

The German Times

A GLOBAL NEWSPAPER FROM BERLIN

October 2019

ISSN 1864-3973

Germany

- how to |
- how to sharpen a hand plane
- how to ride a bike
- how to build the world's fastest car

Traveling bell bottoms

How a woman wandered the world, honed her craft and followed a great tradition

[Read more >>](#)

Man on steel

How a Brit toured the Iron Curtain on an East German shopping bike

[Read more >>](#)

His way or the highway

How a scion of the Porsche family towered over the German car industry for decades

[Read more >>](#)

Lousy levies

The specter of a new Cold War between the US and China is lurking

BY THEO SOMMER

Trade wars are good and easy to win, US President Donald Trump boasted in one of his toxic tweets. He confirmed his message last month: "We will soon be winning big on Trade and everyone knows that, including China!"

Yet in reality, the grand deal with the People's Republic, which has been Trump's target for more than two years, has turned out to be ever-more elusive. The tariff dispute has tipped over into a full-blown trade war, a currency war and an incipient Cold War between the incumbent superpower United States and the rising superpower China. Their rivalry may well dominate global geopolitics in the next three decades.

In his first foreign policy speech, back in 2016, presidential candidate Trump bragged: "We have the leverage. We have the power over China, economic power, and people don't understand it. And with that economic power we can rein [them] in and we can get them to do what they have to do." Reducing the huge US trade deficit with China – which actually grew from \$375 billion in 2017 to \$440 billion in 2018 – was his main concern. To bring it down, he thought – vainly, as it turned out – imposing punitive tariffs was the most efficient lever. A barrage of tariff increases has become the hallmark of his administration.

He started in January 2018 by raising levies on washing machines and solar panels. In March, he slapped 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum. In July, a 25-percent tariff was imposed on Chinese import goods worth \$50 billion; in September, the US announced a 10-percent tariff on \$200 billion worth of goods, increasing to 25 percent at the end of the year. This hike was postponed temporarily to give the negotiators a chance to reach agreement but put into effect in May 2019, with Washington claiming that China had reneged on deals already agreed upon. In July, Trump tweeted that "China is letting us down in that they have not been buying the agricultural products from our great Farmers that they said they would." In August, he announced on Twitter that an additional 10-percent tariff would be levied on the "remaining \$300 billion of goods." Some of them were postponed in order to avoid harming American

Christmas shoppers, but about half were imposed on Sept. 1. Beginning on Oct. 15, tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods will be ratcheted up from 25 to 30 percent, and from 10 percent to 15 percent on the remaining \$300 billion by Dec. 1. As Beijing has imposed retaliatory tariffs on US imports each time and 12 rounds of negotiations have not brought a solution any closer, China and the US are now embroiled in a full-fledged trade war. Neither Trump nor Xi Jinping is showing signs of backing down.

Trump is still tilting more toward escalation than accommodation. Last month he had China designated a "currency manipulator." One Friday in August, he called Xi Jinping an "enemy," and the following Monday praised him again as a "great leader" and a "tough guy." He regretted that he had not raised tariffs even higher. ("Our country has been losing HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year to China, with no end in sight.") Defiantly, Trump told

reporters: "If they don't want to trade with us anymore that would be fine with me." He is confident of winning the trade hostilities. And not only did he order Amazon, FedEx, UPS and the US Postal Service to "search for and refuse" deliveries of fentanyl, a murderous opioid pain killer that caused the death of 30,000 Americans last year, his administration also banned the import of Huawei products (worth \$11 billion in 2018). The ban will enter into force after a few months.

But China's strongman Xi Jinping is not buckling. The damage done so far to the Chinese economy is less than feared; the country's exports are up and the weakened yuan is cushioning the effect of the tariff increase. Beijing's line remains unchanged: US tariff hikes will be answered by Chinese retaliatory raises. Quoting President Xi, the *People's Daily* underscored: "China's will to defend the core interest of the country and the fundamental interest of the people is indestructible." It will "fight to the end." Obviously, the regime expects Trump, who is gearing up for next year's presidential election, to run increasingly into domestic resistance once the heightened tariffs kick in and China's refusal to buy US corn, pork, beef and soybeans will hit his farming voters in the Midwest particularly hard. If push comes to shove, a ban on the export of rare earths to the US or an accelerated drawing down of China's \$1.1 trillion US treasury holdings could dramatically boost the impact of China's reprisals. Just a few weeks before the 70th

continued on page 2

Loaded language

The AfD's populist rhetoric attracts those who are traumatized by the past and scared of the future

BY PETER H. KOEPP

In the past several years, Görlitz, a picturesque town on Germany's eastern border with Poland, has functioned as the backdrop to several major Hollywood films, including *Around the World in 80 Days* starring Jackie Chan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, *The Reader* with Kate Winslet and David Kross and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* featuring Tilda Swinton and Bill Murray. However, the town's elegant façades conceal a weak economy and scores of elderly and discontented individuals who have lost faith in the future. In fact, so many "Görlitwood" residents reject the EU and the political establishment in their nation's capital that more than two-thirds of them voted for the far-right AfD party in elections held this past Sept. 1.

