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Disenchanting Socialist Internationalism: Polish Workers in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, 1962–91

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Abstract

This article seeks to paint a more nuanced picture of the role plaid by socialist internationalism in East Germany and Czechoslovakia regarding the employment of foreign labour, focusing on Poles. The long-term cooperation with Warsaw provides a suitable perspective on how to interpret particular periods and milestones of the schemes as a whole. The article partly dissociates from contemporary writing on the subject, which perceives socialist internationalism either as an instrument of propaganda, masking ruthless exploitation, or as a genuine value that inspired and permeated foreign labour recruitment. Based on documents from archives of all three countries in focus, it is argued that the schemes were clearly driven by the economic needs from the very beginning. Except for limited-scale cooperation with countries of the Global South, socialist internationalism came largely to the fore during the 1970s as a substitutional objective, when the economic goals of the foreign labour recruitment proved unreachable, and policymakers were at pains to reshape the meaning of the schemes (running already in full gear). However, with growing and unmanageable economic difficulties, the idealist rhetoric of internationalism plaid an ever more important role in framing the labour force cooperation until the end of communist regimes.

Keywords

Czechoslovakia, East Germany, internationalism, labour migration, Poland, socialism

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Krystyna Buczek, leader of Polish workers at one of the biggest Czechoslovak textile companies, Texlen, must have been happy. Her compatriots – mostly women – had, for two decades, been allowed to take jobs in the neighbouring country to the south of Poland. Early on, they had largely come from the Lower Silesian border regions where actual unemployment – especially among women – was nothing unusual in the 1960s.[1] Later, they were drawn from all over the country by the allure of higher salaries and especially the significantly broader range of consumer choice.[2] This was, indeed, the case of Ms. Buczek who had arrived in January 1983 with the last wave of Polish workers fleeing empty shelves and a deepening economic crisis. Moreover, her sending authority – the city of Jelenia Góra – deemed her wages too low and pushed the Czechoslovak factory management to increase them. The Texlen company director, Miroslav Malfa, raised her salary (although it already met the conditions of the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement) and gave Buczek an additional bonus covering two months' remuneration based on the previous payroll. Malfa's reason to promptly appease his Polish counterparts and unfairly overpay Buczek was simple. The Poles plainly informed Malfa – and, in his own words, made him 'very depressed' – that, had he not met their demands in full, the authority of Jelenia Góra would withdraw all its workers from Texlen (34 women) with no compensation.[3]

Such threats worked well. All the Eastern bloc countries were experiencing labour shortages. While the Bulgarians and the Soviets were least effected in this regard, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, the most advanced countries with the most labour-intensive industry, were among the first to face it. In addition, the workforce in both countries had thinned significantly for specific reasons. Immediately after the Second World War, Czechoslovakia expelled the local German-speaking population (more than three million people) that had formed the backbone of blue-collar workforce in the most industrialized regions of Czechoslovakia. It is estimated that the expulsion reduced the blue-collar labour force by some 180,000 workers, or by almost 20 per cent on a national scale.[4] The GDR lost a similar number (almost three million) of its citizens, who escaped to West Germany between 1949 and 1961 before the Berlin Wall was erected.[5]

1 According to Jerzy Kochanowski, there were at least 180,000 (144,000 women) unemployed in Poland already in 1956. J. Kochanowski, '"Niepotrzebni muszą odejść", czyli widmo bezrobocia 1956–1957', *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i Materiały*, 14 (2016), 61–98, 67. Official Polish statistics (much lower than the unofficial estimations) display two peaks in registered unemployment: in 1964 (65,414 unemployed, out of which 55,298 women) and 1971 with almost 82 thousand (some 75,000 women). The numbers steeply declined after the last peak. See *Rocznik statystyczny* (Warszawa, 1947-1997). There are no similar data on 'seeking for a job' in Czechoslovak or East German statistical yearbooks in the three decades in focus.

2 See O. Klípa, 'Escaping the Double Burden: Female Polish Workers in State Socialist Czechoslovakia', *Slavic Review*, 78, 4 (Winter 2019), 1009–1027.

3 Untitled letter, 25 March 1983, Státní okresní archiv Trutnov (SOkAT), Texlen s. p. Trutnov (1958-1991), 3043/228.

4 L. Kalinová, Dělnictvo, IX. Sociální soustava, in J. Kocian et al., *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948–1989* (Praha 2006), 40–41, 40.

5 Germany (unlike Czechoslovakia) suffered from significant war losses, especially among the productive male population. Still, they were, to a great extent, compensated by the re-settlement of expelled Germans (some 4,1 mil., i.e., 24 per cent of East German population) especially from the post-war Polish territory.

The demand for labour continued to grow due to the postwar reconstruction of Europe, East and West. Besides, state socialist Europe suffered from falling levels of workplace productivity (caused by a demotivating system of remuneration and obsolete production facilities, among other things) and labour hoarding (along with all other production resources) by company management in preparation for unforeseen production target increases or sub-supplier failures. In addition, the more employees a company had at its disposal, the greater its bargaining power vis-à-vis the state (a sectoral minister). As an aside, one should add that it was much cheaper for a company to request additional workers (whose expenses were largely covered by the state budget) than to acquire expensive, modern equipment that would reduce the number of workers. Hence the vicious cycle of permanent labour shortages.[6]

Additionally, the economic principles of full employment failed to entice the workforce into taking difficult industrial jobs.[7] After the geographical and sectoral transfers which occurred en masse at the beginning of the communist regime, both the Czechoslovak and GDR authorities began exploiting vulnerable groups (such as students, conscripted soldiers, and convicts) and encouraging women (economically and politically) to enter the labour market.[8] The last disposable group was foreign labour.[9] A Czechoslovak government memo from 1970 reads:

> [A]s regional differences in people's economic activity decline, workers are less prone to be geographically mobile and less willing to enter sectors and regions where there are shortages in the labour force. This tendency is confirmed by a decrease in migration between the Czech and Slovak socialist republics. The current labour situation in The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) thus calls for the consideration of whether to boost the workforce from abroad. Our republic should continue with an active policy in this direction.[10]

This assessment was congruent with the experience in Malfa's Texlen factory. Poor settlers from Slovakia (often Roma) arrived to replenish the workforce after the Germans were expelled in the mid-1940s. They were joined soon after by refugees from the

6 See K. Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton 1996), 21–23.

7 J. Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton 1992), 223, 226.

8 It stems from statistical yearbooks of both the GDR and Czechoslovakia that women reached high numbers in overall employment already in the 1960s. This reservoir of extensive employment gradually dried out. Whereas female labour in East German reached 42,5 per cent in 1952, it was at 46 per cent by 1963. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin 1956, 1964). Czechoslovak women reached 44,5 per cent employment in 1965. *Statistická ročenka Československé socialistické republiky* (Praha 1974), 130.

9 It is explicitly stated in a ministerial account from 1970 that there was not sufficient local workforce to supply 'vulnerable' sectors of the state economy, whose production could be currently secured 'only by soldiers and foreign labour assistance. However, the scope of the labour assistance provided by the army has a diminishing tendency'. 'Zpráva o výsledcích předběžných jednání o zahraniční pracovní výpomoci a návrh dalšího postupu v této oblasti', September 1970, Národní archiv v Praze (NAP), Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

10 Ibid.

Greek civil war, followed by evicted nuns from dissolved Catholic orders (after 1950), and finally by foreign workers.[11] In the early 1980s, Vietnamese and Cuban textile workers gradually joined (or replaced) hundreds of Poles who had worked at Texlen since 1962.

That is why workers were counted on an individual basis, especially in unpopular industrial sectors such as textiles. And that is also why comrade Malfa asked Ms. Buczek directly – after raising her salary – to 'personally engage' in improving relations between the company and the Jelenia Góra authorities so that all Polish workers would stay with his company.[12] To persuade the Poles, Malfa wrote: '… we create good working conditions [for our female Polish workers] and secure their daily shuttle from and to the workplace. We have always regarded the employment of Polish workers in the Texlen national enterprise as internationalist mutual assistance'.[13]

This article contributes to the understanding of the role of socialist internationalism[14] in the former Soviet bloc countries of Czechoslovakia and East Germany especially with respect to foreign labour employment. The study focuses on Polish blue-collar labourers. First, without disregarding the agency of socialist internationalism in this context at large, this article presents the evidence that economic interests were the essential driving force behind the scenes of foreign labour employment in both states in focus, and that these decisively preceded and outweighed ideological-political concerns. Second, socialist internationalism does not seem to be an idea that gradually withered away, defeated by antagonist economic concerns in the later phase of state socialism. On the contrary, instead of a 'pure and virtuous' political ideal standing against the 'grievous' wrongs of profit, this article traces rather deeply entangled motives that occurred in day-to-day situations as interdependent ideas underpinning each other throughout the period in focus.

