

There was forced labor in political prison in the GDR. It was inhuman and contrary to international law. This judgment was made by an international jury made up of politicians, lawyers, historians and human rights activists, chaired by the former public prosecutor Matthias Bath, after hearing 14 witnesses. This book documents the statements of the prisoners, the questions of the jury, the in-depth lectures, and the final judgment that the jury summarized in the *Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor of September 13, 2020*.

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Forced Labor in Political GDR Detention

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International Tribunal

11th–13th September 2020

Human Rights Center Cottbus Germany



Union der Opferverbände
Kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft e.V.
in Germany [Ed.]

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Preface

Dieter Dombrowski,
Chairman of UOKG

Dear readers,

Dear responsible decision-makers in politics and business,

On September 11-13, 2020, the Union of Victims Associations of Communist Tyranny (UOKG) held a Tribunal named after its subject, “Forced Labor of Political Prisoners in Former East Germany.” Before an international jury, 14 witnesses described their experiences at the former Cottbus prison in Germany. As background, it should be noted that in the 40 years of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), there were around 250,000 political prisoners, and most of them were forced to labor in prison. We don’t know all the facts and figures, but we have sufficient knowledge to determine that thousands of innocent people were subjected to forced labor. The special thing about this type of exploitation is that the income from forced labor was an integral part of East Germany’s budget, and that many products were produced for sale in Western countries, especially the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany). By this means, the GDR was able to boost its earnings in foreign currency.

This forced labor of political prisoners did not take place in secret. All governments knew the inhumane manner in which East German political prisoners were forced to labor. These governments of course could not prevent this, but they did try to buy political prisoners out of custody at an early stage for humane reasons. By this means, too, the GDR was able to fill its coffers further with foreign currency.

Through this Tribunal, our aim was to bring this kind of “legalized exploitation” back into the public eye. One company so far [IKEA] has faced up to this dark chapter and taken responsibility. This act

of solidarity and justice cannot be overestimated. German business has been urged and requested, as it still is today, to participate in a fund that provides assistance to former political forced laborers under the East German dictatorship.

Political prisoners in the GDR were imprisoned contrary to the rule of law, contrary to all international norms, and in some cases contrary to the regulations of East Germany itself. They were exploited, and they were pressed into service. They were threatened with draconian punishment if work quotas were not consistently met or if they refused to work. So far it has proved practically impossible to alleviate, through rehabilitation or compensation, the impaired health that this political imprisonment and forced labor caused, since as a rule the victims are unable to provide satisfactory evidence.

The shocking testimony of the witnesses, however, drove the jury of this Tribunal to an unequivocal verdict, and demanded that these victims of forced labor not be left alone, but that they be granted justice. We hope, expect, and demand an objective dialogue with politicians and business leaders in order to find a constructive solution together.

We would like to thank all jury members and witnesses for their extensive cooperation. We would also like to thank our partners – the Cottbus Human Rights Center, the International Society for Human Rights, and the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation – for their active support in preparing and carrying out this Tribunal. We would especially like to thank Prof. Monika Grütters in her role as Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, who financially supported the event and thus made it possible.

Contents

Preface	5
Introduction	11
Welcome	11
Greeting by Dieter Dombrowski.....	12
Keynote by Sylvia Wähling	15
Keynote by Karl Hafen.....	18
Greetings from Marion Smith	21
Greetings from Dr. Maria Nooke	29
Greetings from Birgit Neumann-Becker	32
Lectures	37
C. Sachse: The International Movement against Forced Labor ..	37
J.P. Wölbern: Forced Labor of Political Prisoners in the GDR	44
S. Kill: The Reichsbahn and the Penal System in the GDR	52
Presentation of the Jury	67
Dr. Matthias Bath	68
Peter Heidt, MdB	69
Prof. Dr. Huige Li.....	70
Bada Nam	71
Carla Ottmann, MA	72
Dr. Klára Pinerová.....	73
Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher	74
Marion Smith	76
Arnold Vaatz, MdB	78

Questioning the Witnesses	81
Introduction: Metalworking Industry.....	81
Witness Hugo Diederich	83
Witness Detlef Wengel	87
Witness Ralf Steeg	94
Introduction: Furniture Industry	98
Witness Klaus Peter Simon	100
Witness Alexander W. Bauersfeld	105
Introduction: Mining Industry	110
Witness Wolfgang Wegner.....	113
Introduction: Clothing Industry.....	116
Witness Angelika Schmidt.....	118
Witness Elke Schlegel.....	124
Witness Harald Steffan	129
Introduction: Chemical Industry	133
Witness Holger Rossmann	134
Witness Silvia Krause	138
Introduction: Deutsche Reichsbahn, Pentacon and Elmo	140
Witness Peter Schneider	142
Witness Thomas Schlegel	146
Witness Birgit Krüger	149
The End of the Witness Questioning.....	153
‘Lindenhotel’: from the Everyday Life of a Prisoner	155
Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor.....	156
Closing Words	160
Appeal to the Ambassador of Belarus	162

Appendix	163
Initiatives and Events	163
Part 1: 1949 to 1989	163
Part 2: 1990 to the present.....	165
ILO-Convention No. 105.....	170
References to International Legal Texts	174
German Books	175
List of Prior UOKG Conference Proceedings (German)	177
German Abbreviations.....	178

The jury, the witnesses, and the organizers: Top row, left to right: Peter Heidt, Marion Smith, Klára Pinerová, Dieter Dombrowski, Bada Nam, Thomas Schirrmacher, Carla Ottmann, Matthias Bath, Arnold Vaatz, Huige Li. Middle row, left to right: Detlef Wengel, Peter Schneider, Thomas Schlegel, Karl Hafen, Ralf Steeg, Hugo Diederich, Klaus Peter Simon, Alexander W. Bauersfeld, Wolfgang Wegner. Front row, left to right: Harald Steffan, Eike Schlegel, Sylvia Wähling, Birgit Krüger, Angelika Schmidt, Silvia Krause, Holger Rossmann.



Introduction

Friday, September 11, 2020, in Cottbus Human Rights Center and Memorial Prison, “Pentacon-Hall”

Welcome



Benjamin Baumgart, consultant for fundamental questions of the UOKG

Mr. Baumgart welcomed participants to seats spaced for social distancing due to the coronavirus pandemic. Guests received an introductory packet and were offered headsets for listening in German or in English, and informed that the event was being live-streamed in both languages. The event began with greetings by UOKG and its event partners, beginning with the chairman of UOKG, Mr. Dieter Dombrowski.

Greeting by Dieter Dombrowski



Dieter Dombrowski,
Chairman of UOKG

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests,

Greetings to you all. I would especially like to greet those who have travelled from far away to see us – namely, Mr. Bada Nam from South Korea, and our friends from Victims of Communism, an American foundation, whose executive director, Mr. Marion Smith, is here in the first row and will speak later. I also welcome Mrs. Pinerová from Prague. These are the ones who have travelled the farthest.

Tomorrow, when the event begins with the hearings, the members of the jury will be presented again separately. Not all of them are here yet because the jury starts tomorrow, at which time every single member of the jury will be introduced. But I would especially like to welcome the chairman of the jury, Dr. Matthias Bath, a retired public prosecutor. And the special thing about him is that he is also a former political prisoner. It doesn't happen too often that someone who has worked for the state as a public prosecutor was also a political prisoner during GDR times. In any case, that qualifies him as an expert for this role.

I would like to begin by thanking all those who helped to bring this congress about. We are supported by the German Federal Government, and by Minister of Culture Monika Grütters.

The subject of the Tribunal is already a bit like an indictment, and when we hear the witnesses tomorrow, we will deal with the relationship between the two German governments, and neither our government nor the previous ones will get away without bruises. But the good thing about our democracy is that, as we understand it and fortunately as our government and parliamentarians understand it, critical dialogue is not only welcomed but also, as in our case, encouraged and supported. That is what distinguishes us. At the moment I am thinking of Belarus, which we are all watching with great sadness, and we hope that the people who are going out into the streets, and especially the women, will not lose heart.¹

I would also like to welcome the two state commissioners: Maria Nooke, State Commissioner for the Reappraisal of the Communist Dictatorship, from Brandenburg, and our colleague from Saxony-Anhalt, Mrs. Neumann-Becker, a loyal companion and activist for the interests of former SED victims.

The Union of Victims Associations of Communist Tyranny (UOKG) is the umbrella organization of about 40 associations of victims of the SED dictatorship and communism. Here in the former Cottbus penal institution, we convene this congress: the Tribunal on Forced Labor of Political Prisoners in Former East Germany. Why do we do this?

The variety of injustices committed by the East German dictatorship is almost limitless. It had an impact on all areas of public and private life. At this congress we want to find out, with the help of witness statements to an international jury, whether legal and moral prin-

¹ A reference to the application of criminal prosecutions for political reasons in Belarus and subsequent protests in September 2020. See "Human Rights Situation in Belarus: September 2020," European Platform for Democratic Elections, October 5, 2020, <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/human-rights-situation-in-belarus-september-2020.html>.

principles were violated in the former GDR during the forced labor of political prisoners. As a former prisoner in this prison, I, of course, have an opinion on this, but this opinion is not needed today because we want to have the investigation and evaluation carried out independently and objectively.

We are of the opinion that this German chapter of forced labor of politically imprisoned people, under threat of punishment and in the worst working and health conditions, must not be forgotten. About two years ago, we, the UOKG, also established a foundation to collect money to help former political forced laborers in difficult situations. There are individual companies that were involved in the East Germany to West Germany trade in goods that are willing to participate in a symbolic compensation – or, better, to support these former forced laborers. Through this congress, we also want to draw attention to this topic. We are not talking about a fringe group here. In the 40 years of the GDR's existence, about 250,000 people were imprisoned for political reasons. Converted to the current population of Germany, this would correspond today to the innocent imprisonment of 1.2 million people. Fortunately, in our democratic constitutional state, our argument is valid no matter how many people were harmed.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of this congress, and I wish all of us an interesting and fruitful meeting. I would also ask the media to report on this event in a way that promotes our cause.

Keynote by Sylvia Wähling



Sylvia Wähling, Executive Chairman
of Cottbus Human Rights Centre

Dear former prisoners, cooperation partners, and guests,

On behalf of the Cottbus Human Rights Center, I would like to welcome you to the Cottbus Memorial Prison. We are pleased that we are able to hold the Tribunal on Forced Labor in GDR Prison at our site with our head organization, the UOKG, and our partner human rights organization, the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM). We thank the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, Monika Grütters, for making this event financially possible.

This hall in which we are located was used until 1990 by the state-owned enterprise (VEB) Pentacon from Dresden as a “punching shop” or “punch” for the production of camera housings. Because VEB Pentacon was liquidated by the privatization agency in 1990, and there was no longer production in this hall, you can assume that the handprints and oil stains on the soundproofing panels around us, and the smell of oil rising from the floor and filling the room, are original from the decades before 1989.

If the hall is renovated in the future, it will be important that these testimonies of work from an earlier period are preserved as reminders. This weekend, we will hear from numerous contemporary wit-

nesses of inhumane working conditions, lack of work safety, and lack of hygiene regulations.

I will let the former prisoner Walter Schmidt tell us briefly what he experienced in this room during his time in prison in the mid-1970s:

“A prisoner had cut off a finger. It was a clean cut, no blood. There were a lot of doctors in prison ... The doctors said that with a cut like that, it’s actually no problem to sew the limb back on. But the cut-off limb must be cooled immediately and the victim must be taken to the nearest surgical clinic as quickly as possible. Well, of course, nothing happened in Cottbus. At first the prisoner sat there medically untreated. He sat and sat. His finger was put on the machine where he had cut it off, and it stayed there until someone later threw it away. After hours, the prisoner was brought to the prison hospital in Leipzig-Meusdorf by a prisoner transport, and he was treated there. He got a bandage, and that was it. I don’t want to swear to it, but I would say that a week later he was back with a thickly bandaged hand and had to continue working.”

Did the penal system overlook such incidents and similar accidents, of which there were more per capita in the penal institutions of the GDR than in civilian life?

Just a few meters further behind us another state-owned enterprise, VEB Sprela, made prisoners manufacture bushings, mostly for the automobile industry. As witness Christian Koch recalls from his time in prison in the mid-1970s:

“The room was shrouded in a dense mist of fine plastic dust. And the closer you came to the machines, the denser this cloud of dust became around the workplace. We had to sweep the room every evening. There would be around half a centimeter of fine dust that had settled down from the air. So we stood in this dense dust fog and had to twist out plastic pipes.”

It is worth listening to the original words of the head of the Department of Corrections in the GDR Ministry of the Interior, Colonel Lustik, when speaking about such conditions. He visited the Cottbus prison from November 3-12, 1976, for an inspection, and wrote a report from which the following assessment was extracted:

“The cooperation with the labor deployment companies to ensure health and safety at work and to comply with hygienic standards is inadequate. The members of the employing companies pay little or no attention to their responsibility. Examples are the unhygienic conditions in the sanitary facilities and washing facilities for the prisoners, as well as non-compliance with health and safety regulations such as the wearing of hearing protection and glasses, and the improper storage of trie (trichlorethylene) in the Pentacon department of the plant. Up to now, little or no consideration has been given to comments and complaints by the medical service of the prisons.”

What a devastating assessment!

This is just a small foretaste of what we will be dealing with this weekend. I wish and hope that on Sunday the jury will conclude not only that the work done in the prisons of the GDR was prohibited forced labor, but also that 30 years after the German reunification, it is time that people are compensated for the injustice they suffered. If you have been rehabilitated as a political prisoner and there is compensation from the state, there should also be compensation for the work you were forced to do unlawfully.

In our exhibition on the second floor of the Memorial Center, “Haft – Zwang – Arbeit im Zuchthaus Cottbus 1933–1989” (“Imprisonment – Force – Labor in Cottbus Prison from 1933 to 1989”), you can read more emotional statements, insights, and information about forced labor in Cottbus.

Many thanks.

Keynote by Karl Hafen



Karl Hafen, Board Member of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM)

Why should we today, 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, talk again about prison conditions and hear specifically about forced labor in GDR prisons? Most people have closed the chapter on direct persecution and subsequent imprisonment for political reasons in the GDR. But our topic is relevant even today as we witness people fighting for their freedom in Belarus and rebelling against a regime that continued political imprisonment as a means of oppression since the Soviet Union. And one thing must be remembered: when history is forgotten, it is not mastered and improved on.

We have to thank those who have traded their personal freedom for general freedom. They are the pioneers of reunification, the living witnesses of dissatisfaction and resistance against the GDR system that tried to hold on to power with injustice, violence, control, forgery, and unfairness.

Today, former political prisoners generally live unrecognized among us as former perpetrators, followers, and all those who watched and remained silent. However, the former prisoners' experience caused

damage still apparent today: the destruction of families and friendships, a career bend that is still not overcome due to lower pensions, humiliation, damages caused by imprisonment, loss of trust in friends and in justice, and other disadvantages.

Much has been uncovered and worked through in dealing with the Stasi files, files collected by the East Germany Ministry for State Security. For most people, this is already enough to confirm what they had suspected at the time. But still many people, including members of the German federal parliament (Bundestag), refuse to name this injustice and to admit their complicity. And this applies not only to politicians born in the East, but also to those born in the West.

The Federal Republic of Germany registered the human rights crimes in the GDR with the Central Registration Office in Salzgitter and interviewed, by means of a questionnaire, former GDR prisoners who had been freed. But too late, namely in 1982, the Inner-German Committee of the German Bundestag dealt with the conditions of imprisonment in the GDR in public session and listened to the reports of former political prisoners. The stenographic protocol no. 36 of the 17th Committee of September 8, 1982, was quickly out of print. At the request of the International Society for Human Rights, Gerhard Reddemann, at that time chairman of the Inner-German Committee, wrote to us in July 1986 that he saw "no inherent necessity for a repetition at the moment." The IGFM took this answer as a reason to deal with this sad chapter for a broad audience to inform the population, open the eyes of young people, and encourage them to help. Following a hearing of former political prisoners, we issued two publications: "Human Rights in the GDR and East Berlin" and "Political Imprisonment in the GDR." In both, we devoted a separate chapter to the topic of forced labor, and former political prisoners of the GDR described their experiences. We distributed these documents in large numbers in schools, at the German Bundestag, and at information desks. We used them translated in English, French, and Spanish at The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)

follow-up conferences and as an informal basis for a 1503 collective complaint against the GDR at the United Nations.

I see today's event as a continuation of our work with the difference that today, at a place of action – the Cottbus Penitentiary Memorial – we want to get a picture of how political prisoners were integrated into the GDR's production process under threat of punishment, such as single arrest, separation, and other measures, and how they were exploited without any attention to work safety and health care, including for the production of exports ordered by the Federal Republic of Germany. Forced labor by political prisoners was a reality. No one should make excuses for not knowing.

Greetings from Marion Smith

“The Unresolved Legacy of Communist Crimes”



Marion Smith, executive director
of Victims of Communism Memorial
Foundation

It's an honor to be with you all in Cottbus this evening. And on behalf of the board of trustees of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and our many patrons in the United States, I want to thank you for convening this important conference. It is vitally important that we have not only a moral reckoning for the crimes committed by communist regimes but also some form of legal accountability.

Our organization was authorized by the Congress of the United States 26 years ago, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our mission is to spread understanding of the grave crimes perpetrated by those who sought to enact the ideology and programs of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and many other communist ideologues and despots.

Every day, we strive to remind the world that communism is the most vicious idea in human history, one that has murdered, enslaved, and ruined more lives than any other by a massive margin. It has already killed more than a hundred million men, women, children, infants, and unborn. It has already dominated more than two billion people

for more than a century. And more people live under a single-party communist regime today than ever before. More people suffer from its tyranny than during the Cold War.

The hardest part of my job is listening to their stories.

A North Korean mother forced to watch as her children starve to death.

A Chinese man scarred by torture in a re-education camp because of his religious faith.

A brave Cuban woman whose left arm was chopped off because she tried to reopen a school for the children of her village.

Everywhere I go, I listen to these stories, which is why I am here today. In fact, all of us are here to listen to the stories of the victims of communism.

We will hear from those who witnessed or endured the forced labor that for many defined the German Democratic Republic. We will hear what it was like for the more than 200,000 political prisoners who were sent into the fields, the mines, and the factories. Many were housed in this very prison, which was the largest facility for political prisoners in the GDR. We will hear about the crimes they saw, the pain they felt, and the scars they carry to this day.

But we are not here only to listen. We came to this place to act. We seek one thing, one simple word, and that is justice.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of East Germany's reunification with the West. Sadly, over three long decades, the wrongs that the communist rulers perpetrated have not been righted. We face the threat of collective amnesia as the perpetrators are becoming forgotten, and so are the victims. Yet those of us here have no intention of letting that happen. We want the victims of East Germany to know that we will never forget them.

The pursuit of justice must begin by shining a light on injustice. And so today, we ask ourselves: What happened in this prison? What happened across the German Democratic Republic as a whole?

The sad truth is that forced labor was widespread in the GDR, from its founding in 1949 to its fall in 1990. Of course, the GDR was not the only regime that relied on forced labor. So did the Nazi regime that preceded it and the Soviet Union that controlled it.

The Nazis systematically enslaved ethnic groups across Central and Eastern Europe, affecting at least 12 million people. In the Nazi network of concentration camps, forced labor often preceded extermination. As for the Soviets, they built their own network of suffering and servitude, known as the Gulag. At least 18 million people were sent there, at least one-and-a-half million of whom died.

It was never a question of whether forced labor would come to East Germany. It was just a matter of when.

Like the national socialism of the Nazi state, the international socialism of communism fundamentally rejected the idea of human rights and individual dignity. To the Politburo in Berlin and Moscow, the people of East Germany were serfs, not citizens. They were assets to be used to generate income for the state. After all, in the communist mind, the needs of the state are all that matter. Everything, and everyone, can be sacrificed in the state's name.

East Germany's forced labor system was built on this immoral foundation. As research has shown, the state relied on forced labor from political prisoners in virtually every industry.

Take the metal industry. German prisoners were routinely put to work in steel and rolling mills. They were given little to no training, put on the oldest and most dangerous machines, and forced to work around the clock. We know from witness accounts that accidents were widespread, showing the GDR's utter disregard for human life and well-being.

The furniture industry was no better. Both domestic and international companies turned to East Germany's prisoners to make their tables, chairs, and other goods. Prisoners were exposed to dangerous chemicals, told to work while gravely sick, subjected to x-rays

without protective equipment, and worse. They were sprayed with acid, burned, and blinded. If they refused to work, they were chained to their beds for days at a time.

In the mining industry, the communist authorities also relied on slave labor. In the 1950s, political prisoners could be found mining uranium, which exposed them to radioactive materials. For years, the GDR put thousands of prisoners to work in underground mines, violating its treaty commitments. Injuries and fatalities became so common that even the Soviet Union said the situation was out of control.

There are many other industries where forced labor was the norm. Garments. Construction. Farming. The list goes on. Amazingly, East Germany even had a mechanism to sell its de facto slaves for a profit. By 1989, West Germany had bought the freedom of nearly 34,000 East German political prisoners. East Germany was able to milk them for money to the very last minute.

The system that I have described is the definition of despicable and inhumane. The GDR treated people as property to be used until they broke. This tribunal will uncover more details about the breadth and depth of this evil system.

By the time we leave, we will be able to paint a fuller picture of forced labor in East Germany. Then, we will be in a better place to pursue justice for those who suffered so much for so long.

The importance of our work cannot be overstated. What we are doing here can be a model for the victims of communism in other countries.

Thirty years after Germany's reunification, and 31 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the free world still needs a moral and legal reckoning with the crimes of communism. From Germany to Georgia, Armenia to Albania, and beyond, the victims of communism still have not received the attention and action that they deserve.

In the United States, we have a saying: Justice delayed is justice denied. For those who labored and suffered under the brutal rule of communism, justice has been delayed for far too long. Accountability can wait no longer. The victims of communism in East Germany deserve their due.

We must do this for them – but not only them. We must do this for all the current victims of communism as well.

The stories that we will hear in the coming days are from decades gone by. Yet forced labor in communist regimes did not end in 1990. It continues to this day. In fact, the dictators of the 21st century have learned from the forced labor systems of the 20th century and have even sought to improve on them. Today, we are seeing innovations in forced labor across the globe.

Consider an example from the Western Hemisphere. Ninety miles off the coast of the United States lies Communist Cuba. The regime in Havana uses forced labor not only to make money but also to spread communist propaganda throughout the world.

Cuba's forced labor program involves medical professionals. Every year, the country selects doctors and nurses and sends them abroad. Currently, as many as 50,000 Cuban medical professionals can be found in at least 60 countries, from the Americas to Asia to Africa and beyond. Cuba claims to be engaging in humanitarian work, but that is a lie. It is nothing more than a novel form of forced labor.

The Cuban doctors do not work for themselves. The government in Havana steals their wages, which amount to nearly \$11 billion every year – more than 10% of Cuba's GDP. It also compels the doctors to support local socialist and communist politicians and prop up regimes that Cuba supports, like the dictatorship in Venezuela.

Meanwhile, back home, the doctors' families are held as hostages. Far from doing their jobs willingly, these doctors work to ensure the safety of their loved ones from the brutality of Cuba's Communist Party.

There is no question that this is forced labor. We need only ask the doctors themselves. Plenty have come forward with stories of Havana's abuse and theft in recent years. One Cuban doctor who defected while working in Brazil recently said, "There comes a time when you get tired of being a slave."

Like the victims of the GDR, Cuba's medical workers deserve justice too.

Another example of modern-day forced labor comes from North Korea.

In 2018, some 2.6 million North Koreans lived in slavery, more than 1 out of every 10 people in the country. By some estimates, a "significant majority" of North Koreans have endured forced labor at some point in their lives. Huge numbers of the victims are children as young as 10 years old or even younger.

Like the Soviet Gulag, North Korea's forced labor system has a name – the Kwan-Li-So. It is fair to say that North Korea's economy is built on a foundation of forced labor.

Political prisoners build the country's bridges and apartment buildings. They slave away in mines and on farms. Tens of thousands have also been sent to China, where they work in factories, or to Russia, where they work at logging camps. Countless prisoners die from malnutrition and abysmal conditions, which include working in the coldest months of winter without shoes.

Several years ago, a survivor of Auschwitz and renowned human rights lawyer, Thomas Buergethal, said that North Korea's forced labor system is "as terrible or worse" than the Nazi concentration camps in which he lived. From what I have heard from North Korean defectors, I believe that North Korea's labor camps are the most brutal places on the planet.

Like the victims of the GDR, the millions of slaves in North Korea deserve justice too.

Finally, there is Communist China.

Forced labor is not new to China. It has been a fact of life there since the 1950s. Forced labor has been institutionalized in China as part of the "laogai" system, which translates as "reform through labor." Between 40 and 50 million people have been sent to China's labor camps since the regime's founding.

Currently, more than 1,000 forced labor camps are active in the People's Republic of China. The number of prisoners is unknown, but estimates put it well into the millions.

The world has come to a greater recognition of China's forced labor system in the past few years. Where before the communist authorities primarily targeted political dissidents and people of religious faiths, now they are targeting an entire ethnic group – the predominantly Muslim Uighurs of Xinjiang. As many as three million Uighurs have been sent to camps where they undergo indoctrination and torture.

As part of their imprisonment, many Uighurs are forced to work at Chinese factories. These factories are part of the global supply chains for at least 83 well-known companies, including Apple, BMW, Lacoste, Microsoft, Nike, Volkswagen, and Zara, according to a recent report in Australia. This year, during the COVID pandemic, Uighurs were forced to make face masks that were shipped across the world.

