MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Contrary to Obama's ad, domestic competition played a bigger role in Delphi's downfall than did competition from overseas. But to the extent that trade *has* pressured companies and unions to renegotiate antiquated labor contracts, that's a good thing for consumers and for the U.S. economy. It might not be a popular message in union-dominated northeastern Ohio, but it is settled as a matter of economics.

The question isn't why Ohio has lost manufacturing jobs. The entire country has lost manufacturing jobs because companies have made enormous productivity gains, requiring fewer workers to make the same products. The question is: Why hasn't Ohio created non-manufacturing jobs as fast as the rest of the country (or even as fast as Cincinnati)? Between 2000 and 2007, Ohio lost only a slightly higher proportion of its manufacturing jobs than did the U.S. overall, but the U.S. experienced a net gain of around 7.5 million jobs over that period, while Ohio experienced a net loss of around 200,000.

Former Ohio secretary of state Ken Blackwell, a Republican who ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2006, blames Ohio's high taxes and onerous regulations. He was highly critical of the former governor, an unpopular Republican named Bob Taft, and complained that "Ohio Republicans . . . campaigned like Ronald Reagan and then governed like Jimmy Carter." Despite his attempts to distance himself from Taft, he lost to Democrat Ted Strickland by 24 points.

"At the end of the day, Ohioans want to work, they want jobs, and they want an expanding economy," Blackwell says. "John McCain knows as I know . . . that capital seeks the path of least resistance and greatest opportunity. Ohio's regulatory environment, its tax climate, and the general cost of doing business is non-competitive, and as a consequence we're losing capital and losing jobs."

Federal Reserve economists Mark Schweitzer and Paul Bauer might put it a different way: Ohio is losing innovators. According to the *Toledo Blade*, Schweitzer and Bauer did an analysis on why some states' economies outperform others, and found that a surprisingly important metric was the number of patents per capita. Since 1954, Ohio has fallen from sixth to 20th in this measurement of a state's ability to generate new ideas.

No one needs to explain the importance of innovation to Gary Heiman at Standard Textile, or to his employees in the R&D lab, hard at work on the next generation of synthetic fabrics. At the company's headquarters, Heiman escorts me into a realistic facsimile of a hospital operating room. Everything is draped in sea-green fabric.

"Around 20 years ago, all of the fabric used in major surgeries was just thrown out," he explains. He tells me how his company set out to create a fabric capable of resisting fluids and surviving the harsh wash-cycles that surgical sheets and gowns would need to undergo. "We did that," he says. "And today about 25 percent of [what hospitals in the U.S. use] is reusable."

"And that was before the environmental movement not to throw this stuff out really took off," he says, admiring a row of sea-green surgical gowns. "The way I see it, we're just going to ride that wave all the way up." **NR**

■ **PEOPLE II**

Florian's World

On the writer and director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, maker of *The Lives of Others*

JAY NORDLINGER

Two years ago, something extraordinary appeared: a movie called *The Lives of Others*, or, in its original German, *Das Leben der Anderen*. It was a great movie, a genuine artistic achievement. But it was also something even rarer: an honest, illuminating depiction of life in a Communist police state. Those who know such states could scarcely believe their eyes; some had thought they would never see an honest depiction onscreen.

The film is about a dedicated Stasi man, which is to say, a member of the East German secret police. As he goes about his work, listening in on his targets, he has a revolution of conscience: and winds up being a lifesaver.

This movie was appreciated by more than a select few; it was honored by one and all. *The Lives of Others* won virtually every award available, including the Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film. On seeing it, William F. Buckley Jr. declared it just about the best movie he had ever seen. Many of us felt similarly. And I was able to sit down not long ago with the writer and director of this amazing picture.

His full name is Florian Maria Georg Christian Graf Henckel von Donnersmarck. But you can shorten that aristocratic mouthful to Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. He was born in 1973, in Cologne. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife, a copyright lawyer, and their three children.

For a man relatively young, he has done a lot, and seen a lot—and thought a lot. His father was an executive with Lufthansa; his mother was a sociologist and book scout. When Florian was two, they moved to New York City—in fact, to Roosevelt Island. The Donnersmarcks were one of the first "normal" families to live on that once-forlorn island, formerly known as Welfare Island (and worse). It had been a place of asylums and the like. Florian's family was actually featured on television—it was his first appearance on the small screen. And he had an idyllic time on Roosevelt Island, tripping through parks and the ruins of those asylums.

When he was eight, the family moved to West Berlin—another island, really, an enclave within a Communist country. When Florian was taken to the Wall, he thought it was some kind of art installation. (His mother was an aficionada of art.) But he soon learned its meaning, and loathed its meaning. The family traveled from time to time in East Germany, and Florian remembered those glimpses—he incorporated them into *The Lives of Others*. In

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addition, he set his film in a year during which his family lived in Berlin: 1984 (portentous year in any case).

