

1 | *Socialist Awakening*

In a spirit of great generosity, [the Communist Party gives] the younger generation, which had never enjoyed the right to organize itself freely and democratically, the chance . . . to cleanse their lives of fascist influence and to join together in shaping the future. (Erich Honecker, July 1945)¹

When Stalin passed away in March 1953, the protagonists of this book were in their early twenties. They were about to graduate from university and ready to commit to careers as economists in a regime fully dedicated to following the Soviet example. This was by no means predetermined and was indeed an unlikely outcome of their childhood and youth during the two preceding decades – decades that rendered the twentieth century a time of extremes.

Born shortly before the National Socialist regime ended the short-lived democracy of the Weimar Republic, they grew up in a totalitarian and militarist state. Recalling the severe ostracism of several groups, they belonged to a cohort that was obliged to partake, at the age of ten, in the German Youth (*Deutsche Jungvolk*) and then, at the age of fourteen, in the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*). As adolescents, they witnessed (and possibly participated in) the ferocious final battles of World War II. At zero hour, they came of age as children of the rubble (*Trümmerkinder*) who faced poverty leading to malnutrition and disease, rebuilding efforts, revelations about the terror of Nazism, and a plurality of visions for what the proper response to it might be. The Soviet vision imposed itself more and more. They felt the increasing global conflict between the East and the West in their daily lives in the divided city of Berlin, notably during the airlift in 1948. When the GDR was founded in 1949, they entered university at a time when

¹ Speech titled “The Youth as an Active Participant in the Reconstruction of an Antifascist Order,” cited in Buddrus (1995: 256).

higher education was formally subjected to the dictates of Marxism-Leninism and Stalin's personal cult, which guided the young state until 1955.

Growing up in these years of extremes, life presented itself as a continuous struggle between people with different political identities and ethnic origins. They thus learned what it meant to take sides. As the only generation that partook in the Hitler Youth and the Stalinist mobilization of the early GDR, their childhood and youth would be decisive for the range of experiences they would be capable of in the GDR and thus decisive for their moral stricture and epistemic beliefs. Compared to the Old Communists, they did not form their political identity through resistance and battles against other political movements, the National Socialist movement in particular. Instead, their political identity was formed through the role models of those Old Communists, who continued seeing the GDR as an arena for a sustained fight between allies and traitor, between trust and suspicion. What made them amenable to follow Old Communists as examples?

Even if key events such as the participation in the Hitler Youth and the first Soviet-like institutions on German ground were unique to the age group of our protagonists, the outcome could have been different. In contrast to the subsequent generation that was "born into" the GDR, our protagonists did have a choice in where and how to live, and they made this choice in light of many who chose differently. The five postwar years were characterized by an open ideological clash between different ways to respond to the National Socialist regime and different visions regarding Germany's political orientation. The full range of political parties was still allowed in the early Soviet Occupation Zone. The first elections did not establish a full majority for the Communist Party (KPD), even after the forced integration of the social democrats (SPD) as the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in spring 1946. In addition, there were many for whom the end of the war meant the end of any social mobilization and a return to an apolitical private life. Many of those in the same age group, as Mannheim put it, "worked up the material of their common experiences" differently (1952: 304), acquired a lower political profile, chose a less ideological profession, or simply left the Soviet Occupation Zone and soon the GDR. Not so for our young men. What then explains why they, in contrast to others, were ready to commit to socialism and the Soviet example? Without searching for a general explanation, the reasons are

individual and circumstantial. As much as the existing information allows, this chapter describes the contingent reasons for their emergent political beliefs. As multifaceted as their background was, however, for all of them the historical circumstances gave occasion to, and shaped, their commitment to the values of the emerging socialist state.

From a first-person perspective, the reason for their emergent socialist beliefs is obviously related with the simple persuasiveness of the Marxist principles they discovered in their late youth. As is common with the young, however, ideology is not the result of careful deliberation but a response to specific existential needs that makes them amenable (and vulnerable) to concrete role models. It was only at the end of their childhood and youth, which are described in this chapter, that they read Marx and got intellectually hooked on it. Being “betrayed” by the National Socialist regime that led to utter destruction and postwar poverty, their existential needs were related to their unstable family situation, loss of history, and lack of language and understanding, all of which resulted in a desire for safety and the notion that “this should never happen again.”² While some found this safety by falling back on the religion of their parents and saying “never again will I devote myself politically” or “never again will I allow social exclusion,” the five protagonists would follow the SED’s catchphrase that socialism is the only legitimate anti-fascist regime that can secure peace and by extension prosperity. They would keep faith in the anti-fascist legitimacy of socialism for the rest of their lives. It would later be so strongly rooted in their social being that the similarities between the two regimes would never easily appear to them. In the words of Dieter Klein:

I was a loyal party member . . . without any doubts of its principles. In this early period, they [the principles] meant the opposite of fascism and offered the chance for an alternative. Whatever the nature of the party, it always stood for the idea of socialism, even if this idea became more and more damaged and distorted. Even in 1989, I did not want to get rid of the socialist party, but rather try to turn the SED upside down and turn this hardly socialist party into a socialist one. (Klein interview 2021)

² Regarding this diagnosis of the lack of fathers, history, and language, see the classic study by Bude on the career of the Hitler Youth generation in West Germany (1987); see also Buddrus (1995).

The political worldview of the hope generation grew from their basic belief in the anti-fascist character of socialism. This worldview, as we will see, resulted from a *symbiotic relationship* with the Old Communists as role models. Projecting their hopes onto the young men, they provided amnesty, orientation, and a sense of being.³

Reconstructing the path to their socialist dedication poses a significant historiographical challenge. Large parts of their childhood and youth would later be subject to both public and individual censorship. Whether it be the Jewish background of two of the five protagonists, the oppression of German minorities during Stalin's Great Purge, or the sentiments attached to their socialization in the Hitler Youth – both dear memories and a source of dormant guilt – each of these would become taboo given the official narrative of the socialist regime. While the regime was deeply invested in inquiring into the National Socialist past of the Old Communists in order to mystify it, to censor it, or to use it as a means to exert pressure, the National Socialist past of the young hope generation was left to them alone. The institutions of the new state did not allow them to come to terms with this past. Instead, they offered a highly stylized notion of an “anti-fascist” state nourished by the mythic battles of Old Communists as well as the opportunity to look ahead – that is, they offered amnesty by silence and oblivion. In this sense, Land and Possekel called their experiences in the Hitler Youth the “blind spot” of their generational memory.⁴ Therefore, few sources tell us about their childhood and youth, be they official biographical documents or self-accounts. Much of the uncovering of the existential needs to which their socialist dedication was a response must be inferred from the circumstances of rather thin existing biographical information.

³ This “symbiosis” explains the hope generation's unwillingness to challenge Old Communists, thus granting the GDR's institution its astonishing stability and lack of renewal despite the open and hidden violence and contradictions of the regime. The hope generation inherited a spirit of hostility and sacrifice that was rooted in war experiences and renewed in the context of the Cold War. The argument of a generational symbiosis was alluded to in Niethammer (1994: 108).