In addition to forced labor, many Uighurs have their organs harvested for sale to wealthy foreigners. Practitioners of Falun Gong, a religious movement that Beijing fears, are subjected to the same horrific treatment. Much like Cuba, this represents an innovation in forced labor. China has found a way to profit off its victims in both life and death.

Once again, like the victims of the GDR, the millions of forced laborers in Communist China deserve justice too.

It is against this global backdrop that we gather for this tribunal. The discussions we have and testimonies we hear will rightly focus on the past. Yet we cannot lose sight of the global reality that surrounds us.

The crimes we will hear about are not so different from the crimes being committed in the communist states of today. The victims we will hear from are not unlike the victims of Cuba, North Korea, China, and other brutal regimes.

The particulars may differ, but the larger point is the same. Communism is the world's worst perpetrator of forced labor. It was true in the 20th century. It is true in the 21st century.

No matter when it occurred, where it occurred, or what form it takes, it is our duty to condemn it and call for its abolition. By taking a stand against the evil actions of the GDR and the Soviet Union, we say to the communist regimes of today that we recognize and reject their oppression.

As a millennial American, I can think of no better exercise to ensure that we will enjoy better lives this century than to consciously learn from the horrors of the last century. And so on this front, I express my gratitude to the Germans gathered here for your vital work in challenging our civilization to not commit the moral crime of forgetfulness.

In so many ways, Germany proved to be the crucible upon which new ideologies of the last century were forged. And the tragic failures of fascism and especially communism, and Germany's profound overcoming of war and terror, make your country uniquely able to warn naïve populations elsewhere about all we must safeguard and about all we could lose by succumbing to unnatural, inhumane, and extremist ideologies that deny the dignity of each and every human life.

All this goes to say: Our work here matters more than we know. So let us pursue justice for the past and the present. And together, let us pursue a future free of communism and all the evil it entails so that our children, and theirs, may inherit a world more just than our own.

Thank you.

Greetings from Dr. Maria Nooke



Dr. Maria Nooke, state commissioner for the reappraisal with the communist dictatorship from Brandenburg

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Union of Victims Associations, in cooperation with the Human Rights Center (Menschenrechtszentrum Cottbus) and the IGFM, has taken up an important topic with today's meeting, which continues to impact many people affected by political imprisonment to the present day.

The great burden of forced labor during the period of political imprisonment is a recurring topic in our consulting activities. It is particularly evident in cases where those affected have often unsuccessfully made claims for recognition of the health consequences of imprisonment.

On the basis of this consulting experience, we have included this topic in the study on the social situation of formerly politically persecuted people, which my authority was commissioned by the Brandenburg State Parliament to deal with. The study will be published soon, but I can already give first results on the question of the consequences of injustice and prison work.

In the course of the study, Brandenburg citizens who were politically persecuted in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR or who suffered systemic injustice were asked for information about their current living situation. Also, for the first time, relatives of politically persecuted people were interviewed.

- 70 % of all who answered stated that they suffered from psychological consequences; 38% stated they suffered from physical problems.
- 69 % of those questioned were in prison or had suffered custodial sentences in GDR youth welfare institutions. The young people in youth work camps or youth prisons and special children's homes were also forced to work.
- 23 % of all those who were interviewed stated that they are currently suffering physical damage from prison or work in these homes; 78 % of those still feel "strongly" and "rather strongly" burdened.

Regarding the report on the state of health in which the physical damages from prison or work in homes were included, both the medically diagnosed illnesses and the self-assessment of the state of health were surveyed. In each case, several diseases could be named. We compared the results with the state of health of the average population over 50 years of age in Brandenburg (drawing from microcensus information).

- Medically diagnosed chronic back problems are reported by 47 % of all people who were interviewed. In comparison, 28 % of the Brandenburg population over 50 years of age are affected. People who have had to do prison work thus suffer from such problems almost 20 % more frequently.
- Medically diagnosed joint diseases, including osteoarthritis and rheumatism, are mentioned by 47% of those interviewed. In comparison, 42 % of the Brandenburg population are affected.

- Asthma is mentioned by 12 % of the interviewed people in contrast to 5% of the normal population at the age of 50+.

You can see that the medically diagnosed health problems are considerably higher than in the total population of the comparable age group.

In the case of self-assessment of physical problems related to the experience of injustice, the number is even higher.

- 43 % of those interviewed also name pain and pain disorders of an undefined nature.
- 37 % mentioned skeleton and joint damage.
- 26 % mentioned negative impacts on internal organs or organ systems.
- 15 % mentioned skin diseases/skin changes.

The question of what effects forced labor during imprisonment has had up to the present is thus of immense importance. At this conference, we will gain insight into the conditions that have led to such heavy burdens. To give them a name and to make them public is an important task in coming to terms with the systemic injustice in the Soviet Occupation Zone and Democratic Republic of Germany.

This conference will contribute to this.

Greetings from Birgit Neumann-Becker



Birgit Neumann-Becker,
representative of the State of
Saxony-Anhalt for the reappraisal
of the SED dictatorship

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the invitation to today's tribunal. It is a great honor to take part in this event.

As the representative of the state of Saxony-Anhalt for the reappraisal of the SED dictatorship, the question of forced labor in the penal system is an important topic for me.

The compulsion to work is part of the system of socialism. Forced labor camps were set up on a gigantic scale in the Soviet Union with the Gulags for enemies of the state, and later on, opponents of the system were subjected to severe repression in the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc as well. In North Korea and China, that is still the practice today.

At a conference of the party "Die Linke" in March this year, a participant called for the shooting of rich people. Party leader Bernd Riexinger tried to keep the participant smiling by saying, "We don't shoot them, we use them for useful work." Not only is the socialist fantasy of omnipotence shocking here but so is the spontaneous access to the well-known repertoire of communist tyranny.

My co-workers and I continually meet with the consequences of forced labor in our daily consultations with former prisoners and inmates in so-called Jugendwerkhöfen (special prisons for young offenders). In almost every consultation there are particularly shocking memories: almost always, they describe the burden, stress, humiliation, degradation, and loss of dignity in connection with the working conditions.

Between 1945 and 1989, there were about 55 prisons (detention prisons, court prisons, and penal institutions) just in the area of today's Saxony-Anhalt, from which thousands of cheap laborers were deployed in about 180 companies, laborers who were exposed to special dangers. This will be discussed in several reports at this tribunal, so I will be brief here. Forced laborers were relevant for the system. But this is particularly bitter: prisoners had to work on machines and equipment that often did not meet the requirements of work safety. Their health was deliberately and permanently damaged while being in prison, and thus in the care of the GDR government. They had basically lost their right to physical integrity with their sentencing. And I would like to make it clear at this point that we are talking about political prisoners. Criminal offenders had the right to physical integrity. But political prisoners have so far been ignored in the historical and moral reappraisal.

Many of the damages to health get worse with time. I spoke to many people who suffered from damage to their lungs after working with asbestos or coatings. Just one example: A former prisoner was medically certified as unfit for use in a mine shaft yet was deployed underground at Wismut. And there was a young man who declared in prison, "I do not work for your state." Then, after he was beaten up and imprisoned in a solitary cell, he was used to work with asbestos and inhaled its harmful dust for a long time. Later he had to work in chlorine production in Bitterfeld and suffered severe exposure to mercury. Again, no work safety was provided. We know of several deaths in this company.

Many of these people, who today have been criminally rehabilitated and who should not have been imprisoned at all, have suffered the most serious health damage caused by the SED state. And they are largely not recognized today, as though release from prison were enough. This is a topic that has been on my mind for many years as the state commissioner, and we support it as much as we can. It is bitter for those affected because they feel misunderstood and devalued. How can one also prove that the damage today was caused by imprisonment? No one has been able to prove that work safety and health protection for prisoners did not take place at all in prisons. This is a bitter justice gap, which the legislature may not close until 2024 with the new SGB 14.²

Attention should be paid specifically to improving direct medical treatment and support. The project at the Charité hospital in Berlin, where the health status of former prisoners is being investigated, is also helping to achieve this.

All in all, however, we are in an unsatisfactory and difficult situation with regard to the recognition of forced prison labor and its consequences. Therefore, this tribunal is necessary and important.

It is an important act of remembrance and correction that these experiences will be discussed at this tribunal and that they were classified in internationally valid law, which the GDR had also joined.

I wish you and your important work good success and the necessary attention of the public, which these questions deserve.

A final word:

It is important to me that the exhibition “Hammer, Zirkel, Stacheldraht” (“Hammer, Circle, Barbed Wire”) is shown in connection with

² According to the website of Weisser Ring, a victim support organization in Germany, “The longstanding struggle for the improvement of victims’ rights has found a positive conclusion: The German Federal Council passed Social Code Book (SGB XIV) on 5 December 2019, which will reorganise the right to compensation for victims of violence and terror.” Accessed December 11, 2020, weisser-ring.org.

the tribunal. Together with Dr. Christian Sachse and the UOKG, I have already presented the nationwide use of prisoners in production as early as 2016 in an exemplary manner for Saxony-Anhalt, and this exhibition has already been shown in many cities there. It has also been shown in Hesse and Baden-Württemberg by former prisoners with accompanying events. The topic of forced labor has been the subject of popular public scientific discussion for several years now.

I wish your tribunal every success. Thank you for your attention.

Lectures

C. Sachse: The International Movement against Forced Labor



Dr. rer. pol. Christian Sachse,
scientific assistant of UOKG

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fight against slavery and forced labor is not a success story. It began 240 years ago and has still not ended today. A milestone was the 1926 – and I ask you to note the year – anti-slavery treaty of the League of Nations, to which 124 countries are signatories.

With the Convention of the International Labor Organization No. 29 on Forced or Compulsory Labor, which became effective on May 1, 1932, the signatory states committed themselves “to eliminate as soon as possible the use of forced or compulsory labor in all its forms.” After a five-year transitional period, forced and compulsory labor was to be abolished “without further delay.” You all know the rest of history. During this transitional period, forced or compulsory labor was to be used “exclusively for public purposes and, even then, only in exceptional cases.”

Excluded from this regulation – and this will also play a role in our tribunal – was “any work or service required of a person on the basis of a court conviction.” This exclusion affected our GDR prisoners, both criminal and political. For these allowed cases, the convention imposed strict restrictions on the authorities in the treatment of forced laborers regarding duration of work, pay, medical care, nutrition, clothing, and other conditions. The public authorities had the duty to monitor compliance. That was in the early 1930s.

This satisfying development was thwarted after a few years. In October 1933, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations, thereby evading its obligations to abolish forced and compulsory labor. At the same time, despite temporary membership in the League of Nations, the Soviet Union maintained a steadily growing system of forced labor that exceeded the limit of one million forced laborers in 1935 and two and a half million in 1950.

In view of the excessive expansion of forced labor under Nazism, the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg) spoke of slave labor, not forced or compulsory labor, as was usual in international contexts.

The Nuremberg court’s judgments against Nazi slave-labor motivated international organizations to overcome slave labor in other parts of the world.

In several international agreements after 1945, a general prohibition of forced labor was imposed, and – this is important – only a few exceptions to this prohibition were declared permissible. Since then, forced labor has been considered a restriction of human rights that can be imposed only by an ordinary court. The European Convention on Human Rights of November 4, 1950, explains this in Article 4. This concession to worldwide practices means that the forced labor of convicted persons must not be placed at the discretion of states, authorities, or institutions. It must be interpreted within the framework and in the spirit of international conventions on human rights.

Let me summarize it this way. Human rights may be restricted, and forced labor is permitted under international law, but with the strictest restrictions. And we should examine these narrow restrictions in this tribunal.

In the international negotiations at the beginning of the 1950s, the systems of forced labor in Soviet territory also came into focus. In 1947, citing their previous ruling on slave labor, the Nuremberg Court brought charges before the United Nations against the Soviet Union for its system of forced labor. A distinction was made between forced labor under Nazism (slave labor) and forced labor in the Soviet Union. Both forms should be investigated.

In the debates of the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, a distinction was made for the first time between “political offenders” and common criminals.

It has been said that if someone is a criminal, it is quite reasonable to expect him or her to work. With political offenders, it is somewhat different; they have a different attitude, will remain true to their convictions and must not automatically be subjected to forced labor.

The Soviet Union deliberately called certain types of work “punitive, educational and corrective work” so as not to have to use the term forced labor. Therefore, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided to conduct a worldwide study on various forms of forced labor, such as “punitive, educational and corrective” labor. As the council conducted the investigation, the states within the power area of the Soviet Union collectively refused to provide any information.

Because they could not get information from the states, the experts listened to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Association of Free Lawyers and the International League for Human Rights, as well as former political prisoners from East Germany. The accusations against the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, among others, thus received a documentary

basis for the first time in an international context. That was in the early 1950s.

In June 1953, the investigation report was published in a volume of 630 pages. The reporters came to the conclusion that in the Soviet Union and in the “people’s democracies,” a system of forced labor was being used “that served the political re-education and reform of those who did not agree with the government’s communist ideology.” The following characteristics were mentioned of the GDR: “a) punitive and corrective labor; b) forced labor in general and in the uranium mines in particular; c) the existence of forced labor camps.”

The council criticized the health and work conditions in the labor camps and uranium mines. It found that forced labor within the power area of the Soviet Union went far beyond “ordinary civic duties.” It was declared illegal.

Again, for explanation: In prisons it makes sense to introduce self-administration, which is connected with work; this work is allowed and also makes sense. But if it goes beyond that, it is subject to completely different conditions.

These findings, which incidentally also revealed extensive violations in the rest of the world, led to the first United Nations Congress in Geneva in 1955, which discussed crime prevention and the treatment of prisoners. The committee adopted the Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, which became the official text of the UN in 1957. The Minimum Rules prohibited, among other things, discrimination based on political conviction and religion.

Additionally, prisoners were to be separated according to the legal grounds of their imprisonment. In this respect, political and other criminal prisoners had to be housed separately. Detention rooms had to have sufficient daylight and ventilation facilities, and sufficient sanitary facilities had to be provided. There were regulations for clothing, beds, personal sanitary items, food, and medical services.

About work in the penal system it was said, “Prisoners must not suffer from prison work.... Within the limits of choosing a suitable profession and the requirements of prison administration and discipline, prisoners must be able to choose the kind of work they wish to do. The precautions prescribed for the protection of the health and safety of workers in freedom must be observed in the same way in the prisons. Provision shall be made to compensate prisoners in the event of an accident at work or occupational disease, under conditions not less favourable than those to which workers in freedom are entitled by law.” These were already rules in the mid-1950s, but you can contrast them with the practice in the GDR era.

Based on the investigation reports described above, the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor in June 1957. Now the signatory states (and the GDR was, of course, not one of them), committed themselves “to eliminate forced or compulsory labor and not to use it in any form ...

1. as a means of political pressure or political education or as punishment against people who have or express certain political views, or who are ideologically opponents and express their views against the existing political, social or economic order [i.e., political prisoners];
2. as a method of recruitment and use of manpower for economic development;
3. as a measure of labour discipline;
4. as a punishment for participation in strikes;
5. as a measure of racial, social, national or religious discrimination.”

In 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights made it clear once again that prisoners could be obliged to work only if they had been specifically and individually sentenced to forced labor by the court. Permitted forms of forced labor were, and still are, reasonably normal services – for example, working to maintain the

operation of the prison. Therefore, a general forced labor order, as it was customary practice in the GDR, was illegal.

In 1968, the ILO added a commentary to Conventions 29 and 105, namely:

- The work must be imposed on the basis of sentencing in court.
- Forced labor cannot be authorized by administrative or other extrajudicial bodies. This is a very clear and reasonable restriction on forced labor, which was not observed at all in the GDR.

I would like to mention two more examples of documents condemning GDR prisons:

In 1967, Amnesty International (AI) drew attention to the working conditions in GDR prisons through a German publication based on its own research and interviews with former prisoners.

In 1986, the International Society for Human Rights published a survey of former political prisoners in the GDR. This brochure could be ordered and received everywhere.

We cannot accept the argument of Western companies that they did not know anything.

I would like to say once again that the creation of these documents was very important for us, even if they were not successful in practice.

In summary, one can say that the GDR did not work to end all forms of forced and compulsory labor as defined in ILO Convention 29. As several studies have shown, the GDR violated all prohibitions on forced labor in the ILO Convention 105 by:

- forcing political prisoners to work
- using forced labor for economic development and re-education
- acting against the Civil Rights Pact and the authorized interpretation of the ILO Convention 29 by compelling prisoners to work under the term “work education,” as a decision of official authorities and not as part of a court judgment

- systematically ignoring the Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955, which it eventually agreed to (ca. 1975)

These facts were known early in the GDR era. The Scientific and Social Council of the United Nations reported on them as early as 1953, Amnesty International drew attention to these issues in the 1960s, and the International Society for Human Rights published its study in the 1980s.

We cannot accept the argument that Western companies did not know anything about this, and we should see that international law is an excellent tool with which we can evaluate the forced labor system in the GDR.

J.P. Wölbern: Forced Labor of Political Prisoners in the GDR



Dr. Jan Philipp Wölbern, advisor to Eastern Europe by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

There are two reasons why I am here today. Firstly, I am a historian. I have dealt with the forced labor of political prisoners and wrote my doctorate on the subject of buying political prisoners' freedom. The second reason is that I am a member of the board of the Centre for Human Rights Cottbus.

The first aspect of my lecture is a case study. There is forced labor all over the world, but my task is to examine forced labor in the GDR. And the second aspect will be to compare political prisoners to the small number of criminal prisoners who were also imprisoned here in Cottbus.

I published a study on this topic in 2015 for the Commissioner for the New States after looking into sources; reading documents from the Stasi, the prison administration in the Ministry of the Interior to which the prisons were subordinate; and investigating reports of former political prisoners. I also conducted some interviews.

I will first say a few words about the legal and ideological basis for prison labor, then something about the economic significance, and thirdly, what kind of forced labor the political prisoners had to per-

form. I will answer questions about what forced labor meant for the prisoners, in which branches they had to work, and what concrete work they had to do. I will also deal with the question of whether prison workers were in a worse situation than civilian workers who had to do similar work. Here in Cottbus, we have the example of the SPRELA plant that included both a civilian and a prison factory. Finally, I will also deal with the question: What was the position of the political prisoners in the prison hierarchy? I will summarize my points at the end of my lecture.

Legal and ideological foundations

In the GDR, there was a right to work, which was even enshrined in the constitution. However, this meant that there was also a duty to work, which applied equally to civilian employees and prisoners. According to this ideological understanding, prisoner labor was the normal case, not the exception. This was true throughout the entire GDR. In theory, work was supposed to educate people to become full socialist citizens. In practice, however, all studies and reports show that the primary aim of prisoner labor was to make an economic contribution to the state budget. Thus, in a 1960 administrative memorandum on the penal system, you can read: "The purpose of the penitentiary system is to exploit the prisoners for the economic tasks of society." The first goal of prisoner labor was economic gain, not educating the citizens.

Economic significance

Now I will discuss the economic significance of forced prison labor. Unfortunately, there are no exact surveys or records of how many political and criminal prisoners had to do forced labor in 40 years of the GDR, but it is possible to give an approximate figure. One can estimate between 15,000 and 30,000 people, and in some peak periods even more, who had to do forced labor in prison. If you put this in proportion, that was about 0.5% of the working population in the GDR. The economic significance of prison labor was not this

small contribution of manpower, but rather the types of work the prisoners could be forced to do. Prisoners were tasked with work that civilians would not ordinarily do, perhaps because it was simply unattractive because it was particularly hard or poorly paid. In addition, prisoners were deployed especially at turbulent points in the national economy. When amnesties were imminent, the gentlemen in the administration rotated because they saw that a huge loss of labor was approaching and that, in the worst case, the energy supply would be endangered. Many thousands of prisoners had to extract lignite because every coming amnesty would put the energy supply at a risk.

In this context, the question has often been discussed whether this forced labor was a deficit business or a profit business for the GDR treasury as a whole. This can be calculated only with difficulty since solid figures are missing. The main reason it was attractive to employ prisoners was because they could be deployed in areas no civilian would choose to work. In that way, the GDR saved on investment in work safety. There was no need to buy new machines, and prisoners could be employed without any entitlement to vacation. I once asked a former prisoner whether he had days off in prison, and he asked whether that was meant to be a joke! This was one incentive for civilian companies to employ prisoners.

I tried to make a calculation of the economic gain from prison labor. I used the stocking company ESDA Thalheim to see whether one could earn something by exporting the goods produced by prisoners, but it turned out that there was always a coverage level. That is why I doubt whether one could make exorbitant profits from the export of goods to the West. However, you could earn foreign currency with it. And the longer the GDR existed, the more their motive became clear: to earn foreign currency at any cost.

Prisoner hierarchy

Were political prisoners affected by forced labor more than criminal prisoners? You can basically distinguish between two phases.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, political prisoners were largely evenly distributed among all prisons in the GDR. I was able to make a card index analysis with thousands of details about political and criminal prisoners. It was easy to see that there were political prisoners in almost every prison.

That began to change, especially after the Berlin Wall was built. The Stasi feared that people imprisoned for a failed escape attempt would have a “negative influence” on the other prisoners. They feared this so-called “infection” of the criminal prisoners. Thus, they tried to concentrate political prisoners in one or two prisons and turn those prisons into purely political prisons. But this was not the reality, so they took a middle course and increasingly provided certain prisons for political prisoners. In the 1980s, a particularly large number of political prisoners were imprisoned in Cottbus, which had been a prison for political prisoners since the 1940s, in Brandenburg, Hoheneck, Rummelsburg, Naumburg, Karl Marx Stadt, Hohenleuben, and in the prison for young offenders in Halle. In some of these prisons, political prisoners even formed the majority.

However, there were also some places where no political prisoners were imprisoned. One example is the prison in the Bitterfeld chemical region. Political prisoners were imprisoned there until 1983. But then there were several incidents, I think even one or two deaths, and after that, a newsletter stated that from now on no more political prisoners were to be brought to this prison. The reason for this was out of fear that prisoners whose freedom had been purchased and who came to the West would bring this issue to the media.

Why am I telling this story? This had consequences for where political prisoners would work. For example, in the 1980s, lignite mining, previously a typical place of employment for prisoners, was less and less common for political prisoners. The chemical industry was also no longer a focus for the deployment of political prisoners in the 1980s.

Next I come to the question: How did the position of political prisoners compare to civilian employees in the factories and to criminal prisoners? Dr. Christian Sachse has already mentioned that prisoner labor is not only legitimate but that it is a duty of UN member states to enable prisoners to work. The curious thing is, sometimes even prisoners find it useful. However, one must not misunderstand these statements, even if in fact many former prisoners say so. Prisoner labor is considered the lesser evil because it is seen as a release from the forced idleness of pre-trial detention. This, of course, says nothing about the conditions of imprisonment.

As for the type and severity of the prison work, this is a difficult subject because the area of work and the type of activity in the individual economic enterprises differed greatly. This could range from heavy physical labor – think of lignite mining or track construction – to work that was rather monotonous and perhaps less physically demanding but still burdensome. Former prisoners found the work very exhausting because they were not qualified for it and were only briefly instructed, so they had difficulty meeting the standards. Along with constant pressure to meet standards was a lack of protective equipment, short recovery times, poor food rations, and inadequate medical care. And finally, concerning the chemical region of Bitterfeld, it is very well documented that the prisoners there were a mobile labor force that could be used for particularly dirty work. In addition, one Stasi source reads: “Special difficulties are seen by the ministers for the recruitment of labor to perform exclusively heavy physical labor, which was previously done by prisoners, in connection with the amnesty.” The responsible authorities were also aware of this.

Incidentally, the discrimination of political prisoners in terms of prison and working conditions as a result of the prisoner hierarchy is also well documented because the political prisoners were naturally at the bottom of the hierarchy. Key positions were generally assigned to long-term criminal offenders. Easier jobs were given to criminal prisoners, leaving the political prisoners having to do heavier jobs.

The issue of labor standards and compliance with norms should also be mentioned in this context. There was a fundamental instruction that prisoners and civilian workers should be treated equally. However, the norms were not set centrally, but on the responsibility of the respective companies. So, it depended on the respective company whether this instruction for equal treatment was observed. A report by the prison administration reads, “As a result of insufficient control of the relevant plans by the ministries, the productivity of the prisoners’ labor is planned or changed by the single company. In some cases, this could be as high as 130%.” Reports of increased labor standards are credible because it was up to the company in the respective prison how it was handled. And one must also not forget that there was a kind of incentive system for exceeding the norm. That means quite simply that the prisoners were forced to meet the norm because they had to buy urgently needed food or other goods in order to make imprisonment at all bearable.

The same findings were also made about working hours, which are a frequent topic in these discussions. Legally speaking, it was inadmissible to force prisoners to work longer hours permanently. In practice, however, this meant that prisoners often had to work special, so-called “voluntary” shifts. Let me give you a number to illustrate this: About half of all prisoners in 1977, both political and criminal, were deployed in a three-shift system, which means they also had to work at night. By contrast, outside the prison system, of all civilian workers at that time, only about 20 percent were deployed in a three-shift system. So for political prisoners, the frequency of being exposed to this extreme stress was simply higher.

Other conditions

I don’t really need to explain much about safety at work. The unanimous findings from all studies and investigations indicate that safety measures were often inadequate or non-existent. There are state-

ments in almost all reports of former political prisoners about minor or major injuries and neglect of safety at work. There is also a figure for this. If you look at the frequency of accidents at work, the accident frequency rate for prisoners ranged from one-third higher to three times higher than for civilian workers. Therefore, the probability of suffering an accident at work was significantly higher for prisoners than civilians.

