee für FIlmwesen 1 March 1954, no pagination.
[248] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218 Über die politische Lage in den Filmbetrieben außer den Staatlichen Komitee für FIlmwesen 1 March 1954, no pagination.

Importantly these criticisms came not from party functionaries, but rather came from and were sent back to members of the SKF. The party-state nature of the GDR is further illuminated by this report. It was not just the purpose of the SKF to monitor film production, but also to oversee, and to evaluate, the party organizations and cells. The fact that the SED gave a state institution the responsibility to evaluate the functioning of party groups at DEFA illustrates not just the importance attributed to the party in the process of filmmaking, but also the degree to which the party had come to trust state groups by 1953. While the SKF was intimately tied to the SED, it was still not an official party organization. However, the attention to the functioning of party groups within state institutions fits within the framework theorized by Fulbrook as to how the party-state fully functioned in the GDR. Fulbrook's argument that a complete and total intermeshing between party and state occurred within the GDR provides a theoretical framework for explaining the realities seen in the SKF report.[249]

Here again one sees the emphasis placed on the role and importance of the party for filmmaking. The focus of the SKF on the problems of the BPO reveals not just, as Fulbrook argued, the intertwining of the party and the state, but also the reliance of state organizations on party groups for the fulfillment of state, and party, plans within industry. DEFA had a double role: in the political plan of the SED, it played an important cultural and ideological role and within the economic plan of the state, it functioned as just another industry. Its dual role casts light on the place

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[249] Fullbrook, Mary. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 44.

of DEFA during the Neue Kurs (New Course) era of the GDR from 1953 to 1956.[250] Stark shifts in economic planning, and the realities of economic life in the GDR, during this period led to shifts in DEFA planning and production.[251] The criticisms of the DEFA Commission in the summer of 1952 prefaced these fundamental changes in DEFA planning and production that arose in 1954.

In the spring of 1954 the Politburo received a report on the production plans for DEFA's feature film studio for that year. The report details each of the films planned for that year, as well as the films that were not expected to finish production during that year. In addition, the report contains a section for "reserve films" that could be made in case the films that were scheduled for production ran under budget and finished in less time than was allotted.[252] The productivist values of the GDR's economic planners were shown here within DEFA's yearly planning. In creating strict production schedules for filming the Politburo planners were subjecting DEFA to economic structures of their planned economy.

Strict productivist logic, while seemingly making sense for a planned economy, was not a strong suit for a film production company. Rather than encouraging artistic development and experimentation, the new norms created strict controls over production, encouraging quick shoots with minimal expense. The rising emphasis on cost cutting was, then, associated with a decline in quality for the average film. This decline, in turn, was the cause of a decline in the

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[250] Dennis, p. 63-64.
[251] Dennis, p. 64.
[252] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 218, Produktionspläne für DEFA Spielfilm Studio 1 March 1954, p. 74.

popularity of the average DEFA film as measured by both DEFA officials and decreased film attendance. Productivist attention to costs, on the other hand, meant that filmmakers mainly shot their films on location in the GDR, thus, producing a realist aesthetic which corresponded to the socialist realist artistic vision of the SED leadership. For party officials this was a strongly positive result of their policies, as by 1954 Socialist Realism was the only acceptable aesthetic model for filmmaking.

The impact of the shift in emphasis to economic efficiency is largely glossed over in the historiography. Both Schittly and Feinstein look at this as an era of largely stable development for DEFA. Feinstein goes so far as to say that the creation of the MfK was the only major development in relation to DEFA that occurred in 1954.[253] Schittly briefly outlines the impact of the New Course on DEFA, but he focuses mainly on the return in most industries to increased production norms after the 1953 uprising.[254] While the official structural changes between 1953 and 1954 were minor, the long-term impact that they had on the nature of DEFA production was significant. After 1955, stricter adherence quotas and norms again emerged as constraining influences on DEFA and on filmmakers. Concerns about the amount of film stock used, and the timespan of filming, as well as all levels of cost, played a very important role in DEFA productions, particularly after the early 1950s.

The imposition of greater control over DEFA's budget was not the only major development that occurred in 1954. The creation of the MfK in the spring led to

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[253] Feinstein, p. 40.
[254] Schittly, 74.

new controls and structures for DEFA that integrated it more completely into state structures. The move from almost exclusive party oversight to a mix between party and state oversight was an important one. The creation of the SKF represented the first step in establishing DEFA as a thoroughly state influenced organization. The move of control from the MfV to the MfK in the spring of 1954 established firmer ties to the state, and created the structures under which DEFA would operate for the next 36 years. Ideologically speaking, the continued move toward greater state control mirrored the development of the GDR as a state and the creation of new state institutions in this period.

The Birth of the HV Film and New Control Methods: 1955

The emerging stability of the GDR, in particular after the SED managed to suppress the 1953 uprising and maintain its political power, transferred increasing authority to the MfK and the HV Film, its main film office. The emergence of the HV Film in 1954 led to closer oversight over DEFA by the MfK than had existed in the past. DEFA issued routine reports to the HV Film regarding the status of film production. A report from the head of dramaturgy at DEFA to the Control Committee in February of 1955 provides insight into the methods of control, and what aspects of film production the HV Film considered the most important. At the heart of the report were analyses of production levels and rates at the feature film studio, focusing in particular on the push for DEFA to produce at least 150% of its film quota.[255] In focusing on not just production, but also the relationship between

[255] BA DR 117 32751 An den Leiter den HV Film Herrn Anton Ackermann 24 February 1955, no pagination.

the number of films produced and the assigned quota, the report reveals the continued, and very real, importance of the quota system at DEFA. The importance of discussions about the quota system from the prior become clearer in light of this report, insofar as it indicates that the quota system for DEFA was so integral that non-economic functionaries at DEFA focused on exceeding the production quota.

Production rates were thus included as a part of dramaturgical oversight. The head of Dramaturgy assessed the importance of the cultural works produced by DEFA in light of their place in the production plan and the rate of production at that time.[256] He further talked about the difficulty of meeting the production rate given the authors and directors at DEFA.[257] The combination of these two indicate that economic issues, and fulfilling the plan passed down to DEFA were of crucial importance for dramaturges, and thus were seen as being important for crafting artistic films. Moreover, given the ideological place of dramaturges in the GDR, fulfilling the plan was not simply about satisfying the economic desires of the state, but also of safeguarding the influence of the SED. By fulfilling the quota they could show the party leaders that they not only cared about the quota in an economic sense, but also desired to fulfill the task handed down to them by the party.

Production quotas were, thus, central to all stages of production and planning at DEFA by 1955. Rather than existing merely in the monetary sectors of the feature film studio, the quarterly, and yearly, plans were taken into account by

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[256] BA DR 117 32751 An den Leiter den HV Film Herrn Anton Ackermann 24 February 1955, no pagination.
[257] BA DR 117 32751 An den Leiter den HV Film Herrn Anton Ackermann 24 February 1955, no pagination.

all major figures in the production process. Dramaturges, the ideological watchdogs of the process, were cognizant of where each film fit into the production plan, and were thus tasked with ensuring that the schedule for each film fit into the plan. Problems with films arose that reflected not just the lack of materials, an issue that would plague DEFA productions throughout the studio's history, but also, at least according to DEFA employees, poor writing and directing.[258] Issues with quality writers and directors noted in 1955, mirror those found in much earlier internal DEFA reports, such as the 1949 complaints about the ability of DEFA to produce enough quality films with the limited supply of directors. These personnel issues could not be fixed by simple adjustments to the economic plan, but rather were problems that were central to the, at least perceived, decline in quality in DEFA films over the latter half of the 1950s. Given the labor-power crunch in the GDR in the 1950s, DEFA could not simply fire weak directors and writers and replace them from an extant labor pool. Instead DEFA officials had to rely on the directors and writers that they had, and work alongside these directors and writers to produce the number, and quality, of films that were prescribed by the yearly, and quarterly, quota systems.

While the contents of the report are important, the fact that it went to the HV Film is also important. The normalization of state structures and oversight over film production necessitated the issuance of reports to the HV Film. The very existence of these reports served as an acknowledgement of the role, and place, of the HV Film

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[258] BA DR 117 32751 An den Leiter den HV Film Herrn Anton Ackermann 24 February 1955, no pagination.

in the film production hierarchy. By contrast, no reports were sent to the MfV when it was nominally in charge of production. The transition from reporting almost exclusively to party bodies, to a mix of reports to party and state institutions established the MfK, and the HV Film, as functional overseers of DEFA production in a way that previous state institutions never were. Unlike the MfV the newly created MfK and HV Film therein exercised real authority over DEFA production and did not defer to party bodies before making decisions. The role of the HV Film in the production hierarchy was such that the office opened itself up to high level party scrutiny. Despite being a relatively new office, the HV Film was the subject of debate, and criticism at the 23rd Plenum, in June 1955.

Among the most critical pushes at the 23rd Plenum were those for DEFA to link itself securely to state institutions. Increased ties to all forms of state institutions were important by the mid-1950s, and not just as a sign of the developing place of the state within the GDR, but also for very clear economic reasons. As the 1950s progressed DEFA faced even more pressure to meet and exceed its production quota. In October 1955 the film planning meeting for the Feature Film Studio for 1956 focused heavily on the economic viability of the production plan given to the studio. Representatives from the planning office of the MfK, as well as a number of DEFA representatives, including Albert Wilkening attended the meeting. At the core of the meeting were two questions: whether or not the quota could be met by DEFA, and the economic status of the Feature Film Studio. When seen in context, the drive to meet the plan and recognition of the broader economic complications of the plan reveal the linkages between economic

policies and cultural production. Despite DEFA's desire, to meet and exceed the production quota, there were serious reservations as to the feasibility of the production schedule. Wilkening, one of the most important figures at DEFA, argued that the production quota could only be met if DEFA adapted a number of plays because it did have not enough scriptwriters to craft brand new film ideas.[259] Here again we see the problems that stem from the personnel scarcity that existed in the GDR in the 1950s. The sheer scarcity of qualified writers made it a struggle for DEFA to produce 15, let alone 20, films in a year, in particular when taken in combination with the limited budget given to the feature film studio.

Wilkening suggested the creation of "production groups" in order to speed up filming rates.[260] While Wilkening did not provide a full description of the duties and actions of the purposed production groups, he did state that they would stem from the dramaturgical parts of the feature film studio.[261] The concept of creating stable groups in order to speed up production reemerged in 1959 with the development of Artistic Working Groups (KAGs). It was assumed that productivity could be significantly increased if a small group of writers, directors, and dramaturges would work together over time on a series of projects.

Increased speed of production was not the only goal of the DEFA and MfK planners; they also wanted to increase the quality of films produced at DEFA. As the

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[259] BA DR 117 33453 über die Sitzung am 17.10.55 betr Besprechung des Produktionsplanes für das Jahr 1956, no pagination.
[260] BA DR 117 33453 über die Sitzung am 17.10.55 betr Besprechung des Produktionsplanes für das Jahr 1956, no pagination.
[261] BA DR 117 33453 über die Sitzung am 17.10.55 betr Besprechung des Produktionsplanes für das Jahr 1956, no pagination.

DEFA planners put it: "What do we want to achieve? To produce films of the highest artistic quality."[262] In pairing quality and quantity the planners worked to overcome the possible negative effects on quality of speeding up film production. Discussions of how to increase production rates did not generally address the issue of quality. The balance between these two is not zero sum, but often acts in such a way for production. As a result they needed to find a way to maintain, and even increase, the quality of film production while cutting costs significantly and increasing the rate of production yearly. The overall goals of the planning meeting mimic those laid out at previous meetings in the MfK and the ZK in regard to the nature of film production.

Creation of stable thematic plans for DEFA was related closely to the attention to increased film quality and quantity. These yearly plans established thematic, and ideological, continuity between films. A letter from Minister of Culture Johannes Becher to Paul Wandel, the head of the cultural section of the ZK, regarding the thematic plan for 1956-1960 reveals much about the nature of planning at DEFA. Becher stated that the themes of films were to work against the petit-bourgeois traditions then found at DEFA.[263] Part of achieving this goal was to engage in the "struggle for humor" and to create entertaining socialist films for the masses.[264] Becher further justifies the thematic plan by discussing the problems at

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[262] BA DR 117 33453 über die Sitzung am 17.10.55 betr Besprechung des Produktionsplanes für das Jahr 1956, no pagination.
[263] BA DR 1 8274 Thematischen Plan des VEB DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme für das Jahr 1956 7 12 1955, no pagination.
[264] BA DR 1 8274 Thematischen Plan des VEB DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme für das Jahr 1956 7 12 1955, no pagination.

DEFA with creating a real filmic substance that is recognizable.[265] Becher's admission of problems with finding a recognizable filmic substance points to the difficulty of winning a mass audience. Finding a means of engaging the audience was a critical aspect of the push for more humorous films. Becher concludes by asking the Politburo for guidance in proceeding with the creation of themes for the following year.[266] Becher here subordinated his role as head of the MfK to the guidance of the Politburo, therein putting the heads of the party clearly above the MfK in regard to cultural decision-making.

This act ran counter to the trends of 1954 and early 1955 in which the MfK, and other state institutions, asserted greater authority over cultural matters. Rather than assert that he had solved the problem of thematic issues at DEFA, Becher looked to the Politburo to come up with a solution that would fully resolve the purported issues at DEFA. The only major problem that Becher claimed an ability to solve was that of the existence of petty-bourgeois tendencies in DEFA productions. Here Becher not only demonstrated his support for the platform of the SED, but also his willingness to take the lead in ensuring that the SED's ideas were properly adhered to. Becher not only focused on his willingness to be at the fore in supporting the SED when interacting with representatives of the ZK, but also when acting internally at the MfK. The HV Film internal report on the status of film production in 1955 includes references to the need for DEFA to battle both

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[265] BA DR 1 8274 Thematischen Plan des VEB DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme für das Jahr 1956 7 12 1955, no pagination.
[266] BA DR 1 8274 Thematischen Plan des VEB DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme für das Jahr 1956 7 12 1955, no pagination.

"bourgeois neutral tendencies" and "schematism," i.e. a focus on the structure of a film over its message[267] The report reflected the fear in HV Film and in the party that , DEFA films were disseminating schematism and bourgeois tendencies to the populace.

The emergence of the HV Film and the MfK as a whole in 1954 led to a stark shift in the power structures that oversaw DEFA production. By the end of 1955 the HV Film was a trusted and valued contributor to the oversight of film production. The era from 1950 to 1955 saw a large shift in how films were produced, and the ways in which values were disseminated and dictated. During this period production oversight shifted from being an era of almost exclusive Politburo oversight to a strong mix between party and state officials. This shift reflected trends that were specific to ideas about film and DEFA as well as general trends, including the reaction of the party to the June uprising, the maintenance of production norms after the uprising, and the creation of new state offices to oversee film production. Contrary to assumptions, DEFA did not experience a relaxation of state control but, instead, more bureaucratic oversight than earlier - and now from both state and party institutions. At the same time, however, DEFA enjoyed privileges not accorded to other industries. These included direct meetings with the Politburo and the ability to question the decision making of the party leadership. There emerged a back and forth between control and rejection of control. I will return to this proto-negotiating process in the next chapter.

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[267] BA DR 1 7919 Bericht über das Planjahr 1955 Anlage zum Kontrollbericht der HV Film per 31.12.1955, p. 250.

Roman einer Jungen Ehe: Negotiating Two Germanies

Kurt Maetzig's 1952 film, *Roman einer Jungen Ehe* illustrates the kind of film desired by the SED in the early 1950s. It tells the story of the relationship between two actors in Berlin in the late 1940s through the early 1950s. The central characters Agnes and Jochen represent two journeys towards support for the GDR. For Agnes, the path to support for socialism originated in a dedication to anti-fascism, and a belief that the West intentionally portrayed the East as a terrible place. Jochen, on the other hand, started out as an unrepentant supporter of the West, and only turned toward socialism after seeing the propaganda produced by cultural officials, and the US Army, in the West. The film, set in Berlin, explores the interactions between the cultural intelligentsia in the Soviet and Western sectors, and how the politics of those who support each group develop from the winter of 1945-1946, through the establishment of the two Germanies. As a cultural product the film engages in a discussion of the implications of following a path of anti-fascism versus that of careerism. The character of Agnes sharply contrasts with that of the theatrical group in which Jochen acts.

Agnes and Jochen represent, for the viewer, two possible models for how to respond to the post-War German situation. Agnes quickly embraces the optimism of the workers of the Eastern zone and later GDR, and in so doing encourages the viewer to positively react to the implications of anti-fascism and its relationship to socialism. Jochen, on the other hand, starts out as a careerist who willingly interacts with former Nazi propagandists, and who associates with capitalists and cultural figures who will do anything for money. Most notable among Jochen's associates is

the character of Lutz Frank who actively tries to undermine the efforts of Agnes to show the positives of anti-fascism. It bears noting that the character of Lutz Frank is, in many ways, similar to the character of Conny, played by the same actor in *Frauenschicksale* and engages in similar behaviors throughout the film.[268] This similarity underscores the mentalities that were, for DEFA filmmakers, emblematic of predatory capitalist figures. While Frank was not the financier of the Western cultural figures, he nevertheless worked as a fixer, connecting Jochen and others with work opportunities, including those funded by the American military. In contrast, Agnes associates not with sleazy figures, but rather with workers in the East.

Agnes' interactions with the working class stemmed from her involvement in clearing rubble from factory sites, and aiding in the physical reconstruction of Berlin. Her initial job after she arrived provided her with the opportunity to connect with workers, and to aid in the removal of rubble. Later on in the film Agnes reconnects with the workers that she initially met and works with them to celebrate the successes of the newly formed GDR, as well as of the party. In the process Agnes becomes a member of the FDGB, and fully embraces socialism. Agnes represents a model for the viewer to identify with, and a proxy for those who had embraced socialism via anti-fascism. Simultaneously, her openness to Jochen, even after his interactions with Frank and former Nazis, represents the willingness of the

[268] In *Frauenschicksale* Hans Groth played the role of Conny a notorious West German lothario who did everything to seduce and take advantage of women from East Berlin. His lifestyle is one of decadence and opulent displays of wealth, and is used as a counterpoint to that of the solid East German men who the women in the film should, from the perspective of the filmmakers, be attracted to.

party, and party members, to welcome those who had imperfect pasts, but who were open to the message of socialism and the fight for anti-fascism. Agnes thus both models behaviors, as well as encourages the viewer to provide openness to all who were willing to embrace socialism.

The value presented within the film were quickly embraced by the party, and for the most part, fundamentally represented the ideals of the party. Most notably Günter Klein praised the film itself in internal ZK discussions.[269] This internal support provides clarity for interpreting the function of the film within the GDR, as well as the utility of its message for the party. Although he was a party member, Maetzig did not simply craft party propaganda. Still, the film functions as a promotional tool for both the SED and the plans that the party promoted in the early 1950s. Implicit within this was the concept that the film itself stemmed from authentic belief in the values presented by the filmmakers, and not from party pressure. The character arc of Agnes carries this message, and reminds the viewer that membership in party approved organizations, such as the FDGB, comes not out of a desire for personal benefits, but rather from the dedications and abilities of those who seek membership.

Conclusion

From 1950 to 1955 the relationship between the SED and DEFA changed significantly in terms of production oversight, as well as the actual nature of party-

[269] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 206 Abschrift von Günter Klein 10 September 1951, no pagination.

DEFA interactions. DEFA went from being under the auspices of the DEFA Commission of the Politburo, to the State Film Commission, and finally to the nascent MfK. This transition at DEFA occurred in tandem with the broader development of state bodies within the emerging GDR. Contemporaneous with this the party pushed for greater activism within DEFA, and to ensure that filmmakers understood their roles in relation to both the party and the state. This took place through both direct interactions, such as the 1952 film conference, as well as broader party directives. At the same time, the function of film within the SED's ideology became solidified with Oelßner's inversion of base and superstructure, allowing for film to take on an explicit productive role in relation to socialism. This shift solidified the place of film and reinforced the need for filmmakers to closely work with the party. In so doing, the SED maintained a close watch over DEFA despite the growth of ostensibly independent state institutions.

Chapter 3:

Truffle Pigs and Industrial Labor: Pushback and Response 1956 to 1960

The relationship between DEFA and the SED evolved significantly between 1956 and 1960. The most significant change was in the greater willingness of filmmakers to push back against the SED's plans for DEFA. This willingness reflected, most fundamentally, the effects of the GDR's limited but real destalinization in 1957 and 1958. Destalinization had the indirect effect of providing some leverage to cultural producers in their relationship with the SED. The central ideological role of cultural production was reemphasized, on the one hand, and criticism of party officials was encouraged, on the other. If destalinization allowed for greater criticism, changes in the triangular relationship between DEFA, the SED and the state provoked the criticisms. The emergence of strong state institutions and agencies led to tighter regulations over DEFA by the state, while decreasing filmmakers' access to party guidance. Filmmakers resented both the regulations and the loss of direct feedback from powerful party organs. In particular, they complained to the SED about the (state) Licensing commission [Abnahmekommission] at the HV Film because it altered the distribution system of films, as well as the means of censoring and, thus, controlling films by the state.

In addition, filmmakers had to adapt to twists and turns in cultural policy. These changes were announced at cultural conferences in 1957, 1958, and 1959. The Cultural Conference of 1957 redirected the thrust of cultural policy toward an emphasis on nationalism, on the one hand, and on support for the newly emerging

state security forces, on the other. The biggest shift in cultural policy came in 1959 with the Bitterfeld Conference and the emergence of the Bitterfeld Weg [Path] movement. The Bitterfeld Path required cultural products, including films, to center on industrial sites and the experiences of common workers. The new cultural policies also provoked complaints from filmmakers.

Politically the era began with a series of major shifts. The first was Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress in the USSR in which he denounced the crimes of Stalinism. While this did not lead to an immediate political shift in the GDR, the official ideological line did change as a result. Gone were the days of pronouncements of the importance of Stalinism and of Stalin as the great leader of the workers of the world. Shortly after Khrushchev's speech the Hungarian Revolution broke out. This rebellion, which was put down with the support of the Soviet Army, split activists and intellectuals throughout the Eastern Bloc. Those who supported the revolutionaries, including György Lukács, were purged from power, and in many cases arrested. Inside the GDR this led to a major shift in the political stability of the SED with many ZK members finding themselves in prison as a result of their stance. In the wake of these arrests Ulbricht managed to secure his power to a greater degree within the party, and ironically despite the official destalinization, build an even stronger cult of personality around him. A period of relative peace within the party followed the turmoil of 1956.

Due in large par to the emergence of destalinization this period was one of major shifts, both culturally and politically for the GDR. Destalinization first emerged on a public level at the 1957 Cultural Conference, and thereby reinforced

the role of cultural producers as ideological guides for society. A key aspect of destalinization within the SED, and GDR as a whole, was the promotion of criticisms of party officials. While this occurred both before and after the destalinization process, the years of 1957 and 1958 saw the emergence of a phenomenon in which average people were invited to major conferences and allowed to present criticisms of the party and its actions. These never went so far as to attack key ideological stances of the party, and instead focused on minor policies as they applied to the cultural sphere. Nevertheless, these actions were meant to display the party as a non-Stalinist institution, and one in which all were welcome to participate. The criticisms of the party came not just from common people, but also from cultural producers, most notably during the debates prior to the creation of the Abnahemkommission, and through a deeply disapproving letter sent by the KR to the ZK in 1958. At the same time, this period was not one solely of pushback from members of the party, but also of encouragement from DEFA members to one another to move closer to the party and to more fully align with its beliefs and ideals.

This chapter analyzes the changes in cultural policy that emerged from cultural conferences, discusses the cases of pushback against party and state policy by filmmakers, and tracks the growing distance between filmmakers and the SED. It counters the existing narrative of this period as one of cultural crackdowns and broad obsequiousness on the part of filmmakers. It summarizes first, the political changes that came about as a result of destalinization. It then addresses the important cultural conferences in this period, and how they led up to the Bitterfeld

Weg. It examines, third, the issues and tensions that roiled the relationship between the party and DEFA. Finally, the chapter analyzes Konrad Wolf's film *Sterne* (1957) and situates it in the context of these developments.

Political Changes from 1956 to 1960

The era began with several major geopolitical events that unleashed significant but contradictory changes inside the GDR. Most significant was the denunciation of Stalin and Stalinism at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union by Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev laid out the crimes of Stalin, and argued against Stalinism as a proper method of organizing a socialist regime. The speech sent shockwaves throughout the Eastern Bloc, and across the world. In response, the SED took to decrying personality cults and dogmatism in its internal documents, as well as publicly, as a means of pushing back against Stalinist thought and party organizational styles. [270] However, the public denunciation of Stalinism did not lead to a major shift in the actual organization of the SED, nor did it strongly impact how the SED functioned on a day-to-day basis.[271] Initially, the main change was in public rhetoric. Gone were the days of pronouncements that hailed Stalin as the great leader of the workers of the world.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was directly tied to the denunciation of Stalinism by Khrushchev. The Hungarian Revolution, and the Soviet Union's intervention on the behalf of the established regime, split people across the Eastern

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[270] Malycha, Andreas, "Die Geshichte der SED: Von der Gründung bis zum Mauerbau" in *Die SED: Geschichte-Organisation-Politik Ein Handbuch*, p. 47.
[271] Maylcha, p. 47.

Bloc. Officially no governments intervened to support the revolutionaries; this made any who supported the Revolution, particularly after its failure, outcasts throughout the Eastern Bloc. Many prominent thinkers throughout the Eastern Bloc supported the revolutionaries, and argued that they were properly expressing socialism in their actions against a Stalinist regime. Within the GDR a number of important figures were pushed out of power as a result of their ties to the Revolution, and their open support for the revolutionaries. Most prominent among these was the book publisher Walter Janka. In addition to his arguments in favor of the Hungarian Revolution, Janka supported a broad shift in cultural control in the GDR.[272] These stances were enough for Janka to receive a five-year prison sentence, and his punishment served to highlight the importance of political unity for the leadership of the state and party.[273]

The SED removed people from key party positions and the GDR arrested a handful of individuals. Otherwise, the GDR was neither involved in the suppression of the revolution nor politically roiled by its consequences.[274] Instead the party leadership worked to solidify its control over party members in order to ensure that the shock of destalinization did not produce a similar uprising in the GDR. The means by which this was done were, ironically, through a strengthening of the personality cult surrounding Walter Ulbricht. Rather than succumb to challenges to

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[272] Epstein, p. 165.
[273] Grieder, Peter. *The German Democratic Republic*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 47.
[274] Allinson, p. 71.

his power, Ulbricht managed to solidify his power from 1956 to 1960. [275] His political opponents were pushed to lower levels of power, and replaced by Ulbricht loyalists.[276]

Structural reform did not occur in the immediate aftermath of either Khrushchev's speech or the Hungarian Revolution. Nor were there major political crackdowns. Day-to-day life for the average citizen did not markedly move in either a less repressive or a more repressive direction. The stability that came in the wake of the 1953 uprising continued and the state did not need to exert is authority over the masses in any demonstrable way.[277] The stability was, arguably, undermined by an increase in the number of GDR citizens who left for the West via Berlin.[278] In addition, the late 1950s were years of relative economic stagnation.[279] Ulbricht was eager to secure the GDR's borders and to recharge the economy so that the GDR could outpace development in the FRG.[280] He worked to win Khrushchev's support for closing access to West Berlin and to securing the intra-Berlin border.[281] Despite these pressures, the GDR nevertheless experienced a period of basic political tranquility during these years..

The stability allowed for DEFA's production to, in effect, hold the course. The studio could focus on producing films that would bolster socialist values, rather than

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[275]Schroeder p. 137.
[276] Schroeder, p.138-139.
[277] Schroeder, p. 135; Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 23.
[278] Major, Patrick and Osmond, Jonathan**.** *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 190.
[279] Steiner, p. 90.
[280] Harrison, p. 97.
[281] Harrison, p. 99.

developing ones that would win audiences to new concepts, values, or a way of life. The shift from Stalinism to non-Stalinist socialism did not markedly impact DEFA's production structures and values, but rather necessitated minor adjustments to ensure that the films did not mention, much less glorify, Stalin. The flip side of stability for DEFA was that the party had the time and energy to focus on the minutiae of film value transmission and film production. Stability thus came along with close observation of production. Scrutiny from the party's side had the effect of fomenting irritation and pushback on the side of DEFA filmmakers.

Cultural Conferences 1956 to 1960: Nationalism and Productivism

The GDR did not undergo any major changes in cultural policy nor hold a cultural conference in 1956. High-level discourse about DEFA centered on the emergence of the HV Film and related structural changes in the governance of DEFA.[282] The only significant culture-political development was Kurt Hager's speech before the Kulturbund that outlined theses for the upcoming 1957 Cultural Conference.

Following this brief lull in cultural development, the GDR experienced a period of sharp cultural-ideological changes. The first changes came in 1957 at the SED Cultural Conference, at which the party introduced destalinization into the cultural sphere. At it the party pushed for an elimination of "cults of personality" and "dogmatism" in art. SED officials built on these developments in 1958 through

[282] I will discuss all of these documents at length later in the chapter, but for now it will suffice to say that they are heavily focused on the creation of the Abnahmekommission, as well as its structure and powers.

the joint ZK-DEFA Film Conference. This conference radically altered the structures of past meetings, in that it actively encouraged non-cultural figures and non-ZK members to offer opinions on films and the policies of the party as they related to culture. This interaction with the masses was shown further in the most dramatic change, that of the Bitterfeld Conference in 1959.

The Bitterfeld Conference was one of the most impactful cultural conferences in the history of the GDR. It introduced the Bitterfeld Weg movement, which encouraged cultural producers to live among, and be inspired by, workers and farmers. Of course, the idea of being inspired by the masses was not new in the SED, but the Bitterfeld Weg called for its implementation, had the full backing of the party, and transformed cultural production in the GDR. The 1960 Cultural Conference of the SED offered little in terms of ideological change. Instead, it acted as a moment of reflection and reevaluation, in which the attendees discussed recent conferences and how to further their lessons. This theme became a common one in the 1960s, and thus the 1960 Cultural Conference was the first in a new type of conference, one that focused less on new ideas and more on how to further existing plans and ideals.

1957: De-Stalinization and Changing Ideologies

One of the defining cultural moments in the history of the GDR emerged in 1957. The 1957 Cultural Conference is often interpreted as a moment where the party and the state once again begin to take assertive control over cultural

production.[283] While my previous chapters have shown that DEFA-SED interactions were more frequent than previously assumed, the 1957 conference nonetheless was an important one. Many of the themes of the conference, such as the need to portray the viewpoint of the working class and the clash with imperialist forces built on earlier cultural declarations. One of the most important aspects of this cultural conference was the fact that it acknowledged the fundamental shift that came from Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress in Moscow.[284] As a result, this was one of the earliest moments of semi-public destalinization in the GDR.[285] Another important aspect of the conference was its openness towards criticism of the existing order in the GDR, and in particular of the extant film production and distribution system.[286] These changes from earlier conferences marked, at least to a limited degree, a change in the nature of SED-DEFA interactions. DEFA's role within the GDR became, at least in the view of the SED, more about national development than artistic achievement in this era.[287] Thus, it is important to fully investigate the nature of the 1957 Cultural Conference in order to begin to see how cultural policy, and as a result DEFA film production, began to change

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[283]Feinstein, p.63 , Jäger, , Manfred. *Kultur und Politik in der DDR 1945-1990.* Cologne: Deutschland Archiv, 1990 p. 87, Berghahn, p.37 Heinmann p. 283.
[284] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 9.
[285] I will argue in this chapter, as well as the following chapters, that destalinization was relatively minor in the GDR, but it is worth noting moments of public acknowledgement of the shift from pro-Stalin to at least neutrality towards Stalin.
[286] Most notable here was the speech by the Mayor of Neubrandenburg about the problems surrounding the film distribution system found on page 271.
[287] I will detail this shift more later in the chapter when I discuss, in depth, the nature of SED-DEFA interactions in this period.

Two major developments in SED-DEFA relations, and in SED cultural policy, took place at the cultural conference, both of which signify its overall importance. The first is that the party had not, at the level of a party conference, discussed de-Stalinization prior to this point, and thus the conference signified the official push of the SED to promote de-Stalinization within the GDR. Secondly, the SED offered greater criticisms of DEFA than it had previously, and simultaneously allowed for a degree of open debate on cultural problems that also had not previously occurred at the conference level. The party criticized both film distribution and filmmaking by DEFA that, on a more public level expanded on the critiques that DEFA had received from the DEFA Commission in 1952. This public attack on filmmakers sufficed to move the SED-DEFA relationship in the direction of more party control, and to engender a degree of hostility between the party and DEFA.

