

THE PEOPLE'S DRINK:  
THE POLITICS OF BEER IN EAST GERMANY (1945 - 1971)

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis charts beer's development as a political subject in the Soviet Occupation Zone and German Democratic Republic from the end of the war in 1945 until the tenure of Erich Honecker in 1971. It argues that the cultural significance of beer in German society played a decisive role in determining the regime's policies in the brewing industry and the rhetoric surrounding beer in the media. An examination of economic statistics, government archival records, and daily East German newspapers demonstrates a clear push by the leadership to rebuild and revitalize the brewing industry in the GDR, as well as a rhetorical campaign to utilize beer as a symbol of shared cultural values with the population. Overall, the Socialist Party of East Germany publicly adapted German beer traditions to suit the ideological tenants of socialism so that it could retain the beverage's cultural capital while eliminating supposedly regressive drinking habits.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS<sup>1</sup>

<b>BArch-BL</b>	<i>Bundesarchiv – Berlin Lichterfelde</i>
<b>BZ</b>	<i>Berliner Zeitung</i> (East Berlin Newspaper)
<b>DAMW</b>	<i>Deutsche Amt für Material- und Warenprüfung</i> (German Office for Material and Goods Inspection)
<b>FRG</b>	Federal Republic of Germany
<b>GDR</b>	German Democratic Republic
<b>LMI</b>	<i>Lebensmittelindustrie</i> (Food Industry)
<b>MBL</b>	<i>Ministerium für Bezirkgeleitete- und Lebensmittelindustrie</i> (Ministry for District-Managed and Food Industry)
<b>MLI</b>	<i>Ministerium für Lebensmittelindustrie</i> (Ministry for the Food Industry)
<b>ND</b>	<i>Neues Deutschland</i> (East German Newspaper)
<b>NZ</b>	<i>Neue Zeit</i> (East German Newspaper)
<b>SAPMO</b>	<i>Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik</i>
<b>SED</b>	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party)
<b>SJDDR</b>	<i>Statistischen Jahrbücher der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik</i> (Statistical Yearbooks of the German Democratic Republic)
<b>SJDR</b>	<i>Statistischen Jahrbücher für das Deutsche Reich</i> (Statistical Yearbooks for the German Empire)
<b>SMAD</b>	<i>Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland</i> (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)
<b>Stako</b>	<i>Staatliches Getränkekontor</i> (State Beverage Office)
<b>VEB</b>	<i>Volkseigener Betrieb</i> (People-Owned Operation)
<b>VVB Brau- und Malz</b>	<i>Vereinigung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie</i> (Union of People-Owned Operations of the Brewing and Malting Industry)

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion I have used the German abbreviations for all institutions, as they appear in the source material and in my citations. The only English abbreviations used are for the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

## PROLOGUE:

### BEER; PRODUCT, PLEASURE, AND PASSION

In January 2015 I pulled on a pair of rubber boots and set about the task of assisting a professional brewer on a standard production day at a small-scale craft brewery in Pennsylvania. Beer, especially craft beer, has received much glorification in the past few decades as a high-minded combination of science and art, but as I shoveled several hundred pounds of steaming hot and soaking wet barley out of a converted dairy tank I was invariably reminded that for most of human history beer has been a product with very little glamour, but a great deal of hard labor. Whether it is made with the power of muscles or machinery, consistently producing good beer requires copious amounts of energy and resources, expert knowledge, and precision.<sup>1</sup>

This study approaches beer from a social, cultural, and political standpoint, while recognizing that one cannot separate the idea of beer from its material conditions. What this beverage means to people cannot be removed from the physical process of its creation or the physiological effects of its consumption. The first step in explaining any aspect of beer in modern Germany, therefore, is to lay out a clear description of exactly what the term “beer” refers to, what is involved in its production, and how it developed over time into the product that twentieth-century Germans would have recognized.

In many ways the history of beer in East Germany under a socialist regime continues an ancient and worldwide tradition. Almost every society has produced its own forms of beer at some point. However, for good or ill, the beverages that now dominate

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see the level of effort and intensity required for “home-brewing” or “*Hobbybrauen*” (hobby-brewing). A good resource is John Palmer, *How to Brew: Everything you Need to Know to Brew Beer Right the First Time* (Boulder, CO: Brewers Publications, 2006).

the world market are the result of Europe's centuries-old brewing traditions.<sup>2</sup> The first clear signs of brewing come from early settlements in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean basin, but as wine consumption came to dominate those areas during the Age of Antiquity, the practice of brewing receded northward, becoming particularly entrenched in Central Europe.<sup>3</sup> Archaeological evidence shows ancestors of the German people have been brewing beer since before the earliest written accounts of their existence.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when Roman authors began to describe the peoples of *Germania*, the social and dietary importance of beer appeared clearly in their reports.<sup>5</sup>

These ancient civilizations had the ability to produce beer because the fundamental brewing process is relatively simple, to the point that the earliest beers may have been created by accident. At its most basic, beer only requires three ingredients: grain, water, and yeast.<sup>6</sup> The grain must germinate to a certain extent so that the natural process of growth can break down complex proteins into starches, and enzymes can develop that will eventually convert those starches into simple sugars for the young plant

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Stewart, *The Drunken Botanist: The Plants that Create the World's Great Drinks* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Max Nelson, *The Barbarian's Beverage: A History of Beer in Ancient Europe* (London: Routledge, 2005) and Horst D. Dornbusch, *Prost! The Story of German Beer* (Boulder, CO: Brewers Publications, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> This definition of "German people," of course, presents a problem not easily solved, and one that is present in some ways throughout this study. For my purposes, "East Germans," simply refers to anyone who held citizenship in the German Democratic Republic after it was formed in 1949. I align my own definition of a historical "German" cultural heritage to what that population identified as its collective national past. Therefore, any deployment of the term "nation," within this study refers to a cultural and linguistic *idea* of German identity, as it appears in the primary sources.

<sup>5</sup> See Nelson, *The Barbarian's Beverage*; Richard W. Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Horst Dornbusch, "Germany," in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, ed. Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 389 – 394.

<sup>6</sup> All alcoholic beverages need water, fermentable sugar, and yeast, but beer must be primarily made from grain, as opposed to wine, which comes from fruit, and mead, which comes from honey. See Patrick E. McGovern, *Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 16, 39.

to eat. This procedure is referred to as *malting*.<sup>7</sup> The brewing process interrupts this natural system and utilizes the sugars for a different purpose. To make beer, the malted grains must soak in warm water so that the starches in the kernel can convert to sugar in a process called *mashing*.<sup>8</sup> Most likely as a result of trial and error, ancient people discovered that boiling the resulting concoction (*wort*) made stronger beer that fermented faster and did not spoil as quickly. However it happened, boiling became an integral part of the brewing process. Once the boiled wort has cooled, yeast, which occur naturally in the air and live on every surface, land in the mixture and eat the sugars that have been released. The yeast multiply, and as they consume sugar they produce both alcohol and carbon dioxide. After a few days, this process produces a somewhat sweet alcoholic beverage.<sup>9</sup> This is beer, at its simplest. The wide variety in beer styles results from the huge assortment of different grains used to make this beverage, the different strands of yeast employed in fermenting it, and the almost unlimited array of different herbs and spices available for flavoring.

From the Fertile Crescent of 10,000 B.C.E. to Germany in 1945 C.E. the most significant change to beer, in terms of the liquid itself, came with the increasing prominence of barley as the primary grain, and hops as the primary flavoring agent. Barley offers many biological advantages to the prospective brewer, mostly relating to its thick husk that assists in the mash and its high concentration of enzymes, which convert the starches into sugars. Though wheat, emmer, rice, rye, oats, and several other grains

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<sup>7</sup> Palmer, *How to Brew*, Ch. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Almost all terminology specific to brewing comes originally from German. mash (*Maisch*). *Lauter*, *Vorlauf*, *Sparge*, wort (*Würze*), etc.. For *mashing*, see Palmer, *How to Brew*, Ch. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, *The Drunken Botanist*, 32.



still find their way into some beers, malted barley has served as the dominant grain in European beer production for centuries.<sup>10</sup> Mashing barley, and other grains, produces a sweet liquid that tastes somewhat cloying when not balanced by other flavors. Material evidence shows that brewers over the millennia have used an enormous variety of herbs, spices, and roots to flavor their beer, including several that have since been proven poisonous.<sup>11</sup> Since the eleventh century, though, European beer makers have increasingly relied on a single plant for flavoring their product: hops. Hop flowers grow on a climbing vine, and when added to the boil during brewing they impart a bitter flavor and a pleasant aroma that ranges from piney to citrusy. Just as important, however, hops act as a natural preservative that fights off beer-spoiling bacteria. The transition to using hops as opposed to a medley of other ingredients did not happen all at once; it took centuries of converting individual brewers at a time when most beer production still took place in private homes.<sup>12</sup> The rising predominance of barley and hops led to the emergence of many popular styles of beer still produced today, but one particular type gained enormous popularity in the nineteenth century and transformed the beer market entirely within a hundred years.

Lager beers originated in Bavaria in the Late Middle Ages and developed into the most popular category of beer in Germany, and then in the entire world. The word lager originates from the German *lagern*, which means “to store,” and that effectively describes the difference between these beers and warm-fermented “ales.” Sometime around the

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<sup>10</sup> Colin J. West, “Barley,” in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, ed. Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90.

<sup>11</sup> Randy Mosher, *Tasting Beer: An Insider’s Guide to the World’s Greatest Drink* (North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2009), 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

fifteenth century, Bavarian brewers discovered that beers stored in cool or cold cellars during and after fermentation came out clearer, had a subtler taste, and lasted longer before succumbing to spoilage and off-flavors. Eventually, an entirely different strand of yeast developed that thrived in colder environments. Today, the difference between a lager and an ale revolves almost entirely around the choice of yeast, which determines the temperature needed for a good fermentation and maturation. Both families of beer contain a wide variety of substyles, ranging in color, flavor, and strength.<sup>13</sup> Different iterations on lager beer became popular throughout the German territories in the centuries leading from the Middle Ages into the modern era, but they could only be made when a cool place was available for the long period of conditioning (between two and six months). This meant that the environment, and seasonal weather patterns, played a large role in determining when and where lager brewing could take place.<sup>14</sup>

The true potential of lagers only emerged after the invention and development of mechanical refrigeration in the late nineteenth century. This new artificial climate control, combined with rapidly improving transportation technology and the discoveries of Louis Pasteur in preventing microbiological spoilage, led to an explosion in the popularity of lagers.<sup>15</sup> One new style of lager, developed in the Bohemian town of Pilsen in the 1840s, became the primary beneficiary of this new craze. These clear, bright-gold, generously hopped “pilsner” beers took the world by storm in the late nineteenth and

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<sup>13</sup> Horst Dornbusch, Michael Zepf, and Garret Oliver, “Lager,” in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, ed. Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 532 – 533.

<sup>14</sup> Mosher, *Tasting Beer*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Dornbush, Zepf, and Oliver, “lager,” 533.

early twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> Worldwide commercial beer production soared to levels never before experienced.<sup>17</sup> In Germany, the new pilsners competed heavily with the array of traditional lagers and ales unique to each region, eventually becoming the most popular style in the country. Despite this fact, however, pilsners remain less dominant in Germany than elsewhere, owing to the determination of many regions and localities to keep their distinctive beers. Overall, the predominance of lager beers, including many styles that originated in Germany, is one of the defining characteristics of German beer.

The Bavarian Beer Purity Law of 1516 represents another well known feature of modern German beer, and played a key role in the way that the brewing industries of East and West Germany developed after World War Two. In 1516, Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria saw fit to legally mandate the use of *only* barley, hops, and water (yeast was not yet discovered) in the production of beer, enacting a decree that is now commonly referred to as the *Reinheitsgebot*.<sup>18</sup>

Any history of German beer in the twentieth century must deal with this regulation as well as the myths that have emerged around it. In reality, Germans did not start using the term “*Reinheitsgebot*” until the period of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933).<sup>19</sup> It was not the first law to restrict brewers to certain ingredients, nor was it the first such law passed by a German noble. The ingredient list only represented one part of the law, which also set taxation and beer prices in Bavaria. Perhaps most importantly, the

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<sup>16</sup> Pete Brown, “Pilsner,” in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, ed. Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 651-652.

<sup>17</sup> Eline Peolmans and Johan F. M. Swinnen, “A Brief Economic History of Beer,” in *The Economics of Beer*, ed. Johan F. M. Swinnen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13-16.

<sup>18</sup> “Wird das noch gebraucht, oder kann das weg?” *Craftbeer: Magazin für Bierbraukunst*, no. 1, 2016, 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

admonition to only use barley instead of other grains stemmed primarily from Wilhelm's desire to stop brewers from competing with bakers for wheat and rye, thus driving up bread prices. The law did not aim at classifying those ingredients as inferior for beer making, although it did proscribe the use of many unsavory and unsafe components that had been common in brewing. Even then, the decree did not remain in its original form from 1516 onward. Most German states continued to allow beer production with other ingredients. In Bavaria, the government allowed other grains back into beer within a century, and the four-ingredient restriction did not come back into play until the 1800s.<sup>20</sup>

The modern version of the Bavarian Beer Purity Law emerged during the nineteenth century with the rising tide of German nationalism, and had a great deal to do with distinguishing German beer from foreign competition and setting barriers against cheaper imports. As Germany approached unification in 1871, proponents of the regulation, particularly Bavarian brewers, insisted that these beer standards be applied to all producers in Germany; eventually they got their way.<sup>21</sup> The German Reich began to enforce the Purity Law consistently across its territories in the first decade of the twentieth century. The new Weimar Republic modified the law slightly in 1923, keeping the four-ingredient restriction for all bottom-fermented (lager) beers, and allowing other ingredients like wheat and rye into top-fermented beers (ales).<sup>22</sup>

Thus, as Germany entered its darkest years of crisis between 1914 and 1945, its beer industry operated under the general guidelines of a 500-year-old regulation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>21</sup> Niel MacGregor, "One People, Many Sausages," Germany, Memories of a Nation (Podcast), *BBC Radio 4*, Oct. 9, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04k6rcj>.

<sup>22</sup> Horst Dornbusch and Karl-Ullrich Heyse, "Reinheitsgebot," in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, ed. Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 692-693.

However, the beer itself, the technology involved in its production, and the sheer scale of beer output represented something radically modern. In 1913, Germany's breweries produced about 6.9 billion liters of beer.<sup>23</sup> As a rough estimate, this required 3.6 billion pounds of grain, 87 million pounds of hops, and 34.6 billion liters of water just for the production phase.<sup>24</sup> For every drop of beer produced, the raw ingredients had to be cultivated, harvested, shipped to processing facilities (which for both hops and malt required specialized equipment), and transported to the brewery. The grain had to be ground in a motor-powered mill, combined with hot water in a large metal vat, and mixed (usually with motorized equipment). German brewers also used a method called "decoction" mashing, which involved drawing off some of the mash and boiling it before returning it to the main vat.<sup>25</sup>

Thereafter the wort traveled through heat-resistant conduits into another large metal vat, which was equipped with a heating element of some kind that could quickly bring it up to boil. Regardless of how this was done, it required a great deal of energy. The wort was held at a boil for an hour or longer, and then transferred again either into a separate open-air cooling vat, or through a specialized cooling device that brought the young beer down to room temperature. Once the beer was cooled it arrived at yet another vat (or tank) specially designed for storing it during its weeks of fermentation and conditioning. Every surface that the unfermented beer touched had to be thoroughly sanitized with industrial cleaners or boiling water. After several days of rapid

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<sup>23</sup> *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Reich* 1931, 134.

<sup>24</sup> These numbers are estimated from modern brewing techniques. They should not be taken for precise accuracy, but merely to suggest the scale of the industrial process.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Zepf, "decoction," in *The Oxford Companion to Beer*, edited by Garrett Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 281.

fermentation, the beer was brought down to lagering temperature (unless it was an ale), somewhere in the range of 45° - 55°F.<sup>26</sup> After all of that was completed, and the beer was ready to drink, it had to be carbonated by injecting pressurized CO<sup>2</sup> into the liquid, transferred through more sanitized tubing, and filled into sanitized bottles, kegs, or delivery tanks, which requires specially-designed equipment. Only then could the finished beer be delivered to the retail location where the customer could purchase it.<sup>27</sup> This description makes clear the enormous demands in labor, material, energy, and resources required in making beer; demands that the veteran brewers of Germany were well aware of as their ruined country and shattered economy emerged from World War Two.

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<sup>26</sup> Palmer, *How to Brew*, 101.

<sup>27</sup> American readers can easily visit their nearest brewery to obtain a firsthand view of this process, as most craft breweries will happily walk their customers through every step, explain every piece of equipment, and describe the work involved.

## INTRODUCTION

In April 1949, six months before the official establishment of the German Democratic Republic, the brewmaster at the VEB Radeberger Exportbrauerei near Dresden opined: “*Bier müßte Volksgetränk bleiben*” (Beer should remain the people’s drink).<sup>1</sup> Despite the political and social upheavals in GDR history, that is precisely what happened. Beer remained a drink of the people in the *Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, and, at least until 1978, it was *the* people’s drink. For proof of its popularity, one need look no further than the statistics for alcohol consumption in 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down. That year East Germans drank an average of 146.5 liters of beer per capita, the highest rate in the world.<sup>2</sup> While this quantity of beer consumption ranks quite high in twentieth century history, it alone does not represent an extraordinary fact. A far more curious reality is that the world’s leading beer-drinkers lived in a socialist state, the same one famous for a much-derided lack of quality consumer goods. The political leaders and economic functionaries of the GDR made the decision to rebuild, revitalize, and ultimately expand the brewing industry until the average citizen in East Germany drank more beer than in Czechoslovakia or West Germany. While not ignoring the importance of how they accomplished this feat, the primary objective of this study is to explain why they made that choice.

In the state-run economy of the GDR, the government held responsibility for ensuring that a steady supply of beer reached the people. Given the size and depth of this

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<sup>1</sup> “Jetzt wieder 400 Hektoliter täglich,” *NZ*, April 20, 1949. *Volksgetränk* has a somewhat ambiguous meaning in its original German, but is translated as “the people’s drink.”

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kochan, *Blauer Würger: So trank die DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2011), 77.

industry, the beer market commanded significant economic and political attention. The leaders of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) did not face any outside pressure to revitalize and grow the beer industry to such an impressive size. Moreover, while beer promised decent revenue for the state, the government kept prices relatively low, and never sought to draw more income from the populace even as it spent considerable amounts of hard currency in improving production. Had the brewing industry been allowed to stagnate or just slow down, all of those additional resources could have been used in other, high-profile sectors of the economy such as the auto and plastics industries, or the “1,000 Little Things of Daily Life.”<sup>3</sup> Yet the beer supply began to grow immediately upon the GDR’s foundation and continued to do so despite occasional setbacks until the country dissolved as a political entity. An analysis of these policies, and how the regime represented them to its citizens, shows how the SED leadership recognized and even used the cultural resonance of this product for its own ends under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht (1949 – 1971).

In this thesis, I argue that beer’s cultural significance in German society had the greatest impact in determining the East German leadership’s treatment of the people’s drink. In its handling of the brewing industry, and in its public rhetoric regarding beer, the socialist regime directly confronted historical continuities in German patterns of everyday consumption. Most East Germans conceived of “prosperity” as a life that

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<sup>3</sup> The 1,000 Little Things of Daily Life was a moniker for the SED’s campaign to improve consumer goods, with a particular aim at making domestic life easier. Katherine Pence, “A World in Miniature: The Leipzig Trade Fairs in the 1950s and East German Consumer Citizenship,” in *Consuming Germany in the Cold War*, ed. David Crew (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 24.



included ample beer. Thus, the state refused to risk unrest by shutting down the breweries to save resources, or capping beer production to stop rising consumption. A lack of effort by the leadership to keep up with demand and maintain standards of quality would have signaled a failure of the socialist project in Germany. The SED's understanding of the population's fondness for beer also manifested itself in a concerted program to capitalize on those attitudes by endorsing the beverage as a symbol of shared cultural values. Throughout this period, the state press and bureaucracy repeatedly endorsed beer traditions, brewing history, and connoisseurship.<sup>4</sup> The Party's association of beer with German identity preserved the *Volksgetränk* through a period of intensified criticism during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1950s, and ultimately led the regime to integrate it into the material and ideological push for socialist modernity.

The SED's programmatic push for economic and social modernization in its state would seem to form a counterpoint to historical continuities. This study reveals that the leadership's ideological vision of the future, and the steps that it took to realize that image, were bound up and delimited by persistent patterns of cultural thought and behavior. For beer to be a suitable element in the bright new world of German socialism, the regime had to address its potentially unsuitable social accoutrements and develop it as an example of efficient, cutting edge production within the economy. Yet, while the SED's efforts to reform, and later adapt, beer to the standards of its philosophical beliefs seem to offer an example of discontinuity and change, in reality all such attempts

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<sup>4</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 24.

remained contingent upon shared cultural conceptions of the *Volksgetränk* and its place in society.

Any attempt by the state's leaders to "steer" a certain market required filtering orders down through a labyrinthine network of bureaucracies, leaving a substantial body of records behind. Even so, understanding the government's treatment of a single product requires a general knowledge of how the economy operated, and a number of works detail the structures of the East German *Volkswirtschaft* (national economy). This scholarship shows a clear division between studies written before and after reunification in 1990. A number of analyses from before the *Wende* strike a cautiously positive tone about the economic success of East Germany, which possessed the highest standard of living in the Soviet bloc.<sup>5</sup> That said, fierce critics of the socialist economy also made their opinions known during the Cold War.<sup>6</sup> Overall, studies written during the lifetime of the GDR provide more information on the detailed operations and structure of the planned economy while economic histories written after 1990 focus more on the failures and systemic flaws in the *Volkswirtschaft*.<sup>7</sup> Together, both bodies of scholarship show how hard the SED leadership worked to present a facade of progress and sturdiness to both its

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<sup>5</sup> János Kornai coined the term "shortage economy," in *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam, NY: North Holland Publishing, 1980). Ian Jeffries and Manfred Melzer, *The East German Economy* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), 1; Mike Dennis, *German Democratic Republic: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988); and Martin Schnitzer, *East and West Germany: A Comparative Economic Analysis* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> See Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, for a socialist's critique of the economy.

<sup>7</sup> See Jaap Slieffer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind: The East German Economy in Comparison with West Germany 1936-2002* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006); Harmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier, eds., *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2013) and André Steiner, *The Plans That Failed: An Economic History of the GDR*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

own population and the outside world, even while the economy suffered from fatal mistakes and inefficiencies on a national scale. A similar dynamic played out in the beer industry, where outward claims of “world-class” development clashed with internal admissions of production failures and inconsistent quality.

Relatively recent scholarship on socialist consumption seeks to move beyond the macroeconomic level and focus on daily life. This study adopts the framework created in the case of East Germany by historians such as Eli Rubin, Ina Merkel, and Katherine Pence. These scholars examine how citizens formed and articulated demands for consumer goods, and how the state responded. Such interactions included both agreements and conflicts. Merkel, for instance, lays out the GDR leadership’s changing ideological approach to consumer goods and proper customer behavior as communist theory encountered the politics of daily life in East Germany.<sup>8</sup> Rubin writes about the GDR’s infamous Trabant cars and their symbolism as promises of mobility in a state where movement remained constricted.<sup>9</sup> Pence provides a detailed analysis of the government’s attempt to meet and shape popular demand for coffee, centering her view on the “coffee crisis” of the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Focusing research efforts on a single industry or on

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<sup>8</sup> Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Eli Rubin, “The Trabant: Consumption, Eigen-Sinn, and Movement,” *History Workshop Journal* 68 (Autumn 2009), 27 – 44.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Pence, “Grounds for Discontent? Coffee from the Black Market to the Kaffeeklatsch in the GDR,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 170-196.

the political importance of consumer goods allows these authors to more directly illuminate the experience of daily life under socialism.<sup>11</sup>

Approaching this history through consumption has also permitted scholars of East Germany to prove the extent to which the regime created an “alternative modernity” in opposition to western models of development. Some of these efforts enjoyed more success than others, but little doubt remains that the state’s leaders conceived of a different path to modernity drawn from its own ideological worldview. Getting there usually involved some combination of didacticism and material effort to create the physical preconditions for a new life on the path to communism. Intellectuals and government planners sought to create a new type of highly-conscious individual, surrounded by all the benefits of life under capitalism, rationally and equitably distributed under the tenants of socialism.<sup>12</sup> Viewing development in the East as being on a fundamentally different path than the West negates the simplified narrative of western superiority in social and economic progress. As just one example, Dagmar Herzog argues

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<sup>11</sup> Other key examples of work in this field: Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Eli Rubin, “The Order of Substitutes: Plastic Consumer Goods in the *Volkswirtschaft* and Everyday Domestic Life in the GDR,” in *Consuming Germany in the Cold War: Consumption and National Identity in East and West Germany, 1949-1989, An Introduction*, ed. David F. Crew (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 87-119 ; Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Ina Merkel, “Alternative Rationalities, Strange Dreams, Absurd Utopias: On Socialist Advertising and Market Research,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 323-344; Scott Moranda, “Camping in East Germany: Making ‘Rough’ Nature More Comfortable,” in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 197-218; Katherine Pence, “‘You as a Woman Will Understand’: Consumption, Gender and the Relationship between State and Citizenry in the GDR’s Crisis of 17 June 1953” *German History* 19, no.2 (2001), 218-252.

<sup>12</sup> See Pence and Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern*. For a good synopsis of the chapters in this edited volume see Eli Rubin, review of *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *German Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 89-92.

that East Germans experienced greater sexual liberation and freedom from dysfunction than their western counterparts as a direct result of the social ideals instilled by socialist rhetoric.<sup>13</sup>

In most cases, studies of consumption and modernity investigate “history from below” as well as the actions “from above.” For the purposes of this thesis the role of the government occupies pride of place. Socialist leaders increasingly tied their legitimacy to promises of improving material comfort for their citizens, particularly after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. State governments within the Soviet bloc loosened many of the most restrictive social and cultural policies during the process of “destalinization.” The result was a decided turn toward seeking greater popular support through an enhanced supply of consumer goods. Ideologically, communism rested on a guarantee to make such comfort available to everyone. The *raison d’etre* of Communist Parties included the promise of material security, and even pleasure in an intellectually self-fulfilled manner.<sup>14</sup> Socialist regimes, therefore, had a real vested interest in addressing consumer demands, or at least appearing to do so. They had to maintain a level of ideological consistency with socialist ideals, and simultaneously pacify unrest among their citizens.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dagmar Herzog, “East Germany’s Sexual Evolution,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* eds. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 71-95.

<sup>14</sup> David Crowley and Susan Reid, introduction to *Pleasures in Socialism: Liesure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan Reid (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 3-4, 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Several edited volumes deal directly with this topic. See Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds, *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Susan E. Reid, ed., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); and David F. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany and the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

Scholars of consumption have identified a wide range of voices and political forces that influenced and drove high-level economic decisions in the GDR. Mark Landsman argues that government infighting and inter-ministerial competition caused “ambivalent and zigzagging” policies toward supplying consumer goods. He notes the emergence of a “lobby” within the state apparatus that advocated for the population’s needs, directly contradicting Walter Ulbricht’s focus on the “productionist” model of heavy industry.<sup>16</sup> In another study, Pence focuses on the efforts of average citizens, particularly women, to present their needs and desires directly to the government by criticizing supply efforts in the press and through *Eingaben* (petitions).<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Schevarado and Gundula Barsch chart how Marxist-Leninist ideology affected price controls and individual drinking habits, respectively.<sup>18</sup> Without denying the importance of any of these forces, this study locates the main driver for government policy toward the people’s drink in historic national patterns of everyday consumption.

GDR beer policy sheds new light on cultural continuity in socialist states. Previous explorations in this field have demonstrated the power of tradition and historical cultural behaviors in shaping East Germans’ demands for consumer goods.<sup>19</sup> As Katherine Pence and Paul Betts state in the introduction to their volume *Socialist Modern*: “the sphere of economics was never limited to production quotas and the

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<sup>16</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Pence, “A World in Miniature,” 32-33, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Schevarado, *Vom Wert des Notwendigen: Preispolitik und Lebensstandard in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre* (München: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006); Gundula Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod: die Drogengeschichte der DDR, Band 1: Alkohol – Der Geist aus der Flasch* (Geesthacht, DE: Neuland, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> See Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?”; Stitzel, “On the Seam between Socialism and Capitalism.”

politics of provisions but rather gave form to a host of 'cultural' questions about identity, allegiance, and even nationhood.”<sup>20</sup> These forces affected economic decisions at the highest levels of government. Ina Merkel contends that the SED regime aimed to express the sense that “we [East Germans] are all in this together.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, beer, a staple of German social and dietary life long before the war, attracted the regime’s attention as a key point of shared identity. Efforts to improve the beer industry signified the government’s commitment to more than just “building socialism.” Party leaders wanted the population to know they were building *German* socialism.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, beer’s historical reputation as the drink of the “everyman,” suited it perfectly for socialist rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> Its traditional association with rural village taverns and urban blue-collar pubs throughout Germany made it an ideal subject for propaganda in the “Worker’s and Farmer’s State.”<sup>24</sup> These efforts represented a targeted strategy of propaganda on the part of the regime, but they emerged from a clear awareness that beer enjoyed both widespread popularity and deep roots in German society.

Beer held a prominent place in popular perceptions of Germany both among foreigners and Germans. Indeed, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev remarked in a 1958

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<sup>20</sup> Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, introduction to *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* eds. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Pence and Betts, introduction to *Socialist Modern*, 14; Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Gender discrepancies in beer consumption will be addressed to a certain extent in this study. The term “everyman” is used intentionally here to evoke the stereotypical notion of beer as “man’s drink,” a typecast that certainly persisted in the GDR.

<sup>24</sup> Gudrun Schwibbe and Michael Schwibbe, “Kneipenökologie: Zur räumlichen Verteilung der Kneipen in Göttingen,” in *Kneipenkultur: Untersuchungen rund um die Theke*, ed. Gudrun Schwibbe (Münster, Waxmann, 1998), 40, 42.

speech to an East German audience, “Germans absolutely cannot live without sausage and beer.”<sup>25</sup> Beer’s importance in the daily life of the GDR often appears in the speeches and publications of high-level SED officials, including prominent members of the Central Committee, heads of industrial ministries, and even Walter Ulbricht himself.<sup>26</sup> These mentions range in tone from a full embrace of German beer culture to self-deprecating jests at the national predilection for the *Volksgetränk*. They never endorse heavy drinking or intoxication. The fact that these prominent figures publicly endorsed beer as compatible with normal German society while simultaneously leading the charge in campaigns against alcohol abuse shows their belief that beer could successfully act as a drink of moderation. Those same leaders never spoke with such casual regard about distilled spirits or, in a different but related example, tobacco.

Beer provides a particularly fruitful avenue for exploring this matter based on the combination of its deep historical roots in central European culture, its contestable value in a modern society, and its intoxicating nature as an alcoholic beverage. Before the advent of modern medicine and intensive food production, *Gerstensaft* (literally, barley-juice) served as a trusted form of supplementary nutrition in the standard daily diet of many populations. The brewing process and alcohol content killed potentially harmful

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<sup>25</sup> “Weite Perspektive durch sozialistische Zusammenarbeit,” *ND*, July 25, 1958. 5. Original quote: “Mias ist Wurst, und der Deutsche kann doch ohne Wurst und Bier nicht leben.”

<sup>26</sup> Hermann Streit, Staatssekretär für Erfassung und Aufkauf landwirtschaftlicher Erzeugnisse, “Die Zeile für die Marktproduktion unserer Landwirtschaft sind zu überbieten: Wir haben gute Möglichkeiten,” *ND*, Mar. 5, 1958; “Albert Norden, Sekretär des Zentralkomitees: Unsere Republik ist das Leben und die Zukunft,” *BZ*, July 15, 1958; “Neue Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften in der Periode des umfassenden Aufbaus des Sozialismus: Diskussionsrede des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem 6. FDGB-Kongreß,” *ND*, Nov. 23, 1963



microbes making beer safer to drink than water, particularly in towns and cities.<sup>27</sup> The advent of germ theory and modern sanitation techniques, along with vast improvements in the food supply thanks to motorized farming equipment and biochemistry, left the nutritional and sanitary justifications for beer consumption somewhat obsolete.<sup>28</sup>

These new discoveries made beer's value in progressivist movements, including communism and socialism, a subject of debate, though it never attracted the same level of vitriol as "demon liquor." Indeed, both Marx and Engels wrote diatribes against distilled spirits, condemning them as the enemy of the working man. They, like Lenin, framed the issue as one of class warfare, with liquor playing the role of a seductive, cheap, drug to keep the oppressed proletariat content and disorganized.<sup>29</sup> For the founders of communist ideology, beer and wine did not fall in the same category. Marx was well known for his enjoyment of beer during his years in England, and Lenin was a regular guest at the *Hofbräuhaus* in Munich while in exile.<sup>30</sup>

Beer did eventually come under criticism from temperance-minded socialist and communist reformers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany, but they encountered a difficult paradox in their push for working-class sobriety. On the one hand,

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<sup>27</sup> Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 3, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>29</sup> Manfred Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz: Trinksitten und Alkoholfrage im deutschen Proletariat bis 1914* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), 52-53; Stephen White, review of *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932* by Kate Transchel, *Slavic Review* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 350-351; Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 59-60.

