

# THE NEW GERMANY

From unconditional surrender to record unemployment, East Germany's birth to its demise: a timeline of German postwar history



Wehrmacht Commander Keitel

**1945**

## MAY 8 – UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

The war and Nazi tyranny are finally over. General Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the High Command of the *Wehrmacht*, capitulates in Berlin.

## NOVEMBER 20 – START OF THE NUREMBERG TRIALS

Twenty-four leading Nazis and military aides are tried in Nuremberg. Almost a year later, the International Military Tribunal issues 12 death sentences.

**1948**

## JUNE 20 – CURRENCY REFORM

Things begin to look up again: the deutschmark is now legal tender in the three western zones.

## JUNE 24 – BERLIN BLOCKADE AND AIRLIFT

The Soviet army closes all road, rail and waterway links to Berlin. For more than a year, until September 30, 1949, the western powers supply Berlin by air. Every few minutes a cargo plane lands at one of West Berlin's three airports. The Germans affectionately label these aircraft "raisin bombers."

**1949**

## MAY 23 – BIRTH OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

On May 8, the Parliamentary Council in Bonn passes the Basic Law by a margin of 53 to 12 – the West German constitution is proclaimed on May 23. In September, Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer is elected chancellor. He energetically embeds the Federal Republic into the Western Alliance, and shapes the course of West German politics until the early 1960s.

## OCTOBER 7 – BIRTH OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Provisional People's Chamber approves the constitution of the GDR. In July 1950, Walter Ulbricht becomes general secretary of the Socialist Unity Party. Ulbricht dominates political and cultural life in East Germany until the end of the 1960s.

**1951**

## JANUARY 18 – NUDE SPARKS SCANDAL

The movie *The Sinner* creates a scandal in West Germany because actress Hildegard Knef is shown naked for three seconds.

**1953**

## JUNE 17 – UPRISING IN EAST BERLIN

Construction workers protest against the increases in productivity demanded by the communist regime. The demonstrations escalate into a popular insurrection in the GDR. Hundreds of thousands take to the streets. With the approval of the East German leadership, Soviet tanks quash the rebellion.

**1954**

## JULY 4 – THE "MIRACLE OF BERN"

Goal! Goal! Goal! In Bern, Switzerland, Helmut Rahn scores in the 84th minute against Hungary to win West Germany its first World Cup. Demoralized by the war and Nazi terror, the Germans wildly celebrate the victory.

**1955**

## MAY 9 – NATO

West Germany joins the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO.

## MAY 14 – WARSAW PACT

The GDR joins the Warsaw Pact, the eastern-bloc equivalent of NATO.

**1957**

## JANUARY 1 – RESTORATION OF THE SAAR REGION

Residents of the Saar region opt for German nationality. A referendum makes Saarland, until then occupied by France, West Germany's 11th federal state.

**1958**

## OCTOBER 1 – THE "KING" ARRIVES

Elvis Presley is stationed in West Germany for 17 months. Rock 'n' roll infects young West Germans and divides the generations – an early hint of later youth protests.

**1961**

## AUGUST 13 – BERLIN WALL

Workers begin building the Berlin Wall, which will divide East and West Berlin for nearly 30 years. Until now, hundreds of thousands of East Germans had escaped to the



Newly-built section of the Berlin Wall

West via the city's sector border. The GDR leadership installs a so-called death strip alongside the Wall, complete with barbed wire and mines. About 300 people die on the inner-German border in subsequent years. Thousands are caught trying to escape and end up in prison.

**1962**

**OCTOBER 26 – THE SPIEGEL AFFAIR**

In a cloak-and-dagger operation, federal prosecutors and police officers occupy the offices of DER SPIEGEL in Hamburg. Editor in chief Rudolf Augstein and six journalists are arrested under suspicion of treason. The incident prompts a national outcry, with people speaking out against the judiciary and in favor of freedom of the press. The accusation of treason proves unfounded. Frequently a subject of critical SPIEGEL articles, Defense Minister Franz Josef Strauss of the Christian Social Union was the prime mover behind the raid. Strauss was later forced to resign as a result.

