



**Stefan Bollinger, Ulrich van der Heyden.** *Deutsche Einheit und Elitenwechsel in Ostdeutschland.* Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2002. 262 S. EUR 24.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-89626-381-0.

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## The Import of Scholarly Elites: East German Perspectives

It is now commonplace to note former German chancellor Helmut Kohl's promise to East German voters (in the tumultuous German reunification year of 1990) that the former German Democratic Republic would transform into the "blossoming" landscape of an enlarged Federal Republic and that, alas, things did not turn out quite so rosilily. Unemployment rates, well above the West German average and in some regions 40 percent and higher, continue to plague the former East, which still has few competitive industries. In addition, too many Western executives regard the former GDR mainly as a market for consumer goods.

Despite the immense challenges and perhaps inescapable difficulties of transforming a former state socialist system into a social market economy, however, some of the current structural problems seem to be the product of specific choices, not just inescapable dynamics. One central development is that the process of "re-unification" worked out, in fact, as an incorporation of the former East Germany into the political, socio-economic, and cultural structures of the Federal Republic, leaving little room for any specifically East German contribution to the opportunities and challenges of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century "Germany." Given contemporary Germany's difficulties in adjusting to the newest wave of globalization, this seems a needless waste of intellectual resources. In addition, several observers have noted the sparse level of acceptance for the East's former mechanisms and content of civil society (especially outside the political parties). Awareness of this sit-

uation has gone hand in hand with the alarming growth of far-right parties, whose representatives have recently been elected to the provincial parliaments of Saxony and Brandenburg. A substantial number of East Germans, who by and large view themselves as second-class citizens, have felt excluded from the cultural elites of the new Germany and, in response, have more or less openly rejected its structures as imposed upon them in a semi-colonial fashion.

In their collection of essays on German Unification and the fate of the intellectual and scholarly elites of the former German Democratic Republic, Stefan Bollinger and Ulrich van der Heyden have seized upon this point. Within the frame of eleven essays as well as a joint introduction by Bollinger and van der Heyden, this process of elimination and marginalization—and what it is like to be on the receiving end—is explored from an East German perspective. Bollinger, a political science expert, makes no bones about being a former assistant professor of "Scientific Socialism," clarifying that in no way does this label automatically determine the nature of his scholarly activity. Instead, it provides insight into the academic landscape of a former Marxist-Leninist society that officially looked upon "Political Science" as a "bourgeois" discipline—hence, there *could* be no professors of "Political Science" in East Germany. All who had wanted to study and teach "Political Science" had to do so under the auspices of "Scientific Socialism," which then included a broad variety of academics, from ideologues to serious scholars. Ulrich van der Heyden, a Africanist by train-

ing, makes the same point, advocating a balanced assessment of individual scholarship rather than painting all involved with the same brush; the rest of the authors also argue for a differentiated understanding of East German academics.

The essays focus on the GDR scholarly and intellectual elites (particularly in the social sciences and humanities) uninvolved with the Communist party hierarchy. The generational composition of this study examines those who, in their thirties and forties during reunification in 1990, were well-established academically. In an ironic twist of fate, they had been blocked from senior positions by the previous generation, and when this younger generation could have naturally grown into leadership positions, the implosion of the GDR led to a transfer of elites, and thus the senior positions in the former East were now occupied by imported scholars from the West.

Given their degree of marginalization and exclusion from higher levels of power and authority (of those trained and socialized in the former GDR), the authors of this study have endeavored to avoid the perception of wallowing in their own misery. Instead, they offer a broad range of factual background information combined with rigorous analyses. None of the contributors to this volume hide their deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and all approach their subject matter from an East German viewpoint. This mood also applies to Fritz Vilmar, the only “Western” contributor, a professor emeritus at the Otto-Suhr-Institute of the Free University with a long-standing left-of-center outlook. Thus with their vantage points openly identified, this book provides a much-needed account of how German reunification impacted East German scholars. It is important to note that the authors have refused to play off East German scholars against their West German counterparts. After all, lack of funding has also ended or complicated many academic careers in the West. Bollinger and van der Heyden have thus expressed their hope that a rescue program for marginalized but highly productive East German scholars might provide new impulses for reforms in the West as well. Such a vision may be hoping against the odds.