In the summer before the Cultural Conference the MfK produced a series of theses in order to bring together the ideas that would underscore the conference itself. Sections of the theses that directly dealt with film served to define the function and place of film within the GDR. Ideologically the most important of the defined roles for film was, "the portrayal of our socialist life will be, in the future, one of the most important tasks of our cinematic art."[288] Theoretically, the proclamation of a need for socialist modeling fit with the viewpoint put forward by Fred Oelßner in 1952, the era of High Stalinism. By providing a model of how socialism should be, the films would, arguably, produce socialism and, thus, the superstructure would develop the base. The continuity between the destalinized

[288] BA/DR 1 8243 Thesen zu Kulturkonferenz 1957 p. 32.

and Stalinist understanding of art's political role is notable. Oelßner himself was purged from the SED in early 1958 for claiming that Ulbricht had maintained a cult of personality.[289] Despite his removal from positions of authority, Oelßner's inversion of superstructure and base remained silently embedded in the SED's interpretation of culture

The Theses augmented on the place of the party in cultural production. The party was directed not just to provide ideological-political guidance but also to be involved practically in decisions, directives, and suggestions.[290] Average party members had the responsibility to take an interest in cultural production in order to ensure that socialist art was created, which in turn would help to create socialism.[291] Art was again put directly into the political sphere, and the function of DEFA became further entrenched within the political goals of the SED.

The Conference did not completely conform to the premises of the Theses, nor did it recommend the absolute enacting of the concepts presented. However, the speakers at the Conference did embrace the Theses as a means of presenting, and debating, major cultural concepts stating that they "are a collectively worked out ideological and practical program of struggle of our socialist cultural politics."[292] Functionally the Conference here reified the place of the Theses. Not just would the Theses exist as a base model upon which the conference built, but instead achieved

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[289] Epstein, p. 171-173.
[290] BA/DR 1 8243 Thesen zu Kulturkonferenz 1957, p. 72.
[291] BA/DR 1 8243 Thesen zu Kulturkonferenz 1957, p. 74.
[292] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957p. 8.

an independent value, meaning that they could be studied independent of further commentary, and used as a guide for cultural production.

Furthermore the presenters at the Conference attempted to offer more complete definitions of cultural products, against which already created, and new, products could be compared. In so doing, the presenters at the Conference attempted to establish a more complete system of cultural control and production, with more clearly established ideological guides. At the same time, however, the definitions were not absolute, and left a large amount of room for creation and creativity, relying more on broad terms than specific definitions.[293] These broad parameters for proper cultural expression allowed for a wide range of films to be produced at DEFA, and as will be seen later in this chapter the interactions between DEFA and the SED grew tense at times specifically because of these broad definitions.

Kurt Maetzig used his place within DEFA, and his role as a well-known party loyalist, to thoroughly criticize DEFA's films, as well as the role given to film by the SED. In his speech at the Conference built on the definitions of proper socialist culture stating, "all of these films [DEFA films] should arise from the clearing of the Marxist worldview."[294] Here Maetzig reaffirmed the link between official cultural policy and the foundational ideas behind film production. He built on this by stating that, "it is bad enough that our films take such a small role in the entire plan of our

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[293] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 87-89.
[294] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 156.

republic. But it is even worse that we have so far so poorly understood the easy tasks that are offered in a socialist manner."[295] Maetzig here offered a double edged criticism, both of the party for only giving films a small role to play in the creation of the GDR, as well as towards filmmakers for, in his estimation, misunderstanding the guidance offered by the party. The combination of these two fit into the place of DEFA within the SED's thought at the time. Film production was, as I have already shown, ideologically necessary for the creation of socialism. Yet, at the same time, the film industry, in the eyes of the party leadership, was deeply flawed, and as a result it did not produce the proper style, and quantity, of socialist films. Critiques from the latter portion of the 1950s and early 1950s in regard to improper film production underscore this act of institutional self-criticism by Maetzig.

As a solution to these problems Maetzig proposed increasing the rate of film production to allow for more socialist films to be released, and ideally to be done so at a lowered cost than already existed.[296] By linking quantity and cost together Maetzig displayed a proper understanding, from the perspective of the party, of not only the practical issues behind film production, but also the ideological place of film. Increased film production would result in the surpassing of the quarterly quotas issued to the studios, thereby showing the desire to meet, and exceed, the party's expectations for DEFA. Simultaneously it would serve to provide a broader

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[295] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 156.
[296] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 407 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 157.

selection of films to the populace, thereby encouraging greater consumption of socialist art and ideology.

The mayor of a small town in Neubrandenburg later echoed Maetzig's call for an increase in film production. She provided a thorough critique of film distribution system, as well as the length of time for which films were shown in theaters.[297] Her criticism stemmed from the fact that regardless of popularity films were shown, in her estimation, on an arbitrary schedule in which they would be pulled after an indefinite period of time.[298] For her, and her constituents, this led to popular films quickly selling out and not being able to be seen by everyone who would want to go to showings, or by those who would want to go to repeated screenings. At the same time, films that were unpopular remained in theaters and were shown to largely empty auditoriums.[299] These critiques, at least in part, cut to the core of the planned nature of film distribution and its lack of response to actual conditions in the GDR.

1958: Incorporating the views of the Masses in Conferences

Through the later 1950s, DEFA was plagued by its apparent inability to respond either in the content of its films or in their distribution to the actual conditions of life in East Germany. Nevertheless, attempts to reinforce the socialist nature of film production, and of final film products, remained a major focal point for both DEFA and the SED, in particular during their conferences in 1958, 1959,

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[297] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 408 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957p. 271.
[298] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 408 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 271.
[299] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1.01 408 Kulturkonferenz der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 23. Und 24. Oktober 1957, p. 271.

and 1960. The next major cultural conference, after the one in the fall of 1957, was a joint ZK-DEFA conference held in the summer of 1958. Much like its predecessor in 1952, the conference focused on broad issues of film production, while simultaneously encouraging a stronger focus on issues directly related to the presence of socialist values in DEFA films. A major difference between this conference and the previous one was that it put forward a set of suggestions for work for major institutions in order to enact the ideas that were presented. These suggestions are discussed below.

As preparation for the Conference, a series of meetings were held around the GDR in order to learn what ordinary citizens thought about various films and about film distribution. In many ways these meetings served to respond to the complaints posed at the 1957 Cultural Conference of the inability of the state system to respond to the public's desires. At these meetings, many people, in particular from rural areas, said they wanted to see films that accurately portrayed their lives. As one attendee put it, "[W]hat is missing are films that show life in the countryside; they would help us with the work among our people."[300] Members of a tractor combine complained about inaccuracy in films. They felt that the actors did not know how to properly portray life on farms, including how to use a tractor.[301] Youths complained that films did not accurately depict the lives of young people, and argued that the movies unfairly focused on issues of youth delinquency while never portraying

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[300] BA/DR 1 7904 1 Filmforum zur Vorbereitung der schöpferische Konferenz am 14.5.1958 p. 7.
[301] BA/DR 1 7904 1 Filmforum zur Vorbereitung der schöpferische Konferenz am 14.5.1958, p. 9

upstanding young people.[302] These meetings highlighted the distance between ordinary people in the countryside and the intelligentsia creating films. Presumably, the solutions to the problems of DEFA that were proposed at the Bitterfeld Conference in 1959 were developed in response to these critiques. If the lives and work of the common people were to be accurately portrayed, then, the Bitterfeld Weg posited, artists needed to live alongside and work with workers and farmers.

The preparatory activities for the 1958 conference reemphasized the continuously pursued ideological goal of tying film to the achievement of socialism. According to the preparatory documents, in the future film production was to reflect the struggles of the working class to achieve socialism and be "a helper in the development of socialist awareness among the people."[303] The action reports of the conference itself also reiterated the long-standing assumption that films should be permeated with socialist themes.[304] As ever, films with socialist themes were seen as vital for socialist development in the GDR and for the spread of the correct ideological view among the masses.[305] The continued and reiterated emphasis on the need for a focus on socialist values in films suggests that the SED believed that

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[302] BA/DR 1 7904 1 Filmforum zur Vorbereitung der schöpferische Konferenz am 14.5.1958, p. 7.

[304] BA/DR 1 7904 Arbeitsentschliessung 27 June 1958 p. 6.
[305] BA/DR 1 7904 Arbeitsentschliessung 27 June 1958, p. 6.

DEFA had not yet learned to do this and was, instead, still releasing films with non-socialist values.[306]

Given the SED's obvious irritation at DEFA's ideological failures, it is not surprising that at the conference several structural changes at DEFA were announced. Although members of the HV Film too were admonished for not having paid close enough attention to artistic-ideological issues in the past, they were assigned the future role of making sure that DEFA met its ideological obligations.[307] HV Film was tasked with vetting all of DEFA's co-productions with foreign entities in order to prevent collaboration with "reactionary ideologies."[308] Effectively this limited the ability of filmmakers to collaborate with anyone outside of the Eastern Bloc. Additionally, it put a heavy threat above the head of any filmmaker who collaborated on a film with which the SED disagreed.

The most significant structural change was the reorganization of the Künstlischer Rat under the oversight of the MfK. [309] This major development reflected more than a general desire to improve DEFA's ideological messaging. As is discussed later in the chapter, in 1958 the KR had sent the ZK a letter that complained about the lack of guidance for proper filmmaking and, more generally, about the relationship between the ZK and DEFA. The restructuring of the KR under the authority of the MfK aimed to reign in dissent at DEFA and to bring its more

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[306] I will go into more detail on these issues later in the chapter, but it is important to note here that the party provided implicit criticism of the values of DEFA's films at high level joint SED-DEFA conferences and meetings.
[307] BA/DR 1 7904 Arbeitsentschliessung 27 June 1958, p. 4.

[309] BA/DR 1 7904 Arbeitsentschliessung 27 June 1958 p. 3.

powerful institutions under closer SED and state control. In addition, the leadership of the Feature Film Studio at DEFA was required to reorganize the KR internally. It was told to increase the percentage of writers among the members, effectively diminishing the influence of directors in the KR.[310] Given the struggles between notable directors and the party at the time, on the one hand, and the close ties between the SED and the Writers' Union [Schriftstellerbund], on the other, it is not surprising that the party wanted to add more writers to the KR.

The 5th Party Day, in the summer of 1958, further developed the place of ideology in the GDR, in particular as it related to artistic and cultural production. Party days were held irregularly but were extraordinarily important for issuing directives and for reaffirming, as well as clarifying, the party's stances on a number of important issues. Topics ranging from economic policy to cultural issues to foreign policy were routinely discussed at Party Days. Much like Party Conferences, Party Days were intended to ensure that the lower levels of the party had a full understanding of the proclamations and values of the highest levels. The guest lists of these events included the most powerful figures in the Party, as well as regional representatives and representatives from critical industries. Speakers at the 5th Party Day included Walter Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl, Nikita Khrushchev, and even representatives from the Italian Communist Party.

Ulbricht's speech focused on the nature of the cultural revolution and the issues tied directly to the creation of authentic socialist culture within a new socialist system. As he acknowledged, "[T]he division between art and life, the

[310] BA/DR 1 7904 Arbeitsentschliessung 27 June 1958, p. 5.

alienation between artists and the people, which in the bourgeois society created such a great catastrophe, has not yet been overcome."[311] This statement indirectly referred to the supposedly flawed cultural products in the GDR, including DEFA's purportedly ideologically flawed films. For Ulbricht, rather than swiftly creating the necessary conditions for perfect cultural products, the nature of the cultural revolution in the GDR was such that it only partially guided the creation of proper socialist art, and that the, "new society created new problems."[312] The cultural revolution, was thus not expected to produce immediate results, but rather to establish new norms for gradual longer term change. Von Richthofen argues that the expansion of the cultural-revolution in the GDR was integral to restructuring, and reinterpreting cultural production and cultural products.[313] The revolution's failure, as argued by Ulbricht, was thus a change in tone from the actual impacts on the ground and the ways in which the revolution was disseminated to the masses

Ulbricht's speech can be interpreted as at least a partial defense of DEFA films' alleged ideological deficits. He defended GDR cultural products as superior to the products created under capitalism.[314] Alfred Kurella, a leading SED cultural theorist, built on Ublricht's comparisons between GDR and FRG cultural products

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[311] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958 p. 287.
[312] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 282.
[313] Von Richthofen, p. 154.
[314] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 286.

and argued for the limited exposure of GDR artists to Western products. For Kurella, the small weaknesses in the creations under socialism were nothing compared to the great failures of the West.[315] Kurella argued that the struggle between the products of socialism and capitalism strengthened the ideological positions of artists in the GDR and, thus, helped create "authentic socialist culture." He concluded, "I feel that this struggle [between cultural products] is necessary."[316] Kurella argued that this struggle was further necessary to overcome conservative cultural ideals, such as those held by some members of the MfK, in favor of radical socialist cultural values.[317]

It is important to note that the party used this meeting to further develop its theories in the context of a post-20th Party Congress, and post-Hungarian revolution world. Michael Tsechno-Hell, a party functionary and director in the feature film studio, called for watchfulness among the intelligentsia in order to prevent excesses such as the events in Hungary.[318] He further argued that cultural producers were not yet rid of their petty bourgeois values as they struggled to move from the "I to

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[315] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 2221.
[316] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 2221.
[317] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 2226.
[318] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 6 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 2397.

the we" as a part of the process of creating socialist art.[319] He too acknowledged that these struggles were part of the development of artistic styles under the emerging socialism and were only problematic not counter-revolutionary. Nevertheless the elimination of these tendencies, and any oppositional thought, was a key goal for the party, and was, at least in theory, a major goal of artistic producers in the GDR.

The Fifth Party Day thus clarified the party's (post Stalinist) understanding of the slow emergence of authentic socialist culture. The slowness of cultural development was a problem that needed to be addressed, but at the same time was natural due to the link between it and the creation of socialism itself. The GDR was not yet socialist so the conditions necessary for absolute socialist cultural production did not exist. Simultaneously the Party Day's conclusions on culture pointed the way forward for a new era of cultural production in the GDR. Rather than being based in classical Stalinist notions of perfection in the field of cultural production, and of an internal dialectical movement for art, the Party Day embraced both imperfection and an external dialectical interaction with capitalist art from the West. These shifts paved the way for an era of greater acceptance in artistic fields and a period of openness. Directly tied to this was the continuing intent to overcome the last vestiges of capitalist values in culture.

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[319] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 6 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 2397.

1959: The Bitterfeld Conference and the Bitterfeld Weg

The Author's Conference at the Middle German Publisher in Bitterfeld took up the question of how to achieve an art stripped of capitalist values and filled with socialist ones. Its main message, which came to be known as Bitterfeld Weg, was that artists could learn to make are that realistically represented workers and farmers by working and living among them.[320] This experience would lead to the creation of more relatable artistic works and figures, thereby encouraging workers and farmers to consumer more cultural products. They would, thus, be exposed to the socialist values present in cultural products. This theory assumed that the majority of cultural consumers wanted to consume artistic works that directly reflected their day to day realities and which did not offer escapist moments for them to disconnect from their experiences. In large part this assumption stemmed from the belief that the lives of workers were inherently positive in the GDR and as such they would not want any form of escape when consuming cultural products.

The Authors' Conference in April 1959 was one of the defining cultural moments in the history of the GDR. It made a great practical impact through its focus on cultural production and through its attention to how the party leadership would guide cultural producers to follow through with the ideology of the SED. The conference sought to close both the lived gap and the cultural divide between the two central social groups in the GDR, the intelligentsia and the working class.[321]

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[320] Jäger, p. 88.
[321] This idea stems from the First Cultural Day of the SED in 1946, and was continued in later cultural meetings of the SED.

In order to make sure the conference's values were actualized, after it ended a series of plans were crafted that applied to the work of specific groups at the MfK and the SED. Central to these plans was the exhortation that, "artists you must tie yourselves to the workers in the socialist production" as well as commit to the better representation of the lives of workers.[322] This would be achieved through the creation of a new genre based in the experiences of artists who lived amongst workers and farmers.[323] In order to realize the creation of this new genre, the HV Film was to work with DEFA filmmakers to ensure that they were tied to work brigades in factories and on collective farms.[324] By embedding filmmakers in brigades, the SED aimed to actualize the prescriptions of the conference. HV Film's role of making sure that happened reaffirmed the important place of state institutions as mediators between the theoretical plans of the party and the practical experiences of DEFA workers. Tied into this were a series of tasks for the HV Film and the heads of the Feature Film Studio to ensure that the studio created films with a greater emphasis on the experiences of workers, as well as to open the studio up to ideas from new writers and dramaturges.[325]

While the Bitterfeld Conference did not immediately produce broad impacts on film production, it nevertheless played a crucial role in fundamentally redefining

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[322] BA DR 1 7841 Maßnahme plan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des Mitteldeutschen Verlages am 24. April in Bitterfeld 1959 p. 22.
[323] BA DR 1 7841 Maßnahme plan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des Mitteldeutschen Verlages am 24. April in Bitterfeld 1959, p. 23.
[324] BA DR 1 7841 Maßnahme plan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des Mitteldeutschen Verlages am 24. April in Bitterfeld 1959, p. 31.
[325] BA DR 1 7841 Maßnahme plan in Auswertung der Autorenkonferenz des Mitteldeutschen Verlages am 24. April in Bitterfeld 1959, p. 32.

the official discourse surrounding cultural production in the GDR. As the historian Jäger shows, the shifts after Bitterfeld were immense and long lasting.[326] In terms of other forms of cultural production the Bitterfeld Weg quickly altered production and inspired a generation of writers to live amongst workers and farmers. Most importantly the Bitterfeld Weg heavily influence the development of productivist art, and of productivism as an artistic style. These stylistic and thematic shifts lasted well into the 1960s and, as I will show later, became the favored style of the party in the wake of the 11th Plenum in 1965.

1960: Tying Together Recent Developments

The Cultural Conference of 1960 built on the success of Bitterfeld, as well as of the 5th Party Day, in order to bring about even higher levels of cultural production, in terms of both quantity and quality. The Cultural Conference was the last major theoretical cultural event prior to the erection of the Berlin Wall the following summer, and thus acts as the end of a theoretical era prior to the emergence of a new one in the post-Wall GDR. The Cultural Conference worked to produce a cohesive cultural-theoretical space based on the ideals of the 1957 Cultural Conference, the 5th Party Day, and the Bitterfeld Conference. Its attempt to do this was, by and large, successful and was reflected in the directives issued by the Conference attendees. Commentaries on the past conferences were a common theme in the speeches given at the Conference, and functioned as a means of assessing the place of culture in the GDR, as well as of interpreting successes and

[326] Jäger, p. 88-89.

failures of past policies. These assessments were, in turn, used to guide new policies that originated at the Conference.

Internal preparatory documents for the conference, created by and distributed among high officials at the MfK, detail some of the critical theoretical issues intended to be covered by the conference. Among the most important of these issues were that cultural products "strengthen the intellectual development of the new socialist person."[327] It was understood that a sign of having achieved the new socialist personality was a firm knowledge of, and appreciation for, the "works of the greatest national culture."[328] Cultural production thus played a dual role in both formulating, and signifying the existence of, the socialist person. The role of film in supporting the creation of the socialist person was reaffirmed. Film was necessary for the production of socialist art, and as a means of reaching the masses.[329] During the course of the Conference, speakers built on these ideas and presented them in a more public fashion in order to show the importance of cultural production in the new era after both the events of 1956 and the Bitterfeld Conference. Conference speeches reflected speakers' awareness of the shifts in

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[327] BA DR 1 7928 Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit: Diskussionsgrundlage zur Vorbereitung vom Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, vom Ministerium für Kultur und vom Deutschen Kulturbund 26 April 1960 p. 43.
[328] BA DR 1 7928 Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit: Diskussionsgrundlage zur Vorbereitung vom Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, vom Ministerium für Kultur und vom Deutschen Kulturbund 26 April 1960, p. 43.
[329] BA DR 1 7928 Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit: Diskussionsgrundlage zur Vorbereitung vom Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, vom Ministerium für Kultur und vom Deutschen Kulturbund 26 April 1960, p. 59.

cultural thought. Alfred Kurella discussed interpretations of the 1957 Cultural Conference. He posited that the prognoses of the 1957 Conference were accurate in their prediction of a greater unity between economics, politics, and art as they related to the strengthening of the "moral-political unity of our people."[330] He went on to praise Ulbricht's speech at the 5th Party Day for encouraging the masses to push for the greatest cultural achievements.[331] Kurella's speech worked to weave together the major cultural presentations between 1957 and 1960, and ended by praising the successes of the Bitterfeld Conference and the guidance of the Bitterfeld Weg.[332] By tying the themes of the Conference to past Conferences Kurella assured his audience of continuity in cultural thought at the highest levels of the SED and state. Kurella argued that the conferences were inextricably tied to important changes in the artistic path of the party and the GDR, and that they worked to organize the artistic lives of the masses in a new way.[333] The conferences were thus interpreted as critical for shifting the nature of cultural production and reception in the GDR.

As one of the first speakers at the Conference, Kurella set the major themes of what would be discussed. Alexander Abusch further contextualized the importance of the past three major cultural conferences. For Abusch, the conferences

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[330] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 14.
[331] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 15.
[332] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 16.
[333] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 171.

highlighted the conflict with capitalist artistic influences, and showed the correct path of revolutionary art after the lows of 1956.[334] He built on this by discussing the importance of individual types of artistic expression, including film. Film was, for Abusch, a medium through which the souls of millions can be exposed to the revolutionary thoughts and feelings of Socialism.[335] He contrasted this amazing possibility with the perceived continued weaknesses of films, focusing on the filmic styles, which he derided as naturalistic, and the weakness of the scripts for too many films.[336] For Abusch, the 1958 Film Conference worked to correct these errors, but had not fully succeeded.[337] His remarks about DEFA's continuing errors echoed Ulbricht's at the 5th Party Day. Abusch recognized successes on a policy level, but argued that the day-to-day realities of DEFA productions were still lagging the party's standards. Abusch's position does not fit with the historiographical assumption that there was artistic openness after the 1958 Film conference.[338]

The 1960 Cultural Conference thus recapped the lines of argument developed at recent conferences and measured their results. Ideologically, it tied together the seemingly disparate conclusions of conferences of the past three years

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[334] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 169.
[335] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 185.
[336] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 185.
[337] BA/DR 1 7929 Stenographische Niederschrift der Kulturkonferenz 29 April 1960, p. 185.
[338] See, e.g., Allan, Sean. *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946-1992.* New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 1999, p. 10.

and worked to establish unity within the cultural thought of the GDR in the wake of the events of 1956.

The ideological space of cultural conferences after 1956 were more contested than before Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress and revolution in Hungary. SED thinkers sought to re-ground their cultural thought in the new values of non-Stalinist Marxism-Leninism, reestablish the correctness of their cultural line, and guide cultural producers. While there were few fundamental alterations to cultural policy in this era, new paths did emerge. Chief among these was the Bitterfeld Weg and its claim that restatement of the basis of proper cultural production was social experience and life among the masses. By reaffirming the general line of the SED and its long-standing interpretation of the political role of culture, on the one hand, and emphasizing the importance of learning from the working class, on the other, the SED was able to maintain its place as a party which could properly lead both the intelligentsia and the masses in regard to cultural thought, despite the official political shift away from Stalinism. In the end, the conferences from 1956 to 1960 should be read as moments of continuity in which the party further established its place at the head of cultural thought despite undergoing ideological challenges during the period of early destalinization.

Interactions between the SED and DEFA 1956 to 1960

Relations between DEFA and the SED were, at times, strained during this period. Between struggles over the nature of the Abnahmekommission in 1956 and a rebellious letter from the Künstlischer Rat to the ZK in 1958, DEFA pushed back

against SED decisions, asserted itself as an important industry in the GDR, and attempted to establish some degree of ndependence from the SED. Despite these challenges, the positive aspects of the SED-DEFA relationship balanced out the more negative ones and the overall relationship between DEFA and the SED remained strong. DEFA officials frequently worked alongside SED operatives to refine film production in order to bring it more into line with SED thought and values. DEFA participation in the defining SED document on the strengthening of feature film production, released in 1958 as a companion to the film conference, signaled the studio's willingness to work with the SED to define cultural policy. By remaining close to the SED, the leadership of DEFA minimized any major repercussions for their more rebellious actions. They instead maintained their status as a privileged institution and thereby could influence some level of state and party decision-making. Most importantly this status came through their influence over the process deciding the makeup of the Abnahmekommission at the HV Film. In addition, DEFA representatives took an active role in planning all of the cultural conferences in this era. They further worked with the SED to plan out filmmaking for each year, as well as to refine the final products of the feature film studio. Even the instances of pushback against SED decisions provide evidence of the close ties between the SED leadership and DEFA leadership. Complaints were typically voiced by men in the film studio who were not only party members but members of the ZK. Thus, the DEFA employees who pushed back against the ZK were, to a degree, engaging not just with high-ranking party officials, but also with colleagues. These relationships

between top members of the party and DEFA created openings for engagement between lower level party members at DEFA and the highest levels of the SED.

In February of 1956 the first major interaction between the SED and high DEFA officials, in this period, occurred, with a report crafted by the ZK Office for Culture and Education. The report focused on production rates and reception of films both domestically and internationally. To a large this document was instructive and worked to guide the leadership of DEFA to build on its successes while learning from, and avoiding repetition of, its failures. The directive further focused on issues related to working groups at DEFA and their ability to distribute ideology properly. Furthermore the authors of the report, including Alexander Abusch, argued that the studio leadership needed to do a better job of working against, "the petty bourgeois tendencies of their directors."[339] ZK officials here leveled a serious charge against DEFA filmmakers. For the party leadership petty bourgeois tendencies were antithetical to proper socialist art, and demonstrated an inability to fully grasp the nature of socialism. Moreover, petty bourgeois beliefs were, for the SED, the root of Nazism, and thus not only would those elements at DEFA represent a rejection of socialism, but also of allegiance to the ultimate antithesis of the East German project. Simultaneously, the ZK officials went on to praise the recent work of the dramaturges of the feature film studio to create better

[339] BA DR 1 8206 Der Z.K.K.-Arbeitsgruppe Kultur und Erziehung über die Themen- und Produktionsplanung sowie die Verpflichtung von Künstlern im VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme von 14 February 1956 p. 229.

quality films.[340] This report served as a means for the ZK to communicate to the leadership of DEFA their opinions regarding film production, and how they should meet the demands of the party. Taken as a whole this interaction served to maintain the relationship between the SED and DEFA during this era. The major concerns of the report are related to the overall concerns expressed by the party during previous eras, as well as at the conferences in the following year. Ideological faults and deficits at DEFA that were later brought up at the ideological and cultural conferences were also addressed here. The focus on the extant petty bourgeois tendencies among important figures at DEFA proved vital for highlighting the need for the party, and the state, to exert greater control over DEFA in order to ensure that it followed the ideology of the party.

In summer 1956, control was exerted in practice with the creation of the Abnahmekommission at the HV Film. As originally conceived, and as expressed in the June 1956 meeting, the commission would be comprised of representatives from a number of groups, such as the Free German Youth [FDJ], Free German Trade Union [FDGB], German Women's Federation [DFB], and National People's Army [NVA].[341] Notably, individuals associated with DEFA were not part of the commission. Kurt Maetzig protested the lack of artists, claiming, "[A]rt is a complicated thing, one

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[340] BA DR 1 8206 Der Z.K.K.-Arbeitsgruppe Kultur und Erziehung über die Themen- und Produktionsplanung sowie die Verpflichtung von Künstlern im VEB DEFA Studio für Spielfilme von 14 February 1956, p. 229.
[341] BA DR 1 8206 Protokoll der Sitzung der Fachkommission Film am 5.6.1956 mit Vertretern der DEFA Studios, Des VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb, des VEB DEFA Außenhandel, der DEFA Kopierwerke, der Hauptverwaltung Film sowie Vertretern anderer Institutionen 1t. Anwesenheitsliste, 1956 p. 141.

should not cede it to lay people."[342] A majority of the attendees supported Maetzig's critiques. The representative of the NVA took the opportunity, however, to denounce those who did not feel qualified to properly judge films. He further attacked the DEFA representatives stating, "the colleagues Maetzig and Geschonneck took the opportunity to polemicize against the representatives of democratic organizations."[343] The stringent defense of the original plan, authored by Anton Ackermann, did not in the end hold up against the challenges from Maetzig and his supporters.

A month after the initial challenge to the structure of the commission, another meeting was held. Ackermann acknowledged the problems with his initial organizational plan, and instead supported the reorganization of the commission along the lines suggested by Maetzig and his supporters.[344] The quick shift in tone is important for discerning the relationship between DEFA and the SED at this point. The willingness of a vital office within the MfK to reverse its policy position in favor of one emerging from an industry under MfK oversight shows the important place of DEFA within the GDR as a whole. Moreover, one notes that the protest by a party member – but a lower level party member. Even as a low level party member, Maetzig felt entitled to speak up and assumed his voice would be listened to – as it

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[342] BA DR 1 8206 Protokoll der Sitzung der Fachkommission Film am 5.6.1956 mit Vertretern der DEFA Studios, Des VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb, des VEB DEFA Außenhandel, der DEFA Kopierwerke, der Hauptverwaltung Film sowie Vertretern anderer Institutionen 1t. Anwesenheitsliste, 1956, p 141.
[343] BA DR 1 8206 Protokoll der Sitzung der Fachkommission Film am 5.6.1956 mit Vertretern der DEFA Studios, Des VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb, des VEB DEFA Außenhandel, der DEFA Kopierwerke, der Hauptverwaltung Film sowie Vertretern anderer Institutionen 1t. Anwesenheitsliste, 1956, p. 142.
[344] BA DR 1 8206 Protokoll der Dienstbesprechung am July 1956 p. 154..

was -- by another, more powerful, party member, Ackermann, who was also head of HV Film, a state institution.

A meeting that took place later that summer throws light on why SED member Maetzig's push for changes at the Abnahmekommission was successful. The meeting was a special session of the ZK's collegium that considered suggestions for new types of artistic production in film, discussed the relationship between the party and film production, and heard a report from Anton Ackermann on the tasks and membership of the Abnahmekommission. ZK members Ackermann, Alexander Abusch, and Erich Wandel led the discussion. Ackermann and Wandel also held high positions at the MfK.[345] Clearly, one purpose of the meeting was for Ackermann and Wandel to report on their work as state officials in the MfK to the ZK, the highest party organ, of which they were members.[346] In other words, the Abnahmekommission was a state committee that oversaw DEFA but was overseen itself by the SED. It is no wonder that Maetzig's complaint about its composition would be listened to.

The exceptional meeting also reconsidered the nature of film production and distribution. Ideologically speaking they looked at the relationship between film and socialism, as well as the values in finished DEFA products.[347] Here again we see lower level meetings focusing on issues that would arise in later conferences, such

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[345] BA/DR 1 8206 Protokoll der außerordentlichen Kollegiums Sitzung am 8 August 1956, p. 114, 118.
[346] BA/DR 1 8206 Protokoll der außerordentlichen Kollegiums Sitzung am 8 August 1956, p. 121-122.
[347] BA/DR 1 8206 Protokoll der außerordentlichen Kollegiums Sitzung am 8 August 1956, p. 112.

as the 1957 cultural conference. It is further important to note that the meeting, while mentioning the broad political and ideological context of film production at that time, they did not bring up the 20th Party Congress and Khrushchev's speech. The lack of this context, despite being presented to the ZK that summer, is necessary for seeing the importance of destalinization in the early months after Khrushchev's speech. Politically this was key for limiting the immediate impact of destalinization.

These limits are further found in a document from the ZK Film Sector detailing the relationship between film and the 20th Party Congress. The document goes into limited detail regarding changes to film production, instead focusing on the need to maintain a focus on socialism in film.[348] The most important change, however, came from the new directive, "to fight against any cult of personality", and to make sure that, personality cults did not appear in films.[349] This directive was tied to the destalinization process, and attempts in the GDR to move away from any personality cult surrounding Walter Ulbricht. The fight against personality cults became one of the hallmarks of destalinization in both the GDR and throughout the Eastern Bloc.[350] By acknowledging this policy at an early stage, and directly applying it to film production, the authors of the document worked to assess the best means of distributing this concept to the masses.

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[348] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 2.026 77 Einige Fragen zur Einschätzung des ideologischen Zustande bei den Filmschaffenden 1956 p. 44.
[349] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 2.026 77 Einige Fragen zur Einschätzung des ideologischen Zustande bei den Filmschaffenden 1956, p. 44.
[350] Schroeder, p. 132-133.

