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# ‘Sympathy for the Devil?’

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## The West German Left and the Challenge of Terrorism

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### Abstract

*In the 1970s, the West German extra-parliamentary Left struggled to respond effectively to left-wing terrorism and the state powers mobilised against it. This article argues that a shared conception of counter-violence as legitimate resistance helps explain the Left’s ambivalent relationship to political violence and its solidarity with militants. The mounting strain on the projects and protest networks of student rebels, older leftists, anti-nuclear demonstrators and feminist activists, however, provoked debate and, eventually, change. Caught between terrorism and counter-terrorism, leftists revised assumptions upon which their commitment to resistance had rested – and reconceived resistance itself as part of everyday, mainstream politics.*

In May 1972, members of the militant Red Army Faction (RAF) attacked the West German justice system, US military forces and the conservative Springer press in a string of bombings. By exposing what they understood as US imperialism and the coercive forces of a still fascist or authoritarian society, and simultaneously demonstrating the vulnerability of the state, the RAF hoped to mobilise the population for its cause. The month’s violence left four dead, more than sixty injured, and more West Germans fearful than won over. Even those who agreed with the RAF’s basic assessment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and US foreign policy found their actions wrong-headed and self-stylisation as revolutionaries unconvincing. Immediately following the RAF’s ‘May Offensive’, a number of prominent Left intellectuals publicly distanced themselves from the self-described ‘urban guerrillas’. Among them was sociologist Oskar Negt, who famously repudiated the RAF at a Frankfurt congress honouring the American Black Liberationist Angela Davis. He argued that the RAF did not practice socialist or revolutionary politics but instead equated politics with ‘individual tests of courage’ and ‘mistook the fear that

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they spread for political success'.<sup>1</sup> The RAF had, in other words, fallen victim to their own illusions, becoming a danger to themselves – and to the Left as a whole. The latter concerned Negt most. If what he called the 'mechanism of solidarity' at work among the extra-parliamentary Left were not 'dismantled' – if leftists did not disavow the 'desperados of the Baader-Meinhof group' – he feared for socialism's future.

Oskar Negt's speech – and the heated reactions it elicited – can be credited with beginning a debate on terrorism and violence within the West German Left. But neither the speech nor the response was novel. Participants in the discussion largely rehashed debates from the previous decade, in which it was not the basic question of the legitimacy of political violence in general but rather the strategic utility of its particular manifestations that was the issue. What differentiated this particular iteration from previous ones, however, was the central importance of solidarity, both in the immediate dispute and in the more diffuse and informal discussions of the coming years. Leftists who railed against Negt did not do so because he dared to criticise the RAF's actions, not when so many of them also critiqued the militants for their 'loss of reality', vanguardism and 'dangerous abstractionism'.<sup>2</sup> The anger – and ensuing debate – stemmed from his attack on Left solidarity, exacerbated by the public nature of his critique. However much they may have disagreed with one another or disavowed the actions of certain of their fellows, radical leftists still considered a united front vital to their survival in a period of repression.

Nothing about the Left's relationship with the RAF was uncomplicated or trivial; theirs was an uneasy relationship that mirrored leftists' relationship with the FRG and its fascist past. In this, Negt was correct when he identified solidarity as the noose with which leftists threatened to hang themselves. What he and many others failed to grasp at the time, however, was that the 'mechanism of solidarity' against which he railed could not be dismantled without a rigorous engagement of long-standing assumptions about West German democracy and the logic of resistance. The Cold War did much to keep traditional Left-Right political demarcations alive across Europe. In the West, and particularly in the FRG, system critics were routinely lumped together and de-legitimated as allies of a pro-Soviet Left. But the experience of terrorism – both the acts of political violence and the responses to them – did more than reify a 'Left' identity that had in many ways outlived its usefulness.<sup>3</sup> It mobilised a specifically post-war alliance with roots in an older generation's analysis of the FRG and a common commitment to anti-fascist resistance. Though not initially a 'Left'-exclusive cause, it became one as socialists were pushed to the fringes of Christian Democracy; not necessarily extra-parliamentary, either, it became so when the Social Democrats (SPD) attempted to restrict democratic opposition to parliament and legal

<sup>1</sup> Oskar Negt, 'Sozialistische Politik und Terrorismus', in Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail, 1946–1995*, vol. 2 (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 1998), 752–7.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Bewaffneter Kampf: Texte der RAF: Auseinandersetzung und Kritik* (Graz: Rote Sonne, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> On the latter point, I agree with Belinda Davis's assessment in 'What's Left? Popular Political Participation in Postwar Europe', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 363–90.

institutions at the end of the 1950s. A sincere concern for the post-fascist continuities of the FRG – first articulated by critics in the late 1940s and successfully transferred to a younger generation – kept anti-fascist vigilance alive, with resistance conceived first and foremost in opposition to the state. Even by 1972, many leftists were not so convinced of West Germany's democratic character that they could categorically rule out the need for – and thus the basic legitimacy of – resistance.

Analyses of fascist and authoritarian society were crucial to the political thought and dispositions of the post-war Left and promoted a deep scepticism towards the state. How they arrived at their conclusions varied greatly, but extra-parliamentary leftists roughly agreed that violence in society originated with the state, often as the oppressive tool of a capitalist system. Any force used in opposition to that initial violence was understood as counter-violence and purely defensive in character. These conceptions of violence helped an otherwise amorphous collection of actors to view themselves as allies, by effectively dividing up the political landscape into perpetrators and victims: those who initiated violence in order to maintain the status quo and those who were the object of that violence.<sup>4</sup> Of course, such notions had long been common to Left radical and revolutionary politics across the globe. But precisely because the Nazi past loomed large over these West Germans, understandings of counter- or progressive violence strongly influenced their relationship with the FRG in the 1960s and continued to shape their perception of the political stage in the 1970s. Whether they openly disavowed the violence perpetrated by the RAF, remained silent (implicitly condoning it), or celebrated it – as some certainly did – extra-parliamentary leftists could still understand the group's members as victims of state-initiated violence who acted to defend themselves and the cause of progress from the forces of reaction. Counter-terrorism measures, and the public condemnation of anyone who might 'sympathise' with the RAF, only fed suspicions of the FRG's authoritarian nature and encouraged many to conclude there was no option but to support the guerillas, if not their actions – a fine line that sometimes got blurred.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, this solidarity and the perpetrator-victim schema upon which it rested prevented the majority of extra-parliamentary leftists from confronting left-wing political violence as anything but reactive counter-violence. Even as they condemned specific attacks, they deflected questions of violence – the conditions for it as well as the means of its prevention – onto the state and existing social system. This fundamental ground did not shift until late in the 1970s, when the cycle of terrorism and counter-terrorism threatened to destroy the extra-parliamentary Left,

<sup>4</sup> For a nuanced overview of new left ideas on violence highlighting the linkage to strategies of subversion, see Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, 'Transformation by Subversion? The New Left and the Question of Violence', in Belinda Davis et al., eds, *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 155–69. Notably, the common denominator to all the strategies detailed there is the bipolar framework outlined here.

<sup>5</sup> For recent work on the RAF and West German society, see Wolfgang Kraushaar's 2-volume collection, *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 2006) and Klaus Weinbauer, Jörg Requate and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, eds, *Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik: Medien, Staat und Subkulturen in den 70er Jahren* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006).

not only as a voice of social critique but as partners in new protest networks and political alliances. The anti-nuclear and women's liberation movements in particular embraced conceptions of violence, power and resistance that were often at odds with long-standing currents on the post-war extra-parliamentary Left. As protesters within these movements found their activities undermined by their association with violence and, increasingly, with terrorism, these differences became impossible to ignore. Reaching an agreement on political strategy was more difficult than ever given the diversity of actors. But for this same reason, it was also essential to the movements' futures. Confronting these tensions ultimately prompted a number of self-identifying leftists to interrogate long-held assumptions regarding West German democracy and the legitimate tools for its defence. In the short term, the result was an extra-parliamentary Left that was simultaneously paralysed and in flux: unable to move forwards because increasingly at odds over the means to do so. In the longer term, however, it contributed to a productive reorientation of the Left in the 1980s. This is not to say that terrorism alone explains a shift in political culture at the end of the 1970s. But the challenges it presented – and new conclusions it inspired – are a vital part of this larger story.

