THE days are gone when conferences on GDR studies were limited to a small community of cognoscenti gathered far from the bright lights of public scrutiny. The fall of the Berlin Wall changed this situation drastically. After a brief moment of panic in which the entire field threatened to disappear along with its object of study, the now historical GDR has become an attractive area of research and, with the expansion of scholarly interest, one so broad as to make it difficult to keep up with all of the new developments. A study recently undertaken by the University of Mannheim’s program in GDR history lists no fewer than 759 projects in progress.¹ Although it was never completely apolitical, the field is more contested than ever nowadays. The media have been only too happy to use research results as ammunition in daily political battles. Scholars themselves are still hotly debating who should be authorized to reappraise the history of the GDR, and how they should be doing it. This conflict has long since moved beyond scholarly circles and is being carried out aggressively on the culture pages of the daily and weekly papers in particular. To the outside observer, the tone of this debate appears no less peculiar than the particular fronts and alliances that have developed around it. In the following essay I shall try to shed some

Translated by Pamela E. Selwyn

light on the background of this new outbreak of scholarly politics, which is in many ways reminiscent of the Historikerstreit of the 1980s, and then go on to introduce some of the newly founded institutions for the study of GDR history, all of them located in and around Berlin-Brandenburg.

1. Arguments and Interests

Much is at stake. What appears on the surface to be a mere conflict among various schools of thought, particularly around the well-known theory of totalitarianism, is in reality also a struggle for access to scarce financial resources. At the moment, scholarly institutions find themselves in the midst of a process of total restructuring. It is a well-known fact that in the new federal states entire university departments and research institutes have been dissolved and many staff members dismissed because of their active loyalty to the old regime. Fewer people know, however, that in the old Federal Republic “institutions have been subjected to equally rigorous treatment, even if the terms of dismissal have been less harsh.”

The Gesamtdeutsches Institut in Bonn, which, as the “Federal Office for all-German Tasks” was deemed superfluous after reunification and fell victim to ministerial spending cuts, is no isolated case. The established programs for GDR studies at the universities have also come under pressure, and rivals welcome every emerging revelation of cooperation with the STASI (Staatssicherheitsdienst, the GDR’s state security agency). After it became known that Dietrich Staritz, up until that point a respected scholar of the GDR, had, with the knowledge of the Federal Republic’s internal security agency, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, reported to the STASI as an “unofficial collaborator” (Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter, or IM) in the 1960s, his case was instrumentalized in order to dismantle the institutions in which he was involved. At the University of Mannheim a neighboring department successfully appropriated Staritz’s chair. More devastating than this public punishment, which rested on a rather accidental discovery in the archives, were the effects of numerous more covert attempts at denunciation. At the same time a whole series of new, and sometimes structurally quite novel, institutions were established. Here, however, there is a continuing battle over which institutions deserve to be placed on a permanent footing, who should fill the (administrative) positions, who can acquire the most outside funding, and which intellectual influences can be asserted within, or should be exerted by, the institutions themselves.


3. Most of the members, however, were taken on by the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, so that the expertise accumulated in the GI was not lost altogether.
The last-mentioned aspect impinges directly on party and power-political interests. Their representatives, whether unwittingly or through express intervention, are fostering the further polarization of internal scholarly debates. After all, those seeking access to public research funding are more dependent than ever on powerful allies within the political institutions. The various preferences of political parties, down to methodological questions, can be looked up in the transcripts of Bundestag plenary sessions. As in the “deputy debate” (Stellvertreterdebatte), which the media have reduced to one on the STASI, the conflict over which image of the past should be awarded the “scholarly” seal of approval is ultimately about what “remains” of the GDR: which was more tightly woven, the social safety net or the STASI web? While the one side seeks the complete delegitimation and disqualification of the former political system in the GDR, the other tries to resist this, whether for the sake of their own East German “identity,” their “self-esteem,” or to fend off the threatened general loss of utopian visions.

This by no means unravels the knot of arguments and (mostly) hidden interests. Debates around the GDR past have also thrust questions about the first German dictatorship back into the foreground. To be sure, the insight that the official myth of antifascism in the Soviet zone and the GDR was more a hindrance than a help in dealing with National Socialism was not exactly new. The most recent studies have established its accuracy, however. The West German version of “denazification” is now also undergoing reevaluation. The discussion explicitly addresses the extent to which it may or may not serve as a yardstick for the resolution of current problems. At the same time there is an implicit conflict around the confirmation of the evolutionary path taken by the old Federal Republic, which is to be regarded as exemplary—and thus binding—in every respect.

This goes at least some way toward explaining the paradox that it is precisely those people who call for the rigorous prosecution of political misdeeds and a thorough exclusion of the old SED (Socialist Unity Party) elite from positions in society who think so highly of the “communicative silence” (Lübbe) surrounding the Nazi period as a successful, because consensus-building, way of dealing with the past. The “unholy alliance,”


5. In contrast, Jürgen Habermas argued in early May 1994 before the Bundestag’s Commission of Inquiry that, to be sure, something akin to an economically and socially based “faith in the system” had been able to develop under the favorable conditions of the immediate postwar period, among a population shielded from crises. Not until the 1960s, however, when a normative confrontation with the National Socialist
visible in the STASI debates, between the wounded subjectivity of vic-
tims and the grudges of the "old warriors" (alte Kämpfer) has clear coun-
terparts on the level of scholarly politics. At any rate the East-West axis
does not dominate the way the fronts run and the usual right-left attribu-
tions are also inadequate here. The most bitter conflicts seem to be those
between factions within the borders of the old systems. There is no ques-
tion that old scores are being settled in both East and West that have
little to do with the immediate occasion.

