

German History, 1945-1990

Eighth Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History
Potsdam, Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, May 1-4, 2002

Co-sponsored by the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, and the BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University. Hosted by the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF), Potsdam, May 1-4, 2002. Conveners: Roger Chickering (Georgetown University) and Richard F. Wetzell (GHI). Moderators: Andreas Daum (Harvard University), Manfred Görtemaker (Universität Potsdam), Elizabeth Heineman (University of Iowa), Ulrich Herbert (Universität Freiburg), Konrad Jarausch (ZZF), Christoph Kleßmann (ZZF).

For the eighth time, the Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History brought together sixteen doctoral students from North America and from Germany to present and discuss their dissertation projects with one another and with faculty mentors from both sides of the Atlantic. Since this year's seminar was dedicated to German history from 1945 to 1990, it also had the virtue of bringing together historians working on West Germany with those working on East Germany. It was graciously hosted by the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF) in Potsdam. The seminar began with an opening lecture from the co-director of the ZZF, Prof. Konrad Jarausch, on "A Double Burden: The Politics of the Past and German Identity", in which he explored the connections between the debates about the East German and Nazi dictatorships and argued that Germany's culture of historical self-criticism ought to be balanced with a historical sense of Germany's positive accomplishments in order to allow a "democratic patriotism" to develop.

The first panel brought together two papers that examined the early postwar histories of East Germany and Poland in comparative perspective. Jan Behrend's paper examined the history of propaganda in East Germany and Poland from 1944/45 to 1957, focusing on the question to what extent the propaganda strategies of the two regimes succeeded in creating *Vertrauen* (trust) in the regime among the population. Although the nature of the available sources makes it difficult to assess the reception and effectiveness of propaganda efforts, Behrend's argued that sudden changes in propaganda strategy, which occurred in both countries, led to irritated reactions in the population. The lack of open communication, he concluded, meant that "Soviet-type" systems suffered from a very limited scope of *Vertrauen*. David Tompkins compared the early history of music festivals in the GDR and Poland, from 1948 to 1957. Music, he argued, was a key element in the communist parties' "softer" forms of control. The communist parties in both countries sought to harness music for ideological purposes by pushing for "socialist-realist" music, but encountered some resistance from composers interested in more avant-garde "formalist" works and from audiences who could simply leave concert halls empty if the musical program strayed too far from popular tastes. On balance, the SED was more successful in imposing its vision than the communist party in Poland, where composers gained considerable autonomy after 1953. The first panel's discussion focused on the difficulties of determining popular attitudes in dictatorial regimes and of distinguishing between pragmatic adaptation and genuine consent; differences between *Vertrauen* and other forms of legitimacy; and the importance of negotiations over the meaning of terms like "socialist realism".

The second panel dealt with West German history during the 1960s and 1970s. Peter Kramper's paper examined the history of the trade-union-owned "Neue Heimat" and its transformation, over the course of the 1960s, from a developer of housing projects into a *Städtebaukonzern*, a company involved in urban development more generally. This transformation, Kramper argued, was both the last initiative that the Neue Heimat legitimated in terms of "meeting demand" (*Bedarfsdeckung*) and its first step toward assuming a particular role in the social market economy. Keith Alexander's paper dealt with the increasing acceptance of parliamentary democracy in the West German left by examining how one of the "K-Groups", the antiparliamentary, revolutionary KPD-Rote Fahne, came to join in the formation of a parliamentary party, Berlin's Alternative Liste, which ran in the 1979 election and entered the West

Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus the same year. The ensuing discussion raised several important issues: whether the papers demonstrated the increasing acceptance of parliamentary democracy (by the K-Groups) and the market economy (by the Neue Heimat); whether the transformation of the K-Groups should be attributed primarily to the appeal of parliamentary democracy or to the biographical path of K-Group members; the relative weight of ideology and biography in the history of the K-Groups; and whether the reasons for the urban-development ambitions of the Neue Heimat included political hostility to the architecture of the Kaiserreich and a process of *Verwissenschaftlichung*.