### The 'when' and 'how' of resistance

Some have argued that the West German Left, particularly the '68ers', actively supported the use of political violence.<sup>6</sup> This hardly seems the case. For most, it remained a hypothetical discussion about the potential need for armed resistance, inspired by the past and kept alive by events in the present – first the conservative 'restoration' of the 1950s and then protesters' experience of police brutality and political intolerance in the 1960s and 70s. The killing of Benno Ohnesorg on 2 June 1967 looms large in memories of the period precisely because it prompted a debate on whether or not the time for resistance had come.<sup>7</sup> The young engineering student was shot by a police officer in West Berlin, not far from where thousands had gathered to protest against the state visit of the Iranian Shah. The brutal suppression of the demonstration was followed by the city government's refusal to acknowledge any wrongdoing and by media attacks on protesters. Many, previously uninterested in politics, were drawn into the extra-parliamentary Left milieu at this time, fearful that recent events revealed a genuine threat to democracy (however broadly conceived). A hastily assembled university congress provided a forum to discuss both the perceived crisis and the need for action. Convened in Hanover, it attracted participants from different generations, all over the FRG, and across the left spectrum – 'old' and 'new'

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Stephen Eisel, 'Angebliche "Gewaltfreiheit" als Gründungsmythos', *Die Politische Meinung*, 376 (2001): 60–4.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account, see Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 112–23. More broadly, see Detlef Siegfried, *Time Is On My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006) and Davis et al., *Changing the World*.

leftists, 'traditionalists' and anti-authoritarians, Maoists and Trotskyists. Whatever their age differences or political disagreements, these were outweighed at that moment by a shared concern over West Germany's fascist potential and a corresponding commitment to anti-fascist resistance. The Hanover congress made tangible the solidarities of the extra-parliamentary Left.

Standing before some 5,000 participants, the esteemed jurist Wolfgang Abendroth pronounced the death of Benno Ohnesorg symptomatic of democracy's precarious position in the FRG. He pointed to current economic and political elites 'who had earned their spurs . . . in the Third Reich' and their efforts to arm the state with special emergency powers. He predicted that – should the long-debated Emergency Laws come to pass – the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg 'would become a thousand shootings' and, just as before, German democracy would be destroyed.<sup>8</sup> The strong continuity perceived between pre-1933 and post-1945 politics and society made it possible for Abendroth, in the late 1960s, to argue that a brutal presidential dictatorship followed by fascist rule was all too possible in the FRG. It also explained how he could be roundly applauded by Germans half or less than half his age. Those who gathered in Hanover were more or less convinced that fascism had yet to be decisively defeated.

Abendroth opened the conference. The thirty-one-year-old attorney (and future RAF member) Horst Mahler closed it by capturing what gave post-war opposition its pre-emptive character. Raising the spectre of Nazism, Mahler explained that the 'generation of fathers' was not to blame for its failure to resist a fascist dictatorship but rather for its failure to act earlier, when resistance 'was still possible and sensible'.<sup>9</sup> The question of whether the present situation was a comparable moment had brought those assembled to Hanover. If they answered in the affirmative, as Mahler seemed to think they did, then it was time to confront the 'ghost of yesterday' with an 'active, dynamic interpretation of basic rights'. According to the young lawyer, this meant preparing 'to confront risks and to give resistance', as was their democratic right and duty. This apparently straightforward assertion left the definition of resistance open at the same time as it gave voice to the hopes and fears that drew the extra-parliamentary Left together.

The Hanover congress is most often remembered as the site of philosopher Jürgen Habermas's confrontation with student leader Rudi Dutschke, whose call to action he judged a 'voluntaristic ideology' akin to 'leftist fascism'. However fundamentally Habermas disagreed with Dutschke – and alienated himself from the student movement in the process – he stood firmly within the ranks of the post-war, anti-fascist Left. Addressing the audience, he asserted that

the kind of satisfaction obtained through provoking the transformation of latent violence into manifest violence is masochistic – not satisfaction but instead subjugation to this same violence. The demonstrative violence [*demonstrative Gewalt*] to which student opposition is confined . . .

<sup>8</sup> Uwe Bergmann, ed., *Bedingungen und Organisation des Widerstandes: Der Kongreß in Hannover* (Berlin: Voltaire, 1967), 31–3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

the demonstrative violence to which, in our [current] situation, political enlightenment must lay claim, is defined by the goal of enlightenment. Through demonstrations we force attention to our arguments, [arguments] we take to be the better.<sup>10</sup>

However unpopular Habermas's intervention, it attempted to make clear the groundwork of legitimate political action. Specifically, he enjoined students to embrace tactics focused on sensitising society to the oppression around them. Vital to that task was not so much rendering political action non-violent as rescuing it from actionism, by firmly establishing its ends. For Habermas, *any* action taken without mediation by theory was unacceptable. Only theory provided praxis with a definite goal and a contextual understanding of the situation. Thus only theory could prevent politics' descent into oversimplification, irrationality and the actionism he associated with fascism. Here, the post-war philosopher of coercion-free communication made a plea for a politics of rational dialogue with a practical orientation. It was, in short, far from a pro-violence position. But it is unclear that Habermas rejected the use of force that succeeded in its communicative mission. If anything, he left the door open to legitimate violence, given that protest action's privileged mode was to be, as he put it, 'demonstrative violence'.

The tensions that Habermas brought to light surrounding the question of political practice only grew in the coming months. Divergent positions on organisation and strategy crystallised around 'traditionalists', who preferred the coalition-building embodied in the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO), and the anti-authoritarians, who favoured an extra-legal action strategy famously articulated by Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl. In an 'organisational report' to the Socialist Student League (SDS), they diagnosed the FRG as a monolithic, oppressive apparatus of 'integral statism', asserting that only through provocative, rule-breaking acts could its structural violence be revealed.<sup>11</sup> Sensitive to the difference between abstract and manifest violence, Dutschke and Krahl called for a cultural and psychological revolution in the metropolises akin to third world anti-colonial revolutions. The SDS, they argued, had to become a political organisation of guerilla fighters who would lead the struggle from their social basis in the university. By defying state regulation, urban guerillas' actions would reveal the state's vulnerability, and this strategy alone would stimulate a mass movement of individuals aware of both the system's illegitimacy and their ability to destroy the authoritarian power structure upon which it rested.

The question of whether Dutschke or Krahl can be considered intellectual precursors of the RAF is relevant here only inasmuch as it concerns the shared framework within which they, and the entire extra-parliamentary Left, worked. Dutschke and Krahl's assertion of the total structural violence integral to post-fascist capitalist society demonstrated a new generation's adaptation of an analysis forged during the Nazi era, specifically Max Horkheimer's 'authoritarian state' theory.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>11</sup> Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl, 'Das Sich-Verweigern erfordert Guerilla-Mentalität (Organisationsreferat auf der 22. Delegiertenkonferenz des SDS, Sept. 1967)', in Rudi Dutschke, *Geschichte ist machbar*, ed. Jürgen Miermeister (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1980), 89–95.

