

Medicine Against the Cold War

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The Cold War profoundly affected the lives and everyday conditions of all people in East and West. Indeed it was in no way just an ideological, military or political conflict but a phenomenon that encompassed all of society. Anyone who has yet to confront this simple truth, despite the extensive research of recent years, had the opportunity to do so at an event on "Medicine Against the Cold War" on April 28 at [Berlin's Willy-Brandt-Forum](#).

The occasion was the presentation of the new book "[Medizin gegen den Kalten Krieg. Ärzte in der anti-atomaren Friedensbewegung der 1980er Jahre](#)" by Claudia Kemper of the [Hamburg Institute for Social Research](#). Her freshly published postdoctoral thesis traces the history of the West German chapter of the "[International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War \(IPPNW\)](#)", a non-governmental organization, from its foundation in 1980 into the decade's second half. She based her work on the organization's voluminous files, which it had made available a few years ago to the [Research Centre for Contemporary History in Hamburg](#), the FZH. Its director, the contemporary historian Axel Schildt, also took the opportunity to moderate an eyewitness conversation following the book's presentation with Dr. Barbara Hoevener, a Berlin anesthesiologist and cofounder of the West German IPPNW. The event at the Willy-



Brandt-Forum was held in cooperation with the Berlin Center for Cold War Studies and with the generous support of Wallstein Verlag.

In her introduction, Claudia Kemper first sketched the subject of her research, the international peace organization IPPNW and its West German chapter. It was founded in 1980 at the suggestion of colleagues in the US, yet could build structurally on local doctors' initiatives that had been active since the 1970s against the so-called "peaceful use" of nuclear power in West Germany.

Three analytical levels interested the author regarding this complex initial situation. First, she investigates the tensions that became apparent among the NGO's various organizational units. In the West German context, of special interest were the lines of conflict that emerged from the cooperation of the East- and West-German IPPNW. On another level Kemper asks what influence the fact had that the IPPNW is an organization open to practitioners of only one profession, namely medicine. In her analysis, this was a crucial point for many members whose engagement was based more on their profession's moral ethic than on any political stance. Thirdly and finally, the doctors' organization serves as a vehicle for tracing the close ties between the protests against nuclear armament in the 1980s with the multilayered discussions and debates within West Germany. This is the point at which one must acknowledge that the Cold War had permeated society as a whole.



The author's subsequent discussion with Dr. Barbara Hoeverer, a founding member of the West-German IPPNW, confirmed the study's findings and enriched it with vivid anecdotes, to which many audience members who were also eyewitnesses of the time contributed. The discussion again brought to life the tense conditions within which the West-German IPPNW did its work. These included its relationship with politics, in which it engaged through its own protests, yet to whose parties (even the Greens) it generally maintained a considerable distance. The willingness of policymakers to seek influence among its ranks, on the other hand, is documented in the sometimes bizarre stories surrounding the awarding of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize to the IPPNW. An additional source of tension emerged in the collaboration with the German Medical Association, which Barbara Hoeverer recounted both vividly and with admirable fairness. She made clear that the relationship de-escalated over the years and that the IPPNW thereby succeeded in spreading its message to a wider audience. One might have wished to learn more about the concrete "work" of the organization that evening, about the kinds of its networks and forms of protest and how, by using them, it affected West-German society. Yet perhaps it was not a bad thing that these questions remained unanswered. The answers will certainly be found by reading Claudia Kemper's new book.

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