Good Bye, Lenin!

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Hodder:

Historical & social background

with translations

''An ingenious little idea that is funny, moving and - gasp! - even makes you think ''
Empire magazine

''A brilliantly original comedy'' *''Intelligent and funny''*
Heat magazine *GQ magazine*

Der historische Hintergrund

Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg wurde Deutschland von den Allierten (USA, Russland, Frankreich, Großbritannien) in vier **Besatzungszonen** geteilt. Wegen ihrer Wichtigkeit wurde die Hauptstadt Berlin in vier ähnliche Zonen geteilt. Aber die Russen führten in ihrer Zone Änderungen ein, die sich auf das kommunistische System in Russland beziehen.
Der Konflikt zwischen Ost und West entwickelte sich zu einer Art Krieg, dem sogenannten „Kalten Krieg" (Cold War). In einer berühmten Rede am 5. März 1946 in Fulton, Missouri, nannte Winston Churchill die Trennung zwischen Ost und West den „Eisernen Vorhang" (Iron Curtain).

Wichtige Ereignisse in der Geschichte der DDR	
7. Oktober 1949	**Gründung** der DDR
8. Februar 1950	Gründung des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit (Stasi)
25. Juli 1950	Walter Ulbricht wird Generalsekretär der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)
13. August 1961	Sperrung der Grenzen zur Bundesrepublik; Bau der Berliner Mauer
3. Mai 1971	Erich Honecker wird Erster Sekretär des Zentralkomitees der DDR
9. November 1989	Öffnung der Berliner Mauer (**Mauerfall**)
3. Oktober 1990	**Wiedervereinigung** der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD) und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR)

The historical background

After World War II Germany was divided by the Allies (USA, Russia, France, Great Britain) into four zones of occupation. Because of its importance the capital city Berlin was divided into four similar zones. But in their zone the Russians introduced changes relating to the Communist system in Russia.

The conflict between East and West developed into a kind of war, the so-called ‘‘Cold War‘‘. In a famous speech on 5th March 1945 in Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill called the division between East and West the ‘‘Iron Curtain‘‘.

Important events in the history of the GDR	
7th October 1949	Founding of the GDR
8th February 1950	Founding of the Ministry for State Security (Stasi)
25th July 1950	Walter Ulbricht becomes General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)
13th August 1961	Closure of the borders to the Federal Republic; building of the Berlin Wall
3rd May 1971	Erich Honecker becomes First Secretary of the Central Committee of the GDR
9th November 1989	Opening of the Berlin Wall (Fall of the Wall)
3rd October 1990	Reunification of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR)

Wichtige Persönlichkeiten

Wladimir Lenin (1870–1924) war ein russischer Revolutionär und Politiker. Nach der Russischen Revolution (1917) war er **der Gründer** der Sowjetunion.

Sigmund Jähn (geboren 1937) war ein ostdeutscher Kosmonaut. 1978 flog er mit der russischen Mannschaft der Sojus 31 ins **All**. Natürlich waren die DDR-Bürger stolz, dass ein Mann aus ihrem Land der erste Deutsche im **Weltall** war. Jähn, wie wir im Film sehen, war Alex' Jugendidol und ersetzt seinen verschwundenen Vater. Alex träumt davon, der zweite Deutsche im All zu sein.

Erich Honecker (1912–1994) war von 1976 bis 1989 der Leiter der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) und deswegen der Leiter der ostdeutschen Regierung. Honecker führte eine neue Politik und eine neue Wirtschaft in die DDR ein. Sein erster Fünfjahresplan zielte auf die Verbesserung des Lebensstandards in der DDR. Ein wichtiger Teil dieses Programms war der Bau vieler neuen Wohnungen, die die Wohnungskrise lösen sollten.

Important personalities

Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) was a Russian revolutionary and politician. After the Russian Revolution (1917) he was the founder of the Soviet Union.

Sigmund Jähn (born 1937) was an East German cosmonaut. In 1978 he flew with the Russian crew of Soyuz 31 into space. East German citizens were of course proud that a man from their country was the first German in space. As we see in the film, Jähn was Alex' idol when he was younger and a replacement for the father who had disappeared. Alex dreams of being the second German in space.