1957: The Abnahmekommission in Action

An important element in guaranteeing proper distribution of ideology via film was, of course, the assurance of ideological obedience at DEFA. While the creation of the Abnahmekommission covered this issue, it arose again in the summer of 1957 in a report from Anton Ackermann regarding the nature of the artistic-political situation at DEFA.[351] Ackermann focused on the varying quality of DEFA films, arguing that while some of them were good, the majority of them were, in his estimation, ideologically poor, and that while they started from a place of good artistic and ideological merit, the final product is flawed. He stated that of the most recent films only a couple possessed "possibilities of meaningful publicly noteworthy films." [352] He further contextualizes these supposed errors by discussing the new ideological context that emerged in 1956.[353] For Ackermann the problematic films went in two directions, one was influenced by "bourgeois decadence", and the other had an overly "dogmatic interpretation of socialist realism".[354] Here again the inability of filmmakers to, from the perspective of party leaders, properly interpret the values to the party comes to the fore. Ackermann used the significant ideological shifts in 1956 as a platform to criticize the majority of DEFA productions. Given the broad categories of critique, he was able to lump

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[351] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios 5 May 1957 p. 23.
[352] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios, p.24.
[353] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios, p 28.
[354] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios, p. 28.

together all films that were deemed ideologically lacking, as well as to evaluate ideologically pure films that were not popular with audiences. This in turn exculpated the party of any responsibility for the failure of their ideas to translate into popular films. The filmmakers were, for Ackermann, simply too dogmatic in their interpretation of the party's ideals, and thereby at fault for the failure of the films.

Ackermann's role as the head of the HV Film, and thereby one of the most important figures in film control in the GDR, helps to fully contextualize and interpret his report. Although acting as a state official in the HV Film he looked at the ideological content of films, and thereby acted as a party representative, fulfilling his place within the party-state system. His solutions to the problems at DEFA focused on the reinforcement of the ideological dictums of the party, and greater support for its beliefs, as well as ideological education for all DEFA employees.[355] Ackermann also called for greater clarification of how the advancements of the party in the wake of the events of 1956 should be translated into film, as well as how they directly applied to film.[356] Here Ackermann, at least indirectly, critiqued the party leadership for its inability to properly spell out how its ideas should be implied. The criticisms were, to a large degree, fair in that many of the party's decrees were overly general and open to a broad range of interpretations. This, in turn, led to problems when filmmakers attempted to

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[355] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios, p. 29.
[356] BA/DR 1 8208 Die gewärtige künstlerisch-politische Situation der DEFA-Studios, p. 29.

interpret the party's beliefs, and ended up with films that were criticized as either bourgeois or overly dogmatic. Ackermann attempted to solve this problem in his call for greater clarity and education.

Later that year the ZK crafted a report, which in their eyes, was vital for the education of DEFA filmmakers in how to properly craft socialist films. Their report, "For the Development of Socialist Filmmaking in the GDR" sought to address the critical issues related to film production, many of which were noted by Ackermann in his report. The report began by directly tying the development of socialism and a socialist society in the GDR to the production of proper art.[357] While this did not create a new connection, its reaffirmation was part of the process of restricting the relationship between art and society in the aftermath of 1956. These ideas were later modeled in the major cultural conferences of 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1960. In addition to focusing on the relationship between film and society, the report looked at the nature of film production, and in particular praised DEFA for its ability to meet its film production quotas in the previous four years.[358] Production rates were, of course not just critical to meeting the quotas set by the party, but also for ensuring that the masses had access to a broad selection of films.

Later conferences, as well as later sections of the document, echoed this process. The broader selection of films offered by increased production is linked within the document to the ability to win over the working class and farmers to the

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[357] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR 1957, no pagination.
[358] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR.

cause of the party and socialism.[359] By helping to ensure that the masses were ready to support the state and the party, more production aided, in the eyes of the ZK, national defense.[360] In order to guarantee that the filmmakers followed through with producing ideologically pure films, the authors proposed greater oversight processes by the HV Film and the party.[361] This in turn would guarantee that the intelligentsia acted in the interests of the working class and alongside the party.[362] Later conferences, such as the 1957 Cultural Conference that fall, also addressed these goals.

The desire to ensure proper socialist filmmaking came in part form the nature of DEFA production at the time. As Ackermann's report showed, the SED did not agree with the majority of films that were produced at DEFA, and instead felt that they were ideologically lacking. When taken alongside both Ackermann's report, and the later Cultural Conference, the ZK thesis provided a complete picture of, for the SED, the status of film at the time. While the SED felt that DEFA could properly produce films, to a limited degree, and in large quantities, it still needed greater guidance to ensure that it was able to send the right message to the masses and that they were thus properly educated in the values of the party. Moreover, given the broad ideological place of film, the party worked to further establish film's place in producing, and thereby achieving, socialism.

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[359] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR.
[360] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR.
[361] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR.
[362] BA/DR 1 4480 Für die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Filmkunst in der DDR.

A report that Fall, which came after the Cultural Conference, and which outlined the best way to fully achieve a socialist culture in the GDR, directly connected to the attempts of the party to assert control over DEFA to a larger degree. The report "For a Socialist Culture: Theses for the Development of Cultural Work in the time of the Second Five Year Plan" sought to overview how to better develop socialist cultural production.[363] The document tied structural economic changes with the broad shifts in cultural production, as well as the context of culture.[364] Alongside of the economic changes, the report focused on shifts in ideology, namely the 20th Party Congress and its changes to the GDR's policies.[365] These changes were seen as a means of strengthening the GDR and its ability to resist the "militarists and imperialists" of the NATO nations.[366] Achievement of a true socialist culture, for the SED, was seen as the ultimate means of strengthening the GDR as a state, as well as a society.[367] Linked with this was the basic concept of the necessity of achieving socialism in the GDR, as well as of ensuring that the masses believed in, and supported, socialism.

The document then worked to define and portray socialism. Fundamental to any socialist cultural product was its ability to reflect the worldview of the working

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[363] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, 11 October 1957 p. 3.
[364] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 3.
[365] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 3.
[366] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 3.
[367] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 4.

class, and to act in their interest.[368] As has been shown, ideologically this needed to happen for art to move from superstructure to base, and thus achieve a social creative function and take an active role in producing socialism, instead of merely reflecting economic conditions. This productive role was further reified through the belief that proper socialist culture would be able to overwhelm the "decadent imperialist culture" in the FRG, and thereby lead the whole of Germany forward.[369] Here again culture is elevated to a politically important role and seen as crucial for the international policies of the GDR. The link between cultural policy and political realities was such that following through with proper cultural production was raised to a higher level of importance.

Understanding how to properly produce cultural products was critical for DEFA at the time, as was further shown in the document. The emphasis on the strong shift in the nature of the SED's ideology after the 20th Party Congress necessitated a reevaluation of cultural thought.[370] The authors acknowledged the renewed fight against dogmatism and personality cults as a direct response to Khrushchev's speech. Dogmatism was, for the party, the over-adherence to ideological norms and dictums. The critique of dogmatism, while seemingly paradoxical given the very strict boundaries for ideological expression established by the party, allowed high party officials to simultaneously pay lip service to

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[368] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 5.
[369] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 9.
[370] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes. p. 11.

destalinization while using dogmatism as a bludgeon against cultural producers to keep them in line. Moreover, Ackermann's criticisms of DEFA films for being too dogmatic in their interpretation of the party's policies gain new strength when taken in light of the anti-dogmatism emphasis that emerged after 1956.

Dogmatic interpretations of policy in film were thus not just a minor error in ideology, but rather, for the party, a revanchist attack on the progress that the party had made. The shift in thought meant that filmmakers had to reassess their knowledge of the party's beliefs, as well as how the party wished their beliefs to be presented. As a whole, however, DEFA's production was praised as having achieved "new cultural and artistic heights" in recent years.[371] The purported errors expressed in films were to be overcome through a rededication to party work in the studios.[372] This plan would then allow for filmmakers to fully grasp the beliefs of the party and understand the shifts in ideology. Taken alongside the suggestions and plans of the cultural conference that year, the document presented actionable ideas for distributing knowledge of ideological shifts, such that the masses would fully understand the values of the party.

1958: The KR Fights Back and the KAGs are Created

By 1958 the membership of the KR, who functioned as the highest officially non-party office within DEFA had become fed up with the party's ever-vague directions for filmmaking. In response to over a decade of increasingly opaque

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[371] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 24.
[372] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1 182 Für eine sozialistische Kultur: Thesen für die Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit in der Zeit des zweiten Fünfjahrplanes, p. 24.

directives, the membership of the KR crafted a letter to the leadership of the SED with the goal of pointing out the inherent flaws in the party's film policy and direction. The effort was one of taking the party leadership to task for its continued critiques of DEFA, while simultaneously never offering an understandable description of what exactly they expected filmmakers to produce. In response, the ZK gutted the KR, removed all of its official duties, and created the KAGs. On the one hand, this served to grant the party even more power in the day-to-day operations of DEFA by crafting a system of more thorough on the ground control over filmmaking, and created a more democratized system of film oversight on the other hand. Within the KAGSs individual party members would exert much more influence than they could have at the KR, thereby offering the party much greater control over filmmaking than they had under the previous system. At the same time, the inherently decentralized nature of the KAGs give filmmakers much more direct control over their films, would thereby serve to function as a means of democratizing, at least to a degree, control over film production.

Despite the practical solutions presented by the SED in 1957 in regard to distributing ideology to cultural producers, filmmakers wanted more specific guidelines about the values their films were supposed to convey. They wanted a clear presentation of party values so that they could make films that would pass muster. At the monthly meeting of the Künstlischer Rat in February 1958, filmmakers addressed these issues in blunt and colorful language. They said that they, "feel like blind truffle pigs on a leash, we search and search, when we find something we are pulled back and told: you can! or you cannot! Why, how come?

That we only find out afterward or never."[373] The filmmakers here expressed their frustration with the inability of the party to clearly define its cultural, and ideological, expectations. They complained that "the helpful, leading, successful side of cultural policies is missing."[374] Rather than embrace the platitudes of the 1957 Cultural Conference, and the major documents that the SED distributed on successful film and socialist culture, the filmmakers insisted on clear directions that they could successfully follow.

The report on the discussion held by the KR was agreed to by the members of the Küsntlischer Rat and sent to the ZK. It offered a clear challenge to SED guidance, yet not in theory but in practice. Instead of rejecting the SED's ideological leadership or even its intervention in film production, the filmmakers wanted to be able to see, and understand, the policies that were guiding them, and not to be blindly led on a leash. They further criticized the presence of cultural failures, arguing that the party was responsible for any cultural failures, as well as for the failures of the state.[375] In effect, the meeting, and the subsequent report, used the party's own logic against it, to argue for clear guidance in regard to cultural production. This call for guidance in turn functioned as a defense of DEFA productions, intended to show that it was not the fault of individual filmmakers that films failed to meet the party's standards, but rather the fault of the party for not

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[373] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Information über die Sitzung des künstlerischen Rates am 1 February 1958 p. 64.
[374] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Information über die Sitzung des künstlerischen Rates am 1 February 1958, p. 64.
[375] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Information über die Sitzung des künstlerischen Rates am 1 February 1958, p. 66.

properly guiding the filmmakers. For the filmmakers, it was the party's duty to lead, and for them to follow, but if they could not see the path that they were following, then they could not be expected to go down it.

The activist day of the party organization at DEFA, in their meeting the following month, took up the fraught issue of the inability of filmmakers to understand the policies of the party. Anton Ackermann set the tone of the meeting with an opening speech that initially seemed to recognize the legitimacy of the KR's complaints but ended by giving its members the responsibility for not understanding the party's guiding artistic ideology.[376] Ackermann, used this speech to then turn the KR's arguments on them, putting the onus on the filmmakers to understand what the party stated, rather than on the party to provide clear guidance. On the one hand, Ackermann provided a definition of socialist realism as an optimistic artistic perspective that did not, however, present an overly positive socialist reality.[377] On the other hand, Ackermann criticized the past argument from Maetzig in regard to the difficulty of properly addressing reality via film.[378] Here Ackermann used his speech to attack Maetzig's idea that it was difficult to present the reality of East German life in film. By going after one of the most prominent filmmakers at DEFA, as well as one of DEFA's major party activists, Ackermann thus

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[376] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 6.
[377] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 12.
[378] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 12.

put the onus on the filmmakers to interpret the party's values. Ackermann drove home the point by declaring that, "that party line has been, and is, correct."[379]

Rather than offer concrete artistic guidance, Ackermann repeated the long-standing and vague claim that the closer films were to the party's ideals, the stronger the films would be artistically.[380] The director Konrad Wolf also placed the onus of responsibility on filmmakers, saying that they should ensure that their work was aligned the party's final goal.[381] Wolf's support, however, focused on the ultimate ideals of the party, and not explicitly on the actions taken by the party. In many ways Wolf's speech followed with the critiques of the Künstlischer Rat that the filmmakers were supportive of the party's goals, but unclear about its directives. To rectify the problems of the party Wolf called for the creation, and acceptance, of a clear line by the time of the film conference that year.[382] Wolf here, made an open call for the party to clearly define proper filmmaking, and to create a "party line", which would be a clear party based stance on filmmaking and films. While the conference did not include any new definitions of cultural thought, nor a new cultural line, Wolf's calls were, to a lesser degree, found in the strong emphasis at the conference of the need to ensure the strong presence of socialist values in DEFA feature films.

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[379] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 16.
[380] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 16.
[381] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 77.
[382] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 409 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 6. März 1958, p. 77.

At the Party Activist Day in March 1958, the SED continued to build on its theme of strong unity between party ideology and DEFA production. The March 26 meeting developed a number of the themes expressed earlier that month, and provides greater insight into the development of thought between meetings. Siegfried Wagner's speech echoed many of the themes that Ackermann discussed, including the major ideological shift that occurred, and needed to be carried through with, after the 20th Party Congress. Wagner emphasized the guiding role of the party in providing stability during the period of ideological conflict that emerged the previous fall.[383] Wagner's emphasis on the need to follow the party's leadership fell in line with the overall tone of the party at all of its meetings and conferences. The continued emphasis belied the fact that a number of major filmmakers questioned the structure of the guidance, and the party never full addressed their concerns, instead they were largely pushed aside in favor of minor platitudes and encouragement to follow the path. Wagner continued this trend when he argued that the normative understandings by filmmakers as to how to show the shifts in society, that being on focusing in films on negative examples, was incorrect and instead they should only focus on positive examples as shown by the party.[384] This analysis, while seemingly contradicting that given by Ackermann earlier that month with his denunciation of overly positive depictions of reality, fit within the party's overall ideological framework and its conception of the relationship between film

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[383] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 410 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 26. März 1958, p. 42.
[384] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 410 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 26. März 1958, p. 42.

and society. By providing solely positive examples filmmakers would be creating a stronger form of socialism via the production of fictional role models for society. It is noteworthy that Wagner's calls were echoed in the pre-conference meetings with the general public later that summer.

The other major development at the party meeting was that of Kurt Maetzig discussing preliminary plans for the creation of Production groups, an idea which later that year would lead to the creation of Artistic Working Groups (KAGs). Maetzig praised the concept as positive for the studios, and pointed out how the idea had originally been proposed in 1949, but went nowhere at the time.[385] Tightening production relations within DEFA would have a number of positive side effects for their backers. Most importantly, for Maetzig, was that they could provide for "stronger ideological guidance."[386] He further explicitly linked the guiding role of the party to the creation of production groups, and therein to the dissemination of ideology to the filmmakers.[387] Maetzig's speech served as a reaffirmation, from the perspective of some filmmakers, of the need to work alongside the party leadership. Despite his prominent role in that February's KR meeting, Maetzig called for greater ties between the party and filmmakers. He further implicitly supported both Ackerman and Wagner's arguments in favor of the need for greater party oversight.

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[385] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 410 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 26. März 1958, p. 9.
[386] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 410 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 26. März 1958, p. 10.
[387] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 1.01 410 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 26. März 1958, p. 11.

The party activist day in the beginning of that April served to reinforce the ideas presented at earlier party activist days, as well as in the KR meeting that February, and to outline topics that would be reemphasized at the Conference that summer. Alexander Abusch, in his presentation spoke about the need for focusing on a "socialist perspective in film production", and in the films themselves.[388] Abusch then worked to clarify that from the perspective of the party, following its ideology strictly was not being dogmatic, but rather was going along with the proper view of reality.[389] This presentation worked to reiterate and reaffirm the values presented at the previous two party activist days. By repeating their stance on the relationship between art and SED ideology the party representatives, all of whom worked at the MfK, sought to convince the DEFA filmmakers of the need to go through with the party's policies. At the same time, however, they again did not clarify how exactly the party would lead DEFA, but rather that DEFA should listen to the party's beliefs and should be sure to present socialism within their films.[390] Pushing this issue both emphasized the necessity of acting within the parameters of the party's beliefs, and offered opportunities for filmmakers to participate in the creation of socialism. The broadness of the categories provided by the party did allow for filmmakers to determine how they would present socialism, and the means by which they would encourage filmgoers to embrace socialism. This

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[388] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 226 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 15 April 1958 p. 109.
[389] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 226 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 15 April 1958, p. 109.
[390] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 226 Stenographische Niederschrift der Parteiaktivtagung der Parteiorganisation der DEFA am 15 April 1958, p. 109.

openness was, as argued by the members of the KR, frustrating when combined with harsh oversight from the party, but positive when allowed to blossom.

These spaces for creation were further discussed in the document, For the Development of Socialist Film, released that summer. In many ways this document followed the one created the previous year, as well as the various SED-DEFA meetings that had occurred that spring. The ZK authors of the document clarified that the main means by which films were to create socialism would be to make sure that the socialist reality was recognizable.[391] Again, positive modeling of the socialist reality was the primary focus of how DEFA could achieve its function in producing socialism. It further called on filmmakers to grow and develop their role and to better fulfill their duties, particularly after they failed to do so during the first half of the 1950s, despite the party's calls for greater levels of socialism in art.[392] Failures on the part of DEFA were thus seen as a continuous series of actions and were taken within the context of the lack of proper socialist values in film. These critiques were not unique to the document, but rather were echoed in conferences from 1957 to 1960, and thus representative of the party's analysis of DEFA film in that period.

As a means of fixing these supposed errors and more fully guiding DEFA, the document called for greater action on the part of the party organization at DEFA.[393]

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[391] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Für die Entwicklung des Sozialistischen Filmschaffens in der DDR 4 June 1958, p. 3.
[392] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Für die Entwicklung des Sozialistischen Filmschaffens in der DDR 4 June 1958, p. 6.
[393] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Für die Entwicklung des Sozialistischen Filmschaffens in der DDR 4 June 1958, p. 8.

Rather than emphasizing the periodic party meetings at DEFA, and their success in disseminating values to filmmakers, the authors called for daily action at DEFA in order to organize the studios.[394] Delineating between these events allowed for the authors to focus on the failures at DEFA, while simultaneously setting aside the meetings that already were taking place. Directly tied to the creation of the stronger emphasis on party organizing at DEFA was greater knowledge, and understanding, of the relationship between socialist knowledge and the production of socialism.[395] Education, thus could not exist solely at monthly meetings, but rather had to take place as part of the day-to-day activities at DEFA. Mass organization, and mass action, was to be part of the fabric of work life at DEFA in order to safeguard the presence of socialist values in film. These were not fully new concepts, but were instead reinforced as part of the plan for further developing socialist film and socialist values in film. As part of the general buildup to the DEFA Conference later that month, these plans should be taken as realistic in their intent. They were not, as had happened with the plans from the previous year, part of a small shift, but rather part of the realization on the part of the SED that DEFA had not, in the eyes of the party, fulfilled its duties in terms of producing socialism and socialist film. Structural adjustments were, for the party, needed in order to achieve these realities at DEFA, and over the course of the DEFA Conference and the 5th Party Day, very real changes at DEFA took place.

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[394] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Für die Entwicklung des Sozialistischen Filmschaffens in der DDR 4 June 1958, p. 8.
[395] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 2 9.06 204 Für die Entwicklung des Sozialistischen Filmschaffens in der DDR 4 June 1958, p. 9.

That fall the first changes were implemented with the creation of KAGs, and the structural changes to the KR. While the KR would continue to function into the 1960s, most of its duties were removed and instead given to the newly created KAGs, thereby eliminating the main source of non-party power at DEFA, and replacing it with a decentralized system of small scale control, meaning that the only centralized power structures at DEFA were those of the APOs and BPO. The KAGs functioned not just as a means of decentralizing power, but also of offering greater democratic control over film production.[396] From the perspective of the DEFA leadership the creation of KAGs represented a fundamental step towards ensuring quicker and more efficient film production.[397] Decentralizing the process would allow for filmmakers to make quicker decisions and to not have to deal with as much direct bureaucracy when reviewing and editing their films. At the same time, the process was interpreted as one in which filmmakers who were loyal to the party's ideology would be able to more thoroughly convince their colleagues to follow with their ideals.[398]

Officially the ideological focus functioned as, secondary to the decentralization process, but realistically from the perspective of the party it was central to the reasoning behind the creation of the KAGs. Much like with the initial planning of the KR the KAGs could serve as sites for direct ideological dissemination

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[396] BA/DR 1 7838 Über die Bildung von künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen und deren Aufgaben und Rechte im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 25 November 1958, no pagination.
[397] BA/DR 1 7838 Über die Bildung von künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen und deren Aufgaben und Rechte im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 25 November 1958.
[398] BA/DR 1 7838 Über die Bildung von künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen und deren Aufgaben und Rechte im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 25 November 1958.

between colleagues, and would allow for ideologically trustworthy filmmakers to oversee the films made by one another, and in particular the others in their KAG.[399] While this was initially a task of the KR, the reorganization of the KR, and the creation of the KAGs, led to a quick shift. While officially unrelated to the actions of the KR that previous winter, realistically these two events were closely connected. The lack of any discussion regarding the creation of KAGs or for decentralizing control over film at DEFA prior to the KR's letter to the ZK, and the quick change to support for the creation of new groups, which eventually became the KAGs, provides support for the link between the events. With their new roles, and their place in making the thematic plans for DEFA, the KAGs were able to fully supplant the KR.[400] These new changes were slowly implemented, but over time had a significant impact on the structure and function of DEFA, both practically speaking and as an SED led institution.

1959: The Cultural Commission Re-Emerges

The reemergence of the Politburo's Cultural Commissions suggests that, perhaps due to the KR's complaint, the SED leadership felt the need once again to define from on high the nature of socialist art and explicate the role of film in particular. At the many sessions it held over the course of 1959, the Great Cultural Commission of the Politburo discussed the problem of the dissemination through art of socialist ideology from several angles. Taken as a whole, these meetings

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[399] BA/DR 1 7838 Über die Bildung von künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen und deren Aufgaben und Rechte im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 25 November 1958.
[400] BA/DR 1 7838 Über die Bildung von künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen und deren Aufgaben und Rechte im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 25 November 1958.

reaffirmed at the highest level the SED's threefold insistence: all art adopted a class point of view; socialist art not only focused on the masses and their struggles but presented socialism as the solution to workers' exploitation; socialist art would only emerge from artists' recognition of the need for guidance from the party. Simultaneously, the speakers presented variations on these themes that were fitted to the particular tone and concerns of the era, in particular, its emphasis on learning from the masses and on positive encouragement of artists along this path. In both explicit remarks and the usual vague insinuations, speakers indicated that their particular artistic target was film and its makers at DEFA. Despite being packaged in the language of encouragement, the criticisms were far from even handed. In fact, they fit into a broad pattern of SED officials leveling attacks against the products and filmmakers of DEFA during this era.

The February 5 meeting covered the relationship between ideology and artistic form. In his presentation, Hans Rodenburg, head of the feature film studio at DEFA, built on the tradition of postwar Communist critiques of artistic "form over content" as bourgeois. This time, the focus was on naturalism and expressionism in film. According to Rodenburg, "[N]aturalism is second a content problem, and then first a problem of form."[401] Thus, naturalist films were placed in the negative category of formalist works of art. Rodenburg concluded that art must take part in

[401] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 2 Stenografische Niederschrift der Erweiterten Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK im Hause der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Robert-Koch-Platz am Donnerstag, dem 5. Februar 1959, p. 61.

the struggles of socialism and the people.[402] He, thus, foreshadowed the main message of the forthcoming Bitterfeld Conference. And, also similar to the tenor of discussion at the conference, he did not attack artists who fell into artistic errors, but rather encouraged them to voluntarily change. At the next meeting of the Cultural Commission, Alexander Abusch proposed that the key to ensuring the strength of the socialist mass movement was close work between the party and the cultural intelligentsia.[403] This relationship, in turn, would contribute to the development of a new socialist life for the people.[404] Abusch's encouragement proved key for elaborating the continuance of the need for DEFA to support the socialist project. Implicit within this argument was the idea that the cultural intelligentsia did not necessarily always work in the interests of the masses. His stance was one of simultaneously recognizing the significant role that cultural production played for the SED, while attacking any purported failures of DEFA.

Furthering Abusch's critiques was the presentation by Siegfried Wagner at the meeting that March, in which he critiqued the place of DEFA's errors.[405] For Wagner, the party activist days and the DEFA Conference the previous year could, and should, have clarified the problems at DEFA as they related to the questions of

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[402] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 2 Stenografische Niederschrift der Erweiterten Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK im Hause der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Robert-Koch-Platz am Donnerstag, dem 5. Februar 1959, p. 63.
[403] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 3 Stenografische Niederschrift der Erweiterten Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK 16 February 1958 p. 51.
[404] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 3 Stenografische Niederschrift der Erweiterten Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK 16 February 1958, p. 51.
[405] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 4 Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK mit den Intendanten der Berliner Theater im K.-L.-Haus, Thälmannsaal am Montag, dem 16. März 1959, p. 3.

the SED's cultural policies.[406] That they did not overcome those problems was seen as proof of the inability of the cultural intelligentsia to fall in line with the party and fully embrace the party's views. Despite engaging in self-reflection and self-criticism, DEFA workers, it seemed, could not discover the roots of their failures.

Ensuring that the purported errors would begin to be fixed was vital for the party. A means of achieving this was done through the HV Film, which at the time had been renamed as the VVB Film, in their yearly planning report. The summer report, which detailed the necessary actions for that fall called for the guaranteeing that socialist film would be a socialist mass product coming from DEFA that fall.[407] Again the lack of pure socialist production on the part of DEFA came to the fore and was taken as part of the task of the MfK. A further task of the VVB was to support the cultural-ideological strengthening of national film production as a whole, and of film production at each of the DEFA studios.[408] This assessment built on Ulbricht's speech from the previous summer at the 5th Party Day in regard to the slow process of developing and perfecting DEFA film production. They were later further developed at the cultural conference the following summer.

The nature of control over DEFA production came under greater scrutiny later that year. That winter, a ZK document looked at the nature of film production, and in particular looked at control structures. Among the critical structures

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[406] Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK mit den Intendanten der Berliner Theater im K.-L.-Haus, Thälmannsaal am Montag, dem 16. März 1959, p. 3.
[407] BA DR 1 4053 Auszug aus dem Arbeitsplan der VVB Film für das 2. Halbjahr 1959, no pagination.
[408] BA DR 1 4053 Auszug aus dem Arbeitsplan der VVB Film für das 2. Halbjahr 1959.

identified by the ZK's cultural sector were the Party Cell's [APOs] at DEFA.[409] They were identified as primary sites of ideological dissemination and critical for the party organization to properly function at DEFA, and in particular at the feature film studio.[410] As part of the broad decentralization process at DEFA, the APOs were, in effect, analogous to the KAGs, and provided a place for day-to-day mass organization within the studio. The opportunity for low-level interaction between party members, as well as for them to convert members of their KAGs to their APO opened up a chance of the party to fully bring DEFA into line with their policies. Taken in the context of the Bitterfeld Conference that spring, the ZK document highlights the continued efforts of the party to bring everyone into line, and in particular to ensure that film production met the standards set by the party. When combined with the VVB plans for that year, the ZK document reveals a slow development towards utilizing the recent decentralization as a tool for mass action at the feature film studio, and within DEFA as a whole.

1960: Further Reorganization at DEFA

The changes were intended to facilitate the rapid distribution of information from the party to all levels of the intelligentsia so that members of the intelligentsia would gain more knowledge more quickly about how to fulfill their duties and tasks. The changes also allowed for greater debate and discussion within party groups.

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[409] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Einschätzung der Abteilung Volksbildung/Kultur zur Bürovorlage der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA studio für Spielfilme 21 December 1959 p. 3.

[410] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Einschätzung der Abteilung Volksbildung/Kultur zur Bürovorlage der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA studio für Spielfilme 21 December 1959, p. 4.

One can see how these structural and ideological changes affected DEFA and its relationship with the SED at the most basic level through the lens of the party organization at DEFA.

In 1960, the BPO at DEFA issued a report regarding the new duties and responsibilities among artists. Its goal was to further clarify the values of the conference and to allow for more actions on the part of the filmmakers, while also reminding filmmakers to focus on the new peace process between the FRG and the GDR and promote peaceful coexistence between the two states.[411] The report discussed the success of the development of ideological-cultural groups at DEFA.[412] These groups were, according to the report, necessary for the spreading of ideology and the value of friendship between the USSR and the GDR.[413] The existence of these cultural groups, as well as the continued development of the KAGs, helped to secure these processes.[414] Decentralization was critical to the process of ideological distribution and the party as a mass movement.[415] KAGs and party cells were understood to be critical to the success of not only of DEFA but of the foreign policy

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[411] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme Informationsbericht 6 May 1960 p. 101

[412] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme Informationsbericht 6 May 1960, p. 101.

[413] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme Informationsbericht 6 May 1960, p. 102.

[414] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme Informationsbericht 6 May 1960, p. 103.

[415] For discussion of decentralization by the Cultural Commissions, see SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 9 Stenografische Niederschrift: Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 5. August 1960 p. 3.

of the GDR and its relations with the FRG. One notes the quickly elevated role of the new KAGs in these reports.

Abusch, in a further speech at the meeting declared the necessity of continually developing the Bitterfeld Weg and following with the Bitterfeld measures.[416] To do this required direct decisions on the part of the party, in order to ensure the distribution of these values to the masses and to the intelligentsia.[417] Here Abusch reflected on the necessity of direct and clear distribution of values and concepts to the cultural workers. He pushed beyond the typical actions of the party, and argued in favor of a shift in their means of policy creation and distribution. The broad directives of earlier eras were insufficient in this case, and instead needed to be replaced by clear instructions.

The means of disbursing these instructions were explicitly the MfK and implicitly the party organizations.[418] The decentralized structures at DEFA offered opportunities for new methods of ideological disbursement and value transmission. By creating clear directives the party could fully guide these groups in their actions at DEFA. By doing this they would be able to craft more ideologically pure films, and transmit the party's values to the masses in a clearer manner. Further by creating

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[416] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 9 Stenografische Niederschrift: Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 5. August 1960, p. 17.
[417] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 9 Stenografische Niederschrift: Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 5. August 1960, p. 17.
[418] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2.109 9 Stenografische Niederschrift: Tagung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands am 5. August 1960, p. 17.

clear directives they would limit the space of discussion and debate at the lowest levels by limiting the room for interpretation of the directives.

This process was, for the MfK, tied into the structural-ideological restructuring of the film production process. Abusch, in his role as the Minister of Culture, authored a plan for these changes in September 1960. Among the core suggestions was ensuring that the productions groups were supportive of socialist productions methods.[419] This level of care focused on the means of production, and the values of the producers. Looking at the production groups as essential function to overall socialist production meant that they needed to be fully within the ideological purview of the party to ensure that they provided the nation with socialist products. Given the new place of the production groups, it was critical for the MfK to guarantee that they went along with the overall plan for production. Moreover, the plans of the MfK fell in line with the SED's plans and understanding of the place, and function, of production groups in DEFA.[420]

The other major aspect of structural reorganization was a focus on the nature and structure of the party organizations at DEFA. Abusch argued that more workers needed to follow along with the socialist value system.[421] His focus here was not just on the overall agreement with the SED, but also on particular policy points. Echoing his speech before the Cultural Commission of the Politburo, he argued for

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[419] BA/DR 1 7930 Bericht an den Ministerrat über die Maßnahmen des Ministeriums für Kultur zur Auswertung der Kulturkonferenz 1960, p. 22.
[420] For more on production groups see von Richthofen, p. 154-156, as well as Majors and Hübner, Peter. *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiss-Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1970*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995.
[421] BA/DR 1 7930 Bericht an den Ministerrat über die Maßnahmen des Ministeriums für Kultur zur Auswertung der Kulturkonferenz 1960, p. 22.

the acceptance of the Deutschlandplan at the level of all cultural producers.[422] Here Abusch moved beyond simply looking at party members at DEFA, and instead expanded his focus to all cultural producers. The cultural intelligentsia at DEFA was thus tasked with following along with party plans and values, and this then can be seen as another means of the party working to bring the entirety of the intelligentsia into line with their values.

Sterne: Anti-Fascist Memories and Socialism

Konrad Wolf's 1959 film *Sterne* focuses on the interactions between a Wehrmacht corporal and Jewish prisoners in Greece. Over the course of the film the corporal, whose real name is never known, grows sympathetic towards the Jewish internees, and finds ways to help them, such as providing medicine. His actions are juxtaposed with those of his fellow soldier, Kurt, who revels in the power that he possesses over the Jews, as well as the local Bulgarians. A co-production with the Bulgarian state film company, *Sterne* presents a literal, and figurative, cooperative effort between Germans and Bulgarians to promote the values of anti-fascism. Over the course of the film Walter, the name given to the corporal by local partisans, is convinced to come to the aid of both the Communists fighting against the Nazis, as well as the Jews being held. These actions humanize Walter, and encourage the viewer to go on the journey of self-discovery alongside him. In the end, Walter, after failing to help a young Jewish woman escape deportation to Auschwitz, offers to provide weapons to local Communist partisans.

