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Renaud, Terence Ray

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Restarting Socialism: The New Beginning Group and the Problem of Renewal on the
German Left, 1930-1970

by

Terence Ray Renaud

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

and the Designated Emphasis

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Martin E. Jay, Chair

Professor John Connelly

Professor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann

Professor Robert G. Kaufman

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Abstract

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in History and the Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Martin E. Jay, Chair

This dissertation concerns the problem of renewal on the German Left. How did crises of renewal and moments of generational conflict shape the theory and organization of German socialism during the tumultuous four decades between 1930 and 1970? When and how did socialism cease to be a viable political alternative to democratic capitalism? I treat the history of one small organization, New Beginning, as paradigmatic for the experience of the socialist renewers generation—the generation that renewed socialism through antifascist struggle and remade the German Left after the war.

Born between 1905 and 1915, the renewers were too young to have served in the First World War or actively participated in the November Revolution. They matured amid the political and economic turmoil of the Weimar Republic and later pioneered the formation of “socialist splinter groups.” Between the fronts of social democracy and communism, these small organizations like New Beginning, the Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP), the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), and the Communist Party-Opposition (KPO) sought to unify and renew the German socialist movement through a curious combination of elite vanguardism and grassroots initiative. They believed that the fight against fascism provided socialists a unique opportunity to finish the democratic revolution that had begun as early as 1848, leapt forward in 1918-19, but stalled during the conservative Weimar Republic. New Beginning distinguished itself from the other splinter groups in the way it explicitly articulated the problem of socialist renewal and linked the fate of socialism to the fate of its own generation.

After twelve years of anti-Nazi resistance and war, former members of New Beginning such as Fritz Erler, Waldemar von Knoeringen, Richard Löwenthal, Wolfgang Abendroth, Ossip K. Flechtheim, and Robert Havemann either arose from the rubble or returned from exile to acquire leading posts in German academia and politics. They set about applying the theories and methods they had learned during the 1930s to the new problems of reconstruction, divided Germany, and the developing Cold War. The majority of the renewers generation helped modernize the Social Democratic Party and develop a new kind of socialism that renounced Marxism and embraced a liberal, middle-class ethos. An

important minority of renewers, however, stayed true to the promise of radical socialism. These dissident left socialists paved the way toward a New Left, and in the 1960s the original revolutionary élan of the renewers passed on to a new generation of militant young intellectuals: the Sixty-eighters.

Political ideologies as well as mass social movements grow old. Their proponents and participants physically age, and their ideas start to rust. Revival and rejuvenation, then, periodically capture the attention and shape the objectives of multi-generational social movements. The former members of New Beginning were keenly aware of how the problem of renewal could cause dysfunction in the established parties of the Left. But they also recognized an opportunity to mobilize the German youth against capitalism and conservative reaction. Instead of restarting socialism, however, the New Left and the Sixty-eighters unwittingly extinguished the original promise of German socialism and the renewers generation. Subsequent movements for social change in Germany and elsewhere in Europe would occur largely outside the socialist tradition.

To my parents,
Patricia and David Renaud

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AADG | American Association for a Democratic Germany |
| ADGB | General German Federation of Trade Unions [<i>Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i>] |
| AFGF | American Friends of German Freedom |
| Antifa | Antifascist Committee [<i>Antifaschistischer Ausschuss</i>] |
| APO | Extra-Parliamentary Opposition [<i>Außerparlamentarische Opposition</i>] |
| BdS | League of Democratic Socialists [<i>Bund demokratischer Sozialisten</i>] |
| BRSD | German League of Religious Socialists [<i>Bund religiöser Sozialisten Deutschlands</i>] |
| CDG | Council for a Democratic Germany |
| CDU | German Christian Democratic Union |
| Comintern | Communist International |
| CSU | Christian Social Union in Bavaria |
| DAF | (Nazi) German Labor Front [<i>Deutsche Arbeitsfront</i>] |
| DGB | (West) German Federation of Trade Unions [<i>Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i>] |
| DKP | (West) German Communist Party [<i>Deutsche Kommunistische Partei</i>] |
| DVPW | German Political Science Association [<i>Deutsche Vereinigung für Politikwissenschaft</i>] |
| ECCI | Executive Committee of the Comintern |
| ERC | Emergency Rescue Committee |
| F-Course | Advanced Course [<i>Fortgeschrittener Kursus</i>] |
| FDJ | Free German Youth [<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i>] |
| FDP | Free (Liberal) Democratic Party |
| FDGB | Free (East) German Federation of Trade Unions [<i>Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund</i>] |
| FRG | Federal Republic of (West) Germany |
| Gesag | (Bourgeois) Societal Working Group [<i>Gesellschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft</i>] |
| Gestapo | (Nazi) Secret State Police [<i>Geheime Staatspolizei</i>] |
| GDR | (East) German Democratic Republic |
| GLD | German Labor Delegation |
| IG-Metall | Industrial Union of Metalworkers |
| ISK | International Socialist Fighting League [<i>Internationaler sozialistischer Kampfbund</i>] |
| ITF | International Transport Workers' Federation |
| Jusos | Young Socialists [<i>Jungsozialisten</i>] |
| KJVD | German Communist Youth Association [<i>Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands</i>] |
| Kon | Rules of conspiracy [<i>Konspiration</i>] |
| Kostufra | Communist Student Fraction [<i>Kommunistische Studentenfraktion</i>] |
| KPD | German Communist Party |
| KPO | German Communist Party-Opposition |
| KZ | Concentration camp [<i>Konzentrationslager</i>] |

| | |
|--------|---|
| LSI | Labour and Socialist International |
| NB | New Beginning [<i>Neu Beginnen</i>] |
| NKVD | People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs [<i>Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del</i>] |
| NL | Personal Papers [<i>Nachlass</i>] |
| NSBO | National Socialist Factory Cell Organization [<i>Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation</i>] |
| NSDAP | National Socialist German Workers' Party [<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>] |
| Org | Leninist Organization |
| OSS | US Office of Strategic Services |
| OSI | Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science at the Free University of Berlin |
| OWI | US Office of War Information |
| RGO | Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition [<i>Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition</i>] |
| RSD | German Revolutionary Socialists |
| RSÖ | Austrian Revolutionary Socialists |
| SAJ | Socialist Worker Youth [<i>Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend</i>] |
| SAP | German Socialist Workers' Party [<i>Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</i>] |
| SA | (Nazi) Storm Detachment [<i>Sturmabteilung</i>] |
| SB | Socialist League [<i>Sozialistischer Bund</i>] |
| SBZ | Soviet Occupation Zone [<i>Sowjetische Besatzungszone</i>] |
| SDS | Socialist German Student League [<i>Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund</i>] |
| SED | (East) German Socialist Unity Party [<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i>] |
| SFG | Socialist Booster Club [<i>Sozialistische Förderergesellschaft</i>] |
| SFIO | French Section of the Workers' International [<i>Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière</i>] |
| SHB | Social Democratic Collegiate League [<i>Sozialdemokratischer Hochschulbund</i>] |
| SHG | Socialist Collegiate Collective [<i>Sozialistische Hochschulgemeinschaft</i>] |
| SJVD | German Socialist Youth Association [<i>Sozialistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands</i>] |
| SMAD | Soviet Military Administration in Germany |
| Sopade | German Social Democratic Party in Exile [<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands im Exil</i>] |
| Stasi | East German Ministry for State Security [<i>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</i>] |
| SPD | German Social Democratic Party |
| SS | Protection Squadron of the NSDAP [<i>Schutzstaffel der NSDAP</i>] |
| UDSO | Union of German Socialist Organizations in Great Britain |
| USPD | Independent SPD [<i>Unabhängige SPD</i>] |
| ZA | Central Committee (of the Berlin SPD) |
| ZK | Central Committee (of the KPD) |

INTRODUCTION:
German Socialism and the Renewers Generation

German Socialism and the Renewers Generation

In 1933 the German workers' movement met with massive defeat at the hands of fascism. National Socialism, a far-right movement that misappropriated elements of the socialist tradition and combined them with a racist and revanchist ideology, would instead determine the country's fate. This moment of defeat and profound disillusionment on the German Left, however, slowly gave rise to a new hope for revolutionary socialist renewal. Oppressed inside Germany and often driven into exile, socialists of the younger generation began to diagnose the impotent workers' movement as suffering from pathological disunity and ideological obsolescence. These militant intellectuals in their midtwenties called for the renewal of socialist theory and leadership. Over the course of the 1930s, they accomplished on a very small scale their goal of forging united fronts of social democrats and communists against the common fascist foe. But as for inspiring a mass uprising against the Nazis and restarting socialism more generally, the early experience of the renewers generation amounted to a history of failure.

Walter Benjamin once urged historians to redeem the vanquished by brushing history "against the grain," while Reinhart Koselleck asserted more confidently that "[i]f history is made in the short run by the victors, historical gains in knowledge stem in the long run from the vanquished."¹ These valuable perspectives might justify focusing on the years 1933 to 1945 for a study of my primary case, the group New Beginning [*Neu Beginnen*]. The sparse scholarship that exists on the subject has indeed confined itself to the Nazi period and the framework of anti-Nazi resistance.² But by spanning the four decades between 1930 and 1970, we can draw different conclusions from the longer history of German socialism and the fuller lives of the renewers generation.

In the decades following 1945, the vanquished socialist renewers entered their professional and political primes. In West Germany the majority transformed into the victors of "modernized" social democracy, while an important minority inspired a revival of radical socialism that culminated in the New Left. A few renewers like Robert Havemann even pioneered the dissident movement in East Germany. When viewed from a long generational perspective, the experiences of the renewers form a surprising success story for democratic political culture in postwar Germany. They also reveal how the problem of renewal continued to cause dysfunction on the Left and ultimately contributed to the dissolution of socialism as a viable alternative to democratic capitalism.

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [1940], *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253-64 (257); Reinhart Koselleck, "Transformations of Experience and Methodological Change: A Historical-Anthropological Essay," *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), 45-83 (76).

² John M. Cox, Ch. 2 in *Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009); Jan Foitzik, *Zwischen den Fronten. Zur Politik, Organisation und Funktion linker politischer Kleinorganisationen im Widerstand 1933 bis 1939/40 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Exils* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1986); Hans J. Reichhardt, "Neu Beginnen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Widerstandes der Arbeiterbewegung gegen den Nationalsozialismus," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, 12 (1963), 150-88; Kurt Kliem, "Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich dargestellt an der Gruppe 'Neu Beginnen'," Ph.D. (Philipps-Universität zu Marburg, 1957). The great exception is Tobias Kühne, "Das Netzwerk 'Neu Beginnen' und die Berliner SPD nach 1945," Ph.D. (Technische Universität-Berlin, 2014).

The history of socialism, German or otherwise, has fallen out of fashion.³ The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the rise of neo-liberal ideology have seemed to render socialism in Europe and the United States a quaint relic with very little contemporary relevance. Social democratic or socialist parties for the most part operate comfortably within the confines of the existing order. The prospect of further social progress beyond capitalism strikes many as absurd, undesirable, or at best unrealistic. And yet for a century and a half millions of Europeans and others around the globe believed in socialism's revolutionary promise. In explaining why hope for revolutionary socialism gradually faded in Germany, this dissertation offers a fresh perspective on the current promise and pitfalls of restarting socialism.

I consider socialism a non-partisan umbrella term for the variety of progressive counter-movements to capitalism and liberal individualism that began to emerge in the early nineteenth century. George Lichtheim argued similarly that “cleavages separating communists from democratic socialists, and both from anarchists or anarchosyndicalists, occur within what may broadly be termed the socialist movement. . . . Socialism in this sense is not a party label, but the designation of a historically conditioned response to a particular challenge.”⁴ Social democrats, communists, and anarchists were thus all “socialists” in this most general sense. The historical and theoretical ties that bound them were stronger than the political distinctions that separated them.

My dissertation begins in Germany's tumultuous 1920s and '30s, when political divisions on the Left fully eclipsed the basic unity of the socialist worldview. The First World War and the political revolutions that accompanied its end had brought down the last remnants of Europe's old regime. The dogged perseverance of communism in Russia, the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, and the devastating financial collapse of 1929 threw capitalism and liberal democracy into crisis. Even after the Nazis took power in

³ A handful of Anglo-American scholars still bear the torch. See for example William Smaldone, *European Socialism: A Concise History with Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998). In contrast, scholarship on capitalism and neo-liberalism has skyrocketed. See for example Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte des Kapitalismus* (Munich: Beck, 2013); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* [2013], trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014); Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* [2013], trans. Patrick Camiller (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2014); Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012); Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011); Monica Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

⁴ George Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1970), x. Lichtheim stressed perhaps too emphatically that socialism was a worldview invented by bourgeois intellectuals and propagated among the working class. Socialist ideas also emerged spontaneously from the working class itself, through its cultural practices, traditions, etc. But he did correctly surmise that no necessary or logical connection existed between socialism and the workers' movement: “At no stage was the entire labor movement unequivocally committed to socialism as the term is currently understood. It would be truer to say that the early socialists had to convert the working class to their own faith. . . . Their most solid and enduring success was scored in Germany, where they captured the democratic inheritance of the workers' movement along with it” (51-52).

January 1933 and German socialists went underground, landed in prison, fled into exile, or acquiesced to the new regime, many imagined their historical moment as a grand struggle between socialism and capitalism's "highest stage," fascism. Antifascism was almost by definition a socialist endeavor. But not everyone agreed on what socialism meant or which form Germany's and by extension Europe's break with capitalism should take. The socialist movement was divided a thousand ways.

Out this quandary of crisis, division, and revolutionary hope emerged a small group of Marxist intellectuals that called itself simply "the Organization." They formed in Berlin out of a discussion circle of former communists who had either resigned or been expelled from the party at the end of the 1920s for opposing Stalinism. This secret cadre of professional revolutionaries consciously stood between the fronts of German social democracy and communism, more revolutionary than the social democrats and more "realistic" than the communists. An illegal pamphlet appeared in the fall of 1933 that propagated the group's vision of an autonomous antifascist revolution in Europe led by the young generation. The pamphlet described a process of socialist renewal that would replace the defunct ideas and leaders of the traditional workers' movement. Its title was *Neu beginnen!*, and overnight this secretive organization had a popular new name: "New Beginning."

At its core New Beginning's membership never exceeded a few hundred, while on its periphery stood around one thousand people. Those who sympathized with the group's aims and aided it indirectly numbered perhaps several thousand, although due to the many lacunae in records from the era precise numbers are difficult to determine. One third of them were proletarian workers, another third white-collar employees, and the rest bourgeois intellectuals. In 1933 they averaged twenty-seven years old.⁵ New Beginning understood itself not as a political party but rather as a conspiratorial faction that aimed to renew socialism from within the existing Social Democratic and the Communist parties. But the three short years between the group's inception and the Nazi seizure of power did not suffice to carry out its long-term plan. After 1933, New Beginning transformed into an anti-Nazi resistance organization. For the next twelve years its members concentrated on destabilizing the Nazi regime from within and from exile. They engaged in the Popular Front debates of the mid-1930s, sent recruits to fight fascism in Spain, and in 1939-40 relocated their headquarters to London and New York when all hope was lost on the Continent.

Survivors of the group inside Germany and those who returned from exile helped reconstruct socialism and democratic political culture after the war. Over subsequent decades, former members of New Beginning acquired leading posts in West German academia and politics. Their supposed "influence" inspired the conservative journalist William S. Schlamm to concoct a fantastic conspiracy theory about how New Beginning constituted "a fourth of the German 'establishment'" and pulled the strings of Willy Brandt's chancellorship.⁶ Schlamm may have exaggerated the influence of this small,

⁵ These demographics are based on my own data set, which compiles the dates of birth and death, function and years in the Org/NB, class background, political affiliations, years and places of exile, etc. for well over 300 identified New Beginning members and sympathizers.

⁶ William S. Schlamm, *Zorn und Gelächter. Zeitgeschichte aus spitzer Feder* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1977), 324-27. In an earlier book, he acknowledged the more modest generational connection of the "young masters of the old earth" like Brandt and John F. Kennedy—"They govern us in the name of their generation" (9)—but spared no ink in decrying their alleged cynicism, pessimism, and nihilism. Schlamm,

defunct socialist splinter group, but he was on to something: the *generation* that New Beginning represented did in fact control the Social Democratic Party in the 1960s, not least through the person of Brandt.

Born between 1905 and 1915, the renewers generation was too young to have served in the First World War or actively participated in the November Revolution. Its members grew up amid the political and economic turmoil of the Weimar Republic, matured in the militant socialist youth movement, and later pioneered the formation of so-called socialist splinter groups. Between the fronts of social democracy and communism, these small organizations like New Beginning, the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP), the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), and the Communist Party-Opposition (KPO) sought to unify and renew the German socialist movement through a curious combination of elite vanguardism and grassroots initiative. They believed that the fight against fascism provided socialists a unique opportunity to finish the democratic revolution that had begun as early as 1848, leapt forward in 1918-19, but stalled during the conservative Weimar Republic: full democratization of society and the economy, socialization of key industries, institutionalization of democratic workers' control, demilitarization and disarmament, and—very importantly—*independence from Moscow*. New Beginning distinguished itself from the other splinter groups in the way it explicitly articulated the problem of socialist renewal and linked the fate of socialism to the fate of its own generation. Its history is thus paradigmatic for the experience of the renewers on the German Left.⁷

The renewers' understanding of socialism had three main intellectual sources: the radical left critique of mainstream social democracy offered by V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg; the legacy of Austromarxism; and the interwar trend known as Marxist humanism. Following Lenin in stressing the primacy of revolutionary organization, the renewers at the same time valued the democratic socialist conviction of Luxemburg. They often cited her remark that freedom must always include “the freedom of those who think differently,” and the subtitle of the *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet, for example, adapted Luxemburg's well-known alternative of “socialism or barbarism” into a new motto for the 1930s: socialism or fascism.⁸ For their part, Austromarxists like Max Adler and Otto

Die jungen Herren der alten Erde. Vom neuen Stil der Macht (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1962). Schlamm himself was a former communist, knew the New Beginning leader Karl B. Frank since they were young in Vienna (despite mistaking him for “Miles”), and had dealings with NB in exile during the 1930s. In the United States after the war he helped found the conservative magazine *National Review* and later joined the radical-right John Birch Society. See Susanne Peters, *William S. Schlamm. Ideologischer Grenzgänger im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft, 2013).

⁷ For the best comparative study of the socialist splinter groups in the context of anti-Nazi resistance, see Foitzik, *Zwischen den Fronten*, op. cit. I borrow the term “renewers” [*Erneuerer*] from the historian Harold Hurwitz, himself a student of the former New Beginning member Ossip K. Flechtheim, although he used the term to describe a postwar political camp rather than a generation. See Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: Die Anfänge des Widerstands, Pt. 1: Führungsanspruch und Isolation der Sozialdemokraten (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990).

⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution” [1918], *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 281-310 (305). I have altered this translation. Walter Loewenheim (pseud. “Miles”), *Neu beginnen! Faschismus oder Sozialismus: Diskussionsgrundlage der Sozialisten Deutschlands* (Carlsbad: Graphia, 1933), reprinted in Kurt Klotzbach, ed., *Drei Schriften aus dem Exil* (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1974), 1-88. While the pamphlet was published in exile (as the name of the Klotzbach collection suggests), Miles/Loewenheim composed it inside Nazi Germany.

Bauer conceptualized the “intellectual worker” and provided the renewers a model for a unified and democratic socialist workers’ party that stood between the fronts of reformist social democracy and dictatorial communism.⁹ And like the Austromarxists, the Marxist humanists tried to reconcile idealist philosophy with historical materialism. Inspired by the work of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch and by new research into the early writings of Karl Marx, the Marxist humanists highlighted the subjective role of culture and class consciousness in preparing the socialist revolution. They opposed the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism and retrieved the Hegelian concept of “totality” from the dustbin of historical ideas.¹⁰ These three sources formed the primary intellectual inheritance of the renewers generation and, over several decades, informed their solutions to the problem of socialist renewal.

German Generations

In addition to these main currents of socialist thought, the renewers came of age right around the time the sociological concept of “generation” gained traction. In 1928 Karl Mannheim, whose forthcoming book *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) would serve as one of New Beginning’s foundational texts, published his classic essay on “The Problem of Generations.” Although earlier theorists like Auguste Comte, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Wilhelm Dilthey had pondered the function of and relationship between generations,¹¹ Mannheim for the first time defined a modern sociology of generations against existing positivist and “Romantic-historical” interpretations. One could neither quantify a regular biological rhythm of fifteen- to thirty-year intervals like the positivists, Mannheim argued, nor qualify the spiritual essence of any given generation like the Romantics. Instead he urged a dialectical mediation of these two approaches: “between the natural or physical and the [spiritual] spheres there is a level of existence at which social forces operate.”¹² By emphasizing social relations in the formation of generations, he characteristically introduced Marxian ideas to critique bourgeois social science and philosophy.

For Mannheim, a “generation unit” need not manifest itself in any concrete social group or organization. A generation represented instead a diffuse relationship between a

⁹ See Janek Wasserman, “The Austro-Marxist Struggle for ‘Intellectual Workers’: The Lost Debate on the Question of Intellectuals in Interwar Vienna,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 9, no. 2 (2012), 361-88; Ernst Hanisch, *Der große Illusionist. Otto Bauer (1881-1938)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011). A more elitist notion of the “intellectual worker” had emerged already in 1918 with the Politischer Rat geistiger Arbeiter around Kurt Hiller. See Lewis D. Wurgaft, *The Activists: Kurt Hiller and the Politics of Action on the German Left, 1914-1933* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977).

¹⁰ For a good overview of Marxist humanism, see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984). For a more negative appraisal, see Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, Vol. 3, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

¹¹ See for example Wilhelm Dilthey, *Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat* [1875] (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1957), 36-41; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886], trans. Helen Zimmern (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), 142 (§285). The idea of generational conflict had also animated nineteenth-century Russian literature from Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* (1862) to Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (1872). Mannheim placed Martin Heidegger’s related concept of “fate” [*Geschick*] from *Being and Time* (1927) in the category of “imaginative speculations” that prematurely closed off avenues of social research.

¹² Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations” [1928], *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York, Oxford UP, 1952), 276-320 (284).

set of individuals galvanized by some pivotal historical moment. Generational “situatedness” [*Lagerung*] functioned analogously to class position. Just as individuals inspired by a collective class consciousness may join trade unions, class-driven political parties, or economic interest groups, generation-based organizations may arise out of a shared generational consciousness. He noted that “it may sometimes happen that a feeling for the unity of a generation is consciously developed into a basis for the formation of concrete groups, as in the case of the modern German Youth Movement.”¹³ And New Beginning formed one such concrete group.

Not at first conscious of its generational identity, New Beginning consisted of several different age cohorts. The founders of the “Organization” were born roughly between 1895 and 1905 and thus fell in between the so-called “front generation” (b. 1880-1900) and the renewers (b. 1905-1915).¹⁴ Mannheim referred to such in-betweeners as members of “half generations” or “older people who [were] isolated in their own generation (forerunners).” He stressed the potential for conflict between adjacent generations and the social need to accommodate both the “continuous emergence of new participants in the cultural process” and the “continuous withdrawal of previous participants.”¹⁵

Generation units could attract earlier or later age cohorts to their ideological message or political style. As its founders increasingly empathized with the cause of the youth, the Organization/New Beginning grew into a concrete manifestation of the renewers generation. The majority of its rank and file were themselves renewers and considered their own age cohort the bearer of hope for socialism in Germany. In later decades, the renewers projected their hopes onto still younger generations.¹⁶

Class affiliations, generations, and ideologies blend in the composition of social movements. Mannheim recognized the intimate connection between the physical rejuvenation of a movement’s personnel and the intellectual revitalization of its guiding theory. But the political orientations of “young” versus “old” did not always map stereotypically onto “progressive” versus “conservative”—especially in Germany during the interwar years. The youth’s “being young” and the “‘freshness’ of their contact with the world . . . manifest themselves in the fact that they are able to re-orient any movement they embrace, to ad[a]pt it to the total situation.” Young socialists thus always sought an

¹³ Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 288. He implicitly drew on his friend Georg Lukács’ influential book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) to make an analogous study of generational consciousness. See Balint Balla et al., eds., *Karl Mannheim. Leben, Werk, Wirkung und Bedeutung für die Osteuropaforschung* (Hamburg: Krämer, 2007), especially Pt. 4; David Kettler, *Marxismus und Kultur. Mannheim und Lukács in den ungarischen Revolutionen 1918/19* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967); Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985). Robert Wohl argued that Mannheim’s concept of generation actually contradicted class analysis entirely. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979), 73-84.

¹⁴ On the composition and political orientation of the front generation, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* [1987], trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 14-18; Richard Bessel, “The ‘Front Generation’ and the Politics of Weimar Germany,” *German History*, 9, no. 3 (July 1991), 339-40; Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*.

¹⁵ Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 308, 293-96.

¹⁶ On postwar German youth, see Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2007); Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2000).

“up-to-date formulation” of socialism, while young conservatives sought an analogous renewal of conservatism.¹⁷

The historian Thomas A. Kohut has published an admirable study of what he calls the “German generation.” Born roughly between 1900 and 1915, this generation underwent formative experiences similar to the renewers’. But instead of the vanguard of socialist renewal, Kohut’s generation formed the most committed core of the Nazi movement.¹⁸ While drawing on his theory of generations, however, Kohut does not discuss Mannheim’s idea that generations contain multiple and often antagonistic ideological orientations.¹⁹ The “German generation,” with its elective affinity for bourgeois youth movements predisposed to Nazism, actually constituted in Mannheim’s sense only one generation unit. My dissertation thus analyzes the same generation’s ideologically opposite pole: the unit of socialist renewers.²⁰

Two generational conjunctures bookend my dissertation. Around 1930, the concept of generation first acquired theoretical rigor in the work of Mannheim and the New Beginning group established itself as an important mouthpiece of the socialist youth.

¹⁷ Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 297n1.

¹⁸ Thomas A. Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012). Similarly, Michael Wildt has written about the “uncompromising generation” that filled the ranks of the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS). Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* [2002], trans. Tom Lampert (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2009). Wildt’s German title *Generation des Unbedingten* translates perhaps more accurately though less elegantly as “unconditional generation” or “generation of absolutes.” See also Peter Loewenberg, “The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort,” *American Historical Review*, 76, no. 5 (Dec. 1971), 1457-1502. In another national context, Czesław Miłosz’s critique of Polish communism, *The Captive Mind* (1953), concentrated on the same generation born circa 1910. Marci Shore, whose book resembles my dissertation in many respects, claims to focus on a slightly older generation of Polish Marxists born between 1900 and 1920—“the last to be educated in Russian or German under the partitioning empires and the first to come of age in the universities of independent Poland”—but the ages of her protagonists overlap Miłosz’s considerably. Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006), 3.

¹⁹ Referring to the era of Napoleonic Wars, Mannheim observed that “[b]oth the romantic-conservative and the liberal-rationalist youth belonged to the same actual generation, romanticism-conservatism and liberal-rationalism were merely two *polar forms* of the intellectual and social response to an historical stimulus experienced by all in common. Romantic-conservative youth, and liberal-rationalist [youth], belong to the same actual generation but form separate ‘generation units’ within it. The *generation unit* represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such.” Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” 304.

²⁰ Aside from Kohut’s oral histories and choice of subject, our methodologies largely coincide. Like his Free German Circle, the New Beginning group functions for me as the paradigmatic manifestation of the renewers generation. The literature on the methodology and historiography of generations is vast. Most recently, see Björn Bohnenkamp, *Doing Generation. Zur Inszenierung von generationeller Gemeinschaft in deutschsprachigen Schriftmedien* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014); Hartmut Berghoff et al., eds., *History by Generations: Generational Dynamics in Modern History* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012); Dorothee Wierling, “Generations as Narrative Communities: Some Private Sources of Official Cultures of Remembrance in Postwar Germany,” in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, eds., *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Ohad Parnes et al., *Das Konzept der Generation. Eine Wissenschafts- und Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2008); Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt, eds., *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005); Sigrid Weigel et al., eds., *Generation. Zur Genealogie des Konzepts – Konzepte von Genealogie* (Munich: Fink, 2005). For older scholarship, see the work of Jürgen Reulecke, Ulrich Herbert, Christian Schneider, Nancy Whittier, Pierre Nora, Ulrich Hermann, Helmut Fogt, M. Rainer Lepsius, Hans Jaeger, and Manfred Riedel.

And around 1970, the enraged students and radical youth who rebelled against authority across Europe and America almost immediately thought of themselves as a transnational generation. Ample scholarship now exists on twentieth-century German generations, from A. Dirk Moses' analysis of the "Forty-fivers" to various studies of the "anti-aircraft helper generation" [*Flakhelfer*], the "Hitler Youth generation," the "skeptical generation," and the "Sixty-eighters."²¹ My definition of the renewers generation encompasses the life experiences and theoretical innovations of German socialists born after the front-generation leadership of the Weimar socialist parties (b. 1880s-90s) and before the "Forty-fivers" (b. 1920s). These were the Germans who led the heterogeneous underground struggle against Nazism, "modernized" social democracy in the 1950s, and—the more radical among them—also paved the way for an extra-parliamentary New Left. And when the "Sixty-eighters" (b. 1940s) rose in revolt, they directed their most vehement attacks against the renewers generation—their parents' generation—which by then mostly supported the established democratic order.

By introducing this key piece of modern Germany's generational puzzle, my dissertation makes a strong case for conceptualizing the history of German socialism as a whole, undivided by political differences, contingent state borders, or lingering Cold War biases.²² Traditional dates of rupture like the so-called "zero hour" of May 1945 retain their experiential significance but recede behind broader intellectual and political continuities. As a multi-generational social movement, German socialism constantly struggled with the rebellion of children against parents and grandparents, a rebellion that deeply imprinted both socialist theory and party organization.

²¹ Most recently, see Benjamin Möckel, *Erfahrungsbruch und Generationsbehauptung. Die "Kriegsjugendgeneration" in den beiden deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaften* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014); Malte Herwig, *Die Flakhelfer. Wie aus Hitlers jüngsten Parteimitgliedern Deutschlands führende Demokraten wurden* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2013); Arndt Weinrich, *Der Weltkrieg als Erzieher. Jugend zwischen Weimarer Republik und Nationalsozialismus* (Essen: Klartext, 2013); Barbara Stambolis, *Töchter ohne Väter. Frauen der Kriegsgeneration und ihre lebenslange Sehnsucht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2012); Mary Fulbrook, "Divided generations: State violence and the formation of 'two worlds' in Nazi Germany," *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence Through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2011); A. Dirk Moses, "The Forty-fivers: A Generation between Fascism and Democracy," *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), originally published as a review essay in *German Politics & Society*, 17, no. 1 (1999); Klaus Schönhoven and Bernd Braun, eds., *Generationen in der Arbeiterbewegung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); Sigrid Weigel, "'Generation' as a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945," *Germanic Review*, 77, no. 4 (2002), 264-77; Dorothee Wierling, "The Hitler Youth Generation in the GDR," in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 307-24. For older scholarship, see the work of Mark Roseman, Heinz Bude, Gabriele Rosenthal, Matthias von Hellfeld, Rolf Schörken, and Claus Richter. The classic work that sparked much debate in West Germany was Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation. Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsseldorf; Cologne: Diederichs, 1957).

²² George Lichtheim always insisted that European socialism be treated as a whole (West plus East), but he did not incorporate a generational perspective. See Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1970) and *The Origins of Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1969). On the need to overcome the "Cold War" division of scholarship on West Germany versus on East Germany, see Konrad H. Jarausch, "Die Teile als Ganzes erkennen". Zur Integration der beiden deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichten," *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, no. 1 (2004), 10-30, and Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 15-16.

Weimar in Exile

Several recent studies have likewise traced the continuities of German history and the crucial role of pre-war ideas in postwar reconstruction. These studies revive an old trend of twentieth-century German intellectual history: the primacy of exile. With the rise of the Nazis, thousands of Germany's leading artists and intellectuals fled into European and American exile. Oppressed political leaders too tried to gain a foothold in the émigré capitals of Prague, Paris, London, and New York. Preserved abroad from extinction inside Nazi Germany, so the narrative goes, the intellectual and political legacies of the Weimar Republic eventually returned home to help reconstruct (West) German democracy.²³

Udi Greenberg's book *The Weimar Century* (2015) suggests some useful amendments to the standard narrative while still following its general contours. The theories of "responsible elites" (Carl J. Friedrich), "collective democracy" (Ernst Fraenkel), "totalitarianism" (Waldemar Gurian), "militant democracy" (Karl Loewenstein), and international "realism" (Hans J. Morgenthau) were marginal during the Weimar Republic, argues Greenberg, but in exile they resonated with American elites' own self-conceptions and thus won a great deal of official patronage. After the war, these intellectuals and their ideas helped lay the foundations for West German anti-communist democracy and American Cold War hegemony: from the margins of Weimar they arrived at the center of the postwar order.²⁴

New Beginning and the renewers fit at least partially into Greenberg's framework, even if his protagonists belonged to a slightly older generation. New Beginning made its reputation in exile, extending its antifascist network to the liberal democracies of the West and cultivating there valuable sources of funding and patronage. The analyses of Nazi society and Soviet policy as well as the theories of totalitarianism developed by the likes of Richard Löwenthal and Karl B. Frank reached sympathetic ears in Britain and the United States. Although somewhat more limited in scope than Greenberg's subjects, New

²³ On the period of exile and the role of returning émigrés in postwar reconstruction, see Christian Bailey, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: German Visions of Europe, 1926-1950* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Pamela Ballinger, "Impossible Returns, Enduring Legacies: Recent Historiography of Displacement and the Reconstruction of Europe after World War II," *Contemporary European History*, 22, no. 1 (Feb. 2013), 127-38; Marjorie Lamberti, "Returning Refugee Political Scientists and America's Democratization Program in Germany after the Second World War," *German Studies Review*, 31, no. 2 (May 2008), 263-84; Matthias Stoffregen, "Kämpfen für ein demokratisches Deutschland: Emigranten zwischen Politik und Politikwissenschaft," Ph.D. (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/Main, 2002); Marita Krauss, *Heimkehr in ein fremdes Land. Geschichte der Remigration nach 1945* (Munich: Beck, 2001); Claus-Dieter Krohn and Patrik von Zur Mühlen, eds., *Rückkehr und Aufbau nach 1945. Deutsche Remigranten im öffentlichen Leben Nachkriegsdeutschlands* (Marburg: Metropolis, 1997); Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America* [1987] (London; New York: Verso, 2006). See also the classic studies by Martin Jay, Alfons Söllner, Anthony Heilbut, Joachim Radkau, Bernard Bailyn and Donald Fleming, and Laura Fermi.

²⁴ Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015). See also Greenberg, "Germany's Postwar Re-education and Its Weimar Intellectual Roots," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46, no. 1 (2011), 10-32. For a similar study that attributes the success of postwar democratization to the ideological reconciliation in exile of previously opposed Weimar camps, see Noah Strote, "Emigration and the Foundation of West Germany, 1933-1963," Ph.D. (UC-Berkeley, 2011). On the role of German-American networks in postwar reconstruction, see Julia Angster, *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie. Die Westernisierung von SPD und DGB* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003).

Beginning's ideas too influenced the formulation of Allied occupation policy. Waldemar von Knoeringen, Erwin Schoettle, and a host of other New Beginning émigrés returned to Germany after the war to reconstruct social democracy. The exile experience played a central role in the modernization of the party during the 1950s.

But such a strong emphasis on Weimar intellectual roots and the primacy of exile leaves something out. First, this perspective ignores or at least marginalizes the significant intellectual trends that survived inside Nazi Germany. The complicated experiences of those Germans who eventually conformed to the Nazi regime and especially of those who continued to resist it had the most direct influence on immediate postwar reconstruction—especially during the crucial summer months of 1945 before most émigrés could return. Besides, many political activists after the war resented interference by returning émigrés, whose experience over the past twelve years differed so starkly from the ordeal of oppression, police violence, concentration camps, compulsory military service, and total war. Second, American Cold War hegemony as Greenberg defines it was not synonymous with the political possibilities of postwar Germany or even just West Germany. The German Left, and particularly “left socialists” in the West who ran afoul of the Social Democratic Party, always disputed the antagonistic anti-communism and exclusivist model of militant democracy supported by the American Cold War elite.²⁵ And finally, for both the renewers generation and the younger Forty-fivers, the memory of Weimar offered very few positive models for the future. For them, the “Weimar century” had ended already in 1933 and Germany after fascism required a totally new beginning.

The Problem of Renewal

In 1933, the leftist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich identified the “wish for *new beginning* as a general psychodynamic phenomenon.”²⁶ Hannah Arendt later wrote in a related vein that “the fact of natality” and the human capacity to begin anew lay at the core of civilization: they constituted the “miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin.”²⁷ Beginning anew may be an eternal feature of human affairs, but it has posed a particular problem for modern social and political movements.

In his famous critique of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke claimed that the French in 1789, in contrast to the English in 1688, had broken completely with past customs and traditions in order to begin society anew. He predicted that the consequences

²⁵ Greenberg attempts to cover the whole West German political spectrum by making Ernst Fraenkel stand for the Left, but Fraenkel's ideas hardly appealed even to mainstream social democrats, much less left socialists. That said, he did count as a “founding father of West German political science.” See Hubertus Buchstein, “Political Science and Democratic Culture: Ernst Fraenkel's Studies of American Democracy,” *German Politics & Society*, 21, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 48-73; Buchstein, *Politikwissenschaft und Demokratie. Wissenschaftskonzeption und Demokratietheorie sozialdemokratischer Nachkriegspolitologen in Berlin* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1992); Stoffregen, “Kämpfen für ein demokratisches Deutschland,” op. cit.; Alfons Söllner, “Ernst Fraenkel und die Verwestlichung der politischen Kultur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” *Leviathan*, 30, no. 1 (2002), 132-54.

²⁶ Hartmut Soell, *Fritz Erler – Eine politische Biographie*, 2 Vols. (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1976), 518n103, emphasis in original. Soell cited Wilhelm Reich, *Charakteranalyse* (Vienna, 1933), 215. The wish to begin anew also characterized the German self-image of 1945 as “zero hour.”

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago; London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 247.

of this radical break from the past would be dire.²⁸ Instead, he favored a gradual process of social change that respected established customs and reformed rather than destroyed past institutions. Arendt later revised this argument in her volume *On Revolution* (1963). The difference between the American and the French revolutions, she argued, was that the former's new beginning resulted in the legal foundation of liberty in a written constitution acknowledged by all as legitimate. The French new beginning, on the other hand, only produced a series of abortive constitutions that degenerated into constant upheaval, anarchic renewal, and “permanent revolution,” as Leon Trotsky might have called it.²⁹ For her, the problem with the French revolutionary model was that there was no way to end it—no way to sustain any new social foundation.

Both Burke and Arendt recognized the tension between renewal as an ongoing process and new beginning as a discrete foundational moment. And both feared the consequences of this tension for political and social action. Political ideologies as well as mass social movements grow old. Their proponents and participants physically age, and their ideas start to rust. Revival and rejuvenation, then, periodically capture the attention and shape the objectives of multi-generational social movements. Calls for new leaders and fresh ideas often go hand in hand, even if the newest leaders do not necessarily subscribe to the freshest ideas.³⁰

The translation of the *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet's original German title, the imperative “begin anew,” into the pronoun “New Beginning” demonstrates how a plea for socialist renewal quickly turned into a concrete, nominalized event or political program.³¹ This process of reification or conceptual oscillation between renewal and new beginning reflects the dialectic inherent in all attempts to reform modern political parties, which combine elements of hierarchical organization with a more fluid mass movement. The sociologist Robert Michels predicted that “worldview parties” like German Social Democracy would bureaucratically ossify and eventually succumb to the “iron law of oligarchy”: the leaders of the mass movement would accumulate organizational power within the party and, served by a disciplined party bureaucracy, would stifle the originally democratic character of the movement.³² This oligarchic or authoritarian tendency even in parties on the Left claiming to fight for socialism and democracy prompted periodic crises of renewal. In the 1930s, splinter groups such as New Beginning stood at the vanguard of such initiatives within German socialism.

²⁸ “[A]t the end of every [utopian] vista, you see nothing but the gallows.” Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790], ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 68.

²⁹ She referred to the American Revolution as the “*Constitutio Libertatis*” and the French Revolution as the “*Novum Ordo Saeclorum*.” Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [1963] (New York: Penguin, 2006). For Trotsky's theory, see Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects* [1929, 1906] (Seattle, WA: Red Letter Press, 2010).

³⁰ Another notable example of the new beginning motif was Abraham Lincoln's evocation of a “new birth of freedom” in his Gettysburg Address.

³¹ Even German observers nominalized the pamphlet title: *Neues Beginnen*, *Neubeginnen*, etc. Other socialist groups of the time began using the “new beginning” motif, especially after New Beginning itself became popular. Cf. the 1935 pamphlet by the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), *Sozialistische Wiedergeburt* (“Socialist Rebirth”). Rebirth and renewal were also frequent motifs in Nazi propaganda. See for example Hermann Göring, *Germany Reborn* (London: E. Mathews & Marrot, 1934).

³² Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* [1911] (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

But the dialectic of renewal and new beginning kept going. In the aftermath of the Second World War, many leading European socialist parties integrated proposals for renewal into their official party platforms. The British Labour Party won the 1945 elections on a renewal platform (both inner-party reform and social reform), many of the communist parties of the Soviet bloc were “de-Stalinized” and renewed after 1953-56, and German Social Democracy renewed itself at the 1959 party convention at Bad Godesberg. But in the 1960s, the mantle of renewal once again passed to a new set of splinter groups: the small, unofficial, and extra-parliamentary opposition groupings frustrated with the oligarchic tendencies of the established parties.

The historian Sean A. Forner has explored the “challenge of democratic renewal” in the postwar period insofar as it related to the renewal of German democracy, that is, of democratic ideas and practices. His protagonists formed a loose network of scholars that included Dolf Sternberger, Ernst Bloch, Wolfgang Harich, Eugen Kogon, Walter Dirks, Alfred Kantorowicz, and Alfred Weber. These “engaged democrats” born very roughly around 1900 spanned the political spectrum and the German-German divide, and whether through Western liberal democracy or Eastern popular democracy they encouraged a more participatory mode of political life that drew on progressive elements of the German cultural heritage.³³

But the problem of renewal looks somewhat different in the context of real social movements and political organizations that bound their members tighter together than Forner’s informal milieu. Tobias Kühne’s recent dissertation on New Beginning’s network in postwar Berlin shows, for example, how former members of the group applied their shared past experiences and used their connections to steer the Berlin Social Democratic Party down a militantly anti-communist course. Although once proponents of radical renewal, Kühne’s protagonists settled into key bureaucratic posts, designed policies to suppress left radicalism, and otherwise subdued the socialist youth.³⁴ Their rhetoric of renewal sedimented into a concrete program of “modern” and moderate social democracy, and the conflicts of the 1960s demonstrated how far their ideas had drifted from the immediate concerns of the German youth. The renewal of socialism, as opposed to free-floating calls for “democratic renewal,” demanded rejuvenation of personnel and revitalization of ideas either within existing party and union structures or through the creation of new structures. The older organizations had already undergone crises of renewal in the past, but even for them changing geopolitical and socioeconomic circumstances always altered the object and direction of renewal.

³³ Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014); Forner, “Reconsidering the ‘Unpolitical German’: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany,” *German History*, 32, no. 1 (Mar. 2014), 53-78; Forner, “The Promise of Publicness: Intellectual Elites and Participatory Politics in Postwar Heidelberg,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 9, no. 3 (Nov. 2012), 641-60; Forner, “‘Deutscher Geist’ und demokratische Erneuerung: Kulturbünde in Ost und West nach 1945,” in Alexander Gallus and Axel Schildt, eds., *Rückblickend in die Zukunft. Politische Öffentlichkeit und intellektuelle Positionen in Deutschland um 1950 und um 1930* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 221-37; Forner, “Für eine demokratische Erneuerung Deutschlands: Kommunikationsprozesse und Deutungsmuster engagierter Demokraten nach 1945,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 33, no. 2 (Apr.-June 2007), 228-57. See also Andreas Agocs, “Contesting the ‘Other Germany’: Politics and Cultural Renewal from Antifascism to Cold War, 1935-1953,” Ph.D. (UC-Davis, 2009).

³⁴ Tobias Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” Ph.D. (Technische Universität-Berlin, 2014).

German socialism's repeated confrontation with the problem of renewal yielded many "new lefts." The scholar Lewis J. Edinger once perceptively described New Beginning and its allied socialist splinter groups of the 1930s as a "New Left" opposed to the Old Left of the established parties.³⁵ The year Edinger's book appeared, 1956, saw the birth of what another scholar remembered as Britain's "first new left."³⁶ In the 1960s, of course, a younger generation across Europe and America styled itself the definitive New Left. But what was new about these new lefts, and why did they continue to follow on each other's heels?

In his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), Peter Bürger argued that the aesthetic category of "the new" should be historicized: modernism entailed a particular conception of "newness" that differed from classical art and from literary trends like Russian formalism.³⁷ The problem of renewal likewise manifested itself in different ways throughout the history of German socialism. In the 1960s, the New Left struggled to revitalize the tradition of revolutionary socialism while keeping its distance from the official inheritors of that tradition in the established parties. In looking for new revolutionary subjects outside the working class and creating alternative forms of organization irreconcilable with the existing socialist parties, the Sixty-eighters inadvertently ruptured the historical continuity of the socialist movement. Despite its radical promise, the crisis of renewal brought on by the symbolic year 1968 marked the end of revolutionary socialism and the final act in the dissolution of a coherent German Left. Thereafter the project of "restarting socialism" became utopian in the classical Marxist sense: a wish to revive a ruptured past tradition or to envision an alternative future without any organizational basis in a revolutionary class. Subsequent movements for social change in Germany and elsewhere in Europe would occur largely outside the socialist tradition.

Chapter Summary

My chapters draw primarily on personal correspondence between former New Beginning members, published and unpublished memoirs, official records of state security services, and organizational documents such as meeting minutes and circular reports. Most of my subjects wrote journalistic articles and longer scholarly tracts throughout their careers, so the amount of published material is vast. Almost all secondary scholarship on New Beginning, the socialist splinter groups, and the renewers generation has appeared in German, so one of the tasks of this dissertation is to synthesize that material for Anglo-American readers.

Chapter One introduces the renewers generation and focuses on New Beginning's early history of conspiracy and anti-Nazi resistance inside Germany. The original "Organization" combined elements of what Georg Simmel described as "secret societies" with Lenin's notion of "professional revolutionaries." It distinguished itself by its peculiar theoretical attitude toward the world: every political step taken by the group in

³⁵ Lewis J. Edinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1956).

³⁶ Stuart Hall, "Life and Times of the First New Left," *New Left Review*, 61 (Jan.-Feb. 2010), 177-96. C. Wright Mills' famous "Letter to the New Left" appeared in *New Left Review* in Sept.-Oct. 1960.

³⁷ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1974], trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 59-63.

the twilight of the Weimar Republic and at the dawn of Nazism proceeded according to a totalizing “conception” and to the strictest rules of conspiracy. This primacy of organization corresponded to the group’s plan to build and preserve a future revolutionary elite in Germany. Its founder Walter Loewenheim (alias Miles) published the pamphlet *Neu beginnen!* in the fall of 1933, which won the group wider acclaim and a new name—“New Beginning.” By the summer of 1935, lingering tensions within the group led to a leadership coup by the youth and the first series of arrests by the Gestapo. As the underground struggle grew more futile, the renewers gradually abandoned their fetish of revolutionary organization and projected their hopes onto the open public sphere abroad.

The second chapter follows New Beginning into exile and surveys its activities in Prague, Paris, London, and New York. Acting in the émigré public sphere meant curtailing the conspiratorial techniques that had helped secure the group underground. Lenin once wrote presciently that “[o]nly abroad” could revolutionaries play the “game of democracy.”³⁸ In the 1930s, the game of democracy as played in France, Britain, and the United States demanded more honesty and transparency than New Beginning had previously been accustomed to. Separated from their home country and their primary arena of political influence, members in exile had to persuade foreign patrons and publics to support their cause. Rational consensus and pragmatic compromise began to displace older forms of conspiratorial discipline, ideological devotion, and direct action that had suited conditions underground. As the New Beginning foreign bureau became increasingly involved in exile politics, it gradually lost its connection to the underground struggle in Germany. The foreign bureau functioned less as a revolutionary cadre than as a lobbyist group. Instead of practicing socialist renewal on the ground, New Beginning in exile began to pitch the *idea* of renewal to potential allies in the governments, socialist parties, and progressive publics of its host countries. This transformation mirrored the general maturation of the renewers generation from insular youth politics to a European politics of antifascism and socialist renewal. During this period, many renewers also definitively broke with communism.

In the third chapter I examine how the ideas and personal network of New Beginning reconstituted themselves immediately after the Nazi surrender in May 1945. The pivotal episode involving survivors of the group occurred during the reconstruction of the Social Democratic and Communist parties in Allied-occupied Berlin. In the city and in the Soviet zone at large, social democrat and communist leaders of the older generation proposed fusing the two parties into a new “Socialist Unity Party” (SED). On the surface this fusion proposal seemed to fulfill the original hopes of the renewers for working-class unity. But members of New Beginning remembered the communist betrayals of the 1930s and recognized the behind-the-scenes manipulation that accompanied what became known as the “fusion struggle.” To them the SED represented a false messiah, promising renewal and a democratic socialist future but in fact delivering Germany into Soviet hands. With help from abroad, New Beginning’s small network was able to coordinate mass resistance to communist coercion and help preserve the independence of Social Democracy in West Berlin. After the disturbing experience of the

³⁸ V. I. Lenin, “What Is to Be Done?” *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. H. M. Christman (New York: Dover, 1987), 53-175 (161).

fusion struggle, many renewers abandoned their revolutionary hopes and began to profess a pragmatic “socialism without utopia” within the ranks of the Social Democratic Party.

While the first three chapters combine the approaches of political, cultural, and social history to analyze the trajectory of the renewers generation, the fourth and fifth chapters turn to intellectual history to describe how the problem of renewal preoccupied the German Left during the postwar decades. By examining the intellectual biographies of two former members of New Beginning prominent in West German social democracy, Fritz Erler (1913-67) and Richard Löwenthal (1908-91), Chapter Four explains what happened to German socialism during the economic boom years of the 1950s. The historian Axel Schildt has noted that West Germans in that decade had the distinct impression of living in “modern times.”³⁹ A banner reading “Get with the times” hung on the wall at the SPD’s Godesberg party convention in 1959. But what exactly did social democratic modernity mean? In many ways, the efforts of leading West German socialists like Erler and Löwenthal to “modernize” and “rebrand” their party during this decade—a process that involved the abandonment of Marxism, the shift from a working-class to a broad middle-class party, and the adoption of American-style electoral techniques—ironically marked the end of socialism as a distinct and viable alternative to democratic capitalism.

Although the mainstream SPD would enjoy electoral success in the decade that followed, the party alienated much of the German youth and unwittingly planted the seeds for generational revolt. The final chapter centers on two of West Germany’s chief leftist intellectuals, Wolfgang Abendroth (1906-85) and Ossip K. Flechtheim (1909-98)—also former members of New Beginning. Representing the SPD’s left wing, they opposed what they saw as the party’s embourgeoisement and “conformist” tendencies manifest in the 1959 Godesberg Program. This conflict within the German Left came to a head in 1961 when the SPD leadership declared the Socialist German Student League (SDS) “irreconcilable” with the party. The party bureaucrats of the renewers generation worried that SDS radicalism could sabotage the new reformist agenda set down at Godesberg. The left socialists Abendroth and Flechtheim, also renewers, helped form a support association in defense of the radical students. In response, the SPD leadership expelled Abendroth from the party and induced Flechtheim to resign. In 1962 their support association transformed into the Socialist League (SB), one of West Germany’s earliest examples of extra-parliamentary opposition and a new New Left.

In their innovative reconceptualizations of socialism, both Abendroth and Flechtheim recalled the original “unitary moment” of the socialist workers’ movement, the legacy of interwar Marxist humanism, and the necessity of orienting socialist politics critically toward a future that neither accommodated itself to existing society nor indulged in utopian fantasies. These former members of New Beginning were keenly aware of how the problem of renewal posed a threat to the established parties of the Left. But they also considered it an opportunity to mobilize the German youth against capitalism and conservative reaction. Instead of restarting socialism, however, the New Left and the Sixty-eighters ironically extinguished the original promise of German socialism and the renewers generation.

³⁹ Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten. Freizeit, Massenmedien und “Zeitgeist” in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995).

CHAPTER ONE:
Revolution and Resistance: The Berlin Org and the Birth
of “New Beginning”

Revolution and Resistance: The Berlin Org and the Birth of “New Beginning”

One summer day in July 1935, Berlin police were puzzled to hear that two large suitcases had washed up on the banks of the Müggelsee, a lake in the city’s eastern suburbs. When they forced them open, they found reams of documents—personnel files, situation reports, meeting minutes, subversive Marxist literature—some of which featured an arcane numerical encryption. After analysis, the Secret State Police (Gestapo) concluded that the documents comprised a substantial portion of the “Org Archive,” the records of an apparently vast underground resistance organization called New Beginning. Based on these files fished from a lake, the Gestapo started making arrests two months later.

Or so goes one account of how Nazi authorities discovered New Beginning. Another version has it that the blame lay with the carelessness of the executive board of the German Social Democratic Party in exile (Sopade). Accustomed to the bourgeois comforts of parliamentary politics, these old functionaries did not know the slightest thing about illegal work when they fled Hitler to Prague in May 1933. In the summer of 1934, the Sopade board ordered its bureau to draft a memorandum that listed the real names and addresses of dozens of underground socialist leaders inside Germany, including known members of New Beginning. A clerk at the bureau named Reinhold Schwabe happened to spy for the Gestapo. When the Sopade found out and fired him the next year, they never checked whether he might have seen the memo. He returned to Berlin and the New Beginning arrests started soon thereafter.

Yet a third version shifts the blame from the Sopade to New Beginning itself. Against the backdrop of the global financial collapse and the bitter division of the German workers’ movement at the end of the 1920s, the ex-communist Walter Loewenheim had formed a discussion circle in Berlin that eventually grew into the “Leninist Organization.” Working under the strictest secrecy, this elite cell of socialist revolutionaries sought to infiltrate the established workers’ parties in an effort to steer their policies toward socialist unity. The organization consciously stood “between the fronts” of German social democracy and communism, more revolutionary than the former and more “realistic” than the latter. At its peak, it comprised several hundred core members, a thousand peripheral members, and many more sympathizers. One third of them were workers, another third white-collar employees, and the rest bourgeois intellectuals. About 80% were men and 35% Jewish, and in 1933 they averaged twenty-seven years old. Half a year after the Nazis took power, Loewenheim published a pamphlet under the pseudonym “Miles” called *Socialism’s New Beginning*, which won the group greater recognition and gave it a new name. The Berlin leadership cadre around Loewenheim decided in 1934 that given the Nazis’ consolidation of power, illegal work inside Germany had grown too dangerous. A small contingent of members should remain inside Germany, the leadership resolved, but the rest should emigrate and continue the fight against fascism from abroad. The younger rank and file, however, wanted to expand membership inside Germany, open up the leadership’s decisions to wider debate, and continue the resistance fight from within. In the spring and early summer of 1935, the younger faction accused Loewenheim of defeatism and carried out a successful coup against the old leaders, who subsequently fled the country. On their way out, they

stopped by the Müggelsee and tried unsuccessfully to dispose of the organization's incriminating archive. But more importantly the coup disrupted the normal operations of the organization just long enough to expose it to Gestapo detection.

All of these accounts contain elements of truth, and the differences between them depend largely on a matter of perspective. The unreliability of memoirs and the fragmentary nature of official documents from the period account in part for this uncertainty. But New Beginning (NB) was an organization cloaked in secrecy from the start. The true story of NB often seems to shimmer like a mirage in the desert of totalitarianism. Its antifascist resistance activity pitted it on one side against the Nazis, and on the other side its preparation for a socialist revolution ran counter to the designs of Moscow-faithful communists. Objectively the group found itself in the same position as the late-Weimar Social Democratic Party (SPD)—between two anti-democratic fronts—except NB criticized the social democrats just as ruthlessly as their opponents and certainly did not hasten to defend Weimar democracy.¹ New Beginning moreover represented the young generation of German socialists who had come of age during the 1920s and now, faced with the bankruptcy of the Old Left, sought to renew socialism at the level of both personnel and ideas.

The three accounts of the NB arrests encompass a number of important points in the group's historical constellation: the original leaders who fled in 1935; the organization's relationship to the established parties of the German workers' movement, including the exiled social democrats; and the new leadership faction that took over in 1935, attempted to "democratize" the organization, and ultimately defined its legacy. Within and between these points stretched a variety of personal, intellectual, and sociological lines of tension. Generational conflict both within NB and between NB and the established German workers' parties accounted for many of the vitriolic debates that characterized the organization's history between 1929 and 1935. One of the primary intellectual tensions arose between what the organization's founder Walter Loewenheim saw as a "pure" Leninist application of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism as it actually existed in the Soviet Union. As will be shown, the most salient theoretical feature of NB was its willingness to turn Marxian ideology critique back against the established parties of the Old Left.

Another tension existed between the group's almost obsessive compulsion to analyze and its desire to act. Despite New Beginning's belief in revolutionary "praxis," that is, the dialectical unity of theory and practice, theorizing in practice often proved an obstacle to decisive political action. For most of its history NB struggled to find an arena for meaningful political action, however, so perhaps theory was its only recourse. The sociological and psychological tensions within the group compounded its political problems: it was both authoritarian and democratic, both closed in on itself and oriented toward an open society, both secretive and transparent, both introspective and extroverted, both reliant on charismatic leadership and on soldierly discipline. Despite these paradoxes, New Beginning capitalized on the rhetorical power of renewal at a time when the German workers' movement had suffered a crushing defeat and when the traditional leaders and ideas had lost much of their legitimacy. But every attempt to fill

¹ For a nuanced comparison of Nazi and communist discontent with the Weimar Republic and the SPD, see Timothy S. Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists Between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

“renewal” with ideological content—to build a concrete new beginning—ended in disappointment.

The Intellectual Foundations of the Org

Max Weber once wrote that “no new religion has ever resulted from the needs of intellectuals or from their chatter.”² Could the same be said about revolutions? Clearly intellectuals do play a role in the formation of “vanguard” parties, the revolutionary elites who may not start revolutions but who certainly can steer them in a particular direction. Weber belied his own statement about religious movements when he noted how the spread of Calvinism depended on a “predestined aristocracy” whose doctrine flowed “into the routine of everyday living and into the religion of the masses.” He concluded that “[the] decisive aspect of the religious ethic is its theoretical attitude toward the world.”³ At least for Calvinism, then, an intellectual elite and its theory mattered a great deal. Regardless of whether a religious model fits New Beginning’s development from 1929 to 1935,⁴ the group’s own theoretical attitude toward the world set it apart from its contemporaries. Understanding NB’s characteristic revolutionary ethic and its strategies for socialist renewal thus requires an analysis of the group’s foundational “conception” [*Konzeption*], or guiding principle.

When the Nazis took power at the end of January 1933, the group actually had no official name. And contrary to the Gestapo’s later claim that it represented a vast “political umbrella organization of all Marxist groupings,”⁵ it was comparatively small and appealed to a particular type of critical communist or left-wing social democrat. Known unofficially as the “Org” (short for “Leninist Organization”), it had formed in Berlin in late 1929 as a small discussion circle of Marxist intellectuals frustrated with the established parties of the German workers’ movement. The 1920s had been tumultuous years in Germany. Aside from the familiar images of hyperinflation and defeated soldiers returning home from the front, the early interwar years saw an extraordinary degree of political violence.⁶ Revolution had broken out in November 1918 and had led to the establishment of Germany’s first parliamentary democracy, the Weimar Republic. But the price paid for democracy was dear. The radical left wing of the German workers’ movement represented by the Spartacus League had tried to steer the revolution toward communism, emulating the Bolsheviks in Russia. Their former comrades in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) allied with the liberal, Catholic Center, and moderate conservative parties to stop the revolution before it went too far. The Spartacus League,

² Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 137.

³ Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 205, 209.

⁴ The interpretation of secular revolutionary movements as religious or quasi-religious in character has had its fair share of devotees. See the classic study by Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965). More recently Italian scholars have traced the millennial roots of modern revolutionary violence. See Luciano Pellicani, “From the Apocalypse to the Revolution,” *Telos*, no. 166 (Spring 2014), 25-41; Pasquale Arciprete, *Apocalittica, terrorismo e rivoluzione: radici religiose della violenza politica* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2009); Pellicani, *Revolutionary Apocalypse: Ideological Roots of Terrorism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

⁵ Report by Krim.-Bez. Sekr. Josef Kluske (Staatspolizeistelle für den Regierungsbezirk Breslau) to Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich (Gestapa Berlin), July 17, 1935, BA-Berlin, R58/2.

⁶ See Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany, 1925-1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1984).

which laid the foundation for the German Communist Party (KPD), organized a dramatic general strike in January 1919 but suffered a mortal blow when right-wing soldiers of the paramilitary Free Corps assassinated its leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Gustav Noske, the SPD minister of defense, had essentially given the Free Corps free rein to crush the revolution. In the years that followed, communists would never forgive their fellow socialists in the SPD for this betrayal.

The Russian Revolution in 1917 had radicalized many soldiers whose sympathies already lay on the Left. After his discharge from the German Army in 1918, Walter Loewenheim, then twenty-two years old, immediately joined the Spartacus League and acquired a leading position in its affiliated Free Socialist Youth. The failed uprising in January 1919 only intensified his commitment to communism, so he joined the League's successor, the KPD, and remained active in its youth organization. In the early 1920s, Loewenheim visited Moscow as a delegate to the youth division of the Communist International (Comintern). But the relationship between the KPD and the Comintern was unstable. Moscow controlled the Comintern and demanded that all national parties follow its orders. Most German communists complied enthusiastically, but a significant minority within the KPD grew restless with Moscow's overbearing attitude.⁷ Among the leaders of this disaffected minority was Paul Levi, whom the party expelled in 1921.⁸ Loewenheim considered Levi a mentor but nevertheless remained in the party until 1927, when he finally quit in frustration over its official policy of splitting off left-wing elements from the SPD. Both Levi and Loewenheim believed that this "splitting policy" [*Spaltungspolitik*] only served to divide and weaken the German and international workers' movement even further.

Over the next two years, Loewenheim began working out a conception of a clandestine socialist organization that might heal the divisions of the workers' movement and help prepare for the next revolution. In 1928, Stalin announced the first Five Year Plan, which marked the end of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). A transition economy that incorporated private capital and a limited market thus gave way to a centralized planned economy that abolished the market, nationalized major industries, and collectivized agriculture. Loewenheim strongly disapproved of this change of policy because it imposed an abrupt, statist solution on the problem of Russia's economic backwardness. In his view, Russia was not yet ready for full socialism. But more importantly, the abandonment of the NEP represented for him a turn away from Marx and Lenin's dialectical understanding of how socialism should arise from within capitalism. Stalin's planned economy, he believed, represented a vulgar and utopian attempt to replace capitalism (or however one chose to define Russia's economy prior to the Revolution) wholesale with socialism. In the terms of Marxist discourse at the time, the NEP constituted a smooth "dialectical" abolition [*Aufhebung*] of capitalism whereas the Five Year Plan stumbled into "mechanical" negation. As Marx had written in his 1875 critique of the social democrats' inaugural Gotha Program,

⁷ On the relationship between the early KPD and the Comintern, see Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* [1948] (Hamburg: Junius, 1986), 113ff.; Hermann Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 2 Vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969).

⁸ See the standard short biography by Charlotte Beradt, *Paul Levi. Ein demokratischer Sozialist in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969). See also Frédéric Cyr, *Paul Levi, rebelle devant les extrêmes: une biographie politique* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2013).

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.⁹

Stalin had tried to eradicate the birthmarks of capitalism, Loewenheim thought, rendering the Soviet body politic alienated and unrecognizable.

But perhaps even more important than Loewenheim's growing disaffection with Soviet communism was his reaction to the global financial collapse in late 1929. Capitalism had entered into a crisis period of unforeseeable duration. Now was the time to build an organization of professional revolutionaries who could unite the working class and seize political power while the liberal democracies reliant on capitalism reeled. If the revolutionary socialists did not seize power, he feared, then the fascists surely would.

Loewenheim, his wife Traute (née Kahn), and his younger brother Ernst gathered together a few dissident socialists in Berlin who sympathized with their position: Heinrich Jakubowicz, Franz Schleiter, and the brothers Eberhard and Wolfgang Wiskow. All were born roughly between 1895 and 1905 and all with the exception of Jakubowicz had belonged at one time or another to the KPD. Schleiter had also joined the Communist Party-Opposition (KPO) around Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer.¹⁰

Loewenheim and his friends turned to Lenin's 1902 pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* for inspiration.¹¹ The only spontaneity found in the masses, Lenin had argued, resulted in either popular demagoguery or bourgeois democracy, not socialism. Both trade unions and socialist parties remained trapped by bourgeois ideology and thus focused exclusively on the present, on what they could reasonably gain within existing circumstances. A revolutionary class needed instead a revolutionary consciousness, wrote Lenin, and trade unionism and "spontaneism" only offered such consciousness "in embryonic form."¹²

So, what was to be done? Truly revolutionary intellectuals who understood Marx's scientific socialism, he wrote, must build an organization to act as the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. By making revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice mutually dependent, this elite would work politically toward a

⁹ Karl Marx, "Marginal Notes to the Programme of the German Workers' Party [Critique of the Gotha Programme]," *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin, 1983), 533-55 (539). Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ For the history of the KPO, see Theodor Bergmann, "*Gegen den Strom*". *Die Geschichte der KPD(Opposition)*, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2001) and Karl Hermann Tjaden, *Struktur und Funktion der "KPD-Opposition" (KPO). Eine organisationssoziologische Untersuchung zur "Rechts"-Opposition im deutschen Kommunismus zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1964).

¹¹ See Kurt Kliem, "Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich dargestellt an der Gruppe 'Neu Beginnen'," Ph.D. (Philipps-Universität zu Marburg, 1957), Notes pp. 6-7n34. In addition to the work of Lenin, the Org's conspiratorial principles also harkened back to the Russian conspiratorial groups of the nineteenth century. Fritz Erler's biographer Hartmut Soell claimed that "[f]or that reason Franz Borkenau, originally one of the most important 'mentors' [of the Org], supposedly said about the principles of New Beginning, 'That's all just Nechayev.'" Sergey Nechayev was the nefarious nihilist agitator who wrote the "Catechism of a Revolutionary" (1869) and for a time exerted influence over Mikhail Bakunin. Dostoevsky immortalized him as Pyotr Verkhovensky in *Demons* (1872). Soell, *Fritz Erler – Eine politische Biographie*, 2 Vols. (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1976), 515-16n70.

¹² V. I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. H. M. Christman (New York: Dover, 1987), 53-175 (74).

future that existing socialist parties could not imagine on their own.¹³ The future socialist organization supposedly would theorize every act and activate every theory.¹⁴ Surely the trade unionists and amateur revolutionaries of the major workers' parties could not build such an organization themselves. Only professional revolutionaries, Lenin thought, or those who made revolution their full-time occupation, could accomplish the grand historical task confronting the Russian proletariat. The reality of tsarist autocracy meant that professional revolutionaries would have to work illegally. Lenin recognized that his organization had to be small and had to recruit its members very carefully. All of the group's activities would correspond to the strictest rules of conspiracy. Lenin quipped that "it is far more difficult to catch a dozen wise men than it is to catch a hundred fools."¹⁵

Just as Lenin viewed the task confronting the Russian proletariat in 1902 as having world-historical proportions, so Walter Loewenheim and his friends viewed the task confronting the German proletariat in 1929-30. By Loewenheim's time, however, there already existed a Communist Party that *claimed* to operate according to Lenin's wishes. A new Leninist organization for the fascist era must start by critiquing this claim by the existing Comintern-aligned parties, which according to Loewenheim had lost sight of both Marx's dialectical method and of Lenin's organizational principles. The Comintern parties had succumbed to bourgeois ideology as much as the social democrats, he thought. Loewenheim's Org thus turned Lenin's 1902 critique back on the communists of the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶ Now they were the fools who believed in the spontaneity of the masses and the "subjectivist" power of the party to force historical change in spite of unfavorable objective conditions. The Russian Revolution was a great success for international socialism, the Org freely admitted, but it marked only the first step. A new revolution in Germany would supersede it.

Loewenheim thought it crucial that the Org not become a political party like the SPD or the KPD, both of which had participated in elections and the bourgeois public sphere before 1933. Nor should it organize itself like previous splinter groups that had tried to forge one "third way" or another (e.g. the aforementioned Communist Party-Opposition or the Socialist Workers Party around Kurt Rosenfeld and Max Seydewitz). Any new workers' party separate from the existing ones furthered the division of the socialist movement and would end up politically isolated. In fact, the Org tried repeatedly to encourage members of splinter groups to rejoin either the SPD or the KPD. Both the

¹³ For a useful survey of elitist tendencies in late Imperial and Weimar Germany, see Walter Struve, *Elites against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973).

¹⁴ The idea of "praxis," or the embodiment of theory in practice (and vice versa), became fashionable in Marxist-humanist discourse of the 1920s and 30s. The Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, for example, referred to Marxist method as the "philosophy of praxis." To be sure, he also used this term in order to sneak his writings past the dim-witted censors at the Fascist prisons where he was held from 1926 until his death in 1937. Loewenheim could not have known about Gramsci's prison notebooks, which remained unpublished until the late 1940s—and indeed not in German until the 1990s. But he likely did encounter the work of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch, who also wrote extensively about revolutionary praxis during the interwar years.

¹⁵ Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" 147.

¹⁶ The Org's willingness to turn ideology critique back against the socialist parties echoed Karl Mannheim's argument in *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), which many Org members read and discussed in the early 1930s.

Org's conception of a united socialist workers' party and its very existence as an autonomous group had to be kept secret from the workers' movement at large. Slowly, over many years, Org infiltrators would occupy key positions in the two major parties and convert their functionaries to the cause of socialist unity. This process would thus accomplish unity not from above or below, but rather from the middle. Even when the Org shifted its attention to anti-Nazi resistance in 1933, its veil of secrecy fell before the eyes of communists, social democrats, and the Gestapo alike. Conspiracy, Loewenheim emphasized, must dominate all other considerations, or else the Org would be stigmatized as just another splinter group with a particular agenda.

Lenin had called the fundamental organizational principle of a revolutionary party "democratic centralism": elections and discussion within the party, but strict maintenance of outward discipline and "unity of action."¹⁷ Loewenheim adopted this model but did not consider it necessarily authoritarian. In his view, the commissarial leadership should not simply give orders from on high and expect subordinates to follow them blindly. The leadership must make executive decisions by virtue of its central position in the organizational structure, to be sure, but the theoretical conception that inspired these decisions must develop through open discussion within the rank-and-file cadres. Here Loewenheim at least in principle departed from Lenin's stricter prohibitions on factionalism and "freedom of criticism."

The Org comprised a collection of basic cadres, or groups-of-five [*Fünfergruppen*], that carried out the organization's practical tasks and functioned as mini-forums for critical debate. Due to the rules of conspiracy, only the leader of the group-of-five would have access to the central Org leadership but also the duty to pass on the opinions of his or her particular cadre. Outside the cadres an assortment of loosely organized peripheral members would provide the Org with intelligence, meeting spaces, and a respectable "bourgeois" cover, but they themselves only possessed partial knowledge of the Org's guiding principles. The periphery functioned as a transitional space or buffer zone between the wholly "initiated" and the wholly uninitiated, that is, the rest of society.¹⁸ Loewenheim explained that "against our comrades' own creative activity should be posed within the bounds of the current policy as few organizational and bureaucratic barriers as possible." Inside the organization's core would reign the "freest intellectual democracy."¹⁹ Already this fundamental principle of organization, however,

¹⁷ See Lenin, Pt. VIII, "Report on the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.: A Letter to the St. Petersburg Workers," May 1906, <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/rucong/>> (accessed Aug. 2014).

¹⁸ As the sociologist Georg Simmel noted, "[t]he circle of the only partially initiated constitutes to a certain extent a buffer area against the totally uninitiated. . . . Precisely because the lower grades of the [secret] society constitute a mediating transition to the actual center of the secret, they bring about the gradual compression of the sphere of repulsion around the same, which affords more secure protection to it than the abruptness of a radical standing wholly without or wholly within could secure." Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology*, 11, no. 4 (Jan. 1906), 441-98 (489).

¹⁹ Kurt Menz [i.e. Walter Loewenheim], "Die proletarische Revolution: Allgemeine Grundzüge ihrer Theorie und ihrer Besonderheiten in Deutschland" [ca. 1930], Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org 1929-1935*, ed. J. Foitzik (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand & Edition Hentrich, 1995), 35-67 (63). Loewenheim's thought proceeded in parallel with that of the imprisoned Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. The latter explained that democratic centralism is dynamic and progressive, while bureaucratic centralism is rigid and regressive; only the former involves "a continual adaptation of the organization to the real movement of matching thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership

contained a potential contradiction between the organization's need for stability in leadership and the danger of bureaucratic ossification. The Org cadres frequently debated whether the core and periphery should expand or contract. As we shall see, the tension between the central leadership's authoritarian desire to control the creative impulses of the rank and file and that rank and file's democratic will to build consensus from below would come to a head in the 1935 leadership crisis.

In addition to organizational principles, Loewenheim's earliest theses included a foray into a philosophical matter that preoccupied Marxist humanists during the interwar years: the important distinction between "natural process" [*Naturprozess*] and "cultural process" [*Kulturprozess*]. Prominent Marxist theorists like Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch had tried to reconcile the objective conditions of socioeconomic development with the subjective elements of class consciousness and revolutionary will. At the heart of the matter lay the question of who or what could serve as the revolutionary agent.²⁰ Orthodox Marxists of course considered the proletariat the only revolutionary class. But why had the proletariat not already risen up and broken the chains of capitalist oppression?

It is unclear whether Loewenheim had read Lukács' landmark book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), but according to Org member Georg Eliasberg he did read an article by Hans Mayer about Lukácsian theory.²¹ Lukács had argued that *unconscious* human activity corresponded to the "laws of nature" and to the objective determination of history. Since humans acted unconsciously according to economic self-interest, which like the classical economists Lukács called "natural," one could describe history that proceeded naturally as economically determined. For Lukács, however, the victory of the world revolution was not "guaranteed by the 'laws of nature.'"²² Deferring to the natural spontaneity of the proletariat or to the economic laws of capitalism would only perpetuate the status quo. Between the "crude empiricism" of economic determinism and the "abstract utopianism" of spontaneism, or revolutionary voluntarism, lay the *conscious* praxis of the revolutionary vanguard.²³ Lukács agreed with Lenin that the socialist movement could not allow history to develop naturally. True class consciousness, he claimed, was not natural but rather what Loewenheim would call a "cultural process." The vanguard party represented the conscious expression of Marx's dialectical method; it did not reflect the popular will or economic laws still bound up in history's natural course. The cultural praxis of a revolutionary organization should break through the "second nature" of bourgeois ideology. The final line of Loewenheim's earliest theses

apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience." When an organization becomes excessively bureaucratized, "the leading group is saturated [and turns] into a narrow clique which tends to perpetuate its selfish privileges by controlling or even by stifling the birth of oppositional forces." Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International, 1971), 188-89.

²⁰ For a critique of how interwar Marxist intellectuals posed that question, see Martin Jay, "The Weimar Left: Theory and Practice," in Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick, eds., *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013), 377-93.

²¹ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, op. cit., 515n68. I have been unable to find the full citation of the Mayer article in the Communist Youth International journal *Junge Garde*.

²² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 43.

²³ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 77.

quoted Goethe's *Faust*: "In the beginning was the act!"²⁴ This political act was the true manifestation of the revolutionary ethic. But unlike ethical socialists of the period, Loewenheim insisted that the politics of the "ought" had to be derived from the objective social situation.²⁵

Making the distinction between natural and cultural processes required an understanding of socialism as a contingent and uncertain possibility. Loewenheim's lack of certainty about the future of socialism recalled the ideas of his mentor Paul Levi and particularly of Rosa Luxemburg. In her so-called *Junius Pamphlet* (1915), Luxemburg had argued that the horrible destruction wrought by the First World War presented humanity with a fundamental choice between socialism and barbarism—that is, between the next stage in human civilization, marked by the emancipation of the proletariat from capitalist oppression, or a further descent into the anarchy of imperialist wars and exploitation on a global scale. "This is the dilemma of world history," she wrote, "its inevitable choice, whose scales are trembling in the balance awaiting the decision of the proletariat. Upon it depends the future of culture and humanity." Critical moments like a world war offered opportunities for revolutionary decision, but they did not automatically yield socialism like "manna from heaven."²⁶ The revolution needed a conscious choice. Loewenheim and the Org altered Luxemburg's formula only slightly in the early 1930s. Now the choice lay between "socialism and fascism."

Building the Berlin Org

In 1930, Walter Loewenheim and his friends met in a summer cottage near the S-Bahn station Berlin-Karlshorst for the first seminar of what would become the primary training mechanism of the Org: the "advanced course," or F-Course [*Fortgeschrittener Kursus*]. Besides Loewenheim (alias "Kurt Menz"), this first meeting, known as "F1," consisted of Otto Sperling (alias "Funk"), Walter Dupré (alias "Hans Pohl"), Erich Busse (alias "Starke"), Kurt Ziebart (alias "Rechlin"), and Paul Klapper (alias "Lange").²⁷ All were former members of the Communist Party Opposition who, in accordance with the Org conception, had rejoined one of the major workers' parties (in this case the SPD). They averaged a few years younger than the original cohort that Loewenheim had assembled in late 1929.²⁸ Subsequent F-Courses drew in members from the SPD, the KPD, the trade unions, and the various other socialist splinter groups. Non-proletarian or

²⁴ Menz, "Die proletarische Revolution," 67. Goethe had altered the first line of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word."

²⁵ Neo-Kantian and ethical socialist tendencies were prevalent on the German Left during the interwar years. The Göttingen philosopher Leonard Nelson, for example, helped found in 1925 the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), which blended neo-Kantianism and an ascetic lifestyle into a peculiar kind of ethical socialism. The Org/NB later formed a strategic alliance with ISK. See below and Ch. 2.

²⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy," *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. M.-A. Waters (New York; London: Pathfinder, 1970), 257-331 (269). She was inspired by a passage from Friedrich Engels. Loewenheim later wrote a similar passage: "In reality socialist revolution and socialist remodeling of society are not historically inevitable, but are, rather, a great historical opportunity placed within the reach of the human race. It is for us to use it." Miles [i.e. Walter Loewenheim], *Socialism's New Beginning: A Manifesto from Underground Germany* (New York: Rand School/League for Industrial Democracy, 1934), 85.

²⁷ Recollection of Otto Sperling in Hans-Rainer Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt. Widerstand aus der Arbeiterbewegung in Berlin von 1933 bis 1945* (Berlin: Lukas, 2007), 227-28.

