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## The Old GDR Opposition in the New Germany

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ablesbar, alles ist korrekt verzeichnet, aber in eine so abstrakte Nomenklatur verhüllt, daß man nichts mehr verstehen konnte. Die zweiwertige formale Logik der Glanzzeit des Realsozialismus (Hauptfrage ist: Wer wen?) wandelte sich in das milchige Licht einer Realitätsbeschreibung, in der die Vorinterpretation so versteckt wurde, daß die Wahrheitsfindung im Ermessen des sklerotischen Generalsekretärs lag.

So sammelte die Stasi Informationen, die niemals Informationen sein durften. So ermittelte sie Wahrheiten, die

niemals den logischen Bruch der Gesamtlüge aufscheinen lassen durften. So betrog die Staatssicherheit sich selbst und die Partei, der sie Schild und Schwert sein wollte und doch letzten Endes nur ihr Papertigerbild zustande brachte.

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# The Old GDR Opposition in the New Germany

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How are the dissidents and critical left-wing intellectuals from the old GDR coming to terms with life in the new Germany after losing the role they briefly played at the head of the opposition movement? What transformations have they undergone, and what, if anything, have they contributed to German political life in the post-unification period? This article looks at some critical left-wing intellectuals' post-unification discussions on a new Germany which would somehow embrace the East German experience. These discussions are interesting in their own right, but they will also be examined as signs that the critical left has begun to rethink its relationship with the population as a whole. Many of these discussions are conducted in two recently founded journals, *CONstructiv* and *Utopie kreativ*, which see themselves as a forum for non-dogmatic discussion of contemporary issues, but with a commitment to socially and ecologically responsible politics. In particular, the journals' East German roots have made them a forum for consideration of what that part of the new Germany might contribute to a redefined German identity.

It is worth noting in passing that the PDS has failed to reform itself into a credible alternative left: faced with a dwindling membership in the East (January 1991: 1.3 million; September 1991: 180,000), a near total failure to recruit in the West, rapidly declining support from the electorate, and mounting debts, it has shown itself to be consistently one step behind events with its policy changes.<sup>1</sup> Where it does embrace new initiatives of other groups, the effect can be a downturn in the fortunes of those groups because of their association with the PDS rather than with any politically significant united front. Speaking recently as a prominent PDS member, Hermann Kant seemed to sum up the feeling of many in the party when he stated his reluctance to have anything to do with visions of how society might be. He explained that he once had a few ideas about how a state should look, but these turned out to be wrong. Nor did his view of what role the PDS might play extend beyond being "the place to which people come with their troubles," a sign that the PDS has tended to end up as little more than a refuge for those who lost out politically through unification.<sup>2</sup>

The critical left which was opposed to the old SED has experienced its own problems. The *Bürgerbewegungen* have not been free of internal wrangling, with the debates about methods between Bündnis 90 and Neues Forum in particular threatening to tip over into hostility. In September 1991 Neues Forum considered whether or not to become part of Bündnis 90 which was busy establishing itself throughout Germany. Neues Forum decided to remain a separate movement, but also decided to fight elections. From this middle position, Neues Forum criticized Bündnis 90 for slipping into parliamentary ways and mocked what it saw as Bündnis 90's long list of disciplinary measures awaiting anyone who stepped out of line.<sup>3</sup> For its part, Bündnis 90 claimed to be the focal point in the five new *Länder* for alternative, ecology and civil rights groups, and it claimed that Neues Forum was sinking into political obscurity. Bündnis 90 also tackled the unresolved question of cooperation between groups in East and West Germany. After the Green's poor showing at the polls, they no longer appeared attractive partners to groups in the East. Moreover, both sides were holding out for policies they regarded as essential. Basically, however, Bündnis 90 seems more willing to cooperate with other organizations than Neues Forum. At parliamentary level it has formed *Fractionen* with the Greens, and it clearly has its eye on a good result in the *Kommunalwahlen* coming up in the spring of '92.<sup>4</sup>

When it came to interpreting the transition from the GDR to the FRG, many paths turned out to be dead ends. Considerable time and energy went into developing the theory that the West had conspired to take over the East German reform movement for its own purposes, and dire warnings were sounded about succumbing to the charms of capitalism. Yet these had little impact.<sup>5</sup>