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[422] BA/DR 1 7930 Bericht an den Ministerrat über die Maßnahmen des Ministeriums für Kultur zur Auswertung der Kulturkonferenz 1960, p. 22.

Ideologically the film functioned in two discrete ways. Firstly, it worked as a reminder of the necessity of anti-fascist action and of the need to fight against any resurgence of fascism in the world. Secondly, it worked as a statement that the path to authentic anti-fascism stems from the cooperation between Communists of all nationalities. These messages fit well within the overarching ideological framework of the SED at the time. The memories of the struggle against fascisms explicitly respond to the calls of the party in 1959 that filmmakers more appropriately portray the push towards socialism in the GDR. Moreover, the portrayal of an internationalist struggle against fascism functioned to encourage the viewer to see all Communists as equal in the fight against a re-emergence of fascism. A focus on anti-fascism not only fit within the broad ideological ideals of the SED, but also worked alongside specific critiques leveled against DEFA, including those from the HV Film as to the ideological quality of DEFA products. While the film itself was not a specific response to these criticisms, it bears noting that the previous film that Konrad Wolf directed, *Sonnensucher*, was banned until 1972, and that the party's comments to Wolf focused on the censorship coming for ideological reasons.[423]

Sterne, thus presented an opportunity for both Wolf and DEFA to craft a film with an ideologically safe theme, and which simultaneously served the goals of the party through a promotion of figures tied to socialism, and thereby provided proper modeling for the viewer. The ideological models in the film come through the figures of the partisans, namely Petko who introduces Walter to the Communists,

[423] It should also be noted that, in all likelihood, the actual reason for the censorship of *Sonnensucher* came from the USSR's discomfort with a film focused on uranium mining, and which had relatively negative portrayals of Soviet military officials.

and Walter himself. Petko's willingness to risk his position in the partisan group in order to bring in Walter, reveals to the viewer the necessary risks of being a Communist, while simultaneously memorializing the struggle of those who resisted Nazism. At the same time, Walter's development journey was one that the viewer in the GDR could understand, seeing as the majority of the populace had lived under Nazism and were themselves developing into potential socialists and communists. These models fit well within the SED's ideology, and served to demonstrate that DEFA could indeed create a film in which the audience had figures to follow and relate to. At the same time, the fact that the film was a historical one, and not one focused on contemporary events, elucidates a tension in DEFA filmmaking that emerged more completely in the 1960s: that being that DEFA struggled to craft ideologically acceptable films which focused on the then contemporary situation in the GDR.

Stylistically the film also fit within standard stylistic formats of DEFA films in that period. The most complex aesthetic moments came with the superimposition of the face of Ruth, the Jewish woman whom Walter tries to save, over varying background in order to strengthen her monologue in several scenes. Most importantly the films ends with the face of Ruth imposed over a shot of a train entering a tunnel and smoke billowing forth, symbolizing her fate at Auschwitz. This technique allowed Wolf to provide information to the viewer without directly indicating what was happening via dialogue. This method, while not new on any level, still allowed for more than straight forward filmmaking, and for Wolf to play

with aspects of reality within the individual scenes in the film. For the late 1950s this represented that most developed of the DEFA techniques for realist filmmaking.

Sterne thus represents the core ideological tendencies of late 1950s DEFA filmmaking. Its style fit well within acceptable trends, and did not, to any significant degree, push forward aesthetic trends. At the same time, the ideological content of the film maintained the push for positive portrayals of socialist figures in films. These styles, while not fitting within the Bitterfeld Weg, nevertheless highlighted the need to respect socialism and its development, as well as to memorialize past anti-fascist figures. Wolf, here fulfilled the central dictums of SED film policy in the latter 1950s.

Conclusion

A more combative relationship between the SED and DEFA filmmakers emerged in the latter half of the 1950s. SED officials pushed, in this period, to assert greater control over DEFA through both party actions, as well as through offices at the MfK. The emergence of the HV Film fundamentally altered the nature of film oversight in the GDR, and created a new means of licensing, and thereby censoring, films. Filmmakers at DEFA, however, did not accept all of the changes without pushback, and instead sought to create a more democratic response to the oversight of film production. These responses were met with both disapproval and acceptance. The elimination of the KR as a functional means of film oversight within DEFA was counterbalance with the creation of the KAGs. KAGs, alongside the dictums of the Bitterfeld Weg, ushered in a period of decentralization within DEFA and the overarching film production process. Thus, the latter 1950s witnessed

significant changes in the relationship between DEFA and the SED, as well as to the very structures of filmmaking itself.

Chapter 4:

The Path to the Kahlschlag: DEFA and the SED From 1961 to 1965

The first half of the 1960s alternated between sharp political closures, and cultural crackdowns, interspersed with stretches of openness. Two major events, one political and one cultural, bookend this period. They represent the most severe points of crackdowns on freedom in the GDR. The era opened with the most infamous political moment in the history of the GDR, the creation of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961. The era closed with the sharpest cultural crackdown in the history of the GDR, the notorious 11th Plenum of 1965 at which the GDR banned 12 feature films and blacklisted a number of artists. These two events were not representative of the political or cultural policy of these years that were punctuated by stretches of openness and cultural acceptance. In the case of film policy, for example, these years saw extended periods of decentralization, which were associated with more openness, at DEFA and within the SED's cultural control structures.

Decentralization at DEFA slowly progressed into the mid-1960s. Ideological stability and openness should be viewed as, at best, partial descriptors for this period.[424] Indeed, during the early-1960s the party actively sought to exert greater control over cultural producers, and this process culminated in the 11th Plenum in

[424]Fenemore, Mark "The Limits of Repression and Reform: youth policy in the early 1960s" in *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971*. ed. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond**.** Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 172 and Fulbrook *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 26.

1965 with the banning of 12 films. Despite the political stability provided by the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and the subsequent declaration of the achievement of socialism, the SED did not feel ideologically secure. Instead, rather ironically, this political stability led to a period of ideological paranoia about the trustworthiness of cultural producers and, thus, attempts to bring cultural producers more into the fold of the party. The party's reputation for cultural openness during these years stems largely from the fact that the SED did not actively censor DEFA films, on the one hand, and the aesthetic shifts that occurred within DEFA productions, on the other. Some authors even look to this period as the era of the East German New Wave, although many of the films that exemplify these styles were banned in 1965.[425] The relatively high level of stylistic variation and experimentation before 1965 should not be equated with ideological openness to beliefs contrary to SED thought. Throughout, DEFA productions were subject to harsh critiques at SED conferences and in internal SED reports. Yet the conflation of aesthetic openness with ideological freedom is characteristic of the majority of scholarly interpretations of DEFA films from 1961 to 1965.[426]

An interval of political stability after 1961, however, did occur, and it does provide a critical background for interpreting the ideological stresses and conflicts found within the SED. The creation of the Berlin Wall in 1961 provided the SED

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[425] Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and its History* p 10, and Harhausen, Ralf. *Alltagsfilm in der DDR: Die "Nouvelle Vague" der DDR*. Marburg; Tectum Verlag, 2007, p. 37.

[426] See the discussions of DEFA productions in Berghahn, Feinstein, Harhausen, Heiduschke, and Schittly.

with an unprecedented level of political security.[427] The SED more fully asserted their authority over society without having to fear a mass departure to the West. This control provided the degree of stability for the SED to push for even greater ideological consistency. As part of their declaration of having achieved socialism in 1961, party leaders expected more complete ideological homogeneity among party members and the populace as a whole. A period in which the party routinely attempted to exert control over cultural producers, and in which it encouraged producers to more fully move in line with the party, rather than alongside the party, followed the creation of the Berlin Wall.

The SED, then, did not steer a straight path to the so-called *Kahlschlag*, a word that means "clear-cutting" and was used to refer to the sudden and sweeping censorship of cultural products at the 11th Plenum. Rather, the party leadership tacked and veered culturally between 1961 and 1965. During 1960, cultural direction continued trends of the late 1950s with their emphasis on decentralization, party mass action, and adherence to the Bitterfeld Weg. By 1961, however, these points of focus merged with a new series of directives on the need for cultural producers to portray (rather than create) life under socialism and to present socialism accurately. From the 14th Plenum in 1961 to the 11th Plenum in 1965, the SED made it abundantly clear that they expected cultural producers, including filmmakers, to fall more fully into line behind the party leadership than they had in earlier periods. The party criticized DEFA filmmakers for their inability

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[427] Allinson, p. 126 and Wolle, Stefan *Aufbruch nach Utopia: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1961-1971*. Berlin: Ch Links Verlag, 2011, p. 72.

to provide realistic models for the masses to base their lives on. Filmmaking, despite its relative stylistic openness, thus came under a stronger ideological microscope after 1961 than during the previous five years.

The party slowly rolled back the decentralization programs in favor of stronger emphases on the need for centralization and ties to the party hierarchy. The SED quickly lost its faith in the experiments of the KAGs, and instead worked to actively tie them to APOs and ideological guides from the party. Paradoxically, these closer party ties did allow for a period of stylistic openness and stark shifts in visual and dramatic elements in DEFA films. While the party never focused on specific artistic issues, they did repeatedly critique DEFA for failing to produce films with a great enough artistic-ideological quality. The linkage between artistic and ideological quality became a catchword for describing DEFA productions in this era. Art and ideology remained as one for the SED, and stayed the measure by which they interpreted the quality of DEFA films. 1961 to 1965, thus, should not be divided into two periods, one of openness followed by one of control, but should be understood as a single era of increasing focus on and control over film production.

This chapter will cover the political implications of the erection of the Berlin Wall, and how the new political norms that resulted created shifting cultural structures. With an end point of the 11th Plenum, and the most extreme act of censorship on the part of the SED and state offices of the GDR, the chapter will assess how the party came to intervene so directly in the filmmaking process. Simultaneously, it will demonstrate that the lead up to the 11th Plenum was not a direct path of increased government and party control but rather a continual back

and forth of more and less intervention and control. Furthermore, I will show that criticism of the party's actions that took place in the latter portion of the 1950s did not result in any major crackdowns on filmmakers in this period. Following on the heels of the Bitterfeld Conference, the early 1960s saw the emergence of a new focus at DEFA, and in film control as a whole. Using the model of the Bitterfeld Weg, the increased attention to the lives of ordinary citizens and the experiences of workers and farmers coincided with periods of decreased control over film production by the SED. This focus and the lessened control culminated, paradoxically, in the 11th Plenum, where 12 films, all of which centered on the lives of ordinary East Germans were banned by the SED. At the end of the chapter I will assess the place of *Das Kaninchen bin ich* [The Rabbit Is Me] in the 11th Plenum, and how the film represents the ideological values of the period that preceded its prohibition. *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, the story of a young woman who falls in love with a powerful married judge who sentenced her brother to prison for political crimes, portrays and explores some flaws and imperfections of society and politics in the GDR. I will show how the filmmakers' values displayed in the film were in fact explicitly encouraged by the SED, and how the process of making the film was fraught from the beginning, with KAG members questioning much of the film. In sum, the chapter demonstrates that the early 1960s were a period of simultaneous growing stability for the SED, on the one hand, and of its declining trust in filmmakers to follow through with the opaque instructions of the party, on the other.

Political Stability: The Aftermath of the Creation of the Berlin Wall

The erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 signaled a new era in the relationship between the SED and the people of the GDR. The emergence of a strict system of control in regard to the movement of people within, and without the state led to a period of political stability. Politically this allowed the SED to exert more authority without having to use any additional force. [428] The control over the ability of citizens to leave the country, most fully realized through physical barriers to mobility, lessened the fears of the party in regard to the exodus of the intelligentsia and skilled workers that occurred in the latter portion of the 1950s. And, in fact, the wall stabilized the population's number and ended the brain drain to the West.[429] The wall provided a means of stemming this population movement, which in turn allowed the party to focus less on social control, and more on cultural expression. The economics of the era were directly tied to this social control, and were highlighted by the emergence, and ultimate failure of the New Economic System [NÖS] and its attempts to further expand the GDR's economy throughout the early 1960s.[430] This plan built on the stabilized population numbers provided by the closure of the inter-German border.[431] Further the ability of the state to erect, and fully maintain, this closed border sent a signal to the populace in regard to their ability to react against the state.[432] The creation of the wall, thus created a system of

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[428] Allinson, p. 126.
[429] Majors, p. 190-191, and Wolle p.77.
[430] Steiner, p. 105.
[431] Steiner, p. 105.
[432] Allinson, p. 127.

stability and peace by which the party could focus on less direct control in favor of a period of cultural and political openness.

The building of the wall and its political and economic repercussions overlapped with the winding down of destalinization and a return to and even enhancement of the cult of personality surrounding Ulbricht. Both party and state officials seemed to accept him as the absolute leader as they groomed his public image as the great authority figure within the party and the state.[433] Ulbricht solidified both his role as the head of the SED and his domestic reputation as a major player in international politics through his bold decision to build the Berlin Wall despite the doubts of the Soviet leadership.[434] The GDR emerged as a more independent actor vis-à-vis the USSR and Ulbricht won a larger degree of leeway in domestic policy-making.[435] This top level stability ensured a system in which the average citizen, after coming to terms with the closure of the Berlin transit points, could live a relatively unmolested life in regard to their interactions with the state. The Stasi was developing a system of omniscient but less "hands-on" surveillance that involved fewer arrests and more observation and had a calming effect on state-citizen relations.[436] The lower incidence of direct interference in people's lives provides an important context for understanding the place of culture and cultural production in the GDR in this period. Lower levels of direct intervention in the everyday lives of East Germans fostered political stability that in turn reassured the

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[433] Wolle, p. 128
[434] Harrison, p. 224.
[435] Harrison, p. 224.
[436] Gieske, p. 52.

SED and led it to be somewhat more relaxed in its interactions with cultural producers.[437] The SED permitted more expression of critical points of view from both cultural producers and ordinary people.[438] Certainly, self-censorship by filmmakers continued and remained a major factor behind all film production. And there were still instances of active censorship by the party, particularly in regard to experimental films that were deemed challenges to the state

The closure of the border allowed the GDR to control the entry of Western goods, outside of television and radio waves.[439] Limited access to Western goods in turn worked with Ulbricht's interpretations of cultural interactions with the West that he presented at the 5th Party Day in 1958, in which he argued that the purity of cultural products would increase via overcoming the Western influence then found in the GDR.[440] Closing out Western goods replaced the system of frequent contact with one of infrequent interaction, which served to increase the party's faith in the ability of the GDR's citizens to produce goods without a Western context.[441] Simultaneously this created a new system of cultural production and reception in the GDR.

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[437] Heiduschke, p. 100.
[438] For more information see Berghahn, p. 134-141.
[439] Allinson, p. 124.
[440] SAPMO BA/DY 30 IV 1 V 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des V. Parteitags der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in der Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, Berlin vom 10-16. Juli 1958, p. 286.
[441] Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 26.

Openness and Closure: Conferences From 1961 to 1965

1961: A Renewed Push for Cultural Socialism

The body of evidence from cultural conferences from 1961 up to 1964 indicates that the cultural policies of the SED were not fully open to discussion, the party was still engaged in efforts to rein in DEFA, and artists increased the artistic-ideological quality of their films. Thus, the decisions of the 11th Plenum did not come out of nowhere but were the shocking end point of a developing process. The SED gradually went from actively promoting the decentralization of cultural controls to clamping down on DEFA feature film production as a whole. The SED never provided explicit guidance and leadership but continued its past tendency to speak in vague, broad terms, which allowed for an element of interpretation and debate about cultural production. On the other hand, producers could never fully be sure that they were in fact following the party's guidance and so proceeded cautiously, especially when it came to experimentation.

Tied into this system, both production and reception of art were vital issues covered by the SED in its party meetings and conferences during this era. The first party-wide conference in this period to cover cultural issues was the 14th Day of the ZK, in November 1961. In his speech, Walter Ulbricht assessed the level of dedication found among cultural producers in the GDR. He argued that, while many artists supported the eventual achievement of Communism, too many were satisfied to sit back and "do nothing to create the starting point of Socialism."[442] Here

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[442] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 260 Stenografische Niederschrift der 14. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED vom 23. Bis 26. November 1961p. 101.

Ulbricht acknowledged that the GDR had not truly achieved socialism, despite declarations to the contrary, and simultaneously laid much of the blame on cultural workers. For the first time when addressing cultural production, Ulbricht brought up the need for the intelligentsia to work to actualize Communism in the GDR, and not just to work towards the achievement of socialism. Ulbricht built on the declaration of the achievement of socialism in the GDR in order to push for a greater level of success, that being the work towards the realization of Communism. His arguments directly addressed the unwillingness of artists to fully follow along with the party's platform, and instead sitting back and accepting socialism as an end, instead of a means to an end.[443] By seeing socialism as only one part of the ultimate journey, Ulbricht challenged artists to work harder in following with the party's ideals.

Returning to the themes of the Bitterfeld Conference, Ulbricht tied together life among workers and farmers with both the transformation of artists' work and the achievement of communism.[444] According for Ulbricht, the realistic depictions of life in the GDR from the perspective of the proletariat were necessary aspects of training society to look past socialism and towards communism. Ulbricht's speech signaled that the SED saw a communist society led by the masses on the horizon and faulted artists for not pitching in to realize that vision.

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[443] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 260 Stenografische Niederschrift der 14. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED vom 23. Bis 26. November 1961, p. 101.
[444] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 260 Stenografische Niederschrift der 14. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED vom 23. Bis 26. November 1961, p. 99.

The creation of the KAGs, decentralization of film control, and the Bitterfeld Weg – key developments of the late 1950s -- were more fully presented in Ulbricht's speech. [445] The lack of complete support for the movement towards communism and beyond socialism, at least from Ulbricht's perspective, was part of the broader critique of the failure of artists to, in his estimation, fully support the SED's plans, as well as their inability to produce films, which fully reflected the lives of ordinary people in the GDR. Ulbricht's commentaries on the cultural-revolution at the 1960 cultural conference provide a more complete context for his critiques here in 1961. For Ulbricht, the willingness of artists to accept the achievement of socialism as an end in and of itself, rather than as a means to the ultimate end, fits with Ulbricht's comments in 1960 about the need for the cultural revolution to more fully encapsulate the experiences of the working classes through more perfected films. His criticisms laid much of the blame for the supposed failures of the GDR to achieve socialism and be well on the road to communism on the shoulders of cultural producers. He simultaneously reified the important place of film production in the GDR, and laid down a harsh attack on cultural producers. Ulbricht's comments in 1961 about the need for artists to more fully attack the difficult process of achieving communism fit with his previous commentaries on the cultural revolution.[446] The difficulties with getting artists to fully embrace the SED's stances on the movement

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[445] For more information on the decentralization of political control see von Richthofen, p. 158-162.

[446] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 260 Stenografische Niederschrift der 14. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED vom 23. Bis 26. November 1961, p. 101. See also, Mittenzwei, Wener *Die Intellektuellen-Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschlond von 1945-2000*. Leipzig: Verlag Faber, 2001, p. 177.

from socialism to communism were part of the much broader attempts to bring the cultural intelligentsia into the fold with the SED, particularly after the creation of the Berlin Wall the previous summer.

1962: Planning the 6th Party Day and Overtures to Filmmakers

The SED attempted to engage DEFA and the cultural intelligentsia more actively in the party by involving them in the planning of major party conferences and Party days.[447] During the late fall of 1962 the BPO at DEFA took part in the conceptualization process for the creation of the 6th Party Day. This planning, which incorporated members of the KAGs, as well as the BPO, sought to involve all levels of DEFA in the process in order to comprehensively assess the interrelationship between the ideals of the party and film production.[448] By tasking lower level members of DEFA with these assessments, the process of decentralization of power continued within DEFA. The inclusion of average party members, and not just high ranking members, showed a faith in the ability of the average party member to fully grasp the values needed to properly take part in planning DEFA's contribution to the 6th Party Day. This process contrasted sharply with Ulbricht's harsh judgments of the ability of filmmakers to follow the party's dictums that he laid out at the 14th Day of the ZK. The contrast between Ulbricht's attacks on DEFA in 1961 and the continuation of the decentralization of party power at DEFA in 1962 illustrates the tight zigzags in the relationship with DEFA during this period. SED leaders were willing to openly, and thoroughly critique the beliefs of DEFA filmmakers, and

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[447] Von Richthofen, p. 158-162.
[448] BA DR 117 27691 Konzeption zur Vorbereitung des VI. Parteitags no date, no pagination.

shortly thereafter embrace the ideas of low-level party members at DEFA, many of whom were relatively high up at the organization with many directors, writers, and dramaturges among the party membership, as to planning a major party conference.

Ulbricht's words, on the one hand, and decentralized decision-making, on the other, both reflected the SED's understanding of the era as one of transition to communism in the GDR, meaning that, "everything that was part of the construction of socialism has ended."[449] DEFA too was no longer a producer of socialism in the GDR. Instead, the film studio needed to reassess its place and find how it could continue to contribute to an already socialist society.[450] For the party, the solution to this was found through producing quality films that related to what the public both wanted and needed.[451] Linking these issues reaffirmed, at least in part, the function of DEFA as an institution through which the values of the party would be used to guide the masses. At the same time, however, the goal to produce films which were popularly received and which the masses enjoyed took a larger role than it had in previous years. In part this stems from the fact that the SED believed that the GDR had achieved socialism and that as a result proper socialist modeling was no longer necessary in order to produce socialism, but now only to maintain it. This shift did not decrease the importance of modeling in and of itself, but rather shifted its role from educational to representative. It is important to note that despite Ulbricht's earlier complaint that cultural producers were not looking beyond

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[449] BA DR 117 27691 Konzeption zur Vorbereitung des VI. Parteitags.
[450] BA DR 117 27691 Konzeption zur Vorbereitung des VI. Parteitags.
[451] BA DR 117 27691 Konzeption zur Vorbereitung des VI. Parteitags.

socialism, the internal SED discussion of DEFA's role the following year did not state that DEFA needed to work towards Communism, but only to represent socialism.

This shift returned film to the traditional theoretical place of the late 1940s and very early 1950s when the party argued that film should reflected the conditions under which it was created, rather than produce new conditions. Arguably, film no longer occupied as important a place in the political process of producing socialism. At the same time, however, it had to now accurately reflect the realities experienced by GDR citizens in their day-to-day lives, rather than portraying aspirational models for citizens to follow. Deviations from this would serve as critiques of the failures of the system to live up to the reflections found in film. Film's modeling ability still served a crucial function.

1963: The 6th Party Day and Renewed Criticism of DEFA

The core of cultural planning done at the 6th Party Day conference directly related to the level of support for socialism amongst the populace of the GDR. Ulbricht discussed the necessity of artists working to ensure that people did not backslide into past beliefs and attitudes, stating that they had an important role to play in, "the fight against old ways."[452] Here Ulbricht challenged cultural producers to actively prevent the ideological distribution of any values associated with a pre-GDR Germany, whether Nazi or capitalist. Cultural products thus retained an important educational function, in that they could provide models on how to

[452] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963 p. 151.

maintain a socialist perspective. Ulbricht saw this as part of the successes of the 5th Party Day, and implicit within this from the success of the cultural-revolution.[453] By linking these issues together Ulbricht presented a clear mission for the cultural intelligentsia: that of keeping up with their past successes, and not losing sight of the ultimate goal of achieving communism, even after the achievement of producing socialism.

The successive cultural decisions after the 5th Party Day, were directly tied to the successes of the creation of socialism. For Ulbricht, the new policies of the Bitterfeld Conference, proved critical in binding together the intelligentsia with the masses, and in allowing the intelligentsia to depict, "the problems of the development of socialism."[454] Ulbricht here alluded to the sixteen year transition from a post-Nazi occupied zone to the purportedly socialist GDR of 1961. This uneven developmental process did not go as smoothly as the SED would have wanted, and in a nod to the need for realistic depiction of life in the GDR, Ulbricht called for depictions of the uneven path to socialism that the citizens of the GDR experienced.

The need for the intelligentsia to ensure compliance within the continued socialist project, in turn informed these experiences.[455] These close ties allowed the cultural producers to more accurately depict the realities of life, as experienced by

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[453] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 151.
[454] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 152.
[455] Werner, p. 169.

the masses, in a manner that in turn would encourage their support for socialism. Ulbricht argued that, "socialist realism gives artists the possibilities to grasp the richness of our reality."[456] He, however, made sure to quickly clarify that adherence to socialist realism, was not a dogmatic act, but rather one that overcame dogmatism.[457] This delineation remained significant for maintaining a post-Stalinist stance on cultural production, which toed the line between mandating adherences to a relatively strict doctrine, and offering options so that the dogmatic nature of Stalinist art was no longer present.

Alfred Kurella, in a speech during the second day of the conference, further clarified the meaning of support for socialist realism, particularly in light of the achievement of socialism in the GDR. Kurella linked the adherence to socialist realism to the protective nature of art, against the decadent capitalist impulses of the FRG.[458] By acting as a shield against capitalist cultural influences, socialist realism retained an important political-ideological function. Kurella's discussion of the importance of socialist realism as an artistic method reinforced Ulbricht's earlier speech on the importance of cultural changes and challenges. While support for socialist realism was standard for the SED, the reaffirmation of its important practical role in showing the realities of life under socialism reinforced the

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[456] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 154.
[457] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 1 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 155.
[458] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963 p. 1260.

functional shift in cultural production since the achievement of socialism.[459] By using socialist realism as the guiding artistic style cultural producers could further fight against "formalist tendencies", and "inaccurate depictions of reality."[460] These intentionally over-broad warnings encouraged cultural producers to target anything that did not fall fully in line with the SED's thought. By not specifying what exactly constituted an inaccurate depiction of reality, Kurella opened up any cultural work that depicted reality in a way contrary to SED thought to attacks of falsely portraying reality. This served even more to tie the use of socialist realism to ongoing cultural-ideological struggles both within the party, and against non-party forces.[461]

Kurella reminded the audience that in order to fully achieve the promises of socialism more development needed to occur. He argued that, having politically and economically arrived at socialism, the next step was continued personal transformation, and party membership was central to ensuring that everything, and everyone, was properly changed.[462] Part of the broad process of maintaining socialism within the GDR involved emphasizing these shifts. Having a fully socialist personality, which was admittedly a standard, yet largely undefined, idea for the SED, was still an ongoing process for the masses, as well as for party members, in

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[459] Von Richthofen, p. 153.
[460] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 1260.
[461] Jäger, p. 108-109.
[462] SAPOM BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 1262.

this period. Kurella's speech served as a reminder to the party members in attendance that simply being in the party was not enough to produce change, but rather that they also had to actively participate in the party, and work towards its goals. Tied into this process was, "the fate of the nation as a socialist nation", as well as the fate of artistic production as fully socialist.[463] Kurella effectively tied these issues together, and saw personal transformation as a necessary aspect of this process. It was thus, only after the achievement of socialist personalities that individuals could properly take part in the maintenance of socialism through the production of socialist art. [464] Within this context, both Kurella and Ulbricht's speeches about the necessity of using socialist realism as an artistic method take on greater importance. Much as in earlier periods, cultural production existed as a means of protecting and furthering the development of the nation as a whole, and the masses as individuals. While art could no longer produce socialism it was, in light of the 6th Party Day, still a necessary aspect of the socialist journey, and actively producing socialist art was still an important task for all cultural producers.

1964: The Second Bitterfeld Conference

Maintaining a focus on proper socialist cultural production remained an important focus the following year with the preparations for the second Bitterfeld

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[463] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VI 5 Stenografische Niederschrift des VI. Parteitages der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands in Berlin, Werner-Seelenbinder-Halle, vom 15. Bis 21. Januar 1963, p. 1263.

[464] The party never fully clarified how exactly a person with a socialist personality would act, but in general the term was used to indicate a strong support for, and belief in, the achievements of socialism and of the party as an organization.

Conference. This conference, planned to celebrate the five year anniversary of the first Bitterfeld Conference, sought to assess the developments since 1959, with a particular emphasis on the economic and cultural shifts since then. Directly tied to these developments were the efforts of cultural producers to aid in the achievement of socialist persons in the GDR. This continuation of the earlier cultural-political line of ensuring that cultural products produced socialist personalities reaffirmed the emphases from the 6th Party Day that the need for socialist persons was a continuing process. Rather than serving as a simple repetition of what had already been said by the party, the arguments within these plans focused more on the direct ties between the socialist personality and economic and social developments. Linked to this was the emphasis that only through the use of the "highest artistic method" that being socialist realism, could the highest level of national achievement be reached.[465] By linking these issues to one another the authors of the document, which originated in the Politburo, saw the inherent ties between culture and the lives of the people of their nation.

These theoretical descriptions set up the tasks for the coming conference. Rather than function as a simple anniversary celebration, the upcoming second Bitterfeld Conference was to operate as a means by which the cultural-political successes, and failures, of the past five years could be discussed and debated. Assessing past success and failures was deemed essential to fully understanding the

[465] BA DR 1 8675 Konzeption für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung einer Konferenz anlässlich des 5. Jahrestages der Bitterfelder Konferenz zum Thema „5 Jahre Bitterfelder Konferenz-Die Ergebnisse und weitern Aufgaben bei der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nationalkultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik"1 February 1964.

developmental path of the GDR's culture, as well as the best way to fully produce "socialist culture at a high level."[466] By focusing heavily on the past five years, the conference further served as a referendum on the successes and failures of the 5th Party Day, whose political-cultural decisions were, in many ways, designed to more fully implement the ideals of the first Bitterfeld Conference. These processes were thus the guiding ideological context for the development of the second Bitterfeld Conference, and served to structure the ideas, which would be presented at the conference.

In April 1964 the SED held a major conference on socialist cultural production. Taking place five years after the Bitterfeld Conference, the Second Bitterfeld Conference aimed to assess developments since 1959, with a particular emphasis on economic and cultural shifts in the intervening years.[467] The party leadership, I argue, used the Second Bitterfeld Conference to launch a series of oblique criticisms of the implied failure of contemporary artistic production to properly promote socialist values. This interpretation of the conference contrasts sharply with that of other scholars, most notably Feinstein. In his view, the conference served as the party's platform to convince cultural producers to create art that would conform to the tastes of the East German working class.[468]

I also differ with Feinstein's interpretation of the tenor and atmosphere of the conference. He suggests that the discussions at the conference were quite

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[466] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz 2 April 1964 no pagination.
[467] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.
[468] Feinstein, p. 155.

unrestrained. The limits on real discussion, he argues, were only slightly tighter than at the first Bitterfeld Conference. Thus, he concludes, the five-year anniversary conference continued the norm of the political discussion of culture that characterized such conferences, and, he concludes, provides evidence that the crackdown on cultural autonomy of the 11th Plenum in 1965 was an aberration in the GDR's cultural controls.[469] Feinstein does not discuss the rising tide of criticisms of DEFA by SED spokesmen, as well as the increasing centralization of the party's film controls. His analysis, in sum, downplays the fundamental criticisms of DEFA which stood at the heart of the SED's relationship with DEFA in the years from 1961 to 1965.

To understand the conference, one must place it in the context of SED preparations for it over the preceding months. In February 1964 the Politburo produced a document, on the "Conception and Planning" of the forthcoming conference. It directly tied economic developments to the efforts of cultural producers to aid in the achievement of "socialist workers" in the GDR. The emphasis on the immediate link between cultural production and the creation of a "socialist individual" reaffirmed the constant refrain of speakers at the 6th Party Day in 1962, who insisted that the formation of a socialist personality was never complete, but an ongoing process. Here the Politburo retooled earlier discussions, adding in economic and social developments to the chain of cause and effect between (correct) cultural production and the socialist person. The document also revived the SED's earlier emphasis on socialist realism as the, "highest artistic method."

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[469] Feinstein, p. 155.

According to the Politburo, the "highest levels of national artistic achievement" could only be reached using this method.[470] Thus, the Politburo suggested, (correct) cultural production played a powerful role in the lives of ordinary East Germans for it was vital to forging both the socialist economy and the socialist person.

These apparently purely theoretical reflections set up the conference's practical agenda, which was to assess the cultural-political successes and failures of the past five years. This evaluation was deemed essential to fully understanding the developmental path of the GDR's culture as well as the best way to fully produce a socialist culture at a high level.[471] The conference further functioned as a referendum on the successes and failures of the 5th Party Day of 1960, whose cultural-political decisions were, in many ways, designed to more fully implement the ideals of the first Bitterfeld Conference. These processes were thus, the guiding ideological context for the development of the second Bitterfeld Conference, and structured the ideas that were presented there.

In April 1964 the Cultural Section (Abteilung Kultur or AK)of the ZK issued a commentary that previewed critical issues to be covered at the upcoming conference. Among the challenges to the SED's policies to be addressed were calls

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[470] BA DR 1 8675 Konzeption für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung einer Konferenz anlässlich des 5. Jahrestages der Bitterfelder Konferenz zum Thema „5 Jahre Bitterfelder Konferenz-Die Ergebnisse und weitern Aufgaben bei der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nationalkultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik"1 February 1964.

