

On Re-reading Myself Thirty Years Later: Preface

Peter Barton

The article is a reflection on a travel text written after a trip to Rostock and Mecklenburg in March 1990 to observe the first free elections to the East German parliament (Volkskammerwahl). Unread for thirty years, the text becomes a means of recalling, through detailed retrospective annotations, some of the key events and individuals involved in German unification. The CDU's policy of rapidly privatising the East German economy via the Treuhandanstalt after 1990 is compared with similar far-reaching economic reforms enacted in New Zealand, the author's home country.

Keywords: East Germany, reunification, March, 1990, elections, Volkskammerwahl, Rostock, Mecklenburg, privatisation, neoliberal, economic, reform, New Zealand

The following text was written after a trip to Mecklenburg in March 1990 at the time of the first free elections to the East German parliament (Volkskammerwahl). It has been extensively annotated in 2020 to contextualise the political and historical references. Originally intended as a general interest article for an English-language readership, the text and the photos which accompany it never made it much further than my writing desk. They have been languishing in my files now – in my 'Schublade', as it were – for the last thirty years. Reproducing them here may involve a certain kind of archaeology but it is not an archival excavation intended to provide new insights into the specifically German national story of unification, nor even of its implications for European history. All that has been richly

detailed over the last thirty years by armies of specialists before whom I would happily raise my white flag. At the same time I hope it can be read as more than just a personal indulgence – like an old diary pored over while seated on a trunk in the attic. It seems to me that if there is any value to be mined from a ‘failed’ document like this it might lie in searching it for signs of, for want of a better word, redemption – a point I will come back to later.

First, some background on how I came to write this article:

In early 1990 I was 26 years old and had been living for a year in Tübingen, funded by a postgraduate scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service. Unfortunately, my research project on the work of the Austrian lyric poet, Christine Lavant, had never really caught fire. Partly this was because the topic had been hastily cobbled together out of a sense of obligation to what I felt were the painful but necessary challenges of non-narrative literature. But it was also the case that living in Germany had sapped my self-confidence slightly. I had an unhelpful tendency to compare myself constantly with my German peers who all seemed preposterously erudite and articulate, fully at home in a language in which I expressed myself competently but cautiously. Even the patronage of my stand-in supervisor, the ever gracious, ever generous Professor Paul Hofmann – *lector mundi*¹ and tireless advocate of all things Aotearoan – could not turn me from this defeatism. It seemed to me that I was never going to cut the mustard as a Germanist. Added to this was the feeling

¹ This epithet, conferred on him by Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom, adorns his headstone.

(no doubt a legacy of New Zealand's anti-intellectual traditions) that the *vita contemplativa* of the academy was a pretty poor thing, and that real life was forged by a man (!) who made his own way through the cut and thrust of the world. Perhaps, I thought, I should take a stab at a different career? If I wanted to write, perhaps I ought to be a journalist?

Meanwhile, on the world stage something rather more important was going on. Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* had encouraged an opening up by Warsaw Pact countries. Hungary had opened its borders to Austria and thousands of East Germans were taking this route to leave for the West. And, remarkably, tens of thousands of ordinary East German citizens were taking to the streets every week to protest at their own government. The regime seemed determined to ride it out, however, and pressed ahead with the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the GDR in October 1989. Tensions were building and it seemed impossible to predict what turn political events would take. Of course it is rhetorical over-kill to say that there was anything like an entanglement between the agony of the GDR and my own neurotic concerns. As absurd as it is, however, the suggestion can serve as a convenient heuristic device: I can disavow it as comic hyperbole² while taking it seriously enough to point up what I think might be useful correspondences between the situation of the GDR at the time of the *Wende* and the political developments taking

² This idea of a marriage between the political events of 1989 and those of an individual life was explored to comic effect, of course, in Thomas Brussig's novel *Helden wie wir* (1995). There are numerous literary and cinematic resonances of elsewhere, too, for example in Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) or Woodie Allen's film *Zelig* (1983).

place in the social formation that had shaped me – that is, in New Zealand.

As it happens, East Germany's crisis proved a welcome distraction from my own concerns, and my attempts to seek out an encounter with German history-in-the-making provided an opportunity to escape Tübingen's sometimes too narrow confines. A week after Günther Schabowski's ad-libbed announcement on 9th November of unrestricted travel for East Germans, I travelled to Berlin hoping to find myself the spectator at a revolution. From my base at a friend's flat in Moabit I set out to patrol the Wall and the city's neuralgic points. I lurked at the border crossings, and with a borrowed chisel tried unsuccessfully to chip a souvenir off the Wall. But if I was in the wrong place in Tübingen, it turned out I was in the wrong time in Berlin. I had arrived a week too late. History's train had already departed – or, at least, its inaugural service had. The first democratic elections for the People's Chamber set for March 1990 seemed to offer the chance to jump on board another and arrive punctually this time at the performance of History. My plan was to use my knowledge of the language and local contacts – courtesy of a medical student friend in Rostock – to write an article which I would then tout to an as yet unidentified publication. If it didn't lead to a new career, at least I would have something for the CV.

As it turned out, my brief sojourn in the East – mainly in Rostock but with side-trips to Bad Doberan and Güstrow – was illuminating and enjoyable but the resulting article did not result in the professional break-through I had hoped for. I was never quick off the mark when it came to writing and by the time I had the piece finished, History had once again got a head start on me. I recall that I half-heartedly submitted it to a couple of New Zealand magazines, but even though I used the new-fangled fax technology to send

the text it would still have arrived too late, I am sure, to have elicited anything but a bemused frown from an editor. The demand in the New Zealand media for stories on the specifics of German unification would almost certainly have been very limited. And, in retrospect, I can see that the text is not 'ontologically grounded'. For what was it exactly? Travel journalism? Political reportage? Opinion piece? Observations of a diarist? Little wonder that no one took it on.

If this text – involuntarily consigned to the desk drawer for so long – still has any relevance for me today it is not because it allows me to recognise the continuity of some of the social issues it describes. These will be obvious to most readers. There is still an earnings discrepancy between East and West and the problem of xenophobic nationalism which was beginning to raise its head in early 1990 has become, rightly or wrongly, firmly associated with the East. As we know, the success of the Alternative für Deutschland, an electoral lightning rod for such sentiments, has presented a challenge for parliamentary democracy for the whole of the Republic.

Reading this article from the perspective of 2020, though, does permit me to attribute a certain 'redemptive' quality to it in the way it hints – to the reader in the know – at common linkages between East Germany and New Zealand and their wider, global, ramifications. When it was written in 1990, this connection could only have been accounted for in the biographical details of the person who wrote it (a New Zealand postgrad student with aspirations to be a Germanist). Today, it seems to me, these connections could be more confidently and objectively described using an expression such as 'the neoliberal experience', since in the 1980s and 90s both East Germany and New Zealand were the scene of far-reaching economic reforms which

radically altered the structure of their respective polities, and which shifted the “master signifier”³ of their public discourse from social harmony to efficiency.

New Zealand had the jump on East Germany in this respect, because our neoliberal reforms had been underway since 1984. Always determined to punch above our weight, New Zealand’s free market policy initiatives sometimes exceeded those of our models in the Anglosphere, the United States under Ronald Reagan and the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher.⁴ Like East Germany, New Zealand, too, had had a highly regulated economy with a relatively generous social welfare system but by 1990 the neoliberal project of rolling back the state was already well advanced. In that year the country entered one of its most intense phases of socio-economic restructuring with the election of a new National Party government that would slash welfare entitlements and introduce ‘flexible’ labour markets (i.e. ensure they were non-unionised). At the same time in East Germany a change of political course, necessitated by the results of the East German parliamentary elections in March, meant that the Treuhandanstalt, “originally created to safeguard state ownership of the *Volkseigenes Vermögen*, now became the

³ A term in Lacanian psychoanalysis. See Lacan, Jacques and Alan Sheridan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1981.

