

Religious History in an Atheist State:

Teaching the Reformation in the German Democratic Republic

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ABSTRACT

Religious history and a Marxist education seem diametrically opposed to one another. Yet, the German Democratic Republic rooted its very identity, its moral and revolutionary character in the Reformation period of the early sixteenth century and in the Peasants' War. While Martin Luther is the historical figure most associated with the Reformation in the West, in the German Democratic Republic the person of veneration was the apocalyptic preacher, Thomas Müntzer. The German Democratic Republic did not only understand itself as the homeland of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. As a nation, the German Democratic Republic was the land in which the revolutionary spirit and vision of Thomas Müntzer had come to fruition.

This thesis explores how the history of Thomas Müntzer and the Reformation period was portrayed in the textbooks used in the classrooms that the citizens of the German Democratic Republic attended. This study takes the textbooks and teaching plans used throughout the entire duration of the German Democratic Republic as a lens through which to better understand how the regime's conceptualization of the Reformation was mobilized for contemporary political and national narratives, and how that narrative changed. In the early years of the regime, Reformation history was employed to legitimate both the new political system and the new political borders, harnessing previous Marxist scholarship for contemporary circumstances. As the German Democratic Republic sought to stabilize its position, it attempted to use history to convince its citizens to cultivate an identity tied to the state, and to achieve this aim, the conception of the Early Bourgeois Revolution developed, and the legacy of Martin Luther changed.

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¹ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), xi.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland (West Germany; see FRG)
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik (East Germany; see GDR)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (see BRD)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (see DDR)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Zone of Occupation)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)

NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS AND ORTHOGRAPHY

All translations, unless otherwise noted are that of the author. All orthography has been left in its original, excepting the spelling of Thomas Müntzer, which has been modernized from “Münzer” to “Müntzer.” The only exclusion of the previous rule is that where “Münzer” has appeared in book titles, the author has maintained the old spelling. Where the author has quoted or cited a translation of a German text, he has sought out a German original, which appears alongside the English translation.

Introduction

On September 14, 1989, the Panorama Museum in Bad Frankenhausen opened to the East German public for the first time. Within its walls hung a colossal panoramic painting, the *Frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland* (“Early Bourgeois Revolution in Germany”), by Werner Tübke, depicting the Battle of Frankenhausen during which the preacher Thomas Müntzer and thousands of revolting peasants were slaughtered by a coalition force of German princes as part of the Peasants’ War and the Reformation. The painting, which measures an astounding 14 by 123 meters, weighs nearly a thousand kilograms, and took over ten years to complete, was meant to demonstrate “that Müntzer’s vision of the future has come true in [the German Democratic Republic (GDR)].”² Yet within two months *die Wende* (The Turn) arrived, and the Berlin wall came down. The future of the GDR did not extend far beyond the horizon of the autumn of 1989. The opening of the Panorama Museum so late in the history of the GDR indicates both how unexpected the coming changes appeared to the regime, and how, even at the end, Reformation history, known in its particular form as the Early Bourgeois Revolution, was mobilized to validate the regime. Yet, why did the East German regime seek legitimization from a moment in religious history when the regime encouraged the secularization of society and was officially not only secular but also an atheist state? What are the connections between Müntzer’s cowl and habit, and Walter Ulbricht’s and Erich Honecker’s hammer and compass? From where did these connections originate? This thesis examines the links between the Müntzer and the GDR, as well as the regime’s relationship and framing of the Reformation

² „...dass in unserem Lande die Zukunftsvision Müntzers in Erfüllung gegangen ist,“ Thomas Götz, “Das Bauernkriegspanorama ist Werner Tübkes größtes Werk. Es wird noch immer bestaunt – der Maler aber war lange nicht in Bad Frankenhausen – Eine runde Sache mit Ecken und Kanten,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 5, 2004.

period more generally. The primary vehicle for this examination is an analysis of the presentation of the Reformation to children during their compulsory general education.

The Reformation was a historical world event that continues to have resonance beyond its religious dimensions. One marker of its continuing relevance is the fondness with which governments and the press celebrate the movement's myriad anniversaries annually, and with greater attention every twenty-five years or so. The Reformation period, starting with the birth of Martin Luther on November 10, 1483, and ending with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, provides a plethora of occasions to memorialize. The year 2017 was a particularly auspicious as it marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Luther publishing his infamous *Ninety-Five Theses*, celebrated on October 13, "Reformation Day," the date on which the theses were sent to the Archbishop of Mainz. In celebration, *The New York Times* published articles and opinion pieces, including one title, "Who Won the Reformation?," an indication of the ways in which the legacy of the Reformation is still debated publically. Similar pieces were published in *The Guardian* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, just to give individual examples from the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.³ The social and political impacts of the Reformation have been debated since the sixteenth century, and they have provided inspiration to an exhaustive list of authors of various nationalities, religions, politics, creeds, etc. While the Reformation is rooted in a religious debate, it has been frequently mobilized for national purposes, and the current German government is no exception, annually celebrating

³ Ross Douthat, "Who Won the Reformation?" *The New York Times*, November 1, 2017.

Harriet Sherwood, "After 500 years, Europe's Reformation scars have all but healed, study finds – Pew Research Center says theological differences have disappeared to degree that might have shocked Christians in past," *The Guardian*, August 31, 2017.

"Merkel: Ohne Religionsfreiheit nimmt die Gesellschaft Schaden," *die Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 31, 2017.

“Reformation Day” in honor of the movement. In spite of all of the other various historical persons and sub-movements, the story of the Reformation most frequently focuses on Martin Luther. Yet, for the majority of the second half of the twentieth century, another Reformation figure, Thomas Müntzer, held a higher place of honor in East Germany.

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) invested significant intellectual and cultural energy in shaping Reformation history for an atheist state. In 1956, the state-owned film studio *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) released *Thomas Müntzer*, a socialist realist film highly saturated in color and ideology. West German critics in *Der Spiegel* archly drew the connection between the historical figure of Müntzer and the contemporaneous leader of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht, by commenting that Müntzer was portrayed as an “original ancestral communist” of Ulbricht.⁴ While perhaps this observation by the contributors of *Der Spiegel* was meant condescendingly, they had identified precisely the manner in which the Reformation period was mobilized as a legitimating tool in the GDR. The link between Müntzer and Ulbricht was highly intentional. In a country whose anthem was “Risen from Ruins” (*Auferstanden aus Ruinen*), history was an instrument to explain how the course of events had led to the destruction of Europe by the Third Reich, and how the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) was the best, if not the only political entity to lead the GDR into the future. History and politics were “inextricably linked.”⁵ Within the GDR, in place of the more traditionally prominent Luther, the preacher Thomas Müntzer was championed as the appropriate historical character for honor and remembrance for a socialist future. A particularly

⁴ „einen urkommunistischen Ahnherrn des Walter Ulbricht,“ “Thomas Müntzer (Ostzone),” *Der Spiegel*, July 11, 1956.

⁵ Robert Walinski-Kiehl, “History, Politics, and East German Film: The *Thomas Müntzer* (1956) Socialist Epic,” *Central European History* 39 (2006): 30.

effective way to observe this connection is in examining how the Reformation was written and explained for childhood education.

Education is an important nation-building tool in any modern state. In the GDR it was a way to mold the perspective of future adult citizens. Educational materials, textbooks, teaching aids, etc., were taken very seriously in the GDR. They served as devices to indoctrinate students to a particular view of the world, much like many national educational programs, and to prepare these students both to value the state and to see their future as tied to the state. Even from the very earliest days of the Soviet occupation, before the founding of the GDR, changes in the education system were prioritized even as the most basic necessities of food and housing were lacking. Children and education were essential elements in building an East German socialist utopia, as two party slogans more than suggest:

WER DIE JUGEND HAT, HAT DIE ZUKUNFT!

[Who has the youth, has the future!]

MANN MUSS DIE MENSCHEN NUR GEBÜHREND SCHULEN - DANN WERDEN SIE SCHON RICHTIG LEBEN!

[You need only to school people properly—then they'll live right!]⁶

Controlling the educational system and the textbooks that system used was a way to influence the general population. The study of history played an important role for the education system, and East German society as a whole.

The highly centralized and vetted nature of East German educational materials lends insight into what the official position regarding the Reformation was, as well as how it changed or remained stable over time. The end of the Second World War opened up many new

⁶ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxv.

opportunities in society in a broad sense, and in history making in a particular sense, but the earliest interpretations of the Reformation by the East German regime were deeply rooted in traditional German historiography; however, these roots were redirected for the present political situation. Many of the key events of the Reformation took place in the geographical space of the contemporary East Germany, and the state used this geographical status to its advantage. Furthermore, East German educators were intrigued by the fact that the Reformation had been a topic of particular interest for the cofounder of Marxism, Friedrich Engels.⁷ While Soviet influence in East Germany is undeniable, socialist interpretations of the Reformation predate the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (*Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland*, or SMAD). The relationship between Soviet and SED authority is complex, and observable in textbooks. Although the regime's educational policy toward the Reformation is emblematic of the nature of the SED's attempt to legitimate itself through history, Reformation history is also revealing in how this regime itself changed. Tracing how and why the regime began to use the concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution in the education system is one objective of this study. Exploring how the understanding of history altered through the revaluation of Martin Luther is another goal. However, this thesis explores not only metrics of change, but also of stability, particularly in reference to the consistent reverence given to Thomas Müntzer.

Chapter One, "Literature Review, Theory, and Method," provides a broad view of the state of research children's education in the GDR and, more particularly, of the image of Thomas Müntzer. In addition, this chapter examines approaches to the study of the GDR, and it sketches an outline of the theoretical and methodological concepts that guide and limit this

⁷ Robert Walinski-Kiehl, "Reformation History and Political Mythology in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1989," *European History Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2004): 43.

thesis. Chapter Two, “The German Marxist Perspective of the Reformation Period,” tracks the developments in German Marxist historiography regarding the importance of the Reformation. Chapter Three, “Teaching Plans and the Early Bourgeois Revolution,” examines the teaching plans (*Lehrpläne*) composed by the state to guide teachers in their instruction, and it identifies the specific period in which the term the Early Bourgeois Revolution entered the classroom. Chapter Four, “Risen from the Pages of Marxist History,” explores early textbooks as they appeared in the classrooms of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it traces the development of a national narrative between the end of the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ) and the founding of the GDR, and it explores how sixteenth-century events were mobilized to explain twentieth-century political issues. Chapter Five, “We are Proud of this Epoch of our History!,” focuses on an essay written by one of the editors of GDR textbooks, Hans Wormes, and through his writing reveals why pedagogues in the GDR believed they had to write new histories and the manner in which they hoped to engage their students to connect with *their* history. Finally, Chapter Six, “Luther Resurrected,” observes Luther’s changing image alongside the developments in the concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution.

I

Literature Review, Theory and Method

“What does it matter which books were spoken of?”
 “It matters a great deal, because here we are trying to understand what has happened among
 men who live among books, with books, and so their words on books are also important.”
 -Abstract from *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco ⁸

Many historians have explored the GDR educational system and the GDR’s perception of Thomas Müntzer. The most extensive study of the teaching of history in the GDR is Heike Christina Mätzing’s *Geschichte im Zeichen des historischen Materialismus: Untersuchungen zu Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht in der DDR (History in the Sign of Historical Materialism: Explorations on Historical Science and History Teaching in the GDR)*. A highly detailed investigation, Mätzing’s text provides a thorough overview of the foundations of Marxist-Leninist history, a general synopsis of the historical curriculum from classes 5 through 10, and a specific investigation of how academic research into the nineteenth century in the GDR entered textbooks.⁹ The most encompassing work on Müntzer’s mythic presence in the GDR is Alexander Fleischauer’s *Die Enkel fechten’s besser aus: Thomas Müntzer und die Fröhbürgerliche Revolution – Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur in der DDR (The Grandchildren Fight Better: Thomas Müntzer and the Early Bourgeois Revolution – The Politics of History and Cultural Remembrance in the GDR)*. Fleischauer’s study centers on days of remembrance, cultural festivals, memorials, and films that celebrated Müntzer’s legacy and the historical movement known in the GDR as the Early Bourgeois Revolution. Fleischauer first follows early developments of Müntzer’s veneration in the SBZ and the GDR in the form

⁸ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver, (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1984), 112.

⁹ Heike Christina Mätzing, *Geschichte im Zeichen des historischen Materialismus: Untersuchungen zu Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht in der DDR*, (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung Verlag, 1999).

of movies, monuments, and books. Later, he examines four Jubilee year celebrations held to mark the 450th anniversaries of the beginning of the Reformation in 1967 and the Peasants' War throughout the 1970s, as well as the events held to commemorate the 500th birthdays of Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer in 1983 and 1989, respectively.¹⁰ Erich Honecker's very public rehabilitation of Luther around his 500th birthday is an important moment in the shifting evaluation of the figures associated with the Reformation. In *Mythen in der Politik der DDR: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung politischer Mythen (Myth in the Politics of the GDR: A Contribution to the Exploration of Politics Myths)*, Raina Zimmering adopts a political science perspective to examine the GDR's discourse around concepts of anti-Fascism, the Reformation period, and the regime's perspective on Prussia from the standpoint of mythmaking. Zimmering positions the veneration of Müntzer as part of a larger project of mobilizing narratives to legitimate the state. These works combined provide an extensive picture of the instruction of nineteenth-century history in the GDR, the veneration of Müntzer in the public arena, and the broader use of myths in GDR society. They leave room, however, for the exploration in this thesis for investigation of Müntzer's image in the classroom.¹¹

There is also significant research in the English language on the topic of education in the GDR. By investigating all textbook topics in the GDR, John Rodden's *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity* gives a broad picture of how every school subject (even chemistry and math) was utilized to varying degrees as an ideologically tool for

¹⁰ Alexander Fleischauer, *Die Engel fechten's besser aus: Thomas Müntzer und die Fröhbürgerliche Revolution – Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur in der DDR*, (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2010).

¹¹ A broader discussion into educational culture in Germany and the concept of an individual's development, their *Bildung* ("education") would be appropriate, but falls outside the focus of this thesis. English language readers, particularly coming from the American or British educational traditions may find Raymond Geist's article "Kultur, Bildung, Geist" a useful primer, Raymond Geist, "Kultur, Bildung, Geist" *History and Theory* 35, no. 2 (May, 1996): 151-164.

the state. For example, chemistry textbooks outlined the GDR's reserves of lignite coal, and math textbooks highlighted the quadratic curves that the jets of the *Nationale Volksarmee* ("National People's Army") created flying across the sky.¹² In a second study, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, Rodden examines the educational system more broadly. However, there is significant space for further research into specific aspects of the curriculum. The interviews included in both of Rodden's books reveal that the instruction, perception, and acceptance of ideological education in the GDR varied dramatically.¹³ While the educational materials themselves paint one perspective, individuals developed their own conclusions from their classroom experiences.¹⁴ In terms of the higher educational system, John Connelly's useful transnational study, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*, suggests that the implementation of "Soviet" systems should not be viewed as a foreign project, particularly in the educational sphere, as changes to the Soviet model were carried out by local factions and do not represent a kind of imperial Soviet authority, implemented by foreign Russian overlords.¹⁵

The relationship of authority and power is a common, perhaps even cliché, topic of GDR historiography. The use of the term "totalitarian" to describe the GDR and other governments in the Eastern Bloc is emblematic of this. Opponents and skeptics of the term

¹² John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity*, (Penn State University Press, 2006), xxvii, 166.

¹³ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ "I do not mean to suggest that all DDR citizens were lock-step, ideologically benighted, card-carrying communist functionaries – or even to imply that lifelong Party supporters rigidly conformed to official DDR views," Rodden, *Textbook Reds*, xxviii.

¹⁵ John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 46.

point to the pejorative sense it acquired during the ideological battle of the Cold War, as equating the Third Reich to the GDR, and therefore consider it “academically suspect.”¹⁶ While this association has been useful in comparing dictatorships, propaganda, social engineering, and ideology, there should also be major caveats when using the term to discuss East Germany, as East Germany did not engage in a world war, inflict genocide, or come to its conclusion in the same way, etc.¹⁷ However, totalitarianism and the general comparison between the Third Reich and the GDR is difficult for historians to avoid. In *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, Rodden writes “simplistic equations of Nazism and Stalinism (or communism) – especially given that the later changed significantly over time – are untenable.”¹⁸ Yet, on the next page, he also quotes Hitler and equates him to the GDR: “‘Education must be so arranged,’ Hitler had declared in *Mein Kampf*, ‘that the young person leaving school is not half pacifist, democrat, or what you will, but a complete German.’ Substitute ‘communist’ as the last word of that sentence: by mid-century, the statement applied to the DDR.”¹⁹ While Rodden argues that he is merely pointing out continuances, arguing on one page that the GDR and Third Reich should not be “equated” with another, and on the very next page prompting the reader to perform “substitution” between the two regimes is representative of the kind of draw that these comparisons have on historians.²⁰

¹⁶ Fulbrook, Mary and Port, Andrew I, *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁸ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 51.

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ See Andrew I. Port’s “The Banalities of East German Historiography” for a more in depth discussion of issues regarding GDR historiography, especially in respects to totalitarianism, Fulbrook, Mary and Port, Andrew I, *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 1-30.

In spite of its pitfalls, the term totalitarianism has been useful in recent investigations into the GDR educational system, particularly in its transition period from the Third Reich to Communism. In *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships*, Charles B. Lansing argues that the ideological cleansing that both regimes attempted, typical of totalitarian regimes, were much less effective than previously thought by scholars such as Rodden. While Rodden cites that ninety percent of the faculty in universities was fired as result of their political affiliations during the Nazi period,²¹ Lansing argues that although the communists were very interested in denazifying the schools, these stories of a vast purge of the educational system are incorrect.²² Lansing asserts that the success of denazification is a long-held myth, and that the majority of teachers managed to work in the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and East Germany because of both their “disengagement” and “adaptability” to ideology.²³ They taught ideologically charged curriculums in the Third Reich and in East Germany, reinforcing the values of both dictatorships.²⁴ Lansing’s argument that teachers taught ideological material whether or not they truly accepted its tenants is a further reason to limit the types of conclusions that can be reached when writing about the effectiveness of GDR’s curriculum.

While this thesis does not employ totalitarianism as a conceptual or theoretical framework, it does borrow several concepts from other scholars. As mentioned earlier, John Connelly’s assertion that local authorities took significant action to “Sovietize” their own

²¹ Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 46.

²² Charles B. Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), 130.

²³ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

educational systems partially frames the arguments in Chapter Four. This is opposed to, for example, John Rodden's claim that "DDR Stalinism was definitely a matter of "L" before "M": Lenin, not Marx; Russian, not German."²⁵ Although this thesis does not deny the influence from Moscow, especially with regards to the Reformation period, German communists needed little help in establishing a suitable socialist past for the history curriculum. In addition to the concept of Sovietization, Chapters Two through Six of this thesis all deal heavily with the idea of "insiders and outsiders," a concept adapted from Jeffrey Brooks's *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*.²⁶ While the types of sources and participants analyzed are different, the question of whether Luther represented a figure within the national community of the GDR parallels the questions Brooks posed about which social groups existed within the community of the Soviet Union. In the GDR, the question of honor and dishonor, inside and outside, was central. As a nation, the GDR championed itself as representative of "progressive" ideas and history, while the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) represented "reactionary" forces. In no way were concepts of "progressive" and "reactionary" subtle. Citizens of the GDR were supposed to hate their reactionary enemies and were taught to do so through an educational campaign appropriately called "Education to Hate" (*Erziehung zum Hass*).²⁷ Tracing the manner in which Müntzer and Luther fit into this

²⁵ Rodden, *Textbook Reds*, 8.

²⁶ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 126.

²⁷ Rodden, *Textbook Reds*, 98.

Ibid., 9.

