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Marx or Mosca? An Inquiry into the Foundations of Ideocratic Regimes

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Abstract: »Marx oder Mosca? Eine empirische Untersuchung der Fundamente ideokratischer Regime«. In John Higley's and Michael Burton's taxonomy of elite settings, 'ideocratic elites' are represented by regimes of the Soviet type. These regimes based their rule on an egalitarian ideology that legitimized inequalities as temporary abnormalities. According to Marx the abolition of private ownership of the means of production would ultimately lead to a classless society. Gaetano Mosca questioned this claim and argued that families would maintain and even strengthen their function in producing and reproducing a 'ruling class' (tantamount to the elite concept) in communist regimes. The present contribution examines these claims on the basis of GDR's Central Cadres Database. Comprehensive empirical evidence is provided supporting Mosca's claim of a persistent impact of families in the formation and reproduction of communist elites.

Keywords: elite theory, Marxism, Leninism, communism, socialism, social inequality, nomenklatura, cadre.

Communist Elitism

In their seminal taxonomy of elite settings, John Higley and Michael Burton count the elites of Soviet-type communist societies among the class of ideologically united or "ideocratic elites" (cf. Higley and Burton 2006, 1-32). These regimes base the legitimation and objectives of their rule on a universal ideology that provides a binding framework for the order of all fields of society and particularly for the regimes' organisation of power. The structure of rule is hierarchically stratified and highly centralized, with the top personnel of the state party providing its core. Societies of this type are of particular interest for elite theory and research, because they exemplify a hierarchical social and political order that is not based on the private ownership of the means of production. The claim of elite theories that social and political hierarchies inevitably continue to be produced and reproduced after the abolition of capitalism contradicts the utopian Marxist construct of a classless, de-etatised and de-hierarchized socialism (cf. Best 2004a; 2009), which is why representatives of

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Marxism-Leninism have denounced the concept of the elite as “part of the reactionary wing of bourgeois ideology” and an “expression of the claim for power of the most reactionary part of monopolist bourgeoisie” (cf. Wörterbuch 1983, 156-57). Consequently the concept of an elite was discarded by orthodox Marxists, and the term “elite” is still regarded as improper by former leaders of socialist regimes (Best and Hornbostel 2003; Salheiser 2009a).

Nevertheless, there are multiple synonyms of the term “elite” in the official language of socialist regimes: *avant-garde*, *cadre*, *nomenklatura*, leader, functionary (Wörterbuch 1983 74-5, 398-400; Wagner 1999). There are also “classical” references. Marx (1964, 379), for example, had given reasons why leadership would be necessary for any kind of “combined production,” pointing to the “uniformity of the process as the result of one commanding will ... just as with the conductor of an orchestra.” Similarly, Lenin (1989b, 92-5) demanded “party discipline” and “unopposed subordination under one uniform will” as it was required by “the dictatorship of the proletariat” to the same extent as any “machine-driven big industry.” Also, he did not see any “basic contradiction between Soviet (i.e. socialist) democracy and individuals exerting dictatorial power.” This power, he stated, comes from the Bolshevik party representing the people, and it was to be used to run the bourgeois state in its state of transition, without bourgeoisie.

Here, the rigid structures of the rule of socialist elite *sans la lettre* become obvious: this elite – the top party leadership – is legitimized by functional and historic necessities in a way that is compatible to classical elite theories. In Lenin’s theory of the state, the rule of a socialist elite is legitimized by the Communist Party’s “leading role” as a revolutionary *avant-garde* and by the functional necessities of the state. The leadership and planning functions of society are basically open to “any qualified and participating worker” – but the new system of rule must be oriented towards the world-historic objectives of socialist development. The purposeful mode of recruiting the revolutionary cadre and leadership functionaries, Lenin assumed, would result in leadership superior to the ruling minorities of bourgeois society (Lenin 1989a, 731-9). The legitimacy of the socialist elite, therefore, was essentially based on meeting the ideological criteria of communist ideocracies, meaning that it is particularly appropriate to test the congruity of the criteria set by the official ideology against the reality, that is, against the actual practices of socialist states (Higley and Pakulski 2000).

