

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the winter of 1993/94 I was teaching English to business students at a technical school in the comfortable Westphalian city of Münster. Wanting to get a first-hand glimpse of conditions in the former German Democratic Republic, I traveled to the East in late December 1993. Standing in line at Dresden's Semper Opera House, I had the good fortune to strike up a conversation with a young couple from Jena in Thuringia. Having never spent time with an American, they were kind enough to invite me back to their home. Conditions in their industrial city presented a striking contrast to the affluence of Münster. Jena consisted of grim, dilapidated apartments, stores, and factories, all thickly blanketed in coal soot. The frustrations of many East Germans regarding the lack of economic and social progress since reunification were aptly summed up by some graffiti scrawled on the wall of a row house: "Kohl lied!" The wife of this couple was educated as a doctor and her husband as a mechanical engineer, yet both of them were unemployed and squatting in an apartment house that lacked indoor running water. In these difficult circumstances, they spoke nostalgically of the days of the former East Germany, when the street cars were virtually free and they had enjoyed a sense of social security. The pair was leery of the free market's intrusion into their lives and definitely could not perceive any of its potential benefits.

Spending time with this couple made me realize how difficult a task it would be to tie the two German states together. It was not merely a matter of reconstructing the infrastructure, as many in the West thought, but also of changing people's minds. Now, almost twenty years later, the "wall in the mind" remains a formidable obstacle. Meeting this couple led me to wonder what transpired during the early Federal Republic in terms of West Germans' changing perceptions and meanings regarding the economy. To be sure, West Germany experienced an "economic miracle" of the 1950s that transformed society and undermined Social Democratic calls for the socialization and planning of the economy. Although after the Third Reich many West Germans were sharply critical of industry and free-market capitalism, within a few years most had become fiercely proud of their "social market economy." Clearly the conservative Christian Democratic Union and Ludwig Erhard, the Federal Republic's first economics

minister, had successfully positioned themselves as the bearers of the economic miracle—but, I wondered, just how they succeeded in doing this? And more importantly perhaps, what did this economic reconstruction mean to West Germans in the midst of building a new democracy out of the ruins of the Nazi past?

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