<sup>30</sup> "Cheers to Karl Marx," *BBC News*, 1 May, 1998, accessed February 4, 2017, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/86431.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/86431.stm).; Horst Dornbusch, *Bavarian Helles: History, Brewing, Techniques, Recipes* (Boulder, CO: Brewers Publications, 2000), 9.

opponents of alcohol such as F.S. Schmidt and his German Worker's Abstinence Union argued that beer, while not as destructive as liquor, contributed to an artificial contentedness during the non-working hours and led to squandered leisure time, as opposed to the Marxist notion of constant self-improvement and intellectual development.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, advocates of worker's moderation such as Karl Kautzky believed that ignoring the distinction between beer/wine and liquor, and between excessive drunkenness and relaxing camaraderie at the bar, ultimately hurt the efforts of socialist organizers. He, and many others, realized that workers' pubs (*Eckkneipe*, *Bierstube*, *Bierlokale*) acted as central locations for social group development and labor organization. In these venues, beer represented *the* consistently omnipresent drink of the working man, and quite often woman, from the late 1800s on while liquor consumption ebbed considerably around that same time. The push for total abstinence from alcohol never gained widespread popularity among average German workers.<sup>32</sup> Still, the issue never faded entirely, and while temperance efforts in Germany became muted from 1914 to 1945, the GDR's leaders could look back on the example of their comrades in "socialist brotherhood" during those years.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union sought unsuccessfully to eliminate problem drinking and alcoholism among industrial workers, its failure served as a warning to the SED decades later. The Russian revolutionaries employed idealistic rhetoric about eradicating the roots of alcoholism (capitalism), and stopping the

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<sup>31</sup> Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*, 120.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

government's exploitative monopoly on vodka production. By 1934, however, Stalin effectively gave up, declared that alcoholism had been destroyed, and continued the practice of generating enormous state revenue from liquor sales. As Kate Transchel puts it, the Bolsheviks "found themselves helpless to curb the flow of illegal alcohol, unable to generate acceptable forms of revenue to replace alcohol revenues, and utterly incapable of changing traditional drinking habits."<sup>33</sup> She further points out, however, that despite Stalin's capitulation, every subsequent Soviet leader attempted to combat drinking habits, including Khrushchev and Brezhnev during the period of this study.<sup>34</sup> Thus, as East Germany got on its feet in the 1950s, the regime's alcohol policy was in no way predetermined. Among other issues, Ulbricht and his fellow Party leaders had to determine how to treat beer, which they recognized as an essential element of German society, workers' leisure activities, and rural communities.

The existing literature on alcohol and drinking culture in the GDR focuses on two narratives: rising consumption of liquor and alcoholism. This study has little to add to the latter topic. GDR-era publications and articles that mentioned beer in relation to alcohol addiction tended to lump it in with wine and liquor as an undifferentiated mass.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the years under Ulbricht's leadership present a particularly challenging period for looking at this matter. Thomas Kochan and Gundula Barsch have made clear the

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<sup>33</sup> Transchel, *Under the Influence*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> Ihre Diätassistentin Monika, "Paprika statt Salz," *NZ*, May 11, 1963; C.N., "Das geht die Gesundheit an: Wer "Lunge" raucht, schadet sich," *NZ*, Aug. 10, 1954; G. Plath, Pfarrer in Wusseken, "Nicht mit der Gesundheit wüsten!: Die Suchtkrankheiten und ihre Bekämpfung / Von G. Plath, Pfarrer in Wusseken," *NZ*, Jan. 29, 1957.

regime's attempts to downplay and trivialize the problem of alcoholism in the GDR, but most of their evidence comes from the Honecker years, when alcohol consumption reached exceedingly high levels. Prior to that, the government's treatment of alcohol dependency was even more obfuscating and limited.<sup>36</sup> When individuals in the press and authorities criticized drinking habits during Ulbricht's leadership, they consistently skirted the issue of addiction.

The dynamic increase in liquor consumption in East Germany tends to overshadow beer in the current scholarship, which has resulted in a spirits-heavy narrative to explain the government's relationship to alcohol, most robustly related by Kochan in his monograph, *Blauer Würger*. He states that the regime took no meaningful steps to impact or steer the conversation around alcoholic beverages in the immediate postwar years as they were too preoccupied with establishing power, setting up the planned economy, and improving living conditions.<sup>37</sup> Drinking became a subject of debate in the GDR only in the mid-1950s. After rejecting a renewed call for socialist abstinence led by the German Hygiene Museum and its onetime employee Ralf Neubert, the Ulbricht regime took aim at reforming undesirable drinking habits with an intensified push for Cultural Revolution in 1957.<sup>38</sup> In Kochan's view, this resulted in new official positions on wine, which state functionaries lauded as the supreme drink of culture, and liquor, which they derided as an unsophisticated drug of excess. Despite pointed

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<sup>36</sup> Gundula Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod; Die Drogengeschichte der DDR. Band 1: Alkohol – der Geist aus der Flasche* (Geesthacht, DE: Neuland, 2009), 181; Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 300.

<sup>37</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

campaigns of propaganda and renovation of some “dark pubs,” the government’s attempt to stem rising alcohol consumption failed. Though the rhetoric continued, regime policy became increasingly focused on prosecuting poor behavior, in part because the spirits industry generated too much revenue for the state to hinder its growth.<sup>39</sup>

This version of GDR alcohol history includes the critical claim that after 1978, East Germany evolved from a *Bierland* (beer-country) into a *Branntweinland* (liquor-country).<sup>40</sup> A sound statistical justification backs up this argument, as East Germans, on average, did consume more pure alcohol in the form of liquor than beer or wine from that year forward. Other authors who discuss East German alcohol consumption repeat this pattern, treating the later decades of the state’s existence as indicative of its entire history. They identify the GDR as a land of free-flowing spirits, with beer as a supplementary beverage, even though East Germans drank over ten times more beer than liquor by volume, even at the latter’s peak.<sup>41</sup>

These writers do not ignore beer entirely, but they never access the full significance of the subject. Both Kochan and Barsch note that many ordinary citizens in the GDR hardly considered beer to be alcohol, but viewed it more as liquid nutrition.<sup>42</sup> Kochan uses this to explain why state officials in the 1950s and 1960s remained “oddly quiet” in their judgments of beer, while the rhetoric toward wine and spirits became more

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>41</sup> Fabian Tweder, *Vita-Cola and Timms Saurer: Getränkeaison in der DDR* (Berlin: Elefanten Press Verlag, 1999), 8; Jutta Voigt, *Der Geschmack des Ostens: Von Essen, Trinken und Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlagsgruppe, 2008), 165; Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*.

<sup>42</sup> Kochan, *BlauerWürger*, 273; Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*, 136.

polarized.<sup>43</sup> According to his interpretation, many health experts in East Germany did not reject the *Volksgetränk* as a refreshing, somewhat nutritious, and possibly even medicinal beverage during these years. That shift began only in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>44</sup>

By bringing beer in its full importance and weight back into the history of alcohol in East Germany, this study presents a balanced vision of the government's relationship to drinking during the years under Walter Ulbricht. From the earliest period after the war, both Soviet and German administrators became increasingly involved in the brewing industry. The state's behavior toward beer during these years shows, not a period of distracted neglect of alcohol, but rather myriad day-to-day decisions and statements that set the tone regarding drinking and affected the supply of beer, wine, and spirits to the East German population. As the new government emerged and established itself in the early to mid-1950s, beer represented a prominent issue both in the media and in the bureaucracy. It is true that the leadership remained more focused on rebuilding and bringing basic supplies to the population than it did on minute details of individual industries, but in both rhetoric and action, these years contain no shortage of important developments for the *Volksgetränk*. Likewise, the Cultural Revolution hardly quieted discussions of beer in the media and among state officials. While wine and liquor became polarized opposites in the debate over alcohol, beer saw the emergence of its own heated dialogue. Ample evidence proves that the government saw beer as an alcoholic beverage, its potential for destructive effects on the body and society appear regularly in the press.

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<sup>43</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 273.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-278.

Notions that beer did not constitute alcohol remained widespread among the population, but they never received endorsement from the state, and thus played little role in determining the leadership's behavior toward *Gerstensaft*.

Even by the standards of pure alcohol consumption, beer predominated for the majority of the GDR's existence and remained the most popular alcoholic drink in terms of volume. The story of East German liquor tempts the historian with promises of rupture, change, and difference. The story of East German beer, on the other hand, reflects continuity, negotiation, and accommodation in cultural consumption patterns. One concept that does translate well from the history of liquor to that of beer in the GDR is how willingly the leadership made compromises that helped ensure its stability. Ultimately, the East German government could not afford to stop or cap liquor production, because distilleries represented one of the few industries that actually turned a profit for the state.<sup>45</sup> One could characterize this as either an incentive, or a desperate need, but either way it constituted an opportunity that the administration could not pass up. In like fashion, financial profit was only one benefit that a commodity could offer, and beer also provided something that the regime always ran a deficit in: cultural capital. Beer's importance in German society represented both a chance for the East German leadership to endorse a cultural mainstay, and an unavoidable demand for a product that the regime would have to carry forward into its vision of socialist modernity.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 13.

### Sources, Definitions, and Structure

The history of beer reveals its own set of broadly defined “camps” within the industry and bureaucracy, whose overlapping or competing interests affected the treatment of beer. This study identifies four main groups within the administration that directly engaged in the production and distribution of beer and produced beer-related documents. “State economic planners” and “economic bureaucrats” refers to personnel employed in government organs who worked to coordinate and supervise the operations of the GDR’s breweries, but did not run them on a day-to-day basis. This distinguishes them from “brewers” or “brewery operators,” who managed and represented individual facilities and their employees. Another group, “research facilities,” often found itself awkwardly balanced between the power of the state and the needs of the breweries, but formed a distinct voice. Lastly, this thesis draws on the “print media” and “press;” both terms refer exclusively to East German newspapers.

Three main bases of primary source material appear in this study. The Statistical Yearbooks of the German Democratic Republic provide raw numbers for the brewing industry, its subsidiary industries, and the wider economy from 1955 to 1990. Archival documents from the Federal Archive (*BArch – BL* including *SAPMO*) provide communiques, reports, planning documents, and orders from state organizations such as the industrial ministries, State Planning Commission, National Economic Council, Institute for Market Research, and State Beverage Office. Finally, the three newspapers



cited for this study are the *Neues Deutschland*, *Neue Zeit*, and *Berliner Zeitung*.<sup>46</sup> In addition to current events-coverage, they contain editorials, cartoons, reader contributions, installations in novels and novellas, and culture pieces such as travel and leisure suggestions.

Research into both the state archives and newspapers for this study utilized keyword searches to identify material relating to beer, the brewing industry, and some key terms from German beer culture such as “*Stammtisch*” and “*Volksgetränk*.” The results, organized chronologically, were investigated to classify beer’s role in the document into two broad camps: positive and negative. Statements that directly addressed beer or drinking as their subject matter carried more weight than offhand mentions, but both appear here as signs of the writer’s attitude. If the author accepted or promoted beer’s place in East German everyday life that constituted a positive reference. These could range from industry communiques attempting to increase production to newspaper articles celebrating the history and traditions of the *Volksgetränk*. Conversely, columns and records that show beer as unhealthy, destructive, unenlightened, or suggest that people should drink less appear here as negative references. In both cases, example material was then categorized according to the most common themes used to endorse or criticize beer.

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<sup>46</sup> Particularly in the early years of the state, East German newspapers often published articles or brief news pieces either without listing the author’s name or merely identifying him or her by initials or pseudonym. A number of critically important articles about beer, therefore, appear only with names such as “cobra,” or “G.K.” This study, wherever possible, identifies newspaper contributors according to the type of content they wrote (advice, novella, political commentary) and any official titles they may have held.

On a final note, it is outside of the scope of this thesis to deal with the attitudes of individual members of the East German media and bureaucracy except in rare cases. A future study in this area, at a more micro level, would undoubtedly show more variety of opinion within groups. After all, the people who comprised the press and state apparatus did not constitute a hermetically sealed group apart from the GDR population. They too were Germans, and undoubtedly most of them also felt a personal habituation to beer and fondness for it. Undeniably, expressions of rhetoric or attitudes by a group of people ultimately represents the collective actions and beliefs of a network of singular actors, each with their own agency and unique identity. This study seeks larger patterns in the effect of cultural and ideological forces on government bodies at the organizational level.<sup>47</sup>

This thesis charts the government's behavior toward beer through both economic policy and discursive structures. Chapter one shows that the beer supply grew, progressively, throughout the entire history of the GDR and economic planners devoted a great deal of resources and effort to improving its production and organization. Considering the huge investment in materials and equipment needed to make beer, these steps represent a consistent pattern of growing state investment and participation in the brewing industry. The sheer size of the beer sector and its subsidiary suppliers and retailers required government attention at levels of scale far exceeding other alcoholic beverages. Moreover, most state management of the beer industry came from the district

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<sup>47</sup> For a good breakdown of the individual versus group dynamic in East German politics see Pence and Betts, introduction to *Socialist Modern*, 10-14.

and regional level, after attempts at centralized administration proved untenable. Thus, while wine, liquor, and beer may have received similar attention as individual parts of a larger ideological issue at the highest echelons of government, beer production represented a much bigger consideration at all levels of the state.

Chapter two describes the value of beer to the East German regime as a product, but more importantly as an idea that fostered a sense of cultural unity. The tone of beer-related material in the Ulbricht period enthusiastically reaffirmed the German predilection for *Gerstensaft* and shows a government eager to promote and utilize beer for its own purposes. In the early postwar years, the leadership placed a great deal of emphasis on revenue from the brewing industry to help rebuild a devastated country. As the 1950s progressed beer prices continued to drop and never went back up. The *Volksgetränk's* utility as cultural capital, however, lent it to any number of uses in propaganda attempts to generate positive feelings toward the government. The state media reminded the population regularly that the planned economy had their best interests in mind, and that included bringing them good German beer with all the trappings of tradition. Just as importantly, it warned them that a capitalist system would exploit their modest desires for simple pleasures like beer for the benefit of the rich and powerful.

Finally, chapter three looks at the course of beer reform in the GDR, focusing on two turning points in the history of East German beer and beer culture by examining the effects of the 1957 call for Cultural Revolution, and the subsequent push to integrate beer into the vision of socialist modernity. The late 1950s reveal a dramatic increase in

rhetoric and policies aimed at combating persistent elements of beer culture that the regime found unfavorable. Beer-centric spaces like the corner pub and the social tradition of the *Stammtisch* (see footnote) came under attack.<sup>48</sup> For several years, anti-beer messages circulated through the newspapers. Yet, they appeared alongside articles that continued to endorse it as a positive symbol of German life. By the mid-1960s, beer's pervasive popularity and value as cultural capital won out. Alcohol critics within the SED had to accept a modified course for the *Volksgetränk*. Rather than combating beer, the mission became to “modernize” it, and its surrounding social institutions, to accommodate it to communist ideology. The government included the brewing industry as a key sector for material development in the “Scientific and Technical Revolution” and instituted a new system of didactic rhetoric aimed at shifting the dialogue around beer to one of refreshment, moderation, and (proper) sociability.

In a broader sense, this study addresses the effect of cultural continuities on sources of political power, but rather than focusing on expressions of popular demand, it charts the strategies of engaging those desires by the authorities. Regardless of exactly how individual East German citizens represented their need for beer to the leadership, the regime interpreted these claims through a cultural lens and acted accordingly. Indeed, the term “acted” presents an intentional argument that state behavior constituted something more constructive and positive than mere “reaction” to the public will. The press and

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<sup>48</sup> *Stammtisch* has no direct translation to English. Its closest equivalent would be “table of regulars”, but it tends to be a more formalized arrangement than that. It is used to describe a regular meeting of a group to drink at a pub and it connotes a certain traditional social space in German society. For further reading see the essays in Schwibbe ed., *Kneipenkultur*, (Münster: Waxmann, 1998).

functionaries in East Germany worked from a sense of shared cultural identity to consistently recreate the conceptual idea of “German beer” as both they and their target audience would recognize it. In addition to carrying out the material supply of *Gerstensaft*, members of the bureaucracy and state-run media, both subject to a hierarchy of supervision from the top echelons of the SED, actively remade beer as the people’s drink in the GDR.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE BEER INDUSTRY UNDER ULBRICHT**

Understanding how beer policies in the GDR developed requires first knowing what happened in that industry during Soviet administration and Walter Ulbricht's leadership of the SED. This chapter utilizes economic statistics and government records to chart the material reconstruction and organizational shifts in the East German beer sector. Following a persistent decline in the beer supply under Soviet occupation, the events of this period show a clear and immediate acceptance by the new state's economic functionaries of the need to revitalize and rebuild the brewing industry.

On a broad graph, beer production in East Germany grew steadily under Ulbricht, but upon closer examination three distinct periods of development become clear. After the founding of the GDR in 1949, economic recovery and reconstruction produced eight years of rapid revitalization. Following on these successes, a stretch of stagnation and mild expansion, interposed with regression, defined the brewing industry from 1958 to at least 1962. Thereafter, the beer supply increased consistently until the takeover of Erich Honecker in 1971, and in fact achieved some of its fastest growth in the final years of Ulbricht's tenure. The early and constant push to increase beer production clearly points to a government under pressure to meet demand, while the outlier middle years suggest a change in economic policy for beer that was later reversed. In both cases, rising beer supplies directly reflect state investment, and therefore regime plans. Without a doubt, the East German brewing industry suffered every type of shortage, inefficiency, and

failure inherent to the planned economy.<sup>1</sup> No amount of individual effort or ingenuity can produce beer out of thin air; the fact remains that government entities devoted appreciable amounts of resources and even precious *Valutamittel* to supplying the East German people with beer.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, efforts to improve production resulted in organizational arrangements that do not fit neatly in to the expected picture of a centralized state-run economy, but resonate with long-standing traditions in German brewing. After initial attempts to operate a large chunk of the country's breweries from a central authority, the GDR's economic leaders progressively moved the industry toward regional and local control. Even while more and more breweries became property of the "people," the central government increasingly placed them under the authority of district, county, or community councils. Leaders in East Berlin established several organizations to coordinate supplies and research for beer across the country and maintained ultimate authority on economic matters, but otherwise beer production remained largely diffused geographically. Hyper-regionality is one of the defining features of Germany's beer sector both historically and in the present day, suggesting that even the physical distribution of the GDR's brewing industry resulted from continuities in German beer production.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lietz and Manger eds., *Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost* (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Joachim Nicol, "8.4 Der VEB Radeberger Exportbierbrauerei," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016), 183.

<sup>3</sup> Frank von Tongeren, "Standards and International Trade Integration: A Historical Review of the German 'Reinheitsgebot,'" in *The Economics of Beer*, ed. Johan F. M. Swinnen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 59.

### **Soviet Administration: 1945 - 1949**

Conditions in East Germany after the Nazi surrender offered little chance for a quick restart to any aspect of the economy, let alone the brewing industry. The Red Army acted as the government in its zone of occupation in the years immediately following World War Two.<sup>4</sup> From that point forward, East Germany operated with a “planned economy,” but that plan changed multiple times, starting with the punitive and extractive measures adopted by Soviet administrators during the early postwar years. While the initial level of industrial destruction in the East did not reach the same level as the Western zones, the USSR confiscated significant portions of the resources and commercial infrastructure in their section. These “reparations,” combined with a lack of certain natural resources and an influx of refugees, led to abysmal conditions in the Soviet zone. Nothing contributed so much to the misery of postwar Germany as the failure of the Allies to negotiate a proper settlement on what to do with the defeated state. A united economic and government policy likely could have pulled the war-torn country out of its slump within a few years, but once negotiations between the USSR, US, and Britain deteriorated, the Soviet leadership confronted the reality of administering its occupation zone separately.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Dennis, *German Democratic Republic*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> André Steiner, “From the Soviet Occupation Zone to the ‘New Eastern States,’” in *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* eds. Harmut Berghoff and Uta Anrea Balbier (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2013), 19-20; Dr. Peter Lietz, “Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ausgangsbedingungen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen*



Once Allied negotiations began to break down in summer 1946, the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD), which held governmental authority in the zone, started slowly easing reparation demands, though it continued to extract enormous amounts of resources.<sup>6</sup> As a preliminary step to allowing greater German control in zonal governance, in April 1946 the Soviet Union “arranged” the combination of the Social Democratic Party and Communist Party in their occupation zone to form the SED.<sup>7</sup> From that point on, portions of the zonal economic administration transferred back into the hands of Germans. When the Western Allies introduced currency reform in their zones in June 1948 it sparked the Berlin Blockade, sending events spiraling quickly toward a divided Germany. Ultimately, the Soviet leadership in Moscow responded to the failure of Allied negotiations and a very poor showing by the Communist Party in West German elections by fostering the formation of a separate government in their occupation zone.<sup>8</sup> In October 1949, the German Democratic Republic came into existence under the leadership of the SED and its leading politician, Walter Ulbricht.<sup>9</sup>

Despite massive deficiencies in labor and raw materials, several breweries resumed operation before the end of 1945, though only with Soviet approval and under

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*Brau-und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016), 21-28.

<sup>6</sup> Ciesla Burghard, “Winner Take All: The Soviet Union and the Beginning of Central Planning in East Germany, 1945-1949,” in *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* eds. Harmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (Washington D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2013), 61.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Grieder, *German Democratic Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Grieder, *German Democratic Republic*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ulbricht’s power was not definitive in the early years of the state. Only after the Workers Uprising on 1953 did he begin to eliminate his rivals and emerge as the singular authority of the GDR. Even before he managed to consolidate his power more firmly, however, he can be seen as the “leading politician” of the SED. See Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31 – 43; Dennis, *German Democratic Republic*, 2.

strict regulation. The Feldschloßen brewery in Dresden began brewing again within the year despite the fact that an estimated 55 percent of the facility had been destroyed by Allied bombing.<sup>10</sup> It, like all breweries that restarted operations during this time, worked under an initial decree that required the facility to brew a certain amount of its beer for the Soviet Red Army. The regulation also set the strength of beer produced for the occupying forces at roughly 3 percent ABV, and beer made for the German population at somewhere around half that amount.<sup>11</sup> This directive remained in effect until October 1948, one year before the official birth of the GDR.<sup>12</sup>

Also during this period, Soviet authorities began nationalizing the beer industry through direct confiscation, a standard practice in most sectors of the East German economy. Starting in 1945, the SMAD dispossessed large landowners of their property, and nationalized major industrial operations into *Volkseigene Betriebe* (VEB) or “people-owned operations,” which placed them under state ownership and management.<sup>13</sup> The first sweep of brewery nationalization continued until 1948, culminated in the formation

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<sup>10</sup> Uwe Hessel, “8.7. VEB Getränkekombinat Dresden,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 251.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Lietz and Rüdiger Teichert, “5. Die Ausgangsbedingungen in den Brauereien und Mälzereien der sowjetischen Besatzungszone,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 50. Alcohol percentages given here are calculated from the conversion table provided on a standard homebrewing hydrometer. Most German sources provide the strength of beer in the percentage of sugar dissolved in the wort, known in English as the “original gravity” and in German as the *Stammwürzegehalt*.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Lietz, “8.1 Entwicklung der Getränkeversorgung,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 134.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Lietz, “3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 28-29.

of the Union of People-Owned Operations of the Brewing and Malting Industry. This Dresden-based organization provided central administration for the largest VEBs of the beer and malt industry throughout East Germany, and answered directly to the German Economic Commission under Soviet supervision.<sup>14</sup> At this point, a sizable portion of smaller breweries remained in private ownership.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of who controlled a brewery or where it received its orders, resources for repair and reconstruction, not to mention day-to-day operations, remained scarce and strictly rationed.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Soviet authorities targeted several breweries for dismantlement and shipment to the USSR as reparations, though relatively few compared to other industries.<sup>17</sup>

The overall East German economy suffered tremendously from war damage, reparations, and Cold War trade restrictions. Only with the introduction of separate currencies and the eventual establishment of two states did real recovery begin. Though hardly ideal, this step gave the two halves of Germany some direction in their development and set the path for economic recovery.<sup>18</sup> Like many industries, breweries had seen little but neglect and decline under Soviet administration. The beer supply in the Occupation Zone fell significantly from 1946 to 1949 as a result of material and labor

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<sup>14</sup> This relationship requires further archival research. The location and nature of the VVB has left its records at the local archive in Dresden, making investigation from the *Bundesarchiv* very cursory.

<sup>15</sup> “Nationalization” here means any form of state ownership in a brewery. “State ownership,” “people ownership,” and “nationalized” appear interchangeably.

<sup>16</sup> See the previously cited NZ article: “Jetzt wieder 400 Hektoliter täglich.”

<sup>17</sup> Hubert Getzin, “8.20 VEB Getränkekombinat Schwerin,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 313.

<sup>18</sup> Ian D. Turner ed., *Reconstruction in Post-War Germany: British Occupation Policy and the Western Zones* (Oxford: Berg, 1989).

shortages, as well as the low priority placed on beverage production by the SMAD.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, postwar territorial changes had cut East Germany off from both the most productive barley growing regions, and almost all of the hop-growing regions of the former Reich.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Early Push: 1949 - 1957**

As a German-run government took power in the East, it inherited a brewing industry that showed all of the damage of two world wars and a global depression. Put simply, the beer sector in the Weimar Republic had never matched production levels from before World War One, and, even in their best year, breweries under the Third Reich fell short of the output from the year before the Great Depression. War and economic instability had put the beer industry in *Deutschland* on an almost four-decade path of general decline that continued, in the East, until 1950. Moreover, while the eventual region of the GDR had comprised almost one quarter of Germany's post-Versailles territory, it only produced about 18 percent of its beer.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that the area relied, to a modest degree, on outside beer deliveries that now had to be compensated for with domestic production. The East German beer supply in 1950

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<sup>19</sup> SJDDR 1956, 168; Hessel, "8.7 VEB Getränk kombinat Dresden," 251; Lietz and Teichert, "5. Die Ausgangsbedingungen in den Brauereien und Mälzereien der sowjetischen Besatzungszone," 51.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Lietz, "2. Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ausgangsbedingungen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> SJDR 1943, 223; SJDDR 1956, 168.

amount to a paltry 3.8 million hectoliters.<sup>22</sup> At a rough estimate, the same region in 1913 likely produced over 13 million hectoliters.<sup>23</sup>

The freefall in brewing production finally reversed in 1949, and within five years the GDR surpassed the first of several major historic mile markers in beer volume. By 1954, the brewing industry exceeded the peak supply under the Nazi regime.<sup>24</sup> This quick turnaround represents a much-improved circulation of goods and foreign trade following currency reform and the creation of a permanent administrative structure, rather than a sudden improvement in the beer sector's physical capacity. An unprecedented amount of damage and outdated equipment still pervaded the brewing industry.<sup>25</sup> Still, the new government of East Germany made its intentions clear regarding beer: it wanted more. The SED leadership also secured state control over the bulk of the industry and began to experiment with different management models.

In terms of administration and ownership, the first trends visible in East Germany's beer industry after the war are nationalization and centralization. The resulting arrangements were often labyrinthine to the point of near-opaqueness, and the loss of much source material from this era does not help clarify the situation.<sup>26</sup> The Union of People-Owned Operations remained in place and transferred into the administrative

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<sup>22</sup> SJDDR 1956, 168.

<sup>23</sup> This is calculated by taking 18 percent of the German Reich's beer production in 1913. SJDR 1931, 134. SJDDR 1956, 168.

<sup>24</sup> SJDDR 1956, 168.

<sup>25</sup> Lietz and Teichert, "5. Die Ausgangsbedingungen in den Brauereien und Mälzereien der sowjetischen Besatzungszone," 49-52.

<sup>26</sup> For reference, a timeline of the brewing industry's administrative arrangements, to the highest accuracy possible with available sources, is provided in Appendix 1.

structure of the new country. It answered to the leading authority in the state-run food industries, which eventually developed into the Ministry of the Food Industry. The Union itself also underwent two organizational restructurings and a name change before finally being dissolved in 1954. Following that, regional councils at the district and county level took over administration for centrally-managed state-owned breweries, directing their operations from the regional seat of power. Some breweries transferred to local management, meaning that orders came from the administration of the surrounding community. Coordination and oversight of the industry as a whole fell to the *Genussmittel* (“semi-luxury consumables”) Department in the Ministry, which remained in that role until 1958.<sup>27</sup> The key takeaway from these early restructurings is the firm grip of government organs, and therefore the SED, on the bulk of brewing activity in the GDR from an early date.

Two major events took place in 1953 that had an enormous impact on GDR economic policy, and particularly the area of consumer goods. Stalin died in March, setting off a series of rapid political changes that realigned the central leadership in the Soviet Union. Many scholars of socialist consumption identify this moment as a turning point for socialist regimes in making a greater effort to meet citizens’ demands for everyday items. Stalin’s death unsettled the Eastern Bloc enough that its governments felt compelled to offer “concessions” in the form of more non-essential consumer products in

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Lietz, “3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR,” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: Verlag der VLB Berlin, 2016), 29.

order to secure communist rule. Other disturbing events, such as the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, further drove home the need for post-Stalin reform. Socialist leaders in Eastern Europe improved their welfare systems, reduced working hours; and raised living standards.<sup>28</sup> These changes started even before Khrushchev began the explicit process of “destalinization.” This was most famously encapsulated in his 1956 secret speech, which openly admitted many of the failures and injustices of Stalin’s leadership and began a period of partial thaw in Soviet social and political policies.<sup>29</sup>

The second critical event in 1953 had a far more direct impact on East Germany and prompted an immediate and significant improvement in its consumer goods supply. In June, construction workers in Berlin went on strike in response to shortages of basic necessities and increased production quotas. The demonstrations morphed into a political uprising, with protesters specifically calling for the removal of Walter Ulbricht and the implementation of open elections, but the root cause came from supply issues.<sup>30</sup> The beer situation may have played a role in further upsetting the population, as a government decree in May lowered the strength of beer nationwide in reaction to malt shortages. While certainly not a leading cause, “watered down” beer likely served as one drop in the bucket of consumer complaints that helped push people into the streets in protest.<sup>31</sup> Their uprising lasted several days and spread to most of the major cities. In response, Soviet tanks rolled into areas of protest and dispersed the crowds, killing an uncertain number of

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<sup>28</sup> Crowley and Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism*, 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Matthies, Geschäftsleiter - VLK Getränke, “Entwicklung des VE-Versorgungs- und Lagerungskontors der Lebensmittelindustrie Getränke,” n.d., BArch, DE 4/24528, n.p.

people in the process.<sup>32</sup> The Soviet Politburo reaffirmed its commitment to Ulbricht for fear of looking weak if it removed him so soon after demonstrators had identified him personally as a target of their revolt.<sup>33</sup> For its part, the SED leadership rescinded the policies that sparked the conflict and took immediate steps to bring more consumer goods to the population.<sup>34</sup>

The June Worker's Uprising sparked greater interest in consumer goods on the part of the Central Committee, but it hardly represented the only motivation to further develop this part of the economy. Mark Landsman has detailed the existence of a "consumer supply lobby" within the government apparatus that pushed for more attention to the production of such items. This pressure served as a counterweight to Ulbricht's efforts to push the productionist model of socialist economic development, centered on heavy industry at the expense of all others.<sup>35</sup> Most East German leaders also recognized the importance of improving material conditions in order to reduce the number of people fleeing west. The emigration of large portions of the population, especially skilled workers, caused constant headaches for the GDR's socialist leaders, and served as a reminder that West Germany offered a more attractive life in the minds of many Germans.<sup>36</sup> Deficiencies in consumer goods exacerbated this problem.

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<sup>32</sup> Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 116. While I have been unable to confirm at what point the restriction on beer strength was lifted, a similar order in 1955 indicates that the situation had returned to normal in the interval. See Droz, Oberreferent - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, Fachgebiet Lebensmittel/Ernährung, "Herstellung von Dünnbier," 7 March, 1955, BArch, DF 4/40677, pg.1.

