Workers, Steel Factories, and Communism: Labor in Kremikovci (Bulgaria) and Elbasan (Albania) under State Socialism

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1 Introduction

On 14 March 1960, the Bulgarian engineer Zlatan Zlatarov noted in his diary:

> Now, after four years of hard work as technical manager of the construction site of the copper factory G. Damjanov in Pirdop, I reported at my new work place – the metallurgical plant Kremikovci. Already some years ago, there was talk about the construction of this giant of our ferrous industry and I yearned for the day, when I would start work at its construction. I was looking back on almost ten years of construction work as technical manager, exclusively on national construction sites – the railway lines Loveč-Trojan, die Lower-Balkan Railway Line, the copper factory in Pirdop, and others.

> So, together with the technical manager of the group, Ljako Marinov and the boarding foremen Jordan Docov, and together with engineer Delčo Gjurov, we were the first construction workers here, who laid the foundations of the factory in Kremikovci.

> It was a fortunate twist of fate that my first working day here coincided with the laying of the first stone of the metallurgical plant in Kremikovci.

> The work was tense and exhausting yet fruitful. We managed to do a lot for the preparation of the superstructure work. After this hard day of work we returned together with brigadier Jordan Docov back in our barrack, which was "generously" provided by *Transtroj*, the factory developer. We now used it as our living space. We had to think about the equipment of this place because there could not be any word of "living conditions" yet. The room, which we had to furnish, was three times three meters in size. There was only enough space for two beds and one chair, which served also as table. Yet, only that one who had never before worked on a construction site would complain about such inconveniences, which are the companion of the construction worker, especially the first ones.

> And so … the first day of the building of the Kremikovci steel plant passed by. I laid down in my hard bed and imagined that in the next years, in this endless plain, hundreds of machines would resound, that thousands of construction workers would come and that joint efforts would build factory halls and mills, that the chimneys would smoke and the gigantic heart of the Kremikovci steel plant, which I have seen so far only on plans, would beat – yet, let's see what tomorrow will bring.[1]

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[1] The diary is kept by the "Ivan Hadžijski" Institute at Gallup Sofia, doc. no. 1011.

Zlatarov put down these lines about his first day of work in Kremikovci in his diary. On the following pages, he describes the construction of the steel plant, which would become the single largest industrial enterprise in socialist Bulgaria. Despite backbreaking work and awful living conditions, his enthusiasm for the project did not faint. He was a real exemplification of the ideal worker as imagined by the communist regime, although not even being a party member: hard working, ready to sacrifice himself for a greater good – the industrialization of Bulgaria and the building of socialism. He articulated his experience and expectations with the tropes of official ideology setting his eyes clearly on a bright future.

To take a diary at face value would be naïve, of course. Yet, there is no indication that Zlatan Zlatarov wrote these lines for anybody else than himself. The diary was never published and is today kept in a private archive in Sofia. The language, which the author uses, resembles official rhetoric. His unclouded optimism and astonishing ability to look over obvious shortcomings in the present make the reader suspicious: is it possible that someone really internalized communist ideology to the extent that he spoke Bolshevik – to paraphrase Stephen Kotkin[2] – even to himself? Is this a case of self-duplicity, of double speak in a closed circuit? Or does this diary reflect real enthusiasm of a technical worker who cherished the creation of heavy industry in socialist Bulgaria and took pride from the fact that he was part of the modernization of the country?

For the expression of his feelings, Zlatarov used the language that was there at the moment. The use of the ideological tropes rendered his own experiences meaningful and helped him to connect his personal fate with larger historical forces.[3] He was devoted to his

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[2] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain.*

[3] Research on Soviet diary writing, which is much better developed than on any other formerly socialist country, points to the internalization of official tropes and the writing of the self in terms that connect with the ideological foundations of the system, be it the ideal person as envisioned by Stalinism or the fear of war nurtured in the post-war period. See Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist soul"; Hellbeck, *Revolution on my mind*; Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet experience,* esp. 142 passim. Oral history research on memories of socialism has also shown that many interviewees, for situating themselves in society and creating subjectivity, use salient category of socialist differentiation and group ascription, such as [being] "a worker from a poor family", [coming] "from a poor peasant background", [being] a "diligent worker" etc. See Wierling, "Dominante scripts und komplizierte Lebensgeschichten", 324; for empirical examples from Bulgaria see: Koleva et al., *Slŭnceto na zalez pak sreštu men,* 120, 178, 208, 224 and 234.

work and to building industry, and he praised diligence and commitment. He felt that his participation in socialist Bulgarian society was a success and that he contributed to the success of Bulgaria. He shared these values with the communist regime, which, therefore, appeared as a legitimate one in his eyes, although there are no indications in his diary that he cared for any other aspect of communist ideology. The communist regime relied on people such as Zlatarov: first, it needed their labor and technical expertise for industrialization and modernization. Second, such workers manifested the ability of the communist regime to link its ideological claims to pre-existing popular values and attitudes, such as notions of hard work, progress, self-reliance, education, and endurance.

Research on post-socialist memories of (formerly) industrial workers confirms that workers at least to some extent have internalized elements of communist ideology. In interviews they often articulate their position through notions and images once promoted by communist power. Tanja Petrović, for example, in her study of the social memory of workers in a once large cable factory in the Serbian town of Jagodina, alludes to the importance of the concept of "modernity" in the reflections of workers about post-socialist development. The workers she interviewed felt that under socialism, they had been part of modernity, while after socialism their whole country became more backward and less European than it had used to be. So, the pivotal claim of the Yugoslav communists to build modernity had found eager recipients and participants.[4] No wonder that these workers also nostalgically remember the Yugoslav idea of "Brotherhood and Unity", which they contrast with the catastrophic consequences of the politics of nationalism.[5] In her research on the memory of workers in a Slovenian textile mill, Nina Vodopivec came to similar conclusions. Workers remembered socialism as the "good old days" and rendered their current life meaningful by relying on categories that come from socialism.[6] Analyzing shop-floor relations in a Sofia based glass factory Dimitra Kofti also found out that the workers de-

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[4] Petrović, "When We Were Europe", 141.

[5] Ibid, 131.

[6] Vodopivec, "Past for the Present", 226–7.

scribed their situation today "often through the lens of communist practices."[7] The concept of work is salient in workers' memories, which is clearly a result of the fact that under communism, "work served as the basic determinant of what constituted a loyal and respectable socialist citizen."[8]

Yet, despite the obvious importance of state socialism for workers, and of workers for state socialism, and despite the heavy weight of the communist legacy on the (former) workers' habitus and their memories today, we know relatively little about workers under communism in the Balkans. The project which this working paper describes wants to help filling this void. It aims at a comparative study of shop floor practices and labor relations in two major industrial enterprises in the communist Balkans: the steel mills in Kremikovci near Sofia in Bulgaria and in Elbasan in central Albania.

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[7] Kofti, "Everything has changed" – "Everything is the same", 20 [unpublished paper].

[8] Massino, "Gender, Identity and Work Under State Socialism", 133.

2   The research project "Industrial Workers' Cultures in the Balkans during State Socialism"

Modernization and industrialization were among the pivotal goals of the communist regimes in Southeastern Europe. The challenges which they faced were comparable to those of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution: when communists took power in the Balkans, they did so in largely rural societies, where the single most sizeable social group were peasants (mostly smallholders). The working class, in contrast, was small and dispersed. So, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was forced to create a "socialist" working class in the first place. Hence the nature of the emerging industrial working class was tied to the structures of communist power in the Balkans from the very beginning. This was a marked difference – with important consequences for shop-floor relations – to the East Central European countries, especially Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Zone of Occupation / GDR, but also Hungary and Poland, where a relatively large and sometimes well organized industrial workforce was already in place when the communists took power. Peter Heumos, for example, showed how difficult it was for the Czechoslovak communists in the late 1940s and early 1950s to implement Stalinist campaigns for the increase of production, such as shock-work and socialist competition. These measures were detested by a proud working class that had been socialized in a unionized, social-democratic industrial milieu.[9] Mark Pittaway comments that "Eastern and especially Central European workers had powerful preexisting working-class cultures, values, and aspirations which clashed sharply with notions underpinning Communist party attempts to reshape workers in their own image."[10] This was a noted difference to the Balkans, where such traditional working class strongholds were almost totally missing with few local exceptions.

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[9] Heumos, "Betriebsräte, Einheitsgewerkschaft und staatliche Unternehmensverwaltung"; Heumos, "Zum Verhalten von Arbeitern in industriellen Konflikten"; Heumos, *'Vyhrňme si rukávy, než se kola zastaví!';* Heumos, "Grenzen des Sozialistischen Produktivismus"; Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism".

[10] Pittaway, "Introduction: Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe", 5.

Bulgaria and Albania can illustrate the Southeast European pattern, while at the same time they display important differences. In both countries, the industrial working class was miniscule – in the Albanian case, almost non-existent – when the communists took power in 1944/5. Bulgaria registered some 90,000 industrial workers in 1945, many of them in small, hardly mechanized workshops.[11] In Albania, there was no industrial working class to speak of at all. In 1950, the share of people employed in industry, mining and construction amounted to 7.0 percent of the workforce in Albania and 11.4 percent in Bulgaria in 1950, according to the official data.[12] Yet, in both countries, the ruling communists aimed at achieving industrialization. As a matter of fact, Bulgaria and Albania experienced rapid industrialization under communist rule, though in Albania to a lesser extent than in Bulgaria. By 1989, 45.3 percent of the Bulgarian workforce worked in industry which made this country one of the most industrialized ones in the world. Industry and mining contributed almost 60 percent to the gross domestic product of Bulgaria by the end of communist rule. In Albania, according to official and probably inflated figures, 31.0 percent of the workforce was employed in industry, mining and construction by the end of the 1980s.[13] The lower share of industrial employment in Albania was the result of strict restrictions on rural-urban mobility. The Albanian communists had put in place forceful administrative measures to limit the rural exodus (see below), and in their pursuit of total autarky they placed more emphasis on retaining a large farming population.[14] So, Bulgaria and Albania stand also for different ways of economic policy under communism.

