

Perceptions and Perspectives

Exploring Connections between Ireland and the GDR

Gisela Holfter, Deirdre Byrnes and Jean E. Conacher (eds)

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES
DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN
LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

11

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Deirdre Byrnes (National University of Ireland, Galway)

Jean E. Conacher (University of Limerick)

Gisela Holfter (University of Limerick)

Perceptions and Perspectives: Exploring Connections Between Ireland and the GDR

Introduction

Deirdre Byrnes, Jean E. Conacher, Gisela Hoffter

Were there any meaningful connections between Ireland and the GDR? Or: “Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Irland – gab es da überhaupt welche?” While working on this volume, we have heard this question frequently, both in Germany and in Ireland. The short answer is that there were manifold connections, the respective perceptions and perspectives allowing for intriguing insights into both societies. Exploring connections between Ireland and the GDR (the German Democratic Republic, also known widely as “East Germany”) has thus been a very fruitful and fascinating undertaking.

In contrast to the relationship between the GDR and many other European countries, the various connections to Ireland have not previously been studied in detail, although Jérôme aan de Wiel’s 2015 monograph *East German Intelligence and Ireland, 1949-90: Espionage, Terrorism and Diplomacy* does something to alleviate the situation.¹ In comparison, the many facets of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the GDR have been researched by many academics,² and a number of edited volumes on the topic

1 Jérôme aan de Wiel, *East German Intelligence and Ireland, 1949-90: Espionage, Terrorism and Diplomacy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

2 Among others, see Klaus Larres, Britain and the GDR: Political and Economic Relations, 1949-1989. In: Klaus Larres and Elizabeth Meehan (eds), *Uneasy Allies: British-German Relations and European Integration since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 63-98; Marianne Howarth, Freundschaft mit dem Klassenfeind: Die Image-Politik der DDR in Großbritannien nach der diplomatischen Anerkennung. In: *Deutschlandarchiv* 36/1 (2003), pp. 25-33 and Howarth, Vom Kalten Krieg zum „Kalten Frieden“: Diplomatische Beziehungen zwischen Großbritannien und der DDR 1972/3-1975. In: Peter Barker, Marc-Dietrich Ohse and Dennis Tate (eds), *Views from Abroad: Die DDR aus britischer Perspektive*. Bielefeld: WBV, W. Bertelsmann, 2007, pp. 149-62; Henning Hoff, *Großbritannien und die DDR 1955-1973: Diplomatie auf Umwegen*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003; Hans-Georg Golz, *Verordnete Völkerfreundschaft: Das Wirken der Freundschaftsgesellschaft DDR-Großbritannien und der Britain-GDR Society. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004; Anthony Glee, *The Stasi Files: East Germany's Secret Operations Against Britain*. London: Free Press, 2004; Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR 1949-1990*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2010.

have also appeared.³ French-GDR relations have also been well researched thanks to studies such as Ulrich Pfeil's *Die "anderen" deutsch-französischen Verbindungen: Die DDR und Frankreich 1949-1990*.⁴ Pfeil's volume considers diplomatic relations since 1973 and the multi-layered socio-cultural dimensions outside of and in connection with politics and diplomacy, including a detailed portrait of friendship societies, contacts in theatre, music, academia, schools and in the youth sector. It is complemented by publications such as the volume *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft*, edited by Sandrine Kott and Emmanuel Droit, which includes reflections on the specific French contribution in terms of researching GDR society and a comparative analysis of French-GDR scholarship.⁵ GDR relations with Sweden and other Scandinavian countries have also been analysed by numerous academics.⁶ Italy and Austria have not been neglected either.⁷ The links, too, between the GDR and countries farther afield have been explored in detail.⁸ Yet, even in an overview of the relationship of the GDR's Sozialistische Einheitspartei (SED) with the com-

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- 3 See, for example, Arnd Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain and the GDR: Relations and Perspectives in a Divided World*. Berlin: Philo, 2002 and Peter Barker, Marc-Dietrich Ohse and Dennis Tate (eds), *Views from Abroad: Die DDR aus britischer Perspektive*. Bielefeld: WBV, W. Bertelsmann, 2007.
- 4 Cologne: Böhlau, 2004.
- 5 See Sandrine Kott, *Der Beitrag der französischen Sozialwissenschaften zur Erforschung der ostdeutschen Gesellschaft*, pp. 13-25 and Mary Fulbrook, *Theoretische Überlegungen zur DDR-Geschichte: Die französische DDR-Forschung in vergleichender Perspektive*, pp. 278-85, both in: Sandrine Kott and Emmanuel Droit (eds), *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft: Eine transnationale Perspektive*. Berlin: Links Verlag, 2006.
- 6 See, for example, Robert Bohn, Jürgen Elvert and Karl Christian Lammers (eds), *Deutsch-skandinavische Beziehungen nach 1945*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000; Nils Abraham, *Die politische Auslandsarbeit der DDR in Schweden*. Berlin: Lit, 2007 and Michael F. Scholz, *Östen Undén und die DDR: Schwedische Deutschlandpolitik in den fünfziger Jahren*. In: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3/43 (July 1993), pp. 391-418.
- 7 See Johannes Lill, *Völkerfreundschaft im Kalten Krieg?: Die politischen, kulturellen und ökonomischen Beziehungen der DDR zu Italien 1949-1973*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002 and Maximilian Graf, *Österreich und die DDR 1949-1990: Politik und Wirtschaft im Schatten der deutschen Teilung*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 2016.
- 8 See, for example, Inga Emmerling, *Die DDR und Chile: Außenpolitik, Außenhandel und Solidarität*. Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013 and Harald Möller, *DDR und Dritte Welt: Die Beziehungen der DDR mit Entwicklungsländern – ein neues theoretisches Konzept, dargestellt anhand der Beispiele China und Äthiopien sowie Irak/Iran*. Münster: Verlag Dr. Köster, 2004, as well as Johannes H. Voigt, *Die Indienpolitik der DDR: Von den Anfängen bis zur Anerkennung*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2008.