



NORMAN M. NAIMARK

# THE RUSSIANS IN GERMANY

A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949

# *The Russians in Germany*

A HISTORY OF THE SOVIET ZONE  
OF OCCUPATION, 1945–1949

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NORMAN M. NAIMARK

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## *The Russians in Germany*

*For Lila, Sarah, and Anna*

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## Acknowledgments

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THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN WITH ME in one form or another for my entire adult life. In 1965, as a twenty-year-old Stanford junior, I crossed the Berlin wall and happened to meet a fascinating group of East German young people. The friends I made then are still part of my Berlin circle of friends today. Their stories, and the stories of their families and friends, became part of my own autobiography. Some endured harrowing escapes to reach the West; some were eventually arrested for attempting to flee the republic (*Republikflucht*) and were sent to prison; a few stayed behind and tried to make a life for themselves in the East. That the lives of these good people were penetrated by fear, persecution, and pressure to conform led me to ask how the communist East German state had come into being. This book is intended as an answer to that question. It could never have been completed without the interest and support of these former East Germans—neither “Ossies” nor “Wessies”—and without their ongoing willingness to share their histories with an American friend. In many ways, this book belongs to them: Evelyn and Günter Reiss, Norman Herbst, Renata and Gerd Schubring, Monika Wellenbrock and Dieter Flügge, Heidrun and Rudolf Steiner, Manuela and Lutz Wruck, Ulf König, and Ilse and Rudy Hahn.

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in East Berlin and in Moscow were funded in part by the Institute of International Studies, the Office of the Dean of Humanities and Sciences, and the Center for Russian and East European Studies, as well as by the International Research and Exchange Corporation (IREX). Through their good questions and consistent interest, colleagues and graduate students in the Stanford History Department too numerous to mention have contributed to this work. I remain deeply grateful to my teachers and now colleagues Terence Emmons and Wayne Vucinich for their ongoing enthusiasm for my research and their unflagging dedication to the historical enterprise.

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The SED archives changed hands several times between the summer of 1991, when I first was able to use them, and the summer of 1993, when I last worked there. Through it all, the archivists at Wilhelm Pieck Strasse 1 were consistently welcoming and helpful. For making possible the quick and efficient use of the Stasi archives, I would also like to thank Monika Tantscher and Walter Süss of the Abteilung Bildung und Forschung of the so-called Gauck Behörde, which oversees the documentation of the GDR's Ministry for State Security. In connection with my work with these papers, I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Historische Kommission of Berlin and Jürgen Schmädke.

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guided me through complex research problems and demonstrated good spirits and great patience, even when I sometimes lost mine.

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ideals of the community of scholars. But they know, as do I, that the sole responsibility for the content of any book is the writer's.

The final acknowledgment is the hardest, because it can in no way encapsulate the depth of my gratitude or the extent of my debt. My wife, Lila, and my daughters, Sarah and Anna, have remained constant friends through the long and sometimes painful process of researching a book twice, once before the archives in the East opened and once after. For their patience and good cheer through it all, both when going with me and when staying home, I dedicate this book to them with love.

## *The Russians in Germany*

# *Abbreviations*

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ACC	Allied Control Council
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CPSU(b)	Communist Party of the Soviet Union (bolshevik)
DEFA	German Film Studio, AG
DVV	German Education Administration
DVdI	German Interior Administration
DWK	German Economic Commission
FDGB	Free German Federation of Unions
FDJ	Free German Youth
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GlavPURKKA	Main Political Administration of the Worker-Peasant Red Army (GlavPU after 1946)
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party of Germany
MGB	Ministry of State Security
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NKFD	National Committee for Free Germany
NKGB	People's Commissariat of State Security
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OMGUS	Office of Military Government for Germany, United States
ONO	Education Department (of SVAG)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
SAG	Soviet stock company
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SMERSH	Death to spies (Soviet Military Counterintelligence)
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SBZ	Soviet zone of occupation
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SVAG	Soviet Military Administration in Germany
Vdgb	Association for Mutual Farmers' Help
VEB	People's factory
VOKS	All-Union Society for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries

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## *Introduction*

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THE RED ARMY MARCHED into eastern Germany in the spring of 1945, fresh from a series of spectacular victories over the Nazi enemy. Though tattered and war weary, the Soviet officers and men were confident and brash, looking forward to a new era of peace in Europe and an end to isolation and economic want at home. How different the world appeared in the summer of 1994, a half century later, as the last contingents of Russian troops returned home from Germany to an atmosphere of uncertainty and upheaval, of privation, doubts, and pessimism. Behind them, the evacuated soldiers left run-down barracks and old target ranges, rusted vehicles and an environmental catastrophe that will take decades to repair. Of the Germans who watched as the Russians marched off, many from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) felt twinges of nostalgia and regret. However painful, part of their own history had vanished forever; the Soviet occupation was over.

The Russians also left behind them in Germany a legacy of resentment and anger. The years of the occupation regime, 1945–1949, were harder on the Germans in the Eastern zone than they were on their brethren in the West. In all the zones of occupied Germany there was severe economic privation, and there was widespread bitterness as a result of Germany's total defeat and unconditional surrender. None of the Allies had much affection for the Germans, and the occupation authorities treated local populations with hostility and disdain. The terror, destruction, and mass murder wrought by the Wehrmacht and the SS during the war resulted in the Germans' having few sympathizers in Europe, and even fewer friends.

But the Soviet occupation was especially difficult for the Germans. They were forced to kowtow to the occupation administration of a nation they



had been taught to believe was inferior in every way to their own. They had to endure in silence the brutal reality and humiliation of widespread rape and violence on the part of Soviet soldiers. They had to make believe, and in some cases did believe, that the “Bolshevik way” of doing things was good for Germany and for their compatriots. To make matters worse, for almost forty-five years after the beginning of the occupation, Germans in the East were not allowed to dwell on the difficulties of this period. In the cant of the German Democratic Republic, eastern Germany was not “occupied” but “liberated.” Until the very end of the GDR, even the best histories that dealt with the Soviet zone said almost nothing of substance about the policies and actions of the Russian occupiers.<sup>1</sup> Forced amnesia is never healthy for a nation, and there will be many difficult moments in the “new Bundesländer” before this past can be grappled with openly and honestly.

The Russians today face problems that differ from those of the East Germans. At this juncture in the post-Soviet era, Russians are far too occupied with issues of survival to cross swords with the dangerous ghosts of history. Besides, historical issues of how Russians treated those outside of the Soviet Union, whether Poles, Germans, or Hungarians, are dwarfed by problematic relations with the non-Russian peoples of the former Soviet Union who reside within the Russian Federation—for instance, the native peoples of Siberia, the Chechens and Ingush of the Northern Caucasus, and the Volga Tatars. Not to mention the serious confrontations with peoples in what is today called the “near abroad”—the Balts, Ukrainians, Georgians, and Central Asians.

The hysterical quality that attends public discussion of relations between Russians and the nationalities of the former Soviet Union is personified by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, with his bellicose rhetoric. Whether or not he succeeds as a political force in the Russian future, his platform epitomizes the extreme vulnerability of Russians to distortions of their historical relations to other peoples. Like the Germans after World War II, the Russians still have to deal with issues that penetrate the very core of their twentieth-century existence: in particular, the Stalin dictatorship and the murder of millions of innocent Russians by their own government. As a result, despite new opportunities for research in the Russian archives, there has been very little improvement in the meager Soviet historiography of the USSR’s role in postwar Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Until 1989 the West Germans also demonstrated a remarkable lack of interest in the history of either the Soviet zone of occupation or the Ger-