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Continuity and Change
Political and Social Developments
in Germany
after 1945 and 1989/90

by

Gerhard A. Ritter

Gerhard A. Ritter is Professor Emeritus of Modern History at the Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich. He is a full member of the *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Munich and an Honorary Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. His publications include *Der Sozialstaat. Entstehung und Entwicklung im internationalen Vergleich* (2nd edn 1991) and *Über Deutschland. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte* (1998, paperback edn 2000).

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Bonn ist nicht Weimar (Bonn is not Weimar). This title of a famous book published in 1956 by Fritz René Allemann,¹ a Swiss journalist, has become the most common slogan used to contrast the stable and viable second German democracy with the politically fragile, economically weak, and socially disrupted Weimar Republic which led to Hitler. The slogan is also directed against the widespread thesis that the Federal Republic was nothing but a restoration of older authoritarian and pre-Fascist elements in Germany's political, economic and social system.

In this lecture I shall try to show why the charge of restoration is false and how the Federal Republic has developed into the most successful German state so far. The lecture is based on a book of mine called *Über Deutschland*.² In the book I attempt to determine the historical roots of the Federal Republic, or, to be more precise, the place of today's Federal Republic and its predecessors, the Federal Republic until 1990 and the GDR, in German history. In both the book and this lecture I deal with the question of continuity and change, of how the Federal Republic fits into long-term trends. Neither is intended as a synoptic history of divided, and for the past nine years reunited, Germany.

But what do I mean by determining the Federal Republic's place in German history? As we know, there was a tendency after 1945 to regard National Socialism as a sort of 'industrial accident' and to remove it from German history just like a source of illness is removed by surgery. Quite rightly, this did not succeed. We know today that National Socialism and its crimes are deeply embedded in German history, that authoritarian ideas, the weakness of democratic institutions and forces, exaggerated nationalism and *völkisch* thinking, racism and anti-semitism all paved the way for it. But in the book and this lecture I want to show that like the Nazi regime, the

existing Federal Republic did not come about by chance either, is no 'industrial accident' in a positive sense (if indeed there is such a thing). Rather it is related to older, more positive traditions of German history, though these were not dominant in the period before 1933, and in the twelve subsequent years were completely suppressed. This is not to dispute the significance of Germany's membership of the European Union and the western alliance, or the specific influence of the Allied occupying powers. But on closer inspection it becomes clear that the elements adopted by western Germany were those which coincided with German traditions. Every attempt to implant foreign institutions, for example in the bureaucracy, the school system, the universities, and in the social security system, was condemned to failure because it was rejected, like a body rejects a transplanted organ.

This is particularly obvious in the case of the GDR. Early attempts to link up with the traditions of the German labour movement were soon abandoned in favour of Soviet concepts and institutions. But these were never really accepted by the population so that in 1989, when – in contrast to June 1953 – the Soviet Union refused military intervention in support of the GDR leaders, they could be swept away without much resistance, without bloodshed.

So I want to show that the Federal Republic is not simply a fair-weather democracy, nor the brainchild of the western Allies, but has roots buried deep in German history.

This lecture will be in four parts. Firstly, continuities and discontinuities in state and social institutions in West Germany after 1945; secondly, economic and social change in the Federal Republic; then new departures and older traditions in the GDR; and finally problems of transformation following reunification.

I

Continuities and Discontinuities in State and Social Institutions after 1945

One of the most obvious ruptures in continuity is, *firstly*, that with the loss of the eastern provinces and the division of Germany, the Federal Republic did not cover the same territory as Germany before the war. This made its economic and social structure far more homogeneous. The Junkers, the owners of large estates in East Elbia, were not only diminished in number by the war and the persecution of those who participated in the resistance to Hitler, but also lost the economic basis of their position as a political and social élite as a result of the land reform in the Soviet zone of occupation. This weakened the forces of conservatism.

Secondly, defeat in 1945 marked the end of German militarism which previously had such a disastrous impact on politics and society. The Bundeswehr was completely integrated into the supranational organisation of NATO. It has no general staff and no specific national defence strategy. There has never been any serious doubt about the strict political control exerted over the armed forces. Nor is there any sign of militarism in civilian life. Hardly any officer now wears a uniform to the opera or at a wedding, as was usual in the period before 1945.

Thirdly, the relationship between the confessions and the role of the churches in society changed dramatically. The division between Protestants and Catholics had been a crucial factor in German history since the Reformation and led to terrible wars and a deep rift in German society. It was also a constituent element in the German party system in which until 1933 the Catholic minority, in contrast to the time after 1945, was largely organised in a separate party, the Centre Party.

On the level of society, the rigid separation of Protestants and Catholics, especially in small towns and in the countryside, was brought to an end by the mass evacuation of women and children from the bombed-out cities and in particular by the influx of millions of refugees.³ The confessions overlapped far more as a result of mixed marriages and the fact that their specific social milieux largely disintegrated.

Fourthly, the break-up of Prussia, the hegemonic power that encompassed three-fifths of the German Empire, fundamentally changed the nature of German federalism.

Fifthly, the importance of the integration of the Federal Republic in the western alliance and the European Union, contrasting sharply with the wavering between East and West before 1933, can hardly be overestimated.

But alongside these discontinuities, there are also obvious areas of continuity. Clearly the most important is the fact that, despite strong tendencies towards nationalisation and a planned economy after 1945 in almost all political camps, the Federal Republic remained a capitalist market society with an essentially unchanged legal and taxation system.⁴

A second important field of continuity is the enduring strong influence of the state in shaping the social and economic order. Closely connected with this is the character and strength of the state bureaucracy. Allied attempts to reform the German bureaucracy, which they regarded as a closed social caste and a bastion of authoritarian tendencies, failed.⁵ And denazification only brought about a relatively limited change in the functional élite of higher civil servants. However, in contrast to the Weimar Republic, political control of civil servants by ministers recruited from the parties was never seriously challenged and civil servants loyally accepted the new parliamentary state.

