Dear friends,

35 years after the annexation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), divisions between East and West prevail. At least according to 75% (three out of four) of East Germans, as published in a recent representative Forsa survey. 'The results show how fragile the sense of unity is,' said Anna Kaminsky, director of the *The Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Germany*. A sense of unity is obviously not manifesting. On the contrary, it is diminishing. The historical constellation of 1990, in which East Germans were subjugated, is generally incompatible with a feeling of unity. No amount of sophisticated propaganda can remove this historical legacy from the Federal Republic.

Or can the latest proposal by Dietmar Bartsch (Die Linke) to recruit former soldiers of the National People's Army (NVA) as Bundeswehr reservists (the CDU enthusiastically embraced the proposal) change the minds of the stubborn Ossis? The opposite is more likely. After all, the NVA was the result of the anti-fascist democratic commitment to 'never again'. And for decades it stood in direct opposition to the Bundeswehr which continued in the tradition of a greater Germany and also – quite literally in opposition - across the border, between two systems. Unity here therefore means another subordination to the system of German imperialism, which, in the absence of volunteers for its military, now intends to incorporate and turn around the old peacekeeping force of the GDR.

On the occasion of October 3rd – the so-called day of reunification – and October 7th – the founding day of the GDR –, we recall another result of the anti-fascist democratic process in East Germany: the land reform that was implemented 80 years ago. In this newsletter, we present the newly published third edition of our series "Studies on the DDR": **'The Land to Those Who Work It: From Land Reform to Socialist Agriculture in the DDR'**. Furthermore, we respond to the position taken by Heidi Reichinnek (*Die Linke*) and others who say the GDR was not socialist with an article: **'Yes, the German Democratic Republic was socialist – and we have much to learn from it'**.

We also invite you to the 18th Peter Hacks Conference, supported by the Zetkin Forum, from 31 October to 1 November in Berlin, entitled: **'A dead end in social evolution' – Hacks on imperialism**. Our intern will get the final word with a **report** about his work and a note on the GDR's impact on younger generations.

NEW STUDY PUBLISHED!

The Land to Those Who Work It: From Land Reform to Socialist Agriculture in the DDR

The study traces how in just 45 years, conditions in rural areas changed fundamentally – first in the Soviet occupation zone and later in the GDR.

Liebers, Peter. LPG Öttersdorf, Mechanic. 8 June 1978. Photo. Wikimedia Commons / Federal Archives, Image 183-T0608-0003 / CC-BY-SA 3.0.

One of the first measures taken after the defeat of fascist Germany was the implementation of **land reform** in the Soviet occupation zone beginning in September 1945, 80 years ago. It began with the expropriation of large landowners and the distribution of land to landless and land-poor farmers and war-refugees. By 1 January 1949, over 7,000 privately owned estates of more than 100 hectares had been expropriated. A further 4,278 farms of less than 100 hectares were also expropriated. Eighty years later, bourgeois historiography narrates this development in terms of injustice and coercion, responding to it either with silence or with 'stories of victims' of oppressed aristocrats and landlords. It fits in with the revisionist zeitgeist when Junkers, Nazis and war criminals are rehabilitated and compensated as 'victims of land reform'.

In fact, **land reform** and the **cooperative movement** represented a radical democratic turning point in German history. Starting from feudal property structures and working conditions, economic and political oppression, and cultural backwardness, the peasantry developed into a confident, politically progressive force in the GDR. Highly effective, industrial-scale agricultural production emerged, and with the development of social and cultural infrastructure in the villages, the quality of living conditions in urban and rural areas began to converge. Without millions of farmers and agricultural workers challenging deeply ingrained experiences and long-standing traditions and actively participating in the reorientation of agriculture and village life, these changes would not have been possible.