Florian finished high school in yet another city, Brussels. And then he did something very much out of the ordinary: He went to Russia—rather, the Soviet Union—to study. The year was 1991, shortly after the coup against Gorbachev failed. Florian had always loved things Russian: literature, history, art. So he went to Leningrad, to learn the language and immerse himself in its literature. While there, he also did some charitable work with the Order of Malta: starting up soup kitchens, feeding the poor. After two years, he earned a diploma, qualifying him to teach Russian as a foreign language. The diploma was adorned with a hammer and sickle: The Soviet Union had expired, but old habits died hard.

I might mention, now, that Donnersmarck is a polyglot: He speaks French, Italian, and English, in addition to Russian and his native German. And he is spending a lot of time just now listening to English—American English—in L.A. He has his ear cocked for idioms, inflections, nuances. His current screenplay is in English.

After Russia, he went to Oxford, to study politics, philosophy, and economics. In 1994, who should show up but one Mikhail S. Gorbachev? And what Russian-speaking student should have been chosen to guide him around? Donnersmarck reports that the former Soviet leader was immensely personable, and keenly interested in what he was seeing. He would ask that students be called over to him, for a discussion; and they would be flabbergasted.

LOOKING TO MOVIES

During Donnersmarck's time at Oxford, Richard Attenborough, the famed film director, came for a visiting professorship. Donnersmarck had thought of himself as a novelist: That is what he would become. But it was dawning on him that "maybe my challenge was to try to give people the same psychological depth in a film that they would normally get only from a novel." Could he do in just a couple of hours what a novel can do in 50, or 100?

Attenborough announced a competition: an essay competition on "Why Film Is My Chosen Medium." The winners would be interns on his next film, *In Love and War*. "I dropped all my academic duties for two weeks," says Donnersmarck, "and wrote my essay." He was one of the three winners. And his experience on the Attenborough film was formative, making him think "I'll never accept a lower professional standard than this."

Attenborough encouraged him to go to film school. So he did, in Munich. Donnersmarck himself is not a great believer in film schools. "I don't think that going made me a better director at all." The craft of filmmaking is no big issue, he says; you don't need a film school for that. But such a school is "a great excuse to see a lot of films that interest you, and maybe see them multiple times, and to talk to other people about films."

I have mentioned the influence of Russian culture on Donnersmarck. But there have been other influences, of course: German and Austrian literature, for example. He cites in particular Freud, Zweig, Mann, and Arthur Schnitzler. He also mentions the American film director Elia Kazan, who, with his actor, Brando, "freed cinema." Donnersmarck calls Kazan "a great artist and a real thinker," who went about his work "very, very conscientiously." He regards Kazan's memoirs as "possibly the best nonfiction book I've ever read." The book gave him courage, he says, to admit his own "weaknesses and troubles." It would do the same for other readers.

While in the Munich film school, Donnersmarck made a short-action film called *Dobermann*. It was just four minutes, and included no dialogue, but the film took off: being sold to television, winning awards all over the world (in a rehearsal for *The Lives of Others*). Donnersmarck was able to live off that little flick for two years, traveling abroad to festivals, collecting his awards. This is exceedingly rare. And, naturally, he started to think about a full-length feature.

"How did the idea for *The Lives of Others* come about?" people ask. And Donnersmarck has an answer. Lenin was famously opposed to listening to music. (Reagan liked to cite this fact.) He thought that music would soften him, when he had to remain hard, to make his omelet (which was never to materialize, of course). Donnersmarck mused about forcing stereo headphones on Lenin, making him listen to music, whether he wanted to or not. And then came a related idea: What if a committed secret policeman were forced to listen, through headphones, to free-minded, liberal, democratic people? And that is what the Stasi man in the movie—Wiesler—does.

Donnersmarck wrote his script. He offered it to every single distributor in Germany, but there were no takers. "This is too intellectual," people said, "no one will want to see the movie." Donnersmarck would counterargue: "Maybe you're underestimating people. Maybe you're not offering films that they would enjoy seeing." Undaunted, he went about assembling the best of everything for his film: the best of everything as he saw it. He got the actors he wanted, the composer he wanted, and so on. He convinced them to work for relatively little money. And, without a distributor, they went ahead and shot the film.

Even with the film in the can, there were no takers—save one: Buena Vista (a division of Walt Disney). Thus far, the film has earned a cool $100 million.

REACHING OUT

Before the official launch of the film, Donnersmarck took it to various audiences in the former East Germany. He wanted to assure them that this was not a film attacking them, or making fun of them; this was a film suggesting what life was like. From these audiences came an outpouring of recognition, affirmation, and gratitude. During the Q&A sessions, people would not so much ask questions as tell their own stories, about life under Communism, and the Stasi. Some of them said, "This is the first time I've even allowed myself to go back to these things, and to open up these memories."

Donnersmarck makes an observation: People were brought up to identify totally with the state; they may be slow to realize the extent to which they were victimized by that state.

In his newspaper column, Bill Buckley referred to *The Lives of Others* as a "holy vessel of expiation." And so it was, in part. Of course, not all East Germans, or former East Germans, were happy with it. Donnersmarck cites his main Stasi adviser, who congratulated him on getting the details right: but why did the main character have to be a traitor? Is that the only way to make a Stasi officer a hero—by having him betray the state?