[471] BA DR 1 8675 Konzeption für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung einer Konferenz anlässlich des 5. Jahrestages der Bitterfelder Konferenz zum Thema „5 Jahre Bitterfelder Konferenz-Die Ergebnisse und weitern Aufgaben bei der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Nationalkultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik"1 February 1964.

for absolute freedom of speech, further differentiation from Soviet Art, and a 20th Party Congress for art. In order to properly address these challenges, the ZK stated that the second Bitterfeld Conference would have to correct for the errors of the first Bitterfeld Conference, above all the fact that, allegedly, its tasks were not, "sufficiently fundamental and depicted concretely enough."[472] The AK implicitly suggested that the first conference's directives were overly broad and as a result had opened the party to diverse opinions about how to properly produce culture, and more generally, encouraged overly open discussion about the nature of culture and cultural production. Ironically, the AK's complaints applied to the vast majority of cultural directives produced by the SED: they were always broad and open to a variety of interpretations.

According to the AK, "[T]he continuity of our Marxist-Leninist cultural politics since 1945 has not been thoroughly worked out."[473] The AK authors here offered a moment of self-criticism in indicating that the policy implications of the cultural-political history of the party were (and remained) unclear. They even conceded, "In the assessment of the period of the cultural-revolution to 1959 there were some flawed tendencies of overemphasis on examples of dogmatism."[474] At the same time, by clearly marking a separation between pre-and post-Bitterfeld cultural assessment, namely through the use of Bitterfeld to delineate between

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[472] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.
[473] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.
[474] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.

contemporary cultural production and the years of the cultural-revolution, prior to and during 1959, improper fear of dogmatism was presented as no longer being an issue as Bitterfeld implicitly removed dogmatism as a problem. Implicitly this separation involved a direct critique of the period of decentralization and openness that emerged as a result of the 20th Party Congress in 1956, and which involved a strong emphasis on the need to avoid dogmatism in all forms. When taken alongside the AK's criticisms of the tasks of the first Bitterfeld Conference, it becomes clear that, a new conference was indeed necessary to correct for the past failures of the party, as well as cultural producers.

Despite its hints of self-criticism at the top of the SED, the AK's report was still couched in the opaque language of party documents. The modern reader finds it extremely difficult to parse the actual meaning of the ideas contained in this, and most, cultural commentaries of the time. Even the most specific phrases were layered within a continually changing political framework, which served to alter the meaning of terms such as "dogmatism" from one year to the next. The anti-dogmatist crusade of Walter Ulbricht in the late-1950s became, for the AK in 1964, a moment of overemphasis, and no longer the key to the ideological struggle with capitalism. This move away from anti-dogmatism did not occur through simple changes in state policy, but instead via shifts in the definition of terminology, as well as how specific words became framed within the SED's ideology. To cultural producers and SED functionaries, in the early 1960s, words like "dogmatism" remained catchalls for any type of cultural product that was not acceptable. The redefinition within the SED's thought from the key to protecting the country, to a

point of overemphasis, served to weaken the place of this term, and necessitated a new way of framing unacceptable cultural products.

Hans Bentzien, the head of the MfK, took up this task at the Second Bitterfeld Conference. He launched a broad based attack on cultural producers, stating that too many artists, "critiqued and watched, while others were willing to defend the gains of our freedom." [475] Bentzien's offensive echoed the earlier comments about the problem of cultural producers not taking active part in the transition from Socialism to Communism that Ulbricht laid out at the 6th Party Day in 1961. Ominously, Bentzien linked proper cultural production to the defense of the GDR as a nation. Rather than explain how cultural producers could defend culture, he denounced those who, in the SED's view, did not engage in some undefined defense of the GDR. The closest Bentzien came to a clear positive example was to praise "the immortal accomplishments" of post-Bitterfeld cultural productions as well as their "unexaggerated dialectical ability to abolish and retain elements of the past."[476] Bentzien never clarified how filmmakers, or any cultural producers, were to ensure a proper dialectical approach to the past, or how they could emulate the works that, in his estimation, successfully did this. Vague praise only served to further discourage experimental approaches to cultural production because producers could never fully know if they were actually following the cultural interpretations of the party.

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[475] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.
[476] BA DR 1 8677 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Kultur zum 1. Entwurf des Referates für die zweite Bitterfelder Konferenz.

Hans Sachs, an SED functionary and the head of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag [Middle German Publisher], put forth a similar line of attack on recent cultural production. Sachs argued that artists, if properly doing their job, would "trace the psyche of the masses". For Sachs, writers were, in particular, responsible for crafting, and encouraging, the right mentalities among the ordinary people.[477] Sachs' emphasis on the important role of artists echoed the statements of a number of the planners of the conference, as well as of speakers at earlier conferences. The key points of emphasis for both Sachs and Bentzien served as a culmination of the last five years of cultural-theoretical development. Apprehensions in regard to the ability to ensure that cultural production maintained support for socialism and encouraged a socialist population in the GDR, lay at the core of this period of theoretical development for the SED. A number of SED officials at the time repeated these trepidations, and eventually laid the basis for more drastic action than was found at the Bitterfeld Conference. Fundamental distrust of cultural producers by the hierarchy of the SED lay at the heart of the movement towards the second Bitterfeld Conference, as well as the developments after the conference. The leadership, from Ulbricht's speeches at the 6th Party Day, to those by Bentzien and Sachs in 1964, repeatedly called on artists to remember their important role in the GDR's society, and the overall importance of cultural products. The ultimate conclusion of these developments lay in the events of the 11th Plenum in 1965.

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[477] BA DR 1 8680 Rede aus der zweiten Bitterfelder Konferenz 24/25 April 1964 no pagination.

1965: The 11th Plenum

The continued distrust of a significant portion of cultural producers evolved into radical action the following year at the 11th Plenum. In 1965 the status of cultural production and the GDR's cultural policies, as they related to the policies of the SED fundamentally changed. This change, for Klaus Wischnewski, amounted to "without doubt a catastrophe for our country."[478] To a degree never before seen, the SED directly inserted itself into the production process. It did so in a very dramatic manner: it banned 12 films. The infamous 11th Plenum in December became, to a large degree, a full discussion on the status of cultural production in the GDR.[479] The issues brought up at the second Bitterfeld Conference took center stage as ZK and Politburo officials discussed the role, and function, of cultural production in the GDR. While the decisions made at the 11th Plenum were comparatively extreme, the party's decisions were not, as argued in most studies of the 11th Plenum, either completely unforeseeable or aberrant. Rather, they represented a culmination of a trend toward more political control over cultural production that, as I have argued, can be traced across the previous few years. The increased number of complaints about the unwillingness, and inability, of cultural producers to actively participate in the maintenance of socialism laid the groundwork for the controls implemented at the 11th Plenum. Thus, the 11th Plenum represented the culmination of years of

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[478] Klaus Wischnewski, "Die zornigen jungen Männer von Babelsberg" in *Kahlschlag-Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente*. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1991, p. 172.
[479] Hager, Kurt. *Erinnerungen* Leipzig: Faber& Faber Verlag, 1996, p. 283.

rising political concerns about the alleged failure of cultural producers to actively contribute to the socialist project.[480]

Erich Honecker got right to the point. In his first speech to the Plenum, he addressed the issue of artistic failures. He argued that too many recent productions had failed to appreciate the successes of socialism, and instead had focused too heavily on problems within the system.[481] For Honecker these products did not live up to the full potential of art, which he defined as by its ability to elevate the totality of national culture as well as strengthen the worldview of the people.[482] Thus, he tied the failures to broader social issues, and national problems as a whole. Cultural products were again taken as part of the important production of the GDR and their messages were integral for national unity and national success. Honecker's link reaffirmed the connections made, by cultural and political functionaries, at prior conferences. As one of the most important figures in the SED, his intervention effectively raised the issue from an artistic one to one of central national significance.

Honecker went on to clarify that the core problem with the new cultural products was that they focused "too much on conflict", and not that they presented

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[480] Berghahn, p. 143; Feinstein, p. 151; Jäger, 120; and Schittly, p. 128 all present classical interpretations of the 11th Plenum as an aberration.
[481] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965 p. 83.
[482] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 81.

conflicts and problems.[483] For Honecker the problems with contemporary cultural production directly tied to "the petty-bourgeois tendencies" still found among the intelligentsia, and in particular cultural producers.[484] This charge was a drastic one, in that it directly tied cultural producers to the most loathed class category of the SED. The accusation of latent petty-bourgeois tendencies among cultural producers labeled them explicit enemies of the socialist project in the GDR. By repeating complaints and indicating faults in the GDR's society, the cultural producers failed to, in the eyes of the party, accurately depict reality, as it existed in the GDR, and instead crafted a reality in which only problems existed. In so doing, the producers failed to live up to their party designated roles, and rather than uplifting society would bring it down.[485] Honecker presented, in sum, a more nuanced interpretation of the nature of current cultural production, by arguing that the failures were not in showing a particular aspect of the GDR, but rather in overemphasizing the nature of certain problems. At the same time, however, Honecker managed to overgeneralize as to the nature of cultural production, by taking aspects of certain films and making them out to be emblematic of the entirety of recent cultural production at that point. Rather than differentiate between the variety of feature films produced by DEFA,

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[483] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 86.

[484] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 86.

[485] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 87. For similar themes see Horst Sindermann's Speech in SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336, p. 154-158.

even in the previous two years, Honecker looked at the focus on the problems within the GDR found in DEFA's films produced that year, and took them to be identical to the totality of film, and cultural, production.

Honecker's perception of the DEFA films became the core of the SED's critique of cultural production at the 11th Plenum. Günter Witt, a cultural functionary at the MfK, in his speech during the second day of the conference, presented his main criticism of DEFA by arguing that the faults of films at that point, in particular their critiques of the party, were in fact representative of the opinions of the majority of DEFA employees.[486] Witt built on Honecker's attacks, by claiming that the films discussed at the plenum were typical of DEFA production. The films, he argued, were representative of the "skepticism and alienation" of filmmakers at the feature film studio.[487] Witt's critiques functioned as a means of calling into question the entirety of film production in the GDR, and the degree to which the party could truly rely on the filmmakers at DEFA to properly address the realities of life in the GDR. Given the reaffirmed status of film as critical to the maintenance of socialism, both at the second Bitterfeld Conference and in Honecker's speech earlier at the 11th Plenum, the ability of the party to rely on filmmakers was crucial. By calling into question this relationship, Witt fundamentally challenged the very basis

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[486] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 232.

[487] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 232.

for party backing of film production, and the degree to which the party could support filmmakers.

Witt offered a solution for this dilemma. He argued that for the next year the guiding principle of film production should be the party's decisions at its meetings, including "the 6th Party Day, the Bitterfeld Conference, and the this ZK-Plenum."[488] For Witt, only the leadership of the party could guarantee that the reality of the present would be fully depicted in film.[489] The party leadership was critical for this to occur, in that it provided the interpretive framework through which reality could be expressed. Witt, in effect, bridged the gaps between the recent conferences, and interpreted them as a unified ideological lens through which filmmakers could interpret the present. He argued that there would be a, "…consolidation of the approval of the events of the 6th Party Day, the Bitterfeld Conference, and this Plenum through new films with socialist content, artistic mastery, and efficiency of the masses."[490] For Witt, the function of new films would be to ensure greater support for these inherently linked, and thereby similar, conferences. Here again the continuity between these events, for the SED, provides a deeper context for the 11th Plenum that is often lacking in scholarly interpretations.[491] The ideas of the

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[488] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 246.
[489] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 245.
[490] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 336 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 246.
[491] Feinstein, Jäger, et al.

plenum, thus, did not come from nowhere, but rather, in the eyes of the party, existed on a continuum with the major conferences of the previous six years.

On the third day of the conference, however, the partially conciliatory tone of the early days towards DEFA filmmakers turned markedly hostile and even threatening. While the record shows that this shift in tone did in fact occur, Kurt Hager, in his memoirs argues that internally the ZK membership was purely antagonistic towards artists during the Plenum.[492] In one of the first speeches of the day, Ulbricht declared that the problems with film production were not simple errors, but rather were "systematic crimes" on the part of the filmmakers![493] Despite these alleged crimes, there would not be a "Stalinist" response, Ulbricht continued. Instead, the film offices of the Volkskammer and the MfK would be used to, in his estimation, democratically determine what actually happened at DEFA.[494] Ulbricht's ominous, but vague, accusation signaled an overall shift in attitude toward the films that the plenum investigated. While Ulbricht claimed that the production of the films would be democratically investigated, it was clear from his speech, and from the crowd's response to it, including numerous moments of applause and shouts of approval from those listening to the speech, that the party had already determined the guilt of the filmmakers, and that the only remaining question was how the party would act on its accusations.

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[492] Hager, 284.
[493] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965p. 71.
[494] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 72.

Before the party took a firm action against DEFA, they allowed a representative to make a case on behalf of all of DEFA's filmmakers. Siegfried Wagner took on this role. He attempted to clarify the context of the films under attack, and to present their errors as correctable.[495] Wagner used his position to argue that the purported errors in the films, most notably in *Das Kaninchen bin ich* were unintentional and that, "we believe that the errors are correctable because they, in our opinion, seek to resolve conflicts in the contemporary situation."[496] He aimed, clearly, to push back against Ulbricht's accusations. Rather than intentional criminal acts, the films simply contained mistakes made by filmmakers. He quoted Kurt Maetzig's defense of *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, wherein Maetzig argued that given his past films, including *Schlösser und Katen* and the *Thälmann* films, he should not be considered as someone who would act against the party.[497] This defense incensed the leadership of the party. Margot Honecker called for the filmmakers responsible for the films to present themselves and defend themselves against the charges laid out by the party leadership.[498] Wagner attempted to explain that there were filmmakers at the Plenum who were involved in the film, but this did little to

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[495] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 329.
[496] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 329.
[497] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 329.
[498] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 340.

mollify the crowd. Ten minutes of chaos erupted and ZK members shouted at one another before order could be restored.[499] This chaotic disruption mimics that of the response of the crowd the previous night to a viewing of *Das Kaninchin bin Ich,* which Frank Beyer described as hysterical.[500] Wagner attempted to maintain his control over the crowd, but could not speak over the constant interruptions from other ZK members.[501] Shortly thereafter Erich Honecker abruptly ended the day's proceedings and called for them to continue the following day.[502]

The sharp response to Wagner's timid defense of DEFA made it clear that the ZK leadership was unwilling to negotiate with DEFA. Instead the Central Committee was intent on punishing those who were responsible for the films. The most extreme examples of this were the effective blackballing of Frank Beyer, the director of *Spur der Steine*, from DEFA until the 1970s, and the removal of Konrad Wolf, an ardent defender of Beyer and Maetzig, from the ZK. Despite the chaos and public acts of rage of ZK members, the actions against DEFA filmmakers were limited. In part this stemmed from the fact that the filmmakers had, even in the eyes of the party, only gone against the party's wishes, and not violated any actual laws. This prevented even the most virulently anti-DEFA ZK members, such as Margot

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[499] SAPOM BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 337.
[500] Beyer, Frank. *Wenn der Wind sich Dreht: Meine Filme, Mein Leben*. Munich: Auflage Verlag, 2001, p. 137.
[501] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 341.
[502] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 1 337 Stenografische Niederschrift der 11. Tagung des Zentralkomitees im Plenarsaal des Hauses des ZK vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1965, p. 341.

Honecker, from initiating any additional retaliations, other than those already taken against Beyer and Wolf.

The next month Kurt Hager, the SED's chief ideologue at the time, went to DEFA and met with the APO I in order to explain the decisions of the party. [503] The meeting, discussed below, was famously contentious and led to a shouting match between Konrad Wolf, Kurt Maetzig, and Hager. The 11th Plenum was the high point of the party's control over DEFA throughout the GDR's history, and represented the culmination of the previous four years of political-cultural developments. DEFA filmmakers, while still ideologically important, were in many ways, largely constrained by the decision to ban 12 films, and by the party's more general efforts to exact greater control over the studio. As the highpoint of the SED's control over DEFA, and the endpoint of this period of SED-DEFA development, the 11th Plenum paved the way for a new relationship between the two. However, this period only lasted until the emergence of Honecker as the head of the SED in 1971.

Acceptance and Rejection: the SED and DEFA 1961 to 1965

The tension between cultural producers and major party officials that suffused the conferences of this era also comes through in sources that illuminate relations between the two groups at lower levels of the hierarchy of DEFA and the SED. Overt tension did not permeate all exchanges, but can be picked up as background noise in the majority of interactions. When assessing the ways in which the party and DEFA worked to produce and distribute films in this era, it is critical to

[503] For more information on this meeting see Feinstein, p. 177.

keep in mind the pressure exerted by the SED leadership to ensure that producers worked to develop positive models for the masses. Filmmakers did not always react positively to these downward pressures and at times even pushed back against them. The pushback never questioned, much less challenged, the SED's ideology or the legitimacy of party rule. Filmmakers questioned the policies of the party and challenged the extent of SED control over cultural production.

1961: The Strengthening of the KAGs

The first major interaction between the SED and DEFA in 1961 took place in the form of a BPO document released that January. The report addressed the situation of the artistic intelligentsia, in regard to their relationship with the SED and their ability to follow through with the party's directives. Among other issues it discussed the state of film as it related to the battle against revisionism and schematism.[504][505] The BPO authors of the report made it clear that films were to participate in this struggle by presenting a story with "partisan content".[506] The link between these films with proper content and the fight against revisionism and schematism served to ensure that filmmakers fully understood that maintaining the

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[504] BA DR 117 Vorl. S 68 Zur Situation unter der künstlerischen Intelligenz 9 January 1961, no pagination.

[505] Within the SED's cultural ideology the terms revisionism and schematism had very specific meanings and functions. Revisionism would be considered any cultural product that improperly depicted either the past or the present. And schematism applied to cultural products that presented, and focused, on their structural plan. It was similar too formalism in that sense, and was used by the party to attack cultural products that had too strong a focus on their structural nature, or experimented too much with the structure of an artistic work.

[506] BA DR 117 Vorl. S 68 Zur Situation unter der künstlerischen Intelligenz.

achievements of the present were only tied to acting in favor of the party and its beliefs. A filmmaker could not, thus act in support of socialism without explicitly acting in a way that benefitted the party and its interpretations of how socialism should be achieved and should exist. The document, thus, underlined the party leadership's central role in the creation of proper art and to crafting films which were artistically accomplished.

Directly tied into this report was a document crafted that March, again by the BPO, which delved into the artistic-ideological quality of DEFA's products. "Measures for the Improvement of the Artistic-Ideological Quality of Feature Film Production" basically summarized of previous ZK discussions about how to raise the artistic-ideological quality of DEFA films. The measures assumed that adherence to the principles of democratic centralism was essential to this process.[507] Implicit within this assumption was the recognition of the important role of the party within DEFA's production structure, in that the party was the highest example of democratic centralism within the GDR. Along with the BPO document of January, the "Measures" made it clear that to raise their artistic-ideological quality DEFA films had to follow the party's principles. These documents did not yet explicitly critique the artistic-ideological quality of DEFA films, but such a critique was heavily implied. Reading between the lines, one can interpret the documents as suggesting that at least some DEFA filmmakers did not understand the need to portray "the achievements of the present" as achievements of the leading party, the SED. Both of

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[507] BA DR 117 Vorl. S 68 Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der künstlerischen-ideologischen Qualität in der Spielfilm-Produktion 3 March 1961 no pagination.

these documents covered the failures of DEFA to produce films of the quality expected by the SED. Given that the BPO members were themselves employees at DEFA, the creation of these documents indicated a very real tension between the desire to follow the leadership of the party, and the reality of film production at the feature film studio. A function of this was the sense of responsibility by BPO members for the creation of proper films by all filmmakers.

The guidance and leadership of the BPO involved, ironically, a greater diffusion of power. Part of the process of more thoroughly imbuing the studio with democratic centralism was seen through the embrace of KAGs. They were seen as a means of actively raising the artistic-ideological quality of films.[508] In relating a future increase in artistic quality with the decentralization of the previous years, the BPO authors worked to show how structural changes at DEFA were inherently tied to the proper degree of ideological dissemination. This effort embodied ongoing conceptualizations of the impact, and function, of power decentralization at DEFA. The KAGs were thus seen as akin to the APOs, and were intended, at least by 1961, to function as direct sites of ideological dissemination and oversight. Thus, the KAG, was officially a non-party organization but the BPO saw it as a quasi-party entity and as responsible to the party and its ideals. Functionally, this interpretation of the role of the KAGs allowed the party to diffuse its decision making, by trusting the smallest organizational unit at DEFA to carry out its directives. The BPO recognized that the values contained in films came from the filmmakers themselves, and rather

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[508] BA DR 117 Vorl. S 68 Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der künstlerischen-ideologischen Qualität in der Spielfilm-Produktion.

than overburden the existing control structures, they entrusted the KAGs with carrying out this task.

To make sure the KAGs carried out SED directives correctly and effectively disseminated party values to filmmakers, the APO, a party organization, the BPO leadership assigned greater control over the ideological direction of the KAGs.[509] By assigning oversight to the lower-level APO, the BPO l seemed to continue on the path of decentralization. This decentralization, however, was temporary and, to a large degree, was superficial. It was still the BPO that made the plans and pushed for the realization of the plans of the party's leadership.

In fall 1961, the issue of the artistic-cultural quality of DEFA productions arose again, this time in the context of a Politburo meeting. The authors of the document presented at the meeting argued that the filmmakers at DEFA knew of the task to increase the artistic-ideological quality of their films, and that they had known of this since the Film Conference in 1958.[510] The report went on to decry the rising number of problems at DEFA, including a large number of "ideological inaccuracies that also include aesthetics, are found primarily in scripts and films."[511] Despite the harsh charges, the purported inaccuracies were never defined, but rather left open to interpretation. These problems were seen as the fault of the filmmakers at DEFA. The continued focus on the artistic-ideological quality of

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[509] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Arbeitsplan der Parteiorganisation DEFA-Spielfilm II. Quartal 1961 p. 235.
[510] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2 794 Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomittees 9 October 1961, p. 10.
[511] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2 794 Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomittees, p. 11.

filmmaking at DEFA reveals that the highest levels of the SED were concerned about the nature of national film production, as it existed at that point in time. These concerns would continue to appear in party discussions and conferences up to the 11th Plenum.

Alongside the ideological quality of films, there were numerous complaints about the inability of the filmmakers at DEFA to realistically portray life in the GDR.[512] Coming only a month before the 14th Plenum, in which similar issues were discussed, the Politburo discussion made clear that the SED leadership was displeased with the state of DEFA production by the fall of 1961.[513] While the need to portray the successes of socialism did not appear in the Politburo document, the foundation for Ulbricht's arguments at the 14th Plenum nevertheless are clearly outlined in the Politburo's complaints. The document went on to declare that, "some filmmakers see the path to socialist film through the development of new forms, without putting the difficulties of humanity and content in their films."[514] Here the ZK critiqued DEFA filmmakers for not portraying the imperfections of life in the GDR, and instead for making films which glossed over problems for ordinary citizens. These purported issues were further tied to poor ideological leadership at

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[512] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2 794 Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomittees, p. 11.
[513] Periodically the ZK renamed its list of Plenums, with periods ranging from 1950 to1958, 1958 to 1963, 1963 to 1967, and 1967 to 1971 during the years covered in this dissertation. This meant that its number did not indicate when the Plenum occurred relative to all other Plenums but only within a particular period.
[514] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2 794 Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomittees, p. 11.

the studio.[515] It was thus a top down, as well as bottom up, issue at DEFA that fundamentally needed to be addressed by the studio. Ulbricht and others discussed these perceived failures to a greater degree at the 14th Plenum the next month. The issues of KAG control, and the need for greater ideological quality would become recurring themes over the next few years. Rather than sitting back and allowing for DEFA to produce films with minimal oversight, as is often the interpretation of this era, the period from 1961 to 1965 was in fact one of increased concern and control on the part of the party

1962: The Party Presses Down on DEFA

The leadership of the SED continued to push for DEFA filmmakers to fully comply with party ideology and party practices into 1962. The first major interaction between party and DEFA was in the middle of April that year. The ZK Office of Culture issued a document on following through with the Politburo's decisions regarding feature film production. It stated, "[M]easures for the simplification and improvement of the leadership and planning of feature film production will be set by the MfK and other state organs."[516] The ZK argued that the scripts produced in 1961 were barely politically qualified.[517] In particular, the ZK noted the alleged inability of DEFA filmmakers to fully understand the political role

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[515] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 2 794 Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomittees, p. 12.
[516] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Durchführung des Beschlüssen dem Politbüro zu Fragen des Spielfilmschaffens in der DDR 17 April 1962, p. 344.

of artists in representing the "current national place of the working class."[518] This criticism fit fully within the ideas presented by Ulbricht at the 14th Plenum and by SED documents throughout 1961. The continuation of this theme indicates that DEFA attempts to grasp the political failures of their films did not meet the standards of the SED. The ZK did, though, concede that DEFA's creation of discussion circles to address political problems in the production process was a sign of progress.[519]

Only a week later, the ZK took up the critique of DEFA again but this time aimed its ire at the party leadership within DEFA and, in particular, the alleged inability of the membership of the APOs to exercise self-criticism when it came to their productions.[520] As a result of this failure, the ZK concluded, the members of the party groups at DEFA were unable to come to the proper conclusions in regard to the improvement of party-based educational work.[521] These negative comments about party members reinforce the impression that high party officials were increasingly concerned about the ability of filmmakers at DEFA to properly act on party beliefs and values.

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[518] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Durchführung des Beschlüssen dem Politbüro zu Fragen des Spielfilmschaffens in der DDR, p. 347.
[519] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Durchführung des Beschlüssen dem Politbüro zu Fragen des Spielfilmschaffens in der DDR p. 345.
[520] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme 24 April 1962, p. 354.
[521] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, p. 355.

The ZK also criticized the APOs for their inability to retain large active memberships, stating that, "too many irregularly take part in the party life."[522] It was disturbed that only 61% of party members took part in elections within the KAGs and APOs.[523] This was too low of a participation rate for the ZK. If they could not trust those who *were* party members to actively participate, then how could they rely on them to both recruit new members and carry out the tasks of mass party action? In part, the ZK found their solution in putting greater pressure on the party leadership at DEFA.[524] By doing this they would be able to use their more trusted members at the studio to ensure that lower level members acted accordingly.

An internal DEFA report from that May detailed the need to pay greater attention to the artistic-ideological quality of their film production, stating that the quality of the films was at a low point. This important document reveals that DEFA officials were clearly aware that the SED was serious about holding them responsible for improving film quality. It recognizes and, indeed, underscores the significance of ideological quality in a way that had not, up to that point, been fully addressed by filmmakers at DEFA. It blames the decline in quality, at least in part, on the failure of KAGs to fulfill their purpose to ensure the quality of films.[525]

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[522] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, p. 355.
[523] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, p. 355.
[524] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 2 9.06 211 Stellungnahme der Abteilung Volksbildung und Kultur zum Bericht der Parteileitung des VEB DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, p. 356.
[525] BA DR 117 27691 Grundsätze über die Einbeziehung der Qualität in die Planung und Abrechnung der Film-Produktion. no pagination.

It seems that the membership of the BPO at DEFA also concluded that the Politburo's directives on ideological quality in film production had to be addressed. The report of the BPO's conference in May stated that, "in its accountability report the delegates conference supports the presented assessment of the party leadership, in particular its tasks and measures."[526] The delegates also accepted that they needed to recognize the role of art in forming socialist persons, engage in mass political work, and aid the state in its "struggle against Western imperialism."[527] The report on the conference suggests that the lower levels of the SED at DEFA had internalized the party leadership's concepts and goals, on the one hand, and the tasks it laid out for members, on the other.

In contrast to members of the Künstlischer Rat in 1958, BPO delegates in 1962 appeared to believe they understood the party's conception of the role and function of filmmaking vis-à-vis ideological dissemination. They called for immediate shifts in production themes in order to ensure an increase in ideological quality, while in the 1950s the typical call from filmmakers was for increases in artistic quality. This change suggests greater understanding, or at least acknowledgement of, the values of the SED and the role of film in conveying them. Simultaneously, the willingness of filmmakers to address these issues within their films, however, did not appear to increase in this era. The films that were created in the early to mid-1960s were not focused on acting as ideological expressions for the

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[526] BA DR 117 27691 16 May 1962 Entschließung der Betriebsdelegiertenkonferenz 1962, no pagination.
[527] BA DR 117 27691 Entschließung der Betriebsdelegiertenkonferenz.

party, but rather were more of challenges to the status quo, in particular of party leadership, than existed in earlier eras.

The BPL cited the Politburo's declarations regarding "the need to increase the ideological quality of films" as it proceeded to strengthen the role of both the BPO and the APO at DEFA and carry out " broader mass party actions at DEFA" toward the end of activating party members within the studio. [528] Linking the success of the APOs and the BPOs was an obvious move on the part of the BPL. Guaranteeing lower level party activism would provide for a healthier party atmosphere as a whole, and would help to ensure that the ideals of the BPO would be understood by a greater number of filmmakers.

Inherently tied into the success and health of the APOs were the success and health of the KAGs. In September 1962 the BPL crafted a document to prepare for a party activist day among the KAGs that November. One of the planned tasks for that meeting was to explain how to properly follow through with the Politburo's cultural decisions regarding film production.[529] This was then linked to the goal of ensuring that the KAG members understood the need for increases in "the ideological quality of films."[530] Here again the BPO worked to ensure that the largest number of filmmakers possible understood the importance of an increase in ideological quality at DEFA.

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[528] BA DR 117 27691 Direktive: Der betriebsparteileitung der BPO DEFA-Spielfilme zur weiteren organisatorischen Festigung der Betriebsparteiorganisation. 8 August 1962 no pagination.
[529] BA DR 117 27691 Direktive zur Vorbereitung der Parteiaktivtagung der künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen 1962, no pagination.
[530] BA DR 117 27691 Direktive zur Vorbereitung der Parteiaktivtagung der künstlerischen Arbeitsgruppen.

1962 was thus an integral year for the movement of criticisms from the highest levels of the party down to average party members. The party critiques of DEFA were articulated not only in Politburo and ZK meetings, but also filtered down to meetings of the BPL, BPO, and eventually the APOs and KAGs. Within DEFA, in turn, the leadership of the BPO (the BPL) worked to disseminate this knowledge to ensure that all filmmakers understood their role vis-à-vis the party. This movement of information from the SED outside DEFA through the SED inside DEFA effectively sent top down signal to DEFA filmmakers. It was now clearly communicate that they must understand the need for ideological dissemination in their films but should act on that understanding and to use their films as tools in the service of the maintenance of socialism.

1963: Rollbacks on Decentralization

The continued movement of party ideology from the top to the lower levels of party membership of DEFA can be traced in a report the BPO sent to Kurt Hager on an APO meeting held in February 1963. The letter to Hager provides a window into if and how the lower levels of party membership at DEFA understood their artistic and ideological mission. Although not all filmmakers were in the SED/APO, many of them were and, thus, the report provides some sense of how the average filmmaker at DEFA understood the ideological directives of the SED.

The APO meeting was attended by several major filmmakers, including Frank Beyer, Kurt Maetzig, and Konrad Wolf. Both Maetzig and Beyer spoke in support of

the party's decisions at the 6th Party Day and its cultural politics.[531] After affirming their loyalty to the party, however, the APO members made specific criticisms. The most telling came from Beyer who argued, "[N]ever has the party decided to illustrate decisions, but decisions are the basis for our art, for our work, because they reflect the scientific nature [*Wissenschaftlichkeit*] of our reality."[532] Beyer's critique directly echoed the protest of the Künstlischer Rat in 1958 about the party's unclear guidance and, in effect, disagreed with the conclusions that the BPO and BPL had come to the previous fall. For his part, Konrad Wolf offered harsh appraisal of how the party presented its ideas at the Party Day. Wolf argued that the party left too much up to the artists and, as a result, artists did not properly portray the need for accepting the concept of peaceful coexistence when it came to cultural production.[533] The APO meeting suggests, in sum, that the BPO had been presenting a rather overly rosy portrayal of DEFA filmmakers now moving in sync with the SED.

