

THE UPHEAVAL OF 1989\91 AND THE HISTORIAN¹

Gerhard A. Ritter

I

Michael Howard, the well-known British military historian, pointed out in March 1990, that the great changes in Europe and the world are forcing us fundamentally to revise our thinking:

"We became indeed so accustomed to the prison that history had built for us..that we became almost incapable of visualizing any other kind of existence. No other world, it seemed, could possibly exist ... Now the walls of our prison have suddenly collapsed and we emerge, bewildered in a new and unfamiliar world. How can we adjust to it?"²

It is now accepted that the liberation of the middle-European states from Soviet domination, the end of the division of Germany and the final collapse of the Soviet Union constitute a major turning-point in European, indeed in world history, scarcely less important than the French Revolution. Already one can speak of a long 19th century extending right from 1789 to 1914-18 and of a short twentieth century, from the First World War, according to George F. Kennan, the "great seminal catastrophe of this century"³, to 1989-91, the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Watersheds so deep and so acute are accompanied by a re-evaluation of everything that went before; the earlier period now appears in a new light, a new perspective. This is true of how we judge epoch-making events such as the French Revolution of 1789, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the destruction of the German Empire in 1945 - and also of how we comprehend specific forces and ideas that have determined history. Furthermore, questions relating on the one hand to the relative meaning of

1. * Text of a lecture held at the Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Giuridiche, Politiche e Sociali, University of Siena 3 may 1995. Translation from the German by Catherine Stodolsky and Gerhard A. Ritter.

2. Michael Howard, *The Remaking of Europe*, in: Survival, vol. 32/2, March/April 1990, p. 99.

3. George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order. Franco-Russian Relations, 1875- 1890*, Princeton 1973, p. 3.

structures and long-term processes, and on the other to specific events, individuals or chance, must now be reformulated. We do not yet know how the mighty process of transformation consequent on the collapse of the old order in 1989-91 will turn out, as history is an open book. Hence the new picture of history - especially of 20th century history - is anything but clear-cut; it is, on the contrary, constantly changing.

At first there was a sense of euphoria that the western, liberal-democratic system had eventually after the crushing defeat of National Socialist rule emerged as the unexpected victor over the Communist dictatorships. Francis Fukuyama, political scientist and deputy director of the Planning Section of the American State Department, and one of the first to have recognized and promoted developments leading towards German unification went so far as to proclaim in a highly noticed book the "end of history", the victory of liberal democracy⁴.

Even if we do not accept this view, which overestimates the importance of the east-west divide by comparison with the north-south divide, with fundamentalism or the global ecological crisis, it is nevertheless obvious that there are great opportunities in the new situation. The differences to 1789 and 1917 are obvious:

The French Revolution brought Europe more than two centuries of bitter warfare and deepened the division into western and eastern Europe - between which Germany had to find its own way. As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 an even deeper division of Europe developed; areas with sharply opposed forms of economic and social organization and totally different political and ideological systems confronted one another in a tense relationship, culminating in the Cold War. Now, by way of contrast, the fall of the communist dictatorships has come about without war and - with the exception of Rumania - almost without bloodshed. Soviet domination over the middle east-European states has been abolished without creating any new, polarising utopia. The way to European unity, to the general acceptance of the institutions and values of western liberal democracy and to the transition to a market economy appeared open.

In the meantime, however, we have learned that democracy in the former Communist states is by no means secured, and that the attempt to change over to a market economy has led to difficult economic crises and

^{4.} Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1992.

social tensions, and that the political unity of Europe may perhaps not be achieved for decades.

National movements and ideas contributed decisively to the mobilisation of political opposition and thereby to the collapse of Communist domination. On the other hand, the strength of nationalism, so potentially explosive in internal and external politics has once again become powerful. It leads to pressure for the dissolution of multinational states, the extension of national borders and for the expulsion of foreigners - above all in former Yugoslavia but also in some of the successor states of the Soviet Union or within Russia. Especially alarming in this context is the frequently observed affiliation between former Communist cadres and extreme nationalist movements. No solid new international order has substituted itself for the previous international system, that was built on the confrontation between east and west and the oppression of large parts of Europe.

The historian cannot predict what such an order might look like. He can, however, as a warning against overoptimistic expectations, point out that in 1917-18, after the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy, the Ottoman empire and the semi-authoritarian central powers Germany and Austria-Hungary, many people then too believed the world or at least Europe would now be safe for democracy. In reality, however, the newly-created parliamentary democratic states with few exceptions were soon replaced by authoritarian, fascist or totalitarian regimes of the Communist or National Socialist varieties. People's rights of participation were actually reduced in comparison with the period before 1914. And after 1945, the liberation from National-Socialist domination did not lead to the hoped-for independence or to democracy in large parts of Europe.

Many of the long-term problems of Europe and the world will not be solved by the resolution of the east-west confrontation. One problem which remains is how western industrialized countries, with their high wage- and wage-related costs can hold their own in an increasingly global economy against competition from the low-wage countries. It is not yet clear what will be the consequences of the population explosion and, especially, the unequal development of populations in rich and poor countries. Will it lead in the future to an enormous influx of refugees into the rich countries? The strength of fundamentalism, with its disdain of democratic values and accepted conventions is also alarming. And beyond the political-social level, we must think about ecological problems, which are becoming increasingly dramatic. Some of these difficulties are increased by the col-

lapse of the Soviet empire - for example by the unleashing of fundamentalism in the Islamic states of the former Soviet Union or the greater ease with which the mid-European states with their lower wages can penetrate the western industrial markets.

In the case of united Germany, it seems to me that the middle to long-term outlook is rather positive - because it is possible socially to cushion the transition to a market economy through a massive transfer of funds to the new German Länder in the East, and because of the marginal position of the old Communist cadres in the context of a larger Federal Republic. Nevertheless, the de-industrialization of the former GDR, high unemployment, the difficulties involved in rapidly assimilating to a new legal, social and economic system, as well as four and a half decades of a totally different history and way of conceiving history have led to a re-unification crisis, which is what is behind the increase of PDS votes in the most recent elections in the new German Länder in the East.