<sup>35</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 127.

<sup>36</sup> Harmut Berghoff and Andrea Barbier, *The East German Economy*, 5.



Yet while 1954 saw a dramatic increase in the beer supply, significant efforts to rebuild the brewing industry predated these events. East German beer production grew every year from 1950 to 1955.<sup>37</sup> Stalin's death and the Worker's Uprising had, at most, a modest impact on beer production. The evidence suggests that the regime's concerted push to fulfill the economic goals of the first Five Year Plan, which ended in 1955, had a greater effect in this case.<sup>38</sup> This also suggests that the state-ordered reductions in beer strength in 1953 and 1955 signify a decidedly "quantity over quality" approach to the *Volksgetränk* during this period.<sup>39</sup> While industry output dipped slightly in 1956, it rebounded with extraordinary growth the following year, increasing by nearly 17 percent.<sup>40</sup> This strong showing in 1957 rounds out a seven year period of rapid ascent for the beer supply.

After the dissolution of the brewery Union, changes to ownership and management structures in the beer industry calmed down as the government's economic planners settled into a pattern of slow and steady decentralization.<sup>41</sup> The state had already secured its control over the most important operations.<sup>42</sup> The only noticeable change during this time came with the transfer of several more breweries from central to local

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<sup>37</sup> SJDDR 1957, 291; 1956, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Schnitzer, *East and West Germany*, 206; SJDDR 1956, 169; SJDDR 1957, 291.

<sup>39</sup> Matthies, Geschäftsleiter - VLK Getränke, "Entwicklung des VE-Versorgungs- und Lagerungskontors der Lebensmittelindustrie Getränke," n.d., BArch, DE 4/24528, n.p.; Droz, Oberreferent - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, Fachgebiet Lebensmittel/Ernährung, "Herstellung von Dünnbier," 7 March, 1955, BArch, DF 4/40677, 1.

<sup>40</sup> SJDDR 1958, 306.

<sup>41</sup> SJDDR 1958, 226.

<sup>42</sup> SJDDR 1957, 214; SJDDR 1958, 227 show clearly that, in terms of gross-production, the state-owned breweries absolutely dominated, accounting for more than four-fifths of the market, leaving the small remainder to private businesses.

management.<sup>43</sup> Local management created fewer redundancies in administration and allowed for more flexibility while still retaining state ownership. This model proved attractive enough that the government adopted it for all remaining centrally-managed VEBs in the brewing industry in 1958.<sup>44</sup>

### **Flat Beer Growth: 1958 - 1962**

In the late 1950s, the flood of East Germans “voting with their feet,” prompted Ulbricht’s infamous pronouncement regarding consumer goods. At the SED’s Tenth Party Congress in 1958, the First Secretary of the Central Committee predicted that consumption in East Germany would match and then overtake the West by 1961, adopting the vision of socialist ascendancy first presented by Khrushchev in the USSR.<sup>45</sup> This promise may seem, in hindsight, like empty propaganda, but massive policy changes followed the announcement making 1958 a pivotal year both for GDR history and the beer industry. The SED abandoned its second Five Year Plan (1956-1960) and adopted a new Seven Year Plan that it hoped would dramatically improve the consumer goods supply, as Ulbricht promised.<sup>46</sup> After just four years of relative stability, the GDR’s economic planners once again overhauled the ownership and management structures of the beer industry with an eye toward rapid improvement. Despite, or perhaps because of,

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<sup>43</sup> SJDDR 1957, 213; SJDDR 1958, 226.

<sup>44</sup> SJDDR 1959, 296.

<sup>45</sup> Berghoff and Balbier, *The East German Economy*, 5; Jutta Scherrer, “‘To catch up and overtake’ the West,” in *Competition in Socialist Society*, eds. Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic, (New York: Routledge, 2014), e-book.

<sup>46</sup> Schnitzer, *East and West Germany*, 221.

their sudden interference in a system that had been producing progressively more beer, the brewing sector entered a mild slump starting in this year.

The new system brought the gradual push for decentralization to final fruition as the SED continued to seek new arrangements to produce more beer, and Germany's traditionally regionalized network of breweries presented the most attractive option. The government dissolved the Ministry of the Food Industry and the *Genussmittel* department that had overseen the brewing sector. In its place, a new entity, the State Beverage Office ("Stako") formed out of the GDR's existing wine distribution office. The Stako acted as a "balancing organ," and the State Planning Commission tasked it with inter-district coordination of the beer sector. Thus, the Beverage Office became responsible for shipping beer between different regions of East Germany, handling all beer imports, and supplying breweries with raw materials and consumable production stock (bottles, bottle caps, kegs, labels, etc.).<sup>47</sup> However, it never held direct authority over any facilities and did not have the power to issue orders in the same way as a ministry or an industrial union. Instead, the Stako relied on cooperation with the various regional economic councils to carry out production.<sup>48</sup> The Beverage Office's first director, Gerhard Matthies, found this system immensely unwieldy and frustrating. On multiple occasions he petitioned his superiors to form a new union of breweries, or to give the Stako powers similar to such an organization. Decentralization remained the watchword of the day,

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<sup>47</sup> Report by Matthies, Direktor-Staatliches Getränkekontor und Kauerhof, Hauptbuchhalter, "Analyse über den Ablauf des Planjahres 1958," 16 February, 1959, BArch, DE 4 – 24528, n.p.

Lietz, "3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR," 34-35.

<sup>48</sup> Krack, Minister - MBL, "Direktive zur Durchführung der Versorgung mit alkoholfreien Erfrischungsgetränken und Bier im Jahre 1967," 14 March, 1967, BArch, DG 5/440, 3.

however, and these requests failed.<sup>49</sup> Still, the central state authority retained final oversight in the economy, guiding the progress of the beer sector with annual plans and receiving “yearly analyses” from the districts via the Stako.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the largely powerless coordination of the Beverage Office and the unobtrusive oversight of the state’s central economic organs, the beer industry in the GDR became an overwhelmingly local and regional concern.<sup>51</sup> Many of these facilities found themselves unified into the earliest brewing *kombinats* around this same time. These “combines” allowed the breweries or maltsters to remain legally separate entities but horizontally integrated with other producers in their industry and area. The combine managers treated the supply needs and distribution capacities more like a single body than a patchwork of separate facilities. Administrative authority remained with the regional government management.<sup>52</sup> In terms of the day-to-day business of receiving and fulfilling orders, this formed a stark contrast to the capitalist system of unintegrated competition. However, the fact that Germans in smaller communities continued to drink

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<sup>49</sup> Matthies, Direktor - Stako, “Nachtrag zur Ergänzung des Rechenschaftsberichts des 1. Halbjahres 1964,” 26 September, 1964, BArch, DE 4/24528, pg. 17; Matthies, Hauptdirektor - Stako, “Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Leitern der Erzeugnissegruppen der Gärungs- und Getränkeindustrie am 10. 6. 1965 um 10.00 Uhr im Staatlichen Getränkekontor,” 10 June, 1965, BArch, DE 4/25702, pg. 3, 6.

<sup>50</sup> After the 1958 dissolution of the industrial ministries, including the Ministry of the Food Industry, the State Planning Commission assumed the role of leading economic authority in the state. These duties then transferred to the National Economic Council in 1961, where they stayed until the formation of the new industrial ministries in 1965. See Appendix for more information. “Behördengeschichte DDR,” *Das Bundesarchiv*, 15 June, 2013, <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/fachinformationen/01711/index.html.de>; “Jahresanalyse 1962,” 18 January, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7408.

<sup>51</sup> SJDDR 1959, 296.

<sup>52</sup> Lietz, “3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR,” 29.

most of their beer from local breweries makes the GDR an outlier in the development of the world's brewing industries during this time.<sup>53</sup>

1958 also marked a large step toward full nationalization of the brewing industry, with signs of caution from a regime that knew a sudden elimination of private beer producers might harm overall production. Thus, the first semistate-owned breweries appeared in this same period.<sup>54</sup> The government forced, or “encouraged,” these private companies to accept the state as a controlling partner in their businesses, forming a public/private mixture. Fewer taxes and economic restrictions applied to operations that adopted this model, and the state usually allowed the former owners to remain as managers in exchange for giving up their control. In this way the GDR's economic leaders extended state-ownership to a much wider array of breweries than it had previously, without risking the disruption of a full shift to people's ownership. Thus, semistate-owned breweries acted as a transitional phase on the way toward full nationalization.<sup>55</sup> The implementation of this new model heavily impacted private breweries. After brewing 19 percent of the GDR's beer in 1957, privately owned production plummeted to less than 5 percent in 1962.<sup>56</sup>

1958 to 1962 represent the weakest years of growth for beer in the GDR. It remains unclear whether the organizational shakeup caused problems in the beer industry, demand reached a temporary plateau, or government policy stopped favoring rapid

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<sup>53</sup> Gavin D. Smith, *Beer: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 27-34.

<sup>54</sup> SJDDR 1959, 296-297.

<sup>55</sup> Schnitzer, *East and West Germany*, 233.

<sup>56</sup> Statistics compiled from SJDDR: (1958, 226), (1959, 296), (1960, 298), (1962, 264), (1963, 244), (1964, 74).

growth. The final option fits with evidence from state rhetoric in the bureaucracy and media during this period. For whatever reason, the brewing sector managed only 1.5 percent growth in these years.<sup>57</sup> The governmental Institute for Market Research attributed the stagnation in per capita beer consumption to a lack of greater demand. It is critical to note, however, that this was the institute's answer, pro-forma, for all changes in the consumer good supply. The economists who studied the East German markets acknowledged the poor quality of available beer and the inability of the brewing industry to produce enough to meet the population's needs, and yet their reports always tended to collapse the entire issue into a question of rising or falling demand.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For growth see SJDDR 1965, 160; SJDDR 1958, 306. The mild increase in supply corresponds with a decrease in beer imports and a rising level of exports, implying improvement in domestic production beyond the statistics for pure volume, but only by a small amount. See SJDDR: (1957, 291), (1958, 306), (1959, 357), (1960, 357), (1962, 331), (1963, 311), (1965, 160), (1959, 576), (1965, 388), (1970, 316), (1968, 403).

<sup>58</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B.-D. Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, "Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab," September 1966, BArch, DL 102/224, pg. 6

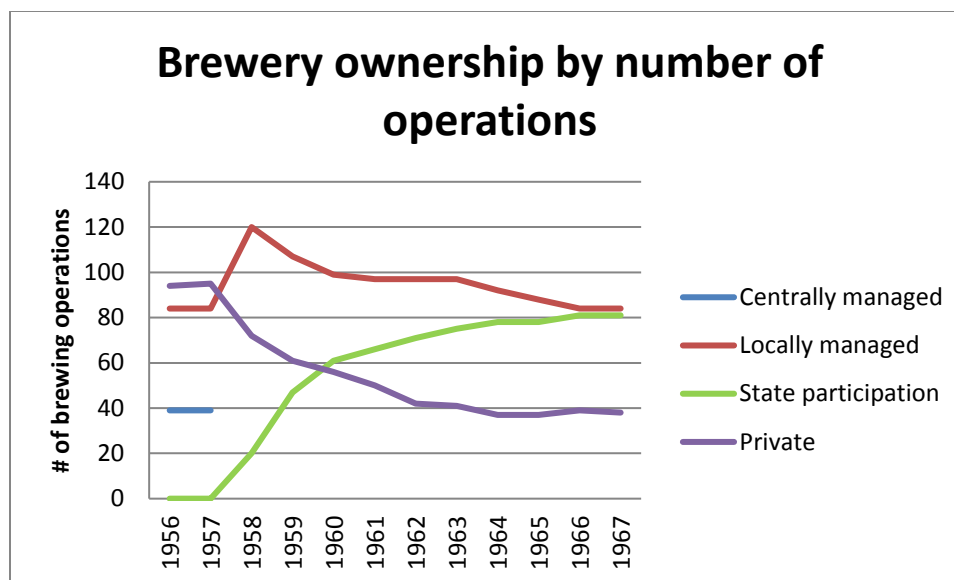


Figure 1.1 Brewery ownership by number of operations.

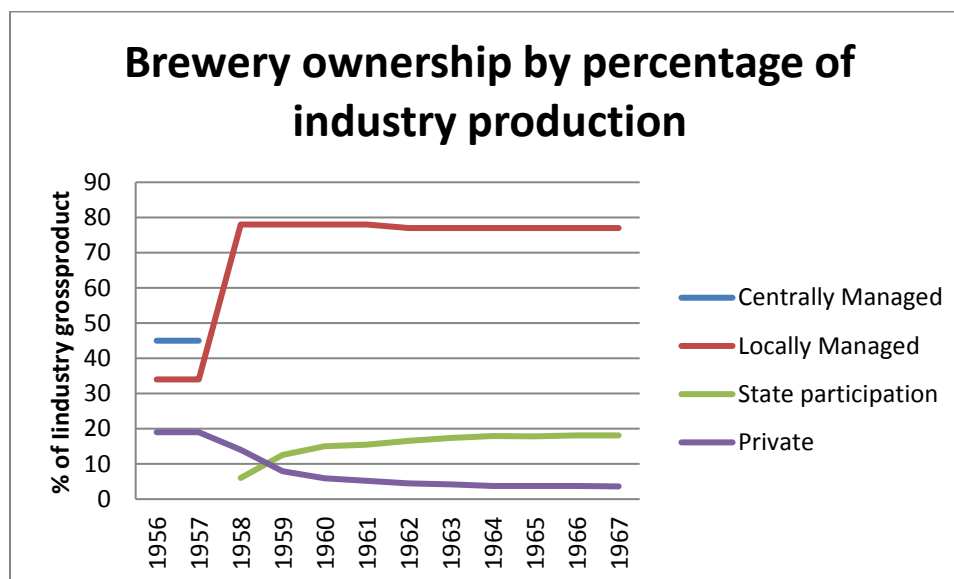


Figure 1.2 Brewery ownership by percentage of industry production.

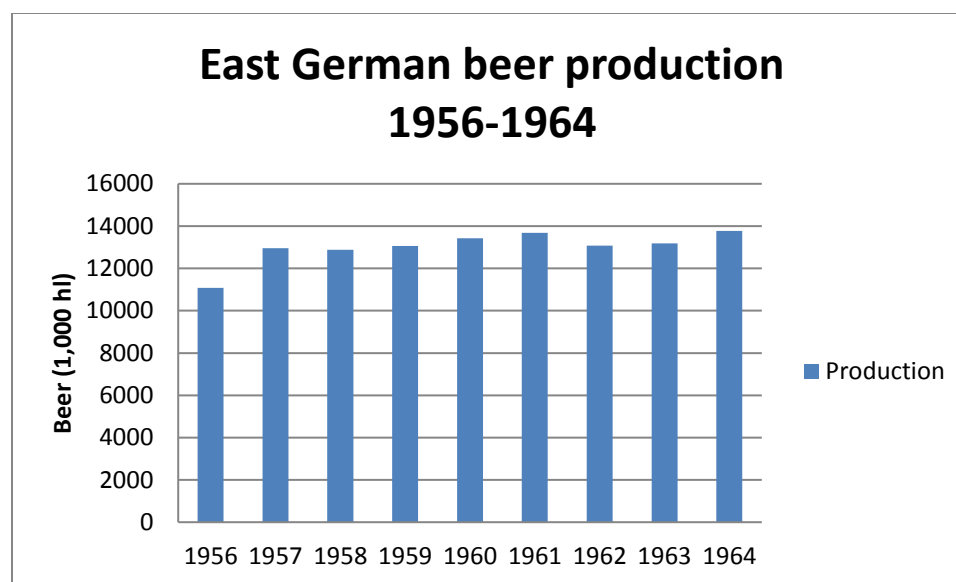


Figure 1.3 East German beer production 1956 – 1964.

Nor did beer's tepid growth during these years grant greater success to other alcoholic beverages. Wine and spirits producers struggled to increase the availability of their goods. The inability of domestic viniculture and distilleries to meet supply quotas forced economic planners to dramatically increase imports. The wine market accomplished the most consistent growth during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In this period, wine consumption doubled, but wine imports had to more than double to meet the desired supply.<sup>59</sup> Despite the appearance of strong growth, wine never overtook liquor in terms of per capita consumption in the GDR.<sup>60</sup> Spirits purchases experienced dramatic ebbs and flows from 1955 to 1961, after which they rose slowly but steadily throughout the Ulbricht era. Imports of liquor also saw a marked increase during this time.<sup>61</sup> While

<sup>59</sup> SJDDR: (1959, 237), (1960, 237), (1962, 235), (1965, 421), (1963, 554).

<sup>60</sup> It came closest in 1960, when wine consumption was 3.4 liters per capita and liquor consumption was 3.5 liters per capita. These statistics from SJDDR 1962, 235; SJDDR 1965, 421.

<sup>61</sup> SJDDR 1963, 554



the increase in beer production remained slow, beer imports dropped by nearly half during the same years while overall consumption continued to rise.<sup>62</sup> The statistics form a picture of a population that wanted alcohol in all forms in greater quantities, but beer held a unique position of prominence. It was easier and faster to produce than wine (especially considering the existing brewing infrastructure) and did not carry the same sociocultural taboo as liquor, which was associated with drunkenness and alcoholism by many segments of the population.<sup>63</sup>

As the brewing industry struggled to grow through the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the State Central Statistics Administration expanded the range of detailed information available in records, giving a more three-dimensional image of beer production. The price of a brew declined steadily from 1950 to 1959, when a 1 liter pour of *Vollbier* from the tap cost 1.6 East German deutschmarks. Beer stayed at that price until the end of Ulbricht's leadership.<sup>64</sup> Employees in the brewing industry also received relatively good wages. From 1956 to 1963, production workers in breweries earned more than the average wages in the Food and Semi-Luxury Consumables Industry, with the fourth highest pay rates in that sector behind meat, fish, and oil processing workers.<sup>65</sup> These numbers suggest the extent to which beer formed an ordinary, if unspectacular, aspect of life in the GDR. For the majority of people, it served as an affordable commonplace drink for refreshment and a measure of relaxation.

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<sup>62</sup> SJDDR 1963, 554; SJDDR 1963, 331.

<sup>63</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 84.

<sup>64</sup> SJDDR 1960, 230.

<sup>65</sup> SJDDR 1957, 270; SJDDR 1965, 188.

### **Beer, Ascendant: 1963 - 1971**

In 1963, the SED leadership instituted a new plan to kick-start the East German economy by further decentralizing industrial management and adopting a “system of economic levers” to promote realistic growth models and sustainable profitability. Scholars of East Germany’s economy have presented this “New Economic System of Planning and Management (NES)” as Ulbricht’s most concerted attempt at pushing the GDR to catch up to the West.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, it failed. At the end of the 1960s, the government replaced the NES with another system that reintroduced more central steering mechanisms (Economic System of Socialism).<sup>67</sup> In the brewing industry, however, the period from 1963 to 1967 shows no great rupture in organization. NES-style measures of decentralization developed in the beer industry as early as the late 1950s. The Stako continued in its role attempting to balance and coordinate the people’s supply of beverages, but without any increase in its direct authority.<sup>68</sup> The early 1960s marked the start of an intensive investment and development program for the brewing industry, representing a concerted push toward modernization in equipment and methods. Finally, in 1968 the state established the administrative structures that governed the beer sector through Eric Honecker’s leadership as General Secretary. This last major change under Ulbricht entrenched the decentralized, dispersed nature of beer production in East

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<sup>66</sup> Steiner, “From the Soviet Occupation Zone to the ‘New Eastern States,’” 28.

<sup>67</sup> Dieter H. Renning, *Industrial Kombinate in the GDR: A Decision-Making, Information, and Motivation Analysis* (Wien, Wiener Institut für Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche, 1980), 1; Grieder, *German Democratic Republic*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Germany. Regional beverage industries became solidified as a loosely connected network of separate units.

Beer production in East Germany finally achieved consistent, significant growth in the final eight years of Ulbricht's leadership. As compared to the frequent regressions of the previous half-decade, this period only saw one year in which the beer supply did not increase from the previous fiscal cycle.<sup>69</sup> Exports also grew significantly, reaching a new peak in 1968.<sup>70</sup> Exported goods, particularly those sold to western non-socialist countries, held a high value in the economies of Eastern Europe for their ability to generate hard currency. For East Germany, Radeberger Exportbrauerei and Köstritzer Schwarzbierbrauerei played a significant role in developing the export market for beer. The GDR even exported beer to the FRG, though only breweries that maintained their adherence to the *Reinheitsgebot* gained access to the West German market.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> SJDRR 1965, 160; SJDDR 1972, 120.

<sup>70</sup> SJDDR 1970, 316.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara und Hans Otzen. *DDR Getränkebuch*, 139-141..

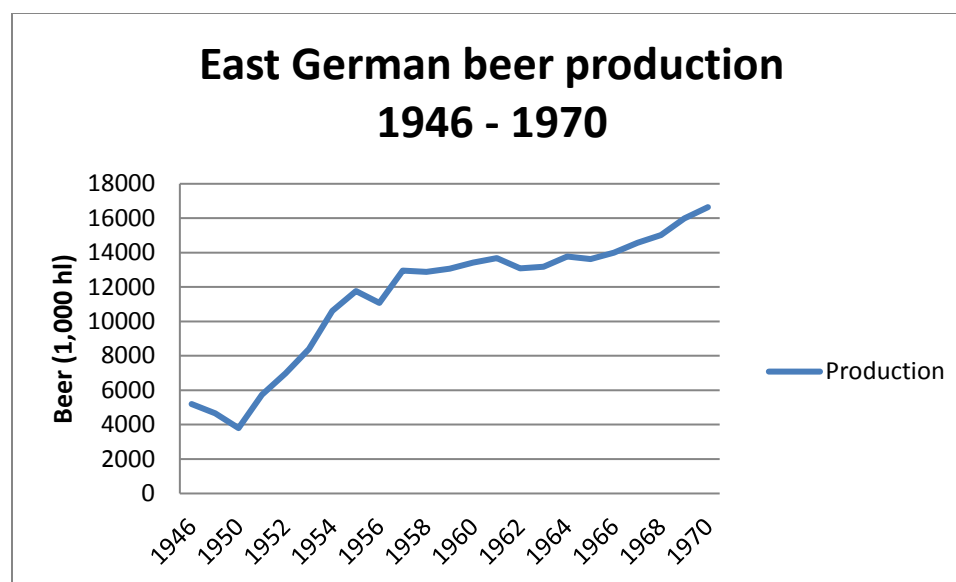


Figure 1.4 East German beer production 1946 – 1970.

Further nationalization also took place during these years, and found its ultimate expression in 1972. From 1963 to 1967 (the last year that ownership statistics appear), more private breweries converted to semistate-ownership, further marginalizing private beer production. State-owned operations retained their dominance in terms of total production, but the public/private hybrid model gained increasing importance. This model clearly held favor with Ulbricht's economic planners as a part of their decentralizing economic policies.<sup>72</sup> When Honecker took over as General Secretary, however, the semistate-owned operations quickly disappeared. In 1972 the government converted all remaining private, cooperative, and semistate-owned breweries into VEBs.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, Honecker did not share Ulbricht's patience with semi-private forms of

<sup>72</sup> SJDDR: (1959, 296), (1960, 298), (1962, 264), (1963, 244), (1964, 74), (1965, 94), (1966, 108), (1967, 116), (1968, 116), (1969, 118).

<sup>73</sup> "Eigentumsformen der Brauereien und Getränkebetriebe in der DDR," DDR Brauwesen, accessed April 1, 2016, <https://www.getraenkebetriebe.de/eigentumsformen.html>

control, but both men ultimately aimed at a fully nationalized economy.<sup>74</sup> In the last few years of Ulbricht's leadership, the state's economic planners instituted the last major organizational rearrangement of the brewing industry, creating the structures and institutions that lasted until 1990.

In the late 1960s, the Beverage Combine emerged as the favorite form of industrial organization for drink production in the GDR, and rooted the decentralized, loosely coordinated, nature of the brewing industry more firmly in government policy. The combines replaced the precursor *Braukombinate*, which included only plants and businesses directly related to the beer industry. These new organizations oversaw breweries, maltsters, and bottling plants, but also engineering firms, research labs, equipment-manufacturers, distilleries, wineries, and alcohol-free drink producers.<sup>75</sup> They developed in 1967 through the designs of the Stako, which by then answered directly to the Ministry for District-Managed Industry and Food Industry (MBL).<sup>76</sup> The combines acted as a single administrative structure, managed on the district level by the economic councils.<sup>77</sup> The formation of these new structures, while certainly important for local brewing operations, changed very little in the state-level command structure of the industry. The operations now answered to the management of the *Kombinat*, but the combines continued to report to the district economic councils, which ultimately took

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<sup>74</sup> Schnitzer, *East and West Germany*, 233.

<sup>75</sup> Lietz, "3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR," 35.

<sup>76</sup> Schnitzer, *East and West Germany*, 229.

<sup>77</sup> Lietz, "3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR," 35.

direction for planning and crises from the MBL. The Stako continued to coordinate and balance the beer supply on an inter-district level.<sup>78</sup>

The final years of Ulbricht's leadership also saw the crystallization of alcohol consumption patterns that continued until the end of the GDR. East Germans drank more alcohol in every form from 1963 to 1971, but consumption in the three major categories did not rise at the same pace. Here, the three major beverages are compared with reference to pure alcohol.<sup>79</sup> At the end of the decade, about 9 percent of the average citizen's alcohol intake came from wine, as opposed to 43 percent from spirits and 48 percent from beer. Beer drinking increased significantly, but liquor was growing faster.<sup>80</sup> Still, twenty-three years into the GDR's forty-one-year existence, the consumption of alcohol still came predominantly from the *Volksgetränk*. Moreover, both beer and liquor consumption had yet to match their historical peaks in the history of Germany. This pattern of growth in East German drinking (liquor outpacing beer, beer outpacing wine) continued through the remainder of the state's history, and has its roots here in the late 1960s.

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<sup>78</sup> Lietz, "3. Die Stellung der Brau- und Malzindustrie im System der Planwirtschaft der DDR," 33; also see, for examples, Krack, Minister - MBL, "Direktive zur Durchführung der Versorgung mit alkoholfreien Erfrischungsgetränken und Bier im Jahre 1967," 14 March, 1967, BArch, DG 5/440; Report by Naumburger, Information für Krack - Minister-MBL, "Betr.: Untersuchung über den Stand und die Leitung der Enzymforschung im Bereich der Lebensmittelindustrie," 28 March, 1966, BArch, DG5 0036 , Bl. 00008;

<sup>79</sup> The precise means of calculation for this statistic is unclear in the SJDDR. Obviously, not all beer contains the same ABV, which is equally true of wine and liquor. The comparisons made here are based on the data given in the yearbook.

<sup>80</sup> See Fabian Tweder, Tobias Stregel, and Rudolf Kurz, *Vita-Cola und Timms Saurer: Getränkeaison in der DDR*, (Berlin: Elefant Press Verlag, 1999), 8 for DDR statistics. See SJDR 1929, 400; SJDR 1938, 362; SJDR 1943, 438 for Nazi regime and Weimar statistics.

Liquor overtook beer in pure alcohol consumption seven years after Honecker took over as General Secretary of the SED. Of course, as argued in this study's introduction, one should be hesitant to judge these trends as indicative of attitudes or preference among the population. More importantly for this thesis, the statistical arc toward higher liquor consumption does little to reveal the regime's treatment of alcohol, nor how they interpreted or represented their efforts to bring more of it to the people. It is equally ineffective for showing the conceptual differences between forms of alcohol in the discourse of East German authorities. Such questions require a more detailed analysis of the government's words and actions. In that analysis, beer stands out as an entirely different matter from wine or *Schnaps*. Put simply, liquor was an unavoidable evil and wine was the preferred libation of high-culture, but beer was the drink of the German people.

## **CHAPTER TWO: BEER, FOR STRENGTH AND SOCIALISM**

In 1954, a column ran in the newspaper *Neue Zeit* bragging that conditions in West Berlin were so bad that citizens there drank an average of fifteen liters of beer less than their counterparts living elsewhere in the FRG. East Berlin, on the other hand, appeared as a land of reasonably priced and “cultivated” restaurants, proving the superiority of the socialist model. Claims of East German preeminence appeared frequently in the GDR’s print media, but the inclusion of beer in this column is telling.<sup>1</sup> The press and its government censors did not merely accept the economic necessity of brewing. Rather, beer served as a synecdoche for prosperity for Germans of both countries. The implication that West Berliners would drink more beer if they had the means almost certainly rang true for a German readership. In the East, the ruling party took direct responsibility for providing a prosperous life for all citizens through proper distribution and coordination of resources. In short, if socialism was going to exist in Germany, then beer was going to exist under socialism.

Yet while the regime felt the need to supply a culturally-engrained everyday good for life in Germany, its efforts to assimilate beer into communist ideology clearly go beyond a mechanistic response to popular demand. Not even authoritarian leaders can deny the wishes of their people beyond a certain point without inciting protest and mass resistance, but that does not mean they must express approval of those desires. Rather,

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<sup>1</sup> “Auch ein Votum” *NZ*, Oktober 29, 1954.



beer-friendly rhetoric, extra-ordinary concern with the variety and quality of the *Volksgetränk*, and the continuation of beer-related traditions suggest that the top echelons of the SED actively endorsed a pro-beer attitude in the media and among state employees in order to promote a shared cultural identity.<sup>2</sup> By examining descriptions and written deployments of beer by newspaper contributors and bureaucrats, this chapter identifies how narratives about beer, its role, and its past in German society offered advantages to the leading party as proof of their goals to build German socialism.

One could potentially argue that this subject was innocuous enough not to attract rebuke from the party regardless of what attitude a writer or speaker presented, but this seems unlikely for several reasons. First, Ulbricht and his functionaries considered strict media censorship a high priority, and the SED tightly controlled content. Beyond the possibility of direct intervention in the media, this had the effect of inducing newspaper writers and editors to anticipate the opinions of the Central Committee.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, anyone writing a report or memo within the government apparatus would have been highly cautious of including anything politically uncouth. Second, many comments made about beer in the media and bureaucracy directly touch on political issues and (naturally) support the views of the SED. It is highly unlikely that such statements would have manifested themselves without at least a generally approving attitude from the leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be stated, though it is perhaps quite obvious, that there is no outright statement of a beer “policy” available in the history of the SED. In fact, as Gundula Barsch points out, there really are no definitive proclamations concerning alcohol in general. Thus, the government’s attitude has to be reconstructed by analyzing their actions and trying to make inferences from sources related to the subject. See Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Anke Fielder and Michael Meyen, *Fiktionen für das Volk : DDR-Zeitungen als PR-Instrument : Fallstudien zu den Zentralorganen ND, Junge Welt, NZ und Der Morgen* (Berlin: LIT, 2011), 7-8.

Finally, in several cases state officials went beyond mere words, and expended significant effort, resources, and time perpetuating beer culture. Government employees and institutions under “people’s ownership” carried on seasonal beer traditions, conducted subjective taste tests to judge breweries’ products, and continued to brew specialty styles of beer that served no easily definable purpose. All such activities acted as increased strains on scarce resources. Ultimately, someone in an administrative roll had to approve these expenditures in the name of celebrating beer. At some level, then, the regime must have felt that the circulation of positive messages and approving attitudes toward beer served its purposes.

### **Material Value**

Cultural capital was not the only possible advantage that beer could offer. Revenue from beer sales and the *Volksgetränk*’s potential nutritional value played significant roles in influencing state policy. However, the importance of these material motivations had their peak in the desperate years immediately after the war and diminished progressively after that. Without suggesting that they formed separate, hermetically-sealed, issues, the material value of beer appears weaker than its utility as cultural capital.

Governments of every type have targeted beer as a source of tax income since at least the “cottage industry” era of the Middle Ages, and the powers that governed postwar East Germany were no exceptions to this rule.<sup>4</sup> Following the war, many

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<sup>4</sup> Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages*, 8.

regulations from the Third Reich remained in place, including the tax system for beer. It took six months for the SMAD to revise taxes on the brewing industry, but when the new law came into effect it put state revenue as the top priority. For the weakest *Gerstensaft* produced, over 67 percent of the brewery's wholesale price went to the state, and stronger beers had even higher proportional tariffs.<sup>5</sup> Newspapers announced the new decree in May 1946, and within a few days of its enactment an article in the *Neue Zeit* justified the government drawing monetary proceeds from people's "useful addictions." The unnamed author of this opinion piece approvingly names tobacco, *Schnaps*, and beer as three products well suited to providing high tax revenue. The beneficial side effect would be to keep consumption of these items, especially tobacco and liquor, low.<sup>6</sup> The need to explain and argue in favor of such actions suggests a level of displeasure among the populace that so much of their *Genussmitteln* expenditures went to tax revenue.<sup>7</sup> At least one column from the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1947 presented the entire subject as an extension of war reparations.<sup>8</sup> Most of this tax money went to provisional governmental institutions in the Soviet Zone, but appropriation of a certain portion would have been well in keeping with occupation policies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Der Präsident der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Handel und Versorgung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone gez. Dr. Buschmann, "Verordnung No. 5 der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Handel und Versorgung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone über die Neufestsetzung von Bierpreisen," 14 January, 1946, BArch, DL 1/146, Bl. 023-024, pg. 4.

