

**Stalin's Last Comrade: Hanna Wolf and the "Karl Marx" Party College in
the German Democratic Republic**

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

STALIN'S LAST COMRADE: HANNA WOLF AND THE "KARL MARX" PARTY COLLEGE IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

For over thirty years, the *Parteihochschule* Karl Marx (PHS) was under the direction of the fervent Hanna Wolf, who oversaw the training of East Germany's Socialist Unity Party (SED) functionaries. First appointed as Director in 1950, Wolf proved to be a tenacious and calculated leader who was not only able to remain in her position for over three decades, but who also wielded power as a female member of the SED. While many high-ranking women in the East German regime were either propped up due to the influence of a more powerful partner or their positions were deemed more suitable to women's work, Wolf's appointment at the PHS proved neither and she broke through the male-dominated party culture of the SED on her own merits. However, scholarship focusing on high-ranking women in the SED has been quite meagre and on the PHS itself, there is a modest but important literature. Therefore, this dissertation explores how Wolf's political savviness, which included a myriad of personality traits, helped her successfully navigate the male dominated party culture of the SED. Such personality traits included being an "iron maiden," proving to be cold and domineering with students and peers who did not follow the party line, or warm and friendly with those in positions of power. As a result of Wolf's keen awareness of party politics, she was able to remain in her role as Director for thirty-three years, overseeing the training of close to 25,000 party functionaries that were sent out into the workforce and branches of the party apparatus armed with a very limited set of professional skills and only the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, which ultimately helped stall technological advancements in the East German regime.

Often referred to as "Wolf Canyon" or the "Red Monastery," Wolf ruled over the PHS with an "iron fist" and proved to be a massive barrier when it came to changing the student curricula. As a veteran communist who first joined the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1930, then spent the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union, Wolf was instilled with a vehement dedication to Stalinism which never faltered throughout the duration of her life and which she employed in her management of the PHS. Even during the 1950s, with Stalin's death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of the Soviet dictator in 1956, Wolf stayed true to her ideals and faced backlash from colleagues at the party school who started a campaign for her removal. During the 1960s, Wolf had to contend with Walter Ulbricht's transition from an ideologue to a technocrat and his attempts to reform PHS student coursework from focusing primarily on ideology to more technical topics. However, by the 1970s, Wolf's leadership remained unchallenged as Erich Honecker, who was also a dedicated hardliner, replaced Ulbricht as Party General Secretary in 1971, and the PHS continued to operate under Wolf's dogmatic and dictatorial rule until her retirement in June 1983.

DEDICATION

For Barney.

*“Some of our greatest historical and artistic treasures we place with curators in museums;
others we take for walks.” – Roger A. Caras*



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I am grateful to have studied on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which includes ten kilometers of land on each side of the Grand River that was promised to the Six Nations in 1784.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANTIFA – Anti-fascist
CDU – Christian Democratic Union of Germany
COMINTERN – Communist International
CPC – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DDR – *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*
DEFA – German Film Agency
DFD – Democratic Women’s League
DM – *Deutsche Mark*
DSV – German Writers’ Union
DVA – The German Academy of Public Administration “Walter Ulbricht”
FDJ – Free German Youth
GDR – German Democratic Republic
GO – Ground Organization Teaching Department
HO – National retail organization (*Handelsorganisation*)
ILS – International Lenin School
KPD – Communist Party of Germany
KSČ – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*)
KZMP – Communist Youth Association of Poland
LPG – Agricultural Productive Cooperative (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft*)
M-APPARAT – KPD’s Intelligence apparatus
MfS – East German Ministry for State Security
NES – New Economic System
NKFD – National Committee for a Free Germany
PCR – Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român*)
PDS – Party of Democratic Socialism
PHS – *Parteihochschule* Karl Marx
POW – Prisoners of War
SA – Paramilitary unit of the Nazi Party (*Sturmabteilung*)
SED – Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SED-PDS – Socialist Unity Party – Party of Democratic Socialism
SERO – Secondary Raw Material System (*Sekundärrohstoffeffassung*)
SPD – Social Democratic Party of Germany
SMAD/SVAG – Soviet Military Administration in Germany
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

Often referred to as the “*Wolfsschlucht*” (Wolf Canyon) due to the leadership of Hanna Wolf, who served as Director from 1950 to 1983, the “Karl Marx” Party College (*Parteihochschule* Karl Marx – PHS) was founded in 1946 by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in order to provide political training to its party members and functionaries.¹ The PHS was not only part of the central party apparatus but also belonged to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) university system and by the time it closed in June 1990, close to 25,000 students had gone through its doors.² The main task of the PHS was to ideologically prepare cadres for future deployment in the socialist system and much of the training culminated in student essays, theses and dissertations.³ The first cohorts of students received political training through regional party schools but as enrollment increased, the PHS moved from various locations until settling in central East Berlin in 1955. The school offered a variety of educational opportunities ranging from shorter courses to three-year courses that resulted in a social sciences diploma. In 1953, the school was granted the right to award doctoral degrees.⁴ By the 1980s, 61.7 percent of graduates were employed as functionaries throughout the regime in various positions such as political employees of the Central Committee, secretaries of the District

¹ Uwe Möller und Bernd Preußner (Hrsg.), “Geschichtliche Einblicke” in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 14.

³ Thekla Kluttig, *Parteischulung und Kaderauslese in der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, 1946-1961*, (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1997), 22-27.

⁴ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), “Geschichtliche Einblicke,” 11-12.

Leadership, party secretaries in the ministries or in functions of the mass organizations.⁵ By 1989, all fifteen First District Secretaries of the SED had completed training at the party school.⁶

Although the PHS was the main training institute of the SED, it also operated fifteen district branch offices throughout the GDR, that provided party education to students who were unable to attend the full-time programs in Berlin. Despite students being able to earn university level degrees, their education was designed specifically for work in the party-apparatus. As a result, student training focused heavily on Marxist-Leninist theory and how to incorporate their training in work-place functions. There were also two other main training centres in the GDR, the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee, that specialized in scientific research in the fields of history, sociology and scientific communism, while the Institute for Marxism-Leninism specialized in research focusing solely on scientific communism.⁷ These other important training centres were different from the PHS in that they were specifically designed for more advanced scientific research. Most students at these two institutions already had a university-level education and were considered qualified researchers and scientists, while the PHS aimed to ideologically prepare party members for more mid-level to higher positions throughout the SED party apparatus.⁸

Wolf was the perfect candidate for the role of Director of the PHS which she held for over thirty years. Not only had she joined the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany – KPD) in 1930 and studied at the International Lenin School (ILS) in Moscow, she was also head of the Antifa (anti-fascist) School for German prisoners of war

⁵ Dietrich Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx under Ulbricht and Honecker, 1946-1990: The Perseverance of a Stalinist Institution*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 38.

⁶ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 2.

⁷ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 31.

⁸ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 2.

(POWs) in Krasnogorsk in the Soviet Union. However, while male communists with political backgrounds such as Wolf's achieved influential positions in the SED hierarchy, Wolf was never made a member of the Politburo despite her nearly flawless communist biography. Although East Germany is often remembered for its commitment to gender equality in the workforce, with 49.1 percent of the GDR's total labour pool made up of women by 1966, women were still relegated to specific types of work and they were usually unable to move-up to more substantial positions in the work-place hierarchy.⁹ Such continuities were also present in the higher echelons of the GDR bureaucracy. For example, only five women were ever made candidate members of the SED Politburo, meaning that they were not full members and had no voting rights, and the few women who did achieve esteemed political positions either had a politically influential husband or were single and "married" to their communist ideals. Margot Honecker, for instance, served as Minister of National Education from 1963 through 1989.¹⁰ However, the latter was the case for Wolf, who was unmarried and completely devoted to the communist cause.

The PHS was commonly referred to as "Wolf Canyon" or the "Red Monastery" and often received criticism from other SED members for developing overly dogmatic party functionaries. Such criticisms were usually directed at Wolf, who was known for her fervent dedication to Stalinism.¹¹ Often remembered for ruling over the PHS with an "iron fist," Wolf was able to wield power as Director of the party school and was often included in discussions and activities amongst her high-ranking male peers in the SED. Unlike other influential women in the party

⁹ Donna Harsch, "Squaring the Circle: The Dilemmas and Evolution of Women's Policy" in Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds), *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-1971* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 151.

¹⁰ Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 120. Although Margot Honecker was arguably the most powerful female SED member during Honecker's leadership, she was never made a candidate member of the Politburo.

¹¹ Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 122.

apparatus, Wolf's position was not elevated due to the influence of a powerful male partner and her role was not representative of women's work. Wolf proved to be a calculating and forceful leader who was able to thrive in the male-dominated party culture of the SED. However, this masculine party culture was still very present throughout the entirety of Wolf's career and her power was mostly relegated to the halls of the party school.

The concept of "masculinity" used in my dissertation refers to attributes that are typically considered "agentic." Such characteristics refer to controlling, assertive and confident behaviours like pursuing problem-focused actions, speaking out, and having influence. Agentic characteristics are usually ascribed to men, especially men in leadership roles. In contrast, women are often ascribed communal attributes that are considered more feminine, such as concern for the welfare of others and personal characteristics like warmth, empathy, nurturing and kindness. In work settings, communal behaviours often refer to focused attention on a group rather than oneself and providing emotional support.¹²

Although gender roles vary across cultures and organizations, expectations usually exist that are shared by most members of a group. Such expectations can prove problematic when women take on leadership roles due to the blending of gender roles that influence their behaviour. This has resulted in two forms of prejudice against women in leadership positions: 1) agentic characteristics are stereotypically more associated with men resulting in women being evaluated less favourably when pursuing leadership positions. 2) Agentic leadership behaviours are perceived as less desirable in women and therefore evaluations of female leaders are often less positive.¹³ Neuropsychologist Cynthia S. Kubu refers to these problems as the "double

¹² Cynthia S. Kubu, "Who does she think she is? Women, leadership and the 'B'(ias) word," *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2018): 236.

¹³ Kubu, 240.

bind,” in that women in leadership roles face challenges of not only trying to maintain their gender role which often conflicts with expectations to fulfill their leadership role, whereas maintaining their leadership role often fails to conform to their gender role.¹⁴ Kubu also notes that “factors such as the extent to which an organization is male dominated may exacerbate or lessen the double bind” and that “it is challenging for women to establish credibility in a culture that is ‘deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority.’”¹⁵

In this regard, the party culture of the SED ascribed to the agentic notion of masculinity, where male party members held the majority of leadership positions while female members that achieved influence were often placed in roles that were considered traditionally more feminine, such as Margot Honecker in her role as Minister of Education or Inge Lange, head of the Women’s Department. During the 1970s, social psychologist Virginia Shein identified this gender stereotyping as the phenomenon of “Think Manager – Think Male,” which documented how people usually associate more agentic and masculine characteristics with leadership positions.¹⁶ This concept has also led to how men have been evaluated in regard to their own success. Men have traditionally been expected to progress from follower positions into leadership positions, especially by a certain age, and if men do not progress, they are more likely to be labelled as failures or unsuccessful at work. However, women who remain in follower positions are not evaluated as failures. Instead, this position has been viewed as natural for women in the workplace.¹⁷

¹⁴ Kubu, 240.

¹⁵ Kubu, 240-42.

¹⁶ Stephan Braun, Sebastian Stegmann, Alina S. Hernandez Bark, Nina M. Junker and Rolf van Dick, “Think manager - think male, think follower - think female: Gender bias in implicit followership theories,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 7 (2017): 378.

¹⁷ Braun, *et al.*, 385.

Although success can be defined in many ways, my dissertation focuses specifically on this notion of agentic success in leadership positions in the apparatus of the SED. Perhaps Wolf defined her personal success in a myriad of ways, such as having a stable and healthy long-term partnership, a loving family, and a successful daughter who became a doctor. Maybe Wolf was genuinely happy at both work and at home. There are multiple avenues that could be explored when defining how successful someone was throughout their life. However, in my dissertation, the concept of “success” focuses on Wolf’s role as a female leader, who was able to overcome the many gender-related obstacles that existed in the patriarchal party culture of the SED.

This dissertation was motivated by one central inquiry: what circumstances enabled Wolf to achieve a notable and enduring position in the male-dominated SED? As the research developed, I began to question how Wolf’s lengthy career compared to other high-ranking and notable female party members? What kinds of people succeeded in having stable and long-lasting careers in the party apparatus? Also, did Wolf successfully navigate her success based on her own political savviness? Or did she adopt more agentic behaviour patterns to get ahead? While Wolf remains the central focus of this study, these questions evolved to include a broader examination of how the PHS under Wolf’s leadership played a contributing role in both the building and the disintegration of the East German regime. My dissertation reveals that Wolf was a complex person whose political savviness recognized the need for a myriad of personality traits that allowed her to successfully navigate the male dominated party culture of the SED. Such personality traits included being an “iron maiden,” proving to be cold and domineering with students and peers who did not follow the party line, or warm and friendly with those in positions of power or who she considered loyal peers. As a result of Wolf’s keen awareness of party politics, she was able to remain in her role as Director for thirty-three years, overseeing the

training of close to 25,000 party functionaries that were sent out into the workforce and branches of the party apparatus armed with a very limited set of professional skills and only the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, which ultimately did help stall technological advancements in the East German regime.

As the PHS remained an institution of Stalinist indoctrination until its last years, Wolf faced many challenges both internally and externally in how she ran the party school. Although Wolf was able to halt the many proposed reforms that came her way, she was ultimately fighting an uphill battle during her thirty-three-year tenure as Director. In fact, the direction of the PHS proved to grow more incompatible with the aims of the East German regime with each passing decade. Not only did Wolf work tirelessly to curb necessary technical training for students but she also fought tooth-and-nail to maintain the sole focus of the teaching curricula to remain on the “classics” of Marxism-Leninism. As Wolf held tight to her hardline ways, student training at the PHS proved to be an outdated relic, suitable for the Stalinist era of the early 1950s, but incompatible with the many changes and technological advancements that had taken place by the 1980s. Wolf’s pursuit of maintaining a purer ideological focus at the party college was also further reinforced by Erich Honecker, when he became SED leader in 1971, and Kurt Hager, who was the chief ideologist of the SED, and was politically responsible for the school since the 1950s. With the support of these other two hardliners, Wolf faced very few challenges from the higher party-apparatus during the 1970s and 1980s.

Wolf has proved to be one of the few enduring female figures that held a prominent party position in the GDR. Therefore, the following chapters will provide a chronological examination of the PHS from its early foundation in 1946 until its closing in June 1990 with a special emphasis on the political biography of Wolf and her influence during these decades. The first

chapter provides a brief biographical sketch of Wolf from her early days in Poland, university studies in Berlin and joining the KPD, as well as her emigration to the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s and her return in 1948 and eventual appointment as Director of the PHS in 1950. This chapter also focuses on the early history of the PHS during the late 1940s. Chapter two examines the PHS under the direction of Wolf during the 1950s and the many challenges she faced as Director during the *Aufbau* years (1946-1961). Not only did Wolf have to navigate the many changes taking place with the death of Stalin in 1953 and the process of de-Stalinization after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956, but Wolf also faced opposition from her peers at the PHS who were campaigning for her removal. Chapter 3 examines how the scientific technological revolution and cultural reforms initiated by Ulbricht during the 1960s affected the PHS. This chapter also focuses on Wolf's relationship with Ulbricht during the latter 1960s prior to his removal as leader of the SED. The fourth chapter analyzes how Wolf adjusted herself politically and professionally to the new leadership of Erich Honecker during the 1970s. This chapter also includes an examination of PHS student theses and dissertations in order to determine how much influence Wolf had on PHS student research. The fifth and final chapter examines Wolf's retirement, her exclusion from the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in February 1990 and the last years before her death in May 1999.

This dissertation is based on *Bundesarchiv* sources including SED Central Committee and PHS internal documents such as briefings, meeting minutes, formal correspondence, event planning and programs. The briefings provide a basic outline of what was taking place at the PHS over the various decades. Such updates could include news of student delegations travelling to the Soviet Union, what conferences were taking place or even guest speakers that would attend the school that week. Other sources from the *Bundesarchiv* include the *Nachlässe* and

Sammlungen (personal files) of various former instructors at the school and also higher level East German politicians such as Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker and Kurt Hager. However, due to the “thirty-year rule,” Wolf’s own personal files are still unavailable to the public. Also examined are former PHS student theses and dissertations, as well as articles from *Neues Deutschland*, the official newspaper of the SED.

Many former students have also written memoirs about their lives in the GDR and provide personal reflections on their experiences at the PHS and their interactions with Wolf. One such memoir is historian Hermann Weber’s *Damals als ich Wunderlich hieß. Vom Parteihochschüler zum kritischen Sozialisten. Die SED-Parteihochschule „Karl Marx“ bis 1949* (2002). Weber details how he was recruited to study at the PHS between 1947 through 1949 as a young KPD member from West Germany who eventually became disillusioned with the communist cause due to the rigidity and Stalinization of the PHS. Another memoir that recounts a former student’s experience at the PHS during the 1950s is Carola Stern’s *Doppelleben* (2005). These sources help supplement Wolf’s biographical information by providing personal details not only about Wolf’s character but also her reputation amongst the student body. Such details are not regularly available in SED documents and these sources help provide a more colourful representation of both Wolf and the school itself. Likewise, a collection of personal articles written by former PHS instructors on their experiences at the school provides insight on various issues that arose amongst the PHS faculty.

Historiography

Wolf is often remembered in the memoir literature of her SED peers and former students as an “iron maiden,” that is, unforgiving when matters of ideological conformity were violated

and coming off as cold and domineering when dealing with dissenters. However, Wolf was also sometimes described as being warm and friendly, even funny and thoughtful, with those she considered loyal comrades. The complexity of Wolf's personality portrays a woman who knew how to navigate the political realm of the SED and whose dedication to Marxism-Leninism was unwavering throughout her life. Such complexities are further reinforced when delving into Wolf's personal life, the fact that she had a long-term partner whom she lived with in the Pankow district of East Berlin until his death in 1995, and that she had a daughter who was born in the Soviet Union in 1941. Yet, when researching Wolf, details about her personal life and intimate relationships are sparse, making a well-rounded examination of who she was as a person outside of the political realm difficult. In this regard, Wolf comes across as an "unperson," as Ian Kershaw describes Adolf Hitler in his seminal biography, a person "who has as good as no personal life or history outside of the political events in which he [or she] is involved."¹⁸

According to Kershaw's analysis on Hitler, "there was no 'private life' for the Nazi dictator, "he could enjoy his escapist films, his daily walk to the Tea House at the Berghof, his time in his alpine idyll far from government ministries in Berlin. But these were empty routines."¹⁹ Wolf's life was much the same, she could retreat to her Pankow apartment after a day of work, visit her daughter and grandchild on weekends and holidays, or even vacation every year with her partner Wilhelm Knigge, but her entire life revolved around the Party and her political work. Finding details on Wolf's preferences, whether on music, art, or films, was like searching for a needle in a haystack. Wolf's personal interests were the party's interests. In this regard, Kershaw states that when writing a biography of an "unperson," one must "focus not

¹⁸ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009): 78. E-book.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

upon the personality... but squarely and directly upon the character of his [or her] power.”²⁰ This means, for my examination of Wolf, on how she became successful, what characterized her success, how she exercised her authority, and what circumstances allowed her to break through institutional barriers, specifically as a woman, to achieve her level of success in the SED.²¹

Biography as a genre of historical scholarship has proven to be not only popular but also controversial and contested. Much of the criticism against biographical writing, especially during the 1970s, came from scholars who favoured a more theory-driven historical science, where structures and long-term developments were prioritized over the focus on individuals or singular events.²² Such biases against biographical scholarship were especially persistent amongst German historians during the 1970s and 1980s when social history first began to gain momentum. Part of the reason many German historians steered clear of biography was due to general differences in the cultures of historical writing and communicating through publishing. As Anglo-American historians often write historical studies that aim to reach a popular readership, German historians have traditionally been trained to write for their own specialized fields. Another difference has been in how German and Anglo-American historians communicate in their publications. In order to reach a popular readership, a publication requires a high-level of style, language, and composition, which more Anglo-American historians have been trained to employ in their writings.²³ However, that does not mean that historical biography did not only experience a decline in popularity amongst German scholars. From the 1930s until the 1970s,

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kershaw, *Hitler*, 72.

²² Simone Lässig, “Introduction: Biography in Modern History - Modern Historiography in Biography” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, edited by Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 1.

²³ Lässig, 2.

many British, American and French historians, who were influenced by the Annales School, were also highly critical of biography as a historical genre, choosing instead to focus on social, economic and cultural patterns rather than on “great men” or political leaders.²⁴

The 1980s and 1990s experienced a “biographical turn” in that there was once again demand to bring “the human actors back on stage.” This has included a much higher quality of biographical scholarship and the genre has even garnered popularity amongst French and German historians. Historical biography is now far less controversial than it was during most of the twentieth century and has significantly improved in quality due to the influence of new fields that aim to explore individuals and their way of life, such as microhistory, gender history, and the history of everyday life. Historical biography has thus moved to include not just “great men” but also women and “nameless” individuals, moving toward a broader inclusion of social groups that have traditionally been excluded.²⁵

As social and gender history began to examine the lives and voices of women during the late twentieth century, the rise in historical biographies that focused on women did not persist without problems. In fact, historical biography in gender history was largely used to portray the voices of women and their life stories not as individuals but as groups. If biographical writing did not focus on “great women,” such as Queen Elizabeth I or Catherine the Great, it concentrated on the “phenomenon of Woman,” addressing women in the plural, such as “German women” or “women of the East.” Likewise, most historical biographies focusing on women have been written by women (myself, for example) and have generally reached a mostly

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Lässig, 3-4.

female audience.²⁶ According to Angelika Schaser, a German gender historian, “the general absence of women’s biographies within historiography cannot, however, be explained solely in terms of the values and traditions of a male-dominated discipline. It also owes much to the circumstance that planned biographies of women are often abandoned because of meager sources.” Schaser notes that women’s papers have historically been less likely to be included in archival collections and even when they do, they often suffer from a lack of funding. For example, the collection of women’s papers at the University of Vienna, founded in 1989, still lacked permanent funding in 2006.²⁷

For Schaser, the contrast between writing a biography on a female versus a male from the same social strata becomes most evident when comparing source materials. She states that there are usually less organized source materials available for women in comparison to men. However, that has not stopped the scholarly pursuit of writing female biographies and such research has had a positive influence on the genre of historical biography as a result. When sources on women are available, there is usually much more documentation on everyday life, from domestic work in the home to taking care of children, details that have typically been considered uninteresting to men and “this is perhaps the point in which women’s and gender studies have had the greatest influence on traditional biography: while historical biographies of men still tend to focus on professional careers, modern biographers no longer completely neglect their subject’s family and everyday life.”²⁸

²⁶ Angelika Schaser, “Women’s Biographies - Men’s History?” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, edited by Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 75-76.

²⁷ Schaser, 76.

²⁸ Schaser, 80.

Part of the task of a historian when writing a historical biography is to be aware of the gaps that arise due to a lack of evidence. This has proven to be an obstacle for my own writing when trying to peer into who Wolf was on a personal level. Not only are Wolf's files sealed at the German Federal Archives, but finding more personal sources, where Wolf reflects or discusses her intimate relationships has proven to be a difficult task to tackle. Rather than intertwining Wolf's professional life with her more everyday experiences, my study focuses on Wolf's role as a leader, how she played the game and knew the political ropes, so to speak, that allowed her to significantly influence the PHS and its students. Wolf's power was institutional, that is, she maintained authority at the party school and served as a mid-level bureaucrat in the East German regime and therefore I also examine how Wolf was able to navigate her way through the patriarchal apparatus of the SED. As Kershaw points out, Karl Marx's statement in the introduction of his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) is still applicable when pursuing biography as a historical genre today: "'Men' – women too, we ought now add – 'do make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'"²⁹

Although two full-length studies focusing on the PHS have been completed, Wolf has not been the central focus despite her unquestionable influence. In fact, the two completed monographs have pursued either a more structural or top-down approach when analyzing the history of the party school. These studies include Thekla Kluttig's detailed investigation on the structural history of the PHS until the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, while Dietrich Orlow

²⁹ Ian Kershaw, "Biography and the Historian: Opportunities and Constraints" in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, edited by Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 37.

has more recently provided a short, yet comprehensive, examination of the PHS under both Ulbricht and Honecker. Aside from these two studies, scholarly attention on the party school, and especially the longstanding Director Hanna Wolf, have largely been overlooked.

In fact, Kluttig's *Parteischulung und Kaderauslese in der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1961* (Party Training and Cadre Selection in the Socialist Unity Party of Germany 1946-1961 - 1997) did little to ignite further historical investigation into the PHS and its broader implications in the overall development of the GDR. This lack of interest was possibly due to the density of Kluttig's work itself, as her book does not make for a compelling read. As the first full-length study to make use of available SED documents, Kluttig laid out the necessary, yet tedious, groundwork for further investigations to be completed. Although merely a structural history, Kluttig does an excellent job outlining the development of the PHS from its opening in 1946 until the building of the Wall in 1961, showing how the political instability of the 1950s made planning and managing the school quite difficult. As the 1950s were characterized by the many political ups and downs that accompanied the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's "secret de-Stalinization speech" at the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) in February 1956, Kluttig suggests that the PHS did not experience any actual stability until the 1960s. The building of the Wall, according to Kluttig, marked a decisive turning point in how the PHS functioned due to the inability of East Germans to leave the GDR, ultimately forcing citizens to "come to terms" with the regime.³⁰ However, as Kluttig ends her examination in late 1961, her thesis neglects important matters which shaped the latter 1960s. My dissertation shows how events such as the 11th Plenum in 1965 and the effect of Ulbricht's technological and cultural reforms on the more hardline

³⁰ Kluttig, 21.

members of the SED directly affected the PHS and how Wolf's relationship with Ulbricht completely deteriorated.

Kluttig's detailed investigation on the early years of the PHS left much fertile ground to be explored by future historians. However, scholarship remained dormant for nearly twenty years after the publication of her work. That is, until Dietrich Orlow released *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx under Ulbricht and Honecker, 1946-1990: The Perseverance of a Stalinist Institution* (2021). Orlow's account spans the entirety of the GDR era, focusing primarily on the two leadership periods of Ulbricht and Honecker and he argues that the PHS became increasingly Stalinized with each passing decade and functioned primarily as an institute of indoctrination until its closing in June 1990.³¹ Orlow also provides convincing secondary arguments throughout his work, such as how the 1970s represented a high point in Wolf's career. For example, Orlow portrays how Wolf and Honecker were "ideological soulmates," as both were Stalinists at heart, which resulted in Wolf having to contend with fewer challenges during his leadership period which began in 1971.³² On this point, Orlow is more than correct, as both Honecker and Wolf remained dedicated hardliners throughout the entirety of their political careers and did share a close professional relationship. However, his examination remains a top-down history which examines the PHS from the perspective of the former GDR leaders and their influence on the school.

Although it is difficult to complete an institutional history of the PHS that does not pursue a top-down approach, Orlow's account focuses less on the role of Wolf at the party college and how she proved to be one of the few high-ranking female SED members who was able to hold an authoritative position for over thirty years. Rather than acknowledging the

³¹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 5.

³² Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 27.

significance of Wolf's longstanding position as a female member of the SED, Orlow merely consigns Wolf's authority during the 1970s and 1980s to being the result of her positive working relationship with Honecker and Hager. While Orlow does not address issues of gender, my dissertation examines Wolf's role as an influential woman and how she was able to maintain an authoritative role in a high-standing position in the male-dominated party culture of the SED.

Due to the lack of literature focusing on the PHS, a group of former instructors published a selection of essays detailing their experiences as contemporary witnesses while working at the institution in hopes that future historians would help close this scholarly gap.³³ The collection is addressed primarily to former students of the school and the essays focus on matters such as what the lecturers hoped to achieve, their experiences working as Department heads, as well as how they view the failure of socialism years later. The essays are meant to provide factual and objective personal accounts ranging from the early 1960s until 1990. Their work includes personal accounts of former instructors such as George Ebert (Lecturer then Department Chair of the Political Economics of Socialism, 1962-1990), Johnny Norden (Director of the Institute for Foreign Studies – PHS, 1982-1990), and Hans Steußloff (Department Chair of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, 1975-1990).

The scholarship on other Eastern bloc training institutes is also limited. This is especially evident when it comes to studies on the Soviet training facilities such as the International Lenin School, which provided the blueprint for the other training institutes in the Eastern bloc. However, one study was completed, surprisingly by an American historian, that focused on the Soviet political education system in urban areas from the Second World War until the mid-

³³ Uwe Möller und Bernd Preußner (Hrsg.), "Vorwort" in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 8.

1960s.³⁴ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz' *Soviet Political Schools: The Communist Party Adult Education System* (1967) outlines the three levels of the political education system in the Soviet Union, which included: the "beginning," "middle" and "higher political education." The lowest level included the *politschkola* which provided the most basic political education. Adults enrolled in the *politschkola* usually only had an elementary school education. The middle level educated adults on the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism and the higher political education included university studies.³⁵ Mickiewicz states that the task of the Soviet political education system was to keep individuals continuously studying throughout most of their adult lives.³⁶

Although Mickiewicz thoroughly explains the Soviet education system from its "beginning" and "middle" levels, she does not discuss the higher political education which took place at universities or at the International Lenin School. This is most likely due to her being denied access to the sources required to investigate these higher levels of the Soviet system as an American writing during the middle of the Cold War. Similar to studies focusing on the PHS, little scholarship focusing specifically on the political training schools in either the Soviet Union or the Eastern Bloc states has appeared. Various studies have touched on the schools in minor detail, but more comprehensive examinations are still few and far between.

Romanian historian Sorin Radu has recently taken on the challenge of addressing this scholarly gap. In the article "Der Aufbau des Sozialismus. Kaderschulen und Parteibürokratie in Rumänien 1948 bis 1973" ("The Construction of Socialism. Cadre Schools and Party Bureaucracy in Romania 1948 to 1973"), he examines the recruitment and training of lower-to-mid level party functionaries at the Communist Party school in Timișoara, Romania, during the

³⁴ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Soviet Political Schools: The Communist Party Adult Instruction System* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), v.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 18.

late 1940s through the 1960s. Radu argues that recruitment policies aimed to attract lower-class workers and less educated rural Romanians on the basis of social advancement. By the 1960s, the political school witnessed a surge in professionalism which also saw a change in advanced ideological and technical training.³⁷ Radu states that western historical research on the Soviet political institutions first emerged during the 1950s and 1960s, such as the work completed by Mickiewicz (1967), and despite the lack of archival resources available at that time, some of the research on nomenclature and student recruitment is still valuable.³⁸

According to Radu, the Romanian party school served as a total institution, which offered all-round care that not only included living accommodations and leisure activities, but also a military-structured teaching and study program. Students at the school were granted numerous advantages and improved social status upon graduation that made enrollment attractive to many Romanian workers and farmers. Similar to students at the PHS, many over-zealous graduates could look forward to an attractive career in the party bureaucracy – albeit, one that was under close scrutinization and control of the Romanian Communist Party.³⁹ However, Radu asserts that the current state of research does not allow for concrete statements to be made about former student career advancement and his analysis is based on student evaluation documents from the school management that recommended graduate recruitment into the various party organs for employment.⁴⁰

Although there is minimal scholarship on Eastern bloc communist training institutions, much work has been done focusing on youth education and the main university system in the

³⁷ Sorin Radu, “Der Aufbau des Sozialismus. Kaderschulen und Parteibürokratie in Rumänien 1948 bis 1973” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 69, no. 1 (January, 2021): 55.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 56-57.

³⁹ Radu, 64-65.

⁴⁰ Radu, 81.

GDR. American historian, John Connelly, has published multiple articles focusing on East German university policies and student resistance,⁴¹ while his full-length study *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (2000) examines how the GDR, Czech Republic and Poland used their universities in an attempt to build socialism and develop loyal socialist citizens during the Stalinist period. Connelly argues that despite all three states attempting to restructure their University systems according to the Soviet model; the outcomes varied widely, with East Germany being the most successful.⁴² One reason for the GDR's success had to do with its very recent National Socialist past, which culminated in sweeping denazification measures and reorganization of university faculties. In the Czech lands, Connelly suggests that professors in the university system more easily accepted communist control, while Poland, with its long-standing history of resistance, especially during the Second World War, proved to be more defiant of communist regulation.⁴³ However, Connelly does not include the PHS or Wolf in his examination on East German universities.

Fellow American John Rodden has also written on education in East Germany. In *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995* (2002), Rodden explores how education, from elementary to university levels, helped contribute to the development of the "socialist citizen" in the GDR. Before the publication of this study, much of Rodden's scholarship focused on George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and he used this influence to examine education in East Germany through an

⁴¹ See John Connelly's "East German Higher Education Policies and Student Resistance, 1945-1948," *Central European History*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1995): 259-98 and "Ulbricht and the Intellectuals," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 6, no. 3 (November, 1997): 329-59.

⁴² John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Orwellian lens.⁴⁴ Rodden contends that the SED used education and participation in youth organizations to help build socialism by providing various advantages to those who conformed and then contributed to GDR society. Such advantages were especially attractive to students from worker peasant backgrounds, as they were able to receive higher levels of education and move into more professional careers than were previously available to them.⁴⁵ However, similar to Connelly, Rodden does not include the PHS in his examination and Wolf is only mentioned once in reference to a verbal attack she made on another SED member during the 1960s.⁴⁶

Another pivotal study focusing on education in the GDR was Charles Lansing's *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers under Two Dictatorships* (2010). Lansing focuses less on specific education policies that helped develop "socialist citizens" but instead on how a group of teachers from Brandenburg transitioned from one regime to the next during the late 1940s until 1953. Lansing states that between 1933 and 1938, Brandenburg experienced a 33 per cent population surge which resulted in a shortage of skilled teachers that made the Nazi purging of teaching staff less effective. According to Lansing, the majority of teachers in Brandenburg that were employed prior to 1933 remained in their positions even after 1938.⁴⁷ Similarly, when denazification measures were pursued during the mid-1940s and early 1950s, nearly 51 percent of Brandenburg teachers had been members of the Nazi Party, therefore a shortage of skilled teaching staff resulted in a rehiring of the purged pedagogues in the new

⁴⁴ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 105-106.

⁴⁶ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135. Rodden quotes Hanna Wolf's criticisms of Professor Robert Havemann from an SED Central Committee meeting in 1964.

⁴⁷ Charles Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers under Two Dictatorships* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 56-57.

socialist regime.⁴⁸ Lansing also mentions that the majority of teachers were neither resisters or defenders of the regime but instead insulated themselves from political ideology and went about their work.⁴⁹ Although Lansing does not examine the PHS, many instructors appointed at the party college during the post-war period also followed a comparable process where former POWs from the Antifa training schools in the Soviet Union were rehabilitated and assigned to teaching positions at the party college during the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁵⁰

Similar to the lack of attention on Eastern bloc communist training institutes, the historiography surrounding influential female communists in the East German regime has also received minimal attention. In fact, the under-representation of women in the higher levels of the SED bureaucracy is directly mirrored in the lack of literature focusing on this topic. However, scholars such as Gabrielle Gast, Donna Harsch, Catherine Epstein and Anna Kaminsky have made important contributions to our understanding of both the political roles of women and the limitations they faced in the patriarchal atmosphere of the SED. Gast, a West German political scientist, provides one of the earliest accounts of the inequality experienced by female SED members in her doctoral dissertation “The Political Role of Women in the German Democratic Republic” (1973).⁵¹ Gast was the first scholar to point out that even though there were relatively high numbers of women in the SED and the parliaments, women were usually only represented in large numbers in functions which were “merely representative or advisory” and that female

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 87-88.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 202.

⁵⁰ Chapter 1 further discusses German POWs being assigned to teaching positions at the PHS during the post-war period.

⁵¹ Gabrielle Gast was from West Germany but travelled to the GDR to complete her doctoral dissertation research. She ended up working for the Stasi as a secret agent and was arrested in 1990 for espionage. See Gisela Friedrichsen, “Ich hätte gerne geheiratet,” *Der Spiegel*, vol. 49, (1991). <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ich-haette-gerne-geheiratet-a-5965fba6-0002-0001-0000-000013490903>

functionaries were “predominantly active in the departments that are traditionally most likely to be granted to women.”⁵²

Gast’s conclusions have since been echoed by more contemporary historians. Harsch has also documented the inequality of women in the East German workforce in her article “Squaring the Circle: The Dilemmas and Evolution of Women’s Policy” (2002). She states that the idea that the GDR was progressive when it came to women’s integration into the work force requires a closer examination and suggests this claim is undermined when looking at the types of work women performed and how far they were able to advance professionally.⁵³ Harsch’s *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (2007) also reinforces this notion, as she shows how despite the impressive numbers of women in the Ministry of Justice, with women making up 23.3 percent of prosecutors, 26.8 percent of judges and 34.6 percent of lay judges by 1959, female judges were usually appointed to lower levels and were also disproportionately represented in the family and divorce court system.⁵⁴

Harsch also points out how East German women during the 1950s opted to join the Democratic Women’s League (*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* – DFD) rather than pursue active membership in the SED. The reason for this was because party membership demanded an “extraordinary commitment,” as meetings were numerous and often ran long into the night.⁵⁵ Due to these heavy demands, working women with families were less interested in becoming party members and often preferred to join the DFD, which was less time consuming

⁵² Angela Schmole, “DDR-Frauenbilder,” review of *Frauen in der DDR*, by Anna Kaminsky, *Zeitschrift des Forschungsverbundes*, vol. 41, (2017): 190.

⁵³ Harsch, “Squaring the Circle,” 151.

⁵⁴ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 72.

⁵⁵ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 70.

and focused on issues more central to their own lives, such as parenting, consumerism and housework.⁵⁶ My own analysis also reinforces this notion, as Wolf's own political career was able to flourish in comparison to many other female communists because she was unmarried with one adult child by the late 1950s, meaning she had fewer familial obligations that allowed her to take a more active approach to party politics.

This sentiment has also been backed by Epstein in *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (2003). Epstein notes that the few women who did achieve high-ranking positions in the male-dominated party apparatus of the SED were either married to a more influential male partner or were single and completely devoted to their professional work.⁵⁷ Some single female veteran communists that were able to achieve notable positions include Hilde Benjamin (Minister of Justice, 1953-1967), Margarete "Grete" Wittkowski (President of the State Bank, 1967-1974), and Hanna Wolf (Director of the PHS, 1950-1983). Epstein also notes that despite many female veteran communists being active in party work during the late 1940s and early 1950s, they usually began to take on more traditional roles by the mid-1950s, such as staying at home and taking care of the household and children. Epstein explains that in the earlier years of the regime, many men were still stuck abroad as prisoners of war or had died, and women were initially mobilized to help build the regime. However, by the mid-1950s the demographics changed and the mobilization of women for political work was no longer a priority.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 71. Throughout the 1950s, the DFD maintained a membership of around 1.3 million East German women.

⁵⁷ Epstein, 121.

⁵⁸ Epstein, 120.

A more recent survey focusing on the lives of East German women is Anna Kaminsky's *Frauen in der DDR* (2017). Kaminsky asks: "What did it mean to live as a woman in the GDR?" and argues that East German women were not so easily able to reconcile motherhood, full-time work and emancipation as the post-GDR myth has suggested.⁵⁹ Kaminsky notes that the living realities of East German women also varied between social classes, generations and even locations. She states that it was easier for women in rural locations to take on higher positions in politics in comparison to women living in urban areas such as East Berlin due to less competition. For example, during the 1980s, every fourth town or municipality in the GDR was headed by a female while men predominantly ruled the larger cities.⁶⁰ This underrepresentation of women in politics was evident at every level of political power and even by the end of the 1980s, the SED and the organizations it controlled remained paternalistic and had little interest in allowing women into their spheres of influence.⁶¹ Although Kaminsky's analysis is accurate, her focus on women in politics in the GDR merely covers a few more well-known female political figures such as Hilde Benjamin (Minister of Justice, 1953-1967), Elisabeth Zaisser (Minister of Education, 1952-1953) and Margot Honecker (Minister of National Education, 1963-1989); while overlooking many other influential women such as Hanna Wolf, Margarete Wittkowski (Deputy Chair of the East German Council of Ministers, 1961-1967) and Herta König (Deputy Finance Minister, 1968-1989).

Studies focusing specifically on influential female communists in the political bureaucracy have been few and far between due to the SED being dominated by a masculine party culture. However, much scholarship has been done on East German women and their roles

⁵⁹ Anna Kaminsky, *Frauen in der DDR*, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2017), 13.

⁶⁰ Kaminsky, 61.

⁶¹ Kaminsky, 65.

in “everyday life,” that is, social histories and their roles in the workforce and in the home. Much of this scholarship has focused on Alf Lüdtke’s concept of “*Eigensinn*,” which refers to “self-reliance, self-will, or ‘the act of appropriating alienated social relations.’”⁶² Social histories such as Mary Fulbrook’s *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (2005) have pursued this approach by examining the relationship between “ordinary” East German citizens and the state in what she refers to as a “participatory dictatorship.” Fulbrook examines how women in the GDR expressed personal agency when negotiating the terms of their everyday lives by writing letters of complaint, initiating petitions (*Eingaben*), and forming discussion groups.⁶³

Likewise, Katherine Pence has also focused on the participation of women in East German society by examining the “women’s question” in “Women on the Verge: Consumers between Private Desires and Public Crisis” (2008). Similar to Fulbrook, Pence portrays how women actively participated in the regime by voicing their concerns over their roles as both paid workers and household consumers by writing letters.⁶⁴ Pence documents letters ranging from complaints about poor quality goods, critiques of economic ministries and even threats to leave labour unions if conditions did not improve. In this sense, Pence views the act of letter writing amongst women as an attempt to forge a direct relationship with the state and despite wage inequality and the continued reliance on women to take on the majority of household work, the state did implement changes such as improving childcare for working mothers.⁶⁵ However, rather

⁶² Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 105.

⁶³ Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 288.

⁶⁴ Katherine Pence, “Women on the Verge: Consumers between Private Desires and Public Crisis,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, edited by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 296.

⁶⁵ Pence, “Women on the Verge,” 293.

than highlighting the continued struggles women faced with the double burden of work and household duties, Pence suggests that the regime was quite modern when it came to the “women’s question,” as East Germany was further ahead of western democracies in bringing higher numbers of women into the workforce.⁶⁶

Harsch has also focused on the “everyday lives” of women in GDR history. However, in contrast to Fulbrook and Pence, she suggests that East German women pursued acts such as letter writing and initiating petitions as a form of resistance due to their inability to challenge the regime publicly or by forming oppositional political groups.⁶⁷ In *Revenge of the Domestic*, Harsch documents how the individual behaviours of women such as refusing to go to work or take part in skilled labour training helped push the regime to acknowledge and address their concerns. Harsch notes that the relationship between ordinary women and the state was not based on a process of negotiation and instead suggests that the gap between the production-oriented party-state and “ordinary” women “never disappeared.”⁶⁸ She rejects Fulbrook’s concept of a “participatory dictatorship” and instead suggests that Konrad Jarausch’s notion of a “welfare dictatorship” is more suitable when examining the role of women in the GDR. Harsch argues that “the GDR was always a dictatorship, but it became a welfare dictatorship” over time and she “emphasizes the domestic causes of this transition in a triple sense: it privileges internal GDR structures and processes, private gender relations, and home-based labour and consumption.”⁶⁹

Stefan Wolle has also examined the misconception that the GDR was a beacon of equality for women. Although Wolle acknowledges that the East German regime was further

⁶⁶ Pence, “Women on the Verge,” 287.

⁶⁷ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 7.

⁶⁸ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 1.

⁶⁹ Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 11.

advanced than the West when it came to higher numbers of women in the workforce, he suggests that women in the GDR lived in a constant balancing-act of running a household while being employed full-time.⁷⁰ In *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1971-1989* (1998), Wolle references sociological studies from the post-reunification period that show how the GDR was much more paternalistic and conservative than West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s.⁷¹ These studies, according to Wolle, illustrate that despite the general acceptance of women entering the workforce, this did not result in any real form of equality when contrasted with what a typical day looked like for a working woman. Wolle describes the average day of a working mother in East Germany; beginning with childcare at 5 am, heading to work during the day, returning home with the children after shopping, then cooking dinner and tending to household chores once children were put to bed.⁷² Wolle references a study from 1972 which states that for 54 percent of East German marriages, the responsibility of managing the household was left to the women. While for 34.5 percent, it was mainly left to the women with some help from the husbands. The issue of raising children also reflected similar numbers with 43.3 percent of women taking on the responsibility of childcare single-handedly, while 41.8 percent had minor help from the men. The study also showed that only 12.8 percent of marriages claimed to raise children together.⁷³ Wolle points out that despite East Germany's celebration of its high female employment rates, life for working women, especially women with children, was anything but equal.⁷⁴

As my dissertation argues that the lack of innovation and scientific training at the PHS

⁷⁰ Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1971-1989*, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 291.

⁷¹ Wolle, 289.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

helped contribute to the eventual demise of the East German regime, it is necessary to examine the historiographical debates surrounding the revolution of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Scholarship on this topic has ranged from examinations of the Stasi to more long-range socio-economic and political problems that led to East Germany's rapid disintegration. While the former has included arguments such as the Stasi being so overburdened with administrative tasks that it failed to account for broader issues taking place during the 1980s, such as the immigration crisis or the threat of the Wall coming down, other accounts have pointed to the peaceful and non-violent nature of the demonstrations themselves.⁷⁵ For instance, Hans-Hermann Hertle has argued that the large number of demonstrators in Leipzig on 9 October 1989 was so overwhelming that the Stasi refused to open fire on the crowds and therefore allowed the demonstrations to take place with no serious accompanying repercussions.⁷⁶ Similarly, Karsten Timmer has suggested that the peaceful nature of the demonstrations made it difficult for the Stasi to justify using force as they worried that it would further escalate the situation.⁷⁷

Although not directly analyzing the Stasi, Charles S. Maier has also acknowledged the peaceful nature of the demonstrations which helped lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. However, Maier views the demise of the regime as an inevitable consequence of more long-range problems such as economic difficulties that finally surfaced through the

⁷⁵ See Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality* (London: Longman, 2003). Dennis provides an overview of how the Stasi's extensive bureaucratic procedures contributed to the downfall of the East German regime in the late 1980s.

⁷⁶ Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996), 115. For a review of the Stasi's role in the downfall of the GDR see: Gary Bruce, "'In Our District, the State Is Secure: The East German Secret Police Response to the Events of 1989 in Perleberg District,'" *Contemporary European History*, vol. 14, no. 2 (May 2005): 219-244.

⁷⁷ Karsten Timmer, *Vom Aufbruch zum Umbruch: Die Bürgerbewegung in der DDR 1989* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 185. Timmer also notes that the Stasi would most likely have used force if the demonstrations had turned violent.

collective action of discontented East German citizens.⁷⁸ Similar to Maier, my study also reinforces the argument that the GDR had grown stagnant politically and economically by the 1980s, as PHS students were lacking professional skills that could help the regime advance in technological and economic fields.

In contrast to Maier, Mary Sarotte examines the months preceding the dismantling of the Wall in *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (2014) and suggests that the fall of the Wall was due to a “series of accidents.”⁷⁹ Some of these “accidents” include multiple communication failures in which the non-violent resistance movement were able to use to their own advantage.⁸⁰ One such accident described by Sarotte includes the announcement made by Politburo member Günter Schabowski to the media on the evening of 9 November 1989, that the borders to West Germany and West Berlin were immediately being opened and thousands of people on both sides of the Wall flocked to the border crossings.⁸¹ Rather than announcing the restrictions that were being lifted for travel, Schabowski mistakenly told the press, which included international as well as East German news outlets, that the party had decided “to issue a regulation that will make it possible for every citizen... to emigrate.”⁸²

While some historians have examined the role of the Stasi and the events which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, others have focused more specifically on the GDR’s economic difficulties. For instance, Jonathan Zatin examines the East German economy and the massive debt accumulated by the regime during the Honecker period in *The Currency of Socialism:*

⁷⁸ Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), xiii-xiv.

⁷⁹ Mary Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xix.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Sarotte, 118.

⁸² Sarotte, 117.

Money and Political Culture in East Germany (2007). According to Zatlin, Honecker and other high-ranking officials worked to not only undermine socialism itself but also the currency of the regime, as they failed to acknowledge the importance of money as an asset that eventually led to a massive rise in economic debt.⁸³ To help combat the rising debt, the Honecker regime sold off goods such as art, weapons and even donated blood.⁸⁴ Zatlin also shows how the GDR's economic deficiencies directly affected the population through an examination of the production of East German cars, most notably the Trabant, which became a status symbol due to its high price of 12,000 Marks and the requirement of being put on a waiting list in order to purchase one.⁸⁵ The SED not only failed to produce enough cars to satisfy the East German population but most citizens did not even want the Trabant, but instead a BMW. Such failures in production, according to Zatlin, "produced shortages that led to an inflation of desire."⁸⁶ Essentially, Zatlin portrays how economic failures in the GDR made many East Germans feel that they were "second-class citizens in a capitalist world," that ultimately helped steer the eventual downfall of the regime.⁸⁷

Zatlin also portrays how Honecker was resistant to change and used his authority as an "old communist" to maintain the dictatorial character of the regime. Due to Honecker's anti-fascism and imprisonment during the Nazi period, many of his SED peers remained less inclined to criticize the East German leader.⁸⁸ Zatlin's account demonstrates how Honecker could "adopt ruinous policies without consequence," as there were no real general elections or serious threats

⁸³ Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102.

⁸⁴ Zatlin, 93.

⁸⁵ Zatlin, 215.

⁸⁶ Zatlin, 238-42.

⁸⁷ Zatlin, 3.

⁸⁸ Zatlin, 83.

to his position.⁸⁹ As a result, party officials and other SED members were essentially forced to accept Honecker's decisions, which ultimately kept the Party and the regime in a state of paralysis.⁹⁰ In this regard, my dissertation echoes this premise, as old hardliners like Honecker and Wolf, made economic and technological changes, especially in the student curricula and teaching methods at the PHS, almost impossible.