²⁸ Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt*, 227n182.

non-aligned intellectuals could participate too, so long as they met the Org’s strict standards of recruitment. All core members of the Org were required to enroll in an F-Course, which functioned like a modern revolutionary catechism.

The F-Course lasted sixteen to eighteen evening sessions, which could take anywhere from three to four months to complete—the average length of a university semester. Having developed from a more elementary course called “A Gallop Through History,” the extensive curriculum covered the method of dialectical materialism; the history of bourgeois revolution in Europe; the history of social democracy and the Second International; the development of Lenin’s ideas and their realization by the Bolsheviks; the limitations of Soviet communism; the history of the SPD and the KPD since the First World War; an analysis of bourgeois democracy in the Weimar Republic; and finally an overview of the Org conception and the most immediate political tasks.²⁹

Each evening the leader of the F-Course, often Loewenheim himself, would present the material in question-and-answer format. For example, a discussion question for Evening 1 read “Why did people in bourgeois revolutions pose very similar demands independent of each other and why did they fight without agreeing on a common direction?” The discussion leader would field answers from the participants and gently steer them toward the one correct answer: “Because all individual wills were compelled in the same direction by the same causes (feudal-absolutist lawlessness, etc. . . .).”³⁰ Aspects of the Org’s pedagogical method sound eerily like a cult. None of the questions were open-ended. Their definite answers proceeded logically from the total Org conception. Loewenheim wanted to train professional revolutionaries who could independently apply the Marxist method whenever needed but who would not think outside the box. To think freely, in the colloquial sense, meant to regress into the “natural process” of bourgeois democratic ideology; only a rigorous application of Marxist method, properly understood, would constitute a progressive cultural process.

Erich Schmidt (alias “Richter”; “Kirchner”), a young member who joined the Org in the summer of 1931, later summed up this “convincing” conception:

The bourgeois revolutions presented themselves as natural processes in contrast to the proletarian revolution, which was interpreted as the fulfillment and success of the historic will of the revolutionary Marxists. Complicated processes of ideology formation dependent on bourgeois society were considered chief factors for the failure of the workers’ movement—of both the reformist SPD as well as the subjectivist KPD. In the deepest crisis of capitalism in decline, which has created the conditions for its own overcoming, the victory of fascism as a sort of “mirror-image proletarian revolution” is a threat to be taken seriously. Salvation can only occur through the (at first necessary) conspiratorial activity in both workers’ parties, which have been fatally paralyzed by their division.³¹

Loewenheim believed it necessary to turn bourgeois democrats into revolutionaries, to free them from their “anti-Leninist reservations” by subjecting them to authoritarian

²⁹ Various iterations of the “old” and “new” F-Courses are located in the NB Archives, 62-79.

³⁰ “Alter F., A[bend] I,” NB Archives, 63/1. Transcripts such as these served as the course’s answer key or “teachers’ edition.”

³¹ Erich R. Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin. Triumph und Elend der Arbeiterbewegung 1918-1933* (Bremen: Donat, 1988), 142.

discipline and indoctrinating them with a self-contained theory.³² Here we see a Rousseauian paradox within the Org: through adherence to the Marxist dialectical method as prescribed by Loewenheim, members of the group were “forced to be free” of their bourgeois preconceptions.³³ With such theoretical rigor and political discipline, the Org convinced itself that it could bring about the unification of the German workers’ movement and give a renewed socialism the tools and leaders it needed to beat fascism.

Gerhard Bry (alias “Paul Kemp”; “Bauman”), only twenty years old when the Org “co-opted” him, recalled the effect of the F-Course: “in the depth of the Great Depression and in the face of the helplessness of the [Weimar] democratic system and its labor components, *the message was electrifying*. Here was new thought, new organization, new hope, a new beginning.”³⁴ Erich Schmidt described the “fascinating theoretical system of proletarian revolution and its historical, ideological and organizational-methodological requirements” that confronted him in the F-Course.³⁵ And Julia Rahmer (alias “Lilly”) was told during her initiation in 1933 that the F-Course was “something rather special—an intellectual experience and a kind of promotion into the inner ranks” of the Org.³⁶

Sometimes the older or more experienced participants did not play by the classroom rules. Bry remembered his amazement at discovering that one of his fellow students was none other than Karl Frank (alias “Fred”; “Willi Müller”), whom he recognized at the time as “a living legend in parts of the radical labor movement.”³⁷ Frank, who held a doctorate in psychology from the University of Vienna, had taken part in numerous exploits over the years, including a brazen attempt while serving as an Austro-Hungarian artillery lieutenant in the First World War to end the “war of imperialist aggression” by publishing an open protest letter to Emperor Franz Joseph (he was quickly discharged for “health” reasons). In 1928 he planned a kidnapping of an SPD official scheduled to give a radio address about world peace so that a KPD functionary could deliver a counter-address denouncing German naval rearmament instead. Following the incident he went to jail and staged a hunger strike until his release (this time truly for health reasons).³⁸ Handsome, intelligent, and courageous, Frank was said to possess more charisma than the entire Org leadership combined.³⁹ In Bry’s recollection he was “the only member in the F-Course who questioned some of the basic tenets of the new organization.”⁴⁰

Overall and somewhat understandably, the courses impressed the youth the most.

³² Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 142.

³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously wrote that whoever is not in accord with the *volonté générale* must “be forced to be free.” *Of the Social Contract*, Book I, Part 7.

³⁴ Gerhard Bry, *Resistance: Recollections from the Nazi Years* (West Orange, NJ: self-pub., 1979), 38. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 141.

³⁶ Julia Rahmer, “Some Reminiscences and Reflections about Neu Beginnen,” NB Archives, 83/1. Her husband Bernd Rahmer was already a member of the Org.

³⁷ Bry, *Resistance*, 39.

³⁸ See Reinhard Müller, “Karl B. Frank alias Paul Hagen (1893-1969),” *Newsletter des Archivs für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich (Graz)*, 12 (Nov. 1995), 11-19, and Terence Renaud, “The German Resistance in New York: Karl B. Frank and the New Beginning Group, 1935-1945,” B.A. (Boston University, 2007), <http://terencerenaud.com/german_resistance.htm> (accessed April 2014).

³⁹ Erich R. Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre 1933-1940. Berlin-Bern-Paris* (Rostock: Verlag Jugend und Geschichte, 1994), 35.

⁴⁰ Bry, *Resistance*, 43.

But the younger participants too sometimes questioned the dogmatic rigor of the curriculum. Julia Rahmer had a rather bad experience. Loewenheim, who often taught the courses incognito, spoke “in a very authoritative manner and at breathtaking speed. It soon became clear that he did not like to be interrupted.” While Richard Löwenthal (alias “Gleich”; “Paul Sering”), who had a reputation as a brilliant youth leader, sat there silently assuming “the humble role of student,” she dared to speak out in opposition to a few of Loewenheim’s Leninist conclusions. He kicked her out of class. “I was appalled,” she remembered. “This was thought-control! One accepted restrictions in one’s personal freedom of speech for the sake of our security vis-à-vis the [Nazi] regime. But this was a blatant attempt to silence a divergent view! I felt outraged.”⁴¹ But even if he did not speak up, the star pupil Richard Löwenthal also objected to many of Loewenheim’s conclusions. Both he and Karl Frank would play central roles in the leadership change that occurred in the summer of 1935.

The closed dynamic of the F-Courses and the smooth functioning of the Org in general encountered their first disturbance in the summer of 1931 on the occasion of the group’s greatest triumph: the recruitment of almost the entire leadership of the Berlin Socialist Workers’ Youth (SAJ) into its core and 3,000 to 4,000 of the SAJ rank and file into its periphery.⁴² A half-generation younger than the Org founders, Fritz Erler (b. 1913), Erich Schmidt (b. 1910), and the rest of the SAJ leadership were friendly with the radical socialist Max Seydewitz and generally hostile to what they saw as the conformist policies of the majority SPD.⁴³ During the 1920s Seydewitz had stood on the left wing of the SPD’s Reichstag faction, and in 1931 he and Kurt Rosenfeld were expelled for breach of party discipline. Together they formed the Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP), attracting prominent leftist intellectuals like Jacob Walcher, Fritz Sternberg, and Paul Frölich as well as thousands of supporters to what was the largest socialist splinter party since the Independent Social Democrats dissolved in 1922.⁴⁴ Seydewitz hoped also to attract the Berlin SAJ to his new party, and they nearly did join. Loewenheim and the Org, however, convinced the SAJ leadership not to follow Seydewitz into the SAP and instead to remain within the ranks of the SPD as a kind of loyal opposition.

According to the Org’s basic conception, one should work from within the two major workers’ parties rather than aggravate the division of the movement.⁴⁵ “The attraction of the Org for leading SAJ members like Fritz Erler,” argued Hartmut Soell,

lay less in the romanticism of conspiratorial work, which the Org prepared since 1931

⁴¹ Rahmer, “Some Reminiscences,” 13, 18.

⁴² One need not have been fully conscious of working in the Org’s interests in order to count among its periphery. In this case, much of the SAJ rank and file continued to follow their leaders without the slightest knowledge of the Org. SAJ leaders who did not go along with the Org included Willy Kressmann (the future SPD chief of Berlin-Kreuzberg), Edith Baumann (the future wife of Erich Honecker), and Max Schwarz. Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 142-43.

⁴³ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 19.

⁴⁴ For the history of the SAP, see Jörg Bremer, *Die Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAP). Untergrund und Exil 1933-1945* (Frankfurt/Main; New York: Campus Verlag, 1978); Hanno Drechsler, *Die Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1965); Jan Foitzik, *Zwischen den Fronten. Zur Politik, Organisation und Funktion linker politischer Kleinorganisationen im Widerstand 1933 bis 1939/40 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Exils* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1986).

⁴⁵ See Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 77ff.; Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 141ff.

[sic] through the establishment of safe houses for meetings, the encryption of documents and personnel files, etc. The allure of the Org for the young SAJ members was stronger in its seemingly consistent analysis of fascism and its consequent demand for the unity of the workers' movement: after all, it is precisely in late adolescence when the need is particularly great for a clear worldview with a future perspective.⁴⁶

For the impressionable renewers generation, the Org functioned as the arena of primary socialization and provided a coherent worldview. It also taught them the techniques of dissimulation and rhetorical manipulation.

In June 1931, the Communist Youth League (KJV) invited the Berlin SAJ to an assembly in a music hall near Bülowplatz (today Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz), one of the most densely communist areas of Berlin. The SAJ leaders accepted the invitation but did not inform the Berlin SPD executive board, which surely would have forbade it. The hall was packed with some 500 SAJ members, 400 young communists, and numerous KP stewards who stood along the walls for security. Erich Schmidt delivered an unanticipated speech. The young communists had expected the SAJ to come and defend the official SPD "toleration policy" toward the Brüning government, but instead Schmidt critiqued both the SPD and the KPD from a Marxist point of view. He faulted the communists for a series of un-Marxist errors since 1918-19 and for alienating the social democrats, whose mass support they needed for any kind of revolutionary action. Jeers and shouts of disapproval by the young communists repeatedly interrupted the speech, and the crowd averted a brawl only by joining together in a chorus of "The Internationale."⁴⁷ Loewenheim and the Org had orchestrated the whole episode: from Schmidt's radical speech to various interjections by Org *agents provocateurs*.⁴⁸ As an indication of Schmidt and the Org's success, the communists never again invited the Berlin SAJ to a public meeting. The KP warned its members to stay away from the SAJ in general. Among the SAJ rank and file, the speech's effect was immense. Never before had they heard a critique of communist policy from a revolutionary Marxist point of view; the SPD had only ever offered them reformist platitudes. "Very soon," recalled Schmidt, "our organization became immune to communist agitation."⁴⁹

Beyond such communist defense maneuvers and the prevention of large-scale conversions to the SAP, the Org reinforced a solid revolutionary Marxist contingent within the ranks of German social democracy.⁵⁰ By the time the Nazis seized power in January 1933, the Org comprised about one hundred core people [*K-Leute*], several hundred peripheral people [*P-Leute*], and a diffuse penumbra of a few thousand sympathizers, many of whom were organized into "Gesag" working groups

⁴⁶ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 29.

⁴⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 143-46.

⁴⁸ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 23.

⁴⁹ Schmidt, *Meine Jugend in Groß-Berlin*, 145. For a useful analysis of youth socialism toward the end of the Weimar Republic with particular attention to generational conflict, see Franz Walter, "Republik, das ist nicht viel". *Partei und Jugend in der Krise des Weimarer Sozialismus* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011).

⁵⁰ For a survey of the variety of socialist positions within the SPD at the end of the Weimar Republic, see William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009); Helga Grebing, Ch. IV, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Von der Revolution 1848 bis ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Vorwärts-Buch, 2007); Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1993).

[*Gesellschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaften*].⁵¹ The Org built clandestine cells all over Germany and infiltrated the major workers' parties, trade unions, and industrial concerns like Siemens, Deutsche Reichsbahn, Telefunken, and Bergmann Electrical Works. Org members even managed to infiltrate Nazi organizations like the Hitler Youth, the SA, and the Nazi Factory Cell Organization (NSBO). Besides Loewenheim's brother Ernst (alias "Fritz Brill"), the leadership cadre included the brothers Eberhard and Wolfgang Wiskow, Heinrich Jakubowicz (alias "Neumann"; "Henry Hellmann"), Walter Dupré (alias "Pforten"; "Hans Pohl"), and Franz Schleiter (alias "Richard"). Eberhard Wiskow (alias "Heinrich Zahn"), a former officer in the Reichswehr, oversaw the rules of conspiracy [*Konspiration*] throughout the Org. Members called these rules the "Kon."

The first element of the Kon was the pervasive use of aliases. Each new set of social relations entered into by an Org member required an alternate identity. In her five-person cadre, the member would use one name; in her daily job, or bourgeois "cover," she would use another; in the Gesag groups she would use still another; and should she have the task of traveling abroad, she would take on yet another name. This multiplication of names, which drew on long conspiratorial and communist traditions, served the purpose of severing the normal chain of connections that the police might use to establish a person's real identity. It may also have contributed to the general assumption within the Org rank and file and later within the Gestapo that the group comprised many more members than it actually did. Walter Loewenheim multiplied himself at least a half dozen times: "Kurt Menz," "Rita," "Kurt Berger," "Miles," "Scipio," et al.⁵² Dissociation, division, and dissemblance constituted the fundamentals of conspiracy. And for the Org, the Kon began at recruitment.

The Org targeted potential candidates in a highly selective process that involved an initial recommendation by an Org member. Once the Org had someone in its sights [*jemand anvisiert*] then the leadership cadre started a personnel file and researched the candidate's past.⁵³ The leadership would order "control" reports by other Org members who knew the candidate. If the candidate passed the paper test, then the leadership would arrange a probing meeting [*Sondierung*] to which the original Org recommender would bring the unsuspecting candidate and then find some pretext to leave. The candidate might never again see his or her original recommender, who might have been a good friend. The Org often concocted elaborate stories to convince the candidate that the recommender was not in fact a member of the group and should not be pursued for more information. Alone in casual conversation with a representative of the leadership cadre, the candidate would answer questions that allowed the prober [*Sondierer*] to get a "sense of the total personality of the probed person [*Sondierte*], not only of his political intentions but also of his character, his obligations elsewhere, his intellect, etc."⁵⁴ If the

⁵¹ I have been able to identify 260 core and peripheral members by name, plus a few dozen sympathizers. Due to security precautions, the Org leadership did not maintain a general list of members. I could only locate a few lists of codenames in the NB Archives.

⁵² While still a member of the KPD, Loewenheim apparently contributed articles to the party newspaper *Rote Fahne* under the pseudonym "Spartanikus." And in Britain after 1945, he and his brother legally changed their last name to "Lowe," but this did not really count as an alias or pseudonym in the conspiratorial sense.

⁵³ Julia Rahmer claimed that the usage of the German word *anvisieren* in this context, with its military connotation, was unique to the Org. "Some Reminiscences," 5.

⁵⁴ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 87.

candidate proved “suitable” [*geeignet*] and “ripe for an F-Course” [*Fortgeschrittener-Kurs-reif*], then the leadership would place him or her in a cadre as soon as possible.⁵⁵

Conspiracy extended to the management of documents and the arrangement of meetings. Org members

learned how to use concealed code in writing and in telephone conversations, shift meeting times and places by pre-arranged rotations that made them different from those agreed upon by phone, arrange for danger signals, avoid being followed, discover trails, shred carbon and other papers, develop individual codes for telephone numbers or addresses, prepare hiding places, arrange for alibis, and many other tricks of the trade.⁵⁶

The technology of conspiracy ranged from writing messages with lemon juice only visible when ironed hot to the sophisticated quick-burning, no-residue paper developed for the Org by the chemist Robert Havemann. Other means included micro-photography and “capsules in which undeveloped microfilm could be carried in the mouth and quickly destroyed.”⁵⁷ But the human element mattered most. Before every meeting the participants would perform a five- or ten-minute “Kon”: a conversation about why they were there should some non-initiate inquire. Conspiracy pervaded every corner of the Org’s world.

Preserving the Kon often came down to quick reactions. Bry recounted two instances involving the inimitable Karl Frank. The latter once visited the apartment of his friend and leader of the SAP Max Seydewitz when the Gestapo launched a raid. Unfazed, Frank took Seydewitz’s daughter over to the piano and told her to play some scales. Conveniently his forged identity papers listed his occupation as piano teacher, and the Gestapo agents left him alone.⁵⁸ Another time he and Bry walked into house for a meeting when Frank heard heavy footsteps inside. Bry wrote:

He thanked me for a match, which I never had given him, lit a cigarette, motioned me on my way, and entered the house alone. Meanwhile three uniformed Nazis came out of the front door and crossed the street without paying any attention to us. I walked around the block, then joined him upstairs and thanked him for his fast and generously protective motions. He answered that in this occupation you have to be agile and also a bit lucky.⁵⁹

Frank had a knack for finding creative ways out of tough situations. But for the most part, conspiracy meant undertaking a tedious and time-consuming set of preparations for the

⁵⁵ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 89.

⁵⁶ Bry, *Resistance*, 53-54.

⁵⁷ Bry, *Resistance*, 54.

⁵⁸ Bry, *Resistance*, 93. Frank’s brother Hans was a classical music composer, so perhaps he could in fact play the piano. He later gave a somewhat different account of this incident of March 12, 1933: “While I was at the apartment a group of Storm Troopers came in order to arrest Seydewitz and his brother-in-law, Fritz Levy. The Storm Troopers found me, threatened me and detained me in the apartment; as they were not specifically looking for me they made no careful investigation after I had established the fact that I was a ‘foreigner.’ . . . After several hours I was released under surveillance and ordered to report to the Gestapo. That was the beginning of my illegal life [sic]. I could not return home, but I know that the Gestapo was at my apartment a few days later in order to arrest me.” See letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Frank Papers, 7/7. Depending on his audience (the young, impressionable comrade Gerhard Bry versus the politically wary OSS agent Calvin Hoover), Frank seems to have added certain nuances to the story in order to provoke the desired effect.

⁵⁹ Bry, *Resistance*, 93.

most mundane daily tasks. Every contact, every meeting place, every step had to be painstakingly vetted. In keeping with the Org's general conception, each move turned into a consciously theorized and deliberate action. Nothing could happen "naturally," but to the outside world everything had to *seem* natural.

After the Nazis took power, the Gestapo counted on subversive elements falling into unconscious habits that could be easily traced. The culture of the Org revolved around constant analysis of and adjustment to changing circumstances. With the flow of reports, the frequency of cadre meetings and committee debates, and the continuous revision of the guiding theory, one wonders how Org members ever ate, slept, or relaxed. To make things worse, all members had to appear as inconspicuous as possible by holding down regular jobs and maintaining normal social lives.

Just after the war in 1946 Günther Weisenborn, who had himself participated in the underground group Red Orchestra, wrote the play "The Illegals" to commemorate the "unheroic heroes" of the German resistance. The Good Neighbor, who leads a small cell of resistance fighters, gives the following speech to a new recruit:

Become the most ordinary person. If you love someone, leave him. If you trust someone, then you've made a mistake; trust only us in the world. Be clever like a fox in winter. Be ice-cold toward yourself. If you get angry, that can cost us our lives. Become the most ordinary person. Never get denounced; follow every police order. Don't get irritated with man, woman, or child. Become the most ordinary person, the Everyman; become Mr. Nobody from Nowhere. Become cold, calm, modest; you are a penny in the movement until your silver is revealed.⁶⁰

The Good Neighbor stresses the duality of appearance and essence: ordinary in public, revolutionary in private; seemingly worthless penny on the outside, precious silver on the inside. But this did not mean living a "double life," as the Expressionist poet Gottfried Benn described his inner exile during the Nazi years, whereby one pays for inner creative freedom with outer conformity.⁶¹ Joining the Org meant orienting one's entire being, both appearance and essence, toward the interrelated goals of unifying the workers' movement, overthrowing fascism, and restarting socialism. In other words, the deliberate choice to appear as a "penny" followed logically from one's "silver" conviction.

Life in the Org was all-consuming. The Org leadership monitored every aspect of members' personal lives, collecting testimony and adding regular reports to their personnel files in the Org Archive. An evolving, long-term plan determined every day-to-day tactic. And according to Loewenheim, this shared plan—the Org "conception"—held the group together more than anything else.⁶² Loewenheim thought of the Org as a grand human and socialist experiment. After fifteen years of bitter enmity since the "unfinished revolution" of 1918-19, social democrats and communists had become obsessed with each other. Within the Org, both political types discovered the advantages of engaging in common discourse and cooperative action.⁶³ The feeling of camaraderie in the Org was

⁶⁰ Günther Weisenborn, *Die Illegalen* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1946), Scene 19 (p. 42). Incidentally, the former Org member Robert Havemann wrote a blurb for the playbill of the work's premiere at the Hebbel Theater in Berlin. See NL Havemann, 23-1/82.

⁶¹ Gottfried Benn, *Double Life*, trans. S. Draghici (Corvallis, OR: Plutarch, 2002).

⁶² Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 109.

⁶³ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 109-10.

like holding a “skeleton key” [*Passepartout*] to the whole workers’ movement.⁶⁴ The sociologist Georg Simmel once wrote that

Since the secret society occupies a plane of its own . . . it exercises a kind of absolute sovereignty over its members. This control prevents conflicts among them which easily arise in the open type of co-ordination [i.e. in the public sphere]. The “King’s peace” (*Burgfriede[n]*) which should prevail within every society is promoted in a formally unsurpassed manner within secret societies through their peculiar and exceptional limitations. It appears, indeed, that . . . the mere form of secrecy as such holds the associates safer than they would otherwise be from disturbing influences, and thereby make[s] concord more feasible.⁶⁵

Similar to the Freemasons, the Org functioned as a special place where all doors between people of various and often inimical backgrounds were unlocked. In the Org, the impressionable youth in particular might experience preemptively the “coming unity” and concord of socialist renewal, the telos of the Org conception in practice.⁶⁶

Sometimes the Org’s attention to pedagogy and private lives went to unusual extremes. Loewenheim declared that “[a] true revolutionary has no private life.”⁶⁷ The leadership kept tabs on all members’ friendships and sexual relations, and perhaps not surprisingly, a large number of marriages resulted between men and women who met in the Org. But the high ratio of men to women (approximately 4:1) meant that many male members had uninitiated wives or girlfriends. The leadership sought to minimize this potential liability through constant internal surveillance. Every Org member should furthermore stay healthy and physically fit: sick people not only performed their illegal tasks less efficiently, potentially endangering their comrades, but they also stood out in society.⁶⁸ The Good Neighbor’s admonishment to appear “most ordinary” determined almost every public manifestation of these otherwise extraordinary revolutionaries.

As a consequence of the Org’s hierarchical structure and strict observance of the Kon, nobody except for those at the top had any real idea about how many people the organization comprised. Most rank-and-file members tended to exaggerate the Org’s size, placing estimates in the range of tens of thousands. This waxing consciousness of size and strength contrasted sharply with Loewenheim’s own fear of degeneration and decline. Ironically using the same rhetoric as the radical Right, he described the age of fascist dictatorships as an “era of the spiritual and cultural decline of society, of the growing physical distress of the masses and the moral decay of the ruling classes.”⁶⁹ Decline characterized not only society at large but also the organizations of the working class: “The reservoir of the declining socialist mass organizations from which they draw their increased strength, strictly limited though it may be, may, in the near future, be exhausted, and they will finally become quite as much the object of the fascist policy of suppression as the large socialist organizations of the period of legality.”⁷⁰

It is perhaps this psychology of gradual decay and eventual loss that later led

⁶⁴ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 111.

⁶⁵ Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,” op. cit., 492.

⁶⁶ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 111.

⁶⁷ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 111.

⁶⁸ Gerhard Bry recalled how the Org arranged for an operation to fix his stomach ulcer. *Resistance*, 44-45.

⁶⁹ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning: A Manifesto from Underground Germany* (New York: Rand School/League for Industrial Democracy, 1934), 87.

⁷⁰ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 129.

Loewenheim to abandon all hope for the underground struggle.⁷¹ The Org required its members as well as its charismatic leader to put forth a lot of effort for minimal results, and one might easily slip up or to lose one's nerve. Understandably, then, the organization retained its own lawyers (Werner Wille and Fritz Michaelis) as well as an in-house psychoanalyst (Dr. Edith Jacobsohn).⁷²

Loewenheim himself reacted with hostility to any intrusion of psychoanalysis into the Org's conception. In early 1932, the Org experienced a breach of the Kon when it discovered that some of its theoretical formulations had made their way into public debates between psychoanalysts in Berlin. Org member Sergei Feitelberg (alias "Werber") fancied himself an innovative thinker and decided to share his synthesis of the Org conception and Freudian psychoanalysis with some of his colleagues outside the Org. This infuriated Loewenheim. Besides the fact that Feitelberg had broken the rules of conspiracy, Loewenheim believed that the Freudian drama of human emancipation from within the individual psyche was antithetical to a Marxist conception of emancipation from within the social totality.⁷³ He also considered psychoanalysis a "bad moral influence" on the Org.⁷⁴ Yet his philosophical distinction between "natural process" and "cultural process" did resemble Freud's distinction between unconscious and conscious mind. Both psychoanalysis and the dialectical Marxism favored by Loewenheim entailed personal enlightenment through knowledge and self-critique, itself a sort of revolutionary praxis. The overlap and tensions between the Org and the Berlin psychoanalyst milieu were probably more than coincidental.⁷⁵

Another area of overlap was Berlin's bourgeois Jewish youth. The Org functioned as an important nexus of community and belonging especially for its younger Jewish members. Reinhard Bendix, just seventeen years old when recruited in 1933, recalled that the illegal discussions in the Org compensated for the profound social isolation that he and his older sister Dorothea (also an Org member) underwent after their father, a prominent Jewish lawyer, was arrested and sent to a concentration camp.⁷⁶ Bendix had already broken with the Zionist youth group Hashomer Hatzair, so only the Org existed to complement his broken family. Such memories of "personal reassurance" were

⁷¹ See below for an account of the 1935 change in leadership. In Loewenheim's later years, this Spenglerian sense of doom and decline became his *idée fixe*. His 1961 book under the pseudonym Miles, "A World in Upheaval," traced degenerative tendencies through the entire history of Western civilization. Miles, *Eine Welt im Umbruch. Zur Auseinandersetzung um die Krise unserer Zeit* (Bremen: Verlag Der Werktag, 1961). His final manuscript, which he left unfinished upon his death in 1977, bore the title "The Twilight of Our Industrial Age." For a synopsis, see Tobias Kühne, "Das Netzwerk 'Neu Beginnen' und die Berliner SPD nach 1945," Ph.D. (TU-Berlin, 2014), 179-85.

⁷² Bry, *Resistance*, 104-5.

⁷³ Wilhelm Reich and Frankfurt School theorists such as Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse argued, on the contrary, for the basic commensurability of Marxian and Freudian emancipation.

⁷⁴ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 116-17. Karl Frank seems to have had some connection to this "psychoanalysis debate" within the Org. Holding a doctorate of psychology from the University of Vienna, Frank also lived for a while in the apartment of Org sympathizer Siegfried Bernfeld, co-author with Feitelberg of the book *Energie und Trieb. Psychoanalytische Studien zur Psychophysilogie* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1930). See letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Frank Papers, 7/7.

⁷⁵ For a good overview of psychoanalysis in Berlin, see Veronika Fuechtner, *Berlin Psychoanalytic: Psychoanalysis and Culture in Weimar Republic Germany and Beyond* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2011).

⁷⁶ Reinhard Bendix, *From Berlin to Berkeley: German-Jewish Identities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1986), 176-7.

sometimes all that younger members retained of their experience in the Org: “After five years of isolation in Hitler’s Germany [by 1938], I could hardly consider myself a political expert, though [the Org] had been quite successful in counteracting the effects of that isolation.”⁷⁷ Gerhard Bry, also a young Jew, recalled how one needed “a framework for orienting oneself [to] escape bewilderment.”⁷⁸ In this sense, the Org conformed closely to Georg Simmel’s classical definition of a secret society, whereby secrecy “secures, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the obvious world.”⁷⁹ If members of the Org felt alienated in the obvious worlds of late Weimar and Nazi Germany, then they found meaning and camaraderie in the second world of New Beginning.

The Birth of New Beginning

On January 30, 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of the German Reich. Not much changed in German society until one month later when, on the night of February 27, the Reichstag parliament building suffered significant fire damage in an arson attack. The perpetrator was Marinus van der Lubbe, a mercurial Dutch anarchist and communist who apparently worked alone.⁸⁰ But the Nazis took advantage of this golden opportunity to blame their sworn enemies the communists. After obtaining an emergency decree from Hindenburg, Hitler ordered the mass arrest of communists and many social democrats. Persecution of left-wing politicians continued in this state of emergency until March 23, when the Enabling Act legalized the communist ban and established Hitler’s dictatorship. A coordinated attack by brown-shirt storm troopers (SA) immediately followed against all remaining communist and social democrat offices throughout the country. Thousands of socialists were carted off to the first concentration camps at Dachau, Oranienburg, and Osthofen over the next few months. Only one Org member, Henry W. Ehrmann, sat among them, and his arrest owed solely to his more visible job as a social democrat jurist in Berlin.⁸¹

The primary reason why the Org survived the initial Nazi raids more or less unscathed was because of its elaborate Kon. Although members held important positions in the major workers’ parties and therefore might have been identifiable by the Nazis, none used their real names and none—with the exception of Ehrmann—had the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time when the SA burst through the doors. Members of the Org also escaped capture because they had taken the threat of fascism more seriously than any other socialist group in Germany at the time. The Org always accounted for the very real possibility that the Nazis might win over the masses. In fact, according to the Org conception, the spontaneity of the masses during economic crises was even more likely to result in fascism if no proper organization existed to

⁷⁷ Bendix, *From Berlin to Berkeley*, 203.

⁷⁸ Bry, *Resistance*, 72.

⁷⁹ Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,” 462.

⁸⁰ Contemporaries doubted that van der Lubbe could have acted alone, and for a while historians too debated whether the Nazis or communists had secretly put him up to it. But now scholarship points pretty definitively to van der Lubbe as the lone arsonist. See Richard J. Evans, “The Conspiracists,” *London Review of Books*, 36, no. 9 (May 8, 2014), 3-9.

⁸¹ After his release from KZ Oranienburg in 1934, Ehrmann promptly emigrated to Prague and joined the Org/NB’s foreign bureau. See Ch. 2. Ehrmann was later featured in Richard Kaplan’s documentary film *The Exiles* (1989).

initiate the “cultural process” of socialist revolution. The fatal flaw of the Org’s strategy was that even if it could have succeeded in unifying the workers’ movement, it required too much time. Loewenheim and the other leaders did not know how long it would take, but certainly the three years between the group’s inception and the Nazi takeover were not enough.

While communists labored under the illusion that a mass proletarian revolution lay around the corner and social democrats considered fascism a mere episode that would quickly pass, the Org dug in for a long, hard battle.⁸² Toward the end of 1933, it started to expand its operations and to conceive of illegal work more explicitly as a struggle against the fascist state. Org members collected information about every aspect of German society, from the attitudes of factory workers at Siemens to rumors that circulated in the working-class pubs and hostels. They smuggled these reports abroad, where German socialists in exile as well as Western observers read them with rapt attention.⁸³

But the group’s biggest public success came in September 1933 with the publication of the pamphlet *Neu beginnen!* Writing under the pseudonym Miles (Latin for “soldier”), Walter Loewenheim reworked his 1931 theses “The Proletarian Revolution” and portions of the F-Course into a concise manifesto of socialist renewal. Ira Richowski, a trained engineer who worked as a secretary in the Org’s illegal bureau at the Columbushaus in Potsdamer Platz, remembered the collective effort required to produce the pamphlet: Loewenheim “dictated directly into the machine and we three girls took turns [transcribing]. Also when he was at home he dictated to other comrades so that a series of Org members were involved in the production of the book.”⁸⁴ According to the historian Hans J. Reichhardt, Loewenheim and his wife traveled already in June with a copy of the manuscript to Switzerland, where he apparently handed it over to Robert Grimm, a leading Swiss social democrat.⁸⁵ But Erich Schmidt, perhaps more reliably, described how in fact he and Walter Dupré first had to smuggle the manuscript to friends in Mannheim. It had been typed on “Chinese silk paper” and tucked safely into their clothing. Once in Mannheim, their Org comrades hid the manuscript in the spare tire of

⁸² For communist analyses of fascism during this period, see Klaus Kinner, *Der deutsche Kommunismus. Selbstverständnis und Realität*, Vols. 1-2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1999); Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929-1933* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1983); James J. Ward, “Smash the Fascists...”: German Communist Efforts to Counter the Nazis, 1930–31,” *Central European History*, 14, no. 1 (1981), 30-62; Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* [1970] (London: NLB, 1974). For social democrat analyses, see Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler*, op. cit.; the difficult-to-read dissertation by Wolfgang Saggau, *Faschismustheorien und antifaschistische Strategien in der SPD. Theoretische Einschätzungen des deutschen Faschismus und Widerstandskonzeptionen in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik und in der Emigration* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1981); Bärbel Hebel-Kunze, *SPD und Faschismus. Zur politischen und organisatorischen Entwicklung der SPD 1932-1935* (Frankfurt/Main: Röderberg-Verlag, 1977). In general, see Helga Grebing and Klaus Kinner, eds., *Arbeiterbewegung und Faschismus. Faschismus-Interpretationen in der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1990). For the full spectrum of leftist interpretations of fascism, see William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁸³ See Bernd Stöver, ed., *Berichte über die Lage in Deutschland. Die Lagemeldungen der Gruppe Neu Beginnen aus dem Dritten Reich 1933-1936* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1996). See also Ch. 2.

⁸⁴ Qtd. in Sandvoß, *Die “andere” Reichshauptstadt*, 228-29.

⁸⁵ Hans J. Reichhardt, “Neu Beginnen: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Widerstandes der Arbeiterbewegung gegen den Nationalsozialismus,” *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, 12 (1963), 150-88 (161).

an Opel sports car and drove it across the border into Switzerland.⁸⁶ In any case, by prior agreement Robert Grimm conveyed the manuscript to the executive board of the German Social Democratic Party in exile, known as the Sopade, which agreed to publish it through its press Graphia in Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary), Czechoslovakia. The pamphlet appeared in a standard format for German readers in exile, but the Sopade also produced a smaller edition for smuggling into Germany. The latter carried the false title “Arthur Schopenhauer, On Religion: A Dialogue.”⁸⁷

Although difficult to measure precisely, the impact of both formats was considerable. French, British, and American translations appeared over the winter of 1933-34.⁸⁸ Both the pamphlet title (“New Beginning”) and the author’s name (“Miles Group”) became popular ways to identify the hitherto nameless Org. “The appearance of the New Beginning pamphlet,” explained the scholar Lewis J. Edinger,

created a considerable stir, reaching beyond the German exile colonies into the international labor movement. . . . Left wingers throughout the world had been shocked by the so-called failure of the old leadership of the German labor movement to prevent the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship. Miles, they were told, spoke for the members of small conspiratorial underground groups, for men and women who were too young to wield any influence in the parties that allowed themselves to be destroyed without a blow, who were now trying to live down the suicidal quarrel that separated Socialists from Communists by drawing their “soldiers” from both camps.⁸⁹

Writing in the mid-1950s, Edinger presented the arrival of New Beginning on the international socialist scene as the intervention of a “New Left” against the various representatives of the traditional workers’ parties (i.e. the Sopade and the Central Committee of the KPD).⁹⁰ The Org/New Beginning and the renewers generation that it embodied indeed thought of themselves as constituting a new left. This characterization might sound strange to anyone with a knowledge of the 1960s. But as will be shown, the

⁸⁶ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 14-15. Schmidt’s own recollection is confirmed by the transcript of a Mannheim Gestapo report included in the indictment [*Anklageschrift*] against Karl [i.e. Carl Maria] Kiesel, Wilhelm Pabst, Josef Karl Wilhelm, and Hans Bruno Egger, by the Oberreichsanwalt (Zweigstelle Berlin), Dec. 22, 1934, NB Archives, 59/1. For an overview of the Org’s provincial cell in Mannheim, see Konstanze Wegner, “Die Gruppe ‘Neu Beginnen,’” Erich Matthias and Hermann Weber, eds., *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Mannheim* (Mannheim: Edition Quadrat, 1984), 233-43.

⁸⁷ Miles, *Neu beginnen! Faschismus oder Sozialismus: Diskussionsgrundlage zu den Streitfragen unserer Epoche*, Probleme des Sozialismus: Sozialdemokratische Schriftenreihe, Vol. 2 (Carlsbad: Graphia, 1933). A more recent edition is available in Kurt Klotzbach, ed., *Drei Schriften aus dem Exil* (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1974). On the disguised edition “Arthur Schopenhauer, Über Religion, Ein Dialog,” see the Gestapo report transcribed in the indictment against Karl Kiesel, Wilhelm Pabst, et al., op. cit.

⁸⁸ The French edition (*Nouveau départ*) included an introduction by Alexandre Bracke, co-founder of the SFIO, the British edition (*Socialism’s New Start*) by the prominent left-wing journalist H. N. Brailsford, and the American edition (*Socialism’s New Beginning*) by the frequent Socialist Party candidate for president Norman Thomas. All of these translations nominalized the German main title, which technically was an imperative verb, *neu beginnen* [“begin anew”]. In German too the group was almost immediately referred to using the gerunds *Neubeginnen* or *Neues Beginnen* [“new beginning”].

⁸⁹ Lewis J. Edinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: UC Press, 1956), 83.

⁹⁰ Edinger furthermore defined the “Old Left” as the circle of older left-wing social democrats around Siegfried Aufhäuser, Karl Böchel, and Willy Lange who founded the group German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD) in 1933-34. See Ch. 2.

history of German socialism saw a succession of new lefts over the tumultuous four decades between 1930 and 1970.

In the 1933 pamphlet, Miles/Loewenheim sketched out some of the basic precepts of the Org conception. Both the Communist and Social Democratic parties were “creatures of bourgeois democracy,” he argued, and therefore lacked any real mandate to represent the underground socialist movement in Germany.⁹¹ Conditions had changed fundamentally from the Weimar status quo ante. Both parties placed a naïve faith in “a revolutionary spontaneity inherent in the proletariat”: the Sopade let the tail wag the dog by waiting for the masses to make the first move, while the communists wanted the dog to wag more than its tail, so to speak, by expecting revolution around every corner and thus underestimating fascism’s grip on the country. Miles called this communist tendency “subjective idealism.”⁹² The established workers’ parties needed new leaders, he claimed, and they could only emerge from the underground struggle itself. A revolutionary elite had taken shape—that is, the Org—“creating the intellectual and political basis for the reorganization” of German socialism. Composed primarily of the young generation, this elite was “knocking at the door” of the old party hierarchy: “The time has come for the old officials of the party abroad to keep the promise with which they took up their propaganda work in exile. If those who bore the responsibility in the past will now make way for the fighters of the present, we need have no fear for the future.”⁹³ The economic crisis of capitalism and the attendant political crisis in Germany had created the objective conditions for this renewal of socialist leadership.

Following a chronology similar to the one presented by Marxist theorists of an earlier generation like Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Rudolf Hilferding, Miles traced the development of the capitalist mode of production through imperialism and the formation of monopolies and global cartels at the turn of the twentieth century. Capital had accumulated rapidly in the hands of a small number of individuals and corporations. Increased militarism and imperial competition had caused the First World War, and the moral and material privation of its aftermath turned European nations away from internationalism toward protectionist autarchy. The war had created “a far more disorganized and chaotic economic system . . . than had ever before existed and ever could have come into existence under peaceful conditions.”⁹⁴ In alliance with monopoly-capitalist interests, governments took an increasingly active role in regulating national markets. This tendency toward increased state intervention in the economy also occurred in the Soviet Union, which had abolished the market altogether by the late 1920s. Even liberals abandoned the idea of the free market, Miles observed, which anyway was never more than a myth.⁹⁵

The acute crisis of 1930-32 that followed the global financial collapse signified the delayed manifestation of the heightened contradictions of capitalism:

The devastating crises which we are experiencing are not isolated social “accidents,” but rather the manifestations, the symptoms, of the fatal turning-point in the capitalist system

⁹¹ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 20.

⁹² Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 98-99.

⁹³ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 22-23.

⁹⁴ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 30-31.

⁹⁵ The Hungarian philosopher and economist Karl Polanyi would make a similar observation about the pervasion of planned economies after 1914 in his influential book *The Great Transformation* (1944).

which has so long been predicted by socialists, and which will lead to a catastrophe for western civilization unless it succeeds in breaking its way through to a socialist society.⁹⁶

Like Rosa Luxemburg before him, Miles formulated an existential choice for mankind: civilization or barbarism, socialism or fascism. If the crises of capitalism were to develop naturally, then fascism would complete the destruction of Western civilization in a second world war, unleashing the vast productive forces of advanced capitalism on an unimaginable scale.

Fascism's success depended on the bourgeoisie's willingness to sacrifice political freedom in order to retain its economic control. In contrast, socialism could preserve political freedom while emancipating the proletariat. Anticipating postwar left socialists like Wolfgang Abendroth, Miles argued that only socialism could guarantee political democracy.⁹⁷ "The proletarian revolution," he wrote, "is an historical alternative, the *decision* with regard to what is dependent in the last resort upon the historical creative power of the most advanced sections of society, the historically conscious minds of the working class."⁹⁸ The working-class elite and bourgeois intellectuals committed to revolutionary socialism might initiate this "cultural process." Resistance to fascism transformed in Miles' apocalyptic account into a conscious intervention of a revolutionary elite "against the current" of history, which if not diverted would lead to barbarism.⁹⁹

Miles offered a more sophisticated theory of fascism than the standard interpretation by Marxist orthodoxy. More than the mere outward political appearance of advanced capitalism in crisis, fascism according to the Org relied on a genuine mass movement that followed a charismatic dictator who claimed he could resolve the contradictions of capitalism by decree. The Org based its theory on Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), which had considered such a "Bonapartist" dictatorship the logical consequence of bourgeois revolution. Just as Marx had written about the failed revolution of 1848 in France, which ended with the coup d'état of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte in 1851, Miles wrote about the abortive German revolution of 1918-19, which for him ended with Hitler's coup in 1933. The German "Party of Order" (i.e. the Weimar Coalition) took charge in January 1919 to save society from anarchy, socialism, and communism, and the year 1933 saw the final dissolution of the democratic order and the political downfall of the bourgeoisie. If history occurred first as "tragedy" (the original Napoleon in 1799) and again as "farce" (his nephew in 1851), then one might wonder how to characterize Hitler and the Nazis.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 33.

⁹⁷ See Ch. 5.

⁹⁸ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 81-82. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁹ The metaphor "against the current" [*gegen den Strom*] was popular at the time especially with the KP-*Opposition*, which began publishing a journal called *Gegen den Strom* in 1928. See Bergmann, "*Gegen den Strom*", op. cit. Lenin and Zinoviev had earlier published a collection of essays called *Gegen den Strom* (Hamburg, 1921). See also Arno Klönne, *Gegen den Strom. Bericht über den Jugendwiderstand im Dritten Reich* (Hannover: O. Goedel, 1957); Hermann Brill, *Gegen den Strom* (Offenbach/Main: Bollwerk-Verlag K. Drott, 1946). Perhaps ironically given his family past and anti-communist political stance, Isaiah Berlin used the metaphor in the title of his 1979 collection *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx introduced his book with the famous phrase: "Hegel observes somewhere that all great incidents and individuals of world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," *The Portable Karl Marx*, 287-323 (287). This Bonapartism theory of fascism had other adherents in the late 1920s and 1930s, most

The Miles pamphlet played on the profound frustration of workers who could not understand why the SPD and KPD continued to quarrel despite sharing a common fascist foe. This frustration had eaten away at the proletariat's revolutionary will and made it more amenable to Hitler's promises.¹⁰¹ Only a militant antifascist organization could reactivate the revolutionary consciousness of these depressed workers: "The structure of the fascist dictatorship will only be shaken when a determined united socialist organization transforms the suppressed murmurings of the masses into the clear expression of their will to fight, and thus into a political factor in the bid for power which will find a response even in the proletarian strata of fascist organizations and associations."¹⁰² A united socialist organization just might turn that sack of potatoes, as Marx had called the unconscious proletariat, back into a revolutionary class.

After defeating the Nazis, Miles continued, this new socialist organization would temporarily concentrate all state power into its hands. A centralized transition to socialism could not approach the ideal of "democratic socialism" that the social democrat reformists and revisionists like Eduard Bernstein wanted. Only a dictatorship of the proletariat, correctly understood, yielded the "true democracy of the workers."¹⁰³ At the same time, the socialist party must resist all bureaucratic tendencies and remain flexible, giving its members free rein to discuss and criticize the current party line. Miles/Loewenheim did not necessarily believe, however, that such freedom of discussion should apply within the Org itself. Unlike Lenin, for whom the conspiratorial organization of professional revolutionaries was synonymous with the party, Loewenheim never specified the exact relationship between the Org and the future mass party of socialist renewal.

As for economic policy, the pamphlet called for the socialization [*Vergesellschaftung*] of heavy industry, the chemicals industry, and high finance. But in contrast to the Soviet Union, whose Five Year Plans the Org criticized severely, the future socialist state would seek "to promote the establishment of industries producing consumption [i.e. consumer] goods rather than of those producing production goods [such as concrete and steel]." The well-being of the masses, their highest possible standard of living, and their comprehensive welfare must always take chief priority. In order to realize this level of consumer goods production, "state concerns will be established side by side with the private capitalist undertakings inherited from the past and will compete with them."¹⁰⁴ Miles essentially wanted to duplicate for Germany the

notably August Thalheimer of the KPO. Thalheimer, "On Fascism" [1930], *Telos*, no. 40 (1979), 109-22. Other Org/NB members elaborated on the theory. See, for example, Fritz Alsen [i.e. Henry W. Ehrmann], "Napoleon III. und Hitler. Bonapartismus und Faschismus," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 3, no. 31 (Apr. 1936), 989-94. See also Frank Adler, "Thalheimer, Bonapartism and Fascism," *Telos*, no. 40 (1979), 95-108; Jost Döffler, "Bonapartism, Fascism and National Socialism," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1976), 109-28; Martin Kitchen, "August Thalheimer's Theory of Fascism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 34, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1973), 67-78.

¹⁰¹ "The disappointment of the workers in their own organizations is the fundamental cause of their indifference and inactivity in the face of the fascist advance, and even of the partial sympathy which they show towards it." Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 40.

¹⁰² Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 49.

¹⁰³ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 60-62. For a cogent argument about the dilemma between "principles and power" on the German Left, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia UP, 1952).

¹⁰⁴ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 68.

Soviet New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1921-28, which had allowed a limited free market and some degree of private enterprise. Because socialism could only unfold dialectically from capitalism, it would retain some of the latter's institutions.¹⁰⁵ The dictatorial economics of the Five Year Plans, thought Miles, stymied the “creative initiative of the factory manager” and the worker alike.¹⁰⁶

Although his analysis included many useful insights that contemporary historical scholarship confirms, Miles sometimes demonstrated a certain naïveté in his critique of Soviet economic policy. For example, he favored the collectivization of agriculture but opposed the way that the Soviet state had compelled the peasants to collectivize, a process which he thought should have been voluntary and driven by “organic promotion.”¹⁰⁷ Given the primitive state of agriculture and the general lack of revolutionary consciousness among the Ukrainian peasantry at the time, it is unclear how immediate collectivization could have occurred without brutal and “inorganic” measures. Like Marx in the final two sections of *The Communist Manifesto*, Miles in any case contrasted what he saw as the Soviet Union's utopian socialism with a “scientific” socialism based on a critical, non-dogmatic method.¹⁰⁸ In this way, Miles attempted to out-Marx and out-Lenin the Bolsheviks.

According to internal Org reports and émigré observers, discussion of the pamphlet apparently lit up underground cells of socialist resisters throughout Germany. It was read in the factories, in the pubs, in private apartments of working-class neighborhoods of Berlin such as Wedding, Neukölln, and Prenzlauer Berg, in large shipping centers like Hamburg and Bremen, in the industrial heartland of the Ruhr, and even in Nazi strongholds like Munich.¹⁰⁹ Although perhaps only a few thousand copies of the pamphlet's smaller edition made it into Germany, one can guess that each copy reached an underground cell of half a dozen to twenty members. The call for unity in the socialist movement must have resonated deeply, and Miles' realistic and pragmatic prose would have appealed to both workers and intellectuals dissatisfied with the seemingly impractical proposals by their former leaders in exile. In the Org's creative encryption system that used “Dutch” for German, “Harmsdorf” for Berlin, and “Pollyville” for Paris, the codename for the Org itself was usually “the Realists.”

In a direct appeal to the renewers generation, Miles declared that the “younger elements” would take the lead in the new socialist organization. He hoped “that we shall succeed in holding together the younger, energetic elements [of the SPD] and making

¹⁰⁵ “Socialist economy cannot dispense with either competition or the market, with either money or the initiative of the leaders of industry. . . . The negation of this necessity in the U.S.S.R. originated from utopian conceptions of socialism and threatens to lead to catastrophe.” Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 112. A joke later circulated about how Soviet workers only pretended to work while the state pretended to pay them.

¹⁰⁷ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 112. To be fair, information about the full extent of Soviet collectivization was not widely available until decades later.

¹⁰⁸ Karl Marx, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. F. L. Bender (New York; London: Norton, 1988), 54-86 (75-86). This Norton edition minimizes the role of Friedrich Engels in drafting the Manifesto, even though he traditionally appears as its co-author.

¹⁰⁹ The actual reading radius of the pamphlet is difficult to determine with any kind of precision. Only indirect sources like Gestapo reports in BA-Berlin, R58/2, provide independent confirmation of the Org's own claims that the pamphlet proliferated widely. The Org/NB's network inside Germany did extend to all of the locations listed above. See Ch. 2.

them the basis for the renewed existence of the party.”¹¹⁰ Young socialists who managed to get their hands on a copy of the illegal pamphlet—and any of the multitude of people who heard about it secondhand—must have been inspired by this call for “renewal of the socialist core” and for “the freest and most critical discussion among all those elements who regard the revival of the socialist movement in a militant spirit, based on Marxist theory, as necessary, and wish to serve this movement.”¹¹¹ Fritz Erler’s biographer Hartmut Soell emphasized the psychological appeal of “beginning anew” for young socialists like Erler born around 1910, who knew only times of economic and political crisis.¹¹² As the historian Hans J. Reichhardt noted, small discussion groups all over Germany identified so closely with the ideas in Miles’ pamphlet that they felt like they actually belonged to this elite organization, which they could only think to call New Beginning: “‘New Beginning’ soon became a concept and comprised many people who had no connection whatsoever with the actual ‘Org’ and about whose existence and development the [Org] leaders possessed no knowledge.”¹¹³ Erich Schmidt remembered traveling from Berlin to Mannheim and Düsseldorf in order to discuss the Org’s ideas and noticing immediately the effect of the Miles pamphlet:

We found that the delegates from Berlin [i.e. Schmidt and his partner] were awaited with excitement. According to the rules [of conspiracy], here too the “Org.” went unmentioned. We merely pretended to be members of a group of critical social democrats and communists in Berlin who had already for some time given thought to the problems of the workers’ movement. Such identification problems disappeared at once with the publication of the Miles manuscript. All one talked about now was the New Beginning Group, the Miles folks.¹¹⁴

The reception of the Miles pamphlet inside Germany during the winter of 1933-34 thus marked the birth of “New Beginning” proper, a public name for a secret organization and

¹¹⁰ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 132.

¹¹¹ Miles, *Socialism’s New Beginning*, 132-33.

¹¹² The leftist psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich wrote in 1933 about the “wish for *new beginning* as a general psychodynamic phenomenon.” Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 518n103, emphasis in original. Wilhelm Reich himself seems to have had indirect ties to the Org/NB via Karl Frank, Siegfried Bernfeld, and Sergei Feitelberg. See the bizarre, conspiracy theory-laden blog “Nachrichtenbrief” at <nachrichtenbrief.wordpress.com> (accessed April 2014). It should be noted that the rhetoric of renewal and rebirth was not the exclusive property of the Left. Hermann Göring, for example, published a short book for English readers in 1934 called *Germany Reborn* (London: E. Mathews & Marrot) in which he praised the “German freedom revolution” carried out by the Nazis.

¹¹³ Reichhardt, “Neu Beginnen,” 162. This phenomenon corresponded to Karl Mannheim’s analysis of what binds generational units: “The social importance of these formative and interpretative principles is that they form a link between spatially separated individuals who may never come into personal contact at all. Whereas mere common ‘location’ in a generation [*Generationslagerung*] is of only potential significance, a generation as an actuality is constituted when similarly ‘located’ contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding.” Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations” [1928], *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York, Oxford UP, 1952), 276-320 (306).

¹¹⁴ No longer would the intellectual jokers and also-rans [*Witzbolde und Auch-Konkurrenten*] be able to provoke [our audiences] with a furtive grin or refer to the “Org.” as “the black hand on the graveyard wall of the proletariat.” Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 19. The exact meaning of the “black hand” remark is a mystery. Schmidt attributed it to Boris Goldenberg (alias “Frey”; “Gilbert”; “Bernhard Thomas”), a former associate of Richard Löwenthal and Franz Borckenau in Berlin University’s Communist Student Faction (Kostufra) and a member of the German Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP).

a symbol for redemptive hope. For countless workers and intellectuals in Nazi Germany, New Beginning became legend.

For New Beginning's supporters, the pamphlet was a "masterstroke," expertly attuned to the needs of the moment.¹¹⁵ But Loewenheim later remarked that "[o]ur political fate as a democratic group was not decided inside Germany, but outside."¹¹⁶ The international reaction to the pamphlet was divided. Its leading proponents included Friedrich Adler of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), Robert Grimm and Ernst Reinhard of the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SPS), and Edo Fimmen of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). A diverse array of opponents included Leon Trotsky, leaders of the SAP, and the Comintern. The Central Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) ordered the rapid publication of a substantial counter-pamphlet by someone named Rudolf Gerber.¹¹⁷

The reaction by the Sopade was more ambivalent. The old social democrats surely did not approve of Miles' critique of the émigrés' alleged mandate to represent the SPD. And many of Miles' organizational suggestions probably struck them as communism by another name. But the Sopade underwent a crisis of legitimacy in the winter of 1933-34 that made them more receptive to radical reorientations. The active support for New Beginning by what Lewis J. Edinger called the "Old Left"—Siegfried Aufhäuser, Karl Böchel, and the German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD)—as well as by Paul Hertz, a member of the Sopade executive board until 1938, probably accounted for why the Sopade agreed to publish the pamphlet and to help smuggle it into Germany in the first place. But it soon became clear to the moderate and right-wing members of the board like Otto Wels, Hans Vogel, Erich Ollenhauer, and Siegmund Crummenerl that the widespread success of New Beginning required an official response.¹¹⁸

That response came in January 1934 with the so-called "Prague Manifesto," published on the front page of the émigré newspaper *Neuer Vorwärts* and smuggled into Germany disguised as a promotional booklet for razor blades. The Sopade struggled to find a radical language in which to repackage its reformist policies. But it did make some statements that could appease a more militant readership. It argued that the fascist state completely changed the conditions of political work in Germany from those that had prevailed under democracy. In the revolutionary struggle against the Nazi dictatorship, "there are no compromises; there is no place for reformism and legality." A new "revolutionary organization" composed of "an elite of revolutionaries" should replace the defunct apparatus inside Germany.¹¹⁹ But unlike Miles, the Sopade did not consciously choose a more militant course; the new course had been forced upon it by the circumstances of the fascist takeover and indeed by the propaganda success of rival socialist groups like New Beginning. And the Sopade still clung to its faith in the spontaneous action of the masses: the Nazis' exploitative economic policy, for example, would "compel the masses to fight for the security and improvement of their material existence." Despite the revolutionary tone of the Prague Manifesto, the Sopade continued

¹¹⁵ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 23.

¹¹⁶ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 185.

¹¹⁷ Reichhardt, "Neu Beginnen," 161n17. See Rudolf Gerber [probably pseud.], *Hitlerdeutschland, die Sozialdemokratie und die proletarische Revolution* (Reichenberg [Liberec], Czech.: Hadek, 1934).

¹¹⁸ See Edinger, *German Exile Politics*, 98ff.

¹¹⁹ "Kampf und Ziel des revolutionären Sozialismus: Die Politik der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands," *Neuer Vorwärts*, Nr. 33 (Jan. 28, 1934), 1.

to fall back on its tried-and-true reformist strategies. The primary fight, the Sopade argued, should be for political rights: only through recapturing the democratic rights to free assembly and free speech could the working masses of Germany hope to overthrow Hitler.

It was rather naïve to expect that Hitler would ever liberalize German political culture or that differences within the workers' movement would automatically disappear in the common struggle against fascism.¹²⁰ But the Sopade did make three proclamations that opened the door to cooperation with organizations to its left. The first established the freedom of social democrats to form coalitions with non-social democrat resistance groups. More concretely, the second proclamation offered to fund any underground group that could prove its antifascist bona fides: "Every group will receive support and funding whose revolutionary spirit ensures that it subordinates its activity to the overthrow of the National Socialist dictatorship within the framework of the unity of the working class." Finally, the Sopade opened its newspaper and all of its publications to free discussion of the problems of revolutionary socialism. This last proclamation might have been the Sopade's attempt to put the genie back in the bottle: by making its publications the chief discussion forum of German socialism, it could potentially control the discourse and legitimize its claim to represent the socialist general will.

The Miles pamphlet thus prompted a general reorientation of German social democracy, if only for a brief period. But as the pamphlet circulated in the winter of 1933-34, Loewenheim and the Org/NB leadership had already started to doubt the prospects of continuing work inside Germany. Ironically, the pamphlet's call to action proved the original leadership's last gasp and a new leadership's first breath. Against the background of the Saar plebiscite in January 1934, in which 90% of the population of this German-speaking region that had been occupied by Britain and France since 1920 voted in favor of rejoining the German Reich, and the Night of the Long Knives in the summer of 1934, during which Hitler purged the Nazi Party of most actual and perceived enemies, Loewenheim and his closest associates decided that due to the diminished prospects for a mass uprising against the Nazis, the continuation of illegal activity in Germany no longer made sense. As they later put it, "the historical merit of the Org is not to have led the fight against fascism but to have revealed that one cannot lead this fight. We must have the courage to admit that there are no more revolutionary tasks in Germany. Either one acknowledges that or one goes over to the Communist Party—there is no middle way [*Zwischenlösung*]." ¹²¹ A maximum of twenty New Beginning members should remain in Berlin and the provinces while the rest should emigrate. Loewenheim framed this new "conception" just as ambitiously as the original: New Beginning in exile should now infiltrate the socialist parties of Europe in an attempt to steer them toward antifascist unity. "There was a megalomaniacal trait in him," diagnosed Karl Frank, "but that is probably unavoidable when one plans to do so much; he had always seen himself as the German Lenin." ¹²² Many NB members, however, could not accept this course. They accused Loewenheim himself of harboring an "émigré utopia," which, as with the Sopade

¹²⁰ "Whether social democrat or communist or supporter of the many splinter groups, the enemy of dictatorship becomes in the struggle—through the requirements of the struggle itself—the same socialist revolutionary." "Kampf und Ziel des revolutionären Sozialismus," 2.

¹²¹ "Rücktrittserklärung der alten Leitung," NB Archives, 10/1.

¹²² Qtd. in Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 39.

leadership, accorded far too much significance to the antifascist work that could be done in exile.¹²³

One year earlier, as part of its general effort to strengthen its position in Germany and abroad, the Org had established a foreign bureau in Prague under the directorship of Karl Frank. Some speculated that the Org leadership also found this a convenient way to get rid of Frank, whose thick Austrian accent, independent cast of mind, and proclivity for daring exploits allegedly made him unsuitable for underground work.¹²⁴ The Org leadership always felt uneasy about Frank and, according to Erich Schmidt, “held him at arm’s length”: ““He thinks he belongs to us,”” Schmidt recalled Loewenheim muttering after Frank said something irreverent during an F-Course.¹²⁵ Abroad his stature was so great that the Gestapo for a while mistook him for “Miles,” author of the nefarious *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet.¹²⁶ Schmidt described this remarkable character as follows:

He was a full-blooded politician, clever, brave, a man for his time, more charismatic than the whole leadership circle of the “Org.” combined, a debater with considerable diplomatic talent, who knew how to backpedal with his light Austrian charm without personally offending anyone. But Frank also had these somewhat mysterious, unreadable character traits that occasionally made it hard to tell where exactly you stood with him.¹²⁷

Even Loewenheim grudgingly had to admit that Frank “was the most suitable person for [the task of] democratic representation” abroad.¹²⁸

Frank gathered around him a young, militant faction that wanted to broaden the scope of NB’s activities both abroad and inside Germany. Loewenheim called their ambition an attempt to create “a kind of European New Beginning organization”—an idea that he too briefly entertained.¹²⁹ Frank’s coterie shared the sentiments of another faction inside Germany centered around Richard Löwenthal and Werner Peuke (alias “Wilke”; “Konrad”). Earlier Löwenthal had belonged to what Loewenheim suspiciously dubbed the “student faction”—a number of young recruits from the KPO and the Communist Student Faction (Kostufra) who joined the Org in 1931.¹³⁰ Under the influence of his friend and mentor Franz Borkenau, Löwenthal revised Loewenheim’s theory of fascism into a precursor of the totalitarianism theory that prevailed in the 1940s

¹²³ “Zum Leitungswechsel in der Organisation,” July 16, 1935, NB Archives, 10/2.

¹²⁴ Reichhardt, “Neu Beginnen,” 160; Bry, *Resistance*, 93; Rahmer, “Some Reminiscences,” 28-29. In Schmidt and Bry’s favorably-inclined memoirs, Frank’s independence and daringness were exactly what made him such an effective underground operative. His critics on the other hand gave him the epithet “political adventurer,” which during the 1940s stigmatized him as unreliable for the United States government. He was not allowed to return to Germany immediately after the war. See Chs. 2-3.

¹²⁵ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 34-35.

¹²⁶ Report by Josef Kluske (Staatspolizeistelle für den Regierungsbezirk Breslau) to Reinhard Heydrich (Gestapa Berlin), July 17, 1935, BA-Berlin, R58/2; report by Gestapa Berlin Abt. II 1A 2, re. “Miles-Gruppe,” Sept. 1935, BA-Berlin, R58/2; “Lagebericht über die kommunistische Bewegung für die Monate (Juni), Juli, August u. September 1935” (Gestapa Berlin Abt. II 1A), Oct. 3, 1935, BA-Berlin, R58/2. By 1936 the Gestapo had determined that Karl Frank was not in fact “Miles,” but only in 1939 did they identify Walter Loewenheim—by then safely out of the country—as the right man.

¹²⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 35.

¹²⁸ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 183.

¹²⁹ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 183.

¹³⁰ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 113-14. Kliem, “Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich,” 12.

and '50s.¹³¹ Werner Peuke was a dissident communist who provided NB with important contacts among the railway workers and factory unions. With Frank and the foreign bureau's help, Löwenthal and Peuke set about organizing a coup to replace Loewenheim and the old leadership in the spring of 1935. Within a few weeks, they had succeeded in convincing a three-quarter majority of NB members that Loewenheim's defeatism and "liquidationist" course could no longer be tolerated. On June 25 a number of coordinated meetings took place in Berlin and the provinces that finally decided the issue.¹³² Loewenheim and his friends were presented with a majority resolution and formally expelled from the organization that they had created. Apparently socialist renewal too "dismisses its children."¹³³

The Loewenheim circle's predominantly ex-communist Jewish background provided the plotters with yet another incentive to oust them.¹³⁴ Even before the proclamation of the Nuremberg Laws that autumn, Jewish members of NB like Reinhard Bendix and Gerhard Bry posed a problem for the organization. Not only did their potential arrest on ethnic grounds put the whole group at risk, but the limits on their social mobility made it almost impossible to hold down a normal job. Without an independent source of income and a bourgeois cover, Jewish members would stand out in German society even more than they had since 1933 and well before. By the time of the Reich Pogrom Night in November 1938, almost all remaining Jewish members of New Beginning had fled into exile. Ironically, then, even anti-Nazi resistance groups saw a need to purge their ranks of Jews—if only for security reasons. But this latter incentive surely was subordinate to the real reason for the leadership change: resistance inside Germany had become a psychological necessity for NB's expanding rank and file, which was younger and in many ways more brazen than the Org founders.

The plotters even surprised themselves at how quick and easy they had pulled off the coup, going so far as to consider that de facto justification for their actions:

No case is known to us in the history of the workers' movement where, in such a short period of time, such a difficult task was solved in essence [so] successfully. That speaks for the correctness of the orientation of the oppositional forces who have now taken over the Org, and also suggests that the stock of people, alliances, etc. that could be saved [from the old Org.]—only because the decomposition of the old leadership [*Spitze*] had not yet penetrated [too] deeply—remain[s] intact in its fighting capacity [and] can be successfully redeployed.¹³⁵

This redeployment of the old Org's resources involved a significant democratization and decentralization of the new organization's decision-making process. The old leadership suffered from "reality-adverse dogmatism" and "sectarian passivity" in the face of real

¹³¹ See Jones, *The Lost Debate*, op. cit., 78. For a short time Borkenau apparently considered himself a "fellow traveler" of the Org. Under the pseudonym "Ludwig Neureither" he defended Miles against his critics in the pages of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, the Sopade's theoretical journal. See Ch. 2.

¹³² Three quarters according to Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 39. Karl Frank had traveled illegally to Berlin to attend the decisive meeting there. See letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Frank Papers, 7/7.

¹³³ See the ex-communist Wolfgang Leonhard's 1955 memoir about leaving the East German SED, *Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder* ["The Revolution Dismisses Its Children"], which appeared in English translation as *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C. M. Woodhouse (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1958).

¹³⁴ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 40.

¹³⁵ "Zum Leitungswechsel in der Organisation."

developments that proved the revolutionary will of the German proletariat, such as the elections of factory staff representatives [*Vertrauensratswahlen*] in 1934 and 1935, in which workers voted overwhelming against the official Nazi candidates.¹³⁶

Loewenheim's circle had hermetically closed itself off from the lower cadres and committees and as a result NB risked turning into a rigidified bureaucracy.¹³⁷ In fact, the plotters had used the leadership's own self-isolation and rules of conspiracy to their advantage. The Kon ensured that individual cadre members did not have access to the leadership, but it also ensured that the leadership did not have any direct contact with them. By winning over a series of cadre leaders—the sole liaisons with the leadership—Löwenthal and Peuke effectively pulled the rug out from under the old leaders' feet.

The new leaders wanted to reverse the process of bureaucratization and revive the kind of active lower-level discussions they had experienced in the early years of the Org. This effort to democratize the organization—indeed, to begin New Beginning anew—would condition much of the group's work over the coming years. Besides continuing the fight inside Germany, the new leaders had one main goal: to preserve a revolutionary elite for that moment when fascism fell, whether through a homegrown uprising or through Germany's defeat in a world war (they saw both possibilities as equally probable in 1935). The “new” New Beginning stayed true to Lenin's remark about the nature of professional revolutionaries: they are “reapers, not only to cut down the tares of today, but also to reap the wheat of tomorrow.”¹³⁸ But the new leaders also stayed true to Loewenheim's own program as set out in the *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet:

The future leadership of the party must consist of those comrades who are developing and applying, amidst the serious perils of the fight itself, the forms and methods of the anti-fascist proletarian class movement, and who have expertly and opportunely prepared this work. For it is not the old democratic, but the new illegal conspiratorial work which will, from now on, be necessary and all-important for our movement. . . . The struggle against German fascism will be settled neither in Paris, Prague, Switzerland, nor the Saar [still independent from Germany in 1933]. It must be fought out in the German factories, cities and villages.¹³⁹

New Beginning, revamped, set out to capture the original hope and energy that the Miles pamphlet had generated underground and abroad a year and a half earlier. Was the network of sympathizers still out there? Could the new organization connect with the legions of New Beginning members in spirit? Unfortunately for the revamped organization, the Gestapo soon cut short all attempts to mobilize this real or imagined reservoir of anti-Nazi resisters.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ “Absetzungserklärung” by the provisional leaders of the Org/NB, June 1935, NB Archives, 48/1.

¹³⁷ “Political phenomena are reacted to hardly at all or in a bureaucratic and delayed manner. Our comrades de-politicize themselves or distance themselves from Org tactics, and mutual spying instead of discussion among comrades characterizes Org life.” “Absetzungserklärung.”

¹³⁸ Lenin, “What Is to Be Done?” 140.

¹³⁹ Miles, *Socialism's New Beginning*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ The question of whether the majority of German workers actually opposed the Nazis and might have mounted an antifascist revolution if given the right opportunity has remained controversial. See Timothy W. Mason, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*, ed. Jane Caplan (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1995); *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the “National Community”*, ed. Jane Caplan (Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1993). For the deep background of working-class behavior in Nazi

Already at the beginning of 1934, four members of the Mannheim NB cell had been arrested.¹⁴¹ But the first arrests to affect the Berlin center occurred in early September 1935, right around the time when Loewenheim and his associates fled the country. The journalist and Quaker pacifist Alfons Paquet, who sometimes acted as courier between the Berlin leadership and NB cadres in other German cities, was detained briefly by the Gestapo and might have given up some information. Following his arrest, in any case, the Gestapo rounded up Edith Schumann, Georg Eliasberg, Gerhard Hein, the Org psychoanalyst Edith Jacobsohn, and several others.¹⁴² The Gestapo continued following leads and building its case over the winter months until late March 1936, when it rounded up a few dozen more NB members in Berlin, including Gerhard Bry's younger brother Ernst, Eberhard Hesse, Fritz Tinz, Rudolf Heuseler, Theo Thiele, and Hedwig Leibetseder.¹⁴³ As Gerhard Hein recalled, the Gestapo treated the communist and former communist members of the "Miles Group" much harsher than those like him who had come from the Socialist Workers' Youth (SAJ): "they didn't take us seriously [and] there was no feeling of hate. They didn't understand that we were intellectually more dangerous."¹⁴⁴ Another former SAJ member, Hilde Paul (alias "Lotte Klinger"), remembered that she and her friends had discussed the possibility of arrest and developed a strategy whereby "one should make oneself as politically unimportant as possible and explain our meetings as get-togethers of old friends."¹⁴⁵ This strategy did not entirely deceive the Gestapo, but it may have accounted for the relatively modest sentences that she and the other the rank-and-file members of NB received.

What then did the Gestapo actually know about New Beginning? The official indictments reveal that the authorities knew they had discovered the group behind the Miles pamphlet of 1933. But of the size and scope of New Beginning and of its prehistory as the Org they knew comparatively little. The Gestapo had observed a number of cadre meetings and took note of some of their conspiratorial tactics, including the standard Org protocol for recruiting new members. The indictments also corroborated the story of the two half-sunken suitcases that had washed up on the banks of the Müggelsee that past July. Interrogators presented Gerhard Hein with both the suitcases and their dried out contents during questioning.¹⁴⁶ But while the Gestapo had managed to gather some rudimentary information about the group through careful investigation and a bit of

Germany, see Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, trans. Barbara Weinberger, ed. Wolfgang Bonss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984).

¹⁴¹ Indictment against Karl [i.e. Carl Maria] Kiesel, Wilhelm Pabst, Josef Karl Wilhelm, and Hans Bruno Egger, by the Oberreichsanwalt (Zweigstelle Berlin), Dec. 22, 1934, NB Archives 59/1. See also their trial proceedings, Apr. 15, 1935, NB Archives 59/4.

¹⁴² Edith Schumann, who had worked as secretary for the Marxist theorist and KPD politician Clara Zetkin in the 1920s, attempted suicide while in custody by slitting her throat with the lens of her glasses. Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt*, 237.

¹⁴³ Like Schumann, the ex-communist Leibetseder tried to escape arrest by jumping out of her sixth-floor apartment window. Miraculously she survived without any serious injuries. Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt*, 232-38.

¹⁴⁴ Qtd. in Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt*, 233.

¹⁴⁵ Hilde Schmidt (née Paul), "Meine Verhaftung im September 1935," Erich Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 27-34 (27).

¹⁴⁶ Sandvoß, *Die "andere" Reichshauptstadt*, 233. It is not clear whether the Gestapo was able to extract much information from the Müggelsee documents. They may very well have used them solely as intimidating props during interrogations.

luck, they lacked any comprehensive notion about New Beginning's structure or conception beyond what they read in the Miles pamphlet. They did have enough material to convict about three dozen members of treason at the People's Court from March 1936 to January 1937. Sentences ranged from eight months in prison to four years in the concentration camps at Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald.¹⁴⁷ Most of these NB prisoners were released before the war broke out and either emigrated or tried to reestablish contacts with the underground.

Conclusion: A Handful of Matches

About thirty undetected members chose to remain in Berlin, including Fritz Erler, Kurt Schmidt, Ernst Jegelka, and Hans Braun.¹⁴⁸ Limited illegal work continued there and in the provinces, but it would take a few more years before these remnants of New Beginning rebuilt anything like the underground network that had existed previously. Did the arrests prove Loewenheim right? Had work inside Germany become too dangerous? Or might NB have avoided arrests altogether had Loewenheim and his associates never embarked on their "liquidationist" course and prompted the coup in the first place? That only one death resulted from the Gestapo raids suggests that both the old and new leadership had done everything possible to protect their comrades from the worst of fates. Lisel Paxmann (alias "Ellen"), who before joining the Org and serving as Loewenheim's secretary had worked for Max Horkheimer at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, was arrested by the Gestapo at the Czechoslovak border in September 1935. Rather than risk giving up information under torture, she committed suicide in a Dresden jail.¹⁴⁹

Of all the varieties of German resistance to Hitler, observed the historian and former NB member F. L. Carsten, "the honours of the day must go to small groups such as the *Roter Stosstrupp*, *Neu Beginnen*, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei* [SAP], and the *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund* [ISK], which attempted to learn from past failures, to adapt their policy to changed conditions, and to think of the future along less doctrinal lines." "Although the German Resistance did not succeed in its endeavours," he concluded, "it has left an important legacy which has continued to influence German life and politics," not least its role in "the political education of the younger generation."¹⁵⁰ With the benefit of several decades of hindsight from his comfortable university post in England, Carsten could transform the immediate failures of the anti-Nazi resistance into a reassuring success story for (West) German democracy. The character Lill in Günther Weisenborn's 1946 play "The Illegals" perhaps better captures the profound uncertainty about success that resisters actually experienced:

¹⁴⁷ Sitzung des 4. Strafsenates des Kammergerichtes vom 7. und 9. Januar 1937, NB Archives, 59/5.

¹⁴⁸ Kliem, "Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich," 163ff. See Chs. 2-3.

¹⁴⁹ Kliem, 169. "Protokoll von den Kindermädchen (Fanny und Gertrud) aufgenommen am 1.11.35 in der Wohnung von Hartmann," NB Archives, 12/12. Also see letter from Max Horkheimer to Moshe Schwabe, Mar. 24, 1952, Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters: Selected Correspondence*, ed. and trans. M. R. & E. M. Jacobson (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2007), 290-92 (291). Some New Beginning members suspected that her "suicide" was in fact murder by the Gestapo. Evelyn Anderson (pseud. Evelyn Lend) dedicated her history of the German workers' movement *Hammer or Anvil* (1945) to the memory of Paxmann.

¹⁵⁰ F. L. Carsten, Introduction to Hermann Graml et al., *The German Resistance to Hitler* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: UC Press, 1970), vii-xiii (xi, xiii).

Sometimes it's just too late. Then you wonder whether our work has any success at all. It's surely pointless. That's what happens when you try to plant a violet in a sandstorm. It's as if somebody were to throw a handful of matches into the North Sea and hope that one day the sea will dry up and someone will find a match, dry it, light a fire, and warm the whole world with it . . .¹⁵¹

Mixed metaphors aside, Lill despairs at the lack of tangible results in the underground struggle and the seemingly insurmountable odds in the fight against fascism. After endless days, months, and years of living in fear, anti-Nazi resisters began understandably to question whether they should bother carrying on. After 1935-36, New Beginning decided to confine its work inside Germany to quietly collecting information and preserving an elite that would possess enough legitimacy after the fall of Hitler to lead the socialist revolution—a legitimacy that only could come of having stayed voluntarily in the devil's den. Some did remain in Germany. The majority of these renewers emigrated to Prague, Paris, London, New York, and elsewhere, like a handful of matches thrown into the tumultuous sea of interwar Europe. They only hoped that a few of them might turn up and dry out when it was all over—too few to warm the whole world, but enough to light the way toward socialist renewal. The story of the renewers' work in exile is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁵¹ Günther Weisenborn, *Die Illegalen*, Scene 39 (p. 84).