However, after the October Revolution of 1917, it became increasingly difficult for communists to maintain congruity between their political practice and ideological claims. It became clear that their unconstrained use of force and the totalitarian scope of their rule matched, and in some respects exceeded, the etatised violence of “ordinary” tyrannies. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks upheld the vision of an egalitarian future, where the elimination of private Capital (with a capital “C”) would bring about the abolition of major social inequalities

and the reduction of power differentials (Trotsky 1967). Everything, the Bolsheviks claimed, would depend on the course of social and political development after the transition to socialism. But would it be possible to prevent the communist party “avant-garde” from developing into a closed, hereditary and privileged “ruling class”? This raises further questions: What would happen to an ideocracy if the mismatch between ideology and reality persisted in the course of social and political development? How would the communist elites – and the populations of communist countries – react to such a mismatch?

Elite theories of the “realistic” Machiavellian school had challenged the claim (made by Marxists and radical democrats) that egalitarian societies and polities are possible under the conditions of advanced industrialisation (Burnham 1941; Burnham 1943). They had identified power differentials as a universal feature of all complex societies, independent of their form, and regardless of who controls the means of production. In the 1923 edition of his ‘Ruling Class’, Gaetano Mosca (English publication 1939) extended the idea of an inevitable social closure of the ruling class even further. All social orders, he claimed, showed a tendency to close ranks and to restrict access to the upper echelons to the kin of actual position holders, which also applied to Soviet-type socialist societies. Mosca argued that this “abuse,” usually associated with the existence of private property, would be even worse in a “collectivistic society.” The reason he gave was that the merger of economic and political powers in such a society provided established power holders with significantly broader control over the recruitment and socialisation of leadership candidates than in a bourgeois society, and that these established power holders (elites) would inevitably use this broad control to favour their own offspring. Mosca pointed to the family as the main distributor of favours and privileges, and insisted that family loyalties would override any egalitarian norms. Consequently, in order to establish an egalitarian society, Mosca initially considered the abolition of the institution of the family as a necessary complement to the abolition of private property. However, he subsequently dismissed this idea and maintained that favouritism would find its way into the ruling classes, even if families were dissolved.

Mosca’s argument about the inevitability of favouritism is not only anthropological, in that he sees all humans as disposed to favour their offspring and close friends, but also functional, in that it is desirable for a peaceful and efficient functioning of society that starting conditions in the competition for elevated positions are not equal. He also suggests that intense social competition between large numbers of contenders may lead to a waste of energy in pursuit of egotistical goals; praises the advantages of a multigenerational process of maturation of leadership; and sees the transmission of privileges as compatible with the accumulation of collective and moral qualities which aid good ruling.

These observations set the agenda for intense theoretical and ideological debates about the nature and prospects of socialist societies. These debates had as

their main theoretical question and empirical problem: Did the family matter as a means of production and reproduction of social inequality, although private ownership of the means of production (i.e. *Capital* in the Marxian sense) had been abolished? The basic and fairly uncontroversial assumption in these debates was that socialist societies were characterized by social inequalities. Although official self-descriptions of socialist societies emphasized their egalitarian (“classless”) character, everyone realised that many elements in Marxist-Leninist ideology and policy also stressed and reinforced hierarchy. In particular, the communist party leadership regularly took the role of the “avant-garde” i.e. being the principal guide of society and the economy. This was complemented by the system of “democratic centralism” that endowed central authorities with an unchallenged control of societal development, as well as the power to select the leaders of all spheres of society. In all, this created a wide and rigid social hierarchy. The party *nomenklatura* epitomized this openly hierarchical nature of “real socialism” (Wagner 1999; Kupferberg 2002; Brown 2009). It was also apparent that political inequality correlated with an unequal access to material goods, valid information, and symbolic rewards, but this inevitable “vertical differentiation” was validated by official propaganda as a necessary means of attaining socialist goals, and as a way to protect socialist achievements: full egalitarianism was to be postponed until the final and total victory of socialism.