While the specific appropriation of guerilla warfare was indeed novel, here too they followed earlier leads. Their call to action not only continued the Left's commitment to resistance but also its conviction that the preconditions for resistance lay within popular mentalities. What began as an older generation's struggle against Germany's fascist and authoritarian continuities evolved, in the minds of the anti-authoritarians, into an active battle against neo-fascism's globalisation. And the extra-legality of their actions was seen as vital to this fight. For if the connection between violence and potential freedom was lost, Dutschke and Krahl believed it was only a matter of time before extra-parliamentary opposition reverted to reformist parliamentarism.<sup>12</sup>

Their organisational report failed to win SDS support, but it established violence as the central question for oppositional politics in West Germany. There, as elsewhere, 1968 was a year of dizzying prospects, bitter disappointment and violent conflict. Seventy thousand protesters marched on the capital while thousands of others participated in sit-ins, mass rallies and worker strikes in the weeks leading up to the May parliamentary vote on the Emergency Laws. Their failure to prevent its passage – viewed alongside the war in Vietnam and the defeat of protesters in both Paris and Prague – intensified the Left's sense of impotence and placed strategy ever more firmly at the forefront of discussion. In April, an attempt on Dutschke's life sparked violent riots across the country. While calculated acts of violence against people remained abhorrent to most, violence against property found many champions. The events inspired celebrity journalist Ulrike Meinhof to distinguish protest from resistance: 'Protest is when I say that I don't like this and that', whereas 'resistance is when I make sure that the things I don't like no longer occur. Protest is when I say I will no longer go along with it. Resistance is when I make sure that no one else goes along with it anymore either'.<sup>13</sup> Borrowing the American SDS slogan, 'From Protest to Resistance', Meinhof characterised the April riots as a positive progression from the verbal and futile to the physical, effective and – implicitly – heroic. The fatal blows dealt by projectiles, however, caused others to question whether violence against property could ever remain as free from harming humans as arguments for its legitimate use (versus the illegitimate use of violence against humans) suggested. Several prominent leftists argued that essentially it did not matter: the deaths were state-sponsored murder and grounds for civil violence in kind.<sup>14</sup> That others agreed was suggested by that November's 'Battle on Tegeler Weg', in which demonstrators ultimately gave chase to police with clubs and stones.

Responses to Tegeler Weg proved that there was no consensus among leftists on where the limits of resistance lay in the current situation. Publicising this to dramatic effect was the West Berlin Republican Club, an organisation of trade unionists, left-wing Social Democrats, FDP members and various 'Left socialists', whose weekly bulletin launched a debate on 'Demonstration and Violence' that quickly consumed

<sup>12</sup> Bernd Rabehl, 'Zur archaischen Inszenierung', in Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule*, vol. 3, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Ulrike Marie Meinhof, 'Vom Protest zum Widerstand', *konkret*, 5 (1968), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Berliner Redaktionskollektiv, 'Gewalt', *konkret*, 6 (1968), 24–8 and 35; here, 25. Authorship is attributed to Rudi Dutschke, Peter Schneider, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Bahman Nirumand, Gaston Salvatore, Jürgen Horlemann and Eckhard Siepmann.

the club. In an initial commentary lauding Tegeler Weg for its unprecedented nature, editor Solveig Ehrler argued that Germans were finally on the same (implicitly correct) trajectory as protesters in other countries.<sup>15</sup> 'For the first time, demonstrators did not flee from water cannons, clubs and horses but instead hit police as they fled . . . they were the ones armed with stones, who had water cannons, and who pulled police from horses'. Ehrler declared the confrontation a success for its psychologically compensatory and politically strategic function. More specifically, she judged it emancipatory: 'the step . . . towards concrete counter-violence' had liberated seasoned demonstrators 'from the trauma of 2 June'.

The essay provoked a flood of letters that assumed tidal-wave proportions.<sup>16</sup> Discussion focused largely on questions of strategy. The main point of contention was not violent versus non-violent tactics but whether or not the anti-authoritarians' offensive strategy fitted the logic of progressive violence. Most members of the Left thought not. But its defenders expended a good deal of energy establishing Tegeler Weg's legitimacy: first as class struggle, then as a response to direct police attack. Passions were high precisely because at stake was the difference between legitimate and illegitimate violence within the extra-parliamentary Left. As one observer stated at the time, the crucial distinction was not the oft-debated line between violence against property and violence against people, but rather that between offensive and defensive violence.<sup>17</sup> Though much was still open to interpretation, the basic distinction between progressive and reactionary force went uncontested. In one scenario, Habermas's communicative criterion for legitimate action had been achieved; in the other, it had not. However polemical their debates, the extra-parliamentary milieu agreed that the goal of human emancipation and enlightenment was crucial to distinguishing progressive from retrograde violence. For this reason, leftists unconvinced by anti-authoritarians' attempts to present offensive action as counter-violence interpreted their actions as authoritarian or quasi-fascist. And they responded to these developments with corresponding alarm.

What Tegeler Weg and the strategy debate exposed was an essentially tactical disagreement: most extra-parliamentary leftists did not believe the time had come for revolutionary action. Instead, they were convinced that the only violence whose open commission could enlighten West Germans to the system's contradictions and injustices was that initiated by the state. Just as vividly, though, these discussions confirmed that conceptions of progressive violence and the FRG's fascist or authoritarian potential remained intact, across all the emergent fault lines. Even those who rejected radicalisation were unwilling to condemn violence altogether or to promote non-violence as a matter of principle. As became painfully clear to Republican Club members, the result was a strategic and moral impasse. Unable to

<sup>15</sup> Solveig Ehrler, 'Demonstration und Gewalt', *RC-Bulletin*, 3 (1968), 1–3.

<sup>16</sup> 'Erklärung des Vorstands des Republikanischen Clubs Berlin zum Thema: Demonstration und Gewalt', *RC-Bulletin*, 4 (1968), 4–8.

<sup>17</sup> Roland Reichwein, '21 Thesen zur Gewaltanwendung', *RC-Bulletin*, 1 (1969), 10–5; here, 12.

reach agreement on how to move forward, one by one the extra-parliamentary Left's institutions splintered and dissolved.

In the wake of collapse, Left activists went in myriad different directions. Many threw their support behind the Social Democrats and the charismatic reformer Willy Brandt. With the SPD's 1969 electoral victory, the Christian Democrats' twenty-year rule ended and a wave of young leftists optimistically joined party ranks.<sup>18</sup> Those who remained distant from parliamentary politics tended towards one of three routes, each demonstrating a continued commitment to resisting society's authoritarianism and systemic violence. Many gravitated to the communist splinter groups referred to generically as *K-Gruppen*, or to the 'undogmatic' circles around West German universities, such as the spontaneous, action-oriented, and irreverent *Sponti* movement, and the more academic Socialist Bureau. Others rejected overt political struggle altogether to pursue alternative lifestyles. And finally, a small number broke radically from the rest by taking up arms against the state. Scorning 'intellectuals, cowards, and know-it-alls' who continued to debate whether the time for resistance had come, Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Horst Mahler – the RAF's founders – announced it was time to bring the international struggle for liberation to the FRG.<sup>19</sup> Arrested in 1972, they continued to call on West Germans to counter the violence of police 'pigs' and fascist imperialism with violence of their own.

The armed resistance of the few did not mobilise the masses but it did help to keep Left allegiances alive. Each new skirmish between the RAF and the state tugged at the logic of counter-violence and resistance. And the tremendous effort expended to win legal recognition for the imprisoned militants as political prisoners and torture victims, suggested that the group's leaders grasped better than anyone the concerns around which the extra-parliamentary Left's diverse membership cohered. For what routinely eluded leftists was how to reject the RAF's actions without rejecting either its members or militant struggle. The perceived mistreatment of RAF prisoners – through isolation, sensory deprivation and forced feedings – as well as the reactions of the government and mainstream public, argued for solidarity and against the categorical rejection of counter-violence in the FRG. Indeed, to many leftists, police checks, surveillance of suspected terrorist sympathisers and the appearance of armed diplomatic guards suggested a state at war with its own population. The 1972 Decree against Radicals banning presumptive 'radicals' from public-sector employment came to symbolise a general culture of intolerance. Leftists of all stripes found or feared themselves subject to investigation and disciplinary action on a variety of pretexts. Basic freedoms of expression were subject to further violation under a newly amended

<sup>18</sup> Heinrich Potthoff and Susanne Miller, *Kleine Geschichte der SPD* (Bonn: Dietz, 1991), 226. On the SPD's struggle to confront terrorism, see Karrin Hanshew, 'Daring More Democracy? Internal Security and the Social Democratic Fight against West German Terrorism', *Central European History*, 43 (2010), 117–47.