More evidence of the continuing gap between the artistic-political conception of the highest party levels and the realities on the ground at DEFA came that summer in the form of a ZK Culture document on the need to reform the party leadership at DEFA. The problem lay not in the arena of party action, according to ZK Culture, but in the inefficiency of the state offices that officially oversaw film

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[531] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Brief an Kurt Hager 12 March 1963, p. 2.
[532] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Brief an Kurt Hager, p. 3.
[533] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Brief an Kurt Hager, p. 3.

production, namely the HV Film.[534] Charging state offices with failure to oversee the ideological content of films pulled the focus away from possible failures of the party hierarchy. Given the already strong powers held by the HV Film the calls for increased oversight over film production, with an emphasis on ideological content, represents a move toward tighter overall control of film production and distribution. These calls for greater control over ideological content were couched within explanations of the need to solve economic, technical, and production problems.[535]

Self-control, as it had existed within DEFA under the auspices of the APOs and KAGs was now, at least implicitly, no longer deemed to be fully effective. Instead a push for recentralization of control over film production emerged over the course of 1963. The Minister of Culture was to be answerable for all issues relating to film production, and to use his authority to more clearly control the situation at DEFA.[536] This reemphasis on the already nominal control exercised by the MfK was Inclusion of the Minister of Culture was not a move outside of the normative chain of oversight over film production, but rather served as a stark reminder that the highest cultural authorities in the GDR had a direct role to play in ensuring that films had the proper ideological content. Tied to this was a plan to create new ZK offices

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[534] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Maßnahmen zu Verbesserung der Leitung von Film Produktion 3 July 1963, p. 6.
[535] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Maßnahmen zu Verbesserung der Leitung von Film Produktion, p. 7.
[536] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Maßnahmen zu Verbesserung der Leitung von Film Produktion, p. 8.

to deal with film, not just culture as a whole.[537] These shifts would, in theory, create a stronger control structure to oversee DEFA production, and therein, to more thoroughly ensure the propagation of the proper ideology in film.

Part of the centralization process involved the strengthening of the leadership positions within the HV Film. The leaders of the HV Film would continue to oversee the cultural-political orientation of DEFA. Its leaders would now also focus on the central questions of the artistic side of film production. It would craft thematic plans for DEFA, a task that was previously an internal matter. Artistic oversight thus shifted upwards from within DEFA itself to the HV Film, in a move that altered the then normative status of the HV Film from a largely ideological check, to a more holistic overseer of film production. Simultaneously the HV Film was expected to act as an artistic-ideological intermediary between DEFA, the MfK, and the party.[538] These changes reinforced the base function of the HV Film, while also giving it greater control over the production process.

The place of the HV Film as the critical site for film control was further reaffirmed that autumn. In an internal MfK Report on the artistic status of film, the leadership of the HV Film was identified as the key group to ensure an elevated artistic-ideological quality in DEFA films, while also tasked with ensuring economic efficiency and popular films at DEFA.[539] Ideology, artistic merit, and economic

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[537] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Maßnahmen zu Verbesserung der Leitung von Film Produktion, p. 8.
[538] BA DR 1 4242 Konzeption Leitungstätigkeit der Hauptverwaltung Film 18 July 1963 no pagination.
[539] BA DR 1 4242 Merkmale der künstlerischen Qualität 18 September 1963, no pagination.

success were thus brought together as one goal for the HV Film. The success of any single DEFA film could only be truly declared if it met all of these markers.

1964: The BPOs Exert their Influence

The movement of ideology from the highest levels of the SED down to the lower party levels went not just through the HV Film, but also through the BPOs. The BPOs, however, did not make decisions on their own, but rather checked that they were following through with the ideas of the ZK. As part of this process, Werner Kuhn, the first secretary of the BPO, contacted Alexander Lösche, of the ZK in order to ask for guidance. This process reveals how the BPO worked to ensure that it did not violate the principles of the ZK, and at the same time sought direct guidance from higher levels of the party hierarchy.

The initial letter, in the beginning of February 1964 from Werner Kuhn to Alexander Lösche, asked for suggestions for the means by which the leadership of the BPO could properly prepare for the upcoming second Bitterfeld Conference, as well as maintain better production control. The letter asked for Lösche to provide guidance to the BPO, and to cover both thematic and ideological issues.[540] This letter itself provides an insight into how the BPO worked to better understand their role within the party hierarchy, as well as how they could best act in order to prepare for another major party conference. The overall purpose of the letter was one in which Kuhn sought out Lösche's guidance for, admittedly, broad topics

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[540] BA DR 117 27692 Brief an Alexander Lösche. 10 February 1964, unpaginated

mainly with the goal of understanding the ideological spaces in which the BPO could properly operate.[541]

Lösche's response to Kuhn provides insight into the ways in which the BPO was supposed to operate by 1964. Chief among these was the SED's expectation that BPO members actively work alongside both the KAGs and APOs. The relationship was to be one of guidance, in which the BPO was to remind the KAGs and APOs of their important role in constructing socialism, as well as "the spiritual maintenance of the GDR."[542] The unique place of DEFA was shown here, with the lowest level party members having a distinct role in the overall formation of the GDR, and the maintenance of a proper ideological order. Here again, there was a, albeit subtle, movement toward centralization, in that the BPO was tasked with acting in a more controlling manner than it had in previous years. It was to guide and direct the actions of the KAGs and APOs in order to ensure that "socialist morals were present amongst their members."[543] Leadership instructions were thus not solely based on the accomplishment of party goals, but also of ensuring the ideological purity of the membership of both the KAG and the APOS. Importantly, the KAG was not a party organization, and thereby the actions to ensure that socialist morals were present in KAG members were a direct act of the party taking over a non-party organization.

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[541] BA DR 117 27692 Brief an Alexander Lösche.
[542] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Alexander Lösche an Werner Kuhn. 24 February 1964, no pagination.

[543] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Alexander Lösche an Werner Kuhn.

The role of the BPO was further reinforced that spring during the delegates' conference. Among the core issues addressed were those of the need for continued focus on the ideological and artistic merits of films.[544] In part this involved ensuring that the day-to-day activities of film production were done, "from the perspective of socialism."[545] The focus in the BPO delegates' conference echoes the letter exchanges between Lösche and Kuhn, in looking at the need for the BPO to ensure that the KAGs and APOs are focusing on these key issues.[546] One can identify an ever-widening emphasis in word and deed on the need to establish the link between ideology and artistic quality during these years. This desiderata was repeated in every major conference and in all of the central documents that emerged from the party showing that the party gradually returned to its focus on ideological purity after 1960.

The members of the BPO further saw that their task was not just as ideological guardians, but also as guides of the lower level party groups. This included the need for them to aid the KAGs and APOs in their efforts to ensure that "qualified ideological officers" were part of their organizations.[547] This, in turn, would aid the party in developing within DEFA so as to produce successful ties between artists and others who were actively taking part in the full development of socialism.[548] Here the members of the BPO mix the ideological task of mass party

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[544] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 1964
no date, but between documents from February and April 1964 no pagination.
[545] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 1964.
[546] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 1964.
[547] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 1964.
[548] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 1964.

action with the themes of the Bitterfeld Conferences, in seeing the need to properly bring together artists and workers. They both pay tribute to the first Bitterfeld Conference, and show awareness of the upcoming second Bitterfeld Conference. The BPO conference as a whole, thus served as a means of transmitting the most critical aspects of the party's contemporary beliefs to the members of the BPO.

By the end of 1964 the situation in DEFA had become clear. The current level of film production was not meeting the expectations of the state, and the party, in regard to its ideological and artistic quality. As the MfK laid out in an internal document, there was strong interrelationship between the economic and technological developments of the New Economic System [NÖS] and ideology in DEFA films. Most important for the ideological content was the need to continue to focus on the "contemporary situation in our nation."[549] While never explained, this implicitly meant that films were to depict the achievement of socialism in the GDR, and the continued successes of the socialist project. The MfK's assessment called for a focus on production changes in the content of films. Its analysis provides a window onto the status of film production and the MfK's interpretation of ideological production. Rather than emphasize the ideological content of films, the MfK wanted DEFA films to accurately portray reality, and thereby to promote the successes of the GDR. Nevertheless, issues of the cultural-politics, and thereby ideology, of the films were still among the most important topics for the MfK.[550]The internal document called for filmmakers to reaffirm socialist realism in film, to

[549] BA DR 1 8657 Informationsmaterial Gegenwärtige Situation in der nationalen Produktion. 31 December 1964 no pagination

embrace the fighting nature of Marxist filmmaking, to reject peaceful coexistence in the cultural sphere, and to renounce the subjective nature of non-socialist realist film production.[551] As a guiding theme for production, socialist realism thus became as much about depicting life in the GDR as it did about combating western influences.

1965: The BPO turns against the APOs

Film production, by 1965, had become clearly a highly politicized issue. The ideological basis for film, in particular as it related to the realities of the party's beliefs, became central for how film was interpreted on the official level. The need for strict adherence to party regulations was reaffirmed time and again. For the party leadership, in particular the Politburo and the ZK, film production was in jeopardy, and was not consistently living up to the party's expectations. Instead, for SED leaders, the field of film production was an area in which substandard ideological products were routinely created and distributed to the masses. Given the high ideological standing of film production itself, this was an important issue that needed to be addressed.

A ZK protocol from March 1965 reiterated all the points about the importance of film as a cultural, political and economic product and the central roles of both party and state in making sure the product was ideologically correct and effective. Film needed to come more under "the unified political-ideological

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[551] BA DR 1 8657 Informationsmaterial Gegenwärtige Situation in der nationalen Produktion.

leadership of the party" in order to fully achieve the goals set out for film producers by the party.[552] Strong guidance from both party and state offices was directly tied into the ability of films to address, and to a degree solve, problems in the economic sphere.[553] Again the ZK reaffirmed the need for increased centralization, i.e. direction from above. It also reaffirmed the role of the Film office in ensuring that filmmakers followed through with the newest decisions from the party's leadership.[554]

The BPO delegates' conference of 1965 reinforced the conclusions of the ZK from that March, as well as the delegates' conference from the previous year. Among the central issues targeted by the conference attendees was the need for the ZPL to ensure that the KAGs continued to properly develop.[555] The KAGs' development was, for the first time in years, publicly praised, but at the same time it was done within the context of calling for greater party guidance to ensure proper full development. The internal development of the KAGs was thus something that only existed thanks to the existing party guidance, and was dependent on greater party leadership for future development.

The leadership of the party was not just necessary for non-party entities, but also for the successful development of party organization within DEFA. Attendees at

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[552] SAPMO BA DY 30 J IV 2 3 1056 Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 16: Konzeption des Sektors Film 8 March 1965, no pagination.
[553] SAPMO BA DY 30 J IV 2 3 1056 Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 16: Konzeption des Sektors Film.
[554] SAPMO BA DY 30 J IV 2 3 1056 Anlage Nr. 1 zum Protokoll Nr. 16: Konzeption des Sektors Film.
[555] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Betriebsdelegiertenkonferenz April 1965 no pagination.

the conference called on the BPO to guide the lower level party groups to properly ensure that there were no ideological divisions but, instead, productive exchanges of ideas and experience in these party groups. Clearly, the BPO feared the possibility of ideological shakiness at the lower levels of the party, although one cannot know if the distrust was based on actual tensions or paranoia. The conference proclaimed that strong leadership was needed along with internal party education to solidify the party at DEFA as well as improve film production.[556] Although the themes of the BPO delegates' conference for 1965 were the same as the conference in 1964, small changes in emphasis suggest a growing divide between the party leadership at DEFA and the lower level members. The conference's focus on a tighter relationship between the APOs and the BPO and "strengthening" the leadership of the BPO indicates that BPO leaders no longer trusted the APOs and KAGs to create ideologically pure films.

Ideological controls were not just the purview of the BPO and the ZK, but also of the MfK, and in particular the HV Film. As part of this control structure the HV Film crafted an assessment of the state of film production in 1965. This assessment focused less on the production process, than on the ideological space film occupied in the GDR. It further focused on the need to shift tasks and the status of production, and how it related to the movement of ideology to the masses. Understanding the cultural-political status of film at the time is critical for seeing how with the shift toward greater control, the HV Film worked to complete its tasks and thereby to ensure that DEFA met the goals the party set out for it. Moreover, this document

[556] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Betriebsdelegiertenkonferenz April 1965.

provides insight into how, prior to the 11th Plenum and its major shift in the place of film in the eyes of the party, the major players in the film control structure planned on guiding the film in the following years.

Among the central themes covered in the document was the status of the minor films being developed and released that year. All of the films that were later banned by the 11th Plenum were discussed, in varying degrees of detail, in the MfK document, and none were discussed in positive terms.[557] Instead they were, as a group, contrasted to Erwin Strittmatter's novel *Ole Bienkopp*[Old Beehead] as being negative examples of contemporary society.[558] Unlike in *Bienkopp*, the films did not provide guidance on how to act, but rather solely served to criticize.[559] This document, prefigured a number of the sentiments found among members of the ZK during the 11th Plenum, most notably the concept that critique was acceptable, as long as it was couched within positive discussions and examples. Instead, the films produced in 1965 were deemed to only provide negative depictions of the GDR's society, and in particular of the party at that time.

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[557] BA DR 18657 Thesen für eine Analyse des Gegenwartsschaffens im Spielfilm 20 July 1965, no pagination.
[558] BA DR 18657 Thesen für eine Analyse des Gegenwartsschaffens im Spielfilm. *Ole Bienkopp* tells the story of collectivization in a rural community. The protagonist, called Old Beehead, pushes for collectivization before the party makes it an official policy. Over the course of the book he fights both with the locals who oppose collectivization, and the party officials who display open ignorance of the nature of farming and rural life. To highlight the ignorance of party officials Strittmatter at one point has an SED official suggest housing farm animals outside in the winter, because their fur must protect them from cold and snow. A suggestion, which horrifies the locals, as following through with it would have killed all of their livestock. The climax of the book depicts Old Beehead dying while trying to drain a marsh to make the land into usable farmland, thereby serving as a martyr.
[559] BA DR 8657 Thesen für eine Analyse des Gegenwartsschaffens im Spielfilm.

The critiques of DEFA productions continued into that fall. In October the ZPL at DEFA crated a report on the nature of DEFA productions, as well as their plans for the future. Included was a section on the need for films to properly, and dialectically, portray the realities of the present in the GDR.[560] ZPL officials called for a greater understanding of this necessity and for its presence, to a greater degree, in DEFA films.[561] Again, the need for more accurate, and proper, depictions of the present arose in the context of discussing the present, and future, of DEFA productions. While the document does not list the films that were highlighted in earlier documents, and at the 11th Plenum, its problems with the themes in DEFA films does overlap heavily with the prior critiques of DEFA films from 1965.

The correlation between the thematic analysis of the ZPL documents with the HV Film analysis from earlier that year provides greater insight into how higher level entities were assessing the film products of 1965 prior to the 11th Plenum. Central to the thematic analysis was the need for more accurate depictions of contemporary life in the GDR, and thereby to provide proper ideological modeling for the masses. Critiques of the films censored by the 11th Plenum, were thus not new, but rather had occurred throughout 1965, and were in fact drawn from a series of internal party, and HV Film, assessments. In addition, these attacks built on analyses of the place, and function, of film from the previous five years. This connection, in turn, indicates a significant trend toward the need for a fundamental

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[560] BA DR 117 27692 Die ZPL beschließt 26 October 1965 no pagination.
[561] BA DR 117 27692 Die ZPL beschließt.

reformation of DEFA production, as well as a shift in regard to how DEFA films portrayed contemporary life in the GDR.

Filmmakers react to the decisions of the 11th Plenum

In the wake of the 11th Plenum, there were a series of meetings at DEFA dealing with the ZK's decisions and their impact on DEFA. These meetings discussed both the party's decisions, and the nature of the films themselves. The first of these meetings, in December 1965, involved interactions between high party officials, including the party's chief ideologue Kurt Hager, and BPO and APO representatives. In this meeting the party officials targeted the films censored by the 11th Plenum. Jochim Mückenberger in response criticized DEFA for their political-ideological errors in filmmaking.[562] These errors stemmed, according to Mückenberger, from the inability of DEFA filmmakers to properly follow the ideological line set by the Bitterfeld Conferences. Linking the failures with these two conferences served for Mückenberger, to acknowledge the dominant cultural-ideological framework in the GDR at the time, and to show how, for the party, the two conferences represented a unified ideological line. The proper response to this situation was for party members to rally around one another in order to ensure proper production and to fight against future errors.[563]

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[562] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Studio für Spielfilm 21 December 1965, p. 2.
[563] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Studio für Spielfilm, p. 3.

This meeting was the first of several between ZK representatives and DEFA officials and filmmakers. The meetings provided a space for DEFA filmmakers to defend themselves against accusations from the party. They were generally contentious. Maetzig was among the most vociferous in defending his film, *Das Kaninchen bin Ich*.[564] At the same time, however, he did not decline his responsibility as an artist, but rather argued that he fulfilled his position properly and did what an artist should in crafting his film.[565] Maetzig's defense represents a sharp critique of the party's exertion of authority over filmmakers. Fundamental to his defense was that it was the party that was at fault, and not the filmmakers, in that the films themselves were not problematic, but rather the problems stemmed from the party's interpretations of the films. Maetzig, one of the founding members of DEFA, here used his standing as a filmmaker and party member to defend his own film, and thereby the films of his coworkers, against the accusations of the party.

The following January Kurt Hager again went to DEFA for an APO meeting. At this meeting he again presented the ZK's interpretations of the films censored by the 11th Plenum, and used them as an example to discuss proper filmmaking. For Hager, they could be negatively compared to past films, such as *Schlösser und Katten* [Castles and Cottages], and provided an example of what not to do in filmmaking.[566] For Hager, films like *Schlösser und Katten* were examples of, "the full worth of our

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[564] SAMPO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Studio für Spielfilm, p. 6.
[565] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Studio für Spielfilm, p. 6.
[566] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Spielfilmstudio 5 January 1966, no pagination.

socialist filmmaking."[567] This explicit juxtaposition, allowed Hager to single out Maetzig, the director of both *Schlösser* and *Kaninchen*, for his creation of a censored film. Hager's position at this meeting served both to clarify the ZK's stance to lower level party members, as well as to encourage the assembled filmmakers to accept the censorship of the films banned by the 11th Plenum. At the same time, his presence there indicated a desire, on the part of the ZK, to enter into meaningful dialogue with critical filmmakers at DEFA. While, the record of the meeting provides minimal back and forth dialogue, all of those who spoke refer repeatedly to questions posed by filmmakers to the ZK, indicating a preparatory question period which did not make it into this record group. That alone shows a greater degree of interest in actual dialogue with filmmakers than has generally been assumed in commentaries on this interaction.[568]

Hager was not the only one to speak at the meeting, and several filmmakers and officials at DEFA made, what were in effect, speeches that presented their interpretations of the 11th Plenum. Konrad Wolf, in his presentation, discussed the implications of the party structure at DEFA and their impact on filmmaking. In so doing, he stated that, "I am of the opinion that the KAGs must be strengthened."[569] His support for this strengthening did not exist in isolation, but rather was later developed by the SED in the following years. At the same time, Wolf was not entirely supportive of the party and its measures, but also took time to critique the

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[567] SAMPO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Spielfilmstudio 5 January 1966.
[568] See Feinstein, p. 177.
[569] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Spielfilmstudio 5 January 1966.

nature of the censorship process. He argued that it took far too long for the leadership of the HV Film to respond to requests to license films.[570] Wolf's critique here pushed back, to a limited degree, against the process of film licensing and censorship. In effect, he questioned why the office whose job it was to oversee and approve film production, could not do so in a timely manner, and thus allow filmmakers to properly adjust their films within the timeframe allowed for by the same office. The quota system for film production at the time meant that filmmakers could not take years to make small changes to their films, but rather had to do so quickly, and the HV Film dragging its heels on film approval, effectively meant that rejections led to films either never seeing the light of day, or the filmmakers coming under scrutiny for taking too long to make a film and have it released. Wolf, thus put the onus for ideologically impure films on the state, rather than on filmmakers themselves.

Unlike in past encounters between the party and DEFA, this one did not come without serious repercussions. Konrad Wolf was removed from the ZK, and thereby lost his authority as a high party official. Maetzig, lost his standing as a highly respected filmmaker, at least from the perspective of the party that is. Frank Beyer, in response to his film *Spur der Steine,* would not be offered a chance to direct a film until the creation of *Jakob der Lügner* [Jacob the Liar] in the early 1970s. Despite the crackdown on DEFA, however, the party did not take extreme actions. They did not arrest anyone, nor were any filmmakers officially removed from their positions at

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[570] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 123 Partei Sitzung bei der DEFA Spielfilmstudio 5 January 1966.

DEFA. The 11th Plenum, thus exemplifies the heightened place of film in the eyes of the party, in that even when the party cracked down on DEFA, they did not bring down the full power of the state on filmmakers, but rather worked to derail the careers, albeit temporarily as it turned out, of some of those involved in the creation of the banned films.

Das Kaninchen bin ich: Reality under Real Existing Socialism

Das Kaninchen bin Ich, Kurt Maetzig's 1965 adaptation of the banned novel by Manfred Bieler, represents the true tension at the core of post-Bitterfeld filmmaking in the GDR, as well as the attempts by the party to reconcile the essential paradox at the heart of their directives. Filmmakers were to, without any alterations, depict the realities of life in the GDR. At the same time they were, according to the Bitterfeld Weg, to do so from the perspective of the average citizen. The central problem for this directive was that life under "real existing socialism" in the early 1960s did not conform to the interpretations of the party, and as a result many citizens were, to varying degrees, dissatisfied with life under the SED.[571] This displeasure, or even the belief that the party was a flawed institution, meant that filmmakers had to straddle the line between depicting life from the perspective of average citizens and that of the party's view of life in the GDR. The films at the 11th Plenum all, to one degree or another, dealt with these issues and addressed the fact that the GDR was not a utopia, but rather was a flawed state led by an imperfect party.

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[571] Fennemore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock n Roll*, p. 78.

Das Kaninchen bin ich tells the story of a young university student, Maria Marzeck, and her affair with an older judge Paul Deister. The film begins with Maria's brother being sentenced for a political crime, and as a result Maria being blackballed from the Slavic Studies department at her university. Shortly thereafter Maria meets Paul while trying to appeal her brother's sentence. Not realizing that he was the judge who sentenced her brother, she beings a relationship with him. Throughout the film, their relationship serves as a commentary on the power of political officials, and the imperfections of East German society. As a married man, and a judicial, as well as party, official Paul had high moral expectations placed upon him, and his affair is a gross moral failure in the eyes of the party. The film climaxes with Maria learning who Paul truly is, and ending their relationship as a result. At the end, Maria's brother is released from prison, and instead of embracing his sister after his sentence, he physically attacks her after learning of her affair with Paul.

While *Das Kaninchen bin ich* never explicitly discusses party decision-making, it nevertheless, through the tension between the two main characters, Maria Marzeck and Paul Deister, explores the interactions between average citizens and powerful governmental figures. Realistically speaking, a judge in the position of Paul Deister would have been a party member, or at least indirectly affiliated with the party. Throughout the film Deister makes numerous references to the need to protect the GDR from outside influences and of the beauty of creating a new society within the GDR, implicitly presenting the views of the party. Maria, on the other hand, takes the position of the average person, and has both positive and negative interactions with governmental figures. Initially all of her encounters with the state

are negative, as her brother is arrested and then tried in secret for subversive activity, and as a result Maria's application to study Slavic studies at university is rejected. Her downward personal spiral changes when she begins an affair with Paul Deister, the judge who sentenced her brother. Throughout her relationship with Deister Maria receives personal benefits, but is never able to convince Deister to intervene on her brother's behalf. In the end, even Maria's relationship with her brother becomes negative after he beats her for engaging in a relationship with Deister. The end of the film, however, has a relatively upbeat note as Maria takes charge of her life and discusses her plans for the future. This formula, which was common for early socialist realist films, provides the viewer with a belief that the future will be better despite the flaws of the present.

A hope for a better future that would come after an imperfect present was central to early DEFA filmmaking, and often served as an encouraging reminder to the audience that things were getting better. After the achievement of socialism in 1961, however, this was no longer an acceptable stance, but rather functioned as a rejection of the belief that the achievement of socialism inherently meant a better life for everyone.[572] Studies of the flaws of reality in media thus did not, in the eyes of the party, exist as encouraging reminders to the people of the GDR that life would be better, but rather as anti-party attacks on the morale of the audience and thereby the citizenry of the GDR. The inherent skepticism at the heart of *Das Kaninchen bin ich* thus became, for the party, an issue not of art not conforming with reality, but of

[572] For more on this see my prior analysis of the function of the achievement of socialism earlier in this chapter.

artists actively attacking the party's interpretation of reality in the GDR. This rejection was, for the party, not part of a critical examination of life in the GDR, but rather an inherent assault on the place of the party within society.

Even within DEFA, the perspective portrayed in the film was viewed as contrary to the realities of life in the GDR. An analysis from the KAG "Roter Kreis" stated that if one had the identical life experiences to that of Maria then, "one could understand her skepticism only a little bit."[573] This analysis cut to the core of the issues with *Das Kaninchen bin ich* that later arose at the 11th Plenum. For the members of the KAG, as well as later on the ZK members, *Kaninchen* presented an overly negative interpretation of life in the GDR that did not reflect the experiences of the average filmgoer. Critical assessments of *Kaninchen* were not just limited to that time, but also arose in Frank Beyer's memoir in which he lamented that hte films of that time, including *Das Kaninchen bin ich* were filled with social alienation.[574] By couching the disapproval within an analysis of the experiences of Maria, the KAG document posits that only the most negative life experiences in the GDR could produce such a skeptical attitude towards the socialist project. This simultaneously justified, and isolated, the presentation of Maria's attitudes, in arguing that they were understandable, but only for a tiny fraction of the population. In turn, within the context of the Bitterfeld Weg, this implied that the makers of the film did not accurately reflect the views of the people of the GDR, and thereby internationally made a film that did not represent the views of the working class.

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[573] BA DR 117 27830, Inhaltsangabe "Das Kaninchen bin ich" 10 March 1965, no pagination.
[574] Beyer, 285.

Tied into the discussion of the inaccuracy of the depiction of Maria was a broader commentary on her immorality, including taking explicit note that when she met Paul, "she sought to avoid thinking about Paul being married."[575] Thus, for the members of the KAG the film not only did not properly portray life in the GDR, but it also presented a main character who engaged in immoral behavior, and who could not be considered a model for the lives of the viewers.

These central tensions within the film and its reception elicit a broader understanding of the problem of portraying reality in the GDR in the early and mid-1960s. It is not that all people who lived there were like Maria, but rather that there were in fact people who had similar lives to her, and the fact that those lives could not be depicted in film products. DEFA thus could not fully fulfill the spirit of the Bitterfeld Weg and show the lives of the working people of the GDR, because if DEFA filmmakers did this, they would present flawed individuals for the viewer. These imperfections, as shown in *Kaninchen*, amounted to, for the SED, an attack on the party, and in the view of Ulbricht a criminal act. At the same time, the realities of life in a country mean that the characters in *Kaninchen* were not actually out of line for depictions of people in the GDR in the 1960s. Adulterers, dissatisfied youth, and borderline corrupt government officials exist in any country at any point, and thus their depiction in *Kaninchen* came from, for Maetzig, a genuine desire to show life in the GDR and the complexities of life in a country that had in fact achieved socialism.

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[575] BA DR 117 27830, Inhaltsangabe "Das Kaninchen bin ich" 10 March 1965.

Conclusion

The interactions between DEFA and the SED from 1961 to 1965 constituted a concerted effort by the party to increase its control over the film production process, as well as to ensure that film producers fully fell into line behind the party. Every major cultural conference, and the majority of low-level interactions, focused on the need for filmmakers to more fully depict the party's vision of the GDR in their films. Their continued failure to do so, from the perspective of the party, meant increased pressure from the party, culminating in the 11th Plenum. At the heart of the push from the party for filmmakers to portray life in the GDR according to the party's understanding, lay the tensions of the Bitterfeld Weg. Filmmakers had to depict the perspectives of common people in the GDR, leading to the creation of *gegenwartsfilme* in the GDR, but at the same time they could not portray any dissatisfaction with life under the SED. This pressure led to the crackdown of the 11th Plenum and, as I will show in my next chapter, a push from the party for filmmakers to refocus on the spirit of the two Bitterfeld Conferences. Thus, this period was one of continual pressure from the SED and misunderstandings between filmmakers and the party as to what properly constituted a film that encapsulated the spirit of the Bitterfeld Weg.

Chapter 5:

Political Upheaval and Cultural Stability: DEFA and the SED 1966 to 1971

After the cultural crackdown of the 11th Plenum DEFA experienced a period of relative calm. Starting in 1966 filmmakers had to determine how to properly interpret the decisions of the 11th Plenum, and to thereby adhere to the party's proclamations regarding cultural production. At the heart of this task lay the need for DEFA filmmakers to ensure that the supposed errors that led to the 11th Plenum did not occur again. DEFA filmmakers engaged in a long process of internal reflection in order to determine how exactly they could produce films that satisfied the party's declarations. For its part, the SED crafted few new policies and, instead, retrenched with their support for overall conceptions of the first and second Bitterfeld Conferences. The best evidence for the cultural stability in this era comes from the paucity of cultural conferences compared to every other period since the foundation of DEFA in 1946. Only the Seventh Party Day in 1969 dealt with cultural issues at the whole party level and provided guidance that, by and large, reiterated the values promoted at the Bitterfeld Conferences.

The quiescence in cultural policy is notable in part because politically, the period from 1966 to 1971 represented the largest shift in the history of the GDR up to that point. Walter Ulbricht, the head of the SED from its beginning and the functional head of the GDR since its foundation, faced increasing challenges to his authority as head of the party and thereby the state. These challenges came from his protégé Erich Honecker who in 1971 emerged as the head of the SED and, thus, the GDR. This internal power struggle took place behind closed doors at the highest

levels of the party.[576] Honecker drove the split by opposing a number of Ulbricht's attempts at economic reform and rapprochement with the FRG.[577] There were no mass campaigns, even within the party, to push out Ulbricht, and as a result it functioned as a silent shift with Ulbricht entering official retirement with relatively fanfare. Thus, the party experienced a level of internal instability but the political shifts at the top of the SED and the state apparatus did not lead to any level of wider political instability.

Honecker's rise to power signaled the end of the first major period in the GDR's history. Honecker orchestrated Ulbricht's ouster from the Politburo, but he did not act alone. In order to ensure that his seizure of power would go unchallenged, he consulted with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and encouraged him to speak with Ulbricht about stepping down.[578] In the summer of 1970 Brezhnev did just that, and after this meeting Ulbricht agreed to step down, and did so in the spring of 1971. This process, while indicating that the Soviets had a large say in the nature of government in the GDR, does not in fact mean that Brezhnev controlled who was in charge of the GDR, but rather that he had enough authority to convince Ulbricht to step aside.[579] It did not mean that Brezhnev made the call as to who would run the GDR.

Honecker's ascension to power, as it turned out, represented more than a change in the ruling personnel. It signaled the opening of a new era in the GDR.

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[576] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, p. 184.
[577] Grieder, p. 184.
[578] Epstein, p. 182.
[579] Epstein, p. 184.

Honecker came into power as a recognized reformer compared to Ulbricht and worked to delineate between his policies and those of his predecessor. Ulbricht's cult of personality and the era of Stalinist and near-Stalinist policies ended in 1971. In terms of cultural policy, Honecker's first speech as the new head of party and state, appeared to mark a sea change in cultural policy. In declaring that there were to be no taboos in art as long as it came from a socialist place, he altered the conceptualization of artistic production. His statement represented a fundamental shift in SED-artist relations in the post-11th Plenum era.[580]

Retrospectively, then 1966 to 1971 can be identified as the last years of the foundational era in the GDR. Yet at the time there were almost no signs that change would come soon. The control over artistic policies in this era continued the progression that developed from 1946 to 1965. Only minimal shifts occurred during this time, and cultural policy remained focused on ensuring that producers reflected the realities of life for workers and peasants. Relative cultural stability highlighted the last years of Ulbricht's time in power. For film the major shift in this period was from *Gegenwartsfilme* [Contemporary Films] to *Alltagsfilme* [Everyday Films], which brought to the fore films that covered everyday life in the GDR. This move was part of a shift from films focusing on idealized exemplary figures to more flawed figures that represented average East Germans. The embrace of everyday life as a topic of film followed from the earlier Bitterfeld Weg, but moved from the inherent production settings of farms and factories to more domestic settings and events that took place outside of work contexts.

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[580] Feinstein, p. 201.

Culturally, the SED in this period focused on continuity. It promoted the teachings of the Bitterfeld Weg, while only implicitly referencing the message of the 11th Plenum. New, however, was the decision to cut back on cultural conferences as a venue for delivering the party's message. The SED held only one cultural conference from 1966 through 1971. In no other five-year period from 1945 through 1965 did the SED hold fewer than two conferences. The lack of major cultural conferences suggests that the party remained confident about the message delivered at the 11th Plenum. At the lower levels of the party, however, this period was not one of tranquility as the party struggled to define proper action in the wake of the 11th Plenum. Party members attacked one another, while also promoting their own actions and interpretations as correct. These critical and self-corrective actions formed the basis of post-11th Plenum cultural thought among lower level members of the SED. In whole these actions were spurred by a significantly lower level of trust from the upper levels of the party than had been expressed in earlier periods. The distrust, and greater attempts at control expressed by the party leadership encouraged the lower level party members to engage in theoretically corrective actions to win over the trust of the party leaders. These struggles and pushbacks are reflected in the films of the period. Konrad Wolfs *Ich War Neunzehn* [I Was Nineteen], which I will cover at the end of the chapter, portrays a semi-autobiographical story of a young German Red Army Lieutenant during the final days of World War II. The themes of the film, including friendship with the USSR and anti-militarism, were deeply politically relevant for the time.