CHAPTER TWO:
Exile and Revolutionary Hope: New Beginning's
Antifascist Network

Exile and Revolutionary Hope: New Beginning's Antifascist Network

On April 10, 1942, a curious document crossed the desk of Allen W. Dulles at the New York bureau of the Coordinator of Information, forerunner of the Office of Strategic Services. Called "How to Prepare Collaboration with the Anti-Nazi Underground Movement," the memo called on the American government to create a special agency in order to evaluate "the anti-Nazi potential in Germany" and make contact with underground resistance cells. Border stations should be established in Switzerland, Sweden, and elsewhere, and a research office in the US should support the European operation by carefully analyzing "German newspapers and above all, all of the available local newspapers, reviews, books, etc." The staff should consist of American intelligence officers mixed with "some carefully selected people who have been active in the mentioned underground movement"—that is, "real experts" and "trustworthy refugees." The memo also included a rather fantastic proposal: "In the later period it could be conceived that collaborators of this agency could be dropped the parachute way [sic] in order to make direct contact with people inside if the border contacts wouldn't be successful enough." The author of the proposal happened to know just the people for the job. It was signed "Paul Hagen," the American alias of Karl Frank.¹

Unlike the unfortunate suitcases that failed to sink to the bottom of the Müggelsee in late 1935, Karl Frank's parachutes did in fact touch down on German soil sometime in 1944. But the antifascist agents dangling from their lines were not from New Beginning.² As far-fetched as the plan might have seemed, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the US Army saw some value in stirring up trouble behind German lines. The British and Americans had already made similar arrangements with de Gaulle and the Free French. But the lack of any recognized German government-in-exile complicated the task of picking the right people for the job. Karl Frank's proposal was sound, but the verdict was

¹ Document 1 (10 April 1942), "Memorandum by Paul Hagen: How to Collaborate with the Anti-Nazi Underground in Germany," in Jürgen Heideking and Christof Mauch, eds., *American Intelligence and the German Resistance to Hitler: A Documentary History* (Boulder, CO; Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 1996), 17-19. A copy of the original memo is located in the Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7. After an initial rebuff by the OSS, Frank turned to Lt. Col. Julius Klein and asked him to present his plan, the "Hagen formula," to the military intelligence office Army G-2. Klein did this in August 1942. "One of the underground groups of some importance, the New Beginning Group, made up mostly of younger members of the former Social Democratic party," reported Klein, "has developed adequate techniques, a system of intelligence and information for its own purposes and a personnel of staff members. By the fact that it still exists, it proves unusual vitality and the qualifications for a more extended activity under the present conditions." Klein then went on to recommend Paul Hagen (i.e. Karl Frank) specifically as "one of the most suitable persons to be used for such activities, which should come under the direct supervision of the War Department." Confidential report to the War Department, General Staff, Army G-2, Aug. 24, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7. This referral caught the attention of the OSS, and Robert D. Murphy, assistant to the director William J. Donovan, apparently took the matter in hand. Letter from Julius Klein (Charlottesville, VA) to Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank], Sept. 29, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7.

² The New Beginning member and former Sopade border secretary Franz Bögler was approached by an agent of the OSS in Zürich, perhaps Allen W. Dulles himself, who asked whether he would be willing to parachute into Germany. See interview of Franz Bögler by Wolfgang Jean Stock (Speyer), Dec. 20, 1972, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich), ZS-3113.

still out on him personally and on his mysterious organization New Beginning.³ Instead, the American intelligence services decided to recruit from another socialist splinter group, the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), whose non-Marxist brand of ethical socialism must have seemed politically safer.⁴ Operations such as this had little effect on the course of the war, but they did provide a tremendous psychological boost to their German émigré participants. They also supplied ample material for future popular histories of the Allies’ “shadow war” against Hitler.⁵

By the start of the war in September 1939, New Beginning had long since shifted its antifascist activity into exile. The year 1935 had been a turning point. Not only had the organization undergone a leadership change and a generational rejuvenation that spring and summer, but the Gestapo had tracked down enough leads to make its first series of arrests that fall. As a result, a significant portion of the remaining several hundred core members of the group emigrated by the end of the year and the majority of its peripheral members were rendered inactive. The group’s underground resistance work inside Germany did not yet cease entirely, but compromised contacts and increased police attention severely limited its room for maneuver. Having established a foreign bureau in 1933 and engaged extensively in exile politics in Prague, Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere for several years, the group was no stranger to working outside Germany. But with the sudden rush of emigration in late 1935, the group’s critical mass shifted abroad for good.

Work in exile provided a new set of opportunities for New Beginning as well as a significant number of obstacles. Greater exposure to the international socialist movement and to the broader European and American publics meant new sources of funding and political influence. Acting in the public sphere, however, also meant curtailing the conspiratorial techniques that had made NB such a cohesive underground resistance group: false identities, dissimulation, manipulation, use of secret informants, occasional misrepresentation of the group’s aims, etc. While those aspects did not disappear immediately, they gradually gave way to more democratic modes of honesty and transparency.

There was an indirect relationship between the increasing intensity of NB’s engagement in exile politics and its decreasing connection with the “underground struggle.” In exile, NB transformed from a resistance cell into a lobbyist group. Socialist renewal became less an act that New Beginning carried out on the ground than an *idea*

³ Frank provided the OSS with a detailed explanation of his political activities since 1933 in order to prove his “authenticity and credibility” and “to destroy the atmosphere of doubt, which is not only disagreeable for me but which is hindering my work.” Letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, D.C.), July 31, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7.

⁴ The ISK parachutists were trained by the Labor Branch of the OSS and by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in England as part of the so-called “Faust Project” from the end of 1943 through 1945. Participants included Josef “Jupp” Kappius (1907-67), Anna Beyer (1909-91), and Hilde Meisel (1914-45). Meisel was shot while attempting to illegally cross the Austria-Switzerland border. The scholar Albrecht Kaden claimed that Kappius retained his reputation as a “parachute jumper” well after the war. Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit. Die Wiedegründung der SPD 1945/46* (Hannover: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1964), 152ff.

⁵ For example, see Nelson MacPherson, *American Intelligence in War-Time London: The Story of the OSS* (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003); Joseph E. Persico, *Piercing the Reich: The Penetration of Nazi Germany by American Secret Agents during World War II* (New York: Viking Press, 1979). For a more professional account, see Christof Mauch, *The Shadow War against Hitler: The Covert Operations of America’s Wartime Secret Intelligence Service* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

that it had to “pitch” to patrons abroad. As a result, the idea of socialist renewal, partially divorced from political practice, became a point of orientation for the German emigration and for the group’s European and American allies. Most clearly symbolizing this reification of renewal was the brand name “New Beginning” itself. The shapeless, nameless “Org” of the formative years 1929-33 had changed into a crisp, unmistakable rallying cry by a new generation of German socialists. They would be the ones who would finally complete Germany’s democratic revolution. At least that was how the group started to market itself.

The exigencies of the Second World War and New Beginning’s cooperation with the British and American governments tempered somewhat the group’s revolutionary aspirations. When the anticipated popular uprising against Hitler never materialized, the group devoted itself to the military defeat of Nazism and to the distant hope that perhaps such a defeat would liberate the revolutionary potential of the German people. In New York and London, NB leaders joined progressives and bourgeois antifascists in defending democracy against dictatorship. “Democratic revolution” became their watchword; the rhetoric of Marxism receded from their repertoire. Developing theories of totalitarianism, fighting fascism in Spain, forging European socialist unity, and participating in the Allied war effort all influenced the way that NB reformulated its program in exile.

In addition to the general experience of exile, it was the generational dimension of exile politics—the various age cohorts represented by the warring social democrat and communist factions—that determined how NB and other socialist splinter groups used the language of renewal and democratic socialism. The political reorientation of New Beginning in exile thus cannot be plotted on the traditional right-left spectrum. These spatial points must be expressed temporally in terms familiar to a later era: “new right,” “new center,” and “new left.”

Political Exile

In order to judge how the new circumstances of exile affected NB and the renewers generation, the parameters of political exile as an archetypal social phenomenon must be reconciled with the historical specificity of exile in the 1930s and early ’40s. Traditionally associated with some form of banishment, the concept of exile has long had a negative connotation. Political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes—himself an exile in Paris during the English Civil War—did consider exile a positive alternative to punishment at home, but the “Banished man” was nevertheless “a lawful enemy of the Common-wealth that banished him; as being no more a Member of the same.”⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, who endured internal exile in Florence under Medici rule, portrayed political “refugees” [*sbanditi*] in a still darker light, warning against “the unreliability of agreements and promises made by men who find themselves shut out from their country.” “[O]nce they get a chance of returning to their country without your help,” he continued, “they will desert you and turn to others in spite of any promises they may have made to you.”⁷

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, Part II, Ch. 28, *Leviathan* [1651], ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 218.

⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, Book II, Ch. 31, *The Discourses* [1531], ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie J. Walker (London; New York: Penguin, 1998), 376.

The etymology of the word exile, however, suggests a more neutral connotation. Deriving from the Latin *exsilium*, which literally means “out of Troy,” exile refers to the myth of Aeneas and his flight from his native city after it was sacked by the Greeks. In Virgil’s account, Aeneas leads the survivors of Troy across the Mediterranean Sea to a new homeland in present-day Italy, where they lay the foundations of what would become Roman civilization. In this context, exile even strikes a positive note: out of Troy becomes “into Rome.” By Virgil’s time in the first century BCE, the term was associated generally with flight from one’s native land due to a mortal threat.⁸ While the classical term exile had broad applicability, it differed from modern usage in that it did not describe a person. Aeneas and his followers were not “exiles,” but “refugees” [*profugis*]; exile instead represented their objective condition and, most literally, their geographical location.

The exile of New Beginning and of countless other renewers in the 1930s did not quite follow the Aenean model. Most politically active refugees never intended to build a new home abroad, although many eventually resigned themselves to it. Germany was their “native land,” whether by birth, cultural self-identification, or political socialization, and only a return to Germany after Hitler’s defeat could conclude their exile.⁹ A contrasting model to Aeneas might then be his one-time adversary Odysseus, who after the Trojan War tried to journey home to Ithaca but was thrown off course by the sea god Poseidon. Not a refugee, Odysseus was rather a “wanderer, harried for years on end,” who wanted nothing else than to return home.¹⁰ Like the celestial revolution of those “wanderers” (Greek: *planétés*) of the sky, the planets, the Odyssean model revolves around a delayed homecoming.¹¹

⁸ Virgil hinted at this in the *Aeneid* when he told the story of the deposed Volscian king Metabus—not himself from Troy—who “took along his infant child [Camilla]/ In flight amid the struggles of that war/ To share his exile [*exsilio comitem*].” Virgil, Book XI, Lines 735-37, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 351. In her 1943 essay “We Refugees,” Hannah Arendt operated in the classical Aenean mode by emphasizing settlement abroad, noting how (Jewish) refugees in the United States preferred not to be called “refugees,” but rather “newcomers” or “immigrants.” But there was something decidedly modern about her meditation on the mass movement of displaced persons. The refugees from Hitler crossed border after border in their flight from persecution, and in the process “[o]ur identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are.” Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees” [1943], Marc Robinson, ed., *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* (Winchester, MA: Faber & Faber, 1994), 110-19 (110). Her essay indicated the importance of national identity and citizenship in the age of the nation-state and the precariousness of individual identity when the nation-state is in crisis or decline—a theme to which she would famously return. See Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] (Cleveland; New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 267-302.

⁹ This phenomenon is illustrated nicely by the title of Friedrich Stampfer’s documentary exile memoir, “Facing Germany.” Stampfer, *Mit dem Gesicht nach Deutschland. Eine Dokumentation über die sozialdemokratische Emigration*, ed. Erich Matthias (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1968).

¹⁰ Homer, Book I, Line 3, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 1. The English word “wanderer” and the German *Wanderer* are, so far as I can tell, etymologically unrelated to the Greek. Curiously enough, however, the German terms for emigrant and immigrant (*Auswanderer* and *Zuwanderer*) do seem to invoke the émigré connotation of Odyssean wandering.

¹¹ For the historian David Kettler, a specialist in exile studies, the paradigmatic political exile was that of the Roman philosopher and orator Marcus Tullius Cicero. Sentenced to exile in 58 BCE due to the connivance of a rival senator in league with the dictatorial triumvirs, the staunch republican Cicero spent just one year out of Italy before the Senate recalled him. His exile was nevertheless significant because of the many letters he exchanged with friends in Rome and the speeches he delivered upon his triumphant

German socialists had a long experience with political exile and statelessness. After the failed revolution of 1848, many socialists and radical democrats including Karl Marx landed in permanent exile. Later, from 1878 to 1890, the social democratic party—then called the German Socialist Workers' Party (SAPD)—was subject to Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws, which prohibited any extra-parliamentary social democratic politics or publications inside the Reich. A number of social democrat leaders and theorists, including Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, and Georg von Vollmar, spent most of those twelve years in Swiss and English exile.¹² While securing one's legal status in those host countries may have been easier in the nineteenth century than in the twentieth, the continuation of meaningful political action in exile always encountered the same difficulties. In London exile, Friedrich Engels had written to Karl Marx in February 1851 that "[o]ne can see more and more that exile is an institution in which everyone must necessarily become a fool, a donkey and a scurvy knave unless he withdraws from it completely and contents himself with being an independent writer who doesn't bother his head in the least even about the so-called revolutionary party." Marx concurred: "The system of mutual concessions, of half-measures tolerated for the sake of appearances, and the necessity of taking one's share of the responsibility in the eyes of the general public together with all those donkeys, is now at an end."¹³ Their decision to withdraw into scholarly isolation in order to escape "the noisy squabbles of the emigration period" was certainly not the model that socialist renewers of the 1930s had in mind.

The Antifascist Network

It is impossible to say for sure just how many people fled Nazi Germany, whether for political, economic, or ethnic reasons. Often it was a combination of all three factors. Official state records do not help much in determining numbers. German authorities at first revoked the civil rights of only the most prominent refugees, while the subsequent denaturalization and expropriation of ordinary refugees proceeded inconsistently. Many who left Germany claimed at the border to be going on short vacations and therefore never applied at foreign consuls for long-term visas. Refugee relief agencies in Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium, and elsewhere registered and counted thousands of

return. Although it would seem that Ciceronian exile is no different than the Odyssean model with regard to homecoming, it was the pathos of his letters and speeches that framed exile as a dramatic subjective experience. As Kettler puts it, "[t]he story of Cicero's exile and return, 58-57 BCE, is hardly an inspiring one, notwithstanding Cicero's rhetorical effort to make it appear so and its subsequent incorporation as a minor moment in his Humanistic legend." Cicero portrayed his acquiescence to exile as an act of "magnanimous self-sacrifice, accepted to avoid bloodshed," and he claimed to be nearly suicidal over his separation from the Roman political scene. Kettler wants to emphasize the political quality of Cicero's exile: it resulted from a particular power constellation in Rome, and during it he remained politically active, resisting his opponents and mobilizing allies on his behalf. Poetic depictions of exile as a mere stimulus to artistic creativity or as generally indicative of the human condition, contends Kettler, discount politics and misleadingly portray exiled subjects as powerless in the face of grand historical forces. Focusing on political exile thus allows one to make exiled subjects' experiences historically concrete and to reclaim their often stunted agency. David Kettler, *The Liquidation of Exile: Studies in the Intellectual Emigration of the 1930s* (London; New York: Anthem, 2011), 8-9.

¹² See Eduard Bernstein, *My Years of Exile: Reminiscences of a Socialist* [1918] (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1921).

¹³ Qtd. in Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* [1918], trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), 208-9.

people, but it can be assumed that just as many refugees either never registered or “double-dipped” by registering multiple times at different agencies. Moreover, a significant portion of these agencies’ records were destroyed or lost in advance of German armies after 1938. In any case, the total number of emigrants by 1935 was probably less than 100,000, and the majority of them were chiefly ethnic (i.e. Jewish) rather than political refugees.¹⁴ The higher public profile of the political refugees owed in part to the preferential treatment accorded them by most countries’ asylum and refugee policies. Victims of ethnic or racial persecution were everywhere undesirable.

Estimating the number of New Beginning members who went into exile also presents problems. Of the 171 core members of the group that I have been able to identify by name (there were at least twice as many in total and several hundred more on the group’s periphery), 72 found themselves outside of Germany at the end of 1935. From the fall of 1935 to the spring of 1936, about 35 members were arrested inside Germany and roughly an equal number fled into exile to avoid arrest.¹⁵ Most of the group “in exile” had already been working in some capacity for the foreign bureau before the Gestapo made its move. The transience of New Beginning and other socialist splinter groups—their frequently changing headquarters and meeting places, their use of couriers to communicate with the outside, the routine with which they crossed German borders, etc.—suggests that the distinction between internal politics and exile politics never applied as strictly to them as it did to the traditional parties of the Weimar Republic. The socialist intellectual of bourgeois origin in a sense already played the role of refugee, “at once a stranger and a citizen” in two different social classes.¹⁶

From its very origin, Marxian socialism had been international, even when socialist parties concentrated their efforts on parliamentary politics within national frameworks. “The working men have no country,” Marx had written in *The Communist*

¹⁴ As already mentioned, these emigrant categories often overlapped. Kurt R. Grossmann, a refugee himself and coordinator of the Democratic Refugee Relief in Czechoslovakia until 1938, cited several incongruous statistics based on official state records. One total that he gave for the number of German emigrants between 1933 and the end of 1935 was 65,000, of whom about 43,000 were apolitical Jews, 7,000 communists, 6,000 social democrats, 2,000 pacifists and non-affiliated, 1,000 Catholics, and 2,000 sui generis. Of that total, 37,000 remained in Europe while the rest went overseas. Grossmann, *Emigration. Geschichte der Hitler-Flüchtlinge 1933-1945* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969) 43, 52, 151. But the number of Jewish emigrants alone by 1935 could very well have been 81,000. Léon Poliakov, an historian from a Russian-Jewish refugee family that had fled to France in 1920, estimated that 75,000 Jews left Germany between 1933 and 1935. Léon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine: le IIIe Reich et les Juifs* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1951), cited by Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America* [1987], trans. David Fernbach (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 104.

¹⁵ Erich Schmidt estimated the number of arrests at “about 35,” and this estimate seems to be confirmed by the various official indictments collected in the NB Archives and BA-Berlin, R58. Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre, 1933-1940. Berlin - Bern - Paris: Erinnerungen* (Rostock: Verlag Jugend und Geschichte, 1994), 40.

¹⁶ Clara Zetkin, qtd. in Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* [1911], trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 299. The metaphor of the “bourgeois refugee” is reminiscent also of Zygmunt Bauman’s argument that socialism in general and communism in particular served as the “exit visa” for many Jews who wanted to leave the Jewish ethnic community. This definitely applied to many of the younger Jewish members of the Org/NB like Gerhard Bry and Reinhard Bendix. Bauman, “Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation,” *Telos*, no. 77 (Sept. 1988), 45-77. See Ch. 1.

Manifesto, so perhaps the Nazis too could not “take from them what they have not got.”¹⁷ While social democrats might have felt that they indeed had a country to lose, internationalism tended to be stronger farther on the left of the socialist spectrum.¹⁸ The Org/NB had denied the legitimacy of the Weimar state, and unlike ancient political exiles, these revolutionaries of the 1930s did not love their native land for what it was or had been. While they did have faith in the vanguard role of the German working class, they only loved what Germany could become should socialism triumph.¹⁹

Instead of relying on the common distinction between inside and outside, the historian Jan Foitzik visualized NB’s antifascist network as a combination of exilic and non-exilic points.²⁰ New Beginning originated in Berlin, gradually established points in other urban centers throughout Germany such as Mannheim, Frankfurt am Main, and Düsseldorf, and by 1935 had cultivated a web of contacts across German borders. After the German annexation of the Sudetenland in October 1938 forced the leadership abroad to leave Prague, the purely exilic points of the NB network like Paris and London grew in importance relative to the border stations at Neuern (present-day Nýrsko), Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary), St. Gallen, and Saarbrücken. As discussed in the first chapter, Miles/Loewenheim’s *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet had perfect timing and won the Org/NB a great deal of supporters inside Germany and abroad. But as Erich Schmidt noted, its full effect was somewhat dampened due to the fact that the organization “did not have a network in the country at its disposal that was widespread enough to bring the ideas of the pamphlet successfully to bear in the complicated and perilous reality of illegal work.”²¹ New Beginning’s network was extensive, but not extensive enough to accomplish the group’s own aims.

Tobias Kühne, an historian who has studied New Beginning’s Berlin network, has skillfully synthesized Max Weber’s organizational theory (bureaucracy, hierarchy, charismatic leadership, etc.) with contemporary network theory to demonstrate the dynamism of NB during the Nazi years and its persistence as a friend network well into

¹⁷ Karl Marx [and Friedrich Engels], *The Communist Manifesto* [1848], ed. Frederic L. Bender (New York; London: Norton, 1998), 72. The influence of Lassalle and his more nationally oriented socialism was strong in the early days of German social democracy, and the persistence of Lassallean ideas may account for why patriotism has continued to figure so prominently in social democratic discourse ever since. The SPD was never an exclusively Marxist party. Still, the pre-1914 social democrats took some ironic pride in Wilhelm II’s pejorative label for them, “unpatriotic knaves” [*vaterlandslose Gesellen*].

¹⁸ Some scholars might disagree: Soviet communism, for example, manifested extremely nationalist characteristics. See Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2010).

¹⁹ The title of a 1966 collection of Willy Brandt’s exile writings, *Draußen* [“Outside”], captures some of the ambivalence of members of the renewers generation about identifying fully with the category “exile.” It should be noted that the book’s tone and selection of writings were colored by the electoral politics of the mid-1960s, when Brandt had to prove to the West German public that he was in fact a good German despite having returned to Berlin after the war wearing a Norwegian army officer’s uniform. See the English translation *In Exile: Essays, Reflections and Letters, 1933-1947* (London: Wolff, 1971).

²⁰ Jan Foitzik, *Zwischen den Fronten. Zur Politik, Organisation und Funktion linker politischer Kleinorganisationen im Widerstand 1933 bis 1939-40 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Exils* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1986). In addition to NB, Foitzik’s other subjects were the Socialist Worker Party (SAP), the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), the Communist Party Opposition (KPO), the German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD), the Red Fighters (RK), the Left Opposition of the KPD, and the anarchist Free Worker Union (FAUD). What Foitzik called literally “leftist political small organizations” I call socialist splinter groups.

²¹ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 24.

the postwar decades.²² But his contention that the Org/NB started as an organization (or better: “charismatic commune”) and then around 1935 transformed into a “network” involves a slight conceptual slippage. Social network analysis (SNA), historical network research (HNR), and Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) all radically challenge the very notion of “organization” in the traditional Weberian sense. For network theorists, an organization is already a network. The structures of political parties, state institutions, military formations, or any number of informal groups all function as networks of weighted relationships between individuals and groups of individuals. Latour adds the interesting twist that technology and non-human elements too help compose any “actor-network”: the technology that facilitates the group’s interaction (e.g. typewriters, telephones), the rituals and practices that regulate interaction, the goals and values for which the group stands, and even the symbolic name of the group itself. All of these elements work more or less in concert to sustain the cyber-organic network, which grows dysfunctional once it stops being “performed” by its constituent parts, that is, once the personnel and technology break down.²³ New Beginning was thus from the beginning both an organization *and* a network. What Kühne sees as a qualitative transformation of the group circa 1935 represented in fact only the acceleration of a process of structural decentralization whereby the scattered elements of the group in exile gained a greater degree of autonomy from the Berlin center.

But in general, contemporary network analysis fails to take adequately into account the purpose of the network, its qualitative goals, and its specific theoretical or ideological content. Not very long after the events that he studied, the historian Erich Matthias outlined three political goals of the socialist political emigration after 1933. First, émigrés had to build an organization abroad to support the underground resistance inside Germany. Second, the exile organization itself had to conduct resistance from abroad by seeking to influence foreign public opinion, speaking in the name of the oppressed German people (“the other Germany”), and building alliances with the international socialist movement. And third, the organization had to promote ideological clarification within its own ranks.²⁴ This latter goal took the form of intra-party debates over reform versus revolution, democracy versus proletarian dictatorship, West- versus East-orientation, and how best to unify the divided German workers’ movement. Matthias omitted one additional task of the exile organization: the need to deal with the generational conflict that had broken out after 1933 when the old party leaderships of the SPD and KPD lost their legitimacy. New Beginning and the other socialist splinter groups represented by and large the renewers generation, then in their midtwenties, who

²² Tobias Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” Ph.D. (TU-Berlin, 2014).

²³ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005). Ironically, the Gestapo anticipated this idea when it started referring to certain underground resistance groups as “orchestras” [*Kapellen*]: the radio operators who broadcasted resistance propaganda were the “pianists,” the radios “pianos,” and the organizers “conductors.” The most famous of these was the communist-oriented Red Orchestra around Harro Schulze-Boysen, Arvid Harnack, and his American wife Mildred Harnack (née Fish). See Anne Nelson, *Red Orchestra: The Story of the Berlin Underground and the Circle of Friends Who Resisted Hitler* (New York: Random House, 2009).

²⁴ Erich Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der sozialdemokratischen Emigration in der Prager Zeit des Parteivorstandes 1933-1938* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1952), 23-25.

themselves called for the generational and ideological renewal of the German Left. Their age and political stance “between the fronts” of official social democracy and communism conditioned the ideological contents of their programs—as did their lateral positions on the political spectrum.

In the 1930s, however, the political geography of the German emigration defied the traditional logic of left and right that had characterized European politics since the French Revolution.²⁵ This circumstance owed in part to the dizzying multiplication of parties during the Weimar Republic: at least nine major parties had at various times contended with each other and thirty or more smaller parties. Furthermore, a number of new organizations emerged after the Nazi takeover. Accounting for the post-1933 German and post-1934 Austrian emigration, Jean-Michel Palmier classified the “complex mosaic” of political tendencies as follows:

- Aristocrats, monarchists, conservatives and republicans (e.g. Otto von Habsburg, Hubertus Prinz zu Löwenstein, Harry Graf Kessler)
- Champions of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (e.g. Franz Werfel, Joseph Roth)
- Former political figures from the Weimar Republic (e.g. Philipp Scheidemann, Joseph Wirth, Heinrich Brüning)
- Conservatives (e.g. Balder Olden, later Fritz Thyssen)
- Catholics and Protestants (e.g. Paul Tillich, Carl Spiecker²⁶)
- Pacifists (e.g. F. W. Foerster, Kurt R. Grossmann, Emil Julius Gumbel, Egon Kisch, Berthold Jacob, Kurt Hiller, Ernst Toller, Leonhard Frank)
- National-Bolsheviks and turncoats from National Socialism (e.g. Karl Otto Paetel, Ludwig Renn, Otto Strasser, Hermann Rauschning)
- Anti-Communists (e.g. the German Freedom Party)

²⁵ Among others, the political philosopher Marcel Gauchet showed that these metaphors originated in that “immutable primal scene of 1789” when the people’s delegates took their seats in the National Assembly, the radicals on the left, the moderates in the center, and the conservatives on the right. There apparently was no plan behind this seating arrangement, just a sort of tribalism of like-minded delegates. This tripartite division of left-center-right, accentuated when the public arrayed itself in the gallery according to the same pattern, emerged as an alternative to the English binary model of government versus opposition. The French “law of legislative seating” really took root, argued Gauchet, during the early Restoration from 1815 to 1820, when shifting coalitions within a predominantly conservative political framework became the norm. Crucially, the logic replicated itself within each parliamentary bloc, so the Left, for example, would always have its own left, right, and center sub-tendencies. From the beginning, then, the spatial geography of late modern politics developed in a self-similar, fractal pattern. Marcel Gauchet, “Right and Left,” in Pierre Nora, ed. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* [1984-92], Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), 240-98. There are a number of problems with Gauchet’s interpretation, not least his limitation of political action to voting in parliamentary elections, his total disregard for material and class interests, his unapologetic belief in the superiority of liberal democracy, and his denial that the extreme ideologies of fascism and communism significantly shaped French political consciousness during the interwar years. On how fascism collapsed the distinction between right and left, see Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* [1983], trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: UC Press, 1986).

²⁶ Walter Loewenheim was not the only “Miles”: the left-Catholic Carl Spiecker used the pseudonym “Miles ecclesiae” [soldier of the church] for his book *Hitler gegen Christus. Eine katholische Klarstellung und Abwehr* (Paris: Société d’éditions européennes, 1936). He may also have been the “leading Catholic publicist” who wrote under the name “Katholicus” in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*. See “Ende des politischen Katholizismus,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, I, no. 1 (Oct. 1933), 30-36. Peter Maslowski is another likely possibility.

Social Democrats (e.g. the Sopade, socialist splinter groups, Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Erich Kuttner)

Communists (e.g. the KPD, Willi Münzenberg, Manès Sperber, Arthur Koestler)²⁷

These categories overlap each other considerably, and almost every one contains more radical and more moderate elements. But Palmier's classification shows weakness in describing the varieties of the German Left. Applying the same "Social Democrat" label, for example, to groups and personalities as diverse as the SPD in exile (Sopade), New Beginning, the Socialist Worker Party (SAP), and the Austromarxist Otto Bauer forces a teleological straitjacket onto socialist exile politics in the 1930s. While some of these groups did eventually achieve unity under a more capacious definition of social democracy by the end of the war, that was not at all the case before 1939.

Within the Left as whole, New Beginning positioned itself in the center between the SPD to the right and the KPD to the left. After some initial success in recruiting among communists, NB changed its policy after the Nazi takeover in 1933 and ordered its members to cease activity within the KPD.²⁸ Communist resistance tactics were too overt and dangerous, and such a small organization as NB could not afford the high losses associated with distributing illegal leaflets to the German public and with other provocative acts bound to draw Gestapo attention.²⁹ Inside Germany NB hoped to transform the former mass organizations of social democracy, and abroad it concentrated its earliest efforts on winning the support of the SPD representation in exile, the Sopade. In so doing, it hoped also to steer the Sopade's policies toward a more revolutionary socialist course. As the 1930s progressed, NB would continue to champion revolutionary socialism against the opposition of the more conservative Sopade, but at the same time NB drifted closer and closer to the social democrats' own reformist position.

German social democracy and the general term "socialism" recalled the original unity of the German workers' movement before the First World War. The party had survived the Anti-Socialist Laws and emerged in the 1890s stronger than ever before. In 1914, the SPD had preemptively sent an exile delegation to Switzerland for fear that the party might be outlawed when war broke out.³⁰ When the party decided to take similar action after the Nazi takeover, a significant portion of the SPD Reichstag faction insisted on keeping the movement within the bounds of legality even after the Enabling Act of March 1933 gave Hitler dictatorial powers.³¹ A series of events followed that destroyed

²⁷ Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, op. cit., 106-12. I have paraphrased the list.

²⁸ See Walter Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org [Neu Beginnen] 1929-1935. Eine zeitgenössische Analyse*, ed. Jan Foitzik (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), 95ff., 136ff.

²⁹ On the communist resistance generally, see Detlev Peukert, *Die KPD im Widerstand. Verfolgung und Untergrundarbeit an Rhein und Ruhr 1933 bis 1945* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1980); Hermann Weber, *Kommunistischer Widerstand gegen die Hitler-Diktatur 1933-1939*, Beiträge zum Widerstand, 33 (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1988).

³⁰ Per Kaiser Wilhelm's policy of "civil truce" [*Burgfrieden*] the SPD was not outlawed and, much to its later shame, voted repeatedly in favor of war credits. See Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1955), especially Ch. 11.

³¹ The leader of this faction was Paul Löbe. See his memoir *Erinnerungen eines Reichstagspräsidenten* (Berlin: Arani, 1949). For an overview of different social democrat points of view on the SPD's chances of weathering the Nazi storm, see William Smaldone, *Confronting Hitler: German Social Democrats in Defense of the Weimar Republic, 1929-1933* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Donna Harsch, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1993); Richard N. Hunt, *German Social Democracy, 1918-1933* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964); Helga Grebing,

the SPD as an active political organization in Germany: on May 10, the party's funds and property were confiscated; on June 22, Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick banned any further activities of the party; and on July 14, a law passed that banned all parties except for the NSDAP.

Several SPD executive board members emigrated after the Nazis arrested the leaders of the General German Federation of Trade Unions (ADGB) on May 1. They initially referred to themselves as the Representation Abroad [*Auslandsvertretung*] of the SPD. Otto Wels, Hans Vogel, Siegmund Crummenerl, Paul Hertz, and Erich Ollenhauer—with the exception of the last, all born between 1870 and 1895—established a bureau first in the Saarland and then in Prague with the purpose of aiding the party executive still based in Berlin.³² Their newspaper *Neuer Vorwärts* first appeared in Prague on June 18 under the editorship of Friedrich Stampfer (b. 1874). Karl Kautsky considered the paper the successor to *Der Sozialdemokrat*, which had been published abroad at the time of the Anti-Socialist Laws.³³ But by July 3, according to the scholar Lewis J. Edinger, “the Representation Abroad had become ‘the members of the party executive still at liberty’ and on July 30 signed a call to battle to all ‘who can fight and will fight for the liberation of Germany,’ as the ‘Executive of the German Social Democratic Party.’”³⁴ Through claiming the mandate for leadership of social democracy from the outlawed and imprisoned leadership inside Germany, the Sopade was born.

In response to pressure from New Beginning and more radical social democrats in exile like Siegfried Aufhäuser and Karl Böchel, the Sopade felt obliged to incorporate more revolutionary rhetoric into its program. The first issue of *Neuer Vorwärts* featured an appeal to German workers to “Break the Chains” that followed “closely the model of the *Communist Manifesto*.”³⁵ The first volume in the Sopade's pamphlet series “Problems of Socialism” bore the title “Revolution against Hitler: The Historical Task of German Social Democracy.”³⁶ The second volume was of course Miles/Loewenheim's *Neu beginnen!*, which besides a substantial critique of the old SPD leadership included a passionate call for socialist revolution.³⁷ Later volumes included one by the exiled Menshevik leader Georg Denicke called “Revolt and Revolution.”³⁸ In October 1933 the party-affiliated Graphia publishing house in Carlsbad also began issuing the theoretical journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, which grew into a monumental testament to the rich

“Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung und Nationalsozialismus 1924-1933,” in H. Grebing and Klaus Kinner, eds., *Arbeiterbewegung und Faschismus. Faschismus-Interpretationen in der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung* (Essen: Klartext, 1990), 237-46; Bäbel Hebel-Kunze, *SPD und Faschismus. Zur politischen und organisatorischen Entwicklung der SPD 1932-1935* (Frankfurt/Main: Röderberg, 1977).

³² Lewis J. Edinger, *German Exile Politics: The Social Democratic Executive Committee in the Nazi Era* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1956), 26ff.

³³ Karl Kautsky in *Neuer Vorwärts* of July 30, 1933, cited by Werner Berthold, *Exil-Literatur 1933-1945. Ausstellung der Deutschen Bibliothek, Frankfurt am Main, Mai bis August 1965*, Sonderveröffentlichungen der Deutschen Bibliothek, no. 1 (Frankfurt/Main: 1965), 100.

³⁴ Edinger, *German Exile Politics*, 37-38. The quotes are from *Neuer Vorwärts*.

³⁵ Edinger, *German Exile Politics*, 42.

³⁶ Anon. [probably Curt Geyer], *Revolution gegen Hitler. Die historische Aufgabe der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Probleme des Sozialismus, Nr. 1 (Carlsbad: Graphia, 1933).

³⁷ See Ch. 1.

³⁸ Georg Decker [i.e. Denicke], *Revolte und Revolution. Der Weg zur Freiheit*, Probleme des Sozialismus, Nr. 7 (Carlsbad: Graphia, 1934).

intellectual life of the early socialist emigration.³⁹ Under the editorship of Rudolf Hilferding (alias “Richard Kern”), the thirty-six issues of the *Zeitschrift* included contributions from, among others, Franz Borkenau (alias “Ludwig Neureither”), Rudolf Breitscheid, Konrad Heiden, Karl Kautsky, Harold J. Laski, Franz L. Neumann (alias “Leopold Franz”), Arthur Rosenberg (alias “Historicus”), and several New Beginning members.⁴⁰ Before Czechoslovak authorities compelled Graphia to change it, the original title of the journal was “Socialist Revolution!”

In his programmatic introduction to the first issue, Rudolf Hilferding declared that “[t]he struggle against the total state can only be a total revolution” and that the journal’s task was “the intellectual preparation for waging the struggle and exercising power [afterward].” To that end, he continued, the journal

will be a revolutionary organ, revolutionary not only in combatting the adversary, but revolutionary also in its ruthlessness toward its own movement [i.e. social democracy], its flaws, and its backwardness. . . . ¶ To recognize the road to power, to present the goals of exercising power, and to develop the methods of . . . asserting power—these are the tasks that must be discussed, clarified, and solved by a journal that was born in the time of the worst defeat but longs to take part in the fight to help usher in the triumphant day for freedom and socialism.⁴¹

The entire run of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* from October 1933 to September 1936 represented, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, a 1,136-page “victory wrenched from the powers of darkness.”⁴²

³⁹ More than a few articles from the journal have stood the test of time. See for example Franz Borkenau [pseud. Ludwig Neureither], “Staat und Revolution,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1, no. 6 (Mar. 1934), 180-85; Franz L. Neumann [pseud. Leopold Franz], “Rechtsstaat, Gewaltenteilung und Sozialismus,” *ZfS*, 1, no. 8 (May 1934), 254-61; Karl Kautsky, “Thomas More – ein sonderbarer Heiliger,” *ZfS*, 2, no. 20/21 (May/June 1935), 637-43; Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], “Die Wandlungen des Kapitalismus,” *ZfS*, 2, no. 22/23 (Aug. 1935), 704-25; Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], “Der Faschismus [Pt. 1],” *ZfS*, 2, no. 24/25 (Sept./Oct. 1935), 765-87; Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], “Der Faschismus [Pt. 2],” *ZfS*, 2, no. 26/27 (Nov./Dec. 1935), 839-56; Franz L. Neumann [pseud. Leopold Franz], “Zur marxistischen Staatstheorie,” *ZfS*, 2, no. 26/27 (Nov./Dec. 1935), 865-72; Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], “Historische Voraussetzungen des deutschen Nationalsozialismus,” *ZfS*, 3, no. 30 (Mar. 1936), 959-75; Peter M. Bergmann [pseud. Kurt Marso], “Der Etatismus [Pt. 1],” *ZfS*, 3, 31 (Apr. 1936), 994-1004; Peter M. Bergmann [pseud. Kurt Marso], “Der Etatismus [Pt. 2],” *ZfS*, 3, 32 (May 1936), 1030-37.

⁴⁰ New Beginning’s contributors were Richard Löwenthal (“Paul Sering”), Karl B. Frank (“Willi Müller”; “Paul Hagen”), Henry W. Ehrmann (“Fritz Alsen”), Peter M. Bergmann (“Kurt Marso”), and Moses Blatt (“J. Landau”). Other contributors who sympathized with New Beginning at one time or another included Paul Hertz, Gregor Bienstock, Bernhard Menne, and Raphael Abramowitsch.

⁴¹ Anon. [Rudolf Hilferding], “Die Zeit und die Aufgabe,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1933), 1-11 (10). Hilferding’s phrase “road to power” might have alluded to Karl Kautsky’s influential 1909 book *Der Weg zur Macht*, which offered a critique of the Bernsteinian revisionists and reformists in the SPD. See the English translation *The Road to Power* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996). Lenin often praised this book and felt betrayed by the “Pope of Marxism” Kautsky when the latter repudiated his earlier radicalism, sharply attacked the Bolsheviks, and defended parliamentary democracy in, among other works, his 1918 book *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, trans. H. J. Stenning (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1964). Another article appeared in the *Zeitschrift* in 1935 called “The Road to Power,” but I have been unable to identify its true author. See B. Irlen [probably pseud.], “Der Weg zur Macht,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 2, no. 26/27 (Nov./Dec. 1935), 856-65.

⁴² See the letter from Walter Benjamin (Paris) to Gershom Scholem, Jan. 11, 1940: “Every line we succeed in publishing today . . . is a victory wrenched from the powers of darkness.” *The Correspondence of Walter*

The *Zeitschrift* gave voice to all tendencies of the non-communist socialist emigration, including opponents of the Sopade. The scholar Lewis J. Edinger, writing in 1956, perceptively distinguished between an Old Left and a New Left opposition.⁴³ The former consisted of old social democrat rebels like Siegfried Aufhäuser and Karl Böchel (both b. 1884), who organized themselves into a faction called the German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD) in 1934.⁴⁴ The RSD had a strong following in Saxony and Thuringia, the old heartland of German socialism, and with the help of the sympathetic Sopade border secretary Willy Lange had at its disposal a broad network of underground contacts. In its official platform, the RSD called for “the reconstruction of the revolutionary socialist unity party” based on the Gotha and Erfurt programs of the pre-1914 SPD.⁴⁵ Socialist unity could not be achieved by a *new* party, they claimed, but only by a return to the original unity of the German workers’ movement. In practice, this meant creating a united front out of the existing SPD and KPD. The Old Left around Böchel and Aufhäuser wanted to bridge the first “great schism” of German social democracy that had occurred in 1905-17 by invoking the original intentions of the founders of scientific socialism.⁴⁶ The only new thing they added to Marx and Engels was a greater appreciation of the terroristic extent of the bourgeoisie’s willingness to defend itself, which was how they chose to interpret fascism.

New Beginning and the “New Left,” according to Edinger, also recognized the value of Marx and Engels’ original intentions, but they stressed much more than their older comrades the historical novelty of fascism and the need for a new socialist language to tackle the problems of the present. While the average age of the Old Left circa 1935 was fifty years old—about the same as the Sopade—the average age of NB’s new leadership was roughly twenty-five. Representing a younger generation more willing to shed the vestiges of social democratic tradition, NB looked to a new party of the future that would truly embody a “new beginning” for socialism, a dialectical break from the past that carried the past’s own progressive elements along with it. In place of the Old Left’s somewhat antiquated idea of revival, the New Left offered a future-oriented concept of renewal.

With the exception of Karl Frank (b. 1892), the leaders of NB’s foreign bureau all belonged to this renewers generation—on average two decades younger than the leaders of the Weimar-era workers’ parties. Henry W. Ehrmann for example was born in 1908 in Berlin, where he joined the Socialist Worker Youth (SAJ) in the mid-1920s and the SPD in 1927. He studied law at Berlin and Freiburg universities until 1932, when he earned his doctorate in jurisprudence. His career as a jurist back in Berlin lasted only a brief time until the Nazi seizure of power made further employment impossible, but it was long enough to make contact with the Org/NB. One of the few NB members to fall into Nazi hands during the early days of the regime, Ehrmann spent almost a year in the Oranienburg concentration camp before his release in 1934. He emigrated immediately,

Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932-1940, ed. G. Scholem, trans. Gary Smith and André Lefevre (New York: Schocken, 1989), 262-64 (262).

⁴³ Edinger, *German Exile Politics*, 78-90.

⁴⁴ See Jutta von Freyberg, *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten. Die revolutionären Sozialisten Deutschlands vor dem Problem der Aktionseinheit 1934-1937* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1973).

⁴⁵ Arbeitskreis revolutionärer Sozialisten [i.e. the RSD], “Der Weg zum sozialistischen Deutschland. Eine Plattform für die Einheitsfront,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1, no. 12/13 (Sept./Oct. 1934), 375-409 (406).

⁴⁶ See Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917*, op. cit.

settling in Paris and running NB's operations there under the pseudonym "Paul Bernhard." As with every NB functionary, he went by many additional names ("Paul Scheffler"; "Sieburg"; "Lamprecht"; "Olga") and contributed numerous articles and reviews to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* under the name "Fritz Alsen." Fluent in French and well connected after 1936 with Léon Blum's Popular Front government, Bernhard/Ehrmann proved one of the most useful assets in NB's antifascist network.

New Beginning's man in Switzerland, where stricter refugee policies made it harder to carry on exile politics, was Erich Schmidt. Born in Berlin's working-class neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg in 1910, Schmidt learned the printer's trade and joined the SAJ in 1926. He was one of the earliest members of the SAJ to be "co-opted" by the Org/NB in 1932, and Walter Loewenheim considered him a kind of protégé. After his arrest in 1933 in connection with the SAJ and his accidental release as the wrong "Erich Schmidt," he made his way to Bern, where he won the support of local Swiss social democrats and began running an NB station under the name "Kirchner." He published journal and newspaper articles there under the pseudonym "Erwin Sander," an especially prudent tactic in Switzerland because of its law that forbade political refugees from working in any capacity, including journalism. Regarding the Austro-German emigration in Switzerland, Kirchner/Schmidt considered himself both an exception to and a representative of the norm: "I felt useful and fully employed, rare feelings among émigrés. I was in this sense a special case, but I also shared with all émigrés the fate of people without civil rights, without the means of making a living, without a future."⁴⁷ At the time Schmidt believed that his future lay with the German workers' movement, but as NB's revolutionary hope began to fade toward the end of the 1930s, apocalyptic visions took its place.

In addition to its core members, New Beginning also had an active periphery in exile. Ossip K. Flechtheim (b. 1909) was a good example of someone who started in the Org/NB's core, albeit in the "province" of Düsseldorf, but moved onto the group's periphery after going into exile. After his arrest and brief detainment in Düsseldorf, he left Germany for Switzerland and, heeding the advice of legal scholar Hans Kelsen, enrolled at the University Institute for Advanced Studies in Geneva.⁴⁸ Faculty at the Institute included the émigrés Kelsen, Ludwig von Mises, and Wilhelm Röpke, and Flechtheim fell in with a group of fellow renewers in exile that included the literary critic Hans Mayer (b. 1907), the historian Ernst Engelberg (b. 1909), and the political scientist John H. Herz (b. 1908)—the last of whom he already knew from Düsseldorf.⁴⁹ All of these friends had undergone roughly the same political socialization in Berlin's dissident communist milieu of the late 1920s, but only Flechtheim had direct ties to New

⁴⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 45. For more on NB's activities in Switzerland and especially the role of Erwin Schoettle, see Hermann Wichers, *Im Kampf gegen Hitler. Deutsche Sozialisten im schweizer Exil 1933-1940* (Zürich: Chronos, 1994), 256-71.

⁴⁸ See Mario Keßler, *Ossip K. Flechtheim. Politischer Wissenschaftler und Zukunftsdenkler (1909-1998)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 45ff. Flechtheim's first stop after fleeing Germany was Brussels, and initially he underestimated the danger and wanted to return to Germany as soon as possible. If not for the sage advice of his NB friends in Belgium, he may not have gone on to Switzerland. As he later admitted, NB "saved me" (qtd. p. 47, my trans.).

⁴⁹ Keßler, *Ossip K. Flechtheim*, 49ff. The Geneva Institute was the forerunner of today's Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

Beginning. The circle also collaborated with the Institute for Social Research, contributing reviews to its journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.⁵⁰

Although Flechtheim might have agreed with his NB comrade in Switzerland Erich Schmidt that their political future was bleak, his own academic future looked rather bright. In 1936 he published the dissertation rejected by the faculty at the University of Cologne (namely Carl Schmitt), “The Hegelian Theory of Criminal Law.” By 1938 he had completed his thesis at the Institute, “Bolshevism’s Struggle for the World.”⁵¹ Despite his growing political pessimism after Hitler’s repeated foreign policy triumphs in the Saarland, the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland, Flechtheim maintained an active connection to New Beginning. A series of letters between him and Richard Löwenthal (alias “Paul Sering,” NB’s leading theorist after 1935) indicated that Flechtheim had lent Löwenthal money to help during his first weeks in exile and that, after arriving in London, Löwenthal relied on Flechtheim to forward him NB-related reports and manuscripts. In return, he put Flechtheim in touch with Theodor W. Adorno and helped him find more stable employment at the Institute for Social Research.⁵² Flechtheim corresponded regularly with “Richter” (Erich Schmidt), “Willi” (Karl B. Frank), and “Ilse” (his one-time girlfriend Vera Franke), but as evidence of his peripheral status within the group, he always used his real name Flechtheim. He quite possibly established a “Gesag” working group in Geneva, which served as the chief organizational form of New Beginning’s periphery.⁵³

The NB foreign bureau established additional stations in Zürich, Warsaw, London, Brussels, and Vienna. While the members who ran these stations like Henry W. Ehrmann and Erich Schmidt sought to cultivate local contacts and win the support of native socialist parties, a number of NB’s theorists traveled between these stations as itinerant members. Richard Löwenthal (b. 1908), F. L. Carsten (b. 1911), Lucy Ackerknecht (b. 1913), Lotte Abrahamsohn (b. 1908), Evelyn Anderson (b. 1909), Paul Anderson (b. 1908), Horst Mendershausen (b. 1911), Jerry Jeremias (b. 1908), and Else Gronenberg (b. 1909) all served this function. Among the group’s most important outside contacts were Edo Fimmen and Hans Jahn of the Amsterdam-based International Transport Workers’

⁵⁰ Hans Mayer, multiple reviews 1934-39, including “Ossip Kurt Flechtheim, Hegels Strafrechtstheorie,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 6, no. 3 (1937), 662; H. Herz [i.e. John H. Herz], Review: “Julius Binder, Grundlegung zur Rechtsphilosophie,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 6, no. 3 (1937), 704-5; Ossip K. Flechtheim, Review: “Rudolf Kaulia, Staat, Stände und der gerechte Preis,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 7, no. 1/2 (1938), 306-7.

⁵¹ Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Hegelsche Strafrechtstheorie* (Brünn; Prague; Leipzig; Vienna: Rohrer, 1936); Flechtheim, “Der Kampf des Bolschewismus um die Welt,” Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales (Geneva), 1939. He later incorporated the latter study into his book *Bolschewismus 1917-1967. Von der Weltrevolution zum Sowjetimperium* (Vienna; Frankfurt/Main; Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1967).

⁵² Various letters from Richard Löwenthal to Ossip K. Flechtheim (Geneva), Nov. 1935-Oct. 1937, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

⁵³ Gesag was the acronym for “Gesellschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaften,” where “gesellschaftlich” referred to something like good or respectable society. For Marxists that generally meant the bourgeoisie. See Ch. 1. Another possible meaning was simply society at large, rather than just working-class or radical intellectual circles. That would be in keeping with the Popular Front politics of the time. See below. The Central Committee (ZK) of the KPD, which had intercepted some correspondence of the NB foreign bureau, identified Flechtheim as the “Miles representative in Geneva.” See “Schlüssel” (ca. summer 1937), BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/405.

Federation (ITF), which supported German socialist splinter groups of all kinds.⁵⁴ Coded correspondence and situation reports circulated among the group's rank and file. Free discussion reigned in most meetings and exchanges, with agendas set in advance but results open to debate. And although the new leaders of NB had all been liberated from the authoritarian strictures of Loewenheim's Org, they more or less deferred to a new charismatic leader in the person of Karl B. Frank.

Frank belonged to the front generation of German-Austrian socialists, but his youthful demeanor, radical political ideas, and romantic revolutionary exploits endeared him to the interwar New Left.⁵⁵ He gave the impression, in the words of Erich Schmidt, of a

cool, calculating professional revolutionary, whose doe eyes that you could melt into [schmelzenden Rehaugenblick] made him look rather like the heartthrob pop stars of the French avant-garde films of those years—a lucky factor that was of great use to him. . . . [T]here was no other politician in the emigration who attracted so much trust and admiration as Karl Frank.⁵⁶

He also attracted an equal measure of distrust and contempt. His enemies liked to point out that he “made amazing, unimpeded trips into the German interior, whose success could not be explained by intelligence and courage alone nor simply by luck.”⁵⁷ Such accusatory rumors implied that Frank was somehow in league with the powers of darkness. As Schmidt made clear, however, Frank's task of maintaining the connections between the New Beginning network's exilic and non-exilic points required a combination of intelligence, courage, and no small amount of luck. And his excursions into Germany were certainly not as “unimpeded” as the rumors suggested. Police had nearly captured him twice—once in Berlin when the Gestapo raided the apartment of a political associate he was visiting,⁵⁸ and a second time while crossing over the Giant Mountains from Czechoslovakia into Germany. He apparently ran into a snowstorm, fell

⁵⁴ A group with especially close ties to the ITF was the International Socialist Fighting League (ISK), which advocated a neo-Kantian ethical socialism inspired by the thought of Leonard Nelson. ISK also cultivated a number of alternative lifestyles, like vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. See Heiner Lindner, “Um etwas zu erreichen, muss man sich etwas vornehmen, von dem man glaubt, dass es unmöglich sei.” *Der Internationale Sozialistische Kampfbund und seine Publikationen* (Bonn/Bad Godesberg: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2006); Sabine Lemke-Müller, ed., *Ethik des Widerstands. Der Kampf des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kampfbundes (ISK) gegen den Nationalsozialismus: Quellen und Texte zum Widerstand aus der Arbeiterbewegung 1933-1945* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1996); Walter Struve, “Leonard Nelson: The Rule of the Just,” *Elites against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973), 186ff.; Werner Link, *Die Geschichte des Internationalen Jugend-Bundes (IJB) und des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kampfbundes (ISK). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich*, Marburger Abhandlungen zur politischen Wissenschaft, Vol. 1 (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1964).

⁵⁵ For more on Frank, see Ch. 1. He was a prime example of the kind of “romantic revolutionary” that first arose in the nineteenth century (e.g. Simón Bolívar, Giuseppe Garibaldi) and persisted well into the twentieth (e.g. John Reed, Max Hoelz, Karl Radek, La Pasionaria). In his many brushes with the law, Frank also resembled Eric Hobsbawm's figure of the “social bandit.” See Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Norton, 1965).

⁵⁶ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 35. Schmidt might have had in mind Jean Gabin, star of Jean Renoir's films *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and *La Bête humaine* (1938), who bore a certain rugged resemblance to Frank.

⁵⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 35.

⁵⁸ The apartment belonged to the SAP leader Max Seydewitz. See Ch. 1.

unconscious, and was apprehended by Czechoslovak border guards who planned to turn him over to the Germans. After waking up, he managed to escape the guards' hut and ski cross-country to Berlin, where he arrived with badly frostbitten limbs.⁵⁹

Frank always considered his calculated risks incomparable with “the danger of life and limb with which our comrades still fighting inside Germany had to reckon every day.”⁶⁰ “It was the established principle of our organization,” he later wrote, “that members abroad should be ready to take as great risks as the members inside.”⁶¹ Under Frank's charismatic spell fell the Sopade executive member Paul Hertz; the Sopade border secretaries Erwin Schoettle, Waldemar von Knoeringen, and Franz Böglér; the leader of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) Friedrich Adler; the Swiss social democrats Robert Grimm and Ernst Reinhard; and the Austrian revolutionary socialist Joseph Buttinger.⁶² Friends described him as a genuine “gemütlicher Mensch” who would stay up with his comrades into the late hours drinking wine and telling tales from his adventures. Karl Frank stood larger than life, and his charisma was perhaps the main reason why New Beginning could sustain its influence in exile politics well after the initial excitement of the Miles pamphlet had worn off. In 1935 Walter Loewenheim, the Org's original charismatic leader, provided a relatively balanced evaluation of Karl Frank: “he was the standard type of courageous person devoted to the revolutionary cause, but with a large dose of adventurism and high-risk gambling.”⁶³

Frank did not stand well with the Sopade in Prague. At first the Sopade showed itself willing, perhaps grudgingly, to finance the work of New Beginning. Here was a group of young, radical social democrats and critical communists who had a real underground organization in Germany and real prestige abroad. In the fall of 1933 the embattled and delegitimized Sopade deemed it politically prudent to humble itself before this group of militant young socialists, to publish its revolutionary pamphlet, and to ride its coattails to prominence in the émigré public sphere. Shortly after the Miles pamphlet appeared, Karl Frank wrote diplomatically to the Sopade that reviews of the English edition had in general portrayed the Sopade “just as honorably” as the Org/NB. The work

⁵⁹ James A. Wechsler, “An Early Anti-Nazi,” *PM*, ca. 1944, Karl B. Frank Papers, 3: Lectures 1943-1944. Despite some embellishment by Frank and his admirer Wechsler, this story probably had more than a grain of truth in it. In Frank's own version of the story, he was caught in the snowstorm, “fainted and was picked up by some Sudeten German Nazis who had a mountain cabin nearby. Although my hands were frozen I managed to get away from the cabin the next day and continued my trip to Berlin and Breslau. Returning a few weeks later [I was discovered by] the same Sudeten Nazis . . . [who] turned me over [superscript: “denounced by telephone”] to the Czech police as a Nazi crossing the border illegally [sic!]. It was only the intervention of Mr. [Franz] Boegler which saved me from being handed over to the Germans by the Czechs as a result of this denunciation.” Letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7. Wechsler, a left-wing American journalist who would edit the *New York Post* after the war, was a life-long devotee of Frank. See his articles “The Man We Lost,” *New York Post* (Dec. 1, 1966), 36, and ““This Was a Man,”” *New York Post* (June 3, 1969), 57.

⁶⁰ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 35.

⁶¹ Letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7.

⁶² When the Austrian social democrats set up their underground organization after February 1934, they asked Frank to instruct them in conspiratorial tactics. See letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, DC), July 31, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7.

⁶³ Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 182. This was probably the last time that Loewenheim and his friends had anything positive to say about Frank. Their enmity, mostly one-sided, lasted until the grave.

of New Beginning, according to Frank, continued to benefit the “movement as a whole.”⁶⁴ For a while at least, the Sopade found it convenient to agree with this assessment.

The decisive change in the Sopade’s course came in December 1934 when it abruptly cut off funding to the group. It reached its decision at a meeting in Prague while Frank was away in Austria. One of his deputies briefly represented New Beginning at the meeting before the Sopade withdrew behind closed doors. The Sopade had acquired confidential letters from Karl Böchel’s files which indicated that the German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD) and NB were conspiring together against the Sopade. What exactly the letters said and how the Sopade acquired them remain a mystery, but they were used as a pretense for purging the revolutionary socialists—both the Old and the New Left—from the social democratic ranks.⁶⁵ Since that summer, the Sopade had backpedaled from the radicalism of the Prague Manifesto toward a more moderate, reformist position.⁶⁶ When Karl Frank complained about the undemocratic procedure with which the Sopade had reached its decision against the revolutionary socialists, the Sopade simply postponed discussing the matter until after the holidays.

Frank immediately appealed to Friedrich Adler and the LSI and informed the Sopade that because it now withheld “an already agreed-upon sum, an immediate danger has arisen for our comrades in the Reich.”⁶⁷ Frank, Böchel, Siegfried Aufhäuser, and Willy Lange penned a protest letter in late January 1935 that demanded the reinstatement of NB’s funding and an investigation into how the Sopade had procured the confidential files. “It is truly unprecedented in the history of the party,” the letter stated, “that a part of the movement is deprived of vital [financial] means” so suddenly and unjustifiably. Such “arbitrary acts by the acting trustees [of the party] in exile” only serve to injure those “comrades in Germany who confront fascism under the most awful conditions of terror.” Reminding the Sopade that in its Prague Manifesto it had declared “the old [party] apparatus dead and attempts to revive it rejected,” the representatives of NB and the RSD warned that “the worst habits of the old apparatus are celebrating a resurrection.”⁶⁸

Regardless of whether they were in fact “the worst” habits, the Sopade had indeed fallen back into old habits by the end of 1934. After having flirted with a revolutionary

⁶⁴ Letter from Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank] (London) to Siegmund Crummenerl (Prague), Nov. 22, 1933, NB Archives, 1/44. It is possible that the Sopade developed its generally negative impression of Frank due to the machinations of Walter Loewenheim and the Org’s old leadership circle. Loewenheim traveled to Zürich in early August 1934 for a meeting with Siegmund Crummenerl, Otto Wels, and Friedrich Adler to discuss the Org/NB’s funding situation—a meeting to which Frank was not invited. See letter from Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank] (Prague) to Siegmund Crummenerl (Zürich), Aug. 5, 1934, NB Archives, 1/34.

⁶⁵ According to Loewenheim, Frank along with Böchel, Aufhäuser, and Lange had indeed attempted in May 1934 to organize an “opposition congress” in exile that would openly challenge the Sopade’s authority. The Org leadership supposedly convinced them to build a secret “Left cartel” instead, which would work conspiratorially within the Sopade ranks. This approach corresponded to the original Org conception of infiltration rather than fission. The cartel apparently worked together from the summer of 1934 through the spring of 1935, which overlapped the controversy over the Böchel files. See Loewenheim, *Geschichte der Org*, 183-84.

⁶⁶ On the Prague Manifesto, see Ch. 1.

⁶⁷ Letter from Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank] to Siegmund Crummenerl (Prague), Dec. 27, 1934, NB Archives, 1/26.

⁶⁸ Letter from Karl Böchel, Willy Lange, Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank], and Siegfried Aufhäuser (Prague) to the office of the Sopade (Prague), Jan. 22, 1935, NB Archives, 7/1.

socialist reorientation, the Sopade entered a moderate, liberal-reformist phase from the summer of 1934 through 1939. During this period the relationship between social democratic leaders and groups like New Beginning soured, prompting the Sopade to expel Aufhäuser and Böchel from the party executive, cut funding to New Beginning, and distance itself from Paul Hertz, who by 1936 worked closely with NB's foreign bureau.⁶⁹ Whereas the Prague Manifesto had recapitulated many of the ideas advanced by New Beginning and other revolutionary socialist groups and had pledged support for "all groups operating in accordance with socialism," the Sopade's new course fell back on "old antagonisms" and reaffirmed the legitimate mandate of the social democratic "trustees."⁷⁰ The Sopade definition of socialism had once again narrowed to the old parameters of the Weimar SPD.

The leading intellectual of the Sopade's liberal turn was Curt Geyer (alias "Max Klinger"), whose 1939 pamphlet "The Party of Freedom" defended liberal democracy against the "dictatorial" organizational theories of New Beginning and the Austromarxist Otto Bauer.⁷¹ Although Geyer's ideas went beyond what the orthodox Sopade leaders were willing to endorse, his rejection of the Marxist notion of class struggle and his redefinition of socialism as just a more social form of liberal democracy anticipated the direction taken by the SPD in the decades after 1945.⁷² And in addition to this liberal tendency already present within the Sopade milieu, many interpreted the external factor of the Röhm purge in July 1934—the so-called "Night of the Long Knives"—as a sign of Hitler's weakness. The Sopade majority convinced itself that the Nazi regime's days were numbered and that the exiles would soon return to restore the old social democratic movement. New Beginning's call for the creation of a new, revolutionary socialist party now fell on deaf ears. The Old Center, if one might spatialize the Sopade's position, had regained its confidence.

But the Sopade grew disconnected from the underground struggle in Germany. Although it had published an impressive set of reports on German internal affairs,⁷³

⁶⁹ Hertz edited the journal *Sozialistische Aktion*, a miniature version of *Neuer Vorwärts* that was typically smuggled into Germany disguised as something innocuous, like an advertisement for razor blades. His collaboration with NB and control over this journal meant that he presented social democratic positions to the anti-Nazi underground from a revolutionary socialist point of view even after the Sopade's moderate turn in the summer of 1934. According to Edinger, the Sopade excluded Hertz from further meetings of the executive starting in March 1938 and at the same time withdrew its financial support for *Sozialistische Aktion*. Edinger, *German Exile Politics*, 216. See also Berthold, *Exil-Literatur 1933-1945*, op. cit., 101.

⁷⁰ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 37-38.

⁷¹ Curt Geyer, *Die Partei der Freiheit* (Paris: Graphia, 1939), reprinted in Kurt Klotzbach, ed., *Drei Schriften aus dem Exil* (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Dietz, 1974) along with the primary objects of his critique: Miles, *Neu beginnen!* (1933) and Otto Bauer, *Die illegale Partei* (posth. 1939). There were elitist and even totalitarian aspects to the "liberal" brand of interwar socialism, e.g. the baffling idea of a "totalitarian program" of freedom advanced by Werner Thormann (pseud. "Ernst Henrichsen") in his article "Von den Oppositionen zum Freiheitskampf," *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 2, no. 22/23 (Jul./Aug. 1935), 689-97. See Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation*, op. cit., 219-20.

⁷² See Chs. 4-5. For Geyer's unorthodox position in the socialist emigration, see Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation*, 220-22, 331-32n178. After emigrating to London, Geyer really went off the rails by throwing in his lot with the anti-German Vansittartists. He was expelled from the SPD in 1942.

⁷³ The official name was the *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands-Sopade*, but since their covers were green they were more commonly known as the "Green Reports." Starting in 1937, the British Labour Party commissioned an English translation (*Germany Reports*) and, when the Graphia publishing house relocated to Paris after the German annexation of the Sudetenland, a French

several waves of Gestapo arrests in 1935-36—the same that struck NB—disrupted its underground contacts. Furthermore, nearly all the Sopade border secretaries in the Sudetenland, Switzerland, France, Belgium, and Poland whose job it was to cultivate these contacts had fallen under the influence of NB, which collected their information in its own “Reports on the Situation in Germany.” For a while, NB’s reports had a more authoritative international reputation than the Sopade’s own.⁷⁴

The leading Sopade border secretary who went over to NB was Waldemar von Knoeringen. Born in 1906 in a small Upper Bavarian town to a minor noble family, Knoeringen joined the Munich SAJ and SPD in 1926, where he soon earned the teasing nickname “Red Baron.” An intellectual and librarian-in-training, he joined the republican defense league Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold in 1930 perhaps in an effort to toughen up his image. He emigrated immediately after the Nazi takeover and worked out of Vienna until the Dollfuss putsch in March. After that he received a mandate from the Sopade to develop an underground network in Munich and Upper Bavaria from his Czechoslovak border station in Neuern (Nýrsko). For the next five years he cultivated one of the best informed, most extensive underground resistance organizations in Germany.

The Miles pamphlet had a great effect on Knoeringen at the end of 1933. He had already met Karl Frank in Vienna, and it is quite possible that he thought of himself as working in the Org/NB’s interests well before he received his Sopade mandate. The underground cell that he had founded, which knew him as “Michel” and consciously identified with the ideas of New Beginning, survived long after he himself had to relocate to Paris in 1938.⁷⁵ Unfortunately the cost of continuing resistance work into the early war years was high. Along with several other members of Knoeringen’s group, two of its leaders Bebo Wager and Hermann Frieb were arrested in 1942 and executed the following year.⁷⁶

Other border secretaries who worked in NB’s interests included Erwin Schoettle in St. Gallen, Franz Bögler in Trautenau (Trutnov), the Old Left representative Willy Lange in Carlsbad, Emil Kirschmann in Saarbrücken, Forbach, and Mulhouse, and Georg Reinbold in Strasbourg and Luxemburg. Out of the thirteen Sopade border secretaries,

edition also appeared (*Rapports d’Allemagne*). See Werner Plum, ed., *Die “Grünen Berichte” der Sopade. Gedenkschrift für Erich Rinner (1902-1982)* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1984). The full run of the reports has been reprinted as *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (Salzhausen: Petra Nettelbeck; Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 1980).

⁷⁴ NB’s reports have been reprinted in Bernd Stöver, ed., *Berichte über die Lage in Deutschland. Die Lagemeldungen der Gruppe Neu Beginnen aus dem Dritten Reich 1933-1936*, Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, Beiheft Nr. 17 (Bonn: Dietz, 1996).

⁷⁵ See Helga Grebing and Dietmar Süß, eds., *Waldemar von Knoeringen 1906-1971. Ein Erneuerer der deutschen Sozialdemokratie: Reden, Aufsätze, Briefwechsel und Kommentare zu Leben und Wirken* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 2006); Hartmut Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen – Eine politische Biographie. Der Weg vom revolutionären Sozialismus zur sozialen Demokratie* (Munich; London: K. G. Saur, 1989).

⁷⁶ See Annedore Leber, ed., *Conscience in Revolt: Sixty-four Stories of Resistance in Germany, 1933-45* [1954], trans. Rosemary O’Neill (London: Vallentine; Mitchell, 1957), which includes chapters on Bebo Wager and another New Beginning member who lost his life in Berlin, Oskar Umrath. See also Eugen Nerdinger, *Die unterliegen nicht, die für eine grosse Sache sterben! Fragen und Antworten über Tat, Grund und Bedeutung des Augsburger Widerstandskämpfers Bebo Wager* (Augsburg: F. Fröhlich Unterbezirk der SPD, 1965).

then, at least six worked either directly for or in the spirit of New Beginning.⁷⁷ Regardless of political differences, however, both NB and the Sopade's final disconnection from the German underground came in the fall of 1939, when they relocated together to London in anticipation of the German invasion of France.

Within the non-communist socialist emigration, whose group characteristics the historian Erich Matthias outlined in 1952, three dominant tendencies emerged. The first, liberal democratic socialism—or what Matthias rather awkwardly referred to as “political humanism of a West European character”⁷⁸—stressed the importance in the post-Hitler order of a freely elected parliament, the pursuit of working-class goals through parliamentary means only, and the reconciliation of the needs of the working class with the needs of society at large. Freedom, democracy, and ethical commitment featured as the chief values of this tendency, while revolution, class struggle, and Marxist scientific socialism receded into the background if not disappeared altogether.

The second tendency identified by Matthias was a radical workers' socialism. The Sopade vacillated between these two, acting more liberal during its initial phase until August 1933, more radical until the summer of 1934, again more liberal until 1939-40, and again slightly more radical during its final years in London exile. Until the war and quite a while into it, New Beginning consistently embodied a radical workers' socialism, calling for the revolutionary renewal of Marxism, of European socialism, and of the whole socialist mass organization from the ground up. Socialism needed new leaders and a new language, argued NB theorists like Richard Löwenthal, and only then could “socialist workers' parties *modernize* themselves.”⁷⁹ New Beginning's rhetoric began to assimilate liberal principals in London and New York exile, but not at the same rate as the Sopade.

Matthias' third tendency was alien to both organizations: “people's socialism” [*Volkssozialismus*]. Socially more conservative than either liberalism or radicalism, this tendency exalted the cultural importance of the nation alongside socialist values.⁸⁰ If New Beginning represented the New Left of the German socialist emigration, then the people's socialists represented a kind of “New Right.” The Sudeten German social democrat Wenzel Jaksch's 1936 book “Folk and Workers” was representative of this tendency.⁸¹ His plan for a “national factory community,” Emil Franzel's vision of an “Occidental Revolution” [*Abendländische Revolution*], and Wilhelm Sollmann's paeans to the “soul of the German worker and peasant people” sounded a lot like the rhetoric of the National Bolsheviks or Otto Strasser's left-wing National Socialists. Richard Löwenthal and other critics noted this similarity with contempt.⁸² Of Matthias' three

⁷⁷ The other border secretaries who either opposed or did not seem to have any connection to NB were Hans Dill in Mies, Switzerland; Kurt Weck, who from 1935 on was Lange's replacement in Carlsbad; Emil Stahl in Reichenberg (Liberec); Otto Thiele in Bodenbach (part of present-day Děčín); Richard Hansen in Copenhagen; Ernst Schumacher in Arnhem and Antwerp; and Gustav Ferl in Brussels.

⁷⁸ Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation*, 47 and passim.

⁷⁹ Paul Sering [i.e. Richard Löwenthal], “Was ist der Volkssozialismus?” *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 3, no. 36 (Sept. 1936), 1105-36 (1120-21). Emphasis in original.

⁸⁰ For his summary of the three tendencies, see Matthias, *Sozialdemokratie und Nation*, 216-34.

⁸¹ Wenzel Jaksch, *Volk und Arbeiter. Deutschlands europäische Sendung* (Bratislava: Eugen Prager Verlag, 1936).

⁸² Paul Sering, “Was ist der Volkssozialismus?” op. cit., 1105-6. The issue of Sollmann's alleged antisemitism and his connection to Strasser would return in New York exile politics in 1941, when adherents of the right-wing social democrat paper *Neue Volkszeitung* and the quasi-official German Labor

tendencies, people's socialism was the shortest lived, probably because it bore too close a resemblance to Nazism.

Breaking from Communism

Within the liberal, radical, and *völkisch* tendencies a subject of constant debate was whether to orient German socialism toward the democratic (but capitalist) West or the communist (but dictatorial) East. Opposite the Sopade and the Labour and Socialist International stood the German communists and the Comintern as the second great magnetic pole of the socialist emigration. For a while, New Beginning viewed the two camps as offering a false alternative; socialist renewal instead required a *united workers'* movement, and that meant making overtures to the communists. Many NB members had acquired their earliest political education in one communist organization or another. The fire of Red October still burned bright for European socialists of all kinds. But the antifascist struggle in exile during the 1930s initiated a gradual disillusionment with Soviet communism that even revolutionary socialists could not withstand.

It was not always the case that international communism represented so narrowly the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union. Scholars of communism generally agree that in their earliest years, European communist parties operated with a great deal of autonomy. At its Second World Congress in July and August 1920, the Comintern laid out the notorious "Twenty-One Conditions" for membership: communist parties had to subordinate their propaganda and agitation work to the official line of the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI); to purge reformists, "centrists," and bourgeois "opportunists" from their ranks; to break all ties with social democracy and the LSI; to infiltrate trade unions, workers' and soldiers' councils, consumer and producer cooperatives, and other proletarian mass organizations; to organize themselves on the principles of democratic centralism and iron party discipline; to obey unquestioningly all decisions of the ECCI; and, finally, to expel any party members who "fundamentally reject the conditions and Theses laid down by the Communist International."⁸³ Lenin, Zinoviev, and the other Bolshevik leaders justified these authoritarian conditions on the grounds that the world was in a state of civil war and that the reactionary capitalists would use any means necessary to crush the socialist movement. From a Russian perspective and indeed a German perspective in the year 1920, such fears seemed justified.⁸⁴

Delegation mounted a campaign against Karl Frank, accusing him among other things of slandering Sollmann. See Renaud, "The German Resistance in New York: Karl B. Frank and the New Beginning Group, 1935-1945," B.A. (Boston University, 2007), <http://terencerenaud.com/german_resistance.htm> (accessed Apr. 2014).

⁸³ For the full text, see "Twenty-One Conditions," Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-one_Conditions> (accessed Feb. 2014).

⁸⁴ Debates over whether to accept the Comintern's conditions divided several leading European socialist parties, like the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO), from which a faction split off that would form the French Communist Party (PCF). The German Independent Social Democrats (USPD), who had already split off from the SPD in 1917 in protest against the party's continued support for the war, refused to accept the conditions. The German Communist Party (KPD), in contrast, accepted the conditions wholeheartedly, but it did threaten to walk out of the congress due to the presence of the ultra-leftist, quasi-anarchist German Communist Workers' Party (KAPD). The leader of the KPD at the time was Paul Levi, a close associate of the assassinated founders of the party Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Leo Jogiches. Levi would later become the intellectual and political mentor of Walter Loewenheim and the

In 1928 began the third period in the history of the Comintern, which saw a revival of the so-called “ultra-leftist” course of its early years. The most characteristic feature of this period, and perhaps the most tragic, was the communists’ baffling theory of “social fascism.” Because social democrats advocated conciliatory policies toward the bourgeoisie, so the theory went, then *objectively*—that is, over and above any subjective intentions—they worked in the interests of capitalism, whose most advanced political form was fascism. Social democrats thus appeared to communists as imaginary social fascists. This kind of “dialectical” logic made any united socialist front against the Nazis in 1932-33 impossible, even had the SPD leaders welcomed communist overtures (which they did not). The social fascism thesis symbolized the self-destruction of the German workers’ movement. It served as the communists’ complement to the social democrat trade unionists’ failure to call a general strike after the Prussian coup in July 1932.⁸⁵

After 1933 many communists in the anti-Nazi underground disregarded the directives of the KPD Central Committee (ZK) in exile and entered into tactical alliances with social democrats wherever possible. In 1934-35 the ZK dialed back the accusations of social fascism and made a concerted effort to build a united front. But of course the Sopade and other socialist groups greeted this change of heart with skepticism.⁸⁶ Although pleased with the new communist line, New Beginning too remained cautious. Walter Loewenheim arranged a meeting with Klement Gottwald, leader of the Czech communists, on July 12, 1934, but to little effect: Gottwald, noted Loewenheim, made a “very bigwig-like impression” [*sehr verbonzten Eindruck*] by apparently snubbing his NB interlocutors.⁸⁷

The ZK had tried repeatedly to split off the left-wing elements of the social democratic emigration and instrumentalize them for its united front plans. Karl Böchel and Siegfried Aufhäuser seemed like easy targets for this “splitting-off policy” [*Spaltungspolitik*], especially because their own group, the RSD, had propagandized loudly in favor of a united front. Suspicion that Böchel and Aufhäuser had actually considered a communist offer (which they did not) gave the Sopade another reason to cut off funding to the RSD and New Beginning in December 1934.⁸⁸ This hostile splitting-off policy made NB leaders wary of becoming pawns in the Comintern’s game. Ironically, the ZK in 1935 expressed concern that New Beginning itself might try to split off and recruit members from the KPD inside Germany.⁸⁹

original Berlin discussion circle that formed the Org in 1929. Interestingly enough, one of Levi’s supporters in the KPD party executive [*Zentrale*] was Curt Geyer, who would later advocate the most liberal position in the social democratic emigration.

⁸⁵ Erwin Schoettle recalled that after the Prussian coup, people said that the trade unionists and the whole workers’ movement “out of fear of death [had] committed suicide.” Schoettle, “Die unerwartete Revolution und ihre Folgen. Die letzten 50 Jahre tätig mitgemacht,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 15, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1968), 469-72 (471).

⁸⁶ For a thorough analysis of the KPD during this period, see Horst Duhnke, *Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972).

⁸⁷ Log-book entry by Walter Loewenheim [presumably], “Aufsuchen von Gottwald,” NB Archives, 5/11. See also Jan Foitzik, *Zwischen den Fronten*, 106.

⁸⁸ Letter from Karl Böchel, Willy Lange, Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank], and Siegfried Aufhäuser (Prague) to the office of the Sopade (Prague), Jan. 22, 1935, NB Archives, 7/1.

⁸⁹ Report “Zur hiesigen Lage / St. Gallen,” 1935, BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/312. After a meeting with “Miles” (maybe Loewenheim, but the report suggested that it might have been Karl Frank) in February 1935, the ZK operative “Franz” even had the impression that “Miles himself does not know how strong the position

The common threat of real, not imagined, fascism sustained interest in unified socialist action. Perhaps recognizing the difficulty of the situation in Germany and the rise of fascist and reactionary movements in France and Spain, the Comintern made an about-face at its Seventh (and last) World Congress in July-August 1935. The new strategy of the “Popular Front” would remain in effect until the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939. During this period, cooperation between communists, social democrats, socialist splinter groups, and bourgeois democrats became possible in a variety of different combinations, not all of which the Comintern explicitly approved: popular fronts that included bourgeois antifascists, united fronts of communists and social democrats, and socialist “concentrations” which excluded communists.

The first serious attempt to build a German Popular Front [*Volksfront*] occurred at the Hotel Lutetia in Paris between September 1935 and April 1937. The communist impresario Willi Münzenberg organized these meetings of the SPD regional committee [*Landesgruppe*], KPD, SAP, RSD, and luminaries of the German emigration like Heinrich Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger.⁹⁰ Neither New Beginning nor the Sopade officially attended, but NB did cultivate close ties with Léon Blum’s Popular Front government in France. Through his aptly-named chief of staff André Blumel, Blum in fact provided NB a secret monthly stipend in the amount of 8,000-10,000 francs. New Beginning’s ally in the Sopade, Paul Hertz, apparently also convinced the French propaganda ministry to put its Strasbourg radio station at the group’s disposal for the purpose of broadcasting its reports into Germany.⁹¹

At the NB “West Conference” in June 1936, Richard Löwenthal (alias “Ernst”) outlined a strategy for creating a Popular Front inside Germany. He rejected any immediate demands for a freely-elected national assembly on the grounds that the power relations in Germany first had to transform radically: “destruction of the fascist power apparatus, nationalization of heavy industry, etc.” A “democratic upheaval” had to precede any bourgeois parliamentary procedure.⁹² But F. L. Carsten (alias “Bohner”) urged caution:

of the Left [i.e. NB, RSD] is in the social democratic organizations inside [Germany].” The fear was that this strong social democratic Left might have some appeal for critical communists. Report by Franz, “Aussprache mit Miles Mitte Februar,” received on Apr. 1, 1935, BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/402.

⁹⁰ For more on the German Popular Front as well as New Beginning’s reaction to it, see Ursula Langkau-Alex, *Deutsche Volksfront 1932-1939. Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau*, 3 Vols. (Berlin: Akademie, 2004).

