

One autumn day in 2012, Yngve Holen was leaning out from his elevator building in Berlin's Kottbuser Tor watching his life go by. A sparrow in a park picked up a turd with its beak and deposited it, longingly, on a public exercise machine. Moments later, an executive-looking man eating a clementine got off his bike, reached into a trash bin, and made off with forty-three beer bottles.

"Money doesn't grow on trees. But that day it hit me. Why couldn't it?" he recalls. Today, Holen is known throughout Europe as the visionary behind Basic Income, aka the 1000 Euros for All movement. Since its approval by German parliament last spring, the scheme has taken a once-debt-stricken Germany by storm. Since May, each German citizen has been guaranteed a 1,000€ monthly income. No questions asked. All citizens, including children, the disabled and prisoners, are guaranteed this income to ensure that their basic needs are covered. "The amount is not a loan," but rather an "investment in the security of our current and future well-being," Holen explains, sipping a latte.

Since that September day, a sense of change in Germany is palpable. The headlines from today's Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung read: the Eurozone has just been divided into 120 micro-nations. Newest iPhone comes with a holographic empathy robot named Kari. A cannabis plant shaped like the Adidas logo, invented by geneticists in Switzerland, has citizens rejoicing. A mere two years after CERN's "God" particle breakthrough, a "Satan" particle has now been discovered by nuclear researchers in Kyrgyzstan.

But on the streets in Kreuzberg, Berlin, today, on everyone's mind is something else: "1000 bucks for everyone. It's simple. It works. I'm single-handedly regenerating the economy. It's making us happier, fitter, more ourselves," Holen tells me from an IKEA footstool in his modest, light-filled rental. The most recent issue of the Financial Times sits on a state-of-the-art treadmill.

Today, Germany has a manufacturing surplus. "There is too much stuff produced, not enough buyers," Holen explains. "We've rerouted this surplus. We're giving it back to the people." The nation's budget for social services has been converted into this Grundeinkommen scheme, which costs about 600 billion Euros yearly." But by nearly all counts – and despite early skepticism – Basic Income has been a resounding success. "Citizens can still work; they just don't have to." To the bafflement of early critics, few people have quit their jobs. Polls are reporting a sense of overall well-being, fitness, the effects of a new Wirtschaftswunder. Children are beginning to invest in real estate; futures indexes of nearly every domestic commodity are rising. Teenagers are leaving home early to participate in things like WWOOF, an organic-farm volunteer scheme. Violence has

dropped. The incidence of car accidents has likewise decreased.

Since finding fame and fortune as the initiator of epoch-changing policy, Holen has retained a childlike poise, an air of modesty and guilelessness betrayed by his personal hygiene, a messenger bag from his college days, and his modest lifestyle. Holen has allowed himself scant luxuries apart from custom table-sized electronics replicas, time-share holiday homes in his native Norway, and a sizeable share in Germany's Deutsche Bahn rail network. ("It's because I love trains," he says.) But before his status as one of the world's top economic advisors – when we met, he was coming from a garden fundraiser with the chair of the I.M.F. – Holen was an artist.

"You remember that Simpsons episode where Barney the drunk turns himself around and starts contributing to society? Now we're giving people an incentive to do just that. I can personally speak for this, having grown from artist to economic artisan." Holen picks up two model ICE high speed passenger trains – a smaller and a larger one – and holds the tip of the smaller of the two just behind the rear of the larger train. "I used to be... I was like this train here: the ass-kisser train. All artists are ass-kissers."

What's next for Holen? "I'm working with Deutsche Bahn and [German convenience store chain] DM on a new campaign to spread the word about Basic Income. We want to take it even further, we want to take it internationally, to spread it, we're going to be the next Facebook."

Near the end of my visit, Holen takes me to a wall-sized reproduction a piece of street art he has recently installed in his kitchen. He is beaming. "This replica was given to me by the artist himself. He grew up just down the street from here. One day, he rings my doorbell and hands me this." The mural shows a spray-painted graffiti scribbled, in freehand, 'Deutschland, du Opfer, gib Handy!'

"It means something like 'Germany, you bastard, give me your cell phone!' The artist and I, we're great friends now, the two of us. We go golfing together."

- Pablo Larios

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