<sup>19</sup> 'Die Rote Armee aufbauen', *Agit* 883, 62 (1970), 6. See, among others, Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

criminal law code, which allowed for the censorship and confiscation of publications ambiguously defined as aiding terrorism. Storeowners who displayed or sold texts by a militant group could now be accused of supporting a criminal organisation. The Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll also proved that one did not have to be a 'radical', communist or former urban guerilla to be ensnared in the vitriol and suspicion of counter-terrorism. A vocal pacifist, Böll became a target for commenting critically on the disproportionate use of state force against the RAF.<sup>20</sup> Conservative politicians joined the Springer press in demonising the author – casting him and all Left intellectuals as terrorist sympathisers. Under these conditions, civil liberties and the Left seemed equally under fire and in need of defence.

### Challenging the nuclear state

In September 1973, Brandt's government announced plans to expand massively the number of nuclear plants in the FRG, amid rising oil prices and as a means to growth and employment.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of the 1970s, however, this and other government programmes came up against increasing opposition. Public interest in ecological problems spiked, along with the suspicion that the unceasing pursuit of economic growth was responsible for many other ills. As state intervention became both more pronounced and shrouded in bureaucracy and technical lingo, government policy became less and less transparent and large numbers of citizens expressed growing insecurity. The result was the apparently spontaneous birth of hundreds of local citizens' initiatives (CIs) that questioned the legitimacy of current government practices and proved that middle-class radicalism was not confined to the Left or to the youth. CIs brought together individuals from diverse social and ideological backgrounds in order to oppose administrative plans they considered contrary to local communities' interests. State bureaucrats and corporate managers were the enemy and technocracy (more than capitalism) was the system to be countered.<sup>22</sup> Their emphasis on participatory democracy and defence of a reproductive (rather than exclusively productive) sphere that valued family and ecology, however, ensured that many self-identifying leftists felt at home in the movement.

In the fight against nuclear power, citizens' ability to gain public sympathy and successfully contest government policy transformed local initiatives into a national and even international protest movement. Most histories begin with Wyhl, a small town near the French border in Baden-Württemberg.<sup>23</sup> When Wyhl was declared the site of a new nuclear reactor in July 1973, the Citizens' Initiative Weisweil immediately formed. After several failed attempts at negotiation, the CI publicly

<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Böll, 'Will Ulrike Gnade oder Freies Geleit?', *Der Spiegel*, 3 (1972), 54–7.

<sup>21</sup> Christian Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Energy: A Comparison of Germany and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 93; Dorothy Nelkin and Michael Pollack, *The Atom Besieged* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 15–16.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Mayer-Tasch, *Die Bürgerinitiativenbewegung* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), 18–25.

<sup>23</sup> The standard remains Dieter Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben: Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung* (Munich: Beck, 1980).

joined French activists from across the river to disavow the undemocratic tactics employed by officials and declare their willingness to occupy the site if necessary.<sup>24</sup> Despite opposition, construction began on 17 February 1975. The result was a national outpouring of support for the movement, with an estimated 28,000 people flooding the construction area. Determined to hold the site, local organisers drew inspiration from recent demonstrations in France.<sup>25</sup> They erected an 'alternative' settlement that eventually included a 'friendship house' and an adult education centre.<sup>26</sup> For a significant number of the participants and the movement's later chroniclers, these projects' co-operative and non-violent nature defined their experience of Wyhl. Their efforts seemed to pay off when an administrative court ordered a halt to construction. In March 1977, the plant's building permit was officially suspended.

Wyhl is remembered fondly as a triumph of organised citizens' action and a model for non-violent protest. However accurate this was, the occupation became both symbol and catalyst for broad anti-nuclear opposition in the FRG and elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it was Wyhl that introduced extra-parliamentary leftists to the ecological scene, which most had previously dismissed as too narrow in outlook and agenda.<sup>28</sup> When they did embrace the anti-nuclear movement, however, they brought their own interpretative frameworks. For many leftists, nuclear energy was not an isolated issue but symptomatic of the state's authoritarian relationship with power and undemocratic disregard for the people's opinions and true interests. The activists, *K-Gruppen*, *Spontis* and students most eager to occupy construction sites understood anti-nuclear demonstrations as a matter of political resistance. They sought nothing more or less than to defend democracy by putting an end to what they regarded as the abuse of state power. In a pamphlet explaining 'why we fight', the West German Communist League (KBW) expressed sentiments common within the movement: resentment over being ignored, fear of being treated as guinea pigs and disbelief that nuclear technology furthered the public good.<sup>29</sup> The conclusion they drew from Wyhl was that two 'democracies' existed within the FRG. There was the 'apparatus' that used the 'free democratic order' and the rule of law to prop up the 'capitalist classes against the people', and then there was the 'genuine' democracy of the people, which was being trampled. Rather than submit to laws and rules that served only the interests of a repressive democracy, the KBW argued that 'the people must . . . answer the

<sup>24</sup> 'Erklärung des Internationalen Komitees der 21 Badisch-Elsässischen Bürgerinitiativen', in Heinrich Billstein and Klaus Naumann, eds, *Für eine bessere Republik: Alternative der demokratischen Bewegung* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1981), 172.

<sup>25</sup> Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 83–4.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Karapin, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right Since the 1960s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 132–4; Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 84–7.

<sup>27</sup> Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 85–91. Also Stephen Milder, 'Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-) Locally: Petra Kelly and the Transnational Roots of West German Green Politics', *Central European History*, 43 (2010), 301–26.

<sup>28</sup> According to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the Left 'remained skeptical of the ecological hypothesis and avoided alliances' with groups judged 'purely ecological' in orientation. *Kursbuch*, 33 (1973), 7.

<sup>29</sup> KBW, 'Warum kämpfen wir gegen das Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl?' (Freiburg: KBW, 1975).

entire apparatus of power and violence . . . with its own violence'.<sup>30</sup> Though hardly a call to immediate armed rebellion, it clearly articulated the continuing belief in the potential need for violent resistance against the originary violence of the system. And this belief influenced the direction of the anti-nuclear movement by helping intensify confrontations between demonstrators and authorities, who had drawn dramatically different conclusions from recent events. If Wyhl symbolised the power and potential of grassroots intervention, then Brokdorf – the next major demonstration site, in Schleswig-Holstein – symbolised the movement's potential for violence as well as for political disaster.

Seeking to prevent the occupation tactics that had proved so successful at Wyhl, police at Brokdorf cordoned off the proposed site long before construction began. One published account captured the highly charged lens through which many viewed such preventative policing:

It was just like in a movie: when you looked down from the dam, you saw the KZ – equipped with about twelve water guns, an encampment at its centre, and mercenary soldiers everywhere. On the surrounding dirt roads the assailants wandered in slow troop movements. This, at the same time the citizens' initiative gathered . . . a small group in the distance.<sup>31</sup>

Referring to the site as a *KZ*, the German abbreviation for concentration camp, the writer invoked Nazism to convey both the extreme criminality and the magnitude of state force confronting demonstrators in Brokdorf. By doing so, they laid claim to anti-fascist resistance and, implicitly, the legitimacy of counter-violence to halt construction.

