

# Editorial

That what Napoleon Bonaparte is supposed to have said was also the credo of both the NS state and the SED dictatorship: „Who owns the youth, owns the future“.<sup>1</sup> Striving for maintaining their ideological hegemony, without doubt totalitarian systems make enormous efforts to win over children and youths. Gaining their agreement and loyalty means legitimating current rule and securing it for the future. In addition there is the fact that almost all the autocracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century presented themselves as new, modern forces promising to dismantle or reorganise decrepit institutional, economic and social structures. Although the GDR was almost frequently and not only at the leadership level suffering from overaged staff, with the description it gave of itself – just like with the “Weltanschauung” of the NS dictatorship – ideological formulas of youthfulness were omnipresent: The old social order was supposed to be overcome, a new order was supposed to unfold by way of the power of youth.<sup>2</sup> “‘Trust in and a responsible position for the youth’, this is our, the better world” this is what Erich Honecker said publicly still in early October, 1989, a few weeks before the collapse of the GDR – turning a deaf ear to the demands of demonstrators protesting at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

There are no comparative studies on the youth policies and youth organisations of the ideocracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At best there are some dissertation theses dedicated to single aspects from a comparative perspective.<sup>4</sup> This is really astonishing, as in recent years the comparison of autocracies has gained fresh impetus, and this not only in political sciences. Meanwhile there are a large number of systematic international studies. Recently, comparative perspectives have stimulated innovative studies also in the field of NS and Fascism research. Against this background, a comprehensive analysis of youth and youth policy in the two autocracies looks promising. There are many reasons for such an approach, for due to striving for realising their utopias particularly ideocracies concentrate their efforts in particular on educating the youth, to actively include young people as actors of the transformation of society.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 Veronika Wabnitz, review of: Charles B. Lansing, *Nazism to Communism. German Schoolteachers under Two Dictatorships*, Cambridge 2010. In: *H-Soz-Kult*, 23.2.2011.

2 See Christian Götz, *Ist die DDR ein Staat der Jugend?* In: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 19 (1968) 1, pp. 27–42.

3 Festansprachen zum 40. Jahrestag der DDR. In: *Neues Deutschland*, 9.10.1989.

4 On this e. g. Arne Ramm, *Nationalsozialistische Volksgemeinschaft und sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft. Wertvorstellungen von HJ und FDJ im Spiegel ihrer Zeitschriften*, Kiel 2009; see also Anne Neunzig, *Staatsjugendorganisationen – Ein Traum der Herrschenden. Hitlerjugend/Bund Deutscher Mädchen und Freie Deutsche Jugend im Vergleich*, Leipzig 2014.

5 On the ideocracy see Uwe Backes/Steffen Kailitz, *Einleitung*. In: the same (eds.), *Ideokratien im Vergleich. Legitimation – Kooptation – Repression*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 7–17.

Accordingly, there are many parallels of the NS and SED dictatorships: strategies of mobilisation and monopolisation when it comes to exclusion and stigmatisation, and concerning the state concepts of the communitisation of young people. Who looks through regional and local archive files identifies at first sight insignificant but interesting continuities even in the smallest spatial contexts: for example, in many places the National Socialist “Haus der Jugend (House of the Youth)” suddenly became a “Stalin-Heim (Stalin Home)” after 1945 where – although under changed ideological auspices – not seldom the same children and young people were lead towards politics. Was this really an anti-Fascist new beginning, as the KPD/SED boasted? In such contexts it must be pointed out to the fact that the lifeworld influences of the years 1933–1945 did not just disappear but continued to influence youth work in the GDR. A BDM member from Dresden who later, due to being a pacifist, became committed at first with the Junge Pioniere and then the FDJ, told the author that of course she had transferred her stock of experiences to youth work in the GDR: “Of course there were many things we had done in the Hitler Youth and continued in the FDJ. These were beautiful things, and we wanted to hand them over.” Biographies were continued, not only at the lowest level of state youth organisation(s). Already in 1945 Hans Keßler had formulated the demand for a campaign which was supposed to promote former Hitlerjugend and BDM girls to leading positions with the FDJ Jugendausschüsse (youth committees).<sup>6</sup> Right from the beginning, GDR functionaries had the alleged success story of the Hitlerjugend in their minds when it came to organising the GDR’s own youth work. Smugly, in March 1951 under the headline “Taking over What Was Good” *Der Spiegel* pointed out to former HJ functionaries changing to the GDR’s youth work; for example the former cultural officer of the BDM, Sonja Klinsch, had been recruited for the same task in the FDJ Central Council. Already contemporaries noticed that at least at first sight the GDR youth organisation was similar to that of the NS state. After having taken part in a Pentecost march by the FDJ the former HJ Oberbannführer in Hamburg, Wilhelm Jurzek, is said to have stated enthusiastically: “Now, that is the old HJ, only wearing the blue shirt. They’ve taken over our drums, fanfares and marches, and they are as thrilled as we were.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, there is reason enough to deal with both youth organisations from a comparative perspective; there are congruencies concerning staff, biographies, cultural and educational techniques or organisational structures.