Despite differences in the speed and intensity of industrial development in Bulgaria and Albania, both countries displayed a number of similarities in their industrialization effort. In both countries – such as in most other communist countries – the state prioritized heavy industry over light industry, with notorious consequences for

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[11] Vladigerov, *Ikonomičesko i socialno razvitie na Narodna Republika Bŭlgarija*, 44.

[12] Brunnbauer, "Gesellschaft und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Südosteuropa nach 1945", 669. It goes without saying that communist statistics are not the most reliable source of information.

[13] Ibid, 668–9.

[14] Sjöberg, "Rural Retention in Albania".

the provision of the population with consumer goods. Heavy industry received the bulk of state investment because economic planners thought that only capital industry would lay durable foundations of a modern economy by producing the goods necessary for infrastructure development and further industrialization. As Katherine Verdery put it "Socialist regimes wanted not just eggs but the goose that lays them."[15] The concentration of resources in heavy industry created significant imbalances in the economy as a whole which contributed to the economic malaise of state socialism. It had also salient consequences for the nature of the workforce and its internal differentiation: factories in heavy industry employed more people and formed a micro-cosmos within socialist society; they wielded more political influence and, therefore, were more successful in soliciting scarce resources from the state authorities. Workers in heavy industry received higher wages and were more sought after; that is why they had more room for maneuver than, for example, female workers in the textile industry. It is important to note that the size of an industrial enterprise did matter greatly not only for economic but also for social reasons. Companies in state socialism were not only employers, and factories not only a place where people worked, but they played a significant role for the organization of social life. Many social benefits, such as housing, places in vacation homes, educational opportunities, cultural and other leisurely activities, were distributed and organized through the employer and not the state directly. To work in a large, politically powerful enterprise which enjoyed privileged investment provision, thus, meant concrete benefits for the workers.

Our project does not aim at a detailed reconstruction of economic policies and industrial development. We rather take the post-1945 industrialization drive and the concomitant rise of a working class as point of departure for the analysis of industrial labor relations under communism. We are interested in practices and relations on the shop-floor and the attitudes of workers towards work and their relations with management and the party-state. We want to reconstruct the social differences among the workers and their accommodation with the communist system. These questions will

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[15] Verdery, *What was socialism, and what comes next?*, 26.

be studied by two case studies: the "Brežnev Metallurgical Complex" in Kremikovci in Bulgaria and the "Steel of the Party" steel mill in Elbasan, Albania. Both steel factories were the single largest industrial enterprises in their country with enormous economic but also political significance.

The heuristic value of these two case studies lies in their being a micro-cosmos of social relations in state socialism. We depart from the assumption that the salient patterns of economic and social organization, but also of cultural and societal policies of the communist regimes are reflected in the relations at the workplace and between workers and management in these two steel mills. The two enterprises were sites of the construction of communism. They stand for its ideology but also for the divergent social results that came out of policy measures. Such as other large-scale sites of the building of socialism – in a literal and metaphorical way – the steel plants in Kremikovci and Elbasan were over-determined by various and sometimes conflicting symbolic ascriptions.[16] They were intended to become molders of the "New Man" and of the communist soul, while at the same time they had to fulfill functions essential to the economies of Albania and Bulgaria. The communists ascribed huge ideological importance onto the two factories and invested a lot of political as well as financial capital to make these intentions true. Enver Hoxha even called the construction of the Elbasan steel plant a "second liberation" of Albania, after the first one by the communist partisans in World War Two. The names of the factories carried a lot of symbolic meaning as well: In 1982, after the death of the long-time General Secretary of the Communist Part of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brežnev, who had worked in the iron and steel industry, the Kremikovci plant took his name. This choice of name alluded to the close relationship between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. The name "Steel of the Party," given to the factory in Elbasan, highlighted the role of the party and its claims at heroism, steadfastness and strength. The symbolic meaning of the factories would eventually outweigh their economic rationale: the "Brežnev Metallurgical Complex" in Kremikovci and the "Steel of Party" mill in Elbasan were essentially

poetic endeavors. A business or economic history point of view, therefore, cannot fully appreciate their political, social and cultural significance.
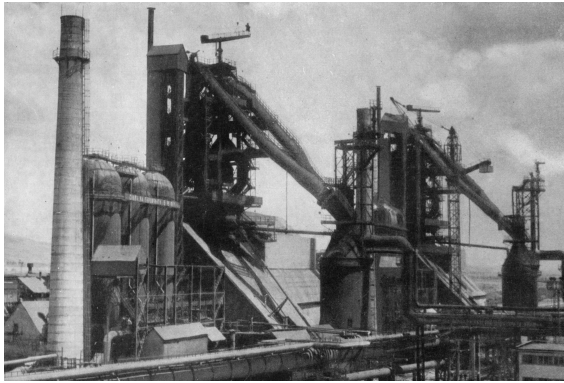
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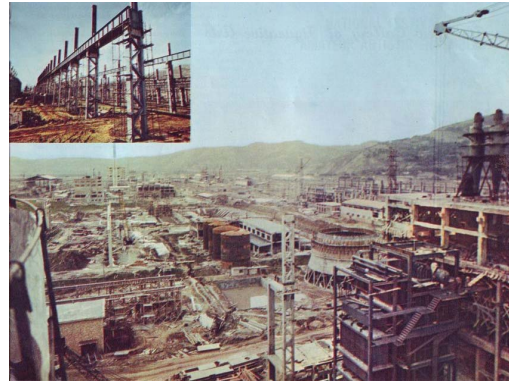
Elbasan

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[16] Cf. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*; Gestwa, *Die Stalinschen Großbauten des Kommunismus*.

3 Industrial workers in state socialism

While the history of industrial workers under communism in Southeastern Europe has attracted limited interest, we can build on a significant body of scholarship on workers' history in state socialism in other countries. The main thrust in this literature is the relationship between workers and the party-state which – according to most accounts – was ambiguous. Peter Heumos succinctly concluded on this issue that

> Cooperation with the political system could coexist with actions that could be described as deviant, just as accommodation and the pursuit of individual interests could reinforce conformity. Patterns of behavior that were unambiguous were only found occasionally.[17]

The spread of the geographic focus of research on "socialist workers" is very uneven. This is a pity because each state socialist society possessed its idiosyncratic features. The variations neither in time nor in place have been sufficiently explored. In terms of place, we know most about workers in the Soviet Union and the GDR, two arguably and for different reasons very specific cases. As for the Soviet Union, the development of the industrial working class and industrial relations in the 1920s and 1930s have been in the center of the attention of labor history; that is, the periods of the relatively liberal *Novaia ekonomičeskaia politika* (New Economic Policies) and of forced industrialization under Stalin.[18] There is much less research on workers in the Soviet post-war and especially the post-Stalinist period.[19] The history of workers in the GDR has found extensive treatment as well, for example by the voluminous collection "*Arbeiter in der SBZ – DDR*" or in Christoph Klessmann's similarly exhaustive "*Arbeiter im Arbeiterstaat*".[20] In her

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[17] Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism", 47; cf. Pittaway, "Introduction: Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe", 1.

[18] Filtzer, *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialization;* Filtzer, *Soviet workers and de-Stalinization*; Filtzer, Labour and the Contradictions of Soviet Planning under Stalin; Filtzer, "Labor Discipline, the Use of Work Time, and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928–1991; Filtzer, "The standard of living of Soviet industrial workers in the immediate postwar period, 1945–1948"; Filtzer, *Soviet workers and late Stalinism*; Filtzer, *A dream deferred*; Kotkin, *Magnetic mountain*; Chase, *Workers, society, and the Soviet state.*

[19] A notable exception is Donald Filtzer (Filtzer, *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialization*). The impact of perestroika on workers has found more attention, though mainly from a political (science) point of view.

[20] Hübner, Klessmann and Tenfelde, *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus*; Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im 'Arbeiterstaat' DDR.*

comparative study of different industrial enterprises in the GDR Jeannette Madarász has pointed to the significance of the political relevance of a factory: its place in the hierarchy of investment allocation and the ability of its director to exploit networks had direct consequences for the situation of its workers.[21]

Research on workers in other state-socialist countries is sketchier and owes a lot to individual efforts, such as Peter Heumos' explorations of the relationship between communist power and industrial workers in Czechoslovakia or late Mark Pittaway's interest in the accommodation of workers with the socialist system in Hungary.[22] There is especially a lack in genuinely comparative studies.[23] Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast's exploration of the steel mills in Nowa Huta (Poland), in Eisenhüttenstadt (GDR) and Ostrava (Czechoslovakia), in which she deals also with the situation of the workers, is a notable exception,[24] Mark Pittaway's cross-regional perspective another.[25]

A very productive thread in the research on the social history of state socialism, which offers important insights also into workers' history, has been the exploration of new "socialist" cities. Stephen Kotkin's now classic study on the "Magnetic Mountain",[26] which is a *histoire total* of the construction of the new Soviet industrial city of Magnitogorsk south of the Ural Mountains, was followed by investigations of the social, cultural and economic developments of other "socialist" cities as well: Nowa Huta in Poland,[27] Sztálinváros / Dunaújváros in Hungary,[28] Stalinstadt / Eisenhüttenstatt in the

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[21] Madarász, *Working in East Germany*.

