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Imbibing the Future: Alcohol Moderation and Modernity in 1960s and 1970s East German Broadcast Media

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This article explores the representation of alcohol on East German television, radio and film in the 1960s and 1970s. It analyses the state media's attempts to strike a balance between preaching moderation in the name of public health and co-opting the cultural legacy of beer, particularly for working-class men. The attempt to accomplish both goals simultaneously resulted in a seemingly contradictory programme of public messaging that reveals efforts by the socialist leadership to calibrate their vision of a modern socialist future to accommodate the persistent power of a cultural commodity in Germany.

Rain had started to fall when Franz Donnhauser arrived for work at a concrete panel assembly yard near the East German town of Gera early one summer morning in 1963. The weather made work at the site impossible, so Donnhauser and his fellow workers headed to a nearby cantina to wait out the rain with a few bottles of beer. Later, during a criminal trial by the Gera district court that was featured on East German radio, Donnhauser admitted that he had drunk 'maybe fifteen [bottles]. But I'm not exactly . . . I don't know'.¹ He did not react well when told that it was time to return to work, refusing to go. According to witness statements, an argument broke out when a fellow employee tried to convince him to leave. Donnhauser made slanderous remarks about the inferiority of East Germany in comparison to the West and brutally beat his colleague in a physical assault.²

The radio show that described Donnhauser's trial did not leave the audience to draw their own conclusions about how, why and when Herr Donnhauser went wrong. The narrator sets the stage of this morality tale against a backdrop of progress toward modernity, pointing out that, just south of the old city-core of Gera, Donnhauser and his colleagues had built 'really an entirely new city', full of 'neat modern residential blocs with lots of green space in between'.³ This forward-looking picture is followed by the description of the regressive act, after which the host sifts through a list of the perpetrator's character flaws and anti-social behaviours in search of the root of the crime. The story centres on Donnhauser and his problematic relationship with alcohol, along with his proclivities for watching West German television and spending his free time playing Skat. Toward the end of the programme, as the host builds to his final judgement, the personality of Franz Donnhauser largely falls to the wayside. A greater lesson suggests itself, namely the consequences of an insufficient degree of social responsibility on the part of those around the criminal. Donnhauser remains liable for his actions, but the causal factor lies in the failure of his fellow workers to really embrace the 'new human circumstances' of a proper socialist 'togetherness', which would have compelled them to keep their comrade on the straight and narrow.⁴ The lesson of the Donnhauser trial

¹ *Radio DDR I*, 'Verfahren gegen Franz Donnhauser und Harry Rostock wegen Staatsverleumdung und gefährlicher Körperverletzung', aired 11 Aug. 1963, Rundfunk der DDR, made available by Deutsche Rundfunkarchiv (hereafter DRA), OMS02352.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

was that people abuse alcohol because the collective has failed to teach or convince them to exhibit better behaviour.

This article explores how East German media creators balanced moralising imperatives against alcohol abuse with popular fondness for beer in their attempts to envision and portray a German socialist modernity. The study juxtaposes ‘negative’ messaging on the airwaves and silver screen that warned against the dangers of abusive and addictive drinking with the ‘positive’ ways that representations of beer evoked material progress and reassuring continuity for a cultural commodity. The dogma of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) claimed that socialism would build a society of abundance but also eliminate alcohol abuse and alcoholism by ending the exploitative misery of capitalism.⁵ The only thing necessary was compliance and effort from the people. In Donnhauser’s case, the host declared that such incidents would cease to occur with better mutual support and social vigilance. ‘When the construction workers of [Donnhauser’s] Brigade have fully accepted this, they will be true socialists. The Republic needs men such as them, today and in the future’.⁶ The need to both reform ‘men such as them’ to exhibit constructive behaviour and win them over by assuring access to popular consumer goods ‘in the future’ explains the tension that created a bifurcated pattern of messaging in the media’s representations of alcohol and beer during this period. East German television, film and radio programme makers faced immense pressure to use their platforms to aid in building what scholars have dubbed a ‘socialist modernity’, including efforts to inculcate socialist morality and develop the ‘new socialist person’ as detailed by First Secretary Walter Ulbricht in 1958.⁷ A focus on audio and visual representations of drinking from these years shows how the state-run media sought to help alleviate the problem of excessive alcohol consumption in the present while also imagining a better but still familiar future for beer.

I argue that East German broadcast media and film makers presented audiences with two distinct narratives about beer in the 1960s and 1970s. First, they frequently showed beer alongside liquor as culprits in destructive drinking habits even as the underlying narratives assigning responsibility for those habits changed. In the early years, programmes portraying alcohol abuse and its consequences implied insufficient or non-existent collective morality as the cause. Narrators and hosts optimistically predicted that improved social solidarity would soon eliminate the threat. Through the 1960s warnings became sharper and depictions darker in tone as consumption continued to rise. The message of abuse-related content became less about encouraging collective progress than shaming individual choices. In the 1970s, the moralising impulse largely faded as media content dealing with destructive drinking increasingly framed it as a medical and legal issue rather than a symptom of insufficient social uplift or character flaws.⁸ Through all of this, beer consistently played a clear second to liquor as the primary vehicle of abuse, but it had its fair share of negative press in the mould of the Donnhauser case.

Even still, in this period and over the same airwaves rolled an entirely different and much more positive portrayal of beer. Aiming to benefit from beer’s continuing perception as the German *Volksgetränk* (people’s drink), a blue-collar favourite and the most popular alcoholic beverage in the country, the state-run media embraced it as a natural component in East Germany’s path to an idealistic vision of a future proletarian society. Beer had a place here. Brewery improvements, production achievements and celebrations of special occasions (particularly anniversaries) brought the people’s drink into the public spotlight during these years. By the late 1960s, elements within the state apparatus also began to argue for beer as a drink of moderation to counterpose against liquor.