There was even greater continuity among other functional élites such as those in the churches or the educational system, including universities, and especially in the economy. On the other hand vital and often enduring changes compared to the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich were brought about in the mass media, the radio and press,⁶ and above all in the political sphere in its narrower sense. Here the whole group of higher Nazi Party functionaries and their auxiliary organisations lost their political positions and the social status connected with them.⁷

The original leadership of the new parties was primarily made up of people who had already been politically active in the Weimar Republic. Under the close control of the Allies they, and a few new faces such as the Social Democrat Carlo Schmid, worked out the constitutions of the *Länder* and later the Basic Law.⁸ The Basic Law was a conscious attempt not only to make a break with Nazism but also to use the historical experience of the Weimar Republic to erect a more stable, viable and efficient system of government.⁹

Of vital importance here was the principle that the basic rights laid down in the constitution were valid law binding the legislature, the executive and the courts. This was fundamentally different from the Weimar Republic where a far more extensive enumeration of 'the Germans' basic rights and duties' was understood as a kind of programme which could, in effect, be ignored. The value-system on which the Basic Law is founded not only protects the individual from encroachment by the state. In addition, the decisions reached by the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (Federal Constitutional Court) also protect the individual from encroachment by social forces. Moreover, the state is held responsible for creating the social preconditions under which basic rights can be

enjoyed. The Constitutional Court has, for example, crucially promoted equal status for men and women in family law, and has improved the legal status of illegitimate children. The court has also prevented government control of television, and has forced political parties to lay open their finances.

There is, however, a danger here that genuine political issues, even involving questions of foreign or defence policy, can be referred to the court in cases where no consensus can be reached. The rulings of the Constitutional Court and the growing role of labour law in the restriction and resolution of social conflicts have encouraged this tendency to refer controversial questions to the courts. A lack of flexibility, an often over-cautious bureaucracy and long delays, for example in granting building permits for factories and roads, are the price we pay for a juridification of political, economic, and social life which far exceeds that in other Western democracies.

Federalism, another central principle of the constitution, is deeply rooted in German traditions. The distinguishing characteristic of *German* federalism, which dates back to the Bismarck era and is quite different from that of the United States, for instance, is the involvement of the *Länder* governments in federal legislation via the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council), and their responsibility for regional administration, even in the implementation of federal laws. Federalism takes account of the importance of the concept of *Heimat* and regional attachment for the typical German,¹⁰ and allows for a high degree of decentralisation, especially in the fields of culture, education, and regional economic development. The Federal Council gives the opposition parties, which play an important role in regional government, the opportunity to participate in formulating and applying federal laws, and has thus prevented them from becoming politically isolated

and more radical. It encourages broad consensus because the federal government has to take the special interests of the *Länder* into account. At the same time the opposition in the *Bundestag* (Federal Diet) has to bear in mind that a policy of obstruction also damages the regional governments which are led by its own party. Unlike the British parliamentary system, which is almost exclusively geared towards conflict between government and opposition, German parliamentarism has certain elements of a consensus democracy, similar in character to the Swiss political system.

There is, however, a danger of immobilism, especially if the parties of the governing coalition in the Federal Diet have no majority in the Federal Council, as was the case with the Socialist-Liberal coalition in the 1970s and the Kohl government from spring 1991 until it lost the election in September 1998, and indeed the Schröder government since the CDU victories in the 1999 *Länder* elections. The compound federalism (*Verbundsföderalismus*) of the Federal Republic, the close interdependence between the federal government and the *Länder*, also makes it more difficult to allocate duties and responsibilities clearly and the practice of fiscal equalisation (*Finanzausgleich*) does little to encourage thrift on the part of the *Länder* or competition between them.

Furthermore, the *Länder* play a crucial role in recruiting for the top jobs in the federal government. Since Ludwig Erhard resigned as Chancellor in 1966 almost all Chancellors and Chancellor candidates of the leading opposition parties, now including Schröder, have established their political reputations in a governmental position in one of the *Länder*, particularly as Minister-President or Mayor of a city that is also a *Land*, such as Berlin, Hamburg or Bremen.

Like the rule of law and federalism, the concept of the

Sozialstaat (social or welfare state), the basis of our social security system and labour relations, also has a tradition going back over a century. As we know, the foundation of the modern system of social security was already laid in the social insurance laws of the 1880s, which made Germany a pioneer among the industrial nations. The system of labour relations and collective labour law also has its roots in the Empire, and was unified and substantially extended in 1918/19.¹¹

Typical of Germany in comparison with other industrial nations is the high level of *legal* regulation of labour relations.¹² This means, on the one hand, that conflicts are differentiated and restricted, which promotes industrial harmony. On the other hand, it also reinforces the tendency towards inflexibility in the German economy and is a threat to its competitiveness on increasingly globalised markets.