In addition to the fore-mentioned contributors, essays by the economist and sociologist Helmut Steiner, political scientist Wolfgang Duemcke, historian Ingrid Matschenz, and economist Ulrich Busch are also included, differing in genre and length. Vilmar’s and Busch’s pieces are interviews, while Bollinger offers three separate essays with van der Heyden and Steiner

providing two each. The essays are a mix of historiographic overview, factual and statistical data, as well as personal and autobiographical reflection. Frequently, the blending of these genres does not work; however, despite a few editorial and conceptual imbalances, the collection works very well. The first essay (in addition to the introduction) is by Bollinger and deals in a personal fashion with GDR-trained scholars who studied during the 1970s. Many of Bollinger’s fellow students are still employed, although not always in the fields they had studied. Their consignment to middle-ranking scholarly, business, and administrative positions is what defines them as the “passed over generation” (“*Die bersprungenen*”), which is also the title of Bollinger’s essay. This relatively short piece is followed by a more substantial treatment on his part, entitled “*Revolutionsopfer, Kolonialisierungsverluste, Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Vielschichtigkeit eines Systemwechsels—Anmerkungen zum Elitenwechsel nach der Wende 1989/1990.*” Bollinger engages the multi-dimensionality of these dynamics, pointing out how they unfolded with both supporters of the Communist regime as much as those whose only misfortune it was to be East German (thus ending up on the “losing side of history”).

The extent to which East German structures were replaced with West German ones is apparent in the fact that no aspect of the old GDR—be it state institutions, parties, or the judiciary—survived unification, and more than three-fourths of East German academic structures were cut outright. Remaining academics were integrated into less prestigious positions, ran out of funds, or were dismissed after a few years, despite their qualifications and productivity (as attested to by their Western colleagues). Bollinger contrasts this radical break from the East German past with how West Germany dealt with the academic elites of the Nazi state in the late-1940s and 1950s. With only rare exceptions, East Germany permanently excluded Nazi scholars and cultural, economic, and political elites from power—while such men found their way into leadership positions in West Germany.[1] It is profoundly disturbing that 10 percent of those condemned for war crimes and politically motivated murder during the mid-to-late 1940s served as police officers in West Germany in the 1960s.[2]

Bollinger, of course, remains conscious of the difficulties of settling moral and judiciary questions in the young Federal Republic of Germany, where, as Jeffrey Herf has suggested, one could either engage the past openly or win elections. The East German dictatorship compromised less, but the contrived and overly ideolog-

ical nature of East Germany's break with the Nazi past (itself turning into an authoritarian regime with totalitarian features [p. 23]) did not totally cancel out its success in dealing with Nazism. West German officials sought in 1989 and 1990 the kind of stark disengagement with the GDR that their predecessors neglected after 1945. Bollinger may overstate his case by interpreting it as West Germany's revenge for forty years of resistance during the Cold War, but he is certainly correct in identifying this interpretation as the leading sentiment of disenfranchised East German scholars. All in all, the reasons for Western triumphalism are far more multifaceted, and Bollinger's analysis could have been pushed further. He could also have identified more specifically the dynamics and mechanisms of decision-making in the transfer of elites. He hints at such factors when pointing to the fears of both mainstream West German politicians and some East German civil-rights activists that reunification potentially could endanger the institutional order of West Germany, as independent and innovative East German academic elites, in all likelihood (although for different reasons than their ideological colleagues), would also have resisted the wholesale transfer of West German structures upon the former East. This observation is certainly valid and would benefit from more specific examples.

