

Approach/Avoidance: Communists and Women in East Germany, 1945-9

Author(s): Donna Harsch

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Donna Harsch

# Approach/avoidance: Communists and women in East Germany, 1945–9

In July 1945, a German Communist scolded fellow members of the KPD for how they talked to women in the Soviet zone of occupation. According to Irene Gärtner (aka Elli Schmidt), her comrades opened lectures to female audiences with the question: 'Is it not a fact that Hitler came to power only because a high proportion of women succumbed to the poison of Nazi propaganda?'<sup>1</sup> A year later, Schmidt rued, Communists continued to make the 'error' of expounding on the guilt women bore for the fascist seizure of power.<sup>2</sup> As late as May 1947, another woman in the party felt the need to point out that, *in fact*, women had voted at a lower rate for Hitler in 1928, only catching up to the male vote in 1931–2.<sup>3</sup> For her part, Elli Schmidt did not question the accuracy of the charge but its political acumen. Women, she reminded her comrades, composed 60 per cent of the adult population in post-war Germany. To win an electoral majority, communists should not censure women but court them.<sup>4</sup>

As a member of the KPD executive committee (PVS – the second highest authority in the party), Schmidt conveyed the view of the party leadership and, presumably, influenced it.<sup>5</sup> Official Communist propaganda adopted a compassionate tone towards women. Following unification of the KPD and the Social Democratic party (SPD) in the Soviet zone in April 1946, the new Socialist Unity party (SED) created a Central Women's Section (attached to the party's highest body, the Central Secretariat) and devoted considerable resources to publicizing

<sup>1</sup> *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, Irene Gärtner, 6.7.45, cited in Frank Thomas Stössel, *Positionen und Strömungen in der KPD/SED 1945–1954* (Cologne, 1985), 83–4. Eric Weitz has noted that Communists reprimanded the populace in general for its support of Hitler. See Eric Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990* (Princeton, 1996). It is, nevertheless, remarkable that the press and orators upbraided women *as women* whereas men were criticized under the rubric 'German'.

<sup>2</sup> Elli Schmidt, 'Frauen u. Gemeindewahlen', *Neuer Weg* (subsequently *NW*) (August 1946), 3.

<sup>3</sup> 'Frauen und Politisches Denkvermögen', *NW* (May 1947), 30. For scholarly comment on differences and similarities in gender voting patterns, see Jürgen Falter, 'Die Wähler der NSDAP 1928–1933: Sozialstruktur und parteipolitische Herkunft' in Wolfgang Michalka (ed.), *Die national-sozialistische Machtergreifung* (Munich, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> 'Stärker Werbung unter den Frauen!', *NW* (July 1946), 30; Elli Schmidt, 'Frauen und Gemeindewahl', *NW* (August 1946), 3; Gertrud Heusch, 'Frauen gewinnen heisst Mehrheit des Volkes gewinnen', *NW* (August 1946), 24–5; W. Barth, 'Frauenarbeit – Sache der Gesamtpartei', *NW* (October, 1946), 12; Stössel, *op. cit.*, 83–4; Stiftung der Arbeiterpartei und Massenorganisationen-Bundesarchiv (subsequently SAPMO-BA), IV 2/1.01/3, Funktionärinnen-Konferenz am 16. u. 17. Mai 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt, part of the Moscow emigration, was the most influential woman in the KPD/SED in the Soviet zone (SBZ). Gabriele Gast, *Die politische Rolle der Frau in der DDR* (Düsseldorf, 1973), 98–9. The KPD central committee had eighty members (13.7 per cent female); the SED party executive had sixty members in 1947 (16.7 per cent).

its programme for women's rights and equal pay. Its agenda was similar to the KPD's pre-1933 platform but, unlike their Weimar comrades, post-war Communists were counselled to learn the 'concrete, practical, and emotional' language of women. The SED propagated social democratic solutions to the abiding inequalities and post-war emergencies that burdened women. This approach matched the moderate line that the SED initially adopted, styling itself a mass socialist party, proposing a gradual, populist 'German road to socialism' and co-operating with bourgeois parties.<sup>6</sup> The consolidated party campaigned hard for the June 1946 referendum on the expropriation of the 'property of war criminals and active Nazis' in Saxony and for local and provincial elections in the autumn, determined to win an absolute majority by seducing voters away from the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (LDP). Women, the SED recognized, were central to its electoral strategy. Yet the continuing pleas to discard the charge that 'women brought us Hitler' suggest that not all SEDers cleanly executed the friendly turn. Internal documents confirm that 'proletarian anti-feminism' survived the Third Reich: women were assumed to be apolitical at best, retrograde at worst; religious and under clerical sway; and blinkered by short-term, family-bound concerns.<sup>7</sup> The heel-dragging of male party members expressed not just encrusted beliefs but irresolution about how to appeal to women. Everyone recognized that the Socialist Unity party had to bridge a wide gender gap. But how was the SED to understand and overcome female enmity? While some Communists were ready to accept woman's particular public personae, others grew ever more irritated by her 'backwardness'.

Between 1946 and 1949, an argument about gender policy clattered beneath the hum of a party machine set on full power. Discord over *Frauenpolitik* was far from the only creaky part of the operation.<sup>8</sup> It is one, though, that scholars have not examined with the careful attention to content and context applied to, for example, the strains that accompanied the drive to get the working class into line.<sup>9</sup> The relative neglect of gender politics is a peculiar one, for even many SEDers recognized that malfunctions in this small engine threatened to stall history's big

<sup>6</sup> Gast, *op. cit.*, 51, 46; Schmidt, 'Frauen. und Gemeindewahl', *NW* (August 1946), 3; Hermann Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971* (Hannover, 1971), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Werner Thönnessen coined the phrase 'proletarian anti-feminism'. See *The Emancipation of Women: The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933* (Glasgow, 1976; originally published, 1969). On women in the Weimar KPD, see Silvia Kontos, *Die Partei kämpft wie ein Mann* (Basel/Frankfurt a.M., 1969). More recent works include Weitz, *op. cit.*; Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (Oxford, 1995); Karen Hagemann, *Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik. Alltagsleben und gesellschaftliches Handeln von Arbeiterfrauen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Research on the social history of the GDR has exploded in the 1990s. A considerable amount of this work is being done by graduate students from Germany, the United States and Great Britain. The institutional centre of GDR research is the

Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF – Centre for Contemporary History) in Potsdam. Under the direction of Christoph Klessmann and Konrad Jarausch, permanent and visiting scholars at the ZZF carry out research into all aspects of GDR history, often from a social historical perspective. In the series 'Zeithistorische Studien', published by the ZZF and issued by the Akademie Verlag, have appeared central studies of the GDR such as Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Historische DDR-Forschung. Aufsätze und Studien* (Berlin, 1993) and Peter Hübner, *Konsenz, Konflikt und Kompromiss. Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1970* (Berlin, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Hübner, *op. cit.*, Stössel, *op. cit.* and Weitz, *op. cit.*, as well as Axel Bust-Bartels, *Herrschaft und Widerstand in den DDR-Betrieben* (Frankfurt a.M., 1980); Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Siegfried Suckut, *Die Betriebsrätebewegung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands (1945-1948)* (Frankfurt a.M., 1982).

motor, the class struggle. Scholars have outlined the broad course of the SED's policies toward women and investigated specific aspects of gender relations.<sup>10</sup> We have not had, however, a study of the precise effects of a rapidly changing political and economic situation on Communist strategies towards women or an appraisal of power and class relations from a gender perspective. This article makes a first attempt to fill these gaps.

One can subsume *Frauenpolitik* under politics in general, dividing it into two periods preceding the consolidation of power in 1949. At first, SED organizers and propaganda targeted women with a language that ignored social distinction. In 1947–8, as it struggled to increase productivity in a devastated economy, the SED trained its sights more narrowly on women factory workers. The woman question, though, generated its own dynamic and interacted with class issues in awkward ways. Women were not only more sceptical of the Communist message than were men but, for a variety of reasons, were resistant to paid employment. To win them as voters and workers, women party organizers contended, the SED must create non-partisan, female-only groups to address women's interests. Though many, not only male, Communists opposed the trend towards separatism, it dominated SED *Frauenpolitik* from 1946 to 1948. Inside the new, segregated Democratic Women's League (DFD), female Communists in the Soviet zone attained a political and organizational autonomy greater than they had enjoyed historically in the KPD. Their room for manoeuvre was larger than the rapidly constricting space available to party or union functionaries whose terrain was the male-dominated shopfloor. When male officials complained about unusual favours for women, female activists turned to the party elite for support. When their leaders too stonewalled demands for special concessions, SED women appealed to the ultimate power, the Soviet military administration (SMAD). Neither sheer ideology nor pure instrumentalism explain male reactions to demands by women organizers. Their behaviour was influenced as well, but in different directions, by motivated bias. The higher the authority, the less threatened its members felt by the promotion of women into the lower echelons of political, administrative and industrial hierarchies and the more they grasped the benefits that the integration of women would yield.

Women in the party exploited, and profited from, the initial centralization and Stalinization of power in the Soviet zone. Rather than ordered from above, though, their proto-feminism and anti-unionism emerged fitfully in the tumult of the post-war era as they stumbled against the distrust of the socialist mission among women and the contempt for sexual equality that permeated the working class and its leaders, whether former Social Democrats or Communists. To reach the lowest of the low – women workers – SED women discovered that they had to rely on support from the highest of the high – the Soviet command. This strategy revealed its weaknesses as women's leverage in the SED declined in 1948. The consolidation of one-party rule deflated the significance of the female electoral majority and an ever greater emphasis on basic industry, efficiency and extant skills eroded the SED's urge to alter the gendered structure of the

<sup>10</sup> On general developments, see Gast, *op. cit.*; Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); and Renate Genth *et al.*, *Frauenpolitik und politisches Wirken von Frauen im Berlin der Nachkriegszeit, 1945–1949* (Berlin, 1996). Sexual relations have been most closely investigated. See Naimark, *op. cit.*; Grossmann, *op. cit.*;

Kirsten Poutrus, 'Von den Massenvergewaltigungen zum Mutterschutzgesetz: Abtreibungspolitik und Abtreibungspraxis in Ostdeutschland, 1945–1950' in Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (eds), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen, 1996); Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, 'Eine Woche im April, Berlin 1945: Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal', *Feministische Studien*, 11 (1984).

labour force. When the SED officially transformed itself into a Leninist 'party of a new type' in 1949, the traditional hostility of Communist culture towards 'feminism' reasserted itself. Party leaders repudiated separatism as a Social Democratic deviation and charged that it isolated women. In quashing women's autonomy, the SED elite, in fact, put political women in their place and segregated gender equality from the central domestic agenda.

This trajectory parallels the history of the women's section of the Communist party of the Soviet Union some twenty years earlier. There, the women's section grew out of a revolution from below, the separatist experiment lasted longer, and women activists entertained the radical ambition of transforming the conditions of daily life that deterred women workers from full participation in politics. Still, the story's course and denouement are strikingly consistent with that in the Soviet zone in the 1940s. Russian women, too, had turned to separate organization as a solution to the neglect of women by the party and trade unions. The party hierarchy tolerated the women's section, while men in the lower echelons never gave up their resistance to female activism. With the turn to productionist goals in 1927–8, hostility intensified. The trade unions 'liquidated' their women's sections in 1928. In the wake of the decisive shift towards industrialization and collectivization in 1929, the women's section was eliminated with the empty promise that the party 'in general' would take up its work.<sup>11</sup> Not having learned from the history of women's organization in international Communism, women in the SED repeated it. Less their questionable tactics, however, than the historic weakness of the German workers' movement on the woman question gave the SED and Soviet military administration another lever to exploit in their campaign to destroy the independent organization of workers in the Soviet zone.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE, 1946–7

Women crept out of the ruins of East German cities in May 1945, shellshocked and often homeless, confronted with the ordeal of nourishing their families in a bleak, chaotic world. Relieved by the war's end as they were, the majority of women were also profoundly exhausted and used what little energy they had to scavenge for food, clear rubble and otherwise make a living. A minority, however, participated in the primitive, restricted but diverse revival of public activity sanctioned by the Soviet military administration. In the winter of 1946, KPD meetings for women were 'always packed' in Berlin and 'well attended' in Leipzig. Impressed by rising attendance at women's 'evenings', Leipzig Social Democrats concluded, 'Women are interested in everything, but especially in politics. . .'<sup>12</sup> The revival of public activity acquired a gendered character. While the anti-fascist committees that took up local administrative duties and the factory committees that helped restart production were largely 'manned', their social-welfare equivalents were run by women: 'anti-fascist women's committees' (AFA) devoted themselves to helping women and children, especially in the cities and among refugees. Under conditions

<sup>11</sup> Wendy Z. Goldman, 'Industrial politics, peasant rebellion, and the death of the proletarian women's movement in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, IV, 1 (Spring 1996), 46–77.