⁵ Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999); Gundula Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod: die Drogengeschichte der DDR* (Geesthacht: Neuland, 2009).

⁶ *Radio DDR I*, ‘Verfahren gegen Franz Donnhauser’.

⁷ Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, introduction to Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 10; Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), ch. 3; Antonia Kleikamp, ‘Als Walter Ulbricht den Sozialistischen Moses gab’, *Die Welt*, 10 Jul. 2018.

⁸ Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*, 29–33.

Young people appear to have been the readiest target for this message as television and radio content positively depicting youthful beer consumption increased markedly in the 1970s. Despite the apparent contradiction between the discourse of temperance and that of a beery socialism, both tracks led to the same destination: a future vision of socialist beer culture that enmeshed the party's ideological values with habits of consumption and leisure that evoked comfortable continuity in everyday life for East German audiences.

A focus on media representations of alcohol sometimes buttresses and at other times complicates existing historiography on consumption and modernity in East Germany. Previous scholarship has shown the SED's efforts to build a modern and progressive socialist society while accommodating demand for both basic and 'semi-luxury' goods. In studies of issues as varied as fashion, housing construction and coffee, historians have shown that the state's handling of consumer issues always involved negotiation and compromise between ideological goals and economic plans on one side, and 'a host of "cultural" questions about identity, allegiance, and even nationhood' on the other.⁹ I concur with this perspective and show that even the envisioning of modernity represented a compromise with cultural habits. As it relates to health specifically, Young-Sun Hong, in her study of tobacco, argues that the government saw promoting public health as a core mission, but it also hesitated to confront smoking head on in part because of 'the cultural connotations associated with the habit'.¹⁰ Hong touches on alcoholism as a related issue but keeps her main attention on cigarettes.¹¹ My study shows that a similar 'contradiction between the health and consumption policies of the East German government' occurred with beer and appeared even in the state-run media, for all to see.

The existing literature on alcohol in East Germany emphasises the confrontation between state-driven temperance campaigns and the population's *Eigensinn* (wilfulness) in persistently overdrinking and sticking to popular habits and predilections. Most scholars who mention drinking do so within the context of government efforts to combat crime, prevent illness and eradicate 'asociality'.¹² Thomas Kochan's book includes media analysis and considers alcohol as both a problem and opportunity for the SED, as this article does, but in that vein he is most interested in liquor as a profitable enterprise.¹³ He also describes the state's ultimately unsuccessful campaigns, starting in the late 1950s, to promote 'cultureful' wine consumption above all else.¹⁴ Where he considers positive portrayals of alcohol on television, Kochan associates them with the consumer-oriented ideological laxity of the late 1970s under the Honecker regime and does not distinguish between depictions of different beverages.¹⁵ By focusing on beer, this study shows that the complexity, compromises and sometimes outright contradictions in the state media's representations of alcohol consumption appeared in the 1960s as well. There is more of continuity than rupture between the *Volksgetränk's* appearances on television, radio and film in the Ulbricht and Honecker years. More broadly speaking, this argument

⁹ Quote from Pence and Betts, introduction to *Socialist Modern*, 10; see also Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andrew Kloiber, 'Brewing Global Relations During the Cold War: Coffee, East Germans and Southeast Asia, 1978–1990', in Heather Merle Benbow and Heather R. Perry, eds., *Food, Culture and Identity in Germany's Century of War* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 247–70.

¹⁰ Young-Sun Hong, 'Cigarette Butts and the Building of Socialism in East Germany', *Central European History* 35, 3 (2002), 329–33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹² Thomas Lindenberger, "'Asociality' and Modernity: The GDR as a Welfare Dictatorship', in Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 221; Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'n' Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Richard Millington, "'Crime Has No Chance": The Discourse of Everyday Criminality in the East German Press, 1961–1989', *Central European History* 50 (2017), 59–85; Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*.

¹³ Thomas Kochan, *Blauer Würger: So Trank die DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011).

¹⁴ Archival documents show wine's high price and challenges in securing a quality supply as obstacles. See Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 105; Dipl. Eoc. P. Donat und Dr. W. Dlouhy, 'Die prognostische Bedarfsentwicklung bei Spirituosen, Bier sowie Wein einschließlich Sekt im Zeitraum 1975–90', 31 Mar. 1973, BArch (Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde), DL 1/21099, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 202–12.

complicates the existing picture of a regime whose public messaging on alcohol boiled down to: liquor-bad, wine-good, beer-(silence).¹⁶

This article analyses East German films, television and radio available through the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv and the Socialism on Film collection. While I cannot claim to have viewed or listened to every piece of media content that included portrayals of alcohol in these years, I still found myself with more evidence than I could cover or even cite in my notes. Furthermore, such artifacts demand a close reading and detailed description. For these reasons, I have chosen to limit my scope to the two decades in which the historiography identifies the biggest shift in East German alcohol policies, and to provide relatively deep analysis of the materials most representative of larger trends in the media landscape.

Moderation: ‘That Devil, Alcohol’

Radio, television and film depictions of alcohol abuse transformed in both content and conceptual framing from the early 1960s to the late 1970s, moving gradually and without precise ruptures from an issue of social responsibility and morality to one of medical and juridical expertise. Previous literature on alcohol in East Germany has acknowledged this change. As Thomas Kochan shows, in 1960 a flurry of anti-alcohol messaging began to appear, first centred on appeals to moderation and modesty, but in the late 1960s shifting to narratives that emphasised the association of drink with crime as jurists cracked down on infractions committed under the influence.¹⁷ Gundula Barsch and Young-Sun Hong largely concur that by the end of the 1970s official reluctance to acknowledge and diagnose alcoholism as a problem in East Germany gave way to more open conversations led by medical professionals in light of growing case numbers and rates of consumption.¹⁸ Beer frequently appeared in portrayals of abusive drinking, making the parallel narratives explored in this article all the more intriguing.