The Decline of Ulbricht and Rise of the Ministry of State Security: Politics in the GDR 1966 to 1971

By the end of the 1950s, Ulbricht had fully entrenched himself as the undisputed leader of the SED, and his interpretation of how to move forward in the GDR remained unchallenged.[581] In the mid-1960s, however, his power started to wane. Internal challenges from the highest levels of the party began to emerge, mainly in the form of supporters of Honecker.[582] Party politicking became the method by which Honecker and his supporters challenged Ulbricht's authority.[583]

State policies largely remained unchanged in this period. Nor did the political struggles impact the populace of the GDR. After the first years of adjustment, the populace had largely come to accept the existence of the Berlin Wall and the closure of transit to the West.[584] This period of political stability provided a cover for the internal party struggles regarding leadership of the party and Ulbricht's position of authority. Despite the outward political stability, the party increasingly feared the populace at the highest levels of the party, and therein continued the development of the MfS and its agents amongst the populace.[585] It was in this period that the Stasi began to develop into the all-encompassing state-security force that it became by the late 1980s. This is not to say that the GDR was a totalitarian state in this period, but rather that state security forces took far greater

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[581] Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, p. 114.
[582] Ibid, p. 184.
[583] Epstein, p. 182.
[584] Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 235.
[585] Dennis, Mike**.** *The Stasi: Myth and Reality*. Edinburgh, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2003, p. 31.

interest in the activities of the average person by the late 1960s than they had in any prior period in the history of the GDR.[586] By the end of this period, and the transition to Honecker as the head of the SED, the MfS employed over 100,000 IMs and over 45,000 full time officers.[587] The population was heavily surveilled but was less likely to be actively persecuted or prosecuted than in the 1950s.

The expanding security state in the GDR began to slowly impact DEFA in these years as well. The political situation with the MfS meant that its agents worked to observe filmmakers and ensure that they were following through with the party's beliefs and being loyal to both party and state.[588] The observation of filmmakers was a new shift of the MfS and for the GDR as a whole, in that in prior years the state, and the party, relied on the normative cultural controls to ensure loyalty, and did not involve security forces in the situation.[589] By including the MfS in their control plan, the SED indicated that they no longer fully trusted filmmakers to be loyal, and that they further did not trust the normative cultural controls of the BPOs and HV Film to properly ensure loyalty. The placement of Stasi officers, and recruitment of IMs, at DEFA gave the MfS a window into the lives of DEFA employees, and a means to determine their loyalty to the party and state. This shift occurred on both ideological and functional levels, and indicates a significant

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[586] Ibid, p. 32.
[587] Harsch, Donna. *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 240, and Gieske, Jens. *Die DDR Staatssicherheit: Schild und Schwert der Partei*. Bonn: Federal Agency for Civic Education, 2000. p. 41.
[588] Geiss, Axel. *Repression und Freiehit: DEFA-Regisseure zwischen Fremd-und Selbstbestimmung*. Potsdam: Brandenburger Landeszentrale für Politischebildung, 1997, p. 32.
[589] Ibid, p. 42.

alteration in the relationship between individuals and the state. No longer would non-security measures for compliance and control be trusted, and instead the MfS and its agents had to be relied on to act as guarantors of the state's, and thereby the party's, security and position of authority, particularly in regard to observing and controlling the actions of individuals.

The GDR as a whole continued its shift in this era to a more welfare based state dictatorial system than it had during its earliest years. In part this stemmed from a greater degree of economic stability, as well as a willingness of the party to listen to demands from the populace, and to act on them.[590] This shift towards a more complete welfare-dictatorship aided in providing stability for the GDR, and to ensure that the populace trusted in the party. One of the largest overhauls in this era came in the criminal reform of 1968, which effectively decriminalized homosexuality, and paved the way for a more lenient criminal justice system.[591] Paradoxically this openness was tied to increasing observations on the part of the MfS. Lowered oppression thus came at a price, and the GDR as a state worked to guarantee that the populace remained loyal through a mixture of control and reward. By lessening social controls in some ways, and improving state support in others, the SED could mitigate the sense of oppression that could come from the increase in mass surveillance and MfS interference in the lives of individuals.

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[590] Fulbrook, Mary "The Concept of Normalization and the GDR in Comparative Perspective" in *Power and Society in the GDR 1961-1979: The 'Normalization of Rule?'* ed. Mary Fulbrook. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 23, Harsch, p. 240.
[591] McClellan, Josie. *Love in the time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 12.

The Shadow of the 11h Plenum: the 7th Party Day, 1967

The only major discussion of culture at the total party level, during these years, took place at the 7th Party Day in April 1967. At the whole party level no major conferences took place in 1966, and from after the 7th Party Day until Honecker came to power in 1971. This lack of major cultural dialogue stemmed in part from the time it took to fully interpret the decisions of the 11th Plenum. As part of this the SED experienced a period of complacency and did not work to alter, or to fully reinforce all of its cultural policies. Instead, they used the decisions of the 11th Plenum, and the example that they set as the basis for their policies. The lack of development, in particular when taken in comparison to all previous eras of the GDR's history indicates a sharp shift in internal policy and the place of culture. The fact that no major conferences dedicated to culture took place in this era, and that the discussion took a secondary role at a major party conference indicates a sharp shift from earlier eras. No longer did the SED feel the need to have routine major conferences focusing on art and film, and instead focused on economic development.[592]

The intermittent occurrence of cultural conferences did not, however, indicate a lack of concern on the part of the SED. Instead, this process became one in which the party acted on a period of cultural stability, that resulted from its cultural crackdown at the 11th Plenum, to move focus away from frequent cultural

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[592] See Meuschel, p. 222, Stein, p. 117 and Zatilin, Jonathan. *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 48-51 for more details on Ulbricht's economic policies in this era.

conferences. The faith in the success of the declarations of the 11th Plenum, allowed the party to move forward with cultural policy without the need for continual reinterpretations of the same policies.[593] This period of trust and stability has largely been interpreted as the direct result of the SED exerting its authority over producers in the GDR, and as part of a strict crackdown, at the 11th Plenum but without much continued guidance.[594] When documents from lower level party meetingsis taken into account, it becomes clear that the SED trusted DEFA far less than is indicated in other secondary literature. Implicitly the party leadership believed that the message of the 11th Plenum had been clear enough that the cultural producers did not need broad cultural directives. However, at the same time, the party engaged in more direct actions of guidance in order to ensure compliance, as I will discuss in detail below.

Direct statements about culture were rare but no less significant than earlier frequent and longer declarations. At the 7th Party Day, for instance, Ulbricht reaffirmed culture's political role, by declaring that, "this [socialist] culture must likewise, also produce the intellectual and physical values to consciously further develop our socialist society."[595] Ulbricht clearly stated that culture had contributed explicitly to the development of a socialist society, while also implyingthat cultural

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[593] Meuschel, Sigrid. *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR 1945-1989.* Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992, p. 221.
[594]See Feinstein's discussion of *Gegenwarts* films in *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 194-199, Berghahn's discussion of post-11th Plenum film in *Hollywood Behind the Wall* p. 170-173, Jäger's discussion of the 11th Plenum and its impact in *Kultur und Politik in der DDR: 1945-1990,* p. 124-125, and Schittly's discussion in *Zwischen Regie und Regime* p. 156-163.
[595] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VII 1 Stenographischen Niederschrift des VII Partei Tages der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei Deutschlands 17-22 April 1967, p. 119.

producers have to desire the creation of socialism and contribute to it for their art to be part of socialist culture. This reminder to the attendees of the constructive function of culture served to reinforce the party's insistence on the positive nature of culture in the wake of the 11th Plenum. Ulbricht sent, in effect, a dual message: cultural producers played an important role in building socialism and they better play it properly.

Ulbricht and the SED did not interpret the link between cultural and social development as a one-way street. Instead, an inextricable link existed between these two in such a way that social development, and cultural development produced one another. Ulbricht argued that only when the masses fully participate in society, and engage in full social development, could the "highest cultural levels be achieved."[596] Cultural production thus became more fully dependent on the societal development of the GDR. Ideologically the focus on the actual development in the GDR meant a need for a more comprehensive emphasis on the reflective nature of film than in the past. Largely this stemmed from the SED's own interpretation of the development of socialism in the GDR. No longer did culture have to have an inherently productive role in relation to socialism, in that socialism had already been achieved, and the GDR was, from the SED's perspective, now on the path to Communism. Social development could, thus, take the lead in influencing cultural development. This position derived, in part, from the ideas of the Bitterfeld Weg and the need for art to properly address the realities of life for

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[596] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VII 1 Stenographischen Niederschrift des VII Partei Tages der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei Deutschlands 17-22 April 1967, p. 122.

the masses. Ulbricht later made this connection when he linked the fulfillment of the Bitterfeld Weg, with the, "recognition of the placement of art as a critical lever for the development of the entirety of socialism."[597] Ulbricht, in his deeply opaque style, repeats his earlier point about the inherent relationship between socialist culture and socialist society, and places socialist culture in an inherent role for the creation of a socialist society. These ideas were not new, but rather served to reinforce the concepts put forward by the party since the first Bitterfeld Conference in 1959. For Ulbricht, and thereby the SED, the main lens through which cultural work should be read was that of the Bitterfeld Weg, and the cultural decisions since the first conference were simply meant to bolster the ideas of the conference. The presentation of these ideas at the 7th Party Day served as a reminder that in light of the 11th Plenum there were going to be no major changes in the cultural directives of the party, and that producers were to stay the course with products in line with the Bitterfeld Weg.

Normalization of Rule: the SED and DEFA from 1966 to 1971

The tumultuous aftermath of the 11th Plenum carried on into the early months of 1966. A number of meetings, including at the ZK and APO level, occurred in January 1966 that covered the events of the Plenum and the reaction of the directors who were immediately impacted by the Plenum via the censorship of their films. After these meetings, however, the impact of the 11th Plenum began to wane, as it moved from being the focal point of ideological interpretation. The discussions

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[597] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV 1 VII 1 Stenographischen Niederschrift des VII Partei Tages der Sozialistischen Einheits Partei Deutschlands 17-22 April 1967, p. 127.

shifted from interpretations of the Plenum to refocusing on the messages of the two Bitterfeld Conferences. Renewed emphasis on these two conferences allowed for filmmakers, and SED representatives, to pay attention to the overarching cultural plan of the SED. Bigger picture issues, such as the main cultural line of the SED and the relationship between culture and society, became the main means of achieving this, along with directions from the SED as to how to carry out the tasks set forth by the two Bitterfeld Conferences. Achieving the goals of these two conferences became the central focus of DEFA into 1971.

1966: 20 Years of DEFA

In May 1966 DEFA celebrated its 20th anniversary, and as part of this Ulbricht authored a letter addressing DEFA and its accomplishments, as well as its tasks for the future. Alongside his commemoration of DEFA's past, he reminded filmmakers that the foundational spirit of DEFA centered on "an uncompromising struggle against reactionary beliefs."[598] Ulbricht here implicitly charged DEFA filmmakers with carrying on a militant struggle against any beliefs that went counter to the party. As reactionary beliefs functioned as a catchall term for any ideas that were not lock-step with the Party's beliefs, Ulbricht's reminder served as a challenge to filmmakers to maintain an orthodox relationship with SED ideology. Reminding filmmakers of these foundational beliefs served as an implicit critique of their actions, in that Ulbricht did not only commemorate these concepts, but also to showed that filmmakers had to continue to act on the ideals of cultural support for the party. Filmmakers could not relegate fighting against reactionary beliefs to the

[598] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Walter Ulbricht 17 May 1966, no pagination.

past, but rather had to address them in the present. Ulbricht's reminder served as a means of encouraging filmmakers to fully act within the bounds of accepted party belief, as well as to ensure that they understood the link between the past and their present activities.

Ulbricht's letter did not solely remind filmmakers of the past, but also discussed contemporary issues. As part of this he declared that Leninist party principles were alive at DEFA, and that it was amongst the filmmakers that they were fully realized. Ulbricht stated that, "for the filmmakers of the GDR the Leninist principle of partisanship and national unity is not an empty word." Ulbricht's praise here indicates that the party leadership did trust DEFA filmmakers. Despite the crackdown the previous year at the 11th Plenum, Ulbricht still demonstrated a belief in the loyalty of filmmakers, and their ability to conform to the party's teachings. This realization contributed, for Ulbricht, to the successes of the 6th Party Day as they were achieved at DEFA.[599] Ulbricht recognized the ideological successes of DEFA and the ways in which they worked to fulfill the directives of the party, and in turn this mitigated his earlier implicit critique of filmmakers. This acknowledgement provided commendations from the party to the studio, which in light of the events of the 11th Plenum the previous winter was important for the party to accomplish. Rather than continue the contentious relationship between the two, Ulbricht reached out to DEFA, through his letter celebrating the 20th anniversary of their founding, and to encourage filmmakers there to build on their successes. Part of this praise involved a reminder that in the future DEFA would, "in

[599] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Walter Ulbricht May 1966.

the future have a crucial role in the formation of the people of the new socialist society".[600] Here Ulbricht implicitly praised filmmakers for the work that they had already done in this process, and encouraged them to seek to achieve this again in the future.

Ulbricht tempered this praise of the future, with reminders of the challenges faced by DEFA. He did not explicitly reference the 11th Plenum, but rather argued that filmmakers had to be aware of the challenges they had faced, and of their failures in the past.[601] While unstated, the purported failures referred to the films produced prior to the 11th Plenum that deeply criticized the failures in the GDR as a whole, and within the party in particular. For the SED, these films were inherent failures on the part of the filmmakers in that they would potentially lead the populace astray. He stated that in overcoming these past failures and challenges, which the filmmakers were able to achieve the "true beauty of your work", that filmmakers would then contribute to the development of the GDR.[602] Ulbricht tempered the criticism with praise, which given the timeframe, was necessary in order to ensure that filmmakers still felt encouraged enough by the party to produce films that fell in line with the party's beliefs. The necessary balancing act for Ulbricht in the aftermath of the 11th Plenum, between reminding filmmakers of their lack of absolute support for the party and its beliefs on the one hand, and trying to promote reconciliation with filmmakers on the other, meant that the celebration of DEFA's 20th anniversary would involve both light criticism and heavy praise.

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[600] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Walter Ulbricht May 1966.
[601] BA DR 117 27692 Brief von Walter Ulbricht May 1966.
[602] BA DR 117 27692. Brief von Walter Ulbricht May 1966.

Ulbricht's letter was telling in that it revealed how the highest levels of the party understood the history of DEFA, as well as how they wanted the filmmakers at DEFA to understand their own history. By mixing praise and criticism Ulbricht worked to remind the filmmakers that they were neither fully successful nor abject failures, but rather cultural producers who needed to work to learn from their failures. The lack of discussion of the 11th Plenum and its impact on film reveals that at least Ulbricht did not want filmmakers to dwell on the events of the Plenum, and its aftermath, but rather to focus on big picture ideological issues. Reminding filmmakers of the ultimate purpose of their tasks allowed Ulbricht to refocus their attention from the impact of the 11th Plenum on their craft to the need for cultural producers to promote socialist values in their art, which could then aid in the creation of socialist persons and thereby a socialist society. Ulbricht acted in both a pragmatic and constructive manner in doing this, and his actions provide a window into the thought processes of the SED leadership at that time. For the SED leadership the further development of socialism necessitated a healthy and productive studio environment, and as such filmmakers had to be encouraged to produce proper socialist art, and the party did this through both chastisement and encouragement.

In other words, after dropping the hammer on DEFA at the 11th Plenum, the party leadership did a little light damage control so that DEFA directors et al would not become too demoralized. It seems to have followed the motto: "in the past you were good and in the future you can be good again, even if you've been really bad recently." Functionally this allowed the party to partially repair their relationship

with DEFA, and to remind the filmmakers of their important role in the party's plans. At the same time it reminded DEFA filmmakers that the party was willing to crack down on filmmakers again in the future.

Criticisms of DEFA continued throughout the spring and well into the summer of 1966. That August, Erich Honecker, head of ZK Kultur, authored an analysis of DEFA films entitled "On the Problems of Feature Film Production at DEFA". Honecker's analysis focused on a series of problems at DEFA, among them the alleged inability for filmmakers to distinguish between successful and good films.[603] For Honecker "this undifferentiated equation [of popular and quality films] is an unjust assessment of the actual function of film."[604] Honecker separated quality from popular films, and therein criticized both the populace who enjoyed certain films, and the filmmakers who produced them. The inability, or refusal, to distinguish between these two qualities meant that too many filmmakers equated commercially successful films with quality films.[605] Honecker reminded filmmakers that they should work to craft artistically strong, and implicitly ideologically strong, films rather than films with simple mass appeal. Yet Honecker did not explain what defined quality.

From the SED's ideological interpretation of film, this directive seems paradoxical, for films were supposed to be a mass product with mass appeal.

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[603] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA, 23 August 1966, no pagination.
[604] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.
[605] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.

Honecker even acknowledged this desired outcome, stating, "Lenin once said that film has the greatest mass impact of any type of art."[606] Honecker suggested that, in its very nature, film should be a product with mass impact and, thereby, mass appeal. Yet he also knew that a film with mass appeal was not necessarily ideologically correct. The advice to filmmakers not to worry about commercial success was thus not paradoxical. The party leadership believed that truly good films would have inherent mass appeal, and that the people of the GDR wanted artistically, and ideologically, strong films rather than purported cheap entertainment. However, it is noteworthy that despite the party's belief in the public's desire for films that fell in line with party ideology, the popular films at the time were, in Honecker's own assessment, not quality films.[607] His discussion, thus, became contradictory in that he simultaneously asserted the inherent mass appeal of ideologically correct films, while assessing that popular films of the time were not quality films.

Honecker went on to explain that the key for filmmakers to fully overcome their faults was to "embrace the lessons of the Bitterfeld Conferences", as well as the 11th Plenum.[608] Implicitly these lessons were that filmmakers should, in the model of Bitterfeld, embrace the realities of life from the perspective of common workers and farmers, while simultaneously not using these experiences to criticize the SED

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[606] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.
[607] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.
[608] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.

or the GDR as a society. Using these conferences as bases for guidance for filmmakers, served to continue the themes that Ulbricht covered in his letter to DEFA that May. Honecker's analysis echoes the praise and criticism model, and uses the 11th Plenum as a basis to guide filmmakers away from their purported negative habits, such as any functional criticism of the party or of the GDR as a state or society. Use of the 11th Plenum, by Honecker in his assessment served to reinforce the messages sent to filmmakers at the conference, while simultaneously showing that the largest guideposts for filmmakers should remain the two Bitterfeld Conferences.[609] At the core of DEFA's problems, according to the SED leadership, was the inability or unwillingness of filmmakers to fully embrace the spirit of the Bitterfeld Conferences, and Honecker highlighted the need for filmmakers to do just this. He contended that feature films did not fully embrace the reality of the experiences of the people of the GDR, and instead chose topics that did not "reflect the lives of workers and peasants".[610] For the party this would mean presenting characters and scenarios that came from the real lives of workers and peasants, as was laid out in the Bitterfeld Weg. However, the reality of the directive was that the party never fully defined what it meant for producers to reflect the lives of workers and peasants. The failure of DEFA was seen as a much larger failure on the part of the HV Film and the office of the head of feature film in that they made thematic plans and accepted scripts. Thus for Honecker DEFA's missteps represented an

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[609] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.
[610] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA.

institutional failure.[611] On a system wide level, in the SED's view, thematic plans thus had to change in order to ensure that future films properly addressed the lives and experiences of the citizens of the GDR.

The theme of the need to focus on the two Bitterfeld Conferences continued that fall. In October, the ZK Kultur created a report on the nature of feature film production and its relationship to the themes of the second Bitterfeld Conference. The core of the report was an analysis of how the films produced by DEFA had either successfully or unsuccessfully incorporated the themes of the conference as a means to aid in the development of socialist persons in the GDR.[612] Tying these themes together communicated the expectation of more complete adherence to the ideals of the conference that the end of creating socialist persons and socialist personalities. In part the creation of socialist persons, and socialist personalities, involved the presentation of proper socialist heroes to the masses to use as role models.[613] When combined with portrayals of the day-to-day lives of the masses, the presentation of appropriate heroes in films would allow filmgoers to experience models for their own lives, and be able to easily apply the lessons presented by the filmic characters to their own experiences. While the ZK did not provide a very detailed description of socialist heroes, they did present a basic description including, "developing despite the objectionableness of the everyday" and

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[611] Also see Schittly, p. 258.
[612] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966, no pagination.
[613] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.

experiencing a conflict.[614] Any hint at objectionableness or conflict, however, would not be due to societal problems or any structural failures, but rather would always in DEFA film stem from interpersonal problems and bad individuals. When taken alongside the concept of ideological modeling, the emphasis on the need to follow through with the lessons of the second Bitterfeld Conference became even more important. Providing proper heroes would not just give audiences a character to root for, but also would give them someone upon which they could, and should model their own lives and whose actions related to their own experiences.

This process inherently involved a strong relationship between filmmakers and the masses in the GDR. As part of this the filmmakers had to ensure that they based their films on real experiences within the GDR, and not on external experiences from other countries. Ironically, the greatest source of concern for the ZK authors was not the West, but rather other countries in the Eastern Bloc. For the ZK these films, particularly those from Czechoslovakia and Poland, came "from the viewpoint of the critique of the cult of personality, and… the position of anti-dogmatism" and did not focus on the promotion of proper Marxist ideals.[615] The contrast between a critique of a cult of personality and anti-dogmatism with purported proper Marxist ideals was, within the ideological phrasing of the SED, an inherent support for Stalinism. The SED had spent the previous decade crusading

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[614] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.
[615] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.

against any form of a cult of personality and equating dogmatism with reactionary sensibilities. The criticism of anti-dogmatism and of personality cults, thus functioned as a significant shift from long held stances by the SED, and of turning against beliefs shared by other Eastern Bloc nations.

Due to the party's expectation to focus on the experiences of the members of the nation, an implicit concept in the Bitterfeld Weg, DEFA filmmakers had to delineate between the subjects of their films, and the topics that they covered, and distinguish from those of other Eastern Bloc filmmakers. Although Czechoslovak films in 1966 had not fully achieved the height of New Wave filmmaking, they nevertheless challenged older filmmaking styles and hinted at political criticism.[616] Czechoslovak filmmakers faced domestic criticism that was similar to ZK complaints about DEFA films.[617] The focus within the films, thus demonstrated the willingness of the ZK to encourage filmmakers to disassociate their work with Czechoslovak influences.

Accurate portrayals of the lives of the workers and peasants of the GDR meant that filmmakers had to, for the most part, focus on the national context within the GDR, and to make sure that the subjects of the films were rooted in the themes of their films in that context. The prioritization of anti-dogmatism over the portrayal of daily life, would suggest a filmmaker cared more about attacking a concept than supporting workers with the result, in the eyes of the ZK, of making

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[616] Hames, Peter. *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 3-5.

[617] Hames, p.4, and SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.

viewers feel insecure.[618] Importantly, the ZK authors did not reject adaptation of aesthetic and technical knowledge from other Eastern Bloc countries. They focused, instead, on certain themes such as the theme in Czechoslovak cinema of greater openness in society, and the subjects of experimental filmmaking in Poland.[619] The ZK then rejected foreign influence on a DEFA film's content, including social criticism and experimentalism, but accepted foreign innovations in form, including style and technique.

The SED's attempts to control the level and types of influence of East Bloc filmmaking on DEFA at least partially failed. Films from the USSR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, in particular, contributed to innovations in DEFA filmmaking. Whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, these influences shaped DEFA films both aesthetically and in the filmmaking process. Ralf Harhausen argues that the USSR and Czechoslovakia provided much of the aesthetic inspiration for the *Alltagsfilme* [everyday film] which emerged as major innovation in DEFA filmmaking after 1971 ???.[620] For Harhausen, Eastern Bloc New Wave films provided the foundation for the aesthetic shifts found in *Alltagsfilme* in the GDR and exposure to the films of these countries fundamentally altered the approach that many DEFA filmmakers took toward the entire filmmaking process.[621] Sebastian Heidusckhe too credits the emergence of *Alltagsfilme* to exposure to the Eastern

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[618] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.
[619] Hames, p. 4 and Charles Ford and Rober Hammond. *Polish Film: A Twentieth Century History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc, Publishers, 2005, p. 125.
[620] Harhausen, p. 45 and 48.
[621] Harhausen, p. 44.

Bloc, but contends that DEFA's Alltagfilm also represented a unique contribution to New Wave cinema.[622] This interrelationship is representative of the underlying basis of the ZK's criticisms of Eastern Bloc filmmaking, in particular that of Poland and Czechoslovakia. As their critiques highlighted, it was not the aesthetic shifts that came from these countries that party authorities feared, but rather thematic ones.

Thematic foci became part of the broader ZK plan to ensure that DEFA more fully acted on the ideals of the two Bitterfeld Conferences. The overall tenor of the ZK document fell fully in line with what Ulbricht and Honecker had written about DEFA earlier that year.[623] Ulbricht and Honecker made clear that the HV Film and DEFA's Feature Film Studio must insure *at the planning stage* that filmic depictions of daily life would correspond to the SED's vision of daily life under socialism. Films would have to forego large social commentaries and historical analyses in favor of focusing on the day-to-day experiences of workers and peasants in the GDR. WWhen portraying the problems of everyday life, they must collective action and the support of the party as the ways to overcome difficulties. Films must also present positive role models with whom audiences could identify.

This bundle of expectations represented a major shift in the focus of DEFA films from the era of heroic struggle and anti-fascism of early socialist realism to a focus on contemporary life. The *Gegenwartsfilm* [contemporary film] highlighted

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[622] Heiduschke, p. 10.
[623] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 An der Politischen, Ideologischen, und Künstlersichen entwicklung der DEFA spielfilmschaffens in die Zeit seit den Zweiten Bitterfeld Konferenz 1 October 1966.

the day-to-day life of the GDR's citizens. The shift began in the early 1960s. It seemed to stall with the attack on Gegenwartsfilm by the 11th Plenum. Yet soon the shift regained momentum and was encapsulated by the speeches and directives of 1966.[624] This directive, in effect, explained to DEFA filmmakers how they could depict the present without incurring the wrath of the SED. The films condemned by the 11th Plenum were held up as the wrong way to depict daily reality in the GDR. When taken together, the ZK document, Honecker's letter, and Ulbricht's ??? make clear that the SED's plans after the 11th Plenum focused almost entirely on DEFA living up to the ideals of the two Bitterfeld Conferences by properly portraying the lives of the masses in the GDR.

Support for purportedly accurate portrayals of the day-to-day experiences of the GDR's citizens did not remain within the ZK, but rather filtered down to lower levels of the party. A summary of an APO meeting on November 1966 provides insight into the degree to which members of the lowest level of the party hierarchy at DEFA were exposed to the ideals of the ZK. The summary, while not a transcript and thereby flattening any sense of debate, nonetheless covers the issues discussed at the meeting. Among the issues pushed downward within the party's system was the concept that, "the party organization of the studio has the special task of ensuring that the decisions of the party, in individual films, and the completion of film projects will be consistently enforced."[625] In effect, the membership of the APO

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[624] Feinstein, p. 197 and Harhausen, p. 36.
[625] BA DR 117 27692 SED-Betriebsorganisation APO I 17 November 1966, no pagination.

understood that it was up to their members to self-censor in order to follow the party's directives.

This system of pre-censorship functioned as a direct response to the lack of control over film themes that Honecker critiqued the previous summer. Officially the HV Film and the studio director oversaw production issues and themes, but the BPO in 1966 issued commands to the APO to ensure that its members properly oversaw ideological disbursement in films. Given the structure of film production at the time, with KAGs comprised of both APO members and non-members, the APO members were thus being called on to act as the party's watchdogs within their KAGs.

As part of this control structure, the members of the APO had to "see themselves as responsible for the films produced in the studio" as well as for the success of the party's line within DEFA's films, and the overall ideological success of each film produced at DEFA.[626] Setting APO members up as ideological watchdogs over film production meant that the party leadership could effectively deflect blame for censorship of films. Instead the party established a functioning system of pre-censorship in which filmmakers would seek to censor, and self-censor, films well before they were sent to official approval bodies. Apportioning responsibility amongst the party members meant that members of the cell had to work both collectively and individually to achieve the party's goals in the filmmaking process. On top of this, the leadership of the party cell needed to more effectively work to fully control the disbursement of ideology and to ensure "the success of the political-

[626] BA DR 117 27692 SED-Betriebsorganisation APO I 17 November 1966.

ideological content of films" on which its members worked, as well as of all films produced by DEFA.[627] Again, the adjustments hinted at by Honecker and the ZK that summer and fall, in particular the need for more stringent oversight in the planning process, arose in APO meetings months later. The downward movement of these tasks represents a more controlling structure than had existed in earlier eras. While power did, by and large, emanate from the top of the party's structure, and the tasks set by the ZK always moved downward within the party, the duties laid out in this BPO message to the APO went beyond that of prior years. In addition to their already expected party duties, APO members had to more actively guide non-party members than in the past.

In order to more effectively lead the non-party members, the APO provided a clearer description of their duties. The APO stated that it was the further duty of the members of the APO to oversee all of the work within the KAGs, in particular their, "artistic-ideological doctrines."[628] APO members, thus became party watchdogs and ideological censors for film production at DEFA, actions which in earlier eras were handled by the BPO and Künstlischer Rat within DEFA, and the HV Film at the MfK. The APO's own push for the need to oversee the proper ideological development of films fits within the broad pattern of SED thought on mass political action since the 1950s, but at the same time represents a clearer response to the leadership of the SED than had occurred in earlier periods. On top of this, the APO members had to monitor the actions of one another and guarantee that the party groups in the KAGs

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[627] BA DR 117 27692 SED-Betriebsorganisation APO I 17 November 1966.
[628] BA DR 117 27692 SED-Betriebsorganisation APO I 17 November 1966.

of which they were members properly engaged in political-ideological work and development.[629] This process would help to ensure that the party members actively monitored the ideological stance of one another, as well as the totality of film production at DEFA. By actively working within the KAGs to guarantee that they were ideologically correct, the party members would be fully carrying out Honecker's directives and fulfilling their party duties. It bears noting that this process existed outside of, as well as alongside, the presence of *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* [unofficial coworkers] who carried out monitoring for the MfS within the studio.[630] The focus on monitoring non-party members by the APOs was fundamentally different than the observations conducted by the IMs of the MfS, in that APO members dealt with the role of ideology within cultural products, and not loyalty to the state and party.[631]

In a draft resolution from later that month, the APO further developed the roles of party members in the production process. In this resolution the focus shifted from the structural interventions discussed at the previous meeting, to more ideological and political interventions that were seen as necessary for the proper response to the 11th Plenum. The motivation of this new intervention was the recognition on the part of the APO that "party work is the basis for every artistic production."[632] Tying political mass work to cultural success supported the core concepts addressed by Honecker earlier that year. Again the decisions of the APO

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[629] BA DR 117 27692 SED-Betriebsorganisation APO I 17 November 1966.
[630] Geiss, p. 42.
[631] Gieske, p. 41.
[632] BA DR 117 27692 Entwurf der Entschliessung der APO I 25 November 1966, no pagination.

reflect a process of downward movement of ideological directives, as well as of the awareness of these directives on the part of the APO membership. The downward movement of these directives in this fashion provides a window into determining the true impact of ZK directives and reports on film. While awareness and compliance are not the same thing, it is clear from this APO report and the prior one that November, that, at minimum, the leadership of the APO were supportive of the need to achieve the party's goals, and to translate the party's beliefs into reality in films. Both documents demonstrate a clear understanding of, and support for, the changes supported by Honecker the previous summer.

Support for the party's principles was further shown in this meeting through a dedication to acting in a leadership capacity within the studio. The APO, in its resolution, stated that, "the APO must be aware of its leading role and responsibility for the entire of film production."[633] While the APO members were working to implement the ZK's ideals, they were also given leeway in regard to how they would do this and what that implementation would look like, creating a system in which the APO understood its own role, while being given room for action by the party's leadership. Again the members of the APO identified the need for greater party work and leadership, and stated that they needed to fill this role.[634] Self-identification of the need greater leadership from party members meant that they would have to take a larger role in guiding the totality of DEFA production.

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[633] BA DR 117 27692 Entwurf der Entschliessung der APO I 25 November 1966.
[634] BA DR 117 27692 Entwurf der Entschliessung der APO I 25 November 1966.