[22] For Heumos see references in footnote 9; Pittaway, "Workers, Management and the State in Socialist Hungary"; Pittaway, "Accomodation and the Limits of Economic Reform"; International Labor and Working-Class History, vol. 68 (2005), special issue on "Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe"; Pittaway, *The workers' state*.

[23] An important edited volumes with contributions on different countries is Hübner, Klessmann and Tenfelde, *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus*.

[24] Jajeśniak-Quast, "Die sozialistische Planstadt Eisenhüttenstadt im Vergleich mit Nowa Huta und Ostrava-Kunčice", Jajeśniak-Quast, *Stahlgiganten in der sozialistischen Transformation*.

[25] Pittaway, "Introduction: Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe".

[26] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

[27] Lebow, "Socialist Leisure in Time and Space"; Janus, "Labor's Paradise".

[28] Horváth, *A kapu és a határ*; Horváth, "Alltag in Sztálinváros".

GDR,[29] and Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria.[30] These towns were not only connected with the important goal to create a heavy industry base for the socialist economy but they were considered by the communists also a hotbed of the New Man, the ultimate goal of communist societal policy. One common theme of these explorations is the significant gulf between political intentions and socio-cultural as well as economic results: although these new cities and their industries[31] enjoyed privileged resource allocation and were places of major ideological investment, the social and cultural practices diverged from the communist blue print of the New Man (and Woman). The party had hoped to see the emergence of self-sacrificing builders of socialism. Yet, social life in these places was characterized by a myriad of practices that in the eyes of the communist rulers were often deviant. The cities and industries also mirrored general shortcomings of communist planning, evident for example in severe housing shortages and problems in labor discipline. Another important finding of these studies on new "socialist" cities is the fact that these places became characterized by new forms of social inequality. Communist policies produced new mechanisms of social exclusion while at the same time providing avenues of social advancement for certain segments of the population.

However, the failure of communist regimes to render social relations and cultural practices a mirror image of their ideology does not mean that political interventions did not leave traces in collective identities and loyalties. The impact of party politics and of ideology, therefore, must not be neglected. On the one hand, there were certain elements of communist ideology – such as the appraisal of work – which were accepted by workers; on the other hand, the workers learnt how to navigate the constraints of the system by learning to speak "Bolshevik." This is how Stephen Kotkin put it: "Life in Magnitogorsk taught cynicism as well as labor enthusiasm, fear as well as pride. Most of all, life in Magnitogorsk taught one how to identify oneself and speak in the accepta-

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[29] Jajeśniak-Quast, *Stahlgiganten in der sozialistischen Transformation.*

[30] Brunnbauer, "'The Town of the Youth': Dimitrovgrad and Bulgarian Socialism".

[31] With the exception of Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, which became a center of chemical industry, the other 'socialist' cities were shaped by the steel industry.

ble terms."[32] The acceptance of communist concepts for individual identification is also evident in contemporaneous autobiographies of workers and in their letters to the authorities in which they framed their self in terms that were meaningful to the power-holders.[33]

A core question in the research of workers' history under state socialism is the impact of party dictatorship upon the workplace and upon shop-floor relations. Contemporary research refutes both the notion that workers were just cogs in a gigantic cogwheel, nor that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" has brought liberation from alienation; neither does recent research portray workers as being in constant opposition to the communist regime. The relationship between workers and party-state are rather described in terms of a "complex dynamic of consent, accommodation and appropriation as much as by resistance."[34] The intricate issue of labor discipline is a case in point for the fact that any dichotomous conceptualizations are misplaced. Many researchers highlight the apparent paradox that, on the one hand, labor codes and labor policies were strict and often repressive; on the other hand, party, government and enterprise documents are full with reports about slack labor discipline, frequent absenteeism, drinking at the workplace, and insubordinate workers. Even though during Stalinism violations of factory discipline were part of the criminal code, and many workers were sent to the GULAG or otherwise repressed for coming late, causing machine breakdowns, or stealing property of the factory, the communists appear to have been on the losing side in their struggle for increased labor productivity and discipline. Neither punishment and propaganda, nor material incentives seemed to help: industrial workers displayed a high degree of "*Eigen-Sinn*" (self-will)[35] which manifested itself also in a lack of discipline.

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[32] Kotkin, *Magentic Mountain*, 237.

[33] See Friedman, "Furtive Selves".

[34] Pittaway, "Introduction: Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe," 3.

[35] Cf. Lüdtke, *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis.*

Already in 1982, Charles Sabel and David Stark provided a plausible answer to the apparent puzzle, why workers under a dictatorial and overtly interventionist regime and despite harsh labor codes and the non-existence of independent trade unions, enjoyed a surprisingly large room of maneuver: full employment – which was an important political-ideological promise of the communists that they hardly wanted to betray – had created a tremendous need of labor, which forced enterprises to accept 'deviant' practices of the workers because workers could threaten the management to leave. State socialist economies were economies of shortage, and labor was one of the scarce production factors. Such as with other supplies, many companies pursued a strategy of hording: they employed more people than they would normally need for maintaining regular production, just to have enough workers at those – rare – moments when they received the necessary materials in order to meet their production goals as specified by the plan. Workers knew that the management depended on them, and managers knew that if they did not meet production figures they would face sanctions or lose their job. The permanent lack of workers constituted a risk for the managers and a chance for the workers. Workers gained bargaining power on the workplace and vis-à-vis their superiors, regardless of the fact that trade-unions were relatively toothless and rarely stood up against the party.[36] Kotkin makes a similar point:

> The state policy of full employment further reinforced workers' leverage. Workers discovered that in the absence of unemployment or a 'reserve army,' managers and especially foremen under severe pressure to meet obligations could become accommodating. What resulted could be called a kind of equal but nonetheless real codependency.[37]

This mechanism seems to have been in place in all European state-socialist countries once they had reached full employment. The only notable exception is Yugoslavia, where officially recognized unemployment became a permanent feature of socio-economic life in the mid-1960s and grew to very high numbers in the 1980s (with sig-

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[36] Sabel and Stark, "Planning, Politics, and Shop-Floor Power", 451; Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism", 51 and 54.

[37] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 224.

nificant differences between the republics and provinces).[38] Unfortunately, there is practically no new historical research on the situation of industrial workers in socialist Yugoslavia (in contrast, for example, to the topic of workers' memory of socialism, which draws scholarly interest). Yet, the fact that Yugoslavia recorded a high number of usually localized strikes and walkouts can be seen as an indicator for the fact that the relations between workers and management were different from other state socialist countries. It was not only unemployment that constituted a difference: Yugoslav workers enjoyed "self-management," which was introduced by law in 1950 and became one of the pillars of Yugoslavia's claim to a distinctive path towards socialism. This was not mere window-dressing. Workers had more say in company related matters than in other state socialist (and for that matter, capitalist) countries.[39] The other major difference which must have had an impact on relations on the workplace was the opportunity of Yugoslav workers to take up work abroad. In 1963/4 the Yugoslav government permitted temporary emigration abroad for the purpose of taking work. Until 1973/4, when the Western European countries declared a stop on recruitment of Yugoslav emigrant workers, up to one million workers left Yugoslavia.[40] It seems a reasonable but yet to be tested hypothesis that the opportunity to go abroad and the relatively strong position of workers in the "self-managed" enterprises in Yugoslavia had similar consequences for shop-floor relations like full employment in the other state socialist economies.

An important economic result of full employment and the general need for workers was the high rate of labor turn-over in state socialist societies. Sabel and Stark point to frequent complaints by party leaders that so many workers changed their job, especially young and well-qualified ones who easily found another job with better pay or lighter norms and better working conditions.[41] The opportunity to get employment somewhere else was a major bargaining chip of workers vis-à-vis their employer. Katharyne Mitchell

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[38] Woodward, Socialist umemployment.

[39] Höpken, "Sozialismus und Pluralismus in Jugoslawien".

[40] Baučič, "Some economic consequences of Yugoslav external migrations".

[41] Sabel and Stark, "Planning, Politics, and Shop-Floor Power", 452.

notes in a 1992 paper that in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, approximately 20 percent of all workers changed their job in each year. They were mostly young and qualified. Mitchell also emphasizes that there were significant differences in the rate of labor turn-over according to region, industry, level of qualification, age and political engagement of the workers.[42] Neither the Soviet nor the other ruling communists managed to curtail labor turnover with administrative measure. One reason for that failure was the practice of the managements of enterprises in need of workers to directly recruit workers from somewhere else.[43] Dagmara Jajeśnik-Quandt, for example, shows how the steel mill in Stalinstadt / Eisenhüttenstadt lost workers to other industrial enterprises, despite its prominent ideological and political position in the GDR. Yet, other factories would offer better working conditions (e.g., no night shifts, physically less exhaustive jobs) or were located in more attractive places, so that they were able to recruit workers from one of the presumed flagships of GDR industry.[44] Rates of labor turnover could reach astronomic dimensions, especially in the early years of socialist construction: The steel mill in Nowa Huta hired 4,928 workers in the first five months of 1955, while 4,306 left the enterprise during the same time.[45] However, as Mitchell's data on the 1970s' Soviet Union show, turnover would remain on a high level also in the years after the initial built-up of industry. In Bulgaria as well, labor turnover was a major characteristic of industry: in 1981, the rate was twenty-nine percent.[46] It goes without saying that the discontinuity of the workforce had detrimental effects on production and qualification levels. It was one important reason why the communist regimes never achieved their goals with respect to professional training of workers.

The particular bargaining power of workers shaped relations also within an enterprise. The management often sought ways to retain workers, especially qualified personnel, and to tie them to the factory. One way was to offer higher wages, which however was a limited option because wages were usually centrally set. Yet, the management could decree

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[42] Mitchell, "Work Authority in Industry", 688.

[43] Sabel and Stark, "Planning, Politics, and Shop-Floor Power", 453.

