

# Obituary

## Manfred Kossok (1930–1993)

FRIEDRICH KATZ\*

ENRIQUE SEMO\*\*

Early in 1993, Manfred Kossok, one of Germany's leading historians of Latin America, died in Leipzig. For most of his life, he taught history at the Karl Marx University of Leipzig in what was the German Democratic Republic. Kossok was a student of Walter Markov, the dean of East Germany's historians. Markov, a specialist in the history of the French Revolution, had spent 11 years in a Nazi prison, where the library contained a huge number of books on colonial problems and especially German colonial ventures. This may have been the basis for Markov's interest in colonial problems, which led him to set up a workshop at the University of Leipzig to examine the history of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Kossok became the main Latin Americanist in that group, and after studying with Markov, he went to the University of Cologne to study the colonial history of Latin America with Richard Konetzke, the dean of German Latin American historians.

Refusing an offer to teach at Cologne, Kossok returned to East Germany, where he first wrote a dissertation on the social and economic organization of the Río de la Plata in the colonial period. He then wrote a second dissertation (*Habilitationsschrift*) that was published under the title *Im Schatten der heiligen Allianz* (In the Shadow of the Holy Alliance, 1964). On the basis of a huge number of unpublished archival sources from Germany, Austria, France, Britain, Spain, and Russia, Kossok proceeded to analyze the reasons for the failure of the Holy Alliance's efforts to reconquer Spanish America for Spain.

Kossok during that same time wrote a pathbreaking essay on Nazi

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policy toward Latin America, based on hitherto unpublished sources available in East Germany. Kossok taught at universities in a number of Latin American countries—Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, Cuba—and his work that was translated into Spanish was known throughout Latin America.

Kossok's interests soon ranged beyond Latin America, and he founded a workshop in East Germany that dealt with the comparative history of revolutions. This workshop was characterized by a degree of open and free discussion that was quite unusual in the German Democratic Republic. Kossok was editor and part-author of 11 volumes called *Studies of the Histories of Revolutions*. He edited 31 monographs in the series *Contributions of Leipzig to the Research of Revolution*.

Although during the last 12 years of his life he suffered from kidney failure, his intellectual production did not decrease but increased in scope and variety. In 1989 he published *In Tyrannos. Revolutionen der Weltgeschichte; Am Hofe von Ludwig XIV*; and *La revolución en la historia de América Latina*. He completed another book on the world in 1492, 1492: *Die Welt an der Schwelle der Neuzeit* (1992).

His last years were marred not only by illness but by political difficulties as well. After the reunification of Germany, Kossok, who continued to consider himself a Marxist, albeit critical of many aspects of East Germany's policies, was for a time forbidden from teaching at the University of Leipzig, even though a West German evaluation commission looking at his work had qualified it as very good. International protests from West Germany, Austria, the United States, Mexico, Spain, and France led to his reinstatement at the University of Leipzig, but he was not allowed to supervise dissertations.

His last visit to the United States was to the University of Chicago, where he lectured in 1991 on the reasons for the collapse of the German Democratic Republic. His last project, on which he was working when he died, was an analysis of the East German revolution and the reasons for the fall of the German Democratic Republic.