

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Viewpoints on German partition and reunification

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This article reassesses the German partition and reunification from an East German perspective. It examines culture, politics and everyday life in East Germany and analyses the sense of unease and inequality between the two Germanies since its reunification.

**Keywords:** GDR; German partition; German reunification; German politics; everyday life

#### **The country I knew for as long as it existed**

German partition and reunification are subjects intimately bound up with my own history: after the end of World War II, I moved from Britain to the Soviet sector of Berlin. I was an Austrian refugee from Nazi oppression and had lived in this country since before the war. My husband, a German anti-fascist resistance fighter from Berlin, and I had both good jobs and many friends and felt at home in Britain. Going to East Germany in December 1946 was motivated by our desire to help build up a better, anti-fascist, and democratic Germany. Notwithstanding the controversial reports about the Russian occupation zone, the reforms that were carried out there impressed us because they implemented the provisions of the Potsdam Agreement in a consistently anti-fascist way.

Our life in East Berlin proved very different to what we had anticipated. Immediately after the end of hostilities, anti-fascist committees were formed generally under the guidance of communists joined by social democrats and Christian anti-fascists. Some of these had just been released from concentration camps and prisons and immediately set about rebuilding the country. The debris had to be removed, roads cleared, the damaged houses repaired; supported by the Russians, they set up a new Nazi-free administration and ensured that the meagre food rations were available and did not land on the black market; they reformed education, created a unified non-profit health service, theatres opened again, concerts took place, new films were produced, newspapers and books published – in short: social life, which at the end of the war had almost ceased, revived. On the other hand, the general policy, with which I mostly agreed, was laid down from above; we were, in fact, shocked at the authoritarian manner in which it was at times ruthlessly implemented. Public dissent was not tolerated.

My husband, who had a record of being a critical socialist, very soon got into trouble because of his continued public criticism of the undemocratic way the country was ruled. His political expectations were shattered when he was expelled

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Hanna Behrend, 1922–2010, passed away very suddenly on 30 November 2010.

from his party membership and debarred from employment in his profession in the civil service, and forthwith had to earn his living by translating English books and articles into German.

While many people accepted mindlessly acts of arbitrariness, there were always people who courageously resisted bureaucratic interference or injustice. To the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) I was therefore convinced that the system would eventually reform and overcome its deficiencies. While I suffered with my husband at the injustice to which he was exposed, I also benefited from the system – I was able to attend a crash course established for young workers, farm labourers and farmers as well as victims of Nazi oppression to qualify them for university studies, and subsequently I was able to undergo university studies. I received my doctorate in history and, later on, a second one in English literature. After graduation I was, however, not taken on at Humboldt University's history department because I was a "remigrant from the West" who, at that time, would not be employed in that department. I got a job in a museum; after that, I was a reader for a publishing house, a freelance translator, until I did manage, in 1969, to find a temporary assistant's job at the English and American Department at Humboldt University where they did not object to my *vita*. Despite eventually being fully qualified, I never became a full professor because even after I was divorced from my first husband and married to a historian, my record of being the ex-wife of a dissident and a square peg in a round hole made me ineligible for such a post. My career as a university teacher and researcher was, however, in no way restricted; by 1989, I had been the head of the language department, the second-in-command of the English literature department, I had run a team who published a new English textbook, I had organised three international conferences on working-class literature and women's studies, a subject I had introduced to the department in the mid-1980s. In other words, I was able to do everything a professor did and thus could easily do without the title.

#### **The other German state**

While West Germany was speedily built up and supplied with capital and commodities with the help of Marshall Plan Aid from 1948 onwards, the East Germans built up the country under much more difficult conditions and, additionally, bore the bulk of war damage compensations due, particularly, to the Soviet Union on behalf of the whole of Germany. Despite the handicap of an embargo on commodities necessary for modern electronic production, nobody was destitute or homeless in the GDR or lacked essential nourishments, nor was he or she deprived of educational opportunities.

Partition was initiated by the West when the three western occupation zones merged, established a joint currency and founded the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. The Soviet zone, in its turn, thereupon constituted itself into the GDR. While the GDR was never able to compete with Federal Germany's wealth and productivity, there were other achievements which the Federal Republic could not boast of, which, if adopted by reunited Germany after 1990, would have been worthwhile. For instance, a number of progressive reforms in the fields of education, health, culture, the economy, and legislation were carried out. War and Nazi criminals were not tolerated in high office. Many of the top people in the GDR had been fighters against the Nazi regime or victims of Nazi oppression. Creating a new,

more or less Nazi-free, administration was followed by an amnesty for ordinary members of the Nazi party and organisations.

