

*German teenagers' tastes in dress, social activities, and music are very similar to other teenagers in industrialized countries.*



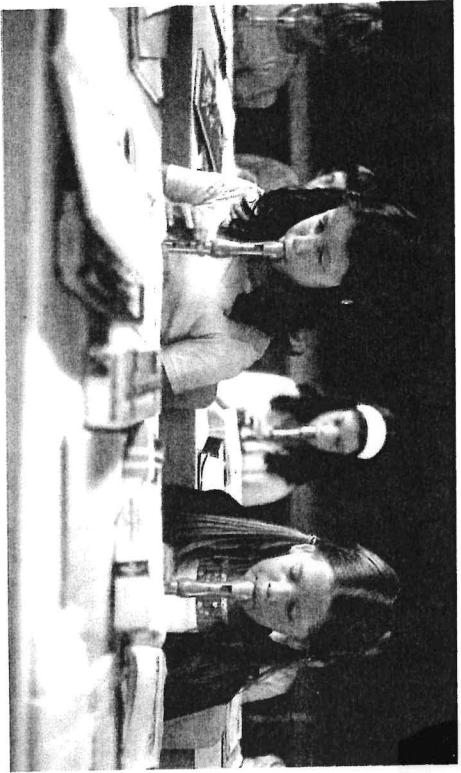
## Chapter 8

# LEARNING AND WORKING

The German nation is a rich mixture of diverse regions. Most have centuries-old traditions that make them surprisingly different from their neighbors. Add to that the years Germany was a divided nation, as well as its emphasis on state governments, and it is clear that working and learning in today's Germany varies a great deal from place to place.

By law, all German children must attend school from the age of six to fourteen. During their final school years, however, some students may attend vocational school part-time. Rules vary from state to state. According to the German constitution, all students must receive religious training until the age of fourteen. Older students can decide whether to continue their spiritual instruction. Most decide not to. Free public schools are available to all German children. Some students go to private schools, which charge tuition.

Almost all German students get a summer vacation that lasts six weeks or so. During summer recess, many states and cities offer special holiday passes and other programs that let groups of students take organized field trips inexpensively.



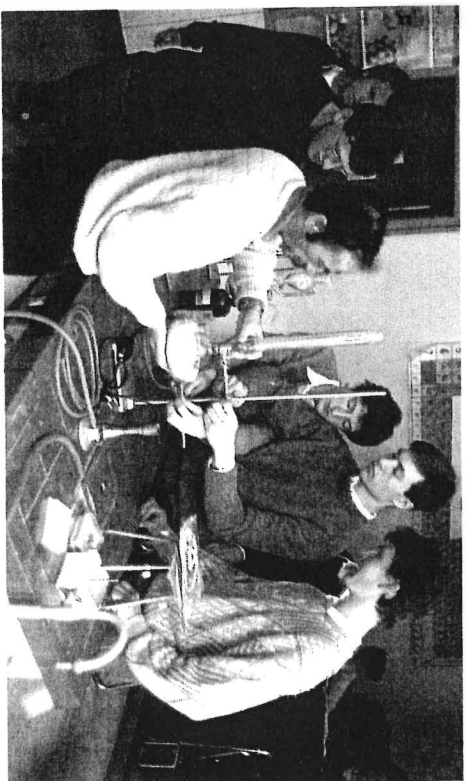
Students practicing at a music school

## KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten is a German tradition, as well as a German word, that has been borrowed by many different nations. German children often attend kindergarten between the ages of three and six. There, they learn to play together and to express themselves clearly and creatively. Kindergarten is not officially a part of Germany's public school system. Parents usually decide whether their children will attend. The overwhelming majority of German children do. Kindergarten classes are run by local governments, churches, private companies, and other groups. Parents often pay all or much of the cost of running the school.

## THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

All German children begin attending primary school (*Grundschule*) when they are six years old. In most parts of the



A Gymnasium science class

nation, primary school lasts four years. After that, students, in consultation with parents and teachers, must decide which of three different types of education they want to receive.

Nearly half of German children choose to attend a type of secondary school (*Hauptschule*), between the ages of 10 and 15. This school teaches academic subjects but also prepares children to begin their working lives.

After completing primary school, some students begin studying at a different secondary school called a *Realschule*. After about six years, although it varies from state to state, students earn a degree a bit more advanced than Hauptschule students. Both groups generally continue their education in vocational schools.

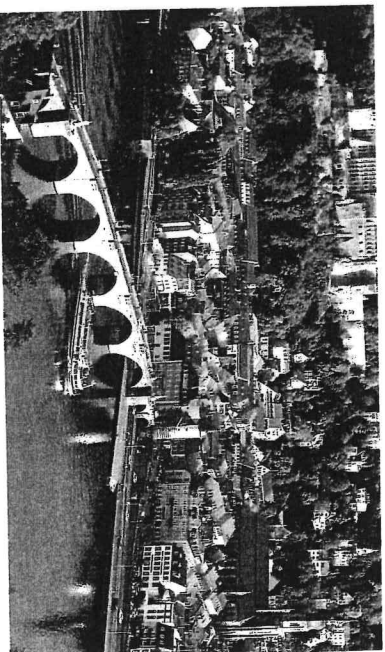
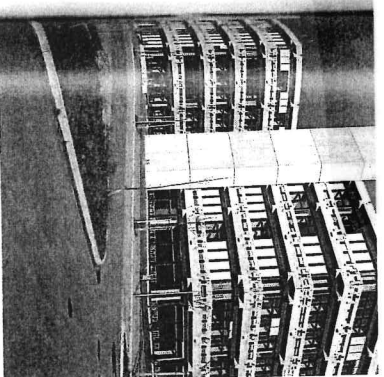
Students who eventually plan to attend a university go to a third type of school called a *Gymnasium*. During their early years at a gymnasium, pupils normally begin to concentrate their studies in one or more specialized areas. Typically, it takes nine years to graduate from a gymnasium, the longest course of all German secondary schools.

In recent years, some people have complained about the German public education system. In it, students who are just nine or ten years old must begin making decisions that will shape their adult lives. It is far too easy, some people say, to make a wrong choice that is difficult to change. Because of these criticisms, a fourth type of secondary school, called a comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*), has become increasingly popular. Comprehensive schools combine the features of the other three types of schools, allowing students to make decisions about their lives when they are a bit more mature.

### VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The majority of German students attend a vocational institute following their graduation from secondary school. Vocational schools and the apprenticeship system prepare many young people for work in various trades. The most popular German trades are construction workers; cleaning contractors; motor mechanics; bakers; butchers; barbers and hairdressers; cabinetmakers; painters; electricians; plumbers; metalworkers; and radio, television, and computer technicians. There are nearly four hundred other jobs for which training is usually offered. At the same time they prepare for the working world, vocational students take courses such as history and politics.

Most vocational students attend school only a few days a week. On the other days, they work as apprentices, a sort of assistant. Apprentices work with professionals to get on-the-job training in their chosen field. Apprentices are paid for their work. Wages are usually very low at first, but gradually increase. Many vocational



