
REVIEWS

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Review of the book: **The last decade of socialism: Transformational processes in the GDR and in the Soviet Union (1985–1989; 91): Collection of articles. Moscow: New chronograph, 2016. 463 p.**

The reviewed collection of articles was compiled by the editorial board of German and Russian authors based on the materials of the international scientific conference ‘The last decade of socialism: Transformational processes in the GDR and in the Soviet Union (1985–1989; 91)’ held on 27–28 July 2013 in Tutzing (Germany). In 2016, the publishing house ‘New Chronograph’ issued the compilation in Moscow. The publication was implemented with the financial support of the Academy for Political Education (Tutzing, Germany), the Representative Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Moscow, the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Dictatorship of the German Socialist Unity Party, the German Historical Institute Moscow and the German-Russian Museum Berlin-Karlshorst.

The collection consists of five thematic sections, including fourteen articles. The text of the articles in the collection is provided in two languages: Russian and German. At the end of the publication, the section ‘Results’ is presented in English. Thus, the results of the research of historians and political scientists became available to the broader scientific community.

The first section, ‘Late socialism: Recent analytical approaches and research in the latest state of the art’, is opened by an article of Professor of the South Ural State University, Olga Nikonova, ‘Sevryuzhina with horseradish’ instead of a ‘constitution’: from the dichotomous model to ‘understanding’ historiography of late socialism’. As the title of the article suggests, there are two stages in the historiography in question. The first stage includes presence of two dichotomies: a ‘small’ dichotomy, which comprises ‘stagnation’ and perestroika (milestone 1985), whereas the second dichotomy would imply socialism and capitalism [p. 21]. The second stage involves attempts to understand the late socialism and the final stage of existence of the Soviet society. The author rightly notes that “the use of a dichotomous model for the description of the Soviet society not only obscures but also distorts the picture of the late socialism”. The author agrees with the opinion of A. Yurchak about the inexpe-

diency of such ‘binary oppositions’ as ‘suppression – resistance’ and ‘culture – counterculture’ [p. 33].

Olga Nikonova concludes that the number of interdisciplinary works is increasing, the works on the everyday life history are fairly spread and the transition from ‘telling’ to ‘understanding’ historiography gradually takes place [p. 36].

In the next article ‘What is there, beyond the ‘rim of the plate’: the ‘constitutive contradictions’ of the GDR and the prospects for global contextualization of transformational processes’, the vice-rector for research at South Ural Institute of Management and Economics Oksana Nagornaia demonstrates her special interest in the history of the second German dictatorship. In the opinion of the author, the study of the East German society led to formation of numerous explanatory concepts, such as: the GDR – ‘welfare state’, ‘dictatorship of education’, ‘party and bureaucratic domination’, ‘Red Prussia’, ‘niche society’. Such diversity is explained by the ‘constitutive contradiction’ (defined by Detlef Pollack) and ‘irresistible multi-perspectives’ (Martin Sabrov's formulation). The turning point in the history of German discussions about the nature of the GDR was publication of the program article by Jürgen Kokki, in which he criticized the researchers of the GDR history for self-isolation and the need to “look beyond the rim of the plate”, for the desire to inscribe the history of East Germany in pan-European and global processes [p. 40].

The author points out that the last decade of socialism, which led to the collapse of the GDR, is viewed to this day through the prism of the interdisciplinary approach of transnational history, the (dis)continuity of global trends, the ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ civilization perspectives [p. 42].

The second section of the collection ‘Systemic transformation in the GDR and the USSR’ consists of three articles. In the work of the Center for Contemporary History (Potsdam, Germany), the representative of the ‘new political history’ Jan Claas Behrends under the title ‘The road leading away from violence, the road leading to violence. Gorbachev’s civilization from above in historical perspective’ gives an interesting interpretation of the essence of perestroika time from the point of view of activities of law enforcement agencies in the USSR. The relationship between violence and non-violence as a means of politics is of importance for understanding the era of reforms. In the author’s opinion, the Soviet government had always held on to military force. The apogee of this policy was the Brezhnev Doctrine, which led to the war in Afghanistan [p. 53]. Over the next ten years, the Soviet leadership was looking for ways out in the foreign policy crisis. The USSR could no longer be a fearsome superpower, whereby the development of ‘soft power’ was taking place [p. 55]. Liberalization at that time served only as an instrument of weakening the party [p. 61]. Behrends believes that the collapse of the Soviet empire in Europe and the end of the Soviet Union as a state represented two different events and should be treated separately [p. 65].

The author does not limit himself to analyzing the last days of the USSR. After the collapse of the union, Yeltsin was unable to dissolve the security forces: “The KGB changed into Russian uniforms”. It was not freedom and property but rather power and property that became the reality of new Russia. The force, as before, stood above the law, and the state could not protect its citizens [p. 72]. Moscow again relied on violence, which per Berends, is proved by the storming of the White House and the war in Chechnya.