"The following guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and Volk and Wissen, 'DDR textbooks should take as their model the works of Marx and Lenin, which are permeated with boundless faith in the victory of communism and unrelenting **hatred** [(my emphasis)] for its enemies. A textbook should be written so that not a single fact leaves the student indifferent.'"

dichotomy of insiders and outsiders, along with investigating the development of the Early Bourgeois Revolution in the context of children's education, is the major frame of analysis in this thesis. Although Luther fit nicely into the reactionary camp during the early GDR, increasingly his legacy became more complicated and differentiated, finally to the extent that Erich Honecker rehabilitated him into the national community the 1980s.

Jeffrey Herf's description of the GDR's approach to the past as the celebration of "Hegelian moments" is also of importance to this thesis.²⁸ Herf argues that the GDR memorialized and gave meaning to senseless death as part of a greater plan. In his analysis, Herf refers to the victims of the Third Reich as being remembered in a Hegelian perspective. In the following pages, the deaths of Müntzer and the thousands of revolting peasants are understood in the same way. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that when examining history textbooks from the GDR, it becomes clear that the SED regime took part in a particular kind of national project, a kind of state-socialist nationalism. As David Brandenberger explores in *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, there were early attempts at a kind internationalist approach to history in the Soviet Union, but these were soon abandoned for more traditional forms of nationalism that fit within the paradigms of class struggle.²⁹ Unlike the Soviet Union, the GDR had a relatively homogenous ethnic populace, but the kind of national project seen in the textbooks of the

²⁸ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 164.

²⁹ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 27-62.

As a term, "National Bolshevism" is complicated particularly in the German context by a movement led by Ernst Niekisch in the 1920s that sought to fuse elements of right wing German politics with Bolshevism. I do not mean "state-socialist nationalism" to be understood in that sense of right wing nationalism. Niekisch will briefly appear again later in this thesis.

Soviet Union, combining communism with a strong sense of nationalism, is analogous to the trends seen in textbooks of the GDR. Nevertheless, Chapter Six argues that boundaries set by Marxist-Leninism within textbooks were large enough to encompass a variety of understanding of the Reformation period.

This thesis is based primarily on sources produced by the state and representatives of the state, namely the teaching plans (*Lehrpläne*) and the textbooks (*Lehrbücher*) used in GDR classrooms. Chapter Two examines the writings of a selection of historians, mostly Marxist, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter Five analyzes an article by one of the textbook editors creating the history textbooks on the Reformation period; it is one of few sources besides those of the historians that can be ascribed to an individual. The teaching plans and textbooks were authored by a composite group of individuals. Even where authors are listed, they represent only the editorial staff of a much larger collective. It is impossible to say whether the government sources represent any one person's opinion regarding the Reformation period, or whether any student or teacher believed, word for word, what these textbooks taught. Yet, this limitation is consciously part of this investigation. The sources are the method and dictate the types of conclusions that are possible. These sources represent the government's official published position in the year they appeared. I agree with the statement "clear meanings are the exception, not the rule," and believe that there was nuance to the how the Reformation was taught over time in the GDR.³⁰ However, the textbooks of the GDR were specifically ordered by the Ministry of Education (*Ministerium für Volksbildung*) and were designed and written to have direct messages: "A textbook should be written so that **not a single fact leaves**

³⁰ Bhikhu Parekh and R.N. Berki, *The History of Political Ideas: A Critique of Q. Skinner's Methodology*, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, no 2 (April-June, 1973): 167.

the student indifferent” (my emphasis).³¹ Theoretically, these textbooks represent what every single child in the GDR learned about the Reformation period. The teaching plans reflect the emphasis every history teacher was supposed to stress about the Reformation. It was in general education, not in academia, that the majority of the GDR citizens were exposed to the Reformation period. Still, this thesis does not claim to represent what students and teachers, or even party ideologues believed. However, by examining how these textbooks and teaching plans changed over time, it is possible to learn how the government’s position on the Reformation changed, and what concepts they believed were most important.

³¹ Rodden, *Textbook Reds*, 9.

II

The German Marxist Perspective on the Reformation Period

*“This is the essence of the Reformation:
Man is in his very nature destined to be free.”*
-Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel ³²

“Since Adam’s ruin, there is not a single human act according to Luther that would not deserve eternal damnation. Never was the humanly weakness, the powerlessness of free will sharper, more terrifying than ever, and never was man even more deeply oppressed and humiliated.”
-Ernst Bloch ³³

Scholars have spilled more than a significant amount of ink interpreting and discussing the Reformation and its effects. The conclusions they have drawn come in all forms, and the most famous have been diametrically opposed as a comparison between Hegel and Bloch reveals. The above quotation from Hegel’s *The Philosophy of History* demonstrates some have interpreted the Reformation as a liberating phenomenon. Others historians and cultural theorists, such as Max Weber, have seen the repercussions of the Reformation as leading to the entrapment, or “iron cage” as Talcott Parsons translated, of the modern individual in industrial society. ³⁴ Following Hegel’s example, Marxist historians viewed the Reformation as a

³² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Trans. John Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 417.

„Dies ist der wesentliche Inhalt der Reformation; der Mensch ist durch sich selbst bestimmt, frei zu sein,“ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 497.

³³ „Seit Adams Fall gibt es nach Luther keine einzige menschliche Tat, die nicht ewiger Verdammnis würdig wäre. Niemals wurde die menschliche Schwache, die Kraftlosigkeit, des freien Willens scharfer, entsetzlicher als hier erlebt, niemals auch der Mensch tiefer gedrückt und erniedrigt,“ Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution*, (München: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1921), 189.

³⁴ “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter’s view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulder of the “saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.” But fate decreed that the cloak

progressive moment, moving history toward a utopic end. Yet unlike Hegel and more in line with Weber, Marxists interpreted this historical moment from a societal perspective. Nineteen-century Marxist perspectives of the Reformation opened up a third strain from the two confessional branches of Reformation history (Catholic and Protestant) that had existed before. Nevertheless, the Marxist histories of the Reformation, while their conclusions and methods are often different, are at their heart an outgrowth of the protestant variety traceable to Hegel. Even beyond the manner in which all historiography has a certain Biblical atmosphere (And Hegel beget Marx, who beget Lenin, etc.), Marxists were themselves conscious of the similarities between their own social theory and religious belief, specifically Christianity.³⁵ This self-awareness helps to explain why both the founders of Marxism, specifically Engels, found the

should become an iron cage,” Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, Routledge: 1930), 181.

„Der Puritaner **wollte** Berufsmensch sein, wir **müssen** es sein. Denn indem die Askese aus den Mönchszellen heraus in das Berufsleben übertragen wurde und die innerweltliche Sittlichkeit zu beherrschen begann, half sie an ihrem Teile mit daran, jenen mächtigen Kosmos der modernen, an die technischen und ökonomischen Voraussetzungen mechanisch-maschinelles Produktion gebundenen, Wirtschaftsordnung erbauen, der heute den Lebensstil aller einzelnen, die in dies Triebwerk hineingeboren werden – nicht nur der direkt ökonomisch Erwerbstätigen-, mit überwältigendem Zwange bestimmt und vielleicht bestimmen wird, bis der letzte Zentner fossilen Brennstoffs verglüht ist. Nur wie »ein dünner Mantel, den man jederzeit abwerfen könnte« sollte nach Baxters Ansicht die Sorge um die äußeren Güter um die Schultern seiner Heiligen liegen. Aber aus dem Mantel ließ das Verhängnis ein stahlhartes Gehäuse werden,“ Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2013), 200-201.

³⁵ Genesis 4:18 (King James Bible)

“And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech.”

See pages 436-437 of Max Steinmetz’s *Das Müntzerbild von Martin Luther bis Friedrich Engels* for a concise picture of confessional historiography from 1850-1900 that is reminiscent of the Bible: „Auf katholischer Seit Jörg (1851), Sporschil (1851), de Bussière (1852), Thonissen (1852)“ etc., Max Steinmetz, *Das Müntzerbild von Martin Luther bis Friedrich Engels*, (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1971), 436-437.

Refer to 295-304 of Matthias Riedl’s chapter “Longing for the Third Age: Revolutionary Joachimism, Communism, and National Socialism” in *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* for an overview of how the Christian medieval philosophy of Joachim of Fiore and its derivatives (Müntzer being the derivative most important for this thesis) came to influence modern philosophy, Communism, and National Socialism, Mathias Riedl, “Longing for the Third Age: Revolutionary Joachimism, Communism, and National Socialism,” in *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore*, ed. Mathias Riedl, (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2018): 267-318.

religious conflicts of the sixteenth century so intriguing, and why the GDR later placed so much of an emphasis on the period and on the concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. A direct historiographical line connects the Reformation historians of the GDR to Hegel.

The origin of orthodox Marxist interest in the Reformation can be traced directly to Christian philosophers and historians. Beyond the manner in which Marx turned the Christian philosophy of Hegel “right side up,” Marxist historians relied heavily on the work of Christian scholar Wilhelm Zimmermann (1807-1878) when they wrote about Reformation and the Peasants’ War. When textbooks on the late medieval period were published in the GDR in the twentieth century, they were indebted to Zimmermann’s three-volume *General History of The Great Peasants’ War*.³⁶ While Zimmermann was a Leftist, even a radical republican and democrat in the context of the numerous German states and revolutionary atmosphere of the mid-nineteenth century, he was a deeply religious man and worked as a pastor after his politics ended his academic career.³⁷ In spite of his religious convictions, Zimmerman’s work was intriguing to Marxists on a variety of levels. From one perspective, he provided a history of the Peasants’ War that was empathetic of the lower strata of society, their motivations and hardships, rather than supportive of the nobility. In a different perspective, Zimmerman’s work was also pleasing to Marxists as it both justified the French Revolution as the “historical-dialectical” class revenge for the suppression of the Peasants’ War, and was interpretable as an appeal to further revolution, as Matthias Riedl points out.³⁸ Besides the theological dimensions

³⁶ Wilhelm Zimmermann, *Allgemeine Geschichte des großen Bauernkrieges. Nach handschriftlichen und gedruckten Quellen*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Franz Heinrch Köhler Verlag, 1841-1843).

³⁷ Riedl, “Longing for the Third Age,” 295.

³⁸ “At one point, Zimmerman even presents the French Revolution as historical-dialectical revenge for the Peasant War. While in the Peasant War the aristocracy had brutalized the people, the French Revolution reversed the situation,” Ibid., 296.

of his analysis, Zimmermann had authored a book that slid very comfortably into Marxist thought, and it only took revision and condensing to place Zimmerman's research firmly within the Marxist cannon, a task that was completed by Friedrich Engels (1820-1895).

In comparison to Zimmermann's three volumes, Friedrich Engels' *The Peasant War in Germany*, published in 1850 following the revolutions of 1848, is a brief exposition, well under a hundred pages.³⁹ While Engels viewed the desired outcome of revolution differently than Zimmermann —Zimmermann advocated for democratic revolution and Engels for the proletarian revolution— they both conceptualized the timeframe from 1525 to 1848 as that of revolutionary action.⁴⁰ Through Zimmerman's research, Engels identified Thomas Müntzer as the initiator of this historical epoch of revolution through his leadership of the peasants in the Peasants' War. Within *The Peasant War in Germany*, Engels is explicit in seeing the Peasants' War and the revolutions of 1848 as direct reflections of one another. This manner of juxtaposing past events with the recent history would become common in GDR textbooks. In addition to their shared research interest, Zimmerman's Christian utopia and Engels's Communist one are poignantly similar. Both utopias conceptualize the imminent coming of climatic events, a resemblance between Christianity and Communism that Engels noted late in his life.⁴¹ Müntzer in Engels' analysis became a precursor to modern communism, and the sixteenth century figure became a model revolutionary leader of both the peasants and proto-proletariat.⁴² In spite of its brevity, Engels' work was highly influential and his prestige as a

³⁹ Friedrich Engels, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, (Hamburg: Neue Rheinische Zeitung, 1850).

⁴⁰ Abraham Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and Its Antecedents*, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 152-153.

⁴¹ Riedl, "Longing for the Third Age," 298.

⁴² Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia*, 156, 162.

father of Communism gave later scholars permission to explore further the medieval period from a socialist perspective.⁴³ The ideological links then between Christianity and Communism, and between socialist history and the Reformation, were secure from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. However, the singular concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution that came to exist in the GDR did not exist yet.

The similarities between Christianity and Communism were thoroughly explored after Engels' *The Peasant War in Germany* by Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) in the *Forerunners of Modern Socialism (Vorläufer des neuen Sozialismus)*. Kautsky found in early Christianity distinct parallels to the proletariat of the nineteenth century. He positively evaluated Christianity and argued that early Christianity had been hijacked by the interests of institution of the Church and specifically the clergy who developed a separate and malicious class interest to that of broader Christian community.⁴⁴ Yet, Kautsky went still back into that the past to argue that the roots of communism were inherent in the very nature of humanity.⁴⁵ In relation to the Reformation period, Kautsky, as Engels had done before him, portrayed Müntzer as a martyr to Marxist history:

He failed in his purpose it is true, but his failure was due to circumstances beyond his control. He did what he could with the means at his command, and that an insurrection of unarmed peasants in Thuringia, in 1525, could for a time threaten the very

⁴³ Riedl, "Longing for the Third Age," 300.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁵ "Nothing can be more erroneous than the widespread idea that communism is antagonistic to the existence of man – antagonistic indeed to human nature itself. This is not the case. Communism dates from the childhood of the race, and has been the social foundation of almost all nations, even to the present day," Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, trans. J.L. and E. G. Mulliken (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 2

„Nichts irriger, als die weitverbreitete Anschauung, der Kommunismus widerspreche dem Wesen des Menschen, der Menschennatur. Im Gegenteil, an der Wiege der Menschheit stand der Kommunismus, und er ist noch bis zu unserer Zeit die gesellschaftliche Grundlage der meisten Völker des Erdballs gewesen,“ Karl Kautsky, *Vorläufer des neuen Sozialismus* (Stuttgart: von J. H. W. Dietz Verlag, 1895), 3.

foundations of existing society was owing, in no small degree, to Thomas Müntzer – to his extravagant communistic enthusiasm, combined with an iron determination, passionate impetuosity, and statesmanlike sagacity.⁴⁶

Kautsky's analysis of Müntzer was not the same as Engels'. Significantly, Kautsky argued that Müntzer had not created any original ideas but rather had only been a man of revolution.⁴⁷

Considering Kautsky's influence during the period of the Second International (1889-1916), his contributions to the dogmatization of Marxist theory, and more than anything else, the popularity of his writings, Kautsky's analysis further solidified Müntzer's place in the Marxist pantheon of heroes.⁴⁸ However, Kautsky's influence on the course of the GDR's historiography was diminished, because he famously attacked Bolshevism in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat (Die Diktatur des Proletariats)* and was subsequently publically attacked by Lenin.⁴⁹ Considering that the later socialist bloc was an outgrowth of Lenin's Bolshevism, Kautsky's legacy within the future states created after the Second World War was limited. For example, Max Steinmetz did not even mention Kautsky when summing up the historiography of Müntzer research at the end of *The Image of Luther from Martin Luther to Friedrich Engels* in 1974.⁵⁰ Yet, Kautsky was not wholly rejected either. In a 1948 reading list intended to

⁴⁶ Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, 110.

„Wenn er scheiterte, so lag dies in Verhältnissen begründet, die es nicht ändern konnte. Was aber mit den vorhandenen Machtmitteln geleistet werden konnte, das hat er geleistet, und wenn 1525 in Thüringen ein Aufstand der dort so wehrlosen Bauern eine Zeitlang die Ausbeutergesellschaft in ihren Wurzeln bedrohen konnte, so ist dies nicht zum wenigsten Thomas Müntzer zu verdanken, seiner Verbindung überschwänglicher kommunistischer Schwärmerei mit eiserner Willenskraft, mit leidenschaftlichem Ungestüm – aber auch mit staatsmännischer Einsicht,“ Kautsky, *Vorläufer des neuen Sozialismus*, 265-266.

⁴⁷ Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia*, 183.

⁴⁸ Riedl, “Longing for the Third Age,” 303.

⁴⁹ “But that’s enough. It is impossible to enumerate all Kautsky’s various absurdities, since every phrase he utters is a bottomless pit of apostasy,” Vladimir Lenin, “The Proletarian revolution and the Renegade Kautsky” in *Lenin’s Collected Works*, Vo. 28, trans. Jim Riordan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 241.

⁵⁰ Steinmetz, *Das Müntzerbild*, 436-438.

familiarize new GDR teachers with Marxist thought, Kautsky's works appeared along with those of Marx, Engels, and Lenin.⁵¹ In spite of Kautsky's waning influence after his break with Lenin, Kautsky was an important figure in continuing and promoting the positive evaluation of Müntzer in Marxist tradition to a large public audience and was a direct link to Engels, with whom he corresponded and debated about Müntzer's legacy.⁵²

Before the National Socialists rose to power in 1933, which effectively cut off academic research in Germany, Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) published in 1921 *Thomas Müntzer as the Theologian of Revolution* (*Thomas Münzer als der Theologe der Revolution*). This text laid down important conceptual ideas for the later GDR and was the most important Interwar work on the Reformation from a Marxist perspective.⁵³ Significantly, Bloch engaged with the theological concepts of Müntzer and Luther, as the quotation at the top of this chapter, lambasting Luther's concept of *sola fide* demonstrates. In Abraham Friesen's reading of Bloch, the essential emphasis of analysis became Müntzer's chiliasm, his vision of the Kingdom of God on earth.⁵⁴ In the context of the GDR, this was a useful ideological idea, because the regime claimed to exist to enact Müntzer's sixteenth century vision of equality on earth. This enabled the regime to claim a heritage not only back to the middle of the nineteenth century, but back to the sixteenth. Although Bloch eventually fell out with the SED and left the GDR for

⁵¹ Karl Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1948), 35.

See Appendix A for full list.

⁵² Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia*, 167.

⁵³ Steinmetz, *Das Müntzerbild*, 437.

⁵⁴ Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia*, 179.

the FRG, but the conception of the GDR as the enactment of Müntzer's legacy remained until the very end of the regime.

In the SBZ and later GDR, the drive to write and angle the Reformation and Müntzer into the mythic past was very strong. Historians since Zimmerman had written about the Thomas Müntzer as a harbinger of a more equitable future society. As far as the SED was concerned, that future had arrived in 1945 with the Red Army. Immediate influences on Müntzer scholarship came in 1947 from the USSR in *The People's Reformation of Thomas Münzer and the Great Peasants' War* by Soviet historian Moisei Mendelevich Smirin (1895-1975). Following upon Engels, Smirin saw the Reformation as being the logical outcome of the oppression of the feudal institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Significantly, the Reformation and the following Peasants' War were analyzed as part of a movement that was national in character.⁵⁵ While Friesen, a scholar working within the opposing Western capitalist academic system saw very little in Smirin except Soviet orthodoxy, Smirin's scholarship was influential in the GDR. Translated into German in 1952, Smirin was viewed by German educators as foundational in creating the GDR's image of Müntzer.⁵⁶ The characterization of the Reformation and Peasants' War as a national movement was instrumental in developing the national narrative of GDR history. The nature of this movement was important too, as it was not one directed from "above," but rather from "below," and was therefore representative of the

⁵⁵ Peter Blickle, *Die Revolution von 1525*, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), 281.

