

GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC*

Horst Gies

It is no coincidence that the Palace of the Republic where the Volkskammer, i.e., the Parliament of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), meets and where the Socialist Unity Party (SED) has its party congresses is situated exactly where the city residence of the Hohenzollern used to be. The square in front of it today is called Marx-Engels-Square; Walter Ulbricht, founder of the GDR, had this symbol of the Prussian monarchy blown up around the same time that the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great was taken down. In the early days of the GDR, all reactionary remains of German history were to be extinguished.

Since 1981, Frederick II has been standing on his old place again; every day he watches the ceremony of the guards of the National People's Army of the GDR in front of the Neue Wache, next to the arsenal where the museum of German history--the National Museum of the GDR--is housed. On the occasion of Berlin's 750th anniversary in the year 1987, the government even tried to reconstruct Prussian history by building new houses imitating a historical style in the old town center, the Nikolaiviertel.

For years the SED has been making efforts to adapt all of German history to their concept of *Erbe und Tradition*, i.e., heritage and tradition. Not only revolutionary traditions like the peasant revolt of 1524-25, the Vormärz (eve of the revolution of 1848-49) and the revolution of 1848-49, and the labor movement and the communist resistance of 1933-1945, but also the national heritage left behind by Luther, Goethe, Kant, Bismarck, Stauffenberg, and even kings and emperors of the middle ages are in the process of being included in the official cultivation of historical consciousness in the GDR. In this German state, history plays an important part in the stabilization of the existing conditions of society and government. Its legitimizing function

*This manuscript was completed in October 1988.

Gies

for government policy is immense and is part of the national historical culture. The recourse to history functions as a guideline for identity and behavioral patterns. Historical consciousness aims at explaining the present time and, moreover, at shaping the future exclusively in accordance with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

This theory of evolution of human society has been raised to a state doctrine. On the basis of the theory of historical materialism--in which the relationship between economy and politics, productive powers and conditions of production, base and superstructure, class warfare and social formations is ranked as objective law-- leading representatives of the SED, the state party of the GDR, develop fundamental convictions that form the underlying set of political standards for a compact conceptualization of history. This conceptualization of history, which is an objective of education, meets with high expectations because the standards for the individual as well as the collective body established by the state party are to be historically justified, furnished with sound argument, and promoted by means of education.

In the GDR, the development of socialist historical consciousness is understood as a task to be taken charge of by the entire society; it is therefore not confined to history teaching at school. Essentially, the principle of conformity of politics and education can be applied to all stages and levels of human existence because the development of socialist consciousness and the perfection of the socialist order in the sense of a "communist morale" (VII. Educational Congress, 1978) is regarded as an ongoing process of education. Parallel to the supposed conformity of the acquisition of skills (object: professional performance) and education (object: ideological convictions) in the GDR, science and ideology, partiality and objectivity, are considered inseparably linked in the compact concept of Marxism-Leninism.

All institutions in the education sector, from day nursery to university and adult education, are used for the purpose of controlling behavior and consciousness. The aim is to make people understand the "leading role of the working class" in the realization of social and political progress and to make them recognize the GDR, "the first German laborer and peasant state," as the "climax in the history of the German people." According to the principle of "democratic centralism," the leading part is played by the "vanguard of the proletariat," i.e., the SED. The SED prescribes the objects historians should have as their goals: "History has to be written in such a way that the character of the GDR as the socialist state in which all great, progressive, and

German Democratic Republic

revolutionary traditions of our people are taken care of becomes evident" (Kurt Hager, *Einheit* 27 (1972): 189).

