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Twentieth New Hampshire Symposium

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Twentieth New Hampshire Symposium

In June 1994 the twentieth symposium on the GDR/East Germany took place at the World Fellowship Center in New Hampshire. Some fifty specialists attended and discussed papers under the heading "Issues of Integration, Issues of Segregation: Progress and Obstacles on the Way to Real Unity in the New German States."

The symposium papers clearly showed the benefits of access to the hitherto closed archives: Ulrich Meyszies' paper on the "literary system of the GDR" drew on correspondence between Kurt Hager and Erich Honecker on whether to allow the publication of the third volume of Strittmatter's *Wundertäter*.

The issue of identity ran through many of the papers: an investigation of the position of the Sorbs in the united Germany posed the question of whether a society geared to protecting the rights of individuals would make it more difficult for the Sorbs to retain their group identity. More generally, the increasingly positive view by East Germans of the GDR and their growing sense of being second-class citizens were noted, as was the role of academic study of the past in ensuring that realism balanced nostalgia.

Time was also set aside for reviewing research methodology before and since unification. That many Western observers underestimated the terror and overestimated the reform potential in the GDR was

generally agreed. This led to a discussion about a possible split in post-unification research on the GDR/East Germany, with projects which focused on the SED, dictatorship, the Stasi and the state on the one side, and projects on *Alltagsgeschichte*, *Lebenslaufforschung* and how GDR citizens lived their lives inside and outside these power structures on the other. In the discussion participants did not see a polarization of research arising, and one can only hope that this is a correct assessment.

Although the program was international, with speakers from the USA, East and West Germany, and the UK, it was particularly noticeable that only a relatively small number of USA academics attended the symposium as listeners. It may be that the lower US attendance signals a decline in the number of GDR specialists in the USA since unification, but it may be no more than a reflection of the growing pressure on academics to perform at every conference they attend. One of the original goals of the symposium was to serve as an information point for the larger academic community in the USA. If the symposium is to avoid becoming a workshop at which specialists meet and exchange ideas (a worthy goal in itself, certainly), it will need to find ways of reaching a wider audience.

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