A few remarks on pay: Since the 1950s, prisoners had only about 10 % of a comparable net wage at their disposal because the company did not have to pay prisoners what it paid non-prisoners. After all, it was not a relationship under labor law, because there was no employment contract, just a claim by the penal institution to receive its money.

Next I will offer some remarks about sanctions for refusal to work. Lower work performance, lower standards, or even a refusal to work led to harsh consequences. Privileges such as visiting hours, reception of parcels, and shopping could be restricted or completely withdrawn. Wage cuts were also common practice, as was further arraignment. Examples of this are documented here from the Cottbus prison. There is an exhibition on the subject of forced labor on the second floor of the Human Rights Center.

In 1978, it was estimated that only 1.3% of prisoners refused to work. The number is so low because the refusal to work had such harsh consequences.

Finally, I will give a few remarks on the long-term consequences of prison work. It is incredibly difficult to attribute physical complaints to prison work because, of course, the prison conditions have to be considered in combination with the work conditions. You cannot consider these separately from each other, except in the case of an example where someone lost a finger during on the job. This raises methodological questions, so the problem cannot be solved easily.

Concluding remarks

I am coming to the end of my speech and want to emphasize three points.

1. Despite the fact that labor was officially considered a means of re-education in the GDR, in practice it mainly had an economic function. Prisoners were used for work that was unattractive to civilian workers because of its particular severity.
2. Since the 1980s, some industries have been rather atypical for the use of political prisoners, such as lignite mining or chemical industries. Overall, it can be said that prisoners had a worse position compared to civilian workers, although there were great differences from company to company and from industry to industry. And one must not forget in the whole discussion that work always had to be done under prison conditions.
3. The working conditions of forced labor, which is a special form of prison labor, were fundamentally worse than in civilian companies because of overlong, health-endangering work or harsh sanctions for refusal to work. The extent to which Western companies also bear responsibility for this was not the subject of my investigation, and I will say no more about this.

We have to deal with a fundamental question that has become increasingly important in a global perspective in recent years, namely how we want to deal with this issue in the global community. Perhaps we can make a small contribution to this today.

S. Kill: The Reichsbahn and the Penal System in the GDR



Dr. Susanne Kill, head of
Group History Deutsche Bahn

“Prisoner Forced Labor for the Deutsche Reichsbahn in the GDR: Historical Research and Remembrance Policy”

Dear Sir or Madam,

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the invitation to present here in the Human Rights Center in Cottbus the results of the study published in 2016 on prison forced labor for the German Reichsbahn (railroad) in the GDR. Among the audience there are certainly some who are very familiar with the topic. Therefore, it is my concern to also draw attention to the possibilities of historical research and remembrance policy in the specific case of my employer, the Deutsche Bahn.

Six years have now passed since Deutsche Bahn commissioned the “Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte” to research the role of the GDR Reichsbahn in the forced labor of prisoners in cooperation with us. At that time, the topic of forced labor among prisoners once

again became the focus of public attention. The fact that a Western company like IKEA had produced wares in GDR prisons attracted media attention. In addition, the study of Tobias Wunschik, “Knastware für den Klassenfeind” (Prison goods for the class enemy), was published. The UOKG has fought harder for a better pension for the victims, and the commissioner for the New Federal States, Iris Glicke, had commissioned Jan Philipp Wölbern at the Center for Contemporary Historical Research in Potsdam to investigate the extent of the prison work of political prisoners.

At that time, the railroad of the GDR, the Reichsbahn, was not yet in the focus of the public as a client for prisoner labor. Only insiders and those affected knew that prisoners had also worked for the Deutsche Reichsbahn. Wunschik and Christian Sachse had prominently drawn attention to this. But within Deutsche Bahn, there was not any documented knowledge about forced labor among prisoners.

In this respect, it was urgently necessary to answer questions about when, where, and under what conditions prisoner workers were employed for the railroad, and whether there were any “prison goods” that could be sold for Western currencies. These were the questions that first needed to be researched empirically. Thus, no expert report was worked out, but a topic was developed that had not yet been historically researched.

Behind the research, there were certainly intentions in terms of remembrance policy: On the one hand, the Deutsche Bahn wanted to be able to provide information on the expected media inquiries. On the other hand, it was important to get to know and evaluate its own company history. For even if Deutsche Bahn AG, which was founded in 1994, is not the legal successor to its predecessor organizations, it feels it has a duty to know its heritage and to assume socio-political responsibility. This also means that injustice must be named when it happened. As a German state-owned enterprise, the Deutsche Bahn has always been closely linked with the respective political history of the Germans and was accordingly placed in their service. However,

the fate of prisoners in the GDR who had to work for the Reichsbahn was, as I said, not known in the company.

Through the “Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte”, Professor Christopher Kopper and Dr. Jan Henrik Peters, two proven experts in the history of the Reichsbahn in the GDR, were commissioned to provide historically scientific answers to these questions. I will briefly summarize their research results.

With a somewhat brute structuring, three temporal phases of prisoner forced labor for the Deutsche Reichsbahn in the GDR can be recorded: The first phase, which lasted until the mid-1960s, was characterized by the fact that the Reichsbahn had to implement important infrastructure projects in order to build up the rail infrastructure, which had been weakened by wartime destruction and dismantling. These were mainly track construction works for which prisoners were used, sometimes on an ad hoc basis.

In a second phase, beginning in the late 1960s, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport agreed on a kind of temporary employment contract in which they mutually committed themselves to employing a fixed contingent of prisoners to work at stationary workplaces.

A third and final phase can be accounted for in the 1980s, when the number of arrested republican refugees rose rapidly and political prisoners with sentences of less than five years were now also re-imprisoned in the Brandenburg-Görden Prison. There the Reichsbahn maintained a branch of the Reichsbahnausbesserungswerk Potsdam, a repair shop for railroad freight wagons.

First phase

One of the first examples of prisoners’ labor that we were able to prove is an infrastructure project in the Erzgebirge. It had its beginnings even before the founding of the GDR. In contrast to the military administrations of the Western Allies, the Soviet military administra-

tion very quickly, as early as September 1945, handed over responsibility for the railroad system to the Germans.

De facto, however, the Reichsbahn leadership had hardly any room to act immediately after the war. Their main task was to keep the system running.

It was all the more astonishing when the Reichsbahn management in Dresden received the order for a two-track expansion of the railway line for the Wismut mining area around Johanngeorgenstadt in Erzgebirge in December 1948 via the office of the head of the Soviet transport department, Major General Kwaschin. The project was ambitious for the immediate postwar period. The Schwarzenberg–Johanngeorgenstadt line was to be extended on two tracks, a new tunnel had to be built, and a freight station and connecting railroad had to be constructed. According to the plan, all work was to be completed by January 1, 1951.

It was obvious that such projects could not be implemented immediately in the postwar period. Conflicts of competence, such as questions of project management, the commissioning of the construction companies, which were still privately run, as well as the difficult procurement of materials and manpower were all major problems in the postwar period for an economy destroyed by the war. In the end, a Soviet construction staff took over the overall management of the project. The Reichsbahn remained the project manager for the extension of the station and the construction of the line.

I mention this project from the early years of the GDR in detail because the many shades of gray from the early days of the penal system and prisoner labor in the GDR become very clear here.

Since it was not possible to recruit the required 600 to 700 workers on the free labor market, the heavy work was to be done by prisoners from Saxony. For this purpose, the Saxon judicial authorities set up the Erlabrunn prison labor camp. Together, the Reichsbahn and Wismut provided rail freight wagons for the accommodation of

12 men each and regulated the issues of wages, social security contributions, and food, and executed contracts with the construction companies. Then these companies had to transfer the wages for the prisoners to the justice system. Only prisoners who had to serve sentences of at least six months and at most three years were used.

The Saxon judicial authorities were not in a position to provide enough prisoners. Only 350 prisoners from the Saxon prisons and a labor camp in Pirna could be brought to Erlabrunn. In this situation, in April 1950, the Department of Prison Service and Prison Management of the Ministry of Justice took over the coordination of prisoner recruitment. It ordered that Mecklenburg should send 150 prisoners, Thuringia 100, Saxony-Anhalt 150, and Brandenburg 50 prisoners “fully able to work.” This was the case.

It was still the time when the prisons were subject to the judiciary and not the Ministry of the Interior. And it can be assumed that this penal labor camp was to be exemplary for the GDR. The Saxon judicial authorities ran it under the name “Progress.” Accommodation was acceptable, the supply of clothing and food was sufficient despite the general shortage, and efforts were even made to provide a kind of “cultural program,” at least one prisoner reported to his family back home.

The mentioned labor camp had nothing in common with the penal labor camps or prisoner-of-war camps in Stalin’s Soviet Union or the forced labor camps during the Nazi era. But one thing became clear, especially during the establishment of this perhaps “exemplary camp”: for the young state and the powerful Soviet military administration, the prisoners formed a reservoir of manpower that they could use at any time with the agreement of the Administration of Justice.

The camp did not exist for long, probably until the turn of the year in 1951 or 1952, and the project had no long-term value for the Reichsbahn or Wismut. On the one hand, the work on the dams and backfills had been carried out unprofessionally, so industrial accidents were expected. On the other hand, only a few years after completion

of the construction work, it became apparent that the ore deposits in the Johannegeorgenstadt area were exhausted, so the railway line extension was basically unnecessary.

Even though the railway construction project in the Erzgebirge was a “Soviet project,” it was completely in line with the SED leadership and its judiciary. Prisoners should not do useless work, such as bag stitching, which is often mentioned as an example of useless work. Prisoners were to actively contribute to the development of the German Democratic Republic.

In this early phase of the GDR, which was characterized by internal party power struggles, work under the conditions of a nationalized economy was generally regarded as an instrument of integration of the socialist society. Ideologically, and with the help of its repressive apparatus, the GDR leadership adhered to this until its end. Not to work was not only socially ostracized but also punishable. The so-called “Antisocial Elements” paragraph 249 provided for up to two years’ imprisonment for “work shyness,” and during this imprisonment, working was to be learned.

It was not a new idea for the penal institution, the labor camp, to be a re-education institution. Yet it soon took a back seat to another calculation of benefit. The prisoners of the GDR became a reservoir of manpower to which the state, and thus also state-owned enterprises, could access at any time.

In the case of the Deutsche Reichsbahn, this initially mainly concerned track construction. While no prisoners were used for the construction of the Berlin outer ring in 1951 for political reasons, the situation was quite different in the second important infrastructure project of the Reichsbahn – the expansion of the Rostock harbor and the railway line from the harbor to Berlin.

For this project, which was part of the seven-year plan of 1958, construction capacities from the entire republic were pulled together. Nevertheless, the Reichsbahn construction management had difficul-

ties in recruiting enough workers for the dam and track work, which was still largely carried out by hand. To this extent, the management relied on the work done by prisoners, a practice that had been forced upon them by the Ministry of the Interior and no longer by the judiciary. But the initiative to employ prisoners here came – as far as we know – from the local construction management of the Reichsbahn in Lalendorf, which in December 1958 requested 100 prisoners from the prison administration of the Schwerin district.

Because of the economic urgency of the construction of the main railway line, the district administration of the Volkspolizei (people's police) gave the prison management in Bützow the order to send prisoners from other labor deployment companies to the Reichsbahn. Independently of this, the central Reichsbahn construction department in Berlin also requested prisoners from other prisons in the northern part of the GDR from the head of the prison administration in the Ministry of the Interior.

In addition to the Bützow prison, the Neustrelitz prison mobilized several hundred prisoners to work for the Reichsbahn. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the increasing repression by the judiciary and state security had caused the total number of prisoners in the GDR to rise. As a result, there was no shortage of prisoners, and a considerable number of the newly imprisoned people in Bützow were used in the construction work on the main railway line.

From the perspective of the Reichsbahn, however, this was not a lasting solution. Even the head of the political administration at the Reichsbahn construction department regarded the prisoner workers as an "uncertain quantity," whose provision could not be relied upon permanently in the further planning for the expansion of the route.

It was clear to all participants that the Reichsbahn could not meet its planning targets without prison laborers. In 1966, as Christopher Kopper noted, prisoners accounted for 6.4 percent of the total number of track construction workers, which means 243 people.

Not much is known about the prisoner workers' situation on the main railway line. The Bützow prison sent mainly prisoners of the general prison system to the Reichsbahn. Prison authorities saw the use of prisoners on mobile construction sites as critical. Although the prisoners were placed in closed work columns and guarded during work by armed guards from the penal institutions and the transport police, they came into contact with civilian workers. Prisoners exchanged goods with civilian workers and, in some cases, received their desired alcohol. The relatively small number of guards was unable or unwilling to fully monitor the prisoners at the construction sites.

This did little to change the efficiency of the work performance. The prisoners' fulfillment of standards was not different from that of the free workers. Between 1962 and 1965, it varied between 130 and 85 percent. The Reichsbahn construction management had to guarantee the conditions for all workers to meet the standards. In practice, however, this did not apply to prisoners, because the intention was to give free workers the opportunity to earn more. Because free workers could earn more if they met the standards, they chose jobs where they were more likely to do so. Therefore, prisoners were often forced to work the jobs the free workers had refused because the standards for those jobs could not be met.

Because of the hard work in sometimes very bad weather, the sickness rate among the prisoners was high. Despite the prison physicians' strict practice of sick leave, on average, each prisoner worker was unable to work and on sick leave 15 days per year.

There was no opportunity for prisoner workers on the Reichsbahn construction sites to obtain vocational qualifications.

Unfortunately, the records of the Bützow prison do not give any data on the proportion of political prisoners during the construction of the main railway line from 1958 to 1967. The only data available is about the Stand Command in Waren in 1963, where one-fifth of the

prisoners had been sentenced because of their attempt to “escape from the Republic,” and all the others were imprisoned because of crimes.

From the perspective of the Reichsbahn, the use of prisoners was not a lasting solution to achieve the planned targets. Even the head of the political administration at the Reichsbahn Construction Department regarded prisoner workers as an “insecure quantity,” whose provision could not be relied upon permanently in the further planning of the line expansion. Also, for the penal institutions themselves, the deployment of prisoners in permanent jobs was more lucrative and easier to manage.

One exception was the Berndshof military prison command, where, among others, conscientious objectors of the Jehovah’s Witnesses had to spend their mandatory 18- to 24-month sentence. They were used until 1983 for heavy repair work in track construction. Other far-reaching considerations of the penal system from the 1960s, such as the permanent installation of prisoner construction trains, were rejected for cost reasons.

Second phase

With that in mind, the second phase of the deployment of prisoners to work for the Reichsbahn began in 1967. In order to give the Reichsbahn and the penal institutions planning security, the Ministry of Transport, in the person of its Minister and General Director of the Reichsbahn Erwin Kramer, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs under Friedrich Dickel, signed a master agreement on the deployment of prisoners with the Reichsbahn in 1967. With that, it was possible to plan the deployment of prisoners not only on a project-by-project and year-by-year basis but over a long term.

However, track work was now the exception: permanent jobs were set up, for example, at the Bützow Oberbauwerk (a plant for the construction of superstructures), in the yoke assembly in Fürstenberg

and Hohenbocka, in Wülknitz in Saxony, and in Stößen in Thuringia. At these places, the Reichsbahn set up the prisoners’ workstations at its own expense.

The work at the places for the yoke assembly was already hard and dangerous for the free workers. This was even more true for the prisoners because their training time was limited, and no great importance was attached to accident prevention. The long distances to the working places, shift work, and monotonous insubstantial prison food very often led to accidents.

This was especially true for the work in the Reichsbahn repair shop in the infamous Brandenburg prison.

While freight traffic declined more and more in the Federal Republic of Germany, it remained strong in the GDR. Particularly at harvest time, there was even a shortage of freight wagons, and the numerous Reichsbahn repair shops had difficulties in recruiting enough workers to keep the wagon fleet running. Therefore, after 1967, the Reichsbahn general management prioritized the employment of prisoners at their repair shops. It had gained initial experience with prisoners from the Stendal remand prison and found that the establishment of a prison seemed worthwhile. Under the direction of RAW Potsdam, a separate prison workplace was built in the Brandenburg prison in the late 1960s.

Brandenburg was therefore suitable as a production place for a lot of enterprises because the prison area had enough space for enterprises requiring large areas. For the Reichsbahn, the rail connection to the Brandenburg–Rathenow railroad branch line was an advantage. The freight wagons needing repair could be transferred to the repair shop without additional investment in the track network. For these reasons, the general management decided in 1967 to establish a branch office of RAW Potsdam on the prison area at its own expense. That same year, the prison administration committed itself to the Reichsbahn to put 110 prisoners at the disposal of RAW Potsdam.

But this was not a stable figure. The comprehensive amnesty in October 1972 reduced the number of prisoners to 27, but then, due to the high number of new convictions, it quickly returned to the target figure until November 1973.

Despite the fluctuations in personnel, the prison workplace was a worthwhile institution from the perspective of the Reichsbahn and the penal system: the penal system received the wages, and the Reichsbahn received the repaired wagons. In 1973 or 1974, the prison administration and the Reichsbahn's general management agreed to increase the number of prisoner workers in the RAW to 150.

In 1975, 300 prisoners were employed in the RAW. However, in October 1976, with 204 prisoners, the effective number of prisoner workers was again below the Reichsbahn's wishes. I mention the figures because they clearly show how strong the fluctuations were between plan and reality. Even the master agreement between the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Transport did not change this.

The branch office of RAW Potsdam in Brandenburg was continuously expanded throughout the 1970s. In April 1979, 261 prisoners were employed there. That was more than half of all prisoners who had to work for the GDR's Reichsbahn on an annual average.

It has often been described how terrible the conditions were in the prisons of the GDR and especially in Brandenburg. Wolfgang Schmidt, a Reichsbahn employee who worked as a master craftsman in the prison factory, compared the working conditions in Brandenburg to Dante's inferno. During the period from 1967 to 1989, the accident rate in the RAW was higher than the average for all workplaces in this prison. Although only about 5% of Brandenburg prisoners were deployed in the RAW in 1972, 40 percent of all accident-related sick days were accounted for by prisoner workers in the repair shop. Among the most frequent causes of serious accidents were heavy metal parts that could fall down when dismantling the walls of wagons and cause serious injuries. The workers were also at risk from

the sulfur-containing welding gases. As they were not provided with respiratory masks. Their only preventive health protection consisted of a modest special ration of a quarter liter of milk per day.

The accident rate in the repair plant was significantly higher than the average for all plants in the GDR. While an average of 60 notifiable accidents were recorded each year per 1,000 regular workers in the GDR's transportation system, in the RAW in the Brandenburg prison, there were 100 to 130. In 1983, every seventh prisoner worker in the RAW, an estimated number of 40 total prisoners, suffered an accident at work.

Thirty of the 40 accidents were reportable, which indicates an above-average proportion of more serious accidents. However, these figures do not tell us how many prisoner workers suffered permanent damage to their health due to accidents at work or work-related illnesses.

Third phase: 1980–1989

Thus we find ourselves in the third phase of prisoner forced labor for the Reichsbahn, in the 1980s. Line work under the supervision of the construction departments no longer took place. There were still jobs at the yoke assembly stations and in the prisoner plant in Brandenburg-Görden Prison. The Reichsbahn personnel who were responsible for supervising the work at the prisoners' workplaces had a relaxed attitude toward the prisoners at the yoke assembly stations – at least that is what the complaints of the prison system suggest. In Brandenburg, authorities completely abandoned the responsibility for action or the care of prisoner workers. It was only the prison administration and a self-organized prisoner regime that watched over the working conditions. Thus the young men who spent their prison terms there, for example, due to escape from the Republic, had to go through very different experiences. The work could be a recovery from the cell situation, but it could also, if one had no protector, be a never-ending pain.

The administration of the penal institutions cared about the withdrawal of Reichsbahn deputies from the work process of the prisoners. After all, the work deployment companies had committed themselves to “a continuous presence of company employees in the operational areas.” In October 1987, the head of the Department of Prison Services in the district administration of the Volkspolizei (people’s police) criticized that “the supervision and influence of the employees” was not always up to the mark. Nevertheless, the main goal of the prison administration and the repair plant in Brandenburg was achieved: to increase production figures.

In contrast to free workers, prisoners were available every day and could not refuse overtime after work hours and weekends. While the average number of 125 hours of overtime per year for employees at RAW Potsdam was already considered extraordinary, the plant management was able to exhaust the maximum collectively agreed limit of 400 hours of overtime per year for prisoners, who had no means of appeal. At times, the number of overtime hours among the prisoners was so high that even the prison management demanded a reduction in overtime. The management of the repair shop had the right to allow the prisoners to work almost unlimited hours in times of high repair needs, such as in freight traffic in autumn.

By contrast, free workers were able to influence the shaping of labor standards through the trade union management and to emphasize their unwillingness to accept standards, including a notice of termination. The prisoners did not have these means at their disposal, just as they could not appeal against unacceptable work. On the contrary, the penal system had draconian means of punishment available to those who refused to work, such as solitary confinement and confinement in a darkened cell.

The working conditions were – as far as we could find out – the same for political and criminal prisoners. The high added value of prisoner labor made it understandable why the Reichsbahn was involved in building a new prison in Zeithain. I will not go into details concerning

the background of this new prison there – only that it was a prerequisite for the Wülknitz Yoke assembly company to continue getting prisoner laborers. Until 1983, there were 100 prisoners a year who worked on the dangerous yoke assembly site, mostly well above the norm.

Conclusion

As you may have noticed from my remarks, the extent of the prisoner labor in the specific case of the Reichsbahn can be described only partly. The significant sources come almost without exception from the penal institutions and the Ministry of the Interior. The Reichsbahn documents contain a very small number of recordings. Only the reports from the political departments to the Ministry of Transportation allow insight into the practice of forced labor among prisoners. As a result of the sources, only a fragmentary picture can be conveyed. Only against the background of the overall picture of the penal system in the GDR can general conclusions be drawn. Christopher Kopper came to the conclusion that probably in no other country in the world was the use of prisoners’ labor so strongly economized and integrated into economic planning as in the GDR.

In the special case of the Reichsbahn, which was not used to earn foreign currency, prisoners provided services for the country’s transportation infrastructure, and the GDR-specific penal system was systemically supported. This is especially the case after 1966. The Reichsbahn was able to plan with a certain contingent of prisoners, just as the penal system could count on the corresponding jobs and income.

On an annual average, about 500 prisoners worked for the Reichsbahn. We could not determine how many of them were political prisoners. In the infamous Brandenburg prison, the number of political prisoners was small. It was a different situation in Zeithain, where many young people were imprisoned who had tried to escape from the GDR. We could not confirm a systematic unequal treatment

of political prisoners and criminal prisoners. However, the prison authorities made sure that political prisoners were not assigned to one cell or a common workplace. Political prisoners were trained at their jobs by criminal prisoners. The prison regime thus continued at the workplace.

Even if there are some reports that the Reichsbahn personnel behaved in a decidedly humane manner toward the prisoners, it must be said that the destiny of the prisoners was of no interest for the general management of the Reichsbahn. The deployment of prisoners became an unquestioned matter of fact, and the beneficiaries of prisoner labor delegated or left the responsibility for these workers to the penal institutions.

Because the situation of political prisoners could not be determined from paper sources, contemporary witness testimonies were so important for the study. They are of a high value concerning a remembrance policy. We recreated this experience in the DB Museum, where a new permanent exhibition on the history of the Reichsbahn and the Bundesbahn has been on display for two years now. Michael Proksch and Michael Teupel were so kind to speak about their experiences in front of a camera once again. As the museum educator told me, these interviews are often listened to. Thus, Nuremberg is one of the few places in the old federal states where the destiny of political prisoners in the GDR is remembered.

Presentation of the Jury

Saturday, September 12, 2020, in Cottbus, MRZ “Pentacon-Halle”

Welcome



Benjamin Baumgart, consultant for fundamental questions of the UOKG

Mr. Baumgart welcomed attendees and assured them that testimony by three English-speaking jury members would be translated for German listeners.

Mr. Marion Smith, executive director at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in the United States, replaced Mr. Wladimir Nowitzki as a jury member, the latter being unable to travel from Russia.

Two members of German Bundestag were present. All parties of the Bundestag were invited. Three parties answered: the Christian Democratic Union of Germany/Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CDU/CSU), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Unfortunately, the SPD could not find anyone who wanted to participate in this tribunal.

Dr. Matthias Bath

Former public prosecutor, former political prisoner

Baumgart: I will start with the chairman of the jury, Dr. Matthias Bath, former prosecutor and political prisoner. He was born in Berlin in 1956. In January 1976, he attempted to smuggle people from the GDR by car on the transit route. He was caught and, in April 1976, was sentenced to five years imprisonment according to § 105 of the GDR Criminal Code for anti-government human trafficking. He was released in 1979 and returned to West Berlin. In 1988, he received his doctorate



Dr. Matthias Bath

at the Free University of Berlin and was a public prosecutor in Berlin from 1988 to 2017. We have found a knowledgeable expert and highly competent chairman of the jury in Dr. Bath.

I will give the individual jury members the opportunity to say a few words after I introduce them.

Dr. Bath: When I was released from prison in the GDR after three years and four months, I naturally had a strong motive to concern myself with the GDR legal system. I wrote a book about my time in prison, did scientific work on the GDR legal and penal system, and also did my doctorate on a topic that deals with the German-German subject “self-defense and state of emergency during escape from the GDR.” And after the end of the GDR, I worked for eight years on the legal reappraisal of the SED injustice.

