

SHORT TAKES

Marx is Hot!

In mid-October, not quite a month after the meltdown of financial markets began throughout the world, *Reuters* reported that Karl Marx is back in vogue in eastern Germany. Selling 1,500 copies so far this year—a 100-fold increase since 1990—*Das Kapital*, Marx’s classic critique of capitalism, “has risen from the publishing graveyard” to become an improbable bestseller for the academic publisher, Karl-Dietz-Verlag.

“Even bankers and managers are now reading *Das Kapital* to try to understand what they’ve been doing to us,” managing director Joern Schuettrumpf told *Reuters*. “Marx is definitely ‘in’ right now.”

Anti-capitalist sentiment has been building in eastern Germany, which has seen unemployment and poverty skyrocket after free market economics was introduced following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Unemployment in the former communist east Germany is 14 percent—double that in the west—and wages are significantly lower. After the two Germanys were reunified, millions of jobs were lost as western competitors bought up many factories in the east, only to shut them down. The recent intense financial turmoil and resulting bank failures and government bailouts has only reinforced capitalism’s unpopularity in eastern Germany, *Reuters* reported.

According to a recent survey, 52 percent of eastern Germans said they thought the free market economy is “unsuitable,” and 43 percent said they wanted socialism rather than capitalism. The news agency said interviews with “dozens of ordinary easterners” confirmed those findings:

“We read about the ‘horrors of capitalism’ in school. They really got that right. Karl Marx was spot on,” said Thomas Pivitt, a 46-year-old IT worker from east Berlin. “I had a pretty good life before the Wall fell,” he added. “No one worried about money because money didn’t really matter. You had a job even if you didn’t want one. The communist idea wasn’t all that bad.”

Hermann Haibel, a 76-year-old retired blacksmith added: “I thought communism was shit, but capitalism is even worse. The free market is brutal. The capitalist wants to squeeze out more, more, more.”

—*Karen Charman*