

IDENTITY PATTERNS AND CONFLICT BEHAVIOUR OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKFORCE IN THE SOVIET ZONE OF OCCUPATION/GDR

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Not only did industrial workers represent the numerically strongest social layer of GDR society, they were also understood to be the most important target for social policies of the GDR administration. On one hand, the regime wanted to obtain legitimacy by means of displaying what it meant by "working class" in a kind of stage production, and on the other hand industrial workers did indeed have a model function for the "socialist working society". Nevertheless the GDR workers retained strong traditional features, both on the shop floor and in tackling problems of their daily life. An industrial policy which was remarkably conservative, in spite of all the rhetoric about socialist industrialization and modernization, contributed to the long-term stability of the working community. This discrepancy between the stability of the social environment and the party's totalitarian claim to the right to mould society as it saw fit resulted in a specific conflict strategy being displayed by the workers. This was predominantly defensive, aimed at avoiding wage reductions and injustice in payment and supplies. Workers saw their opportunities more in sticking with the tried and tested than in embracing change.