Closely exploring negative media depictions of drinking during these decades also shows a more nuanced trajectory for moderation messages in East Germany. The broadcast media and film industry deployed a range of different interpretive frameworks to try to educate the population toward a healthy relationship to alcohol. First, they exhorted society to reform problem drinkers as part of the progressive construction of socialism (as in the Donnhauser case). Then, in the mid-to-late 1960s the individual drinker’s moral character came to the centre of the narrative and depictions dealt more in shame or blame than social solutions. This darkening tone, followed by a continued rise in alcohol consumption, helps explain why the East German judicial system intensified laws dealing with crimes committed under the influence by the end of the decade. Finally, as the 1970s wore on the voices of legal and medical experts moved to the fore in media content dealing with problem drinking. Tracking the different approaches to temperance during this time shows more than a decade of flailing efforts by the state media to find an effective strategy in combatting alcohol abuse in East Germany before ‘professionalisation’ set in.

Portrayals of heavy and abusive drinking in the 1960s largely continued in the moralising but forward-looking tone of the Donnhauser case. In a similar way, films from this time naïvely assert that building socialism would inevitably change habits with alcohol. A charming production from 1962 used the conceit of a father describing the world to his just-born child as an avenue to show the progress of socialism. One scene explores a metal-working shop and briefly shows a man tossing a rag at his colleague, who lies passed out on the shop floor with wine and beer bottles at his feet. The voiceover gently proffers: ‘I’m not telling any fairy tales. We all have our flaws and weaknesses, our rough edges. But we are changing. Believe me. We are all changing.’¹⁹ The tone of collective

¹⁶ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷ Ibid., 16–18, 24, 181–4.

¹⁸ Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*, 172–6; Hong, ‘Cigarette Butts’, 328.

¹⁹ *Geburtsort Magdeburg* (1962) available through: Progress, <https://progress.film/record/8302> (accessed 30 Sept. 2020).

improvement appears again in a 1963 documentary that followed a group of workers at an oil refinery in Schwedt through their after-work activities. Jumping back and forth between images of men gulping beer in a pub and others enjoying refined activities at the library or in an art class, the film again conveys the sense that the old ways of proletarian life are reforming under socialism but that the job remains half-finished. The men appear as two undifferentiated masses, one stuck in the old world and one living in the new.²⁰

A raft of examples from the mid-to-late 1960s shows the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel beginning to fade in the battle against alcohol abuse. While portrayals of overconsumption continued to present the drinker as a victim of social circumstances, an increasingly disparaging tone also crept in. For example, in 1965 the film studio of the National People's Army (NVA) put out a short production that represents a newly emergent narrative of harsher personal judgement. In *Zum weißen Kobold* (To the White Goblin) an NVA soldier, prodded on by a cartoon demon, succumbs to the temptation to drink an enormous amount of beer with accompanying shots of liquor. The man stumbles back to his barracks after a few embarrassing incidents only to find that his company is called out to drill in the middle of the night. The drunken soldier can barely stand. His comrades quickly knock him to the ground as they sharply turn in formation to march. While the animated goblin somewhat trivialises the scene, there is nothing here about 'new human circumstances' or 'socialist togetherness'. A simple short text at the end of the film states, in so many words, 'do not let this be you!'²¹

In most cases from these years the causal factor in excessive drinking comes from more concrete and ideological forces than a cartoon. West Germany's heartless capitalist individualism fit the bill. Heather Gumbert has pointed out how government officials tasked even 'light entertainment' on television to "strike the opponent, the political enemy in the West".²² Examples from the variety show *Tele-BZ* portray frequent drunkenness as a common trope of life in *Westdeutschland*.²³ One episode from 1966 featured a satirical song with lyrics that give a concrete sense of what 'drives a man to drink' in the West. A man sits on a stool holding a liquor bottle, framed by advertisements for different Western brands of spirits, and sings to the camera:

When my wife is unfaithful,
when my house is foreclosed on,
when my gallbladder acts up,
when I hear I've lost my bets.
What am I to do?
Such a poor, poor man.
Then I drink myself just one,
and then again one more,
and then it seems to me,
it's all not half so bad.²⁴

Though obviously the man himself is troubled, the words point to other factors as the 'real' cause of abusive drinking. Along with marital distress and a troublesome gallbladder he bemoans losing his house, being mistreated by his boss, losing the lottery and inflation robbing his deutschmarks of half their value (i.e. capitalist problems). The final words contain the moral imperative of the piece,

²⁰ Karl Gass, dir., *Feierabend*, (1963) available through: Progress, <https://progress.film/record/7926> (accessed 30 Sept. 2020).

²¹ *Zum weißen Kobold* (1965) available through: Progress, https://progress.film/record/_jPi54yCq1aSmwiKiWiD9 (accessed 30 Sept. 2020).

²² Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism*, 77.

²³ See also *Tele-BZ*, 'Meine Wäsche - Deine Wäsche - Beitrag: Der alkoholisierte Theaterschauspieler', aired 3 Jul. 1970, DRA, 640888.

²⁴ *Tele-BZ*, 'Satire aus der Redaktion der *Tele-BZ* zu aktuellen westdeutschen Fernsehsendungen - Lied: Trinken als Rezept', aired 8 Jan. 1966, DFF-1, DRA, 640851.