This article is based on literature as well as a wide array of documents from various Czech, Polish, and German archives. Although the amount of empirical evidence from Czechoslovakia is larger, it is still useful to integrate the East German case into the study. It bears many similarities, to the extent that both 'recipient' countries competed for the same Polish labour.

The case of Polish workers has been chosen explicitly to support this argument.[15] They are much less studied than Third World foreign labour in the two countries in question, but the period of Polish employment in both countries is longer than any other

11 'Rozbor příčin fluktuace pracovníků kategorie 8 se zaměřením na ženy-matky, n. p. Texlen Trutnov', September 1976, SOkAT, Texlen s. p. Trutnov (1958–1991), 3043/227. At the time this report was written, Texlen employed almost 6000 workers (70 per cent female). Some 566 of them were Polish women.

12 Untitled letter, 14 April 1983, SOkAT, Texlen s. p. Trutnov (1958-1991), 3043/228.

13 Untitled letter, 15 April 1983, SOkAT, Texlen s. p. Trutnov (1958-1991), 3043/228.

14 Being aware of various semantic shifts of 'proletarian (prevalently coined "socialist" after the Second World War) internationalism' in history, for this article a generic term is used that subsumes various expressions addressing 'brotherly' countries of the bloc and referring to 'help', 'assistance', 'friendship', or vernacular notions such as Czechoslovak (and Russian) *družba* or German *Völkerfreundschaft*.

15 For detailed information about Polish workers in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, see R. Röhr, *Hoffnung - Hilfe - Heuchelei. Geschichte des Einsatzes polnischer Arbeitskräfte in Betrieben des DDR-Grenzbezirks Frankfurt/Oder 1966–1991* (Berlin 2001); R. Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung polnischer

labour-force cooperation programme in the Soviet bloc,[16] beginning in the 1960s (1962 in Czechoslovakia, 1965 in East Germany) and ending after 1989 (the last Polish workers employed on intergovernmental agreements left the GDR and Czechoslovakia in 1991). Moreover, the Poles in Czechoslovakia made up the largest group of foreign workers, numbering at least 65,000.[17] Since cooperation with Poland in both the CSSR and East Germany chronologically frames the entire period of foreign labour employment, it seems to be a suitable case for presenting a broader view of the motives for launching the programs and the objectives pursued by the cooperating states. When workers from the Third World arrived in the two East European countries, there had already been internal political debate on the issue and praxis of its official interpretation.

Of course, Poles differ in economic development and cultural proximity compared to workers from, say, Mozambique, Vietnam, or Cuba. Nevertheless, archival documents usually discuss all the groups together, using common arguments for their employment. After all, the decision makers who designed the programs with the Poles were the very same people who organized the programs for other foreign labourers. All the groups entered the same labour markets, working on the same or very similar positions.

However, the most relevant reason for focusing on Polish workers is the unique perspective their history offers. Viewing the broader phenomena of foreign labour in Czechoslovakia and East Germany through the lens of this 'pioneer' migrant group provides an explanatory framework that helps to decode both the economic and ideological motivations for such multilateral cooperation. The ups and downs in negotiations with Warsaw directly impacted the subsequent approach of the 'recipient' states towards non-European source countries. Thus, the continuous rise of non-European nationals from developing countries can perhaps be better explained by the floating number of Polish labourers rather than by ideological-political shifts.

Before proceeding further, it is important to sketch the prevailing standpoints published on the subject. The 'traditional' stance is to deconstruct socialist internationalism and reveal its alleged propagandist nature, thus recalling arguments already pursued in the

Arbeitskräfte in der DDR 1966-1990', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte,* 42 (2002), 211–236, Klípa, 'Escaping the Double Burden'.

16 Some older but decentralized and limited-scale labour migration schemes in Czechoslovakia concerned Italians, Bulgarians, and Poles in the aftermath of the Second World War. But these widely withered away during the late Stalinist period or – as with Bulgarian labour forces – continued in negligible numbers. In addition, based on intergovernmental agreements, Czechoslovakia and East Germany were the only states that received Polish labour migrants as employees in their own factories. Among other noticeable foreign employees in the Soviet bloc were Bulgarians working in the Soviet Union (about 15,000). Besides direct employment in the host countries, tens of thousands of skilled workers were circulated within the bloc as 'exported' services (mostly construction works), dominated again by the Poles.

17 Klípa, 'Escaping the Double Burden'. The number is probably even higher because of the enormous turnover rates among Polish women workers in Czechoslovak enterprises. Although the total number of Poles employed in East Germany remained lower (estimated at 30–40,000), it was the leading country in terms of the share of foreign workers (around 1 per cent) in the labour force within the CMEA countries. See Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje zagraniczne z Polski 1949-1989* (Warszawa 2010), 275; K. J. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Oxford 2003), 246. Thus, the GDR surpassed Czechoslovakia, which had some 0.5 per cent of foreigners in their labour force. L. Tomešová, 'K zahraničním pracovníkům', *Lidová demokracie*, 27 (1 February 1990).

Cold War era by both Western observers (journalists, politicians, international organizations like the International Federation of Human Rights and International Federation of Labour) and by dissident circles within the Soviet bloc.[18] The words 'international help', whether addressed to local or foreign audiences, tended to hide a sophisticated system of exploitation of the less-developed 'friendly nations'. Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, for instance, put it like this: 'Despite the proclaimed equality under the banner of 'proletarian internationalism', the foreign workers [in East German factories] were not treated equally to the local work force'.[19] Patrice G. Poutrus and Annegret Schüle, to mention a few others, have drawn very similar conclusions.[20] The focus of these authors on a number of examples of discrimination against foreign workers, such as the spatial segregation of their accommodation, dismissal of women from their jobs due to pregnancy, harsh limits on purchasing and transporting local goods, etc., naturally leads to the perception of socialist (proletarian) internationalism as nothing more than a propagandist tool. Insincerity of official internationalist rhetoric is further documented by Ann-Judith Rabenschlag, who speaks about a strong sense of paternalism and even the infantilization of the developing nations, associating this with (in allusion to Rudyard Kipling) 'the GDR-citizen's burden'.[21]

When putting socialist internationalism into a broader historical context, it is not difficult to find the solid ground from which doubts about the idea and its role in Soviet bloc international cooperation arose. Since Karl Marx, at the end of his Communist Manifesto, emotionally expressed his brief plea for the proletariat to unite internationally against a common bourgeoise oppressor, the idea has been blatantly betrayed several times. To remain with the countries in focus, it is worth mentioning the postwar Stalinist paranoia and growing antisemitism that established a new meaning for the term 'cosmopolitism' in Soviet political discourse. As Alexei Yurchak noted, there was a thin and unpredictable line between the desired and acclaimed notion of internationalism on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism – a fatal accusation (with lethal consequences especially in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s), on the other.[22] In the international arena as well, the ideal of internationalism

18 J. Pehe, 'Foreign Workers in Czechoslovakia', *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, transcript (26 January 1989), 29–34; M. Syruček, 'Proč u nás pracují?', *Tvorba* 23 (5 June 1986).

19 D. Jajeśniak-Quast, '"Proletarische Internationalität" ohne Gleichheit. Ausländische Arbeitskräfte in ausgewählten sozialistischen Großbetrieben', in C. Th. Müller and P. G. Poutrus (eds), Ankunft – Alltag – Ausreise. Migration und interkulturelle Begnung in der DDR-Gesellschaft (Köln 2005), 267–294, 269.

20 P. G. Poutrus, 'Die DDR, ein anderer deutscher Weg? Zum Umgang mit Ausländern im SED-Staat', in R. Beier-De Haan (ed.), *Zuwanderungsland Deutschland. Migrationen 1500–2005* (Berlin 2005), 120–133; Annegret Schüle, '"Proletarischer Internationalismus" oder "ökonomischer Vorteil für die DDR"? Mosambikanische, angolanische und vietnamesische Arbeitskräfte im VEB Leibziger Baumwollspinnerei (1980-1989), *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 42 (2002), 191–210. Poutrus argues (about foreigners in the GDR in general and labour migrants in particular) that 'despite the teaching on "proletarian internationalism", the foreigners were not equal members of the imagined transnational socialist society but tolerated guests of the German ethno-nation in the GDR'. P. G. Poutrus, 'Die DDR als "Hort der internationalen Solidarität". Ausländer in der DDR', in T. Großbölting (ed.), *Friedensstaat, Leseland, Sportnation. DDR-Legenden auf dem Prüfstand* (Bonn 2010), 134–154, 148.

