

# Division remains in Germany 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

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Visitors view a light installation of balloons along the course of former Berlin Wall at a Berlin Wall memorial site on Nov. 8, 2014, in Berlin, Germany. Some 8,000 luminous white balloons were set in Berlin from Nov. 7 to 9 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Photo: Zhang Fan/Xinhua/Zuma Press/MCT

KLEINMACHNOW, Germany — Klaus-Jurgen Warnick pulls up to the rusted remains of the Berlin Wall's Checkpoint Bravo on a trendy electric bike. He was here in 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, the Cold War ended, and the world changed forever.

The division of Berlin, and Germany itself, goes back to World War II, when the United States, Great Britain and Russia (then known as the Soviet Union) defeated Nazi Germany. After the Germans and Japanese were defeated, the United States and the Soviet Union were left as the only two global superpowers.

The United States was capitalist, emphasizing free markets and trade. The Soviet Union was communist, hoping to build a completely equal society where the government owned and controlled most things. These two systems clashed, and the Cold War began — the United States and the Soviet Union became enemies with many nuclear weapons pointed at each other.

Germany found itself split in half, with West Germany run by the United States, Britain, and France; and East Germany, the communist side, run by the Soviet Union. In communist East Germany, people had little freedom to criticize their government, travel, or buy many goods.

## **Division Between East And West**

Berlin, the capital of Germany, was split in half by a wall running down its middle. The Berlin Wall, built in 1961, became a symbol of the division between the capitalist West and the communist East.

When the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, the world changed — Germany was on the road to being reunified, and the Cold War was ending.

But Warnick insists that East Germans like him who crowded around the wall in 1989 weren't trying to change the world: they just had dreams that life could, and should, be a little better.

In many ways, life is better today for Germans who live in eastern Germany. They have free speech and elections, the ability to travel, and freedom from government surveillance.

Still, in many other ways, Germany remains divided and many former East Germans feel more like they've been conquered than reunified.

Today, Ossies, as former East German residents are called, suffer from higher unemployment, are paid less, have far less in savings, and receive lower retirement pensions than Germans in the former West.

Germany's two former halves are seen as unequal. The German Parliament passed a minimum wage law that set a lower rate in the old East than the former West. Employees at a shopping mall in East Berlin make \$1,400 a year less than employees across the street at another mall in West Berlin.

## **Kleinmachnow Syndrome**

Here in Kleinmachnow, on the outskirts of Berlin, the inequalities between East and West 25 years later are on display. The town has even spawned a name for how Ossies suffered after reunification: Kleinmachnow Syndrome.

The problem started because of a basic difference between capitalism and communism — the importance of personal property. While property was sacred in the capitalist West, there was no personal property in the East, and the government owned everything.

As a result, when Germany was reunited, many East Germans lost the homes they'd lived in for decades to West Germans who had left the houses long before, but returned to reclaim them after the Wall fell.

Eight thousand of Kleinmachnow's 11,000 residents were forced to leave their homes after reunification. Nationwide, about 4 million of East Germany's 17 million people were displaced.

The effects, and even some legal cases, continue today. Because they had no property, Ossies have had less security, less wealth, less ability to borrow and less ability to invest than their Western counterparts.

## **Klaus-Jurgen Warnick's Story**

As communism took over more and more control of East Germany in the 1950s, many people moved to the West. Some made plans for their homes and gardens, but many just abandoned them. Even though the East German government didn't believe in personal property, it kept all the land records. Germans do not throw out records, Warnick notes.

All of the abandoned houses became the property of the East German government, which gave the houses to people who stayed in the East. Because of a housing shortage, people were even encouraged to build houses on garden plots.

Warnick received a garden plot in 1969. The only building on the land was a small cottage dating back to World War II that hadn't been used for 20 years.

Years passed, and Warnick tore down the cottage and started building a house, gathering stones and concrete for the foundation. He began to see himself and his family building a life on this land. He met the love of his life and they had four children.

"I started dreaming of a legacy here," he said. "I planted trees, so that my grandchildren's grandchildren would know their grandfather's grandfather had put down these roots."

But when the wall fell, Warnick and others like him wondered what would happen to their land. In East Germany, the government owned everything. Now that the East German government was gone, what would happen? Unfortunately for the Ossies, the land records had been maintained and West Germans could now return and take back land they abandoned decades ago.

## **"No Concept Of Land Ownership"**

"I remember the first time the former owner from West Germany showed up," Warnick said. It was a sunny afternoon in April 1990. The kids were growing and, needing more room, Warnick had just gotten the permits to add a second story to his house.

The man was nice, at first, and he said that Warnick didn't have to leave right away — he could have six months to find a new place.

It was a scene repeated thousands of times in Germany. There's a map of Kleinmachnow showing every disputed property in red, and the map is almost completely red.

Warnick won the right to stay, after paying about \$180,000 to the previous owner and lawyers. It was worth it, in the end, to have the home he built and to be able to dream about his great-grandchildren someday staring up at the trees he'd planted.

"I spent years kicking myself for not changing the land records, but we were naive," he said. "It was a nation with no concept of land ownership. And who believes that their nation, their way of life, will collapse?"

## Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Division Between East And West" that BEST shows that the two Germanys are still not equal.
  
- 2 Select the sentence from the article that is MOST important to include in its summary.
  - (A) Still, in many other ways, Germany remains divided and many former East Germans feel more like they've been conquered than reunified.
  - (B) The Soviet Union was communist, hoping to build a completely equal society where the government owned and controlled most things.
  - (C) But Warnick insists that East Germans like him who crowded around the wall in 1989 weren't trying to change the world: they just had dreams that life could, and should, be a little better.
  - (D) Years passed, and Warnick tore down the cottage and started building a house, gathering stones and concrete for the foundation.
  
- 3 Why does the author elaborate on Warnick's difficult experience with his property?
  - (A) to demonstrate that the East and the West can never live in unison
  - (B) to highlight the effect of different forms of governance on the two factions
  - (C) to highlight some of the injustices done to Ossies after reunification
  - (D) to suggest that German government is partial toward the West
  
- 4 What purpose does the section "Klaus-Jurgen Warnick's Story" serve in the article?
  - (A) It highlights the effect of communism on East Germany in the 1950s.
  - (B) It explains the benefits reaped by Ossies when many people headed for West Germany.
  - (C) It highlights how unprepared East Germans were for the fallout from reunification.
  - (D) It describes the inefficiency of the German government in managing property in East Germany.

## Answer Key

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**Paragraph 9:**

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- (C) But Warnick insists that East Germans like him who crowded around the wall in 1989 weren't trying to change the world: they just had dreams that life could, and should, be a little better.
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