Helmut Steiner's essay, "Über 50 Jahre ostdeutsche Elitenentwicklung seit 1945—Einige Thesen," starts out by exploring the concept of "elites." Mindful of the differences between "elites" as an analytical category and its more populist usage, Steiner discusses them as societal leadership groups, who are distinguished from broader society by their technical expertise and ability to make and implement decisions of wider significance, their ability to represent any given political, ideological, socioeconomic, and/or cultural system positively or negatively, and their skills in utilizing public media for their objectives. Steiner, who, as a former professor of economics at the East German Academy of the Sciences, was personally affected by the developments he describes, proceeds in a remarkably detached fashion.<sup>[3]</sup> Of course reflections on how elites are defined, especially in academia, are central to this study; perhaps Steiner's chapter would fit even better into the overall structure of the book if placed right after the introduction, rather than as chapter 3. But this organizational issue does not actually detract from the high degree of readability as well as descriptive and analytical focus. Steiner sketches the main stages of the East German scholarly elites' development, cross-referencing the situation in West Germany. Without ro-

manticizing, Steiner points to the legacies of anti-Fascist sentiment and the social penetration of the previously close-knit and overwhelmingly upper-class background of German academics. The GDR, particularly during its early existence, had taken considerable steps to include students and budding scholars from the lower-income, working classes, and this led to East German academics becoming, by and large, a bastion of support and stability for the regime. They were critical of many of the GDR's specific policies but with the hope for reform and liberalization within the existing structures. Their high degree of self-identification with East German society made them unable to fully grasp the growing dissatisfaction within the populace at large. Thus in speed and force, the implosion of the East German regime came as a surprise (as it did to most Western scholars). Numbed by these developments, East German academic elites were less effective in responding to a West German take-over of their institutions. Steiner is not sparing in his critique of the shortcomings of the East German scholarly elite, while maintaining that their wholesale dismissal was equally counter-productive.

Ulrich van der Heyden's piece, "Wie die Afrikawissenschaft in Ostdeutschland durch eine 'spte Abwicklung' beseitigt wurde," chronicles in great detail how the GDR's Africanists were one-by-one removed from their positions, without any real attention to their individual scholarly records, as accumulated before and after unification. Van der Heyden also points to the problematic nature of West German professors' decisions about the fate of their Eastern counterparts, given that those West German scholars were hardly uninterested in placing themselves and their own students. He notes that within the last few years not even one percent of all new professorships have been awarded to East German scholars—a loaded statistic.

Fritz Vilmar, in conversation with Heinz Niemann, contributes a piece entitled "Autonome Erneuerung der Politikwissenschaft an der Humboldt-Universität—Ein gescheiterter Versuch" highlighting their specific efforts (the former from the West and the latter from the East) to transform the Marxist-Leninist discipline of Scientific Communism into a pluralistic political science. Niemann stresses that he and his colleagues knew that such a renewal would require intensive exchange (lectures and seminars) with Western scholars, from the Otto-Suhr-Institute at the Free University, the Federal Institute for International and Eastern Studies in Cologne, the Kennedy Institute in Berlin, as well as the University of Bochum. Their objectives were to encourage the mixing

of Western and Eastern scholarship, where East German-trained colleagues would be assessed based on their individual merits. Yet such efforts, to create something new out of the remnants of the old East German structures with the active help of Western colleagues, were ultimately abandoned by the new political establishment in favor of the complete replication of West German structures.

In his essay “Fr Innovationen keine Chance—Einige Bemerkungen zur ‘Abwicklung’ der ostdeutschen Sozialwissenschaften im deutschen Einigungsproze,” Wolfgang Duemcke articulates how a unique opportunity for creative renewal was sacrificed for short-sighted ideological triumphalism, fossilizing the West German status quo. It is important to note that many Western scholars, representing the entire range of the political and methodological spectrum, have been aware of needed reforms within their system. Duemcke’s focus is not only what went wrong after unification, but the positive nature of breaking with “Marxist-Leninist” structures and dogmas. He examines the various East German academic “reforms” until 1989 and points to potential alternatives that could have prevented or at least softened stagnation and dogmatism on that side.

Ingrid Matschenz chronicles, in her article “Wie 68 Historiker an der Humboldt-Universitt ihren Job verloren,” how ruthlessly certain East German scholars were dismissed, offering much empirical material.[4] A particularly poignant example is the situation of Gnther Vogler, who occupied the chair of Early Modern History at Humboldt prior to reunification. After lengthy legal battles, Vogler succeeded in renewing his contract for two more years. He then applied for the newly advertised position of his old professorship and made it to the second place on the short list. So, naturally, when the first choice withdrew his application, Vogler would have been entitled to the job; however, the hiring committee curiously changed the order of desirable candidates and Vogler was excluded.

