

Manfred Wilke's Wide-Ranging Contributions to Scholarship

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Nearly 30 years ago the Cold War International History Project, which had just been set up under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, awarded me a grant to pursue research in newly open archives in Moscow and Berlin. I went to both places in the summer and fall of 1992 and again for two months in early 1993. When I was working at the archive holding former Communist party records in Berlin (SAPMO-BA) in early 1993, one of the archivists gave me a huge collection of reproduced SED-Politbüro documents pertaining to the Polish crisis of 1980–1981 that had just been compiled as a working paper by scholars at the Free University of Berlin's Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, headed by Manfred Wilke. That working paper, titled “SED-Politbüro und polnische Krise 1980-82: Aus den Protokollen des Politbüros des ZK der SED zu Polen, den innerdeutschen Beziehungen und der Wirtschaftskrise der DDR”, was the first of several items produced on the same topic by the team led by Wilke. Of particular importance was a working paper coauthored by Wilke, Reinhard Gutsche, and Michael Kubina, “Die SED-Führung und die Unterdrückung der polnischen Oppositionsbewegung 1980/81”, which was published in slightly revised form as a lengthy article in the February 1994 issue of the “German Studies Review”. Wilke and his coauthors provided an excellent overview of East Germany's vigorous efforts in 1980–1981 to work with Soviet leaders in pressuring the Polish Communist regime to quell the Solidarność movement and restore orthodox Communist rule. Wilke and his colleagues laid out the main findings of their research and then carefully backed up each of them with crucial evidence from declassified archival collections.

Those two working papers, along with transcriptions of declassified documents from the former East German military archives, were the basis for the landmark book put out in 1995 by Manfred Wilke and Michael Kubina, “‘Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen’: Die SED kontra Polen 1980/81. Geheimakten der SED-Führung über die Unterdrückung der polnischen Demokratiebewegung”, published by Akademie Verlag in Berlin. The book is an invaluable resource for scholars interested in the Polish crisis, and I have cited it over

and over in my own research. The book is also a gold mine for anyone seeking to understand East German foreign policy, Soviet-East German relations, and Erich Honecker's long reign as General Secretary of the SED.

In August 1995, I happened to be on a panel with Michael Kubina at a conference in Budapest, and I told him how much I admired "Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen." He and I had a long conversation afterward about how the book had come into being, and he urged me to get in touch with the lead author, Manfred Wilke. Not until thirteen years later, however, did I actually meet Manfred in person, when he and I were taking part in a large international conference in Vienna and Graz organized by the Boltzmann Institute for the Study of War's Consequences. By then, I had read many of Manfred's other books and articles, finding them an extraordinary guide to the history of East Germany (the society as well as the Communist-ruled state), the history and sociology of German Communism, the history of the Soviet bloc, and the evolution of the international Communist movement under Soviet domination both before and after the Second World War.

Manfred's immense body of historical and sociological work extends over fifty years, and one of the striking things about it is that the scholarship he produced before 1989 is just as illuminating as the path-breaking books and articles he has produced since the end of the Cold War. Manfred is a diligent researcher and was able to make maximum use of publicly available sources and interviews long before archival collections became accessible. Among the important publications he produced in the 1970s were items tracing the impact of de-Stalinization at the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress in 1956 and the repercussions in the Soviet bloc – a topic he returned to numerous times in his scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s after archival collections became available. In the mid-1970s, Manfred co-edited a first-rate volume on the global impact of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's works, especially the impact on Western leftist intellectuals and political parties, and a carefully documented book tracing the repressive "normalization" that had been imposed in Czechoslovak society under Gustáv Husák's leadership in the wake of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Manfred's expertise on the sociology of trade unions in both East Germany and West Germany (as well as pre-1933 Germany) is well displayed in many of his publications both before and after 1989, setting the standard for all scholarship on the topic.

Once the archives opened in former Soviet-bloc countries after 1989–1991, Manfred was at the forefront of scholars making use of them, as shown in "Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen" and his other books and articles. His work over the past thirty years has ranged over many topics and has greatly enriched the publications he produced in earlier decades. His scholarship in the post-Cold War era has illuminated every aspect of East German history, from beginning to end. His meticulous exploration of the large-scale uprising in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in June 1953 and his wider discussion of opposition movements in East Germany and other Soviet-bloc countries from the 1950s through the 1980s are of particular value, laying the groundwork for his analyses of the role of popular

unrest in bringing down Honecker's regime in 1989 and undermining the foundations of Communist rule in the GDR and the rest of the Soviet bloc.

