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Margrit Pittman: Encounters in Democracy. A U.S. Journalist's View of the GDR

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to slight -- though he certainly acknowledges the inhibiting framework of the counterposed alliance systems to which the GDR and FRG belong. There is no lack of attention to Soviet domination of the GDR, but one misses the sense in which the relationship works itself out within an international system dominated by two superpowers. One of the chief virtues of this study is its breadth in dealing with all aspects of the relationship -- down to the most mundane aspects of postal and telephonic communication (though I was disappointed at the modest coverage of cultural interplay). But its origins as a dissertation are revealed in a seeming disinclination to address the larger political implications of the German "leak" in the opposing alliance systems.

Unfortunately one has also to remark upon the dreadfully turgid prose in evidence here. That may also (though it should not) smack of a dissertation; but if it does, then it is fair to expect a published book to rise above the impenetrable English that appears to satisfy -- or even may be required by -- political science departments. If there is no discernable difference between dissertation and published book, then it is also fair to wonder why we should not simply settle for the former, available in microfilm and useful as careful research, and credit the author accordingly.

Lyman H. Legters
University of Washington

Encounters in Democracy. A U.S. Journalist's View of the GDR. By Margrit Pittman. New York: International Publishers, 1981. 229 pp. \$1.95.

This book was written shortly after the 10th Congress of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR in the spring of 1981. It is an admiring account of the achievements of the GDR

interesting background study for the 11th Congress. International Publishers printed this work in the GDR and it must be considered an authorized account. Margrit Pittman was born in Germany and fled the racial persecutions of the Third Reich in 1938. From the United States she returned as a correspondent for the Daily World in the period 1974 - 1979 and her observations and interviews from this time are the foundations for her study.

The decade of the 1970s saw many Western attacks upon Eastern Europe for the lack of human rights. Margrit Pittman is writing in part to show that progress occurred in many areas of life and that the West's concern for "malcontents" is overdrawn: "Essentially this book will deal with the question of human rights under Socialism for the population as a whole -- or, more precisely, the nature of socialist democracy." Her study highlights the remarkable growth of the GDR from the rubble of WWII to its status as the 10th greatest industrial power today.

History is a serious enterprise in the GDR and this book is similar to other recent accounts such as Heinz Heitzer's GDR. An Historical Outline (1981) in interpreting the world in which East Germans live. This report is highly sensitive to Western attitudes toward the GDR and the attractions of the Federal Republic of Germany. There are constant uses of comparisons and contrasts between East and West German conditions and practically all results are favorable to the GDR. Often, there is reason for celebrating the achievements in the GDR; for example, the greater concern for equal pay for women, the greater availability of nursery and day-care opportunities for working parents' children, or the support of family life that extended paid maternity leaves provide. At other times the author stretches things a bit and becomes repetitious -- for example, in quoting a West Berlin sociologist's disappointment that resistance figures and victims of the

Third Reich have not played greater roles in the economic and cultural reconstruction of the Federal Republic. She also tells us twice that the television series "Holocaust" was necessary to inform West Germans about the persecution of Jews whereas East German school children already know a great deal about the history of National Socialism.

This book is recommended as an authorized East German view of conditions in the GDR today. It is a good cheap survey of how leaders and social scientists explain the GDR to westerners.

John A. Maxwell
West Virginia University

Der Lauf der Dinge: Geschichten. By Helga Königsdorf. Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982. 217 pp.

"Ich habe Verhaltensmuster akzeptiert, die mir aufgeschwatzt worden sind, ich habe Talent bewiesen, alles zu tun, was man von mir erwartet, nur eins habe ich darüber vergessen, ich weiß nicht mehr, wer ich bin," (Schreib-Auskunft: Helga Königsdorf, Neue Deutsche Literatur, 27, nr.4 (1979), 9-10) wrote Helga Königsdorf about the reason she began writing fiction. Der Lauf der Dinge, Königsdorf's second collection of short stories, is the result of this pressing need to discover a private identity.

The book testifies eloquently to her ability as a prose writer effectively to express a side of both her private and her public lives she had been forced to neglect in college and in her profession. Since 1962, Königsdorf, a physicist by training, has been working in mathematics research, and this rigorous occupation has left her little time to examine herself and her relationship to both her work and her society.

The fourteen stories published in this

slim volume reflect the two realms of experience their author lives in: About half the collection is devoted to stories about women attempting to establish their own identity in a world which is divided into a male-dominated work realm and a private sphere in which men represent an oppressive weight that threatens to suffocate the female characters. The remaining pieces are at times hilarious and always effective satires of the practice of science in the GDR.

Many of Königsdorf's stories describe a dreamlike world from which the characters awake to discover a new dimension of everyday reality that begins to subvert all they have held dear and unquestionably accepted. "Ehrenwort -- ich will nie wieder dichten," the first piece in the book, concerns a woman who wakes up one day to discover that overnight she has become a poet. Her husband and son are shocked and irritated about this transformation (the husband screams at her: "Ja Dichter ... aber Du! Du bist meine Frau"(p.13)) and her colleagues at work, research scientists, feel betrayed by the personality change. As a result of this pressure she awakes one day and finds that she is no longer a poet and returns to the practiced routine of her previous life.

"Die Wahrheit über Schorch" is the story of a woman whose devastating experiences with men (she is recently divorced) lead her to invent a new husband, Schorch, who represents in reality her recourse to masturbation as the only method of physical fulfillment she is able to discover -- this despite warnings she reads in magazines about possible "Hautausfall, Konzentrationschwäche, Rückenmarkzersetzung, (und) allgemeine Auflösung der Persönlichkeit"(p.44).

In "Unverhoffter Besuch", perhaps the best story in the volume, a teenage daughter, living with her father following her parents' divorce, visits her mother's apartment, where the two discuss ways of living that will allow them to define their identity as individuals independent