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## Stefan Pannen: Die Weiterleiter. Funktion und Selbstverständnis ostdeutscher Journalisten

Ralph Ley  
*Rutgers University*

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"Junges Deutschland" despite some heroic attempts to render that literature readable in today's context.

Reading the latter part of his book, some may feel that the author himself is somewhat bemused by the commitment of the writers to the state even when they opposed that state as did Kunert, Kunze, Biermann, and others, all of whom are quoted and referred to often. Even their opposition made the political a central part of their literary oeuvre. If the book stimulates its readers to engage with the question about the actual nature of the ideological and its concomitant political formulations in the realm of literature it will have served an even more useful purpose than being another western representation of the awful GDR.

Duncan Smith  
Brown University

Pannen, Stefan. *Die Weiterleiter. Funktion und Selbstverständnis ostdeutscher Journalisten*. Köln: Edition Deutschland Archiv im Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1992. 227 pp.

At its foundation in September, 1989, as East Germany was coming apart at the seams, New Forum issued a proclamation whose very first sentence was not a call for free elections or the reorganization of the economy or the resignation of the government and the "Politbüro" or the freedom to travel, but rather for an end to the breakdown in communications between state and society, to the sorry condition of journalism in the country. By all accounts, the men and women who operated the media were, next to the people who ran the government or worked for the Stasi, the least liked group in the GDR. Lutz Rathenow's criticism of the profession was merciless: journalistic activity was simply a synonym for mendacity, opportunism, and sheer boredom. Christoph Hein's was devastatingly ironic: at the 10th Writers' Congress in 1987 he thanked the media for turning people off to them, thereby increasing the sale of books. And the person-in-the-street's was anecdotal: an East German applies for a travel permit to the GDR, and as the astonished "Vopo" points out that he is already there, he explains that he wants to visit the other GDR, the one he keeps reading about in the papers.

Stefan Pannen's book is a highly informative attempt to see the world of the GDR journalists from the inside out. To ascertain what their own world was like and what they thought about themselves, he interviewed 22 of them and scrutinized some 110 novels and stories by 82 GDR authors, many of them with journalistic experience. Pannen is quick to point out that the East German journalists were caught between a rock and a hard place. The "Stasi" knew about the rotten state of the nation and reported the facts to the government in intimate detail; on the whole, the party functionaries closed their eyes to the conditions of real existing socialism and embellished things in their speeches and plans; the journalists, who were generally as informed as the Stasi, were not allowed to pass on the truth, but, like the party, glossed over and embellished. Their dual function as part of the state apparatus is epitomized in the term Pannen uses to refer to them in the title of his book. It was their job to transmit in a form suitable for the masses the information given to them from on high "Weiter-leiter" and to be instruments of enlightenment "An-leiter."

In their dual role as professionals who were not supposed to tell lies and as servants of the regime

who were not allowed to tell the truth, their existential plight worsened with the worsening political and economic conditions and the concomitant tightening of the censorship. Why then did the media persons not participate in the protests against the regime, even in the final days? From his interviews Pannen came up with a host of reasons, among them the proverbial German "Untertanengeist" (much more prevalent in the GDR that refused to recognize a Nazi past than in the FRG), a reluctance to give up the privileges of a prestigious position, true-believership, a cynicism beyond any sort of caring, the hope of better days, the fear of jeopardizing the future of one's children, and just plain greed. A considerable number of journalists turned to alcohol and some to the ultimate solution (the windows of the upper stories of the offices of *Neues Deutschland* were barred after a colleague plunged to his death).

In GDR fiction media people were, for some two decades, depicted as loyal and practically flawless servants of the state. With the internalization of the literature of the early seventies, they began to be presented as three-dimensional human beings in conflict between job and family. This emphasis on the personal failings of individuals received its most explicit portrayal in Hermann Kant's novel of 1972, *Das Impressum*, whose journalist-hero, David Groth, is the Weiter- and An-leiter par excellence. The novel was given the green light by the censors because Hermann Kant was, after all, Hermann Kant and because he simply described, keeping all value judgments to himself. The culminating point in the fiction critical of the media came just one year before the wall came down, in Axel Oelschlegel's *Das Pseudonym*, in which for the first time the entire communication system as such was brought under attack (by this time the literary censors had relaxed their grip considerably and besides, the author was the good friend and ex-brother-in-law of Hermann Kant.)

In a concluding chapter we learn from the interviews how the "Weiterleiter" are faring in the new Germany. The jury, so to speak, is still out on the survivors, the sixty percent who have not lost their jobs because they are too old, too compromised, too unqualified, or because the newspaper they work for has not yet gone under.

Skillfully combining the technique of the political scientist, the literary scholar, and the journalist, Pannen has fashioned a solid contribution to a heretofore much neglected aspect of GDR political culture.

Ralph Ley  
Rutgers University