<sup>6</sup> "Nützliche Süchte," *NZ*, May 22, 1946. The new taxes also applied large tariffs to tobacco, liquor, and matches.

<sup>7</sup> People did not miss the fact that beer was expensive, or fail to mention it publicly. See "Brünett und schon sehr beliebt: Wie die 'Leichte Barbara' entstand," *NZ*, July 21, 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Beykirch, "Erleichterung bei der Umsatzsteuer," *BZ*, Jan. 19, 1947.

<sup>9</sup> Message from Ministerium für Finanzen to the five Landesregierungen Finanzministerien, Lietz, "Landesanteile an Biersteuern," November, 1949, BArch, DN 1/36174, pg. 1; "2. Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ausgangsbedingungen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone," 22.

If the astronomical beer taxes of the early postwar years represented a further extension of Soviet confiscation, that would help explain why the government of the newly formed GDR changed the law almost immediately after its formation. In mid-November 1949, one month after the state's founding, the East German leadership reformed beer taxes.<sup>10</sup> The designers set the tax rate for the weakest beer at just under 50 percent of the final wholesale price, a significant decrease from the policy of Soviet administration.<sup>11</sup> Not only did the new East German government immediately lower beer taxes, but it continued to do so throughout the decade. In 1953 the previous tariff dropped by more than half.<sup>12</sup> Afterward, beer prices continued to fall until, in 1959, they reached their final level in East German history.<sup>13</sup> While the post-1953 price decline did not explicitly come from tax cuts, the evidence proves that breweries' profit margins increased from their levels under Soviet administration, leaving lower tariffs as the most logical source for decreased consumer cost.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of a state-run industry, taxes did not constitute the only financial value of a business; the administration also had a vested interest in profitability. An overview

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<sup>10</sup> "Ermäßigung der Biersteuer," *NZ*, Jan. 28, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> 39. Sitzung der Regierung vom 31.8.50, "Anlage 6 zum Protokoll der 39. Sitzung der Regierung: Preisverordnung Nr. 105," 31 August, 1950, BArch, DC 20-1 3/28, Bl. 114-115, pg. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Präsidium des Ministerrates, "Beschluss über die Erhöhung des Aufkommens an Biersteuer," 20 April, 1953, BArch, DC 20-1 4/12, Bl. 56.

<sup>13</sup> SJDDR 1960, 360.

<sup>14</sup> Der Präsident der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Handel und Versorgung in der Sowjetischen Besetzungszone gez. Dr. Buschmann, "Verordnung No. 5 der Deutschen Zentralverwaltung für Handel und Versorgung in der sowjetischen Besetzungszone über die Neufestsetzung von Bierpreisen," 14 January, 1946, BArch, DL 1/146, Bl. 023-024, pg. 4; Präsidium des Ministerrates, "Beschluss über die Weiterführung der Industriepreisreform in der Lebensmittelindustrie, 12. Komplex, Hopfen, Braumalz, Bier, alkoholfreie und alkoholhaltige Erfrischungsgetränke," 12 May, 1966, BArch, DC 20-1 4/1334, Bl. 47.

of statewide profits and tax proceeds from the brewing industry during this period is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>15</sup> However, financial reports from the people-owned brewery Union in 1949 show profits of over 3 million marks and an almost equal amount of tax payments. This comes from the period of peak beer taxes. Still, even in these years the overall state budget amounted to tens of billions of marks, making the brewing industry's contributions relatively small.<sup>16</sup> As for profits, a 1966 document from the Council of Ministers reported that beer prices had a built-in profit margin of 20 percent over production and distribution costs. It does not specify how much of that money stayed with the individual facility and how much went to the state budget.<sup>17</sup> As with taxes, the state never put increasing profits ahead of a low consumer price on its list of priorities. Even so, brewers and other beer sector professionals presented the industry as lucrative and a reliable source of tax revenue whenever they described their operations in the press or to higher-level administrators.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, unprofitable beer producers

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<sup>15</sup> Sources which provide this evidence, if they have survived, would likely be kept at regional and local archives in Eastern Germany. An investigation of such records will be a necessary step in continuing this study.

<sup>16</sup> Geißler, Hauptdirektor, Böhme, Kfm. Direktor, and Fleischer, Hauptbuchhalter - VVB Brau- und Malz, "Nachtrag zur Stellungnahme des Bilanzausschusses der VVB der Brau- und Malzindustrie Gesamtbilanz zum 31. Dez. 1949," 22 May, 1950, BArch, DN 1/36976, pg. 2; Geißler, Hauptdirektor, Böhme, Kfm. Direktor, and Fleischer, Hauptbuchhalter - VVB Brau- und Malz, "Ergebnisrechnung für die Zeit von 1. April bis 31. Dezember 1949," 20 May, 1950, BArch, DN 1/36976, n.p; Total state revenue in 1953 was 34,775 billion DM, see SJDDR 1957, pg. 529.

<sup>17</sup> Präsidium des Ministerrates, "Beschluß über die Weiterführung der Industriepreisreform in der Lebensmittelindustrie, 12. Komplex, Hopfen, Braumalz, Bier, alkoholfreie und alkoholhaltige Erfrischungsgetränke," 12 May, 1966, BArch, DC 20-1 4/1334, Bl. 47.

<sup>18</sup> "Jetzt wieder 400 Hektoliter täglich," *NZ*, April 20, 1949; "Schultheiss erhöht Produktion," *BZ*, July 9, 1958; fa, "Das Radeberger und die Standardisierung: Wenn die Ausnahme von heute das Prinzip von morgen geworden ist, haben die Verpackungsorgen ein Ende," *NZ*, Nov. 4, 1959; Droz, Oberreferent - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, Fachgebiet Lebensmittel/Ernährung, "Herstellung von Dünnbier," 7 March, 1955, BArch, DF 4/40677, pg. 2

regularly appeared as a concern in both the media and the bureaucracy and even led to the closing of several breweries in East Berlin in October 1949.<sup>19</sup>

Beer's greatest financial value came from the industry's economic size, the number of people it employed, and its impact on subsidiary markets. In this area, beer distinguished itself from other beverages and forms of *Genussmitteln*. Unlike coffee, tea, or wine, beer's raw ingredients were perfectly suited to large scale domestic production in East Germany.<sup>20</sup> The same could be said of liquor, but in terms of volume, the production of distilled spirits never reached 10 percent of beer output.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the period investigated here, beer commanded just under 8 percent of the entire food and *Genussmittel* sector.<sup>22</sup> Among drinks, only the milk industry could claim to outrank beer's economic impact.<sup>23</sup> As a Party dedicated to putting the entire population to work, the SED could not afford to let the industry founder unless it could find new work for

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<sup>19</sup> E. N., "Umriss des berliner Plans 1950: 1949 wurde der Durchbruch erzielt / Erhöhung der Produktivität und Kostensenkung entscheidend," *ND*, Nov. 11, 1949; Message from Erich Pilz, Betriebsleiter - Brauerei Wurzen to Dr. Berger, stellvtr. des Ministerpräsidenten - Sekretariat W. Ulbricht, n.t., 23 August, 1951, BArch, DC 20/3106, Bl. 81 – 85; gez. Sack und gez. Baum, "Abschrift der im Sekretariat veränderten und angenommenen Vorlage," 11 October, 1949, BArch, DA 4/1171, 1.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to suggest that the GDR was always capable of producing the needed amount. Particularly in the early years it relied almost entirely on trade to supply hops, mostly from West Germany and Czechoslovakia. The point is, rather, that East Germany *could* grow hops in large quantities, and eventually did. Once trade with the West became increasingly taboo, the GDR relied more on Czech hops, but by the early 60s its own cultivation had begun to fill most of its demand. See Karl Borde and Dr. Wildling, "6.3 Rohstoffpolitik in der DDR: Hopfen," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016), 81.

<sup>21</sup> Tweder, *Vita-Cola und Timms Sauerer*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung)," 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B.-D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy - Institut für Bedarfsforschung, Abt. Nahrungs- und Genußmittel, "Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln: Bericht 2, Vergleich des Getränkeverbrauchs zwischen der DDR und der westdeutschen Bundesrepublik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Alkoholverbrauchs," August, 1966, BArch, DL 102/222, 5.

thousands of people, not to mention the enormous financial loss of having so much equipment and so many facilities go to waste.<sup>24</sup> Industry advocates did not hesitate to point this out in the early postwar years when critics appeared to question if the authorities should devote scarce resources to beer.<sup>25</sup> By the mid-1950s, as the general economic recovery progressed and better supplies of consumer goods reached the population, references to this subject become more scarce, outside of pro-forma official statements to increase profitability in all sectors of the economy.

Despite its continuing importance, after several years it became clear that profit did not influence the state's agenda for beer as much as other factors. The first decade after the war was a time of extreme deprivation; everything came second to economic recovery. It is not surprising that profitability and state revenue loom large in these years. However, after the massive tax reduction in 1953, beer tariffs never went back up, as they did, for example, in the spirits industry.<sup>26</sup> Once consumption levels in the GDR reached impressively elevated levels in the 1960s and 1970s, with the brewing industry struggling to fulfill needs, the government could have increased tax rates and enlarged revenue, while simultaneously easing demand on its overburdened breweries. This measure would have been in keeping with the regime's tactics for liquor, where higher taxes served as a

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<sup>24</sup> In 1949 Brauhaus Halle, Abteilung Glaucha reported total capital worth of over seven million DM. It was certainly a large brewery, but not even close to the largest in the GDR. See (signature illegible), Betriebsleiter, (signature illegible), Hauptbuchhalter, and (signature illegible), BGL - MLI, HA Lebensmittelindustrie und Fischereibetriebe, VVB der Brau- und Malzindustrie, Dresden, Brauhaus Halle, Abt. Glaucha, "Schlußbilanz zum 31. Dezember 1949," 6 May, 1950, BArch, DN 1/36747, Fassungen 1.

<sup>25</sup> Mietke, Betriebsrat der Schultheiss-Brauerei, "Wie der "Telegraf" hilft," *ND*, Feb. 5, 1947.

<sup>26</sup> Nie., "Unsere aktuelle Untersuchung zur Versorgungslage: Durstige Kehlen hoffen auf Berliner Bier: 130 000 hl werden zusätzlich gebraut / Die Bierniederlagen müssen ausgebaut werden / Flaschenproblem lösen," *BZ*, May 24, 1954; SJDDR 1960, 360;

common tool for both profiting from the population's habits and attempting to combat "excessive" consumption.<sup>27</sup> In fact, when health professionals in the GDR began to specifically question the policy of using harmful substances to generate tax income in the late 1950s, they directly identified liquor and tobacco sales as the object of their concern. They did not even mention beer or wine.<sup>28</sup>

Squeezing the population's beer budgets for greater revenue would also have cast the SED in a hypocritical light considering the many stories and articles that circulated through the newspapers accusing capitalist governments in the West of that very thing. In these articles, beer represents the drink of the working class. In countries run by bourgeois elites (or by fascists depending on the level of vitriol) the state allegedly only cared about beer in so far as it could syphon more money away from blue-collar families and into its own coffers.<sup>29</sup> One particularly poignant line of attack, exemplified by a 1952 *Neue Zeit* article, directly links higher beer taxes in Bavaria with "Bonn (FRG federal government) remilitarization politics."<sup>30</sup> While hypocrisy certainly did not concern the regime in many cases, beer represented a highly visible object for government price politics. At least some voices in the state apparatus might have balked at the idea of raising beer prices for state revenue while the media repeatedly beat the drum of western

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<sup>27</sup> Dipl.-Wirtsch. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Entwicklung des Bier Verbrauchs bis 1975," 10 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung, BArch, DL 102/660, 14; Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 114-115. They failed to curb demand, but succeeded in helping profits.

<sup>28</sup> Müller, Sekretär des Kollegiums and Prof. Dr. Marcusson, Stellv. d. Ministers - Ministerium für Gesundheitswesen, "Protokoll Nr. 11 der Kollegiums-Sitzung vom 1. Juli 1958," 17 July, 1958, BArch, DQ 1/1703 Bd. 1, 8.

<sup>29</sup> AP, "Unverschämte Handesspannen," *BZ*, Feb. 26, 1950; "Albert Norden, Sekretär des Zentralkomitees: Unsere Republik ist das Leben und die Zukunft," *BZ*, July 15, 1958; Lieselotte Thoms und Günter Böhme, "Ruhrgebiet heute - und morgen? (III): Dortmunder Disharmonien," *ND*, Sept. 15, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> "Hiobsbotschaft für Bayerns Biertrinker," *Neue Zeit*, June 26, 1952.



exploitation for that very same matter. The SED sought to make better profits in the brewing industry, but never at the expense of rising consumer prices. It saw the path to that end through greater efficiency and lower costs in production.

Although the government never subsidized the cost of beer like it did for basic foodstuffs, some of its citizens placed it in that category.<sup>31</sup> In the same 1949 article where the Radeberger brewmaster defended beer as the German *Volksgetränk*, much of his argument centered on its dietary content. He pointed out that a liter of “Radeberger” contained 450-700 calories, the same amount of carbohydrates as 150 grams of bread, and protein levels equivalent to 60 grams of bread.<sup>32</sup> A similar article from the year before stated flatly that beer is not just a *Genussmittel*, but also *Nahrungsmittel* (food/nourishment).<sup>33</sup> In like manner, a 1953 column from the *Berliner Zeitung* greeted the seasonal production of *Bockbier* both for its better flavor and its higher nutritional value.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the best example of this mentality comes from a 1949 proposal by the VEB Rathenower Brewery, suggesting that the state should exempt its low alcohol double-caramel-maltbeer from taxes to make it affordable for school children. The justification followed that a third of a liter of their beer provided more nutrition than a

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<sup>31</sup> Trying to figure out what counts as “subsidization” in a socialist economy is quite difficult, the government controlled all prices and tried to base the consumer cost on a rationalized equation of the costs of production, distribution, industry R&D, etc. Prices did not emerge from the organic curve of supply and demand, as they supposedly do in a market economy. The point here is merely that the SED never appeared willing to let the beer sector operate at a loss in order to bring prices down, and then compensate for that unprofitability with proceeds from other areas. See Schevardo, *Vom Wert des Notwendigen*.

<sup>32</sup> “Jetzt wieder 400 Hektoliter täglich,” *NZ*, April 20, 1949.

<sup>33</sup> “Berliner Brauereisorgen,” *NZ*, Oct. 9, 1948. Neither this article, nor the Radeberger article, lists an author. They could very well have been written by the same person.

<sup>34</sup> “Herr ober, ein Bock: Ab 15. Oktober Bockbiersaison in Berlin,” *BZ*, Oct. 10, 1953.

quarter liter of skim milk, which the state had subsidized to make more affordable.<sup>35</sup> The school's teaching staff enthusiastically endorsed the proposal.<sup>36</sup>

Despite popular conceptions of beer as valuable nourishment, neither Soviet nor German authorities treated it as anything more than a supplementary beverage for those who could afford it. Beer taxes remained highest in the early years, when questions of caloric intake held the most importance. The GDR's statisticians never listed beer under the category of "important foodstuffs."<sup>37</sup> Put simply, the regime defined beer as *Genussmittel*, a pleasure item not strictly required for survival. That did not invalidate its significance, but it confirms that the East German leadership believed itself to be addressing a *want*, rather than a *need*. Moreover, the fact that newspaper columnists could openly express such attitudes proves that SED censors did not find them objectionable.

### **The Power of Tradition**

Beer earned a reputation as the definitive drink of the German proletariat toward the end of the nineteenth century. *Schnaps* consumption plummeted in the final decades of the 1800s and remained low, while beer consumption had seen a mild downturn but still amounted to 250 percent of its 1850 levels.<sup>38</sup> The association of beer with the working class culminated in the "beer war" of 1909, in which the Social Democratic Party organized mass boycotts of certain brewers and tavern keepers to force them to

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<sup>35</sup> Message from (signature illegible) - Rathenower Brauerei Volkseigener Betrieb to DWK HVF, n.t., 22 October, 1949, BArch, DN 1/36174, n.p.

<sup>36</sup> N.t., 29 October, 1949, BArch, DN 1/36174, n.p.

<sup>37</sup> SJDDR 1956, 103.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 109.

lower prices. By that point, beer's adoption as the drink of labor no longer represented a mere popular trend. The largest socialist party in Germany now officially recognized the *Volksgetränk's* importance as part of its political agenda.<sup>39</sup> Conservative anti-socialist elements in Germany referred to beer as "*sozialdemokratischer Saft*" (social-democrat juice).<sup>40</sup> Debates over alcohol within the German socialist movement had reached a tipping point before World War One. Karl Kautzky's pub-friendly program of worker's moderation won out over the nascent socialist abstinence movement. It is unclear what stance the Communist Party of Germany took toward beer after its founding in 1918, but it is safe to say that they were not anti-beer in any outward manner.<sup>41</sup> In any case, beer was heavily associated with the early phases of the German worker's movement and labor organization.

The East German media often harkened back to that common thread of proletarian life in the 1950s, presenting beer as a touchstone issue for blue-collar social classes. Newspapers routinely mentioned beer as the drink of the workers, and did not limit this association to Germany, or the socialist bloc.<sup>42</sup> For example, one foreign correspondent in the SED-controlled press cited England, another country with a deeply rooted beer

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<sup>39</sup> James S. Roberts, *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1984), 97.

<sup>40</sup> Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> In the historiography, there is never a hint of a communist "anti-beer" campaign in the inter-war years. At any rate the issue seems to have generated little movement during this period. Consumption rates for all forms of alcohol remained low during the Weimar years as a result of economic and political turbulence. See Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*; Roberts, *Drink, Temperance, and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Germany*; Kochan, *Blauer Würger*; Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*.

<sup>42</sup> Nie., "Unsere aktuelle Untersuchung zur Versorgungslage: Durstige Kehlen hoffen auf Berliner Bier: 130 000 hl werden zusätzlich gebraut / Die Bierniederlagen müssen ausgebaut werden / Flaschenproblem lösen," *BZ*, May 24, 1954; Molli, "Wo findet der Hans seine Liesel? Glück im Berliner Kafegarten / Warum ist das heute so schwer?" *BZ*, April 3, 1953; "Und die andere Seite," *BZ*, Dec. 11, 1951.

culture, as an example of capitalist exploitation when its parliament dramatically lowered the price of wine, but kept beer costs relatively high. Within the worldview of the GDR's leading party, this showed how the bourgeois, imperialist, politicians in Whitehall exploited the modest demands of the proletariat to subsidize their consumption of expensive luxury goods.<sup>43</sup> Another report from Austria described a "beer strike" by the working classes in 1957.<sup>44</sup> Twice during election campaigns in Berlin, political commentators in the media even presented the hope that beer, and the social spaces that it created, could strengthen the bonds between workers from East and West Germany, with the obvious goal of educating Westerners on the superiority of socialism.<sup>45</sup> When the GDR's Institute for Market Research reported in the early 1970s that industrial workers and agricultural laborers consumed the most beer in the country, they were confirming an already assumed fact.<sup>46</sup> While the SED never failed to appeal to the collective will of the workers (as it chose to understand it), beer offered access to cultural traditions much older, and with more direct appeal to widespread conceptions of German national identity.

German beer traditions, as they existed in the collective memory of GDR press members and government employees, represented a positive element in the SED's vision

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<sup>43</sup> G.K., "Ein Budget gegen das Volk," *BZ*, May 5, 1949.

<sup>44</sup> "Bierstreik in Österreich," *BZ*, July 3, 1957.

<sup>45</sup> "Um den goldenen Boden: Handwerker am Stammtisch / Rechnung mit ++ // auf dem Bierdeckel," *BZ*, Nov. 24, 1954; "Ganz Berlin deutsche Hauptstadt des Friedens: Aus der Rede des Genossen Albert Norden auf der großen Kundgebung in Westberliner Sportpalast; Störenfriedpolitik endet schlecht; Wir drohen mit Milch und Gemüse, mit Weizen und Bier," *ND*, Nov. 14, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung,)" 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666.

of the past.<sup>47</sup> Long standing beer customs or institutions held a certain cache as long as any backward, anti-social elements had been properly identified and exorcised. As such, the workers at the VEB Bötzw-Brewery felt justified in writing directly to the president of the Republic, Wilhelm Pieck, in 1949, protesting the decision by the Berlin City Magistrate to close their facility. In a short telegram on behalf of the brewery's "workforce," the author(s) decried the fact that the people-owned operation, which the employees had rebuilt from the rubble of 1945 into a profitable enterprise, had now been ordered to shut down despite eighty-five years of tradition.<sup>48</sup>

In a similar vein, newspapers repeatedly carried stories announcing breweries re-opening or increasing production after the war, and specifically pointed to their histories as important institutions in the community, the region, or the entire country.<sup>49</sup> Other beer-related establishments also benefitted from frequent association with their continuity of service. Bars, beer-cellars, and restaurants with famous historical drinking scenes appeared often in the culture sections of newspapers.<sup>50</sup> Celebrations of a centuries old *Ratskeller* in Berlin, articles detailing the renovation of Leipzig's famous "Burgkeller,"

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<sup>47</sup> For general East German history see Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Message from Otto Winzer, Chef der Privatkanzlei to Friederich Ebert, Herrn Oberbürgermeister, "Protest der Belegschaft der Bötzw-Brauerei gegen beabsichtigte Schliessung," 2 November, 1949, BArch, DA 4/1171.

<sup>49</sup> Br., "Aus der Schultheiss-Brauerei A.-G.," *BZ*, Oct. 16, 1945; "Gesicherte Bierversorgung," *BZ*, March 25, 1948; "Jetzt wieder 400 Hektoliter täglich," *NZ*, April 20, 1949; "An der Quelle des berliner Leitungsheimers: Im Anfang war ein Teerbrenner / Friedrichshagener Wirtschaftsquerschnitt," *BZ*, Aug. 29, 1953; S.E., "Eine harmlose Bierreise durch Berlin: Das Urteil des Mannes / Perlou-Molle ade / VEB Engelhardt: Für den Ansturm gut vorbereitet," *BZ*, Feb. 10, 1957.

<sup>50</sup> Paule Panke, "Im Weißbiergarten," *BZ*, June 23, 1957; Molli, "Wo findet der Hans seine Liesel? Glück im Berliner Kafegarten / Warum ist das heute so schwer?" *BZ*, April 3, 1953; mo., "HO-Gaststätten von zwei Seiten: Der Hans findet seine Liesel / Sparsamkeit auf den Kopf gestellt," *BZ*, April 22, 1953.

and even a column on the tradition of a “beer wagon” that traveled from house to house delivering beer all acted as signifiers that the *Volksgetränk*'s past still carried weight and garnered approval in government and press circles.<sup>51</sup>

Even the media's presentation of beer traditions that no longer continued, or stemmed from other countries and cultures, represented a general “beer nostalgia.” For example, the town of Buckow (Märkische Schweiz) to the east of Berlin served as a popular rural vacation spot for residents of the capital, particularly for the Easter holidays. In multiple years both the *Neue Zeit* and *Berliner Zeitung* carried stories about the town, and in both cases the region's preindustrial brewing traditions received prominent mention and detailed description even though local production appears to have died out hundreds of years prior.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, travel reporters who made trips to Bohemia during this period consistently glorified Czech brewing traditions.<sup>53</sup> One 1957 article, reporting on Czech machinery exhibits at the Leipzig Fair, noted that imports of “Pilsner and Budweiser (beer from České Budějovice)... can never be large enough.”<sup>54</sup> The excellent quality of Czech beer and raw goods made regular appearances in East

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<sup>51</sup> rü, “Der Bierschenk gelobte und schwor: Kellerordnung eines 'Erbarn Rathes' - 80 Jahre Berliner Ratskeller,” *NZ*, Aug. 25, 1949; Vi., “Zu Gast bei den Burgkeller-'Geistern,’” *NZ*, Aug. 29, 1970; “NZ-Reporter Berichten: Der Bierwagon fährt wieder vors Haus,” *NZ*, April 18, 1951.

<sup>52</sup> Günter Priebe und Horst Neugebauer, “So verleben unsere reiselustigen Berliner das Osterfest: Eiersuchen in der Märkischen Schweiz und am Stechlinsee / Erstmalig Osterfahrten mit dem Feriendienst der Gewerkschaften,” *BZ*, April 13, 1952; “Die ‘Märkische Schweiz’ feiert Jubiläum: Theodor Fontane wurde ihr Entdecker - ‘Ick fühl mia hier sehr wohl!’” *NZ*, Aug. 8, 1953; see also Charlotte Leven, “Zu Füßen von Schloß Hartenfels: Torgau in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart,” *NZ*, Nov. 17, 1957.

<sup>53</sup> Carl Ordnung, “Was wäre Prag ohne die Pragen!: Reisenotizen vom Besuch der Goldenen Stadt - Von Carl Ordnung,” *Neue Zeit*, June 5, 1958; Friederich Eismann, “Wo der Pilsner Urquell sprudelt: In zwei weltberühmten Brauereien zu Gast,” *NZ*, Feb. 11, 1961; Dr. K.-H. Arnold, “Prager Impressionen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, June 13, 1961.

<sup>54</sup> -dp-, “Schnell wächst in der CSR der Riese Maschinenbau: Ein Rundgang durch die Halle 4 der Technische Messe - Von unserer Leipziger Messe-Sonderredaktion,” *NZ*, March 5, 1957.

Germany's print media, and columnists repeatedly waxed eloquent over the fine state of Bohemia's *Nationalgetränk* and the high rates of its consumption.<sup>55</sup> These articles often paid close attention to the nuanced characteristics of Czech brewing history, and the customs surrounding beer in that state.

The economic planners and administrators of East Germany also invested a surprising level of effort in producing the *Volksgetränk* in a range of traditional styles, rather than seeking higher efficiency by standardizing beer production. Indeed, they sometimes placed greater emphasis on variety than on quality or tradition. The industry produced hoppier, *pilsner*-style beer in the early 1950s despite the fact that hop scarcity in these years led research labs to suggest using replacement bittering agents like vermouth.<sup>56</sup> In like manner, certain breweries received the green light to make *Schwarzbier* (black beer), *Bockbier*, *Weißbier* (wheat beer), and German porter.<sup>57</sup> All of these offerings represented tiny shares of the market. Even *pilsner* formed a relatively small category next to the dominant style of *Vollbier Hell*, though it gradually gained market share.<sup>58</sup> Yet the very insignificance of these smaller styles suggests that demand

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<sup>55</sup> -dp-, "Schnell wächst in der CSR der Riese Maschinenbau: Ein Rundgang durch die Halle 4 der Technische Messe - Von unserer Leipziger Messe-Sonderredaktion," *NZ*, March 5, 1957; Carl Ordnung, "Was wäre Prag ohne die Pragen!: Reisenotizen vom Besuch der Goldenen Stadt - Von Carl Ordnung," *NZ*, June 5, 1958; Friederich Eismann, "Wo der Pilsner Urquell sprudelt: In zwei weltberühmten Brauereien zu Gast," *NZ*, Feb. 11, 1961.

<sup>56</sup> VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie Verwaltung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie, "Abschlussbericht über den Forschungsauftrag 510 901 / 03 071. Erforschung der Verwendungsmöglichkeit von anderen, gleichwertigen Rohstoffen an Stelle von Hopfen für die Biererzeugung," 4 March, 1952, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Message from -Der Leiter, VWR, Abt. LMI to Stellv. des Ministers, Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung, "Program zur Sicherung der Getränkeversorgung 1962," 17 February, 1962, BArch, DE4 - 23552.

<sup>58</sup> Gen. Berger, "Sitzungsmaterial: Grundrichtung der Entwicklung der Erzeugnisgruppen Bier und alkoholfreie Erfrischungsgeränke 1971 - 1975," 8 September, 1971, BArch, DG 5/1734; Message from - Der Leiter, Volkswirtschaftsrat der DDR, Abt. Lebensmittelindustrie- to -Stellv. des Ministers, Ministerium

for them remained relatively low, suggesting the state had other reasons for supplying such niche markets. Hints at their motivation can be found in the media, which provided profiles, laudations, and connoisseur-style histories of these specialty beers. They enthusiastically associated them with the rich historical traditions of uniquely German brewing practices.<sup>59</sup>

*Bockbier* offers an excellent example of the Party's efforts to appropriate and embrace beer traditions. *Bockbier* originated in the central German city of Einbeck in the thirteenth century, and gained popularity as brewers in Bavaria imitated its style in the following centuries. While the term "bock" refers to beers with a range of different gravities and ingredients, they share the common characteristics of being somewhat stronger, richer, lager beers with round sweetness balanced out by a healthy dose of hop bitterness.<sup>60</sup> All of these characteristics (stronger, richer, sweet, hoppy), result from the fact that *Bockbier* requires considerably larger quantities of all the raw ingredients used in making beer.<sup>61</sup> It originally developed out of the need to have a strong beer that could survive an entire summer of storage, which resulted in the association of *Bockbier* with fall, and therefore with harvest festivals.<sup>62</sup> Despite the greater investment needed for this

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für Handel und Versorgung, "Program zur Sicherung der Getränkeversorgung 1962," 17 February, 1962, BArch, DE4 - 23552.

<sup>59</sup> K, "Auch die Weiße hat es in sich," *NZ*, July 29, 1952.

<sup>60</sup> Dornbusch, *Prost!*, 64-65, 102.

<sup>61</sup> For example, a standard homebrew recipe for a *Vollbier Hell* calls for 8.75 pounds of grain and 1 ounce of hops. See Michael Dawson, "Homebrew Recipe: Müncher Hell," *the Growler*, <https://growlermag.com/homebrew-recipe-muncher-hell/>. One can compare this to the same author's recipe for a *Maibock* which calls for 13 pounds of grain and 2 ounces of hops. Michael Dawson, "Homebrew Recipe: Maibock," *the Growler*, <https://growlermag.com/homebrew-recipe-maibock/>.

<sup>62</sup> Dornbusch, *Prost!*, 64-65.



classic German beer, GDR breweries began producing it again less than five years after the state came into existence.

An article announcing the return of bocks to East Berlin in 1953 lavished detail over the history of the style. In an interview with a brewmaster at Berlin's Engelhardt brewery, the columnist identified only as "ke" walked readers through the origins of *Bockbier*, the differences in its two most common forms (light and dark), production choices that determined its color and flavor, and the proper glassware to drink it out of. The article ends on a forward-looking note about apprentices at the brewery learning how to make the fall seasonal for the future. Layered, implicitly, in statements about specialty serving vessels, ingredients, and distribution methods is the extra cost and effort put into these beers by the state-run breweries.<sup>63</sup> The arrival of *Bockbier* season and its attendant traditions forms a common theme, year after year, in GDR newspapers.<sup>64</sup>

The perpetuation of styles and social elements of beer consumption reaffirm structural support for beer enthusiasm in the GDR, and weigh directly against claims in the historiography that East Germans had strictly "utilitarian" attitudes toward drinking and never developed a "connoisseur-culture."<sup>65</sup> This may have been true to some extent with liquor and wine, but beer clearly breaks the mold. The media repeatedly associated beer with celebrations, holidays, and popular events, while the state's economic

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<sup>63</sup> ke, "1000 Fässer rollen täglich in Stralau: Jetzt ist Bockbier Saison - Geschmackswandlung der Berliner," *NZ*, Jan. 21, 1953.

<sup>64</sup> "Herr ober, ein Bock: Ab 15. Oktober Bockbiersaison in Berlin," *BZ*, Oct. 10, 1953; Heiner Hein, "Gefragt - Geantwortet: Woher hat das Bockbier seinen Namen," *BZ*, Dec. 29, 1965; Gerhard H. Kegel, "BZ stellt vor Die Industrie der Hauptstadt: Lebensmittel; Appetitliches Sortiment aus 85 Betrieben," *BZ*, Dec. 11, 1965; Bertold, "Moment Mal," *NZ*, Nov. 1, 1967.