Similarly, Raymond G. Stokes's *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany 1945-1990* (2000) examines how technology in the GDR both advanced and eventually helped bring down the regime. In contrast to Maier, Stokes views the collapse of the GDR not as "inevitable" or "preordained from the outset," but rather suggests that high technology in East Germany actually helped, at least initially, sustain the longevity of the regime.⁹¹ Some of the successes in East German technology include the first nuclear reactor developed in 1957, advances in the optics industry, the Trabant car and machine tools. However, Stokes outlines how the GDR faced problems in the technological field right from the outset with the "brain drain" in which many talented East German engineers and scientists relocated to the West. During the 1970s and 1980s, the GDR also invested heavily in the development of electronics and computers. However, due to a shortage of raw materials and economic problems, the regime had to rely on recycled materials through the *Sekundärrohstofffassung* (Secondary Raw Material System – SERO) and had trouble keeping up with Western technology. Stokes portrays how even technological achievements such as the 32-bit microprocessor and one-mega chip in

⁸⁹ Gary Bruce, "Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic by Andrew Port: The East German Leadership and the Division of Germany: Patriotism and Propaganda, 1945-1954 by Dirk Spilker: The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany by Jonathan Zatin," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 52, no. 3 (September 2009): 810.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Raymond G. Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany 1945-1990*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 200.

computing technology proved to lag behind the technical advancements being made in other industrial countries.⁹² According to Stokes, “GDR technology was at once an important cause, and at the same time a key consequence of the country’s political, social and economic development.”⁹³

A more recent study on the collapse of the East German regime is Thomas Fleischmann’s *Communist Pigs: An Animal History of East Germany’s Rise and Fall* (2020). Fleischmann examines the pork industry from three different perspectives: the industrial pig, the wild boar and the garden pig, with the industrial pork industry being the most influential as it not only helped the GDR become a competing player on the world market but also proved that the regime was dependent on capitalism in order to succeed.⁹⁴ Fleischmann shows how East Germany was the second largest producer of pork in Eastern Europe during the 1970s, which also meant that the regime had to become active traders in the global market for grain and oil. During the 1980s, the price of grain increased, and East Germany’s pork industry became an economic liability. The use of manure and oilseed monocultures also had a negative impact on the environment, poisoning rivers and watersheds and in 1982 there was a grain shortage while a Foot and Mouth disease epidemic erupted, causing the GDR to fall behind on its trade agreements.⁹⁵ This meant a shortage of pork for East Germans, who, similar to Zatin’s portrayal of East German’s having to wait years just to be able to purchase a Trabant, also began to realize that they were merely “second-class citizens” living in a capitalist world.

⁹² Stokes, 177-94.

⁹³ Stokes, 12.

⁹⁴ Thomas Fleischmann, *Communist Pigs: An Animal History of East Germany’s Rise and Fall* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2020), 14.

⁹⁵ Fleischmann, 165.

Most historians would agree that the downfall of East Germany was the result of a myriad of reasons. Economic problems, a lack of innovation amongst the higher party apparatus and even the Stasi's failure to use force during the October and November 1989 demonstrations all played a critical role in the eventual demise of the GDR. Many of these issues have also been explored from the role of the Stasi to the pork industry which show how failures in various sectors of the East German regime worked together on a larger scale to develop the ideal conditions for the final nail in the coffin which came in late 1989. My dissertation contributes to our overall understanding of the downfall of the GDR by examining one of these specific sectors, that is, the PHS and how Wolf's dogmatic and rigid dedication to ideology influenced the SED's most important party training institute for over thirty years. As faculty and even some SED members called for improvements in the student curricula throughout the various decades, Wolf proved resistant and ensured that student training remained confined to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism during the entirety of her career.

Chapter 1:

“A Wolf at the Door:” The Making of a Stalinist

During Wolf’s first years as Director of the PHS, a framed portrait of Joseph Stalin hung in her office, symbolizing her fanatical dedication to Stalinism and how she ran the school with an “iron fist.”⁹⁶ Wolf was often criticized by her peers in the SED for her dogmatism and she was sometimes mockingly referred to as “Stalin’s last comrade.”⁹⁷ Wolf remained a loyal Stalinist until the bitter end. When Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the SED from 1971 to 1989, was voted out of office on 18 October 1989, Wolf was the only vote amongst over 200 Central Committee members in favour of keeping him in his position.⁹⁸ At 82 years old, Wolf was expelled from the successor party of the SED, the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* – PDS) for “anti-party” behaviour and had to watch bitterly from the sidelines as the East German regime faded from her eyes and gave way to the reunification of Germany in 1990.⁹⁹ However, despite living out the last years of her life as one of the last remaining hardliners of the former SED, Wolf undeniably left her mark not only on the memories of many of her former students and peers but also on the East German regime itself.

Early Life: Poland, Germany and the Soviet Union

Born in the small town of Goniądz in Northeastern Poland on 4 February 1908, Hanna

⁹⁶ Carola Stern, *Doppelleben* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 2002): 67.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Margot Honecker stayed at home and did not attend the party meeting. Erich Honecker was replaced by Egon Krenz. Dietrich Orlow, “The Last Hurrah: Hanna Wolf’s and Wolfgang Schneider’s May, 1989 Defense of Stalinism,” *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies*, vol. 24/25, no. 31/32 (2018/2019): 117.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Wolf (born Haschka) was raised in a Jewish family and attended a German-Hebrew school before transferring to the larger town of Białystok to complete her high school education. Her mother was a teacher; her father a merchant and Rabbinical instructor and she described her upbringing as “Zionist-bourgeois.”¹⁰⁰ Wolf did not remain close to her family in her later years. In one of her SED autobiographical statements, she describes cutting contact with a brother who emigrated to Nebraska in the United States and a sister who moved to Tel Aviv after the Nazi Party came to power in 1933. However, she remained close with one sister who was also a dedicated communist and lived in the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹

Wolf’s interest in politics began at an early age. She joined a red student group in 1920 and then in 1922 joined the Communist Youth Association of Poland (*Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polski* – KZMP). After completing her high school education in 1927, Wolf moved to Germany where she studied history and philosophy at the University of Berlin (now Humboldt University).¹⁰² Part of the reason for Wolf’s move to Germany was due to the strict anti-Jewish measures that existed in the Polish university system. For example, during the 1920s, most universities maintained a quota system that restricted the number of Jewish students admitted into certain programs, as well as which programs they could enroll in.¹⁰³ As a result, many Jews went abroad to pursue their university education.¹⁰⁴ In 1930, Wolf also joined the Communist

¹⁰⁰ Orlow, “The Last Hurrah,” 112.

¹⁰¹ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 5533, Hanna Wolf autobiographical statement.

¹⁰² Erich Honecker, “Glückwunsch des ZK der SED für Hanna Wolf: Grußadresse zum 80. Geburtstag.“ *Neues Deutschland*. 4 February 1988. Provides a short biography on Wolf.

¹⁰³ Natalia Aleksiu, “Together but Apart: University Experience of Jewish Students in the Second Polish Republic,” *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 109 (January, 2014): 117. <https://doi.org/10.12775/APH.2014.109.06>. For example, Aleksiu documents the experience of Haskel Grossmann during the 1920s, who applied to Medical School at the University of Warsaw but was rejected. The program maintained a strict quota that only accepted twenty Jewish students per year.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – KPD) and her early political involvement helped garner her a position in the KPD’s intelligence apparatus (M-apparat). The M-apparat consisted of the KPD’s inner-most circle and many former members were granted esteemed positions in the SED hierarchy. For example, all three Stasi ministers: Wilhelm Zaisser (1950-53), Ernst Wollweber (1953-57) and Erich Mielke (1957-89) had been part of the KPD’s M-apparat.¹⁰⁵

During the early 1950s, the SED sought out “politically reliable” comrades to fill important positions within the regime and past involvement with the M-apparat, the Communist International, volunteering in the Spanish Civil War or working in some way for the Soviet military or intelligence agency helped solidify one’s communist background.¹⁰⁶ Not only did Wolf have significant experience in the KPD’s exclusive M-apparat but in 1932 she emigrated to the Soviet Union where she spent sixteen years living directly under the Stalinist dictatorship. Following her like-minded sister, Wolf left for the Soviet Union in April 1932 and found work as a translator and editor for a foreign publishing house in Moscow. This position was short-lived however, as she enrolled at the International Lenin School (ILS) where she studied from 1933 through 1935 and from 1935 until the closing of the school in 1937, she worked as a research assistant.¹⁰⁷

The years spent studying and working at the ILS in Moscow had a formative impact on Wolf and her experiences carried forward in her role as Director of the PHS, which was likewise

¹⁰⁵ Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 281.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Hanna Wolf’” Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hanna-wolf>

molded after the ILS. The aim of the ILS was to produce communist party cadres that were disciplined, proletarian and “free of the taint of reformism.”¹⁰⁸ From the opening of the ILS in 1926 until its temporary closing in 1937, the school is estimated to have trained around 3000 young communists.¹⁰⁹ The ILS provided the blueprint for party education for political schools in the Eastern bloc and some notable former students included leaders such as Władysław Gomułka (Poland), Marshal Tito (Yugoslavia) and both Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker (GDR).¹¹⁰ The basic courses required for students at the ILS focused on working-class history, Marxist theory, the experience of proletarian dictatorship and the political economy of imperialism. Practical work was also included in the basic requirements for study at the school and once a student matriculated, they were granted probationary membership in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).¹¹¹

While still a student at the ILS, Wolf gained Soviet citizenship in 1934, then it is unclear what she did after the closing of the school in 1937. Her biographical information states that she had an interruption in work for personal reasons between 1937 through 1939.¹¹² However, it can be gleaned that her absence from work during these years were due to complications that resulted from the Stalinist purges. Between 1936 and 1938, Stalin unleashed a campaign of political repression in the Soviet Union which is referred to as “the Great Purge” or “the Great Terror.” This period witnessed increased police surveillance over every aspect of life, purges of the CPSU

¹⁰⁸ Cohen Gidon and Kevin Morgan, “Stalin’s Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926-37,” *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2002): 327.

¹⁰⁹ The ILS closed in 1937 and re-opened after the end of the Second World War. It officially closed after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union. Gidon and Morgan, 328.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Gidon and Morgan, 331.

¹¹² “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Hanna Wolf’” Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hanna-wolf>

and the Red Army, ethnic cleansing and extreme repression of the peasantry.¹¹³ Economist Michael Ellman estimates that around 950,000 to 1.2 million people died between 1937 and 1938 as a result of Stalin's political repression. However, these numbers do not include those deaths that occurred as a result of deteriorating health conditions after being released from the *Gulag* or those that were arrested during this time and continued to be imprisoned after 1938.¹¹⁴ This number also does not include the deaths of famine victims. It merely focuses on those deaths that were a result of political persecution.¹¹⁵

The Great Terror affected everyone in the Soviet Union and tested the faith of even the most dedicated communists. According to Christa Uhlig, who specializes in German and Soviet educational history, more than half of the female, and close to two-thirds of male pedagogues that lived in exile in the Soviet Union were affected by the purges and at least one in five died.¹¹⁶ Some German female pedagogues effected by these purges included: Gertrud Braun, who arrived in Moscow in 1932 and worked at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute. She was arrested in 1938 and was sentenced to eight years hard-labour.¹¹⁷ Former SED member Wolfgang Leonhard's mother Susanne was also sentenced to five years hard-labour in Siberia for "counter-revolutionary Trotskyist activities."¹¹⁸ Language teacher Trude Richter, who left Germany in 1934 and took a teaching position at the Moscow Pedagogical for Modern Languages, was arrested only one day

¹¹³ James Harris, "Introduction" in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*. Edited by James Harris (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

¹¹⁴ Michael Ellman, "Soviet Repression Statistics: Some Comments," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 54, no. 7 (2002): 1162-63.

¹¹⁵ Ellman, 1172.

¹¹⁶ Christa Uhlig, "'Es gäbe hierzu viel zu berichten:' Pädagoginnen im sowjetischen Exil" in *Jahrhundertschicksale: Frauen im sowjetischen Exil*. Edited by Simone Barck et al. (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2003), 105.

¹¹⁷ "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Gertrud Braun'" Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/gertrud-braun?ID=4126>

¹¹⁸ "Biographie – Susanne Leonhard." Accessed 29 October 2021. <http://www.gulag.memorial.de/person.php?pers=140>

after being granted Soviet citizenship and was sent to the *Gulag* for “Trotskyist” activities.¹¹⁹

Luckily for these three women, they were all eventually released and able to return back to Germany.

At the height of the Great Terror, the “Year of ’37,” the ILS temporarily closed and only reopened after the ending of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1943, a smaller Communist International (COMINTERN) school was established and disguised as an agricultural college in the town of Kushnarenkovo, roughly 1000 miles east of Moscow. However, this school also stopped running in 1943 due to the war.¹²⁰ After the ILS closed, Wolf did not return, as she became pregnant in 1939 and her only child, Erika Wolf, was born on 14 August 1940. Not much is known about the father of Wolf’s daughter, except that he was a German émigré who was also living in Moscow.¹²¹

Despite being a new mother, Wolf requested to be sent to the front lines as the German army advanced towards Moscow in fall 1941. With her application denied, she described the rejection as one of the worst days of her life as she had dedicated her life to the KPD. Wolf claimed to have felt immense guilt that she was able to live and learn in the Soviet Union under “splendid conditions,” while her comrades from the KPD and the CPSU were either suffering in concentration camps or dying in combat.¹²² In October 1941, Wolf was evacuated to Kuibyshev where she found employment working for the Soviet Radio Committee until becoming appointed head of the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk in 1943.¹²³

¹¹⁹ “Biographie - Trude Richter.” Accessed 29 October 2021. <http://www.gulag.memorial.de/person.php?pers=178>

¹²⁰ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Eurocommunism: Challenge for East and West*, translated by Mark Vecchio (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979): 33.

¹²¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62162, Wilhelm Knigge short biography. 14 April 1971.

¹²² Uhlig, 102.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Ulbricht was one of the first political figures to propose the creation of special anti-fascist re-education schools for German POWs being held in the Soviet Union.¹²⁴ The hope behind this idea was that if enough German POWs were influenced to see the merits of Marxism-Leninism and the failures of Nazism, a German vanguard could be created that would ultimately help build communism in Germany once the war ended.¹²⁵ Six months after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the National Committee for a Free Germany (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland* - NKFD) was established in a POW camp in Krasnogorsk in July 1943 and was led by the German communist writer Erich Weinert.¹²⁶ The NKFD worked to convince German soldiers to desert by distributing leaflets and other anti-fascist propaganda and received support from both German communists in exile and the Soviets.¹²⁷ After the founding of the NKFD came the development of the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk which was then referred to as the “Antifascist Political School under the auspices of the Special U.S.S.R. NKFD.” Ulbricht was given political responsibility for the school and appointed Wolf, who also taught history courses there, as head of the school.¹²⁸

Leading figures from the NKFD often made special visits to the Antifa school to provide guest lectures. Some of these visitors included NKFD leader Erich Weinert and longtime KPD members like Walter Ulbricht, Anton Ackerman and Wilhelm Pieck.¹²⁹ The core curriculum of the Antifa schools focused on Marxism-Leninism, the history of the Soviet Union and the history

¹²⁴ Ralph Jessen, *Akademische Elite und kommunistische Diktatur: Die ostdeutsche Hochschullehrerschaft in der Ulbricht-Ära* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 307.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Uhlig, 108.

¹²⁷ Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 64.

¹²⁸ Jessen, 307.

¹²⁹ Arthur L. Smith Jr., *The War for the German Mind: Re-educating Hitler's Soldiers* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 114.

of Germany from a communist perspective.¹³⁰ Antifa students were not expected to favour communism but had to show that they maintained at least some anti-Hitler sentiment. Prior to being accepted into an Antifa school, a student was made to fill out a questionnaire and once qualified, began their student experience by swearing an oath renouncing any future participation in the Nazi movement and self-confessing that their involvement with the Nazi Party had been a mistake.¹³¹ The number of German prisoners that completed an Antifa program is difficult to ascertain since Soviet recordkeeping was not well maintained. However, historian Arthur L. Smith Jr. estimates that between one thousand to three thousand prisoners finished an Antifa program every year in the Soviet Union with the first Antifa course beginning in May 1942 and running until late 1949.¹³²

In her SED *Lebenslauf*, Wolf wrote of her life in the Soviet Union as a joyous one. She described a deep attachment to the Soviet people, whom she respected and loved and wrote of her belief about the importance in fighting for everyone.¹³³ She appears to have immersed herself fully in her Soviet life and the heartbreak she felt over being denied the right to serve on the frontlines quickly dissipated with her appointment as head of the Antifa school. Wolf finally felt useful, as she was able to directly make a difference in the fight against fascism.¹³⁴ However, Wolf does not shed light on any hardships she may have experienced in the Soviet Union as not only was she a fervent Stalinist, but she also witnessed first-hand the purges of the 1930s. Wolf also most likely maintained a sense of appreciation to the Soviet Union for harboring her during the Nazi period, as not only did she face persecution as a communist in Nazi Germany but she

¹³⁰ Jessen, 307.

¹³¹ Smith Jr., 106.

¹³² Smith Jr., 108.

¹³³ Uhlig, 101.

¹³⁴ Uhlig, 103.

was also Jewish. Wolf's lack of information in regard to her personal experiences during the "Great Terror" was most likely strategic as she understood what the possible repercussions could be and how critical words could affect her future political and professional endeavors. This tactic seemed to be common amongst communists in exile in the Soviet Union during this period.

Christa Uhlig describes that personal revelations about the purges of the 1930s were usually brief and fragmentary, and it was usually women rather than men who were more open to sharing. She states that such writers usually showed a keen awareness of the tragedy that took place as well as its consequences even into the post-war period.¹³⁵

Although Wolf kept quiet about her experiences during the purges, her colleague Franziska Rubens shared some personal details about what life was like during this time. Rubens was also a teacher at the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk and like Wolf, had an extremely impressive communist biography, as she had been involved in red student youth groups in Germany and joined the KPD in 1920. After returning to Germany in 1948, Rubens was Deputy Head of the Polit-Culture Department from 1948, and in 1953 she took a position as a Research Associate at the Institute for Marxism-Leninism for the Central Committee of the SED.¹³⁶ Ruben's life was severely impacted by the Great Terror. Her first husband fell victim to the purges and died in a Siberian labour camp. In 1938, her second husband was imprisoned for two years. In 1941, her son was arrested in Moscow and died in the summer of 1942 after being sentenced to five years hard-labour.¹³⁷ Reflecting on the hardships experienced in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist purges, Rubens wrote:

It is not easy, given all the terribly difficult experiences we went through in those years... there was a lot to report on; of

¹³⁵ Uhlig, 106.

¹³⁶ Central Committee of the SED, "Obituary notice for Franziska Rubens," *Neues Deutschland*. 26 February 1971.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

enjoyments that were lost, of the atmosphere of fear and mourning that separated friends. Survivors isolated, from loved ones... who, when they saw you, went to the other side of the street so as not to run into you. The emotional pressure was enormous, only belief in the party, the sure hope that the truth would win, kept us going... There was a lot to report on this, if one was allowed or even could or wanted too? This subjunctive does not mean the past first, but a present burdened by the past.¹³⁸

For Rubens, and many others like Wolf, these hardships were “years of testing” which did not sway their ideological convictions, as they “adamantly” stood by the party even during the most difficult times.¹³⁹

Whatever problems Wolf may have experienced is difficult to pin down due to her own lack of commentary on those years as well as the fact that her *Nachlass* at the *Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde* location remains closed due to the thirty-year rule. However, despite Wolf’s great love for the Soviet Union, she did mention that she could not wait to get back to Germany to help in any way she could with the building of communism in the Soviet occupation zone.¹⁴⁰

Although the war ended in May 1945, the majority of Germans in POW camps and in exile abroad were not immediately allowed to return home. By 1946, only 440,000 POWs returned to Germany while 370,000 returned in 1947. However, there were still 1,700,000 POWs scattered abroad with 830,000 in the Soviet Union in November 1947.¹⁴¹

As Wolf and Rubens were left behind in Krasnogorsk to continue their work at the Antifa school, their colleague Willi Kropp was allowed to return to the Soviet occupation zone. Kropp

¹³⁸ Uhlig, 106.

¹³⁹ “Biographies: Franziska Rubens.” Accessed 31 October 2021. <http://ausstellung.geschichteinnenministerien.de/biografien/franziska-rubens/#!fourth>

¹⁴⁰ Uhlig, 106.

¹⁴¹ Martin McCauley, *Marxism-Leninism in the German Democratic Republic: The Socialist Unity Party (SED)* (London, UK: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1979), 17.

was also a veteran communist; he had joined the KPD in 1920 and in 1924 became manager of a KPD bookstore first in Frankfurt am Main and then in Stuttgart. In 1935, he emigrated to the Soviet Union where he worked in various teaching positions including at the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk.¹⁴² After being shuffled around in various roles once returned to Germany in 1945, Kropp was appointed as head of the early version of the PHS which emerged in 1946. He and Carl Bose, a Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) member, ran this earlier version of the school until 1947. However, Bose was removed from this position and Kropp was eventually reassigned as head of the German Academy of Public Administration “Walter Ulbricht” (*Deutsche Verwaltungsakademie* “Walter Ulbricht” – DVA).¹⁴³ It is unclear why Kropp was sent back to Germany in the early post-war years to be appointed to party-training work while more experienced female comrades were left waiting in the wings. Despite the image of equality that was perpetuated in East Germany, even in the early post-war years, senior level positions in politics and society were dominated by men.

Wolf and Rubens had no choice but to remain at the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk. As large numbers of German POWs were still stranded in the Soviet Union, the Antifa school continued to run its courses until late 1949. Both women requested many times to be sent back to Germany, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. On 24 February 1946, Rubens wrote to Pieck and Ulbricht in desperation:

We, in Krasnogorsk, are sitting as if on an island... far from political life and German work. Time has changed, life goes on, but we are still sitting here as if in a monastery without any connection to the real world... I am writing this in the hope that you will not forget us and our work. We have never

¹⁴² “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Willi ,Wilhelm‘ Kropp” Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/willi-wilhelm-kropp>

¹⁴³ Kluttig, 211.

received a message from you all this time... For us old party members, it is incredible that we are not involved in the building of the party and the country... We are waiting for the day when you come pick us up.¹⁴⁴

Despite Wolf and Ruben's pleas to return to Germany, they were made to wait until the dust settled in Berlin. In 1948, the majority of the remaining POWs in the Soviet Union returned to Germany; and finally, Ulbricht granted permission for both women to make the journey back to Berlin to help with the communist cause.¹⁴⁵

Return to Germany and the PHS Karl Marx

After the majority of German POWs returned from the Soviet Union, the "success" of the Soviet Antifa schools was put on display on 2 November 1949 at the main campus of the PHS in Kleinmachnow. In front of a large crowd consisting of teachers, students, school children, workers and functionaries, a delegation of former German POWs ceremoniously handed over a Soviet flag to Rudolf Lindau, then co-Director of the PHS.¹⁴⁶ Members of the delegation gave speeches on the changes they underwent in the Soviet Union, shouting uplifting statements such as: "We were not shot! The fascist in us was just shot!" Lindau thanked each delegate personally for the flag and spoke about the ten thousand German POWs who were changed for the better, from fascist soldiers to conscious workers who would be invaluable in the building of socialism in the GDR. He concluded the event by shouting: "Long live the friendship between the German people and the Soviet Union!"¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Rubens quoted in Uhlig, 107.

¹⁴⁵ Uhlig, 108.

¹⁴⁶ Hermann Weber, *Damals als ich Wunderlich hieß. Vom Parteihochschüler zum kritischen Sozialisten. Die SED-Parteihochschule „Karl Marx“ bis 1949* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2002), 387.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

While Wolf and Rubens were made to wait in the Soviet Union until 1948, Lindau was immediately sent back to East Berlin in 1945. Lindau had also immigrated to the Soviet Union in 1934 and taught alongside Wolf at the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk.¹⁴⁸ A member of the KPD since 1920, Lindau worked in various political and editing positions until leaving for the Soviet Union in late February 1934 after his son was executed by the Nazi regime in January for allegedly shooting a *Sturmabteilung* (SA) member.¹⁴⁹ Lindau was a transport worker by trade but fashioned himself as a historical researcher of the German communist movement. Although less educated and experienced than Wolf, he was appointed, alongside Paul Lezner, a former SPD member, as the first Directors of the main campus of the PHS in Kleinmachnow in 1947.¹⁵⁰ Lezner was a trained lithographer who had joined the SPD in 1912. Upon his appointment as co-director, he was responsible for the organization of cultural and political work, as well as the PHS library.¹⁵¹ Lindau and Lezner's positions as co-directors were merely temporary however, as both were reassigned to pursue work at the Institute for Marxism-Leninism for the Central Committee of the SED in 1950.¹⁵²

Prior to the development of the PHS, communist authorities had already begun providing “training evenings” for party members, which covered current issues taking place in the Soviet occupation zone. By early 1946, these “training evenings” evolved into fourteen-day courses which focused on the theory of Marxism-Leninism. These courses were initially provided through small local party schools but as enrollment numbers began to increase, the courses were

¹⁴⁸ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Rudolf Lindau’” Accessed 10 January 2022. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/rudolf-lindau>

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Kluttig, 257.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Kluttig, 211.

offered through state party schools.¹⁵³ Around this time, communist authorities realized the urgent necessity for a more systematic organization of training methods. Since many of the old KPD members had died during the war and more and more young people who had been influenced by the Nazi Party were joining the SED, communist authorities decided to found the PHS. This decision was made at the second meeting of the SED party executive committee in May 1946 in order to “build up the training system in the Socialist Unity Party of Germany:”

V. Party College ‘Karl Marx’

Institute for the training of qualified cadres in connection with theoretical research and production of training and other materials according to the instructions of the central secretariat. Organization of basic courses lasting six months and special courses. Determination of curricula and selection of teachers and students by the central secretariat. At the “Karl-Marx-Schule” an aspirant has to be created. Students must be given written confirmation of their participation in the party university and their success.¹⁵⁴

The first PHS campus was located in Liebenwalde in Brandenburg, close to forty kilometers north of Berlin and Anton Ackermann and Otto Meier were given political responsibility for the school. In December 1947, the school moved to Kleinmachnow, between the border of Berlin and Potsdam in the district of Brandenburg.¹⁵⁵

The first course offered at the PHS in Liebenwalde ran from 15 June through 14 December 1946 and had an enrollment of 141 students. Most of these students were mid-level functionaries from the local and regional party apparatus. However, by the 1960s, student enrollment became more selective and most course participants had already received a university or technical college education and the minimum age for study was 25 years old.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵³ Kluttig, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), “Geschichtliche Einblicke,” 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ Kluttig, 210.

¹⁵⁶ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), “Geschichtliche Einblicke,” 11-12.

curriculum taught in these earlier courses, as outlined in the SED document “Principles and Goals of the Socialist Unity Party,” prioritized the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin.¹⁵⁷ Initially, the PHS was made up of three main faculties: economics, history, and philosophy. In 1947, a fourth faculty was added: “the faculty of basic questions of Marxist Politics” and course offerings increased from the basic six-month course to nine-months, one-year, and two-years.¹⁵⁸ Prior to attending a course at the PHS, students were made to write an entrance exam that consisted of both written and oral sections and were mailed reading materials to study before their exam date. Introductory study topics covered before acceptance into a PHS



Figure 1: The PHS campus at Kleinmachnow. During the Nazi period it was used by the Reich Postal Ministry. The main building, pictured here, is called *Neue Hakeburg*. Along with this manor, there were other long buildings which were used for teaching. Photo credit: © Alexander Savin, WikiCommons.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

program included: fundamentals on Marxism-Leninism, visions of the CPSU, party structure and party politics and the history of the German workers' movement.¹⁵⁹ Students were selected six months in advance by state propaganda and management divisions and examinations were administered six weeks before the course start date.¹⁶⁰

In 1953, the school began offering three-year courses which awarded a social sciences degree and was also granted the right to award doctoral degrees and habilitation.¹⁶¹ On average, the PHS hosted around 750 students per year that were enrolled in the one and three-year courses, shorter qualification courses, graduate programs and courses for international students. The average number of professors, lecturers and teaching assistants regularly employed at one time was around 150.¹⁶² By the 1970s, the school maintained a distance learning department with fifteen district offices throughout the GDR, a foreign studies department and also had its own publishing house which regularly printed the *Theory and Practice: Scientific Contributions of the PHS* magazine. Students in the district branch courses consisted primarily of party functionaries for whom it was mandatory to complete a one-year program. District branch students were required to set aside two nights per week to study and were given twelve free working days to prepare for final examinations.¹⁶³

Although many former Antifa POWs were assigned to teaching positions in party training, the PHS made sure to appoint qualified chairs in the social sciences departments of the

¹⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch NY 4330, Invitation to Kurt Rossberg for course study at the PHS from the SED Central Committee, 15 August 1950.

¹⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 55850, Protokoll Nr. 51, Der Sitzung des Sekretariats des Zentral Komitees am 9 March 1951.

¹⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 55850, Protokoll Nr. 51, Der Sitzung des Sekretariats des Zentral Komitees am 9 March 1951.

¹⁶² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 55850, Protokoll Nr. 51, Der Sitzung des Sekretariats des Zentral Komitees am 9 March 1951.

¹⁶³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 55850, Protokoll Nr. 3/53 v. 12.1.1953, SED Zentral Komitee, Berlin, den 14 January 1953.

PHS and other GDR universities. In 1948, the PHS held a special training course for twenty-two university level instructors that focused on Marxism-Leninism and who were then appointed as chairs in various social sciences departments throughout the Eastern occupation zone.¹⁶⁴

Teachers at the PHS also regularly attended teaching conferences, received critical feedback on their pedagogical methods and the school usually attempted to recruit instructors from specific regions to teach topics which focused on that region. For example, if a course was being offered on the history of the Czech communist party, the PHS would attempt to find an instructor from Prague.¹⁶⁵ Instructors were encouraged to be enthusiastic, creative and to provide deeper analysis in their seminars rather than simply pursuing a question and answer approach. However, that proved not to be the case during Wolf's three decades of leadership.¹⁶⁶

Prior to the creation of East Germany on 7 October 1949, the Soviet occupation zone was under the control of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) which oversaw its political and social organization.¹⁶⁷ By this point, Stalinization was thoroughly underway, and the SED had begun purging political opponents from its ranks and many of these political targets were former SPD members.¹⁶⁸ Although the SPD and KPD merged to form the SED in April 1946, power remained in the hands of the old KPD members and the merger had been forced with the backing of the Soviets.¹⁶⁹ As early as June 1948, the SED was following Ulbricht's "party of a new type" which oversaw the Stalinization of the SED and a party based on the "first

¹⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86885, Lecture by Kurt Hager at the Parteihochschule Karl Marx on 13 July 1965 in Berlin.

¹⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, Memorandum, 24. May 1955. Meeting minutes for PHS meeting on 28 April 1955.

¹⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, Memorandum, meeting minutes for PHS meeting on 7 March 1955.

¹⁶⁷ Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 24.

¹⁶⁸ Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades, 1945-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49-50.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 17.

commandment of Stalinist politics: that ‘the party was always right’” and any deviation from the party line was considered an attack on party unity.¹⁷⁰

Both SMAD authorities and old KPD members took an immediate interest in higher education in the Eastern zone. According to John Connelly, “through the twin tools of denazification and democratization, that is, preferences for social background in student admissions,” Soviet authorities and German communists began the process of turning the higher education system into a program that would create “politically loyal elites.”¹⁷¹ University faculties in the social sciences underwent a denazification process and student selection began to favour students from worker-peasant backgrounds.¹⁷² SMAD did not allow universities to re-open until all former Nazi Party members had been removed. Connelly states that:

As a result of denazification, the ongoing deportations of specialists, and other unaccounted-for attritions, including war casualties, teaching staff active in the winter semester of 1944-45 declined from 1,630 to 286 (17.5 percent) by the summer semester 1947. The number of full professors fell from 461 to 123 (28 percent).¹⁷³

The SED’s success in transforming the East German higher education system was based on three key factors: first, the importance placed on education by SED authorities; second, the support of SMAD, and third, the availability of many politically reliable cadres.¹⁷⁴

East Germany’s focus on the importance of a socialist education was especially championed by Ulbricht, who promulgated many initiatives with the backing of the Soviets. Not only did he work to advance the recruitment of women in university programs but in 1950 he

¹⁷⁰ Peter Grieder, “The Leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany under Ulbricht” in *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany 1945-71*, edited by Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 24.

¹⁷¹ John Connelly, *Captive University*, 9.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Connelly, 95.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

also dedicated around two-million marks to triple the number of worker-peasant student admissions in GDR universities.¹⁷⁵ In 1950, the SED named the party training school for public administration in his honour. The DVA “Walter Ulbricht” (*Deutsche Verwaltungsakademie* “Walter Ulbricht”), which was located in Forst Zinna on the site of a former *Wehrmacht* training centre, opened in October 1948.¹⁷⁶ The purpose of the DVA was to train state-appointed staff, especially senior-level and administrative employees. Students at the DVA studied administration, economics and law in order to familiarize themselves with the new political and economic orientation of the GDR. The DVA was moved to Potsdam-Babelsberg in 1952 and eventually merged with the German University of Justice to form the German Academy for State and Jurisprudence “Walter Ulbricht” in February 1953.¹⁷⁷

As the PHS curriculum primarily focused on the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, the instructors had already experienced a thorough denazification process. However, students from the various programs were regularly reviewed as their enrollment also meant they were applying for party membership. Cancelled memberships were usually the result of past involvement with the Nazi Party, western sentiment, old age or careerism.¹⁷⁸ Authorities showed themselves to be quite lenient when assessing the applications of younger students who had been involved in the Nazi movement, as they were seen by the SED reviewing committee as being able to undergo a process of rehabilitation. For example, East German film director Günter Reisch had been a member of the Nazi Party since April 1944 and then joined the Free German Youth (*Freie*

¹⁷⁵ Connelly, 278.

¹⁷⁶ Markus Wicke, “Chronik” in *Der Universitätscampus Griebnitzsee: Eine Standortgeschichte* (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2016), 42.

¹⁷⁷ Wicke, 43.

¹⁷⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3375, review of members/candidates and exchange of party documents of the SED at the central, regional level and in mass organizations of the GDR, 1950-52. “Parteihochschule Karl Marx – 27 June 1951.”

Deutsche Jugend – FDJ) once the war ended. Reisch attended a one-year course at the PHS during the early 1950s.¹⁷⁹ However, authorities also cancelled memberships for evidence of having a “weak character.” These applications usually showed some form of dishonesty by downplaying their Nazi past or lacking the ability to practice self-criticism. For example, one application was cancelled because the student had a pack of American cigarettes and did not understand why this was a problem, while another application was terminated because the woman refused to evict a tenant from West Berlin that was renting a room in her home.¹⁸⁰

The faculty at the DVA “Walter Ulbricht” also went through a denazification process during this period. As the school had only recently been established in 1948, many of the instructors had been employed in administrative, economic and judicial positions during the Nazi period. Out of a sample of 112 evaluations, there were eighteen problematic appointments; eleven had been former Nazi Party members but only six had their SED candidate memberships revoked, while two faculty members were removed due to a former SPD membership and the other for maintaining western sentiment. The five former Nazi Party members able to keep their candidacy status were determined by factors such as showing an in-depth understanding of ideological theory, they were self-critical of their political past, had come to the SED by their own initiative or were quite young. Whereas the six former Nazi Party members whose memberships were cancelled, had shown a weak understanding of ideological theory, continued to maintain fascist sentiment or had joined the SED based on careerist motivations.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 26461, Kurt Hager work consultation with faculty at the Parteihochschule Karl Marx – 15 December 1981.” Meeting minutes include a discussion on Reisch’s attendance at the PHS during the 1950s.

¹⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3375, review of members/candidates and exchange of party documents of the SED at the central, regional level and in mass organizations of the GDR, 1950-52. “Parteihochschule Karl Marx – 27 June 1951.”

¹⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3375, review of members/candidates and exchange of party documents of the SED at the central, regional level and in mass organizations of the GDR, 1950-52. “*Deutsche Verwaltungsakademie* ‘Walter Ulbricht’ – 23 June 1951.”

Interestingly, despite Ulbricht's dedication to education in the eastern zone, he did not assign the majority of former teachers that returned from the Soviet Union to pedagogical roles. This was also the case for Wolf, who returned to Germany in April 1948 and moved through various positions, including working as a historical researcher for the Central Committee of the SED and then as a personal advisor to Paul Wandel.¹⁸² By December 1949, 142 teachers and other workers from the three central Soviet Antifa schools (Krasnogorsk, Ogrë, and Talica) were assigned important roles in the developing political system but only twenty-three of these functionaries were initially assigned to party training work.¹⁸³ According to Kluttig, most male pedagogues who returned from the Soviet Union in the post-war period experienced long-term careers in more esteemed non-educational positions within the branches of the SED. In contrast, when most female pedagogues returned to the eastern occupation zone, they were not assigned to esteemed political positions. Most were not even assigned to teaching positions, as these roles were increasingly replaced by younger and newly trained functionaries. Many of the early training courses were taught by former Soviet Antifa school graduates. Kluttig states that of 7500 central Soviet Antifa school graduates living in East Germany in the post-war period, 433 were used for work in political training.¹⁸⁴

The PHS was not only part of the central apparatus of the SED but it also belonged to the East German university system. This meant that PHS instructors were obligated to follow the regulations determined by the SED Central Committee and Politburo. Instructors were also

¹⁸² "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Hanna Wolf'" Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hanna-wolf>

¹⁸³ Kluttig, 57.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

expected to continue with their own academic research.¹⁸⁵ Faculty members both at the PHS and other GDR universities were regularly required to provide research and analysis on central party resolutions, expert reports and other academic documentation required by the SED and it helped develop close to 25,000 party functionaries.¹⁸⁶ Once a student completed a course at



Figure 2: The PHS campus on Rungestraße in East Berlin which has since been turned into a residential condominium. Photo credit: © Jörg Zägel, WikiCommons.

the PHS, they were provided with an assessment from their instructors, these assessments were not always entirely necessary for a student to continue their work within the mid-to-lower tiers of

¹⁸⁵ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), “Vorwort,” 7.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

the SED bureaucracy. For lower-level functionaries, it was usually enough to just finish their course work. However, functionaries who showed advanced understanding of ideological work had better chances of moving up within the SED party apparatus and such assessments helped respective SED department committees determine the future work of candidates.¹⁸⁷ Since the results of a student's performance at the PHS could have such a long-lasting impact on one's future career, the school took on an almost peremptory character and over the various decades of the GDR's existence, received a fair amount of criticism from SED functionaries.

Much of this criticism was directed at Wolf, who was viewed by many of her peers as being too dogmatic and unable to practice self-criticism. As soon as Wolf was appointed as Director of the PHS in September 1950, she sat in on various student seminars and complained about the lack of Stalinist doctrine being discussed and ordered the immediate addition of Stalin's own works to the reading lists.¹⁸⁸ After Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in February 1956, Wolf was accused by a group of her colleagues at the PHS of "Stalinizing" the student curriculum and rumors swirled that there was a campaign emerging for her removal.¹⁸⁹ Like any good strategist, Wolf overcame these accusations and had the reform-minded faculty members removed from their positions.¹⁹⁰ However, was this political scare enough to change Wolf's ways? Did she loosen the grip of her "iron fist" during the late 1950s or did she find new methods to enforce her ideological convictions in managing the school? The following chapter examines how Wolf dealt with these challenges during the 1950s and how she established herself as a dominant leader at the party school.

¹⁸⁷ Steffan Honig, "Abriss: SED-Relikt fällt erst nach 30 Jahren," *Volksstimme*, 1 September 2019. <https://www.volksstimme.de/sachsen-anhalt/sed-relikt-fallt-erst-nach-30-jahren-955242>

¹⁸⁸ Kluttig, 465.

¹⁸⁹ Weber, 221.

¹⁹⁰ Kluttig, 484.

Chapter 2:

A Wolf in SED Clothing: Hanna Wolf and the Crisis of De-Stalinization

The 1950s, also referred to as the *Aufbau* (reconstruction) period, was both a hopeful and tumultuous decade as the SED declared the building of socialism in East Germany. As these years gave way to Stalinization and establishing a new political order, the SED also worked purposefully in establishing new cohorts of socialist functionaries to help with the building of the regime. The majority of these new functionaries were trained at the PHS, under the leadership of Wolf, who played a pivotal role in establishing the Stalinist indoctrination which took place under her supervision. With her former experience running the Antifa school in Krasnogorsk, Wolf was more than prepared to take on the challenge of running the party college and did so with absolute tenacity and machination. Wolf proved to be one of the few female SED members that was able to not only achieve a high-ranking position but who also upheld that position for over thirty years. However, her longevity did not persist without challenges.

As a hardline Stalinist, Wolf faced the many ups and downs that characterized the *Aufbau* period, such as Stalin's death in 1953, the subsequent 17 June Uprisings and Khrushchev's denunciation of the dictator in 1956. This chapter examines how Wolf overcame these hurdles, securing her position as both the longtime Director of the PHS and as a member of the Central Committee of the SED. Although often described as thoughtful, funny and warm in her private life, Wolf developed a complex professional persona that was sometimes fervent and ferocious, and employed these traits in masterfully calculated ways in order to not only survive but thrive amongst her peers in the male-dominated party culture of the SED.

Mother and Fury? Successful Single Female Veteran Communists in the SED

Wolf's ability to stay in her role as Director of the PHS for thirty-three years, only stepping down due to old age and retirement, was itself a major milestone for a woman in the SED. When comparing the longevity of Wolf's career to other female veteran party members who maintained high ranking positions for notable lengths of time, only a few such women were able to do so who were not propped up due to the influence of their male partners or who were not appointed to positions that were considered to be more traditionally female.¹⁹¹ These women, such as Hilde Benjamin (Minister of Justice, 1953-67) and Grete Wittkowski (President of the State Bank, 1967-74), were all veteran KPD members who were unmarried and fully devoted to their political work. As Catherine Epstein has shown, veteran communists, that is, those pre-1933 KPD members who faced persecution and participated in resistance to the Nazi regime, often held esteemed positions in the GDR.¹⁹² However, Epstein also notes that for many female veteran communists, complete devotion to the communist cause was itself not enough to achieve success in the SED where masculine culture dominated.¹⁹³

So, what did these three women have in common that allowed them to single-handedly break through the "glass ceiling" of the SED? Similar to Wolf, both Benjamin and Wittkowski were also tenacious and outspoken women who used these merits to successfully champion for the communist cause. However, these strengths were only acceptable when the cause aligned with the ideals of the party and both Wittkowski and Benjamin made significant strategic miscalculations during their careers. Wittkowski was a talented economist, with a PhD from the University of Basel and had worked closely with fellow East German economist Jürgen

¹⁹¹ Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 119-20.

¹⁹² Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 2.

¹⁹³ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 121.

Kuczynski. During the Nazi period, Wittkowski went into exile in Switzerland but continued to pursue illegal work, often travelling back into Germany to deliver communist literature. As both a communist and a Jew, this was extremely dangerous and after being arrested by the Swiss police for illegal political activity in 1938, Wittkowski eventually left for England in 1939.¹⁹⁴ Upon returning to Germany in 1946, Wittkowski worked as a journalist writing economic columns for her and Kuczynski's own editorial called *The Economist (Die Wirtschaft)* and also for *Neues Deutschland*.¹⁹⁵ In 1950, she was appointed as Vice President of the State Planning Commission but due to her Jewish background and time spent in England during the war, she was demoted over suspicions that she had been ideologically contaminated from living in the West. This demotion did not last long however, as Wittkowski was academically gifted and had proven herself to be a valuable asset to the party and in 1953 she was reinstated as Deputy President.¹⁹⁶

Unlike Wolf, who staunchly stood by Ulbricht when he faced political opposition, Wittkowski was much more comfortable voicing her opinions. After Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956, Wittkowski used the opportunity to openly criticize the SED leader about past economic reforms and was removed from the Central Committee and again from her Deputy President position with the State Planning Commission. Fortunately for Wittkowski, she was able to fall back on her superior intellectual abilities and was eventually once again reinstated to the Central Committee in 1963 and then appointed as President of the State Bank in 1967.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Margarete Wittkowski.'" Accessed 15 April 2022. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/margarete-grete-wittkowski>

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 138-40.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Although Wittkowski held this position until her death in October 1974, she had learned a valuable lesson about speaking out against the ideological constraints of the regime and was reprimanded for stepping outside the party line.¹⁹⁸

Similar to Wittkowski, Benjamin was also an incredibly valuable asset to the SED. Not only did she work as a lawyer helping other communists during the late 1920s and early 1930s, but she was also fluent in Russian.¹⁹⁹ Once the Nazis came to power her life drastically changed. She was no longer allowed to work in law and her Jewish husband was sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp where he died in 1942. From 1939 through 1945, Benjamin worked in a factory to make ends meet but went back to practicing law once the war ended and was appointed as Minister of Justice in 1953.²⁰⁰ During the early 1950s, Benjamin helped preside over the Waldheim Trials, which were a series of secret trials and show trials that convicted over three thousand German POWs and other war criminals. These trials were controversial because the accused were not provided with defense lawyers and the majority of cases were settled within twenty to thirty minutes each. Most of the sentences resulted in fifteen to twenty-year prison terms, but twenty-four prisoners were executed, with Benjamin handing out two of those executions. As a result, Benjamin was sometimes referred to as “Bloody Hilde” or “the Red Guillotine.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Margarete Wittkowski’” Accessed 15 April 2022. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/margarete-grete-wittkowski>

¹⁹⁹ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Hilde Benjamin’” Accessed 15 April 2022. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hilde-benjamin>

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Marianne Brentzel, “Leseprobe: *Die Machtfrau: Hilde Benjamin, 1902-1989.*” Accessed 12 April 2022. <https://www.mariannebrentzel.de/benjamin-leseprobe.html>

Like Wittkowski, Benjamin was also an outspoken woman who was not afraid to challenge the official party line. In 1967, Ulbricht had Benjamin removed from her position due to “health concerns.”²⁰² However, Benjamin had played a significant role in advocating for reforming the Family Code in East German law, which included giving women the right to choose their family name, more equality for children born out of wedlock and more divorce rights for women.²⁰³ Benjamin also played a major role in having Paragraph 175 removed from the East German penal code, which abolished the illegality of consenting males over the age of eighteen to take part in homosexual acts. According to Polish historian Krzysztof Zablocki, Benjamin’s son Michael, who was also a lawyer, was known to be a homosexual and Benjamin often campaigned for the removal of Paragraph 175 at SED meetings, stating that it was a “remnant of decadent bourgeois lawmaking, for which there was no place in the progressive penal code of democratic and socialist Germany.”²⁰⁴ The outdated paragraph was removed in 1968, however, Benjamin’s political career was over. Whatever the reason for Benjamin’s mysterious downfall, it is clear that she began stepping on too many toes amongst her peers in the SED.²⁰⁵

As Wittkowski and Benjamin proved to be tenacious in their support for the regime they were also unafraid to speak their mind when advocating for issues they felt strongly about and that proved to be unpopular amongst the party leadership. Fortunately for Wittkowski, her intellectual talents as an economist set her apart from other SED members and enabled her to be

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Marianne Brentzel, “Leseprobe: *Die Machtfrau: Hilde Benjamin, 1902-1989.*” Accessed 12 April 2022. <https://www.mariannebrentzel.de/benjamin-leseprobe.html>

²⁰⁴ Krzysztof Zablocki, “Wolfgang Jöhling: A GDR Citizen in the ‘Promised Land’” in *Sexual Culture in Germany in the 1970s: A Golden Age for Queers?* Edited by Janine Afken and Benedikt Wolf (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan), 222-23.

²⁰⁵ Zablocki, 223.

readmitted into the upper echelons of the SED bureaucracy, albeit, as long as she fell in line with the aims of the regime. Benjamin had also proved herself to be a staunch supporter of Ulbricht and the goals of the regime, but her dedication to her personal convictions were in opposition to Ulbricht's backward and dogmatic line of thinking later in her career. Benjamin's personal advisor described her as being "both mother and 'fury' at the same time," and clearly there was only room for 'fury' if a single female veteran communist wanted to remain in a position of power in the SED.²⁰⁶

Similar to Benjamin, Wolf was also a mother and her daughter Erika Wolf was born in the Soviet Union in 1940. Not much is known about Erika Wolf, as Hanna Wolf's files are still closed due to the thirty-year rule at the *Bundesarchiv*-Lichterfelde location. According to the SED biography of Wilhelm Knigge, Wolf's longtime partner, Erika became a doctor and was Wolf's only child.²⁰⁷ In contrast to Benjamin, Wolf rarely, if ever, discussed her daughter in official political or professional situations. The only reference found in which Wolf discusses the existence of a child is in a personal letter to Jürgen Kuczynski from 1984, where she references having a grandson.²⁰⁸ Even as a mother, Wolf's political convictions appeared to have taken centre-stage as she volunteered to go to the front during the Second World War while in the Soviet Union to help fight the communist cause and this was only one year after giving birth.²⁰⁹ While Benjamin advocated for more rights for her son, Wolf kept her personal life more private and did not allow family obligations to come between her professional and political aspirations.

²⁰⁶ Marianne Brentzel, "Leseprobe: *Die Machtfrau: Hilde Benjamin, 1902-1989*." Accessed 12 April 2022. <https://www.mariannebrentzel.de/benjamin-leseprobe.html>

²⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62162, Wilhelm Knigge short biography. 14 April 1971.

²⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, "Letter from Comrade Hanna Wolf to Jürgen Kuczynski – 4 January 1984."

²⁰⁹ Uhlig, 102.