⁵⁶ „Ausgehend von M. M. Smirin, der den Bauernkrieg und das Erbe Thomas Müntzers als humanistische und revolutionäre Traditionen hervorhob... die Ziele und Schwerpunkte für einen antifaschistisch-demokratischen Geschichtsunterricht nach dem Sturz des Faschismus festgelegt.“
[“Starting from M. M. Smirin, who emphasized the Peasants' War and the inheritance of Thomas Müntzer as humanistic and revolutionary traditions...set the goals and priorities for an anti-fascist-democratic teaching of history after the fall of fascism”] Hans Wermes, „Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit,“ *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der KMU, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 23 (1974): 520.

masses of society.⁵⁷ Müntzer's importance in the GDR went beyond his historical image. In 1971, Max Steinmetz (1912-1990) described the veneration of Müntzer as an activity throughout East German society:

In the GDR Müntzer's legacy is a living possession; his most important thoughts have become a reality at a higher level. Historians, poets, artists, and filmmakers have endeavored in ever-new attempts to form his image. All this happened and is the result of a deep insight into the course of our history, in the realization that the designers of the socialist humanity community in the GDR not only inherited the Communist Manifesto, but also the legacy of the continuers and the completers of the old revolutionary and genuine humanist tradition that goes back to the peasant and urban struggles of the Middle Ages and that are especially embodied in the form of Thomas Müntzer.⁵⁸

Müntzer was fashioned by Steinmetz and other GDR historians as the founding father of the GDR off the previous research completed by Smirin. The Reformation and the Peasants' War, working in tandem as a historical movement of class struggle against the feudal order increasingly became known as the Early Bourgeois Revolution (*frühbürgerliche Revolution*). The importance of the Reformation in this movement was not Luther's theology, but rather the act of making the people consciousness of the injustices of the feudal Church. Galvanized by this knowledge, the people were led in revolutionary revolt by Thomas Müntzer in the

⁵⁷ Thomas Nipperdey, *Reformation, Revolution, Utopie*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 15.

⁵⁸ „In der DDR ist Müntzers Erbe lebendiger Besitz, sine seine bedeutsamsten Gedanken ist sein leidenschaftliches Streben auf höherer Ebene Wirklichkeit geworden. Historiker, Dichter, bildende Künstler und Filmschaffende haben sich in immer neuen Versuchen um die Gestaltung seines Bildes bemüht. Das alles geschah und geschieht aus der tiefen Einsicht in den Gang unserer Geschichte, in der Erkenntnis, daß die Gestalter der sozialistischen Menschengemeinschaft in der DDR nicht nur erben des Kommunistischen Manifestes, sondern auch die Erben, Fortsetzer und Vollender einer altern revolutionären und echt humanistischen Tradition sind, die zurück bis in die bäuerlichen und städtischen Kämpfe des Mittelalters und die sich besonders eindringlich verkörpert in des Gestalt Thomas Müntzers,“ Steinmetz, *Das Müntzerbild*, 438.

Marx Steinmetz, in spite of his later position as the leading GDR historian on Thomas Müntzer, had a complicated past. In his youth, Steinmetz was a member of the National Socialist Party, and only “converted” to Marxism as a Soviet prisoner of war.

Peasants' War.⁵⁹ While Müntzer's revolution had been a failure, his character was imagined to live on in the collective identity of the GDR.

While Zimmermann, Engels, Kautsky, Bloch, Smirin, and Steinmetz are used here to illustrate the continuance of Marxist research on Thomas Müntzer, there were numerous others scholars involved. August Bebel (1840-1913), a founder of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany, Karl Kleinschmidt (1902-1978), a Lutheran minister and member of the GDR's legislature (*Volkskammer*), Leo Stern (1901-1982), a GDR historian, all contributed to a socialist understanding of the Reformation period. While at first glance the religious period of the Reformation might appear contradictory to the atheism of modern communism, the apocalyptic Christianity that Müntzer preached was repeatedly etched into the imagination of communists with each successive generation. While the conception of Müntzer as a positive revolutionary of the people began from a Christian Democrat, Wilhelm Zimmermann, it was coopted by Engels and his successors. With the establishment of the SBZ and later the GDR, the regime immediately set about in legitimizing itself in the image of Müntzer. The process of state legitimization took place across much of the globe following the political changes at the end of the Second World War. However, in many respects the GDR found itself at an advantage as it discovered it had a readymade historical legacy, which it fashioned into the concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. Not only did East Germany have the historical legacy of the founding fathers of communism, Marx and Engels, as Steinmetz emphasized, but they also had a mystic revolutionary hero to venerate in the form of Müntzer, who had already been validated by the Marxist canon.

⁵⁹ Nipperdey, *Reformation, Revolution, Utopie*, 16.

III

Teaching Plans and the Early Bourgeois Revolution

“Above all [the goal] is to strengthen the will in the youth, to work and to fight for a social order in which there is no exploitation of man by man anymore.”
-Dr. Karl Sturm in Teaching Plan of 1948.⁶⁰

“The instruction of history builds lively and lasting relationships of students to history. It deepens and directs their historical interest”
-Abstract from Teaching Plan of 1988.⁶¹

While a brief overview of the socialist perspective on the Reformation period gives a glimpse at the importance the GDR placed on the era at an intellectual level, examining the teaching plans (*Lehrpläne*) used in the compulsory educational system reveals the great emphasis the state placed on the Reformation for integrating youth into society. *Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag*, the central publishing company of educational material, based in Berlin and Leipzig issued teaching guides and plans for pedagogues throughout the existence of East Germany. These texts provide a particularly revealing window into what was deemed correct ideologically and thematically for instruction. In the context of the significant changes that occurred in East Germany society, it is remarkable just how constant Reformation history remained as a major feature in historical education. For example, within the broader culture, East Germans identifying as either Protestant or Catholic dropped from ninety-five to thirty

⁶⁰ „Vor allem ist [das Ziel] der Wille in der Jugend zu stärken, zu arbeiten und zu kämpfen für eine Gesellschaftsordnung, in der es keine Ausbeutung des Menschen durch den Menschen mehr gibt,“ Karl Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1948), 8.

⁶¹ „Der Geschichtsunterricht bildet lebendige und dauerhafte Beziehungen der Schüler zur Geschichte heraus. Er vertieft und lenkt ihr Geschichtsinteresse,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan der zehnklassigen allgemeinbildenden polytechnischen Oberschule Geschichte Klassen 5-10*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1988) 5.

percent between 1950 and 1989.⁶² In the officially atheist state, which was successful in diminishing its citizens' identification with religion, a corresponding drop in the emphasis placed on religious history might be expected, however this did not occur. Instead, religious history, understood through a Marxist-Leninist perspective and focused on Thomas Müntzer, formed a cornerstone of the GDR historical perspective and identity. The teaching plans from the 1950s through the 1980s demonstrate that Reformation history was often the most intensely instructed historical topic in terms of hours in the year it was discussed, and that it was continuously taught throughout the regime.

For the first ten years of the SBZ and GDR, the Reformation and the Peasants' War were taught in year six. Unlike later teaching plans, which gave a numerical breakdown by subject by the hour, the 1948 teaching plan outlined the curriculum in the broadest strokes. For example, the only instructions to the teacher toward the subject "The Reformation in Germany and the Neighboring Counties" was "Luther. Calvin. The Anglican Church, Ignatius of Loyola." The advice regarding the "Peasants' War" was similarly brief: "The Bundschuh Movement. Luther and Müntzer. Müntzer in Thuringia. The Anabaptists."⁶³ These brief directions are surprising, not only in relation to the Reformation period but also in relation to all historical subjects considering the task at hand of convincing the general populace to commit itself to a new communist regime. This is especially the case in the early days of the regime, as the population could vote with their feet and go to the West. As John Rodden has remarked: "No other communist state faced a comparable problem of legitimacy and identity—and risked

⁶² Wall Chart, *Religion in der DDR*, DDR Museum, Berlin, Germany.

⁶³ „Die Reformation in Deutschland und den Nachbarländern: Luther. Calvin. Die anglikanische Kirche. Ignaz von Loyola,“ Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, 13.

„Bauernkrieg: Der Bundschuh. Luther und Müntzer. Müntzer in Thüringen. Die Wiedertäufer,“ Ibid.

losing millions of its citizens to a rival neighbor.”⁶⁴ The East German teacher of 1948 needed all the help they could get; it can be assumed that many of these teachers had a limited, rusty, or very new familiarity with the concepts of socialist history and Marxist-Leninism. Recognizing this, the teaching plan did offer a list of important books for the new socialist teacher to lightly skim. The author of the preface to the teaching plan, Karl Sturm, euphemistically phrased the lack of the correct ideological training as follows: “It seems necessary then to point out some of the particular writings that the young teacher, still lacking in a thorough scientific education, should prioritize before he studies the great theoretical writings of scientific socialism and the important works of bourgeois historiography.”⁶⁵ The catalog of titles included a dizzying array of over 120 socialist and non-socialist works of history and political philosophy, ranging from “The German Two Year Plan for 1949/1950” to texts penned by authors from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Kautsky, Lukács, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.⁶⁶ How far through any teacher, let alone the majority got through this list before entering the classroom is difficult to say; however, this list does indicate that the SBZ authorities at least desired their teachers to be rooted in Marxist-Leninism, even if at this early stage of the East German regime it was impossible to gather a large group of instructors who had grown up in a socialist education.

⁶⁴ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34.

⁶⁵ „Es erscheint dabei notwendig, auf einige Schriften besonders hinzuweisen, die der junge Lehrer, dem noch eine gründliche wissenschaftliche Ausbildung fehlt lesen sollte, bevor er an das Studium der großen theoretischen Schriften des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus und der bedeutenden Werke der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung herangeht,“ Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, 9.

For a more complete picture of the challenges that faced new teachers, (*Neulehrer*) in the SBZ, see pages 153-166 in Charles B. Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶⁶ „Der deutsche Zweijahrplan für 1948/50. Dietz 1948,“ Ibid., 33-36.

See Appendix A for full list.

In the preface to the teaching plan, Sturm notably highlighted the Reformation and Peasants' War as important historical events. The sequential order of the Reformation moving right into the Peasants' War is suggestive of an interrelated process that made up the later termed Early Bourgeois Revolution. While 1948 text does not provide an idea of how many hours were devoted to the Reformation period, it does offer some comments on how to interpret Luther in the Reformation and the Peasants' War. This is interesting considering the emphasis the 1948 textbook placed on Müntzer rather than Luther (see Chapter Four). The preface harshly rebukes Luther and relativizes the destruction that the Peasants' War caused. Sturm quotes the German politician Ernst Niekisch (1889-1967), who rebuked Luther and Lutheran scholars:

The Protestant theologians love to apologize for the fateful progress of events, Luther as a homo religious, that is to say an exclusively religious man, who was unaware of all social and political events. Nothing is more wrong and misleading than this attempt to cleanse. Luther, we find, had a really wonderfully developed sensitivity for the true social and political power relations in the Reich.⁶⁷

Here, at least in the preface if not the textbook, Luther is represented as a Machiavellian figure, who sensed that his self-interest lay within the existing power of the nobility, rather than peasants. Such strong condemnations of Luther would appear later, especially in the textbooks issued after 1951, but often in conjunction with a positive comparison with Müntzer. Here, in 1948, Sturm does not even mention Müntzer in his preface. Instead, Sturm quotes another, less

⁶⁷ „Die protestantischen Theologen lieben es, um den verhängnisvollen Fortgang der Ereignisse zu entschuldigen, Luther als einen homo religious, d.h. ausschließlich religiösen Menschen, darzustellen, der allem gesellschaftlichen und politischen Geschehen ahnungslos gegenübergestanden sei. Nichts wohl ist falscher und irreführender als dies Reinwaschungsversuch. Luther hatte, so finden wir, ein geradezu wunderbar entwickeltes Feingefühl für wahren gesellschaftlichen und politischen Machtverhältnisse im Reiche,“ Ernst Niekisch, quoted in Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, 5.

Ernst Niekisch is particularly remembered for his involvement in National Bolshevism, which in the 1920s involved a combination of Bolshevism, as it existed in the Soviet Union, and highly nationalist German currents existing in the Weimar Republic.

extreme German politician and historian than Niekisch, Gottlob Egelhaaf (1848-1934), who argues that the actions of the revolting peasants should be measured against the fate they received: “The horror of the rebellion was outdone tenfold by the horrors of a reaction dehumanized beyond all conceptions. The number of peasants killed is estimated at 130,000.”⁶⁸ In spite of the limited instructions given to teachers in the plan, the 1948 preface shows that the East German regime, even before the founding of the GDR, valued the Reformation period. However, Müntzer role is noticeably muted in the teaching plan in comparison to the later emphasis found in both teaching plans and textbooks that grounded both the Early Bourgeois Revolution and the GDR’s past firmly as the legacy of Müntzer.



⁶⁸ „Die Greuel des Aufruhrs wurden zehnfach überboten von den Greueln einer über alle Begriffe entmenschten Reaktion. Die Zahl der getöteten Bauern wird auf 130 000 geschätzt,“ Gottlob Egelhaaf, *Deutschen Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1885) quoted in Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, 5.

Figure 1. Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag. BArch DR 200/1930

In 1952, the teaching plan gave a highly specific breakdown of how to teach the medieval era and the Reformation. It states that fifteen hours should be set aside for topics relating to the Reformation and the Peasants' War, under the heading "The struggle of the German Peasants against their Feudal Lords."⁶⁹ These fifteen hours represented over twenty percent of the total seventy-four hours devoted to history, a curriculum that also included two additional related topics, "The German Kingdom in the Period of the Full Development of Feudalism" and "The Beginning of the Struggle of the Bourgeoisie against Feudalism."⁷⁰ Altogether, these topics amounted to forty-one teaching hours, or fifty-five percent of the entire history curriculum in year six. Within this broader thematic course, the Reformation and Peasants' War received the most hours of instruction. The teaching plan of 1952 reveals that the late medieval era and the Reformation period specifically were highly emphasized. It was essentially outlined as a series of interrelated class struggles: the German kingdom against the Papacy, the bourgeoisie against the nobility, and the peasants against the nobility – familiar components of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. However, the term was not used in the textbooks or teaching plans of the 1950s.

⁶⁹ „Der Kampf der deutschen Bauren gegen ihre Feudalherren,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für Grunschulen: Geschichte 5. Bis 8. Schuljahr*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1952), 20.

⁷⁰ „Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in der Periode der vollen Entfaltung des Feudalismus“ „Der beginnende Kampf des Bürgertums gegen den Feudalismus,“ Ibid.

6; 3	Der Kampf der deutschen Bauern gegen ihre Feudalherren	15 Stunden
6; 31	Die Klassegegensätze in der Zeit des verfallenden Feudalismus	5 Stunden
6; 32	Bauernaufstände vor der Reformation	2 Stunden
6; 33	Die Reformation und der Große Deutsche Bauernkrieg Die Ausbreitung der Reformation in Europa	6 Stunden
6; 34	Die Festigung der katholischen Kirche	2 Stunden
6; 4	Aus der Geschichte der europäischen Völker	3 Stunden
6; 41	Aus der Geschichte Osteuropas	2 Stunden
6; 42	Aus der Geschichte Westeuropas	1 Stunde

Figure 2. Abstract of Teaching Plan of 1952.⁷¹

According to the teaching plan of 1953, class time for history was extremely extenuated. Only forty-one hours were given over to the subject, the same number of hours allotted to all Reformation history in 1952. Notably, the topic “The Struggle of the German Peasants against their Feudal Lords” retained the same allocation of fifteen hours, which in 1953 accounted for nearly thirty-seven percent of all class time reserved for history, indicating how even as teaching hours dropped, the state continued to see the Reformation period as a critical topic of study.⁷² Despite overall reduced teaching time, for history the teaching plan in 1953 gave more detailed instructions on what issues should receive “emphasis” in any give lesson, and what specific “material” should be used to achieve that aim.⁷³ In addition, the teachers were given an annotated (and more manageable) reading list to supplement their own learning of socialist history. This reading list included Schmidt-Werder’s recent *The German Peasants’ War*, published in 1947, as well as more classical socialist literature, such as Engels’ *The Fall of*

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für Grunschulen: Geschichte 5. Bis 8. Schuljahr*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1953), 5.

⁷³ „Schwerpunkt“ and „Stoff“, Ibid., 7.

Feudalism and the Coming of the Bourgeoisie and *The German Peasants' War*.⁷⁴ While this reading catalog gives an impression of what the Ministry of Education officially expected, or more realistically hoped teachers would read, this list still does not prove that teachers were significantly influenced and changed their instruction accordingly. In spite of how much teachers may or may not have followed the suggested reading in their teaching plans issued by the Education Ministry, the teaching plan of 1953 highlights both the high degree of importance that the state saw in retaining Reformation history as a topic as teaching hours were reduced and how ideologically rooted the ideal teacher was supposed to be in the most classic works of Marxist history.

After a brief experiment of teaching the Reformation in the tenth year in 1956, the topic returned to sixth year of general education in 1957. Within the sixty hours of instruction set aside for history, the Reformation and the Peasants' War received sixteen hours, or almost twenty-six percent of class time. The subject with the next closest level of class time was "The Beginning of the Medieval German Kingdom – The Conquest of German Feudal Lords to the East" with thirteen hours, or around twenty-two percent of class time.⁷⁵ The topic of the "Great German Peasants' War" was encouraged to be studied in coordination with other subjects such as German, Music and Art. The whole sixth year of school was seen as important to students development of a group consciousness as "In the whole of the history lessons of this school

⁷⁴ „Schmidt-Weder: *Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg*, Volk und Wissen Verlag 1947“
 „Engels: *Über den Verfall des Feudalismus und das Aufkommen der Bourgeoisie*, Dietz Verlag“
Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg, Dietz Verlag, “ Ibid., 9.

See Appendix B for 1953 Reading List

⁷⁵ „Die Anfänge des mittelalterlichen deutschen Reiches Die Eroberungszüge deutscher Feudalherren nach dem Osten,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für Grunschulen: Geschichte 5. Bis 8. Schuljahr*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1957), 5.

year, through the treatment of national history, the homeland's history is to included to a large extent."⁷⁶ This kind of holistic approach to the topic of the Reformation and Peasants gives an interesting indication of the significance of the period as a cultural identity-building subject, a national project. The period was directly linked to the homeland. The topic was not just another series of dates to be remembered, but a moment of deeper meaning that was worth celebrating with art. The teaching plan of 1957 also reflected on Luther's role in the Reformation by contrasting his legacy with Thomas Müntzer in a negative light. For example, when talking about the Peasants' War, the teaching plan encouraged teachers to "Talk of the teaching of Luther, his behavior in the Peasants' War, the students should understand that Luther did not advocate for the just cause of the Peasants."⁷⁷ Although the history of the Reformation and the Peasants' War was important, the figure of admiration was not Luther, but Müntzer. The farther into the 1950s the GDR went, the more clear the connection between the teaching plans instruction to connect the Reformation and Peasants' War to the East German regime became.

⁷⁶ „Bei der Behandlung des Großen Deutschen Bauernkrieges ist eine Absprache mit dem Deutsche-, Gesangs- und Zeichenlehrer nötig (vgl. entspr. Lehrpläne).“ [“In the treatment of the Great German Peasants' War, an agreement with the German, Singing, and Art teacher[s] is necessary (compare corresponding syllabi),”] Ibid., 4.

Im gesamten Geschichtsunterricht dieses Schuljahres ist bei der Behandlung der nationalen Geschichte die Heimatgeschichte weitgehend einzubeziehen,“ Ibid.

⁷⁷ „Spricht der Lehrer von Luthers Verhalten im Bauernkrieg, werden die Schüler erkennen, daß sich Luther für dir gerechte Sache der Bauern nicht einsetzte,“ Ibid., 8.



**Figure 3. „Thomas Müntzer berät mit Bauernführern“
 (“Thomas Müntzer advises with Peasant Leaders”) 1955 Textbook.⁷⁸**

In the 1960s, the term Early Bourgeois Revolution begins to appear in the teaching plans. Intriguingly, the change can be observed between 1966 and 1967. The 1963 textbook, used until the new textbook of 1967 was introduced, does not include the term Early Bourgeois Revolution anywhere in the chapter dealing with the Reformation and Peasants' War. In addition, the Reformation and Peasants' War are included along with the Hussites and Jan Hus as historical topics.⁷⁹ In 1966, two teaching plans were published. The 1966 teaching plan for

⁷⁸ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1955), 147.