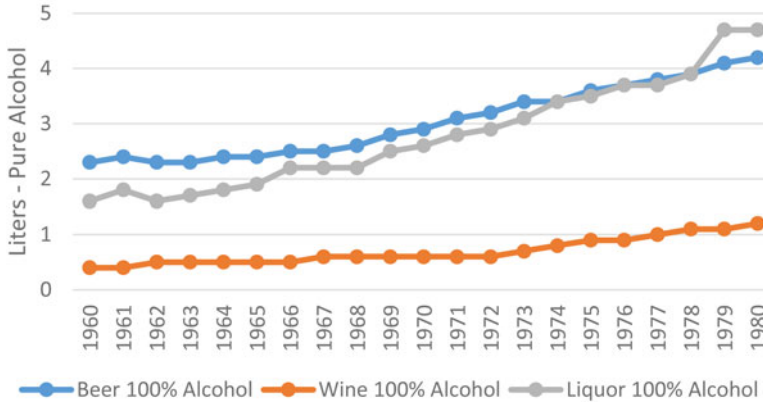


Figure 1. Per Capita GDR Alcohol Consumption 1960–1980. Compared by Quantity of Pure Alcohol.

as the character breaks through in a moment of clarity to announce, ‘against all of that . . . drinking is no prescription’.²⁵

1966 also saw the premiere and quick ban of an alcohol-soaked East German film, *Spur der Steine*. Drinking is nearly omnipresent in the movie. The opening scenes show the ‘Balla brigade’ swaggering down a road and popping the tops of their bottles in unison like a salute. Shortly thereafter they egg on their comrade to chug beer from a massive *Stiefel* while singing an ode to ‘the boot’.²⁶ The authorities banned *Spur der Steine* because of its realistic (read: critical) portrayal of socialism in East Germany, but it can hardly have helped that so many scenes are swimming in booze, not to mention the poignant scene where Balla relativises the difference between East and West Germany but concludes, ‘over there? Shit. Here? We have plenty of bottles on the table’ as he gestures to a vodka bottle.²⁷ The writers meant Balla’s story to be that of a philistine who is gradually won over to the party.²⁸ As such, even as the film questions adherence to unyielding principles of ‘socialist morality’, it suggests that heavy drinking is a symptom of the system not working properly, driving workers like Balla to indifference, selfishness or resignation.

As the 1960s wore on, it became increasingly difficult for East Germany to downplay its growing issues with alcohol abuse, and moralising about social responsibility had failed to solve the problem. Criminal offenses involving alcohol rose from just under one-quarter of all cases in 1960 to almost one-third in 1966.²⁹ The steady rise in alcohol consumption never abated during these two decades (see Figure 1).³⁰ Without admitting that their efforts to build socialism had not eliminated substance abuse as they predicted, the SED began to take active measures aimed at addressing these developments. In 1968 East German leaders struck intoxication from the list of possible extenuating circumstances during sentencing for crimes.³¹ The following year, a series of new youth ordinances came into effect, sharpening the state’s stance against underage alcohol and tobacco use.³² Out of the public eye, medical authorities spoke increasingly about alcoholism in the East German population.³³

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Spur der Steine*, directed by Frank Beyer. DEFA Film Library, 1966. Accessed 28 May 2020, timestamp: 3:55–4:45.

²⁷ Ibid., 56:15.

²⁸ Joshua Feinstein, ‘Constructing the Mythic Present in the East German Cinema: Frank Beyer’s “Spur der Steine” and the 11th Plenum of 1965’, *Central European History* 32, 2 (1999), 203–4.

²⁹ Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 183.

³⁰ *Statistischen Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1971*, 354.

³¹ Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 190.

³² *Radio DDR II*, ‘Über “Sargnägel”, “Pils” und “Kleine Klare”’, aired 11 Apr. 1973, Rundfunk der DDR, DRA, OMS04510.

³³ Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod*, 172–6; Hong, ‘Cigarette Butts’, 337.

In 1970 the editors of *Tele-BZ* placed a bullseye on the drinking habits of their fellow East Germans in the satirical programme *Meine Wäsche-Deine Wäsche*. One parody from an episode aired in August of that year pulled no punches and placed the individual's own flaws squarely at the root of excessive drinking. The scene opens with a man lying on his couch with his shoes on. A table crowded with beer and liquor bottles sits just in front of the sofa. The man smokes and bemusedly mumbles to himself. Reacting to the sound of his wife entering the apartment he merrily invites her to a drink, but she does not come right away. He admonishes her for bothering with the dishes then drunkenly begins to wax eloquent about the beauty of alcohol, smiling and speaking directly to his glass of beer. 'Beer is barley or malt and hops. "Nature! Nothing but pure nature". Just as Goethe said of the noble Shakespeare!'³⁴ The man's wife enters the room, notices her husband's sorry state and begins to berate him. 'It's not just you who suffers from this', she says in frustration, 'it's us'. He sits up quickly and a pain-stricken look comes over his face. 'You suffer?' He pauses, then in apparent sincerity says, 'I'm truly very sorry'. His use of the informal plural 'you' in this case (*ihr leidet?*) also hints at children who do not make an appearance.³⁵

The remainder of the scene plays out with the woman pointing out her husband's daily drunkenness and resulting hangovers and to each accusation he replies with the same sentence, '*Ja [elongated], dafür kann ich nichts*' (Yeah, but that's not my fault), followed by some excuse for why he had to drink that day. Among his reasons are: an exciting programme was on television, his brother came over, his co-worker had a birthday party, the exciting programme was back on television and he had to drink off the hangover from the previous days. No larger issue drives this man to drink. Neither capitalism nor inflexible party functionaries nor even a cartoon goblin victimise him. He seeks every opportunity to get drunk and then justifies it with flimsy excuses. The interchange ends when the wife realises that her spouse has accomplished none of the domestic tasks that he had volunteered for. 'You', she says crossly, 'do we even have bread in the house?' Without looking at her he replies in monotone, 'of liquid variety'.³⁶