The third panel examined two different kinds of cross-border traffic. Simone Derix's paper analyzed the role of images (*Bilder*) in official state visits in West Germany in the 1950s. The Federal Republic might have seemed short on symbols because it cultivated a "pathos of soberness" that was designed to project distance from the pomp of the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, in its arrangements for state visits, Derix argued, the Federal Republic sought to promote two images in particular: Germany's successful rebuilding, visualized through visits to model factories, and the division of Germany, visualized through visits to Berlin. In her paper, Edith Sheffer offered a "microhistory of German division" by examining the border relations between two neighboring Franconian towns (Sonneberg and Neustadt) that became separated by the inter-German border. Exploding the myth that the border was fortified by the East against Western objections, Sheffer showed that the German population and the occupying forces on both sides contributed to making the border increasingly impermeable for a variety of reasons, including both economic self-interest and hostility toward refugees on the Western side. The discussion raised the questions of how one can combine cultural and political history, and to what extent both papers represented new approaches to writing the history of the Cold War.

The fourth panel dealt with two instances of "social engineering" in West and East Germany. Ruth Rosenberger's paper studied the entry of industrial psychologists (*Betriebspsychologen*) and human resources specialists (*Personalexperten*) into West German companies during the period 1945-1975 as an instance of the scientization (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) of the social. The impact of these experts, Rosenberger argued, was Janus-faced. On the one hand, management used psychological expertise to rationalize production; on the other hand, the principle of dialogical communication that these experts promoted also had the potential to humanize the workplace. The second paper, by Gregory Witkowski, also dealt with the arrival of a new actor in an economic institution: in this case, the arrival of industrial workers on East German collective farms. Examining the East German campaign to recruit industrial workers to work on farms during the 1950s, Witkowski demonstrated how the various interests of the participants B workers and farmers B consistently frustrated the state's planning goals. The GDR, he argued, is best understood as an "educational dictatorship", whose power was limited by a measure of *Eigen-Sinn* - individual interests rather than outright resistance - of the population. In the discussion, it was argued that both papers dealt with processes of modernization that addressed specifically German deficits: hierarchical structures in industrial enterprises and an insufficiently modernized agricultural sector. It was also suggested that the interest of enterprises in human-resources specialists fluctuated with the labor market. Finally, the question was asked: Did these papers suggest that West German methods of social engineering were sophisticated (wrapping rationalization in the mantle of humanization), whereas East German methods were generally clumsy and therefore ineffective?

The fifth panel brought together two papers on history and memory in East Germany. David Marshall presented an overview of his dissertation on East Berlin's Museum für deutsche Geschichte. In the 1950s and 1960s, Marshall argued, the museum focused primarily on German national history and engaged in harsh Cold War rhetoric against West Germany. After 1970, the museum shifted its focus toward international socialism, emphasized German-Soviet relations, and started to promote a "separate GDR historical identity". In his paper, Jon Berndt Olsen examined three examples of early East German "memory work": the reconstruction of the Gedenkstätte der Sozialisten in the Friedrichsfelde cemetery, designed to link the SED to the tradition of the German labor movement; the centennial commemoration of the 1848 Revolution, which stressed supposed analogies between 1848 and the current situation in Germany; and the 1948 traveling exhibit "The Other Germany", which portrayed the SED's current struggle as an extension of the fight against fascism. In sum, Olsen argued, the SED attempted to appropriate existing "memory rituals" and to "transfer the counter-memory of a select group of individuals onto the collective memory" of the East German population.

The ensuing discussion called attention to: the fact that the politics of history and memory in both Germanies were always shaped by competition between the two German states; the need to analyze the interaction of public memory culture and the development of history as a discipline; and the benefits of moving beyond national histories when studying the politics of history.

The sixth panel addressed two important aspects of social and economic life in East Germany. According to Molly Wilkinson Johnson, the SED regarded organized sports as an important tool for building a "socialist culture" (defined by "productivity, health, and military preparedness") and for "structuring the leisure time" of its citizens. Examining the campaign to mobilize the Leipzig population for "voluntary work actions" to build a sports stadium, she argued that the campaign's success demonstrated the GDR's "progress in fostering citizens' identification with the state", but also observed that the available sources make it difficult to determine people's motivations for participating in such campaigns. Philipp Heldmann examined GDR consumer goods policy during the 1960s, using the example of clothing. His "analysis stressed four weaknesses" of the regime: the leadership's policies were often contradictory; the bureaucracy often did not implement the leadership's wishes; the planning bureaucracy had limited control over the economy; and, finally, the regime depended on a measure of cooperation from the population and was keenly aware that the availability of certain consumer goods was crucial to secure such cooperation. Heldmann concluded that far from being dictated from above, consumer goods policy was characterized by a fair amount of "bargaining" and "negotiation" among different actors, including the population. The discussion suggested that the different goals of the regime's sports policy - creating socialist personalities, structuring leisure time, and training a corps of athletes for the Olympics - might have been in tension with one another and raised the question how changes in priority changed sports policy over time. The discussion also addressed the question whether the notion of "weaknesses" of the regime was useful for analyzing the GDR.