21 Rabenschlag, 'Arbeiten im Bruderland', 100.

22 A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ 2006), 164–165.

was violated to primarily serve Soviet geopolitical interests. Foreign workers in East Germany and Czechoslovakia began arriving in larger numbers right after the infamous armed 'internationalist assistance' of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. Paradoxically, the internationalist claims of 'equality for all socialist nations' had been among the key ideas of the Prague Spring, crushed by the invading armies. Thus, the so-called 'Brezhnev doctrine' as the 'practical form' of socialist internationalism in the geopolitical arena must have dramatically impacted the popular reception of ideological notions pursued by the party.

Although internationalism was underpinned at the party level in the CSSR by a canonical text, 'Lessons Drawn from Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia', adopted in December 1970,[23] one may doubt how much it was internalized even among the party leaders. In her analysis of the memoirs of top-ranking Czechoslovak Communist Party figures written after 1989, Françoise Mayer found striking ignorance of, and even disdain for, Marxist ideas. The authors presented themselves as proud but pragmatic communists, not 'blinded by ideology or propaganda'. Mayer noted that 'ideology' was associated in these memoirs entirely negatively with pre-August 1968 politicians - both the 'Stalinists' of the 1950s and 'reformists' of the Prague Spring.[24] According to Yurchak, the term socialist internationalism in the post-Stalinist USSR was a typical ideological catch phrase that filled highly standardized and predictable – 'hypernormalized' – speeches, resolutions, and slogans.[25]

By no means does it imply that no sincere internationalist motives appeared in the actions of communist politicians. But they were often so intertwined with economic and geo-political interests that they could hardly be discerned.[26] It was perhaps even more apparent in East Germany where, as Schüle put it, socialist internationalism was among the core values carefully fostered in the national narrative. East Germans had to be particularly active in proselytizing communist ideas to rectify the German role in the Second World War. The country identified itself as a victim liberated by the USSR, which saved it from its 'miserable' destiny and set it on the right track towards prosperity. Thus, even more than other Soviet satellites, the GDR was obliged to replicate the gratitude and extend a helping hand to nations in similar

23 The 'Lessons' do not mention socialist internationalism explicitly. Yet, the text reads about the 'brotherly community' and 'internationalist ties' that bound the ČSSR and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with 'other socialist countries and their fraternal parties'. According to the document, these ideological relations were now 'fully restored' and, indeed, 'stronger and deeper than ever before'.

24 See F. Mayer, *Češi a jejich komunismus. Paměť a politická identita* (Prague 2009), 129.

25 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 49-50, 86-87. It is worth mentioning here Marx's claim, 'Proletarians of all countries – unite!' which people saw every day as the motto of many national and regional newsarticles around the Soviet bloc. Likewise, 'The Internationale' was regularly sung in school classrooms and on many public occasions.

26 A good example might come from the very early history of postwar Czechoslovakia when communist politicians enthusiastically engaged in helping Greek comrades in the civil war. However, their activities had to strictly subordinate to (hesitant and volatile) directives from Moscow so that the line between authentic bottom-up initiative and obedient fulfilment of Soviet orders became somewhat blurred. C.f. P. Hradečný, 'Zdrženlivý internacionalismus. Občanská válka v Řecku a československá materiální pomoc Demokratické armádě Řecka', *Soudobé dějiny*, 10, 1-2 (2003), 58–92.

despair.[27] Again, one cannot plainly condemn the East German authorities and citizens of hypocrisy. Christina Schwenkel, in her study of the East German assistance in rebuilding Vietnam (especially Vinh City) after the 'American War', points out that the experts (architects, engineers, etc.) sent to Vietnam termed their activities as solidary and cooperative 'assistance', not paternalist 'help'. In other words, treating Vietnamese equally as active stakeholders instead of passive beneficiaries as it would be in the 'old' (post-)colonial scheme.[28] It is difficult to distinguish the actual motivations of the East German politicians for such an engagement, however, since Vietnam was one of the hottest outposts of the Soviet bloc (serving earlier as the site of a proxy war against the West) and solidarity with Vietnam was strongly 'recommended' and overseen by Moscow.

Another example, to stay within the region in focus, was the project initiated by East Germans and officially termed 'Borders of Friendship', i.e., easing border restrictions between the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. This radical step perfectly fit the ideological internationalist directives, as the official political rhetoric also suggested. However, sincere motives of 'friendship' were conspicuously accompanied by other political interests and later substantially curtailed by economic ones.[29] Specifically the impact of Polish 'tourists' emptying out East German retail stores after the border was opened in 1972 caused a fast response from the GDR authorities and made Czechoslovakia unilaterally postpone the project (namely the border opening with

27 Schüle, '"Proletarischer Internationalismus"', 195–196. Such a strong accent on internationalism in one's self-image brought the GDR near to the position of Castro's Cuba. Unlike East Germany, however, Cuba was active in disseminating its political vision in a military manner, especially in Africa. Radoslav Yordanov speaks about the Cuban 'revolutionary messianic streak, exemplified in its potent internationalist drive'. R. Yordanov, 'Cuba and the Soviet Bloc: Searching for the Last Guardians of Socialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 0-(0), (2020), 1-24, 11.

28 However, the official project documents evoked exactly the paternalist flavour, using the notion of 'help' (*Hilfe*). C. Schwenkel, 'Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Post-war Vietnam', in Q. Comrades (ed.), *Comrades of Color. East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, Oxford 2015), 267–292, 277, 280. In recent literature, one can find many other instances of East European engagement in the non-aligned or socialist 'South', when internationalist altruism was more or less accompanied by economic and political concerns, such as the stories of 'cultural diplomacy' of some Balkan states. See, for example, L. Stanek, 'Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War' (Princeton 2019), or T. Dragostinova, 'The Cold War from the Margins. A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene' (Ithaca and London 2021). In terms of direct material aid provided to the 'developing South', East Germany (after the USSR) was apparently in the lead, however. Schwenkel, 'Affective Solidarities', 275.

29 It is assumed that the GDR tried to neutralize Willi Brandt's new 'Ostpolitik' towards Eastern Europe. Also, the example of ever closer integrating the European Community played an important role. Another motive for such a step was the effort – in line with a newly preached 'really existing (or developed) socialism' - to satisfy local societies by providing them with broader consumption choices, i.e., letting them shop abroad. See M. Keck-Szajbel, 'The Politics of Travel and the Creation of a European Society', *Global Society*, 24, 1 (January 2010), 31–50, 37–39; M. Keck-Szajbel, 'Shop Around the Bloc: Trader Tourism and Its Discontents on the East German-Polish Border', in P. Bren and M. Neuburger (eds.), Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe (Oxford 2012), 374-392, 376.

Poland) by several years, and eventually quit it completely in 1981 in the face of Polish political and economic turmoil.[30]

The entanglement of 'internationalist' political action with *Realpolitik* motives, which also applies to foreign labour migrants in the Soviet bloc, provides enough room for observers to highlight either the former or the latter aspect. Several recent works (termed 'revisionist' in this article) have taken quite the opposite tack from 'traditional' scholarship.[31] Eric Allina, for example, in his thorough insight into the situation of Mozambican workers in the GDR, opines that 'East Germany's use of foreign workers was hardly ever discussed in economic terms'.[32] While persuasively arguing against the popular image of overwhelming coercion and oppressive control by the state vis-à-vis Mozambican workers, Allina slipped in another extreme; he acknowledges the 'practical benefits' for East Germans in employing cheap labour, but remains too preoccupied with internationalism as the crucial reason for the programme. Thus, Allina emphasizes 'friendship, solidarity, and cooperation', while downplaying demands 'to meet labour shortfalls' [33] and thus extract 'surplus value'.[34]

Similarly, Alena Alamgir, whose focus is mainly Vietnamese workers in communist Czechoslovakia, is equally aware of the financial perks that labour force cooperation brought to both Czechoslovak and Vietnamese governments. Nevertheless, she perceives the entire issue through an 'ideological' lens, regarding socialist internationalism as the original impetus of labour force cooperation. Alamgir claims, for example, that 'Czechoslovak officials did not anticipate the potential fiscal advantages of this aspect of the programme at the time they agreed to it, and thus its introduction was not influenced by profit motives'.[35] To explain the evidence pointing to the programme's clear economic factors, she introduces a temporal perspective to the problem. According to Alamgir, the cooperation – especially

30 M. Keck-Szajbel, 'The Politics of Travel', 40-42; J. Kochanowski, 'Pašeráci, turisté, kšeftaři. Neoficiální obchodní výměna mezi Polskem a Československem v letech 1945–1989 (pohled z polské strany)', *Soudobé dějiny*, 3 (2010), 335–348, 344. The CSSR opened the borders with Poland as late as in August 1977. East Germans closed the borders with Poland already in 1980.