The man's personal flaws are the undisputed focus of this parody and it should surprise no one that the portrayal centres on a marital dispute involving an unsupportive husband. Paul Betts has shown that alcohol played a common role in domestic conflicts in East Germany. In his exploration of divorce proceedings from the 1960s, Betts reports that 'the majority of cases had to do with drunken husbands, many of whom were violent'. Of the totality of cases he examined 'some three-quarters had to do with alcohol'.³⁷ With such problems widespread in East Germany and solutions hard to come by, the state-media's increasing focus on shaming or admonishing individual men for their drinking habits becomes eminently more understandable. At the same time, this change in emphasis had the overall effect of shifting the onus for such failures firmly from social support to personal character. From there it was only a short step toward being treated as a compulsion subject to health and juridical experts, rather than a moral failing. Radio and television sources from later in the 1970s reflect this change.³⁸

From the legal side came a direct address of alcohol abuse among young people, even if the message mostly focused on efforts to do away with destructive habits among the adults in their lives. A 1973 radio programme, 'On "coffin-nails", "Pils" and "a little *Schnaps*"', broadcast a group discussion on alcohol and tobacco between legal experts and male pupils of the ninth and tenth grade (so most likely ages fifteen to seventeen) at a technical high school in Berlin. Explaining the implications of the 1969 'youth protection' laws to the teenagers are Dr. Krause (whose exact qualifications are unstated) and Herr Wolfgang Lück, the leader of the *Jugendhilfe* (youth aid) sector within the Greater Berlin magistrate government. Two patterns quickly stand out from the dialogue. First, this conversation, ostensibly

³⁴ *Tele-BZ*, 'Meine Wäsche - Deine Wäsche - Beitrag: Feierabendtrinker', aired 7 Aug. 1970, DRA, 640850.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 100.

³⁸ Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpelod*, 169–76, 181.

to educate young people, mostly addresses bad comportment among their parents and other adult authority figures. Second, much of the unacceptable behaviour that Krause and Lück identify stems from persistent customs that, in Lück's words, 'really belong in the past'.³⁹ So, for example, they touch on the legal implications of parents giving their children alcohol at home (only over the age of sixteen and 'in moderation'), store personnel selling alcohol and tobacco to adolescents 'for their parents' (strictly forbidden), and the 'übele Sitte' (evil custom) of the 'Einstand', an alcohol-fuelled celebration of a new job.⁴⁰ The programme spends next to no time considering personal morals, insufficient consciousness or societal conditions. Rather, it always returns to legal efforts to eliminate backward habits. Moreover, the didactic exercise seeks less to convince than simply to explain. These laws exist to protect young people, and so they must be followed. Period.

A radio programme from 1979 captures the essence of the 'medical' side of the equation. Appropriately titled: 'No thank you, I am an alcoholic', the broadcast begins by interviewing random factory workers coming off their shifts about their understanding of the term 'alcoholic'. The reporter asks two groups, one comprised of men and the other of women, what comes immediately to their minds when they hear that word. Some of the men seem to trivialise the matter or suggest that alcoholics simply drink too much and spend too much time in pubs. One man blurts out 'a sick person! Very sick!' but fails to explain further. The first woman respondent points out that men and women both can become addicted (the only time that abusive drinking among women is mentioned in the materials reviewed for this article) and that problem drinking causes terrible consequences for the people around the drinker. She then claims, however, that such individuals are 'willenschwach' or 'weak-willed'.⁴¹ By 1979, this was the 'wrong' answer.

The narrator then suggests that his listeners might harbour similar (unenlightened) views of alcoholism and need education. The programme presents a definition of alcoholism 'from the book'. The opening words to this description drive straight at the heart of the issue, stating that an alcoholic is 'an excessive drinker, whose dependency on alcohol' has begun to affect their health, relationships or work.⁴² Dependency (*Abhängigkeit*) anchors this definition in explicit contrast to popular understandings based on willpower or personal responsibility, which speaks to the change since the 1960s. The onus on those surrounding an addict has also changed. No longer are co-workers and comrades meant to hold a potential problem drinker on the righteous path. Rather, their duty is to recognise the signs of a medical illness, encourage the person to seek professional help and assist in reintegrating them after they have taken a 'cure' and recovered.⁴³

Modernity: The New Socialist (Occasional) Beer Drinker

Despite their strident tone in warning against alcohol abuse, SED leaders had no intention of divesting themselves of the benefits that the alcohol industry could provide. State-run distilleries brought in critical profits to the government, which helps to explain the consistently rising supply of liquor throughout East German history.⁴⁴ Yet, *Schnaps* (liquor) also received sharp condemnation from high-ranking SED members including First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, who personally crusaded to combat rising consumption. Despite producing liquor and profiting handsomely from the proceeds, the East German media rarely portrayed hard alcohol consumption in a non-judgmental light.⁴⁵ Not so with beer. When it came to the *Volksgetränk*, the SED's own ideological imperatives, namely its

³⁹ *Radio DDR II*, 'Über "Sargnägel", "Pils" und "Kleine Klare"', start TS: 14:00.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The legal focus of this 'discussion' contrasts with a similar programme from 1961 East German television, further showing the shift from morality to juridical/medical expertise. Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 28–30.

⁴¹ *Berliner Rundfunk*, 'Nein Danke - ich bin Alkoholiker - Eine Sendung über abstinent Lebende', aired 6 Jun. 1979, *Rundfunk der DDR, DRA, 2027293*, start TS: 0:15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4:00.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

'historical mission' as the champion of the proletariat, challenged its programmes for public health and socialist morality.