<sup>12</sup> On the Berlin KPD: SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/78, Bl. 25, Lage der Frauen in Berlin, 25.2.46.

On Leipzig KPD: Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Leipzig (subsequently SHSTA Leipzig), I/3/24, Bl. 128, Bericht über die Frauenarbeit, 20.2.46. On Leipzig SPD: SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/10, Bl. 29, SPD Bezirksvorstand Leipzig an den Zentralfrauenausschuss der SPD, Frauensekretariat, 24.1.46.

of severe malnutrition, high infant mortality and a dearth of basic clothing, the women's committees cajoled the authorities to provide food and shoes for children, ran soup kitchens, found shelter for refugees, set up sewing rooms, aided returning veterans, and opened kindergartens, children's homes and women's shelters. As early as August 1945, every district in Berlin had an AFA. Though they got going more slowly outside the big cities, by mid-1946 they were cropping up at an ever more rapid rate throughout the Soviet zone. Former concentration camp and prison inmates – i.e. anti-fascists – gave the initial spark, but the committees spread from below and attracted mainly women who were not politically organized.<sup>13</sup> By September 1946, they encompassed, a leading Communist claimed, about 300,000 women in 6000 committees, a thousand of which had materialized since July.<sup>14</sup>

The AFAs immediately drew the interest of the left-wing parties (SPD and KPD), while the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (LDP) at first neglected them. According to Social Democrats, the KPD pressured the Soviet military administration to license them as social organizations in October 1945 with the hope of improving the party's standing among women.<sup>15</sup> Soon, socialists and Communists were over-represented in committee offices, especially at higher levels. In early 1946, a Central Women's Committee was formed and a Communist became its chairwoman.<sup>16</sup> The KPD/SED convinced the Soviet military administration to attach the AFAs to the emerging educational/propaganda bureaucracy, rather than the welfare administration, to give them a political accent. Communists were instructed, however, to accept their social-welfare orientation and non-partisan character for 'only through [such an orientation] can women be drawn more quickly into politics'.<sup>17</sup> This moderate line reflected the influence of Elli Schmidt and Käthe Kern, a former Social Democrat. Appointed co-directors of the Central Women's Section, Schmidt and Kern were the only women in the Central Secretariat and, as such, the most influential women in the SED.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/55, Bl. 12, Bericht über die Sitzung des Zentralen Frauenausschusses am 9.2.46; Bl. 15–16, 1. Sitzung des erweiterten Zentralen Frauenausschusses am 15.2.46; Bl. 22–4, 18.2.46, Die Lage der Frauen in Berlin; Bl. 43–7, Bericht des Hauptfrauenausschusses, 30.4.46; IV 2/17/52, Bl. 47–50, Bericht über die Frauenausschüsse in Provinz Sachsen [December] 1946. On the rapid growth of FA in summer 1946, see IV 2/17/78, Bl. 0024, Abteilung Frauenausschuss 25.9.46, Arbeitsplan der Frauenausschüsse für die Zeit vom 1.10–31.12 46; Bl. 0010, Frauensekretariat, Berlin, 17.6.46.

<sup>14</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 21–4, Zur Frage der Schaffung einer Frauenorganisation, 1.9.46. A few months later, however, an anonymous comment in *Neuer Weg* reckoned 200,000 women in 7000 committees. See *NW* (January 1947), 28. In December, 12,000 women participated in 1616 committees in Sachsen-Anhalt (IV 2/17/52, Bl. 47–50).

<sup>15</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/10, Bl. 29, SPD Bezirksvorstand Leipzig an den Zentralausschuss der SPD, Frauensekretariat, Berlin, 24.1.46. For evi-

dence of early disinterest in the AFA on the part of the CDU and LDP, see IV 2/17/80, Bl. 21–4, Zur Frage der Schaffung einer Frauenorganisation, 1.9.46.

<sup>16</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51 (Brandenburg), Bl. 57–8, Kreis Frauendelegiertenkonferenz, Kyritz, 16.3.46; Bl. 62–3, Bericht über Arbeit AFA Langerwisch, 21.3.46; IV 2/17/10, Bl. 44, SPD Leipzig an Frauensek, 3.46.

<sup>17</sup> SHSTA Leipzig, I/3/24, Bl. 128, Bericht über die Frauenarbeit, 20.2.46; SHSTA Leipzig, IV BV/15, Bl. 88, SED Sitzung des Kreisvorstandes am 2.7.46. Also see SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/78, Bl. 39–42, Vom Kommunalen zum Zentralen Frauenausschuss, Herausgeber: Referat für Frauenausschuss bei der Deutschen Verwaltung für Volksbildung, 5.6.46.

<sup>18</sup> I am reluctant to identify women by their male connections, but it seems relevant to note that Schmidt's husband was Anton Ackermann, theorist of the 'German road to socialism', and Kern was very close to Otto Grotewohl, ex-Social Democrat and co-chairman of the SED.

In these first months, the KPD/SED addressed itself to assorted female constituencies, stressing commonalities among them. To advance women's position inside the SED, the Central Secretariat introduced a statute (borrowed from the Weimar SPD without acknowledgment) that guaranteed women 'an appropriate number' of seats on all leading party bodies. The overall strategy may have modestly boosted the SED's attraction for women. At its founding, 21.5 per cent of SED members were female; a year later women made up almost 24 per cent of the party. Compared to the Weimar KPD or to West German parties, whose female percentage hovered around 15 per cent, the SED's accomplishment looked downright impressive.<sup>19</sup> It contrasted itself, however, not to its own past or to distant rivals, but to the 'Schultzes' next door – the East German CDU – whose membership in June 1946 was 44 per cent female. With communal and provincial elections looming in the autumn, leaders of the SED and the Soviet military administration looked with deep dissatisfaction at the meagre harvest of SED efforts.<sup>20</sup> At all levels of the party and throughout the zone, complaints proliferated about *Frauenarbeit* as organizers bemoaned the failure to achieve the coveted breakthrough.

Internal documents disclose the ambiguities among Communist interpretations of this lack of success. Most frequently, they claimed that women were apolitical. In reports on the campaign for the Saxon referendum, agitators noted that the expropriation issue did not interest most women. Field organizers lamented that 'political activity' was 'extraordinarily sparse' among female workers.<sup>21</sup> At the first conference for female SED functionaries in May 1946, Schmidt claimed that women yearned to help others or to lose themselves in romance novels, but showed little interest in politics or high culture, while Kern worried that they were 'fleeing into religion and the churches'.<sup>22</sup>

Scattered amid such remarks lies testimony which suggests that the real problem was not women's deficient, but their 'false', politics. SED organizers acknowledged the 'continuing hold of Nazi ideology on women's minds'. Women Communists did not blame German women for Hitler's ascension to power but also did not see them as passive victims who discarded Nazi myths when the regime collapsed. Schmidt contrasted women's Nazi-era fervour to their post-war malaise:

We remember how much idealism, how much enthusiasm, the masses of women summoned up for Hitler. They were enthusiastic about everything, even for what was bad . . . we see virtually no enthusiasm for the democratic reconstruction of Germany, for the new, for the peaceful Germany.

Yet in 1945–6 both SPD and SED field reports had noted that women's meetings were well attended and '[w]omen are interested in everything, but especially politics'. The problem, as Schmidt knew, was that women harked to precisely the issues that the SED, with its ties to the Soviet occupiers, preferred to avoid. Above all, women flocked to meetings that promised to

<sup>19</sup> L. Schmidt, 'Gibt den Frauen in der Partei Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten!', *NW* (May 1947), 27; Gast, *op. cit.*, 54, 56, 42. Gast attributes the increase in women from 1946 through 1948 to the looser requirements of a 'mass party' that were intended to swamp SPDers who initially composed a majority of the SED.

<sup>20</sup> Naimark, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> On the Volksentscheid campaign in Brandenburg, see IV 2/17/51, Bl. 117, SED Ortsgruppe O., An den Kreisvorstand, 11.6.46; Bl. 28, Stimmungsbericht zum Volksentscheid im Kreis O., 13.6.46. On women workers: SHSTA Leipzig, 1/3/24, Bl. 128, Bericht über die Frauenarbeit, 20.2.46.

<sup>22</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/6, Bl. 0001–7 Funktionärinnenkonferenz am 16./17.5.46.

address the *Ernährungsfrage* (food question). Women in Brandenburg claimed to ‘understand nothing about politics . . . socialism or communism’, but showed up in impressive numbers to participate in ‘robust discussions’ of provisions. At Saxon meetings dedicated to the expropriation referendum, women sat silent until someone raised the *Ernährungsfrage*. Men too, of course, talked about food, but women spoke up more exclusively about provisioning. They protested, in particular, at its incompetent, inequitable distribution.<sup>23</sup> One would expect such complaints to provide rich fodder to Communist organizers. As Kern reminded SEDers, the ‘crucial foundation of any agitation among women is visible success in the provision of food’ and to call for such things as ‘equal distribution of cigarettes among men and women’ (not a trivial matter, given the desperate demand for cigarettes and their function as an ersatz currency). Accordingly, in summer 1946 the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* trumpeted improvements in rations for expectant and nursing mothers as the latest achievement of the SED.<sup>24</sup>

SEDers addressed women’s daily concerns. They treated these, however, as proof of woman’s concrete, ‘emotional’ outlook on life not as a *political* perspective.<sup>25</sup> Blindness to the social significance of women’s demands was, in part, ideological. Committed to a theory that addressed the politics of production, Marxists did not see demands that revolved around ‘the labours of consumption’ as central to the class struggle.<sup>26</sup> Circumstance reinforced doctrinal bias. To its misfortune, the SED could approach the cry for ‘Bread!’ only circumspectly. Lenin’s heirs, after all, had set up the rationing system and controlled the political levers of food distribution. The Soviet military administration’s highly differentiated system was based, first, on the size of the locale (the larger, the more rations) and, second, on what one did. Especially awkward for the SED’s relationship with women voters, the Soviet rationing system placed housewives – the majority of urban women – in the lowest category of recipients. ‘Normal consumers’ were divided into six (or in the biggest cities, five) categories: I (and II) ‘workers in heavy industry’; III workers; IV white-collar employees (including cleaners and washerwomen); V children; VI ‘others’ – including non-working factory owners, ex-Nazis and ‘non-working housewives’. Thus, the ration cards allotted to powerless and hard-working housewives the ‘starvation rations’ (fewer than 1200 calories a day) allowed to the social and political outcasts of the new Germany.<sup>27</sup>

Local SED functionaries longed to ditch this political albatross. In Leipzig, where the bourgeois parties were nipping at the SED’s heels, the party called publicly for revision of the system.

<sup>23</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 117, SED Ortsgruppe O . . . 11.6.46; IV 2/17/6, Bl. 0001–7 – Ref. Elli Schmidt in d. Funktionärinnenkonf. am 16./17.5.46. Schmidt quote: IV 2/17/51, Bl. 20, öffentliche Frauenversammlung, March 1946. Also see IV 2/17/51, Bl. 21, Bericht der Frauenleiterin; Bl. 28, Stimmungsbericht zum Volksentscheid im Kr. O, 13.6.46; Bl. 102 Stimmungsbericht vom Arbeitsgebiet Warmsdorf am 8.6.46; IV 2/17/56, Bl. 1–3 Lisa Ulrich, Verammlungsbericht aus Mecklenburg vom 2 bis 6.9.46.

<sup>24</sup> Nachlass Käthe Kern. NL 145/49, Bl. 1–8 Frsek. 31.5.46; Gries, *Die Rationengesellschaft* (Münster, 1991), 122.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Elli Schmidt, ‘Frauen und Gemeindevahlen’, *NW* (August 1946).

<sup>26</sup> The phrase in quotes is from Katherine Pence, ‘Labours of consumption: gendered consumers in post-war East and West German reconstruction’ in Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (eds), *Gender Relations in German History* (Durham, N.C., 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Gries, *op. cit.*, 93–8, 127–9. Card I/II holders were entitled to 2186 calories a day, while Card V/VI holders received only 1171. They could supplement this starvation diet, of course, through diligent hoarding (hoarding), but such activities made it even more difficult to take on regular work. In 1946, even the allowed daily calorie intake was not attained. The rations allotted Cards V/VI were raised slightly in summer 1946.

