Strikes in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1968: Systems Analysis and the Debate over the Causes of the Collapse of State Socialism

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The following essay examines the historical and sociopolitical conflicts that triggered worker strikes and/or created the preconditions for such strikes in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1968. Even before the communist takeover in February 1948, the rules governing labor disputes—including the legal foundations for such disputes—had eroded so much that from this perspective, the Prague coup cannot be considered a turning point in Czechoslovakian history. In fact, the causes of labor unrest before and after February 1948 are entirely indistinguishable.

The first communist constitution in Czechoslovakia, adopted in May 1948, did not explicitly forbid strikes; even the constitution of 1960, which officially proclaimed the transition to communism, included no such prohibition. In fact, the legality of strikes had been revoked as a result of industrial conflicts before 1948, because the authorities had to make up for downtime due to labor disputes whose aims did not lie within the boundaries of the state's wage and general social policy.[1] After the communist takeover, party jargon equated strikes with "terrorist actions" and "bloody deeds" while evoking the semantics of the "class enemy" and "imperialist agents."[2] Until 1953, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*, or KSČ) was quick to take repressive actions against labor disputes, intervening with overwhelming force when strikes garnered public support and generated widespread unrest. In such cases, the party relied on the police and armed militias. When a demonstration in

[1] Všeodborový archiv (hereafter VOA), Prague, ÚRO-Org., box 28, no. 125. Compilation of strikes in the area of individual district union councils for the period October 1–December 31, 1947.

[2] Národní archiv (hereafter NA), Prague, 100/24, vol. 59, no. 927, 1948. Overview of strikes, acts of terrorism and murder, subversive activities and [illegible]

Plzeň spread beyond the industrial sector in early June 1953, the party even called up units from the border guard and army.[3]

Nevertheless, many questions concerning strikes remain unanswered, especially with reference to sanctions against striking workers. For example, it is still unclear how many striking workers were sent to forced labor camps, where roughly 10,000 workers had been imprisoned between 1948 and 1954.[4] It is estimated that workers accounted for 25–30 percent of the approximately 30,000 individuals prosecuted in the state courts in Prague and Brno for political crimes between 1948 and 1952. However, the number prosecuted for strike participation cannot be definitively determined,[5] although the disturbances and strikes in Brno in November 1951, as well as the strikes that followed the radical currency reform of early June 1953, have been thoroughly scrutinized.[6] Judicial terrorism against strike participants was not uncommon during this period. For example, a machine worker who helped to organize the 1953 Plzeň strike was sentenced that summer by a local court to fourteen years in prison.[7] In the years following the 1953 currency reform, however, such extreme measures were clearly in decline. This transformation is also evidenced by the calmer tone adopted in internal party reports on strikes after 1954.[8]

For this essay on strikes, the term "state socialism" will also be utilized when speaking of the democratically constituted Third Republic (1945–1948).[9] Three work stoppages in 1946, 1948, and 1949 had implications for several labor issues that persisted until 1968, in particular the relationship between the factory councils and the trade unions, and how workers tried to influence this relationship. These three examples also highlight shared characteristics of industrial conflicts between state-socialist and Western societ-

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3 Kevin McDermott, "Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953," *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 4 (2010): 287–307.

4 No references are made in the literature. See Mečislav Borák und Dušan Janák, *Tábory nucené práce v ČSR 1948–1954* [Forced labor camps in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1954] (Šenov: Tilia, 1996).

5 This estimate is based on a survey of the registries of both state courts.

6 On the November 1951 disturbances, see Jiří Pernes, *Brno 1951: Příspěvek k dějinám protikomunistického odporu na Moravě* [Brno 1951: A contribution to the history of anti-Communist resistance in Moravia] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1997). On the 1953 strikes, see McDermott, "Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia."

7 Archiv ministerstva vnitra (hereafter AMV), Prague. Měnová reforma, H-193. Reports of the district administration of the State Security Service in Plzeň to the head office of the State Security Service in Prague concerning the trials against demonstrators from July 13–17, 20–21, and 22, 1953.

8 NA, 19/13, vol. 3, no. 17, 1954. Report on three construction workers' strikes in Prague,

ies, which this essay in turn will address against the backdrop of the debate over the causes of state socialism's demise.

Socialist Competition and the Postwar Industrial Offensive

The first example of industrial conflict, a strike at the Plzeň Škoda Works in September 1946,[10] is linked to the postwar economic reconstruction of Czechoslovakia. During this rebuilding process, the KSČ—although not yet in power—succeeded in introducing elements of industrial "socialist organization." This primarily entailed the immediate politicization of the production process with the aim of improving work performance. Its introduction sparked mass resistance, and in the wake of the 1948 coup this resistance turned into a nationwide boycott. Workers' protests predominantly derived from the fact that the introduction of higher production targets frequently meant an increase in hard physical labor.[11] The political dramatization of the "Labor Front," which peaked with the onset of the Cold War in the early 1950s, has been represented in great detail elsewhere, such as in studies on socialist competition, the shock labor movement, the coalfield and harvesting brigades, and the Subbotniks.[12] Consequently, a few summary remarks will suffice here.

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[10] NA, MPSP, A II, A III/dův. 1946–1950 (transcript).

[11] In 1961, 47 percent of all Czechoslovak industries still relied on manual labor; in the mining industry, the percentage was 55 percent, and in machine shops it was 65 percent. See Peter Heumos, "Grenzen des sozialistischen Produktivismus: Arbeitsinitiativen und Arbeitsverhalten in tschechoslowakischen Industriebetrieben in den fünfziger Jahren" [Limits of socialist productivism: Work initiatives and labor behavior in Czechoslovak industrial enterprises in the 1950s], in *Arbeit im Sozialismus—Arbeit im Postsozialismus: Erkundungen zum Arbeitsleben im östlichen Europa* [Work in Socialism—Work in Post-Socialism: Exploring the working life of Eastern Europe], ed. Klaus Roth (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 211.

[12] See Peter Heumos, "Wenn sie sieben Turbinen schaffen, kommt die Musik: Sozialistische Arbeitsinitiativen und egalitaristische Defensive in tschechoslowakischen Industriebetrieben und Bergwerken 1945–1965" [When you create seven turbines, the music comes: Socialist work initiatives and egalitarian defense in Czechoslovak industrial plants and mines, 1945–1965], in *Sozialgeschichtliche Kommunismusforschung: Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn und DDR 1948–1968; Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 22. bis 24. November 2002* [Social-historical communism research: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the GDR, 1948–1968; Lectures at the meeting of the Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee

The strike at the Plzeň Škoda Works highlights just how controversial the politicization of industrial work was. Unlike in Plzeň, the labor front at the national level did not divide along party lines between communist and non-communist workers. For example, in forty-three precision engineering factories, accounting for almost 70,000 employees, only half of the workers organized into communist labor cells in late 1949 participated in socialist competitions.[13] As such, rather than adherence or non-adherence to the party position, what is key for understanding worker resistance to state-organized production quotas is the KSČ's adherence to the slogan, "Socialism means much work," which since the Russian Revolution had become the prevailing representation of the socialist agenda. As early as 1946, factory workers had abandoned the optimistic assumption that piecework would be abolished in the new postwar era.[14] This was also true for miners, who wryly noted in 1946 that the "old broom" had not gone away, but had merely changed hands; the trade union bosses had become the "new bourgeoisie."[15] As one factory director explained in January 1948, workers still perceived supervisors, industrial organizations, and government institutions as "exploiters."[16] In 1949, when the textile industry began requiring workers to operate multiple machines, workers balked at the demand, exclaiming that they had already fought against "profiteering" during the "era of private capitalism."[17]

With the transition to economic planning measured in physical units (accounting for roughly 80 percent of industrial production until 1952), there was increased criticism of socialist work initiatives because they prioritized gross production at the expense of quality. Work competition statutes maintained the demand for shorter production times.[18] The Škoda Works factory council objected to the use of shock workers in 1950 on the grounds that their work was "substandard"; they preferred those who did their jobs more slowly but delivered higher quality work.[19] A year later, this objection

13 NA, 014/11, vol. 6, no. 5, 1950/2. Socialist competition in precision engineering.

14 VOA, ÚRO-Soc., box 7, no. 7/6 d. Statement of the Prague Institute for Labor Standards.

15 VOA, NHK, box 33, no. 101. Investigation into social, labor-organizational, and labor-economic conditions in the František mine in Přívoz, near Ostrava (1946).

16 Státní oblastní archiv (hereafter SOA), Prague, ČKD-Ú, box 5, fascicle 59. Director of a machine-building factory in Modřany to the general director of the Bohemian-Moravian Engineering Works, January 22, 1948.