Ulrich Busch (a financial economist and former East German banker who became director of the Institute of Economics at Humboldt University in 1992) documents, in an interview, his own ostracization and eventual dismissal from the university, conveying the personal tragedy and humiliation accompanying this process. He points out how, at times, the process of marginalization and gradual dismissal violated West German law, was pushed through via the bending of rules, and followed hastily constructed *special* regulations in the East. Thus

any hopes of integrating West and East German scholars in former East Germany were, in reality, illusory.

The book is a very fruitful engagement of a complex and emotionally charged subject matter. On a conceptual level, the book could have benefited from balancing the majority of East German contributors with some West German colleagues. As mentioned earlier, Fritz Vilmar is the only Western author in the collection. However, this has been remedied in the second volume of the series (on the fate of East German-trained scholars and intellectuals in united Germany). Appearing in print two years after the first volume, *Ausgrenzung oder Integration? Ostdeutsche Sozialwissenschaftler zwischen Isolierung und Selbstbehauptung* like volume 1, is edited by Bollinger and van der Heyden, with the addition of Mario Kessler.[5] The chief strength of the latter volume is the broader inclusion of West Germans in addition to Fritz Vilmar: Theodor Bergmann, formerly a professor of comparative agricultural policy at the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim, as well as Jrgen Kocka from the Free University. The inclusion of transregional comparisons and cooperation further guards the project against listing provincially or parochially. Those interested in volume 1 will benefit from volume 2.

A weakness of *Deutsche Einheit und Elitenwechsel* lies in the, however infrequent but still noticeable, editorial oversights. To cite one example, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s close associate Hans Globke (infamous for his involvement with the Nazi regime) appears as “Rainer Maria Globke” (p. 102). In the otherwise useful list of contributors’ biographical sketches at the end of the volume, Wolfgang Duemcke has been forgotten altogether, while the historian and political scientist Heinz Niemann, who essentially serves as Vilmar’s interviewer, is included with some detail.

Other problems of information overlap or occasional repetitiveness are part and parcel of any collection of essays by multiple authors, which must reset the context in order to stand on their own. In any event, the volume serves as a spirited and equally analytically demanding introduction to one of the problems of contemporary Germany and is useful to specialists and more general readers alike; I highly recommend it.

#### Notes

[1]. Between 1945 and 1948, about 520,000 individuals with former Nazi affiliation were banned from leadership positions in East German society, which amounts to almost 2.7 percent of the population of what was then

the Soviet Zone of Occupation.

[2]. Klaus-Dietmar Henke, "Die Trennung vom Nationalsozialismus. Selbsterstrung, politische Suberung, 'Entnazifizierung,' Strafverfolgung," in *Politische Suberung in Europa. Die Abrechnung mit Faschismus und Kollaboration nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Woller (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 1991), p. 53.

[3]. Helmut Steiner was director of several research institutes at the Academy of the Sciences, from 1962 until the end of the GDR, and his scholarly activities were highly respected in both the East and West. After German re-unification, Steiner's academic record was evaluated positively by the so-called *Wissenschaftsrat* or academic council of western scholars. Yet, in disregard of

positive assessment, Steiner was dismissed from his post and forced into unemployment, followed by early retirement. Other prominent and less prominent GDR scholars suffered similar fates (i.e., they were forced to reapply for their own positions only to be rejected) despite positive recommendations by their West German academic peers.

[4]. She also points out that, in some instances, documents dealing with the administrative specifics are not yet available.

[5]. *Ausgrenzung oder Integration? Ostdeutsche Sozialwissenschaftler zwischen Isolierung und Selbstbehauptung*, eds. Stephan Bollinger, Ulrich van der Heyden, and Mario Kessler (Berlin: Trafo Verlag Dr. Wolfgang Weist, 2004).

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