

more benefits, and better working conditions because industrial enterprises desperately tried to fill vacancies or add surplus labor.

The difficulties in recruiting workers prevented a tougher factory regime: on the one hand, strict enforcement of labor discipline would have alienated workers and pushed them to look for a job somewhere else. Experienced workers also developed routines for how to maintain as much control as possible over their own work time and, thus, the production process. On the other hand, the constant recruitment of new workers from the countryside resulted in low average skill levels. These factors constitute one reason for frequent disruptions of production and posed structural limits to efforts at increasing efficiency. Hence, the specific recruitment practices in Bulgaria and Albania contributed to the very conditions which allowed industrial workers to gain a relatively high level of agency. The difficulties in finding new workers also stimulated factories to provide various benefits to workers. Recruitment and a sort of mundane, real-life workers' socialism went hand in hand. Full employment paid off—for the workers.

Recruitment also created the peculiarly socialist form of industrial society in another way: it was at the heart of geographic and social mobility which merged people from different backgrounds into new social milieus. This is not a unique phenomenon at all but resembles industrialization processes in other countries at different periods and under various political systems. Apart from its speed, especially in the Bulgarian case, what really stands out is the situation after recruitment: state-socialist institutions provided a different pathway to industrial socialization, which is why socialist factory life looked so different to its capitalist equivalent. The political economy and institutional setup of a society, therefore, are of great significance to the course of proletarianization.

“Inappropriate Behavior”: Labor Control and the Polish, Cuban, and Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia

Alena K. Alamgir

One of the legacies of the Cold War is the conceptualization of the state-socialist era as a time of immobility characterized by “isolation and the reduction of cross-border contact to a minimum,” since “movement across state borders was very carefully controlled.”¹ This portrayal ignores a robust and oft-overlooked circulation of people, goods, knowledge, and capital² that existed between the state-socialist states, circulations that Christina Schwenkel calls “socialist mobilities.” Drawing on archival documents, Jerzy Kochanowski³ reports that, in the mid-1970s, some 25 percent of Poles travelled outside the country.⁴ In fact, he continues, when cross-border travel reached a mass scale, it was not unusual for 2,000 people to board a train bound for Budapest; several times more than the regulations permitted, which “rendered any effective control impossible.”⁵

¹ David Turnock, “Cross-Border Cooperation: A Major Element in Regional Policy in East Central Europe,” *Scottish Geographical Journal* 118, no. 1 (2002): 20, 19.

² Christina Schwenkel, “Rethinking Asian Mobilities: Socialist Migration and Post-Socialist Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany,” *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2014): 236.

³ Jerzy Kochanowski, “Pioneers of the Free Market Economy? Unofficial Commercial Exchange between People from the Socialist Bloc Countries (1970s and 1980s),” *Journal of Modern European History* 8, no. 2 (2010): 196.

⁴ We must take into account the pitfalls of cross-time comparisons, as well as the radical differences in country sizes and their geographical locations. However, given the vehemence of the claim that state-socialist governments immobilized their citizens, it is nonetheless instructive to note the fact that, in 2014, only about 21 percent of US citizens, or 68,303,358 people, traveled abroad, and in 2000, the number was only 35,717,731, not even 13 percent of the (then) population of the United States. See US Office of Travel and Tourism, [http://travel.trade.gov/view/m-2000-O-001/index.html](http://travel.trade.gov/view/m-2014-O-001/index.html), accessed July 29, 2015.

⁵ Kochanowski, “Pioneers of the Free Market Economy,” 198.

In addition to tourism, which often included not just shopping but also informal trading,⁶ there was another robust form of cross-border travel: namely, that for educational and employment purposes. Far from being immobile, the socialist world was, as Susan Bayly put it, "crosscut and interconnected by agreements under which scientific and technical specialists in their thousands were continually on the move to distant places."⁷ And so were tens of thousands of blue-collar workers, whose travel took two basic forms. The first consisted of the daily or weekly cross-border commute for jobs. This form of employment abroad was primarily the result of initiatives taken by companies on one side of the border, and workers on the other side. The states were involved in it by regulating the basic conditions of employment, such as the issues of welfare provisions and benefits.⁸ An example of this type of cross-border employment was, for instance, the employment of some 600 Hungarian citizens in Slovak companies located near the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border in 1974.⁹ The second form of employment abroad consisted of labor exchanges that were sponsored and organized by the states (although in the late 1980s, companies started playing a greater role in these as well). We can distinguish between two types of such labor exchanges: (1) mutual exchanges between *European* state-socialist countries, and (2) exchanges between these countries and *non-European* socialist, or socialist-leaning, countries.

⁶ On tourism combined with shopping and various forms of informal trading, see, e.g., Alenka Svab, "Consuming Western Image of Well-Being: Shopping Tourism in Socialist Slovenia," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 63–79; Ferenc Hammer, "A Gasoline Scented Sinbad: The Truck Driver as a Popular Hero in Socialist Hungary," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 80–120; Michelle Standley, "Here Bears the Heart of the Young Socialist State: 1970s East Berlin as Socialist Bloc Tourist Destination," *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 5 (2013): 683–98; or Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷ Susan Bayly, "Vietnamese Intellectuals in Revolutionary and Postcolonial Times," *Critique of Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (2004): 336.

⁸ Czechoslovakia and Poland signed such an agreement with regard to welfare provisions for Polish cross-border workers in 1948. See Ondřej Klípa, "Pošit pracovníci v ČSSR: nevtitáná družba. Specifika dočasné zahraniční pracovní migrace v socialistickém systému" (Ph.D. dissertation, Charles University, Prague, 2013), 23.

⁹ Národní archiv (hereafter NA), Prague, "Zpráva o současném problému při zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR a návrh zásad dalšího postupu," material presented at the meeting of the presidium of the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on October 11, 1974 (I hereby thank Dr. Ondřej Klípa for making the document available to me).