A survey of intellectual activity reveals what is in one sense a healthy interest in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*,<sup>6</sup> yet the intensity with which intellectuals looked back was also an indication of their difficulties in talking constructively about the present. More recently, there seems to be a further use for the past in fighting the battles of the present: to suggest that the people of West Germany should not presume to cast the first stone. Against the background of what has been referred to as the "ungezähmte Siegerlaune" of the old Federal Republic,<sup>7</sup> the West German left has sought

to deflect its fellow citizens' attacks on East Germans for their compromised past by going back as far as Auschwitz and stressing its all-German nature. The superficiality of Helmut Kohl's recent flying visit there also comes in for criticism, and the rise of the radical right in eastern Germany is seen in the same frame as the electoral successes of the radical right in Bremen.<sup>8</sup>

When it came to looking at what might be worth rescuing from the old order and bringing into some kind of renewed Federal Republic, critical intellectuals of the left for a while found virtue in some elements of GDR social policy. "Sozialistische Errungenschaften" thought worth preserving ranged from GDR *Frauenpolitik* to full employment, official support given to cultural life, and a standardized educational system. Yet the shortcomings of these arguments were quickly and rightly shown up by East as well as West German critics.

Another attempt to rescue something from the GDR past was the appeal to an antifascist, humanist heritage based on solidarity. Yet it has been argued with some justification that the positive value of antifascism in fact meant little to the younger generation and was seen rather as another piece of the old official political culture.<sup>9</sup>

One noteworthy development in critical left-wing discussion has been the return to traditional dissident themes from the days of the GDR. It was a long-established part of the dissident left's thinking in the Honecker period that the West was no model for a reformed East Germany. Rudolf Bahro saw the capitalist economic system as anarchy, and Robert Havemann was always critical of the waste of resources which he saw as an inevitable characteristic of capitalism.<sup>10</sup> Yet whereas the dissidents of the Honecker period criticized capitalism from a traditional socialist point of view, attacked "actually existing socialism" for starting down the same road as the capitalist West, and offered a reformed socialism as the only real solution, the critics in the period following German unification attack the economics of growth but offer only tentative solutions which are identifiable not as socialist, but rather as part of what has been termed an "alternative political culture." Sebastian Pflugbeil of Neues Forum argues that none of the established political parties is able to offer a credible strategy for solving the social, economic, ecological, and legal problems of the day.<sup>11</sup> Jens Reich's particular concern is population explosion, but he can see no easy solutions. He only knows that things cannot continue as before, and he pleads for a fundamental change in ways of thinking and in society's goals. In particular, the "deification" of the growth principle has to be abandoned. Reich comments that this conclusion is startling when one considers that eastern Germany is currently in the process of introducing the system of ownership which underpins the growth principle.<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Leonhard pursues the point when he calls for "new ethical goals" to emerge from the civil rights movements of the East,<sup>13</sup> and Vera Wollenberger asks whether the "ecologically ruined" ex-GDR will repeat the mistakes made in the reconstruction of West Germany, or whether there is a chance of creating a socially and environmentally responsible industrial society in the East which could even serve as a model for others. She calls for job creation schemes to help clean up the environment, and gives the example of transport systems based on electricity rather than petrol.<sup>14</sup>

In these arguments we hear echoes of the dissident themes of the seventies and eighties which had tended to create a rift between an opposition which was given to calling for a "revolution in people's needs" and a GDR population which,

as survey results from the Honecker period indicated, tended to attach considerable importance to a consumer economy. It remains to be seen whether returning to these themes with less ideological baggage and at a time of growing recognition that the problems articulated are not going to go away will convert into support for the old GDR dissidents in the new Germany.

A related attempt to construct a GDR identity focuses on the switch in the population from passive to active politics in 1989<sup>15</sup> and the idea that the experience of solidarity, debate, and unanimity in the movement will provide the seed of something new.<sup>16</sup> Here, the Round Table and the principles underlying the constitution it drafted—participatory democracy, social solidarity, equality of men and women, environmental awareness—what has been called "die eigene politische Kultur dieser Revolution"<sup>17</sup> are the focus of attention.

The Round Table's draft constitution did not get off to an encouraging start, not even making it to the committee stages when the Volkskammer was still in existence, but in the post-unification period it has provided an important stimulus for a discussion on whether Germany needs a new constitution. In November 1991 the discussion of constitutional change was given an institutional framework when a joint constitutional committee was established to recommend changes in the constitution to the Bundestag and Bundesrat.<sup>18</sup>

