

WALTER SCHMIDT:
Prussia and the German Culture of History

The 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Kingdom of Prussia is celebrated in 2001 with great pomp and expense. In the Land of Brandenburg alone, government funds pay for more than 400 events. Walter Schmidt, senior expert of Marxist historiography on the 1848 revolution, analyses the public images of two major events in Prussian-German history. He critically investigates the public image of the 1848 revolution from the time of its outbreak until today. And he looks into the historic perception of the foundation of the German Reich in 1871. With a look at the »Prussian Year 2001«, he concludes that the two Länder, Berlin and Brandenburg, shall finally be prepared to merge – a move that had already failed in 1997 because of the resistance of the Brandenburg citizens.

ULRICH BUSCH and ANJA SCHNEIDER:
Much Consumption, but small Growth.
On the Effects of the Transfer-Payments

Wolfgang Thierse, by stating that one decade after unification, the West German economy is booming while the East is balancing on a knife's edge, made an invitation to rethink the promotion of economic development in eastern Germany. This raises a series of problems, e.g. of the validity of the existing economic policy strategy, the distribution of unification's costs and benefits, the results of the Aufbau Ost and the effects of Solidarpakt I. But above all, is the question concerning the effects produced by the transfer payments, their benefits and contribution to strengthening the economic basis of eastern Germany. The analysis draws the conclusion that the main effect of the transfers consists in maintaining living standards. But there was too little investment support for a self-sustaining economic upturn.

Hubert Laitko:
The Role of Education in a Future Society
with Multiple Development Options

If we characterize future society as a social community in which science plays a crucial role, then we must recognize that we are talking of an »educational society«. But this does not mean – as often suggested – that the main challenge is to learn how to operate a computer or how to use the internet. The most important question is what kind of education will be useful in a social community with very uncertain, and probably highly risky future. In such a situation, where multiple development options exist, the educational system has to provide two development resources. First, it must deliver a complex basic knowledge that enables the individual to understand ongoing processes. And second, it must guarantee diversification, i.e. simultaneous co-existence of various individual specialisations. But beside this the society as a whole must be open enough to give everyone the opportunity to participate in decision making, and this means a future sustainable society ought to be much more democratic than social reality is now.

Meinhard Creydt:

Off the main road or on a special development path: Towards a criticism of German approaches to come to terms with history

An influential current in German historical studies supposes a »special German development path«. This approach transforms a moral judgement into a causal pseudo-explanation, of events particularly in the past century, seeing them as founded upon a monolithically conceived »German Essence« or a godly evil. The author argues, on the contrary, that National Socialism should be understood from an analysis of the development of capitalist/bourgeois society and its specific historical constellation after World War I. In its conclusion, this essay discusses also the mentalities taking attractive, moralizing approaches to this historical period and the perpetuation of Anti-German clichés.

Jürgen Leibiger:

The Property Question in 21st Century Capitalism

The crash of socialism was closely connected with total state-ownership, and its not correlating with the character and degree of the socialization of production. In transnationalised capitalism, property relations are very diverse and differentiated. Thus socialist policy has to take a different approach to the property question, that should take into consideration various forms of ownership and property, of appropriation and possession and of their legal forms, and the possibilities of participation and democracy. While in highly developed capitalist countries the struggle for democracy and worker-participation in the economy should be at the center of a socialist economic policy, the vision of an alternative socialist society has to start from a re-evaluation of the differentiation and diversity of today's property. Instead of a single act violent of expropriation, we will step forward in a long historical iterative process in search of the most efficient property forms. In most developing countries, it is at first necessary to create opportunities to work for simple human existence. In these cases property relations are not so important.

Ulla Plener:

Economic Democracy

Analysis of DGB (German Trade Union Federation), SPD and PDS documents of the late 1990s show that concepts of economic democracy – although included in the DGB Political Program – are no longer advocated by the leaderships of the DGB and the SPD. They are however still defended and, in view of upcoming new problems and challenges, even further developed in DGB member unions, in the SPD membership and, particularly, in and by the PDS. The demands and proposals made by left trade union members and social democrats, as well as by socialists in and outside the PDS, outline the draft concept for public-interest-oriented and democratic economic activities which are simultaneously implemented both from the top-down i.e. by the state – and bottom-up – i.e. from the grass roots of society. There are real opportunities and approaches stimulating a democratic movement for such a project. In addition, the article provides a definition of »social justice« as a category of political economy.

Redaktion:
Jörg Schultz,
Arndt Hopfmann