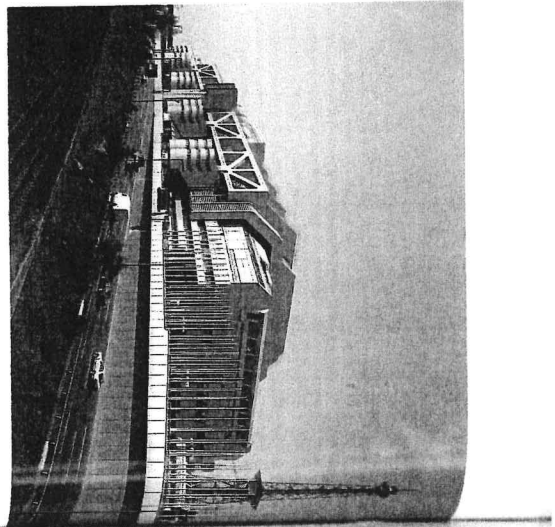
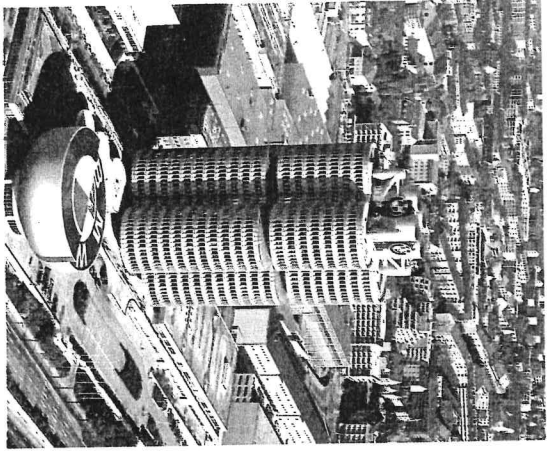
*Heidelberg University (left) is located in the center of the city, while the castle is on a slope above the town.*

students work as apprentices for two, three, or even four years before completing their educations. Many vocational schools are run by state governments. Large companies often sponsor schools specializing in a specific industry as well.

### UNIVERSITIES

Most of the universities in Germany are operated by governments of the sixteen states. Some are extremely old. The University of Heidelberg, for example, was founded in 1386. Quite a few others are also more than five hundred years old. In almost all cases, students must first graduate from a gymnasium before entering a university. University students study advanced subjects in the fields of law, social studies, engineering, humanities, art, mathematics, science, and medicine.

Whether they attend vocational schools or universities, most German men and women eventually begin working, often even before their schooling is completed. Partly because of unification, some jobs in Germany are more difficult to find, even for university graduates.



Munich's BMW administrative offices (left) and museum (bottom of picture); Berlin's International Congress Center (right)

### GERMANY'S POWERFUL ECONOMY

Even as a part of a divided nation, the economy of old West Germany was one of the world's strongest. During the 1980s, for example, only Japan and the United States produced more automobiles than West Germany. East Germany also enjoyed some economic success, although it paled in comparison to West Germany. Of all the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, East Germany's economy was the strongest throughout the 1980s.

Many of the products made in Germany are exported to other nations. In 1990, eastern and western Germany together exported goods worth 457 billion dollars in United States money. In recent years West Germany, the United States, and Japan were the top three exporting countries in the world.

In the early 1990s, the German economy was weakened by the expense of unification and by a nearly worldwide recession. The German government was forced to borrow large amounts of money and to raise taxes to have the funds needed to help people hurt by high unemployment rates. At the same time, many German industries were spending large amounts of money to cut back on pollution. Factories in former East German territory also needed cash to modernize their plants to compete successfully in an open market.

### THE RUHR VALLEY

An area near the Ruhr River, which empties into the Rhine north of Düsseldorf, has more large factories than any similar-sized place on earth. Cities and towns, inhabited by people who work in the factories, are crowded into the area. Outside of a few city centers, the Ruhr Valley is the most densely populated district in Germany.