II

For the historian, as for other human and social scientists, the reunification of Germany came as a complete surprise. The approaching collapse of the GDR was not predicted, nor was it thought to be a realistic possibility. For the systematic social sciences - political science and sociology - and probably also for economics - the now evident inability to forecast the future constitutes a serious challenge to their self understanding. According to the political scientist Klaus von Beyme, "the collapse of real Socialism ... methodologically speaking amounts to a 'black Friday' for social science"⁵. German historians, whose job does not entail predicting the future, can be reproached for the fact that many of them had not only given up on the idea of German unification, but frequently had attempted to find a rational basis in German history for renouncing reunification altogether⁶.

Some saw the division of Germany as the legitimate punishment of German aggression and the crimes of National Socialism - a permanent verdict

5. Klaus von Beyme, *Die vergleichende Politikwissenschaft und der Paradigmenwechsel*, in der politischen Theorie, in: Politische Vierteljahrsschrift, vol. 31, 1990, pp. 457-474, quotation p. 472.

6. See Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Mit gestopften Trompeten. Die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands aus der Sicht westdeutscher Historiker*, in: Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 44, 1993, pp. 683-704.

on German history. In particular it was argued that German responsibility for the First and Second World Wars showed that a strong German nation state in the middle of Europe was incompatible with European equilibrium and the maintenance of peace; and that thus (as in 1648 at the peace of Westphalia and in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna), the order of middle Europe must be determined from the outside, and required a plurality of German states.

With the merging of the Federal Republic in Europe it was thought that Germany might become a model of how successfully to surmount the nation state, discredited as it was by the wars of the 19th and 20th centuries. Following the philosopher Karl Jaspers, who argued as early as 1960 for giving up the idea of reunification as a way of attaining freedom in the GDR⁷, more and more West German historians began to see a contradiction between demands for reunification and any hope of liberalization and mitigating individual suffering within the GDR.

Freedom versus unification: the alternative was incorrectly formulated from the start. Since the GDR was not supported by the vast majority of its people, its continuing survival as a separate state necessitated the establishment of an extensive system of surveillance and terror, the rejection of democratic participation and the closing off of the West by building the Wall in 1961. In contrast to, for example, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the GDR did not in fact form a self sufficient nation and defined itself precisely in opposition to the capitalist, western Federal Republic of Germany.

From its foundation, the GDR tried to appropriate to itself the legacy of the socialist and communist precursors in German history, thus confining itself to narrowly specific parts of German history. With the renunciation of the unity of the German nation at the 8th Congress of the SED in June, 1971, there slowly gained ground (mainly from the end of the 1970s) a new interpretation of history, according to which the whole of German history was usurped and was now regarded as the "historical legacy and the tradition" ("Erbe" und "Tradition") of the GDR⁸. This was particularly evident during the state festivities organized for the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's birth in 1983, and at the re-erection

^{7.} Karl Jaspers, *Die gegenwärtige Lage und ihre Möglichkeiten*, in: Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung. Über Aufgaben deutscher Politik*, München 1960, new edition 1990, pp. 31-38. The article appeared originally in: *Die Zeit*, Septembre 2, 1960.

of the equestrian statue of the former Prussian king Frederick the Great in its former location in the famous street "Unter den Linden". The attempt thus to create a broadly-based national identity did not however succeed. For the majority of its population, as was revealed in 1989-90, the GDR did not in fact constitute a nation on its own. Freedom and democracy, and of course also the hope of prosperity, were rightly seen to be inseparable from reunification.

What errors of judgement follow from the artificial distinction between freedom and reunification were exemplified in the speech given by the leading American historian Fritz Stern (driven from Germany in 1938), on the occasion of the German Parliament's commemoration, in 1987, of the uprising of 17 June, 1953. Stern emphasized that the 17th of June was "an uprising for a better, a freer life," and "for greater humanity" but "not an uprising for reunification"⁹. Today we know, not least from the archives of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi), that this uprising - regarded by certain some younger historians of the former GDR as an "abortive revolution"¹⁰ - has not only been underestimated as regards its length and breadth and depth - in our research and by Stern - but also that the demand for reunification played an important role in the protest movement.

Most of the population of the GDR had never really accepted the division of Germany. Nevertheless, German reunification, the deeper origins, development and consequences of which will be a central focus of future historical research, is only explicable by a coincidence of unusually favorable circumstances. These include the fact that the Soviet Union was badly weakened by overextending its resources, by the invasion of Afghanistan and the arms race with the West, and also by the increasingly evident scler-

8. The most important texts discussing the relation of the GDR to the historical legacy (Erbe) of socialism and the tradition of German history are collected in a chronological order in: Helmut Meier/ Walter Schmidt (eds.), *Erbe und Tradition in der DDR. Die Diskussion der Historiker*, Köln 1989. - For a critical analysis of this discussion compare Ulrich Neuhaüßer-Wespy, *Erbe und Tradition in der DDR. Zum gewandelten Geschichtsbild der SED*, in: Alexander Fischer/Günther Heydemann (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR*, 2 vols., Berlin 1988 and 1990, vol. 1: Historische Entwicklung, Theorie, Diskussion und Geschichtsdidaktik, pp. 129-153.

9. Fritz Stern, *Ein Gedenktag und seine Tabus. Rede zum 17. Juni*, in: Stern, *Der Traum vom Frieden und die Versuchung der Macht. Deutsche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1988, pp. 243-259, esp. pp. 257, 244.

10. Compare Armin Mitter/Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten. Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte*, München 1993, esp. pp. 124, 128 seq.

rosis of its economic system. As a result, it could no longer hold its empire together. Nevertheless, the solution of the German question really devolved on Gorbachev, who was weak enough in the summer of 1990, according to Timothy Garton Ash, “to feel he had to concede German unification within the Western Alliance but still strong enough to push this through at home. Had he been a little stronger, he might not have conceded the deal of the century. Had he been a little weaker, he might no longer have been there to make any deal”¹¹.