⁹¹ See report by Gestapo informant “Bernhard” (Munich) to Gestapo Berlin II. 1. A., Feb. 18, 1937, BA-Berlin, R58/2. According to an interview with Henry W. Ehrmann (like the Gestapo informant, also called “Bernhard”) by the historian Harold Hurwitz, this monthly stipend apparently continued after the fall of the Popular Front while Blum was still vice president and only ceased with the Munich Pact at the end of September 1938. Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: “Die Anfänge des Widerstands,” Part 1: “Führungsanspruch und Isolation der Sozialdemokraten” (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), 51. Kurt Kliem, who received the same information from Ehrmann, added that NB could cultivate such high connections in France only because of the antipathy of the French Socialist Party (SFIO) toward the Sopade. Kliem, “Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich, dargestellt an der Gruppe ‘Neu Beginnen,’” Ph.D. (Philipps-Universität zu Marburg, 1957), Notes pp. 58-59n49. See Kliem’s letter of inquiry to Ehrmann (Boulder, CO), Nov. 19, 1956, NL Abendroth, 1041. See also Henry W. Ehrmann, “The Blum Experiment and the Fall of France,” *Foreign Affairs*, 20, no. 1 (Oct. 1941), 152-64.

⁹² “Protokoll Westkonferenz vom 14. und 15.6.36,” NB Archives, 55/1.

There cannot be any popular front under stable fascism. The popular front shenanigans [*Volksfrontspielerei*] of the émigrés could have fatal consequences inside Germany, especially if they have positive results. . . . We should warn groups in the Reich against any direct cooperation with the individual parties [i.e. KPD]. All these forms of operations are dangerous inside Germany. . . . We must emphasize the practical demands of illegal work; that is the most important condition for inclusion [in the Popular Front efforts].⁹³

Evelyn Anderson (alias “Mary”) agreed with him, saying that inside Germany only small conspiratorial cells could survive, not any broad popular movements. In these discussions about the German Popular Front, New Beginning began to distinguish more starkly between the conditions and demands of work outside Germany versus inside. Despite her reservations about fostering popular front organizations inside Germany, Anderson pointed out that “the Popular Front, Unity Front, etc. on the outside [i.e. in the emigration] need not be rejected out of consideration for the inside.” After NB shifted most of its activity to Paris by 1938, the heterogeneous network of exilic and non-exilic parts that had characterized the organization until 1935 transformed into two homogenous blocs, one inside Germany and one outside, with very few connections between them. The debate continued over how exactly the inside and outside should relate to each other, and whether the tactical differences of working in one sector versus the other necessitated qualitatively different political theories.

New Beginning’s enthusiasm for the German Popular Front was always measured. Fear of being devoured along with more gullible groups “into the great KP stomach,” as Lucy Ackerknecht (alias “Ursel”) put it, prevented NB from throwing all its weight behind communist-led unity initiatives.⁹⁴ Even though antifascist unity and especially socialist unity aligned with NB’s long-term goal, the danger of becoming a communist pawn never diminished. At the same time, NB did not want to fall into the same trap as the Sopade of categorically refusing to entertain any communist offers for cooperation. From the summer of 1936 into 1937, NB adopted a position on the popular front question that one might call “critical distance,” as opposed to the Sopade’s dogmatic distance. Henry W. Ehrmann (alias “Olga”) indeed put the group on guard against becoming “social-democratized” [*versozialdemokrater*].⁹⁵ The two magnetic poles of the emigration pulled strongly in opposite directions, making it difficult to hold any kind of middle ground.

Despite the obstacles faced by the German Popular Front initiatives, a relatively successful collaboration between NB and the communists took place among the socialist youth. Not willing to abandon the field to the communists, two New Beginners Lucy Ackerknecht and Mark Rein (alias “Julius”) organized the handful of SAJ members in Paris into an independent exile group. Ackerknecht had been a member of the Berlin SAJ leadership, and she was forced to flee shortly after the Nazis’ seizure of power. She later married the New Beginning member Henry W. Ehrmann, but her first husband Erwin H. Ackerknecht recalled that she was “good for the Milesians [sic] because Edo Fimmen [of

⁹³ “Protokoll Westkonferenz vom 14. und 15.6.36,” NB Archives, 55/1.

⁹⁴ “Protokoll Westkonferenz vom 14. und 15.6.36,” NB Archives, 55/1.

⁹⁵ “Protokoll Westkonferenz vom 14. und 15.6.36,” NB Archives, 55/1.

the ITF] fancied her so much. That brought in a lot of money for them.”⁹⁶ Mark Rein, born in Russia in 1909, was a second-generation émigré. He trained in Berlin as an engineer and then emigrated to Paris in 1933, where he proved invaluable in helping NB gain the support of the non-German socialist emigration. Many young socialists like Günter Markscheffel (b. 1908) entered New Beginning’s periphery for the first time through Ackerknecht and Rein’s Paris SAJ.

Together with the youth wing of the SAP, the Paris SAJ united with the Communist Youth Association (KJV) at the end of 1935 to form a German socialist “Action Group of Proletarian Youth Organizations.” In June 1936, the group renamed itself the Free German Youth (FDJ). Although this organization after the war became an official appendage of the East German Socialist Unity Party, it remained in prewar Paris an autonomous organization. The group published the bimonthly journal *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, which despite the numerical superiority of the communist youth in general was operated almost entirely by the non-communist socialists. Erich Schmidt quipped that only the socialist youth knew how to write.⁹⁷

Meanwhile inside Germany, the new leadership of NB around the former SAJ leaders Kurt Schmidt and Fritz Erler, the religious socialist Erich Kürschner, and the young social democrat economist Oskar Umrath began collaborating with a group of older social democrats and communists called the Deutsche Volksfront [German Popular Front]. Led by Hermann L. Brill and Otto Brass, the Deutsche Volksfront had developed a ten-point program calling for the overthrow of the Nazi dictatorship and the socialization of the economy.⁹⁸ New Beginning provided the group funding, access to its well developed technical apparatus, and contacts abroad. Against NB’s advice, however, the Volksfront group decided to publish its program illegally inside Germany, which eventually led to all of their arrests in 1938.⁹⁹ Schmidt, Erler, Kürschner, and Umrath received heavy sentences. The four were split up into different penal and concentration camps. Compared to the KPD cells and other more visible resistance groups, NB suffered very few losses as a result of its anti-Nazi work. Oskar Umrath’s death in 1943 therefore struck the group hard. According to the official German account, he had succumbed to illness while in prison. The unofficial account was that his guards had assigned him to a

⁹⁶ Interview of Erwin H. Ackerknecht by Werner Röder (Zürich), Mar. 29, 1971, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich), ZS-2077.

⁹⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 55.

⁹⁸ On account of its program, Deutsche Volksfront also became known as the “Ten Points Group.” Frank Moraw, *Die Parole der “Einheit” und die Sozialdemokratie. Zur parteiorganisatorischen und gesellschaftspolitischen Orientierung der SPD in der Periode der Illegalität und in der ersten Phase der Nachkriegszeit 1933-1948* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1973), 47ff.; Kliem, “Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich,” op. cit., 219ff; Hermann Brill, *Gegen den Strom* (Offenbach: Bollwerk-Verlag K. Drott, 1946), 15-17.

⁹⁹ Letter from Fritz Erler (Tuttlingen) to Hermann Brill (Wiesbaden), Nov. 11, 1947, NL Löwenthal, 4. An official investigation into Fritz Erler’s past by the East German Stasi in 1965 confirmed that the NB leadership was in fact discovered after the arrest and interrogation of Brill and Brass. NL Hurwitz, 98. The Stasi cited a report by the Gestapa Berlin II.A.2 of Dec. 6, 1938, which I did not find in the files of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt at BA-Berlin. Records of the trial before the People’s Court in 1939 also confirmed that the Deutsche Volksfront round-up had exposed NB.

penal detail tasked with removing unexploded bombs from the streets and buildings of Berlin—when one exploded.¹⁰⁰

At the NB West Conference, which had taken place at about the same time as the creation of the FDJ in Paris and shortly before the formation of the Deutsche Volksfront group inside Germany, Richard Löwenthal welcomed the Popular Front in France and Spain as the first progress in the fight against fascism in years. While affirming the Soviet Union’s general position, Löwenthal speculated that the Popular Front strategy of defending democracy might succeed in attracting the masses to the movement but not to keep the movement in power. One needed a positive, “democratic-revolutionary” program that went beyond mere “defense of democracy,” and such a program could only develop spontaneously through a bit of revolutionary “chaos.”¹⁰¹ Löwenthal wanted to transition from the defensive to the offensive in the antifascist struggle. The progressive force behind the Popular Front were the masses, he argued, not any specific impetus from Moscow.

France’s refusal to come to the aid of its fellow Popular Front government in the Spanish Civil War was baffling and signaled the end of both governments.¹⁰² New Beginning had cultivated a number of useful contacts with Spanish Republicans, including Julio Álvarez del Vayo of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and representatives of the more radical Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification (POUM).¹⁰³ Most importantly, NB helped recruit volunteers for the Republican cause from among the German socialist emigration in Czechoslovakia. Leopold Kulcsar (alias “Maresch”; “Krug”) and his wife Ilse Barea-Kulcsar were two Austrian Socialists who collaborated with NB in this operation, mainly out of the Spanish legation in Prague.¹⁰⁴ Considerable

¹⁰⁰ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 42. See the entry for Oskar Umrath in Annedore Leber, *Conscience in Revolt: Sixty-Four Stories of Resistance in Germany, 1933-45*, trans. R. O’Neill (London: Vallentine & Mitchell, 1957). Fritz Erler remembered a moment of ironic levity from their trial: the vice president of the People’s Court Karl Engert at one point remarked, “We know that you are intelligent, Defendant [Umrath]. That speaks not for you, but against you.” Letter from Fritz Erler to Eugen Umrath (Berlin-Dahlem), Dec. 20, 1954, NL Erler, 224C.

¹⁰¹ “Protokoll Westkonferenz vom 14. und 15.6.36,” NB Archives, 55/1.

¹⁰² For more on the Popular Front in France, see Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: Norton, 1994); Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1988). Jackson described Blum’s understanding of socialism as follows: “The Bolsheviks . . . had committed the Blanquist error of confusing the political seizure of power with the social revolution. The social revolution was a substitution of the capitalist system of property relations by a collectivist one, and it could only occur at the requisite state of capitalist development. To seize political power before this would either result in failure (as in the Commune) or in dictatorial terror (as in Russia). Until the economic conditions were mature, then, the role of Socialists was to secure the maximum of progress compatible with the present social order, and prepare people’s minds for the collectivist society. This was the sense in which every reform contributed to revolution by preparing the ‘foundations of socialist order’ on which the new society would one day be built” (p. 58).

¹⁰³ See report by Gestapo informant “Bernhard” of Feb. 18, 1937, op. cit.; Jean-François Berdah, “Un réseau de renseignement antinazi au service de la République espagnole (1936-1939): Le mouvement Neu Beginn et le Servicio de Información Diplomático Especial (SIDE),” in F. Guelton and A. Bicer, eds., *Naissance et évolution du renseignement dans l’espace européen, 1870-1940: entre démocratie et totalitarisme, quatorze études de cas* (Paris: Service historique de la défense, 2006), 295-322.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Buttinger of the Austrian Revolutionary Socialists (RSÖ) described the Kulcsars as an “oppositionist couple” whose ambition “was to become the Austrian counterpart of the founders of the German New Beginners. They called their creation Spark Group [*Gruppe Funke*], after *Iskra* (Spark) of Lenin’s early period.” He had a low opinion of the group: “Every good man attracted by Ilse and Leopold

suspicion of Maresch/Kulcsar had arisen by the fall of 1937.¹⁰⁵ He had left the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) many years before, but the NB foreign bureau sensed that he still pursued Soviet-communist interests in Spain. In October 1937, NB leaders made Kulcsar resign his membership and put him on a three-month “freeze,” during which NB members were to have no direct contact with him.¹⁰⁶

The dispute with Kulcsar had gathered steam during a tragic episode involving the disappearance of the NB member Mark Rein near Barcelona in April 1937. He had volunteered for the Republican cause and left France for Spain a few months before. Rein’s father, the exiled Menshevik leader Raphael Abramovitch, had for years run afoul of the Comintern.¹⁰⁷ Suspicion therefore fell immediately on the NKVD and the Comintern *Apparat*, which conducted purges in Spain of “Trotskyite” deviants and a variety of other socialist dissidents.¹⁰⁸ News of the Moscow show trials had furthermore “exploded like a bomb” in the socialist emigration and had shaken New Beginning’s faith in the possibility of working productively with the communists.¹⁰⁹ Now that one of their own members had apparently fallen victim to the purges, that shaken faith turned into outrage. With the tacit approval of the Spanish Republican government, Karl Frank and his new American wife Anna Caples (alias “Nelly”) traveled to Spain in July 1937 to investigate the cause of Rein’s disappearance. Frank came away nearly certain of communist responsibility. Along with Paul Hertz, he wrote a letter to the ZK of the KPD demanding an explanation. Not until two months later did the ZK reply, brushing off the matter and accusing NB of betraying the Popular Front effort.¹¹⁰ It remains unclear whether the German communists were directly involved in Rein’s disappearance, but they did of course defer to the discretion of the Comintern and the NKVD.¹¹¹ The

Kulczar’s political discernment was sooner or later repelled by their striking faults. They never could have strong and independent men around them; useful ones, half won over, were often lost by sloth. Soon the motley crowd of their followers consisted of a large but lukewarm ‘periphery’ of radicals, who could find nowhere else what they were seeking in politics, and a few dozen Group members, with eccentrics, braggarts, and cranks, predominant.” Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism: A History of the Revolutionary Socialists of Austria*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1953), 9, 23, 191-92. See also Ilse Barea-Kulcsar’s memoir *Vienna: Legend and Reality* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966).

¹⁰⁵ See Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen*, 148ff.

¹⁰⁶ Memo from the NB foreign bureau “Mitteilung zur Angelegenheit Maresch an die St.Leiter,” Oct. 22, 1937, NB Archives, 16/9.

¹⁰⁷ For a general overview of the activities of Russian Menshevik exiles in the 1920s and 30s, see André Liebich, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy after 1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997).

¹⁰⁸ For the best general overviews, see Pierre Broué, *Staline et la révolution: le cas espagnol (1936-1939)* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); Patrick von Zur Mühlen, *Spanien war ihre Hoffnung. Die deutsche Linke im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936 bis 1939* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1983).

¹⁰⁹ See for example the anonymous manuscript “Der Moskauer Kommunistenprozess und die internationale Arbeiterbewegung,” late 1936, NB Archives, 34/10.

¹¹⁰ Report by Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank] to Friedrich Adler, “Bericht über Nachforschungen im Falle des Genossen Mark Rein in Spanien vom 1.-10. Juli 1937,” July 13, 1937, NB Archives, 17/7; “Zusammenfassung der Tatsachen und Hypothesen zum Fall Mark Rein in Barcelona,” late 1937, NB Archives, 15/5; letter from Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank] and Paul Hertz to the ZK der KPD (Prague), July 28, 1937, BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/405; letter from ZK der KPD to Paul Hertz and Willi Müller [i.e. Karl Frank], Sept. 24, 1937, NB Archives, 15/2.

¹¹¹ Report by “Br.” to ZK der KPD, “Verschwinden von Mark Rein (Abramowicz, jun) in Spanien (Barcelona),” July 27, 1937, BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/405. The report was based on information from another former Menshevik in Spain, a certain “Nicola,” who claimed that Rein “was in hot water from the very

investigation never came to a satisfactory conclusion. Most likely Rein fell in with the wrong sort in the political “cockpit” of Barcelona during the spring of 1937, and on the night of April 9 these comrades delivered him into the hands of either Spanish communist agents or the NKVD.¹¹² Leopold Kulcsar, in Spain at the time of Karl Frank’s investigations, apparently offered little in the way of help, giving the excuse that the group should concentrate all of its efforts on winning the war.¹¹³ After the war was all but lost in 1938, Kulcsar himself died in Paris under mysterious circumstances. He quite possibly shared Rein’s fate.

The evasiveness of the ZK during the Rein affair and the general background of the Moscow show trials worsened New Beginning’s relationship with the communists and weakened its faith in the redemptive role of the Soviet Union. Approaching the end of the 1930s, the scope of antifascist unity progressively narrowed: from the Popular Front initiatives of 1935-36, to a United Front approach that excluded non-socialists, and finally to “socialist concentration” in 1937-39, which abandoned all hope of working with the communists.

Erich Schmidt described the much hoped-for unity of the German working class as a “shimmering Fata Morgana.”¹¹⁴ Making things worse was the fact that the Gestapo was always watching, no matter where these meetings and discussions about socialist unity took place.¹¹⁵ The “high point” of Schmidt’s conspiratorial precaution (or low point) came when he met up with a former SAJ member in Switzerland: “we ran a kilometer along the [Bern river] Aar in swim trunks, debating the whole time, then we dove into the swift current, continuing to talk nonstop, until I [was swept away by] a whirlpool not too far from the German embassy Mother Nature in league with the Nazis.”¹¹⁶ Exile politics had degenerated into a farcical game of cat and mouse.

Kurt R. Grossmann began his book *Emigration* with another fluvial allusion:

A man falls into the current. He is in danger of drowning. Ignoring the danger to themselves, people spring into the water from both banks in order to save him. ¶ A man is grabbed from behind and thrown into the current. He is in danger of drowning. The

beginning.” Rein “entered into a plethora of connections and relationships in order to fulfill the intelligence-gathering tasks set for him by his father, the well known Menshevik leader.” Among these contacts—and probably the ones that sealed his fate—were members of the left-socialist POUM, who along with the anarchists were the primary object of communist purges in Spain at the time. See Zur Mühlen, *Spanien war ihre Hoffnung*, 44ff.

¹¹² Two letters allegedly from Rein in Madrid on April 13 made excuses for his sudden departure from Barcelona and asked, among other things, that his friend pay his bill at the hotel. NB suspected that these letters were either forged or forcibly extracted from Rein. See BA-Berlin, RY1/I 2/3/405. For an overview of the Rein affair from the perspective of the Austrian socialist Julius Deutsch, who served as a Republican general during the Civil War, see his memoir *Ein weiter Weg. Lebenserinnerungen* (Zürich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1960), 282. Franz Borkenau used the cockpit metaphor in the title of his 1937 book *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eye-Witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937).

¹¹³ For his later explanation, see letter from Paul Maresch [i.e. Leopold Kulcsar] to NB foreign bureau, Sept. 10, 1937, NB Archives, 16/15.

¹¹⁴ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 44.

¹¹⁵ See various Gestapo reports in BA-Berlin, R58/2.

¹¹⁶ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 44.

people on both banks watch with growing alarm the desperate attempts to swim by the person thrown into the water, thinking: if only he doesn't save himself on *our* shore.¹¹⁷

Was failure to unite the German political emigration a foregone conclusion? Was the reluctance by their host countries to come to these émigrés' rescue an objective obstacle that prevented any productive political cooperation? The psychological strain of exile played no small part: the material need, the mass housing quarters, the persistent hunger, "the dissolution and destruction of the individualism of the single person."¹¹⁸ But the opposite too held true, an excess of individualism bred of political isolation and impotence. The Freudian "narcissism of small differences" fueled personal animosities, froze the subtle distinctions between political groups into dogmatic rigidity, and made disunity almost into a precondition for survival.¹¹⁹

The NB ally Paul Hertz wrote to Ernst Reuter in April 1937 that the mere fact of the Blum government in France and the civil war in Spain had "itself entirely sufficed in showing oppositional [i.e. antifascist] people that things in the world are not so hopeless" as they may have seemed a couple years before.¹²⁰ Hardly more than a year later, the collapse of the French Popular Front and the dire conclusion of the Spanish Civil War extinguished much of what remained of NB's revolutionary hope. In Paris exile, the dark clouds of the coming world war began to overshadow everything. Erich Schmidt recalled that "[o]ur 'group life' was carried on by just a few activists. I was overcome by contemplating the apocalyptic historical circumstances, and the problems and small joys of everyday life receded into the background."¹²¹

In July 1939, NB collaborated on its last major theoretical work in Continental exile, the pamphlet "The Coming World War." A product of efforts at "socialist concentration" that had followed the failed Popular Front initiatives, this pamphlet was co-authored by Richard Löwenthal and Karl Frank of NB, Jacob Walcher of the SAP, and Joseph Buttinger and Josef Poplipnig of the RSÖ. It explained the revolutionary Marxist aims of the left socialist splinter groups in exile and did not seek any input from the representatives of the old workers' parties. The blame for the strategic success of fascist imperialism and for the now unavoidable world war, argued the pamphlet, lay squarely with the Western European bourgeoisie, "which in the crucial beginning stages of fascist expansion feared strengthening the international workers' movement for the purpose of overthrowing fascism more than it did strengthening fascism through further concessions." This class theory of appeasement agreed more or less with the orthodox Marxist-Leninist interpretation of fascism as the inevitable product of capitalist-imperialist developments. Bourgeois democracy was beset by too many contradictions and the socialist workers' movement by too much division to offer any serious opposition to the fascist counter-revolution. Only in the Soviet Union "were the essential achievements of the revolution preserved, even if [they were] perhaps deformed by the constraint of having to develop a backwards country in a surrounding environment growing ever more reactionary."¹²² Just

¹¹⁷ Alfred Polgar, *Prager Tageblatt* (Sept. 18, 1938), qtd. by Grossmann, *Emigration*, op. cit., 5. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁸ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Freud discussed this form of narcissism in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930).

¹²⁰ Letter from Paul Hertz (Prague) to Ernst Reuter (Ankara), Apr. 14, 1937, LA-Berlin, NL Reuter, 166.

¹²¹ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 45.

¹²² NB, SAP, and RSÖ, *Der kommende Weltkrieg. Aufgaben und Ziele des deutschen Sozialismus. Eine Diskussionsgrundlage* (Paris: self-pub., 1939), 6-8.

one month later, however, this last bastion of the revolution would make its peace with fascism.

Although the Moscow show trials and the Spanish Civil War had prepared NB morally and psychologically for disillusionment with the Soviet Union, the shock of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in late August 1939 nevertheless surprised everyone.¹²³ New Beginning's foreign bureau struggled to analyze the Soviet rationale but could not help but conclude that the Pact "has the character not only of reckless interest-driven politics but also of a no-limit and hazardous game of all-or-nothing [*Va-Banque-Spiel*]." One NB report decided that "[t]he fundamental meaning of the Soviet-Fascist Pact for the orientation of the socialist movement lies in the fact that it demonstrates with a clarity which can no longer be ignored how the immediate interests of the Russian state need not coincide with the interests of the socialist movement as a whole—that those interests can indeed be opposed."¹²⁴ In an NB discussion report of October 1, 1939, Richard Löwenthal argued further that Soviet motives only made sense when evaluated from the standpoint of pure nationalist-imperialist interests, rather than from any consideration of socialist goals or antifascist strategy. "[T]he Stalin regime," he declared, "has ceased to be a factor in the socialist movement and has become a fetter on the international level for every progressive effect of those elements of socialism that had [in fact] developed in Russia." The common struggle against fascism and, through it, the reunification of the workers' movement must now proceed independently of Stalin. Löwenthal keenly foresaw that in a world divided between two competing power blocs, one democratic capitalist and the totalitarian-communist, "there will be no real possibility for a socialist movement that seeks to carve out a transition to a planned economy free of private property . . . and supported by the will of the working masses."¹²⁵

Another report referred to "Russian-German Bonapartism," an allusion to the widely held theory of *fascism* developed by August Thalheimer and others in the late 1920s and early 30s.¹²⁶ That so theoretically precise an organization as New Beginning now lumped the Soviet Union together with Nazi Germany in the same category of "fascism" illustrated the profound feeling of betrayal on both the non-communist and, hardly any less, the communist German Left. Later NB would fine-tune its analysis, but the basic equation of the two "totalitarian" regimes would remain a theoretical and rhetorical touchstone for the group.¹²⁷ The coming world war, no matter how the

¹²³ Hartmut Mehringer somewhat overstated his case when he portrayed the Pact as the turning point in NB and other socialist exile groups' estimation of the communists. The Pact is better understood as the last in a long series of disappointments, the straw that broke the camel's back. Mehringer, "Sozialdemokratisches Exil und Nachkriegs-Sozialdemokratie. Lernprozesse auf dem Weg zum Godesberger Programm," in C. Burrichter et al., eds., *Ohne Erinnerung keine Zukunft! Zur Aufarbeitung von Vergangenheit in einigen europäischen Gesellschaften unserer Tage* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1992), 109-23.

¹²⁴ Anonymous NB theses, "Die Sozialisten und der deutsch-russische Pakt," autumn 1939, NB Archives, 34/24.

¹²⁵ Paul Sering [i.e. Löwenthal], "Zur Einschätzung der deutsch-russischen Zusammenarbeit. Diskussionsgrundlage," Oct. 1, 1939, NB Archives, 41/2.

¹²⁶ Anonymous report, "Nochmals zur Frage der Revolution von oben und des russische-deutschen Bonapartismus," no date, NB Archives, 41/4. See August Thalheimer, "On Fascism" [1930], *Telos*, no. 40 (1979), 109-22.

¹²⁷ For NB and Löwenthal's contributions to the development of totalitarianism theory, see William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana, IL; Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999).

alliances between the superpowers might change, threatened to preclude entirely the possibility of democratic socialism and the emancipation of the international working class.

Immediately after the outbreak of war in September 1939, the French government ordered the internment of most German refugees.¹²⁸ Despite her Austrian passport and valid student visa, Hilde Paul was detained and sent to Camp de Gurs in southwestern France. Dozens of other NB members had likewise been interned in camps at Meslay-du-Maine, Le Vernet, and elsewhere.¹²⁹ She was placed in a special, quarantined political barracks, whose inmates generally received worse treatment than the broader camp population. On the day of the ceasefire, June 22, 1940, her NB friends in the regular camp managed to forge the necessary paperwork to transfer out of the barracks.¹³⁰ Bureaucratic wrangling inside a concentration camp marked the symbolic extent of NB's political activity in Europe after the outbreak of war.

Settling Abroad and Renewing Socialism

The decision to relocate New Beginning's foreign bureau to London in the fall of 1939 was necessary given the acute possibility of war on the Continent. Karl Frank had meanwhile set up an NB base in New York City, and on both sides of the Atlantic the group prepared for a transition to wartime. Despite some preliminary canvassing in both New York and London during the mid- to late-1930s, New Beginning members still felt very much like strangers when they arrived for good in 1939. In 1908 Georg Simmel had postulated that the sociological phenomenon of "the stranger" represented the fusion of "wandering" and "fixation" at a given point. The stranger stands in limbo, separated from home yet provisionally placed somewhere else. He or she is not "the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather . . . the person who comes today and stays tomorrow."¹³¹ Simmel suggested that the peculiarity of a stranger's distance vis-à-vis her host community, her simultaneous nearness and farness, allowed for a certain degree of critical "objectivity" in her mode of thought. That objectivity translated into non-partisanship and gave the stranger a degree of political power, or at least potential power, that natives themselves could not possess. Freedom of thought was the stranger's virtue.¹³² In his short essay, which reads like a consolation for strangers, Simmel forgot that material need and the pressure on the newly arrived refugee to assimilate severely limits such freedom of thought. When they arrived in England and America, members of

¹²⁸ First it was men between the ages of 17 and 55 years old; then, after the Germans began their offensive on France in May 1940, the round-up expanded to include all men under 65 and all childless women between 17 and 55. Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 64.

¹²⁹ A list of interned members and allies of NB that police found on Franz Böglér when he was detained included the following names: Günther Markscheffel, Fritz Schmidt, Werner Wille, Thomas Schocken, Erich Schmidt, Carl Kiesel, Jerry Jeremias, Franz Feuchtwanger, Max Diamant, Gerhard Dannies, Otto Pfister, Walter Fabian, Paul Frölich, Fritz Lamm, and Henry Pachter. There were many more names on the list whose connection to NB is unclear, but they might have been friends, relatives, and additional allies from the SAP, ISK, and other socialist splinter groups. BA-Berlin, R58/3292.

¹³⁰ Hilde Paul, "Paris – Gurs," in Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 66-70 (70).

¹³¹ Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), 402-8 (402).

¹³² Simmel, "The Stranger," 404. For another take on how the experience of exile (as one manifestation of the "stranger" phenomenon) could affect modes of thought, see Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1981).

New Beginning and the renewers generation played the role of Cassandras of the coming world war and of the general threat of fascism. But during the war itself they transformed from Cassandras into cooperative partners of the Allied war effort, thinking as much for the benefit of their host countries as for themselves.

New Beginning had long ago decided that only a military defeat of fascism could create the conditions necessary for a socialist transformation of German society. At the same time the group considered it essential to maintain “the continuity of the socialist organization and its political autonomy vis-à-vis the imperialist opponents of fascism [i.e. the Allies].”¹³³ The group thus attempted to steer between the Scylla of full assimilation and the Charybdis of political isolation. Arthur Koestler, who was still a communist in the late 1930s, described the difference between political exile in Britain versus France as follows:

what a refugee craves most is relief from his permanent feeling of uprootedness. Soldiers abroad have the same craving to escape from their bleak army billets into the comforting warmth of a family around a meal. The British have an instinctive understanding of this need and, for all their apparent shyness and restraint, they have a way of picking up the stranger as if he were a kind of stray dog, carrying him to their houses and making him feel at home; while the French, with their easy affability, embrace him warmly and let him stand shivering in the street, condemned to remain forever a permanent tourist or permanent exile, as the case may be.¹³⁴

While in France the “great mass of refugees . . . lived cut off from French contacts and led a kind of ghetto existence,” in Britain they “moved among English friends and ceased to be a refugee.”¹³⁵ Koestler actually spent his first months in Britain in prison because he lacked a visa, so the picture he painted definitely appeared prettier in hindsight.¹³⁶ Like France, Britain too ordered the internment of German refugees after the outbreak of war. Both NB’s present leaders and the old Loewenheim circle, which had emigrated to London several years before, were interned on the Isle of Man. Because of NB’s good contacts with the Labour Party, however, it could secure the release of its own people quite rapidly. New Beginning either did not advocate for or could not secure the release of the half dozen people that remained of the Loewenheim circle, who were stuck on the Isle of Man for many months longer.¹³⁷ Loewenheim and his friends never forgave New

¹³³ *Der kommende Weltkrieg*, 34. This necessity of a military defeat of fascism and the attendant military victory of the antifascist coalition (i.e. the Allies) constituted “the international dependence of the German Revolution” (pp. 25ff.).

¹³⁴ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 247.

¹³⁵ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, 247-48. Koestler was never a sympathizer of New Beginning, but in Paris he worked with Richard Löwenthal in the “editorial Brain Trust” of the Popular Front journal *Die Zukunft* (pp. 406ff) and in London he was an associate of the publisher and NB ally Victor Gollancz (pp. 382ff.).

¹³⁶ Koestler did have a visa to enter the United States which was procured for him by the Emergency Rescue Committee, an organization backed by New Beginning’s American supporters. But he chose instead to enter England illegally because emigration to the US symbolized for him a complete political resignation. Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, 421.

¹³⁷ In 1940, while still in the camp, Loewenheim drafted a new manifesto that was to herald his return to the political scene, “At the Crossroads of History.” In it, he came out even more strongly in favor of the NEP-style of mixed economy that he had praised in the *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet. Free market and individual competition, he argued, were essential parts of socialist society. He hinted already at the equation of Nazi

Beginning for this perceived slight, and it probably contributed to the bitterness between the two factions that lasted for many decades to come.

The first theoretical work published by NB in London was “New Beginning: What It Wants, What It Is, and How It Grew.”¹³⁸ As an indication of the diminishing funds available to the group, the mimeographed pamphlet featured a hand-drawn title page that looked rather like the cover of a garage band’s self-produced demo tape. The pamphlet essentially recounted the history of NB from the perspective of the new post-1935 leadership, deftly minimizing the importance of the Leninist Org, focusing on the influx of SAJ members in 1931 as NB’s real foundational moment, and reappropriating the more democratic socialist passages of the Miles pamphlet. New Beginning now explicitly identified itself as a *social democratic* movement that had completely abandoned its conspiratorial past. Instead of dwelling on the losses suffered by the group at the end of 1935, the pamphlet portrayed that moment euphemistically as the start of the organization’s “Years of Growth.” Finally, NB’s “entrenchment in the whole movement,” the failure of the Popular Front, and the sad spectacle of the Moscow show trials had all prompted a fundamental revision of the group’s political thought. No longer did it advocate a centralized, single-party state or party dictatorship as the means of realizing socialism.¹³⁹ Only democratic means could ensure democratic ends, and socialism was unthinkable without democracy.

Despite this rather liberal-sounding turn in NB’s rhetoric, the pamphlet still contained a substantial critique of the Sopade for hindering efforts at “socialist concentration,” that is, the coalition of all non-communist socialist groups. The Sopade either came to agree with such criticism or, more likely, came to recognize that the left socialist groups in British exile no longer advocated such radical programs, because in March 1941 it agreed to co-found the Union of German Socialist Organizations in Great Britain (UDSO). Members of NB like Richard Löwenthal, Erwin Schoettle, Evelyn Anderson, and Waldemar von Knoeringen sat beside the representatives of the Sopade Hans Vogel and Erich Ollenhauer in the leading committees of the new Union. The SAP and ISK were also well represented. All the bitter feuds between the renewers generation and the older social democrats had started to simmer down. Although it often had contentious debates at its meetings, the Union persisted until after the war and issued a joint pamphlet in 1945 called “On the Policy of German Socialists,” one of the earliest documents in the postwar reconstruction of the SPD.¹⁴⁰ All groups in the Union underwent an ideological moderation, with the consequence that Marxism largely retreated before more liberal or ethical versions of democratic socialism.¹⁴¹

and Soviet totalitarianisms—and indeed “fascisms”—that would become the whipping boy of his postwar thought. See the manuscript “Am Scheideweg der Geschichte” in FES (Bonn), Sammlung Personalia, 6307.

¹³⁸ *Neu Beginnen. Was es will, was es ist und wie es wurde* (London: Auslandsbüro Neu Beginnen, 1939).

¹³⁹ *Neu Beginnen. Was es will*, 39.

¹⁴⁰ UDSO, *Zur Politik deutscher Sozialisten. Politische Kundgebungen und programmatische Richtlinien* (London, 1945). See also Ludwig Eiber, ed., *Die Sozialdemokratie in der Emigration. Die “Union deutscher sozialistischer Organisationen in Grossbritannien” 1941-1946 und ihre Mitglieder: Protokolle, Erklärungen, Materialien* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1998).

¹⁴¹ In many ways, the intellectual maturation of the Union anticipated by more than a decade the general reorientation of postwar European socialism. See Ch. 4. For more on the Union itself, see Isabelle Tombs, “Une identité européenne assiégée? Les exilés socialistes à Londres, 1939-1945,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 46, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1999), 263-79; Ursula Adam, “‘Wege zum neuen Deutschland’: eine Debatte deutscher Emigranten in Großbritannien,” in R. Kühnl and E. Spoo, eds., *Was*

New Beginning's most significant contribution to the British war effort was its work from 1940 to 1942 for the BBC radio station "Sender der Europäischen Revolution" (SER), which broadcasted propaganda aimed at potential or active oppositional Germans inside the Reich. Paul and Evelyn Anderson, Karl Anders, Waldemar von Knoeringen, and Richard Löwenthal participated in this venture.¹⁴² Despite its willingness to contribute political propaganda in support of the antifascist war effort, however, members of NB always worried about sacrificing their autonomy or abandoning their group's socialist goals. Just before the war, NB had warned its fellow socialist groups that they "must avoid unconditionally" any kind of "incorporation into the propaganda apparatus of imperialism." The Allies might try to "transform émigré groups into recruitment offices for imperialism."¹⁴³ This unease of German socialist émigrés in the strongholds of world capitalism, Britain and the United States, diminished over time. Regardless of whether the Allied propaganda agencies actually succeeded in assimilating them, groups like NB began voluntarily to alter their initially negative perception of democratic capitalism.

Although the framework for political action in American exile resembled that of Britain, NB encountered much less success there in uniting the various tendencies of the socialist emigration. Fittingly enough for the Odyssean wanderers Erich Schmidt and his wife Hilde Paul, when they departed Lisbon for New York in the fall of 1940 they were aboard the Greek ship *Nea Hellas*—"New Greece."¹⁴⁴ They were welcomed on arrival by Karl Frank and the organization that he had formed in the US to pursue NB's interests, the American Friends of German Freedom (AFGF). As early as 1935, Frank had begun fundraising and propagandizing in the US for New Beginning under the name "Paul Hagen." He won the support of B. Charney Vladeck of the Jewish Labor Committee in New York and raised much more money than the official representatives of the Sopade.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most tangible achievement of the AFGF was the creation in June 1940 of the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), which undertook to facilitate the emigration of endangered artists and intellectuals from unoccupied France and, whenever possible, procure them visas to the US. The ERC's agent Varian Fry ran a legendary operation out of Marseille that rescued over one thousand refugees and their families from Vichy France.¹⁴⁶

aus Deutschland werden sollte. Konzepte des Widerstands, des Exils und der Alliierten (Heilbronn: Distel, 1995), 147-55; Anthony Glees, *Exile Politics during the Second World War: The German Social Democrats in Britain* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford UP, 1982).

¹⁴² Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen*, 213ff.

¹⁴³ *Der kommende Weltkrieg*, 38-39.

¹⁴⁴ Roland Gröschel, in his foreword to Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed analysis of Frank's activities in the US, see Renaud, "The German Resistance in New York," *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ For more on New Beginning and the AFGF's role in creating the ERC, see Terence Renaud, "'This is our Dunkirk': Karl B. Frank and the Politics of the Emergency Rescue Committee" (2009), <http://terencerenaud.com/The_Politics_of_the_ERC_FINAL.htm> (accessed April 2014). See also Varian Fry's memoir *Surrender on Demand* (New York: Random House, 1945); the biographies by Sheila Isenberg, *A Hero of Our Own: The Story of Varian Fry* (New York: Random House, 2001), Andy Marino, *A Quiet American: The Secret War of Varian Fry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), and Jeremy Adelman, *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013), 171ff.; the popular history by Rosemary Sullivan, *Villa Air-Bel: World War II, Escape, and a House in*

In concert with the left-leaning Protestant theologians Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, the AFGF also helped create the Council for a Democratic Germany (CDG). Founded in New York in May 1944, this organization modeled itself in part on the Union in London. It attempted to unite the disparate factions of the German emigration in the United States. But instead of following the Union's approach of "socialist concentration," which perhaps was not politically possible in an American context, the CDG aimed for a Popular Front-style coalition of all anti-Nazi groups regardless of political ideology. That included communists. Such an approach also provided an alternative forum for exile politics to the Soviet-dominated National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD) that had formed in Moscow in 1943 and spawned affiliates around the world. The CDG wanted to build a German government-in-exile and had even tapped the novelist and Nobel laureate Thomas Mann as a potential candidate for its president. But disputes between communists, social democrats, and bourgeois democrats and particularly between New Beginning and the semi-official SPD representation in the US, the German Labor Delegation (GLD), ground all of these efforts to a halt. These problems and the war's end caused the dissolution of the CDG in the fall of 1945.¹⁴⁷

Clearly the CDG collapsed because of its own internal contradictions, but in many ways the political climate of the United States was far less favorable to such an émigré congress than Britain. Thomas Mann wrote to Karl Frank in August 1943 that "[n]o one [here] asks us our opinion. On the one hand we are enemy-aliens, and other hand 'premature anti-fascists' and not at all popular."¹⁴⁸ As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Karl Frank and representatives of other socialist émigré groups did have some success in volunteering for the American intelligence services and the war effort more generally. Even though they never parachuted behind enemy lines, New Beginning members like Georg Eliasberg and Bernhard Taurer at the Office of War Information (OWI) and Fred H. Sanderson at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) did tremendous work. The fabled "Research and Analysis" branch of the OSS, which featured many Frankfurt School collaborators like Franz L. Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, and Otto Kirchheimer, resembled very closely the proposal made by Karl Frank to Allen W. Dulles in April 1942.¹⁴⁹

New Beginning members in the US published extensively. Karl Frank's first book *Will Germany Crack?* (1942) and second *Germany After Hitler* (1944) were reviewed

Marseille (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); and the TV movie starring William Hurt, *Varian's War* (2001).

¹⁴⁷ See Heike Bungert, "Deutsche Emigranten im amerikanischen Kalkül. Die Regierung in Washington, Thomas Mann und die Gründung eines Emigrantenkomitees 1943," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 46, no. 2 (Apr. 1998), 253-68; Friedrich Baerwald, "Zur politischen Tätigkeit deutscher Emigranten im Council for a Democratic Germany," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 28, no. 3 (July 1980), 372-83.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Thomas Mann (Pacific Palisades, CA) to Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank], Aug. 6, 1943, Karl B. Frank Papers, 9/M.

¹⁴⁹ "Memorandum by Paul Hagen: How to Collaborate with the Anti-Nazi Underground in Germany," op. cit. For more on the Research and Analysis branch, see Raffaele Laudani, ed., *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013); Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989); Alfons Söllner, *Zur Archäologie der Demokratie in Deutschland*, Vol. 1: "Analysen politischer Emigranten im amerikanischen Geheimdienst: 1943-1945" (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1982).

widely and for the most part positively.¹⁵⁰ After reading the original German manuscript of the latter book, Thomas Mann called it “the clearest, most rational, and most realistic preview of things in store for Germany that I have come across.” One can only hope, he continued, “that [the victors] are familiar with the thoughts that your work offers.”¹⁵¹ Frank favored as much liberty for democratic elements in defeated Germany as possible within the constraints of the Allied occupation. He also firmly opposed any division of the country or any serious territorial losses relative to the pre-1938 borders. At the same time, he called on the Allies to ensure that the denazification of the German military and civil service proceeded thoroughly and to socialize as soon as possible the major industrial concerns that had supported the Nazi regime. Aside from their reservations about his socialist economic policy suggestions, American reviewers found fault with one aspect of Frank’s analysis that might seem surprising given the apocalyptic mood of most émigré literature of the late 1930s: his optimism, or, put in the context of New Beginning’s entire political development, his revolutionary hope.

New Beginning’s antifascist network, whose exilic and non-exilic parts had been completed severed from one another since 1939-40, disintegrated further as the war progressed. Its peripheral members adapted most quickly to the circumstances of their host countries. Ossip K. Flechtheim, for example, did build an Org/NB-inspired “Gesag” group after arriving in New York in 1939. It included Karl Korsch, Fritz Sternberg, the NB confidant Fred H. Sanderson, and perhaps also a few associates of the Institute for Social Research.¹⁵² But his connection to New Beginning broke down after he accepted

¹⁵⁰ Paul Hagen, *Will Germany Crack? A Factual Report on Germany from Within*, trans. Anna Caples (New York; London: Harper & Bros., 1942); *Germany after Hitler* (New York; Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944). For an analysis of these books, see Renaud “The German Resistance in New York,” op. cit. Reviews appeared in the *New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *American Political Science Review*, et al.

¹⁵¹ Handwritten letter from Thomas Mann (Pacific Palisades, CA) to Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank], July 13, 1943, Karl B. Frank Papers, 9/M.

¹⁵² Letters from Karl Korsch (Boston) to Ossip Flechtheim (New York), Nov. 7, 1939 and Jan. 12, 1940, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179. Korsch wrote, among other things, that “I really liked the people in the circle [*Menschlich gefiel mir der Kreis außerordentlich gut*]” and that Flechtheim “must not forget to send me a copy should any new material from NB have appeared.” As for the connection to the Institute for Social Research, Friedrich Pollock’s name comes up in Korsch’s second letter, although it is uncertain whether he actually participated in the circle. Flechtheim was also good friends at the time with another Institute collaborator in New York, A. R. L. Gurland. Franz L. Neumann had sympathized with NB in the mid-1930s when he contributed to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus* under the pseudonym “Leopold Franz,” and he very well may have collaborated with the group while in London and New York exile—especially given the similarities between NB’s postwar reconstruction plans and Neumann’s 1942/44 book *Behemoth*. Karl Frank also listed Neumann as a character witness in a report to the OSS. See letter from Paul Hagen [i.e. Karl Frank] to Calvin Hoover (Office of Strategic Services, Washington, D.C.), July 31, 1942, Karl B. Frank Papers, 7/7. This is of course mostly circumstantial evidence. Gerhard Bry recalled the following: “One person must be singled out because of his great importance for our future. Franz Neumann had been a successful practicing trade-union lawyer in Berlin, but he was equally interested in legal academics and in political theory. He was a strong sympathizer, but not a declared member of our group. . . . I liked to talk to the people at the Institute for Social Research. They were scholarly, each has his specialty and knew his field, and most of them had a broad range of knowledge and interests. They all had a sociological perspective and they all were Marxists of sorts. . . . Some of them expressed broad sympathy with our organization which they knew from pre-Nazi times, but Neumann was the only political activist—at least as far as I knew.” Bry, *Resistance: Recollections from the Nazi Years* (New Jersey: self-pub., 1979), 175, 188-89.

academic positions at Clark College in Atlanta (1940-43) and then at Bates College in Maine (1943-47). The degree of Flechtheim's engagement with New Beginning—intense engagement in Düsseldorf until 1935, moderate engagement in Geneva and New York until 1940, and virtually no engagement thereafter—corresponded to his shifting focus from a German homecoming to settlement and assimilation abroad.

Georg Eliasberg—an NB leader arrested by the Gestapo in 1935, detained in a number of German prisons and jails, deported to Italy, and finally allowed to emigrate to the Dominican Republic in 1940—replied to a letter from Flechtheim in November 1940. Glad to have re-established contact with an old comrade, Eliasberg nevertheless could not understand what Flechtheim had meant when he wrote “that you [i.e. Flechtheim] have lost your youthful illusions about your dear fellow human beings, ‘thanks to Rix [Löwenthal], Willi [Karl B. Frank], and many others—not least Vera [Franke].” “I don't want to believe,” continued Eliasberg, “that this means that those named also belong to your severe human disappointments. With regard to your pessimism more generally, I'm very much inclined to share it, but I'm still in such an isolated situation that I doubt whether my thoughts on this subject could be anything more than unauthoritative reflections.”¹⁵³ For lack of Flechtheim's original letter, it is impossible to tell whether he was disillusioned with his fellow human beings in general, his fellow Germans, or his fellow renewers in New Beginning. In a skeptical tone, Eliasberg criticized Flechtheim's posture of “professorial dignity” and assumed distance from politics.

But Flechtheim was in some ways an exception. Many New Beginning members in American and British exile never ceased yearning for home and never abandoned hope for a democratic revolution in Germany. Even if they refused or could not assimilate fully to their host countries, however, their collective experience of political exile tended to moderate their concept of socialism. Liberal ingredients like party pluralism, consensual decision-making, and freedom of thought and dissent leavened the hard bread of revolution. Erich Schmidt remembered “the metamorphosis of the ‘Org.’” even in 1932 “from its strictly elitist, centralized existence as a secret society into a more relaxed, democratic organizational form that allowed more room for [individual] initiative.”¹⁵⁴ And in 1939, while NB still propagated the necessity of dictatorial means to achieve a workers' democracy after the defeat of fascism, it acknowledged the danger of slipping into dictatorial ends:

The German revolutionary socialists are convinced that dictatorial means may only serve to secure a workers' democracy and that the leadership quality of the revolutionary party must prove itself by *not needing* a totalitarian special status in order to accomplish its tasks and, due to its recognition of the importance of freedom as a vital principle of socialism, by *not wanting* such a status.¹⁵⁵

The experience of communist betrayal during the Spanish Civil War, the spectacle of the Moscow show trials, and the abomination of the Hitler-Stalin Pact not only ended NB's admiration for the Soviet Union. These moments also occasioned a self-critique of NB's own structure and ideals. “From our oft-expressed critical affinity for the Soviet Union, while maintaining our independence from it,” continued Schmidt, “we now had to pass

¹⁵³ Letter from Stefan Weyl [i.e. Georg Eliasberg] (Sosua/Puerto Plata, D. R.) to Flechtheim (New York), Nov. 19, 1940, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 13.

¹⁵⁵ *Der kommende Weltkrieg*, 25. Emphasis in original.

very sharply into a fundamental critique and rejection of this system.”¹⁵⁶ German communists who justified the worst Soviet crimes in a mind-bending secular theodicy “saw [their] world at that time in a dependent relationship that had degenerated into the purest cretinism [and were] unable to form a single realistic idea of their own.”¹⁵⁷

New Beginning tried to defend its independence and dared to fight for a realistic brand of democratic socialism distinct from and opposed to the world’s largest purportedly socialist power. The liberal institutions of the West, despite their capitalist character, at least allowed room for that sort of independence not only in the public sphere but also within the socialist organization itself. Gerhard Bry once remarked about the Frankfurt School that “[p]erhaps they were not undogmatic, but at least everybody had his own dogma.”¹⁵⁸ He might have said the same about his comrades in New Beginning.

Conclusion: The Principle of Hope

Although the “exile period” of New Beginning’s history may be said to start in 1935, the group’s full transition to exile took a while and did not crystallize until the outbreak of war in 1939-40. The group’s frequent claim that it maintained exclusive contact with the German underground—even after war had eliminated whatever tenuous contacts actually existed—was as much a product of the group’s hybrid structure as it was wishful thinking or willful misrepresentation. Once the connection between its exilic and non-exilic parts had been severed, a degree of dysfunction entered New Beginning’s antifascist network. Without its contacts inside Germany, the foreign bureau and its partner groups lost their de facto mandate as representatives of the underground resistance. This did not mean that they necessarily slid into political isolation like so many other political exiles, but simply that they took on a lobbyist role that departed from their original purpose as professional revolutionaries. They promoted democratic socialist renewal to their European, British, and American hosts, and often these hosts found it expedient to support them. New Beginning’s de-radicalization owed as much to the objective condition of political exile and external political developments as it did to a genuine internal conversion.

The philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote *The Principle of Hope* while in American exile. In this magnum opus, he described the historical trajectory of utopian thinking from the beginnings of civilization. The future-orientedness of modern revolutionary utopias, their anticipation of the “not yet” and their imagination of the “as if,” he argued, represented the true progressive force of history. But hope was a precarious thing in exile. “How does man live with doom, with the continuous crumbling away before his eyes of everything that makes life worth living?” asked Erich Schmidt. “With the principle of hope for yet another last straw? For us émigrés, this straw was always yet another country where we could continue our fight, a place where we refugees still had a chance to start again from the beginning.”¹⁵⁹ Schmidt had reconciled himself to Aenean exile, making a

¹⁵⁶ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 53.

¹⁵⁸ Bry, *Resistance*, op. cit., 188-89.

¹⁵⁹ Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 59.

new life together with his wife Hilde Paul in America.¹⁶⁰ But hope for a new beginning sustained all refugees from Hitler, including those Odyssean wanderers who intended to return to Germany and help shape its political future after fascism—all except those driven over the brink of material and psychological despair.

After the war, the New Beginning members in exile breathed a collective sigh of relief to see many of their old comrades inside Germany rise up from the ruins. They were amazed to see that a small underground cell in Berlin had survived intact to the very end. But they were also distraught that Germany's fate, its new beginning, had become the plaything of the world's two superpowers. New Beginning had always lamented the division of the socialist movement and of the German working class. They had never counted on this division becoming a permanent fixture of geopolitics.

More generally, the renewers generation that New Beginning represented had grown up. Twelve years of antifascist struggle both inside Germany and in exile matured their political and theoretical understandings of socialism. A heavy dose of realism now displaced the unbounded idealism of their adolescence. They would enter the postwar years as adults in full possession of their mandate to restart socialism.

¹⁶⁰ They did make one attempt to resettle in West Germany in 1955, but after a few strenuous months they decided to return to New York. Erich remarked, "I would have needed two psychoanalysts to stay there." Qtd. by Roland Gröschel, Foreword to Schmidt, *Meine Emigrantenjahre*, 7.

CHAPTER THREE:
Germany's New Beginning: Reconstruction, Remigration,
and the Postwar Fusion Struggle

Germany’s New Beginning: Reconstruction, Remigration, and the Postwar Fusion Struggle

The end of the war in Europe on May 8, 1945, brought great uncertainty and confusion into the ranks of New Beginning. Whereas during the previous twelve years and particularly during the war New Beginning and other socialist splinter groups had one clear enemy in the Nazis and one clear purpose in survival—that is, preserving a socialist leadership elite—now the real prospect of Germany’s post-fascist future opened up before them. The first response at “zero hour” by New Beginning members inside Germany and in exile was to seek out survivors and count the fallen. But above all, the NB contingents wanted to reestablish contact with each other. For the émigrés, to uncover NB survivors amid the rubble of the Reich meant reclaiming their mandate as legitimate representatives of a new, socialist Germany. For the survivors, to communicate with comrades abroad meant an end to years of political isolation and access to moral and material resources that would prove indispensable in the hard times ahead. As NB’s leader in the United States, Karl Frank, recalled some months later,

The illegal anti-Nazi groups in Germany were atomized. . . . It was necessary to search them out, to learn something about their activity, to break through the double ring of isolation that had been placed around Germany by the Nazi regime and the state of war. Ways had to be found at least to cast a glance here and there behind the wall and thus, out of small fragments, compose a picture that would show people that not every German was a Nazi.¹

Frank could have identified yet a third ring of isolation around Germany, one that proved just as formidable as those forged by the Nazi regime and the war: Allied occupation policy.

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allies had reaffirmed their commitment to the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany and to the eventual division of the country into four occupation zones. The Allied military leaders and heads of state based their plans on a serious concern about “the political and psychological forces which have united the majority of the German people behind the total war effort.” They saw “little sign that the mass of the German people has the inclination, the energy, or the organization to break the Nazi grip and to take active steps to end the war,” and they anticipated armed resistance by the German people even after the official surrender. The failed attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20 of the previous year had thrown the military and conservative resistance into disarray, and the “[u]nderground opposition of German workers is not strong enough to constitute an effective political force prior to German collapse.”² As British and American armies approached from the West and the Soviet Red Army from the East over the next few months, the prevailing strategy for the political reconstruction of Germany was therefore one of complete subjugation. This total war would end in total peace.

¹ American Association for a Democratic Germany, ed., *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit. Briefe und Dokumente Berliner Sozialisten* (New York: AADG, 1946), 7. Translation mine.

² Report by the Combined Intelligence Committee, “Estimate of the Enemy Situation – Europe (as of 23 January 1945),” *Argonaut [i.e. Yalta] Conference, January-February 1945: Papers and Minutes of Meetings* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 2002), 29-43 (32-3).

When the Nazi regime capitulated in early May 1945, American, British, French, and Soviet leaders disagreed on the details of how political reconstruction and the reeducation of the German people should proceed within their respective occupation zones. But they generally agreed on the need for thoroughgoing denazification and demilitarization—policies made official at the Potsdam Conference three months later.³ The American Joint Chiefs of Staff directive JCS 1067, adopted secretly for the American zone, stipulated that “[n]o political activities of any kind shall be countenanced unless authorized” by the military government.⁴ Similar orders applied in the other zones, and together the Allies formalized their “supreme authority” over the German territory with the Berlin Declaration of June 5.⁵ In addition to the expected dismantling of the German military and government, all German schools and universities were closed, radios and newspapers shut down, correspondence censored, organized political activity forbidden, German uniforms of any sort banned, major industries seized, and aircraft grounded. Not surprisingly, then, the first contact between NB émigrés and NB survivors inside Germany came through the mediation of Allied occupation personnel.

Fred H. Sanderson, an agronomist working for the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS), arrived in the American sector of Berlin on September 11, 1945.⁶ A native of Kassel, he had first entered the New Beginning periphery in Geneva in 1934 or ’35 and participated in a discussion circle there with Ossip K. Flechtheim and Horst Mendershausen.⁷ Later he collaborated with the NB-backed American Friends of German Freedom in New York, where he continued his friendship with Flechtheim and grew close to Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg.⁸ Before Sanderson departed for Europe as an agent of the OSS in 1945, Frank gave him a list of NB members that he should try to

³ For histories of the various occupations and their denazification efforts, see Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg, 1945-1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000); Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995); Heiner Wember, *Umerziehung im Lager. Internierung und Bestrafung von Nationalsozialisten in der britischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1991); Clemens Vollnhals, ed., *Entnazifizierung. Politische Säuberung und Rehabilitierung in den vier Besatzungszonen 1945-1949* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991); James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982); F. Roy Willis, *The French in Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1962).

⁴ Section 9a, “Directive to Commander-in-Chief of United States Forces of Occupation Regarding the Military Government of Germany [JCS 1067],” in effect already in May 1945 but only publicized on Oct. 17, 1945, <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/JCS_1067> (accessed July 2014).

⁵ “Declaration Regarding the Defeat of Germany and the Assumption of Supreme Authority by Allied Powers,” Berlin, June 5, 1945, <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/ger01.asp>> (accessed July 2014).

⁶ Harold Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: “Die Anfänge des Widerstands,” Pt. 1: “Führungsanspruch und Isolation der Sozialdemokraten” (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), 47. Sanderson would become chief of the Western European Economic Branch of the US Department of State’s Division of Research for Europe and later an official in the Department of Agriculture.

⁷ Letter from Fred Sanderson (OSS Mission to Germany, Wiesbaden) to Ossip K. Flechtheim (Lewiston, ME), Aug. 19, 1945, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179; Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 59-60; interview of Ossip K. Flechtheim by Wolfgang Jean Stock (Berlin), June 26, 1972, IfZ-Munich, ZS-3016.

⁸ A letter from Karl Korsch (Boston, MA) to Ossip K. Flechtheim of Jan. 12, 1940, indicates that Sanderson and his wife helped expand the NB network outside of New York City. NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

locate. On his tour of Berlin that September and October, he did actually find most people on the list: Kurt Schmidt, Georg Müller, Theo Thiele, Kurt Mattick, Erich Kürschner, Werner Peuke, Ernst Jegelka, et al.⁹ Not only alive, many of them had already formed an active working group of about twenty or thirty people who met in the old spirit of New Beginning.

Sanderson reported back to Frank and Eliasberg in New York and to Richard Löwenthal in London:

Those whom I have seen impressed me as extremely earnest and reliable people, but their statements are still characterized by a certain lack of specificity and a long-windedness which has been so characteristic of German left-wing thought. I’d say that this group more than others suffers from German philosophitis [sic]. I was nevertheless surprised by the degree of parallelism between the development of their concepts and yours. Needless to say, they were pleased to hear from you and only wished that you and others were here to talk with them.¹⁰

The measured tone of Sanderson’s report contrasted sharply with the joyous effect it had on the NB émigrés. The news, wrote Eliasberg to Henry Ehrmann, is “much better than we had dared to hope.”¹¹ Hans Braun, writing from San Francisco, told Eliasberg that “never has a piece of news brought me so much joy as your message that most of our old friends were able to survive those difficult years.”¹² That NB members had survived the war and had gathered again spontaneously when it was over, and that they now sought to influence Germany’s political future, proved the success of the group’s mission since 1933: to preserve a socialist leadership elite for Germany after Hitler. But the challenges that this reconstructed NB network would face in the coming months and years showed that the mission was far from over.

This chapter reassembles the broken pieces of New Beginning and the renewers generation in the wake of twelve years of Nazi terror and almost six years of total war. Many inside Germany had suffered intimidation, arrest, violent interrogation, and imprisonment in concentration camps. Some had served in penal battalions or the regular army, witnessing firsthand the destruction and brutality wrought by Hitler’s war machine. A few had survived undetected in German society, conforming outwardly to the demands of the Nazi state and waiting for the day when they might again practice democratic politics. Those outside Germany had endured the common fate of all refugees and displaced persons: poverty, psychological stress, political impotence, and legal

⁹ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 61. According to an interview of Fred Sanderson by Harold Hurwitz (Washington, DC), Nov. 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17, he had been in Berlin working for Allen Dulles and the OSS since July 1945. Sanderson probably meant that he had been working in Germany since July, not Berlin specifically.

¹⁰ Letter from Fred Sanderson to Karl Frank, Oct. 7, 1945, qtd. in Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 62. See also the almost verbatim letter from Fred Sanderson to Richard Löwenthal (London), Oct. 9, 1945, NB Archives, 25/1.

¹¹ Letter from Vera Eliasberg to Henry Ehrmann (Fort Getty, RI), Oct. 19, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/10.

¹² Letter from Hans Braun (San Francisco) to Vera Eliasberg, Nov. 1945, NL Hurwitz, 103. Georg Eliasberg replied from New York to the first direct correspondence with Kurt Schmidt and friends: “I hardly need to write to you that we have rejoiced here tremendously at every piece of news and at every name of surviving friends. The years of not knowing your personal fates were certainly after all one of the worst parts of the exile life.” Letter from “Stefan Neuberg” [Georg Eliasberg] (New York) to Kurt Schmidt and friends (Berlin), Jan. 7, 1946, Goldbloom Papers, 4/15.

uncertainty. But the “zero hour” of May 1945 and its immediate aftermath offered Germans everywhere, including those in exile, a chance at beginning anew.

The German nation served of course as the primary object of renewal. Because the Nazis had corrupted the language of national renewal and “regeneration,” however, the debate over the new German borders and whether the country should remain divided by the occupying powers took place chiefly in economic terms.¹³ The Western Allies’ plans for reconstruction made German political culture, and particularly its latent democratic potential, into another object of renewal.¹⁴ Only the Soviet occupiers valued socialist renewal as such. In the crucial ten months between June 1945 and April 1946, the proposal to unify social democrats and communists into a Socialist Unity Party (SED) seemed finally to provide a real opportunity for resurrecting German socialism. Proselytizers of this “fusion” of the SPD and KPD into the SED played on the widespread desire among German socialists to overcome the division of the workers’ movement and to redeem the failure of 1932-33. But the surviving members of New Beginning in Allied-occupied Berlin and those still abroad remembered the communist betrayals of the 1930s. To them the SED represented a false messiah, promising a socialist future but in fact delivering the German Left into Soviet hands. After the disturbing experience of the “fusion struggle” [*Fusionskampf*] in 1945-46,¹⁵ many former members of NB abandoned their revolutionary hopes and adopted a pragmatic “socialism without utopia,” usually—but not exclusively—within the ranks of the SPD.

Germany’s new beginning offered the first real opportunity to restart socialism after the failure of the workers’ movement against fascism, and the key to this opportunity lay right where NB had originated. Four-power Berlin looked on the map like a microcosm of occupied Germany as a whole.¹⁶ In the fall of 1945, leading social democrats and communists in the city began serious discussions about unifying the two workers’ parties. For the first time in twelve years the great hope of the renewers

¹³ For example, the Morgenthau Plan, which called for the permanent division of Germany with an eye toward its deindustrialization and “pastoralization,” became the main object of critique for those on the German Left and Right who believed that Germany should retain its borders prior to Hitler’s annexations. For a copy of Henry Morgenthau, Jr.’s original memorandum to Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Program to Prevent Germany from starting a World War III,” and a further elaboration of his plan, see Morgenthau, *Germany Is Our Problem* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1945).

¹⁴ See Karl Loewenstein, *Political Reconstruction* (New York: Macmillan, 1946). See also Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015); Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014).

¹⁵ I will try to avoid the naming controversy by not using the more common terms “forced fusion” [*Zwangsvereinigung*], favored at the time by the anti-communist West, and “voluntary merger” [*freiwilliger Zusammenschluss*] or “push for unity” [*Einheitsdrang*], favored by the pro-communist East. “Fusion struggle” [*Fusionskampf*], also in use at the time, describes the entire contested process of forming the SED in 1945-46. It should be said that the historian Harold Hurwitz gave this term too a pro-Western connotation. Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: Die Anfänge des Widerstands, Part 2: Zwischen Selbsttäuschung und Zivilcourage: Der Fusionskampf (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990).

¹⁶ At the same time, Berlin proved the exception to most political, economic, and social rules that applied elsewhere: “the fifth zone” possessed its own logic that exacerbates most attempts to draw conclusions from it that apply to the rest of Germany. See Arnold Sywottek, “Die ‘fünfte Zone’. Zur gesellschafts- und außenpolitischen Orientierung und Funktion sozialdemokratischer Politik in Berlin 1945-48,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 13 (1973), 53-129.

generation, unity of the German working class, seemed just over the horizon. Only, the intransigence of communist leaders returned from exile, the strategic preponderance of the Soviet occupation authorities, and the traditionalism of many social democrats shattered the foundations of rapprochement. A partial unification of the two parties of the German Left did occur in the spring of 1946, but it looked very different from what New Beginning and the renewers had imagined.

Really Existing Socialist Renewal

The immediate postwar period featured several examples of spontaneous socialist unity and renewal that occurred outside the official control of the traditional workers’ parties. Most visible were the numerous Antifascist Committees (Antifas). Despite recent scholarly attempts to downplay the significance of the Antifas in early postwar reconstruction,¹⁷ the existence of these impromptu united fronts of local social democrats and communists ready to undertake democratic socialist self-administration after Hitler cannot but astonish the contemporary observer accustomed to narratives of postwar Germans’ political apathy. The historians Lutz Niethammer, Ulrich Borsdorf, and Peter Brandt described how the Antifas

tried to adopt security measures against Nazis and gather their manpower and assets as reparations, to organize the clearing of rubble and the repair of houses and factories, to protect supply depots from looting, to obtain food and fuel and distribute them equitably along with the remaining housing spaces, to purge administrations and factories of “Nazis,” to safeguard an elementary order by means of an auxiliary police force, and to create connections [*Anknüpfungspunkte*] through committees in the factories and neighborhoods for communication between all those willing to rebuild and those in need.¹⁸

Even though they lacked any trans-regional coordination, the Antifas displayed remarkably “homogeneous” forms of organization. These German socialists “put into practice . . . the desire to remove the ruins of the National Socialist regime immediately and enabled the populace to mobilize for collective self-help.” From them sprang “[a]n initiative for a new start [*Neuanfang*].”¹⁹

Besides the Antifas, which soon lost their authority as Allied occupation forces established regular systems of administration, the former inmates of KZ Buchenwald near Weimar represented another example of socialist renewal. Social democrat, communist, and left-wing Catholic inmates at Buchenwald had clandestinely organized a united front during the final months of the Nazi regime, and on April 13 they issued the so-called Buchenwald Manifesto. In response to hearing that communists in some parts of liberated Germany sought to reconstitute the KPD, the Buchenwald inmates declared that they had no intention of reforming either of the old parties, the SPD or KPD, and instead wanted a new, democratic socialist party on the basis of the Popular Front. They called it the League of Democratic Socialists (BdS). The Manifesto envisioned a German People’s Republic grounded in a broad, participatory democracy not limited to “empty, formal

¹⁷ See Gareth Pritchard, *Niemandland: A History of Unoccupied Germany, 1944-45* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

¹⁸ Lutz Niethammer et al., eds., *Arbeiterinitiative 1945. Antifaschistische Ausschüsse und Reorganisation der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1976), 11.

¹⁹ Niethammer et al., eds., *Arbeiterinitiative 1945*, 12.

parliamentarism.” Governed by an antifascist alliance, this Republic would ensure both bourgeois democratic freedoms and worker-friendly social welfare policies. Heavy industries, banks, and the production of consumer goods would be socialized and planned. In addition to its commitment to the peaceful reintegration of Germany into the international community, the Manifesto also called for close cooperation with the Soviet Union and with other socialist states in order to foster a socialist Europe. The German People’s Republic would help “renew Europe’s cultural mission to the world at the societal stage of socialism.” Accomplishing socialist unity on the basis of “revolutionary democratic socialism” represented the immediate precondition of all of these tasks. Neither social democrats, nor communists, nor socialist factions of any kind would continue to exist independently. Indeed, the future socialist state had as its anthropological goal the creation of “a new type of German European”—an internationally minded socialist committed to cultural progress and artistic unfolding.²⁰

One of the leading camp committee members was Hermann L. Brill, the social democrat jurist and politician whose anti-Nazi resistance group Deutsche Volksfront had formed an alliance with New Beginning in 1937 and who continued to identify himself as a member and even leader of NB well into the postwar years.²¹ Brill and the BdS would repeatedly run afoul of the Soviet occupation authorities in Thuringia as well as annoy representatives of the traditional workers’ organizations, who could not countenance such a radical, unauthorized new party. Put on the defensive by the formation of the BdS, for example, the Berlin social democrat leader Otto Grotewohl later invoked the SPD’s “glorious and magnificent seventy-year history” as a reason for remaining loyal to the name “social democracy” and not experimenting with any groups that preached a new “democratic socialism.”²²

But despite their long and sometimes spotty past, the traditional workers’ parties too had to reinvent themselves at Germany’s zero hour. Allied martial law and caution about any kind of native German political activism made this a difficult task. The Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) was the first occupation power to loosen the political straitjacket. Because American, British, and French troops did not arrive in Berlin until July, Soviet authority extended over the entire city for two critical months. In

²⁰ “Buchenwalder Manifest,” printed in Hermann Brill, *Gegen den Strom* (Offenbach: Bollwerk-Verlag K. Drott, 1946), 96-102. For a related document, cf. the “Action Program” of the Hamburg SPD and KPD, July 24, 1945, analyzed somewhat unfavorably by Albrecht Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit. Die Wiedergründung der SPD 1945/46* (Hannover: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1964), 53ff. The Buchenwald Manifesto’s anthropological goal resembled Walter Loewenheim’s grand human and socialist experiment, the Org. See Ch. 1.

²¹ For a useful comparison of Deutsche Volksfront (also known as the “Ten Points Group”) and NB, see also Frank Moraw, *Die Parole der “Einheit” und die Sozialdemokratie. Zur parteiorganisatorischen und gesellschaftspolitischen Orientierung der SPD in der Periode der Illegalität und in der ersten Phase der Nachkriegszeit 1933-1948* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1973), 47ff. And for a history of the League of Democratic Socialists and of Brill’s role in particular, see Manfred Overesch, *Machtergreifung von Links. Thüringen 1945/46* (Hildesheim; New York: Olms, 1993); Overesch, *Hermann Brill in Thüringen, 1895-1946. Ein Kämpfer gegen Hitler und Ulbricht* (Bonn: Dietz, 1992); Overesch, “Hermann Brill und die Neuanfänge deutscher Politik in Thüringen 1945,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 27, no. 4 (Oct. 1979), 524-69.

²² Grotewohl, “Interne Rede vor SPD-Funktionären in Leipzig am 6. September 1945,” in Hans-Joachim Fieber et al., eds., *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei*, Vol. 1: Mai 1945 bis April 1946 (Berlin: Edition Luisenstadt, 1994), 105-22 (117).

its Order No. 2 of June 10, 1945, SMAD permitted the independent formation of antifascist parties and trade unions in its occupation zone. These new political organizations should strive for “the permanent eradication of the remainders of fascism and the strengthening of the foundations of democracy and bourgeois freedoms in Germany.”²³ At this point, the Soviet line in the occupied territories resembled its Popular Front program of the mid-1930s: complete the bourgeois revolution through securing civil liberties, writing constitutions, building antifascist “blocks,” and supporting ostensibly democratic, multi-party parliamentary systems.²⁴ But unlike the similarly oriented BdS in Thuringia, the Soviets did not want the immediate unification of the German workers’ movement.

The Central Committee (ZK) of the German Communist Party (KPD), always prepared with finished documents in hand, published its founding proclamation the day after Order No. 2. In diagnosing the failure of the German workers’ movement in 1932-33, the proclamation described how unity could have prevented the Nazi seizure of power—not working-class unity, but “the will of a unified *people* ready to fight.”²⁵ It admitted that German communists too shared the blame insofar as “we were unable to forge the antifascist unity of workers, peasants, and intellectuals in spite of the blood sacrifice of our best fighters and because of a series of our errors.” While gesturing at the party’s divisive “social fascism” policy of the early 1930s, the ZK still presented the KPD as the only movement that had tried to unify the German people against Hitler. Its apology thus read like a vindication. At this uncertain moment in the summer of 1945, the KPD wanted to focus German discontent on the failure of 1918-19—the stunted revolution—when social democrats arguably did betray the cause of democracy and opened the door to right-wing reaction. The failure of 1932-33, on the other hand, when communists shared more of the blame, was not a useable past. Nor did the ZK see fit to mention the awkward years of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

The German people, the communist proclamation continued, must embark on “an entirely new path” while learning from past mistakes. The cause of German democracy, which had begun with the bourgeois-democratic transformation [*Umbildung*] of 1848, must be carried through to the end. At the same time, “a new page” in the history of the German workers’ movement has been turned. This alternation between historical continuity (the German democratic revolution) and rupture (a new path) symbolized the problem of renewal for the German Left during the immediate postwar months. The communist proclamation considered socialism’s immediate task “the struggle for the democratic renewal of Germany, for the rebirth [*Wiedergeburt*] of our country.” And the “new birth” [*Neugeburt*] of the German people could only occur through “a firm unity of democracy,” which would take the form of “a block of antifascist democratic parties” in “a parliamentary-democratic republic.”²⁶ Renewal, democracy, and antifascist unity were that summer’s buzzwords.

²³ “Befehl des Obersten Chefs der Sowjetischen Militärverwaltung in Deutschland, Nr. 2,” June 10, 1945, in Hans J. Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951* (Berlin: H. Spitzing, 1964), 748-9.

²⁴ For the broader context of this early Soviet policy of “People’s Democracy,” see Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1967), Pt. 1.

²⁵ “Aufruf der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands,” 757. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ “Aufruf der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands,” 759-60.

Among the signatories of the proclamation were Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht, Franz Dahlem, and Anton Ackermann—a broad but generally middle-aged spectrum ranging from Ackermann at thirty-nine to Pieck at sixty-nine. They represented the last elected ZK of the illegal KPD in 1939. Most had gone into Moscow exile, survived the purges of the late 1930s, and recently returned to Germany at the end of April with the Ulbricht, Ackermann, and Sobottka groups.²⁷ A few like Franz Dahlem, Ottomar Geschke, and Hans Jendretzky had spent the war years in German concentration camps.

Unlike the reestablished KPD, the social democrats in the Soviet zone had no trained cadres flown in from Moscow with readymade plans. They were slower in issuing their own proclamation, mostly because of their uncertain position vis-à-vis the Soviet authorities and the comparatively ad hoc nature of their party reorganization. Moreover, no one group of social democrat leaders in the Soviet zone, the Western zones, or in exile could claim the exclusive mandate for leadership of the new SPD with the same authority that the ZK claimed for its party. The Sopade émigrés and the rump parliamentary faction inside Germany had never officially settled their dispute when the Nazis banned the party in the summer of 1933. The claims by socialist splinter groups like New Beginning to represent the genuine workers’ resistance eroded the legitimacy of the Sopade. By the time the Sopade and these splinter groups resolved their differences in the Union of German Socialist Organizations in Great Britain in 1941, the exile leaders had lost all contact with the rank and file inside Germany.²⁸ Many questioned whether the SPD should be refounded at all after Hitler. The power of party tradition and the awareness of the communists’ rapid redeployment in the occupation zones, however, convinced most social democrats of the old party’s necessity. Still, according to the traditional democratic statutes of the SPD, only a national party convention could elect a new leadership. Given the strictures on political activity within and especially between the four occupation zones, such a convention could not occur anytime soon.

The social democrat leaders that emerged in the Soviet zone stemmed primarily from the masses of liberated camp inmates and from the subdued, older party functionaries who had successfully kept their heads down during Nazi rule. The members of the earliest organizations in postwar Berlin averaged fifty years old.²⁹ This age pattern makes sense given the fact that most younger males in their twenties or thirties (the renewers generation) would have served in the military and at the war’s end likely sat in POW camps somewhere. And although younger social democrats of both sexes might have proven their worth in the underground struggle, they had never held any official

²⁷ For a firsthand account by a member of the Ulbricht Group, see Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* [1955], trans. C. M. Woodhouse (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1958).

²⁸ See Ch. 2.

²⁹ Erich W. Gniffke and Otto Grotewohl gathered together in their office at Bülowstraße 7 near Nollendorfplatz a number of former trade union leaders like Theodor Leipart, Hermann Schlimme, Alwin Brandes, Helmut Lehmann, Otto Suhr, and Bernhard Göring—the last an erstwhile ally of New Beginning. Other participants of these meetings included the former SPD leaders Engelbert Graf, August Karsten, Friedrich Ebert, Jr., Otto Meier, Toni Wohlgemuth, and Karl Litke. These were all relatively old men, save one middle-aged woman in Wohlgemuth. Except for Göring, who was forty-seven, all were in their fifties or much older—Leipart and Brandes were nearly eighty. Erich W. Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1966), 19ff. At the same time as the Gniffke-Grotewohl meetings in Schöneberg, Max Fechner (b. 1892) gathered social democrats at his food store in Neukölln. The age range of the “Fechner Circle” was similar. See Bernhard Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung. Biographien und Chronologie* (Berlin: Edition Luisenstadt, 1994), 42, 207.

party functions. While not so surprising, the age pattern of Germany’s postwar new beginning does however demonstrate that the social democrat reorganizers represented the oldest traditions of the SPD. Despite the twelve-year hiatus under Nazi rule, this older milieu had grown accustomed in the past to coordinating union struggles for better wages, trusting in the party’s parliamentary representatives, and espousing an orthodox Marxist faith in progressive social transformation. For their whole lives they had participated in a variety of proletarian mass organizations like choirs and sports clubs and breathed in the rich atmosphere of working-class culture. At the same time, these leaders had grown susceptible to bureaucratic tendencies. Although all believed in socialism and democracy, many over the next year flirted with authoritarian means to achieve those goals.

On June 11, the day that the KPD issued its founding proclamation, social democrat functionaries poured into Erich W. Gniffke’s office at Bülowstraße 7 to witness the formal constitution of the Central Committee (ZA) of the SPD.³⁰ Addressed to “Workers, Peasants, and Citizens!,” the June 15 proclamation of the ZA followed the rhetorical model used by the KPD. To achieve the concurrent ends of democracy and socialism, the social democrat ZA declared itself willing “to work together with all like-minded people and parties,” including the KPD, whose founding proclamation the ZA “warmly” welcomed. It also endorsed the KPD’s call for “an antifascist democratic regime and a parliamentary-democratic republic with all democratic rights and freedoms.”³¹ This new republic must first eliminate all vestiges of fascism and militarism and reinvigorate the German youth. It must also compensate the many victims of fascism and German imperialism. The fascist economy had to be transformed from the ground up, redistributing large property holdings and socializing banks, insurance companies, mines, power companies, and most vital heavy industries. All liquid capital must be directed toward investment in domestic reconstruction. These socialization and capital-steering measures went much further than the KPD’s proposals, which only involved land reform, local self-administration of factories, and moderation of capitalism’s excesses.