⁴ And both had famously had their precursors in the reforms experimented with in Chile under Pinochet’s dictatorship by the ‘Chicago Boys’ (University of Chicago trained economists) whose aim was to create a “revolutionary capitalist transformation” leading to a “Hayekian market society”. See Clark, Timothy David (2017) “Rethinking Chile’s ‘Chicago Boys’: neoliberal technocrats or revolutionary vanguard?”, *Third World Quarterly*, 2017. 38:6, 1350-1365, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2016.1268906](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1268906)

indispensable tool of massive privatisation”,⁵ and was charged with finding buyers for what was the world’s largest collection of assets. Though in many instances great effort was expended by Treuhand officials to retain as much of the plant and workforce as possible⁶, whole industries were nonetheless pared to the bone and vast numbers of workers laid off in an effort to make businesses attractive to investors. Most of these assets were purchased by individuals or corporations from outside East Germany giving rise to feelings of resentment that the country had been, in some way, colonised. Similarly in New Zealand during the 1980s and 1990s, state owned assets were often sold to majority foreign interests leading to a sense of local disenfranchisement.⁷ For all the geographic and cultural distance between East Germany and New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s, then, the two countries were bound by a common experience, that of being fundamentally refashioned by the forces of neoliberalism.

The last thirty years have seen neoliberal reforms enacted throughout the globe. Yet rather than provide for stability and prosperity it is clear that they are driving us towards another, far greater crisis at breakneck speed. The advocates of neoliberal policy frequently claim that “there

⁵ Seibel 2013, 99.

⁶ See Raab (2002) for such efforts during the privatisation of the East German shipyard industries.

⁷ For example, New Zealand Rail Limited was sold in 1991 to a consortium of ostensibly local merchant bankers (Faye, Richwhite and Co. – 40%) and overseas investors (Wisconsin Central Railway – 40% / Berkshire Partners – 20%). It was renationalised in 2008. See Abbott, Malcolm and Bruce Cohen. “The privatization and de-privatization of rail industry assets in Australia and New Zealand” *Utilities Policy*, 2016 (41). 48-56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2016.04.010>

is no alternative”⁸, that the imperatives of productivity and financial efficiency must take precedence over the social benefits of secure employment, and that inequality is the necessary outcome of a political economy that prioritises and rewards individual initiative. But political systems are constructed from decisions made as a consequence of ideological commitments. Systems are made to work in the interests of certain privileged groups, they are not derived from universal axioms. Where the decision-making process involves elections, the alternatives to a current prevailing order will be evident as the historical trace of failure – the failure of certain political parties or alliances to convince a majority of voters of the attractiveness of their programme. In the case of East Germany in March 1990 this meant the failure – at least at a national level⁹ - of parties such as Bündnis 90 or Die Grünen to persuade their fellow citizens that the relationship with the Federal Republic could be approached from a different angle, that perhaps unification in a single sovereign entity might not be desirable, that certain features of GDR society might be worth retaining or that a working through of the previous 40 years of oppression should take precedence over opportunities for spending and consumption. This is not to say that any sense of shame should attach to this past failure today. Quite the opposite. Given that our current systems of political and economic organisation appear to be approaching exhaustion, the examples of democratic failures from the recent past – especially those that prioritise social and ecological values – can provide a valuable resource and

⁸ A phrase frequently used by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

⁹ This is an important point to bear in mind since the results of the March 1990 election were highly differentiated along regional lines. See footnote 43.

point of re-orientation for the challenges of the future. If this article failed thirty years ago, it might redeem itself today by drawing our attention to that election in March 1990 and its potentially productive failures.

East Germany, March 1990: Eine Schublade-reportage

To the foreign visitor to West Berlin it seems that the great East-West reconciliation party is over and it's back to business as usual. Nike is removed from her perch atop the Brandenburg Gate and taken away for restoration work following damage inflicted in the course of the New Year's party.¹⁰ The deafening hammering of the so-called 'wallpeckers'¹¹ – souvenir hunters seeking a chip from the infamous "anti-fascist protection wall"¹² – has given way to a tinny staccato. Professionals have now taken over and pieces of the wall along with East German army uniforms and insignia are available from a host of peddlers. The media circus has decamped and moved elsewhere – to

¹⁰ In fact, the entire ensemble atop the Brandenburger Tor (the quadriga and allegorical representation of Victory) had been removed for restoration. While the statue had indeed been damaged during New Year's celebrations in 1989/90, it transpired in the course of investigations that even more extensive conservation work would be required due to several decades of neglect. Particularly badly affected were the struts and the outer copper skin. Repairs were undertaken at the West German Museum für Verkehr und Technik. (Bahrman, 1999. 271)

¹¹ The German expression was Mauerspecht.

¹² A common SED designation for the wall was antifaschistischer Schutzwall. Its first recorded use was in a speech by Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the SED Central Committee, at the Party Congress on 13th August 1961 – the year the wall was constructed. (Wilke, 2014. 286)

Lithuania¹³, Nicaragua¹⁴, Columbia¹⁵. Shops in West Berlin sold out four months ago have long since restocked and are once again able to offer fruit and medium sized socks. Capitalism's impartial laws of supply and demand have restored the balance and healed the rift of 40 years of hostility and suspicion ... a common desire to make money in peace will overcome all obstacles, the city is wont to whisper.

There is something soothing in this notion of a prejudice free plutocracy. Unfortunately, its promises of universal harmony are no comfort to the Berliners living in the previously "undesirable" area hard against the wall who now find themselves in the centre of the proposed capital city and under pressure from property speculators. Nor can these promises gloss over a tragic past. History's ugly memorials cannot be gentrified. Take a walk alone the wall

¹³ In mid 1990 there was considerable tension in the Baltic region over Lithuanian demands for secession from the Soviet Union, despite the large proportion of ethnic Russians in its population. After the Lithuanian Parliament had unilaterally declared independence in April there followed a trade embargo imposed by the Soviet Union. There were also incidents of outright violence: several Lithuanian border guards were killed in an incident in July 1990 which may have involved Soviet police. (See Lieven, 1993)

¹⁴ In national elections in February 1990, the left-wing FSLN government led by Daniel Ortega which had fought a decade long insurgency against the so-called Contras financed by the US was defeated by a grouping of opposition parties under Violeta Chamorro. (See Williams, 1990)

¹⁵ Presidential elections were held in Columbia on May 27th 1990 and were won by César Gaviria of the Liberal Party after three of the leading candidates had been assassinated in the preceding months. The political scene in Columbia at the time was marked by high levels of violence which were contributed to variously by right-wing paramilitaries, drug cartels and left-wing insurgents. (See Ladrón de Guevara, 1990)

where the eastern salient bulges intrusively into the west, for example, and one sees numerous reminders of how the city came to be divided; the shattered remains of the Anhalter railway station, the shrapnel scarred Berlin gallery and, beside it, the site of the notorious Friedrichstrasse Gestapo headquarters. One recalls that Berlin's short, 75 year span as the capital of the German Reich began with the boom years of the 1870's due to reparations from the Franco-Prussian war and ended in the *Götterdämmerung* of defeat in World War Two.¹⁶

¹⁶ Policies concerning the configuration of public spaces and strategies of memorialisation, and the planning processes for housing and new forms of industry soon became some of the most fraught aspects of German reunification. Scholarly discussion of these controversies has spawned an extensive literature. (See, for example, Demshuk, 2020 and Bernt, 2014) Since the political nature of the settlement between the two Germanys involved the incorporation of the East into the West's existing constitutional structure as a *Beitrittsgebiet*, (under article 23 of the Grundgesetz rather than article 146) it was feared that the specific history of the GDR visible in its urban fabric would be overwritten in a gesture of capitalist triumphalism. If the ruins of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche and the Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin had been left standing as a persistent reminder of the defeat of fascism, they also served to underscore West Germany's claim to membership of the postwar capitalist order. This same order now seemed to require not the retention of what had been inherited – that is, Socialist architecture rather than bombed buildings – but its eradication through a building programme that combined, in many instances, advanced construction technologies with a backward-looking, nostalgic aesthetic. The obvious example of this was the demolition from 2006-08 of the *Palast der Republik* on Marx-Engels-Platz and the ongoing reconstruction on that site of the *Berliner Schloss* which is recreating Andreas Schlüter's original Baroque facades. The reconstruction of Dresden's *Frauenkirche* has been similarly controversial with critics accusing the project of a nostalgic aura-fetishism. It should be noted, though, that this argument can also be turned against itself: the *Frauenkirche* replica can be said to achieve in architectural form Walter Benjamin's

Today, the Federal Republic has a great deal of confidence in its economic strength and it is the momentum of this economic powerhouse which it hopes will make a trouble-free reunification possible. But what was the prevailing attitude in the East as voters geared up for the election on March 18th? Would the intoxicating promises of wealth of the conservative parties win out or would a government be elected which would work cautiously towards union? These are the questions I asked myself as I crossed into East Berlin on my way to Rostock, a city of some 300 000 on the Baltic coast.