Erich Honecker (1912-1994) was leader of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and therefore leader of the East German government from 1976 to 1989. Honecker introduced new policies and a new economy to the GDR. His first five-year plan aimed to improve the standard of living in the GDR. An important part of this programme was the building of many new flats which were supposed to solve the housing crisis.

Beziehung zu dem Film

Lenin lends his name to the title of the film, which suggests the end of an era: the disappearance of the socialist GDR and its replacement by the capitalist BRD. This is symbolised by the flying away of Lenin's statue by helicopter.

At the end of the film, Alex and Denis, in their news broadcast, alter the course of German history. Erich Honecker's successor as *Generalsekretär* is not Egon Krenz, but Sigmund Jähn, played by a taxi-driver lookalike.

The block of flats where the Kerner family lives is a typical example of the buildings erected during Honecker's first five-year plan. These *Plattenbauten*, as they were called, were quickly erected, but not particularly attractive. They were also quite small. Hence in the film the flat becomes known as '79 Quadratmeter DDR'.

Der gesellschaftliche Hintergrund

Die Stasi war der Geheimdienst der DDR. Bis 1989 hatte sie 91.000 Beamte und 174.000 Mitarbeiter (und das in einem Land, wo die Bevölkerung nur 16 Millionen betrug). Ihre Hauptaufgabe lag darin, den Staat zu schützen, Leute mit antisozialistischen Meinungen auszusuchen und **Republikflucht** zu verhindern. Ihre Methoden waren meistens brutal: lange Verhöre von Verhafteten und unangemeldete Hausdurchsuchungen.

Die Berliner Mauer: Bis 1961 waren 3.5 Millionen Bürger aus der DDR entflohen. Die Regierung hatte sich entschieden, die Grenzen zu schließen, angeblich um das Land gegen Einflüsse aus dem Westen zu schützen. Die Mauer wurde also am 13. August 1961 errichtet und teilte die Stadt in Ost- und West-Berlin. Sie existierte bis zu ihrem Fall am 9. November 1989.

Die Jungen Pioniere war die sozialistische Jugend-Organisation der DDR für Kinder von 6 bis 10 Jahren. Sie trugen ein blaues Halstuch. 95% der DDR-Jugend waren Mitglieder.

Aktuelle Kamera war die Nachrichtensendung im DDR-Fernsehen. Sie wurde täglich um 19.30 Uhr gesendet. Die **Sendung** war vom Staat kontrolliert und stellte den Westen in einem negativen Licht dar.

Das Sandmännchen war eine tägliche Kindersendung. Um 18.50 Uhr wünschte sie den Kindern Gute Nacht.

Ossi und *Wessi* waren zwei neuen Wörter, die man nach der **Wende** benutzt hat, um die Herkunft der Deutschen zu beschreiben. Leute aus den sogenannten „neuen Ländern" (der ehemaligen DDR) waren Ossis und die aus der Bundesrepublik waren Wessis.

Verschiedene *DDR Produkte* werden in dem Film erwähnt: Spreewald-Gurken, Mocca-Fix-Gold und Tempo-Bohnen. Als Christiane sich diese Sachen wünscht, wird das ein Problem für Alex, weil sie in den Supermärkten nach der Wende nicht mehr zu bekommen sind.

Der *Trabant*, kurz „Trabi" genannt, war ein beliebtes Auto in der DDR. Mehr als drei Millionen wurden produziert. Die Karosserie war aus Kunststoff und er hatte eine Maximalgeschwindigkeit von 110 km pro Stunde.

Eine *Datsche* war ein Wochenendhaus auf dem Land. Viele Ostdeutsche hatten eine.

The social background

The Stasi was the secret service of the GDR. By 1989 it had 91,000 officers and 174,000 collaborators (and this in a country where the population numbered only 16 million). Their main task consisted in protecting the state, seeking out people with anti-socialist opinions and preventing escape from the GDR. Their methods were mostly brutal: long interrogations of prisoners and unannounced house searches.

The Berlin Wall By 1961 3.5 million citizens had escaped from the GDR. The government had decided to close the borders, ostensibly to protect the country against influences from the West. The Wall was therefore erected on 13th August 1961 and divided the city into East and West Berlin. It existed until its fall on 9th November 1989.