<sup>65</sup> Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kompeltod*, 57, 73.

bureaucrats worked hard to prevent shortages on these occasions.<sup>66</sup> Beer retained its particularly German characteristic as both an everyday drink and an object of connoisseurship. On multiple occasions, officials in the state's economic councils and ministries sent out detailed instructions for beer-serving establishments on the proper techniques for pouring beer.<sup>67</sup> A pamphlet from the National Economic Council's Beer and Malt department used whimsical graphics and a refined-looking typeface to evangelize about every aspect of "caring for beer." They described proper practices from the moment of delivery to the point of service, including the selection and cleaning of glassware.<sup>68</sup>

Care for custom and the finer points of the drinking experience appeared in the manufacturing of beer-paraphernalia as well. When the German Office for Material and Goods Inspection standardized the production of restaurant serving glasses in the early 1960s, it authorized four styles of beer glass at different sizes resulting in eleven total configurations. By comparison, wine, spirits, and non-alcoholic drinks each had a single style and size of glass designed for them.<sup>69</sup> All of this points to the fact that state-run beer

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<sup>66</sup> "Nur der Schlüssel zur Notenbank fehlte noch: Wie man in Leipzig den Rosenmontag feierte / 'Escha, escha, escha' war die Parole," *BZ*, March 2, 1954; "Blick auf Berlin: Hauptgewinn: Ein IFA-F 9," *NZ*, Nov. 28, 1953; hae, "Sollen wir verdursten? Apfelmost allein genügt nicht," *BZ*, Dec. 31, 1952; Message from Männel, Leiter - VWR, Abt. LMI to BWR Leipzig, Abt. LMI, "Sicherung der Getränkeversorgung zum IV. Deutschen Turn- und Sportfest vom 1.8. - 4.8.1963 in Leipzig," 2 July, 1963, BArch, DE 4/12099, pg. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Merkel, Minister - MHV, "Ausschank von Bier u. Spirituosen, Anweisung Nr. 69/62," in *Verfügungen und Mitteilungen des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung* Heft 43, 29 December, 1962, BArch, DF 5/3143, pg. 391.

<sup>68</sup> n.a., "Die Pflege des Bieres," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7591.

<sup>69</sup> Amt für Standardisierung, Berlin, "DDR-Standard, Schankgefäße Bierbecher - TGL 5074, Gruppe 521," 31 July, 1961, BArch; Amt für Standardisierung, Berlin, "DDR-Standard, Schankgefäße Bierpokale - TGL 5075, Gruppe 521," 29 January, 1962, BArch; Amt für Standardisierung, Berlin, "DDR-Standard, Schankgefäße Bierseidel - TGL 5076, Gruppe 521," 31 July, 1961, BArch; Amt für Standardisierung, Berlin, "DDR-Standard, Schankgefäße Weissbierbecher - TGL 5077, Gruppe 521," 31 July, 1961, BArch.

and restaurant industries did not consider specialization and expert care of beer to be superfluous or inappropriate. The continuation of beer connoisseurship represents one important way that the GDR's government organs showed nuanced care for the standards of production and service of the people's drink.

### **The Question of Quality**

Attention to detail did not always guarantee a satisfactory consumer experience. According to industry leaders and state economic functionaries, a large portion of the beer produced in the German Democratic Republic consistently fell short of quality standards throughout the period of this study, with the summer months being worst as a result of higher demand.<sup>70</sup> Reports on beer included every measurable characteristic of the beverage in their definition of *Qualität*. Critically, though, the same designation also applied to subjective features such as taste and aroma.<sup>71</sup> When beer evaluations in East Germany reported on these features, descriptive terms only appear to explain problems with the product. A "high-quality" beer required no detailed, explanatory list of sensory experiences among state employees and overseers of the brewing industry. Lest one think

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<sup>70</sup> The following sources show quality issues over time, however only in a few cases did members of the state bureaucracy give a concise summary of the state of beer in the entire nation. When they do, the results are not encouraging. n.a. - SPK, Abt. LMI, "Haupttrichtung der wissenschaftlich-technischen Entwicklung," n.d., BArch, DE 1/51636, n.p; Matthies, Direktor - SG, "Protokoll über die Tagung der Zentralen Kommission für Warenbilanzierung am 30.7.1962," 31 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/24531 Bd. 2, pg. 4; "Jahresanalyse 1962," 18 January, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7408, pg. 2; Lemmel, Abteilungsleiter - SG FA Koordinierung, Grundsatzfragen und Getränkeversorgung, "Protokoll über die Arbeitstaung der Leiter der Leitlaboratorien und der TKO-Bearbeiter der Bezirke am 26.2.1963 im Kulturraum des Betriebsteils Engelhardt-Brauerei Berlin," 7 March, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7596, pg. 1

<sup>71</sup> One document, which the author has failed to find extant despite many attempts, could go a long way toward improving our knowledge of this subject. The original TGL (Technical Norms, Goods Regulations, and Delivery Conditions) document for beer was written in the early 1960s according to state documents. It would describe the government's standards for beer in minute detail, of the kind that is only available in pieces throughout other archival documents. A version from the 1980s is available online, but it shows clear updates.

that exuberant descriptions of beer did not exist at all in the GDR, newspaper examples can prove otherwise. A 1967 *Neues Deutschland* article described the award-winning beers from the VEB Berliner breweries with extravagant detail, listing them under titles such as “A beer for connoisseurs,” “a beer for gourmets,” and “an old specialty from Berlin.”<sup>72</sup> Such in-depth subjective explanations were not anathema to East German beer, but they never appear from the industry or government side.

This speaks to the fact that the high-level brewery staff and researchers who evaluated and judged beer worked from an assumed consensus among their target consumer base to understand what their product “should” taste like. In reports for supervisory government officials and internal quality checks the potential for varying beer pallets never emerges. Industry experts felt confident enough in their grasp of these ideas that they treated characteristics like flavor, aroma, and mouthfeel as just another set of quantifiable, measurable features. Judging techniques exhibited an unquestioning and confident acceptance of culturally-constructed consumption patterns by the administration, and a significant level of concern in meeting expectations. Thus, even as industry researchers continued to report unacceptable quality in East German beer, they recognized taste and enjoyability as necessary to their objectives. Their goal was not simply to produce beer, nor even beer that met some standard of being objectively acceptable. Their words state clearly that they aimed for “good” beer. Put simply, the GDR’s beer industry uniformly operated from a system of cultural normative values in

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<sup>72</sup> [Berliner Brauereien advertisement] *ND*, March 5, 1967.

terms of beer character, even when it intentionally chose to settle for lower standards in production.

Immediately after the war the push to return to “normal” beer began. As East Germany and the brewing sector recovered, beer quality referred almost entirely to strength (measured in gravity) and ingredient choice. The slow development of the brewing industry under the SMAD left the population thirsty for beer of “peace-quality”, meaning the styles and strength of the *Volksgetränk* available before the war.<sup>73</sup> Limits on beer gravity relaxed progressively during the final years of occupation. In 1948 and 1949 East Germany’s breweries began to produce normal strength beer once again.<sup>74</sup> These years also show the first use of ersatz ingredients in beer production, an issue that remained throughout the state’s existence. In March 1946 Soviet authorities gave East German brewers permission to break the *Reinheitsgebot*, which had remained in effect up to then.<sup>75</sup> Breweries could now use sugar and other adjuncts in lieu of malted barley. Likewise, research facilities attempted to find new ingredients that could replace ultra-scarce hops and replicate their bittering and preserving qualities.<sup>76</sup> Even these earliest

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<sup>73</sup> M.H., “Leser nehmen Stellung: Schiefe Werbung,” *NZ*, Dec. 14, 1954; Hwg. “Brauereien wollen exportieren,” *NZ*, March 12, 1947.

<sup>74</sup> Message from DWK, HV LMI und Fischwirtschaft to all Landesregierung Handel und Versorgung abt. LMI, Magistrat von Groß-Berlin, and VVB Brau- und Malz, “Umstellung der Bierproduktion und Produktions-Befehl für das IV. Quartal 1949,” 12 September, 1949, BArch, DN 1/36174, 1; ADN, “Bierpreise werden gesenkt,” *ND*, Nov. 19, 1949.

<sup>75</sup> Message from (no name), Der Präsident usw. (no organization) to Provinzialverwaltung Sachsen in Halle, “Abweichung vom Reinheitsgebot bei der Herstellung von untergäurigem Bier,” 18 March, 1946, BArch, DN 1/36162, 1.

<sup>76</sup> n.a. - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik Wissenschaftlich-technische Organisation, “Richtlinien für den Forschungs- und Entwicklungsplan 1952 für Nahrungs- und Genussmittel auf Grund der Beiratssitzung vom 18. Mai 1951,” 8 June, 1951, BArch, DF 4/40112, pg. 2; Zentrallaboratorium Berlin, “Forschungsauftrag Plannummer 280 307 F 3 - 06,” 31 August, 1953, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1-2, Table 1.

efforts to improve quality show the power of culturally-defined expectations. The East German administrators abandoned the *Reinheitsgebot* to more quickly return beer to its previous strength and variety without drastically reducing production.<sup>77</sup> Ironically, they eliminated the Beer Purity Law to produce “better” beer.

Despite this deviation from the *Reinheitsgebot*, hints of its influence on East German conceptions of beer persisted. Industry leaders and economic officials overseeing the beer sector understood that the GDR’s two beer-loving neighbors, West Germany and Czechoslovakia, adhered to production codes that East Germany frequently violated, but the media routinely neglected to mention that fact when discussing beer to the west and south.<sup>78</sup> After the initial decree that lifted the four-ingredient limit, the term *Reinheitsgebot* disappears from sources in the Soviet Occupation Zone and GDR. However, associations of adjunct use with lower quality in beer recur frequently in both industry documents and administration files.

The issue of adjunct use provides the clearest example of disagreement between different factions within the state brewing structure. Starting in the early 1950s it became standard practice in most GDR breweries to replace 10 to 25 percent of the malted barley in beer recipes with rice, corn, or unmalted barley.<sup>79</sup> At the end of the decade, research

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<sup>77</sup> Message from (no name), Der Präsident usw. (no organization) to Provinzialverwaltung Sachsen in Halle, “Abweichung vom Reinheitsgebot bei der Herstellung von untergärigem Bier,” 18 March, 1946, BArch, DN 1/36162, 1; Message from DWK, HV LMI und Fischwirtschaft to all Landesregierung Handel und Versorgung abt. LMI, Magistrat von Groß-Berlin, and VVB Brau- und Malz, “Umstellung der Bierproduktion und Produktions-Befehl für das IV. Quartal 1949,” 12 September, 1949, BArch, DN 1/36174, 1.

<sup>78</sup> n.a., report in files of VWR, “Reihenfolge und Methode zur Berechnung des Pro-Kopf-verbrauchs der Bevölkerung an Lebensmitteln in der Tschechoslowakei,” n.d., file dates: 1960, BArch, DE 4/929, 69-70.

<sup>79</sup> Schneider, Leiter - VWR Abt. LMI to Gen. Schaefer - Büro des Ministerrates Abt. Eingaben der Bürger, “Eingabe Günther Haase - VV Brauereiwesen,” 26 September, 1963, 2.

organizations such as the Central Laboratory for the Brewing and Malting Industry and the Institute for the Fermentation and Drink Industry started pushing the use of artificially produced enzymes in many branches of food production, including beer. This allowed for adjunct use of up to 50 percent.<sup>80</sup> Their voices became loudest and most insistent in the first half of the 1960s, but plans to increase rice and corn use in brewing ran up against resistance from the leader of the Food Industry Department in the National Economic Council. He noted reports from brewers of negative results in attempts to make beer with less malted barley.<sup>81</sup> When the regime formed new ministries in 1965, the head of the MBL reopened the issue for debate. One of his immediate subordinates clearly favored the researchers and increased adjunct use, but Gerhard Matthies and the Stako, on behalf of a professional organization of brewers, objected, claiming insufficient research.<sup>82</sup> All of these discussions took place behind closed doors, but clearly differing opinions remained on how far the East German brewing industry should deviate from traditional practices.

Any suggested changes to beer in the GDR had to fit in the state's definition of "quality," including the acknowledged consensus on proper taste. During the hop crises of the early 1950s, industry researchers showed that vermouth provided a level of bitterness similar to hops, and that its use did not interfere in the brewing process or alter

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<sup>80</sup> Fachabteilung Brau und Malz, "Wissenschaft und Technik," 9 July, 1955, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1; n.a., "Analyse über die Entwicklung der Sortimente und die Verbesserung der Qualität in den wichtigsten Industriegruppen," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408, n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Schneider, "Eingabe Günther Haase - VV Brauereiwesen," 2.

<sup>82</sup> Matthies, Hauptdirektor-Stako to Männel, Stellvertreter des Ministers für Bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie, "Betr.: Einsatz von Enzympräparaten in der Brauindustrie," 22 October, 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 1-2.

the empirically measurable features of beer (foam retention, color, shelf life) to an unacceptable degree. However, they also felt compelled to repeatedly mention that these measures would be strictly temporary, and that beer produced without hops “causes no changes in flavor.”<sup>83</sup> This statement is truly remarkable both for its inaccuracy and for its assertion that a subjective experience can be empirically measured in a laboratory. Yet, the same model of taste tests showing “no changes” reoccurred multiple times in the first two decades of the GDR’s existence.<sup>84</sup> During the push for higher adjunct use, researchers provided several reports of taste tests conducted to evaluate high-adjunct beer produced with artificial enzymes.<sup>85</sup> Their results unsurprisingly showed that brews with 40 percent replacement malt had a certain “flavorlessness,” but immediately argued that this could be overcome by adjusting the recipe.<sup>86</sup> The consistent claims that new methods

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<sup>83</sup> Fachabteilung Brau und Malz (Abteilung of what not listed), “Wissenschaft und Technik,” 9 July, 1955, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1; VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie Verwaltung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie, “Abschlussbericht über den Forschungsauftrag 510 901 / 03 071. Erforschung der Verwendungsmöglichkeit von anderen, gleichwertigen Rohstoffen an Stelle von Hopfen für die Biererzeugung,” 4 March, 1952, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1, 4; quote from Lichtenstein, Abteilungsleiter - Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, “Protokoll über die erste Sitzung des Beirates Nahrungs- und Genußmittel am 18. Mai 1951,” 19 May, 1951, BArch, DE 4/40112, 6.

<sup>84</sup> See also “Verkaufskultur muß gehoben werden: Mehr Bier durch Ultraschall,” *NZ*, May 6, 1952; “Besseres Bier mit Ultraschall,” *BZ*, March 4, 1953; VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie Verwaltung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie, “Protokoll der Verkostung ultrabeschallter Biere am 3. Nov. 1952 in der VEB Riebeck Brauerei, Erfurt,” 6 November, 1952, BArch, DE 4/23557, 3; Kluge, “Protokoll über eine Bierverkostung beim VEB Berliner Brauerei en, Betriebsteil ‘Bürgerbräu’, Berlin-Friedrichshagen am 3. Mai 1963,” 3 May, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7596, 1; Dipl. Chem. W. Piratzky, Leiter - Forschungs- und Entwicklungsstelle, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie, “Jahresbericht 1958 der Forschungs- und Entwicklungsstelle,” 9 February, 1959, BArch, DE 4/23562 Bd. 1, 4, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Message from Dr. Wange, Stellvertreter des Ministers to Briska - Leiter der Abteilung Leicht-Lebensmittel- und bezirkgeleitete Industrie für Zentralkomitee der SED, “Einsatz von Enzypräparaten,” 17 Sept. 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 6; Message to Sekretär Männel-stellv. Minister-BGL, “Erste Auswertung der Versuche ‘Enzympräparate in der Praxis,’” 30 August, 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 20-30.

<sup>86</sup> Message from Männel, Stellvertreter des Ministers- Bezirkgeleitete und Lebensmittelindustrie to Briska-Leiter der Abteilung Leicht-Lebensmittel- und bezirkgeleitete Industrie für Zentralkomitee der SED, “Betr.: Einsatz von Enzympräparaten in der Brauindustrie,” 8 August, 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 17-18.



and techniques would have no effect on flavor strains credulity. Beer is a highly sensitive product and slight changes often have outsized impacts on taste. However, the more important takeaway from these sample probes is that the administration and industry leaders insisted that any new ingredients or change to the brewing process could at least claim to not cause significant alterations in the organoleptic features of beer.

Contradictions in the state-run brewing industry's pursuit of quality point clearly to a regime seeking to paint itself as a champion of the people's expectations on the one hand, and perfectly willing to enact measures that would disappoint those hopes on the other. Thus, they maintained their claims to share and promote the cultural values of the people, while saving on critical resources. In 1951, a representative from the Ministry of the Food Industry communicated a sharp rebuke to a brewery manager who had stated that consumers failed to recognize the differences between beers. The brewer had argued that, for the average customer, beer represented a uniform product. The ministry stated flatly, "Colleague Pilz's view that all beer should be treated as equal in terms of quality is indefensible."<sup>87</sup> The highest office of economic management in the GDR's government made clear that subjective beer quality represented a prominent issue, and demanded that lower level operators in the industry share this view. Yet, on at least two occasions, in 1953 and 1955, that same Ministry issued a blanket order to East Germany's breweries to lower the gravity of their beers, and held to this decree despite resistance from industry

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<sup>87</sup> Message from Erich Pilz, Betriebsleiter - Brauerei Wurzen to Dr. Berger, stellvtr. des Ministerpräsidenten - Sekretariat W. Ulbricht, n.t., 23 August, 1951, BArch, DC 20/3106, Bl. 83.

leaders.<sup>88</sup> The newspapers did not announce these changes to the public, which was the most common way for the population to hear news about its beer supply.<sup>89</sup>

The government put quantity over quality in production of *Gerstensaft* in a number of other ways as well. The administration authorized continued and increasing use of adjuncts, occasional reductions in hop usage, investment in new bottling equipment instead of replacing dilapidated kettles and fermenters, and curtailing the conditioning period for beer to meet demand.<sup>90</sup> In the latter two cases, economic planners made decisions that directly and unavoidably led to poorer quality in the people's drink. The average East German citizen would have required insider knowledge to be aware of these policies, but the end results were unmistakably plain when a beer tasted flavorless, went bad in a few days, or appeared hazy and unclean.<sup>91</sup> Certainly, East Germans did

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<sup>88</sup> Droz, Oberreferent - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, Fachgebiet Lebensmittel/Ernährung, "Herstellung von Dünnbier," 7 March, 1955, BArch, DF 4/40677, 1-2; Matthies, Geschäftsleiter - VLK Getränke, "Entwicklung des VE-Versorgungs- und Lagerungskontors der Lebensmittelindustrie Getränke," n.d., BArch, DE 4/24528, n.p.

<sup>89</sup> A keyword search in three of the GDR's largest newspapers in 1953 and 1955 for the terms "stammwürzegehalt" and "bier" returned no articles referring to lowered gravity.

<sup>90</sup> Message from Dr. Wange, Stellvertreter des Ministers to Briska - Leiter der Abteilung Leicht-Lebensmittel- und bezirkgeleitete Industrie für Zentralkomitee der SED, "Einsatz von Enzypräparaten," 17 Sept. 1966, BArch, DG5/36, Bl. 6; n.a. - SPK, Abt. LMI, "Haupttrichtung der wissenschaftlich-technischen Entwicklung," n.d., BArch, DE 1/51636, n.p.; n.a., "Analyse über die Entwicklung der Sortimente und die Verbesserung der Qualität in den wichtigsten Industriegruppen," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408, n.p.; "Aufgabenstellung und Struktur des VLK Getränke, Berlin," 4 June, 1957, BArch, DE 4 - 24528, n.p.; n.a., "Technische und technologische Forderungen bei grundlegender Beachtung der technologischen Einrichtungen und der Maschinen der Brauindustrie, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Bedürfnisses an Einrichtungen für die Periode bis zum Jahre 1965," 1960, BArch, DE 4/23562; Dipl.-Wirtsch. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Entwicklung des Bier Verbrauchs bis 1975," 10 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung, BArch, DL 102/660; Dr. Petzold, Abt. Leiter - MBL Abt. Produktionskontrolle und Absatz, "Sitzungsmaterial: Getränkeanalyse 1971," 21 September, 1971, BArch, DG 5/1734.

<sup>91</sup> Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, "Bieranalysen für Engelhard," 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, "Bieranalysen für Breithaupt Berlin.," 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176.

notice. In just one prominent example, Stefan Heym's 1974 novel *5 Days in June*, mentions the "bland" flavor of East German beer, and implies that West German brews were better.<sup>92</sup> Still, in the state-run media, all signs pointed to a government deeply concerned with bringing its people good German beer. This might help explain why so many seemingly banal documents from the GDR's brewing industry received the stamp "*streng vertrauliche*" (strictly confidential).<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps the most pertinent example of the state's deployment of beer quality as a cultural touchstone for its population comes from its beer export industry. In order to satisfy foreign customers, and to ensure that beer survived transit, the GDR's economic planners invested more resources in equipping its export breweries with modern bottling and pasteurizing equipment, while giving them first priority on deliveries of quality raw goods.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, export brands of beer remained more likely to continue brewing according to the *Reinheitsgebot*. This proves both that the Beer Purity Law retained its cache as a signifier of better beer in the GDR, and that the most well-regarded beers were

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<sup>92</sup> Stefan Heym, *5 Tage im Juni* (München; Bertelsmann Verlag, 1974), 124, 281.

<sup>93</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Nicol "8.4 Der VEB Radeberger Exportbierbrauerei,"; Dr. Bernd Schmidt, Rodewisch, "8.5 Der VEB Exportbierbrauerei Wernesgrün," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016); Wilfred Bley and Dr. Peter Wächter, "8.16 VEB Getränkekombinat Gera," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016); Ulrich, Werkleiter - Köstritzer Schwarzbierbrauerei und Lemmel, Mitarbeiter - SG, "Niederschrift über eine Beratung in Export-Angelegenheiten im VEB Köstritzer Schwarzbierbrauerei - Bad Köstritz," 16 March, 1961, BArch, DE 4/780, pg. 1. Message from gez. Kleppsch, UA-Leiter - bez verw dsdn (Bezirks Verwaltung Dresden?) to koll. Richter, SPK Abt. LMI, gruppe genussmittelindustrie und gruppe verpackung, "kronenkorken fuer veb radeberger exportbierbrauerei," 20 July, 1961, BArch, DE 4/780,

those destined to leave East Germany.<sup>95</sup> However, even though these beers cost more and remained harder to come by for the average citizen, the media repeatedly heralded them as the finest specimens of high quality brewing in the name of the “people.” When state functionaries argued that GDR beer matched the standards in West Germany, their examples inevitably came from one of the high-end export breweries.<sup>96</sup>

Much of the praise for these brews emerged from the Leipzig Trade Fair, where foreign representatives and East German citizens could try GDR export beer, and breweries received recognition for their finest products. The Fair acted as a display window for East Germany to the outside world. Representatives from both socialist and non-socialist nations could attend and view the GDR’s best goods, as well as advertise their own.<sup>97</sup> Many brewing facilities received the designation of “Operation of Outstanding Quality Work” from these events.<sup>98</sup> The best beers from East Germany made

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<sup>95</sup>Of course for beers that were exported to West Germany the *Reinheitsgebot* was a required precondition for their entry. However, the FRG was not the largest importer of East German beer, and a great deal of export beer that did not sell there still kept to the four-ingredient restriction. See S. Hausdorf “DDR Reinheitsgebot,” *DDR Brauwesen: Das Informationsarchiv über Ostdeutsche Brauereien und Getränkebetriebe von 1949 bis 1989 und deren Werbemittel*, Accessed 9-30-2017, <https://www.getraenkebetriebe.de/allgemeines/reinheitsgebot.html>; “Wird das noch gebraucht, oder kann das weg?” 17.

<sup>96</sup>“Ganz Berlin deutsche Hauptstadt des Friedens: Aus der Rede des Genossen Albert Norden auf der großen Kundgebung in Westberliner Sportpalast; Störenfriedpolitik endet schlecht; Wir drohen mit Milch und Gemüse, mit Weizen und Bier,” *ND*, Nov. 14, 1958; Droz, Oberreferent - SPK, Zentralamt für Forschung und Technik, Fachgebiet Lebensmittel/Ernährung, “Herstellung von Dünnbier,” 7 March, 1955, BArch, DF 4/40677, 1; “Berliner Molle in Rom,” *NZ*, March 11, 1965; Na., “Pils' aus Berlin,” *BZ*, Oct. 12, 1965; “Gute Nase für 'Helles': Berliner Molle auf Reisen / Beste Qualität,” *NZ*, Oct. 15, 1965; *ND*, March 5, 1967; Vi., “Zu Gast bei den Burgkeller-'Geistern,’” n.a., “Jahresanalyse 1960,” n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408.

<sup>97</sup> Katherine Pence, “‘A World in Miniature’: The Leipzig Trade Fairs in the 1950s and East German Consumer Citizenship,” in *Consuming Germany in the Cold War: Consumption and National Identity in East and West Germany, 1949-1989, An Introduction* ed. David F. Crew (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

<sup>98</sup> Nicol “8.4 Der VEB Radeberger Exportbierbrauerei,” 191; Schmidt and Rodewisch, “8.5 Der VEB Exportbierbrauerei Wernesgrün,” 216; Na., “Pils' aus Berlin,” *BZ*, Oct. 12, 1965.

their presence known through this institution, consumption in high quantities received unabashed praise from Fair reporters, and many of the brewing industry's export contracts came from negotiations there.<sup>99</sup> The *Leipziger Messe* presented East Germans with a microcosm of the contradictions and mixed messages inherent in a state that demanded modest consumption from its citizens while showcasing its ability to export higher quality consumer goods.<sup>100</sup>

While these examples tend to paint the government's management of beer quality in a somewhat cynical, self-serving light, certain policies point to a legitimate interest in producing enjoyable beer according to consumer expectations. Not all taste testing took place out of an effort to legitimize new brewing methods. At regular intervals during this period, industry researchers and healthcare professionals working on food hygiene conducted sensory panels to probe beer and report on its flavor, aroma, mouthfeel, and appearance. Surviving records provide little information beyond the end results of the examination. Nevertheless they show adherence to a single idea of correct attributes, without room for differences in preference, either among the tasters or the customer base. Judges listed subjective features of beer as "normal," "good," or "full-flavored" and only made detailed notes if something seemed incorrect.<sup>101</sup> Nor did the state completely

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<sup>99</sup> 383, "Bockwurst-Rekorde in Leipzig gestürzt," *Berliner Zeitung*, Sept. 14, 1954; US, "Leipzig wurde wieder Treffpunkt der Welt: Wettergott hatte Einsehen - "Sturm auf die Messehäuser" - Täglich 30 Sonderzüge," *Neue Zeit*, Feb. 29, 1956; "Berliner Molle in Rom," *NZ*, March 11, 1965.

<sup>100</sup> Pence, "A World in Miniature," 21-22.

<sup>101</sup> Message from Dr. Prange, Abteilungsleiter - Abt. Lebensmittelchem., Bezirks-Hygiene-Institut Rostock, RdB Rostock (Land Macklenburg) Abt. Gesundheitswesen, n.t., 12 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, "Bieranalysen für Schultheiss, Leninallee," 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, "Bieranalysen für Engelhard," 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie,

whitewash individual complaints about bad beer from the consumers, though only criticisms of objective product issues such as cleanliness, cloudiness, or poor shelf life appeared in the state newspapers or received attention from officials.<sup>102</sup>

Regardless of its ability to execute high quality beer production or the internal contradictions between its actions and rhetoric, East Germany's leadership consistently highlighted its efforts to make good German beer. Critically, it defined that idea according to an internally agreed-upon assumption of traditional consumer preferences. Endorsing a material expression of cultural identity offered the regime many benefits, not the least of which was the ability to use those shared values in the war of words against its rivals to the west.

### **Cold (Beer) War**

The global conflict between American and Soviet spheres of influence infiltrated the discourse surrounding beer in the GDR, and had enormous impact on the brewing industry. In 1958, Albert Norden, an East German journalist and politician, traveled to West Berlin to give a speech praising the SED, and denouncing West German leaders for

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“Bieranalysen für Berliner Bürgerbräu,” 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, “Bieranalysen für Berliner Kind.,” 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, “Bieranalysen für Breithaupt Berlin.,” 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, “Bieranalysen für Bärenquell.,” 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Bosewitz - Abt. Ltr. Technologie, VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- u. Malzindustrie, “Bieranalysen für Schultheiss, Schönhauser Allee.,” 19 July, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Gen. Berger, “Sitzungsmaterial: Grundrichtung der Entwicklung der Erzeugnisgruppen Bier und alkoholfreie Erfrischungsgeränke 1971 - 1975,” 8 September, 1971, BArch, DG 5/1734.

<sup>102</sup> “Berliner Wirtschaftsleben: Kindl-Brauerei in Weißensee,” *BZ*, Jan. 8, 1947; Albert B. Pankow, “Den Appetit verdorben,” *BZ*, July 9, 1954; Hans Gemeinhardt, “Nicht auf den Grund sehen,” *BZ*, June 9, 1959; “Unsere Leser erhalten Antwort; Vom VEB Berliner Brauereien erhalten wir folgende Stellungnahme,” *BZ*, June 30, 1959; Message from Schneider, Leiter - VWR Abt. LMI to Gen. Schmidt, Werkdirektor - VEB Berliner Brauerein, “Beanstandungen von Flaschenbier,” 24 October, 1963, BArch, DE 4/12099;

their anti-communist rhetoric. Toward the end of his talk, Norden addressed recent statements by West Berlin's political candidates Lemmer (CDU) and Willy Brandt (SPD), in which they accused East Germany of threatening behavior. The *Neues Deutschland* reprinted his words under a section titled "We threaten with milk and vegetables, with wheat and beer." Norden suggested sarcastically, "Perhaps Lemmer and Brandt fear that we want to get the West Berliners drunk with our outstanding Radeberger Pilsner... The individuals who recently vandalized this *Sportpalaste* (the Berlin Sports Palace) had not drunk any Radeberger, but rather were intoxicated by the fleeting and minor art culture of Rock'n Roll imported from America."<sup>103</sup>

Norden's words neatly encapsulate much of the rhetorical strategy employed by GDR politicians and journalists in its brash assertion of beer superiority. This sense of competing brewing sectors extended beyond mere propaganda, however, it penetrated the actions and words of the industry and bureaucracy. Whenever possible, lower-level functionaries reporting to government leaders included information on the state of the West German brewing industry, especially after Ulbricht announced in 1958 that his state had three years to overtake the FRG's supply of consumer goods. Economic planners included beer in this campaign, though the evidence suggests that neither wine nor spirits received similar treatment. Yet, even before this concerted push to match West German

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<sup>103</sup> Original quote: „Vielleicht befürchten Lemmer und Brandt, daß wir mit unserem ausgezeichneten Radeberger Pilsner die Westberliner Bürger besoffen machen wollen. Das besorgen ganz andere. Diejenigen, die kürzlich das Inventar dieses Sportpalastes zertrümmerten, hatten kein Radeberger getrunken, sondern wurden durch die Amerika importierte Kurz- und Klein-kunst des Rock'n Roll besoffen gemacht.“ “Ganz Berlin deutsche Hauptstadt des Friedens: Aus der Rede des Genossen Albert Norden auf der großen Kundgebung in Westberliner Sportpalast; Störenfriedpolitik endet schlecht; Wir drohen mit Milch und Gemüse, mit Weizen und Bier,” *ND*, Nov. 14, 1958.

beer output, and even after it became clear that the mission was doomed to fail, the GDR's media maintained a regular drumbeat of beer-related anti-Western rhetoric.

Associations of West Germany with poor supplies of beer began almost immediately after the war as East German newspapers pointed their fingers at the Western Allies for neglecting the *Volksgetränk*. Unlike in the East, where the majority of brewery expropriation took place under the aegis of popular referendums, business confiscations in the British zone were painted as crass property grabs by the occupying forces. Such critical jabs at the West usually lacked concrete information, and relied on vague assertions of corrupt wrongdoing.<sup>104</sup> In many ways this became the standard method for how the GDR's print media reported on problems in the West German brewing industry. Hard facts and details always came second to a resounding judgement that the people's desire for beer was subject to the greed of the bourgeois business owners. Thus, when breweries in Hamburg and Bremen requested to export their beer two years after the war, the *Neue Zeit* reported that the dreadful conditions under Anglo-American administration made it impossible.<sup>105</sup> One year later, following the currency reform, the same newspaper denounced beer exports on the grounds that the Western Allies had fixed prices so that producers were encouraged to send desperately needed agricultural goods abroad rather than sell them locally.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Lietz, "Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ausgangsbedingungen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone," 25; G. H., "Anglo-amerikanische Reparationen aus Deutschland," *ND*, Sept. 18, 1946.

