

# COMMUNICATION AND COMPROMISE : THE PREREQUISITES FOR CULTURAL PARTICIPATION ESTHER VON RICHTHOFEN pdf

## 1: Power and society in the GDR, : the "normalisation of rule"? in SearchWorks catalog

*Chapter 4. Organising Culture: Compromise and Communication PART II: ATTEMPTED SELF-DETERMINATION - PURSUING AN INTEREST: THE PARTICIPANTS Chapter 5. Patterns of Participation Chapter 6. Communication with Cultural Functionaries PART III: FROM UTOPIANISM TO PRAGMATISM: CULTURAL POLICY Chapter 7. Responding to Developments at the Grassroots Chapter 8.*

Bringing Culture to the Masses: Totalitarianism theory, nourished by the wider political climate, has been in rude health, and yet, study after study has exposed its inadequacies. Meticulous archive-based research has shown that grassroots interests influenced the behaviour of middle-level functionaries and even central policy makers to a considerably greater extent than the totalitarianism model allows. While the ruling Communist Party SED did attempt to shape and control important facets of the everyday lives of East German citizens, their behaviour exerted a significant influence upon its prescriptions, and they were able to evade or less frequently to defy them. Histories of GDR industrial relations, for example, abound with accounts of planners and managers yielding to shop floor resistance, and of officials agreeing to negotiate and compromise. At times, the authorities encouraged workers to voice their opinions and articulate their grievances – so long as they did not express overtly political criticisms of the regime. In the field of culture, something similar applies. By way of illustration, consider rock music. Rock fans were branded as deviants. Although only partially successful – because the sounds and lyrics of approved bands were so bland, so lacking in passion and authenticity – the earlier adamant anti-rock position did soften, and was ultimately abandoned. The other consisted of p. It spanned at least the first half of the 20th century. State control of mass culture offered a means by which the threat could be countered. Nor was this simply a pre-war phenomenon. In post-war Germany, politicians of both East and West revealed a penchant for politicising culture. There was a Victorian flavour to the pious and patronising manner in which they would preach to the population: If in the s there was fervour in the sermonising, by the s that had faded – but the pieties remained, contributing to that stolid, stiff and stuffy quality that characterised official East German culture in its final decade. By controlling the leisure sphere, the SED p. Art and literature were regarded as means by which popular consciousness could be moulded. Did the engagement by individuals in leisure pursuits such as matchbox collecting signify a rejection of public life in favour of the private niche? This sort of conclusion is favoured by totalitarianism theory, but von Richthofen repudiates it. Cultural life in the GDR, she insists p. Ordinary citizens were able to exert a considerable influence upon policy, especially during the s and s, during which decades the SED was obliged to moderate its attempts to fit popular cultural practices into its ideological mould, and instead adapted its aspirations to popular culture. A case in point is rock music mentioned above, and in von Richthofen, p. Another is the celebration of carnival p. By then the state, recognising the popularity of carnival, had set up carnival clubs in order to channel revellers into circles organised by itself. Ordinary people, von Richthofen shows, were able to play the system. Keen to realise their desires, they were prepared to integrate into regime structures, and this included negotiating and cooperating with lower- and middle-level functionaries. They would pay lip service to the ruling ideology while pursuing their private agendas. The processes by which individuals and groups made their interests felt are the focus of some of the most interesting passages in *Bringing Culture to the Masses*. A typical strategy p. In some cases, where functionaries let them down, workers were confident enough to register vociferous and robust complaints e. She does not see their role as particularly crucial in the early s, when repressive techniques of rule loomed particularly large, to which citizens responded with withdrawal and emigration. In the subsequent 20 years, however, relations between rulers and ruled became more complex, differentiated and flexible, with dialogue and communication between ordinary people and middle-level cultural functionaries gaining in importance p. The role of the functionaries was to ensure that participation in cultural activity was enabled for culturally active people, but simultaneously that cultural life functioned without presenting a serious challenge to the supremacy of the SED. Many