17 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 5, no. 17. Report on the activities of the Textile and Leather Workers' Union for the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions, June 1, 1949.

18 VOA, Strojírenství, box 4 A, fascicle 8. Principles of socialist competition in heavy engineering.

19 Škoda-Archiv, Plzeň. ZVIL 1515, PV 1287. Minutes of the meeting of the workers' coun

took on a more concrete form when a socialist competition champion was removed from the list of candidates for upcoming elections to the Škoda factory council.[20] In the mining industry, clashes over competition also assumed concrete forms.[21] Miners were outraged by the fast work pace, which resulted in the neglect or even complete abandonment of basic security measures, often with disastrous consequences.[22]

Such reservations about faster work pace and compromised work quality largely emanated from the ranks of skilled workers.[23] Introducing competitions and importing work methods from the Soviet Union in order to create a devoted "producer class" flew in the face of traditional training, experience, and skill sets.[24] Nonetheless, not all workers objected to the new methods. Between 1948 and 1960, an estimated half million workers with minimal industrial background had flocked to the factories.[25] Many of these less skilled workers supported the socialist competition, because for the first time they saw members from their ranks being honored for their work. For example, when accepting her medal for outstanding work performance at the 1953 Congress for the Defenders of Peace, pig feed farmer Podařilová told the delegates that "no one" in the past had "noticed" her work.[26]

The conflict in factories over the restructuring and redeployment of labor collectives in connection with socialist competitions did not only take place behind the scenes. While the proponents of work initiatives triumphantly made it known that they had successfully entered and estab-

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[20] Peter Heumos, "Works Council Elections in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1968," in *Voting for Hitler and Stalin: Elections under 20th Century Dictatorships*, ed. Ralph Jessen and Hedwig Richter (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2011), 191.

[21] VOA, ÚRO-Soc., box 109, fascicle 109/2. Report on the voluntary miners' brigade in the Sokolov mine in Ostrava (1950).

[22] VOA, ÚVOS-Horníci, box 59, 1956, fascicle 1. Report by the delegation of Comrade Krpec from the Ostrava-Karviná district, July 23–28, 1956.

[23] There is no exact proof of this. To date, the statistic could only suggest that the shock workers were recruited to some degree from skilled workers. Of 602 shock workers between the Ninth Congress of the KSČ (May 1949) and June 1950, skilled workers comprised around 54 percent. NA, 100/1, vol. 14, no. 96.

[24] VOA, NHK, box 33, no. 101. Investigation into social, labor-organizational, and labor-economic conditions in the František mine in Přívoz, near Ostrava (1946).

[25] There is little comprehensive research on the qualification level of the industrial workforce. For an introduction, see Lenka Kalinová, "Vývoj struktury a postavení čs. průmyslových dělníků a hospodářsko-technických pracovníků v 50. letech" [Development of the structure and situation of Czechoslovak industrial workers and economic-technical personnel in the 1950s], *Revue dějin socialismu* (special issue 1968): 1025–62.

[26] VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 137, no. 441. Report to the Board of the District Trade Union

lished themselves in the ranks of long-established worker cadres,[27] their adversaries publicly denied their right to claim traditional job titles. For example, when Soviet Stakhanovite workers visited Czechoslovakia in 1951, the experienced metal workers told their Soviet visitors that a worker named Svoboda, although he had broken every speed record for turning, was no turner.[28]

There is some evidence that the postwar industrial offensive, which involved the accelerated expansion of the armament industry, had already begun to wane during the first Five-Year Plan (1948–1953).[29] The distribution of shock worker identification cards, which since 1949 had allowed holders to receive extra ration cards, was discontinued in March 1951. This was due to the fact that the number of ration cards had multiplied exponentially, as factory councils distributed them to shock workers as well as other workers.[30] When party leaders became aware of this practice, they condemned the desecration of an honorable award. Realizing that its abuse jeopardized general provisioning, they terminated the program.[31] The waning of the industrial offensive also meant fewer opportunities for upward mobility in the factory, which in practice meant shock workers moving into management positions based on their performance in socialist competitions. By 1952, this practice was no longer a mass phenomenon.[32] Although "political control of the production process" sparked fewer public conflicts by the early 1950s, criticism of the politicization of production

27 Škoda-Archiv, PV KSČ 2/238. Report on the socialist competition in the Lenin works [Škoda works] in Plzeň for the municipal committee of the CPT, April 1, 1958.

28 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 9, no. 126/2/8. Speeches of the Soviet Stakhanovite workers at the extraordinary meeting of the board of the Central Council of Trade Unions on May 7, 1951.

29 Neither the number of socialist competitions nor the number of workers who participated in them can be verified, because it is unclear to what extent the relevant statistics were faked. The internal correspondence between union officials suggests that the faking of statistics was generally taken for granted. VOA, ÚVOS-Horníci, box 10, section 2, 1949. Activity of union mining groups.

30 VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 103, no. 353. Extract from the reports of the instructors of the district union councils, February 23, 1950.

31 NA, 02/4, vol. 27, no. 163. Report on the Development of Socialist Competition, December 19, 1950.

32 The sources on this point are sparse. Between 1949 and 1951, the number of workers (male and female) in mid-level technical and administrative positions rose to 1,627; an additional eighty-two workers undertook "responsible managerial positions." Škoda-Archiv, box 457, no. 432. From 1952 to 1968, one finds in the archives only irregular ev[illegible]

remained virulent.[33] To this end, in 1968 trade unions demanded that the reformed KSČ henceforth refrain from any direct intervention in the production process.[34]

The Factory Councils and the Party

The second example begins with a strike that took place at the end of September 1948 at the Bohemian-Moravian Glassworks, located in the village of Krásno nad Bečvou.[35] It can be classified as an offshoot of the 1947 wave of strikes, when approximately half of the 103 strikes were responses to the conversion of the wage and labor system. To this end, workers at the Krásno nad Bečvou factory had stopped production because their trade union representatives had not been allowed to participate in the restructuring of the wage and labor system.[36] As early as December 1945, the worker representatives knew from firsthand experience that neither party leaders nor top officials in the unified trade union organization were responsive to their concerns. When they demanded access to the deliberations on wage brackets of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (*Revoluční odborové hnutí*, or ROH), the national unified trade union organization, the worker representatives were immediately dismissed.[37]

Party and state security officials did not attend the second round of negotiations; whether their absence stemmed from the fact that they had already ensured that no explosive issues would be on the table cannot be de-

[33] In addition to these arguments, it should be noted that both plant management and workers were notorious for exploiting material shortages and supply problems to avoid holding socialist competitions. VOA, ÚRO-VMP, box 2, 1953. Reports of the brigades and reports on socialist contests; Škoda-Archiv, ROH 16, PV 164. Meeting of the works committee of the ROH (smithy), February 22, 1957.

[34] See Peter Heumos, "Arbeitermacht im Staatssozialismus: Das Beispiel der Tschechowakei 1968" [Workers' power in state socialism: The example of Czechoslovakia 1968], in *Die letzte Chance? 1968 in Osteuropa* [The last chance?: 1968 in Eastern Europe], ed. Angelika Ebbinghaus (Hamburg: VSA, 2008), 59.

[35] Two letters from the Central Directorate of the National Association of Glass Works to the Office of the President of the Republic concerning a strike at the plant in Krásno nad Bečvou that took place at the end of September 1948. Archiv Kanceláře presidenta republiky, Prague, no. 2339/C.

[36] See Peter Heumos, "Zum industriellen Konflikt in der Tschechoslowakei 1945–1968" [On industrial conflict in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1968], in *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus: Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* [Workers in state socialism: Ideological claim and social reality], ed. Peter Hübner, Christoph Kleßmann, and Klaus Tenfelde (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 475–76.

[37] VOA, ÚRO-Soc., box 3, no. 2/9/2, 1945. District Trade Union Council Brno to the

termined from the two reports on the Krásno nad Bečvou strike. However, those reports do indicate that no efforts were made at that time to normalize the regulation of strikes. The role of state security organs, whose local representative in Krásno nad Bečvou led the first round of negotiations, shows that chaos prevailed when dealing with strikes. In the fall of 1947, state security representatives had told construction workers in Žilina to push for their strike demands.[38] But after 1948, the state security intervened in labor disputes so vigorously at times that the KSČ leadership claimed the security organs demonstrated too little "class consciousness."[39] In early summer 1953, party leaders again demanded that the state security more closely toe the party line, claiming that in its regulation of strikes it disregarded political aspects and merely addressed "administrative" measures.[40]

In spite of this claim, the KSČ itself had no idea how to handle worker protests. Between 1948 and 1953, the party largely relied on repressive measures. But their heavy-handed tactics, as party officials learned, were ineffective in quelling workers' desire to strike; of the 401 verified strikes between 1945 and 1968, over half (215) occurred between 1948 and 1953.[41] During this period, the KSČ also tried employing "soft" strategies, which included dispatching high-ranking party functionaries to negotiate directly with striking workers.[42] However, the paternalistic self-fashioning of the KSČ during these on-site negotiations inadvertently gave a higher value to strike activity, one that could not be confined to the particular place or incident. Consequently, in the early summer of 1957, top members of the KSČ asked the communist leadership in Beijing how it handled strikes. Their Chinese comrades advised them not to intervene too early, but to wait until the concerns and needs of the striking workers had crystallized.[43] At this time, the KSČ leadership was already following a strategy similar to the Chinese formula.