[44] Jajeśniak-Quast, *Stahlgiganten in der sozialistischen Transformation,* 130.

[45] Ibid, 135.

lighter norms, often in conflict with central planners who preferred higher, "scientifically" established norms.[47] Management also often turned a blind eye on violations of labor discipline, such as showing up too late or leaving too early, drinking on the job, etc. It should be noted that absenteeism was often caused by unpredictable public transportation and the need to queue for basic consumer goods, and not a result of laziness. Enterprises that enjoyed privileged access to state investments could offer non-financial incentives as well, such as better housing, vacation homes in attractive touristic areas, cultural, sports and other leisurely facilities for their workers, etc. The provision of welfare benefits through enterprises can be seen as an attempt of the communist regime to territorialize citizenship rights and thereby prevent mobility and create loyalty of workers to their enterprise.[48] The frequent organization of enterprise festivities was another attempt by the management to foster among the workers bonds of attachment with their work place. While politico-ideological speeches were an inevitable component of these festivities, workers do seem to have enjoyed them, though for more mundane reasons, i.e., for the availability of food and drinks as well as the chance to take a day off.[49] The workers practiced, in John Scott's term, a "counter appropriation" of an action that management had thought to use for increasing control over them.[50] This does not contradict information from oral history that the core workforce of an enterprise identified with it.[51]

Another area where managers had leeway to make concession was the acceptance of informal practices. They often turned a blind eye on the wide-spread practice of workers to appropriate resources of their enterprise for moonlighting. These resources included not only material items (tools and machines, primary materials for production) but also work time. Informal relations permeated all walks of socialist society, and informal economic activities were essential for maintaining at least a modicum of stability and to

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[46] Lampe, *The Bulgarian economy in the twentieth century*, 161.

[47] For an example of such a conflict see Sabel and Stark, "Planning, Politics, and Shop-Floor Power", 455–6.

[48] Dičev, "Usjadaneto na nomadskija komunizăm"; Tóth, "Shifting Identities in the Life Histories".

[49] Petrov, "Sozialistische Arbeitsfeiern im Betrieb", 161.

[50] Quoted in Lüdtke, "Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis", 49.

[51] E. g. Tóth, "Shifting Identities in the Life Histories", 87.

put the available economic resources to use. Hence, party leaderships often accepted these arrangements even if they ran counter to their claim of rationally organizing society and planning economy. The work-place was a fundament of such informal networks. Access to networks and resources became a major factor in the differentiation of the working class (and of wider society).[52]

So, workers were not completely powerless in contrast to what has often been suggested by Western observers during the Cold War. Workers played an active role in the formation of the state-socialist system. Yet, the literature on workers under communism does not paint a rosy picture either. It stresses the many material and political constraints under which workers (and other members of socialist society) lived and worked. The relationship between communist rulers and workers was difficult from the very beginning, because established industrial workers opposed certain policy measures of the new regimes.[53] The well known examples of labor unrest – such in the GDR and Czechoslovakia in 1953, in Poland and Hungary in 1956, in Romania in 1971 and 1987, and the Solidarność movement – are evidence of the significant gap between workers' aspirations and their lived realities. These manifestations of workers discontent often forced the party to offer concessions and to improve living and working conditions. Mark Pittaway stressed the "workerism" of communist regimes after the labor upheavals in the mid-1950s, which at least for some time stabilized the system and secured workers rising living standards. So, workers through mass action forced policy changes. The regime's attempts to accommodate the industrial working class and to safeguard its earnings – especially of its male, skilled elite – "resulted in tacit acceptance by the regime of the informal patterns of workplace bargaining, which had sprung up between workers and management (…)."[54] This policy undermined regime and management efforts to raise productivity in the long-term. In Hungary, for example the workerism of the regime created a new sense of entitlement among the skilled workers, which the workers perceived to be jeopardized

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[52] Pittaway, "Accomodation and the Limits of Economic Reform", 462–3.

[53] Ibid, 2; see Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland.*

[54] Pittaway, *Eastern Europe 1939–2000,* 68.

when the Hungarian communists introduced market-oriented reforms in the late 1960s. These reforms were, thus, met with "a wave of working-class protest. (…) Some [workers] felt alienated by what they saw as a new managerialism in industry."[55] Hungarian workers also resented the increased materialism manifest in the economic reforms.[56]

Hence, the attitudes of the working class were a factor with which communists had to reckon when introducing economic reforms. The large miners' strike in the Jiu Valley in Romania in August 1971 is a case in point: a new law that brought a number of reductions in social benefits marked the end of a tacit 'deal' between regime and workers. The walkout in the Jiu mine was even successful in the short time, because Ceaușescu personally came to the miners and promised to accept their demands. Only later did the state clamp down on the organizers of the protest.[57] In post-1968 Czechoslovakia and the GDR – two other regimes which resisted political liberalization – system stability depended to a large degree on the material concessions granted by the party-state to the workers; at least as long as the tacit social contract of foregoing political liberties in exchange for social benefits, consumer choices, tranquility and a relatively relaxed labor regime could be maintained.[58] Bulgaria broadly falls into this pattern as well. Even the Albanian regime took measures to appease workers, such as by reducing prices and wage differences and by creating "workers' control committees" in factories.[59]

Workers, thus, were not pawns in the socialist chess play but actors with their own agendas, hopes and expectations. Their room for maneuver and bargaining power nevertheless remained dependent on the bureaucratic decisions of the rulers, upon which they usually had only a mediate influence at best. The workers' situation was connected to the institutional-political arrangements and the power structures of the communist system. They fared best if they could find allies among powerful circles of the regime that used the support of workers for their own purposes. This could result

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[55] Pittaway, "Accomodation and the Limits of Economic Reform", 453–4.

[56] Bartha, "The Disloyal 'Ruling Class'", 147.

[57] Petrescu, "Workers and Peasant-Workers in a Working Class' 'Paradise'", 127.

[58] Boyer, "Sozialgeschichte der Arbeiterschaft und staatssozialistische Entwicklungspfade", 77.

in divergent and dynamic constellations and tacit coalitions that impacted on the overall development of economic and social policy.[60]

Finally, our project takes up the important insight that the working class did not form a unified body at all. It is hard to retrospectively analyze workers' self-identification because this is clouded by a thick wall of ideological ascriptions. Collective actions of workers were often concentrated around individual factories and there were few cases of trans-local activism (the emergence and rapid growth of the Solidarność movement in Poland is a rare case in point). There were important cleavages among the industrial workers during state socialism which sometimes resulted in antagonistic relations: "old", well established workers detested new recruits who were seen as more liable to accept communist-style forms of production and to do overwork for material and non-material incentives, while established workers had acquired knowledge how to resist impositions by the management.[61] Skilled workers used the dependence of the management on their work for defending their privileges, sometimes to the disadvantage of unskilled workers.[62] Male workers did not greet with enthusiasm the promotion of female workers.[63] Another major divide was between urban workers and rural workers who often maintained close connections with farming; especially in the late industrializing countries a significant percentage of workers can be classified as peasant-workers. The nature of the industry made also an important difference as for the bargaining power of workers: those who worked in politically sensitive branches had more options than those who worked in marginal industries. A qualified male worker in a large steel or machine factory in a large city was in a better place to negotiate concessions than an unqualified female worker in a textile factory in a village.

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[59] Kaser, "Economic System", 301.

[60] See Sabel and Stark, "Planning, Politics, and Shop-Floor Power", 466–72.

[61] E. g. Chumiński and Ruchniewicz, "Arbeiter und Opposition in Polen 1945–1989", 451; Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism", 59–60.

[62] Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism", 66.

[63] E. g. Massino, "Gender, Identity and Work Under State Socialism", 143.

Why do we nevertheless use the concept of class, despite the mentioned differentiations within this presumed group? First of all, we use "class" for the lack of better alternatives. But there is also a more substantial argument: memories of former industrial workers reveal a self-identification as "worker" and the construction of a community of fate by this name. Workers often position themselves against non-workers and describe their experiences as part of a collective story. As E. P. Thompson stressed in his seminal "The Making of the English Working Class," class is something that happens during a process; it constitutes a relationship and a set of ideas, not a structure or category.[64]

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[64] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9–11.

4   Kremikovci and Elbasan: Two steel giants in comparison

The economic policies of communist governments displayed a distinctive trend towards achieving autarky. Each of them intended to build a national base of heavy industry. The production of steel played an important role in these strategies, not least because communists regarded the steel industry an embodiment of modernity and the fundament of further industrial progress. Steel also represented a variety of values in which the communists fervently believed. Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili's *nom de guerre*, Stalin, added further symbolic power to steel. Bulgaria and Albania were no exceptions.

In 1958, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) decided to build a large steel plant in the outskirts of Sofia near the village of Kremikovci.[65] The new factory was thought to produce the amounts of steel deemed necessary for Bulgaria's further industrialization and infrastructure development. It was part of the Bulgarian "Great Leap Forward" propagated by the party leadership at that time, which amounted to a renewal of massive investments in industry. The factory was also to create jobs in order to erase urban unemployment, which had appeared in the late 1950s. From the very beginning, this industrial endeavor was attributed cultural functions as well: the ruling communists hoped that the new factory would contribute to the making of the socialist worker and to giving Sofia, the capital city, a more pro-letarian outlook. The motivations of the Albanian communists were similar. In 1964, the Fifth Congress of the Party of Labor of Albania passed the decision to build the country's first steel plant, which was to be located near the town of Elbasan in central Albania. In Albania even more so than in Bulgaria, this decision reflected the party's aim at achieving economic autarky: Albania had broken with the Soviet Union in 1961 and was economically isolated from both East and West. The foundation of its own steel industry was, therefore, imperative because the country could not, or did not want to, import steel.