Although the "statute about the uniform socialist educational system" of the GDR (1956) characterizes school as the main force of the educational system, family, youth organizations (Junge Pioniere, FDJ), the National People's Army, colleges and universities, museums, exhibitions, and mass media (the press, broadcasting stations, television, the movies), as well as institutions of adult education (*Kulturbund*--cultural league, academies, groups run by factories and rural communities, or the URANIA society for the spreading of scientific knowledge) are also included. The entire educational system of the GDR is integrated in a comprehensive planning and development program and is subject to central control. The declared object of a "universally developed socialist personality" requires the harmonization of education at school and outside school in respect to intentions, syllabus, organization, and institutions. Only within the institution of the churches in the GDR have deviations from the party doctrine so far been possible. The hierarchically structured organizations for the education of the people (from the ministries for the "Education of the People," "Colleges and Universities," and "Culture," to the regional, local, and municipal councils) are in charge of the administration of the educational system. They are subject to the direction of the party leaders and are given advice and support by the Academy of Educational Science (APW; before 1979, German Educational Central Institute).

As far as political socialization, or education for "socialistic patriotism" and "proletarian internationalism," is concerned, all agents teaching history have a task that is considered highly responsible. In accordance with this, history has to pass a tight system of filters before it is publicly presented and taught in the GDR. Resolutions of the SED party committee (Zentralkomitee, ZK), directives issued on party congresses and instructive articles in special periodicals are the means by which the prescribed standards of value and opinion are set forth. In doing so, the SED makes use of the intellectuals at party academies and at the relevant institutes for Marxism-Leninism and social studies, attached to the ZK of the party. From here, guidelines are forwarded to the transmitters of historical knowledge.

The terms "ideology of historical research" and "propaganda of history" relating to the development of a compact conceptualization of history are in good repute in the GDR. "Socialist historical consciousness" is not only a focal point of research in the GDR, it has also been the focus of a campaign that induced various activities (congresses, publications) in the

Gies

years 1967 to 1969 in connection with a directive of the VIII. Party Congress of the SED dealing with the reorganization of historical science.

Corresponding to the theory taken over from Soviet educational theory, that the "logic of scholarship" plays a decisive part in the process of teaching substance, historical science in the GDR has a leading function. Among the social sciences, historical science has not only a significant but also a crucial position because it compiles and provides historical data that form the conception of history to be transmitted. Outstanding thinkers are above all the historians who belong to the Central Institute of History attached to the Academy of Science of the GDR (founded in 1956), and to the Council of Historical Science at the Ministry for College and University Affairs. A Nationalkomitee der Historiker der DDR, under the chairmanship of Joachim Herrmann, was involved with the preparations for the 17th International Congress of Historians in Madrid in 1990; the historians of the GDR not only have to contribute to the development of socialist consciousness, they also have to fulfill an important propagandistic task in the ideological struggle with the *Klassenfeind* (class enemy) of the *imperialistische(n) Lager* (imperialist camp).

If the objectives (including evaluation and judgment) are provided by the party, and the content (including methods of cognition and procedures) is provided by historians, it is the task of history teachers in the GDR to put it into practice, i.e., to develop increasingly efficient control of the teaching and learning process. It is not the intention or the selection of topics that is the object of reflection about teaching history in the GDR, but mainly methods and media of teaching (*Unterrichtsmittel*). This division was institutionalized in the sixties in the process of integrating methodology in the academic *Sektionen* of the universities, although F. Donath, who has been organizing annual conferences of history methodology in the GDR since 1961, which have taken place regularly till today, regarded this as a "disquieting separation of methodology from general educational science and psychology" (*Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 1965: 1011). Contacts in this direction have not been given up since then: they are institutionalized, for instance, at the "scholarly council of methodology in history teaching" at the Academy of Educational Science of the GDR. Since 1963, parallel to this within the Deutsche Historiker-Gesellschaft (founded in 1958, since 1966 called Historiker-Gesellschaft der DDR) a Sektion Geschichtsunterricht und Staatsbürgerkunde (section on history

German Democratic Republic

teaching and civics), now called Fachgruppe Geschichtsunterricht has existed. It organized its twenty-first conference in 1987.