Although its aims may have seemed more “socialist” than the KPD’s, the ZA wanted “above all to lead the struggle for the reshaping [*Neugestaltung*] [of Germany] on the basis of the organizational unity of the German working class.”³² Oddly enough, however, the language of renewal did not feature so prominently in the SPD proclamation as it did in the KPD’s several days earlier.³³ Terms like “reconstruction” [*Wiederaufbau*] appeared just as often as “new construction” [*Neuaufbau*]. The old social democrats still held on too tightly to party tradition to consider the unity of the working class something entirely “new.” The proclamation’s final injunction harkened back to the earliest days of the SPD: “Forward! [*Vorwärts!*] To work!”³⁴

³⁰ “The crowd of people in my office suddenly increased,” recalled Gniffke, “since every old functionary wanted to be there when the party acquired new life.” Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 26.

³¹ “Aufruf der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands,” Berlin, June 15, 1945, in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 761-4 (762).

³² “Aufruf der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands,” 763.

³³ Otto Grotewohl’s draft of the proclamation did include the phrase “historical rebirth [*Wiedergeburt*] of the German people.” Grotewohl, “Entwurf für den Aufruf der SPD vom 15. Juni 1945,” in Fieber et al., eds., *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei*, Vol. 1, 65-68 (66).

³⁴ For differing accounts of the first official meeting of Berlin social democrats since the war’s end which took place on June 17 at the hotel Deutscher Hof in Kreuzberg, see Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 22ff.; Otto Grotewohl, “Weg und Wille!” *Das Volk* (July 7, 1945), reprinted in *Im Kampf um Deutschland. Reden und*

Both the KPD and SPD proclamations indicated to varying degrees that socialist renewal and unity still went hand in hand at Germany’s so-called zero hour. If the social democrat proclamation shied away from the explicit rhetoric of renewal, ZA leaders like Gustav Dahrendorf and Otto Grotewohl spoke frequently in other contexts that summer about a “complete new beginning,” “democratic renewal,” “renewal of the life of the German people,” “German renewal,” and “new shaping [*Neugestaltung*] on the basis of the organizational unity of the working class.”³⁵ Since the working class’ failure to prevent the fascist takeover in 1932-33, German socialists increasingly diagnosed division within the movement as the primary problem. Although the initial shock of Hitler’s victory and the “coordination” of German society in 1933-34 caused greater fragmentation of the socialist movement—during this period, for example, the appeal of splinter groups like New Beginning, ISK, the KPO, and the SAP reached its peak—calls for unity and calls for renewal had merged into a single unity-renewal formula. The bonds forged in the shared struggle against fascism during the United and Popular Front periods and during the war, despite the caprice of Soviet policy, encouraged social democrats and communists to seek common ground. Even when exiled social democrat and communist representatives could not agree to cooperate, as in the failed experiment of the Council for a Democratic Germany in New York, the dominant modes of both groups’ rhetoric continued to revolve around antifascist unity and democratic renewal.

The last words in late September 1944 of Wilhelm Leuschner, a social democrat antifascist martyr, had supposedly been “Establish unity!” [*Schafft die Einheit!*].³⁶ Ever since the defeat of the German workers’ movement in 1932-33, the “slogan of unity,” as historian Frank Moraw once called it, functioned as the panacea, the embodiment of all socialist hopes, and the concrete solution favored by most social democrat and communist resisters inside Germany and in exile. Scholars of postwar political reconstruction have either ignored the genuine appeal that unity had for many social democrats at the war’s end or defined unity too narrowly according to its ultimate form, the Socialist Unity Party (SED). Frank Moraw diagnosed the dominant historiography of his time with an anachronistic tendency to represent the complicated events of 1945-46 as already possessing the deterministic contours of the coming Cold War.³⁷ Western scholars like Albrecht Kaden and Hans-Peter Schwarz as well as Eastern scholars like Siegfried Thomas exhibited this tendency, each venerating or vilifying the historical proponents of socialist unity according to the dominant political discourse of their

Aufsätze, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1948), 13-5 (15); Klaus-Peter Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg. Der Freiheitskampf der SPD in Berlin 1945/46* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1965), 22ff.

³⁵ Gustav Dahrendorf, “Neubeginn!” *Berliner Zeitung* (June 29, 1945), 1; “1945: Was wird aus Deutschland?” speech at the first public assembly of the SPD in Berlin-Zehlendorf, Aug. 20, 1945, *Der Mensch, das Maß aller Dinge. Reden und Schriften zur deutschen Politik 1945-1954*, ed. Ralf Dahrendorf (Hamburg: Verlagsgesellschaft deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften, 1955), 155-8. Grotewohl, “Interview für die ‘Krasnaja Swesda’ am 12. Juli 1945”; “Rede auf der Kundgebung der SPD in Leipzig am 25. August 1945” [according to the eds., might have actually occurred on Sept. 6], in Fieber et al., eds., *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei*, Vol. 1, 93-104 (101).

³⁶ For an interpretation of Leuschner’s testament as the “binding legacy of the dead,” see Gustav Dahrendorf, “Vermächtnis der Toten” [Sept. 9, 1945], *Der Mensch, das Maß aller Dinge*, op. cit., 61-64.

³⁷ Frank Moraw, *Die Parole der “Einheit” und die Sozialdemokratie*. Even the considerable scholarship that has come out since Moraw’s day has generally remained within the contours that he observed in the work from the 1960s.

respective blocs.³⁸ As an alternative approach, Moraw traced the slogan of unity back to socialist discourse of the 1930s and examined how it persisted into the early postwar years. Among other things, he concluded: “Unity—subject to a variety of interpretations and capable of being used and abused for many different ends—thus became a hope for the future beyond any rational analysis of the political force field.”³⁹ Moraw convincingly demonstrated continuities in the rhetoric of socialist unity that transcended the historical rupture of May 1945.

Alternatively, the historian Harold Hurwitz chose to emphasize the tension particularly among social democrats between “tradition” [*Tradierung*] and renewal. In his presentation, the “renewers” of German social democracy—he had New Beginning specifically in mind—typically represented the younger generation who waged a democratic struggle against the authoritarian “traditionalists” of the older generation. Whereas the renewers at first stood on the sidelines, Hurwitz argued, they eventually led the courageous struggle for democracy and freedom against communist influence in Berlin. The traditionalists, on the other hand, by and large took leading positions in the reconstructed SPD and contributed to its bureaucratic and dogmatic rigidification. In the Soviet zone, these older social democrats also compromised the independence of the party by throwing in their lot with the SED.⁴⁰ Hurwitz’ tendentious presentation aside, he correctly highlighted the appeal of renewal, democratic or otherwise, in the postwar months and the continuity of that appeal with socialist positions developed during the 1930s. Drafters of the ZA proclamation, for example, freely admitted that they looked back for inspiration to the Sopade’s revolutionary socialist Prague Manifesto of 1934. That Manifesto had been a direct response to the challenge posed by the Miles/Loewenheim pamphlet, *Neu beginnen!*⁴¹ But Hurwitz underestimated the extent to which the problem of renewal also preoccupied older social democrats and communists.⁴²

³⁸ Albrecht Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit. Die Wiedergründung der SPD 1945/46* (Hannover: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1964); Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Vom Reich zur Bundesrepublik. Deutschland im Widerstreit der außenpolitischen Konzeptionen in den Jahren der Besatzungsherrschaft 1945-1949* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1966); Siegfried Thomas, *Entscheidung in Berlin. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der SED in der deutschen Hauptstadt 1945/46* (East Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964).

³⁹ Moraw, *Die Parole der “Einheit” und die Sozialdemokratie*, 53. See also Gerd-Rainer Horn, “The Social Origins of Unity Sentiments in the German Socialist Underground, 1933 to 1936,” in David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 341-55.

⁴⁰ Harold Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, 4/1. Moraw partially anticipated Hurwitz in identifying the problem of “authoritarian democracy” as the basic theme of his book. *Die Parole der “Einheit” und die Sozialdemokratie*, 15n17.

⁴¹ Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 30. See Ch. 1.

⁴² Nor did the language of renewal and unity at zero hour confine itself to the Left. The founding proclamations of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—both newly created parties in the Soviet zone—also spoke of building a “new home” in the “new democracy,” of “completely new requirements for a rebirth of the German people,” of “the reshaping [*Neugestaltung*] of community life,” of “renewal of the education system,” etc. “Aufruf der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands,” Berlin, June 26, 1945, and “Aufruf der Liberal-Demokratischen Partei Deutschlands,” Berlin, July 5, 1945, in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 764-8. In another example, the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris in August 1938 had resulted in the formation of an International Committee of Study for the Renewal of Liberalism [Comité international d’étude pour le renouveau du libéralisme (CIERL)]. This was a foundational moment for European neo-liberalism. See also Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal*, op. cit.

The ZA believed that the first step toward renewal was to immediately unify the two workers’ parties. But in the summer of 1945 the KPD and the Soviet occupation authorities repeatedly turned down social democrat offers for unity. While the two parties did accomplish a “unity of action” [*Aktionseinheit*] from June to September, which involved joint meetings of the ZA and ZK and cooperation in a variety of practical and administrative matters, Erich W. Gniffke recalled that the communists and especially Walter Ulbricht made clear that they considered immediate organizational unity “premature.”⁴³ Following the Soviet line, Ulbricht and Co. even told their social democrat comrades: “You want to introduce socialism. How is that supposed to happen, given the ideological devastation deep in the ranks of the working class?” The question of socialism did not seem to them “opportune.”⁴⁴

Despite its preferred status with the Soviet occupation authorities, the KPD encountered a number of difficulties in establishing its political hegemony in the Soviet zone. Gniffke heard rumors of “considerable differences” that had arisen “between the rapidly emerging groups of former [communist] functionaries and the emigrants who suddenly showed up in large numbers from the Soviet Union, differences whose reconciliation had required a lot of effort.” One even spoke of the NKVD’s “brainwashing of old communists” who had not yet conformed to the new party line, which meant that they either continued to view social democrats with suspicion as “social fascists” or desired “a renewal of the party—but not in the direction of the Soviet KP.”⁴⁵ The Red Army’s lack of discipline, raping and pillaging throughout the conquered territory, tended to discourage sympathy for the communist cause. The KPD knew that immediate unification with SPD would place it in an inferior position.

After several months of reorganizing, reeducating old functionaries, and monopolizing key administrative posts, the communists finally changed their tune. On September 19, 1945, Wilhelm Pieck delivered a speech at a KPD mass rally in Berlin that called on social democrats and communists in the Soviet zone to pursue “a unification of both parties as soon as possible.”⁴⁶ He claimed that this new “unified workers’ party” would serve as the vanguard of “the whole antifascist democratic movement” in Germany. Social democrats generally welcomed this about-face as a fulfillment of their long-standing wishes for unity and renewal. But the communists’ delay tactic had aroused suspicion. The chief political question of the day was no longer whether the SPD and KPD would unify, but whether socialist unification in the Soviet zone alone might actually result in the permanent division of the German nation and thus of the German working class. The historian Mike Schmeitzner has dubbed the so-called fusion struggle in the spring of 1946 “the first great caesura of partition [*Teilungszäsur*] in postwar history.”⁴⁷ The fate of both Germany’s and socialism’s new beginnings depended on its outcome.

⁴³ Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 32.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 32-33.

⁴⁵ Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 35.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Pieck, “Die demokratische Bodenreform. Deutschlands Aufbauproblem. Die Kraft der demokratischen Einheit,” *Reden und Aufsätze. Auswahl aus den Jahren 1908-1950*, Vol. 2 (East Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1951), 11-27 (21).

⁴⁷ Mike Schmeitzner, “Auf dem Weg zur Diktatur des Proletariats: die KPD/SED als Instrument der Diktaturdurchsetzung,” in J. Gieseke and H. Wentker, eds., *Die Geschichte der SED. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 61-83 (75).

New Beginning Begins Anew

The NB foreign bureau’s man in Berlin, Fred Sanderson, learned that Kurt Schmidt had found a job in the office of Gustav Klingelhöfer, who soon became the ZA’s chief “economic-political” secretary.⁴⁸ Upon returning to Berlin after the Nazi collapse and searching out his friends and relatives, Kurt Schmidt had set about the task of attaining “so far as possible a politically influential post in the SPD.”⁴⁹ In August 1945 he joined Klingelhöfer’s team and also began working in the ZA’s Youth Committee. Despite these strategic positions, Schmidt had to admit that because of his relative youth—Klingelhöfer and Otto Grotewohl, for example, were fifty-six and fifty-one respectively, while he was only thirty-two—he would not at first be able to exert much influence.⁵⁰ Still, they all worked well together. Sanderson saw fit to report back to New York and London that “Klingelhöfer, Schmidt, and other members of the economic committee of the SPD function has a sort of brains trust” for the ZA.⁵¹

Schmidt was part of the trio that had led New Beginning inside Germany from 1936 until his arrest in the fall of 1938. He had suffered physically during seven years of internment and was still in poor health when he first wrote to Karl Frank in December 1945.⁵² “When we took our leave of each other in 1938,” Schmidt began his emotional letter,

I knew that it would be for a long time, but not forever. . . . I was firmly convinced that I would hear from you again one day. I looked forward to this moment the whole time I was interned, and the knowledge that our friends abroad would do everything personally and politically to ease our fate was a great relief to me.⁵³

This kind of psychological dependence on “friends abroad” preserved the New Beginning idea and sustained the morale of NB survivors through the war years and into the early postwar months, even if the actual NB organization inside Germany had all but ceased to exist.

Immediately after the war, Schmidt had begun organizing NB survivors in Berlin.⁵⁴ What actually happened in May and June 1945, who participated in the earliest

⁴⁸ Working closely with his old friend, the former National Bolshevik leader and now KPD member Ernst Niekisch, Klingelhöfer unilaterally expanded the purview of the ZA’s Economic Section into the “Section for Economy and Politics.” Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 47-48. Niekisch had actually joined the KPD after his liberation from the Brandenburg-Görden Prison and assumed directorship of the adult school [*Volkshochschule*] in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. Bernhard Meyer described Klingelhöfer’s position as “economic-political secretary,” whereas Klaus-Peter Schulz referred to his “political bureau.” Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 85; Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 43.

⁴⁹ Letter from Kurt Schmidt to Karl Frank, Dec. 1945, qtd. in Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 44.

⁵⁰ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 44.

⁵¹ Letter from Fred Sanderson to Richard Löwenthal (London), Oct. 9, 1945, NB Archives, 25/1. Schmidt and the rest of Klingelhöfer’s team drafted a number of Otto Grotewohl’s speeches during the late summer and fall of 1945.

⁵² Hermann Brill met him once as a fellow prisoner and remembered him looking terrible, even for a camp inmate. Otto Suhr and Hermann L. Brill, “Kurt Schmidt,” *Das sozialistische Jahrhundert*, 1, no. 17-18 (July 1947), 277.

⁵³ Letter reprinted as “Brief von Kurt Schmidt an seine Freunde in New York. Berlin, im Dezember 1945” in *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, 13-20 (13).

⁵⁴ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 162; Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, 4/1, 34ff.

meetings, and who assumed leadership of the group remains unclear. But by July, twenty to thirty former members of the old NB organization had reconstituted themselves as the “Socialist Working Group” and set about holding regular discussions and lectures. They had to contend with the KPD’s mistrust that dated back to the Popular Front debates of the 1930s, the ZA’s attempt to monopolize social democratic organization in the city, and the Allied occupiers’ anxiety about any kind of political activity.⁵⁵ Given these pressures, the NB survivors fell back on familiar clandestine habits. In Harold Hurwitz’s words, they believed it was necessary and now possible “to pursue their original goal of renewing and then unifying the workers’ movement in secret as a faction, to meet and make joint decisions, without however working in accord with the programmatic determinations, discipline, cadre training, and conspiratorial rules of the old Org.”⁵⁶

Despite the outer trappings of conspiracy, then, the NB working group did not develop into a disciplined secret society or cadre like the old organization. Many former peripheral members such as Fritz Benke learned now for the first time that they had actually belonged to NB in the 1930s. Although the group featured some leading personalities like Kurt Schmidt, the religious socialist Erich Kürschner, and the union organizer Georg Müller, it functioned much more openly than the old conspiratorial cadres, including more people in each meeting and having fewer organizational secrets.

Meetings took place in the American sector of Berlin, often in the apartment of Robert Havemann near the Max Planck Institute in Dahlem or at the Neukölln offices of the doctor Willi Günther.⁵⁷ The membership of the NB group fluctuated as the political situation changed during the fall and winter of 1945-46. Until September 1945 when the oppositional communist Werner Peuke returned from a British POW camp, Kurt Schmidt and Erich Kürschner were the only two representatives of the prewar NB leadership.

The earliest discussions of the NB working group focused on Germany’s dire economic situation and the implications for political reconstruction. Economically, Schmidt noted in a letter to Karl Frank in December 1945, the German people would have to endure the fate of most conquered countries: decreased productive capacity, diminished territory, reparation payments, etc. But that Germany should also remain politically suppressed by the victors came as a shock to many socialists and anti-Nazi resisters, who initially viewed the Allied armies as “liberators.” The Allied occupiers had offered Germans little chance for political self-determination. “At the moment,” Schmidt quipped, “we have no politics to practice, only orders to receive.”⁵⁸

The manner in which the SPD had reconstructed itself in the Soviet zone also gave the NB working group little cause for enthusiasm. Despite his belief that younger elements and a progressive idea of renewal would eventually win out, Schmidt observed that older social democrats had thus far exerted the most influence. For many social democrats who had not actively resisted the Nazis or had only done so passively, a continuation of party tradition and a return to “how it used to be” seemed most appealing.

⁵⁵ As mentioned before, the Soviets were the first to allow the independent formation of “antifascist” political parties and trade unions with its Order No. 2 on June 10, 1945. The Americans followed suit for “democratic” parties on August 27 and the French on December 13. British policy restricted the establishment of zone-wide political organizations until the beginning of 1946, but it did allow them to form at the local level.

⁵⁶ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 34-35.

⁵⁷ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 45.

⁵⁸ “Brief von Kurt Schmidt an seine Freunde in New York,” 17.

The Communist Party, for its part, remained beholden to Marxist-Leninist dogma and a centralized, authoritarian form of organization that contradicted its present claim to champion democracy. Still, in good New Beginning style, Schmidt hoped “to influence [the communists] positively and pedagogically, minimizing their backwards characteristics and supporting their positive-progressive ones until they predominate.” The question of socialist unity loomed large for the NB working group. The “will for unity of the [workers’] movement is strongly developed everywhere,” Schmidt wrote, and although “what emerges will not be 100% the ideal that we have in mind, . . . it could be a crucial step forwards.” The new socialist unity party must function as “a bridge between the West and the East,” and the greatest danger stemmed from the possibility that the “conflict between the victorious powers,” that nascent Cold War rivalry, would imprint itself on the destinies of the two socialist parties.⁵⁹

Fred Sanderson’s various letters back to New York and London and his later recollections serve as an important source for reconstructing NB’s postwar Berlin network, but even he wondered whether Schmidt, his “sole source of information about NB in [Berlin],” was being completely honest with him. After all, Sanderson did appear in American uniform.⁶⁰ Other sources included the testimony of George Silver and Bill Kemsley, two Americans who worked for the Manpower Division of the US military government (OMGUS) in Berlin. Paul Porter, Newman Jeffrey, and David J. Saposs also had contact with NB in the postwar months. All of them had worked as labor organizers in the US, either for the trade unions or the Socialist Party of America, and they had already dealt with NB’s front organization there, the American Association for a Democratic Germany (AADG). These American occupation officials were also associates of the Detroit UAW leaders Victor and Walter Reuther, who counted among Karl Frank’s most influential friends and took a keen interest in the future of the German workers’ movement.⁶¹ Politically, this American contingent in Berlin represented the left-liberal, progressive, and socialist supporters of the New Deal coalition. They considered themselves a left-wing minority within OMGUS as a whole. Horst Mendershausen, a German-born economist and NB member since 1934, also worked in the Manpower Division’s Berlin bureau, which set up shop at Gelfertstraße 19 in the quiet neighborhood of Dahlem about ten kilometers southwest of the city center.⁶²

Even though NB had important contacts among the American occupation authorities, the German-British observer Werner Klatt noted how the “desperate isolation” of the survivors made them unconscious “of the fact that there are Labour movements in

⁵⁹ “Brief von Kurt Schmidt an seine Freunde in New York,” 18-19.

⁶⁰ Interview of Fred Sanderson by Harold Hurwitz (Washington, DC), Nov. 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17.

⁶¹ Interview of George Silver by Harold Hurwitz (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 10-11, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17. Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 58. The NB member Thomas Schoecken settled in Detroit during his American exile and kept Frank and the New Yorkers informed about American labor politics.

⁶² Bombs and street fighting had not damaged this area as heavily as Mitte, the industrial suburbs, and the eastern neighborhoods that lay directly in the Red Army’s path. As one employee of the Manpower Division recalled, “Berlin was a rubble heap inhabited by a vanquished people. This does not apply to the suburbs where the military government offices were located. In Zehlendorf, Dahlem, and Charlottenburg there was damage, but many houses were still intact. Besides, even in shambles luxury housing looks better than tenements.” Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Gerhard Bry in Bry, *Resistance: Recollections from the Nazi Years* (West Orange, NJ: self-pub., 1979), 230-4 (230). By “tenements” she probably meant the working-class “rent barracks” [*Mietskaserne*] found in eastern neighborhoods such as Prenzlauer Berg.

existence in Western Europe, who are watching their decisions very closely and might even be prepared to give them some moral support in their struggle for democratic representation.”⁶³ Such political isolation pained Kurt Schmidt. The American friends of NB, he wrote to Karl Frank, should help the Berlin group “broaden [its] horizons” by sharing “all progressive trains of thought.” Schmidt and the Berlin group wanted to “solve these problems [of German reconstruction] together with you and with all of our friends abroad, regardless of nationality.” In another letter to Georg Eliasberg in New York, Schmidt described how “after 12 years spent in an intellectual concentration camp”—he spoke here metaphorically, but he had also spent seven years in an actual camp—“we are all famished [for knowledge] and would all be glad if you were able to close these gaps too as soon as possible.” He asked first for the latest books and literature to satisfy his friends’ spiritual needs before listing vital material needs like fat, meat, vitamins, medicine, shoes, underwear, etc., which all Germans lacked.⁶⁴ Even more than conduits outside of Germany, the NB survivors wanted clear channels of communication between the four occupation zones. Eliasberg offered to forward them newspaper clippings from the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and other papers in the Western zones and remarked that “[i]n these crazy times it is possible that the quickest way from Frankfurt to Berlin leads through New York.”⁶⁵ Such inefficient material detours symbolized how intellectually stuck Schmidt and his friends felt.

Jean Eisner, an economic analyst and employee of the US Manpower Division, remembered Schmidt as “impressive and astute.”⁶⁶ He was a “very strong leader” of the NB milieu, “a highly intelligent working-class socialist with an impeccable record of forceful political activity.”⁶⁷ He spoke not only for NB but also as a former district executive board member of the Berlin Socialist Worker Youth (SAJ). Bill Kemsley deemed Schmidt “a very solid person and it is almost unbelievable to us that a young person could live in the vacuum of the Hitler regime for 12 years, with 7 of them in prison, and still be as politically well developed as he is.”⁶⁸ In the interests of both the American occupation and the German workers’ movement, Kemsley considered him “a very valuable ‘find’” whose “clear, logical thinking amazes us.”⁶⁹ But others had the impression that Schmidt perhaps swayed too easily under pressure, adapting to

⁶³ Letter from Werner Klatt to Phil Neild (London), Jan. 21, 1946, qtd. in Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 63. Klatt had ties to NB dating back to at least 1935, and in London exile he had grown close to Richard Löwenthal, Erwin Schoettle, Waldemar von Knoeringen, and the rest of the NB milieu. They worked together on the BBC radio program *Sender der Europäischen Revolution* during the war. Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen*, 219, 452n163.

⁶⁴ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to Georg Eliasberg (Long Island, NY), end of Dec. 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/13.

⁶⁵ Letter from “Stefan Neuberger” [Georg Eliasberg] (New York) to Kurt Schmidt and friends (Berlin), Jan. 7, 1946, Goldbloom Papers, 4/15.

⁶⁶ Letter from Jean Eisner to Harold Hurwitz, Aug. 7, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 150.

⁶⁷ Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Gerhard Bry in Bry, *Resistance*, 233.

⁶⁸ Letter from Bill Kemsley to Thomas Schoecken, Dec. 16, 1945, qtd. in Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 64. Original in NL Hurwitz, 105, and Goldbloom Papers, 4/13.

⁶⁹ Letter from Bill Kemsley (Berlin) to Karl Frank, Dec. 26, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/13. Harold Hurwitz characterized Schmidt as “intellectually gifted, [a] born youth leader, very inspiring of confidence, and [possessing] a strong character.” Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 38. And Joseph Kaskell, a confidant of Frank, reported being “highly impressed by Kurt Schmidt’s qualities, his intelligence as well as his character. The most striking element of this character is his complete naturalness and simplicity.” Letter from Joseph Kaskell to Karl Frank (New York), Jan. 12, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 105.

circumstances rather than steering them in a desired direction. According to George Silver of the Manpower Division, the real driving force behind the Berlin NB group was thus not Schmidt but the union organizer Georg Müller.

Born in the town of Brandenburg an der Havel in 1902, Georg Müller moved to the Berlin neighborhood of Köpenick in his youth and followed in his father’s footsteps by training as a plumber and pipefitter. From an early age Müller developed an active proletarian class consciousness, joining the German Metalworkers Union (DMV) and various left-wing political organizations like the Naturfreunde and the Communist Youth (KJVD). Although he was too young to serve in the First World War, the vicarious experience of the war and the wave of political revolutions that ensued radicalized him for life. In the 1920s he joined the communist auxiliary organization Rote Hilfe, but the vicissitudes of Comintern politics drove him into conflict with the KPD. He joined the Communist Party Opposition (KPO) in 1929 and then the Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP) in 1931, at which point he was recruited by the Org.

As per the Org policy of requiring its members to operate within one of the major workers’ parties, Müller joined the SPD in 1932. For the next three years he worked in the Org/NB underground organization. During the 1935 leadership coup he remained loyal to the Loewenheim faction. That fall he was arrested along with several dozen other Org/NB members and would spend the next two years in prison. He was released in 1937 (possibly because of his skills as a worker) and before long he had reestablished contact with his former comrades in NB.⁷⁰ During the war the Army called him up to Penal Division 999, but he managed to convince the authorities that he was “unfit for duty” and, remarkably, they discharged him.⁷¹

After the war he set about reorganizing the German trade unions in Berlin-Lichtenberg but quickly ran afoul of the KPD and the Soviet Commandant’s Office. From the beginning he opposed any form of cooperation with the communists, so he criticized the ZA and its policy of “unity of action” with the KPD. Politically he sat “between two stools.”⁷² Prone to abstract theorizing and conspiratorial intrigue, Müller’s natural home was the NB working group. He became one of its most active participants.

A rivalry developed between Müller and Kurt Schmidt. The two had different philosophies about politics. Müller still shared the old Org’s emphasis on painstaking, theoretical analysis, whereas Schmidt preferred the more pragmatic approach of his NB correspondents in exile. Moreover, Müller had abandoned Marxism entirely in the late 1930s. He identified himself instead as a socialist seeking “humane solutions for the workers based on the insights of ‘social democratism.’”⁷³ The rivalry made sense from a generational perspective: Müller (b. 1902) had more in common with Loewenheim and

⁷⁰ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 122. See also Tobias Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” Ph.D. (TU-Berlin, 2014), 107ff.

⁷¹ “Müller, Georg (1902),” *Widerstand in Berlin gegen das NS-Regime 1933-1945. Ein biographisches Lexikon*, Vol. 5, ed. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2004).

⁷² Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 122. Hurwitz considered Georg Müller “one of the most interesting personalities of the Berlin defensive battle” against the forced fusion of the two workers’ parties. See below. Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 48.

⁷³ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 122.

the other communist renegades who had founded the Org than he did with Schmidt (b. 1913), who identified with the renewers generation and NB’s post-1935 leadership.⁷⁴

Müller’s correspondence with Henry Hellmann and Walter Loewenheim in London, with whom he had reestablished contact in the late summer of 1946, shows that he still relied on the old Org style of theoretical debate, speaking frequently of the need to develop a new “conception” [*Konzeption*].⁷⁵ In Karl Frank’s estimate, Müller was “certainly an outstanding functionary and he has acquired completely correct insights into essential questions[;] but when he tries to express them, the danger exists of confused theories that would be difficult for older party comrades to understand.”⁷⁶ In essence, the rivalry between Müller and Schmidt derived from their different expectations about what role the NB working group could and should play in the future of the socialist movement. Müller believed that the group should continue working as a conspiratorial clique behind the scenes, whereas Schmidt envisioned a looser network of likeminded friends that would eventually dissolve into the ranks of the SPD.

The Fusion Struggle and Its Aftermath

In the spring of 1945, the veteran social democrat and concentration camp survivor Kurt Schumacher had set about reorganizing the SPD in the area around Hannover, which had been liberated by American troops but soon merged into the British occupation zone. He delivered a long speech “We Do Not Despair!” before the first postwar gathering of social democrat functionaries in Hannover on May 6. Democratic socialists would find congenial the Allies’ demand for democracy, he claimed, for unlike with many other parts of the population, democracy was “the fundamental idea of our past and of the future.”⁷⁷ He surely included communists with those “other parts of the population” for which democracy was not so congenial.

Schumacher did express a willingness to set aside the bitter conflict between social democrats and communists, but he warned against too much eagerness for organizational unity. In all liberated countries as of early May 1945, he noted, social democrats and communists had reestablished independent organizations with their own ideologies. If a united socialist party did not arise in those liberated countries, then it seemed highly unlikely to succeed in occupied Germany. Any cooperation with the German communists must reckon with the fact that they identified entirely with one

⁷⁴ At first, Schmidt definitely held the most important political position outside the group. He claimed to exert considerable influence over his boss Klingelhöfer, but George Silver thought the power relationship was exactly the reverse. “Schmidt’s mind was full of gimmicks,” Silver recalled, whereas Georg Müller’s “strength was his fertile mind,” even if he could be “very methodical.” See letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] to Karl Frank, Mar. 19, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108; interview of George Silver by Harold Hurwitz (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 10-11, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17.

⁷⁵ See letter from Georg [Müller] (Berlin) to Vicky Abrams (London), Aug. 7, 194[6], Vicky Abrams Papers, 1031/1/158-196; letter from Georg Müller to Heinrich Jakubowicz [Hellmann] (London), Sept. 13, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 46.

⁷⁶ Frank recounted how Müller had even tried to school the former SAP functionary and NB confidant Werner Klatt in the manner of an old Org F-Course. “I could imagine the confusion,” Frank joked, “if he were to approach [SPD chief Kurt] Schumacher in a similar manner.” Letter from Karl Frank to Erwin Schoettle and Richard Löwenthal (London), Feb. 26, 1946, NL Löwenthal, 4.

⁷⁷ Kurt Schumacher, “Wir verzweifeln nicht!,” speech before social democrat functionaries in Hannover, May 6, 1945, *Reden – Schriften – Korrespondenzen 1945-1952*, ed. Willy Albrecht (Berlin; Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1985), 203-36.

occupation power, Russia. “We cannot and will not be the autocratically wielded instrument of any foreign imperial interest,” Schumacher declared.

With reference to socialist splinter groups like New Beginning, he advocated a “unified [social democratic] party” that would act as “a magnet for all splinters.” There would be no room for factionalism nor for any claims to preeminence based on past membership in any particular group. He was far less critical of the past actions of the old SPD than the Sopade émigrés in London. The SPD had made some errors, yes, but “it has been the only party in Germany to hold adamantly onto what proved through the whole course of events to be the correct line of democracy and freedom.”⁷⁸

In Hannover and throughout the Western zones Schumacher forged alliances with groups of mostly “old-guard functionaries” and entered into correspondence with Sopade leaders in London like Erich Ollenhauer, Fritz Heine, and Hans Vogel. “Despite formal restrictions on political activities and poor communications,” wrote the scholar Lewis J. Edinger, “he quickly established contact with these groups and gained acceptance for Hannover as a rival center to Berlin in the reorganization of a national party organization.”⁷⁹ Schumacher’s “Political Guidelines” pamphlet of August 1945 further established his claim as social democracy’s preeminent figure in the West.⁸⁰ His charismatic persona and quasi-autocratic leadership style combined with three factors that made him popular among social democrats during the immediate postwar period: first, argued Edinger, “he symbolized and articulated more effectively than anyone else the Social Democratic succession myth according to which the resurrected S.P.D. was the only legitimate counter-elite to the leaders of the Third Reich”; second, he insisted that “the party must rectify past strategic and tactical errors and follow a militant course of action”; and third, he espoused an “emphatic anti-Communism” that most of the social democrat rank and file shared.⁸¹

But Schumacher had a rival in the Soviet zone. There Otto Grotewohl began to fashion himself into a prospective leader of a future national party organization. In an internal speech before social democrat functionaries in Leipzig on September 6, Grotewohl maintained that “the Zentralausschuß [ZA] in Berlin merely views as its task as a trustee [*treuhänderisch*]” until a national party convention could elect worthy leaders.⁸² With this calculated modesty, he called into question the legitimacy of Schumacher’s own leadership claim.

The growing rivalry between Schumacher and Grotewohl conditioned the behavior of the Berlin ZA during the coming fusion struggle. On September 15,

⁷⁸ Schumacher, “Wir verzweifeln nicht!”

⁷⁹ Lewis J. Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher: A Study in Personality and Political Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1965), 101.

⁸⁰ Kurt Schumacher, “Politische Richtlinien für die SPD in ihrem Verhältnis zu den anderen politischen Faktoren” (Aug. 25, 1945), *Reden – Schriften – Korrespondenzen 1945-1952*, 256-86.

⁸¹ Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher*, 138.

⁸² Grotewohl, “Interne Rede vor SPD-Funktionären in Leipzig am 6. September 1945,” 116. Grotewohl further established his leadership claim with the influential speech “Where Do We Stand, Where Are We Headed?” on September 14 in Berlin-Neukölln. Grotewohl, “Rede auf der SPD-Kundegebung in Berlin am 14. September 1945,” in Fieber et al., eds., *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei*, Vol. 1, 123-74. This verbatim edition of the speech corrects some of the parts censored in its first publication as a pamphlet, *Wo stehen wir, wohin gehen wir? Weg und Ziel der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin: Verlag Das Volk, 1945). Gustav Klingelhöfer’s position paper of early September “Die Partei 1945” supposedly served as the basis of Grotewohl’s speech. Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 85.

Schumacher circulated a letter to the regional executive boards of the SPD in the Western zones in which he warned “that the Berliners assert a central claim to validity for the whole Reich.” While the Western SPD should recognize the ZA’s jurisdiction in the Soviet zone, “we must ward off” the ZA’s claim to national leadership.⁸³

In the early fall of 1945, Kurt Schmidt and the Klingelhöfer team began preparations for the upcoming conference of the SPD scheduled for October 5-7 in Wennigsen outside Hannover. In his “Political Guidelines,” Schumacher had explicitly called for this “Reich Conference” of the SPD in the three Western zones, not in the Soviet zone.⁸⁴ Due to continued restrictions on German political parties both within the occupation zones and especially between them, delegates of the ZA could only attend the conference as observers. Either due to a willful snub or to a misunderstanding with the British authorities, however, the Berlin delegation was denied entry to the plenary session and had to meet separately in a nearby building.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, on the last day of the conference Schumacher and Grotewohl met personally to discuss the future of the party. They agreed that so long as Germany found itself divided into occupation zones, the organizational unity of SPD was impossible: the Berlin ZA should lead social democrats in the Soviet zone, while the Schumacher bureau should assume leadership in the three Western zones. But they disagreed about the extent of political freedom in these respective zones: Grotewohl referred approvingly to the Soviets’ Order No. 2, which had permitted political parties as early as July, whereas Schumacher’s supporters doubted the ZA’s claims about “unhindered” political life in the East.⁸⁶

The ill treatment that the ZA leaders received at the Wennigsen Conference and the perceived political restrictions in the West prompted them to accept the KPD’s offer in October to establish a joint working group in the Soviet zone. This group prepared for the first major event of the fusion struggle, a joint meeting of thirty representatives each from the KPD and the SPD on December 20-21. This “Conference of Sixty” marked a turning point in the uneasy relationship between the ZA and the ZK: Grotewohl came out in favor of the organizational unity of the two parties—with significant reservations about the communists’ behavior—and the conference generally affirmed his stance.⁸⁷ The majority decided in favor of fusing the two parties over the course of the next three months. Gustav Klingelhöfer attended the conference and spoke last during the

⁸³ Qtd. in Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit*, 130. Kaden, who generally sympathized more with the Western SPD than the Berlin ZA, summed up Schumacher’s stance: “Warding off [*Abwehren*]—from the beginning that had been the core of all considerations that Schumacher made with regard to the Soviet occupation zone and to the Zentralaussschuß in Berlin” (130).

⁸⁴ Schumacher, “Politische Richtlinien,” 284.

⁸⁵ See Matthias Loeding, *Otto Grotewohl kontra Kurt Schumacher. Die Wennigseener Konferenz im Oktober 1945* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2004); Albrecht Kaden, “Entscheidung in Wennigsen,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 7, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1960); Sopade, *Die Wiedergeburt der deutschen Sozialdemokratie. Bericht über Vorgeschichte und Verlauf der sozialdemokratischen Parteikonferenz von Hannover vom 5. bis 7. Oktober 1945* (London, 1945). Guests at the conferences included Erich Ollenhauer, Fritz Heine, and the New Beginning leader Erwin Schoettle, all of whom had traveled from London and set foot in Germany for the first time since 1933.

⁸⁶ Kaden, *Einheit oder Freiheit*, 149ff.

⁸⁷ “Rede Otto Grotewohls auf der gemeinsamen Konferenz von Vertretern der SPD und KPD, 20. Dezember 1945,” Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 794-805. See also Josef Gabert et al., eds., *Einheitsdrang oder Zwangsvereinigung? Die Sechziger-Konferenzen von KPD und SPD, 1945 und 1946* (Berlin: Dietz, 1990).

discussion. He drew attention to the pressure on social democrats in the Soviet zone and criticized the unequal treatment of the SPD and KPD by the Soviet occupation authorities. The fusion of the two parties in the Soviet zone alone, he warned, could bring about the permanent division of Germany.⁸⁸ But in the end, Klingelhöfer too voted for fusion.

Kurt Schmidt and most of the NB working group shared Klingelhöfer’s sentiments, but they grew increasingly uneasy with the push toward unity. In a manuscript composed toward the end of December called “On the Tasks of Social Democracy,” Schmidt emphasized the need for new ideas to fit the new situation. The old Marxist prediction of the imminent collapse of capitalism, the need to expropriate the expropriators, and so on, he argued, no longer had any validity for Germany, given the wholesale destruction of its means of production. That did not disprove Marxism; on the contrary, he insisted, Marx himself would have arrived at the same conclusion. Traditional dogmas must be avoided and the new party of democratic socialism must root itself realistically in the present in order to develop viable ideas for the future. Schmidt pointed out the peculiarity of Germany’s new beginning: “The workers’ movement begins anew [*beginnt von Neuem*] without an active contribution of the masses to facilitate its socially transformative force.” The old workers’ movement was destroyed by fascism, and because of the lack of intellectual freedom under the Nazi regime, the working class could not develop any new insights. Therefore, “[t]he old ideas have today become shackles on the parties.”⁸⁹

Both economically and politically, Schmidt continued, the greatest danger facing the German working class and the people at large was the possibility that the great-power rivalry might imprint itself on divisions within Germany. “The reproduction of the contradictions between the Allies in the parties of the workers’ movement,” he explained, “can be more influential than the will to unity born out the hard times of fascism.” Schmidt suggested that the reality of the Allied occupation and the rivalry between the Western powers and the Soviet Union undermined any genuine attempts to forge socialist unity. Due to its traditions of inner-party democracy and freedom of opinion, he argued, only the SPD was in a position to seize the initiative in reorganizing German political life. In order to succeed, however, German Social Democracy must keep space open for free discussion and overcome its appearance of being “too old” [*überaltert*]. Toward the end of this short thought piece, Schmidt made an implicit appeal to the renewers generation: “Let us prove that after two world wars there is a generation that is capable of responsibly fulfilling the tasks set for it by history.”⁹⁰

The next month, he wrote to Richard Löwenthal in London about the Conference of Sixty:

there were no grounds for celebration; instead [I am] inclined to the opinion that the decision [for unity] was an intermediate goal [*Etappenziel*] of the KP. It is not easy to convince our comrades in the ZA of this. People are deluding themselves here and, in my estimate, see things unclearly. The KP does not want unity in the interests of the working class, but rather through the conquest of the SP wants to create for itself a mass basis, which it is not capable of doing on its own.

⁸⁸ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 86.

⁸⁹ Kurt Schmidt, “Ueber die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie” (end of Dec. 1945), in *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, 21-25.

⁹⁰ Kurt Schmidt, “Ueber die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie.”

He went on to explain that most of the SPD rank and file as well as the district leaderships questioned whether the delegates of the ZA had the authority to make a decision for unity without calling for a party plebiscite [*Urabstimmung*]. He called for “clear, concise formulations” that expressed what the coming unity party would look like. Among the new party’s tasks, Schmidt listed “party democracy, internal freedom, independence from other [outside] powers, new mindset, overcoming of dogmas, education into self-conscious socialist human beings.”⁹¹

Most rank-and-file social democrats in Berlin opposed immediate fusion. Their leaders in the ZA, however, lobbied strongly in its favor. On January 3, 1946, Klingelhöfer sent a letter to Otto Grotewohl suggesting that he had some misgivings about how the ZA was handling the situation. The decision for unity at the Conference of Sixty, he wrote, marked “the opening of the strategic struggle for leadership of the German working class.” Klingelhöfer had in fact just met with an emissary from the Labour Party recently arrived in Germany, a certain German-Englishman named “Holt”—none other than the NB émigré leader Waldemar von Knoeringen. The latter reported to him that in certain Labour circles the Conference appeared as “the opening of the German ‘crisis’” and represented the “capitulation of the SPD” in the Soviet zone. While Klingelhöfer did not agree with that precise characterization, he pleaded with Grotewohl to take a stronger public stand for the autonomy of the SPD and to ensure that social democrats maintain control over “the tempo of unity.” After all, they had more than a 2:1 electoral majority in the Soviet zone. Klingelhöfer thought that the SPD must “determine the moment [of unification] at our own discretion and have and retain leadership; everything depends on that for us.” The days that followed the Conference “have indeed been the most tumultuous that our Berlin movement has had so far.”⁹² Everything depended, he thought, on the unification of the German workers at the correct pace and at the national level.

The Allied occupiers determined to a great degree the horizon of political possibility in their respective zones. The Soviet position in favor of unity seemed clear, and Klingelhöfer believed that Britain’s new Labour government might help German social democrats achieve unity on more equitable terms with the communists. The French generally opposed any measures that might encourage German national unity. But the stance of the Americans remained ambivalent. “The kindest word for the attitude of the American Government,” remembered an observer in the Manpower Division, “is utter innocence. . . . Both Washington and the local military administrators seemed to think that the whole controversy was nothing more than a family squabble between two types of reds.”⁹³ Still, the NB working group had friends in the Manpower Division who discriminated between “reds” and did recognize the dangers of immediate fusion.

In January and February 1946, Kurt Schmidt emerged as the leading opponent of immediate fusion in the Berlin SPD’s Neukölln district. He knew “that the mistrust with which the leaderships of the SPD and the KPD always viewed the New Beginning Group would be rekindled and thereby the debut of its former members in these parties endangered.”⁹⁴ Both representatives of the KPD as well as the Soviet occupation

⁹¹ Letter from “Soldt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to Richard Löwenthal, Jan. 10, 1946, NB Archives, 25/3.

⁹² Letter from Gustav Klingelhöfer to Otto Grotewohl, Jan. 3, 1946, Goldbloom Papers, 4/15.

⁹³ Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Gerhard Bry in Bry, *Resistance*, 232.

⁹⁴ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 66.

authorities began putting pressure on NB and other fusion opponents.⁹⁵ Fred Sanderson heard that a communist-led office of the Berlin Magistrate had subjected former NB members to interrogation and had even pressured some to sign a declaration of the group’s liquidation.⁹⁶

Schmidt’s “foreign connections” to the NB émigré circles in London and New York lent him credibility. The Berlin working group still struggled to overcome its years of isolation under the Nazi regime and to get up to speed on the latest developments. Richard Löwenthal informed them of the many shifts in the Comintern and Soviet lines since the 1930s, and Schmidt asked him to write a concise history the KPD for the group. Given the mounting pressure on fusion opponents by the Soviets, he also wanted Löwenthal’s help in obtaining the official backing of the British authorities. “The ZA is not willing to obey” the communists’ demand for unity by May 1: “they want to fight, but they do not have the necessary support.” The fusion struggle was a matter of “the existence of the party and under the circumstances also of personal existence.” The situation was serious, he stressed, and without support from the outside “we will not be able to hold out much longer as the bridgehead of democracy in Berlin.”⁹⁷

At the first assembly of young social democrats in Berlin-Neukölln on February 10, Schmidt delivered perhaps his most important speech during the fusion struggle. Following staid remarks by the ZA delegate Max Fechner, Schmidt spoke on behalf of all the young men and women who had now grown into adults and had spent the best years of their lives under fascist rule—he meant his own renewers generation now in their thirties. These veterans of NB and the other socialist splinter groups recognized already in the 1930s that both parties of the workers’ movement had failed to find a socialist solution to the crisis of capitalism that brought down the Weimar Republic. But while the social democrats had at least advocated individual freedom and a democratic state, communists had succumbed to dictatorial tendencies, revolutionary “subjectivism,” and the destructive social fascism theory that further divided the workers’ movement. Present-day communists, Schmidt claimed, still persecuted dissidents in their ranks, branding them “fault-finders” [*Kritikaster*], heretics, opportunists, and renegades. In the 1930s “we were clear about the fact that a renewal of socialist thought is necessary, and the practical experience of fascism has corroborated this insight.”⁹⁸

He went on to describe “a new program” for democratic socialism and, in a clever piece of rhetoric, defined what it meant to restart socialism and modernize Marxism:

[C]omrades, tradition does not mean literalism [*Buchstabentreue*]. Tradition is an affinity for a living idea. Tradition does not mean that one proceeds in the exact same footsteps as one’s forebears. Tradition means rather that one marches further in the same direction, on the path that our forefathers pursued. [It does not mean] that one automatically transfers

⁹⁵ The NB member Theo Thiele, for example, had lain in a sickbed throughout much of 1945, but he had “exposed” himself politically to such an extent that Schmidt wanted to find him an “escape route into the West.” Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 44.

⁹⁶ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 47. He might have referred to Fritz Erler’s attempt to disband NB in August 1945. See Ch. 4.

⁹⁷ Notably, Schmidt had switched here from his earlier metaphor of Berlin as conciliatory “bridge” between East and West to one of a contested “bridgehead,” the battleground for democracy. Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] to Richard Löwenthal, Feb. 2, 1946, NB Archives, 25/4.

⁹⁸ “Rede von Kurt Schmidt auf der ersten Versammlung der jungen Sozialdemokraten in Berlin am 10. Februar 1946,” *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, 26-32.

the insights of the past onto the present, but rather [that one] has the inner freedom to develop out of the present [new] insights and principles for our action. Tradition also means making the effort to do what the great minds of the workers’ movement would have done if they stood in our place. Karl Marx would roll over in his grave were he to learn what kind of dogmatic cult and what kind of literalism and canonization to which his great, vital, revolutionary ideas have been subjected. We on the contrary want to be revolutionary socialists!

Given the complicated political circumstances of the fusion struggle, it is remarkable that Schmidt should have characterized himself and the renewers generation as “revolutionary socialists.” The “on the contrary” [*doch*] of this statement implied that the true revolutionary course did not follow any dogma: only by moving Marxism and the socialist tradition forward beyond the established dogmas could socialists at all think of themselves as “revolutionary.”⁹⁹

Schmidt interpreted socialism not only as an economic theory about the transformation of the mode of production but also as a spiritual and cultural “teaching” [*Lehre*] oriented toward changing the very being of the whole world. The materialism of orthodox Marxism had lost sight of the human’s intellectual capacity to make plans for a better social order. “This socialism is human,” he allowed, “but it is not on account of that any less revolutionary.” Within the new socialist party—whether a united party of the Left or only Social Democracy—one must ensure a “lively turnover” of leaders, letting only the best lead so long as they could. Schmidt hoped to avoid Robert Michels’ iron law of oligarchy, whereby party elites gradually expanded their bureaucratic control over democratic mass movements.¹⁰⁰ Revolution, redefined, would involve securing individual freedoms, basic rights, the full development of the personality, and all this in harmony with the needs of society as a whole, not just the working class.¹⁰¹

The closing sentiment of Schmidt’s speech drew on a quote from the Italian socialist and antifascist martyr Giacomo Matteoti: “Freedom is like the sun. One has to have lost it in order to know that one cannot live without it.” Freedom would thus serve as the rallying cry of Berlin’s fusion opponents, all of whom would have agreed with Schmidt that uniform, dictatorial state parties represented “the foundation of this epoch of modern spiritual and material barbarism.” In a letter to Löwenthal sent right after the Neukölln assembly, he described having “raised a great storm.” He considered his speech

⁹⁹ “Rede von Kurt Schmidt auf der ersten Versammlung der jungen Sozialdemokraten in Berlin am 10. Februar 1946.” Marx discussed this dialectical relationship between tradition and renewal in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), where he illustrated how the “tradition of countless dead generations is an incubus to the mind of the living.” At the same time, however, such “raising of the dead” during the English and French Revolutions “served to glorify the new struggles, not to parody the old; it fostered in imagination an aggrandizement of the set task, not flight from its actual solution, a rediscovery of the spirit of revolution rather than a summoning up of its ghost.” Depending on the circumstances, tradition thus either weighed down the present revolutionary spirit with dogma and obsolete models or it inspired present revolutionaries to think about the totality and world-historical importance of their actions. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in E. Kamenka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 287-323 (287-89). Schmidt had indeed studied Marx, but this particular interpretation is mine.

¹⁰⁰ See Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* [1911], trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

¹⁰¹ “Rede von Kurt Schmidt auf der ersten Versammlung der jungen Sozialdemokraten in Berlin am 10. Februar 1946.”

a “prelude to a campaign . . . which should gather the oppositional elements” in Berlin. Having received alarming reports about impending provincial unification congresses in Thuringia, Saxony, and Mecklenburg, he and his NB friends agreed “that the pressure in the provinces is so strong that the only possibility of still rising up against it exists only in Berlin.” Schmidt and his comrades had no illusions about the personal danger they would face in standing against the current of Soviet-sponsored socialist unity:

We know that we find ourselves in a political state of war [in which] all means of warfare tactically and strategically apply. The battles of encirclement which aim to eliminate SP members are being waged now in Saxony, Thuringia, and Mecklenburg. We want to hold the bridgehead of democracy so long as possible. . . . Worst case scenario, we’ll have to take off to the West.

He even mentioned beginning preparations for “Kon-style continuation of work” [*konmäßige Weiterarbeit*], that is, the implementation of the rules of conspiracy that everyone in the NB working group had learned by heart during the 1930s.¹⁰²

On February 11, the day after Schmidt’s speech, the ZA decided in favor of fusion with the KPD in the Soviet zone only, thus abandoning its earlier commitment to unification on the national level. By mid-February, Schmidt’s boss Klingelhöfer had broken with Otto Grotewohl and the majority ZA line and thrown his support behind the fusion opponents. Now any subtle distinctions on the German Left about the tempo of unity or its regional or national scope receded before the crystallization of two antagonistic camps: fusion supporters versus fusion opponents. Schmidt wrote to Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg in New York that from the moment one of the occupying powers (i.e. Soviets) expressed its wish that the two workers’ parties should unify, the unity question stopped serving the interests of the German workers and turned into a tool of foreign manipulation. At this point, oppositional social democrats in Berlin began using the same language of “resistance” that had animated their anti-Nazi underground work. But now they consciously resisted communist oppression.¹⁰³ Schmidt even despaired of holding the bridgehead of democracy in Berlin, suggesting that the only remaining option “for the active comrades of the O. [i.e. the Org/NB]” was “to move to the West and from there continue the struggle anew”—a curious replay of the debates surrounding the NB leadership coup in 1935.¹⁰⁴

Even before the conclusion of the fusion struggle, then, the hope for socialist unity born of antifascist cooperation and sustained during the immediate postwar months of “really-existing socialist renewal” had given way once more to division and a life-and-death struggle. As the fusion struggle progressed, the geopolitical orientation of the two antagonistic camps of Berlin socialists drifted toward the opposite magnetic poles of “democratic” West versus “dictatorial” East. Even since early February, as the historian

¹⁰² Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to Richard Löwenthal, Feb. 10, 1946, NB Archives, 25/4.

¹⁰³ Letter from Kurt Schmidt (Berlin) to Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg (New York), Feb. 16, 1946, qtd. in *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, 53-55 (54). Frank and the New York AADG started referring to “the new struggle for freedom,” “the new ‘Gleichschaltung,’” and the need “to counteract the semi-totalitarian pressure” faced by social democrats in Berlin. “Important Political Developments in Berlin,” uncorrected draft (New York), Feb. 19, 1946, NB Archives, 25/2.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank or Paul Hertz], Feb. 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108. At this point, Schmidt thought that the danger against himself might necessitate relocating to the West. He asked Frank to look into possibilities for where and how he might be useful.

Andreas Malycha has noted, the ZA saw “no more genuine alternatives for action” other than joining the KPD in pushing for immediate fusion.¹⁰⁵ The space in between the two camps had turned into a political no-man’s land.

On February 14, the district chairman of the SPD-Tempelhof, Curt Swolinzky, hosted the first coordinated meeting of fusion opponents at his textile shop in Tempelhof. They continued to organize on February 17 at the District and Section Leader Conference held in the SPD party headquarters in Mitte. Klaus-Peter Schulz emerged there for the first time as one of the leading young fusion opponents. Swolinzky summed up the determined attitude of all involved: “Better to go hungry under a democracy than be full under a dictatorship.”¹⁰⁶ Two days later, the KPD publically criticized Ernst Moewes—district chairman of the SPD in Berlin-Mitte and associate of the NB working group—for ignoring all “concrete proposals for unity” and for pursuing a delay tactic. And on the same day, the ZA announced a party conference for April 19-20 that would decide the unity question once and for all.¹⁰⁷ The tempo of unity had picked up considerably.

On February 21, Swolinzky invited Gustav Klingelhöfer along with NB members Kurt Schmidt, Kurt Mattick, and Willi Urban to a second, two-day meeting at the pub “Winkel” [The Nook] on Tempelhofer Damm.¹⁰⁸ Besides Swolinzky and Klaus-Peter Schulz, the main coordinators of the Berlin Opposition—as the fusion opponents came to be known—were Gerhard Außner, Wilhelm Lorenz, and Karl Germer, Jr. In accord with its well practiced rules of conspiracy, NB continued to operate behind the scenes.

The day before, Kurt Schumacher had finally arrived for his much-anticipated visit to Berlin. Otto Grotewohl and the ZA tried to keep him away from the fusion opponents, but the latter used semi-covert means to arrange a meeting with the “guest from Hannover” in Tempelhof on February 23. Schulz remembered how an “involuntary emotion took hold of those present” as Schumacher entered the room that day accompanied by his British officer chaperone.¹⁰⁹ His account surely took on melodramatic contours in retrospect, but the fact that the fusion opponents should have so enthusiastically greeted Schumacher—who until then had symbolized only the intransigence of the Western SPD—demonstrated the growing gulf between the two antagonistic camps on the Berlin Left. Schumacher became for fusion opponents more

¹⁰⁵ Andreas Malycha, *Die SED: Geschichte ihrer Stalinisierung 1946-1953* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2000), 110.

¹⁰⁶ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 132, 165, 171, 179. For Schulz’s interpretation of these events, see Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 104ff. Among the other attendees at the meeting were Franz Neumann (representing Reinickendorf) and the journalist Arno Scholz (Wilmersdorf). Scholz, who was managing editor of the newspaper *Der Berliner* and later the *Telegraf*, had good relations with the British occupation authorities. For the results of this conference, see “Entschließung der Kreis- und Abteilungsleiterkonferenz der Berliner SPD über das weitere Verfahren bei der Vereinigung von SPD und KPD, 17. Februar 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 826-27.

¹⁰⁷ “Beschluß des Zentralausschusses der SPD über die Einberufung eines Parteitages, 19. Februar 1946,” Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 827.

¹⁰⁸ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 87, 115, 121, 163, 185.

¹⁰⁹ “At the sight of this still austere thin, disabled veteran of the First World War, whose body stooped from suffering and sickness, you thought you saw before you the emblem of German destiny, German misery, but also of the invincible spirit of resistance against tyranny. Only with effort did we succeed in dispersing the teeming crowd around Dr. Schumacher to make room for him . . . With the meeting in Tempelhof an impression arose on both sides [i.e. Schumacher and the Berlin Opposition] that would never go away.” Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 127.

than a convenient ally: he now appeared as oppositional social democrats’ savior, the very epitome of militant democratic-socialist ideals, and the most worthy champion of what now had transformed into a thoroughly anti-communist struggle.¹¹⁰

Klingelhöfer, Schulz, and some of the other fusion opponents still favored a cartel model of relations between the SPD and KPD, whereby the two parties would develop “a common program but separate candidate lists for the elections.”¹¹¹ But the increasing speed of events quickly rendered this cartel idea obsolete. The ZK and the ZA announced in a joint statement on February 26 that they had set the date of the Unification Congress for April 20-21, that is, directly after the Berlin SPD party conference that was supposed to vote on the fusion question.¹¹² Along with the joint statement, they included a sort of manifesto for the new party, “Principles and Goals of the Socialist Unity Party.” The manifesto blamed “the division of the working class” for the success of fascism in Germany and the subsequent imperialist world war. Now only the immediate unification of the workers’ movement could prevent reactionaries from returning to power. The list of immediate tasks for the new German Socialist Unity Party (SED) resembled a synthesis of the two party’s founding proclamations of June 1945—denazification, expropriation of capitalist interests, democratic self-administration, democratic freedoms, etc.¹¹³

Unlike the KPD’s original proclamation, however, the manifesto of the new SED included an explicit commitment to “the struggle for socialism.” In order to achieve socialism, it asserted, the working class must seize state power. The SED wanted to follow “the democratic road to socialism; but it will resort to revolutionary means, if the capitalist class abandons the ground of democracy.” This differentiation between “democratic” and “revolutionary” means turned the traditional call on the German Left for “democratic revolution” into an oxymoron.¹¹⁴

Readers of the SED manifesto might have assumed (correctly) that a unification of the two workers’ parties solely within the Soviet occupation zone would pose a threat to German national unity. The German Socialist Unity Party represented, the manifesto assured, “the most progressive and best national power, whose entire power and energy stands against all particularistic tendencies and for the economic, cultural, and political unity of Germany.” Unification in the Soviet zone should inspire socialist unity and national unity across Germany as a whole. The manifesto’s concluding lines contained yet another promise that “[t]he unity of the socialist movement is the best guarantee for the unity of Germany!”¹¹⁵ The rhetoric of *national unity* predominated in this first

¹¹⁰ According to Bernhard Meyer, Kurt Schmidt also managed to meet with Schumacher on the latter’s six-day visit to Berlin and the two spoke about the prospects of organizing an official SPD-Opposition. Arno Scholz apparently served as Schumacher’s “secret and trusted adviser and informant” during the visit. Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 163-5.

¹¹¹ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 87, 171. Schumacher apparently rejected this model as too conciliatory toward the communists.

¹¹² “Organisationsbeschluß des ZA der SPD und des ZK der KPD, 26. Februar 1946,” Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 827-28. This decision was published the next day in the pro-fusion papers *Das Volk* and *Deutsche Volkszeitung*.

¹¹³ “Entwurf über Grundsätze und Ziele der SED, 26. Februar 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Pt. 1, 828-32.

¹¹⁴ “Entwurf über Grundsätze und Ziele der SED.”

¹¹⁵ “Entwurf über Grundsätze und Ziele der SED.”

statement of the future SED—almost to the point of overcompensation—while the rhetoric of *renewal* played only a minor role.

The most decisive move to date by the Berlin Opposition occurred on the snowy Friday, March 1, at the Berlin SPD’s functionaries’ conference in the Admiral Palace theater on Friedrichstraße. The ZA had convened the conference with the expectation that such a weekday meeting of perhaps a few hundred people would, as Klaus-Peter Schulz put it, “let the already decided [ZA] all the more easily be *exceeded*” by a members’ quorum on the question of socialist unity. This maneuver would give the ZA the appearance of merely following the general will of the social democrat rank and file.¹¹⁶ But the ZA did not reckon with the growing strength of the Opposition, now emboldened by Schumacher’s visit and the moral support of the Western SPD. Around two thousand functionaries showed up to the conference, filling the Admiral Palace “to the ceiling” and defying the ZA’s expectations. Many of these section and district functionaries, moreover, were renewers who had only been in office since the end of 1945, reflecting the Berlin SPD’s “biological rejuvenation process.”¹¹⁷ Otto Grotewohl could hardly get in a word without interruptions from the angry crowd.

Despite Schulz’s claim that the generally anti-fusion atmosphere of the conference had arisen spontaneously, he and a leader of the SPD-Prenzlauer Berg, Werner Rüdiger, apparently conspired backstage to arrange for the fusion opponents Karl Germer, Jr., Curt Swolinzky, and Franz Neumann to speak after Grotewohl. Schulz then reentered the audience and acted as *claqueur*, demonstratively clapping for the Opposition and heckling the ZA. Kurt Schmidt and a number of others from the NB working group apparently joined in.¹¹⁸ Franz Neumann, district chief of the SPD-Reinickendorf and, at forty-one, a decade younger than the ZA, was unequivocally “the man of the hour.”¹¹⁹ His district had recommended several days earlier that the SPD in the Soviet zone hold a party plebiscite [*Urabstimmung*] on the fusion question. But hardly anyone had taken notice of this recommendation until he repeated it at the conference. The audience roared in approval, which caught the ZA completely off guard.¹²⁰ The manipulated proceedings of this assembly resembled the meeting between the Berlin SAJ and the Communist Youth in June 1931 that the Org had so successfully coopted.¹²¹ The date for the party plebiscite was set for March 31.

¹¹⁶ Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 140. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁷ Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 143.

¹¹⁸ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 150, 163, 171.

¹¹⁹ Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 141. This Franz Neumann (b. 1904) is not to be confused with the Marxist legal theorist and political scientist Franz L. Neumann (b. 1900), although both had indirect ties to New Beginning in postwar Berlin and in exile, respectively.

¹²⁰ The eventual majority decision in favor of a secret-ballot party plebiscite reminded Schulz of the Tennis Court Oath of June 20, 1789, in which the overwhelming majority of the Third Estate had voted in favor of pressing forward until they achieved a democratic constitution for France. Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 143, 148n45. Communist critics likely would have found it appropriate that Schulz’s celebration of the Berlin Opposition recalled the prototypical *bourgeois* revolution of 1789. For the text of the resolution, see “Resolution der Funktionärkonferenz der Berliner SPD über eine Urabstimmung zur Frage der Vereinigung mit der KPD, 1. März 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 834-36.

¹²¹ See Ch. 1.

With its triumph at the functionaries’ conference, the Berlin Opposition for the first time acquired public renown in Germany and abroad.¹²² Even if the battle in the provinces of the Soviet zone already was lost, as Schmidt already believed two weeks earlier, Berlin’s social democrats would continue the fight to decide the fusion question democratically.¹²³ The struggle reached its climax around the Ides of March.¹²⁴ Schmidt wrote to Karl Frank that now one sought the “consolidation of the Berlin Opposition, in itself large and firmly rooted but instinctive [and] without solid orientation.”¹²⁵ The former ZA member Gustav Dahrendorf had already fled to the West, and on March 9, Gustav Klingelhöfer officially resigned from the ZA and immediately joined the fusion opponents, whom he notified about the ZA’s plan to obstruct the party plebiscite.¹²⁶ The next day, the Opposition organized an “Action Committee” to run its plebiscite campaign.¹²⁷ Over the next couple of weeks, the split within the Berlin SPD between fusion supporters and opponents grew into an unbridgeable gulf.

The NB working group began agitating against fusion. Schmidt described their tasks as “the reinforcement of democratic tendencies; the creation of a crystallization point; [and] the reconstruction and expansion of the [social democratic] party in the West.” They would work within the individual wards [*Bezirken*] of Berlin, try to get new anti-fusion leaderships elected, and if possible “convert” [*umbauen*] the SPD-Berlin’s regional committee. Furthermore, the NB milieu would try to establish an independent socialist newspaper in order to break the pro-fusion “monopoly on opinion” (he alluded

¹²² “After several failed attempts,” declared Schulz, “David had hit his adversary Goliath in the most sensitive spot.” Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 149. Newspaper reports included “Eindeutiger Kurs für wahre Demokratie – Berlins SPD-Funktionäre fordern Urabstimmung,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (Mar. 2, 1946); “Versammlung der Berliner SPD-Funktionäre,” *Berliner Zeitung* (Mar. 2, 1946), 1; “Germans Hold Up Communists’ Bid – Berlin Socialists Demonstrate Against Merger and Then Call for Secret Vote,” *New York Times* (Mar. 2, 1946), 3; “Berlin Social Democrats – Opposition to Fusion,” *The Times* (Mar. 2, 1946), 4; “German Party Plebiscite – Fusion Campaign in Berlin,” *The Times* (Mar. 13, 1946), 3.

¹²³ Letter from Kurt Schmidt (Berlin) to Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg (New York), Feb. 16, 1946, qtd. in *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, 53-55 (55).

¹²⁴ This was Schulz’s phrase. *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 189.

¹²⁵ Excerpt of letter from “Sold” [Kurt Schmidt] to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 3, 1946, NB Archives, 25/15.

¹²⁶ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 87. Dahrendorf had a heart attack during a heated discussion at Erich W. Gniffke’s birthday party on Feb. 14. A few days later he asked for protection by the British occupation authorities and wrote to Gniffke and Otto Grotewohl: “For me this is how things stand: here [in Berlin] I must subjugate myself, but over there [in the West] I still see a task!” Qtd. in Gniffke, *Jahre mit Ulbricht*, 150. Shortly after arriving in the British zone, Dahrendorf published a scathing critique of the ZA and ZK’s fusion campaign, *Zwangvereinigung der Kommunistischen und der Sozialdemokratischen Partei in der russischen Zone* (Hannover, 1946), reprinted in Dahrendorf, *Der Mensch, das Maß aller Dinge*, 89-124.

¹²⁷ Members of the Action Committee included Curt Swolinzky (b. 1877), Willi Kiaulehn (b. 1898), Klaus-Peter Schulz (b. 1915), Franz Neumann (b. 1904), Karl J. Germer, Jr. (b. 1913), Arno Scholz (b. 1904), Gerhard Außner (b. 1909), and Julius Scherff (b. 1896). Minus the outlier Swolinzky, their average age was forty as opposed to the ZA’s fifty-four. Though elected to this committee, Franz Neumann did not initially accept the position. He sensed that the group’s activity, especially that of the young doctor Schulz, smelled of “factionalism” [*Fraktionsmacherei*]. By March 17, however, he decided to join this official Opposition and participated in a meeting of its leaders at Schulz’s apartment. There they discussed strategies for the upcoming plebiscite. Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 132-3. According to Meyer, Schulz had some connection to the Org/NB as early as 1932, but I have found no corroborating evidence. He did have good contacts with the editors of the daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* in the American sector and saw to it that “oppositional social democratic views could be published there.” In March he joined the paper’s editorial staff. Meyer, 170-71.

to the ZA’s paper *Das Volk*). The technical and material difficulties of building an organized resistance in occupied Berlin included such mundane things as paper shortages and lack of automobiles. But the personnel difficulties loomed larger: Schmidt complained about the “lack of qualified people” and asked his NB friends abroad to help in “the fundamental new orientation” of the Opposition’s political staff.¹²⁸

At the Britz section member assembly of the SPD-Neukölln on March 10, Schmidt spoke out against the ZA representative Hermann Schlimme’s proposal in favor of immediate fusion. Along with fellow NB member Maria Hannemann, he then brought forward a motion to reject fusion, which was taken up 720 votes to 60.¹²⁹ On March 12, NB member Theo Thiele participated in a joint KPD-SPD organizing committee for unification in Berlin-Lichtenberg, where he opposed immediate fusion and urged broad participation in the party plebiscite at the end of the month.¹³⁰ As the first discussion speaker at the Berlin conference of the SPD factory groups two days later, Maria Hannemann raised another motion against immediate fusion. “I belong not to the Opposition,” she declared, “but to the majority of the Berlin party.”¹³¹ Although her motion did not pass, a similar one by her NB counterpart Georg Müller did later in the discussion.¹³²

The Soviet authorities escalated their intimidation campaign against anti-fusion social democrats, especially those working in the Soviet sector of the city. Ernst Moewes, the district chairman of the SPD in Berlin-Mitte and associate of the NB working group, and Werner Rüdiger, outspoken leader of the SPD in Prenzlauer Berg, were arrested by the NKVD/MGB on March 17 and spent three days in custody.¹³³ The Opposition reached out to the Western occupation authorities for support but met with limited success. The most exposed Opposition leaders made contingency plans of “emigrating” to the Western zones, and the KPD newspaper *Deutsche Volkszeitung* derisively quoted Curt Swolinzky as saying that “if it were to come to a workers’ regime [*Arbeiterherrschaft*] in Berlin, I would rather emigrate.”¹³⁴ Swolinzky undoubtedly meant a *communist* workers’ regime, but that kind of nuance evaporated in the unseasonably heated atmosphere of Berlin that spring.

On March 17, the day of the Moewes and Rüdiger arrests, Kurt Schmidt delivered a stirring speech at the Neukölln district delegates’ assembly in which he contrasted the divergent political cultures of social democracy versus communism. Whereas the SPD featured a near total inner-party democracy, in which members could settle differences of

¹²⁸ Excerpt of letter from “Sold” [Kurt Schmidt] to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 3, 1946, NB Archives, 25/15.

¹²⁹ In place of fusion, they recommended a “regulated cartel relationship” with the KPD. Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 63, 163.

¹³⁰ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 183-84.

¹³¹ “We shall not give up our important mediating position [*Mittlerstellung*] in the life of Germany and the world through a premature merger.” Qtd. in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 856-57n126.

¹³² Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 63; Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 856-57n126. The ZA and the Opposition began exchanging accusatory “proclamations” [*Aufrufe*] in the Berlin press. See “Aufruf des Zentralausschusses der SPD an die Berliner SPD-Mitglieder gegen die Tätigkeit der Opposition, 14. März 1946” *Das Volk* (Mar. 15, 1946), reprinted in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 851-54; “Aufruf des Aktionsausschusses der SPD-Opposition,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (Mar. 15, 1946).

¹³³ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 121, 151.

¹³⁴ Article of Mar. 17, 1946, qtd. in Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 180.

opinion “through objective discussion and panel debate [*Referate und Korreferate*],” thus ensuring freedom of criticism, the KPD was “a centralistic party with absolute party discipline, in which each member has the duty to carry out unconditionally the decisions of the ZK even when they do not accord with his opinions and go against his conscience.” The KPD model could lead only to “a suppression of the responsibility and freedom of the personality,” resulting in “uniformity of spirit and dogmatic thought.” For the SPD, Schmidt insisted, “democracy is the constant political struggle for the renewal of a sensible and social democracy, the political struggle against democratic degeneration, against undemocratic reactionary and dictatorial handling of the fundamental content of our party program.”¹³⁵

Here Schmidt outlined New Beginning’s primary theoretical contribution to the postwar political culture of West Germany. In defending the autonomy of the Berlin SPD against dictatorial communist pressure, he transformed the old idea of revolutionary socialism into a new, pragmatic form of democratic renewal. “Our revolutionary task,” he explained,

consists not only of freeing people from economic and social exploitation; revolutionary progress also consists in securing for the people . . . the full possession of their basic rights, the full realization of their abilities, and freedom within and without. . . . Our socialism is furthermore a teaching that should penetrate hearts and minds, that will transform lifestyles and thought, a teaching that will change the being of the whole world . . . Socialism is inseparably bound to democracy. Socialism can never be realized through a party dictatorship.

Democratic socialist revolution, he argued, must secure the full development of individual rights and freedoms on the basis of political and spiritual [*geistige*] democracy. Humanity according to his vision of revolution qua democratic renewal consisted of something more than working, eating, sleeping, and following orders: humanity *thought*, created new ideas, and fought for them. And Berlin would have to fight too.¹³⁶

Schmidt’s speech indicted the whole push toward fusion and particularly the ZA’s weakness in the face of communist intimidation. Klaus-Peter Schulz thought that “[i]t was primarily thanks to [his] initiative that the majority of the Neukölln district took the side of the fusion opponents in the spring of 1946.” And George Silver, an observer from the American Manpower Division, reported to New York that “I attended the first really democratic meeting in Germany.”¹³⁷ Although the speech served in the short run to prepare the Neukölln district for the upcoming party plebiscite—Schmidt raised a motion against fusion that passed 146 votes to 106¹³⁸—its persuasive combination of revolutionary socialism with a commitment to democratic renewal symbolized an important milestone in postwar attempts to restart socialism. This militant form of democratic socialism which centered on humanistic values did not content itself with flaccid calls for reform. Indeed, the old leftist dichotomy of revolution versus reform no

¹³⁵ “Rede von Kurt Schmidt, Wende [? unreadable] auf Kreisdelegiertenversammlung, Neukölln, 17. März 1946,” NL Hurwitz, 119. Copied from Goldbloom Papers.

¹³⁶ “Rede von Kurt Schmidt . . . 17. März 1946.”

¹³⁷ Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 379; excerpt of letter from George Silver, unspecified recipient [probably AADG, New York], Mar. 19, 1946, NB Archives, 25/15.

¹³⁸ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 163. Meyer considered Schmidt’s action at the assembly “an important victory for the Opposition in a heavily contested borough.”

longer seemed to fit German conditions immediately after 1945, when nearly everyone on the Left and the Right agreed that the era of capitalism as they knew it had passed.¹³⁹ During the course of the fusion struggle, as calls for socialist renewal started to diverge from calls for working-class unity, social democrat renewers imagined a new dichotomy: stale, unrealistic, Soviet-style revolution versus young, objective, independent socialist renewal.

The ZA responded to the unexpectedly energetic Opposition with a pro-unity propaganda campaign and direct administrative measures.¹⁴⁰ Schmidt wrote to New York about “threats reminiscent of the Nazi period.” Although he thought that “after 12 years our comrades have [developed] too fine an ear” to be influenced by the ZA and KPD slander,¹⁴¹ pressure on the Opposition did not stop at slander. On the same day as the expulsions, the regional leadership of the KPD demanded that the SPD dismiss Georg Müller as functionary. One month later, fearing for his life, Müller fled to the American sector.¹⁴²

Despite such pressures, almost 24,000 social democrats in the Western sectors of Berlin showed up at the polls for the party plebiscite on March 31, 1946. They made up 71% of eligible party members in West Berlin and 39% in Berlin as a whole. The Soviet authorities had blocked the plebiscite in the Eastern sector. Two questions appeared on the ballot:

1. Are you for the immediate unification of both workers’ parties? Yes or No.
2. Or are you for an alliance of both parties, which ensures cooperation and rules out fratricidal conflict? Yes or No.¹⁴³

An overwhelming 5:1 majority voted “No” on Question One against immediate fusion, while a narrower 3:2 majority voted “Yes” on Question Two for a cooperative alliance between the SPD and KPD. Even had social democrats in the Soviet sector been allowed to vote and even had they voted more in favor of immediate fusion than their Western

¹³⁹ That broad consensus of having moved “beyond capitalism” did not last longer than 1948-49. See Chs. 4-5.

¹⁴⁰ On March 19, it expelled three of the most vocal fusion opponents from the party: Curt Swolinzky, Willy Kiaulehn, and Klaus-Peter Schulz. See “Ausschluß von SPD-Mitglieder, die gegen eine sofortige Verschmelzung opponieren, 19. März 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 857-58. Swolinzky experienced the added trouble that judicial proceedings had started against him for having acquired his Tempelhof textile business from an expropriated Jewish owner in 1938. See “Was ist mit dem Oppositionsführer Swolinzky? War er Pg.?” *Deutsche Volkszeitung* (Mar. 30, 1946), cited in Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 180. See also “Die ‘proletarische Existenz’ – Herr Swolinzky und sein dunkles Geschäft,” *Berliner Zeitung* (Aug. 10, 1946), 6.

¹⁴¹ Excerpt of letter from “Sold” [Kurt Schmidt] to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 19, 1946, NB Archives, 25/15.

¹⁴² Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 123.

¹⁴³ For the text of the ballot, see “Resolution der Funktionärkonferenz der Berliner SPD über eine Urabstimmung zur Frage der Vereinigung mit der KPD, 1. März 1946,” Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 834-36 (835-36). The wording of Question Two was slightly ambiguous. Voting “No” against an alliance of the two parties indicated that one either favored instead immediate fusion or opposed any kind of cooperation with the communists. A clearer formulation of Q2 would have been: “If ‘No’ on Q1, then are you (at least) for an alliance of the two working parties . . . ?”

comrades, they likely would not have changed the results significantly.¹⁴⁴ The Opposition considered the plebiscite a huge victory, and the Western press agreed.¹⁴⁵

Reprisals by the ZA and the Soviet authorities came swiftly. Ernst Moewes was deposed as district chairman of the SPD in Berlin-Mitte on April 5 and the fusion supporter Willi Obst took his place without a vote.¹⁴⁶ But the Opposition did not back down. At the second Land Party Convention of the SPD-Berlin held at the Zinnowwald School in Berlin-Zehlendorf (American sector) on April 7, the fusion opponents declared themselves the legitimate leadership of the SPD and thus laid claim to the ZA’s supposed mandate. The delegates elected Franz Neumann, Curt Swolinzky, and Karl Germer, Jr., as co-chairmen. New Beginning continued to operate in the background. Kurt Schmidt assumed control of the breakaway leadership’s Information Office and would oversee the schooling of functionaries, the appointment of expert committees, and the youth secretariat. Maria Hannemann acted as his deputy. She had already quit her job as speaker on women’s issues for the FDGB in March and had officially been expelled from the SPD at the beginning of month.¹⁴⁷ Theo Thiele joined the regional party secretariat and Georg Müller the factory secretariat. The NB allies Otto Suhr and Gustav Klingelhöfer held leading positions in Berlin’s new, oppositional SPD.¹⁴⁸

On the weekend of April 20-21, both the KPD and the official SPD party conventions decided as planned for immediate fusion. Western delegates attended the SPD convention at the Mercedes Palace theater in Wedding, but they could not vote. Kurt Schumacher’s speech was apparently interrupted by loud disturbances by communist agitators.¹⁴⁹ Theo Thiele’s own father favored unification and disapproved of his son and his fellow renewers’ delay tactics. Theo wrote to him, “[t]here is no reconciliation between democracy and totalitarian striving for power [*Machtstreben*].”¹⁵⁰ The Unification Congress took place that same Sunday, April 21, and stretched into the early hours of Monday. The new chairmen of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), Otto Grotewohl

¹⁴⁴ For the results, see “Die Ereignisse der Urabstimmung vom 31. März 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds, *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 880.

