

Wilfried Loth. *Die Sowjetunion und die deutsche Frage: Studien zur sowjetischen Deutschlandpolitik.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007. 318 pp. EUR 24.90, paper, ISBN 978-3-525-36298-3.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Stalin's Unwanted Child, Wilfried Loth's book of 1994, initiated a fierce, long-lasting controversy on Soviet postwar policy toward Germany.[1] Four years after German unification, Loth's claims that Joseph Stalin had not sought the establishment of a separate socialist state and that he had seriously favored a unified democratic Germany (and not merely for propaganda purposes) jolted one of the cornerstones of the West German self-conception. Heinrich August Winkler, in later years the author of a monumental work about Germany's long road to the West and awarded the virtual title "Historian of the Berlin Republic," called Loth's views more or less "bizarre." [2] By 1994, Loth was supporting his contention from within the SED archives, mainly from the notes of Wilhelm Pieck, which he also edited, together with Rolf Badstübner.[3] But since Pieck only wrote down some key words rather than entire thoughts, his scribbles leave room for interpretation. Loth's new book is based on extended findings from the archives, mostly those of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. It is a collection of nine essays,

six of which are reprinted. It begins with a reply to the reviewers of *Stalin's Unwanted Child*. Loth accuses them of exploiting meager arguments, of being poorly informed, and of committing "abstruse prevarications" and seeking "cheap effects" (p. 26). Despite this ongoing polemic, the book is perhaps more worthy of scholars' attention than is apparent at first.

After the opening piece, the second and third articles, both published for the first time here, deal with Soviet plans during and shortly after World War II. Loth explains that Stalin at first favored partitioning the Reich into three or more separate states, but since he failed to reach precise agreement on this project at Tehran and Yalta, he eventually changed his mind. In the spring of 1945, Loth concludes, the Soviet leadership became "an advocate of German unity" (p. 59). Essays 4 and 5 cover the road toward partition and the foundation of the GDR. Loth follows the reasoning Stalin outlined on August 2, 1948 (when Soviet authorities had already imposed the blockade upon Berlin): that the western Allies forced

the Soviet Union to install a government in its zone of occupation, contrary to its wishes. Only after Konrad Adenauer was elected chancellor of the Federal Republic did Stalin assent to launching the GDR.

The Stalin Note of March 10, 1952 is widely discussed in the next two studies, which are based on documents of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Fifteen of these are found, translated into German, in the appendix. Loth traces back the stages of development in this statement from the first proposal of February 1951 to the final draft. He is convinced that Stalin actually wanted what he suggested: a united, democratic, neutral Germany. In the last two essays of the volume, Loth examines Soviet foreign policy after Stalin's death and in the context of the uprising on June 17, 1953. He argues that at this point, when both Lavrentii Beria, Stalin's notorious executioner, and Winston Churchill urged the solution of the German problem, the "window of opportunity" for achieving this goal was even more widely open than it had been following the Stalin Note of 1952.

The book is written in a fervent style, which makes--to a certain extent--for entertaining reading. One can sense Loth's frustration that *Stalin's Unwanted Child* did not receive broad acceptance either in the academic community or among the public. He is convinced that this skepticism is due to the fact that his theses do not fit into the traditional worldview maintained in the FRG, and he frequently polemicizes against this position. The net effect of such language, however, seems primarily to consist of reassuring himself, and leads to apodictic pronouncements, like his proclamation of the "end of the legend" that the Stalin Note was intended as a propaganda coup. This argument appears awkward in view of the fact that only a few months after Loth's book was released, Peter Ruggenthaler presented his own new archival findings on the same subject.[4] Ruggenthaler had gained access to the Molotov papers, which were still classified when Loth was origi-

nally writing. Although Molotov had been fired as foreign minister in 1949, he still controlled the foreign policy branch of the party. Therefore, his papers represent a much closer view of the decision-making process behind the Stalin Note than those Loth had examined. The Molotov papers reveal that the Soviet leadership was fully aware that the United States would never retreat from the European theater and that the Stalin Note was in this respect pointless. It was thus only intended to stimulate opposition to the integration of the Federal Republic into the West and thus to destabilize the young democracy.