SED leaders in Berlin, in contrast, refused to criticize the classification of housewives. Friction about this issue, though, did extend into the top leadership, where it emerged as a gender divide. At a meeting of the executive committee in November 1946, Elli Schmidt censured the rations' divisions, while Wilhelm Pieck, co-chairman of the SED, defended them:

*Schmidt:* The cursed 'V and VI' cards cripple our work [among women] at every turn. Couldn't we make it three [categories] and change the rationing norms? Under Hitler, there was one card . . . and women constantly confront us with that. [Three categories] are also what they have in the western zones.

*Pieck:* Hitler could do that because of plunder.

*Schmidt:* We tell women that.

*Pieck:* Anyway, the rationing system is an incentive to employment.

*Schmidt:* Comrade, there is already a decree that requires women to work.<sup>28</sup>

In public, Schmidt berated women for 'lacking idealism'. *In camera*, however, she looked at their plight from an agitational standpoint. Pieck already addressed it from the lofty perspective of power. In this transitional phase, Schmidt's vantage point still counted. On 1 February 1947, in the midst of an extremely cold winter, Cards V and VI were eliminated with much fanfare that attributed the revision to SED intervention in women's favour.<sup>29</sup>

The *Ernährungsfrage* was only one, and the most straightforward, handicap to the SED's ability to attract women. Party organizers complained that Soviet policy towards German prisoners of war was a second deterrent to their politicization. Women could not understand why Soviet release of their men proceeded so slowly. The SED was dogged by objections about the failure to release even 'our anti-fascist husbands' and about the impossibility, then irregularity, of communication with POWs. In public, Communists touted small releases as evidence of Soviet generosity. In private, though, they argued that the party must convince the USSR to accelerate the process.<sup>30</sup> When a Russian lieutenant asked Martha Arendsee why the SED's *Frauenarbeit* was making so little progress, Arendsee, a member of the party executive, informed her that the 'POW question plays a big role'.<sup>31</sup>

Most sensitive of all was Soviet soldiers' mistreatment of German women. Atina Grossmann and Norman Naimark have discussed the scope, causes and effects of the mass rape of East German, and especially Berlin, women in May 1945. Driven by vengeance and desperation, Soviet soldiers and ex-POWs continued to engage in widespread violence against women. The wave receded in mid-1946, only to surge again in 1947. Naimark argues that rape cost the Soviet military administration and KPD/SED more goodwill than any other policy or behaviour of the occupying forces. It was also an issue where open discussion was *absolut verboten*. As in the case of POWs, functionaries registered internal protests, while Pieck and Walter Ulbricht only reluctantly raised the matter.<sup>32</sup> In January 1947 Lisa Ullrich, a field

<sup>28</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/6, 8. Tagung des PVS, 18/19.11.46.

<sup>29</sup> Gries, *op. cit.*, 127, 99–100; Hübner, *op. cit.*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/55, Bl. 22–4, 18.2.46, Die Lage der Frauen in Berlin; IV 2/5/220, Bl. 45–50, Instrukteur Josef König, Arbeitsbericht. . . ; IV 2/17/51, Bl. 427–8, Klara Zetkin Spinnerei, Betr: Versammlung in Jutespinnerei in Brandenburg, 14.10.48; IV 2/17/52, Bl. 55–64, Jahresbericht über

die Frauenarbeit der SED Prov. Sachsen-Anhalt, 27.1.47; NL Käthe Kern, 145/49, Bl. 1–8, Frauensekretariat, 31.5.46.

<sup>31</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/4, PVS Sitzung, 18. bis 20.6.46, p. 44. On the more general Russian frustration with the SED's poor record on women, see Naimark, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>32</sup> Naimark, *op. cit.*, 88, 118–21. Also see Poutrus, *op. cit.*, and Schmidt-Harzbach, *op. cit.*

organizer, informed Lieutenant-Colonel Nasarov, 'Even if attacks and harassment occur only occasionally, fear and worry spread among all women and cripple all our work, not only in the women's committees but in the unions and the party.'<sup>33</sup> Indirectly, the SED approached the issue of mass rape by championing a reform of Paragraph 218, Germany's anti-abortion law. In 1946–7, its delegates in provincial legislatures called for a regulation that would allow an abortion not only on medical, but also on social or ethical (i.e. in case of criminal mishandling) grounds.<sup>34</sup>

The close bonds between German Communists and Soviet occupiers damaged the SED's standing among male voters, too. Still, eyewitness accounts suggest that the burning questions – food, POWs, the misdeeds of Russian soldiers – were perceived as *women's* affairs. Moreover, most women seem to have identified themselves as innocent victims of the post-war crisis.<sup>35</sup> Last but not least, the SED could not draw on stored political capital among women. Because the core membership of both the SPD and the KPD had been overwhelmingly male, the merged party did not possess a solid connection to any class of women. Schmidt's exasperated 'we tell women that' said it all: attempts to ascribe current troubles to Nazi crimes did not impress people with a different understanding of history and politics. In contrast, the Christian Democratic Union could appeal unreservedly to women's sense of injury. In addition, it entered the fray with the advantage of high standing among clerics and the reputation as a moderate party. In the Weimar republic, post-war claims notwithstanding, women had remained loyal to non-extremist parties, especially the (Catholic) Centre party, longer than had men.<sup>36</sup> Their suspicion of radicalism apparently reasserted itself after 1945. A Social Democratic organizer argued, for example, that the percentage of women in the Leipzig SPD fell sharply in late 1945 because women interpreted the 'recent emphasis on the unity of the working class' as a sign that the SPD would soon 'slide to the [extreme] left'.<sup>37</sup>

Women's resistance to 'idealistic' solicitations only confirmed the scorn of male Communists for *Frauenarbeit*. In fact, SED men made it hard for women to engage in political work at all. Told to prune public outlays, the (SED) county councillor in Ribnitz (Mecklenburg) axed none other than the posts of the only three women (all SED) in his administration.<sup>38</sup> Comrades refused to appoint women to responsible positions in consumer co-operatives because they wanted to reserve these positions for veterans. Despite a decision by the Central Secretariat that one-third of all SED electoral candidates be women, men in the Saxon SED rejected women and youthful candidates with the excuse that the party should honour its older (male) comrades

<sup>33</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 75, Vorschläge des Herrn Oberleutnant Nasarov zum Programm der demokratischen Frauenorganisation, 7.1.47.

<sup>34</sup> See Grossmann, *op. cit.*, 193–9; Poutrus, *op. cit.*, 179–86.

<sup>35</sup> For evidence of a similar sense of victimhood in the western zones, see Donna Harsch, 'Public continuity and private change? Women's consciousness and activity in Frankfurt, 1945–1955', *Journal of Social History*, xxvii, 1 (Fall 1993); Inge Stolten (ed.), *Der Hunger nach Erfahrung: Frauen nach '45* (Frankfurt a.M., 1981); Sibylle Meyere and Eva Schulze, *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner. Familienalltag in der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> On the CDU's emphasis on 'Alltagssorgen' and 'Christentum oder Marxismus', see Ernst Schotte, 'Der Kampf von KPD/SPD und der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands um die Befreiung der Frau im Prozess der Herausbildung der Hegemonie der Arbeiterklasse in der damaligen Sowjetischen Besatzungszone (1945 bis 1946)' (D. Phil., Humboldt, 1972), 153.

<sup>37</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/10, Bl. 29, SPD Bezirksvorstand Leipzig, an den Zentralausschuss der SPD, Frauensek, Berlin, 24.1.46.

<sup>38</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 3–11, Ke[rn]/S(chmidt), Anlage zum Rundschreiben Nr.1/v, 25.6.46.

with political offices. Under pressure to place women on the SED list in a small town, the chairman of the party chapter retorted, 'Don't bother us with your long-haired ruffraff (*Kroppzeug*)!' Practitioners of 'cooking-pot politics' (the belief that women belonged behind the stove) deterred their own wives from joining the SED.<sup>39</sup>

Squeezed between the indifference, even hostility, of the average female citizen to the SED and the apathy, even contempt, of the average male comrade towards women, women functionaries proclaimed, 'We have to force the party to strengthen its work among women!'<sup>40</sup> Yet they were themselves divided about how to do that. In the summer of 1946, for example, women in the SED and AFAs debated whether to underwrite and even organize 'women's electoral lists'. Initially, the SED Women's Section opposed the lists but let itself be convinced by Ulbricht's endorsement of the scheme.<sup>41</sup>

Tactical differences aside, leading female Communists agreed that since May 1945 they had learned something essential: 'It's in women's nature to want to help; they want to work practically, theoretical questions don't interest them. . . . Women don't want to hear about politics . . . but about the women's committees? Yes!'<sup>42</sup> The party, Kern and Schmidt contended, must revise its strategy to exploit better the 'ever growing' allure of the women's committees and to challenge the CDU's 'unmistakable attraction for women who don't work in factories'. 'To bind these women to us and give the women's committees a tighter form', Kern argued in a memorandum to the Central Secretariat, the party must support the formation of a separate, centralized, formally non-partisan women's organization. The intent was to give the SED direct access to all women eager to help secure peace and rebuild their society.<sup>43</sup>

The SED elite had its doubts. Marxists and, even more vehemently Marxist-Leninists, believed that the separate organization of women skirted dangerously close to anti-party factionalism, on one hand, and to bourgeois feminism, on the other. Only under Soviet pressure did the SED executive committee deign to discuss the idea.<sup>44</sup> Even several women on the executive opposed the plan because they feared it would siphon off the best female cadres into social and cultural pursuits that were far removed from the central political concerns of the party. Kern and Schmidt mounted a strong offensive against all objections. The CDU, they emphasized, was winning the competition over women and predicted that in the western zones a re-emergent 'bourgeois women's movement' would soon attract 'bourgeois, intellectual, and politically unattached women'. A mass organization, they added, could raise the theme of German unity and challenge

<sup>39</sup> SHSTA Leipzig, IV BV/06, Bl. 35,38, 1. Bezirks-Frauenkonferenz der SED Bezirk West Sachsen, Abteilung Frauen, 23. u. 24.7.46; Bl. 55, 1. Bezirks-Frauenkonferenz . . . West Sachsen . . . 23. u. 24.7.46; Barth, *op. cit.*, 12. Also see Stössel, *op. cit.*, 84; Erika Buchmann, 'Die Frage steht offen: Wo bleiben die Frauen der Genossen?', *NW* (May/June 1948).

<sup>40</sup> Maria Rentmeister speaking to the SED women's functionary conference, SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1.01/3, SED Funktionärinnen-Konf. am 16. u. 17. Mai 1946 in Berlin, B. 132.

<sup>41</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/6, Bl. 70-5, 4. Tagung des PVS 16/17.7.46; IV 2/1/6, Bl. 165-6, 8. Tagung

des PVS, 18/19.11.46 (Elli Schmidt). On opposition in the AFAs, see Renate Genth and Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, 'Frauen in den Parteien' in Genth *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Quote from Martha Arendsee: SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1.01/3, Bl. 68, SED Funktionärinnen-Konf. am 16. u. 17. Mai 1946.

<sup>43</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 21-4, Zur Frage der Schaffung einer Frauenorganisation, 1.9.46; Bl. 0001, Frauensekretariat., K. Kern, Vorlage für der Sitzung des Zentralsekretariats, 14.6.46: Betr.: Organisatorische Zusammenfassung der Frauenausschüsse.

<sup>44</sup> Naimark, *op. cit.*, 132.

West German groups on the international stage.<sup>45</sup> They insisted, above all, that only a separate, non-partisan organization would provide access to the female masses, proletarian or not. Martha Arendsee, another leading Communist, warned direly, 'We are not reaching women . . . we have not been able to politicize them. . .' Especially alarming to the women's section was the SED's failure to make inroads among farming women who had been organized in the Nazi *Frauenschaft* and were now pouring into the Lutheran Women's Aid.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, the idea for the organization that became the Democratic Women's League originated on high, not, as claimed by the SED, from below. Months before the topic was broached in public, Kern and Schmidt drafted the programme of the future organization, chose its name and decided when and by whom it should be announced. The pre-history of the DFD does not, however, provide strong evidence of Machiavellian decisiveness. At the executive's discussion of the plan, Wilhelm Pieck declared himself 'absolutely' for a separate organization.<sup>47</sup> His apparent enthusiasm notwithstanding, the question still hung in the air three months later, suspended between lack of interest in the woman question and antagonism towards this answer. In this case, Pieck and Ulbricht did not jump to fulfil a Soviet objective.

