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Manfred Hagen. *DDR-Juni '53: Die Erste Volkserhebung im Stalinismus*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992. 248 pp. DM 38 (paper), ISBN 978-3-515-06007-3.

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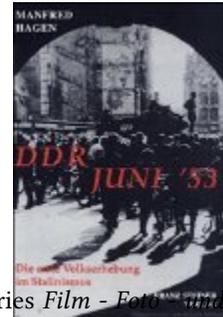
Historians who wish to deal properly with post-1945 Germany will have to devote considerable attention to the 17 June 1953 uprising in the German Democratic Republic. The opening of the archives of the former Soviet bloc has begun to reveal the major significance of the uprising. It was more widespread and involved more segments of the population than had been previously believed, thus suggesting an underlying opposition in the early years of the GDR that the present historical literature has not adequately addressed. Manfred Hagen's work is the first attempt at a comprehensive treatment of the events of 17 June on the streets and in the factories of the GDR, with tangential reference to the international and internal political implications. Arnulf Baring's *Der 17. Juni 1953* (updated 1983), long the standard work in the field, simply did not have the sources necessary to be comprehensive. Works that emerged soon after 1989, such as Torsten Diedrich's *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR* (1991) or *Das Herrnstadt Dokument* (1990) by Nadja Stulz-Herrnstadt, tended to focus on particular aspects of the uprising. Other works have since expanded on Hagen's, including *Der Tag X* (1995) by Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle, and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk.

DDR-Juni '53 is based on a variety of sources. Hagen relies largely on interviews with participants as well as approximately 400 letters that he received from East Germans who responded to his advertisements in East German newspapers in 1990 for eye-witness accounts of the uprising. Another major source is the Party Organs record group in the Archives of the Party and Mass Organizations of the GDR. Hagen has used this group extensively, while he has used only sparingly the papers of Walter Ulbricht. He has not made use of other important record groups such as the *Buero Ulbricht* files, or the Ministry of Interior files in Potsdam. Other sources used

were photos and tapes from the series *Film - Foto - Tonquellen zum 17. Juni 1953 in Berlin* produced by the *Institut fuer Wissenschaftlichen Film* in Goettingen. Hagen also uses the main secondary works, with a heavy reliance on Diedrich.

The book is divided into a brief background discussion of the uprising, followed by sixteen chapters, each dealing with a particular aspect of 17 June, such as the leadership of the strikes or the role of "agents." The work concludes with a summary of the immediate effects of the uprising and some general remarks. The background discussion is the standard explanation of the uprising. The "building of socialism" proclaimed at the Second Party Conference of the SED in July 1952 led to a buildup of heavy industry at the expense of consumer industry, and a subsequent decrease in the standard of living. The latent discontent came to a head with the announcement of increased work norms on 28 May 1953, and ultimately led to strikes when the norms were not rescinded with the announcement of the "New Course" on 11 June 1953. Hagen offers no new insights into the origin of the uprising in this section, although he touches on various areas of discontent that are often overlooked, such as the SED campaigns against the church and the withdrawal of food cards from, among others, independent business workers and people who worked in West Berlin. The most intriguing factor, however, is brought up in a later chapter when he discusses the rearming of East Germany, which had been publicly discussed, as a source of discontent. East German armed forces would have been the clearest evidence of Germany's division, a fact which was still unacceptable to many East Germans.

In the following section, Hagen addresses the uprising itself. By dividing the uprising into individual



aspects, and treating the events as parallel rather than chronological, Hagen offers new insights into the extent of the uprising. His approach reveals, for example, that striking workers often encountered protesting groups on the streets already, not groups who joined workers only *after* they saw the workers protesting (199). Similarly, a number of factories went on strike virtually simultaneously with Berlin, suggesting that conditions for disturbances were rife throughout the GDR, and that Berlin's importance as the catalyst may be exaggerated.

Hagen's greatest contribution to the present literature is his discussion on the nature of the uprising. He demonstrates that construction workers did indeed begin the uprising, and that the working class overall played a large role throughout, but that members from a wide range of social groups participated. He argues convincingly, especially in his chapter on strike leadership, that the middle class, technical intelligentsia, farmers, youth, and women all made important contributions to the demonstrations. Hagen suggests that this participation may have been the reason that political slogans were introduced early in the uprising (200). Through his discussion on participation, Hagen furthers his choice of "popular uprising" (*Volkserhebung*) as the correct term for the phenomena of June 17, having ruled out "revolt" (*Aufstand*) due to the lack of clear and premeditated leadership. The author's thesis on the extent and nature of the

uprising surpasses the view put forward by Baring that the uprising was limited, that it involved only workers, and that even then it included but a small percentage of workers.

There are several drawbacks to this work, however. Although there is an enormous amount of detail on the uprising, the sources are suspect. At several junctures, the author has relied solely on letters from eye-witnesses without any corroborating archival evidence. His statement, for example, that there were attacks on *Kasernierte Volkspolizei* barracks, is based on one eye-witness report (51). Secondly, he does not address the long term effect of June 17 on other uprisings in eastern Europe, or on the revolution of 1989 in the GDR, as he suggested he would do in the introduction. Lastly, the footnoting style is awkward. Hagen has used a numberless method based on either the first words in a sentence or on a sentence's content. The result is that the reader must refer to the endnotes at virtually every sentence to see if a source is cited. In all, *DDR-Juni '53* advances our understanding of the 17 June uprising moderately, but the source basis prevents it from being a thorough treatment of the subject.

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