For their part, state officials acted in such a way as to confirm the need for open resistance. Though construction had been halted by court order, the minister president of Schleswig-Holstein ordered machinery onto the site under heavy police protection and the cover of night. Even Helmut Schmidt – who replaced Willy Brandt as chancellor in 1974 and was no friend of the movement – alluded to Nazi criminality in his condemnation of the 'night and fog' action, while an estimated 30,000 to 45,000 protestors demonstrated their conviction that 'Where justice becomes injustice, resistance becomes a duty'.<sup>32</sup> Several broke off from the main demonstration, forded the moat, and withstood water-cannon fire in order to occupy the construction site. From this point on, events rapidly escalated. Another group of demonstrators reached the construction site equipped with helmets, shovels, rocks and other makeshift 'tools of defence' only to meet unprecedented police force. The violent clash between police and protesters left over 500 people injured and set the tone for Grohnde, in Lower Saxony, and the fatal demonstration in Malville, France.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>31</sup> 'Die Schlacht von Brokdorf', *Grosse Freiheit*, 12 (1976), 8.

<sup>32</sup> 'Redeauszug des BKs in seiner Ansprache vor den Delegierten der SPD-Kreisdelegiertenversammlung', 7 Nov. 1976, Archiv der sozialen Demokraten (Bonn, thereafter AdsD) Helmut Schmidt Papers 9226; Bürgerinitiative Umweltschutz Unterelbe, *Der Bauplatz muß wieder zur Wiese werden!* (Hamburg: BUU, 1977), 102.

One of the most significant consequences of Brokdorf was the association it forged of anti-nuclear protest with political violence. Indeed, after Brokdorf, officials at the state and federal level approached anti-nuclear demonstrations as they did terrorism: as intertwined threats to be contained. It was not only the impression of uncontrolled violence that linked the two in their minds but also the government's position that nuclear energy was critical to the West German order. Schmidt was explicit that an attack on nuclear power plants was an attack on the FRG. He and other like-minded politicians distinguished between 'convinced democrats' who legitimately made use of their civil liberties, and 'small groups of terrorists and militant enemies of our constitution' who 'hoped to strike the free democratic order with their violent actions against nuclear energy sites'.<sup>33</sup> By connecting rowdy demonstrators to extremists, the chancellor publicly limited legitimate resistance – and West Germans' right to resistance – to non-violent, peaceful protest, and folded the destruction of property into the definition of (illegitimate) violence.<sup>34</sup> Those who rejected this definition became objects of investigation as suspected enemies of the state. Activists were subjected to surveillance, apartment searches, and, under the Decree against Radicals, dismissal from public-sector positions.

The popular media encouraged these associations. The daily *Tagesspiegel* ran a headline proclaiming that Brokdorf and the anti-nuclear movement were 'linked with terrorists in a common fight against the state'.<sup>35</sup> In case the Molotov cocktails, steel helmets and other sundry weapons with which the 'militant Brokdorf groups' were said to be equipped were not convincing enough, the article made explicit reference to the RAF. Citing responsible security officials, the paper announced that 'the terrorists in custody were discussing the events at Brokdorf and their possible significance for a "new solidarity campaign"'. Such coverage was a nightmare for a movement that relied on public favour to effect political change. West Germans registered a growing disinterest in the politics of nuclear energy and the hope that the whole controversy might simply go away.

Very quickly, then, a fear of political isolation forced CIs to address violence explicitly, exposing stark differences between activists. Demands for the categorical rejection of physical aggression from the movement's pacifist elements as well as from members concerned to recoup public support were rejected by those convinced that non-violent protest could neither eliminate violent confrontations nor bring change, given the violence of the system itself. The majority conceded the illegitimacy of violence against humans but insisted that the destruction of property, a frequent practice in site occupations, was an acceptable – and vital – form of resistance. In this way, the Lower Elbe Citizens' Initiative (among others) openly countered the

<sup>33</sup> Helmut Schmidt to Minister President Stoltenberg, 3 Feb. 1977, AdsD Helmut Schmidt Papers 6523.

<sup>34</sup> 'Erklärung der Bundesregierung zu den am 19. Februar 1977 in Brokdorf vorgesehenen Demonstrationen gegen die Errichtung eines Kernkraftwerkes', 7 Feb. 1977, AdsD Helmut Schmidt Papers 6523.

<sup>35</sup> Horst Zimmermann, 'Brokdorf/Anti-AKW mit Terroristen verbunden im gemeinsamen Kampf gegen den Staat', *Tagesspiegel*, 17 Feb. 1977.

government's definition of civil disobedience with one of their own, one that ruled out actions that targeted or risked human life but otherwise left all avenues open.<sup>36</sup>

If the question of violence as strategy dominated protesters' discussions much as it had at the end of the 1960s, there was a critical difference for those leftists involved in the anti-nuclear movement. They had experienced success, not only in halting bulldozers but in mobilising mass support. This fed optimism as well as the knowledge that demonstrators had something to lose. While the majority of leftists still maintained their post-war conceptions of counter-violence and resistance and the solidarities these entailed, a number of dissenters reconsidered them in the hope that new answers might bring real change. Making this move did not require them to abandon their critique of society's structural violence. Like the student anti-authoritarians, these leftists argued that power structures would not change until mentalities and social relations changed. They denied, however, that violence could potentially play a productive part in bringing this about. These leftists voiced disillusionment with counter-violence as a progressive force and accorded newfound importance to non-violent resistance in achieving the Left's traditional goals of emancipation and peace.

### Fantasies of peace and violence

The heavyweight in the fight against nuclear energy was the Federal Association of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection (BBU), representing nearly 400 CIs by 1977.<sup>37</sup> Since its founding in 1972, the BBU had come to champion an ethos of 'ecological humanism', maintaining that the struggle to free West Germans and the natural environment from nuclear destruction could not be won by answering violence with more violence. As far as the organisation's spokesperson was concerned, there were no exceptions to this rule, for the BBU's goal was not 'revolution' but rather 'the protection of life', and Wyhl was the symbol of their principled commitment to 'non-violent resistance'.<sup>38</sup> The BBU thus openly refuted the heritage of progressive counter-violence. But it was adamant that non-violent resistance did not equal passivity. Those practising non-violence needed more than good intentions and lucky circumstances; they had to sustain their refusal to be drawn into physical conflict even as they relied upon open opposition to force attention onto specific injustices. This resonated with popular action strategies of the 1960s and the BBU found support from a number of leftists who had, over the course of the decade, come to agree that violent resistance was a moral and strategic dead end.

<sup>36</sup> Minister of Justice Hans-Jochen Vogel asserted that Brokdorf demonstrators' actions were not legitimate expressions of the *Widerstandsrecht*. Vogel to Herbert Bruns, Bundesverband Deutsche Bürgerinitiative für Umwelt und Lebensschutz, 31 March 1977, AdsD Hans-Jochen Vogel Correspondence 4.

<sup>37</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102.

<sup>38</sup> BBU, 'Rundschreiben an alle Mitgliedsgruppen des BBU am 19.2.77 Demonstration in Brokdorf', 2 Feb. 1977, AdsD Helmut Schmidt Papers 9442.