¹⁴⁵ See Schulz’s chapter on the results, “David Prevails Over Goliath,” *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 234-46. The pro-fusion papers had difficulty accounting for the clear vote against immediate fusion. Some even tried to spin the results as a victory for the ZA and the fusionists. See for example “Die Niederlage der Einheitsgegner – Politik des Zentralausschusses der SPD von den Mitgliedern bestätigt,” *Berliner Zeitung* (Apr. 2, 1946), 1; “Niederlage der Einheitsgegner in Berlin – selbst in den Westbezirken Berlins nur eine Minderheit der SPD-Mitglieder gegen die sofortige Vereinigung,” *Deutsche Volkszeitung* (Apr. 2, 1946), qtd. in Schulz, *Auftakt zum Kalten Krieg*, 239. These papers used the fact that the SPD districts in the Soviet sector did not participate in the plebiscite as proof of their support for the ZA’s position, without mentioning of course that Soviet authorities had forced the polling stations to close. For reactions in the Western press, see Kathleen McLaughlin, “Berlin Socialists Reject Merger – Russians Bar Vote in Their Zone,” *New York Times* (Apr. 1, 1946), 1; “Berlin Party Plebiscite – Big Vote Against Fusion,” *The Times* (Apr. 1, 1946), 4; “No Party Fusion in Berlin – Russians Prohibit Poll,” *Manchester Guardian* (Apr. 1, 1946), 5; “Les social-démocrates berlinois se prononcent contre la fusion avec le parti communiste,” *Le Monde* (Apr. 2, 1946).

¹⁴⁶ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 121.

¹⁴⁷ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 63-64.

¹⁴⁸ “Personalaufstellung,” May 16, 1946, NL Mattick, 87. For a detailed account of the administrative posts within the Berlin SPD occupied by members of NB, see Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” 273ff.

¹⁴⁹ Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 134.

¹⁵⁰ Qtd. in Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 184.

and Wilhelm Pieck, demonstratively shook hands and thus consummated the long-awaited reunification of German socialism—in the Soviet zone.¹⁵¹ At the end of May 1946, the Allied Commandant Office made a compromise that would shape the socialist politics of Berlin for years to come: the SPD could maintain an independent “East Office” in the Soviet sector so long as the SED could operate freely in the West.¹⁵² But with the exception of Berlin, the SPD (and the KPD) ceased to exist in the East.

Significant divisions arose within the NB working group in the wake of the fusion struggle. A heated debate about the legacy of New Beginning and the continued viability of Marxism took place in the fall of 1946. On November 20, a large group met in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. In contrast to old Org members like Georg Müller and later recruits like Robert Havemann, Kurt Schmidt had no intention of reviving the old NB conception: “NB is dead and probably will not rise again. It belonged to an epoch associated with the defeat of the workers’ movement . . . Today we stand before entirely new conditions, and it would be an error in my opinion if at this stage we were to mobilize again out of inertia.”¹⁵³ Werner Peuke disputed Schmidt’s pragmatist and somewhat cynical adaptation to existing conditions. For him, the former NB circle provided an ideal forum for developing a more dialectical form of Marxist method and following the same path to Marxism that Marx himself had followed “to Hegel and Feuerbach.” Robert Havemann claimed not to take political sides, preferring instead to set himself “entirely on the grounds of science—so, [as an] old inveterate intellectual.”¹⁵⁴ But he did affirm the revolutionary socialism of the old Org/NB and the “democratic” seizure of state power that it supposedly had advocated. In contrast, Georg Müller downplayed the revolutionary elements of the old conception and emphasized instead the basic goal of democracy. Kurt Mattick chimed in with a plea to leave behind debates over Marxism, which could only lead to “deadlock.” The NB working group increasingly found it difficult to agree on anything.

At least one other large meeting took place on December 15. Participants found these discussions strongly reminiscent of debates within the old Org/NB. A “bygone world arose in these discussions, a period that left the most lasting impressions on my life,” reported Havemann.¹⁵⁵ And many of the old divisions dating back to the leadership coup of 1935 resurfaced. Schmidt and Müller continued to disagree about the role of socialist theory in actual political practice, and Havemann opposed them both.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ See the “Manifest der SED, 22. April 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 891-95.

¹⁵² “Anerkennung von SPD und SED in Berlin durch die Alliierte Kommandantur, 31. Mai 1946,” in Reichhardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, 895-96. By the end of the year Ernst Moewes led the East Office (Section IIb of the Berlin SPD), and a former associate of his who later joined the SED accused him of working there “in the interests of American spy agencies.” Meyer, *Sozialdemokraten in der Entscheidung*, 121-22. From 1948 to its dissolution in 1966, the East Office’s leader was Stephan G. Thomas, who also had ties to NB during the 1930s and 40s.

¹⁵³ Protokoll der Sitzung am 20.XI.1946 in der Nassauischen Straße 49 in Berlin, mit einem Diskussionsbeitrag R. Havemanns über die marxistische Theorie von “Neu Beginnen,” NL Havemann, 4/11D.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Robert Havemann (Berlin-Dahlem) to Gerhard Bry, Dec. 5, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 45.

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Robert Havemann (Berlin-Dahlem) to Gerhard Bry, Dec. 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Robert Havemann (Berlin-Dahlem) to Gerhard Bry, Dec. 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 45. Havemann later noted how Schmidt “participated less and appears to have generally less interest in such

Despite this fragmentation, the NB working group continued to meet in the Western sectors over the next few months and, in the spring of 1947, adopted as its home the historic Wannsee villa where the Nazis had planned the “Final Solution.” Kurt Schmidt had been named director of the August Bebel School, newly formed to train and educate Berlin SPD functionaries, and classes took place regularly in the villa.¹⁵⁷ That summer, Georg Müller and Ernst Jegelka argued for a return to conspiratorial methods. They wanted to develop a new NB conception and support it with the training of secret cadres. In their view, this was the only way to prepare the Berlin SPD for the hard struggle ahead against communism.¹⁵⁸ From New York, Karl Frank warned against this proposed return to conspiracy, and Schmidt agreed with him wholeheartedly.¹⁵⁹

Working group participants like Robert Havemann and Erich Kürschner viewed the SED much more favorably than the moderate Schmidt and certainly more than the rabid anti-communist Müller. Until the fall of 1947 when American authorities fired him, Havemann directed the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry in Berlin-Dahlem—a position of institutional power that the NB working group had used to its advantage. Fred Sanderson had considered Havemann “clearly pro-Western” when he first met him in September or October 1945 and “very critical” of the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁰ But Havemann’s true personality and politics defied easy analysis.

Jean Eisner of the US Manpower Division later recalled that “[a]s to Havemann I think the suspicions [about his communist intrigues] dating back to ’45 are well-founded. He and I were very good friends, yet I was always suspicious of him. To this day I couldn’t tell you whether his ingenuous air was genuine or a façade. Probably a little of both.”¹⁶¹ She observed that he was on friendly terms with a few NB members, and some “trusted him as an old comrade (Kurt Schmidt did, at least as first) and other[s] didn’t ([Kurt] Mattick).” When the SED became a real possibility at the beginning of 1946, Havemann did not at first commit himself:

He seemed to have a “line.” . . . He avoided serious political debate, and preferred “profound” general observations. He continued to claim that his needs for food were his major interest in the “Russian Connection.” Perhaps he was under the orders of the Russians, but perhaps he played Solitaire. His behavior was compatible with both versions and, as we know from his later exploits, he was a very independent person, and a very complex one. Sometimes I believed one thing, sometimes another.¹⁶²

‘theoretical’ problems. He became set on the standpoint of the practitioner.” Letter from Robert Havemann (Berlin-Dahlem) to Gerhard Bry (Maplewood, NJ), Apr. 6, 1947, NL Hurwitz, 45.

¹⁵⁷ See Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” 294ff., especially his account of how the NB group dealt with the young radical Willy Huhn and his rival Marxist Working Group [Marxistischer Arbeitskreis, or MAK].

¹⁵⁸ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 48.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from “Paul Hagen” [Karl Frank] to “friends” (Berlin), Nov. 26, 1947, qtd. in Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 587n98. Original in Frank Papers, 8/I-L.

¹⁶⁰ Interview of Fred Sanderson by Harold Hurwitz (Washington, DC), Nov. 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17. The NB representatives knew that Havemann had been married to the communist Antje Hasenclever.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Jean Eisner to Harold Hurwitz, Aug. 7, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 150.

¹⁶² Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Harold Hurwitz, Oct. 1978, revised Jan. 24, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 45 (also in NL Havemann, 443). See also interview of Jean Eisner by Harold Hurwitz (New York), Nov. 1, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 18.

The “Russian Connection” referred to frequent visits to Havemann’s apartment in Dahlem by Soviet officers and medical personnel, who delivered food and medicine packages in an obvious attempt to woo him away from American influence. He did suffer from tuberculosis contracted during his internment in Brandenburg-Görden Prison from 1943 to 1945, which he used as an excuse for accepting these gifts. But Havemann, an accomplished and high-profile chemist, must have realized that such liaisons with the Soviets would arouse suspicion among his American friends and his associates in the NB working group.

In Jean Eisner’s later judgment, “Havemann played a puzzling role, in all likelihood a double game. I was not clear whether he played both ends against the middle or whether he was actually a Russian agent.”¹⁶³ His ambiguous behavior during the immediate postwar years sheds some light on why, over a decade later, he turned into one of the German Democratic Republic’s foremost dissidents. The historian Harold Hurwitz reconstructed as far as possible Havemann’s life during this period and came to the conclusion that far from being a convinced Stalinist or anti-Stalinist at any point, Havemann always excelled at the “art of survival,” practicing an idiosyncratic, individualistic brand of politics against the system.¹⁶⁴ In October 1947, Havemann wrote to Gerhard Bry in New Jersey that in Germany one must “completely remodel the Social Democratic Party, break the domination of the old dogmatists, and replace the socialist utopia with a new policy that one can also call socialist if, as I formulated it in a NB discussion, one says: Socialism is not a goal, but rather a constant task.”¹⁶⁵ Regardless of his opportunistic political game, Havemann nevertheless symbolized the independent spirit of renewal that characterized NB and the renewers generation as a whole.

Most members of the NB working group decided eventually that a socialist new beginning for Germany could only occur within the ranks of the SPD. A minority, including Havemann and Rita Sprengel, instead put their faith in the SED.¹⁶⁶ Still others like Werner Peuke, Karl Elgaß, and Ernst Jegelka joined the KPD and the SED in the old Org/NB spirit of infiltrating the existing workers’ parties and transforming them from within.¹⁶⁷ But Kurt Schmidt did not think this strategy had much hope of success. He wrote to Richard Löwenthal that “[t]he most difficult thing is combatting the illusions

¹⁶³ Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Harold Hurwitz, Oct. 1978, revised Jan. 24, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 45. Havemann also behaved oddly on a convalescent trip to Switzerland organized for him by the American occupation authorities in the late summer of 1947. He met up there with Mira Munkh, an old associate of Henry Hellmann, Walter Loewenheim, and the London “Miles Circle,” but he gave the impression of wanting to gather intelligence on former Org/NB comrades. Both his American sponsors and the Miles Circle began to suspect his motives. See letters in NL Havemann, 5/12A-13; NL Hurwitz, 46; Harold Hurwitz, “Robert Havemann als Mitglied der Widerstandsgruppe ‘Neu Beginnen’,” based on a lecture delivered at a meeting of the Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft in the Haus der Demokratie, Berlin, May 6, 1995, available as a printout at the Havemann-Gesellschaft.

¹⁶⁴ Hurwitz, “Robert Havemann als Mitglied der Widerstandsgruppe ‘Neu Beginnen’.”

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Robert Havemann (Ascona-Collina, Switzerland) to Gerhard Bry, Oct. 29, 1947, NL Hurwitz, 45. This last line resembled Eduard Bernstein’s famous dictum in *The Preconditions of Socialism* that “what one commonly calls the end goal of socialism is nothing to me; the movement is everything.”

¹⁶⁶ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 45.

¹⁶⁷ Initially, remembered Jean Eisner, the former NB members “thought that perhaps they could manage to protect the SED against a Communist takeover.” Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Gerhard Bry in Bry, *Resistance*, 233.

that almost everybody has about the possibilities for influence within the unified party.”¹⁶⁸

Of the majority of NB working group members who ended up joining or remaining in the SPD, most viewed their party membership as subordinate to their NB affiliation.¹⁶⁹ As Hurwitz put it, a “feeling of common belonging to New Beginning existed and was also cultivated. . . . They saw themselves as socialists still standing in the tradition of the ‘Org’ or New Beginning.”¹⁷⁰ But they also committed themselves to rejuvenating the personnel and ideas of the traditional workers’ organizations. The Labour representative and NB ally Patrick Gordon Walker had observed during the fusion struggle that the majority of the Berlin Opposition belonged to the renewers generation.¹⁷¹ This matched Kurt Schmidt’s vision of the renewed SPD: “imagine the SPD, the party of the youth, that is ready to go forward with new knowledge, that is ready to fight for the ideals of freedom, justice, personal and political scrupulousness [*Sauberkeit*], critical thought, and reason.”¹⁷² This vision idealized the real prospects of transforming the whole SPD from the “island of Berlin,” but it proved a useful ideal.

Although the NB working group had operated effectively during the fusion struggle, acquired leading administrative posts in the Berlin SPD, and received de facto institutional legitimation through the August Bebel School in Wannsee, the ideological rifts between its members persisted and eventually dissipated any coherent influence that the group might have exerted on socialist politics. Tragedy also struck the group. After complications from an appendectomy, Kurt Schmidt died suddenly on July 9, 1947, at the age of thirty-four.¹⁷³

Kurt Schmidt had embodied the renewers generation’s hopes for the future of German socialism. He had written to Karl Frank on March 30, 1946, on the eve of the momentous Berlin party plebiscite, that the current moment of “revolutionary loosening” presented the best opportunity for initiating the “cultural process” of socialist renewal.¹⁷⁴ The old language and spirit of New Beginning had lived on through Kurt Schmidt, but it would not die with him.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to Richard Löwenthal, Feb. 10, 1946, NB Archives, 25/4.

¹⁶⁹ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 35.

¹⁷⁰ Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus*, 4/1, 45.

¹⁷¹ “Gordon Walker über den Abwehrkampf der Berliner Sozialdemokraten,” NB Archives, 25/11.

¹⁷² Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 30, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108. Original in Goldbloom Papers.

¹⁷³ “Even though I stood only in loose contact with the New Beginning circle,” declared Otto Suhr in his eulogy, “again and again I heard the name of Kurt Schmidt during the illegal period. And not only me. Back then his name had acquired a ring [*Klangfarbe*] that secured him friends even today in England and America.” Despite this slight exaggeration—nobody would have known about Schmidt during the Nazi period, at least not his real name—Suhr’s heartfelt words indicated the profound sense of loss that accompanied Schmidt’s premature death. He “was a politician out of passion, who joined political insight with political will, political imagination [*Phantasie*] with political creative power,” and his “early death becomes a symbol of his life; it is the tragedy of the unfinished one [*des Unvollendeteten*].” “Trauerrede” for Kurt Schmidt, July 12, 1947, NL Suhr, 50. Jean Eisner described Schmidt’s death as “one of the greatest losses of the SPD.” Letter from Jean Eisner to Harold Hurwitz, Aug. 7, 1985, NL Hurwitz, 150.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 30, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108. Original in Goldbloom Papers, 5/3. On Walter Loewenheim’s formulation of the revolutionary “cultural process,” see Ch. 1.

Political Reconstruction and Remigration

Since the outbreak of war in 1939, the frequency of correspondence between the London and New York contingents of New Beginning’s foreign bureau subsided and their ideological consensus broke down. The pressures of exile, political isolation, and cooperation with the respective Allied governments’ war efforts drove a wedge into relations between Richard Löwenthal and Evelyn Anderson in London and Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg in New York. Rediscovering New Beginning survivors in Germany and providing them moral and material support during the fusion struggle, however, provided the occasion for a general reconciliation.¹⁷⁵

Contact with NB survivors in Berlin served to reanimate the London and New York NB émigrés. Henry Ehrmann wrote to Vera Eliasberg in New York in October 1945 that Fred Sanderson’s report “raises a series of the questions that I would wish to talk through in a regular ‘session’ [*Sitzung*],” that is, the old discussion format of the NB foreign bureau during the 1930s. Ehrmann quickly added that “it seems to me time to consider NB . . . disbanded, but [we should] probably abstain from a declaration to that effect.” “At this point,” Ehrmann continued, “rapprochement with those in London is naturally of great importance.”¹⁷⁶ Thomas Schoecken in Detroit concluded in December 1945 that “[t]he real difference between our situation and the one of our London-friends is obviously the different attitude of the two governments (no exit-permit in London) and occupational [sic] authorities.”¹⁷⁷ Ehrmann and Schoecken thus attributed the lull in NB’s activity in exile and the rift between the London and New York factions to external circumstances rather than internal pressures.

Cooperation to help embattled comrades in Berlin during the fusion struggle united the frayed threads of NB from San Francisco to Shanghai.¹⁷⁸ The dynamic between NB émigrés and the survivors in Berlin revived the relationship between the foreign bureau and the “internal leadership” [*Inlandsleitung*] that had characterized NB’s antifascist network from 1933 to circa 1938. This revival of the spirit of the 1930s—Schmidt even described the fusion struggle as “a similar situation to 1933”¹⁷⁹—extended so far as to make NB members of the Berlin Opposition consider “emigrating” to the Western sectors or zones and coordinating their anti-communist and anti-fusionist resistance as representatives “abroad.” Their work abroad would constitute a kind of reverse image of the old NB structure: inside the quasi-totalitarian Soviet Zone, NB should remain as a *legal* “crystallization point,” putting pressure on the new party and reporting to observers abroad; in West German “exile,” NB should operate conspiratorially in order to drum up support for their comrades in the East, taking advantage of every backroom connection they had. The anguish that accompanied this

¹⁷⁵ See letters from the fall of 1945 through the spring of 1946 in Frank Papers, 8/A-D, I-L; NL Löwenthal, 4; NB Archives, 25/5.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Henry Ehrmann (Fort Getty, RI) to Karl Frank and Vera Eliasberg (New York), Oct. 22, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/10.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Thomas Schoecken (Detroit) to Vera Eliasberg, Karl Frank, and Thelma Lewinsky (New York), Dec. 24, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/13.

¹⁷⁸ Hans Braun followed the events of the fusion struggle from San Francisco and Ludwig Lazarus and Max Blatt from Shanghai. See letters in NL Hurwitz, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Feb. 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108.

plan to retreat from the battlefield of democratic socialism called to mind debates within the group during the leadership crisis in 1935.¹⁸⁰

In American and English exile, the old NB foreign bureau avidly joined the cause by engaging in public debate about the future of Germany. In 1943, NB leaders in London had collaborated anonymously on the book *The Next Germany*, which warned against the postwar restoration of the social forces responsible for fascism.¹⁸¹ Under his American pseudonym “Paul Hagen,” Karl Frank had published in 1944 the book *Germany After Hitler*, which considered various scenarios for economic and political reconstruction involving the active participation of native German democrats.¹⁸² But the situation after May 1945 and the Potsdam Conference several months later gave this question new urgency. New Beginning’s front organization in New York, the American Association for a Democratic Germany (AADG), published a series of pamphlets in 1946 for distribution among German-speaking émigrés and social democrats inside Germany. The first was Karl Frank’s “Conquered, Not Liberated!”¹⁸³

In his foreword, Frank acknowledged “Paul Hagen” as his pseudonym and New Beginning as his former political affiliation, but he notably characterized NB as “part of the illegal *social democratic* movement” against the Nazis.¹⁸⁴ For him, the SPD represented the only real agent of “democratic renewal” and the only real promise of “a new start” [*einen neuen Start*] in Germany.¹⁸⁵ Although the party had made mistakes in the past, it was at least “a one-eyed man among the blind of Weimar.” But social

¹⁸⁰ In order to establish the “technical preconditions” for working out of the West, Schmidt named Werner Peuke, Georg Müller, Ernst Jegelka, and Theo Thiele as the first people who should emigrate. “My dear Paul [i.e. Karl Frank],” lamented Schmidt about the emigration plan, “this is truly the saddest message that I’ve had to send to you in years; personally I’m very unhappy about it, but it’s useless to ignore the reality.” Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Feb. 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108.

¹⁸¹ A Group of Anti-Nazi Germans, *The Next Germany* (Harmondsworth, UK; New York: Penguin, 1943).

¹⁸² Paul Hagen, *Germany After Hitler* (New York; Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944). This book and *The Next Germany* competed against communist-oriented proposals like Gerhart Eisler, Albert Norden, and Albert Schreiner’s *The Lesson of Germany* (New York, 1945) and anti-German racial propaganda like Robert Vansittart’s *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (Toronto, 1941). See Renaud, “The German Resistance in New York: Karl B. Frank and the New Beginning Group, 1935-1945,” B.A. (Boston University, 2007), <http://terencerenaud.com/german_resistance.htm> (accessed Aug. 2014). See also Ch. 2.

¹⁸³ The second pamphlet published by the AADG in 1946, *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit* [The New Struggle for Freedom], compiled a number of letters from NB survivors in Berlin and speeches by Kurt Schmidt in an effort to drum up support for the Opposition during the fusion struggle. The AADG planned another pamphlet in this “Series for a Democratic Germany” called *Der Traum von der Weltrevolution* [The Dream of World Revolution], presumably based on Georg Eliasberg’s critical history of the Comintern. For an advertisement of further planned installments in the series, see *Der neue Kampf um Freiheit*, back matter. Eliasberg’s manuscript did eventually come out as *Historische Grundlagen der Kommunistischen Internationale. Das sozialistische Erbe des Westens, das revolutionäre Erbe des Ostens* (Berlin: SPD, 1949). The original manuscript “Kurze Geschichte und Kritik der Kommunistischen Internationale” can be found in NL Löwenthal, 37.

¹⁸⁴ Karl B. Frank [pseud. Paul Hagen], *Erobert, nicht befreit! Das deutsche Volk im ersten Besatzungsjahr* (New York: AADG, 1946), 6. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁵ Frank, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 48. Bob Lochner reported to the AADG in October 1945 that “[o]nly the old SPD men have stuck it out and are ready to start again; the trend is very definitely in their favor; I think that if the facts about the Russian occupation are sufficiently known, the Communists won’t have a ghost of a chance.” Letter from Bob Lochner (American Zone) to Karl Frank et al. (New York), Oct. 11, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/10.

democracy needed new, younger leaders, and the “pseudo-religion” of Marxist dogma must be abandoned.¹⁸⁶ An intellectually renewed SPD, he claimed, might overcome the indecision and escapism of the (bourgeois) intellectuals and the skepticism of the youth. Frank attributed the general political apathy and demoralization encountered among the German populace to the shock of defeat, profound material need, broken families, etc. Like Kurt Schmidt, he suggested also that Germans had grown skeptical of any form of political ideology or engagement. He worried especially about “the nihilism of the youth” and their juvenile tendency to reject anything “old,” including democracy.¹⁸⁷ The primary representatives of the rejuvenated SPD were the oppositional Berlin social democrats.

Aside from the KPD and the “left opportunism” of the Berlin ZA,¹⁸⁸ Frank made his primary target of critique what he perceived as the Allies’ overly-harsh occupation policy. Under the terms of the Potsdam Conference and the exploitative and economically regressive Morgenthau Plan, Germany risked transitioning from a “totalitarian state to an occupation colony.”¹⁸⁹ The Allies’ punitive policies, he claimed, stifled the “progressive forces” inside Germany which had led the anti-Nazi underground struggle and would again lead the country’s peaceful reintegration into Europe. The dismemberment and “pastoralization” of Germany per the Morgenthau Plan—which called among other things for the internationalization of the Ruhr industrial heartland—would prevent partitioned Germany from providing adequate material nourishment to its swelling population. Loss of industrial factories, he warned, would also mean loss of jobs and as a consequence considerable worker-class unrest. The new borders created by the Allied occupation hindered German reconstruction because they tended to redirect new productive forces toward the interests of the respective occupying powers. The occupation “demands tributes, but does not rebuild. It plans reconstruction, but the result is further decay” and “disenfranchisement” [*Entmündigung*].¹⁹⁰

Frank called for clear and rational thinking that would identify precisely the objective constraints on German agency. The conquered too had rights, which in this case meant the democratic self-help of the German people. Good-willed occupation officials, he hoped, would help ensure enough space for “a democratic renewal of the German people.” The solution to the age-old “German problem” lay in accelerating the process of democratization that had been delayed historically, and this could take the form of an “antifascist revolution” or a “democratic and socialist reorganization.”¹⁹¹ Frank’s rhetoric glided smoothly between revolution, reconstruction, and renewal.

In the chapter “Democratic Opposition,” he outlined prospects for the non-violent resistance that Germans might offer against excessive Allied occupation policy. He was

¹⁸⁶ Frank, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 50-51.

¹⁸⁷ Frank, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 42. The sociologist Helmut Schelsky would take up a similar theme in his classic work *Die skeptische Generation. Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsseldorf; Cologne: Diederichs, 1957). “From the perspective of the Germans, still filled with self-pity,” writes Konrad Jarausch, “the conditions for democratization did not seem to be particularly favorable. Only a small minority, above all the regime’s opponents and its victims, actually greeted the defeat of the Wehrmacht as a liberation from the dictatorship.” Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 9.

¹⁸⁸ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 50.

¹⁸⁹ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 16-17.

¹⁹¹ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 31, 38-39, 41.

anxious to distinguish between what he called the “reactionary alternative” (i.e. nationalist revanchism) and the “progressive alternative.” “Not the ‘Irish’ [i.e. violent] but rather the ‘Indian’ [i.e. civil disobedient] national resistance” must serve as the model for Germans’ democratic opposition. He hardly ever mentioned “socialists” by name. After five or six years in the United States, he had dropped such overt language from his rhetoric and referred instead to “progressive people.” Survivors of the anti-Nazi resistance represented for him “the natural vanguard of a democratic renewal.”¹⁹² But his critique of the allegedly punitive occupation policy and the widespread expulsion of ethnic Germans from the East began to sound a lot like the rhetoric of the nationalist Right—a circumstance that probably unsettled his friends and delighted his enemies.

Most striking about Frank’s pamphlet was its greater sympathy for “West orientation” [*Westorientierung*]. Whereas before he and his NB comrades had always carefully avoided falling into the uncritical anti-communist trap, now he denied that Soviet influence meant better chances for socialism in Germany and even defended Western imperialism as freer and more liberal than Soviet imperialism—quite the un-Marxist argument.¹⁹³ Soviet-style modernization, he argued, only worked for historically backwards nations, not for Germany. For Central and Western Europe, the Soviet system represented “a reactionary alternative.” Europe’s only hope, in any case, was to develop a federative “third way” between Western capitalist imperialism and Eastern dictatorial socialism.¹⁹⁴

The final chapter of Frank’s pamphlet bore the apocalyptic title “Renewal or Downfall,” an echo of Rosa Luxemburg’s formula “socialism or barbarism” and its modification by Miles/Loewenheim into “socialism or fascism.” The latter, darker alternative, according to Frank, would result in Germany if the punitive and exploitative policies of the Allied occupiers continued unabated. German renewal, by which he meant its reintegration into the comity of nations, required that it remain whole and retain possession of the material and political means necessary for a democratic and independent reconstruction. Renewal was a fickle thing. Here Frank did not qualify it as “socialist” or “democratic,” and earlier he had even warned of the possibility of reactionary restoration in the form of a “liberal-conservative renewal.”¹⁹⁵ Did he simply couch his proposals in neutral prose, or had his concept of renewal really lost its socialist referent? Despite the ambiguity of Frank’s rhetoric, Kurt Schmidt claimed that the pamphlet did help the anti-fusion cause in the spring of 1946. One hundred mimeographs had circulated among key functionaries and five hundred more, updated to the current situation, throughout the Soviet zone.¹⁹⁶

With the restart of German socialist politics inside Germany, the NB émigrés faced the real prospect of returning home after a decade or more in exile. What kind of role could these returning émigrés expect to play? On September 6, 1945, Otto Grotewohl claimed before an assembly of SPD functionaries in Leipzig that

¹⁹² Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 43-44.

¹⁹³ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 24-25.

¹⁹⁴ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 27-28.

¹⁹⁵ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 58.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from “Sold” [Kurt Schmidt] to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 3, 1946, NB Archives, 25/15. “Paul Hagen,” Frank’s well known pseudonym, had also been removed from these extra 500 copies for the SBZ.

If these comrades could return from exile, then no one would be happier than all of us to sit together with them again at the same table. We must only make it clear that after the experiences we have had over the past twelve years, it is unacceptable to the German working class if now some comrades, should they return from exile, believe that they derive leadership claims from the past and have the right to stand in the way of work that we have accomplished.¹⁹⁷

Grotewohl expressed a widely-held view among socialist survivors in occupied Germany that their former leaders in exile might attempt, with the support of the Western Allies, to coopt leadership of the new party. They should not have worried. No socialist group in exile possessed the same political authority and military backing as the communist returnees in the Ulbricht, Ackermann, and Sobottka groups.

American and British observers too expressed a certain reluctance to encourage the return of socialist émigrés to Germany. They had witnessed firsthand the dirty game of exile politics and had grown skeptical of the real possibilities for democracy in occupied Germany. The journalist, director of the Office of War Information (OWI), and longtime NB ally Elmer Davis had written to a colleague in October 1944 that Karl Frank “and his friends are the kind of Germans with whom the world could get along; but it can cost us heavily if we too hastily assume that they have much honest support, or that the people who come out smiling to greet the army of occupation are, in any large number, animated by any emotion but a desire to get off as lightly as they can.”¹⁹⁸ Frank in fact encountered extraordinary difficulties in obtaining a visa from the US Department of State, an effort that lasted well into the postwar years and ultimately ended in failure.¹⁹⁹

Due to his communist past and unpopular critique of the Potsdam Agreement, Karl Frank was harried for years on end. In December 1945 he wrote to a friend in the US Manpower Division that “[y]ou should know that I have made six efforts or more to return as a private citizen, but so far no success. . . . I am sure that I finally will come. You can tell that to Kurt [Schmidt] and that we will meet again.”²⁰⁰ Sadly, Frank never did see Schmidt again. After several years of trying to return to Germany, frustrating protests against the Allies’ punitive occupation policies, the death of Kurt Schmidt, and the permanent division of Germany into East and West, Frank retired from politics altogether in the spring of 1948. He sent in his formal resignation to the executive secretary of the AADG, Maurice J. Goldbloom:

My German (New Beginning) mandate, the only one I ever had, as long expired. American mandate, I have none. I am not even a letterhead figure as an ex-expert. My merits in this capacity, known to few, are questioned by some people in the U.S. government, in some of the most important American trade unions, and last, not least, among some such important partners of future efforts as the German Social Democrats. If

¹⁹⁷ Grotewohl, “Interne Rede vor SPD-Funktionären in Leipzig am 6. September 1945,” 120. Grotewohl showed great respect for the ailing Sopade chief Hans Vogel, but he remained silent on the other London social democrat representatives like Erich Ollenhauer and NB leaders like Erwin Schoettle. Letter from Otto Grotewohl to Hans Vogel (London), Aug. 17, 1945, in Hans-Joachim Fieber et al., eds., *Otto Grotewohl und die Einheitspartei*, Vol. 1, 91-92.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from Elmer Davis (Office of War Information, Washington, DC) to Paul Kellogg (New York), Oct. 16, 1944, Karl B. Frank Papers, 8/D.

¹⁹⁹ For a thorough account of Frank’s visa troubles, see Renaud, “The German Resistance in New York,” *op. cit.*

²⁰⁰ Letter from Karl Frank (New York) to Bill Kemsley (New York), Dec. 4, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/12.

I had not decided some time ago to retire from political activities to study—to gain a better understanding of some of the reasons for the lack of success of such good causes as ours, for instances—I would have to withdraw simply according to the rules of the game: *Gewogen und zu leicht befunden* [weighed on the scales and found wanting].²⁰¹

However exceptional the case of Karl Frank, it nevertheless demonstrated that the NB émigrés had only limited viability as agents of German political reconstruction.

But the émigrés did use important indirect channels to influence Germany’s new beginning. Henry Ehrmann for example had taught courses on German politics and history to American soldiers training for occupation duty at Fort Getty, Rhode Island, and Fort Eustis, Virginia, and he often incorporated NB discussion materials into his lectures.²⁰² In England during and after the war, NB members had worked extensively with German POWs in democratic “reeducation” initiatives. When the British Army started taking German prisoners in the Mediterranean theater, Waldemar von Knoeringen volunteered to conduct extensive interviews in order to gauge troop morale and the prospects for reforming these soldiers after the war.

Knoeringen and F. L. Carsten both lectured at the Wilton Park school for the political reeducation of promising young German POWs.²⁰³ There they reestablished contact with Wolfgang Abendroth, who after deserting his penal battalion around 1943 had fought with the Greek partisans. He fell into British custody when they occupied the country in 1944. Carl Cohen, a veteran of the KPO and ally of NB, had already informed Karl Frank in December 1945 that his friend Norbert Carlebach, an editor at the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “writes about Wolf Abendroth, whom you know and who is our best friend. He was stationed in South Greece with the Bataillon [sic] 999 (politically suspected ones).” Cohen asked Frank if he could find out more about Abendroth’s fate and wondered whether the London NB leader Evelyn Anderson, “who one time was his ardent admirer, may know of a way.”²⁰⁴ New Beginning did in fact arrange for Abendroth to be transferred to the Wilton Park school, where he participated actively and contributed to the student-run journal *Die Brücke* [The Bridge].²⁰⁵ Over the next two

²⁰¹ Letter from Karl Frank to Maurice J. Goldbloom, Mar. 9, 1948, Karl B. Frank Papers, 8/G.

²⁰² Several of Ehrmann’s POW students, including Hans Werner Richter, returned to Germany and founded in Munich the influential “independent journal of the young generation,” *Der Ruf*. This milieu also formed the basis of the literary society Gruppe 47. See Alexander Gallus, “‘Der Ruf’ – Stimme für ein neues Deutschland,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 25 (June 6, 2007), <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/30421/der-ruf-stimme-fuer-ein-neues-deutschland>> (accessed Apr. 2015).

²⁰³ For the history of Wilton Park, see Arthur L. Smith, *The War for the German Mind: Re-educating Hitler’s Soldiers* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1996); Matthew Barry Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace: Four Hundred Thousand German Prisoners and the People of Britain, 1944-1948* (London: H. Hamilton, 1979); Dexter Merriam Keezer, *A Unique Contribution to International Relations: The Story of Wilton Park* (London; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973).

²⁰⁴ Letter from Carl Cohen (Cambridge, MA) to Karl Frank, Dec. 24, 1945, Goldbloom Papers, 4/13. It is some matter of debate whether Abendroth ever was part of New Beginning. See Ch. 5. Richard Löwenthal’s letter to Waldemar von Knoeringen of June 25, 1946, which claimed that “[h]e would have been part of NB had it existed in Frankfurt [in the early 1930s]” (NL Knoeringen, 84), was misleading: NB did have a cell in Frankfurt, even if it was more loosely organized than other provincial cells like Mannheim. Löwenthal later provided a more accurate account in a letter to Kurt Schmidt on Jan. 2, 1947, NL Löwenthal, 4: “Wolf Abendroth is an old Frankfurt student friend of Evelyn [Anderson] and me [and] has participated in our whole development . . .”

²⁰⁵ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Demokratie und Rechtspflege,” *Die Brücke. Für Verständigung und Frieden* (Okt. 1946), 12-13, reprinted in Abendroth, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 1, eds. Michael Buckmiller et al.

years, he functioned as an important interlocutor for Richard Löwenthal while the latter wrote the book *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* [Beyond Capitalism].²⁰⁶

Actual remigration by NB members and thus direct influence on the course of German reconstruction remained difficult. In the fall of 1946, Fritz Erler had actually written to Erich Schmidt in New York that the latter’s return to Germany would not be very useful: Schmidt “would undoubtedly have many political difficulties under the present circumstances,” not least his distant émigré perspective and lack of legitimacy among the populace.²⁰⁷ Kurt Schmidt had told Karl Frank something similar in March 1946, only with the positive spin that Frank could actually better serve the movement through his work abroad.²⁰⁸ Erwin Schoettle, whose prospects seemed better because of his pre-1933 service to the SPD and his friendship with Kurt Schumacher, hesitated at first to return. He did finally assume office with the SPD in Baden-Württemberg, joining the party’s executive board in 1948, but only after overcoming serious personal misgivings.²⁰⁹

The most heart-wrenching episode of NB’s remigration occurred in Bavaria in May 1946, when Waldemar von Knoeringen, who had returned in the service of the British occupation authorities, reunited with Eugen Nerdinger, a member of the NB underground cell that Knoeringen had directed from across the Czechoslovak and Austrian borders in the 1930s. Some awkward and angry words passed between the two, and afterward Nerdinger tried to explain what had happened. Taking part in the illegal resistance against the Nazi regime was the only thing that kept him and his friends going, he wrote, and their sole contact outside Germany, “Michel” (Knoeringen’s alias), came to symbolize everything that Nazi Germany was not: freedom, hope, courage, and socialism. Nerdinger’s words barely suppressed his conflicted emotions.²¹⁰ This NB survivor found it so difficult to reunite with his hero Michel/Knoeringen because a seemingly unbridgeable gap of experience now separated the two men who used to share so much in common. Whereas Kurt Schmidt had eagerly awaited any new insights and information that Karl Frank and Richard Löwenthal could provide, Nerdinger decided to withdraw from politics and to keep his distance from his former NB comrades.²¹¹ The memory and promise of New Beginning had become for him too painful to reconcile with his present life after fascism. Letters like Nerdinger’s indicate the psychological trauma that survivors of Nazi persecution continued to undergo long into the postwar years.

Several alternatives to immediate remigration also existed for NB émigrés. Richard Löwenthal for example returned to Berlin in 1948 as foreign correspondent for

(Hannover: Offizin, 2006), 465-67. See also the letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to Waldemar von Knoeringen, June 25, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 84.

²⁰⁶ For an analysis of the book and Abendroth’s critical feedback on it, see Ch. 4.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Fritz Erler (Tübingen) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, Sept. 6, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136.

²⁰⁸ Letter from “Fritz Brandt” [Kurt Schmidt] (Berlin) to “Paul” [Karl Frank], Mar. 30, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 108. Original in Goldbloom Papers, 5/3.

²⁰⁹ See letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to “Paul” [Karl Frank] (New York), Apr. 19, 1946, NL Löwenthal, 4.

²¹⁰ Letter from Eugen Nerdinger to Waldemar von Knoeringen, May 22, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 142.

Nerdinger’s anticipation of Michel recalls a section in Peter Weiss’ novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Vol. 1 (1975), in which Heilmann recounts how the people of Tiryns anxiously awaited Heracles’ return.

²¹¹ Nerdinger later wrote a tribute to his NB comrade Bebo Wager, who was executed in 1943. *Die unterliegen nicht, die für eine große Sache sterben! Fragen und Antworten über Tat, Grund und Bedeutung des Augsburger Widerstandskämpfers Bebo Wager* (Augsburg: F. Fröhlich; SPD, 1965).

Reuters and the London *Observer* but maintained his permanent residence in London until 1959, when he accepted a job at the Otto Suhr Institute in Berlin. And of course many émigrés like Karl Frank, Vera Eliasberg, Erich Schmidt, and Henry W. Ehrmann never returned, whether by choice or circumstance.

Wolfgang Abendroth represented a peculiar case. After graduating from the Wilton Park reeducation school and joining the SPD in the fall of 1946, British authorities allowed him to return to Germany. Much to their chagrin, however, he moved in 1947 from Marburg to Potsdam, which lay in the Soviet zone. He may have expressed his discontent with communist policies in the past through his militancy in the KPO and NB, but he still firmly believed in socialist unity and in the Soviet Union's progressive role in realizing socialism in Germany. His brief stint as professor of jurisprudence in Halle, Leipzig, and Jena from 1947 to 1948 disabused him of these illusions. Secretly a member of the SPD, aware of the mounting pressure on him to join the SED, and openly critical of what he saw as the Soviets' dictatorial interventions in the universities, he fled along with his wife Lisa and one-year-old daughter to the West in early December 1948.²¹² He found academic positions in jurisprudence and political science first at Wilhelmshaven and then at Marburg. Having remained in Germany and served in a penal battalion during the war, Abendroth did not experience political exile during the Nazi period. But after POW camp and Wilton Park he played the role of repatriate, then after flirting with the East the role of refugee, and after returning to West Germany finally the role of *rémigré*.

Conclusion: From Renewal to Division

As Abendroth had experienced firsthand, the Soviet zone offered a false promise of socialist renewal. Unifying the workers' parties only in the Eastern Zone obstructed socialist unity across Germany as a whole. In a mirror image of the SED's promise of socialist unity and renewal within a particular sphere, however, the former members of NB began to conceive of democratic renewal as something that could take place exclusively within the Western zones and the SPD.

But New Beginning did not possess a monopoly on democratic renewal. On July 4, 1945, amid much fanfare, the Soviet zone's Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany (Kulturbund) issued its founding proclamation. For the Kulturbund, whose members included Robert Havemann, the object of renewal was obviously German culture—art, music, literature, science—which the Nazis had corrupted and only progressive socialism could restore.²¹³ To a certain extent, the SED and the affiliated Kulturbund coopted the language of renewal more effectively than the NB working group or the SPD. In theory, at least, the SED did symbolize a new beginning for German socialism that its shortcomings in practice could not entirely efface. In the American zone,

²¹² See Lisa Abendroth, "Die Flucht: Warum Wolfgang Abendroth die sowjetische Besatzungszone verließ," *Sozialismus*, 16, no. 2 (1996), 24-27.

²¹³ "Aufruf zur Gründung des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 4. Juli 1945," in Reichardt et al., eds., *Berlin. Quellen und Dokumente 1945-1951*, Vol. 1, 772-75. See Andreas Agocs, "Contesting the 'Other Germany': Politics and Cultural Renewal from Antifascism to Cold War, 1935-1953," Ph.D. (UC-Davis, 2009). For an intellectual history of cultural renewal in Germany after the war, see Mark W. Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe: German Intellectuals and Cultural Renewal after World War II, 1945-1955* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

“engaged democrats” like Alexander Mitscherlich, Alfred Weber, and Dolf Sternberger pursued yet another version of democratic renewal focused on reviving the progressive elements of German culture.²¹⁴

The specificity of New Beginning’s call for renewal dissolved into the general spirit of renewal that characterized the immediate postwar years. In May 1947, as the Cold War superpower rivalry picked up steam, the Soviet-sector press answered an article in the American-sector paper *Der Sozialdemokrat* called “Neu beginnen!” The mantle of “new beginning” truly belonged to the SED and the East, argued the *Berliner Zeitung*. The recent merger of the three Western zones meant Germany’s permanent division into two zones and the likelihood of general economic immiseration. “If one speaks of ‘beginning anew,’” it continued,

then one must leave the old behind. In the Eastern Zone we began anew from the ground up two years ago. Even if there are some difficulties to overcome, with us it is still a matter of solidifying and expanding past successes. Should the SPD in the West now have the serious will to break from its present false path and actually begin anew, then it might be possible to come to a better understanding with it in the future.²¹⁵

Such a “better understanding” between East and West would have to wait several decades.

A great number of social democrats joined the SED voluntarily, some enthusiastically. The standard narrative of dictatorial intimidation and manipulation that dominated Western historiography of the fusion struggle and still largely informs accounts today often ignores these enthusiastic proponents of socialist unity, even if the merger of the two parties did involve an extraordinary degree of Soviet coercion. “Unity is,” Jean Eisner put it bluntly, “certainly on the surface, better than disunity.” Such naiveté combined with a strong dose of fear and venality.²¹⁶ Socialist renewal could dovetail nicely into the prospect of unity. Opponents of fusion into the SED, on the other hand, associated renewal with the defense of democratic freedoms against communist dictatorship.

In early 1946, Karl Frank summarized what he viewed as a dialectic of socialist unity: “Not long ago there still existed in Germany hope for overcoming the division of the pre-Hitler workers’ movement with a new, socialist-democratic unity party. Now the so-called socialist Unity Party, compelled to form from above, has still deepened the division in the chemical retort [*Retorte*] of the Russian Zone.”²¹⁷ The geopolitical pressures of the mounting Cold War combined with local experiences like the struggle for control over the Berlin trade unions in January-June 1948, the Berlin blockade from

²¹⁴ See Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014); “Reconsidering the ‘Unpolitical German’: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany,” *German History*, 32, no. 1 (2014), 53-78; “The Promise of Publicness: Intellectual Elites and Participatory Politics in Postwar Heidelberg,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 9, no. 3 (2012), 641-60; “Für eine demokratische Erneuerung Deutschlands: Kommunikationsprozesse und Deutungsmuster engagierter Demokraten nach 1945,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 33, no. 2 (Apr.-June 2007), 228-57. For émigré perspectives on the problem of democratic renewal, see Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015).

²¹⁵ “‘Neu beginnen!’ Antwort an den ‘Sozialdemokrat,’” *Berliner Zeitung* (May 24, 1947), 1.

²¹⁶ “[T]he Communists held out the promise of prestige and power to Social Democrats supporting the SED.” Interview of Jean Eisner-Steinberg by Gerhard Bry in Bry, *Resistance*, 232.

²¹⁷ Hagen, *Erobert, nicht befreit!*, 53.

June 1948 to May 1949, and the massive railway workers’ strike in June 1949 to gradually limit the range of possibilities for socialist politics in the postwar period.²¹⁸ In four short years, the German Left underwent a distillation process that separated traditional social democrats from traditional communists or neo-communists in the SED. At the height of the blockade in December 1948, Werner Peuke and Karl Elgaß—who had remained in the SED according to NB’s general principle of working from within the existing parties—announced their resignation. “We have not endured all the agonies of fascism,” they wrote in *Der Telegraf*, “only now to go down the same road of suffering under a different flag.” The behavior and policies of the SED led down “the road into barbarism.”²¹⁹

On May 8, 1949, exactly four years after the capitulation of the Nazis, the Parliamentary Council of the merged Western zones enacted the Basic Law of the new Federal Republic of Germany. Several months later, on October 7, the Eastern Zone formalized its independence by declaring itself the German Democratic Republic. The very next day, the remnants of New Beginning in Berlin suffered another loss. Werner Peuke, beset by health problems leftover from his years in concentration camps, died of a heart attack at the age of forty-three. “The SPD and the social democratic workers’ movement,” said Theo Thiele in his eulogy, “lose with Werner Peuke one of their most hopeful members; his friends [*Freundeskreis*]”—here Thiele meant the NB working group—“lose in him a loyal friend and comrade. This great void that death has torn open cannot be closed.” He concluded: “Dear Werner! We now take our leave of you forever! You will be missed! But your friends will continue your work in championing freedom, democracy, and social progress.”²²⁰

Although the German Left had experienced factionalism, splintering, and the formation of rival new parties before—e.g. the Independent Social Democrats (USPD), the KPD, the SAP—the new Socialist Unity Party’s claim to political hegemony within a separate state was completely unprecedented. The renewers generation too was now divided into two states. With fascism and the difficult early years of reconstruction behind them, the renewers looked ahead to a new decade of renewal, modernization, and socialist progress.

²¹⁸ The NB working group leader Georg Müller was instrumental in forming the Independent Trade Union Organization (UGO) in 1948 as a rival to the pro-SED Free German Federation of Trade Unions (FDGB). See Kühne, “Das Netzwerk ‘Neu Beginnen’ und die Berliner SPD nach 1945,” 265-73. On the railway workers’ strike, see Paul Steege, “Finding the There, There: Local Space, Global Ritual, and Early Cold War Berlin,” in Gary Backhaus and John Murungi, eds., *Earth Ways: Framing Geographical Meanings* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 155-72.

²¹⁹ Werner Peuke and Karl Elgaß, “Befreit Euer Gewissen, Genossen!” *Der Telegraf* (Dec. 5, 1945), qtd. in Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst, eds., *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004), 560.

²²⁰ Theo Thiele’s eulogy for Peuke, “Liebe Paula, lieber Koko, liebe Freunde, liebe Genossen, verehrte Trauergemeinde!” NL Hurwitz, 135.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Socialism Rebranded: Fritz Erler, Richard Löwenthal,
and the Modernization of Social Democracy

Socialism Rebranded:

Fritz Erler, Richard Löwenthal, and the Modernization of Social Democracy

The final defeat of fascism in 1945 had given European socialists hope for a revolutionary new beginning. All the bitter divisions of the 1920s and 30s were temporarily forgotten and calls for working-class unity joined together with calls for socialist renewal. As a result of the Depression and the Second World War, no country—least of all the victorious Soviet Union—practiced any longer the sort of capitalism that had characterized modern Europe since the early nineteenth century and against which the socialist movement had first risen in opposition. The former leader of the French Popular Front, Léon Blum, expected the war's end to usher in socialism's "triumphant period." Alas, the historian Mark Mazower has observed, "[i]t was not to be. The new era of social reconstruction would not take place on the basis of socialist principles."¹ What happened?

The previous chapter described how calls for working-class unity and socialist renewal first diverged in postwar Germany, the antagonistic policies of the occupying powers as well as internal feuds having driven a wedge between West-oriented social democrats and East-oriented communists. Survivors of the New Beginning group saw the generation that they represented, the renewers generation born circa 1910, torn apart during the Berlin fusion struggle of 1945-46. At the same time, former members of New Beginning in Germany and abroad reclaimed the progressive liberal tradition in the name of democratic socialism, calling into question the dogmatic interpretation of Marxist principles that prevailed on both wings of the old workers' movement. Defense of individual freedoms, both political and intellectual, became their rallying cry. This chapter examines further what happened to European socialism during the first full postwar decade, the economic boom years of the 1950s. In many ways, the efforts of leading Western European socialists to "modernize" and "rebrand" their parties during this decade marked the practical end of socialism as a distinct and viable alternative to democratic capitalism.²

The experiences of New Beginning's former members foreshadowed broader developments in the European socialist movement as a whole. During the 1950s, social democratic parties in the West and communist parties in the East underwent a process of "revisionism" that upset the traditional Marxist ideology that had guided policy for most of their histories. The result for European social democracy was the complete abandonment of Marxism in favor of reformist programs no longer based on the emancipation of the working class. Marxism remained the official ideology of the Eastern bloc, but to a certain extent the revisionism that followed Stalin's death led to a separation of ideology from political practice. The uprisings of 1953, 1956, and later in

¹ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* [1998] (New York: Vintage, 2000), 290.

² I follow the theorist Wolfgang Streeck and others in calling "democratic capitalism" the uniquely Western combination of industrialization, economic liberalism, and formally democratic political institutions. Today we might take for granted that capitalism and political democracy need each other, but historically and globally this has not at all been the case. See Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* [2013], trans. Patrick Camiller (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2014).

1968 showed the limits of Eastern revisionism.³ If in the West the socialist movement made pragmatism into its explicit platform, consistent with its reformist political strategies, then in the East socialism implicitly adopted pragmatism while still preaching the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. The Old Left thus drifted toward the political Center in both blocs, justifying the existing political and socioeconomic regimes even when, as with the West German social democrats, it found itself playing the minor role of parliamentary opposition. In the 1950s, the Cold War division of Europe resulted as much from external geopolitical pressures as from their internal duplication by domestic politics.

But the course of this postwar transformation of European socialism—this trans-bloc renunciation of revolution and accommodation to the status quo—was neither inevitable nor without its costs. The “modernization” of German social democracy in particular was tortuous in a twofold sense: both literally twisted, insofar as previously held ideological truths now stood on their heads, and figuratively painful, because of the high degree of resistance it encountered within its own ranks.

Socialism during the Boom Years

The vast devastation of the Second World War and the economic misery of the Depression that had preceded it did not last very long after 1945. Recovery proceeded unevenly in Europe, but with the help of the Marshall Plan in the West and forced social restructuring in the East the postwar economies regained and often surpassed their prewar levels of production. Despite the advance of really existing socialism, the historian Eric Hobsbawm dubbed the period from roughly 1947 to 1973 capitalism’s “Golden Age” and the 1950s in particular its “Golden Years.” Real wages rose along with gross national products, and unemployment was low. Hobsbawm sought to minimize the difference between Western capitalism and Soviet communism by noting that the latter too acted “as a powerful accelerator of the modernization of backward agrarian countries.” From a long-term global perspective, the Golden Age brought a greater degree of material prosperity to a greater number of people than ever before in history: it constituted “the Great Leap Forward of the world economy.”⁴

In the West capitalism thrived, but it was capitalism of a different sort. Central planning and state ownership of key industries became widely accepted practices, if not so dominant in the West as in the East. The general Western consensus opted for “systematic government control and the management of mixed economies” that involved cooperation “with organized labour movements so long as they were not communist.” Capitalism, traditionally understood, “needed to be saved from itself to survive.”⁵

³ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [1976], Vol. 3, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1978), 465-66.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* [1994] (New York: Vintage, 1996), 9-10.

⁵ Everybody agreed after the war, observed Hobsbawm, “that a return to *laissez-faire* and the unreconstructed free market were out of the question. . . . Even regimes dedicated to economic and political liberalism now could, and had to, run their economies in ways which would once have been rejected as ‘socialist.’ . . . The future lay with the ‘mixed economy.’” Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 272-73. For more on how the Allied occupiers and later West German economic planners appropriated socialist principles in the name of democratic capitalism, see Eberhard Schmidt, *Die verhinderte Neuordnung, 1945-*

Drawing on Keynesian theories, leading economists from across the political spectrum encouraged more government investment, state regulation, responsible public ownership, deficit spending, and a progressive income tax.⁶ The political form best suited to this mixture of free and controlled economy was the welfare state, which promoted a “soft” or democratic capitalism based on equal political representation and a wide range of publicly funded social services. Class relations changed radically from those that reigned before the war. Employers and employees no longer confronted each other in a life-or-death class struggle, but rather agreed to work together in a mutually beneficial (so it was said) social partnership. “The welfare state was avowedly social,” wrote the historian Tony Judt, “but it was far from socialist.” He was wrong, however, when he concluded that “welfare capitalism, as it unfolded in Western Europe, was truly post-ideological.”⁷ As will be seen below, the postwar ideological debate over democratic capitalism knocked down traditions and redirected entire social movements.

Faced with such an unprecedented and frankly unexpected success of democratic capitalism after the war, socialists across Europe reexamined their guiding principles. As the historian George Lichtheim observed, the distinguishing historical characteristic of Marxian social democracy—the leading brand of Western European socialism—was its “insistence that the party of the working class must aim at the conquest of political power, within the context of democracy but not at the expense of socialism. . . . It sought a peaceful revolution, but a revolution all the same.”⁸ The peaceful revolution of social democracy through the “bourgeois” institutions of representative democracy had brought European workers and their middle-class allies enormous social gains in the past, guaranteeing key welfare legislation like public health insurance, social security, and unemployment benefits.⁹ But by the 1950s, the electoral results for leading social democratic parties brought little but disappointment.

The British Labour Party lost its governing majority in 1951, and intellectuals inside and outside the party set about “editing” or revising socialism in an effort to make it practical for the postwar world.¹⁰ The French SFIO participated in a variety of governing coalitions in the 1950s, but controversy surrounding the Algerian War and the party’s inability to challenge Charles de Gaulle led to a decline in popular support and a split of the party in 1958. As for the West German SPD, it had not once participated in a governing coalition at the federal level and had lost repeatedly in elections over the course of the decade. Only the Scandinavian social democrats enjoyed consistent electoral success during the 1950s and 60s. With the exception of the communist parties, which remained strong in Italy and France, the Western European socialists began a

1952. *Zur Auseinandersetzung um die Demokratisierung der Wirtschaft in den westlichen Besatzungszonen und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970).

⁶ Classic examples include John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), and Gunnar Myrdal, *Beyond the Welfare State: Economic Planning and Its International Implications* (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 1960).

⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 362.

⁸ George Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 211.

⁹ See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002). Sometimes these gains were achieved indirectly through concessions by authoritarian leaders rather than through democratic legislation, as with Bismarck in Germany.

¹⁰ See Dennis L. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997). A classic example of this Labour Party introspection was C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

general “retreat from Marxism” in an attempt to appeal to a broader electorate and to adapt to the transformed socioeconomic circumstances of the postwar world.¹¹ The instrumental logic of parliamentary politics trumped any consideration for ideological purity. Adaptation to the humdrum everyday politics of liberal middle-class democracy represented postwar European social democracy’s “common destiny.”¹²

In the East many socialists did just the opposite: without the distraction of parliament, intellectuals affiliated with the official communist parties attempted to purify the Marxist-Leninist ideology of its perceived Stalinist deviations. While revisionists in the West tended to deny the existence of any authentic “Marx” or Marxism and to insist on “permanent revision,” Eastern revisionists tried to recover the original intentions of the classic theorists Marx, Engels, and Lenin.¹³ Social democrat revisionists thus posed as historical relativists, while their Eastern communist counterparts returned to the sources as quasi-originalists. The Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski summarized the demands of Eastern revisionists as “a general democratization of public life, the abolition of the system of repression and the secret police, or at least the subordination of the police to a judiciary acting in accordance with law and independence of political pressure; they demanded freedom of the Press, sciences, and arts, and the abolition of preventive censorship.” As for the economy, revisionists in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere demanded

the cessation of compulsory agricultural collectivization; . . . an enlargement of the role of market conditions in the economy; profit-sharing by workers; rationalized planning and the abandonment of unrealistic all-embracing plans; a reduction in the norms and directives that hampered enterprise; and concessions to private and co-operative activity in the field of services and small-scale production.¹⁴

While the party revisionists used socialist and specifically Marxist language in their arguments, the general populace appealed to nationalism and religion in their calls for renewal. Overall, Kołakowski saw no progressive potential in revisionism: for him it represented “only one of several manifestations of the post-Stalinist disintegration of Marxism.”¹⁵

Despite his attempt to differentiate Eastern communist revisionism from the historical revisionism of Eduard Bernstein or of the postwar social democrats,¹⁶

¹¹ As Mark Mazower has put it, “socialists were forced one way or another to recognize [the] electoral and economic truth: the only way to avoid gradual extinction was to escape the ghetto of class politics and undergo the transformation into a broader-based type of party.” Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 290.

¹² Dietrich Orlow, *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, French, and German Social Democratic Parties, 1945-1969* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000). See also Jan de Graaf, “Outgrowing the Cold War: Cross-Continental Perspectives on Early Post-War European Social Democracy,” *Contemporary European History*, 22, no. 2 (2013), 331-42.

¹³ Helga Grebing, *Der Revisionismus. Von Bernstein bis zum “Prager Frühling”* (Munich: Beck, 1977), 14-15, 280. For Leszek Kołakowski too, all variations of Marx or Marxism were “legitimate,” including and especially the Marxist-Leninism of the Soviet bloc. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3.

¹⁴ Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, 458-60.

¹⁵ Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, 487. In the 1950s, however, Kołakowski had been an avid supporter of revisionism. On his many ideological and political peregrinations, see John Connelly, “Jester and Priest: On Leszek Kolakowski,” *The Nation* (Sept. 3, 2013).

¹⁶ On Bernstein’s revisionism, see the classic text Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein’s Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia UP, 1952). For the continuing legacy of

Kołakowski's own argument suggested several similarities between these diverse examples. All tried to expose "the grotesque contrast between Marxist-Leninist [or simply Marxist] phraseology and the realities of life,"¹⁷ or, to resolve the apparent contradiction between party ideology and the real political and economic situation. As in the West, Eastern revisionists invoked a reality principle and encouraged pragmatic policies.¹⁸ All used the classic reformer's device of a return to the sources, if for very different purposes. And all came to the same conclusion that the prevailing form of Marxism in their respective socialist movements no longer met the demands of their time.¹⁹ Finally, the trans-bloc revisionism of the 1950s shared the aim of renewing socialism by making Marxism more subject to rational debate—the only difference being that Western social democrats mostly ended by renouncing Marxism altogether.²⁰ Few histories of the Left note the parallelism between the postwar reform of social democracy and Eastern revisionism, preferring instead to dwell on the intensification of Cold War rivalries.²¹ Only Jan-Werner Müller has undertaken a sustained, trans-bloc comparison of European political ideologies, but his unapologetically liberal bias somewhat diminishes his contributions.²²

In the 1950s, the renewers generation of German socialists entered their forties and their professional and political prime. This chapter's analysis of the non-Marxist reformist faction at the SPD party convention at Bad Godesberg indicates how this generation's ideas about the democratic renewal of socialism only now came to the fore. These former revolutionary socialists subjected their own political pasts and ideological inheritance to criticism. Ironically, they proved extremely intolerant of those within the party who, like their younger selves, remained committed to Marxist revolutionary socialism. Marxism went on trial in the 1950s, and it would never fully recover from the verdict.²³ The postwar lives of two former members of New Beginning, Fritz Erler and

Bernsteinian revisionism, see Dylan Riley, "Bernstein's Heirs," *New Left Review*, no. 76 (July-Aug. 2012), 136-50.

¹⁷ Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, 460.

¹⁸ Despite the fact that some countries like East Germany lacked a widespread revisionist movement—and there one could still point to Wolfgang Harich, Ernst Bloch, Hans Mayer, Alfred Kantorowicz, and the former New Beginning member Robert Havemann—in general the Eastern bloc after Stalin's death in 1953 and especially after Khrushchev's turn at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 entered into a brief period of ideological relaxation. A select few dissidents even began to question what Kołakowski viewed as the foundation of Communist power, the institution of one-party rule. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, 461.

¹⁹ In a way, the reform of European socialism in the 1950s resembled the reform of the Catholic Church during the same period, a process that culminated in the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 and likewise stressed the importance of a "return to the sources" [*ressourcement*] and a "bringing up to date" [*aggiornamento*]. See John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008), and John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012).

²⁰ Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, 461.

²¹ The only example that I could find is the broad collection of essays edited by Leopold Labedz, *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

²² Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2011); Müller, "The Triumph of What (If Anything)? Rethinking Political Ideologies and Political Institutions in Twentieth-Century Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 14, no. 2 (June 2009), 211-26.

²³ Cf. Fritz Sternberg, *Capitalism and Socialism on Trial* (London: Gollancz, 1951).

Richard Löwenthal, illustrate the twisted detours and intellectual gymnastics necessary to turn erstwhile revolutionary socialists into defenders of democratic capitalism.

Fritz Erler: Socialism as a Present-Day Task

After escaping from a prison transport in the spring of 1945 and starting his political career in the French Occupation Zone, Fritz Erler underwent a slow process of de-radicalization as he sought the most practical means of accomplishing “socialism as a present-day task”—the title of a pamphlet he would publish two years later. At the same time he mourned the deaths of two New Beginning comrades and of his political mentor from the concentration camp. Erler would later become one of the most influential members of the SPD executive board. But right after the war, he still had his sights fixed on revolution.

Before making contact with the New Beginning group in Berlin, the German-American officer and friend of NB Fred Sanderson rode in a jeep through the Western occupation zones seeking out survivors. In June 1945 he passed through the town of Biberach in Upper Swabia, where he discovered Fritz Erler, a member of the trio that had led NB inside Germany from 1936 to 1938. Erler had been rounded up along with Kurt Schmidt and Oscar Umrath as part of the Gestapo’s second wave of arrests against NB in the fall of 1938. During his interrogation, he learned that the Gestapo actually did not know many of the real “bourgeois” names that stood behind the “Miles Group” aliases. The Gestapo grilled him about the illegal activity of a certain “Comrade Grau,” for whom they had been searching in vain since 1933, without realizing that Grau now sat before them. He spent the next year in custody awaiting trial.²⁴

In Moabit Jail he encountered Kurt Schumacher, the militant social democrat leader with an already legendary anti-Nazi and anti-communist reputation. The two played the old proletarian card game skat and, as far as possible given the circumstances, talked politics. Erler’s biographer Hartmut Soell summarized the encounter:

their political discussions . . . did not at first result in very much political agreement. Their theoretical points of departure seemed too different: on the one side, the representative of the “right-wing” of the SPD who even during his already six years in concentration camps made no secret of his intransigence toward the KPD, and on the other side, the young SAJ member from the left-wing of the SPD who during years of illegal work had convinced himself ever more of the need for unity of the workers’ movement.²⁵

Here in the Nazis’ maw two men tricked and outbid each other at skat, and two generations of the German Left sat face to face: the Weimar generation born in the 1890s, with vivid memories of Imperial Germany, the war, and the November Revolution; and the renewers generation born circa 1910, who had no love for Weimar social democracy and believed that socialists must find a new way to overcome the split in the workers’ movement.

When his trial did take place in September 1939, just two weeks after war broke out, Erler was convicted of a well grounded *suspicion* of treason—the People’s Court

²⁴ Hartmut Soell, *Fritz Erler – Eine politische Biographie*, 2 Vols. (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1976), 50.

²⁵ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 51.

admitted that it lacked the evidence to prove its case. Such a juridical proceeding under the Nazi regime was remarkable, with its attention to empirical proofs, consideration of mitigating circumstances, and patience with the defense attorney's "school lecture" about the hairsplitting differences between regular treason [*Landesverrat*] and high treason [*Hochverrat*].²⁶ Due to such "juridical scruples," Erler got off relatively easy with a sentence of ten years in prison with forced labor. Sentences for similar and lesser offences gradually worsened as the war progressed.

Erler served most of his time as a so-called "bog soldier" at the Aschendorfermoor penal camp, located in the low country along the Ems River in northwestern Germany. Work and living conditions in the camp were hard, reducing his six-foot frame to a skeleton weighing a mere 110 pounds.²⁷ But he kept his spirits high and wrote to his wife Käthe in June 1942 that "[y]ou certainly know from Goethe: 'To be active is the ultimate determination of man'"—which likely indicated to her that he meant to continue the political struggle.²⁸ Unlike Werner Peuke and Karl Elgaß, who had consciously carried on the work of New Beginning in KZ Sachsenhausen, Erler in Aschendorfermoor fell under the influence of the unorthodox communist Hans Glaser. The two had common acquaintances from illegal work in Berlin and both agreed that the antifascist struggle required a united socialist front. But what drew Erler to Glaser, argued Hartmut Soell, "was not only his more comprehensive education, which featured an excellent knowledge of psychology, philosophy, and the natural sciences, but also his poetic talent." Glaser's "ability to inspire and his power of persuasion" helped him and Erler spur their exhausted fellow camp inmates to participate in lively political discussions and to enroll in a "bog university," which included courses in English, French, Spanish, the natural sciences, medicine, psychology, and history.²⁹

Glaser developed a brief "catechism" as an introduction to scientific socialism, and each student was required to learn it by heart—naturally they could not circulate paper copies. Soell speculated that this pedagogical program had a stronger influence on Erler than even the Org/NB F-Course that he took in 1932. He found the catechism attractive because it was "flexible enough to legitimize every step as a necessary detour out of tactical or strategic considerations." But he did not agree with many of Glaser's conclusions, especially his economic determinism (that is, the mechanistic determination

²⁶ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 52. For an extended analysis of the Nazi People's Court and how its legal practices varied over time and type of case, see Holger Schlüter, *Die Urteilspraxis des nationalsozialistischen Volksgerichtshofs* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1995). See also Bernward Dörner, "Heimtücke". *Das Gesetz als Waffe: Kontrolle, Abschreckung und Verfolgung in Deutschland 1933-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998).

²⁷ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 53. The theater and film director Wolfgang Langhoff, who served time at the nearby camp Börgermoor, first brought the "bog soldiers" to the world's attention with his 1935 book *Die Moorsoldaten. 13 Monate Konzentrationslager* (Zürich), which soon appeared in English under the poorly chosen title *Rubber Truncheon* (New York). In 1936 under the pseudonym "Klaus Hinrichs," Karl August Wittfogel also published a memoir about his time in the Börgermoor camp, *Staatliches Konzentrationslager VII. Eine "Erziehungsanstalt" im Dritten Reich* (London).

²⁸ Qtd. in Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 59. The final line of Walter Loewenheim's earliest theses was a quote from Goethe's *Faust*: "In the beginning was the act!." Kurt Menz [i.e. Loewenheim], "Die proletarische Revolution: Allgemeine Grundzüge ihrer Theorie und ihrer Besonderheiten in Deutschland," *Geschichte der Org 1929-1935*, ed. J. Foitzik (Berlin: Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand & Edition Hentrich, 1995), 35-67 (67). Goethe himself had altered the first line of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word."

²⁹ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 54.

of the political and cultural superstructure by the economic base). So the fundamental Org/NB “conception” of 1933, which emphasized the interdependence of politics, culture, and the economy and accordingly considered fascism a semi-autonomous political movement rather than a pure class phenomenon, still maintained its hold on him.³⁰

As the war neared its end, the Germans transferred camp inmates in the West away from the advancing Allied armies. During a brutal forced march in the spring of 1945, Erler and his communist fellow prisoner Matthias Trauden managed to escape. They hid in the area around Biberach in Upper Swabia, which was liberated by French troops on April 30.

Perhaps even more than hearing about his old NB comrade Oskar Umrath’s demise in 1943, news shortly after the armistice of Hans Glaser’s death struck Erler hard.³¹ For nearly five years he had forged deep personal bonds with his fellow prisoners, and hearing of their deaths dampened the activist hope for the future that had sustained him in the camps. Despite the trauma of these memories, he remained lifelong friends with other survivors like the abstract expressionist artist Rolf Cavael.³² In the days and weeks following the Nazi capitulation, however, he did not have much time to mourn. The French had appointed him district commissioner [*Landrat*] of the town of Biberach, whose population suffered from a material privation soon exasperated by the influx of thousands of German expellees from the East. After meeting him in June 1945, the NB confidant Fred Sanderson observed that his efforts to alleviate the situation and restart political life repeatedly ran afoul of the French authorities.³³

³⁰ The catechism followed five progressive levels: 1. Marxist crisis theory; 2. surplus value and concentration/accumulation theory; 3. historical materialism; 4. the bourgeois mode of production, state, and ideology; and 5. dialectical materialism. Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 56-57. For more on NB’s fascism theory, see Ch. 1.

³¹ See Erler’s eulogy for Glaser “Der lange Hans - Bild eines Moorsoldaten,” *Die Freie Gewerkschaft* (Nov. 7-12, 1946). Erler acted as executor of Glaser’s personal papers, and in 1955 another comrade from the camp, Alfred Markwitz, wrote to him from East Germany demanding that he release some of the documents for publication. Annoyed, Erler replied that “I have already often tried to publish many of Glaser’s writings, as yet without success. But I am not prepared to make parts of them available only for the purpose of introducing them into current debates about German unity. Back then Germany was not yet divided, and things had another point of reference [*einen anderen Bezug*].” Clearly Erler wanted to protect Glaser’s memory and, perhaps also, keep his own radical experimentation firmly in the past. Letter from Fritz Erler to Alfred Markwitz (Eisenach), July 21, 1955, NL Erler, 224C. Former comrades of all stripes in East Germany seemed to enjoy needling Erler about his past affiliation with Glaser. Else Schmidt, whom he knew from the old Berlin SAJ, wrote him a propos of West German rearmament that “an Adenauer-party of your fellow soldiers” in the SPD could never take a stand against militarism, only those who had suffered along with you in the prisons and concentration camps: “Should the blood of Hans [Glaser] and the other resistance fighters have flowed entirely for nothing?” Letter from Else Schmidt (East Berlin) to Fritz Erler, Dec. 14, 1954, NL Erler, 224C.

³² Cavael wrote to Erler in 1954, perhaps exaggerating, that “I have no other friend than you in whom I can confide about all things.” Letter from Rolf Cavael (Munich) to Fritz Erler, Sept. 18, 1954, NL Erler, 224A. In January 1956, some months before the Hungarian Uprising, Erler wrote to Cavael and his wife Dorothea about how news from Hungary reminded him of Hans Glaser, “who was very devoted to Georg Lukacz [i.e. Lukács].” Letter from Fritz Erler to Rolf and Do Cavael, Jan. 4, 1956, NL Erler, 224A.

³³ Interview of Fred Sanderson by Harold Hurwitz (Washington, DC), Nov. 1985, NL Hurwitz, 17. Erler recalled his astonishment “when an American with flawless German greeted me in our house” and began to tell him about the fate of NB members in exile. The rural, Swabian environment of Biberach was strange to the Berliner Erler, so he welcomed all the more this visit from “such a familiar world.” Letter from Fritz Erler (Biberach an der Riss) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, May 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136.

Unlike the British and American occupiers who treated German civilians relatively well and unlike the Soviets who at least encouraged the resumption of political life in their zone, the French treated their *ennemis vaincus* with sheer contempt. The historian Edgar Wolfrum has referred to the “dismal French period” of 1945-49 and noted how Kurt Schumacher labeled the French “West Russians,” making a comparison to the horrible treatment of civilians by the Red Army. The press in the American and British zones spoke of a French “Silken Curtain” (as opposed to an Iron Curtain) that hung around the German Southwest, and in 1947 the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* dubbed the French occupation area the “forgotten zone.” Although Wolfrum listed certain historiographical biases, divisions within French politics between communists and Gaullists, and the unfavorable international, national, and infrastructural circumstances that the French occupiers faced, his summary of initial German perceptions of the occupation still captured much of the reality:

French soldiers terrorized the population, and while there was no liberation or democratization to speak of, there was plenty of new military dictatorship. The French hermetically sealed off their occupation zone from the outside and within the zone isolated regions from one another. This corresponded fittingly to the ideas associated with them about how there should no longer be a German national state: suppression of Prussia, annexation in the West, dismemberment and small-state politics [*Zwergstaatenpolitik*] as far as influence allowed—in short, a “Balkanization.”³⁴

All that being true, the chief of the French military government Émile Laffon did favor some grassroots democratic initiative, local self-administration, and initially even the work of the Antifascist Committees. And up until 1947, when the French adopted the rather weak American model of the “civilian court” [*Spruchkammer*], the denazification of society and the economy proceeded thoroughly and systematically.

Fritz Erler had thus entered into a complicated situation. He found most frustrating the French policy of intra-zonal fragmentation, which made it impossible “to make contacts with like-minded political people across local borders and to organize them into a party.”³⁵ As soon as he had the chance, in August 1945, he abandoned his post as district commissioner and traveled back to his home city of Berlin. What he hoped to accomplish there remains shrouded in mystery, political controversy, and a fair degree of biographical omission. Available evidence suggests that he had every intention of joining the Communist Party—since his expulsion from the SPD in 1933, he had considered himself officially “without a party” [*parteilos*]³⁶—and assuming some position in the Soviet Zone, perhaps in his home neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg.

On the long journey from Upper Swabia to Berlin, he came across a pamphlet by the Union of German Socialist Organizations (UDSO) in Great Britain, which listed New Beginning among its members. Erler sensed from the pamphlet “an emigrant spirit so foreign to the German reality” that he “considered it a sin to identify with it the name of the organization in Germany [i.e. ‘New Beginning’] in any way.”³⁶ As he explained

³⁴ Edgar Wolfrum, “Französische Besatzungspolitik,” in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Deutschland unter alliierter Besatzung 1945-1949/55. Ein Handbuch* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 60-72 (60).

³⁵ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 64-65.

³⁶ Letter from Fritz Erler (Biberach an der Riss) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, May 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136. The Union pamphlet that Erler saw might have been *Die neue deutsche Republik* (London, 1943). In August 1945 it had not yet published the more well known pamphlet *Zur Politik deutscher Sozialisten*.

rather bureaucratically in a letter to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, “[t]he emergence of the group NB as a particular organization was . . . so contingent on the needs of the period of illegality that I denied the further necessity of its official special existence during the period of the democratic reconstruction of parties.”³⁷

When exactly on his journey he came to this conclusion about the liquidation of NB remains unclear. In Halle in the Soviet Zone he established contact with the KPD and met with Walter Ulbricht. A longer meeting with Ulbricht about his political future followed in Berlin. Erler recounted the episode to the Schmidts:

I did not conceal from Ulbricht in August that I came from the left wing of the SP. I asked him how there could really be *two* parties in the Eastern Zone. His seemingly honest answer was that after the painful impression left on the population by the Russian occupation, the working masses . . . would migrate into the bourgeois camp if there were no Social Democracy. As far as my future conduct, U[lbricht] advised me only to campaign for a unity party if no appreciable [social democrat] residue was left over. Otherwise my place was in the SPD.³⁸

Ulbricht must have known exactly where on the “left wing of the SP” Erler came from, and his curious advice that this militant young socialist choose the SPD over the KPD or any future unity party probably owed something to the mutual distrust that had brewed between the Central Committee of the KPD and the NB foreign bureau during the 1930s. Somebody like Erler with an independent cast of mind and a history of involvement in socialist splinter groups must have seemed already lost to the communist cause.

Erler’s meeting with Ulbricht in Berlin took place either right before or right after he contacted Kurt Schmidt, Erich Kürschner, and the rest of the NB survivors there. In any case, this NB reunion did not go well. Erler later spoke of “differences” with Kurt Schmidt “that perhaps are attributable in part to abrupt treatment by me.”³⁹ But at the time he convinced himself that Schmidt was working politically against him. Schmidt in turn might have considered Erler a rival.⁴⁰ Whereas the Berlin NB comrades viewed the prospects for a socialist unity party with growing skepticism, due in large part to their direct dealings with the Soviet occupiers, Erler came out definitely in favor of unity—despite Ulbricht’s advice that he stay out of the matter. He decided moreover that NB should publicly declare its dissolution and even drafted a proclamation to that effect. “Since 1931 [sic],” it began,

we have fought for the unity of the working class. Socialists in all camps, members and functionaries even of the old KPD worked in our ranks for the internal political rectification of the workers’ parties as a prerequisite for their later organizational unity. . . . Our goal remains the unity of all producers. The conditions of the present however make the continued existence of our organization superfluous. True to our traditions we call on you to take your places in the German workers’ parties and to do your best in the struggle for a democratic Germany, which should develop someday into

³⁷ Letter from Fritz Erler (Biberach an der Riss) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, May 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136.

³⁸ Letter from Fritz Erler (Tübingen) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, Sept. 6, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ Letter from Fritz Erler (Biberach an der Riss) to Erich and Hilde Schmidt, May 16, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 136.

⁴⁰ Interview of Erika Weidlich [Schmidt’s girlfriend] and Gerda Eick [Erler’s later assistant] by Hartmut Soell, unspecified date, Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 533n12. For more on Kurt Schmidt, see Ch. 3.

a socialist Germany. The New Beginning Group in Germany is hereby dissolved. We expect that our comrades in exile will follow this example. . . . Whether in Social Democracy or the Communist Party: members of New Beginning, forward to the front and start your work!⁴¹

Did Erler make this proclamation at the behest of Ulbricht and the communists? That is what Georg Müller and doubtless many other NB members in Berlin thought.⁴² Although Soell suggested that the proclamation never reached its intended targets (i.e. the NB rank and file throughout Germany), it did circulate widely enough in Berlin to anger the NB survivors there and prompt a mutual feeling of betrayal.⁴³

Following Ulbricht's advice, Erler in fact rejoined the SPD. Berlin social democrats around Otto Ostrowski, the future governing mayor of the city, offered him a job as "recruitment speaker and organizer" in the surrounding province of Brandenburg. He turned it down, likely because he would have preferred a position in the city of Berlin itself. Instead he decided to return to Biberach, where he began working his way up the ladder of the local SPD and continued to annoy the French occupation authorities. In January 1946 he was arrested under a pretense and spent four months alongside ex-Nazis in the French internment camp at Balingen. There he wrote his first serious political work, "Socialism as a Present-Day Task."