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38 VOA, Organizační oddělení, box 28, no. 125. Letter from the District Trade Union Council Žilina to the Central Council of Trade Unions, December 31, 1947.

39 Peter Heumos, "Industriearbeiter in der Tschechoslowakei 1945–1968: Ergebnisse eines Forschungsprojekts" [The industrial worker in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1968: Results of a research project], *Bohemia* 44 (2003): 163.

40 NA, 02/3, vol. 40, no. 224, June 22, 1953. Report on the investigation of the work of the company party organization in the workshops of the Czechoslovak State Railways in Česká Lípa on May 21 and 22, 1953.

41 Heumos, "Zum industriellen Konflikt," 476. Given the state of current research on strikes in Czechoslovakia, these statistics will soon be obsolete, especially for the period of the first Five-Year Plan.

42 NA, 014/12, vol. 24, no. 869, 1956/10. Report on the situation in the North Bohemian lignite mining area.

On July 6, 1953, a few weeks after the strike wave that followed the currency reform, both the trade union and party leadership agreed that in future trade union leaders should assume full responsibility for addressing the two central issues plaguing industry: absenteeism and work fluctuation.[44] What this meant, it soon transpired, was that henceforth the trade unions had to settle their own labor disputes. The trade unions should "hammer into the heads" of the workers that they were not allowed to strike "without the unions."[45] In 1946, experienced trade unionists already doubted that the ROH, established a year earlier, was a viable solution. They worried that different worker subcultures and occupational identities[46] could not be reconciled within a new organization dedicated to socialist values.[47] In fact, "attachment" to the unified workers' organization remained low because, as in other socialist nations, it did not offer institutionally governed interest mediation. Instead, it primarily served as a means of politically indoctrinating workers and upholding the legitimacy of the system. Until 1953, trade union leaders would not openly acknowledge this organizational shortcoming,[48] even though the negative consequences of fusing the trade union apparatus with its grassroots organizations had been apparent long before then.[49]

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[44] On the dispute between the KSČ and ROH, see Dalibor Státník, *Sankční právo v padesátých letech: Vládní nařízení o opatřeních proti fluktuaci a absenci č. 52/1953 Sb.* [Legal sanctions in the fifties: The government regulation on measures against fluctuation and absence no. 52/1953] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1994).

[45] Quotation from President Zápotocký's speech on June 11, 1953. For the complete text of the speech, see Dana Musilová, *Měnová reforma 1953 a její sociální důsledky: Studie a dokumenty* [The currency reform of 1953 and its social consequences: Study and documents] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1994), 123–38.

[46] See Peter Heumos, "Die Arbeiterschaft in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik: Elemente der Sozialstruktur, organisatorischen Verfassung und politischen Kultur" [Workers in the First Czechoslovak Republic: Elements of social structure, organizational constitution, and political culture], *Bohemia* 29 (1988): 58.

[47] VOA, ÚRO-Soc., box 7, no. 7/12 h. Letter from the CC of the Association of Healthcare Workers to the Central Social Policy Commission of the Central Council of Trade Unions, June 11, 1946.

[48] It was stated at the board meeting of the Central Committee of Trade Unions on May 28, 1953, that they had control over "broad trade union activity in the factories"; however, this position of power is "unfortunately formal." VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 16, no. 177. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions, May 28, 1953.

[49] See Peter Heumos, "Betriebsräte, Betriebsausschüsse der Einheitsgewerkschaft und Werktätigenräte: Zur Frage der Partizipation in der tschechoslowakischen Industrie vor und im Jahr 1968" [Workers' councils, workers' councils of the unified trade union, and working people's councils: On the issue of participation in Czechoslovak industry before and in the year of 1968], in *1968 und die Arbeiter: Studien zum "proletarischen Mai" in Europa* [1968 and the workers: Studies on the "proletarian May" in Europe], ed. Bernd Gehrke

When the Nazi occupation regime began to collapse, the worker factory councils that had been driven underground resurfaced. With their calls for a level of worker participation that far exceeded the provisions of the interwar republic, they garnered the support of most workers. The factory council movement supported radical democracy in factories, meaning equal decision-making power for workers and managers. On the question of distribution of power in the workplace, the works councils adopted cooperative socialist ideas that had already incorporated strong anti-state sentiment under Austro-Hungarian rule. After World War I, these ideas led to a wave of industrial socialization in Czechoslovakia, and during the interwar era, cooperative socialism remained the decisive programmatic element of workers' actions, especially in industrial disputes. With the goal of overthrowing the "capitalist classes," the factory councils allied early on with the KSČ, which they regarded as the guarantor of social emancipation and justice.[50] For their part, the KSČ and the ROH did everything in their power to bring this factory council movement under their influence. In the factories, the unified trade union organization established co-rule with their trade union groups, which formally ensured the dominance of their recognized alliance over the factory councils. This system of co-sovereignty officially lasted until 1959; in actuality, however, the trade union groups were toeing the line of the factory councils by the beginning of the 1950s at the latest.[51] In the presidential decree on factory councils from October 24, 1945, which established the exclusive responsibility of the managing director, the trade unions' claim to participation in factory councils was limited to "productive" participation, and trade union leadership was subjected to the principle of collective responsibility.

Although the factory council movement signaled from the outset that their goals were at cross-purposes with those of state socialism, the movement nevertheless matured under communist rule. Their recipe for success simply entailed taking charge in the various factory institutions, building both formal and informal structures aimed at protecting the factory from centralist intervention. As already noted, the factory councils' strategy included supporting resistance to socialist competition. Linked to this strategy was an emerging development at the shop floor level that encapsulated the prevailing industrial dispute: namely the normalization of operating

50 See the protocol of the constituent meeting of the Revolutionary Factory Council of the Škoda-Works in Plzeň on May 10, 1945. Škoda-Archive, Plzeň 503, 45 A.

51 See Peter Heumos, "Zum Verhalten von Arbeitern in industriellen Konflikten: Tschechoslowakei und DDR im Vergleich bis 1968" [On the behavior of workers in industrial conflicts: Czechoslovakia and the GDR compared to 1968], in *Kommunismus in der Krise: Die Entstalinisierung 1956 und ihre Folgen* [Communism in crisis: The de-Stalinization of

processes and compensation. This development revealed that the centralized control of industrial production had failed. Workers made the most of their position of power in factories: for example, if good cheap bread was not available, a chemical worker in Ústí nad Labem explained that it would impact the planned increase of labor standards.[52]

With their growing influence over factory disciplinary commissions, the factory councils curtailed the criminal prosecution of workers. When the factory councils wanted to set an example after the June 1953 strikes, they rejected the establishment of Soviet-style honor courts, or were so dilatory in establishing such courts that their response could be termed a boycott.[53] The 1961 law governing people's courts in the plants, which aimed to raise the work ethic by encouraging denunciations from fellow workers, foundered due to opposition by the new trade union committees that had emerged from the Association of Factory Councils and Factory Unions in 1959.[54]

For the factory councils, it appeared a matter of urgency to limit the influence of communist cells in the factory, which until 1953 had endeavored to enforce their claim to leadership.[55] Factory councils protested against the "leading role of the party" in the factory, and these protests occasionally garnered support from factory management: for example, at the United Steelworks in Kladno in 1949.[56] Over the course of this conflict between factory councils and communist cells, the advantage slowly shifted in favor of the factory councils. Consequently, until mid-1953 they succeeded in limiting the communist cells' claim to power at the Plzeň Škoda Works to their constitutionally assigned task: management control.[57]

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[52] NA, 014/11, vol. 6, no. 70, 1950/12. Information Service 46/1950, 3.

[53] VOA, f. f. Minutes of the Central Committee of the Trade Union Federation for Heavy and General Machinery, September 1–December 12, 1953 (for the meeting of the Central Committee of the Union on September 1, 1953).

