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PAST *to* PRESENT

The Journal of the Teesdale History Research Group

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TEESDALE HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

Contents

This journal is the product of the work of the Teesdale History Research Group that has met each week in school since 2016 and is made up of students from years 9 to 13.

The articles in the journal represent the personal opinions of the authors and do not represent the views of Teesdale School as a whole.

A back catalogue of volumes can be accessed at ***www.teesdaleschool.co.uk/curriculum/subjects/history****.*

Foreword

In 2020 the Teesdale History Research Group will be working in collaboration with the Albrecht-Ernst-Gymnasium school in Oettingen in the Bayern region of Bavaria.

Our German friends will be visiting Teesdale School from March 8th-13th and we will be visiting them in the autumn term of next academic year.

The project that we will be working on is entitled 'Revolution and Evolution – The impact of industrial and technological change on rural communities.' Expect to see more about this project in the spring issue of this journal.

In this issue we continue the theme of links with Germany with a focus on the Berlin Wall. In November 2019 the world commemorated the 30th anniversary of its fall.

Editors

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The Story of the Berlin Wall

Jessica Carter and Evie Arundel, Year 9

Construction of the Berlin Wall began at two o'clock in the morning on Sunday the 13th of August 1961. The East German soldiers put a barbed wire fence along what would become the border between East and West Berlin. It was to be a guarded, concrete barrier that physically and ideologically divided the city.

In 1949 Germany was two separate countries: The Federal Republic of Germany on the west run by the Allies and the German Democratic Republic in the east run by the Soviet Union, also known as GDR. Berlin was originally in East Germany; however, it was still shared between Britain, France America and the Soviet Union. When things started to develop, the city became the main route for the unaffected East Germans to the West. Thousands of people went through it, it became known as the "Berlin emigration loophole", so to try and prevent it the GDR introduced passport laws in 1957 attempting to stop or reduce the amount moving, nevertheless it did the opposite of this. The laws encouraged movement from east to west meaning that more people were trying to get through the capital. Up to 90 percent of all refugees were going from the east to the west.

When the wall was built it separated not only Berlin but it divided Germany, it became the division of Europe, the division of the communist East and the democratic West. Each side had very different views of the wall. The East saw it as a protective barrier that separated its people from fascists who were intent on stopping the 'will of the people' to build a socialist state in East Germany. The West, however, saw it as a prison wall. The finished wall was 66 miles in length and was 3.6 meters high, there was more than 41 miles of barbed wire fencing and more than 300 manned lookout towers.

When the wall suddenly appeared, it did not only separate the country but families were separated, Berlin workers could not get to work and depending where you were you could have lost your home as well. It all caused absolute chaos and confusion. The guards that were based there were given the orders to shoot anyone who tried to make an escape.

As the wall stood for longer and longer, people began to try and get over it in various different ways. These daring tales became rather popular in Western media stories. However, not all the escape attempts were successful, the first person to die while trying to escape was killed on August the 24th 1961. This was the first, but there were many more to come. Over the years the wall stood, hundreds of people died trying to get over the wall to the opposite side.

The wall finally fell in 1989, in the midst of revolutions and by this point the Soviet Union was hanging by a thread. Five days prior to the fall half a million people had gathered in East Berlin in a mass protest. The East German leaders tried to dissolve the tension and return back to the normal rules, yet they were losing their superiority and failed to do so. When the wall fell on the 9th of November people rushed through the wall to the west side and were greeted by the residents, after standing strong for 28 years the wall fell and the people who had been separated were finally reunited with their families with emotions flowing. Many climbed the wall at the Brandenburg gate but some were also chipping away at the wall with their own hammers and pickaxes.

The Berlin Wall and art as protest

Sadie Askwith

Teesdale alumna and Second Year Art History student at the University of Manchester

When examining the artwork and graffiti on the Berlin Wall, I decided to explore the format of the mural first as it is something I've been researching closely for my final deadline of this term and equally a format of public artwork I find incredibly interesting.

Murals have historically been viewed as 'low-art', art work for the masses, and are not considered to be valuable or thought of as 'Fine-Art'. The format has been long used by artists, movements and governments alike to spread a political message. They are described by David Conrad as 'an art that is accessible to all, that relates to current or historical events or experiences, and that expresses deeply felt aspirations or visions for the future'.

Political murals are usually painted in various styles of realism, which makes the messages they portray easy to understand for the public audience. This audience has historically been people of lower and working classes who, in cases such as the early 1920s Zapasta murals in Mexico, were illiterate.

Murals have been used throughout history to disseminate a political message or protest against a political power, from the Mexican Muralists working for a communist government in the 1920s to more recent pieces by female Iraqi artists in Baghdad against government corruption. In Berlin, this was no different, as the Berlin wall is at this moment the largest open-air gallery in the world and features artworks from muralists all over the globe.