⁴ See Land and Possekel (1994: 33). In Niethammer's words, anti-fascism “blocked the transfer of experience between the generations” (1994: 108). Also, Buddrus spoke of an “anti-fascism by decree” which “precluded a genuine catharsis” and lead into a “communal self-deception” (1995: 267)

Who then were the young men of this book when they arrived at university as the first cohort of East Germany's economics students? What were their memories, what were their needs, and how did their political consciousness take shape?

Dieter Klein

A first unchosen fact of life would be decisive for the childhood, youth, *and* professional career of all five protagonists: their family origin that associated them with a specific religious identity, a specific ethnic and national identity, or a specific profession and thus class identity. In contrast to those born after them, who grew up in a state where these identities officially no longer played a role, in both the National Socialist regime and the early GDR, identity mattered a great deal. Being Aryan, Jewish, half-Jewish, ethnic German (*Volksdeutsche*), resettler (*Umsiedler*), worker, bourgeois, close or distant to education, etc. determined the possibilities they were born into.

Dieter Klein, born in 1931, grew up in Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin in modest circumstances. His parents were both commercial employees, but his father lost his job during the Great Depression. The Depression offered promise for the socialist movement in Germany, and both the SPD and the KPD gained in popularity. Klein's mother was a member of the SPD, and his father a member of the KPD. In the years before National Socialism, the German left was increasingly jeopardized by the conflict between the reformist SPD and the Stalinization of the KPD. Communists considered social democrats to be the left variant of National Socialism. But by the time Klein would be able to understand anything of such debates, both parties were made illegal. When the parliament voted for the Enabling Act in March 1933, many communists had already been imprisoned and social democrats were a minority who would also soon be forbidden. Though Klein knew of the socialist background of his parents, they hardly spoke about politics at home in order to protect themselves and their son. They did not belong to the small minority of the two left parties who risked their lives for reform or revolution.

Another identity that played only a small role at home soon became important at school. According to the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935, Klein was considered a "half-Jew of the second degree" (*Mischling*), as

the father of his father was Jewish, though not practicing.⁵ Klein had fond memories of his grandfather, who died in 1937. The status of half-Jews during the National Socialist regime was undecided at first and hence precarious. Some wished to treat them like Jews, while others wished to “protect” their Aryan parts. The early laws discriminating against Jews did not apply to half-Jews, thus they were not branded with a Jewish star. However, marriage between half-Jews was forbidden, and marriage between Aryans and half-Jews was subject to permission but rarely granted. Later, the more the genocide advanced, the more half-Jews came under pressure. On German territory, they were subject to forced labor, and in Eastern occupied territories they were deported and killed.

Klein’s father, a half-Jew of the first degree, was not drafted into the military as he was considered to “undermine military force” (*wehrkraftszersetzend*). Instead, he was forced to perform heavy physical labor in Berlin. Young Dieter Klein understood the reasons for the family’s poverty. At school, no difference was made initially between him and Aryan children, though Klein did recall that he was not allowed to participate in the morning flag roll call.⁶ His Jewish background did not prevent him from compulsory participation in the German Youth, the organization preceding the Hitler Youth. Starting in 1939, participation became obligatory, and in 1941, Klein, age ten, had to take part. The German Youth was used for war purposes such as collecting scrap metal for military production. They also had to swear an oath of obedience to the *Führer* and to National Socialist ideas, an oath that might have meant little at this young age. They were old enough, however, to develop their first role models and acquire a sense of sociality and affective bonding to a larger *Volk*. Considering the political orientation of his parents and the discrimination he faced as a half-Jew, Klein recalled, at age ninety, a certain reluctance regarding the German Youth:

My reluctance simply resulted from the fact that I saw at home how threatening the system was when my grandparents said cautiously, “on the second floor, they were picked up again.” For me, this youth organization was included in this system. I also had [negative] experiences of my own. For

⁵ Two Jewish grandparents would count as a half-Jew of “first degree.” See on the status of half-Jews, Ehmann (2001).

⁶ Klein (2009) as part of a video series produced by Roland Sender showing autobiographical accounts of about one hour, presented in front of former colleagues. I thank Roland Sender for the permission to use these videos. See also Rohde (2009) and Kolloch (2008).

example, it was a popular practice to put two chairs on a table, and two of the young people had to slap each other until one fell off. I had the feeling that this wasn't for me though this feeling was not backed by explicit beliefs . . . This experience made me dislike organizations of any kind. It took a while until I got over it and was gradually able to become active again in [political] organizations. (Klein interview 2021)

Compared to other children of his age group, Klein's experience with the German Youth was shorter than expected. In March 1943, when Klein was twelve years old, the first Allied attacks poured down bombs on Berlin. While many young children were sent into camps in the countryside in so-called children evacuation campaigns (*Kinderlandverschickung*), half-Jewish children were forbidden to join until November 1943, and then they were often excluded. When several of the houses on Klein's street were bombed out, the family looked for a place outside the city and found a room northeast of the city in Werneuchen. In this small village, his obligatory participation in the German Youth was no longer reinforced, and Klein was spared the National Socialist propaganda during the last violent years of the war. On the contrary, in Werneuchen he had a group of friends that rejected the National Socialist regime and were all glad not to be forced to be involved in any way, though they still sensed the danger of the regime and the war. It turned out that the landlord of the room the family rented was the local village leader of the National Socialist party (*Ortsgruppenführer*), and the room was close to a military airport base that would also soon be bombed. Having attended at first a one-class village school, Klein's parents wanted him to attend a high school (*Gymnasium*). His half-Jewish identity could have prevented this, yet the director of the school granted him a special permission. But this also meant that the family had to pay the significant fees levied for attending the *Gymnasium*, though these were not specific to the National Socialist regime. Many of the same generation emphasized the sacrifices the payments required. Access to education was a privilege, and the free access once provided in 1949 would be welcomed with gratitude and seen as proof of the anti-fascist legacy of socialism.

In May 1945, Klein was thirteen years old and would be turning fourteen in October. Thus, he was just months too young to be obliged to join the actual Hitler Youth, which was involved in the battles around Berlin. At zero hour, he returned with his family to an occupied, divided,

destroyed, and close to anarchic Berlin as a so-called child of the rubble (*Trümmerkind*). As all children did, Klein experienced postwar poverty, particularly during the cold winter of 1946–1947. Note that the full meaning of fascism was openly revealed to the masses only after the war when the crimes of the National Socialist regime were shown to the population through public displays of posters with images of dead bodies in the concentration camps. The population was blamed for being complicit (*mitschuldig*).

Schooling mattered. Continuing his education at Schinkel Gymnasium in Prenzlauer Berg, Klein recalled the peculiar mixture of teachers after the removal of members of the National Socialist party (NSDAP), including returning prisoners of war. Some of the teachers openheartedly expressed their support for the “democratic system,” as socialism was propagated at the time. But his actual politicization during school time was caused, first, due to the presence of a separate school class dedicated to workers’ children:

There was a special class [*Aufbauklasse*] at the Gymnasium with all working-class children who were led to the Abitur by special measures. They all had very sensible views, were cheerful people, and yet were still very committed. The whole manner of their appearance was attractive to me. You could tell they knew what they wanted, and they were visibly quite tough with themselves and with others. I liked them. And they were all in the FDJ. (Klein interview 2021)

Thus, in the last years at the Gymnasium, Klein also became a member of the FDJ, something he did not associate with his experiences in the German Youth. Among his schoolmates, FDJ members were in a minority. In Berlin, only 5 percent of those between age fourteen and twenty-five joined the FDJ (Ohse 2009: 76).

