Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic

Why did the German Democratic Republic last for so long – longer, in fact, than the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich combined? This book looks at various political, social, and economic conflicts at the grass roots of the GDR in an attempt to answer this question and account for regime stability. A local study, it examines opposition and discontent in Saalfeld, an important industrial and agricultural district. Based on previously inaccessible primary sources as well as on interviews with local residents, the book offers a novel explanation for the durability of the regime by looking at how authorities tried to achieve harmony and consensus through negotiation and compromise. At the same time, it shows how official policies created deep-seated social cleavages that promoted stability by hindering East Germans from presenting a united front to authorities when mounting opposition or pressing for change. All of this provides an indirect answer to perhaps the major question of the postwar period: Why did the Cold War last as long as it did?

Andrew I. Port is an assistant professor of History at Wayne State University in Detroit. He earned a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University and a B.A. in history from Yale University. He has published articles in Social History and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, as well as chapters in several edited volumes.
Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic

Andrew I. Port

First published 2007

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Port, Andrew I.
Conflict and stability in the German Democratic Republic / Andrew I. Port. p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-521-86651-0 (hardback)
1. Saalfeld (Germany) -- Politics and government -- 20th century. 2. Socialism -- Germany -- Saalfeld. 3. Denazification -- Germany -- Saalfeld. 4. Ex-Nazis -- Germany -- Saalfeld. 5. Reconstruction (1939--1951) -- Germany -- Saalfeld. 6. Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands -- History. 7. Saalfeld (Germany) -- Social conditions. 8. Germany (East) -- Social conditions. 1. Title.
DD901.S12497 2007
943'.1087--dc22 2006013864

ISBN 978-0-521-86651-4 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.
...so sind die Vorgänge und die Geschichte eines Dorfes und die eines Reiches im Wesentlichen dieselben; und man kann am Einen wie am Anderen die Menschheit studieren und kennen lernen.

...the events and history of a village and of a kingdom are essentially the same; and we can study and learn to know humanity just as well in the one as in the other.

–Arthur Schopenhauer
Contents

List of Illustrations and Tables xi
Acknowledgments xv
List of Abbreviations xix
Note on the Text

Introduction: The Puzzle of Stability

A Brief History of Saalfeld 1

PART I  UPHEAVAL (1945–1953)

1 Creating a “New Order”
   Denazification and the Seizure of Power 21
   Reforming the Countryside 23
   Housing Shortages and Forced Requisitioning 28
   Reconstruction and Restructuring 33

2 The GDR’s “First Strike”
   The Events of August 16, 1951 46
   Underlying Causes 52
   A Political Protest? 57
   The Creation of a “Privileged Cadre” 61
   “Outcast Elements” 65

3 The Revolution Manquée of June 1953
   The March on Saalfeld 70
   Popular Reactions 72
   A Sense of Injustice 75
   The Limits of Solidarity 78
   Official Responses 82
   Collectivization and Class Conflict 85
## Contents

### PART II  THE CALM AFTER THE STORM (1953–1971)

4  The Limits of Repression
   - A Siege Mentality  97
   - Punitive Measures  99

5  Exit, Voice, and Apathy
   - Dissenting Voices in the “Grumble Gesellschaft” 112
   - The Repertoire of Everyday Protest 115
   - Pacifism and the “Revenge of the Little Man” 120
   - Fleeing the Republic 128

6  Power in the People’s Factories
   - Shop-Floor Etiquette 140
   - The Motor versus the Transmission Belt 142
   - Showdown at Zeiss 147
   - The Schizophrenic Role of the Unions 156

7  Economic Struggles on the Shop Floor
   - Spiraling Wages and Stagnating Productivity 164
   - The Limits of Economic Reform in the 1960s 172
   - “A Real Traveling Circus” 178
   - The Sick, the Slacker, and the Slovenly 184

8  Divide and Rule?
   - Schichtegoismus, or “Shift Selfishness” 195
   - Collective Divisions 198
   - Gender Discrimination and the Battle of the Sexes 201
   - The Unmaking of the East German Working Class? 206

9  “I Comes before We” in the Countryside
   - Struggling (Not) to Deliver 217
   - Forced Collectivization (Round Two) 218
   - Old Wine in New Bottles 220
   - Rural Divisions and Traditional Mentalities 224
   - The Limits of Interclass Unity 230

10 “Whatever Happened to the Classless Society?”
   - The Traditional “Collar Divide” 238
   - Endemic Scarcity: The Great Equalizer? 240
   - The “Triple Burden” of Working Women 244
   - The Local Housing Crisis 253
   - An Apartment of One’s Own 257
   - Conclusion: A Divided Society in a Divided Nation 262