The system of labour relations was destroyed by the Nazis and had to be completely rebuilt after the Second World War. By contrast, the social security system, despite massive and partially successful attempts by the Nazis to adapt it to their *völkisch*-racial ideology, has retained its basic characteristics and organisational structure. This is quite amazing given the radical political disruptions of 1918, 1933, 1945 and 1989/90. The system has, however, been increasingly extended and differentiated by the inclusion of a growing spectrum of social risks and groups of people, starting with blue collar workers and later including white collar workers, farmers and most of the self-employed. The basic ideas of social insurance instead of state welfare (*Staatsbürgerversorgung*), legal entitlement to insurance benefits, organisation of the system by self-governing public institutions, excluding all private insurance schemes, stratification according to different risks and large occupational groups in-

stead of all-risks insurance, differentiation of contributions and benefits instead of flat-rate contributions and pensions, and, above all, the financing of insurance by employer and employee and the resultant close connection with employment – all these were retained from the 1880s and are fundamental reasons for the problems of the system today. Transferring this system to the former GDR since 1990 has been enormously expensive and is one of the main reasons for the massive increase in the national debt. But it has also made the transition to a market economy more bearable and has thus done much to ensure that the transfer to a completely new political, social, economic and legal system in the East has *not* been associated with serious social disruptions or political unrest.

In parliamentarism, the party system, local government constitution and administration,¹³ too, new developments in the Federal Republic were closely linked to older traditions. There was a variable mixture of continuity and change in the party system and in the individual parties. The new and amazingly successful departure was the creation of the CDU – in Bavaria the CSU – as a supraconfessional party which attracted not only former Catholic voters of the Centre Party, but also Protestant and Conservative elements.

The SPD, of course, stood in the tradition of the party in the Empire and the Weimar Republic. Even before the Godesberg Programme of 1959 it had tried to expand its social basis and to become an all-embracing people's party rather than the party of the working class.¹⁴ Its particular social milieu largely broke down under the attacks of the Nazis and what remained of it, for example in the Ruhr area, melted away in the 1950s.

The KPD in the West never won back the strength of one-sixth of the electorate it had at the end of the Weimar

Republic. It was already dead politically when it was prohibited – quite unnecessarily – by the Constitutional Court in 1956. In the FDP, political liberalism had, for the first time since its split in 1866/67, a united, though still small party.

The new German party system was, until 1980, characterised by a process of consolidation and concentration. Of the ten parties in the Federal Diet of 1949, only three were left between 1961 and 1980 — CDU/CSU, SPD and FDP. The two major parties, which won around 60% of the vote in 1949, increased their share to about 90% by 1976. Neither a special Bavarian party, nor a refugee party, nor a nationalist radical right-wing party was able to keep seats in the Federal Diet for any length of time.¹⁵

In 1983, a new party, the *Greens*, entered the Federal Diet for the first time. It had its main electoral strength among young voters, particularly students, who are not primarily governed by their economic and social interests but rather by so-called ‘post-material values’,¹⁶ such as, for example, quality of life and protection of nature. The *Greens* have now broadened their social basis, entered into government coalitions with the SPD in some *Länder* and also, since 1998, in the central government. However, they have difficulties coping with the change from an opposition to a government party and in extending their policy to fields not connected with the environment or the fight against nuclear energy. In the new *Länder* – though not in the West – the PDS has established itself as a third party of considerable strength, gaining the votes of some 20% of the electorate.

In consequence of all this the share of the vote of the two major parties dropped in the last general elections to 76% and is much lower in many regional elections. There has been much talk by political scientists and journalists in recent years about *Politik- und Parteiverdrossenheit*, dis-

gust with politics and parties, the inability of the major parties – CDU/CSU and SPD – to integrate the mass of voters, and the rise of protest parties.¹⁷ Some have even suggested that the German party system might break down, as has happened in Italy. No doubt, there are signs of change in the attitude to politics and the traditional parties. The party system is in a great state of flux. But it remains to be seen whether in future we will be faced with a higher degree of instability and indeed a reduced capacity to reach consensus on the part of the political forces.

II

Economic and Social Changes in the Federal Republic

Fundamental changes, especially in the economy and society, are characteristic of the Federal Republic, and indeed of other Western industrial nations.¹⁸ The change in the economic and social structure, and the resultant rejection of traditional ideas, role models and modes of behaviour had a particularly dramatic impact. In agriculture, for example, the number of employees decreased to one-eighth, while production was increased by the transition from a labour-intensive to a capital-intensive system. Connected with this was a revolutionary upheaval in the traditional rural social structure when farm labourers disappeared, rural artisans died out, and the villages were urbanised by motorbikes, cars, supermarkets, films and television.¹⁹

Within a few years village life was completely revolutionised. In addition, there is an on-going trend away from an industrial towards a service society in which, although industry and the remnants of agriculture still exist, trade, traffic, banks, insurance companies, and above

all a new system of world-wide communications determine the image of our world.

Let us also be clear about the significance of the fact that 12 million refugees were, after some serious social conflicts at first, successfully integrated into the society and economy of the Federal Republic²⁰ – in my view a greater miracle than the so-called economic miracle.

Workers' real wages, in other words wages allowing for the rising cost of living, increased almost four-fold in three decades.²¹ Between the second half of the 1950s and the recession of 1973 the Federal Republic became a modern consumer society. The number of cars rose from less than 300,000 in 1948 to more than 15 million in 1971, by which time one in four Germans owned one.²² Washing machines and refrigerators became the standard equipment of the German household. I remember that when our best friends had their third child in 1956, we first went into the cellar to admire the new washing machine before we looked at the baby! The quality of food and the standard of housing also became much better. It is only since this time that the average flat has had central heating, a bath and a flushing toilet. Along with the consumer society, a society developed in which leisure time and increasingly far-ranging foreign travel played an ever-greater role.²³

Although income levels, and especially the distribution of wealth, are still very unequal, the lifestyles and mentalities of the different social groups have become more similar – due to the levelling effect of mass consumption, similar leisure activities and mass media, especially television. In the case of the workers there is talk of a 'farewell to proletarianism' (*Abschied von der Proletarität*)²⁴ – the end of a specific lifestyle and mentality, and in particular the dissolution of the special worker milieu which had been the backbone of the socialist and

communist parties and the trade unions until the end of the Weimar Republic.