The actual inequality in supposedly egalitarian societies of the socialist type was also legitimized by social openness and (ideological) merit. Both were illustrated, as the propaganda machine stressed, by a privileged access of candidates with a working-class background to leadership positions. In view of such socialist self-attributions, social background related leadership candidates to the “masses”, especially the “working masses”. According to the egalitarian doctrine of the party, it was not legitimate, however, to allow hereditary or gender-based recruitment (Best 2009; Brown 2009). Family relations, parental or conjugal, were not supposed to interfere with the even-handed work of central authorities. It was maintained that, with the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, the family had ceased to be a unit of social reproduction.

These claims made it difficult for Marxist-Leninist insiders to criticise the highly stratified communist regimes. An example is Trotsky (1937), who fiercely attacked the “bureaucratic” character of Stalin’s *nomenklatura*, but defended its ideological basis in the Leninist concept of an “avant-garde” of professional revolutionaries. Trotsky also denied the transformation of the *nomenklatura* into a “class”, because the cadres had not (yet?) appropriated the means of production. A remote shadow of Trotsky’s position can be found in Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “political capital” (1991), which refers to the control of resources of power (including control over elite recruitment) exercised by the socialist state and held by party and state functionaries. The an-

tagonism between the functionaries and elites who derive their status from specialist knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) reflects this division (c.f. also Ludz 1968). However, Bourdieu also maintains that there is a strong meritocratic element in the transfer of political capital, making it difficult to identify the stratum of power holders as a distinct “class”.

The last and decisive step in the direction of Mosca’s early diagnosis of a communist elite (“ruling class”) was made by “new class” theorists like Milowan Djilas (1983) and Michael S. Voslensky (1984), both of whom identified the social closure and self-reproduction of the ruling class as inherent qualities of Soviet type socialist societies and polities. With these diagnoses, they shattered the corner stone of Marxist-Leninist ideology, namely, that the establishment of party rule and the hierarchical system of the nomenklatura were reversible steps on the way towards a classless and egalitarian society. They also pointed to the inherent instability of a power structure and a system of socialist inequality. The reality of this socialist inequality delegitimized and thereby destabilized the entire “real socialism” (c.f. also Konrad and Szelényi 1979).

Empirical Access to an Obsolete Society: The Central Cadre Database (ZKDS)

Empirical research into “real socialism” has challenged the ideological claims and self-descriptions, especially those propagated by party officials and their mouthpieces in Marxist-Leninist “social science”. In particular, it could be shown that from the 1960s onwards there were tendencies towards social closure and increasing self-recruitment in the “service classes” of several socialist countries. During the whole period of communist rule in Europe, for example, women were consistently disadvantaged in recruitment for leadership positions. On the other hand, there were also strong indications that during the initial period of socialist transformation, socialist societies offered good opportunities for upward mobility to contenders with a lower-class background, especially when compared with western capitalist societies (Mayer 1994; Solga 1994).

However, crucial theoretical and empirical problems of a sociology of socialism, such as a reconstruction of the social mechanisms that brought about the reproduction of social differentiations in socialist societies, are still to be addressed. For example, it is evident that economic capital could not play the “transmitting role” in a society where private ownership of the means of production was replaced by state ownership. In particular, the role of families as contexts and agents in processes of social differentiation needs further investigation, because they are the most probable source of “illegitimate” differentiation – “illegitimate” according to the criteria of socialist ideologies (Best 2009; Salheiser 2010). In light of the strict control over fields of research where ideologically undesirable findings might have been unearthed, little systematic –

although quite a lot of anecdotal – evidence is available. In particular, the leadership of socialist societies did not want to be investigated and remained more or less inaccessible to any serious sociological inquiry.