In this 52-page pamphlet, which came out in 1947, Erler criticized the general apathy that seemed to have taken hold of the German population. This "fear of politics," he argued, proceeded from the fallacy that Nazism had delegitimized all forms of mass political engagement, when in reality the only antidote to the disaster of Nazi politics was a "rational politics conscious of its goal," namely socialism.⁴⁴ In other words, the postwar German rejection of mass politics as such constituted an abstract negation of Nazi mass politics rather than its determinate negation through militant democratic socialism. Erler's dialectical reasoning also applied to active antifascist resisters, who now had to overcome their "'anti'-attitude" to fight *for* something positive. But Germans had lacked any real political education since the Weimar Republic, and as a result, if an average person "has already taken a stand for a party, then it's only for its *name*, i.e. for its *tradition*, and not for its current program."⁴⁵

Potentially even more dangerous than political apathy, Erler warned, was "falling back into the traditions from before 1933."⁴⁶ Socialists should look ahead toward the future, renew their theoretical and practical programs according to the demands of the

⁴¹ "An die Mitglieder der Organisation Neu Beginnen," qtd. in Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 66. Original in NL Erler, 906.

⁴² Letter from Georg Müller to Heinrich Jakobowicz [alias Henry Hellmann], Sept. 13, 1946, NL Hurwitz, 46.

⁴³ The historian Harold Hurwitz claimed that Erler's "Berlin friends got the impression that he had gone over to the KPD." Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: Die Anfänge des Widerstands, Pt. 1 (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), 47.

⁴⁴ Fritz Erler, *Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe* (Schwenningen/Neckar: Neckar-Verlag, 1947), 5. Hartmut Soell noted that the original title of the work was "Die politische Entscheidung" and that its subsequent title had nothing to do with Kurt Schumacher's speech "Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe" in October 1945. Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 535-6n36. Apparently the idea of "socialism as a present-day task" was in the air at the time: cf. the lecture delivered in November 1946 by the communist theorist Fred Oelßner, *Marxismus in der Gegenwart* (Schwerin: Landesverband der SED-Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 1946).

⁴⁵ Erler, *Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe*, 8.

⁴⁶ Erler, *Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe*, 9.

present, and place their greatest hopes in the young generation and the youthful spirit of the whole movement:

Whoever has dedicated the entire third decade of his life, a person's loveliest years, to the illegal struggle against fascism and for socialism, whoever has remained young at heart through all the suffering of bitter persecution—that person may also today speak the language of the youth and hope that those who are today just turning twenty join . . . the socialist ranks thinned out by [antifascist] struggle.⁴⁷

Erler would turn thirty-three on Bastille Day, 1946. Although in his fourth decade of life, he continued to speak in the name of the youngest adult generations—both his own renewers generation as well as the so-called “Hitler Youth” or *Flakhelfer* generation born in the 1920s.

Erler's appeal to the youth complemented his reevaluation of Marxism as a “living” body of thought that continuously evolved alongside current social and economic realities.⁴⁸ Like Eduard Bernstein before him, he took seriously Marxism's own claim to scientificity. The only scientific socialism worthy of the name must be prepared to move beyond Marx's own critique of political economy. Revising Marx meant working directly in Marx's own undogmatic spirit.⁴⁹ This notion of a “living Marxism” recalled New Beginning's critique of dogmatism in the 1930s and prefigured later calls by Louis Althusser and others to rethink Marxism as an evolving science rather than a dead ideology.⁵⁰

With some irony, Erler's second stint in prison—that “school of the revolution,” as communists liked to call it—served as his school of socialist reform, convincing him that the SPD must adapt to the new socioeconomic and geopolitical circumstances of the postwar world. A voluntarist spirit suffused his early postwar work, with its critique of traditional social democratic and communist beliefs in the “automatic” development of socialism out of capitalism and its frequent allusions to Rosa Luxemburg's contingent alternative of “socialism or barbarism.”⁵¹ But while a socialist revolution might have defeated fascism in 1932-33, he claimed, revolution as such no longer presented a viable option for the postwar workers' movement: “The socialists' conquest of the majority of the German people requires no more political revolution; this conquest *is* the revolution.”⁵² Here again we see proof of what George Lichtheim described as Marxian social democracy's original orientation toward “peaceful revolution”⁵³—that is, a slow and non-violent revolution through the institutions of democracy. Formal democratic institutions thus might channel revolutionary socialist passions in a progressive and

⁴⁷ Erler, *Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe*, 52.

⁴⁸ Fritz Erler, “Lebendiger Marxismus” [1946], *Politik für Deutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Gaebler (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1968), 83-86, originally published in *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (Dec. 1946).

⁴⁹ See Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism* [1899], ed. Henry Tudor (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1993).

⁵⁰ Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital* [1965], trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon, 1970). See also Michael Burawoy, “Marxism after Polanyi,” in Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar, eds., *Marxisms in the 21st Century* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits UP, 2013), 34-52.

⁵¹ See Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy” [1915], *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 312-41.

⁵² Erler, *Sozialismus als Gegenwartsaufgabe*, 26.

⁵³ Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism*, 211.

realistic direction. Erler’s intellectual and political transformation did not function as a symptom of some jaded “end of ideology,” as the (ex-socialist) American sociologist Daniel Bell famously claimed in 1960,⁵⁴ but rather as the pragmatic recalibration of youthful revolutionary passion and Marxian ideological commitment—a renewer matured. And pragmatism too had its own ideology, one that justified the existing state of things.⁵⁵

Erler’s new belief in the basic compatibility of socialism and parliamentary democracy departed from the earlier New Beginning conception of a binary opposition between social reform and revolution, a position informed both by Rosa Luxemburg and by later communist theorists.⁵⁶ Not until the 1950s, however, would he completely abandon the old promise of revolutionary socialism. Hartmut Soell’s contention that his work in the late 1940s already documented a decisive change [*Wandel*] in his thought, ending his dream of implementing “an autonomous, German, socialist concept of democracy,” seems overstated or at least premature.⁵⁷ The change took more time, and in fact Erler never did give up on that dream: he only altered his understanding of what democratic socialism should mean.

His flirtation with Ulbricht and the KPD—the “Berlin episode,” as Soell somewhat evasively called it—had soured his relations with the old NB network and given rise to some confusion among his friends in exile. Although he maintained his support for a socialist unity party for quite some time, the actual course of the fusion struggle in the Soviet Zone during the winter and spring of 1945-46 made him reconsider his stance. By the time his old comrade Kurt Schmidt died prematurely in July 1947, Erler had already come to accept that socialist unity could not be achieved throughout Germany or Europe on a democratic basis. In a 1950 article, he honored the sacrifices of European antifascist resisters and urged them to adopt the motto “that the struggle for freedom must be carried on in all directions, against every new servitude, no matter from [where] it threatens.” The antifascist resistance, he argued, must continue its historical task by opposing Soviet tyranny in the East: “We would dishonor the past struggle for freedom if we did not continue it into the future.” Implicitly adopting the totalitarianism theory’s equation of Nazi fascism and Soviet communism, Erler evoked a transhistorical contest between freedom and dictatorship. He concluded with an allusion to his favorite democratic socialist theorist, Rosa Luxemburg: “Nobody can fight for freedom if he only means his own freedom and not also that of people who think differently.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960).

⁵⁵ In his eulogy of Fritz Erler in March 1967, Waldemar von Knoeringen claimed that Erler was “a realist, a man who had recognized the essence of power and who knew that one needs power in order to shape society. But he did not belong to those pragmatists for whom it was only a matter of cheap momentary successes and who wanted to conform at the cost of their convictions.” Knoeringen, “Dem Gedenken Fritz Erler,” *SPD Informationen des Landesvorstandes* (Munich), no. 3 (March 13, 1967), 1, NL Knoeringen, 44.

⁵⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, “Social Reform or Revolution” [1899], *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 128-67. This was her critical response to Bernstein’s revisionism.

⁵⁷ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 84.

⁵⁸ Fritz Erler, “Kampf für die Freiheit,” *Schwarzwälder Post* (Apr. 15, 1950), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Gaebler (Stuttgart: Seewald), 47-49. According to Rosa Luxemburg in her 1918 critique of Bolshevism, “[f]reedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks

An essential part of Erler's political and intellectual reorientation in the early 1950s was his extended effort to promote the research and commemoration of socialist anti-Nazi resistance. Since the disappointing results of the first West German federal elections in 1949, the SPD had adopted the role of "constructive opposition" to the governing conservative-liberal coalition.⁵⁹ Social democrats believed that the conservative political trend had a negative influence on the public's understanding of anti-Nazi resistance. Not only did attention dwell almost exclusively on examples of military insubordination and aristocratic resistance, the very act of resistance during a war—even a Nazi war of aggression—appeared to many conservative Germans as a betrayal of the Fatherland.

On the tenth anniversary in 1954 of the July 20 attempt to assassinate Hitler, Erler wrote an article that, on the one hand, stressed the diverse composition of the plotters—that is, not only honorable generals but also civilians and socialists—and, on the other hand, encouraged a more capacious definition of "resistance" to include non-violent acts of dissidence and non-conformism. The July 20 plot was not the only example of German anti-Nazi resistance: "As a matter of fact there was from the very first hours of the Hitler regime a tough and courageous running battle [*Kleinkrieg*] waged by those who could not or would not reconcile themselves to the dictatorship. The first blows by those in power in 1933 were directed against the political organizations and unions of the workers." But despite its inflated place in public memory, the comparatively well researched July 20 plot had the symbolic importance of showing to the world that "there were people in Germany who resisted the regime."⁶⁰

Erler started a letter campaign in 1951 among former members of New Beginning to gather testimony about the group's resistance activities. He received a number of responses from former members of the group in West Germany and the GDR as well as those who had settled abroad. Already a few years before he had corrected several errors about the history of NB propagated by Hermann Brill, who had led the Deutsche Volksfront group in the late 1930s, co-authored the famous Buchenwald Manifesto in 1945, and published the memoir *Gegen den Strom* in 1946.⁶¹ His NB letter campaign likewise aimed to set the record straight by gathering documentary material and building a research base for scholars of the resistance.⁶²

In 1955-56, Erler entered into a dispute with the historian J. C. Maier-Hultschin over assertions that the latter had made about NB's work in exile. Responding to the

differently [*Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der Andersdenkenden*]." "The Russian Revolution" [1918], *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 281-310 (305).

⁵⁹ Fritz Erler, "Konstruktive Opposition," *Der Württemberger* (Sept. 15, 1949), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Gaebler (Stuttgart: Seewald), 316-19.

⁶⁰ Fritz Erler, "Pflicht zum Widerstand," *Der Deutsche Beamte* (Aug. 1954), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 50-54.

⁶¹ Hermann Brill, *Gegen den Strom* (Offenbach/Main: Bollwerk-Verlag K. Drott, 1946). See the letter from Fritz Erler (Tuttlingen) to Hermann Brill (Wiesbaden), Nov. 11, 1947, NL Löwenthal, 4; letter from Hermann Brill (Wiesbaden) to Fritz Erler (Tuttlingen), Nov. 20, 1947, NL Löwenthal, 4; letter from Fritz Erler (Tuttlingen) to the Sopade-Informationsdienst (Hannover), Aug. 5, 1948, NL Erler, 3. Brill implied in his book that NB had played second fiddle to Deutsche Volksfront, when in reality it was the other way around; he also understated the extent to which Deutsche Volksfront's own tactical mistakes resulted in the arrests of Erler, Kurt Schmidt, and Oskar Umrath in 1938. See Ch. 3.

⁶² See various letters in NL Erler, 37.

alarmingly widespread belief that the émigrés had abandoned their country, Maier-Hultschin had sought to demonstrate the patriotism of most German emigrants, including socialists. But he also seriously mischaracterized New Beginning as proposing a nationalist “German variant of Titoism” that assigned leadership of a future socialist Europe to Germany; as producing “fantastic” (i.e. imaginary) reports on the situation inside Nazi Germany; as somehow developing an East-orientation due to “a one-sided love of these ex-communists for Moscow”; and, paradoxically, as favoring a “greater German” [*großdeutsch*] alliance with the Austrian socialists. Thinking only in simplistic national terms, Maier-Hultschin considered New Beginning nothing more than a group of lefties with confused German nationalist and Soviet communist sympathies.⁶³ Erler responded by correcting numerous errors about the NB leaders’ personal biographies and political sympathies, defending the veracity of NB’s “Inside Germany” reports, debunking the charge of nationalism, and totally distancing the group from its communist past (and in this he went perhaps too far).⁶⁴ Maier-Hultschin in turn accused Erler of ignoring the Leninist roots of NB, minimizing the role of ex-communists in the group’s leadership, generally representing the naïve perspective of a rank-and-file member, and ignoring NB’s real nationalist—and even “National Bolshevik”—tendencies.⁶⁵

As the 1950s progressed, Erler’s historiographical interventions departed from the norm of scholarly objectivity and increasingly followed the logic of political calculation. In a 1957 letter to Kurt Kliem, who had recently earned his doctorate under Wolfgang Abendroth at Marburg, he encouraged the young scholar to wait to publish his dissertation on the history of New Beginning until after the federal elections in September of that year. “[I]t is surely to be feared,” he explained, “that in the campaign atmosphere individual sentences would be torn completely out of context and exploited for use against the Social Democratic Party and some of its leading men.”⁶⁶ In addition to New Beginning’s frequent encounters with communists during the Popular Front, united front, and socialist concentration phases of the 1930s, Erler also alluded to the embarrassing rivalry between NB and the SPD/Sopade. One episode in particular worried him: the so-called “Berlin youth conflict” of 1932-33, when Erler along with several other leaders of the Berlin SAJ were expelled from the SPD for preparing an illegal underground organization to fight the Nazis—at the time, the bewildered SPD leadership had wanted to stay the legal course.

These minor incidents of the past probably did not make much of a difference for the SPD’s present electoral prospects. After almost matching the number of seats won by the CDU/CSU in the first federal election of 1949, the social democrats lost big in 1953, dropping to just 28.8% of the vote, and again in 1957, creeping up to 31.8%. In contrast, the CDU/CSU under Konrad Adenauer strengthened its hold: 31% (1949), 45.2% (1953), 50.2% (1957). Before this precipitous decline in social democratic political power, Erler had already spoken at the SPD Party Convention at Hamburg in 1950 about how “the intellectual climate of our time” required democratic socialists to rethink their ideological

⁶³ J. C. Maier-Hultschin, “Struktur und Charakter der deutschen Emigration,” *Politische Studien*, 6, no. 67 (Nov. 1955), 6-22.

⁶⁴ Fritz Erler, “Die Rolle der Gruppe Neu Beginnen,” *Politische Studien*, 6, no. 69 (Jan. 1956), 43-45.

⁶⁵ J. C. Maier-Hultschin, “Nochmals: Neubeginnen,” *Politische Studien*, 6, no. 70 (Feb. 1956), 47-49.

⁶⁶ Letter from Fritz Erler to Kurt Kliem (Marburg/Lahn), July 2, 1957, NL Erler, 3. See Kurt Kliem, “Der sozialistische Widerstand gegen das Dritte Reich, dargestellt an der Gruppe ‘Neu Beginnen,’” Ph.D. (Philipps-Universität zu Marburg, 1957).

heritage: “There are islands, delightful islands of democratic socialist reality and democratic socialist consciousness, but in the world of today, on a global scale, they are desperately small islands.” Using the Marxist humanist language of the interwar years, he urged his party comrades “in the current state of society to swim not with the current but against it”—against totalitarianism, against nationalism, against the “bourgeois nihilism” preached by French existentialists, and against any resigned acceptance of the existing social structure. Socialists must guard themselves against any automatic or determinist tendencies: “If one leaves society and consciousness to their own devices, then they both end up in totalitarianism.” Although socialism may have represented humanity’s “leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom,” as Engels once described it, history would not stop with socialism. Erler warned against any utopian expectations. Only the hard path of democracy, the transformation of the vanguard party into “the party of humanity,” could ensure the success of socialism and thus the survival of civilization.⁶⁷ In the first half of the decade, then, Erler’s thought wavered between his old urge to swim against the current and this new demand for socialists to get with the times.

Although he repeatedly lost to CDU candidates in his home electoral districts of Tuttlingen and then Pforzheim in Baden-Württemberg, he entered the Bundestag in 1949 and remained there uninterrupted for the rest of his life by means of the SPD’s provincial list of candidates [*Landesliste*]. In his maiden speech in January 1950, he stressed the importance of parliamentary control over the government and denounced the authoritarian culture of the conservative ministerial bureaucrats.⁶⁸ He served on a number of important committees, not least of which the advisory committee on West Germany’s controversial military rearmament through the European Defense Community (EDC).

Quickly he grew into the SPD’s chief expert on foreign policy. He always favored a greater economic and political integration of West Germany into Europe, and already in 1949 he had tempered his stance on the question of German national unity.⁶⁹ But in debating West German rearmament, which Kurt Schumacher and the SPD vehemently opposed, he accused Christian Democrats who supported the EDC treaties of preventing any peaceful solution to the German national question.⁷⁰ The EDC project eventually foundered in the French Parliament, but West Germany’s military status and the national question continued to preoccupy Erler in the Bundestag. In 1955, he warned of the intensifying East-West conflict and argued that the Federal Republic’s proposed membership in NATO would likewise endanger the peace process. Instead, a neutral West Germany should take the lead in promoting international détente and nuclear

⁶⁷ Fritz Erler, “Das geistige Klima unserer Zeit,” discussion contribution to a speech by Carlo Schmid at the SPD Party Convention at Hamburg, May 25, 1950, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 87-90.

⁶⁸ Fritz Erler, “Parlament und Regierung,” January 23, 1950, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 320-27.

⁶⁹ Fritz Erler, “Bundesstaat Europa,” *Schwäbisches Tagblatt* (Aug. 24, 1949), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 427-31.

⁷⁰ Fritz Erler, “Europäische Verteidigungsgemeinschaft,” remarks in Bundestag on July 10, 1952, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 432-47. See also Erler, “Zur Landesverteidigung,” speech at the Berlin SPD Party Convention, July 20-24, 1954, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 448-52. For Schumacher’s reasons for opposing West German rearmament within the framework of the proposed EDC, see Schumacher, “Die Gründe für die sozialdemokratische Ablehnung der Verträge,” speech over Bayerischer Rundfunk, June 11, 1952, reprinted in Schumacher, *Reden – Schriften – Korrespondenzen 1945-1952*, ed. Willy Albrecht (West Berlin; Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1985), 905-11.

disarmament.⁷¹ From the fall of 1953 through the spring of 1957, Erler was in fact the most frequent speaker of all representatives of any party in the plenum of the Bundestag.⁷²

Hartmut Soell claimed that after 1956 Erler retired from the “debate over principles” [*Grundsatzdebatte*] that raged within the SPD and would culminate in the new program adopted at Bad Godesberg in 1959. His daily political work allegedly demanded all of his attention. Soell would have us believe that by the latter half of the decade, Erler no longer figured as a politician-intellectual but rather as a full-time politico who left the theoretical work to others. His friend and former NB comrade Waldemar von Knoeringen carried on the dual life of politician-intellectual and tried to keep Erler involved in the debate on principles, but to no avail.⁷³ As will be shown below, however, Erler’s significant contributions to the debate at Godesberg rendered Soell’s account only half true: his deep investment in the theoretical problems of postwar socialism and in the fate of Marxism never diminished, even when his immediate attention had turned to more pragmatic issues of foreign policy and military rearmament.

Richard Löwenthal: Beyond Capitalism

Unlike Fritz Erler, Richard Löwenthal’s investment in social democratic theory never came into doubt. Having spent most of the 1930s and 40s in exile, Löwenthal’s intellectual and political transformation from revolutionary socialist into reformist social democrat began much earlier than Erler’s. Löwenthal was New Beginning’s chief theorist after the leadership change in 1935 and, like Waldemar von Knoeringen, had spent the entire Nazi period in exile. But unlike Knoeringen, he did not return immediately to Germany after the war. Urged on by his former comrades, he published one last NB manifesto in 1947, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* (“Beyond Capitalism”). But in his journalistic post as correspondent for Reuters and the London *Observer*, he soon assimilated to British parliamentary democracy and to the conciliatory culture of the Labour Party.⁷⁴

From his extended exile in London, Löwenthal kept abreast of the latest political developments in occupied Germany and across Europe. In October 1946, Knoeringen

⁷¹ Fritz Erler, “Sicherheit und Wiedervereinigung,” speech in the Bundestag, Feb. 25, 1955, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 453-89. See also Erler, “Armee und Staat,” *Der Monat* (Aug. 1955), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 490-97; “Konsequenzen der Atomwaffen,” speech in the Bundestag, May 10, 1957, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 507-36. For more on the SPD and the issue of Western European integration, see Dietrich Orlow, “German Social Democracy and European Unification, 1945 to 1955,” in David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (New York: Berghahn, 1998), 467-88. For the broader context of socialist and other ideas about Europe at that time, see Christian Bailey, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: German Visions of Europe, 1926-1950* (New York: Berghahn, 2013).

⁷² Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 277-78.

⁷³ Soell, *Fritz Erler*, 276-78. The novelist Wolfgang Koeppen famously described the political atmosphere of Bonn as a “hothouse” and a “jungle,” an appropriate metaphor given the city’s peculiar climate due to its “bowl”-like position in the Rhine River valley. Koeppen, *Das Treibhaus. Roman* [1953] (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 18, 38.

⁷⁴ Such a process of political assimilation to the liberal-democratic institutions of England and the United States was a common phenomenon among German émigrés. But the influence often flowed in both directions. See Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015).

wrote him that “[t]he success of the Berlin social democrats [in defending their autonomy] confirms for me yet again what I felt there already in January. At the moment, the chance of Social Democracy lies above all in its liberal-political principles [*freiheitspolitischen Prinzipien*].” He went on to describe the reconstructed SPD and the need for a new NB circle with people like Löwenthal: “Our great problem is that we have not yet overcome the rigidity in our own party and that we lack the inflow of new people. I orient myself mainly toward intellectual people especially from the younger generation.” Knoeringen mentioned admiring the journal *Der Ruf*, which appeared in Munich in 1946 as “the independent journal of the young generation” and would serve as a platform for the literary circle Gruppe 47: “In this circle of people one observes extremely interesting personalities who fit so well with the ‘New Beginning type.’” “What we need,” he implored Löwenthal, “is people like you who can bring to the lively discussions that sharp clarity that I always admired in you.” This quasi-NB circle in Bavaria, whose program was “socialist humanism,” still worked with an “extremely primitive” social-critical thought, which would require some “fertilization” to develop faster. Knoeringen concluded his letter with a warning that the new SPD could not afford to settle for pragmatism or mimic English reform practices: “Realism paired with that amount of belief necessary to help us transcend the influence of pessimism—that is the correct mixture, and the best of our young people have this mixture, even if they tend to intuit the [right] path rather than see it clearly before them.” Knoeringen struck a chord of optimism that perhaps his friends still abroad did not yet share.⁷⁵

Against this backdrop of political crisis in Berlin, tentative intellectual reconstruction across Germany, and the need for theoretical enlightenment from abroad, Löwenthal dedicated his 1947 book *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* to his “surviving friends in Germany.”⁷⁶ The intended audience of the book were those committed socialists inside Germany who had survived twelve years of “material and spiritual isolation” and needed help getting up to speed on the new problems of socialism—exactly what Kurt Schmidt had requested of his NB comrades in exile.⁷⁷ The German youth in particular “did not have the opportunity in the past to familiarize themselves with the ideas of democratic socialism” and Löwenthal wanted “to give them a first picture of what socialists have to say about the historic tasks of our time.”⁷⁸

Echoing sentiments expressed in a very different key by the conservative historian Friedrich Meinecke that same year, he described the enormous “historical catastrophe” undergone by Germany and the world at the hands of fascism, which he still considered

⁷⁵ “I believe that the clouds that lie over the Continent look blacker from England than here, where one finds oneself directly under them. Here they only appear grey, but one senses that it could be possible they will someday dissipate.” Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen (Munich) to Richard Löwenthal (London), Oct. 24, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 84.

⁷⁶ Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], *Jenseits des Kapitalismus. Ein Beitrag zur sozialistischen Neuorientierung* (Nuremberg: Nest-Verlag, 1947), 3. There was one more printing by Nest-Verlag in 1948, an Austrian edition by Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung (Vienna) in 1948, and a new German edition by J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. (Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg) in 1977. Like Erler’s theme “socialism as a present-day task,” the notion of going “beyond capitalism” was also in the air at the time. See for example Pierre Dieterlen, *Au delà du capitalisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946). Already during the interwar years, the Italian revolutionary socialist Arturo Labriola expressed this notion in his book *Al di là del capitalismo e del socialismo* (Paris: Casa editrice Respublica, 1931).

⁷⁷ See Ch. 3.

⁷⁸ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 5.

the extreme manifestation of capitalist exploitation. Ironically, Löwenthal celebrated the apparent dissolution of any specific meaning of the word “socialism” because this illustrated the truth of Marx’s vision of the modern world: after the great catastrophe, socialism, at least in its analysis of capitalism, would be accepted as commonplace truth. Even political opponents of socialism would coopt originally socialist demands.⁷⁹

Any major reorientation of socialist theory had to begin with a reassessment of Karl Marx. Already in February 1946, Löwenthal had signed a letter to Karl Frank and the New York NB group “with un-Marxist greetings.”⁸⁰ But in his book, he dealt with the primary ideological inheritance of European socialism in a more balanced manner. In good Western Marxist fashion, Löwenthal stressed the Hegelian roots of Marx’s thought and grounded his own version of Marxism in “the tradition of European humanism.”⁸¹ Very similar to Fritz Erler and other former members of New Beginning, he interpreted Marx through the voluntarist lens of Rosa Luxemburg’s alternative “socialism or barbarism.” Not only did this alternative symbolize the contingency of socialist politics and the precariousness of socialist transformation—rejecting the orthodox Marxist belief in an automatic or deterministic transition to socialism—it also made socialism into the only remaining vessel for European civilization. Left to its own devices, capitalism would destroy the very features of that civilization that had first allowed it to become the world’s dominant economic logic and mode of production. But socialism could not be asserted as an abstract ideological alternative to capitalism; it must instead draw its poetry from the pragmatic demands of the day, the “concrete situation” of the present. Therefore, he argued, socialist struggle would take on different forms in different countries and social circumstances. Alongside its Hegelian tendency to ascribe universal world-historical significance to particular moments, Marxism provided the tools for navigating the myriad concrete problems of the modern world. But at the same time, Löwenthal opposed the doctrinaire tendency of Marxists to respond to “concrete problems of daily politics with Marx citations.” Such a dogmatic instrumentalization of Marx constituted “the opposite of scientific socialism.”⁸²

Without explicitly referencing Karl Polanyi’s 1944 book *The Great Transformation*, which he very well might have read in London exile, Löwenthal identified as his central theme the widespread phenomena of planned economy and state regulation of markets that began during the Depression and continued into the postwar years. Planned capitalism, based in part on Keynesian theories, could in fact “reach its completion only as planned imperialism” and fascism. Welfare planning, on the other hand, “cannot achieve the goal of stable full employment as capitalist planning, but only as socialist planning,”⁸³ by which he meant the democratic control over the state’s economic steering mechanisms. The downfall of free-market capitalism and traditional economic liberalism, he argued, was a “product of the immanent economic and social

⁷⁹ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 6. See Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections* [1946], trans. Sidney Bradshaw Fay (Boston: Beacon, 1963).

⁸⁰ Letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to “Lieber Freund” [Karl Frank], Feb. 24, 1946, NB Archives, 25/5.

⁸¹ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 14.

⁸² Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 24.

⁸³ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 108.

dynamic of capitalism itself.”⁸⁴ Contrary to Bernsteinian revisionism, however, he affirmed the Marxian belief in the falling rate of profit and the growing degree of risk in capital investments.⁸⁵ In the twentieth century, a new form of corporate capitalism effected the separation of the owners of capital from the actual “entrepreneurial function.” The owners no longer made real decisions on the factory floor nor maintained direct contact with their employees; instead a new class of managers, administrators, and chief executives—themselves often holding large shares in the corporation—took over the day-to-day business. The bourgeois owners had turned into pure rentiers, living off their stock dividends. Like the American theorist James Burnham, Löwenthal noted the profound effect of this “managerial revolution” on the operation of capitalist enterprises.⁸⁶

Löwenthal rejected the label “reformist” but did see the benefit of progressive reforms: “Social reforms alone cannot overcome capitalism, but each step of social reform is, as Marx said about the introduction of the 10-hour work day, ‘the victory of a principle’: the principle of the regulation of society according to human necessities instead of automatic laws of the market.”⁸⁷ In order to secure the long-term applicability of reforms, the socialist movement must fight for control of the state. The distribution of wealth, for example, “is not decided through immutable economic laws but rather can only be changed through the political struggle for influence on the economic policy of the government.” Here Löwenthal advocated a “peaceful revolution” of socialism through existing democratic institutions, but he did acknowledge that the cyclical crises of capitalism might bring about a legitimation crisis of the democratic state.⁸⁸ The only way to avoid the delegitimation of democracy, as had happened with fascism, was for socialists to take the reins of economic planning and correct for the volatility of the capitalist market. Democratic institutions could become “the real tool for the submission of the production hierarchy to the collective will of the workers.”⁸⁹ Socialists must ensure that any new bureaucratic hierarchies necessitated by technological advances in the mode of production submitted to democratic control. Although the state had traditionally figured as an organ for oppressing the working class, Löwenthal argued, the postwar welfare state now represented the only tool for achieving socialism.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 28. Given the parallelism of capitalist and socialist planning, Konrad Jarausch draws perhaps too sharp a distinction between the “social market economy” that developed in West Germany and the “Marxist state planning” that developed in the East. Jarausch, *After Hitler*, op. cit., 87ff.

⁸⁵ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 31-34. He also disagreed with Bernstein about the development of the corporation [*Aktiengesellschaft*]: far from democratizing control over capitalist enterprises, Löwenthal claimed, corporations represented “one of the most powerful means of centralizing capital in a Marxian sense, i.e. of accumulating the effective control [*Verfügung*] of ever greater amounts of capital in ever fewer hands” (43). Smaller stock-holders, including the workers themselves, would always be outvoted by the majority holders.

⁸⁶ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 44. See James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day Co., 1941).

⁸⁷ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 50-51.

⁸⁸ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 59-60.

⁸⁹ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 70.

⁹⁰ “The purely negative attitude toward the state does not correspond in a democracy to the actual interests of the workforce.” Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 82-83.

Recent scholarship has highlighted Löwenthal's pioneer work in developing a theory of totalitarianism.⁹¹ But in *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, his differentiation of fascism and totalitarianism depended on a rather muddled definition of "dictatorship." He argued that "dictatorship is the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of all legal limitations on state coercion. Total dictatorship is the total abolition of the rights of the individual not only during an emergency but as a permanent system: rights only exist so long as they do not come into conflict with the aims of the state—in a totalitarian regime, there are no rights against the state."⁹² His legalist definition centering on a state of emergency, sovereign versus commissarial dictatorship, and the suspension of the individual's constitutional rights (i.e. freedom from the state) recalled the classic interwar theories of Carl Schmitt and Hans Kelsen.⁹³ But his elision of the analytical differences between "dictatorship," "total state," "centralized one-party state," and "totalitarianism"—not to mention his identification of fascism with "planned imperialism"—indicated that much of the book's theoretical framework depended on a political situation specific to the immediate postwar period: fascism had recently been defeated, democratic political life in Western Germany nervously sputtered, and an apparently totalitarian communist superpower had established a foothold in the East.

Löwenthal composed the book still in London exile, and he placed his greatest hope in the British Labour Party as a beacon for a democratic socialist "third way" in Europe—Europe as a third force "between the colossuses" of the capitalist USA and the totalitarian-communist USSR.⁹⁴ He called for a "concrete" European internationalism as opposed to some abstract appeal to human rights or a feeble League of Nations: in the present postwar moment, this internationalism "is no longer the proclamation of an abstract moral principle nor the rallying cry of a single class [i.e. the bourgeoisie]: It is the practical and vital necessity of the free countries of Europe, the only concrete national policy that remains open to them."⁹⁵ This brand of internationalism, oriented toward peaceful coexistence and détente, differed considerably from the socialist or proletarian internationalism that Löwenthal had advocated in his youth.

With regard to the struggle of the workers for political power, Löwenthal warned against violent revolution and any "ossification [*Erstarrung*] of socialist thought."⁹⁶ Such

⁹¹ See Mike Schmeitzner, *Eine totalitäre Revolution? Richard Löwenthal und die Weltanschauungsdiktaturen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012); Schmeitzner, Introduction to Richard Löwenthal, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus. Schriften zur Weltanschauungsdiktatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Mike Schmeitzner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 9-61; William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana, IL; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). See also Oliver Schmidt, "Meine Heimat ist – die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung". *Biographische Studien zu Richard Löwenthal im Übergang vom Exil zur frühen Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁹² Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 118.

⁹³ See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* [1927], trans. George D. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* [1922], trans. George D. Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Hans Kelsen, *Das Problem der Souveränität und die Theorie des Völkerrechts. Beitrag zu einer reinen Rechtslehre* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1920). On the influence of Carl Schmitt's political philosophy after 1945, see Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003).

⁹⁴ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 247.

⁹⁵ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 256.

⁹⁶ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 85ff.

“one-sided and dogmatically ossified ideas” had led to the failure of both wings of the workers’ movement against fascism in 1933. Neither social democrats nor communists had understood “class struggle as the struggle for leadership of the nation, for the democratic acquisition of state power in order to push through a concrete crisis program” in response to the economic depression and the political uncertainty of that period. But the “German catastrophe of 1933” did have the positive effect of initiating a “clarification process in the international workers’ movement, a feverish effort toward the practical and theoretical adjustment to new tasks.”⁹⁷ What Löwenthal glossed over, however, was the fact that the “new tasks” of the 1930s—socialist unity and renewal—did not necessarily correspond to the new tasks of socialism in the postwar world. Two separate “socialist reorientations” took place during these decades: the antifascist reappraisal of socialist principles that occurred primarily in exile between 1933 and 1939, and the postwar reappraisal of democratic socialism that occurred primarily in the West starting in 1945.

Like Fritz Erler, Löwenthal believed that the peaceful revolution of democratic socialism meant the transformation of the bourgeois “state apparatus” into a decentralized decision-making body that incorporated critical public debate at all levels. This thoroughgoing transformation of political culture distinguished itself from the communist ideal of violent revolution and from the fascist seizure of power, both of which functioned as mere coups d’état. “No socialist party today,” he wrote,

is inherently “revolutionary” in the sense that it considers a violent uprising against the democratic state as the way to achieve its goals; but each socialist party must be ready to employ revolutionary force against fascist or reactionary dictatorships and to put down counter-revolutionary acts of violence against democracy by means of state coercion and mass mobilization [*Massenaufgebot*]. No socialist party today is inherently “reformist” in the sense that it contents itself with the struggle for reforms within the framework of the capitalist economy; each strives for the democratic conquest of state power for the purpose of rebuilding society as a whole—of tackling immediately a program of socialist planning.⁹⁸

By transcending the traditional opposition between revolution and reform and linking these two political strategies to the existing democratic state, Löwenthal argued for a kind of institutionalized socialism that resembled the republican theories of militant democracy propagated in the postwar years by the likes of Dolf Sternberger, Alfred Weber, and Walter Dirks.⁹⁹ It remained unclear, however, how defensive state coercion could reconcile itself politically and culturally with mass mobilization—especially if the masses directed themselves against the “democratic” state, a scenario that threatened to occur in the 1960s. But Löwenthal’s formula seemed to suit the West’s economic boom years of the 1950s, when democratic socialism accommodated itself to existing political structures and to a reformed capitalism and when all that anyone seemed to care about was economic growth.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 87.

⁹⁸ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 199.

⁹⁹ See Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal*, op. cit.; Jan-Werner Müller, “Militant Democracy,” in Michael Rosenfeld and András Sajó, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 1253-69.

¹⁰⁰ On the rise of consumerist mentality in West Germany during the 1950s, see Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten. Freizeit, Massenmedien und “Zeitgeist” in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995).

In describing the promise of socialist planning in the East, Löwenthal insisted that the course of socialism in Russia did not at all disprove that model's *economic* feasibility. The Soviet problem was essentially a political one: a dictatorial one-party system enabled the rise of a new social hierarchy, indeed a new class structure. Anticipating the argument of the Yugoslav dissident communist Milovan Djilas, he criticized how the elite of communist party bureaucrats had arrogated unto itself social privileges and made the masses entirely dependent on it for everything. In the USSR, there was no party democracy: instead, a "new class" exercised a "monopoly of knowledge" that ruled out any democratic control over the economic planning process.¹⁰¹ There was nothing inherently undemocratic or even uneconomical about the socialization of key industries, the establishment of production quotas, and state regulation of private enterprise; only the political decision-making process that guided these policies proved undemocratic to an extreme, even totalitarian. "As we have said," Löwenthal summarized, "the Soviet Union is economically free to pursue the goal of welfare planning. We now see that it is politically unfree to do this systematically."¹⁰²

He concluded his chapter on Soviet planned economy with a section called "The Tragedy of the Russian Revolution": the original ends of the Revolution had been worthy and good, but the means of pursuing them that developed during the 1920s and 30s made the attainment of those ends impossible. In line with the NB tradition, Löwenthal directed his critique of communism specifically at its Stalinist variant. But having departed from the original Org/NB conception already in the mid-1930s, he no longer viewed the Leninist model of an elite revolutionary vanguard as applicable to the advanced industrial and cultural conditions of the West. The tragedy of the Russian Revolution taught democratic socialists that

between the socioeconomic goal of socialism and its political form there exists a necessary connection. Clearly the widespread belief that socialists might choose between a dictatorial and a liberal [*freiheitlich*] form of socialism for reasons of expediency is an illusion. Precisely because modern technology and organization of production tends toward the formation of a new hierarchy, the decision whether this hierarchy hardens into a new dominant class or in its function is subordinated to the needs of the working masses depends on the existence of effective democratic controls. In the age of the hierarchical organization of production, a society can only be socialist when and insofar as it is democratic.¹⁰³

Löwenthal did not view Bolshevism as a legitimate heir of the European socialist tradition or even of its Marxian variety: orthodox Marxism-Leninism was an undemocratic, "Russified Marxism" and thus an aberration.¹⁰⁴ Russia lacked a Reformation, an Enlightenment, any tradition of free thought, and any concept of legal or human rights. The model of the Soviet state and the course of the Russian Revolution could not therefore be replicated in Europe because that would involve the abandonment of humanism, individual rights, freedom of thought, etc. In short, Soviet communism

¹⁰¹ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 147, 157. See Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957).

¹⁰² Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 156.

¹⁰³ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 157-58.

¹⁰⁴ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 165.

would spell cultural disaster and indeed “barbarism” for Europe.¹⁰⁵ The only course that secured European civilization was democratic socialism.

Such brushes with cultural chauvinism aside, Löwenthal described democratic socialist planning as striving “for economic efficiency [*Wirtschaftlichkeit*] with respect to a given purpose, not economic efficiency ‘in itself.’” That purpose was to level the social playing field, to establish “equality of opportunities for advancement for everybody.”¹⁰⁶ Capitalism always sought to limit opportunities and, indeed, to limit democracy.¹⁰⁷ Socialism must accept that full democracy was “the *only* way to socialism,” but also that it involved a fair amount of risk: “There is no sure way to the socialist goal—no way where the danger of backsliding at every step does not lurk. The democratic way is a way of constant struggle against resistances that only gradually get weaker and are ready to ruthlessly take advantage of every socialist failure.” Any other way besides democracy leads away from socialism toward some form of “totalitarian ossification”: “the long struggle [and] the risk of failure are inevitable for the movement that the socialist alternative wants to make a reality.”¹⁰⁸ In this lecture on the inconvenient truths of democratic socialism, Löwenthal sounded a lot like Max Weber, who said that in politics, there are no quick and easy solutions, only “a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards, with a mixture of passion and a sense of proportion.”¹⁰⁹

Going beyond capitalism meant rejecting “the formal analogy between the economic hierarchy of a planned economy and the political hierarchy of a totalitarian state.” England’s war and postwar economies proved that a state-guided plan for production and welfare services need not follow the totalitarian model of fascism or communism.¹¹⁰ In contrast to theories developing around the same time among German refugee intellectuals later identified as the Frankfurt School, Löwenthal argued that the tendency toward a totalitarian political structure did not find its necessary basis in the general development of the means of technical and administrative domination.¹¹¹ His faith in rational-democratic control trumped any pessimistic observations about the dialectic of enlightenment: even typical characteristics of totalitarian states like state-directed propaganda and extensive surveillance networks could be subjected to the democratic will of the masses.

Although now a militant democrat with growing liberal sympathies, Löwenthal never became a pure institutionalist. “The decision about the future,” he proclaimed, “rests in the present. The circumstances under which the new planned economic order comes into the world determine whether the socialist promise will someday become reality. The decision between the alternatives of the transition period is the decision

¹⁰⁵ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 180, 182. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁷ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 193.

¹⁰⁸ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 200.

¹⁰⁹ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 32-94 (93).

¹¹⁰ Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 209.

¹¹¹ See the classic Frankfurt School synthesis of Marxian, Freudian, and Weberian theories of modernity in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [1944/47], trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002). Löwenthal’s preoccupation with formal democratic institutions associated his thought more closely with the political, economic, and legal theorists in the Frankfurt School orbit, like Friedrich Pollock, Franz L. Neumann, and Otto Kirchheimer.

between the way toward the socialist goal and the way into the totalitarian dead end of world history.”¹¹² Again we see another iteration of the Luxemburgian logic of socialism versus barbarism, only this time the Soviet totalitarian model assumed fascism’s inimical role. Löwenthal explicitly heeded “Rosa Luxemburg’s warning”: she was the only person in the revolutionary workers’ movement, he claimed, who had both the theoretical scope and the moral authority to prevent international socialism from being dominated by “Bolshevik party dictatorship.”¹¹³

Sering/Löwenthal’s book synthesized New Beginning’s intellectual evolution during the 1930s with the widespread belief after the war that capitalism had danced its last waltz. Democratic socialists, it advised, must therefore stake out a conciliatory position that appealed to the broadest swath of the population. The “catch-all” party of democratic socialism should try to transcend class conflict as much as possible.¹¹⁴ Speaking of the grassroots reconstruction of the SPD, Waldemar von Knoeringen hoped that the book might aid “the intellectual new orientation of our functionary corps.”¹¹⁵ He summarized the effect of over twelve years of membership in New Beginning: “The long discussions that we had in our years together and that especially you fertilized come in useful to me today when I try to define for others the standpoint of our political movement, at least in rough outline.”¹¹⁶ But because Knoeringen placed so much hope in the book’s political future, both he and Wolfgang Abendroth gave Löwenthal a hard time about some of its lines of interpretation. The three debated the strengths and weaknesses of the book manuscript from the fall of 1946 through the spring of 1947.

Despite their generally enthusiastic and constructive criticism, Löwenthal took issue with “the style” of Knoeringen and Abendroth’s suggestions for revision. These suggestions smelled “still too much of decades of sectarian discussions in communist and left-socialist opposition groups” and would fit together with his book “like apples and oranges [*wie die Faust aufs Auge*].” Löwenthal even perceived a veiled threat in Knoeringen’s previous letter that the latter “would not consider the book for use in an official party sense” if certain revisions were not made. The book should stand as an independent work of socialist theory, he argued, not serve the ends of “everyday

¹¹² Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 214.

¹¹³ As a Pole who had one foot in Russian and the other foot in German social democracy, Luxemburg united in her person “the revolutionary will to fight [*Kampfwillen*] of the Eastern European workers’ movement with the humanitarian traditions of the Western European movement.” Löwenthal and countless other democratic socialists considered her death at the hands of right-wing assassins in January 1919 a tragedy of immense proportions. Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, 224-25. See her numerous critiques of Leninist vanguardism, most notably “Credo: On the State of Russian Social Democracy” [1911] and “The Russian Revolution” [1918], *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, 266-80, 281-310.

¹¹⁴ On the concept of the “catch-all” party, see Otto Kirchheimer, “The Transformation of Western European Party Systems,” in Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1966), 177-200. See also Kirchheimer, “Notes on the Political Scene in Western Germany,” *World Politics*, 6, no. 3 (Apr. 1954), 306-21; “The Political Scene in West Germany,” *World Politics*, 9, no. 3 (Apr. 1957), 433-45.

¹¹⁵ Knoeringen’s educational initiative would eventually result in 1948 in the foundation of the Georg von Vollmar Academy in Kochel am See, Upper Bavaria. See Hartmut Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen – Eine politische Biographie. Der Weg vom revolutionären Sozialismus zur sozialen Demokratie* (Munich; New York: Saur, 1989), 336ff.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen (Munich) to Richard Löwenthal (London), Oct. 24, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 84.

propaganda.” He spoke further of the book’s “long-term” scientific purpose.¹¹⁷ What he wanted to avoid, as he wrote to Abendroth, was the immediate political instrumentalization of his book at the expense of “fundamental schooling” over the long term.¹¹⁸

Substantively, Löwenthal disputed Knoeringen’s use of the “bridge” metaphor to describe Germany’s place between East and West. Germany was a bridge only insofar as both power blocs trampled it, he replied rather flippantly. To Löwenthal, such talk of bridges was “humbug”: “A socialist *Europe* can potentially be a bridge between America and Russia; but Germany cannot be a bridge between Russia and Europe, but rather can only be a part of Europe.”¹¹⁹ Departing from the language of both Karl Frank and the NB working group in Berlin, then, Löwenthal preferred to treat democratic-socialist Germany and Europe in general as a “third force” [*dritte Kraft*] in the force field generated by the two superpowers. He furthermore approved of Kurt Schumacher’s policy of non-alignment: “if Schumacher lives for a few more years, [then] I have hope for the future of the German [socialist] party.” In fact Schumacher did live for just a few more years, probably fewer than Löwenthal had hoped. What the non-aligned stance allowed, in any case, was a two-directional critique of both American and Soviet imperialism. Löwenthal objected to the uncritical anti-communism and pro-American turn of many former socialist intellectuals in Britain like Richard Crossman and Arthur Koestler.¹²⁰ For him, the God had already failed in the early 1930s when he abandoned communism and joined the Org/NB.

Knoeringen wrote back in January 1947 to clarify some things that he felt Löwenthal had misunderstood. He led with reassuring news that the Bavarian political education center had now ordered 2,000 copies of the book—perhaps trying to allay the author’s charge that Knoeringen was holding the manuscript politically hostage.¹²¹ With reference to the chapter on Soviet state economy, Knoeringen explained that one might get the impression from reading it that the future Soviet economy would develop “inevitably in one particular direction”—a direction “that does not allow any normal understanding between the ideas of the East and those of the West.” He was concerned that despite Löwenthal’s superb analysis of planning trends across both blocs, the logic of

¹¹⁷ Letter from Richard Löwenthal to Waldemar von Knoeringen, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 84.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to Wolf and Lisa Abendroth, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Abendroth, 1177.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to Wolf and Lisa Abendroth, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Abendroth, 1177. Emphasis as all-caps in original.

¹²⁰ Letter from Richard Löwenthal to Waldemar von Knoeringen, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Knoeringen, 84. See Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper, 1949), which included essays by the repentant former communist sympathizers Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Louis Fischer, and Stephen Spender.

¹²¹ In March 1947, Knoeringen wrote to Karl Anders in London that he regretted deeply that Löwenthal’s book had not yet appeared in Germany. “I adjusted my entire work schedule according to [the book],” he complained, “and wanted to use it this spring as the basis for theoretical discussions in the party. I hope that it appears soon.” Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen (Munich) to Karl Anders (London), Mar. 11, 1947, NL Knoeringen, 23. Anders had taken a leading position at the publisher Nest Verlag in Nuremberg, and although he was enthusiastic about Löwenthal’s book, he admitted dire financial difficulties in issuing subsequent printings. He also seemed to blame the SPD for promising subsidies that never materialized. Letter from Karl Anders (Nuremberg) to Waldemar von Knoeringen (Munich), Dec. 11, 1948, NL Knoeringen, 23.

his argument ruled out the possibility of détente. “Our whole struggle for peace and democratic socialism,” Knoeringen argued, “only makes sense in the end if we can believe in this possibility of global rapprochement.” At the same time, “[a] retreat from the dispute with the communists into a question of the difference between totalitarian and democratic planning would surrender our own position.” Knoeringen presciently foresaw that distinguishing too starkly between Soviet planning and democratic socialist planning, with the aim of completely discrediting the former, could lead politically to the abandonment of planning altogether in the West. Democratic socialism’s conciliatory, middle-ground approach could backfire.

Löwenthal also wrote to Wolfgang Abendroth, who had recently returned from his “Odyssey” in the Soviet zone.¹²² Despite kind personal words congratulating him on his recent marriage to long-time partner Lisa Hörmeyer, Löwenthal took a firm stance against his comrade’s proposed revisions of the manuscript. He objected strongly to what he perceived as the old-fashioned, “thesis-like” [*thesanisch*]—that is, Org/NB-like—language with which Abendroth as well as Knoeringen had expressed their revisions. They had wanted Löwenthal to take a more expressly political stance on the issue of Soviet planned economy, whereas he defended his objective analytical perspective. But he did partially relent. Löwenthal’s claim that a democratic socialist development in Europe would likely have a beneficial and “loosening” effect on both Soviet communism and American capitalism apparently stemmed from Abendroth and Knoeringen’s suggestions.¹²³

In this letter exchange, Knoeringen and Abendroth thought in terms of politics and Löwenthal answered in terms of supposedly objective science. They shared a common past in New Beginning and a commitment to democratic socialism, but in the winter of 1946-47, due to their different professional and political positions, they seemed to talk past each other. In the end, however, Knoeringen and Abendroth complimented their old comrade from years of antifascist struggle: “with this work of intellectual clarification you have done a great service to the movement.”¹²⁴

Reactions to the book were generally positive. Kurt Schmidt summarized its arguments in an article for the Berlin social democrat journal *Das Sozialistische Jahrhundert* in December 1946, and two years later Fritz Erler used the opportunity of reading the book to make contact with Löwenthal for the first time since 1938.¹²⁵ Beyond former members of NB, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* aroused theoretical debate throughout occupied Germany, including the Soviet Zone.¹²⁶

¹²² Letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to Wolf and Lisa Abendroth, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Abendroth, 1177. See Ch. 3.

¹²³ Letter from Richard Löwenthal (London) to Wolf and Lisa Abendroth, Dec. 30, 1946, NL Abendroth, 1177. See Löwenthal, *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, Ch. 10.

¹²⁴ Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen (Munich) to Richard Löwenthal (London), Jan. 23, 1947, NL Knoeringen, 84.

¹²⁵ Kurt Schmidt, “Europäische Planung,” *Das Sozialistische Jahrhundert*, 1, no. 3/4 (Dec. 1946), 54. Letter from “Grau” [i.e. Fritz Erler] (Tuttlingen) to Richard Löwenthal (London), Apr. 14, 1948, NL Löwenthal, 4.

¹²⁶ The communist economist Friedrich Behrens wrote an extended and predictably scathing review in the SED’s theoretical journal *Einheit*. Fritz Behrens, Review: “Jenseits des Kapitalismus?,” *Einheit*, 2, no. 8 (1947), 740-50. For reviews in the Western zones, see “Sering, Paul (d.i. Richard Löwenthal): Jenseits des Kapitalismus,” *Der Sozialdemokrat* (June 14, 1947), 5; Marianne Pollak, Review: “Jenseits des Kapitalismus,” *Arbeiter-Zeitung* [Vienna] (Nov. 1, 1947). In the anti-communist journal *Der Monat*, Paul Kecskemeti speculated that Sering/Löwenthal’s arguments about democratic economic planning actually

Despite the achievement of *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, Löwenthal did not become the leading party theoretician or intellectual light that his former NB comrades in Germany had expected. Instead, he set down roots in England and began work as a correspondent for the London *Observer* and Reuters. His journalistic work sometimes translated into more abstract reflections on the direction of socialism and world politics: he contributed regularly to the social democratic theoretical journal *Die Neue Gesellschaft* and to American-supported (and often covertly funded) periodicals such as *Der Monat* and *Problems of Communism*. But in the 1950s he acted primarily as one of the West's leading Soviet experts.¹²⁷

The uprising in East Germany on June 17, 1953, for example, provided him grist for the mill. In his foreword to the second edition of Arnulf Baring's now classic account, Löwenthal in retrospect described the events of June 17 as "revolutionary." Reflecting on his own reportage at that time, he admitted that

[n]o matter how conscientiously these early writers strove after objectivity, they could not avoid expressing their sense of human and political solidarity with the oppressed workers of the GDR, their indignation over the coercive methods that had provoked the demonstrations, their satisfaction at finding people capable of attempting the impossible by taking such sudden and completely spontaneous action, and their bitter disappointment over their own impotence—or failure?—and over the fruitless outcome of the rising.

After Stalin's death in March 1953, "power struggles within the communist leadership arose out of the question of how much liberalization should be allowed at home and how much détente abroad." The protesting workers who flooded the streets of East Germany that summer and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the Soviet bloc represented for him "a resurgence of individualistic activity," perhaps a poor choice of words for spontaneous collective action.¹²⁸ He likely meant a resurgence of class solidarity and action uncoordinated by the official communist party.

Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 as well as the ramifications of the Hungarian Uprising that autumn gave Löwenthal the opportunity to hone his theory of totalitarianism and to reflect on the widening rift between Western democracy and Eastern dictatorship.¹²⁹ The mid-1950s also saw

took him "beyond socialism" as well as capitalism. Kecskeméti, "Jenseits des Sozialismus," *Der Monat*, no. 3 (1948), 103-6.

¹²⁷ From the American side, see David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

¹²⁸ Richard Löwenthal, Foreword [1965] to Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953*, trans. Gerald Onn (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell UP, 1972), xix-xxvii. For Löwenthal's reportage, see for example "Coming Changes in East Germany: New Government in Making," *The Observer* (June 21, 1953), 1; "The East German Uprising," *The Observer* (June 21, 1953), 4; "East Germans Face a Hard Winter," *The Observer* (Sept. 27, 1953), 7.

¹²⁹ Some examples of his reportage on these events include: "Jenseits des Stalinismus," *Der Monat*, 8, no. 91 (1956), 3-10, reprinted in Löwenthal, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus*, 389-402; "Leninism – 1956," *The Observer* (Feb. 26, 1956), 6; "World Communist Rift Widening," *The Observer* (Nov. 25, 1956), 1; "Revolution over Eastern Europe," *Problems of Communism*, 5, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1956), 4-9; "Die Hölle auf Erden. Despotie im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert," *Der Monat*, 9, no. 105 (1957), 3-8, reprinted in Löwenthal, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus*, 431-38; "Party vs. State: The Permanent Revolution Is on Again," *Problems of Communism*, 6, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1957), 1-7; "Ideologie und Realpolitik. Glauben die Kreml-Machthaber an Dogmen?" *Der Monat*, 10, no. 117 (1958), 37-46, reprinted in Löwenthal, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus*, 415-28; "The Logic of One-Party

Löwenthal's attempt to bury his New Beginning alter ego, "Paul Sering," once and for all. His last piece published under the name Sering, an article in the short-lived *Ernst-Reuter-Briefe*, bore the title "Socialist Renewal and the Case of Berlin." Here, reflecting on the travails of social democrats in Berlin since the end of the war and particularly on the courageous leadership of Ernst Reuter during the Blockade, Sering/Löwenthal argued for an embrace of the West as the only option for German socialists. "Nowhere in the past years," he wrote, "has the importance of freedom as the core of socialism—the character of the socialist struggle as a freedom struggle—become more dramatically visible than in Berlin." Significantly revising claims that he had made seven years earlier in *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*, he rejected the prospect of a democratic socialist Europe as "third force" between the capitalist and communist blocs: "so long as there is a global-political power bloc in which all democratic socialist attempts at struggle are pinned down by totalitarian means, socialists can only act as a progressive wing *within* the camp of freedom [i.e. the West], not as a 'third force' *between* one allegedly capitalist and another 'communist' camp."¹³⁰ Gone was the critique of capitalism and the revolutionary socialism that had characterized the original "Sering" of New Beginning; in its place stood a pragmatic anti-communism suited to the Cold War reality that Germany, divided or not, could no longer hope to act independently on the world or even the Continental stage. Löwenthal accepted his place and the place of liberal socialism within the Western democratic-capitalist camp.

That same year he published an article in the SPD's official theoretical journal *Die Neue Gesellschaft* called "Socialism Without Utopia." The original impetus for European socialism, he wrote, "lay in overcoming the existential insecurity and impersonal dependence into which the onset of modern capitalist industry had thrust working people. . . . [A] new collective home for the alienated masses grew in the solidarity of the socialist workers' movement." But socialists had failed just as much as conservatives to invent a solution to the basic problems of capitalism, a failure that only became clear after the economic catastrophe of 1929. The post-1945 socialist movement, however, must not "experiment" with any new-fangled utopian solutions. The "process of capitalist centralization and the development of banking techniques had already created the objective preconditions for a politics of full employment, just as the increase in productivity [created] the objective preconditions for a welfare state." Echoing Eduard Bernstein's revisionism, Löwenthal claimed that capitalism itself had created the objective conditions necessary for economic welfare and the emancipation of the masses from material privation; all that remained was "a pure question of political power," which Scandinavian and British socialists had partially answered. Socialism must "once and for all be identified with the cause of full employment and the welfare state." His subsequent arguments about governmental steering of the economy, democratic "co-determination"

Rule," *Problems of Communism*, 7, no. 2 (Mar. 1958), 21-29. His later essays on totalitarianism include: "Totalitäre und demokratische Revolution," *Der Monat*, 13, no. 146 (1960/61), 29-40, reprinted in Löwenthal, *Faschismus – Bolschewismus – Totalitarismus*, 439-57; "Totalitarianism Reconsidered," *Commentary*, 30 (Jan. 1960), 504-12; "Ideology, Power, and Welfare," *Problems of Communism*, 9, no. 1 (Jan., 1960), 18-20.

¹³⁰ Richard Löwenthal [pseud. Paul Sering], "Sozialistische Erneuerung und der Fall Berlin," *Ernst-Reuter-Briefe*, no. 2 (Jan. 1954), NL Klingelhöfer, 90. Emphasis in original. Along with Willy Brandt, Löwenthal wrote the first substantive biography of Reuter in 1957. See Brandt and Löwenthal, *Ernst Reuter. Ein Leben für die Freiheit: eine politische Biographie* (Munich: Kindler, 1957).

[*Mitbestimmung*] in the workplace, and overcoming alienation followed the blueprint laid out in *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*.¹³¹ He may have buried “Paul Sering” in 1954, but he did not waste the inheritance.

Frequently throughout this article he reiterated the Luxemburgian notion of socialism as the sole future bearer of European civilization. Upon reflecting on the devastation of the Second World War and the present threat of global nuclear annihilation, however, he sought to excise all “utopian” elements from democratic socialism: “Not the belief in the imminent heaven on earth, but rather the prevention of hell on earth” constituted the “historical core of socialism”—“not the nihilistic destruction of traditional values, but rather their preservation through the fundamental transformation of institutions.” Soviet totalitarianism in fact threatened “the destruction of Western civilization.” He concluded his article with a quote about universal liberty from, of all people, Abraham Lincoln. A growing impression of a crisis of civilization and a closer embrace of liberalism defined both Löwenthal’s and the majority of German social democrats’ attitude toward Soviet communism and the Cold War politics of the 1950s.

The Road to Godesberg

German social democracy’s slow abandonment of “utopia” during the 1950s, a process also undergone by most other European socialist parties at the time, culminated at a very real topos: the quiet town of Bad Godesberg on the left bank of the Rhine. The Cold War geopolitical reality, the stalling of talks on German national reunification, and West Germany’s incredible economic recovery on the basis of democratic capitalism coincided mid-decade with a generational shift in the leadership of the SPD. Now middle-aged and “respectable,” the renewers generation started to take the helm of the party. Just as the death of Stalin in March 1953 had initiated an uneven “thaw” in communist party theory and practice, the death of Kurt Schumacher six months before in August 1952 had freed the SPD to reevaluate its guiding principles and infuse new blood into its leadership at all levels.¹³² All of these tendencies would culminate in the SPD party convention at Bad Godesberg in November 1959.

The dominant historiographical paradigm for explaining the transformation of the SPD and of West German society as a whole during the 1950s is the “Westernization” or “Americanization” thesis advanced by Axel Schildt, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Heinrich August Winkler, and Julia Angster, among others.¹³³ When examining the

¹³¹ Richard Löwenthal, “Sozialismus ohne Utopie,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 1, no. 2 (Sept./Oct. 1954), 50-59 (52).

¹³² On Schumacher’s charismatic but authoritarian leadership style, see Lewis J. Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher: A Study in Personality and Political Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1965).

¹³³ See Axel Schildt, *Zwischen Abendland und Amerika. Studien zur westdeutschen Ideenlandschaft der 50er Jahre* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999); Schildt and Arnold Sywottek, eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau. Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1993); Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Doering-Manteuffel, “Turning to the Atlantic: The Federal Republic’s Ideological Reorientation, 1945-1970,” *Bulletin of the GHI* (Washington, DC), no. 25 (Fall 1999), 3-21; Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West*, Vol. 2: 1933-1990 [2000], trans. Alexander J. Sager (Oxford: New York, 2007); Julia Angster, *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie. Die Westernisierung von SPD und DGB* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003); Angster, “The Westernization of the Political Thought of the West German Labor Movement,” in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (New

cultural transformation of these years, the rise of consumerism, the acceptance of liberal-democratic concepts developed by American political science, and the reliance on military defense through NATO, one sees the value of such a thesis. Even Konrad Jarausch, who in his attempt to write a trans-bloc postwar history raises important objections to the Westernization thesis, slips back into that same paradigm with his acknowledged norms of “civilization,” “human rights,” and “civil society.”¹³⁴ Jarausch orients his analysis toward the slow triumph of Western democratic capitalism over Eastern state socialism. In his description of the SPD’s reorientation at Bad Godesberg, his Western bias comes even more explicitly to the fore: “Only with passage of the Godesberg Program of the SPD, which reversed the course of the largest opposition party, did the commitment to the West bec[o]me fully accepted in the domestic politics of the FRG.”¹³⁵

In the following analysis of the “modernization” of social democracy, however, I propose a modest alternative to the rather one-directional Westernization thesis: Godesberg represented the mainstream SPD’s final acceptance of the geopolitical status quo, its final settling-in with the Federal Republic and the existing state apparatus, its final peace with democratic capitalism. This accommodation or adaptation thesis is more inward-looking than the externally oriented notion of Westernization, and at most one might call it a West-Germanization thesis—the logical counterpart of which among Eastern socialists was an almost simultaneous acceptance of the DDR as an eternal political structure. As Tony Judt put it, the new SPD made “a virtue of the necessity of compromise with West German reality.”¹³⁶ In the immediate context of the 1950s, the general political development of European socialism followed this same pattern of adapting to the norm of East-West division, which for the first time in the history of the Left made geographically concrete the ideological distinction between democratic and dictatorial socialism.

In a sense, the experience of antifascist resistance underground and in exile had already made European socialists aware of this new norm and initiated a partial thaw in social democratic traditions. But the practical demands of reorganizing the party after the war, the relative conservatism of many leading social democrats who had offered only

York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 76-98; Stefan Paulus, *Vorbild USA? Amerikanisierung von Universität und Wissenschaft in Westdeutschland 1945-1976* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010); Volker R. Bergahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry, 1945-1973* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1986). Even the widespread anti-American sentiments among West German intellectuals and ordinary citizens can be seen as an expression of American culture’s dominance. See Philipp Gassert, “The Anti-American as Americanizer: Revisiting the Anti-American Century in Germany,” *German Politics & Society*, 27, no. 1 (2009), 24-38.

¹³⁴ Drawing on Jürgen Kocka’s definition, Jarausch lists as civil society’s main features “social self-organization through the free association of citizens for the pursuit of collective interests in the public sphere”; “nonviolent sociability, and a relationship between states that is not marked by militaries and militarism”; “cultural civility along with religious tolerance, civic courage, and a sense of responsibility for the community”; “economic self-regulation by means of an unrestricted market, which effectively allows individuals to pursue their own economic interests”; and “civic involvement in both local self-government and national rights of democratic participation.” Jarausch, *After Hitler*, op. cit., 13.

¹³⁵ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 117.

¹³⁶ Judt, *Postwar*, op. cit., 268. Judt did not seem to grasp the full significance of this argument. He went on to write that the reformed SPD paid “an ironic price” by “contribut[ing] inadvertently to the political stability of the West German Republic” (269). That in fact was precisely what the new party wanted to do.

“passive opposition” to the Nazi regime, the preponderance of older personnel and ideas, and the unanticipated strength of the CDU together created a moratorium on “rethinking” socialism between 1948/49 and 1953. The 1952 Dortmund Action Program of the SPD still bore the ideological stamp of Kurt Schumacher, who composed its foreword in the spirit of Weimar-era social democracy. Although he considered the SPD a kind of “popular party” [*Volkspartei*] that would represent the broad interests of the German people, he nevertheless continued to privilege the working class as the party’s base and guiding spirit.¹³⁷

After Schumacher’s death and then a crushing electoral defeat in 1953, the new leaders of the SPD around Erich Ollenhauer and the former communist Herbert Wehner charged the party intellectuals with drafting a new program. Veterans of the socialist splinter groups of the 1930s took the lead in this endeavor: Willi Eichler, Fritz Borinski, and Josef Kappius of ISK; Willy Brandt of the SAP; Wolfgang Abendroth of the KPO (and New Beginning); and Fritz Erler and Waldemar von Knoeringen of New Beginning, among others. The thirty-four-member Program Commission, mandated at the Berlin Party Convention in 1954, began meeting in March 1955. Sub-committees formed to tackle every area of German social life: culture, education, foreign policy, social welfare, employer-employee relations, etc.¹³⁸

Defeat in the 1957 federal elections lent the work of the Program Commission added urgency.¹³⁹ It finally presented a draft program to the Stuttgart Party Convention in May 1958.¹⁴⁰ Over the next year and a half, every party district in the Federal Republic scoured over the draft and wrote motions to revise disagreeable elements in preparation for the Extraordinary Party Convention [*Außerordentlicher Parteitag*] at Bad Godesberg in November 1959, which would officially decide the socialist “debate over principles.”

A rough analysis of the Godesberg Convention meeting minutes shows that the twenty people who spoke most often, including the three rotating chairmen, belonged predominantly to the non-Marxist “rightist” reformist faction. Among them stood the former New Beginning members Fritz Erler and Waldemar von Knoeringen as well as the NB ally Rolf Reventlow. The average age of these rightist reformists in 1959 was fifty-three years old. The three outliers who favored a left socialist reform that maintained the party’s Marxist heritage but incorporated new economic and cultural insights were Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, Peter von Oertzen, and Willi Birkelbach, with an average age of forty-one—not a vast generational difference, but enough to associate the dissident left wing of the party with the youth. Of the 415 total attendees listed in the official meeting minutes, a distressingly meager 12% were women. Despite the rightist reformist efforts at

¹³⁷ On the Dortmund Action Program, see Kurt Klotzbach, *Der Weg zur Staatspartei. Programmatik, praktische Politik und Organisation der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1945 bis 1965* (Berlin: Dietz, 1982), 255-64.

¹³⁸ See the initial Commission invitation circular from Willi Eichler (Bonn), Mar. 15, 1955, NL Abendroth, 7.

¹³⁹ See Fritz Erler’s reflection on the 1957 defeat, “Gedanken zur Politik und inneren Ordnung der Sozialdemokratie,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 5, no. 1 (1958), reprinted as “Konsequenzen aus der Bundestagswahl 1957” in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 126-37.

¹⁴⁰ See “Entwurf zu einem Grundsatzprogramm [May 1958],” *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des Außerordentlichen Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 13.-15. November 1959 in Bad Godesberg*, ed. Vorstand der SPD (Hannover; Bonn: Neuer Vorwärts-Verlag, 1959), 332-80.

“modernization,” the SPD resembled most other democratic political parties of the postwar decades as the domain of middle-aged (and white) men.¹⁴¹

Besides the two brands of reform represented at the convention, other ideological tendencies included rightist traditionalists, who wanted to stick to the old welfare agenda of the Weimar and early postwar-era SPD, and leftist traditionalists who like the Revolutionary Socialists of the 1930s wanted to return to the more radical Marxist programs of the pre-1914 SPD. A few minority positions existed in addition to this rather schematic breakdown of reformism versus traditionalism, such as the Protestant radical democracy advocated by the erstwhile member of the CDU Gustav Heinemann or the liberal humanism of Carlo Schmid. Although he was not physically present, the moral and intellectual authority of Richard Löwenthal nevertheless exerted an influence on the Convention proceedings.¹⁴²

Passions often surfaced during the convention debates and significant motions to revise the draft program were accepted. But critics of the party’s new course sensed already before the convention opened that they faced a *fait accompli*. Wolfgang Abendroth for example had originally planned to attend but canceled his hotel reservation at the last minute, probably out of frustration.¹⁴³

The “Core Values of Socialism” that introduced the final Godesberg Program centered on freedom, justice, and solidarity. Democratic socialism supposedly was rooted in Christian ethics, humanism, and classical philosophy—not scientific socialism. The new SPD understood itself as “the party of intellectual freedom,” and it based its values in the ethical idea of “socialist volition” [*sozialistisches Wollen*]. The telos of social democratic politics was a “humane society” that would exist peacefully in the international legal order, promote democracy against dictatorship, and ensure the free unfolding of “the multifaceted economic, social, and cultural” life of the individual.¹⁴⁴ In addition to social rights, the individual in this humane society would have the social “co-responsibility” of sustaining and, through education, reproducing a democratic political

¹⁴¹ The SPD Bundestag faction for the period 1957-61 likewise consisted of only 12.2% women, but that was higher than the CDU/CSU (7.9%) and the FDP (7.0%). From a high point of 9.2% in 1957, the total percentage of women in the Bundestag dropped steadily to a low of 5.8% in 1972. The real rise in female representation began only in 1983 with the entry of the Greens as the fourth major party. As of the latest German federal election in 2013, the percentage of women representatives stood at 36.5%. By comparison, the percentage of women in the 113th United States Congress (2013-15) was just 19.1%. See the Wikipedia article “Frauenanteil im Deutschen Bundestag seit 1949,” <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenanteil_im_Deutschen_Bundestag_seit_1949> (accessed Jan. 2015), and Beate Hoecker, “Frauen in der Politik,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Nov. 5, 2009), <<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/gender/frauen-in-deutschland/49362/frauen-in-der-politik>> (accessed Jan. 2015). As an indication of how the SPD has changed, the percentage of women in its Bundestag faction as of 2013 stood at 42.2% and in 2014 it appointed Yasmin Fahimi, a German-Iranian woman, as its secretary-general.

¹⁴² Löwenthal likely would have attended too had he not been in the United States as a research associate at Harvard University’s Russian Research Center. Products of this stint included a speech reprinted in a Congress of Cultural Freedom journal as “Stalin and Ideology: The Revenge of the Superstructure,” *Soviet Survey* (July/Sept. 1960), 31-37. He also wrote during this period the article “Totalitarianism Reconsidered,” *Commentary* (Jan. 1960), 504-12, and, along with Geoffrey F. Hudson and Roderick MacFarquhar, the book *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1961).

¹⁴³ Letter from Wolfgang Abendroth to Hotel Eden (Bad Godesberg), Nov. 3, 1959, NL Abendroth, 62. For more on Abendroth and the left socialist dissent, see Ch. 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Grundsatzprogramm der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, ed. Vorstand der SPD (Cologne: Deutz, 1959), 7-9.

culture. The Program realized a latent tendency in German social democracy toward ethical idealism. The key idea of “unfolding” [*Entfaltung*] of the human personality bore some resemblance to what Marx had in mind for the future communist society, but it owed much more to the neo-Kantian influence on European socialism that first manifested itself around the turn of the century and won a strong following in the socialist splinter group ISK.¹⁴⁵

Instead of beginning with an analysis of the socioeconomic conditions in Germany and Europe, as was the custom in previous SPD programs, the Godesberg Program’s first substantive section concentrated on “the governmental order” [*die staatliche Ordnung*]. The Program described a unified, liberal welfare state [*Sozialstaat*] that would realize individual self-determination in the political as well as cultural spheres. A “lively democracy” would require civic co-determination and co-responsibility through public institutions, independent associations, and a free press. The SPD furthermore committed itself to winning votes only through competition with other democratic parties in a stable parliamentary framework.¹⁴⁶

As the historian Axel Schildt has observed, the *Zeitgeist* of the 1950s involved a widespread impression of living in “modern times.”¹⁴⁷ A large poster hung on the wall of the Godesberg Convention hall that read, informally, “get with the times – get with the SPD” [*geh mit der zeit – geh mit der SPD*]. In a political context, this emerging social democratic consciousness of modernity took the form of “rebranding” the party. In his postmortem of the failed SPD electoral campaign in 1953, Fritz Erler had already argued that the renewal of German social democracy required American-style electoral techniques. Social democracy must reform its image, take into account modern voter psychology, and heed the “insights of modern advertising science in the evaluation of popular opinion polls.”¹⁴⁸ Admittedly he later warned of the danger to democracy presented by the manipulation of popular opinion through modern technology,¹⁴⁹ but his support for “modernizing” the SPD remained.

To the rightist reformers, social democratic modernity meant relegating Marx to the past. A progressive socialist science, or “scientific socialism,” logically required a substantial revision of the analyses that Marx had pioneered in the mid-nineteenth century. But in going beyond Marx, the Godesberg Program nevertheless preserved vestiges of the Marxian heritage. A description of the Party’s preferred governmental

¹⁴⁵ On the history of ISK, see Heiner Lindner, “Um etwas zu erreichen, muss man sich etwas vornehmen, von dem man glaubt, dass es unmöglich sei.” *Der Internationale Sozialistische Kampfbund und seine Publikationen* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2006); Werner Link, *Die Geschichte des Internationalen Jugend-Bundes (IJB) und des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kampf-Bundes (ISK). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich* (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1964). See also Chs. 1-2.

¹⁴⁶ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*.

¹⁴⁸ Fritz Erler, “Lehren und Konsequenzen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung* [Karlsruhe] (Oct. 17, 1953), reprinted as “Nach der Bundestagswahl 1953” in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 91-94.

¹⁴⁹ Fritz Erler, “Wird die öffentliche Meinung total manipulierbar?” *Frankfurter Hefte* (Feb. 1958), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 328-31. He had also warned of the dangers of modern technocracy in a speech before the Working Group of Social Democratic Academics organized by Waldemar von Knoeringen in Munich, “Der Sozialismus in der Epoche der zweiten industriellen Revolution” (Jan. 24, 1956), reprinted as “Die zweite industrielle Revolution” in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 95-125.

order included the remark that “[t]he laws must be adapted in a timely fashion to social development so that they do not come into contradiction with the general sense of justice [*Rechtsbewußtsein*] but rather serve the realization of the idea of law [*Rechtsidee*].”¹⁵⁰ In other words, the laws could potentially march out of step with objective social development—essentially, class relations and cultural norms—and such a “contradiction” might lead to a crisis of the democratic order. A Marxist might then conclude that even if the laws matched the stage of social development perfectly and thus adapted to the prevailing class relations, such a consistent democratic order could still come into contradiction with the forces of production: the degree of technological advancement, the amount of capital investment, the rate of employment, the distribution of resources, etc. The non-Marxist social democrats of the late 1950s concerned themselves only with democracy in crisis, while both traditionalists and left socialists in the party like Abendroth would have viewed such a concern as subordinate to capitalism in crisis.

Also in keeping with the Marxian traditions of German social democracy, the Program warned of the growing capital accumulation and concentration since the end of the war and the concomitant rise in the political influence of big business.¹⁵¹ A social democratic government would seek to limit the power of cartels and monopolies, not in the interest of some alternative economic order but rather in accord with the logic of distributive justice within the existing capitalist system. Private property should be protected, but not at the expense of the social good. Alongside a multitude of small and medium-sized businesses, larger public concerns should play a role in key industries like resource extraction, energy, and transportation. Despite fostering a robust public sector, the SPD encouraged bureaucratic decentralization and self-administration. The Program opposed any kind of accumulation of economic power, including by the state.¹⁵²

Marxists in the party probably cringed at the Program’s call for free world trade as a precondition of peaceful coexistence. How could socialists ignore the inherent inequalities and structural exploitation of the capitalist global market? The Program mentioned the need to aid developing countries in order to effect a just redistribution of the world’s riches, but the new social democracy’s acceptance of the capitalist world system simply did not rule out “new forms oppression” that accompanied globalization.¹⁵³

In recognition of the Cold War geopolitical reality, the Program reaffirmed the SPD’s support for a West German military, an issue that had proved quite divisive within the party since the early 1950s and roused considerable debate at the convention too.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, the Program took a firm stand against atomic weapons or any other

¹⁵⁰ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 11.

¹⁵¹ To a certain extent, this section of the *Grundsatzprogramm* adopted a milder form of Abendroth’s controversial counter-program. See Ch. 5.

¹⁵² *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 15.

¹⁵³ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 25. On the inequalities of the capitalist world system, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy: Essays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1979); *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements, and the Civilizations: Essays* (Cambridge; New York: 1984). See also Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 4: Globalizations, 1945-2011 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

¹⁵⁴ The Motions 11 and 95 brought forward by the Marburg party district (Abendroth’s home) attempted among other things to preserve West German neutrality and to strike down the majority’s provision for a mandatory military draft. They did not pass. See *Protokoll* (1959), op. cit., 156, 388-89, 550-51.

weapons of mass destruction. The European zone should promote détente between East and West. The section on “national defense” concluded with a call for general disarmament, somewhat contradictory given the party’s support by that point for a West German military.¹⁵⁵ The Program also recognized the necessity of “normal diplomatic and trade relations with all nations regardless of governmental system and social structures.”¹⁵⁶ But this just as easily could have applied to the multitude of third-world countries newly independent from colonial rule. The Program’s call for German national reunification and its aggressive stance toward the GDR contradicted its support for détente, disarmament, and European economic cooperation.¹⁵⁷ Only several years later with Willy Brandt’s conciliatory Ostpolitik did the SPD try to resolve this contradiction.