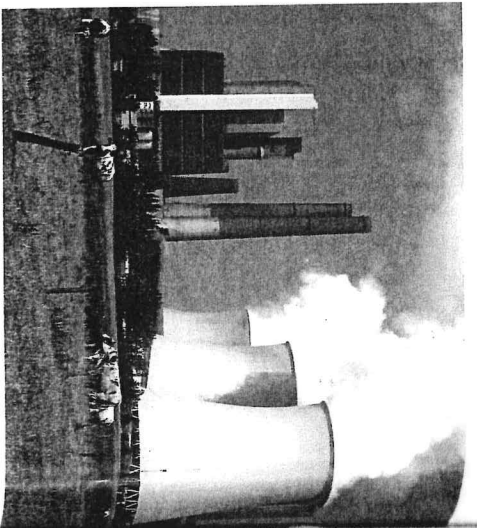
It is easy to understand why this area has been such an industrial powerhouse. Enormous deposits of both coal and iron ore are found throughout the Ruhr region. In huge refineries, coal is burned in white-hot blast furnaces, where iron is changed to steel. Nearby factories shape the steel into parts for automobiles, skyscrapers, furniture—almost everything imaginable. With coal and iron ore so close at hand, the refineries and factories of the Ruhr can make finished goods without having to pay expensive transportation fees.

The Ruhr is a nearly ideal place for heavy industry. The area is crisscrossed with canals and train lines. Heavy products can be





*A steel worker (above) wears heat-protective clothing; a thermoelectric plant in the Ruhr region (right)*

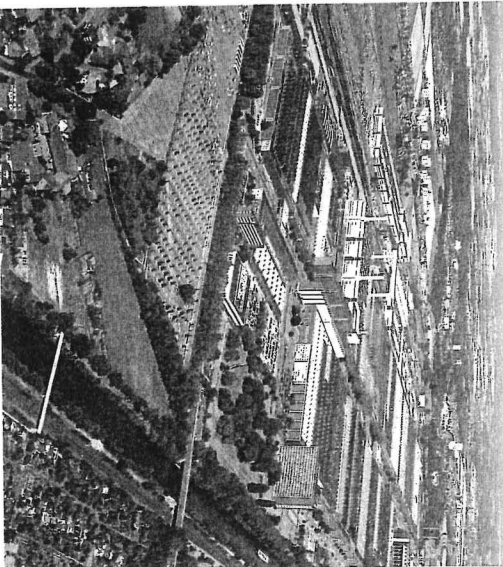


moved cheaply. On the Ruhr River, barges and other ships carry the region's industrial output directly to the Rhine. From there, they go on to the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the ports of the world.

About one-third of the factories in the Ruhr region were destroyed during World War II. After the war, Allied nations demolished all the surviving factories that had made war materials. They also limited the output of many others. But Germans quickly rebuilt the plants that had been wrecked. By the late 1950s, the Ruhr Valley was producing more material than ever before. Today, the region produces many chemical and textile products in addition to metal and steel parts. Much of the electricity used in western Germany is produced by coal-burning generators in the Ruhr Valley.

### INDUSTRIES LARGE AND SMALL

Two of Germany's largest industrial companies produce automobiles. Daimler-Benz AG, headquartered in Stuttgart,

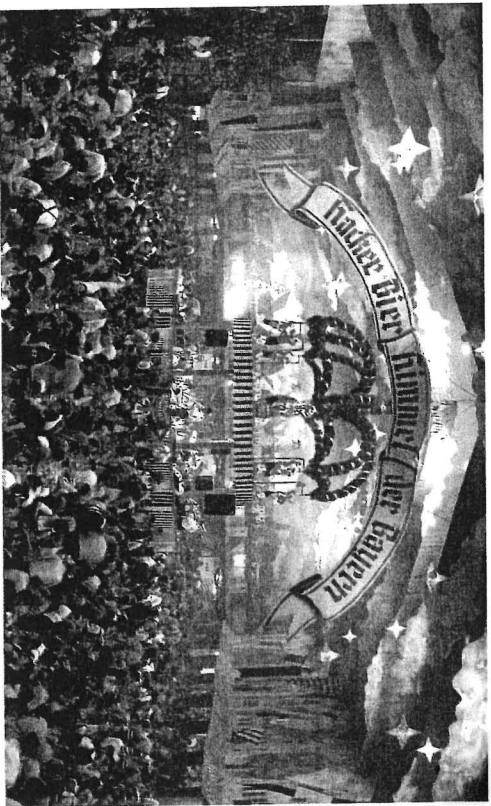


*A hand-carved German clock (left) and the Volkswagen factory in Wolfsburg*

employs more than 320,000 people worldwide to produce renowned Mercedes-Benz cars and other products.