Only the results of elections in September and October shocked the powers-that-were into a sense of urgency. In 'Red Saxony', despite fairly intense harassment of the bourgeois parties, the SED managed to attract only 53 per cent of the vote (CDU, 21 per cent; LDP, 22 per cent). In Leipzig and Dresden it did not even win a majority. The results of segregated polling in several places fed a widespread belief that women were responsible for the SED's poor showing. Dresden had an electorate that was almost 62 per cent female, from whom the SED received 57 per cent of its votes, in contrast to their contribution of 64 per cent to the LDP's tally and an impressive 69 per cent to the CDU's; 94 per cent of eligible women voted, suggesting that women were more political than the SED might have wished.<sup>48</sup> In Berlin, where 1.4 million female voters confronted 900,000 men (and the SED faced bourgeois parties *and* the SPD), Elli Schmidt reported, 'men were highly sceptical of women. Many said out loud that women should not vote. . .' Things turned out worse than feared. With a paltry 19.8 per cent of the vote, the SED finished third behind the SPD and CDU.<sup>49</sup> The [non-party, AFA] lists of female candidates, that Pieck had convinced reluctant organizers to sponsor, fared disastrously everywhere, capturing about 1 per cent of votes cast. Schmidt complained that SED women had laboured assiduously to convince CDU and LDP women to support the AFA candidates, only to have fellow SEDers

<sup>45</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 3-11, Ke[rn]/S[chmidt], Anlage zum Rundschreiben Nr.1/v, 25.6.46; SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/4, Zentralkomitee Sitzung . . . 18. bis 20.6.46, Bl. 275-81, 283-5. Bl. 269-74, 282-3. On bourgeois women's organizations, see Irene Stöhr, 'Friedenspolitik und Kalter Krieg: Frauenverbände im Ost-West Konflikt' in Genth *et al.*, *op. cit.*; Barbara Henicz and Margrit Hirschfeld, '"Wenn die Frauen wüssten, was sie könnten, wenn sie wollten"- zur Gründung des Deutschen Frauenrings' in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Frauen in der Nachkriegszeit*, V. II (Düsseldorf, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/4, Bl. 286-7, Zentralkomitee Sitzung - 18. bis 20.6.46. On the eagerness to attract farmers who had been in the

*Frauenschaft*, see Hoover Institution Archives, Wm. Sander Collection, Box 1, Folder: Letters from Dresden, 1945-7, Bericht aus der russischen Zone, 8.3.47, 3.

<sup>47</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 21-4, Zur Frage der Schaffung einer Frauenorganisation, 1.9.46. A 'draft programme' of the 'DFD' appears in the documentary record, dated 17.9.46 (IV 2/17/80, Bl. 61). For Pieck's position, see SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/4, Bl. 292, Zentralkomitee Sitzung . . . 18. bis 20.6.46.

<sup>48</sup> Barth, *op. cit.*, 12; NL Käthe Kern, NY 145/49, Bl. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Nachlass (NL) Elli Schmidt, NY 4106/4, Bl. 147-50. Election results from Naimark, *op. cit.*, 329.

undermine them. 'One could even say our party sabotaged the lists,' she told the PVS. 'Some local chairmen ordered comrades to plaster SED placards over the few posters for the women's tickets. Several declared: *Frauenlisten* are whores' tickets. We won't vote for them!'<sup>50</sup>

Immediately after the September polling, the Soviet military administration queried the women's section about the status of the proposed women's league. With proof of Russian concern, Kern and Schmidt prodded Pieck and Otto Grotewohl (the SED's other co-chairman) to make a decision. They finally did, and the two women now moved rapidly, managing to convince a majority of the Central Women's Committee of the AFA to call for a 'permanent women's organization'. Over the next few months, parallel committees prepared the DFD's founding convention, scheduled for International Women's Day, 1947. The public 'Preparatory committee for the creation of the DFD', composed of SED and non-partisan women, worked on the statutes of the DFD and organized the convention, while its hidden shadow – SED leaders Franz Dahlem, Erich Gniffke and Helmut Lehmann – vetted requests from Kern and Schmidt to allow the official committee to take the next step.<sup>51</sup>

Unstoppable it may have been, but the juggernaut encountered greater friction, and from more corners, than was foreseen. The SED was surely not surprised that CDU women, having endorsed the decision to form the DFD, changed their minds under pressure from *their* male party leaders.<sup>52</sup> More disconcertingly, Lieutenant-Colonel Nasarov of the Soviet military administration objected that the draft programme did not 'include the political demands of German women . . . [a hole through which] reactionary forces might creep into the organization. . .'. The outline was, he asserted, 'too narrowly focused on charitable activity' and failed to raise the demand for German unity.<sup>53</sup> Most problematic was hostility to the DFD from within the SED and trade unions. Opponents included sectarians who opposed co-operation between proletarian and bourgeois women, women who wanted to promote female interests in 'mixed' organizations, and men who did not think women should lead any organization. Even supporters fretted that the DFD would either become a 'coffee circle . . . where unenlightened (*unverstandene*) women unload their everyday concerns' or be shunned by apolitical women as an SED front.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, many SED women diligently prepared for the founding convention. In fact, in some locales 'anxiety

<sup>50</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/1/6, Bl. 165–8, 8. Tagung des PVS, 18/19.11.46.

<sup>51</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/78, Bl. 54–5, Dr Durand-Wever, Zentraler Frauenausschuss Tagung am 7.–8.12.46; Bl. 69–70, Edith Hauser (ohne Namen veröffentlichen), 11.12.46: Gibt es eine überparteiliche Politik?; Bl. 76, Kern und Schmidt an Dahlem, Gniffke, Lehmann, 15.1.47; Bl. 77–8, Vorbereitende Komitee zur Schaffung DFD, Mitteilung an die demokratischen Frauen und die antifaschistischen Frauengruppen der Amerikanischen, Britischen und Französischen Besatzungszone, 17.1.47. On the debates inside the Central FA (and, later, the Preparatory Committee) over whether, when and what kind of women's organization to create, see Rita Pawlowski, 'Der Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschlands (DFD)' in Genth *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 77–82.

<sup>52</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/78, Bl. 54–5, 13.12.46; Bl. 97, Mina Amann (CDU) an Kom. DFB, 28.1.47; Bl. 98, Entwurf von Frau Else Lueders an Frau

Amann; IV 2/1/6/14, Bl. 163–6, Tagung des PVS, 22/23.1.47. Bericht über die Schaffung des DFD (Käthe Kern).

<sup>53</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 69 [7.1.47], Vorschläge d. Herrn Oberstleutnant Nasarov z. Programm der demokratischen Frauenorganisation (signed by Lisa Ullrich).

<sup>54</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 63 [n.d., Sachsen-Anhalt]. Quote from: IV 2/17/80, Bl. 103–5, Ruth Becker, Betr. DFD, 16.2.47. For evidence of opposition, see IV 2/17/56, Bl. 54, Lisa Ullrich. Bericht über eine Aussprache mit Genossinnen der Frauenabteilung des Provinzvorstandes Brandenburg am 13.1.47; Bl. 61–2, Maria Krick. Bericht über die Zeit vom 24.2 bis zum 3.3.47; Bl. 238, Edith Höding. Bericht über die Kreisleitersitzung (Wedding) am 24.2.47; Landesarchiv Merseburg, IV/L-2/3/2, Bl. 224–5, Sekretariatssitzung (SED), 9.1.47.

[that the DFD] will be a bourgeois organization' stimulated SEDers to take on virtually all organizational tasks, thus alienating CDU and LDP women who wanted to co-operate.<sup>55</sup>

Despite sundry difficulties, the DFD founding convention took place in March 1947 and was celebrated as a triumph.<sup>56</sup> At least on paper, the DFD grew at a rapid, though for Communists always inadequate, pace. Its membership reached 140,889 by June and 242,544 by September 1947; 60 per cent of recruits were not in a political party; most of the others were in the SED.<sup>57</sup> The SED moved rapidly to occupy key posts in Berlin and the provinces.<sup>58</sup> Two months after its formation, of 428 DFD executive committees in Brandenburg, 193 were headed by SED, 119 by 'unaffiliated', 52 by LDP, and 46 by CDU women.<sup>59</sup> Even as they worked diligently to dominate the DFD, SEDers worried that it might be perceived as an 'SED-affair' – with good reason. In May 1948, non-SED members of the Greifswald DFD complained that 'the party dictatorially determines who will be elected to the executive and [its officers] then don't possess the confidence of the ranks'.<sup>60</sup> SED women soon ran into an unanticipated obstacle to the hegemony of the DFD – the anti-fascist women's committees. More party women put their energy into the new DFD, rather than the AFAs, with the effect that the AFAs began to fall apart and many members 'wandered off' in undesirable directions. From Potsdam came the suggestion to 'transfer' the women's committees to the DFD, while refashioning their niche in the local administration as a 'woman's department'.<sup>61</sup> After some initial hesitation, Kern and Schmidt opted for this solution, but asked the Soviet military administration to take the unpopular decision off their backs by ordering the AFAs to merge with the DFD – which it did in November 1947.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>55</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 73–5, SED Frauenbericht, February 1947; Bl. 78, März Bericht, DFD [both from Saxony-Anhalt].

<sup>56</sup> Gerda Weber, 'Zur Vorgeschichte und Entwicklung des Demokratischen Frauenbundes (DFD) von 1945 bis 1950' in Hermann Weber (ed.), *Parteiensystem zwischen Demokratie und Volkdemokratie* (Cologne, 1982), 424–5; SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 188, DFD Kongress, Gründungsverammlung, Referat Paula Hertwig. Perhaps one reason for its success was the extra rations of money, groceries and cigarettes that the SMAD granted participants. See Pawlowski, *op. cit.*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> The organization continued to grow: March 1948, 259,954 members; January 1949, 308,274; January 1950, 484,075. See Armin Friedrich and Thomas Friedrich (eds), *Politische Parteien und gesellschaftliche Organisationen der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945–1949* (Berlin, 1992), 105. On party breakdown of members, see SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 108–29, Referat M. Weiterer . . . am 3. und 4. 10. 47, 6.

<sup>58</sup> For evidence of manipulation of appointments, see IV 2/17/82, Bl. 19, SED Zentsek, Fr. Dahlem an Schmidt und Kern, 8.4.47; Bl. 26–7, Bericht über die Sitzung des Frsekretariats des Zentralsekretariats der SED und des Frauensekretariats des Landesvorstandes Potsdam, am 20.5.47.

<sup>59</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 36, Vorstände des DFD Mark Brandenburg, 24.5.47. The remain-

ing eighteen chairwomen were members of organizations close to the SED (Victims of Fascism, Free German Youth, etc.).

<sup>60</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 194, Kreiskonferenz der Funktionärinnen, Brandenburg, 22.3.47; IV 2/17/56, Bl. 0010, Maria Krick, Frauensekretariat. Bericht über meine Fahrt nach Greifswald . . . 20.5.48.

<sup>61</sup> On the original plan to maintain them, see SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/80, Bl. 39–41, Vorlage an dem Zentralsekretariat, 27.10.46. On the decision to dismantle them, see SAPMO-BA, Brandenburg, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 194, Kreiskonf. d. Funk'innen, Brbg. 22.3.47; IV 2/17/82, Bl. 19, SED Zentsek, Franz Dahlem an Genossinnen Schmidt u. Kern, 8.4.47; Bl. 20, Prov.reg. Mark Brbg Ministerium für Volksbildung, Martha Domnisch, Potsdam, Abt. Frauenausschuss an Zentr-Sek SED, K. Kern, 13.5.47.

<sup>62</sup> On the plan to have the SMAD give the order, see IV 2/17/79, Bl. 1, 15.10.47, Zentralsekretariat SED Frauensekretariat an SMV; Bl. 3, 11.11.47. SMV Befehl: Verschmelzung der AFA mit DFD; IV 2/17/82, Bl. 164, Entwurf zur einer 2. Resolution für die 27.11.47. On the origins and early months of the DFD, also see Anna Hampele, "'Arbeite mit, plan mit, regiere mit'" – Zur politischen Partizipation von Frauen in der DDR' in Gisela Helwig and Hildegard Maria Nickel (eds), *Frauen in Deutschland, 1945–1992* (Berlin, 1993), 297–8.

Months of indecision, planning and competing demands behind them, SED women set out to make the DFD the organization that would win the majority of German women to the cause and, eventually, the party. A change in the political winds detoured them – turning them away from a focus on women as women and on their majority status in the electorate and towards a concentration on women as workers and on their minority status in the industrial workplace. The orientation was determined from above, the tactic adopted – organizing women on the shopfloor – emerged from both above and below. It provoked an acute competitive struggle between the DFD and the trade union hierarchy over the right to speak for women workers within the emerging SED institutional infrastructure that will be discussed after a brief overview of labour policy in the Soviet zone.