Nearly a million people in the states of Brandenburg and Saxony cast their ballots for the party called Alternative for Germany (AfD); that's more than a quarter of all voters there. One out of four rallied behind politicians – both men and women – who have shocked the public with right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic, racist or otherwise inhuman remarks. Is Germany on a path back to its past?

In short, no. In the more heavily populated west, the AfD attracts far less support. Even in the AfD-friendly eastern states, nearly three-quarters of the electorate backed other parties. The AfD won neither Saxony nor Brandenburg. Plus, no other party wants anything to do with them.

The AfD had hoped and even expected to become the top vote-getter in these elections, which could have set the stage for Angela Merkel's ouster. "Complete the revolution" was an AfD poster slogan during the campaign. To the outrage of many, the party claimed that the Peaceful Revolution, which had led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, had been betrayed and that conditions today resembled those of the communist past.

Luckily, the worst has been avoided, at least for the moment. Brandenburg will once again have an SPD minister president and Saxony one from the CDU. In Berlin, Merkel will remain chancellor, probably to the end of her term – if not even longer. The CDU might need her, for lack of any charismatic successors.

But what about the claim that the revolution remains incomplete? And why do so many former

East Germans believe they are being shortchanged, ignored and treated like second-class citizens?

The *New York Times* described a "lingering inequality between East and West three decades after the Berlin Wall fell." The *Washington Post* wrote that the east of Germany "still suffers from higher unemployment and lower wages and pensions than the West, about 30 years after the country's reunification." But the truth is more complex.

Saxony's unemployment rate is 5.7 percent, and Brandenburg's is 5.6 percent, while the national average is 5.1 percent. In the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the rate is 6.7 percent, with peak levels of 13.4 percent in Gelsenkirchen and 10.4 percent in Dortmund. However, average wages in the east continue to lag behind those in the west. Last year, people in Saxony and Brandenburg earned 20 percent less than the German average. There are many reasons for these discrepancies.

One-third of eastern Germany's full-time employees work in the low-wage sector – that's twice as much as in the west. More eastern German women work than do their western counterparts. These women earn on average 20 percent less than men. Eastern Germany has few big corporations and many rural, structurally weak and depopulated regions.

On the other hand, wherever corporate headquarters are, rents are rising and so are other costs of living. Pensions, meanwhile, are based on wages – including those earned during the Communist days of old. Meanwhile, pensions in the east have risen to 96 percent of those in the west. A complex compensation scheme has now been put in place to balance pension levels by 2024.

Low income does not automatically predispose people toward the AfD. The fact that most welfare recipients in Saxony live in Leipzig – where the party scored well below its average for the state – illustrates this simple insight. There are more important reasons for the rejection of "the system" and "the establishment" than empty wallets. One such reason lies in the past, another in the present.

Even 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent incorporation of East Germany in the Federal Republic, many eastern Germans still feel betrayed and sold out. Their industries, which were no longer competitive, were handed over as gifts to west-based corporations; barely 10 percent

continued on page 3

The chicken and the egg

Michael Ronzheimer on the farm-to-fork movement changing German agriculture [pages 12 and 13 >>](#)



MisTweeted

Agnes Monka on the turmoil and turnover at the Jewish Museum in Berlin [page 22 >>](#)



Money ballers

Thomas Kistner on the costly soccer rivalry between Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund [page 23 >>](#)



Done with walls

Recollections of the night 30 years ago when the city became one again, in *The Berlin Times* – a paper within the paper



BY LUTZ LICHTENBERGER

Jeremiads about the state of liberal democracy and its institutions have been the dissonant theme of 2019. The West as a whole is in decline; NATO is obsolete; once proud and powerful parliaments and congresses have been rendered superfluous. Autocratic rulers like Russia's Vladimir Putin, China's Xi Jinping and North Korea's Kim Jong-un seize the day while Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Jair Bolsonaro seem more inclined to emulate their governance than to stand up for the idea – and the practice – of liberty and a pluralistic society.