Peter Heidt, MdB

Chairman of the FDP parliamentary group in the committee for human rights and humanitarian aid in the German Bundestag



Peter Heidt, MdB

Baumgart: Next, I would like to introduce Mr. Peter Heidt, chairman of the FDP parliamentary group in the Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid at the German Bundestag.

Born 1965 in Frankfurt am Main, he joined the Young Liberals in 1986 and has been a member of the FDP since 1987. He studied law in Gießen from 1986 to 1992 and passed his first state examination in 1992 and his second state examination in 1995. He has been an independent lawyer and defense counsel since 1995. This makes him a competent jury member. He served on the Bad Nauheim City Council from 1999 to 2006 and is currently serving a second term he began in 2016. He has been a councilor in the Wetterau District (Hesse) since 2006. Since 2011, he has been chairman of the FDP district parliament group, and since July 1, 2019, he has been a member of the German Bundestag.

Mr. Heidt: Thank you very much for the warm welcome. I was very happy to come here because, as a lawyer and criminal defense attorney, this is a very exciting topic, and, as a member of the Human Rights Committee at the German Bundestag, I deal with such topics. Forced labor is unfortunately still an extreme issue all over the world, and therefore, I think it is very important we talk about it this weekend. I am looking forward to the whole team today.

Prof. Dr. Huige Li

*Deputy director of the Institute for Pharmacology
at the Mainz University Medical Center*



Prof. Dr. Huige Li

Baumgart: Next, I would like to welcome Prof. Dr. Huige Li. He was born in China in 1967. After studying medicine and doing research in Wuhan, he came to Germany in 1995, where he received his doctorate in 1997. Since 2011, Prof. Li has been a university professor of pharmacology in Mainz and is actively engaged in the field of medical ethics with the aim of ending unethical organ removal in China. Professor Li has spoken about the topic of organ theft at the European Parliament, the Swedish Parliament, the Parliament of Great Britain, the German Transplant Society, and the IGFM. He is also an interview partner in science documentaries on television, and he has published several articles in scientific journals. As an authority on organ theft in China, Prof. Li is also very familiar with the situation in camps and is, therefore, an expert for our jury.

Dr. Li: Dear guests, as you have already heard from Mr. Marion Smith, prisoners in China must help the socialist system in life and also after death. If they are alive, they are forced to labor, and if they are dead, their organs are taken for transplants. In some cases, prisoners are killed for their organs. That is why this is an important issue for me. Forced labor in the GDR is already past, but in China it is still present.

Bada Nam

*General secretary of the human rights organization PSCORE,
in South Korea*



Bada Nam

Baumgart: Next, I will introduce you to a widely travelled guest: Mr. Bada Nam from South Korea. Since 2010, he has been secretary general of the human rights organization PSCORE (People for Successful Korean Reunification), which deals with the issues of North Korean human rights and peacebuilding on the Korean peninsula. PSCORE works closely with governments from around the world, including the UK, Germany, France, and the USA. The organization also supports refugees from North Korea and plans educational programs for North Korean people who go to South Korea. In 2012, Mr. Bada Nam obtained the consultative status of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has participated in the annual meetings of the UN Human Rights Council. He prepares and publishes reports on human rights violations in North Korea and was a member of the Committee for the Evaluation of National Responsibilities in the Prime Minister's Office from 2017 to 2019. He is a member of the Group on North Korean Human Rights at the United Nations Office at Seoul.

Mr. Nam: It really is a great honor to be able to participate in this event. I was born in South Korea, and I support refugees from North Korea and the movement for reunification. After more than 70 years, Korea remains divided. We deal with this issue as well as with political prisoners and forced labor. Therefore, it is vitally important to participate in events such as this one. We still have much to learn.

Carla Ottmann, MA

Deputy federal chairwoman of the UOKG, former political prisoner in Hoheneck, honorary judge at the Social Court in Berlin



Carla Ottmann

she has been actively involved in reappraisal in the "Verein zur Förderung der Projektwerkstatt Lindenstraße." Since 2015, she has been a member of the board of the UOKG and deputy chairperson of the Forum for Politically Persecuted Women in the Soviet occupation zone and the GDR.

Ms. Ottmann: I am glad that we have this congress here. As an honorary judge I am active in the legal sphere of social compensation and get to know many people who have no more files, are in poor health, and have a lot of trouble enforcing their rights. I am very happy to be involved and hope that we can all make progress together.

Baumgart: Next, I would like to introduce Ms. Carla Ottmann. She is deputy federal chairwoman of the UOKG, former political prisoner in Hoheneck, and for ten years has been honorary judge at the Social Court in Berlin. Ms. Ottmann was born in 1946 and studied theater and dramatics in Leipzig beginning in 1973. In May 1978, she was imprisoned, and in December 1979, she was amnestied and released into the GDR. In 1981, she left the GDR for West Berlin. Since the 1990s,

Dr. Klára Pinerová

Historian, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague



Dr. Klára Pinerová

she is involved in several research projects, including the transformation of the prison system in Czech countries in the years 1965–1992. In 2008, Ms. Pinerová was awarded the E-M. Remarque Prize, granted by the Czech-German Historical Commission.

Dr. Pinerová: First of all, thank you very much for the invitation. As you know, we found the same situation in Czechoslovakia as in the GDR with thousands of political prisoners forced to labor in uranium mines and other places. They worked under terrible conditions in different places in the Czech Republic. This tribunal on forced labor is very important. It is necessary to talk about it, not only in the context of the GDR, but also in the context of other countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. I am very happy to be here and to be able to open the discussion about forced labor in the GDR.

Baumgart: The next jury member is Dr. Klára Pinerová from Prague. She is a historian at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague. Born in 1982, she obtained her doctorate in economic and social history at Charles University in Prague. The focus of her work is on modern economics, cultural and social history, the prison system in Czechoslovakia, the GDR intellectual faction and Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and anti-communist resistance. She was and

Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher

President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights and Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom

Baumgart: Next, I would like to introduce Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher. He is president of the International Council of the IGFM and director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. He was born in 1960 in Schwelm, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). He studied theology, cultural anthropology, comparative religious studies, and sociology in Basel, Bonn, the Netherlands, and Los Angeles. He received his doctorate in theology, cultural anthropology, and sociology of religion and was awarded various honorary doctorates in 1996, 1997, and 2006. Since 2009, he has been working as a professor at West University in Timisoara (Romania) and teaches human rights and religious freedom at universities worldwide, including Oxford University.



Prof. Dr. Thomas
Schirmmacher

Since 2016, he has been president of the International Council of the IGFM. Before that he was a member of the board of the IGFM Germany. He is also deputy general secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Dr. Schirmmacher: Why am I here? To visit a good friend, Mrs. Sylvia Wähling, who works here. And because Mr. Hafen once told me two decades ago that it doesn't take much time for me to work as a member of the board of the IGFM – I wouldn't have to be present at every meeting either. Meanwhile, I work in the International Council of the IGFM, which is the union of the different sections. It is not by chance that we have a section in all Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS) successor states – a very exciting thing. This work also brings me around the world with our topic here, and I have recently seen existing institutions in China, Cuba, and North Korea, but also historical ones, like Cambodia's famous prison S 21, which looks almost the same as here. As you may know, the last person responsible for this machinery died a week ago at the age of 77 years, who was in charge of the S 21 prison and who personally signed the death sentences for 15,000 prisoners in the period from 1975 to 1979. Many more were actually killed, but this number is already enormous.

I deal with two issues: religious freedom and human trafficking. And we have a worldwide campaign, because human trafficking is frowned upon worldwide, but there is too little talk about the fact that the whole system of forced labor, especially under Communist regimes, is also part of this issue. That is why it is important for me that we not only remember things that belong to our own past but also that we listen to people again and again who have experienced it themselves and can report it, and that these reports are documented and kept for the future. That is why I am glad to be here to listen to many of those affected.

Marion Smith

Executive director and CEO of Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, Washington, DC

Baumgart: Next, I would like to introduce Mr. Marion Smith, who already gave a speech here yesterday. He is the executive director of the congressionally authorized Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation a non-partisan, nonprofit organization for education, research, and human rights in Washington, DC. He is also a founding member of the Common Sense Society, which promotes civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and leadership among young professionals in the



Marion Smith

United States and Europe. He is the chairman of the National Civic Art Society. He was born in 1984 in South Carolina and educated at Wofford College and Central European University. His articles have been extensively published in *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. He is a regular guest on ABC, NBC, Fox News, and CNN.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much. I am here today in my capacity as executive director of the Victims of Communism Foundation, which was unanimously authorized by Congress in 1993 to deal with ideologies and crimes of communist regimes worldwide. And, as discussed yesterday, we are dealing specifically with the issue of forced labor, both in the past and in the present. It is remarkable how similar the approaches of communist regimes are, how they treat citizens in relation to forced labor. This has implications for the victims in Cuba, China, and North Korea, who still suffer from forced labor. That is why I am very happy to be part of this high-level jury. Many politicians around the world talk about justice, but you cannot achieve justice without mentioning injustice. And that is what this is all about. In the

USA, both parties now agree it is important to create justice for victims of communist regimes. We want to make this century a better century than the last one.

Arnold Vaatz, MdB

*Deputy chairman of the CDU / CSU parliamentary group
and former GDR civil rights activist*

Baumgart: Finally, I am especially pleased to introduce Mr. Arnold Vaatz. He is deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU fraction in the German Bundestag and a former GDR civil rights activist. He was born in Weida, Thuringia, in 1955 and studied mathematics in Dresden from 1976 to 1981. In 1982, he was sentenced to six months imprisonment for refusal of reserve military service and was in prison until May 1983 in the Unterwellenborn Prison. There he was forced to labor at the Maxhütte steel mill. In October 1989, Arnold Vaatz worked in the so-called Group 20 and took part in the occupation of the Dresden district administration of the Stasi on December 5, 1989. As deputy government commissioner for the Dresden district and as chairman of the Coordinating Committee for establishing the State of Saxony, he was one of the leaders for the reestablishment of the Free State of Saxony on October 3, 1990. In February 1990, he joined the CDU and was minister of state in the Saxon State Chancellery from 1990 to 1992 and, from 1992 to 1998, was Saxon minister for environment and state development. He has been a member of the Bundestag since 1998 and deputy chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group since 2002.



Arnold Vaatz, MdB

Mr. Vaatz: I gladly accepted the invitation to this event for several reasons. I do not come primarily as a person affected nor as a judge, but because I find it incomprehensible to what extent this side of totalitarianism is being ignored in our society at the moment, and I want to do something about the fact that our society is unwittingly making itself the accomplice of those who are still practicing these

principles that were pursued in the GDR. Some countries have already been mentioned, and there are some more: Eastern Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian opposition. They must always fear for their lives and their actions. That is why I think such an event is important to counter the process. The carriers of this repressive mechanism must not be released from their responsibility.

Baumgart: Thank you Mr. Vaatz.

Dr. Schirmmacher asked for leave to tell us one more thing about his past.

Dr. Schirmmacher: I have forgotten a fact. I would like to inform you that I am the proud owner of an extensive Stasi file. We came to the GDR several times to talk to the so-called underground church, and I always forgot to write down where I was. But thanks to the Stasi file, I now know exactly where I was. They considered even a small light like me a great danger.

Questioning the Witnesses

Introduction: Metalworking Industry

Dr. Christian Sachse

The metalworking industries in which prisoners were forced to work included foundries, rolling mills, and metal forming (punching, sawing, drawing, etc.).

Until the end of the GDR, the metalworking plants showed an extraordinarily high degree of wear and tear, which increased until 1989 (plants in Brandenburg 75%, Riesa 66%, Hennigsdorf 70%, and Gröditz 81%).

The metal industry sector had the highest accident rate among prisoners by far. Lack of training, high working speed, worn-out equipment, and lack of occupational health and work safety repeatedly led to the most serious accidents among prisoners. The rate of notifiable accidents in 1962 was already extraordinarily high among civilian workers, at 176 accidents per 1,000 employees. The rate of notifiable accidents among prisoners was almost twice as high in the same year, at 319 accidents per 1,000 prisoners, taking into account the much more restrictive reporting behavior in the penal system.

In 1964, the working conditions for 1,000 prisoners in the metalworking industry were characterized internally as follows:

- Maxhütte Unterwellenborn: “Not acceptable in terms of safety” (325 prisoners)
- Edelstahlwerk Freitag: “Hardly acceptable in terms of security” (250 prisoners)
- Riesa steel and rolling mill: “Extraordinarily high accident rate” (180 prisoners)
- Thale rolling mill: “Exceptionally high accident rate” (160 prisoners)

The working conditions did not change significantly in the course of the following years. In the internal documents of the GDR, the following are further named as accident black spots: the Burg rolling mill and the Riesa steel and rolling mill. In the Hettstedt rolling mill in 1985, the staff demanded the prisoners continue to operate faulty technical equipment even though there was a high risk of accidents.

Prisoners report lifelong physical consequences by the work in rolling mills and at straightening machines.

Witness Hugo Diederich

Call of the first witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction



Hugo Diederich

I was born as the seventh and last child of a Catholic family in 1954 in Eichsfeld, Thuringia. My oldest brother had already been in the West since 1951. I attended a 10-class polytechnic secondary school (POS) and then completed an apprenticeship as a banker at the technical school for finance until 1980.

From 1980 to 1986, I was branch manager of the Sparkasse in Berlin and involved in distance learning at the Humboldt University from 1982 to 1986.

I was arrested at the border between Hungary and Yugoslavia in August 1986, about 500 meters from the border. I was first interrogated by border police, struck in the ribs with a gun, then transferred to Szeged. I spent one week in a small cell, once a day having something to drink during a period of heat. Later, I was transported to Budapest for 14 days' imprisonment of remand, accommodated in a two-man cell. The conditions were better than in Szeged; we could play mills [similar to tic-tac-toe] and checkers with light and dark breadcrumbs.

Next, I went on a special flight to Berlin wearing handcuffs and a gag. After three weeks in Hungary, I was examined again and sent first to Keibelstraße, where I shared a cell with a murderer for six weeks, then to Rummelsburg.

In November 1986, I was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment for illegal border crossing, then transferred in the so-called Grotewohl-Express (a Barkas car with small single cells 1 meter × 1.34 meters large) across the GDR for three days to Riesa and then from there to

the Zeithain penal institution, a relatively modern prison. In 1990, there was a Spiegel-TV report about this prison. When I have shown pictures of the outside facilities with the dog-running areas and asked others what it could be, I never heard the answer “GDR.” The answer was always “concentration camp.”

Questions

Dr. Bath: The jury will now ask you about your prison work for VEB Rohrkombinat Stahl- und Walzwerk Riesa (a steel and rolling mill for producing pipes). We have about 10 minutes for this.

Question from Mr. Vaatz: Where were you employed?

Answer: I was directly in the pipe mill in Riesa, where seamless steel pipes were produced. We had to deburr and bundle red-hot pipes. I once experienced how a bundle like this broke open, and someone was lying underneath, who was then immediately taken away and never returned. I had some pipes fall on my foot, an accident that was not properly treated at the time.

Question: The pipes were transported through the factory building with a so-called “cat” – a crane?

Answer: Partly. The pipes came to us hot over rollers. There was a barrier installed, which sometimes did not work. The pipes were red-hot. We then deburred them, and then the pipes were first bundled together with a “cat” and placed on a special pallet. There they cooled down. The pipes were not treated again; they were ready for shipping, so we attached transport flags to the pipe bundles. The recipient was the company Mannesmann & Klöckner, which exported the pipes to Russia for the oil industry.

Question: Were there any safety devices in case rope or steel tape broke during crane transport?

Answer: I can’t remember any safety devices. There was a kind of machine that gathered the pipes into bundles, and then two people

bent the steel tapes or ropes around them by hand and tied them with a machine. This happened above the heads of the prisoners. By today’s safety standards, the plant would be shut down immediately. In GDR times, many plants were worn out, but there were areas where only prisoners – not civilians – had to work.

Question: There were no civilian workers at the company?

Answer: There were still civilian workers, but more as supervisors, not as workers. The work had to be done exclusively by the prisoners.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Were you injured? Do you suffer from permanent damage?

Answer: I have already mentioned it. Some pipes fell on my left foot and damaged the middle toe, which is still deformed. I was not forced to continue working and was allowed to sit on a chair. I felt sick, but I was not permitted to see a doctor. I had to wait until the shift was over. Then we were taken by bus back to the prison to our cells. The next morning, I did not need to go to work. I was picked up and taken to a sanitation facility inside the prison. I called the physician the “concentration camp doctor” at the time. I was pushed by the guards into a waiting room that was overcrowded, and when it was my turn, my foot was not x-rayed. The foot was green. They put ointment and a bandage on it, and I was allowed to stay in the cell for three days. Afterward, I was issued bigger shoes to be able to work. There was no further medical care. I can live with the toe.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you have the opportunity to refuse this hard work? And if you had refused, what would have happened?

Answer: Refusing to work was fundamentally impossible. If you refused, you would be punished – placed in a single cell or a dark cell, for example. On the other hand, one was glad to have work. But I don’t want to say it like that. I did not want to expose myself to dangerous work and become damaged all my life. But we all had one aim: we wanted to get out of this state. I once said, “Better 2 years in

a strict labor camp than 50 years in a normal labor camp.” There was no possibility to refuse work.

Question from Dr. Li: If it was already known that this work had a very high accident rate, were there briefings or instructions given beforehand on how to proceed in case of accidents?

Answer: There were no briefings, work instructions, or any precautions.

Dr. Bath: Thank you, Mr. Diederich.

Witness Detlef Wengel

Call of the second witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

My name is Detlef Wengel, and I was born in the Harz Mountains in 1955. I graduated from the POS and then trained as a bookseller in Leipzig. Afterwards, I wanted to study German language and literature, which was not possible, because I was not good enough at school in the subject of “political building.” For this reason, I attempted to escape to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1974 but failed. I had talked to a first-degree relative about it beforehand, and he be-



Detlef Wengel

trayed me. I was arrested on Easter Monday in 1974 and was taken into a remand prison. During the first interrogation, I was beaten on the head with a telephone book from behind on my left side, which caused my eardrum to burst. This was never treated, and a chronic middle ear infection developed, which I have had for over 40 years.

I was imprisoned at Torgau from 1974 to the end of 1976 and was first employed in a factory where parts for combine harvesters were produced. In 1975, I was transferred to the accounts department within the prison because I was the only prisoner who could operate an accounting machine. That was basically my luck. In Torgau, there were 90% criminal prisoners and 10% political prisoners, and we as political offenders were at the lowest level of the prisoner hierarchy. I am sure I would not have survived imprisonment if I had had to work in this factory for agricultural machines all the time.

After my release at the end of 1976, I was sent to the area around the town Weißenfels. I was not allowed to return to the Harz Mountains

to my parents, because it was a border area. I was given the so-called identity card PM12 [travelling to socialist countries no longer possible]. With the residence restrictions and registration obligations, I had to work as an unskilled butcher, cutting up pigs and cattle. I did this until 1978 when I got married and was allowed to change my job. I worked as a forklift driver in Leuna and later worked for the railroad company. In 1983, I got divorced and moved to Leipzig. There I was absolutely forbidden to work, but I had to prove what I made a living from.

I then worked as a waiter on a flat-rate basis and submitted eight applications for leaving the GDR, all of which were rejected. When the last application was rejected in 1988, I went to Berlin to the permanent representation of the Federal Republic of Germany in December to force my wish of leaving the GDR. The Ministry for Internal German Affairs clarified the steps involved. I first had to return to Leipzig and would be allowed to leave the country in February 1989. I then went to Bremerhaven, and after the fall of the wall, I spent 10 years abroad in Israel and Italy and returned to Germany in 2000. I am living now in Munich. Since 2011, I have been a disability pensioner due to post-traumatic stress disorder from imprisonment, and I help others apply for recognized health damages caused by imprisonment.

Questions

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you ever receive a pay slip for the work you did at the company for agricultural machines (Landmaschinenbau Torgau)?

Answer: As prisoners, we did not receive pay slips. I later worked in the prison's accounts department, where the pay slips were processed. The companies sent the pay slips, and a prisoner in the accounts department calculated the deductions – child support, for example. This was deducted from the net amount because social security was already deducted and paid by the company. From the sum then calculated, the prisoners received a certain percentage. There

were, in general, four levels of the penal system: easy, normal, strict, and intensified. I was in strict, so 7% of the net wage was paid to me for buying something. A prisoner in an intensified regime received only 5%. In Torgau, at that time, a prisoner had about 20 marks a month for his own use. There were, however, general wage differences between the various companies where prisoners had to work. In 1975, a new law was passed that forced companies to pay prisoners the full compensation for especially hard work. There were cases where the amount of this compensation was higher than the real earning.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did the prisoners receive wage slips for this?

Answer: No, prisoners were paid a certain amount based on if they fulfilled a certain percentage of the plan. Subtracted from their wages was a reserve for the time after their release, which was usually about 5 marks. If the prisoner still had debts (e.g., court costs), he was forced to sign a so-called savings contract (usually 10 marks/month) to pay the debts. One was forced to do so. We in the account office were given these savings contracts and had to write in pencil exactly how much money came in from the company, how much was paid out to the prisoner, and how much was deducted for such a savings agreement. The contract was destroyed afterwards. Ten marks was a lot of money in prison, but 10 marks to pay off, for example, 1,000 marks of debts, was nothing. Because the figures were written with a pencil, I sometimes could change some numbers so that more money could be paid out to the prisoners for their own use.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did this handling happen only among political prisoners who did not exist in the GDR officially? Did normal criminals receive pay slips?

Answer: I made no distinction between criminal and political prisoners. We were all in the same situation; we were always told we were all criminals. An officer in the prison once said to me, “Your social

position is not human. You are a criminal.” I was 19 years old at the time.

Question from Mr. Smith: Could you briefly describe how you were treated in prison in Torgau? How did you sleep? Did you have free time?

Answer: We were constantly transferred. There were times when we were in a cell with 4 to 5 people. Torgau was a fortress and a former Wehrmacht prison. The designed cell occupancy was 1 to 2 people maximum. During my time there (1974–1975), the prison was overcrowded, so there were 4 people in one cell. Sometimes we were also in a large cell with 30 men: 10 from the early shift, 10 from the day shift, and 10 from the night shift. This meant there was never any peace. Sleeping three hours was not possible. Even in the smaller cells there was no thought of sleeping at night because of the light controls and life checks. The guards also made a lot of noise, so more than two hours of sleep was not possible. Food rations were also poor. I came to prison weighing 75 kg (about 165 lbs); upon release I was 57 kg (about 126 lbs).

Question from Dr. Li: You said that you were beaten and suffered hearing loss. Was there any recognition of this damage to your health? What is it like in general?

Answer: In 2011, I had a blackout and voluntarily went into psychiatric treatment. This was the first time I was able to talk openly about my past. I then applied for a disability pension due to post-traumatic stress disorder. In the application, I received a degree of disability pension of 40 years of post-traumatic stress disorder according to the Federal Health Care Act. In this context, I mentioned the ear. The injury was not recognized in an expert certificate, because it could have been a previous injury, and I could not prove that a police officer had hit me on the head from behind. Was I supposed to bring a witness for this after 40 years? No, the ear damage was not recognized.

While reviewing my files in preparation for this tribunal, I found two documents. One is the report from the initial examination at the beginning of the imprisonment on remand, which confirmed I was healthy, as were my ears. The second is the release report from the prison in Torgau with a note that I suffered from chronic middle ear infections. So, the illness had its origin during my time in prison.

I have now applied for a check-up by the Versorgungsamt and learned that the damage will likely be recognized. Now there is proof.

I have a note in my release papers from Torgau prison where I had to sign that I did not suffer an accident during my time there. Only with this signature was I released. But then, I found a note in my prison file that I had two accidents at work in the factory for agricultural machines due to “carelessness.” It was always our own fault if something happened. At the beginning, we were told there were no accidents, and if proof to the contrary arose, it was your own fault. This is still a problem today with the recognition of consequential health damages. There are not only post-traumatic stress disorders but also physical damages that occur later as a result of the time in prison. In my experience, the experts in the old federal states often have a more positive attitude than those in the new federal states. I am currently helping seven to eight people with applications for recognition of health damage caused by imprisonment. Many give up after they have been to the health expert. This is probably what the health care authorities are counting on, that the applicants give up after an initial refusal. In my opinion, up to 90% of the damage caused by accidents at work during imprisonment or post-traumatic stress disorders are not recognized. It is always said that the evidence and witnesses are missing. People give up; the process takes years.

Dr. Li: That’s what I mean: you suffered then, and now, when you apply for compensation, you suffer again. This is not a real question, but an appeal to the federal government to see if a professional authority can be set up to help people.

Mr. Wengel: Sure. The evidence procedure system must be changed. Those of us affected are obliged to prove what was done to us and what we had to go through. The system tries to prove that we did not go through this. That must be changed; this is where politics fails.

Question from Dr. Bath: During your imprisonment, did you hear of cases where prisoners refused to work?

Answer: Yes, because 99% of refusals to work were punished with arrest. And after an arrest, there was automatically a three-month prohibition on buying anything. This had to be noted in our accounts department. The entire earnings then went into the reserves; the prisoner did not get any money. This changed in mid-1975 when the law for hard-work compensation came into force; the money had to be paid out. However, no tobacco was allowed to be bought with it, and attention was paid to this. The money could be used only to buy food.