Even so, it would be too easy a task merely to dismiss Loth's book with reference to Ruggenthaler. The documents Loth presents are important nonetheless, and his arguments deserve serious consideration. Such consideration is somewhat hindered by the careless editing of the volume. Aside from many spelling errors, for example, on p. 70 the same paragraph is printed twice in a row. As far as German sources are concerned, Loth is mainly drawing upon files from the former archives of the SED, which has been part of the Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-BA) since 1993. In the first essay, however, Loth still refers to the Central Party Archive, while in the others he cites the SAPMO-BA; sometimes he gives the old IDs of the archival holdings, sometimes the new ones. Readers wishing to trace a certain document quoted in the references are thus likely to get lost. Similar chaos is found in the spelling of Russian words. Loth uses three variants: the so-called *Duden* transcription, the German academic transliteration, and the English transliteration, and occasionally he even combines these in one word or phrase. These misspellings of Russian names, acronyms, and initials (for instance, S. A. Golunskij rather than C. A. Golunskij; Gromkyo rather than Gromyko; and not Kudrjawtzew but Kudrjawzow [Duden], Kudrjavcev [academic German] or Kudriavtsev [English]) are continued in the appendix of translated

documents and raise questions about the reliability of the translations. Not having the original documents at hand, I did not find any actual indication that the translations are incorrect, but given the level of controversy that surrounds this subject and the capacity for even a tiny linguistic nuance to be decisive, scholars should be aware that they might not be secure in relying on these translations.

Scholarly skepticism about Loth's use of the documents is also based on his failure to weigh them to discuss different interpretations. Instead, he uses them only to support his own point of view. This pattern can be seen in Loth's handling of the case of Colonel Sergei Tiul'panov, the reputedly most influential head of the information division of the Soviet Military Administration (SMA). Loth sums up what he already had revealed in *Stalin's Unwanted Child*: that Tiul'panov and Walter Ulbricht pursued the establishment of a socialist and separate East German state on their own initiative, with the Soviet Union serving as a model. This activity, according to Loth, ran "objectively" contrary to Stalin's intentions. As a proof for this theory, Loth quotes reports composed by control commissions from Moscow that criticized Tiul'panov for accelerating the setting up of socialist structures, and he points out this development as an example of how events frequently evaded central control. But one could also draw different conclusions from these sources. Tiul'panov's dismissal had been suggested to Stalin repeatedly since the autumn of 1946, but only other servants of the SMA were replaced. Did Tiul'panov evade firing because he was not such an important figure as we have assumed, or rather because he enjoyed protection by Andrei Zhdanov, Michail Suslov, or others?[5] We simply do not know. It is also possible that Stalin did not consider the issues discussed in criticizing Tiul'panov (among them the question of German unity) as essential enough to take action.

This point seems crucial to me. The documents Loth edits can also be read to suggest that for the Soviets, as opposed to the Germans, the question of a united Germany was not at the top of the political agenda. The main strategic objective for the Soviets was to safeguard the Soviet Union from any attack and not only from a new German aggression (one rather unlikely in the wake of its then-recent total defeat). From Stalin's point of view, it was the United States rather than Germany that posed the main threat to the Soviet Union, and therefore, he aimed to encourage U.S. troops to withdraw from Germany or, even better, from Europe, and to prevent Germany from being integrated into the western political, economic, and military system. This objective corresponds with a basic line of Soviet foreign policy from the 1920s onward: to hinder a united western front against the Soviet Union. In order to achieve this goal, Stalin pretended he was ready to accept a democratic and unified, but neutral, Germany. But even in the unlikely case that the Allies would have agreed to Stalin's suggestions, the draft of the peace treaty contained provisions that ensured the Soviet Union an immense influence on the future united Germany.

Loth is convinced that Stalin and his successors wanted to introduce a civil democracy in Germany following the constitution of the Weimar Republic. In making this claim, he draws mainly upon an address delivered by Soviet prime minister Sergei Malenkov to an SED delegation on June 2, 1953. But it is hard to forget that the Weimar Republic was not a stable democracy and that the German Communist Party, which had been loyal to Moscow, was part of its problems. A closer look at the peace treaty drafted by the Soviet Foreign Ministry allows the assumption that a Weimar-like situation is exactly what its authors had in mind: to establish an unstable political system in Germany that would provide the Soviet Union with an opportunity to intervene. Four areas of possible conflict that would have plagued any state constituted along such lines should