This is where Wolf differed from her female veteran communist peers who broke through the patriarchal atmosphere of the SED bureaucracy. Unlike Wittkowski and Benjamin, Wolf did not have an impressive academic background to fall back on if she chose to speak out of line. Although she had attended the University of Berlin during the 1920s, studying philosophy and history, she did not finish her degree and most of her education was completed at various party schools in the Soviet Union.²¹⁰ Although not completely talentless or intellectually inferior, as Wolf was multi-lingual and had a strong grasp of communist theory, her path to success was markedly different in that she used her personal charm and wit to advance within the male sphere



Figure 3: Hanna Wolf member identification card for the SED. SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 27763.

²¹⁰ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Hanna Wolf.’” Accessed 15 October 2021. <https://www.bundesstiftungaufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hanna-wolf>

of the KPD and then SED. Wolf was cunning and knew how to align herself with the right people at the right times, and unlike Benjamin, proved herself to be more than willing to sacrifice a friendship or personal relationship for her own benefit. As Benjamin was both “mother and fury,” Wolf could be pure “fury” in her professional life and fully understood her role in the SED hierarchy, knowing the dangers that existed if she stepped out of line or pushed too far for unpopular reforms.

From Wolf’s early days in the KPD, she showed herself to be a successful social climber, able to work her way into the elite M-Apparat after only joining the party two years prior. She also survived the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union, even advancing her position by being appointed as the Director of the ANTIFA School in Krasnogorsk. Wolf achieved these successes on her own accord and without the help of a more influential husband. Although unmarried, Wolf did have a life partner who was also a dedicated communist. However, he was not more politically influential than Wolf and the two met while he was a student at the PHS between 1951 and 1952.²¹¹ Willi, or Wilhelm Knigge, had joined the KPD in 1927 in Bremen and spent the majority of the Nazi period in France, where he continued working as a member of the KPD group that was in exile in Paris. In 1951, he moved from Bremen to the GDR, studying at the PHS between 1951 and 1952 and then worked various positions, eventually becoming Deputy Head of the Transport Department of the Central Committee of the SED in 1971.²¹² Wolf and Knigge lived together in Pankow in East Berlin and remained together until his death in 1995.²¹³

²¹¹ Wilhelm Mensing, Georg Herbstritt and Gudrun Weber. *SED-Hilfe für West-Genossen: Die Arbeit der Abteilung Verkehr beim Zentralkomitee der SED im Spiegel der Überlieferung des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR (1946–1976)*. Hg. BStU. Berlin, 2010. Page 100. <http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421307146>

²¹² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62162, Wilhelm Knigge short biography. 14 April 1971.

²¹³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62162, Wilhelm Knigge short biography. 14 April 1971.

How much of an impact Knigge had on Wolf is hard to determine, especially since her personal files at the German Federal Archives are still sealed due to the thirty-year rule. However, most personal and academic accounts mentioning Wolf rarely mention Knigge alongside her name which in itself is illustrative of Wolf's own autonomous nature. When reading about other female East German politicians whose political fortunes rose and fell alongside their husbands, such as Margot Honecker, Minister of National Education for twenty-six years, or Elli Schmidt, Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League from 1949 through 1953, it is much more common to find their names alongside references to their more influential husbands.²¹⁴


Nom Name	<i>KNIGGE alias Vautier</i>	SIGNALEMENT PERSONALBESCHREIBUNG	
Prénoms Vorname	<i>Wilhelm (Robert)</i>	Taille Grösse	<i>1.82 m</i>
Nationalité Staatsangehörigkeit	<i>allemande</i>	Cheveux Haare	<i>châtain</i>
né geb	<i>16 décembre 1906</i>	Bouche Mund	<i>normale</i>
à zu	<i>Bremen</i>	Yeux Augen	<i>gris</i>
Profession Beruf	<i>maçon</i>	Visage Gesicht	<i>ovale</i>
Domicile Wohnort	<i>Paris</i>	Signes particuliers Besondere Kennzeichen	
Rue Strasse	<i>44 rue Victor Hugo</i>		
Date d'admission Datum der Aufnahme	<i>dès le début</i>		
			 Signature du Titulaire.

Figure 4: Wilhelm Knigge fake identification card from his time spent in France during the Second World War. SAPMO-BArch SGY 30/ 1078.

²¹⁴ Margot Honecker was married to Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the SED, 1971-1989. Elli Schmidt was married to Anton Ackermann, SED functionary and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1953.

When researching Wolf, it becomes evident that she had an intensely strong personality which most likely outshone that of her partner, as she was not only ferocious in speech but also quick witted, if not sometimes crass. In a personal letter from February 1954 to Heinz Kurze, the Assistant Director of the PHS (1950-58), Wolf shows some of her tongue-in-cheek personality. The letter also displays her participating in “male banter” with her colleague:

Dear Heinz!
Greetings from the airport! How am I? I spoke to W.U.
[Walter Ulbricht] and K.S. [Karl Schirdewan]. Is there still
something to do with Rungestrasse... Toi, toi. We want to
decide by Tuesday. I promised K.S. admission conditions for
the PHS and distance learning. New from last year, IV Party
Congress, National Congress and Youth Congress. Possibly,
some of the old courses. Send that in early Monday morning...
Greetings,
Hanna and Willi
Say hello to your bosom friend. Rest well and let your wife
seduce you!²¹⁵

According to sociologist Sarah Rutherford, “banter often includes the use of sexual language and humour” and usually occurs in industries that are male dominated.²¹⁶ Rutherford states that “male banter” is especially common in industries where there is danger and risk, and it can “alleviate feelings of powerlessness, shore up a particular type of masculinity by emphasizing women’s difference... [and] act as a male bonding mechanism.”²¹⁷ Although Wolf was often remembered for her sense of humour, here she uses sexual language as a bonding mechanism with her colleague in the male dominated party culture of the SED.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Letter to Heinz Kurze from Hanna Wolf. February 1954. Received in a package of documents from *Rotes Antiquariat* in Berlin.

²¹⁶ Sarah Rutherford, *Women’s Work, Men’s Cultures: Overcoming Resistance and Changing Organizational Cultures* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 175.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Rutherford, 175-76.

Another female veteran communist who held a prominent party position was the former Director of the Academy of Social Sciences, Helen “Lene” Berg (1951-1958). Similar to Wolf, Berg had also been involved in socialist groups in her youth and spent the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union, where she served as Head of the German section of the ILS until its closing in 1937, before being appointed as Director of the ANTIFA school for German POWs in Talica.²¹⁹ After returning to Berlin once the Second World War ended, Berg was appointed as Director of the Academy of Social Sciences for nearly seven years and became a member of the Central Committee in 1958.²²⁰ Despite Wolf and Berg sharing a similar political trajectory, it is difficult to compare the two women in their respective roles as Directors because Berg’s personal files at the *Bundesarchiv*-Lichterfelde location are also closed due to the thirty-year rule.²²¹

Although there are many personal accounts from former PHS students and faculty that describe Wolf’s character, mostly due to her dictatorial methods, personal reflections of Berg are quite meagre. However, former Party Secretary in the Department of Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism at the Academy of Social Sciences during the 1950s, Herbert Prauss, recalls how Berg responded to the news of Stalin’s death in March 1953, which shows that she too, was a devoted hardliner. Prauss states that after Stalin’s death, Berg and Walter Berthold, the former Party Secretary of the Institute, “immediately ordered a prolonged wake. Two comrades at a time had to stand watch for fifteen minutes to the right and left of a bust of Stalin adorned with a funeral wreath, remaining motionless with their countenances fixed in an expression of grief.”²²²

²¹⁹ Gottfried Hamacher, *et al. Gegen Hitler. Deutsche in der Resistance, in den Streitkräften an der Antihitlerkoalition und der Bewegung “Freies Deutschland.” Kurzbiografien* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2005), 29.

²²⁰ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Helen (Lene) Berg’” Accessed 15 April 2023. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/helene-lene-berg?ID=209>

²²¹ Lene Berg died on 21 February 2006.

²²² Herbert Prauss, *Doch es war nicht die Wahrheit* (Berlin: Morus-Verlag, 1960), 91-93.

Another former faculty member, Alfred Kosing, noted that after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956, he could tell "how affected and at a loss" Berg was and that she informed the Academy faculty members about the crimes of Stalin in a very "superficial and often apologetic and euphemistic manner."²²³

Despite Berg also being a devoted Stalinist during the early 1950s, it is unclear why she left her position as Director of the Academy of Social Sciences. However, in contrast to Wolf, Berg had been married to Paul Wandel, who also worked at the ILS in the Soviet Union and then served as Minister of Education in the GDR (1949-1952) until being appointed as the Secretary of Culture and Education at the Central Committee.²²⁴ In October 1957, Wandel fell victim to Ulbricht's attack against revisionism in the aftermath of the cultural thaw that took place after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956. Due to "insufficient hardness in carrying out the cultural-political line of the SED leadership" in dealing with revisionism in GDR universities, Wandel was severely reprimanded by Ulbricht and was removed from his position in the Secretariat and was made Ambassador to the People's Republic of China in 1958.²²⁵ Whether Berg was also reprimanded for "insufficient hardness" is difficult to determine. However, Berg's appointment as Director of the Academy of Social Sciences ended around the same time that her more powerful husband was removed from his position.²²⁶

Wolf's success as a long-serving female SED member and Director of the training college can be attributed to a myriad of reasons. Not only was she a veteran communist, who had joined the party in 1930 in Berlin, she also spent over fifteen years in the Soviet Union during

²²³ Alfred Kosing, "Der bedeutendste Staatsmann der DDR" in *Walter Ulbricht*, edited by Egon Krenz (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2013), 16.

²²⁴ "Paul Wandel" in *Munzinger Online/Personen - International Biographical Archive*. <http://www.munzinger.de/document/00000002826>. Accessed on 5 April 2023.

²²⁵ McCauley, 100.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

the Nazi period. Wolf was also multi-lingual and had been in teaching roles throughout most of her adult life. However, it was her own personal characteristics that led to her overall success, as not only was she funny and warm in personal encounters but she was also strategic when it came to how she carried herself amongst her peers, often adopting more masculine attributes in professional situations which made others perceive her as cold and domineering. As Donna Harsch points out, women in the East German regime experienced equality in regard to being recruited into the workforce at higher numbers than other states during the 1950s, but there existed an invisible barrier as to how far they could advance professionally and women typically were still paid lower salaries than men.²²⁷

Although Wolf was never admitted into the Politburo, meeting minutes from a Central Committee meeting on 12 January 1953 show that she out earned her male colleagues at the PHS, bringing in 3200 *Deutsche Mark* (DM) per month, while the second highest wage belonged to Dr. Alfred Lemnitz, Director of the Teaching Department and Chair of the Department of Political Economics, who earned 3000 DM per month.²²⁸ Wolf's wage was quite high not only for a female but for any valued member of the SED. At this time, the average income for an SED district secretary was 1100 DM per month and the average overall income for a working-class family with two children that year was 295 DM per month.²²⁹ This contradictory professional persona seemed to work in Wolf's favour and she applied these traits systematically throughout her career, but especially during the 1950s when she was establishing herself as a dominant personality amongst her peers in the SED.

²²⁷ Harsch, "Squaring the Circle," 151.

²²⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/56028, "Protokoll Nr. 3/53 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des Zentralkomitees am 12 January 1953."

²²⁹ Falcon Werkentin, "Wir wollen Butter - keine Kanonen." *Berliner Morgenpost*. 4 September 2003. <https://www.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/politik/article102243269/Wir-wollen-Butter-keine-Kanonen.html>

Women of the Politburo

Despite Wolf's longstanding role as Director of the PHS, she did face one significant barrier in her political career, as she was never made a candidate member of the SED's Politburo. Wolf even maintained close relations with both Ulbricht and Honecker during their leadership periods but was still never able to overcome this last hurdle. However, five women in the SED did achieve candidate status and an examination of their political lives provides insight into why not only Wolf, but other female veteran communists like Wittkowski and Benjamin, were never able to advance to the highest party organ of the SED. Out of the five women who achieved candidate status, two were married to more influential partners, two were appointed to positions deemed as women's work, while one woman proved neither and was the longest serving female candidate member on the SED's powerful Politburo.

Although not a veteran communist like Wittkowski, Benjamin or Wolf, Margarete Müller also held a long-term position in the SED party apparatus. Müller was born in Prudnik, Poland in 1931 and her family relocated to Germany when she was a child. As a teenager, she became one of the first females in her village to be trained as a tractor driver and she also worked on a collective farm and then pursued agricultural studies at a technical school in Demmin. In 1951, Müller joined the SED and was sent to study at the Agricultural Institute in Leningrad from 1953 until 1958. After returning to East Germany, she worked as an agronomist before being appointed as Chairwoman of the Agricultural Productive Cooperative (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft* - LPG) in her village of Kotelow, which is located east of Neubrandenburg.²³⁰ Müller's position as a high-ranking female SED member lasted for over

²³⁰ Margaret Müller, "Er wollte Praktiker im Politburo. Ich war jung, qualifiziert, Frau und leitete eine Genossenschaft" in *Walter Ulbricht*, edited by Egon Krenz (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2013), 305-308.

twenty-five years. She was first appointed to the Central Committee and the Politburo in 1963 and remained in these positions until 1989.²³¹

In contrast to many other high-ranking women in the SED, Müller represented a generational shift in that she was not only young but also came of age as an East German adolescent. According to Mary Fulbrook and Dorothee Wierling, the generational cohort of the “1929ers,” that is, those Germans who were born during the late 1920s and early 1930s, often experienced upward mobility in being recruited into mass organizations and party functionary positions due to older generations being tainted by the Nazi regime. This was especially apparent for women, who were recruited into the workforce during the 1950s and 1960s to help fill the void left by the loss of German men during the Second World War.²³² In an interview with Egon Krenz, who had been a member of the SED since 1955 and was briefly appointed as Honecker’s replacement as Party General Secretary in 1989, Müller recalls her experience as one of the few high-ranking women in the SED. Müller states that she was first appointed to the Politburo as a result of her young age and technical experience. In fact, she states that part of the reason Ulbricht appointed her was because he “systematically followed young people.”²³³ Müller also noted that when Ulbricht first approached her about becoming a candidate member, she initially declined due to her dislike of public speaking. However, Ulbricht responded that her ability to influence the farmers is what mattered more than making public speeches and during her time as a Politburo candidate member, Ulbricht never pressured her to speak.²³⁴

²³¹ Müller, 305.

²³² Dorothee Wierling, “How do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, edited by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 206-207. Also see Mary Fulbrook’s *Dissonant Lives. Generations and Violence Through the German Dictatorships*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²³³ Müller, 310.

²³⁴ Müller, 311-12.

Müller proved to be an anomaly amongst the high-ranking female members of the SED. However, aside from her technical training and youth, which helped garner her a powerful position in the party apparatus, Müller's interview with Krenz also highlighted some significant insights in regard to her longstanding position in the male dominated party culture of the SED. According to Müller, despite her appointments to the Central Committee, the Politburo, and the State Council (1971-1989), she continued to live as a single woman in Kotelow, where she cultivated her own land. She also mentioned that she never had bodyguards or anyone from the party helping her run her farm, except one time when she cut her foot by running it over with a lawn mower. Müller also stated that she did not have a personal driver and when she had to attend meetings in East Berlin, she would travel to Neubrandenburg where she would be picked up by car.²³⁵

Despite Müller's esteemed political position, she continued to live a country life far removed from the party politics in East Berlin. Unless she had to attend meetings or other political events, she claimed that she lived in rubber boots and maintained a quiet life in her village. Müller also had around fifty chickens on her farm and noted how she once attended a Central Committee meeting in East Berlin and was given a rooster by another SED member.²³⁶ Although Müller was the longest standing female candidate member of the Politburo, she appears to have been compliant and more than content when it came to staying in her lane and remaining somewhat removed from a more active political life in the East German capital. As Wittkowski, Benjamin and Wolf pursued their positions with dedicated "fury," Müller proved to be a dedicated farmer whose passion for agriculture came first and foremost, which kept her out of the SED's line of fire and helped maintain her high-ranking position.

²³⁵ Müller, 313-15.

²³⁶ Müller, 313-14.

Another female who was appointed as a candidate member of the Politburo was Ingeburg Lange, who first joined the KPD in 1945, became a candidate member of the Central Committee in 1963, and then was appointed as a candidate member of the Politburo from 1973 until 1989. Lange was responsible for Women's Policy in the East German regime and played a significant role in liberalizing East Germany's abortion laws. Lange had also studied at the PHS, earning a social sciences degree during the late 1950s and early 1960s.²³⁷ Although Lange was not married to a more influential male partner, her position was clearly deemed more representative of female work and she was the only new female candidate member appointed to the Politburo under Honecker's leadership. According to Günter Schabowski, former Chief Editor of *Neues Deutschland* and member of the Politburo, Lange was not taken seriously during Politburo meetings. Schabowski stated that, "from time to time Inge Lange was the object of lightly ironic banter, if she in some context pointed to the interests of women. It would all be relatively temperate and, as far as those not involved were concerned, there was nothing too crazy about it."²³⁸ Despite making important advancements in women's policy in the GDR, Lange's position on the Politburo appears to have been the result of tokenism, that is, appointing a person from a minority group in order to give the appearance of diversity in the workplace.²³⁹

The other women, aside from Lange, who were made candidate members of the Politburo were all appointed under Ulbricht's leadership. However, this was not necessarily due to Ulbricht being supportive of women's policy or women's equality. As Harsch points out, communists during the 1950s believed that women's emancipation was directly tied to their

²³⁷ Inge Lange, "In der Frauenpolitik, so Ulbricht, dürfen nicht die Buchhalter reden" in *Walter Ulbricht*, edited by Egon Krenz (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2013), 538.

²³⁸ Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 167.

²³⁹ Gretchen R. Webber and Patti Giuffre, "Women's Relationships with Women at Work: Barriers to Solidarity," *Sociology Compass*, no. 13 (2019): 2.

participation in production and that their involvement in the regime was not about men or women but about labour.²⁴⁰ Aside from the two female candidate members who were married to more influential partners, the other two women appointed during Ulbricht's leadership had technical training and their expertise was highly valued. The two women who achieved candidate status without any prior technical or university education were Edith Baumann, Honecker's first wife, who worked in the Women's Department from 1955 until 1961, and Elli Schmidt, candidate member from 1950 to 1953 and also the only female veteran communist who reached candidate status.²⁴¹ However, Schmidt had been married to Anton Ackermann, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the GDR. From 1949 through 1953, Schmidt was appointed as Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League and both her and Ackermann were expelled from the Politburo in July 1953 for "factionalism."²⁴²

Aside from Müller, the other woman appointed as a candidate member to the Politburo that had technical training in her field was Luise Ermisch (1958-1963). Ermisch had experience managing dress factories and qualified as a clothing textile engineer until becoming the Chairwoman of the Clothing Industry Business Council of the GDR. Ermisch had developed the "Luise Ermisch Method," which was a process used in industrial production that increased productivity. As a result of this new method in textile manufacturing, Ermisch was the first female in the GDR to be awarded the Hero of Labour Award in 1950, which was given annually to East Germans who made significant contributions in improving the East German economy.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Harsch, "Squaring the Circle," 155.

²⁴¹ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 120.

²⁴² Matthew Stibbe, "The SED, German Communism and the June 1953 Uprising: New Trends and New Research" in *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule*, edited by Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 46.

²⁴³ Katherine Pence, "Labours of Consumption: Gendered Consumers in Post-war East and West German Reconstruction" in *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, edited by Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (London: Routledge, 1996), 225.

Although not as young as Müller, Ermisch was appointed in 1958, around the time when Ulbricht first started to take an interest in more technological affairs, which would see him spur on the scientific technological revolution during the 1960s.²⁴⁴

Aside from the brief positions held by Baumann and Schmidt, the three women who achieved candidate status on the Politburo and who were not married to more powerful partners, either had advanced technical expertise or were specifically appointed to a role representative of women's policy. Even Honecker's second wife, Margot Honecker, former Minister of Education from 1963 to 1989, and arguably the most powerful woman in the SED during Honecker's period of leadership, was never appointed to the SED's highest decision making body.²⁴⁵ It is fair to say that the Politburo and upper echelons of the SED party apparatus remained dominated by men throughout the GDR's existence and the few women who did achieve candidate status either had a more powerful male partner, were younger and chosen for their technical expertise, or in the case of Lange, were deemed necessary as a "token" representative of women's policy.

In Figure 5 (next page), the complexity of Wolf's personality is on display. Whether the image was shared amongst the party leadership in a news bulletin or in media for the event taking place is unknown. What is striking about this photo is the cheerfulness it depicts. The three women are drinking what looks like wine while laughing and eating. It appears as if Wolf is the one speaking, perhaps making a joke while the other women react heartily to her words. What remains unknown is the topic of conversation. Was Wolf participating in friendly banter? Could she have been making a critical joke at the expense of another party member? These details, along with the lack of information about the consumption and circulation of the image,

²⁴⁴ "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Luise Ermisch'" Accessed 15 April 2023. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/luise-ermisch>

²⁴⁵ Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 167.



Figure 5: Elisabeth Walther in discussion with Margarete Wittkowski and Hanna Wolf after receiving the Clara Zetkin Medal in recognition for her efforts in building socialism in the GDR. 7 March 1964. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-C0307-0006-005.

further complicates attempts at interpretation. Despite these minor obstacles, there is still much that can be gleaned from the image. For example, the presentation of the Clara Zetkin medal, which was awarded to Elisabeth Walther for International Women's Day in 1964, was an official SED event, with both male and female party members in attendance.²⁴⁶ Rather than viewing an image of Wolf networking with more powerful male colleagues, here she is chatting with two other high-ranking women, neither of whom were members of the Politburo. Walther was the Director of a stockings factory and Wittkowski was Deputy Chair of the Council of Ministers

²⁴⁶ Clara Zetkin was a German feminist SPD and then KPD member. She was editor of the socialist paper *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) and also helped found the International Socialist Women's Congress in 1907. In 1910, Zetkin campaigned at the Second International Socialist Women's Conference to make 8 March into International Women's Day.

(before being re-appointed as President of the State Bank in 1967).²⁴⁷ Not only is Wolf chatting, but she is making the women laugh and smile. This image contradicts the “iron maiden” persona described by some of her SED peers, that she was cold, harsh, and sometimes fanatical during Central Committee meetings.

Another aspect of the photo that remains ambiguous is whether the image was taken in real-time or if it was staged. Jennifer Evans states that the main purpose of visual sources is to make us believe that what we see is “life as it happened.” However, Evans also notes that “shrouded from view are the ways in which a photo’s actual qualities, strategies, and features render meaning intelligible to us in the first place” and “although they often obfuscate the technology of making meaning under the cover of realism, photographs are active sources, disciplining the eye to see certain things more plainly at distinct moments in time.”²⁴⁸ In this regard, does the image convey a real moment in time or a staged opportunity of cooperation and harmony? Were the three women asked beforehand to have their photo taken or were they caught in a moment of genuine lightheartedness? If the former, did Wolf choose to position herself in this way to appear as a more dominant personality? She certainly seems to be the one making the joke or leading the discussion. If the latter, is this a rare glimpse of Wolf’s genuine personality? Does this image convey natural warmth and friendliness? The photo also pushes the viewer to question Wolf’s personal and professional relationships with other women. Did she have many female friends and acquaintances? Most sources I’ve found that include details about Wolf come from her male peers in the SED, such as comments in the memoir literature from Heinz Brandt, Markus Wolf and Rudolf Herrnstadt. Whether the photograph is a realistic representation of

²⁴⁷ Wittkowski was the only female ever appointed to a Deputy Chair position on the Council of Ministers where she oversaw Trade, Supply and Agriculture.

²⁴⁸ Jennifer Evans, “Historicizing the Visual,” *German Studies Review*, vol. 35, no. 3 (October 2012): 486.

Wolf amongst her peers remains uncertain. However, it is an interesting image to ponder while trying to understand who Wolf was as a person outside of her role as an active SED party member.

The photograph was taken on 7 March 1964, one day prior to International Women's Day (8 March), which celebrates the work and commitment of women in their efforts to achieve fair participation in political, social and economic life.²⁴⁹ The image was taken during events following the awarding of the Clara Zetkin Medal, which was presented to Walther that year. This medal was awarded to women who made significant efforts in developing and advancing East Germany's socialist society. Most of the women who received the medal were professional working women who were also mothers in order to reflect the GDR's more progressive initiatives on gender equality in contrast to Western democracies.²⁵⁰ As pointed out by both Gast and Harsch, the GDR was not as progressive when it came to women's equal integration into the work-force when examining the types of work women performed.²⁵¹ As Gast argues that female functionaries were most active in departments and roles that were "traditionally most likely to be granted to women," this was the case for Walther, who had worked her way up in the party apparatus and professional field managing women's hosiery factories.²⁵²

Walther was born in Breslau in 1926 (since 1945 the city of Wrocław in Poland) to a merchant father and joined the Nazi Party in 1944. Walther was born into the generational cohort of the "1929ers," who Fulbrook and Wierling note experienced more upward mobility in being recruited into the party apparatus or mass organizations due to their youth.²⁵³ After the end of the

²⁴⁹ Iwona Dadej and Angelique Leszczawski-Schwerk, "Together and Apart: Polish Women's Rights Activists and the Beginnings of International Women's Day Around 1911," *Aspasia*, vol. 6, (2012): 28.

²⁵⁰ Günter Tautz, *Taschenlexikon Orden und Medaillen - Staatliche Auszeichnungen der DDR*, second edition (Leipzig, VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1983), 14.

²⁵¹ Harsch, "Squaring the Circle," 151.

²⁵² Schmole, 190.

²⁵³ Wierling, 206-207.

Second World War in 1945, Walther found work at a hosiery factory where she trained as a textile technician. In 1949, she studied textile engineering at the Chemnitz Textile School. Walther returned to the same factory in Arwa after her education and advanced to a management position. By 1963, she was elected as a candidate member of the Central Committee of the SED. By 1971, Walther was made a full member of the Central Committee and also acted as the General Director of the *VEB Stumpfkombinat Esda Thalheim* and oversaw all hosiery factories in East Germany.²⁵⁴

While Wolf had an impressive communist background and decades of networking amongst the party leadership, Walther had technical training as an engineer and also represented a field that was considered more traditionally female. Although Walther had an impressive career that was fairly long-lasting, she was eventually removed from her position as General Director of the parent factory in Thaleim in 1980. She was replaced by a man named Roland Ziegenhals and moved to another stockings factory where she worked as manager until 1983. Why Walther was replaced by a new male General Director is unclear but it does appear that she was demoted for one reason or another. Walther was only fifty-four years old when she moved on to a lower-level position managing a single factory in 1983.²⁵⁵

Personality, Politics, and the *Parteihochschule Karl Marx*

Despite not reaching the highest organ of power in the SED party apparatus, Wolf still maintained a great deal of authority and influence in her position as Director of the PHS, which she held for thirty-three years. Arriving in Kleinmachnow in September 1950, Wolf wasted little

²⁵⁴ “Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch ‘Wer war wer in der DDR? – Elisabeth Walther’” Accessed 15 November 2023. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/k-ataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/elisabeth-walther>

²⁵⁵ “Valutaerlöse liegen über dem Durchschnitt?” *Neues Deutschland*, 8 November 1989.

time in making her presence known at the party school, immediately taking the reins from her forerunners Rudolf Lindau and Paul Lezner, who had left the school prior to her arrival. Described as short and plump with a puffy face and narrow eyes, Wolf was a person of contradictions.²⁵⁶ Markus Wolf, former Deputy Minister for State Security in the GDR (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* – MfS), had known Wolf since the Nazi period when both had emigrated to the Soviet Union and remarked on how different she was between her personal and professional life. He stated that in private she was witty, funny and thoughtful, while professionally she was intolerable and dogmatic. He described her speeches in front of the SED Central Committee as fanatical and that she was harsh towards anyone who didn't follow the party line.²⁵⁷

Michael Miller, a former student at the PHS during the early 1950s, described Wolf as cold and arrogant with a masculine demeanor. Miller remembered Wolf's lecture style as being flat and superficial and that she liked to boast that she had been "*persona grata*" in Krasnogorsk.²⁵⁸ While Wolf could be warm and friendly behind the scenes, she pursued an almost *Machiavellian* persona in work and politics in order to succeed and this was recognized by nearly everyone in the SED. Even Wolf's partner Wilhelm Knigge, received criticism from his superior Josef Steidl in the traffic department of the Central Committee, who told him that he should have only "messed around" with Wolf, rather than establishing a relationship and moving in with her.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Stern, 67.

²⁵⁷ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Spurensuche: Vierzig Jahre nach "Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder"* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), 232.

²⁵⁸ Leonhard, *Spurensuche*, 231.

²⁵⁹ Wilhelm Mensing, Georg Herbstritt and Gudrun Weber. *SED-Hilfe für West-Genossen: Die Arbeit der Abteilung Verkehr beim Zentralkomitee der SED im Spiegel der Überlieferung des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR (1946–1976)*. Hg. BStU. Berlin, 2010. Page 100. <http://www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0292-97839421307146>

Wolf's contradictory personality could also be seen in her personal preferences outside the workplace. During a conversation with another SED member about the Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke, Wolf stated that she enjoyed reading Rilke's work during the evenings in her home but made sure to clarify her official position: "Of course, this language is wonderful, but who is Rainer Maria Rilke? A decadent, idealistic poet, a swamp flower of decaying capitalism... If Rainer Maria Rilke should have ever been sentenced to death because of his counter-revolutionary activities... [she] would have signed his death sentence without batting an eyelid."²⁶⁰ For Wolf, ideology and commitment to the party always came first, even if it meant making sacrifices in private matters such as personal preferences in art and literature.

Heinz Brandt, a former journalist and SED member who fled the GDR in 1958, recalled a conversation he had in 1956 after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin while visiting Wolf at her home. Brandt stated that upon entering Wolf's apartment, she had a framed portrait of the Soviet dictator hanging on her wall. In reaction to Brandt's surprise at seeing the framed picture, Wolf quipped "I left the Stalin picture hanging on my wall... although it has now become fashionable to remove it" and justified this action by asking Brandt "does Stalin's devaluation benefit our movement or does it not rather benefit the class enemy?"²⁶¹ Despite being on friendly terms with Brandt, Wolf would later attack him publicly at a party meeting after he fled to West Germany: "I do not say this to agitate the comrades present... Comrades, I must say I had to practice self-criticism... when a comrade hears that someone has taken flight from the Republic, a comrade's first reflex must be – at least it is so with me, that, that person is a pig."²⁶² Wolf's humorous and

²⁶⁰ Leonhard, *Spurensuche*, 231.

²⁶¹ Leonhard, *Spurensuche*, 231-32.

²⁶² Heinz Brandt, *The Search for a Third Way: My Path Between East and West* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1970), 253.

warm persona in private interactions could be immediately replaced with animosity and disaffection, as she was quick to attack both friend and foe if they went against the party.

It was this strict and unforgiving persona that Wolf brought forth as Director of the PHS and which helped her maneuver her way through the many challenges of the 1950s. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, both the SED and the PHS underwent a process of Stalinization and there was no one more suited to take the reins in managing the PHS than Wolf. The move toward Stalinization began after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, in which Josep Broz Tito moved Yugoslavia away from Soviet-style politics to a more decentralized and liberal road to communism. Shortly after, the SED denounced the Yugoslavian regime and followed in the Soviet Union's footsteps and this also occurred at the PHS. By early 1950, the requirements for party training for SED members remained somewhat ambiguous but in February 1950, the SED sent a delegation to the Soviet Union, under the direction of Fred Oelßner, Secretary for Propaganda for the Central Committee (1950-55), to report on the structure of the CPSU training system. The results from the trip were assessed at a party conference in April and it was decided that the lessons and teaching programs at the PHS would mirror those used by the Soviets.²⁶³ Around this time, the SED also introduced the "party year," which required all new SED candidates to undergo one year of ideological training.²⁶⁴

Another result of the Tito-Stalin split was the expulsion of former SPD members and reform-minded cadres from both the ranks of the party and the PHS. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, students enrolled for coursework at the PHS underwent a process of evaluation before being admitted and former involvement with the SPD often resulted in cancelled

²⁶³ Kluttig, 61.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

applications. Faculty members also underwent similar evaluations and even long-time communists became victims of these purges.²⁶⁵ As Stalinism began to take over in the Soviet occupation zone, the SED and PHS experienced a severe shake up when the highly respected history instructor Wolfgang Leonhard chose to flee to Yugoslavia in March 1949. Leonhard's flight was an embarrassment for the SED, as not only had he come-to-age and undergone the majority of his education in Moscow but he had also been one of the ten men that formed part of the "Ulbricht Group" that were the first to return from the Soviet Union to help build socialism in the Soviet-occupation zone.²⁶⁶

Leonhard had emigrated to the Soviet Union from Sweden in 1935 with his mother Susanne, who was arrested the following year for "counter-revolutionary Trotskyist activities" and was sentenced to five years hard labour.²⁶⁷ In 1948, Leonhard was able to negotiate his still imprisoned mother's release and she returned to West Germany in 1949. Leonhard had been working since 1947 as a lecturer of Soviet history at the PHS and was an advocate of democratic socialism.²⁶⁸ Due to his mother's imprisonment under the Stalinist regime and realization that the SED would follow the path of the Soviet Union in enforcing communism in East Germany, he fled to Yugoslavia. Leonhard commented that when the SED began to become more Stalinized,

...it was exactly the period where purges began, where the trials, show trials were prepared, the mass arrests, the mass expulsion from the party for so-called anti-party or anti-Soviet activity, and all of that I knew from the Soviet Union under Stalin. So, when that began to happen in East Germany, I knew exactly where it would end. It would

²⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3375, review of members/candidates and exchange of party documents of the SED at the central, regional level and in mass organizations of the GDR, 1950-52. "Parteihochschule Karl Marx – 27 June 1951."

²⁶⁶ "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Wolfgang Leonhard'" Accessed 10 April 2022. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wolfgang-leonhard>

²⁶⁷ "Biographie – Susanne Leonhard." Accessed 29 October 2021.

²⁶⁸ "Wer war wer in der DDR? – Wolfgang Leonhard" Accessed 10 April 2022.

imply the Stalinist system in East Germany, and I said no place for that. Once is enough. And so, I escaped.²⁶⁹

Leonhard's flight from the regime was not only an embarrassment for the party, but it also impacted many of his former colleagues and students at the PHS, who had all been taken by surprise when Leonhard mysteriously disappeared.

After Leonhard's escape, the PHS spent close to two weeks trying to address the ordeal by giving lectures and seminars on the dangers of Trotskyism.²⁷⁰ On 8 April 1949, *Neues Deutschland* printed a bulletin that he had been expelled from the SED for "anti-party behaviour."²⁷¹ However shocking and unexpected Leonhard's flight was for his colleagues and students, what was to come for some of them was even worse and ultimately changed the atmosphere of the PHS for the rest of the 1950s. The SED decided that anyone from the PHS who had been in close contact with Leonhard had to be investigated for "ideological contamination." Those who were investigated was decided by going through all of Leonhard's correspondence, as well as interviewing students from his courses for whom he had written positive course assessments.²⁷² Leonhard's escape led to a campaign against "alleged Trotskyists" at the PHS and on 7 June 1949, at a party meeting, Ulbricht justified the investigation, stating that: "when ideological fluctuations arose among some comrades at the party academy as a result of the activities of the Trotskyist Leonhard, it also became apparent that not only Leonhard had been active in Trotskyist activities, but that there were comrades who behaved in a wait-and-see manner and were very careless in ideological matters."²⁷³

²⁶⁹ "Interview with Wolfgang Leonhard," "Iron Curtain: Episode 2," *The National Security Archive*. 7 January 1996. Accessed 8 April 2022. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/>

²⁷⁰ Wolfgang Leonhard, "Im Fadenkreuz der SED: Meine Flucht von der Parteihochschule 'Karl Marx' im März 1949 und die Aktivitäten der Zentralen Parteikontroll-Kommission," *Vierteljahrs Hefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 46 (1998), 292.

²⁷¹ "Ausschluss aus der Partei." *Neues Deutschland*. 8 April 1949.

²⁷² Leonhard, "Im Fadenkreuz der SED," 301.

²⁷³ Leonhard, "Im Fadenkreuz der SED," 304-5.

According to former PHS student Hermann Weber, the aftermath of Leonhard's flight created an atmosphere of paranoia and fear at the school. Prior to Leonhard's departure, the practice of self-criticism as a disciplinary measure was used for students who veered too far off the ideological path of the party, but it was to become an almost daily procedure. The friendly atmosphere that existed during the late 1940s, which was characterized by collective group work and social activities, soon turned into an environment of intimidation and suspicion. Describing the changed climate at the PHS, Weber stated:

What had previously made life difficult for us in terms of Stalinist practice was nothing compared to what was about to come over us. It was becoming unbearable. Criticism and self-criticism had become, so to speak, 'majors.' The search for agents became a mania, and no one was certain that some word he had said earlier to another would not turn up at a self-criticism event and would now be his undoing.²⁷⁴

The collective spirit which existed prior to Stalinization and Leonhard's escape to Yugoslavia was gone. The beginning of the 1950s at the PHS saw the break-up of many student friendships and there now existed "agent seekers" amongst the student body that were more than willing to turn against a peer for their own advancement.²⁷⁵

Likewise, Michael Miller described the moral pressure and paranoia which prevailed at the PHS during the 1950s. According to Miller, prior to the 1950s, his participation in the communist movement had been free from moral pressure but his experience at the PHS was when he became familiar with fear for the first time and which was a "fear which one does not know... is it fear of others? Such as superiors or comrades, or of oneself, or one's own conscience, or one's own nature?"²⁷⁶ Another student, Hella Iglarz (née Maron), attended the

²⁷⁴ Leonhard, "Im Fadenkreuz der SED," 298.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Weber, 234.

PHS between 1951 and 1952 and described how one of her classmates criticized her for smoking Camel brand cigarettes, to which she then had to practice self-criticism. According to Iglarz, she saw no issue with her Camel cigarettes since her home address was in West Berlin and she therefore received part of her stipendium in Western money.²⁷⁷ However, for Iglarz, this was only the beginning, soon she became a regular target of not only peers but also students she considered friends and she found herself practicing self-criticism frequently for reasons such as wearing nice clothes and even for how she spoke. She claimed that one week she was made to practice so much self-criticism that she cried non-stop and lost seven pounds in seven days.²⁷⁸

As some students like Iglarz had a difficult time with the critical atmosphere that existed at the PHS during the 1950s, other students were quick to adapt. Both Hermann Weber and former student Carola Stern learned that the best course of action to deal with the harsh environment was to maintain a low profile and to always have lines from the “classics” memorized for when it was their turn to account for their sins.²⁷⁹ The typical procedure for self-criticism usually involved waiting for your turn, as students were chosen alphabetically from the class-list. However, with so many students informing on one another there was no guarantee that one would be safe after their turn came and went.²⁸⁰ Due to the arbitrary nature of this process, Stern said that she learned to excel at the art of self-criticism, by howling her sins before her classmates and providing an unending list of her mistakes. However, she also stated that this ability sometimes made her more forthcoming with how she responded to her accusers.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Monika Maron, *Pawels Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1999), 174.

²⁷⁸ Maron, 175.

²⁷⁹ Weber, 322.

²⁸⁰ Stern, 66.

²⁸¹ Leonhard, “Im Fadenkreuz der SED,” 233.

According to Stern, school days at the PHS always began with morning sport which she detested and regularly attempted to avoid. One day this resulted in criticism from a male comrade who scolded her for being unsportsmanlike while inciting all of the Bolshevik qualities of sport such as collective spirit, iron discipline and perseverance. Stern responded in turn by laughing harmlessly and asking out loud about the sporting achievements of Comrade Stalin and Wilhelm Pieck.²⁸² Evidently, Stern was made to practice self-criticism for her “petty-bourgeois individualism, arrogance, lack of trust and disparagement of leading comrades.”²⁸³ However, despite Stern’s ability to poke fun at her more fanatical peers, she also stated that she was imbued with a deep fear of “Trotskyists” and as every seminar included praise for Stalin they also included the castigation of Leon Trotsky. Stern recalled one of her classmates nervously asking if she had ever met a real Trotskyist to which she responded, “for God’s sake, no!” and described how she had pictured such people as being “a cross between a child molester and Al Capone.”²⁸⁴

While Stalinization gave way to an atmosphere of paranoia amongst the student body, the PHS campus itself was quite a comfortable and modern space for its students to live and learn. Prior to its use as a student campus, the PHS in Kleinmachnow had been used by the National Socialists as a testing facility for the Reich Postal Ministry and was made up of a long row of one-story buildings, a large manor and some small villas. Students were provided with large bedrooms that contained a bed, couch and armchairs. The campus also had many seminar and club rooms, a large dining hall and an auditorium.²⁸⁵ Despite the atmosphere of fear which existed during the 1950s, students were made to work together in collective groups throughout

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Stern, 69.

²⁸⁵ Stern, 66.

most of the day and evening. School hours consisted of classes, group seminars and special learning collectives where stronger students helped tutor weaker students. Evenings at the PHS often included film screenings in the auditorium, performances by local theatre groups or cabaret artists, poetry readings or guest lectures.²⁸⁶ Collective participation at the PHS could not be escaped. If a student chose to separate themselves from the larger student community, they would be criticized for “petty-bourgeois individualism” and Stern noted that the repressive atmosphere at the PHS was partially enforced by a small army of career-driven former *Wehrmacht* officers that became Wolf’s most reliable helpers.²⁸⁷

During the 1950s, the PHS expanded exponentially under Wolf’s leadership. Although many of the changes that took place were under the direction of the SED, such as extending the two-year courses to three years for a social sciences diploma and the introduction of the “party year,” Wolf also played a significant role in shaping the institution both internally and externally. For example, it was Wolf who consistently pushed for the PHS to be moved to a new location that provided a larger campus and she regularly advocated for more faculty and staff positions for the growing student population. As a result of Wolf’s steadfast determination, the PHS moved from Kleinmachnow to central East Berlin in 1955 and by the end of the 1950s, the number of teaching staff employed at the school more than doubled.²⁸⁸

According to a structural plan for the PHS from 1950, there were five main departments when Wolf first started as Director, each with their own Department Chairs and staff, as well as an office for Distance Learning. These departments and the numbers of employees included: Teaching (six employees and other staff such as a librarian and two translators), CPSU (twelve

²⁸⁶ Stern, 75.

²⁸⁷ Stern, 68.

²⁸⁸ Kluttig, 211.

teachers), Philosophy (twelve teachers), Political Economics (twelve teachers), and History (twelve teachers).²⁸⁹ The main teaching themes these departments focused on were: party building, Russian studies, international relations, political and economic geography and literature and art.²⁹⁰ By the beginning of the 1960s, the PHS maintained eight departments which also included ten full professors and 134 teaching staff.²⁹¹ The departments included: History, History of the International Workers' Movement, Political Economics, Economics of the GDR, Administrative Law of the GDR, German and Russian Linguistics, German Literature and the Party Life of the SED.²⁹²

In 1952, the PHS also expanded to include smaller party schools in order to train student functionaries in the districts of the GDR. By 1954, there were 59 district party schools in East Germany which offered four-month and one-year courses for students.²⁹³ However, problems arose almost immediately with the district branches, as teachers proved to be unqualified and in 1955, only 30 percent of students were able to be placed in party functionary positions after completing their studies.²⁹⁴ Wolf was unhappy with the lackluster training provided at the district schools and pushed for their disbandment. Although the district branches had their own management, Wolf and the PHS still oversaw their organization. However, the Central Committee instead ordered a re-structuring of the schools in March 1956. This reorganization proposed the closing of all training centres that maintained low attendance rates and also the development of a new curriculum which stipulated that each school should have one teacher for

²⁸⁹ Kluttig, 541.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 19.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Kluttig, 167.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

every eight to ten pupils.²⁹⁵ By 1958, there were 34 district party schools in the GDR. Despite the reorganization of the schools, the quality of teaching was still very low and in 1959 another reorganization took place. The four-month courses offered during the early 1950s were replaced with individualized special courses at some of the district party schools.²⁹⁶ For example, the school in Schwerin altered its four-month course to focus on economics, while the district party school in Gera focused on agitation and propaganda. While some district party schools, such as the one in Potsdam, offered multiple specializations.²⁹⁷

However, these changes had very little effect on the outcome of student training as most students were still not prepared enough to be appointed to positions within the district party apparatus or in collective enterprises. Part of the problem was due to the lack of thoroughly trained instructors, as many of the district teachers were graduates of the four-month courses themselves and their theoretical knowledge was barely any better than the incoming students.²⁹⁸ At the beginning of 1958, the district school in Schwerin reported that the demand of the Central Committee to “educate comrades in the party schools who can convincingly argue in the sense of the implementation of our goals and tasks” was quite low, as 75 percent of students that completed course-work returned to their previous positions. There were also problems with low attendance rates during the late 1950s, as the district of Güstrow reported that only 280 out of 959 leaders had completed training at a district school, while the district of Sternberg reported only 41 members out of 372 had completed a district training course.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Kluttig, 169-70.

²⁹⁷ Kluttig, 175-83.

²⁹⁸ Kluttig, 171.

²⁹⁹ Kluttig, 172.

On 16 December 1959, the Central Committee initiated another re-structuring which directed all of the 34 district party schools to focus their four-month courses on specific specializations.³⁰⁰ The district party school in Magdeburg converted into a special school focusing on industry, the party schools in the district of Halle: Naumburg, Bad Dürrenberg and Dessau, specialized in agriculture and light industry, while the district party schools in Rostock converted into schools focusing on industry and the state party apparatus.³⁰¹ The district party school with the largest capacity for students was in Berlin, which offered 300 seats per course and was also the only district party school that provided external accommodation.³⁰² Students were also provided scholarships for their participation in the courses. By 1953, married couples enrolled in a one year course were entitled to DM 140 per month with a family allowance of DM 30, plus child benefits and paid rent, up to a maximum of DM 380.³⁰³ Each district party school was also made up of its own Chairs for the various departments, which usually included a Chair for the teaching of Marxism-Leninism, the history of the CPSU, the history of Germany and the German Workers' movement, Political Economics and party building as well as other specializations that a school may have had.³⁰⁴ However, by the 1970s, there were only fifteen main party schools for each district in the GDR which offered the one-year and three-year courses similar to those offered at the main campus of the PHS in East Berlin.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Kluttig, 183.

³⁰¹ Kluttig, 185-86.

³⁰² Kluttig, 201.

³⁰³ Kluttig, 205. These scholarships were also available to students studying at the main PHS campus.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 60/3284, “Summary Report on the Party Training Year 1981/1982 – 9 July 1982.”

Table 1: Kluttig, 589-90. Kluttig outlines the topic plan for the first three-year course held at the PHS which was based off the Bundesarchiv document: "Themenplan des 1. Dreijahreslehrgangs an der Parteihochschule "Karl Marx" beim ZK der SED (vom 15. Februar 1953 bis zum 31. Juli 1955), Kleinmachnow 1953."

Plan for the 1st three-year course at the PHS, 1953-1955

Chair for the Study of History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Cycle: "*History of the CPSU*" (203 hours)

Cycle: "*History of the USSR*" (80 hours)

Chair of Party Building (115 hours)

1. Introductory lesson, 2. Lenin's and Stalin's doctrine of the party, 3. The structure of the Party and the organizations of inner-party life, 4. Basic questions of the organizational leadership of the Party, 5. The ideological work of the Party, 6. The Party's leadership of peaceful construction, 7. The Party and mass organizations of the working people, 8. Party organizations in the People's Police

Chair of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

Cycle: "*Dialectical and historical materialism*" (200 hours):

1. Dialectical materialism – the world-training of the Marxist-Leninist party, 2. The Marxist dialectical method, 3. Marxist philosophical materialism, 4. Historical materialism, 5. The development of Marxist philosophy by Marx and Engels and the further development by Lenin and Stalin

Cycle: "*Logic*" (29 hours)

Cycle: "*Constitutional Law and State Building*" (152 hours)

1. Foundations of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state and law, 2. The Stalinist constitution and the questions of Soviet state construction, 3. The foundations of state law in the countries of people's democracy, 4. State law of the GDR

Chair of Political Economy

Cycle: "*Economic and Political Geography*" (61 hours)

Cycle: "*The economic policy of the German Democratic Republic*" (110 hours)

1. Political Economy of Capitalism, 2) Political Economy of Socialism (together 222 hours)

Chair of History

Cycle: "*General History*" (144 hours):

1. History of antiquity, 2. History of the Middle Ages, 3. History of modern times

Cycle: "*History of Germany*" (182 hours)

Cycle: "*History of International Relations*" (70 hours)

Chair of Language and Literature

Cycle: "*German and Russian language*" (262 hours)

Cycle: "*Literature*" (140 hours)

1. German literature, 2. Russian and Soviet literature, 3. Literature of other peoples.

Wolf was fully dedicated to her position and the PHS grew substantially in the first decade since she took over as Director. Aside from the larger campus and increased student enrollment and faculty appointments, Wolf proved herself to be a capable and calculated leader as the tumultuous 1950s brought unexpected challenges her way. One challenge that emerged with the process of Stalinization and which also haunted Wolf for the majority of her life was that she was Jewish. Even prior to the 1930s, Wolf made the move to Germany to attend university due to anti-Jewish measures.³⁰⁶ As antisemitism was on the rise during the early 1930s, Wolf immigrated to the Soviet Union to escape Nazi persecution. However, antisemitism was also present in the Stalinist dictatorship, as Stalin associated Jewishness with cosmopolitanism and launched an anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in 1948.³⁰⁷ Prior to Stalin's death in March 1953, an anti-Jewish purge had been planned under Stalin's orders, known as the "Doctor's plot," in which Stalin alleged that a conspiracy was being set up by a group of Jewish doctors in the Soviet Union to murder himself and other leading officials.³⁰⁸ Before this anti-Jewish purge could be carried out, Stalin died. However, antisemitic and anti-Zionist sentiment persisted in the ranks of the SED, as Jewishness and its association with cosmopolitanism were linked to bourgeois ideology and American imperialism.³⁰⁹

Another reason that antisemitism remained within the ranks of the SED was due to the challenges that persisted after the atrocities of the Holocaust. Despite both Jews and communists being persecuted by the Nazi regime, the SED felt threatened by Jewish demands for reparations

³⁰⁶ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 16.