<sup>105</sup> Hwg. "Brauereien wollen exportieren," *NZ*, March 12, 1947.

<sup>106</sup> "Rund um die Agrarkrise," *NZ*, July 27, 1948.



The ordinary West German drinker regularly appeared as a victim of the vicious trends and swings in the market economy. Another *Neue Zeit* column from 1952 described increasing beer prices in Bavaria as an “antisocial price spiral,” and approvingly reported calls for “beer strikes” among the population there.<sup>107</sup> Whichever way events transpired, reporters in the Soviet Zone and later the GDR used beer to remind their readers that the western economy and government offered nothing but disappointment and exploitation.<sup>108</sup> A 1957 *Berliner Zeitung* article served a good example of the direct connection made between capitalism and beer. The author reported that breweries in Austria complained about their profit margins being squeezed by rising utility prices, but they merely wanted an excuse to raise the end-consumer price of beer and stuff the wallets of their shareholders.<sup>109</sup>

The GDR’s journalists aimed their sharpest critiques at West German brewery owners and managers, sometimes including charges of Nazism in their diatribes. Shortly after the war a story appeared in the East German press regarding the former head of the brewery economic group under the Third Reich. In 1947, a Munich-area court exonerated him even though he had been a member of the Nazi party since 1938. The article implied that the Western Allied authorities excused the businessman’s political affiliation based

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<sup>107</sup> “Hiobsbotschaft für Bayerns Biertrinker,” *Neue Zeit*, June 26, 1952.

<sup>108</sup> “... und ohne Bier,” *BZ*, July 24 1947; “Kaufkraftrückgang und Bierproblem,” *NZ*, Jul. 24, 1948; “Kein Starkbier in der Bizone,” *ND*, Oct. 14, 1948; G.K., “Ein Budget gegen das Volk,” *BZ*, May 5, 1949; AP, “Unverschämte Handesspannen,” *BZ*, Feb. 26, 1950; AP, “Unverschämte Handesspannen,” *BZ*, Feb. 26, 1950; “Und die andere Seite,” *BZ*, Dec. 11, 1951; “Noch weniger Konsumgüter für Westdeutsche,” *ND*, Jan. 6, 1952; Hako, “Der 'selbstständige' Unternehmer der 'freien Welt': Mittelständler werden zu Angestellten der Konzerne degradiert,” *ND*, March 26, 1957.

<sup>109</sup> “In Österreich illustriert: Volkskapitalismus: Verschiedene Seiten des 'gesegneten Zeitalters' / Bier auch teurer / Entlassungen als Druckmittel,” *BZ*, May 25, 1957.

on his reputation as a good Christian and his participation in the well-loved enterprise of brewing.<sup>110</sup> In the East, of course, neither characteristic brought forgiveness to former members of the NSDAP. The Soviet administration pursued charges against any brewery owner or employee who had openly supported fascism and ruthlessly removed them from their posts.<sup>111</sup>

The most common polemics against West German brewery owners involved conspiracy and political intrigue.<sup>112</sup> Brewing concerns in the FRG and West Berlin quite often received the moniker “monopolistic” when described by the East German media.<sup>113</sup> The practice of allowing “tied pubs” served as proof of the unscrupulous business practices inherent in the capitalist system.<sup>114</sup> This arrangement, made famous by the British brewing and bar industry, allowed beer producers to own retailers, and thereby require that only products from that company be sold in the pub, tavern, or store. Perhaps the most prominent scandal (from the perspective of the GDR) involving beer directly affected the first chancellor of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer. Adenauer’s wife, according to the state newspapers, came from a wealthy family that had owned more than a dozen large breweries in East Germany. Over a span of three years from 1958 to 1961,

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<sup>110</sup> “Religion und Bayrisch Bier: Nazi zur ‘Rettung des Braugewerbs’ / Auch Beichtvater half nicht,” *BZ*, Aug. 15, 1947.

<sup>111</sup> Ingo Sens, *Bier für Rostock* (Rostock: Hinsdorff, 2016), 93; Lietz, “Die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ausgangsbedingungen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone,” 25.

<sup>112</sup> For further examples, see “Strauß würgt SPD-Zeitungen ab: Bonns Kreisminister greift mit Polizeistaatmethoden in den Wahlkampf / Terrorwelle ausgedehnt,” *ND*, Nov. 8, 1958; W.R., “ND Kommentiert: Bonn ruiniert Hopfenbauern,” *ND*, Sept. 21, 1959; G. Fl., “Krieg & Bier en gros,” *ND*, April 23, 1960.

<sup>113</sup> “60 Millionäre im Nacken der Westberliner: Immer schärfere Gegensätze zwischen Reichtum und Armut / Hemmungslöse Prasserei der Neureichen,” *BZ*, Dec. 2, 1954.

<sup>114</sup> Hako, “Der ‘selbstständige’ Unternehmer der ‘freien Welt’: Mittelständler werden zu Angestellten der Konzerne degradiert,” *ND*, March 26, 1957; for another example see “Und Schwarz,” *BZ*, Feb. 18, 1960.

eastern journalists and prominent politicians reveled in accusing Adenauer of wanting to reunify Germany under a capitalist system simply to regain property and increase his own personal wealth.<sup>115</sup> In another pithy line, Albert Norden announced in a speech that “now that these facilities [breweries] are owned by the people and their profits flow to the Worker’s and Farmer’s State, the beer tastes much better to us.”<sup>116</sup>

These unsubtle digs deflected attention from an East German beer industry struggling to understand and overcome widespread difficulties and often dependent on western trade. Attacks on the capitalist system of beer production usually failed to mention the state of the industry in the GDR. When complaints or issues did appear in the media, blame always fell on an individual brewery or on the population itself for not behaving correctly. Put simply, when disruptions emerged in the West German beer industry the problem was the capitalist system of economy. When similar issues occurred in the east, the root cause was anything but the socialist model of production. The fact that East Germany relied upon an exchange of goods and ideas across the Iron Curtain to sustain and improve its beer supply never appeared in these articles. Despite repeated efforts to steer all such trade toward fellow socialist states, the Ulbricht regime authorized imports of equipment and materials as well as exports of finished beer with capitalist countries, including the FRG, throughout his leadership.

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<sup>115</sup> “Albert Norden, Sekretär des Zentralkomitees: Unsere Republik ist das Leben und die Zukunft,” *BZ*, July 15, 1958; Herald Feudenberg, “Das wahre Gesicht eines Rosenzüchters,” *BZ*, Aug. 13, 1960; Albert Norden, “Repräsentant einer untergehenden Zeit: Das kapitalistische Königreich einer Familie,” *ND*, Nov. 8, 1961;

<sup>116</sup> “Albert Norden, Sekretär des Zentralkomitees: Unsere Republik ist das Leben und die Zukunft,” *BZ*, July 15, 1958.

As early as 1949, brewery officials in the GDR warned their political superiors of the serious threat of competition from beer produced in the Federal Republic and West Berlin. The fear of being undersold by western brewers formed a core part of the argument for reducing East German beer taxes in the early 1950s.<sup>117</sup> Thereafter industry leaders and economic functionaries regularly acknowledged that the FRG's breweries were out producing their eastern counterparts.<sup>118</sup> When forced to compare the beer from the two states in terms of quality, GDR officials showed reluctance to openly admit that their beer was not as good as that in the West, but reading between the lines their recognition of that fact becomes obvious. One report by a special committee in 1960 begins a statement with the words: "Beer quality is, in general, equivalent to the West." Immediately following this assertion is an admission that East German beer "sometimes" showed poor standards because of rushed production during the summer months.<sup>119</sup> The following sentence then claims equal quality based on a comparison of "top brands" such

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<sup>117</sup> gez. Sack und gez. Baum, "Abschrift der im Sekretariat veränderten und angenommenen Vorlage," 11 October, 1949, BArch, DA 4/1171, 2.

<sup>118</sup> n.a., "Protokoll über die Leitbetriebstagung der Brauereien am 30. 3. 1960 in der Diamant-Brauerei Magdeburg," 30 March, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176, 6; n.a., "Analyse über die Entwicklung der Sortimente und die Verbesserung der Qualität in den wichtigsten Industriegruppen," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408, n.p.; n.a., "Jahresanalyse 1960," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408; Message from Lemmel, Abteilungsleiter to Matthies, Direktor - SG, "Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch in Bier im Jahre 1962 in der DDR," 2 October, 1962, BArch, DE 4/5176; Dipl.rer.oec. B. -D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, "Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab," September, 1966, BArch, DL 102/224; Dipl. Oec. J. Hawemann, "Internationaler Vergleich: Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch einiger Nahrungs-u. Genußmittel in ausgewählten RGW - u. kapitalistischen Industrieländern im Jahre 1976," 30 November, 1977, BArch, DZ 30/25124.

<sup>119</sup> Considering that four years after this report the State Planning Commission reported 78% of beer in the GDR as not meeting quality standards, we may assume that the the statement quoted here was a vast understatement.

as Radeberger with beers from the FRG, even as the GDR's export beers hardly represented the state of quality in the entire industry.<sup>120</sup>

Cold War tensions between East and West Germany not only pushed the GDR's media to downplay the inferiority of their beer supply, it also contributed to the problem by making it harder for East German breweries to conduct desperately needed trade with capitalist countries. West Germany and the United States made significant advances in scientific and technological brewing practices during the early decades after the war. Before the creation of the two states, the beer industry in the Soviet Zone still had access to advanced independent research and development facilities like the VLB Berlin, but by the 1950s contact was broken off.<sup>121</sup> New methods and processes for brewing continued to cross the border from West to East, but it became increasingly difficult for GDR breweries to get the equipment and expertise necessary to build a world-class industry.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> n.a., "Jahresanalyse 1960," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408.

<sup>121</sup> A VLB newsletter still appeared in the files of the East German brewing industry in 1947. See Brauereidirektor Dr. Eberhard Heimann, Berlin, "Das deutsche Braugewerbe und sein Wiederaufbau," *Die Brauerei: Zeitung für das Brauereigewerbe und die Getränke-Industrie*, 7 November, 1947.

<sup>122</sup> VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie Verwaltung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie, "Protokoll der Verkostung ultrabeschallter Biere am 3. Nov. 1952 in der VEB Riebeck Brauerei, Erfurt," 6 November, 1952, BArch, DE 4/23557; VEB Zentrallaboratorium für die Brau- und Malzindustrie Verwaltung Volkseigener Betriebe der Brau- und Malzindustrie, "Abschlussbericht zum Teil 1 des Forschungsauftrages 280-307 F2/02 u.F 3/02: Ultraschall in der Brauerei," 3 November, 1953, BArch, DE 4/23557, 1; Message from Seitz-Werke GMBH. Kreuznacher Maschinenfabrik Filter - und Apparate-Bau to VE Versorgungs - und Lagerungskontor der Lebensmittelindustrie - Getränke -, "(Work Quote)," 26 April, 1956, BArch, DE 4 - 24528, n.p.; n.a., "Technische und technologische Forderungen bei grundlegender Beachtung der technologischen Einrichtungen und der Maschinen der Brauindustrie, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Bedürfnisses an Einrichtungen für die Periode bis zum Jahre 1965," 1960, BArch, DE 4/23562, 4; Message from Männel, Stellvertreter des Ministers-Bezirkgeleitete und Lebensmittelindustrie to Briska-Leiter der Abteilung Leicht-Lebensmittel-und bezirkgeleitete Industrie für Zentralkomitee der SED, "Einsatz von Enzympräparaten in der Brauindustrie," 23 June 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 19.

Acquiring the newest research was often the least of the problems facing the East German beer sector. Decreasing trade with the West cut the GDR off from critical sources of raw goods, basic supplies, and high-quality imports.<sup>123</sup> Eastern breweries depended on shipments of hops from the FRG for a large quantity of their demand in the 1950s. This issue appeared recurrently in both the files of the state bureaucracy and in East German newspapers. By the end of the decade, the GDR's economic planners began pushing harder and harder to reduce the state's dependence on western hops despite the fact that domestic production remained greatly inferior in terms of both quality and quantity.<sup>124</sup> The East German media blamed hop shortages in the late 1950s on a dastardly attempt by the West German and American governments to hamper beer production in the GDR by greatly reducing the hop supply.<sup>125</sup> Once again, the SED-backed press deflected serious issues in the East German brewing industry by putting the blame on corrupt politicians and greedy capitalists in the West.

When complaints rolled in about undeniable failures in the beer supply, the media and leadership identified scapegoats so that blame would not fall on the socialist

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<sup>123</sup> Ulrich, Werkleiter - Köstritzer Schwarzbierbrauerei und Lemmel, Mitarbeiter - SG, "Niederschrift über eine Beratung in Export-Angelegenheiten im VEB Köstritzer Schwarzbierbrauerei - Bad Köstritz," 16 March, 1961, BArch, DE 4/780, 2; Matthies, Geschäftsleiter - VLK Getränke, "Entwicklung des VE-Versorgungs- und Lagerungskontors der Lebensmittelindustrie Getränke," n.d., BArch, DE 4/24528, n.p.;

<sup>124</sup> Message from Hillebrad, Werkleiter; Weber, Planungsleiter; Beutler, Leiter der Abteilung Arbeit; und Schmidt, Sekretär der B P O der SED - VEB Brauerei Dessau to z. Hd. der Kollegin Hölterhof - SPK, Abt. LMI, Gruppe Genußmittelindustrie, "Niveauvergleich im Rat der gegenseitigen Wirtschaftshilfe, Erzeugnis Bier und Malz," 25 July, 1961, BArch, DE 4/28135; Bosewitz / Schaak, "Volkswirtschaftsplan 1961 Plan Forschung und Technik Themenblatt: Einfluss des Austausches von Hopfen aus Westdeutschland durch Hopfen aus sozialistischen Ländern," 30 August, 1961, BArch, DE 4/5176; Wozny, Leiter d. Techn. Büros - SG, "Protokoll über die Sitzung des Techn. Büros des Staatlichen Getränkekontors zur Störfreimachung der Getränkeindustrie der DDR von Westdeutschland und dem kapitalistischen Ausland am 28. 11. 1961, 10.00 Uhr," 2 March, 1962, BArch, DE 4/24530.

<sup>125</sup> W.R., "ND Kommentiert: Bonn ruiniert Hopfenbauern," *ND*, Sept. 21, 1959.

economic model or the leading party. The target became poor work practices at individual breweries. Newspapers occasionally published complaint letters from unhappy consumers in East Germany and particularly bad cases could receive attention from central government organs like the Stako. In the case of beer, these stories tend to follow a similar pattern. A customer complains that he or she purchased beer, which turned out to be cloudy, improperly labeled, or have yeast cake on the bottom. The report mentions the specific brewery, and overtly suggests that the culprit must be lazy workers, poor management, or improper work procedures.<sup>126</sup> So, for example, the *Berliner Zeitung* published a letter from reader “Albert B.” complaining about a bottle of beer from the Schultheiss brewery that was contaminated with debris. The complaint ends with a resounding sentence: “I ask the responsible colleagues of this operation, what they intend to do in order that something like this never repeats?”<sup>127</sup> Critically, these stories generally failed to mention any larger root cause of poor standards in beer production such as the lack of supplies and labor or a highly inefficient economic model destined to cause constant shortages. The closest they came to critiquing the system was calling for high-level functionaries such as the Minister of the Food Industry to get involved.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Lemmel, Abteilungsleiter - SG FA Koordinierung, Grundsatzfragen und Getränkeversorgung, “Protokoll über die Arbeitstaugung der Leiter der Leitlaboratorien und der TKO-Bearbeiter der Bezirke am 26.2.1963 im Kulturraum des Betriebsteils Engelhardt-Brauerei Berlin,” 7 March, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7596, 1; “Alles liegt in unseren Händen,” *BZ*, March 21, 1963; Bärchen, “Bärchen meint: Na, denn Prost!” *BZ*, Feb. 22, 1961; gis, “Wann klappt die Getränkeversorgung? Handelskonferenz in Weißensee / Selbstbedienung in 70 Läden / Mantelmode liefert für 10 000 DM,” *BZ*, Sept. 3, 1959.

<sup>127</sup> Albert B., “Den Appetit verdorben,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 9, 1954.

<sup>128</sup> Nie., “Unsere aktuelle Untersuchung zur Versorgungslage: Durstige Kehlen hoffen auf Berliner Bier: 130 000 hl werden zusätzlich gebraut / Die Bierniederlagen müssen ausgebaut werden / Flaschenproblem lösen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, May 24, 1954.

Especially with beer, shortages in packaging could, and often did, get blamed on the ordinary consumer. In fact, the newspapers sometimes published responses directly from breweries to customers that had complained about them. Albert B. received an answer from the workers at Schultheiss three weeks after his objection appeared in the paper. The VEB's representative apologized for the mistake and promised to install new equipment that would help with bottle cleaning. After that, though, the blame shifts somewhat: "But we also remind our customers not to use bottles for other liquids such as gasoline, turpentine, etc. These polluted bottles, which are returned to our facility, often lead to later complaints."<sup>129</sup> The circulation of bottles, kegs, and beer cases all relied on people returning their empty containers to the retailer. However, because of hoarding practices endemic to the "shortage economy," customers and vendors often held on to these goods in copious quantities. The East German media spent an inordinate amount of column-space printing complaints, accusations, and comradely calls-to-action desperately trying to convince people to return their empties and relieve the stress on the packaging industries.<sup>130</sup> Press contributors consistently swept the fact that these problems stemmed almost entirely from systemic failures in the GDR's system of economic management under the rug. Individuals at every level of the beer distribution network continued to

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<sup>129</sup> "Unserer Leser erhalten Antwort: Saubere Bierflaschen von Schultheiß / Nachfolger für die 'Apfelperle,'" *BZ*, July 30, 1954.

<sup>130</sup> Matthies, Direktor - SG, "Kurzanalyse für Monat November 1963," 5 December, 1963, BArch, DE 4/24531 Bd. 1, 3-4; Ch., "Liebe Redaktion der 'NZ': Leere Flaschen warten auf die Brauereien," *NZ*, June 23; "Eine kleine Marktinformation," *BZ*, June 7, 1967; Harry H. Pätzold, "Leserbrief," *BZ*, April 17, 1960; Bing, "Wenn's erst wieder heiß ist... wird das Bier hoffentlich nicht mehr knapp sein - Sachverständige berieten," *NZ*, March 1, 1958; Nie., "Unsere aktuelle Untersuchung zur Versorgungslage: Durstige Kehlen hoffen auf Berliner Bier: 130 000 hl werden zusätzlich gebraut / Die Bierniederlagen müssen ausgebaut werden / Flaschenproblem lösen," *BZ*, May 24, 1954.



pursue the course of action that held the most benefit and financial security to them and their businesses. The press took this as proof of insufficient education and social awareness.<sup>131</sup>

These recurring beer narratives, which supported the political and social views of the SED, appeared regularly throughout the period in question. The overall discourse surrounding beer did experience changes during this time, and those changes are important to understand the bigger picture of beer's path in the politics of the GDR. The specific themes listed above, though, remain relatively stable in their appearance and unity of message. East German media members and state officials endorsed and carried on beer traditions, they took extreme care to show their attention to beer's quality based on shared cultural notions of what that entailed, and they constantly reminded the population that everything about the *Volksgetränk* was better under socialism.

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<sup>131</sup> o., "Spiritus in Bierflaschen: Räumt mal die Speisekammern aus!," *BZ*, April 25, 1952; o., "Spiritus in Bierflaschen: Räumt mal die Speisekammern aus!," *BZ*, April 25, 1952; Alfred Reinert und Elvira Dombrowski, "Berlin zieht ins Grüne: Der Durst und das 'Flaschenproblem,'" *ND*, May 24, 1953; Nie., "Unsere aktuelle Untersuchung zur Versorgungslage: Durstige Kehlen hoffen auf Berliner Bier: 130 000 hl werden zusätzlich gebraut / Die Bierniederlagen müssen ausgebaut werden / Flaschenproblem lösen," *BZ*, May 24, 1954; Ch., "Liebe Redaktion der 'NZ': Leere Flaschen warten auf die Brauereien," *NZ*, June 23, 1957; "Täglich 10000 Hektoliter Getränke," *NZ*, July 4, 1957; Matthies, Direktor – Stako, "Kurzanalyse für Monat November 1963," 5 December, 1963, BArch, DE 4/24531 Bd. 1, pg. 3-4; Erwin, "Moment Mal: leere Flaschen," *NZ*, April 2, 1965; (ND), "Flaschen zurück!" *ND*, Dec. 3, 1965; "Eine kleine Marktinformation," *BZ*, June 7, 1967; "Die nimm' wa nich," *BZ*, June 9, 1967; G. Linke, "Kühles Naß für heiße Tage: Ostquell KG bereitet Fünf-Tage-Arbeitswoche vor," *NZ*, July 9, 1967; Wieder: Flaschenärger," *BZ*, July 19, 1967.

### **CHAPTER THREE:**

#### **CARRYING BEER INTO SOCIALIST MODERNITY**

The need to identify and reform certain elements of beer's social and spatial surroundings show themselves throughout Ulbricht's leadership even as the media and state apparatus embraced and continued much of the pre-existing beer culture in the GDR. This chapter uses the same source base as chapter two to identify statements that criticized and challenged beer and beer culture in East Germany, or portrayed the people's drink as a catalyst for negative, anti-social, behaviors. In comparison to the steady stream of rhetoric and actions showing the regime's approval of beer and its use as cultural capital, the push to modernizing reform appears inconsistent and shows major shifts during Ulbricht's leadership.

During the GDR's first fifteen years, attempts to modify German beer culture for a future in socialist modernity came mostly in the form of direct criticism of persistent social customs. This initial pattern is defined by a sharp turn in the late 1950s. In the state's early years, critiques aimed at beer and its associated social structures almost entirely pointed toward examples from the West, and identified reactionary political and ideological spaces as the enemy. With the 1957 Cultural Revolution, the media turned all those same arguments against the social practices surrounding beer in East Germany. Over the following several years, beer became the target of doctors, crime reporters, and ideologue journalists who implicated it in holding back the construction of socialism by fostering negligent or reactionary beliefs and behaviors. Pro-beer messages, of the type that had been common in the media since immediately after the war, continued to appear

in parallel with this new narrative. Yet, despite abundant examples of an endorsement for beer in the same press channels, critics not only accused beer culture of crimes against socialism, but made no effort to suggest that it was redeemable. Thus, until the mid-1960s, the regime's main efforts to modernize the social world of beer in the GDR came in the form of negative rhetoric, attacking regressive behaviors and ideas that it associated with beer-centric spaces and group dynamics. Editors and state censors allowed these stories to counterpose the image of beer as a positive, German, cultural tradition rather than displacing it.

The transformation of state behavior toward beer in the final decade of Ulbricht's leadership shows a more wholistic and constructive vision for achieving socialist modernity in beer. Starting in the early 1960s and reaching preeminence in beer rhetoric by 1965, a new message of progress and moderation took over the state's public discourse surrounding beer, while the GDR's economic planners began a campaign of material investment and development of brewing infrastructure. Discussions of beer during these years frequently deployed terms such as "modern" as well as closely related phraseology from progressivist social programs. A 1966 report from the Institute for Market Research described the technical aims of the brewing industry: "The goal of development must be a beer, which is made in modern breweries with the most advanced technology, using the most suitable raw ingredients, and reaching the consumer in the best condition through a modern distribution network."<sup>1</sup> This same document hints at the

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<sup>1</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B. -D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, "Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab," September, 1966, BArch, DL 102/224, 5.

role of “moderation” in building the ideal society of the future, stating that guiding people toward a measured use of alcohol, “within the framework of socialist education,” was necessary to “increasing the joy of living, supporting society, and improving general welfare.”<sup>2</sup> In the push for a modern East Germany, the physical and rhetorical were deeply intertwined. Yet, for all this sound and fury evidence from Ulbricht’s final years reveals a government still internally divided and unsure about how to understand or control popular attitudes toward the *Volksgetränk*.

### **The Battle over Beer**

The people’s drink took on a dual nature in the media and bureaucracy starting in 1957. Its favored position in German cultural heritage remained, but a new wave of propaganda reminded the populace that beer could also act as a central element in “anti-social” behavior in their country. These critiques did not emerge out of a vacuum, but rather reflect older themes of temperance ideology and propaganda, as well as the East German media’s previous attacks on beer culture in western states. Still, until the Cultural Revolution, the press had not specifically associated GDR beer drinkers with these negative themes. The new cultural policy demanded an accelerated realignment of actual lifestyles in East Germany to conform with the class-conscious, educated, high-culture loving model of the “new socialist individual” required in Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>3</sup> Announced in fall 1957, this campaign opened the door for expanded criticism of many “unenlightening” behaviors still common among the GDR’s population, and it played a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 24.

prominent role in state policies over the next several years. By the mid-1960s, however, the concerted anti-alcohol rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution faded as the regime turned more to legal prosecution in its efforts to fight excessive drinking.<sup>4</sup>

Competing messages about beer emerged in the press and among state officials during these years. Doctors, health experts, and crime reporters presented general anti-alcohol polemic, sometimes specifically identifying beer as a problem, and often lumping it in with all intoxicating drinks as a social ill. Journalists reporting on the progress of socialist programs problematized or openly discredited beer and beer culture. Along with government officials, they also proselytized the superiority of wine over other alcoholic beverages. Yet bureaucrats overseeing the beverage industry fluctuated between approval and disapproval of beer in their language, reflecting the lack of a consistent party line on beer.

The absence of clear direction explains why positive messages about beer persisted at the same time and through the same channels as criticism. Employees in the brewing industry and other advocates of beer continued to promote the beverage as a German tradition, drink of moderation, and economic mainstay in East Germany. Thomas Kochan has noted the increasing negativity toward liquor and beer during the Cultural Revolution, but the continuing appearance of these themes complicates that narrative. For beer, at least, 1957 marked the beginning of an argument, rather than the closing of a firm conviction. The content of pro-beer messages points to the reason for its persistence. The

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 181-183.

leadership did not repress voices that portrayed beer as a unifying feature of East German society, with roots in a generally accepted vision of the people's shared cultural history. For nearly five years, both the average official working in a government ministry and the average citizen reading the daily newspapers received a deluge of mixed and contradicting messages about the *Volksgetränk*.

Beer critics in the GDR picked up on important themes from earlier temperance advocates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and particularly the confluence of alcohol with dangerous and unenlightened social spaces. Spatial politics has always formed a key element in the history of beer and alcohol reform, and became particularly important during the Industrial Revolution when progressivist lamentations over the evils of the proletarian saloon reached fever pitch.<sup>5</sup> Even within the history of German socialism, F.S. Schmidt identified the “three pillars” of worker's subjugation as capital (*Kapital*), the church, and the pub during his campaigns for socialist abstinence.<sup>6</sup> Much of this clamor aimed directly at liquor consumption, which peaked during the same period, but beer's permeation of these spaces meant that it often fell under the general condemnation of problem drinking.

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<sup>5</sup> Communal drinking stretches back to the earliest histories written about Germans. In the Middle Ages peasants used religious festivals and holidays as an opportunity to engage in immense levels of alcohol consumption, and usually reserved the best beverages for these occasions. Such activities always proceeded in a public fashion, and helped regulate patterns of life for entire communities. See Gudrun Schwibbe, introduction to *Kneipenkulture*, ed. Gudrun Schwibbe (Münster, Waxmann, 1998), 1; Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880 – 1914*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 9; Roberts, *Drink, Temperance, and the Working Class*, 42-54; Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*, 18-19, 56-58.

<sup>6</sup> Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*, 122.

Media in the early postwar years criticized beer's spatial settings by pointing out negative stereotypes and undesirable traditions of beer culture in West Germany. Bavaria, viewed as the most conservative region in the FRG and perhaps the most entrenched beer culture in the world, often took the brunt of these attacks.<sup>7</sup> A 1949 *Neue Zeit* article reported snippets of conversation from a table at the Oktoberfest festival and had one participant reportedly saying: "Yes, of course we also need housing (a desperate shortage in postwar Germany). But the high beer price of over one mark per *Maß* (1-liter mug) has to come down first!"<sup>8</sup> Members of the East German print media clearly had a certain type of FRG citizen in mind when they presented their social polemics. The most common historical stereotypes involved in these columns were the petty bourgeoisie and aristocracy. These images of backward, reactionary public spheres involved copious consumption of beer to the point of excess, coupled with crude behavior evoking traditions of patriarchy, political corruption, and bourgeois social dominance.<sup>9</sup> Yet another example from *München* describes group dynamics in the famous beer halls as "the traditional separatism of Bavarian citizens."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "München hat keine Zeit für politischen Krakeel: Oktoberfest mit schäumenden Maßkrügen," *NZ*, Sept. 25, 1949; "Jurgen Ruhle, "München bleibt bei Weißwurst: Kulturreportage aus Bayern (II)," *BZ*, May 12, 1954; Günther Fuchs, "Begegnungen in Westdeutschland: "Anna-Seghers-Ensemble" besuchte Hessen," *ND*, Oct. 26;

<sup>8</sup> See previously cited: "München hat keine Zeit für politischen Krakeel"

<sup>9</sup> Cobra, "Beerdigung eines alten Bayern: Abenteuer eines Trauergastes, der das Banner der Moral verteidigte," *BZ*, July 12, 1956; Paule Panke, "Sorgen am Stammtisch," *BZ*, March 11, 1956; Cobra, "Bester Diplomat: Der Chauffeur," *BZ*, May 21, 1959; G. Fl., "Krieg & Bier en gros," *ND*, April 23, 1960; aroslav Hasek, "Der lila Blitz und andere Geschichten: Erzählt von Jaroslav Hasek, deutsch von Rudolf Feige, Wir drucken mit freundlicher Genehmigung des ARTIA-Verlag Prag.," *BZ*, Oct. 23, 1960; a, "Der selbstlose Fürst," *NZ*, April 6, 1965;

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Ruhle, "München bleibt bei Weißwurst: Kulturreportage aus Bayern (II)," *BZ*, May 12, 1954.

The *Stammtisch*, a historical social tradition in German drinking culture, neatly encapsulated all the potential problems of unenlightened alcohol-fueled gatherings. The tradition of these regular social meetings, which typically included both beer and *Schnaps*, received regular condemnation from the press in the postwar era, with common examples from West Germany punctuated by the occasional column decrying the continuation of such practices in the East. For the press, the *Stammtisch* served as the archetype for anti-social spaces involving alcohol. While bad behavior certainly played a role, the most pernicious danger to emerge from the *Stammtisch* came from the circulation of unacceptable ideas. Thus, the media depicted these spaces as a support network for misogynistic, patriarchal behavior toward women.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, newspaper accounts connected group drinking sessions to political conservatism or recidivism, including gatherings by former or unrepentant Nazis.<sup>12</sup> One 1953 article by “Cobra,” who reported court cases in later years, stated directly that Hitler started the Nazi Party with the help of thirty liters of beer and seven acolytes at “the *Stammtisch* of a smoky Munich beer cellar.”<sup>13</sup> The *Stammtisch* came to stand, in general, for intellectual regression. It fostered objectionable behaviors encouraged by an environment of

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<sup>11</sup> Paule Panke, “Sorgen am Stammtisch,” *BZ*, March 11, 1956; Cobra, “Bester Diplomat: Der Chauffeur,” *BZ*, May 21, 1959; “Pierrot,” *NZ*, Sept. 3, 1960;

<sup>12</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 18; Helmut Oelschiegel, “Wie Krieg entsteht,” *NZ*, July 1, 1951; Hans Marchwiza, “Die Heimkehr der Kümiaks,” *ND*, Jan. 24, 1953; F.C. Weiskopf, “Die Versuchung,” *BZ*, July 28, 1953; Jürgen Ruhle, “München bleibt bei Weißwurst: Kulturreportage aus Bayern (II),” *BZ*, May 12, 1954; Max Kretzer, “Der Millionenbauer,” *NZ*, May 12, 1957

<sup>13</sup> Cobra, “Alter Nazi auf großer Fahrt: Provokation in der S-Bahn / Unter der maske des Biedermannes,” *BZ*, Nov. 5, 1953.



unenlightened thought and bound up with excessive drinking of beer and shots of spirits.<sup>14</sup>

In fairness, the socialist leadership also offered a constructive, progressive, vision of spaces explicitly associated with beer drinking during these years. A pair of architectural plans from 1953 and 1955 for Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt), “the first socialist city on German soil,” included designs for a *Bierstube* (beer parlor) and a *Bierbuffet*, respectively.<sup>15</sup> The plans portray well lit, open spaces, finely appointed with classical elements of building ornamentation and interior design, and suited to serve crowds numbering in the hundreds at any given time. Tiny frothing beer mugs even appear on the tables in the blueprint of the beer parlor.<sup>16</sup> These types of spaces could surround the East German beer drinker with the desired material “education” described in previous works on spatial politics in the GDR.<sup>17</sup> Even still, it seems that having the word “bier” in the name of these establishments suggested an unacceptably singular focus on alcohol. Though the physical characteristics of modern eating and drinking establishments in the later 1950s directly reflected these earlier designs, the terminology

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<sup>14</sup> Cobra, “Im Stuhlgewitter der Brautzeit: Der Bräutigam zwischen Bacchus und Venus / Das Versprechen,” *BZ*, May 12, 1957; Prof. Dr. med. habil. F. Lickint, “Butter, Brot und Barrenturnen: Aus einem Diskussionsbetrag,” *ND*, July 11, 1959;

<sup>15</sup> The city was constructed and there is no reason to think that these two facilities were not included. For quote see Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> (signatures illegible), Leiter; (signature illegible), Verfasser; (signature illegible), Gezeichnet; (signature illegible), Kontrolle - Deutsche Bauakademie Meisterwerkstatt II, “Projekt K5 Kulturhaus Maxhütte BL. NR. 281 Wandabwinkl. Bierschw.,” 3 February, 1953, BArch DH 2/PLAN/2632, (microfische construction plans); (signature illegible), autor, (no signature), Leiter der Werkstatt - Architekturwerkstätten des Ministeriums für Aufbau, Meisterwerkstatt Professor Hopp, “H.O.G. - G, -NORD- 23 Stalinallee , Restaurant Bierbeffet (sic),” (only legible date) 1955, BArch, DH 2/PLAN/1073, (microfische construction plans).

