



Heiner Timmermann. *Deutsche Fragen: Von der Teilung zur Einheit.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001. 685 S. (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-428-10715-5.



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Foreign Policy of the GDR Reexamined

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Deutsche Fragen is a collection of thirty-three essays that were originally presented by scholars at a conference (“German Questions: From Participation to Unification”) held in 2000 at the European Academy at Otzenhausen, Germany. The Academy has hosted numerous conferences since 1988 on the GDR’s social and political history, attracting scholars from all over Europe and North America to Saarland, a German *Land* bordered by France on the south, Luxemburg on the west, and the Rhineland-Palatinate on the north and east. The editor is Heiner Timmermann, director of the Academy’s Social Science Research Institute, professor of European history at the University of Jena, and author of *Die DDR in Deutschland: ein Rückblick auf 50 Jahre* (2001); *Die DDR: Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates* (2001); *Die DDR: Erinnerung an einen untergegangenen Staat* (1999) and others. Selecting just thirty-three of the total sixty-eight papers presented, Timmermann divides the volume into four parts: foreign relations, power, society, and aspects of unification. In the introduction Timmermann provides short synopses of the Academy’s fifteen colloquia and conferences in re-

cent years. Even before the autumn of 1989 four colloquia were held on social and economic change in the GDR in which social scientists from both the FRG and GDR took part. Each conference resulted in a publication by Dader Verlag of Saarbruecken. Timmermann described the conference in 2000 as the most memorable, due in part to the participation of Dr. Wolfgang Schaeuble, the former Minister of the Interior, who played a key role in the German reunification process.

One cannot, of course, assess all the essays in just a brief review. Four essays in the foreign policy section strike this reader as especially interesting. In his contribution, “Modern Weapon Systems for the Soviet Union: The SED Caught Between Economic and Ideological Pressures,” Gerhard Barkleit argues—despite what the title of his essay suggests—that ideological pressures dominated the relationship between the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the USSR, not economic reality, since true economic competition could not exist in a command economy aping the Soviet model (p. 51). In the second essay, “Brezhnev’s Long-Term Strategy as Reflected in SED Documentation,” Michael Ploetz draws on extensive

interviews with witnesses and internal SED documents to demonstrate that the ultimate goal of Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's foreign policy was to crush the West. The Brezhnev leadership engineered a "peace campaign" against NATO's military policies, but despite its initial success, the campaign failed to reduce NATO's military and political influence, nor did Soviet-initiated arms control policies. Ploetz argues—a bit one-sidedly—that it was the arsenal of weapons that the Brezhnev leadership assembled with manic obsession that caused the Soviet collapse. It became a "leaden vest which in the course of the 1980s caused the over-extended Soviet empire to drown helplessly" (p. 77). Unfortunately, Ploetz seems to ignore other causal factors, such as the change in leadership, ideological disillusionment, dissatisfaction of the masses, and the overall effects of globalization. In the third essay, "Problems of the GDR's Indebtedness to the West and Its Foreign Trade Statistics," Armin Volze argues controversially that the GDR could have muddled along for several more years, since its foreign trade statistics were distorted. He cites a report on the discrepancies between real and perceived indebtedness (p. 91).

The final essay particularly worth noting, by Doerte Putensen, shows how the GDR's foreign policy toward the Nordic countries developed after diplomatic recognition was established. As the years passed, the number of regulations increased and the content of treaties became more specific. Relations with Sweden were especially close, given the myriad areas of mutual interest: environmental concerns in the Baltic, the fishing industry, and the GDR's role as a transit country (p. 114). The GDR also valued highly its relations with Finland—host to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)—and sought, especially in the 1970s, both to prove its adherence to the Helsinki Accords and to silence critics of the GDR's foreign policy via robust bilateral relations with Finland (p. 115). On its part, Fin-

land expanded its economic and cultural relations with the GDR to demonstrate that, as a neutral country, Finland was treating the two Germanies equally. As international tensions increased in the 1980s, the GDR made a concerted effort to broaden extant contacts with the Scandinavian countries, both to portray itself as a proponent of détente and demonstrate its interest in dialogue with the West, and to gain support for the East Bloc's security interests as a way to justify its own Western policy within the Bloc (p. 115).

Key strengths of *Deutsche Fragen* include the authors' frequent use of interviews, statistics, and documents from archives such as the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv*, the party archive of the SED. The volume is thus useful reading for scholars and advanced graduate students, although the inclusion of an index would have made it more so. *Deutsche Fragen* should be read in conjunction with *Fall und Aufstieg: Deutschland zwischen Kriegsende, Teilung und Vereinigung* by Peter Bender and Egon Bahr (2002); *Erinnerung entsteht auf neue Weise: Wende und Vereinigung in der deutschen Romanliteratur* by Richard Lorou (2003); *Konflikt und Konsens: Transformationsprozesse in Ostdeutschland* by Martin Brussig and Frank Ettrich (2003); *Dictatorship, State Planning, and Social Theory in the German Democratic Republic* by Peter C. Caldwell (2003); and *The Berlin Republic: German Unification and a Decade Of Changes* by Winand Gellner and John Douglas Robertson (2003).

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