Berends concludes that perestroika was a short period of Russia’s rapprochement with the West. The greatest achievement of Gorbachev was the refusal to use force in Eastern Europe in 1989. The policy of ‘civilizing from above’ ended in the early 1990s. This policy turned out to be the most successful on the Eastern European periphery of the Soviet empire, where thus democratic states were created. Inside the country, this civilized mission of perestroika collapsed [p. 76].

Margareta Mommsen, professor of the Munich School of Political Science, Germany, in her article ‘The collapse of the system in the GDR and in the Soviet Union after 1985’ emphasizes that Gorbachev called the restructuring the second revolution. The author does not quite agree with this interpretation. Perestroika collapsed because of the delay in reforms and their rejection by the nomenclature. In the USSR, there was not a ‘revolution from above’ and not a ‘revolution from below’, but the decisive factor for the changes was the refusal of the communist parties of the union republics and their leadership to rule solely and exclusively [p. 83]. In the GDR, on the contrary, the concept of an ‘explosion’ of the regime was prevailing. In other words, that was the concept of revolution. The reason for this would lie in absence of both a reformist wing in the ruling party and the will and desire of the political elite for changes [p. 85].

The research scientist of the Academy for Political Education (Tutzing, Germany) Michael Mayer in his article ‘Counteract the transformation? Gorbachev and the collapse of the GDR’ reflects on the recently declassified declarations of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the role of the USSR president in the collapse of the East Germany state. These documents open a previously unknown prospect for Gorbachev's actions at the turning point of 1989–90. Based on the declassified conversations of the French ambassador in Moscow, Jean-Marie Mérillon, with the representative of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Nikolai Portugalov, the author tries to understand how the French visualized the crisis in the USSR and the GDR. Mayer notes the important role of the FRG in the process of preserving the GDR on the political map of the world, arguing with Gorbachev's thoughts about the ‘triangle’ consisting of the USSR – the FRG – the GDR. The author's conclusion is that the collapse of the GDR gradually delayed the destruction processes of the USSR [p. 94].

The third section of the book ‘Economics in the epoch of transformation’ opens with the article ‘The shortage of the labor force and intensification of labor processes in the last decade of socialism’ by Heike Knorz, Professor of the Institute of Economics and its Didactics (Karlsruhe, Germany). 1980 was the time of an unprecedented failure of the Soviet economy. It was clear that the problem with labor resources would become acute no later than 1985. The author argues that soon the Soviet and East German economies would have found themselves in a crisis, which meant the biggest challenge for the national economy [p. 102]. The strategy of rationalization and liberation of labor resources in the GDR was called a ‘Swedish initiative’ after the name of the city of Schwedt, where ‘RSK Oil Refinery’ was located [p. 104]. In the goals of the five-year plan for 1981–85, there was a task of releasing the workforce based on the model of the Swedish initiative. This practice became mandatory for all GDR enterprises. In the Soviet Union, an example of Schwedt imagery was embedded into the construction of a chemical plant in Shchekino. The author concludes that all attempts to intensify the production undertaken in the USSR based on Shchekino experiment, as well as those in the GDR that followed the example of the Swedish initiative, did not bring the desired result. The extensive type of economic growth proved unable to respond adequately to the challenges of the time.

Roman Kirsanov, senior research scientist at the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, in his article ‘The financial system of the GDR and the USSR’ examines the role of the commercial banking sector at the final stage of perestroika. The author concludes that the new banks did not have a tangible impact on the economies of the countries [p. 112]. Thus, the transfer of the Soviet economy to the market relations was accompanied by aggravation of complexities and contradictions of the financial system of the USSR: an increase in commodity-money imbalances and a budget deficit and a fall in the purchasing power of the ruble. If the reform of the banking system in the USSR was one of the factors that strengthened the separatist tendencies (haste and mistakes in reforming, the desire to create their own monetary system) and the collapse of the country, in the GDR on the contrary, the modernization of the banking system came as a consequence of unification with the FRG (introduction of principles and organizational forms in the commercial banking sector on the territory of the GDR) [p. 113].

The fourth section of the collection ‘Society and ideology in the last decade of socialism’ consists of four articles. The researcher of Leibniz Research Alliance ‘Disappointments in the 20th century. Loss of utopia’ from the Institute for Contemporary History of Munich-Berlin and the University of Munich Konrad Schidat in his article ‘It is worrying but is socialism on the threshold again? Debates of the West German Left in the USSR and the GDR in 1985–91’ notes that the debate around transformation of political systems in two countries mainly went to the pages of the West Germany magazine ‘Konkret’. Gradually, the magazine became the mouthpiece

of the so-called new leftists. The Maoists, the Trotskyites, the Greens, the social democrats and dissidents from the GDR published their works there.