<sup>17</sup> See Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis* and Paul Betts, “Building Socialist at Home: The Case of East German Interiors,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* eds. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 96-132.

changed.<sup>18</sup> Now, the regime wanted its citizens to find nourishment and leisure in “cafes” or “restaurants,” terms that made no direct reference to beer or drinking.<sup>19</sup>

Once the call for Cultural Revolution came in 1957, it brought a rhetorical and physical campaign against “dark pubs” and other alcohol-centered spaces.<sup>20</sup> The print media provided ample evidence for the dangers that lurked in such regressive social settings as the farmer’s village pub and worker’s watering hole. Echoing nineteenth century temperance advocates, newspapers portrayed bars as spaces where blue-collar men went to waste away their paychecks on copious quantities of *Gerstensaft* and *Schnaps* while their families and loved ones waited at home, forced to live on bare means because of the irresponsible behavior of the patriarch.<sup>21</sup> A 1957 article described a court case against Julius, a hard worker with a good job who had hoped to marry the love of his life, an honest and respectable woman. She forced him to give up his *Stammtisch* at the local pub as a precondition. After trying and failing, Julius got in a fist fight with the woman’s son after she announced that she could no longer marry him. In his final act of self-destruction, he robbed her at gunpoint for money to drink his sadness away.<sup>22</sup> If this story had come from West Germany, the author certainly would have found the origin of

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<sup>18</sup> The German words *Kneipe*, *Bierstube*, *Stube*, *Lokal*, *Ausschank*, and others that have a distinct relation to alcohol consumption are roughly equivalent to the English words “bar,” “pub,” “tavern,” and “beer parlor.”

<sup>19</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Dark pubs is a reference from Kochan borrowed from a worker’s poem read at meeting of the Central Committee in 1960. It’s clear that the government had a certain type of space in mind when it began the campaign against pubs, taverns, or bars. The most relevant defining feature of these locations is a primary focus on alcohol and drinking. This distinguishes them from “restaurants” where beer or wine was served, or “cafes” that might offer alcohol along with coffee and dishes. See Kocahn, *Blauer Würger*, 32.

<sup>21</sup> These articles exclusively portray male antagonists.

<sup>22</sup> Cobra, “Im Stuhlgewitter der Brautzeit: Der Bräutigam zwischen Bacchus und Venus / Das Versprechen,” *BZ*, May 12, 1957.

Julius' behavior in his repressive and immiserating surroundings. East Germany, though, had no onerous "wage slavery" that forced the workers to drink away their pain to the detriment of all other concerns. Rather, the blame fell squarely on the individual, and on the unenlightened spaces that fostered and encouraged such negligence.<sup>23</sup>

In the context of East Germany, the dangers of pub life to individuals and families always came second to its effect on society as a whole. Health risks, criminality, and waste repeatedly formed the most prominent reasons for condemning taverns. Doctors and crime reporters wrote most of these tirades, binding this moralistic crusade with established figures of medical and legal authority. Beer's place as the people's drink earned it no reprieve from negative associations. Alcoholism occasionally received mention in such anti-drinking rhetoric, but as other scholars have noted, it played a remarkably muted role in East German propaganda.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the majority of press material portrayed the driving cause of excessive intoxication as a lack of social awareness and education. Sometimes these critiques came in the form of praise for people who rejected the chance to drink. After winning a competition held by the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1957, one East German man chose to receive a case of milk in lieu of a case of

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<sup>23</sup> Max Kretzer, "Der Millionenbauer," *NZ*, May 12, 1957; Prof. Dr. med. habil. F. Lickint, "Butter, Brot und Barrenturnen: Aus einem Diskussionsbetrag," *ND*, July 11, 1959; "Zur Diskussion: Der betrunkene und der Arzt: Besser Sport als Alkohol," *ND*, Jan. 5, 1961;

<sup>24</sup> G. Plath, Pfarrer in Wusseken, "Nicht mit der Gesundheit wüsten!: Die Suchtkrankheiten und ihre Bekämpfung / Von G. Plath, Pfarrer in Wusseken," *NZ*, Jan. 29, 1957; Barsch, *Von Herrengdeck und Kumpeltod*, 160-161; Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 293

beer as his reward. The newspaper favorably reported his choice to the entire readership a few days later.<sup>25</sup>

Even people who did not feel a physical compulsion to drink could, nonetheless, be seduced by anti-intellectual environments to consume alcohol in quantities that damaged their health. One novella, published in installments through the *Neue Zeit* in the same year as Julius's story and the "Milk prize", painted the picture of an old farmers' tavern where drinking began before lunch, and patrons guzzled beer "like an expensive medicine."<sup>26</sup> This reference to health touches on an important issue. In many articles beer appeared to present a unique medical danger to society. When drunk in large quantities, it not only caused problems related to extreme or regular intoxication, but became increasingly associated with obesity. Thus, when the dark pub scene pushed people to quaff multiple liters of beer in a single evening, it directly increased the burden on the state-run healthcare system.<sup>27</sup> A 1958 column titled "From tomorrow on, a new life," describes one man's visit to the doctor and the health professionals recommendations for keeping in shape. Among the things he explicitly sanctions are chocolate, fatty cooking, and beer.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Milch-Prämie als willkommene 'Entgiftung': Adler holte sich außerdem den 'BZ' - Preis / II. Nachtkriterium ein voller Erfolg," *BZ*, Sept. 12, 1957.

<sup>26</sup> Max Kretzer, "Der Millionenbauer," *NZ*, May 12, 1957.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. We., "Das geht die Gesundheit an: Bier - Als Medizin empfohlen: Vorstoß eines Münchener Professors - Auch er warnt vor übermäßigem Genuß," *NZ*, Sept. 15, 1955;; Ihre Diätassistentin Monika, "Paprika statt Salz," *NZ*, May 11, 1963; E. Peter, "Gehört das Bier zum Kegeln? Kugelschieben macht Durst - aber Alkohol ist schädlich, meinen die Aktiven," *BZ*, Dec. 30, 1963

<sup>28</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, "Ab morgen: Neues Leben," *BZ*, Dec. 31, 1958.

Likewise, the press strongly implied that the counterproductive and criminal nature of wayward drinking spaces encouraged patrons to waste time and resources swigging mugs of beer and firing down shots of liquor. A 1962 piece from *Neues Deutschland* took time to list the behavior of “regulars” at a typical farmer’s pub: “Dawdling at work, delayed milk deliveries, hazardous driving, crude shenanigans, defiance of work, health, and fire safety codes, disorder in the stables...”<sup>29</sup> Worst of all, these insidious localities fostered drunkenness that led directly to violent rowdiness and crimes against the people. In the same year, four young men appeared before a court to answer for their behavior after a night of drinking ten to fifteen glasses of beer each. They had crashed a dance party and started several fights.<sup>30</sup> One doctor summed up the point succinctly when he warned of behaviors that would lead, “through police action from the pub to the hospital.”<sup>31</sup>

The media began to explicitly question and criticize the preservation of common elements in German beer culture in other ways as well. The traditional place of the *Gerstensaft* as a key social element in rural community gatherings and its near omnipresence in recreational sports activities also came under fire. The mixture of beer and sports further reflects the government’s division between proper and improper

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<sup>29</sup> “Ordnung in Krien: Von Hauptmann der Volkspolizei Willy Piper,” *ND*, June 30th, 1962.

<sup>30</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 27; E. Wiedemann, “Zwei Sprüche und ein Widerspruch: Unionsfreund Kalb: Ködderitzscher Ergebnis zeugt von hohem Bewußtsein,” *NZ*, Jan. 25, 1962; E. Wiedemann, “Zwei Sprüche und ein Widerspruch: Unionsfreund Kalb: Ködderitzscher Ergebnis zeugt von hohem Bewußtsein,” *NZ*, Jan. 25, 1962; Dr. Tord Riemann, “Die garnicht so ungewöhnliche Wandlung der vier Jungen von Fredersdorf,” *ND*, Dec. 24, 1962; icus, “Unser Gerichtsbericht: Maß für Maß,” *BZ*, Jan. 15, 1965; oc, “Bier machte sie 'stark',” *NZ*, Feb. 17, 1965. 6. AND oc, “Rowdys verurteilt,” *NZ*, Feb. 25, 1965; icus, “Unser Gerichtsbericht: Viele sind mitschuldig,” *BZ*, March 3, 1965.

<sup>31</sup> “Zur Diskussion: Der betrunkene und der Arzt: Besser Sport als Alkohol,” *ND*, Jan. 5, 1961.

settings for the *Volksgetränk*. Sports festivals and spectator events continued to see large quantities of beer sold and consumed under the explicit support of the State Beverage Office.<sup>32</sup> Yet amateur athletics and recreational leagues represented a more problematic environment. In these venues, where state involvement and oversight remained distant, drinking became an ideologically unsuitable activity.<sup>33</sup> An article in the *Berliner Zeitung* purported to relate popular opinions from Berlin bowlers, claiming that more and more people had started to abnegate beer entirely during events. Interviewees overwhelmingly claimed improved performance as their primary motivation for doing so. The column admits that the sport used to have a reputation as “booze- or beer-bowling,” but the newly enthusiastic and competitive attitudes of an enlightened citizenry made people want to take it more seriously now.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in press coverage of the “modernization” of rural farming villages, columnists in the early 1960s pointed out several communities that had collectively rejected the old ways of hard drinking. Fondness for overconsumption of beer had been replaced by a new commitment to discipline and building socialism.<sup>35</sup>

Yet state officials emphatically did not seek to replace beer and liquor drinking with abstinence. Rather, it had a specific alternative in mind. The ideological campaign to promote wine as the best alcoholic beverage represents the closest thing to a concrete

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<sup>32</sup> Message from Männel, Leiter - VWR, Abt. LMI to BWR Leipzig, Abt. LMI, “Sicherung der Getränkeversorgung zum IV. Deutschen Turn- und Sportfest vom 1.8. - 4.8.1963 in Leipzig,” 2 July, 1963, BArch, DE 4/12099, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, people who spent too much drinking and not enough time participating were ridiculed for pretending to be able to speak about sports. “Pierrot,” *NZ*, Sept. 3, 1960.

<sup>34</sup> E. Peter, “Gehört das Bier zum Kegeln? Kugelschieben macht Durst - aber Alkohol ist schädlich, meinen die Aktiven,” *BZ*, Dec. 30, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> E. Wiedemann, “Zwei Sprüche und ein Widerspruch: Unionsfreund Kalb: Ködderitzscher Ergebnis zeugt von hohem Bewußtsein,” *NZ*, Jan. 25, 1962; “Ordnung in Krien: Von Hauptmann der Volkspolizei Willy Piper,” *ND*, June 30th, 1962.

“anti-beer” policy on the part of the regime. The leadership wanted higher and more widespread wine consumption, with the express purpose of shifting people’s preferences away from distilled spirits and, to a lesser extent, beer.<sup>36</sup> Examples of wine endorsement appeared in the press even before the Cultural Revolution, but in the late 1950s and early 1960s the promotion of wine accelerated.<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, positive references to wine explicitly identified it as a better alternative to beer.<sup>38</sup> In general, though, the regime’s publicly declared preference for fermented fruit beverages makes their failure to similarly endorse the brewing industry stand out. This, coupled with negative press coverage of beer, adds up to a government strategy of placing significant rhetorical distance between itself and the *Volksgetränk*.

Unlike with beer, the messages surrounding wine appear remarkably stable and unified. It represented the drink of sophistication and culture, uniformly promised moderate and genteel behavior, and served as a shining example of the productive capacity of the socialist state, which promised to bring this luxury good to the table of every worker and farmer.<sup>39</sup> In a 1960 speech at a conference of restaurant directors, the

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<sup>36</sup> Dipl.-Wirtsch. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, “Die Entwicklung des Bier Verbrauchs bis 1975,” 10 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung, BArch, DL 102/660, pg. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Kay, “Er ist der König der Getränke: 600 000 Liter Wein im Keller / Verbrauch stieg beachtlich,” *BZ*, Okt. 23, 1955.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Ludwig, “Plauderei beim Punsch: Vom Berliner Wein,” *BZ*, Feb. 8, 1963; Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, “Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung),” 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666 pg. 25, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 68; n.a., “Diskussionsbeitrag zur Zentralen Gaststättenkonferenz in Leipzig am 9. Und 10. 11. 1960,” 8 November, 1960, BArch, DE 4/24530, pg. 6/; Dipl.rer.oec. B. -D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, “Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab,” September, 1966, BArch, DL 102/224, pg. 2; Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, “Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung

head of the State Beverage Office, which handled trade in imported beer and spirits but overwhelmingly focused on wine, declared his organization's new advertising motto: "drink with distinction, turn to wine!"<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the government's pro-wine agenda failed due to economic difficulties. It could never find a way to provide the drink of "culture" at a low enough price that people would buy it in similar quantities to beer or spirits. Still, the rhetorical battle continued, even as growth in wine consumption remained tepid at best.<sup>41</sup> The regime's treatment of wine proves that by the 1960s, beer constituted a second-class beverage in the ideological vision of socialism. Yet, while beer ranked second to wine, it was positively saintly compared to distilled spirits.<sup>42</sup> This helps explain why beer advocates could continue to promote the *Volksgetränk* in the print media in the same manner as they had since the earliest days of the GDR.

Beer still appeared in the press throughout this period as the people's drink of tradition and moderation, and as an example of superiority for the socialist model. Portrayals of beer-centered spaces as breeding grounds for reactionary conservatism coexisted with newspaper columns painting *Gerstensaft* as the common element in proletarian social circles.<sup>43</sup> Articles by doctors warning about the health risks of drinking beer circulated in close proximity with reports of increasing production, better supply

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einer Bevölkerungsbefragung.)" 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666 pg. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Kollege Gerhard Matthies, Direktor des Staatlichen Getränkekontors, n.t., [speech] n.d., BArch, DE 4/24530, Bl. 177.

<sup>41</sup> SJDDR 1971, 354; SJDDR 1965, 421.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Kochan has done an excellent job of showing the demonizing of *Schnaps* in the media during this same period. See *Blauer Würger*, 71, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Max von der Grün, "Freiheit und Feuer: Gekürzte Fassung / Originalausgabe im Paulus Verlag Recklinghausen Lizenzausgabe im Aufbau-Verlag Berlin und Weimar," *BZ*, Oct. 28, 1964;



methods, and even events where large quantities of beer were proudly awarded as prizes in a competition.<sup>44</sup> Stories decrying excessive beer guzzling both by unenlightened East Germans and by intellectually backward Westerners popped up in the same periodicals as travel journals celebrating universally high levels of consumption in Bohemia.<sup>45</sup> More importantly, state officials continued to advocate for increased beer production to overtake the supply in West Germany. Oftentimes, the government organs seeking to increase the beer supply were also promoting wine over beer at all turns.<sup>46</sup> Industry promoters still wrote ebullient descriptions of the product's history and traditions in Germany.<sup>47</sup> They praised it as the drink of moderation even while crime reporters labeled beer as the main culprit in cases of assault, theft, and vandalism. Perhaps most importantly, nuanced concern with quality, style, consistency, and taste never waned in

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<sup>44</sup> Hei, "Der erste Preis - 90 Flaschen Bier: Puzzelspiel fand Anklag / Auch den Frauen schmeckt ein Molle," *BZ*, Nov. 14, 1957; "Ausgereiftes Bier im Hochsummer," *BZ*, Feb. 28, 1958; gis, "Wann klappt die Getränkeversorgung? Handelskonferenz in Weißensee / Selbstbedienung in 70 Läden / Mantelmode liefert für 10 000 DM," *BZ*, Sept. 3, 1959; gis, "Damit der Durst gestillt wird: BZ-Konferenz mit VEB Berliner Brauereien / Saison 1960 beginnt jetzt," *BZ*, Nov. 4, 1959; fa, "Das Radeberger und die Standardisierung: Wenn die Ausnahme von heute das Prinzip von morgen geworden ist, haben die Verpackungsorgen ein Ende," *NZ*, Nov. 4, 1959; VK Horst Kroitor, "Hopfen und Malz gewonnen," *BZ*, Nov. 29, 1960;

<sup>45</sup> Bärchen, "Armutzeugnis," *BZ*, Oct. 30, 1957; C.H., "Der Feind ist das Bier," *NZ*, Aug. 12, 1959; "Auf der 'Wies'n,'" *BZ*, Oct. 3, 1961; Friederich Eismann, "Wo der Pilsner Urquell sprudelt: In zwei weltberühmten Brauereien zu Gast," *NZ*, Feb. 11, 1961.

<sup>46</sup> n.a., "Analyse über die Entwicklung der Sortimente und die Verbesserung der Qualität in den wichtigsten Industriegruppen," n.d., BArch, DE 4/7408, n.p.; n.a., "Protokoll über die Leitbetriebstagung der Brauereien am 30. 3. 1960 in der Diamant-Brauerei Magdeburg," 30 March, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176, pg. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Charlotte Leven, "Zu Füßen von Schloß Hartenfels: Torgau in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," *NZ*, Nov. 17, 1957; Hans Ludwig, "Rund um 'Weiße' und 'Molle,'" *BZ*, Sept. 23, 1960; eka, "Ratskeller mit historischen Gewölbe," *ND*, Dec. 8, 1963; Heinz Stern, "Butlers' Boogie," *ND*, April 4, 1965; Prof. Dr. med. habil. F. Lickint, "Butter, Brot und Barrenturnen: Aus einem Diskussionsbetrag," *ND*, July 11, 1959; Werner Müller, "Von Regen in die Traufe; Englisches Leinen und deutsche Seufzer Aus der Biedermeierzeit der Leipziger Messe," *ND*, Feb. 10, 1965.

the face of demands that beer disappear from sports and celebrations of sobriety in rural communities that had once gathered regularly around kegs of the *Volksgetränk*.<sup>48</sup>

A slightly longer description of two such articles can give a more in-depth understanding of the contradictory messages about beer circulating through the press during this time. Both columns appeared in the *Neue Zeit*, one from February 1961, and the other from January the following year. The first, a travel article about Czechoslovakia, opens with an old joke about three Anglo-Sachsen men who come to Prague:

Each ordered a beer and, as luck would have it, each glass was served with a fly in it. While the American poured his glass on the floor in a high arc and demanded another, the Englishman just requested a spoon and removed the annoying insect. The Scot, however, carefully fished the fly out and tried to squeeze everything out of its nose back into his glass. When asked why he did this, he answered: “this is good Czech beer, and every drop is expensive!”<sup>49</sup>

The remainder of the article described all the wonders of Czech beer, including the special quality imparted by the water, and ended by cheerily describing how the winner of the last beer drinking contest in Prague had consumed 54 liters of the beverage within 16 hours.<sup>50</sup>

Contrast this positive and whimsical treatment of *Gerstensaft* with the column from 1962. Writing about a field visit to a small farming community, Ködderitzsch,

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<sup>48</sup> “Jahresanzuse 1962,” 18 January, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7408, pgs. 1-3; Kluge, “Protokoll über eine Bierverskostung beim VEB Berliner Brauerei en, Betriebsteil 'Bürgerbräu', Berlin-Friedrichshagen am 3. Mai 1963,” 3 May, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7596, pgs. 1-2; “Drei Millionen Pfannkuchen,” *ND*, Jan. 7, 1964; Bert, “Hochsommer-Labsal,” *NZ*, July 13, 1965.

<sup>49</sup> Friederich Eismann, “Wo der Pilsner Urquell sprudelt: In zwei weltberühmten Brauereien zu Gast,” *NZ*, Feb. 11, 1961.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

ahead of the Seventh German Farmers Congress, the author describes how the village has progressed and achieved “high consciousness” in all of their actions. The article ends on this note:

A sign on the front of the small, sober village hall reads: “Our LPG (Agricultural Commune) gives a good example for the Seventh German Farmers Congress.” Next to the counter stands a different message: “The water gives the oxen strength, / the people beer and wine. / So everyone drink beer and wine, / because no one wants to be cattle.” Which of these claims remains valid in Ködderitzsch? We asked the farmers; they all responded that the inciteful message (beer poem) no longer applies... Because the Ködderitzscher are smart farmers, they do not let themselves be befuddled, but rather keep a clear head – even when they have good reason to celebrate.<sup>51</sup>

Here beer and wine represent relics of the past, signs of behaviors that smart socialist farmers abandoned in favor of the new, conscious, way of life. Examples similar to these repeated frequently throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s.

### **Drink Responsibly, Comrades**

Starting in the first half of the 1960s, a concerted effort to upgrade and improve conditions in the brewing industry yielded large investments in new equipment, facilities, and production techniques, marking a change in state policy toward supporting further growth in the beer sector. This activity began to take place “behind the scenes,” while the press continued to present an ambiguous dialectic with regards to beer. Finally, in 1965, the rhetoric shifted as well. Newspapers adopted a more unified message that incorporated elements from both pro- and anti-beer camps. The cultural capital of beer was retained as a powerful symbol of German identity and proletarian brotherhood.

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<sup>51</sup> The poem rhymes in the original German and sounds much better. E. Wiedemann, “Zwei Sprüche und ein Widerspruch: Unionsfreund Kalb: Ködderitzscher Ergebnis zeugt von hohem Bewußtsein,” *Neue Zeit*, Jan. 25, 1962.

However, the new consensus had to find a way to deal with the regressive elements of pre-socialist beer culture so that they would fit in the bright future of East Germany. In order to address these unsavory features, a new watchword pervaded all discussions of beer: moderation. From this point until at least the end of Ulbricht's tenure in 1971, almost all references to beer made it inescapably clear that proper enjoyment of the beverage included a conscious dedication to measured consumption. In addition, *Gerstensaft's* days as a material anchor for spaces of misogyny, conservatism, and criminal or political intrigue were over. The people's drink now served to promote women's equality and foster comradely socialist mentalities.

State economic planners began to push harder for new technology and improved efficiency in the brewing industry early in the 1960s as a part of the "Scientific and Technical Revolution" in the East German economy. This statewide program to improve productivity with cutting edge equipment and methods expanded programs of selective upgrade that, in the beer sector, had mostly affected export producers up to that point.<sup>52</sup> A report from early in that period by the main research institution for the brewing industry contained a fifty-two page list of new and renovated equipment needed in the GDR's brewing and malting industry by 1965 to achieve development targets.<sup>53</sup> A shorter document from four years later still stretched more than twenty-six pages.<sup>54</sup> In the

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<sup>52</sup> Grieder, *German Democratic Republic*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> n.a., "Technische und technologische Forderungen bei grundlegender Beachtung der technologischen Einrichtungen und der Maschinen der Brauindustrie, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Bedürfnisses an Einrichtungen für die Periode bis zum Jahre 1965," 1960, BArch, DE 4/23562.

<sup>54</sup> Report from -Stako to -Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, Abt. Industrie, VA Lebensmittelindustrie, "Ermittlung des Maschinenbedarfs für sämtliche Gruppen der Lebensmittelindustrie für die Jahre 1962 bis 1965," 23 May, 1961, BArch, DE4 23552.

intervening years and those that followed, the State Planning Commission, National Economic Council, and MBL all note a marked increase in new projects, research, and investment aimed at improving every facet of the beer sector in East Germany.<sup>55</sup> Money and resources flowed into projects such as the “continuous brewery,” which occupied several years of attention by industry researchers and government supervisors before finally being abandoned as an impossible goal.<sup>56</sup> Many other, more successful, ventures emerged during these years as well. The use of artificial enzymes to increase efficiency and allow for higher-adjunct beers became a regular practice following an extended period of testing and bureaucratic wrangling in 1965-1966.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> n.a., “1. Projekt der Entwicklung der Lebensmittelindustrie von 1965 - 1975,” March, 1960, BArch, DE 4/27452 Bd. 1, 8, 11, 23, 34; Koll. Greßler, “Volkswirtschaftsplan 1961 Plan Forschung und Technik Themenblatt: Entwicklung eines vollautomatischen zwölfstempligen Kronenkorkautomaten,” 1 July, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176; Dr. Dickscheit / Kolln. Zehle, “Volkswirtschaftsplan 1961 Plan Forschung und Technik Themenblatt: Vergleichende morphologische, physiologische und hisochemische Untersuchungen industriell genutzter Rassen von *Saccharomyces carlsbergensis*,” 20 August, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176; Dr. Dickscheit / Kolln. Natho / Hirsch, “Volkswirtschaftsplan 1961 Plan Forschung und Technik Themenblatt: Vergleichende Untersuchungen von Verschieden erzeugten Mutanten (Röntgen- und UV-Bestrahlung, Chemomutagene) von *Saccharomzces cervisiae* und *Saccharimyces carlsbergensis* auf ihr Ergosterinbildungsvermögen,” 20 August, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176; Dipl.Br.Ing Schaak, “Volkswirtschaftsplan 1961 Plan Forschung und Technik Themenblatt: Entwicklung von Behältern und Verschlüssen aus Plaststoffen für die Bier- und Limonadenindustrie,” 8 September, 1960, BArch, DE 4/5176; n.a., n.t., n.d., BArch, DE 4/24531 Bd. 2, 1-2;

<sup>56</sup> Dr. Dickscheit, Delegationsleiter, “Dienstreisebericht zum TWZ - Beschluß DS 332/2/XVII: Kontinuierliche Mälzerei, Kontinuierliche Brauerei, vom 6. VII. - 18. VII. 1964, Zwischen dem Institut für die Gärungs- und Getränkeindustrie, Berlin, DDR und dem Allunionsinstitut für die Bier, alkoholfreie Getränke- und Weinindustrie, UdSSR,” July, 1964, BArch, DE 4/23562 Bd. 1, 2-14; Dr. Peter Lietz, “7.3 Die Gründung des Instituts für Gärungs- und Getränkeindustrie (IfG),” in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016), 112-113.

<sup>57</sup> Message to Sekretär Männel-stellv. des Ministers-MBL, “Erste Auswertung der Versuche ‘Enzympräparate in der Praxis,’” 30 August, 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 20-30; Message from Dr. Wange, Stellvertreter des Ministers to Briska - Leiter der Abteilung Leicht-Lebensmittel- und bezirkgeleitete Industrie für Zentralkomitee der SED, “Einsatz von Enzypräparaten,” 17 Sept. 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 6; Message from gez. i. V. Rüscher Briska, Leiter - Abt. LLB der ZK der SED to G. Matthies, Hauptdirektor- SGK, n.t., 28 September, 1966, BArch, DG 5/264; Message from G. Matthies, Hauptdirektor - Staatliches Getränkekontor to Gen. Briska, Leiter - Abt. Leicht-, Lebensmittel. und

This period also saw the most aggressive push to improve bottling capacities in East Germany's breweries up to that point, which corresponds to the earlier campaign to move beer consumption out of pubs and bars. Kegging beer requires its own costly equipment and materials, but bottling remains the more capital-intensive packaging form, and it represented a recent innovation in beer production, which many GDR breweries had not yet adapted to before the war.<sup>58</sup> Although East Germany's economic planners did not explicitly link increased bottling to the reduction of traffic in "dark pubs," one cannot deny the correlation between the two goals. For their part, state officials justified the push for more bottled beer as corresponding to popular demand. Worldwide trends in beer consumption do support this conclusion, as demand for packaged beer rose across the globe during this period.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the reasons, multiple advances improved bottling during these years. Several state organs coordinated to finally institute standardization in bottle sizes and styles, which also set off a years-long effort to expand bottle cap production in the GDR and accelerate the acquisition, manufacture, and installation of high-capacity automated filling lines.<sup>60</sup> The advances listed here do not constitute an

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Bezirkgeleitete Industrie der ZK der SED, "Einsatz von Enzympräparaten in der Brauindustrie," 22 October, 1966, BArch, DG 5/264.

<sup>58</sup> Lietz and Teichert, "5. Die Ausgangsbegingungen in den Brauereien und Mälzereien," 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> Mosher, *Tasting Beer*, 21-22.

<sup>60</sup> n.a., dokument in files of MBL, "Zuarbeit zur Analyse für das 1. Halbjahr 1966 Rationalisierung in der Lebensmittelindustrie," 20 July, 1966, BArch, DG 5/67 Bl. 18 – 24; Präsidium des Ministerrates, "Beschluß über die Weiterführung der Industriepreisreform in der Lebensmittelindustrie, 12. Komplex, Hopfen, Braumalz, Bier, alkoholfreie und alkoholhaltige Erfrischungsgetränke," 12 May, 1966, BArch, DC 20-1 4/1334, Bl. 29, 48; "Volkswirtschaftliche Gesamtschätzung zum Problem 'Rationalisierung der Flaschenkelleranlagen der Getränkeindustrie bei genereller Einführung der Steinieflasche,'" 21 June, 1965, BArch, DE 1/51551, 1-8; "Maßnahmenplan des Ministeriums für Bezirkgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie zur Realisierung der Aufgaben des RGW-Komplexprogramms (Abschnitt 11 - Teil Lebensmittelindustrie)," 31 October, 1971, BArch, DG 5/1734, 34;

exhaustive record of industry development during this period, but they give a general sampling of the broad campaign for improvement.<sup>61</sup>

Success in these efforts came slowly and with great difficulty, if it came at all, but the most important facet of the push for modernization is the regular attention and accolades it received in the media. By the middle of the decade news about the improving beer supply replaced much of the previous ideological debate. These articles usually neglected any outright moral or didactic message about beer, but in their promotion of an improving industry they inherently suggest that the people's drink represented a worthy addition to the Scientific and Technical Revolution. Newspapers heralded even seemingly mundane projects such as the standardization of bottle sizes as a critical step in improving the people's supply of the *Volksgetränk*.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, the hullabaloo over producing and returning bottles garnered the bulk of attention in industry reports and appeared regularly in media coverage of the beer sector, as they had before. Now, though, these articles took on a tone of triumphant struggle. Though issues continued to arise in the bottle supply, progress continued apace. A 1967 *Berliner Zeitung* article presented a Q&A session with a local brewery employee. The brewer admitted that his facility still had problems with keeping a stock of packaging

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<sup>61</sup> For a truly comprehensive list and description of all research and development see Lietz and Teichert, "5. Die Ausgangsbegingungen in den Brauereien und Mälzereien," and Dr. Peter Lietz, Prof. Dr. Gerolf Annemüller, Prof. Dr. Werner Schade, and Dr. Hans-J. Manger, "7. Forschung und Entwicklung für die Brau- und Malzindustrie der DDR," in *Die Brau- und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost zwischen 1945 und 1989: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Brau- und Malzindustrie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> fa, "Das Radeberger und die Standardisierung: Wenn die Ausnahme von heute das Prinzip von morgen geworden ist, haben die Verpackungsorgen ein Ende," *NZ*, Nov. 4, 1959; K. U./E. W., "Ein Weniger wird zum Gewinn: Einheitliche Konservengläser sparen nicht nur Aerger beim Oeffnen," *NZ*, March 30, 1961.

materials, but immediately noted that a new, high-capacity filling machine would solve those issues soon.<sup>63</sup> In this and many other columns, the media announced that upgraded equipment for filling, capping, and pasteurizing bottles advanced the people's access to packaged beer despite all difficulties.<sup>64</sup> The press regularly featured other technological, procedural, and educational improvements in the brewing industry, providing their readerships with a sense of scientific energy and advancement in the beer supply.<sup>65</sup>

A parallel message of progress emerged in the discourse surrounding beer's cultural and social importance, most prominently exemplified by the now-constant use of "moderation" as a requisite admonition whenever an article mentioned consumption of the *Volksgetränk*. A single column from the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1965 displays all of the core features of beer coverage in the media during the final decade of Ulbricht's tenure. It starts by describing how the work collective at Berlin's Bürgerbräu brewery had recently

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<sup>63</sup> Dr. K.-H. Gerstner, "Blickpunkt VII. Parteitag: Um abgepackte Lebensmittel," *BZ*, March 25, 1967.

