

Die Deutschen und Gorbatschow. Der Gorbatschow-Diskurs im doppelten Deutschland 1985-1991

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Moving systematically through events in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev, Hermann Wentker explores how Germans evaluated them. His sources include the most influential West German print media (both right and left), the writings of prominent contemporary experts, statements by West German party leaders, and opinion polls. He also consults the deliberations of the East German leadership, the ruling Socialist Unity Party's (SED) press guidance, and the Stasi's summarial reports on public opinion. The result is an encyclopedic, albeit somewhat repetitive, compilation of the ways Gorbachev was discussed in divided and reunified Germany.

For West German conservatives, greater Soviet openness was both a public relations maneuver and a potential source of positive change. "Oscillat[ing] between hope and skepticism" (372, reviewer's translation), these Westerners initially suspected that the media-savvy Gorbachev was adeptly pursuing the usual Soviet goal of separating the transatlantic partners. But conservatives also perceived that a laggardly economy and an increasingly visible technological shortfall (Chernobyl, "Star Wars") would compel the Soviets to engage in productive arms-control negotiations.

For their part, many Social Democrats and much of the liberal press were drawn to what they saw as Gorbachev's recognition of their own insight that the source of danger was no longer one's Cold War adversary, but a shared security conundrum. Gorbachev's interest in massive nuclear-arms reduction, the physical destruction of weaponry, a vigorous inspection regime, and the alleviation of conventional imbalances represented cause for hope that bipolarity might give way to a security partnership. Wentker notes that Gorbachev began his tenure by courting not Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had permitted NATO to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INFs) in response to Soviet deployments, but Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, who had opposed NATO's counterdeployments. Longstanding champions of the concept of an East-West security partnership, Brandt and Bahr tended to "project" their pet ideas onto Gorbachev (43, 142, 162, 228-229, 313, 462, 612-613). But enthusiasm for Gorbachev required a broader base than Brandt and Bahr could supply.

Ronald Reagan's rejection of Gorbachev's dramatic but conditional nuclear disarmament package at the Reykjavik summit (October 1986), followed by Kohl's hyperbolic comparisons of Gorbachev to Goebbels and of Reykjavik to Munich, stoked popular sympathy in both Germanys for Gorbachev, even though Western security experts pointed out that the proposals would have made conventional warfare in Europe "conceivable again" (133). Gorbachev's decision in 1987 to forgo the bigger package and accept a landmark INF deal (Reagan's "zero option") solidified the West German public's trust in the Soviet leader. Downgrading his relations with the Social Democrats, Gorbachev courted key members of Kohl's reelected governing coalition, especially Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Outflanking Kohl, Gorbachev met with Bavaria's right-wing Prime Minister Franz-Josef Strauss and neutralized Strauss's earlier warnings about succumbing to a Soviet charm-offensive. Gorbachev's follow-up steps to reduce Soviet conventional military superiority, necessitated in part by economic restructuring, put Western skeptics further on the defensive. With Soviet nonintervention in the collapse of East European communism in 1989 and the accelerating crisis

over self-rule for the USSR's internal nationalities, Kohl's old suspicion that Gorbachev was cleverly strengthening the Soviet threat gave way to the fear that Gorbachev's fall would end "the East-West cooperation [he now] appeared to embody" (438).

Unlike Gorbachev's improving relations with the West, his relations with East German leader Erich Honecker deteriorated due to Gorbachev's liberalizing reforms. Gorbachev's early backing of Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtuschenko despite the latter's open reference to German unity enraged Honecker and confirmed his sense that glasnost deepened his regime's vulnerability to both West German and Soviet pressures. By contrast, internal party reports show that Gorbachev was popular from the beginning among rank-and-file managerial cadres who identified economic efficiency with both reform and "discipline." According to Wentker, early Stasi reports about the broader population's hopes suggest that the policemen were counseling party leaders to adopt a more favorable line. Popular sympathy for Gorbachev's arms initiatives was linked to hopes about liberalization, particularly easing travel restrictions. For the East German population, writes Wentker, Gorbachev's significance was always primarily about the projected consequences for their own daily lives.

In that context, Wentker cites Honecker's decision to ban five Soviet films and the magazine *Sputnik* in the fall of 1988 as a major turning point. With this event, all hope that the SED might undertake Soviet-style reforms seemed dashed. Citizens and even rank-and-file party members reacted by protesting, petitioning, and seeking out readily available Western coverage of the banned materials. According to Stasi reports, the impression was gaining ground domestically that the regime was running scared. The East German media's "spare" coverage of Gorbachev's seminal visit to Bonn the following June confirmed this impression (525f). Nevertheless, writes Wentker, Gorbachev was not so much the "idea-giver" as he was the "door-opener" (495) for the truly momentous events that followed. The SED leadership's attempts to reduce popular enthusiasm for Gorbachev by pointing out the failures of economic restructuring in the Soviet Union contributed to the dashing of popular hopes for reform from above. The result was a rise in self-empowerment among some, but also widespread resignation and, soon, support for reunification.

A strength of this book is the differentiated treatment of prominent individuals' attitudes, including Eastern figures who later overstated their own support for Gorbachev (Hans Modrow, Manfred Stolpe). Wentker's Western coverage is particularly thorough: deftly analyzing the views of security experts, politicians, and the media, he points out how views clustered around political positions yet remains attentive to differences inside political cohorts. To be sure, the material is familiar, and few surprises emerge. Moreover, the unrelenting narrative pattern of the earlier chapters, as each section visits the responses of the same cast of characters to Gorbachev's latest move, tends to lend tedium to a colorful subject. Even so, there are also startling omissions, such as the German commentaries occasioned by Reagan's call to Gorbachev to "tear down this Wall." Still, in scope and detail, Wentker's compilation of "the Gorbachev discourse" will prove a useful guide for anyone engaged in scholarship on any aspect of the issues surrounding German-Soviet relations in this period.

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