The here presented volume is meant to encourage researchers to ask comparative questions. The contributions on the Hitlerjugend (André Postert) and on the FDJ (Peter Skyba) focus on the development of the monopolist youth

---

6 Peter Skyba, Vom Hoffnungsträger zum Sicherheitsrisiko. Jugend in der DDR und Jugendpolitik der SED 1949–1961 (Schriften des Hannah-Arendt-Instituts für Totalitarismuskforschung Vol. 10), Köln 2000, p. 45.

7 Das Gute übernommen. In: *Der Spiegel*, 27.3.1951, pp. 6–8, here 6.

organisations of both ideocracies. Both HJ and FDJ claimed totality. They did not accept any competitor, tried to reduce the influence of traditional educational authorities, such as family and Church, and employed propaganda techniques to influence the young people: collective mass rallies, community experiences by way of reading, sports, torchlight processions and singing at youth centres or mass rallies, providing possibilities of participation and social climbing for members while at the same time stigmatising, persecuting and socially disadvantaging outsiders. In view of the ideology and practice of communitisation, of course there are substantial differences: as Kathrin Kollmeier shows in her contribution, the NS youth organisation tried to be a “small-scale ethnic community” whose social practice was oriented at the bio-political and racist principles of the NS “ideology”. The FDJ on the other hand pursued the goal of achieving the development of “Socialist personalities” by way of “class education”.<sup>8</sup> Connecting to this, Hagen Stöckmann dedicates his enlightening contribution to the disparity of claim and reality of the training of political cadres in both dictatorships.

Also when it came to strategies of mobilisation, both regimes proceeded in quite different ways: whereas after 1939 the NS regime made HJ membership a legal obligation, until the end the GDR kept the principle of indirect social pressure to adapt by way of disadvantaging non-members. Already at an early stage, when confronting worried parents, GDR functionaries emphasized that the FDJ, quite contrary to the HJ, did without legal enforcement; however, in this context one withheld that at least up to 1939 also the HJ had used the principle of voluntariness as an argument.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, despite maintaining the “principle of voluntariness” until the end of the GDR the FDJ had many possibilities to control, as in many fields of life – even at universities – it constantly claimed the time and commitment of its members. Until the last days of the regime two days a week were reserved for the HJ, and its entering the schools was not at all undebated, although it was increasingly successful.<sup>10</sup> However, did the FDJ have more possibilities to influence, only because it was more visibly rooted in the everyday lives of its members, at least at first sight? This may be doubted. Both youth organisations faced surprisingly similar constellations of problems contradicting their claim to totality: “Thus, the claim to educate all children and young people of the appropriate age, if ever possible, within the state youth organisations, in order of making sure that the doctrine of the state party was uniformly communi-

8 See Peter Helmberger, *Blauhemd und Kugelkreuz. Konflikte zwischen der SED und den christlichen Kirchen um die Jugendlichen in der SBZ/DDR* (Forum deutsche Geschichte Vol. 16), München 2008, pp. 47–79.

9 Sabine Andresen, *Die sozialistische Kindheit in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone*. In: Meike S. Baader/Florian Eßer/Wolfgang Schröer (Eds.), *Kindheiten in der Moderne. Eine Geschichte der Sorge*, Frankfurt a. M. 2014, pp. 391–414, here 402 f.