<sup>64</sup> "Wo bleiben die Pullen?" *BZ*, April 14, 1960; Harry H. Pätzold, "Leserbrief," *BZ*, April 17, 1960; Udo Klähn, "Der Student und seine Getränke," *BZ*, April 20, 1960; Wally Kuhn, Max Weiß, Paul Ehrhardt, "Durst und leere Flaschen," *BZ*, May 4, 1960; (ADN), "Täglich 140 Kästen mehr," *ND*, Sept. 20, 1961; B.R., "Wie in Dr. Dathes Tropenhalle: Heiße und schwüle Hochsommertage in der Hauptstadt / Mittwoch: 34 Grad in Schatten," *ND*, July 25, 1963; Erwin, "Moment Mal: leere Flaschen," *NZ*, April 2, 1965; Kei, "Hitze und Hagel: Hochbetrieb in Strandbädern / Begehrte Kaltschalen / Helfer bei Schultheiß," *NZ*, July 15, 1965; (ND), "Flaschen zurück!" *ND*, Dec. 3, 1965; G. H. Kegel, "Erfrischender Sommertrunk: Neuentwicklungen unserer Getränkeindustrie," *BZ*, March 21, 1967; "Wohlschmeckende Getränke: Alkoholfrei und Bier in besserer Qualität," *NZ*, March 22, 1967; "Eine kleine Marktinformation," *BZ*, June 7, 1967; "Wieder: Flaschenärger," *BZ*, July 19, 1967; Hugo Polkehn, "Zur Woche der Bereitschaft im Handel: Gerstensaft und Spezial-Toast, Versorgung muß auch bei 5-Tage-Woche gesicherte sein," *BZ*, Aug. 3, 1967; Hugo Polkehn, "Zur Woche der Bereitschaft im Handel: Gerstensaft und Spezial-Toast, Versorgung muß auch bei 5-Tage-Woche gesicherte sein," *BZ*, Aug. 3, 1967; "Aus der Wirtschaft," *NZ*, Nov. 28, 1967; Günter Herbert, "Hauptstädtisches Niveau für Handel und Gastronomie: Aus dem Referat von Stadtrat Günter Herbert, Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters," *BZ*, April 11, 1969.

<sup>65</sup> (ADN), "100. Geburtstag mit Porter," *ND*, Feb. 16, 1965; oha, "Schulabgänger, helft den Brand löschen!" *ND*, Nov. 23, 1965; "Bier aus geeichten Aluminiumtanks," *ND*, Dec. 20, 1966; L. Waldau, "Aus unseren Instituten: Enzyme auf neue Weise wirksam," *BZ*, May 14, 1967; Lothar Gottwald, "Enzyme - biologische Wirkstoffe mit Zukunft," *ND*, July 6, 1968.



received the distinction of “operation of outstanding quality.” Thanks to their efforts, customers in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and the Soviet Union could enjoy an excellent Berliner Pilsner beer, made with malt, hops, water, and yeast, a clear allusion to the *Reinheitsgebot*. Even the capitalist nations of Sweden, Denmark, and West Germany received shipments. A brief survey of the history of beer since the time of the pharaohs and a description of Bürgerbräu’s own long tradition of quality production precedes a lavish rundown of its modern brewing techniques. Finally, the entire column concludes with a resounding “*Na, denn, ‘Prost!’ – aber maßvoll.*” (So, then, cheers! – but in moderation) This pattern of stories evoking pride, progress, cultural tradition, and a decisive injunction to drink “responsibly” appeared regularly in the press during these years.<sup>66</sup>

Beyond these formulaic articles, explicit and implicit pleas for moderation became an omnipresent element in references to beer drinking. The same court reporter who had earlier described in detail the role played by beer in catalyzing several heinous crimes now changed her (or his) tone. A new crime report involving intoxication identified the true culprit as “high-percentage alcohol.” The perpetrator had made the mistake of indulging in distilled spirits for an evening, breaking with his usual, safe, habit of drinking “one or two bottles of beer” after work. As a result, he “blacked-out” and

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<sup>66</sup> Hans Ludwig, “Rund um 'Weiße' und 'Molle',” *BZ*, Sept. 23, 1960; Heiner Hein, “Gefragt - Geantwortet: Woher hat das Bockbier seinen Namen,” *BZ*, Dec. 29, 1965; Ihre Diätassistentin Monika, “Nichts gegen ein Gläschen Bier: Organische Schäden durch größere Mengen Alkohol,” *NZ*, Oct. 1, 1966; G. “Bier verleitet zum Mäusen ... behauptet ein zynischer Chronist,” *NZ*, Jan. 7, 1965; Vi., “Zu Gast bei den Burgkeller-Geistern,” *NZ*, Aug. 29, 1970.

shattered a store window to steal the pants off a mannequin.<sup>67</sup> In a similar vein, a diet columnist, who three years earlier had warned of heart damage caused by alcohol and specifically mentioned beer, presented a new advice piece in 1966 entitled “Nothing against a glass of beer: health damage through large quantities of alcohol.” She related the history of drinking back to the time of ancient Egypt and contrasted beer with tobacco. The former was a substance requiring moderation, the latter an example of something that should never be used in any quantity.<sup>68</sup> Moderation became the didactic element par excellence.<sup>69</sup> Still, while this served as an effective counterpoint to the problem of drunkenness and excessive consumption, other unacceptable elements of beer culture required more direct reformation to become suitable for socialist modernity.

The state-run press had to break the *Volksgetränk*'s association with spaces of conservative social and political attitudes to fit beer within communist ideology. One step toward accomplishing this goal came with the physical removal or renovation of the dark pubs. Whether city planners altered the existing building or tore it down and replaced it, they aimed to substitute dim, cramped, inconspicuous alcohol-centered spaces with roomy, bright, well-advertised establishments focused more on food.<sup>70</sup> Though not uniformly successful, this program did change the material surroundings of beer drinking

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<sup>67</sup> icus, “Unser Gerichtsbericht: Unscheinbares corpus delicti,” *BZ*, Dec. 24, 1965.

<sup>68</sup> Ihre Diätassistentin Monika, “Nichts gegen ein Gläschen Bier: Organische Schäden durch größere Mengen Alkohol,” *NZ*, Oct. 1, 1966.

<sup>69</sup> “Aber nur bis zum bewußten Eichstrich: Abschluß unserer Diskussion “Gläser gleich einweihen?”” *BZ*, Nov. 10, 1967; Wolfgang Hasse, “Zwischen Warnow-Kal und Banquereau-Bank (10), Nachts tagt das Heringskollegium; Kulinarische Probleme auf hoher See - Pro Fangreise elf Tonnen Fleisch und Wurst - Frische “Milch vom Block,”” *NZ*, March 18, 1969.

<sup>70</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 38.

in quite a few venues, particularly in bigger cities like Berlin.<sup>71</sup> Later in the decade a new strategy emerged. The media began to feature beer in stories that portrayed it as an impetus for social progress and advancement.

Once again, the *Stammtisch* played a key role in this reformulation of beer culture; the old reactionary space disappeared, replaced by drinking circles of enlightened, committed activists. A 1968 article in the *Neues Deutschland* walked its readers through this process step by step in a full-page spread describing the authors' trip to the small town of Mylau in Saxony. First, they told the history of Mylau's old *Stammtisch*, made up of the town's bourgeois business owner class, which used to gather at the "Golden Lion" for its regular meetings. Starting in 1890, the wealthy, conservative men would assemble in their closed, private, social circle to conspire about business and politics. The column showed how this *Stammtisch* always came down firmly on the wrong side of history, opposing liberalism, repressing worker's rights, and supporting Hitler. With the establishment of the proletarian state, the town's bourgeois either fled or lost their possessions to state expropriation ratified by a popular referendum. The workers took over and closed the Golden Lion. Rather than claim the closed-door *Stammtischpolitik* as their own, the empowered proletariat conducted government openly and democratically in the town hall, workplace, and school. The workers convened their own socialist "round table" (a term with clear resonance to *Stammtisch*) of leading citizens in a local restaurant/tavern to talk about the progress of the town. The content of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

the conversation matters less than the composition of the group. Of the seven attendees, two were women who held prominent leadership roles in the community. Two of the men worked as managers at local businesses, one was the mayor, and two were ordinary shop workers.<sup>72</sup> In short, the new *Stammtisch* represented an open space where people from every profession and both genders could sit and speak as equals under socialism.

Women's liberation formed a key part of the new push for modernization in beer and in the 1960s after little progress in the previous decade. Donna Harsch and Katherine Pence, among others, have pointed out how the supposedly egalitarian ideals of socialism served to increase the work and responsibilities of most women in East Germany, giving them a "double burden" of both domestic and industry labor.<sup>73</sup> Beer formed yet another area where this dynamic played out. Women in East Germany consumed a relatively high amount of beer compared to other populations, but still far less than the average man.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, women were increasingly responsible for purchasing beer as more and more of the *Volksgetränk* went into bottles and reached consumers via grocery stores. This meant that progressively more women literally carried the burden of supplying beer

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<sup>72</sup> Elvira Lietzmann und Hans Uslar, "Handlungen-Wandlungen: Mylau - ehemals und heute / Tischrunde in einer kleinen Stadt," *ND*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>73</sup> Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-3; Pence, "'You as a Woman Will Understand': Consumption, Gender and the Relationship between State and Citizenry in the GDR's Crisis of 17 June 1953," *German History* 19, no.2 (2001), 218-252.

<sup>74</sup> Actually, women's beer consumption in German society appears to grow progressively as they enter the commercial workforce in larger numbers during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Manfred Hübner points this out in the context of the Industrial Revolution, stating that women preferred beer over spirits because they were expected to remain "moderate" unlike the men. Sources from the DDR show that this trend continued in the second half of the twentieth century, though nothing suggests the same desire for moderation. Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz*, 132-133. Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung.," 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 20.

to the men in their lives.<sup>75</sup> A newspaper cartoon from the *Berliner Zeitung* in 1969 satirized men who sat at home and demanded that their wives bring them beverages. In the image, a bald headed and somewhat scrawny-looking man sits in front of the television in the middle of drinking his fifth or sixth libation with a case of beer on the floor next to him and several empty bottles strewn about the room. His wife stands in front of him, holding a scrub brush almost triumphantly in the air. The caption reads: “Now that you have thoughtfully switched your beer consumption to self-service, I have brought you something for self-service in the bathtub.”<sup>76</sup> Though this domestic lampoon approaches the question of gender equality in a light-hearted manner, the government treated women’s relationship to beer quite seriously, especially in their participation in the industry.

By the 1960s, state supervisors of the brewing sector actively sought to reduce gender disparity at the people’s breweries. Thousands of women worked in the beer sector in East Germany from its earliest years, but almost always in very specific roles, performing menial tasks. The most common employment for female brewery workers came on the bottling lines, some of the most repetitive, dirty, and uncomfortable jobs in the operation.<sup>77</sup> In 1965, a report in the files of National Economic Council described the

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<sup>75</sup> “Die Preisprüfung im Einzelhandel: Eine amtliche Darlegung über Verbesserungsmöglichkeiten - Gesamte Bevölkerung ist zur Mithilfe aufgerufen,” *NZ*, Jan. 10, 1953.

<sup>76</sup> Schmitt, “Frieda und Otto 7 bis 10 Spree-Athen,” *BZ*, Jan. 4, 1969.

<sup>77</sup> “NZ-Reporter Berichten: Der Bierwagon fährt wieder vors Haus,” *NZ*, April 18, 1951; Lemmel, Abteilungsleiter - Staatliches Getränkekontor FA Koordinierung, Grundsatzfragen und Getränkeversorgung, “Protokoll über die Fachtagung des Volkswirtschaftsrates, Abt. Lebensmittelindustrie mit den Fachreferenten der Getränkeindustrie der Bezirkswirtschaftsräte und den Leitbetrieben der Brauindustrie am 25. April 1963 im Staatlichen Getränkekontor,” 30 April, 1963, BArch, DE 4/7408, 4.

many advantages of acquiring new, highly automated bottling machines for the brewing industry. The author mentioned, among other key points, “increased ease of work for those employed in the filling process (overwhelmingly women), because the work can be mechanized and the hard physical labor reduced.”<sup>78</sup> The need to mention the gender of workers who would benefit from new equipment speaks to the continued assumption that women needed relief from physical labor, thus making the request for better technology even more urgent.

As the image below makes clear, women were often used to promote scientific and technological advances in beer production that claimed to make work easier, simpler, or safer. This advertising pamphlet from one of the GDR’s primary keg producers shows a well-dressed woman easily lifting an empty aluminum keg over her head to hand it to the man loading a railroad car. The man wears work clothes and appears to be employed by the railroad. The woman’s image intentionally highlights her femininity and middle-class status. Beyond implying that the new aluminum kegs weigh so light that “even women” could lift them high in the air, the image evokes a sense of domestic ease framed within the industrial setting of a railyard.<sup>79</sup> Still, the state did also make some effort to encourage women into skilled and prominent positions in the brewing industry, and promoted their efforts to do so as a sign of the socialist project to open opportunities for women, even in industries where they were historically underrepresented.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> “Volkswirtschaftliche Gesamteinschätzung zum Problem ‘Rationalisierung der Flaschenkelleranlagen der Getränkeindustrie bei genereller Einführung der Steinieflasche,’” 21 June, 1965, BArch, DE 1/51551, 8.

<sup>79</sup> DE 5/3143 Bd. 2.

<sup>80</sup> VK Horst Kroitor, “Hopfen und Malz gewonnen,” *BZ*, Nov. 29, 1960



Figure 3.1 East German keg advertisement uses the image of a well-dressed woman lifting an empty aluminum keg to portray how light and modern the product is. Image courtesy of Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde, DE 5/3143, Bd. 2.

All of this shows a general accommodation of beer to the goals and ideals of the socialist project, making it more than just a cultural symbol carried over from the past. Beer now had a productive role to play in future progress, and in spaces where that future was planned and coordinated. Walter Ulbricht himself acknowledged the role of beer in party functions during a 1963 speech to the Free German Trade Union Federation, albeit in a mildly chiding way. “There are still many departments in the operations where [union events] go like this: in the official union gatherings everything goes very beautifully on stage, but the real issues are first discussed after a glass of beer! [crowd

reaction:] (**Amusement and applause**)”<sup>81</sup> Ulbricht, personally, had little in the way of positive feelings for alcohol in any form, but his tone is more of paternalistic finger-wagging than real outrage.<sup>82</sup>

Other leading figures of the SED felt no such compunctions in their approval of the *Volksgetränk* in the last years of the decade. Legitimate progress had occurred in improving the supply of beer, and the Minister for the MBL proudly and publicly stood by the accomplishments of the brewing industry.<sup>83</sup> The corresponding department head in the Central Committee of the SED likewise took an active role in pushing further upgrades and development in the beer sector.<sup>84</sup> Most tellingly, financial investment in the GDR’s breweries grew enormously during this period. One calculation put the total expenditure of hard currency in the beverage industry at more than forty-four million marks in the period from 1966 to 1970. Well over half of that amount went directly to the beer and malt industries.<sup>85</sup>

### Understanding Beer

As Ulbricht and other Party leaders shifted their economic policies and rhetoric toward beer, their subordinates at the Institute for Market Research conducted a series of new studies to investigate and explain the population’s relationship to alcohol. The

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<sup>81</sup> “Neue Aufgaben der Gewerkschaften in der Periode des umfassenden Aufbaus des Sozialismus: Diskussionsrede des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem 6. FDGB-Kongreß,” *ND*, Nov. 23, 1963.

<sup>82</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 72-73

<sup>83</sup> “Hochseefischerei mit hoher Fangkapazität: Gute Ergebnisse in der Lebensmittelindustrie,” *BZ*, April 27, 1971.

<sup>84</sup> Message from Matthies, Hauptdirektor-Staatliches Getränkekontor to Männel, Stellvertreter des Ministers für Bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie, “Betr.: Einsatz von Enzympräparaten in der Brauindustrie,” 22 October, 1966, BArch, DG 5/36, Bl. 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Gen. Berger, “Sitzungsmaterial: Grundrichtung der Entwicklung der Erzeugnisgruppen Bier und alkoholfreie Erfrischungsgeränke 1971 - 1975,” 8 September, 1971, BArch, DG 5/1734, 33-34.



results display a continuing lack of consistent agreement on the part of state officials about beer's conceptual nature as it related to socialist ideology. In general, GDR officials seem to have accepted that beer enjoyed widespread popularity that stemmed in large part from long-running cultural traditions and customs. This recognition led to the appropriation of those historical and identity-linked elements and the eventual push to adopt it into socialist modernity. However, the unified public message hid persistent uncertainties in the regime's internal views toward beer. A series of studies by the Institute for Market Research written in the final years of Ulbricht's leadership reiterate the institutional beliefs, ambiguities, and contradictions surrounding beer that marked his entire tenure as First Secretary of the SED.

The Institute repeatedly asserted that the main driver of German fondness for beer was historical habit. The first beer-specific study, published in 1966, noted that "obviously, historically developed customs play the most important role in current consumption levels."<sup>86</sup> Nor did such studies ignore cultural identity. "Beer is a *Volksgetränk* for [East German society]. Its consumption is a fundamental requirement of our population."<sup>87</sup> This conclusion, repeated multiple times in other studies over the next decade, could hardly have surprised any members of the government. It had already made

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<sup>86</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B. -D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, "Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab," September, 1966, BArch, DL 102/224, pg. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. Werner Bischoff und Dr.rer.oec. Werner Jurich - Insitut für Bedarfsforschung, Abt. Nahrungs- und Genußmittel, "Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs an alkoholischen Getränken bis 1970," n.d., BArch, DL 102/39, pg. 39.

its recognition of beer's deep historical roots in German culture and social tradition clear.<sup>88</sup>

The overwhelming connection between beer drinking and weather patterns represented a less obvious revelation. Not only did demand for the *Volksgetränk* spike every summer, leading to the worst shortages, quality issues, and circulation problems for bottles, but the correlation between warmer temperatures and beer intake defined East Germany's regional variation in the beer supply. The GDR displayed a clear north-to-south curve in local beer demand, always highest along the border with Bohemia in the south and lowest along the Baltic Sea coast in the north.<sup>89</sup> Institute researchers even predicted that the rising number of homes with central heating would lead to a noticeable increase in beer consumption.<sup>90</sup> Heat and history made the German people want more beer. On those facts, the Institute reports showed consistency and unanimity.

On the related question of beer's use as a thirst-quenching beverage, the message was jumbled and incoherent. Thomas Kochan points out how difficult the government found this problem in his monograph on alcohol in the GDR. He takes as his main evidence a 1963 report by a medical doctor who visited seven industrial operations in the

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<sup>88</sup> Dipl.-Wirtsch. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Entwicklung des Bier Verbrauchs bis 1975," 10 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung, BArch, DL 102/660, 31; Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung)," 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung)," 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 7, 14.

<sup>90</sup> Dr. W. Dlouhy und Dipl.-Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, "Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Bier undalkoholfreien Erfrischungsgetränken im Zeitraum bis 1980," January, 1975, BArch, DL 102/888, 5.

area around Halle to investigate employee drinking habits. The young researcher reported that beer drinking was common before, during, and after the work day and that many laborers viewed it as a way to battle intense heat and relieve thirst. The doctor, young enough to have been raised and educated under socialism, disagreed strongly when some workers suggested that beer did not count as “alcohol,” but he did not condemn their daily consumption of significant quantities of the *Volksgetränk*. Nor did he take a hard stand against beer’s potential to slake thirst and provide nourishment.<sup>91</sup>

This same ambiguity appeared in the reports of the Institute for Market Research. While economists there never went so far as to deny that beer was alcohol, they vacillated between various positions when comparing it to other beverages. Two reports from 1966, written by the same authors, presented beer in a good light and associated it closely with soft drinks and wine as drinks of refreshment and moderation, respectively. The authors of one report suggested that *Gerstensaft* represented something unique among alcoholic beverages. Its very low alcohol content let it serve as a thirst-quenching drink, something not possible with wine or spirits. Beer also fit into a list of drinks that satisfied “special, not exclusively nutritional-physiological needs” along with tea and lemonade.<sup>92</sup> The latter beverages represent drinks that enjoyed positive reputations in the GDR. Both reports gave wine and beer equal standing in terms of moderation. The later document stated: “Wine and beer are alcoholic beverages with relatively low alcohol contents. Through the

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<sup>91</sup> Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 270-273.

<sup>92</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B.-D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy - Institut für Bedarfsforschung, Abt. Nahrungs- und Genußmittel, “Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln: Bericht 2, Vergleich des Getränkeverbrauchs zwischen der DDR und der westdeutschen Bundesrepublik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Alkoholverbrauchs,” August, 1966, BArch, DL 102/222, 8.

consumption of these drinks the use of high-percentage spirits should be reduced...<sup>93</sup>

Yet, just one year later, the same two researchers warned that many East Germans viewed beer as a substitute for soft drinks, and flatly rejected such attitudes.<sup>94</sup> These statements do not come from random sections of the report, but rather represent the conclusive findings of the Institute's research, backed up by piles of statistical data. More or less the same information appeared couched in a shifting and ambivalent conceptual framework.

The exponential rise in beer consumption in the late 1960s caused further fluctuations in the Institute's treatment of the *Volksgetränk*. A study published in 1972 affirmed beer's core place in East German life, and made no explicit suggestion that it represented a problem. It laid out in nuanced detail how beer's reasonable prices helped slow liquor consumption.<sup>95</sup> Then the authors repeated the earlier assertion that the population's historical beer customs and the *Volksgetränk's* deeply rooted association with social events kept its popularity high and growing.<sup>96</sup> The report confirmed beer as the most popular alcoholic beverage in East Germany, and stated that it had entrenched itself further in that position within the past few years.<sup>97</sup> On the question of alternatives, the authors of this study were highly skeptical. No other single product could do everything that beer did. Soft drinks did not provide the psychological pleasure of

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<sup>93</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B. -D.Schimizek und Dr.rer.oec. W. Dlouhy, "Berichtsreihe: Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln, Bericht 4: Die Entwicklung des Bierverbrauchs im internationalen Maßstab," September, 1966, BArch, DL 102/224, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Dipl.rer.oec. B.-D.Schimizek und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von alkoholfreien und alkoholhaltigen Erfrischungsgetränken in Volumen und Struktur bis 1970 sowie prognostisch bis 1980 (Abschlußbericht) Teil 3 des Forschungsauftrages 1.06/8," 31 July, 1967, BArch, DL 102/326, 51.

<sup>95</sup> Dipl.-Wirtsch. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Entwicklung des Bier Verbrauchs bis 1975," 10 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung, BArch, DL 102/660, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5.

alcohol, wine did not quench the thirst, and nothing really approached the same flavor profile as beer.<sup>98</sup> Despite these clear signals of beer's deeply rooted position in the GDR, a new report from just *three weeks* later, supervised by the same researcher, called decisively for an intensified campaign of wine advertising to help reduce beer consumption or at least slow its growth.<sup>99</sup>

Despite internal ambivalence, the shift to economic policies and public messages of modernity helped foster growth in the beer supply during Ulbricht's last years, and made beer look like a juggernaut in the economy in the early 1970s. By the time Erich Honecker took over as First Secretary of the SED, beer consumption had risen 20 percent over the previous six years. It remained the drink of the everyman (and increasingly everywoman). More than four out of five households in the GDR consumed some beer multiple times a week, and a robust percentage of men reported drinking it daily. *Gerstensaft* was just slightly less preferred to serve to guests than wine, and it remained the most common beverage to drink at restaurants.<sup>100</sup> The *Volksgetränk* enjoyed acceptance across all income groups and professional classes, but retained highest popularity with the SED's target beneficiaries of workers and farmers.<sup>101</sup>

Behind the government's public message of socialist modernity for beer lurked continuing divisions and contradictions in ideology and final goals. The SED leadership

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>100</sup> Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, "Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung,)" 31 December, 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 12 – 15.

learned the ineffectiveness of a hardline strategy toward changing the population's drinking habits and decided to quit trying. Yet, conflicting viewpoints on beer remained among at least some sectors of the state administration. In the scope of this study, that merely reconfirms the notion that the continuity of German material culture during this period made beer valuable enough for the regime that it chose to repress these divisions and modify public criticism of the *Volksgetränk* into a narrative of modern progress. The simple, unalterable, reality that beer *was* the people's drink determined the Party's treatment of it.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has traced beer's treatment as a political concept by the socialist leadership, showing the material development of the brewing industry, and how the state dealt with the *Volksgetränk* as an idea both in private and through the media. The regime's recognition of beer's cultural importance drove the need to produce it in ever greater quantities, incentivized government functionaries to endorse it as a cherished symbol of tradition, and ultimately earned beer a place in the state's vision of socialist modernity.

Following the disastrous years of Soviet administration, the supply of beer in East Germany grew immediately upon the establishment of the GDR, and continued to do so throughout Ulbricht's tenure. After initially nationalizing the bulk of the brewing industry and attempting some measure of direct central control, the regime progressively relinquished administrative power to a more decentralized system of management to improve efficiency. The historically regionalized character of the German brewing industry persisted as a feature of beer in the GDR, even as the state slowly brought the remainder of the country's breweries under people's ownership. Though direct management came almost entirely from lower levels of the administrative structure, the highest levels of economic authority still planned and coordinated beer production through the bureaucratic hierarchy. Thus, the resuscitation and revitalization of the beer sector during these years reflects an overall state policy that supported an increasing supply of the *Volksgetränk*.

The regime identified its people's desire for beer first and foremost as a result of cultural affinity, and sought to capitalize on that demand by endorsing the people's drink. This helps explain why the state consistently supported the reconstruction and growth of the beer industry even through extreme economic struggles. Though they stopped short of accepting beer as a "need," Ulbricht and his functionaries clearly acknowledged the *Volksgetränk* as a "want" that they could not deny citizens. Moreover, their use of the drink's cultural resonance to generate a shared identity clearly outshines other motivating factors. The continuity of long-running traditions and patterns of consumption in taste and style makes beer an insightful example of the regime's relationship to consumer goods. The state sought to make every industry profitable, it claimed to strive for the highest quality in all wares despite constant failures, and it took every opportunity to shift attention away from its own flaws and refocus it on the supposed evils of the West. In the case of beer the rhetoric from press and bureaucracy shows a pervasive tendency to appeal directly to the population's sense of its national self-image and historic traditions.

The resiliency of German beer culture and its usefulness to the regime in constructing shared points of identity explain how the *Volksgetränk* and most of its social traditions survived in East Germany despite the push for Cultural Revolution in 1957. Press coverage during this period suggested that certain elements in the government believed that beer's growth had come to an end, and that demand would recede going forward, presumably because people would adopt a more enlightened approach to



drinking and consume less.<sup>1</sup> This, along with the sudden abundance of anti-beer messages in the press, speaks clearly to a new concern with the population's attitudes toward *Gerstensaft*, unease with the perseverance of certain social and cultural traditions that surrounded it, and hope that propaganda could affect attitudes.

Public critiques of beer primarily came from health experts, crime reporters, and politically-minded social reformers. They received a louder and more prominent voice in the press during the Cultural Revolution, pointing to a policy change at the highest levels of the media and government censorship. Yet pro-beer messages continued to circulate in the newspapers without any obvious changes to their rhetoric or composition. Competing factions in the regime may have limited the effect of Cultural Revolution on the people's drink. Alternatively, the symbolic and economic value of beer may have simply guaranteed its advocates a voice despite a generally negative turn against beer in the government's public discourse. In any case, for approximately five years after 1957 the population received a bevy of mixed and contradicting messages about beer.

By the early 1960s, the Scientific and Technical Revolution began to garner more attention in beer-related press coverage, and by 1965 public rhetoric about beer from the government and media showed a complete turn away from conflicting viewpoints. At every point of contact between government policy and the world of beer, a material and discursive shift adapted the *Volksgetränk* into a constructive symbol of socialist modernity. The brewing industry received intensive investment in modern technology

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Böer, "Berliner Bier, Prozent und weiche Pläne: Schultheiss produzeirt gut ein Zehntal als Bürgerbräu / Beratung mit Finanzminister Rumpf," *BZ*, June 5, 1959.

and production methods. The skeptical attitudes displayed toward beer in the press faded, replaced by a distinctive message that acknowledged the history, tradition, and cultural depth of the beverage, but wove an implied or outright injunction to moderation into the narrative. Apparent uncertainty in the regime's ideological views of beer, showcased in the ambivalent conclusions of studies by the Institute for Market Research, suggest that conceptual disagreements remained between some state organs. Regardless, the usefulness of beer as financial, and especially cultural, capital had won over enough minds in the leadership that state beer policy morphed into a unified message of progress.

In the final analysis, this study shows the impact that cultural continuities had on an authoritarian socialist regime. Widely held ideas about tradition, taste, and social convention shaped the words and actions of the GDR, which, while more responsive to popular demand than it has often been portrayed, still left much to be desired in satisfying its citizens' wishes. Moreover, viewing the SED's treatment of beer moves the conversation away from simply identifying limits on the regime's power, and toward the kinds of incentivizing influences that led it to actively embrace parts of what it considered German culture, even as it tried to adapt them for the future of socialist modernity. These patterns suggest a different approach for evaluating the effect of beer and other cultural commodities, not only in tightly-controlled states such as the GDR, but also in countries where market capitalism gear the economy to more directly reflect the whims of those with purchasing power.

Ulbricht and his subordinates in the SED faced a conflict in their vision of modernity, which seems endemic to all episodes of modernization whether they are

socialist and centrally-steered or otherwise. Simply put, hopes for the future are inherently contingent on the past. Grand designs for prosperity, efficiency, and equality do not emerge from a vacuum; they are created through the experiences and memories of history both at an individual and societal level. Thus, the beer policies of the GDR's leaders in the mid-twentieth century and their plans and hopes for the future really boiled down to understanding beer as concept defined by history. Specifically, the *Volksgetränk*, as they saw it, derived from cultural continuities carried forward by the collective memory of a national identity. Even explicit efforts to change the nature of beer referred to ideas of its historical place in society to determine what a bright new world of German, socialist, beer culture would and would not include.

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APPENDIX



## APPENDIX A:

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES IN THE BREWING INDUSTRY (1945 - 1971)

- 1945 – Under the SMAD, large breweries are nationalized.
- 1949
- 1947 The VVB Brau- und Malz is founded as a horizontal organizing apparatus for nationalized breweries.
- 1951 The VVB Brau- und Malz is reorganized to have three seats in Dresden, Erfurt, and Potsdam.
- 1952 The Vereinigung Volkseigener Betriebe is renamed to “Verwaltung (administration) Volkseigener Betriebe” with the same abbreviation VVB.
- 1954 The VVB Brau- und Malz is dissolved. The Food Industry, with a special department for *Genussmittel*, takes a coordinating and supervisory role, but most individual breweries are placed under administration of local district, county, and community governments. The trend is toward increasingly local control.
- 1958 The GDR’s industrial ministries, including the Food Industry Ministry, are dissolved. The State Planning Commission takes direct control of planning and steering the economy. The SPK forms the Stako to coordinate production and distribution in the beverage industries, but only from a “balancing” role. The first *Braukombinate* form, usually between brewing and malting operations within the same city or locality.

- 1961 The SPK forms a new *Volkswirtschaftsrat*, which takes over many of the old duties of the industrial ministries. The Stako now answers to both the SPK and VWR, but its duties with regards to the brewing industry do not change.
- 1965 The Council of Ministers forms new industrial ministries, including the Ministry for District-Managed and Food Industries, which becomes the direct superior of both the Stako and the district economic councils responsible for managing the breweries in their territories. As such, the MBL is the most direct centralized government control the brewing industry has seen in over a decade, but the individual breweries still answer to their local authorities.
- 1968 The first *Getränk kombinat* are formed. Within roughly a decade all brewing operations in East Germany will be combined within these conglomerates that integrate the industry both horizontally and vertically. The GKs continue reporting to local and regional councils, the chain of command does not change.