The role of *women* in the economy, society and politics of the Federal Republic has also changed dramatically. Several of the typical female occupations of the period before 1945 have disappeared. There are hardly any farm-girls anymore and the maids that were still part of the bourgeois household in my youth have given way to cleaning ladies. There are hardly any washerwomen or ironers, and virtually no dressmakers who call at the house.

In 1950, married women, if they embarked upon a job at all, generally helped their husbands, fathers or brothers on the farm, in the inn, in the shop, or were responsible for the paper-work connected with their husbands' trade. They were categorised, for statistical purposes, as *mithelfende Familienangehörige*. And of course this still goes on today.²⁵ But the overwhelming majority of married women who work do not do so at home. There was a substantial difference here between the Federal Republic and the GDR where almost all married women, even those with small children, were employed. In West Germany and most of the other Western industrialised countries there was traditionally a sharp division between the various phases in a woman's life – working until the birth of her first child, staying at home until her youngest child went to school, and then often an attempt to regain employment once there was less to do in the house. In the GDR, by contrast, employed work and work for the family were increasingly synchronised.²⁶ Women, especially those with small children, have thus been particularly badly hit by the high rate of unemployment in eastern Germany since unification. Married women with children in the East still tend to prefer to work, not only for economic reasons, but for private ones as well, for

example not wanting to lose social contacts and the stimulation connected with having a job. These women still envisage simultaneous employment and motherhood, not one followed by the other.

There has also been a significant change in women's voting behaviour in West Germany. Until the general elections of 1969 women had given about ten percentage points more of their vote to the CDU/CSU than men, and were thus largely responsible for the CDU-led governments of the first two decades of the Federal Republic. In the elections of 1972 and 1976 the gap between the preferences of men and women closed considerably, and in 1980, when Franz-Josef Strauß challenged Helmut Schmidt for the Chancellorship, slightly more men than women actually voted for the CDU/CSU. Since then the difference in voting patterns between men and women has been only marginal.²⁷

The role of women in society and their self-perception has also radically changed.²⁸ In the early 1950s, at a time of mass unemployment, the idea of women with small children working outside the house was largely frowned upon by society, as expressed in the term *Schlüsselkinder* (latch-key kids). Furthermore, as in the years of the Great Depression and in the early years of Nazi rule, there was a tendency to push married women out of their jobs. In the civil service the so-called 'celibacy clause' was still in force, whereby women had to give up their job when they married if they could expect a widow's civil service pension in old age.²⁹ And during the 1950s most married women themselves considered paid employment merely as a transitional phase, necessary for the purchase of furniture, a motor car, for buying a house, or for providing their children with a better education. This attitude gradually changed. The obstacles to the employment of married women, especially in the civil service, were

removed, while social acceptance of working mothers increased. It was several decades, however, before, under pressure from the Constitutional Court, the principle of equal rights for men and women laid down in Article 3 of the Basic Law was also applied to family, marital and divorce law.³⁰

There was a dramatic change in attitudes towards pre-marital sex. In the late 1950s only 27% of young women found it acceptable that an unmarried couple should live together; by the 1970s this figure had risen to 90%.³¹

A major role was played in bringing about social change in the Federal Republic, in its life-styles, modes of behaviour and values, by a specific youth culture that started to develop from the 1950s under the impact of trends in America. This was manifested in the influence of American films, American pop music, the popularity of jeans, and the adoption of American values such as individual self-fulfilment, religious tolerance, and political, social and cultural pluralism.

This Americanisation can also be seen in the economy, in the stimulation of mass consumption by supermarkets and chain stores, the adoption of American marketing and advertising methods, in computer software, and American institutions, instruments and techniques in mass communication.³²

An analysis of how the West and East Germans, each in their different ways, came to terms with the Nazi period³³ would be worth a lecture of its own. Unfortunately I do not have time to go into this here. Let me just say, however, that an increasingly critical approach to the Nazi period ultimately became part of the identity of the Federal Republic and its newly-emerging political culture.

III

New Departures and Older Traditions in the GDR

So let's now look briefly at the GDR. Here the intellectual wrestling with the Nazi period remained fairly superficial. All the blame was laid at the door of the fascists, monopoly capitalists and the military, so that the mass of the people were effectively exonerated.³⁴ It was also claimed that with anti-fascism – in contrast to West Germany – the country had broken with German traditions and was therefore not responsible for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis, and did not need to make restitution and pay compensation (*Wiedergutmachung*) for those who had been driven out of the country or persecuted by the Nazis.

On the other hand, denazification was carried out far more rigorously than in the Federal Republic, particularly as regards the public administration and the legal and education systems,³⁵ though hardly at all where the churches and doctors were concerned.³⁶ In the schools most teachers were replaced by young people who had taken crash courses.³⁷ In the judiciary the former judges, almost all of whom had belonged to the Nazi party, gave way to so-called *Volksrichter* (people's judges), again trained in crash courses.³⁸ In the administration, as in the judiciary, the aim of denazification was not only to get rid of Nazi party members, but also to build up a completely new administration and justice system as an effective instrument for achieving the regime's political and social goals. The civil service, an institution deeply rooted in German history, was abolished altogether. And in the economic sphere, too, denazification was not only aimed against former Nazis, but was increasingly instrumentalised to suppress the old social and economic élites.