Another influence on Klein turning toward the socialist movement were certainly his parents. They both became member of the SED and no longer had to hide their orientation at home. In addition, Klein recalls an encounter with a friend of his father:⁷

My father had a good friend who I liked to visit. He showed me Marx’s *Capital*, which he had saved from the Nazi era. My father pushed Engel’s *Peasants’ War* to me across the table. So my politicization happened through

⁷ Klein’s father held no official party function. Later, he was a staff executive at the German Investment Bank and then at the opera (*Volksoper*).

my head and not through an organization. The friend encouraged me to say that if one lived in the GDR, the country that one hoped embodied the future, then one should also do something political for it. (Klein interview 2021)⁸

This family friend one day was arrested for his involvement in the black market trade between the zones. His wife warned Klein not to visit him in prison as this might have negative consequences. Later, Klein blamed himself for following her advice. He could neither imagine that his friend did anything wrong, nor that the regime arrested him without good reason. “By then I was so socialized in a way that I couldn’t imagine the administration doing anything wrong. That was the Stalin era . . . It took me a while to get used to the idea that injustice could exist in that system, too.” (ibid.). The anti-fascist profile of the FDJ was so dominant in his political mind that he did not easily associate the two regimes. It would remain the basic conviction that would nourish his being socialist until the end of the GDR. “Anything that was the alternative to (fascism) was to be supported . . . That was the starting point for me and my family, and that dominated also my evaluation of the system.” (ibid.) in addition, Klein appeared to have no difficulties associating his own experiences during National Socialism with the anti-fascist propaganda driven by the Old Communists and Soviets’ war against fascism, even if his memories of being discriminated against as a half-Jew were little acknowledged by the Soviet administration.⁹ This was possible because Klein experienced comparatively less indoctrination into Nazism, knew of his own and his family’s discrimination, and, above all, because it was simply not the time to ruminate with his new friends about personal memories. What mattered was building toward a brighter future.

I don’t think that was a delusion, but we were . . . so filled with what had to be done now and what had to be worked on that in our conversations about

⁸ According to Land and Possekel, such an encounter with an old comrade is typical for the biographical narrative of the hope generation: “An ‘old comrade’ appears again and again in their stories who, in view of the sudden loss of their orientation in 1945 . . . , pointed out the way toward the action of reparation, toward a humanistic action in the context of the SED” (1994: 34).

⁹ “What I had observed with my parents and grandparents, how I myself did and did not get along in the Nazi era, and what the older generation had experienced, definitely went hand in hand for me. I did not see any breaks there” (Klein interview 2021).

ourselves we were absorbed by the presence ... We did not sit down and discuss how the years before had been for us. The crucial question was always: What to do now? (Ibid.)

In 1951, at the age of eighteen, Klein graduated from high school. By then, his desire to become politically active had been formed, and he decided to study economics at Humboldt University where he would remain until the end of his career. He recalled that the majority of other students were older than himself, such as soldiers returning from Soviet war prisons, members of the socialist party that were delegated from the industrial Ruhr area in West Germany, and devoted socialists who had been illegally active until 1945. Being a student also carried with it a feeling that many members of his generation shared when sitting in their first lectures: the feeling of *gratitude* for having been given access to higher education. By *showing* gratitude, the young students were prone to the indoctrination that awaited them, namely indoctrination into Stalinism. As Klein said of himself and his fellow students:

We were fully convinced that our studies were a kind of gift from those who earned the money in the society, a gift, as it were, from the working class. We were thus greatly motivated during this strange time between the rise of new hopes and hopeless dogmatism. We were convinced that things had to be as they were and sometimes wondered what was being offered to us, but by and large we passed our studies in deep faith; it was only now and then that I was held back by my wife, who was more down-to-earth than I was with my aloof principles. (Klein 2009)

The gratitude for having been given the opportunity to gain an education and later have a career would remain a central virtue for this generation. They judged, for example, the many who had left the country in the years preceding the building of the wall as lacking gratitude for what they received from the state. Their gratitude, in turn, would also feed into a very forgiving attitude toward the shortcomings and contradictions of the regime.

Klein's undergraduate education ended in 1955 with a diploma thesis on trends in the Berlin retail trade. His thesis had to be based on Stalin's ideas, which was not an easy task for such a specific subject. Nonetheless, his performance was sufficiently convincing that he received the position as assistant for writing his doctoral dissertation at the chair for political economy. He wrote his thesis under the

supervision of Heinz Mohrmann, yet the institute was headed by the most doctrinaire Stalinist at the university, Robert Naumann, who is discussed in Chapter 2. It was then, at the end of his undergraduate education, that Dieter Klein became a formal member of the party.

Arne Benary

Arne Benary, born in 1929, did not come from a worker's or farmer's family. His father was a medical doctor, which would later count as being "close to education" (*bildungsnah*) because of the elevated income associated with a bourgeois milieu. Born in Greifswald, Benary grew up in his father's hometown of Erfurt in Thuringia. His father worked as a surgeon and women's doctor. Arne was his first son, and two years later his second son was born. Though his father's workplace changed several times, the family remained in Erfurt until the end of the war. Also, Benary's father was considered a "half-Jew of the first degree" such that Arne counted as a "half-Jew of the second degree." A combination of his profession and racial status may have prevented his father from being drawn into the military. The increasing demand for medical doctors during the war must have given the family more security than other half-Jewish families at the time.

Benary's political memberships are documented. Starting in 1939, he was obliged to partake in the German Youth, and in 1943, at age fourteen, in the Hitler Youth. At this point, the Hitler Youth had turned into a paramilitaristic organization that was preparing for active battle. In August 1944, the leader of the Hitler Youth, Arthur Axmann, called on those sixteen years and older, those born in 1927 or 1928, to volunteer for military service. Within six weeks, 70 percent of this age group had signed up (McDougall 2008: 30). Some of Arne's friends who were one year older than him thus served in the dangerous role of anti-aircraft auxiliaries (*Flakhelfer*).¹⁰ Erfurt experienced more than twenty-seven British and American air raids. Benary instead was most likely used for manual work related to these battles, and possibly was actively involved. The city was taken by US forces on April 12, 1945, and in July it became part of the Soviet Occupation Zone.¹¹

¹⁰ Between January 1943 and the end of the war, approximately 200,000 German teenagers (including tens of thousands of girls) served as *Flakhelfer*; see Kater (2004: 198–199, 235–237) and Buddrus (1995).

¹¹ See the Stasi files on Benary, in particular MfS AOP 1012-57 (1): 134.