The fact that a united Germany obtained Nato membership - the absolute precondition for United States support for German unification and its at first reluctant acceptance by Great Britain and France¹²- was a further lucky circumstance which did not only depend on the relatively weakened position of the Soviet Union. It was also a success of German policy, which had created a basis of trust with Gorbachev, and it was, furthermore, founded on the interests of the east middle-European states, who preferred a Nato-bound and thus disciplined Germany to a free floating neutral Germany.

Finally, an essential factor was that, astonishingly, it proved possible successfully to coordinate the process of internal unification with that of external security, i.e. the dissolution of the rights of the occupying powers over Germany as a whole and in Berlin in particular, as a result of the Two plus Four negotiations. Though not entirely free of violence, this development was on the whole peaceful, without bloodshed, and orderly; and this despite a speed and dynamism that repeatedly caused politicians to abandon their time-schemes and preconceptions. This peaceful development was a condition for the success of the policy of reunification, a fact which is frequently overlooked.

We know from the diary entries of Horst Teltschik, Chancellor Kohl's closest foreign policy advisor, that Gorbachev was very concerned in No-

^{11.} Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name. Germany and the Divided Continent*, New York 1993, p. 363.

^{12.} For the attitude towards German unification taken up by the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada and the major states of the European Union compare the articles in: Josef Becker (ed. with Günther Kronenbitter), *Wiedervereinigung in Mitteleuropa. Außen- und Innenansichten zur staatlichen Einheit Deutschlands*, München 1992; Elisabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall. Germany's Road to Unification*, Washington D.C. 1993. For her attempts to prevent or slow down German unification see the memoirs of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, London 1993, pp. 792-796.

vember 1989, in view of large mass demonstrations, that the situation in Berlin might get out of control and lead to chaos¹³. Those in opposition in the GDR feared after the experiences of the bloody suppression of the rising of June 17th, 1953, the defeat of the reform movements in Hungary 1956 and in Prague 1968 and the crash-down on the opposition in the Tianamen in Peking in June 1989 a military reaction of the Soviet Union in case of any kind of provocation or too radical demands¹⁴. It is in fact difficult to believe that the Soviet troops would have remained in their barracks and refrained from open intervention in support of the GDR leadership, had that leadership moved against the demonstrators, had there been instances of lynch law against the hated exponents of the old regime, or had there been any challenge to the Soviet troops, or had it come to storming the monument to the Soviet Army in 17. Juni street behind the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, or to an infringement of the Soviet Embassy on "Unter den Linden".

The economic conditions of reunification with the rapid take-over of the DM under a very favorable exchange-rate for GDR inhabitants weakened the industrial competitiveness of the east German economy and necessitated high annual transfer payments from Westem to Eastern Germany of more than 150 billion DM for a long period. They were severely criticized, in accordance with the majority of economic experts, which in the first half of 1990 wanted a longer period of adaption and an exchange rate much less favorable to the population of the GDR. But for one thing the full extent of the mess the GDR economy was not known. For another, rapid decisions had to be made, decisions in which political rationale played a more important role than economic rationale. It was important not only to stop mass emigration from the GDR but also consciously to take advantage of the foreign policy moment, and - with the economic, currency and social union becoming effective on July 1st, 1990 - to make the process of German unification irreversible¹⁵. It is nevertheless dou-

^{13.} Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage. Innenansichten der Einigung*, Berlin 1991, esp. pp. 19-20, 23, 27-28, 34.

^{14.} Jens Reich, *Die Kub ist auf dem Eis*, in: *Die Zeit*, November 25, 1994.

^{15.} See the convincing analysis of Wolfram Fischer, *Politische versus ökonomische Vernunft. Wirtschafts- und währungspolitische Entscheidungen im deutschen Einigungsprozeß*, in: Jürgen Kocka/ Hans-Jürgen Puhle/Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zum modernen Sozialstaat. Festschrift für Gerhard A. Ritter zum 65. Geburtstag*, München etc. 1994, pp. 805-830.

btful whether a lengthier period of adaptation, with lower or more flexible exchange rates and consequently lower wages and prices, would really have assisted the entry of the GDR into the western market economy. Clearly, most products of the GDR, even at low prices, were unsaleable. The condition of the GDR economy was much more disastrous than was known at the time. This is not only the present judgement of Western experts, but is also obvious by a highly revealing expertise of Gerhard Schürer, the chairman of the planning committee of the all-powerful policy bureau of the SED from October, 30th, 1989¹⁶. Necessary investments in the infrastructure were not made. The damages done to the environment were in many areas catastrophic. The capital stock of industry was much too old and worn out. There was practically no modern data communication and the technological gap to Western industrial nations was constantly increasing in view of the lack of innovation in the system of planned economy of the GDR. Moreover the GDR was on the verge of a state bankruptcy in view of its high indebtedness in non-socialist foreign countries. The relation of credits and interest payments due in 1989 to exports was 150%, 6 times more than the 25% deemed acceptable. An end to foreign indebtedness would have necessitated according to the mentioned analysis for the SED a reduction of the standard of living in the GDR in 1990 by 25-30%. This would have made the GDR ungovernable¹⁷. There was therefore - even before the near complete breakdown of markets in the Eastern nations 1990/91, on which the GDR economy had relied to a large degree - no alternative to a complete and rapid change of the existing economic policy and the switchover from public to private ownership in order to re-establish the international competitiveness of the economy in the territory of the former GDR.

III

The German unification of 1990 demonstrates clear parallels with, but also distinct differences from, earlier unification processes in 19th- and 20th-century German history and their international context¹⁸. It procee-

¹⁶. Published under the title: '*Schürers Krisenanalyse*', in: Deutschland Archiv 25, 1992, pp. 1112-1120.