[54] Peter Heumos, "Aspekte des sozialen Milieus der Industriearbeiterschaft in der Tschechoslowakei vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Reformbewegung der sechziger Jahre" [Aspects of the social milieu of industrial workers in Czechoslovakia from the end of World War II to the reform movement of the sixties], *Bohemia* 42 (2001): 341–42.

[55] See the report of the Olomouc District Trade Union Council to the Central Council of Trade Unions about the conditions in the Moravian county of Jeseník, April 4, 1950. VOA, KOR, box 14/1950, no. 59.

[56] SOA, SONP Kladno, 1949–1960, no. 10. Minutes of the conference of the cadre and social policy department [of the United Steel Mills Kladno] on the board of the company, March 15, 1949.

[57] Škoda-Archiv, ZVIL 945/ZU 507. Investigation in the Blechpress factory (June 1953). As a general rule, this limitation on the influence of communist factory cells ended with the Tenth Congress of the KSČ in 1954. See Karel Kaplan, *Proměny české společnosti*

Factory councils and workers criticized the unified trade union organization, ROH, as a colossus that had lost touch with the reality of the industrial workplace.[58] "Your policies are worthless," a factory council chairman in Ružomberok complained in November 1951 to an instructor for the Žilina District Council of Trade Unions; "here in the factory, we need to do things in a way that reflects our conditions."[59] In the long run, any change in dealing with industrial conflicts had to be aligned with the insistence on grassroots regulations.

As the KSČ withdrew from the strike issue as a result of the aforementioned agreement of July 6, 1953, the intervention of high-level trade union bodies also became rare, with a tendency toward finding in-house solutions. In October 1953, strike negotiations recovered a traditional method of resolution by introducing the implicit acceptance of collective bargaining methods.[60] In June 1957, the appropriate trade union officials successfully conducted strike negotiations without any KSČ involvement for the first time.[61] This progress, however, was not linear; when another industrial dispute erupted a few months later, the state security attempted to exploit the conflict for its own purposes, in much the same way as it had in previous years.[62] Finally, in March 1960, a trade union at a factory in eastern Bohemia was in a position to pull all the strings and negotiated a settlement with management without involving high-ranking trade union organs.[63] In 1968, factory committees wanted to formalize this informal acquisition of power and called for the Central Council of Trade Unions (*Ústřední rada odborů*, or ÚRO) to intervene in favor of a statutory right of veto. In addition, they argued that the trade union's right to call a strike without the approval of higher-ranking trade union bodies should be firmly entrenched in the collective contract.[64]

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58 As an example, see the records for both meetings of the board of the factory council of Gottwaldov District on May 7–8, 1956. VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 159, no. 530/1, supplement 1.

59 VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 105, no. 382. Report of the instructor of the county union council Žilina Pistovčák, November 1951 (no date).

60 On a strike in the mining industry in Rožňava, see NA, 014/12, vol. 10, no. 132, 1953/10.

61 VOA, ÚRO-PaM, box 8. Reports of the payroll department. Record for Comrade Hnilička, June 20, 1957. Work stoppage in the foundry of the national company Agrostroj Jičín.

62 NA, 014/12, vol. 31, no. 92928, 1958/2. Walkout in the Defenders of Peace mine in Hovorany.

63 VOA, Strojírenství, box 49, 1960, fascicle 3. Report on the investigation of the reasons for the stoppage in the processing workshops of the national company THZ Výsoké Mýto, Slatiňany, March 4, 1960.

64 On these two demands, see VOA, ÚRO-Sekr., box 357, no. 1390 VII. Suggestions and

The gradual "decentralization" of the labor dispute raises multiple questions. It is generally assumed that in the wake of the convulsions of 1953, Moscow—with its so-called New Course, the liberalization of state socialism—had decreed a type of civilizational turning point.[65] Apart from the fact that this assumption is untrue—at least for the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and its factory conditions in particular[66]—the assumption is once again made with regard to Czechoslovakia that social change in state socialism was dependent on the party's decisions. If one considers that strike frequency in Czechoslovakia fell rapidly after 1953, from 218 strikes between 1948 and 1953 to seventy-two strikes between 1954 and 1959,[67] then the logical assumption is that the drop in the frequency of strikes correlates with the transfer of sole responsibility for governing strikes to the factories.[68]

Accordingly, the convergence of several developmental strands made the factory a bastion against the power apparatuses of both the party and the trade unions. The anti-centralist and anti-bureaucratic strategies employed, which zeroed in on the "lack of productivity" and the "degeneration" of high-level institutional arrangements,[69] suggest that the factory councils wanted to transform the industrial sector into a network of state-free enclaves that could serve as models of operational autonomy.[70] The libertarian socialist concept of factory councils was associated with the aforementioned right to participation, first formulated in Ostrava in 1947, which aimed at eliminating the divide between "management and execution."[71] The party

[65] For an example of this argument, see Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[66] See Renate Hürtgen, "Konfliktverhalten der DDR-Arbeiterschaft und Staatsrepression im Wandel" [Conflicting behavior of the GDR workers and state repression in transition], in Hübner, Klessmann, and Tenefelde, *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus*, 383–403.

[67] Heumos, "Zum industriellen Konflikt," 476.

[68] Here, possible effects of the arbitration proceedings introduced in 1959 can be understood as a move from collective conflict resolution to individual conflict resolution.

[69] Heumos, "Zum Verhalten von Arbeitern," 427.

[70] Peter Heumos, "Betriebsräte, Einheitsgewerkschaft und staatliche Unternehmensverwaltung: Anmerkungen zu einer Petition mährischer Industriearbeiter an die tschechoslowakische Regierung vom 8. Juni 1947" [Works councils, the unified trade union, and state enterprise administration: Notes on a petition by Moravian industrial workers to the Czechoslovak government of June 8, 1947], *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 29 (1981): 215–45.

[71] VOA, KOR Moravské Ostravy, box 1/1947, no. 13, Ministry of [illegible]

and trade unions identified this as "syndicalism,"[72] which was true insofar as the factory councils rejected political parties, appreciated trade unionist-run educational work, and emphasized the equality of every type of "productive" work. If the factory councils became too rebellious, then talk within the party about "anarcho-syndicalist tendencies"[73] was not unfounded: both the factory councils and the anarchists placed very little emphasis on policy statements or esoteric theories, rather working toward creating a new society within "the old enclosure."[74]

The factory councils' successes can also be seen in the denunciations of syndicalist actions by party and union officials, when factory councils in the 1950s started making the place and form of factory management a topic of debate. A trade union official in Lutín complained in 1950 that "[q]uestions of production were settled at factory council meetings."[75] By 1951, in the Prague District Trade Union Council's sphere of influence, it was commonplace for factory councils "to have taken over the tasks of management."[76] In early 1956, the České Budějovice District Trade Union Council explained that throughout southern Bohemia, factory economists had been replaced by members of factory union organizations.[77]

In their dealings with management, factory councils benefited from the fact that by 1950, one-third of all plant directors were workers who had been promoted in the postwar era.[78] Without this proximity in social status, the oft-cited planned production pacts—which compensated for the

[72] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 21, no. 212/2/1. Appraisal of the annual general meetings of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions, January 13, 1955. The Reformed KPT of the Prague Spring also kept this name. *Komunistická strana Československa: Pokus o reformu (říjen 1967—květen 1968)* [The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia: Attempt at reform, October 1967–May 1968], ed. Jitka Vondrová et al. (Prague and Brno: Doplněk, 1999), document no. 76.

[73] NA, 02/4, box 93, no. 105. Report of the Department of the CPC Central Committee for Party Organs, Trade Unions, and Youth on the Work of the Party in Mechanical Engineering of the District of Prague and Draft Decision of the Central Committee of the CPT, February 20, 1956.

[74] Quoted in David Graeber, *Frei von Herrschaft: Fragmente einer anarchistischen Anthropologie* [Free from domination: Fragments of an anarchist anthropology] (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2008), 31. In the mining industry of Czechoslovakia, especially in the north Bohemian area, the anarchists traditionally had strong support.

[75] VOA, KOR, box 14/1950, no. 59. Report on the study of socialist competition.

[76] VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 112, no. 392/21. Report on the work of the instructors of the District Trade Union Council [Prague], December 12, 1951.

[77] VOA, KOR, box 75/1956, no. 138/3. Minutes of the Plenary Session of the District Trade Union Council, České Budějovice, May 18, 1956.