In Germany, the parties at the center are struggling to deal with the growing appeal of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is less a political body than the manifestation of a hodge-podge of racism, resentment and radical right-wing ideas. The party, barely six years old, has made considerable gains in recent regional elections, finishing second in two states (see page 1) without offering any coherent ideas of how to govern. Their slogans follow the drumbeat of most international far-right movements; they target immigrants and perceived elites while railing against what they refer to as the establishment's tyranny of political correctness.

The AfD is built on the cult of the strongman, the crude longing for an "authentic" leader able and willing to put an end to the tedious game of politics and all the never-ending debating, negotiating and countervailing. They want their followers to believe that politics, the ever-muddy practice of true democracy, is practically and morally depraved and should be replaced by the dogged determination of a "chosen one."

Sure enough, the dualistic conception of politics as either a game of eternally bound-to-fail compromise (played by those driven by the desire to debate another day) or ruling by fiat and forever – is not an autocratic fad of 2019.

This dualist view of politics is reflected in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1759, which describes politics as "the Science of Government, the art or practice of administering public affairs." Elsewhere in the dictionary, Johnson describes the politician not as an artist but one who is "cunning" and "a man of artifice."

The contemporary German philosopher and political scientist Wolfgang Ickert takes a modern view of Johnson's dichotomy. "The contrast couldn't be greater: there the divine action, here the devilish actors," he writes in his treatise titled *The Disappearance of Politics*. Ickert denotes the difference as "POLITICS (in all caps, because of its quasi-divine nature), understood as the transcendent care of and for the entirety; on the other hand, common politics, engaged in by self-appointed Machiavellian men, whose thinking is engulfed by immoral haggling without prospects."

Ickert diagnoses this tendency in all people, no matter their political affiliations: we want to believe in POLITICS, yet we despise the rigmarole of politics – and find ever-new ways of forgetting or suppressing the latter, without acknowledging the intertwined nature of the two concepts. We are blinded, Ickert notes, by "the magic effect" of the otherworldly promise.



Democracy for grown-ups

Live to debate another day – not having easy answers is a liberal asset, not a moral failing

In this vein, countries long proud of their mature democracies, including Germany since 1949, may be said to be witnessing a rather vulgar re-enchantment of the great political idea by a faction of strongmen in the last 10 years. The promise of transcendence through political action is increasingly secularized. The aspiration to lift up every citizen – not to mention refugees from war and poverty around the world – is discarded in favor of a more particular promise of salvation. Or, as Adam Gopnik writes in his recent book on the "moral adventure of liberalism," *A Thousand Small Sanities*, "everywhere we look, throughout Europe as much as in America, patriotism is being replaced with nationalism, pluralism by tribalism, impersonal justice by the tyrannical whim of autocrats who think only to punish their enemies and reward their hitmen."

Deprived of its universal claim, something once upheld by both liberal and conservative notions of democratic politics, today's strongman politics has embraced and indeed relies on simplistic concepts.

This is not just the ordinary argument for the necessity of expertise, impact analysis and inclusion of a plethora of perceptions in policymaking. The tax code, environmental regulation and government programs of all stripes rarely fit neatly into even the traditional categories of left and right, let alone the cruder ones of good and evil.

Nor is it the assertion that politics just happens to be a complicated technical affair better left to the elites and their dabblings in obscure jargon. The disapproval of political huskers and industry proxies rigging the game for the various

0.1-percenters can be spot-on; look no further than the global financial crisis of 2008, which was brought on by too much deregulation and unsound safeguarding by the state.

What appears to be perplexing about the electoral success of the strongmen is that few of their supporters actually believe their proposed policy ideas will help make their lives better. They share the oft-repeated grievances, the feeling of neglect, the perceived slights by proverbial liberal elites, the assumption that immigrants and minorities have been moved ahead of them to the top of the queue – a version of this story is told in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and elsewhere.

The proposed countermeasures, if there are any, like walls, mass deportation or no-deal Brexit, are too expensive, impractical or sometimes even counterproductive.

And yet today's autocratic appeal, following Wolfgang Ickert's theory, lies not in the actual substance, and not even in symbolic meaning – that is, "owning the libs" or any other right-wing armchair battle cry.

In 2018, the historical anthropologist Thomas Bauer published a short yet weighty essay on the loss of ambiguity and diversity, *The Disambiguation of the World*. He traces the story of how modern societies lost their will and their ability to handle or even tolerate pluralist meanings from religion to the arts and politics. "In many areas of life, the most attractive spiritual offerings are those promising release from the unnavigable ambiguity of the world." Bauer notes all the impersonal factors for this tendency: bureaucratization, technical advancements, mass-market consumer culture.

But he also sees an express will of people to live in a more conclusive world.