Diplomhistoriker (scholars with a degree in history) and *Diplomlehrer* (history teachers) are trained in different programs. Both programs, however, share some methodology and a strong professional orientation. A three-week practical course in a museum, archive, or library or at an excavation site is part of the history course. For prospective teachers, practical courses in a holiday camp in their first year of studies, and at school in their second year and in their fifth year are obligatory and ensure a continual reflection of the relationship of theory and practice. Teachers teaching in the ninth to twelfth grades (*erweiterte Oberschule*, including preparatory classes) until 1985 in general had to go through a five-year course at one of seven universities; teachers for the fifth to tenth grades (*Oberschule*) had to pass a four-year course at one of nine teacher training colleges in the GDR. A reorganization of the program, worked out between 1982 and 1985, standardized the teaching course to the five-year model.

Since 1969, continuing education courses for all history teachers have been compulsory. Within a span of four years, every teacher must participate in one basic and two special courses, generally held during vacations. The courses are organized by the Zentralinstitut für Weiterbildung der Lehrer und Erzieher (Central Institute for Continued Education for Teachers and Educators) at Ludwigsfelde near Berlin, in cooperation with academies, colleges, and universities. The commission for history teaching of the society of historians in the GDR and the museum of German history in Berlin regularly offer continuing education courses for history teachers. Advisors, trained among other places in the centrally controlled Parteischule Karl-Liebknecht in Kleinmachnow near Berlin, attached to the party Central Committee, have the important task of instruction and propaganda (such as introducing new curricula and teaching material.)

Since the late 1940s, there has been an obvious closeness of educational theory and history teaching in the GDR and the Soviet Russian example. This orientation is manifested in many translations of monographs and regular reports on the new Soviet Russian method of history teaching ("*aus der neuen sowjetischen Geschichtsmethodik*") in the organ *Geschichte in der Schule* (1948-1959) and *Geschichtsunterricht und Staatsbürgerkunde (GS)*, (1959-). Every other year, experts from socialist countries meet in order to exchange their experiences (the first conference was held in East Berlin in 1965; in 1985 the X. International Symposium on History Teaching in Socialist Countries took place in Hungary).

Gies

In the GDR, outside the schools the transfer of the results of historical research to the nonprofessional public takes place in particular during military service and in the course of the "cultural education of the masses." To this end, not only the mass media, which are exclusively state-owned, are used. For instance, the URANIA society organized 28,000 lectures on historical issues (*Stat. Jahrbuch der DDR*, 1969: 496) in the year 1967; the society for local history attached to the cultural association of the GDR--Gesellschaft für Heimatgeschichte im Kulturbund der DDR--has 24,300 members who are organized into 1,438 regional groups (*Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 1987: 818); since 1981 (Regulation of local chronicles) there are "local historians" whose task it is to take care of traditional customs, especially in newly built housing estates. In the GDR, industrial history is regarded as being of great importance for the development of historical self-identification--since 1970 the same applies to the conservation of historic sites and monuments when historical townscapes are reconstructed. History instruction (which was not reinstated before 1946-47 in Brandenburg and Saxony, even later in Mecklenburg and Thuringia, and not before 1948-49 in Berlin), together with civics (since 1958--before that it was called *Gegenwartskunde*) and geography, are part of social science studies. An integrated course including these subjects, however, has never been discussed in the GDR.

Within the scope of a further developed socialist general education it is the function of history teaching to contribute decisively to the development of the pupils' Marxist-Leninist conception of history and socialist consciousness, to lay the foundations of their class-mindedness from a historical point of view as well as to help them find a sound Marxist-Leninist fundamental attitude toward the problems of our time and to further the pupils' readiness to strengthen and protect the GDR as their socialist mother country deeply rooted in the best traditions of German history (H. Diere, *GS* 1987: 401).

The importance of the subject of history for "socialist general education" is reflected in the share it has in the timetable of the secondary polytechnical school (*zehnklassige allgemeinbildende polytechnische Oberschule*), the mandatory type of school in the GDR, comprising ten grades: it is twice the amount of civics (11 lessons per week in seventh to tenth grades). In addition to this, there are three lessons per week in the

German Democratic Republic

Erweiterte Oberschule (EOS)--which leads to the *Abitur* (eleventh and twelfth grades). In the professional training of young people (lasting two years when they leave school after the tenth grade, three years after the eighth grade), history lessons take place too.