Question from Dr. Bath: Are you familiar with examples where prisoners continued to refuse to work after their arrest?

Answer: Very rarely. These punishments were harsh. In the cell, everything was shared among the prisoners. For example, we only had permission to talk to a relative for 30 minutes once a quarter. And the visitor was allowed to bring a gift of a value of five marks. And it always depended on the “educator,” who determined the value of five marks. My educator was rather friendly, so he determined that a piece of butter, which my mother brought and had a value of two-and-a-half marks, had a value of only one-half Pfennig [penny], allowing for additional things to be brought. If you couldn’t buy anything after being arrested, the other prisoners supported you with their money. It was the same with the visiting time. Everyone who got something shared it with everyone else. But that also depended on who was together with you in your cell. We political prisoners were at the very bottom, and when a political prisoner was in a cell with three criminals, it was quite different.

Dr. Bath: Let me summarize your statement: There was already massive pressure on the prisoners to comply with this work duty because, otherwise, there were disadvantages not only for themselves but also for the other cell members.

Answer: Of course. There was the so-called self-education: if someone did not fit in the system, all the others were punished as well. And the others then had the opportunity to “teach” the one the rules by more or less strict means. And the policemen only watched. That was called self-education.

Dr. Bath: I think we have all understood that now. Thank you very much.

Witness Ralf Steeg

Call of the third witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

Today, I am a graduate engineer for landscape planning and environmental planning and do research in wastewater treatment. Imprisoned at the age of 16, I was one of the youngest political prisoners in the GDR. I am the one who brought IKEA's practices to the public, namely that IKEA had forced laborers. That was first published in the press in 1979.



Ralf Steeg

Born in Lauchhammer in 1961, I was delegated to the so-called Elite School (EOS) at the age of 14 due to good performance at school. My parents had submitted an application for leaving the GDR, which was not approved for years, and I then decided to try to leave the state. When I was 15, I tried to escape in the winter. I was caught just before the Czech border and was treated quite well by the Czech border guards before being handed over to the GDR's state security (Stasi). My time with the Stasi was marked by beatings and torture. I was sentenced to one and a half years in prison, suspended to three years of probation. When I refused to take part in pre-military training, the probation was revoked, and I was sent to the prison "Jugendhaus Halle," where I spent most of my incarceration. The house had the ironic name "Happy Future." Many people think we played table tennis there all the time, but it was one of the most brutal prisons in the GDR. There was no difference between the time when you worked and the time when you didn't work. You were forced 24 hours a day, around the clock, to do things you didn't want to do. We had to march, sometimes to the point of collapse. After marching, we had to clean up. Even in the night we were under

constant pressure. Your hands had to be over the blanket; you were not allowed to get up at night. So much for my short introduction.

Questions

Dr. Bath: Thank you. The jury would now like to ask you about your work for VEB Metalldrücker Halle.

Question from Dr. Pinerová: I read in the documents that the work standards were very high. You could not meet these standards. Was there a penalty for not meeting the work standards?

Answer: I never met the work standards. We were beaten by the guards. The system of self-education has already been mentioned. The guards watched from the outside as the prisoners mistreated each other. If one of the prisoners did not meet the work standards, all the others were punished as well. They were then not allowed to go shopping, or their visiting hours were cancelled. Visiting hours were always very important; it was like Christmas for us. And when other prisoners had no visiting hours, they took their anger out on the prisoner who had not met the norm. I was not beaten often by other prisoners because I had a pretty good standing, but the guards beat me with a baton. I was one of two political prisoners; all the others were criminal prisoners, some of whom were very raw because of their own history (e.g., in GDR children's homes). Physical assaults took place; all other prisoners were terrorized by them, the so-called bosses. The guards looked away.

Question from Mr. Heidt: You were 16 when you were imprisoned. Were there only teenagers or also adults in the institution or in your working group? Did you suffer injuries, or were there also sexual assaults?

Answer: Yes, there were also sexual assaults. The general state of health was poor. We ate expired food that was no longer fit for sale in shops. Because of vitamin deficiency, every injury became infected, and everyone had blue or yellow faces from disinfectant ointment or

other elixirs. In my case, blood poisoning almost led to death. Only at the very last minute I was taken to the prison hospital, although I had asked to be taken to the doctor several times.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Perhaps you can say something about the average age in prison.

Answer: The prisoners were between 14 and 18 years old. Halle was supposed to be a kind of model prison. It was a new building fenced in with barbed wire, and there were dog run zones. Machine guns were on the watchtowers.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you have educational opportunities in prison?

Answer: There were different groups, one for special students of low intellect and one for the others to which I belonged (I was at EOS and POS). But the education was poor. We had lessons once a week, mostly political education and some courses about metalworking. Education was not important for the prison authorities.

Question from Mr. Vaatz: Are you aware of any deaths? Rape? Serious accidents?

Answer: Rape occurred. A prisoner looking girlish was enough. There were also accidents at work, and there were cases of self-mutilation to get into the prison hospital.

Question from Mr. Bath: Can you say anything about the activities you had to perform at work?

Answer: The company we had to work for was VEB Metalldrücker Halle, but we did not know this. We were cut off from all information in prison, even from the newspaper *Junge Welt*; many articles were cut out before we were allowed to read it.

We did not know for whom we produced or what we produced. We had to file off metal layers on some parts in piecework, but we didn't

know anything about the use of the parts. And IKEA caught my attention only because I didn't know the word *SVIT*, the company's name of these parts. We knew that IKEA existed, but did not know its names for individual parts. We had to screw together these parts, which were very clean and bright, almost white.

Question from Mr. Bath: Are you aware of cases of refusal to work?

Answer: We never had this because we knew exactly that you would disappear into the bunker, and we also knew about beatings before you landed in the bunker. That is why none of us did it.

Question from Mr. Bada Nam: Did you see someone who refused to work and who was then beaten? Were there any other consequences besides a beating?

Answer: I was told that I refused to work because I only fulfilled up to 50–60% of the work standards. Other people in the group who did not meet the standard were also accused of refusing to work. And then they were beaten by the guards. There were also other punishments, such as having to march until you collapsed or go up and down the stairs in a so-called duckwalk until you collapsed. There was an unlimited repertoire of punishments, the least of which was being prohibited from shopping. When that happened, you could no longer trade with others or "buy your way out" with cigarettes and other things to avoid harassment from criminal prisoners.

Introduction: Furniture Industry

Dr. Christian Sachse

At the beginning of the 1970s, GDR furniture production developed into an “export hit,” not only for the Federal Republic of Germany but also for the entire West. Production took place mainly in the lowest price segment. The company Lämmerzahl, with a turnover of 130 million Deutsche Mark (DM) per year, was the exclusive distributor of GDR furniture in the Federal Republic of Germany. Major customers included Quelle (29%), Otto (25%), Kaufhof (17%), Horten (14%), Neckermann (12%), Woolworth (9%), Hertie (7%), Karstadt (4%), Metro (4%), Baur (2.5%), and COOP, Hess, Schöpflin, and Kaufhalle with approximately 2% each.

This means that all major mail-order companies bought furniture from the GDR through Lämmerzahl.

In 1986, about 5% of all prisoners were employed in furniture production, most of which was produced on behalf of IKEA and for export to Western countries: Sprela Spremberg (110 prisoners), Polstermöbel Cottbus (50 prisoners), Mewa Naumburg (350 prisoners), Sitzmöbel Waldheim (30 prisoners), Holzverarbeitung Burg (380 prisoners), and Holzveredelungswerk Wiederitzsch (95 prisoners).

The health conditions are described by several prisoners as terrible. Here is a statement of a Cottbus prisoner in 1975: “Work in two to three shifts, health and safety at work terrible, work in a state of illness, work with carcinogenic synthetic resin dust, no working suction device, routine X-rays of the lungs were performed without protective devices.” One obviously knew about the dangerous dust.

Semi-finished products made of Sprelacart, a product made of fabric and synthetic resin, were manufactured in the Cottbus prison using metal-cutting methods. The lack of suction devices led to high dust concentrations to which prisoners were exposed for years. Sprelacart contains the resin melamine. According to the Federal Institute

for Risk Assessment, toxic effects due to melamine were observed in animal experiments.

Already since the end of the 1960s, IKEA, which was already known at that time, had a production contract in the Eastern Bloc, including the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The resulting competitive pressure was passed on to the prisoners, who had to work under unsuitable and unacceptable conditions, mostly in a three-shift system.

One of the most harmful production facilities associated with IKEA was the electroplating shop in the Naumburg prison, where parts were refined in an acid bath with a metal coating. Due to a lack of protective means, there were many burns and eye injuries. These resulted in spontaneous refusals to work, which were punished with the harshest measures. As one prisoner reported: “I was immediately taken away, chained to the bed with handcuffs on my hands and feet, dressed in a combination suit – nothing more – and locked up three times a day. You were forced to lie firmly fastened to the bed for almost 24 hours.”

Witness Klaus Peter Simon

Call of the fourth witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction



Klaus Peter Simon

I was born on November 2, 1954, in Querfurt, Saxony-Anhalt and attended the POS in Hötensleben.

On December 29, 1972, I was arrested at the border in the Harbke-Offleben area. They shot at me, but I survived. Then, I was taken to Marienborn, where I was interrogated and beaten on the ears and face. I was then taken to the remand prison in Halberstadt until March 1973, where I worked for the VEB Ketten- und Nagelwerke Wernigerode. I had

to assemble chains for transmissions and test transmissions filled with oil.

In March 1973, I was sentenced to fourteen months imprisonment according to § 213 of the GDR Penal Code for “unlawful border crossing [escape from the republic],” and according to § 51, I was given an unlimited residence ban for all border areas and Berlin.

I was transferred to Naumburg prison, where I had to work for VEB Metallwaren Naumburg (MEWA), at first in the “old MEWA.” The small, very low hall had no windows, and because of the trichloroethylene vapors we inhaled, we were always in a so-called “funny mood.” I had to sort, polish, degrease with trichloroethylene, and pack furniture and armchair castors. I also had to grind and polish handles for department store doors in various shapes. Much of this was done by hand.

Interruption by Dr. Bath: Mr. Simon, you are already anticipating the jury’s questioning by going into great detail about your work in

prison. That is very commendable, but we have agreed on a certain time for the presentation and a certain time for the questioning. We should now begin this questioning.

Questions

Question from Dr. Li: This is not a question, but a comment on the harmful effects of Sprelacart and melamine. In his report, Dr. Sachse mentioned that animal experiments have shown that melamine is harmful. We now know more. I would, therefore, like to add that there is now evidence that melamine is harmful, namely from human experiments in China. In 2008, six babies died, and 200,000 babies were hospitalized for kidney stones and renal insufficiency from baby milk mixed with melamine that was produced in China. And this was done willingly. All companies did this to fake the protein content. A high protein content was measured and the milk product was rated as very good. This proves that melamine is toxic, depending on the concentration. This was also felt in Germany. The Chinese had lost all confidence in domestic products, and the students in Germany bought baby milk here and sent it to China. In some supermarkets, there was a notice on the shelves that only one to two packages per person were allowed to be bought.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you have any professional training for the work you had to do in prison? If not, how were you prepared for this work, and did you have a choice to do another job?

Answer: When I got there, I was 18 years old and had no work experience. My only training was at the school during the so called “day in the production” (a special subject at school in the GDR). I was inexperienced and first had to punch out, bend, and rivet small metal sheets for window fixings. I was quite skillful, and then I went to the other department where the furniture castors were treated.

There were no means of protection. As a young person, I was able to cope with all this. Health problems came later. I can say I was not prepared for working life.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You have classified the work as dangerous. Was there any advice on work safety? Were there regular training sessions? Were you informed about the health risks?

Answer: No. You put on simple work suits and work shoes and were taken by bus from the prison to the company. Once there, you were brought to the working places. That does not mean that I always had the same job. If I did one thing on one day, I did something else the next day. We were not warned about the trichloroethylene vapor either. Two to three civilian workers took up different positions and the guards stood aside. There were no safety instructions or other means of protection. The most important thing was that there was a button for each buttonhole on the suit.

Later we moved into the “new MEWA,” a large hall with no windows. The exhaust air system was very small so that nobody could crawl through. There were cleaning flaps to suck off the fabric lint from polishing. These were hot and sometimes started to burn. There were no proper extinguishing devices either. Preparation for work processes, as I got to know them later in civilian life, looks different.

Mr. Bath: I still have four requests to speak now, but our time is already very limited.

Question from Mr. Heidt: My first question is about the age structure in your prison, you yourself were 18 years old. The second question concerns consequential damages.

Answer: In the area where I was, I was the youngest at 18. Some were in their early 20s, but most were older than 30 – the oldest being 75, I think. As far as bodily injury is concerned, I had been shot at when arrested, but I suffered more from the psychological strain. I was beaten, but an 18-year-old can take it well. In the remand prison in Halberstadt, they didn’t give me my antihistamines against hives, so one night, I had seizures. My fellow prisoners alerted the guards. They moved me to a solitary cell. I was placed in a chair and tied up. Later a doctor came and held my nose and had me swallow antihis-

tamine pills (the insides of which were corrosive) with water. He gave me an injection also. I fainted but couldn’t fall off the chair because I was tied up. Sometime in the very early morning, I was back in my cell. Today, I have problems with my bones, my ears, and my voice; I have even more psychological problems. I noticed this immediately after my release. I had been very athletic, able to jump from the five-meter board into the water. Now, I could not even jump from the starting block. In 2013, I submitted a compensation application followed by several objections against its denial, without result. I can’t explain it to myself. Now it’s 2020. I don’t know why people are still doing this to others. I think I am not the only one. And surely there are still people who are much more affected.

Dr. Bath: I can see the witness is visibly exhausted, and time is running out. For those still waiting to ask questions (Mr. Smith, Dr. Pinerová, and Dr. Schirrmacher), do you insist on asking your questions?

Question from Mr. Smith: To clarify, is it true that the incident you described concerning the pills and the injection took place before your time in Naumburg?

Answer: Yes, it was during the time in the remand prison in Halberstadt. The order was as follows: first arrest, then remand, then sentencing and prison.

Question from Mr. Smith: You also said that in Naumburg you sometimes felt high because of the vapors. Did you experience illness as a result, or did you or other prisoners suffer injuries as a result, and how did the guards react?

Answer: I was not directly ill. But there must have been a reason for the whole psychological history that gradually appeared after my release from prison. I was shot at, and I inhaled the vapors every day for 10 to 11 months. Nobody knows whether this is a consequence. I was not directly ill in prison. I did not report anything either. I didn’t have an accident either, although there were accidents.

Dr. Bath: I apologize, but we should stop the interview at this point, as we are running behind schedule. Many thanks, Mr. Simon, for your statement.

Witness Alexander W. Bauersfeld

Call of the fifth witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

Since I am 72 years old, it is always difficult to say something about my experience in a few minutes. In preparation for this event, I thought a lot about what could be important. When I was 13 years old, I had an accident and was in hospital for several weeks. At night, I heard someone crying in the next room and asked the nurse who was crying. She explained there was a soldier of the Nationale Volkarmee (armed forces of GDR) who had stepped on a mine, severing both feet.



Alexander W. Bauersfeld

This experience shocked me because I had heard on the radio station RIAS on August 13 that the construction of the wall had begun and that we were all locked in now. That made me realize at the age of 13 that this is an unjust state. And I still react very sensitively when left-wing politicians doubt the term *unjust state*. The laying plans had been destroyed, so the soldiers did not know where the mines were. A state that lets a young man step on mines laid by the Soviet armed forces is unjust.

A few years later, on August 21, 1968, I was in the People's Army to do my basic military service. You had to go there or you went to prison. I heard on the radio the news of the occupation of Prague by the Warsaw Pact armies. And then it was clear to me again that this is an unjust state. Our officers told us that we should repel the attacks of the American soldiers and the Bundeswehr. I didn't believe it.

My sympathies were with the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany. I knew the difference between freedom and dictatorship.

This date made such an impression on me because, as a 20-year-old young man, I feared for my life – the war was threatening. That was the reason I went to church and found in the young community what did not exist otherwise in the GDR: open and honest discussion. That was also the way to confrontation for me. I am not a victim. I made a very conscious decision against the GDR, and I stand by it. I realized very early that this is a socialist dictatorship that wants to force people to accept this “religion.” I was arrested because I was involved in the *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen* (Swords to Plowshares) movement, as well as the social peace service. I was 35 at the time. Shortly after that, my wife was also arrested, and we were forced to divorce. I found Cottbus Prison to be a particularly bad place. If you walked across the prison yard, you could see the buildings of the print shop of the newspapers *Neues Deutschland* and *Lausitzer Rundschau*. And above them was the lettering “Neues Deutschland.” Yes, the prison was the new Germany. This had a great influence on me. Until then, I felt the Nazi dictatorship was the worst. When I read in my Stasi file that I was “released for liquidation in case of tension,” it was clear to me that both dictatorships were inhumane. One must never forget that.

When I went to prison, I already knew Cottbus because I knew Siegmund Faust. Siegmund Faust was imprisoned here, and later, together with Dieter Dombrowski, made this prison into a memorial site. It still shocks me that this ideology of socialism and communism has come back from the garbage heap of history, and that more than 1.4 billion people still suffer from this dictatorship today. While we sit here together, people are being oppressed and killed. We must become aware of these crimes.

Questions

Dr. Bath: Thank you for the introduction, Mr. Bauersfeld. The jury would now like to ask you about your work for the VEB Sprela Spremberg in this prison.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You were sentenced as a criminal in GDR times. Was there a time you were forced to do a very specific kind of work? Was that part of the sentence?

Answer: No. I was sentenced according to § 99, “Landesverräterische Nachrichtenübermittlung” (treasonous communication). There was no reference to work. But upon arriving in prison, I was informed that I had two options: work or get arrested. I was psychologically very weak, partially due to the divorce from my wife, and I was very happy that I could work.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You had no choice to accept or refuse a job, but were you faced with the choice of either being arrested or doing the job that was given to you?

Answer: Yes, that was absolutely clear.

Question from Dr. Pinerová: How many hours did you have to work per day or week? Were you forced to work longer? How and why? Were you paid for the work?

Answer: There was a three-shift system: early shift, late shift, and night shift. And as I remember, it was always eight hours. The working conditions were very bad, and so was the pay. However, I had found a trick how to meet or exceed the work standard by treating the parts twice, so finished parts were counted and written down a second time, and so, I had a little more money. Since I was a non-smoker, I spent the money mainly on vitamin tablets (Summavit).

Question from Dr. Schirmacher: You were rehabilitated by the court early, in 1990, and immediately afterwards you initiated proceedings at the administrative court for the consequential damages of imprisonment. It says only “without result.” What did you claim as consequences, and was that soon after, in 1992–1993?

Answer: The object was asset compensation. I was arrested and later ransomed and had not been able to take my assets with me. In the

state of Brandenburg, the authorities did not deal with this matter or the fact that I did not get any asset compensation. When I was arrested, I owned a Volkswagen, which was gone.

Question from Mr. Heidt: You did not take this matter to a court?

Answer: Of course, I did. I was later rehabilitated by the Cottbus district court. Only the part of property right was not discussed.

Question from Mr. Heidt: There is not a court decision at all.

Answer: No. I have experienced what many others have experienced. At the beginning of 1990, the company Sprela still existed as VEB and refused to talk about this topic at all. And at that time, the state of Brandenburg was always called the “People’s Republic of Brandenburg.” There were many authorities who did not like to touch this topic. For many years there was no state representative for the Stasi files in this state.

Dr. Bath: But you didn’t go to the administrative court to persuade the Brandenburg authorities to act?

Answer: I avoided that so-called “ox tour.”

Question from Mr. Smith: During your time in prison, did you experience degrading treatment against yourself or against other prisoners by the prison officers? Can you give an example?

Answer: There is one example that I remember over and over again. A fellow prisoner who was about to be released to the GDR was put under a lot of pressure by the civilian foreman. So he took chalk and drew a grid on the wall, next to which he wrote the word *Salt* – this was the paraphrase for the central reception center in the town of Salzgitter. Then the civilian foreman came to me and said: “I have always treated you well. Do you have any complaints against me?” I asked him, “Why do you ask this question?” And he answered that as a pensioner, he would also like to go to the West, and it was important to him that there was nothing against him in the West.

In prison, there were attacks again and again, but what I found the worst was the very bad food and the poisonous dust we had to inhale. This has already been mentioned. Sprela belonged to the companies with the worst working conditions – not at all in accordance with the GDR code of law.

Mr. Bath: There are no further requests to speak, and we have used up all the time and are now on schedule.

Introduction: Mining Industry

Dr. Christian Sachse

Dr. Bath: Actually, the plan was to look at the mining industry, which was an important sector for prisoner labor in the GDR. Unfortunately, neither witness is present. Mr. Isikli had to cancel for health reasons, which we regret very much.

We have a witness – Mr. Wegner – who can say something about the structural and civil engineering sector. We will listen to him later. Nevertheless, Dr. Sachse will give us an introduction into the mining industry.

Dr. Sachse: The mining industry was a very important sector for the GDR in the 1940s and 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s. We have a common history with Czechoslovakia because we also have to report on uranium mining.

The GDR's territory was poor in mineral resources, except for lignite deposits. Imports were hardly affordable. That's why the unproductive mining of copper in the Hettstedt area and of hard coal in the Zwickau area was forced, despite considerable costs. In order to reduce costs, prisoners had to work underground in mining, contrary to international conventions. The GDR ignored the special international agreement not to use prisoners in mining, as did the Soviet Union. The entire Gulag system was characterized by underground mining of coal and ore. In 1953, the investigative committee of the UN Economic and Social Council criticized the use of prisoners in the uranium mines in the south of the Soviet occupation zone and the GDR. The Czech Republic also sent most of its prisoners to this area. In all areas, prisoners were used underground without any training or education. The high numbers of serious accidents were criticized even by the Soviet occupiers. In 1966, the Mansfeld Kombinat "Wilhelm Pieck" requested up to 1,000 prisoners to carry out work underground in the Bernhard-Koenen pit.

According to GDR internal statistics, the number of accidents among prisoners working underground was five times higher than among civilian miners. To whitewash the statistics, prisoners were taken to hospitals after work fatalities, so that the cause of death could be reported an accident without using exact details. In reality, the figures were much higher. The rate of notifiable accidents at work was 23% in 1962; every fourth prisoner underground suffered a notifiable accident. For civilian workers, the rate was about 7%.

This shows under what conditions underground work had to be done at that time.

Other prisoners were employed in the metallurgical industry. The equipment was totally worn out. In 1953, the minister of metallurgy called for 3,850 "long-term prisoners" to work in a lead works near Hettstedt. They used such offenders because they would have been released from prison only by death. The poisoning of prisoners in consequence of increased exposure was accepted as reasonable. Prisoners were exposed to heavy metal dusts and increased radioactivity when processing slag into paving stones.

In 1962, according to GDR internal statistics, 1,250 prisoners (7%) were employed underground in mining; 2,340 prisoners (13%) were employed in opencast lignite mines for track construction work. Most of them were young people because this was hard physical work. For 1985, 2,380 prisoners were planned for use in lignite mining. In the late 1960s, young prisoners were also deployed in briquette factories.

Prisoners in the opencast mines laid tracks by hand with the simplest tools (shovels, lifting devices) in all weather conditions, always following the mining process. Prisoners reported heavy work in sub-zero temperatures, scorching heat, mud, and snowstorms. Prisoners accounted for more than 80% of the workers in this area. Accidents, such as broken bones, bruises, and spinal injuries occurred mainly during the manual transport of tracks and railroad sleepers.

In 2015, the successor institutions of the GDR lignite firms (Vattenfall, LMBV, MIBRAG) signaled interest in discussions with the UOKG.

In the second part of my presentation, I would like to tell you what Mr. Isikli has told us. I know Mr. Isikli very well as a contemporary witness. He had to do forced labor in the VEB Mansfeld Kombinat “Wilhelm Pieck” and in the “Karl-Liebknecht-Hütte” (a copper mill) in Eisleben. There, slag from copper smelting was processed into paving stones for road construction. This was physically hard work, done by hand.

Grids were placed on the floor, into which the glowing slag was poured. The prisoners wore wooden clogs to walk over the grids. These could catch fire.

The work was very hard. Mr. Isikli and the others complained of back pain, including slipped disks. In general, these were not treated. A replacement was found only when someone could not work at all.

The cooling slag bubbles produced broken fragments that led to injuries, such as leg ulcers and abscesses, which were treated poorly.

A particular problem yet to be solved is radioactivity. The copper rock has a slightly increased radioactivity, which is normally harmless. But according to a *Spiegel* magazine report made several years ago, if you have to work permanently with the substances and inhale vapors over a long period of time (e.g., two years), it is possible that these dusts and vapors are carcinogenic. We are allowed to say here explicitly that Mr. Isikli had thyroid cancer, which was already operated on during the GDR times, but nobody spoke about it to Mr. Isikli, and nobody called it cancer. This was proven only after 1990.

This work was carried out with an unbelievable cynicism, and these stones were also bought in the West, which did not know anything about this danger. In the meantime, they have been replaced and are now only present at a few places.

I would not like to answer questions about Mr. Isikli, if the jury agrees. I am not the witness, only the transmitter of the information.

