

IN THIS ISSUE

There have been many calls for integrative perspectives on contemporary German history that encompass both the Federal Republic and the GDR, and indeed a number of relevant studies, notably in this journal, have taken this approach. And yet there is a distinct impression that such perspectives are still largely limited to specialised studies and are rarely reflected in the broad syntheses of contemporary German history. Where these speak of ›Germany‹ for the period after 1945, the focus is mostly primarily on West Germany, with the GDR featuring merely as a somewhat exotic sideshow (at times reasons are given for this, at others it is implicitly assumed). *Frank Bösch* challenges this and reiterates the case in this issue for the usefulness and intellectual appeal of a perspective that categorically includes both Germanys. This is more than just a restating of old arguments. As the emphasis of contemporary history research has shifted to the 1970s and 1980s, many new themes and questions have emerged which can be very fruitful in the context of the two Germanys with regard to both content and methodology. Bösch's article, and its commentary by *Dorothee Wierling*, are intended as an invitation to continue the discussion, and above all to encourage historians to act on this programmatic plea in future studies as well as in academic teaching and education.

Our cover photo is a document of this history of entanglement: It shows the contents of a *Westpaket*, a care package from West Germany, dating from the 1970s or 1980s. This specimen, however, appears not to have been a private parcel, but one from the pages of a gift service catalogue that West Germans could have delivered to their friends or relatives in the GDR (see also the illustration and description in the article by Dorothee Wierling, p. 121). The photograph itself is in the files of the Ministry of State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS), and hence now belongs to the collection of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service (BStU). The MfS sometimes opened these parcels from the West and documented their contents in photographic form, but would scarcely have taken the trouble to arrange them as elaborately as is the case here; hence our surmise that it is an excerpt from a catalogue. (The editorial team welcomes any further information readers may have about this.) As a matter of fact, the picture tells us less about what GDR consumers actually wanted than it does about Western assumptions regarding what the recipients in the other German state might especially enjoy.

Another theme of the present issue also has to do with consumption: *Peter-Paul Bänziger* questions whether the much cited transition from a work society to a consumer society in the German-speaking countries over the course of the 20th century actually took place. Future research, Bänziger believes, must look more closely at the interconnections between the two modes of experience and interpretative models. His article suggests how this could be done and gives a broad overview of the literature on work and consumption – fields of research which have, in the past, generally been considered in isolation from one another.

An integrative German perspective is again the focus of the article by *Jens Gieseke*. He analyses the ›proxy surveys‹, conducted on behalf of the Federal government over more than two decades, with which the polling institute Infratest sought to gauge the mood of the population of the GDR. Being of course unable to simply travel to the GDR and conduct surveys there, Western opinion pollsters proceeded in a roundabout way – by interviewing West German citizens who had recently visited the GDR and asking them about the attitudes of the East Germans with whom they had been in contact. Such assumption-based information obtained through intermediaries is clearly problematic. Nevertheless, the long-term perspective of the interviews reveals some interesting trends, such as a marked reduction in the degree to which the GDR population identified with the state socialist system in the 1980s. While caution should be exercised in assuming a direct causal link with the events of autumn 1989, the findings do go some way towards explaining the longer term erosion of the SED regime and the changing values within GDR society. Gieseke's article can also be read as a historicisation of the empirical social research of the West.

Quinn Slobodian addresses East-West relations over a much wider geographical expanse: He investigates the fascination that communist China and Vietnam held for West German feminists after 1968. As the situation of women in the GDR was not really a suitable model, West German feminist circles looked to more distant societies and the forms of direct action employed there on the road to emancipation. Slobodian avoids reducing this to a history of illusions and projections. Instead, he shows how the West German feminists' notions of conditions in East Asia shifted in response to events on the ground and personal encounters. There were disappointments, but also important learning processes as the feminists gained in awareness of themselves and the other.

As always, this ›open‹ edition of our journal presents a wide range of themes, not all of which can be mentioned here. An essay by *Berna Pekesen* is devoted to contemporary Turkish historical culture, an article by *Boris Belge* addresses composer Alfred Schnittke and the history of Soviet music, and a piece by *Patricia Vidović* looks at the films of Hungarian director Márta Mészáros. And yet, despite the breadth of content and geographical scope, a perspective that takes both Germanys into account is a key aspect throughout – even where this may not at first blush be apparent. Thus *Cornelia Siebeck*'s look back at Richard von Weizsäcker's speech on 8 May 1985 reminds us that the labelling of the symbolic date in 1945 as *Tag der Befreiung* (V Day, literally: ›Liberation Day‹), on which a general (and often too uncritical) historical and political consensus exists today, was highly contentious in Germany during the 1980s: Since its inception, the GDR had commemorated this ›Liberation Day‹ as an official day of remembrance in a conscious act of dissociation from the West, where interpretation of the end of the war remained more ambivalent.

The editorial team
(translation: Joy Titheridge)