State-Socialist Labor Migrations

Intra-European state-socialist labor migration often grew out of cross-border employment. Thus, in the early post-World War II years, Polish citizens started appearing in Czechoslovakia as individual commuters. By 1961, some 4,000 Polish citizens worked in Czechoslovakia as a result of an agreement signed between the regional governments (the districts of Eastern and Northern Bohemia on the Czechoslovak side, and the Wrocław voivodeship [county] on the Polish side).¹⁰ In 1964, a government-level *Protocol and Agreement* were signed, and some six years later, the number of Polish workers in Czechoslovakia climbed to 15,000. The program peaked in 1974, when almost 21,000 Polish citizens were permanently employed by Czechoslovak enterprises;¹¹ furthermore, some 45,000 Polish youth traveled to Czechoslovakia annually for seasonal agricultural work.¹² Czechoslovakia was also a destination for Bulgarian workers. First, in 1946, agricultural workers arrived, and, after the signing of an intergovernmental treaty in 1957, industrial workers started arriving as well.¹³ The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was also a significant destination for intra-bloc labor migration, employing, in the late 1970s, between 60,000 and 70,000 Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and Yugoslavs.¹⁴ The third largest destination for intra-bloc labor migration was the Soviet Union.¹⁵

The other type of labor mobility that existed among the state-socialist countries involved workers from socialist or socialist-leaning countries outside Europe coming to Europe for training and work. The main destination countries were the Soviet Union, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent later on also Hungary and Poland. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the vast majority of overseas foreign workers came from Vietnam and Cuba. Based on various partial statistics compiled from archival documents of the Czechoslovak Labor Ministries, I estimate the total number of Vietnamese workers employed in Czechoslovakia between 1967 and 1989 at about 60,000. Additionally, some 23,160 Cubans worked in Czechoslovakia.

¹⁰ Petra Boušková, "Pracovní migrace cizinců v České republice v 70. až 90. letech," in *Národní diskuse u kulatého stolu na téma vztahů mezi komunitami 19. února 1998, sborník dokumentů* (Prague: MPSV, 2005), 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ Klípa, "Pošit pracovníci v ČSSR," 74.

¹⁴ Friedrich Levick and Sue Halsey Westphal, "Migration and Employment of Foreign Workers in COMECON Countries and Their Problems," *Eastern European Economics* 16, no. 1 (1977): 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

slovakia between 1978 (when the first worker-exchange treaty with Cuba was signed) and 1989.¹⁶ The GDR's overseas foreign worker schemes were more extensive: "In 1988 alone more than 78,000 [workers] from Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, and Cuba" were employed in GDR enterprises.¹⁷

One factor that significantly shaped the overseas labor migration schemes was the fact that at the time, many of the non-European sending countries had only just embarked on wide-scale industrialization projects and/or had their economies in ruins as a consequence of anti-colonial or other wars. As a result, labor migrations took place within the context of comprehensive development aid, or "socialist economic assistance," provided to these countries by the state-socialist European countries and the Soviet Union. In the overseas workers' training and labor programs, commitments to socialist modernization and economic development converged: since (socialist) modernity, which was ideologically desirable, could not happen without economic progress, these programs were conceived of as projects that were simultaneously useful in a pragmatic sense and imperative in an ethical sense. These programs, then, were not conceived of as "mere" labor migration schemes, but incorporated elements of professional training as well. In some cases—those in which training was to take place exclusively on-the-job, not in educational settings—the training component may have sometimes fallen by the wayside (in the Czechoslovak case, this happened to the Cubans). In other cases—prominently in the case of Vietnamese migration, not just to Czechoslovakia but also to the GDR, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union—the "training leading to productive overseas labor" model became well developed and was quite successful, at least through the end of the 1970s, as I have described and argued elsewhere.¹⁸

Scholarly literature on these blue-collar labor migrants working in state-socialist European countries remains rather modest, perhaps with the exception of Mozambican and Vietnamese laborers in the GDR.¹⁹ This literature

¹⁶ Bonšková, "Pracovní migrace cizinců v České republice," 36.

¹⁷ Jude Howell, "The End of an Era: The Rise and Fall of GDR Aid," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, no. 2 (1994): 310.

¹⁸ Alena Alamgir, "Socialist Internationalism at Work: Changes in the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Labor Exchange Program, 1967–1989" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2014).

¹⁹ Jochen Oppenheimer, "Mozambican Worker Migration to the Former German Democratic Republic: Serving Socialism and Struggling Under Democracy," *Portuguese Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2004): 163–87; Jonathan R. Zaldin, "Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989," *Central European History* 40 (2007): 683–720; Damian Mac Con Uladh, *Guests of the Socialist Nation?: Foreign Students and Workers in the GDR, 1949–1990* (Ph.D. dissertation, University College London, 2005); Mike Dennis, "Working under Hammer and Sickle: Vietnamese Workers in the German Democratic Republic, 1980–89," *German Politics* 16, no. 3 (2007): 339–57.

tends to portray the schemes as primarily expedient propaganda tools, while the workers are typically seen as victims of exploitation and oppression perpetuated by both the home and the receiving states. The programs were, no doubt, embedded within a larger framework of European state-socialist governments' Cold War geopolitical concerns and foreign relations.²⁰ It is also undeniable that migrant workers, especially in the 1980s, were often short-changed in terms of both wages and the professional development they had been promised. However, as I show elsewhere, the assertions of *blanket* exploitation are incorrect.²¹ In this chapter, I discuss a matter that has thus far been absent from existing literature: the issue of foreign workers' resistance and protests against working conditions they found unfair. If migrant blue-collar workers in state-socialist societies were mistreated, or even exploited, they also challenged and resisted this mistreatment, often effectively.

Besides correcting the historical record, this issue is also of theoretical interest. In their astute sociological analysis of the state-socialist workplace, Burawoy and Lukacs²² only discuss the so-called "key workers" as capable of resisting "managerial dictatorship." Key workers were those who possessed special skills and firm-specific experience making them indispensable to the foremen for meeting the production goals. Consequently, "management [was] forced to rely on such workers, who [were] then able to extract concessions in defense of their interests."²³ However, the state-socialist migrant workers, especially the non-European ones, were rarely if ever key workers. If anything, they were in fact marginalized in ways that were strikingly similar to the way women, for instance, were marginalized in state-socialist fac-

Felicitas Hillmann, "Riders on the Storm: Vietnamese in Germany's Two Migration Systems" in *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets: Patterns and Processes of Immigrant Labour Market Insertion in Europe*, ed. Ernst Span, Felicitas Hillmann, and Ton van Naerssen (London, Routledge, 2005); Pipo Bui, *Envisioning Vietnamese Migrants in Germany: Ethnic Stigma, Immigrant Origin Narratives and Partial Masking* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2003); Jude Howell, "The End of an Era: The Rise and Fall of GDR Aid," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, no. 2 (1994): 306.