Twelve years of Nazi rule in Germany had, however, made even former democrats and socialists so used to conforming to authority that there was little resistance offered to stupidities, repression, or injustice if they were decreed from above. The GDR was from the very beginning not a parliamentary democracy. Its parliament was a mockery, as were its elections. The Political Bureau of the leading Socialist Unity Party, many of its members being re-migrants from the Soviet Union who had been spared by Stalin's murderous campaigns, were the decision-makers. Their omnipotence was restricted, on the one hand, by the Soviet rulers. On the other hand, their power was also subject to the toleration of their rule by the ordinary people whom they distrusted, but at the same time feared. This became obvious when in 1989 public tolerance of the system broke down and Soviet guns were no longer available to protect an unpopular regime.

The rulers stemmed from the ranks of the German working-class movement, and while their practice was authoritarian and their theory a deformed Marxism, they still retained basic elements of socialist visions and of social democratic political practice. This was evident in the character of the reforms they undertook. Thus the industrial reform was to nationalise, in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, not only all big corporations owned by war and Nazi criminals but also, medium-size firms and firms not owned by war or Nazi criminals were expropriated in excess of actual legislation. A land reform gave labourers and refugees from the lost Eastern territories the chance of becoming farmers and, later, encouraged the formation of agricultural cooperatives that turned out to be successful, although in the early years undue pressure on the farmers had made thousands leave the country.

While the political programme of the ruling few was ruthlessly implemented, there were fields where a considerable amount of genuine discussion and intervention was possible. Work teams in factories, in agricultural or horticultural cooperatives, in the civil service, in schools and universities were free to organise themselves and had a say in respect of working conditions, wages and promotions. Wherever there were individuals committed to those who had elected them and not pawns in the hands of the management, it was possible to implement the workers' right to a share in management decisions. All important social laws were widely discussed and amendments or improvements called for by the public integrated into the bills.

The constitution of 1949 established the right of every able person to participate in gainful employment, equal rights for men and women, and equal wages for equal work. Legislation on families passed in 1965 proved the GDR one of the most modern European states. Married women were able to take up full-time gainful employment without asking their husbands' permission. A sufficient number of childcare facilities (i.e. crèches, kindergartens, and after-school care centres) allowed mothers to cope with both family and the job. School meals and work canteens enabled women to work full-time. Qualification was opened up for them in primary and supplementary job training also in traditional men's occupations. In engineering and agriculture, women were qualified for leading managerial posts as well as in various engineering and agricultural trades and skills. While this was clearly an advance, women's integration into gainful employment still spelled their entry into a man's world. They had to adjust to men's employment patterns, which meant that raising the children and looking after the household remained their leisure-time

occupation, in addition to being fully available to their employer, at times even in excess of working hours. Although childcare and other facilities increased and improved from year to year, and although more young husbands and fathers were prepared to share the domestic chores than ever before or elsewhere, the women's double burden of full-time employment and domestic and childcare duties remained and made many women decide to have fewer children. This, in turn, induced the government to modify family legislation. In the 1970s and 1980s, mothers of young children were given the opportunity of attending special university or college courses to suit their specific personal situation. Legislation focused on further harmonising motherhood and gainful employment, although regrettably not parenthood. Regulations included shorter working hours for women with two or more children, sick leave with pay in the advent of children's illness, one paid day a month (the "washing day", for domestic chores), the "Baby Year" (a year's paid leave for each of the first two children and one-and-a-half years for further offspring), financial support for families of more than three children, interest-free loans for young married couples, and heavily subsidised and therefore cheap children's wear. In 1972 abortion was legalised and free, as were contraceptives.

As these and other measures were directed nearly exclusively towards alleviating women's double burden, they also contributed towards cementing the idea that women only were responsible for childcare and domestic chores. The well-meaning paternalism of the rulers turned into arbitrariness and rank injustice whenever they met with demands for more democracy. Those most ruthlessly treated were, at least until the late 1960s, mostly dissenters from the ranks of the ruling socialist party. Nowhere were critical socialists or communists more consistently persecuted than in socialist/communist countries by their very own leadership.