East Berlin is not a place which greatly challenges the western perspective and its rigorous expectations of material well-being. It was always a showpiece of the communist regime - a city of irony where socialism attempted to prove that it could foot it with the capitalist West on the West's terms. This is evident in the impressively restored architecture of the pre-socialist era on Unter den Linden and Marx-Engels square. There has been no indulgence in iconoclasm and the impression is more one of imperial grandeur than of socialist functionalism. Shops stock a wide range of products but since the compulsory currency exchange has been removed, the pressure for the visitor to buy anything just to get rid of the non-convertible East mark is no longer present.¹⁷

“overcoming of the aura by means of [...] technical reproduction.”
(Cliver and Smith-Prei, 2015. 6)

¹⁷ Prior to 24th December 1989, any visitor to East German was required to hold 25 GDR marks for each day of their stay. Purchase of the currency could only be made at the official rate 1 : 1. Given the rudimentary state of the consumer economy in the East, the problem became one of how to dispose of this relatively generous sum. Most

Fortunately, the stringent visa controls have been relaxed a little so that I was granted a private visitor's visa in the relatively short space of five hours instead of the normal two weeks.¹⁸ This meant running a whole gamut of bureaucrats ranging from stern matrons to monomaniacal policemen, all of whom seemed to consider it their duty to discourage visits to their country. They were obviously overwhelmed by the pace of change and unable to relinquish their old role as watchdogs of the state. Even office equipment had been rendered redundant. To my look of horror as my visa application was stamped with "Urgent. 3 days." the sheepish response was: "Don't worry, we just haven't had time to get any new stamps." In my frustration to complete these formalities I could only marvel that the GDR's revolution had not been bloodier. The process gave me an interesting insight into a system in transition and also taught me a valuable lesson on survival

West Germans were only able to travel at the weekend when shops were shut and pubs and restaurants were full. Leftover money was often simply given to relatives or left in the collecting boxes of the Red Cross at the border crossing points. (Wolle, 1998. 64 – 65)

¹⁸ For both West German citizens not resident in Berlin and non-German foreigners, a day visa could be obtained by presenting a valid passport at a border crossing in Berlin. Such a visa was, however, only valid for East Berlin and the holder had to return to the West by midnight on the day of issue. Prior to December 1989, there were much tighter regulations for visitors wanting to stay longer with friends outside the capital; they required the East German host to have applied for a *Berechtigungsschein* and provide precise details on the potential visitor at least four weeks prior to their entry into the country. Both this *Berechtigungsschein* and a valid passport were required before a visa would be issued by East German authorities for a visit of up to 30 days. (See Ehlers, 1973)

in East Germany; one must resign oneself to spending half one's waking hours in queues.

Finally, it was a relief to leave the tourist office on the Alexanderplatz - romantic illusions of a roaring Berlin inspired by Alfred Döblin, Marlene Dietrich or Fritz Lang are very soon laid to rest in this grey, empty basin - and head for the 'provinces'. I constantly reminded myself of the importance of not judging East Germany from the viewpoint of a prosperous Westerner. After all, as a New Zealander, it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to lay claim to that status. Like Easterners visiting the West for the first time I, too, often felt like a peasant in the face of West German opulence.¹⁹

¹⁹ Though New Zealand had maintained a high standard of living by international standards in the 1950s and 1960s the collapse of wool prices in the late 1960s and the UK's entry into the EEC in 1973 meant that, by the late 1980s, the country was starting to slip badly in international rankings – a state of affairs that would have been obvious to anyone familiar with the dreary shopfronts of main street New Zealand upon visiting the glittering arcades of German cities in 1989 – 1990. What was not obvious in 1990 was the historical irony that this situation would produce i.e. that the trajectory of the East German economy would become the trajectory of the global economy itself. In an attempt to halt its economic decline, New Zealand adopted a set of radical neoliberal policies which ultimately produced effects not dissimilar to those that East Germany would experience after reunification. In 1984 the New Zealand Labour Party had come to power in a snap election and it immediately embarked on an aggressive agenda of reform in what had previously been one of the West's most protected and regulated economies. These reforms, which were continued at an even faster pace by the conservative National government after 1990, saw the sale of state assets, the removal of labour market protections, the reduction of welfare benefits, the introduction of 'light touch' business regulation and lower corporate taxation. (See Easton, 2020)

Getting off the train late at night in Rostock it became immediately apparent that I was in a land in the grip of election fever. Political posters hung from every flat surface. On the night of my arrival Gregor Gysi,²⁰ the deputy leader of the reformed communist party, the PDS²¹, had given an address. Fortunately, there had been no violence at this meeting such as had occurred when Chancellor Kohl had held a similar rally.²² Then, a group of

²⁰ b. 1948. Lawyer, politician and the last leader of the PDS-SED. One of the few figures from the Wende period still active in German public life Gysi has been a member of the Bundestag since 1990, first as a representative of the SED's successor party, the PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus), and more recently as a representative of Die Linke. This was not the only occasion I attended a rally at which Gysi spoke; he was in Tübingen a few months later where he gave a talk in the university's Neue Aula on 3rd July. Still toying with the idea of a career in journalism, I took notes during his speech. Reviewing these recently, I can see that I was clearly impressed by Gysi: I had made references to his "disarming manner" and "wit". Others were less susceptible to his charms. A flyer from the "Tübinger Initiative Demokratischer Sozialismus" called Gysi's appearance at the university "ein Schlag ins Gesicht ... ein Skandal" because of his association with the totalitarian politics of the SED. (See accompanying photos)

²¹ Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus. In 2005 the PDS was renamed Die Linkspartei.PDS before joining with the Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit in 2007 to become Die Linke. (See Dalz, 2017)

²² This confrontation had occurred on 9th March at a rally at the city's Fischerbastion where Chancellor Kohl had addressed a crowd of around 100 000. „BK Kohl ruft bei seinem Wahlkampfauftritt in Rostock die Bürger dazu auf, >>alle kommunistischen Bonzen abzuwählen<<. Neben einem Meer von schwarzrotgoldenen Fahnen, jubelnden Menschen mit „Deutschland“- und „Helmut“-Rufen kommt es auch zu massiven Protesten von Vereinigungsgegnern. Es fliegen Eier und Knallkörper. Als vor der Tribüne ein >>Kanonenschlag<< explodiert, ruft Kohl der Menge zu: >>Lassen Sie sich nicht von dem Pöbel beeindrucken!<<“ (Bahrman, 1999. 271 – 272)

protesting left-wing students were viciously attacked by a group of skinheads. Advertisements for this visit still hung and announced Kohl's arrival at 1700 hours. Alongside was the response from an opposing faction announcing his departure at 1705. Humour was an important means of recruiting votes. An anti-Kohl flyer depicting a grimacing Chancellor had the caption: "It's not enough to have no ideas. You have to be unable to express them as well."