²⁰ Michael Radu, "East vs. South: The Neglected Side of the International System," in *East-cen Europe and the Third World*, ed. Michael Radu (New York: Praeger, 1981); Bartłomiej Kamiński and Robert W. James, "Economic Rationale for Eastern Europe's Third World Policy," *Problems of Communism* 37 (1988): 15–27; Marie Lavigne, "East-South Trade: Trends, Partners, Commodity Composition, Balances," in *East-South Relations in the World Economy*, ed. Marie Lavigne (London: Westview Press, 1988).

²¹ Alamgir, "Socialist Internationalism at Work."

²² Michael Burawoy and János Lukacs, "Mythologies of Work: A Comparison of Firms in State Socialism and Advanced Capitalism," *American Sociological Review* 50, no. 6 (1985): 723–37; and Michael Burawoy and János Lukacs, *The Radium Par: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

²³ Burawoy and Lukacs, "Mythologies of Work," 733.

tories.²⁴ Yet, as I will show in this chapter, these migrant workers also protested against their working conditions and wages and challenged the management of the enterprises they worked for. Thus, the analysis of foreign workers' protests can reveal other avenues for pushing for workers' interests and rights within the state-socialist context.²⁵

Polish Workers in Czechoslovakia

In Czechoslovakia, the Polish constituted the biggest group of foreign workers until the 1980s. Figure 4.1, taken from Ondřej Klípa, is telling:

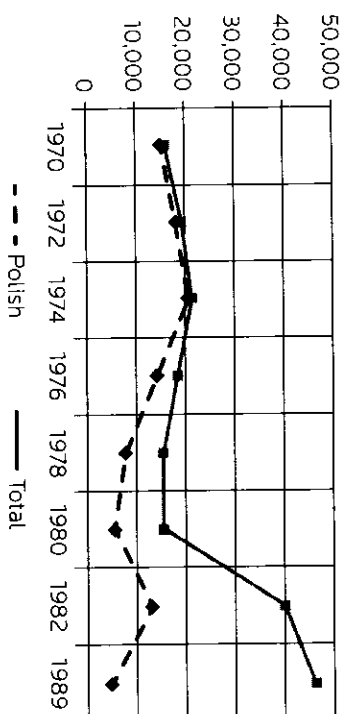


Figure 4.1: Polish and foreign workers in Czechoslovakia, 1970–1989

Source: Ondřej Klípa, "Polští pracovníci v ČSSR: nevládná družba: Specifika dočasně zahraniční pracovní migrace v socialistickém systému" (Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, 2013), 108.

²⁴ See Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-Politics of Anti-Feminism, 1948–1990" (Ph.D. dissertation, UC Berkeley, 1993), 254.

²⁵ On working class resistance in state socialism, see, e.g., Peter Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism: On the Social Context of Socialist Work Movements in Czechoslovak Industrial and Mining Enterprises, 1945–1965," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 68 (2005): 47–74; Kevin McDermott, "Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Pilsen Uprising, June 1953," *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 4 (2010): 287–307; Johanna Simla, "The Party and the Proletariat: Škoda 1948–53," *Cold War History* 6, no. 2 (2006): 153–75; Mark Piraway, "The Reproduction of Hierarchy: Skill, Working-Class Culture, and the State in Early Socialist Hungary," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 4 (2002): 737–69; Jeffrey Kopstein, "Chipping Away at the State: Workers' Resistance and the Demise of East Germany," *World Politics* 48, no. 3 (1996): 391–423; Robert K. Evanson, "Regime and Working Class in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1968," *Soviet Studies* 37, no. 2 (1985): 248–68.

The line with squares represents all foreign workers in the Czechoslovak economy, while the line with diamonds represents Polish workers. Throughout the 1970s, the lines barely diverge from each other; sometimes, especially early on, they actually overlap. In other words, until about 1980, the two categories were almost identical: to have been a foreign worker in Czechoslovakia for a long time almost certainly meant to be a Pole. In the 1980s, the two lines depart sharply from each other, as the Poles were being replaced by other foreign workers. Based on my archival sources,²⁶ it is clear that these other workers were almost entirely Vietnamese and, to a significantly lesser extent, Cubans (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Vietnamese and Cuban workers in Czechoslovakia, 1980–1989

Year	Number of Vietnamese workers	Number of Cuban workers
1980	3,529	4,726
1981	11,543	3,972
1982	21,314	4,241
1983	22,446	3,737
1984	*	5,352
1985	15,300	*
1986	11,400**	*
1987	18,900	10,600
1988	28,955	8,031
1989	35,609	*

* missing data
** expected numbers (actual numbers unknown)

²⁶ Data compiled from various reports prepared by the Czech (i.e., republic-level, not the federal Czechoslovak) Labor Ministry, usually titled "Přehled o počtech zahraničních pracovníků k 31. prosinci [rok] podle resortů a jednotlivých zahraničních partnerů" [Summary of numbers of foreign workers as of December 31, according to (industrial) departments and individual foreign partners], with the exception of data for years 1985 and 1986, which come from "Návrh do VSR: Provádění protokolů o spolupráci mezi Československou socialistickou republikou a Vietnamskou socialistickou republikou v oblasti dočasněho zaměstnávání kvalifikovaných pracovníků Vietnamské socialistické republiky spojeného s další odbornou přípravou v československých organizacích v roce 1987" [Proposal for the VSR: Implementation protocol on (sic) the cooperation between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the area of temporary employment and further technical training of skilled workers from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam], undated draft.

