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Three books on reunification

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BOOK REVIEWS

Aufbruch in eine andere DDR: Reformen und Oppositionelle zur Zukunft ihres Landes. Ed. Hubertus Knabe. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowolt, 1989.

Links, Christoph and Hannes Bahrmann: *Wir sind das Volk: Die DDR im Aufbruch--eine Chronik.* Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau; Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1990.

Oktober 1989: Wider den Schlaf der Vernunft. Berlin (West): Elefant Press; Berlin DDR: Neues Leben, 1989.

As Wolfram Kempe states in *Oktober 1989: Wider den Schlaf der Vernunft*: "Den historischen Augenblick erkennt man daran, daß die Ereignisse schneller sind als die schnellsten Wörter und Sätze" (187). One year after the events of Fall 1989 began to accelerate, the pace of changes continues to outrun our ability to comprehend and digest them. Thus much of what these three works document has long been overtaken by another reality. Nonetheless, their urge to articulate the moment captured vividly that brief period in history bracketed by the slogans, "Wir sind das Volk" and "Wir sind ein Volk."

However, the record of words and deeds preceding 9 November 1989 has taken on another significance. Hubertus Knabe rightly argues that the people who ought to have given expression and insight to the crisis in GDR society, by virtue of their position--"die Intellektuellen und Künstler, die Wissenschaftler, Schriftsteller und Journalisten"--did not proclaim publicly their solidarity with the political dissatisfaction of the populace until such action no longer represented a personal risk (*Aufbruch* 11). However, this observation does not justify the increasingly black-and-white judgements about the past role of various GDR citizens, particularly those in the intellectual/artistic community, that would label anything short of emigration or obvious civil disobedience as *Wendehals*-behavior. The controversy over Christa Wolf's book, *Was bleibt*, provides only one example of such excesses. Thus it is more vital than ever to recall the context of the events preceding the watershed dates of Fall 1989, lest incremental stages of change and the significance of subtle acts of moral courage become obscured.

Each of the three texts listed above takes a different approach to the documentary task. *Wir sind das Volk*, the most comprehensive overview, summarizes the significant events for each day from 7 October to 17 December, first in detail, and in brief outline in the appendix. The viewpoint of its GDR authors emerges in their occasional commentary and in the choice of details and quotations. However, their predominantly matter-of-fact presentation emphasizes documentation over opinion or analysis. The authors underscore benchmark events and selectively provide relevant background information, but leave it to the reader to establish the causal links in the transition. Their accuracy suffers only the occasional inconsistency; the Leipzig demonstration of 23 October (est. 300,000 participants) is listed as the largest protest demonstration in the GDR, and that of 30 October (est. 200,000) as the largest since World War II.

More notably, this chronicle of events remains compelling, even after a year and countless media reports. The sheer succession of extraordinary deeds and revelations day after day successfully evokes the moments of tension, confusion, and euphoria. Interspersed with photographs, it also provides an invaluable reference work for use in conjunction with other documentary texts, such as *Oktober 1989* and *Aufbruch in eine andere DDR*.

The subtitle of *Oktober 1989, Wider den Schlaf der Vernunft* echoes Volker Braun's speech ("Gegen den Schlaf der Vernunft"), given at the reading by GDR authors on 28 October 1989, in East Berlin's Erlöserkirche. Indeed, this collection of letters, personal accounts of police detainment, journal entries, interviews, news items, position papers, and short literary texts

testify to the vitality of those whose words and deeds contributed to the end of the old regime. Mostly from the period of early September to 8 November, the selections capture, as the brief editorial statement notes, "Stimmungen und Rhythmen" of those three months. Unfortunately, the editorial collective has not been consistent about supplying the dates, background information about contributors, and sources. The arrangement of the table of contents does not make it fully clear which texts stem from the same forum (Volker Braun's, for instance). The haste of the publication process also shows in the number of typographical errors. Nonetheless, the range of topics, positions, and contributors (including many GDR literary artists) plus the large-format photographs of demonstrations, creates a fascinating resource.

A combination of analysis and personal reflection characterizes many of the thirty-two essays found in *Aufbruch in eine andere DDR*. Editor and contributor Hubertus Knabe (who also wrote *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen--Friedensbewegung in der DDR* under a pseudonym) invited "Weggegangene und Dagebliebene, Parteien- und Oppositionsvetreter, Wissenschaftler und Schriftsteller" to describe what they saw as the cause of the upheaval and how they imagine the future. Organized into five sections ("Abrechnung," "Aufbruch," "Opposition," "Für eine andere DDR," "Deutsche Identitäten"), the essays address political, economical, and cultural dimensions of the Fall 1989 events, as well as such phenomena as sexism, homophobia, and nationalism. The final entry gives a brief chronology of events from 11 August to 15 November.

Reiner Schedlinski's essay, "gibt es die ddr überhaupt?" (an expanded version of an article first printed in the *tageszeitung* on 7 October), also appears in *Oktober 1989*. A noteworthy contribution to both volumes, the essay offers one of the most succinct analyses of the phenomenon GDR and its disintegration, within the context of what it meant to be a GDR citizen. Other contributors to *Aufbruch* include Wolf Biermann, Jürgen Fuchs, Olaf G. Klein, Lutz Rathenow, and Konrad Weiß. In its totality, this collection provides valuable depth and causal connections for the data and documents contained in *Wir sind das Volk* and *Oktober 1989*.

In conclusion, these three texts still remain worth attention, as the record of a brief time span, and as a basis for comprehending the events that have followed. Moreover, these documents crystallize facets which are essential to recapture if a process of *Gegenwartsbewältigung* is to bring psychological health and political maturity to the unified Germany.

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Brandt, Helmut, ed. *Friedrich Schiller: Angebot und Diskurs. Zugänge. Dichtung. Zeitgenossenschaft.* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1987.

For the 225th anniversary of Schiller's birth, the Friedrich Schiller-Universität Jena hosted an international conference devoted to him and his reception. This volume is comprised of a selection of forty papers from that conference. The papers are grouped under four main categories: general, drama and theater, poetry, and reception by contemporaries.

Within the compass of a brief review, it is not possible to discuss in much detail the wealth of information and diversity of viewpoints included. Virtually all aspects of Schiller's work are examined; several of the dramas, such as *Die Räuber* and *Don Carlos*, are the object of two and three papers. If any of the dramatic texts is under-represented, it is *Wallenstein*, although Schiller's interest in history and the philosophy of history is a major theme throughout the volume. Without disparaging any of the contributions, several might be singled out as particularly