10 Neunzig, *Traum der Herrschenden*, pp. 302–304; Kathrin Kollmeier, *Ordnung und Ausgrenzung. Die Disziplinarpolitik der Hitler-Jugend* (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft Vol. 180), Göttingen 2007, pp. 53–85; Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich*, pp. 52–57.

cated, could never be completely realised”, recently Anne Neunzig stated as the result of a first attempt at a comparison.<sup>11</sup>

Both the NS regime and the GDR observed deviating youth behaviour closely and with deep distrust. Against this background Mark Fenemore and Florian Lipp demonstrate how the SED regime reacted to resistant or non-compliant behaviour, sometimes by a variety of changing strategies. This way, based on previous studies, the perhaps most striking difference becomes obvious: although already at an early stage its functionaries had used all the power at their hands to proceed against politically competing youth organisations, for a long time the NS regime relied on the attractiveness of its own “ideology” and exerted pressure only indirectly – by way of stigmatisation and occupational discrimination. During the war the NS state reacted to deviating youth behaviour by sharpening its legal and repressive tools, such as increased HJ squad service, juvenile detention or the deportation of “unkempt” youths to concentration camps for young people. After 1939, such and similar measures were employed ever more ruthlessly and arbitrarily. For the GDR youth policy, on the other hand, it seems as if a reversed development can be stated: In the 1950s and 1960s the SED regime pursued a policy of strict sanctions, bans and repressions, to then, in the 1980s, in a period of home-political destabilisation and youth individualisation, increasingly react to sub-cultural youths by way of concessions as well as integration and entertainment offers, although to little avail.<sup>12</sup>

After all, however, both ideocracies failed with rooting their ideologies among the youth. Their youth organisations were able to influence young people, to pre-determine, influence or prevent life-courses, however at the same time they had grown to become bureaucratic apparatuses whose attractiveness declined conspicuously and whose mobilising power came to its limits. Neither could they meet their own claim to total incorporation of the youth, nor did they do complete justice to the excessive propaganda events of their regimes. Also the important question if the state youth organisations did really lastingly and successfully influence their members for all future should not be answered prematurely. Surprisingly, based on a study on the denazification of children and young people, already in May 1946 the American military administration stated carefully but basically optimistically: „Its purpose was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Information Control and Education program of Military Government in the reeducation of German youth and in its more positive results it showed that of the 134 youngsters who participated only 50 demonstrated attitudes which were still unmistakably Nazi. [...] Reeducation of German youth, the survey suggests, has resulted in creating in its minds full knowledge of the failure of Nazism, but has

---

11 Ibid., p. 312.

12 Helmberger, Blauhemd und Kugelkreuz, pp. 301–304; Ulrich Mählert, FDJ 1946–1989, Erfurt 2001, pp. 79–90; the same, Die Freie Deutsche Jugend 1945–1949, Paderborn 1995.

not yet replaced this with an understanding of or belief in democracy.”<sup>13</sup> And as concerns the FDJ, when looking back to the 1990s probably nobody would like to overestimate its legacy. Today it lives a miserable life at the fringes of the political system, poor in membership and rejected by all parties, a life in the shadow of GDR nostalgia.

The here presented contributions provide an overview of the current state of research and of approaches at comparisons, without claiming to make such comparisons in detail. The latter will be the task of future studies. In the political, social and historical sciences the comparison is considered one of the most important methods of identifying the specifics, differences or structural common grounds of political systems. This is the foundation of all ways of generating types. If we ask about the youth policies and organisational models of autocratic states, a comparison of NS state and GDR makes sense already because of the initially mentioned lines of continuity. However, there is no reason why research should stop there. Still we are far away from having an overall presentation of the youth policies of the autocracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But an international comparison of, for example, the *Balilla* – from 1936 on: *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* – of Fascist Italy,<sup>14</sup> of the *Frente de Juventudes* of the Franco dictatorship in Spain, of the probably hardly researched *Mocidade Portuguesa* of the “Estado Novo”, or of the youth organisations of the Communist states of the Eastern Bloc would be a most fruitful enterprise. Although under different ideological covers, all these organisations pursued the same goal: making the nation’s youth subservient to the state and its leadership, to secure rule and state ideology for the future. It is time to put the youth policies of autocratic states to the test from a comparative perspective.

André Postert

---

13 Youth – The Big Problem in Germany. In: Military Government (Hg.), Weekly Information Bulletin, (1946) 40 of 6.5.1946, pp. 12–16, here 12.

14 There already exists one comparative study: Ute Schleimer, *Die Opera Nazionale Balilla bzw. Gioventù Italiana del Littorio und die Hitlerjugend. Eine vergleichende Darstellung* (Internationale Hochschulschriften, Vol. 435), Münster 2004.