But it's not just for historical truth that it is worth examining the agricultural history of the GDR. The struggle for land ownership and food sovereignty is highly topical in times when land and food are objects of speculation, when a few agricultural monopolies control production and distribution, colonial land

Kluge, Wolfgang. Leipzig: Farmers' protest. 10 July 1990. Photo. Wikimedia Commons / Federal Archives, image 183-1990-0710-019 / CC-BY-SA 3.0.

grabbing continues unabated and over 750 million people worldwide are starving.

In the third edition of our study series on the GDR, **‘The Land to Those Who Work It’**, we focus on the history of agriculture in East Germany, from the initial land reform and *agricultural production cooperatives* (LPGs) to *industrial agriculture* in the GDR and the dismantling of the LPGs from 1990 onwards, which reintroduced capitalist conditions in the countryside.

Debate: “Yes, the German Democratic Republic was socialist – and we have much to learn from it”

In early September, Heidi Reichinnek, chairwoman of the parliamentary group of DIE LINKE, made headlines after claiming that her party's vision of ‘democratic socialism’ had nothing to do with the GDR: ‘What existed in the GDR was not socialism.’

Instead of challenging the prevailing narrative about the GDR, Nathaniel Flakin wrote an article in response that agrees with Reichinnek's assessment. According to Flakin, ‘a society can only be called socialist if it meets Marx's criteria for the development towards the withering away of classes and the state,’ which was certainly not the case in the GDR.

In our contribution to the debate, we make it clear: Yes, the German Democratic Republic was socialist – and we have much to learn from it! Read it here.

Peter Hacks Conference 2025

‘A dead end of social evolution’ – Hacks on imperialism

On 31 October and 1 November 2025, the 18th Peter Hacks Academic Conference will take place in Berlin.

Hacks believed that imperialism was historically obsolete and therefore of no value in terms of form and substance. Hacks came to the GDR in 1955 to devote himself to subjects he considered more promising and to address the contradictions in the development of socialism.

More than other writers, Hacks devoted himself to the century-long contradiction between imperialism and socialism, both in his poetry, in his essays and plays. He understood imperialism as a political-economic stage in the development of capitalism and had thoroughly absorbed the ideas of classical authors. The conference seeks to clarify Hacks's discussion about capitalism and imperialism and will identify the relevance of his ideas for current conflicts.

With lectures by **Ingar Solty**, **Bafta Sarbo** and our Advisory Board member **Dr. Shaswati Mazumdar**. More information about the programme and registration **here** (please note that the conference will be held in German).

The Sahel seeks sovereignty

In September 2023, shortly after the coups led by progressive factions of the military, the heads of state of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger met in Bamako (Mali) to sign the Liptako-Gourma Charter establishing the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Article VI of the Charter stipulates:

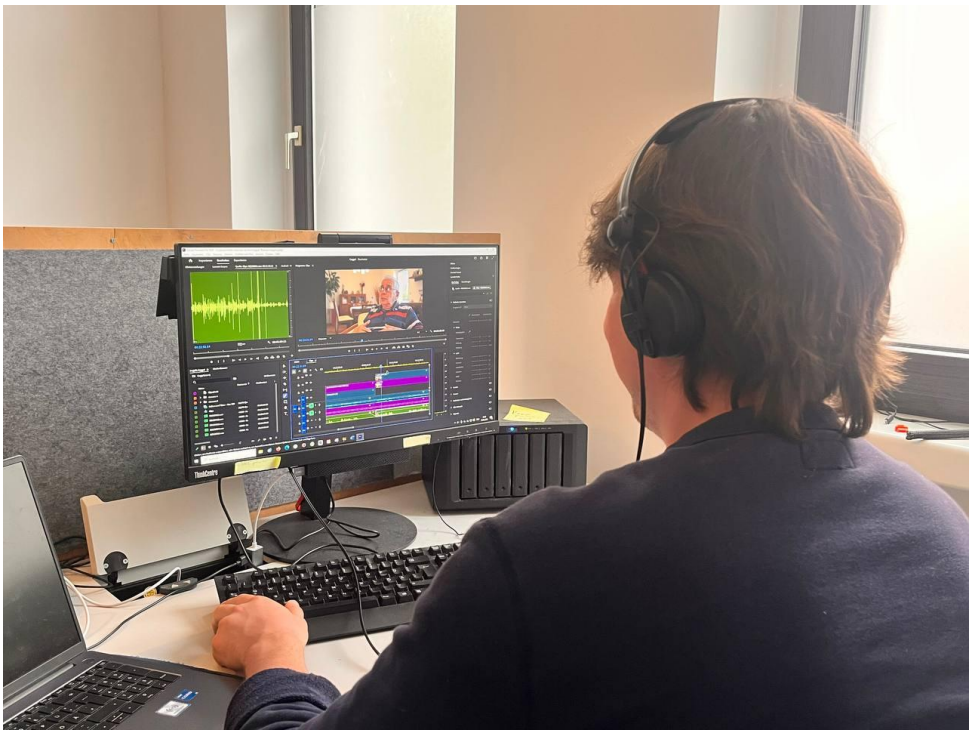
‘Any violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one or more contracting parties shall be considered as an aggression against the other parties and shall give rise to a duty of assistance and relief by all the parties, individually or collectively, including the use of armed force, to restore and ensure security within the area covered by the alliance.’