The serious nature of the campaign was visible also. Every grinning portrait of Wolfgang Schnur, the leader of the right-wing Democratic Awakening²³ who had been accused of being in the pay of the secret police, had had the word "Stasi" – the abbreviation for the State Security Service - daubed across it. Schnur had just confessed to the charge that morning from his hospital bed where he was recovering from a "nervous disorder".²⁴ The election was only three days away.

²³ Demokratischer Aufbruch. Formed in October 1989, it contested the Volkskammerwahl as part of the Allianz für Deutschland. In August 1990 it was absorbed into the CDU-Ost. (See Grashoff, 2004)

²⁴ The official diagnosis was "Kreislaufprobleme". (Bahrman, 1999. 272) Schnur's fall from grace was the most spectacular of all those whose political careers were ruined by revelations that they had collaborated with the Stasi. He had gained a reputation as a committed and highly competent defender of dissidents against the State and his position within Demokratischer Aufbruch seemed to mark him as a future Ministerpräsident. Though he protested that he was being targeted in a dirty tricks campaign, the evidence against him was irrefutable and devastating: he had signed an agreement with the Stasi as a 20 year old already, and his file in Rostock was considerable: thirty-three folders of information including records relating to his receipt of payments. (Bahrman, 1999. 277) Schnur was struck off as a lawyer but later went on to work as a project manager. He died in Vienna in 2016 at the age of seventy-one. In an interesting historical footnote, Angela Merkel began her political career as Schnur's press spokesperson. (*Der*

For someone such as myself for whom Rostock meant only the Hanseatic League and the witty portrayals of pre-war life of the novelist Walter Kempowski,²⁵ viewing the harbour town by daylight is something of an eye-opener. The city was hit hard by World War II bombing raids and little of the red brick architecture so characteristic of other Hansa cities remains. There has been a brave attempt to recreate the style of medieval granaries and warehouses in a new housing development in the old town and a pedestrian zone in the commercial centre shows restored patrician houses to advantage. But away from these showpieces it is a sorry sight. Beautiful gable-roofed structures under historic places protection are alarmingly decrepit and threaten to topple into the street. The anatomy department of the medical school conducts its dissection classes in a building in imminent danger of collapse. The stout churches which once dominated the skyline are crumbling. Unlike West Germany, the East German churches receive no tax revenue from their members to help maintain their properties. (Their membership is only likely to decrease in the future as the church is no longer required as a political forum.) At the feet of the cathedrals stand empty, half-vandalised houses despite an officially recognised housing problem.

Responsibility for this state of affairs rests with the policies of central government. Private ownership of housing didn't square with Marxist dogma, so freehold over land was rarely granted. In those instances where

Spiegel, 20th January 2016) For a more detailed consideration of Schnur's legal and political career, see Kobylinski, 2015.

²⁵ No doubt I was thinking here mainly of Kempowski's *Tadellöser & Wolff* (1971).

houses are owned privately they are invariably in impeccable condition.²⁶ Until now this type of care has demanded considerable initiative - there have been no private tradesmen and building supplies have been difficult to obtain. For those who borrowed money from the state bank at low interest rates to build, the future looks uncertain. Economic union with the Federal Republic means that interest rates will be determined by market forces and so are likely to increase dramatically.²⁷

²⁶ As Michelsen and Weiß note (2010, 395), the housing market in the East was indeed marked by “shortages in supply and poor quality in dwellings”. A policy had been launched in 1972 with the aim of constructing three million flats but in 1989 there were still 780 000 new housing applications. According to official statistics, around 5% of the housing stock – 400 000 units – was unoccupied. The reasons for this appear to have been economic, ideological and historical: the economics of maintaining old housing for private rental purposes did not stack up because such accommodation was subject to a rent freeze still in effect from the Nazi era and “restrictions caused by the planned economy which prevented owners from procuring building materials legally, made restoration of buildings almost impossible.” (Grashoff, 2019. 549) Furthermore, the State preferred to build what it saw as utopian ‘Socialist cities’ rather than invest in old stock. Finally, tenants regarded new flats as more affordable and better appointed. Housing shortages and their centralised allocation according to need meant that social behaviour was geared towards the acquisition of desirable housing. According to East German sociologist, Alice Kahl, “people avoided work, married, got divorced and had children—all with the goal of getting an apartment.” (*Erlebnis Plattenbau: Eine Langzeitstudie*. Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2013. 70. Quoted in Sammartino, 82)

²⁷ Interest rates did indeed increase but in response to a tighter monetary policy instituted to stabilise the D-Mark in the wake of currency union: “To preserve the D-Mark’s stability, the Bundesbank raised interest rates to levels not seen since the Great Depression, creating a more harsh business environment for East German

For students, accommodation is a particularly complex problem. Under the old regime all students were required to live in student hostels at 3 - 6 per room. For some time many students have elected to find a flat in town even though this meant endangering their place at university if discovered. (Frequently, these flats are very generously proportioned and would be way beyond the means of any student in the West.)²⁸ The methods used to discover a flat are an indication of the ingenuity and native wit which East Germans seem to have plenty of. Neighbourhoods are scoured for empty apartments, the other occupants of the building are then consulted and, if they are in agreement, a name-plate and new lock are fitted to the door. If, after a period of two weeks, no eviction notice has been received it is considered safe to a move in. The threat: of eviction is ever present though if the appropriate authority is informed. In such squats electricity is almost always connected and available free of charge; it is estimated that 1/4 of Rostock's residents pay no electricity bill.²⁹

companies by tightening credit conditions at home and exacerbating the economic contraction of Germany's main trading partners." (Zatlin, 2015. 130 – 31. FN23)

²⁸ Despite the imaginative use of dilapidated and unoccupied housing by some students, the dominant form of accommodation was still the hostel with 75% of students living in one in 1983. (Gibas, 1999. 18) The chronic shortage of accommodation meant there were no plans to build hostels with more generous space and the result was overcrowding: two-bed rooms became three-bed, three-bed became four and social facilities (Klubräume) were re-purposed as dorms. (ibid, 19-20)

²⁹ Although the unauthorised occupation of flats was technically illegal, the State was not in a position to enforce the law given the country's acute shortage of housing. In any case, systematic inspections of housing stock very rarely occurred. The construction of large high-rise housing estates on the periphery of cities and increased emigration to the West also meant that older, inner city flats were abandoned, thus

Landlords have simply accepted the situation. To collect rent would mean having to sign a lease which would then oblige them to invest in upkeep - hardly profitable when the maximum rent chargeable under law for a modest 2-room flat is 20 East marks a month = (approximately NZ\$3 at the West German exchange rate of 1DM: 70M).³⁰ Just how long this will last is anyone's guess. There is now a rush to have one's squat officially guaranteed but such a guarantee is only valid until reunification when controls on housing are likely to be radically altered. This is causing much unease. Already landlords are serving notices to quit. People who had their property confiscated in the collectivisation drives of the 50's and 60's and then emigrated to the West are now returning with an eye to a profit from "their" estates.³¹

creating the conditions for Schwarzwohnen (squatting). Squatters were seldom identified since they took great care to maintain the appearance of legality: registering their addresses with the police, signing the house register of the building in which they resided and cultivating good relationships with their neighbours. (Grashoff, 2019. 549-550) Finally, in contrast to the West, squatting was by no means a politically deviant activity in the East and was tolerated by the authorities: "Schwarzwohnen was neither organised by groups nor defended in public, in sharp contrast to Western squatters who claimed the 'right to inhabit' as a universal right and mobilised public support in its name." (ibid, 551)

³⁰ The low return was due to a rent freeze imposed by the National Socialists in 1936 and continued by the SED regime. See FN17.