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[65] For a history of the steel plant see Palairet, "'Lenin' and 'Brezhnev'"; Brunnbauer, "Stählerne Träume".

Our project focuses on the workers in these two enterprises. Yet, their situation and their relations to the management cannot be understood if the economic development of the factories and their political context are ignored. The significance of national politics for the steel plants is evinced by the fact that their directors were also members of the party's Central Committee and directly answered to its Politburo. Hajredin Çeliku, director of the Elbasan factory since 1981, was even member of the Albanian Politburo.[66] Political developments, even the foreign policies of the governments, had direct effects on workplace relations. A case in point is the external orientation of Bulgaria and Albania: Bulgaria relied heavily on Soviet support (loans, machinery, and technical specialists) for the construction of the Kremikovci plant, even though the Soviets doubted its economic viability.[67] Consequently, propaganda praised the "Metallurgical Complex Kremikovci" as a symbol of the "eternal friendship" between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, manifested in 1982 also by the adding of the late Soviet leader's name to the name of the factory. This added another important symbolic layer to the meaning of the factory. In Albania the government solicited help from the PR of China, the remaining ally of Albania after its break with the Soviets. China sent hundreds of specialists who supported the erection of the plant in the 1960s. The Chinese also tested the iron ore sent by Albania for inspection.

In 1978 the Albanian leadership broke also with the Chinese communists. The cooling of relations prior to the complete break is evident in reports on the Elbasan steel factory, which detailed the economic damage of alleged Chinese "sabotage". Before the eventual break between the countries, the local interaction in Elbasan between the Albanians and the Chinese was increasingly fraught with difficulties. The cessation of economic support from the PR of China caused severe disturbances in the Albanian economy and the Elbasan steel plant as well. This forced the management, under close surveillance by the government, to seek contacts with western firms, e.g. the "Salzgitter AG" in Germany, in search for expertise. It is an irony that the technical demands of a

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[66] Mataj, *Kur jeta kerkon te flas*, 331.

[67] The doubts concerned mainly the size and quality of the iron ore deposits near Kremikovci, which were one of the main reasons for choosing this site for the steel plant. At about 31 percent, the iron content of the ore was much lower than in ore from mines in the Soviet Union.

major instrument in the pursuit of autarky, i.e., the steel plant in Elbasan, forced the Albanian leadership to seek contacts with a capitalist country.

The Bulgarians were faced with similarly paradoxical results. While thanks to Kremikovci they accomplished their goal of self-reliance in steel production, the plant's insatiable demand for resources created new external dependencies. The iron ore deposits in Kremikovci, which had been the prime reason for the location of the factory, proved to be insufficient. The Bulgarians were, therefore, forced to import iron ore from the Soviet Union and other countries. They also had to buy coke abroad, which was required for the production of steel, because Bulgaria did not possess its own bituminous coal deposits for the production of coke. Now, the location of the plant far away from the nearest port turned into a major disadvantage, which was compounded by the notorious unreliability of the Bulgarian railways, which transported ore and coke from Burgas at the Black Sea to Kremikovci. The plan to build a channel from the Danube to Sofia was not realized. Aside from that, the technology of production in Kremikovci was outdated and was hardly modernized during the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually, the productivity of Kremikovci was lower than that of the older and smaller steel plant in the Bulgarian town of Pernik, which had been founded before World War Two. Nevertheless, thanks to its size, Kremikovci produced more steel than the Bulgarian economy would need. So, the factory sought to sell its products on foreign markets. However, the quality of its steel was so low that it could be marketed abroad only at very low prices which were below the costs of production. The state would finance the difference, which is why Kremikovci continued to swallow up a significant part of the total industrial investment in Bulgaria. When all costs are factored in, it would have been cheaper for Bulgaria to buy Soviet steel instead of producing its own.[68] Today's memories of Kremikovci as one of the biggest nails in the coffin of the Bulgarian socialist economy are not much beyond the point, although former workers of Kremikovci deplore its bad image.

The economic development of the factory in Elbasan has not been reconstructed yet. From our exploratory analysis of archival evidence it seems that problems were

similar – if not more severe – to the ones in Kremikovci. In the mid-1980s, for example, the Elbasan plant struggled to receive enough raw materials (iron ore, nickel) from domestic suppliers who preferred to export these commodities. Production almost came to a standstill in the late 1980s; workers remember that they were often idle. The efficiency of the plant was low as well, if compared to western steel factories.[69] However, neither the Kremikovci nor the Elbasan steel plant followed an exclusively or even predominantly economic rationale. They were ascribed by the party-state many other equally important social, political and cultural functions. Therefore, party and government, which were well aware of the economic inefficiencies of these factories, were ready to commit further resources to keep them afloat. They were also ready to accept enormous pollution of air and soil – another notorious feature that unites Kremikovci and Elbasan and that has left a lasting imprint on the public perception of the two plants.

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[68] See Palairet, "'Lenin' and 'Brezhnev'"; Schönfelder, *Vom Spätsozialismus zur Privatrechtsordnung*, 896.

[69] Hutchings, "Albanian Industrialization", 123.

5 Work in the Kremikovci and Elbasan steel factories

In order to understand what it meant to be a worker in the two factories, and how daily work and life were shaped by political and economic conditions, the genealogy of the workforce and their everyday labor practices need to be reconstructed. Particularly revealing is the investigation of those fields of interaction, where policies and agendas of the party-state and its divergent institutions, of the management, and of the workers intersected. In the following, we will therefore present first results of our analysis of three major problems: (1) the patterns of the recruitment and of the composition of the workforce, (2) the problem of labor discipline and (3) the integrative function of the steel plants.

5.1 Recruitment of workers and composition of the workforce

A common challenge to the management of both factories was the recruitment of workers. This is an important question also because recruitment, and concomitantly the social and geographic background of workers, was a prime factor for the differentiation of the workforce. Furthermore, the difficulties to recruit workers is yet another indicator for the gulf between political intentions and results: despite being so highly cherished by propaganda and despite offering material privileges, the two steel plants found it difficult to attract and retain workers.

The analysis of recruitment offers insight into the realities of the internal mobility regime that was in place in both countries. The governments of Bulgaria and Albania had imposed restrictions on internal mobility in order to stem the rural exodus. In Bulgaria the government introduced new restrictions on the relocation to Sofia in the early 1950s, which in 1955 were extended to other large cities and later to smaller ones as well.[70] In Albania the movement from one place of residence to another was dependent

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[70] These restrictions were based on a 1942 law. In 1981, there were only 121 small towns without restriction of taking residence there. Yet, these restrictions did little to stem the tide of urbanization in socialist Bulgaria. Creed, *Domesticating Revolution*, 145.

on permission by the authorities because the government wanted to prevent the depopulation of the rural areas. In the early 1960s the flood of rural migrants was, indeed, practically stemmed in Albania.[71] Unfortunately, it is very difficult to reconstruct the legal framework governing mobility in Albania because, as Örjan Sjöberg notes, most laws, decrees and other legal rules were not made public after the Fifth Party Congress in 1966.[72] Sjöberg could nonetheless identify several concrete measures of the Albanian government, by which they tried to reign in the rural exodus.

From the overall demographic development of Bulgaria and Albania it appears that the Albanian regime was much more consistent in enforcing these administrative restrictions on mobility, although it did not manage to fully implement them as well. Despite an ongoing trend of urbanization, the majority of the population of Albania continued to live in the countryside, whereas in Bulgaria the rural-urban distribution was reversed. According to official Albanian statistics, the share of the population residing in rural areas increased from 20 percent in 1950 to 36 percent in 1989, while in Bulgaria it grew from 30 to 67 percent.[73]

The recruitment practices of the Kremikovci plant help to explain why in Bulgaria, despite legal restrictions, the rural exodus continued almost unabated in the 1960s. One of the main motives to take work in Kremikovci was the granting of a residence permit (*žitelstvo*) in Sofia. Thanks to its political leverage and the priority status that it enjoyed in the eyes of the government the Kremikovci factory faced no difficulties to get residency permits from the city authorities for its newly recruited workers. Many workers took work in Kremikovci only for that purpose, and left the factory after some time in order to find a job in the city of Sofia proper. This practice was one of the underlying factors of the continuously high rate of labor turnover in Kremikovci: in the early 1970s, for example, between 16 and 18 percent of the workforce left the factory each

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[71] Sjöberg, "Rural Retention in Albania", 215.

[72] Ibid, 210. This points, of course, also to a very idiosyncratic understanding of law and statehood by the Albanian communist.

[73] Brunnbauer, "Gesellschaft und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Südosteuropa nach 1945", 685.

year. Between 1971 and 1975, the plant hired 17,492 workers, while 13,950 left it.[74] Since many of the new workers came from villages, the authorities and the management continued to deplore the low level of qualification of the workforce.

Even though the mobility restrictions were much more vigorously enforced by the Albanian regime, the investigation of recruitment practices by the Elbasan steel plant reveals divergent practices. In general, the Albanian communists tried to strictly divide the labor force into an urban and a rural component. Sjöberg writes that

> Moreover, labour legislation appears to prescribe a strict divorce of new entrants to the labour 'market' along the lines of rural or urban origin and place of residence. Thus, the rural youth are expected to take up jobs in the rural sector (…), whereas urban youth remains the pool from which the urban labour force is replenished.[75]

Yet, the same author already assumed that these strict rules were not always enforced because they contradicted other important political goals, such as the achievement of production targets and the maintenance of high employment levels. Sjöberg also suspected that Albanian enterprises as well practiced a strategy of hoarding resources and sought additional labor beyond what the central planning authorities had allocated to them.[76] Archival evidence indeed shows that the Elbasan steel plant circumvented the mobility restrictions in place. The factory had no choice but to resort to informal practices if it wanted to reach the employment level necessary for plan fulfillment. A 1977 report of the State Commission for Planning, which was responsible for the allocation of workers to enterprises, stated that various enterprises in Elbasan recruited, in violation of the existing rules, workers from the countryside, although there were enough unemployed in the town.[77] The Elbasan steel plant employed workers who came from collective farms, although they had not been granted a permission to work in the factory by the head of their farm. Another practice of the factory was to employ workers from

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[74] DA (State Archive) Sofia, f. 1459, op. 3, a.e. 528, 63; DA Sofia, f. 1459, op. 3, a.e. 537, 4.