⁷⁹ *Lehrbuch für Klasse 7*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1963) 6-42.

the old textbook does not mention the Early Bourgeois Revolution.⁸⁰ Published in April of 1966, it hinted at the coming change to the curriculum on the cover page by disclosing that the plan for year six in this publication still retained the plan from 1959.⁸¹ The other 1966 teaching plan, published in June, written for the new 1967 textbook, explicitly separates the Hussites and Early Bourgeois Revolution, emphasizing the German nature of the revolution and dispelling the suggestion that it was a multinational phenomenon.⁸² After 1967, the term the Early Bourgeois Revolution consistently appears in the teaching plans and textbooks until the dissolution of the republic. Even though the particulars of the Early Bourgeois Revolution still developed and shifted in the text between editions, the term was accepted for the last twenty-three years of the regime within the schoolbooks.

⁸⁰ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für das Fach Geschichte*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigner Verlag, 1966), 12.

⁸¹ „Unveränderter Nachdruck des Lehrplans von 1959 für die Klasse 7“
[“Unchanged reprint of the teaching plan from 1959 for class 8”] Ibid., 1.

⁸² „Der Präzisierte Lehrplan für Geschichte, Klasse 6, tritt am 1. September 1967 für den Unterricht in allgemeinbildenden polytechnischen Oberschule in Kraft. -Berlin, den 30. Juni 1966“
[“The clarified teaching plan for history, class 6, enters into effect on September 1st, 1967 for the instruction in polytechnic general upper school. –Berlin, the 30th of June 1966”] Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Ziele und Inhalt des Unterrichts im Fach Geschichte (Klasse 5 bis 10) und Grundsätze zur Unterricht*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1966), 3, 28.

4.3. Leben und Kampf der Bauern im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter	(4 Stunden)
4.4. Die Hussitenbewegung	(2 Stunden)
4.5. Die Weiterentwicklung der Kultur im Hochmittelalter	(3 Stunden)
5. Das Wesen des Feudalismus – Systematisierung	2 Stunden
6. Die frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland	14 Stunden
6.1. Der Frühkapitalismus in Deutschland – die Verschärfung aller Widersprüche des Feudalismus	(4 Stunden)
6.2. Weltanschauung und Kunst des deutschen Bürgertums	(3 Stunden)
6.3. Die Reformation und der deutsche Bauernkrieg	(5 Stunden)
6.4. Die Ergebnisse der frühbürgerlichen Revolution in Deutschland	(2 Stunden)

Figure 4. Abstract from 1966 Teaching Plan highlighting the new differentiation between the Hussites and the Early Bourgeois Revolution.⁸³

Right to the end of the GDR, education regarding the Reformation and the Peasants' War remained a significant aspect in of the historical education of a child living in the East – even in a purely statistical sense. In the teacher's guide of 1976, "The Early Bourgeois

⁸³ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Ziele und Inhalt des Unterrichts im Fach Geschichte (Klasse 5 bis 10) und Grundsätze zur Unterricht*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1966), 28.

Revolution in Germany” contained fourteen hours of instruction.⁸⁴ This accounted for nearly twenty-two percent of class time of the total sixty-four hours. In 1988, within eighty hours of planned instruction in historical topics, the events and effects of the Early Bourgeois Revolution were allotted sixteen hours, or twenty percent. No other historical topic taught in 1988 received such a density of investigation.⁸⁵ This continuing emphasis on the Reformation period and the so-called Early Bourgeois Revolution formed part of the national mythos of the GDR. The preface to the 1976 teaching plan explains why the GDR put such a strong emphasis on the past: “In particular, they [the students] should obtain a party-line way of thinking about the GDR, their historical tasks and political goals, and prepare themselves to work in every field for the realization of the historical tasks and to defend their socialist fatherland against all attacks.”⁸⁶ The placement and decision to teach particular topics was neither happenstance nor hastily formed. They were deliberately chosen for their ideological and theoretical use to the regime, to link the goals of the nation and citizen seamlessly together. History, and the Reformation in particular, was critical for the present national project of the GDR.

From these teaching guides it is clear that the Reformation and the Peasants’ War remained important topics in history education in East Germany. Whether taught in the sixth,

⁸⁴ “*Die frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland*,” Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Ziele und Inhalt des Unterrichts im Fach Geschichte (Klasse 5 bis 10) und Grundsätze zur Unterricht*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1976), 26.

⁸⁵ „1. *Reformation und Bauernkrieg in Deutschland als frühbürgerliche Revolution – 8 Stunden*
 2. *Das deutsche Reich nach der frühbürgerlichen Revolution. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg – 8 Stunden*“
 [“1. [The] Reformation and Peasants’ War in Germany as [the] Early Bourgeois Revolution – 8 hours
 2. The German Kingdom after the Early Bourgeois Revolution. The Thirty Years War – 8 hours”] Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan der zehnklassigen allgemeinbildenden polytechnischen Oberschule Geschichte Klassen 5 bis 10*, (Berlin, Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1988), 31.

⁸⁶ „*Sie sollen insbesondere eine parteiliche Einstellung zur DDR, zu ihren historischen Aufgaben und politischen Zielen gewinnen und sich darauf vorbereiten, an jedem Platz für die Verwirklichung der historischen Aufgaben zu wirken und ihr sozialistisches Vaterland gegen alle Angriffe zu verteidigen*,” Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Ziele und Inhalt des Unterrichts im Fach Geschichte*, (1976), 9.

seventh, or tenth year of school, this topic was nearly always the most emphasized within the curriculum. Even in periods when teaching hours were cut, Reformation history maintained its privileged spot in the syllabus. The deep intellectual roots in the German Marxist historiography and tradition, which Reformation and the Peasants' War history specifically contained clarifies why this topic continued to receive such a high level of emphasis in the national project of the GDR throughout the existence of the East German educational system. From the perspective of Reformation history, 1967 was an important year for the GDR. Aside from the introduction of a new textbook, 1967 marked an auspicious year for Reformation remembrance, as it was the 450th anniversary of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses*. Onward from 1967, the term, Early Bourgeois Revolution never left GDR textbooks or teaching plans, and only continued to develop. In order to better understand how the early sixteenth century was used to legitimize the regime from its earliest years, it is necessary to take a closer look at the textbooks themselves.

IV

Risen from the Pages of Marxist History

“They are to be inspired for the heroic liberation struggle of German peasants and plebeians in the Great German Peasant War and for their revolutionary leader Thomas Müntzer.”
 -Abstract from Teaching Plan of 1955 ⁸⁷

The conditions for education, and the conditions of life more generally in years immediately following the end of the Second World War, were poor in all the zones of occupation in Germany. In addition to the most pressing problems of food and shelter, from a childhood education perspective there were vastly more children to educate within the SBZ than there had been in the same area in 1939. Refugees from the east clogged the classrooms.⁸⁸ Yet, the problems were further compounded because even once the limited number of trained teachers had passed through a denazification process, there were almost no materials with which to teach as the use of Nazi-era textbooks was forbidden.⁸⁹ Any educational resources published within the last twelve years were essentially forbidden. New books of a highly different ideological bent did eventually arrive though, first in limited numbers and in a limited number of subject areas in 1946.⁹⁰ These new textbooks, initially based on texts from the Soviet Union, were used to introduce Marxist-Leninist concepts to children. History in the SBZ was

⁸⁷ „Sie sollen für den heroischen Befreiungskampf deutscher Bauern und Plebejer im Großen Deutschen Bauernkrieg und für ihren revolutionären Führer Thomas Müntzer begeistert werden,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Direktive zur Arbeit mit dem Lehrplan für das Fach Geschichte*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1955), 5.

⁸⁸ John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945-1995*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

Charles B. Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German Schoolteachers Under Two Dictatorships* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), 134.

⁸⁹ Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism*, 136.

⁹⁰ John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity*, (Penn State University Press, 2006), 2-3.

now taught through the lens of class struggle and progress toward a socialist utopia. These books explained the present world political situation not simply as product of the recent past of Marxist history since the mid-nineteenth century but rather from the very beginning of time. In spite of their Soviet origin, the first textbooks published in the SBZ contained the nascent beginnings of a national mythos even before the founding of the GDR and essentially paraphrased existing German historiography. While it is certainly true that the ideological framework grounding the educational curriculum and society more generally in Germany changed dramatically, more so in the SBZ than anywhere else, describing the shift as simply as “Soviet nationalism replaced *Deutschtum*” glides over the origins that GDR state-socialist nationalism had in Germany’s own history, and which the administration worked to develop.⁹¹ In focusing on the changes that took place within the first couple years of the new regime, from its transition from the SBZ to the GDR, it becomes apparent that the regime sought to legitimize itself by placing its roots deep into the past, prior to the occupation zones of 1945, the founding of the KPD in 1918, even before Marx, Engels, and the revolutions of 1848, and into the religious upheavals of sixteenth-century Europe.

The first medieval period textbooks, *Geschichte des Mittelalters (History of the Middle Ages)* published in the SBZ by Volk und Wissen in 1948—before the founding of the GDR on 7 October 1949 — were not written directly by German scholars. They were German translations of the fourth edition of history textbooks used in middle schools in the USSR.⁹²

⁹¹ John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 8.

⁹² „Dieser Ausgabe liegt die Übersetzung von Prof. Dr. Alfred Siggel, Berlin, nach der vierten Auflage des Russischen Originals zugrunde, das in der RSFSR. als Lehrbuch für die 6. bis. 7. Klasse der Mittelschule dient“. [“This edition is the translation of Professor Alfred Siggel, Berlin, based from the fourth edition of the Russian original that in the USSR serves as the textbook for the six to seven grades of middle school,”] E.A. Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1948), v.

That the textbooks came from Russia can be seen as evidence of the general Sovietization that was taking place not only in the German SBZ, but also across east-central Europe, where Soviet troops were stationed after the end of the Second World War.⁹³ However, even though *History of the Middle Ages* was a translated and Soviet text, it presented the Reformation and the Peasants' War both in a way that was recognizable as part of socialist German historiography and open to a particular German state-socialist narrative. Intriguingly, as early as 1948, the textbooks published in the SBZ portrayed a vision of the past, and of the Peasants' War in particular, as the moment of German national awareness. Depicting Thomas Müntzer and the peasants as proto-communists, the SBZ and later the GDR authorities were therefore declaring that *true* German national heritage was socialist.

Throughout the chapter “The Reformation and the Peasants' War in Germany,” the 1948 text emphasizes various ways in which the Peasants' War generally, and Thomas Müntzer specifically, represented a growth of an understanding of early communism from the perspective of socialist authorities in the GDR.⁹⁴ While neither characterizing Müntzer as a modern communist, nor directly referencing Müntzer's religious dimension, the text positively presents Müntzer as a doomed, but heroic revolutionary historic figure par excellence:

The leader of the revolutionary movement was Thomas Müntzer (1493–1525). His goal was a society in which there was neither exploiter, nor exploited, all were equal and all property belonged to the entire society. He had some unclear vision of the character of a classless socialist society, but that society as we know today, can only be created through a socialist revolution that has been carried out by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Since at that time such a proletariat was only a sprout, Thomas Müntzer's ideals could not be actualized. Müntzer recognized this himself also; that the existing social conditions little favored the realization of his ideals, but as a true revolutionary,

⁹³ Norman Naimark, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953” in M. Leffler & O. Westad (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177.

⁹⁴ „Die Reformation und der Bauernkrieg in Deutschland,“ Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 204.

he used his organization and leadership abilities to unite the revolutionaries of that time in the struggle against the Feudal lords.⁹⁵

The text focuses on Müntzer's "correct" class perspective when evaluating his beliefs, but it does not mention how these beliefs stemmed from any religious basis. While underlying Müntzer's righteous understanding of society from the perspective of twentieth-century socialism, the above section also reveals a teleological understanding of history by likening the development of the "proletariat" to a young plant that was still germinating in the unfertile soil of a period of history not ready for communism.⁹⁶ This interpretation of history, and of Müntzer, while coming from Evgeniy Alekseevich Kosminski (1886-1959), a Russian scholar, was deeply rooted in German historiography. It links strongly with the work of Wilhelm Zimmermann, his beliefs about the past, and his interpretation of the philosophies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the *General History of the Great Peasant's War* ("*Allgemeine Geschichte des großen Bauernkrieges*"), which Friedrich Engels used extensively in his own work on the subject.⁹⁷ Zimmermann identified the motive force behind history as the rational world spirit that in cooperation with human reason was working toward the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. The details of this Kingdom of God were very different in the SBZ of course, as this was the utopia of an atheist state, of the proletariat, and "human reason" was

⁹⁵ „Führer der revolutionären Bewegung wurde Thomas Münzer (1493-1525). Sein Ziel war eine Gesellschaftsordnung, in der es weder Ausbeuter noch Ausgebeutete gibt, alle gleich sind und das Eigentum der ganzen Gesellschaft gehört. Er hatte also gewisse unklare Vorstellungen vom Charakter einer klassenlosen sozialistischen Gesellschaft, die aber, wie wir heute wissen, erst nach Durchführung einer sozialistischen Revolution durch die Diktatur des Proletariats geschaffen werden kann. Da es damals ein solches Proletariat nur erst im Keime gab, waren Thomas Münzers Ideale nicht zu verwirklichen. Münzer erkannte auch selbst, daß die bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse die Verwirklichung seiner Ideale wenig begünstigten, aber als echter Revolutionär verwandte er sein Organisations und Führungstalent darauf, die damaligen Revolutionäre im Kampfe gegen die Feudalherren zu einigen,“ Ibid., 210.

⁹⁶ Particular emphasis here derived in the following sentence: „Da es damals ein solches Proletariat nur erst im Keime gab, waren Thomas Münzers Ideale nicht zu verwirklichen.“ [“Since at that time such a proletariat was only a sprout, Thomas Müntzer's ideals could not be actualized.”] “*im Keime*” being more directly translatable as “in the bud,” but “*der Keim*” having the English meanings “germ,” “embryo,” “nucleus,” Ibid.

communism and not Christianity.⁹⁸ In addition, the note that the proletariat was not developed enough to sustain a revolution appears as a direct paraphrasing of sections of Engel's *The Peasant War in Germany*: "The mass of the nation, small bourgeois artisans and peasants, were left in the lurch by their nearest and natural allies, the bourgeoisie, because they were too revolutionary, and partly by the proletariat because they were not sufficiently advanced."⁹⁹ While imported from Russia, the textual footprints of Engels and the conceptual ideas of Hegel and Zimmermann in this textbook published in the SBZ are clear. The whole chapter avoids theological discussions, and it does not mention the word God ("Gott") once when discussing the most significant rupture in Christianity, but the teleological perspective is derived from Christian and Hegelian concepts.

While discussing the sixteenth century, and based on the nineteenth-century writings of Engels, the lessons and significance of Müntzer in the historical curriculum in the SBZ were about the twentieth century. The interpretation of Müntzer's ultimate defeat as a historical moment worthy of remembrance and reverence is analogous to broader contemporaneous policies in East Germany regarding the past. As the Jeffery Herf argues when discussing the East German annual September International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascist Terror (*Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus*), the East German regime memorialized failures and tragedies as moments that progressed the course of history toward its utopic end: "These modified days of remembrance were essentially Hegelian moments. They redefined unredeemable and senseless tragedy into a redemptive martyrdom that contributed to the

⁹⁸ Abraham Friesen, *Reformation and Utopia: The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and Its Antecedents*, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974), 105.

⁹⁹ Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin, (New York: International Publishers, 2000), 89.

victorious end of History.” In this way, masses of nameless victims of the Second World War, socialist or otherwise, and prominent German communists, like Ernst Thälmann, were given active roles in a new historical mythos.¹⁰⁰ As a historical martyr of the SED from the more distance past, Müntzer effectively played two roles. In one manner, he was a figure to emulate as he was portrayed as keeping true to his revolutionary values, even as he knew he was doomed. As such a figure he was paralleled to recent KPD victims of the Third Reich, such as Thälman. In another, perhaps more important way, Müntzer was evidence for the SED that socialism was both invented and native to Germany. Depicting Müntzer as a proto-communist was a tool to backdate Germany’s socialist roots several centuries before Marx and Engels, even before capitalism.

Kosminski’s 1948 SBZ textbook also argues that the Reformation period was the beginning of a kind of national consciousness in Germany. The very beginning of the chapter emphasizes that Germany did not have a unified state in the sixteenth century.¹⁰¹ However, as the text goes on it argues that the Peasants’ War catalyzed opportunities for ideas toward a unified government to form through bourgeoisie allies of the peasants in the following series of demands made in the city of Heilbronn: “Unification of Germany under the authority of the Emperor, a uniform weights and measures, a uniform currency system, and the limitation of the power of the princes and other noblemen.”¹⁰² Linking these nationalistic demands to the Peasants’ War in general had a particularly beneficial aspect to the SED. In this interpretation,

¹⁰⁰ Jeffery Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 164.

¹⁰¹ „Deutschland war im 16. Jahrhundert wie Italien kein einheitlicher Staat“. [“Germany, like Italy was not a single state in the sixteenth century,”] Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 204.

¹⁰² „Einigung Deutschlands unter der Herrschaft des Kaisers, einheitliches Maß und Gewicht, einheitliches Münzsystem, Beschränkung der Macht der Fürsten und der übrigen adligen Herren,“ Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 212.

the impetus for the unification of Germany started as an outgrowth from a socially righteous revolution, not Prussian expansionist policies, and the SED, tracing its legacy back to the Peasants' War and Thomas Müntzer, were therefore the inheritors of this tradition and national cause which could be distanced from other national projects which were rejected as imperialist.

The consequences of the failure of the Peasants' War as described by Kosminski follows Engels interpretation in *The Peasant War in Germany*, but also hints toward darker historical events from the more recent past. Engels, writing in 1850 and reflecting on the Revolutions of 1848 identified the winners of 1848 and the Peasants' War as analogous: "Who profited by the revolution of 1525? The princes. Who profited by the revolution of 1848? The big princes, Austria and Prussia."¹⁰³ Kosminski's summation is essentially the same except that his connection to the Prussia is to the sixteenth century and not the nineteenth century:

The suppression of the peasant uprising was particularly beneficial for the princes. They now advanced the Reformation movement in their own way. The clerical possessions passed into their hands. It happened that priestly princes renounced their spiritual authority and became sovereigns over their former spiritual principalities. So for example, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order assumed the title of Duke of Prussia in 1525.¹⁰⁴

The emphasis on the victory of the princes is important as it developed in time into a concept of its own, the "Princely Reformation" (*Fürstenreformation*). While the 1948 textbook reference to Prussia is placed within the sixteenth and not nineteenth century, the implications of giving Prussia as an example of a princely state that benefited from the Peasants' War was not trivial or limited to the sixteenth century. Rather this connection had implications all the way up to the

¹⁰³ Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 89.

¹⁰⁴ „Die Niederwerfung des Bauernaufstandes war vor allen für die Fürsten von Vorteil. Sie trieben jetzt die reformatorische Bewegung auf ihre Weise vorwärts. Der klerikale Besitz ging in ihre Hände über. Es kam vor, daß geistliche Fürsten ihre geistliche Würde ablegten und sich zu Herrschern über ihre ehemaligen geistlichen Fürstentümer machten. So verfuhr z. B. der Hochmeister des Deutschen Ordens, der den Titel eines Herzogs von Preußen annahm (1525),“ Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 215.

present. Highlighting the decision of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order to seize church land and property and found the Duchy of Prussia through the House of Hohenzollern as a materially motivated decision was a way to portray the following centuries of Prussian expansion, imperialism, and German unification in 1871 under Prussian leadership as based upon unsound moral foundations from a socialist perspective.

While this connection may seem slim from just this one example, the broader history curriculum in 1948 provides further evidence of this association. For example, students also learned about “Eastern Colonization” (*Ostkolonisation*) carried out by Teutonic Order and later the Duchy of Prussia, which teachers were explicitly instructed to portray as having a “predatory character.”¹⁰⁵ Later, in the 1957 teaching plan, the theme of predatory eastern expansion was emphasized by instructing the teachers to characterize the Slavic resistance to the Germans as legitimate: “The party line representation of the robbery and conquest of the German feudal lords in Slavic territory is important in the sixth school year. The students are in the process of realizing that the Slavs were conducting a just defensive struggle.”¹⁰⁶ Themes of colonization and imperialism with Prussia were consistent throughout syllabus in 1948. When leading classes on the nineteenth century, teachers were directed to discuss “[t]he influence of Prussian reactionarism throughout Germany” and “German Imperialism and its aggressive foreign politics.”¹⁰⁷ This unified message portrayed the German past from the death of Müntzer

¹⁰⁵ „Der räuberische Charakter der germanischen Ostkolonisation“. [“The predatory character of the German eastern colonization,”] Sturm, *Lehrplan für Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, (1948), 13.