### TRANSFORMING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE SOVIET ZONE

In 1947, the SED grew increasingly preoccupied with workers and their productivity. Its socially inclusive, democratic message of the immediate post-war period grew faint, drowned out by class struggle, Leninist rhetoric reminiscent of the propaganda of the Weimar KPD. The leftward move was accompanied by efforts to increase production and stamp out Social Democratic economism and dissident shopfloor culture. Along with the Manichean imagery of international class struggle, German workers were introduced to an unfamiliar Communist language of discipline, order and incentive.<sup>63</sup> The plant-based perspective of the factory committees that had sprung up during the chaotic weeks of transition in 1945 conformed badly to the centralist, productivist line now adopted by the SED. Irritated by their egalitarianism (*Gleichmacherei*) and commitment to workers' immediate welfare, the SED and Soviet military administration manoeuvred to transfer power from the factory committees to the trade unions.<sup>64</sup> The unions, too, had re-emerged in 1945, often reorganized by the same Social Democratic functionaries who had controlled them before 1933. Initially, the unions operated as conventional bargaining units. In 1947, the SED began to retool them into a transmission belt of the party line. It took considerably longer than some scholars have assumed to harness the unions to the productivist scheme, in part because of worker resistance and in part because Social Democrats controlled union departments that dealt with wages, labour law and social policy. Despite official wages guidelines, local contracts were negotiated and real wages increased considerably, if unevenly, into 1949 and even beyond.<sup>65</sup>

The *policy* of incentives based on piece rates, however, lurched forward. In October 1947 came Order No. 234, the first step towards the introduction of USSR-style labour relations in the Soviet zone. Steeply graded 'achievement' wages were instituted in high priority industries such as mining, chemicals and optics. Under the guise of inaugurating non-wage benefits (such as medical care), Order 234 also began the process of differentiating between the benefits

<sup>63</sup> Discussions of these developments can be found in Weitz, *op. cit.*; Stössel, *op. cit.*; Bust-Bartels, *op. cit.*; Kopstein, *op. cit.*; and Dietrich Staritz, *Die Gründung der DDR* (München, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> Hübner, *op. cit.*, 28, 35; Bust-Bartels, *op. cit.*, 26–8.

<sup>65</sup> On Social Democrats in the FDGB, see Detlev Brunner, *Der Wandel des FDGB zur Kommu-*

*nistische Massenorganisation. Das Protokoll der Bitterfelder Konferenz des FDGB am 25./26.11.48* (Koblenz, 1996), 10–11. On the difficulty of effectively imposing wage rates from above, see Hübner, *op. cit.*, 16, 19, 41, and Wolfgang Zank, *Wirtschaft und Arbeit in Ostdeutschland 1945–1949* (Munich, 1987). Suckut and Bust-Bartels, in contrast, see the crack-down as quite immediately effective.

allowed technical/engineering, skilled, and 'heavy' labour, on one side, and those available to unskilled workers, on the other. Most controversial was Order 234's provision that employees in the privileged categories would receive, free of cost, an 'A' meal of more, superior calories and 'other' workers would receive a 'B' meal of fewer, inferior calories. The authorities found it quite difficult to implement this measure. Not only the factory committees, but numerous plant-level trade union and party officials opposed it. In many places they redivided the food so that all workers received the same rations.<sup>66</sup>

When it came to women workers, the SED and Soviet occupiers faced a set of problems that included, but was not limited to, increasing productivity. Many women had to be convinced to take a job in the first place and to train for skilled – and more productive – labour. Post-war economic administrators and planners in the Soviet zone recognized early on the need for female labour and used a combination of carrots and sticks to draw women into paid jobs. Foremost among the positive incentives was Order No. 253 (August 1946) which legally ended wage discrimination based on gender (and age). Order No. 234 and other regulations decreed that factories should provide laundry, sewing, medical and childcare services. Some discriminatory 'protective' regulations were voided so that women could work in, for example, construction jobs. The goal was to train women to do the skilled jobs in high demand in the reconstruction economy. On the 'stick' side stood a decree which required all adults to work, except women with very young children. To give this directive teeth, the Soviet military administration, as we have seen, assigned very low rations to housewives. The provisional regime also cut off widows' and war pensions to women under sixty who were able to work.<sup>67</sup>

Between 1945 and 1949, neither sticks nor carrots increased the percentage of women in the labour market or perceptibly eroded gender segmentation. The absolute number of women who worked for wages increased right after the war, but declined from late 1947 through late 1949. In 1950, fewer women were employed than in 1939. The female employment *rate* (the percentage of women in wage-dependent labour) was continually lower than in 1939, even in 1947, and from late 1947 through 1949 it fell. The reputed shortage of labour in the Soviet zone was, in fact, a dearth of certain types of skilled labour. Unskilled, light-industrial women workers were vulnerable to the shortages in fuel and raw materials that hit consumer goods production harder, to the market downturn that occurred in 1948, and to the lopsided emphasis on basic industry in the economic plan introduced in September 1948. Demand for women workers slumped while it remained robust for skilled men, producing a higher male employment rate in 1950 than in 1939. The employment of women in 'male' industries rose only in specific industries in specific labour markets (such as iron foundries in Leipzig).<sup>68</sup>

The official desire to integrate women into the workforce was foiled not only by structural obstacles and investment decisions, but also by human resistance. As thousands of soldier-husbands returned home, many women voluntarily left employment, recognizing that in a semi-barter economy housewives could make major material contributions to the breadbasket. Most

<sup>66</sup> On Order No. 234, see Zank, *ibid.*, 122–3; Staritz, *op. cit.*, 132–4; Kopstein, *op. cit.*, 25–9; Hübner, *op. cit.*, 21–7; Suckut, *op. cit.*, 492–500; Bust-Bartels, *op. cit.*, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Zank, *op. cit.*, 112, 133–6. On the skill-structure of the female workforce in 1945, see Wolfgang

Mühlfriedel and Klaus Wiessner, *Die Geschichte der Industrie in der DDR* (Berlin (East), 1989), 133.

<sup>68</sup> Zank, *op. cit.*, 43, 84, 107, 137–9, 173; Dr Elisabeth Obst, 'Förderung der Frauenarbeit', *Arbeit und Sozialfürsorge*, Nr. 1 (1950), 4.

of the women who were looking for work had no husband and/or were refugees from Silesia, the Sudetenland or elsewhere, with few possessions to trade. Veterans vanquished these women on the job market because they possessed skills valued in the post-war economy and enjoyed the sympathy of employers *and* plant-level party and union functionaries. In metal-working plants that had again become 'woman-sparse', for example, and SED officials had to be convinced that the replacement of women with ex-soldiers was not the party line.<sup>69</sup>

Harder to gauge is the level of commitment of the SED elite to the integration of women into the workforce, much less its motivation. Several labour historians have argued that desire to promote women's equality was real but instrumentalist. The SED aimed to weaken shopfloor solidarity against new production norms by inserting women workers who had no experience with labour organization.<sup>70</sup> The divide-and-conquer thesis is plausible. The SED and Soviet military administration 'tested' the new piecework system in predominantly female textile firms where workers had little organizational experience. By late 1947, women workers laboured under 'incentive plans' at twice the rate of men.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the story of the DFD factory groups, as told below, cautions against an interpretation that, first, ranks opportunism above political doctrine or culture and, second, fails to account for the interaction of all three factors with gender and bureaucratic politics. Female functionaries and leaders did not always agree among themselves about how to advance women but, whether primarily active in the SED, trade union federation (FDGB) or DFD, acted quite consistently on a theory of equality that predicated woman's emancipation on her integration into the workforce. Party men, in contrast, were notably influenced by their place in the hierarchy of power *and* by the attenuated, yet unbroken, bonds of an inherited culture of (male) solidarity. Top SED leaders were, thus, torn between a determination, both idealistic and opportunistic, to promote women in the factory and their connections to a trade union leadership that resisted the incursions of, especially, 'outside' women into positions of competence. Not these, but other binds constrained the Soviet occupiers. Russian managers of Soviet-expropriated plants resisted raising women's wages. The Soviet military administration, meanwhile, sincerely advocated gender wage equality but was interested, above all, in introducing a labour regime that relied heavily on incentives and non-wage, factory-based benefits and that countenanced no independent role for traditional workers' organizations.

### STRUGGLE OVER THE ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN WORKERS

From 1947 on, not only the SED, but its front organizations (FDGB, DFD, Free German Youth, Association of Free Farmers, consumer co-operatives) tied their propaganda to the mission of increasing productivity. Each front competed for the approval of the party leadership by demonstrating its ability to 'produce' – that is, to attract a huge membership and get it into line. It was not easy to find a happy balance between transmission of the dour productivist message and

<sup>69</sup> SSTA Leipzig, I/3/24, Bl. 128, Bericht über die Frarbeit, 20.2.46. On the similar treatment of women after the First World War, see Susanne Rouette, *Sozialpolitik als Geschlechterpolitik. Die Regulierung der Frauenarbeit nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt/New York, 1993). On single women in the Soviet zone and GDR, see Elizabeth Heine-

man, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> This argument is made most forcefully by Stössel, *op. cit.*, 104, 188–90.

<sup>71</sup> Kopstein, *op. cit.*, 29.

(at least apparent) attention to the concerns of the intended constituency. Moreover, since the potential base of each mass organization intersected with the target group of at least one rival, the fronts had to vie with each other for the dues and participation of an impoverished, exhausted population. The women's league confronted an especially crowded field because its constituency overlapped with that of every other mass organization. The DFD's powerful competitor for the participation of women workers was the trade union federation with its four million members. Rather than sit back demurely, DFD/SED women challenged the FDGB on its own turf. Disgusted with the unions' neglect of women and determined to establish the DFD's credentials as the more effective purveyor of the party line, the women's organization took up the interests of women workers with considerable gusto.

The SED's rate of success among women factory workers was even lower than among women as a whole.<sup>72</sup> In mid-1947, the SED in Saxony-Anhalt, a highly industrialized province, had 92,542 female members (22.1 per cent) of whom 20 per cent were industrial workers and 20 per cent white-collar employees, while almost 47 per cent did not work for wages. In October 1948, 50 per cent of women in the entire SED were housewives. In many mills with large female workforces, the SED had few women members.<sup>73</sup> The SED's position became even more difficult when propagation of the two-year plan became the top priority of the party. 'Discussions show that [the plan] is not popular, even among [female] comrades . . . they gaze longingly at the Marshall Plan,' a woman organizer reported.<sup>74</sup>

The Soviet military administration and male party leaders could not understand why the order for 'equal pay for equal work' (Order No. 253) did not counteract such attitudes. SED women explained its lack of resonance. They noted, first, that the crisis of daily provisions overshadowed everything else for women as it did, too, for men. SED women pointed out, second, that Order No. 253 had not yet benefited a critical mass of women workers. From their posts in shopfloor committees, FDGB committees and SED factory committees, male workers resisted its implementation.<sup>75</sup> No doubt, they saw the imposition of 253 as a wedge against the inviolability of negotiated contracts.<sup>76</sup> Yet, by raising the wages of women and young workers by 25–30 per cent, Order No. 253 introduced greater equality of reimbursement, in contrast to the anti-egalitarian impetus of Order No. 234. Certainly, misogyny fed male resentment. Male resistance to 253 crossed every social and political boundary in many factories, uniting workers, foremen, managers, trade union functionaries and SED officials. Soviet-owned and -operated enterprises were some of the worst violators of the decree.<sup>77</sup> If SED leaders intended to undermine workers' unity with Order No. 253, they managed, instead, to forge a kind of male unanimity.

<sup>72</sup> Elli Schmidt, 'Auf die aktive Mitarbeit der Frauen kommt es an!', *Neues Deutschland* (subsequently *ND*) (28.8.47), 2.

<sup>73</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 86, SED Monatsberichte, SED Frauenmitglieder, May 1947; Lotte Kühn, 'Frauenarbeit – Aufgabe der Gesamtpartei', *ND* (23.12.48), 3; Naimark, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>74</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 321–6, Protokoll . . . 28.2.48 (Potsdam).

<sup>75</sup> Hans Thalmann, 'Lohnpolitische Perspektiven', *Die Arbeit* (1947/12), 342.

<sup>76</sup> Hübner points out this effect of '253' (*op. cit.*, 19).

<sup>77</sup> Frieda Krueger, 'Keine Lohn und Tarifkommissionen ohne Frauen!', *NW* (November 1946), 31. On the uneven efforts of the trade unions, see Luise Krueger, 'Zur Gleichberechtigung der Frauen in der Gewerkschaft', *Die Arbeit* (1949/1), 37. On the lacking implementation of 'Order 253' in textiles and clothing, see Hans Thalmann, 'Grundsätzliche zur Durchführung des Befehls der SMA Nr. 253', *Die Arbeit* (1947/7), 183.