The operation of the logic of substitution is apparent from the numbers: for instance, between 1985 and 1986, when the number of Polish workers in companies managed by the Industry Ministry was expected to decrease from 3,663 to 2,845, the number of Cuban workers was expected to rise from 3,619 to 4,033.²⁷ By the very late 1980s, this logic was clearly the guiding principle of foreign workers' employment in Czechoslovakia. As a matter of fact, a report on the current situation and expected developments regarding training and employment of foreign workers explicitly used the language of replacement when it stated that the Vietnamese state "puts practically no limits on the numbers of its citizens who could work in the ČSSR [Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]." The two sides agreed that 15,000 Vietnamese workers would arrive in 1988, with the expectation that "in future years new Vietnamese workers would replace the departing Cuban and Polish workers."²⁸

While Polish workers played an important role in the Czechoslovak economy overall, their presence and labor was particularly crucial to certain industries, such as the textile industry. In 1974, for instance, Polish workers comprised 10.4 percent of all workforce in the cotton industry and 7.4 percent in the flax industry. Even these numbers, however, do not capture their importance adequately because, in addition, individual plants had units—and, as a ministerial memo put it, "quite a few of them" (*nejšou vyjímku*)—in which Polish workers constituted *more than 40 percent* of the factory's overall workforce.²⁹ It is then fair to say that, in such cases, the fortunes of the companies heavily depended on the Polish workers they were employing.

Yet, as a whole, Polish workers seemed not to have been an easy workforce to manage. For one thing, they had stunningly high turnover levels. In 1976, for example, some 32,000 Polish workers joined Czechoslovak enterprises, while "roughly the same number of Polish workers left" the country.³⁰ Table 4.2, originally compiled by the Czechoslovak Federal Labor

Ministry, details the reasons for departures of Polish workers from companies under the purview of three different ministries.³¹

Table 4.2: Reasons for departures of Polish workers from companies under the purview of three different Czechoslovak ministries, April 1973–January 1974

Reason for departure	Industry Ministry of the Czech Socialist Republic		Federal Ministry of Metallurgy and Heavy Engineering	Federal Ministry of General Engineering		
	Apr 1973	Jan 1974	Apr 1973	Jan 1974	Apr 1973	Jan 1974
End of contract	6.5%	5%	Not available	20.9%	15.3%	12.3%
Health and family reasons	31.7%	30.1%	Not available	28.9%	17.3%	19.5%
Request of Polish authorities	1%	1%	Not available	3.5%	7.6%	4.4%
Absenteeism	14.3%	12%	Not available	3.9%	24.5%	24.2%
Gratuitous desertion (světvolný odchod)	17.8%	20.4%	Not available	15.2%	9.7%	8.8%
Other reasons	28.7%	31.5%	Not available	27.6%	25.5%	30.8%

If we combine the "absenteeism" and "gratuitous desertion" cells, we arrive at the figures of 19–34 percent of Polish workers employed in the three industrial areas in 1973–1974 who refused to submit to the will of their Czechoslovak employers. And, concomitantly, less than 21 percent in the best case, and a mere 5 percent in the worst case, of the Polish workers in these industries fulfilled their original contractual obligations. Moreover, this fluctuation was happening in the context of plans, agreed upon by the governments of both countries, according to which the number of Polish workers in Czechoslovakia was supposed to gradually increase, with the goal of reaching 50,000.³² This goal never materialized, however, and the highest number of Polish workers employed in Czechoslovakia was less than half of that—20,825—in 1974.³³

²⁷ NA, Table "Ministerstvo průmyslu ČSR: Předpokládaný stav zahraničních pracovníků v letech 1985 a 1986 podle národnosti a VHI (fyzické stavy dle uzavřených, resp. připravovaných protokolů)."

²⁸ NA, "Zpráva o současném stavu odborné přípravy a dočasného zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů v československých organizacích a o výhledu této spolupráce do roku 1990," emphasis mine.

²⁹ NA via Klipa, "Zpráva o současném problému při zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR a návrh zásad dalšího postupu," report presented by the minister of labor and social affairs of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Michal Štancl, to the presidium of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, on October 11, 1974.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² NA via Klipa, "Zpráva o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR," document prepared by the federal Czechoslovak Labor Ministry for the meeting of the Economic Section of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on February 27, 1978.

³³ Boušková, "Pracovní migrace cizinců v České republice," 35.

However, individual workers' insubordination was not the only reason behind high turnover rates; so were the decisions by Polish authorities, which canceled work contracts or withdrew their workers from Czechoslovak companies, sometimes at short notice. For instance, in 1979, the Polish side gradually reduced the number of its female workers in a textile factory that was Czechoslovakia's sole producer of damask and terry cloth from 829 to 460, with the plan of eventually withdrawing "all female workers under the age of forty-five, which [amounted to] 193 persons."³⁴ This was a cause of great concern to the company, as the withdrawal of so many workers was likely to have serious adverse effects on production, alongside concomitant losses of revenue from both domestic and export trade.

Czechoslovak officials speculated that the representatives of the Polish government used workers' withdrawals, or the threats of withdrawals, as a method to push through their workers' demands. For example, a 1984 report noted: "In an effort to secure more advantageous conditions than the treaty mandates, the Polish side pretended (*předstírala*) already in 1983 that it was having difficulties with securing workers [for work in Czechoslovakia], and it fell 2,000 workers short. . . . Given the decision of the Czechoslovak side not to give in to the demands, in the best possible case, we can expect approximately the same decrease in 1984 as we experienced in 1983."³⁵ First of all, this quote shows that, at least by the early 1980s, the relationship between the Czechoslovak and Polish officials involved in the worker exchanges was frayed, conceptualized as something of a tug-of-war, and filled with suspicion. More important for the argument pursued in this chapter, however, is that it also indicates that Polish officials were actively promoting the interests of their workers. If this involvement by the sending state's officials is only hinted at in this report, it is documented explicitly elsewhere. For instance, in February 1983, the deputy director of the Czechoslovak textile factory Jitka personally visited employment offices in the Polish towns of Brzeg and Opole in order to negotiate the recruitment of female Polish workers for his company.³⁶ He succeeded, but by August, the recruited Polish workers were already complaining about their working conditions, even asserting that the company was "bullying them."³⁷ The company, for its part, described the Polish em-

³⁴ Archiv bezpečnostních složek [Archive of the Security Forces, hereafter ABS], Kanice, "Informace o operativní situaci ve VĚK pro vedoucího tajemníka KV KSC," written by KS SNB—Správa Státní bezpečnosti, Hradec Králové, October 25, 1979.

³⁵ NA, "Informace o předpokládaných odjezdech zahraničních pracovníků v roce 1984," February 14, 1984.

³⁶ ABS, OB 332 ČB, "Dělníci," "Nástup dalších PLR dělnic do n.p. Jitka Jindř. Hradec," March 3, 1983.