³⁰⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 109.

³⁰⁸ Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution, Volume 1: A-K*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc.: 2005), 182-183.

³⁰⁹ Herf, 109.

and Ulbricht used this issue to purge Jews from the party ranks. Any SED member that supported a Jewish claim to statehood in Palestine, whether Jewish or not, such as longtime KPD member Paul Merker, was purged from the party.³¹⁰ The purge of Jewish party members also took place amongst other Soviet satellite states. For example, Rudolf Slansky, the Jewish First Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, was purged in September 1951 and was eventually killed in 1952, and Ana Pauker, the Romanian Jewish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was removed from her position in 1952.³¹¹

In fact, Pauker was one of the highest-ranking female communists in the Eastern bloc. As both a woman and a Jew, Pauker was encouraged by Georgi Dimitrov, the former General Secretary of the COMINTERN, to return to Bucharest in September 1944 and lead the Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist Român* – PCR), where she served as the unofficial leader until October 1945. However, Pauker was not replaced due to fair elections or because of Soviet interference. Instead, Pauker told Dimitrov prior to her return to Bucharest, “I’m a woman, I haven’t been in the country throughout the war, I was in prison, and have no idea how things stand. Ten years have passed, and [leading the party] would be hard for me to do. I’m a woman, a Jew, and an intellectual.”³¹² Pauker understood the challenges she would face as a female Jewish leader and handed over the “official” role of General Secretary to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.³¹³ However, Pauker was recognized not only in the Eastern bloc, but also internationally, as

³¹⁰ Peter Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, 33.

³¹¹ Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 169. Also, Philip Mendes, *Jews and the Left: The Rise and Fall of a Political Alliance* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 247.

³¹² Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 71.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

the woman-in-charge. Pauker even appeared on the cover of Time Magazine in September 1948, where she was described as “the most powerful woman alive.”³¹⁴

Born in Bucharest to an Orthodox Jewish family, Pauker joined the Romanian Workers’ Social Democratic Party in 1915 and then the Communist Party in 1921. In 1928, Pauker moved to Moscow to study at the International Lenin School and then relocated to Paris to work as a special instructor for the French Communist Party. However, after returning to Romania in 1934, she was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison. During this period, Pauker’s Jewish husband, Marcel Pauker, was purged during the Great Terror.³¹⁵ In 1941, Pauker was traded in a prisoner exchange between the Romanian government and the Soviet Union and pursued work at the COMINTERN’s “Free Romania” radio station until September 1944.³¹⁶

Similar to Wolf, Pauker considered herself to be an Orthodox Stalinist and has been remembered as the “Iron Lady” of the PCR. However, Norman Naimark has suggested that Pauker’s policies were actually more similar to those of the Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, as she “encouraged coalitions with the ‘historical’ parties, urged compromises with ‘bourgeois’ politicians, and sought to deflect the persecution of social democrats and liberals.”³¹⁷ Similarly, Robert Levy suggests that much of the “conventional wisdom” surrounding Pauker’s life and career, such as claims that she denounced her own husband for being a “Trotskyist,” are “largely myth.”³¹⁸ Rather, Levy states that Pauker was “a person characterized more by contradictions than by dogmatism: a Communist leader fanatically loyal to Stalin and the Soviet Union but

³¹⁴ “A Girl Who Hated Cream Puffs,” *Time*, 20 September 1948. Accessed August 6th, 2023. <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,799158,00.html>

³¹⁵ Robert Levy, “Ana Pauker: 1893-1960,” *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. Accessed 7 August 2023. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/pauker-anna>

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Norman Naimark, review of *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, by Robert Levy, *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 389.

³¹⁸ Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, 3.

actively opposing the Stalinist line and deliberately defying Soviet directives on a number of important fronts.”³¹⁹

Unlike Wolf, who was a devoted Stalinist and completely disconnected herself from her Jewish family and Judaism, Pauker was not so easily able to cut ties with her family and Jewish roots. Pauker refused to persecute Zionist leaders in Romania, as her brother Zalman Rabinsohn was a member of the Ha-Po’el ha-Mizrachi Zionist movement and she promoted an “independent line on Jewish issues that rejected orthodox Marxism-Leninism’s class-based approach, and she sanctioned the unrestricted emigration of Romanian Jews to Israel after the Soviets adopted an increasingly hostile stance toward the Jewish state.”³²⁰ Due to her resistance to Stalin’s own antisemitism, Pauker was purged from the PCR in May 1952. Accused of “right-wing deviationism” and “spying” for the United States for the purpose of “international Zionism,” Pauker was arrested in February 1953.³²¹ However, Stalin died in March 1953 and Pauker’s trial was cancelled. She remained under house arrest until 1954 and died from breast cancer in June 1960.³²²

Despite the antisemitic and anti-Zionist sentiment that existed in the ranks of the SED, many Jewish party members did reach notable positions in the regime. Aside from Wolf, who was the Director of the PHS, some examples include Albert Norden, who was elected as a secretary for the Central Committee in 1955, Kurt Hager, chief ideologist of the party, and Grete Wittkowski, President of the State Bank from 1967 through 1974. However, many of these Jewish SED members usually proved to be orthodox communists with no ties to their Jewish

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Robert Levy, “Ana Pauker: 1893-1960,” *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. Accessed 7 August 2023. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/pauker-anna>

³²² *Ibid.*

communities or religion while many were also highly educated and multi-lingual which proved to be an asset for the party.³²³ This was the case for Wolf, who spoke Polish, German, Russian and French, and had cut ties to her remaining living siblings that relocated to the United States and Israel, only keeping in touch with her one communist sister. Wolf proved herself to be a loyal communist whose only religion was the party itself.³²⁴

After Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the SED continued building socialism in the GDR at an accelerated pace despite advice from the CPSU to change course and lessen the effects of Stalinization. In fact, the SED only decided to follow its "New Course" as a result of the 17 June uprisings as the death of Stalin and the SED's inability to address East German discontent erupted in a popular revolt in June. Prior to the events of 17 June, plans had been made to celebrate Ulbricht's sixtieth birthday over multiple days (his official birthday was 30 June), which included having a bust of himself made, the publication of his biography, a documentary about his life building socialism, multiple lunches, a banquet on 1 July 1953 and a multitude of speeches and events at various locations around the GDR.³²⁵ At the PHS specifically, Wolf was in charge of putting together the biography of Ulbricht which was to have around 50,000 copies printed. The PHS also planned to host a three-hour long presentation on "the life and struggle of our General Secretary Walter Ulbricht" and a photography exhibit was to be set up on campus.³²⁶ The majority of these events were cancelled, as Ulbricht and the regime faced its first serious challenge. However, this personality cult surrounding Ulbricht would also prove to be another major obstacle for Ulbricht and even Wolf, after the events of 17 June came to a head.

³²³ Mendes, 247.

³²⁴ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 4.

³²⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3297, "Anlage Nr. 9 zum Protokoll Nr. 21/53 vom 14 April 1953 - Plan zum 60 Geburtstag Walter Ulbrichts."

³²⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 3297, "Plan der Parteihochschule "Karl Marx" zum 60. Geburtstag Walter Ulbrichts – 18 February 1953."

Beginning on 16 June 1953, construction workers in East Berlin went on strike due to increased productivity demands that then carried on throughout the following day. The discontent of the workers was also felt by many other sectors of East German society and protests erupted all over the GDR. As the SED had called for the official building of socialism in 1952 and the acceleration of this process left many East Germans struggling to find and even afford basic necessities, popular discontent had reached its peak. By 17 June, over 300,000 East Germans had taken to the streets to protest over working conditions, food shortages and the extremely high prices in the *Handelsorganisation* (HO - the national retail organization), and many people were calling for the end of the regime.³²⁷ To make matters worse for the SED, American forces in West Berlin were providing food to East German protestors who crossed the border. As a result, the SED had to call for help from the Soviet Union and Soviet tanks were brought in to help put an end to the uprisings which left twenty-one demonstrators dead.³²⁸

Overall, the SED had no choice but to make an actual effort in pursuing a “New Course” and address East German discontent. The SED improved the supply of food, manufactured goods and working conditions. At the PHS, the “New Course” after the events in June evoked few changes. Since the school was essentially a Stalinist institution of indoctrination, student life carried on despite most of the celebrations for Ulbricht’s birthday being cancelled. The PHS would not even consider pursuing a “New Course” until 1956.³²⁹ However, problems did not end here with the arrival of Soviet tanks, as Ulbricht now had to face internal criticism for his own mistakes and this came in the form of opposition from Wilhelm Zaisser, the Minister of State

³²⁷ Pence, “Women on the Verge,” 307.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86885, “Lecture by Kurt Hager at the Parteihochschule Karl Marx on 13 July 1965 in Berlin.”

Security (1950-53) and chief journalist of *Neues Deutschland* and Politburo member Rudolf Herrnstadt.

As Politburo members met during the last days of June 1953 to discuss what this “New Course” might mean for the GDR, there was general agreement that Ulbricht’s leadership style had to change if any positive revisions in policymaking were to be achieved. What became known as the “Herrnstadt document” and those in support of it, the “Herrnstadt-Zaisser faction,” generally agreed that the rapid construction of socialism and the personality cult surrounding Ulbricht required major alterations.³³⁰ Herrnstadt proposed structural changes which would ultimately diminish Ulbricht’s dictatorial role in the SED by moving the party towards adopting a structure based more on the principles of collective leadership.³³¹ Initially, nearly every Politburo member with the exception of Hermann Mattern, Honecker and Ulbricht himself, were in favour of Herrnstadt’s proposal. However, luck was on Ulbricht’s side in this matter, as the Soviets feared that a change in leadership at this time would only further destabilize the regime and with his continued leadership secured, Ulbricht went on the attack.³³² Both Herrnstadt and Zaisser were removed from their Politburo and Central Committee positions and were subjected to a harsh defamation campaign that ultimately deemed both men as “non-persons” in the East German media.³³³

The Herrnstadt-Zaisser Affair did not only put Ulbricht in an uncomfortable political position but also those who had worked closely with the two men once the General Secretary’s leadership had been secured. Wolf had been on friendly terms with Herrnstadt prior to the ordeal and when the affair broke out, she quickly moved to secure her position in the party and as

³³⁰ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 161.

³³¹ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 75.

³³² Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 161.

³³³ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 163.

Director of the PHS by attacking both men and providing support to Ulbricht. Wolf claimed that Zaisser had violated party discipline by criticizing Ulbricht's working habits while accusing Herrstadt of being a Zionist.³³⁴ Although Wolf was friendly with Herrstadt, her interactions and past support of him put her in a compromising political situation and despite not knowing what horrible outcomes could have resulted for either men, she quickly positioned herself in support of Ulbricht and strategically directed the conflict away from herself.

According to Herrstadt, in January 1953 he was visiting the PHS on behalf of the Central Committee to give a speech and presentation on a new course being offered. During this visit, he sat with Wolf in her office where he discussed an article he found from 1911 in regard to the Jewish origins of Karl Marx and began a discussion on how the Jewish experience of Ghetto life and Talmud education may have helped Marx develop his "extraordinary power of abstraction."³³⁵ Herrstadt claimed that he was just making informal discussion with Wolf who, at the time, was amused by the topic and after his speeches at the PHS did not make any complaints to the Central Committee. Wolf even teased Herrstadt about the conversation in a personal letter she sent to him on his 50th birthday:

the number 50 is a very dialectic unit, above all it offers a good opportunity to say to a person what one does not say in other years and days. The General Secretary of our Party - Walter Ulbricht - did that for all of us. On the other hand, I have a theoretical, Talmudic-Kabbalistic question: is it a coincidence that the Paris Commune and you have the same birthday? Or is it an established law that heavenly stormers are born on this day?³³⁶

³³⁴ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 20.

³³⁵ Rudolf Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument: Das Politbüro der SED und die Geschichte des 17. Juni 1953*, edited by Nadja Stulz-Herrstadt, (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 216.

³³⁶ Herrstadt, 217.

Herrnstadt states that the topic of conversation which took place that day in Wolf's office was not the reason for why she put him at the mercy of Ulbricht and his supporters. Rather, the reason had to do with an event which took place prior to his visit to the PHS.

At a Central Committee meeting that was held one month before his January 1953 visit with Wolf, and with the approval and support of Ulbricht, Herrnstadt gave a speech on the dangers of dogmatism that was plaguing the propaganda work of the SED. After the speech, Wolf approached Herrnstadt with her support for his words and a few weeks later shared her agreement with his speech in an article. After Ulbricht secured his leadership position, he used this speech as evidence in his attack against Herrnstadt, accusing him of being an enemy of the working-class, a traitor, a Trotskyist and a German Tito.³³⁷ Unfortunately for Wolf, her article also came up during this Central Committee meeting where Herrnstadt was being accused of being a social democrat. Since Wolf's own position was directly compromised by this situation, she acted swiftly and strategically, shifting the accusations against Herrnstadt to focus on his support for Zionism rather than social democracy and offered up the conversation that took place in her office about the Jewish origins of Marx as her evidence. Herrnstadt and Zaisser were both removed from the Central Committee at its Fifteenth Plenary Session meeting and were eventually expelled from the party in January 1954.³³⁸ Herrnstadt stated that after all was said and done, he still considered Wolf to be "a clever, party-minded, and also courageous comrade, who in no way intended to provide a building block for his and Zaisser's destruction, but who – despite all her education – was highly imperfectly oriented about the real nature and danger of dogmatism and personality cult."³³⁹

³³⁷ Herrnstadt, 218.

³³⁸ Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990*, translated by David Burnett (NY: Berghahn Books, 2014), 42.

³³⁹ Herrnstadt, 218.

Despite Wolf's success in deflecting danger over her past support for Herrstadt, the events of 1956 brought more problems for the PHS Director. On 25 February 1956, Khrushchev denounced the crimes of Stalin in his "Secret Speech" at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, where he condemned Stalin for his use of mass terror during the purges of the 1930s, his deportations of ethnic groups such as the Chechens and Balkar peoples, and read excerpts from the Lenin Testament, where Lenin had warned that Stalin would abuse his power if he became leader.³⁴⁰ Although the speech was given with no forewarning and in a closed session, news of Khrushchev's plans to de-Stalinize the Eastern bloc spread quickly, leading to much uncertainty amongst the SED leadership and especially those that had been fully dedicated to Stalinism. Concern about what would come next for the East German regime also intensified over the following months as uprisings in both Poland and Hungary resulted in the expulsion of their Communist leaders.³⁴¹

As the events surrounding 17 June 1953 only occurred three years prior to Khrushchev's monumental speech, Ulbricht was clearly worried about his leadership and the stability of the regime. One of his first actions was to declare that the works of Stalin were no longer considered amongst the classics of Marxism-Leninism and the SED organized a series of scientific meetings amongst East German economists, humanities scholars and other intellectuals.³⁴² Although East Germany did not experience another political upheaval as it had in 1953, political discontent did arise in Magdeburg and a rebellion against compulsory Russian language lessons was staged by students at Humboldt University in East Berlin.³⁴³ However, much of the discontent amongst the

³⁴⁰ Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe: The Politics of a Contested Continent* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 96.

³⁴¹ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*, (Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 2012), 452.

³⁴² Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 259.

³⁴³ Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, 47.

East German population was over material matters and the SED took steps to improve the quality of life for its citizens by introducing a forty-five hour work week, increasing worker's pensions by 30 DM, and there were price reductions on various goods such as bicycles, electronics and textiles.³⁴⁴ Despite Ulbricht's attempt to make some concessions to appease East German discontent, many members in the SED felt that it was not enough and he again faced criticism for his Stalinist leadership practices and the cult of personality he had built around himself.

As the 17 June 1953 uprisings resulted from popular discontent amongst the East German population, the threat that erupted for Ulbricht in late 1956 came from East German intellectuals. The SED leadership was able to appease East German citizens with improvements over material concerns but made few moves to liberalize the party and its own ideology. This led Wolfgang Harich, a philosophy professor from Humboldt University, to draft a fifty-page reform program which criticized Ulbricht's leadership and called for a more concrete de-Stalinization in the GDR.³⁴⁵ Harich was not alone in his contempt for Ulbricht and had the support of Walter Janka, the head of the *Aufbau* publishing company, as well as other East German intellectuals. After watching events unfold in Poland, where the reform-minded communist Władysław Gomułka, who advocated for a "Polish way to socialism," was put in power in October 1956, Ulbricht was fearful that an East German "Gomułka" could do the same and he therefore unleashed an attack during the late 1950s against intellectual revisionism.³⁴⁶

Just as Ulbricht was saved in 1953 by Soviet concerns that his replacement could lead to political instability, the Soviets were so preoccupied in 1956 with what was taking place in

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Harrison, 76.

³⁴⁶ Kluttig, 38.

Poland that they were once again against a change in leadership in East Germany.³⁴⁷ As a result, Wolfgang Harich was arrested in November 1956 and was imprisoned until December 1964. Similarly, Janka was also arrested and imprisoned until December 1960.³⁴⁸ Other revisionist intellectuals also faced problems as a result of the Harich affair, such as the philosopher Ernst Bloch, who was removed from the Philosophy Department at the University of Leipzig and who eventually fled the regime in 1961, and Johannes R. Becher, novelist and the first East German Minister of Culture (1954 through 1958), who was demoted from his position for suspected support of the Harich Group. Ulbricht also purged reform-minded SED members from their positions, such as Ernst Wollweber, Fred Oelßner and Karl Schirdewan.³⁴⁹

As Ulbricht cleared his path of possible reformers after the events of 1956, so too did Wolf, whom herself was a staunch Stalinist, and also faced opposition from colleagues at the PHS. However, just as Ulbricht waited until it was safe to go on the attack, so did Wolf. During the spring and summer of 1956, Wolf watched the actions of Ulbricht and the East German leadership in how she should respond to the Khrushchev fiasco and proceeded cautiously. One of her first steps at the school was to organize meetings amongst the chairs of the various departments to discuss the issues that had arisen due to the “new global political situation.”³⁵⁰ One issue that was of vital concern was how to deal with questions being asked by students about why the personality cult surrounding Stalin persisted for so long. During a meeting in April 1956, department chairs were advised that:

when dealing with this question, it is necessary to assume that the Soviet Union in the years 1934-1941, when the personality cult developed, stood alone. The establishment

³⁴⁷ Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, 47.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the 4 April 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS.”

and consolidation of socialism was the main task. At the same time, we must make it clear to the comrades under what difficulties this happened, among other things because the establishment of fascism in Germany threatened the Soviet Union in the most dangerous way. At that time, the struggle against Stalin's personality cult, in the form it has today, was due to the danger of splitting the labour movement and the shattering of the first socialist state. Today, with the existence of a socialist world system, the liquidation of the personality cult may be necessary, since it and its consequences are a serious obstacle to the development of the socialist revolution all over the world. With the liquidation of the personality cult, the CPSU has shown great help to the communist parties and the labour movement in all countries.³⁵¹

It was also decided that the CPSU Department at the PHS would be abolished and replaced with a new department entitled "The History of the International Labour Movement." This new department would continue to teach the history of the CPSU and the Soviet Union but from a "broader" perspective, beginning with the history of the 1848 revolutions.³⁵²

Many faculty members felt that not enough was being done at the school in response to Khrushchev's speech and heated discussions took place that included open criticism of the PHS administration, the course curriculums and of Wolf's leadership. Some Department Chairs pointed out that the dogmatic teaching methods, with the extreme use of criticism and self-criticism, and the lack of access to Western literature, had created an inadequate learning environment for students and called for major reforms.³⁵³ The Assistant Director of the PHS, Heinze Kurze, openly criticized how Marxism-Leninism was taught at the college and indicated that teaching methods were hampered by dogmatism and were therefore uncreative. He also

³⁵¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, "Meeting minutes for the 4 April 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS."

³⁵² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, "Meeting minutes for the 4 April 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS."

³⁵³ Kluttig, 476.

called for an entire review of the PHS curriculum in order to better "educate comrades who can think independently and are able to make decisions without guidance and help."³⁵⁴ Similarly, Eberhard Schlorke, the Chair of the GO (Ground Organization) Teaching Department, also criticized the PHS administration and the behaviour of the SED, for not allowing constructive discussions to take place during Department Chair meetings. Schlorke stated that faculty at these meetings never took part in constructive criticism due to their fear of being labelled as a reformer or a social democrat, while other PHS staff complained that Wolf played "too big a role" at the school and was not open to self-criticism.³⁵⁵

During the spring and summer of 1956, PHS faculty remained optimistic that significant changes to teaching methods and course curriculums were a coming possibility and openly discussed adding new content to the curriculum which had prior been unthinkable. For example, discussions took place which considered adding literature by early leaders of the German Labour Movement such as August Bebel, one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany, Karl Kautsky, the Czech orthodox Marxist philosopher, and Franz Mehring, a former German historian and SPD member. Magazines and newspapers from West Germany were also to be added to the PHS library.³⁵⁶ Even more surprising, meeting minutes from August 1956 show faculty discussions over whether compulsory Russian language classes were truly necessary.³⁵⁷ Wolf was not pleased with what was taking place at the PHS but she chose to wait and observe how this political situation would play out from above and in the meantime had no choice but to make concessions to appease her critics. However, once Ulbricht arrested Harich

³⁵⁴ Kluttig, 478.

³⁵⁵ Kluttig, 478-79.

³⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, "Meeting minutes for the department chair meeting on the improvement of teaching and teaching methods at the PHS – 8 August 1956."

³⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, "Meeting minutes for the department chair meeting on the improvement of teaching and teaching methods at the PHS – 8 August 1956."

and Janka in the fall of 1956 and unleashed his attack on revisionism, Wolf had the green light she needed to start her own purge of revisionists.

Wolf had already begun her reclamation of Stalinist methods in the party college by mid-October 1956. While chair department meetings during the spring and summer discussed such issues as adding Western and social democratic literature to the school library and even working more closely with members of the SPD, most of this progress was thrown to the wayside as soon as Ulbricht unleashed his attack on revisionism.³⁵⁸ In April, the department chairs had concluded that “today there are new possibilities for close cooperation with the SPD. In the discussion, views propagated by the enemy should also be destroyed, such as the SED wanting to undermine or swallow the SPD. The GDR is the best example of the inaccuracy of such a claim, because many former members of the SPD hold leading positions in the state, business and the party in the GDR.”³⁵⁹ During the initial months after Khrushchev’s speech, the door had been open to accepting and working more closely with elements of social democracy. However, by mid-October, Wolf polemicized about how the role of the SPD in the communist movement had to be overcome in the classroom.³⁶⁰ By November, Wolf was criticizing faculty members who still showed “a certain political immaturity and naivety” about the current political-ideological work at the school and stated that the coursework should once again focus only on the “classics” of Marxism-Leninism.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the 16 October 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS.”

³⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the 4 April 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS.”

³⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the 16 October 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS.”

³⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the 8 November 1956 meeting of Department Chairs of the PHS.”

By early 1957, faculty discussions about possible reforms at the school had completely dissipated. At a Department Chair meeting on 26 March 1957, Wolf targeted the faculty members that had previously suggested making more Western or liberal literature available to students and they were made to practice self-criticism.³⁶² This was only the beginning of Wolf's personal attack against PHS reformers. During mid-1957, the Central Party leadership of the PHS formed a commission with the specific purpose of investigating the school for problematic faculty members that had maintained an unprincipled and incorrect political orientation during 1956. Concerned that these initiatives were leading the PHS back to its more dogmatic and authoritative methods, Helmut Bahr, the Party Secretary of the PHS, along with Schlorke and Kurze, questioned the objectives behind the development of this committee but Wolf had already successfully reclaimed her authoritative role as Director.³⁶³

The results of the investigation concluded that there were significant PHS faculty members that had fallen out of line with the party during the events of 1956 and "there... [was] reason to assume that the comrades are still opposed to the implementation of the resolutions and are seriously endangering the work of the PHS."³⁶⁴ The commission directly attacked Bahr, Schlorke and Kurze and they were removed from their positions at the party college during the late 1950s. The results of the commission were sent to the Politburo of the SED in July 1957, outlining the events which took place at the PHS, as well as the allegations of revisionism. In response, the Politburo acknowledged that "some employees of the PHS and from the apparatus of the Central Committee 'unilaterally led the fight against dogmatism... without considering that the main danger is revisionism.'"³⁶⁵ However, no further consequences were carried out

³⁶² Kluttig, 480.

³⁶³ Kluttig, 481.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Kluttig, 483.

against those deposed faculty members, showing that despite Wolf's victory against reformers at the PHS, her sphere of influence stretched only so far.

Conclusion

With the removal of reform minded faculty members at the PHS, Wolf reclaimed her dominance as Director and the teaching methods and course curriculums returned to their earlier forms. Wolf succeeded in navigating through the various challenges of the 1950s, which was not an easy task for a hardline Stalinist, when the call for de-Stalinization threatened the political course of the regime at multiple turns. However, Wolf made use of her authoritative and dogmatic tendencies and she was able to strategically maneuver through the various threats that came her way. A woman of contradictions, Wolf was humorous and thoughtful behind closed doors, yet cold and calculated in her political and professional life. Whether friend or colleague, Wolf was quick to put another functionary on the SED chopping block if her own position was compromised. Her loyalty was always to the party, and to herself.

Throughout her political career, Wolf always aligned herself with the party leadership, in this case Ulbricht, and this helped garner her positions as both Director of the Antifa School in Krasnogorsk and as head of the PHS. As Ulbricht's leadership remained unchallenged over the next ten years after unleashing his attack against revisionism in the mid-1950s, Wolf also maintained her authority as the Director of the party college during this period. However, as Wolf overcame external challenges and opposition during the *Aufbau* years, she would have to contend with a more personal challenge during the 1960s. After nearly two decades of complete loyalty and dedication to Ulbricht and the party, Wolf discovered that she was no longer politically compatible with Ulbricht and his new reforms. The following chapter will examine

the deterioration of Wolf's dedication and loyalty to Ulbricht and how she turned against him as a result of his more lenient reforms during the 1960s.

Chapter 3:

A Stalinist Stalled: Hanna Wolf and the Scientific Technological Revolution

After halting reform attempts and securing her position as head of the PHS during the previous decade, the 1960s brought even more challenges for Wolf and the party school. However, these challenges did not come from Wolf's peers within the PHS faculty, but from Ulbricht himself. Wolf's dedication to Stalinism did not waiver during this decade as Ulbricht attempted to initiate many new reforms in the regime, including the introduction of the New Economic System (NES), more liberal cultural and artistic policies and even to change the focus of studies in the education system toward a concentration on technology instead of ideology. This turn from ideology to technology at the PHS included directions from Ulbricht to develop more practicum work for students throughout the GDR. As a result of Ulbricht's reform initiatives, Wolf and other hardliners in the SED became disenchanted with him and the changes he was attempting to enforce in the regime. For Wolf, ideology was first and foremost when it came to being a dedicated communist and when Ulbricht went against her ideals and began making changes in how the PHS curricula should be managed, Wolf became resentful. The reforms pursued by Ulbricht during the early 1960s forever altered Wolf's relationship with the SED leader. As he attempted to encroach within her sphere of influence at the PHS, Wolf fought back by moving closer to Honecker, in order to maintain control over the party school.

Walter Ulbricht: From Hardliner to Liberalizer

During the early 1960s, Ulbricht made significant changes regarding student selection and curricula at the PHS in order to raise the technical and professional qualifications of graduates. While prerequisites for enrollment from the 1950s focused on student political orientation and class background, some of the new admission requirements at the PHS for the 1960s required at least fifty percent of students enrolled in the one-year course to already have a university or technical college education and priority was given to students who already had some experience in political leadership, economic or agricultural work. Likewise, student admissions for the three-year course prioritized applicants that had already accumulated a fair amount of full-time work experience in politics or the technical fields, with at least twenty percent of these students having completed a high school education.³⁶⁶

The one-year and distance learning courses catered to older and more experienced students who already had a fair deal of work experience while the three-year course was established for younger candidates. The new selection procedures also included specific regulations in regard to age; the cut-off for the three-year course was forty years old and any student applicant between forty and fifty years old must have been a party member for at least eight years with minimum five years of political work experience and could only be admitted into a one-year program.³⁶⁷ Throughout the early 1960s, efforts to improve the education of students at the PHS focused on four main areas: first, to deepen the understanding of the importance of the party's goals for national unification on communist lines. Second, improving

³⁶⁶ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/60810, “Department for Cadre Issues – Submission to the Secretariat of the Central Committee, Berlin, 13 August 1960.”

³⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/60810, “Department for Cadre Issues – Submission to the Secretariat of the Central Committee, Berlin, 13 August 1960.”

student ability in solving economic and political tasks necessary for the realization of socialism in the GDR. Third, improving and expanding the socialist relationships between people, and fourth, ensuring that the socialist worldview was strengthened and further developed to prevent bourgeois influence in East Germany.³⁶⁸ Essentially, the student curricula at the PHS during the early 1960s, as directed by the Central Committee of the SED, was supposed to focus on the development of functionaries that were not only devoted to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, but who could also go out into East German factories and party organizations with the necessary skills to lead worker collectives.

In order to improve the professional skills of students, the PHS was instructed to begin introducing work practicums into the course offerings. At a Department Chairs meeting in January 1962, a long discussion was held about the need for more practical work experience in the course curriculums. Kurt Hager, who was politically responsible for the PHS, read aloud results from interviews that were conducted with former PHS graduates on their educational experiences. Many former graduates who were interviewed held the unanimous opinion that “the PHS taught... [them] a lot, so that... [they] acquired a good foundation of knowledge... But they also expressed that the PHS must deepen the connection with life, with the practice of... [their] struggle, with the solution of economic tasks, in order to make aware the whole complexity of the struggle.”³⁶⁹ One former PHS graduate who had entered into party work after graduation remarked that: “the presentation at the school was often too simplified, that the studies went too

³⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

smoothly and did not do justice to the actual problems that had to be solved outside the school in a company or in a village or in the state and economic apparatus.”³⁷⁰

During the discussion, one of the Department Chairs, Dr. Rudi Herold, who had been teaching at the PHS since 1949, raised some concerns. Herold complained that the topic of improving student training at the PHS was an issue that was discussed every spring, but nothing was ever accomplished. He then suggested that the best course of action for student practical work would be to “ensure that the comrades are able to organize the masses outside to carry out the party’s decisions and to convince the population that our policy is the right one” and “in order to do this, however, they themselves [the students] must gain insight into the steps that need to be taken in order to build up socialism consciously, because it cannot be built up spontaneously... but we haven’t really gotten beyond the fact that we have to train cadres who are capable of putting politics into practice.”³⁷¹

Although PHS students had been entering into the workforce straight from the party school after completing their studies, their knowledge of the classics of Marxism-Leninism proved to be insufficient in how they performed in their positions. Rather than being prepared for work with technical and practical training, students were armed with Marxist-Leninist ideology, and both faculty and party functionaries in the field recognized this issue. However, Wolf and Hager were reluctant to seriously address this problem when it came to discussing the improvement of student training and the conversation was merely a regurgitation of typical Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. During the meeting, Herold shared that there were “complaints from

³⁷⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

fellow students that in such lessons they want to be acquainted not only with the basic categories of philosophical materialism – matter, space and time, but also with certain new discoveries... if you make an effort, it is quite possible that the comrades will also acquire this knowledge.”³⁷² In response to Herold, Hager stated “the task is to impart knowledge of materialism,” and Wolf concluded “that is probably not achievable with our current curriculum.”³⁷³

During the January 1962 meeting, faculty also brought up the topic of including more revisionist content being made available to students. However, discussion about including such content focused not on the value of the work but rather how it would help teach students the dangers of revisionism.³⁷⁴ PHS Department chairs concluded that it was important for students to be familiar with the history of the German Workers’ movement but only in order to better understand “the origins of today’s politics of the right-wing Social Democratic leaders...” and how “students can only become aware of the great power of Marxism-Leninism when they see how history has confirmed the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. How Marxism has creatively developed, how it answers the questions of our time, how it corresponds to a certain extent, to the spiritual interests and needs of people today.”³⁷⁵ However, Wolf remained closed to such ideas and the majority of the course curricula continued to rely on the classics of Marxism-Leninism and PHS student theses and dissertations analyzed during the 1960s refrained from using revisionist source materials in the research.³⁷⁶

³⁷² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁷³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, “Stenographic transcript for the Chairs Meeting at the PHS, Berlin, 29 January 1962.”

³⁷⁶ Georg Ebert, “Die Arbeitsgruppe bzw. der Lehrstuhl Politische Ökonomie des Sozialismus an der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ in den 60er und 70er Jahren“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer*

The use of revisionist content, a topic frequently brought up amongst PHS faculty during staff meetings even during the 1950s, continued to be banned at the PHS throughout the rest of the 1960s and 1970s. Although Ulbricht became more open to cooperation with the SPD during the mid-1960s, PHS faculty suggestions for the use of reformist literature in the student curricula continued to be rejected by Wolf. One reason for why Ulbricht eventually became more open to cooperation with the SPD was due to the appointment of Willy Brandt as Chairman of the West German SPD in 1964. According to Peter Grieder, Ulbricht was both the “initiator” and “main proponent” of dialogue with the SPD throughout the mid-to-late 1960s. At the Seventh Central Committee Plenum in December 1964, Ulbricht suggested that the nomination of Brandt could provide an opportunity for improved relations. In February 1967, Ulbricht even wrote to Brandt (without consent from the Soviets), hoping to initiate discussions and he also published an open letter proposing a united action programme.³⁷⁷ Through these actions, Ulbricht hoped to take the lead on the “national question,” meaning that he wanted to gain an upper hand in promoting German reunification along communist lines.³⁷⁸ However, the SPD rejected most of Ulbricht’s attempts and West German cooperation with the Eastern bloc would not take place until Brandt was elected Chancellor with his Social-Democratic-Liberal coalition government in late October 1969. One aspect of Brandt’s platform for position as Chancellor, was that he pledged to pursue

Rückblick, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 152-53. In a letter dated 20 January 1971, Wolf lists the teaching materials used at the PHS and states that the course materials had been in use for many years. An analysis of PHS student theses and dissertations is available in Chapter Four.

³⁷⁷ Peter Grieder, “The Overthrow of Ulbricht in East Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1998): 20-25.

³⁷⁸ Grieder, “The Overthrow of Ulbricht in East Germany,” 25. Although Ulbricht had been opposed to rapprochement with West Germany during the 1950s, Grieder states that Ulbricht’s stance changed during the 1960s due to the building of the Berlin Wall, the GDR’s increased stability and strength, and also because of the rise in popularity of the West German SPD.

the policy of *Ostpolitik* (Eastern policy), meaning a normalization and opening up to relations with Eastern Europe.³⁷⁹

Aside from Ulbricht's directives for more student practicums and changes in student selection, there was one initiative he put forward that was welcomed by Wolf. That was the requirement for one and three-year course participants to officially enroll in preparatory Russian language courses before being admitted into their respective programs.³⁸⁰ Since the abolishment of the Russian language requirement for student coursework was proposed by some PHS faculty members during the 1950s after Ulbricht's brief attempt at de-Stalinization, making students enroll in preparatory language classes was one of the few regulations initiated by Ulbricht during the 1960s which Wolf supported.³⁸¹ However, most of these changes did not sit well with Wolf. As both she and Hager were still dedicated hardliners, the majority of these modifications were the first of many that led to their disillusionment with Ulbricht.

As a result of both Wolf and Hager's resistance to many of Ulbricht's directives in the PHS curricula, a Teacher's Conference was held on the request of the Central Committee on 18 September 1962 in order to discuss the academic plan for the school year of 1962/1963. The meeting minutes stated that "despite good successes in the academic year 1961/1962... the faculties and chairs were not sufficiently prepared for the coming academic year. The preparations did not meet the demands that the Party made of the PHS" and then listed a set of measures that "must be implemented." The purpose of the Teacher's Conference was to discuss

³⁷⁹ Grieder, "The Overthrow of Ulbricht in East Germany," 32.

³⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/60810, "Department for Cadre Issues – Submission to the Secretariat of the Central Committee, Berlin, 13 August 1960."

³⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, "Meeting minutes for the department chair meeting on the improvement of teaching and teaching methods at the PHS – 8 August 1956."

how the PHS curricula had not met directives for more technical training and community work in the previous year. Some of the measures included:

When preparing and elaborating lessons, certain principles must be observed according to their special importance in the teaching process: as has already been discussed several times, the lessons must be prepared in practice...

At all levels, leadership must be improved... particular attention will be paid to the enforcement of decisions taken jointly by the Directorate and the Scientific Council. The faculty and chair directors are responsible for ensuring that socialist community work is developed and implemented in the research work, in the elaboration of certain lessons and in the preparation and implementation of predetermined seminars.

The increase in labour productivity among all teachers – which currently does not follow the pace of their development in industrial enterprises – requires the rapid and systematic raising of the political-ideological and scientific-theoretical level.³⁸²

A copy of the meeting minutes and the following directives were then distributed not only to all department and chair heads of the PHS but also to Wolf and Hager. As part of Ulbricht's transition to a scientific technocrat, he directed course curricula at the school to include course practicums in the already established courses where students went out into the community to gain practical experience working in factories or other collective enterprises. However, the PHS was slow to incorporate these measures fully and both Wolf and Hager had to be pushed to take these initiatives more seriously.

Although Wolf proved resistant to incorporating more student practicums in the PHS course curricula, the Department of Agricultural Economics had been sending students out into the field since 1955. Originally organized as a working group in the Department of Political Economics, the department received designation with its own Chair in the early 1970s. The

³⁸² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, "Meeting Minutes and Directives from the Teacher's Conference on 18 September 1962 for the new tasks in the academic year 1962/1963 – 4 October 1963."

purpose of the working group was to train students in agricultural cooperative production in order to help with the transition from private individual small-scale production to cooperative collective large-scale production.³⁸³ Student coursework initially focused on two areas: industry and agriculture and if a student performed well in their three-year course and passed an exam, they were able to pursue a master's degree. Courses in this department focused on "the basic findings of Marxist agricultural theory, agricultural economics and agricultural business theory, coupled with the presentation of new and future possible developments of science, technology and organization in agriculture and crop production, in animal and livestock farming, in storage management and the processing of agricultural products and with the presentation of sociological and ecological conditions and effects of these processes."³⁸⁴

According to former professors Günter Durak and Heinz Wachowitz, student coursework focused more on industry and academics, meaning industry and ideology, rather than agriculture as the department became more established. Teaching in the Department of Agricultural Economics initially started with the "Marxist view of the historical development of town and country, of 'agriculture as the mother of industry,'" and how the "invention" of agriculture and cattle breeding developed during the Neolithic period and progressed to the development of class societies, as well as a focus on the development of science and technology, the productive power of labour and the social division of labour.³⁸⁵ During the 1950s and 1960s, students were taught about policy implementation for the GDR's agricultural cooperative plan, experiences in the Soviet Union and the "forms and ways of participation of the peasants in state power and the

³⁸³ Günter Durak and Heinz Wachowitz, "Über den genossenschaftlichen Weg der Bauern zu einer modernen Landwirtschaft: Zur Lehre und Forschung des Lehrstuhls Ökonomik der Landwirtschaft" in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 188.

³⁸⁴ Durak and Wachowitz, 189-90.

³⁸⁵ Durak and Wachowitz, 190.

way of incorporating the LPG into the national planned economy.”³⁸⁶ However, since the mid-1960s, teaching shifted to focus more on basic questions of socialist business management in the LPGs, the development of cooperative relations, cooperation with the processing industry, trade in the food industry and problems of specialization in agricultural enterprises.³⁸⁷

Beginning in 1955, students from the three-year course were sent to LPGs to complete fourteen day internships, while one-year course participants completed seven day internships.³⁸⁸ Aside from students gaining hands-on experience working at collective farms, Durak and Wachowitz share some other “lessons” that students learned during their field work. For example, during the early 1960s, Professor Harry Milke (later Chair of the Department of Political Economics), was sent to the Thomas Müntzer LPG in the Oderbruch region to set up student practicum work. While speaking with the LPG Chairman Bernhard Grunert about how the weather was too cold and the soil was too wet to sow corn, an editor from the district newspaper called to enquire about the status of plant production, as there had been directives from the Central Committee to have corn sown by this time. On the call, Grunert assured the editor that the corn had been sown and that everything was fine. Grunert then turned to Milke and said “young comrade, you have to understand that my message just now to the district editor was perfectly fine. It brings a triple benefit: firstly, the central decisions and directives are respected. Secondly, our LPG is doing well in the press. We remain leaders in the district and they leave us alone. And finally, the corn will get into the ground at the right time.”³⁸⁹

Nearly ten years later, Durak was also sent to the same LPG to organize student practicums and again met with Grunert, who was still Chairman of the LPG. According to

³⁸⁶ Durak and Wachowitz, 191.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Durak and Wachowitz, 192.

³⁸⁹ Durak and Wachowitz, 198.

Durak, the Central Committee had just issued directives for all multi-branched farms to split into special farms, meaning that animal and plant production had to be separated. When Durak arrived at the LPG, there were two signs on the main door, when there used to only be one. A sign on the left read: “LPG Plant Production,” and on the right: “LPG Animal Production.” When Grunert met Durak at the main entrance he asked “where are you going? For crop production, you have to walk along the left railing, for animal production you have to walk along the right.”³⁹⁰

Despite Grunert’s continuous deceptions in following SED agricultural directives, the Thomas Müntzer LPG was one of the main locations for PHS students to complete their practicum work in the Department of Agricultural Economics. Durak and Wachowitz note that department faculty did not always agree with the decisions made by the Central Committee, especially the decision made after the VIII Party Congress (the first Party Congress chaired by Honecker), which issued a rapid restructuring of the LPGs into “special” or “split” LPGs. Although the Department of Agricultural Economics always subordinated teaching to the decisions of the SED, Durak and Wachowitz state that there was no regular cooperation between the department at the PHS and the Department of Agriculture at the Central Committee of the SED.³⁹¹ Evidently, it appears that both faculty and students in the Department of Agricultural Economics learned that sometimes clever manipulations could be employed when official policy seemed to cause unnecessary difficulties in the workplace.

Although the Department of Agricultural Economics had been sending students out into the field to gain first-hand experience working at LPGs, not all PHS departments did the same. Therefore, Ulbricht issued measures for more practicum work to be conducted by students

³⁹⁰ Durak and Wachowitz, 199.

³⁹¹ Durak and Wachowitz, 192.

enrolled in the three-year course in order to improve functionary training in factories, work collectives and in mass organizations. The curricula for the three-year course was based on the Soviet Union's own party training school system. In February 1962, the CPSU sent out a report on the academic structuring of their own system to the Ambassadors of the socialist countries in the Eastern bloc for the modelling of their respective party schools. The document indicated that all party training institutes in the Soviet Union focused on three main areas: 1) History of the CPSU, 2) Philosophy – dialectical and historical materialism and 3) Political Economy.³⁹² The PHS had been following this structure from the 1950s and continued to do so throughout the 1960s through 1980s, with the exception of the Department of Scientific Communism which was included at the PHS. However, throughout the various decades, different departments underwent name changes, restructuring or were added and removed. Individual course topics assigned to each department were also frequently subject to changes.³⁹³

One reason behind Ulbricht's transition from an ideological hardliner to a technocrat during the 1960s was due to the high numbers of East Germans who fled the regime before the building of the Berlin Wall. Between 1945 and 1961, 3.5 million people "voted with their feet," causing embarrassment for Ulbricht and the party.³⁹⁴ To make matters worse, West Germany referred to defectors as "refugees" instead of as "immigrants" and blamed the high numbers on East Germany's deplorable living conditions and totalitarian repression.³⁹⁵ Recognizing the massive differences between living standards in West Germany and the GDR, Ulbricht began

³⁹² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86330, "Report on information from the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Heads of the Chair of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the CPSU – 13 February 1962."

³⁹³ Johnny Norden and Rainer Brandau, "Zur Arbeit des Thälmann Instituts (Institut für Ausländerstudium) der Parteihochschule der SED" Zur Arbeit des Thälmann Instituts (Institut für Ausländerstudium) der Parteihochschule der SED" in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick* (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 217-18.

³⁹⁴ Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010): 56.

³⁹⁵ Major, 59.

focusing on how to improve the quality of life in the regime, and this included not only the development of the NES but also in making improvements at the PHS in order to train higher qualified party functionaries. However, before these developments could be initiated, Ulbricht decided to build the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 in order to block East Germans from being able to flee.³⁹⁶ In response to this new development, PHS faculty were instructed to inform students that the Wall was built due to the threat that Western powers planned to use “military intervention” to end the East German regime and re-establish fascism.³⁹⁷

Hope Harrison has shown that the building of the Berlin Wall was a measure which Ulbricht forced on the Soviets as he had more at stake with the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to West Germany. Harrison suggests that since the GDR was the weaker state, it had more to lose if the regime collapsed. Therefore, Ulbricht had more bargaining power and acted with more persistence in pursuing his goals and the Soviets ultimately had no choice but to allow him to close off access to West Berlin in order to maintain stability in the East German regime.³⁹⁸ The building of the Wall was supposed to be a temporary measure that would provide East Germany with some “breathing space,” as Ulbricht hoped that by preventing East Germans from leaving, the pressures of consumer demand influenced by the West, would ease and help improve the GDR’s own productivity and standard of living.³⁹⁹ However, the Berlin Wall proved to be a permanent fixture throughout the rest of the GDR’s existence until the collapse of the regime in 1989.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 55.

³⁹⁸ Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall*, 5-9.

³⁹⁹ Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 211.

As Peter Grieder points out, Ulbricht was initially viewed as an inflexible hardline Stalinist who was incapable of making space for reformist ideas. However, Grieder shows that this was not the case by the early 1960s, as Ulbricht began to engross himself in scientific and technological matters.⁴⁰⁰ The purpose behind Ulbricht's new direction was to eventually move ahead of West Germany by forcing the pace of the scientific technological revolution.⁴⁰¹ One such initiative put forward by Ulbricht came in 1963 with the NES. The purpose of the NES was to improve worker productivity by:

loosening up the rigid system of central planning and decision making; greater flexibility would be achieved through the introduction of 'economic levers.' Appealing to 'material interest,' the reform would make profit the primary measure for evaluating enterprise performance. The measure of profit, in turn, would be made possible by the introduction of more realistic – that is, market oriented – prices.⁴⁰²

The NES was not as successful as Ulbricht hoped it would be, in fact, Ulbricht's reformist attitude of the 1960s did more to upset many of his peers in the SED and even the higher-ups in Moscow than to improve economic performance. By 1968, Ulbricht's NES initiatives were brushed aside, as the Prague Spring resulted in the Soviets invading Czechoslovakia in August of that year. The events in Czechoslovakia were the most significant threat in the Eastern bloc since the Hungarian Uprisings in 1956 and Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) leader Alexander Dubček's initiatives to achieve "socialism with a human face" were crushed.⁴⁰³ As a result, anti-reform backlash spread across the Soviet bloc and Ulbricht's NES was abandoned.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 160.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² Landsman, 211.

⁴⁰³ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 174.

⁴⁰⁴ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 167.

Economic reforms were not the only changes the SED dictator encouraged during the 1960s. Ulbricht also loosened his grip on the GDR's cultural policies, allowing space for art and literature that was more open to criticism of the socialist system. Since the PHS often held events for writers and artists to share their work, this initiative had a direct impact on who visited the campus to provide guest lectures or lead discussions. One such writer who caused some controversy at the PHS was Erwin Strittmatter, First Secretary of the German Writers' Union (*Deutscher Schriftstellerverband* – DSV), with his book *Ole Bienkopp* (1963). Despite Strittmatter's questionable background as a reservist for Police Battalion 325 during the Nazi period, he was a two-time National Prize winner for Art and Literature for his play *Katzgraben* (Cat Graves – 1953) and youth novel *Tinko* (1955), and the SED had more or less given him the all-clear.⁴⁰⁵ Strittmatter led the cultural program spurred on by Ulbricht and the SED between 1959 through 1964, known as the *Bitterfelder Weg* (Bitterfeld Way), which was to promote culture “from below” in order to create a distinctive East German national culture.⁴⁰⁶ The Bitterfeld Way aimed to encourage artistic and literary participation and advancement through the form of “organized and institutionalized collective creativity,” usually within settings of collective labour such as building sites, factories and mines.⁴⁰⁷

The Bitterfeld Way initially had a significant impact on East German cultural output during the 1960s, as hundreds of work-place writing circles were formed and bookstore shelves

⁴⁰⁵ Matthias Braun, “Das Jahr 1959 - Erwin Strittmatter und der ‘Bitterfelder Weg’” in *Es geht um Erwin Strittmatter oder Vom Streit um die Erinnerung*, edited by Carsten Gansel and Matthias Braun, (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), 114.

⁴⁰⁶ Alison Lewis, “The Romancing of Collective Creativity: The ‘Bitterfelder Weg’ in Brigitte Reimann’s Letters and Diaries” in *Collective Creativity: Collaborative Work in the Sciences, Literature and the Arts*, edited by Gerhard Fischer and Florian Vassen, (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2011), 252.

⁴⁰⁷ Lewis, 254.

became lined with socialist literature focusing on the everyday lives of workers.⁴⁰⁸ Some well-known novels that resulted from this initiative included Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (The Divided Heaven – 1963), which was inspired by her time working at *VEB Waggonbau Ammendorf* and Brigitte Reimann's *Ankunft im Alltag* (Arrival in Everyday Life – 1961), which detailed the experiences of her writing circle at *Schwarze Pumpe* combine.⁴⁰⁹ However, in contrast to other socialist works published during this period, *Ole Bienkopp* caused quite a stir amongst the SED leadership and even led to a heated public debate in the regime because it deviated from the typical fashion of socialist realist literature. Strittmatter also caused some havoc while visiting the PHS in 1964, where he put the usually sharp Wolf on the spot.