SED women on the executive board of the DFD, such as Emmy Damerius, saw the DFD as the best antidote to the SED's class/gender gap. Unfortunately, the DFD was composed even more disproportionately than the SED of women who did not work and/or were not proletarian – in September 1947, about 15 per cent of DFD members worked in factories (were *Arbeiterinnen*), while 55 per cent were housewives and 30 per cent were white-collar workers, professionals or labourers/farmers.<sup>78</sup> The solution, DFD leaders reasoned, was to organize women at work, if only so they could attend meetings more easily. As an added bonus, factory organization would enhance the reputation of the DFD in the eyes of SED women. In August 1947, DFD leaders complained that only 20,000 of 95,000 female party members in Saxony-Anhalt had joined the women's league, suggesting that many SED women still saw the DFD as a social club for 'bourgeois women and former Nazis'.<sup>79</sup>

The FDGB vigorously opposed the very idea of 'DFD factory groups'. The DFD had, however, a powerful backer, the Soviet command, which in this case too saw women as both an end in themselves and a means to a greater end. In the spring of 1947 a protracted behind-the-scenes battle over the formation of such DFD factory groups began. Women representatives of the Soviet military administration broached the idea but retreated when Friedel Malter, head of the FDGB Women's Department, rebuffed them. To the fury of the FDGB, DFD functionaries proceeded to organize factory groups in scattered mills.<sup>80</sup> Under pressure from below, Kern and Elli Schmidt took up the cause and turned to the Russians for support. At a meeting with Malter and leaders of the SED Women's Section, Soviet spokeswomen pushed 'very strongly for the building of DFD groups at Buna and Leuna', huge chemical plants under Russian management that were hiring ever more women. As SED women looked on approvingly, the Russians informed Malter that FDGB antagonism bespoke its 'organizational egoism' and 'underestimation of the political significance of the German women's movement'.<sup>81</sup> A political logic of the moment linked the Soviet military administration's low estimation of trade union border-guarding to its high esteem for the women's movement, but it was one that served women organizers in the SED/DFD well.

As Malter knew, the FDGB had a poor record on women workers. In December 1946 women formed 29 per cent of its membership, a higher ratio than ever before in a German

<sup>78</sup> FDGB Buvo, A1676, Emmy Damerius (DFD Landesvorstand Dresden) an Friedel Malter, 6.6.47; SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 108–29, Referat M. Weiterer an der Bundausschusssitzung, am 3. und 4.10.47, Überblick über die Entwicklung des DFD in der SBZ, 1.9.47, p. 6. Weiterer only gave exact figures for Saxony-Anhalt but said the percentages were similar throughout the SBZ/East Berlin. The ratio was similar nine months later. See Gerda Weber, *op. cit.*, 427. About one-tenth of delegates to the DFD's regional and zonal founding conventions were workers. See SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 26–7, Bericht über die Sitzung des Frauensekretariats des Zentralsekretariats der SED und des Frauensekretariats des Landesvorstandes Potsdam, am 20.5.47.

<sup>79</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 113, August

1947 Bericht. DFD [Sachsen-Anhalt], #371. Quote from: IV 2/17/56, Bl. 238, Edith Höding, Bericht über die Kreisleitersitzung am 24.2.47, Kreis Wedding.

<sup>80</sup> Pawlowski, *op. cit.*, 102; SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1678, Rundschreiben Nr. 4/47, 3.5.47. FDGB Landesvorstand Thüringen an alle Kreisvorstände; IV 2/17/82, Bl. 46, Friedel Malter, FDGB, Hauptabteilung Frauenfragen an SED, Abteilung Frauen, E. Schmidt und K. Kern, 3.6.47; Pawlowski, *op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1676, An Kollegen Jendretsky von Hauptabteilung Frauen, 14.7.47; An Kollegen Jendretsky von Hauptabteilung Frauen, 18.7.47. Betr: Betriebsgruppen des DFD (Besprechung mit der SMA), 1–2.

union federation, but below women's 40 per cent representation in the 'wage-dependent' workforce. Active involvement in the FDGB was lower – women made up 17.6 per cent of the delegates to the FDGB's second congress in June 1947. Prodded by the anti-fascist women's committees, the FDGB had formed women's commissions but these often did not meet for months at a time or only weakly pressed for services to relieve workers' burdens.<sup>82</sup> FDGB women's commissions did, however, offer stiff competition to the new DFD groups in precisely those 'big concerns with substantial numbers of women such as Leuna' into which the Soviet military administration was so eager to insert DFD groups. Leuna's workers, one notes with interest, offered quite robust resistance to the introduction of piece-rates and harassed colleagues who met the raised production norms.<sup>83</sup>

Did DFD factory groups originate in the disgust of DFD/SED women over the failure of the FDGB to represent women workers? Or were they ordered by Soviet military administrators and SED leaders eager to undermine union and factory committees that represented workers' interests too well? In fact, Stalinist and feminist inclinations coincided on this issue. The still-predominantly Social Democratic union infrastructure blocked the progress of both the command economy and the advancement of women. The DFD proposed to play a genuinely dual role – it would induce higher productivity among women by enticing them with incentives that would benefit the overwhelming majority of women workers. The DFD's quarterly plan of work for the autumn of 1947 demonstrates the intimate link between its statist and egalitarian goals. In order to ease the implementation of Order No. 234 (with its steeply sloped wage and non-wage incentives), DFD chapters in textile concerns were instructed to expand 'contacts with *Arbeiterinnen*' and discuss 'with factory women the questions of improving and increasing production, boosting the work ethic, and struggling against truants (*Bummelanten*)'. Yet, its authors stressed, absenteeism and 'loafing' should be treated not as evidence of bad faith, but of poor conditions. The DFD must strive to get nurseries, kindergartens, school lunch programmes and laundries set up in every plant. 'Contacts' could also provide DFD activists with information about wages which they would pass on to factory committees to advance the enforcement of Order No. 253.<sup>84</sup>

The opposition of FDGB leaders and functionaries to DFD factory groups was also doubly motivated. First and foremost, they saw them as a threat to union prerogatives. 'Attacked' at a joint meeting with DFD and female SED activists for her opposition to DFD factory groups, a female FDGB functionary conceded that such groups could take on 'cultural tasks' but insisted: 'We will not . . . be convinced [to surrender] trade union issues *such as wage policies* [my

<sup>82</sup> Friedel Malter, 'Gewerkschaftswahlen und die Frauen', *NW* (January 1947), 13; *NW* (July 1947), 28; SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1618, n.d. (1946) (no number or title); FDGB, A1672, (Brandenburg) Bericht (Landesvorstand FDGB, Hauptabteilung Frauen), 13.9.47, Sitzung des Frauensekretariats der SED.

<sup>83</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 92, Funktionärinnensitzung im Landesfrauensekretariats (Sachsen-Anhalt) am 16.7.47. The DFD built factory groups there and in the giant Buna chemical works in early July 1947 (FDGB, A1676, Bericht der Hauptabteilung 9 – Frauen – des LVS FDGB

Sachsen-Anhalt, July 1947); Kurt Engelsmann, 'Der Kampf der SED um die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Aktivistebewegung im VEB Leuna-Werke "Walter Ulbricht", VEB Chemische Werke Buna und im VEB Elektrochemisches Kombinat Bitterfeld (Ende 1947 bis Ende 1949)' (D. Phil., Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften, Central Committee/SED, 1961), 151–2. Leuna workers were known for their militance in the Weimar republic (Weitz, *op. cit.*, 122–8).

<sup>84</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 89–95, DFD, Arbeitsplan für Oktober, November, Dezember, 15.10.47, 2.

emphasis]'.<sup>85</sup> In addition, *female* FDGB functionaries worried that women, able to afford only one organization, would choose the DFD and weaken women's presence in the FDGB.<sup>86</sup>

From June 1947 to late 1948, this dispute left a wide, but meandering, paper trail that can be followed in party and union documents. The tugging and pulling of the FDGB and DFD buffeted an indecisive party executive that appears to have been split on the issue. In autumn 1947 a directive from the Central Secretariat instructed FDGB officials not to 'obstruct DFD factory organizers' and informed DFD functionaries to 'co-operate' with the FDGB. Yet six months later a member of the Central Secretariat told the chairman of the Leipzig SED that the party's highest body opposed DFD factory groups.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, the FDGB took the Central Secretariat directive to mean that DFD functionaries could recruit women at work but not establish factory cells. The DFD permitted its activists to build groups but as late as April 1948 did not see them as official policy and was careful to describe its factory mission as 'democratic-cultural' co-operation with the FDGB to 'draw women into the control of production [in order] to bind them to the factory' and 'ensure that gifted women workers are sent to higher schools'. The DFD's conciliatory efforts did not foster the collaboration that all sides claimed to want. Not only the FDGB but other well-established, male-dominated mass organizations, such as the consumer co-operatives, complained that the women's league was treading on their territory. Hermann Lehmann, head of the FDGB's social policy department, relayed this information to Kern with the implication that the DFD, not its influential rivals, should retreat.<sup>88</sup>

The DFD, however, appeared to be the only organization ready to face the 'intense discontent' of women workers. In the Potsdam area, DFD meetings were better attended than party gatherings *and* the DFD reactivated '267 women's [factory] commissions' that the unions had allowed to languish. When SED women ran up against strong hostility to politics among *Arbeiterinnen*, they switched to their DFD hat to allay suspicion.<sup>89</sup> Other than gripe about DFD activity, the FDGB did little to support its own female functionaries. At a conference in Bernau, women unionists complained 'about neglect in the factories and poor co-operation with [male] colleagues'.<sup>90</sup>

FDGB neglect of women seemed only to get worse as the campaign to implement the 'plan'

<sup>85</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1676, An Kollegen Jendretsky von Hauptabteilung Frauen, 14.7.47; FDGB Buvo, A1678, Sitzung aller SED Kreisreferentinnen der Frauenausschüsse am 10.7.47 in Weimar (report written by Erna Walther of FDGB).

<sup>86</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1672 (Brandenburg) Bericht (Landesvorstand FDGB, Hauptabteilung Frauen), 13.9.47, Sitzung des Frauensekretariats der SED.

<sup>87</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/5, Bl. 62, SED Leipzig an PVS der SED, 13.3.48. Hermann Lehmann, a former Social Democrat high in the FDGB, told Kern that he opposed DFD factory groups (IV 2/17/82, Bl. 223, Betr: Rücksprache des Gen. Lehmann mit Kern und M. Weiterer am 16.2.48). Otto Grotewohl, a former Social Democrat high in the SED, supported them (IV 2/17/82, Krüger an Sekretariat, 18.12.48, 4).

<sup>88</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 228–31, 155–7, Richtlinien für die Betriebsarbeit des DFD, 1.4.48; Bl. 223, Betr: Rücksprache des Gen. Lehmann mit Kern und M. Weiterer am 16.2.48. For evidence that DFD factory groups existed, see IV 2/17/51, Bl. 321–6, Protokoll Frauenabteilungssitzung am 28.2.48 (Potsdam); IV 2/17/82, Bl. 150, Auszug aus dem Protokoll Nr. 10 der Sitzung des Zentralsekretariats vom 20.10.47, Behandelt: Bildung von Betriebsgruppen des DFD; FGDB Buvo, A4004, Beschluss-Protokoll Bundesvorstand Sitzung am 25.8.47.

<sup>89</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 321–6, Protokoll Frauenabteilungssitzung 28.2.48 (Potsdam); Bl. 379, Schröter, Brandenburg: VEB Klara Zetkin.