³⁷ ABS, OB 332 ČB "Dělníci," "Charakteristika pracovní morálky mezi polskými dělnicemi pracujícími v n.p. JITKA Jindřichův Hradec," August 25, 1983.

ployees' work performance as "bad" and noted that "it has been pointed out to the Polish workers that they were paid for the work that they actually performed, not merely for being present during the shift," with the latter remark meant as a response to workers' complaints about low wages. The company further told the workers that it "would not yield to any sort of pressure."³⁸ However, the workers responded by informing the management that the head of the regional (voivodeship) employment office in Opole would travel from Poland to the Czechoslovak factory to help resolve the conflict. This happened, and the Polish representatives were able to successfully apply pressure on their Czechoslovak counterparts: a report from a meeting between the company's management and "the representatives of the Polish People's Republic" stated that "the company's leadership promised to replace part of the hostel furnishings, and to equip the rooms with cooking stoves and refrigerators,"³⁹ thus presumably addressing at least some of workers' complaints. It seems, however, that the Czechoslovak company may have failed to deliver on (all) its promises, as some three months later the Polish authorities announced that they planned to withdraw their workers from the plant one year before the end of the contract, in July 1984. A company insider ascribed the decision to withdraw the workers to "the efforts of the Polish side . . . to put pressure on the management of the JITKA Company in order to obtain further working and material advantages for its workers, which the Polish side had already requested in the past, but the JITKA leadership rejected."⁴⁰ As it turned out, the withdrawal was not an empty threat on the part of the Polish authorities, and the Polish workers did indeed leave. The company decided to resolve its labor shortage problem by securing fifty Cuban female workers to replace the outgoing Polish workers,⁴¹ exemplifying the shift in the overall employment of foreign workers in Czechoslovakia.

Cuban Workers in Czechoslovakia

However, the Cubans did not turn out to be the best replacement for Polish workers. There were frequent complaints about them as well. Although the Czechoslovak sources discussed all the complaints as disciplinary transgres-

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ ABS, OB 332 ČB "Dělníci," "Jednání zástupců z PLR v n.p. Jitka Jindřichův Hradec," November 23, 1983.

⁴⁰ ABS, OB 332 ČB "Dělníci," "Prodloužení pracovní smlouvy s PLR státními příslušnicemi zaměstnanými v n.p. Jitka Jindř. Hradec," February 16, 1984.

⁴¹ ABS, OB 332 ČB "Dělníci," "Ukončení pobytu dělnic z PLR, které pracují v n.p. Jitka Jindřichův Hradec," July 4, 1984.

sions, only a few of the reported incidents—such as the complaint by a company that it had outfitted its hostel with brand new furnishings, which the Cubans “have already managed to completely wreck”⁴²—would seem to belong in that category. Other complaints betray intercultural misunderstanding, or even confrontation with undertones of civilizational scorn and racializing discourses. Typical examples include the complaint that the Cubans were “expressing their temperament, especially in the evening hours, by playing various musical instruments, drums, et cetera,”⁴³ complaints about Cuban workers’ behavior in pubs and restaurants, the judgment that conflicts between the Czechs and the Cubans were caused by the latter’s “excessive temperament,”⁴⁴ and that these behaviors were sufficient to explain “Czechoslovak citizens starting to express an aversion” to the Cubans.⁴⁵ I analyze racialized discourses deployed against foreign workers in Czechoslovakia elsewhere.⁴⁶ In this chapter, I want to draw attention instead to the last type of complaints that appeared in the archival documents: those that directly concerned the Cubans’ participation and incorporation in the production process in Czechoslovakia. A 1979 report, for instance, complained about Cubans refusing to work overtime and on Saturdays.⁴⁷ Similarly, a report from 1982 stated that Cuban workers were “refusing to perform jobs for which financial remuneration is low,”⁴⁸ a concern that was reiterated in a follow-up report six months later.⁴⁹ Or again, a quarterly report of the economic section of the Czechoslovak counter-intelligence service from 1985 reported a “mass refusal to work by Cuban citizens” in an auto-

⁴² ABS, OB 332 ČB, “Zahraníční dělníci,” “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—zpráva,” report by Jindřichův Hradec district police for state police authority, dated June 15, 1981.

⁴³ ABS, OB 332 ČB, “Delegáti,” “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—odpověď na dožádání,” written by Správa Státní bezpečnosti, 3. odbor, České Budějovice, November 30, 1978.

⁴⁴ ABS, OB 332 ČB, “Zahraníční dělníci,” “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—zpráva,” report by Jindřichův Hradec district police for state police authority, June 15, 1981.

⁴⁵ ABS, OB 332 ČB, “Zahraníční dělníci,” “Zahraníční pracovníci z Kuby—žádost o operativní kontrolu,” Krajská správa národní bezpečnosti, České Budějovice, September 21, 1981.

⁴⁶ Alena Alamgir, “Race Is Elsewhere: State-Socialist Ideology and the Racialisation of Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia,” *Race & Class*, 54, no. 4 (2013): 67–85.

⁴⁷ ABS, “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—vyhodnocení” written by OS SNB, Jindřichův Hradec, June 18, 1979.

⁴⁸ ABS, OS 412 ČB “Cizina,” “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—sdělení,” July 7, 1982.

⁴⁹ ABS, OB 412 ČB “Cizina,” “Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—sdělení,” report from district police (SNB) to regional police administration (Krajská správa SNB), December 10, 1982.

motive parts manufacturing company, motivated by “a protest against work assignments.”⁵⁰ Sometimes concerns about Polish and Cuban workers converged, such as when, in July 1981, it was discovered that:

Male Cuban workers employed by the power plant and the Energostroj company in Chvalčovice travel to meet female Cuban workers in Černožice, in the vicinity of Hradec Králové, where they come into contact with Polish workers, from whom they gain information about the situation in the Polish People’s Republic. Subsequently, they show dissatisfaction in the workplace and make statements to the effect that they will go on strike, as is happening in Poland.⁵¹