A breakthrough occurred after the collapse of European communism in the 1990s. The ZKDS (Zentraler Kaderdatenspeicher) or Central Cadre Database (CCD), which provided a complete machine-readable inventory of the GDR's functional elite (Best and Hornbostel 2003; Remy 2003; Salheiser 2009a) could be saved, reconstructed and made available for social science research. The CCD, which was compiled during the 1980s under the auspices of the GDR's Council of Ministers, contained full records of about 700,000 persons covering their social and political family backgrounds, party and organizational affiliations, status in the *nomenklatura*, military service, their family situations in the 1980s, occupational careers, educational backgrounds, special skills and qualifications, and further information concerning their cadre status, such as the entitlement to travel to Western countries. The data also identified their position (level of appointment in *nomenklatura*), as well as them having relatives in the West. The recording practices that generated the CCD data were a direct inheritance of Stalinism, with its obsession about hidden enemies and potential traitors, and the fact that the CCD was established indicates the importance of this information for the cadre policies and decisions.

A grid of cadre characteristics, which was developed in the early 1950s for recording details of party officials, was later extended to all cadres and, with few changes, remained in use until the end of the GDR. The grid comprised 180,000 files referring to leaders at elite and sub-elite level (e.g. high-level administrators up to the positions of ministers), managers of the socialist economy (up to the level of directors of collective combines), and other leading personnel from almost all parts of GDR society during the 1980s, but excluded full time party functionaries and officers in the military and the security services. These security personnel data were stored in other databases that were either destroyed or remain unavailable. Nevertheless, even this incomplete Orwellian project of the CCD generated an immensely valuable database for research into the formal and informal mechanisms of recruitment and the development of careers within the socialist cadre apparatus – the socialist power elite. In fact, it became even more valuable when it was found to contain several hundred thousand full records of persons of non-cadre status, thus providing a reference for comparisons between power/status groups of the GDR society.

Earlier studies of the CCD have shown that there was no homogeneous regime of cadre recruitment or advancement that transcended individual sectors of GDR society (Best 2004a; Best 2004b; Salheiser 2005; Salheiser 2008; Salheiser 2010). Although loyalty to the regime and qualification for the executive function were mandatory prerequisites for cadre positions, the relative weight attributed to those prerequisites, and the relevance of other criteria,

varied between sectors. This meant that there was no single, standardised system of recruitment, making it appropriate to follow a sector-specific approach and to look for communalities and differences in cadre recruitment in specific sectors of GDR society.

In the present study I focussed on the GDR's nationalised manufacturing industry ("Verarbeitendes Gewerbe") or production sector, which included industries such as the motor industry, mechanical and electrical engineering, and the central state administration ("Zentrale Staatsorgane") which, among others, comprised the staff of ministries and central planning bureaucracies (Best 2004b; Best 2007). The production sector had a leading role in providing the resources for the reproduction of the GDR society (including showpieces like the Zeiss works in Jena), while the central state administration sector was a central pillar of the power apparatus (including the GDR's diplomatic service). Within each sector, specific institutional practices and rules for cadre recruitment were applied, and the cross-over of cadres between sectors was relatively rare. Where it did occur, it mostly included the professional apparatus of party and mass organizations. It was possible and appropriate, therefore, for further analyses to choose the reference group of "non-leaders" from within each sector and to compare their recruitment and career-patterns with those of high ranking leaders of the same sector. I decided to dichotomize the data by drawing a line between lower and upper level cadres, with foremen and work team leaders ("Brigadiers") allocated to the lower category, and department leaders and group leaders in ministries allocated to the upper level. Top positions were made up of ministers and directors of Combines¹. The bulk of the lower-level reference category was, however, made up of secretaries, drivers, and production workers, including scientific staff in low hierarchical positions.