Beer had been a consciously recognised cornerstone of blue-collar identity in Germany since the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Defence of beer and condemnation of spirits had a long and prominent history in the labour movement, including treatments by titans such as Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky.⁴⁷ At the 1907 Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) congress in Essen, the party officially endorsed an approach to the alcohol question that promoted beer and wine over liquor, though wine cost too much for the average worker. One representative called for greater tolerance from the pro-abstinence camp because 'in Germany we have counted on the pleasure of beer for a long time. There has yet to be found a replacement for beer that is quite so delicious (*wohlschmeckend*).'⁴⁸ Put another way, beer, unlike liquor, held enormous cultural capital among Germans, particularly among male industrial and rural labourers. The socialist regime did not shy away from tapping into this well of positive associations, any more than it shunned the profits to be gained from the liquor industry. However, while several of the examples provided in this section make the continuity of beer as a drink of the labouring classes explicit, media producers also demonstrated a moderating role for it in a wider swath of East German society.

Television, film and radio producers took this long-standing 'working man's drink' and projected it onto the progress of East German society in at least two ways. First, the broadcast media overwhelmingly portrayed positive beer consumption as an occasional or exceptional activity rather than a quotidian part of daily life. This 'occasionality' recurred on East German television and radio despite the fact that a large portion of the population viewed beer as an everyday drink.⁴⁹ Second, beer appeared in a good light almost exclusively alongside or central to narratives of progress toward modernity and building socialism. In the mid-to-late 1960s this often meant economic advances of the industrial variety in beer production or service. By the 1970s, media portrayals of beer frequently centred around youthful consumption and sociability associated with political enthusiasm and acceptable forms of recreation such as movie theatres or state festivals. This growing willingness to show young people enjoying beer relates back to the fact that it became an increasingly attractive 'beverage of moderation' as liquor consumption continued to soar and the wine supply stagnated in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁰ Accordingly, beer was shown, aspirationally, as a drink that could foster youthful exuberance for socialism and contribute to conviviality in modern spaces. In short, media producers in the East showed no hesitancy in portraying acceptable beer consumption but displayed meticulous attention to the context of those images, as well as who would appear in them.

Summer, with its bright sun and rising mercury, marked the beginning of 'beer season' in East Germany. That fit well in the media's understanding of when and why beer 'should' be consumed. A heat wave in Berlin in the summer of 1964 served as the backdrop for a substantial segment involving beer on the nightly news, *Aktuelle Kamera*. After a short clip showing people sweltering in the heat, the image shifts to a pair of men working on streetcar lines and gulping beer as fast as they can. The voiceover comments: 'one can hardly swallow fast enough to drink as much as one would like'.⁵¹ The report then moves on to the Bärenquell Brewery to show strenuous efforts to meet demand.

⁴⁶ James S. Roberts, *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 43; Manfred Hübner, *Zwischen Alkohol und Abstinenz: Trinksitten und Alkoholfrage im deutschen Proletariat bis 1914* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), 73–5.

⁴⁷ Roberts, *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class*, 87; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 164–5.

⁴⁸ *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands: Essen - 15. bis 21. September 1907* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), 345–76.

⁴⁹ Dipl. - Wirtsch. B.-D. Schimizek, Dipl.-Wirtsch. B. Sauer und Dr. W. Dlouhy, 'Die Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Wein, Spirituosen und Bier in der DDR (Globalauswertung einer Bevölkerungsbefragung)', 31 Dec. 1972, Institut für Marktforschung Komplex Ernährung, BArch, DL 102/666, 60–1.

⁵⁰ Dipl.rer.oec. Werner Bischoff und Dr.rer.oec. Werner Jurich, 'Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs an alkoholischen Getränken bis 1970', n.d., BArch, DL 102/39.

⁵¹ *Aktuelle Kamera*, 'Aktuelle Kamera - Hauptaufgabe - Beitrag: Sommer in Berlin', aired 28 Jul. 1964, DFF-1, DRA, 400355.

‘The colleagues here are working overtime so that we don’t shrivel up into mummies. 700 hectolitres of beer and bräuse [a soft drink] are filled into bottles daily . . . Nevertheless they cannot meet the demand for bottled beverages’.⁵² Despite insufficient personnel and materials to put out enough bottles, the report continued, the breweries could easily cover the need for their goods in keg-form.⁵³ Heat, sun and dust formed common refrains when the East German media made reference to beer consumption. One 1967 *Aktuelle Kamera* piece explicitly stated that the beer from Braustolz in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz) ‘tastes great! And not just on hot days’. Despite that statement, the entire purpose of that news clip was to show the efforts of East German breweries to supply summer beach vacationers on the Baltic Sea coast for their days of leisure in the sun, thus reiterating the connection between beer and warm, sunny weather.⁵⁴

The previous example also hints at the most common type of beer-related media content: celebrations of East German industrial progress. The 1960s saw Walter Ulbricht and the SED leadership try more market-oriented practices in the economy and double down on the ‘scientific-technical revolution’ to improve efficiency.⁵⁵ The brewing industry received glowing coverage on this front. On three occasions in 1966 and 1967 alone *Aktuelle Kamera* featured visits to East German breweries to report on their achievements in production or the installation of new equipment. The 1967 report from VEB Braustolz Brewery ends with a triumphant announcement that ‘Every week 150,000 bottles from the Karl-Marx-Stadt district begin their journey to Rostock’.⁵⁶ Never to be outdone, East Germany’s most successful brewery, Radeberger Export-Beer Brewery, received feature newsreels on both *Aktuelle Kamera* and the cinema newsreel *DDR Magazin* in 1967 and 1969. Both clips marvelled over the advanced new bottling line that allowed Radeberger to ‘unpack, wash, fill, seal and label’ 15,000–18,000 bottles per hour (the two segments give different numbers).⁵⁷ Knowledgeable viewers would have recognised that these facilities represented exceptions. Most East German breweries struggled with antiquated equipment, insufficient resources and unrealistic production targets.⁵⁸ This dichotomy between the televised ideal and the everyday reality for East German workers and consumers is not a new discovery, but television and film makers explicitly showing audiences the state’s progress with beer offers a clue to what the regime thought (or knew) its people desired. Such scenes could also occur with reference to wine, but almost never with liquor.⁵⁹

Celebrations offered another situation where beer consumption frequently appeared on the airwaves. A 1966 broadcast of *Aktuelle Kamera* shows a room full of well-dressed men being served ‘export-quality’ Berliner Pilsner, rarely available to East Berliners themselves, but dispensed on this occasion in celebration of the seventeenth birthday of the republic.⁶⁰ One performance from a youth festival of political songs on the same anniversary in 1979 touts beer-drinking as a staple of the commemorative holiday in conjunction with several other classic symbols of German consumer culture such as brass band music and bockwurst.⁶¹ Similarly, a radio broadcast from Berlin for the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Aktuelle Kamera*, ‘Aktuelle Kamera - Spätausgabe - Beitrag: Braustolzbier nach Rostock’, aired 21 Aug. 1967, DFF-1, DRA, 652657.