Since 1985, new history curricula for the six forms of the polytechnical school have been worked out in the GDR. The point in question was to put into practice the instruction of the XI. Party Congress of the SED, saying that the history of the GDR was to be dealt with more exhaustively in lessons than before (*GS*, 1986). This fifth generation of curricula in the history of the state took the place of guidelines that had been worked out in the years 1964 to 1971 under the direction of the Academy for Educational Science in close contact with the Department of Education at the Ministry of Education of the People (*Volksbildung*), and that had been introduced in 1966 to 1967. Since November 1986, when for the first time parts of the new concept "History Teaching and Civics" were published, approximately 15,000 history teachers in the GDR have continuously been made familiar with the new curriculum by means of instructing articles, discussions, and advance copies of parts of the syllabus in this organ, as well as special courses and advanced training. Starting in 1988-89, the fifth, eighth, and ninth grades were taught according to the new history curricula; the sixth, seventh and tenth grades will follow.

Due to its structure, which includes detailed aims, issues, and methods, this can be called a comprehensive curriculum, particularly because all teaching material is derived from it. To begin, the six-volume textbook *Geschichte 5-10* (first edition, 1966) will be replaced by a new edition of a textbook that will be published simultaneously with the gradual introduction of the new curriculum. It corresponds to the six-volume teacher's edition *Unterrichtshilfen Geschichte Klassen 5-10*. Both works, the textbook as well as the teacher's edition, exactly correspond to the curricula and are worked out by a cooperative group of authors under the centralized administration of the Institute of History at the APW; they are licensed for school use by the Ministry of National Education. There is no alternative. Optional lessons coming from the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft nach Rahmenplan* (AGR) or the study group *Junge Historiker* are in accordance with the curriculum, as are educational broadcasting and films produced by the state. There is no *Lehrmittelfreiheit*, i.e., access to a variety of textbooks, in the GDR. As a rule pupils buy their own textbooks.

Since the 1970s, the educational system of the GDR has been remarkably stable. This applies above all to the institutional

Gies

framework. Reforms in teaching, such as changes in curricula, new methods, and revision of textbooks, are mainly carried out as gradual "improvements of quality," adaptations to the progress of cognition relating to the standard of political and societal development. More than anything else, teaching instructions for single issues, often outlined without having been tested in practice and overcharged with issues, gave rise to this. That is the reason why in the beginning of the 1980s more and more experienced history teachers were heard in the government organ, *Geschichtsunterricht und Staatsbürgerkunde*, presenting reports on their experiences. Their reports were increasingly varied but in agreement with the valid standards published as solutions for teaching problems; the theory-oriented methodologies were obviously reserved.

In the 1950s and 1960s, there was no equivalent for this obvious struggle for stability and continuity in historical science and history teaching in the GDR. After a period of reckoning with the German past, regarded as disastrous (see A. Abusch, *Der Irrweg einer Nation*, 1946), the development of an affirmative socialist image of history as a result of a resolution of the Central Committee of the SED was demanded of the GDR. In 1956 the historians in the GDR once again had to face severe criticism of the leading party and government organs, because they were said to have dealt inappropriately with the period after 1945--the development of the GDR to the climax of the German people's history. In the 1960s, historical science contributed considerably to the development of the citizens' national consciousness in the GDR as well as to the consolidation of the state and its structure (proof of their performance is the eight-volume work *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 1966, as well as the three-volume *Deutsche Geschichte*, 1968).

As early as 1949, the SED demanded, in light of the 300th anniversary of Goethe's birth, that "the people's own great cultural traditions" should be encouraged. This has remained valid from then through the 1980s. In the beginning, the conservation of traditions of a "socialist national culture" concentrated on the "progressive aspects of German history." The television film "Scharnhorst" (1978) and the biography of Frederick II of Prussia by Ingrid Mittenzwei were the first indications that the historiography of the GDR embraced all of German history, including all its inconsistencies (H. Bartel and W. Schmidt). In doing so, a great stress was laid on the difference between *Erbe* (heritage), i.e., the entire legacy of the past, and *Tradition* (tradition), the parts of history to which one feels obliged, which are accepted, and which therefore can serve as an example and be

German Democratic Republic

continued. Erich Honecker spoke to the same effect about the attitude of the GDR to German history: "We emerged from it [history], we are part of it and we will continue it." (*Neues Deutschland*, Dec. 7, 1983).