Immediately after the war, Benary's father became chief medical doctor of a regional hospital in Meiningen, a small town in Thuringia. Benary's family thus possibly suffered less from postwar poverty than others. In spring 1946, at age seventeen, Benary graduated from high school (*Oberschule*). Up until this point, he had not experienced any formal socialist education at school, and there is nothing on the surface of his biographical background that would indicate his inclination to become dedicated to the socialist cause. On the contrary, his father appeared to be critical of the regime.¹² However, something must have drawn him into it. In 1946, he became one of the first members of the FDJ, the youth organization of the socialist party, just like hundreds of thousands of other young East German men and women who switched, in a matter of months, from the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls respectively to the FDJ. We can only speculate on the reasons, the ease, and the tensions that might have accompanied this astonishingly quick switch between two ideologically opposed youth organizations.

The FDJ was founded in March 1946 and was open to everyone between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five.¹³ Membership was particularly attractive for the younger cohort aged between fourteen and eighteen, or those born between 1928 and 1932, that made up more than 60 percent of the first FDJ members. Having just been "betrayed" by the National Socialist regime, one would not expect to immediately join another social movement with dedication to yet another party that required significant party discipline. Political disillusionment and critical distance from big political ideas was a natural reaction among the older generation but equally among the majority of the younger generation. However, while in Berlin only about 5 percent of the young joined the FDJ, in the rest of the Soviet zone about a third joined, according to Ohse (2009: 76). What made it so easy for some to take a fascist and an anti-fascist oath one after the other?

There were several concrete differences in the two youth organizations that might have been essential for the young who are more

¹² His father is reported to have withdrawn from participation in the political organization of the hospital. In 1949, his father was moved to a different working place "for political reasons." He had taken old furniture from his office, thus violating public ownership (MfS AOP 1012-57 (1): 23; 134).

¹³ The following reflections on the relationship between Hitler Youth and the FDJ are informed by McDougall (2008), Ohse (2009), and Buddrus (1995).

sensitive to practical details than big ideas. In contrast to the later years, the early FDJ was a nonmilitaristic organization. There was no uniform to be worn and no parades to be walked. More importantly, in contrast to the separation between the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, the FDJ was a unisex organization and thus presented an opportunity to meet with the other sex. Also, since the FDJ was known for its evening dances, many wanted to seize this rare occasion to have fun during the poverty of the postwar period. Some more politically minded members even complained that dancing seemed to be the only reason why many came to the meetings. The mixture of individual motivations also gave the early FDJ an aura of inclusiveness. At the beginning, the FDJ presented itself as more of an umbrella organization of other youth organization, including Christian groups, in order to attract as many young people as possible. "Everybody was heard," one witness recalled, as in principle everybody could be part of the socialist movement. In December 1945, Erich Honecker, who would become the head of the FDJ (to be founded some months later), declared: "Differences of belief and *Weltanschauung* should, in our view, not be a source of dissension. We believe in total tolerance in such matters."¹⁴ This sense of inclusiveness was indeed an essential part of the ethos of this generation and would later nourish trust in an open debate culture. On a deeper level, the young certainly looked for a place to belong. A natural need for those going through puberty, this longing might have been reinforced by the fact of having grown up in a society with a rigid order, possibly having lost family members in the war, and the anarchic state in postwar cities. However, this need could have been met by any other youth organization.

The underlying reason that might explain the smooth ideological switch is related to what McDougall has called an "amnesty alliance" between the Old Communists and the Hitler Youth generation (2008: 35). The Soviet administration did not have much choice but to "forgive" the Hitler Youth when mobilizing the young for their

¹⁴ Cited in McDougall (2008: 38) and in Buddrus (1995: 252). Buddrus describes well the subtle transition from political inclusion to political indoctrination in the first years of the FDJ. In the early Soviet Zone, the less political Protestant Church or even the Esperanto movement were still allowed, but soon put under control of the FDJ before being openly repressed in the early 1950s. This was also manifest in the rhetorical choice to speak of "democracy" rather than "socialism."

cause. Considering that participation in the Hitler Youth was obligatory and that this exact cohort would be crucial for building up new institutions, it was not possible for the Soviet administration to dismiss an entire cohort of the population through their “denazification” policies: 8.7 million of 8.87 million young people between the ages of ten and eighteen were members of the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls. The administration thus drew the line at a high Hitler Youth rank: those who ranked *Unterbannführer* and upwards, the “paid” Hitler Youth, were excluded from the FDJ (McDougall 2008: 30). But that was only a very small number, and leadership experience in the Hitler Youth below these positions could actually be a resource for higher positions in the FDJ. Indeed, even some dedicated socialists did not join because they perceived “the same rabble” as in the Hitler Youth taking part (*ibid.*: 24).

Though there was no official amnesty directive, the attitude was clear. The young were generally “excused” due to their age; that is, they were considered *victims* of fascism. As Otto Grotewohl, one of the heads of the SED, said at the first FDJ parliament in June 1946, the party did consider the young “not for a single day or hour” responsible for the regime (in McDougall 2008: 30). The FDJ thus offered political amnesty of the collective guilt, of the “complicity” (*Mitschuld*) that was heavily communicated by the denazification campaign to the rest of the population. This amnesty might have been attractive to those who came out of the war with actual feelings of guilt, feelings that emerge more easily among the young but are less easily recognized as a driving force of their actions. Thus, while the Old Communists took on the ethos of the fighters against fascism, the young were put into the role of misused *victims* of the Nazi regime. The psychological twist inherent in this role was the basis of their emotional dependency: “Communists hoped,” as Buddrus argued, “that by extending an amnesty to the young, declaring faith in them and yet simultaneously reminding them of their guilt, they would induce young Germans to seek absolution by throwing themselves whole-heartedly behind the new order” (1995: 256).

Amnesty came at the cost of censoring one’s own past. The young could not or certainly were not encouraged to openly speak about their life in National Socialism. Despite the inclusive and light atmosphere of the early FDJ, there was a taboo of not speaking about the tragic events of war. Memories were held back. McDougall argued that “a pragmatic

fact of silence between regime and young allowed the Hitler Youth generation to participate actively in the political and socio-economic reconstruction of East Germany after 1945 . . . Private thoughts and memories of the Third Reich – whether positive or negative, defiant or remorseful – remained powerful. They were simply given no public outlet in the GDR” (McDougall 2008: 27, 45). It is this pact of silence that created a symbiotic bond, an emotional dependency between Old Communists and the hope generation. The hopes put onto the young, involving the bright future they were to create, were to make up for the sacrifices of their role models in their fight against fascism, a burden that granted authority to the Old Communists’ historical version of fascist Germany in contrast to their own past.¹⁵ This lack of integration of their own biography into that of the state can be understood as an initial form of self-censorship in the name of higher ideals. Accepting this silence led to a “conservative alliance” between these two generations, an acceptance that gave the older generation room to maneuver and allowed them to paper over apparent contradictions between the GDR’s ideals and the reality that the following chapters describe. In particular, their alliance would manifest in the fundamental ambiguity of a simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Stalinism and the presence of subtle state violence. It is for this reason that this generation, as we will see in Part II, did not achieve a renewal or appropriation of socialism in its own non-Stalinist terms, but fell back into self-censorship and party discipline.¹⁶ On the surface of their self-awareness, this pact between the two generations would be manifest in the basic belief held as a dogma until the end of the GDR, that only socialism, in contrast to capitalism, is entitled to guarantee peace.