The study uses various causal models to identify sector-transcending and sector-specific determinants of careers. Special emphasis is placed on the effect of cadres' conjugal affiliations and parental family backgrounds. "Legitimate" factors of socialist cadre recruitment, such as loyalty to the regime and formal qualifications, were introduced as control variables and operationalized through communist party (SED = Socialist Unity Party) membership and formal education of the cadre. A further control variable was the age at which the highest position of the cadre was reached, which accounts for age-differences between the target group (leaders) and the control group (non-leaders). Conjugal affiliations and parental family backgrounds are possible "illegitimate" factors influencing the recruitment and careers of socialist leaders. These factors were captured by 12 indicators that comprise the marital status of cadres (married, divorced, having children), their social origin (worker, intelligentsia, "bourgeois," including leaders with a business or large scale agricultural back-

¹ A Combine or "Kombinat" was a group of state-owned enterprises (Volkseigene Betriebe or VEB).

ground), their political origin (pre-1945 membership of parents in NSDAP (National Socialist Party) or KPD/SPD (Communist/Social Democratic Party), post-1945 membership of parents in SED, and finally, the social position and political affiliation of their spouse (leading cadre, intelligentsia, SED).

Earlier studies of CCD data showed that women were not only heavily underrepresented in leading cadre positions, but also that women's careers in such positions followed different tracks and were subject to different underlying rules (Best and Hornbostel 2003; Best 2004b). I have therefore calculated the models of career determinants not only for sectors, but also for men and women separately. I have further differentiated between age cohorts (those born before and after 1945) to identify changes in cadre policy and social mobility opportunities throughout the history of the GDR. Altogether, eight causal models for distinct sub-populations were tested through logistical regression analysis (see Table 1). This technique uses maximum-likelihood estimations to predict a dichotomous dependent variable (in this case, the inclusion or non-inclusion in the upper echelon of the cadre system of the respective sector) on the basis of a set of independent variables of any measurement level (in this case, the career determinants mentioned above). Interpretations are based on standardized odds and their significance levels. Although we technically have a complete census of the cadres in both sectors of GDR economy and polity, I have made a heuristic use of inferential statistics to reduce the complexity of the data to be interpreted. I have, therefore, also distinguished between the "positive enforcing" and "negative impeding" effect of the researched characteristics on cadres' careers.

Family Relations as a Career Determinant in a Socialist Society: Empirical Results

A first inspection of the control variables shows, with one remarkable exception, their expected effects on career opportunities: SED membership and academic education consistently improved career prospects for managers and administrators (Table 1). We also see that members of the "leading cadres" reach their highest positions at a later age than members of the reference groups. The one exception is female leading cadres from the older cohort in higher administration, who reached their top positions at a younger age than their same-sex colleagues in non-leadership positions. This result needs further clarification, but it is probably the consequence of a combination between affirmative action and a glass-ceiling effect, with women of the older cohort being recruited into elevated positions in the administrative sector at a relatively young age, but being excluded from further promotion. However, the underlying pattern is clear: there has been discrimination against women in both sectors studied here. This may not be fully revealed by the models presented in Table 1, because gender was used as a classification variable, but in

other studies women were found to have been almost completely absent in the highest echelons of GDR's functional elites (Best and Hornbostel 2003). A comparison between age cohorts reveals that little changed in this respect during the existence of the GDR. Only at the middle level of authority are the effects of gender discrimination somewhat reduced because younger females had a better chance of rising into the middle stratum of leadership positions than their older, same sex colleagues (Best 2004b). A strong negative effect of being female also appears in separate models (not presented here) that include gender as an independent variable.