The Young Pioneers was the socialist youth organisation of the GDR for children between 6 and 10 years of age. They wore a blue neck scarf, 95% of East German youngsters were members.

Aktuelle Kamera was the news programme on GDR television. It was broadcast daily at 7.30pm. The programme was state-controlled and depicted the West in a negative light.

Das Sandmännchen was a daily children's programme. At 6.50pm it wished the children good night.

Ossi and Wessi were two new words used after the *Wende* (9th November 1989) to describe where Germans were from. People from the so-called ''new states'' (of the former GDR) were Ossis and those from the Federal Republic were Wessis.

Various GDR products are mentioned in the film: Spreewald-Gurken (gherkins), Mocca-Fix-Gold (coffee) and Tempo-Bohnen (beans). It is a problem for Alex when Christiane wishes to have these things because you cannot get them any more in the supermarkets after the *Wende*.

The Trabant, often called by the shorter name ''Trabi'', was a popular car in the GDR. More than three million were produced. The bodywork was made of plastic and the car had a maximum speed of 110 km per hour.

A dacha was a weekend house in the countryside. Many East Germans had one.

Beziehung zu dem Film

We see only a small picture of the Stasi in this film, when they are interviewing Alex's mother after his father has fled to the West, but their incessant questioning is sufficient to cause Frau Kerner's breakdown and long silence.

After the departure of her husband, Christiane engages fully in the work of the Young Pioneers. Alex describes her involvement cynically: 'sie hat sich … mit unserem sozialistischen Vaterland verheiratet'. The singing by two former Young Pioneers at Christiane's birthday party is part of Alex's attempt to keep the GDR alive for his mother. To recreate the GDR, he and Denis also make three of their own versions of *Aktuelle Kamera*, with Alex supplying the ideas and the script and Denis the technical knowhow.

Alex sees the *Sandmännchen* in space at the beginning of the film, and when he visits his father's house at the end of the film he joins his half-brother and sister in watching an episode in which, ironically, the *Sandmännchen* is dressed as an astronaut.

The Kerner family and their neighbours are Ossis, while Denis, Rainer and the bank official represent the Wessis. The longing of Ossis for the good old days of the GDR also led to the coining of the word *Ostalgie*, nostalgia for the former East.

Basic foodstuffs were very cheap in the GDR and had a single price throughout the country. Luxury items by contrast were very expensive. Because most women worked, there were lots of quickly prepared foodstuffs such as Tempo-Bohnen. Clothing was practical rather than attractive. After the *Wende* these products disappeared very quickly and the GDR was flooded with consumer goods from the West.

The Trabi had a two-stroke engine and cost ten times the average monthly wage. After placing an order it was usual to wait some 10 or 12 years for delivery. After the *Wende* the Trabi became a cult vehicle and in the film Rainer, a convinced Wessi, buys one for himself.

When the film begins, we see the Kerner family at their dacha, and at the end they make a final excursion there. It is there that Christiane reveals the secret she has been hiding from her family.

Unsere Heimat (Our Homeland) was a popular song in the German Democratic Republic, where it was sung by the Ernst Thälmann Pioneer Organisation. The song demonstrates the strong bond between East German people and nature, emphasising the important sense of one's *Heimat*.

The song features more than once in Good Bye, Lenin! and it is sung by Young Pioneer groups.

Unsere Heimat, das sind nicht nur die Städte und Dörfer,
unsere Heimat sind auch all die Bäume im Wald.
Unsere Heimat ist das Gras auf der Wiese,
das Korn auf dem Feld und die Vögel in der Luft
und die Tiere der Erde
und die Fische im Fluß sind die Heimat.
Und wir lieben die Heimat, die schöne
und wir schützen sie,
weil sie dem Volke gehört,
weil sie unserem Volke gehört.

Our Homeland *is not only the cities and villages,*
our Homeland is also all the trees in the forest.
Our Homeland is the grass in the meadow,
the grain in the field and the birds in the air
and the animals of the earth
and the fish in the river are the Homeland.
And we love the beautiful homeland,
and we protect it,
because it belongs to the People,
because it belongs to our People.

The national anthem of the GDR also features towards the end of the film. It is called Auferstanden aus Ruinen (Risen from Ruins) and is played in the background during Sigmund Jähn's speech to the nation. Check it out!