In the East, the role of aggressor is usually played by younger histori-
ans associated with the Unabhängiger Historiker Verband (Association of
Independent Historians), which was founded during the turbulent last
month of the regime. Many of them had seen their careers hampered,
often for political reasons, and they now deny those colleagues who once
enforced party policy the moral and political right to continue to write
GDR history. Although as former members of the citizens' rights move-
ment they belong more to the "left-liberal" end of the political spec-
trum, the conservative Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung has gladly given them
space in its pages. This was hardly evidence of the paper's open-mindedness,
since their attacks were directed at colleagues at the Potsdam
Forschungsschwerpunkt Zeithistorische Studien (Research Program in
Contemporary History), which is allegedly dominated by Social Demo-
crats. The article's heading, "Inquisitors on the Sloth Farm," which was
chosen not by the authors Stefan Wolle and Armin Mitter but by the
newspaper editors, gives some indication of the level of the debate.

In the West, too, (presumed) proximity to the SED and indirect com-
plicity with the GDR regime are at issue. Ever since leaving the path of
totalitarianism research in the late 1960s, so the accusation runs, the "left-
liberal mainstream" of old GDR researchers had provided a largely posi-
tive description of the GDR state "drawn mainly according to the ideas
of the SED," which had played down the mechanisms the latter used to

past was demanded, did this "faith in the system," anchored in the convictions of a liberal
political culture, turn into loyalty to the Constitution.

6. Jürgen Habermas, "Was bedeutet 'Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit' heute?" Die Zeit,
10 April 1992. In this case the old warriors were cold warriors. By using a term that
originally referred to men who had joined the National Socialist Party before it came to
power in 1933, Habermas indicated the proximity of these cold warriors to the political
far right.

7. Cf. FAZ, 9 September 1993. The above-named authors had already opened the
debate in August. See "Der Bielefelder Weg," FAZ, 10 August 1993, as well as Rainer
Eckert, "Nicht ohne Reue," FAZ, 22 September 1993. The interim director as well as a
member of the institute were given the opportunity for rebuttal. See Jürgen Kocka, "Auch
Wissenschaftler können lernen," FAZ, 25 August 1993; Peter Hübner, "Ein LaByrinth, in
maintain power and, ultimately, also misrepresented the signs of collapse. According to their critics the analytical blindness of these scholars stemmed in part from the direct influence of the STASI, and in part from toadying to the SPD’s Ostpolitik, including the accompanying grants and other material perks. The irrefutable deficiencies of the old GDR research, particularly its undervaluing of modernized methods of repression, have been pointed out repeatedly by Hermann Weber and Karl-Wilhelm Fricke, among others. Critics of their caliber, however, have refrained from the sort of mud-slinging I describe here. Those who do engage in it are of diverse political persuasions. Some are carrying on in the same traditional anticommunist stance they have maintained for the past twenty years, the scholarly corollary of which has, however, even after a change of government (which left little mark on policy toward the GDR), increasingly been relegated to a little-noticed minority status. Others tend more to be newcomers to the field of GDR studies who are taking advantage of the subject’s popularity, and are hoping for grants to finance their research. Making one’s own way by discrediting the established representatives of the field, in this case rather belatedly, is a process typical of turf wars within professions, and certainly not specific to any one discipline. To this extent the “left-wing” political background of some of its loudest proponents does not in itself require explanation.

A flood of literature now exists on the GDR and its “downfall.” At this point, no one can tell which works will prove to have long-term value. Not only journalists, but also some historians and social scientists who discovered a sudden vocation as GDR experts, have succumbed to the temptation to make snap judgments, since they found the otherwise rather buttoned-up mass media unexpectedly open to them. The Verband der Historiker Deutschlands (German Historical Association) is concerned

10. With a view toward the initiators of the Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, formerly aligned with the Left in university politics, Gesine Schwan, dean of Berlins’ Otto-Suhr-Institute, rejects sweeping accusations, pointing out that the notion of “outside direction . . . is particularly strong among former Maoists or members of the former K-groups, who now, (having done a political turnaround) ‘fear a read under every bed.’ ” Cf. Gesine Schwan, “Kein Anlass zu pauschalen Verdächtigungen,” in Der Tagesspiegel, 18 January 1995, p. 21.
about this phenomenon. Journalists may be an annoyance, but the “bandwagon jumpers” from among their own ranks represent a serious threat to professional standards and, ultimately, to the reputation of the profession as a whole. For this reason a “Resolution on the Treatment of Contemporary History in Public” was passed at the 1994 Historikertag, which opposed all “zealous investigative history” (Enthüllungshistorie). This is a noteworthy document, since the “principles” formulated therein read like an introduction to the elementary rules on the verification of sources presented to aspiring historians.  

2. The New Research Institutions in Berlin-Brandenburg

CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Berlin-Brandenburg region is doubtless the new institutional center of historiography pertaining to the GDR. Aside from the Hannah Arendt Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism in Dresden, all of the larger institutes are located here. The main reason is the richness of archives in the region. In its power center, Berlin, the SED also preserved its written records in the Central Party Archive. State records were mainly collected and processed in the Central State Archive in Potsdam. Together with the papers of the “mass organizations” such as the Free German Youth (FDJ) and Democratic Women’s Federation of Germany (DFD), they now represent an immense and publicly accessible storehouse of sources for the study of contemporary history. It is administered under the umbrella of the old Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive). To be sure, this does not include materials pertaining to the former “block parties,” which their West German sister parties managed to secure in time for archives subject to their own use regulations rather than to those of the state. As for those archives at first still controlled by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), including the records of the KPD since its founding, of the SED, and accompanying personal papers, only after a long tug-of-war could a satisfactory solution be found which ensured that the uniquely complete body of material could be kept together and public access guaranteed. It has now been transferred to a foundation within the Bundesarchiv, while the Potsdam state documents were directly incorporated into it. For users, however, this difference is of no consequence.