Here, the old GDR opposition has had some success in gaining support from the established political parties, with some SPD members coming out in favor of "further developing" the Grundgesetz: Heide Pfarr, an SPD member of the Bundestag, has suggested a mass petition to the Bundestag to prompt the parties into serious consideration of constitutional reform.<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Thierse, deputy chairman of the SPD and a member of the Bundestag, asks why the SPD is not doing better in eastern Germany. He puts his party's poor showing down in part to "Parteiverdrossenheit," to the association of the SPD with the SED via socialism, and to distortions by their political opponents. But he also argues that the very concept of a political party is starting to look outmoded, and the SPD must start to think about changing. The context in which the SPD originally operated scarcely exists any more in western Germany and not at all in the East. Coming from the East himself, Thierse does not have the years of experience of his West German colleagues and he points out that he does not slip easily into the role of a politician. He calls for cooperation between the SPD and the citizens' movements.<sup>20</sup>

The *Kuratorium für einen demokratisch verfassten Bund deutscher Länder* argues that a constitution should replace and/or update the Grundgesetz because the Grundgesetz was provisional in nature; because when it was drawn up, destruction of the environment could not be foreseen; because the Grundgesetz lacks plebiscitary elements. (This point reflects an attempt to recapture something of the mass involvement in politics which characterized the political scene in the GDR from late 1989 onwards.) A new constitution might also ban arms exports, and here one can detect a widening perspective among the old East German opposition as it ceases to be preoccupied with eastern Germany and tackles issues which affect German identity as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

The SPD Member of the Bundestag, Herta Däubler-Gmelin, is committed to a new constitution and has suggested a *Verfassungsrat* to consider what it might look like. She argues that the new united Germany should not simply be a continuation of the old Federal Republic which has merely acquired new territory. A *Verfassungsrat* should consist in

equal proportions of men and women, and it should not only be made up of members of parliament. Within two years, it should present a draft constitution to be put before parliament and the people in a referendum. Däubler-Gmelin makes the link with the GDR's experience of mass involvement in politics explicit when she refers to the slogan "Wir sind das Volk," but she also argues that such sentiments are just as appealing to many in the old Federal Republic and that some West Germans have been considering constitutional reform for many years. Däubler-Gmelin favors a federalism which would involve decentralization of decision-making from the European level through individual nations and down to their constituent parts. For Germany, she favors a clear commitment to peace, environmental protection, and an acknowledgement at the constitutional level of the right to work and to decent housing. She concludes by spelling out the relevance of these issues for the question of what remains of the old GDR: East Germans used to feel inferior because of their economic weakness. Now they are being made to feel inferior when they are told that the last forty years were a scandal which left behind nothing of importance. For Däubler-Gmelin the discussion of a new constitution is somehow part of an attempt to end what she refers to as a "pseudo-colonization" of eastern Germany.<sup>22</sup>

Surveys of public opinion are not clear on the issues raised by the *Kuratorium*: one 1990 investigation conducted by the Free University in Berlin into what Germans thought of direct democracy as it exists in Switzerland concluded that, whereas more than 50% of the population was in favor of it, in the Bundestag 80% was against it.<sup>23</sup> Yet other surveys suggest that these ideas do not meet with the approval of the East German population: first indications are that the majority prefers political leadership by an elite.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, surveys confirm that, whereas most East Germans thought an organization such as Neues Forum was necessary to bring about change in the first place, by the summer of 1990 there was less need for such a group.<sup>25</sup>

The exception here is probably concern for the environment, with surveys showing widespread concern among the former GDR population on this issue.<sup>26</sup> Also, some of the participants in the debate on a new constitution for the whole of Germany, even while attacking the advocates of a new constitution for seeking to "smuggle in left-wing policies by the back door," agreed that the current political system in Germany encouraged short-term thinking of a kind which was unlikely to meet the ecological challenges of the future.<sup>27</sup>

The "political culture of the revolution" does seem to be occupying a place in the political life of united Germany and gaining some support from established groups in the West. Moreover, in the East, each of the five new *Länder* has to work out its own constitution; and against a background of disappointment with the performance of the major political parties and a recognition that East Germany's political culture is different from that of West Germany, there are many signs that the Round Table's draft has influenced discussions at the level of the *Länder*. Regional studies also indicate that in local elections, groups such as Bündnis 90 achieved some considerable success, with many activists in the original *Bürgerbewegungen* now serving as local politicians.<sup>28</sup>

A further attempt at reorientation was made over the concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Although it runs the risk of being thrown out with the old ideological bathwater, and revelations about the extent of many citizens' involvement with the Stasi have created antagonisms which could undermine the notion of a community, the idea that the East German experience may

have left behind positive by-products does seem to be acquiring substance and durability.