Shidat notes that in 1987, historians and political scientists were at first optimistic that the reforms in the USSR were contributing to the new socialism but on a higher level. Several West Germany Marxists understood the new socialism in the traditions of the new left. The changes in the rhetoric of the authors were audible in 1988 when Gorbachev destroyed the “fortress of the world revolution ...” with his ‘new thinking’ [p. 122]. Analyzing the difference in approaches in assessing the events of the last decade related to socialism, Shidat concludes that “the 1980s was not the first decade of another socialism epoch, but rather the last decade of socialism that really existed”. The transition from expectations to disappointment was characteristic for all representatives of the left. In the end, this disappointment led to the crisis of the leftist movement in the West [p. 122].

The editor of the news department of the Russia Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (Prague, Czech Republic) Petr Cheremushkin in his article ‘The crisis and disintegration of the system of propaganda and information about the Eastern bloc countries in the USSR at the example of TASS’ considers the informational aspect in the process of disintegration on the territory of the Soviet state. In Soviet times, acute themes and conflicts related to the countries of the Eastern bloc were either hushed up, expressed in Aesopic language or rather ignored or tabooed at all (Katyn, insurrections in Berlin, Hungary, relations with Yugoslavia and Albania). The USSR did its best to block information about the ‘Solidarity’ movement in Poland [p. 135]. In the Soviet Union, there were some closed issues. Quite often, Soviet people received the world news from the Western sources. One of the events that broke the Soviet system in terms of isolation from the real-world information, was the epic disaster at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in 1986. Cheremushkin notes that when the news about the technogenic catastrophe leaked and became known abroad, the Soviet media could no longer keep silent about the truth [p. 136].

The author's memories of his stay in Poland in 1988 brings a special emotional color to the article. “What was seen there did not correlate with what was written about Poland in the Soviet media”. The author was particularly impressed on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Poland's independence. “People came with portraits of Pilsudski – this politician in the Soviet Union was usually called a fascist. It was a Catholic, nationalistic, Anti-Soviet and bourgeois but definitely not a ‘socialist’ country” [p. 139–140]. The author's conclusion is as such: “TASS was still a ‘factory of illusions’. TASS served as a state communist ideology almost up to the end of the USSR”. But the revolutions in the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe and the collapse of the USSR led to the liquidation of the main TASS Editorial Department in the socialist countries [p. 145].

Volker Benkert – a lecturer at the University of Arizona (the USA) – in his article ‘Performative change or differentiation? The last generation of the USSR and the GDR and the end of state socialism’ considers socialization of the cohort born at the turn of the 1970s in the GDR as the last generation being socialized in the GDR. The researcher relies on the theory of Alexei Yurchak regarding the differentiation of the last generation of the GDR and the USSR, whilst singling out seven types of socialization. The author emphasizes the amazing variability of the types of East Germany socialization types and explains it not only through his creative reinterpretation of the socialist discourses but also by interweaving many specific factors.

Research assistant of Sigmund Freud University Vienna (Austria) Anna Shor-Chudnovskaia prepared the article ‘Strength and weakness of public critical reflection in the years of perestroika’. In the author’s opinion, perestroika is interesting for its weakness, although it cannot be called weak in scale: the end of the Cold War, collapse of the Communist bloc, disintegration of the Soviet Union [p. 159]. The author is interested in perestroika, first, on the level of public thinking and public reflection [p. 160]. The Soviet society had two notable features: 1) ignoring the reality; 2) presence of a ‘devious man’. Dreams, illusions, deception, utopia and lies were important political and cultural components of the Soviet society.

In the author's opinion, “perestroika was an opportunity to finally build or rather complete what was long-planned...” [p. 162]. Thus, many historians and political scientists concluded that “perestroika was an attempt to rebuild the unregulated and to reform the irreformable” [p. 165].

The three most important requirements (per Jaspers) are as follows: awareness of the need for a moral and political revolution, unlimited will to stop the continuity from the past, understanding of necessity and desire to create something new – were not implemented in perestroika. Per the author, perhaps this was its main weakness [p. 178].

The fifth section ‘Consumption and everyday life in the 1980s’ opens with an article by Andrea Prause, the doctoral student of the Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany), ‘The parallel world of fashion. Multifaceted erosion processes in the late GDR at the example of alternative culture’. In her reflections, the author relies on the interviews with architects, artists and fashion designers of the GDR. Per A. Prause, the residents of the GDR and the USSR lived in the world of lack and shortages in fashion. Fabric saving, functionality, modesty of style and comfort were regarded characteristic of the clothing style, which corresponded to the needs of the working class. Since the early 1980s, an alternative fashion trend began to develop in the GDR. These people positioned themselves as part of the alternative environment of the GDR, as opposed to socialist morality and aesthetics. Fashionable clothes made of various materials were sewn and sold in their own apartments and

ateliers. The notion of ‘society of fashion deficit’ appeared [p. 183]. The next step since 1984 would be fashion shows and other presentations of various kinds.