¹⁷. Ibid, p. 1119.

ded without the intermediate stage of confederation that was still anticipated in Kohl's ten-point program of 28 November 1989 or (at least in outline) in the proposal by GDR Ministerpräsident Modrow of 17 November 1989 to construct a contractual union of the two German states¹⁹. This differentiates it from the example of the German Confederacy of 1815-1866.

Unification did not occur, as in 1866/67 with the creation of the north-German Bund, as a result of fusing existing states, which adopted a new constitution in common, but by the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic²⁰. It is also a notable feature that within the framework of the north-German Bund, the merged states continued to exist as member states, though with significantly reduced competence; whereas the GDR was not maintained as a unit by itself.

Of especial interest are the international aspects of the unification process. In 1815 the new order in Germany came into being under the influence of the European powers, whose interest lay in weakening the European centre and thus in splitting Germany into several different states.

A provision in the constitution of the north-German Bund of 1867 stated that this Bund could be expanded via the "entry of the south-German states or one such state ... upon a proposal by the "Bundespräsidium" (the federal presidency) through the process of federal legislation". This constitutional provision stood in clear contradiction to Article IV of the Prague peace treaty of August 1866, whereby - on France's insistence - the planned confederacy of south-German states should enjoy an "internationally independent existence." The founding of the German empire was thus made possible solely by means of a war, in which Bismarck succeeded in isolating France and could prevent Austrian intervention.

^{18.} Compare Rainer Wahl, *Die deutsche Einigung im Spiegel der historischen Parallelen*, in: Der Staat, vol. 30, 1991, pp. 181-208.

^{19.} See for the declarations Ingo von Münch (ed. with cooperation of Günter Hoog), *Dokumente zur Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands*, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 57-66, 33-57.

^{20.} For the constitutional problems involved in German unification 1990 see the article of Peter Lerche, p. 194. Der Beitritt der DDR - Voraussetzungen, Realisierung, Wirkungen, in: Josef Isensee/Paul Rirchhoff (eds.), *Handbuch des Staatsrechts der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, vol. VIII. I thank Peter Lerche for allowing me to see the galley proofs of his article.

Similarly, a provision of the Weimar constitution that allowed for the "Anschluß" of German Austria into the German Reich, contradicted the prohibition against Austria's entry in Article 80 of the Versailles treaty. Hitler as we know disregarded this when he proceeded with the Anschluß in 1938.

The Grundgesetz (basic law) of the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949 enshrined in its preamble the demand for reunification; Article 116 declares the common citizenship of all Germans, and Articles 23 and 146 refer to the incomplete, provisional character of the Federal Republic created in the western zone. Corresponding provisions in the 1949 constitution of the DDR were eliminated in 1968 and 1974 - even though in the National Anthem of the DDR (for this reason no longer sung) there was still mention of "Deutschland einig Vaterland" (Germany united fatherland).

The new Germany created after reunification acquired "full sovereignty" over its "internal and external affairs" according the treaty of 12.9.1990 (29) signed by both German states and by the four occupying powers²¹. In the same treaty not only did Germany give up any claims to further territory and recognize its present borders according to international law; it also specifically committed itself to a constitution which would not contradict this regulation. This again reflected historical experience, in that German unification did not merely concern Germans but was also a special concern of international politics.

IV

Let us now discuss the implications for our comprehension of history and for historiography, of the dramatic changes of 1989-91 in general, and of German unification in particular.

It is now more evident than before that history is unpredictable and open-ended, and this should induce in historians greater humility as regar-

²¹. 'Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung in bezug auf Deutschland' September 12, 1990 and 'Erklärung zur Aussetzung der Wirksamkeit der Vier-Mächte-Rechte und Verantwortlichkeiten' October 1, 1990, in: Bundesgesetzblatt 1990, part II, pp. 1318seq., 1331-1332. This treaty became effective on March 16, 1991. The concerned Four Powers however declared already on October 1, 1990 that from the date of unification (on October 3, 1990) until the treaty would have gone into effect their rights and responsibilities for Germany as a whole and for Berlin were suspended.

ds their portrayal and analysis of the course of historical events. All too often we tend to regard what actually happened as the only possible outcome of events, and to interpret history in this light. The events of 1989-91 show that, on the contrary, chance plays an important role in history and that drastic changes of direction, hitherto inconceivable, are altogether possible. History does not add up. Reality is contradictory, it is characterized by twists and turns; it involves the reconciliation of the apparently irreconcilable; it is full of surprises.

The time factor, the use of the favourable moment is of crucial importance in politics. Politics is not a game of chess in which one is obliged to move once the opponent has done so. Instead there are periods of stagnation and periods of accelerated change and the politician who wants to shape the future must know how to wait for the right moment without letting it slip past. As an historian passing judgement on the great protagonists of history, one must be aware that their successes and failures were crucially dependent on the favourable moment.

The events of 1989-91 bring to mind Bismarck's famous dictum that "world history with its great events ... does not proceed like a railroad train at a steady speed. No, it advances in fits and starts, but with irresistible power. You must just, always, keep a lookout for the Lord striding across world history; then jump forward and cling to his coat-tails and get swept along as far as you can"²².

The role of political history and the history of events, but also that of biography have been re-evaluated in the wake of the upheaval of 1989-91. Political events cannot be directly derived from structures and processes, even if as conditioning factors they do demarcate the limits of the possible.

Structural history has thus not become superfluous²³. Firstly, changes in social structures and long-term social processes are all legitimate themes for historical research even if they have no connection with political history. Secondly, no thorough analysis of the breakdown of the Soviet empire and Soviet Union can ignore the fact that it was the economic and

²². Undated statement of the old Bismarck in a conversation with Max Vorberg, quoted with similar statements in: Arnold Oskar Meyer, Bismarcks Glaube. Nach neuen Quellen aus dem Familienarchiv, 4. ed., München 1933, pp. 7, 64-65.