In turn this would allow them to take a larger role in ensuring ideological and thematic purity at DEFA and within film production. Taking this role on themselves showed that the members of APO I, the APO for directors, writers, and dramaturges at the feature film studio, understood the need for them to respond to the challenges from the ZK, and to show their willingness to take a role in overseeing film production. In part this stemmed from the famously contentious response to the 11th Plenum by members of the APO I.[635] Their response to the challenges of the party's leadership indicated an understanding of the need to fully back the party's interpretations, and not just the socialist project. Simultaneously this involved a moment of bottom-up action, in that the members of APO I were trusted in this role and were trusted to take part in overseeing ideological work at DEFA. The APO members identified this role in their discussion of the need to take the ideological lead in film production.[636] This level of trust for lower level party members reveals the degree to which the ZK actively relied on members of the lowest forms of party groups to oversee important tasks. Andrew Port describes a similar phenomenon as emerging in factories at the same time, contending that emergent workers' brigades were given significant amounts of authority in carrying out party tasks in the 1960s.[637] Faith in the lowest levels of the party fits with the broad movement of filmmakers' views away from those that adhered to the tightest levels of state guidance and toward more experimental filmmaking.[638] The *Gegenwartsfilme* of the

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[635] See my discussion in my previous chapter.
[636] BA DR 117 27692 Entwurf der Entschliessung der APO I 25 November 1966.
[637] Port, p. 196, and Hübner, p. 225.
[638] Feinstein, p. 196.

late 1960s, in particular *Jahrgang 1945*, and *Das Mädchen auf dem Bett*, 1966 and 1967 respectively, represent this trend.[639] While *Jahrgang 1945* was censored, it nevertheless showed the willingness of filmmakers to engage in experimentation even after the 11th Plenum.

1967: Empowering the APOs

Downward pressure, from both within, and external to DEFA continued into 1967. The party groups at KAGs worked to interpret the messages sent from APOs and the BPO in regard to proper political action. In KAG Babelsberg, the party group actively attempted to address the ideals presented by APO I the previous fall, discussing, in particular, the need to bring more filmmakers into the party.[640] The report on this meeting, while not a full transcript, provides insight into the overall understanding of party issues by members of the KAG party group. As a report on the meeting, and not a full transcript, it provides a flatter overview of what happened, but nevertheless gives insight into the overall decisions of the meeting, while not providing insight into any level of discussion. The need for increased party membership stemmed from the belief, by the members of the party group, that the majority of non-party members lacked a full awareness of all of the lessons of the 11th Plenum, and thus needed to be more completely educated.[641] Linked to this process was the ability for the party members within the KAG to fully oversee the production process. By increasing the total number of party members within

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[639] Feinstein, p. 196.
[640] BA DR 117 27692 Parteigruppe der KAG Babelsberg 7 January 1967, no pagination.
[641] BA DR 117 27692 Parteigruppe der KAG Babelsberg 7 January 1967.

the KAG those in the party group would have a greater say in the nature of the films produced, and thus fulfill the directives of the APO from the previous fall. Part of the recruitment of new party members involved the educational goals of encouraging all filmmakers to understand the directives of the 11th Plenum and post-Plenum interpretations of film. An overall increase in the number of party members within the KAG would further this process and would aid in ensuring that all films operated within the guidelines established by the party.

The need to guarantee that the filmmakers at DEFA had a complete understanding of the decisions of the party was an oft-repeated theme. At the meeting of the APO I later that month the members discussed the need to fully prepare for the upcoming 7th Party Day and therein to embrace the upcoming decisions on culture and cultural policy.[642] Doing this would allow for filmmakers to continue to make films which would raise the GDR to a, for the party, higher cultural and political level, and would simultaneously avoid the errors of making films with supposed artistic and ideological problems.[643] Implicitly tied into this was the continued imperative to broaden the party membership at DEFA and to ensure that party members disbursed their knowledge to non-party filmmakers. In so doing they would act on the party's lesson that, "party actions are the basis for all cultural production."[644] Repeating these values and interpretations proved critical for the membership of the APO to fully act in line with how the party understood the nature of cultural production.

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[642] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der APO I 30 January 1967 no pagination.
[643] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der APO I 30 January 1967.
[644] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der APO I 30 January 1967

From the perspective of the party, the values of the party provided a firm basis upon which DEFA filmmakers worked to produce their films. As part of their effort to implement the party's ideals,the filmmakers within APO I stated the need, " to be true to the Leninist norms of party life, the members of the KAG need to fulfill their political-ideological leadership tasks on a daily basis".[645] The APO itself placed an immense level of pressure on its members in using this party language. While standard terminology, the charge was one in which the APO members would be expected to continuously, and without failure, direct, and correct, the actions of KAG members regardless of their party affiliation. From these party activities the members of the APO were to be able to take a leading role in guiding the production of the entire studio.[646] The push for the APO to take a more active part emerged from the desire of the APO members to fulfill the directives issued by the BPO the previous fall, and in turn from the policy suggestions of Honecker and the ZK the previous summer. Continuing the themes from the prior fall, the members of the APO acknowledged the party's solutions to problems with the filmmaking process. Within these strictures filmmakers could fully act in line with the ideals of the 11th Plenum and to promote the beliefs of the party as they related to film production. The APO's decision provides insight into the willingness of APO members to act on the beliefs of the party, and to fulfill these beliefs in their films.

Concerns about the ability of party members within DEFA to act as leaders within the studio continued to emerge that summer. The BPO delegates' conference

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[645] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der APO I 30 January 1967.
[646] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der APO I 30 January 1967.

reflected a serious focus on the desire of the members to fulfill the directives of the 7th Party Day and to thereby fully realize "the goals of the Bitterfeld Weg."[647] The first presentation at the Party Activist Day stated that the members of the party had engaged in serious discussion and seminars in the previous weeks in order to fully understand the Bitterfeld Weg and the decisions of the 7th Party Day.[648] Party leadership and activism could only fully be realized when the average members took it upon themselves to be disciplined and ready for the "ideological struggle in their day-to-day activities."[649] Linking the success of party leaders with the willingness of average members to continually and performatively adhere to party norms, served to provide a connection between all aspects of filmmaking and the ideological teachings of the party. Oversight in regard to film production would thus be linked to viewing non-party aligned productions as ideologically suspect and thereby antithetical to the success of the GDR, in that they did not engage in party activities.

The ideological struggle between East and West became centered, at least for BPO members, within the feature film studio at DEFA. This struggle would not just be between party members and non-party members, but also, from the encouragement for party members to actively engage in the ideological struggle every day, would exist within each party member and be presented through their

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[647] BA DR 117 Vorl S 308 Parteiaktivtagung der BPO im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 27 June 1967, p, 1.
[648] BA DR 117 Vorl S 308 P Parteiaktivtagung der BPO im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 27 June 1967, p. 1.
[649] BA DR 117 Vorl S 308, Parteiaktivtagung der BPO im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 27 June 1967 p. 3.

ability to understand and act on the party's principles at all times. For the BPO delegates this would allow party members to fulfill the Leninist party norms inherent in party membership, and thereby prepare them to fight against the party's ideological opponents.[650] Effectively this charged BPO members not only with external propagation of the party's ideology, but also with internally promoting a correct interpretation of SED thought. Ideally for the BPO leadership the internal struggle would take place not just within the party, but also within each party member, so that they would constantly strive to be perfect followers of the party.

The repetition of these principles and ideals by the BPO, APO, and KAG members in the fall of 1966 through the summer of 1967 indicates a fundamental internal shift within the party's self analysis of how its members should relate to one another. Past discussions focused almost exclusively on the implementation of the party's values, and paid little attention to the direct ideological work involved in that process. At this point, however, a shift occurred in which party members had to stop merely following the party's directives, and instead were expected to actively enforce the party's teachings. In part this came in response to the changes in attitude at the highest levels of the party after the 11th Plenum. No longer could filmmakers be fully trusted to implement ideals on their own, at least not without strong encouragement to focus on the inherent "ideological struggle" involved with the filmmaking process. Filmmakers thus had to focus more and more on the ideological nature of film as a medium, and to view their films as tools in a broad

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[650] BA DR 117 Vorl S 308, Parteiaktivtagung der BPO im VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme 27 June 1967 p. 20.

ideological contest, and, at least in part this involved a reversion to the early 1950s and the rejection of peaceful ideological coexistence that emerged at the end of the 1950s and with the 6th Party Day.

The focus on ideology in film, specifically, came in the analysis of *Ich war Neuenzehn* produced by the KAG "Babelsberg" in October 1967. The film, which I will cover in detail at the end of the chapter, tells the story of a German exile Lieutenant in the Red Army in the closing weeks of World War II, as his unit pushes towards Berlin and liberates villages and the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. The analysis focused not only on the content of the film, but also on the structure behind the production and how it related to the Second Bitterfeld Conference. For the authors, the quality of the film came explicitly from the interrelationship between the director, Konrad Wolf, and the dramaturges, as well as the HV Film overseers, including Anton Ackermann.[651] The interaction of these groups behind the production of the film, indicates the willingness of DEFA filmmakers to live out the values of the second Bitterfeld Conference, and to understand the need for strong connections between the structures within DEFA and the overseeing bodies at the HV Film. This analysis from the KAG went so far as to credit the HV Film with the success of the film stating that, "significant help, especially in the writing, came from Anton Ackermann, who took charge of the political guidance of the film"[652] Linking the willingness of filmmakers to coordinate with HV Film to the success of

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[651] BA DR 117 27692 Zur Verwirklichung des Bitterfelder Weges in der KAG „Babelsberg" 16 October 1967, no pagination.
[652] BA Dr 117 27692 Zur Verwirklichung des Bitterfelder Weges in der KAG „Babelsberg".

the film showed that for the KAG the ability to follow through with the party's directives formed an inherent part of filmmaking.

1968: The ZK Tries to Control Film Production

The fundamental shifts in the relationships between the BPO, the APOs, and the KAGs continued into 1968. From the openness of the early 1960s the greater controls developed more fully. Members of the KAG "Johannisthal" took the time to report their internal party group elections to APO I, while at the same time APO I issued a similar report to the BPO of the Feature Film Studio.[653] The similarity between these two reports indicates an upward flow of information from within the party groups at DEFA. Minutiae, up to and including the election of officers within the party groups, found their way into the hands of the highest level party authorities at DEFA. As with the developments in downward pressure on ideological action the previous year, these reports indicate a far stricter control structure within DEFA, than had existed prior to the 11th Plenum. The information flow of minute details to the party leadership at DEFA reveals the new methods of control by which the BPO could obtain information on the beliefs and actions of non-party members within KAGs.

Included within the details of the report from KAG "Johannisthal" was that they had received word that in March Frank Beyer would be readmitted to the party organization at DEFA.[654] Beyer's expulsion from the party came as a direct result of his role in the creation of *Spur der Steine* and became the means by which the party

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[653] BA DR 117 27763 Gruppe „Johannisthal 18 1 68, no pagination and DEFA Studio für Spielfilme BPO-APO I 8 3 68.
[654] BA DR 117 27763 Gruppe „Johannisthal 18 1 68, no pagination.

sought to punish him for his supposed transgressions. While two years is a long time to be removed from a workplace, the SED did seek to, at least theoretically, reintegrate Beyer back into the filmmaking process. This did not fully happen until the early 1970s with Beyer's work on *Jakob der Lügner*, but it nevertheless remains notable that he was brought back into the party organization within two years of being removed and a full four years before he began to work on another film. Beyer's experience was not unique, but rather followed a similar trend with cultural producers who had been removed from the party, most notably the experience of Walter Janka.[655]

These reports focused as much on minutiae, as they did commentaries on the abilities of the party leadership at the lowest levels to fulfill their duties. As much as they focused on ideological issues, they also made sure to engage in symbolic tasks, such as reaffirming their connection with the Vietnamese people.[656] For the members of the KAG, and APO I the most important tasks were to ensure that "films accurately documented our Marxist worldview and contributed to the development of socialist persons."[657] Again, the push for a stronger emphasis on ideology in filmmaking came from within. These reports reveal the willingness of filmmakers at the KAG and APO to work within the party's overarching ideological goals, those being primarily that films contributed to the ideological development of filmgoers

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[655] As I detailed in Chapter 2, Janka was imprisoned for his stance on the Hungarian Revolution, only to emerge in the early 1960s as a dramaturge at DEFA after his release. For more information on Janka see Greider *The East German Leadership* p. 110.
[656] BA DR 117 27763 DEFA Studio für Spielfilme BPO-APO I 8 3 68.
[657] BA DR 117 27763 Gruppe „Johannisthal 18 1 68, no pagination and DEFA Studio für Spielfilme BPO-APO I 8 3 68.

and that they reflected the party's interpretation of the reality of life in the GDR. Active adherence to such goals served as a counterpoint to the party's criticisms from the 11th Plenum, as well as from internal party reports from 1966 and 1967. It is, at the same time, important to note that these were internal reflections, and not commentaries from the party hierarchy. That analysis came in the form of a ZK report issued in February 1968.

In the eyes of the ZK the leadership within DEFA had not fully succeeded in their tasks. Party members at DEFA, "in particular the directors have in opposition to their duties, have affirmed various ideological-political positions."[658] While vague, the critique by the ZK functioned as a means to argue that DEFA directors had not stayed true to the SED's ideological line. A very clear disconnect existed between the perceptions of the APO members at DEFA and the ZK members overseeing their production. At the same time as the APO and KAG members explicitly praised one another for their ability to lead the production process, and implicitly therein to fulfill the directives of the ZK, ZK members actively attacked the ability of these very same filmmakers to understand the party's beliefs.[659] The purported diverse political-ideological stances of DEFA filmmakers functioned for the ZK to undermine the successes of the 7th Party Day in its guiding role in the

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[658] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm 16 February 1968, no pagination.
[659] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm 16 February 1968, no pagination and BA DR 117 27763 Gruppe „Johannisthal 18 1 68, no pagination and DEFA Studio für Spielfilme BPO-APO I 8 3 68.

filmmaking process.[660] This very different perception of the situation stemmed, presumably, from the fact that the ZK perceived their directives to be fully clear despite the fact that even at the 7th Party Day members of the ZK spoke in vague terms about ideological quality and direction.

Partly this situation stemmed from the fundamental fact that the SED's highest levels never fully produced clear guidance in terms of how exactly filmmakers were to produce ideologically strong films. Instead the party leadership repeated the same broad directives time and again and clamped down on DEFA when the filmmakers did not meet the unknowable standards of the party. Even within the ZK document, the party leadership did not provide any clear terms, or any clear definitions for the language they were using to describe the failure of DEFA's filmmakers. Rather than provide clear discussions of how to improve films, the ZK authors focused on broad based declarations such as, "a good historical film is better than a bad film about the present."[661] While this may seem like a fairly obvious statement, particularly when the descriptors "good" and "bad" are directly related to the artistic-ideological quality of the films, it was nevertheless important from the perspective of the ZK members. As they had argued repeatedly in the previous two years, the ZK leadership, and party members as a whole, were displeased with DEFA's continued focus on the *gegenwarts*, or contemporary,

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[660] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm 16 February 1968, no pagination

[661] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm 16 February 1968, no pagination

film.[662] While the party had pushed for a deeper focus on the everyday experiences of workers, they did not mean this in the same sense that filmmakers interpreted it in *gegenwarts* films. The contemporary films were focused both on everyday experiences and the current state of the GDR, whereas the party's ideal focus was a more dissociated everyday experience that was not inherently grounded in the exact historical moment of the GDR at that point. Interestingly, Feinstein argues that it was precisely at this point that the *gegenwarts* film became more popular among audiences, albeit with a more explicit political focus.[663] The focus of the ZK on the need to support historical films helps to explain why even *gegenwarts* films in that era had historical elements.[664]

Even the directives aimed at the party leadership, which again directly contradict the APO and KAG leaders' self-perception, were steeped in broad terminology with no real suggestions. One directive was simply that, "the ideological work should be, generally, strengthened."[665] Within the ZK's conceptualization of ideological work, this was a very specific order that could, and would, be easily carried out by DEFA filmmakers and party members. However, given that the APO and KAG members already believed that they had successfully implemented this in the prior year, it is clear that the ZK members had little

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[662] See SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm, and SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 Über einige Probleme des spielfilmschaffen der DEFA

[663] Feinstein, p. 197.

[664] Feinstein, p. 197 and Harhausen, p. 40.

[665] SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm 16 February 1968, no pagination.

understanding of the realities on the ground for APO and KAG members. Effectively, this meant that the ZK fundamentally did not understand that APO and KAG members believed themselves to be active adherents to the SED's beliefs and to be properly enacting the SED's directives.

Simultaneously, however, the broadness of the directive did reveal the implicit trust on the part of ZK members for APO, BPO, and KAG members to be able to carry out these directives with minimal guidance. Part of the decentralization process of the late 1950s involved increased trust in the ability of small party groups within DEFA to fully carry out ideological directives. While seemingly paradoxical, the practice of sending out broad directives with minimal guidance and continual criticism, was in fact logical from the party's perspective. The lowest levels of the party had to understand the party's ideological position, and to thereby implement it through their films, with no real guidance. For the SED this practice functioned as a moment of continued decentralization and diffusion of power, by allowing the filmmakers the interpretive space to implement their directives with little guidance, and thus a return to the policies of the late 1950s. In effect, this system was one in which the higher levels of the party had to inherently trust that the lower levels would, with some criticism, follow through with even the broadest directive in a way that aligned with the party's beliefs. This trust lay at the core of the decentralization program, and allowed for a degree of leeway for the lower levels of the party in interpreting directives.

In contrast to the portrayal of the successes of the APO and KAG leadership, by these groups, the BPO, also in February 1968, released a report, which was

extraordinarily similar to the one issued by the ZK the previous day. The timing of these two reports, as well as the similar themes, presents a clearer picture of the downward movement of the ZK's perspective to the BPO. In particular, the two focused on the need for a strengthening of ideological work on the part of DEFA filmmakers.[666] While not too dissimilar from the reports of KAG Johannisthal and APO I, the BPO report nevertheless focused on different questions than those two documents. This difference, presumably, reflected not just the nature of the BPO as a higher-level party entity, but also from the closer place ideologically that the BPO leadership occupied relative to the ZK in comparison to the membership of the APO and KAG. At the same time, the BPO leaders did not engage in the level of critique found in the ZK Kultur document, instead their plan looked to the future and provided, again vague, means by which they could achieve better ideological expression. For the most part the BPO stated that their goals could only be achieved through "films with high artistic quality and the broadest ideological awareness attached to economic efficiency."[667] Much like the ZK, instead of providing specifics, the BPO members instead posited a general path to ideological compliance.

In part the path presented by the BPO fit with that of the ZK, while not fully adhering to all of its ideals. Differentiation between the two functioned more as a sign of openness within the SED than as a sign of fundamental disagreements or

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[666] BA DR 117 27692 Plan der massenpolitischen Arbeit 19 February 1968, no pagination, and SAPMO BA DY 30 IV A2 9.06 122 über die Ergebnisse der Beratung der Kulturabteilung des ZK Culture über den Film und der Stoffentwicklung im DEFA-Studio der Spielfilm.

[667] BA DR 117 277692 Plan der massenpolitischen Arbeit 19 February 1968, no pagination.

rebellion. Spaces for discussion and debate were an inherent aspect of the party structure of the SED, and their presence in the discussions of ideological presentation in the spring of 1968 were not an outlier, but rather a normative aspect of the system. Despite the top down informational structure of the SED, there was always an opportunity within the party for members to interpret how to implement the directives from the top. In part this stemmed from the nature of the SED and its philosophy of democratic centralism. Rather than clamping down on information from below, the SED doubled down on the emphasis that ideological stability came from the bottom, and that it was up to the filmmakers within the APO to realize the ideals of the party.

1969: Bottom Up Attempts at Ideological Discussion

Efforts by lower level party members to realize the goals of the party continued into 1969. Lower level party members used the degree of openness available to them in interpreting party directives to apply their own interpretive meaning to these directions. Konrad Wolf, speaking at the party group meeting of KAG "Babelsberg" in March declared that, "in the area of socialist art the task before all others is to develop socialist personalities."[668] Wolf directly mimicked the broadest party interpretations, and directly applied a core party ideal to his own speech. At the same time, Wolf's ideals were echoed in the ideological plans of the

[668] BA DR 117 27692 KAG Babelsberg Parteigruppe der SED 11 March 1969 no pagination.

BPO that May.[669] It was not that Wolf's ideas moved from the KAG to the BPO, but instead that he presented a standard interpretation of the function of filmmaking, and the BPO in its plans reiterated that understanding.

Filmmakers functioned as the lynchpin in the SED's ideological plans, and it was only when they believed in and supported the party's direction that it could come to fruition at a national level. It is clear that filmmakers like Konrad Wolf understood this and wanted to act on that knowledge, as well as to encourage his fellow filmmakers to follow his lead. Wolf's statements at the meeting of the KAG Babelsberg reveal much higher degree of acceptance of SED ideology by lower level party members than is normally assumed in this era. Most historical studies focus on the period of aesthetic malaise and transpose it into the relationship between DEFA and the SED, whereas Wolf's statements indicate that DEFA filmmakers responded to the party's directives with enthusiasm and a desire to see them realized.[670] Wolf went so far as to declare that the only way for socialist personalities to be promoted through art was for "..the person of the artist to stand at the peak and minimize political-ideological risks."[671] Wolf appeared to call for the artists themselves to take the responsibility and stand at the forefront of the production of works. In so doing, he suggested, they would limit the overall input into products and theoretically minimize the possibility that products would be created that went against the party's beliefs.

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[669] BA DR 117 26394 Betriebsparteiorganisation DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme Babelsberg Plan der ideologischen Arbeit der BPO bis 31 December 1969, 13 May 1969, no pagination.
[670] Berghahn, p. 172, Feinstein, p. 195, and Schittly, p. 154-160.
[671] BA DR 117 27692 KAG Babelsberg Parteigruppe der SED 11 March 1969.

Building on Wolf's statement the membership of the BPO concurred at the delegates' conference as to the importance of socialist film in the GDR. They declared that, "… the decisions of the 7th Party Day and the ZK show the importance of the role of socialist film to societal development."[672] Wolf again proffered an interpretation of the integral role of socialist film, and socialist filmmakers, that BPO members later repeated. The agreement with Wolf by other KAG members show that he was not alone in this belief, and that filmmakers who were party members had a strong basic understanding of what the ZK wanted.[673] At the same time, the discussions at the KAG that the filmmakers had indicate that they did not have a completely clear understanding of what they were to do in particular. Instead, they repeated, with minimal increased specificity, the language of the BPO and ZK, demonstrating at minimum an ability to use the party's language to describe their plans. Because, obviously, these documents do not reveal the actual convictions of speakers or writers, one has to infer real views from other kinds of "documentation," including analysis of the films produced by DEFA artists such as *Ich war Neunzehn* by Konrad Wolf.

The understanding of the path to achievement of the party's beliefs, however, differed between the BPO and the APO and KAG in one major regard: the level of attention paid to the Bitterfeld Weg. While the BPO delegates' conference focused

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[672] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz 26 April 1969, no pagination.

[673] BA DR 117 27692 KAG Babelsberg Parteigruppe der SED 11 March 1969. The records of the party members' experiences contrasts sharply with some of the secondary literature on this period, in particular Schittly's assessment in *Zwischen Regie und Regime*, p. 161-163.

heavily on the need to follow the Bitterfeld Weg, and to follow it, in order to properly create socialist art, the discussions at the KAG and APO level fundamentally did not focus on the Bitterfeld Weg.[674] This differentiation between how to ensure the proper ideological content in films reveals a fundamental separation between the ZK and BPO level and the lower levels of the party's structure. In comparison to the ZK's pronouncements, the interpretations of the party's beliefs articulated by members of the KAG and APO-lower level committees within the SED focused more on practical methods of achieving ideological purity. While ordinary party members never did provide a clear definition of their ideological tasks, they did seem to care more about the practicality of their tasks than whether their duties related to broad ideological directives. In effect, the members of the KAG and APO did not reject the need to follow the Bitterfeld Weg; instead they maintained a position that internal development was necessary.[675] This stance was in fact fully in line with the premises of the Bitterfeld Weg, and as such they could, and did, follow with this line of thought while not explicitly discussing it as such.

Differentiating between explicit discussion and implicit agreement is critical when assessing the function, and nature, of cultural interpretation at this point. While the ZK and the BPO continuously focused on the need to reaffirm the Bitterfeld Weg, the APO and KAG members moved beyond this limiting interpretation in favor of functionally living the ideals of the Bitterfeld Weg. They thus aimed to implement the beliefs of the party, as set out by the ZK, without

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[674] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz and BPO-APO I Entschließungs-Entwurf 7 April 1969, no pagination.
[675] BA DR 117 27692 KAG Babelsberg Parteigruppe der SED 11 March 1969.

actually discussing them in the same language as the party leadership. Splitting from the official language and focus of the party did not signify an act of rejection on the part of filmmakers, but instead a means of achieving the party's goals while speaking in more specific language. As opaque as they were, phrases like "socialist film" and "acting in a socialist manner as an artist" were far clearer than the admonition to "follow the Bitterfeld Weg".[676] By presenting cultural work using clearer terminology the filmmakers at the KAG and APO level demonstrated functional acceptance of the goals of the party, and the ability to turn the party's phrases into clearer directives and actionable concepts.

The interactions between DEFA and filmmakers in 1969 exemplify their relationship throughout the latter 1960s and until the transition between Ulbricht and Honecker in 1971. Stability in this era provided a critical function not only in the cultural sector, but also throughout the entirety of society. Given the important role of stability at DEFA in regard to its relationship with the SED, the ability of filmmakers at the lowest levels to fully understand the meaning of the ZK's directives proved imperative. The willingness of filmmakers to actively follow the direction of the ZK, allowed for the ideology of the SED to more fully come through in the films produced at DEFA. In part this dissemination involved not just pro-socialist messages and proper modeling for filmgoers, but also engaging in a less critical manner with the party structures in the GDR.

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[676] BA DR 117 27692 Entschließung der Delegiertenkonferenz and BPO-APO I Entschließungs-Entwurf 7 April 1969

Certainly not all of the films produced in this era were fully embraced by the party. Rather, in the ZK's eyes, they apparently achieved a fuller realization of the party's ideals than had the films of the first half of the 1960s. Despite this, the party never fully embraced DEFA's production in this era. It criticized, for example, DEFA's purported overemphasis on *Gegenwartsfilme* and the contemporary situation in the GDR. These films should be separated from the emergence of an entirely new type of film, the *Alltags* or everyday, film that rose to prominence in this era and continued into the 1970s. The key differentiation between these two filmic types is what separates accepted from rejected film. The *Gegenwartsfilme* were films set in the GDR at that time, whereas *Alltags* films focused on the everyday life of the GDR's citizens. While containing similar features the key difference between the two was that an *Alltags* film was not inherently set in the same historical moment and focused on day to day actions, while the *Gegenwartsfilme* was set in that historical moment, but did not always deal with day to day lives of average citizens. For the traditionalists within the ZK, historical films were more important than films set in the present. Thus, they were not only the focus of DEFA's production but became among the more celebrated films of the late Ulbricht and early Honecker years. The most prominent examples are *Ich war Neunzehn*, *Goya,* and *Jakob der Lügner*.

Ich war Neunzehn: Ideology and Biography

Konrad Wolf's semi-autobiographical film, *Ich war Neunzehn* represents many of the ideological trends that emerged in the latter half of the 1960s. At its core the film covers the importance of the German-Soviet relationship, and works to

remind viewers that the victory over Nazism came through work of anti-Nazi Germans, as well as the Red Army. This portrayal functions as a then present commentary on the need for strengthened GDR-USSR relations. In 1968 the GDR crafted a new constitution that, for the first time, mentioned the inherently strong relations between the GDR and the Soviet Union, as well as the importance of the friendship between the two states. Moreover, the film, coming only a year after the Prague Spring, serves as a greater reminder of the integral nature of maintaining GDR-Soviet relations.

The film is the story of the final months of the war, narrated by the protagonist, 19 year-old Grego Hecker,, a German émigré who was a Lieutenant in the Red Army. Gregor's unit is responsible for occupying small villages in the push for Berlin, and in the process interacts heavily with civilians, both those who helped the Nazis, and leftists. As the Red Army approaches Berlin they encounter more of the Nazis horrors, and encounter former KZ inmates. The unit, after overrunning the suburbs of Berlin, reaches Sachsenhausen and liberates the inmates there. Gregor then encounters a former family friend who laments that it was the industrialists and army who pushed Germany towards war. The message is aimed both at the soldiers in the film, and the audience, as a message against both capitalism and any form of militarism.

Stylistically the film maintained its message through the use of intermittent voiceover narration, which was directed at the audience, and historical recreations. The voiceover ranges from informational statements, such as updates on the movement of the Red Army unit that the narrator, Gregor Hacker, is a part of, to

direct commentaries on the defeat of Nazism. The use of the narration allows Wolf, who served as both director and script writer for the film, to encourage the viewer to remember the horrors of Nazism, as well as to remember the need to fight against Fascism. When taken alongside both brief historical reenactments, and moments where Red Army officers speak with freed concentration camp inmates, the narrations create a direct message to the viewer about the rise of Nazism, its horrors, and the method of its defeat. In showing how camp guards at Sachsenhausen systematically murdered tens of thousands of people, the film directly engages the viewer, and acts to remind all viewers of the horrors of the Holocaust, and specifically of the brutal treatment of Soviet POWs in Concentration Camps. The focus on Soviet POWs, and the use of Sachsenhausen as the site of liberation, functions as a reminder, or educational moment, to the viewer that the Nazis were exceptionally vicious in their treatment of Soviet POWs, particularly in the fall of 1941.

These stylistic elements, combined with the overall plot, provide the viewer with a direct education of a positive view of the Red Army's advance into Germany. The film covers the final weeks of the war through the eyes of Gregor Hacker a lieutenant in the Red Army and the son of Communist emigrants who moved to the USSR in the early 1930s. Hacker serves initially as the commandant of the occupying forces of Bernau, as well as a translator for propaganda announcements aimed at Nazi forces, and for Red Army officers who negotiate surrender agreements with Nazi officers. Hacker's place as a translator gives him access to the frontline, while, for the most part, removing him from direct combat scenarios. The

only scenes of combat in the film focus on attempts by the Wehrmacht to breakout of the Red Army's encirclement of Berlin, and when the SS attacks German soldiers who surrender to the Soviets. The debates among Nazi soldiers, and between Red Army soldiers in the film provide insight into the complexity of the situation at the end of the war. After the film demonstrates the liberation of Sachsenhausen it then portrays a May Day celebration amongst the Red Army with former inmates as guests at the celebration. It is at this point that the film most directly addresses the viewer with commentaries on the role of capitalism and the German military in the rise of Nazism in Germany. These commentaries, provided by the character of a former Sachsenhausen inmate, present a clear message to the viewer that only under the auspices of major industry, finance capital, and the militarism of pre-war Germany could Nazism come to power. This message combines with the final narration, which mourns the inability to shoot the Nazis who escaped, and contains an angry lamentation that there are still Nazis free in the world, but at the same time declares that they will always be hunted, in order to energize the viewer against the memory of Nazism.

When taken within the context of a post-11th Plenum DEFA *Ich war Neunzehn* serves as a rejoinder to the then popular *geenwartsfilme* and emerging *Alltagsfilme*. As a historical war film, it stands out against a background of contemporary focused filmmaking. In so doing, Wolf provides the viewer with a stark reminder of the foundations upon which GDR society was based, and the need to memorialize the actions of those who fought to bring down Nazism. Ideologically this fit well within the framework provided by the SED at the time, in that it relayed positive messages

about the USSR and the fight against fascism directly to the viewer. The film was not, however, a complete callback to the 1950s era of anti-fascist films in the GDR, but instead incorporated aesthetic shifts with thematic material that hearkened back to an earlier period of filmmaking. Combining the two allowed Wolf to reaffirm his dedication to party approved filmmaking, while simultaneously engaging with newer filmic techniques.

Conclusion

The period from 1966 to 1971 was not a completely stagnant one for DEFA, and its relationship with the SED continued to develop. Rather than exist as a period of limited artistic development and minimal interactions with the party, this period provided for significant aesthetic and stylistic changes in DEFA filmmaking. The emergence of the *Alltagsfilm* at the end of the period was precipitated by the continued dominance of the *gegenwartsfilme*. At the same time, the SED continued to engage in a dialogue with DEFA filmmakers as to the nature of film and cultural products. Top down, and bottom up, engagement within the SED between the ZK and DEFA filmmakers, continued throughout this period, and evidenced the inherent semi-democratic nature of the SED. Much like in earlier eras the top levels of the SED engaged in direct contact with filmmakers at DEFA with the hope of encouraging the filmmakers to produce films that would fall in line with the views of the party leadership. While this was, by and large, successful it was nevertheless a struggle for the ZK, as well as DEFA filmmakers, to come to mutual understanding as to what exactly a properly crafted film would look like. Thus, as in earlier periods,

the late 1960s can best be classified as one of continued transition in the relationship between the SED and DEFA.

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