⁵⁵ Phillip J. Bryson, *The Consumer under Socialist Planning: The East German Case* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 2.

⁵⁶ *Aktuelle Kamera*, ‘Braustolzbier nach Rostock’.

⁵⁷ *Aktuelle Kamera*, ‘Neue Abfüllanlage in Radeberger Bierbrauerei’, aired 19 Nov. 1967, DFF-1, DRA, 322386.

⁵⁸ Bischoff and Jurich, ‘Bedarfs an alkoholischen Getränken bis 1970’, 48; Peter Lietz and Hans-J. Manger, eds., *Die Brau- Und Malzindustrie in Deutschland-Ost Zwischen 1945 Und 1989: Ein Beitrag Zur Geschichte Der Deutschen Brau- Und Malzindustrie Im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: VLB Berlin, 2016).

⁵⁹ *GDR Magazine 12* (n.d.), available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, ‘Socialism on Film: The Cold War and International Propaganda’, http://www.socialismonfilm.amdigital.co.uk.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/Documents/Details/N_507880_GDR_MAG_J12 (accessed 28 Jan. 2019).

⁶⁰ *Aktuelle Kamera*, ‘Aktuelle Kamera - Spätausgabe - Beitrag: Pilsner-Anstich im Ratskeller’, aired 30 Sep. 1966, DFF-1, DRA, 641345.

⁶¹ ‘“Blasmusike, Bockwurst, Bier” - 9. Festival des politischen Liedes 1979. Konzert vom 13.02.1979 in der Volksbühne Berlin’, aired 13 Jul. 1979, Rundfunk der DDR, DRA, 1950126.

Tenth World Festival of Youths and Students in 1973 served as the setting for an interview with the director of the Märkisches Museum about the history, qualities and virtues of Berlin's unique *Berliner Weiße* beers.⁶² Bringing these examples into dialogue with the negative portrayals of beer consumption in the previous section leads to the general conclusion that 'occasionality' played an important role in marking the difference between acceptable and unacceptable uses of the people's drink. They also highlight the common associations of 'proper' beer drinking with young people, particularly young men, in East Germany, a surprising trend considering the state's well-documented concern with preaching youthful temperance.⁶³

The appropriate occasion for beer drinking had to correspond to a suitable location. As Eli Rubin argues, the SED saw spatial reorientation for its citizens as a key project of socialist modernity, putting them in physical surroundings that embodied the values of the communist project at a 'phenomenological and experiential' level.⁶⁴ The need to control the spaces where people lived, worked and took leisure manifested itself in connection to alcohol with a campaign against the 'dark pub' starting in the late 1950s. These efforts, apparently spearheaded by Ulbricht himself, aimed at eliminating the old 'watering holes' and 'corner pubs' where the immiserated masses supposedly went to drink away the ill effects of capitalist exploitation.⁶⁵ East German television from the late 1960s and 1970s provides several examples of what the government hoped would replace these unfortunate pits of drunkenness. One episode of *DDR Magazin* twice shows venues that serve alcohol, but rather than 'pubs', 'bars' or 'beer halls', this town offers its citizens refreshment at the movie theatre or in a dance café where drinking is a side feature.⁶⁶ A later episode in the same series depicts young people casually enjoying beers at a brightly lit modern café and in a discotheque where dancing, rather than drinking, occupies most of the patrons.⁶⁷ These new venues of alcohol consumption eschewed the earth tones and grainy feel of wood and brick construction common to older German beer cellars or corner pubs and they physically shed more light on the act of drinking with bright illumination. In the media, the good East German beer drinker was quite literally an enlightened individual.

Many of the preceding points converge strikingly in the lyrics to a 'beer song' commonly sung by members of the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*; FDJ) since at least the 1970s. Witnesses providing oral histories about alcohol in East Germany after 1989 recalled this song as a prominent example of beer's persistent popularity for young people. Though the exact relationship of FDJ officials to the song is unclear, it was recorded in an album by a state-sanctioned 'folk' music group in 1978, suggesting that it was at least tacitly authorised by youth leaders. The lyrics deserve full reproduction for their value in tying together so many of the threads presented in this article:⁶⁸

Whoever has his daily woes,
because he rules in our state,
For them it's not all work, no play;
who rules by day has thirst at night!
[Refrain:]
We were born in a state,

⁶² 'Sammelband DOK188: X. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten Berlin 1973 (Band 72) - Interview mit Herbert Hampe, Direktor des Märkischen Museums, während der Weltfestspiele in Berlin', aired 28 Jul. 1973, Rundfunk der DDR, DRA, 2031541.

⁶³ See again 'Über "Sargnägel", "Pils" und "Kleine Klare"; Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'n' Roll*, 62.

⁶⁴ Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 6.

⁶⁵ Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 31–56.