¹⁵ Regarding the tension between public and private memory, see the oral history study by Moller in Schüle et al. (2006: 399–410).

¹⁶ In Niethammer’s words: “This large class of (mid-rank) leaders . . . seems to be a key to the structural history of the GDR since the 1960s: a relatively homogeneous generation with state-related career experience and executive activism, whose fate was indissolubly linked to the state and whose experience was not repeatable for younger generations. This class of leaders needed the aging Old Communists at the top, whose politics – derived from the 1920s and from the Soviet Union – they implemented without being able or willing to renew it, and who at the same time, like a praetorian guard, shielded this younger generations from their own experiences and perspectives” (1994: 105).

In addition to the amnesty regarding their past, the hope projected onto the young, as we have seen in the case of Klein, was an attractive feature of the FDJ. It helped them to look ahead instead of back. The FDJ offered a source of overt optimism regarding the building up of a new socialist state as well as opportunities for personal advancement. Being a socialist, until the end of the GDR and beyond, meant believing in the *future* of socialism, as if they never grew out of being a child of the rubble. This future orientation deeply fed into the belief structure of our protagonists, and it would become manifest in both the belief in Marx's historical determinism as well as the trust in the party's claim to modernism. With this future orientation also came an elevated work ethos typical of the hope generation. Hard work was an important source of satisfaction in its capacity to deal with difficult emotions. In addition, the language of sacrifice and effort that echoed the propaganda of National Socialist militarism (as well as Prussian Protestantism) was certainly something they were able to recognize from their earlier socialization.

All of this might not have been apparent to the young men, including Arne Benary. What was present in their mind was rather the postwar struggle that made them relive on a smaller scale the larger class struggle the older generation experienced in the Weimar Republic and during Nazism. Those in the FDJ comprised a minority of all youths. For others, the parallel between the Hitler Youth and the Free German Youth might have been too obvious, as their distrust in political devotion was too great or religion was more important. But there was also an actual enemy of the FDJ, the so-called werewolves that continued the Führer's struggle. They distributed anticommunist leaflets, sang old Hitler Youth songs, and interrupted FDJ meetings. The existence of werewolves was a welcome excuse for the Soviet administration to arrest whoever they saw necessary. Thus, in these first years, the young learned their ABCs of political agitation, with the language of veteran communists on their lips. In this sense, the war was not over. Peace had to be fought for.

In short, the FDJ was attractive because it offered a combination of the old *and* the new, of "the reassuring familiar alongside the fresh and exciting" (McDougall 2008: 41). For those who joined the FDJ, the differences might have been present to their mind, while the subtler similarities and unrecognized emotional needs might have remained unrecognized. For the many young men and women in the Soviet zone who did not join the FDJ, the contrary appeared to be the case.



Figure 1.1 Third Youth World Festival, Berlin, August 1951.

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There are no documents that allow a reconstruction which of these motivations led to Arne Benary joining the FDJ at the earliest occasion possible in 1946. Neither his professional choice after school gives an indication. He decided to train as a banker between 1946 and 1948, a profession that would be subjected to a socialist transformation but at the time was still practiced as before. Working at a bank and learning about socialist ideas at the FDJ easily explains his choice to enroll in the economics program at University of Jena. After his first year, in 1949, he moved to a bigger department at the University of Leipzig. There, he would encounter his single most important role model and tutor for the remainder of his career, Friedrich Behrens. He graduated in 1950 and became Behrens' assistant in writing a dissertation and teaching classes in political economy (where he met his future wife). For half a year in 1952, he had to work in industry to gain experience as a worker (*Stahlwerk Brandenburg*). While also teaching at a school for finance in Brandis, in 1954, he graduated with a doctoral thesis on "current problems of the agrarian theory of Marxism-Leninism" that discussed a

central problem of Stalin's political economy, specifically, how industrial progress depends on agricultural development.¹⁷ He then became Behrens' higher assistant (*Oberassistent*) to write his habilitation. The two became friends and engaged in activities outside of their professional relationship. It was then, in 1954, that they moved together to Berlin to the newly founded Central Economics Institute at the Academy of Sciences. It is there that we take up his story in Chapter 3.

Erwin Rohde

The other three protagonists of this book were either born in Germany's Eastern territory such as Eastern Prussia, East Pomerania, and Silesia that would become part of Poland or Russia after World War II, or belonged to the German minorities in Eastern states (*Volksdeutsche*), such as Czechoslovakia or specific Soviet regions. Their move to the later territory of the GDR had several causes. Some of the *Volksdeutsche* were expelled from Soviet territory after the German army invaded the Soviet Union in 1939, while others were resettled by Hitler's campaign to bring German minorities abroad back "home" (*Heim ins Reich*). Others were taken by the withdrawing German army or fled from the arrival of the Soviet army, and most of the remainders were expelled after 1945 from the Soviet, Czech, or Polish national forces. Once they settled in the Soviet-occupied zone after the war, they would all be called "resettlers" (*Umsiedler*). The political will was to quickly integrate them into society without consideration of their migratory past, but their different background also led to tensions with the existing population. Starting from nothing, resettlers stuck out due to their accents and were often looked down upon, both in West and East Germany. The reason why they settled in the Soviet instead of the Western zone might have been related to personal circumstances or was the result of administrative allocation but was only in exceptional cases a matter of political preference.¹⁸ Compared to the Old Communists, who knew the capitalist West from

¹⁷ MfS AOP 1012-57, I: 23.

¹⁸ Around 12.5 million Eastern refugees had to be integrated in the new frontiers of the Eastern and Western occupied zones. By 1948, around 4.5 million of them were in the Soviet zone, which constituted around 25 percent of the entire population (see Wille 1991: 6). Already in 1950, after the foundation of the GDR, there was no special legal status attached to resettlers.

exile or prewar activities, none of the five economists in this book knew West Germany or Western Europe from their own biographical background, as did very few of East Germany's hope generation.

Erwin Rohde was born 1927 in Insterburg in Eastern Prussia, East of Königsberg, a town of 50,000 inhabitants that is today called Chernyakhovsk in the Russian province of Kaliningrad.¹⁹ Rohde's family, he recalled, would later be considered "distant from education" (*bildungsfern*). His father, Richard Rohde, was a tailor, and his mother, Emma Rohde, née Sternberg, was a salesperson.²⁰ Thus, it was not obvious how the family would pay for their son's high school fees. His father received a disability pension, which helped. In his hometown, Rohde witnessed not only the oppression of the large Jewish population but also, after the attack on Poland, the oppression of the Polish population, who were subject to forced labor. In 1937, he had the option, and in 1939 he had the obligation, to become a member of the German Youth, while in 1941 he was required to be a member of the Hitler Youth. He does not mention this in his short biographical notes, but his membership in both organizations is documented for the years between 1937 and 1944.