Books and periodicals that proliferated Nazi, racist, or anti-Semitic ideology were banned for which purpose a censorship was established after the War. This institution eventually decayed more and more into an instrument in the hands of the rulers to fetter critical literature and journalism.

Class-related education was replaced by unified 10-year state-run education for all children. This comprised an introductory course into industrial manufacturing or agriculture. There was a pre-school education programme for crèches and kindergartens for everybody. Graduates from the 10-year schools could either attend a course of practical and theoretical training for a trade or a two-year course preparing school students for university or college. The children of the hitherto underprivileged were to be given preferential treatment if they wanted to attend these preparatory courses. These reforms were popular and helped to establish a new professional class from the ranks of the hitherto underprivileged. They were, however, marred by the fact that in some places and, for some time, children of the old professional classes or trade people were excluded from higher education, no matter how excellent their scholarly records.

The GDR made far fewer state debts than the Federal Republic had accumulated even before the present crisis. These facts naturally do not compensate the indisputable deficits in democracy and civil rights.

Shortcomings also comprised the neglect of city centres where war-damaged ancient churches and other valuable buildings were not repaired and allowed to turn into ruins. The government concentrated on housing programmes that were to provide cheap housing quickly for those in need, and only began to reconstruct the old city centres in the latter half of the 1980s. Supplies of other than basic foods and

consumer goods were unreliable, and so was catering. You might wait up to 10 years and more for a new car and by no means everyone enjoyed the facility of a private telephone. All this was largely due to the overcentralised system of planning and administering production.

There was, indeed, political censorship, which made the publication of critical authors' work difficult at times. Despite the efforts by hardliners to suppress GDR-critical works, critical writers such as Christa Wolf, Helga Schütz, Helga Königsdorf, Christoph Hein, and Stefan Heym all became very well known in the GDR.

In 1953 the building workers rose against regulations (cancelled the following day) raising production targets. They were defeated by Soviet tanks. In 1956, following the exposure of Stalinist practices in the USSR, the new intellectuals (young university staff and students) clamoured for more democracy and were crushed. In 1968, a new generation of young people, a number of whom were activists of the churches, supported the slogan of "socialism with a human face" initiated by Czechoslovak reformers whose uprising then was steamrolled down by military force. GDR writers, actors and artists rebelled time and again in the 1970s and 1980s, and many of them left the country in despair. After Gorbachov initiated the brief period of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union in 1985, the number of discontented and dissident people kept increasing, all still bent on achieving reforms that would bring about "socialism with a human face", a society that would combine the cultural achievements of existing socialism with civil and democratic rights.

#### **The only democratic year of the GDR**

In October 1989, mass demonstrations in all the major GDR cities took place regularly on Mondays. The demonstration on 9 October in Leipzig rallied 70,000 people and forced the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Social Unity Party of Germany; SED) Central Committee on 11 October to meet representatives of the civil rights groups and agree on a non-violent course. A week later, the Political Bureau of the SED dismissed their leader, Erich Honecker, and two more leading men. By 4 November, when the largest ever demonstration of 500,000 people took place on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, the "velvet revolution" was in full swing. The GDR media almost immediately turned from being drab, boring, and above all unbelievable into well-made, interesting, truthful, and entertaining information providers. Hitherto banned films and theatre productions were shown. Politically indifferent people flocked to the newly established political organisations; women joined the different groups of the newly-founded Independent Women's Association and soon became, like myself, activists founding women's centres, cafés, shelters.

So-called "Round Tables" were formed to which the newly-established organisations sent delegates. At every level from government downwards to the civil service, to industrial and agricultural enterprises, the health service, schools and universities, these Round Tables were involved in taking decisions on an equal footing with the heads and managers. The GDR parliament turned from an institution with very little genuine power into a platform where the old and the new organisations and political parties debated frankly and passionately, and within weeks eliminated the country's repressive structures.

On 9 November 1989, Central Committee member Günter Schabowski, on behalf of the former leadership, opened the frontier and allowed henceforth unrestricted and uncontrolled passage from one German state to the other. Although few people then realised it, this spelled the end of the new, democratic GDR and was to change the lives of 16 million East Germans out of recognition.

### **The gallop into unification**

Unification would, very probably, have come, sooner or later, even if Schabowski had not made the Wall come down without any provisions to safeguard the rights and property of the people in the GDR.