Some of the mechanisms involved in discriminating against females are revealed in the variables referring to family status (see Table 1). While there was a positive association between career success and reproduction for men, for females in the manufacturing sector having children was a clear disadvantage. Male cadres also profited from being married, while marital status did not have a significant effect on the careers of female cadres, with the exception of younger women in central administration, who seemed to profit (career-wise) from being married. Having a spouse from the cadre, or with an intelligentsia background, was common for cadres of both sexes in the manufacturing sector, and for older male cadres in the state administration sector. About 75 per cent of married female administrators in the state administration sector also had partners from the leadership stratum or with an intelligentsia background. In the causal model, however, having a high status husband does not result in a strong positive effect, because so many female leaders in the state administration sector were single or divorced. Thus, even the advantage of having a spouse with high status favoured men more than women. Only female leading cadres in the manufacturing sector profited from a husband who was himself a leading cadre or a member of the intelligentsia.

A similarly "illegitimate" pattern of career advancement is revealed with regard to working-class origin. In the manufacturing sector, coming from a working-class background had a consistently *negative* effect on career opportunities in all age and gender categories (cf. Salheiser 2005; 2008; 2009b): the same was found for older males in the central administration sector (cf. Gebauer 2009). In the other models no significant effect of having a working-class background – negative or positive – is found. The contrast to the picture painted by the official propaganda of the communist regime is even more glaring when we look at the case of cadres with a bourgeois background, i.e. those who had fathers involved in business, large-scale agriculture, or who were self-employed. Coming from a bourgeois family, in fact, *improved* the odds of having a high status position, while in the same model the odds of success for descendants from a working-class background are significantly *diminished*. In the manufacturing sector, especially in the younger cohort, we see almost a return of the "old bourgeoisie" with one in five leaders coming from the stratum of the self-employed. A family background in the intelligentsia had sig-

nificant effects in only two of the eight models: it improved the odds of success for younger male cadres in the state administration sector, and it diminished the chances of success among younger men in the manufacturing sector.

The “illegitimate” effects of political origin are even more glaring. Descent from a family with an NSDAP affiliation actually *improved* the career prospects of cadres in all older cohorts and of younger females in the central administration. A family affiliation with a pre-1945 working-class party, by contrast, *diminished* career prospects of older males and females in the manufacturing sector, while it *improved* the prospects of older males in the state administration sector significantly (Table 1). The fact that National Socialist (NS) family affiliations had consistently favourable career effects in all sectors and for both sexes indicates the presence of ‘illegitimate’ mechanisms underlying selection and self-selection (Best and Salheiser 2006; Best 2010). Indeed, there is some evidence that young candidates for party careers with a personal history of NSDAP membership were officially sponsored by the apparatuses of the communist party and the state in the early period of the GDR (Best 2003; Jutd 2005, 58-62), even though there was no official policy to justify or promote the inclusion of people with a National Socialist family background. I rather assume that there were multigenerational family strategies for upward social mobility, and that such strategies worked regardless of the hegemonic party in power, which until 1945 was the NSDAP, followed by the SED from 1946 until 1989. Ideological polarity and political hostility between these parties were overshadowed by the interest of families in safeguarding and improving their status in society.

At the aggregate level, this assumption is supported by the positive effects SED family background had on careers in the models, where we also find significant positive effects for having an NSDAP background. The only exceptions are younger female cadres in the central administration. At the individual level, we see a clear path connecting NSDAP and SED through inter-party mobility (Best and Salheiser 2006). Parties affiliated to the SED (*Blockparteien*) seldom appeared in the career background of top officials. This even applied to the NDPD (National Democratic Party), which had been formed to serve as a repository for former Nazis. A transition from one hegemonic party in power to the other was a rational option when the fortunes of families were at stake; an option made possible, if not encouraged, by the SED. In other words, the overt ideology of antifascism was not meant to prevent GDR’s authorities from co-opting cadres with an NS background into leadership positions when it seemed opportune to do so.

Another unexpected finding is that SED membership of family members *diminished* the odds for upward mobility in some subcategories of the manufacturing sector. I assume this to be the effect of a process of self-selection, in that the manufacturing sector was relatively distant to the centres of power and ideology and thereby a possible channel for upward mobility for those whose

social milieu were somewhat removed from the regime and its hegemonic party. This did not, however, exempt pretenders for cadre positions in the manufacturing sector with such backgrounds from joining the SED. The situation was completely different in the central administration sector, where we see the emergence of a *noblesse d'état* (Bourdieu 1989) with incumbents preferably coming from SED-related families and being married to SED-related spouses.