Whether or not Cuban workers’ expressions of dissatisfaction with their wages and working conditions were fueled by the actions of the Polish *Solidarności* movement, as this report suggests, is up for debate. More important to the argument pursued in this chapter is the fact that such expressions of dissatisfaction were made possible by the way the foreign worker programs were structured. Notably, representatives of the sending countries’ governments (usually embassy staff but also officials and administrators back home) retained—in a striking contrast to most labor migration schemes, including guest-worker programs, in non-state-socialist contexts—a great degree of control over their workers. We have already seen this in the case of Polish workers, and we see it in the case of the Cubans as well. A 1979 report, for instance, described a group of Cuban workers in a Czechoslovak company as “an independent structure of sorts that refuses to submit, even in basic matters, to any instructions from anyone except those coming from the Cuban Embassy.”⁵² This was possible due to a structural attribute of these labor migration schemes, which we could call *split authority*. Split authority meant that in the workplace, foreign workers fell under the jurisdiction of the Czechoslovak companies for which they worked. However, the final say on all other matters, and to some extent even on labor-related matters, belonged to their respective embassies: that is to say, to the workers’ home governments. This meant, for instance, that no matter how much a company, or the Czech (or Slovak) Labor Ministry,

⁵⁰ ABS, Na Struze, I/5/e-59A/1985, “Čtvrletní informace XI. S SNB: Hodnocení bezpečnostní situace a dosažených výsledků ve služební činnosti po problematice XI. správy SNB za III. čtvrt. 1985.”

⁵¹ ABS, Kanice, addition from Hradec Králové, package 11, “Informace o operativní situaci ve VěK pro vedoucího tajemníka KV KSC,” July 15, 1981.

⁵² ABS, Kanice, “Informace o operativní situaci ve VěK pro vedoucího tajemníka KV KSC,” written by KS SNB—Správa Státní bezpečnosti, Hradec Králové, June 15, 1979.

wanted to fire a worker (or extend her contract or move it to another company), it could not do so until and unless the embassy issued an approval. This structural feature was crucial to the ability of foreign workers to challenge their working conditions. The Vietnamese case exemplifies this in a particularly salient manner.

Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia

In both oral histories and archival documents, the Vietnamese are often described as almost fabulously docile, diligent, and disciplined workers. As a former Labor Ministry clerk said: "No, there were no really significant problems . . . the Vietnamese, they are hardworking."⁵³ A former HR manager in one of the largest Czech industrial conglomerates of the period echoed the ministerial clerk in his assessment: "The Vietnamese, they had a more pronounced tendency to apply themselves at work [in contrast to the Cubans] . . . the first groups [that arrived to the factory] were absolutely ideal." Furthermore, he claimed that "the Vietnamese, they work relentlessly, they are very diligent." His effusiveness continued throughout the interview: "The Vietnamese, more so than the Cubans, the Vietnamese were better liked [by the Czechs], they were more industrious and kind of [hesitates, looking for the right word] more disciplined and calmer."⁵⁴ Similarly, a report that criticized the Cubans contained glowing reviews of the Vietnamese workers.⁵⁵ Another report based on information obtained from various enterprises employing Vietnamese workers described them as "disciplined, hardworking, modest, well-behaved both in the workplace and in public, and therefore well liked," as well as having an "interest in work and making an effort to earn as much money as possible." These qualities, stated the report, meant that the Vietnamese were "gladly [*ochotně*] working night shifts and accepting overtime work and weekend work."⁵⁶ Or again: "The management of Texlen [a spinning mill company] notes that the Vietnamese workers' work ethic is incomparably better than that of the [female] workers from Cuba."⁵⁷

⁵³ Interview, April 20, 2010.

⁵⁴ Interviews, March 18 and 25, 2010.

⁵⁵ ABS, OB 332 ČB, "Zahraniční dělníci," "Zapojení zahraničních dělníků v ekonomice ČSSR—zpráva," report by Jindřichův Hradec district police for state police authority, June 15, 1981.

⁵⁶ ABS, "Komentář k vývoji stavu a pohybu vietnamských pracovníků v I. pololetí r. 1981," October 20, 1981.

⁵⁷ ABS, Kanice, addition from Hradec Kralovce, package 11, "Informace o operativní situaci ve VĚK pro vedoucího tajemníka KV KSČ," July 15, 1981.

Yet this is not the whole story, not by a long shot. An undated (but likely written in the fall of 1982) Labor Ministry report states that, according to information obtained from the companies, "Vietnamese workers express their dissatisfaction with strikes."⁵⁸ According to another report, most strikes—56.5 percent—took place in agriculture, the construction industry, and forestry, although only 30 percent of Vietnamese workers worked in these sectors.⁵⁹ Another report⁶⁰ contains a list of sixteen strikes carried out by Vietnamese workers in late summer 1982, practically all of them over low wages. Yet another document mentions a strike by forty-eight workers in a Prague construction firm (Pražský stavební podnik) in the fall of 1982.⁶¹ The strike was preceded by the workers' refusal to show up for final exams that were to conclude a three-month training period. But "the entire group of fifty workers announced [to the management of the company] that they did not intend to take part in any further training, neither language [acquisition] nor professional." During the strike, the Vietnamese workers explained that they were refusing to work in protest against their wages, which they considered too low, and demanded that they all be paid 12 Kčs per hour. Other sources report yet more strikes taking place at around the same time. In mid-August 1982, some female Vietnamese workers employed in a spinning mill (Jitka Otín) refused to work in protest against the compulsory "transfer."⁶² The women further complained that the machines on which they worked were technologically inferior to the machines used by their Czechoslovak coworkers. Their wages also became an issue, although one which transpired only indirectly, when a source apprising the secret police of the situation mentioned that "the lower wages earned by the Vietnamese workers are caused by the fact that they are not fully trained yet."⁶³ Vietnamese women in another branch of the same textile factory (Jitka

⁵⁸ NA, "Informace o některých incidentech vietnamských pracujících v ČSSR," undated.

⁵⁹ NA, "Informace o současných problémech spojených se zaměstnáváním vietnamských pracovníků v čs. organizacích," September 1982.

⁶⁰ NA, "Přehled o stávkách a další závazné protispolečenské činnosti vietnamských pracovníků v čs. Organizacích."

⁶¹ NA, Letter from the director of Pražský stavební podnik to the Vietnamese Embassy in Prague, September 23, 1982.