11. The document goes on to say that the “ease” with which these might be discarded “tends to damage the country’s political culture and diminish the reputation of the historical profession.” Cf. the resolution of 30 September 1994, in Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft 11 (1994): 1000.

For West German research institutions the rich archives offered sufficient reason to establish branches in the Berlin-Brandenburg area. Other institutions represent mergers of West German institutions with an East German counterpart already located here. Yet others are, from the institutional standpoint, completely new entities, whether as purely East German enterprises, or as lifeboat institutes under West German administration which were founded to take in unemployed GDR scholars who had been “dealt with” (abgewickelt) and dismissed. According to Paragraph 38 of the unification treaty, scholarship and research in the former GDR were to be fit into a common research structure for the new Federal Republic. Apart from the “Centers for the Humanities” (Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren), one of which, in Potsdam, also concerns itself with GDR history, this restructuring in effect has meant adaptation to the West German model. Thanks to sustained “resistance from the institutional establishment,” particularly the universities, reunification did not unleash the hoped-for spurt of innovation in the humanities and social sciences which, even there, were admittedly sorely in need of reform. This holds true at least for the institutions supported by public funding. A number of other initiatives exist as well, not all of which can be mentioned here. These range from the Robert Havemann Archive, which is supported by former activists in the citizens’ rights movement and dedicated to the history of that movement and of the opposition more generally in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s to the “Counter-Inquiry” (Gegen-Enquete) which defines itself as the extraparliamentary oppositional counterpart to the Commission of Inquiry (Enquete-Kommission) in Bonn and which is made up mainly of historians close to the PDS. The fact that archivists are forced, because of a lack of financial resources, to run the Havemann Archive without being paid is typical of the citizens’ rights movement’s scholarly projects, all of which are operating today below the institutional poverty line.


15. Their previous chairman, the recently deceased Wolfgang Harich, wanted contemporary history to be understood as resistance ("Zeitgeschichte als Widerstand"). The work, which was done exclusively by unpaid volunteers, was meant to convey "pride in accomplishment" and to encourage people to "stand tall." See the interview with Harich in Scheinschlag. Zeitung aus der Mitte 11 (1994): 16, as well as the contribution by the present chairman and former professor of contemporary history at the Humboldt University, Siegfried Prokop, "Über Sinn und Unsinn von Enquête-Kommissionen zur 'Aufarbeitung' von Geschichte," in Z. Zeitschrift für marxistische Erneuerung 20 (Frankfurt/Main, December 1994): 95–108.
Regardless of how they began, by now all institutions include scholars from both East and West. Collaboration functions surprisingly smoothly at times. Differences of biography remain apparent nonetheless. Personal "involvement" is by no means necessarily a handicap. On the contrary, it can be quite useful if it is subjected to theoretical reflection. On the level of those colleagues doing the spadework the competition among their respective institutions also seems of little importance. Here, more than among the institute directors, there is much regret over the politicization of GDR historiography, since too close an association with one camp may ruin one's own later career opportunities.

An objective comparison of the institutes' achievements is not possible at present. They began their work at different points in time, none of them longer than three years ago. This is quite a short period of time for historical research, particularly for studies demanding elaborate archival work. Even if some larger studies have already been completed, this is not necessarily the achievement of a particular institution. Frequently, they can be attributed to the circumstance that researchers brought in years of preparatory research as their "capital." The outer circumstances of the founding of institutes played an important role both in the recruitment of personnel and in defining the content of research. In some cases, accidents of personnel composition seem to have had more influence than any well thought out plan. Thus, except for those institutions whose subject matter is already strictly circumscribed, one sometimes has the impression of dealing with a scholarly version of a general store. Breadth of subject matter certainly need not be a drawback if the individual projects can be held together by common questions and a corresponding theoretical and methodological approach.

THE GAUCK AUTHORITY’S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The Abteilung Bildung und Forschung (Department of Education and Research, BF), which resides in the former GDR Ministry of Culture building on Berlin’s Molkemarkt, is not merely the oldest extramural research institute, but also the one with the largest staff. Established after the “STASI Documents Law” (StUUG) was passed in November 1991, it currently employs some 120 people. Its tasks and structure broke new ground. It is part of an agency, that of the “Federal Commissioner for the Documents of the State Security Service of the Former GDR” (Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR), known as the “Gauck Behörde” (Gauck Authority). According to the law, the department’s purpose is to aid the agency in its mission of “ensuring and promoting” the “historical, political, and legal
reappraisal of the activities" of the STASI. Through its own research it is supposed to analyze the structure, methods, and actions of the Ministry for State Security (MfS) and to inform the public about it by means of publications, educational events, and document centers. At the same time it is also responsible for aiding outside scholars, journalists, or private individuals "by allowing them to consult documents and giving out duplicates" (37 StUG). This service function distinguishes it from research institutions of the traditional type.16 This function is extremely labor-intensive, when one considers that before being given out, all documents must be read and, if they contain information about third parties and affected persons who were not MfS employees or are not considered "persons of contemporary historical interest" (officeholders or politicians), they must be rendered anonymous and, in these cases, blacked out and photocopied.

Initially, historians viewed the founding of the BF with skepticism. They had fundamental doubts about whether a state agency was the right place to initiate a "reappraisal" of GDR history. The dual function of the department’s staff, however, provoked the unspoken suspicion—doubtless mixed with some envy as well—that the staff would use its privileged access mainly for their own scholarly purposes instead of assisting the research of colleagues from other institutions. These fears have proved largely unfounded. On the one hand, an internal reorganization has led to a separation of personnel between the research section and the office that handles applications to view files. On the other, the BF has succeeded, despite being an integral part of a state agency, in living up to the discipline’s scholarly standards. The recruitment of qualified personnel was one of the reasons for this success. Rather than being transferred from government offices in Bonn, most of these people were already qualified scholars of the GDR or contemporary German history before the political Wende. Scarcely any of them have civil service status, and some are even on temporary contracts. The West Germans dominate among the 15 scholars in the research section, and East Germans among the 53 members of the clerical and technical staff. While GDR citizens’ rights activists were in the forefront during the storming of STASI headquarters and the securing of files, many of them found that, because of political discrimination under the GDR, they lacked the formal educational qualifications required to meet the strict regulations governing public service

careers in the Federal Republic. This dilemma has arisen in other research institutions as well, but it was particularly pronounced in the case of the Gauck Authority.