¹⁰⁶ „Wichtig ist im 6. Schuljahr die parteiiche Darstellung der Raub- und Eroberungszüge deutscher Feudalherren in slawisches Gebiet. Die Schüler sind dabei zu der Erkenntnis zu führen, daß die Slawen einen gerechten Verteidigungskampf führten,“ *Lehrplan für Grunschulen*, (1957), 5.

¹⁰⁷ „Der Einfluss des reaktionären Preußentum in ganz Deutschland. Der deutsche Imperialismus und seine aggressive Außenpolitik“. [“The influence of Prussian reactionarism throughout Germany. The German imperialism and its aggressive foreign politics,”] , Karl Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1948), 16.

to the fall of Berlin three years prior as being controlled by self-interested political forces unconcerned for the wellbeing of the masses of German society as a whole. In addition to angling the SED both as the redeemer and inheritor of the German nation and Müntzer's legacy, the narrative involving Prussian expansionism was useful in interpreting the loss of territories on the eastern borders. The territories were deemed illegitimate because they had been obtained through Prussian imperialism.

This position was normalized to the young in ways outside of the history curriculum, notably with children's picture books, such as the 1949 *Neue Heimat (New Homeland)*, which depicted a German refugee family arriving in the SBZ—the implied subtext being they have arrived in the SBZ having been expelled from the lost eastern territories—and beginning a new life of productive work—agriculture production, education, and rigorous outdoor exercise—in the new “homeland.”¹⁰⁸ When comparing the curriculum and other materials, such as *Neue Heimat*, a picture develops of a wider effort to legitimize the status of the SBZ, SED, and the broader new political order before the founding of the GDR in late 1949.

¹⁰⁸ Annelise Jahnke, *Neue Heimat: Ein Erstleseheft*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1949).

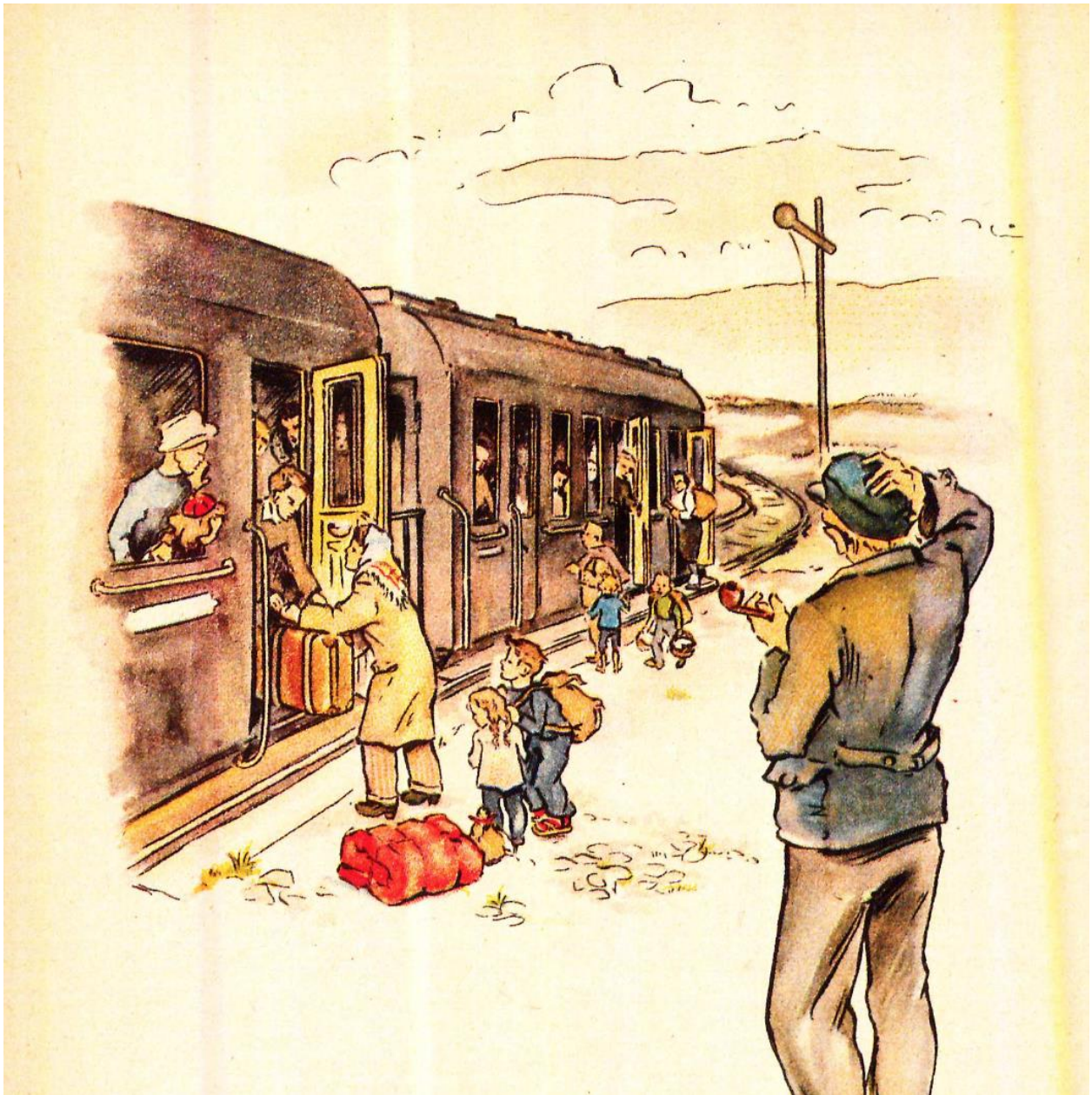
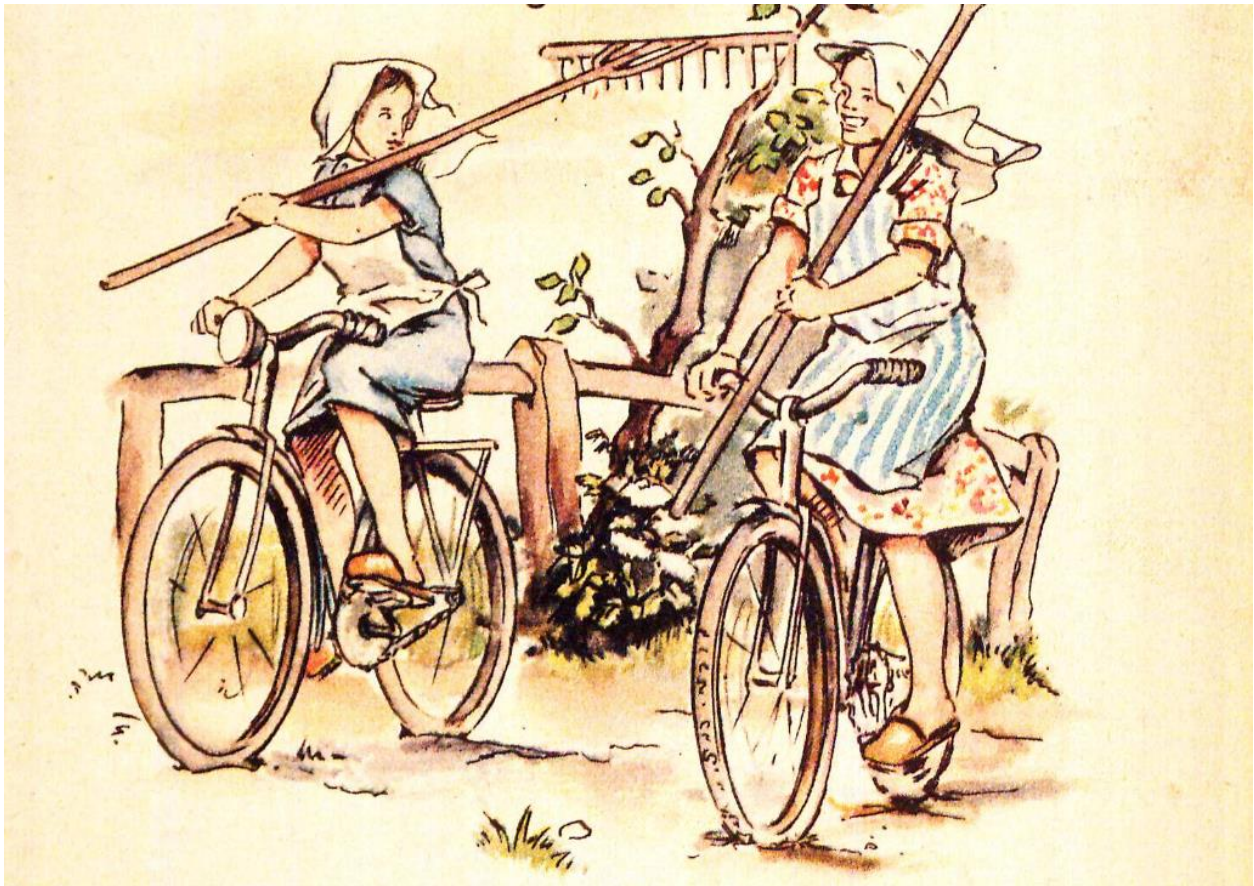


Figure 5. Refugees Arrive by Train - Abstract from *Neue Heimat* (1949).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Annelise Jahnke, *Neue Heimat: Ein Erstleseheft*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1949), 3.



Figures 6. Farming Women Cycling - Abstract from *Neue Heimat* (1949).¹¹⁰

In 1951, after the founding of the GDR, the revised edition of the textbook, *Geschichte des Mittelalters* regarding the Reformation became more explicitly nationalistic. Additionally, the didactic lines differentiating images of Luther and Müntzer became starker. The 1951 textbook, still listed Kosminski as the author, explicitly described the Reformation period as a *national* movement, one that Luther did not comprehend:

The peasants and the urban poor imagined the Reformation completely differently [than Luther]. They wanted to combine the Reformation of the Church with the transformation of the whole social system on the basis of justice and equality. Within the working classes of Germany there still lived the teaching of the Taborites [(a faction

¹¹⁰ Annelise Jahnke, *Neue Heimat: Ein Erstleseheft*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1949), 24.

of the Hussite movement)]. The working people of Germany demanded not a royal and not a bourgeois, but a *national reformation* [italicized emphasis in original text].¹¹¹

In the context of the new circumstances since the founding of the GDR, a stronger national narrative appeared in the text written by the same Russian author published just three years earlier. The lauding adjectives describing Müntzer increased as well as he was no longer just a leader, rather he was promoted to a “hero” and “great revolutionary.”¹¹² Significant portions and ideas of the text were reprinted as they appeared in 1948, for example Müntzer was still said to have “vague ideas about what a classless society should be like,” but the emphasis of Müntzer’s importance toward the GDR’s national vision is striking.¹¹³ For while Müntzer is at the center in the 1948 text, in the 1951 text his death is dramatically more important as it is portrayed as the fall of the German nation’s most important historical hero: “The princes set strong forces against Müntzer. His army was beaten in an unequal fight at Frankenhausen. Müntzer was taken prisoner, cruelly tortured and executed. So died this greatest hero of the German people.”¹¹⁴ The developments in the 1951 text from 1948 edition indicate how the changing political landscape drove editorial decisions to amplify a national cannon to legitimize the young state. Compared to 1948 when the SED still operated within the SBZ and it was not

¹¹¹ „Ganz anders stellten sich die Bauern und die Stadtarmen die Reformation vor. Sie wollten die Reformation der Kirche mit der Umgestaltung der ganzen Gesellschaftsordnung auf der Grundlage der Gerechtigkeit und Gleichheit verbinden. Unter den werktätigen Klassen Deutschlands lebte noch die Lehre der Taboriten weiter. Die Werktätigen Deutschlands verlangten keine fürstliche und keine bürgerliche, sondern eine **ationale Reformation**,“ (bold text italicized in original text) E.A. Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1951), 208.

¹¹² „Held“ and „der große Revolutionär,“ Ibid.

¹¹³ „Er hatte unklare Vorstellungen darüber, wie eine klassenlose sozialistische Gesellschaft beschaffen sein müßte“ (1951) compared with „Er hatte also gewisse unklare Vorstellungen vom Charakter einer klassenlosen sozialistischen Gesellschaft“ (1948), E.A. Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1951), 208, and E.A. Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 210.

¹¹⁴ Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1951), 210.

clear whether the various occupied zones would be unified, the regime had an official country and a national mythos to cultivate. While efforts to legitimize the regime are apparent in the 1948 text, the 1951 text reveal the intensification of this effort.

Another development within the 1951 text is the increasingly strong attacks against Luther as a traitor to the German people, and his general diminishment as a unique figure. This was done by presenting Luther as an agent of the bourgeois class rather than having any national or religious motivations: “[The bourgeois] wanted a church that sanctified the bourgeois order and preached to the workers and craftsmen, that they should work as much as possible for their masters and not dare to grumble about their poverty. Representative of these views was Luther.”¹¹⁵ Luther’s actions in the 1951 text are essentially reduced to economic ones related to his class status. While Luther was presented in the same class perspective in the 1948 text, he was also acknowledged as having had some sympathy, at least at first, for the peasants.¹¹⁶ The 1951 curriculum was unambiguous. Besides his initial protests against the pope’s sale of indulgences, Luther was a reactionary enemy of the “national” German Peasants’ War. While the 1948 schoolbook did mention that Luther turned against peasants, the 1951 text presents this decision as essentially spinelessness, one emblematic of the bourgeois class: “The German bourgeoisie has betrayed the revolution viciously and cowardly. With their spiritual leader Luther, they hastened to prostrate themselves before the princes, and poured out their wrath upon the defeated peasants and the city-poor, who had frightened the bourgeoisie by their

¹¹⁵ „Es wünschte eine Kirche, die die bürgerliche Ordnung heiligte und den Arbeitern und Handwerkern predigte, daß sie möglichst viel für ihre Herren arbeiten und es nicht wagen sollten, über ihre Armut zu murren. Vertreter dieser Ansichten war Luther,“ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ „Luther, der anfangs den Fürsten und dem Adel vorgeschlagen hatte, den Bauern kleine Zugeständnisse zu machen, ging jetzt endgültig auf die Seite der stärkeren Partei...“ [“Luther who had in the beginning proposed to the princes and nobility to make small concessions to the peasants, now ultimately took the side of the stronger...”] Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1948), 214.

revolutionary behavior.”¹¹⁷ Even Luther’s stance against the indulgences is belittled as it was portrayed as being part of a larger discussion in Christian society by others such as the knight Ulrich von Hutten, the philosopher Erasmus, and the humanists.¹¹⁸ The increasing denigration of Luther served to promote a clearer picture of Müntzer as the true hero of early sixteenth-century Germany and to provide not just an enemy, but a traitor for the nation to despise on a class basis.

The development of the history curriculum on the Reformation period reveals various layers involved in legitimizing the new regime. For on one hand, until 1952, these textbooks were literally stamped as foreign knowledge imports with the colophon boldly stating the origin as the Institute for History in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.¹¹⁹ Yet, these books bore more than faint traces of German thought and contained a growing national narrative which clearly announced itself in the text. Teleological frameworks and utopic ends to history were not new to German historiography, even if they were to the twelve year olds in the classrooms where these textbooks were used. The identification of Müntzer with the German nation and the belittlement of Luther as representative of the bourgeois and nobility were shadows of the ideas of Engels, but the degree to which editors of educational materials in the SBZ and GDR

¹¹⁷ „Es beeilte sich zusammen mit seinem geistigen Führer Luther, sich vor den Fürsten auf die Knie zu werfen, und schüttet seinen ganzen Zorn über die geschlagenen Bauern und die Stadtarmen aus, die durch ihr revolutionäres Auftreten das Bürgertum in Schrecken versetzt hatten,“ Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1951), 207.

¹¹⁸ „Schriften der Humanisten wie „Das Lob der Torheit“ des Erasmus, die „Dunkelmännerbriefe“ und besonders die feurigen Aufrufe Ulrichs von Hutten, mit der Vorherrschaft der Päpste und der katholischen Geistlichkeit Schluß zu machen, fanden in Deutschland lebhaften Widerhall. Im Volk wurden Flugblätter verbreitet, in denen die katholische Geistlichkeit entlarvt und verspottet wurde.“ [“Writings of the humanists such as Erasmus’s “The Praise of Folly,” the “Letters of the Dark Men” and especially the fiery calls of Ulrich von Hutten to put an end to the hegemony of the popes and the Catholic clergy found a strong echo in Germany. Leaflets were distributed among the people exposing and mocking the Catholic clergy,”] Kosminski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1951), 207.

¹¹⁹ „Institut für Geschichte in der Akademie der Wissenschaften der UdSSR“ Ibid.

broadened and darkened these shadows were part of an effort to solidify a new political environment, even the new territorial losses. Particulars, even of Marxist cannon were adaptable to fit the current circumstances as for example Engels in *The Peasant War in Germany* identified the German nation as existing with the “small bourgeois artisans and peasants” but the textbooks of 1951 placed the nation within the peasants and urban poor.¹²⁰ The old historiography, adapted to current circumstances, served to proclaim that the last four centuries of Germany’s past had been controlled by the wrong forces (the nobility, expansionists, Prussians, imperialists, etc.), and that the GDR existed to correct this calamity and enact Müntzer’s vision of the future.

¹²⁰ Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 89.
Kosminkski, *Geschichte des Mittelalters*, (1951), 208.

V

We are Proud of this Epoch of our History!

“Moreover it is essentially about the knowledge derived from history, that the liberation and happiness of the peasants can only become perfect under socialist conditions in the GDR.”
 -Dr. Hans Wormes, Textbook Editor writing in 1974 ¹²¹

Within the fifties and the sixties, GDR citizens experienced a significant amount of change. While the rubble created by the Second World War was eventually cleared from the streets and living standards began to rise, GDR citizens also witnessed the June 1953 uprising, the closing of the Western frontiers on May 26, 1952, and the beginning of the construction of the Berlin wall on August 13, 1961. The unrest in 1953, the closing of the borders to limit the flow of GDR citizens westward (*„Republikflucht“*) indicated that the SED was struggling to convince its citizens to support the national project that was the GDR. In the midst of these changes, and many others, the manner in which textbooks were written transformed as well, and textbook writers sought new ways to develop the bond between the GDR and its citizens through history. While early textbooks were translated from Russian (see Chapter Four), committees of German educators, organized by the Ministry of Education, began in 1953 to publish new history textbooks on the Reformation period.¹²² These committees created ideological textbooks for every subject taught in primary school. Regardless of the subject area,

¹²¹ „Dabei geht es wesentlich um die aus der Geschichte abgeleitete Erkenntnis, daß auch die Befreiung und das Glück der Bauern erst unter sozialistischen Verhältnissen in der DDR vollkommen werden kann,“ Hans Wormes, *„Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit,“* Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der KMU, Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, 23 (1974): 519.

¹²² John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity*, (Penn State University Press, 2006), xxvi.

Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1953).

these pedagogical materials were infused with highly nationalistic content and the committees were remarkably responsive in utilizing world events for political learning purposes. Through the essay, “The Peasants’ War and Thomas Müntzer and their Significance for the Socialist Students’ Personality” („*Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit*,”), written by one of members of the textbook committees, Dr. Hans Wermes, it is possible to see just how strongly one textbook writer identified the religious strife of the sixteenth century with the GDR of the twentieth. This essay, written for an academic audience, displays how Wermes thought schoolbooks should be designed for students to develop an empathetic connection to *their* socialist past.