If this group of activists rejected the notion of emancipatory violence, they did not exchange it for a pacifist's dream of a violence-free world. The immensely popular activist-songwriter Walter Moßmann, for instance, asserted that the denial of the omnipresence of violence verged on 'middle-class self-delusion'. But his experiences as an anti-Vietnam and then anti-nuclear demonstrator led him to embrace non-violence as the only path to peace.<sup>39</sup> Certain as he was that the media exaggerated the violent behaviour of the *K-Gruppen* and *Spontis*, Moßmann was equally convinced that the aggressiveness and militancy ascribed to Left activists was not pure fiction. Both ran rampant among the radical Left, he argued, and would continue to do so until activists examined their own actions – and fantasies – for how they fell short of the politics they espoused.<sup>40</sup> Hoping to inspire self-reflection, Moßmann pointed to the Left milieu's preference for action movies in which Viet Cong rebels blew up American bombers over documentaries on everyday life in Vietnamese towns. He then related this to the casual way that demonstrators violated the homes of German townspeople with spray-painted slogans, while they simultaneously ridiculed residents' provincial customs and concerns. The conclusions he drew were unequivocal: such behaviour smacked of the same distant, uncaring elitism displayed by the politicians and businessmen they criticised. For Moßmann, this was not mere hypocrisy but symptomatic of the very mentality responsible for 'wars, ecological disasters and radioactivity'.<sup>41</sup>

Moßmann did not condemn armed resistance or deny his own complicity in what now disturbed him about radical culture. Indeed, his critique of violence came from inside, and he held up the same mirror to his own actions. He recounted sitting before a television in May 1972 cheering the RAF's bombing of military bases, sure of the parallels between Germany's urban guerrillas and the Vietcong. And he recalled how, years later, he still argued that the RAF and the 'great sit-in' at Wyhl were rooted in the same anti-war movement.<sup>42</sup> Looking back, these recognitions fed his desire to save the Left from a series of distinctive blind spots: militant attitudes, undemocratic habits and an elite disinterest in regular people. He insisted that the path was as crucial as the goal. He was not the first to link the ends of progress to the means of cultivating caring, personal relationships along the way. But he was among the first publicly to re-examine notions of progressive violence for their destructive and inhumane consequences. His rejection of counter-violence as resistance developed out of (rather than in opposition to) the extra-parliamentary Left. For if he dealt a blow to the victim-enemy dichotomy, his new conviction rested on critiques of elitist politics, state power and militarism common to that milieu. The way forward envisioned by Moßmann was one of rejuvenation – not departure.

<sup>39</sup> 'Protokolle: Interview von Walter Moßmann', 29 Sept. 1987, International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam, thereafter IISG), ID-Archiv, Projekt-Arthur.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Moßmann, 'Der lange Marsch von Wyhl nach Anderswo', *Kursbuch*, 50 (1977), 1–22; here, 13–4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Moßmann's position echoed discussions among leftists within the autonomous women's movement, where a similar sense of disillusionment and a gendered understanding of violence allowed for its critique. Left feminists insisted that the overthrow of the repressive, capitalist system had to begin at home, with the 'internal dictatorship' between men and women, husbands and wives, parents and children.<sup>43</sup> Their emphasis on the private, subjectivity and a woman's right to become a fully actualised person defined second-wave feminism. The attention to domestic re/production and women's specific oppression under existing conditions echoed earlier feminists, however, inasmuch as it tended to associate women with the rejection of violence. In truth, the average feminist spent little time contemplating the general matter of counter-violence, secondary as it was to more immediate concern of violence against women. Rather than problematised explicitly, non-violence seems simply to have been assumed female. Even as they rooted gender differences in social or cultural conditions, which the majority of Left feminists did, they often discussed the world in the dualistic terms of their essentialising sisters, whereby women were freed – by dint of their historical and ongoing experiences of violence and oppression, if not biology – of destructive impulses.<sup>44</sup> For, as Alice Schwarzer put it in her bestseller, *The 'Little Difference' and its Huge Consequences*, if men and women were both victims of the current gender regime, women were undeniably the 'victims of the victims'.<sup>45</sup>

With violence coded directly or indirectly as male, feminists could collectively reject it without difficulty. But as with other extra-parliamentary leftists, their opposition to repressive violence did not lead feminists to identify as pacifists or actively to pursue non-violence. Indeed, strategy discussions clearly indicated that counter-violence and armed resistance were not off the table for feminists frustrated by the resilience of patriarchy. According to one woman, however, it necessarily ranked low on the list due to the fact that overwhelming force was 'on the other side'.<sup>46</sup> This not uncommon assessment of counter-violence's futility suggests, perhaps, that feminists' distancing of women from violence made even radical feminists less prone to the fantasies of successful revolution maintained by their male counterparts. This did not translate into the dismissal of violence as a potentially liberating form of resistance. Many women activists agreed, for example, with the editor of *Courage*, Sibylle Plogstedt, who, in one article, criticised Irish feminists' too docile peace march and, in another, carefully equivocated on whether Ulrike Meinhof had erred in taking

<sup>43</sup> Helke Sander, '1. versuch. Die richtigen fragen zu finden', in Ilse Lenz, ed., *Die Neue Frauenbewegung in Deutschland: Abschied vom kleinen Unterschied. Eine Quellensammlung* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2008), 55–9. On the movement's history, see Gisela Notz, 'Die autonomen Frauenbewegungen der Siebzigerjahre: Entstehungsgeschichte – Organisationsformen – politische Konzepte', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 44 (2004), 123–48; Kristina Schulz, *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968–1976* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Gabrielle Kuby, 'Ende der patriarchalen Herrschaft', *Frauenoffensive*, 2 (1975), 3–13.

<sup>45</sup> Alice Schwarzer, *Der 'kleine Unterschied' und seine großen Folgen* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1975), 178.

<sup>46</sup> Susanne Kahn-Ackermann, 'Verschiedene Ebenen von Gewalt', *Frauenjahrbuch* (1976), 179–86.

up arms, admiring her for having defended herself when so few women would.<sup>47</sup> But it did free some female extra-parliamentary leftists to critique counter-violence as a macho myth.<sup>48</sup> Plogstedt herself used her power as editor to draw attention to activists' language and its contribution to the cycle of violence feminists hoped to break.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, a campaign to 'out' sex offenders was stalled by participants who pressed their sisters to reconsider deliberately provoking violence.<sup>50</sup> Ambivalent, to be sure, Left feminists were nonetheless discussing the broader implications of violence for the achievement of their goals.

If feminism offered a space for the incipient critique of counter-violence, efforts to de-legitimize the movement by connecting women's liberation to the rise of international terrorism complicated matters. The unprecedented number of women militants was an object of titillating media coverage from the beginning. But mid-1970s depictions of female militants as dependent on their male counterparts soon gave way to less traditional stereotypes.<sup>51</sup> Women were now portrayed as having gone too far in the pursuit of equality, either by adopting mannish characteristics or by seeking 'emancipation "with a gun in hand"'.<sup>52</sup> They were everything a woman was traditionally *not*, and female violence was an aberration. By the late 1970s, feminists' ability to protect themselves and female militants from this gendered demonisation was, in part, hampered by their own disagreement over women's relationship with violence. For some, questioning counter-violence simply took a backseat to the battle against essentialism. Many more Left feminists had trouble seeing how women's categorical rejection of political violence would not play directly into the hands of the movement's enemies. As Susanne von Paczensky put it: 'If the rejection of violence, the horror at a group that wants to destroy itself and our society, is at the same time reinterpreted as a rejection of active women, a renouncement of protest and necessary rage, then this conflict leaves me paralysed between two solidarities'.<sup>53</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the ideological use of terrorism to arm the established order against anyone threatening the status quo made the categorical rejection of armed resistance and solidarity with alleged terrorists difficult.

<sup>47</sup> Sibylle Plogstedt, 'Irland: Frauen, die pfeifen', *Courage*, 2 (1976), 31–2; idem, 'Vom Protest zum Widerstand: Der Tod an Ulrike', *Courage*, 0 (1976), 22–3.

<sup>48</sup> Antje Vollmer, 'Die Faszination der Gewalt und die eigene Geschichte', *Links*, 9 (1986), 18–20.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the editorial board's controversial censorship of the word 'bulls' (*Bullen*), a derogatory term for police commonly used among leftists: Vier Berliner Frauen, 'In Grohnde', *Courage*, 5 (1977), 27–9.

<sup>50</sup> 'Protokoll: Nationaler Frauenkongreß am 5.-6.3.77 in München', in Lenz, 299–301.