The research section is divided into three areas. The first is responsible for political education and publicity, more particularly for the exhibition and document centers and for public events. A second falls under the category of "pure research," and a third is supposed to concentrate on "individual projects," although there is no substantive division between the two last mentioned. The general theme is the relationship between the SED and the MfS. Was the latter a "state within the state" or the "sword and shield" of the Party? The aim is to study the entire development of the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR, which is subdivided into time periods, using regional case studies as examples. One of the main projects is a reference work on the structure and function of the MfS which has now grown to some 2,000 printed pages and is slated to appear in early 1996. Intensive research is also being devoted to the "unofficial collaborators" who are so ubiquitous in the media. Apart from their functions and significance within the MfS apparatus, attention is also being paid to sociological and psychological aspects. A prosopography aims to determine the social structure of fulltime MfS personnel. The reports issued by the "Central Analysis and Information Group," often referred to as the "brains" of the MfS, are also being prepared for a critical edition. The most recent addition is a project group on the topic of "isolation camps." Whether the BF department also makes a theoretical or methodological contribution to the reconceptualization of GDR history beyond its official mandate, remains to be seen. The intention is there. What was historically new and typical of the MfS were not its methods of espionage and repression, but rather its "function of all-encompassing covert control and manipulation." Since the MfS was also an institution "in the tradition of the CHEKA" there are hopes, according to the BF's director, of reaching general conclusions on "novel totalitarian techniques of domination" and "the functioning and nature of the Communist apparatus of repression."\textsuperscript{17}

A number of publications have already appeared on individual topics, most of which can be ordered from the Gauck Authority for a token fee.

THE FORSCHUNGSVERBUND SED-STAAT (CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE SED STATE) AT THE FREE UNIVERSITY IN BERLIN

If one were to evaluate the institutions discussed here according to the media attention they receive, the Center would doubtless hold pride of place. Its initiators have also become experts in fundraising, a skill many professors of the old school resent having to invest any time in acquiring. They first distinguished themselves through the above-mentioned fundamental critique of established GDR studies. The vociferousness and wide reception of this critique, however, has not pleased all of the Center’s 25 collaborators from East and West, since in the long run it threatens to do more harm than good to the scholarly reputations of those who are engaged in solid historical work under its umbrella. According to the critical assessment of scholars of contemporary history, a part of the results presented so far does not stand up to scholarly scrutiny. 18

The Center was founded at the end of 1992 with the support of the president of the Free University. It is a different type of institution from the others mentioned here insofar as it was initially set up only to provide an organizational framework for existing and planned projects funded from outside the university. In the meantime, however, a few positions are now supported out of the Free University’s budget. According to its self-definition, though, the Center is and will remain “a kind of production cooperative.”19 It is explicitly dedicated to “counteracting currently prevailing practice which limits historical reappraisal to legitimation after the fact or to a renewed playing down of the GDR dictatorship, as well as to STASI revelations focusing on individuals”—the last one prefers to reserve for oneself. 20 In a departure from what the Center views as the dominant approach before the political turnaround—modernization theory—which “privileged” the economic over the political determinants of societal development, the scholars propose returning to a focus on the totalitarian

18. A particular criticism is that scholars do not compensate for the onesidedness of the sources, which is a result of the archive situation. See among others, Martin Sabrow's review in Comparativ. Leipziger Beiträge zur Universitätsge schichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung 2 (1995): 150–55.


20. The quotation is from Manfred Wilke, who used the unmasking of Dietrich Staritz as the occasion to accuse the community of GDR scholars of having been “infilt rated.” In their (for lack of proof) sweeping attacks, Jochen Staadt, a member, and Klaus Schroeder, speaker and coordinator of the Center, have focused of late on the Otto-Suhr-Institut at the Free University, where Staritz worked before his call to Mannheim. On this issue, see the discussion in the Berlin Tagesspiegel newspaper, which begins with an account by Staadt: “Fred Winter. Ein neuer Blick auf die Geschichte der FU,” 13 January 1995; Klaus Schroeder, “Für einen redlichen Umgang mit der Geschichte,” 25 January 1994; letters to the editor from the dean of the faculty Gesine Schwan, 18 and 21 May 1995, and from Klaus Schroeder, 5 May 1995.
system of rule. The Party's own notion of its leading role should be "taken seriously." Since the Center has been planned "for the foreseeable future," the intention is to "concentrate on areas in which the course of GDR history is reflected most sharply." 21

The array of themes of the fifteen projects is quite broad, nevertheless, and the periods of time under study generally encompass several decades. The emphasis is not, however, on the much-touted "previously neglected" aspects of GDR history. One focus of attention is the SED, particularly its founding and the development of the central party apparatus. The "block parties," however, are left out once again. 22 Apart from policy toward the church, another favorite topic is academia in Berlin, with an emphasis on the Humboldt University as a training ground for the GDR elite, and on the influence of the SED on its West Berlin counterpart, the Free University. Another project is dedicated to the SED's policy regarding Germany in all its ramifications. A study of the decision-making process within the SED leadership surrounding the 1968 invasion of Prague emphasizes foreign policy. There are two projects in the field of economic policy, one on "The Energy Policy of the Miners' Union" and the other on "The GDR Economy between the Necessity to Innovate and the Inability to Innovate." Projects on "The Situation of Women Employed in the Chemical Industry" and "The Opposition in the GDR since the 1980s" do not quite fit into the larger picture. It remains to be seen whether the "hypothesis of the SED's central role in the political and social system of the GDR" will hold up and will "connect all of the research projects" as intended. 23 The long time periods under study may also present a problem unless scholars limit themselves to the archives of the SED's highest governing bodies. In that case, to be sure, the results would be predetermined: yet another variant of the all too familiar history of the GDR as an emanation of SED history. The Center is presenting its results in a series edited by Manfred Wilke and Klaus Schroeder, of which four volumes have appeared so far. The publisher is Akademie Verlag. 24

