



**Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach, Ulrich Mählert.** *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003. 557 S. EUR 39.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-506-70110-7.



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**Published on** H-German (November, 2005)

This volume is the Festschrift for the doyen of GDR research, Hermann Weber, but simultaneously a most welcome survey of the state of the burgeoning research into the history of East Germany and related aspects of the “German question.” 53 specialists have contributed overviews of the state of work in their individual fields of GDR studies, and the volume is helpfully divided into eight sections, covering overviews of GDR history and its periodization; rule and repression; resistance and opposition; religion; a variety of specific policy areas from the economy to sport, education and women’s issues; foreign policy and the German question; and the development of research into the GDR since 1990. No key issue is neglected, and these sections include chapters on discrete topics such as agriculture, the GDR’s Jewish community and the expulsion of Wolf Biermann, as well as surveys of work on the Ministry for State Security, youth policy, and the work of museums in presenting GDR history since the state’s collapse. That said, the volume is concerned with historical themes (broadly defined), while literary criticism and similar cultural interests fall outside its remit.

Perhaps inevitably in such a large collection, not all of the contributors have taken the same approach to the task. Some, but not all, of the chapters include a brief but helpful overview of the GDR’s historical development in

a certain field (e.g. Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk on 17 June 1953 and Andr   Steiner on the economy), while others concentrate almost exclusively on the book’s main task of discussing the work published and how the historiography has developed.

Here, though, a problem of balance emerges, albeit one which could perhaps only have been solved by doubling the volume’s already impressive length. With just one specialist to discuss the range of work in each area, but with controversies abounding in a historiography where no lasting received wisdom can yet be said to have emerged, there is a danger that the collection does not give a fair hearing to all views, and that there may be no further discussion when an individual contributor is critical of the work of another scholar. For example, in his article on Soviet policy in Germany, Gerhard Wettig is rather dismissive of Wilfried Loth’s thesis that Stalin never sought to create a separate East German state. As Wettig is the only specific contributor on this theme, this appears to be the final word. Hermann Wentker is similarly critical of a range of the work already produced in his field of interest, the relationship between politics and the justice system. Rather disappointingly, a number of contributors take the opportunity to stress the solid bases on which their own research publications are built, while also noting the apparent shortcomings of other scholars

in the field.

Some contributors are less concerned with providing an historiographical overview than with presenting the standpoints with which they have attempted to influence public awareness and understanding of the GDR. Rainer Eppelmann is understandably proud of the achievements of the Bundestag's Enquete-Kommission into the GDR's history, which he chaired, and both explains and defends the title of the enquiry: "The Commission of Enquiry spoke of the GDR unmistakably as the SED dictatorship and in this way also countered the perspectives of an approach which was inherent to the system [die Perspektiven einer systemimmanenten Betrachtungsweise]" (p.402). Similarly, Tobias Hollitzer presents the work of citizens' groups and initiatives in preserving and exploring the GDR's past. Critical of the state's tendency to extend a monopoly over archival and historical work, while calling for more state financial support for the work of citizens' groups, he also unambiguously presents his view that, "Strictly speaking, societal history initiatives are groups which concern themselves with the communist dictatorship from a standpoint which neither distorts it nor plays it down" (p. 391). Yet the criteria for determining which approaches validate themselves in their disavowal of the "SED state" (as some authors would have it—a point to which we shall return) are not clear.

Though a number of scholars and personalities (such as Hollitzer) whose careers were hindered by the SED are present in this volume, the prominent historians of the old regime or of the modern PDS are absent and so unable to give their own views of current historiography (though Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung does have an article on the GDR in the 1980s). This is a pity, since representatives of the alternative views presented in collections such as *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR* and the usually scholarly publications of the Helle Panke group should surely also have been deemed worthy of inclusion in this otherwise fairly comprehensive survey of the state of research.

Thomas Lindenberger's piece on the GDR as an object of "societal history" (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) is one of those which takes helpful issue with some of the views presented elsewhere in the volume, and who calls for a more differentiated view of GDR history. Critical of both Sigrid Meuschel's view in the mid-1990s that a history of GDR society would be unproductive, given the apparent unity of SED politics and society in East Germany, and of Klaus Schröder's representation of the GDR as ultimately the "SED state" (sadly neither of these important

scholars has a chapter in the collection), he emphasises the great importance of exploring the social history of the GDR, not least as a means of identifying both how far-reaching and how limited was the scope of the SED's dictatorship, and regrets (p. 240) the absence of work on social and *Alltagsgeschichte* in the first of the two Enquete-Kommissionen. A sense of the scale and contours of the controversies that raged at times both before and after 1990 between different schools of thought on the GDR is given in the balanced articles by Mary Fulbrook and Klaus-Dietmar Henke, the latter in particular critical of works in the early 1990s which sought to locate the GDR at the same depths of immorality as the Third Reich.

Besides the detailed overview of work on the individual themes and the controversies within GDR research, an ongoing thread is the great debt owed to Hermann Weber, for establishing the solid foundations of historical and political research into the GDR at an early stage, for establishing clear perspectives for future work in the field, and for particular services to the discipline, notably in helping to secure and maintain broad access to archival materials once they became available. Markus Meckel speaks in his closing contribution for many in expressing his warm thanks to Weber for his numerous services to historians of the GDR.

This is a valuable reference work for anyone intending to pursue research in GDR history, and a useful companion to the *Vademekum DDR-Forschung*, since the individual chapters not only give very helpful pointers to work already published, but also in most cases note the questions which remain unanswered or which have emerged from work already completed. In some cases these are a salutary reminder that despite the significant resources already devoted to GDR research since 1990, much remains to be done. Several contributors mention the absence of work which would place the GDR in a more comparative framework, particularly (as in Jan Foitzik's article) with reference to the other socialist states of eastern Europe; Andreas Malycha reminds us that there is as yet no comprehensive history of the SED; Andr   Steiner notes the absence of a satisfactory final account on the GDR's economic record over the whole of its history, which prevents a clear view of the country's performance in international comparison, and Jens Sch  ne similarly calls for further work on the productivity of GDR agriculture. Overall, Detlef Nakath and Gerd-R  diger Stephan conclude that the GDR is not an over-researched subject, despite claims to the contrary and even though West Germany from 1949 to 1990 has received rather less attention.

Notwithstanding the call for further research into a wide range of questions, the wealth of existing publications is well documented in this text, and particularly useful is the detailed and carefully structured bibliography. Though not exhaustive (perhaps an impossible task given the huge number of publications in this field since 1990), the list includes details of 2066 books or articles, divided into 29 distinct areas, and covering both the weighty surveys and the tightly focused research articles. The chronological scope of the bibliography ranges

from the late 1940s to the present, and includes a number of official or semi-official publications from both East and West Germany as well as secondary research literature. In conjunction with references in the related chapters, this thorough bibliography presents an admirable map through a field now so rich in publications that an overview often seems impossible. For the bibliography alone, the volume would be a worthwhile addition to any research library.

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**Citation:** Mark Allinson. Review of Eppelmann, Rainer; Faulenbach, Bernd; Mählert, Ulrich, *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 2005.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11231>

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