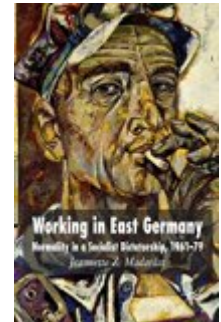


**Jeanette Z. Madarász.** *Working in East Germany: Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961-79.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 224 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-00160-2.



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This case study of five factories in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) seeks to understand working conditions after the 1961 building of the Berlin Wall. With *Working in East Germany*, Jeanette Z. Madarász joins an increasing number of scholars who describe the first years after the Wall as a period of both political and social stability. The study, part of a larger project on the normalization of rule in the GDR, focuses on the workplace, the most important place ideologically in a socialist state. By comparing and contrasting different scenes of employment, Madarász illustrates the negotiated nature of the GDR dictatorship during this crucial period in East German history.

Madarász emphasizes that, throughout its history, the GDR went through "political shifts" that shaped East German society. She rejects any single explanation or term to describe all of East German history and instead focuses her work on the period after the Berlin Wall was built. The GDR after 1961, she explains, was a society in which all players (state, party, and individuals) wanted to

come to terms with the ongoing existence of an East German state. Madarász argues that in these conditions, a change in societal interactions occurred in which the distinction between state and society narrowed. The East German population was integral to the shaping of social policy that brought about this transformation, which was "a reflection of the interaction between all levels of the East German state" (p. 3). Still, the "patriarchal state" was ultimately not able to provide all that individuals needed. By the end of the 1970s, therefore, East Germans reacted against state influence in their lives, and looked for means beyond the state to satisfy their individual needs.

The core of the book consists of five case studies that explore the diversity of experience in East German factories. Madarász employs a nice mix of institutions, including enterprises that predated the formation of the GDR, and ones that the East Germans built. She brings in both factories that were important to the state's economic priorities and ones that were far less so. She also is attentive to regional diversity, including two exam-

ples from Berlin (Transformatorenwerk Berlin and Berliner Glühlampenwerk), one from the Polish border (Halbleiterwerk Frankfurt/Oder) and two from more agrarian regions (Erdölverarbeitungswerk Schwedt and Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz).

Madarász focuses on factory politics more than the workers themselves. Each chapter thus first presents an overview of a factory and then concentrates on an aspect of its history relevant to understanding factory politics. For instance, her chapter on the Transformatorenwerk examines the role of central planners in the functioning of a factory, pointing to both the advantages in these interventions (securing more goods) and disadvantages (ineffectively meddling in factory policies). The next chapter discusses management's use of benefits such as childcare, sick leave, and housing to compensate for a lack of pay increases at the light bulb factory. Her chapter on Schwedt illustrates problems with the command economy in terms of accounting, indicating the lack of concrete production behind plan goals and supposed outputs. Her work also describes the use of foreign (Polish) workers to overcome the labor shortage at the Halbleiterwerk. Here, she points to persisting problems of discrimination against Polish workers in the GDR. Her final case study points to the importance of factories to East Germans' social life (as well as the labor market) in agrarian areas.

Many of these themes are familiar to the GDR specialist. Still, the strength of Madarász's argument comes from the details in each of these chapters. Through these five examples, she presents an overview of factory politics and life in the GDR that embraces distinctions between each example. Although all East German factories had to address labor relations, for instance, Madarász shows in her case studies and analysis how the labor force and its needs varied dramatically from factory to factory. As she makes clear, the working force itself was not homogenous, with different

groups requiring different strategies to satisfy their demands. Some factories employed primarily women; other factories engaged predominately young workers or men from agrarian regions. Those factories with employees who had long worked there shared a common identity as a working-class group with needs specific to their self-identification as socialist workers. She indicates as well the diversity of leaders and the methods they used to cope both with workers and central planners. Her work thus highlights that the negotiations that defined the lived experiences of East Germans were highly individualized and local in character. In this way, the sum of these case studies is indeed greater than the parts.

Madarász conducted extensive research for each case study in regional and factory archives. She also conducted interviews, excerpts of which appear at the end of each case study in a "voices" section. Much of her analysis of the workers' role in factories is based on Alf Luedtke's concept of *Eigensinn* to explain workers' interactions with administrators.[1] This theoretical approach further supports her argument that workers helped shape the contours of policy within the GDR by pursuing their individual interests. While she rightly points out that these interviews must be understood in the context of the dramatic change that occurred in peoples' lives after 1989, these sections provide some of the most engaging and instructional material. I would have liked to have "heard" more worker voices throughout the chapters either from contemporary sources (for example, brigade reports) or from the interviews that she conducted later. The richness of material in brigade reports material from that area would have allowed for a more detailed examination of worker interest and self-regulation.

This work enhances our understanding of this understudied period of history. The five case studies indicate the diversity of workplace experiences in East German factories and, more importantly, point to ways in which East Germans

shaped their own lived experiences. Madarász's conclusions regarding the negotiated nature of change in factory culture during a period of stability in the GDR makes a well-researched and useful addition to the historical literature on both East Germany and labor relations more generally.

#### Note

[1]. Alf Lüdtke, "'Cash, Coffee-Breaks, Horseplay:' Eigensinn and Politics among Factory Workers in Germany circa 1900," in *Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process: Studies in Proletarian Class Formation*, ed. Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 65-96.

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