<sup>51</sup> On the media and female violence: Brigitte L. Nacos, 'The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in News Coverage of Women in Politics and Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28 (2005), 435–51. Also Patricia Melzer, "'Death in the Shape of a Young Girl": Feminist Responses to Media Representations of Women Terrorists During the "German Autumn" of 1977', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11 (2009), 35–62.

<sup>52</sup> 'Ausbruch in Berlin', *Der Spiegel*, 29 (1976), 17–8, and 'Frauen im Untergrund: "Etwas Irrationales"', *Der Spiegel*, 33 (1977), 22–33. Also Erwin K. Scheuch, 'Von der Banalität des politischen Terrorismus', *Merkur*, 8 (1975), 779–85.

<sup>53</sup> Susanne von Paczensky, ed., *Frauen und Terror: Versuche, die Beteiligung von Frauen an Gewalttaten zu erklären* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1978), 11–12.

### Re-conceiving resistance in the FRG

If counter-terrorism measures, attacks on ‘sympathisers’ and repeat clashes with police reinforced Left solidarity, these same pressures also finally worked to convince some critical leftists that the only way to escape criminalisation and isolation was to rethink their relationship with violence in principle. There was no singular path to doing so, but one of the earliest such moves was made by an unknown Joschka Fischer before extra-parliamentary leftists in Frankfurt. In direct response to the riots which followed Meinhof’s death in May 1976, the *Sponti* expressed horror at a radical Left trapped by the logic of violence and counter-violence.<sup>54</sup> In their anger over Meinhof, he charged, activists threatened to make the same mistakes as the urban guerillas – namely, to lose sight of the connection between their violent militancy and their political isolation. The fateful decision made by the RAF, for which Fischer criticised them, was the completeness with which they severed negative notions of resistance from the positive need to create a new way of living. Had he stopped there, Fischer’s speech would have differed little from Negt’s and others before him. But animating his critique of the RAF was a clear refusal to break with them. Where others had sought – and failed – to confront the problem of solidarity by simply denying any relationship between the RAF and the Left, Fischer succeeded by resisting such a move. Instead, he called for continued solidarity all the while urging his audience to reconsider its conditions. Solidarity, he argued, could not be a one-way street. In the present situation, it demanded that the urban guerillas put a stop to their ‘death trip’ and ‘armed self-isolation’, and return to a form of resistance that promised life. In this, Fischer managed a critical balance. For by affirming the importance of Left solidarity, he relieved many from having to make an all-or-nothing decision at odds with their emotional attachment to the RAF and their sympathy for them as victims of state repression. He also opened the door for them to refute the legitimacy of counter-violence as resistance without having to distance themselves from the dream of radical change and a more just tomorrow, one they recognised as the RAF’s basic motivation as well.

Months later, members of the Socialist Bureau castigated fellow leftists for staunchly defending the author of an anonymous obituary after he incurred the wrath of the mainstream public for expressing a ‘clandestine joy’ at the news of attorney general Siegfried Buback’s assassination by the RAF.<sup>55</sup> Sociologist Detlev Claussen, in particular, criticised the victim-perpetrator schema that enabled their unquestioned solidarity by underscoring its lack of genuinely progressive political content: ‘Solidarity at any price, only to demonstrate one’s own radicalness, fetishises a unity that we all know is not to be had. What unifies us cannot be opposition alone’.<sup>56</sup> Instead of focusing on the oppressor, he argued, the Left needed to reorient itself to the interests and goals of the larger population. Only in this way might leftists once again

<sup>54</sup> Frankfurter Spontis, ‘Uns treibt der Hunger nach Liebe, Zärtlichkeit und Freiheit’, *links*, 8 (1976), 11.

<sup>55</sup> Mescalero, ‘Buback–Ein Nachruf’, *Göttinger Nachrichten*, 27 April 1977, 10–12.

<sup>56</sup> Detlev Claussen, ‘Solidarität oder Distanzierung: Falsche Alternative’, *links*, 40 (1977), 40.

find a truly socialist programme and genuine solidarity. Sensitive to the Left's fears, the Socialist Bureau nonetheless declared the inhumane strategies of its members as abhorrent and retrogressive as the state violence they professed to fight. They rejected 'terror with the same radicalism as we challenge authoritarian, repressive, and police methods' and thereby denied the legitimacy of counter-violence as resistance.<sup>57</sup> Though contentious, the positions taken by the Socialist Bureau, Fischer and several others in the summer of 1977 pointed towards a reconceptualisation of resistance as not only possible but necessary within the scope of mainstream politics.

The experiences of that autumn were decisive for pushing developments forward. On 5 September, the RAF kidnapped industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer and brutally murdered his driver and three police bodyguards. The ensuing crisis, which included the lockdown of German borders, a media blackout, and the hijacking of a Lufthansa airliner, ended six weeks later with the triple suicide of the RAF's imprisoned leaders and the recovery of Schleyer's body. The RAF's actions had long degenerated into a single-minded pursuit of their leaders' liberation and their blatant disregard for the 'rules of revolutionary pragmatism' was criticised from day one. But that year's string of assassinations – particularly the close range shooting of Schleyer in the back of the head – undermined the guerillas' cultivated image as victims as well as the moral justification for their armed struggle. 'What would have happened if the kidnappers had released the *person* Schleyer!' asked former SDS member, doctor, and historian Karl-Heinz Roth.<sup>58</sup> It was a rhetorical question meant to provoke self-critique should the reader find the scenario unimaginable. For by killing Schleyer, the RAF proved it operated with the same abstract hate and easy exchange of victims as the institutional forces they fought. Leftists now faced the guerillas' moral bankruptcy as well as the implications of their own previous ambivalence towards violence. For many, this process entailed definitively rejecting the legitimacy of violent resistance in the FRG. As one person confided, 'my problem was never distancing myself from the RAF and their "suicidal politics", but rather the feeling of inadequacy that I *myself* was unable to conduct my war with this state at that level'.<sup>59</sup>

Still, many criticised those such as Herbert Marcuse, Rudi Dutschke and the Socialist Bureau – who issued public statements denouncing the RAF and political violence – for being too willing to appease the mainstream. At the annual Frankfurt publishing expo, Peter Brückner, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Otto Schily, Alice Schwarzer and Frank Wolff concluded that those who violated Left solidarity dug their own political graves. They accused them of masochism, self-delusion and a 'deadly stupidity' caused by fear, identification with the 'overly powerful collective aggressor' and a sense of guilt over 'having done or wanted something improper' in the eyes of the system.<sup>60</sup> On the other side of the country, members of West Berlin's alternative

<sup>57</sup> 'Sozialismus und Terrorismus: Stellungnahme des Arbeitsausschusses des Sozialistischen Büros', *links*, 91 (1977), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Leo Kerrner, 'Terror und Unperson', *Autonomie*, 10 (1978), 4–12; here, 12.