22. The "block parties," CDU, LDPD, NDPD, were formally independent parties that were actually controlled by the SED.
23. Ibid.
THE FORSCHUNGSSCHWERPUNKT ZEITHISTORISCHE STUDIEN (RESEARCH PROGRAM IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL STUDIES) IN POTS DAM

The Research Program in Contemporary Historical Studies (FSP) has also frequently been in the headlines since its founding in January 1992, albeit not always voluntarily. In the summer of 1993 the FSP sparked a public debate whose significance went far beyond the Potsdam Institute. For representatives of the Association of Independent Historians, the FSP is a stronghold of politically tainted GDR historians once loyal to the regime who have simply conformed to the new democratic order and are thus dependent, and whose scholarly capacities are therefore limited from the outset.25 This is a weighty accusation, which is as false in this sweeping form as it may be accurate in individual cases. The institute’s West German directors stood firmly behind their colleagues, defending their individual expertise as well as their more general ability to learn, so long as “they did not participate in exercising power under the dictatorship in such a way as to disqualify them politically or morally.”26 The most recent unmasking of an IM, however, appeared to substantiate these accusations—and the implied demand for a kind of compensatory justice—and the fact in a most unfortunate manner. To be sure, academic policy can offer no general way out of this moral dilemma, provided that one accepts the vote of the Wissenschaftsrat (Council on Scholarship) according to which East Germans who receive a positive scholarly evaluation should be given a new chance in unified academia. It was for just this purpose that the FSP was founded, together with six other institutes, under the aegis of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft (MPG) and financed through special funds of the federal government. Because of this unusual situation I would like to describe in more detail the context in which the FSP arose, and how its origins strongly affected its structure.

Making constructive use of the unification crisis, research institutions of a completely “new type” were conceived with the substantial participation of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). What was new

25. A fact that, according to Wolle and Mitter, meshes completely with the interests of the West German profession: “A new type of scholar has emerged: easy-care, streamlined, always willing to change his standpoint, deep inside, of course, terribly insecure and boundlessly dependent. For some mysterious reason the West German profession loves the very type of scholar who also loyally served the SED regime. At any rate he will not call into question the historical profession’s bigwigs, either as individuals or as representatives of particular approaches or ideas.” See EAZ, 10 August 1993, as well as the documentation in note 7. The authors are lecturers (Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter) in the department of history at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

was that they were at once independent and connected to neighboring universities. The current interim director of the institute is supported by an “advisory board” of outside experts. The teams, each of which composed of approximately 25 research fellows from various disciplines, work on their respective projects for longer, but nevertheless specified periods of time. It was hoped that, beyond their function as “lifeboat institutes,” they would also contribute to overcoming the long-lamented “deficiencies in the situation of the humanities.”

It was decided that if they lived up to expectations, they would not be a mere transitional phenomenon, but would become a model for permanent institutions in the German academic system. The experimental phase ended at the end of 1994. The assessment of the institutions’ achievements was positive enough for the MPG, DFG, and the Wissenschaftsrat to recommend their organizational transformation into “Centers for the Humanities” (Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren). The universities remained skeptical, seeing a threat to their domain in the humanities. Almost simultaneously with the Wissenschaftsrat’s tensely-awaited vote in November 1994, the federal government’s seed money ran out, unleashing a rather “undignified haggling” in federal and local bodies concerning their respective contributions to the new financing concept recommended by the Wissenschaftsrat.

This concept envisaged that the budgets of the various host states, Berlin, Brandenburg, and Saxony, would cover costs for permanent staff, premises, and regular operating expenses, which corresponds to about one-third, while the bulk of financing would have to be provided by the DFG in the form of project grants. To be sure, this would mean topping up the DFG’s budget with federal monies. In comparison to institutes in the natural sciences the costs, at approximately DM4 million annually for each Center, are rather low.

While the federal state of Brandenburg, on whose territory two of the future Centers were to be founded, agreed to provide basic facilities, the federal government refused to accept financial responsibility. Whether the well-known budgetary constraints were the only factor here is an open question. The DFG decided upon an emergency “salvage action” even without the promise of funds from Bonn. In the meantime, an association incorporating representatives of the universities in Potsdam and Berlin, the Ministry of Science, the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, and other neighboring research institutions has been founded as the formal supporting...

28. According to the director of the Research Program in Literary Studies (Forschungsschwerpunkt Literaturwissenschaft) and former president of the Free University, Eberhard Laemmert. Cf. Interview in Frankfurter Rundschau, 10 November 1994, p. 6.
institution for the future Center for Contemporary Historical Studies. In July a commission of experts from the DFG evaluated and largely approved the applications for research projects following the procedures for special research areas.

Beginning in January 1996 the FSP will thus have a regular research staff of some 20 persons, most of them on temporary contracts, as well as a few PhD students and scholars on grants. About one-third of them now come from the old (Western) federal states, whereby the FSP is gradually losing its original character of a "lifeboat institute," mainly for employees of the former GDR Academy of Sciences. The range of topics treated is as wide as that of the Center for Research on the SED State, which has a similar number of staff and projects. In the face of all this abundance, it has until now also shared with the latter the problem of establishing a clear definition of its activities, since the labor intensive evaluation period greatly increased the Potsdam institution's scholarly image. Regarding their approaches, there have been substantial differences between the two institutions from the beginning.

