



**Jan Foitzik.** *Sowjetische Kommandanturen und deutsche Verwaltung in der SBZ und frühen DDR: Dokumente.* Berlin: de Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014. VII, 632 S. ISBN 978-3-11-040072-4.

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## **J. Foitzik (Hrsg.): Sowjetische Kommandanturen**

The Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany, the SBZ, is one of the most fascinating and revealing pieces of the complicated jigsaw puzzle of twentieth century German history. Yet it remains relatively little explored by German, Russian, and Anglo-American historiography. Until 1989, a substantial part of the problem was the lack of availability of Russian or East German archival sources. Now that the archives are for the most part open, there is still less scholarly work than one might expect. As a result of the integration of eastern Germany into the Federal Republic, the formation of the European Union, and new lines of conflict between "East" and "West," the German Democratic Republic (DDR), and its hybrid Soviet and German forerunner, the SBZ, have receded into the background of university teaching and historical exploration. Yet thanks to the efforts of a small group of German historians – Jan Foitzik, formerly of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Berlin, among the most prolific – considerable progress has been made in documenting the history of the SBZ and early DDR and exploring the complicated relationship between Soviet aims, actions, and dilemmas in its part of occupied Germany and German, especially German communist, traditions, goals, and initiatives.

Foitzik's newest edited book, *Sowjetische Kommandanturen und deutsche Verwaltung in der SBZ und frühen DDR: Dokumente*, deepens and broadens our understanding of the SBZ by exploring how local government, in particular, developed over the first half dozen years or so of the Soviet administration. The title is a

bit misleading in that the first half of the book does not consist of documents at all, but rather of two fine monographic essays on the history of the period, one by Nikita Vasilevich Petrov, perhaps the leading Russian expert on the SBZ, and the second by Foitzik himself.

Petrov's contribution, *Die sowjetische Besatzungsverwaltung und die Sowjetisierung Ostdeutschlands*, appeared in Petrov's 2011 Russian book on the secret police in Eastern Europe, but is well worth having available in German. Among the many interesting aspects of Petrov's piece is his emphasis on the crucial role of the NKVD/MVD, which is "hard to overemphasize," as he notes – in the rebuilding of the German administration and in the development of political parties in the zone, including the SED (p. 54). In this regard, he adds, we have much more to learn about Soviet secret police practices given the inaccessibility of the archives of the Soviet kommandant service itself, not to mention of relevant NKVD/MVD archives. Petrov also understands the importance of the problem of controlling Soviet soldiers in the zone, given the "wild hate" that was cultivated against the Germans by Soviet authorities during the war (p. 55). That the behavior of Soviet soldiers had "real political" consequences even beyond 1945 is well documented in Petrov's contribution. Petrov also explores the role of the Soviets in setting up German institutions that were designed to protect the frontiers with the Western occupation zones and to fight against internal enemies of various sorts. The role of the defense of the new border between Western and Soviet occupied

Germany in the construction of a new state in the east is frequently underestimated. As far as the question of Soviets' goals in Germany, Petrov is convinced that by the beginning of 1948 — fully six months before the Berlin Blockade — Stalin was certain that Germany would be divided into two halves, citing Milovan Djilas's report of Stalin's remark that "[w]e will make out of East Germany our own state" (p. 93).

Foitzik's monograph of one hundred fifty plus pages within the book is entitled *Sowjetische Ordnungspolitik und deutsche Ordnungsambitionen* and constitutes a comprehensive administrative history of the SBZ and early DDR. The practices and ambitions of the Soviet occupiers are analyzed in detail against the backdrop of the needs of the local population for food, housing, security, work, and political participation given the utter destructiveness of the last months of the war, especially in eastern Germany. Added to this was the chaos of both Russian and German administrative organization under the occupation. New territorial administrative borders only made matters worse, since they "took note of neither legal, historical, bureaucratic-organizational nor regional-cultural traditions" (p. 133).

Meanwhile, there was very little consistency from "Land to Land and from bureaucratic agency to bureaucratic agency" (p. 153). Just as the SED (the Socialist Unity Party) worked to increasingly control the economic and political development of the zone, it had to deal with the fact that the Soviet occupation authorities constantly meddled in the functions of the German administrative bodies, frequently creating more problems for the "Sovietization" of the zone than necessary. Given Soviet interference, the practice of German "self-administration," noted the former Thuringian Minister-President Rudolf Paul, was simply "ineffective" (p. 200). Even in the early 1950s, when the Soviet Control Commission (SKK) took over the functions of the Soviet Military Administration, Soviet officers were "intensively and directly involved" in ensuring that Soviet practice was applied to German problems (p. 224). In Foitzik's convincing rendition of the administrative history of the SBZ, the Soviet occupiers listened to and worked with the SED; but they also caused as many problems as they solved by their ubiquitous meddling in personnel decisions and policy making, not to mention ideological and political matters.

The documents presented in the second half of the book are meant to support an understanding of the functioning of the kommandanturs and the local German ad-

ministration. Some of them have been published before in Russian and German collections. Most are from GARF (the State Archives of the Russian Federation) and SAPMO BArch (the Foundation Archives of the Parties and Mass Organizations for the former DDR in the Bundesarchiv). However, the editor also collects relevant documents from a wide variety of other archival repositories including the Ostbüro of the Social Democratic Party and some private collections.

At the beginning of the documents section, there is a long and comprehensive list of the kommandanturs and kommandants, as well as a list of the 137 administrative units of the kommandanturs in the DDR and Berlin as of November 17, 1948. The most substantial document in the collection is an eighty-five page long "History of the Military Kommandantur of the Kreis Zauch-Belzig and the city of Belzig 1945-1948," marked "secret." It is less revealing than one might hope, but nevertheless contains a detailed overview of the functions of the kommandanturs and the extent of their administrative reach in such fields as health care, schooling, agriculture, and supplying pharmaceuticals.

The remaining documents will have more or less interest for the student of early East German history. Some of them refer to the criminal behavior of Soviet soldiers in the zone and to the fact that the kommandants themselves were frequently accused of drunkenness and an "unworthy relationship to the honor of Soviet soldiers" (p. 445). That this was a serious problem even late in the occupation is attested to by a complaint by SED officials in Thuringia to the head of the military government in Weimar Major General I. S. Kolesnichenko (January 6, 1947). They wrote that the "almost daily" complaints about the behavior of the occupation soldiers could be a serious "danger for the further anti-fascist democratic development of Germany" if sharp countermeasures were not taken (p. 469). But the Soviets also complain about the Germans: about their inability to work well, to take decisive measures, and to organize their party propaganda effectively. Both the Soviets and the Germans in the zone think the other were to blame for the administrative problems of the zone. The hectoring and superior tone of Soviet officials clearly got on the nerves of the German party leaders and bureaucrats. All in all, Foitzik has selected relevant documents for getting "up close" to the administrative life of the kommandanturas and local officials in the SBZ and early DDR. This is important and useful work for the development of the historiography.

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