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showed an ability to compromise, to adapt their tactics in order to enable cultural policy to engage more closely with the interests of citizens. Not all of them, by any means, functioned as obedient cogs within the state machine, and some were quite stropy towards their superordinates. Others were only reluctantly prepared to tolerate concessions to the populace – as for example one SED regional official who complained about working with the FDJ, an organisation which seemed only to be concerned with organising dance events p. Much of the documentary evidence that von Richthofen has marshalled is relevant and interesting. But, it seems to me, she has been too indulgent towards her materials. There is an abundance of trivial detail; stories that occupy much space while shedding little light. By way of illustration, consider the tale of a Karl-Marx-Stadt stamp collector, who requested assistance from the state in retrieving some money that he had rashly lent to a fellow philatelist. The point of the story is that the functionaries involved were less than overjoyed at receiving this request. Is this even noteworthy, let alone remarkable? Functionaries expressing impatience at a trivial request? Does this tell us anything at all about the GDR? But there is worse. The platitudinous nature of some of the empirical evidence is coupled with a banality of analysis. Back to 1 Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR*, Oxford, , p. *Communism and Society in East Germany*, 1971, ed. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond Manchester, , pp. Back to 6 April

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## 2: Table of Contents: Power and society in the GDR, :

*Esther von Richthofen Throughout the forty-year history of the GDR, the SED aimed to fill people's free time with ideologically sound and intellectually stimulating cultural activities. First, in mass organisations such as the Kulturbund and in factories, GDR citizens were encouraged to apply themselves to the pursuit of a particular artistic.*

To simply declare that the euphoria surrounding unification has atrophied is hackneyed. Survey data provide the overall contours of how German unification has proceeded, but we lack nuanced understandings of why things have proceeded in this fashion. Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR respond to this analytic gap, and in so doing, give us tremendous leverage in understanding the ongoing lack of unity between the two parts of the country twenty years after the fall of the wall. Contrary to the many other works that assume the strength and coherence of the East German state,<sup>11</sup> each of these authors advocate an analytic approach that problematizes state strength and, thus, allows for a measure of agency on the part of citizens. One of the legacies of this agency is the persistent lack of unity.. Perhaps provocatively, I would like to suggest that far from being lamentable or detrimental, the lingering divisions between Osis and Wessis should be understood as positive attributes of a healthy and stable democracy. This view, which will be further developed in the conclusion of this essay, is rooted in an appreciation of the necessity of disunity in democratic politics. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker. In that work she argues: In brief, the state is a contradictory entity that acts against itself. Within this approach, society is taken seriously, for it is not simply an object of domination, but a challenger to that domination. The state and society approach thus sheds new light on the nature of power in societies. As is well understood, this growth meant that more citizens were incorporated into the state. In short, this entails a more complex relationship between state and society than the purely authoritarian conception. The participation of large numbers of citizens in the functioning of the state allowed for an interdependence to arise between state and the people, in which individuals were not only shaped by the state, but also shaped state policy. Examples abound, but some of the more charming ones cited by Winton include the lobbying by functionaries for Popgymnastik aerobics , yoga, and skateboarding to be officially sanctioned sports, and thus eligible for state funding and support. Contrary to typical views of the GDR, which cite the incorporation of additional cultural and sporting groups into the purview of the state as further evidence of state domination, the state in society approach sees such incorporation as evidence of agency on the part of functionaries. The acknowledgment of such agency advances a more thorough understanding of the nature of power in the GDR. While this disjunction led many functionaries to give up their posts, still others became even more committed to their jobs of defending and progressing cultural interests. Her analysis of mass cultural life in Potsdam is rooted in a thorough analysis of numerous archives including the Brandenburgisches Landesarchiv and several local archives, which included materials from the Socialist Unity Party SED , mass organizations, as well as factories. Both authors cite growing frustrations with the lack of recognition and support that East German citizens received for their Sisyphean labors, leading many to give up, but others to become even more committed. In *Inventing a Socialist Nation*: In short, neither antifascism nor socialism alone provided sufficiently popular bases for national identity. As a result, the Party had little option left but to try to root a GDR -specific identity in local Heimat practices. Rather than achieving the cultural transformation it strove for, the SED was left to appropriate meaning from the past in order to anchor itself in popular culture. Inadvertently it seems, the party created a sense of national identity, albeit one comprised of numerous local identities. Here, he reveals himself a victim of the paradigm that he purports to slay. Towards a Synthesis This essay thus far has relied on a state in society approach to contest the myth of state coherence and domination in the GDR. The oversimplification of state strength and unity is far from innocuous, and has prevented us from attaining a deeper understanding of the legacy of East Germany. Self-interest and the dominance of local identities, rather than a national one, characterized life in the GDR. To a political scientist, these observations beg further analysis. In the absence of such from the

