
PREFACE

This volume presents to an English-speaking public some of the recent, increasingly sophisticated work on the GDR, conducted at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung. Growing out of the Forschungsschwerpunkt Zeithistorische Studien, this Center for Research on Contemporary History was founded in 1996, partly as a home for scholars of the former GDR Academy of Sciences whose projects had been evaluated positively and partly as a spur to interdisciplinary innovation in the humanities and social sciences within the united Germany. Initially the institute proved highly controversial, since East German dissidents and West German Cold Warriors claimed that historians who had been active in the previous regime ought to be barred on moral and scholarly grounds, while Eastern postcommunists and Western radicals resented its probing analyses of the flaws in “real existing socialism” (see also Mary Fulbrook, “New *Historikerstreit*, Missed Opportunity, or New Beginning?” *German History* 12 [1994]: 203-7). Under its founding director Jürgen Kocka and his successor Christoph Kleßmann as well as myself, the ZZF has tried hard to develop an intermediary line of interpretation that would analyze the dictatorial character of the GDR comparatively, but at the same time acknowledge some of the normalcy of daily lives in the SED state.

The essays in this collection originated in a conference on “The GDR – A Modern Dictatorship?” held in Potsdam during early December of 1997 (see Anette Weinke, “Eine moderne Diktatur? Jahrestagung des ZZF” *Deutschland Archiv* 31 [1998]: 461-64). To advance the theoretical discussion beyond the totalitarianism paradigm M. Rainer Lepsius contributed a preview of his study of the GDR bureaucracy, Juan Linz commented on “post-totalitarianism”

based on his book on democratic transition and Klaus von Beyme provided an overview of Stalinism in Eastern Europe (published in the *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* 13 [July 1998]: 8-22). The symposium also centered on the presentation of new empirical studies from the ZZF's four research projects on "Sovietization", the transformation of elites, the interplay of repression and self-assertion in ordinary lives and finally the role of history in legitimizing the regime. In order to include a broad selection of works within a limited space, some authors have graciously combined their efforts in a joint text. As session chairs Sigrid Meuschel, Hans-Günter Hockerts, Adelheid von Saldern, and Manfred Görtemaker and as concluding panelists Inga Markovits, Dietrich Mühlberg, Joachim Petzold, Peter Steinbach, Rüdiger Thomas and Heinrich August Winkler contributed to a spirited discussion. Christa Schneider of the organizational staff of the institute, Eve Duffy as translator of many of the texts, Rosalie Radcliffe as their copyeditor and Cora Granata who prepared the index also deserve the warmest thanks.

This collection also hopes to provide fresh research impulses and interpretative direction for the rapidly expanding Anglo-American discussion of the GDR. Through the accessibility of its records and the political controversies surrounding its legacy, the second German dictatorship has become a popular subject, especially for dissertations, some of which are unfortunately directed by scholars who themselves have not been able to work on East German materials. An impressive body of English-speaking work is overcoming the polarization of Cold War stereotypes and utopian sympathies through methodological innovation, comparative perspective and political openness. But sometimes outside researchers need further guidance on the complicated internal German discussions, arcane structures of the GDR, or the indecipherable prose of the SED. Both the members of the ZZF and its many Anglo-American guests such as Mitchell Ash, Mary Fulbrook, Georg G. Iggers, Charles S. Maier, Voitech Mastny, Norman Naimark, and Eric Weitz, just to mention a few of the established scholars, have therefore benefited from interacting with each other. Reflecting my own involvement in both academic cultures, this volume is an effort to strengthen this transatlantic working relationship by encouraging especially younger scholars to look to the Center for consultation and support.

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