

continued to argue that the Greens' efforts to broaden the FRG's representative democracy and to organize themselves in accordance with the principle of direct democracy threatened West German parliamentary democracy. By emphasizing the SPD's low assessment of the Greens' democratic bona fides, Lieb supports his argument that the first state-level red-green coalition governments, which were formed in the 1980s and 1990s, were options of last resort, not proof that the two parties understood themselves collectively as partners on the Left, let alone evidence that they conceived of democracy in the same way.

By articulating leading Social Democrats' instrumental view of environmental protection, and their disdain for grassroots environmental initiatives that they conceived as challenges to the primacy of Germany's hard-won representative democracy, Felix Lieb makes a compelling argument that SPD powerbrokers were never really interested in saving the environment as an end in and of itself. Precisely this recalcitrance underpins Lieb's interpretation of this particular case study's broader importance for our understanding of politics "after the boom," since Social Democratic environmental debates offer ample evidence that the political parties have "not only been 'victims' of alleged value change," but continued to "shape ideational and social-political constellations" (382). These same findings about the durability of political parties and the extent to which the SPD, at least, insistently applied old paradigms to new questions, also – if only implicitly – indicate a seminal challenge facing proponents of transformative environmental politics in the climate change era.

doi:10.1017/S0008938924000645

Brewing Socialism: Coffee, East Germans, and Twentieth-Century Globalization

By Andrew Kloiber. New York: Berghahn, 2023. Pp. xiii + 206. Hardcover \$135.00. ISBN: 978-1800736696.

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Investigating a small part of the economy of a small country leads us, in Andrew Kloiber's work, to big questions about consumer products and their role in socialist societies, how authoritarian governments rule, and a little-known side of the Cold War. In the years 1975-1977, a coffee crisis developed in the GDR. It began with a "Black Frost" in Brazil that killed millions of coffee trees overnight. Within two years, the global price of coffee rose fourfold. East Germany, already struggling to fulfill its long-standing promise to raise its citizens' standard of living to match or exceed West Germany's, found that it could not afford to use its limited convertible currency to buy coffee on the world market.

Many works on coffee have shown that it is much more than a warm drink. It can bring people together in a form of sociability that governments from the 1500s onward could not control. Coffee signifies status and hospitality, soothes and stimulates at the same time, and provides a break from the everyday world. In the GDR, availability of coffee in the home, especially the more expensive brands, became socially disruptive: it put class differences on display in a state that swore it was eliminating them.

The government did not want to portray socialist society as entirely new in its cultural and culinary habits. Bach's *Coffee Cantata*, composed in Leipzig in 1732-1735 and awkwardly claimed as East German, served regularly to remind citizens that they were Europeans who

could draw on a long history of refinement. Socialism would not forgo pleasure, even though the GDR emphasized the joy of work. A dilemma arose: how to promote a popular culture of individual taste and still have a classless society of activists. The answer was never found.

The word *Genussmittel*, pleasure substances, is used in German for products that are not vital for human life yet make it better. These substances include alcoholic drinks, tobacco, and especially coffee. Kloiber eschews the word “totalitarianism,” delving instead into the social and political problems that arose in the GDR when the government tried to withdraw a popular brand of coffee and replace it with a blend of cheap beans and other materials. The result was a wide boycott of the new label, Kaffee-Mix, which became the subject of angry letters to public officials and the butt of many jokes and poems. Citizens in Leipzig, a report from the political police (Stasi) noted, “felt the mixture has no resemblance to coffee.” Letter writers and the general public referred to Kaffee-Mix as “gnat piss” and “[SED leader Erich] Honecker’s Workers Swill.” Ditties suggested that it worked better than the Pill to inhibit conception. *Brewing Socialism’s* use of *Eingaben*, letters to officials, shows that citizens used them to express serious discontent, typically arguing that the workers’ state was not fulfilling its promises to workers. The *Eingaben* were a valid means of communication between people and the authorities. SED leaders reacted to the letters without employing repression, indicating that the state took public opinion seriously and tried to satisfy it.

Kloiber notes that “from the 1950s onward . . . officials believed coffee had a role to play in strengthening the state’s claims to political and cultural legitimacy” (3). When it could not deliver drinkable coffee in 1977, the writer Jutta Voigt saw a “rupture” of ties between people and the state. People’s “patience came to an end over this issue” (98). If the GDR could not provide decent coffee, how could it deliver a standard of living higher than in West Germany?

The GDR made barter agreements in the late 1970s with nominally socialist countries, for example trucks to Ethiopia in exchange for coffee. The East Germans had to step carefully around Soviet policy but could make their own international agreements with nominally socialist countries and, for that matter, with West Germany. However, barter arrangements fell victim to producing countries’ need for hard currency; they turned to the global market to sell their coffee. Only in Vietnam and to some extent in Laos was the barter program successful, and then only partially and for a relatively short time. Nonetheless, Kloiber argues that the GDR played a key role in the growth of the Vietnamese coffee industry; the usual story is that the Vietnamese themselves started to put substantial resources and coercion into coffee production. The World Bank provided much financing. Still, Kloiber’s material on East Germany’s involvement in the increase in Southeast Asian coffee production is intriguing.

When the coffee crisis finally hit home in the GDR in 1977, socialist officials discussed the problem of coffee and its social significance at the highest level, in the Politburo. Honecker felt it necessary to mention coffee and to promise improvement at a “mass party rally in Dresden” in September 1977 (103). But the damage among the public was already severe.

A few quibbles: “bean” (*Bohnenkaffee*) and “raw” (*Roh-*) coffee are German terms translated directly here; internationally, “green” means unroasted coffee, and “bean” is not necessary, since all coffee comes from “beans” that are in fact the seeds of a fruit. Kloiber could have devoted more attention in his introduction to the work of scholars like Mary Fulbrook, who argue that there was room in East Germany for a private sphere and meaningful protest. But *Brewing Socialism’s* endnotes are replete with references to work in this vein.

The coffee crisis did not bring down the GDR, but it made a serious contribution to its demise. Perhaps the Stasi, the army, and other instruments of coercion could have been unleashed on the people unhappy about Kaffee-Mix. But it would appear from Andrew Kloiber’s work that such repression would only have made the situation much worse.

doi:10.1017/S000893892400075X