It remains to be seen how useful this means of a seemingly selective interpretation of history proves to be when applied to the writing of a "Nationalgeschichte der DDR" (W. Schmidt, 1981). Obviously there are no *Traditionen* (traditions), but only *Erbschaften* (elements of heritage) to be found before Müntzer or Hutten--an attitude that troubles historians doing research on the middle ages. Major problems arise when tradition is associated with progress, such as when certain historical phenomena, which in the historical conception of Marxist-Leninist ideology are considered reactionary and therefore part of the heritage, brought forth progressive changes. The reinterpretations of Martin Luther, at first considered a *Fürstenknecht* (the sovereign's servant), then a *frühbürgerlicher Revolutionär* (early bourgeois revolutionary), shows their dilemma, which can also be illustrated by the example of socioreligious movements of the middle ages or even the fascist movements of the twentieth century. In many historical events, personalities, and processes, there is often a merging of progressive and reactionary elements. As a rule, history is too complex for an always undisputable distinction between positive "tradition" and a "heritage" that has to be accepted as it is--quite apart from the fact that political opportunism and trends tend to influence the appreciation of historical phenomena.

The narrow way that historians of the GDR in the 1950s and 1960s saw the task of the SED, to make people "take a pride in the great traditions of our people" (W. Ulbricht, 1952), had given rise to a party directive demanding the integration of the history of socialism in Germany into a process of *Herausbildung des sozialistischen Weltsystems* (development of the socialist world order), which meant that the important role of the Soviet Union in the formation of the GDR should be pointed out. It was during the VIII. Party Congress of the SED that the idea of the "socialist nation"--in contrast to the "bourgeois nation in the Federal Republic of Germany" was proclaimed in the GDR. Together with the treaties between the two German states (*Basic Treaty*, 1972), it led to a change of attitude within the state party of the GDR with respect to their policy concerning German affairs. With Erich Honecker, who succeeded Walter Ulbricht as the head of the party and the state in 1971, stating that "history had decided" about the national question (1974), a concept of history was revised that until then had been linked with the idea of an "undivided German national state." Accordingly, the constitution

Gies

of the GDR was rewritten (the GDR, the *sozialistische Staat deutscher Nation*--socialist state of German national origin--became the *sozialistischer Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern*--socialist worker's and peasant's state) and the lyrics of the national anthem ("Deutschland einig Vaterland"--Germany, united mother country) has not been sung since that time.

In a similar way, history teaching and history methodology were confronted with various demands that often caused changes. This applies especially to some curricula that were revised several times and were even suspended for some time under an SED directive in 1961, after the erection of the Berlin Wall. In the beginning, no teachers in the Soviet-occupied zone in Germany had been trained in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist concept of history; there was no basic literature about historical science, not to mention teaching material that "complied with the new societal requirements." Although two to three lessons per week were reserved for history, history lessons were suspended until "propagandists of a progressive image of history" (GS, 1986: 3, 4) were trained in appropriate courses. With respect to literature, students and teachers had to make do with translations of Soviet Russian books.

The first curriculum worked out under central control, issued in 1946, was based on guidelines that had been drafted by communists of the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland in the first half of the year 1945. "Bourgeois" historians like F. Hartung and W. Schadewald had contributed to that version. It was replaced by a translation with an obvious Marxist-Leninist bias, which was in use from 1947 to 1951. The third generation of curricula was introduced in 1951-1952, and the fourth was in use from 1966-1967 to 1988.

