

Reports

Nineteenth New Hampshire Symposium

The Nineteenth New Hampshire Symposium was held at the World Fellowship Center in Conway, New Hampshire June 23-30, 1993. The theme of the interdisciplinary conference, "The GDR Revisited: A Critical Evaluation of the GDR within the Context of the Present," was engaged by over sixty participants representing both old and new German "Bundesländer," Great Britain, France, Denmark and the United States.

Access to records and archival materials provided document-based historical analyses of various aspects of the demise of the GDR. Papers addressed developing tension between the Soviet Union and the GDR as reflected in the relationship between Gorbatschow and Honecker, with the inability of GDR political structures to allow for reform or respond to crises, with the GDR state's strategic use of the Stasi to neutralize the political potential of alternative Literature in the 80's, and with FBI and Stasi approaches to the control of literary culture.

The issue of "coming to terms with the past" was introduced by a presentation on the evolving cultural meaning of Buchenwald. Problematizing the term "Vergangenheitsbewältigung," papers presented radically different approaches to the theme: the official institutional one embodied by the German parliament's commission on the "'Aufarbeitung' der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland" and that represented by "Remembrance Work" on the part of individual citizens in Dresden. The church's position on the margin between resistance and compliance was examined critically and questions raised about the adequacy of its self-assessment and coming to terms with the past.

In the field of literature, the conference focused on the attempts of East German writers to find a new self-definition based on Hans Mayer's, Günter Kunert's and Christa Wolf's assessments of the role of the writer and literature in the GDR. New approaches to GDR literature were suggested by a reassessment of Anna Seghers as a Twentieth Century German author writing in the post-war tradition of German self-examination and by a reading of Wolf and Hein through the lens of the "post-modern condition." Heym's, Königsdorf's and Schneider's various treatments of integration were discussed in terms of "Trauerarbeit," identity, coming to terms with the past, and the critique of the material and political realities for East Germans. In keeping with the New Hampshire Symposium's tradition of providing opportunities for its participants to get to know writers from East

Germany, the Berlin avant- garde poet Jan Faktor read/performed his poetry and discussed his work with the group.

A special Session "The 'Altlast' of Political 'Bevormundung' and the Transition to Pluralism and Western Forms of Governance in the New German States" also benefited from the tradition of balancing analysis with experience: Social science analyses of the political evolution of the "Runder Tisch" in Rostock and of the legal and material requirements placed on local governments in the new German states provided the background for a presentation by the Reverend Reinhard Glöckner. Glöckner, the former mayor of Greifswald, told of his experience in local government during the early transition period.

The conference also heard papers on cultural policy and practice in the GDR, including discussions of "schreibende Arbeiter" in Bitterfeld, the role of popular music between conformity and resistance, and the GDR documentary film tradition. In addition, discussions addressed the legacy of problems unsolved by education in the GDR, the Skinhead movement, the changes in GDR "Arbeitermilieus" and in participation by residents of "Neubaugebieten" as well as social issues involved in urban renewal and the shaping of a united Berlin.

Participants had the opportunity to view Günter Gaus's TV interview with Christa Wolf and a number of documentary films from the GDR.

Helen Cafferty
Bowdoin College