<sup>59</sup> 'Jupp Heynckes', 'Erwiderung', *Pflasterstrand*, 18 (1977), 23–5; here, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Verband des Linken Buchhandels, 'Sympathy for the Devil: Hexenjagd auf die Linke. Podiumsdiskussion auf der Frankfurter Buchmesse', Oct. 1977. IISG ID-Textarchiv.

scene showed similar disdain for those who distanced themselves: 'We experienced the reaction of the Left to the events surrounding Schleyer . . . as cowardice before an imaginary attack by the state. Many were taking cover as they would from an approaching thunderstorm . . . crying "don't get me wet!"'<sup>61</sup>

Despite their derision, both groups were charting new paths not unlike those they criticised. Those in Frankfurt collaborated in founding the *tageszeitung*, or *taz*, an alternative newspaper professing that, even in the 'midst of the media machines of the ruling class, a public sphere requires discussion and reason with the force of truth behind it'.<sup>62</sup> Unabashedly oppositional, this initiative nonetheless privileged communication over confrontation. Similarly, the Berliners were busy planning a January 1978 meeting of all 'freaks, friends and comrades' interested in leaving behind 'Model Germany' for 'the beach of *Tunix*' (a play on the German for 'do nothing').<sup>63</sup> Somewhere between a flight into fancy and a determined effort to 'find' the radical Left in the midst of confusion and chaos, *Tunix* pronounced a continued commitment to resistance even as it turned its back on old forms of opposition. Participants conveyed their utter exhaustion as both the victims and perpetrators of violence and, in the process, negatively recoded counter-violence as reactive, rather than a new or self-initiated action.<sup>64</sup>

The need to contain both terror and counter-terror clarified the impossibility of separating the means from the ends. One consequence was a deep-seated pragmatism that no longer held a place for idealised notions of armed revolt. The ecological movement turned its attention towards a new, national political party and away from its more conservative roots. In 1980, a spectrum of 68ers, environmentalists, feminists and disillusioned Social Democrats founded West Germany's Green Party. Particularly evident among peace activists was the embrace of non-violence as the only true revolutionary path for, ironically, the very reason it had previously been dismissed as an effective political tool. In a world where violence was the norm, the use of violence was now understood to reaffirm and not undermine structural violence. If revolution was that which negated the existing system, then non-violence was the singular revolutionary act. Nothing captured this new spirit better than a 1984 flyer recasting a canonical image from the Russian Revolution.<sup>65</sup> Where Lenin once stood, ready to lead an eager crowd towards a better tomorrow, Green Party leader Petra Kelly now presided. Despite the awkward fit of her super-imposed head on the Bolshevik's shoulders, the final result maintained the original's momentous excitement and was clearly intended to inspire a new sort of revolutionary. Read alongside the *taz's* self-designation as an oppositional forum and the self-description

<sup>61</sup> Autorenkollektiv, 'Zum Tango gehören immer zwei, wenn ich gehe, kommst du mit!' in Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, ed., *Zwei Kulturen? Tunix, Mescalero und die Folgen* (Berlin: Ästhetik und Kommunikation, 1978), 127.

<sup>62</sup> 'Herbst 77: Es wird ZEITung', in *Dieses obscure Objekt unserer Begierde: Die Tageszeitung: Diskussionspapiere und Leserbriefe April 1978-Januar 1979* (Frankfurt: FAZ, 1979), 5.

<sup>63</sup> 'Treffen in Tunix', IISG ID-Textarchiv: Projekt Arthur.

<sup>64</sup> For a summary of events: 'Tunix O-Ton' in Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Zwei Kulturen?*, 94–109.

<sup>65</sup> IISG ID-Textarchiv.

of the Greens as an 'anti-party party', there can be little doubt that the possibilities for resistance had been dramatically reconceived.<sup>66</sup> Instead of always being defined against the state and fought outside mainstream politics, resistance was being waged, as Kelly herself described it, *within* the dominant institutions.<sup>67</sup>

That this shift relied on a new understanding of resistance's context was articulated by another prominent Greens member, Antje Vollmer. Unlike Kelly, Vollmer identified strongly with the extra-parliamentary Left milieu. In a later interview, Vollmer reflected on her generation's experience of state violence, the events of the 1970s and her own eventual rejection of violence as a legitimate form of resistance or protest.<sup>68</sup> The first factor Vollmer listed was the realisation that not only fascist systems but also democracies have a potential for violence that should – and can – be watched. Clearly implied was also a distinction: unlike fascism, liberal democracy had built-in mechanisms for curbing such potential. For Vollmer and others like her, understanding that the state's potential to abuse power was not, as she put it, 'a cause for emergency', was crucial to allowing the past to remain in the past.<sup>69</sup> Put slightly differently, the necessary condition for a new understanding of resistance and opposition in the FRG was the extra-parliamentary Left's conclusion that the West German state was, despite its many flaws, fundamentally different from its Nazi predecessor.

The Left's confrontation with terrorism did not lead to a new consensus on what form oppositional politics in West Germany should or could take. The definition of non-violence was no less disputed than that of violence. Debates within the Greens over the course of the 1980s – and over Germany's military role in Kosovo in 1998 and Afghanistan in 2001 – proved that the question of state violence was far from dead. And the controversy around the 2005 Berlin exhibition on the RAF suggests that the history of the 1960s and the student movement's relationship with violence are still being worked through. But this debate over the new Left's affinities for political violence is perhaps one of the most striking indicators of the transformation in West German social relations and political culture for which I argue here. The defenders of 1968 hastily dismiss terrorism and violence as a sideshow and its opponents illegitimately attribute a pro-violence position to the Left.<sup>70</sup> For both sides, the discussion pivots on the conviction that non-violence is *the* morally and politically acceptable mode of protest and resistance – hence the need among advocates of '68 to protect it from the implication that student protesters operated on a different code.

<sup>66</sup> 'Es wird ZEITung', 5; Petra Kelly, 'Wir müssen die Etablierten entblößen wo wir können', in Jörg Mettke, ed., *Die Grünen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1982).

<sup>67</sup> Petra Kelly, *Nonviolence Speaks to Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>68</sup> Antje Vollmer, 'Die Faszination der Gewalt und die eigene Geschichte', *links*, 9 (1986), 18–20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967–1977* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 2001); Belinda Davis, 'Activism from Starbuck to Starbucks, or Terror: What's in a Name?' *Radical History Review*, 85 (Winter 2003), 37–57; Wolfgang Kraushaar, Jan Philipp Reemtsma and Karin Wieland, *Rudi Dutschke, Andreas Baader und die RAF* (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 2005); and the *taz* forum [www.taz.de/digitaz/.dutschkestrasse/gewaltdebatte](http://www.taz.de/digitaz/.dutschkestrasse/gewaltdebatte) (last visited 13 June 2012).

The absoluteness of this conviction is testimony, in my opinion, to the experiences of the late 1970s and the revised political landscape of the following decades, in which the fear of fascism and the post-war conceptions of violence and resistance it spawned no longer defined political action.

### **‘Sympathy for the Devil’? La gauche allemande et le défi terroriste**

Pendant les années 1970, la gauche extra-parlementaire allemande a eu du mal à répondre au terrorisme de l’extrême-gauche et au pouvoir de l’état mobilisé pour y faire face. L’auteur soutient que l’idée partagée des représailles comme résistance légitime qui explique en part la relation ambivalente de la gauche envers la violence politique, et sa solidarité avec les militants. Les projets et les réseaux de résistance d’étudiants, d’anciens gauchistes, de manifestants anti-nucléaires et de militantes féministes, souffrant une pression croissante, ont tourné au débat puis au changement. Pris entre le terrorisme et l’anti-terrorisme, les gauchistes ont corrigé les hypothèses soutenant leur engagement à la résistance, et ont réinventé la résistance même pour en faire un élément intégré de la politique quotidienne.

### **‘Sympathy for the Devil’? Die Westdeutsche Linke und die Herausforderung des Terrorismus**

Die außerparlamentarische Linke in Westdeutschland tat sich in den siebziger Jahren schwer mit einer wirksamen Reaktion auf den Linksterrorismus und die gegen diesen mobilisierten staatlichen Kräfte. Dieser Artikel vertritt die These, dass sich das gespaltene Verhältnis der Linken zu politischer Gewalt und ihre Solidarität mit der militanten Szene zumindest teilweise durch eine gemeinsame Auffassung von Gegengewalt als gerechtfertigtem Widerstand erklären lässt. Die wachsende Belastung für die Projekte und Protestnetzwerke der Studentenbewegung, der Alt-Linken, der Antiatomkraft- und der Frauenbewegung mündete jedoch in eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema Widerstand und führte schließlich einen Wandel herbei. Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Terrorismus und Terrorismusbekämpfung überdachte die Linke die Prämissen, auf denen ihr Einsatz für den Widerstand beruhte, und schuf schließlich eine neue Art des Widerstands als Bestandteil des alltäglichen Politikbetriebs.

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