

Socialist Reform Politics (October 3, 1969)

Abstract

For many citizens of the Federal Republic, the GDR had become something of a no-man's-land. Written on the GDR's twentieth anniversary, this article from the West German weekly *Die Zeit* presents a nuanced portrait of the social changes being pushed through in the GDR by dictatorial force and restrictive power politics.

Source

A German Anniversary

[...] In many areas of life, in education and social welfare, and also in legislation, it is apparent that, for entirely practical reasons, the same or similar reforms are being sought and realized in both parts of Germany. But in the GDR it is easier to achieve such goals. There, things are decided and administered; here, they are debated, federalized, and timidly amended. Results achieved through democratic means are preferable in every instance, but they often take an excessively long time to materialize.

This explains why the GDR has gone so much further than the Federal Republic in education reform, in the introduction of new teaching and learning methods, in the restructuring of universities, and in making entirely new avenues of education available. We should not fail to appreciate that every graduate in the GDR today leaves school with qualifications as a skilled worker. Soon, there will be no more unskilled workers there.

We must also take it seriously that children of workers and farmers constitute a much larger percentage of university students over there than they do here, although workers and farmers represent a large part of the population in both places. If the educational system of the GDR did not involve virtually unbridled political indoctrination, we would have to call it exemplary.

Much of the same is true for gender equality, which has been pursued consistently and without reservation in the GDR. Women there hold leading positions in administration, research, and industry much more frequently than they do here. They have access to continuing education, even at an advanced age and, once they have children, they do not have to give up what might be a beloved career because of a shortage of daycare services.

But equal rights also mean equal duties. Women in the GDR, like men, are obligated to work, so they cannot demand lifelong alimony payments from their husbands if they get divorced. That is the flipside of the coin. The benefits enjoyed by women in bourgeois society are also gone. Many doors are open to those who play by the rules in the GDR, but anyone who openly supports views that deviate from the party line enjoys neither equal rights nor equal educational and training opportunities.

Today, when the doorbell rings at five in the morning, it is no longer the Stasi, even in the GDR. But whoever kicks against the pricks is stripped of his offices, like Anton Ackermann, will be expelled from the Academy of Sciences, like Robert Havemann, will withdraw into inner immigration, like Wolfgang Biermann, or will be forced to wear the label "degenerate subject," like Alfred Kantorowicz. That is the fate of people who were lifelong Marxists but afforded themselves the luxury of having an opinion of their own.

Source: Joachim Nawrocki, "Ein deutsches Jubiläum," *Die Zeit*, October 3, 1969; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970*. Göttingen, 1998, p. 592. Published with permission from the author.

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