The break with the past in the economy was radical. In agriculture the large estates typical of Eastern Prussia and Mecklenburg were confiscated as part of the so-called Land Reform and distributed to small peasant farmers. However, from the early 1950s onwards these were forced to join agricultural producers' co-operatives.³⁹ Industry, and later the retail trade, were nationalised step by step. The market economy was replaced by a strictly centralised planned economy, controlled in every detail by the state party, the SED, and the state bureaucracy closely linked to it. All later attempts to make this planned economy more flexible, and to give the plants greater autonomy,⁴⁰ were doomed to failure.

As far as party politics was concerned, after a democratic start, the SED which emerged as a result of the forced unification of the KPD and SPD ⁴¹ developed into the state party of the GDR. In 1968 its leading role as a marxist-leninist party was formally incorporated into the GDR's constitution. In 1952 the five original *Länder* of the GDR were replaced by 14 *Bezirke* (districts) as the top level of regional administration.⁴²

In the GDR, Sovietisation, unlike Americanisation in West Germany, was confined to political and social institutions. However, most of the population did not really accept it, especially since orientation towards the Soviet model obstructed the process of economic and social modernisation. From the 1970s onwards there were attempts to establish the GDR as an independent socialist German nation, but these all failed. The population remained orientated towards West Germany, which could be seen on TV in virtually every GDR flat. Competition with the Federal Republic had a far greater impact on the economic and social policy of the GDR than vice versa.

There was no unemployment in the GDR, although it became apparent after reunification that many plants,

administrations and universities were overstaffed to a level that made no economic sense. The public health system and old-age pensions covered virtually the entire population. However, the pensions paid by the GDR's unified system of social insurance, which broke with the German tradition of having special funds for various risks and groups, were extremely small compared to West German standards or even to wages and salaries in the East. The result was that from 1950 onwards additional state-financed pension schemes were set up for the functional élites.

All in all, between 17 August 1950 and 1 January 1989 27 additional schemes of this sort and also four special schemes for members of the People's Police, the Army and employees of the customs authorities and the Ministry of State Security were established.⁴³ The low level of standard pensions was also a means of forcing widows to work since, unless they had small children, they did not receive any support until they were 60, and even then it was minimal. While virtually all women were forced on to the labour market, generous child-care provision was made at the workplace and in local communities, starting when the child was still a baby. The percentage of employed women was eventually only slightly lower than that of men, and thus far higher than in the Federal Republic.⁴⁴

Other differences between the GDR and the Federal Republic were that in East Germany there was virtually no middle class (*bourgeoisie*). It had lost its economic basis and only fragments remained amongst the clergy, doctors and university professors.⁴⁵ Only a small proportion of the GDR population belonged to the churches,⁴⁶ and a central role was played by the *Betrieb* – the plant and workplace – not only in the social security system, but also in labour relations and in the life of the people.

The *Betriebsräte* (works councils), which at the end of the war tried to take over and rebuild the plants, were prevented from doing their work and dissolved in 1948. Employers' organisations were banned. The all-embracing state trade union, the FDGB, was subject to strict political control by the SED. There was no free collective bargaining, no autonomous sphere of labour relations, and the right to strike was virtually obsolete. The most important instrument for representing workers' interests in the workplace were the so-called workers' brigades, created following the Soviet model, as a collective organisation for all workers at a particular plant.⁴⁷ Their main purpose was to increase productivity, to school the workers in socialism and to control them. However, they also generated a certain *esprit de corps* and were centres for close social contacts. The members of a brigade celebrated birthdays together, often had coffee together before the official knocking-off time, and organised festivities and group excursions. Of course, all this was tied up with social control, but many people felt that their lives were enriched by it. So after reunification, when plants were more strictly geared towards profitability, and above all there was mass unemployment, many GDR citizens, especially single women, fell into a sort of emotional void. This was cleverly exploited by the PDS with its offers of substitute leisure activities.

Differing generational experiences were of great importance in the East, as they were in the West.⁴⁸ Young people were particularly resentful of the fact that they could not participate freely in the western rock culture, travel to countries outside the eastern bloc, and enjoy some of the symbols of youth consumerism available in the West.

The spirit of independence and rebellion against the colourless everyday life of the GDR was given moving

expression in the early 1970s, in a play by Ulrich Plenzdorf called *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* – a reference, of course, to Goethe's famous Werther. Here the 'hero' sings a 'hymn to jeans',⁴⁹ which were initially banned by the GDR authorities as a sign of Americanisation. Before this he says: 'Of course Jeans. Can anyone imagine a life without Jeans? Jeans are the most noble trousers in the world ... Jeans are a mentality (*Einstellung*), not a pair of trousers.'⁵⁰

The GDR regime eventually collapsed not only because of the lack of political freedom and because a country that was increasingly taking on the character of a gerontocracy had little attraction for young people, but also because its economic system did not work.

Ultimately, the weakness of the system was the result of power being concentrated in one state party, which claimed responsibility for all spheres of state, economy and society, and the lack of any autonomous, intermediary organisations.⁵¹ The GDR's inflexibility and lack of potential for innovation, its backwardness in research and the fact that it was cut off from the division of labour in the world economy, often led to a grotesque misdirection of limited resources. For example, thousands of millions were invested to produce the GDR's first 256-kilobyte chips. They had a total production cost of 536 Marks, of which the plants where they were used paid 16 Marks – 100% more than the world market price – while the state paid a subsidy of 520 Marks.⁵²

As we now know from internal sources, in autumn 1989 the GDR was on the brink of bankruptcy because of its enormous foreign debts. According to an analysis of 30 October 1989 by the SED's chief planning officer, Gerhard Schürer, this could only have been prevented by a decrease of 25-30% in the standard of living, which was regarded as politically unviable.⁵³ Incidentally, all west-

ern experts under-estimated the miserable state of the GDR economy and wildly over-estimated its productivity.