Beginning in 1941 with the attack on the Soviet Union, the region came under crossfire with the first Soviet air attacks on Königsberg. Close to Insterburg, a war prison was built. In 1942, Rohde witnessed the deportation of the Jewish population. In summer 1944, the region was surprised by British air raids, which they thought they were protected from by distance. The center of the city was largely destroyed. It was then that the Hitler Youth, Rohde included, were summoned to volunteer for military service. As mentioned, 70 percent of this age group signed up, and they were often assigned as anti-aircraft auxiliaries (*Flakhelfer*). The closer the Red Army came, the more people were evacuated. There is no documentation indicating to what exact extent Rohde was involved in the war activities at the end of 1944, but considering his age, he must have participated to some extent.

¹⁹ See his papers in the University Archive of Humboldt University (hereafter NR). The following information is based on his curriculum in NR 1 and 2, as well as 4, 12, 16, and 72. In the Stasi files, there is but a travel cadre file in MFS HA/ AKG RK, 521–540.

²⁰ Despite the Jewish maiden name of her mother, no religious aspect of his life is reported. Rohde also had two sisters, who are unknown to the author.

When the Soviet offense in East Prussia began in January 1945, including repeated air attacks on the city, only about a fifth of the population was left. In Rohde's oral account, he mentioned that his family decided to await the Red Army, welcoming them as liberators. He added that his family feared he would become a prisoner of war and disguised him as a woman (Rohde 2009). Since it is documented that the Hitler Youth was very involved in defending the Königsberg area, Rohde indeed could have taken part in the final fights against the Red Army. However, according to the documentation in the archive, he had already enrolled in November 1944 in a high school close to Berlin at a time when the Red Army had not yet arrived in Insterburg. The family may have wished to stay but were not allowed to, or some other reasons may have caused them to move. It is difficult to imagine the origin of the Soviet-friendly attitude of the family, but in any event if they had awaited the Red Army, their attitude would not have made a difference. Once the Kaliningrad area was annexed, the remaining population fled, was expelled, or was subject to violence and later forced labor. The family went to Falkensee close to Berlin where one of the family's aunts was living. The choice of a place to settle could not have been political since the end of the war and the territorial organization were not yet clear in November 1944. They might have expected, as was the case with many other refugees, that after the war they would be allowed to return to their hometown. But it soon became clear that this would not happen. It was a new beginning.

Arriving in Falkensee on the outskirts of Berlin in November 1944, Rohde was enrolled in the local high school, where he remained until April 1946. It is documented that his father became a member of the KPD. Regarding his own politicization, Rohde recalled that he shared his room with an "uncle" who had been a communist imprisoned during Nazism and thus was an actual veteran communist. Having learned to see the immediate past as well as the present situation through his eyes, before the end of 1945 Rohde too became a member of the KPD and actively engaged in its cause. In 1946, he became the founder of the youth section of the FDJ in Falkensee. Rohde thus has the longest party experience of the five protagonists discussed in this book. The speculations mentioned above regarding Benary's adherence to the FDJ apply equally to Erwin Rohde. Sticking out at school due to his Eastern accent as well as the organization he adhered to, he

decided, in April 1946, to move to Berlin. The same month, he witnessed the forced unification of the SPD and KPD as the SED, of which he fully approved. His party membership gave him access to a special educational class (*Sonderlehrgang*) that soon gave him a high school degree and access to university. Thus, in 1947, he enrolled in economics at Humboldt University, which was then still called Berlin University. Like Klein, Rohde would remain at this university until the end of his career.

Rohde acquired his political identity as a young party warrior during the years of open struggle for the political identity of East Germany. Even after the forced unification of the SPD and KPD, the united left did not win the majority of votes in the first democratic elections. In 1948, the Nationalist Party and the Farmers' Party were formed to weaken the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats (CDU). These "bloc parties" (*Blockparteien*) remained in existence until the end of the GDR but without actual political influence. The official plans of Stalin were to prepare a political order for a unified neutral Germany. Only in 1949, after the long months of the Berlin blockade, was the power of the SED constitutionally secured. Rohde would later comment that at this time the SED was "hindered by other parties from being effective" (2009). Also, at the university, those dedicated to the Soviet example were still the minority until 1950. Rohde built up his party profile through the hostility and struggle over Stalinization with other academic groups. Only a small minority of one or two dozen were comrades from the party as compared to 600 students – a "small banner of the honest," as Rohde called them in a 1986 speech (*Fähnlein der Aufrichtigen*).²¹ The pioneering spirit shared by them created important bonds and heightened their shared intellectual experience when reading Marx on their own. As Hans Wagner, one of the other comrades, recalled: "We studied 'The Capital' alone in 1948. There was no one who could teach it. But it

²¹ See his talk in 1986 to graduates of the year 1961 about the history of the faculty ("Zur Geschichte von Lehre und Forschung an der wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät/Sektion der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin," October 1986, in NR 16). Rohde used the term "Fähnlein" (small banner), willingly or not, that was used by the German Youth as a (para)military unit referring to four "Jungzüge" of three "Jungenschaften" each of fifteen young scouts.

was the best teaching we could have. I have always told my students: it would be best if you read ‘The Capital’ on your own.”²²

The socialist cause found little echo among the majority of students that did not come, as was traditionally the case, from lower-class families. Also, those coming back from war prisons wished to quickly get a degree and were not interested in socialism, as Rohde recalled in the same speech. A poster that announced a meeting of the party students was forbidden, and their meetings had to take place outside the faculty. The first official FDJ groups at the faculty were not founded before 1949. Rohde was also active in battling so-called bourgeois economists, notably in business economics (*Betriebswirtschaftslehre*), which was still a dominant element of the curriculum but considered bourgeois by socialist dedicates. Rohde put up flyers opposing the prominent business economist Konrad Mellerowicz.²³ As with many FDJ students, he took part in leaflet actions in West Berlin. Later in 1955, he was even put under arrest for a day or a night, which was not uncommon in these years. “Studying and political struggle constituted a unity,” he commented in 1977 (NR 15: 9).

It should be noted that during Rohde’s undergraduate studies, the curriculum had not yet been adapted to the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism. He was thus trained in an economics curriculum that did not differ much from that of the 1920s. He became interested in finance and taxes in particular, a subject taught by the aged Oswald Schneider, who had been trained in a bourgeois tradition by Gustav Schmoller. Already as a student, Rohde worked part time at the Central Finance Administration (later Ministry of Finance) as an associate of Ernst Kaemmel, a later professor of finance at Humboldt University.²⁴ The field of finance was a surprising choice, since the status of finance, comparable to that of business economics, had been put into question. In the early GDR, the financial system was downplayed considering the overall importance of “use value” and the decreasing importance of

²² Hans Wagner Interview, *SED-Reformdiskurs*, TB Wagner.

²³ See documents related to his studies in NR 3 and the remarks in Hesse and Rischbieter (2012). For his arrest, see NR 16.