[75] Sjöberg, "Rural Retention in Albania", 218.

[76] Sjöberg, "Rural Retention in Albania", 219.

the countryside on temporary contracts even after their contracts had expired.[78] Many workers from villages accepted a job in the Elbasan steel plant in the hope to receive an urban residence permit and a significant number of them left the factory soon: in the first eleven months of 1973, for example, 1,378 workers left the plant.[79] The informal and illegal recruitment by the "Steel of the Party" factory helps to explain why the population of the town of Elbasan significantly increased in the 1970s (from 39,100 in 1969 to 62,400 ten years later). Elbasan also consistently recorded higher numbers of rural migrants who lived in the town without permission than Tirana.[80]

Yet despite the fact that workers from villages took a job in the two steel plants for the reason to receive residence permits in Sofia and Elbasan respectively, and despite the circumvention of existing rules for recruitment by the factory managements, both factories found it very difficult to recruit enough workers. In Kremikovci, wages for workers were fifteen to eighteen percent higher than standard wages in Bulgarian industry, and workers could earn a twenty-five percent premium for the "fulfillment of the plan."[81] Yet, "Sofia residents avoided working there as if it were plague-infected" (Michael Palairet).[82] Work in Kremikovci seemed unappealing to many, because working conditions were hard and it took a rather long and often not very reliant commute from downtown Sofia to the plant. Sofia residents preferred white collar jobs. The above mentioned numbers for labor turnover also make clear that recruitment was a constant problem because each year the factory had to find replacements for thousands of workers who had left.

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[77] AQSh (State Archive of Albania), f. 495, Komisioni i Planit të Shtetit (State Planning Commission), document no. 1977 / 23, 24–37.

[78] AQSh, f. 14, KQ i PPSh (Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania), document no. 1977/590, 1–15.

[79] AQSh, , f. 657 Bashkimet Profesionale të Shqipërisë (Trade Unions of Albania), document no. 1974/63, 5.

[80] AQSh, f. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave (Council of Ministers), document no. 1976/478, 24.

[81] DA Sofia, f. 1459, op. 2, a.e. 4 and a.e. 14; DA Sofia, f. 1459, op. 3, a.e. 528, 74.

[82] Palairet, "'Lenin' and 'Brezhnev'", 501

In the 1970s the Bulgarian government, therefore, introduced special measures to re-cruit workers for their showpiece factory.[83] Teams of recruiters, for example, went to vil-lages of the Turkish minority to find workers; in 1974, more than thirty percent of workers in an important production line belonged to an ethnic minority.[84] The enterprise also hired more than 500 contract workers from Vietnam. In 1973 the government decreed that army recruits would be dispensed from service, if they signed a work contract for at least five years of un-interrupted work in Kremikovci, and in 1974 the Politburo sent an additional 1,500 army recruits into the factory.[85] As a result of this continuous recruitment of new workers, a large percentage of the workers came from the village: according to a 1974 trade-union report more than half of all workers in Kremikovci were of rural origins.[86] In interviews taken in our project, former workers of the factory remember few co-workers who hailed from Sofia. It seems that common origins and kinship bonds attracted further co-villagers – a pattern known also from industrialization in nineteenth century England. One author, who had worked in Kremikovci, wrote that "I learned that in one brigade in the mechanical repair factory kinsmen and neighbors gathered."[87]

The same author also provided a positive interpretation of the rural recruitment: "The people came from villages (…), they entered into the working class, they made them-selves benevolent persons."[88] This notion of the transformative power of industrial work on the self and of the creation of socialist subjectivity through work in a factory is a recurrent motive in the proletarian literature of that time.[89] In an ironic twist the ideolo-gy of the cathartic effect of industrial work had an equivalent in real life because Kremikovci, due to its difficulties to recruit workers, did offer an opportunity for people

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[83] See reports in Central State Archive in Sofia (= CDA), f. 136, op. 56, a.e. 354, 2–3; DA Sofia, f. 1459, op. 3, a.e. 537, 6.

[84] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 31, 19.

[85] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 48, 46–51.

[86] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 6, 44.

[87] Kitanova, *Khiliada i petstotin gradusa na sianka*, 91.

[88] Ibid, 88.

[89] Cf. the stress of the party on the conversion effects of industrial work which instilled a proletarian ethos. Friedman, "Furtive Selves".

with "problematic pasts". The factory hired convicted criminals and people with questionable political credentials. In the recently opened archive of the state-security we found an interesting example:[90] Stoian H. R., a worker in Kremikovci, was questioned by the secret police in 1963 for reasons that we do not know. He had worked in the "socialist town" of Dimitrovgrad at the end of the 1940s, when this new town was being built. Then, he fled to Turkey and in 1951 he moved on to Brazil. In 1957, after the end of Stalinism and an amnesty, he came back to Bulgaria. In 1961 he was sentenced to one and a half years of imprisonment because of habitual drunkenness. After his release from the work camp in Belene, he went to his family in Kazanlŭk and then started to work in the town of Gabrovo. After that he took a job in Kremikovci. While this most certainly is an idiosyncratic case, it can be taken as an indicator of the fact that the shortage of labor, which the Bulgarian economy experienced in general and the Kremikovci steel plant in particular, created job opportunities also for people whose past put them under the risk of social exclusion.

The Elbasan steel plant found it also hard to recruit enough workers. Their problems were, of course, compounded by the tough restrictions on domestic mobility and by the regime's policy to centrally allocate workers to enterprises. The State Commission for Planning set for all the country's districts the number of workers that they had to send to specific enterprises. A firm was allowed to recruit workers from other districts only if there were no workers available in their own district. Yet, because of poor coordination and frequent confusion in the dealings of institutions at different levels, districts often did not send the required number of workers or they sent people, which local authorities considered a problem but were unfit for industrial work. The Elbasan steel factory suffered from that, while it faced growing plan targets as for production. In 1974, for example, the factory failed to achieve the plan because it had not been provided with enough workers from several districts.[91] In the 1970s, the factory directly hired hun-

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[90] "Protokol za razpit", 17 February 1963, in: AKRDOPBGDSRSBNA (Archive of the State Security), f. VI, a.e. 342, part II: Agenturno-operativni materiali, 21.

[91] AQSh, f. 495 (State Planning Commission), document no. 1974/8, 3.

dreds of conscripts after they had finished military service. It was especially difficult to recruit from among better qualified urban workers who were apparently loath to accept such a physically demanding job in a steel factory, which is why the majority of workers had little formal training. Labor fluctuation did exist in Albania as well, though most likely to a lesser extent than in Bulgaria. The state planning commission, at least, deplored "uncontrolled fluctuations" which posed a threat to the recruitment and qualification of workers.[92] There is also evidence that the Elbasan factory employed people from "problematic" families, even though discrimination of individuals because of their family's history remained a fact of life in Albania until the very end of communism.

The continuous inflow of new workers into the factory had significant consequences for the composition of the workforce: on the one hand, there was a more or less stable core workforce; on the other hand, a significant share of the workforce remained in the factory only for few years. In Elbasan labor turnover was lower than in Kremikovci but still significant. We are, therefore, interested in the relationship between these two categories of workers: research on other state socialist industries suggests that this difference was a potential source of tension among workers. "Old" workers knew the routines of production and even though they did bend factory rules, they generally seemed to have had an interest in maintaining production and developed a proletarian ethos.[93] Workers coming directly from the villages, however, often disrupted production and left their workplace without giving notice, which reflected badly on the production figures of the smallest units of work organization. To understand these relations, the basic work units and their role for the integration of new workers and their socialization into the unwritten codes of workers' behavior need to be explored. In Bulgaria, work was organized in brigades which gave groups of workers some leeway in organizing their work. Reports on the impact of financial incentives for plan fulfillment suggest a high degree of solidarity among brigades, that shared premiums on equal terms rather than allocating them according to individual effort. Brigades even used the additional money

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[92] Ibid, 2.

[93] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 24, 20.

earned in "socialist competition" to throw parties, much to the disgust of the authorities, who had intended to stimulate individual competition by providing financial incentives.[94] The workers' sense of egalitarianism proved resilient in face of regime-sponsored attempts to increase competition.

Archival documents suggest various other lines of differentiation among the workforce (gender, qualification, blue collar vs. white collar, and so on) which points to the heterogeneity of the working class even in one factory. This is another reason why the micro-cosmos of a factory is an apt social site to explore state socialist societies which were anything but uniform and equal.

5.2 Labor discipline

A recurrent theme in management and government reports about the workforce in Kremikovci and – to a lesser extent – in Elbasan, and also in interviews taken with former workers is labor discipline; or to be more precise, the lack thereof.