³¹ "[...] restitution of private property was granted to all those whose holdings had been expropriated after the foundation of the DDR (but not to those whose property was taken over during the Soviet occupation period between 1945 and 1949)." (Maier, 1997. 243) Karl Martin Born estimated that there had been 1 039 939 claims made for the restitution of a total of 2 474 136 pieces of property by 30th September 1996. (Born, 1997. 374) There were significant regional

The vast majority of East Germans seemed disgruntled with the poor supply of consumer goods to shops. Certainly chronic shortages exist as they do in every planned economy. One can wait 10 or more years for a phone, for example. Friends of mine, hearing of shop selling extension cords which had not been available for months, immediately hurried off to purchase the scarce item. One's skills in culinary improvisation become sharpened too as the desired foodstuffs are not always available. The thirsty visitor may also find himself languishing in a pub with no beer.³²

On the other hand, access to cultural events is guaranteed to all. East Germans take an intense interest in

variations in the nature of these claims. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern they generally involved businesses and land (64%) because of the break-up of collectivised agriculture, while in Berlin they concerned money because of the complex nature of the property involved and the need to resolve claims by paying compensation. (ibid, 375)

³² The inability of East German industry to provide sufficient quantities of high quality consumer goods was one of the fatal weaknesses of the GDR economy. In order to cater to consumer demand and retain its legitimacy the government had borrowed heavily from West Germany, even while productivity in the East, and thus its ability to repay these debts, continued to decline. (See Jonathan R. Zatlín, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East German*. Cambridge, 2007). The hope of being able to purchase more and better consumer goods was undoubtedly a driving force in the popular demand for closer alignment or even unification with West Germany. Western policy makers and analysts tended to focus on these very public dissatisfactions rather than on the problem of productivity. Charles S. Maier believes these preoccupations were "misplaced"; it was not that supply had collapsed but rather that hopes had been raised out of proportion to purchasing power or market capacity: "East Germans faced no catastrophic shortages in early 1990. [...] The decline was not catastrophic, but it set in at the very moment East German consumers raised their expectations." (Maier, 1997. 231)

literature and I was astonished to observe them buying up the plentiful, quality books by the basket load. Theatre tickets are also acceptably priced so that seats are not solely occupied by the elite as is the case in the West. The standard of performance is high too - it is generally acknowledged that East German dramatic training is superior to that of West Germany. Sadly, though, there has been a considerable outflow of dramatic talent in the past few months. A browse through a theatre journal reveals page after page of vacancies in drama companies, orchestras and choirs.³³

Judging from opinions I heard, some people were prepared to sacrifice convictions for political expediency. A doctor at the university teaching hospital was going to vote for the Christian Democrats, he said, because they would introduce the deutschmark as quickly as possible. A woman overheard in a bus expressed the hope that the conservatives would win because she wanted to travel

³³ East Germany had always prided itself on a thriving cultural scene with access for all. A widespread popular interest in culture can be seen, for example, in the statistics for museum visits. There were 30.7 million individual visits to East German museums in 1980, a figure which increased to 36.8 million in 1989. The two years from 1989 saw dramatic changes, however: by 1991 museum attendance had declined 49% to 18.7 million visits. (Kirchberg, 1999. 220-1) Similar declines were registered for performances at theatres and of operas, operettas and ballets. (ibid, 221-222) These figures demonstrate, Volker Kirchberg argues, that even a large mass of well-educated arts consumers whose habits appear to be well-formed can change their patterns of cultural consumption in response to shifts in the socio-economic field: "It may not always be enough to use the conventional explanations of social and demographic stratification to explain arts consumption. Rather, in this case, a complete change of social macro-conditions had its distinct impact on individual micro-decisions (and on the expression of latent older or growing newer value orientations) with respect to arts consumption." (ibid, 250-251)

abroad in the summer and needed the hard currency they would bring.

Such cynicism was not in evidence amongst the young people I spoke to. They still retained a very genuine belief in socialist principles and, almost without exception, intended to vote for one of the left-wing parties. Yet I detected ascertain inconsistency in their attitude towards economic union. They were loath to see the country sold out to West German business but realised they could only take advantage of their newly found freedom to travel if the necessary hard currency were available. A certain grudging recognition of the inevitability of a capitalist economy in the GDR was starting to make itself felt.

This ambivalence towards economic union was widespread. While the free market is accepted as the only way out of the present crisis there is a fear of its consequences - particularly of unemployment as firms are forced to become competitive. A young engineer at Rostock's shipyards told me of a visit from executives from the West German firm of Blohm & Voss who wanted to assess the viability of the East German operation. Their verdict was that the majority of the 6 000 strong workforce would have to be laid off.³⁴ As the alcoholism rate among

³⁴ The misgivings of my informant concerning potential redundancies at the shipyards were not without cause. Restructuring and privatisation of the State-run shipbuilding and dockyard industries led to very significant reductions in the workforce. Around half the businesses in the machinery and engineering sector were able to be privatised but the rest were simply liquidated. Of the 55 000 workers employed in East German shipyards and associated industries in 1990, only 10 575 remained after privatisation. Although some of those made redundant would have been absorbed into new companies supplying the industry or taken up opportunities with West German shipbuilding companies, the effect on unemployment in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was enormous and was likely to have been running at twice the official

dockworkers already stands at some 20% such a move would have a disastrous effect. Pensioners, whose meagre 350 Mark monthly cheque hardly enables them to experience the liberation of travel, wait tensely to see whether their pensions will be equated with their Western counterparts.³⁵ Young working mothers who have been

rate of 14.5%. The policies of the European Union may not have helped the employment picture. Since the EU wished to avoid an overproduction of supply, any increase in the productivity of shipyards had to be balanced with a reduction in the workforce. (See Raab, 2002. 141 ff.) The Neptun shipyards in Rostock were eventually purchased by the largest West German shipbuilding conglomerate, Bremer-Vulkan. In 1997 the company was taken over by the Meyer group. According to its website, the yards currently employ around 700 staff. (https://www.neptunwerft.de/de/unternehmen/wir_sind_die_meyer_werft/index.jsp Accessed 15th October 2020)

³⁵ The outlook for pensioners may have been more mixed than I allowed for. Total economic output had indeed crashed in the GDR in the aftermath of unification and aggregate unemployment (both registered and hidden) was in excess of 30% - higher than during the Weimar Republic and Great Depression. At the same time, by spring 1991 60% of households in the new federal states had a higher disposable income than they had in 1990 with the gains especially noticeable for those on benefits, "in particular for old-age pensioners." (Schmidt, 1992. 6) The Treaty on the Currency Union, Economic Union and Social Union from July 1990 index linked old-age pensions to net wage increases in East Germany. (On implementation of the relevant clauses in this treaty see: Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung. *Das neue Rentenrecht. Die Rente '92*. Bonn: Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1992. 13-14, 50. Quoted in Schmidt, 1992. 15 FN22) The problem was, of course, that wages in East Germany lagged behind those in the West. Furthermore, because the levels of social insurance pensions are dependent on contributions paid in over a working life, high rates of long-term unemployment could have a very serious effect on pension entitlements. A study in 2010 predicted that the youngest East German cohort (those born in the years 1967 – 71) would, on current employment trends, fall below the minimum provision (Grundsicherung) on retirement. This scenario could be eliminated

able to place their children in state subsidised day-care centres are also worried. Such programmes, it was felt, were liable to be threatened by a budget-cutting conservative government.³⁶

with a more optimistic model of labour market trends but East German pensions were still set to develop negatively compared with the West. (Geyer, 2010. 11 – 12) The consequences of the Financial Crisis of 2008 and the recession caused by the Covid pandemic of 2020 make it unlikely that the more optimistic forecasts will be met.