²⁴ Kaemmel, after a formal divorce from a Jewish woman, was employed by the Reich Ministry of Finance during Nazism. In July 1945, after remarrying he began working for the German Central Finance Administration and moved from West to East Berlin. See Rohde’s talk in honor of Kaemmel’s 100th birthday in September 1990 (NR 31).

monetary terms when counting in “material balances.” As a party warrior, Rohde put himself in an ambiguous position in which he would remain until late in his life.²⁵

As more and more teaching staff that did not wish to follow the Soviet example left the scene, party members such as Rohde were ideal candidates for an academic career. He graduated in 1949, the year before Marxism-Leninism became the foundation of higher education in the so-called second university reform, which is described in Chapter 2. Though he expected to have a career at the Ministry of Finance, in May 1950, he was called back to the university. In response to the enforcement of Marxism-Leninism, Oswald Schneider left for the West and the department was vacant. Finance experts with a socialist dedication in teaching and administration were rare and in high demand. Thus, at age twenty-three, Rohde acquired a position as assistant at the Institute for Finance, which he was to run almost solely, since Martin Schmidt, head of the institute, also had a part-time post at the Ministry of Finance.²⁶ Rohde’s career advanced through his dissertation and early publications on a new system of public accounting (Rohde 1956a; Rohde et al. 1951). He studied how to control the expenses of local administration with respect to the national budget. When Stalin died in 1953, Rohde was twenty-six years old and well on his way to a future academic career. By 1955, he had already received national recognition for his early work. His quick career rise exemplifies the career opportunities that the early GDR created for Soviet-loyal teachers in economics.

Harry Maier

There is more documentation available on the biographical background of the fourth protagonist of this book, Harry Maier. In 1986, he applied for treatment as a political refugee in West Germany and had to explain in this context the complex history of his family before 1945.²⁷ In the many files on him at the Stasi, this past never appeared

²⁵ For early debates on the financial system in the GDR, see Krause (1998b: 275).

²⁶ Martin Schmidt, who was the head of a section of the Ministry of Finance until 1958, became department chair without a doctoral degree, which he received only in 1956. In 1958, he became president of the State Bank.

²⁷ See further details in a letter from September 14, 1986, in N 2693-14. For more biographical background information, see Harry Maier’s papers (N 2693-17,

in detail. Maier lived without public recognition of the difficult years leading up to his career as an economist.

Maier was born 1934 in Feodosija, a small town on Soviet territory on the Crimea. His family origin goes back to rich farmers that had moved to the Crimea from South Germany in the early nineteenth century. Once the Red Army took possession of the Crimea in 1922, the family was expropriated. While most of the German farmer families were sent to the north of the Soviet Union, his father, Klaus Prieb, was permitted to stay because he found employment as a bookkeeper for the local administration in the nearby city of Tokmak, where he met his wife, the schoolteacher Wally Maier. During the Great Purge of Stalin in 1938, however, when Harry was four years old, his father was arrested and sent to a Gulag in Siberia. The young Harry must have recognized the worries of his mother anxiously waiting for his father's letters, which at one point simply ceased. Her own letters were sent back to her, and she never received an official statement of his death. Harry thus grew up with his mother, his grandmother, and his sister.

At the age of seven, in September 1942, Harry was supposed to begin schooling, but this was not to happen. When the German army broke through Sevastopol and quickly approached the city, the Soviets tried to relocate the remaining population. The German army, however, arrived earlier than expected, the city became occupied territory, and school was interrupted. Between 1942 and 1944, the *Volksdeutsche* on the Crimea were naturalized as German citizens, which later gave them the name "administrative Germans" (*Administrationsdeutsche*). Starting in September 1943, these new German citizens were sent to the German territory as part of a campaign that had been run since 1939 in several Eastern regions called "back home to the Reich" (*Heim ins Reich*). He, his mother, his sister, and his grandmother thus left Tokmak to be transferred to several cities before arriving more than a year later, in January 1945, in Belzig close to Berlin. Maier was not even eleven years old, and his situation in the last years of the war had likely been too unstable for him to be subject to a systematic National Socialist indoctrination.

Peace did not mean peace for the "administrative Germans" from the Soviet territory. The Soviet military administration in Germany forced them to return to the Soviet Union as they did not accept the

N 2693-4); for a list of his publications see N 2693-20; see also MfS HA XVIII 16682, MfS U 25-89, MfS HA XVIII AP 46049-92, and MfS 58363-92.

naturalization of the National Socialist regime as legitimate. Maier's mother was afraid that, upon returning to the Soviet Union, the same fate of her husband during the Great Purge would await them. Therefore, she changed her name from Prieb to her maiden name, Maier, and went into hiding at a friend's place in Schöneberg in Berlin. Once she found a job as a teacher, the family became legal residents of Berlin. It was only then, in 1946, that Harry began regular schooling at Prenzlauer Berg. He was put into fourth grade based on his age instead of his proven education, yet he performed well. In 1949, he entered high school, skipped a grade, graduated in 1953, and enrolled in economics as one of the first cohorts at Higher School of Economics in Karlshorst. Without any activity in the FDJ being documented, even before finishing high school, in 1952, he became a member of the party. After his first year of studies, he changed to Humboldt University, which had more prominent teachers in economics. He met his future wife, who was also enrolled in economics, as well as the future sociologist Helmut Steiner. Together, they visited the rehearsals of Berthold Brecht. As a party member at the Higher School of Economics, he was an organizer of the student party-group (*Gruppenorganisator*), and at Humboldt University he was secretary of the student party-group. Party-groups gathered all party members and existed in every organization. The activity of these groups was vital for how political power was employed on a local level, as we will see at several points in the following chapters.

It is difficult to reconstruct these political choices after Maier's arrival in Berlin. Being in a highly unstable situation regarding his national and geographical identity during the war, the peace agenda and the support for worker and farmer families might have been factors in his choice. And yet, how must he have felt about the Stalinist education he received considering what happened to his father, his family, and himself? In 1953, once the danger of being sent back to the Soviet Union was over, his mother legally applied to use her maiden name Maier. She was right in trying to evade the resettlement. As Maier notes, Germans that returned to their prewar location in the Soviet Union continued to be oppressed.

Maier graduated eight years later in 1961 with a doctoral thesis on a socialist critique of bourgeois Christian socialism (1965). He then received a post at the Central Economics Institute at the Academy of Sciences to write his habilitation. He then decided to change to the intellectually less stable but more challenging field of the political economy of socialism.

Ernst Strnad

There is little documentation about the last of the protagonists, Ernst Strnad, who also came from an Eastern territory to Berlin.²⁸ He belonged to a small and little-researched minority of Germans in Czechoslovakia that were part of the Czech Communist Party (KPC̣).²⁹ Strnad was born in 1928 in Mikulášovice, called Nixdorf in German, a small town close to the German border that was part of the contended Sudetenland. His father, born in 1889, was a steel worker (*Stahlschleifer*) and active for the KPD in the city council.³⁰ During the economic crisis, his father had to work in road construction for some time. After 1933, his father hosted political refugees that fled Nazi Germany to the Czech Republic. In this time, his father had been in touch with Florian Schenk, a famous communist from the same region who had been a member of the KPC̣ in the Czech parliament between 1935 and 1938 and later became a famous unionist in the GDR.