In Bulgaria, reports identified workers from the villages and from the minorities – the latter usually belonged also to the first category – as the worst offenders of the work-code, as measured by unexcused absences. In Kremikovci leaders of factory units and the management were apparently lenient to take strong measures against violators of labor discipline.[95] This can be explained by their fear to alienate workers who would then possibly leave the factory for good. Given the difficulty to find adequate replacements, it was a rational strategy of the management to accept a certain degree of violations of labor discipline in order not to offend workers by a heavy-handed approach. The room for sanctions by the management against workers, who regularly came late, left early, drank on their

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[94] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 21, 35–6; Georgiev, "Die Arbeiter als Modernisierungsbremse im realsozialistischen Bulgarien?", 116–7. The memory of strong emotional ties and solidarity among colleagues at a work-place is a frequent topic in oral histories of state socialism. Cf. Tóth, "Shifting Identities in the Life Histories of Working-Class Women in Socialist Hungary", 87. The egalitarian current in working class behavior is also evident in the opposition of Czechoslovak workers against greater wage differentiation, which was proposed by economic reformers in the mid-1960s (Heumos, "State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism", 64).

[95] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 31, 19–20.

work-place, took overtly long breaks, etc., was also limited by interventions of the trade union and party organizations in the factory. The government, for example, deplored that the trade union officials, rather than fighting properly again slack discipline, "took the incorrect position with respect to the punishment of undisciplined workers."[96] The Kremikovci factory regularly fired workers for the violation of labor discipline (though not many). Yet, those who had been fired stood a good chance to be reinstated after the intervention of the party and / or trade union committee in the factory. Neither the party nor the trade union would light-heartedly take a stance against workers on the grass-root level. They also conceded that many cases of violations of labor discipline were not caused by bad character or laziness but by shortcomings of the system: the lack of goods, inadequate working and living conditions, irregular transportation, and other typical features of the Bulgarian socialist economy were often to blame for the violation of factory rules.[97] Many workers of the Kremikovci iron ore mine, for example, left up to an hour early every day in order to catch the 4:20 p.m. bus to Sofia.[98] Of course, there were also workers who really exploited the constraints on the management in firing them and who left the factory, for example, in the early afternoon to see a football game in Sofia.

Information on labor discipline in the Elbasan steel plant is much sketchier. In general, it can be assumed that workers enjoyed less tolerance by the authorities than in Bulgaria. Yet this assumption is until now inferred only from our general knowledge about the much more repressive nature of the Albanian regime, which was the most dictatorial among the European communist regimes. Thanks to its secretive character the regime produced little information (even a statistical yearbook was not regularly published). However, frequent articles about a lack of discipline and other forms of "wrong" behavior in the local newspaper of Elbasan, *Shkumbini*, can be seen as evidence of the existence of these phenomena. The newspaper regularly published letters and articles by "voluntary" correspondents who deplored various problems in the facto-

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[96] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 23, 74.

[97] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 13, 45; a.e. 5, 35–41.

[98] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 23, 79.

ry, such as the fact that workers often appeared late at their work place. Frequent leaves for illness also attracted critique and suspicion by the newspaper.

The official explanation of such behavior in Albania, though, was markedly different from that in Bulgaria. Reports of the Bulgarian authorities and the Kremikovci management describe violations of labor discipline usually as the result of undue behavior by individual workers, who were lazy or politically unconscious, and who might exercise a bad effect on fellow workers. They also conceded, as mentioned above, that shortcomings in the organization of work and in the economy sometimes made the observance of factory rules impossible. In Albania in contrast, violations of the factory code are usually explained as politically motivated "sabotage" and as instances of the malign offensive of the imperialist forces against Albania. So, the ideological framing of violations of labor discipline was markedly different in Bulgaria and Albania. The Albanian communist mounted heavy guns against this phenomenon, which politicized it even stronger. Violations of labor discipline became part of an overarching discourse of a country being permanently threatened by outside forces. We assume that this language reduced the room of maneuver of the management: it became much more risky to take a lenient approach towards workers, if their "misbehavior" was described as a mortal danger to Albania.

5.3   Socialist integration

The ideological framing of workers' practices is an important topic of our research project because it not only reveals the official perception of the working class but shaped also the self-identification of workers. The steel plants in Kremikovci and Elbasan were major sites of socialist socialization into which the party-state invested not only a lot of financial and political capital but also symbolic meaning. The breadth of ideological literature and the prominent role of the two enterprises and their workers in the self-image of the regimes are evidence of the significance attributed by communist power to these two factories. While communist ideology did not directly translate into workers consciousness and self-identification, it did leave traces, which becomes evident also in the nostalgic memories about that time by workers. Festivities in the enterprise, official praise and awards for their workers, rituals of community and other performative acts as well as the patterns of

labor produced arenas of legitimacy. The probably most effective force of creating consents was the way, how production was organized, because this touched the daily routines of workers and directly impacted on their level of life satisfaction.

In most of our interviews with (former) workers of the Kremikovci and Elbasan steel plants strong identification with work in the factory is evident. Galina Petrova T., for example, worked various jobs from 1980 to 2001 in Kremikovci (as assistant of an electrical engineer, dispatcher, fitter, machine operator). While she is generally a taciturn respondent, she perks up when being asked about her concrete work, which she describes in great detail. She stresses how hard her work was and how often she was forced to cope with unforeseen problems, but she obviously gained self-confidence from overcoming these difficulties. She presents herself as having agency. This reflects the particularity of the organization of production in large industrial enterprises during state socialism: production was relatively inefficient (not to be compared with Fordist principles of the organization of work, not to mention post-Fordist just-in-time production), also due to outdated technology. Machines often broke down, labor processes were often not thoroughly standardized and the supply with materials was irregular. In such a production environment, the maintenance of production often depended on the effort and creativity of workers. This model of production depended on generalists, i.e., workers who managed to fix different things. These workers executed more than the same physical motion all over again. From the point of view of workers, this pattern of production gave them more leeway in determining how they would use their time, at least as long as production targets were met. They felt to have some agency in the factory and to *make* things. As far as the mentioned respondent is concerned, there is another moment which explains her strong identification with her former work: women especially felt that industrial work, despite all the drudgery, did have a liberating effect.[99]

There was another important aspect of the workers' opportunities to fashion daily work: at least for the Bulgarian case study, there is evidence that workers appropriated resources by the factory for their own private purposes either for moonlighting or for

personal needs. This pattern corroborates findings from other state socialist countries. The management, and even the government, put a blind eye on these practices, as long as workers kept some restraint, although these constituted theft of "socialist property" which was a severe crime. Yet, this was one incentive that the management could concede to its workers, and the immediate economic effects were seen positively by the regime. Informal economic activities filled some of the many wholes of the formal economy, especially with regard to the poor level of its service sector. By that, resources were used – though in a different than originally planned way – which otherwise would not have been exploited. In an ironic twist, this arrangement also strengthened the accommodation of workers with the regime, because they got a sense to be able to trick and work the system.

At the same time, the opportunities to shape one's own work and to use resources of the employer for private purposes were unequally distributed among the workers. Here again one sees the differences between the situation of workers in a large, important enterprise and those in small, less important ones. The latter usually had less access to these opportunities. To put it bluntly: a qualified, typically male steel worker in Kremikovci had more bargaining power than a female worker at a conveyer belt in a small textile factory in a village.

Another recurrent theme in interviews with workers of formerly socialist enterprises is the sense of comradeship that many of them express. It is quite common that in oral narratives, co-workers are presented as a second family.[100] These nostalgic reflections are, of course, shaped by the experience of atomization, social decline and dissolution of networks experienced by many (former) workers after the end of socialism. Yet, they express also pre-1989 experiences, as shaped by the perception of social action at the time of both experience and speaking. Co-workers were an important social network, and the formal structures of power and labor organization strengthened these primary groups. The brigade organization of work in Bulgaria is a case in point. Workers also stress that, even if they had

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[99] Cf. Massino, "Gender, Identity and Work Under State Socialism", 144.

[100] See Kofti, "Everything has changed", 11.

disagreements and quarrels among each other, they would have never betrayed their co-workers vis-à-vis the management. Informal relations appear to have been important in Albania as well. Otherwise, newspapers would not have reported on the downsides of strong mutual support and solidarity, such as clientelism, misappropriation of state property, and nepotism. It will be interesting to see, how the 'traditional' foundations of informal networks in Bulgaria and Albania, such as family, kinship and locality, were transformed and re-shaped by the industrial experience. It is indeed striking to hear former workers in Bulgaria using the word "collective" when they describe their primary group at the workplace.

The enterprise as well as the trade union and party committees in the factory attempted to foster loyalty of the workers towards the factory by various means. This included the allocation of social benefits (such as housing and places in vacation homes), the provision of facilities for leisurely activities (especially for sport), and the organization of "political-educational" and cultural events. The trade union committee in Kremikovci, for example, aimed at "inculcating the love of every worker, engineer and clerk to the giant of our heavy metallurgy."[101] The formation of class consciousness and collectivism, of industrial habits and discipline was another goal of the trade union's educational program. However, documents from the trade unions point to the fact that few workers were interested in these kinds of programs and rarely signed up to them if not forced to do so. Yet, we nevertheless believe that the all-encompassing take of the factory on the workers had an impact on their habitus. Workers not only worked in the factory, but they took also their vacation in one of its homes, they lived in apartments provided by their employer, they used the factory's leisure facilities, and they supported one of the factory's sports teams. Almost the whole day – work and leisure – could be spent in the factory and its socio-cultural outlets. So, there was a strong material fundament for workers' identification with the factory, as it is articulated today in memories.