[78] Lenka Kalinová, "Ke změnám ve složení hospodářského aparátu ČSR v 50. letech" [On

impositions of socialist "productivism" by making concessions on wage and work standards[79]—could hardly have worked.[80] All in all, the position of the management was weak; its members could never be sure if they would survive the next political purge.[81] Many strikes were aimed directly at management; for instance, in cases when measures were implemented without prior consultation with workers. Such examples include, but are not limited to, the strikes in Chomutov in 1950, Hostivař in 1951, Plzeň in 1953, and both Znojmo and Vsetín in 1956.[82]

Notwithstanding the disputes, the recurring theme of this power struggle was the assertion of egalitarian objectives by factory union councils or their successor organizations. Far more than the KSČ—which repeatedly deferred its egalitarian goals in favor of differentiating performance and wage levels for the workforce—factory councils remained focused on the elimination of injustice, "which to date has been committed above all against the most vulnerable workers."[83] Factory councils first turned their attention to the issue of supplemental wages. Until the mid-1950s, supplemental wages—such as premiums, bonuses, and overtime—accounted for roughly 50 percent of total wages. Since the distribution of supplemental wages was decided at the factory level, it was an obvious starting point for the battle against wage inequality.[84] The growing control exercised by factory councils over the organization of labor, as well as the increased cooperation between factory council wage commissions and plant compensation

Karla Kaplana [Scroll through the history of the times: Anthology for the 65th birthday of the historian Karel Kaplan], ed. Karel Jech (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1993), 149–57.

79 Peter Heumos, "Der Himmel ist hoch, und Prag ist weit!: Sekundäre Machtverhältnisse und organisatorische Entdifferenzierung in tschechoslowakischen Industriebetrieben 1945–1968" [The sky is high, and Prague is far!: Secondary power relations and organizational de-differentiation in Czechoslovak industrial enterprises, 1945–1968], in *Vernetzte Improvisationen: Gesellschaftliche Subsysteme in Ostmitteleuropa und in der DDR* [Connected improvisations: Social subsystems in East-Central Europe and the GDR], ed. Annette Schuhmann (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2008), 22–24.

80 VOA, KOR, box 75/1956, no. 138/1. Assessment of the all-union activists of the district officials from July 6–20, 1956, in all districts of the České Budějovice district.

81 On this, see Kalinová, "Ke změnám ve složení hospodářského aparátu ČSR v 50. letech."

82 VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 103, no. 353. Excerpt from the reports of the instructors of the district trade union councils (Kreisgewerkschaftsrat Prag); VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 105, no. 382. Report of the instructor of the District Trade Union Council Prague, January 1951; Škoda Archive, ZVIL 1452/PV 382. Report on the progress of the review of standards, January 1953; VOA, ÚRO-PaM, box 8. Reports from the wages department.

83 VOA, ÚRO-Soc., box 1, no. 1/6, 1945. Resolution of the trade union organizations in the Brno Arms Works, July 12, 1945.

84 VOA, ÚRO-Sal., box 76, no. 672. Report

departments, facilitated the leveling of income differences. Overtime, accrued primarily during *šturmovština*—recurrent, regular forced accelerated work actions instituted to meet planned targets—was reserved for those workers who had to get by with "starvation wages." Assigning easier performance targets to lesser-qualified workers served to bolster their wages. Premiums also counterbalanced differences between wage brackets.[85] In this context, protests against the higher salaries of industry management were common. Accordingly, selecting a "second capitalist" as a plant director was declared undesirable in 1958 at the Plzeň Škoda Works.[86]

The trade unions rallied against the "unhealthy and petty bourgeois tendencies" of factory wage policy more vehemently than the KSČ;[87] nevertheless, they could do little about it. The conflict between the trade unions and the factory councils initially became acute in 1965 with the introduction of economic reforms that were tied to the wage differentiating policy.[88] Workers criticized the proposed reforms because they clearly favored management in the distribution of factory profits.[89] Workers in Bratislava were the first to protest,[90] followed by a large wave of protests prior to 1967 in eastern Slovakia,[91] which then spilled over into Bohemia and Moravia.[92] At the factory, the new wage concept submitted to grassroots union or-

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85 VOA, ÚRO-Sekr. II, box 66, no. 215/1. Report on the progress of the activity of the chairman of the wage commission at the works committees of the Trade Union of employees of the smelters and ore mines and the head of the wages department of the smelter in Ostrava county, September 14, 1956; VOA, Fascicles Standards Review on the basis of the Government Decision of July 14, 1950 (without archival signature). Report from the Department of Wages and Labor of the County Trade Union Council Liberec for the Central Council of Trade Unions of January 26, 1951; VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 56, no. 355 III/3. Materials for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions, October 31, 1961.

86 Škoda-Archiv, ROH 4/PV 696. Minutes of the plenary session of the Corporate Committee and the chairmen of the ROH committees, July 1, 1958.

87 See Report from the Department of Wages and Labor of the County Trade Union Council Liberec for the Central Council of Trade Unions of January 26, 1951.

88 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 77, no. 424 I/2. Report on the course of experimental testing of the perfected system of economic steering in selected enterprises (for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions on November 17, 1965).

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 88, no. 453. Evaluation of the Annual General Meetings of ROH's Enterprise Organizations in 1967 (for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions on June 15, 1967).

92 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 94, no. 450/1. Information for members of the Board of the Cen-

ganizations often had not been negotiated.[93] The KSČ had thought that skilled workers would be pleased with the new wage policy: this assumption proved to be wrong. However, even skilled workers such as the violin makers in Malešov clung to their egalitarian orientation, viewing the 1966 change in the wage policy as an "action against *the* workers."[94]

During the Prague Spring, the tone of the debate on wage policy became more raucous. The KSČ action program from April 5, 1968, abandoned all pretenses of diplomacy, labelling the egalitarian wage policy as the decisive brake on economic growth and productivity.[95] "Egalitarianism," according to the KSČ, favored "slobs" and "slackers" over the "self-sacrificing" workers, and "busy" lower-skilled workers over more skilled ones. The change in the wage policy reflected a growing belief within the KSČ that industrial management should be assigned a higher value. In 1964, the State Wage Commission began to discuss whether economic reform required strengthening the "authority of plant directors."[96] A year later, the KSČ Central Committee strongly advocated increasing the competencies of plant management personnel.[97] The workers' councils, whose founding in 1968 was spurred by the anticipated social implications of economic reform, were offered some degree of participation in factory decisions.[98] However, the KSČ leadership made it clear that factory councils changed "nothing about the indivisible authority and legal power" of the plant management.[99] Industrial management immediately took steps to reduce, or remove completely, the councils' role as advisory organs for plant management.[100] One of the typical workers' complaints was the "dominance of technocratic management at the ground level of socialism."[101] In March 1968, the Avia air-

[93] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 88, no. 451. Lessons learned from the work of the trade union organizations in carrying out pay leveling in the consumer goods industry (for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Unions on June 1, 1967).

[94] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 84, no. 440 II/1 (emphasis added).

[95] Reproduced in *Komunistická strana Československa*, document no. 50.

[96] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 70, no. 405 I/5. Report of September 22, 1964, on the present forms of involvement of the trade union organs in awarding extraordinary wages.

[97] VOA, ÚRO-Sekr., box 359, no. 1399 I/3. Suggestions for changes to the Labor Code due to resolutions of the Central Council of Trade Unions (July 1968).

[98] See Vladimír Fišera, ed., *Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia, 1968–9: Documents and Essays* (London: Allison & Busby, 1978).

[99] For the actions program of the KSČ, see *Komunistická strana Československa*, document no. 50.

[100] "První zkušenosti rad pracujících" [First experiences of the workers' councils], *Odborář* 21, no. 23 (1968): 8. The contributor is not named, but was probably a union official.

[101] From a declaration made by a North Moravian KSČ County Council Committee on the political situation, *May 22, 1968*, *Komunistická strana Československa*,

craft factory in Prague demanded veto power for factory committees should the decisions of management infringe upon the rights of workers.[102]

That same month a nationwide campaign began which, within a few weeks, offered evidence of the unified trade union organization having "lost touch" with workers' reality. By the end of May, the ROH collapsed under pressure from its factory organizations, disintegrating into twenty-five separate unions, which in turn faced increasing pressure to subdivide further into professional associations.[103] In terms of participation, the Prague Spring did little for laborers. While the reformed KSČ announced that under its leadership the transition to "real working class power" had been completed,[104] skepticism prevailed among workers. The reform movement did not give the impression, one unionist wrote in the fall of 1968, that it was serious about the question of "humanizing work" or "overcoming alienation."[105]

Strikes, Participation, and Violence

Our third example, beginning with the 1949 strike in Čadca, demonstrates that it was not only the state that resorted to the use of violence in strikes.[106] Negotiations with union and party functionaries became occasions for violent action by striking workers.[107] In fact, until the 1960s, violence remained an integral part of the "construction milieu" of large industrial projects. During the construction of the East Slovakian Iron Works in Košice, social conditions were "boiling over," leading to thousands of workers repeatedly engaging in violent confrontations that quickly spread to other social milieus.[108]

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102 Open letter of the aircraft factory from March 13, 1968, reproduced in *Odborář* 21, no. 7 (1968): 19.

