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The state-sponsored cultural activity and opposition in the GDR, 1957-1961: The case of students' cabaret group "Rat der Spötter"

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between the state-sponsored students' cultural activities and students' opposition from 1957 to 1961 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and clarify the meaning of this relationship for the East German society in the post-Stalinist era. The students' cabaret group "Rat der Spötter" in Leipzig was the group being in favour with the Socialist Unity Party Germany (SED). However, the group resulted in the arrest of the members in autumn 1961 due to their political performance. What was the students' vision on "their" democracy and hopeful future for own society, and how and why they came to conflict with the SED. Previous studies have interpreted the group members as typical victims of the GDR dictatorship. Contrary to these previous views, my paper reconsiders this affair by paying attention to the vision of socialism and democracy those students nourished after the death of Stalin. As students of new generation and proletariat origin, they had a great hope to construct a new socialist community and democracy. At the same time, however, the Stasi had expanded its system and put the group under surveillance since the mid-1950s. Therefore, it is important to scrutinize these relationship between the students and the authorities. For this aim, the paper scrutinizes German archival materials such as the Stasi, the administrative and university documents. My paper shows the conflict between the authorities and students' in the post-Stalinist era by using these materials.