ABSTRACT:

POLITICAL CARTOONISTS ABOUT THE DIVISION OF GERMANY, THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTION, AND THE REUNIFICATION. A CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL EDUCATION

Ulrike Martens

Cartoonists comment the current political and social processes, and create with their caricatures historical period documents which reflect prevailing opinions, ideologies, norms, and values of a generation.

The present work deals with cartoonists of the Federal Republic and the former East Germany as drawing witnesses of the division of Germany, the peaceful revolution, and reunification for the first time from a scientific perspective.

A survey conducted with 54 caricaturists working in Germany will be analysed in order to examine the everyday professional life of caricaturists in the GDR and the Federal Republic, as well as the conditions and boundaries which existed for the drawing work during the German division. The question will be asked about what has changed professionally for the caricaturists through reunification. In addition, the present-day working life of respondents will be examined, what factors influence the choice of topics, and whether there are issues which they do not address in their drawings.

The findings from the questionnaire survey will be concretised, developed, and supplemented by interviews with selected cartoonists.

Furthermore, the cartoonists' statements about the development of German political caricature over the past decades and its current status, serve as a basis for a model which shows the influence and impact on the content and style of political caricature.

The survey showed that while censorial interventions were a part of the daily work of GDR cartoonists during the German division, cartoonists of the Federal Republic also experienced censorship. Editors of both countries did not publish cartoons which dealt with taboo subjects.

Although the taboo subjects have hardly changed in content, today more cartoonists are aware of taboos in their work. They describe editors as being restrained towards critical or provocative cartoons, and an increasingly sensitized readership which has become quicker to critize caricatures. This causes cartoonists to handle taboo subjects more consciously and therefore resulting in self-censorship. If cartoonists weigh economic reasons not to treat themes in their cartoons and thus limit their own freedom of expression, criticism and reflection as well as the questioning of existing conditions become more difficult and prevent a possible constructive dialogue.

This affects the current appearance of political caricature in such a way that the cartoonists characterize the caricatures as superficial, descriptive, and increasingly apolitical. According to the cartoonists, this results in caricatures having a low significance in German society. In order for the significance of the German cartoon to change, its appearance must be altered. This may have an influence on cartoonists - depending on the illustrated interactions between all the actors in the model - because they decide which issues they address and how they implement them.