EAST GERMANY AND DETENTE
BUILDING AUTHORITY AFTER THE WALL

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EAST GERMANY AND DETENTE
BUILDING AUTHORITY AFTER THE WALL

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Preface

This study began as a doctoral dissertation about the way in which the political character of communist regimes is defined by their environments. At the time, I was particularly interested in analyzing the steps that such regimes typically take to shore up their citizens’ tenuous loyalties in the face of unwanted contacts with the nonsocialist world, and East Germany seemed the perfect example of this kind of defensive reaction to the threat of capitalist ‘contamination.’ Its leaders had practically trembled at the idea of resuscitated ties between the populations of the two Germanies, and of course, East Berlin eventually became famous for its opposition to the Soviet detente initiatives of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

However, as this study progressed, I became aware that there was much more to East Germany’s actions than simply a mechanical response to the changes surrounding the country. As the regime matured, its leadership seemed to operate according to a kind of progressive learning curve, no longer merely responding to the changes around it, but slowly acquiring a limited ability to control its setting and even to set agendas for the country’s future. This was important for at least two reasons: first, because it showed that the relationship between leadership and environment can go both ways, as states learn to manage their surroundings as well as be managed by them; and second, because it suggested that many of the old truisms associated with East Germany – that the state was a weak and largely deferential satellite of the Soviet Union, that its leaders feared any but economic contacts with the West – were at best overly simplistic ways of coming to grips with an ever more complex situation.
Preface

Future observers will be in a much better position than I to evaluate what all of this means for East Germany and to assess the state’s evolving role in central European affairs in the coming years. Even as I write, there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the country’s actions and the motivations of its leaders. However, I have at least tried to show that a great deal has changed in East German orientations toward the outside world over the last two decades, and I have tried to account for these changes by putting them in their proper and necessarily historical perspective. It can only be hoped that this approach will provide some useful foundations for future attempts to deal with one of Europe’s most controversial and, I would argue, increasingly important regimes.

Naturally, the many years expended on this work have brought numerous debts in their wake. The rich intellectual life of the University of California at Berkeley provided me with an ideal setting in which to pursue the study of communist international relations, and I am especially indebted to the help that I received there from three scholars: from Ken Jowitt, who shared his uncanny ability to interpret the motivations of Leninist elites; from George Breslauer, who demanded the most rigorous standards of proof and who taught me to appreciate the public statements of communist leaders; and from Richard Löwenthal, whose unfailing enthusiasm for the subject matter got me into the field in the first place.

I am also thankful to many others, who in one way or another were instrumental in pursuing this work: Wolfram and Elisabeth Fischer, Gregory Grossman, Norman Naimark, Paul Seabury, and Dale Vree. In particular, Frank Anheier and Peter Sackmann made invaluable contributions to the book through their meticulous readings of early drafts.

I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) through whose generous assistance I was able to spend a year at the Free University in West Berlin. This opportunity brought me into contact with numerous West German experts on East German affairs, and I am thankful to the many who took the time to speak with me and to share their resources, whether at the University’s Ostseepru Institut and the East German division of the Zentral Institut für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung or at the Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung und the Forschungsstelle für gesamdeutsche Fragen. I am also pleased to have had the opportunity to meet with social scientists in East Berlin, particularly at the Institute of Inter-
national Relations, and while many of those whom I have gotten to know over the years may disagree with sections of this book, I still remain in their debt for the many hours of patient discussion which have undoubtedly contributed to my understanding of their country.

Also, it is hard to see how any work on East Germany these days can avoid a word of thanks to the editors of *Deutschland Archiv*. This unique publication was not only of inestimable help in my own research but is surely the best journal of its kind on any communist country in any language.

Additionally, I would like to thank the American Council of Learned Societies for a research grant financed in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation under which I was able to spend a very congenial period as a visiting scholar at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. This time for reflection was crucial for finishing the book.

The Foreign Policy Research Institute of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania graciously consented to let me reprint portions of Chapter Six, which first appeared in the Summer 1983 issue of *Orbis, a Journal of World Affairs*.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my former colleagues at Hamilton College, who were a continuing source of support and inspiration. I am especially thankful to June Darrow, who cheerfully and expertly typed the whole book.

One’s greatest debts, of course, are not just intellectual but also emotional. But these are also the hardest to express. To my parents, I am indebted for the years of love and conviction that have made me the kind of person I am.

And to my wife, Nancy, to whom this book is affectionately dedicated, I can only say that we did it all together.

*Clinton, New York*  
*September 1984*