31 E. Allina, 'Between *Sozialismus* and *Socialismo*: African workers and public authority in the German Democratic Republic', in M. Sarkar (ed.), *Work out of Place* (Oldenbourg 2017), 77−100; A. K. Alamgir and Ch. Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance to National Self-Interest: Vietnamese Labor Migration into CMEA Countries', in Edited by J. Mark, A. M. Kalinovsky, S. Marung, *Alternative Globalizations. Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, IN 2020), 100−126; A. K. Alamgir, '"Inappropriate Behavior": Labor Control and the Polish, Cuban and Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia', in Marsha Siefert (ed.), *Labor in State Socialist Europe after 1945: Contributions to a History of Work* (Budapest 2020), 99-119; A. K. Alamgir, 'Recalcitrant Women: Internationalism and the Redefinition of Welfare Limits in the Czechoslovak-Vietnamese Labor Exchange Program', *Slavic Review*, 73, 1 (Spring 2014), 133 −155. This approach is also visible in works of other authors who do not specifically focus on labor migration in the Soviet bloc. Celia Donert, for instance, writes about 'the many ways in which socialist internationalism became a part of everyday life in the socialist bloc throughout the 1950s and 1960s, along with (…) bilateral agreements on contract labour between socialist countries in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia'. See C. Donert, 'From Communist Internationalism to Human Rights: Gender, Violence and International Law in the Women's International Democratic Federation Mission to North Korea, 1951 332', *Contemporary European History*, 25, 2 (2016), 313–333.

32 Allina, 'Between *Sozialismus*', 86.

33 Ibid., 85−86.

34 Ibid., 81.

35 Alamgir, 'Recalcitrant Women', 139.

when it comes to the Vietnamese – can be roughly divided into a 'truly' socialist and internationalist earlier phase, beginning with the start of the programme in the late 1960s and continuing to the end of the following decade, and a later phase with a proto-capitalist market and the 'commodification' of workers in the 1980s. As Alamgir put it, '[In the 1970s] the sense of internationalist duty trumped the actuarial conclusions, and projects were given a green light regardless of their expected economic disadvantageousness. In the 1980s, however, economic 'acceptability', along with the feverish efforts to plug the holes in the labour market, became the cardinal rule'.[36] Similarly, another of her texts, already widening the argument to include all three major groups of foreign laborers in Czechoslovakia (Vietnamese, Poles, and Cubans), reads: '[T]he Czechoslovak state began to gradually retreat from its socialist and internationalist commitments, and instead started to focus on its own economic dilemmas and pressures and, in the process, commodify foreign workers.'[37]

In their recent essay, Alamgir and Schwenkel examine the issue of Vietnamese workers in all CMEA countries, emphasizing Czechoslovakia and the GDR but also including data from Bulgaria and the USSR (all the Soviet bloc countries where Vietnamese workers were deployed). Although they focus on a single group of foreigners, the authors often articulate their findings – apparently due to the transnational scope of their study – in a more generalized way, creating the impression their argument is applicable across the entire system of 'guest' labour within the Soviet bloc. Alamgir and Schwenkel claim, for instance, that '[i]n contrast to the West, these programmes were not originally envisioned or articulated as a strategy for economic growth in the receiving countries'.[38] Elsewhere, they assert that 'one important distinction [from the West] was in the objectives of the socialist programmes: assistance and training. In the early stages, socialist labour programmes were not conceived of as a means of economic development for the recipient countries but rather as solidarity with the sending country'.[39] Again, as with Alamgir's previous texts, the last communist decade is depicted differently as a phase 'when the structure of the programme was veering off its original socialist, internationalist, and altruistic path and inching closer to a self-interest-based, quasi-market model'.[40]

This argumentation leads once again to the economic context of the CMEA 'guest labour' cooperation which began in the early 1960s and which is examined here through the prism of the Polish workers. Czechoslovakia has just self-confidently declared victory in its development as a socialist nation, being rechristened CSSR and adopting a new constitution in 1960. The self-assurance of a vigorous leader, Antonín Novotný, was accompanied by broad amnesty for political prisoners, signalizing the end of the Stalinist period even in such a politically orthodox country. Since taking presidential office in 1957, however, he had been facing a growing economic crisis that culminated in 1963 following the collapse of two previous five-year plans (tackled between

36 Alamgir, 'Recalcitrant Women', 154–155
37 Alamgir, '"Inappropriate Behavior"', 118.
38 Alamgir and Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance', 102.
39 Alamgir and Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance', 114.
40 Alamgir and Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance', 103–104.

1958–60 by Kurt Rozsypal's reform) and a catastrophically ambitious third plan.[41] The crisis further highlighted the necessity to mobilize all labour reserves into the production process. But – as argued above – the reserves were no longer there.[42] It was Czechoslovakia in the 1960s that first realized it needed to immediately 'plug the holes' in its labour market.[43]

Meanwhile, in Poland, the path to socialism looked somewhat different. The farewell to Stalinism took place right after the 20th Soviet Communist Party conference in a decisively more radical way. After 'Polish October' (*Październik*), Władysław Gomułka, the (old-)new leader who had won the trust of the Poles and helped to calm anti-Soviet unrest, was given a relatively free hand by Khrushchev to rule his country. His policies, aimed at turning life in Poland away from Stalinist 'abnormality' and restoring its 'natural order', moved women out of what were seen as typically male menial jobs.[44] Poland, however, devastated by war and traditionally an agricultural country, lagged far behind its two socialist neighbours in industrialization, leaving Gomułka little work to offer the women instead.[45] This was especially true in regions known for heavy industry such as the Lower Silesian coal-mining towns where there were very few employment opportunities for female labourers.[46]

It was thus an obvious solution for the Czechoslovaks to turn to their northern neighbour and sign a win-win deal. After the Stalinist period of international suspicion and autarchy, it was now possible to open mutually beneficial labour migration from Poland to Czechoslovakia. Already in 1965, however, a shadow was cast over the newly-opened labour force cooperation agreement. While Prague constantly pressed for more workers to be sent from Poland, Warsaw obscured its estimations of the available labour force, concluding that it had no more workers to offer. In addition, Czechoslovak ministerial clerks noticed the same year that Poland was discretely establishing contacts with Western countries in order to solve its 'surplus' of available labour.[47] Hence Prague perceived its Polish partner as not fully reliable and increased

41 It was also an economic crisis year in Poland and in East Germany, where it resulted in launching the New Economic System with modest reform measures (which however proved short-lived). One of its – unreached – goals was the reduction of the labour force shortages. S. Gruner-Domic, *Kubanische Arbeitsmigration in die DDR 1978 - 1989. Das Arbeitskräfteabkommen Kuba - DDR und dessen Realisierung* (Berlin 1997), 5.

42 Decreasing coercion and control over its citizens – symbolized by the amnesty that drained forced labour camps – also meant somewhat limited opportunities to fill vacancies in physically demanding, dangerous and badly needed jobs. Projects like 'Action 77 thousand into production' (transferring intelligentsia into blue-collar jobs) in 1951 had never been repeated since Novotný took power.

43 One of the additional reasons for the Czechoslovak labour shortage increase in the 1960s was the last significant wave of a German population transfer to Germany. This time fully voluntary. It led to the rise of demand for Polish workers especially in Bohemian northern border regions. Z. Jirásek, 'Polští pracovníci v textilním průmyslu Trutnovska a Náchodska po druhé světové válce', in *Pohledy do minulosti. Sborník příspěvků k šedesátinám doc. PhDr. Vladimíra Lesáka, Dissertationes historicae, 2* (Hradec Králové 1994), 139–148, 143.

44 M. Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industrialization in Poland* (Cambridge 2010), 1–2.

45 Fidelis, *Women, Communism,* 231.

46 Röhr also mentions the development of comparatively modern state farms in Polish Silesia, which could not offer sufficient vacancies either. Röhr, *Hoffnung – Hilfe,* 213.

47 'Záznam o výměně názorů se s. Lobodyczem, vedoucím odboru MZV PLR v rámci konzultací MZV PLR a ČSSR dne 27. 4. 1965', 27 April 1965, NAP, KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, inventory number not available.

its search for another source country. Indeed, they looked for a 'friendly' state (from within the bloc or one leaning towards it) with a strong, younger population cohort and even less-developed industrial base that could provide a more available labour force. The authors of a Ministry of Labour report from 1970 put it bluntly: 'Most of the [East European] Socialist camp countries have run out of available labour reserves, especially male'.[48] Vietnam was naturally one of the first countries considered as cordial relations between the Soviet bloc and Hanoi had been in place since the 1950s, when, for instance, Vietnamese orphans were brought from the war-torn country (accommodated in the town of Chrastava in the case of Czechoslovakia) and Vietnamese students were able to continue their education at East European universities.