²³. Compare Jürgen Kocka, *Überraschung und Erklärung. Was die Umbrüche von 1989/90 für die Gesellschaftsgeschichte bedeuten könnten*, in: Manfred Hettling/ Claudia Huerkamp/ Hans-Walter Schmuhl (eds.), *Was ist Gesellschaftsgeschichte? Positionen, Themen, Analysen*, München 1991, pp. 11-21.

social crises which became increasingly acute in the 1970s and 1980s that first facilitated or compelled Gorbachev's political reforms. These then plainly escaped from the control of their initiator and made possible the radical changes in east and middle Europe. And who would deny that economic deficits contributed decisively to the collapse of the GDR?

It has further become clear that, contrary to Marxist theory, political action is not simply determined by social and economic factors. Of the greatest relevance to the course of history can be the contingent and spontaneous action often of individuals or small groups, motivated by ideas, values and cultural norms. In general, it was emphasized that besides military and economic power, what counts as immensely important in this era of mass communications for the stability even of non-democratic political systems, is consensus and loyalty, the hopes and expectations of the population.

The relevance of the international context for German history, but also for the history of the middle east-European sphere, is clearly demonstrated by the events of 1989 to 1991. The internal development of Germany (this applies to the period up to 1989, the process of unification and certainly also to the future) is thus decisively influenced by the system of international politics. The mutual interdependence of foreign, external-economic and domestic policy; the bilateral relations of the powers and their conflicts and cooperation within the framework of supranational organisations are thus important subjects of historical research. This will lead to a further revaluation of the often in Germany neglected specialised discipline of the history of international relations; and to a revaluation of international politics in the context of political science.

V

Basic to our understanding of history is, furthermore, the fact that the most significant impetus towards radical upheaval in 1989-91 came not from the pressure of individual social strata and classes, but instead from an entire society's desire for democratic participation and economic growth - and, above all, from the lure of nationhood. Compared with the period before the First World War and the inter-war period, the conflict between capital and labour, between bourgeoisie and proletariat, has clearly in Europe lost its dynamic. This is due to the extent of social change and the communications revolution of recent decades, which has contrib-

buted to a levelling of the ways of living and values, if not of income and property among social groups.

The rebirth of the nation state and of nationalistic movements in the areas no longer under Communist domination is without doubt a development accompanied by significant dangers for peace, freedom and democracy. This is to be seen in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the splitting of Czechoslovakia into two states, and also in those violent repercussions in the successor states of the Soviet Union caused by ethnic rivalries and difficult integration problems affecting often sizeable Russian minorities. The powerful nationalistic factors in movements towards freedom and political self-determination have demonstrated, above all in the east middle-European states, the extent to which nationalism can mobilize people; it remains however unable to determine the intrinsic goals of such a mobilization - the system of politics, economy and society, and those values that uphold the community.

The perversion of the nation state, with its apex in Germany with National Socialism has led Karl Jaspers after the end of the German Empire in 1945 to state that it was the historical mission of the Germans to persuade Europe and the world of the baneful and destructive power of the nation state²⁴. This mission has not succeeded. The hope of many Germans, particularly of my generation, that European integration would act as a substitute for a fatherland has at any rate until now not been realized. Despite the transfer of increasingly significant responsibilities to the European Union, Europe is still a Europe of mother countries, and the nation state has remained the central principle of political order in the European and non-European world. The upheaval of 1989-91 has only served to reinforce this situation.

That this state of affairs is likely to last for the foreseeable future in western and middle Europe is indicated, not only by the emotional ties most people have with their nation state, but also by the failure to develop democratic institutions in the European Union and other supranational institutions. Certain things are still best supplied by a constitutional, liberal, democratic and social nation state. These include democratic participation; the non-violent resolution of political, economic and social conflicts; the guarantee of human and civil rights and protection of minorities; legal se-

²⁴. Karl Jaspers, *Deutsches Nationalbewußtsein und Wiedervereinigung*, in: Jaspers, *Freiheit und Wiedervereinigung*, pp. 39-56.

scurity, and also the social security of the individual. As a social community the European Union is still wholly underdeveloped²⁵.

And for Germany, now united, it seems to me - despite signs of aggressive xenophobia in certain sectors of the population - that prospects are much brighter than they were in the past. Germany has unambiguous borders for the first time in its recent history, accepted with a few exceptions - by its population and also by its neighbours. The people, the territory and the authority of the state are in congruence. Its constitution and political institutions are democratic and characterized by the rule of law, and this goes fundamentally unchallenged. These institutions have proved successful during the history of the former Federal Republic, for over forty years; as has the economic and social order. Furthermore, Germany is firmly tied to the Western community primarily through the European Union and Nato, and the values and norms of this community are shared by the overwhelming majority of the population. There is thus a chance that the diffuse concept of nationhood, overshadowed in Germany in the past by cultural, ethnic and racist elements, will come to be dominated by the element promoting the democratic self-determination of each citizen; and that a heterogeneous German nation state will build the framework of an open society of citizens of different races, ethnic backgrounds and religions.

But in general it is true of east and middle Europe and parts of Central Asia that when the Soviet tanks disappeared, the past and hence traditional nationalisms came alive again, along with their destructive, destabilizing power and also with earlier geopolitical constellations. Decades of Communist rule have clearly not mollified old antagonisms and passions: they had not been abandoned, but just superficially covered up. The study of those long-term historical continuities that are preserved despite the ruptures of revolution and changing systems of government remains a central task of the historian's profession. A new de Tocqueville is called for²⁶.

For German historians, the upheaval should also provide an impetus to overcome their provincialism and national introspection, and to apply

^{25.} Compare Gerhard A. Ritter, *Der Sozialstaat. Entstehung und Entwicklung im internationalen Vergleich*, second ed., München 1991, pp. 196-200; Bernd Schulte, *Die Entwicklung der europäischen Sozialpolitik*, in: Heinrich-August Winkler/Hartmut Kaelble (eds., Nationalismus-Nationalitäten-Supernationalität, Stuttgart 1993, pp. 261-287.

