Niemann, Heinz. *Meinungsforschung in der DDR. Die geheimen Berichte des Instituts für Meinungsforschung an das Politbüro der SED.* Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1993. 408 pp.

In this publication Heinz Niemann presents information about sociological practices in the former German Democratic Republic. Specifically, Niemann examines documents from the *Institut für Meinungsforschung*, which was set up in 1963 as an arm of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). Niemann begins the book with a short overview of the history of *Meinungsforschung*. The main segment of this tome contains documents and reports from the *Institut* from 1965 to 1976.

Meinungsforschung was a well-kept secret in the GDR; not only the *Institut* itself, but also its findings were not publicly known. The purpose of the *Institut* was to inform the SED of the opinions of GDR citizens, a practice which depicted a sort of mass loyalty to the GDR regime. The *Institut* reported directly to the Politbüro, and functioned therefore as a political instrument. Within an elaborate system of information gathering, a questioning process was set up for various sectors of the GDR. All questionnaires had to receive final approval from the Politbüro. Despite these ties to the Party, Niemann assures that the questions and methods employed by the *Institut* conformed to the usual scientific practices in taking opinion polls.

The *Institut* officially closed in January 1979; most of the archival holdings were destroyed. Despite this fact, Niemann managed to uncover fifteen unharmed documents, because they were scattered throughout various archives in the GDR. The author acknowledges, however, that because of the meager number of documents, his book can not draw overriding conclusions, but merely individual assertions.

Of the documents which Niemann reviewed, a poll from 1965 demonstrated that there were strong feelings of national consciousness at the time. Such a determination fulfilled a legitimizing function, namely it served to confirm the practices of the SED. Similarly, in a survey taken shortly before the vote on the constitution (April 1968), the poll takers noted a decided majority in favor of the constitution. The survey was conducted without repressive measures; there was apparently no pressure on those partaking in the poll to answer positively. This poll served to predict the success and actual election results were not surprising.

Further information contained in these documents indicated that the approval of the people was very closely tied to economic conditions. When conditions were favorable, approval ratings were high. Despite these slight variances, the results indicated that the majority of GDR citizens had reconciled themselves to the socialist system and to the status quo.

Surveys distributed between 1971 and 1976 pointed to a crisis, as the Federal Republic's *Ostpolitik* began to influence the GDR. The last available survey from 1976 indicates that the GDR regime was suffering a decline in its approval ratings, a fact, the author notes, that Honecker chose to ignore. Instead of accepting the crisis situation, Honecker twisted the poll results to indicate a positive reaction among the people.

Niemann presents copies of the documents in their entirety. The reader may therefore draw conclusions about the purpose of *Meinungsforschung* in the GDR. Although not all-encompassing, Niemann's presentation of these documents does present an inside look at the psyche of the SED and the situation of the average GDR citizen.

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