At that time, a merger of the two German states would be a decision no responsible politician could support. It would turn the GDR into a development country with uncertain prospects for its citizens; the country would become Germany's poorhouse. By building up a peaceful, democratic, and popular movement, the GDR citizens have the chance of establishing, at last, a humane, public spirited alternative to the Federal Republic. The two states of the Germans have become an indispensable guarantee for peace, safety, and stability in Europe. (Gregor Gysi, Extraordinary Party Congress of the SED/PDS [Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus], December 1989)

Rarely has a political prophecy been so accurate.

Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym, Bishop Krusche and others initiated an "Appeal To Our People" in favour of a confederation of the two German states. Both should abstain from membership in any military alliance and completely disarm. The GDR was to become a modern democratic and socialist alternative to the Federal Republic. The appeal was widely supported. Yet, all these plans and hopes eventually proved to be illusions.

By December 1989, the reformed conservative parties, the dissident organisation "Democratic Rising", and the Social Democrats had changed their strategy. They now embraced "social market economy" and speedy unification, which left only the reformed socialist party PDS as a supporter of democratic socialism. The conservative and social democratic parties of the Federal Republic provided their fraternal organisations in the GDR with ample financial, technical and ideological means to run powerful election campaigns. The GDR media were taken over by West German press tycoons and their representatives, who put an end to independent GDR television, radio and journalism. The same also happened to the reformed GDR trade unions; they were taken over by the West German unions.

After the victory of the conservative coalition in the first and last democratic elections in the GDR in March 1990, the original slogan of the "velvet revolutionaries", "We are the people!" was changing into "We are one people!" A fast growing number of people now wanted a merger with the Federal Republic rather than a period of confederation of two independent states. Only a few people warned that this would inevitably ruin the country's economy.

The institution with the largest share in turning the GDR into Germany's poorhouse was the Treuhandanstalt, a powerful holding company established by the provisional GDR government in 1989 designed "to take in trust and administer faithfully the people's property". The first and also last freely-elected GDR government hastened to change the purpose of this institution from taking care of

the national property to privatising and reorganising it. This revised law of June 1990 was considered by prominent critics the sell-out and destruction of the people's property. Treuhand's chief manager Detlef Rohwedder, a West German social democratic finance expert, who stood for a policy of reorganising GDR enterprises in a way that would at least have made them viable, was murdered, the assassin never found. His successor, Birgit Breuel, a neoliberal hardliner, stood for a policy of privatisation before rehabilitation. Under her regime, 300 enterprises were privatised in one month. Within less than three years, Treuhand destroyed or handed over to West German big business national property to the value of at least several hundred billion Deutschmarks for next to nothing. Rohwedder had valued this property at DM600–650 billion, whilst it was worth DM520 billion according to the so-called Deutschmark opening balance. While such generous prices were able to improve their positions of West German purchasers of these firms in international competition, the ordinary taxpayer had to repay the nearly €300 billion of debt that Treuhand heaped up on the Germans.

Many of the GDR citizens who had voted for German unity had done so expecting that in one or two years, if not before, their situation would match that of their West German brothers and sisters with regard to comfortable living conditions, good wages, safe jobs, unrestricted travelling, overboarding supplies of all commodities that had been scarce in the GDR. A few of the more enterprising East Germans, indeed, succeeded in new ventures, became independent entrepreneurs, or found new careers for themselves, and moved to places in West Germany where unemployment was still almost non-existent. But the majority of the East Germans lost their safe jobs, were obliged to take temporary and lower-paid ones or to eke out their existence on unemployment money and social security. Quite a number also lost their property. The new ruling provided that restitution of property took priority over compensation. This meant that people who had at one time or another left the GDR for the Federal Republic could now claim housing property they had left behind uncared for and rob the people who had bought or rented this property and looked after it for decades.

Behind a façade of newly freshened-up and refurbished house fronts and road improvements, many places in the former GDR are actually derelict areas. Young families and enterprising young women have long left and moved westwards where the jobs are. Many villages and small towns are now chiefly populated by elderly people and unqualified young men with little hope or drive. Unemployed, they hang around and often fall a prey to alcoholism or join the neo-Nazis or both.