spring immediately to mind. First among these was the recognition of the Oder-Neiße line. In 1952 the expulsion from the *Ostgebiete* dated back only seven years, the expellees were far from integrated into East or West German society, and the desire to return was extremely strong among the expellees. If we consider that in 1972, Willy Brandt's government was almost voted out of office because of the *Ostverträge*, we can easily imagine the tensions twenty years earlier. Second, the draft treaty affirmed the expropriation of industry and land reform that had been enforced by the SMA. Even after 1990, this question caused political turbulence and ongoing legal proceedings. How could peace under the rule of law have been maintained if ownership of more than one hundred hectares of land was inadmissible in one part of Germany, but remained untouched in the other part? A third problem would have been presented by the liquidation of the European Coal and Steel Community (*Montanunion*) and concession of controlling rights in the Ruhr to the Soviet Union. The *Montanunion* was a cornerstone of the German economic recovery and of reconciliation with France and its other signatories. Annulment of the treaty for the benefit of German unification would have led to severe conflict with the new state's western neighbors. Additionally, granting the Soviet Union access to the Ruhr's industrial potential, which the Allies had always prevented, would have given Stalin a tool for manipulating the German economy. A final problem would have been created by the need for acknowledgment of the Allies' holdings in Germany. At first glance, this provision appears harmless, but in fact it was highly critical for the economy. After 1945, the SMA turned vast parts of key industries that had not been destroyed or removed into Sowjetische Aktiengesellschaften (SAGs). In these cases, the Soviet Union was officially registered as the owner of both property and plants. SAGs were part of the Soviet reparations scheme and constituted 30 to 40 percent of the East German economy; in the energy and chemical sectors, the ratio was even

higher.[6] Thus, even after the pullout of the Red Army, the Soviet Union would have had an enormous influence on the German economy through SAGs.

How highly the authors of the draft treaty rated the economic questions as an aspect of the settlement can be extracted from its chapter, "Sanctions": German noncompliance with the provisions for the Ruhr area was to trigger reoccupation. But the draft also contains elastic clauses. Every activity that cultivated militarism, fascism, or revanchism was to be strongly prohibited and prosecuted. Even a cursory look into Soviet newspapers of the 1940s and 1950s provides a good sense of whom and what the Soviets branded "fascist" and "revanchist." These areas of conflict would have generated even more "revanchism." After withdrawal of U.S. troops over the Atlantic and of British forces to their isle, the Soviet Union, with a mighty army just behind the Polish and the Czechoslovakian border, only 50 miles from Berlin, 150 miles from Munich, and 190 miles from Frankfurt, would have been in a perfect position to implement any sanction upon Germany. The many pitfalls the peace treaty draft included indicate, in contradiction to what Loth would have us believe, that the Stalin Note would not have led to a stable and sustainable civil democracy in a unified Germany.

To Lord Ismay, NATO's first secretary general, is attributed the *bon mot* that the purpose of the alliance was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down." [7] For Stalin, the foreign political objective was just the opposite: to keep the Americans out, to stay in Germany, and obtain the greatest possible profit from doing so. It seems, then, that the GDR was not so much "Stalin's unwanted child" as a most valuable token in Stalin's tricky diplomatic game.

Notes

[1]. Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind: Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994), translated as *Stalin's Unwanted*

Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question, and the Founding of the GDR (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[2]. Ekkehard Fuhr, "Mitten in der Hauptstadt," *Die Welt*, December 22, 2000; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, 2 vols. (Munich: Beck, 2000); and Heinrich August Winkler, "Im Zickzackkurs zum Sozialismus," *Die Zeit*, June 17, 1994.

[3]. Wilhelm Pieck, *Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1953*, ed. Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth (Berlin: Akademie, 1994).

[4]. Peter Ruggenthaler, ed., *Stalins großer Bluff: Die Geschichte der Stalin-Note in Dokumenten der sowjetischen Führung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007).

[5]. Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1995), 318-352.

[6]. Rainer Karlsch and Johannes Bähr, "Sowjetische Aktiengesellschaften (SAG) in der SBZ/DDR: Bildung, Struktur und Probleme ihrer inneren Entwicklung," in *Mikropolitik im Unternehmen: Arbeitsbeziehungen und Machtstrukturen in industriellen Großbetrieben des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Karl Lauschke and Thomas Welzkopp (Essen: Klartext, 1994), 214-255.

[7]. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 150.

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