Conclusion

Who was right: Marx with his prediction that the abolishment of private capital would usher in an egalitarian society where everybody would find a place according to his or her abilities and needs; or Mosca who predicted that, in the absence of capitalism, families would maintain and even enhance their significance as producers and reproducers of social inequality? The results of our study appear to favour Mosca's conclusions. They paint a picture of a complex process of elite formation and reproduction in a Soviet-type society, with strong vertical and horizontal differentiations between hierarchical levels and sectors. The abolition of the private ownership of the means of production seems not to have prevented two seemingly universal laws of social differentiation from working. Putnam's (1976) famous "law of increasing disproportion," which maintains that the share of disadvantaged categories of the population decreases the higher the social position, seems confirmed, as does Mosca's (1939) equally well known "law of intergenerational status conservation," which maintains that leadership groups tend to pass on their elevated status to the next generation by building supportive family ties. The first law is confirmed mainly by the steep decline in the share of female cadres in the higher echelons of the social and political system of the GDR; the second is consistent with the observation that in the GDR families continued to be units of social reproduction of "illegitimate" social properties.

Not all of Mosca's claims fare well, though. His assumption that "collectivistic" societies will give rise to a hermetic system of social reproduction through the pooling of political and economic powers in a "super elite" does not hold true. The social reproduction of cadres in a socialist society remained a complex process, and was never as straightforward as in capitalist societies, i.e., through inheritance or exclusive private education. What we see in the GDR is an inherently contradictory pattern with clear differences between the sectors of the economy and the state. The economic sector was distant from the socio-political milieu of the hegemonic party and maintained some ties with the "old" classes and political milieus of the pre-socialist past. The state, by contrast, seems to have established a *noblesse d'état* with parental and conjugal family ties fostering strong attachments to the regime.

It is also evident that in the 1989-90 period of transition a cleavage opened between the two sectors studied here and that different reactions to regime change can be plausibly related to different modes of social reproduction in each sector. While the leading cadres in the manufacturing sector quickly abandoned their commitment to socialism and an independent GDR, the cadres of central state administration maintained their attachment to the “Socialist German State” and tried to promote the idea of a “third way”; a compromise between capitalism and socialism. Leading cadres in the GDR manufacturing sector could translate the insider knowledge they had accumulated in running their companies and Combines into career assets in a capitalist economy of a united Germany (Martens 2005; Martens 2007; Best 2007; Schmidt 2009) and were prepared, through their biographical and family backgrounds, to take leading roles in capitalist companies. Indeed, being well trained and experienced in running technologically demanding production processes, they had a lot in common with their Western counterparts. Perhaps as important, giving up socialism for East German managers meant finishing with the all-controlling influence of the central cadre offices. This “reallocated” the responsibility for social reproduction to their families.

There were fewer such incentives for the leading cadres of the central administration to desert the project of socialism and an independent GDR. Their employer, the state, would disappear, and the insider knowledge they possessed would be almost worthless under the new regime, unlike the knowledge and skills of their managerial counterparts. But even for the leading cadres in the central administration sector there was hope. The family history of many of them showed that it had been possible to survive – or even thrive – in the GDR with an NSDAP background. In other words, even if the odds were bad, families could develop strategies of successfully overcoming adverse starting conditions for a career. Today’s East German political elite provides quite a few examples of children from the GDR’s *noblesse d’état* having returned to positions of power, with the post-communist PDS (former SED and recently renamed DIE LINKE) being a particularly efficient vehicle for an intergenerational reproduction of power (Best and Vogel 2011). We have also gained a valuable confirmation of Mosca’s sober (and sombre) prediction concerning the persistence and reproduction of the powerful and privileged “ruling class.” This continuity contributed to fissures in the power structure and the ideological superstructure of the “ideocratic” regime, thus furthering its breakup and final collapse. Paradoxically, however, it also facilitated a smooth transition to a new regime (Higley and Pakulski 1995; Higley, Kullberg and Pakulski et al. 1996; Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski 1998).