**1963**

**JUNE 26 – BERLIN AND FREEDOM**

At the peak of the Cold War, U.S. President John F. Kennedy visits West Berlin. The city's isolated residents love him, above all for the sentence he utters outside the city hall in Schoeneberg: "I am a Berliner!"



"Guest worker" Rodrigues

**1964**

**SEPTEMBER 10 – "GUEST WORKERS"**

Armando Sa Rodrigues, a carpenter from Portugal, becomes West Germany's one-millionth guest worker. When he arrives in Bonn, the Federation of German Employers' Associations presents him with a moped.

**1967**

**JUNE 2 – BENNO OHNESORG DIES**

The Shah of Persia's visit to West Germany triggers demonstrations and civil disturbances. The student Benno Ohnesorg is shot to death by a police officer. The incident sparks riots at universities across West Germany.

**1968**

**APRIL 2 – INITIAL LEFT-WING TERRORISM**

Two department stores in Frankfurt are targeted with arson attacks. The perpetrators include Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, who go on to lead the self-proclaimed Red Army Faction (RAF).



Terrorists Baader, Ensslin

**APRIL 11 – RUDI DUTSCHKE ATTACKED**

Student leader Rudi Dutschke is seriously wounded in an assassination attempt. The attack prompts clashes between demonstrators and the police throughout West Germany. Students march against the Vietnam War and the conservative Springer publishing group.

**1969**

**OCTOBER 21 – START OF THE SPD-FDP COALITION**

With the support of the country's liberals, Willy Brandt is elected chancellor in the first Social Democratic-led government in West Germany. With its so-called ostpolitik, a policy of gradual bridgebuilding, the administration seeks to reduce tensions between East and West. The inner-German border becomes increasingly porous.

**1971**

**MAY 3 – ULBRICHT IS TOPPLED**

An era comes to an end in the GDR: Walter Ulbricht is forced to step down as first secretary of the Socialist Unity Party's Central Committee. He is succeeded by Erich Honecker. Nothing changes for the East Germans: there is no liberalization at home, while foreign policy remains keyed to the Soviet Union.

**1972**

**SEPTEMBER 5/6 – TERROR AT THE OLYMPICS**

The "happy games" turn into bloody disaster. Arab terrorists attack the Israeli quarters at the Olympic village in Munich. Eleven Israeli athletes, five terrorists and one police officer die.

**1973**

**NOVEMBER 25 – FIRST BAN ON SUNDAY DRIVING**

German autobahns remain empty. The Arab states' oil boycott forces the industrialized countries to impose drastic saving measures. West Germany prohibits driving on four Sundays during the year.



Strolling on a car-free Sunday

**1974**

**APRIL 25 – ESPIONAGE IN THE CHANCELLERY**

A personal assistant of Chancellor Willy Brandt, Guenter Guillaume, is arrested and exposed as a top East German spy. As a result, Brandt tenders his resignation on May 6.

**1977**

**SEPTEMBER 5 – UNMITIGATED TERROR**

Members of the Red Army Faction kidnap Hanns Martin Schleyer, the president of West Germany's employers' association. They want to extort the release of other members who are being held in Stammheim prison in Stuttgart. The same demands are made by Palestinian terrorists who hijack the Lufthansa aircraft "Landshut." Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a Social Democrat, toughs it out. On October 18, West Germany's GSG 9 special forces storm the airliner at Mogadishu airport in Somalia, freeing all the hostages. Three of the imprisoned Red Army Faction members subse-

quently commit suicide. The following day, Hanns Martin Schleyer is found dead. In April and May, the faction's members murder Siegfried Buback, Germany's Chief Federal Prosecutor, and Juergen Ponto, head of Dresdner Bank.

**1978**

**AUGUST 26 – OFF INTO SPACE**

GDR officer Sigmund Jaehn joins Russian cosmonauts to become the first German in space. Five years later, on November 28, 1983, the West German Ulf Merbold goes into orbit with the U.S. space shuttle.

**1979**

**JANUARY 22 – AUSCHWITZ AS A TV DRAMA**

The four-part TV series *Holocaust* breaks all known records. Twenty million Germans sit glued to their screens, horrified by Germany's past and the crimes committed against Jews. The Hollywood production achieves what countless books, plays, documentaries and films had failed to do: it makes Auschwitz a national issue.