IV Problems of Transformation after Reunification

Berlin will not be Bonn. The new Federal Republic is not only bigger than the old one, but also more heterogeneous. It is bound to have more social and political conflicts, and more clashes between different mentalities. It also has to bear greater international responsibility.

With unification, the new *Länder* of the former GDR very rapidly adopted the entire set of political, economic and social institutions and the legal norms of the old Federal Republic. But along with this total transformation of the existing system, the very popular re-establishment of the *Länder* abolished in 1952, and the more or less blanket adoption of the West German system of parties and interest groups, there were also continuities. These are to be found in the PDS, in the middle and lower levels of local government, in the school system where former GDR teachers can only slowly be replaced as they reach retirement age, in the churches, and, astonishingly, in the mass media. The press, for example, even though it has been bought up by major western publishers, is still dominated by the former district newspapers of the SED. Below the level of editor-in-chief, there has been virtually no change of personnel.⁵⁴ The newspaper market in East and West, even in Berlin, is still largely segregated.

In the economy the most difficult process of transformation, and the one with the most important consequences, was the changeover to a new currency and the transfer from a centralised planned economy to a capitalist market economy. Many people in the West do not

realise that the conversion of wages and salaries in the ratio of 1:1, in view of the GDR's secret exchange rate for export proceeds of 4.4:1, represented an abrupt upward revaluation of 340%. This meant, for example, that a cupboard made for Ikea for 100 Western Marks in the East was suddenly supposed to cost 440 Marks and thus, of course, became completely unsaleable. Also the increase in negotiated wage rates to about 90% of the western level within a few years and in actual wages to about 77%, far exceeded the rise in productivity,⁵⁵ so that many East German firms were no longer competitive and had to close down or get rid of many of their employees. The weakness of the East German economy was also caused by the fact that workers and managers – as in the Nazi period – were geared towards increasing production, while marketing was more or less left to itself.

As I have already mentioned, the very expensive extension of the West German system of social security to the East did much to overcome the social consequences of the transition from a planned to a market economy. For example, by 1997 280 thousand million Marks had been transferred to introduce and maintain the system of social insurance in the new *Länder*.⁵⁶ A large part of these transfers were made within the social security system. In 1997 those paying social insurance contributions in the West – and not the general taxpayer – had to finance the pensions and unemployment insurance in the East to the tune of nearly 36 thousand million Marks.⁵⁷

Unification has had different effects on the standard of living of the various social groups. Pensioners have generally done well. Since unification pensions in eastern Germany have increased, on average, almost three-fold,⁵⁸ even if we consider West-Marks and East-Marks to be of equal value. This has more than compensated for the loss of subsidies for food, rent and transport. In the new

Länder state pensions for men today are slightly higher than average pensions in the West, and for women, most of whom have worked for much longer than women in the West, they are more than a third higher.⁵⁹ We must bear in mind, however, that retired people in the East have to rely almost exclusively on social security pensions, whereas in the West a considerable proportion of people's income in old age comes from occupational pensions, private life assurance or revenue from their own wealth, and also that many more old people own their own house or flat. Thus, despite higher social security pensions, the net income of old people's households is still much lower in the East than in the West.⁶⁰ Widows have seen a particularly dramatic improvement in their situation. The number of widows' and widowers' pensions has increased about twelve-fold to around 1 million, their average value ten-fold, to 1000 DM.⁶¹

Many women, however, have not done so well out of unification – those who have lost their jobs, and especially single mothers who have seen a reduction in the benefits they used to receive in the GDR.

By now we have all realised that it is not only the enduring discrepancies in economic situation and standard of living, and resentment about the loss of certain social privileges, that is making internal cohesion between East and West more difficult. It is also the four-and-a-half decades of socialisation within a different political, economic and social system, and the misunderstandings this causes.

Furthermore, people in western Germany do not fully appreciate the massive adjustments demanded of those in the East. To give just one example, the social system in the East was run with about 10% of the norms in the Federal Republic.⁶² Even many West Germans do not really know exactly what they are entitled to, for example

in the sphere of taxes and social benefits. How much more difficult was it for the East Germans who had to make the transition from a relatively simple to an extraordinarily complex system virtually over night.

The party system in eastern Germany, especially the relative strength of the PDS, reflects the problems of unification. The PDS, which has far more members than any other party in eastern Germany, is a very heterogeneous party in terms of ideology and social composition.⁶³ Firstly, it is a protest party for the East against the influence of the 'Wessis' that dominates all other parties. It is also the only party which clearly articulates the new interests and identity of the East. With its strong representation at community level and its *Rentnerbrigade* (pensioners' brigade) – the many older members of the former SED who lost their jobs and took early retirement, now doing unpaid work for the party – it is strongly rooted in the local milieu, especially in the big towns. One of its great strengths is that it helps people to get what they are entitled to under the new system, for example by assisting them in filling out claims for social security, pensions or housing allowance, and that it revives old forms of communication and festivities.

