Heinz Heitzer: GDR. An Historical Outline

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This work by a leading scholar of the GDR is of interest for several reasons. It is a handy, brief history of the GDR until 1978. It presents the official GDR view of historical developments and interprets contemporary and present relationships of the country with other nations, particularly the Soviet Union, socialist Eastern Europe, and the Federal Republic of Germany. The short volume introduces the Western reader to the vital ideological framework necessary for understanding life in the GDR today. Divided into four equal parts, the book covers the three distinct periods in the history of the GDR: I. "The antifascist-democratic revolution" of 1945-1949; II. "Establishment of the foundations of socialism," 1949-1961; parts III. and IV. deal with the further development of the socialist society, 1961-1970 and 1971-1978, respectively. Little scholarly apparatus is employed and only thirty-seven footnotes and a brief list of names are used. However, the sixty-four pages of photographs of people, places, and activities are excellent. Reproductions of charts and documents appear within the text in addition to the photographs.

Maxwell: Heinz Heitzer: GDR. An Historical Outline. Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1981. 265 pages. This book is recommended for the teacher of German Western historians will find much with which to disagree, particularly the author’s treatment of the creation of the Red, the Berlin Blockade, 1948, and the Berlin Wall. Heitzer is forthright, however, in discussing problems and mistakes. Agrarian hostility to collectivization, the overemphasis on heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods (which led to "negative effects" on workers in 1952-1953) and the "imbalance" and "disproportions" that developed during the five-year plan of the past two decades are discussed.

This book is recommended for the teacher of German Studies who wishes to have students understand the history of the GDR from its own historians’ point of view.

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