In the early 2000s, Manfred published two important books with Jürgen Maruhn on the Euromissile debate in Europe in the early 1980s and the Soviet Union's deployment of SS-20 intermediate-range nuclear missiles, showing how the West German peace movements had full leeway to oppose their government's policies on nuclear weapons, unlike their beleaguered counterparts in East Germany who were repressed if they deviated from official Soviet-bloc policy in any way. Under the influence of the Western peace movements, the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) voted in the Bundestag in November 1983 against the long-planned deployments of U.S. missiles, which the SPD itself had earlier arranged. (The fact that a Christian Democratic-led government under Helmut Kohl had come to power in October 1982 and retained its majority of seats in the March 1983 federal election undoubtedly played some role in the SPD turnaround on the matter.) Taking advantage of the many archival sources and memoirs that have become available since 1989, Manfred and his coauthors highlighted the interaction between the West German anti-nuclear activists and various individuals and organizations in the GDR, who were effective in "seducing" the Western peace movements. The two books reinforce and go well beyond the work of other scholars such as Jeffrey Herf, a historian who spent a good deal of time in West Germany in the 1980s and published several insightful items based in part on his firsthand observations.

Manfred has served for many years on the editorial board of the "Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung" (I have been pleased to serve with him on that board) and has contributed valuable essays to the JHK. I was especially intrigued by an article he published there in 2008 tracing the intellectual and political evolution of Jiří Pelikán, a Czechoslovak Communist Party official who had once been staunchly loyal to the Soviet Union but gradually became disillusioned and emerged as one of the strongest supporters of the bold reforms undertaken during the Prague Spring in 1968. After Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Pelikán was forced into exile in Rome, where he lived for the next three decades until his death in 1999. Pelikán remained a socialist and served for twelve years in the Italian parliament as a member of the Italian Socialist Party, but he was severely critical of the repression and tyranny that had become so pervasive in the Soviet bloc, and he publicly deplored some of his own actions as a young Communist in the 1950s. Having first gotten to know Pelikán in the early 1970s, Manfred was able to provide a concise, probing, and lucid analysis of Pelikán's changing outlook, set against the backdrop of the Prague Spring, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the Husák-era repression.

During most of Manfred's career, his scholarship appeared exclusively in German, a language known widely enough that his work was familiar to scholars of the Cold War not only in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland but also in other European countries and in North America. But over the past fifteen years, thanks largely to the Boltzmann Institute, a good deal of Manfred's output has been appearing in English translation, a development that has

significantly expanded the number of scholars who can benefit from his research. I am very pleased that recent essays by Manfred have appeared in volumes in Harvard University's Cold War Studies Book Series, which I have long edited. His essays have shed crucial light on East Germany's role in key events of the Cold War.

In 2011, the fiftieth anniversary year of the construction of the Berlin Wall, Manfred published "Der Weg zur Mauer: Stationen der Teilungsgeschichte", his seminal overview of how the Wall came to be built. The book highlights the domestic and international events stretching from the Second World War to the occupation and division of Germany at the end of the war, the emergence of two German states in 1949, the Berlin Blockade of 1948–1949, the East German uprising in 1953, the crises over Berlin from 1958 to 1960, the resurgence of tensions in 1961 that peaked on 13 August when the Wall was put up overnight, and the immediate aftermath of the Wall's construction. Manfred recounts how the East German leader Walter Ulbricht made strenuous efforts to induce the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to give his consent for the building of the wall (efforts highlighted in another book on the subject published in 2011, by Hope Harrison), but Manfred rightly emphasizes that the very fact that Ulbricht had to go all-out to gain Soviet approval of the construction indicates who was fundamentally in charge. Ulbricht throughout the crisis had to operate within certain parameters set by the Soviet Union. Manfred's book earned wide acclaim when it appeared in Germany shortly before the anniversary, and I am glad to say the book appeared in a lapidary English translation published by Berghahn Books in 2014, bringing his comprehensive analysis of the Wall's provenance to a broad audience around the world.

At least a couple of times in the 1990s I saw Manfred in SAPMO-BA when he and I overlapped in doing research there, though I did not yet know him at that point and did not venture over to speak to him. Fortunately, in 2008 I finally met him in person and have been delighted to have him as a friend and colleague ever since. We have worked together on numerous projects in conjunction with leading scholars from the Boltzmann Institute, and my appreciation of Manfred's scholarship now is even greater than the enormous admiration I felt when I first saw "Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen." His even-handed approach to scholarship, his sedulousness as a researcher, and his elegant writing are models for today's graduate students to emulate. This volume, featuring some highlights of his vast academic output, is a worthy tribute to a formidable scholar.