Dr. Hans Wermes (1926–2010) was an East German historian, textbook writer, and editor. In the context of this thesis, he is a particularly important character as he was the lead editor on the 1978 textbook that covered the Reformation period, and he worked on earlier editions of GDR textbooks as well. He, like his entire generation, lived through multiple regime changes: the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the German Democratic Republic, and the currently existing Federal Republic of Germany. In his own educational development he experienced primary school, secondary, university under three different regimes, and he had a career as an academic before and after unification in 1990.¹²³ Wermes displayed a highly self-aware and complex perception of history’s role in the GDR, and his leader’s position upon its importance. The past was an active image builder for the GDR, and Wermes understood historical instruction to students as part of state creation: “History teaching in the GDR is generally conceptualized as conceiving of our republic as the ‘official embodiment of the best

¹²³ Biography of Hans Wermes, Professorenkatalog der Universität Leipzig/Catalogus Professorum Lipsiensium, Herausgegeben vom Lehrstuhl für Neuere und Neueste Geschichte, Historisches Seminar der Universität Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany.

traditions of German history.”¹²⁴ Wormes’ own quotation is significant as he is referencing the head of the SED, Erich Honecker.¹²⁵ Noteworthy here is not just that the head of the SED, or that the Honecker family’s influence seeped into the educational system. Besides Erich Honecker’s own ability to affect the education of GDR citizens, Margot Honecker, wife of Erich Honecker, was the Minister of National Education (*Ministerin für Volksbildung*) with her own vast power to affect educational policy. It is remarkable just how directly editors of textbooks like Wormes saw their work as related to the project of the “better Germany,” and how Wormes in particular in this article phrased his history making work within the very words of the leader of the SED. This phrasing of “the best traditions” implies that certain traditions were left out of, or did not belong to the GDR. In the context of the separated Germanies Wormes’s writing suggests that the FRG inherited the negative “traditions.” While relatively subtle in Wormes’s article, this discourse in the GDR that the FRG had inherited the worst aspects of Germany history was pervasive and quite explicit with the Berlin wall being named “the anti-fascist protection wall” (*antifaschistischer Schutzwall*), and continuing accusations by the GDR that FRG was a country run by former Nazis. History existed within this language of claiming and blaming where the GDR collected the honorable, “progressive” past and left the dishonorable, “reactionary” past for the FRG.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Wormes, „*Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit*,“ 523.

¹²⁵ Erich Honecker, *Zügig voran bei der weiteren Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des VIII. Parteitages der SED*. Berlin 1973, 21, quoted in Wormes, „*Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit*,“ 523.

¹²⁶ „*Die Tradierung des ‚reaktionären Erbes‘ war dabei den Herrschenden in der Bundesrepublik zugeordnet worden, während die SED für die DDR das ‚progressive Erbe‘ in Anspruch genommen hatte*“.
[“The tradition of the ‘reactionary heritage’ had been assigned to the leaders of the FRG, while the SED had claimed the ‘progressive heritage’ for the GDR,”] Hans-Jürgen Schreiber & Achim Leschinsky, “Luther vor der Revisionsinstanz. Der Konflikt um das Luther-Bild und der Einfluß Historiker auf die Revision des DDR-Geschichtslehrplanes in den 80er Jahren” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 40, no. 2 (2000): 277.

The goal of history teachers, as Wermes articulated it was not only to transmit the correct facts, but rather to develop within the students a strong emotional attachment to *their* past of the “best traditions.” Writing about the placement of the early bourgeois revolution within the curriculum, Wermes noted how the proper placement of particularly important aspects of the GDR past were important by quoting the martyred head of the KPD, Ernst Thälmann – a man who never lived to see the GDR:

These events [the early bourgeois revolution] rightly occupied a special place in the considerations, since large revolutions are an essential subject of **our** [my emphasis] historical picture. E[rnst] Thälmann wrote shortly before his murder: “... Immeasurable are the forces that flow from the memory of proud and elevated moments and facts of **our** [my emphasis] past.”¹²⁷

Intriguingly Wermes implies that there is a “historical picture” to be built, and one to be claimed by a body of people, the citizens of the GDR. In addition, it is not only remarkable that Wermes again places his conception of the past within the quotations of a German socialist leader, but that the citation of Thälmann is made to emphasize the power –“immeasurable”– of the past to influence the present through the feelings they evoke. There was a specific purpose in mind in creating an emotional attachment with the past, because it created a connection beyond the individual and with a community. Evidential knowledge was not enough, the students had to care about the past.

¹²⁷ „Diese Ereignisse nahmen zu Recht einen besonderen Platz in den Überlegungen ein, da große Revolutionen wesentlicher Gegenstand **unseres** [Hervorhebung durch die Verf.] Geschichtsbildes sind. E. Thälmann schrieb kurz vor seiner Ermordung: “... Unermeßlich sind die Kräfte, die **uns** [Hervorhebung durch die Verf.] aus der Erinnerung an stolze und gehobene Momente und Tatsachen unserer Vergangenheit zuströmen,“ Wermes, „Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit,“ 520.

The following GDR joke comes to mind: „Was sind die drei großen Nationen der Welt, beginnend mit „U“? USA, UdSSR, und unsere DDR“. [What are the three great nations beginning with “U,” the USA, the USSR, and our (unsere) GDR.]

It was the teacher's role to conjure up these emotions for the past, using the textbooks that Wermes and his fellow editors constructed. Every history teacher was a citizen builder and therefore requirements for these teachers were large: "The social demands and the syllabus for history demand a high scientific-theoretical, political-ideological and educational-methodical knowledge and skills from the history teacher."¹²⁸ The social demands that Wermes writes about are not individual demands on the social aspects of the teachers' life, but rather that of society more generally. As the teacher was helping to create GDR citizens, pedagogues were responsible for constructing the future of the republic. The three specific obligations that Wermes identified –scientific-theoretical, political-ideological and educational-methodical– are in their most reduced meanings related to first, a teleological Hegelian understanding of the "progress of history", second, the correct Marxist-Leninist interpretation of this history, and third and perhaps most interesting, the way in which this knowledge was transferred to the students. The first two demands, while ideologically important, meant very little if the teacher could not impart this "scientific-theoretical, political-ideological" knowledge onto their pupils.

Wermes, in advocating for an "emotional" approach as the most effective "educational-methodical" way to teach children, argued for the coordinated instruction between teachers of different classes with a focus on images. Ideally, a student would not have one type of historical knowledge, stored only for history class, but knowledge that integrated itself from all their classes:

In carrying out the [teaching] hours of the Peasants' War –and not only there– greater methodological diversity on the part of the teachers would be desirable in order to shape the meaningful activity of the pupils to be more stimulating and varied. We refer in particular to the use of artistic works of painting, prints, and music. The deep

¹²⁸ „Die gesellschaftlichen Forderungen und der Lehrplan für Geschichte verlangen insgesamt ein hohes, wissenschaftlich-theoretisches, politisch-ideologisches und pädagogisch-methodisches Wissen und Können vom Geschichtslehrer,“ Wermes, „Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit,“ 519.

penetration into the content of illustrations (“Three Farmers in Conversation” or “The Flagbearer and Drummer of the Farmers”) helps to deepen the emotional grasp of the story. This is preferably arranged with the subject teachers [of other classes].¹²⁹

Reading the above quotation could give the impression that all GDR textbooks before 1974 contained no images. However, this is not the case as even the 1948 Kosminksi textbook contained illustrations. Yet, it is true that early GDR textbooks were very text heavy. While financial and technological constraints hindered earlier editors, Wermes was able to advocate for methods of visual education in the seventies, which would have been difficult in the late forties and fifties, even if he did not have the later audio textbook developments of CD-ROM inserts familiar globally with students and teachers of the nineties.¹³⁰ These technological advancements however were not just for the pleasure of the reader. Ideally, the illustrations did not serve to just distract the ten and eleven year old reading the textbook from the message of the text –although it is quite possible this is exactly what they did– but rather to further the “emotional grasp” of the content. Wermes’ method of avoiding a wrong interpretation of these images was to have the student guided through an analysis by the history teacher, or a teacher from another department. Wermes got his way, the 1978 textbook, for which he was the lead editor, contains both the illustrations he mentions, along with many others.

¹²⁹ „In der Durchführung der Stunden zum Bauernkrieg –und nicht nur dort- ware eine größere methodische Vielfalt von seiten der Lehrer wünschenswert, um die sinnvolle Tätigkeit der Schüler anregender und vielseitiger zu gestalten. Wir verweisen hier besonders auf die Nutzung künftlerischer Werke der Malerei, Grafik und Musik. Das tiefe Eindringen in den Gehalt von Abbildungen (“Drei Bauern im Gespräch” oder “Fähnrich und Trommler der bauern”) verhelfen zum tieferen emotionalen Erfassen der Geschichte. Das ist zweckmäßigerweise mit den Fachlehrern abzusprechen,“ Ibid.,526.

¹³⁰ There is not an indication of accompanying compact audiocassettes with GDR history textbooks.



Figure 7. „Drei Bauern im Gespräch”
(“Three Farmers in Conversation”) from
1978 Textbook.¹³¹

In addition to a more emotional approach to teaching, Wermes argued that the way the GDR thought about history had to change because the GDR itself had changed since its founding in 1949. Kosminski text in 1948 and the other editions that followed had been appropriate, even exceptional for the time East Germany:

For the history teachers from back then –often young, anti-fascist forces, who had a special authorization of the county school council for teaching history –the publication of the Soviet history textbooks in German due to the lack of scientific literature was an excellent event and the basis of our own education [(*Bildung*)]. In the *History of the Middle Ages*, edited by E.A. Kosminski, one could find the material for the treatment of the Peasants’ War, [and] become acquainted with the Marxist evaluation of Thomas Müntzer.”¹³²

¹³¹ Albrecht Dürer, 1496/98, „Drei Bauern im Gespräch” (“Three Farmers in Conversation”) Reproduced in Hans Wermes & Sieglinde Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1978), 175.

¹³² „Für die Geschichtslehrer von damals – oftmals handelte es sich um junge, antifaschistische Kräfte, die zur Erteilung des Unterrichts in Geschichte eine besondere Genehmigung des Kreisschulrates besaßen – war das Erscheinen der sowjetischen Geschichtslehrbücher in deutscher Sprache bei dem Mangel an wissenschaftlicher Literatur in hervorragendes Ereignis und die Grundlage der eigenen Bildung. In der “Geschichte des Mittelalters”, herausgegeben von E.A. Kosminskij, 1948, konnte man den Stoff für die Behandlung des

However, in spite of the contribution of the Kosminkski's text to the educational development (*Bildung*) of the GDR, Wermes argued that the texts of the late forties and fifties – Kosminkski's and others – were obsolete. No connection is made between the GDR citizens leaving west for the FRG in the text, rather the changes Wermes believed were necessary and framed in a positive view of development. In the forties and fifties, the GDR had been a young socialist state, but in the sixties and the early seventies, Wermes believed the GDR had progressed:

In the meantime, our republic, in the framework of the socialist community of states, has moved into the stage of the developed socialist society. The question is to ask what new, higher demands in the treatment of the results and doctrines of the Peasants' War, taking into account newer evidence in the history of science today.¹³³

Perhaps in a self-interested way, Wermes understanding of the need to reevaluate history for every new stage of socialist progress reflected a way to legitimize his own profession.

However, this assertion that contemporaneous developments required a revision of the past was an ideological way of phrasing the idea that history, while discussing the past is essentially about the present. This statement also helps to explain why Wermes paid close attention to developments in historical research within East German academia related to the Reformation period, as he had kept updating the past to reflect what had been discovered in the GDR's "history of science."

As discussed in Chapter Four, nineteenth century German historiography deeply influenced the arguments within the textbooks of the forties and fifties. However, Wermes

Bauernkrieges finden, lernte man die marxistische Wertung Thomas Müntzers kenne, " Wermes, „Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit, 521.

¹³³ „Inzwischen hat sich unsere Republik im Rahmen der sozialistischen Staatengemeinschaft in die Etappe der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft fortbewegt. Es ist die Frage zu stellen, welche neuen, höheren Forderungen bei der Behandlung der Ergebnisse und Lehren des Bauernkrieges unter Beachtung neuerer Aussagen der Geschichtswissenschaft heute zu stellen sind,“ Ibid., 519.

makes clear that it was not only the “Bearded Marxists” whose intellectual arguments affected the text of GDR schoolbooks. The earliest post-war understandings of the Peasants’ War came from a combination of the ideas of Soviet historian, “M.M. Smirin, who emphasized the Peasants’ War and the **inheritance** [my emphasis] as humanistic and revolutionary traditions” and connected these with the KPD’s Weimar failed experience of fighting against the rise of fascism.¹³⁴ Both the Peasants’ War and the KPD Interwar experiences were failed ones, but they were a past the GDR could claim, be proud of and honor. The GDR conceptual understanding of the Reformation and Peasants’ War together as the “German Early Bourgeois Revolution” (*deutschen frühbürgerlichen Revolution*) emphasized “early” both in the sense that it came before the bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century, but also in its prematureness in the progress of history. This was not a normative understanding throughout the eastern bloc, but rather a GDR formulation by GDR historians as Wermes confirms: “Crucial, however, is the exact characterization of the Reformation and the Peasants’ War as fundamental stages of the Early Bourgeois Revolution in Germany. This points to the participation of the leading historians of the GDR in the discussion of the curriculum, such as Max Steinmetz among others.”¹³⁵ While Wermes clearly understood the period under the terms of the Early Bourgeois Revolution, only the most recent 1967 edition of Reformation period textbooks utilized the term. As discussed in Chapter Three, the 1963 textbook for example did not even use the

¹³⁴ „Ausgehend von M.M. Smirin, der den Bauernkrieg und das Erbe Thomas Müntzers als humanistische und revolutionäre Traditionen hervorhob, sowie auf den Erfahrungen der Geschichtspromaganda der KPD aus der Weimarer Zeit und ihrem Kampf gegen die faschistische Ideologie aufbauend...”

[“Starting from M.M. Smirin, who emphasized the Peasants’ War and the inheritance of Thomas Müntzer as humanistic and revolutionary traditions, as well as on the experiences of the history propaganda of the KPD from time of the Weimar [Republic] and of their struggle against the building fascist ideology...”] Ibid., 520.

¹³⁵ „Entscheidend ist die exakte Kennzeichnung von Reformation und Bauernkrieg als wesentliche Etappen der frühbürgerlichen Revolution in Deutschland. Das weist die Mitwirkung der auf diesem Gebiet führenden Historiker der DDR an der Diskussion des Lehrplans, wie M. Steinmetz u.a.,“ Ibid., 521.

term.¹³⁶ Other socialist countries did not emphasize the Reformation period in the same way as the GDR. Even though the Early Bourgeois Revolution was constructed within a Marxist narrative, its nationalistic tones did not contribute to the narratives that other socialist blocs constructed. So while the GDR emphasized the Peasants' War, other countries emphasized their own indigenous religious or peasant rebellions as with Czechoslovakia's historiography stressing Jan Hus and the Hussites as an alternative and earlier fifteenth century example of class struggle and a failed revolution against feudalism.¹³⁷

In concluding his essay, Wermes identified three objectives for East German pedagogues to achieve as part of their classroom new instruction around the four-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Peasants' War:

1. to further develop and deepen the Marxist-Leninist view of history from the Peasants' War on the basis of the an effective curriculum,
2. to communicate the political, spiritual-cultural and military traditions of the Peasants' War to the pupils and
3. to bring this revolutionary legacy to life and use it for the development of consciousness in the sense of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism.¹³⁸

So while Wermes advocated for change in how the curriculum was conceived, he promoted this within familiar constructs. Müntzer remained the hero of the narrative, his actions were the

¹³⁶ Hans Wermes & Sieglinde Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1978).

Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für Klasse 7*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1963).

¹³⁷ Josef Macek, *The Hussite Movement in Bohemia*, (Prague: Orbis, 1958).

Similar to the GDR, Czechoslovakia could draw upon previous Marxist historiography from such historians as Paul Lafargue and Ernest Belfort Bax to support a national narrative for contemporary circumstances.

¹³⁸ „1. auf der Basis des gültigen Lehrplans das marxistisch-leninistische Geschichtsbild vom Bauernkrieg weiter ausarbeiten und zu vertiefen, 2. die politischen, geistig-kulturellen und militärischen Traditionen des Bauernkrieges den Schülern nahezubringen und, 3. dieses revolutionäre Erbe lebendig zu gestalten und für Bewußtseinsentwicklung im Sinne des sozialistischen Patriotismus und proletarischen Internationalismus zu nutzen,“ Wermes, „*Bauernkrieg und Thomas Müntzer in ihrer Bedeutung für die sozialistische Schülerpersönlichkeit*,“ 522-523.

“culmination of the first Early Bourgeois Revolution.”¹³⁹ Luther is only mentioned once in Wermes article, and only in a timetable of events.¹⁴⁰ This is surprising on the one hand because as discussed in the following chapter, the evaluation of Luther did change under the editorial direction of Wermes, and on the other hand perhaps it is telling that Wermes does not mention Luther in a negative light within his essay. Developing an effective curriculum for Wermes entailed integrating the latest scholarship from GDR historians, which his writing demonstrates he was familiar and engaged with. It meant utilizing images to evoke emotions within the students so that they could have an understanding of class struggle and the revolutionary past that went beyond the mere memorization of facts towards a passionate self-identification, a “consciousness” with this past as part of a collective identity. While earlier textbooks had built the framework for this identity, Wermes demonstrates some of the various ways educators attempted to get this identity to resonate within their students. Whether this was effective is questionable, but it is clear that Wermes and other textbook authors had high goals for the use of history textbooks in the classroom “to bring this revolutionary legacy to life,” and instill pride in the GDR citizen for their past.

¹³⁹ „Dieser Höhepunkt im historischen Prozeß läßt die Schüler den Bauernkrieg und das Wirken Thomas Müntzers als Höhepunkt der ersten frühen bürgerlichen Revolution erfassen“. [“This climax in the historical process allows the students to grasp the Peasants’ War and the work of Thomas Müntzer as the culmination of the first Early Bourgeois Revolution,”] Ibid., 523.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 520.



**Figure 8. „Fähnrich und Trommler der Bauern“
“The Flagbearer and Drummer of the Farmers”
as appears in the 1978 textbook.¹⁴¹**



**Figure 9. „Thomas Müntzer“ as
he appears in the
1978 textbook.¹⁴²**

¹⁴¹ Hans Sebald Beham, 1544, „Drei Bauern im Gespräch“ (“Three Farmers in Conversation”), Reproduced in Hans Wermes & Sieglinde Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1978), 198.

¹⁴² Christian Siche, 1608, „Thomas Müntzer“ Reproduced in Hans Wermes & Sieglinde Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1978), 191.

VI

Luther Resurrected

“Talk of the teachings of Luther, his behavior in the Peasants’ War, the students should understand that Luther did not advocate for the just cause of the Peasants.”

-Abstract from Teaching Plan for Primary Schools of 1957.¹⁴³

“The German Early Bourgeois Revolution began with the Reformation, which Luther triggered. Thomas Müntzer led it further to the People’s Reformation by giving the Revolutionary People’s Movement a goal and establishing its right to liberate itself from the godless masters. The Peasant Movement became a Peasants’ War through the Reformation in Germany.”

-Abstract from History for Grade Six Textbook of 1978.¹⁴⁴

The official position on Martin Luther in the GDR underwent an extreme revision in the late seventies and throughout the eighties. Leading up to the celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of Luther’s birthday, Luther was reintegrated within the GDR by the head of state, Erich Honecker as “one of the greatest sons of the German People” and part of the “progressive tradition” of the GDR.¹⁴⁵ This was major development; the leader of the nation was effectively changing decades of national policy towards the past. Celebrations and commemorations of Luther’s contributions to German history took place at important reformation sites across the GDR, such as Wartburg castle, where Luther had translated the New Testament. When discussing the textbook that was used in this late period, however, it is important to acknowledge that the

¹⁴³ „Spricht der Lehrer von Luthers Verhalten im Bauernkrieg, werden die Schüler erkennen, daß sich Luther für die gerechte Sache der Bauern nicht einsetzte,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für Grunschulen: Geschichte 5. Bis 8. Schuljahr*, (Berlin: Volk & Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1957), 8.

