

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
*Friday Film Fest Series*



**Zwei Zu Eins (2024)**  
German with German Subtitles

**March 20 | 6.30pm**  
Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania  
611 Spring Garden St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19123

## “Zwei zu Eins” (2024)

**Director:** Natja Brunckhorst  
**Screenplay:** Natja Brunckhorst  
**Production:** Susanne Mann  
**Music:** Amaury Bernier  
Hannah von Hübbenet  
**Camera:** Martin Langer  
**Editing:** Ramin Sabeti  
**Length:** 116 Minutes

**Cast:** Sandra Hüller as Maren  
Max Riemelt as Robert  
Ronald Zehrfeld as Volker  
Peter Kurth as Markowski  
Martin Brambach as Lunkewitz  
Tom Keune as Genosse ABV  
Ursula Werner as Käte



The movie ‘works’ in no small part due to this celebrated cast of East-German actors. Especially Sandra Hüller who provides the enchanting apex angle for the love triangle involving her childhood friends Robert and Volker. Whether this movie is indeed properly categorized as a ‘heist-comedy’, or perhaps something a bit more serious, it sheds a bright and poignant light on the *transition trauma* experienced by the good citizens of the DDR.

**Join us for our next Friday Film Night:**

**Friday, April 10 at 6.30pm**

**“Zwei zu eins” (2024)**

**German with German Subtitles**

**Commentary by: Karl Moehlmann**

### **Die erste und letzte freie Wahl in der DDR**

March 18, 1990 was a memorable day for East-Germany. For the first time in the history of the “*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*”(DDR) an election was held that actually lived up to its name. It was free and democratic. 93.4 % of eligible voters participated, another historic rec-



on this socially and psychologically bruising chapter of the capitalistic take-over. When “Marke” dresses up to stand in line at the “Treuhand”-building, he feels like he is standing in a “*Schlange von Schlangen*” – well-dressed Western businessmen of various backgrounds ready to buy up all the state owned companies before downsizing them (or “*platt machen*”) with little regard to the fate of the unemployed workers. To add insult to injury, once the group owns the local VEB and has access to the books they discover that they had provided cheap labor all these years for products that were exported abroad to earn desperately needed foreign funds while consistently being misled by the communist propaganda about the purpose of their work. Trapped between the old centralized and politicized hierarchy and the ruthlessness of the “*Besserwessies*” the movie rekindles and celebrates the old communal spirit and solidarity that existed in the DDR prior to the fall of the wall. Involving the entire local “*Hausgemeinschaft*” in the conversion scheme stands in stark contrast to the coming intrusion of a more individualistic world and reminds us what has been lost in this process. It is fitting that the whole cast is made of prominent actors from the old DDR:



First of all Sandra Hüller as Maren, born in Suhl, who starred in movies like “Zone of Interest” and “Anatomy of a Fall” and has become an international celebrity.



Max Riemelt as Robert, born in East-Berlin, who starred in “Before the Fall”, “Sense 8” and “Berlin Syndrome”.



Also Ronald Zehrfeld as Volker, born in East-Berlin, who starred in “Barbara”, “Phoenix” and “The people vs Felix Bauer”.



And finally Peter Kurth as “Marke”, born in Güstrow, who played in “Good Bye, Lenin” and became famous in his role as detective Bruno Wolter in the TV-Series “Babylon Berlin”.

ord. Against all the predictions, the “Allianz für Deutschland”, a coalition of parties that aligned itself with the CDU of chancellor Helmut Kohl, won the election with 48.1% outpacing the favored SPD with 21.9 % and the PDS (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*) with 16.4 %.

The elections results were a major factor in paving the way for an accelerated path to unification. The newly formed “*Volkskammer*” elected Lothar de Maizière of the conservative “Allianz” as prime minister with a great coalition of SPD and some other smaller parties. At the end of April 1990, an agreement was reached with the West-German government of Helmut Kohl to initiate a “*Wirtschafts-, Währungs- und Sozialunion*” on July 1, 1990. At the end of August the “*Vertrag über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands*” followed and on October 3, 1990 the 5 states of the DDR joined the Federal Republic to form a united Germany.