Strittmatter's novel tells the story of his protagonist Ole Hansen, called Ole "Bienkopp" (Bee-Head), and his struggle to reform agriculture and start a collective farm in his village of Blumenau during the 1950s.⁴¹⁰ The story portrays Bienkopp's struggles with the party, most notably with the SED mayor of his village Frieda Simson, a hardline and dogmatic Stalinist that often-reflected Wolf's own personality, who worked against Bienkopp's efforts to start a collective farm. The climax of the novel sees Bienkopp removed as chairman of the collective farm he is attempting to organize, when Simson files false charges against him. After falling into a depression due to the failure of his project, Bienkopp retreats into isolation, working tirelessly on the farm until he dies of exposure. Bienkopp's death occurs just before his region's SED District Secretary arrives in Blumenau to drop Simson's charges and approve Bienkopp's collective farm.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Teilen Via, "Diese Auswirkungen hatte der "Bitterfelder Weg" für DDR-Kultur." *MDR*. 29 November 2021. Accessed 16 July 2022. <https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/ddr/politik-gesellschaft/kultur/bitterfelder-weg-102.html>

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Gregory D. Hanners, "Erwin Strittmatter's 'Ole Bienkopp' and the Origins of Political Criticism in GDR Literature," *Monatshefte*, vol. 87, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 205.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

Strittmatter's novel erupted in what became known as the "Bienkopp Affair," while the SED held heated debates over whether the novel should be subjected to censorship. However, the controversy over the book also garnered a great deal of attention amongst the general East German population and newspapers printed stories about the book and the public engaged in numerous discussions. The problem with Strittmatter's story was that it deviated significantly from what was typically expected in a socialist realist novel. Rather than telling a story where the protagonist is in conflict with counter-revolutionary forces, Strittmatter's protagonist was in conflict with the party itself. To complicate matters even further, the "socialist hero" presented in the novel proved to be more of an "anti-socialist hero" that dies from depression due to conflict with his local SED party members.⁴¹²

Throughout the novel, Strittmatter criticizes the dogmatism of his local SED members and even regularly makes harsh judgements on the Stalinism of the 1950s, which still persisted at the PHS, and members of the SED were concerned that readers might seek to emulate the individualistic and resistant behaviour of the main character.⁴¹³ However, the SED did finally approve the book and it became incredibly popular in the GDR. There were two main reasons the party approved Strittmatter's novel: first, was due to Strittmatter's own reputation and recognition as an acclaimed socialist writer. Second, SED functionaries concluded that the criticism in the novel was not directed at the higher levels of party leadership but was reserved for the lower levels of the party apparatus, specifically the SED mayor Frieda Simson.⁴¹⁴ *Ole Bienkopp* was the first popularly read novel in the GDR which did not follow the typical socialist

⁴¹² Hanners, 205.

⁴¹³ Hanners, 206.

⁴¹⁴ Hanners, 207.

realist format and opened the door for more politically critical works to be written and published during the rest of the 1960s.⁴¹⁵

In 1963, one of the public discussions surrounding *Ole Bienkopp* took place at the PHS in front of students and faculty. In his diary, Strittmatter describes the behaviour and reactions of Wolf throughout the discussion. According to Strittmatter, Wolf seemed to take a very disconcerting interest in one aspect of the novel that, ironically, seemed to mirror her own professional behaviours. In the novel, the antagonist Frieda Simson, the dogmatic mayor of Blumenau, keeps a “*Schwarzes Diarium*” (black diary), in which she records comments and keeps notes on her adversaries in order to intimidate them.⁴¹⁶ Strittmatter used the actions of Simson to highlight the abuses of Stalinism during the 1950s. In the novel, the District Secretary Wunschgetreu is made aware of Simson’s black book when she arrives at his office to file false charges against Bienkopp and reads incriminating comments allegedly made by him from her diary. However, Wunschgetreu is not fooled by Simson and condemns her for using such tactics.⁴¹⁷

This scene in the novel must have struck a chord with Wolf, as Strittmatter described his impression of her during the public discussion as being similar to a drunkard stumbling over her words and questions. Strittmatter wrote of the ordeal: “impression: *Säuferin* [drunkard]. Deep internal conflicts. Will not turn around from Stalin dogmatism. She repeatedly intersperses her contributions to the discussion: ‘I am called dogmatic, but I would like to ask...’ and she asks questions that show that she understands little about art. ‘Why did Bienkopp have to...’ the longer Comrade Wolf talks, the darker and more questioning the faces of the party college

⁴¹⁵ Hanners, 203.

⁴¹⁶ Hanners, 208.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

students become. You have never seen your headmistress like this before. You can feel the uncertainty and the maneuvering.”⁴¹⁸ Despite Wolf being the head official of the party school, Strittmatter undermined her position by referring to her as “headmistress,” as if she were in charge of youth at a private school rather than the Director of the party university.

During the event, when Strittmatter answered Wolf’s questions, the students in attendance expressed their sympathy for him by loudly applauding his responses. Clearly, the discussion over *Ole Bienkopp* held at the PHS put Wolf in a very uncomfortable situation, as someone who was known for her wit and clever mind, the similarities between her and the antagonist Simson must have made her feel like she was under an incriminating spotlight that ultimately left her dumbfounded. Strittmatter concluded in his journal entry: “the black diary from the novel has done it to her. So, that is what she read from *Bienkopp*: the black diary is the symbol of Stalin’s dogmatism. Yes, yes, that’s how I want it to be understood.”⁴¹⁹ The Bitterfeld Way movement more-or-less died by 1965, as the SED faced both internal and external conflict over Ulbricht’s reformist initiatives, which came to a head at the 11th Plenary Session of the SED on 15-18 December 1965. However, Wolf’s loyalty to Ulbricht had been on the decline for much of the early 1960s, as she disagreed with most of his political reforms. Despite Wolf’s feelings of discontent, she maintained an aura of amicability until the time was ripe to share her grievances which came during the 11th Plenum sessions.

Figure 6 provides an interesting glimpse into Wolf’s keen awareness on how to perceive and navigate the social and professional hierarchy that existed in the SED. The photograph shows Wolf receiving the Karl Marx Order from Ulbricht on 5 October 1964, in the midst of her frustration with him and the reforms he was pursuing both in the SED and at the party school.

⁴¹⁸ Annette Leo, *Erwin Strittmatter: Die Biographie*, (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2012), 10.

⁴¹⁹ Leo, 16.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-C1005-0005-066 / Fotoatelier Juno, Heinz

Figure 6: Hanna Wolf receiving the Karl Marx Order from Walter Ulbricht. 5 October 1964. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-C1005-0005-066.

One year after this ceremony, Wolf accompanied a small group of other SED members who travelled to the Soviet Union to prepare for an attack against Ulbricht at the 11th Plenum. Despite Wolf's animosity toward the SED leader, the photo shows her and Ulbricht shaking hands, with genuine happiness and admiration on their faces. The pleasantness of the situation appears to affect both parties equally. It seems like Wolf was just as delighted to receive the award, that included 20,000 DM, as Ulbricht was to give it. In this regard, Wolf comes across as deceitful, having worked her way into Ulbricht's good graces, even receiving honours and cash rewards for her loyalty and hard work. On the other hand, Ulbricht appears as the unsuspecting victim, unaware of Wolf's feelings of animosity. In a sense, it is like Wolf is wearing a mask of conformity, a mask that will eventually slip in late 1965 with preparations for the 11th Plenum, once she decides that Ulbricht is no longer useful as a political ally.

The *Kahlschlag* Plenum (clear-cut plenum) was initially planned to discuss Ulbricht's failing economic reforms. However, less than two weeks before the plenum, the chairman of the State Planning Commission, who oversaw the management of the NES, Eric Apel, committed suicide. Apel was not only primarily responsible for the NES, but he also advocated for international trade policies that would make the GDR more independent from the Soviet Union. After Nikita Khrushchev fell from power in October 1964, Apel was attacked for his policies by the more hardline elements within both the SED and CPSU.⁴²⁰ According to a former lawyer who worked under Apel in the State Planning Commission, Siegfried Seidel, much of the criticism towards Apel came from Erich Honecker, Alfred Neumann, the head of the Economic Council, Willi Stoph, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Central Committee members Margot Honecker and Hanna Wolf.⁴²¹ Willi Stoph supposedly ordered Seidel to prepare disciplinary action against Apel after the 10th Plenary session in the summer of 1965 for "consequences for serious violations of state discipline in the Planning Commission."⁴²² Prior to this, the State Planning Commission had been in charge of managing vocational training programs for secondary students until Margot Honecker, who had been appointed Minister of Education in 1963, expressed dissatisfaction with the programs. As a result, Margot Honecker, along with other Central Committee members, co-signed an ordinance that stipulated which professions required technical training and which did not and then made Apel speak about his mistakes at the 10th Plenary session.⁴²³

⁴²⁰ Eugene K. Keefe, et al., *Area Handbook for East Germany* (Washington, DC: Foreign Area Studies, the American University, 1972), 139.

⁴²¹ Siegfried Seidel, "Zur Position Erich Apels" in *Kahlschlag das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente*, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991), 253.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

Afterwards, the Politburo decided that Apel should speak again in front of the Politburo and Central Committee members before he was handed his documents on how he had violated state discipline.⁴²⁴ The attack on Apel had been orchestrated by the Honeckers and the other neo-Stalinist SED members, including Wolf, and only grew worse over the coming months.⁴²⁵ During fall 1965, Ulbricht also received internal and external pressure to abandon the NES and to move the GDR's economic initiatives closer to the Soviet Union's. In late November 1965, the new Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev travelled to East Berlin to sign a new trade agreement which completely abandoned the NES program and after months of being on the defense, Apel shot himself with a pistol just a few hours before the trade deal was signed.⁴²⁶

Another issue which emerged during this time had to do with rising youth unrest as demonstrations erupted in Leipzig and other East German cities and plans for the upcoming 11th Plenum shifted its focus from concentrating not only on the failures of the NES but also toward youth and cultural policies in the GDR. However, due to Apel's recent death, the Honecker faction was not entirely confident in their decision to shift the Plenum towards a stronger focus on culture and a small group left for Moscow only days before the session was to be held in order to garner Soviet support. On 9 December 1965, Hager, along with four other SED Central Committee members, including Kurt Rätz, a consultant in the Department of Culture, Hannes Hörnig, head of the Department of Sciences, Hanna Wolf, and an employee from the East German embassy, set out on a short three-day trip to Moscow to discuss the upcoming 11th Plenum

⁴²⁴ Seidel, 254.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ Keefe, 140.

sessions.⁴²⁷ The purpose of the trip was to meet with Pyotr Demichev, the Soviet chairman of the Ideological Commission of the CPSU Central Committee to ensure Soviet support for the upcoming attack against GDR artists and the return to more hardline cultural policies.⁴²⁸ Hager received the support they required to launch their attack and quickly issued a written report summarizing the meeting and sent it to all members of the Politburo and Central Committee before the 11th Plenum took place. As a result, the sessions of the 11th plenum were far more heated and accusatory than usual for an SED meeting.⁴²⁹

The 11th Plenum took place over three days and included speeches by various Politburo and Central Committee members, as well as from artists and writers. The sessions also included the viewing of films such as *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (The Rabbit is Me – 1965) by Kurt Maetzig and *Denk bloß nicht, ich heule* (Just Don't Think I'm Crying – 1965) by Frank Vogel. Attendees also read manuscripts for plays and discussed youth beat groups and their influence in the GDR. During the sessions, many East German writers, directors and artists were directly attacked and Hans Bentzien, the Minister of Culture, was removed from his position.⁴³⁰ One East German writer who attended and spoke in front of the Politburo and Central Committee members was Christa Wolf (no relation to Hanna Wolf), who was a member of the East German Writers' Union and is remembered for such novels as *Der geteilte Himmel* (The Divided Heaven – 1963) and *Cassandra* (1983). Christa Wolf's speech in front of the many SED members started out supportive of the East German regime and socialist system with phrases such as "it seems

⁴²⁷ Andreas Kötzing, "Grünes Licht aus Moskau. Die SED-Führung am Vorabend des "Kahlschlag"-Plenums." *BPB: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. 10 June 2016. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/228714/gruenes-licht-aus-moskau/>

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Keefe, 140.

appropriate to say that I am very happy to live and write here and that I am in the Writers' Association that Becher and Brecht were in and that Anna Seghers is President of today," and "I believe that socialist society not only develops society itself, but it is the only society that allows literature and art to develop truly and freely."⁴³¹

Christa Wolf then went on to defend her peer and friend Werner Bräunig, whose unpublished manuscript *Rummelplatz* had two excerpts under scrutinization at the 11th Plenum sessions. *Rummelplatz* dealt with Bräunig's own experience of working at the Soviet owned uranium mine at Wismut during the 17 June 1953 uprisings. The novel had been under attack by the SED for months before the 11th Plenary meeting and Christa Wolf was the only person in attendance to defend Bräunig. Speaking out against the criticisms aimed at Bräunig, Wolf stated, "I believe and know that Werner Bräunig did not write this book because he wants to be sold in the West. I think that is one baseless suspicion that is not appropriate to a writer who has not provided any means of doing so..." and "in my opinion, these excerpts... do not testify to the anti-socialist attitude he has been accused of. On this point, I cannot agree. I cannot reconcile this with my conscience. I do not believe it."⁴³² Throughout Christa Wolf's speech, there were interjections from SED members, who accused her of making a "defense speech" and claims that many GDR authors were writing anti-socialist content as an attempt to make themselves interesting.⁴³³ Although Wolf was not directly reprimanded for her defense of Bräunig, after the sessions had ended, she requested to have her candidacy for the Central Committee cancelled

⁴³¹ Christa Wolf, "Christa Wolf: Diskussionsbeitrag" in *Kahlschlag das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente*, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991), 337-38.

⁴³² Christa Wolf, 338.

⁴³³ Christa Wolf, 339.

and spent some time in a psychiatric hospital for stress. She later stated that “after the 11th Plenum [in] 1965, I was for a very long time in a state of deep depression.”⁴³⁴

Since the 11th Plenum was essentially an attack on Ulbricht’s reform initiatives by the Honecker faction, which included Wolf and Hager, it is important to address the way in which he handled the meetings. Similar to past situations where he came under the scrutiny of other SED members, Ulbricht fell in line with his critics and accepted that his cultural liberalization policies would return to the more hardline pre-1960 forms. Ulbricht also directly addressed the issue of “cultural excesses” amongst certain GDR groups and the “so-called beat movement,” as Ulbricht had approved the Youth Communiqué, entitled “Young People: Trust and Responsibility,” which was published by the Politburo in September 1963 and was a partial liberalization on the former hardline and repressive youth policies of the 1950s.⁴³⁵

The Youth Communiqué included passages which emphasized how young people in the GDR were the “Masters of Tomorrow” and how the criticisms of young people could be used to reform the GDR into a more open society. GDR youth were encouraged to put pressure on their local authority figures in order to help improve youth policies.⁴³⁶ The reasoning behind this liberalization on youth policy was the hope that, if such policies were implemented more effectively, there would be less western and imperialistic influence on young people in the regime. For East German artists and musicians, this new communiqué was incredibly refreshing, as it appeared to be indicative that the repressive policies from the 1950s were being

⁴³⁴ Hannes Krauss, “Avant-Garde or Idyll? Christa Wolf’s Discovery of Modernity” in *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, edited by Hilary Chung, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1996), 152.

⁴³⁵ Mark Fenimore, “The Limits of Repression and Reform: Youth Policy in the early 1960s” in Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds), *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-1971* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 177.

⁴³⁶ Fenimore, 178.

abandoned and many artists, writers and musicians began to experiment with more taboo subjects and be more critical in their works.⁴³⁷ However, for hardliners like Wolf, who dealt with East German youth on a daily basis, this new policy was a nightmare. Likewise, the Youth Communiqué also criticized the GDR's formalistic teaching styles, which it claimed led to "feigned allegiance" and instead called for "more attention to individual personalities and problems."⁴³⁸

Ulbricht and other reformers recognized that the youth of the 1960s were not the same as previous generations, as they did not grow up experiencing fascism, war, deprivation or exploitation and were therefore less concerned with political warnings about militarism or the dangers of imperialism. Therefore, it was decided that different measures had to be pursued in order to garner their support and participation.⁴³⁹ According to Mark Fenemore, the reasons Ulbricht loosened his grip on East German youth policy "remain ambiguous." He suggests that this partial liberalization could have been an attempt to appease the more radical reformers in the regime, while on the other hand, "given the return to repression only two years later, the relaxation of 1963 can be seen as a disingenuous measure to trick young people into hanging themselves with their own rope."⁴⁴⁰ Whatever the reasons for Ulbricht's relaxation on youth measures, Honecker and other hardliners like Mielke, Margot Honecker, Hager and Wolf were not on board with these new policies and made every effort to overturn them.

As Margot Honecker was appointed Minister of Education in 1963, she was able to reverse the education policies initiated by Ulbricht while Mielke developed new guidelines for

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ Fenemore, 179.

⁴³⁹ Fenemore, 172.

⁴⁴⁰ Fenemore, 177.

dealing with non-conformist groups.⁴⁴¹ During the summer of 1965, only months before the 11th Plenum meeting, there was also a purge of pro-reformers in the administration who had been supportive of the Youth Communiqué and they were removed from their positions.⁴⁴² One of the main purposes of the 11th Plenum sessions was to discuss the issues caused by the Youth Communiqué and to determine what the causes were behind these dissenting groups. However, the Politburo and Central Committee decided that instead of addressing the root cause of the problem, that is the reasons behind youth dissent, the discussion would centre on an investigation “at the top, where have the central organs, television, culture and literature worked in such a way that such effects on young people were unavoidable?”⁴⁴³ Ulbricht came under fire for his encouragement of the Youth Communiqué and understood that in order to maintain his position as leader of the SED and remain in good standing with the authorities in the CPSU, he had to fall in line with the more scrutinizing faction of SED members.

Although Wolf was not one of the scheduled speakers during the sessions, she did make significant contributions which showcased her anger and harsh criticism towards the relaxed cultural policies that had characterized the first half of the 1960s. Audio recordings from the sessions depict Wolf as yelling her words in an angry tone while also using vulgar language.⁴⁴⁴ After Ulbricht’s reform initiatives at the PHS, which included a shift to focus more on technical education rather than ideology and the openness for writers such as Strittmatter to publish works that were critical of the socialist system, and especially the embarrassment she felt during Strittmatter’s visit to the PHS, Wolf clearly had a lot of emotions to express and the critical

⁴⁴¹ Fenemore, 179.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ Walter Ulbricht, “Walter Ulbricht: Zwischenrede” in *Kahlschlag das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente*, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1991), 332.

⁴⁴⁴ Original sound document of Hanna Wolf’s contribution during the 11th Plenum sessions. 15-18 December 1965. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://geschichte-wissen.de/blog/tondokumente-11-plenum-teil2/>

atmosphere of the 11th Plenum opened the door for her to not only express her opinions, but to angrily shout them out loud.

Taking the floor, Wolf addressed the issue that plagued her the most, especially as Director of the PHS, which was the move away from an ideological to technical focus in the course curricula, stating “it seems to me that in recent ideological work, I mean not only the work of professional ideologues, but also the work of the party organizations, we have somewhat forgotten something that used to be common and very useful, namely, the question of the class struggle and the need for it to be dealt with more thoroughly and clearly.”⁴⁴⁵ Although Wolf did not specifically refer to Ulbricht, her words were a direct attack on his push for technology and his reformist attitude of the past years. Wolf lamented that there had been criticism from party members in regard to how Marxism-Leninism was taught at the PHS and how it was considered boring, uncreative and dogmatic. Wolf shouted to the audience:

But the way it’s been lately, that people only bitch about the method of Marxism, excuse me, comrades, if I fall into the usual jargon but does not say that first of all the study of Marxism is necessary, then we do not get along. That is my view. Maybe I have the wrong view! (Audience cheers: You are absolutely right!)⁴⁴⁶

Wolf then went on to condemn “false prophets” such as Robert Havemann and East German writer Stefan Heym, who openly criticized the socialist system in the GDR. Havemann had been a Professor at Humboldt University as well as the Director of the Physical-Chemical Institute from 1950 through 1964, however, he was removed from both positions.

⁴⁴⁵ Original sound document of Hanna Wolf’s contribution during the 11th Plenum sessions. 15-18 December 1965. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://geschichte-wissen.de/blog/tondokumente-11-plenum-teil2/>

⁴⁴⁶ Original sound document of Hanna Wolf’s contribution during the 11th Plenum sessions. 15-18 December 1965. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://geschichte-wissen.de/blog/tondokumente-11-plenum-teil2/>

Although Havemann was himself a communist, he was opposed to Stalinism and was a strong supporter of the Czech leader Alexander Dubček.⁴⁴⁷ Even prior to the 11th Plenum sessions, both Hager and Wolf spoke out against Havemann during a Central Committee meeting in February 1964. The fifth session of the Central Committee meeting took place shortly after Havemann held a series of lectures at Humboldt University in East Berlin which were critical of Marxism-Leninism. The purpose of the meeting was for the Central Committee to issue a lecture ban against the professor causing several SED and Central Committee members to go on the attack.⁴⁴⁸ Hager accused Professor Havemann of maintaining a line of thinking which deviated from the party and the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. According to Hager, Havemann “completely ignore[d] historical changes” that had taken place since Stalin’s death, including the “elimination of all effects of the personality cult surrounding Stalin by our party” and stated that Havemann “behaves as a champion against dogmatism.”⁴⁴⁹ Likewise, Wolf also contributed to the attacks on Havemann, stating “I don’t understand why a scientist, they say that Havemann is a scientist, holds philosophical lectures and seminars... why does Havemann have to give lectures on morality at Berlin’s Humboldt University, why do we allow him to spoil our young people like Socrates. He is not as clever as Socrates.” The fifth session of the Central Committee meeting resulted in a lecture ban against Havemann and he remained in the GDR, being put under house arrest in 1976, until his death in 1982.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch DX 3/ 866, “Lecture Ban for Professor Havemann – Sharp Attack by leading SED Functionaries. *IWE Berlin*. 4 March 1964.”

⁴⁴⁸ G. Ann Stamp Miller, *The Cultural Politics of the German Democratic Republic: The Voices of Wolf Biermann, Christa Wolf, and Heiner Muller* (USA: Brown Walker Press, 1999): 75.

⁴⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch DX 3/ 866, “Lecture Ban for Professor Havemann – Sharp Attack by leading SED Functionaries. *IWE Berlin*. 4 March 1964.”

⁴⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch DX 3/ 866, “Lecture Ban for Professor Havemann – Sharp Attack by leading SED Functionaries. *IWE Berlin*. 4 March 1964.”

Stefan Heym was also a loyal communist who became subject to attacks for “giving false pictures of life in the Soviet Union and the GDR,” for publishing material in the West, and for writing about “Western-oriented truth.”⁴⁵¹ Prior to the 11th Plenum, Heym had published an article entitled “A Lonely Voice” in Hamburg’s *Die Zeit* newspaper on 29 October 1965 which read:

We expect our fellow writers in the West to raise their voices against tyranny and for human rights. Do we raise our voices whenever the great principles are violated, principles for which our revolution was made? We expect our fellow writers in the West, if need be, to give up honours, comforts and life for so unrewarding a thing as truth.⁴⁵²

According to Wolf, these types of people, were forgetful that it was socialism which brought the destruction of fascism and that allowed them to be able to live and freely complain today. Wolf referred to the viewpoints of such people like Havemann and Heym, as well as other critical artists and writers, as having a “brothel point of view,” meaning that their opinions were immoral, undignified and influenced by ill-reputed Western and imperialist sources.⁴⁵³

Wolf then went on the attack against the Deputy Minister of Culture and Head of the Film Department, Gunter Witt, who had spoken earlier at the 11th Plenum. Witt was severely criticized for his role in approving the license for the film *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, one of the films shown to the session attendees for review and scrutinization.⁴⁵⁴ Shortly after the 11th Plenum sessions concluded, Witt was removed from his position as Deputy Minister of the Culture Department. Witt’s speech at the Plenum was apologetic and he suggested that the SED

⁴⁵¹ Ilse Spittmann, “East Germany: The Swinging Pendulum,” *Problems of Communism*, vol. xvi (July/August 1967): 17-18.

⁴⁵² Spittmann, 17.

⁴⁵³ Original sound document of Hanna Wolf’s contribution during the 11th Plenum sessions. 15-18 December 1965. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://geschichte-wissen.de/blog/tondokumente-11-plenum-teil2/>

⁴⁵⁴ Sean Allan, “DEFA: An Historical Overview” in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, edited by Sean Allan and John Sandford, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 13.

members “could leave it up to the audience to reflect on a solution to the contradictions and conflicts shown in it [the film].”⁴⁵⁵ Wolf was angered by Witt’s remarks, especially because he had been a former student at the PHS and she used him as an example on how the significance of ideology had recently been lost amongst some SED comrades. Wolf stated “I was very surprised at Comrade Witt’s contribution to the discussion. He spoke very learnedly, but the word “class struggle” or “class view” did not even appear in his speech even though he studied at the party school for three years.”⁴⁵⁶

The 11th Plenum sessions brought an end to the short-lived era of artistic and cultural openness. The Bitterfeld Weg movement fell apart after 1965 and the more hardline policies of the 1950s returned. In the aftermath of the 11th Plenum sessions, at least eleven films were banned, including Gunther Stahnke’s *Der Frühling braucht Zeit* (Spring Takes its Time – 1965), Jürgen Böttcher’s *Jahrgang 45* (Born in 1945 – 1966) and Frank Beyer’s *Spur der Steine* (The Trace of Stones – 1966).⁴⁵⁷ Along with Witt and Bentzien, many film directors and *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (German Film Agency – DEFA) employees lost their positions while other artists and writers were heavily censored or banned from publishing. Most notably, the performer Wolf Biermann, whose plays, poetry, and music were critical of the GDR, especially during the 1960s after the erection of the Berlin Wall, was blacklisted from publishing and performing and was eventually forced out of the country in 1976. However, Biermann did not want to leave the GDR and was tricked by East German authorities who gave him “permission” to perform in West Germany then refused to allow him back into the regime.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Original sound document of Hanna Wolf’s contribution during the 11th Plenum sessions. 15-18 December 1965. Accessed 10 July 2022. <https://geschichte-wissen.de/blog/tondokumente-11-plenum-teil2/>

⁴⁵⁷ Allan, 13.

⁴⁵⁸ Miller, 83.

The 20th Anniversary of the PHS

Less than one year after members of the Politburo and Central Committee met for the 11th Plenary session in 1965, the PHS recognized its twenty-year anniversary with a full day celebration. Interestingly, neither Ulbricht nor Honecker attended the event. Both Erich and Margot Honecker were included on the draft guest list but were unable to attend, while Ulbricht and his wife Lotte, were not included on the guest list at all.⁴⁵⁹ The reason why Ulbricht and his wife were not invited is unknown. Hager provided congratulations and warm greetings on behalf of Ulbricht and made references to some of his past speeches. However, very little acknowledgement of Ulbricht was made during the event.⁴⁶⁰ In fact, Hager served as the highest appointed political representative at the celebration and gave speeches and led the festivities, while Wolf acted as moderator, introducing speakers and maintaining the event schedule.⁴⁶¹

The celebration took place on 14 May 1966 on the PHS campus and included an opening speech by Hager, a premiere of a documentary film about the German workers' movement, a group lunch followed by a cultural program in the afternoon and then concluded with a dinner and dance. Guests included current students, various Politburo and Central Committee members, some international representatives from other Eastern bloc parties, as well as PHS staff and other members of the GDR academic community.⁴⁶² Wolf was presented with an award of recognition for her service to the PHS. The award was initially to be presented by Honecker but due to his absence, SED member and mayor of Berlin, Friedrich Ebert, made the presentation. Other PHS staff and instructors were issued certificates for their service, however, only Wolf made a short

⁴⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "Draft guest list for the 20th anniversary of the PHS celebration, 1966."

⁴⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁶² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "Celebration program pamphlet for the 20th anniversary of the PHS, 1966."

speech, since she was the Director and leading functionary of the school.⁴⁶³ Wolf also wrote a short foreword in the commemoration pamphlet which was developed for the event. This pamphlet included essays by various instructors and SED members on the history of the German workers' movement and the building of socialism in the GDR. The foreword provided by Wolf gave a short history of the development of the PHS and she wrote about how "being a party worker was not just a job, but a revolutionary job, that they [PHS students] are professional revolutionaries whose purpose is to lead and plan the great revolutionary process of our time in the GDR and throughout Germany."⁴⁶⁴

In the foreword, Wolf also recognized outstanding party members who helped pave the way for the building of socialism in East Germany, including Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, and Ulbricht, in that order. Then she concluded her foreword with gratitude for the party leadership, the Central Committee, members of the Politburo, and then Ulbricht, again, in this order.⁴⁶⁵ At first glance, the order of these acknowledgements would not come across as a slight towards Ulbricht. However, the cult of personality which existed around Ulbricht during the 1950s and early 1960s was no longer present and the placement of Ulbricht as the primary leader of the SED was replaced with the recognition of collective leadership in her writing. Ulbricht played a major role in the development of the PHS and Wolf had maintained close work relations with him since her time spent in exile in the Soviet Union. Since Ulbricht was still the party leader, Wolf felt obliged to acknowledge him, as she always pursued actions that promoted party unity. However, Wolf's loyalty and dedication to Ulbricht had significantly diminished.

⁴⁶³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "Course of the celebration draft program for the 20th anniversary of the PHS, 1966."

⁴⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "Festschrift for the 20th anniversary of the PHS, 1966."

⁴⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "Festschrift for the 20th anniversary of the PHS, 1966."

Likewise, Hager also made some interesting comments that portrayed his and Wolf's discontentment with Ulbricht during his opening speech at the anniversary celebration. Similar to Wolf, he noted how some leading functionaries made significant contributions to the PHS and acknowledged Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, Ulbricht and then other Central Committee members.⁴⁶⁶ Both Pieck and Grotewohl had died in the years prior to the anniversary celebration and their positions within the SED hierarchy (with Pieck serving as First President and Grotewohl as Prime Minister of the GDR) were merely symbolic as Ulbricht maintained power as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED. Despite this, both Hager and Wolf acknowledged Pieck and Grotewohl's names before Ulbricht's, ultimately assigning them more importance in the history of the communist movement in East Germany. Hager also made reference to suspicions about internal conflict within the party and assured the audience that "our party is and will remain united, under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht, we have a stable collective leadership which acts with complete unanimity."⁴⁶⁷

Hager's hollow acknowledgement of Ulbricht was then followed with discussion on the priorities of the SED and how they were to continue to be implemented at the PHS. Many of these priorities were reflective of issues that arose due to Ulbricht's partial liberalization measures during the early 1960s and his attempts to cooperate with the SPD. For example, Ulbricht's openness for co-operation with the SPD was directly addressed by Hager multiple times. Acknowledging the successful merger of the KPD and SPD in 1946, Hager stated,

the union of the KPD and SPD took place on the basis of Marxism. The revolutionary combat experience of the communists, as well as the knowledge and experience of hundreds of thousands of Social Democrats went into the unification of the party of the working class and merged into a unified whole. However, the comrades who threw

⁴⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

themselves into the fight against imperialism and fascism had to learn many new things, check old knowledge and experiences or overcome existing sectarian and reformist views.⁴⁶⁸

Hager made sure to point out the many faults of social democracy in his speech and the reasons why the continued emphasis on the study of Marxism-Leninism at the PHS was so vital for the building of socialism in the GDR. As hardline Stalinists like Honecker, Hager and Wolf were strongly opposed to the inclusion of more social democratic content at the school, Hager's words seemed to be a direct confrontation with Ulbricht's reformist agenda. Hager also spoke on the SPD in West Germany and how they were "right-wing" and "largely in agreement with the foreign policy of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)," meaning that the SPD in West Germany supported the "dirty war of American imperialism against the Vietnamese people."⁴⁶⁹

Although issues such as reformism had always been a point of contention amongst SED members, Hager's speech appeared to be a direct reflection of the internal instability that had been plaguing the SED in recent years. Hager also briefly addressed the growth of the PHS since its establishment in 1946, when it had a faculty of merely seven teachers and four assistants, to how it now maintained a staff of seven professors, thirty-six lecturers and ninety-six teachers and assistants. He also mentioned how over 160 books and pamphlets had been published by the PHS since the beginning of the 1960s.⁴⁷⁰ However, the majority of his speech focused on the importance of the PHS maintaining its focus on the theoretical teachings of Marxism-Leninism and used spiteful language against the SPD, West Germany and the United States as a result:

The international situation has worsened due to the aggressiveness of imperialism, above all, by the

⁴⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁷⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

imperialist circles in the United States and their West German associates. However, imperialism, whatever means and methods it employs, is incapable of turning history in its favour.⁴⁷¹

Rather than celebrating the positive achievements of the PHS and its faculty members, Hager chose to lament the dangers posed by social democracy and its connection to western imperialist forces. Aside from Wolf's award and short speech at the beginning of the festivities, and a quick note of gratitude at the beginning of Hager's "lecture," there was no other mention of Wolf and her dedication to the PHS. As Ulbricht had been making significant changes in the GDR since the beginning of the 1960s, with the development of the NES, more openness in art and culture, and shifting the focus of educational institutions toward more technical knowledge and practical experience, the 20 year anniversary of the PHS was used more as a platform for those SED members who had become disillusioned with Ulbricht to reinforce their own political ideals. Hager made it clear in his speech that "education for class-consciousness and revolutionary action, loyalty to Marxism-Leninism, the fight for the victory of socialism, for the further strengthening and consolidation of the GDR, is the main focus for the work at the PHS."⁴⁷²

It is difficult to imagine that Wolf would have taken offense at the lack of acknowledgment of the progress made at the PHS in any of the speeches or activities which took place during the 20-year anniversary celebration. Wolf was, above all, an ideologue and had gone to battle against her critics over the maintenance of hardline ideology many times before. During the 1950s, Wolf sat idly by the sidelines waiting for the green light to go on the attack against her adversaries at the PHS who had criticized her dogmatic tendencies and were pushing

⁴⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁷² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

for reforms which included abolishing the Russian language requirements and adding social democratic literature. The changes initiated by Ulbricht during the 1960s went against everything Wolf had worked for during the previous decade and as a result such changes would have completely altered the path she had paved for both the curriculum and future of the party school.

Although no negative words were spoken against Ulbricht during the 20-year anniversary festivities, this was not because hardliners like Hager and Wolf were eager to work in unison with Ulbricht through a collective leadership format, but rather because hardliners truly believed in the concept of “*Fehlerdiskussion*” (error discussion). *Fehlerdiskussion* essentially meant “no discussion of past mistakes” and was typical for SED policy during the 1950s and 1960s, as discussion of any leader or the party’s past mistakes or problems could be dangerous and lead to a loss of faith in the party leadership, or worse, an uprising such as the one which took place in June 1953. Therefore, neither Hager or Wolf would speak critically of Ulbricht in front of PHS students and their guests.⁴⁷³

However, Ulbricht was able to maintain some influence at the PHS concerning his “radical” initiatives, which Wolf detested. The work practicums that Ulbricht engineered during the early 1960s in order to improve the technical expertise of students continued to run throughout the late 1960s. This was a contentious issue for hardliners like Hager and Wolf and another reason why Hager’s speech continuously hailed ideology and the theory of Marxism-Leninism and its importance at the 20th anniversary celebration. Albeit, Hager did mention the “requirement” for these practicums in his speech and made reference to the development of a new department that would address the issue of scientific leadership activities of the party within

⁴⁷³ Matthias Judt, “Deutschlands doppelte Vergangenheit: Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichte” in *DDR-Geschichte in Dokumenten: Beschlüsse, Berichte, interne Materialien und Alltagszeugnisse*, edited by Matthias Judt, et al. (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 16.

the real socialist community. However, Hager also noted that the information gathered on the results of this initiative were, at that time, insufficient and he repetitively continued to advocate for the importance of ideology:

In order for the strategy and tactics for solving the national question to be implemented, we need even more well-founded theoretical and ideological work. I am sure that all PHS enthusiasts will participate in this work with all their knowledge and skills.⁴⁷⁴

Consequently, the PHS continued to operate under the influence of Ulbricht, who had steered the course curricula to include practical work for students, but not without resentment on behalf of other Central Committee members such as Honecker, Hager, and especially Wolf.

Fortunately for these ideologues, Ulbricht's reform initiatives were further brushed aside with the Prague Spring in 1968. The majority of criticism the SED leader received in the previous years, and especially at the 11th Plenary session in 1965, only worked to reinforce the continuation of oppressive measures in East German society and also Wolf's maintenance of Stalinist methods at the party school. Similar to Ulbricht, Dubček had spent many years in the Soviet Union and his leadership and replacement of Novotny in January 1968 was at first not much of a concern for the Soviets and other Eastern bloc parties. However, this changed as Dubček advocated for extreme changes such as freedom to travel, freedom of the press, freedom to live abroad, artistic freedoms, rehabilitation of victims of the Stalinist purges as well as major economic reforms.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/86710, "20th anniversary of the PHS opening speech by Kurt Hager, 14 May 1966."

⁴⁷⁵ Matthew Stibbe, "Ideological Offensive: The East German Leadership, the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of August 1968" in *Eastern Europe in 1968: Responses to the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion*, edited by Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 107.

The changes initiated by Dubček became a cause for concern for not only the Soviets but even for Ulbricht. First, the SED was worried about the border situation between the GDR and Czechoslovakia and what might happen if a rapprochement was made between the Czechs and West Germany.⁴⁷⁶ Second, Ulbricht was concerned that the liberalization taking place under Dubček could provoke Soviet military intervention, thus drawing attention to his own reform initiatives in the GDR. Third, there was also the issue that the SED itself did not fully deal with the death of Stalin and de-Stalinization during the 1950s. If Dubček fully rehabilitated Czech victims of the Stalinist purges and allowed for more intellectual and artistic freedoms, the SED's own crimes would be brought into focus and criticism from oppositional figures such as Robert Havemann, who had been expelled from the SED in 1964, would be legitimized.⁴⁷⁷ Lastly, Politburo and Central Committee members worried about how the Prague Spring would affect East German youth, since the regime had reversed its more liberal cultural policies after the 11th Plenum in December 1965.⁴⁷⁸ However, support for military intervention in Czechoslovakia was welcomed by a minority of young East Germans in the FDJ. According to Alan McDougall, a “substantial minority” supported the FDJ's campaign against Dubček with “varying degrees of enthusiasm.” For example, some FDJ members signed “declarations of support” and in contrast to the events of June 1953, or the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, there was no “mass exodus of FDJ members” during late 1968.⁴⁷⁹

Despite some minor support for military intervention amongst FDJ members, effects of the Prague Spring on university students in the GDR were already being felt in the regime. Stasi

⁴⁷⁶ Stibbe, 103.

⁴⁷⁷ Stibbe, 105.

⁴⁷⁸ Stibbe, 106.

⁴⁷⁹ Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement, 1946-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 222-23.

reports from 1967 and 1968 indicated that students across East German university campuses had been calling for more freedom and in March 1968, students and professors were outed by police informers for voicing pro-Dubček and pro-Czech support.⁴⁸⁰ This led Hager to make an anti-Dubček speech at a philosophy congress on 15 March 1968 in Leipzig in which a group of youth activists circulated flyers with such slogans as “Send the dogmatists into retirement!” and “Rehabilitation for Prof. Havemann!”⁴⁸¹ The effects of Dubček’s reform program proved to hardline Stalinists in the SED that Ulbricht’s earlier progressive initiatives were still a threat to the stability of the regime, which just added to the already antagonistic attitude many members of the party held towards him. On 20 August 1968, military units from the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria entered Czechoslovakia and ousted the Dubček government. Dubček was eventually replaced by Gustav Husak, who was less of a reformer and was willing to co-operate more closely with the Soviet Union.⁴⁸² The military invasion was condemned by most Western European communist parties as well as by the Romanian, Yugoslav, Albanian and Chinese parties and there were some protests in the GDR.⁴⁸³ However, once the dust settled, it became clear amongst the hardliners in the SED Central Committee that Ulbricht’s days were numbered.

By the end of the 1960s, the majority of Ulbricht’s initiatives had been abandoned. His NES program had been curbed by the end of 1965, while the Bitterfeld Weg movement and the liberalization of cultural policies had also come to a halt after the fateful 11th Plenum in December 1965. However, Ulbricht’s desire to strengthen the scientific and technological training of party functionaries was still in full force and the PHS ran work practicums for some

⁴⁸⁰ Stibbe, 107.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, “The Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion through the Soviet and East European Lens” in *Eastern Europe in 1968: Responses to the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion*, edited by Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 9.

⁴⁸³ McDermott and Stibbe, 10.

programs. Despite Hager and Wolf's attempts to curb Ulbricht's influence at the PHS, the scientific technological revolution proved to be a more difficult task to tackle, as it was becoming clearer that PHS students were not ready to enter the workforce as high-performing party functionaries.

A memorandum from 11 June 1970 for the Central Committee documented the numbers of PHS graduates from that year. According to the document, there were 241 students who graduated from the PHS in 1970, with 143 of them completing the three-year course and 98 finishing the one-year course. Out of these 241 students, 41 would be confirmed to nomenclature functions of the Central Committee, which is 17 percent of the yearly total of graduates, a slight drop from the previous year which was 17.5 percent.⁴⁸⁴ Out of the 41 graduates, ten were appointed as political employees of the SED Central Committee, two were hired as party organizers for the Central Committee, seven as secretaries of the District Leadership of the SED, two as party secretaries in the ministries, seven as assistants and aspirants to the PHS, seven in functions of the state apparatus, two in functions of the economic apparatus and four in functions of the mass organizations. 152 comrades were also proposed to eventually be employed in positions within the overall party apparatus, which was a total of 63.07 percent of graduates.⁴⁸⁵ However, the document also stated that the measures for political and scientific qualification of the students at the PHS were not fulfilled and thus more long-term and systematic work with the cadres was required in order to prepare them for employment in the scientific department of the

⁴⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/61971, "Meeting minutes for the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, 11 June 1970."

⁴⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/61971, "Meeting minutes for the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, 11 June 1970."

Central Committee.⁴⁸⁶ The document showed very low numbers of graduates who went on to be assigned in technical fields, with only four being employed in the field of chemistry, seven in construction, six in mechanical engineering, six in electronics and one in engineering.⁴⁸⁷

According to these statistics, it is clear that Wolf had been brushing off Ulbricht's directives to improve the technical education of PHS students. As Ulbricht had called for more technical education and hands-on practical experience in the PHS curricula, Wolf merely gave the impression that the PHS was following through on these initiatives by holding meetings and discussions in regard to improving PHS student courses. However, Wolf continued to safeguard PHS student coursework and maintain her preference for the study of theory and ideology. In less than one year from the date of this memorandum, Ulbricht would be replaced by Erich Honecker as leader of the SED and Wolf would have more control and support from the higher levels of the party apparatus, as Honecker was just as much of an ideologue as Wolf. The following chapter will also further examine how closely Wolf implemented Ulbricht's requests for more technical training at the party college during the 1960s through an examination of PHS student theses and dissertations.

Conclusion

During the 1950s, Wolf overcame many obstacles that threatened not only her own personal and political ideals but also her position as Director of the party college. The challenges that arose with the death of Stalin in 1953, the process of de-Stalinization after 1956 and the threat posed by her adversaries at the PHS, who were critical of her dogmatic tendencies, must

⁴⁸⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/61971, "Meeting minutes for the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, 11 June 1970."

⁴⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/61971, "Meeting minutes for the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED, 11 June 1970."

have seemed to be the worst possibilities that could arise for Wolf. After successfully moving past these obstacles, Wolf most likely entered the new decade of the 1960s with not only a feeling of relief but also with a sense of stability. However, as Ulbricht, who Wolf had been closely aligned with for decades, transitioned himself from a hardline Stalinist to being more open to some partial cultural and economic reforms, Wolf was faced with an even more difficult dilemma. Considering that Wolf had often relied on Ulbricht's own dogmatism in the past to maintain her position in the previous decade, Wolf now had to contend with opposition from "above." As Ulbricht attempted to reform the course curricula at the party school and made room for more open cultural and artistic policies in the GDR, Wolf chose to move away from Ulbricht and align herself with other hardliners in the SED such as the Honecker's and Kurt Hager.

Wolf had always been a loyal and dedicated communist who remained faithful to the party line. However, as Ulbricht began to impede on Wolf's terrain at the party college, Wolf chose to take an active role in opposing the longtime SED leader. Not only were the changes in course curriculums at the PHS upsetting for Wolf, but Ulbricht's openness to more critical literature and the allowance of writers such as Strittmatter to embarrass her in her own environment, led the longtime PHS Director to cut all loyalties held toward Ulbricht. Wolf ultimately provided the appearance that the PHS was working in unison with Ulbricht's initiatives. However, behind the scenes Wolf was actively working against Ulbricht, she even accompanied Hager to Moscow just days before the 11th Plenum session in order to garner approval for the planned attack on GDR artists and the liberalization of cultural policies. By the end of the 1960s, especially with the aftermath of the Prague Spring, Wolf and the other hardliners in the Central Committee knew it was only a matter of time before Ulbricht would be deposed from his position as leader. The following chapter examines how the fall of Ulbricht and

the rise of Erich Honecker as the new leader of the SED provided a period of stability and achievement for Wolf and the PHS.

Chapter 4:

Wolf's Revenge: Reversing Ulbricht's Reforms at the PHS under Honecker

The 1970s ushered in a period of stability and recognition for Wolf and the PHS. Not only was Ulbricht ousted from his position as SED leader in 1971, but he was replaced with Honecker, who shared the same devotion to ideology and the classics of Marxism-Leninism as Wolf. During this decade, Wolf received various accolades, such as the Hero of Labour Award in 1973, an honorary doctorate from the University of Leipzig and the Karl Marx Order, the highest recognition available in the GDR, for the second time in 1978.⁴⁸⁸ The 1970s represented the pinnacle of achievement in Wolf's career and she faced few, if any, major obstacles to her reign as Director of the party school. In fact, Wolf spent most of the 1970s, attempting to reverse the lingering influences of Ulbricht's reforms of the 1960s. This included shifting the focus of PHS coursework back to the study of ideology and theory, as well as helping to establish the cult of personality around Honecker, which also meant removing all reminiscences of Ulbricht from the PHS. However, despite Wolf's continued leadership at the party school and seemingly smooth transition into the Honecker era, she was not as successful in completely eliminating Ulbricht's influence at the PHS as she had hoped. Although Wolf was able to maintain control over the ideological content in the PHS course curricula, the scientific technological revolution of the 1960s and its impact on PHS student research proved to be more difficult of a challenge to tackle than expected.

⁴⁸⁸ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/58344, "Protocol No. 12/78 – Meeting minutes for Central Committee meeting on 30 January 1978."

The Era of Ideologues

Ulbricht's fall from power in 1971 helped pave the way for a decade of stability and achievement for both Wolf and the PHS. As a former hardliner during the 1950s, Ulbricht's transition to a progressive technocrat during the 1960s weakened his relations with other party members and even those in leading positions in the Soviet Union. Despite backlash and criticism throughout the decade, Ulbricht was not always willing to back down from pursuing his unpopular reforms. As his openness to more critical art and literature came to a head in 1965 after the 11th Plenum due to the maneuvering of Hager, Wolf and other hardliners and their short trip to the Soviet Union, Ulbricht was much more stubborn when it came to abandoning his ideas for economic reform. Ulbricht's refusal to throw in the towel and step back into the conventionality of the party-line ultimately led to his replacement with Honecker in May 1971.⁴⁸⁹

During a trip to Moscow in April 1971, Ulbricht was asked to resign by Brezhnev and agreed to do so on the condition that he be given the position of Honourary Chairman of the SED. Along with this position, Ulbricht was initially allowed to remain as a member of the Politburo and maintain his role as Chairman of the Council of State.⁴⁹⁰ However, due to Ulbricht's refusal to accept his political misfortunes, he was eventually demoted from political life in the GDR before his death. Institutions such as the German Academy for Political Science and Law 'Walter Ulbricht' were renamed to the Academy for Political Science and Law of the GDR and the Walter Ulbricht Stadium in East Berlin was renamed as the World Youth Stadium.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-73: Conflict and Crisis* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 160.

⁴⁹⁰ Grieder, *The East German Leadership*, 186.

⁴⁹¹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 23.

Before dying of a stroke on 1 August 1973, Honecker had attempted to turn Ulbricht into a “non-person” by removing his name and photos from public life. On the day of Ulbricht’s death, there was little recognition that the former leader had passed. The World Youth Festival taking place in East Berlin that week ran as usual and even news programs did not inform the public until later in the evening.⁴⁹² However, Ulbricht was given a state funeral, but only because Brezhnev was shocked at the lack of respect being paid to the longtime leader.⁴⁹³ Despite Honecker’s best efforts to erase the memory of Ulbricht, on the morning of his funeral service, a line of people “a kilometer long” poured onto the streets and the funeral procession was delayed multiple times. Many stores in East Berlin also cut out newspaper photos of Ulbricht, posting them in windows.⁴⁹⁴ Despite being laid to rest in the Socialist Memorial Cemetery in East Berlin, East German media referred to Ulbricht as an “outstanding functionary” or “worker son,” rather than a once influential leader.⁴⁹⁵

With Honecker as the Party General Secretary, the PHS experienced tremendous growth and achievement during the 1970s. Likewise, Wolf also had more autonomy than during the previous decade when Ulbricht attempted to reform PHS curricula with more technical practicum work. According to Dietrich Orlow, Wolf and Honecker were “ideological soulmates,” as Honecker was also, “at heart a Stalinist. He had little interest in scientific and technical matters.”⁴⁹⁶ Along with the support and like-mindedness of Honecker, Hager, who was in charge of East Germany’s “scientific institutions,” was also a hardline Stalinist and maintained a close

⁴⁹² Paul Betts, “When Cold Warriors Die: The State Funerals of Konrad Adenauer and Walter Ulbricht” in *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany*, edited by Alon Confino, Paul Betts and Dirk Schumann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 163.

