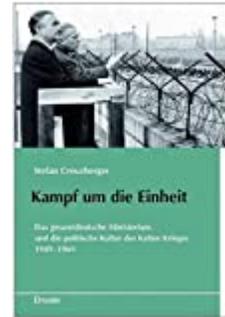


Stefan Kreuzberger. *Kampf für die Einheit: Das gesamtdeutsche Ministerium und die politische Kultur des Kalten Krieges 1949-1969.* Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2008. xii + 604 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7700-1625-9.



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The West German Ministry of Reunification - An Institution of Cold War Culture?

The Ministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen (BMG, or Ministry for Pan-German Affairs) was an institution in divided Germany that existed from the very beginning of the Federal Republic to the end of the partition in 1990, although it was renamed the Ministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen in 1969 (Ministry for Inner-German Relations). In *Kampf um die Einheit: Das gesamtdeutsche Ministerium und der Kampf um die politische Kultur des Kalten Krieges 1949-1969*, Stefan Kreuzberger presents an important part of the West German Cold War mindset. Indeed, the BMG was a key element of the West German political structure that had been headed by prominent politicians such as Jakob Kaiser, who had been chairman of the Christian Democrats in the Soviet Zone and remained critical of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's priority of western integration, which might have precluded an early reunification; Ernst Lemmer, formerly a journalist and liberal trade unionist—regarded as a rather weak leader—from 1957 to 1962; and Rainer Barzel from 1962 to 1963, a rising star in the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and later an unsuccessful candidate for

chancellor. Erich Mende from the Liberal Party became vice chancellor from 1963 to 1966 in the Erhard government, followed by Herbert Wehner (1966-19), who was a communist in the 1930s, a Social Democrat (SPD) from the 1950s to the 1970s, and who became one of the proponents of the SPD opening up to the existing Federal Republic in the Godesberg program of 1959.

The BMG's objective was to render itself superfluous by helping bring about German reunification through international diplomacy, and by keeping this goal alive and desirable in West Germany. Kaiser describes the BMG as a "lighthouse" whose "searchlights indefatigably and permanently should send rays of hope and confidence into the zone of silence on the other side of the Iron Curtain" (p. 53). Indeed, one of the ministry's first tasks was to find a role for itself, including addressing the issue of how to unite Germany in the future. As time went on, however, the goal of unification faded. With this change in focus, many policymakers and German citizens regarded it—at least in hindsight—as a ministry of brochures, an organization that produced numerous publications that had

almost no influence on actual policymaking.

One reason that the BMG lacked the ability to steer West German policy, as Creuzberger argues, was a result of the political character of the ministry's staff, which consisted largely of strongly anticommunist personnel. Regrettably, Creuzberger only briefly touches on the historical events that shaped their ideologies. Thus, important experiences under the National Socialist regime that contributed to these individual and collective identities, including their persecution and even imprisonment, receive little mention. Instead, it is a handful of influential people, such as the first secretary of state, Franz Thedieck, and one of the heads of department (*Referatsleiter*), Ewert von Dellingshausen, who drive Creuzberger's narrative, rather than the totality of the BMG's staff.

The BMG aimed to reach the East German (GDR) population through all medias. The main objective was not to actually destabilize that state, but rather to instill and nurture a sense of a collective German national identity. Attempts to delegitimize and even bring an end to the GDR fell under the purview of other organizations, including the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and even U.S. organizations in West Germany. Nonetheless, the BMG practiced a precarious balancing act of adhering to its stated mission without entering the territory of anti-GDR policies—leaving many of its activities in a very gray legal area. From its first days, the BMG tried to support actions that weakened communism without being involved in covert, anti-GDR operations. Although its actual contribution to creating a common German identity still remains unclear, Creuzberger convincingly refutes the GDR's claim that the BMG was a center for counter-revolution.

In the early 1950s, with the meaning and extent of German division unclear, many politicians attempted to create an institution that would defend West German democratic parties, which the Social Democratic party blocked. The BMG carried out this idea in part, supporting multiple West German private propaganda organizations, such as the Volksbund für Frieden und Freiheit (Association for Peace and Freedom), the Büro Bonner Berichte (Office of Bonn Reports), and many others. Moreover, the BMG commanded large secret sums of the public budget that were absent from official financial records. In some cases, vague information about funds from private sources appeared in official databases. The most prominent example was an index of known and sus-

pected communists, used to fight, symbolically if not in actuality, alleged communists or pacifists. Creuzberger is careful not to be too specific in referring to these "dubious" extra-legal activities, writing instead about a "blind, sometimes overzealous anti-communist defensive front" (p. 156) that was part of the task of *Verfassungsschutz* (protecting the West German constitution). Here, Creuzberger's careful language is itself in a gray area of meaning.