103 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 95, no. 471/5. Annex I to the report on the status of the negotiations and preparations for the distribution of trade union confederations (for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions on June 3, 1968).

104 The citation is from a draft position of a KSČ city committee (Prague) on KSČ policy (May 11, 1968). The completed text is printed in *Komunistická strana Československa*, document no. 63.

105 Open letter of the aircraft factory from March 13, 1968, reproduced in *Odborář* 21, no. 7 (1968): 19.

106 NA, 100/24, vol. 59, no. 927, 1948–1949.

107 See the trade union report about negotiations with striking brickworkers in southeastern Moravia from July 18, 1951. VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 110, no. 385 b.

108 VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 54, no. 349 I/9. Report on the implementation of the resolutions

Before the 1960s, the KSČ had learned that strikes could lead to the mobilization of the local population.[109] In 1949 in Čadca, workers from different factories joined forces to protest, and an estimated 1,000 residents of the city took to the streets to support them. In response, the party called on units of the state security and the People's Militia (*Lidové milice*) to cordon off roads leading to the protest site, in order to prevent news of events in Čadca from reaching other areas. The strike had broken out after a union official had made disparaging remarks in front of workers about the Catholic Church. The living environment of state socialism thus catalyzed the transformation of the work environment.

Another example of the work environment being shaped by the living environment involves shift work. Here, the factory confronted the everyday needs of workers head on. A 1965 survey carried out by the Central Council of Trade Unions found that efforts to promote night shift work dating back to 1948 had been unsuccessful.[110] Consequently, as late as 1966, large companies such as the Plzeň Škoda Works had 80 percent of its workers scheduled for the morning shift, while the night shift accounted for less than 4 percent of workers.[111] The workers' attitude on this point was clear: you cannot "sacrifice social and family life for shift work."[112]

Factory bodies, as a matter of course, were to take over the life-world of the workers. Clubs inside the factory, designed to facilitate a work culture of increased productivity, became somewhat popular, as evidenced by the union leaderships' temperance campaigns directed against drinking in the clubs.[113] The appropriation of factory facilities, the KSČ suggested, could also be used as an impetus for an effective bond to the workplace: that is to say, it should create a system-supported life-world that would safeguard workers' readiness to perform. In the Kladno Steelworks, when worker en-

[109] VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 47, no. 173. Report of the Secretary of the District Trade Union Council Místek on the causes, course, and resolution of the strike in Frýdek-Místek, August 15, 1948. During this three-day strike, the factory buildings were besieged by hundreds of locals fueled by the conflict.

[110] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 73, no. 415 I/3. Report on the commuter traffic and documents for the presentation and the decisions of the national all-union conference for the meeting of the board of the Central council of the Trade Unions on April 21, 1965.

[111] VOA, ÚRO-Před., box 82, no. 435 I/2. Report on services for employees in the factories and places of residence for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of Trade Unions, July 28, 1966.

[112] Quoted in Miloš Pick, "Proč zvyšovat směnnost?" [Why should the shift work be extended?], *Odborář* 18, no. 26 (1965): 1261–66.

[113] VOA, ÚRO-PŘ, box 62, no. 376 I/2, supplement II. Report on the annual conferences of the corporate clubs in 1962 for the meeting of the Board of the Central Council of

thusiasm for socialist competitions was lacking, the children of steelworkers were called upon to ask their fathers why they had not yet been named the "best worker."[114] Similarly, when the work ethic declined in the Ostrava coalfields, the wives of miners were invited to production consultations at the request of party officials.[115] Everyday life stimuli often triggered protests and strikes. In October 1953, night shift workers at a textile factory in Hořice skipped work in order to attend a dance at a nearby village fair. The next morning, they went on strike to protest night shift work.[116] The backdrop of daily life explains the arbitrariness of industrial conflicts and probably also, in this case, worker behavior.

As a rule, strikes were limited to a particular factory department or manufacturing sector; this remained the case even when it seemed like the floodgates had opened. During the large wave of strikes that began in June 1953, armament plants in Strakonice accounted for over one-fourth of the 6,000 strikers.[117] For the pre-1953 era, it is generally assumed that fear of reprisals did not limit participation, because in the post-1953 era the decline in the political criminalization of labor disputes did not result in higher participation. In some cases, striking still required courage. Prior to a 1957 strike at a textile factory in Šumperk, workers had to reassure themselves that "nothing bad could happen" as a general amnesty had been issued some days before.[118] However, against a backdrop of broadly inconsequential responses from the authorities, confidence in protesting emerged all the more clearly. Strikes were often used to provoke the party. Metalworkers who went on strike in Strakonice in June 1953 demanded "strike pay." Striking workers agitated party officials by mocking party jargon, and in Hostivař strikers walked down the streets singing satirical songs poking fun at the party.[119] The provocative inversions of prevailing norms and official values were an element of everyday behavior. At a Moravian sawmill in the spring of 1956, workers grumbled about the "best workers" and argued that publicly displaying the victor of a socialist competition should be considered

[114] VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 105, no. 382. Report of the instructor of the District Trade Union Council Prague, January 1951.

[115] VOA, ÚVOS-Horníci, box 100, fascicle 6. Delegation report by comrade Mertl from the Ostrava-Karviná district, January 4–8, 1960.

[116] NA, 014/12, vol. 15, no. 381. Report on the strike in the national company Mileta 01, Hořice, and the situation of the implementation of the order of the Minister of Fuel and Energy, October 8, 1953.

[117] AMV, no. 310-72-30. Compilation of the strikes after the currency reform in the České Budějovice district.

[118] NA, 014/12, vol. 29, no. 1165, 1957. Strike in the Moravolen factory in Horní Libina.

part of the "cult of personality." The factory council discontinued socialist competitions.[120]

Throughout Czechoslovakia, differentiation between workers based on performance in competitions was replaced by the principle of egalitarian distributive justice. Ironworkers in Kunčice mandated that every worker be allowed to win the competition once,[121] while the employees of the waterworks in Tvržice all took turns at being "the best worker," so that everyone received the monetary prize.[122] Such daily life impulses strengthened the rejection of competitions at the plant level and promoted the appeal of the factory milieu. When workers who had moved up within the party and state apparatus returned to their former work sites, all agreed that the plant was the best of all possible worlds.[123]

Strikes and the Collapse of State Socialism

The yield of historiographical research work on state socialism has been significant. Originally, the factory was described as a place subjected to complete communist control, where "[w]orkers and managers were tightly bound into a system of political command over all aspects of economic and working life."[124] Since then, the view that the state-socialist command economy never achieved lasting penetration of the "organization of the production process" at the shop floor level has permeated scholarship on state socialism,[125] raising the question: how was this free space utilized? The answer that is typically given is problematic, in that it assumes the theory and methodology of functionalism as a key concept in the debate on the causes of state socialism's collapse. For functionalists, the "informal subcontinent"

120 VOA, KOR, box 78/1956, no. 141. Report of the District Committee of the Union of Timber Industry on the implementation of the theses of the Central Committee of the CPT on further technical development in the factories, June 14, 1956.

121 VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 138, no. 467. Report of the Nová Huta political brigade in Kunčice, April 1953.

122 VOA, ÚRO-VMP, box 2, 1953. Reports of the brigades and reports on socialist contests.

123 See summary of the speech of a blacksmith from Litomyšl before the local party organization on his years of services in the school and cultural ministry, October 1954. NA, 014/12, vol. 15, no. 381.

124 Quoted in Mark Pittaway, "Workers, Management and the State in Socialist Hungary: Shaping and Re-shaping the Socialist Factory Regime in Újpest and Tatabánya," in *Sozialgeschichtliche Kommunismusforschung*, 105.