The FSP seeks to approach GDR history within a broader context. The emphasis is to be on comparative methods, in the form of "interconnections" with the history of West Germany as well as comparisons with the dictatorships of National Socialism and of the Communist states of Eastern Europe. One searches in vain for the latter among concrete projects, however. Between interpretations of the GDR as a "state ruled by injustice" (Unrechtsstaat) on the one hand and the rather apologetic version of a "failed experiment" on the other, the FSP strives for "critical historicization" (kritische Historisierung). There is particular interest in "structures and processes that change over a long period of time as well as their links to experiences and patterns of interpretation by contemporaries," which, it is assumed, were always in "fundamental tension to the dictatorial character of SED rule." Although political history is not completely neglected, the emphasis is on social history, the history of everyday life, and the new cultural history, with the objective of linking the history of structures to that of experience. This also explains why the "theory of totalitarianism," which is being revived everywhere, plays only a minor role in the FSP's central questions and approaches. Even in research

30. Funding application to the DFG, May 1995, pp. 2ff; cf. also the contribution of the visiting professor, and since autumn of 1994 deputy interim director of the FSP Konrad Jarasch, Die DDR denken. Narrative Sturkturen und analytische Strategien (forthcoming in Berliner Debatte, early 1996), as well as the article by Martin Broszat taking a stand against the ideological instrumentalization of the results of research on National Socialism, "Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus," in Merkur 5 (1985): 373–85.

31. Progress report, p. 17; DFG application, p. 8; cf also Kocka, Vereinigungskrise, 83–129.
on National Socialism the "theory of totalitarianism" lost in significance
to the extent that historiography moved away from an initial orientation
toward individual personalities in political history to social history includ-
ing the history of mentalité and of everyday life. After all, the rather
static character of a theory of types of rule had—and still has—only a
limited capacity to grasp analytically the social processes of transforma-
tion. The Potsdam researchers prefer the term "modern dictatorship." At
the FSP, as elsewhere, there is no doubt that social conditions in the
GDR were (co-) constituted by state politics. The FSP would like, con-
versely, to ask as well "what was not incorporated into the state's con-
struction of GDR society because it persisted from older constellations or
because new elements arose in reaction to the state's intention to con-
trol." Signs of "social and cultural 'self-assertion' under dictatorship"
are visible in many places. How these, or everyday life in general in
such a "thoroughly dominated" (durchherrscht) society, can be appropri-
ately understood, theoretically and methodologically, remains to be seen.
In the long run, the development of approaches to these problems will
doubtless represent one of the challenges of the new GDR historiography.

The sixteen individual projects (some of them wholly new and some
continuations of older FSP projects) were divided into four thematic ar-
eas in the run-up to evaluation. As was clear in Potsdam, one could not
always achieve a "perfect fit" in every case. The first complex, with a
more traditional orientation toward political history, is devoted to the
tension between Soviet influence and the specific interests of the SED in
the adaptation of the Soviet zone and GDR to the Soviet model. The
primary objects of study here are political decision-making processes, such
as Walter Ulbricht's role in the Stalinization of the KPD between 1945
and 1953 or the activities of the SED’s Party Control Commissions from
1948 to 1956.

32. Indeed, the rejection of this theory in older research on the GDR was based,
among other factors, on the attempt to investigate not only the communist system of rule
but also the changes in society that were brought about by power politics and their
reception of theories of totalitarianism in research on the Nazi period, see Christoph
Kleßmann, "Zwei Diktaturen in Deutschland. Was kann die zukünftige DDR-Forschung
aus der Geschichtsschreibung zum Nationalsozialismus lernen?" in Deutschland Archiv 6
(1992): 601-6. The author has been one of the deputy interim directors of the FSP since
1993.
33. Progress report, see note 26, 21.
34. Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, "Introduction" in idem, eds., Die Grenzen der
Diktatur. Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR (forthcoming: Göttingen, early 1996). In the
above cited work see Thomas Lindenerberger's article on the methodological and theoretical
problems of writing a history of everyday life in the GDR.
35. See DFG application. 10.
A second thematic concentration with a stronger orientation toward social and structural history focuses on the new elites as "agents of the 'thorough domination' of East German society" as well as on the related apparatus. The mechanisms of cadre recruitment, the structure of the apparatus, the social background, biographical influences, values and lifestyles of the newly-created elites are all objects of study. They include the "Pankow power elite" of the 1950s as well as industrial managers and union functionaries or notables in the traditional rural milieu.

Proceeding from the assumption that the GDR's relative stability was based not merely on brute force but also on loyalty, however "reluctant," a third study seeks to identify changes in the practices of domination, remaining freedoms and rudiments of civil society which allowed people a modicum of self-determination while at the same time imposing limits on and stabilizing the SED system. Here the history of experience has been brought more into the foreground, and the terminology is largely taken from the vocabulary of the history of everyday life. The regional emphasis on Berlin-Brandenburg and frequent borrowings from Martin Broszat's studies on Bavaria have gained the project the unofficial title, among outside observers, of the "Brandenburg Bavaria Project." In this context research is being done on the role of the Volkspolizei (People's Police) in public security and disciplining (1952–1968), and the evolution of patterns of consumption between 1958 and 1965.

Under the heading "History as a Discourse of Domination," the fourth project assembles individual projects that examine how the system-specific attempts of culture and scholarship to come to terms with history and tradition produced historical legitimation, and how they could be employed to transform outward loyalty into inner conviction. The "network of relationships among political and ideological intentions, the autonomous laws of art and the media, social tendencies toward inertia, and the traditions of scholarly disciplines" are to be reconstructed in various arenas. Specific topics include the development and transformation of "socialist historiography" in the GDR taking as examples large-scale research projects (1949–1989), the role of returned emigrés in the establishment of Marxist–Leninist discourse in the humanities (1945–1961), or the system of censorship of historical texts in the GDR's publishing industry. The results so far have been published in two collections of essays and two monographs in the FSP's own series, Zeithistorische Studien, published by Akademie Verlag.