As far as the number of classroom lessons is concerned, the focal point has apparently shifted toward contemporary history. Antiquity and the middle ages have become marginal; in the new curriculum an entire year was provided for the history of the GDR. Thirty lessons on antiquity up to the great European migrations in the fifth grade can be contrasted with sixty lessons on the history of the GDR (1945 up to the present time) in the tenth grade. This development was already apparent when in 1984 the exhibit on Sozialistisches Vaterland DDR (GDR, socialist mother country) was rearranged generously in the museum for German history in Berlin. The fact, too, that the "integration of regional history" has become a "principle of teaching" and is compulsory according to the curriculum (GS, 1988: 80) shows that self-identification is the educational objective.

German Democratic Republic

In the area of history teaching methods, the struggle to establish the appropriate relationship between factual knowledge and abstract cognition in the years 1956 and 1958, for example, led to the intervention of the SED in favor of teaching facts. The "neglect of the emotional element and the overemphasis of the rational element of the process of cognition" (Diere and Jackstel, 1982) resulted in increased emphasis on the emotional dimension of history teaching, accompanied by more vivid description (the narrating role of the teacher was preferred to the lecturing role; Mühlstädt's three-volume anthology of historical narration was first published in the years 1963-1967). More than anything else handbooks on method, from those by Donath (1969) and Stohr (1962) to the work of a cooperative group of authors under the direction of Gentner and Kruppa (1975), show how hard and with what varying emphasis the struggle for the appropriate relationship of a "presentation emphasizing personal experience" (personification, emotionalism) on the one hand, and "Marxist-Leninist reasoning" (rationalism, ideology) on the other, was carried out in the process of teaching history at school. Phase patterns of developmental psychology were replaced early by a gradation of processes of historical cognition (data, terms, laws); beginning as early as the fifth grade, a "systematic, analytical-synthesizing understanding of history" has been practised. (GS, 1966: 656) Even though there was some criticism of "temporary overestimation of the use of special terms--*Begriffsarbeit*" (Diere and Jackstel)--the term *Begriffsarbeit* plays an important part in history teaching in the GDR. Terms like peace, liberty, progress, and democracy, which are associated with special values in Western linguistic usage, are deliberately included but have an entirely different meaning.

Although methodological formalism and schematism were officially criticized, the repeated reference to "progressive Soviet methodology" (mentioned for the first time at the VI. Congress of Education in 1949) nevertheless ensured that in history teaching, behavioral patterns in the presentation and the acquisition of knowledge were favored. If teaching methods are regarded as "actions of the teacher," as "means of control in order to make sure that there are favorable conditions for the pupil's acquisition of knowledge" (Neuner, 1973: 60) the autonomy and initiative of pupils in solving tasks and problems set by the teacher and the curriculum are considerably limited. The concept of a history lesson that is focused on the pupil--*Schülerorientierung*--and that confronts the pupil with a problem he or she has to find a solution for--*Problemhafte Gestaltung*--is part of the search for

Gies

the most efficient way of teaching or learning set educational objectives and issues. It is always a matter of making sure:

That pupils receive the factual historical, ideologically and morally convincing proof that our existing socialist reality is the lawful result of mankind's historic fight for economical, political, philosophical, and cultural progress.

That pupils relying on their knowledge and skills resolutely take their stand for the working class and the party with respect to the basic social questions, never to let slip the political, economical, philosophical, cultural, and social achievements of our socialist society from their hand, but to fight all their lives for the strengthening of this society in our common interest with all their might.

That pupils, being principled and partial, are able to face any activity of the class enemy, whether in his disguised demagogic attire or in his overt brutal aggressiveness." (*GS*, 1981: 1ff.)

This urge to draw a distinction has been moderated significantly:

Differences of opinion that exist on German soil between the GDR and the FRG concerning national issues must not endanger or impede the willingness and ability to talk with each other in the interest of peace. These as well as other ideological differences have to be secondary to the preservation of peace. (G. Lozek, *GS*, 1987: 772)

It is to be hoped that the education for hatred by means of history (Gentner and Kruppa, 1975: 28, 35) is now a thing of the past in the GDR.