Volkswagenwerk AG, based in Wolfsburg, uses nearly as many employees to make and distribute Volkswagens, small cars noted for their low cost and fuel efficiency. Some other famous German corporations are Siemens AG and Bosch GmbH, producers of electrical components, and the enormous chemical producers BASF and Bayer AG.

Of course, not all of Germany's products are made by huge corporations. There are smaller factories that make, for example, Germany's famous cuckoo clocks. A small number of craftspeople still work in their homes and in little shops to make one-of-a-kind souvenirs and pieces of art. Elaborate wood carvings, for example, are made by skilled Bavarians and sold throughout the world. Largely because of the power of personal computers and

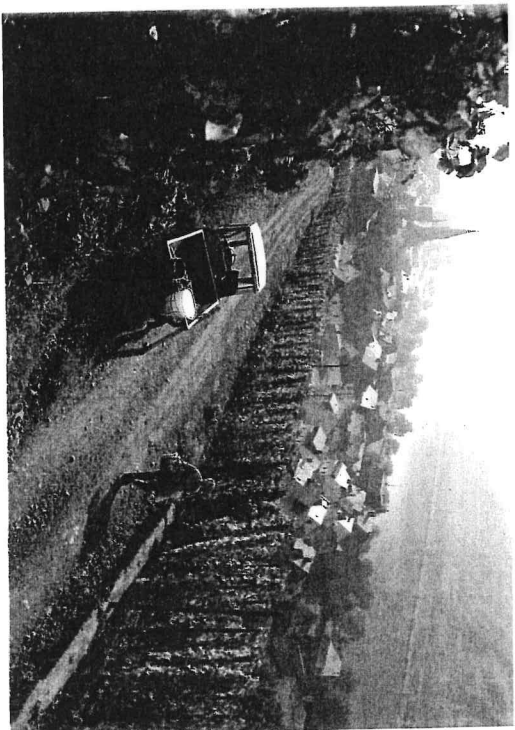


*A crowded beer hall during the Oktoberfest in Munich*

communication devices, some Germans who used to work in offices are now spending all or part of their time working at home.

In some ways, German industry is changing. Many of the largest factories are still in the Ruhr region, but new areas are developing their own economic muscles. In Stuttgart and some other cities, new high-tech factories have sprung up to develop parts for computers and other electronic devices. The reunification of Berlin will certainly strengthen its position as an industrial center in the decades to come.

Some of the most famous medium-sized industrial plants in Germany are breweries. In earlier years, there were literally thousands of German breweries. Today, many have gone out of business or have been purchased by larger companies. More than twelve hundred remain, however, to satisfy the nation's unquenchable taste for beer. There are more breweries in Germany than in all other European nations combined. The average German drinks more beer than anyone else in the world.



*Vineyards along the Mosel River, like this one, grow white grapes used to produce white wine.*

Wine is also a popular drink. Many vineyards—where the grapes that produce wine are grown—can be found in southwestern Germany, especially near the Rhine, Neckar, and Mosel rivers. Grapes have been grown in this area for thousands of years, reflecting the ancient Roman influence.

### AGRICULTURE

More than three-fourths of the food eaten in Germany is grown or raised within the nation's borders. The major crops are wheat and other cereals, potatoes, beets and other vegetables, and fruits. Animals used for food, including chickens, pigs, and cattle, are raised on farms.