## Die Währungsunion – 1:1 / 2:1

While the “*Deutsche Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung*” recommended a realistic exchange rate of 5:1 to protect the export economy of the DDR, chancellor Kohl, worried about the window of opportunity for a quick unification and bound by his earlier promise to provide “*blühende Landschaften in der DDR*” decided on a 1:1 and 2:1 rate that was solely politically motivated. Citizens older than 60 were allowed to exchange 6000, adults 4000 and children up to 14 years old 2000 Ost-Mark at the rate of 1:1, savings above these amounts were exchanged at 2:1. Wages, salaries, pensions, scholarships, rents and leases were also reset at the 1:1 rate.

The transfer period for this unprecedented exchange was set at one year. After July 1, 1991, no more Ost-Mark were accepted.



## Der Schatz von Halberstadt

Starting in April 1990, soldiers from the NVA (Nationale Volksarmee) began to move the entire paper money of the GDR (appr. 100 billion DDR-Mark or 620 Million bills with a volume of about 300 train wagons) to



two underground tunnels near Halberstadt in the Harz Mountains. They needed to make room in the bank safes for the upcoming influx of the West-German currency. Since the DDR had no large scale incinerator, the storage in Halberstadt seemed to be the safest way. The tunnel system had been created towards the end of World War II by forced labor to hide military production from the allied bombings. It had been used during GDR times as storage for military equipment and munition. The money was covered with gravel and left in the bunker to rot naturally. This money included the 200 and 500 Mark bills that were never publicly issued.

Despite heavy steel doors and other elaborate security systems two men from Halberstadt (painter Karsten H. (23) and Janitor Marco K. (21)) succeeded in 1999 in entering the bunker through an unsecured vent and stole large sums of money. When two years later, in 2001, 200 and 500 Ostmark-bills appeared as collector's items, investigators were certain that the bills had been stolen from the tunnels in Halberstadt. Only days later, the two men were caught dead handed at the site in Halberstadt and sentenced from 8 to 16 months probation. Finally in 2002, the federal "*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)*", since 1994 responsible for the DDR-currency decided to burn all the bills. From April 2002 until Jun3 2002 298 containers with the "*Schatz von Halberstadt*" were sent to a "*Müllverbrennungsanlage*" near Helmstedt and incinerated.

## Dichterische Freiheit

The movie shifts the timeline of the theft of Halberstadt to the first week in July 1990, thus creating the possibility of exchanging large sums of Ostmark for the D-Mark. In theory a lot of real money could significantly change the lives of the perpetrators and consequently the whole local community. But how to exchange the money, when the official deadline has passed already? Three scenarios are posited.

1. An uncle of Robert called "Marke" (played by Peter Kurth) works in the tunnel system and has "sabotaged" the exchange deadline and not yet declared and deposited his cash. Robert and Volker, Robert's childhood friend, are able to persuade him to do the exchange with the stolen money. This scenario nets the group more than 50 000 D-Mark, and they are jubilant.

2. When a "Wessie" salesman knocks on the door peddling western goods like pots, microwaves and crystal glasses he tells the suspicious Robert that he would still be able to accept Ost-Mark for payment. He has 3 more days under a special arrangement for these type of sales. Even though he demands an exchange rate of 1:6 our group of thieves senses a golden opportunity to get rid of their cash and launder it into commodities that can be resold for the desired West-Mark. A frenzy of activities erupts that involves the entire "*Hausgemeinschaft*", the community of people living in this housing complex. Soon every apartment is filled with a variety of western goods that are stored for future re-selling.

3. Diplomats who lived abroad during the exchange period had a special extension for their "*Umtausch*". This provides another opportunity for Volker, Robert and Maren (played by Sandra Hüller) to be creative and turn their worthless cash into real money.

"*So hätte es sein können*", if the theft had taken place in the beginning of July 1990. Inspired by true events, this movie is a 'what might have been' tale of the wild days of the currency unification. A new genre, perhaps, a *heist-comedy* that sheds a revealing light on the plight of East-Germans who are faced with the uncertainties of a new capitalistic world. It is also a small act of "Schweyk-like" resistance to the mighty West and the hasty and careless privatization efforts of the "*Treuhandgesellschaft*".

The fact that the group decides to buy and revitalize "*einen stillgelegten volkseigenen Betrieb*" (VEB) from the *Treuhand* for 1 Mark sheds a light