



Berthold Ebert, Franckesche Stiftungen zu Halle. *Hans und Rosemarie Ahrbeck: Den Lehrern vieler Lehrer.* Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2002. 128 S. EUR 10.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-931479-32-9.

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Models in the Classical Sense

This volume is the result of a conference held in 2001 to commemorate the lives of two respected East German pedagogues on the twentieth anniversary of their deaths. Hans Ahrbeck died at the age of 90 in April 1981 and was soon followed by his wife, Rosemarie Ahrbeck, who committed suicide three weeks later. Many of the contributors are former students and colleagues of the Ahrbecks, who share their memories and impressions of the couple. The collection, however, is by no means a mere anthology of biographical tales. The contributors succeed in contextualizing their subjects in the broader threads of German history and raise important questions for future research. More than a narrowly focused investigation of two respected pedagogues, this volume offers valuable insight into the social history of higher education and everyday living conditions in the German Democratic Republic.

Hans Ahrbeck belonged to the founding generation of post-war pedagogues in the Soviet occupation zone and GDR. At age fifty-six, he accepted a position as dean of the newly founded School of Education at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg in 1946, where he also taught courses on the history of education. During his tenure as dean, he met Rosemarie Wothke, a young woman from Magdeburg thirty-six years his junior, who entered the university's teacher training program as part of its inaugural class. The two worked closely together throughout the 1950s and eventually married in 1962.

The overwhelming majority of essays in this volume focus on Hans Ahrbeck. The first of these is by Sonja

Haeder, who examines Ahrbeck's childhood and early education. She concludes that his experiences as a child and pupil were similar to many boys of the middle class during the late Empire. Completing his *Abitur* in 1910, Ahrbeck experienced an education characterized by discipline, drill, and a profound fear of his teacher. Nevertheless, Haeder asserts, he internalized the values of the middle class during his years in the *Gymnasium* and, when his parents relented and offered him the opportunity to pursue his gardening interests at age nineteen, he instead enrolled in the university. Ahrbeck himself later noted that he had undergone an "inner change" and had become fascinated with literature, philosophy, music, and classical languages. These new passions indicated an evolving humanism that would come to define Ahrbeck's academic life.

Gert Geissler investigates Hans Ahrbeck's impact on postwar school reform debates in East Germany. Ahrbeck, like many of his colleagues in the postwar period, hoped that the GDR would serve as a new beginning for education. Yet the idealistic Ahrbeck found himself on the losing side of two key educational debates in the 1950s: teacher training and structural reform. With his support for the beginning of the *Oberschule* after grade six, he indirectly called into question the eight-year *Grundschule*, deemed by many the cornerstone of education in the GDR. Characterized by Walter Ulbricht as one of the educators expressing "revisionist tendencies," Ahrbeck was observed by the Stasi throughout the late 1950s (p. 36). Geissler ultimately concludes that despite

Ahrbeck's loyalty, he suffered the wrath of the state for the criticism he expressed as he attempted to reconcile his personal beliefs with the GDR's educational policies.

Most of the remaining essays are written by colleagues and former students of the Ahrbecks. Above all else, their contributions emphasize the Ahrbecks' legacy as humanist educators. Jan-Hendrik Olbertz asserts that the two were "models in the classical sense" and that their teaching exemplified humanist education (p. 13). Karl-Heinz Guenther notes that although Hans Ahrbeck avoided the schoolmasterly way of telling students what to think, he nevertheless emphasized key humanist values in his lectures: democracy, individuality, and the dignity of man. Renate Reimann reiterates these ideas, using her correspondence with the couple as the basis for her contribution. Reimann's exchanges with the Ahrbecks are particularly revealing because they illustrate the everyday struggles of life in the GDR, including censorship and restrictions on travel. While these essays center on the experiences of the Ahrbecks, they also illuminate several of the contradictions of higher education in East Germany.