The seventh panel examined two aspects of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* - coming to terms with the Nazi past - in West Germany. Jürgen Zieher's paper examined how the legacy of the Holocaust was dealt with in Dortmund, Düsseldorf, and Cologne from 1945 to 1960. Public commemoration of the Holocaust, he showed, was mostly limited to the Jewish communities in these cities and a very small, but active non-Jewish section of the public. Most of the population and city officials were silent about the murder of the Jews. Local officials became more willing to participate in commemorations of the Holocaust in the second half of the 1950s, but they did this in order to make a superficial peace with the survivors and to absolve themselves, rather than to honestly confront their history. Daniel Morat's paper provided an overview of his dissertation about Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, and Friedrich Georg Jünger and how these intellectuals dealt with the Nazi past - and their own role in it - after 1945. Morat argued that after 1945 all three thinkers managed to distance themselves from National Socialism by reinterpreting their relationship to technological modernity, which they now interpreted as part of an "age of nihilism". In the biographical crisis situation they faced after 1945, this intellectual strategy allowed them to relativize the importance of National Socialism, which became merely one instance of the more general phenomenon of nihilism, and to recast their own role as that of intellectuals who were working to overcome this nihilism by acting as "seismographs". The discussion raised a number of issues: Did the papers assume a normative path of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? If so, it was suggested, one ought to examine the social function of *Verdrängung* (repression), which might have been necessary after 1945. There also was a debate about the terms "Conservative Revolution" and *Abstandsdenken*, which can be seen as tainted by their apologetic use and implications.

The last panel was devoted to two aspects of West German reactions to the constant threat of war - nuclear war in particular - during the Cold War. Nicholas Steneck's paper examined the origins of West Germany's first civil defense law, which was passed in 1957. Tracing the interaction of expert planners, parliamentary politics, and public opinion in the shaping of civil policy, Steneck argued that the civil defense law of 1957 was deeply flawed. Its mandates remained unfunded because the Adenauer government was unwilling to commit sufficient federal funds and sought to shift the costs to the private sector and to state and local governments; and the content of the civil defense plans (which contained no provisions for mass evacuations) showed that the civil defense planners were still fighting the last war and failed to take the nuclear threat seriously. As a result, critics charged that the law

simply provided an illusion of civil defense rather than any actual protection. Katrin Köhl presented an overview of her comparative study of the development of “conflict resolution studies” in the U.S. and *Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* in West Germany. Using the concept of *Erfahrungsgeschichte*, Köhl argued that once the immense stockpile of weapons of mass destruction in East and West were experienced as creating a situation of permanent danger, research on war and peace underwent a major shift, which took the form of two different *Denkstile* (styles of thought) in the U.S. and Germany. In the U.S., the desire to expand the room for manoeuvre in international relations led political scientists to move beyond the conceptual dichotomy of “war” and “peace” by focusing on “conflict” and “conflict resolution”, and the question of how to create an international system of arms control. West German research, by contrast, was shaped by the perception that the nuclear threat had eliminated all room for manoeuvre in politics, which led West German political scientists to stress the danger of a superpower “pax atomica” and to develop the notion of *organisierte Friedlosigkeit* - a state that was neither war nor peace - as a key concept in West German peace research. The discussion focused on: the pros and cons of *Erfahrungsgeschichte*; the relevance of the fact that West Germany and the U.S. did not experience a “hot” war after 1945; the role of *Friedensforschung* as a weapon in the Cold War; and the importance of the Korean War and the German *Atomdebatte* for both civil defense debates and peace research.