In the party system there are signs in both parts of Germany of a decline in voters' milieu formation and thus a weakening of party ties. This is particularly marked in eastern Germany where the older continuities, going back to the pre-1933 period, have been lost more or less completely – as the SPD discovered to its disappointment in the 1990 elections in its former strongholds of Saxony and Thuringia – and where the new ties since 1990 are often very loose. The role of the media, particularly television, and of popular politicians has become more important; voters change their party allegiance more easily.⁶⁴

The importance of large organisations, particularly the trade unions and churches, has also declined. Convinced Protestants played a leading role in bringing about the upheaval of 1989, as did Protestant vicars in the Round Tables, in the newly formed parties, and as Ministers in regional governments in the East. Many representatives of the churches therefore expected that this would culminate in a religious revival and that the churches would become *the* guiding moral authorities in the new *Länder*. This was not the case, and instead of an influx of new members, the membership figures, which were in any case very small, declined even further.⁶⁵ Only about 30% of people in the East, compared to almost 90% in the West, are connected with a church.

Furthermore, the difference in mentalities⁶⁶ is also shown by the precedence given in the East to justice – especially social justice – over freedom, in the high esteem in which socialism is held as an idea, if not in reality, and in the critical attitude towards the institutions and legal procedures of their new state.

However, despite the widespread criticism of the market economy, mass unemployment and the new political system in the East, it is clear that very few people want the return of the GDR. This even applies to the majority of PDS voters.

There is still a long way to go before the two parts of Germany, marked by their very different histories between 1945 and 1990, are truly reunited. A vital precondition for this is that standards of living should be made more equal, mass unemployment in the East reduced, and mutual prejudices set aside. What is not necessary, however, is to demand that the East Germans, with their strong sense of territorial allegiance, give up their own cultural identity, thereby forgetting that it is precisely in its variety that the unity of the nation must be preserved.

The crisis of reunification is only one of the problems facing the Federal Republic in its search for a new identity. A further serious problem is the crisis of the welfare state which, as I have tried to show, is deeply rooted in German history and has played a crucial role in legitimising the Federal Republic and in cushioning the transformation in the East. This crisis is connected with problems common to many industrial nations: the ageing of the population, globalisation of the economy, and the opening of the labour market to citizens of all member states of the European Union. Germany, however, has a particular problem due to the traditionally close links between the social security system and permanent full-time employment until retirement in a situation where the labour market is rapidly changing and the traditional forms of employment in the industrial society of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century are eroding.⁶⁷

The Federal Republic's political institutions have also been put to the test. Compared with other countries the political system of the Federal Republic – largely in response to the concentration of power and its abuse during the Nazi period – is characterised by a far-reaching division of power. Hence the strong position of the *Länder* in the Federal Council, and the electoral law which leads almost inevitably to a system of more than two parties, and thus to coalition governments, often with serious difficulties in reaching internal consensus. Hence, also, the great influence of the Constitutional Court and, so far at any rate, of the *Bundesbank*. Powerful interest groups also have *de facto* a wide-ranging right of veto, for example in the system of labour relations, in the social security system and in the health system, and make it difficult for them to adapt flexibly to new conditions.

So the lack of internal unity, which presents, of course, even more serious difficulties in countries such as Italy,

Spain and Belgium – not to mention Ireland – is only one of the problems confronting the Federal Republic at the start of the twenty-first century. It is, however, *the* problem which *each individual* can best help to solve. As the American historian Fritz Stern – who as a Jew had to emigrate from Germany during the Nazi period – said a few weeks ago in his address accepting the prestigious Peace Prize of German Booksellers, it is not acceptable that there are two classes of citizen in Germany, or even people who feel they are second class citizens. In order to prevent this, people in the eastern and western parts of Germany have to approach one another, and it is up to the West Germans to take the first step. After all, they are the ones who have retained their institutions and values, and have not had to make the huge adjustments demanded of those in the East.

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- ⁴⁵ Christoph Kleßmann, 'Relikte des Bildungsbürgertums in der DDR', in Hartmut Kaelbe, Jürgen Kocka and Hartmut Zwahr (eds), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 254-70.
- ⁴⁶ Detlef Pollack, 'Von der Volkskirche zur Minderheitskirche. Zur Entwicklung von Religiosität und Kirchlichkeit in der DDR', in Kaelbe, Kocka and Zwahr (eds), *Sozialgeschichte* (note 45), pp. 271-94, esp. p. 272. The proportion of people not belonging to a confession varies in the sources, 74% being the highest figure and 64.7% the lowest.
- ⁴⁷ For the workers' brigades see Martin Kohli, 'Die DDR als Arbeitsgesellschaft? Arbeit, Lebenslauf und soziale Differenzierung', in Kaelbe, Kocka and Zwahr (eds), *Sozialgeschichte* (note 45), pp. 31-61 and Jörg Roesler, 'Die Produktionsbrigaden in der Industrie der DDR. Zentrum der Arbeitswelt', *ibid.*, pp. 144-70; Peter Hübner, *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiß. Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1970* (Berlin, 1995), esp. pp. 211-45.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato and Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung. Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR. 30 biographische Eröffnungen* (Berlin, 1991); Dorothee Wierling, 'Die Jugend als innerer Feind. Konflikte in der Erziehungsdiktatur der sechziger Jahre', in Kaelbe, Kocka and Zwahr (eds), *Sozialgeschichte* (note 45), pp. 404-25.
- ⁴⁹ Ulrich Plenzdorf, *Die Leiden des jungen W.* (Frankfurt/M., 1973):
- Oh, Bluejeans
 White Jeans? - No
 Black Jeans? - No
 Blue Jeans, oh
 Oh, Bluejeans, yeah
- Oh, Bluejeans
 Old Jeans? - No
 New Jeans? - No
 Blue Jeans, oh
 Oh, Bluejeans, yeah (p. 30).

- ⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 26f.
- ⁵¹ See M. Rainer Lepsius, 'Die Institutionenordnung als Rahmenbedingung der Sozialgeschichte der DDR', in Kaebler, Kocka and Zwahr (eds), *Sozialgeschichte* (note 45), pp. 17-30. The weakness caused by suppressing social differentiation is also stressed by Detlef Pollack, 'Das Ende einer Organisationsgesellschaft. Systemtheoretische Überlegungen zum gesellschaftlichen Umbruch in der DDR', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 19 (1990), pp. 292-307.
- ⁵² Günter Schabowski, *Der Absturz* (Berlin 1991), p. 126.
- ⁵³ Published as 'Schürers Krisen-Analyse', *Deutschland-Archiv* 25 (1992), pp. 1112-20.
- ⁵⁴ See Oskar Niedermayer, 'Das intermediäre System', in Max Kaase et al. (eds), *Politisches System. Bericht der Kommission für die Erforschung des sozialen und politischen Wandels in den neuen Bundesländern e. V. (KSPW), Bericht 3* (Opladen, 1996), pp. 155-230, esp. pp. 207-10; Deutscher Bundestag, 13. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 13/2280, 8.5.1995: Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung. Materialien zur deutschen Einheit und zum Aufbau in den neuen Bundesländern, pp. 259-61, 512f.; Irene Charlotte Streul, 'Die Umgestaltung des Mediensystems in Ostdeutschland. Strukturwandel und medienpolitische Neuorientierung in Rundfunk und Presse seit 1989', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 40/93 (1 October 1993), pp. 36-46.
- ⁵⁵ See Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (ed.), *Sozialpolitische Informationen* 32, No. 4 (28 February 1998), pp. 2f.; Klaus-Peter Schmid, 'Der Knödel und sein Preis. Warum die ostdeutsche Wirtschaft bei der Produktivität dem Westen hinterherhinkt', *Die Zeit*, 5 December 1997.
- ⁵⁶ Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, *Sozialbericht* 1997 (Bonn, 1998), p. 8.
- ⁵⁷ Deutscher Bundestag, 13. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 13/10823, 27 May 1998: Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung. Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit 1998, p. 31.
- ⁵⁸ *Sozialbericht* (note 56), p. 311.

- ⁵⁹ Information given to the author by the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung.
- ⁶⁰ *Sozialbericht* (note 56), pp. 51f. See further Winfried Schmähle and Uwe Fachinger, 'Einkommen und Vermögen älterer Haushalte. Anmerkungen zur heutigen Situation und zur künftigen Entwicklung', in Dieter Farny, Peter Lütke-Bornefeld and Gertrud Zellenberg (eds), *Lebenssituationen älterer Menschen. Beschreibung und Prognose aus interdisziplinärer Sicht* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 93-124, esp. pp. 104ff.
- ⁶¹ Gunnar Winkler *et al.*, *Sozialreport 1992. Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage in den neuen Bundesländern* (Berlin, 1993), p. 249; Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung 1998 (note 57), p. 53.
- ⁶² See the manuscript of an undated lecture by Dr. Martin Ammermüller on 'Die Herausforderung der Sozialversicherung in den neuen Bundesländern', p. 1. Dr. Ammermüller, a higher civil servant in the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Order), was delegated as adviser to the GDR Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and later played an important role in setting up social insurance in Eastern Germany.
- ⁶³ For the PDS, its members and voters cf. Jürgen P. Lang and Patrick Moreau, 'PDS. Das Erbe der Diktatur', *Politische Studien* 45, Sonderdruck (1994); Jürgen W. Falter and Marcus Klein, 'Die Wähler der PDS bei der Bundestagswahl 1994. Zwischen Ideologie, Nostalgie und Protest', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 51-52 (1994), pp. 22-34; Henry Kreikenbom, 'Nachwirkungen der SED-Ära. Die PDS als Katalysator der Partei- und Wahlpräferenzen in den neuen Bundesländern', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 29 (1998), pp. 24-46; Hasko Hüning and Gero Neugebauer, 'Die PDS', in Oskar Niedermayer (ed.), *Intermediäre Strukturen in Ostdeutschland* (Opladen, 1996), pp. 67-85.
- ⁶⁴ See Ursula Birsil and Peter Lösche, 'Parteien in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Der gar nicht so feine Unterschied', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 29 (1998), pp. 7-24.
- ⁶⁵ Niedermayer, 'Das intermediäre System' (note 54), pp. 155-230, esp. p. 224.

- ⁶⁶ For the difference in mentalities see the results of opinion polls conducted by the *Allensbacher Institut für Demoskopie* published in Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher (eds), *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1984-1992*, vol. 9 (Munich etc., 1993) and the articles by Renate Köcher and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 May 1995, 17 April 1996, 16 April 1997, 14 May 1997, 10 December 1997; see further Oscar W. Gabriel, 'Politische Orientierungen und Verhaltensweisen', in Kaase et al. (eds), *Politisches System* (note 54), pp. 231-319; Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, 'Die linken und die rechten Werte. Ein Ringen um das Meinungsklima', in Karl Graf Ballestrem and Henning Ottmann (eds), *Theorie und Praxis. Festschrift für Nikolaus Lobkowitz zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 243-67.
- ⁶⁷ See Hans F. Zacher, 'Der Wandel der Arbeit und der sozialen Sicherheit im internationalen Vergleich', *Zeitschrift für ausländisches und internationales Arbeits- und Sozialrecht* 13 (1999), pp. 1-40.
- ⁶⁸ Published as 'Warum nicht endlich eine deutsche Demokratie?', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 October 1999.