⁴⁹³ Betts, 165.

⁴⁹⁴ Betts, 168.

⁴⁹⁵ Betts, 168-170.

⁴⁹⁶ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 27.

working relationship with Wolf.⁴⁹⁷ The combination of these three individuals – Honecker, Hager and Wolf – allowed the PHS to operate in harmony, at least amongst the higher party apparatus, for the rest of Wolf’s duration as Director.

Once Ulbricht was ousted from office, Wolf and her hardline compatriots wasted little time in returning the focus of the party back to ideological and theoretical matters. One of the first issues that arose at the PHS during this period centered around the use of an Economics textbook. Prior to Ulbricht’s dismissal in 1971, faculty from the Political Economics department at the PHS had been working on a new book to be used at the school. The book was initially written as a habilitation thesis by multiple authors which was published by Dietz Verlag. *System and Mechanism of Action of Economic Laws in the formation of the developed System of Socialism in the GDR* (1969) dealt with basic economic questions, the technological and scientific revolution and the need for the party’s leading role in the economy. According to Georg Ebert, Chair of the Political Economics Department between 1966 to 1974, the book publicly criticized the economic policies of the party leadership and pointed out weaknesses in the economic system. For example, the book criticized economic policy in reference to consumer goods prices, stating that “increased attention should be paid to the economic levers associated with the production of goods, such as price, profit, cost of credit, and their influence on the operational and economic reproduction process.”⁴⁹⁸

The first edition of the book received a fair amount of interest, especially from the other SED training institutes, and Dietz Verlag agreed to publish a second edition. In preparation, Wolf sent the manuscript to the Economic Research Institute of the State Planning Commission

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ Georg Ebert, “Die Arbeitsgruppe bzw. der Lehrstuhl Politische Ökonomie des Sozialismus an der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ in den 60er und 70er Jahren“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 147-148.

for review and despite positive feedback, it was pointed out that one section, having to do with consumer goods prices, contradicted the decisions of the party leadership. Wolf was not concerned about this criticism, stating that “as Lenin said, a spoonful of tar in a barrel of honey!” and plans for a revised second edition remained in the works.⁴⁹⁹ However, Ulbricht also had his own plans for a new book focusing on the political economy of socialism in the GDR and in 1968 the Politburo commissioned Günter Mittag, Werner Jarowinski, Walter Halbritter and a group of prominent economists to complete the study.⁵⁰⁰ *Political Economics of Socialism and its Application in the GDR* (1969) was completed in June 1969 and the foreword included the signature of Ulbricht as well as contributions and observations from eight members and candidate members of the Politburo.⁵⁰¹

The new book initiated by Ulbricht was printed in “hundreds of thousands” of copies and served as the basis of teaching at many universities as well as for training measures. According to Ebert, the book brought “real progress in many areas of theory.”⁵⁰² However, even despite the foreword of the book acknowledging the PHS and its contributions to the preparatory research, the book was met with resistance from Wolf even before Ulbricht’s dismissal as leader. In a letter dated 21 January 1971, almost five months prior to Ulbricht’s replacement, Wolf wrote to Werner Lamberz, the Agitation Secretary of the Central Committee and Politburo candidate member, detailing the course literature being used at the PHS. The teaching materials included the “classics of Marxism, decisions of the party congresses and the Central Committee of the SED, the CPSU, the international consultations of the Communist and Worker’s Parties,

⁴⁹⁹ Ebert, 148.

⁵⁰⁰ Ebert, 150.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

important speeches by leading comrades of the SED and CPSU... In certain cases, textbooks as well as written articles from scientific journals of the GDR and the Soviet Union.”⁵⁰³

In the letter, Wolf discussed the planned use of *Political Economics of Socialism and its Application in the GDR* at the school. Since Ulbricht was still in power in January 1971, Wolf danced around the issue of whether the book would be used in the course curriculums. She stated, “as far as the book *Political Economics of Socialism and its Application in the GDR* is concerned, we have recommended it to all comrades, all comrades use the book as a tool. (There is no decision that the PHS should teach strictly according to this book). The curriculum of the PHS does not always coincide with the structure and topics of the book.”⁵⁰⁴ Wolf also pointed out that since the PHS helped in the planning of the book, that “there can be no question of us pulling back the book. However, the Chair – Political Economics of Socialism – has not specified this book in the main literature for the topics in distance learning that have been initiated so far (transitional period, Basic Law of Socialism and some others), which I do not consider a mistake from the theoretical point of view.”⁵⁰⁵ This letter was a tactical maneuver on behalf of Wolf; since Ulbricht was still in charge, she was not able to go against the decisions of the party leadership. Wolf finished the letter by stating that PHS students had been completing party apprenticeship work in Berlin companies, as if to portray that the PHS always followed the guidelines set out by Ulbricht and the party.⁵⁰⁶ However, it is clear that Wolf did not plan to make use of the book at the party school, at least not in a significant way, and once Honecker

⁵⁰³ Ebert included a copy of the letter from Hanna Wolf to Werner Lamberz, dated 20 January 1971 in his article. Ebert, 152-53.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

took over leadership of the SED, Ebert claims that the book “disappeared into oblivion” at the PHS.⁵⁰⁷

Likewise, once Ulbricht was removed from power, Wolf initiated the development of a committee that would safeguard the focus of student work at the SED’s three research institutes.⁵⁰⁸ On 28 October 1971, at a Central Committee meeting, Wolf proposed the development of a commission that focused specifically on the theoretical problems being tackled by the GDR’s social sciences institutions.⁵⁰⁹ The committee was approved and Hager was put in charge of its organization.⁵¹⁰ This move was made to help censor the content being dispersed amongst the social sciences institutions in order to maintain a purer theoretical focus, which meant only Marxist-Leninist ideology. While Ulbricht had been open to cooperation with the West German SPD during the mid-to-late 1960s, Wolf and her male superiors were completely opposed to such motives. Once Honecker was in charge, Wolf took action to make sure that there were no influences from Ulbricht’s willingness to cooperate with the SPD in the training and research work of party functionaries.

During a speech at the International Scientific Conference held at the PHS on 4 May 1972, which celebrated the anniversary of Lenin’s work “What is to be done?” and the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet Union, Wolf spoke freely and critically in regard to her thoughts on Social Democracy. Outlining the growth of both the Communist and Social Democratic movements worldwide, with 50 million Communists versus 17 million Social Democrats around the world at that time, Wolf lectured on the dangers of bourgeois influence in

⁵⁰⁷ Ebert, 153.

⁵⁰⁸ The three research institutes of the SED included the PHS, the Academy for Social Sciences and the Institute for Marxism-Leninism.

⁵⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62169, “Protocol No. 46 – Meeting minutes for Central Committee meeting on 28 October 1971.”

⁵¹⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 62169, “Protocol No. 46 – Meeting minutes for Central Committee meeting on 28 October 1971.”

the workers' movements, which reflected the smaller yet growing number of Social Democrats globally, stating that, "the influence of the Social-Democratic leaders, the bourgeois ideology in the workers' movement is still considerable, which has its ultimate cause above all in the connection between opportunism and imperialism."⁵¹¹ Wolf also outlined the history of the German Workers' movement, with frequent accolades made to Honecker while not mentioning Ulbricht's name even once throughout the lecture.⁵¹²

Treating Ulbricht as a "non-person" continued throughout the 1970s. In nearly all of Wolf's speeches and printed articles during this period, she refrains from mentioning Ulbricht at all. Instead, she credited the history of the communist movement in Germany and the rise of the SED to figures such as Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Thälmann, Erich Honecker (who was merely the Chairman of the Free German Youth Movement during the 1950s and only became an official member of the Politburo in 1958), and Otto Grotewohl, the former leader of the SPD and first President of the GDR.⁵¹³ However, Grotewohl's position was merely that of a figure-head after 1950, when Ulbricht was appointed First Secretary of the SED and maintained the highest position in the SED hierarchy. As Ulbricht had advocated for more practical hands-on experience for party functionaries during the 1960s, Wolf worked tirelessly to return the focus of the PHS back to the study of Marxism-Leninism and to eliminate any reminiscences of the former

⁵¹¹ Hanna Wolf, „Die Leninische Lehre von der Partei neuen Typus – theoretisches Fundament für die Verwirklichung der historischen Aufgaben der Arbeiterklasse: Referat auf der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ beim ZK der SED aus Anlaß des 70. Jahrestags des Erscheinens des Leninischen Werkes ‚Was tun?‘ und des 50. Jahrestages der Bildung der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken 4 May 1972“ in *Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979): 131.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ See Hanna Wolf's *Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979). Wolf discusses the history of the Communist movement in „Der 30. Jahrestag des Sieges der Sowjetunion über den Hitlerfaschismus – ein hervorragendes politisches Ereignis im Leben des Sowjetvolkes und der ganzen fortschrittlichen Menschheit – Eröffnungsworte und Referat auf der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ beim ZK der SED 21 April 1975“

SED leader. In a speech at the International Science Conference in April 1975, held at the PHS, Wolf lectured on the importance of theoretical study, “we have a lot of work ahead of us in this area: because we don’t want a mass of blind followers in the party. In addition to extensive educational work, this task can only be solved by publishing socialist literature in mass editions, in order to give party members, the opportunity to train themselves through self-study.”⁵¹⁴ However, “a mass of blind followers” was exactly what hardliners like Honecker and Wolf wanted, just as long as no party members were “blindly following” the influence of social democracy.

During the early years of Honecker’s leadership, the East German regime experienced a brief “cultural thaw.” Between 1971 and 1973, Honecker launched two liberal domestic programs which focused on more openness in art and culture, as well as more access to western products. After his appointment as First Secretary in December 1971, Honecker stated that “if the starting point is the firm position of socialism, there can be no taboos in the field of art and literature. That concerns questions of content as well as of style. In short: the question of artistic excellence.”⁵¹⁵ Writers and artists were encouraged to focus on everyday life and the experiences of “real existing socialism,” which essentially meant that in return for improved consumption and partial artistic freedoms, East Germans would provide “political quietude, if not loyalty.”⁵¹⁶ Similarly, East Germans also had more access to Western products such as Levi’s Jeans and could watch West German television programs.⁵¹⁷ Honecker also downgraded the importance of

⁵¹⁴ Hanna Wolf, „Der 30.Jahrestag des Sieges der Sowjetunion über den Hitlerfaschismus – ein hervorragendes politisches Ereignis im Leben des Sowjetvolkes und der ganzen fortschrittlichen Menschheit – Eröffnungsworte und Referat auf der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ beim ZK der SED 21 April 1975“ in *Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979): 271.

⁵¹⁵ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 146.

⁵¹⁶ Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 215.

⁵¹⁷ Alan McDougall, *The People’s Game: Football, State and Society in East Germany* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105.

the scientific technological revolution and the build-up of industry in the East German education system.⁵¹⁸ However, at the PHS very little changed and the training of PHS functionaries carried on as normal. What Wolf may have felt about these initiatives and whether she made criticisms about student functionaries wearing Western clothing is unknown. Either way, Honecker's brief period of cultural liberalization did not last long. After Wolf Biermann was banished from the regime in 1976, Honecker and the SED received a great deal of public backlash from both at home and abroad.⁵¹⁹ On 7 October 1977, at a concert celebrating the founding anniversary of the GDR, around 3000 people started a riot at Alexanderplatz in East Berlin with many shouting "Russians go home!" while others chanted Biermann's name. The ordeal resulted in hundreds of arrests, nearly 200 injured and the death of nine youth and four East German police (*Volkspolizei*). Honecker's "cultural thaw" had come to an end and over the next ten years, over 350 East German artists and cultural figures left the GDR.⁵²⁰

Wolf's management of the PHS faced few, if any, restrictions during this decade and considering how closely aligned she was politically with Honecker and Hager, the PHS became one of the most important party training institutions in the GDR. Not only did the PHS provide a boarding house for students, a kindergarten, children's home, an out-patient clinic and a transport service but it also maintained its own publishing house which printed the magazine *Theory and Practice: Scientific Contributions of the PHS*.⁵²¹ The PHS also operated the Thälmann Institute which trained functionaries from foreign Communist parties. Originally named the Institute for Foreign Studies, the institute was renamed in 1985 after Ernst Thälmann, who was murdered while imprisoned at Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944 and was considered a hero of East

⁵¹⁸ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 146.

⁵¹⁹ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 151.

⁵²⁰ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 152.

⁵²¹ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), "Geschichtliche Einblicke," 15.

German communism for his role and persecution as Chairman of the KPD during the 1920s through 1940s. By the 1980s, around 200 foreign students were enrolled per year at the PHS. Most of these students came from Latin and African Communist countries – with Cuba sending the highest number throughout the 1960s and 1980s, with nearly 300 students, while Ethiopia sent the second largest contingent with 162 students.⁵²²

The Thälmann Institute hosted around 2100 students between 1963 and 1990 from 77 different parties and 67 different countries and it had its own Director and faculty.⁵²³ Although the institute was part of the PHS, it operated its own program for foreign students which consisted of a one-year course (actually only nine or ten months) and provided basic training on Marxist-Leninist ideology. According to former Director of the Thälmann Institute, Johnny Norden (1982-1990), the one-year program for foreign students was a condensed version of the three-year course at the PHS. Students were taught on four different areas: 1) dialectical and historical materialism, 2) history of the revolutionary workers' movement, 3) political economics and 4) scientific communism.⁵²⁴ Although the majority of students that attended the Thälmann Institute came from communist countries, some students from western capitalist nations were sent by their respective communist parties. For example, a total of 80 students from Austria attended the Institute between the 1960s and 1980s, while a combined total of ten students from Denmark, Finland, Canada and Spain participated in the one-year course.⁵²⁵ Leading representatives from international Communist and Workers' parties also visited the school; such as Brazilian Communist Party Secretary-General Luís Carlos Prestes, United States Communist Party General-Secretary Gus Hall, Chilean Communist Party General-Secretary Luis Corvalán,

⁵²² Norden and Brandau, 217.

⁵²³ Norden and Brandau, 216.

⁵²⁴ Norden and Brandau, 217-218.

⁵²⁵ Norden and Brandau, 217.

Indonesian Communist Party Secretary-General D.N. Aidit, Portugal's Communist Party General-Secretary Álvaro Cunhal and Uruguay's Communist Party First Secretary Rodney Arismendi.⁵²⁶

Selected Works for the One-Year Course for Foreign Students

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
- Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886)
- Karl Marx, "Forward" in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)
- Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917)
- Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I* (1867)
- Karl Marx, "Value, Price and Profit" (1865)
- Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917)
- Vladimir Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" (1918)
- Vladimir Lenin, "The Tax in Kind" (1921)
- Vladimir Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905)
- Vladimir Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920)
- Policy documents of the SED and CPSU

Table 2: Selected works for the one-year course for foreign students. Reading materials were provided in English, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and French. Norden and Brandau, "Zur Arbeit des Thälmann Instituts (Institut für Ausländerstudium) der Parteihochschule der SED," 219-20.

Alongside the Thälmann Institute, the main departments of the PHS also participated in international exchanges with other Eastern bloc party schools. Aside from the Soviet Union, the PHS ran programs with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In fact, the PHS had been running a professor exchange program with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa – KSC*) Political School since 1955.⁵²⁷ However, relations between the

⁵²⁶ Möller und Preußner (Hrsg.), "Geschichtliche Einblicke," 15.

⁵²⁷ Michel Christian, "How Transnational Were Eastern Bloc Communist Parties? The Case of Party Institutions of Higher Education," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. 109, no. 1 (2011): 35.

two began to deteriorate by the mid-1960s, when Vilém Nový, the Political School Director, informed Wolf that new courses on political models, including capitalist and Yugoslavian, were being added to their course curricula.⁵²⁸ Wolf shared Nový's plans in a letter to Hager in June 1965, stating "when asked about this issue, I said that it was certainly an innovative idea but that I was strongly against it."⁵²⁹ Nový also informed Wolf that the KSČ Political School was planning to participate in an exchange program with West Germany.⁵³⁰ Unsurprisingly, when Georg Ebert, the PHS Chair of Political Economics, was invited to an economic conference hosted by the KSČ Political School in 1967, the invitation was declined.⁵³¹

Although the PHS had a more equal partnership with the KSČ Political School, where they maintained an equal number of professor exchanges between them, that was not the case for relations between the PHS and the Polish and Hungarian institutes.⁵³² In fact, it appears that Wolf tried to position the PHS as the more "elite" model by only offering one-way exchanges. The PHS allowed instructors from the Polish and Hungarian schools to visit while never offering to send its own faculty in return. A PHS report from October 1969 noted that "our Polish comrades persistently request more two-way professor exchanges and more extensive collaboration."⁵³³ After a visit to the PHS by a Hungarian delegation in 1970, another report stated that "our comrades pointed out that they had often come to visit us, but that we had never visited them."⁵³⁴ Although Wolf made sure to remind the Hungarian and Polish party schools

⁵²⁸ Christian, 37.

⁵²⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86409, "Letter to Kurt Hager from Hanna Wolf – 29 June 1965."

⁵³⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86409, "Letter to Kurt Hager from Hanna Wolf – 29 June 1965."

⁵³¹ Christian, 37.

⁵³² Christian, 39. The PHS and KSČ Political School signed an agreement in 1966, which stipulated an equal number of professor and student exchanges.

⁵³³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86400, "Exchange of delegations and experiences with fraternal parties in socialist countries in 1969 – 29 October 1969."

⁵³⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86414, "Information about the activities of the Hungarian study delegation at the PHS from 21 – 31 May 1970 – 5 June 1970."

that the PHS was more established, her attempts to assert influence over them were not always successful.

One such incident took place at the first conference held specifically for Directors of the Socialist party schools in October 1970. Initiated by the Hungarian party college and held in the village of Tihany, the focus of the conference was to discuss educational issues such as adding new disciplines to party school programs and how to better reintegrate party cadres into classroom settings.⁵³⁵ During the event, Wolf gave a speech on the importance of Marxism-Leninism as the basis for teaching, as it was the “unifying factor of all disciplines.”⁵³⁶ However, the Hungarian representatives did not agree with Wolf and similar to the Czech party training institute, proposed the introduction of new departments such as sociology and political science, which would be more open to the study of other political models. During the meeting, the Polish representatives also sided with the Hungarians and discussed the development of their own Sociology Department.⁵³⁷ Whether these changes were actually implemented is unknown, as very little scholarship has been completed on other party training institutes throughout the Eastern bloc. However, the discussions held at the conference in 1970 show just how much influence a Director could have over their respective institutions. Although all Eastern bloc party schools were structured according to the Soviet model, they did not all conform to the same teaching methods or course content.

Despite Wolf’s sometimes lackluster influence abroad, she did help the PHS grow substantially on home soil. By the 1970s, the PHS maintained an average enrollment of 1200 to 1400 students per year who usually went on to become party functionaries.⁵³⁸ Wolf also had

⁵³⁵ Christian, 40.

⁵³⁶ Christian, 41.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 31.

three Deputy Rectors under her command during this decade; Rudi Wiederänder, who was responsible for party organization at the school, Manfred Herold, who oversaw course curriculums and Wolfgang Schneider, who was in charge of PHS publications and research.⁵³⁹ Schneider himself had been a student at the PHS, completing his doctoral dissertation on “The SED’s Battle for Educating the Working Class about Friendship with the Soviet Union: An Objective Pre-Condition for the Transition to the Socialist Revolution in the GDR, 1948-1950” (1961).⁵⁴⁰ Between 1981 and 1983, 61.7 percent of PHS graduates were employed as functionaries. However, only 4.6 percent of those graduates were deemed qualified enough to work in economic enterprises, which meant that only those 4.6 percent were able to act as “vanguard” employees that could lead worker collectives and teach the importance of party policy.⁵⁴¹

In fact, Wolfgang Schneider, one of the three Deputy Rectors hired during the 1970s, had been one of the former PHS students who went into the field to work after completing his doctoral studies. Schneider was sent to the *Textilkombinat* Cottbus and despite having prior training in textile manufacturing, his performance evaluations were quite poor.⁵⁴² It was noted that Schneider recognized his shortcomings and had attempted to improve but was deemed not qualified enough for the work. Part of Schneider’s position required him to lead a party collective, in which he failed to influence the *Kombinat* employees of the importance of the

⁵³⁹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 30.

⁵⁴⁰ Wolfgang Schneider, „Der Kampf der SED um die Erziehung der Arbeiterklasse zur Freundschaft mit der Sowjetunion – eine objektive Bedingung für den Übergang zur sozialistischen Revolution in der DDR (1948-1950),“ Dissertation. Parteihochschule ‘Karl Marx’, 1961.

⁵⁴¹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 38.

⁵⁴² Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 31.

SED's party resolutions in the production process. Schneider was eventually dismissed from his position in July 1971 and returned to the PHS where he worked as a Deputy Rector until his retirement.⁵⁴³

PHS Student Research

As Wolf had reinstated the central focus of study to be on ideology in the PHS course curriculums, there were complaints from faculty and members of the SED about the quality of teaching and research at the school. Even though Wolf would not openly admit it, it was apparent that ideological training was not enough to produce qualified professional functionaries that were ready to enter the workforce and lead worker collectives.⁵⁴⁴ After the VIII Party Congress of the SED in 1971, it was decided that in order to improve the quality of teaching and research at the school, a new department would be created to specifically address these issues. The Department of Teaching on the Marxist-Leninist Party, Party Life and Party Building was developed with the aim to appoint Chairs that had significant technical experience.⁵⁴⁵ Although every department at the PHS dealt with Marxist-Leninist theory, this new department was supposed to address how better to incorporate ideological theory into the curricula in order to improve economics and society in the GDR. However, the creation of this department did little to improve such problems.

Throughout the 1970s, PHS faculty regularly discussed the issues surrounding this new department. The two main problems centered on what exactly should be taught in a department

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ Bernd Preußner and Harry Milke, et al., „Zur Arbeit des Lehrstuhls Lehre von der marxistisch-leninistischen Partei, dem Parteileben und dem Parteaufbau“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 201.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

focusing only on the theory of Marxism-Leninism and the development of the party. PHS faculty had a difficult time determining what the exact subject matter for this department should focus on, since other departments also focused on the tenants of Marxism-Leninism but through more specific subject areas. Another issue which emerged was that there was a lack of qualified teachers who were able to teach at the university level on this topic. Any scientifically trained experts in the GDR who were qualified to teach in-depth about Marxism-Leninism and party development were few and far between and were usually already employed at the Academy for Social Sciences.⁵⁴⁶ According to Bernd Preußner, who was the Chair of the Department for Scientific Communism from 1976 until 1983, the various attempts to address the issues surrounding the Department of Teaching on Marxism-Leninism, Party Life and Party Building were never truly resolved during the 1970s. Preußner claims that any restructuring of the department resulted in little to no change in regard to teaching activities or the output of scientific research. Rather, the department merely went through various name and staff changes instead.⁵⁴⁷

During the 1970s, fifteen new positions were created in this department to try to help solve these problems. However, most of the new employees came from the SED party apparatus and most had very little teaching experience. One of the appointed Department Heads, Walter Slapke, was hired directly from the party apparatus, and with no prior experience in research or teaching, was overwhelmed with the role and was quickly replaced.⁵⁴⁸ The next Department

⁵⁴⁶ Preußner, 202.

⁵⁴⁷ Preußner, 201.

⁵⁴⁸ Preußner, 202-203.

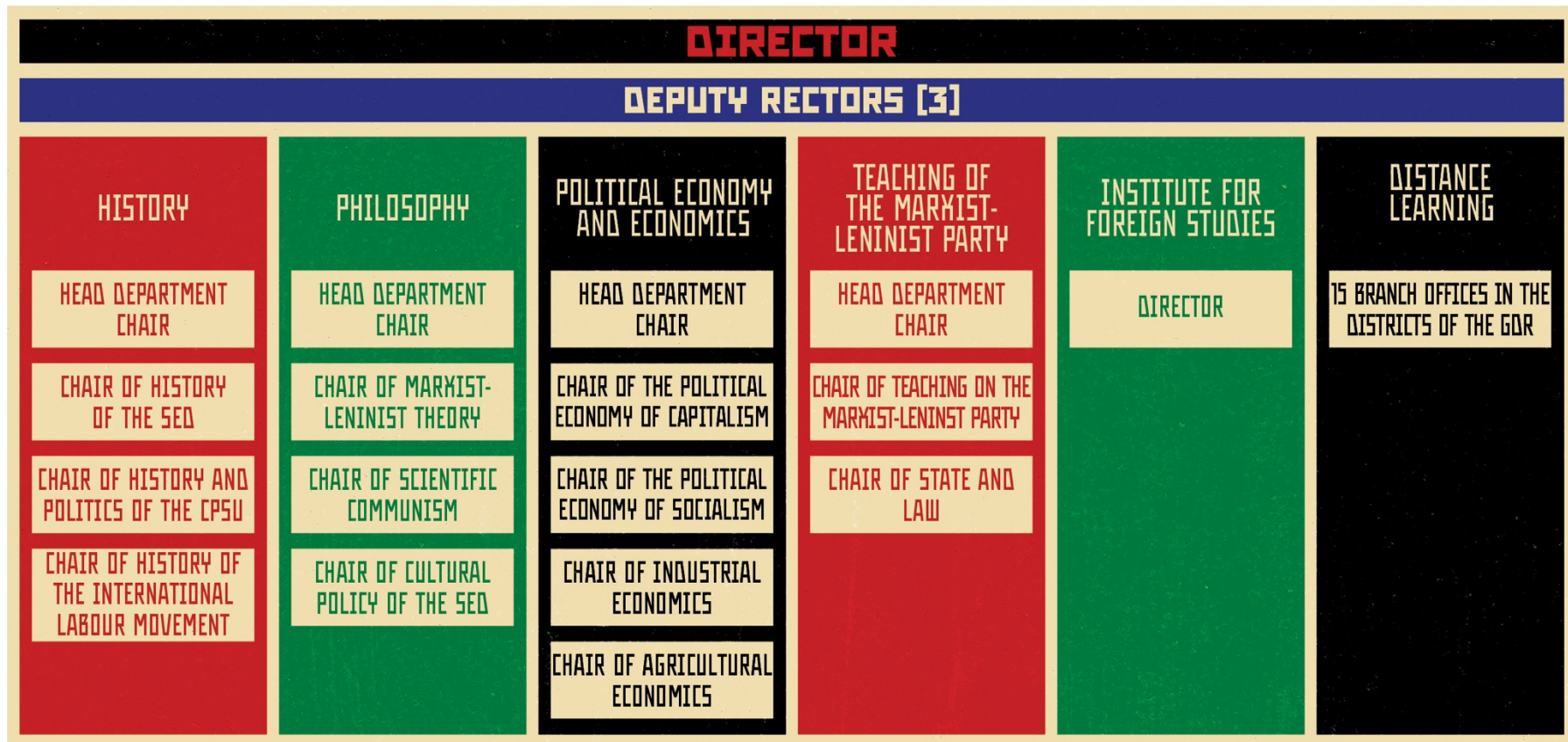


Table 3: Organizational chart representing the main departments of the PHS from the 1970s until 1990. However, many name changes and temporary/additional departments existed throughout these decades. The fifteen district branch offices included: Berlin, Cottbus, Dresden, Erfurt, Frankfurt, Gera, Halle, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Neubrandenburg, Potsdam, Rostock, Schwerin and Suhl.

Head was historian Dr. Horst Lipski, who had more scientific experience and worked hard to improve the scientific quality of research and teaching activities but also proved to be unsuccessful.⁵⁴⁹ Preußner states that a major reason for the failures of these Department Heads was that Wolf directly oversaw their activities. As Slapke was unsuccessful due to his own lack of scientific teaching and research experience, Dr. Lipski was fated to fail as he and Wolf did not get along. Despite Wolf allowing the department to undergo various name and structural changes, Preußner claims that she proved to be a massive barrier when it came to actual changes being made in the department curricula.⁵⁵⁰

The quality of research completed at the PHS continued to be quite low throughout the 1970s, as Wolf refused to allow any significant changes that deterred the focus of teaching from ideology and theory. Even with the appointment of more technically trained Department Chairs, they still had to fall in line with Wolf's own directives. Preußner recalls that the PHS only experienced beneficial changes and an improvement in teaching and scientific output after Wolf retired in 1983 and the new Director, Kurt Tiedke, took over. Once Tiedke became the new head of the party school, he appointed the economist Dr. Harry Milke in 1985 as the new Head of the Department of Teaching on the Marxist-Leninist Party, Party Life and Party Building and many of the issues surrounding the quality of teaching and research improved.⁵⁵¹ However, it is fair to note that Preußner's claims could be the result of personal animosity or misogyny towards Wolf. Albeit, evidence from an examination of PHS student theses and dissertations from the 1980s do show an improvement in student research after Wolf retired, as there was a dramatic rise in technical topics and an expansion of source materials used.

⁵⁴⁹ Preußner, 203.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Wolf Canyon

Clearly, Wolf only paid lip-service to concerns expressed by faculty members about the direction of the PHS. This characteristic was present in Wolf even from her early years as Director during the 1950s, when she toed the line on adhering to the changes taking place after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956 and the effects of de-Stalinization at the school. Wolf was always clever enough to know how to maneuver her way through difficult situations, often falling in line just enough to maintain her own professional security until she was able to get her own way. Another trait Wolf employed in her arsenal of professional weapons was the ability to read the "political" room, so-to-speak, as she was always able to be on the "right" side of those wielding the most power. Wolf maintained close ties with Ulbricht during the height of his leadership and once his influence began to wane, she moved closer to Honecker.

Wolf fully dedicated herself to Honecker's leadership once he took power and praised him whenever she could in speeches and articles. Wolf especially liked to mention the "turning point" that Honecker so admirably ushered in after 1971. In an article penned by Wolf in 1975, she stated that "not only the historians who will one day write the history of the party, but we - as eye witnesses - have already come to the conclusion that the VIII Party Congress inaugurated a qualitatively new step, an objectively necessary turning point in the evolution of our party."⁵⁵² The VIII Party Congress, which took place in 1971, was the first Party Congress chaired by Honecker after taking over leadership of the SED.⁵⁵³ In 1974, Wolf had also made reference to this "turning point," stating that "the way of life of the communist development does not arise spontaneously. It is formed under the scientific guidance of the Party, on the basis of the

⁵⁵² Hanna Wolf, „Vorhut der Arbeiterklasse und Dynamik der Gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung“ in *Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979): 252-53.

⁵⁵³ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 30.

Marxist-Leninist conception of socialism and man” and that “it follows that in the present stage of development our revolutionary workers’ movement and party work are enriched by qualitatively new content.”⁵⁵⁴ By this Wolf meant that Honecker had shifted the focus of the party leadership back to ideology, stating that “this work – in the sense of Marxist-Leninist philosophy... is no doubt the most important prerequisite for the constantly developing, conscious deep connection of the Party, its members, with the masses of our people.”⁵⁵⁵

In return for Wolf’s accolades and loyalty, Honecker likewise praised Wolf for her contributions to the party and work at the PHS. In 1973, shortly after Honecker’s rise to power, Wolf received the Hero of Labour Award, which was given annually to a maximum of fifty people and included a cash reward of 10,000 marks. In 1978, she received an Honourary Doctorate from the University of Leipzig and also that same year was awarded the highest honour available in the GDR, the Karl Marx Order, which she won for the second time.⁵⁵⁶ Wolf was first awarded the Karl Marx Order in 1964, under Ulbricht’s leadership, and in 1971 she received the Patriotic Order of Merit in Gold for her contributions to the PHS.⁵⁵⁷ Honecker praised Wolf for her “battle against revisionism” and Wolf made sure to dedicate herself and the PHS to the development of the personality cult surrounding him during the 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁵⁸

Another weapon in Wolf’s repertoire was her ability to manipulate and play PHS faculty members against one another. According to Eberhard Röhner, former professor and Chair of the Department for Theory and History of Literature at the PHS (1966 – 1990), he was given a

⁵⁵⁴ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 30.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 58344, “Protocol No. 12/78 – Meeting minutes for Central Committee meeting on 30 January 1978.”

⁵⁵⁷ Erich Honecker, “Glückwunsch des ZK der SED für Hanna Wolf: Grußadresse zum 80. Geburtstag.“ *Neues Deutschland*. 4 February 1988.

⁵⁵⁸ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 30.

warning in the form of a birthday gift from his peers at the party school in regard to Wolf's manipulative tactics. He claims that once he was appointed as Chair, Wolf decided on the creation of a second Chair position to help oversee the department. Röhner states that he quickly ruled out the possibility that Wolf merely wanted to relieve him of excessive work and this sentiment was also shared by his colleagues. He said that on his birthday, after Wolf went ahead and appointed the second position, he received a small painting of two leopards, "not exactly friendly to each other, wild beasts fighting, locked into one another" and concluded that "it was clear what it referred to – the two Chairs, possible fights."⁵⁵⁹ Although no conflict arose between Röhner and the second chair, he viewed the gift as a "warning" that was "presented with a smile" by his colleagues.⁵⁶⁰



Bundesarchiv. Bild 183-T0204-0021 / Fotograf(in): Franke, Klaus

Figure 7: Hanna Wolf receiving the Karl Marx Order from Erich Honecker. Werner Lamberz also participated in the ceremony. 4 February 1978. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-T0204-0021.

⁵⁵⁹ Eberhard Röhner, „Erfahrungen eines Lehrstuhlleiters“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 98.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Röhner also described what department meetings were like at the PHS under Wolf's management. Similar to the recollections of former students from the 1950s, who were made to practice self-criticism in front of their peers, PHS staff had to do the same even in the 1960s and 1970s. He claimed that when Wolf initiated Department Chair meetings, the topic of the meetings was usually quite vague and fell under the theme of "improvement of work," which left the faculty in suspense of what might be discussed that day and who would fall prey to Wolf's criticisms.⁵⁶¹ He stated that although the Department Chairs were often unsure of what would be discussed in the meetings, "only one thing was fairly certain, namely that one or a few would be criticized, and usually quite sharply and in such a way that those criticized were very rarely able to defend themselves successfully."⁵⁶² Usually, the only time faculty members might know what to expect was if something in the cultural field caused controversy amongst the party leadership, because then the Department Chairs knew that Wolf would be "turned" and there would be repercussions to face in the meetings and "that was almost as sure as 'amen' in church."⁵⁶³

Röhner described one Department Chair meeting where he came under attack. He said that he was made to go in front of the other faculty chairs and repent for his mistakes. However, instead of falling into the practice of self-criticism, he became angry and his first words in front of the audience were: "I might like to stand behind this desk for once without having been criticized beforehand," while then proceeding to discuss other issues. Rather than being reprimanded for this act of defiance, Röhner was told by another colleague during the meeting break that Wolf laughed and found his actions humorous.⁵⁶⁴ However, when it came to Wolf practicing self-criticism, not a single word of error was ever uttered from her mouth. In fact,

⁵⁶¹ Röhner, 99.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Röhner described how Wolf enjoyed flaunting her power in meetings, using information she gathered from weekly meetings of the department heads of the Central Committee to reinforce her position in the PHS hierarchy. He stated that Wolf often made the PHS Chairs feel that, “unlike her... [they] knew precious little” and if she was unable to provide sources or facts for her information, she would ironically comment that “she... [was] only a propagandist, not a scientist.”⁵⁶⁵



Figure 8: Hanna Wolf receiving the Patriotic Order of Merit in Gold from Hans Reitz, Deputy Chairman of the GDR Council of State. 25 June 1971. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-K0625-0001-014.

Although an unfavourable trait, Wolf’s arrogance was not without substance. She was often included in important and significant meetings and had been a member of the Central Committee since 1958.⁵⁶⁶ Honecker and Hager regularly included Wolf in situations that dealt

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ Erich Honecker, “Glückwunsch des ZK der SED für Hanna Wolf: Grußadresse zum 80. Geburtstag.“ *Neues Deutschland*. 4 February 1988.

with ideological and theoretical matters, such as the short trip to Moscow in 1965 before the 11th Plenum and she was also included on the committee for amending the SED party program during the 1970s.⁵⁶⁷ In fact, Wolf was the only female SED member participating in the third amendment meeting on the SED party program and also one of the few who were not already members or candidate members of the Politburo. In the meeting document outlining the third revision of the SED party program from November 1975, Wolf provides a great deal of commentary on the proposed draft, which included the participation of significant members of the SED party apparatus such as Honecker, Werner Lamberz, Erich Mielke (head of the East German Ministry for State Security), Hans-Joachim Hoffmann (Minister of Culture from 1973 – 1989), Hermann Axen (member of the Politburo and head of its foreign policy commission), as well as many other high-ranking male SED members.⁵⁶⁸

The concept of “masculinity” used in my dissertation refers to “agentic” behaviours that are more often associated with men. These behaviours include being more outspoken, confident, assertive, and controlling; while women are more associated with communal attributes such as being warm, nurturing, and looking out for the general welfare of a group.⁵⁶⁹ Kubu refers to the challenges female leaders face due to these ascribed gender roles as a “double bind,” where women are forced to grapple with expectations of fulfilling their gender role while also attempting to be strong and assertive.⁵⁷⁰ Wolf’s ability to navigate, and even challenge, these complicated expectations is on display in Figure 9. The image provides a telling example of the

⁵⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 68539, “Appendix to the third draft of the SED party program – proposed amendments and supplements. November 1975.”

⁵⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 68539, “Appendix to the third draft of the SED party program – proposed amendments and supplements. November 1975.”

⁵⁶⁹ Kubu, 236.

⁵⁷⁰ Kubu, 240.



Figure 9: Hanna Wolf in discussion during a meeting break at the 9th SED Party Conference on 22 May 1976. The man she is speaking to is listed as “anonymous” for privacy reasons. Frieda Sternberg, Chairwoman of the LPG "Ernst Thälmann," veteran worker Sepp Wenig, and Elisabeth Walther, Director of VEB *Strumpfkombinat*, chat in the background. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-R0522-400.

ascribed gender roles that existed in the party culture of the SED. Not only is Wolf showing assertive and confident behaviour in how she stands up straight directly facing the man she is speaking to, but it also appears like her fists are clenched, as if frustrated or feeling challenged. Photographic information about the man’s identity is noted as “anonymous” and only mentions that he was the First Secretary of the SED Leadership in the District of Plauen. The event taking place was the 9th SED Party Conference that was held between 18-22 May 1976.

Although the topic of conversation is unknown, there appears to be multiple discussions taking place amongst the five people in the photo. Not only is Wolf standing her ground in the discussion she is participating in, but her words seem to catch the attention of Frieda Sternberg,

Chairwoman of the LPG "Ernst Thälmann" in Wurzen-Bennewitz and candidate member of the Central Committee. Sternberg is so distracted by Wolf that she seems to lose focus from her own conversation. Although it is difficult to know what the conversation entailed, Wolf's words and assertiveness clearly left Sternberg stunned. Whether this sentiment was due to Wolf saying something fanatical is difficult to determine, but it is fair to say that whatever Wolf said challenged some sort of expectation on how she should behave.

Another interesting detail in the image is how the women are dressed. Although all three women are wearing dresses or skirts, Wolf's choice of clothing significantly differs from Sternberg and Walther, who wear floral pattern dresses. Instead, Wolf chose a dark solid coloured skirt-suit with a floral pattern shirt underneath. This choice of clothing seems to mirror the blending of gender roles that female leaders in the SED faced. The dark skirt-suit emulates the suits worn by men yet also includes a hint of femininity with the pink and black floral shirt underneath, portraying seriousness and professionalism, yet also a hint of warmth beneath her cold outer shell. Although Sternberg and Walther also held high-ranking positions as female members of the SED, their chosen attire seems more natural, almost as if they are more comfortable with their femininity and positions in the party apparatus. In contrast, Wolf's attire looks like a military uniform, very serious and plain. Although we do not know her motivations for certain, her chosen attire clearly reflects agentic masculinity.

As already mentioned, Walther was the Director of a hosiery factory that acted as a parent factory in the GDR. Sternberg also held a high-ranking position, serving as a co-founder and Director of the "Ernst Thälmann" LPG in Wurzen-Bennewitz. When examining agentic and communal characteristics amongst women in leadership positions in the SED, Sternberg provides a stark counterpoint to Wolf, who often gave the impression of being cold, arrogant, and

domineering. Sternberg was born in East Prussia in 1920, her father an agricultural worker and also a communist. Despite her father's influence, Sternberg aligned herself more with the values of social democracy and joined the SPD after the war ended in 1945. According to Sternberg, due to her own experiences as an immigrant who arrived in Germany in 1944, she was deeply affected by the lack of resources available to refugees after the war ended. Hoping to help refugees that were often disadvantaged due to competition with local populations for social assistance, Sternberg first joined a labour union and then the SPD. However, after the SPD-KPD merger in 1946, her father advised her to break ties with her SPD past.⁵⁷¹

Sternberg worked various agricultural positions and also sat on local council of the SED until 1952, when she helped co-found the "Ernst Thälmann" LPG which she also Chaired until 1988. Sternberg was made a candidate member of the Central Committee in 1954, briefly having her candidacy revoked in 1958 for being too outspoken over a cattle stable construction program but was reinstated in 1963.⁵⁷² Despite a quick rise in the party apparatus during the 1950s, Sternberg was never made a full member of the Central Committee. In fact, she states that she was only reinstated as a candidate member due to the efforts of Ulbricht's wife Lotte, who missed having Sternberg on the Women's Commission. However, Sternberg states that she was not sure whether the reason for her political degradation was due to her former involvement in the SPD, the fact that she was a woman and the "silent quota" for full female Central Committee members had already been met, or perhaps because she was too outspoken when not in agreement over agricultural policies. Sternberg notes that she was often an "unpleasant partner,"

⁵⁷¹ Cordia Schlegelmilch, "Lebenswege in Deutschland: Die Prägekraft geschichtlicher Räume," *Berliner Debatte*, vol. 2 (1996): 49-51.

⁵⁷² "Biographische Angaben aus dem Handbuch 'Wer war wer in der DDR? – Frieda Sternberg'" Accessed 20 November 2023. <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/frieda-sternberg>

which resulted in her not being able to approve many agricultural policies during her role as Chairwoman. She also notes that as a female, she was often the target of members of the SED District leadership in Wurzen, who begrudged her success and helped bring about her political degradation. However, even after being reinstated as a candidate member of the Central Committee, she felt that she was never fully accepted by other members.⁵⁷³

Alongside Sternberg's willingness to speak out, she was also accused by members of the SED District Leadership in Wurzen of privileging her own family in her role as Chairwoman of the LPG. Her critics accused her of attempting to build a family empire, where her own children benefitted by Sternberg following the hereditary farm principle. Sternberg admits that she did use her power as Chairwoman to benefit herself and her family. However, she notes that "family" also included all members of the LPG and she viewed her leadership position as being similar to the role of a father in a household, where she worked to motivate all members to work and perform like a large family.⁵⁷⁴ This method of managing the LPG often caused conflict due to her being a woman and not ascribing to traditional gender roles which persisted in the GDR. Sternberg states that her husband, who was in a lower position than her at the LPG, often received comments about how his wife "wore the pants" and if it were not for his good nature, their marriage probably would have "come crashing down."⁵⁷⁵

Sternberg notes that her position also put a strain on her family because she was rarely home. One year she forgot about her wedding anniversary and came home a day late to see flowers on the kitchen table from her husband. Some days she would not get home until late in

⁵⁷³ Schlegelmilch, 52-53.

⁵⁷⁴ Schlegelmilch, 55.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the evening and then would be gone again by seven in the morning.⁵⁷⁶ Despite these restrictions on family and personal time, Sternberg had four children with her husband, and also twenty-four grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren by the mid-1990s.⁵⁷⁷ Sternberg's maternal nature was also present in her leadership role and she recalls how she often cooked meals for the workers at the LPG. Although Sternberg showed agentic characteristics such as being outspoken and confident, she viewed her own responsibilities as Chairwoman to motivate and care for her LPG "family."⁵⁷⁸ Evidence of such nurturing and maternal characteristics were not found in the memoir literature or archival materials when researching Wolf. Rather than caring for the general welfare of PHS staff and students, Wolf appeared to care more about their successful indoctrination. Instead of developing an open and welcoming learning environment, Wolf encouraged the use of tactics such as self-criticism and manipulation.

On this point, when reflecting on the "totalitarianism" debate in East German historiography, it is fair to suggest that the concept is useful when examining the purpose of the PHS and its role in the GDR. Historians that oppose the use of the term, such as Mary Fulbrook, Corey Ross, and Jeanette Z. Madarasz, suggest that it is "too all encompassing," that it is condemnatory, and that it is a politically loaded term that fails to acknowledge the significant differences between the GDR and the more destructive Nazi and Soviet dictatorships.⁵⁷⁹ On the other hand, historians such as Gary Bruce and Peter Grieder, who support the use of the term,

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁷ Schlegelmilch, 49.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ Mary Fulbrook, "Rethorising 'State' and 'Society' in the German Democratic Republic" in *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-71*, edited by Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 283.

have emphasized the far-reaching intent and impact of the Stasi and other East German organizations on nearly every aspect of society.⁵⁸⁰

In place of the “totalitarianism” concept, some historians have developed their own suggestive models. The “participatory dictatorship” approach, initially coined by Fulbrook in *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (2005), suggests that East German citizens actively participated in the functioning of the dictatorship at various levels of society. This “participation,” according to Fulbrook, exhibited a process of negotiation between regular citizens and the state that allowed some East Germans to lead what Fulbrook refers to as “perfectly ordinary lives.”⁵⁸¹ Fulbrook has also influenced a handful of mostly British historians, who have followed both her everyday life approach and attack on the “totalitarianism model.” American historian Eli Rubin has referred to this group as the “Fulbrookians,” such as Corey Ross and Jeanette Z. Madarasz, whose scholarship usually overemphasizes “society” and downplays the role of the “state” in East German history.⁵⁸²

In attempting to sidestep the totalitarian debate, Konrad Jarausch introduced the concept of the “welfare dictatorship,” which focuses on consent rather than coercion and the attempts by the East German state to meet the material and social welfare needs of the population. In contrast to “participatory dictatorship,” “welfare dictatorship” does not completely lose sight of the role

⁵⁸⁰ See Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8. Bruce shows how far-reaching, yet often mundane, the work of the Stasi often was in the Districts of Grasse and Perleberg and stresses Martin Malia’s assertion that “totalitarianism does not mean that such regimes in fact exercise total control over the population; it means rather that total control is their aspiration.” Also, see Peter Grieder’s *The East German Leadership, 1946-73, Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999). Although Grieder points out that Ulbricht sometimes veered off course from following official Soviet policy, he does not undermine his dictatorial style of leadership and highlights how the former GDR leader often conspired against his opponents before they had time to work against him.

⁵⁸¹ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 2-3.

⁵⁸² Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 6-7.

of ideology.⁵⁸³ However, “welfare dictatorship” also suffers from some basic flaws. As Grieder points out, the main aim of these concepts is to highlight the uniqueness of the East German regime from other “totalitarian” dictatorships and “welfare dictatorship” fails in this sense because the GDR was not alone in providing social welfare for its population. Grieder also notes that although the GDR placed a great deal of prominence on both social and state security, it is the latter that took precedence.⁵⁸⁴

When one considers “totalitarianism” as the aspiration to control society in its entirety, the East German regime fits this definition as not only did its surveillance apparatus target regular people alongside “problem” intellectuals, but even PHS student enrollment only made room for those functionaries that were more than willing to conform to the methods of the regime. Not only did prospective students first have to pass a political evaluation prior to being admitted into a program, but they were also expected to fully comply to the teachings of Marxism-Leninism. Any deviation from this ideological path usually resulted in expulsion and even minor mistakes in the classroom, whether real or imagined, led to punishments such as practicing self-criticism. Under Wolf’s tutelage, the PHS remained an institute of indoctrination that aimed to train SED functionaries who were not only loyal but also fervent contributors to the building of the socialist regime.

PHS Theses and Dissertation Analysis

Although Wolf often had a “seat at the table” with Honecker and other highly ranked male SED politicians, her power was mostly relegated to the halls of the party school. Her contributions to ideological and theoretical matters were clearly valued by Honecker and Hager,

⁵⁸³ Rubin, 7. An example of the “welfare dictatorship” approach is Rubin’s *Synthetic Socialism: Plastic & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (2008).

⁵⁸⁴ Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic*, 7.

and Wolf was sometimes included in significant discussions and activities. While the GDR was progressive when it came to women's integration into the workforce, Gabrielle Gast and Donna Harsch have suggested that women had a more difficult time advancing into professional roles that were not merely advisory or where advancement was only possible for roles traditionally granted to women.⁵⁸⁵ Similarly, Catherine Epstein has pointed out how the success of some female veteran communists was directly linked to their more powerful male partners.⁵⁸⁶

Although Wolf did face professional barriers, such as being excluded from the Politburo, her position was neither traditionally female, as the other Directors before and after her were male and her position was not merely representative. Similar to Müller, Wolf was also not married to a politically influential partner. As can be seen through Wolf's position as Director of the PHS, she played a significant role in managing and controlling the school and hence portrays how some women were able to advance and wield power in their professions within the male dominated party apparatus of the SED. Therefore, this thesis and dissertation analysis will examine the output of work over the decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, in order to assess how much autonomy and control Wolf actually had over student academic work at the PHS.

The Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde library catalogue holds around 1000 theses and dissertations from the PHS, with the 1970s and 1980s providing the lion's share. This section examines 120 theses and dissertations, with forty randomly chosen works for each decade. The 1950s will not be included in this analysis because there were not enough theses and dissertations available through the library catalogue, and for the most part, Wolf and Ulbricht were on the same page ideologically and were forced to deal with similar problems with the

⁵⁸⁵ Gabrielle Gast, "The Political Role of Women in the German Democratic Republic" (1973) and Donna Harsch's "Squaring the Circle."