Like most of the seminar, the concluding discussion was characterized by lively debate. The suggestion that the papers on East Germany had mostly been narratives of failure and those on West Germany mostly narratives of success met with disagreement from most participants, who insisted that the papers on both German states told more complicated stories. Several authors of papers on the early period of the GDR observed that they were primarily interested in explaining the stability of the system for forty years rather than its failure. It also became clear that the division between German and American participants had turned out to be less important than the division between those working on the West Germany and those working on East Germany. Significantly, even though several papers presented comparative studies, no one presented comparisons between the two German states. Whether they were working on the FRG or the GDR, most participants reported that they knew little about research on the “other” German state and were glad that the TDS had brought those working on West and East Germany together. The differences between American and German dissertation topics noted at previous seminars had diminished. Whereas in previous years cultural history was mostly an American enterprise, cultural history was well represented among this year’s German papers as well. One crucial difference between the two academic cultures was repeatedly noted, however: the existence of temporary *Sonderforschungsbereiche* at German universities. Several of the German dissertations presented were part of *Sonderforschungsbereiche* on particular topics and reflected these affiliations in their conceptual frameworks. Finally, it was observed that the papers and the discussions were remarkably unideological. The great debates in German historiography, which were often about causality and hence about ideology, were clearly a matter of the past for the new generation of German historians. The participants seemed primarily interested in writing studies that draw a complex picture of postwar German history. This made for interesting papers and a memorable experience of genuine intellectual exchange at the seminar.

Richard F. Wetzell

Participants and Their Topics:

KEITH ALEXANDER (University of Maryland), *The K-Groups and the Alternative Liste Berlin*

JAN BEHRENDTS (Universität Bielefeld), *Erfundene Freundschaft. Eine vergleichende Studie zur Propagandageschichte in der Volksrepublik Polen und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (1944/45 B 1957)*

SIMONE DERIX (Universität Köln), *Performative Politik. Die ‘Bilder’ der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den Staatsbesuchen der 1950er Jahre*

PHILIPP HELDMANN (Universität Köln), *Herrschaft, Wirtschaft, Anoraks. Konsumpolitik in der DDR der Sechzigerjahre am Beispiel Bekleidung*

MOLLY WILKINSON JOHNSON (University of Illinois, Urbana), *Voluntary Campaigns, Sports, and Mass Participation in the 'Building of Socialism' in Leipzig in the 1950s*

KATRIN KÖHL (Universität Tübingen), *Kriegserfahrung und Friedensforschung. Die Entstehung der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung in den USA und Westdeutschland in der Situation des Kalten Krieges*

PETER KRAMPER (Universität Freiburg), *'Dienst am Fortschritt': Die NEUE HEIMAT auf dem Weg zum Städtebau 1962-1969*

DAVID MARSHALL (University of California, Riverside), *Das Museum für Deutsche Geschichte: A Study of History and Identity in the German Democratic Republic, 1952-1970*

DANIEL MORAT (Universität Göttingen), *Seismographen der Technik? Martin Heidegger, die Brüder Jünger und der lange Abschied vom Nationalsozialismus*

JON OLSEN (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), *Mobilizing Memory and Tailoring Truth in the SBZ*

RUTH ROSENBERGER (Universität Trier), *Psychologen und Personalpolitik in westdeutschen Unternehmen 1945-1975*

EDITH SHEFFER (University of California, Berkeley), *Checkpoint Burned Bridge: The Cold War over the Green Border, 1945-52*

NICHOLAS STENECK (Ohio State University), *Protecting the Population: West Germany and the 1. ZBG, 1950-1957*

DAVID TOMPKINS (Columbia University), *Mobilization, Control and Ideological Formation: Music Festivals in the GDR and Poland*

GREGORY WITKOWSKI (University at Buffalo), *Planned Perceptions: State Policy and Personal Interests in the Socialist Transformation of the East German Countryside*

JÜRGEN ZIEHER (TU Berlin), *Erinnern versus Verdrängen. Der Umgang mit dem Holocaust in Dortmund, Düsseldorf und Köln von 1945 bis 1960*

© Arbeitsgemeinschaft außeruniversitärer historischer Forschungseinrichtungen
in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V., 2002
Nachdruck nur mit ausdrücklicher Genehmigung der AHF.
Heruntergeladen von www.ahf-muenchen.de.