In the post-*Wende* period Ina Merkel, co-founder of the Unabhängiger Frauenverband and representative on the Central Round Table, takes up this line of argument when she detects a largely undeveloped, collective sense of solidarity which came about against the background and partly as a result of non-participatory political life in the old GDR, and she refers to it therefore as a "Notgemeinschaft."<sup>29</sup> The new feature of left-wing intellectuals' thinking is the attempt to establish contact with a wider audience in a way which does not involve educating this audience, let alone criticizing it for not seeing things their way: Merkel operates on the level of perceived characteristics and notes the endurance of traditional, handed-down behavior and the everyday way of life — both among those who have stayed and those who have gone, and she concludes that East Germany is not adequately described by reference to its repressive characteristics (13).

This approach, which highlights those features of GDR society which were unintended by-products of the old system rather than its imperfectly realized goals, is also taken up by Michael Brie at the Humboldt University. Brie asks whether a way of life which was not dominated by money, competition, and hard economic facts of life ("Sachzwänge") could really be dismissed as no more than the oppressive reverse side of the system created by the SED.<sup>30</sup>

The intellectuals who put forward these ideas concede that their earlier ideological concerns were not widely shared. The new direction left-wing discussion has taken, however, is making new claims which are based not so much on shared convictions but rather on what is claimed to be observed everyday reality.

So how accurate is this perception of everyday reality? Public opinion surveys suggest that the features of the GDR which had helped develop a degree of attachment to it among young people came to be regarded in less high esteem once German unification had become a possibility.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, surveys conducted in 1990 indicated that more than three quarters of all East Germans feared an increase in egoism in people's relationships with each other following the collapse of the old order and the uncertainty over the new. Surveys suggest also that what has been termed "Solidarität im kleinen" is perceived by East Germans as more in evidence in East Germany than in West, and it has been suggested that this is a basic value which East Germany could bring into the united Germany.<sup>32</sup>

When asked whether anything valuable remained of the old GDR, Martin Walser pointed to the East Germans' experience with the old political system and their experience with the new political system. He sees the difference between the two experiences as the source of a "constructive contradictory spirit, a spirit which is more difficult to manage than the sterility of an affluent society."<sup>33</sup> There are many signs that the old GDR opposition has something of this spirit and is establishing a representative role for itself in the new Germany.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>See Siegfried Suckut, Dietrich Staritz, "Alte Heimat oder neue Linke," *Deutschland Archiv* 24 (1991): 1050-1051.

<sup>2</sup>Torsten Schulz, "Hermann Kant: Im Gespräch," *CONstruktiv* 2.11 (1991): 15-17.

<sup>3</sup>Sebastian Pflugbeil, "Stark oder Quark?" *CONstruktiv* 2.10 (1991): 14-15.

<sup>4</sup>Bernd Köppl, "Organisationsfragen werden zu Überlebensfragen," *Bündnis 2000* 1.25 (29 November 1991): vi-vii.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Friedrich Schorlemmer, "Deutsch Qwahlen," *CONstruktiv* 2.1 (1991): 12-13.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Heinz Klunker, "'Mut zur eigenen Verantwortung'. Ein Gespräch mit Christoph Hein," *Deutschland Archiv* 23 (1990): 1144-7.

<sup>7</sup>Schulz 16.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Schütt, "Auschwitz im November," *CONstruktiv* 2.11 (1991): 33-35.

<sup>9</sup>Günter, Erbe, "Der Schriftsteller und der politische Umbruch in der DDR," *Prokla* 80 (September 1990): 80.

<sup>10</sup>For more detail, see Roger Woods, *Opposition in the GDR under Honecker 1971-85* (London: Macmillan, 1986): 29.

<sup>11</sup>Pflugbeil 14-15.

<sup>12</sup>Jens Reich, "Spießbürgerliches Klagelied," *CONstruktiv* 2.9 (1991): 13.

<sup>13</sup>Andrzej Madela, "Wolfgang Leonhard: Im Gespräch," *CONstruktiv* 2.9 (1991): 23-25.

<sup>14</sup>Vera Wollenberger, "Aufschwung Ost durch Ökologie?" *CONstruktiv* 2.7 (1991): 22-23.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "Die Stunde der nationalen Empfindung. Republikanische Gesinnung oder Nationalbewußtsein?" in *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990): 165.

<sup>16</sup>Bärbel Bohley, Antje Vollmer, Ulrich Herold, "Revolution in Deutschland?," *CONstruktiv* 1.1 (1990): 20.

<sup>17</sup>Vollmer in *ibid.* 19.

<sup>18</sup>See Peter Badura, "Staatsaufgaben und Teilhaberechte als Gegenstand der Verfassungspolitik," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 29 November 1991: 20-28.