There is no intention to downplay the humanitarian and development aid which Czechoslovakia (and other bloc countries) provided during and after the Vietnam War, but programmes of vocational training for Vietnamese immigrants in Czechoslovakia were, from the outset, conspicuously accompanied, if not driven by, the aim to achieve the needed labour force. True, the first phase of cooperation between the CSSR and Vietnam between 1967–74 (educating 2100 Vietnamese students in CSSR vocational schools) was overtly framed in terms of socialist internationalism, which might serve as a bulletproof argument for the purely ideological grounds of the labour-force cooperation agreement.[49] Why, then, did both the CSSR and – surprisingly – Poland consult each other in 1969 concerning their experience with the experimental placement of Vietnamese apprentices in heavy industry, namely coal mining, which suffered from chronic labour shortages? Representatives of both states concluded that the Vietnamese 'lacked the physical strength' for these jobs.[50]

Czechoslovakia, however, did not abandon efforts to find other source countries that would help fill their urgent labour shortages.[51] At the turn of a new decade, a planned extension of the Polish – Czechoslovak labour cooperation agreement faced severe challenges. Warsaw pushed for financial demands that brought the collaboration to the margins of acceptability for the Czechoslovak side. Although Prague still believed in tens of thousands of Poles arriving in the future, the growing problems with the negotiations brought about a reopening of talks with Vietnam. According to a report on foreign labour employment in Czechoslovakia from 1971, 'an option was found' to bring over 'a higher number of Vietnamese citizens for on-the-job training and work in Czechoslovak enterprises.' The Prague clerks responsible for recruiting foreign workers later regretted,

48 'Zpráva o výsledcích předběžných jednání o zahraniční pracovní výpomoci', 1970, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

49 In the ministerial report from 1971, this cooperation is explicitly termed a 'gift for the development of the Vietnam Democratic Republic'. 'Zpráva o výsledcích dosavadních jednání o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR', March 1972, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

50 'Informace o jednáních na Komitetu Pracy i Płac ve Varšavě ve dnech 25.-27.2.1969', February 1969, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

51 In 1971, in the East Bohemian Region (*Kraj*) only, there was still about 15,000 official vacancies with an unofficial estimation of twice as much. 'Notatka ze spotkania Przewodniczącego Prezydium WRN we Wrocławiu Tow. Mgra Zdzisława Karsta z Przewodniczącym Prezydium Wschodnioczeskiej WRN w Hradec Kralove Tow. Jindřichem Řehořkiem w dniu 24 marca 1971 r. w Kudowie Zdroju', March 1971, Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, Prezydium WRN we Wrocławiu, 1/1170.

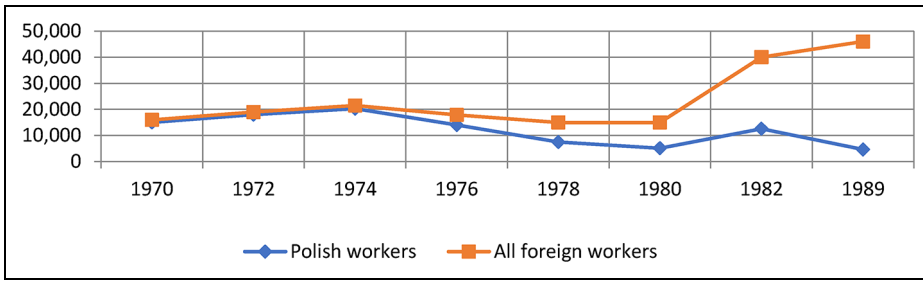

Figure 1. Polish and all foreign workers in Czechoslovakia.[a]
[a]In the peak year 1989, there were 37,000 Vietnamese and 5300 Cuban workers in Czechoslovakia.

however, that it 'turns out no such possibility exists, so we cannot count on it.'[52] Although Prague finally signed a long-awaited intergovernmental agreement on labour force cooperation with Poland in 1972, this did not meet the expectations of either side. Poland really did face an unprecedented influx of postwar baby boomers entering the labour market but, concomitantly, increased the creation of new jobs in an even faster manner. The latter was made possible thanks to massive financial loans taken by Edward Gierek's fledgling (in 1970) administration. Dollar credits from Western banks served mainly as a source of a large-scale industrial investment that 'hoovered' up the available Polish labour force over the 1970s. Hence, instead of the anticipated 50,000 Polish employees in Czechoslovak enterprises, the new agreement brought hardly any increase at all, reaching a peak of some 21,700 Polish workers in 1973 (see Figure 1). That number dropped continually (except during the Polish 'Solidarity crisis') until the end of the Communist regime.

Facing troublesome relations with the Poles and taking advantage of an available and demobilized Vietnam that was just emerging from a bloody war with the United States, Prague signed a new treaty with Hanoi in 1974, agreeing to provide 6 years of professional training to up to 5000 Vietnamese citizens while making parallel efforts to find additional source countries. The educational period stipulated in the new CSSR-Vietnamese agreement (a similar one had been signed between Vietnam and the GDR in 1973), which naturally did not bring immediate profit to the Czechoslovak side, is regarded by Alamgir and Schwenkel as evidence that in the 1970s 'the programmes were still conceptualized as an essentially internationalist project, in which the Vietnamese state's needs ultimately trumped the concerns over costs incurred by the receiving country's economy'.[53] One could argue, however, that the aim of economic efficiency was noticeable here as well. When speaking about this new batch of Vietnamese arrivals, the authors of a ministerial report state that

52 'Zpráva o výsledcích dosavadních jednání o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR', March 1972, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available. Arguably because of the ongoing war with the USA which kept the workforce in the army.
53 Alamgir and Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance', 107.

'we can only consider the employment (*pracovní zapojení*) of citizens from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after 2.5–3.5 years',[54] that is to say, after the time reserved in the agreement for the vocational schooling of their training. One has to keep in mind, that in 1974 the situation of foreign migrant labour in the CSSR was not yet critical, as there was still quite a large, although slowly diminishing, number of Poles in local factories, and talks with nations perceived as more suitable than Vietnam seemed promising, especially the Yugoslavs whose 'language and acclimatization problems would be negligible'.[55] Hence, the first 2–3 years of initial educational period could be seen as a careful calculation during which time the Vietnamese apprentices would acclimate to their new environment and acquire the necessary language skills to be fully integrated into the labour market.

The intentions of the Czechoslovak government became clearer when, in 1978, the number of Poles dropped to just 7500. Prague had had several years to prepare for this because the agreement from 1972 was initially set to expire five years after it was signed, and Warsaw had hesitated to prolong it. At the end of the decade, the CSSR prepared two breakthrough agreements with Cuba (signed 1978) and – again – Vietnam (signed 1980) that effectively replaced the vanishing Poles (see Figure 1).[56] Prague steered especially Cuban workers (5000 women in the first batch) directly to positions in the textile factories that the Poles had left.[57] Though the apprenticeships for Vietnamese workers continued in limited numbers, these new agreements recruited workers in much larger amounts for 'on-the-job training' and were, interestingly, similar to the employment contracts that had applied to the Polish workers. Since the Poles had nearly disappeared from many shop floors, there was no time for a longer 'adjustment period' for legions of new and culturally distant workers. Thus, though the centre of gravity shifted decisively towards non-Europeans states, the 'philosophy' of cooperation continued smoothly along an established economic direction.

The situation in the GDR developed with many parallels, but the shortage of labour dramatically increased due to the Berlin border 'loophole' and a rising number of escapes to the West. On top of that, in 1960 the GDR faced deteriorated trade relations with Bonn. As a result, Walter Ulbricht asked his socialist allies for large bundle of economic support which included some 65,000 foreign workers for essential positions in the East German economy. Talks about migrant labour were held with the USSR, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary. Although disputes with the *Bundesrepublik* were soon settled and the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 hindered further emigration, the quest for a 'guest'

54 'Zpráva o současné problematice při zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR a návrh zásad dalšího postupu', October 1974, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

55 Ibid. In the same report, the CSSR concluded that there was no way to expect more workers from Hungary and Bulgaria (both present in the CSSR in a negligible amount – about 600 workers each) but put hopes in establishing cooperation with the Algerians and Yugoslavs. However, after some years of negotiation, the two latter groups proved too expensive for Czechoslovakia to collaborate with them.

56 Besides the already-mentioned groups, Czechoslovakia managed to recruit in smaller numbers (from 100 to several hundred) Mongolians, Cypriots, North Koreans, Laotians, Mozambicans, and Angolans. Talks with the Egyptians, Tunisians, Portuguese, and Chinese did not reach any agreement.