**1981**

**FEBRUARY 28 – "ATOMIC POWER – NO THANKS!"**

Some 90,000 anti-nuclear campaigners clash with thousands of police officers at a demonstration against the Brokdorf nuclear power plant. From the Brokdorf power plant through the confrontations at the western runway at Frankfurt Airport to occupied buildings in Hamburg, Frankfurt and West Berlin, West German political protests increasingly degenerate into civil disorder.



Demonstration against the Brokdorf nuclear power plant (1986)

**1982**

**OCTOBER 1 – UPHEAVAL IN BONN**

After 13 years of coalition with the Social Democrats, West Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP) quits the government and joins forces with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Following a vote of no confidence against chancellor Helmut Schmidt, CDU leader Helmut Kohl becomes chancellor.

**1983**

**OCTOBER 22 – "PEACE WITHOUT ARMS"**

The high point of the peace movement's activities: hundreds of thousands of people demonstrate in Bonn against NATO's rearmament resolution, which calls for the deployment of new U.S. nuclear weapons to counter Moscow's SS-20 missiles. In parts of West Germany, peace supporters form kilometer-long "peace chains" and block missile bases. The rearmament goes ahead anyway.

**1985**

**JULY 7 – "BOOM-BOOM BORIS!"**

The 17-year-old Boris Becker from Leimen is the first German, and youngest player of all time, to win Wimbledon – the world's top tennis tournament. Germany finds itself in the grips of a collective tennis craze.



Wimbledon great Becker

**1987**

**OCTOBER 11 – DEATH IN THE BATHTUB**

A former premier of Schleswig-Holstein, the Christian Democrat Uwe Barschel, is found dead in his bathtub in a Geneva hotel. At the beginning of September, SPIEGEL revealed that Barschel had planned to discredit Social Democrat Bjoern Engholm, his opponent in the upcoming state election, with allegations about his private life. Barschel, whose party lost the election following the publication of the revelations, denied the plans and urged members of his staff to give false testimony. His death in Geneva becomes a source of intense speculation for several years.

**1989**

**SEPTEMBER 11 – FIRST HOLES IN THE IRON CURTAIN**

Hungary opens its border to Austria for GDR refugees. Hundreds of East Germans had previously sought refuge in the West German embassies in East Berlin, Budapest and Prague.

**SEPTEMBER 25 – "MONDAY DEMONSTRATIONS"**

During a protest rally in Leipzig following the weekly Monday peace prayer at the Church of St. Nicholas – hence the name "Monday demonstrations" – some 6,000 people demand freedom of speech, movement and assembly in East Germany.

**OCTOBER 9 – "WE ARE THE PEOPLE"**

Seventy thousand gather on Leipzig's streets for the city's first large-scale demonstration. Their rallying call: "We are the people." The event prompts mass protests around the GDR during the following weeks. In East Berlin alone, more than 500,000 residents demonstrate for democratic reforms on November 4.

**NOVEMBER 9 – FALL OF THE WALL**

In the evening, *Politbüro* member Guenter Schabowski announces that all East Germans are free to travel. There is no more holding them back. That same night, the Wall is opened and thousands of East Berliners pour into the West.

**NOVEMBER 22 – CALL FOR REUNIFICATION**

At the Monday demonstration in Leipzig, the demand for the two German states to be reunified is voiced for the first time: "We are one people."



Berlin after the fall of the Wall

1990

**MARCH 18 – FREE ELECTIONS IN THE GDR**

The Christian Democratic Union wins the first free elections to the People's Chamber in East Germany. The Christian Democrat Lothar de Maizière becomes the prime minister of a multi-party government and immediately starts negotiating reunification with Bonn.

**OCTOBER 3 – REUNIFICATION**

At midnight, the black, red and gold German flag is hoisted outside the Reichstag in Berlin. Fireworks light up the historic scene at Brandenburg Gate as people celebrate. Germany has been reunified.