⁶² "Transfer" was a tax of sorts introduced at the request of the Vietnamese government, which asked that 15 percent (later reduced to 10 percent) of workers' basic wages (*základní plat*) be collected by companies and transferred into a bank account owned by the Vietnamese government. In the treaties, the payment was described as going toward "the costs of workers' recruitment, preparations for their trip to Czechoslovakia, and a contribution to the fund for the defense and [re]construction of the homeland." Transfer was highly unpopular among Vietnamese workers as it lowered their wages.

⁶³ ABS, OB 332 ČB, "Dělníci," "Nemasoupení pracovníků VSR na odpolední směnu," August 18, 1982.

Jindřichův Hradec) went on strike in protest against the transfer at around the same time,⁶⁴ as did thirty women workers in yet another spinning mill (Prádelny česané přize Nejdk) about a month later. There was also a legendary two-week-long strike carried out by some 100 women working for a plant cultivation company; this strike remains immortalized in a myth that still circulates in the Czech Vietnamese community today, which I discuss in detail elsewhere.⁶⁶

The strikes were certainly a vexing issue for both the Czechoslovak enterprises and the Czech Labor Ministry. But the Vietnamese Embassy's response to the strikes possibly aggravated them even more. The program administrators at the Czech Labor Ministry believed that "the indiscipline of the Vietnamese Embassy contributes to the wave of strikes. The embassy conducts protracted investigations, and wavers [*váhá*] over punishing the strikes' organizers and sending them back to the SRV [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]."⁶⁷ To illustrate this, the report recounted the events following a weeklong strike of eleven workers that took place in the middle of August 1982 in a plant cultivation company. At first, the representatives of the embassy and the Czech ministry representatives agreed to send the five "most active organizers of the strike" back to Vietnam. However, the ambassador then expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed solution, saying that all eleven workers should be sent back. In the end, however, the embassy only sent two persons back in late October. From the Czech Labor Ministry's point of view, "the embassy's approach makes the organizers of strikes think that they may not be punished at all. During their weekend trips to other places in the ČSSR, they boast of the successes that they achieved by going on strike, and in that way they contribute to the strikes spreading further." Sometimes, the ministry even asserted that the embassy was directly to blame for Vietnamese workers' disciplinary transgressions, as at the Živavnice agricultural cooperative, where there were "twenty-four unexcused absences, which were caused by inappropriate behavior of the staff of the [Embassy's] Department for Workers' Care."⁶⁸ (Alas, the docu-

⁶⁴ ABS, OB 332 ČB, "Dělnici," "VSR státní příslušníci," around October 14, 1982 (strike took place on August 13, 1982).

⁶⁵ ABS, Kanice č. př. 1756/1988, balk č. 6 "Pobyt a činnost občanů Vietnamské socialistické republiky v Západočeském kraji—zaslání podkladů," October 20, 1982.

⁶⁶ Alena Alamgir, "They Knit Sweaters and Refuse to Follow Foreman's Orders: Vietnamese Female Workers in State-Socialist Czechoslovakia," unpublished.

⁶⁷ Archive, Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí [Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, hereafter MPSV], "Informace o současných problémech spojených se zaměstnáváním vietnamských pracovníků v čs. Organizacích," uncatalogued, end of 1982.

⁶⁸ NA, "Odborné školení vietnamských pracovníků v MZVz [Ministerstvo zemědělství a výživy] (výňatky z komentářů podniku ke statistice),"

ments do not specify what that "inappropriate behavior" by embassy staff entailed.) The Czechoslovak administrators also complained that the Vietnamese group leaders,⁶⁹ who were nominated for their positions by the Vietnamese side, "often work for the [embassy] even though they are stationed in the company." In other words, the Czechoslovak clerks objected to the group leaders being the instruments of the embassy, as it were, rather than implementing the companies' policies, and thus contributing to the disciplining of workers.

Besides the support that the Vietnamese officials (sometimes) lent to their workers who protested against their working conditions, they also intervened on the workers' behalf directly. For instance, in late 1984, the head of the Department for Workers' Care at the Vietnamese Embassy in Prague informed the Czech Labor Ministry that the embassy staff made trips to two enterprises from which Vietnamese workers had repeatedly asked to be moved elsewhere. The embassy officials reported that

a majority of workers there only engage in arduous, unskilled work. Their main job is to liquidate and clean up an old power plant and a chemical workshop ([in the case of the company located in the town of] Most), or else arduous and unskilled labor with low wages ([in the case of the company located in the town of] Vlašim). In addition, housing conditions are not good or comfortable either.⁷⁰

To bolster their case, the embassy staff added that "the workers of the two groups are, for the most part, former soldiers, who fought for peace and socialism on the front lines. They came to the ČSSR with the greatest goal: to acquire skills for their future during their four-year stay. That is why we ask you, comrade department head, to transfer these workers [to other companies]."⁷¹ Judging by handwritten comments on the margins of the letter, this appeal seems to have been successful. A Czech Labor Ministry clerk wrote: "Please, discuss with comrade Pospíchalová, and make transfer pos-

⁶⁹ With the exception of cross-border employment, blue-collar labor migration in the socialist world did not occur at the individual level, but was organized in groups. These groups, as a rule, had group leaders, whose activities were manifold and included acting as interpreters, both in the linguistic and cultural sense, as liaisons between the company management and the workers, and first-level disciplining agents, among other things.

⁷⁰ MPSV, Letter from Dr. Nguyen Phuoc Loc, CS., the head of the Department for Workers' Care at the Vietnamese Embassy in Prague, to Ing. Karel Kozelka, the head of the Foreign Workers Secretariat at the Czech Labor Ministry, November 12, 1984 (uncatalogued).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

sible: the reasons are skill-related. . . . they are doing unskilled work, and risky work at that; we have to accommodate the Vietnamese side!"⁷²

Significantly, the embassy staff would sometimes go ahead and do what they thought was right for their workers, even if it meant going against the express wishes of Czechoslovak enterprisers or administrators. In the spring of 1986, for instance, the Vietnamese embassy requested that its workers employed in a construction company be transferred elsewhere. In an attempt to accommodate them, the Labor Ministry administrators arranged for the group to be moved to a glassworks company. This move, however, was met with a sharp negative reaction by the Construction Industry Ministry, which wanted to retain the Vietnamese workers in the company. From the correspondence it transpires that, after being first notified about the impending transfer, the Construction Industry Ministry protested, and persuaded the Labor Ministry to rescind its decision. However, the Vietnamese Embassy would not accept the rescission, and insisted on the group's transfer out of the construction industry.⁷³ The embassy argued that the company used the workers only in unskilled or auxiliary jobs, which did not provide them with qualifications. Furthermore, references to the ideological underpinnings of the program were once again used to bolster the argument: "Most of the transferred workers were former members of the Vietnamese Army whom the Vietnamese side wants to acquire qualifications."⁷⁴ These are only two of the numerous cases in which Vietnamese governmental officials (mainly at the embassy but also back in Hanoi) went to bat for their workers. The fact that they were able to do this was made possible by the structure of the program, which preserved a great degree of control and decision-making power for the sending government.