In September 1938, after the threat of a military conflict, the region was annexed by Hitler's Germany, and much of the Czech population fled or was dispelled to other regions. The so-called *Henleinpeople*, the party of Sudeten Germans run by Konrad Henlein in favor of the annexation, surrendered his father and around fifty other communists of the region to the fascist authorities for their political identity. After imprisonment in 1938, he was relocated in 1939 first to the concentration camp in Dachau and shortly after to Buchenwald, the same concentration camp where in 1944 the famous communist leader Ernst Thälmann was killed. From then on, there were only few letters to the family, and Strnad would learn about the truth of his father's camp experience only after the war. After pleas from the local population in

²⁸ Biographical information about Strnad is limited to the documentation regarding his doctoral thesis in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 83342. There is also the account he published about his father jointly with his brother (Strnad and Strnad 1994). His father published some of his concentration camp memories in 1966, shortly before he passed away in 1967, in short articles in the local party newspaper in Bernau ("Mein Weg," *Bernauer Wochenzeitung*, February 12 and 19, 1966).

²⁹ For the German-Czech context between 1945 and 1950, see Zimmermann (2010) and Kučera (1992), as well as the book by Douglas (2012).

³⁰ "Josef Strand was never in high offices and central bodies, but as an elected city councilor in old Czechoslovakia for many years he was a democratic parliamentarian who stood up for the interests of the people, regardless of their nationality" (Strnad and Strnad 1994: 49).

Nixdorf, including pleas from his sons, Josef Strand was released from Buchenwald before its liberation in May 1944. This liberation suggested both high esteem at home and some recognition of his person among the authorities in the concentration camp.

We do not know how Ernst Strnad, as the son of a communist, had been treated after the annexation of the region in October 1938, but it is likely that he, with or without formal membership in the Hitler Youth, had also been involved in war labor. Whatever he contributed to the war, the political sacrifice of his father might have evoked profound feelings of guilt, gratitude, and also vengeance that accompanied his becoming a socialist. In any event, his father wished his children to continue his struggle. "He and his wife and comrade-in-arms," as his father wrote about himself, "raised their children to be good socialists and patriots . . . They continue the revolutionary tradition in the new situation of national struggle."³¹ Jointly with his brother, Ernst Strand would study and write a book about what happened to his father in the concentration camp, which was self-published in 1994 once the biographies of Old Communists were no longer censored. While for the other protagonists, the symbiotic relationship with Old Communists might have applied more on a level of historical experience, for Ernst Strnad, it applied on the individual level of his own family.

In the book on their father's struggle in the concentration camp, the two brothers depict a schematic image of the humanist morale of his father and other prisoners and the unhuman crimes of the Nazi regime. He described the constant fear of death, the heavy physical labor in the stone quarry, the struggle for survival in finessing SS order, the severe and unpredictable punishments, the solidarity among communists, questions of trust, and the threat of denunciation. He recounts how his father lost his teeth when being whipped for declaring his anti-fascist attitude; he noted the public denigration when marching in chains through the city of Weimar; and he emphasized the industrial sabotage in the Gustoff-Werke II where prisoners were used for weapon production; half of the rifles would not work, according to his father's account (Strnad and Strnad 1990: 109). But they also emphasized the plurality of prisoners, such as the presence of Sinti and Roma, a plurality which was absent from the public mind during socialism.

³¹ Josef Strnad, "Mein Weg," *Bernauer Wochenzeitung*, February 19, 1966.

After the war in 1945, the family was again the object of suppression, this time from the Czech authorities regardless of their role in fascism. Informal and formal expulsions of the German population in the Czech Republic, and the Sudetenland in particular, were carried out. Some were also subject to forced labor or internment. About one and a half million went into the Soviet zone and another one and a half million to the Western zones. Even the KPČ, not yet the governing authority, was in favor of the expulsions. Josef Strnad does not report about these events in his short biographical account. He only mentions that “I was employed by the Czechoslovak city administration as a representative of the Nixdorf anti-fascists. My main task was to protect the rights of the German anti-fascists until they moved to Germany.” In June 1946, the Strnad family then was relocated from their home town to Bernau close to Berlin. Here, they again played the role of a cultural minority as they did in their hometown.

Immediately after their arrival, Ernst Strnad began studying economics at Berlin University. There, he witnessed the difficult struggles regarding the Sovietization of the university described in Chapter 2. He graduated in 1950 and found employment as a lector of foreign languages in the publishing house *Die Wirtschaft*.³² There, he became a member of the socialist party, the same year his father became a mayor in the suburbs of Berlin. Although he had no academic employment, Ernst Strand wished to contribute more to the Marxist-Leninist transformation of economic knowledge that was officially called for after the foundation of the GDR. He thus wrote, without supervision, a dissertation on the critique of the use of statistics in bourgeois political economy and its proper use in socialist political economy. He would finish it in summer 1955, the months after the 20th Party Congress that broke with Stalinism. His story is the subject of Chapter 4.

* * *

There is no single answer to the question of what put the five future economists on the socialist path to which they would remain loyal for the remainder of their careers. Indeed, they would develop rather different attitudes toward the virtues and vices of the socialist state. Ernst Strnad and Erwin Rohde would show great faith in orthodox party

³² One of the translations still in the library system is a book on business trade by Smirnov (1954).

discipline, Klein would slowly develop increasing doubts about the party line but not act against it until the last minute, and Benary and Maier would come into conflict with the party but never gave up hope for future reforms. They certainly had different notions of what socialism was supposed to be, but they agreed until the end of their lives that socialism was the only answer to the horrors of fascism and the only system that guaranteed peace. By implication, and nourished by the political struggle over the Stalinization of East Germany, they considered West Germany to be the continuation of “monopolistic capitalism” of which fascism was an extreme variant. This is the existential source of what in their economic philosophy would be stylized as the notion of class conflict. It is also the existential source of accepting the oppression of inner-party criticism and anything else alluding to factionalism in the name of peace. As we have seen, they held these beliefs in contradiction with some aspects of their own biography to the extent that their experiences with Nazism were not solely negative and their experiences with Stalinism were not solely positive.

What made this stylization of their beliefs possible was that their own individual memories of the National Socialist regime and World War II was never actually reflected upon and thus remained open to reinterpretation by others. The underlying existential needs and sentiments of a growing personality – such as a sense of belonging, perspective, security, and vision, and also the relief from guilt attached to the National Socialist regime – were less present in their minds than the idolization of the role models of Old Communists and the heroic myths attached to them. Nazism was a past that had been “present in a condensed, implicit, and virtual form only,” as Mannheim wrote with regard to the phenomenon of inherited and appropriated memories (1952 [1928]: 295). The belief in the state of the GDR was nourished by the conviction that the way back was blocked by the struggle and sacrifices of their role models during Nazism. Despite apparent tensions between their individual memories and the official narrative about the National Socialist regime in the GDR, it was their generation that granted the regime the most credit for representing the legitimate anti-fascist agenda of the GDR.

Who then were their role models as burgeoning economists at university? What were the debates and struggles they witnessed during the institutional transformation of university between 1945 and 1955?