To name one telling example of the unclear jurisdiction of the BMG, after the June 17 uprising in 1953, it helped facilitate U.S.-financed initiatives for food shipments to the GDR. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, however, changed the framework for BMG activities, with such overt actions suspended, while support for West German anticommunist education continued. Under Erich Mende, the BMG attempted another approach: he attempted to integrate some of the ideas of Wolfgang Schollwer, a liberal politician, who worked towards cooperation with, instead of isolation of, the GDR. This new course was fully implemented under Herbert Wehner in the Great Coalition after 1966. Wehner, a politician who had been important in the Gesamtdeutsche Ausschuss (Pan-German Committee) of the Bundestag since the 1950s, was one of the first West Germans to use the ministry as a part of his own political objectives. Wehner's work became a major impetus for the Ostpolitik after 1969. The old personnel of West German politics had retired, either officially or unofficially. The exchange of political prisoners from the GDR had begun under Rainer Barzel, and under Wehner the secret communist index was destroyed. A "breakthrough" and a "magic moment—Sternstunde" (p. 422) was reached in 1968 after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, when "businesslike conventions" for cooperation became the new guideline for West German policy.

Chapter 6, "Influence on Political Culture," is the most interesting chapter. Here, the daily work of authors, publishing networks, and intellectuals, all furthering "state-political consciousness"—that is, official support for research on the GDR and pan-German research—is a topic Creuzberger takes on with specificity. This analysis includes fascinating material. This chapter is all the more convincing because Creuzberger contextualizes—especially in the conclusion—his arguments. As Creuzberger insists, all of these undertakings happened due to West German impressions that they were confronted with a massive communist threat, although the perceived and actual dangers had no mutual relation to each other ("in keinerlei Relation zu einander

standen”) (p. 537). Some measures taken by the BMG and the West German state, as Creuzberger states, were at best “dubious” in a free and democratic order. It was perhaps therefore not surprising that agents representing the West German government, in whatever capacity, reacted against dissidents without squeamishness (*zimperlich*). It seems clear that much of these activities were illegal and could not be justified by official political mandates; Creuzberger, though, resists judgment of any kind here.

This sort of reluctance to identify a policy or action as right or wrong seems to be what Creuzberger means by “Cold War culture.” However real or exaggerated these actions may have been with hindsight, it was nonetheless the omnipresent fear of communist subversion that defined all policies and perceptions in West Germany and specifically in the BMG. Creuzberger, following a certain tradition of post-World War Two scholarship, defines the Cold War as a global and total war just below the threshold of a “hot” nuclear war. Even if this assessment is correct, historians should place this judgment in historical context, instead of only repeating this widely accepted argument. To what extent did the BMG actively contribute to this total war as a historical actor in its own right, instead of merely as one aspect in a perfect storm of events? Of course, this kind of micro-history of the Cold War exceeds the scope of the cultural study of one institution as presented here.

This problematic approach to a key institution in the Cold War holds all the more true in the beginning of the book, when Creuzberger describes, without much context, the BMG’s actions. This lack of true analysis is underlined when the author uses the phrases “SED regime” or *Machthaber* throughout the book, without any expla-

nation of the extent to which those Cold War characteristics of the Soviet zone and its political structure are still valid today. In the same chapters, the author follows an institutional approach, one that he openly reifies as a model in political science in which “institutions” include, without differentiation, the analysis of policy, polity, and politics.

Ultimately, Creuzberger’s approach results in an exhaustive presentation of source materials, almost replicating its presentation as it originated in its bureaucratic model. Many heads of divisions and even lower employees are given long biographical descriptions, and the quarrels in the West German federal government and between the different ministries as well as the debates in the BMG are dealt with at great length. This sort of focus places the book squarely within the tradition of organizational or institutional monographs published by the German Federal Archives. For historians of the Cold War desirous of a more nuanced analysis, many of these sources are of very little interest. A much more focused argument or narrative would have led to meaningful results outside of a history of policy decisions. To put it another way: the text could have been drastically shortened and it would still be a book on West German Cold War fears, propaganda, and culture. Nonetheless, this book, because of its many sources, is a significant contribution to an understanding of the multiple levels of West German policy vis-À-vis the GDR, despite its resistance to pass judgment on the Federal Republic’s official and unofficial actions towards its estranged other half. For those scholars interested in primary documents, it is of particular interest, given its full twenty-four pages of images about the BMG, some of them reproduced in color, and an elaborate bibliography helpful to students and advanced scholars alike.

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