Conclusion

What do we learn from these windows into the programs that brought the three largest groups of migrant workers into state-socialist Czechoslovakia? First of all, that the workers were active agents who pushed vigorously for their interests, and resisted workplace unfairness when they encountered it. They used various means to do this. One method consisted in a refusal to be

a disciplined workforce, most evident in the case of the Polish workers and their astoundingly high turnover rates, absenteeism, and willful quitting. Other methods consisted in bona fide industrial action; in all three groups, this ranged from a refusal to perform low-paying jobs all the way to strikes, documented particularly in the case of the Vietnamese workers. There is an odd contradiction in the conceptualization of Vietnamese workers—both in oral histories and in archival documents (primarily the reports of the Czech Labor Ministry)—as almost fabulously diligent laborers on the one hand, and rabble-rousing agitators on the other. From this, we could conclude that they actually were a paragon, or an ideal type (in the Weberian sense), of socialist worker: they applied themselves in their jobs *and* pushed for their rights as industrial workers.

The second important thing that each of the three case studies makes apparent is the crucial role played by officials from the sending states. This role was dual. On the one hand, some, if not all, of the workers' activism and resistance was made possible by, at the very least, tolerance, and possibly overt encouragement for their actions by the home officials and administrators. No less importantly, these administrators were able to supply such encouragement, or shield the workers from the suppression of their budding activities, due to the way these schemes were structured: namely, thanks to the fact that the sending governments retained a large degree of control over their workers. Certainly, sending states involved in the arranging of work contracts for their nationals as part of Western European guest worker schemes pushed for their workers' interests as well. For instance, in 1964, the Turkish government was able to get the West German state to disburse child allowance to Turkish workers for their children living in Turkey.⁷⁵ It is also worth noting, however, that when the workers first raised this demand two years earlier, they received no assistance from the Turkish consulate in West Germany.⁷⁶ The Italian government was able to "achieve various improvements in recruitment procedures, housing, leisure activities, and training" for its workers in Germany. Importantly, however, "Italy, as an EEC member, enjoyed a decided political advantage for advancing its interests . . . [while] by contrast, the efforts of the Turkish government to make sure its citizens were properly taken care of in Germany were more

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ MPPSV, Letter from Václav Karas, the deputy labor minister of the Czech Socialist Republic, to Pavel Měchura, deputy construction industry minister, April 18, 1986 (uncatalogued).

⁷⁴ MPPSV, "Převod vietnamských pracovníků z rezortu MŠV ČSR," July 17, 1986 (uncatalogued).

⁷⁵ Ulrich Herbert and Karin Hahn, "Guest Workers and Policy on Guest Workers in the Federal Republic," in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968*, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 194.

⁷⁶ Jennifer Miller, "Her Fight Is Your Fight: 'Guest Worker' Labor Activism in the Early 1970s West Germany," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (Fall 2013): 229.

limited and generally came too late.⁷⁷ In other words, the efficacy of the Italian government's advocacy was rooted in its shared membership in an economic-political alliance, which provided both the incentives and the mechanisms making possible, even urgent, the accountability of the receiving government to the sending government. Therein lies the parallel with the state-socialist labor exchanges, in which the power of the sending governments also rested to an important degree in membership in the same economic-political alliance and the attendant ideological commitments that could be (and were, as we saw above) mobilized to buttress the sending governments' claims and demands. By contrast, as Jennifer Miller⁷⁸ shows for the Turkish workers in the Federal Republic of Germany, their best hope of defending their rights and interests lay in their ability to bring German labor unions and native workers to their side and ensure their participation in industrial actions organized by migrant labor. While this tactic was sometimes successful, and arguably came with the significant added benefit of fostering workers' solidarity across national and ethnic lines (something that vigorous action by sending governments on behalf of their workers abroad may have had a hard time accomplishing), it goes without saying that the presence of (robust) unions in the receiving country is a prerequisite for this tactic to be viable even as a theoretical option. In the absence of those, migrant labor worldwide finds itself in the situation that the Turkish workers did when they could not recruit their German counterparts to join their efforts: "[N]either the West German unions nor the Turkish consulate would represent these workers, placing them in a no-man's-land that mirrored their lived reality: not truly welcome in West Germany and yet no longer under Turkish protection."⁷⁹

Returning to the Czechoslovak case, one more element made it possible for the foreign workers to push for their demands: the fact that the Czechoslovak state was increasingly channeling them into companies and industrial sectors experiencing the greatest labor shortages. As we have seen, this meant that in some companies these workers came to comprise a sizable portion of the overall workforce, and as such, though they were not key workers individually, they became a vital workforce collectively. Somewhat ironically, therefore, as the Czechoslovak state gradually began to retreat from its socialist and internationalist commitments in favor of focusing on its own economic dilemmas and pressures while, in the process, commodifying foreign workers and using them to plug the holes in its labor market,

it also simultaneously bestowed new power on the foreign workers, whose disciplined labor became crucial to the success of Czechoslovak enterprises. By the same token, the enterprises became more vulnerable to the foreign workers' refusal to provide their labor. Structurally, then, it was this combination of increased commodification of foreign workers, a harbinger of things to come, and the structure of the labor migration schemes that preserved the sending government's control over the workforce it sent abroad, a remnant of things past, that empowered the workers.

→ ppl they argued with. felt
 → a rude protest their
 → negative mediator (paradoxical)
 → as they are in (and)
 → primary responsibility
 → describe

⁷⁷ Herbert and Humn, "Guest Workers and Policy," 201.

⁷⁸ Miller, "Her Fight Is Your Fight."

⁷⁹ Ibid., 229.