^{26.} Compare Jürgen Kocka, *Folgen der deutschen Einigung für die Geschichts- und Gesellschaftswissenschaften*, in: Deutschland Archiv, vol. 25, 1992, pp. 793-802.

themselves more intensely to the history of east and southern Europe, and to the non-European world too.

Along with re-evaluating the categories 'nation' and 'nation state', the much criticised concept of modernization will perhaps experience a renaissance when analysing historical developments in modern industrial societies. It is however virtually beyond dispute that universal development in the direction of a growth-orientated, dynamic, and tendentially egalitarian democratic industrial and service society of the western type is not to be achieved. This is because in most countries of the Third World the institutional and conceptual preconditions for it are absent. It is also doubtful whether such a development, were it at all possible, would be desirable, in view of the tribulations and ecological costs involved in such a modernization.

However, when analysing the weaknesses of the political, economic and social systems of the former Eastern Bloc states, including the GDR, it has proved fruitful to use the concept of the lack of differentiations of institutions, derived from modernization theory²⁷. The concentration of power in one state party which claims authority over all areas of state, society and the economy; the principle of hierarchical decision-making; and especially the centralized bureaucratic direction of the economy: these have all revealed themselves to be obstacles to development. Similarly, the absence of autonomous intermediary organizations such as pressure groups and self-governing entities, the centrally directed selection of a functioning elite on the basis of politically acceptable behavior rather than on performance - and finally the absence of an independent public opinion - has obviously led to a retreat from rational criteria, to inflexibility and a lack of innovation, as well as to the frequently grotesque misallocation of scarce resources.

Take for example the increasing burden on the economy of subsidizing items such as basic foodstuffs, rents, transportation and children's clothing in the GDR. This benefited the well-to-do as well as the poor and was therefore not only economically senseless but also very anti-social. Another example is the intense concentration of economic resources on the deve-

^{27.} Compare M. Rainer Lepsius, *Die Institutionenordnung als Rahmenbedingung der Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, in: Hartmut Kaelble/Jürgen Kocka/Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 17-30; Klaus Müller, *Nachholende Modernisierung? Die Konjunkturen der Modernisierungstheorie und ihre Anwendung auf die Transformation der osteuropäischen Gesellschaften*, in: Leviathan, vol. 19, 1991, pp. 261-291.

lopment of the microchip at the expense of maintaining and extending the infrastructure as well as largely abandoning investment in other industrial plant. This irrational decision can only be explained by aspirations to self-sufficiency and prestige. The first 256-kilobyte chips made in the GDR had a production cost of 536DM each, of which the user paid 16 DM (already 100 percent above the world market price), while the state paid a 520 DM subsidy²⁸.

VI

The main task of German historians in the coming decades is to research the history of the GDR and its place in the continuities and discontinuities of German history. In a survey done in the second half of 1993, 759 current projects on GDR history were registered²⁹.

Without doubt these and further research projects will also significantly alter our picture of the history of the former Federal Republic as well as of east-west relations in the decades between 1945 and 1991. Since its collapse and the opening of the archives, a mass of sources and information has become available for research into the GDR.

In the meantime there has begun intensive discussion concerning the categories, methods and questions to be raised which can be considered relevant for the study of GDR history. In contrast to developments before 1989, when writing the history of the Federal republic and of the GDR came more and more to resemble two separate disciplines, today's developments tend to emphasize the link between, the interlocking of the two German states. It is a question of actual relations as much as of reciprocal effect on each other.

The Federal Republic relied heavily on consciously distancing itself from the negative counter-image of the GDR when it came to legitimizing its political, economic and social system. It thus attained stability through the challenge from the east, as was the case for the Western democracies in general. The GDR was even more fixated on the Federal Republic and resented its immense attraction on its own population. Since the majority

^{28.} Günter Schabowski, *Der Absturz*, Berlin 1991, p. 126.

^{29.} Th. Heimann (with the cooperation of Ralf Eicher and Stefan Wortmann), Forschungsprojekte zur DDR-Geschichte. Ergebnisse einer Umfrage des Arbeitsbereiches DDR-Geschichte im Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung (MZES) der Universität Mannheim, 1994.

of the population of the GDR saw in the Federal Republic a free and prosperous German state, the Federal Republic constituted a destabilizing element, as evident in the flight or emigration of about 3,4 million people from GDR territory to the Federal Republic and west Berlin between 1945-1961³⁰; and finally of course in the mass movement within the GDR for union with the west German state in 1989-90. The lack of legitimacy on account of the refusal of democratic rights of participation and the failure of its economic system could not be compensated for, as for example in Poland and Hungary, by emphasising the national community of citizens. The artificial concept of a special socialist German nation never struck root.

Besides examining the relations and interactions of the two German states, their points of connection and contradistinction, historical research will naturally continue to give separate treatments of their history. An increasing emphasis will probably also be laid on the influence of international relations, and above all the fact that each state was locked in a different power bloc. The integration of the Federal Republic into the western bloc was probably at least as important as the GDR's integration into the eastern bloc.

Finally, we can attempt to set the GDR as well as the Federal Republic in the broader perspective of German history. We can ask how great was the effect in the GDR of specifically German traditions such as the strivings of the working class movement, the consciously unpolitical stance of many educated citizens or the legacy of authoritarian structures and a corresponding mentality and political behaviour. Was the GDR the more "German" of the two post-war states?

The German historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen has tried to explain the relative weakness of the opposition movement in the GDR and the modest success of attempts to ease communist rule before October 1989, as compared with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia by stressing such a specific German mortgage³¹. It is my view however that insufficient attention has been paid in this respect to the continual loss of the GDR opposition's lifeblood through the flight and, later, the actual expulsion of

^{30.} Compare Helge Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945/49-1961. Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis zum Bau der Berliner Mauer*, Düsseldorf 1994, pp. 42-48.