³⁶ The comprehensive childcare provided by the East German state for working women derived from socialist principles which aimed at securing women's economic independence. It is estimated that by 1989, "the State was paying, either directly or indirectly, for eighty per cent of the costs of children, whether through direct subsidies, public childcare, holiday facilities, or particular provisions made for single mothers." (Leitner, 2008. 176) After reunification family structures tended to converge with women in both regions shifting towards a dual-earner/female part-time carer model compared with the previous dual earner/State carer model that had prevailed in the East. (Rosenfeld, 2004. 110) But it is evident that gender roles and attitudes to family were not entirely determined by the West in the post-1990 period. The generous provision of childcare in the East that had allowed high participation rates of women in the workforce began to be seen as attractive to working women in the West. A 2012 survey of women on the desirability of non-maternal childcare in the West showed the same results as a study in the East from 1994: "Bei der Frage, durch wen kleine Kinder betreut werden sollen, so kann man dies deuten, ist der Osten so etwas wie ein Rollenvorbild für den Westen geworden". (Berth, 2019. 452) Since 1st August 2013 parents have had a legal right to a childcare place for any child from its first birthday. It was thought that these measures would require 750 000 places to be available, a figure that would cover 35% of all one to three year olds. By March 2014 32.3% of this cohort were provided for in childcare facilities but this was outstripped by the demand from parents which was estimated at 45.2%. (Diener, 2018. 124) The most recent studies relating to working women and childcare were conducted in the period after the twentieth anniversary of unification but they indicated that there were still significant differences between

In West Germany, where environmental consciousness is quite marked, green issues were central to interest in the election. There's no doubt that the East German ecosystem is on the verge of ruin; the rivers have been poisoned with heavy metals and other industrial wastes and the air is thick with sulphides from the burning of lignite. This same lignite is won in huge open-cast mines which blight the landscape and force the resettlement of whole villages. In the northern province of Mecklenburg this ecological collapse is not as noticeable as in the densely populated and heavily industrialised south of the country. Travelling across the tranquil, flat countryside of Mecklenburg with its birch and beech forests, its fertile farms and settlements of thatched cottages one perceives little sign of a catastrophe.³⁷

East and West. After the birth of a child, East German women returned to work earlier and for longer hours than their peers in the West. The demand for childcare as well as its uptake were also higher in the East. (ibid, 128)

³⁷ This impression of an ecological cataclysm was largely a creation of the West German media which were reporting from the perspective of a country that itself had just experienced a decade of intense environmental debate (nuclear power, acid rain). A particularly powerful example of this kind of journalism came from Axel Wermelskirchen in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* whose description of Schkopau in Sachsen-Anhalt – site of a huge lignite-burning power plant – seemed indebted to the Expressionist poetry of a Georg Heym: “Kalkstaub liegt auf Krüppelbäumen, Gestank macht das Atmen schwer. Die blinden Fensterscheiben des Fabrikmonsters sind geborsten, Mauerwerk bröckelt, Rauch dringt hervor. In offenen Kloaken gleiten schwarze Abwässer in die Saale.” (25th November 1989. 3. Quoted in Huff, 2014. 524) While the picture of environmental ruin was not entirely inaccurate it was often the secondary effect of a judgement of East German economic performance and tended, as Tobias Huff writes, to obscure the more complex and nuanced history of environmental politics in the GDR. While there could be no doubt that levels of air pollution were indeed staggeringly high in the East in

1989, West Germans tended to downplay those areas where East Germany had actually done better than the West and simply to attribute them to the country's poor standard of living: "Falls doch die Rede von der geringeren Müllproduktion pro Kopf, der weniger versiegelten Fläche, oder dem hohen Anteil des öffentlichen Personennahverkehrs war, wurde dies auf die mangelnde Leistungsfähigkeit der Planwirtschaft zurückgeführt und nicht auf bewusste Entscheidungen." (Huff, 2018. 524) In fact, as both Huff and Möller (2014) show, the East German state had incorporated environmental issues into policy planning at the very highest levels from the late 1960s and was, in many ways, far in advance of the West: environmental protection was made explicit in Article 15 of the revised constitution in 1968; one of the very first European framing laws on the environment was passed by the Volkskammer in 1970; and a stand-alone Ministry for the Environment was established in 1971 – fourteen years before the Federal Republic took the same step. (Möller, 2014. 368) An irrevocable decline in environmental standards, however, began in the mid-1970s with Erich Honecker's economic policy which privileged consumption over production in the hope that, by satisfying citizens' material needs, they would prove loyal to the regime. As social welfare payments and private consumption were effectively financed through loans from the West the financial resources needed for investment in modern and environmentally sensitive methods of production were gradually choked off. The effects were particularly noticeable in the rapidly spiralling problem of air pollution: although East Germany could purchase Soviet oil at a subsidised rate, its price rose relentlessly through the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than use it for domestic energy requirements, the East German state ear-marked ever greater proportions of oil for sale to the West and shifted to the burning of much dirtier lignite coal for electricity production in generation plants it could no longer afford to equip with technology for pollution control. (Huff, 2018. 542 – 545) While sulphur dioxide levels in the 1980s were being rapidly reduced in West Germany, they were continuing to rise in East Germany. Whereas the West reduced its output of sulphur dioxide from 7.5 million to 5.3 million tonnes in the 1980s, the East, with its much smaller population, was producing 5.5 million tonnes in 1987 and internal documents showed that the level was set to increase further in subsequent years. (ibid. 553))

The broad Baltic beaches at Warnemünde or Darss with their sparkling white sands and clear azure waters, though, warn of being deceived by appearances. The fact is that the Baltic Sea is essentially dead. A relatively shallow body of water which requires a long time to exchange its entire volume for "fresh" water from the Atlantic and North Sea, it has long been unable to cope with the quantity of effluent discharged into it. The state of the Baltic whose seductive surface conceals an unholy chemical brew is representative of much of the GDR's environment.³⁸

This same picturesque Baltic coast was, until recently, regularly patrolled from 10 pm onwards to ensure that no one fled the Republic. On a headland near the port of Warnemünde a powerful searchlight could light up the beaches for miles about. A special permit was required for

³⁸ The problems of eutrophication – in which an excess of nutrients leads to phytoplankton blooms and oxygen depletion in aquatic environments – had been visible in the Baltic from the 1950s already and began to be attributed to anthropogenic causes in the 1970s. (Voss, 2011. 307) The Baltic is particularly sensitive to the influence of man-made chemicals from industry and the run-off from intensive agriculture because it serves as the catchment for around 200 rivers in a heavily populated area of the world. The inflow of oxygen-rich water from the North Sea/ Atlantic occurs relatively slowly so that the Baltic is characterised by marked gradations in salinity and temperature. Tidal forces are negligible in the Baltic and the narrow outlets mean that "pollutants may reside within the sea for a long time." (Larsen, 2008. 2003) It is difficult to determine precisely what the GDR's contribution to the poor health of the Baltic in 1990 was. Agricultural and industrial practices would certainly have been more environmentally damaging than in the West, though only around one quarter of the total land area of the GDR drained to the Baltic compared with virtually all of Poland. Although all the countries surrounding the Baltic are now working to improve the health of the sea, a recent study has stated that it is not likely to have a "good status" with regard to eutrophication before the year 2200. (Murray, 2019)

recreational sailors who were kept under surveillance at all times while on the water. Anyone so much as venturing near the ocean with an "illegal" wind-surfer risked immediate arrest. Perhaps most depressingly, bathers at Warnemünde would watch the twice daily ferry sailing to Denmark knowing that this was a privilege always to be denied them.