Such a mentality is far from dead, in Germany and elsewhere.

Within the story of *The Lives of Others* and its making lies a

particular, individual story: that of Ulrich Mühe, who played the lead role of Wiesler. As Donnersmarck relates, he was an extraordinarily sensitive man, as well as an extraordinarily good actor. Mühe had the fate of being an East German, and the Stasi had its eye on him from the moment he left high school: They knew he would be a big star. During his military service (obligatory), they made him serve as a sniper at the Berlin Wall. He was under orders to shoot whoever tried to cross from east to west. If he failed, he would never be allowed to work as an actor. He would have to be a manual laborer to the end of his days.

So there was Mühe, 18 years old, sitting in the towers, with this incredible burden on his shoulders. The only thing worse than not being an actor would be shooting someone. Mühe developed stomach ulcers, and one day he collapsed on duty, bleeding from the mouth. Doctors had to take out three-quarters of his stomach. But, fortunately, no one tried to cross. Still, the Stasi never stopped warning him to toe the political line, through all the years of his acting. He kept his counsel—until just before the Wall came down, when he gave a big, pro-freedom speech in East Berlin's Alexanderplatz.

After the Wall came down, Mühe did what few East Germans have wanted to do: He asked to see his Stasi file. It told him many ugly things, including this: His wife of six years, from whom he was divorced, informed on him for the duration of their marriage. She herself was a famous actress; she was also a Stasi spy, according to the file.

On discovering this, Mühe took a brave step: He spoke about it publicly. He wanted to tell his story, and perhaps give courage to others. When this was done, his ex-wife—with a battery of leftist, or "post-Communist," supporters—sued. She claimed that the information in the file was simply false. Perversely, Mühe lost the case. And there was more: Throughout this time, his ex-wife was sick, and, in fact, died. A certain public sympathy was with her. At her funeral, speakers denounced Mühe as a monster who had destroyed her. He was the object of widespread hate; his answering machine was filled with denunciations. And his own health worsened: Ulcers came to play on the quarter of a stomach he had left. Last summer, he died, age 54.

Needless to say, his friend and director, Donnersmarck, talks about all this with some passion.

Oscar Night 2007: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (l.) with actor Ulrich Mühe

TERRY SCHMITT/UPI

FREEDOM AND TRUTH

What about Donnersmarck's politics? He is clear and direct: "I want the government to stay as far out of my life as humanly possible." His father was, and is, an anti-Communist, and a disciple of the economist Hayek. His mother was different: part of a socialist youth movement, early on. In college, they even called her "Red Anna." Donnersmarck says that he had the Cold War every night at his dinner table.

He has a frustration shared by many: the success of socialists in portraying the Nazis as diametrically opposite them. He says that people ought to be reminded that socialism was part of the Nazis' very name. He is against any system that forbids the individual to live his life to the full. And he is determined that Communism, in Europe and elsewhere, will not be perfumed.

"We must make sure to remember that it was a nightmare, because, as we know, ideologies do make cyclical reappearances. It's incredibly important that we don't allow people to romanticize Communism, and that we call it what it is: an anti-man religion, completely contrary to freedom." Go to the Eastern European countries, he says, and you will see the destruction wreaked by Communism: physical and spiritual. And he makes a point about the progress of formerly Communist countries: It has been delayed, because of a refusal to face up to the past. There has been no decommunization, as there was denazification. We are sternly warned against "victor's justice." And there has been precious little accounting.

The Lives of Others might be considered a part of accounting—which is part of why it has been received so enthusiastically and emotionally.

Reflecting on Communism, Donnersmarck remembers his years in Russia. He lived with architecture students, a civilized bunch. And they were content to live amid garbage, or at least willing to do so. Donnersmarck, the eager West German, suggested that they simply clean it up. They looked at him almost pityingly, saying, "Oh, you *would* say that, wouldn't you?" The sense that they could do anything on their own was utterly absent. They were dependent on the state.

For much of the world, Communism is no memory, and *The Lives of Others* was not distributed in at least two countries: China and Cuba. But there are plenty of bootleg copies about, certainly in China. Donnersmarck gets mail from Chinese intellectuals, saying, "Everyone has seen the film," underground. And this pleases the writer-director no end. "I don't think about all the money I'm losing in China, because I'm so glad the film is being seen. Thank God for piracy."

He is brimming with opinions, and I ask him about the United States. Donnersmarck says, in the course of his remarks, "I really, really hope that America will not make the mistake that has so weakened Europe: looking toward the government for answers to all problems. I hope that America will continue to respect the principle of subsidiarity, which is to say: The state should do only what the individual truly cannot do on his own"—and even then, the government that acts should be the most local government possible.

And what does he want for himself? "I hope to live my potential and develop my skills to the fullest. I hope that, in looking at my work, people will realize that truth lies within themselves. They should rely on themselves and take responsibility for themselves. I believe this so fundamentally, I'm sure it will be expressed in my films, whether I want it to or not, in whatever stories I tell." It should be a treat to follow those stories, year after year, in theaters everywhere: perhaps even in China and Cuba. **NR**