^{31.} Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichte*, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B 29-30/93, pp. 20-29.

dissidents to the Federal Republic - which most affected active and critical elements of the population. On the other hand, Mommsen was right to criticise (and T. Garton Ash had already made the point)³² the one-sided orientation of the Federal Republic's eastern policy for being directed nearly exclusively at the established governments and more or less ignoring the dissidents. But above all, more emphasis should be placed on the completely different national situation, in comparison with Poland or Hungary. In the GDR, the demand for national self-determination so effective in the east-central European states could not be tolerated in view of the absence of a national identity within the GDR. This amounted to a taboo on the whole question of nationhood, which in the context of the existing system made any real reform impossible. By ceasing to define the state in terms of class and of socialism and by allowing a democratic right to self-determination, the GDR would be giving up its very existence. Altogether, in my opinion, what prevailed in the GDR was clearly the break with the German past and a servile emulation of the Soviet model.

The method of comparison will probably prove a valuable instrument for our deeper understanding of the history of the GDR. At the same time, it has to be emphasized that, contrary to popular misconceptions, comparison means discussing and analysing similarities *and* differences: it is not a case of simply setting them side by side. And of course the criteria for comparison must be as precise as possible.

The first object of comparison for the GDR must be the old Federal Republic. Such a comparison is especially fascinating for the social sciences, since the two German states resulting from an artificial division in 1945 can be regarded as a kind of trial arrangement for testing the concrete implications of different political, economic and social systems³³.

In future, comparisons will also be drawn between the Nazi and the SED dictatorships³⁴. Such comparisons, as yet little explored and naturally taboo in the DDR before 1989, partly fall back on the older concept of totalitarianism. In making comparisons of this kind, it must be taken into ac-

³². Ash, *In Europe's Name*, pp. 367-370.

³³. Compare Hans Günter Hockerts, *Zeitgeschichte in Deutschland. Begriff, Methoden, Themenfelder* in: Ilko-Sascha Kowalcuk (ed.), *Paradigmen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft. Ringvorlesung an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, Berlin 1994, pp. 136-167, esp. pp. 161-162; Claus Offe, *Die deutsche Vereinigung als 'natürliches Experiment'*, in: Bernd Giesen/Claus Leggewie (eds.), *Experiment Vereinigung. Ein sozialer Großversuch*, Berlin 1991, pp. 77-86.

count that the Nazi system originated from German roots and was deeply entrenched in German history, whereas the SED dictatorship was imposed from the outside. Further, fundamental differences are that the GDR, despite the inhuman features of its system, never attempted state-directed mass murder, nor did it unleash a war of aggression accompanied by the cruel repression of the conquered peoples. Finally, the socio-historical and intellectual roots of the two ideologies and their social and economic substance were fundamentally different. And there was no figure in the GDR leadership who played Hitler's role of charismatic leader.

On the other hand, there are clear parallels: the rejection of liberal, democratic institutions, the absence of the rule of law, the repeated violation of human and civil rights and the establishment of the dictatorship of a state party. Both systems were widely successful in repressing intermediate autonomous organizations by enforcing political conformity and establishing a broad system of surveillance and terror to crush all opposition. Moreover, both states attempted to extend their domination via the systematic use of modern means of mass communication to mobilize the population and win it over to the goals of the regime.

Finally, comparative studies can demonstrate how far, with totally different ideological premises, each regime succeeded or failed or became bogged down in the attempt to control society and to create a "new human being". The failures and hold-ups can be accounted for by the inefficiency and internal contradictions of these systems, the rivalry of poorly co-ordinated centres of power and the ambitions of rival leaders, but also by the resistance of the governed and their capacity to evade the demands of the regime. The potential for resistance seems to have been significantly greater in the GDR, thanks to a less effective propaganda, economic weakness and the positive contrast offered by the Federal Republic. This is true despite the long duration of SED rule and the density of its systems of surveillance and terror.

Besides questions relating to structure and experience in comparison with the Nazi dictatorship, the entirely neglected work of drawing parallels and differences between the GDR and the Soviet Union or other states in the eastern bloc can naturally be very useful and fruitful.

³⁴. For a discussion of similarities and differences between the two German dictatorships compare Jürgen Kocka, *Nationalismus und SED-Diktatur im Vergleich*, in: Kocka, *Vereinigungskrise. Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart*, Göttingen 1995, pp. 91- 101.

It is yet too early to expect final results of the recent intensive study of the GDR. However, it already seems clear that our picture of the east-German state will be even more dismal than that drawn by former west-German research not to speak of the completely misleading picture given by GDR-historians working to legitimize the GDR regime. The extent of the surveillance and repression of the population, the one-sided privileges granted to the Nomenklatura at the expense of the majority, the poor economic performance and the neglect of the infrastructure, not to mention the thoroughgoing exploitation and devastation of the environment, has become more and more obvious. False, too, is the frequently argued view of former adherents of the regime according to which a relatively democratic initial phase with wide popular support was followed by a later, contrasting phase when the regime got tougher and more dissolute. Although the apparatus for surveillance was not as yet fully in place, in the early years repression was even harsher than in the later years of the GDR, when the population had to be granted a certain amount of leeway. On the other hand it would certainly be incorrect to make the same error as has often been made in writing the history of the Weimar Republic: namely to view everything as leading up to the collapse of the state, thereby ignoring the different phases of the history of the GDR and alternative ways it could have developed.