The phenomenon of alternative fashion trends as a specific subculture in the GDR was in the minority, however its actors and fashion designers influenced the appearance of urban centers in East Germany, which excited and inspired the young citizens of the GDR with a similar perception of the world [p. 186]. The basis of the alternative fashion trend was made up of people born around 1960, per Berndt Linder, the generation of those who ‘distanced’ themselves [p. 187]. The postulates on ‘socialist style of life’ and ‘socialist personality’, in the author's opinion, had turned into ‘trash’ for such people, [p. 189]. The article abounds with a lot of photos of the members of the fashion group ‘Chic, Charming and Durable’ (‘Chic, Charmant, Dauerhaft’ (‘CCD’)) [p. 187, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195].

Such a subculture articulated itself as a bearer of protest and conflict potential, opposing the SED State. On the catwalk and on the ‘stage’ of major cities, certain non-verbal critical messages could be broadcast that could not be pronounced openly in the GDR; thus this phenomenon was part of the ‘artistic face of the opposition’ of the ‘distanced’ generation [p. 196].

Thus, in 1988 the GDR Fashion Institute registered around 300–400 independent fashion groups, the actions of which had no influence on the activities of the state. This fact points out to the collapse of the power of the GDR. The alternative fashion contributed to the collapse of the East Germany state. Per the author, fashion had become a distinctive tool thrown into the garbage box of lofty ideological goals, as well as the iron curtain, long before the peaceful revolution of 1989 [p. 198].

Associate Professor of the Department of Russian History at V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University Alexei Popov in his article ‘The ‘autumn’ (declining years) of ‘Intourist’: ideology, recreational stratification and ‘shadow’ economy in the last Soviet decade’ touches upon an unexplored issue in both domestic and foreign historiography – the exploration of Soviet life and Soviet people in the ‘mirror’ of the All-Union Joint Stock Company on Foreign Tourism in the USSR (‘Intourist’) shortly before the ‘Land of the Soviets’ went into oblivion [p. 200]. Many Soviet citizens in the 1980s also used the services of ‘Intourist’. The author describes the activities of spivs (black marketeers) and prostitutes on the territory of the hotel complex ‘Yalta’. Alexei Popov concludes that the case of ‘Intourist’ in the 1980s shows that the change in ideological, value and ethical attitudes of Soviet people in the last Soviet decade embraced different generations and strata of the population unevenly, however at the same time it was steadily ahead with regards to transformation of the institutional structures [p. 212].

Professor of the National Research University Higher School of Economics Igor Orlov in his article ‘From political vigilance to ‘reasonable sociability’: Soviet outbound tourism in the 1980s’ considers the historiography of inbound and outbound

Soviet tourism. He notes that a vast array of documents on this issue in the domestic archives is still classified. The author works with the materials of three archives: GARF, RGASPI, RGANI. Orlov provides interesting statistics: in the first half of the 1980s, the Soviet tourists travelled mainly to ten countries: Bulgaria, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Finland, Romania, India and Cuba [p. 222]. During the 1960s and 1980s, no more than 0.4–0.9 % of Soviet citizens travelled abroad. Even in the second half of the 1980s, the outbound tourism did not exceed 1 % of the total world tourist flow [p. 223]. Commercial tourism had acquired great development among the Soviet people.

The historian concludes that both international and outbound tourism gradually acquired the form of a dialogue between the West and the East, destroying the ‘iron curtain’ in the minds of representatives of the two ‘camps’. In the 1980s, as the regulation of contacts with the local population weakened, the foreign tourism became a channel for penetration of the values from the Western world into the USSR. The westernization of the country had contributed to the destruction of the Soviet statehood and the collapse of the Soviet Union too [p. 227].

The results of the overall collection of articles clearly show how relevant the study of the last decade of socialism both in scientific and social environment is. The selection of articles and the structure of the collection meet the requirements of the conference organizers quite adequately. The first section demonstrates the state of modern historiographic landscape that has developed and is developing around the last decade of socialism. In the second section, the positions of such trends in German science as traditional and new political history are reflected. The third section is devoted to the economy in the transformational era. The articles in the fourth section represent a trilateral perspective of the social transformations in Europe. The fifth section of the collection is devoted to the history of consumption culture and everyday behavioral practices of various social groups. In general, the presented materials cover the most important areas of historical science – political, economic, cultural history and the history of ideas.