#### **GDR presentation by current media**

The events that in 1990 led to German reunification are by no means past history. Their interpretation by the mainstream media, by historians, writers, political parties, by the different generations in East and West Germany is, on the contrary, a very controversial and topical subject, particularly in this year, which is the 20th anniversary of the coming down of the Berlin Wall. Was the GDR the implementation of a socialist vision, which failed, or was it the dictatorship of a handful of elderly men lusting for power, where civil rights were ignored? Was it nothing but a state of injustice, as the establishment, the mainstream media, and certain prominent former dissidents never tire to reiterate?

The negative picture of the GDR portrayed by the established media and the marginalising of alternative viewpoints is, above all, an instrument to make invisible the unrest of people, the growing number of working poor, and of the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Nobody wants the GDR back, but recent opinion polls show that the majority of East Germans find certain features of the defunct state better than what at present replaces them. Thus many people consider the GDR education and health systems, the family laws and labour legislation better than the present regulations. Two-thirds of East and West Germans would like the German military commitment in Afghanistan to end.

The picture provided by the mainstream reduces the GDR to a police state and, above all, to a state with an enormous secret service that seems to be much more barbarous than any other secret service, assisted by masses of informal agents who were occupied exclusively with observing every single citizen. Indeed, the GDR state security was an organisation to safeguard the state from interference, and the rulers who distrusted the people had also built up a huge apparatus of full-time and informal agents to prevent political opposition of any kind. For this purpose, certain people were asked to report to the authorities on their colleagues, neighbours, and, in some instances, even on family members. Only a small fraction of the people in the GDR were, however, informal agents and it was generally possible to refuse these services. The post-unification media made people believe that almost every GDR citizen in a leading position had been a secret service agent and practically every innocent citizen had been a victim of the secret service. The State Security apparatus left an enormous amount of data, which are being administered by a special state department in order to find and expose people who were involved in one way or another with the State Security in the former GDR. These people generally lose their jobs no matter whether their involvement damaged anybody or not.

The tacit ban on any positive statement on the GDR has also influenced considerably some of the younger East German authors. A case in point is the 1000-page novel *Der Turm (The tower)* by Uwe Tellkamp published by the respectable Suhrkamp publishers in Frankfurt/Main in 2008. The author, born in 1968, was barely 21 when the GDR disappeared from the map; he must have wholeheartedly hated not only the social system and the country's leadership and elites. He must also have thoroughly despised all East Germans; how could he otherwise have written 1000 pages without a single lovable figure.

Tellkamp's GDR, in keeping with the basic image of the GDR in the mainstream media, is a country where 16 million citizens distrusted even their own family members, afraid these would spy and report on them to the authorities; where all teachers were informers or corrupt cowards and all readers in publishing houses self-appointed censors cringing to the censors above them and intent on preventing the publication of any critical manuscript. The country is ruled by fools and knaves; its prominent artists and writers are corrupt and hate one another; Tellkamp consistently ignores any positive or even tolerable facets in the GDR. Everyday life is reduced to chasing after food and other commodities in short supply, to evading the different acts of injustice and arbitrariness, to learning to speak with a twisted tongue, to coping with secret service observation and neglected housing, and last, but not least, to putting up with the stupidity and brutality of the bulk of ordinary people (like the members of the tank regiment one of the protagonists is forced to join or his family's neighbours).

The book reveals not only Tellkamp's viewpoint on the GDR, it enlightens the reader about his general political stance. Thus, another of Tellkamp's protagonists insults Willy Brandt and the West German political reformers of 1968 who were the first post-war generation to challenge West German political amnesia in respect to the Nazi past. He calls them lily-livered fools and wants them to put more pressure on the Soviet Union even at the risk of a nuclear war. It is this unrelenting picture that never misses a single cliché that reveals the author subordinating his art to his politics.

For this novel he was honoured by the renowned Deutsche Buchpreis. In June he was awarded the German National Prize for 2009 together with two other authors of very similar viewpoints. The book was also selected for the €15,000 prize of the conservative Konrad-Adenauer-Trust, which was awarded to him in November 2009.