Primary Sources 287
Index 291
Illustrations and Tables

Illustrations

1. Aerial view of the town of Saalfeld.  
   page 13

   17

3. Saalfeld's main bridge was destroyed by the retreating Wehrmacht during the final days of the war. More than three dozen people were killed in an air-raid shelter located under the Saale Gate, which stands behind the bridge to the right.  
   22

4. The Maxhütte steel mill, located in the village of Unterwellenborn, was the district's largest factory and the site of the only functioning blast furnace in the Soviet zone of occupation.  
   39

5. Members of the newly created National People's Army marching along the Street of Peace in early 1960.  
   131

6. A meeting of the Clara Zetkin Brigade in 1968 at the VEB Thälmann graphics factory. Zetkin and Ernst Thälmann were leading figures in the German Communist Party before 1933.  
   143

7. Members of an agricultural collective in the village of Renschütz planting turnips during the GDR's second major collectivization campaign of the late 1950s.  
   222

8. The district's first major "cement-slab" (Plattenbau) complex was built in the 1960s in Gorndorf, a village located on the outskirts of the town of Saalfeld.  
   260

Tables

1. Social Structure of the Saalfeld District (ca. 1952)  
   11

2. SED Membership in the Saalfeld District  
   125

3. Flight of Saalfelders to the Federal Republic  
   135
Acknowledgments

This book began the night the Berlin Wall fell. I had graduated from college several months earlier and moved to West Berlin to study history at the Free University, and I was spending the evening chatting with friends in a café when the news suddenly broke on the radio. That very night, and over the next two years, I traveled as often as I could to the eastern half of Germany, where I tried to learn from East Germans as much as possible about what their lives had been like under “real-existing socialism.” This personal experience largely explains why I decided to attend graduate school and become a trained historian, and why I later chose to write a dissertation on the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The following study is a substantially revised version of that dissertation, which I wrote at Harvard University under the superb direction of Charles Maier, David Blackbourn, and – on loan, so to speak, from the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany – Lutz Niethammer. Their own work and ways of thinking about history have long served as an inspiration and model, and I thank them wholeheartedly for their many years of support and guidance.

I have incurred a number of additional debts, intellectual and otherwise, over the past decade and a half, and it is with great pleasure that I now acknowledge them as well – beginning with the “otherwise.” The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Krupp Foundation, and the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University provided generous funding and other support during the two years that I spent in Germany carrying out initial research for this project. A fellowship in the humanities from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation relieved me of my teaching duties for a year, which allowed me to write a substantial part of what follows. Another significant portion was written at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF, or Center for Contemporary Historical Research) in Potsdam, Germany, where I spent three months as a visiting scholar. More recently, the Department of History and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wayne State University provided me with a summer research grant that allowed me to carry out a number of
important revisions, as well as a generous subsidy that assured publication of this book.

Over the course of this project, I have received advice, encouragement, and constructive criticism from colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic: Arnd Bauerkämper, Volker Berghahn, Richard Bessel, John Connelly, Christoph Conrad, Richard Gray, Siegfried Grundmann, Peter Hübner, Konrad Jarausch, Jürgen John, Rainer Karlsch, Jürgen Kocka, Jeff Kopstein, Charles Lansing, Sigrid Meuschel, Jörg Roesler, Helmut Smith, Helke Stadtland, Gale Stokes, Rüdiger Stutz, Dorothee Wierling, and Stefan Wolle. Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Ulrich Wehler kindly gave me the opportunity to present some of my early findings in the colloquium on modern social history that they used to conduct jointly at the University of Bielefeld. I am also grateful for the insightful feedback that I received from the participants in the study group on modern Germany run by David Blackbourn and Peter Burgard at Harvard University. During the earliest phase of my research, Hartmut Zimmermann spent many hours sharing with me his vast knowledge about the GDR (and his seemingly endless supply of tea). I am deeply saddened that he did not live to see the appearance of this book.

Two other scholars deserve special mention as well. Henry Turner, who served as my undergraduate thesis adviser, first introduced me to the art of history. He has since maintained a keen interest in my subsequent development as a historian, helped me in more ways than I can imagine, and become a cherished mentor and friend. The same is true of Peter Bender, whose wisdom, fair-mindedness, and humanitas continue to awe me now as much as they did when I first met him almost two decades ago. There were few in the West who knew the GDR as intimately as Peter; fewer still have shown as much sustained interest in my project as he.

