

washers has faded, along with their economic prospects. The book ends, somewhat abruptly, in the mid-nineteenth century, and one can only hope that the authors plan to continue their study into the present day.

## **Alexey Tikhomirov. *The Stalin Cult in East Germany and the Making of the Postwar Soviet Empire, 1945–1961.***

**Trans. Jacqueline Friedlaender. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2022. ix, 368 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$125.00, hard bound.**

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doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.394

This is an important contribution to the founding history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Mostly based on Russian and German archival sources, Alexey Tikhomirov shows how the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG) and the leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Socialist Unity Party (SED) used the Stalin cult in order to re-educate the people in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany and to establish a new regime after the collapse of the Third Reich they could control. Eager to win the people's hearts and minds, they put considerable efforts in presenting Iosif Stalin as "the best friend of the German people," thereby creating a new public space, a new language, a new shared memory, and finally a new society. Stalin, the story behind the abundant propaganda went on, has liberated the Germans from Nazi dictatorship, constantly struggled for German unity and peace, and showed the way to overcome postwar misery, create new wealth in a righteous order, and—most importantly—restore national honor and dignity. By repenting their guilt and accepting Stalin's offer of friendship, Germans could switch to the victor's camp.

It remains somewhat unclear how well these propaganda efforts worked. One the one hand, Tikhomirov maintains that the creation of "spaces of agency enabled people to develop positive modes of self-identification and self-optimization and allowed individuals to generate their private meanings of life under state socialism beyond the binary of belief and cynicism" (309). Engagement in the regime's political initiatives provided not only material advantages, leisure activities, and careers. It also created new self-esteem and inserted personal life and biography into socialist language and behavior patterns. On the other hand, internal reports of the SVAG and of the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) "Eastern Bureau" show a broad panorama of expressions of strong hostility against the occupation authorities and their German agents, as well as the persistence of belief in Nazi propaganda and nostalgia for the mighty national past. The many iconoclastic actions reported in the book may be understood, as Tikhomirov argues, as *one* possible "way of perceiving, using, manipulating, and negotiating Stalins's image in public spaces" (309). But the reader certainly would have liked to learn more about all the other ways. The cases of pure lip-services, split personalities, and individual constructions of "socialism" are clearly under-represented in the reconstruction of Stalinism from below.

This blurring of the overall picture notwithstanding, the persistence of traditional and Nazi beliefs and the manifestations of collective "revanchist" sentiments during the June

1953 uprising justify Tikhomirov's suggestion to rethink the June 17 events rather as the expression of a nationalistic movement than as an uprising for democracy and rule of law, as they appear in today's official culture of remembrance. "In forming local communities of violence, the insurgents experienced tabooed feelings of national pride and tried to effect healing after the trauma of national and state schism resulting from defeat in World War II by taking vengeance on representatives of SVAG, the Red Army, and the SED regime" (355). The outburst of violence, with the burning of power symbols as high point had a cathartic effect: people were able to discharge their emotions and work out ways in which the regime could be tolerated. Together with the regime's cautious restraint in re-establishing the public power symbols, this led to a new stability of the political system.

The persistence of national feelings in the population can also explain why the SED leadership put the struggle for a speedy end to the schism of the German state and nation and the departure of the occupying forces as the top of reasons to trust Stalin and be proud of belonging to the socialist world (a personal letter written to each adult resident of the GDR in autumn 1951, 157). Obviously, this commitment to German unity also contributed to the relative stability of the regime. The de-sacralization of Stalin after Nikita Khrushchev's unveilings at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSS) in 1956 led to another de-stabilization. As a Stasi report shows, people now worried if there was still a chance to create a single German state and to improve their living standards (289). Thus, Tikhomirov can also explain why the regime concentrated its propaganda efforts on the perspective of quickly surpassing West German well-being.

## **Ed. Ferenc Hörcher and Kálmán Tóth. *19th-Century Hungarian Political Thought and Culture: Towards Settlement with Austria, 1790–1867.***

**London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, xiii, 245 pp. Index. \$115.00, hard bound.**

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doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.400

The editors of this exceptionally strong collection of essays have laid out some quite ambitious goals. First and foremost, they describe a gap in our historiography when it comes to the political ideas produced by Hungarian thinkers during the vitally important years between the French Revolution and the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867 that turned the Austrian empire into what became commonly known as the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and by which the Hungarian kingdom achieved a significant degree of autonomy over affairs within its borders. They aim to fill that gap, noting that "an overview of a full range of critical figures from this period has not been published recently in English." (ix).

These were the years where not only ink but also blood was spilled in the struggle to define Hungary's internal political structure and its relationship with the Habsburg dynasty and its broader empire, as well as the extent to which the Magyar language and culture would hold sway within the borders of St. Stephen's kingdom. This book expertly explains the back and forth over the decades on these matters, with an appropriate focus on key periods of change, such as the revolutionary period of 1848–49 and the years leading up to 1867.