The question of farm ownership created serious problems when the two Germans were united. In Communist East Germany, there was no such thing as a private or family-owned farm. All farms were owned by the government or by groups of people—

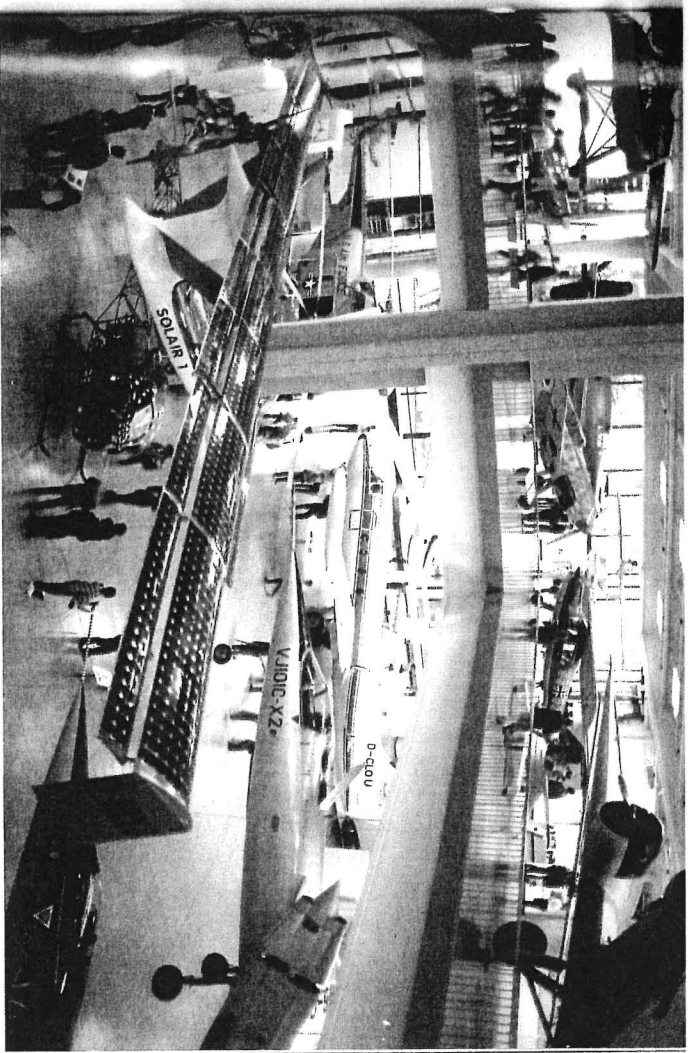
called collectives — organized by the government. In West Germany, however, most farms were (and still are) owned by private companies or families.

Most Germans hope that farms in former East German territories can be turned over to companies and families. However, it is often difficult to decide who owned a farm years ago. Decades earlier, property throughout East Germany, including farmland, was taken away from individual people by the Communist government. To make matters even more difficult, land was illegally taken away from German families by the government of Adolf Hitler more than half a century ago.

Even after all these years, the German government is trying to return all property, including farmlands, to its rightful owners. The process is extremely difficult. By March 1991, nearly half a year after unification took place, approximately 3,500 private farms had been established on former East German territory. In former West German territory, more than 600,000 independent farms already existed.

## MILITARY

In the 1950s, because of the fear for the safety of West European nations due to Soviet military buildup, the Allies reversed the policy made at the end of World War II that forbade West Germany to maintain armed forces. Under a task force overseeing the process, West Germany went from demilitarization to rearmament following the added article to the constitution: "The Federation shall build up Armed Forces for defense purposes." East Germany, under Soviet direction, maintained an extensive military and police force.



Part of the aircraft display in the Deutsches Museum in Munich

The *Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces) now consists of three branches — the army, air force, and navy. Young German men, from the age of nineteen to twenty-eight, are conscripted (drafted) for a military service term of twelve months. The government tries to assign conscripts to duties in accordance with educational and vocational backgrounds and the results of an aptitude test. About half of the armed forces are filled by conscripts; the other half are career servicemen or volunteers who sign on for periods of up to fifteen years.