The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR

Corey Ross

One of the GDR's infamous means of controlling the Population was the Secret Police. According to a Spiegel online, over half of former East Germans defend the GDR. When asked his opinion of the GDR, a former anonymous GDR citizen said “Most East German citizens had a nice life; I certainly don't think that it's better [in reunified Germany]. In the past there was the Stasi, and today (German Interior Minister Wolfgang) Schäuble -- or the GEZ (the fee collection centre of Germany's public broadcasting institutions) -- are collecting information about us. The people who live on the poverty line today also lack the freedom to travel.”
This study of the East German dictatorship is the first detailed mapping of the area, identifying key interpretational issues, describing the evolution of different approaches to them, and providing the author’s own evaluation. A wide range of themes is covered, from state/society relations to the role of opposition to the GDR’s place in the longer sweep of German history, and central aspects of the regime’s foundation, internal organization, social and economic system, collapse, and ‘after-life’ receive close attention. Corey Ross, Reader in Modern History, University The East German Dictatorship, Corey Ross’ masterful survey of debates within historiography of East Germany, is an extremely clear and useful overview for scholars of divided Germany, the Cold War, or modern Germany in general. Modeled explicitly on the classic book by Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, this book tackles seven major areas of debate, first outlining the contours of each dispute, then providing Ross’ own synthesizing evaluation. Review of Ross, Corey, The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR. H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2003.