<sup>90</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1468, Malter an Jendretsky, 8.6.48. Aktennotiz über Frauenarbeitstagung des Kreis Neiderbarnim im Bernau, 27.5.48.

reached a high point in mid-1948. Seeing its opening, the DFD turned to factory organization with renewed fervour and confidence. As of May 1948, it had registered 156 factory groups; five months later, they counted 539. In July, Käte Selbmann, an SED member of the DFD's executive board, declared publicly that the DFD would concentrate 'much more' on factory work: one-to-one conferences, group discussions and 'tastefully staged' meetings would promote the 'consistent implementation of Orders No. 253, 39, and 28' (the latter two decrees introduced benefits). In plants such as the heavily feminized Olympia Works, the DFD groups 'carried out stronger work in, for example, the improvement of social benefits [causing] an erosion of respect for the factory groups of the SED and union'. FDGB lower functionaries denounced the DFD for encroaching on 'purely trade union tasks'. 'Severe tensions' arose between DFD and FDGB women, even in plants where they had co-operated earlier. The FDGB charged that, in defiance of the party leadership, SED female factory activists were egging on the DFD and encouraging a belligerent attitude towards FDGB women functionaries.<sup>91</sup>

The change of attitude among party women is striking. Whereas in 1946-7, most Communist women rejected women's separatism, by 1948 segregation became the vogue, leaving FDGB women to defend the integrationist line. Contemptuous of male anxiety that 'women are building a party within a party', SED women organized women's conferences and courses at which women functionaries traded horror stories about male backwardness, were trained as organizers and learned Communist theory. Women could attend co-educational courses but, organizers reported, frequented special courses in greater numbers and spoke at them more freely. Notably, the women-only courses covered not just the history of the labour movement, but the history of the German and international women's movement, proletarian *and* bourgeois.<sup>92</sup> When women did extol the integrationist goal, they blamed men for the failure to attain it.<sup>93</sup>

Whether the promotion of DFD factory groups and other separatist experiments 'defied' the party leadership, as the FDGB claimed, is less clear. Though it never endorsed DFD activity, the Central Secretariat tolerated it. This silence encouraged competition between women and unionists to the benefit of the party leadership. Each side couched its appeals to the Central Secretariat in the rhetoric of productivism, not that of women's interests. FDGB spokeswomen claimed that segregated factory meetings for women 'take away from time at work and fulfilment of the plan'. In defence of separate gatherings, Käthe Kern contended, 'We never see so many women . . . as at the special women's assemblies', hinting that only through this tactic would women hear the party's message. The Central Secretariat struck a compromise, allowing 'women's meetings about the economic plan in big concerns such as Leuna and Buna'.<sup>94</sup> The

<sup>91</sup> On the numbers of DFD groups, see Gerda Weber, *op. cit.*, 427. SAPMO-BA, FDGB BUVO, A1468, Vorstand des FDGB an PVS SED, 8.7.48. Betriebsarbeit des DFD - Zusammenarbeit mit dem FDGB; IV 2/17/51, Bl. 69-73, DFD Kreisvorstand Neiderbarnim, 23.7.48, An Rat des Kreis Niederbarnim, p.2. The quote is from SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/7, Bl. 75, Gewinnung der Frauen für die Partei.

<sup>92</sup> Quote is from L. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 27. On women's conferences, see Elli Schmidt, 'Auf die

aktive Mitarbeit der Frauen kommt es an!', *ND* (28.8.47), 2. On women's courses, see Edith Höding, Sonderlehrgänge für Funktionärinnen', *NW* (January 1948), 30; 'Erfahrungen aus Frauen-sonderlehrgänge', *NW* (August 1948), 29-30; Stössel, *op. cit.*, 333; Gast, *op. cit.*, 67.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Maria Weiterer, 'Es geht um die Massen der Frauen', *NW* (May/June 1948), 41.

<sup>94</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1468, Krueger an Jendretzky, 19.7.48.

FDGB lost this skirmish – the big factories were, after all, what mattered. In principle, however, its authority over women workers was not questioned. Simultaneously, the party reasserted its hegemony over both rivals. A representative of party headquarters warned FDGB and DFD factory organizers, ‘the factory group of the SED is the political centre of the factory . . . no question can be decided before discussing it with the SED leaders in the factory’. After quoting Lenin, she reminded women organizers, ‘The party is the head, the mass organizations are the limbs, and the labouring masses are the trunk.’<sup>95</sup>

Local party activists worried incessantly about the state of the female ‘trunk’. ‘We have no toehold in [women’s] factories,’ they lamented, and ‘just turn in circles’, receiving no credit for the modest social services that many mills now offered. They were even more alarmed that the two-year plan and Soviet occupation policies were ‘shaking the class consciousness of many [female] comrades’. Again, the solution seemed to be separatism: women functionaries organized a woman’s edition of the latest gimmick to stimulate workers’ productivity and staunch demoralization inside the SED – the ‘activist movement’. ‘Women’s actives’ first appeared in late 1947, led by ‘the most active women SEDers’ and joined by women who, though often apolitical, were ready to work for higher production norms to increase their own earnings and their factory’s productivity. Like the DFD groups, the *Frauenaktives* took their double role seriously. They endeavoured, above all and with some success, to convince workers to accept the new ‘achievement wage’. The women’s groups, though, also pressured management for kindergartens, ‘improvement of wages’ and a paid monthly ‘housework day’ for women (a concession which the SED soon came heartily to regret).<sup>96</sup> Finally, they tried to counter anti-Sovietism, reminding workers that they should be thankful to ‘the socialist occupation forces [that] have helped us come this far’.<sup>97</sup> Like the FDGB women’s commissions and DFD factory groups, the *Frauenaktives* appeared first in the big factories such as Leuna that were central to fulfilment of the plan and in which ‘pessimism in the ranks of the party’ demanded immediate attention.<sup>98</sup>

The effort to politicize women workers, while increasing their productivity, required from SED women extraordinary dedication, considerable imagination, risky confrontations with male ‘allies’, and real, if limited, representation of women’s interests. Having taken the separatist track, female party activists judged its pay-offs as small and uneven, but tangible, and seemed

<sup>95</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 377–89, Protokoll: Arbeitstagung des Frauensekretariats mit dem Kreisfrauensekretariat und den Genosinnen aus den Betrieben am 25.8.48, Referat Bauer: Unsere Aufgaben zum Zweijahrplan, 2.

<sup>96</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 432–43, Frauensekretariat Potsdam, 20.11.48, Bericht über Funktionärinnenkonferenz; Bl. 377–89, Protokoll: Arbeitstagung des Frauensekretariats mit dem Kreisfrauensekretariat und Genosinnen aus den Betrieben am 25.8.48; IV 2/17/52, Bl. 266–71, Frauenaktivleiterinnen in Magdeburg am 5.8.48; Bl. 234, Bericht Mai 1948: Arbeit in Betrieben; IV 2/17/51, Bl. 432–43, Frauensekretariat, Potsdam, 20.11.48, Bericht über die Funktionärinnenkonferenz, 3; Käthe Dietz, ‘Frauenaktives: Unsere Frauenarbeit in Sachsen-Anhalt erstärkt’, *NW* (March 1948), 29.

<sup>97</sup> Quote from: SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 266–71, Frauenaktivleiterinnen in Magdeburg am 5.8.48. Also see IV 2/17/51, Bl. 379, Schröter, Brandenburg: VEB Klara Zetkin; IV 2/17/52, Bl. 279, Konferenz der Frauenaktivisten der SED am 11.8.48, Halle; IV 2/17/52, Bl. 330–5, 6.9.48, Bericht über eine Sitzung mit den Frauenaktives im Leuna Werk in Schkopau.

<sup>98</sup> Quote from: SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/52, Bl. 279, Konferenz der Frauenaktivisten der SED am 11.8.48, Halle. Also see IV 2/17/52, Bl. 330–5, 6.9.48, Bericht über eine Sitzung mit den Frauenaktives im Leuna Werk in Schkopau. The *Frauenaktiv* movement was most developed in Saxony-Anhalt, especially Halle – there were 181 women’s actives in Saxony-Anhalt by late 1947 and 38 in Halle factories by October 1948. See Käthe Dietz, ‘Frauenaktives’, *op. cit.*, 29; Stössel, *op. cit.*, 333.

ever more convinced that it offered the only tactic that could circumvent male opposition to women's equality and female reluctance to get involved.

### THE END OF SEPARATISM AND THE TAMING OF THE DFD

An atmospheric change in autumn 1948 ended the balmy days of separatism. The chill blew in with a theoretical attack from Lotte Kühn (married to Walter Ulbricht), followed by concrete knocks from the SED and the FDGB. Initially, the *Frauenaktives* and FDGB women's commissions suffered the consequences, while DFD factory groups continued to multiply, reaching a peak number of 1470 in May 1949.<sup>99</sup> In that month they, too, received the order to dismantle. A variety of factors ushered in the icy wind. A witchhunt against Social Democratic and bourgeois 'deviations' accompanied the metamorphosis of the SED into an avowedly Leninist party. Initially protected from above, women's exclusive organization was now attacked as a tainted remnant of Social Democratism. In addition, the time-consuming and unorthodox efforts required to overcome women's antagonism to politics SED-style provoked ever more distaste, an aversion bolstered by a rediscovered belief in the superiority of quality over quantity of recruits (this theory too was disinterred as part of the campaign to purge the SED of Social Democrats). The real, if circumscribed, emancipatory language and activities of the post-war era were buried under Cold War rhetoric, high-minded Leninist anti-feminism, and the blatant misogyny of many functionaries in the SED and every front-organization except the DFD.

Writing in *Neues Deutschland*, Kühn attacked the *Frauenaktives*, arguing that women should join the 'activist movement' directly, rather than a 'Sonderorganisation'.<sup>100</sup> Käte Selbmann quickly registered her distaste for *Aktives* for women. What mattered, she wrote, was 'not how many women workers [were recruited], but if they meet the plan' and whether the party led the effort. 'Presumably, some [female] comrades will have to correct their understanding of "special women's work"', she lectured.<sup>101</sup> Six months earlier, of course, Selbmann had enthusiastically endorsed extension of the DFD factory groups. This change of heart included barbed reminders that the DFD was a 'pre-school' for women, neither as central as the FDGB nor even more important than any other mass organization to women's work, and absolutely subordinate to the SED. Kühn openly rebuked Elli Schmidt for her alleged exaltation of the DFD as *the* organization for women and referred, ominously, to Lenin's disdain for the 'feminist tendency towards self-organization'.<sup>102</sup> When such reproaches surfaced next to articles with menacing titles like 'On the Party of a New Type: Exterminating Opportunism from the Ranks of the Party', women in the SED must have observed the barometric change with some anxiety. Not surprisingly, they adapted their rhetoric to the new line. For the moment, though, they also stood their ground. In *Neues Deutschland*, a woman distanced herself from 'Sonderorganisationen' but excepted the *Frauenaktives* from that category – they were often formed from

<sup>99</sup> Gerda Weber, *op. cit.*, 427.

<sup>100</sup> Lotte Kühn, 'Kennen die Hallenser die Beschlüsse des Parteivorstandes?', *ND* (4.11.48), 3.

<sup>101</sup> Käte Selbmann, 'Nochmals: die Frauen und der Zweijahrplan', *NW* (December 1948), 29. Also

see Ella Sworowski, 'Die Aufgaben der Frauenleiterinnen', *ND* (16.12.48), 4.

<sup>102</sup> L. Kühn, 'Frauenarbeit – Aufgabe der Gesamtpartei', *ND* (23.12.48), 3; L. Kühn, 'Die Frauen in den Massenorganisationen', *ND* (23.12.48), 3.

below, fought for important *women's* issues, and did not isolate women from the party. Ignoring this spirited defence, the party executive eliminated them.<sup>103</sup>

Immediately afterwards, at its second congress, the FDGB announced the abolition of its women's factory commissions and entire women's department, accompanying this move with the pious claim that the venture had fulfilled its purpose and, if continued, would hinder the integration of women into the union hierarchy. The decision, however, surprised leading women unionists. It was part of the so-called 'Bitterfeld resolutions' of December 1948 that put the official stamp on the Stalinization of the unions, turning them into transmission belts of the party line. The congress also eradicated the anti-fascist factory committees. Thus, the Bitterfeld resolutions sealed the concentration of shopfloor decision-making inside the 'factory trade union leadership' and advanced the centralization of union power. The dismantling of the women's department also represented something more. Unlike the factory committees, the women's department had not challenged union authority. The explicit silencing of this distinctly female voice in the FDGB was, I suspect, a sop to male union functionaries who could not be expected to swallow the loss of their traditional functions *and* tolerate this recent irritant.<sup>104</sup> The elimination of the FDGB women's division was directly tied to the animosity of union officials towards DFD factory groups. In her zeal to box in the DFD, Friedel Malter had paved the way for abolition of her own post. In August 1948 she had decided 'not to eliminate the women's commissions but to parcel out more of their work to the factory union committees in order to improve women's work and to prevent the DFD from carrying out purely union responsibilities (my emphasis)'.<sup>105</sup> FDGB functionaries took this change as a sign to step up harassment of DFD factory organizers.<sup>106</sup> In November, the FDGB executive board criticized the SED Women's Section as 'one-sided' because it promoted the DFD to the detriment of other mass organizations. Pieck and Grotewohl promised that the SED would review the activity of the DFD groups and require a clear definition of their tasks.<sup>107</sup> The *quid pro quo* for allowing the DFD groups to carry on, if within tighter boundaries, may have been the abolition of the FDGB women's division.