During the two years I spent in Thuringia carrying out research, I was extremely fortunate to have Lutz Niethammer – who first suggested Saalfeld for a case study about the GDR – as my academic host. He and the participants in his colloquium on modern German history at the Friedrich Schiller University not only provided generous advice and feedback, but also graciously listened to my anecdotes about the often humorous (and sometimes maddening) experiences I had in the archives and in the field. That was especially true of Rüdiger Stutz and his family, who warmly welcomed me into their home. My good fortune continued upon returning to the United States, where I spent several years as a resident Fellow at Harvard’s Center for European Studies. I am especially grateful to the directors at the time, Stanley Hoffmann and Charles Maier, who created an intellectually invigorating space for interdisciplinary discussion, as well as to Abby Collins and Annette Schlagenhauff, who offered their friendship along with their administrative support. Konrad Jarausch, Christoph Kleßmann, and above all Peter Hübner were equally gracious hosts at the ZZF in Potsdam, whose staff has produced some of the most innovative and exciting research to appear on the GDR in recent years. A word of thanks as well to my colleagues at Wayne State University, my new academic home. Under the
Acknowledgments

skilled stewardship of Marc Kruman, the Department of History has provided a nurturing environment that made completion of this study possible.

Some of the material in this book has previously appeared elsewhere. Chapter 2 is a revised version of “When Workers Rumbled: The Wismut Upheaval of August 1951 in East Germany,” Social History 22 (1997): 145–73. Sections of Chapters 5 and 7 were originally published in “The ‘Grumble Gesellschaft’: Industrial Defiance and Worker Protest in Early East Germany,” in Peter Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde, eds., Arbeiter in der SBZ–DDR (Klartext: Essen, 1999), 787–810. I would like to thank the publishers, Taylor and Francis (http://www.tandf.co.uk) and Ludger Claßen of the Klartext Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, respectively, for their kind permission to use that material here. I am also grateful to Gerhard Werner, the former director of the Stadtmuseum in Saalfeld, for permission to use his map of the district; Claudia Streitberger, who also works at the museum, helped me find and obtain permission to use photographs of Saalfeld from the postwar period. Wilfried Peper kindly granted me access to the Maxhütte Archiv in Unterwellenborn, and Katrin Beger of the Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt went out of her way to assist me in locating an abundance of useful material. The other archivists in the former East German archives also merit mention: Many of them taught me more about the way in which the GDR functioned than any document I came across.

Lew Bateman, my editor at Cambridge University Press, first expressed interest in this project almost a decade ago. I am indebted to him for the support and encouragement he has offered ever since. His colleagues Jessica Cepelak and Helen Wheeler did a wonderful job of shepherding the manuscript through the production process while patiently answering all of my questions; I could not have asked for a more conscientious copy editor than Helen Greenberg. I would also like to thank the two anonymous referees for the considerable time and effort they put into carefully reading and commenting on the original manuscript. Their insightful observations helped improve the final product immeasurably.

For many years, a number of friends have listened to me talk at length about a place many of them had never heard of before: Katrin Brockmann, Kevin Cramer, Charitini Douvaldzi, Frieda Fuchs, Ivo Georgiev, Michel Goyer, Lutz Kirschner, Rowena Olegario, Jonathan Rosenberg, Anna Stavrakopoulou, and Jens Trefflich. I thank them for their patience and good cheer. Three others deserve special words of gratitude: Beate Bender, who first kindled my interest in Germany and all things German; Sonja Vandenrath, who rescued me from the archives and, in so doing, introduced me to all of the wonderful charms

1 To avoid any possible confusion: Several sections of this article also appeared – in somewhat altered form and without quotation or acknowledgment – in Corey Ross, Constructing Socialism at the Grass Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945–1965 (Houndsmill, UK, 2000), 7, 95–7, 99–100, 167. According to an e-mail that I received from Ross on February 26, 2004, the approximately one dozen disturbing parallels in wording and content were the unintentional result of “naiveté” and “carelessness.”
that Europe has to offer; and Mark Baker, the one person who made graduate
school not only stimulating but also downright fun. I would also like to thank
my parents, Lois and Bob Sansky, whose financial support made my studies
possible from the very beginning.

My greatest debt belongs to my wife, Sylvia Taschka, to whom I lovingly
dedicate this book. Not every historian is lucky enough to have another histo-
rian as a partner – especially one as patient, probing, and perspicacious. Unlike
Sylvia, who diligently read every word (several times), our daughter, Hannah –
who arrived several months before the galleys – was largely spared the many
hours her father spent typing away in a dark and lonely study. Her sparkling
eyes, like those of her mother, now make all of my days that much brighter.