57 'Zpráva o možnosti přijetí kubánských občanů do zaměstnání spojeného s odbornou přípravou v čs. organizacích, 9. 12. 1977', December 1977, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

labour force continued with a concentrated focus on Poland.[58] The lack of a labour force in East Germany was so urgent that the Germans initially suggested the permanent resettlement of Polish families to German border territories.[59] But what distinguished negotiations from the analogous situation in the CSSR was the position of the Polish authorities. The idea of labour migration to Germany was burdened in Polish culture and historical memory by the painful trauma of submission and even forced labour. The worst – and still widely remembered – example for many Poles and other conquered nations was surely the *Totaleinsatz* of the Second World War. Understandably then, Gomułka approached the offer from his German comrades somewhat hesitantly. His citizens, however, assertively demanded a reopening of the borders since temporary labour migration was a traditional model for solving economic hardship.[60] Eventually, the Polish leader agreed to cooperation, primarily to ease social friction after a sudden rise in consumer prices in 1963,[61] and the first commuting workers arrived in the German towns of Guben and Görlitz in 1965.[62] A cross-border inter-regional agreement (analogous to the one with Czechoslovaks two years earlier) was signed in 1966.

As for East Germany, it quite discernibly had, to a large extent, its own economic interests at heart. In their explanation of the alleged pivot recipient states (mainly Czechoslovakia and East Germany) made in the last decade of state socialism away from ideological socialist internationalism and towards unscrupulous economic self-interest, Alamgir and Schwenkel describe the circumstances of Vietnamese 'guest' workers in the 1980s (italics in original): '[Vietnamese] workers would be assigned positions in GDR firms *according to the opportunities and interests of the GDR*. Henceforth, Berlin abandoned its emphasis on the quality (and applicability) of its technical-scientific training and channelled its efforts into recruiting as large a number of Vietnamese workers as it could'.[63] However, the Polish case reveals that this was the very position East German politicians took towards foreign workers two decades earlier in the 1960s. East German regional authorities were pleased to report to the economic secretariat of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, or SED) their first impressions from the newly launched cross-border labour force cooperation in Guben in 1965: 'Implementation of the project brings the GDR substantial economic benefits'. Furthermore, they calculated the exact profits and cost savings: 'The employment of labour forces from the territory of the GDR would have required investing 1.2 million [East German] marks for apartment construction and one million marks for nursery and pre-school day-care'.[64]

58 Röhr, *Hoffnung - Hilfe*, 70–74.
59 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 212.
60 J. Kochanowski, '"Niepotrzebni muszą odejść", czyli widmo bezrobocia 1956–1957', *Polska 1944/45–1989.*
61 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 213.
62 Both are 'twin cities' where parts of their historical territory remained after the war across the border river (Neisse/ Nysa) on the Polish side. As was the case of the CSSR, the cooperation in labour forces was first launched in an experimental model at the municipal and district levels.
63 Alamgir and Schwenkel, 'From Socialist Assistance', 111.
64 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 214–215.

Since the labour force became one of Poland's most demanded and valued 'export' items, Gierek's efforts to maximize export profit to pay back foreign debt inevitably also embraced this area. Czechoslovak reports from the early 1970s, when both the CSSR and the GDR were negotiating the final versions of the inter-governmental agreements, can hardly hide the frustration and disillusionment with their Polish counterparts' 'mischievous' behaviour. Czechoslovak ministerial clerks reported frequently being squeezed by Polish negotiators who demanded the same benefits achieved in parallel negotiation with the Germans.[65] A daily 'separation allowance' to Polish workers from the German government, for example, was a frequent demand used in negotiations with Prague over a period of several years.[66] Röhr discovered that the same tactics were also employed by Polish representatives in negotiations with East Germany. Hence generous transfers from Czechoslovak to Polish treasuries, such as social security and health insurance payments, the entirety of Polish income tax in the CSSR, as well as a special 'compensation payment' for each 'borrowed' worker and, significantly, the requirement to employ a Polish 'group leader' for every 50 workers (at the cost of the recipient state) was used as leverage in the bargaining with Berlin.[67] The threat of full-scale withdrawal back to Poland (or in a way that would benefit the 'competing' country) was always on the table if demands were not met. In her article about Polish workers in the GDR, Röhr quotes one of the state officials describing the climate of economic negotiations with Poland: 'Of course, we kept in mind that we are negotiating the cooperation between closely interconnected countries. We also strove to find a viable solution for both sides and to keep the talks going. Nevertheless, the only thing no one was guilty of during these negotiations was shooting'.[68] To summarize, whereas Czechoslovakia and the GDR strove to maximize the number of Polish workers and minimise their price, Poland – upon discovering there was demand especially for its male workers in (Western and Middle Eastern) 'hard currency' countries – sought to minimise the number of workers and maximise their price. As a result, like Czechoslovakia, the GDR was forced to broaden its geographical horizons and search for more remote source countries, with Vietnam (an extension of the previous cooperation in 1980), Mozambique (after 1979) and Cuba (after 1975) being the most common choice.[69]

65 'Zpráva o výsledcích dosavadních jednání o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR', March 1972, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

66 'Zpráva o současné problematice při zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR a návrh zásad dalšího postupu', October 1974, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available. It is important to mention that Warsaw used its bargaining power not only for the benefit of the state but also of its citizens, from which the state profited only indirectly. Besides the strong pressure regarding separation allowances – introduced in the CSSR in 1975 only as an annual bonus – Warsaw also effectively forced the recipient states to elevate the standards of accommodation and equipment at workers' hostels.

67 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 220.

68 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 235.

69 Other blue-collar foreign workers employed in East Germany since the 1970s included Algerians (after 1974) and Angolans (after 1984). In more negligible numbers, there were also Mongolians (after 1982), Chinese, and North Koreans (both after 1986). A-J. Rabenschlag, 'Arbeiten im Bruderland. Arbeitsmigranten in der DDR und ihr Zusammenleben mit der deutschen Bevölkerung', *Deutschland Archiv 2016* (Bonn 2017), 96; Schüle, '"Proletarischer Internationalismus"', 192.

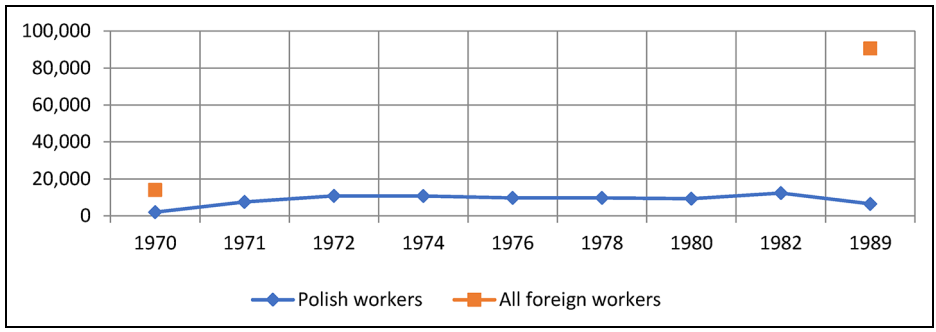

Figure 2. Polish and all foreign workers in East Germany.[a]
[a]Although I have no continual data for all foreign workers in East Germany, given the starting years and scope of cooperation with other countries the shape of the curve would be very similar to the Czechoslovak case. In the peak year 1989, there were 59,000 Vietnamese, 15,100 Mozambican, and 8300 Cuban workers in East Germany.
Source: Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung'; Schüle, 'Proletarischer Internationalismus'.

To be sure, the labour migrants from Vietnam and other non-European countries were, in certain respects, more 'valuable' for the recipient states. Unlike most Poles, they did not commute across borders and could be placed in any East German or Czechoslovak territory. Due to their economic situation, and especially their distance from home, their preterm returns were considerably less frequent. But one can hardly find any substantial 'ideological' change of approach towards them. With the drying-up of European Soviet bloc sources, the two recipient countries in focus turned to remote nations that in great numbers substituted the Poles and Hungarians in East Germany, and the Poles and Bulgarians in the CSSR (see Figures 1 and 2). Nevertheless, the emphasis on economic self-interest and the need to 'plug the holes' in the labour market remained from the previous period.

Moreover, there is little evidence of a noticeable decline in the already existing emphasis on socialist internationalism in the 1980s. In cooperation with Poland, internationalist allusions appeared at first in a rather pragmatic and low-profile form. For instance, in 1965, East German authorities claim that 'the Poles stand to profit by lowering their labour-power surplus and improving the living standard [of their workers]'.[70] However, during and after the hard bargaining over new and broader intergovernmental agreements (1971 with the GDR and 1972 with the CSSR), when the clear mutual economic benefits had crumbled away, internationalism emerged again, this time in a slightly different sense.