### **United Germany still a divided country**

In the years immediately following unification, capitalism triumphed unchallenged. For the citizens of West Germany, nothing seemed to have changed. The recession that had threatened the Federal Republic in the late 1980s was stalled as the GDR and its Eastern European customers provided a market that delayed the approaching economic downswing for at least another two years. History had proved the West German brothers and sisters to have always been on the "right" side. As one of the best known engineers of German unity, the Social Democrat Egon Bahr said in June this year:

we have not yet achieved internal unity. Our brothers and sisters have become Osis and Wessis (mock names for East and West Germans). The westward migration, which we used to call "voting with one's feet", has continued in a shocking manner, although Ulbricht and Honecker can no longer be made responsible for it. (*Berliner Zeitung*, 13–14 June 2009)

To this day, unemployment figures in the so-called "new" German provinces are twice as high as in the "old" (West German) ones. The proportion of East Germans in leading positions particularly, in industry, trade, banking, and the army, is still insignificant. An entire generation of highly educated and competent GDR men and women were ignominiously kicked out of their jobs to be replaced by West Germans.

Since the financial and economic crisis has held Germany in its grip, the wealthy German provinces, too, are affected by rising unemployment figures. This is barely camouflaged by workers in big enterprises kept on short working hours with a fraction of their loss in wages paid for by the taxpayer. Workers employed by subcontractors were, of course, fired first and meanwhile increase the number of people on social security. Subsequently, women's and child poverty are on the increase. According to the government's annual Poverty Report, the gap between the rich and the poor is opening ever wider. A recent OECD report on social justice in European states ranks Germany number 29 out of 30 on account of the lower incomes being burdened far more heavily by taxation than the wealthy. Tax reforms of recent years have without exception merely relieved the big incomes.

While the banks and certain big corporations were saved from imminent crash by billions of taxpayer Euros, the workers on short hours are glad to still get 67% of

their wages – thus losing no more than €200–300 per month. This privilege, however, only applies to workers in permanent employment, not to subcontracted labour and even less to the unemployed.

Since 2006 Germany has been number three of the world's arms exporters, preceded only by the United States and Russia. The money made in this deadly industry is invested in military research and warfare. A mere fraction of it would suffice to provide the West German provinces with the much-needed childcare institutions that, thanks to the GDR, East Germany is much better equipped with.

Since 9/11 the constitutional and civil rights have been gradually eroded under the pretext that this was necessary to prevent terrorist attacks. Thus privacy of banking accounts is no longer safeguarded; the inviolability of one's home is not guaranteed any more; private computers may be screened at the mere suspicion of a person's involvement in an alleged terrorist organisation.

Since 2007, when the German welfare state was severely curtailed, the gap between East and West Germany began to be superimposed by the chasm between the wealthy and the growing number of poor. The new social legislation affected people in all parts of Germany. It cut down unemployment benefits, and reduced women's claims to unemployment money if they share a household with a wage earner or a person claiming unemployment benefit. Demonstrations against these new laws sprang up in East and West Germany.

In the 2005 elections, the social democrats became the junior coalition partner of the conservatives. On account of its neoliberal policy, the Social Democratic Party lost a large number of its members, particularly trade unionists – many of whom merged with the East German PDS to form *Die Linke* (The Left Party), which is still trying to consolidate its profile.

Most East Germans took up the challenge of having to adjust to totally different living conditions. They witnessed the destruction of the country's resources, the steamrolling down and constant abuse of all facets of its social system and the discrimination of its citizens as second rate. This experience contributed to bringing about a specific East German identity that did not exist before the fall of the GDR. The new generation participates, through parents and grandparents, in this unique historical experience. Although they are not any greater fighters for their rights or more politically active than their West German counterparts, they are generally more unwilling to believe the authorities.

The present move to the right in the European parliamentary elections seems to prove that in a crisis people tend to fight shy of any change. On the other hand, for the first time in decades, particularly young people in Germany are protesting. Tens of thousands of school and university students have recently demonstrated for long overdue reforms of education. For weeks, kindergarten teachers have been on strike. While this by no means marks the turning of the tide, fear of the future and of deteriorating living conditions is rampant and fast spreading from the East to the West. This may eventually turn out to be a powerful incentive for establishing German unity from below. This would imply East and West jointly learning from failures and faults, and merging their real achievements no matter whether they originated in the West or in the East.

**Notes on contributor**

Hanna Behrend (1922–2010) taught at Humboldt University, Germany, and researched intensively on the politics of German reunification. Most recently she published her edited collection, *German unification: The destruction of an economy* (1995) and her autobiography, *Die Überleberin: Jahrzehnte in Atlantis* (The Survivor: Decades in Atlantis) in 2008.