The dossier examines the emergence of the AES, and interprets it as an example of anti-imperialist regionalism. It addresses the questions of how states in the Global South can deal with sovereignty, the challenges of dependency and internal and external threats to security. Read more in the dossier!

Internship report: A Different Germany

As the son of former GDR citizens who were and remain highly critical of the socialist republic and its leadership, I had a very one-sided, negative image of the GDR for most of my life. It was only as I became more politically aware that I learned to take a more nuanced look at the prevailing historical narrative. Especially in Potsdam, where I grew up and live, this prevailing, dogmatically GDR-critical view of history can be found everywhere. Regardless of this, the (positive) relationship with the history of East Germany has, in my opinion, increased among Generation Z, to which I belong, and has even become an essential part of our identity.

As part of my university degree in history with a minor in English/American studies, I had to complete a 6-week internship. This gave me the opportunity to learn about many aspects of the IF DDR's work. The entire team placed an unexpected amount of trust in me to work independently and, when necessary, provided me with active support: First, I was able to help with sourcing material for the research centre's next study. With the team's support, I was introduced to working in the State Library and the Federal Archives. On my third day at work, I was already able to visit the State Library to review sources on my own. In addition to typical tasks of a historian, I also edited interviews and managed the IFDDR's Instagram channel, where I was able to create posts promoting the work of the institute.



While editing, uploading and subtitling interview clips, I learned a lot about the topics covered in the interviews. What particularly stuck in my mind was the often (deliberately) forgotten anti-fascist work of the Ministry for State Security (MfS) and the People's Police. While the flag of the GDR can be found at right-wing extremist demonstrations in the East today, we should remind ourselves that these marches were not only banned in the GDR, but that most of their participants would have been sent to jail.

The GDR, unlike its Western counterpart, did not only oppose fascists and imperialists on German soil. In an interview with Thomas Geggel (activist for the Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East and son of Heinz Geggel), which I was able to attend, he explained that ‘the GDR wisely and intelligently recognised that a Zionist, fascist state was emerging in Israel’. In this sense, the GDR, which saw itself as anti-fascist, supported the resistance against Zionist aggression. In the last weeks of my internship, I focused particularly on this solidarity support. I was able to independently research relevant GDR files in the Federal Archives and plan to continue this research after my internship in order to ultimately write my bachelor's thesis on (aspects of) this topic.

The internship gave me great insight into the critical examination of the prevailing view of history, which I would hardly have been able to gain in any other internship. The open atmosphere and helpfulness of the team, as well as the consistently good mood, made the long journey to the office easier for me. Learning about a real alternative to the resurgence of fascism, war and genocide gave me hope for a different Germany, where these will only be found in history books.

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We wish you a colorful autumn,
Your team at IFDDR and the Zetkin Forum