Nuremberg, Germany, July 2006
Abbreviations

ABI Arbeiter–und-Bauern–Inspektionen
ABV Abschnittsbevollmächtigte
ACDP Archiv für Christlich–Demokratische Politik in der
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Sankt Augustin
ADL Archiv des Deutschen Liberalismus in der
Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, Gummersbach
AdsD Archiv der sozialen Demokratie in der
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn
AfS Archiv für Sozialgeschichte
AGL Abteilungsgewerkschaftsleitung
AHR American Historical Review
APO Abteilungsparteiorganisation
APuZ Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte
AWG Arbeiterwohnungsbauenossenschaften
BACZ Betriebsarchiv Carl Zeiss
BA-P Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Potsdam
BDVP Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei
Ber. Bericht
Bez. Bezirk
BG Betriebsgruppe
BGL Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung
BKV Betriebskollektivvertrag
BL Bezirksleitung
BM Bürgermeister
BPKK Bezirksparteikontrollkommission
BPL Betriebsparteileitung
BPO Betriebsparteioorganisation
BStU ASt-G Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des
Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR,
Außenstelle Gera
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BV</td>
<td>Belegschaftsversammlung, Betriebsversammlung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Deutschland Archiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFD</td>
<td>Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOS</td>
<td>Erweiterte Oberschule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDGB</td>
<td>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDJ</td>
<td>Freie Deutsche Jugend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>Genossen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gew.</td>
<td>Gewerkschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>Geschichte und Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>Grundorganisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HaNaGe</td>
<td>Handel-Nahrung-Genuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Handelsorganisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Informationsbericht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IG</td>
<td>Industriegewerkschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILWCH</td>
<td>International Labor and Working-Class History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHK</td>
<td>Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Kreisdienststelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>Kommanditgesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KL</td>
<td>Kreisleitung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOM</td>
<td>Kraftomnibus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPKK</td>
<td>Kreisparteikontrollkommission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kr.</td>
<td>Kreis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KR</td>
<td>Kreisrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KrA-S</td>
<td>Kreisarchiv Saalfeld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KV</td>
<td>Kreisverwaltung, Kreisvorstand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVP</td>
<td>Kasernierte Volkspolizei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDPD</td>
<td>Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEB</td>
<td>Landeseigene Betriebe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPG</td>
<td>Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPKK</td>
<td>Landesparteikontrollkommission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Leitungssitzung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>Landesverwaltung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxh.</td>
<td>Maxhütte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Maschinen-Betrieb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEW</td>
<td>Mitteldeutsches Elektromotorenwerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitgl.</td>
<td>Mitglied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTS</td>
<td>Maschinen-Traktoren-Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MV</td>
<td>Mitgliederversammlung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MxA-U</td>
<td>Maxhütte Archiv Unterwellenborn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

n.d. no date
NDPD National–Demokratische Partei Deutschlands
Niederschr. Niederschrift
NOS Neues Ökonomisches System
n.p. no place
NSDAP Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NVA Nationale Volksarmee
PB Produktionsberatung
PO Parteiorganisation
Prot. Protokoll
PV Produktionsversammlung
SAG Sowjetische Aktiengesellschaft
SAPMO-BA Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin
SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
Sekr. Sekretariat
Sitz. Sitzung
Slf Saalfeld
SMAD Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SStA-C Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Chemnitz
StA-S Stadtsarchiv Saalfeld
SV Sozialversicherung
TAN Technisch begründete Arbeitsnorm
ThHStA-W Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar
ThStA-R Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt
Thür. Thüringen
TSW Thüringer Schokoladenwerk
UACZ Unternehmensarchiv der Carl Zeiss Jena GmbH
VdgB Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe
VEB Volkseigener Betrieb
VfZ Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte
VPKA Volkspolizeikreisamt
WA Wohnungsamt
Wema Werkzeugmaschinenfabrik
WL Werkleiter, Werkleitung
ZAWG Zentralarbeiterwohnungsbaugenossenschaft
ZfG Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft
ZPKK Zentralparteikontrollkommission
Note on the Text

The original German titles have been provided for all documents cited in the footnotes, which use the British dating system. If the document had no title, a short descriptive phrase is provided in English. Many of the document folders from the Maxhütte factory archive had no call number at the time they were consulted. The names and dates written on the covers of those folders have been provided instead.

Those wanting further documentation and examples in support of the individual points made in this book should consult the original dissertation upon which it is based: “Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic: A Study in Accommodation and Working-Class Fragmentation, 1945–1971” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000).

All translations from the original sources are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic