

SECTION V. NEW PUBLICATIONS – REPORTS, PRESENTATIONS AND REVIEWS

V.1: REVIEW ESSAYS

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Ernst Thälmann: Man and Myth in New Literature

- Eberhard Czichon, Heinz Marohn (with Ralph Dobrawa): *Thälmann. Ein Report [Thälmann. A Report]*, Berlin, Verlag Wiljo Heiner, 2010. 1178 pp. – ISBN 9783939828563.
- Armin Fuhrer: *Ernst Thälmann. Soldat des Proletariats [Ernst Thälmann. Soldier of the Proletariat]*, München, Olzog Verlag, 2011. 352 pp. – ISBN 9783957680440.
- Russel Lemmons: *Hitler's Rival. Ernst Thälmann in Myth and Memory*, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press, 2013. 428 pp. – ISBN 9780813140902.
- Joachim Paschen: "Wenn Hamburg brennt, brennt die Welt". *Der kommunistische Griff nach der Macht im Oktober 1923 [“If Hamburg Burns, the World Will Burn, Too”]. The Communist Reach for Power in October 1923*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2010. 264 pp. – ISBN 9783631609194.

Introduction: Ernst Thälmann between East and West

Given the importance of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the Weimar political system, it is surprising that Ernst Thälmann – the party's longest serving leader – is conspicuous by his relative absence in the literature, above all in the wider historiography beyond communist studies. Even in the most acclaimed English-language biographical studies of Hitler and the Nazi movement, Thälmann has at best a cameo role, a walk-on part usually limited to his candidacy in the Reich presidential elections of 1925 and 1932.¹ During the Cold War era, which continues to cast a long shadow over communist studies, Thälmann, according to the Western literature, was part of a narrative which focussed on Moscow as the ultimate arbiter in the formulation and implementation of policy. As Hermann Weber's seminal studies of the KPD highlighted, Thälmann was an early agent of Stalinisation in the party leadership and soon became totally dependent on the Soviet dictator for his position at the head of the German party. To all effects and purposes, Thälmann in Weber's view was a local politician elevated 'beyond his intellectual and political competence', even if he was able to communicate the communist message of outright hostility towards the Weimar 'system' among significant sections of the party's working-class constituency.² Weber's research

¹ Ian Kershaw: *Hitler. Hubris*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 269, 334, 362, 363.

² For Hermann Weber's view of Thälmann see, for example, idem: *Das schwankende Thälmann-Bild*. In: Peter Monteath (ed.): *Ernst Thälmann. Mensch und Mythos*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2000, pp.7-15.

covered the full range of the communist experience in Germany and, after at least one significant challenge to his conceptual framework,³ his Stalinisation thesis continues to be the seminal framework for a new generation of researchers writing political biographies of leading German Communists.⁴ Yet, however inadvertently, he may also have limited direct scholarly interest in Thälmann the revolutionary politician. If Thälmann was an empty vessel of interest only in terms of what Stalin poured in, why not look to those leading Communist who were more independent and more rooted in the traditions of the German left?

The literature under review here adds up to hundreds of pages. Yet, Armin Fuhrer's biography and Joachim Paschen's account of Hamburg in 1923 follow a well trodden path. For them, writing about Thälmann remains a vehicle for anticommunism after the fact in a manner that is historical but lacks historicisation. Human agency and nuance are eclipsed in any way going beyond naked ambition and Thälmann remains merely a puppet whose strings were pulled by Stalin from Moscow.⁵ The biography produced by the former East German historians Eberhard Czichon and Heinz Marohn is an exercise in *Geschichtspropaganda*: as we will discuss below, the Thälmann myth is recreated as a call to arms after the end of communism – even if nobody beyond a micro-milieu of unrepentant SED hardliners is listening. It is a study which is almost indistinguishable from the last official biography of Thälmann in the GDR, which was written under the guiding hand of the SED by the head of the Institute for Marxism Leninism, Günter Hortschansky.⁶ Only Russel Lemmons' study of the Thälmann myth is what most readers would understand as conventional academic history.

More man than myth: Ernst Thälmann as an enemy of democracy

Armin Fuhrer's *Soldat der Revolution* begins by informing the reader that his biography aims to dispel a lingering falsehood – presumably among former East German's of a certain age – which presented Thälmann as an 'antifascist' hero. Instead, they should be aware that Thälmann was an enemy of democracy, whatever the East German regime had claimed to the contrary. In this task, it is Fuhrer the journalist who speaks to the reader. Fuhrer – who worked for *Focus* newsmagazine – stresses that his intended audience is not primarily among academics, but the 'broad interested public'. To achieve this objective, he sets out his guiding principle: he writes from a 'bourgeois perspective' (pp. 13-14). It is an odd term to use, not least as it becomes clear that a contemporary 'bourgeois perspective' is meant, and it is used somewhat ahistorically to provide the moral measuring-stick of Thälmann's political life in an earlier age. In fact, the majority of the contemporary 'bourgeois' shared one aspect

For an up-to-date essay in English on his Stalinisation model in the light of new research, see idem: The Stalinization of the KPD. Old and New Views. In: Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (eds.): *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern. Perspectives on Stalinization*. 1917-53, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2008, pp. 22-44.

³ Klaus-Michael Mallmann: *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik: Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996, esp. pp. 54ff.

⁴ Some of the most important new biographical literature on KPD which broadly accepts Weber's Stalinisation model include: Ralf Hoffrogge: *Werner Scholem. Eine politische Biographie (1895-1940)*, Konstanz, UVK, 2014; Mario Kessler: *Arthur Rosenberg. Ein Historiker in Zeichen der Katastrophen (1889-1943)*, Köln, Böhlau, 2003; Mario Kessler: *Ruth Fischer. Ein Leben mit und gegen Kommunisten*, Köln, Böhlau, 2013; Florian Wilde: *Ernst Meyer (1887-1930) – vergessene Führungsfigur des deutschen Kommunismus. Eine politische Biographie*, PhD Hamburg, 2011.

⁵ For an attempt to understand Thälmann as a product of local German as well as Soviet influences, see Norman LaPorte: *Ernst Thälmann. The Making of a German Communist, 1886-1921*. In: *Moving the Social* (2014), 51, pp. 127-158.

⁶ Günter Hortschansky e.a.: *Thälmann. Eine Biographie*, Berlin, Dietz, 1980.

of Thälmann worldview that Fuhrer does not – his outright rejection of German's first democracy.

From a historian's perspective, Fuhrer's use of East German literature to build up an image of Thälmann which is then turned on its head – whereby the white knight becomes a black knight – is also, at best, questionable. Yet along the way, *Soldat der Revolution* uses some memoir-type material and transcribed interviews of individuals who knew Thälmann to reveal some new details and provides some useful summaries of more recent research.

In a useful sketch of Thälmann's early experiences, Fuhrer draws on an 'old Hamburg comrade's' recollections to show how, by 13 years of age, hard work in the family grocery and delivery business had cause severe rheumatism (p. 27). Thälmann also saw the impact of hard physical work, as well as poor living and working conditions, on others during his delivery rounds for the family business and then, subsequently, as a casual workers in the docks. Yet it is not these experiences that are seen to inform his politics. Instead, from the very outset Fuhrer's antihero, we are told, is infused with the spirit of an anti-democratic power politics which would serve him well when he joined the KPD (p. 33). The chapter on the German collapse of 1918 is also structured around Fuhrer's guiding 'bourgeois perspective'. Entitled 'Democracy Triumphs' (pp. 58-74), he omits any real attempt to address awkward facts, especially why by the June 1920 Reichstag elections the 'Weimar coalition' had lost its majority. And, of course, the black knight is one of Hamburg's foremost enemies of democracy.

The following sections address Thälmann's role in the KPD's 'second foundation' as a mass party in 1920 and involvement in a communist putsch – the so-called 'March Action' of 1921. The coverage is relatively uncontroversial. Although the argument is tailored to fit the author's view that Thälmann's motivations can be reduced to the careerism of a power hungry politician rather than any actual conviction, however misled he may have been (pp. 75ff). The treatment of the 'abortive October' of 1923, however, is much more problematic from the perspective of an academic historian – not least as we learn that some East German literature (if it fits the desired narrative) can be read as given. Despite all the new research – much of which Fuhrer has read – the coverage of 1923 and the 'Hamburg Uprising' are built on the foundations laid by Heinz Haberdank in 1958, including the use of quotations from Walter Ulbricht as an 'expert' witness (pp. 108f). According to this version of events, after some initial confusion about the outcome of the Chemnitz Conference, party courier Hermann Remmele and the Political Secretary of the party district of Wasserkante, Hugo Urbahns, both made it clear to the local party that the revolution had been called off – or at least postponed. However, Thälmann refused to listen and was able to win a majority in the Hamburg 'Struggle Leadership' to go to the barricades in a bloody revolution to destroy democracy.

Here, too, Fuhrer could have noted the complexity of the situation and the difficulty historians have had in reconstructing what exactly did happen in Moscow, on the ground in Saxony and in Hamburg. For example, the EKKI protocols from the crucial September meetings show that Thälmann was not a champion of Moscow's path to revolution running through joining workers' governments in Saxony and Thuringia and arming the proletariat as he did not believe the majority of SPD workers' would take the side of communist revolution.⁷ Had Fuhrer simply insisted that Thälmann's actions locally reflected his loyalty to Moscow in a

⁷ Of the new literature, see, in particular, the coverage in: Bernhard Bayerlein e.a. (eds.): *Deutscher Oktober 1923. Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern*, Berlin, Aufbau, 2003; Kessler: Ruth Fischer, pp.135ff.

series of confused and ill-fated local developments, he would have been on stronger grounds.

A broadly similar version of the Hamburg Rising – if in much greater details and with substantially more research – is given in another of the books under review, Joachim Paschen's account of the KPD's bid for power in October 1923. In terms of Thälmann's role in German communism, Paschen asserts that the rising was made possible by the rivalry between Thälmann and Hugo Urbahns over domination of the Hamburg KPD (p. 237). In similar manner to Fuhrer, Paschen also writes a journalistic narrative with a moral tone (p. 45). But, for researchers of communism who want a detailed and dynamic account of the 'Hamburg Rising' of 23-25 October 1923 centred on the key city districts of Eimsbüttel, Barmbek and Schiffbek, this is a valuable study based on a wide range of local documentation (pp. 121-90).

The coverage of Thälmann's role in the developments affecting the KPD during the mid and later 1920s offers Fuhrer's target lay readership a good summary of events, from the factional struggles of the period to the processes of Bolshevisation and, ultimately, Stalinisation. What jars with the academic reader – or, at least this reviewer – is the reduction of all of Thälmann's choices to an unscrupulous desire for power, which is emblazoned in the narrative with phrases like he was 'skilled at playing on the piano of power' (p. 173). There is also an ahistorical assumption: that Thälmann supported Stalin because he was a careerist. Yet surely Stalin did not seem the likeliest winner of the struggle to succeed Lenin in the mid 1920s?

The coverage of the KPD's campaigning during these years also provides a useful summary for non-specialist readers, even if it is equally peppered with the same simplistic moral story. Thälmann's candidacy in the 1925 presidential elections was certainly the exploitation of democratic means for anti-democratic ends and – whether intended or not – facilitated the election of the monarchist Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg as *Reichspräsident* (pp. 138-41). The coverage of Thälmann's role as chairman of the paramilitary *Rote Frontkämpferbund* (RFB) does, however, locate the KPD in a political culture which was militarised across the party spectrum. There is also a neat summary of the importance of the RFB as a vehicle for propaganda, including its annual Whitsun rallies which dominated the streets of Berlin (pp. 144-49). Importantly Fuhrer notes how Thälmann's was the proletarian public face of the party, even if he avoids asking *why* this intransigent, pro-Soviet militant found such appeal among a significant minority of workers and whether the 'power hungry' politicians had any real power, even if Moscow ultimately dominated the party.⁸

Before Fuhrer's treatment of the KPD's fateful role during the final years of the Republic, the reader – especially the general reader – is provided with some useful wider context. Sociologically the KPD reflected a split in the German working class, with its membership being drawn from younger industrial workers who had only had a primary education. By the beginning of the 1930s, German communism had become the party of the unemployed. The membership was also unstable, not least because of the role of the full-time *apparat* in searching for 'deviators' from the official political line; and few rank-and-file members who were active politically for any length of time were schooled Marxists (pp. 201-5). Fuhrer also discusses to good effect the *Führerkult* constructed around the proletarian 'Teddy' Thälmann as rooted in his affinity with and popularity among the party's core support, as well as tracing

⁸ Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan: Kings Among Their Subjects? Ernst Thälmann, Harry Pollitt and the Leadership Cult as Stalinisation. In: LaPorte/Morgan/Worley (eds.): Perspectives on Stalinization, pp. 124-145.

its root from the 'Hamburg Rising' into a response to the potent *Führerkult* built around Hitler from the later 1920s (pp. 111, 203-5).

These sections are adequate overviews for Fuhrer's target audience; but they do not engage with the types of issues a more scholarly readership would expect. For example, he does not ask why the Thälmann myth – to adopt the term used in Ian Kershaw's work on Hitler – found such fertile soil in German political culture.⁹ Instead, he reduces the complexity of Thälmann to a one-dimensional caricature whereby we again find the East German white knight turned into the 'cold and arbitrary' black knight whose dictatorial rule prevented any actual struggle with Nazism and the fall of Germany's first democracy (p.206).

The chapters dealing with the final phase of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi 'seizure of power' deal with precisely this topic (p. 217-60). Nuance and the limited options for Thälmann to determine policy – even to 'moderate' it – in the face of Stalin's foreign-policy drive to keep Germany divided from the West – are ironed out in the interests of a clear narrative. Thälmann's loyalty to Stalin is used to explain his victory over challenges by Heinz Neumann and Hermann Remmele and his detachment from all reality ensured his readiness to stand again as the communist candidate in the 1932 presidential election campaign. According to Fuhrer, Thälmann's lack of intelligence, including his need for others (Neumann and later Werner Hirsch) to write his speeches (delivered in chaotic German), secured a willingness to be Moscow's willing marionette – as if an intellectual (such as Heinz Neumann) could have withstood these forces in the early 1930s.

The agent of the fateful policy of treating Social Democracy as the 'main enemy' of communism was, ultimately, hung by his own petard. Fuhrer details Thälmann's arrest by the Gestapo on 3 March 1933 while staying with the 'Kluczynski family' – in fact, Martha Kluczynski was his extramarital lover – and his preparations for a show trial which was finally called off in 1935. Initially Thälmann was imprisoned in Berlin's Moabit jail. Then, following successive rumours of a jailbreak, he was transferred to Hannover and then Bautzen, before being taken to Buchenwald concentration camp where he was murdered on 18 August 1944 on the order of Hitler and Himmler. Stalin's loyal German found his letters ignored; his wife, Rosa, realised that he was more useful to Moscow as a high-profile victim of fascism than as a liberated communist leader. The latter is undeniable; yet Thälmann did have relatively 'privileged' conditions before he was shot compared to what could have been expected in a concentration camp. He could grow and smoke his own tobacco, read newspapers and even had a conjugal visit from his wife.¹⁰

More myth than man: Ernst Thälmann as 'antifascist hero'

Eberhard Czichon and Heinz Marohn, the authors of *Thälmann. Ein Report* (henceforth: *TER*), also begin by setting out their reasons for writing a new biography of Thälmann rooted in the struggles of the once mighty German communist movement (pp. 11-14). The authors are part of a now diminutive, aging milieu of former German communist *apparatchiks*, whose members include post-1968 DKP chairman, Herbert Mies, and the last General Secretary of the SED, Egon Krenz. Their biography represents the last stand of a lonely breed, still

⁹ For a succinct discussion of this and comparison with Stalinism, see Ian Kershaw: *Personality and Power. The Individual's Role in the History of Twentieth-Century Europe*. In: *The Historian* 83 (2004), pp. 8-19.

¹⁰ Perhaps the best account of Thälmann's imprisonment, early torture and refusal to abandon his commitment to socialism is written by a former East German, see Ronald Sassning: *Rückblick auf Ernst Thälmann. Der Umgang mit den KPD-Führer im Widerstreit der Meinung*, Jena, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2006.

championing the 'fallen GDR' long after 1989 and calling on a new generation to take inspiration from Thälmann's struggles in their present day fight against capitalist excesses and social injustice. They tell the reader that, unlike Willi Bredel once thought, the struggle led by a 'son of the working class' for a 'free German republic' is not over; instead, Thälmann had 'fallen' in a struggle that continues today (p. 12). In what reads like a dark parody of Milan Kundera's battle for memory over forgetting, Czichon and Marohn inform the reader that '[w]ith this Report we also want to fight for historical truth' – and their weapon in this call to arms is historical materialism as understood by Lenin (reference to the relevant sections in his Collected Works is supplied) (pp. 12-13). It is, in fact, something most readers would understand as *Geschichtspropaganda*.

The battle of memory against forgetting in present-day Germany is also the theme of Herbert Mies' foreword. Denouncing the 'achievements' of the 'socialist' GDR and forgetting the exemplary role of Thälmann as socialist lodestar is, we are told, a means of preventing the struggle for a better future against the supremacy of large-scale capitalism and its inequalities. It is for this reason that Mies welcomes a 'new depiction of [Thälmann's] struggles' (pp. 7-8). Yet, if we cut out references to the end of 'Really Existing Socialism', *TER* reads almost exactly the same as the last official biography of the Communist leader, *Thälmann: Eine Biographie* (henceforth *SED/79*) – which was published in East Berlin in 1979. The biography's lead author, Günter Hortzschansky, is thanked by the authors for his advice, together with the Stasi's HA XI/11, which dealt with politically sensitive files from the Nazi era.

Egon Krenz, who had once been the honorary chairman of the Thälmann Pioneers, covered the same ground when he recommended the *Report* to an invited audience which gathered in Hamburg in 2011 to commemorate what would have been Thälmann's 125th birthday. The last leader of the SED-State presented Thälmann – like von Stauffenberg – as a truly national figure who 'had given his life for a free Germany', while others – including former post-war Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer – had made their peace with Nazism; the Social Democrats had 'tolerated' the governments which led to Hitler then, and now they tolerated the dismantling of memorials to Thälmann, like in Ziegenhals, to the south east of Berlin.¹¹ To the denizens of this alternative reality '[t]he roots of fascism in the *Bundesrepublik* had have still not been eradicated' (p.11).

Yet, all this is an exercise in the political uses of memory so crude that few of their former 'comrades' now listened. Notably Klaus Kinner, in response to Czichon and Marohn's criticisms in *Junge Welt*, pointed out that two decades of post-communist research under the auspices of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and Die Linke did not deny Thälmann's place in the communist canon; but it did rejected his legacy in favour of those who had not unequivocally endorsed Stalinism.¹²

As the *Report* is rooted in the practices of history writing SED-style, there is no actual historiographical engagement with all the invaluable post-1990 research, other than to cherry pick useable findings. And the archival research – which is extensive, if limited to what is available in Germany – is in effect mobilised to provide a scholarly facade for an overtly

¹¹ Egon Krenz: Das Erbe verteidigen. Dokumentiert: Rede bei der Thälmann-Ehrung am 16. April 2011. In: *Junge Welt*, 19.4.2011, p. 10.

¹² Klaus Kinner: Ein Kämpfender, Leidender, Irrender. Vor 125 Jahren wurde Ernst Thälmann geboren. In: *Neues Deutschland*, 16.4.2011 (online edition), URL: <<http://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/195613.ein-kaempfender-leidender-irrender.html>> [Last consulted: 29.10.2015].

partisan publication. Where new details of Thälmann's life emerge they stand outside his political life. For example, one of the most conspicuous findings by Czichon and Marohn is that Thälmann may have had other sibling, in addition to his sister Frieda, who presumably died in infancy (p. 19). Another interesting detail is that Thälmann got a good job administering the work creation schemes of the Hamburg Labour Office in 1919 though Emil Hüffner, who was an old friend on the left-wing of the pre-war SPD (p. 69).

While basic details of Thälmann's rise in the pre-war workers' movement and his role in the First World War and the German Revolution are factually correct, their interpretation is less than the width of an *Ostmark* from the story told by the SED's Institute of Marxism Leninism. Thälmann is always the model militant in a manner more myth than historicised political actor. For example, the section reflecting on Thälmann as he joined the United KPD at the end of 1920 states that at 34 years of age he had 19 years of experience in the workers' movement. This ensured that he 'understood the living conditions of young workers, male and female workers' and white collar employees: 'he was connected to them each and every day and looked for discussions and exchanges of opinion with them' (p. 89). His self discipline – not least in his free time – had allowed him to develop his political work and theoretical understanding. He had broken with Social Democracy, rejecting its compromises with capitalism and 'looked to the young Russian council republic' as an alternative (pp. 89-90). In explaining why Thälmann joined the VKPD at the turn of 1920/21 rather than at the turn of 1918/19, the differences with *SED/79* are so marginal that they can comfortably co-habit the same political space. According to Günter Hortzschansky it was *only* to lead as many USPD workers to communism as possible (*SED/79*: pp. 93f, 106). Czichon and Marohn more accurately observe that Thälmann's support for 'revolutionary' work within the trade unions and a readiness to participate in parliamentary election, if only as a tribune for revolutionary agitation, owed something to his pre-war social-democratic political socialisation (pp. 62-74). But it amounts to the same overarching narrative: Thälmann was the political and moral lodestar who shone a light on the 'correct' Leninist way forward.

During the KPD's *Kampfzeit* both *SED/79* and *TER* concede that Thälmann disagreed with Lenin at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, which was held in Moscow early 1921 (*SED/79*: pp. 126ff; *TER*: pp. 106f, 109-10). The disagreement concerned whether the theory of the 'revolutionary offensive', which has helped precipitate the ill-fated uprisings in central Germany and Hamburg – the so-called *Märzaktion* –, had been a tactical error. Thälmann was reluctant to abandon a left radical position in favour of Moscow's 'united front', but – according to both of these accounts – submitted to party discipline. However, the difference between *SED/79* and *TER* is that while the former stressed that Thälmann could already be set apart from the 'ultra-Left' faction under Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, Czichon and Marohn take into account his factional involvement with the Berlin Left. Both, however, stress that the proletarian Thälmann had learned from Lenin, and already stood closer to him than these 'disloyal intellectuals'.

In the events surrounding the so-called 'abortive October' of 1923 in Germany, both accounts also run in tandem, with Thälmann the exemplary figure who brings the party close to the proletarian masses in the shipyards and factories and stands ready to fight honourably when the signal comes – even if it turned out to be a false start because of the confusion surrounding the outcome of the Chemnitz Conference and the Reichswehr's subsequent march into Saxony and Thuringia (*SED/79*: pp.168-84; *TER*: pp.135-62). This, of course, belongs to the party legend. However, *TER* offers a more detailed account of the events leading to the EKKI's decision to launch the 'German October', notably Thälmann's (and Stalin's) initial reservations about the prospect of the SPD's left wing supporting an armed

uprising. But, in all essential details – not least the demonization of Thälmann's party rival in Wasserkante, Hugo Urbahns – they agree. Thälmann is the hero of the 'Hamburg Rising', even if he 'still needed the bitter experience of class struggle before he was able to break with the pseudo-revolutionary leaders grouped around Ruth Fischer's "Left Opposition"' (*TER*: pp.137). This, we should note, did not happen until 1925 after Thälmann had risen to national prominence as the public face of their intransigent version of communist policy.

Party myth trumps historical fact at every turning. One striking example of the authors' conflation of events to reinvent history is their personal defence of Thälmann's role in 1923. The authors dismiss out of hand more recent 'Western' accounts (without specifying which ones), countering their analysis with the assertion that, 'had they [the KPD] been successful [in leading the German revolution in 1923], it would have saved Germany from fascism and the world from a horrific Second World War' [...] 'This alone makes it necessary to remember these traditions of struggle' (*TER*: p. 162).

But the authors of *TER* are highly selective in what they want us to remember and what they would prefer we forgot, notably Thälmann's role in the completion of the process of Stalinisation. Take for example the corruption scandal in the autumn of 1928, which centred on Thälmann's role in covering up the misappropriation of funds by the political secretary in Hamburg, John Wittorf. There is no disagreement in the literature about how this was mobilised for factional ends. The so-called 'Conciliators' in the leadership – under Ernst Meyer and Arthur Ewert, who had enjoyed great influence since 1927 – wanted to exploit this as an opportunity to oust Thälmann. By doing so, they aimed to limit the political damage in Germany of the Comintern's renewed 'ultra-left' policy. But this is not sufficient for *TER*, which stresses that – unlike conventional 'anti-communist' accounts – support for Thälmann's leadership at the meetings of the Central Committee on 26 and 27 September did not collapse. Instead, it points to how he retained significant support – notably from Joseph Winternitz and Franz Dahlem, as well as Heinz Neumann and Hermann Remmele – at a time when seven members and four candidate members had not returned to Berlin after attending the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in Moscow. There is some truth in this. But something is missing: the vote at these CC sessions was almost unanimous because they resolved to give the final decision to the EKKI. Here *TER* differs from *SED/79* in only one significant way. The latter claimed that the KPD's rank-and-file membership forced the leadership into a u-turn, insisting that the EKKI only subsequently endorsed this and Thälmann's rehabilitation (*SED/79* pp. 398-400). The most significant omission in *TER*, however, is the refusal of Czichon and Marohn to engage with the wider documentation held in Berlin and Moscow – and published in German – which shows how Stalin and Molotov controlled the EKKI investigation using secret networks to pre-empt any undesired outcomes. The German challenge was routed within days, and victory over dissenters in the German party leadership was Stalin's. The head of the KPD owed his position to Stalin's personal intervention, and his opponents were ousted from their positions in the leadership and provincial party organisations.¹³

These examples of how *TER* and *SED/79* share the same essential treatment of the KPD's development during mid 1920s, when Thälmann, we are told, unified – not Stalinised – the

¹³ Hermann Weber, Bernhard H. Bayerlein (eds.): *Der Thälmann-Skandal. Geheime Korrespondenzen mit Stalin*, Berlin, Aufbau, 2003; on the secret networks and the dynamics of Stalin's interventions, see Bernhard H. Bayerlein: *Ernst Thälmann. Vom 'Fall' zur Parabel des Stalinismus*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 35-71.

KPD and made it a genuine Bolshevik 'party of a new type' which was capable of struggle. But it is perhaps more instructive to consider at how Czichon and Marohn deal with Thälmann's role during the fateful final years of the Weimar Republic.

Amid the dense undergrowth of Marxist-Leninist jargon, the authors walk a clear path in which Thälmann is the party leader with clear political visions during the final demise of the Weimar Republic. He was the only top-level party leader able to see through the sectarianism of the 'Neumann Group' and the dogmatism of Stalin and the Comintern. The only mild criticism of Thälmann is that he was unable to advocate a policy of defence the Republic against its enemies, which Czichon and Marohn claim represented a 'strategic mistake and disregard of Leninist notions of communist strategy' (p. 510). And, of course, they are quick to point out that the anti-communism of the political and economic elites made Thälmann's rejection of Weimar understandable.

These chapters, however, focus on Thälmann as a political and theoretical paragon of communist virtues who only failed because the obstacles thrown across his path were formidable. One the one hand, there were problems at the highest level of the communist movement. In 1929, the Political Commission of the EKKI revived the policy of treating Social Democracy as 'social fascism' and this ultra-sectarian – or Stalinist – thinking informed the views of the so-called 'Neumann Group' in the KPD's Secretariat (pp. 490f, 556, 581). On the other hand, there was the role of the SPD whose anti-communism was also pursued from high political office, principally in their Prussian stronghold where Carl Severing held office as Minister of the Interior.

If this was dogmatism and Thälmann could see beyond its blinkered vision, what was his preferred policy? In short, the authors' claim that he championed a mass political mobilisation against cuts in pay and social provision launched from the factories and an ideological campaign against 'Hitler-fascism' in order to forge a broad 'people's alliance' against fascism – or fascisms as the terminology remains as obscure as that used by the contemporary KPD. The authors even insist that Thälmann fought a losing battle to 'overcome the underestimation of Hitler-fascism' in the party's ranks (p. 581).

The narrative of Thälmann's unequal struggle for the 'correct' party policy is peppered throughout these chapters. But one clear example is the authors' treatment of the infamous campaign for a referendum to topple the SPD-led Prussian government. The referendum campaign had been initiated by the 'Harzburg Front', which brought together the Nazis and German Nationalists under the media magnate Alfred Hugenberg. However, in one of the best researched sections of the book, Czichon and Marohn claim to have found documentation of Neumann's meeting with Stalin and Molotov in Moscow which shows the Russian leaders' willingness to support his policy of turning the campaign into a 'red referendum'. Thälmann submitted to party discipline, but opposed the attack on the last bastion of the SPD in a *de facto* alliance with Hitler and Hugenberg. Instead, he insisted that the Social Democratic workers would not understand the policy and neither would many in the party's own ranks. In the end, Wilhelm Pieck had to return from Moscow to take the reins of the campaign (p. 539).

Thälmann's unease about a policy of openly taking the side of the Nazis and Nationalists against the SPD is one of the books most believable assertions. The same cannot be said for the claim that Thälmann wrote the 1930 election platform, the so-called 'Programme of National and Social Liberation' and the ensuing *Volksrevolution*, as a vehicle to counteract

'bourgeois nationalism' by means of a sustained 'ideological offensive'.¹⁴ The authors do not try to explain the purpose of communist propaganda against the Versailles Treaty and the revisions to its terms in 1924 and 1929, or to engage with the standard view in the historiography that it served Soviet foreign policy. Least believable of all is that these policies stand as a testament to Thälmann's supposed early understanding that 'Hitler-fascism' was the 'main danger' (pp. 504f). Instead, Czichon and Marohn assert that Thälmann, who they concede worked within the framework set by the Comintern's 'social fascism' policy, repeatedly pushed the party towards co-operating with 'ordinary' Social Democratic workers in a so-called 'united front from below', which – despite the ubiquitous view throughout the party – did not necessitate them actually defecting to the KPD (pp. 581-83). Interestingly, despite the authors' intentions, in much of this discussion, Heinz Neumann comes across as the *de facto* leader of the KPD's revolutionary wing which wanted to fight the Storm-troopers on the streets in the belief that the 'final struggle' was imminent (pp. 554f). Instead, the authors champion Thälmann's political response, which amounted to a propaganda campaign – or 'ideological offensive', as they term it – to 'beat back' the rise of 'Hitler-fascism'.¹⁵

When the Nazi movement came to power in January 1933, Stalin had resolved the power struggle in the KPD leadership in Thälmann's favour. Immediately after the *Machtergreifung*, Czichon and Marohn detail – on the basis of reports from the German ambassador in Moscow – how Thälmann held two days of talks with Stalin and Manuilsky (pp. 672ff). He was instructed to avoid any provocation of or violent clashes with the authorities, and put this position to the KPD leadership at a series of meetings at the beginning of February. The authors stress Thälmann's advocacy at these meetings of a 'united front' policy across the party divide and conclude – in the same manner as contemporary communist accounts – that it was thwarted by the 'influence of SPD leaders'. After the Reichstag fire, the KPD was decimated in a wave of SA-led violence against the movement's political opponents.¹⁶ Thälmann – together with Werner Hirsch – was found by the Gestapo in his 'underground accommodation' in Charlottenburg with the Kluczynski family. As the account of these events by Ronald Sassning showed, Thälmann paid little attention to the rules of conspiracy and his party accommodation had become as well known as his extramarital affair with Frau Kluczynski.¹⁷ Czichon and Marohn, by contrast, focus on Thälmann's betrayal by a neighbour, Hermann Hilliges, as did *SED/79*.

The chapters addressing Thälmann as Hitler's prisoner over the next eleven and-a-half years offer detailed coverage of the event and the individuals involved on both sides, from the communist *apparat* to Gestapo-men charged with his 'preventative detention'. The reader is taken through the minutiae of the – subsequently abandoned – preparations to prosecute Thälmann for 'high treason'; the role of various party 'couriers' allowing a degree of communication with the KPD leadership and Moscow; the changing conditions he endured – including early Gestapo torture as well as a later conjugal visit by his wife; and, not least, how he refused to renounce communism in return for his release from jail. (My own, as yet unpublished, research confirms the latter.)

¹⁴ For an often overlooked account of these issues, see Conan Fisher: *The German Communists and the Rise of the Nazism*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1991.

¹⁵ In English, the classic account of the KPD's response to the Nazis at street level remains: Eve Rosenhaft: *Beating the Fascists? The German Communist Party and Political Violence*, Cambridge, CUP, 1984.

¹⁶ For an insightful review of recent literature on the Reichstag fire, see Richard Evans: *The Conspiracists*. In: *London Review of Books*, 36 (2014), 9, pp. 3-9.

¹⁷ Sassning: *Rückblick auf Ernst Thälmann*, p.38.

One example of the authors' knowledge of the files – in particular the RSHA files collected by the Stasi, which is supplemented by post-1945 interviews of Gestapo secretaries – is the argument that Himmler proactively sought Hitler's approval to murder Thälmann before the July 1944 assassination attempt (pp. 864ff). They also show how the Nazis' 'plan for murder' included spreading disinformation – which, in the post-war years, was taken up in the West German media – that Thälmann died in the same Allied air-raid as Rudolf Breitscheid on 24 August 1944. This perhaps shows what the book could have been: a work of history piecing together the past from the traces left to the historian. But that was never the aim. If, after 935 pages, we were left in any doubt, Klaus Steiniger's afterword, in a section entitled 'Remembering and Admonishing', makes this clear. 'What' he asks 'does it mean these days to judge things and act in a manner like Ernst Thälmann?' It means, we are told, a broad people's alliance against the present day 'rising danger of fascism' in Angela Merkel's *Bundesrepublik* – and, of course, to guard against 'reformism'.

The Thälmann Myth

The two biographies reviewed above are, as we have discussed, problematic from the perspective of academic history. By contrast, *Hitler's Rival* is a well-researched scholarly study which, in the managerial parlance of the UK's REF, is a 'high-quality publication'. Although the author insists that the monograph is not a work of biography, it does offer a valuable, concise biographical sketch of Thälmann's life into the early years of the KPD (pp. 17-29) and, thereafter, provides biographical details as a backdrop on which to project the development of communist propaganda. There is good reason for this, as Lemmons points out: biography – or, rather, its manipulation – was the raw material from which the myth was manufactured.

Lemmons' aim is to provide a detailed study of the Thälmann legend, which constituted a main theme in communist propaganda over seven decades, from the mid 1920s until the early 1990s. This topic has, perhaps owing to the boom in GDR studies which lasted into the early years of this century, been given considerably more attention than biography *per se*. Lemmon makes two contributions to the wider field: firstly, his study goes beyond remit of earlier research, which focussed largely on the myth among East German youth;¹⁸ secondly, while earlier research addressed the myth's development under the GDR, this study dates the origins of the myth to the mid 1920s, when Thälmann took the party leadership, and traces its development from the Weimar Republic and the Comintern's 'Free Thälmann' campaigns during the 1930s into the GDR. He does this in nine substantive chapters in which a number of recurring themes are integrated within the overarching conceptual framework of 'political religion'.

The quasi-religious motifs which underlay the Thälmann myth are shown to have cohabited the same political space as the cults of Lenin and Stalin and the KPD's early 'fallen heroes', most prominently Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.¹⁹ The myth – or legend – had a number of core features, in particular Thälmann's resolutely proletarian credentials as a Hamburg dockworker and, originating in the party's version of his role in the Hamburg Rising

¹⁸ For earlier influential studies of the 'Thälmann myth', see, for example, René Börrnert: *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn! Das Thälmann-Bild im Erziehungsalltag der DDR*, Bad Heilbrunn, Julius Klinkhardt Verlag, 2004; Allan Nothnagel: *Building the East German Myth. Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the cult of dead martyrs in the KPD, see Mallmann: *Sozialgeschichte*, pp. 220ff.

of 1923, his steadfast readiness to fight against the odds. These facets, complemented by his proletarian style of speech and appearance, made 'Teddy' a figure popular with the party's core members and supporters who regarded him as 'one of us'. Like the Bolsheviks, above all the cult surrounding Stalin, he was also given the attributes of modesty and readiness for self-sacrifice²⁰ – in Thälmann's case, this ultimately led to his martyrdom in the fight against 'Hitler fascism'. From its origins in the KPD's political campaigns in mid 1920, the myth permeated East German society and was communicated in film, literature, including texts written for children and young people, songs, placards and photographs, and the annual commemorations of his birth and death. In short, the Thälmann myth stood at the centre of the GDR's legitimating narrative. He was the embodiment of antifascism in a world shaped by the systemic rivalries of the Cold War in which the FRG was demonized as the successor state to the Third Reich, and for its putative militarism and neo-fascism.

These themes, together with a discussion of the use of quasi-religious Christian imagery, are identified in German communist propaganda over the course of some seven decades. In the first chapter, which covers the period until 1933, Lemmons makes a convincing case that Thälmann had internalised the norms of Stalinist political culture and how this was reflected in his autobiographical sketches, which were written in his prison cell under the Third Reich (pp.27-28). In the discussion of the 'myth' and its uses under the Weimar Republic, perhaps the most interesting observation is how the KPD's contemporary propaganda – notably Thälmann's presentation as Germany's foremost 'antifascist' in the 1932 presidential election campaigns – subsequently informed the SED's presentation of these events to its citizens (p. 57). The myth after 1945 was built on the foundation laid by party propaganda in the 1920s.²¹

The following chapter then deals with the Comintern's international campaigns to free Ernst Thälmann from the prisons of the Third Reich. Lemmons shows how the 'Thälmann Committee' was set up as a communist 'front organisation' by the movement's master propagandist, Willi Münzenberg, and offers examples of local mobilisations as well as the role of French intellectuals and British left-wing parliamentarians in the campaigns. One of the book's best examples of religious imagery in communist propaganda is also detailed in relation to a John Heartfield photomontage of a weeping angel sitting next to a resolute Thälmann in his prison cell (p. 96). The chapter's central – and undoubtedly correct – assertion is that neither Stalin and the Comintern nor the new KPD leadership under Pieck and Ulbricht wanted Thälmann's release. The actual purpose of the campaign was to mobilise wider, non-communist support for the Soviet Union's 'antifascism' during the 'Popular Front' period – which ended abruptly in 1939 with the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

The main body of the book – some two-thirds of the text – is then given over to the origins and evolution of the Thälmann myth in East Germany. Chapter three addresses the role of the myth in the endeavours of leading German Communists under the Soviet Zone of Occupation and early GDR to construct a new, 'antifascist' society. Rather than engage with the problematic issues of mass support for the Third Reich, Thälmann personified the 'good Germany', which had fought and ultimately defeated Nazism; all Germans were now invited to follow his example and to build socialism. The fourth chapter then details how the regime communicated this message using Kurt Maetzig's epic films during the 1950s. Lemmons

²⁰ On Stalin and the party culture of modesty, see Ronal Suny: *Beyond Psychohistory. The Young Stalin in Georgia*. In: *Slavic Review* 50 (1991), 1, pp. 48-58.

²¹ Many of the motifs identified by Lemmons are already visibly in a 'semi-official' publication issued for the 1932 presidential election and written by the party official Peter Maslowski, see idem: *Ernst Thälmann*, Leipzig, 1932.

concludes that the films, which were shown to mass audiences, were – in the regime’s terms – a not inconsiderable success. Indeed, in the absence of a central national monument to Thälmann, Lemmons views these films as the most important manifestation of the myth in the early GDR (p. 185). The fifth chapter is a thematic appraisal of the role of Buchenwald concentration camp, where Thälmann was murdered in August 1944, as the ‘central shrine in the state-controlled antifascist religion’ (p. 187). Lemmons details the use of a ritualised form of mass commemoration from the late 1940s to the end of the 1980s, and the potency of the myth of the camp’s ‘self-liberation’ whereby Nazism’s victims became socialism’s victors (p. 194). Chapter six covers the dissemination of the myth among children and youth which, as Lemmons notes, has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention. The close links between the educational system and the ‘Thälmann Pioneers’ and Free German Youth (FDJ) are shown, and the author makes clear just how vast the scale of agitprop literature directed at young people was (pp. 238-9). One of the most important texts was written by Thälmann’s daughter, Irma, who with her mother, Rosa, played a significant role in cultivating the myth (p. 256).

Chapter seven is a detailed assessment of the role of East German historians in disseminating the myth, which served as an integral component in the SED’s search for political legitimacy. Introducing the concept of *Geschichtspropaganda*, Lemmons paraphrases Marx’s dictum by observing that Marxist-Leninist history writing was not merely ‘to explain the world, but to change it’ (p. 277). He provides two main examples of Thälmann biographies and their message to a wider audience beyond academia: Willi Bredel’s (1948) version and the last official account written by an ‘author collective’ headed by the head of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Günter Hortzschansky (1979). Although the later biography was closer to the actual past, Lemmons reconstructs how the SED leadership directed Hortzschansky and his authorial team in precisely what to write, including the use of the scholarly apparatus of footnotes to present propaganda in trappings of research (pp. 299f).

The final chapters are dominated by the gargantuan 50 ton bronze statue of Ernst Thälmann, which had been designed by Soviet artist Lew Kerbel as the centrepiece of a complex showcasing the achievements of ‘really existing socialism’. Ideas for a National Monument had come and gone since the regime’s earliest years, but this was seen to completion under the personal direction of Erich Honecker. Chapter eight deals with unveiling of the monument on Thälmann’s 100th birthday in 1986, which was only the most conspicuous feature in a nationwide act of remembrance, including the broadcasting of a four-hour long television film, a commemorative postage stamp, a special commemorative ceremony at Buchenwald, new books and a conferences bringing together academics from across the communist bloc (pp. 319-20). Lemmons’ argument is that the National Monument was an act of denial in the face of the new Soviet leader’s call for reforms. The bronze colossus which Michael Gorbachev was shown during a state visit on 16 April – the date of Thälmann birthday – came with the message that the GDR was a showcase for ‘really existing socialism’. Ironically, Thälmann now found himself defending the GDR against Soviet Russia, and the myth again became more prominent than it had been since the 1950s. Chapter nine then looks at how, after the fall of communism, many Germans – from art student to old age pensioners – acted to prevent the Thälmann monument from being swept away with the SED state – as the Lenin Monument made famous in the movie ‘Goodbye Lenin’ had been. Lemmons insists that these activists had little sympathy for Honecker’s fallen regime; but they did believe that Thälmann was an antifascist worthy of remembering. As Annette Leo noted, perhaps there was more than one versions of the myth – and this ‘unofficial’ version had taken legs among

a population which did not want to abandon everything it had known under 'really existing socialism'.²²

While Lemmons is to be congratulated for covering the entire period of German communism in a vast tranche of twentieth century history, for this reviewer at least, it raises two conceptual questions. Firstly, like Armin Fuhrer above, Lemmons tends to assume that, by aligning himself with Stalin in the mid 1920s, Thälmann was securing his own rise to power. But surely Stalin had not yet won the power struggle to succeed Lenin (pp. 43-47). More importantly, Lemmons missed the opportunity to add the role of party propaganda to our understanding of the process of Stalinisation in Germany by asking how the early development of the Thälmann myth was used in the process of Stalinisation. For example, was it part of a development in which a single, seemingly dominant and preferably resolutely proletarian figure came to personify the KPD as a party of militant, intransigent opposition to everything the 'Weimar system' stood for and, in its place, to champion the seeming successes of Bolshevism?²³

For some readers – and certainly this reviewer – Lemmons' use of the concept of 'political religions' will appear not to do justice to what is a far-reaching and important contribution to the place of the Thälmann myth in twentieth century German communism. Had Lemmons limited his use of 'political religion' – principally that elaborated by the political scientist Eric Voegelin at the end of the 1930s – to offering a means of framing a (convincing) argument about the prominence of quasi-religious themes in German communist propaganda, there would be no grounds for debate. But it is worth questioning how useful Voegelin's – and others' – interpretive model is '[a]n effective way of understanding the history of German communism [...] in the broader context of the twentieth century's failed political religions' (p. 11).²⁴ There are two interrelated issues: periodisation and the extent to which the 'state religion' created a community of believers. Firstly, other historians drawing on the political religions model – notably Michael Burleigh – emphasise the emotional impact of the First World War in creating a mass basis – or 'congregation' – which was receptive in times of acute crisis to the message of salvation peddled by demagogues.²⁵ It would have been interesting to read something of how this cultural context informed communist propaganda and its reception among the millions who voted for the KPD and hundreds of thousands passed through its admittedly unstable ranks. For example, Gerd Reuter, who interviewed superannuated Communists in a Hannover retirement home in the 1970s, found that – in West Germany – the myth, which had been created during the Weimar Republic and perpetuated in party literature after 1945, lived on.²⁶

After the Second World War, Lemmons emphasises the East German population's scepticism – or predominant lack of faith – in socialism, attributing this to the imposition of a

²² Annette Leo: Liturgie statt Erinnerung. Die Schaffung eines Heldenbildes am Beispiel Ernst Thälmanns. In: Monteath (ed.): Ernst Thälmann, pp. 17-30.

²³ The 2008 issues of *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (JHK), which was dedicated to Hermann Weber, was given over to appraisal and reappraisals of his Stalinisation thesis. On the role of the Thälmann 'cult' in promoting Stalinisation, see Norman LaPorte/Kevin Morgan: Der Rote Frontkämpfer und der militante Gewerkschafter. Konstruktionen der proletarischen Führerfigur in Deutschland und Großbritannien. In: *JHK* (2008), pp. 68-79.

²⁴ For a critique of 'political religions' as a conceptual framework, see Gidon Cohen: Political Religion and British Communism. In: *Twentieth Century Communism* 2 (2010), pp. 197-14.

²⁵ Michael Burleigh: *The Third Reich. A New History*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 7ff.

²⁶ Gerd Reuter: *KPD-Politik in der Weimarer Republik. Politische Vorstellung und soziale Zusammensetzung der KPD in Hannover zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik*, Hannover, SOAK-Verlag, 1982, pp. 92-95.

foreign ideology and the regime's failure to 'deliver' on its promises of 'eternal peace and material abundance' (pp.11, 376-78). It is a theme which has also come out strongly in novels, perhaps most notably Thomas Brussig's *Heroes Like Us* which dissolves the Thälmann myth and its moral message in caustic irony.²⁷ Yet, as Lemmons observes at various points, a distinct East German identity was forged – if to varying degrees – and it continued to shape East German identity after reunification in 1990. What, then, is really missing is a discussion of the extent to which the Thälmann myth served its purpose, how deeply it penetrate East German society from its ruling elites to ordinary citizens.²⁸ As other studies have also pointed out, many East Germans were reluctant to have their lived past 'colonised' by a post-reunification 'West' German version of their history, which now dismissed antifascism as nothing more than a building block in the making of Germany's 'second dictatorship'.²⁹

Even if versions of the 'political religions' model qualify questions of any actual belief in officially anti-religious 'totalitarian' regimes, it would have been valuable to know more about the formation of propaganda as well as its outward manifestations in rites, rituals and the regime's use of language. Did any leading figures in the SED actually discuss mobilising religious-type propaganda in the service of the regime? As Lemmons details in chapter seven, the SED's use of the various official Thälmann biographies as *Geschichtspropaganda* was so heavy handed that the topic's omission must surely be significant. Perhaps these references were, rather, broadly cultural in a society in which religious themes could be understood within the context of an overtly communist political message?

In the view of this reviewer, Lemmons' use of the concept of 'political religions' is interesting and offers a post-structuralist angle to our understanding of German communism; but at times the author's perceived need to use it as a 'red thread' makes some examples have a shoe-horned feel – as if it didn't quite fit. More importantly than any debate over the relative merits of 'political religions' as a methodology, however, is the enormous contribution *Hitler's Rival* makes to our understanding of the centrality of the Thälmann myth to German communism.

Would the real Ernst Thälmann please stand up?

According to legend, when *Doppelgänger* meet, they cancel each other out. Reading the biographies reviewed above leaves just this feeling. Although Armin Fuhrer's biography is a credible journalistic study, which is – by and large – suitable for the wider audience he aims to reach, it is not a scholarly, historicised account of an important twentieth century communist leader. The 'back-to-the-future' Thälmann, who rises from his SED grave and clambers Frankenstein-like through the pages of Czichon and Marohn's biography, is almost certainly the last stand of those who are, quite genuinely, unable to tell man and myth apart. Thanks to Russel Lemmons' scholarly study, we now know just how central the myth was to legitimising the SED's rule. We can only hope that we know as much about the 'real' historical actor soon.

²⁷ Thomas Brussig: *Heroes Like Us* (trans. John Brownjohn), London, Harvill Press, 1997, pp. 75f, 136.

²⁸ For another review making a similar point, see Martin Sabrow: *Wurzeln und Wandlungen des Thälmann-Bildes – immer im Dienst der SED-Politik*. In: *FAZ*, 6.9.2013.

²⁹ For a useful summary of these issues, see Corey Ross: *The East German Dictatorship*, London, Bloomsbury, 2002, pp. 177-81.