No longer a symbol of division, the wall memorialises the turbulent history of East and West Berlin and the reunification of Germany. Featuring works from artists such as Thierry Noir, Dmitri Vrubel and Birgit Kinder. These works show people attempting to escape East Berlin and in Kinder's work use motifs such as the Trabant Car symbolic of East Germany, painted breaking through the wall. The murals situation in the public, however, means as a format they often invite controversy.

Many pieces on the Berlin wall have been vandalised, with one of the most iconic pieces 'The Fraternal Kiss' by Vrubel having to be repainted due to vandalism in 2009. Berlin's genuine subversive artworks also face a new kind of threat, that which comes with the gentrification of Berlin's public art spaces.

In Paul Hockenos' writing he describes how Berlin's rich history of genuine public art-action is becoming over-ridden by disingenuous, 'fake, commodified art', with businessmen and local officials commissioning graffiti artists to paint new cold-war esque murals on the sides of businesses in order to increase foot-fall. Thus simultaneously gentrifying the spaces that once were the sites of genuine public art. The story of the mural in Berlin's history can be seen to be still evolving today, and raises questions of what public-art really defines.

Sadie says:

"I've been studying History of Art for almost two years, and I would encourage anyone looking into a history degree to branch out a little and incorporate some art research into their practice. As a subject, Art History incorporates the visual arts and their history, but also politics, anthropology, architecture, archaeology and pop-culture into a mish-mash discipline with some of the most interesting reading I've ever encountered. When using a piece of artwork as a source, it is not only the aesthetic elements and materials that must be analysed – the work's historical context, the biography of the artist, how the artwork was first received, and the purpose of the artwork are also considered in depth to create a broad and complex detective's map of the moment in question."

The growth of the AfD and Germany's east/west divide

Will Wood, Year 13

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) became the first party to the right of the dominant CDU/ CSU coalition to enter the Bundestag since 1957 when they gained 12.6% of the vote in 2017.

Classifying the AfD is difficult due to their internal divisions between relatively moderate politicians and those with a more far-right persuasion. Having grown from opposition to the failures of the Eurozone and as a mildly Eurosceptic alternative to Merkel on the right of German politics, the party is now undoubtedly more nationalistic and populist in tone and places a strong emphasis on opposing Islam in German society. The party also embraces various socially conservative ideas like the importance of the traditional nuclear family. Perhaps the best term to describe the party is as right-wing populists or national populists.

It is easy to interpret the 2017 result as a backlash against the approach of Chancellor Merkel to the refugee crisis and the high levels of immigration that followed. While this was undoubtedly a key factor in driving support for the AfD, their rise cannot be separated from the continuing divisions between the East and West of Germany after reunification. The continuing regional inequality in German society provides the long-term platform for such insurgencies rather than any short-term, transient events.

While the fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to signal a new dawn for Germany, society in the country continues to be divided upon East-West lines. A result of the Communist regime in East Germany means that today there is distinct inequality between East and West. In the East wages are approximately at 80% of the level in the West and the economy is generally weaker. The sense of widespread societal decline in comparison to the more affluent West has encouraged internal migration, with 1.2 million people leaving the East to move to the West between 1989 and 2001. This has left the population in the former GDR older and with a pervasive sense of decay.

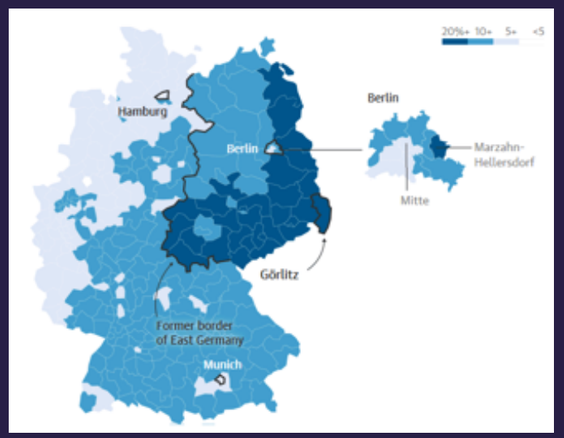
The former East-West border co-ordinates unerringly with AfD support, with votes for the party much more prevalent in the former East Germany, as the map shows. The only state they won was located in the East, with 27% of the vote in Saxony.

The deeper reasons for this can be explained by the work of Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin in their book "National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy". They use the concept of "Four D's" to explain support for National Populist parties and politicians in Western societies. These are an increasing distrust of political elites, concerns about relative deprivation, fears about the destruction of their national or local community and dealignment from mainstream political parties which all encourage support for National Populists. These four aspects map well onto the growth of the AfD in East Germany.

The sense that politicians and the media care little for their concerns, in comparison to the demands of the West, is certainly strong in East Germany. Their concerns about relative deprivation are entirely valid; in the East there is more poverty and less opportunities which contributes to a robust sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing political system.

The fears about changes to their community embody more closely recent developments, particularly the response to the refugee crisis, immigration and Islam. T

hese sentiments may be more acute in the East due to demographic fears, with an aging white population fearing becoming a minority to younger, more ethnically diverse newcomers. The dealignment from traditional



The growth of the AfD and Germany's east/west divide

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parties is in full flow across Germany. Like centre-left parties across the continent the SPD is struggling, achieving its worst post-war result in 2017, and is weaker in the East of Germany. There has been a surge in support for the Green party in the last couple of years and the SPD may be in terminal decline, creating a distinct sense of flux in German politics.