36. In the 1970s, Martin Broszat, in his important work in contemporary history, was the first scholar to address the National Socialist period from the perspective of "history from below." Broszat was director of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich from 1972 to 1989. See Martin Broszat, ed., Bayern in der NS-Zeit, 6 vols. (Munich, 1977–1983).

37. Jürgen Kocka, ed., Historische DDR Forschung. Aufsätze und Studien (Berlin, 1993);
THE POTSDAM BRANCH OF THE INSTITUT FÜR ZEITGESCHICHTE
(INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY HISTORY)

The original name, “German Institute for Research on the National Socialist Period,” still clearly points to the occasion of its founding in the late 1940s. In 1952, the institute’s name was changed to Institute for Contemporary History (IFZ) and its scope broadened accordingly. The Munich-based institute nonetheless earned its international reputation, which was closely linked to the names of the first generations of directors, above all with its studies of the Nazi period. Taking the form of a public foundation financed mainly by funds from the federal government and the state of Bavaria, it is however not a pure research institution, but also offers scholarly services, if on a much smaller scale than the Gauck Authority. After founding its first branch in Bonn in 1990, the IFZ decided shortly thereafter to found a second branch which was opened in early 1994 in close proximity to the riches of the Bundesarchiv in Potsdam. Because the institute was not dependent upon outside funding there was no need for negotiations with the state of Brandenburg. Apparently, not all government officials responsible for the sciences were equally enthusiastic about the new institute. Aside from the fact that the ruling Christian Democrats in Bavaria and the Federal Republic appear to have recently left their mark particularly on staff decisions at the IFZ, the IFZ’s Potsdam branch, with its six permanent paid positions, represented a sudden competitor to the FSP, which is supported by the SPD-dominated Brandenburg state government. The FSP now feared for its continued existence.

The IFZ in Potsdam is a purely Western enterprise. Among the seven research fellows there are, however, two scholars from the former GDR. Like the FSP, the IFZ considers it inappropriate to study GDR history in isolation and favors instead a comparative approach. The IFZ’s own research tradition, including substantial participation in one of the more recent standard works on GDR history, provides a good basis for studies comparing the two Germanies. 38 The development of the GDR is to be


38. Martin Broszat and Hermann Weber, eds. *SBZ-handbuch* (Munich, 1990), written in cooperation with the Mannheimer Arbeitsbereich DDR-Geschichte. On the history of the IFZ and its role in constituting contemporary history in the Federal Republic, cf. also Udo Wengst, “Geschichtswissenschaft und Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland nach 1945 und nach 1989/90,” in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 4 (1995): 192ff. Wengst is deputy director of the IFZ, a fact he fails to mention, a background information that would have been helpful for the reader, considering his appreciative mention of the IFZ—including the Potsdam branch—as well as his negative critique of the “rival” FSP.
compared not simply with the Nazi period and the old Federal Republic but also with the states of Eastern Europe. In so doing the IFZ is, clearly, reacting directly to lacunae in the literature. Scholars, it is argued, have lost sight of the German-German context, just as they have lost sight of "the GDR's incorporation into the Soviet sphere of domination, and, from time to time, of the dictatorial character of the SED regime." "Critical recourse" to the theory of totalitarianism is considered "indispensable."

The IFZ's five current research projects' main focus is on political history, but they also emphasize some aspects of social history. Even if the spectrum of themes is admirably clear, it is unlikely that the selection was as free of personal or material coincidences as the Potsdam institute, pointing to the long planning phase, is fond of claiming. Two research projects address the GDR's founding and its early years in the shadow of Soviet hegemony. The first study examines the influence of the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD), the occupying power's highest administrative body, on the development of society and the system of government between 1945 and 1949. Thanks to the collaborator's many years of preliminary research outside the IFZ, he has already been able to present some preliminary conclusions, and the IFZ's first publication was a recent annotated inventory of SMAD decrees. The second project begins chronologically where the first leaves off and investigates the influence of the Soviet Control Commission (SKK)—in a sense the SMAD's successor—on developments in the GDR, using agricultural policy between 1949 and 1954 as an example. The project is engaged on the one hand in a general reconstruction of the structure and activities of this previously largely unstudied institution, and on the other in documenting its interactions with German agencies. In this case as well scholars were able to fall back on extensive external preliminary studies so that an edition of the SKK's statutes with commentary is slated to appear this year. The third research project has been conceptualized as a comparison with the National Socialist era. The subject is "The Establishment of Class Justice in the Soviet Zone/GDR after 1945," not, however, with respect to political criminal justice, but rather in regard to the changing judicial


41. For a summary see Horst Moeller and Hartmut Mehringer, "Die Aussenstelle," 6, as well as Jan Foitzik, ed. Inventar der Befehle des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD) 1945–1949. (Open Series. Under the auspices of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte) (Munich, 1995).
apparatus on its various levels, from the Central Administration or the later Ministry of Justice on down to the district courts. The fourth study, "From 'Hitler Youth' to 'Free German Youth': The History and Function of Youth Organizations in the Nazi and SED Regimes," which covers the period 1935–1965, is also intended as a study in comparative dictatorships. The fifth project, which is devoted to the structural transformation of society as a result of the integration of the so-called Umsiedler (re-settlers) from the East between 1945 and 1952, takes a more strongly sociohistorical approach. Here, once again, the policy of integration is to be studied both on the central level and on the communal microlevel. The states of Mecklenburg and Saxony-Anhalt were chosen for a regional comparison.