125 On the GDR, see Ulrich Voskamp and Volker Wittke, "Aus Modernisierungsblockaden werden Abwärtsspiralen: Zur Reorganisation von Betrieben und Kombinaten in der ehemaligen DDR" [Modernization blocks

of the industrial sector outlined in this essay with reference to reasons for striking is little more than a thicket of "quasi-legal," "diffuse," and "premodern" behaviors and actions that appear almost indistinguishable from corruption and crime. All these informal arrangements, they claim, do not add up to stable patterns of action that could be used to reduce subjugation or catalyze self-organization.[126]

The examples provided in this essay clearly indicate that the factory was a lively hub of political activity. Likewise, it is clear that the flipside of "organized disorder"[127] was a process of democratization led by the factory councils, whose goal was the dismantling of power relations and the building up of worker-controlled organizations. Functionalism, however, assigns no significance to this process. A central theoretical concept of systems theory is the functional differentiation of structural subsystems and value spheres within a social system as a precondition for its performance- and problem-solving capabilities.[128] If one applies this concept to our topic, then work undertaken during state socialism cannot be considered productive. For systems theory, the "inclusion of a human's full complexity" in labor exchanges is a "disturbance factor."[129]

The influence of this "disturbance factor" in the factory behavior discussed here was not completely suppressed; the politicization of the production process could not be contained by the KSČ. Factory councils also succeeded in placing their political stamp on production, and their egalitarian program for the organization of labor permeated factories. In the mining industry, coal digging groups were often manned in such a way that the group's overall performance compensated for that of its weaker members (including the elderly and sick).[130] On a large scale, it shows the advantage

126 On the GDR, with a claim to more general validity for state-socialist societies, see Richard Rottenburg, "Der Sozialismus braucht den ganzen Menschen: Zum Verhältnis vertraglicher und nichtvertraglicher Beziehungen in einem VEB" [Socialism needs the whole person: On the relationship between contractual and non-contractual relationships in a VEB], *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 20 (1991): 305–20; Ilja Srubar, "War der reale Sozialismus modern? Versuch einer strukturellen Bestimmung" [Was real socialism modern?: An attempt at a structural determination], *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 43 (1991): 415–32.

127 VOA, ÚRO-Org., box 126, no. 436. Report on the activity of the factory council at the Kovosvit firm in Třebíč, September 3, 1952.

128 For a general representation of systems theory, see Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); Seymour M. Lipset, *Soziologie der Demokratie* [Sociology of democracy] (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962).

129 Quoted in Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* [Social Outline of a general theory] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 324.

of creating an amalgam of work and political value orientations from socialist competitions and "collective distributive justice in practice."

Since functionalist interpretations are dominant in the discussion of strikes and workers' behavior more generally, socialist alternatives to state socialism, like the factory council movements, have only been discussed within the context of the history of state-socialist reform, despite their democratic potential.[131] To put it another way, questions concerning economic performance rank much higher on the value scale of systems theory than questions concerning the social construction of meaning. Egalitarian programs can also be added to this list of topics with lower priority for functionalists. Systems theory can do nothing with egalitarian objectives, because it treats hierarchy as "functionally irreplaceable."[132] Egalitarian wage policies, in particular, draw harsh criticism from systems theorists. In their interpretation, such policies stand for primitive backwardness[133] and for low labor productivity in state socialism, just as it did in the KSČ's 1968 declaration.[134]

However, simply equating egalitarian wage policy with low productivity is not accurate. Correlating work productivity with income distribution in state-socialist countries demonstrates that equality in wage distribution is not synonymous with a low level of productivity. Among Comecon countries, Czechoslovakia and East Germany were ranked at the top for both labor productivity and for having the most even income distribution. Conversely, in Poland and the Soviet Union where income distribution was the most unequal, one also found the lowest productivity levels.[135] The price of an empirically unfounded argument is thus not too high if it guarantees "proof" that the concept of work can only be "purified" if "disturbance factors" are agreed upon in advance and eliminated.[136] The example

[131] Christoph Boyer, "Sozialgeschichte der Arbeiterschaft und staatssozialistische Entwicklungspfade: Konzeptionelle Überlegungen und eine Erklärungsskizze" [Social history of the working class and state-socialist development paths: Conceptual considerations and an explanatory sketch], in Hübner, Klessmann, and Tenefelde, *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus*, 79.

[132] Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, 462.

[133] See, for example, Pavel Machonin, "The Social Structure of Soviet-type Societies, Its Collapse and Legacy," *Czech Sociological Review* 1 (1993): 231–49.

[134] See Anthony B. Atkinson and John Micklewright, *Economic Transformation in Eastern Europe and the Distribution of Income* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jiří Večerník and Petr Matějů, eds., *Ten Years of Rebuilding Capitalism: Czech Society after 1989* (Prague: Academia, 1999).

[135] See André Steiner, "Einkommen in den Ostblockländern. Annäherungen an einen Vergleich" [Income in the Eastern Bloc countries: Approaches to a comparison], in Hübner, Klessmann, and Tenefelde, *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus*, 227–47.

[136] For this reason, some authors criticize systems theory for its "normative excess." See Michael Keren, "Ideological Implications of the Use of Open Systems Theory in Political

of labor productivity suggests further objections to these categories in systems theory.

Labor productivity, along with various social structures and activities in the workplace, is part of what is called the work sphere. From the systems theory perspective, this is a primary reason for the collapse of real socialism. The transformation of the work environment inevitably resulted in the collapse of the system because it undermined the basic patterns and virtues of industrial culture, upon which a society based on the division of labor depends.[137] Yet at the time the above opinion was written, the blurring of the boundaries between work and living environments in Western-type societies had already been a topic of discussion for years.[138] However, apart from a few passing remarks, the debate over the causes of the collapse of state socialism does not address this issue.

The reason for this silence is easy to identify: Fordism—that is to say, mechanized production, instrumental rationalization of social relations, the separation of work and living environs, and so on[139]—is the critical benchmark that systems theory has found state socialism to be lacking. Post-Fordism—that is, the "subjectification" of labor supported by microelectronic technology, cooperative management strategies, the blurring of home and work domains, the mobilization of creative potential, the de-standardization of work norms, and so on—has found no place in the functionalist critique of state socialism, despite the fact that this model of production has been recognized for two or three decades.[140] If one were to include post-Fordism, one would have to acknowledge a quandary: both the separation and blurring of

137 Quoted in Ralph Jessen, "Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus: Probleme einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR" [Society in state socialism: Problems of a social history of the GDR], *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995): 96–110.

138 See Daniel Bell, *Die nachindustrielle Gesellschaft* [The post-industrial society] (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1985); Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (New York: Harper, 1993); Nick Kratzer, *Arbeitskraft in Entgrenzung: Grenzenlose Anforderungen, erweiterte Spielräume, begrenzte Ressourcen* [Work capacity in dissolution: Boundless demands, expanded scope, limited resources] (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 2003); Birgit Huber, "Entgrenzung von Arbeit und Leben im Postfordismus und (Post)-Sozialismus: Subjektivierung als Ansatz für vergleichende Forschung" [Dissolution of work and life in post-Fordism and (post-)socialism: Subjectivization as an approach for comparative research], in *Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt: Facetten einer spannungsreichen Beziehung im östlichen Europa* [Working world—lifeworld: Facets of a tense relationship in Eastern Europe], ed. Klaus Roth (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 121–40.

139 See Joachim Hirsch and Roland Roth, *Das neue Gesicht des Kapitalismus: Vom Fordismus zum Post-Fordismus* [The new face of capitalism: From Fordism to Post-Fordism] (Hamburg: VSA, 1986).

living and work environments can act as guarantors of work performance since even the workplace under post-Fordism is primarily subject to principles of economics.[141] Taking a present-day example relevant to state socialism, discussions in IT companies show that work is perceived as extraordinarily flexible, insofar as structures aimed at advancing teamwork are replacing those aimed at stimulating individual performance through in-house competition.[142]

The fact that research utilizing a systems theory approach critically applies de-differentiation of work and living environments to state socialism, while tacitly ignoring this fact in reference to capitalism, means that it ends up avoiding systemic comparison on this very point. Instead, systems theorists argue that the causes, manifestations, and effects of this phenomenon on daily life in the two systems are so different that they are beyond comparison.[143] Considering that dominant political or economic interests take control of removing the boundary between work and living spaces, the end goal is the intensive utilization of the workforce—a process that tends toward the appropriation of the entire personality.[144] From this perspective, no fundamental difference exists between the various policies of the KSČ and today's IT companies. By clinging to an outdated production model, systems theory's concept of rationality becomes brittle. These comments have a direct bearing on strike research.

Strike research drawing on systems theory emphasizes that the development of labor disputes and the behavior of workers is accompanied by increased rationalization. The organization, formalization, and institutionalization of the labor dispute, as well as the growing predictability of company social relations and the increasing perfection of collective bargaining, are the conditions of rationalization and the efficient regulation of industrial conflict.[145] This approach depends on the concept of performance-oriented

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141 Klaus Roth, "Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt: Zu einer spannungsreichen Beziehung im sozialistischen und postsozialistischen Osteuropa" [Working world—lifeworld: To a tense relationship in socialist and post-socialist Eastern Europe], in *Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt*, 14.