The introduction of East Germany into the party system after reunification restarted party loyalties relatively afresh in the region and will have made it easier to change allegiance to a challenger party. Therefore the rise of the AfD is predicated on wider social trends common across Western democracies but in the specific context of the East-West divide in German society.

What remains to be seen is the long-term fate of the AfD and whether they can be a fixture in German politics. The view that they were beyond the pale, a party too willing to cross normative boundaries in German politics in relation to German nationalism, may well be weakening with some voices within the CDU calling for more co-operation at the state level. What will be fascinating is if at the federal level the CDU is faced with either opposition or entering government with the AfD, and whether their opposition to the party melts away as a result. The long-term, East-West divisions in German society suggests that the AfD, or a similar party able to harness the same factors, may be here to stay.

Reflections on a visit to Berlin in March 2014

Dr Simon Henderson

I was ten years old when the Berlin wall fell and I have a vivid memory of the television images of one jubilant Berliner standing atop the rapidly disintegrating structure.

As he enthusiastically brought a pick-axe down onto the masonry, fragments of the edifice of division fell onto the ground below and provided a potent symbol of the reunification of a city and the harbinger of new possibilities for Europe and the world.

That defining moment, the end of the Cold War and the rapid advance of globalisation, seemed to bring new possibilities for a shrinking world where the barriers of difference could be broken by the intrinsic hope of shared humanity. The rise of the internet brought peoples and economies closer together and a new millennium brought boundless opportunity. The 'war on terror' replaced the Cold War after the al-Qaeda attack on America on September 11th 2001, and the collective will of the West to protect the freedoms of democratic society was renewed despite some worrying tendencies towards intolerance. After the destructive and disastrous interventions in the Middle East in the first decade of the twenty-first century the Presidency of Barack Obama seemingly confirmed the triumph of possibility and of hope over fear. Nevertheless, it was in Berlin in 2008, in a speech in front of thousands of admirers on his way to winning the keys to the White House that Obama warned of the fragility of the spirit of freedom, and the co-operation across national borders and political ideologies that the fall of the wall symbolised. 'In this new world, dangerous currents have swept along faster than our efforts to contain them.' He said, before warning, 'that is why we cannot afford to be divided.'

When I visited Berlin in 2014 I was struck by the openness of the city. There was a conscious celebration of the embrace of freedom and liberalism and the rejection of division and fear. To the extent, as Sadie explores in her article above, that there was a commercialism about the recognition of Berlin's past. The fall of the wall was as much a tourist attraction as it was a reminder of the continued struggle to protect unity from those who seek to divide. It would be disingenuous to claim to have detected a sense of complacency about the inherent certainty of the resilience of liberal democracy during that Easter holiday visit because in truth my own naivety prohibited such insight. I was so unwavering in my belief in the truth that we were living in times when sensible people would continue the advance of a centrist consensus that celebrated and protected an inclusive, diverse and open society that I could not conceive of what was coming, nor could I fully appreciate the extent of the backlash against what I regarded as self-evident truths.

I do remember noting, as Will highlights in his excellent article on the Afd, the aesthetic difference between East and West Berlin and the continued variance of the physical environment on either side of where the wall had stood even twenty-five years after it had fallen. My over-riding response to this was to analyse it in the historical context, to consider the long-term legacy of the impact of communist versus free-market economic and political policy. I did not fully appreciate what this reality meant for the people of the different sections of the city and how they viewed the post-wall political consensus. Sitting in the early spring sun that bathed the Tiergarten, I was swept up in the slightly self-indulgent celebration of freedom that was all around me in beautiful Berlin.

Five and a half years later seems like a lifetime removed from those moments. The result of the EU referendum has brought unprecedented political division and discord to the UK that seems unlikely to fade easily. The partisan politics of the United States that became uglier in the late twentieth century have come to dominate the entire political landscape. The fall of the wall symbolised the acceleration of the process of globalisation that was already well under way. The forces unleashed by this process have brought challenges and questions that few could have foreseen in 1989. Economic dislocation and the fragmentation of traditional identities have left many feeling marginalised and without a voice. The rise of populist politics has harnessed much of this frustration and smashed the political consensus.

So here we are thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall that brought the East and the West together and signalled the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Yet in many western democracies the centre ground has been deserted as political solutions are articulated from further right and left than at any time since the twentieth century. The relationship between Russia and the West exhibits a mutual distrust and barely veiled hostility characterised by cyber subterfuge, misinformation and geo-political discord. So the wall came down but new seeds of division have taken root in the decades that followed. Those pick axes chipped away at that most potent symbol of disunion but to preserve freedom, civility, tolerance and the reality that there is far more that unites people than divides them, requires vigilant maintenance. Berlin's story is one of struggle against disunity that is far from complete.

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