Witness Wolfgang Wegner

Call of the sixth witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born in Schwerin on September 26, 1948. My mother is from Pomerania, and my stepfather is from Bohemia. In Schwerin, my mother had met my biological father, a White Ukrainian, who worked as an interpreter for the Soviet Army. I was born from a so-called one-night stand. I never got to know him. My mother had taken me to a children’s home and did not want me back. After a year, she met my stepfather. My sister was born a year later. Then the authorities asked my family to take me out of the home. My stepfather brought me back into the family. He was touchingly caring for me, even though he himself was severely disabled. In 1953, I witnessed the revolt of the workers on June 17. I went for a walk with my stepfather, who wanted to show me the house where I was born (a large military building that served as housing for many refugees after the war). I was amazed at the many vehicles, and he explained to me that these were for Soviet soldiers. Later, at the age of 10, my grandfather explained everything to me. He had a great influence on me and told me his personal experiences from the Second World War. I attended school from 1956 to 1965 with the completion of the eighth grade. I became a plumber and installer and worked as a company craftsman in Schwerin. At 18, I completed the physical examination for military service. I committed myself to do military service for three years because of the free driver’s license, among other things.

From 1973 to 1975, I built my own prison at the Volkswerft in Stralsund. Together with 11 other conscientious objectors from all over the



Wolfgang Wegner

GDR, I was ordered there. The Industriebaukombinat Stralsund was the leading construction company for the project. They used us for the civil engineering work, digging trenches for the wastewater system. Since my profession allowed me to make suggestions for improvement to the project supervisor, I became a group leader of 20 workers.

Question from Dr. Bath: Have you experienced cases of refusal to work, and what penalties were then imposed?

Answer: The most serious case I have witnessed is that of a prisoner who was in the bunker for 164 days. This bunker was a cell two-by-two meters, with a concrete floor and folding bed. It was like a tiger cage. After the first three weeks, he came out again, made negative remarks to the prison officers again and spat on them, and had to go back to the bunker for three weeks. This led to a total of 164 days in the bunker. At the beginning, he weighed 60 kg (about 132 lbs); at the end, he weighed 45 kg (about 99 lbs). Also, shopping was cancelled because of refusal to work, as has already been reported. Another punishment was that one was not allowed to receive parcels, or visiting hours were cancelled.

Question from Dr. Li: You said that you built your own prison. Where were you accommodated? What were the conditions?

Answer: At the beginning, we were in the Stralsund remand prison in an old building from the imperial era. The hygienic conditions were catastrophic. No toilets and no water; we had to use two buckets to relieve ourselves. Since we were Jehovah's Witnesses, we were separated from the other prisoners on the upper floor, in two cells with six prisoners in each. Although eight cells next to us were vacant, we were concentrated in only two cells. We had no exercise area, and there was no yard; we had only the prison corridor. In the cell, there were two air vents, one above the door of the size 20 × 20 cm and a small window (40 × 40 cm).

We had a cell of 10 square meters for six people with beds, wardrobes, etc. Three of us always stayed on the beds. There was a jug of

water for washing. Heating ovens did not exist or were very old, so we had no heat.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you have the opportunity to practice your religion during your imprisonment?

Answer: I came to Stralsund together with another brother of Jehovah's Witnesses. All religious books were removed from the library immediately because Jehovah's Witnesses consider the Bible a spiritual sword. We had a prisoner who had previously served in the Navy for three years as a cook and in the fourth year he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector. He owned a Bible. This was taken away from him on the second day because we had contacted him.

Question from Mr. Bada Nam: Did you and your fellow prisoners try to improve your living conditions? Or were there consequences when you tried to improve something?

Answer: As I said already, the prison director had heard from other prisons that Jehovah's Witnesses should be segregated. This segregation led to being taken outside the prison to a special working brigade of our own. We were sent to Göhren on the island of Rügen, to a Stasi holiday camp with very modern holiday houses and its own beach. There we had to build sidewalks between the bungalows.

We also had to set up twelve foil tents for a gardening cooperative from January to April. The managers of this production cooperative, together with the leaders of the prison, visited us at work and asked the prison administration whether we wanted to join the company as a so-called in-house working team because we had done very good and value-adding work. We always overfulfilled the plan (135–145%). Because of our solidarity and the fact that we were all craftsmen, we were able to work independently on all projects after a short training period without the need to employ civilian skilled workers.

Dr. Bath: Thank you for your statement.

Introduction: Clothing Industry

Dr. Christian Sachse

As early as the 1940s, female prisoners were used in the penal institutions of the Soviet occupation zone and the early GDR to dismantle, repaint, or repair uniforms. At first glance this seems to be a job of normal sewing work. However, these uniforms were usually unwashed. No protective means, such as gloves, rubber boots, or aprons, were available for the dying process. The refurbishing of uniforms took place in adjoining rooms, such as basements or attics, which were poorly ventilated and poorly lit.

As we all know, the GDR did not have a freely convertible currency. It “paid” for goods imported from the West in exchange with cheap mass products, including textiles produced in the GDR. In 1976, for example, the GDR bought machines and electro-technical products from the Federal Republic of Germany in the amount of DM 1 billion. They paid for them with cheap textiles and clothing. The success of this business necessarily required that the mass products could be produced and sold extremely cheaply and in large quantities. There also were situations where prices were lowered in the course of the sale, and consequently, less money was earned. In compensation, the quantity had to be increased. This led to extreme tensions on the part of the manufacturers, and usually the pressure was passed on to the prisoners. The companies Planet Eppendorf (bed linen) and VEB Strumpfkombinat ESDA Thalheim (ladies’ stockings) belonged to the most important foreign exchange procurers. Most prisoners in Hoheneck produced goods under partly inhuman pressure and endured unhealthy working conditions. The stockings were sold by West German department stores such as Aldi-Nord, Aldi-Süd, Kaufhof, Kaufhalle, Quelle, and Neckermann. High profit margins could be achieved with the ESDA business. This was admitted publicly on television in 1990. The GDR sold a pair of ladies’ tights for DM 1.25; the purchase price (not the production price) for Western supply chains was DM 0.22.

I would like to point out one form of production in particular, where shoes were woven by prisoners for the shoe company “Banner des Friedens” Weißenfels in Halle/Saale in the prison Roter Ochse (Red Ox). The work was physically exhausting beyond belief, and often most prisoners, who had to do this work for several months or years, could not endure it. Production was also carried out for the clothing factories in Görlitz, Magdeburg, Eppendorf, Elsterberg, and Greiz.

Witness Angelika Schmidt

Call of the seventh witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction



Angelika Schmidt

I was born in Saxony-Anhalt in 1955. I attended the POS in Merseburg from 1962 to 1970, and from 1970 to 1974, the Special School for Russian Language in preparation to become a Russian teacher in Thuringia. After graduating from that school in 1974, I got married. My husband had just completed his training as a civil engineer and was about to be called up for military service. We were aware that, in the event of desertion, the spying paragraph would come into effect in

addition to the sentence, so we had to implement our plan to leave the GDR as soon as possible. In 1975, we were on our way from Czechoslovakia to Vienna with forged passports. We were caught and sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment. I was sent to Hoheneck prison.

Before my imprisonment, my father – who was a member of the SED with Stasi connections – arranged a deal. If I returned to the GDR, I would be released from prison. However, I was expected to give reports on the house community and my work collective from time to time. In essence, I was supposed to spy for the Stasi. I refused the deal, and so I came to Hoheneck (women's prison).

I had to work for the VEB Planet Wäschekombinat Lössnitz in bed linen production. At first, I thought this was a special harassment because I could not sew and was not interested in it. But later, I found out that the female prisoners at ESDA and the Ellmo company had it much worse because they had to work amidst high temperatures and suffered burns. I talked to two dentists who had suffered serious

festering injuries to their hands, and they feared they would not be able to continue in their profession after release from prison. So, you could say I had the lesser of two evils.

We were not released to the West. Because of my father's connection to the Stasi, he had a special secrecy level. We had to wait three years. Most of the prisoners had to spend only half the time in jail and were bought free. For us, that was a total of 30 months in prison, and then we had to spend another 18 months in the GDR. That was a long, psychologically stressful time. In 1979, on December 30, exactly four years after being arrested, we left the GDR, settling in Wiesbaden. I trained as an MTA (medical-technical assistant) and worked at the university hospital in Mainz until the children were born. Later I worked in my husband's gynecological medical practice until his retirement.

Questions

Dr. Bath: Thank you very much for the comments on your biography. We will now ask you about your work for VEB Planet Wäschekombinat Lössnitz.

Question from Mr. Li: As you have already described, there was a lack of occupational health and safety in production. Can you say something about this in detail?

Answer: We had no working clothes. We worked in our prison uniforms, brought directly from the cells into the factory. One day before going to work, I experienced physical violence. The announcements to get ready for work came over the loudspeaker, but that day, the loudspeaker was broken. The guard unlocked the cell door and immediately shouted at us, demanding to know why we were not ready. I was standing closest and calmly answered that there was no announcement and that the loudspeaker was probably out of order. She immediately pushed me against the three-story bedframe and hit me. Even the criminal prisoners shook their heads because she had attacked me for no reason.

I did not experience any assaults in the workplace. A violinist who did not meet the working standard was called a “lazy pig.” We had very old machines. In a night shift, I once noticed that I had produced defective goods. We had to sew shirts for men, and I had to sew the slits on the sleeves. I had not learned this and was a bit clumsy. I noticed my mistake. Well, you were not allowed to get up from your seat, but I wanted to see how much waste I had produced. I did not want to get into trouble. Failure to meet the working standard and producing waste could have been punished with arrest again. In 1974, I had suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis, and therefore, I was terribly afraid of being arrested. I got up and walked around the table and cut my thigh with the knives that were used as tools to make the slits. The wound was 2 cm long and 3 mm wide and was bleeding heavily. I did not want to report this to the guards under any circumstances and, with the help of other prisoners, fashioned a pressure bandage from fabric remnants. I still have the scar today.

Question from Mr. Bada Nam: You spoke about your situation of not being bought free. In North Korea, the possibility of being ransomed does not exist, because the North Korean authorities deny the existence of labor camps. There are still 100,000 political prisoners in North Korea, and I hope this possibility of buying free will exist in the future. You had been waiting for your chance to be bought free. Were there any changes in your life while you were waiting to leave the country? What was the situation?

Answer: We served our entire sentence. We were released as free people. My husband was banned from working as a civil engineer and was forced to work as an unskilled laborer. I was forced to work as an assistant in the warehouse of a greengrocer’s shop. We refused to accept these assignments. We had served our sentence in full. We went to the Protestant Church in Leipzig and tried to get jobs as nurses, and we got corresponding jobs. But we did not have a normal identity card, and we weren’t allowed to travel to Berlin, because we complained about our situation at the permanent representation of

the FRG. We were so-called second-class citizens. We met only with friends who had a similar attitude and destiny. There was distrust of everyone and everything.

Question from Dr. Pinerová: You talked about your accident. Did you receive financial compensation? Even in the GDR, there was a social insurance for you during your imprisonment. Were there penalties for not meeting the working standards? You said that you had problems meeting the working standard.

Answer: There were penalties for not meeting the working standard. If they suspected you had failed to meet the standard intentionally, they would have taken harsh measures. I don’t know if they knew I could not meet the standard. Failure to meet the standard could also be considered as refusal to work. That would have meant three weeks of arrest. It was not applied to me. We did not get any compensation for accidents. I did not report the accident either. There was no compensation at all.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You were forced to do work for which you were not qualified. Did you have any choice?

Answer: No.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You had to remain seated on your chair during your shift. Were you allowed to go to the toilet? And could you do so of your own choice?

Answer: You had to contact the supervisors. Of course, they also kept an eye on how long you stayed in the toilet and also came in if it took longer.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did your judgment expressly include that you were sentenced to perform work?

Answer: No.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: We have heard that several times before. You worked in a three-shift system. Did you have breaks?

Answer: Yes, we had to work in shifts. We had a short break after half of the shift, so with eight hours of work, we had a break after four hours. That was all.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: What did you do during these breaks? Were you taken outside? Did you receive refreshments?

Answer: We were not taken outside and did not have any refreshments.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: So, you were able to take only a short time-out, and you could leave the room only after the end of your shift. Is that correct?

Answer: Yes.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You had no opportunities to organize your workplace compared to a normal working life. Correct?

Answer: That is correct, too. And if you ever hoped to have a five-day work week, then you certainly had to do an extra shift; overtime was ordered constantly.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: What about health care? If they noticed that someone could not meet the working standard, they could assume a refusal to work. But on the other hand, was there a medical examination? Was it obvious not everyone was able to stand the pressure of work?

Answer: Because of the long imprisonment, mental stress, and the fact that some prisoners were released back to the GDR, I was afraid of being examined. And I had health problems. I had a toothache but didn't get it treated since in Hoheneck prison the common treatment was to pull the tooth, nothing else. So the tooth became inflamed, my face was swollen, and I probably had a fever. And I worked the night shift. I couldn't take it anymore and just wanted to stay in my bed. Pain was bad. I was lucky that evening. The guard was not violent; she wanted me to get ready for work, but a criminal prisoner

from my cell defended me, and I was actually allowed to lie down.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Let me summarize this: There was no general medical care. It depended on the will of the guards or the other prisoners. Do you know of any means used to promote the prisoners' performance?

Answer: Yes, for example, the permission to write a letter.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Do you know about certain pills that were supposed to stimulate performance?

Answer: I have heard that drugs were used to sedate long-time and sometimes aggressive prisoners, but not to promote the working performance.

Question from Dr. Schirmmacher: You have only recently applied for proceedings before the administrative court regarding the consequential damages. Why did you wait 30 years? And you published an autobiography not long ago. Have you already had reactions from other affected persons?

Answer: I was lucky that there were eight political prisoners in my cell. I still have contact with the women, and of course, they all received my book and were thankful.

There is a reason why I waited so long before applying for a proceeding. It was mainly due to psychological scars, and I had no confidence in any psychotherapist. I was always afraid of meeting someone with a GDR history who would talk down everything. I had no confidence. My current family doctor also has roots in the East, but she also has a history to deal with, and we both want to deal with this together now.

Dr. Bath: Thank you very much, Mrs. Schmidt.

Witness Elke Schlegel

Call of the eighth witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

First the witness sang the first words of the prison song of Cottbus (in memory of the men who were imprisoned there).

Short personal introduction

I was born in 1958 in Jena and completed the normal 10-class school education. I learned hotel management and wanted to work on a ship or an airplane as a stewardess. I wasn't allowed to do this because I had relatives in the Federal Republic of Germany, in the USA, and in Canada. My father's brothers went to the West before 1961.



Elke Schlegel

I met my husband, and we had a child. I could have gained permission to work as a stewardess then, but because the child could be used as a means of pressure against me, I refused.

We applied for a visa to leave the GDR because we did not feel like free citizens. In total, we submitted eight applications to leave the country. We joined together with people from the White Circle (the White Circle was a protest group of people in the GDR who wanted to leave the country, formed in Jena in 1983) and from the peace movement. We came together in the marketplace and stood up for freedom of opinion. If you applied for an exit visa, you had to break off contact with all relatives. I did so with regard to my brother. He was then called up for military service immediately. On Human Rights Day, December 10, he stood directly opposite me in the marketplace with a loaded machine gun in his hand, while I met him with a white dove in mine. My brother had to arrest me. "For the clarification of a matter" was the reason. I signed a document saying I would stay away

from such actions in the future. Thereupon our application to leave the country was approved, and we were sitting on packed suitcases.

On March 28, 1984, we were arrested, and I came to Gera remand prison. It reminded me of the Buchenwald concentration camp I had visited as a child. It looked the same there. I was in remand for a total of three months and was then sentenced and sent to Hoheneck. Reading through my Stasi file, I learned it was clear they were earnestly looking for a reason for our imprisonment; § 219 (unlawful establishment of contact) was the only paragraph that could be applied to us. The cause was a telephone call I made to my cousin in Neuwied when the application for leaving the GDR was approved, to ask him for help in finding accommodation. This telephone call was tapped and served as evidence for the judgment. I was sentenced to one year and six months of imprisonment to Hoheneck. There I produced tights. After three months, I was released from prison and bought free. Later, I was trained as a car saleswoman and had to go to a seminar. Carpools were formed for the journey there. A woman who came from the GDR just like me took me in her car. We talked about our past, and it turned out that she was a guard at Hoheneck prison. I got out of the car immediately, had a mental collapse, and went into psychiatric treatment. I have been unable to work since 2014 due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Questions

Dr. Bath: Thank you very much for your comments. Our jury would now like to ask you about your work for the VEB Strumpfkombinat ESDA.

Question from Dr. Li: You are unable to work. Has this been recognized as a result of imprisonment?

Answer: The cause is post-traumatic stress disorder. I have been to many experts. At the beginning, they did not understand me at all. When I described the prison conditions in the GDR, I was often asked

why I invented these stories. They did not believe me, and it was not easy for me to talk about it. The pain was so deep that I could not talk about it and, therefore, waited until application for proceedings before a court. Today, I am sure that nothing so bad can happen to me anymore. Because of the post-traumatic stress disorder, I am unable to work, and next year I will reach retirement age.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: We heard from the witness Angelika Schmidt, who was also imprisoned in Hoheneck, that she had to sew shirts. What did you do?

Answer: I made tights for the company Nur Die. The criminal prisoners told us that the tights were produced for the West. We had a three-shift system, eight hours, six days a week. As far as I remember, we had no break. We had to contact the supervisors for a visit to the toilet. There was a board on the wall on which they wrote down the fulfilment of the working standard. I had to hot-form 2,400 stockings to meet the standard. These stockings were undyed, snow-white, soaked in oil and then pulled onto the hot former. The stockings started to smoke, which was biting and hurt my eyes. There was no ventilation. The hot former was about 60°C (140°F) – you could have fried an egg on it. There was no protective clothing, no working clothes.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Was there any possibility of short breaks during this, as you said, unhealthy work? Were you able to escape the vapors? Were you able to sit down?

Answer: No. There were no breaks, as far as I remember. I really had to stand for eight hours at work. That's probably where my back problems come from. You were allowed to go to the toilet, but they always looked at the clock. In order to meet the working standard, people didn't dare to go to the toilet for long. If you didn't meet the quota, you faced problems. I was in a cell with 42 women, 5 of whom were political prisoners. The cell elder was a kindergarten teacher who had beaten a child to death in class. My

child had been taken from me when I was arrested, and I did not get any information. I wondered if my child was in kindergarten and being looked after by such a woman. During my time in remand prison, I had already tried to contact my mother to learn where my child was. I started a hunger strike to get permission to talk to the father of our child. I came to Hoheneck weighing 37 kg (about 81 lbs) and was released after three months because I was not fit for prison, being too thin.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: I have a question about the working conditions. You knew there were different working groups. Did you have the possibility to choose different work?

Answer: This was not possible. In my Stasi file, I found that I was probably once examined by a doctor who suggested a transfer because I was too thin. But that did not happen. I worked for ESDA until the end.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You found out about this only from the file. What was the medical care like when you weren't physically fit? Were you given stimulants? Were there compulsory examinations? Were there gynecological examinations?

Answer: I once contacted the guard during my time in remand prison because of a hole in my tooth and a toothache. The dentist did not find anything during the examination, but I had pain, and he certainly noticed it. Back in the cell, I tried to fill the hole with breadcrumbs. Never again did I want to call for a doctor's appointment. In Hoheneck, there was an initial examination by a gynecologist who did not even change gloves during the examinations of all the women. That was so disgusting and degrading. I never wanted to go to a doctor again.

Two weeks before my release, I was taken to the prison hospital ward, and an untrained prisoner was forced to take my blood. The guards stood by and did not intervene, although she had problems taking

my blood. I don't know why it was taken. Maybe that was also sold for foreign currency. I was then led to the yard, and I blacked out. Another political prisoner who was my friend at that time brought me back to the cell.

Dr. Bath: We have to take a break now because we are behind schedule and the interpreters need a rest. Unfortunately, I cannot allow any further questions. Thank you very much Mrs. Schlegel.

Witness Harald Steffan

Call of the ninth witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born in 1955 and completed the normal 10 classes of school education. I trained as a machine and equipment assembler and did military service with the riot police. I studied mechanical engineering and pedagogics and worked as a teacher for trainees.



Harald Steffan

Because of the Pershing II rocket order and the SS-20 missile stationing in the GDR, I joined the peace movement *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen* (Swords to Ploughshares). My company expected me to turn trainees away from the peace movement, which I refused to do. In 1988, in the middle of the school year, I lost my teaching job and got another job which was not interesting and not useful. There was an employee in my company whom I knew well from the past, and he told me that he had to write reports about me to the Stasi. He also told me that our daughter, who was two at the time, would never get a place at university in the GDR.

My wife and I then decided to apply for a politically motivated visa for leaving the GDR, and we renewed this application every month. In October 1988, we were arrested – me at work and my wife at home. Our child was taken away. Three months in the remand prison in Gera followed, and then I was sentenced to 22 months in prison according to § 219 and 220 of the GDR Penal Code. I was sent to the prison for young peoples named *Frohe Zukunft* (Happy Future) in Halle in January 1989.

Questions

Dr. Bath: We now come to the time for questions. The jury will ask about your prison work for the VEB Schuhfabrik Weißenfels (a shoe factory).

Question from Dr. Li: I have a general question. Dr. Sachse reported earlier that well-known companies from Germany such as ALDI and Kaufhof have imported goods from prison production. Do these companies now participate in the compensation fund or have they at least apologized for it? I think this is important because we are dealing with history that has an impact on the present. In China, goods are still being produced in prison by forced labor, and these goods are sold to the West, including Germany. The IGFM has set up a whole list of goods produced in Chinese prisons and sold abroad. In the United States, in the state of Oregon, a woman found a piece of paper in a product's packaging that said the product had been produced in prison in China by forced labor. If we now appeal to companies to take responsibility, perhaps fewer products will be imported by the West. We should consider this in our tribunal.

Answer: This also applied to our prison. The civilian master craftsman of the shoe factory told us that this was called "contract production" for the Salamander company and that we sewed moccasin seams by hand for children's shoes and shoes for teenagers.

Question from Mr. Smith: At the time you worked in prison, were you aware that the products you made were being sold to the West?

Answer: Yes, we were aware.

Question from Mr. Smith: Can you say anything about the conditions? How were you accommodated? How could you sleep? How many hours? Did you have free time?

Answer: We measured the cell on the basis of the floor tiles; it was about 20 square meters. We were 10 adult men in one cell, with a free-standing toilet bowl, two wash basins, and a walled-in mirror.

The beds were three bunks high. I slept on the top. The beds were very narrow, only about 50 cm wide. Cells were locked at 8 p.m., and the night's rest started at 9. We were woken up at 4 a.m., and work started at 6. During working hours, it was like being outside the prison. We had a 15-minute break for breakfast, and at noon, our 30-man work group had a 30-minute lunch before returning to work.

We had the impression that the youth prison in Halle was completely overcrowded, especially with political prisoners. They spoke of 600 criminal and 700 political prisoners. We worked in a basement – a supply corridor with pipes (water, gas, and electricity). It was totally dirty and had very small windows, about 20 × 40 cm. No daylight could come in, and the lighting inside the room was bad. It was a dark, poorly ventilated space. There were chairs, and in front of each was a cardboard box with the leather parts. We had to sew eight pairs of shafts per day (16 seams for eight pairs of shoes). Working with needle and thread was very difficult for men's hands. The string was very coarse, and we didn't have any finger protection such as shoemakers use for sewing. The first days everything worked quite well, even if we didn't meet the working standard. The quality of the seam was more important than the quantity.

But after a few days, some prisoners had problems, as the thread cut into their hand. Some then tried to sew with their left hand. There was often bleeding, pus, and pain. At some point, it was foreseeable that these relatively simple tasks could no longer be carried out because we were not allowed to wear finger or hand protection. I can remember a prisoner who cried every day because he was afraid he would not be able to play his stringed instrument again as a musician in the philharmonic orchestra. Even for toilet visits we had to contact and be accompanied by the supervisors. You sat all day long. We were not allowed to talk much to each other. It was very dull and painful work.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Were there any accidents at work? Did consequential damage happen to you or other prisoners? It was a

prison especially for young people, as we have heard. What was the situation, since you were an adult?

Answer: It was called a prison for young people, but there were prisoners between the ages of 17 and 60 to 70. I also assume that they did not know where to put the prisoners. The whole prison in Halle was designed to take away your dignity. Forced labor was not the most important thing. I knew of two attempted suicides. I didn't see them, but I understood the context. After one of the attempts, I heard a prison guard sarcastically saying, "If you want to try it again, just let me know and I will bring a rope because you are worth less than a dead dog."

Question from Mr. Vaatz: Was the place of work in Halle or in Weißenfels?

Answer: Halle, the prison. We worked in the prisoner block down in the basement. We were not transported to another work site.

Introduction: Chemical Industry

Dr. Christian Sachse

If you would like to learn more about this topic, you should read Justus Vesting's book *Forced Labor in the Chemical Triangle*. You also have the chance to watch several reports on the chemical industry made by *Report Mainz*.

There was the so-called chlorine production in Bitterfeld, where mercury was used as an auxiliary material. The plants were actually well designed back in the 1920s. But in the 1970s, they were so worn out that the mercury would simply drip out of the machines. Prisoners were forced to use shovels and sweeping brooms to collect the mercury and put it back in buckets. I know of at least three deaths. Since mercury is highly toxic and poisoning cases occurred often, they simply rotated the prisoners. So, there is a high number of former prisoners with latent mercury poisoning. And these mercury poisonings are hardly recognized today, because they are considered unlikely or unreal.

Our witness Mr. Rossmann will certainly be able to say a little more about this.