1992

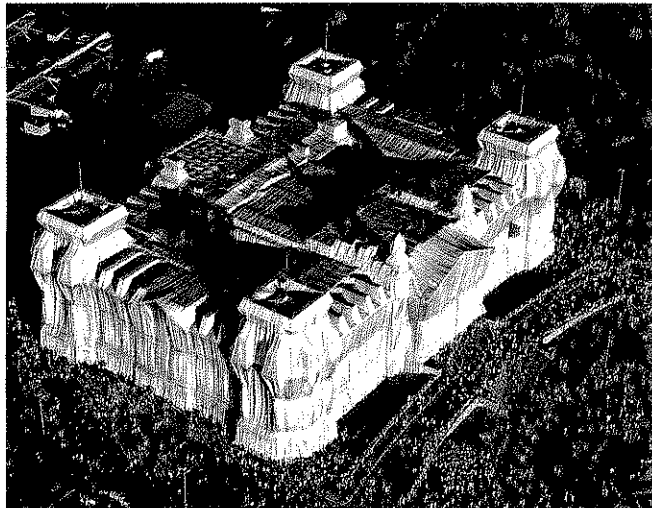
**AUGUST 22 – HOSTILITY TOWARD FOREIGNERS**

Pogrom-like riots are organized by young right-wing extremists against a hostel in Rostock where immigrants are staying. The rioters are applauded by curious on-lookers as they set fire to the building. Violence against foreigners spreads. Three Turkish women die in an arson attack in Moelln. Hundreds of thousands of citizens protest against the xenophobia and form long human chains.

1993

**APRIL 2 – FIRST POSTWAR MISSION**

For the first time since the end of World War II, German troops are deployed. In a joint peacekeeping mission with other nations' forces, they help maintain the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina.



Draped Reichstag

1995

**JUNE 24 – THE REICHSTAG AS A WORK OF ART**

The artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude drape the Reichstag building with silvery, elegantly gathered plastic covers for two weeks. Millions head for Berlin to witness the spectacle.

1997

**JULY 17 – THE FLOOD ARRIVES**

The territories alongside the Oder River in eastern Germany are hit by the worst flood of the century. Forty-five thousand helpers, including 30,000 Bundeswehr troops, spend several weeks working around the clock.

1998

**SEPTEMBER 27 – HELMUT KOHL DEPARTS**

The coalition of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats led by Helmut Kohl suffers a conclusive defeat in the general elections. The chancellor of reunification steps off the political stage, to be succeeded by the Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder.



Kohl, Schröder in the Bundestag

2000

**JUNE 1 – WORLD'S FAIR**

German President Johannes Rau opens "Expo 2000" in Hanover. The first World's Fair in Germany proves a success, despite numerous organizational hitches in the run-up to the exhibition.

2001

**JUNE 10 – GAY GOVERNOR IN BERLIN**

At the convention of Berlin's Social Democrats, Klaus Wowereit, his party's leading candidate for the office of governing mayor, says he is a homosexual. His statement – "I am gay, and that's a good thing" – becomes a popular expression. Berliners have no problems with his sexual orientation and elect him to office.



Euro festival in Frankfurt

2002

**JANUARY 1 – BYE-BYE DEUTSCHMARK**

The first euro notes and coins are issued. The deutschmark disappears. People adjust surprisingly quickly to the new legal tender.

**APRIL 26 – SCHOOL MASSACRE IN ERFURT**

A 19-year-old former student from Gutenberg High School in Erfurt shoots dead 14 teachers and two students. He then turns his weapon on himself.

**SEPTEMBER 22 – SCHRÖDER IS REELECTED**

The Social Democratic Party remains the strongest party in the German general elections. The voters reward Schröder's opposition to the Iraq war. The coalition of Social Democrats and Greens retains its parliamentary majority. Gerhard Schröder is reelected chancellor.

2003

**APRIL 18 – AMERICA, THE ENEMY**

The peace movement undergoes a revival: hundreds of thousands of Germans demonstrate in Berlin and other cities against U.S. President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq.

2005

**MARCH 1 – RECORD UNEMPLOYMENT**

The Federal Labor Office reports that 5,216,000 people in Germany are out of a job – a postwar record.

COMPILED BY JOACHIM MOHR