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authors reviewed here, it may be prudent to turn to our most astute observer of associational life, Alexis de Tocqueville. He argues that isolation and inertia, which are tendencies inherent to democracy, may eventually undermine democratic freedoms. Winton, von Richthofen, and Palmowski cite numerous examples of such action in the GDR—from villagers installing local connections for central water and sewage systems which would then allow their houses to have running water and indoor toilets to cavers using their rope skills to help renovate the building in which a Goethe society was housed which gave them a chance to practice their favorite hobby. This is precisely what Tocqueville meant by self-interest properly understood: This approach grants agency to East Germans, who should be understood to be just as devoted to their interests as West Germans. The presence of a totalitarian state does not change this. As the pieces reviewed here demonstrate, participation in cultural organizations was not simply obligatory. Citizens shaped their participation in various ways across organizations. Many East Germans participated in organizations specifically to further their interests, while at the same time helping the broader society. But, it is fair to say that more often than not, participation was much more about self-interest rather than societal solidarity. Denying the realities of such participation is not only empirically inaccurate, which obscures a thorough understanding of everyday life and politics in the GDR, but also unjust. As discussed above, alongside self-interest properly understood ran a current of intense localism, where local trumped national identity. These local identities have persisted in the post-wall era, and represent far more than nostalgia for the past. Instead, the robustness of these identities should be understood as a response to a state without grounding in civil, social, or political society. Indeed, most East Germans chose local identities over national alternatives. While this choice may have weakened the already tenuous foundations of the GDR, there is little convincing evidence that it is undermining state strength in present-day Germany. Nonetheless, commentators bemoan the lack of unity demonstrated by such choices, and suggest that German unification has failed. Such commentary ignores the empirical ubiquity of disunity. As Georg Simmel argued: As the individual achieves the unity of his personality not in such fashion that its contents invariably harmonize according to logical or material, religious or ethical, standards, but rather as contradiction and strife not merely precede that unity, but are operative in it at every moment of life; so it is hardly to be expected that there should be any social unity in which the converging tendencies of the elements are not incessantly shot through with elements of divergence emphasis added. It also engenders an ongoing and lively dialogue about German unification. See, for example, Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft*: Joel Migdal, *State in Society*:

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*Esther von Richthofen grew up in Bonn, London and Brussels. For her undergraduate degree, she read Modern History at Oxford University. For her undergraduate degree, she read Modern History at Oxford University.*

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*Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR (Monographs in German History) [Esther von Richthofen] on www.enganchecubano.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. Cultural life in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) was strictly controlled by the ruling party, the SED.*

### 8: Table of contents for Bringing culture to the masses

*pp. \$90 (hardback). In Bringing Culture to the Masses, Esther von Richthofen looks at cultural life in East Germany, focusing in particular on the activities and motivations of participants and local functionaries, and on how the desires and (in)actions of both groups affected official.*

### 9: Power and Society in the GDR, : Mary Fulbrook :

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