

## REVIEW ARTICLE/*CRITIQUE EXHAUSTIF*

RICHARD J. BAZILLION (Sault Sainte Marie, Ont., Canada)

### *East German Elites in Historical Perspective: A Review Article*

Walter Struve, *Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. 486 pp. \$20.00 cloth; \$9.75 paper.

Peter Christian Ludz, *The Changing Party Elite in East Germany*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1972. 509 pp. \$15.00.

Thomas A. Baylis, *The Technical Intelligentsia and the East German Elite: Legitimacy and Social Change in Mature Communism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. 336 pp. \$12.50.

Beginning in the 1960s and gathering momentum ever since, interest in the socio-economic interpretation of German modernization has grown among historians and social scientists. Ralf Dahrendorf's *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland*, first published in 1965, suggested a conceptual focus based on a "sociological theory of democracy." Although Dahrendorf accepted the impossibility of building a rigorous and comprehensive theory, he did establish four characteristics of a modern, liberal social order with which to contrast actual developments in German society over the past century. "Liberal democracy can become effective," he asserted, "only in a society in which, (1) equal citizenship rights have been generalized; (2) conflicts are recognized and regulated rationally in all institutionalized orders; (3) elites reflect the color and diversity of social interests; and (4) public virtues are the predominant value orientation of the people."<sup>1</sup> In the industrialized countries of the West, these traits are associated with the evolution of pluralistic societies; but in post-1945 Germany—particularly in the DDR—they achieved recognition in quite a different context. Nevertheless, plan-rational East German society has abolished the tension between traditional and industrial society which arose in the 1890's and ultimately produced a climate in which Nazism could flourish. As Dahrendorf himself concludes, "the DDR is the first modern society on German soil."<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt, in the light of recent research on the DDR published by Western scholars, that this assessment is accurate.

But what does it mean to speak of a "modern society," whether the prevailing institutions are capitalist or socialist? Are there methodological approaches, inspired by the social sciences, which can be applied by historians to their analyses of the

1. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 29.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

impact of modernization on German society? The West German historian Jürgen Kocka recently noted that historians in both the DDR and BRD have been slow to assimilate theories from social science disciplines.<sup>3</sup> East German historians accept the interrelatedness of economics, sociology and history because these areas are connected in Marxist thought. Yet Historical Materialism tends to have a deadening effect on history in the DDR since it is protected against fundamental criticism.<sup>4</sup> The fact remains, however, that historians of Germany wherever they live are increasingly disposed to apply a theory of modernization of the sort proposed by Dahrendorf. This approach has a highly respectable lineage, extending from Marx, Weber and Veblen to Dahrendorf, Gerhard A. Ritter and Hans-Ulrich Wehler.<sup>5</sup> "The main problem," writes Kocka, "seems to be that it is much easier to agree on the criteria of modernity in the economic sphere than in the social or political."<sup>6</sup> Kocka is referring specifically to recent studies, including Dahrendorf's, of the structural weaknesses in German society which facilitated the rise of Nazism. His point can certainly be appreciated by scholars who are studying the processes of social and political change in the DDR. Attempts to employ analytical methods developed by non-Marxist social scientists to studies of East German society often encounter considerable resistance from DDR scholars.

Commenting on the volume of research on the DDR being conducted in the Federal Republic, Heinz Heitzer (the deputy director of the Central Institute for History of the DDR's Academy of Sciences) observes that "this extraordinarily strong concentration of energy and resources is without question not scientifically, but politically motivated."<sup>7</sup> Studies of the DDR elite, whose perspective in Heitzer's opinion is that of "neopositivism," serve the strategic planning needs of the West while fostering hostility toward the DDR at home and abroad. He acknowledges a more objective attitude on the part of Western writers since the 1960s; but he regards this development as "highly inconsequential," since many of the old clichés are still in use, e.g., "sovietization" and "forced collectivization." Much credit for improving Western perceptions of the DDR goes to such writers as John Dornberg, Alfred Grosser, Welles Hangen and Jean Edward Smith, none of whom had ideological commitments to protect. Revision of the old view of the DDR as a totalitarian society led, however, to other difficulties.

Heitzer complains that Western attitudes are still warped by anti-Communism. Models of the "unitary industrial society" created in the United States have strongly influenced DDR researchers in West Germany. Between 1965-68, for example, the "convergence theory" enjoyed considerable popularity; it faded in light of research on the DDR's economy, which revealed the strength of socialist institutions. Misconceptions allied with the convergence theory—such as the constraints

3. Jürgen Kocka, "Theoretical Approaches to Social and Economic History of Modern Germany: Some Recent Trends, Concepts and Problems in Western and Eastern Germany," *Journal of Modern History*, 47, No. 1 (March 1975), 101-19.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 106 and 108.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

7. Heinz Heitzer, "Bürgerliche DDR-Forschung in der BRD," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* [hereafter ZG], 23 (Feb. 1975), 152.