⁵⁸⁶ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 120-21.

death of Stalin in 1953 and de-Stalinization in 1956. Although Wolf retired from her position as Director of the PHS in 1983, the 1980s are included in this examination in order to assess how student work changed or stayed the same after her departure. The student work was selected at random with two exceptions. First, since there was a much higher number of completed studies done by male students, female work was selected when available. However, this examination does not focus on the ratio of male-to-female numbers of completed work. Second, student theses and dissertations were selected randomly in a chronological manner in order to span each decade being analyzed. Only the introductions of the student theses and dissertations were examined, as this was sufficient enough to infer the study topic, main arguments and source materials. The main elements being examined in each decade of student academic output focuses on patterns such as topic themes (ideological or technological), how many theses or dissertations included case studies, as well as the source materials used.

As the PHS was the training institute of the SED, it is expected that the majority of completed student work would largely focus on socialist ideology. According to the guidelines for thesis and dissertation writing issued for academic research completed at the SED party institutes, students were asked to focus on three main areas: “1) how did the work reflect the decisions of the SED, 2) how were the ‘classics’ and the newest results of the Marxist-Leninist social sciences, especially the work being done in the Soviet Union, evaluated, and 3) were bourgeois and revisionist conceptualizations effectively challenged?”⁵⁸⁷ However, as Ulbricht loosened his grip on cultural policies during the 1960s, introduced the NES in 1963, and called for more technical training for students at the PHS, Wolf and her hardline SED peers were resistant to these changes. Therefore, an examination of how student topics shifted over each

⁵⁸⁷ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 33.

decade portrays the power (or lack thereof) which Wolf maintained over the party school. In this analysis, “technology” includes more practical work such as improving economic output at factories or increasing worker efficiency in a contemporary case study. Also included in the “technology” field are student projects that deal with more liberal cultural topics. Although all theses and dissertations were “ideological,” those marked as “ideological” for this analysis include obvious topics that deal directly with socialist theory and ideological matters but do not include case studies conducted at factories or economic institutions, as well as student work focusing on literary or historical topics (most of which focused on the history of the KPD, SED or CPSU).

1960s

The influence of Ulbricht’s initiatives during the 1960s began with a slow and steady rise of academic work that reflected his transition from an ideological to technological focus. By the end of the 1960s, the PHS theses and dissertations examined reflected a higher focus on technology than on ideology. As Ulbricht called for more “hands-on” practical experience for students, which included PHS courses to provide practicums, the student theses and dissertations examined also showed an increase in applied topics. Between 1961 and 1962, the student work (which includes seven theses and dissertations) focused solely on historical/ideological topics from the past. None of the projects examined in these years focused on making future improvements to the socialist system. They were merely studies of past events which ranged from the First World War until the 1950s. Some titles include: Heinz Küster’s “The War Aims of German Imperialism at the Beginning of the First World War: 1914-1916” (1961), Horst Lipski’s “The Founding of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, 1945-46” (1961) and Heinz

Wohlgemuth's "On Some Questions of the Political-Ideological Development of the German Working Class in the first years of the 1914 World War" (1962).

In 1963, Ulbricht initiated the NES and also made clear his expectations for more technical and practical work. Three theses and dissertations were examined for this year, two that focused on political history while the other maintained a more practical focus. Dieter Glatzer's "Television as a means of Socialist Education" (1963) provides the first glimpse of Ulbricht's initiatives beginning to take form in the student work. Although Glatzer's thesis, like most of the student research topics, can be considered political, while also focusing on technology, his topic was the first to not follow the previous pattern of focusing strictly on a more traditional historical or theoretical theme. The results for 1964 were quite similar, out of the five theses and dissertations selected, four focused on political history while one thesis covered a contemporary issue that also included a case study.⁵⁸⁸ In 1965, three theses and dissertations were available, two that focused specifically on political ideology while one thesis dealt with Ulbricht's NES directly.⁵⁸⁹ The results for 1966 maintained a similar pattern, with the majority of student work focusing on ideological topics. Out of eight theses and dissertations, only two focused on technological/practical topics and both included case studies.⁵⁹⁰

What can be concluded from the results of theses and dissertations between 1961 and 1966, is that student work focusing on ideology remained dominant. During these years, 26

⁵⁸⁸ Josef Futschik, „Die Durchsetzung des Beschlusses des Politbüros vom 4.7.1963 zur Verstärkung des Parteienflusses in den LPG des Typ I im Kreis durch das Sekretariat der Kreisleitung Güstrow.“ Thesis. Parteihochschule, 'Karl Marx', 1964.

⁵⁸⁹ Friedrich Matho, „Zu Grundfragen der bewußten Ausnutzung des Wertgesetzes und der Ware-Geld-Beziehungen im neuen ökonomischen System der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft: untersucht für die sozialistische Industrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik.“ Dissertation. Parteihochschule, 'Karl Marx', 1965.

⁵⁹⁰ Fritz Liebisch, „Politische ideologische und ökonomisch organisatorische Aspekte des Automatisierungsprozesses der Chemieproduktion und Probleme seiner Leitung im Betrieb.“ Dissertation. Parteihochschule, 'Karl Marx', 1966. Rita Heuer, „Der Einfluß der Qualität der Erzeugnisse und der Produktionsmittelkosten auf den gesellschaftlichen Nutzeffekt und den betrieblichen Gewinn.“ Dissertation. Parteihochschule, 'Karl Marx', 1966.

theses and dissertations were examined and only a total of six aligned with Ulbricht's directives. However, the students frequently referenced Ulbricht's own writings and speeches throughout the 1960s in the student work. Despite the lack of theses and dissertations focusing on Ulbricht's initiatives, the student work at the very least paid lip-service to Ulbricht through their use of source material. During the 1960s, Ulbricht also encouraged the *Bitterfeld Weg* movement and became open to the inclusion of more revisionist content being available at the PHS. Out of the 26 theses and dissertations, only two focused on literature and both authors examined in the studies were "safe" communist writers. One thesis analyzed the work of Anna Seghers, who was a recipient of both the National Prize of the GDR (1951) and the Stalin Peace Prize (1951),⁵⁹¹ while the second thesis looked at the work of Friedrich Wolf, the former first ambassador of East Germany to Poland (1949-51) and a two-time recipient of the National Prize of East Germany.⁵⁹² Neither thesis dealt with themes of revisionism. According to the 26 theses and dissertations examined between 1961 and 1966, Wolf was able to successfully safeguard her preference for ideology as the main academic focus for student research at the PHS.

The latter 1960s showed an increase in technological topics as well as an increase in the number of case studies in the student work. Out of seven theses and dissertations from 1967, four works concentrated on technological themes, three of which included case studies. Some examples include: Oskar Hinckel's "The Policy of the SED in the fully Co-operative association of Farmers in the District of Strausberg" and Karl-Heinz Hertel's "System and Process of Socialist Construction Industry Forecasting in the German Democratic Republic and some Problems of the Political-Ideological Leadership Capacity of Party Organizations in the

⁵⁹¹ Hella Dietz, „ Die Gestaltung nationaler Grundprobleme in den Romanen von Anna Seghers „Die Toten bleiben jung“ (1949) und „Die Entscheidung“ (1959).“ Thesis. Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘, 1966.

⁵⁹² Günter Mehnert, „Das Bühnenwerk Friedrich Wolfs in den Jahren 1933-1939 als Widerspiegelung und Bestandteil des Kampfes der KPD um die Volksfront.“ Dissertation. Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘, 1964.

Forecasting Process.” Four student works were examined for 1968 that included two studies focusing on ideology and two on technology. The technological works included: Werner Pruskil’s “The Development of the Earth-Processing Industry in West Germany” and Ernst Wied’s “The Task of the District Party Organization of the SED Mansfeld Kombinat ‘Wilhelm Pieck’ in the preparation of the Company Forecast in the VEB Mansfeld Combine ‘Wilhelm Pieck.’” Of the three theses and dissertations examined for 1969, two focused on technology with just one focusing on ideology.⁵⁹³

During the latter 1960s, the influence of Ulbricht’s initiatives on PHS student research increased significantly. Out of the fourteen theses and dissertations examined, eight had a technological focus which was just over 57 percent. These statistics accurately reflect the frustration felt by Wolf during the late 1960s as described in the previous chapter. As Ulbricht began to encroach on Wolf’s terrain, that being the coursework and academic output at the party school, she began to grow closer to Honecker as a result and made significant efforts to help curb his impact. This decade saw a slow but steady rise in student research that showcased Ulbricht’s initiatives from 1961 through 1966 and then a dramatic increase between 1967 and 1969, ultimately paralleling Wolf’s own decrease in control at the party school and her continued dissatisfaction with Ulbricht’s leadership.

1970s

The analysis for the 1970s is split into two sections. First, the period 1970 to 1971, as Ulbricht fell from power in May 1971 and was replaced by Honecker as leader of the SED. The

⁵⁹³ Kaergel, Siegfried. „Das Prinzip der Eigenerwirtschaftung der Mittel für die erweiterte Reproduktion – sein Einfluß auf die weitere Qualifizierung der Planung im volkseigenen Industriebetrieb. Dissertation. Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘, 1969.

second section examines 1972 through 1979, since this period was under Honecker's new leadership and the two men differed significantly in their political and ideological aims. As Wolf had aligned herself with Honecker during the late 1960s, her ability to ensure that the PHS fell in line with her own political ideals should have been more secure. Both Wolf and Honecker were ideologues that were committed to the tenants of Marxism-Leninism. However, as the analysis suggests, many of the initiatives spurred on by Ulbricht during the 1960s continued to take shape during the 1970s.

As Ulbricht's influence on student research at the PHS resulted in approximately 57 percent of theses and dissertations focusing on technological themes by the end of the 1960s, the period between 1970 and 1971 showed a small decline to 50 percent. Eight theses and dissertations were examined from this period with four focusing on ideology and four on technology. Out of eight theses and dissertations examined, five included case studies. Another finding from this period centres on the source materials used by PHS students in their work. All of the theses and dissertations from this short period continued to rely on the classics of Marxism-Leninism as well as GDR and Soviet texts. Although this section only reviewed the years 1970 to 1971, it shows that Wolf was able to successfully maintain control of the academic content being used in the student research.

Between 1972 and 1979, thirty-two theses and dissertations were examined with fifteen falling into the technology category and seventeen maintaining an ideological focus. After Ulbricht was removed as leader of the SED, the number of student theses and dissertations focusing on technology dropped from 50 to 46.8 percent. This is interesting considering Ulbricht's commissioned book, *Political Economics of Socialism and its Application in the GDR* (1969), was taken off the shelves at the PHS, while research output themes focusing on

technology only slightly decreased. Some of the works from this period include Karl-Heinz Keßler's "The Leadership Tasks of the basic Organization of the Party in the Consolidation of the Co-operative Unit for Crop Production (*Kooperative Abteilung Pflanzenproduktion – KAP*) and the Development of its cooperation with the district enterprises for Agricultural Machinery to increase production and effectiveness: Presented in the district of Rostock" (1976), Dieter Voigt's "Experience of the Management to Achieve a High Economic Benefit of Mechanization and Automation of Shock Absorber Production in the VEB Renak Plant Hartha" (1977) and Ursula Barth's "The Relations between Man and Technology under Socialism: Illustrated by Social Effects on Working Women in the Plant for Television Electronics Berlin in the Combine Microelectronics" (1979).

As Ulbricht was ousted from his leadership position in 1971, only one of the selected theses referenced him once Honecker took over. The last student work to include any reference to Ulbricht and use his work was Nikolai Smelow's "The Confrontation of the KPD with the Reactionary Forces in the CDU in the Struggle for the Implementation of Democratic Land Reform" (1972). Although almost half of the selected theses and dissertations between 1972 and 1979 dealt with more contemporary technological issues, it is clear that Ulbricht even became a non-person in the library of the PHS. Likewise, four student works categorized as ideological dealt with revisionist themes. For example, Alfred Weber's "On the Critique of Socialist Conceptions of the 'Quality of Life'" (1973), which examined various socialist and social democratic theories and Eva Witte's "Confrontations with Falsifications of the theory and Practice of the Party of a New Type by the Left Opportunists (Neo-Trotskyist Direction)" (1973). Although these two theses covered topics that addressed what were considered to be revisionist themes by the SED, such as Social Democracy and Trotskyism, the student research

conducted failed to reference any actual “revisionist” work. Instead, the source materials continued to rely on works produced by Marx, Engels, Lenin and sometimes lesser known Soviet writers/theorists. For instance, Weber’s thesis on “The Quality of Life” relied on *The Ideology of Social Democracy in the Present* (1971), which was edited by a Soviet author collective and published by *Staatsverlag* in the GDR.⁵⁹⁴

So, what do the results of the 1970s tell us about Wolf and how much power she wielded at the party school? For the most part, Wolf was able to secure her reign over the ideological content being covered by students by maintaining a limit on what source materials were acceptable and available for student use. However, even with the support of Honecker, who shared Wolf’s ideological ideals, she was unable to prevent the continued influence of Ulbricht and the technological revolution on the research output at the school. It is unknown whether Wolf had to sign off on each individual research topic being pursued at the PHS. However, former Director of the Political Economy and Economics Department, Dr. Karl Hartmann (1977-1990), stated that most of the diploma and course work themes were assigned to each Department and these themes were often pursued as dissertation and habilitation topics and then were reported to special departments of the Central Committee.⁵⁹⁵ Similarly, former Economics Professor Fred Matho described how his own research and the direction of student projects at the school were subjected to internal censorship. However, Matho disagrees with accusations that such censorship was “dogmatism from ‘blockheads’ at the PHS” and suggests that he had

⁵⁹⁴ Alfred Weber, „Zur Kritik der sozialistischen Auffassungen über die ‚Qualität des Lebens.‘“ Thesis. Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘, 1973.

⁵⁹⁵ Achim Dippe and Karl Hartmann, “Zur Struktur und Arbeitsweise des Lehrstuhls Ökonomik der Industrie“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 179. Hartmann does not indicate who assigned themes for coursework or diploma topics. He merely states that themes were assigned and then describes how some of the dissertation and habilitation work was then passed on to special departments of the Central Committee.

somewhat of a “free hand” in his work at the party school.⁵⁹⁶ If Wolf did closely monitor student research output, she either understood that advancements needed to be made in this area and silently let these topic choices slide or she was given direct orders from the Central Committee to pursue specific topics.

1980s

The analysis for the 1980s is also split into two sections. First, 1980 through 1983 will be examined, since these were Wolf’s last years in her position as Director of the party school. The period from 1984 until 1989 will make up the second section in order to assess what lasting impacts Wolf had on student academic output at the PHS and what areas, if any, changed.⁵⁹⁷ As Honecker maintained his dedication to Marxist-Leninist ideology until his last days as leader of the SED, one would assume that, even after Wolf’s departure from the PHS, the academic output from students at the school would not steer too far off track from the previous decade, especially since Hager, who was also just as loyal to the classics of Marxist-Leninist theory, oversaw the management of the school. However, the results for the 1980s show otherwise.

Between 1980 and 1983, seven theses and dissertations were examined and each one focused on ideology while three included research case studies. Some titles from this period include: Lothar Becker’s “Problems of the Political-Ideological Struggle of the CPSU and the Communist International in the Implementation of Lenin’s General Line of Socialist Construction in the USSR: 1926-27” (1980) and Maren Witt’s “The Further Development of Socialist Readiness for Military Service – An Indispensable component of the Socialist

⁵⁹⁶ Fred Matho, “Ware-Geld Beziehungen und Wertgesetz im Sozialismus Ein persönlicher Bericht“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick*, (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 167-172.

⁵⁹⁷ Although there were theses and dissertations available from the early 1990s, they are not included in this analysis.

Development of Consciousness” (1981). The average of student works examined from 1972 through 1979 that focused on technology equaled 46.8 percent and dropped to 0 percent in the first few years of the 1980s. Although it is hard to ascertain the reason for this massive decline in theses and dissertations focusing on technological matters, it can be gleaned that perhaps Wolf felt she had successfully tackled the issue of safeguarding student research from the influence of revisionist sources and turned her attention to the next obstacle, which was reversing Ulbricht’s lasting influence on student research topics. However, one of the theses/dissertations examined from this period raised even more questions.

As most of the theses and dissertations examined between 1980 and 1983 dealt with topics that can be considered typical for the “ideological category,” covering themes to do with the history of the KPD, SED, CPSU or Marxist-Leninist theory itself, one student thesis stood out amongst the rest. Helga Stage’s “The Emergence and Development of the Central Party School of German Social Democracy in the Years 1906 to 1914” was the first student work out of the 120 examined to use source materials that were previously not included or not allowed. Stage’s thesis provides a history of the Social Democratic Party School from the early 1900s without outright attacking the Social Democratic movement. Stage also references work by August Bebel, one of the original founders of the SPD, Franz Mehring, another former SPD member, and articles from the SPD newspaper *Die Neue Zeit* (The New Time). Such sources had been banned for use at the PHS since the 1950s and were only reconsidered by PHS faculty with the aftermath of Khrushchev’s speech in 1956, that was until Ulbricht reversed his thaw on cultural policies after de-Stalinization and went on the attack against revisionism, which Wolf ultimately shadowed in the halls of the PHS.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 86324, “Meeting minutes for the department chair meeting on the improvement of teaching and teaching methods at the PHS – 8 August 1956.”

The results for the period of the 1980s before Wolf retired as Director of the party school raised more questions than answers. According to Dietrich Orlow, Wolf was suffering from various health issues during this period and had even requested to have a Deputy Director hired that would be trained as her eventual replacement.⁵⁹⁹ Perhaps, by this point, Wolf was too exhausted to continue her fight against revisionism in faculty meetings and some instructors began to let rules slide. The thesis that contains this first inclusion of revisionist content was completed in May, only one month prior to Wolf's own retirement in June 1983.⁶⁰⁰ Therefore, it is highly likely that changes had already been underway long before Wolf's official departure. However, Wolf's efforts to reverse student research topics from technology to ideology did not last long as many changes took place once she departed.

The theses and dissertations examined for 1984 through 1989, after Wolf's retirement, provide telling information about how Wolf must have been perceived by her peers at the party school. Thirty-three theses and dissertations were analyzed from these years with twenty-one focusing on technological topics and twelve on ideology. As soon as Wolf walked out the door of the PHS, student research topics experienced a dramatic upward swing back to focusing on technological issues. Some examples of student research work from this period include: Wolfgang Weigl's "The Acceleration of Demand-Oriented Consumer Goods Production based on Modern Technologies in VEB Bekleidungswerke Modesta Johanngeorgenstadt" (1988), Elke Broß's "Analysis of the Changes in the Position of Man in and to the Production Process in the Development and Introduction of Flexible Automation Solutions in the field of Stamping of the VEB Chemie and Tankanlagenbau Fürstenwalde (CTA)" (1989), and Renate Michalik's "Results and Experiences in the involvement of Working Women in the implementation of

⁵⁹⁹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 40.

⁶⁰⁰ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 28.

Scientific and Technical Progress: Illustrated by the example of the VEB Werk for Fernsehelektronik Berlin, operation of the Kombinat Mikroelektronik Erfurt" (1987).

Alongside the massive upswing in technological themes in the student research, 25 out of the 33 theses and dissertations included research case studies. This result of 75.7 percent of the theses and dissertations including case studies, combined with the rise in numbers of studies focusing on technology shows an improvement in student academic output at the PHS, as more work was being conducted that aimed to improve current conditions in the socialist system. In contrast to the majority of theses and dissertations from this period that continued to rely on Marx, Engels and Lenin, one student thesis did make use of Western sources, which had been unthinkable during Wolf's reign. Heike Hauswald's "Criticism of Anti-Communist Attacks against Socialism in the Eighties on the Basis of the Threat Lie" (1985) included western source materials such as political documents from former President Ronald Reagan and western literature such as *The Present Danger* (1980) by Norman Podhoretz, an American conservative political commentator.

It is clear that once Wolf retired, her influence over the party school quickly began to fade. Despite the continued reliance of student research referencing the classics of Marx, Engels and Lenin, once Wolf was out of the picture, the remaining PHS faculty, under the new leadership of Kurt Tiedke, made allowances for previously banned "revisionist" works and western literature. Although ideology still remained a significant aspect of the education at the PHS, more practical contemporary student research studies were conducted by students which focused on technology, ultimately showing a rise in the quality of student research overall.

Results

What do the student theses and dissertations tell us about how much power Wolf wielded at the PHS? Despite Wolf being unsuccessful in deterring the rise in theses and dissertations focusing on technology until her last years as Director, she was successful at preventing the influence of revisionism in PHS coursework and student research projects. Wolf faced criticism from her peers regularly throughout the three decades in which she managed the school and was able to come out on top each time. During her last years as Director, which will be explored in the following chapter, Wolf experienced another onslaught of criticism from both faculty and students and still managed to maintain most of her objectives, even reversing the focus of student research back to ideological themes. The fact that student theses and dissertations showed such drastic changes in the 1980s after her retirement in comparison to the previous decades proves how much control Wolf actually had at the PHS. It was not until Wolf was 75 years old, experiencing health issues, and on the verge of retirement, that changes began to be made with little fear of Wolf's accompanying repercussions.

Conclusion

Wolf had always been loyal to Ulbricht throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, but once the SED leader became more open to revisionist ideas and new technological advancements and began to steer away from his concentration on ideology, Wolf lost faith in her long-time ally. During the 1970s, Wolf abandoned Ulbricht and moved closer to Honecker, with whom she shared similar ideological ideals. The 1970s proved to be a much more stable decade for the PHS and Wolf, as Ulbricht was ousted from power in 1971 and the main focus of both the SED and the party school shifted back to the importance of Marxism-Leninism. However, Wolf was not

able to block Ulbricht's continuing influence of spurring on the scientific technological revolution in the GDR and its impact on PHS student research.

Despite Wolf's best efforts, she was not able to compete with the rise of modernity and the need for improvements in the GDR's economic and technical fields. However, she was successful, throughout the majority of her time as Director of the party school, in "protecting" student course curricula and research work from the "evils" of revisionism. During the early 1980s, as Wolf's age and various health issues began to impact her ability to continue work as Director of the PHS, she would retire. Not only had her line of thinking become outdated, as she was still pursuing the same approach to managing the school as she had during the 1950s, but the scientific technological revolution could not be ignored. The following chapter will examine Wolf's last years as Director of the PHS, in which she faced backlash from PHS students, her continued loyalty and work as a personal assistant to Honecker, and her eventual dismissal from the re-structured Party of Democratic Socialism in 1990.

Chapter 5:

Lone Wolf: Retirement, Rejection and the fall of the German Democratic Republic

As the 1970s proved to be a much more stable period for Wolf and the PHS, with Honecker's leadership posing no challenges to the longtime Director, the 1980s would be the end of the line for not only Wolf but also her SED comrades. After stepping down from her position at the party school in 1983, Wolf asked to be assigned to another role in the party apparatus, as she was not fully ready to officially retire and she was appointed as Honecker's personal secretary, where she scoured the foreign communist press for criticism of the Honecker regime and also launched one last attack against "revisionists" that were slandering the "achievements" of Stalin and the Soviet Union in 1989. Throughout the 1980s, Wolf proved to be out of touch with the political realities taking place not only in the GDR but also in the rest of the Eastern bloc. As Mikhail Gorbachev took power in 1985 and launched his reforms of *Perestroika* (restructuring) and *Glasnost* (openness), Wolf and the other hardliners in the SED were no longer able to maneuver through the new changes taking place. Not only had other SED members and top functionaries in the Soviet Union decided it was time for change, but so too did the masses in other Eastern communist countries.

Both Honecker and Wolf were resistant to the changes taking place during the mid to late 1980s and clung to their rigid dedication to Marxism-Leninism, which ultimately led to both of their political downfalls. In November 1989, Honecker was removed from power and as his personal assistant, Wolf was also made to officially retire. Although Wolf watched the East German regime unravel, she remained loyal to her political convictions until the very end. In

1990, Wolf had her membership in the newly formed Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) revoked for “anti-party” behaviour and she joined a restructured version of the old KPD in 1992. However, by the end of Wolf’s long life, most of her hardline comrades from the SED had died and she remained resentful and alone in Berlin as Stalin’s last remaining comrade.

Wolf’s Last Years at the PHS (1980 – 1983)

During the early 1980s, the PHS continued to run according to plan under Wolf’s leadership. The main focus of student coursework still relied on the classics of Marxism-Leninism and despite some minor points of contention from faculty about the stagnancy of course offerings and teaching methods, Wolf’s last years came and went with no major challenges. However, even after three decades as Director, Wolf and PHS faculty were still trying to contend with problems that arose as early as the 1950s, showing just how little the PHS had evolved during the previous decades. In fact, if you were to compare and contrast PHS faculty or Central Committee meeting minutes in regard to these issues from the various decades, it would appear as if very little had changed. Two such problems that were still being dealt with at the party school during the early 1980s include the lack of qualified teachers and engaged students in the district party schools and Wolf’s continuous refusal to allow any new changes being made in the PHS course curricula.

According to a summary report on the party training year for 1981/1982, which directly mirrored problems faced by the district party schools during the 1950s, there were significant issues with the quality of seminar leaders and poor results from students in the district run courses.⁶⁰¹ Out of the fifteen district offices in the GDR, there were 205 training managers and

⁶⁰¹ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 60/3284, “Summary Report on the Party Training Year 1981/1982 – 9 July 1982.”

6081 seminar leaders for that year. The report indicated that “some seminar leaders approach their tasks too routinely, do not prepare enough for the trainings and give lengthy lectures. Often the discussion deviates too much from the topic” and that only around 30 percent of course participants completed the self-study materials required before beginning the coursework.⁶⁰² The report stipulated that “increased efforts are needed to overcome the still existing differentiation in the political-ideological level of party training and the involvement of members.”⁶⁰³ To combat these deficiencies, consultations were held with the district training managers and three-week qualification seminars were put together to improve the political-ideological level of seminar leaders. By the end of the qualification seminars, close to 76.4 percent of district faculty participated in extra training and “a further 307 seminar leaders took part in three-week training courses... [which] means that of the 6081 seminar leaders employed in the 1981/1982 party training year, 85.1 percent [now had] political qualifications.”⁶⁰⁴ As Wolf was able to maintain control of the main campus of the PHS, her influence on the district branches was not only less effective but both students and district faculty appeared to show lackluster motivation for the “significance” of ideological training. However, at the PHS campus itself, the “classics” remained as the central focus of student coursework and Wolf continued to act as a barrier when it came to any progressive changes being made.

In fact, Wolf’s last years as Director were characterized by the age-old problem of “how to teach Marxism-Leninism at the party school.” On Wolf’s request, Hager was called in to help deal with this question with PHS faculty in December 1981. As Wolf seemed to have little success in handling this issue during the 1970s, she called in the “father” of the party school, as

⁶⁰² SAPMO-BArch DY 60/3284, “Summary Report on the Party Training Year 1981/1982 – 9 July 1982.”

⁶⁰³ SAPMO-BArch DY 60/3284, “Summary Report on the Party Training Year 1981/1982 – 9 July 1982.”

⁶⁰⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 60/3284, “Summary Report on the Party Training Year 1981/1982 – 9 July 1982.”

she stated that the PHS was a “child of the party” and Hager was “one of the child’s most important fathers.”⁶⁰⁵ However, the meeting proved to be neither productive or effective. As the old proverb goes, “a wolf can change its coat but not its character,” and as Wolf and Hager allowed faculty members to discuss their concerns and ideas, this proved to be more of an outlet to let off steam than constructive conversation. Addressing the issue of the meeting, Hager took the floor and said “of course, I could make it quite easy for myself and say, ‘how to teach Marxism-Leninism today?’ – I would say Marxist!” This was supposed to be some lighthearted humour to begin the discussion, but the meeting ultimately followed in this direction.

The majority of issues brought up at the December meeting never saw the light of day at the PHS. Head of the Philosophy Department, Dr. Heinrich Opitz, proposed the expansion of the curricula to include courses on logic, as he complained that the teachings in basic Marxist-Leninist philosophy were “extremely preserved,” making it difficult for instructors to treat modern problems in a logical way. Opitz also complained that the course textbooks were outdated. However, Hager shut down the idea of teaching basic logic courses almost immediately, stating: “today it would be more difficult to give a logic lecture, because you would have to continue until mathematical logic... and no one has yet succeeded in bridging the gap between Aristotelian verbal – formal – logic and modern mathematical logic.”⁶⁰⁶ Likewise, Opitz also suggested the inclusion of a course on Philosophical Anthropology, that is, a course which covered the “problems of man in our time from a philosophical point of view” and pointed out how literature on this topic in the GDR was quite “meagre.” This suggestion was also quickly

⁶⁰⁵ Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv – Berlin, SAPMO-BArch DY 30/26461, “Meeting minutes for the work consultation with the teachers of the PHS Karl Marx on 15 December 1981.”

⁶⁰⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/26461, “Meeting minutes for the work consultation with the teachers of the PHS Karl Marx on 15 December 1981.”

shot down by Wolf, who responded that “the question of man, the happiness of man and the success of man. This also plays a role in Western literature and journalism – and I would like to say, not only a slanderous role against socialism.”⁶⁰⁷

The December 1981 meeting proved to be a continuation of how most meetings amongst Department Chairs and Wolf had been conducted in the past, with a lot of talk and no action. Even in the early 1980s, after thirty years in her role as Director, Wolf was still firmly opposed to reforms being made in the PHS course curricula. Although both Wolf and Hager shut down most of the ideas brought up amongst the faculty members in attendance, one suggestion was taken seriously by Wolf. Professor Röhner, Chair of the Theory and History of Literature Department, pointed out how the PHS continued to “give old answers to new questions that are no longer sufficient” and how “younger and younger comrades... are asking different questions than, for example, five, eight or ten years ago” and suggested that more cultural content be included in the PHS curricula. Röhner noted how many artistic productions made by DEFA were helping young people address questions of everyday life and moral problems in the GDR and that youth had shown a higher level of interest in films in recent years.⁶⁰⁸ He also proposed the idea of more cultural functionaries being admitted to the PHS and used the film director Günther Reisch as an example of the successful training of a cultural functionary, since Reisch attended a one-year course at the school during the 1950s and had gone on to make a handful of significant socialist films such as *Anton der Zauberer* (Anton the Magician – 1978) and *Die Verlobte* (The Fiancée – 1980). Wolf seemed to have no issue with this, as what more could satisfy the ageing

⁶⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/26461, “Meeting minutes for the work consultation with the teachers of the PHS Karl Marx on 15 December 1981.”

⁶⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/26461, “Meeting minutes for the work consultation with the teachers of the PHS Karl Marx on 15 December 1981.”

Director than to have cultural functionaries trained under her command and even offered the development of a special course that would cater to artists.⁶⁰⁹

Although the discussion resulted in no concrete changes being made, Wolf seemed to take Röhner's comments on the effectiveness of cultural content seriously. In fact, Wolf herself had taken a personal interest in socialist films in the early 1980s and had even encouraged the East German film director Konrad Wolf to produce a film about the communist hero Rosa Luxemburg. Konrad Wolf served as President of the *Akademie der Künste der DDR* (Academy of Arts of the GDR) from 1965 until 1982, and on the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Academy, 24 March 1980, Wolf wrote to congratulate him on the special occasion and also to share her hope that he would make a film about Luxemburg.⁶¹⁰ Wolf also provided reading materials on the German workers' movement and photocopies of Luxemburg's writings to help inspire the film director. In response, Konrad thanked Wolf for the warm greetings and mentioned that the reading materials were still sitting on his table, but he was "very curious and very happy."⁶¹¹

What spurred Wolf to all of a sudden take an interest in East German culture and film production is a mystery. In fact, Markus Wolf, former Deputy Minister for State Security in the GDR and brother of the late film director, mentioned his surprise when Hanna wrote to him after Konrad's death in 1982, expressing her condolences and belief that "she was one with Koni's emotional world."⁶¹² Whatever plan the longtime Director was trying to instigate in the cultural

⁶⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/26461, "Meeting minutes for the work consultation with the teachers of the PHS Karl Marx on 15 December 1981."

⁶¹⁰ Markus Wolf, *In Eigenem Auftrag: Bekenntnisse und Einsichten. Tagebuch 1989*, (Munich: Franz Schneekluth, 1991): 99-100. Journal entry for 5 August 1989.

⁶¹¹ Konrad Wolf, „Briefe,“ *Sinn und Form*, vol. 37, (November/December, 1985): 1120.

⁶¹² Markus Wolf, *In Eigenem Auftrag*, 99-100. Journal entry for 5 August 1989.



Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E0306-0009-002 / Fotoatelier/Schneider, Erwin

Figure 10: Hanna Wolf and Erich Wundersee, former Economic Director of the Reich Party School of the KPD, unveil a memorial plaque on the occasion of Rosa Luxemburg’s 95th birthday. Berlin. 6 March 1966. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-E0306-0009-002.

realm of the party apparatus clearly did not come to pass as Wolf’s interest in cultural projects quickly dissipated shortly after Konrad’s death. Wolf’s own interest in Luxemburg during her last years as Director is also surprising, as past PHS students recounted how the revolutionary woman was never a main focus in the course teachings. Former student Carola Stern wrote that during the 1990s, her old PHS neighbour from their Kleinmachnow days, Hella Maron, asked her one day while visiting, “did you notice that... Rosa Luxemburg did not appear at the Party

university? That she was not quoted and not read?” to which Stern replied, “yes, you are right... what honour for the great woman!”⁶¹³

Similarly, PHS library materials at the *Bundesarchiv* Lichterfelde location only include two works on Luxemburg, a “Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg celebration pamphlet” from 1984 and a document celebrating the 30th anniversary of Liebkecht and Luxemburg’s death from 1949. Both documents were from years when Wolf was not active in her role as Director of the party school. However, the PHS library holdings at the Federal Archives do include a multitude of Marx and Lenin’s own writings. Despite Wolf regularly referencing Luxemburg as one of the founders of the KPD who helped pave the way for the establishment of the SED and the building of communism in the GDR in her speeches and written articles, Wolf’s own interest in the former KPD leader appeared to be quite dismal while she was Director. Although Wolf and Luxemburg shared many similarities, their ideological views were quite contrary, and this is perhaps why Wolf was not as enamored with the revolutionary communist hero and why she was not included more frequently in course readings at the party school. Despite Wolf’s lackluster enthusiasm for Luxemburg, she remains the most significant female figure in the history of the German communist movement and provides an important counterpoint to Wolf.

Rosa Luxemburg

If Wolf were to idolize a female Communist the way she idolized Stalin, Rosa Luxemburg would have been a perfect fit. Not only were both women Polish born Jews, as Luxemburg was born in the Russian-occupied Polish town of Zamość, but both women were also

⁶¹³ Stern, 72.

fluent in multiple languages and had been involved with left-wing political groups from an early age.⁶¹⁴ Both women also left Poland to pursue university studies, as Wolf relocated to Berlin and Luxemburg headed to Switzerland where she ended up completing a doctorate degree in Political Economics before moving to Germany in 1898.⁶¹⁵ In Germany, Luxemburg advocated for Social Democracy at various German and International congresses and was also arrested multiple times for her political activities, which helped her gain recognition as a leader of the German Social Democratic movement.⁶¹⁶

While living in Berlin, Luxemburg became acquainted with Karl Liebknecht and together they formed the Spartacus Group, edited the Social Democratic newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) and then helped found the Communist Party of Germany in 1918.⁶¹⁷ Even though Luxemburg played an active role in the founding of the KPD, her views differed significantly from Wolf in that she was extremely critical of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In an article she wrote for *Die Rote Fahne*, Luxemburg stated that Lenin's dictatorship was "worse than the disease it was supposed to cure... Socialism by its very nature cannot be dictated... Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of the press and assembly... life dies out in every public institution and only bureaucracy remains active."⁶¹⁸ However, as Liebknecht spurred on a general strike on 6 January 1919, which garnered much popular support with hundreds of thousands of armed protesters, Luxemburg put down her pen at *Die Rote Fahne* editorial office and joined in the revolution.

⁶¹⁴ Paul Fröhlic, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*, translated by Joanna Hoornweg (London: Bookmarks, 1994), 22.

⁶¹⁵ Michael Brie and Jörn Schutrumpf, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Revolutionary Marxist at the Limits of Marxism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 7.

⁶¹⁶ Brie and Jörn, 8.

⁶¹⁷ J.P. Nettle, *Rosa Luxemburg: The Biography* (NY: Verso, 2019), 753.

⁶¹⁸ Brie and Jörn, 14.

The Spartacist Uprising was a political revolt against the Social Democratic leadership which had taken control in Berlin after the abdication of the Kaiser in November 1918. The newly formed KPD, under Liebknecht and Luxemburg, hoped that the Russian Revolution would spread to Germany and a communist government could be established. However, on 8 January 1919, the German government launched a full-scale counteroffensive with the participation of the *Freikorps* (right-wing paramilitary group), with close to 30,000 of them armed with automatic weapons and a massacre on the revolutionary uprising took place. By 12 January 1919, Berlin was firmly under the control of the *Freikorps* and German *Reichswehr* troops and over 1000 revolutionaries had died with many more injured.⁶¹⁹

Both Luxemburg and Liebknecht survived the ordeal, but their fates were sealed. They took refuge hiding out at various friends' homes, moving frequently to evade capture, as the German government issued an award of 100,000 marks for their arrest.⁶²⁰ On 15 January 1919, both KPD leaders were found and taken in for questioning. However, they did not make it to their interrogations at the Moabit district jail. While being transferred, Liebknecht was shot dead and his body was left in an alley. Luxemburg was unconscious from her attack and while taken in a car, she was shot in the head and then her body was thrown over a bridge into the *Landwehr* Canal.⁶²¹ On 31 May 1919, nearly five months after Luxemburg's execution, her body was discovered floating in the Canal and she was buried in the Friedrichsfelde cemetery in East Berlin, with tens of thousands of mourners paying their respects to the revolutionary leader.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Brie and Jörn, 16.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ Brie and Jörn, 16-17.

⁶²² Brie and Jörn, 17-18.



Figure 11: Memorial for the victims of the revolution in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde. This memorial was inaugurated by Wilhelm Pieck, member of the KPD then SED on 13.June.1926. During the Nazi period, the memorial was removed. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-H29710.

In contrast to Wolf, who clearly was not a leading revolutionary during her lifetime, Luxemburg's ideas were not confined to the classics of Marxism-Leninism and she was not afraid to disagree with Lenin or oppose traditional Marxist views. For example, Luxemburg agreed with Lenin's idea of the need for a vanguard party that would lead the working classes, with the most class-conscious members at the helm and that it had to be centrally organized and carried out with strict discipline.⁶²³ However, she disagreed with the existence of an all-powerful Central Committee and while alive, observed in Lenin and the Bolshevik Party "a dangerous rigidity in argumentation, a certain scholasticism in [their] political ideas, and a tendency to ignore the living movement of the masses, or even to coerce it into accepting preconceived

⁶²³ Fröhlic, 98.

tactical plans.”⁶²⁴ Instead, Luxemburg advocated for the power of the masses and approved of the freedom to criticize the higher party organs:

The ultra-centralism advocated by Lenin seems to us, in its whole character, to be sustained not by a positive creative spirit but by a sterile night watchman spirit. The drift of his thought is mainly directed at the control of party activity rather than its fructification, at its constriction rather than its development and at the harassment rather than the unity of the movement.⁶²⁵

While Wolf always fell in-line with party doctrine and had no qualms about enforcing ideology on others or condemning those whose thoughts did not conform to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, Luxemburg proved to be everything that Wolf was not. That is, Luxemburg was an independent thinker, who believed in freedom and understood that a truly socialist society could only be achieved through general elections that were voted for by the masses. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Wolf was not as enthralled with Luxemburg, as she was too much of a “reformer,” while Wolf herself was more rigid in her thinking and seemed to have no issues surrounding the use of dictatorial methods when it came to ideological matters. However, the lack of attention paid to Luxemburg, and Wolf’s sole focus on ideology at the PHS, is also demonstrative of Wolf’s own position as a high-ranking female in the SED party apparatus.

Wolf’s lack of female solidarity with the former KPD leader can be seen as a reflection of her own resistance to gender equality in the GDR. According to sociologists Gretchen R. Webber and Patti Giuffre, whose research has focused on women’s working relationships with other women, three themes emerge when it comes to women not supporting other women in the

⁶²⁴ Fröhlic, 99-100.

⁶²⁵ Fröhlic, 100.

workplace: first, are the negative stereotypes about women at work, such as women being “too emotional” or not being assertive enough. Second, a lack of recognition of gender inequality overall and third, the devaluation of women supporting other women in professional settings.⁶²⁶ One issue that has been observed in women not supporting other women in professional environments was due to “tokenism,” that is, “processes that occur in workplaces where women are numerical minorities and men are numerical majorities.” Tokenism usually results in women having to navigate between competing roles of being “mothers” or “iron maidens,” which often leads some women to disassociate themselves from others in their own category in order to become more successful.⁶²⁷ Similarly, Webber and Giuffre state that research on this issue has shown that masculine qualities in work environments have provided more status and power than feminine qualities which has consequently led to some women distancing themselves from behaviours that have been considered as being “too feminine.”⁶²⁸

Wolf’s position as Director of the PHS for over thirty years has showcased many of these themes. For example, Wolf’s professional persona has often been described as showcasing more masculine traits, as she was often remembered for being harsh in words and cold and domineering when dealing with students and colleagues in PHS faculty meetings. Wolf has also been remembered as ruling over the party school with an “iron fist,” ultimately adopting the role of an “iron maiden” in order to maintain and advance her standing in the male-dominated party culture of the SED. Since Wolf often came across as incredibly contradictory to people who knew her in private, such as Markus Wolf and Heinz Brandt, who both described her as warm and friendly in personal encounters, Wolf clearly understood that her status and authority

⁶²⁶ Webber and Giuffre, 1-2.

⁶²⁷ Webber and Giuffre, 2.

⁶²⁸ Webber and Giuffre, 5-6.

required a successful navigation between these two roles. Aside from Wolf's more rigid ideological views, perhaps her lack of solidarity with Luxemburg was a tactical maneuver that helped ensure her longstanding position in the patriarchal environment of the SED. However, these adopted personality traits have resulted in Wolf being remembered less for her witty and warm personality and primarily for her role as an "iron maiden" long after her retirement and in the overall history of the East German regime.

Retirement

Wolf's persistent utilization of her "iron maiden" persona appeared to be growing weary by the time of her retirement. By June 1983, Wolf was 75 years old and suffering from various health issues. During the early 1980s, Wolf had requested a Deputy Director to be trained to take over her role as head Director of the PHS.⁶²⁹ However, it was instead decided that Wolf would retire and hand over the reins of the school to Kurt Tiedke. At Wolf's retirement ceremony in June 1983, Hager stated that Wolf was to be relieved of her duties as Director due to health concerns and that the time had finally come when the Politburo could no longer justify making her work.⁶³⁰ According to former Department Chair Röhner, "you only [left] the front when [you've been] asked to do so," as it was the higher party organs that decided when a comrade's time came to stop working. However, not all functionaries understood this unofficial rule and when former PHS Chair of Literature and Cultural Policy, Marianne Lange, asked Wolf to be released from her position, her request was denied. As punishment for this offense, Wolf

⁶²⁹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 40.

⁶³⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 26462, "Kurt Hager documents – Party conference at the PHS on 22 June 1983."

supposedly went out of her way to make Lange's life difficult and she was only allowed to retire at the age of sixty-six.⁶³¹

Despite Wolf's age and declining health, her retirement was a long time coming. Students, PHS faculty and SED Central Committee members were ready for a change in leadership, as Wolf's three-decade rule over the party college had often made necessary changes in student training difficult, if not impossible. As faculty had been critical of the teaching methods and course curriculums over the previous decades, with complaints about the lack of technical training, students too had shown their discontent with Wolf's dictatorial rule. During December 1982, someone circulated flyers around the PHS campus which insulted Wolf's leadership, referring to her as "a senile egotist and notorious ignoramus" and that she acted "like a machine that destroyed human beings."⁶³²

As Wolf was remembered even during the 1950s as an intolerable Stalinist that made students practice self-criticism in front of their peers on a regular basis and also continuing this practice throughout the 1970s with PHS faculty members, it is surprising that more personal attacks did not take place. Apparently, Wolf's failing health and old age gave the more resentful students courage to initiate an attack on the long-time Director. Whether Wolf was bothered by these flyers is unknown, as she simply brushed off the ordeal and complained that whoever was guilty of the offence had violated party discipline.⁶³³ However, Röhner remembers the incident and stated that even though the party leadership tried to keep the ordeal a secret, word "spread like fire" amongst the student body. He also claimed that interrogations were held, and a culprit was eventually caught and expelled from the school.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Röhner, 100.

⁶³² Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 40.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ Röhner, 100.

Wolf's desire to be in control also annoyed members of the Central Committee and faculty at the other GDR research institutes. According to historian Lothar Mertens, the PHS and the Academy for Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the SED were regularly in competition with one another over control of joint projects and Wolf was known to refuse participation unless she and the PHS were in command.⁶³⁵ Mertens also described the faculty at the Academy of Social Sciences as being made up of an "army of Marxism-Leninism preachers" that were interchangeable "like individual light bulbs in a long string of lights."⁶³⁶ Obviously taking offence to these statements, former historian Dr. Eberhard Fromm, who worked at the Academy of Social Sciences, responded that rather than considering the different scientific orientations of each of the institutes, Mertens instead characterized relations between them as competitive and jealous.⁶³⁷ Whatever the case may have been, Mertens did suggest that the relationship between the two institutes improved significantly after Wolf retired. This sentiment was also echoed by former PHS instructor Bernd Preußner, who stated that once Wolf left the school and Tiedke took over, the quality of teaching and student research also improved.⁶³⁸

During his speech for Wolf's retirement celebration, Hager acknowledged the criticisms and personal attacks that had been made against her. He stated that Wolf "was often the target of enemy attacks... but it is part of the life of a Communist, a professional revolutionary, that such attacks bounce off them, as it is also part of one's duty to take seriously every open and objective criticism of friends and comrades in arms and to draw conclusions for one's own work."⁶³⁹

⁶³⁵ Lothar Mertens, *Rote Denkfabrik? Die Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 218.

⁶³⁶ Mertens, 22.

⁶³⁷ Personal website of Dr. Eberhard Fromm includes a review of Mertens' book *Rote Denkfabrik*. Accessed March 20th, 2023. <http://www.der-deutsche-intellektuelle.de/html/mertens.html>

⁶³⁸ Preußner, 203.

⁶³⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 26462, "Kurt Hager documents – Party conference at the PHS on 22 June 1983."

Clearly, Hager's personal and professional conception of Wolf differed significantly from the reminiscences of former students and PHS faculty, as Wolf was often remembered for never uttering a word of self-criticism and for being arrogant and at times insufferable to work with. Hager also praised Wolf for always exposing enemies and traitors, and for dealing with bourgeois and petit-bourgeois attacks against socialism and the party efficiently and effectively.⁶⁴⁰

Wolf was not entirely ready for a full retirement after leaving the PHS, as her entire life centred around the party and her dedication to the communist cause and she began working for Honecker as his personal assistant.⁶⁴¹ This new role enabled Wolf to remain as a member on the Commission of the Heads of the Social Sciences Institutes at the Politburo and she was able to maintain her previous salary.⁶⁴² Wolf was also given an office at 12 *Oberwasserstraße* in East Berlin and a personal car with a driver, a Peugeot, which was the car make used by the higher party functionaries in the SED.⁶⁴³ Wolf's new position also enabled her to keep a close eye on forthcoming publications and provide critical feedback. One book reviewed by Wolf was Jürgen Kuczynski's *Dialog mit meinem Urenkel* (Dialog with my Great Grandson - 1984), which was a personal reflection in the form of answers to a series of questions supposedly asked by his great-grandson. The book had been printed in three different editions by 1985, as it was constantly under review of the Central Committee.⁶⁴⁴ Wolf was assigned by Honecker to review the book and in a personal letter dated 24 April 1984, Wolf shared the good news with Kuczynski, stating

⁶⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 26462, "Kurt Hager documents – Party conference at the PHS on 22 June 1983."

⁶⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 59169, "Meeting Minutes of the Central Committee – Activity of Comrade Hanna Wolf – 27 June 1983."

⁶⁴² SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 59169, "Meeting Minutes of the Central Committee – Activity of Comrade Hanna Wolf – 27 June 1983."

⁶⁴³ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 59169, "Meeting Minutes of the Central Committee – Activity of Comrade Hanna Wolf – 27 June 1983."

⁶⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2560, Letter to Kurt Hager from Jürgen Kuczynski– 20 March 1985."

that she had been assigned as “top censor” and “if I understand correctly, you wanted to write a book like the ones we read with enthusiasm in our youth, like [Nikolai] Bukharin’s *The ABC of Communism*” (1920), which was an elementary textbook on Bolshevism written during the Russian Revolution.⁶⁴⁵

The letter sent by Wolf contained thirteen pages of critical feedback, mostly in the form of her providing examples from the texts of Lenin to portray how Kuczynski was wrong on many points. Wolf especially took issue with Kuczynski’s conception of dialectical materialism as well as his criticisms in regard to inequality in the GDR. Wolf wrote “as for economic equality, equality in general, you apologize to your grandson. But hand on heart, are you not satisfied with your apartment and have you not earned it?” Wolf then described how she also lived in an apartment that was “too big” and in a nice area, with the Deputy Ambassador for West Germany as her neighbour to the right and the Count of the Netherlands to the left. Wolf signed off the letter with “I am available and would like to have a discussion with you, for the sake of your grandson and my grandson.”⁶⁴⁶ Aside from Wolf’s arrogance, the letter portrays how ignorant she was to the privileges she enjoyed as a top-functionary in the SED and how she considered herself to be “above” the rest of the East German population, as she had “earned” her more advantaged lifestyle which not only included a large apartment and a car with a personal driver, but also paid vacations. For example, both Wolf and Knigge travelled to Greece for two weeks in late August and early September 1979, which was paid for by the Central Committee and included a daily allowance.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Comrade Hanna Wolf to Jürgen Kuczynski – 4 January 1984.”