Rather than retreat, the SED Women's Section immediately reaffirmed its support for the DFD groups and underscored its disgust with the FDGB. It convened an (all-female) meeting that confronted trade union officials with angry representatives from every front organization and the social welfare administration. Nearly all of them, a union representative reported to FDGB headquarters, spoke in favour of DFD factory groups and criticized the elimination of the FDGB women's commission as a 'cowardly' admission of its failure to address women's interests. Female unionists, several participants charged, preferred the 'easier tasks of general trade union work' to the hard work of organizing passive women and confronting unfriendly men. Now, the DFD must become more active and 'not allow itself to be pushed onto the

<sup>103</sup> Maria Schaare, 'Um die Frauenaktivs', *ND* (16.12.48), 3; Stössel, *op. cit.*, 333.

<sup>104</sup> Hübner discusses the 'crisis of identity' that the FDGB functionary corps underwent in mid to late 1948 (*op. cit.*, 35–8).

<sup>105</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A1468, Malter, Übersicht über die gewerkschaftliche Frauenarbeit, 14.8.48, 11–15.

<sup>106</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/51, Bl. 432–43. Frauen-

sekretariat, Potsdam, 20.11.48.

<sup>107</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, A0148, Vorlage für das Zentralsekretariat. Massnahmen zur Verbesserung der Arbeit der Frauenabteilungen der SED (n.d. [29.11.1948]); Göring an Warnke, Krueger, 3.12.48. In January, a party ruling explicitly subordinated the DFD groups to the FDGB. See Pawlowski, *op. cit.*, 104.

defensive in factories'. The top leadership of the FDGB might bring in a few women but, discussants predicted, women would disappear from the factory-level union leadership. The meeting condemned the union functionary corps on two other counts. Most egregious, union and shopfloor committees continued their 'zealous sabotage' of the decree for equal wages for equal work. Almost as bad was the FDGB's 'ambiguous attitude' towards the USSR which, one woman claimed, explained why 'women in particular reject anything that is associated with the Soviet Union'.<sup>108</sup> At this meeting, DFD/SED organizers explicitly juxtaposed the autonomous authority of (male-dominated) unions to the extension of Soviet influence *and* the representation of women's interests. SED women may have felt that *only* the Russians could be relied on in this struggle since many of their German comrades openly approved of the FDGB's closing of its women's department. If SED women again turned to the Soviet military administration for protection, however, I have found no documentary record of such a move.

As the campaign against Social Democratic deviations reached a crescendo and the revival of Leninism became official, the pressure mounted for women to purge themselves of every whiff of separatism. In their eagerness to do so, they too adopted class rhetoric in high style. Kern intoned that 'only a class organization can win women for the class struggle'. She at least had the courage to disagree publicly with Kühn's rebuff of the DFD and to counter whispered attacks on the Women's Section.<sup>109</sup> Having been carpeted, Schmidt, in contrast, became a vociferous attacker of proto-feminism. In her speech at the party conference in January 1949 that institutionalized the Stalinization of the SED, she claimed that to become a 'party of a new type . . . a whole series of bad habits in women's work must be ruthlessly overcome. The SPD had special women's groups that stood next to the party. Such separation can and dare not exist in a Marxist-Leninist party.'<sup>110</sup>

From this point on, the assaults on women's special organization and promotion came fast and furious. The conference demoted the (unfulfilled) guarantee of roughly 15 per cent representation of women on all 'leading bodies' to a guideline for what 'ought' to be (*Sollbestimmung*). The Third Party Congress (1950) simply eliminated any hint of 'affirmative action'. Over the next months, the party leadership abolished local women's sections and all 'women's special courses' and demoted the Women's Section of the Central Secretariat (transformed into the Politburo) to the Women's Department of the Central Committee (the former PVS). Since women's work was no longer of high priority, it comes as no surprise that the Politburo did not include Kern and Schmidt and, thus, no woman. The less prominent, more pliable, Käte Selbmann stepped in to direct the more subordinate Women's Department. To the central committee of the *Soviet* party, the head of the Soviet propaganda department in East Germany opined that all this came 'too early' and would weaken the SED's work among women, but neither he nor his superiors intervened to slow things down.<sup>111</sup>

In May the DFD was ordered to dissolve its factory groups, and to merge them with its local

<sup>108</sup> SAPMO-BA, FDGB Buvo, Krueger an Sekretariat, 18.12.48, Aktennotiz über die am 15. u. 16.12.48 Konferenz des Frauensekretariats des Zentral Sekretariats der SED.

<sup>109</sup> Käthe Kern, 'Zur Frauenarbeit unserer Partei', *ND* (13.1.49), 4.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Gast, *op. cit.*, 65.

<sup>111</sup> Bernd Bonwetsch, Gennadij Bordjugov, Norman M. Naimark (eds), *Sowjetische Politik in der SBZ, 1945-49. Dokumente zur Tätigkeit der Propaganda-Verwaltung (Informations-Verwaltung) der SMAD unter Sergej Tjul'panov* (Bonn, 1998), Nr. 48 Memorandum S. Tjul'panovs für das ZK der KPdSU (B), 26.7.49, 208-9.

chapters by October 1949. Having led the DFD during its period of separatist excess, Maria Rentmeister had to step down as its general secretary. Its non-partisan chairwoman, Durand-Wever, had resigned in April 1948 'for health reasons'. Elli Schmidt became its chairwoman, her public attack on separatism evidently convincing enough to allow her to lead apolitical women. Assertion of control at the top was one thing, implementation of the new line quite another: the order to abolish factory groups was blatantly ignored in some mills and only fully executed in mid-1950. Once carried out, though, the abolition effectively ended DFD contacts with *Arbeiterinnen* in many areas. As SED activists admitted among themselves, the decision accelerated the SED-ization of the DFD.<sup>112</sup>

The offensive against separatism was accompanied by tributes to integration and resolutions to 'make women's work the concern of the entire party'. The Women's Department reported that by August 1949 the SED had not implemented its vague promises and the FDGB had done 'virtually nothing' with women since the abolition of its women's division. Only the DFD did any 'mass work' with women and with little guidance from the SED.<sup>113</sup> In plants such as the Zeiss optics factory, female party activists dutifully formed 'party actives', not *Frauenaktives*, and continued the never-ending struggle to convince women workers to overcome their hatred of the Soviets and to increase production norms. As earlier, their productivist efforts received little aid from '[male] comrades in the factory, local, or regional party leadership', while their backing of women's demands for improved working conditions only raised hackles. The top leadership, to be sure, did not completely abandon the attempt to advance women inside the SED. In 1949, central bodies pressured local executives to co-opt women.<sup>114</sup> The short-term effects of such coercion were annulled in the party by-elections of 1950. Male functionaries demonstratively voted out women (and youths) to expose the error of having promoted such neophytes in the first place.<sup>115</sup>

The overall percentage of women in the SED fell, hitting a low of 19–20 per cent in 1950. This decline came in the wake of the expulsion of inactive members, the drive for 'quality over

<sup>112</sup> Pawlowski, *op. cit.*, 84; Gerda Weber, *op. cit.*, 427; Stössel, *op. cit.*, 332–3; SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/82, Bl. 366; IV 2/17/8, Bl. 2–10, SSTA Leipzig, SED Mecklenburg, Frauenabteilung, Bericht über die Vorbesprechung mit den Genossinnen zur DFD Arbeitstagung am. 8.6.49, 9.6.49.

<sup>113</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/8, Bl. 84–98, Bericht der Frauenabteilung über die Arbeit seit des 2. Parteitags, 18.8.49, pp. 9–10; IV 2/5/261, Bl. 16, Die Ergebnisse der Wahlen zu den Parteileitungen (n.d. but pencilled in at top: ?1949/1950). Also see LA Merseburg, IV/L-2/602/70, Arbeit der Gewerkschaften unter den Frauen, 27.7.49, according to which 'many comrades in the trade unions' thought that the elimination of the FDGB's women commission meant that 'work among women would cease'.

<sup>114</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/8, Bl. 284–7, Auswertung des Berichtes aller Genossinnen des Parteiaktives 'Klara Zetkin' im VEB Zeiss, Jena (n.d.); Bl. 293,

SED LVS Thüringen, Fraunsekretariat, an Selbmann, Frauenabteilung, Parteiwahlen 1949. The Politburo instructed the Women's Section to place a woman on every party committee: IV 2/1/62, Bl. 12, Anlage Nr. 5 zum Protokoll Nr. 148 vom 9. u. 10. März 1949, Reorganisation der Massenarbeit unter den Frauen (Beschluss des Politburos vom 8.3.49).

<sup>115</sup> Stössel, *op. cit.*, 522. See, for example, IV 2/17/7, Bl. 10–13: Abschrift des Briefes einer Genossin und Gewerkschaftsfunktionärin aus Bernau von 11.5.49; Bl. 14, M. Fürmann an K. Selbmann, 14.6.49; Bl. 17–20, 'Es ist nicht richtig, Genossen! . . . (n.d., n.a.); Bl. 21, Maria Neumann, Wernigerote/Harz an der Redaktion *Neues Deutschland*, 17.8.49 (the author asked that ND not publish her letter but pass it on to Selbmann); Bl. 22, Selbmann an Neumann, 5.9.49; IV 2/17/51, Bl. 518, 28.9.49, Lisa Ullrich, Bericht über die Fahrt nach Neuruppin.

quantity' and the purge of Social Democrats.<sup>116</sup> Behind closed doors, Käthe Kern complained that in Saxony, where former Social Democrats composed a particularly large proportion of the SED, the ratio of women in the SED had fallen because 'former Social Democratic comrades have been excluded', allegedly due to passivity, but actually because of politics.<sup>117</sup> Kern's discomfort over the effects of the Leninist turn explains her exclusion from any significant position in the party apparatus and increasing isolation on the executive board of the DFD.<sup>118</sup> She remained on the Central Committee but, like most women on it, played no important role. She moved into the government bureaucracy as Director of the Mother and Child Division, a department within the Ministry of Health, and oversaw the implementation of the new regime's maternalist programme for pregnant women, new mothers and infants. Kern's superficially lateral shift to an apolitical and 'feminine' public function symbolized the coincident marginalization of former Social Democrats and political women who, though often at odds with each other, represented important autonomous tendencies in the post-war Communist movement.

Elli Schmidt remained formally prominent as head of the DFD and even advanced to candidate status on the Politburo in 1950, but her influence was more apparent than real, even before her political downfall after the workers' uprising of June 1953. True, under her stewardship, the DFD ballooned into a mass organization of one million members, but its giant size belied its small political stature as the party's transmission belt to housewives. In contrast to the FDGB, it enjoyed no institutional base of power within the state that was decreed in October 1949. The FDGB lost its function and autonomy as a trade union but gained control of the ever more significant administration of factory-based social policy, including accident, sickness and vacation provisions. The DFD, meanwhile, performed the old standby routine, 'women's work for peace'. As the GDR's permanent shortage of labour set in, the DFD took on the additional role of propagating the line that all women should enter production. Yet it had no say over what happened to them once they did. In the provisional politics of the Soviet zone, a dynamic, flexible, and outspoken DFD, led by Communist women with considerable political know-how, tried to position itself as a force within the emerging SED organizational pantheon and as a centre for the defence of women's interests on the job and off. In the dictatorial politics of the new German Democratic Republic, the DFD would devolve, instead, into a bloated, brackish backwater to the torrent of economic and social change that was about to descend on East Germans.

*Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh*

<sup>116</sup> Gast, *op. cit.*, 21. The percentage is inexact because the statistics were imprecise (*ibid.*, 42–7). Also see Christel Dowidat, 'Zur Veränderung der Mitgliederstrukturen von Parteien u. Massenorganisationen in der SBZ/DDR (1945–1952)' in Hermann Weber, *Parteiensystem, op. cit.* The SED introduced the category of 'candidate' at the conference in 1949.

<sup>117</sup> SAPMO-BA, IV 2/17/8, Bl. 330–3, Zur Entwicklung des Frauenanteils im Landesverband Sachsen der SED. An organizer in Dresden and

Zittau confirmed Kern's suspicion (IV 2/17/8, Bl. 334, Gen. W. Ulbricht, Betr: Diskussionsrede der Gen. K. Kern, 30.7.49).

<sup>118</sup> Kern told Franz Dahlem of her 'inner bitterness' over not having been elected to sit on the presidium of the DFD celebration of Stalin's birthday. Dahlem chided Schmidt for 'let[ting] Käthe stand off to the side' (IV 2/17/82, Bl. 365, 18.12.49, Betr: Behandlung der Genossin Käthe Kern, Franz Dahlem an E. Schmidt).