There were, in any case, also limits to the readiness of workers to accommodate with constantly difficult living and working conditions. The archive of the Kremikovci en-

terprise and of its trade union committee contains many complaints of workers, picturing the many problems of everyday life under communism. Workers were dissatisfied with their wages, with the perennial lack of housing, with poor transportation, with the system of distributing vouchers for the vacation homes of the factory, with their work clothes, with the trade union, etc. The regime struggled hard to deflect criticism and opened channels for critique that would not question the foundations of its power. The solicitation of letters of complaints and the invitation to workers to submit recommendations to the management were thought to take the steam off. The introduction of workers' control in Albania and of production committees, and at the end of the 1980s of "workers' self-management" in Bulgaria, served the same purpose. There are, indeed, no indications of open protest or a walk out neither in Kremikovci nor in Elbasan. Yet, this was more likely the result of the fear of workers for severe consequences if they staged an open protest. From sociological polls taken regularly in Bulgaria in the 1980s, which measured workers' opinion, we can infer a growing level of dissatisfaction of workers with the regime. The mechanisms of accommodating the working class appear to have become ever more fragile because of the growing economic problems and ideological antinomies.[102] Eventually, workers were not ready to rally for the survival of state socialism neither in Bulgaria nor in Albania, although most of them today seem unhappy about its demise.

The close look into the inner life of two major factories, thus, reveals new insights into the production of legitimacy in a state socialist system and its erosion. As for the production of legitimacy, the foundations of the always shaky legitimacy of communist rule should also be searched in the daily routines of work and the level of satisfaction that work could deliver, in terms of remuneration as well as of the sense of agency it made possible. For this reason, the loss of legitimacy of communist rule in the eyes of the workers was also closely tied to developments in the enterprises. The deterioration of overall economic conditions in Bulgaria and Albania in the 1980s reduced the oppor-

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[101] DA Sofia, f. 2336, op. 1, a.e. 3, 8.

[102] See Petrov, "Lebenszufriedenheit bulgarischer Arbeitnehmer".

tunities of the two factories to accommodate workers' aspirations. It increased the pressure on workers to engage in informal activities. The growing informality of the economy, in turn, further reduced the efficiency of production, thus strengthening the downward cycle of both the economy and the level of acceptance of the communist regime. Attempts to rationalize or accelerate production were seen as threats to a labor routine which offered workers some autonomy. The gradual breakdown of production in Elbasan in the late 1980s, mainly due to a lack of raw material, must also have had a demoralizing effect. Industrial case-studies, therefore, have something to say about the end of communist rule as well.

6 Conclusions

The comparative exploration of the history of workers in two major industrial enterprises in Albania and Bulgaria reveals new vistas on the creation of "worlds of meaning" in state socialism. We do not want to write neither the history of Albania and Bulgaria nor the company history of the steel plants, but of the people working in these places. How did they perceive and navigate their social world? Of course, in order to understand the actors we need to know the stage (and backstage) on which their history took place. We believe that the Metallurgical Complex in Kremikovci and the Steel of the Party plant in Elbasan are ideal case studies to understand the interrelation between social practices and political intervention in state socialism. The revelatory potential of the two factories is conditioned by their especially salient role for the party-state and the shaping of the "socialist" working class. On the one hand, the two steel factories were a place of claims at legitimacy by the rulers and of the concrete policies that emanated from the politics of legitimation; on the other hand, they were a place where workers aimed to achieve some sort of autonomy and to find a place in a rapidly changing society. We claim that these two factories are an ideal place to investigate what Thomas Lindenberger has described as an important task of the social history of state socialism: to analyze the "interpenetration of the formal structures of power and of the informal relationship building" in order to explain the intricate entanglement between the life-worlds on the micro level and the interventionist party-state.[103] Shop-floor relations and labor practices were social manifestations of larger power structures in state socialism. They highlighted the social quality of rule: the rulers were constrained by dependencies, and the ruled ones were not just the receivers of orders from "above."[104]

One striking factor of these two factories, which differentiates them from steel plants in the capitalist world at that time, was the intensity of ideological ascription to them. The two steel works were also sites where high ideology was translated into concrete

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[103] Lindenberger, "Die Diktatur der Grenzen", 17.

[104] See Lüdtke, "Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis", 13.

instructions. The regime's goal was to firmly link the idea of communism with the social and cultural practices of the workers. Although we can observe also a process of the accommodation of ideological claims to the realities of social life and the necessities of production, ideology continued to matter and conditioned status ascriptions and political perceptions. Industrial labor and relations at the workplace were over-determined in the sense that they always were connected with other than just an economic rationale. There were differences in this regard between Bulgaria and Albania, the latter keeping to a much narrower ideological framework. In both countries, and consequently in the two enterprises in question, work – such as many other aspects of everyday life under state socialism – was highly politicized. Workers were encouraged to meet certain production goals not just for the sake of production but a variety of other reasons as well – such as to fight imperialism. At the same time, the party was heavily present in the factory, though the factory party committee's activities were often less ideologically charged than the narrative of the central authorities would suggest. Still, workers were constantly reminded of the political significance of what they did or failed to do. The social results of this discourse were double-edged: on the one hand, the constant reminder of the importance of industrial work offered workers the opportunity to strengthen their own claims by linking them with official ideology; on the other hand, over-politicization of social life undermined the legitimacy of communism in the long term.

The stabilizing effects of ideology are evident, for example, in complaints of Kremikovci workers in which the adoption of important tropes of official ideology are common place. The highlighting of a political "correct" family background, of sound communist credentials, and of modest social origins belongs to the frequent rhetoric devices in these letters. Since industrial workers were important to the regime not only for ideological-propagandistic, but also economic and ultimately political reasons, the communist regime would not want to alienate them. The fact that the steel factories in Elbasan and Kremikovci ranked especially high on the political and economic agenda of the two regimes gave workers special bargaining power. This was further increased by the shortage of industrial labor thanks to full employment and, in Albania, strict mobility restrictions, which forced the management but ultimately also the government to of-

fer certain privileges to the workers of the two show-piece factories. The nature of "socialist" organization of labor on the shop-floor, with its many inefficiencies and inconsistencies, was another important factor in determining the room of maneuver of workers: they seem to have enjoyed more possibilities to control the usage of their work time than in a thoroughly rationalized, just-in-time production environment. At the same time, this pattern of the organization of production was part of the larger economic malaise of state socialism which eventually undermined the strategies of the regime to accommodate industrial workers with the system. Here again, we see the contradictory and paradoxical effects of certain structures in state socialism. That which appeared as a solution at one moment, turned into a problem in the next moment.

The investigation of relations at the workplace, thus, helps to understand and observe in detail both the production and the erosion of legitimacy of communist rule. It is not enough to point only to economic woes as the main reason why communists all over Europe lost power. Economic crisis is not sufficient to make citizens questioning the very foundations of a given political and social order. A system is on the brink of collapse when its citizens question the viability of the system to cope with problems and instead perceive concrete difficulties as symptoms of systemic contradictions. In such a situation, people refute the claims of the regime to represent an order rooted in morality and question the ideational foundations of the system. Of course, the loss of legitimacy of communist power in eastern and southeastern Europe has many roots and dimensions, and in each country, this process displayed idiosyncrasies, thanks to different social configurations and arrangements.[105] However, the over-politicization of everyday life was one major reason for the loss of legitimacy on a wide front. Katherine Verdery summarized that mechanism succinctly:

> The very forms of Party rule in the workplace, then, tended to focus, politicize, and turn against it the popular discontent that capitalist societies more successfully disperse, depoliticize, and deflect.[106]

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[105] Kenney, *A carnival of revolution*; Kotkin, *Uncivil society*.
[106] Verdery, *What was socialism, and what comes next?*, 23.

In their totalizing self-understanding – manifest in the constitutions of the Peoples' Democracies, which attributed the "leading role" in society to the communist party – the communists had declared themselves responsible for everything. Since much in socialism did not function as it should have, and shortages and other difficulties were an omnipresent feature of everyday life, the communists constantly risked to be made responsible for all these problems. At the same time, the increasingly evident economic failure undermined the basic principle of the communists' claim to legitimacy, their "goal-rationality".[107] The clearer it became that the stated goals – such as overtaking the West and producing ever-increasing standards of living – would not be achieved, the shakier the foundations of communist legitimacy became. The work place was one of the social spaces where these processes crystallized and were negotiated.

From existing research on the attitudes of industrial workers towards communist rule in Bulgaria, we can infer that the alienation of workers grew significantly in the 1980s.[108] Workers were not only fed up with concrete problems in their everyday life and at work and with the empty promises of the party, but they also did not believe that the propagated reform-agenda of the party would lead to genuine improvements. To the dismay of party officials, they took a "wait and see" approach; the party found it impossible to mobilize workers for its reform policies. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" lost even the outward expression of support from the working class in whose name the communists ruled. From the close examination of workers' opinion and practices in the two steel plants we expect further insight into the erosion of communist rule on the level of social practice, but also into the adaptation of accommodation strategies at the end of communism.

Finally it needs to be stressed that a micro-history of shop-floor relations in two giants of socialist industry reveals not only the social logic of state socialism but also the macro-patterns of socio-economic change. One goal of the project is to relate the story

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[107] Rigby, "Introduction: Political Legitimacy", 10–1.

[108] Annual sociological surveys conducted by the research institute of the trade unions, in which thousands of workers across the country were polled, indicate a stark increase in workers dissatisfaction and growing levels of alienation from the regime in the 1980s. See Petrov, "Lebenszufriedenheit bulgarischer Arbeitnehmer", 51–62; Brunnbauer, *"Die sozialistische Lebensweise"*, 235.

of the two enterprises to the wider historical context in order to learn more about the particularities of industrialization in Albania and Bulgaria. This ambition is driven also by the fact that the internal dynamics of industrial relations in the two steel works are entangled with the wider dynamics of change in Albania and Bulgaria, and with the domestic and foreign policies of the two communist regimes. The study of the two factories and of labor relations in them can help to elucidate the micro-social consequences of industrialization in Southeastern Europe, which have hardly been studied. The patterns of interaction between workers, management, party and state officials are an indispensable part of the history of everyday life during a period of rapid change. Any society can be understood only if the social process of its reproduction, i.e. labor, is explored. Industrial work is an important part of it. The working class might have been gone in Southeastern Europe, but its history can still be written.

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