

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Klaus Larres, Panikos Panayi, eds. *The Federal Republic of Germany since 1949: Politics, Society and Economy before and after Unification.* London and New York: Longman, 1996. xvi + 340 pp. \$48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-23891-6.

Reviewed by Matthias Zimmer (University of Alberta, Edmonton)

Published on H-German (January, 1997)

Multi-authored volumes are a nightmare for editors and reviewers alike; for editors, because the long, thorny and sometimes onerous way from the inception of book project to its completion requires stamina, patience, and considerable management skills; for the reviewer, because the book under review has strengths and weaknesses, is more uneven than a monographical study, and thus difficult to evaluate. But more often than not our teaching depends on the availability of up-to-date material on the subjects under consideration, and we happily utilize the multi-authored books, thankful that someone has taken upon him- or herself the task of providing us with the material. The book edited by Klaus Larres and Panikos Panayi is, to begin with, useful and commendable, because it offers both broad surveys and in-depth analyses of certain aspects of the Federal Republic's history and politics, but it is also not without shortcomings. I will briefly summarize the book's intent and content first, then evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

The intent of the book is to "place the long-term transformations which have taken place [in 1989] within the context of the long-term historical structures of the twentieth century, and in particular post-Second World War Germany, focusing upon the Federal Republic of Germany both before and after unification" (p. ix). The book is divided into two parts. The first part surveys the development of the Federal Republic, the second part examines key themes in the politics, society, and economy of the Federal Republic. The first part starts with a history of the West German economy since 1949 by Richard Overy, followed by Hartmut Berghoff's survey of population change and its repercussions on the social history of West Germany. Torsten Oppelland reviews the domestic political developments in the Federal Republic from 1949

to 1969, while Matthias Siekmeier and Klaus Larres follow up with the two decades since 1969. The first part concludes with Immanuel Geiss's chapter on Germany's position in the international system before and after unification.

The second part mirrors the first in its structure: economic-social-domestic political-international issues. Graham Hallett analyzes state intervention in Germany's postwar economy and Panikos Panayi takes a closer look at immigration, ethnicity, and racism since the Second World War. The domestic politics area comprises David Childs's chapter on the nationalist and neo-Nazi scene since 1945 and Stephen Padgett's analysis of the SPD as a *Volkspartei* in decline. Terry McNeill then discusses the Soviet Union's policy toward West Germany 1945-1990, followed by an in-depth analysis of the Rapallo factor in German foreign policy from the 1950s to the 1990s by Klaus Larres. The book concludes with three maps (Europe 1949-90; Europe 1995; Unified Germany) and a useful, but slightly flawed, index.

The strength of the book lies in the mixture of general surveys and detailed analyses. Thus, Overy's text on the German economy and Hallett's analysis of state intervention link up nicely, as do the chapters by Berghoff and Panayi, and the survey by Oppelland, Siekmeier, and Larres with the more specific chapters by Padgett and Childs. Somewhat mysterious to me is the fact that there is no chapter on the Christian Democrats as the major political force in West Germany since 1949. The first part's weakest link is Geiss's chapter; it is superficial and omits important information (Geiss does not even mention the Maastricht Treaty), and Geiss also has a rather disturbing tendency to quote his own works primarily rather

than giving the reader a survey of the major works done in the area of German foreign policy (for example, the studies by Haftendorn, Besson, Hacke, and Hanrieder, to mention just a few). McNeill's analysis of German-Soviet relations is problematic because he does not include anything written after 1990—and the opening of the Soviet archives as well as the publication of some major autobiographical accounts (Gorbachev, Falin, Kvizinsky) after 1990 have certainly had a major impact on the evaluation of the Soviet Union's policy toward West Germany since 1945. Larres's chapter on the Rapallo factor in West German foreign policy is by far the most research-oriented contribution; it seems to me, however, that his extensive use of British and U.S. sources (PRO and FRUS) are a little bit out of proportion for the purposes of the reader.

The book is useful for those who find some of the existing books on the market too confined to political

structures and institutions. It offers a good introduction into some selected fields of West Germany's political, economic, and social developments. It cannot, however, substitute for a general introduction into the history and the political system of Germany. One final thought: it seems to be difficult to incorporate the history of the German Democratic Republic into German history in general. Was the GDR just a political mongrel, a deviation from the national history of (West) Germany, or a phenomenon *sui generis*? The book by Larres and Panayi passes over this question in silence, but how can we properly understand the history of West Germany before 1990 without its alter ego, the GDR?

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-net. All rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Matthias Zimmer. Review of Larres, Klaus; Panayi, Panikos, eds., *The Federal Republic of Germany since 1949: Politics, Society and Economy before and after Unification*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=795>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.