⁶⁴⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Comrade Hanna Wolf to Jürgen Kuczynski – 4 January 1984.”

⁶⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 58522, “Protocol 35/79 – Vacation stay of Comrade Hanna Wolf and Wilhelm Knigge in Greece, no date - 1979.”



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-K1014-0038 / Fotograf(in): Koard, Peter

Figure 12: Hanna Wolf in discussion with Jürgen Kuczynski while Kurt Hager watches in the background at the 8th Party Congress of the SED at the Parteihochschule “Karl Marx.” 14 October 1971. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-K1014-0038.

Figure 12 provides an interesting glimpse into the professional relationship shared between Wolf and Kuczynski, who were often at odds with one another over ideological matters. Although Kuczynski was critical of the East German regime, he was given more freedom in comparison to other intellectuals due to his position as one of the GDR’s more prolific scholars. Kuczynski also considered himself a communist, but one who was not afraid to challenge the policies of the regime. In fact, one of his memoirs is entitled “*Ein linientreuer Dissident*” (A Loyal Dissident – 1992) and despite finding himself in hot water at various points, he was able to publish and share his more critical views throughout his career. What makes this photo of Wolf

and Kuczynski intriguing is not only the face-off they appear to be having, with Kuczynski looking down at Wolf in a patronizing manner, but also the reaction of Hager in the background.

Similar to Wolf, Hager was a hardline ideologue and shared many of the same views. If one were to interpret the photo without context, it would be easy to assume that Hager was snidely enjoying Wolf being spoken down to in a condescending manner. However, Hager was not on good terms with Kuczynski and did not approve of his open criticism of the regime. In fact, during the mid-1950s, Kuczynski was threatened with expulsion from the SED due to a book he published that contradicted East German historiography over German leftist participation in the First World War. Essentially, Kuczynski argued that “no part of the German left in 1914 was Leninist and therefore no faction was in a position to organize revolutionary opposition to the war” and that “the traditional division of the old SPD into right, centre and left in communist historiography had turned out to be insufficient and in some respects ‘completely misguided.’”⁶⁴⁸ As other East German intellectuals were being forced out of the party and even the regime due to revisionism during the late 1950s, such as the philosopher Ernst Bloch, Kuczynski also faced opposition. In 1958, Kuczynski was threatened with expulsion and Hager himself took a direct interest in his looming downfall. Although Kuczynski was spared due to the party’s own mistake of approving the publication of his book despite a rigorous review process, he did retract some of his views in a self-critical speech at the Third University Teachers’ Conference on 2 March 1958.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁸ Matthew Stibbe, “Fighting the First World War in the Cold War: East and West German Historiography on the Origins of the First World War, 1949-1959” in *Divided, But Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War*, edited by Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht and Andrew Plowman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 40.

⁶⁴⁹ Stibbe, “Fighting the First World War in the Cold War,” 43.

With knowledge of Hager's contempt for Kuczynski, the interpretation of Figure 12 takes a different turn. Rather than what the viewer might consider to be Hager snickering at Kuczynski's condescending words toward Wolf, the opposite may have been the case. Was Wolf holding her ground, challenging the esteemed intellectual Kuczynski? Was Wolf caught in a fierce debate that amused and impressed Hager? Like most visual interpretations, it is difficult to determine what actually took place. Although the image portrays Wolf as confident and unafraid of Kuczynski, rather than backing down or walking away, another interpretation could be made in regard to Wolf's own feelings about her personal power. If Wolf truly felt confident about her own opinions, she could have simply walked away from the conversation, feeling that Kuczynski was not worth the effort of engaging. However, perhaps Wolf felt that she needed to prove herself, especially amongst her male colleagues such as Hager. Either way, Hager's smug look denotes amusement over the conversation taking place and it is fair to assume that Wolf was not allowing Kuczynski to overshadow her.

The PHS Under Kurt Tiedke

While Wolf kept busy monitoring the foreign communist press and criticizing East German writers, the party school was under the command of the new Director Kurt Tiedke, who was appointed in June 1983. A member of the Central Committee since 1967, Tiedke was head of the Propaganda Department from 1961 to 1979 and served as Secretary of the Magdeburg District Leadership of the SED until his posting at the party school. Tiedke also attended the PHS as a student between 1950 and 1951. Between 1951 and 1954 he then taught at the school.⁶⁵⁰ While Wolf ruled the PHS with an iron fist, often acting as an absolute tyrant whose

⁶⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 26462, "Kurt Hager documents – Party conference at the PHS on 22 June 1983."

arrogance and rigidity has been well documented by students and staff, Tiedke proved to be a bit more level-headed, even somewhat boring as he was through and through a reliable party man. Faculty at the school commented that the new Director ran the PHS as if it were a District Party Office.⁶⁵¹ In contrast to Wolf, who enjoyed raising intellectual and cultural issues, even if they proved to be an arena for attack, Tiedke had absolutely no interest or understanding in art or higher intellectual matters.⁶⁵² Röhner states that meetings of what was prior the Scientific Council of the school, where Department Chairs met to discuss such issues, were ultimately disbanded once Tiedke took over.⁶⁵³

Similar to Wolf, Tiedke also appeared to be somewhat of a social climber who tried to garner approval from the party leadership. However, as Wolf showed assertiveness and dealt with issues herself, addressing concerns directly in meetings with faculty members or students, Tiedke preferred to go above the heads of Department Chairs and complain about them to the higher party organs. For instance, Röhner describes a film viewing he hosted for students and faculty, showing the movie *Erscheinen Pflicht!* (Attendance is Obligatory! – 1984), which was based on writings by Gerhard Holtz-Baumert and directed by Helmut Dziuba. The film told the story of a teenage girl named Elisabeth, whose father was a Party official and after his death she was confronted with the realities of socialism in the GDR. The purpose of the viewing was to ignite critical discussion and a lively debate took place amongst the attendees.

Despite Röhner inviting Tiedke and informing him of the event and the purpose of the discussion, he received a phone call from Baumer days later, who also attended the event, telling him that he had seen a letter in the Culture Department of the Central Committee which

⁶⁵¹ Röhner, 100.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

described the film as counter-revolutionary.⁶⁵⁴ According to Röhner, “someone” must have written the letter the next day after the film viewing, “someone” who did not understand or appreciate art.⁶⁵⁵ Apparently, Tiedke sent the letter and rather than addressing the issue head on, either with Röhner who invited him to the viewing, or afterwards in a meeting, he went above Röhner’s head and reported the event directly to the Central Committee.⁶⁵⁶ In this scenario, Tiedke most likely approved the film viewing while not paying attention to the context and once he learned what the film was about and of the discussions that took place, made a complaint to the Central Committee in fear of being reprimanded.

Tiedke also proved to be less interested in monitoring research projects at the school. In fact, one project that was completed during the summer of 1986 provides a stark contrast between how Wolf and Tiedke carried out their duties as Directors. Under the guidance of Chair Dr. Hans Streußloff, from the Department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, a research project was completed that aimed to address how functionaries could more effectively be prepared to work with new technologies being introduced in GDR industries. The project included the participation of thirteen teachers, eleven students from the three-year course, and one student from the one-year course. Faculty and students completed literature analyses, theoretical work and empirical studies in twenty-four different companies and institutions in the GDR. The empirical case studies ranged from mechanical engineering, metallurgy, electronics, electrical engineering, rail vehicle construction, medical technology, the energy industry and even the packaging industry.⁶⁵⁷ The project interviewed managerial positions, party secretaries and their

⁶⁵⁴ Röhner, 101.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ Hans Streußloff, „Das gab es auch: Ein interessantes Forschungsprojekt mit bemerkenswerten Ergebnissen,“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick* (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 76-77.

deputies, members of various levels in the party-leadership, foremen, female leaders, and even FDJ functionaries. Many of these roles were positions which former PHS graduates pursued after completing their own training at the party school and the investigations sought to “trace the driving forces of this [technological] change” and to determine further qualifications required for political leadership positions.⁶⁵⁸

The project was not only interesting due to the technological focus, which Wolf worked hard to deter during her last years as Director, but also due to the results. The completed report, entitled: “Basic Ideological Questions of the Accelerated Introduction of Key Technologies in the Industry of the GDR,” aimed to “highlight those moments of the social strategy of our Party in which the humanistic character of this strategy is expressed above all in the mastery of the scientific and technological revolution.”⁶⁵⁹ In other words, the project aimed to answer how the training of party cadres could be improved in order to increase the use of key technologies in the regime. The results of the study argued that, “as our empirical research shows, we can conclude that the consciousness of real freedom in our socialist society is increasingly acting as a driving force for the actions of the working people...” and that “there are reasons for the hypothesis that the successful mastery of the scientific technological revolution for the benefit of man and the associated increase in the exemplary charisma of socialism is essentially influenced by the consciousness and organizational effectiveness of the leading cadres, at what speed and in what dimension the masses grasp the consciousness of real freedom... to the consistent implementation of key technologies throughout the economy.”⁶⁶⁰ According to StreuBloff, in less technical jargon, the results suggested that party cadres were in need of better training in the technical

⁶⁵⁸ StreuBloff, 78.

⁶⁵⁹ StreuBloff, 76-77.

⁶⁶⁰ StreuBloff, 79.

fields in order to develop more confidence in tackling problems in the workforce. The concept of “the consciousness of real freedom,” meant that party cadres required the freedom and opportunity to learn and develop the skills required to excel in technical fields.

Apparently, the PHS was still lagging behind when it came to the training of students who were meant to keep pace with technical advancements in the regime. Even PHS staff in the Department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy recognized the importance of not only improving technical training at the school but also the need for more technically trained functionaries in the workforce and party apparatus. As Tiedke allowed the project to be pursued until its completion, there is no doubt that Wolf would have stopped it in its tracks. In fact, Tiedke took so little interest in the project, despite initially approving it, that Streußloff and his team were disappointed when told that their final report would not be sent to the Central Committee. The justification from Tiedke was that “the party discusses differently: peace is the main driving force,” and not “the consciousness of real freedom.”⁶⁶¹ In communist jargon, “peace” meant “non-opposition” to communism and the concept of “consciousness of real freedom” could lead to criticisms against the regime.

Tiedke’s initial approval of the project was not due to him being more progressive or a moderating influence at the school. Rather, Tiedke was merely less interested in such matters. However, Streußloff did not take Tiedke’s decision lying down and published an article on the project in the school’s own magazine *Theory and Practice* in 1987.⁶⁶² Streußloff wrote of the ordeal, that “the increasing dissatisfaction with the domestic policy of the GDR leadership

⁶⁶¹ Streußloff, 84.

⁶⁶² Streußloff, 84-85. See article: Hans Streußloff, „Freiheit, die wir meinen. Zu weltanschaulichen Fragen der Einführung von Schlüssel-technologien“ in *Theorie und Praxis. Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘ beim ZK der SED*, vol. 4, 1987: 67-75.

became clearly perceptible” and that “change was long overdue.”⁶⁶³ In contrast to Wolf, it appears that PHS faculty were less fearful of any accompanying repercussions that may have been pursued by Tiedke. If such actions amongst PHS faculty took place during Wolf’s time as Director, there is no doubt that the dissenting staff members would have been removed from their positions.

Although Tiedke was less concerned with what research projects were being pursued at the PHS, he did take time to report positive comments about the regime received from foreign functionaries visiting the school. During the mid-to-late 1980s, Honecker’s leadership began to be questioned by more reform minded SED members. Honecker was resistant to the changes taking place under the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his reforms such as *Perestroika* (restructuring), which aimed to restructure the Soviet Union’s economic system by increasing capital investment and improve economic growth, and *Glasnost* (openness), which sought to make the Soviet political system more democratic.⁶⁶⁴ During this period, Tiedke made sure to send regular reports to Hager that documented positive feedback received by Soviet functionaries visiting the school and their criticisms of Gorbachev and his reforms. These reports were then forwarded by Hager to Honecker.⁶⁶⁵

The PHS curricula during Tiedke’s management also fell in line with the teachings of the classics. In fact, the transition from Wolf to Tiedke was not very radical, as Tiedke also proved to be a hardliner but one that was a bit less fanatical. Although there was a drastic increase in the number of theses and dissertations that focused on the technological revolution after Wolf’s departure, part of this reason was due to the appointment of Dr. Harry Milke as Head of the

⁶⁶³ StreuBloff, 84.

⁶⁶⁴ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 50.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Department of Teaching of the Marxist-Leninist Party, Party Life and Party Building, the fact that Tiedke was not obsessed with monitoring ideology in the way that Wolf was, and that the SED had begun to come to terms with the fact that the scientific technological revolution was not something that could be ignored. In fact, the PHS even began using computers during the late 1980s for student course work. By November 1988, approximately 44 instructors and 131 students had been trained in a basic computer course.⁶⁶⁶ Still, students were only able to pursue computer training if they had first passed a course on Marxism-Leninism and faculty tried to connect the rise of computer technology to ideology, insisting that Marx's "Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy" (1861) somehow explained the rise of the technological revolution.⁶⁶⁷ Although the PHS was evolving at a snail's pace during Tiedke's leadership, his role as Director would not last long, as he was replaced by the PHS Chair of History Götz Dieckmann once Honecker fell from power in November 1989.⁶⁶⁸

The End of an Era

Both the PHS and the SED were already too late with their ignited interest in the scientific technological revolution and Honecker himself continued to prove to be a thorn in the GDR's side when it came to reforms. This eventually led to his own downfall in 1989, which likewise meant actual retirement for Wolf. However, before Honecker's dismissal as leader of the SED, he sang Wolf's praises and honoured her with one more award on the occasion of her 80th birthday. Likewise, Wolf also provided Honecker with an attack on Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union in an article printed in *Neues Deutschland* a few months before his

⁶⁶⁶ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 4 and 70.

⁶⁶⁷ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 56-57.

⁶⁶⁸ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 85.

replacement. Unlike Wolf, Tiedke himself was never able to develop such a close working relationship with Honecker and this could be why he was less assertive in dealing with problems at the party school.

On 4 February 1988, Honecker wrote a lengthy birthday acknowledgement praising Wolf which was printed on the second page of that day's *Neues Deutschland*. Although not mentioning Stalinism, Honecker made reference to her dedication and ideological leaning, as well as the group of hardliners which belonged to his own SED camp, stating "you belong to those communists in our country, who for many years took an active part in building the socialist society in the land of Red October," and that under her leadership, "thousands of cadres were trained at the PHS Karl Marx who are loyal to our communist cause and use all their might to strengthen the GDR, to implement the decisions of our party and always to strengthen the friendship and cooperation with the CPSU and the Soviet Union."⁶⁶⁹ Most of the article was a biography of Wolf's political life, highlighting the six decades in which she had been a party member first in the KPD and then the SED and then sent thanks from not only himself, but also the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers and the *Volkskammer* of the GDR. It was then mentioned that Wolf was being honoured with the Patriotic Order of Merit in Gold.⁶⁷⁰

Wolf's 80th birthday ushered in her last year basking in the light of Honecker's reign and 1989 also proved to show just how out of touch the hardliners in the SED truly were about the reality of socialism not only in the GDR but the entire Eastern bloc. As Gorbachev's *Glasnost* opened the door to criticism about the CPSU and especially the Stalinist period, Soviet historians

⁶⁶⁹ Erich Honecker, "Glückwunsch des ZK der SED für Hanna Wolf: Grußadresse zum 80. Geburtstag." *Neues Deutschland*. 4 February 1988.

⁶⁷⁰ Erich Honecker, "Glückwunsch des ZK der SED für Hanna Wolf: Grußadresse zum 80. Geburtstag." *Neues Deutschland*. 4 February 1988.



Bundesarchiv. Bild 183-1988-0204-020 / Fotograf(in): Zimmermann, Peter

Figure 13: Hanna Wolf being awarded the Patriotic Order of Merit in Gold from Erich Honecker on her 80th birthday. 4 February 1988. Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1988-0204-020.

began writing about how the former dictator had abused his power by using the COMINTERN to purge his enemies and to establish control over other international Communist parties.⁶⁷¹ The crimes of Stalin were once again being exposed, just as when Khrushchev denounced the former Soviet leader in 1956. Obviously, this “openness” did not sit well with the hardliners in the SED. Just as Soviet hardliners launched their own counteroffensive against the attacks on Stalinism, such as the historian Nina Andreeva, who wrote that Stalin’s name “evokes a great accomplishment that has no equal for a whole generation of Soviet people” in an article in April 1988, Wolf and her former PHS colleague Wolfgang Schneider did the same.⁶⁷²

Covering two pages in *Neues Deutschland* on 6 May 1989, Wolf and Schneider’s “*Zur Geschichte der COMINTERN*” (On the History of the COMINTERN) attempted to dissemble

⁶⁷¹ Orlow, “The Last Hurrah,” 114.

⁶⁷² Orlow, “The Last Hurrah,” 114.

arguments made by two Soviet historians, Fridrikh Firsov and Kirill Shirinia, which essentially accused Stalin of being a bloodthirsty dictator. The article, “COMINTERN – The Time of Testing” was published in the Soviet Union’s official newspaper *Pravda* on 4 April 1989.⁶⁷³ Wolf and Schneider countered that Stalin was not a dictator and that the organization of the COMINTERN was based on collective leadership and therefore, it was inappropriate to compare Stalin to Hitler or to include communism with fascism as totalitarian systems. They also insisted that only party members were capable of writing the history of the Communist movement and that such historians should focus on Stalin’s defeat of the National Socialists rather than discussing his crimes or mistakes.⁶⁷⁴

Wolf and Schneider’s article proved to be a troublesome reflection of where the SED under Honecker’s leadership currently stood. It was like time had gone back to the late 1950s when Ulbricht reversed his cultural thaw after Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” and began attacking revisionists in the regime. Unsurprisingly, many academics in both the GDR and the Soviet Union took issue with the article. Jürgen Kuczynski mockingly asked “if the postulate that the Communists had always been right included Stalin’s pronouncement in 1939 that France and Great Britain had started the Second World War?”⁶⁷⁵ Another longtime KPD and SED member and Economics Professor, Dr. Nathan Steinberger, accused Wolf of being a Stalin apologist and Historian Fritz Klein from the Academy of Social Sciences wrote that Wolf and Schneider’s take on the history of the Party was dogmatic and one-sided.⁶⁷⁶

In response to the article, over one-hundred letters arrived at the offices of the Central Committee and *Neues Deutschland*. As part of Wolf’s new position, she scoured the reactions

⁶⁷³ Hanna Wolf and Wolfgang Schneider, „Zur Geschichte der Komintern,“ *Neues Deutschland*, 6 May 1989.

⁶⁷⁴ Hanna Wolf and Wolfgang Schneider, „Zur Geschichte der Komintern,“ *Neues Deutschland*, 6 May 1989.

⁶⁷⁵ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 116.

⁶⁷⁶ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Hanna Wolf to Erich Honecker – 7 June 1989.”

and sent a summary to Honecker. She stated that nearly all of the letters arrived with name and address, however, some of the more anti-party letters had fake names and addresses so that the authors could not be identified.⁶⁷⁷ Wolf then provided multiple pages of excerpts from the letters, providing both positive and negative feedback. Some of the positive letters came from members of the Central Committee who expressed “their full agreement with the article (F. Dallman, Wyschowski, Sternberg and others)” and a farmer from Genthin sent a book entitled *Farmers Make History* as an expression of gratitude. Wolf also provided snippets from letters that contained encouraging statements such as: “I am very proud of the work done by everyone under the leadership of the Party,” “imperialism is and remains enemy number 1!” and “this article is written entirely from the heart and on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. It is a treasure trove for the political standpoint formation of every comrade.”⁶⁷⁸

However, there were just as many letters that expressed criticism. Historian Eberhard Czichon wrote, “such neo-Stalinist attempts are no longer convincing today. But it is intriguing to have to read such things.” Thomas Lange from Dresden stated that the “article [was] an attempt to deny the fact that a man like Stalin was at the head of the world Communist movement. Were his millions of deaths amongst his own population not known to others... ? This form of looking at history shows me that I have nothing in common with these political views.”⁶⁷⁹ Despite the negative responses, Honecker was so pleased with the article that it was once again published in the pedagogical journal *Geschichtsunterricht und Staatsbürgerkunde* (History Teaching and Civic Education) in July 1989.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Hanna Wolf to Erich Honecker – 7 June 1989.”

⁶⁷⁸ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Hanna Wolf to Erich Honecker – 7 June 1989.”

⁶⁷⁹ SAPMO-BArch DY 30/ 2559, “Letter from Hanna Wolf to Erich Honecker – 7 June 1989.”

⁶⁸⁰ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 116-17.

Markus Wolf, former head of the Stasi, who also knew Wolf from his time spent in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s, wrote about how Hanna was one of the few remaining hardliners to not grasp the necessity of Gorbachev's reforms. He compared her to former hardliner Helen "Lene" Berg, who was the one-time Director of the Academy of Social Sciences (1951-1958), who had herself come to the conclusion that changes needed to be made:

What a contrast to Hanna Wolf's article. One involuntarily asks oneself why people with a similar life story, similar experiences, the same education with the same teachers, the same lectures from which their ideological attitudes were formed, can think so fundamentally differently about the problems of our time and come to such contradictory conclusions. Some persist in dogmatic ideas and see inner-party democracy only as unconditional obedience to the decisions of the higher-level leadership. Others recognize the path taken by Gorbachev, the need for changes here as well, to be correct.⁶⁸¹

Both Wolf and Berg had spent the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union and both managed different ANTIFA schools, with Berg overseeing the school in Talica and Wolf in Krasnogorsk and then Berg took the position as Director of the Academy of Social Sciences in 1951.⁶⁸² As mentioned in Chapter Two, Berg was removed from her position as Director in 1958, around the same time that her husband, Paul Wandel, was removed from his position as Secretary of Culture and Education at the Central Committee.⁶⁸³

Honecker's "Resignation"

When Honecker was asked to step down in October 1989, Wolf was also relieved of her position. Both Honecker and Wolf's refusal to evolve led to their political misfortunes. By the

⁶⁸¹ Markus Wolf, *In Eigenem Auftrag*, 99-100. Journal entry for 5 August 1989.

⁶⁸² Gottfried Hamacher, *et al. Gegen Hitler. Deutsche in der Resistance, in den Streitkräften an der Antihitlerkoalition und der Bewegung "Freies Deutschland: " Kurzbiografien* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2005), 29.

⁶⁸³ McCauley, 100.

time of Honecker's departure, the GDR's economy had been on the decline for nearly a decade and close to 56,000 East German citizens fled the regime in the first six months of 1989, taking advantage of the open borders in Hungary and Austria.⁶⁸⁴ This exodus took place alongside celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the GDR, which was an embarrassment for the Honecker regime. Likewise, anti-Honecker demonstrations had been taking place in many East German cities such as Leipzig and Dresden.⁶⁸⁵ While Gorbachev was visiting East Berlin to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the GDR, he was informed of plans to remove the ageing leader. This anti-Honecker faction was made up of Egon Krenz, Harry Tisch, Peter Lorenz and Günter Schabowski, and Gorbachev posed no opposition to the more reform minded group. During a Politburo meeting on 18 October 1989, Honecker accepted defeat and stepped down from his position. Two members from his government also lost their positions, Günter Mittag, member of the State Council and Frank-Joachim Hermann, State Secretary of the SED. The following day, the results of the Politburo meeting were presented to the Central Committee and a vote was held amongst members for their endorsement. Out of approximately 200 Central Committee members, there was only one vote against Honecker's dismissal: Hanna Wolf.⁶⁸⁶

On 19 October 1989, Honecker announced his "resignation" in an article printed in *Neues Deutschland*. He claimed that his decision to step down was due to a recent surgery and his ill health. In his goodbye message, he highlighted his lifelong dedication and "unswerving loyalty to the revolutionary cause of the working class" and to the "Marxist-Leninist worldview" and stated that "the founding and successful development of the socialist GDR, which we celebrated

⁶⁸⁴ Minton F. Goldman, *Revolution and Change in Central and Eastern Europe: Political, Economic, and Social Challenges* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 3.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ Orlow, "The Last Hurrah," 117. As mentioned in the introduction, Margot Honecker did not attend the Central Committee meeting on 19 October 1989.

together on the 40th anniversary, is in my opinion the epitome of the struggle of our Party and my own efforts as a Communist.”⁶⁸⁷ Honecker was replaced by his own former Deputy of the Council of State, Egon Krenz, while Hans Modrow, former First Secretary in Dresden, was appointed as Prime Minister.⁶⁸⁸ Shortly after taking power, Krenz allowed oppositional demonstrations to take place, lifted travel restrictions and as Mary Sarotte points out, due to a “series of accidents,” the Berlin Wall opened on 9 November 1989 and right away East Germans began tearing down the Wall with construction equipment and also began to tear down border fortifications between the two Germanies.⁶⁸⁹

Due to these relaxations, which included the accidental opening of the Wall, the GDR’s days were numbered. In hopes of showing East Germans his more relaxed approach, Krenz changed the name of the SED to the SED – Party of Democratic Socialism (SED – PDS). However, it was already too late by this point. Shortly after the Berlin Wall came down, Krenz resigned and a Berlin lawyer, Gregor Gysi, was chosen as the new leader. Under Gysi, the SED portion of the party name was dropped and both the Politburo and Central Committee were abolished and replaced with a democratically elected executive committee.⁶⁹⁰ Wolf was also expelled from the PDS under Gysi’s leadership due to “anti-party” activity, which most likely meant her sharp tongue and criticisms about Gorbachev.⁶⁹¹ Interestingly, Gysi had also provided legal counsel for the disgraced East German reformer Robert Havemann during the late 1970s and Wolf had been one of Havemann’s fiercest critics.⁶⁹² However, the PDS would not remain in power for very long. On 18 March 1990, the East German CDU proved victorious in the

⁶⁸⁷ Erich Honecker, “Honecker’s resignation statement,” *Neues Deutschland*. 19 October 1989.

⁶⁸⁸ Goldman, 3.

⁶⁸⁹ Sarotte, 172.

⁶⁹⁰ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 86.

⁶⁹¹ Orlow, “The Last Hurrah,” 117.

⁶⁹² Howard J. De Nike, *German Unification and the Jurists of East Germany: An Anthropology of Law, Nation and History* (Germany: Forum Verlag Godesberg, 1997), 21.

parliamentary elections. This victory was not only a devastating defeat for the newly formed PDS, but it was a massive win for the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had been campaigning for the East German CDU and the electoral results had opened the door for rapid unification with West Germany.⁶⁹³

The peaceful revolutions in Poland and Hungary throughout 1989 and the eventual demise of the Eastern bloc brought an end to socialism in East Germany and the dogmatic ideological training of party functionaries at the *Wolfschlucht*. Gysi had hoped to maintain the running of the PHS; however, with the loss of the PDS in the parliamentary elections, there were no longer state subsidies available to finance its operations. Although the school still maintained a staff of 307 technical and 238 academic employees, it was forced to close its doors in June 1990.⁶⁹⁴ The GDR's other scientific institutions also shut down. The Institute for Marxism Leninism initially changed its name to the Institute of the Working-Class Movement but eventually closed in 1992, while the Academy for Social Sciences was forced to shut down in 1990.⁶⁹⁵

Although it was not in Gorbachev's plans to bring on the fall of Communism in the Soviet sphere, his refusal to use military force in dealing with Warsaw Pact countries provided reformers and oppositional political parties the opportunity to challenge the communist governments. In Poland and Hungary, peaceful negotiations took place that resulted in parliamentary elections, while in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, the loss of the "Soviet shield" led to political disarray that eventually saw the respective communist parties fall from power.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Sarotte, 169-170.

⁶⁹⁴ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 85.

⁶⁹⁵ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 86-7.

⁶⁹⁶ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (August, 2009): 281.

After the disintegration of the Eastern bloc, Wolf still held tightly to her political convictions and she joined, along with Honecker and Hager, a resurrected version of the former KPD in 1992. However, this reassembling based on the old Weimar KPD was less than impressive, as party membership only ever reached around forty.⁶⁹⁷

Former professor Bernd Preußer, who taught in the Department of Teaching of the Marxist-Leninist Party, Party Life and Party Building since 1983, recorded the events that took place at the PHS after the resignation of Honecker on 18 October 1989. According to Preußer, he was instructed by a former history professor at the party college to document his experiences during this period and began writing down what he remembered in early 1990.⁶⁹⁸ The record begins on 30 October 1989, when a meeting was held amongst PHS faculty to discuss the topic: “The SED – A Living Organism – Renewal and Continuity under the Current Conditions of Struggle.” Preußer wrote for this entry: “there are public statements from other institutions, while the PHS is silent and publishes positions that are untenable in terms of content.”⁶⁹⁹ The former professor’s recollections show, that over the coming weeks, PHS faculty became increasingly dissatisfied with the leadership of Director Kurt Tiedke and his refusal to take action on addressing the coming changes for the institute. On 9 November 1989, during another PHS meeting, Preußer wrote that the decision was made to “demand for the resignation of the Director” and on 15 November 1989, the campaign initiated by PHS faculty members was presented to Tiedke and he resigned. Tiedke was replaced with the PHS Chair of History, Götz

⁶⁹⁷ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 77.

⁶⁹⁸ Bernd Preußer, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick* (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 227.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Dieckmann, who was appointed as Acting Director of the PHS until the school closed merely seven months later.⁷⁰⁰

After Tiedke was removed from his position, faculty were, for the first time, able to critically discuss socialism and how it was taught at the party school without fear of being reprimanded. Once Tiedke resigned, faculty members called for a “comprehensive analysis of Stalinism as one of the essential causes of the situation which had arisen at the PHS” and on 20 November 1989, a meeting was held to discuss “Stalinism in the SED as a whole and at the PHS, and about a reprofiling of the work of the Chairs in terms of content.”⁷⁰¹ By 4 December 1989, the curricula for the three-year course was changed to focus on “current problems of the renewal process in the party and in the country in theory and practice.”⁷⁰² Head Department Chairs were also re-appointed through a “democratic election” and the Department of Teaching of the Marxist-Leninist Party, Party Life and Party Building was renamed as the Department of Theory and Politics of the Parties.⁷⁰³

Preußer states that lessons continued to run at the PHS throughout this period, however, the course curricula changed to accommodate the transition that was taking place in East Germany. He also mentions that during the first half of 1990, the new leader of the GDR, Gregor Gysi, assured faculty members that the school would continue to operate as the central party school of the PDS. However, despite Gysi’s assurances, negotiations were already underway in early 1990 to hand over one of the school’s buildings to be used by a newspaper publisher and another part of the school was being rented out to other organizations, including an office used

⁷⁰⁰ Preußer, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” 228.

⁷⁰¹ Preußer, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” 228-29.

⁷⁰² Preußer, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” 229.

⁷⁰³ Preußer, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” 230.

by the East SPD and it “became clear that the school would continue to exist only on a small scale or not at all.”⁷⁰⁴ By June 1990, the PHS closed its doors and the period of being able to speak freely and critically about socialism and teaching methods was short lived.

Approximately fifteen years after the PHS closed its doors in June 1990, three former professors shared their views on the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the failure of socialism in East Germany in an article entitled: “Where We See the Causes of our Failure” (2006).

Addressing the question of whether their worldview, which completely centred around Marxism-Leninism, “had been wrong all along?” Heinz Wachowitz, Achim Dippe and Günter Durak made an attempt to come to terms with the fact that the Soviet bloc “went down without a sound” during the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷⁰⁵ Most of the article provides a defense for why the former faculty members still believe Marxism-Leninism to be the correct explanation for human history and they continue to claim themselves as Marxists. Despite the overall theoretical explanation for the failure of communism in the Eastern bloc, which the former professors connect to discrepancies in how socialism erupted in Eastern Europe to Marx’s own conception of dialectical materialism, their perspective does highlight some significant points that portray how the PHS played a contributing role in the overall failure of the regime.⁷⁰⁶

For example, one of the ideological reasons for why communism failed, according to Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak, was due to how it arose during the twentieth century in the first place. As Marx dictated that communism would first erupt in the most advanced states in Europe as a result of the capitalist exploitation of the working classes, the development of communism was troubled from the start, as the first revolution occurred in backwards Russia. From that point

⁷⁰⁴ Preußner, “Parteihochschule im Umbruch,” 231.

⁷⁰⁵ Heinz Wachowitz, Achim Dippe and Günter Durak, „Worin wir die Ursachen unseres Scheiterns sehen“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick* (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 235.

⁷⁰⁶ Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak, 236.

forward, the establishment of socialist movements in Eastern Europe had to contend with “contradictions and conflicts, wars and revolution” which made following the Marxist-Leninist concept of dialectical materialism extremely difficult.⁷⁰⁷ However, aside from this typical ideological explanation expected from former PHS instructors who dedicated their lives to socialism, the authors do point to some issues that plagued the East German regime, and that proved to be constant points of contention at the PHS.

One such issue was the failure of the Stalinist system to allow for more than one variant of socialism in the Eastern bloc. The former PHS professors admit that other variants of the economic system of socialism would have been possible and even beneficial in the development of more successful socialist movements (aside from the system in Yugoslavia under Tito) and believe that the allowance of democratic centralism would have provided some of the movements more stability while transitioning into fully socialist states.⁷⁰⁸ They also point out the atrocities committed by Stalin and admit that he was a dictator who murdered millions of his own people. However, despite briefly acknowledging the crimes of Stalin, the former professors also suggest that Stalin’s own dictatorial methods brought changes that would not have been possible in such a short amount of time, such as advancements in industrialization, and therefore, the Stalinist system was “sometimes even necessary.”⁷⁰⁹ This failure in the Stalinist system, which dictated only one path to socialism, made up the entirety of the course curricula at the PHS, where there was no room for any other conceptions of socialism, especially theories involving the process of democratic centralism. Any mention of Social Democracy or other “revisionist” content usually resulted in expulsion from the party school or having to partake in

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak, 246.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

the self-deprecating act of “self-criticism.” Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak admit that, in the Eastern bloc, as at the PHS, “Stalin prevailed.”⁷¹⁰

Similarly, the former professors discuss how the scientific technological revolution played a significant role in the overall crumbling of the socialist regimes. Part of the reason for the lagging behind of the Eastern bloc in making technological advancements was due to the fact that the scientific technological revolution was entirely driven by capitalism, above all, the United States, and therefore, the way in which the planned economies in the Soviet sphere attempted to expand production proved ineffective and inflexible as their economic systems were incapable of competing with the intense pace of the technological revolution driven by the West. This inability to compete with Western democracies played a significant role in how people in Eastern bloc countries viewed the socialist system, as they yearned for the better products and technology that was available to those living outside of the communist sphere.⁷¹¹ Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak note that the East German regime especially fell behind in the development of cybernetics, microelectronics, genetic and molecular biology, as well as computer technology and automation.⁷¹² This lag in technological advancements was especially enforced at the PHS, as hardliners like Honecker, Hager and Wolf were strongly opposed to Ulbricht’s initiatives as early as the 1960s to spur on improvements in science and technology. As a result, student training at the PHS armed around 25,000 functionaries with the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, rather than any technical or professional skills which could help in the overall modernization and advancement of the East German regime.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak, 248-49.

⁷¹² Wachowitz, Dippe and Durak, 248.

Lone Wolf

Former Professor of History of the KPD at the PHS, Gerhard Fricke, recalled Wolf's last days as "tragic and bitter." As Wolf had spent the majority of her life advocating for the close relationship between the SED and the CPSU, by the end of her long life, she finally admitted that "the Soviets regarded us and treated us like a colony until the end."⁷¹³ Despite Wolf spending her remaining years full of resentment, she continued to blame Gorbachev as the harbinger of destruction for the East German regime and watched as her life's work gave way to the "imperialist" forces with German reunification in October 1990.⁷¹⁴ Wolf died from old age on 22 June 1999. She was 91 years old and her health had been on the decline for nearly two decades. Her partner Willi Knigge died four years earlier and even her closest associates from her SED days had already passed. Honecker died in 1994 and Hager in 1998. Wolf spent her last years living alone in the Pankow district in Berlin and by the time of her death, she was truly the "last woman standing."

While many former communists were buried in the Friedrichsfelde Cemetery in East Berlin, Wolf was not laid to rest there in what is now referred to as the "Socialist Memorial Cemetery." There you will find the graves of deceased SED members such as Walter Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl, Wilhelm Pieck and Kurt Hager. KPD founders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg also claim Friedrichsfelde Cemetery as their eternal home. Honecker was not laid to rest at Friedrichsfelde, as he had immigrated to South America during the 1990s with Margot and their daughter. After some legal issues in Germany, where he was deemed too ill to be put on trial for crimes committed during his leadership, Honecker's remains were buried in the Santiago

⁷¹³ Gerhard Fricke, „Geschichte und Politik der KPdSU als Lehrfach in der Parteihochschule ‚Karl Marx‘“ in *Die Parteihochschule der SED - ein kritischer Rückblick* (Berlin: GNN Verlag, 2006), 44.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

General Cemetery in Chile.⁷¹⁵ Despite Wolf maintaining her residence in Berlin until the end of her life, she was buried at *Friedhof Pankow III*, alongside her partner Willi, and away from her peers and the memorials dedicated to those, like her, who dedicated their lives to the building of communism in Germany.

Conclusion

The 1980s did not only bring an end to socialism in the GDR but also the entire Eastern bloc as Gorbachev's reforms helped clear the way for oppositional groups and more reform minded functionaries to pose challenges in the respective communist regimes. As Honecker proved to be resistant to the changes taking place in the Soviet sphere and maintained his hardliner mindset, the time finally came when the SED could no longer count on the Soviet Union for support when political challenges arose in the GDR. Honecker's downfall also brought an end to the power and political standings of other hardliners in the SED, such as members of the Politburo and Central Committee and both Wolf and her PHS replacement Kurt Tiedke. As the Iron Curtain eventually crumbled in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wolf and her peers were forced to watch the unravelling of East Germany from the sidelines as disgraced members of the former SED.

⁷¹⁵ Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, 245.

Conclusion

Prior to this investigation, Hanna Wolf remained a subsidiary figure in the annals of East German history, often appearing as a side note in broader studies when some of her more colourful language, usually insults directed at other SED members, were used to accentuate a specific event or incident. In fact, this is how I first became acquainted with Wolf as a former member of the Central Committee of the SED, as her condemnation of the East German journalist Heinz Brandt, whom she referred to as a “pig” after he fled the GDR in 1958, helped enhance my own re-telling of historical events while writing my master’s thesis.⁷¹⁶ However, Wolf was not merely an SED mouthpiece, whose significance remains confined to her fanatic speeches and incendiary comments during Central Committee meetings. Rather, Wolf’s role as both a female communist and as Director of the PHS for thirty-three years proves to be much more significant than historians have acknowledged.

That is not to say that Wolf was not fanatical in her speeches and written articles, as she was clearly a very outspoken and forceful woman. Instead, it was exactly these qualities, combined with her other contradictory personality traits, that enabled Wolf to successfully navigate the male dominated party culture of the SED. While few female communists were able to achieve notable positions within the SED hierarchy without the assistance of a more powerful partner or due to their posts being assigned because they were deemed “women’s work,” Wolf not only achieved a role in which she was able to wield authority but also maintained her position for an impressive three decades. A major reason for this success was due to Wolf’s

⁷¹⁶ Brandt, *The Search for a Third Way*, 253.

adoption of an “iron maiden” persona, that was less maternal and more domineering, where she gave less consideration to women’s issues, and proved to be quite ruthless when dealing with dissenting peers and students. Another aspect of Wolf’s complex personality that helped contribute to her success was that she could be funny, warm, and thoughtful, allowing her to build connections with more influential party members such as Ulbricht and Honecker.

Many of these contradictions in Wolf’s professional persona are on display in photographs included in my study. In Figure 5 (page 77), Wolf is shown drinking, eating, laughing, and having a good time with some female comrades. In contrast, Figure 9 (page 181) shows Wolf standing tall and speaking directly to a male party member with her fists clenched. Whatever Wolf said appears to have caused her peer Freida Sternberg to gasp in shock in the background. In Figure 6 (page 131), Wolf is smiling and graciously shaking hands with Ulbricht, who just presented her with the Karl Marx Order for the second time in 1964, despite being at odds with him due to his more lenient reforms. One year later, Wolf travelled to the Soviet Union to make a formal complaint against him with some of her more hardline peers.

Due to Wolf’s adoption of more agentic professional behaviours, combined with her own more engaging personality traits, Wolf was able to not only navigate the patriarchal party culture of the SED, but also maintain control over the PHS, where she remained an authoritative leader who directly oversaw the planning and functioning of the school. This included making sure student training always focused on Marxism-Leninism while actively pushing back against both Ulbricht and his technological reforms during the 1960s and the many calls for change from PHS faculty members. Wolf’s significance as both a female communist and as the longstanding Director of the party school proved to have broader implications for the East German regime, as she played a direct role in the training of nearly 25,000 party functionaries that were appointed to

positions in the party-apparatus and mass organizations of the SED. These functionaries, who were considered “professional revolutionaries,” were meant to help steer the course for the success and continuance of socialism in the GDR.

Wolf’s reign was not only exceptional due to the many years she spent as Director but also because she achieved success as a result of her own merits. While scholars such as Gabrielle Gast and Donna Harsch have shown how many high-ranking women were usually appointed to roles considered to be more traditionally female, such as Inge Lange who was in charge of women’s policy, Wolf’s position does not fit with this premise, as the Directors before her, Willi Kropp and Carl Bose, who were first appointed in 1946, then Rudolf Lindau and Paul Lezner, who managed the party school until Wolf’s appointment in 1950, and her replacement after retirement, Kurt Tiedke, were all male. In fact, Wolf was often included in significant discussions and events where she was the only female participant. For example, when Wolf travelled to Moscow with Hager and other SED hardliners before the 11th Plenum to help prepare for the attack on Ulbricht’s cultural reforms of the 1960s, as well as helping draft SED party policies during the 1970s with Honecker, Hager, Erich Mielke, Hermann Axen and other male Politburo members. In 1953, SED Central Committee meeting minutes showed that Wolf out earned her male colleagues at the PHS. Although Wolf faced obstacles in the male-dominated party culture of the SED, she proved to be one of the few female SED members that was able to wield power who was not appointed to a role considered “women’s work” and whose career was not helped by the backing of a more influential husband.

As Catherine Epstein has shown, many female veteran communists that garnered significant positions in the party hierarchy usually had a more powerful partner or were single and completely devoted to the SED. Although Wolf had a long-term partner, Wilhelm Knigge,

who worked in the Traffic Department, he was less influential than her and she met him while already appointed to her position at the PHS. However, Wolf's legal status as an unmarried woman helped provide her with more time for her career and to pursue party work. In contrast to other high-ranking single female communists who had long careers, such as Margarete Wittkowski, Inge Lange and Margarete Müller, Wolf was the only one who did not have advanced training or education despite being awarded an Honourary Doctorate from the University of Leipzig in 1978. Although Wolf attended the University of Berlin during the 1920s, she did not complete her degree and most of her training was completed at various party schools in the Soviet Union. Wolf's long-term appointment as Director and inclusion in meetings and events with important male members of the SED shows that there were other factors that helped her achieve success.

Although only five women were ever made candidate members of the SED's Politburo, only two did not have advanced training and both were married to more powerful partners.⁷¹⁷ The other three women, Luise Ermisch, Margaret Müller and Inge Lange, either had significant experience in their respective fields or were included as a "token" representative for women's issues. Despite this political stumbling block, Wolf has been remembered as a forceful and enigmatic character in the history of the East German regime. The many personal reflections from both students and former SED members note the longtime Director's contradictory personality, which was harsh in meetings of the Central Committee and in the halls of the PHS, while warm and friendly in personal encounters. Wolf had no qualms about putting a friend or close associate in the SED's line of fire if they proved to think differently or if her position was put into question. One day Wolf could be sending someone a personal birthday greeting and then

⁷¹⁷ Edith Baumann was Honecker's first wife and Elise Schmidt had been married to Anton Ackermann.

weeks later be reporting them to the Central Committee – as she had done with her one-time peer and close colleague Rudolf Herrnstadt in 1953.⁷¹⁸

Under Wolf's leadership, the PHS expanded significantly, with the number of staff more than doubling during the 1950s alone and due to her efforts, the main campus moved from Kleinmachnow to central East Berlin in 1955. By the 1970s, the PHS also operated fifteen district branch offices throughout the GDR and the main campus opened the Thälmann Institute which hosted approximately 2100 students. Functionaries from 77 different parties from 67 countries studied at the PHS between 1963 and 1990.⁷¹⁹ By the 1970s, the main campus of the school also maintained an average enrollment of 1200 to 1400 students per year and by the 1980s, over 60 percent of graduated students were appointed as party functionaries.⁷²⁰ Although Wolf retired in 1983, the focus of student training at the party school continued to rely heavily on the teaching of Marxism-Leninism and even when the school closed its doors in June 1990, there were still 238 academic and 307 technical staff employed at the school.⁷²¹

Often criticized by students, PHS faculty and SED members for her dogmatism and running the party school like a Stalinist institution, Wolf was almost always able to get her own way and secure control over the ideological content in the PHS course curricula. However, Wolf's influence on the PHS proved to be outdated and backward as the decades passed and many incoming PHS faculty and students during her years as Director proved to be less enthralled with the fight for the communist cause, which showed that Wolf was ultimately fighting an uphill battle in her war against revisionism. As Wolf and other hardliners like Honecker and Hager were completely opposed to any other theories of socialism, such as

⁷¹⁸ Herrnstadt, 217.

⁷¹⁹ Norden and Brandau, 216.

⁷²⁰ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 38.

⁷²¹ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 85.

democratic centralism, and only allowed orthodox Marxism-Leninism to be taught at the school, faculty were forced to continue teaching students ideological content that had not only grown stagnant, but that also left little room for creativity or innovation.

Due to Wolf's enduring influence on the PHS curricula, the training of students continued to develop party functionaries that were lacking in any professional or technical skills that would help advance the regime. Despite 61.7 percent of PHS graduates between 1981 and 1983 being appointed to functionary positions in the party apparatus, only 4.6 percent were qualified enough to be employed in economic enterprises and even those students were limited in what knowledge they brought forth in their new positions.⁷²² For example, former Deputy Rector Wolfgang Schneider was appointed to a position at *Textilkombinat* Cottbus after he completed his doctoral dissertation during the 1970s. However, Schneider's work evaluations showed that he was underperforming, and he was sent back to continue working at the party school.⁷²³

Due to poor results in student training and the lackluster performance of graduates in the field, PHS faculty regularly called for improvements to be made in the classroom. Throughout the decades, faculty meetings showed that despite Wolf allowing staff to voice their concerns and complaints, these meetings were merely a tactical maneuver which allowed them to let off steam and changes were never actually implemented. One attempt to address these issues came during the 1970s with the development of the Department of Teaching on Marxism-Leninism, Party Life and Party Building, which sought to improve teaching methods and student research and fifteen new positions were created that were supposed to be filled by more qualified teaching staff. However, most of these positions were filled by unqualified personnel that came straight from the party-apparatus of the SED and rather than any concrete changes being made in the

⁷²² Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 38.

⁷²³ Orlow, *The Parteihochschule Karl Marx*, 31.

course curricula or in teaching methods, the department frequently went through various name changes and restructuring moves instead.³⁹ Such tactics show how Wolf provided the appearance of addressing faculty concerns but continued to act as a major barrier when it came to making any significant improvements.

Wolf faced many challenges during her long tenure as Director, most of which centered on her devotion to Marxism-Leninism. During the 1950s, Wolf resisted calls for change after Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956, staying true to her political beliefs and ousting reformers at the PHS who criticized her Stalinist ways. During the 1960s, Wolf turned against Ulbricht, who was her longtime ally, when he initiated a series of more liberal reforms surrounding economics, art and culture. Wolf was so opposed to Ulbricht's turn from a technocrat to a liberalizer that she helped steer the 11th Plenum sessions to focus on an outright attack against many of Ulbricht's policies from the 1960s, such as his *Youth Communiqué*, that encouraged East German youth to play a more active role in criticizing higher East German authorities, as well as his cultural leniencies that allowed more room for criticism from artists and writers. Wolf then helped turn Ulbricht into a "non-person" after his dismissal as leader in 1971 and his name and role in the German communist movement disappeared from both the halls of the PHS and Wolf's own speeches and writings.

While Wolf was successful at maintaining the ideological focus of course curricula at the party school to continue relying on the classics of Marxism-Leninism, she had a more difficult time putting the brakes on the influence of the scientific technological revolution. Prior to her departure from the PHS, Wolf made sure to direct student research work away from technical topics and to focus solely on ideological matters. However, as soon as Wolf walked out the door

³⁹ Preußner, 201.

of the party school in June 1983, PHS student theses and dissertations experienced a major upward swing back to focusing on technological topics, which shows that many faculty members did not agree with her hardliner ways. Part of the reason for the return to a technical focus in student research was due to the new appointment of Kurt Tiedke, who was not as invested in monitoring student research output at the school, and also because there was recognition amongst many SED and Central Committee members that an improvement in scientific and technical training was desperately needed and the PHS even began using computers in the late 1980s.

Although Wolf was forced to watch her life's work crumble before her eyes with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the re-unification of Germany in 1990, there is no question that she left her mark on the history of the East German regime. Wolf was not only a loyal communist whose dedication to Stalinism never faltered during her political life, but she was also responsible for the management of an institution that trained around 25,000 SED functionaries, who were sent out into the regime armed with Wolf's devotion to the classics of Marxism-Leninism. Whether PHS graduates continued to live according to the training from their time spent studying at the party school is questionable; however, one matter remains for certain, that there were no other female communists in the SED whose political lives spanned as long as Wolf's and whose Stalinist ideals directly influenced more than three generations of SED functionaries.

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