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Appendix

Table 1: Career Determinants of GDR Cadres in the Manufacturing and Central State Administration Sectors
(Logistic regression, odds ratios)

	Manufacturing Sector				Central State Administration Sector			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946
SED Member	1.56 ^{***}	1.68 ^{***}	1.95 ^{***}	1.80 ^{***}	1.59 ^{***}	1.84 ^{***}	1.79 ^{***}	1.49 ^{***}
Academic Education	1.36 ^{***}	1.34 ^{***}	1.35 ^{***}	1.36 ^{***}	1.73 ^{***}	2.15 ^{***}	1.84 ^{***}	1.87 ^{***}
Age at Filling Highest Pos.	2.67 ^{***}	3.83 ^{***}	2.73 ^{***}	3.05 ^{***}	1.43 ^{***}	2.23 ^{***}	0.90 [*]	1.51 ^{***}
Married	1.09 ^{***}	1.26 ^{***}	0.97	1.07	1.19 ^{***}	1.17	1.01	1.43 ^{***}
Divorced	1.01	1.04	0.93 [*]	0.93	1.05	0.99	0.99	1.21 [*]
Children	1.15 ^{***}	1.09 ^{***}	0.88 ^{***}	0.80 ^{***}	1.06 ^{**}	1.21 ^{**}	0.95	1.15
Social Orig.: Worker	0.88 ^{***}	0.85 ^{***}	0.85 ^{***}	0.83 ^{***}	0.95 [*]	0.99	0.98	0.95
Social Orig.: Intelligentsia	1.00	0.92 ^{***}	0.98	0.95	0.98	1.13 ^{***}	0.99	0.97
Social Orig.: Bourgeois	1.09 ^{***}	1.04 ^{**}	1.08 ^{***}	1.07 ^{**}	1.04 [*]	0.97	1.02	1.08
Political Origin: KPD/SPD	0.98 [*]	1.02	0.93 ^{**}	1.00	1.08 ^{***}	0.97	1.05	1.09
Political Origin: NSDAP	1.07 ^{***}	1.02	1.05 [*]	1.01	1.09 ^{***}	0.97	1.08 [*]	1.08 [*]
Political Origin: SED	1.02 [*]	0.91 ^{***}	1.04	0.96	1.04 [*]	1.12 ^{**}	1.01	0.90
Spouse: Leading Cadre	1.05 ^{***}	1.06 ^{***}	1.17 ^{***}	1.07 [*]	0.97	1.14 ^{***}	0.97	1.00

Table 1 continued...

	Manufacturing Sector				Central State Administration Sector			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946	* ≤ 1945	* ≥ 1946
Spouse: Intelligentsia	1.06 ^{***}	1.03 [†]	1.19 ^{***}	0.98	1.00	1.03	0.94	0.85 [*]
Cadre & Spouse: SED Memb	0.90 ^{***}	0.97	1.04	0.89	1.51 ^{***}	1.41	1.33 [*]	1.35 [*]
Spouse: SED Member	1.05	0.99	0.88 [*]	1.02	0.79	0.87	0.59 ^{***}	0.61 ^{**}
Model	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Nagelkerke R ²	.252	.353	.223	.255	.186	.281	.151	.124
N	113,814	53,521	68,312	76,683	21,465	11,141	17,075	18,305
(higher, middle level cadre)	29,314	5,363	1,870	917	5,156	865	527	208

Source: Central Cadre Database of the German Democratic Republic

Significance levels and positive (>1) or negative (<1) effects:

sig. *** ≤ .001; sig. ** ≤ .01; sig. * ≤ .05