In addition to the conference papers, this volume contains a selection of other scholarship compiled as a tribute to the Ahrbecks. Martin Kuehnel's speech given on the occasion of Hans Ahrbeck's eightieth birthday is included. Similar in tone to Guenther's contribution, Kuehnel praises Ahrbeck's scholarly accomplishments but stresses the pedagogue's outstanding personal qualities: his kindness, his interest in others, and his commitment to his students. Berthold Ebert contributes an insightful examination of Jan Amos Comenius in Hans Ahrbeck's work. Also included are two essays—one written by Hans and the other by Rosemarie—on August Hermann Francke, an educational pioneer in Halle who founded several schools at the end of the seventeenth century. The volume concludes with a comprehensive bibliography of the two Ahrbecks' publications. These contributions, which round out the volume, will undoubtedly be of greatest value to specialists.

The goal of this volume, as its editor Berthold Ebert notes in the introduction, is to raise new questions. Other contributors reiterate this purpose in their essays, noting that many issues relating to the Ahrbecks remain unexamined. This volume indeed sets out an ambitious agenda for future research on the Ahrbecks and their scholarship; it also prompts several broader questions relating to teacher training, research, and higher education in the German Democratic Republic. Yet read-

ers may wish that the volume's contributors had cast a more critical eye on their subjects and offered assessments and conclusions, even if they were tentative. What was the broader significance of the Ahrbecks' often-mentioned humanism and middle-class values?[1] Why did the Ahrbecks remain in East Germany when colleagues such as Albert Reble and Hans Becker fled to the West? Did the university in Halle provide a unique environment or could the Ahrbecks have conducted their work at other universities in the GDR?

As noted above, most of the essays focus on Hans Ahrbeck—his childhood, his role in the school reform discussions of the postwar period, his work as dean in the late 1940s and 1950s, and his research. Rosemarie Ahrbeck is unfortunately overshadowed by her husband throughout the volume, the sole exception being Berthold Ebert's investigation of her life and work. Ebert's essay underscores the fact that she was a first-rate scholar and educator in her own right. Rosemarie Ahrbeck joined the faculty of the Martin-Luther-Universitaet in 1960 and continued her research on Renaissance humanism, socialist utopias, Komensky, Rousseau, and Francke while teaching a full schedule of courses. At the same time, she pursued her other passion—medicine—and received her medical degree in 1968. In 1977, she became the first female Senator at the university, elected with the unanimous support of her colleagues. Rosemarie Ahrbeck, like her husband, nevertheless struggled to reconcile her pedagogical and humanist beliefs with the requirements of teaching in a socialist state. It was this inner struggle, coupled with their shared intellectual interests, which united the Ahrbecks throughout their almost twenty years of marriage.

This information leads to a final question that is occasionally broached in the volume, yet never fully addressed. What were the Ahrbecks' political convictions and how did they affect their teaching in the young socialist state? Ebert explains Hans Ahrbeck's resistance to National Socialism as an outgrowth of his humanist beliefs. In discussing Hans Ahrbeck's self-perception after 1945, Guenther explains that although Ahrbeck did not describe himself as a Marxist, he had nothing against Marxism. "It was one possible way of thinking next to others," Guenther explains (p. 25). Clearly, Ahrbeck was more interested in the new educational possibilities opened up by the Soviet occupation and subsequent East German government than with any political ideology. Yet even when he recognized that many of his hopes would not be realized and that the state's leaders viewed him as a renegade, he remained in the GDR. Rosemarie

Ahrbeck struggled with the same demons as her husband. Citing the work of Thomas More as an inspiration, she successfully navigated the dangerous political landscape and reached a compromise with the state. This examination of the Ahrbecks' lives provides an ideal forum in which to examine precisely these tensions between intellectual independence and political obligation. Unfortunately, the role of politics is marginalized in this volume; many of the essays portray the Ahrbecks as apolitical beings in a highly politicized world.

These criticisms, however, should not detract from the value of this collection. Ebert's volume offers a revealing glimpse into the lives of two esteemed East German pedagogues. It places the Ahrbecks' work and research in the forefront, while contextualizing their experiences in the broader strands of German history. While

this work is most relevant to specialists in East German higher education, it should also appeal to readers with more general interests in postwar East Germany.

Note

[1]. Guenther remarks in his contribution that the *buengerliche* education Hans Ahrbeck and his colleagues received before 1945 served as a bulwark against the Sovietization of higher education in the GDR (p. 24). This assertion contradicts recent literature that emphasizes the high degree of success East Germany achieved in the Sovietization of its universities. See John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Geist im Dienste der Macht: Hochschulpolitik in der SBZ/DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2003).

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