To understand the reasons for this, one must ask why the 'friendly' states kept the cooperation alive at all. Since the early 1970s, the Planning Committees and Ministries of Labour in both recipient states had unanimously contested these foreign labour

70 Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 214–215.

programmes because of their high expenditures and had become ever more overt in condemning them completely. However, after the failure of economic reforms across the entire bloc at the end of the 1960s, party leaders had very little will to restructure the economic system, which would free the states from dependence on foreign labour. Without giving companies more autonomy and budget responsibility, the badly needed industrial modernization (to which lip service was paid all the time) was far beyond the economic capacity of central state administrations. Therefore, the ministries had to constantly yield to the demands of enterprises for whom foreign labour was the only chance to meet production targets.[71] The companies' dependence on foreign workers grew over time with their investment into new accommodation and other facilities on the one hand and underinvestment into recruitment and vocational training of the local workforce on the other.[72] Röhr concludes for the case of the GDR (archival documents concerning Czechoslovakia only confirm this) that 'in fact the enterprise level bureaucracy defeated clerks of the Planning Committee and the Ministry of Labour and Wages'.[73] To escape from this paradox, hopeless governments resorted to humanitarian and internationalist rhetoric that endowed the cooperation schemes with 'higher' value, trumping dubious economic profitability.[74]

As far as the archival material reveal, the first to define it explicitly was paradoxically the 'sending' country of Poland. Even though Warsaw originally praised the economic benefits of the program,[75] Polish negotiators did not hide their disappointment with the final compromise reached with Berlin and Prague. To rationalize continued cooperation, Poland replaced dissatisfactory economic revenues with 'internationalist framing'. A ministerial account from 1975 mentions that 'the employment of our workers in the CSSR and the GDR on the basis of the current governmental agreements is, as a matter of fact, an expression of help to these countries and does not bring us any real

71 Tense relations between companies and central state bodies appear in many archival documents in the CSSR and East Germany during the 1970s. The companies were criticized for asking for more workers in their 'careless' effort to meet planned targets. It was not an exception in either recipient countries for representatives of the companies to go directly to Poland to recruit workers on their own initiative. 'Zpráva o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR', 27 February 1978, NAP, KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, inventory number not available.

72 An account from textile company Texlen Trutnov in 1976 discusses 'the problem of securing production with a low number of local employees after the [planned] withdrawal of Polish workers from the CSSR. Recruiting Polish labour was easier and more successful, causing recruitment in the CSSR to become overly neglected.' 'Rozbor příčin fluktuace pracovníků kategorie 8 se zaměřením na ženy-matky, n. p. Texlen Trutnov', September 1976, SOkAT, Texlen s. p. Trutnov (1958-1991), 3043/227.

73 Röhr, *Hoffnung - Hilfe*, 216.

74 'Zpráva o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR, 27 February 1978, NAP, KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, inventory number not available.

75 A report from the Polish Ministry of the Interior concerning the Wroclaw voivodship from as early as 1963 describes a strictly economic approach: 'Sending such a considerable number of women [about 1000] to Czechoslovakia for a full-time job almost completely solved the problem of female employment in border districts where the female work force reserve was estimated at about 1000 – 1500 in 1962'. It continues to say that the cooperation's future prospect is 'also profitable for the national economy (acquiring foreign currency)'. 'Kierowanie osób do pracy w CSRS w miejscowości leżących poza pasem małego ruchu granicznego', 15 August 1963, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (AIPN), BU MSW II, 1908.

profit'.[76] Indeed, Edward Gierek did not want a diplomatic conflict with broadly like-minded new leaders in Berlin and Prague.[77] The ideology came to circumvent the dilemma and imbued the economically unsustainable programme with new meaning.

The Polish stance was partly accepted by Czechoslovakia, whose primary concern after the invasion of 1968 was to settle exacerbated relations with other bloc countries, Poland in particular. To show Poland in a better light, Prague celebrated every aspect of bilateral cooperation, including the labour force. Specifically presented as generous, 'comradely help' was the work of elite Polish construction firms contracted to build expansive industrial compounds which were out in public view anyway (e.g. power plants, sugar plants, article mills, iron mills, etc.).[78] But when it comes to Polish employees in Czechoslovakia and foreign labour in general, 'substitutional' socialist internationalism was increasingly prevalent. In 1978, the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of Labour raised serious doubts about the economic effectiveness of the programs and called for conducting them only 'under the principles of international aid to less-developed socialist countries'.[79] Four years later, the same ministry chastened Czechoslovak enterprises for their indiscreet preference of (culturally closer) Polish workers over non-European labour.[80]

The strongest emphasis on socialist internationalism replacing economic profit was apparent in East Germany, which grew independently on the cooperation with Poland. Since the 'Miracle on the Rhine' of the 1950s, it had been evident that, in economic terms, the GDR would not be able to 'catch-up and overtake' its West German 'brethren'. To insist on the inevitable historical superiority of socialism over capitalism, the East German leadership embraced 'moral' rhetoric in various realms – for instance in promoting the image of anti-racist and anti-nationalist 'better Germans' worldwide.[81] The outer protest campaigns, mainly against the South African apartheid government, accompanied labour force cooperation to showcase a genuine socialist approach inside the country. Hence, socialist internationalism was imbued with a partly substitutional value that helped preserve the ideological construction of socialist superiority.[82] This 'strategy of

76 'Informacja w sprawie zatrudnienia pracowników polskich w przedsiębiorstwach CSRS i NRD', 17 January 1975, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Archiwum KC PZPR, Wydział Zagraniczny, LXXVI/6.

77 According to a clerk from the Polish Ministry of Labour, Wages, and Social Issues, 'withdrawal from international agreements [in the context of labour force cooperation] is not desirable, concerning the settlement of the international relations among CMEA countries and the technical-legal consequences of the given agreements'. Ibid.

78 Thus, Prague used 'internationalist' hints in both directions of the cooperation, often employing notions of unlimited 'help' (*pomoc*), which was associated with the Czechoslovak approach towards foreign countries, and 'temporary assistance' (*výpomoc*), used to define what the foreign workers did in Czechoslovakia. See 'Zpráva o zaměstnávání zahraničních pracovníků v ČSSR', 27 February 1978, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

79 Ibid.

80 Zpráva o současném stavu zaměstnávání zahraničních občanů v československých organizacích spojeném s odbornou přípravou a návrh na další postup v letech 1983–1985', 20 August 1982, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

81 C.f. Schüle, '"Proletarischer Internationalismus"', 191; Q. Slobodian, 'Socialist Chromatism', 33.

82 One can see similar cases when a moral value in state socialism is manufactured from one of its shortcomings. Malgorzata Fidelis, for instance, shows how the inability of the Polish communist government to supply the internal market with goods (clothes, etc.) desired by Polish youth was officially presented as the moral rectitude of the youth unspoiled by Western consumerism. M. Fidelis, 'The Other Marxists: Making Sense of

substitution', as Alfred Rieber termed it,[83] reinforced a 'moral framing' of foreign labour programmes as well and helped reinterpret their economic objectives (and the growing setbacks thereof).

Their Western 'counterpart' played an even more direct role in establishing the 'substitutional' version of socialist internationalism. Not only were the East Germans watching, dissociated from their Western compatriots yet ever being compared to them, the West Germans were keeping a critical eye on the GDR too. It is clear from both Czechoslovakia and especially the GDR that, paradoxically, Western criticism is also what pushed these communist states to apply their own ideological tools to labour force cooperation and frame it in internationalist terms. According to archival documents of the SED from 1967, West German media attempted to discredit the 'guest' worker scheme in East Germany, arguing that foreign labour from elsewhere in the Soviet bloc was 'forced' to work in East Germany because it was 'denied the option of working in the West'. It explicitly addressed the publicly announced agreement with Hungary (though not the confidential agreement with Poland) that had been signed the same year.[84]

As a result, particularly the East German government increasingly emphasized the educational character of the programmes, endowing them with a moral dimension and placing them into a superior position compared to the purely 'market-based' schemes in the West. The 'mantra' of 'solidarity through education' (*Solidarität durch Ausbildung*) along with 'raising qualification' (*Qualifizierung*) was applied to all new agreements concerning foreign labour groups.[85]

The emphasis on socialist internationalism did not vanish even in the latest decade of state socialism. In fact, regarding Poland, the opposite was true. When general Jaruzelski took power in 1981 after the explosion of the Polish crisis, conservative leaders in Prague and Berlin were ready to help their 'friendly neighbour' stop 'the plague of Solidarity' from spilling across their borders. Both East Germany and Czechoslovakia transferred substantial funds to support Warsaw.[86] There was indirect aid too, such as the free delivery of medical and industrial goods.[87] In addition, a higher number of Polish workers (like Ms. Buczek and her colleagues) were accepted by the two countries despite their

International Student Revolts in Poland in the Global Sixties', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 3, 62 (2013), 425-449.

83 A. Rieber, 'Afterword: Promises and Paradoxes of Socialist Internationalism (Personal and Historical Reflections)', in P. Babiracki and A. Jersild (eds), *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War. Exploring the Second World* (Cham 2016), 327–343, 337.

84 The cooperation with Poland was signed in secret (one year prior) to prevent, inter alia, this kind of unwelcome publicity precisely. Hungarians made up the largest group (about 12,000) of foreign workers in the GDR at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, later replaced by Poles and especially by non-European nationals. Röhr, 'Die Beschäftigung', 218-219.

85 Schüle, '"Proletarischer Internationalismus"', 191, 200–201.

86 Despite the fact that Poland was already indebted to the CSSR, Prague sent 36 million roubles. A. Szczepańska, 'Oficjalne relacje polsko-czechosłowackie w latach 1980-1989 w świetle raportów ambasady PRL w Pradze', *Przegląd Zachodniopomorski*, XXV, LIV (2010-14), 67–82, 70.

87 Warsaw also asked for urgent financial help in US dollars. The Czechoslovak government had to refuse this demand because the West imposed sanctions (a hard currency blockade) on the whole Soviet bloc due to the Solidarity crisis. 'Zpráva k žádosti o poskytnutí další pomoci PLR', 29 January 1982, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.

growing dissatisfaction with the economic record of the agreement. Hence the greatest number of Polish workers appeared in the GDR during the first half of the 1980s. According to Röhr, those few years (1982–6) were the only period when 'political reasons dominated' in GDR decision-making with respect to foreign labour recruitment.[88]

In its substitutional role, socialist internationalism gradually spread beyond guest labour from Poland to encompass a foreign workforce from countries much further afield by the 1980s. Moreover, at the turn of the decade, instead of withering away, internationalism got its second wind. In finally jumping at the bonanza of a fully disposed and (seemingly) endless labour force from developing countries, both 'recipient' states blatantly revealed these programmes were not a panacea for economic problems. In fact, they were more part of the structural problem of the nations' unreformed economies than a solution. That explains why the authorities, facing surging oil prices (most non-European workers travelled by air), grew more vocal about the long-term ineffectiveness of foreign labour employment. At the beginning of the 1980s, the East German Planning Committee 'recommended diminishing the employment of foreign workers'.[89] In 1983, the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of Labour decided (unsuccessfully) to end foreign labour employment completely by phasing out foreign workers year to year until none remained on CSSR territory.[90] Hence, the need to solve the internal conflict between a growing influx of foreign workers on the one hand, and simultaneous attempts to get rid of them on the other, became increasingly apparent.

Czechoslovakia anchored the substitutional form of socialist internationalism for all foreign laborers officially in a document entitled 'Principles and conditions for the temporary employment of foreign citizens in Czechoslovak enterprises connected to professional training after the year 1980'. Since then, partly driven by the unwelcome attention of Western media and international organizations, references to internationalism became more prevalent in public statements.[91]

Instead of a strict ideological contradiction, the parallel emphasis on economic and internationalist concerns surfaced not only in the documents of top-ranking officials but also at the grassroots level in certain factories where labour migrants worked. Although one can sense the subliminal priority of economic needs, factory clerks at the East German articlemill in Heidenau did not give up their internationalist accent when negotiating with their Polish 'labour source' companies. In 1978 when agreements with both 'recipient' states expired (they were finally prolonged in limited form), Polish

88 Röhr, *Hoffnung – Hilfe,* 216.
89 Röhr, *Hoffnung – Hilfe,* 216.
90 'Zpráva k návrhu MPMSV PLR na změnu Ujednání mezi FMPSV ČSSR a MPMSV PLR o zaměstnávání polských pracovníků v čs. organizacích v pohraničních oblastech a v jiných výjimečných případech ze dne 16. 5. 1978', March 1984, NAP, Úřad předsednictva vlády ČSSR/ČSFR, inventory number not available.
91 In an interview for a Czechoslovak magazine from 1986, Milan Kyselý, Deputy Minister of Labour, explained that 'less developed socialist nations' asked Czechoslovakia (and other countries) 'for comradely assistance' and stated that 'the CSSR strives to responsibly fulfil this internationalist duty', but that 'Western media and organizations, pretending to be defenders of human rights, sometimes try to disparage this internationalist cooperation and distort our stance'. Syruček, 'Proč u nás pracují?'.

authorities simply announced they would not be able to send their workers for the whole period of 1–3 years, as had been stipulated in the original agreement. Their German counterparts politely objected that in such a case, they could not secure the fulfillment of the complete *Qualifizierung* plan, including German-language courses, theoretical lessons, etc. It is worth mentioning that both German and Czechoslovak authorities (including the managers at Heidenau) frequently perceived the training as problematic, mostly because of the incompatibility of industrial equipment in Poland.[92] Thus, both sides quickly agreed that new workers need only to undergo 'a short necessary introduction to machine operation', after which they could be placed directly in 'manufacturing positions' (*produktive Einsatz*) at Heidenau.[93]

Similarly, when Malfa wrote his 'desperate' letter, his own government offered reassurance (albeit somewhat hesitantly) that he 'helps' foreign workers and, by extension, their home countries. However, based on first-hand experience, he was probably aware of the (troublesome) economic nature of the cooperation. After all, it was now first and foremost his own existential interest to keep the Poles in the factory, i.e., to meet production targets and not to get punished by ministerial supervisors. Indeed, Malfa might have referred to internationalism mechanically as a 'magic formula' that must be inserted into any official communication. However, his effort to 'grasp at straws' could have fallen on fertile soil as it was the Polish government that first highlighted internationalism as a way of re-imbuing the clumsy cooperation with new meaning.

Moreover, Ms. Buczek and her colleagues arrived at a time when Czechoslovakia had generously opened its factories to Poles who were, to put it bluntly, in desperate need of better-stocked shelves. Notwithstanding all the geopolitical reasons that were certainly in play behind the Czechoslovak decision, it did effectively help Polish citizens, and was therefore, in a very real sense, 'internationalist mutual assistance'. Thus, today's observer can easily trace laudable 'socialist values' alongside economic priorities even in the 'selfish' 1980s.

Arguably, socialist internationalism was not just an ideological 'fig leaf' concealing exploitation, nor was it an inspirational force – the 'Holy Spirit' of the communist pantheon, so to speak – which motivated labour force cooperation, only to later decline and give way to economic self-interest. Economic concerns were always a clear and stable priority. The visible changes in the 1980s on the 'supply' side – more source countries, higher numbers and greater 'flexibility' of migrants – were conveyed not by the sudden pressure on 'commodification' and profit but by Polish deadlines (though later softened) for withdrawing its workers from Czechoslovakia and the GDR in the second half of the 1970s. The changes on the 'demand' side stemmed primarily from the cooperation's driving

92 In addition, the workers were primarily focused on earning money quickly and buying consumer goods before returning home, so they were not much interested in language courses or professional training. This was especially true concerning non-European labour migrants, who often could not find any work after returning because of the high unemployment in their home countries. C. f. Poutrus, 'Die DDR als "Hort"', 147.

93 'Reisebericht über den Besuch - Generaldirektion für Zellstoff und Papier, Łódzkie Zakłady Papiernicze und Głuchołaskie Zakłady Papiernicze, Heidenau, 15.6.1978', Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, VEB Kombinat Zellstoff, Papier und Pappe Heidenau (11596), 1036.

force being shifted off of the state and onto the companies.[94] Schematically phasing the studied period into 'truly' internationalist and – post 1980 – 'proto-market self-interest' ignores not only the crucial role of the economy at the beginning of the labour force cooperation, but also overlooks the inner frictions in the state-socialist economy that explain apparent contradictions in the state's approach during the final socialist decade.

It also stems from the research that references to internationalism remained on the stage until the very end of the communist regime. In the later period, mainly to substitute for the original, and then contested, economic objectives. The 'internationalist framing' – as the Polish case well exposed – helped communist authorities to both make sense of the economic disappointment from the cooperation and authentically legitimize its continuation (driven eagerly by state-socialist enterprises) as well as to assume the 'moral' upper hand over similar programmes in the West.

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94 This is not to say that there was no profit for the budgets of the recipient states at all. Czechoslovakia and East Germany accepted more and more foreign workers to 'save' production targets, especially during the mid-1980s, after the last timid efforts to modernize the economies and optimize labour markets failed in both states – the Schwedter Initiative in the GDR and Štrougal's reforms in the CSSR. But the central bodies were quite vocal that dependence on foreign labour leads to serious economic difficulties.

2021, in Czech). He published an article 'Escaping the Double Burden. Female Polish Workers in State Socialist Czechoslovakia' in *Slavic Review*. The piece won a special prize of the Prague based French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES) for the best article in social sciences in 2020. Klípa's research focuses on state socialism, nationalism, migration, and ethnic minorities. He is currently working on a book 'Pioneers of Capitalism. Polish Builders of Husák´s Czechoslovakia'.