¹⁴⁴ “Die deutsche frühbürgerliche Revolution begann mit der Reformation, die Luther auslöste. Thomas Müntzer führte sie weiter zur Volksreformation, indem er der revolutionären Volksbewegung ein Ziel gab und ihr Recht begründete, sich von den gottlosen Herren zu befreien. Die Bauernbewegung wurde durch die Reformation in Deutschland zum Bauernkrieg,” Hans Wermes & Sieglinde Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1978), 193.

¹⁴⁵ „einer der größten Söhne des deutschen Volkes“ and „progressiven Traditionen,“ Hans-Jürgen Schreiber & Achim Leschinsky, “Luther vor der Revisionsinstanz. Der Konflikt um das Luther-Bild und der Einfluß Historiker auf die Revision des DDR-Geschichtslehrplanes in den 80er Jahren” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 40, no. 2 (2000): 276, 279.

schoolbook used in the last decade of the GDR for the Reformation period was published in 1978. While new editions had been published since 1978, the text remained the same throughout the eighties and were not directly affected by Erich Honecker's revisions. Hans-Jürgen Schreiber and Achim Leschinsky in an essay titled "Luther before the Moment of Appeal" (*„Luther vor der Revisionsinstanz“*) argue that no significant new development occurred in the textbook account of Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer after the sixties, because reforms to textbooks and teaching plans did not take into account Erich Honecker's revision of Luther in the "progressive tradition of the GDR":

In the end, however, the new approach of the revision of the image of Luther and the inclusion of Luther in the 'progressive tradition' of the GDR were ultimately founded on the appreciation of Luther's theology. Even a more differentiated assessment of the old Luther as well as the so-called 'Princely Reformation' cannot be found anywhere in the new historical curriculum, so that one cannot speak of a real change from the syllabus of the sixties.¹⁴⁶

Yet, while Luther was still understood under the terms of the "Princely Reformation" (*Fürstenreformation*), as ultimately benefiting from the defeat of the peasants, significant changes did occur to his image from sixties to 1978, and even larger changes had occurred since the early fifties. Luther's contribution to the German language with the translation of the Bible was stressed heavily in the sixties and seventies. The military and the technological aspects of the story were also emphasized in this period. While the Early Bourgeois Revolution was still taught in 1978 through a class perspective, the tale shifted to become one to which Müntzer *and* Luther contributed.

¹⁴⁶ „Auf der Würdigung von Luthers Theologie gründete aber letztlich der Neuansatz zur Revision des Luther-Bildes und die Aufnahme Luthers in die ‚progressive Tradition‘ der DDR. Auch von einer differenzierteren Einschätzung des alten Luther sowie der sogenannten Fürstenreformation findet sich im neuen Geschichtslehrplan keine Spur, so daß von einer wirklichen Veränderung gegenüber dem Lehrplan aus den 60er Jahren nicht gesprochen werden kann,“ Ibid.: 286.

Luther's translation of the Bible was held in high esteem throughout the editions of GDR textbooks produced in the fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties. The 1963 text lauds the translation: "Luther decided to translate the Bible so that it could be understood in all parts of Germany and by ordinary people."¹⁴⁷ That Luther's translation was made for the common man is so important for the editors of the textbook, that it is emphasized again: "He succeeded because he did not translate the text literally, but wrote it down in the language of the people."¹⁴⁸ The changes that occurred in the 1967 and 1978 texts did not alter the evaluation of the value of Luther's Bible. Every textbook rated it as an important step in the creation of unifying the German language or nation:

1955: "The great service of Luther is that he helped to create a unified German language;

for Luther's bible was soon read throughout Germany."¹⁴⁹

1963: "Thus, Luther contributed decisively to creating a uniform German language."¹⁵⁰

1967: "At the Wartburg, Luther translated the New Testament into German. This was of great importance for the dissemination of a uniform German written language."¹⁵¹

1967: "What was the meaning of Luther's biblical translation? How has it certainly influenced the further development of a German national identity?"¹⁵²

1978: "At the Wartburg Luther began a great creative achievement for our people. He

¹⁴⁷ „Luther nahm sich vor, die Bibel so zu übersetzen, daß sie in allen Teilen Deutschlands und von den einfachen Menschen verstanden werden konnte,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für Klasse 7*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1963), 25.

¹⁴⁸ „Das gelang ihm, weil er den Text nicht wörtlich übersetzte, sondern ihn in der Sprache des Volkes niederschrieb,“ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴⁹ „Das große Verdienst Luthers ist es, daß er dazu beigetragen hat, eine einheitliche deutsche Sprache zu schaffen; denn Luthers Bibel wurde bald in ganz Deutschland gelesen,“ *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht 6*, (1955), 142.

¹⁵⁰ „Damit trug Luther entscheidend dazu bei, eine einheitliche deutsche Sprache zu schaffen,“ *Lehrbuch für Klasse 7*, (1963), 25.

¹⁵¹ „Auf der Wartburg übersetzte Luther das Neue Testament ins Deutsche. Dies hatte eine große Bedeutung für die Verbreitung einer einheitlichen deutschen Schriftsprache,“ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1967), 179.

¹⁵² „Welche Bedeutung hatte Luthers Bibelübersetzung? Wie hat sie sicherlich die weitere Herausbildung eines deutschen Nationalbewußtseins beeinflusst?“ Ibid.

created the basis for the development of a uniform German language.”¹⁵³

The 1967 text was particularly explicit in tying the translation at Wartburg to a “national” identity, and even though the 1978 text stepped away from that strong of a conclusion, it still associates this act as a positive one. While the stable analysis of Luther’s contribution to the German language from fifties onward supports Schreiber’s and Leschinsky’s assertion that the perception of Luther remained static in the seventies and eighties, other aspects of the overall picture of the Early Bourgeois Revolution did develop.

Early texts, such as the 1954 textbook, dedicated a significant amount of content and acknowledged in a typical Marxist-Leninist fashion the importance of economic and technological factors as guiding historical catalysts for the Reformation, the Peasants’ War.¹⁵⁴ However, the 1978 textbook greatly expanded the attention given to these aspects in the larger historical picture. The text for example explains the power of language and the advances in printing technology by reciting a proverb and requesting that the student unpack its meaning: “A clever man later said: ‘More than the metal cannonballs, the letters made of metal have changed the world!’ What did he mean by that?”¹⁵⁵ This adage is expanded upon in the text as the spread of intellectual movements are credited to the printing press: “Humanism soon reached its peak. This was mainly due to the invention of printing.”¹⁵⁶ For the textbook editors,

¹⁵³ „Auf der Wartburg begann Luther eine große schöpferische Leistung für unser Volk. Er schuf die Grundlage für die Herausbildung einer einheitlichen deutschen Sprache,“ Wermes & Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (1978), 190.

¹⁵⁴ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht 6*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1954), 228-230.

¹⁵⁵ „Ein kluger Mann sagte später einmal: ‚Mehr als die Kanonenkugeln aus Metall haben die Buchstaben aus Metall die Welt verändert!‘ Wie meinte er das?“ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵⁶ „Der Humanismus gelangte bald zu hoher Blüte. Das war vor allem der Erfindung des Buchdrucks zu danken,“ Ibid., 179.

the printing press, a technological advancement, is an integral tool in socialist progress, and it is used to show continuity between decisive historical moments. In their interpretation, printing allowed for the dissemination of both Luther and Müntzer's ideas, but even before that, printing drove the spread of Humanism, which in turn set the stage for the Early Bourgeois Revolution in Germany. Humanism brought a greater emphasis on the "dignity of man," developed a better understanding of "the past of the German people," and even though it was not a "People's Movement," it "helped to prepare for subsequent People's Revolts."¹⁵⁷ In the 1963 and 1967 textbooks, the chapters on the "The Hussite Movement, the Reformation and the Great German Peasants' War" and "The Reformation and German Peasants' War" did mention printing as being used in distributing both Luther and Müntzer ideas; however, neither of the texts from the sixties mentions a connection between Humanism and the invention of the printing press within their chapters on the Reformation.¹⁵⁸ The greater emphasis on the association between intellectual ideas and technology in the 1978 textbook marks a significant change from earlier texts, allowing for a more nuanced picture of the factors leading to Early Bourgeois Revolution by crediting material causes, as well as philosophical ideas as key components of the turbulent period. These distinctions elevated the importance of Luther's contribution to the era.

¹⁵⁷ „Die Humanisten erkannten die große Bedeutung der eigenen Geschichte für die Entwicklung des Volkes. Sie durchforschten Klosterbibliotheken und Archive nach Zeugnissen über die Vergangenheit des deutschen Volkes. Dabei entdeckten sie zum Beispiel lateinische Schriften über das Leben der Germanen“ [The Humanists recognized the importance of their own history for the development of the people. They searched monastery libraries and archives for testimonies about the past of the German people. They discovered, for example, Latin writings on the lives of the Teutons, "] Ibid., 180

„Der Humanismus wurde jedoch niemals zu einer Volksbewegung. Aber er half, nachfolgende Volkserhebungen vorzubereiten“. [Humanism was however never a People's Movement. But it helped to prepare the following People's Revolts,] Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für Klasse 7*, (1963), 6-42.
Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (1967), 175-194.

In spite of the greater appreciation for intellectual movements of the sixteenth century in the 1978 textbook, class interest remained a dominating factor in the teaching of history. In this editing, quotations from Marx and Engels appeared even more prominently in the main text and marginalia than they had previously.¹⁵⁹ Paraphrasing and drastically reducing chapters four and twenty-five of *Capital* (of the English edition) to a single sentence, the 1978 textbook introduces Marx's interpretation of the capitalist accumulation of wealth succinctly as "Money becomes capital,' so said Karl Marx, when more money comes from capital, it is always through the exploitation of people."¹⁶⁰ These classical interpretations of the period were used to present Luther as a strong progressive because he opposed the strongest opponent to the development of history towards socialism, the medieval Catholic Church. The Church was interpreted as the class enemy of all strata of society: "Early capitalist development contradicted feudalism with its fragmentation, its feudal exploitation and its guild barriers. The

¹⁵⁹ „Friedrich Engels sprach von einer gewaltigen Epoche, die mit der letzten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland begann“.[“Friedrich Engels spoke of a huge epoch that began in Germany in the last half of the 15th century,”] Wermes & Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (1978), 167.

¹⁶⁰ „‘Geld wird zu Kapital’, so sagte Karl Marx, wenn aus ihm immer mehr Geld wird: durch Ausbeutung von Menschen,“ Ibid., 173.

“Money which describes the latter course in its movement is transformed into capital, becomes capital, and, from the point of view of its function, already is capital,” Karl Marx, “Chapter 4: The General Formula for Capital” in *Capital – Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1990), 248.

“A larger part of the worker's own surplus product, which is always increasing and is continually being transformed in additional capital comes back to them in the shape of means of payment...[b]ut these things no more abolish the exploitation of the wage-labourer, and his situation of dependence, than do better clothing, food and treatment, and a larger *peculium*, in the case of the slave,” Ibid., “Chapter 25: The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,” 769.

„Geld, das in seiner Bewegung diese letzte Zirkulation beschreibt, verwandelt sich in Kapital, wird Kapital und ist schon seiner Bestimmung nach Kapital,“ Karl Marx, „4. Verwandlung von Geld in Kapital“ in *Das Kapital – Volume I* (Berlin: Verlag für Literatur und Politik, 1933), 154.

„Von ihrem eignen anschwellenden und schwellend in Zusatzkapital verwandelten Mehrproduct strömt ihnen ein größerer Teil in der Form von Zahlungsmitteln zurück...[s]o wenig aber bessere Kleidung, Nahrung, Behandlung und ein größeres *Peculium* das Abhängigkeitsverhältnis und die Exploitation des Sklaven aufheben, so wenig die des Lohnarbeiters,“ Ibid., „23. Das Allgemeine Gesetz der Kapitalistischen Akkumulation,“ 648-649.

Papal Church, as the largest feudal lord, was increasingly hostile to all classes and layers [of society]. The first blow had to be fought against them if social conditions in Germany were to be changed.”¹⁶¹ From this perspective, the Reformation and Luther’s initiation of it were placed in a very positive light. In spite of his later writings against the peasants during the Peasants’ War, Luther could be viewed as a progressive historical figure because he began a course of events, catalyzed in the conditions made possible by the spread of Humanists’ values through the printing press, which allowed the Peasants’ War to occur.

The analysis that technological innovation and intellectual thought led to Luther, as well as the interpretation of the Church as the great class enemy opposed to Luther, provide a narrow avenue for an implicit positive understanding of Luther in the 1978 schoolbook. Yet, the 1978 text is even more explicit. Müntzer as well as Luther were necessary for the Early Bourgeois Revolution: “Martin Luther *and* [my emphasis] Thomas Müntzer became leaders of the People’s Movement.”¹⁶² The Early Bourgeois Revolution was understood as the combination of both the Reformation and the Peasants’ War. Both movements were smaller sections of the larger whole, which the text clarifies by stating: “The Reformation in Germany, which had begun, was at the same time the beginning of the German early bourgeois revolution.”¹⁶³ As leader of the People’s Movement it is important to emphasize how Luther is described as part of the German people, he is honored inside the national community. This is dramatically

¹⁶¹ „Die frühkapitalistische Entwicklung stand im Widerspruch zum Feudalismus mit seiner Zersplitterung, seiner feudalen Ausbeutung und seinen Zunftschranken. Die Papstkirche verfeindete sich als größter Feudalherr immer mehr mit allen Klassen und Schichten. Gegen sie mußte der erste Schlag geführt werden, wenn in Deutschland die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse verändert werden sollten,“ Wermes & Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (1978), 175.

¹⁶² „Martin Luther und Thomas Müntzer wurden zu Führern der Volksbewegung,“ Ibid., 186.

¹⁶³ „Die damit begonnene Reformation in Deutschland war zugleich der Anfang der deutschen frühbürgerlichen Revolution,“ Ibid., 188.

different from how Luther was portrayed in the 1951 text, where the stress of Luther's historical legacy is on his betrayal of the peasants along class lines. Luther's image is further legitimized as part GDR history and brought within the circle of the national community through the words of Engels: "'The lightning struck Luther. The whole German people began to move wrote Friedrich Engels.'" ¹⁶⁴ This quotation validates Luther through the authority Engels has as a founding father of socialism, the storm imagery adds dynamism to his personality, and his actions are seen as parallel to course of the German people. The German people are depicted as having empathy for Luther as when he leaves the Diet of Worms and his life appears in serious peril: "...the people feared for Luther." ¹⁶⁵ Compared with 1951 text, where Luther is understood only as being part of the "cowardly" bourgeois, the 1978 text presents him as a highly positive figure, at least until the beginning of the Peasants' War. While not a completely positive character, Luther is understood as being within the circle of the nation, and having contributed significantly to the progress of the Early Bourgeois Revolution.

The positive view of Luther in the 1978 text was bracketed between the publishing of the *Ninety-Fives Theses* to his condemnation of the peasants. In spite of his negative actions, Luther was still perceived as a necessary, progressive component of the entire process of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. Within the 1978 conception of the Early Bourgeois Revolution, both Luther and Müntzer were necessary: "The German Early Bourgeois Revolution began with the Reformation, which Luther triggered. Thomas Müntzer led them further to the People's Reformation by giving the revolutionary People's Movement a goal and establishing

¹⁶⁴ „'Der Blitz schlug ein, den Luther geschleudert hatte. Das ganze deutsche Volk geriet in Bewegung', so schrieb Friedrich Engels," Ibid., 186.

¹⁶⁵ „...bangte das Volk um Luther," Ibid., 189.

its right to liberate itself from the godless masters. The Peasant Movement became a Peasants' War through the Reformation in Germany.”¹⁶⁶ It is particularly interesting that the enemies of the Peasants' War and Müntzer are described as “godless,” considering that earlier texts, especially in the late forties and fifties had avoided associating the material incentives of the Peasants' War with religious motivations. Yet, this proceeds from the argument and the composite reasoning that the 1978 textbook employed. The text argued earlier that the combination of the printing press's power to spread ideas and that Humanist thought lead to the Reformation. Here with Luther, the text reasons that he was needed to “trigger” the Reformation and “move” the German people by exposing the abuses of the Church, which were both of an economic and religious nature (indulgences for example). However, Müntzer was essential to advance this movement in the proper direction from the perspective of the textbook editors.

The emphasis within the 1978 text with regards to Luther's legacy is not his eventual betrayal of German people through his association with bourgeois, but rather that Luther's progressiveness was outpaced by the speed of historical progress. The language of advancement past or “further” than is repeated multiple times throughout the chapter in association with Müntzer and Luther. As seen in the citation from the previous paragraph, “Müntzer led them [(the peasants/German people)] further” (“*Müntzer führte sie weiter*”) (my emphasis). The sequential progressive adjectives place Luther within the spatial movement forward in history rather than in a strictly oppositional space. Luther takes the Early Bourgeois Revolution to a

¹⁶⁶ “Die deutsche frühbürgerliche Revolution begann mit der Reformation, die Luther auslöste. Thomas Müntzer führte sie weiter zur Volksreformation, indem er der revolutionären Volksbewegung ein Ziel gab und ihr Recht begründete, sich von den gottlosen Herren zu befreien. Die Bauernbewegung wurde durch die Reformation in Deutschland zum Bauernkrieg,” Ibid., 193.

certain stage, and then Müntzer picks up when Luther cannot continue: “So he [(Müntzer)] went far beyond Luther’s thinking” (my emphasis).¹⁶⁷ In going “beyond” Luther, Müntzer remains the heroic figure of the Early Bourgeois Revolution, as he appeared in the texts of the sixties, fifties, etc., particularly as he does more than “Luther’s thinking,” and directly leads and directs crucial aspects of the Peasants’ War. However, that Müntzer is going “further” presupposes that there was somewhere to come from, and so Luther’s progressive contribution to GDR history in the 1978 text –besides his translation of the Bible into German– is create the conditions possible for Müntzer to act.

The stress on Müntzer’s activeness was a way for the historical textbook to honor both the revolutionary values and military traditions of the GDR. The reverence for the martial past was present in the text of the sixties and seventies as passages not just with Müntzer, but the peasants as well, as in the 1967 text:

Among the insurgents there were many who had formerly served as mercenaries in the armies of the princes and emperors. They were experienced in the art of war. They taught the others to handle the weapons. From conquered aristocratic castles and towns, the peasants fetched guns and ammunition. To operate a gun was considered a great art. Anyone who understood this art was called an harquebusier. The harquebusiers were respected people.¹⁶⁸

This discourse stressed the technical knowledge necessary for war, which appears somewhat irrelevant from the discourse surrounding class struggle in the late middle ages. However, in a broad sense, the discussion of violence was intended to inspire the reader’s appreciation for the

¹⁶⁷ “*So ging er über Luthers Denken weit hinaus,*” Ibid., 191

¹⁶⁸ “*Unter den Aufständischen gab es viele, die früher als Landsknechte in den Heeren der Fürsten und des Kaisers gedient hatten. Diese waren im Kriegshandwerk erfahren. Sie lehrten die anderen mit den Waffen umzugehen. Aus eroberten Adelsburgen und Städten holten sich die Bauern Geschütze und Munition. Ein Geschütz zu bedienen galt als große Kunst. Wer diese Kunst verstand, hieß Büchsenmeister. Die Büchsenmeister waren angesehene Leute,*” Lehrbuch für Klasse 6, (1967), 182.

peasant's fight for freedom as a fight for the future GDR's freedom, which the 1978 textbook explicated along the following lines:

For us it is clear: In the German Peasants' War, **our** [my emphasis] people gathered experience in the struggle for their liberation. For the masses of the insurgents, it was a tremendous event in their difficult lives to have seen the castles and monasteries, the bastions of their oppressors destroyed. Thousands of people between 1524 and 1526 experienced what it means to be free and to be masters in their own country.¹⁶⁹

In equating liberty with the deliberate use of force—the destruction of the “the oppressors”—the writers of the textbooks legitimized the modern military of the GDR, the *Nationale Volksarmee* (NVA) (“National People's army), founded in 1956 following the founding of the FRG's *Bundeswehr* (“Federal Defense”) in 1955. Within this context, the narratives around martial traditions in the textbooks of the sixties and seventies could be seen as part of a broader and contemporary understanding simplified through the slogan, “*Der Frieden muß bewaffnet sein!*” (“The peace must be armed!”). The existence of the NVA, and the need for conscription introduced in 1962 was normalized by equating the NVA as the historical offspring of the traditions of the Peasants' War, which defended against the present enemies of the GDR, the capitalist-imperialists forces paralleled with the enemies of the sixteenth century peasants', the princely “*Fürsten*” forces.