Witness Holger Rossmann

Call of the 10th witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born on September 9, 1951, in Hagenow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and completed the normal school education. I was supposed to go to the advanced secondary school to take the Abitur (the German general qualification exam for university entrance). But my father had given up his job as a judge at the district court in Hagenow and went to Schwerin as a church lawyer. As a result, I was not admitted to the Abitur. I then completed a vocational training in Teltow near Berlin as an industrial measurement and control technician. This education included passing the Abitur. In 1970, I started studying electrical engineering in Thuringia. During a visit from my sister in Berlin, I got to know her pen friend Christa (a citizen of the FRG). We liked each other and met frequently in Czechoslovakia and in Hungary. In summer 1972, I was on my way to Czechoslovakia and was checked at the border in Oberwiesenthal. They found a letter from Christa. The following week, I was unenrolled from the university because of my relationship with Christa. I had to “prove myself” in production and worked as an electrician in a cotton spinning mill in Mittweida. On September 9, 1972, we got engaged in Karlsbad. After the sudden death of my mother in 1974, the Stasi tried to recruit me. My identity card was confiscated, and I was given a PM12 [restricting travel]. Christa was also not allowed to visit the GDR. In December 1974, I terminated my employment contract and was supposed to start working in a new company on February 11, 1975. On February 4, 1975, I handed in my PM12 to the police and wanted my



Holger Rossmann

regular identity card back. They did not give it to me. I threatened to complain in Berlin.

I was arrested the next morning. During the house search, a letter from Amnesty International to the Soviet Head of State Brezhnev was found, demanding the release of political prisoners. I was accused of subversive agitation and was sent to the remand prison in Karl-Marx-Stadt for three months. The sentence according to § 249 of the GDR Penal Code was one to two years imprisonment. In May 1975, I was sent to the Bitterfeld Prison and started work for Chemiekombinat Bitterfeld (a chemical factory) in aluminum production, a physically hard job. My father died two weeks before he could visit me in prison. I went to the officer and applied to attend the funeral. That was rejected. When I asked him if there was no humanity here, he replied, “None at all.”

A short time later I had to work in chlorine production. That was the worst.

Questions

Dr. Bath: I’m sorry, but I have to stop you here because we have already exceeded the time limit for the introduction. Now we come to the questions by the jury.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Proceedings about your case are before the administrative court, as I have read. Could you say something about it and also about any consequential damages after your time in prison?

Answer: To say something about the damages, we first have to talk about the working conditions. I belonged to the working brigade of locksmiths. In a huge hall, there were tubs of electrolysis baths containing mercury and alkaline solutions. We had to repair pipes and pipelines between the baths and those that ran from the baths to further production. We had to change flanges, for example. The main problem was there were no breathing masks, in case of deflagration

[subsonic explosion] caused by escaping chlorine gas. We all had to run to the side of the hall to get fresh air from barred open windows. At the baths, of course, people wore masks. There were many burns, and it always smelled like chlorine. These tubs had seals that often leaked, and the mercury could simply leak out onto the floor or into the basement, into a gutter with water.

The hall floor was full of cracks, mercury was everywhere, and the high temperatures were extreme. I had to loosen flanges under the containers of electrolysis baths, and I knew that mercury was poisonous, but they did not talk about it. Only prisoners were used for this work; civilian workers did not have to expose themselves to this health hazard, even for a lot of money. That was very inhumane. We prisoners were sent there with the clear knowledge that we definitely would get sick. Small and large burns from leaking alkaline solutions occurred again and again. Balls of mercury were clearly visible on the pipes. People did not dare to breathe, always afraid of getting sick. My sentence was one to two years. I did not know when I would get out of the prison. That was also an additional psychological burden...

Mr. Bath: I am sorry to interrupt you at this point, Mr. Rossmann. We have to keep to our time schedule, and the jury has one more question.

Question from Mr. Vaatz: You spoke about the long-term health consequences. Did you personally have acute accidents at work, and how did the prison react to them?

Answer: I can give you an example. I had to turn off a tap, and the hose that was attached to it came off. My legs were scalded with boiling water. It was winter, and only water was used for cooling. I had to wait until the bus came in the evening to take us back to the prison. There my legs were bandaged, and I had to go back to work the next day. I got chills from this injury and was in the prison hospital for six weeks. One day, a civilian doctor came to replace the prison doctor and asked what they had put on my legs for treatment.

They had used a lotion that treats dermatophyte (fungal infections). Therefore, I was not surprised why it took so long to heal.

Mr. Bath: Thank you very much for your comments, Mr. Rossmann.

Answer: I'd like to add that after my release in 1976, I was allowed to leave the GDR for the FRG. To this day, I am happy that my wife Christa waited for me for so long.

Witness Silvia Krause

Call of the 11th witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born in 1958 in Greiz, Thuringia, went to the POS, and learned the profession of a physiotherapist at a technical school.

You have already met my husband, Harald Steffan.

We applied for a visa to leave the GDR in 1986 and repeated the process several times. In autumn 1988, we were arrested. At that time, I was at home with my two-year-old daughter. We never saw each other again. After being in remand prison in Gera, I was sent to a special prison in Dessau with some special features that I do not want to go into here. That would be too emotional. There were 700 criminal women – long-term and repeat offenders, some of whom had transitioned to being men through hormone treatment. I was one of the 30 political prisoners who had to live quasi–“naked among the wolves” in order to survive. We had to work for the film factory ORWO Wolfen in the production and cutting of magnetic tape for cassettes. Only the political prisoners were allowed to go to the machines, where the chrome dust was unfiltered. I stood at this machine, without any suction device and without protective clothing, eight hours in uncomfortable shoes. No mask, no gloves. A young woman who worked in front of me lost her right arm to the machine’s sharp knives. Chromium dioxide tape arrived like a roll of carpet and was inserted into the machine. It was then cut into small strips of 5mm width with these very sharp knives and wound on large spools, which had to be removed from the machine with bare hands. The whole production process from raw pro-



Silvia Krause

duction to packaging and shipping took place there. We inhaled the dust at work, but it also attached to our clothes, which we also wore in the cells. We had no work clothes. We were an inside unit. The cell was only for 8 women, but, because of overcrowding, the bunk beds were raised and we were 16 in a cell, with one freely accessible toilet and three washbasins. We had our clothes on for 24 hours.

Questions

Mr. Bath: I think that’s enough so far, and we’ll come to the questions of the jury.

Question from Mr. Bada Nam: Was there any sexual harassment or rape that you can report? If you reported them to the guards, were there any improvements in working conditions? Was anything done against it?

Answer: No. [Emotional outburst from the witness.] It was called “self-education or self-justice.” It also happened to me. There was a sanitary room directly connected to the cell... I cannot and do not want to talk about this in detail.

Dr. Bath: Perhaps we should skip this question, which is very upsetting for the witness.

Question from Mr. Smith: You mentioned that the woman directly in front of you had an accident at work and lost her arm. Can you describe how she was treated, and were there any other accidents at work?

Answer: I did not see this woman; I was only told about it. Therefore, I cannot say anything about it. Because of this report, I always took special care; I wanted to go to the West in good health. This was especially difficult during the night shift. I dried breadcrumbs and took them with me as an energy reserve during the night shift.

Mr. Bath: I think we will end the interview here because I realize that you were very moved by it. Many thanks.

Introduction: Deutsche Reichsbahn, Pentacon and Elmo

Dr. Christian Sachse

Deutsche Reichsbahn

Yesterday, we listened to Dr. Kill's lecture on the subject of forced labor at the GDR Reichsbahn (railroad of the GDR). Remember that prisoners were initially used in the construction of new railroad lines. If you read the reports, you know that the accommodation was very poor. In the winter, the prisoners were housed in freight wagons or temporary barracks camps. This situation was not easy and should remind us of one of the Gulag camps in the Soviet Union. The accommodations became somewhat better when fixed labor camps were set up with the so-called yoke assembly stations. There, old rails were dismantled and new ones were assembled. This was physically hard work, and the prisoners were not trained for it, much of the work being done by hand. The third branch of forced labor at the GDR Reichsbahn was the repair and dismantling of freight wagons. These were dismantled and/or repaired with the most primitive means. An example of this is the Brandenburg-Görden Prison, where the Reichsbahn repair plant in Potsdam (RAW Potsdam) built an assembly hall where prisoners had to endure forced labor.

VEB Pentacon

VEB Pentacon Dresden had camera parts produced in the Cottbus prison. The prisoners dealt with housing parts for "Praktica" camera models. The work was relatively simple and rather monotonous, provided one had the right tools. The company VEB Pentacon had commissioned this work as work for civilian workers too. Work in prison was made more difficult, however, by inadequate work safety, and the machines and tools were outdated or unfit for use. And injuries due to the unusable tools were taken for granted, and if accidents

occurred, the prison authorities did not have to take care of the injured. They consciously degraded people here.

Once more, I would like to point out Sprelacart production because this sector is often insufficiently considered. The fact that work was done with carcinogenic substances must be kept in mind and made clear to everybody.

Witness Peter Schneider

Call of the 12th witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born on April 3, 1962, and attended the normal 10-class secondary school from 1969 to 1979. From there, I started my vocational training at Deutsche Reichsbahn as a skilled worker for railroad transport technology in Hettstedt. As a member of the Reichsbahn, I was able to travel by train free of charge, so I travelled around a lot, sometimes to scout ways you could probably leave the GDR. In 1980, I was arrested at the border of Hungary and Yugoslavia and spent six months in remand prison in Halle in the Roter Ochse (remand prison of the Stasi). In mid-December 1980, I was sentenced to two years according to § 213 of the GDR Penal Code (illegal border crossing/escape from the republic). I was sent to the Brandenburg-Görden Prison, probably the largest prison in the GDR, primarily for long-term offenders. We assume about 5% of the population there were political prisoners.



Peter Schneider

Questions

Dr. Bath: Many thanks for the introduction. The jury would now like to ask you about your work in the prison for RAW Potsdam.

Question from Dr. Li: What were the working conditions like?

Answer: I was 18 at the time. I had done my vocational training at the Reichsbahn, which is probably why I was forced to work there. Of course, there would have been other job opportunities in Brandenburg prison. I was young and weighed 50 kg (about 110 lbs). The

work was very hard. We dismantled wooden freight wagons using crowbars, in any weather, for three shifts, with only a helmet for protection.

Additional question from Dr. Li: Were there any accidents at work? How were they treated?

Answer: Once a plank fell on my leg. I was not immediately taken to the doctor. In the evening, I had to march back to the prison with all the others, and only then, I could apply for an appointment at the prison hospital. The leg was x-rayed, and the bone was broken, but nothing could be done. I refused to work once. In very heavy rain the work outside was stopped, and I was supposed to clean the place in the pouring rain because everyone knew that I was a political prisoner. I refused. I was then picked up and had to spend the next several days together with others in a standing cell.

Question from Dr. Li: Was there a hierarchy among the prisoners? Were the political ones at the bottom?

Answer: Yes, absolutely. After a few weeks, a prisoner came up to me and offered to protect me if I would give him my earned money. I accepted that too. As I later learned from the Stasi file, I was actually supposed to be in a special cell for people who refused to work, but in my case, that was considered inappropriate. So, it was just standing arrest, but in this room, you could really only stand and not move. If you fainted, you just tipped to the side.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You mentioned that there were other job opportunities in Brandenburg prison. Did you have a choice?

Answer: I think there was a rather pragmatic approach. Before my imprisonment, I had worked for the Reichsbahn or had done the vocational training in the non-technical field. So, they put me to work for the Reichsbahn.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: But you did not have a free choice?

Answer: No, I didn't.

Question from Mr. Vaatz: I have a question about work organization. You were certainly put together in working groups under a work team leader. Who were your internal supervisors or superiors? Were they exclusively criminal or also political prisoners?

Answer: Maybe. Political prisoners once worked in the prison hospital or at the surgery of the doctor. In 1983, there were only two political prisoners, and we had to do the worst work – what no one else wanted to do.

Question from Mr. Vaatz: Which functions or jobs were assigned? Work team leader? Or room elder?

Answer: We had different departments at work. Workers, to whom I belonged, used a crowbar to break the wooden planks off the wagons. Then followed the welders, who dismantled the wagons into small pieces, which a crane then loaded onto intact wagons. Everyone had their own area. We had no direct superiors. There was a civilian foreman from the Reichsbahn, but he did not interfere with the work processes in the production. We were supervised exclusively by prisoners. We had to work in a three-shift system.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Do you have lingering injuries? How are your proceedings with the administrative court going?

Answer: I have been in proceedings before the State Social Court for 13 years. The hearing was two weeks ago, but it is still without judgment. It was said, however, that a negative decision will certainly be issued, since Saxony-Anhalt, where I live, has not recognized consequential damages for five years. We have to wait for a judgment. We have already found some mistakes, so we will go to the Federal Social Court.

Question from Mr. Heidt: What kind of consequential damages do you have?

Answer: I suffer from psychological problems. At the trial, it didn't matter that I was a pensioner – unable to work for 10 years – or that I

am severely handicapped up to 50%. My lawyer is also of the opinion we should go to the Federal Social Court.

Question from Dr. Pinerová: Were there any penalties for not meeting the working standards?

Answer: We had no working standards. Sometimes there were also no wagons to be dismantled. Refusal to work was punished, as I have already reported, but we did not have any standards.

Dr. Bath: Thank you very much, Mr. Schneider.

Witness Thomas Schlegel

Call of the 13th witness by Dr. Bath (chairman of the jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born in Jena in 1961. I attended the POS from 1968 to 1978. Afterwards, I completed my vocational training and worked as a tiler.

At the age of 12, I learned that my aunt and uncle were being arrested for smuggling GDR citizens to the West. This had an impact on me and influenced my political attitude toward the GDR. As my wife, Elke Schlegel, explained earlier, we submitted our first application to leave the GDR in 1983, but it was rejected several times. We then got permission to leave the country and were sitting on packed suitcases when we were arrested on March 28, 1984, and taken to the remand prison in Gera. I spent three months there. In June 1984, I was sentenced to a one-and-a-half year imprisonment according to § 219 of the GDR Penal Code. I was then brought to the prison in Cottbus, which I did not know until I arrived at the cell block. In the cell, the hierarchy was immediately made clear to me because I was the only political prisoner. I had the top bed of the three-story bed and was not allowed to touch the beds below it, but I had to get into bed somehow. I had to work for the VEB Pentacon. I found the work very boring and asked the room elder to stand up for me so that I could be assigned another job since I knew that there was also a construction team. The other inmates from the cell beat me in the chest, and I was told I had to stay with them and not spoil their work standard because all of them enjoyed some privileges.



Thomas Schlegel

Questions

Dr. Bath: Thank you very much. The jury will now interview you.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: You said you were the only political prisoner in your cell. And the other prisoners could have also arranged for you to join another work team?

Answer: That is correct. The room elder had good contact with the security personnel.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Were you sentenced specifically to forced labor?

Answer: No.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: So, you had no chance to choose another job or to work in your profession? And you were subordinated to the prison regime by the other prisoners?

Answer: That is correct.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: What would have happened if you had refused to work?

Answer: Writing letters, a stay outdoor in the yard, visiting hours, or parcels would not have been allowed. I could also have been sentenced to solitary confinement.

Question from Dr. Li: I did not understand the circumstances concerning the work standard. Did the norm apply to the whole cell? Or individually for every single person?

Answer: The norm applied to each person individually. But if one of the cell members did not meet the norm, all cell inmates were punished. The room elder took great care to ensure that everyone fulfilled the plan. I probably fulfilled the plan only on the first day.

Question from Dr. Bath: You have reported that if you would refuse to work, a so-called collective punishment would have been imposed. Have you become aware of cases of refusal to work?

Answer: No. I was in Cottbus for only four months. I was ransomed and moved to the FRG.

Question from Mr. Heidt: I have a question about consequential damages. You have stated that a procedure before the administrative court has been running since 2013. What is the current status?

Answer: In 2018, post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized. I am severely handicapped up to 50%. I still suffer from insomnia, photophobia, and noise sensitivity.

Mr. Bath: Thank you very much for your precise statements.

Witness Birgit Krüger

Call of the 14th witness by Dr. Bath (Chairman of the Jury)

Short personal introduction

I was born in Zeitz in 1945, attended the POS, and then completed vocational training as a chemical laboratory assistant in 1964. After that, I worked in Schwedt for two years. Then I met my husband in Berlin, and we moved to Berlin after our marriage in 1966. We have two children. It was only in Berlin, where the border to the West was obvious to me, that I became aware of the situation. In my husband's family, the West always played a big role. My husband had made an escape attempt in 1963, which failed, and he was sentenced to a probationary sentence. Since we had two children, escape to the West was out of the question for me. When the GDR joined the UN in 1973 and signed the UN Charter, it provided the basis for a legal departure, and we applied for a visa to leave the GDR. We submitted a total of four applications. Because of this, I had a weekly meeting in my company (I was working as a laboratory assistant the whole time), where they tried to dissuade me from our plan. But when there was no reply to our applications for a visa, we wrote to the IGFM in Frankfurt/Main and to the UN (to Dr. Kurt Waldheim).



Birgit Krüger

My husband was a cab driver, and some of the letters were sent not by mail but via passengers from the West. We even received a reply that our request was forwarded to the UN Commission on Subsidiary Discrimination based in Switzerland, and that we were officially registered there. Later I learned that the Stasi had knowledge of these letters. During spring of 1977, a letter arrived with news that we should be optimistic and that our departure would soon be ap-

proved. But it did not come to that. On October 24, 1977, we were arrested, I at work, my husband at home, and we spent seven months in the remand prison in Berlin Pankow. We were sentenced to two years and three months imprisonment according to § 100 of the GDR Penal Code (subversive connections), § 106 (subversive incitement to hatred), and § 214 (interference with the activities of state organizations). I went to Hoheneck women's prison, and my husband to Cottbus. At Hoheneck, I had to work for the VEB Ellmo Thurm. We worked on metal motor housings for washing machines.

Questions

Dr. Barth: Many thanks for the introduction. The last thing you said brings us back to the subject of forced labor in GDR prisons. I would ask the jury for their questions.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: What was your working day like?

Answer: We worked in a three-shift system, and there was also a shift on some Saturdays. Many extra shifts had to be worked. We worked in the prison's poorly ventilated basement. We had to use a lift truck to get the boxes with the machine parts, and all parts were stamped with a prisoner number. Then we went to the lathe. I weighed 53 kg (about 117 lbs) at that time. It was hot with bad air, metal chips flew around, and you spoiled and tore your clothes and caused burn marks. Then, I had to take the parts to the drill to drill holes of 10 mm and then to cut threads. All of this was done on a piecework basis. One could not choose any other work. I suffered my first prolapsed intervertebral disc in prison, and I had my first surgery half a year after my release. Since then, I've had four disc surgeries.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you receive medication in prison for this (which was certainly painful)?

Answer: In the prison hospital, the first question was "Will you stay in the country after your release or are you going to leave the country?" When I answered that I wanted to leave the GDR, they gave me an injection, which was very painful. Later, in the Stasi files, I read

that I had been prescribed physiotherapy and that I had been given a less heavy job. I don't know where in Hoheneck such a possibility existed. I did not receive any more painkillers – only these injections in the prison hospital, where I stayed for a week. After this week, I had to work full-time again.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Were you able to take breaks at work?

Answer: We had a break. We usually spent this break at the tap in the toilet because everyone was thirsty. Tea was available only during the night shift. We also smoked during the break at an open window.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: What about safety instructions?

Answer: There were none. We didn't have safety glasses, not even on the drills where hot chips were flying. We wore our normal clothes. We only had cold water for washing, and once a week we were allowed a hot shower. We had dirt and oil on our hands and clothes from work. If you didn't meet the work standard, they even banned you from showering. When the plan figures were not met, then the alimony amount for the children was reduced. My children were with my parents-in-law, and part of my wage was withheld for them. After my release from prison, I learned that no money for the children arrived from me, only from my husband from Cottbus. I don't know where the money went.

Question from Ms. Ottmann: Did you receive pay slips?

Answer: I happened to see a pay slip once. Normally, in civilian life, I would have earned about 600 GDR marks. Here in prison, we received 18–20 GDR marks.

Question: Were your children allowed to come during "visiting hours"?

Answer: No. My daughter was 9 years old and my son was 11 years old when we were imprisoned. They were not allowed to visit us. I did not see my children for two years. That was actually the worst thing, and children were the greatest means of pressure. Any mother will understand that. Beatings were not necessary as punishment.

Question from Dr. Li: The work was dangerous. Did you receive training for it?

Answer: For this work? No. I didn't. I was a chemical laboratory assistant. I had never worked on machines before.

Question from Dr. Li: So, there was no instruction or guidance?

Answer: Not at all. On the machine next to me, a female prisoner worked, who had already been in prison for 16 years for murdering a child. She helped me – maybe from pity – and worked on some parts from my box so that I was better at meeting the standard. Of course, nobody was allowed to know it.

Question from Dr. Pinerová: Were there any opportunities for active recovery from work?

Answer: No. It was particularly bad after the night shift. You fell asleep right away, but the loudspeaker was on all day with either music or various commands. Then, laundry was brought to the cell, or there was a command to line up, and everyone had to participate. No care was taken. So, there was no rest. You were allowed to lie down on the bed only after the night shift but not during the day.

Question from Mr. Heidt: Do you have any consequential damages from your time in prison? I read that a procedure before the administrative court ran from January 28, 2002 to July 10, 2020. What can you say about that?

Answer: I had applied for a compensation. I have had cancer, a pacemaker, and a kidney disease. I have received a recognition of a severe disability up to 30%, which improves my pension a bit. However, a recognition of consequential damages was rejected again.

Dr. Bath: Thank you, Mrs. Krüger, for your statement. We have come to the end of our agenda today, and I hereby declare the interviews closed.

The End of the Witness Questioning

Dieter Dombrowski

Dear members of the jury and participants of our tribunal,

The jury will now make an initial consultation, and I would like to say a few words to them.

I am also a former political prisoner, but with this compactness and concentration of the reports by the witnesses, this is the last straw, as the saying goes. I am sure that the jury in its discussions will come to the conclusion that the forced labor of political prisoners in the GDR cannot be considered normal. But what is also important and has been raised in many testimonies is the issue of recognizing consequential damages, especially psychological damages. Of course, the jury is free to make its own decision, but I would be glad if this issue was also taken into account. I have also presented this again and again in various meetings at the Bundestag. Even if we in Germany have difficulties with comparisons between the Nazi dictatorship and the SED dictatorship, it is still the case that if Nazi victims had been in prison for at least one year, they do not need to provide evidence when claiming damages to their health. This is recognized by law. This is different with the victims of the SED dictatorship, which we have heard again and again today. It is not reasonable to expect former political prisoners to have to spend the rest of their lives in court.

Another important fact: What is being done here today is also watched all over the world, not only because we have a livestream, but also because many people and companies are interested. We as SED victims and victims of communism have no unfeasible demands. It is about dignity, respect, and recognition. And nobody expects that, in the end, a kind of forced laborer pension will come out. That is not the point.

But let us take IKEA, for example. We had meetings four years ago, and studies were made at IKEA, and the company agreed to make a

two-digit-million amount available for compensation. Dr. Kill spoke in her lecture about the Deutsche Reichsbahn, about the fact that Deutsche Bahn sees themselves as morally obligated, but they have a partner: the FRG government. So, my request to the politicians of the German Bundestag is that if we want to be successful here and collect money from the business world for some kind of compensation fund, then it will work only if we get support from the political level nationwide.

A twitter message from IKEA today says the following: “IKEA apologizes for the fact that contrary to strict guidelines, IKEA products were manufactured by forced labor in the GDR.” IKEA has been contributing to the process of dealing with this topic for years and supports a compensation scheme initiated by politicians that is binding for all companies. If such a large company is willing to do something, then I ask that the politicians at the German Bundestag give us support and talk about how all those involved can be helped.

I would like to thank everyone who prepared this event, the staff of the UOKG and the Human Rights Center Cottbus. The technical aspects were organized and very professional. And the preparatory work, the discussions with the contemporary witnesses, the preparation of the documents for the jury – that is all a lot of work to make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible. On behalf of everyone, I would like to thank our project manager, Sandra Czech.



Dieter Dombrowski
and Sandra Czech

‘Lindenhof’: from the Everyday Life of a Prisoner

Dr. Lothar Aust - saxophonist, musical impressions

With his musical impressions from the “Lindenhof” – as the prisoners called the Stasi remand prison in Potsdam – Lothar Aust ensured calm and reflection after the disturbing reports of the witnesses of the forced labor. He spoke from the heart to all those who had to get to know the interior of the cells first-hand.



Dr. Lothar Aust

Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor

September 13, 2020, MRZ Pentacon-Halle

After a welcome from Mr. Benjamin Baumgart and a brief introduction from the expert jury to the journalists at the tribunal, the chairman of the jury, Dr. Matthias Bath, published the “Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor,” which was drawn up by the expert jury in internal consultations.

Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor from September 13, 2020

From September 11 to 13, 2020, a tribunal on the subject of Forced Labor in Political Imprisonment in the GDR took place in the Cottbus Human Rights Center, the former East German Cottbus Prison, at the invitation of the Union of Victims Associations of Communist Tyranny (UOKG).

An international jury was faced with the task of determining “whether characteristics of forbidden forced labor and exploitation according to internationally recognized definitions” were fulfilled with regard to political prisoners of the SED dictatorship.

The jury heard several specialist lectures on the definition of forced labor, its prohibition under international law, and the basics of forced labor of political prisoners in the GDR in various branches of industry.