Translated back into the world of democratic politics, it becomes clearer why a growing segment of the electorate in Western societies chooses to deny or obfuscate the science of climate change, the fact that minorities still face discrimination or that a strong government must level the playing field of the so-called open market in myriad ways.

In other words, what's needed is the normal, untidy and always tentative business of democracy. Democratic decision-making cannot claim to embody the sole truth – such a claim would be counterintuitive to the essence of its undertaking. It is a series of temporary fixes, good only for as long as a new – and hopefully better – solution doesn't come along.

"Compromise is not a sign of the collapse of one's moral conscience. It is a sign of its strength, for there is nothing more necessary to a moral conscience than the recognition that other people have one, too," writes Adam Gopnik. "A compromise is a knot tied tight between competing decencies."

On the face of it, this version of democracy will always be less sexy than the siren songs of the strongman. In the struggle for democracy – one might say the idea of the republic – there is no reverse-engineering the transcendent act of turning politics into POLITICS. Democracy's advocates – politicians, voters and citizens – can only engage in the conciliatory manner that has been lying at the core of the concept since its inception.

Lutz Lichtenberger is senior editor of *The German Times*.

continued from page 1
Loaded language

of all jobs survived; and with no savings to speak of, many slid toward poverty. Whereas in the GDR they had steady jobs, they now found themselves in long queues at the unemployment office.

To the present day, many eastern Germans also feel that their own historic achievements have received inadequate acknowledgement and appreciation. Indeed, this is a people who liberated themselves from an oppressive system without a shot being fired or any blood being spilled. In contrast, western Germans tend to regard the incorporation of *Ostis* as an act of West German charity and kindness. And it's not untrue that West Germans quickly began scouring the east for a quick buck after the Wall came down, and soon found they could easily take their eastern brethren to the cleaners.

All this evolved into a chronic sense of inferiority. However, those who were able to turn their lives around and make a new start now fear they could lose everything again. The Brandenburg village of Hirschfeld, located at the Polish border, gained notoriety this September when more than half its voters, 307, cast their ballots for the AfD. Journalists describe the place as a charming village with decent infrastructure – and not a refugee in sight.

With its brash, loud and xenophobic populism, the AfD is sweeping up those individuals who are traumatized by the past and fearful of the future. The majority of voters are men between the ages of 30 and 60, without high school diplomas, let alone university degrees, and workers worried about their jobs. The fact that the AfD stands far to the right does not bother them, nor do the party's various other scandals, financial embezzlement, public squabbling and internal party feuds.

Party head Alexander Gauland, who until 2013 was a member of Chancellor Merkel's CDU with a respectable career in politics and the media, calls his new political home a "middle-class people's party," although its leaders attract attention through extremist remarks and crude language and frequently lack any kind of middle-class manners.

It would be a mistake not to recognize that it's the rank and file that is steering the AfD leadership. The functionaries fulfill what their voters expect of them. Compromise with the established parties is considered treason. Anyone calling on the angry mob to calm down is accused of being a traitor out to curb freedom of speech.

Many of the AfD's free-market and nationalist founders have since abandoned the party, leaving gaps for right-wing extremists to fill. The far-right wing is growing, taking the rest of the party with it. Countless right-wingers have made a career in the party and now sit in the Bundestag or in Germany's regional parliaments – not to mention in the town halls, where funding for clubs and cultural associations is distributed. Gauland has resisted neither this drift to the right nor its radicalized rhetoric. He has adapted to it.

Following the killing of the Hessian CDU politician Walter Lübcke in June, the Berlin correspondent of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Marc Felix Serrao, quoted Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble's verdict that language had in the past already been a "breeding ground for violence and even murder." The "uninhibited language" of the AfD, Serrao wrote, is like a smeared bathroom wall. Nothing about it is middle class. The language of the AfD, he wrote, can "make murderers."

But to repeat: The AfD is small minority. In the European elections last spring, it polled only 11 percent of the vote. Unlike Marine Le Pen in France, the AfD in Germany is considerably further away from power. The classical parties, troubled though they are, are still the pillars of German democracy.

Peter H. Koepf is editor in chief of *The German Times*.



Baden-Württemberg – where people love to live and discover

Nowhere else can inventors work – and live – so well. L-Bank plays its part, by promoting a climate of innovation with various programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises. We also promote quality of life with measures aimed at families, infrastructure and climate protection. This is how we ensure that Baden-Württemberg's many inventions continue to find their way around the world – whilst their inventors like to stay firmly put! Find out more at www.l-bank.info

L-BANK
Staatsbank für Baden-Württemberg