⁶⁶ *GDR Magazine G/2: Meetings at Frankenburg* (n.d.), Adam Matthew, Marlborough, 'Socialism on Film: The Cold War and International Propaganda', http://www.socialismonfilm.amdigital.co.uk.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/Documents/Details/N_507743_GDR_MAG_G2 (accessed 23 Feb. 2019).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Hagen Jahn, 'Jugend, Musik und Ideologie. Zur Geschichte der FDJ Singebewegung', in *Hallische Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte Heft 12*, ed., Prof. Dr. Hermann-Josef Rupieper (Halle: Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), 10.

Where malt and hops are not lost,
 What do I drink? Hey!
 What do you drink? Hey!
 What do we drink?
Bier, Bier, Bier!
 Come comrade, sit down here,
 and drink a stein empty with us.
 We'll drink until the morning sun,
 and chase our silly little doubts away.
 Turn to beer my quiet boy,
 beer, which loosens many tongues.
 Talk over beer is productive,
 and so it strengthens our collective.
 [Refrain]
 The barkeeps pour from shiny taps,
 But even this requires a plan!
 Drink up so he and the breweries,
 fulfil their plan – we're there for you!
 Beer with its calories,
 gives enormous energies.
 At the plant or on the job –
 sadly not with the ladies.
 [Refrain]
 Whether Wernesgrün or Radeberg,
 the breweries are people's works.
 We decide what comes from them,
 And for all of us, that means beer!⁶⁹

The most striking words of this little ditty come in the second stanza: 'come comrade, sit down here, and drink a stein empty with us. We'll drink until the morning sun and chase our silly little doubts away'. This would seem to violate the SED's policy of not 'arousing desire' for alcoholic beverages.⁷⁰ Critically, though, this song only mentions beer. By the 1970s, alcohol consumption in East Germany had reached truly worrisome levels, but that concern increasingly focused on the skyrocketing use of liquor.⁷¹ The medicalisation of alcohol abuse represents one response to this problem. Starting in the late 1960s, though, officials at the East German Institute for Market Research increasingly promoted beer as a more widely accessible beverage of moderation to accompany wine.⁷² This suggests an element of utility in the media's increasing willingness to openly link youth and beer consumption, aiming to at least push them away from distilled spirits. But there is more here than mere social engineering. This song evokes a full-throated attachment of beer to the political project. Consider the following claims about how the socialist society has taken on Germany's beer culture and embraced it as its own: 1. the 'people' work hard to govern their country, and beer is the reward; 2. the proletariat find power and comradeship in their collective, and beer is a catalyst for their

⁶⁹ Oktoberklub, 'Bierlied', recorded 1978. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_Q3kH3bIhk; *Mahlzeit DDR*, 'Prost Mahlzeit DDR: Kali, Pfeffi, blauer Würger Teil 4', directed by Anreas Kuno Richter, aired 30 Nov. 2003, on MDR (accessed 1 Jan. 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRZozffy-A8>, TS: 12:00.

⁷⁰ *Mahlzeit DDR*, episode 4, timestamp 8:40.

⁷¹ Fabian Tweder, *Vita-Cola und Timms Saurer: Getränkezeit in der DDR* (Berlin: Elefant Press Verlag, 1999), 8.

⁷² Bischoff and Jurich, 'Entwicklung des Bedarfs an alkoholischen Getränken bis 1970', 5, 31, 33–4, 39; Dipl. rer. oec. B.-D. Schimzick und Dr. rer. oec. W. Dlouhy - Institut für Bedarfsforschung, Abt. Nahrungs- und Genußmittel, 'Internationale Entwicklungstendenzen bei Nahrungs- und Genußmitteln: Bericht 3, Der Spirituosenverbrauch und seine Entwicklung in den verschiedenen Ländern', Sep. 1966, BArch, DL 102/223, 5.

cooperation; 3. the planned economy brings beer to all, and in turn that beer strengthens the workers to produce more (though apparently not ‘with the ladies’); 4. even East German breweries with long traditions of excellence such as Radeberger or Wernesgrün now belong to the people. In this idealised vision of socialist modernity, beer is a catalyst to build the future.

Conclusion

‘We were born in a state where malt and hops are not lost’. This line from the FDJ Beer Song contains a play on words that is highly telling for the argument of this article. For ‘malt and hops’ to be lost on something is a German idiom meaning ‘it is hopeless’.⁷³ As such, this turn of phrase both reinforces a commitment to the socialist state as a cause worth believing in and (in the context of a song referring to the actual beverage) reiterates beer’s value as something worth holding on to from the pre-socialist past. Even the Institute of Market Research grounded its understanding of beer’s place in East German society in a long-term historical narrative. ‘Beer is a *Volksgetränk* for us’, the researchers wrote in the late 1960s, ‘its consumption is a fundamental requirement of our population. This requirement results primarily from: A. The utilitarian value of beer . . . and B. The historical development of beer consumption in Central Europe’.⁷⁴

This study has shown that the state media in East Germany actively accommodated the perceived importance of beer as it envisioned a modern socialist society. It did so, moreover, despite parallel efforts to preach temperance and moderation with alcohol where beer frequently played a negative role. On the surface this presents itself as a contradiction between two media narratives. In light of the particular context, however, it appears to be an effort to reform a popular commodity to the new political circumstances of socialism without ceding access to all of the cultural capital historically accrued to it as the drink of the German masses, and particularly proletarian men. Even as they declared that much of East German drinking culture should ‘really belong in the past’, the broadcast media played off of their understanding of beer’s history in German society to envision its future in the bright, modern socialist tomorrow.

⁷³ ‘dict.cc: Deutsche-Englisch-Wörterbuch’, <https://www.dict.cc/?s=An+ihm+ist+Hopfen+und+Malz+verloren>.

⁷⁴ Bischoff and Jurich, ‘Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs an alkoholischen Getränken bis 1970’; three other reports are included in this series and analysed closely in J.P. Gillespie, ‘The People’s Drink: The Politics of Beer in East Germany’, MA Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2018, 132–41.