<sup>19</sup>Antje Vollmer, Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, Heide Pfarr, Fritz Pleitgen, Gerd Poppe, "Paulskirche, zum zweitenmal," *CONstruktiv* 2.7 (1991): 8-10.

<sup>20</sup>Wolfgang Thierse, "Alte Heimat - neue Nische? Sechs Sätze über die SPD im Osten Deutschlands," *CONstruktiv* 2.7 (1991): 17-19.

<sup>21</sup>Vollmer, Hamm-Brücher, Pfarr, Pleitgen, Poppe 8-10.

<sup>22</sup>Birgit Svensson, Jürgen Schlenker, "Herta Däubler-Gmelin: Im Gespräch," *CONstruktiv* 2.6 (1991): 9-12.

<sup>23</sup>See Johan Galtung, "Deutschland in Europa," *CONstruktiv* 2.7 (1991): 13-15.

<sup>24</sup>Ursula Feist, "Zur politischen Akkulturation der vereinten Deutschen. Eine Analyse aus Anlaß der ersten gesamtdeutschen Bundestagswahl," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 8 (March 1991): 21-32. Uwe Thaysen sees the Round Table as the focus for hopes of a new order beyond "real existierender Sozialismus" and beyond the model of the old Federal Republic (*Der Runde Tisch oder: Wo blieb das Volk?* [Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990] 11.), yet he questions the representative status of the Round Table (16).

<sup>25</sup>Jan Wielgoths, Marianne Schulz, "Von der illegalen Opposition in die legale Marginalität. Zur Entwicklung der Binnenstruktur der ostdeutschen Bürgerbewegung," MS of 1991.

<sup>26</sup>A survey from September 1990 of 1,150 East Germans showed 15% satisfied with the state of their local natural environment and 61% dissatisfied. Only 1.8% felt enough was being done to stop destruction of the environment. Helmar Hegewald, Herber Schwenk, "Umweltbewußtsein ehemaliger DDR-Bürger," *Utopie kreativ* 2.6 (1991): 80.

<sup>27</sup>See, for example, Robert Leicht, "Verfassung mit Klampfenklang," *Die Zeit* 21 (June 1991): 4.

<sup>28</sup>See Lothar Probst, "People's Movement and Political Culture," MS of a paper given at the Seventeenth New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic, Conway, 1991. Probst's study also indicates, however, that the election of activists as local politicians has caused local groups outside the official political system to shrink. Wielgoths and Schulz give detailed figures of local politicians from the *Bürgerbewegungen*. Dieter Rink's study of the situation in Leipzig underlines the relatively strong position of the *Bürgerbewegungen* at local level—Dieter Rink, "Bürgerbewegungen im Übergang," MS of paper given at the Seventeenth New Hampshire Symposium.

<sup>29</sup>Ina Merkel, "Der Ausbruch aus der Illusion und die Renaissance des deutschen Patriarchats," *Utopie kreativ* 2.8 (1991): 17.

<sup>30</sup>Michael Brie, "Wer setzt die Normen des wissenschaftlichen Diskurses?," *Utopie kreativ* 2.8 (1991): 65f.

<sup>31</sup>Peter Förster, Günter Roski, *DDR zwischen Wende und Wahl* (Berlin: LinksDruck, 1990): 97f.

<sup>32</sup>Förster, Roski 121f. (Survey of February 1990). See also Walter Friedrich, Peter Förster, "Ostdeutsche Jugend 1990 - 11. Teil," *Deutschland Archiv* 24 (1991): 701-14.

<sup>33</sup>Andrzej Madela, "Martin Walser: Im Gespräch," *CONstruktiv* 2.8 (1991): 9-11.

# Whose Revolution Was It? Stalinism and the Stasi in the Former GDR

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The collapse of socialist governments in Eastern Europe has led to a situation full of ambiguities. At last it seems to be possible to talk openly, to name the mechanisms of social control, to document injustice and state criminality. At the same time, the political and economic insecurities resulting from the disintegration of familiar social structures have narrowed the public's tolerance of alternatives to the ideology of market consumerism and Western parliamentary democracy. It has become practically impossible to assert or

even imagine anything other than real existing capitalism as the goal of human development. Those who do insist on alternatives are branded as utopians or as Stalinists in disguise, a distinction which some would no longer even allow.

During the last three months of 1991 I have been living in Berlin with the express interest of observing closely the consequences of what it means to have lost the collective project of socialism, particularly among intellectuals and artists. In what follows I will try to provide an initial description of what I perceive as some of the coordinates and constraints in the discussion that is just getting underway. In