THE MILITÄRGESCHICHTLICHES FORSCHUNGSAMT (INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN MILITARY HISTORY)

The Institute for Research in Military History (MGFA) in Potsdam is the product of a merger between the West German institute of the same name and its East German counterpart, the Militärgeschichtliches Institut der DDR (Institute for Military History of the GDR). To be sure, the name would seem to indicate the mere administrative absorption of the Eastern institute by the Western, but the East German historians were able to remain in their own quarters while their colleagues in Freiburg, where the Institute had been based since 1958, had to move their offices to the state capital of Brandenburg. A good deal of resistance had to be overcome along the way, including that of the West German staff, who were civil servants. The MGFA was, after all, the largest historical institute in the old Federal Republic. Nearly two years elapsed between the time at the end of 1992 when the move was decided upon and the actual beginning of operations in Potsdam.

The MGFA was founded in 1957 as a department within the Ministry of Defence, and its most pressing task was research on the Second World War. According to the MGFA’s conception of its own work, it is not involved in “commissioned research” or goal-oriented “official historiography with the ultimate intention of legitimation.” That is as may be. In any case they feel committed to a new approach to military history, in which the “military as an instrument of war” takes a back seat to the “military as a structural element of society,” a change that harmonizes quite conveniently with the Bundeswehr’s designated role as “citizens in uniform.”42 Its East German counterpart was founded at almost the same time, in 1958, and in 1970 was reorganized as the higher education wing of the Nationale Volksarmee with the standing of a university and the right to grant doctorates.

Currently the MGFA in Potsdam has a staff of more than 100, including 40 from the new federal states. Only a small portion of them, eight scholars in all, are responsible for GDR history, however. New projects relating to the Soviet zone and the GDR have been designed closely to parallel existing projects on the Federal Republic. The project that is farthest along is one begun in 1991 on the "Beginnings of East German Security Policy." Some results have already been published in a volume of essays on covert rearmament in the period between 1947 and 1952.43 This project is followed chronologically by one examining "The Military and GDR Security Policy during the Period of the Militarized People's Police" (Kasernierte Volkspolizei) from 1952–1956. The third and most recent research project is dedicated to the history of the Nationale Verteidigungs rat (National Defense Council) founded in 1960. Still in the planning stages is a project on public attitudes, particularly among the political parties, mass organizations, young people, and the churches, to the setting up of armed forces before 1956, and a study of the 1957 treaty between the Soviet Union and the GDR on the stationing of troops. Finally, a study is also planned of cooperation between the National People's Army, the FDJ (Free German Youth), and the Association for Sport and Technology as part of "socialist military training."

As a place with a long tradition in military history and military science, Potsdam presumably houses excellent archival resources. This is, however, not the case, thanks to recent errors in decision making. While the Federal Ministry of Defense decided that the MGFA should make the move from West to East, the Ministry of the Interior, which controls military documents, resolved that the archive should remain in Freiburg. To make this absurd situation complete, it was also decided that the GDR military records, which were in Potsdam, should be sent to Freiburg.

3. Conclusion

The demise of the Soviet Union and of the GDR have presented the historical profession with both a test and an opportunity. Traditional periodizations and watersheds will have to be reexamined. The division of Germany will, no doubt, cease to provide the dominant interpretive framework for GDR history.44 Experience teaches us that situations in which outer circumstances force a shift of paradigm improve the opportunities

for innovators. Unlike in the late 1960s, though, this shift coincides with a phase of compulsory belt-tightening in academia. The institutionalization of new approaches appears destined to succeed only at the expense of personnel cuts. This explains to some extent the sharpness of conflict within the historical profession. East German scholars are also struggling with questions of identity. The enormous volume of source materials—in contrast to 1945—could provide a rich basis for microstudies, which could, in turn, be used to help develop new terms and concepts. Instead of beginning at this level, however, conservatives have insisted on starting a politically loaded debate about the big questions—the conquest of intellectual hegemony by surprise coup.

Which pole of interpretation of GDR history will become the central one in the historiography of the Federal Republic is, however, by no means settled. Whether the perspective is that of a "nation," of those "interconnected" German regions, or of an international context, common traditions and problems are now coming to the fore. As a glance at the newly formed research institutes shows, concerted efforts are being made to fit phenomena into historical contexts reaching far back in time. Where previously the focus was on radical breaks, light is now being shed on aspects of continuity. The comparative study of dictatorships, i.e., the Nazi state and the GDR, also seems to have gained general acceptance, despite divergent theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches. Comparative approaches more generally are fashionable at present. The intention, at least, is there, although on the level of concrete projects the reality often falls short of the program. Particularly in comparative studies with Eastern Europe, deficits are bound to remain for some time to come. The great renaissance of the old notion of totalitarianism has, up until now, taken place more among political essayists than among scholars. Fears that professional scholarship could be set back by this politically motivated attempt at resuscitation, falling behind the level of discussion already achieved, appear unfounded. Even its own scholarly proponents admit that this approach, like any other, has a limited analytical scope, and they are working to modify it. It is unlikely that the theory of totalitarianism will ever achieve monopoly status, among other things because of the younger generation's greater tendency to understand history within the rubric of the social sciences. Hoping that it would

45. While scholarly appraisals of National Socialism could only begin after considerable delay, the usual waiting period for access to official documents was largely suspended for the SED archives in 1989. As is usual in the early phase of work in a new field, the data grew "more quickly than the capacity to analyze it." See Kocka, Vereinigungskrise, 103.
help to mobilize resources, many a research project has declared itself indebted to the “theory of totalitarianism,” without really being so. As this brief survey of the new research landscape has shown, there are, apart from theoretically and methodologically innovative projects, also a number which merely refurbish the old scholarly edifice with the ornamentation of “new” sources. Apparently, juggling with labels is a favorite sport of scholars in times of upheaval.

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