In contrast to the former historiography on the GDR, which concentrated primarily on the system of government and political history, in future more emphasis is likely to be given to economic history (without ignoring the decisive impact of the political, legal and social contexts on economic events); and to the social history of a society largely dominated by the political system³⁵. In contrast to the social history of democratic pluralistic societies, here what is required is not so much a study of the social processes which largely determine political organization, but the study of those political processes which determine the social. The concept of generations and specifically generational experience in the history of the GDR will probably also prove its usefulness. Already it has become clear that not only

^{35.} Compare the remarks of Jürgen Kocka, *Ein deutscher Sonderweg. Überlegungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, in: Kocka, Vereinigungskrise, p. 102. For the problems of a social history of the GDR compare further Sigrid Meuschel, *Überlegungen zu einer Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 19, 1993, pp. 5-14; Ralph Jessen, *Die Gesellschaft im Staatsozialismus. Probleme einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 21, 1995, pp. 96- 110.

were the political and economic systems in the GDR and the former Federal Republic completely different but that in many ways the two had developed in completely divergent directions; this applies for example to the conception of the role of women and of the family in society, the place of the company or the Church in the life of the individual, - or in the system of social security and the regulation of employment.

The most important task of the new Federal Republic in the coming decades is probably to attain the internal unification of Germany and to prevent that there will be a lasting West-East difference - similar to the one dividing Italy between North and South since the establishment of the modern Italian nation state in 1860. This involves not only surmounting the enormous structural problems resulting from the transformation of the GDR to a market-oriented non-Communist system, which have so far led to a dramatic de-industrialization and a high level of unemployment. It also involves overcoming the psychological difficulties inherent in the sudden and traumatic adaption to a new legal, economic and social system and the different values and ways of the new society.

The internal alienation of Germany's two parts has one of its major causes in the divided past and consequent different historical experience, but also in the differing perception of German history before 1945. An example with regard to this last point is the way in which the Nazi period is dealt with in the two parts of Germany³⁶. Each state took National Socialism as a negative reference system for the construction of its own identity. In the former Federal Republic, where the slogan "Bonn is not Weimar" soon gained general currency, the intention was - as can be seen in many provisions of the Basic Law/Grundgesetz³⁷ - to correct the errors of the Weimar Republic and establish a viable and stable parliamentary democracy and to prevent any repetition of a catastrophe similar to National Socialism. Although the really intensive and broad discussion of the Nazi past described as "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" (self-critical dealing with the past) began

³⁶. For the different ways of dealing with the history of the Nazi period in the Federal Republic, the GDR and Austria see M. Rainer Lepsius, *Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des 'Großdeutschen Reiches'*, in: Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland. Sozialhistorische Konstellationsanalysen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Göttingen 1993, pp. 229-245.

³⁷. Compare Friedrich Karl Fromme, *Von der Weimarer Verfassung zum Bonner Grundgesetz. Die verfassungspolitischen Folgerungen des Parlamentarischen Rates aus Weimarer Republik und nationalsozialistischer Diktatur*, second ed., Tübingen 1962.

relatively late, ultimately the Federal Republic, as legal successor to the German Empire, accepted collective responsibility and a duty to make payments especially to Jewish victims of National Socialism. As a permanent warning, and starting-point for the analysis of its own system's weaknesses, the Nazi period continues to this day to play an essential role in discussion.

In the GDR, the concept of Fascism was used to universalize National Socialism, enabling the east German state to establish itself as an "anti-fascist" state of workers and peasants outside German history³⁸. Responsibility for the Nazi take-over and their crimes was not laid at the door of its own population, but instead on the shoulders of the monopoly capitalists, the militarists and the Junkers - all of them having been eliminated in the GDR.

While in the Federal Republic the concept of "Totalitarianism" was employed to trace the similarities between the Nazi and the GDR dictatorships, the defamatory term "Fascist" was used in the GDR, especially in the 1950s and 60s, to denounce the Federal Republic, but also its own dissidents. Thus even the uprising of June 17, 1953 was officially judged to be a "fascist putsch" initiated and organized from the outside³⁹. Furthermore, the GDR tried with some success by invoking its so-called "anti-fascism" to provide itself with a basis, extending socially beyond the working class, and to justify itself historically to the outside world. This concept of "anti-fascism" was widely employed politically and differently interpreted according to specific political intention. This helped prevent any internal confrontation or discussion of the Nazi past and, particularly, of the mass murder of the Jews, in terms of common German history. The GDR citizen got the feeling that he had nothing to do with all this. Hitler, it seemed, was a West German.

In many other respects too we can see great differences in historical awareness between people in the new and the old Federal states. These differences, which also have a generational aspect, have radically affected va-

³⁸. Jürgen Danyel, *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Gesellschaftliche Ausgangslagen und politische Dispositionen für den Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten nach 1949*, in: Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Historische DDR-Forschung. Aufsätze und Studien*, Berlin 1993, pp. 129-147; see further Agnes Blänsdorf, *Zur Konfrontation mit der NS-Vergangenheit in der Bundesrepublik, der DDR und Österreich. Entnazifizierung und Wiedergutmachungsleistungen*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 16-17/87, pp. 3-18.

³⁹. See Mitter/Wolle, *Untergang*, esp. pp. 153 seq.

lues, viewpoints and orientations. The experience of a past divided for more than four decades, with all the threats it has posed to the internal unity of the German people, cannot be abrogated by the historical profession, which in any case does not presume to establish a society's meaning and identity, or by historical instruction in school. To construct a realistic picture of this divided past nevertheless presents contemporary German historians in the coming decades with an enormous challenge. An even more important task imposed by the radical upheaval of 1989-91 on all not only German historians is generally to re-examine our ideas concerning the broad outlines of historical development and the forces underlying them, as well as our categories and methods of description and analysis.

It remains to be seen if the experience 1989-91 of "history in the making"⁴⁰, fascinating not only to the historian, will help us in this task or rather, given the absence of critical distance, weaken our judgement. One thing is however clear: the study of history is in for a boom.

⁴⁰. See the brilliant article of Arnold Esch, *Geschichte im Entstehen. Der Historiker und die Erfahrung der Gegenwart*, in: Udo Wengst (ed.), *Historiker betrachten Deutschland. Beiträge zum Vereinigungsprozeß und zur Hauptstadtdiskussion (Februar 1990-Juni 1991)*, Bonn/Berlin 1992, pp. 17- 29.