The jury also interviewed 14 former political prisoners (4 women and 10 men) who, during their imprisonment, were used for forced labor in different companies and industries and at different times in the GDR.

After the lectures and the questioning of contemporary witnesses, the jury came to the conclusion that the GDR penal system was one

of the largest employers within the state-planned economy of the GDR. The GDR penal system and its facilities maintained a nationwide network where GDR companies could take advantage of the existing work obligations of prisoners. Many of the products created in prisons were intended for exports to the non-socialist economic area.

International law states that forced labor can only be sentenced by the court on an individual basis. This did not take place in the GDR.

Prisoners could not choose their job; their professional qualifications were not taken into account. Instead, they were called upon to work solely according to the specifications of the national economic plan and the work available in their prison. In many cases, the statutory provisions on health and safety at work that were otherwise applicable in the GDR were not complied with in the prisons. The inmates had to work longer than civilian employees in normal factories. As a rule, the penal institutions also worked around the clock in three shifts. In addition, physically difficult and health-hazardous jobs were often carried out in prisons. There was a lack of work clothes and protective measures to prevent accidents at work. The accident rate was much higher than in normal industrial companies. In addition, medical care after occupational accidents was often inadequate.

In cases of doubt, the prisoners’ duty to work was enforced with severe sanctions, arrest sentences, and even physical violence in the event of under-compliance or refusal to work. The witnesses reported, among other things, a writing ban, beatings, threats with consequences for their children, and being taken to standing cells. In addition, this forced labor was generally inadequately paid. Thus, the characteristics of forced labor are fulfilled.

The GDR violated all international agreements of the United Nations and the International Labor Organization to suppress and outlaw forced labor and did not even grant its prisoners the minimum

principles of the United Nations for the treatment of prisoners, even though it had acceded to this latter agreement.

Even if the Federal Republic of Germany cannot be regarded in general as the legal successor of the GDR, the values of the Basic Law and Article 17 of the Unification Treaty of August 31, 1990 result in a legal obligation to conduct political reappraisal of SED injustices and to create appropriate compensation regulations for the victims of the SED dictatorship.

The overwhelming majority of the former political prisoners of the GDR have been compensated for the *imprisonment* they suffered through criminal rehabilitation.

However, in sharp contrast to this is the inappropriate treatment of claims for compensation, and the duration of the corresponding proceedings. These compensation regulations do not cover the *forced labor* and the resulting psychological and physical health damage suffered, in addition to the mere imprisonment, so there is a need for further regulation.

In order to simplify the recognition of consequential damage from GDR imprisonment and the forced labor suffered there, a standard presumption in favor of the victims of the SED dictatorship should be introduced or the burden of proof should be reversed in the sense of the regulation of the Federal Compensation Act (BEG).

In addition, an independent fund should be created for compensation or reparation payments for the benefit of former forced laborers. The beneficiaries of political forced labor in the GDR and their legal successors are to make payments to this fund. In the interests of the victims, all political decision-makers are called upon to promote this process.

We welcome IKEA's willingness to participate in this fund. We urge companies and politicians to follow this example.

The foundation for Political Prisoners or the East German Forced Labor Foundation could be considered responsible for the administration of this fund to be created.

In view of the advanced age of the affected people, this fund should be created quickly.

Cottbus, September 13, 2020


The Jury


Dr. Matthias Bath


Peter Heide (MdB)


Prof. Dr. Huige Li


Bada Nam


Carla Ottmann


Dr. Klára Pinerová


Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirmmayer


Marion Smith


Arnold Vaatz (MdB)

Closing Words

Dieter Dombrowski, chairman of the UOKG

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear jury,

I would like to thank the members of the jury once again. They spent two days dealing with the topic of forced labor in GDR prisons, prepared themselves, and made an appropriate and courageous vote, which we hope will not remain without consequences in politics. And I am also pleased that the company IKEA was expressly mentioned here because yesterday, as I would like to mention once again, a Twitter message arrived that they are willing to participate in a compensation fund. That is very courageous. They have my respect for that.

Although we already knew a lot, the hearing of the contemporary witnesses was very impressive. Many thanks to the witnesses for having, as we say, turned their innermost thoughts to the outside. That was very important for the jury to perceive their consternation. I think that these testimonies will continue to have an effect on all of us and also on the members of the jury.

We thank the Cottbus Human Rights Center for allowing us to meet here. By chance I am also its chairman, so I feel at home here. I would also like to thank the two members of the German Bundestag because, as a long-standing member of the Brandenburg Parliament, I know how much pressure is currently being exerted on the members of parliament at the federal level, and yet you took the time to spend two days here for our event. For this, you do not receive the Federal Cross of Merit but our sincere thanks.

I would also like to address a request to the former political prisoners who are present here. In the past days, we have talked about the events in Belarus several times. And with the people here who spoke

on behalf of many GDR citizens who have suffered injustice, we want to send an appeal of solidarity to the Belarusians, which I want to give to the ambassador or to the embassy of Belarus next week, if you agree.

Appeal to the Ambassador of Belarus

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

At a congress held in the former Cottbus prison and named for its subject, Forced Labor in Political GDR Detention, the former GDR political prisoners who were present decided on the following appeal to your government. We would like to ask you to pass on this appeal.

Appeal of Solidarity

We, the former political prisoners of the GDR, appeal to the government of the Republic of Belarus to release all political prisoners in Belarus immediately and to allow the start of a dialogue demanded by the people. We, the Germans, know what it means when a nation is divided. Please do not allow the people of Belarus to be divided in the disputes about the future of the country. Please help the people of the Republic of Belarus decide their future in freedom.

On behalf of the former political prisoners,

Dieter Dombrowski

Appendix

Initiatives and Events

Below are some important events and press reports on forced labor in the GDR. For important publications, see “Publications” in this reader. (Compiled by Christian Sachse)

Part 1: 1949 to 1989

January 29, 1949: *Der Spiegel* reports on Wolfgang Natonek’s sentencing to forced labor. *Der Spiegel* reported several times on forced labor in the Soviet Zone/GDR and on the countries of the Soviet sphere of influence. (*Der Spiegel* No. 5/1949)

May 23, 1951: *Der Spiegel* No. 21/1951 reports in detail on forced labor in the Soviet camps (including Karaganda).

March 27, 1952: The Bundestag receives a report from the Committee for All-German Issues, which names young people who have been tried by Soviet and German courts for political resistance. The young people were sentenced to forced labor. (German Bundestag 1st electoral period 1949, printed matter No. 3256: Written report on efforts to release young people imprisoned for political reasons in the Soviet occupation zone.)

November 12, 1952: Publication of Hartwig Bülck’s habilitation thesis “Forced Labor in International Peace Law,” which is unsurpassed in the German-speaking area to this day. (See list of publications.)

June 1953: Publication of the investigation report of the Economic and Social Council of the UN: “In the Soviet Union and in the ‘people’s democracies,’ forced labor is systematically used.” (See documents.)

August 30, 1955: The 1st United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders in Geneva in 1955 adopts the minimum principles for the treatment of prisoners. (See documents.)

June 13, 1956: Germany joins ILO Convention No. 29 “Convention on Forced Labor” of 1930. (See documents.)

June 22, 1959: The Federal Republic of Germany joins ILO Convention 105, which forbids forced labor for political prisoners. (See documents.)

1967: Amnesty International publishes a brochure about prisoner work in the GDR. Quote: “We believe we are justified in stating that in all penal institutions in the GDR such pressure is exerted on the prisoners that one has to speak of a forced labor system.” (Politische Gefangene in der DDR. Ed.: Amnesty International, London, 1967)

September 9, 1978: In a question to the Federal Government, the Bundestag member Ottfried Hennig (CDU/CSU) points out that the GDR has not acceded to ILO Convention 105 and that illegal forced labor would continue there. (German Bundestag 8th electoral term Drucksache 8/2147 09/29/78)

November 15, 1979: The Bundestag member Hans Graf Huyn (CDU/CSU) quotes the secret anthem of the Cottbus prisoners in the plenary debate of the Bundestag. “It is the Cottbus prison / symbol of socialism / in action.” He cites examples from GDR prisons where it is proven that political prisoners were forced to work. He names Nico Hübener by name. (Contribution to the plenary debate on November 15, 1979)

September 8, 1982: A hearing before the committee for intra-German relations discusses forced labor among other things. (Elaboration of the WD of the Bundestag on GDR prisoner work WD 1-3000-159/12)

October 15, 1982: The Quelle company promises, in a letter to the International Society for Human Rights on October 15, 1982, “to work towards ensuring that no political prisoners are used in the production of goods that are delivered to Quelle.” (Rbb broadcast “Klartext” from July 9, 2002)

March 25, 1983: Western newspapers report on deaths from mercury poisoning among prisoners in the Bitterfeld Chemical Combine. Example: Article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) from March 25, 1983: “Death Command” in Bitterfeld.

1984: A hearing organized by the International Society for Human Rights discusses forced labor, among other things. (Elaboration of the WD of the Bundestag on GDR prisoner work WD 1-3000-159/12)

1986: Publication of the brochure of the International Society for Human Rights from 1986 on the basis of 135 interviews. (See list of publications.)

1986: A hearing, which was organized by “calls for help from over there,” addresses forced labor, among other things. (Elaboration of the WD of the Bundestag on GDR prisoner work WD 1-3000-159/12)

Part 2: 1990 to the present

February 1990: The WDR broadcasts a report about the forced labor in the women’s prison Hoheneck and shows the production rooms for the companies ESDA and Planet.

March 12, 1990: *Der Spiegel* reports under the title “Splitternackt im Trellier” on forced labor in the GDR. Quote: “And as if the human dragging of the slave laborers in large-scale industry had long been forgotten during the Nazi regime, 16 of these prisons are even affiliated to GDR companies.” (*Der Spiegel* No. 11/1990)

November 27, 1990: The former political prisoner Jürgen Wenzel demands that Elektromotoren GmbH (formerly VEB ELMO) pay back the wages for the forced labor he had performed. ELMO GmbH assures Wenzel of the “fullest understanding” but denies any responsibility. The Elektro-Apparate-Werke Berlin reacts in exactly the same way. (UOKG archive, made available by J. Wenzel)

March 1992: The study commission set up by the Federal Government in March 1992 to “come to terms with the history and consequences of the SED dictatorship” does not take the subject of “forced labor” into consideration.

October 19, 1992: Xing-Hu Kuo, who had to do seven years of forced labor as a political prisoner in Bautzen, sues the Saxon state government for damages amounting to millions. According to *Der Spiegel*, the Berlin regional court rules “that the PDS, as the legal successor to the SED, must basically compensate political prisoners. The prerequisite, however, is that the prison victims can prove that they had been sentenced “on the instructions of the SED.” Because Kuo is unable to prove this, the district court dismisses the suit. (*Der Spiegel* No. 29/1992 and 43/1992)

1994: The political magazine *Kontraste* reports on prisoners in the chlorine plants Buna and Bitterfeld. (Borgmann, Reinhard; Meesmann Florian: “Poison in prison,” in *Kontraste* 1994)

May 10–11, 2002: Schwerin conference on GDR forced labor and compensation. Initiator: Jürgen Schmidt-Pohl (See list of publications.)

July 9, 2002: More than 200 former political prisoners announce a lawsuit according to Rbb, broadcast clear text, an announcement of 200 forced laborers.

May 31, 2004: Christina Krahnert writes to the Petitions Committee of the Bundestag in order to obtain compensation for forced labor in the GDR. Other members of the group of plaintiffs for compensation for forced labor in the GDR submit pertinent petitions. (Christina Krahnert archive)

2005: The International Society for Human Rights publishes an expanded edition of its brochure on the prison conditions of political prisoners in the GDR based on 135 interviews. (See list of publications.)

2006: Alexander Latotzky publishes a list of companies for which prisoners in the GDR had to do forced labor. (*Der Stacheldraht* No. 8/2006)

February 13, 2012: The Scientific Services of the Bundestag investigate GDR prisoner labor and come to the conclusion that the term *forced labor* is appropriate. (See list of publications; WD 1-3000-159/12)

May 17, 2012: Deutsche Welle publishes a contribution by the Swedish journalist Björn Thunbäck about forced labor of GDR prisoners for IKEA.

June 6, 2012: The UOKG board proposes a project to IKEA Deutschland GmbH to research forced labor in the GDR. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

November 16, 2012: At a joint event by UOKG and BStU, IKEA presents the first results of research on forced labor by Ernst & Young. The results are generally felt to be unsatisfactory. The most important result, however, is the apology to the forced laborers who had to work for IKEA, presented by Peter Betzel, Managing Director of IKEA Germany. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

November 29, 2012: The magazine *Der Stacheldraht* criticizes the results of the talks between UOKG and IKEA under the heading “It was not enough.” What is required: 1. an extensive research project, 2. statements from politics and business, and 3. decisions on compensation. (*Der Stacheldraht* No. 9/2012)

November 30, 2012: MdB Patrick Kuhrt, on behalf of the FDP parliamentary group in the Bundestag, holds a public hearing on forced labor in the GDR penal system. Invited are Christian Sachse (UOKG), Roland Jahn (BStU), Steffen Alisch (FU-Berlin), Hugo Diederich (VOS), Günter Saathof (Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future; Stiftung Erinnerung Verantwortung und Zukunft), Karin Schmidt (lawyer/author), and Anna Kaminski (Foundation Work-Up; Stiftung Aufarbeitung).

January 14, 2013: The UOKG develops a research concept on forced labor in the GDR. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

March 1, 2013: Official start of the research project “GDR Forced Labor” by the UOKG. Christian Sachse is the project manager. IKEA financed the project with 120,000 euros. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

March 19, 2013: The UOKG starts questioning former prisoners about forced labor. By July 2020, 618 detailed written statements were available. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

Oktober 26, 2013: The UOKG organizes a congress on the subject of “Deficits in rehabilitation and compensation.” Christian Sachse gives the lecture “Forced to work – where was the money?” (UOKG archive)

November 21, 2013: The journalist Isabel Fannrich (Deutschlandfunk) reports for the first time in detail about forced labor in the detention centers Cottbus, Hoheneck, and “Frohe Zukunft” Halle/Saale. (*Mediathek Deutschlandfunk*, “Everything according to plan”) Fannrich then reports at regular intervals.

January 14, 2014: *Report Mainz* (Claudia Butter, Achim Reinhardt) reports for the first time on the profits of West German companies in the exploitation of GDR forced laborers (cf. *Report Mainz* Mediathek). *Report* kept reporting new details in the following years.

June 16, 2014: The UOKG publishes its research report on forced labor in the Soviet occupation zone/GDR with the attention of the international press. It makes seven demands for further work, including further research, negotiations with involved companies and their apology, and the formation of a compensation fund. (See scientific archive of the UOKG.) In the following time events take place, among others in Halle/Saale, Berlin, Frankfurt/O, Ichtershaußen, Maxhütte.

September 20, 2014: UOKG Congress: “We talk about forced labor.” (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

September 25, 2014: Symposium of the working group “Processing and Law.” Prof. Johannes Weberling on legal aspects of forced labor. The results will be published in a conference volume by Nomos-Verlag. (See list of publications.)

November, 13–14, 2014: Halle Forum 2014 in the Roter Ochse in Halle/Saale on the subject of “Forced Labor in Prison in the GDR.” (UOKG archive)

November 29, 2014: After negotiations between the UOKG and railway boss Rüdiger Grube, Grube apologized to the forced laborers of the Reichsbahn of the GDR. He announces a research project on forced labor at the GDR’s Deutsche Reichsbahn, which is being carried out with the cooperation of the UOKG. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

February 2015: The UOKG writes to Western companies that could have been involved in the forced labor of political prisoners. In their answers, the companies consistently emphasize that they did not know anything about it. There are various one-on-one discussions in which companies suggest they want to pay money into a fund without wanting to take on responsibility in the legal sense. The following (or their successors) were written to: Aldi Nord und Süd,

Baur Versand, C & A, Deutsche Bahn AG, Hertie, Kaufhof, LMBV, MIMBRAGG, Otto-Versand, Quelle, Sprela, Vattenfall, and Woolworth. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

June 22, 2015: The Federal Government Commissioner for the New States, State Secretary Iris Gleicke, presents her report on forced labor in the GDR. The author Jan Phillipp Wölbern confirms the research results of the UOKG. (See list of publications.)

November 11, 2015: The exhibition “Hammer Zirkel Bareldraht” opens in the Magdeburg State Parliament building. It is a joint project of the state commissioner for the records of the state security, the state center for political education of Saxony-Anhalt. The exhibition was realized by Christian Sachse (UOKG). The exhibition is shown all over Germany to this day.

April 20, 2016: Deutsche Bahn presents its research report on forced labor on the Deutsche Reichsbahn in the GDR. The authors are Kill, Susanne; Kopper, Christopher; Peters, and Jan-Henrik. (See list of publications.)

June 2016: At the invitation of Jutta Fleck (Hessian State Center for Political Education), a long-term project on forced labor in the GDR begins at Hessian schools. (Authors: Jutta Fleck, Christian Sachse, Anne Worst)

June 24, 2017: Establishment of the Foundation Association of GDR Forced Labor. The association sets itself the task of helping political prisoners of the SED dictatorship to gain material and ideal support. The association is recognized as a non-profit organization. IKEA supports the establishment with a share capital of 50,000 euros.

January 17, 2018: The UOKG states that the former political prisoners of the SED dictatorship have a historical right to the assets accumulated in the West by the SED, the so-called PMO funds. UOKG calls on the former inmates to write to their MPs and prime minister to reiterate their claim. The UOKG applies for PMO funds for the compensation of forced laborers in all federal states. The UOKG also addresses the federal chancellor and other federal politicians. A payout for this purpose is flatly refused. After all, this gives rise to suggestions for the hardship funds of various federal states. The UOKG is leaked documents that prove that PMO money is allocated for absurd purchases (e.g., electric grills for Berlin parks).

June 2, 2018: Petition for justice for SED victims regarding forced labor of political prisoners in the GDR is sent to the petitions committee of the German Bundestag with the request to pay the victims adequate compensation for the injustice suffered and to create the legal requirements for such.

June 8, 2018: The Deutsche Bahn Museum in Nuremberg opens a new section on the Deutsche Reichsbahn, which also deals with the forced labor of GDR prisoners. Two contemporary witnesses who had to do forced labor in the Reichsbahn repair shop in Brandenburg present testimony. A piece of barbed wire belonging to a political prisoner is a reminder of the injustice committed at the time. Also shown is a cell in the Brandenburg-Görden prison and the Wülknitz yoke assembly area.

June 28, 2018: Member of the Bundestag Kai Wegner (CDU) demands that there must not be a line in dealing with the GDR forced labor. He calls on the Governing Mayor of Berlin to set up a hardship fund for victims of the SED dictatorship. (Scientific archive of the UOKG)

August 2019: The UOKG applies to Minister of State Grütters (Federal Ministry of Culture and Media) to finance a tribunal for GDR forced labor. The BKM supports the tribunal financially with more than 50,000 euros. This includes increased costs due to the coronavirus pandemic.

ILO-Convention No. 105

(Prohibition of forced labor for political prisoners)

INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION

Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957

This Convention entered into force on January 17, 1959.

Location: Geneva

Conference: 40

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20131029200949/http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB%3A12100%3A0%3A%3ANO%3A12100%3AP12100_ILO_CODE%3AC105

The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation,

Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, and having met in its Fortieth Session on 5 June 1957, and

Having considered the question of forced labour, which is the fourth item on the agenda of the session, and

Having noted the provisions of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, and

Having noted that the Slavery Convention, 1926, provides that all necessary measures shall be taken to prevent compulsory or forced labour from developing into conditions analogous to slavery and that the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956, provides for the complete abolition of debt bondage and serfdom, and

Having noted that the Protection of Wages Convention, 1949, provides that wages shall be paid regularly and prohibits methods of payment which deprive the worker of a genuine possibility of terminating his employment, and

Having decided upon the adoption of further proposals with regard to the abolition of certain forms of forced or compulsory labour constituting a violation of the rights of man referred to in the Charter of the United Nations and enunciated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of an international Convention,

adopts this twenty-fifth day of June of the year one thousand nine hundred and fifty-seven the following Convention, which may be cited as the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957:

Article 1

Each Member of the International Labour Organisation which ratifies this Convention undertakes to suppress and not to make use of any form of forced or compulsory labour--

- (a) as a means of political coercion or education or as a punishment for holding or expressing political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social or economic system;
- (b) as a method of mobilising and using labour for purposes of economic development;
- (c) as a means of labour discipline;
- (d) as a punishment for having participated in strikes;
- (e) as a means of racial, social, national or religious discrimination.

Article 2

Each Member of the International Labour Organisation which ratifies this Convention undertakes to take effective measures to secure the immediate and complete abolition of forced or compulsory labour as specified in Article 1 of this Convention.

Article 3

The formal ratifications of this Convention shall be communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration.

Article 4

1. This Convention shall be binding only upon those Members of the International Labour Organisation whose ratifications have been registered with the Director-General.
2. It shall come into force twelve months after the date on which the ratifications of two Members have been registered with the Director-General.
3. Thereafter, this Convention shall come into force for any Member twelve months after the date on which its ratification has been registered.

Article 5

1. A Member which has ratified this Convention may denounce it after the expiration of ten years from the date on which the Convention first comes into force, by an act communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration. Such denunciation shall not take effect until one year after the date on which it is registered.
2. Each Member which has ratified this Convention and which does not, within the year following the expiration of the period of ten years mentioned in the preceding paragraph, exercise the right of denunciation provided for in this Article, will be bound for another period of ten years and, thereafter, may denounce this Convention at the expiration of each period of ten years under the terms provided for in this Article.

Article 6

1. The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall notify all Members of the International Labour Organisation of the registration of all ratifications and denunciations communicated to him by the Members of the Organisation.
2. When notifying the Members of the Organisation of the registration of the second ratification communicated to him, the Director-General shall draw the attention of the Members of the Organisation to the date upon which the Convention will come into force.

Article 7

The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall communicate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for registration in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations full particulars of all ratifications and acts of denunciation registered by him in accordance with the provisions of the preceding Articles.

Article 8

At such times as it may consider necessary the Governing Body of the International Labour Office shall present to the General Conference a report on the working of this Convention and shall examine the desirability of placing on the agenda of the Conference the question of its revision in whole or in part.

Article 9

1. Should the Conference adopt a new Convention revising this Convention in whole or in part, then, unless the new Convention otherwise provides:
 - (a) the ratification by a Member of the new revising Convention shall ipso jure involve the immediate denunciation of this Convention, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 5 above, if and when the new revising Convention shall have come into force;
 - (b) as from the date when the new revising Convention comes into force this Convention shall cease to be open to ratification by the Members.
2. This Convention shall in any case remain in force in its actual form and content for those Members which have ratified it but have not ratified the revising Convention.

Article 10

The English and French versions of the text of this Convention are equally authoritative.

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Source: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/ILO_Convention_29.pdf

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No 78: Secondly, the labour must be imposed as a result of a conviction “in a court of law.” Compulsory labour imposed by administrative or other non-judicial bodies or authorities is not compatible with the Convention. In stipulating a decision by a court of law, the Convention aimed at ensuring that penal labour would not be imposed unless the guarantees laid down in the general principles of law recognised by the community of nations were observed, such as the presumption of innocence, equality before the law, regularity and impartiality of proceedings, independence and impartiality of courts, guarantees necessary for defence, non-retroactivity and clear definition of criminal law.

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German Abbreviations

BIP	Gross domestic product: Bruttoinlandsprodukt
BKM	Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media: Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien
COOP	Corporation of supermarkets in West Germany
ELMO	Company in the GDR: VEB Elektromotorenwerk (ELMO) Dessau (DDR)
EOS	Secondary School in the GDR, Erweiterte Oberschule
ESDA	Company in the GDR: "Erzgebirgische Strümpfe für Damen," VEB Strumpfkombinat ESDA Thalheim
GULAG	Labor camps in the Soviet Union: Glawnoje Uprawlenije Lagerej
GUS	Commonwealth of Independent States, successor of the Soviet Union: Gemeinschaft Unabhängiger Staaten
IGFM	International Society for Human Rights, ISHR: Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte
ILO	International Labour Organization: Internationale Arbeitsorganisation, Unterorganisation der Vereinten Nationen,
KSZE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE: Konferenz über Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa
LMBV	Energy provider in the Federal Republic of Germany: Lausitzer und Mitteldeutsche Bergbau-Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH,
MEWA	Company in the GDR: VVB (Vereinigung Volkseigener Betriebe) Metallwaren
MIBRAG	Energy provider in the Federal Republic of Germany: Mitteldeutsche Braunkohlengesellschaft mbH
MRZ	Human Rights Center: Menschenrechtszentrum Cottbus
MTA	Medical-technical assistant
NRO	Non-governmental organization, NGO: Nicht-Regierungs- Organisation
ORWO	Trade name of products of GDR film industry: Original Wolfen

PDS	Party of Democratic Socialism, successor of Socialist Unity Party of Germany (East Germany): Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus
PGH	Producers cooperative in the GDR: Produktionsgenossenschaft des Handwerks
POS	Primary school in the GDR: Polytechnische Oberschule
RAW	Part of the company Reichsbahn in the GDR: Reichsbahn-Ausbesserungs-Werk
SBZ	Soviet occupation zone: Sowjetisch Besetzte Zone
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany (East-Germany): Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPRELA	Company in the GDR: producer of Sprelacart (Spremberg, Laminat, Carton)
VEB	Nationally owned company in the GDR: Volkseigener Betrieb