The “Princes' Reformation” („*Die Fürstenreformation*“) in the end was the winner of the Early Bourgeois Revolution and not Müntzer's People Reformation („*Volksreformation*“).¹⁷⁰ While Luther's legacy was more positive and progressive in the 1978

¹⁶⁹ „Für uns steht fest: Im deutschen Bauernkrieg sammelte unser Volk Erfahrungen im Kampfum seine Befreiung. Für die Massen der Aufständischen war es ein gewaltiges Ereignis in ihrem schweren Leben, die Burgen und Klöster, die Bastionen ihrer Unterdrücker, zerstört gesehen zu haben. Tausende erlebten zwischen 1524 und 1526, was es heißt, frei zu werden und Herr im eigenen Lande zu sein,“ Wermes & Müller, *Geschichte Lehrbuch für Klasse 6*, (1978), 204.

¹⁷⁰ The use of the term “People's Revolution” („*Volksreformation*“) in the 1978 textbook is intriguing and is likely a reference to M.M. Smirin's *Die Volksreformation des Thomas Münzer und der Grosse Bauernkrieg* (*The People's Reformation of Thomas Müntzer and the Great Peasants' War*), *Ibid.*, 191.

text, it remained a mixed legacy for the GDR. This mixed legacy was important as part of the 1978 text. Right before the summarizing section, “What has the German Early Bourgeois Revolution to tell Us Today” (*„Was uns die deutsche frühbürgerliche Revolution heute zu sagen hat“*), the text demands that the reader “Complete your judgment of Luther, after you have rethought his behavior during and after the Peasants’ War!”¹⁷¹ This demand pushed the students to consider both the progressive and reactionary aspects of Luther from a socialist perspective. For all the ways in which the 1978 text presented Luther as a progressive historical figure, his class flaws were still emphasized, such as his stance against the peasants in the Peasants’ War.¹⁷² Yet, within the 1978 text, there were many positive aspects for the students to balance their criticism. This nuanced image of Luther was an extreme development from the textbooks of the late forties and early fifties, which had comparatively little to say regarding Luther, had reduced his actions to ones of economic motivation, and had depreciated his historical influence as being a subsection of Humanism. In comparison, the 1978 text commits a significant portion of the discussion of Luther and the Reformation as the culmination of Humanist thought, along side his positive contribution to the German language through his Bible translation. While the appreciation of Luther’s Bible translation exists in the textbooks of the sixties, the 1978 textbook goes further by dedicating half of the Early Bourgeois Revolution – the Reformation – to Luther, and the other half – the Peasants’ War – to Müntzer.

In the 1978 textbook, the Reformation period remains within a Marxist-Leninist framework. Perhaps what is so interesting, however, is the level of room this intellectual box

¹⁷¹ „Ergänze Deine Wertung Luthers, nachdem Du sein Verhalten während und nach dem Bauernkrieg überdacht hast!“ Ibid., 203.

¹⁷² „Doch er stellte sich gegen die Bauern“. [Nevertheless, he [Luther] stood against the peasants,] Ibid.

held for a changing view of Luther. Müntzer's image as the great proto-communist legacy of the GDR remains relatively untouched from the fifties and along the lines that the GDR historian Max Steinmetz outlined in 1971 at the end of *The Image of Müntzer From Martin Luther to Friedrich Engels* („Das Müntzerbild von Martin Luther to Friedrich Engels“):

It is precisely in the work of Müntzer and in the history of the Great Peasant War that one can make clear that the socialist GDR has grown out of the traditions of our national history, that it is intimately linked with the struggling and longing of the popular masses of four and a half centuries ago.¹⁷³

Luther, however, changes from a historic figure cast out of the national pantheon of heroes to a complex figure, depicted as a contributor to German identity beginning in the fifties with his Bible translation, to even a significant leader, the initiator of the Early Bourgeois Revolution as it was conceived in the 1978 textbook. In terms of the textbooks, the seventy-eight text reflects a changing understanding of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. The 1963 text does not even mention the concept, although the components of the concept were present even within Kosminski's first 1948 text. However, even the 1967 text only refers to the Early Bourgeois Revolution in the context of the Peasants' War and not the Reformation. The GDR historian, Alfred Meusel wrote in 1952 that “Indeed, there is the closest possible connection between the Reformation and the Peasants' War –not in the sense that the Reformation was the ‘cause’ of the Peasants' War, but in that the two events form two phases within and on the same movement. In the years 1517–25, the German people lived through the Early Bourgeois Revolution.”¹⁷⁴ Yet, it was not until the 1978 textbook that this periodization of two distinct

¹⁷³ „Gerade am Wirken Müntzers und an der Geschichte des großen Bauernkrieges kann man deutlich machen, daß die sozialistische DDR aus den Überlieferungen unserer nationalen Geschichte herausgewachsen, daß sie engstens verknüpft ist mit dem Kämpfen und dem Sehnen der Volksmassen vor viereinhalb Jahrhunderten.“, Max Steinmetz, *Das Müntzerbild von Martin Luther bis Friedrich Engels*, (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1971), 438.

¹⁷⁴ „Tatsächlich besteht zwischen der Reformation und dem Bauernkrieg der denkbar engste Zusammenhang - nicht etwa in dem Sinne, dass die Reformation die ‚Ursache‘ des Bauernkrieges ist, sondern in dem, dass die

phases in the Early Bourgeois Revolution (Reformation and Peasants' War) became clear in the educational materials that students used. The 1963 textbook for example started with the Hussites and Jan Hus, which reduced the overall nationalist quality that was otherwise emphasized. The additional modifications that took place in the public discourse regarding Luther after 1978, championed by Honecker to celebrate Luther's birthday did not affect textbooks. However, significant changes had already occurred in how the Reformation and Peasants' War were depicted. Luther was presented in a complex, even "differentiated" manner, resurrected from a completely reactionary figure, but the entire Early Bourgeois Revolution period also remained within a conceptual framework already developed in the 1950s by GDR academics. In spite of the young age of the intended target audience, the 1978 textbook displayed both a strong ideological foundation and a significant amount of nuance.

beiden Ereignisse zwei Etappen innerhalb ein und derselben Bewegung bilden. In den Jahren 1517 bis 1525 erlebt das deutsche Volk seine frühbürgerliche Revolution," Alfred Meusel, *Thomas Müntzer und seine Zeit*, (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1952), 41.

Conclusion

The GDR saw its most vivid historical reflection in the Early Bourgeois Revolution. This historical movement represented a mythic past that was heroic, revolutionary; a “progressive” epic that the GDR claimed to embody with its own existence. While the Reformation and Peasants’ War were mobilized as a national myth, starting during the transition from the SBZ to the GDR, both the Reformation and Peasants’ War had a century of German Marxist historiographic tradition before the SED utilized it for a national project. Erich Honecker and Walter Ulbricht had therefore a deep reservoir of German socialist thought to draw upon when they sought to present the GDR as the future Thomas Müntzer had promised. The kind of nationalism that existed in the GDR was not simply a Soviet transplant. GDR scholars, such as Max Steinmetz, could draw their intellectual lineage in an unbroken line directly back to Hegel. The analysis of this period of history, however, did change, most strikingly in the way that the Reformation and Peasants’ War transformed into a singular concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution. In the context of children’s textbooks, this change occurred between 1966 and 1967, conspicuously around the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the publishing of Luther’s *Ninety Five Theses*. Yet, while the GDR and its scholars and educators sought legitimization in the past, the emphasis of this legitimization was for its use in the present. It went beyond a simple identification of the new state with the sixteenth century, as discussed in Chapter Four; the instruction of the Reformation period in the classroom of the late 1940s and 1950s validated the new borders to the east. In addition, the study of the Early Bourgeois Revolution was used to build pride in the military, the NVA, by equating their fighting spirit with that of the revolting peasants under the revolutionary leadership of Müntzer.

Characterizing the GDR’s historical perspective as purely reductive in regards to children’s textbooks is an unfair summation. Children’s textbook editors from any country, in

any subject, view, select, and craft their pedagogical materials to create texts that by their nature are constrained by time, the age of the target audience, and the ideological sensibilities of society. The GDR leaned heavily on the ideological factor in teaching history; in this respect the student knew history had a reason in his or her education. However, the self-reflective reader might consider what ideological boundaries his or her own education, or their children's education exists within. In respect to ideology within GDR textbooks, there are two further things to emphasize, the first is that while the ideological underpinnings of Marxist-Leninism may have been simplified, they were thoroughly integrated into the text for very young children. Most children learning about the Reformation period in the GDR were not yet thirteen. The second is that within this ideology, textbooks had room to change significantly. For example, there was space to revise Luther's image from one representing reactionary forces to a complex figure made up of both progressive and reactionary aspects. New alterations were expected too, because as Hans Wormes asserted, history had to keep pace for each new stage of socialism, which the GDR claimed to have achieved. The state was willing to change its stance on history when this would benefit the regime. This is most observable in Honecker's major shift towards Luther in the 1980s, but it is also observable throughout the history of the GDR.

Change and stability, existing subtly side-by-side on the pages of textbooks, are the trends that most suitably describe the results of this thesis. Certain changes were stark, for example, the increasing nationalism described in Chapter Four between two editions of the same textbook. Another even more definitive example was the adoption of the term "the Early Bourgeois Revolution" to describe the Reformation period in 1966, as described in Chapter Three. Examples of stability are similarly prominent, such as Müntzer's continuous veneration in the GDR. Yet, other examples of change were more muted, for while later texts visibly included more direct references to Marx and Engels, the textbooks' analysis of history, at least

with respect to the Reformation became more differentiated, not only emphasizing economic factors as significant forces in history. In addition, the change in the emphasis of the Early Bourgeois Revolution from the Peasants' War to a more equally divided appreciation of the Reformation along with the Peasants' War between the 1967 and 1978 textbooks was evident, but the alteration was subdued. Along this line, a change toward a more progressive view of Luther, along with the greater appreciation of the Reformation was detectable in the 1970s, but Luther's image was not completely reversed. However, earlier claims that Luther's image was undifferentiated until Honecker's Committee on Martin Luther in 1980 and the Luther Jubilee Year in 1983 appear suspect. Luther, in fact, was more complex on the pages of the 1978 textbook than he was after his rehabilitation, and more complex than he is often portrayed today in the West.¹⁷⁵

A more broad study into the historical and cultural objects of veneration in the GDR is another avenue of potential research, although examples of these kinds of studies already exist, both Alexander Fleischauer and Raina Zimmering's work come to mind. Even farther afield, and most intriguingly, a comparative study into historical curriculum of Eastern Bloc nations would be fruitful. This project would entail extensive language skills, and extended research, but the prospective rewards are very promising. While, the study of Jan Hus and Hussites are the most apparent comparison to Thomas Müntzer, in the context of Hungary and Romania, researchers could explore György Dózsa's legacy. There are other such figures from the medieval to the late medieval period whose historical images could be explored within school

¹⁷⁵ Max Mönch, Alexander Lahl and Philipp Seefeldt, "Rebel Monk," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2018.

In the context of the GDR's concept of the Early Bourgeois Revolution, and the depiction of Thomas Müntzer as a revolutionary leader, the description of Luther as a "Rebel Monk" is ironic.

textbooks, as has been done in this thesis, or in other ways, such as through the study of monuments, films, or novels.

While this thesis does cover the whole breath of the existence of the GDR, there are many further possible investigations into the GDR's historical perception of Thomas Müntzer, the Reformation, and related topics. Specifically within this topic, there are many more sources from which to observe and test the findings of this study. The intrepid scholar could pursue the meeting notes of textbooks committees, more deeply examine the findings of GDR academia and contrast them with the curriculum offered to the general public. Particularly lacking in this study was an exploration of the transmission of knowledge. How were these texts used in the classroom? How were teachers informed about changes in the curriculum, or in academic research? In a different direction, a large and expansive study conducting interviews with former teachers and students would be immensely interesting. In the past, most interviews included in the history of the educational system in the GDR have been from a small sample of the former citizens. These past studies represent more an attempt to provide a variety of views, rather than an idea of what public perception really amounted to. Methodologically and logistically, extensive interviews into the perception of Thomas Müntzer, or other subjects would be difficult, but it is now that it is possible to conduct such a study. The GDR, as a historical entity, a nation without a future is a relatively recent phenomenon, and so there many living witnesses, especially with respects to the general education system. The ability to conduct these extensive interviews is still possible, to develop a deeper historical picture of the GDR, but this opportunity will only diminish with time.

Appendices

Appendix A: Reading List from Karl Sturm, *Lehrplan für den Geschichtsunterricht an den Berliner Schulen*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1948), 33-36.

Übersicht über die wichtigste seit 1945 erschienene Literatur

Lehrhefte für den Geschichtsunterricht (VOLK und WISSEN Verlags GmbH):

Jahn,	Allgemeine Vorgeschichte 1. Teil.
Franke,	Die asiatischen Völkerwanderung.
M.G. Lange,	Der Frühkapitalismus, 2. Aufl.
Ellrich,	Bilder aus der Zeit der großen Entdeckungen.
Büngel,	Das Zeitalter der Entdeckungen, der Reformation und des deutschen Bauernkrieges
Büngel,	Das Zeitalter der Gegenreformation der Revolution (1603 bis 1702).
Büngel,	Vom Unabhängigkeitskampf der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika bis zum Wiener Kongreß
Ostwald,	Der japanische Imperialismus.
Markov,	Die Geschichte der Türkei.

Arbeitshefte für den Geschichtsunterricht (VOLK und WISSEN Verlags GmbH):

(Die Arbeitshefte enthalten zeitgenössische Quellen und Urkunden, Ausschnitte aus bedeuten Geschichtswerken, Statistiken und Tabellen)

Kuhrau,	Die Gesichte Griechenlands (erscheint in Kürze).
Ostwald,	Kaisertum und Papsttum.
Claße-Spanier,	Das deutsche Volk im späten Mittelalter (erscheint in Kürze).
Schötzki,	Das Zeitalter der Entdeckungen, der Reformation und des deutschen Bauernkrieges (erscheint in Kürze)
Schmidt-Werder,	Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, 2. Aufl.
Paulus,	Das Zeitalter der Gegenreformation und des Dreißigjährigen Krieges.
Bolz,	Englische Geschichte im Zeitalter der Revolution (1603 bis 1702).
Bolz,	Vom Unabhängigkeitskampf der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika bis zum Wiener Kongreß.
Reinherz,	Die Entwicklung des brandenburgisch-preußischen Staates, 2. Aufl.
Ostwald,	Die preußischen Reformen.
Krenn,	Die Anfänge der Industrie in Deutschland.
Lange-Schötzki,	Die japanische Imperialismus.

Geschichtslesebogen (VOLK und WISSEN Verlags GmbH):

Die Stadt des Mittelalters I.
Die Stadt des Mittelalters II.
Auf der Suche nach dem Seeweg nach Indien.
Die erste Weltumseglung.
Die Kenntnis der Erde im Mittelalter.
Das alte deutsche Handwerk.
Die Erfindung des Buchdrucks.
Kolumbus entdeckt Amerika.

Weiter Veröffentlichungen der VOLK und WISSEN Verlags GmbH:

Mischulin,	Geschichte des Altertums.
Kosminkij,	Geschichte des Mittelalters.
Jefimow,	Geschichte der Neuzeit (1789 bis 1870)
Krczynski,	Die Bewegung der deutschen Wirtschaft von 1800 bis 1946.
Girrus,	Wer macht Geschichte?

Kurzbiographien:

Sturm,	Thoms Morus.
I.M. Lange,	Leibniz.
Girrus,	Voltaire.
Schultz,	Robert Owen.
Blau,	Paul Anselm Feuerbach.
Meyer-Hepner,	Malwida von Meysenbug
Podach,	Joh. Ph. Semmelweis
Podach,	Robert Koch.
Weiß,	Romain Rolland.

Lehrpläne für die Grund- und Oberschulen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands. Geschichte. 2. Aufl. 1. September 1947

Alexandrow,	Über die modernen bürgerlichen Theorien der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung. SWA-Verlag, Berlin 1947.
Engels,	Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft. Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1948.
Lenin,	Ausgewählte Werke 2 Bde. Verlag für fremdsprachige Literatur, Moskau 1946.
Mehring,	Über den historischen Materialismus, Dietz 1947.
Marx,	Das Kapital, Band I. Dietz 1947.
Plechanow,	Über materialistische Geschichtsauffassung. SWA 1946.
Plechanow,	Über die Rolle der Persönlichkeit in der Geschichte. SWA 1946.
Rosental,	Materialistische und idealistische Weltanschauung. Dietz 1947.
Stalin,	Über dialektischen und historischen Materialismus. Verlag Neuer Weg, Berlin 1945.
Stalin,	Marxismus und nationale Frage. Verlag für fremdsprachige Literatur 1945.
Stalin,	Fragen des Leninismus. Verlag für fremdsprachige Literatur 1946.
Stern,	Grundzüge des dialektischen und historischen Materialismus. Dietz 1947.
Abusch,	Der Irrweg einer Nation. Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1946.
Barracough,	Tatsachen der deutschen Geschichte. Weidmannsche Verlags-buchhandlung. Berlin 1947.
Felsen,	Deutsche Geschichte bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters Komet-Verlag, Düsseldorf 1947.
Fugger,	Geschichte der deutschen Gewerkschaften. Verlag „Die Freie Gewerkschaft“, Berlin 1947.
Karsen,	Die Geschichte unserer Welt: 2. Band, Die Vorherrschaft Europas, 1. Teil, Von Karl dem Großen bis zur Gegenwart; 2 Teil, Von der Aufklärung bis zum Ausgang des 19. Jahrhunderts, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin 1947.
Kuczynski,	Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter in Deutschland von 1800 bis in die

- Gegenwart. 2 Bde. Verlag „Die Freie Gewerkschaft“ 1947.
- Lindau, Probleme der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Dietz 1947.
- Pascal, Deutschlands Weg und Irrweg. Verlag Volk und Welt, Berlin 1947.
- Marx-Engels, Über das reaktionäre Preußentum. Verlag für fremdsprachige Literatur 1946.
- Mehring, Historische Aufsätze zur preußisch-deutschen Geschichte. Dietz 1946.
- Mehring, Deutsche Geschichte vom Ausgang des Mittelalters. Dietz 1947.
- Niekisch, Deutsche Daseinsverfehlung. Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1946.
- Norden, Lehren deutscher Geschichte. Dietz 1947.
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Appendix B: Reading List from Ministerium für Volksbildung, *Lehrplan für Grunschulen: Geschichte 5. Bis 8. Schuljahr*, (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1953), 9.

Literaturangabe 6;3

A. Für den Schüler:

Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht, 6. Schuljahr, Seite 153 bis 199 und Seite 218 bis 221.

B. Für den Lehrer:

Kominski:	„Geschichte des Mittelalters“, Seite 204 bis 218
Classe/Sapnier	„Das deutsche Volk in späten Mittelalter“, Seite 62 und 63
Schmidt-Werder:	„Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg“, Volk und Wissen Verlag 1947
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