The claustrophobia induced by these measures encouraged the thousands of East Germans to escape to the West last year through Hungary, Poland or via the West German embassy in Prague. In the case of those in the Prague embassy granted safe passage to the West, a particularly grotesque situation developed. Their sealed train travelled back through the GDR where fellow citizens attempting to board along the way were beaten back by truncheon swinging police.³⁹ In every instance, property left behind was confiscated by the state.⁴⁰ Naturally, it can't

³⁹ The rail route was opened on 30th September 1989. The Federal Republic's embassy in Prague had become the focus for attempts by East German citizens to enter the West, partly because the SED had made the decision to restrict travel to Hungary which had begun dismantling its border to Austria on 2nd May. (Bromley, 61 - 62) Just as importantly, the West German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had personally appeared at the embassy in Prague where he had given an undertaking to grant entry visas to the four thousand East Germans who had sought refuge there. Their fellow citizens who flocked to stations along the route of the sealed trains through the GDR were brutally treated by the security services. At Leipzig twenty thousand people stormed the station. Determined to oppose what it called a "Zusammenrottung feindlich-negativer Kräfte" the East German state dispersed the crowd by employing seven companies of police, numerous Stasi officials and four army battalions. (Gunkel, 2009)

⁴⁰ From 1952 the legal provisions relating to unauthorised travel abroad – Republikflucht – meant that any property left behind in the GDR could be claimed and administered by the State. According to Hubertus

be claimed that all these people were fleeing political persecution. Many - perhaps most - were seeking better career opportunities and a more comfortable lifestyle. Sometimes the motivation was sheer greed; hundreds of children were abandoned by their parents and are now accommodated in orphanages. Nevertheless, the nett effect of this outflow was to cause the overthrow of a government whose totalitarian credentials cannot be denied.

The fear generated by this omniscient state will take some time to overcome. East Germans I spoke to confessed to still being very circumspect in what they said and with whom. In the past, a dissenting view expressed to a mere acquaintance may have endangered a job or place at university. Mistrust was an unavoidable part of daily life. According to the latest statistics 1 in 6 East Germans worked for the Stasi.⁴¹ The ghost of the security police still haunts the land. Their headquarters in Rostock stood silent and under lock and key, its files under examination by a special citizens' committee.⁴²

Knabe (2007) around two million people lost most of their property by fleeing to the West. (Quoted in: Borbes, 2010. 54) Claims for restitution in the aftermath of reunification would prove a political sore point.

⁴¹ My reference here is obviously to the large number of so-called unofficial collaborators (inoffizielle Mitarbeiter – IM – as they were known from 1968 onwards) rather than to those who were full-time employees of the Ministry for State Security / Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS). If one-sixth of the population of approximately sixteen million had indeed been working for the MfS then this would have meant a network of some 2.7 million informants. In fact, the figures were much more modest. In 1988-89 there 173 000 people working as IMs, 85 – 90% of whom were men. (Gieseke, 2014. 81) As Jens Gieseke writes: “Compared to the 2.3 million SED members, the flock of informers was relatively small.” (ibid, 83)

⁴² Although local initiatives and citizens' committees had helped secure the records of the MfS in late 1989 and early 1990, there was

By 8:30 the next evening it was all over. The two major West German TV networks had received provisional figures which revealed an astonishing winning margin for the 3-party conservative alliance.⁴³ The election had been conducted in a fair and professional manner according to foreign observers. No untoward incidents had been reported and, outwardly, there was no sign that the bright, spring day had been an epoch making one. The result was accepted with dignity by the losers and qualified joy by the victors. Overall, a painless introduction to democracy.

disagreement concerning what ought to be done with these documents. Some agreed with the agencies charged by the last GDR government with liquidating the security services that the records should be destroyed, while others argued that they should be preserved, catalogued and opened up to the people. Though the Modrow government had drafted a bill which would have seen the files destroyed, after the election for the Volkskammer in March a rival piece of legislation was drawn up by the Select Committee headed by the Rostock representative Joachim Gauck. This bill called for the full “political, historical and legal reckoning [Aufarbeitung] with the activities of the former Ministry for State Security” (Gieseke, 2014. 204). This bill was passed with wide cross-party support on 24th August 1990. It was subsequently – and reluctantly – included by the negotiators of the Federal Republic and the GDR in the Unification Treaty. Gauck would become the first Federal Commissioner for Stasi Records / Bundesbeauftragter für die Stasi-Unterlagen in 1991.

⁴³ The Allianz für Deutschland (CDU, DSU, DA) gained 48% of the votes cast which translated into 188 of the 400 seats in the chamber. There were dramatic regional variations, however. In Berlin the parties of the Left (SPD, Grüne + Frauen, Bündnis 90, PDS) accounted for 74% of the vote, while the Allianz managed only 21.5%. (Roth, 1990. 372) A coalition government of CDU, SPD and Bund Freier Demokraten was eventually formed under Lothar de Maizière.

Immediately the election was over the mood of optimism seemed to dissipate. Those who had demonstrated on the streets last October in the hopes of creating a state where grassroots democracy and socialist principles held sway saw the country sliding into a capitalist Restoration. Stefan Heym, a prominent writer, lamented the fact that the GDR would soon become no more than a footnote in history.⁴⁴ Squabbles over the formation of a governing coalition began to cause ill-feeling between the coalition partners CDU and CSU in the West. The CSU had taken a 'battering in the state elections in their stronghold of Bavaria held on the same day and now want to encourage the autonomy of their sister party in the East, the DSU, in order to expand a dwindling power base. This runs counter to CDU proposals to unite the eastern coalition partners under the aegis of the CDU. To make matters worse, Kohl immediately began to backtrack on potential dates for the start of economic assistance and for general elections for both Germanies. Most disturbing of all are allegations that leading politicians have cooperated with the notorious Stasi. At the time of writing the CDU leader, de Maizière,⁴⁵ is under

⁴⁴ Heym made this remark in a television commentary on election night, 18th March 1990.

⁴⁵ In response to accusations that he had worked as an IM, De Maizière stood down from his various positions in the CDU on 17th December 1990 but resumed his office as head of the Brandenburg party in March 1991 again after an attestation from the Interior Ministry that he had not been involved "dishonourably" ("in unehrenhafter Weise") with the MfS. At the beginning of September 1991 he resigned from all political positions as evidence began to mount that he had indeed been the IM known as "Czerny". (Neubert, 2010. 90) According to the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (23rd March 1991) de Maizière's handler had had most of his records put through the shredder in December 1989 in an effort to protect an informant who was then beginning to operate at the very highest political levels (de Maizière had just been elected

suspicion and Ibrahim Böhme⁴⁶ has temporarily stepped down pending an investigation into his past. The mayor of Rostock has been forced to resign after planning to hire 40 former Stasi officers as teachers for the city's schools.

All these factors point to the reunification process as being very stormy indeed. The conservative victory on March 18th may have been stunning in magnitude but it cannot compare with the enormity of the problems to be faced.

chair of the CDU-Blockpartei). It was thought that the West German CDU had already known of his association with the MfS prior to the Volkskammer vote in March 1990. (Müller, Uwe: „Die Familie de Maiziere, eine deutsche Dynastie. Die de Maizieres dienten Hitler, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik. Sie alle prägten deutsche Politik. Ohne Makel ging dies nicht“, *Welt am Sonntag*, 6.3.2011. Quoted in Neubert, 2010. 116)

⁴⁶ Along with Wolfgang Schnur, Böhme belonged to that elite group of Stasi IMs who were considered to have external contacts or “Feindberührung”. (Gieseke, 2014. 81) When accusations of his involvement with the MfS surfaced Böhme stepped down from his political offices and his fall from grace was permanent. He was later forced to resign from a position with the police department of the East Berlin city council when evidence of his collaboration with the MfS hardened, and he was formally expelled from the SPD in 1992. Böhme eventually took to drinking and became seriously depressed. He died on 22nd November 1999 after a long illness. (*The Independent*, 6th January 2000)

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East German police on the Berlin Wall, 18/19
November 1989.
(All photos by the author
and all figures from his collection)



East Germans queue to collect their
Willkommensgeld in Berlin 18/19 November, 1989



Trabant and Mercedes on a Berlin street.
18/19 November 1989

Neue Übergänge + + + Hunderttausend Begegnungen + + + Ein Erfolg der Menschen

Berliner Stimme

extra

Sozialdemokratische Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur

Sonderausgabe

17./18. November 1989

A 1718 D

„Hier haben Menschen Geschichte gemacht“

Berlin steht wieder ein turbulentes Wochenende bevor. An den letzten 22 Grenzübergängen werden am Samstag und Sonntag erneut rund 100 000 Besucher aus Ost-Berlin und der DDR erwartet. Die Berliner Senat will sich dabei bemühen, die Situation sowohl für die Besucher wie für die West-Berliner so erträglich wie möglich zu gestalten. Bereits am vergangenen Wochenende hatten Verkehrskontrollen und Verkäufer, IVZ-Beschäftigte, Polizei, Bahn- und Postbedienstete und die Angestellten in den zwölf Supermärkten schwere Übermenschliches geleistet.