142 On Microsoft's abandonment of its stacked ranking system, see Julia Graven, "Microsoft kippt Bewertung von 'Minderleistern'" [Microsoft tilts rating of "shortage workers"], *Spiegel Online*, November 13, 2013, http:/www.spiegel.de/karriere/berufsleben/minderleister-microsoft-schafft-bewertungssystem-ab-a-933372.html, accessed February 28, 2014. For this source, I thank Katherine Heumos (Berlin).

143 Roth, "Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt," in *Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt*, 22.

144 See in particular Kratzer, *Arbeitskraft in Entgrenzung*.

145 See Heinrich Volkmann, "Modernisierung des Arbeitskampfes?: Zum Formwandel von Streik und Aussperrung in Deutschland 1864–1975" [Modernization of the labor dispute?: On the formal change of strike and lockout in Germany, 1864–1975], in *Probleme der Modernisierung in Deutschland: Sozialhistorische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [Problems of modernization in Germany: Social history studies of the nineteenth and twentieth

conflict behavior, which is purged of all "disturbance factors" and thereby draws its rationality. However, for some years now, an empirically based opposition to this approach has been growing. The rise of instrumental-rational performance, like the argument, was quite simply based on limited research on West Germany in the 1970s that underestimated the ratio of wildcat strikes to total strikes.[146] The ambivalent, bizarre, and chaotic moments of strike behavior move to the foreground if these wildcat strikes are factored in. Efforts to unpack the conceptual consequences of these types of strikes have coincided with a paradigm shift in international research on strikes since the 1990s.

A starting point for this reorientation is the shrinking of "classic" industries—related in part to globalization—since the 1990s, together with the disappearance of traditional forms of work conflict. The focal point of labor disputes has shifted from the manufacturing industry to the service sector, which in turn has meant a move toward "small scale" strikes. These types of strike are more limited in scope, making it more difficult to generalize strike demands. Strikes in the service sector last longer on average than those in other business sectors and are relatively open to political impulses.[147]

The analysis of connections between local labor disputes and the global economy—another essential element of this new research orientation—is in its infancy.[148] It is still unclear how global cycles of labor unrest are mediated by conflicts at lower levels.[149] Nevertheless, the global entanglement of labor disputes requires strike research that concentrates on business enterprises, and thus on the local milieu, in order to determine the preconditions of global "locatedness."[150] From this emerges a research agenda that can be summed up as the sociocultural "decentralization" of the study of labor disputes. It encompasses the dense description of the workforce, including its cultural heritage (for instance, with regard to migration); the

146 Peter Birke, *Wilde Streiks im Wirtschaftswunder: Arbeitskämpfe, Gewerkschaften und soziale Bewegungen* in *der Bundesrepublik und Dänemark* [Wildcat strikes in the Economic Miracle: Labor disputes, trade unions, and social movements in the Federal Republic and Denmark] (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007).

147 Hagen Lesch, "Strukturwandel des Arbeitskampfes: Deutschland im OECD-Ländervergleich" [Structural change of the labor dispute: Germany in OECD comparison], *IW-Trends* 42 (2015): 3–21; Peter Renneberg, *Die Arbeitskämpfe von morgen?: Arbeitsbedingungen und Konflikteim Dienstleistungsbereich* [The labor disputes of tomorrow? Working conditions and conflicts in the service sector] (Hamburg: VSA, 2005).

148 See, in particular, Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

149 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire: Die neue Weltordnung* [Empire: The [illegible] trans. Thomas Atzert and Andreas Wirthensohn (Frankfurt and New

cancellation of traditional conflict models due to post-Fordism; the integration of the company's social environment and the workers' living conditions into the causal explanation of labor disputes; the linking of wildcat strikes with the so-called new social movements (for example, the Occupy movement); the changing course and expressive forms of strikes as a result of the new social movements; and finally the extensive reworking of all facets of labor unrest.[151]

In the framework of this new orientation, which draws extensively on "lived experience" to analyze structural causes, the jovially striking textile workers of Hořice become an acceptable subject for mainstream strike research. First, the actions in Hořice—as well as those in countless other similar events—illustrate the playful subversive moment in the social collective of the plant. The most important precondition for such actions was that the prevalent methods of state socialism were sufficiently flexible in order to liberate a "deviant" social action context from political pressure for conformity and thereby channel it. This pattern is no different from techniques of social engineering found in Western societies.[152] Second, actions inspired by lived experience, such as in Hořice, were not fleeting phenomena. The experience of factory culture under state socialism—for example, in the Soviet Union—was carried over into the post-socialist era and thus has been

[151] See Christiane Eisenberg, "Die Arbeiterbewegungen der Welt im Vergleich: Methodenkritische Bemerkungen zu einem Projekt des Internationalen Instituts für Sozialgeschichte" [The labor movements of the world in comparison: Methodical comments on a project of the International Institute of Social History], *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 34 (1994): 397–410; Bernhard Ebbinghaus and Jelle Visser, "Der Wandel der Arbeitsbeziehungen im westeuropäischen Vergleich" [The change in industrial relations in Western European comparison], in *Die westeuropäischen Gesellschaften im Vergleich* [The Western European companies in comparison], ed. Stefan Hradil and Stefan Immerfall (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1997), 333–76; Irene Götz, *Unternehmenskultur: Die Arbeitswelt einer Großbäckerei aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht* [Corporate culture: The working world of a wholesale bakery from a cultural science perspective] (Münster: Waxmann, 1997); Klaus Weinhauer, "Konflikte am Arbeitsplatz und im Quartier: Perspektiven einer sozialgeschichtlichen Erforschung von Arbeitskämpfen und Konsumentenprotesten im 20. Jahrhundert" [Conflicts in the workplace and in the neighborhood: Perspectives of social-historical exploration of labor struggles and consumer protests in the twentieth century], *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 337–56; Sam Davies, ed., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History*, 2 vols. (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[152] See Peter Heumos, "Stalinismus in der Tschechoslowakei: Forschungslage und sozialgeschichtliche Anmerkungen am Beispiel der Industriearbeiterschaft" [Stalinism in Czechoslovakia: Research situation and social-historical comments on the example of industri-

formative in shaping the everyday behavior of workers not socialized under communism.[153]

Yet in the face of an example such as Hořice, system theorists want nothing to do with the first point and would exclude it from mainstream research. They also frown upon the second point, as experience is a low-level mental activity and can produce only the crudest "common sense." But it is not that simple. Experience is effective within certain boundaries, as this research on strikes in Czechoslovakia has shown. The sailor may have mystical ideas about the universe, but he also knows his seas.[154]

153 Vjačeslav Popkov, "Alltagskommunikation in 'zivilen' und 'geschlossenen' Betrieben der Sowjetunion: Ein Vergleich" [Daily communication in "civilian" and "closed" enterprises of the Soviet Union: A comparison], in *Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt*, 49.

154 On categories of "experience" in the social theoretical discussion, see Edward P. Thomp... *Das Elend der Theorie: Zur Produktion geschichtlicher Erfahrung* [The misery of the...

"It Shall Not Be a Written Gift, but a Lived Reality": Equal Pay, Women's Work, and the Politics of Labor in State-Socialist Hungary, Late 1960s to Late 1970s[1]

Susan Zimmermann

In the late 1960s, *Women of the Whole World*, the journal of the communist-led Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), repeatedly discussed gendered wage discrimination. At the time the WIDF, a large organization advocating women's rights and equality worldwide, was preparing for the 1969 World Congress of Women it was convening in Helsinki, where "Women at work" would feature as one major theme. There was no hint on the pages of *Women of the Whole World* that unequal pay existed in state-socialist countries. Under the heading "One Woman = ...%?" a series of reports on Argentina, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, and the US documented pervasive and large-scale gendered wage discrimination—exclusively in capitalist countries.[2] The omission of the state-socialist countries—even whilst it confirms stereotypical views on WIDF biases in general[3]—is remarkable when read against the fact that WIDF and *Women of the Whole World* regularly discussed the need for "further" improvement of working women's situation in state-socialist countries. If unequal pay under state socialism was even a taboo for *Women of the Whole World*, the same was all the more true for

[1] The IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History (re:work), gave fabulous support as I wrote this study during my fellowship period. I am grateful for the valuable comments by several readers on an earlier draft, to Marsha Siefert for her invaluable support in polishing the final draft, and to Francisca de Haan who shared the relevant issues of the journal *Women of the Whole World* (originally, I had used the German version). I am particularly indebted to my interview partners.

[2] See *Women of the Whole World* (1968), no. 3.

[3] On these views, see Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's In-