Berlins Regierender Bürgermeister Walter Momper (SPD) hat die Öffnung

Der Regierende Bürgermeister betont, daß es auch eine Vielzahl von Fragen gebe, die von Bonn mit der „anderen Seite“ geregelt werden müßten. Hinsichtlich der notwendigen Devision für die Westströme müßten Planungen einer Berücksichtigung der wirtschaftlichen Lage in der DDR getrieben werden.

Momper sprach sich für baldige Reisenmöglichkeiten für die West-Berliner aus. Weiterhin größtes Problem ist der Zuzugsaustausch, aber auch Entscheidungen bei der Grenzöffnung stehen nun umgekehrt auf der Tagesordnung.

Deutsch auf Distanz ging Momper zu Vorschlägen seiner Parteifreunde Bahr und Gaus, eine Vier-Mächte-

Konferenz einzuberufen. Er halte dies für „absolut überfällig“, weil der Status der Stadt von den Entwicklungen in der DDR nicht berührt werde. Die anstehenden Fragen könnten auf deutsch-deutscher Ebene gelöst werden. Momper erwartete sein Interesse an einem baldigen Treffen mit dem neuen DDR-Regierungschef Hans Modrow.

Die SPD-Fraktion will die Folgen der Entwicklung für die Stadt in einer Klausurtagung am Wochenende erörtern. Dabei sollen bereits in verschiedenen Arbeitsgruppen praktische Vorschläge zur Verbesserung des Verkehrs sowie zur Wohnungspolitik und auch zu Umweltsorgen erarbeitet werden.



Die Mauer ist durchlässig, die Menschen finden wieder zueinander. Auch wenn es bei der Zustlichkeit bleibt: Die neue Öffnung garantiert auch ein Stück mehr Frieden. Foto: Glaser

Free newspaper, Berlin, November 1989



Trades union building, Rostock, March 1990. The word "Gewerkschaften" has been removed.



Rostock street scene, March 1990.



Modern housing development in Hanseatic style,
Rostock, 1990.



Restored frontages, Rostock, March 1990



Poster protesting against a visit by Federal Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. Rostock, March 1990. "Es genügt nicht nur keine Gedanken zu haben ... man muß auch unfähig [sein], sie auszudrücken."



Delapidated house, Rostock. March 1990.

Aktionsbündnis März 1990



wahl aktuell



Vereinigte Linke, Die Nelken



UNS GEHT ES UM
★
DEN MENSCHEN!

Worauf es bei den Wahlen ankommt

In wenigen Tagen ist es soweit. In der DDR finden die ersten freien, gleichen und geheimen Wahlen statt. Es besteht die Gefahr, daß es die ersten und die letzten sind. Schon allein deshalb, weil es die DDR nach dem Willen der Mehrheit, zumindest der Mehrheit der Parteien, lieber heute als morgen nicht mehr geben soll.

In Umfragen, sicher zum Teil auch zur „Stimmungsmaße“ erstellt, signalisieren eine Gefahr doch recht deutlich: Eine Mehrheit von zwei Dritteln der Sitze im Parlament für die von Kohl geschaarte Allianz und die politisch äußerst heterogene SPD ist eine reale Gefahr für den demokratischen Prozeß in der DDR geworden. Was wäre schon für die DDR von einer Koalitionsregierung zu erwarten, die ihr vorrangliches Ziel darin sieht, den Staat, den sie zu führen den Auftrag hat, möglichst schnell verschwinden zu lassen? Und wie sähe eine neue Verfassung aus, die gleichzeitig von der Mitte bis rechtskonservativ allein geschrieben und

auch allein im neuen Parlament durchgebracht werden könnte? Dabei ist hier lediglich die Frage offen, ob es eine neue Verfassung für die DDR überhaupt noch geben würde. Herr Döbeling jedenfalls findet das alles recht unumität und befürwortet das schon eher den raschen Anschluß am besten gleich über Paragraph 23 des Grundgesetzes der BRD, damit man sich sicher sein kann, daß nichts Progressives aus vierzig Jahren DDR-Geschichte im neuen Staat übrig bleibt. Herr Döbeling ist selbst der muttere Wandschrit, mit welchem sich die CDU im unternehmerbörigen, rechtskonservativen Spektrum begibt, noch zu zaghaft. Wie man Herrn Döbeling und seine Getreuen von der DSU politisch einordnen könnte, verbietet der Wohlblick nur ausfällischer zu benennen (es gibt im konservativen Lager zu viele tüchtige Anwälte).

Dennoch: Die beschriebene Gefahr ist ebenso real, wie die Chance, sie zu bannen.

Die Menschen in diesem Land, die der Auffassung sind, daß sie vierzig Jahre nicht nur Unstimm gemacht

haben, daß sie über bittere Erfahrungen etwas erlangen haben, was wert ist, gleichmäßig in einen Prozeß der deutschen Annäherung eingebracht zu werden — die Menschen, die sich hartnäckig nicht anreden lassen, daß Demokratie nicht ist, als einmal in vier Jahren zur Wahl zu gehen, die Menschen, die da immer noch meinen, daß eine Gesellschaft nur in wirklicher Freiheit entwickelt werden kann, wenn soziale Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität herrschen — diese Menschen sollten nicht resignieren. Auch sie haben eine Stimme. Nicht nur im Wahllokal. Es ist Zeit, hohe Zeit, Resignation, Verbitterung und die schon längst wieder aufgekommene Furcht abzuschütteln.

Wir sind viele.

Uns kann man nicht erschaffen, wie vielleicht einem Staat.

Nur noch wenige Tage. Zeigen wir, daß es uns gibt. Haben wir Vertrauen in unsere eigene Kraft. So werden auch andere um Vertrauen.

Michael Mide,
Vereinigte Linke.

Publication from a left-wing citizens' collective.
Rostock, March 1990.

Bitte 50 Adressen und einbinden an:
TÜBINGER INITIATIVE DEMOKRATISCHER SOZIALISMUS
 c/o Anton Brenner - Novemngasse 14 - 74 Tübingen
 846

Wirte verschont mich vor
 so wie sie ist.
 die real existierende Parteiensozialisterei genagt mir
 Terminus des INITIATIVE
 eingesehen (sozialistisch)
 Einem neuen Partei habe ich abget
 statt bei, von
 Parteien à la Gysi,
 -one, die haben ich
 die Kurse voll.

GYSI ??

Verschont uns !

GOODBYE HONNI - WELCOME GYSI ?

Für den bewußten taz-Leser übt dieser neue Name an der Spitze der SED-PDS eine echt unheimlich große Faszination aus. "Demokratischer Sozialismus" (heißt das, daß Sozialismus a priori undemokratisch ist ?) und die Suche nach dem dritten Weg bewegen die Szene! Und die "Fachschaftsräte Vollversammlung der Ernst-Bloch Universität" (???) gibt Gysi ein Forum, sich auszubreiten. Für jeden freiheitlichen Demokraten muß der Auftritt dieses Herrn ein Schlag ins Gesicht sein:

ES IST EIN SKANDAL, DASS DIESER UNDEMOKRAT UNSERE UNI ZUR PROPAGANDA FÜR SEINE SED-PDS NUTZEN KANN.

➔

Flyer protesting against a visit by the PDS (now: Die Linke) politician, Gregor Gysi, to Tübingen University. July 1990.