When the Program turned its attention to the domestic economic and social order, its emphasis lay on constant economic growth to support long-term social welfare programs. Essentially repeating Bernstein’s revisionist arguments, the SPD viewed the general growth of the capitalist economy as ultimately beneficial for all, including the working people. In 1959, the conventional economic wisdom still followed Keynesian lines in promoting a stable currency, full employment, increased production, and a rising general welfare. Comprehensive health care coverage, for example, should be realized by any means necessary, combining public and private care, ensuring the free choice of doctors, and shortening general working time (shorter days, longer vacations).¹⁵⁸ State planning guidelines should ensure that the market economy adapts to the constant structural transformations of society. But these guidelines would not be arbitrarily imposed on free enterprise, which should (paradoxically) maintain “the right of free decision” whether to follow them. Reflecting the rise of neo-liberal ideology, the SPD’s Program envisioned the organic combination of state regulation and free market dynamics. A market economy does not function very inefficiently on its own: state policy must correct for its shortcomings and artificially sustain a framework for free competition.¹⁵⁹

Again and again, the Program intoned the importance of free consumer choice, free choice of employment (“right to work”), free competition, and free entrepreneurial initiative.¹⁶⁰ The historian Anthony J. Nicholls has charted the long rise of the “social market economy” in Germany, and although one usually associates the idea with Ludwig Erhard and the CDU, it largely determined the SPD’s economic policy reorientation as well.¹⁶¹ The liberalization of Western European socialist economic policies in the 1950s

¹⁵⁵ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 11-12.

¹⁵⁶ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 24.

¹⁵⁷ On the SPD’s “Germany plan” of 1959, see Fritz Erler, “Disengagement und Wiedervereinigung,” *Europa-Archiv* (May 1959), reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 537-51. See also Erler, “Bestandaufnahme,” speech in the Bundestag, June 30, 1960, reprinted in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 552-67.

¹⁵⁸ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 18-19.

¹⁵⁹ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 16.

¹⁶⁰ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 13.

¹⁶¹ Anthony J. Nicholls, *Freedom with Responsibility: The Social Market Economy in Germany, 1918-1963* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1994). According to Konrad Jarausch, Erhard might have advocated a free market, but he was no neoliberal: “he continued to recognize the state’s key role in creating the conditions for competition, including a free market and unregulated prices.” Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 83. This position on the state’s role in ensuring the smooth operation of the free market was in line with the ideas of the Ordoliberals. The leading economist of the new SPD, Karl Schiller, largely followed the plan of social

and early 60s reflected the new primacy of politics in that era—and often that meant the primacy of *limiting* political intervention in the economy. The mutual freedom of employers and employees in wage contracts, for example, could be justified by the argument that only a “totalitarian command economy destroys freedom.” The Program’s section on the social and economic order concluded with a new motto for the modern SPD: “Competition as much as possible—planning as much as necessary.”¹⁶²

The public-sector economy, the Program continued, should serve the interests not only of the working people, but also of the general public and consumer—i.e. the middle class. Every citizen should have the opportunity to build a fortune and accumulate savings; every citizen should become a bourgeois.¹⁶³ In line with the theoretical developments of the past decade, the Program no longer referred to proletarian workers [*Arbeiter*] but rather to the undifferentiated mass of working people, salaried employees, and civil servants that fit under the generic term “job holders” [*Arbeitnehmer*]. As used by the rightist reformers, this term implied a looser application of class categories and downplayed real social conflict between such diverse strata as skilled industrial workers, artisanal workers, white-collar employees, unskilled laborers, etc. It even became convenient for social democrats to refer to “economic citizens” [*Wirtschaftsbürger*], which further divorced the SPD from any association with the traditional working class. At the same time, the Program reaffirmed the importance of traditional workers’ trade unions, which functioned as the “essential bearers of the constant democratization process.”¹⁶⁴ The unions’ fight for the right of co-determination [*Mitbestimmung*], which had only partial success in the early 1950s, firmly bound working-class Germans to the fate of capitalist enterprise by giving them a seat on major industries’ executive boards. If the workers could not own the means of production, they could at least help manage them.

In its appeal to the new German middle class, the Godesberg Program shifted from defending the economic rights of the exploited to “just distribution” for all. Exploitation or injustice were not to be found in the capitalist mode of production itself—in the very structure of a society based on profit-driven enterprise that necessarily created two antagonistic classes, the owners of capital and the impoverished owners of labor—but rather in the unequal share of all social strata in the benefits of capitalism. Wealth and income inequality, therefore, should become the target of progressive tax reform and modest redistributive efforts by a democratic welfare state.¹⁶⁵ Conspicuously absent from

market economy. See Matthias Hochstätter, “Karl Schiller – eine wirtschaftspolitische Biographie,” Ph.D. (Universität Hannover, 2006).

¹⁶² *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 14.

¹⁶³ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 15-16. See Franz Walter, *Die SPD. Vom Proletariat zur Neuen Mitte* (Berlin: Alexander Fest, 2002).

¹⁶⁴ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 17-18.

¹⁶⁵ Although the SPD came to this conclusion amid the general prosperity of West Germany’s “economic miracle” of the 1950s, the party’s turn at Godesberg resembles today’s response by American liberals and European social democrats to the global economic crisis in the wake of 2008. Paul Krugman, Robert Reich, et al. focus on wealth and income inequality as opposed to any systemic injustice of capitalism itself. The chimera of “fair” capitalism finds its most blatant and contradictory expression in Michael Lewis’ *Flash Boys* (New York: Norton, 2014), which argues for governmental regulation of the technology used by high-speed financial traders in order to make Wall Street fair. Despite some more forward-thinking initiatives, Thomas Piketty too largely thinks within the framework of the existing capitalist system. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* [2013], trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014). An alternative to these examples of system-immanent critique is the total critique offered by Wolfgang Streeck

the Program was any substantive discussion—much less critique—of capitalism. Eric Hobsbawm noted that the word “capitalism” rarely appeared in public discourse during the 1950s “since it had negative associations in the public mind.” The preferred term was instead “free enterprise.”¹⁶⁶

The final section of the Program, “Our Way,” surveyed the historical (read: past) tasks of the socialist movement: abolishing the privileges of the ruling classes, emancipation of the working class as a prelude to the emancipation of all humankind, etc. Once the object of exploitation by the capitalist ruling class, however, proletarian workers now supposedly enjoyed full and equal rights as citizens. The modern SPD thus transformed from a workers’ party [*Arbeiterpartei*] into a popular party [*Volkspartei*]. At the same time, and perhaps in a contradictory way, the SPD posed as the collective party [*Sammelpartei*] of German socialism, absorbing all of its various tendencies and splinter groups.¹⁶⁷ It fulfilled this ambition very briefly, as the conflicts of 1960s lay on the horizon.

Two things stood out in the final form of the Godesberg Program. First, the language of “freedom” pervaded the entire document: the noun, its related adjectives and verbs, and its synonyms appeared far more frequently than “social,” “socialism,” or even “democracy.” And second, the logic and pathos of its argument followed from the primacy of politics over economics: all objective social forces could be mastered by the decisive action of democratic socialist policy. These two rhetorical features of the Program went hand in hand and distinguished it from nearly every official statement in the eighty-four-year history of German Social Democracy until that point.

At the back of the Program pamphlet, the publishing house J. H. W. Dietz Nachfolger advertised several new books including Werner Blumenberg’s “Fighters for Freedom,” a biographical pantheon of German socialist heroes as diverse as Wilhelm Weitling, Karl Marx, Eduard Bernstein, Kurt Schumacher, and Ernst Reuter.¹⁶⁸ Social democratic historians outside the party convention thus worked on creating a canon of socialist freedom fighters, claiming erstwhile revolutionaries like Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Kautsky as their own and omitting anyone with a legacy too tainted by communism. After twelve years of enduring Nazi oppression and nearly fifteen years of defending its position against the “totalitarian” communist threat to the East, the mainstream SPD embraced freedom as its central tenet. By concentrating on freedom as opposed to equality, democracy, or socialism, the SPD also shifted its weight from the realm of economics and objective social forces to the realm of politics, both in terms of governmental form and the art of policy.

Conjuring the specter of Eduard Bernstein’s revisionism around the turn of the century, the new SPD redefined socialism as a continuing task rather than a fixed goal.¹⁶⁹ Bernstein had summarized this gradualist notion in 1899 with the phrase “that which is

in *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* [2013], trans. Patrick Camiller (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2014).

¹⁶⁶ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 273. Google Ngrams bear this out for “capitalism” in English, but both “Kapitalismus” in German and “capitalisme” in French show a steady rise in usage from about 1940 to a peak at 1974/75.

¹⁶⁷ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 26-27.

¹⁶⁸ Werner Blumenberg, *Kämpfer für die Freiheit* (West Berlin; Bonn-Bad Godesberg: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1959).

¹⁶⁹ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 7.

generally called the ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything.”¹⁷⁰ And as the critical theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe later wrote, “[t]he autonomy of the political from the economic base is the true novelty of Bernstein’s argument.”¹⁷¹ The difference between the revisionism of the late 1950s and Bernstein’s revisionism, however, was that socialism no longer appeared compelling as a mass social movement. Widespread political apathy after the war had turned all “movement politics” into a suspect affair. Participation in May Day parades declined precipitously in the West, and the same parades soon took on an artificially staged character in the East.¹⁷² During the two postwar decades, the European socialist “movement” became more about going through the parliamentary motions.

The day after the Godesberg Convention, on November 16, Fritz Erler gave an interview on the Swiss Radio Beromünster. Observing that drafting and ratifying the program had proceeded more thoroughly and democratically than any other program in the party’s history, Erler characterized the final product as a testament to the lessons learned by Germany’s peculiar experience with Nazi and communist dictatorship. Transforming the SPD into a “modern, liberal, and socialist party” required a militant commitment to parliamentary and pluralistic democracy. Indicating the degree to which the clear majority of the party had accepted the current political and social form of the Federal Republic, he praised the new program’s “unambiguous Yes to national defense.” He reiterated the economic policy line of state ownership and control only as a “last resort” and characterized the program’s critics as “dogmatists” who, if only they had the majority, would have gladly “burned as heretics” the party’s modernizers. While he rejected the left socialist critics’ rhetoric of “betrayal,” he made no secret that “some ideas of the socialist movement from the 19th century no longer fit into the present and consequently had to be dropped or modified. . . . The importance of this program lies directly in the fact that precisely that which does not fit with the present was swept away.” In response to the charge of electoral opportunism, he insisted that the socialist triad “Freedom, Justice, and Solidarity” remained the party’s fundamental objective even while it competed for the most votes. But Erler admitted that despite the Convention’s clear majority in favor of modernization, “it will be a difficult task now to make this program into the practical benchmark for behavior by the entire broad membership [of the party] throughout the country.”¹⁷³ He accurately predicted the bitter civil war that would rage within the party over the next few years and would result in the second “great schism” of German social democracy.

Conclusion: Roads Not Taken

When Tony Judt wrote in 2005 that European social democracy was “[a] practice in lifelong search of its theory,” he expressed a decidedly post-Godesberg sentiment.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* [1899, as *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*], trans. Edith C. Harvey (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1911), 202.

¹⁷¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* [1985], 2nd Ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2001), 30.

¹⁷² Eric Hobsbawm, *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

¹⁷³ Interview of Fritz Erler by Fritz René Allemann, Radio Beromünster, Nov. 16, 1959, reprinted as “Zum Godesberg Programm” in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland*, 138-41.

¹⁷⁴ Judt, *Postwar*, op. cit., 363.

Before the Godesberg moment, which occurred analogously in almost every Western European socialist party, theory still very much determined practice—some watered-down version of Marxism with a tinge of classical Bernsteinian revisionism, perhaps, but theory nonetheless. The reform of social democracy appeared to replace this supposedly “obsolete” theory with a post-ideological pragmatism, and to supporters and critics alike the entire history of social democracy thereafter appeared as a practice-in-search-of-theory. We should beware of such proleptic reinterpretations, not only because they obscure the intense theoretical debate that accompanied every pivotal moment in the history of socialism but also because the “post-ideological” transformation of the late 1950s itself represented the triumph of a new kind of theory: acceptance of formal parliamentary democracy, denial of class conflict, critique of totalitarianism, praise for the market, and celebration of individual liberties.

My argument about the mutual entrenchment of Western social democracy and Eastern state socialism during the 1950s—their adaptation to existing socioeconomic regimes, political institutions, and geopolitical power constellations—resembles the left socialist critique of the Godesberg Program offered by Wolfgang Abendroth, Ossip K. Flechtheim, and others.¹⁷⁵ But unlike these critics, I do not use the concept of accommodation or adaptation [*Anpassung*] in a polemical sense. The SPD’s decision to accept the status quo of West German liberal-democratic capitalism did not necessarily constitute a bitter betrayal of the socialist tradition or a cynical resignation to parliamentary politics. Assimilation to liberal democracy and abandonment of Marxist ideology may very well have been the postwar party’s wisest political move: the SPD’s “Eastern policy” [*Ostpolitik*] of the 1960s, which officially accepted the German-German border and sought “change through rapprochement” with the Soviet bloc, followed logically from the Godesberg moment; and the SPD finally reaped the electoral benefits of appealing to a wider spectrum of the West German population in 1966, when it entered the federal government for the first time as part of the Great Coalition, and definitively in 1969, when it drove the CDU/CSU into the opposition following the lead of Chancellor Willy Brandt in the social-liberal coalition. Whatever left socialist critics might have thought, the Godesberg reform proved a monumental success for German Social Democracy.

Among the winners of Godesberg, Fritz Erler and Richard Löwenthal each embodied some combination of the interwar, wartime, and postwar experiences typical of the renewers generation: anti-Nazi resistance, exile, concentration camp internment, and—although it took Löwenthal longer than usual—remigration. At a 1976 conference in Chicago, Löwenthal reflected on the postwar reform of European social democracy and concluded that “Democratic Socialist parties are first of all parties committed to Western democracy”: only secondarily did they espouse “socialist values” or Marxism. But these parties were hybrids all around. They needed both the idealism of the youth and the pragmatism of the wise: “without the ideologist, [democratic socialism] ceases to produce cohesion and commitment among its members and followers. Without the pragmatist, it ceases to be relevant for the political issues of the day.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ See Ch. 5.

¹⁷⁶ Richard Löwenthal, “The Post-War Transformation of ‘Reformist’ Social Democracy: Thoughts on the Changes in Outlook and Practice of Some Leading European Parties of Democratic Socialism,” prepared

Foreshadowing developments to come, the Godesberg Program of the SPD placed great emphasis on the education and professional training of the youth. Giving young people the most diverse employment opportunities and making them co-responsible participants in political life was a necessity for stabilizing a democratic society. Schools must strengthen young citizens' "power of resistance against the conformist tendencies of our time." The chief purpose of higher education should be to train young citizens for "co-responsible behavior in a democratic state."¹⁷⁷ Already by the early 1960s, however, young Germans began to feel alienated from the democratic institutions of the Federal Republic. This feeling soon developed into radical discontent.

The next chapter will examine the sudden and bewildering exclusion of the radical youth from the ranks of the SPD in the early 1960s. Critics of Godesberg like Abendroth and Flechtheim would rise to their defense and pay the price. As the official parties of Western European socialism gradually adapted to the game of parliamentary politics, a movement toward building an extra-parliamentary left alternative took shape. The task of restarting socialism now fell largely to the younger generation of Sixty-eighters, who reinvested the original revolutionary socialist passion of New Beginning in a new "New Left."

for the Conference on Democratic Socialism, Research Institute on International Change (Chicago), Oct. 6, 1976, NL Löwenthal, 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Grundsatzprogramm* (1959), 20-21, 23. The Program even called for a modest co-administration by university students and school pupils of their educational institutions. The universities should be independent and free to carry out scientific research according to their own desires, but they should not exist in total isolation from the rest of society.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Second Great Schism: Wolfgang Abendroth,
Ossip K. Flechtheim, and the Rise of a Left Alternative

The Second Great Schism: Wolfgang Abendroth, Ossip K. Flechtheim, and the Rise of a Left Alternative

No tidal wave of political tribulation can strand [the vanquished who kept their Socialist faith] for ever, even if they are temporarily barred from pursuing their aims in the political field. What they represent cannot perish in these times, notwithstanding the legion of critics for whom a Socialist faithful to socialism is merely dogmatic or sentimental. Whether the New Men are still scanning the history of the labor movement for the causes of Socialist failure or already struggling to find the language and content of a future revival, they are still on their way.

Joseph Buttinger¹

The modernization of German social democracy described in the previous chapter was the crowning achievement of the renewers generation. This “Godesberg moment” defined the legacy of New Beginning in particular. Its former members Fritz Erler and Waldemar von Knoeringen joined other leading renewers like Willy Brandt to guide the Social Democratic Party into the 1960s, while public intellectuals like Richard Löwenthal firmly anchored social democratic ideology in the institutions of the Federal Republic. Proposing only modest social reforms, these erstwhile revolutionary socialists now stood ready to defend the established democratic order. The SPD’s electoral success later in the decade seemed finally to justify the renewers’ mass conversion to liberal democracy. But the “official” legacy of New Beginning and the renewers generation had a reverse side. The Godesberg moment failed to encompass everyone in the social democratic camp, and a dissident minority began laying the theoretical and organizational foundation for a left alternative.

The tumultuous period 1905-17 corresponded to what Carl E. Schorske dubbed the first “great schism” of German socialism, leading to the breakaway of the Independent Social Democrats and finally to the consolidation of the Spartacus League and Communist Party.² The formal division of the German nation in 1949 crystallized the ideological and political divide: social democracy was identified geopolitically with the West and communism with the East. Around 1960, West German social democracy underwent a second great schism. A left socialist minority diverged from mainstream supporters of the established party and unions. Like the Godesberg reformers, these “socialists faithful to socialism,” as Joseph Buttinger put it, also belonged overwhelmingly to the renewers generation. Marginalized within the established party and unions, they attempted to solve the problem of socialist renewal through extra-parliamentary opposition and the mobilization of a New Left.³

¹ Joseph Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism: A History of the Revolutionary Socialists of Austria* (New York: Praeger, 1953), 548.

² Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1955). The breakaway of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SAP) and the other socialist splinter groups in the 1930s might have constituted another great schism, but the Sopade in Britain and the postwar SPD successfully reintegrated most of these divergent groups. See Chs. 2-3.

³ William D. Graf also used the term “great schism” to describe developments within the German Left around 1960, but he did not link it explicitly to Schorske’s first great schism. He also somewhat

The term “left socialism” goes back at least to the Austromarxist Max Adler, who in 1932 used it to define a third way between communist revolutionary socialism and the reformist socialism of the established social democratic parties. Left socialism arose as a new concept and basis for organization amid the global crisis of capitalism and the political confusion that accompanied the rise of fascism.⁴ Aside from a few scattered works since the late 1970s, scholarly use of the term left socialism to describe non-aligned socialist alternatives did not really spread until recently. The political scientist Peter von Oertzen’s brief 1998 survey of postwar left socialist journals inspired a number of longer works on alternative left theory and practice during the 1950s and 60s. Chief among them is Gregor Kritidis’ well-researched book “Left Socialist Opposition in the Adenauer Era” (2008).⁵

Through studying small journals like *Funken*, *Pro und Contra*, *Sozialistische Politik*, and *Die Andere Zeitung*, Kritidis analyzes the variety of dissident socialist theories and groupings during the early years of the Federal Republic. He organizes his book into three chronological phases: first, from 1945 to 1953, when a left socialist reorientation of the SPD and the Federated German Trade Unions (DGB) still stood a chance; second, from 1954 to 1959, which saw the ascendancy of social democratic reformism; and third, from 1958/59 to 1962, when left socialists consolidated and

dogmatically excluded social democracy from the “genuine” socialist tradition, allowing the left socialist perspective to dominate his narrative. Graf, Ch. 8, *The German Left Since 1945: Socialism and Social Democracy in the German Federal Republic* (Cambridge; New York: Oleander, 1976).

⁴ Max Adler, “Die historische Funktion des Linkssozialismus,” *Der Kampf*, no. 2 (1932), 71-76. See also Adler, *Linkssozialismus. Notwendige Betrachtungen über Reformismus und revolutionären Sozialismus* (Carlsbad: Graphia, 1933). This book was based on a lecture that Adler delivered in Vienna in January 1933 just before the Nazis seized power in Germany. See the review of the book by Alexander Stein (pseud. “Viator”) in *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1933), 77-79, which described Adler as seeking “a common denominator for the problems of reorienting [*Neuorientierung*] the workers’ movement.” By that time, what Otto Bauer had described as Austromarxism’s democratic socialist synthesis and “will—even fanaticism—for unity” had given way to advocacy for a left socialist “third way.” Otto Bauer, “What Is Austro-Marxism?” [1927], in Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, eds., *Austro-Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 45-48 (47). See also Christoph Jünke, “Die Dilemmata des Linkssozialismus am Beispiel des Austromarxismus: Max Adler, Otto Bauer und Joseph Buttinger,” *Streifzüge durch das rote 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: LAIKA-Verlag, 2014), 43-58. Left socialism is not to be confused with the ultra-leftism or “infantile leftism” attacked by Lenin and the KPD.

⁵ Gregor Kritidis, *Linkssozialistische Opposition in der Ära Adenauer. Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hannover: Offizin, 2008). See Peter von Oertzen, “Behelfsbrücken. Linkssozialistische Zeitschriften in der Ära der ‘Restauration’ 1950-1962,” in Michael Buckmiller and Joachim Perels, eds., *Opposition als Triebkraft der Demokratie. Bilanz und Perspektiven der zweiten Republik: Jürgen Seifert zum 70. Geburtstag* (Hannover: Offizin, 1998), 87-100; Michael Benz, *Der unbequeme Streiter Fritz Lamm. Jude, Linkssozialist, Emigrant 1911-1977: eine politische Biographie* (Essen: Klartext, 2007); Philipp Kufferath, “Das linkssozialistische Milieu und die intellektuellen Traditionen der Neuen Linken vor 1968,” M.A. (Göttingen University, 2008); Andreas Diers, “Linkssozialismus. Ursprünge und Geschichte 1917-1989,” *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, no. 2 (May 2010), 47-65; Christoph Jünke, *Sozialistisches Strandgut. Leo Kofler – Leben und Werk (1907-1995)* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2007); Christoph Jünke, ed., *Linkssozialismus in Deutschland. Jenseits von Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus?* (Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2010); Peter Brandt, “Weder Ost noch West – ein unabhängiger Linkssozialismus im geteilten Deutschland,” *GlobKult Magazin* (Nov. 13, 2012). For older scholarship, see for example the work of Hans Manfred Bock, Peretz Merchav, Jürgen Baumgarten, and Karljo Kreter. See also Michael Franzke and Uwe Remppe, eds., *Linkssozialismus. Texte zur Theorie zwischen Stalinismus und Sozialreformismus* (Leipzig: GNN-Verlag, 1998).

reorganized themselves. But by delimiting his subject in advance—“the historically defeated currents of democratic socialism excluded from Social Democracy and party Communism”—Kritidis elides the degree to which the German New Left developed historically from within the existing organizations and traditions of the Old Left. Generational conflict and the problem of renewal do not figure prominently in his account, which concentrates instead on outcasts, fringe figures, and the meddling of Western and Soviet secret agents.⁶ His effort to reclaim the “emancipatory potential” of postwar left socialism, however worthy, focuses too narrowly on one particular and rather disorderly milieu rather than evaluating the trajectory of German socialism as a whole. And while Kritidis correctly argues that the anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s represented in some respects a delayed triumph for the dissident left socialists, he ignores the high price paid for this short-lived socialist renaissance: socialism’s descent into political irrelevance.

This chapter examines the intellectual biographies of two left socialists and former members of New Beginning who broke very bitterly with the established organizations of the Old Left. In the 1950s and ’60s Ossip K. Flechtheim (1909-98) and Wolfgang Abendroth (1906-85) shaped the new academic discipline of political science in West Germany, the former at the Free University of Berlin and the latter at the University of Marburg. Like their counterparts Fritz Erler and Richard Löwenthal they belonged to the renewers generation, but they landed on the opposite side of German socialism’s second great schism. As the SPD started down the road to Godesberg, Flechtheim and Abendroth critiqued the conformist and bureaucratic tendencies in the party, defended Marxism, and tried to steer the workers’ movement toward a democratic socialist course. They too wanted a renewal of socialism, just not how the majority at Godesberg imagined it.

This crisis of renewal came to a head around 1960 in the controversy over the Socialist German Student League (SDS). While the SPD leadership sought to distance itself from these radical students, eventually declaring their organization “irreconcilable” with membership in the party, Flechtheim and Abendroth collaborated to form the Socialist Booster Club (*Sozialistische Förderergesellschaft*, SFG) on the students’ behalf. In the winter of 1961-62, both intellectuals and a number of other leading left socialists either resigned or were expelled from the party. This act prompted a lively debate about reorganizing the German Left, with the Booster Club transforming into a more permanent political forum called the Socialist League (*Sozialistischer Bund*, SB). Amid growing concern about authoritarian tendencies in the Federal Republic following the *Spiegel* affair in 1962 and growing disillusionment with the post-Godesberg SPD, a New Left anxiously took shape. The renewers generation was split between champions of modernized Social Democracy and its radical discontents.

Ossip K. Flechtheim: Saving the Future

After returning briefly to Germany as an adviser during the Nuremberg Trials, Ossip K. Flechtheim resumed his career as a young political scientist at Bates and Colby

⁶ Kritidis, *Linksozialistische Opposition*, 11. His sections on Wolfgang Abendroth and on the controversy surrounding the Socialist German Student League (SDS) form an exception, which he acknowledges as such: “Within this heterogeneous spectrum [of left socialists] Wolfgang Abendroth was in some respects an exception: he acted in every way above factions and maintained contact with all groups” (223).

colleges in Maine. There he grappled with cultural isolation, skepticism about socialism's future, and his wife Lili's reluctance to return to the country that had perpetrated the Holocaust.⁷ Although beset by personal and political uncertainty, Flechtheim's twelve years in American exile from 1939 to 1951 proved crucial for conceiving his most important contribution to postwar German intellectual history: a brand of critical utopian studies he called futurology.

Already in Geneva, just before emigrating to the US, Flechtheim had drafted the essay "Toward a Critique of the Marxian Conception of History" in which he brooded on the inability of human ideals to transcend the limitations placed on them by history. Even Marxist humanism, as highly as Flechtheim valued it then and throughout his life, presumed a given social totality or final end of history that amounted to little more than "a metaphysically contradictory utopia." History was "essentially irrational," he argued, and "actually only the successive realization of a variety of possibilities." Toying with a historical relativism that likely stemmed from the disappointing antifascist politics of the late 1930s, Flechtheim claimed that every social order, regardless of how just or unjust, was scientifically equal. "Interests and ideals," he explained, "are all always of a relative, historically ephemeral nature." While seeking a way beyond the "optimistic dogmatism" of Hegel and Marx and beyond Arnold J. Toynbee's theory of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations, which enjoyed great popularity in the 1940s and '50s, he acknowledged the danger of too much pessimism and of "a still greater skeptical relativization."⁸ A new philosophy of history must take into account the instability of present circumstances, the ever-shifting nature of one's own historical standpoint, and the possibility of futures that could look radically different than the past.

In a 1946 article in Clark Atlanta University's literary and philosophical journal *Phylon*, Flechtheim rejected the quasi-religious "theodicies" of Hegel, Marx, and Toynbee's philosophies of history because they all forced inconvenient historical facts into a teleological straitjacket. Instead of constructing a grand historical narrative, he painted a "picture [of] history as an endless odyssey of the human species. . . . Yet unlike Odysseus, humanity will never return home to its Ithaca, nor will it ever be rewarded for its trials and tribulations by a faithful and devoted Penelope."⁹ This unrequited or open-ended narrative corresponded to his growing appreciation for the complications of thinking about history and the future. As the Cold War developed, forecasting the future through statistical models, doomsday scenarios, and game theory became a lucrative

⁷ Lili Flechtheim, "Emigration und Remigration," in Christa Dericum and Philipp Wambolt, eds., *Heimat und Heimatlosigkeit* (Berlin: K. Kramer, 1987), 33-38. Both she and Ossip were Jewish. For more on Flechtheim's early biography and engagement with New Beginning in Düsseldorf and in exile, see Ch. 2. See also Mario Keßler, Chs. 1-2, *Ossip K. Flechtheim. Politischer Wissenschaftler und Zukunftsdenker (1909-1998)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007); Ossip K. Flechtheim, "'In unserer Familie war kein Platz für Patriotismus,'" in Hajo Funke, ed., *Die andere Erinnerung. Gespräche mit jüdischen Wissenschaftlern im Exil* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1989), 422-39.

⁸ Ossip K. Flechtheim, "Zur Kritik der Marxschen Geschichtskonzeption" [1939], *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, 3, no. 5 (1965), 141-58.

⁹ Ossip K. Flechtheim, "History: Theodicy or Odyssey," *Phylon*, 7, no. 1 (1946), 78-87 (87). Flechtheim had been developing this Odyssean metaphor since 1939. See "Zur Kritik der Marxschen Geschichtskonzeption" (1939), op. cit.: "If one wants to visualize [history's] essence in a poetic image, then it resembles best an Odyssean journey [*Odyseeischen Irrfahrt*], with the only difference being that we know neither the beginning nor the end of this epic poem" (150).

industry in service of the great-power rivalry.¹⁰ Increasingly Flechtheim saw his task in the new discipline of political science as saving the future from the present geopolitical and socioeconomic configuration: namely, through the critical investigation of alternative futures not determined by current power constellations. All this he hoped to accomplish in the name of a socialist but not necessarily Marxist humanism.

His own Odyssean journey did eventually bring him back to Ithaca. In the 1951-52 academic year he accepted a guest professorship at the Institute for Political Science (IfPW) in Berlin. When the year was up he elected not to accept tenure at Colby College and instead, as an *extraordinarius*, to join the faculty of the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik in Berlin, soon to be known as the Otto Suhr Institute (OSI). Scholars have examined Flechtheim's work within the German discipline of political science as well as his continued engagement with Soviet studies.¹¹ But they have paid insufficient attention to the relationship between his early futurological work and his later political engagement inside and outside the SPD.

Flechtheim first used the term futurology in a footnote in 1943,¹² but it took center stage in his short 1945 essay in the *Journal of Higher Education* called "Teaching the Future." Listing ancient prophets like Cassandra and Jeremiah and Renaissance prognosticators like Nostradamus, he observed that thinking about the future had "been both the sacred preserve of the genius and the happy hunting ground of the charlatan." But he was careful to historicize the prophetic or utopian imagination. In the "relatively static age" before the bourgeois revolutions, social change proceeded so slowly that past, present, and future appeared as "basically identical, each constituting but a link in the endless chain of repetitious events which makes up the whole of human development." In the modern age of crisis and rapid social change, however, "the future appears to be basically different from the past." The advance of secularization, rationalization, and scientific progress had enabled people of Flechtheim's day "for the first time in human history, to attempt what might be called a scientific prognosis"—that is, not merely idle speculation or positivist projection of present conditions into the future, but a critical evaluation of all possible scenarios and a realistic estimate of the most likely course of events. "Instead of consulting the stars," Flechtheim proclaimed, "the 'futuresologist' of 1945 can get his [clues] from historians and sociologists, from philosophers and psychologists, from political scientists and economists." Futurology would thus constitute a total, interdisciplinary field of research drawing on a diverse set of authorities including

¹⁰ See Jenny Andersson, "The Great Future Debate and the Struggle for the World," *American Historical Review*, 117, no. 5 (Dec. 2012), 1411-30; Kaya Tolon, "Futures Studies: A New Social Science Rooted in Cold War Strategic Thinking," in Mark Solovey and Hamilton Cravens, eds., *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45-62.

¹¹ See for example Mario Keßler, *Kommunismuskritik im westlichen Nachkriegsdeutschland. Franz Borkenau, Richard Löwenthal, Ossip Flechtheim* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010); Hubertus Buchstein, *Politikwissenschaft und Demokratie. Wissenschaftskonzeption und Demokratietheorie sozialdemokratischer Nachkriegspolitologen in Berlin* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1992).

¹² Ossip K. Flechtheim, "Toynbee and the Webers," *Phylon*, 4, no. 3 (Sept. 1943), 248-64 (248n2), reprinted in Flechtheim, *History and Futurology* (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1966). Privately he had asked his friend John Herz already in October 1942 what he thought about a course of study oriented toward the future: "I would suggest futurology as a name." Qtd. in Keßler, *Ossip K. Flechtheim*, op. cit., 80.

(but not limited to!) Hegel, Marx, Saint-Simon, Comte, Pareto, Spengler, Sorokin, Freud, Fromm, Trotsky, Croce, Henry Adams, Berdyaev, Mannheim, and Huizinga.¹³

After this hodgepodge list of intellectual heavyweights Flechtheim ventured his first futurological hypothesis. For Western civilization at the end of the Second World War there existed two alternatives: further decline as the result of “wars and revolutions, of crises and disintegrations, leading up to a complete breakdown of modern society and a regression in all fields of human achievement”; or “the slow and painful emergence of a world equilibrium, primarily brought about through conquest and revolution and in part achieved through accommodation and rational compromise.” Here Flechtheim revised the Luxemburgian alternative of socialism or barbarism into a formula befitting New Beginning’s dominant postwar mood: either realistic and rational renewal, or anarchy and a new “dark age.” Opting for renewal, he hoped for the creation of a “new world state” and the development of a just “global society” that would enable a fuller range of “cultural creativeness.”¹⁴

The teacher of futurology, Flechtheim stipulated, could not draw on just one disciplinary perspective or simply assign a new textbook. Instead, this teacher must be “a truly creative scholar with a wide socio-cultural background and a vital interest in the forces of our age.” He surely had himself in mind. “Though an active participant in the life of his century,” he continued, this scholar “would have to be, for the purposes and duration of this course [in futurology], a dispassionate and disinterested observer of things future.” His Weberian appeal to non-partisan scientific objectivity suited his somewhat precarious position in American academia. But he hinted at his true belief when he suggested that students of futurology would learn to “adapt themselves with a sense of responsibility to the historically and culturally inevitable or withstand it individually with knowledge and personal conviction.” Between resignation and resistance Flechtheim favored the latter course of action.¹⁵

Despite his skepticism of textbook-style teaching, he in fact edited a textbook on the *Fundamentals of Political Science* (1952) that integrated his nascent futurological ideas into the established categories of the discipline. Although in the preface he stressed “the relationship of political science to the other social and cultural disciplines,” later in his “Delimitation of the Field” he differentiated political science as “the specialized social science of political power.” Implicitly setting his approach apart from the discipline’s traditional assumptions, he identified the “polity”—the primary object of political scientific inquiry—as “the realm of today and tomorrow, not that of eternity or the remote future.” One should beware thinking “what happened in the past or what is

¹³ Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Teaching the Future: A Contribution to the Intellectual and Moral Growth of the Participants,” *Journal of Higher Education*, 16, no. 9 (Dec. 1945), 460-65, reprinted in Flechtheim, *History and Futurology* (1966).

¹⁴ Flechtheim, “Teaching the Future.” In his Introduction to a later German edition of his former New Beginning colleague Evelyn Anderson’s book *Hammer or Anvil* (1945), Flechtheim identified Luxemburg’s alternative of “socialism or downfall into barbarism” as one of the guiding theoretical principles of New Beginning. Flechtheim, Introduction to Evelyn Anderson, *Hammer oder Amboss. Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1981), vi.

¹⁵ Flechtheim, “Teaching the Future.” He returned to the theme of futurology in 1949 with “Futurology – The New Science of Probability?” [1949], in *History and Futurology* (1966), op. cit., 69-80, originally published as the two separate essays “Futurology: The New Science?,” *Forum*, 111, no. 4 (Apr. 1949), and “Futurology – The Science of Probability,” *Midwest Journal*, 2, no. 1 (Winter 1949).

happening in the present is all that is possible.” “The future, too,” he reminded his college student reader, “contains possibilities, and what appears impossible today might be the reality of tomorrow.” Even in considering harsh political realities, cool-headed statesmanship, and the “tragic dilemma” of politics versus ethics, students of political science must entertain the possibility of a future “‘postpolitical’ society in which voluntary and rational acceptance of competent guidance takes the place of government. Then, and only then, would political power vanish from the earth”—and presumably also the discipline of political science.¹⁶

Flechtheim liked thinking in counterfactuals and posing speculative alternatives. The “past does not predetermine the future,” he wrote, and indeed if anything it was the other way around: awareness of possible futures may influence our interpretation of the past and our decisions in the present. The final part of the *Fundamentals* textbook bore the portentous title “Utopia or 1984.” Like Richard Löwenthal, Franz Borckenau, Walter Loewenheim and others in the Org/NB orbit, Flechtheim viewed the mid-twentieth century moment as a “crisis of our civilization.” As wars persisted, the threat of atomic weapons grew, and society underwent constant upheaval, two main challenges to the status quo would arise: totalitarianism and “the third force.” Communism and fascism, though based on “distinct and distinguishable movements and ideologies,” both functioned as totalitarian “secular religions” that threatened further descent into barbarism. This was what George Orwell had in mind when he published the great dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Flechtheim’s great alternative to totalitarianism, the third force, encompassed in contrast all “dynamic, democratic, and humanist movements”: “They range all the way from Christian Democratic or Christian Socialist movements of the Catholic center to nonreligious or antireligious socialist, syndicalist, and anarchist groups of the revolutionary left.” This “great coalition” model of a third force lacked the “clear-cut and unequivocal” ideology of fascism or communism, he admitted, but for that reason its loosely organized components offered the best chance at a pragmatic and progressive solution to the civilizational crisis. The third force would hopefully steer a course between the 1984 of “extreme affirmation of power” and the utopia of “its total rejection.”¹⁷

In Flechtheim’s interpretation, political science was inherently future-oriented. It taught the modern humanist “that the unbroken continuity of our civilization is not to be taken for granted, and that both totalitarianism and [barbarism] are serious possibilities; but it also makes it clear that humanism’s cause is not yet lost, that it has a genuine and perhaps equal chance.” Again we see Flechtheim riffing on the old Luxemburgian alternative of socialism or barbarism, although for an American college audience he saw fit to rename socialism “democratic humanism.”¹⁸

He tried to popularize his new science among scholars in the United States, having enthusiastically circulated an offprint of his “Teaching the Future” article to leading intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, Lewis Mumford, and Pitirim

¹⁶ Ossip K. Flechtheim, ed., *Fundamentals of Political Science* (New York: Ronald, 1952), iv, 9, 11, 19, 25. Wolfgang Abendroth was impressed enough with the textbook to recommend it to the Bund-Verlag for a German edition. See letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim (Berlin-Schöneberg) to Wolfgang Abendroth (Marburg), Oct. 7, 1953, NL Abendroth, 77.

¹⁷ Flechtheim, ed., *Fundamentals*, 38, 551-55.

¹⁸ Flechtheim, ed., *Fundamentals*, 567.

Sorokin. But his idea met with a lukewarm and even chilly reception. Huxley replied perhaps satirically that futurology should be accompanied by “eternitology”: “It is not much use knowing what is likely, given present circumstances, to happen, unless one has clear ideas about man’s Final End, in the light of which those tendencies and their probably outcome can be evaluated.”¹⁹ Regardless of its Final End, futurology’s day had not yet come.

Before his futurological vision could become reality, Flechtheim first had to establish his career as political scientist in Berlin. After arriving at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik (Otto Suhr Institute) in 1952, he channeled his concern about the future into extended analyses of democratic and communist political parties. In his classic study of “The KPD in the Weimar Republic” (1948) he had portrayed German communism as originally a mass movement whose ideology gradually diverged from political reality. Although he stressed the importance of evaluating the history of the KPD from an “objective-scientific” standpoint, he acknowledged that his own subjective bias in favor of a “liberal-democratic-humanistic socialism” would color his analysis.²⁰ He also subjected the Social Democratic Party to critique, tracing its conservative and authoritarian tendencies back to Wilhelmine Germany, decrying the party majority’s support for the war in August 1914, and arguing that already in 1919 it had accommodated itself to the system of “democratic capitalism.”²¹ In this context the radical Left understandably broke away to form the Communist Party; the first great schism of German socialism was inevitable even without Bolshevik interference. But the Bolsheviks did succeed in preventing all subsequent attempts to reunify the socialist movement, in encouraging self-preservationist tendencies within the KPD, and in fueling greater polarization on the Left. The premature deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht accelerated the Bolshevikization of the party and its degeneration into a bureaucratic organization with no mass support among employed workers and little room for maneuver beyond the will of Moscow.²²

In his subsequent analyses of German communism, which drew heavily on the work of New Beginning veterans Richard Löwenthal and Evelyn Anderson,²³ Flechtheim

¹⁹ Qtd. in Keßler, *Ossip K. Flechtheim*, 80. See also Mario Keßler, “Zur Futurologie von Ossip K. Flechtheim,” in Bernd Greiner et al., eds., *Macht und Geist im Kalten Krieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Ed., 2011), 239-57; Keßler, “Between History and Futurology: Ossip K. Flechtheim,” in Keßler and Axel Fair-Schulz, eds., *German Scholars in Exile: New Studies in Intellectual History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 173-211.

²⁰ Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* [1948] (Hamburg: Junius, 1986), 59.

²¹ Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 246-47.

²² Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, 267. See positive reviews of the book by New Beginning members Reinhard Bendix in the *American Sociological Review*, 14, no. 2 (Apr. 1949), and Henry W. Ehrmann in the *American Political Science Review*, 43, no. 2 (Apr. 1949).

²³ See for example his review of Milovan Djilas’ *The New Class* (1957), “Klassenbildung im kommunistischen System?,” *Neue Politische Literatur*, 3, no. 7 (1958), 644-50; Flechtheim, “Die Internationale des Kommunismus 1917-1957,” *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 6, no. 3 (1959), 231-52, reprinted in *Eine Welt oder keine?* (1964) and *Zeitgeschichte und Zukunftspolitik* (1974); Flechtheim, “Der Weg der KPD 1918 bis 1933” [1962], *Eine Welt oder keine?*, 172-92, originally published in *Der Weg in die Diktatur, 1918 bis 1933. Zehn Beiträge* (Munich: Piper, 1962); Flechtheim, “Der Weltkommunismus in der Krise,” *Eine Welt oder keine?*, 221-36, originally published in *Gesellschaft, Staat, Erziehung*, 9 (1964), 160ff.; Flechtheim, *Weltkommunismus im Wandel* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1965); Flechtheim, *Bolschewismus 1917-1967. Von der Weltrevolution zum Sowjetimperium* (Vienna; Frankfurt/Main; Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1967).

always fought on two fronts. Against communist sympathizers he demonstrated how far the KPD had departed from socialist ideals to the point of functioning as a reactionary and counter-revolutionary force. But against uncritical anti-communists he always argued for, on the one hand, the original emancipatory potential of the communist mass movement and, on the other, the diversity of the Soviet bloc and the potential for future progressive reform. Through the back door, then, he brought his futurological perspective to bear on the history of communism: despite his profound disapproval of Stalinism, he always sought to recover that original future vision that had inspired communist movements in the past and might again recapture their politics in the present.

The breadth of Flechtheim's work on political parties in the 1950s and '60s might indicate that he viewed all ideologies and organizations with scientific indifference or objective detachment.²⁴ This was not in fact the case, as both his early futurological forays and, as will be discussed below, his later engagement in West German politics demonstrated. But the work of his friend and colleague in Marburg, Wolfgang Abendroth, left no doubts about that political scientist's true sympathies.

Wolfgang Abendroth: Recovering the "Unitary Moment"

If Flechtheim looked to the future for inspiration, then Abendroth sought to redeem the socialist past. But because of his divided gaze—toward the past tradition of revolutionary socialism and toward the future potential for socialist renewal—colleagues and scholars have depicted him in apparently contradictory ways. For the sociologist and former student of Abendroth Arno Klönne he was a "traditionalist" who preserved the best characteristics of the Old Left. Jürgen Habermas expressed a similar sentiment when he once described Abendroth as a "partisan professor in the land of lackeys [*Mitläufer*]": he "lives in a consciousness that relentlessly makes the past present," treating the events of the 1920s and '30s as if the newspapers just reported them a moment ago. But for the young scholar Richard Heigl he was also a forerunner and "political pedagogue" of the New Left.²⁵

Abendroth's place in the history of the German Left and in the broader intellectual history of the Federal Republic has received renewed attention in the wake of two anniversaries: 2001 marked fifty years since the founding of the Institut für Politikwissenschaft at the University of Marburg, where he decisively shaped the disciplines of political and legal science; and 2006 marked the centennial of his birth, which gave the Hannover publisher Offizin occasion to start issuing his *Gesammelte Schriften* (edited primarily by Michael Buckmiller, three volumes have appeared so far covering the years 1926-1963).²⁶ In addition, that year Andreas Diers published the first

²⁴ See for example Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die deutschen Parteien seit 1945. Quellen und Auszüge* (Berlin: C. Heymann, 1955) and Flechtheim, ed., *Dokumente zur parteipolitischen Entwicklung in Deutschland seit 1945*, 9 Vols. (Berlin: Herbert Wendler, 1962-1971).

²⁵ Arno Klönne, "Ein Traditionalist. Zum Tode von Wolfgang Abendroth," *Vorgänge*, 78, no. 6 (1985), 21-23; Jürgen Habermas, "Partisanenprofessor im Lande der Mitläufer: Der Marburger Ordinarius Wolfgang Abendroth wird am 2. Mai sechzig Jahre alt," *Die Zeit* (Apr. 29, 1966); Richard Heigl, *Oppositionspolitik: Wolfgang Abendroth und die Entstehung der Neuen Linken (1950-1968)* (Hamburg: Argument, 2008).

²⁶ On the anniversary of the Marburg Institute, see Wolfgang Hecker et al., eds., *Politik und Wissenschaft: 50 Jahre Politikwissenschaft in Marburg*, 2 Vols. (Münster: Lit, 2001-2002), especially the contributions by Helga Grebing and Hans Manfred Bock; Friedrich-Martin Balzer et al., eds., *Wolfgang Abendroth, Wissenschaftlicher Politiker. Bio-bibliographische Beiträge* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2001). For

real biography of Abendroth, even though it covered only his early life until his flight from the Soviet Zone in 1948.²⁷ As yet no comprehensive biography exists.

One of the more contentious aspects of his biography in fact concerns his membership (or non-membership) in New Beginning. Later in life Abendroth made a conscious effort to distance himself from New Beginning and its legacy. In a 1977 interview with Barbara Dietrich and Joachim Perels he described NB collectively as “a conspiratorial adventurer.” While acknowledging that he had in fact belonged to the group, he portrayed that period of his life from roughly 1932 to 1937 as one of mistakes, “fantasy,” and false paths. He objected most to the Org/NB’s original conception of the need to infiltrate the existing socialist party organizations. The strict conspiratorial discipline required for such a plan “cut the ground from under our feet”: New Beginning “is an example of how sectarian political processes arise out of isolation. The fetishization of organization, as the ‘New Beginning’ Group practiced it, is also an expression of this isolatedness.”²⁸ Starting in the mid-1960s Abendroth omitted New Beginning whenever he listed the interwar socialist splinter groups. In his reminiscence of the workers’ youth movement in his hometown of Frankfurt, for example, he described the full range of socialist splinter groups from the SAP to ISK and the KPO—but New Beginning was conspicuously absent, presumably relegated to the anonymous “etc.”²⁹ Toward the end of his life he preferred only to discuss his former membership in the KPO.³⁰

literature surrounding his centennial, see Hans-Jürgen Urban et al., eds., *“Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie”. Zur Aktualität von Wolfgang Abendroth* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2006).

²⁷ Andreas Diers, *Arbeiterbewegung – Demokratie – Staat: Wolfgang Abendroth, Leben und Werk 1906-1948* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2006). For more on Abendroth’s biography, see the work of Uli Schöler, “Wolfgang Abendroth – Ergänzungen zu seiner Bibliographie. Mit einigen biographischen Anmerkungen,” *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK)*, 24 (1988), 213ff.; *Die DDR und Wolfgang Abendroth – Wolfgang Abendroth und die DDR: Kritik einer Kampagne* (Hannover: Offizin, 2008); *Wolfgang Abendroth und der “reale Sozialismus”. Ein Balanceakt* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2012); “Wolf(gang) Abendroth,” in Barbara Stambolis, ed., *Jugendbewegt geprägt. Essays zu autobiographischen Texten von Werner Heisenberg, Robert Jungk und vielen anderen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 43-54. Not much scholarship on Abendroth exists in English. Jan-Werner Müller discusses him and the Marburg School briefly as representatives of “the legal road to socialism” in his article “1968 as Event, Milieu and Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 7, no. 1 (2002), 15-37 (21-23).

²⁸ Barbara Dietrich and Joachim Perels, eds., *Wolfgang Abendroth. Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung: Gespräche* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 126-27.

²⁹ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Arbeiterjugendbewegung in Frankfurt” [1978], *Die Aktualität der Arbeiterbewegung* (1985), 72-102, originally published under the title “Einige Vorbemerkungen zur Ausstellung über die Arbeiterjugendbewegung in Frankfurt am Main” in D. Hoffmann et al., eds., *Arbeiterjugendbewegung in Frankfurt, 1904-1945. Material zu einer verschütteten Kulturgeschichte* (Lahn-Giessen: Anabas-Verlag G. Kämpf, 1978). For an earlier example of this practice of omitting NB, see Abendroth, “Historische Funktion und Umfang des Widerstandes der Arbeiterbewegung gegen das Dritte Reich,” in Peter von Oertzen, ed., *Festschrift für Otto Brenner zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1967), 303-21 (307). Later in this essay he mentioned NB among isolated conspiratorial groups composed predominantly of the renewers generation (308-9) and representatives of the social democratic Left in exile (315).

³⁰ Wolfgang Abendroth et al., eds., *Antifaschismus, oder, Niederlagen beweisen nichts, als dass wir wenige sind* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1983). The Stasi kept a copy of Abendroth’s contribution to this book, presumably because it discussed his indictment by the Gestapo and might have revealed evidence about betrayals that the East German authorities could use to discredit or blackmail him. The circumstances of how the Nazis discovered the KPO underground apparatus remain mysterious but most likely involved the

Abendroth's disavowal of New Beginning owed to three main circumstances. First, by the time he joined the group around 1932, he had already run the gamut of leftwing organizations over the previous decade: the Communist Youth, the KPD, the Rote Hilfe, the Free Socialist Youth League (BFSJ), and the KPO. Unlike slightly younger members of the renewers generation, for whom New Beginning could provide the first experience of political militancy and serve the role of primary socialization, Abendroth had already been socialized elsewhere. New Beginning likely seemed to him at the time and in retrospect as a passing episode rather than a life-defining experience. Second, and perhaps more importantly, after the war Abendroth witnessed his former comrades such as Richard Löwenthal drift ever farther away from revolutionary socialism toward a reformed (and he would say conformist) social democracy. New Beginning's legacy was bound up inextricably with the modernization of the SPD and the "Godesberg moment," which alienated left socialists such as Abendroth and Flechtheim. The third reason he distanced himself from New Beginning was that experiments in building a left alternative in postwar Germany always seemed to end in conspiratorial intrigue and political isolation. Abendroth had no interest in recovering that particular legacy of the socialist past.

At Marburg he attempted to counter-balance the overwhelming conservative (and often ex-Nazi) professoriate by outlining a curriculum in political science that emphasized left-wing perspectives, the history of the workers' movement, and a method he later referred to as "political sociology." Every work of political science, argued Abendroth, must recognize methodologically the "moment of unity" where social and historical processes coincide. Unlike Flechtheim, he defined the "political" as "each social activity that either wants to change the *structure of society* (and thus the distribution of power among social groups in society) or to stabilize it through the exercise of power." Because "political behavior" constituted "a specific form of social behavior," political science represented "a special discipline of the science of society, political sociology."³¹

Abendroth totally rejected the Weberian ideal of value-free, objective science. Every study of political sociology must begin with a "meaningful posing of the question" that presumed a theoretical or even ideological standpoint. Ideal types à la Weber only became useful when they were "immanent" to society, that is, when they functioned as "real types."³² Political sociology combined theory and practice and necessitated a certain "partisanship" in its approach. Similar to his Habilitation advisee Jürgen Habermas, Abendroth welcomed a healthy dose of agonism, controversy, and rational debate within his discipline. The scholar could only *approach* some kind of objectivity through dialogue with others and immanent reflection on his or her own subject role. Echoing his friend Flechtheim's preoccupation with futurology, Abendroth described political sociology's "[m]aximum approximation of objective knowledge and actual comprehension of the political process in its historicity and its directedness toward the

confession of member Hans Löwendahl under torture. See Stasi Records Agency (BStU), PA 2671, a copy of which can be found in NL Abendroth, 1239.

³¹ Wolfgang Abendroth, "Politische Wissenschaft als politische Soziologie" [1966], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie. Aufsätze zur politischen Soziologie* (Neuwied; Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), 9-13, emphasis in original.

³² Abendroth's position followed the Lukácsian notion of "objective possibility." See Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), 112.

future.” His redefinition of political science rested on a commitment to a “socialist and democratic humanism” following the scientific model of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: his partisan theory consisted of “a critically renewed Marxism.”³³

He supervised dissertations in a research program coordinated to expand scholarship on and public awareness of working-class resistance to Nazism.³⁴ Similar to other veterans of the socialist splinter groups such as Fritz Erler, he lamented the early Federal Republic’s general ignorance of the German resistance—or at least the exaggerated role assigned to military and aristocratic resistance like the July 20 plot to assassinate Hitler at the expense of more sustained and widespread socialist resistance.

Not least among these projects supervised by Abendroth was Kurt Kliem’s dissertation on *New Beginning* (1957). In conducting research Kliem had immediately encountered the still heated dispute between the founders of the Org/NB around Walter Loewenheim and the “new leadership” around Karl B. Frank and Richard Löwenthal. The latter faction was willing to cooperate with Kliem, sit for interviews, and otherwise provide useful documents for the project. But Loewenheim & Co. refused to aid a dissertation on the so-called “New Beginning” group, a name they associated with Frank and Löwenthal. Walter Dupré for example accused Kliem of writing solely from the perspective of the post-1935 leadership and rejected completely the young scholar’s subject of inquiry.³⁵ Loewenheim’s confidant Henry Hellmann repeated this accusation—

³³ Abendroth, “Politische Wissenschaft als politische Soziologie,” emphasis in original. The Marburg School distilled this approach of political sociology in Wolfgang Abendroth and Kurt Lenk, eds., *Einführung in die politische Wissenschaft* (Bern; Munich: Francke, 1968). Already at Wilhelmshaven he had begun developing a brand of political science that involved extensive historical, sociological, and legal analysis. See Abendroth, “Das Problem der Politischen Wissenschaft,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 66-67, originally published in *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 1 (May 1950), and “Politische Erziehung und Erwachsenenbildung,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 69-72, originally published in *Kulturarbeit. Zeitschrift für Kultur und Heimatpflege*, 2 no. 6 (June 1950). His ideas about political sociology resembled the approach of the Institute for Social Research, reestablished in Frankfurt am Main in 1951. At a Conference on Political Sciences held there on Feb. 9, 1952, Max Horkheimer drew attention to the close relationship between political science and social research. Abendroth and Flechtheim were in attendance. See the conference protocol (Feb. 9, 1952), NL Abendroth, 3. See also Abendroth, “Grundlinien und Ziele wissenschaftlicher Politik,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 278-89, originally delivered as a two-part lecture on Oct. 13 and Oct. 20, 1952, and published in *Vorträge, gehalten anlässlich der Hessischen Hochschulwochen für staatswissenschaftliche Fortbildung, 1952, Bad Homburg* (Berlin; Zurich, 1953), and “Die Aufgaben der Wissenschaft von der Politik im heutigen Deutschland,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 306-7, originally published in *Neuer Vorwärts*, 6, no. 17-18 (May 1, 1953).

³⁴ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Der deutsche politische Widerstand gegen das ‘Dritte Reich’” [1964], in *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 518-33 (527), originally published in *Stimme der Gemeinde* (1964), 426ff. In February 1967 Abendroth took part in a conference in Frankfurt devoted to expanding the study of the *Widerstand* in West Germany. Other participants included Martin Niemöller and Robert Scholl. “Widerstandskampf wird entstellt,” *Neues Deutschland* (Feb. 21, 1967). See also Abendroth, “Die Träger des Widerstandes gegen das Dritte Reich in Deutschland,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 517-21, originally published in *der neue bund* (Zurich), 21, no. 1 (Jan. 1955); Abendroth, “Zum Problem des politischen Scheiterns der deutschen Widerstandskämpfer,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 71-72, originally published in Werner Wille and Heinrich Sperl, eds., *Aufrecht zwischen den Stühlen. K. O. P. Grüße zum 50. Geburtstag am 23. November 1956 für Karl O. Paetel* (Nuremberg, 1956). The latter article mentions the renewers generation as “the non-conformist parts of that generation of intellectuals that came of age under the pressures of the period between the end of the First World War and the victory of Hitler” (72).

³⁵ Letter from Walter Dupré (Kaiserslautern) to Kurt Kliem (Marburg/Lahn), June 18, 1956, NL Abendroth, 1041.

“your manuscript . . . is for me essentially a self-portrait of the Frank/Löwenthal group”—and used the occasion of his 1959 letter to vent his still simmering hatred of Karl Frank and to affirm the Loewenheim circle’s consistent anti-communism.³⁶ Old rivalries died hard, especially amid Cold War hysteria.

Kliem received a warmer response from Fritz Erler and Erwin Schoettle, who scheduled a meeting with him their Bonn political office. But Erler too had some reservations: he urged Kliem to wait to publish the dissertation until after the 1957 federal elections because some of its historical episodes—particularly the so-called “Berlin youth conflict” that involved the expulsion of Erler, Erich Schmidt, et al. from the SPD in 1932 for preparing illegal resistance to the Nazis—might hurt the party’s public image.³⁷ Despite his own reservations about his past membership in New Beginning, Abendroth stepped in to reassure skeptics of Kliem’s reliability and of the dissertation’s scholarly objectivity: “The study of New Beginning will be undertaken so as if possible not to revive the old disputes [*Zwistigkeiten*]. . . . [It] will by no means be handled in such a way as to conduct a belated ostracism [*Scherbengericht*] under the banner of the Cold War.”³⁸ Kliem completed and successfully defended the dissertation, but the interventions of the Loewenheim circle and the political reservations of some of the renewers in Bonn likely prevented him from finding a publisher.³⁹

Regardless of the controversy over Kliem’s dissertation, Abendroth’s students in general produced a remarkable body of scholarship on the Nazi regime, antifascist resistance, and the socialist splinter groups.⁴⁰ The Marburg School curated the heritage of the renewers generation during the 1950s and ’60s. These young scholars predominantly of the Forty-fiver and Sixty-eighter generations commemorated and critically revived the history of the divided workers’ movement, the underground struggle against fascism, exile, and the immediate postwar moment of socialist renewal. Abendroth thought that despite the historiographical biases of scholars in West versus East Germany, the anti-Nazi resistance itself tended historically toward unity (e.g. the collaboration of multiple

³⁶ Letter from Henry Hellmann to Kurt Kliem, Jan. 9, 1959, NB Archives, 61/2.

³⁷ See Ch. 4.

³⁸ Letter from Wolfgang Abendroth to Rudolf Heuseler (Berlin-Britz), May 25, 1956, NL Abendroth, 1041.

³⁹ Only in 1963 did Kliem think he had finally found a publisher (the “Marburger Schriftenreihe” of the Norddeutsche Verlagsanstalt), but that too came to nothing. NL Erler, 3. Kliem worked as Abendroth’s Assistent in Marburg before accepting a professorship in political science at the University of Gießen. From 1985 to 1996 he was also elected Landrat for the SPD of the district Marburg-Biedenkopf in Hesse.

⁴⁰ Among others, Abendroth supervised Rüdiger Altmann’s pioneer work on the concept of the public sphere in German state theory (1954); Arno Klönne on the Hitler Youth (1955); Ermenhild Neusüss-Hunkel on the SS (1955); Werner Link on ISK (1961); Hanno Drechsler on the SAP (1962); Karl Hermann Tjaden on the KPO (1963); Reinhard Kühnl on the Strassers and the Nazi Party Left (1965); Hans Manfred Bock on syndicalism and left communism in the early Weimar Republic (1968); Olaf Ihlau on the Rote Kämpfer (1968); Frank Deppe on Auguste Blanqui’s concept of social revolution (1968); Rüdiger Griepenburg on the German Popular Front (1969); Eberhard Schmidt on postwar Germany’s “impeded” socialist new order (1969); Georg Fülberth on social democratic literary criticism in Wilhelmine Germany (1970); Jutta von Freyberg on the German Revolutionary Socialists (1971); Friedrich-Martin Balzer on the League of Religious Socialists (1972); Bärbel Hebel-Kunze on the SPD’s responses to fascism (1975); Herbert Claas on Bertolt Brecht’s “political aesthetics” (1975); and Barbara Mausbach-Bromberger on working-class resistance to Nazism in Frankfurt (1976).

social groups in the July 20 plot) and thus a critical study of the resistance served the present purpose of reunifying the German people “in humanity and democracy.”⁴¹

Abendroth’s frequent allusions to “unity” and the “unitary moment” betrayed the Hegelian influence on his political and legal theory. In Hegel’s logic “moments” referred to distinct and opposed elements that are preserved and abolished [*aufgehoben*] through a dialectical process; thus, for example, the seeming opposites being and nothingness could achieve dialectical “unity” in becoming. Karl Marx transposed Hegel’s obscure logical scheme into a social and historical key: each discrete historical event constituted a moment of development that only made sense from the perspective of the social totality. Particular moments might recur archetypically given similar historical circumstances, so one could speak of the “welfare state moment” or indeed the “Godesberg moment.”

In a 1957 lecture series at Marburg on “The Political Theory of Marxism,” Abendroth suggested that the “unitary moment” (or “moment of unity”) recurred in the history of Marxism whenever the Hegelian roots of Marx and Engels’ idea of totality were rediscovered. One such moment occurred in the 1920s, when Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch published their monumental works of Marxist humanism and scholars in Moscow, Frankfurt, and elsewhere uncovered the early works of Marx.⁴² Unity of Marxist thought across political and cultural divides created conditions for unity of action, Abendroth argued, especially during economic crises like 1929-30. The collusion of capitalism with fascism and the repression of dissent within Soviet Marxism prevented that interwar “Hegelian consensus” from amounting to much: its progenitors either fell victim to the purges (e.g. David Riazanov), accommodated themselves to Stalinism (Lukács), or fled into exile (the Frankfurt School).⁴³

Another chance at unity, according to Abendroth, came in the immediate postwar years. In Occupied Germany and in much of Europe from 1945 to 1948, there existed a relatively broad consensus in favor of socialism or some form of economic socialization. But the conservative restoration and the exigencies of the Cold War nipped this real chance at socialism in the bud. Just before the SPD’s resounding defeat in the 1957

⁴¹ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Der deutsche politische Widerstand gegen das ‘Dritte Reich’” [1964], in *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 518-33 (533), originally published in *Stimme der Gemeinde* (1964), 426ff. He made the same point about resistance research as a medium for German-German reconciliation in “Historische Funktion und Umfang des Widerstandes,” op. cit., 320. See also Abendroth, “Zum Problem des politischen Scheiterns der deutschen Widerstandskämpfer,” in Werner Wille and Heinrich Sperl, eds., *Aufrecht zwischen den Stühlen K. O. P. Grüße zum 50. Geburtstag am 23. November 1956 für Karl O. Paetel* (Nuremberg: Sperl, 1956), 36ff.; “Widerstandsforschung als geschichtliches Problem,” in *Zehn Jahre Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (VVN). 4. Bundeskongress München vom 17.-19. Mai 1957* (Stuttgart: Druck Heinrich, 1957), 28ff.; “Forschungen über die Widerstandsbewegung in der Deutschen Bundesrepublik,” *Internationale Hefte der Widerstandsbewegung*, no. 1 (1959), 62ff.; “Zur Geschichte des Roten Frontkämpferbundes,” in A. Diemer, ed., *Geschichte und Zukunft: Dem Verleger Anton Hain zum 75. Geburtstag am 4. Mai 1967* (Meisenheim/Glan: A. Hain, 1967), 12-32.

⁴² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. R. Livingstone (MIT Press, 1971); Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* [1923], trans. F. Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). With the cooperation of the SPD Party Archive and the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main, the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow started publishing Marx and Engels’ complete works (MEGA) in 1927, including Marx’s newly discovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (the so-called “Paris Manuscripts”).

⁴³ Lecture transcripts, “Die politische Theorie des Marxismus,” Univ. of Marburg, Summer 1957 and Winter 1957-58, NL Abendroth, 365-367.

federal elections, Abendroth expanded on this idea of Germany’s “missed chance at socialism” [*versäumter Sozialismus*] in an article that examined the constitutional development of the Federal Republic. He claimed that the occupation powers systematically suppressed genuine democratic forces in immediate postwar Germany. A twin process of “Stalinization” in the East and “restoration” in the West had stifled hopes for German national unity and democratic socialism.⁴⁴

Following the example of the dissident socialist historian Arthur Rosenberg as well the legal philosophers Hermann Heller and Hugo Sinzheimer, Abendroth drew an important distinction between “antagonistic society” and “political democracy,” or, as he sometimes expressed it, social reality versus constitutional norms. He was a vocal critic of German labor lawyer Hans Carl Nipperdey, whom he accused of abusing the Basic Law’s liberal rights in defense of private property and economic privilege.⁴⁵ Despite its preference for individual liberal rights—quite understandable in a post-totalitarian society, Abendroth acknowledged—the Basic Law by no means conserved the existing social order. None of its articles guaranteed liberal capitalism; the “homo oeconomicus” of liberal thought was not the intended subject of the Basic Law. Given the description of “a democratic and social federal state” in Article 20 and the equality provision of Article 3, he argued, the “Basic Law reckons instead with a long period of transformation of existing society into one of social democracy and therefore has opened the lasting constitutional possibility of an ever more social intervention into the order of property.” Abendroth affirmed the role of an active state that shaped society into social democracy, a process entirely consistent with West German constitutional norms.⁴⁶

He anticipated objections by liberal critics who feared the power of an overbearing or dictatorial state. The real alternative was not between the individual and the state, he countered, but rather between one social group and another, each vying for political power. For Abendroth, the liberal rule of law [*Rechtsstaat*] did not contradict the social state [*Sozialstaat*]⁴⁷—and in fact, “equality before the law” (Art. 3 § 1 GG) could only be realized fully through greater socioeconomic equality. Article 15 provided for economic socialization measures [*Vergesellschaftung*], which he interpreted as the Basic Law keeping the future open for a democratic socialist state.⁴⁷

But to describe this argument as “the legal road to socialism” as does the historian Jan-Werner Müller in a way misses Abendroth’s point.⁴⁸ The German constitution provided a framework for socialist politics, but laws and legislation alone would never

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Die verfassungspolitische Entwicklung des Bundes” [1957], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 48-61, originally published in *Geist und Tat* (1957), 15ff. One of Abendroth’s students, Eberhard Schmidt, expanded on this theme in his dissertation and first book “The Impeded New Order, 1945-1952” (1970). Schmidt, *Die verhinderte Neuordnung 1945 bis 1952. Zur Auseinandersetzung um die Demokratisierung der Wirtschaft in den westlichen Besatzungszonen und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970). See also the transcript of a talk on the theme “Versäumter Sozialismus” in the series “Unter uns gesagt,” Bayerischer Rundfunk, July 30, 1962, NL Abendroth, 712.

⁴⁵ Abendroth, “Die verfassungspolitische Entwicklung des Bundes,” 58-59.

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Zum Begriff des demokratischen und sozialen Rechtsstaates im Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” [1954], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie*, 109-38, originally published in *Aus Geschichte und Politik. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Ludwig Bergstraesser* (Düsseldorf: Droste-Verlag, 1954), 279ff.

⁴⁷ Abendroth, “Zum Begriff des demokratischen und sozialen Rechtsstaates.”

⁴⁸ Müller, “1968 as Event, Milieu and Ideology,” op. cit.

suffice to realize a new social order. “The mere fact of the existence of a democratized parliamentary constitution,” he wrote in 1954, “offers *no guarantee for peaceful further development into a democratic society.*” One could never entirely trust the dominant class to respect the law and not resort to force during a state of emergency.⁴⁹ Abendroth and the Marburg School thought that the only guarantee for democracy lay in mass working-class and extra-parliamentary mobilization and in a conscious recovery of the Marxist humanist unity of theory and practice. The mainstream SPD too sought such a guarantee, but its democratic road did not exactly lead to socialism.

The Critics of Godesberg

Both Flechtheim and Abendroth used their academic positions to influence public and inner-party debate about the future of socialism in Germany. The position of left socialists in the party had grown weaker since the general defeat of the factory co-determination movement in 1951-52, the death of Kurt Schumacher, and the consolidation of Christian Democratic hegemony in the Federal Republic after the 1953 federal elections. After the SPD’s 1954 party convention in West Berlin, the executive board formed a Program Commission to revise the guiding theoretical and political principles of the party. This commission worked intermittently over the next five years to draft a new program, debating each point in the pages of the party’s theoretical journal *Die Neue Gesellschaft* and elsewhere. It soon became clear to left socialists on the commission like Abendroth that the party executive favored the non-Marxist “reformers” faction and if necessary would use illiberal means to ensure its triumph.

Flechtheim and Abendroth’s initial solution to the SPD’s repeated electoral failures was to strengthen the party’s base, to continue exposing the authoritarian tendencies of West German politics and society, and to mobilize outside of parliament through trade union action and protest demonstrations on the model of England’s anti-nuclear Aldermaston marches (called Easter marches in Germany). The SPD executive board, which by 1959 consisted of a majority of renewers (including three former members of NB: Eler, Knoeringen, and Schoettle), decided to pursue the opposite course: to leave the party base alone, to tolerate the Federal Republic’s authoritarian tendencies, to attract more middle-class voters, and thus through elections to enlarge the party’s parliamentary faction. This strategy essentially corresponded to what the British Marxist Ralph Miliband called “parliamentary socialism” and in a German context immediately brought to mind the figure of Eduard Bernstein.⁵⁰

Never having shared Social Democracy’s faith in “parliamentarism,” Abendroth worried that too much focus on attracting voters and winning elections would distract from the substantive democratic transformation of society and might result in the degeneration of socialist politics into “mere ad campaigns” [*bloße Reklameschlachten*]. For Abendroth, parliamentary politics functioned only as a “coordination station” and

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Demokratie als Institution und Aufgabe” [1954], *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 407-16 (412), emphasis in original. This article first appeared in *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 1, no. 1 (July-Aug. 1954) and was revised in *Arbeiterklasse, Staat und Verfassung* (1975).

⁵⁰ Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961); Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein’s Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia UP, 1952).

guarantor of democratic pluralism and vitality in society as a whole, not as an end in itself.⁵¹

Political parties that did not aim to transform existing society in any substantive way, Abendroth wrote in 1956, had no need for high-flown party programs. When it desired only “to implement modifications within this existing system,” all a party needed was an occasional “campaign platform” that it could alter from one election to the next. He still hesitated to place the SPD in this category. Although it had failed in the 1953 election, the SPD at least had the Dortmund Action Program as a starting point. So long as the economy continued to grow, the SPD could safely function as one democratic party among others within the existing system. But at a moment of economic crisis like 1929, he warned, fickle voters of all classes would switch allegiances to totalitarian parties. By providing a clear, emancipatory “counter-image” to existing society, the SPD had in the past and would again in the future transform into “the point of attraction for the broad masses.” For this reason Abendroth did not think that the party could rely on business as usual. It needed to develop a new program of guiding principles [*Grundsatzprogramm*] that proceeded from a critical analysis of the social totality. This would prove difficult, he admitted, given the dangers of bureaucratization, adaptation to daily political demands, and specialization of partial areas of competence within the party. “Expert thinking” [*Expertendenken*]⁵²—and here Abendroth might have had the foreign policy expert Fritz Erler in mind—threatened to undermine the party’s commitment to total social transformation. Only by working out a unified theory and indeed recovering the Marxian unitary moment could the SPD hope for lasting success. Precisely because of the Federal Republic’s “economic miracle” and the improved cultural standard of the masses, the situation favored a peaceful socialist transformation.⁵² But the party leadership thought otherwise.

Despite the growing isolation of left socialists, minority critics like Abendroth and Flechtheim still believed before the Godesberg party convention in strengthening the SPD as the only conceivable agent of socialist transformation in Germany. “Today a radical break with tradition is neither possible nor necessary,” wrote Flechtheim in a set of theses he worked out after the party’s defeat in the 1957 federal elections. He agreed with Abendroth that while an expanding economy did create conditions favorable to Bernsteinian revisionism, the global crises accompanying decolonization and the Cold War aided the development of a “left-radical Marxist wing” and a robust affirmation of the democratic socialist alternative. Historically the orthodox Marxist center of the party had mediated between the right-wing revisionists and the left-wing radicals, but since the death of Schumacher the SPD Center had gradually withered away. Because the modernizing “reformers,” which he viewed as functionally equivalent to the revisionists of old, believed in the progressive improvement of conditions within capitalism and thus the automatic transition into a more social democracy, the ascendancy of the party’s right wing rendered the SPD “poorly armed to face total crises and catastrophes.” Flechtheim

⁵¹ Abendroth, “Demokratie als Institution und Aufgabe.” The particular sentence about “ad campaigns” referred to capitalist interest groups and the politics of the CDU, but clearly Abendroth viewed the tendency as a danger also within the SPD. For Flechtheim’s critique of CDU campaign finance, see “Politische Entwicklung und Finanzierung der CDU,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 5, no. 3 (May-June 1958), 182-89.

⁵² Wolfgang Abendroth, “Warum Parteiprogramm?,” *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, 3, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1956), 283-91.

warned that the SPD in its current state risked repeating the mistakes of 1914, 1918-19, 1932-33, 1945-46, etc. Not as strong as it could be, the SPD was also not as weak as left socialists often claimed. Historically the party had shown strength in the defensive, he observed, which owed to its good organization and administration plus the conservative traditionalism of German voters who tended to remain loyal to their party. But since future crises and catastrophes were always possible, the party must prepare itself for a “revolutionary-peaceful development.” Flechtheim hoped for at least “a minimum program” that would unite the various party factions on a provisional platform adaptable to changing conditions.⁵³

In addition to strengthening the left wing within the party, Flechtheim also encouraged the consolidation of the left within the German Political Science Association (DVPW). The socialist political scientists must work together, he wrote to Abendroth in 1957, to counter the influence of conservatism and uncritical liberalism on the shape of the discipline. The faction around Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz, Theodor Eschenburg, Arnold Bergstraesser, and Adolf Grabowsky—the latter of whom edited the discipline’s flagship *Zeitschrift für Politik*—opposed critical approaches such as Flechtheim’s futurology and Abendroth’s political sociology. Flechtheim proposed coordinating with Hermann Brill, Otto Stammer, Gerhard Weisser, “and other Sozis,” but Abendroth replied that he doubted whether it was worth the effort. The DVPW had a natural conservative tendency that internal factionalism probably could not improve.⁵⁴

Of more pressing concern for left socialists was the organizational transformation of the SPD in the wake of the failed 1957 election. A seven-man commission including the former New Beginning members Fritz Eler and Waldemar von Knoeringen set about restructuring the party to limit the power of the executive board (and thus of Erich Ollenhauer, the longstanding general secretary) and to expand the influence of the parliamentary faction. District-level decision-making would be subsumed more and more under provincial [*Land*] control in an effort to better coordinate the party’s campaign strategy at all levels. In Abendroth’s interpretation, these changes indicated a transfer of power from the party’s democratic base and middle functionaries to the “professional politicians” at the top. The “de-democratizing effect” of these centralization measures also favored the ascendancy of what he labeled the SPD’s right wing of “social liberals” like Heinrich Deist and Willy Brandt, who allegedly wanted the “de-politicization of party debate” and a limitation even of traditional social democratic reformism. In 1958 Abendroth still counted on Herbert Wehner, who “remains the great hope for all forces [on the party Left] that want to prevent Social Democracy from completely sliding into

⁵³ “Flechtheim Thesen” (Nov. 1957), NL Abendroth, 80. For Abendroth’s thoughts after the 1957 federal election, see Abendroth, “Germany: Doubts and Dilemmas,” trans. Suzanne Keller, *Dissent*, 5, no. 1 (Winter 1958), 55-60, originally published as “Die Chancen der deutschen Sozialdemokratie nach dem 15. September 1957,” *Geist und Tat* (1957), 366ff., and reprinted in *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967).

⁵⁴ Letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim (Berlin-Schöneberg) to Wolfgang Abendroth, July 31, 1957, and letter from Abendroth to Flechtheim (Berlin-Schöneberg), Dec. 10, 1957, NL Abendroth, 80. Abendroth was also more skeptical of people like Weisser, who aligned himself with the SPD right-wing reformers. Stammer actually was a sociologist but apparently also stayed active in the DVPW.

the role of a mere social-liberal party and to preserve it as a democratic organization of the workers and the working class.”⁵⁵ This hope would soon prove sadly misplaced.

Abendroth often expressed his dissatisfaction with the current SPD program draft. He regretted especially that the draft contained no real historical analysis of the relationship between the state and the workers’ movement but only Adolf Arndt’s philosophical speculation about the “essence” of democracy. Although Arndt’s speculation did expose the limitations of representative democracy, it did not sufficiently expose the “class nature and class structure” of Federal Republic. In bourgeois society, Abendroth explained, “only the workers, their unions, and their political parties embody democracy to its full extent and through their class struggle against the class domination of finance capital could subordinate state authority . . . to democracy and fill democratic constitutional norms with vital content.” Democracy on paper was not at all safe from the authoritarian and often ex-Nazi state bureaucrats. “For bourgeois constitutional theory,” on the other hand, “democracy is . . . the duty of the people to say ‘yes’ to the plans of its high authorities.” What the SPD program draft lacked and desperately needed was a real historical critique of state sovereignty in relation to political democracy that went beyond mere “humanistic” speculation.⁵⁶ Flechtheim echoed his friend’s concerns when he described the program discussion as “long-winded [and] insufficiently concrete.”⁵⁷

But more controversial than the party’s organizational restructuring or even the debate over political democracy was the issue of Marxism. Already in 1954 with the founding of the party’s theoretical journal *Die Neue Gesellschaft* Abendroth found himself defending the continued viability and necessity of Marxist method. He took an immediate dislike to the journal’s young editor Ulrich Lohmar, a leader of the nascent Socialist German Student League (SDS) and doctoral advisee of Helmut Schelsky. Lohmar practiced his teacher’s brand of positivist sociology, although Abendroth would claim not half as well. Quickly the young editor aligned himself with the party’s right-wing reformers and set about attacking Social Democracy’s Marxist tradition. In answering his attacks, Abendroth insisted that portraying Marxism as an inflexible “dogma” unable to overcome its narrow nineteenth-century worldview set up an indefensible straw man: “Marxism is not a dogma but rather a social scientific method.” Still, Abendroth welcomed a plurality of views within the SPD following the best example of Marx and Engels, who never sought to exclude religious or ethical beliefs in socialism—despite subjecting them to critique. While the present viability of Marxism did pose a problem worthy of discussion, Abendroth admitted, “Lohmar’s article shows that kind of ‘discussion’ which threatens to invalidate the natural commandments of loyalty among comrades who err and endangers the party and along with it the future of socialism and democracy.” Willfully misrepresenting Marx’s class analysis and questioning the trustworthiness of Marxists in the party, as Lohmar had done, created a

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Die Diskussion in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie nach der Bundestagswahl 1957,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 222-25, originally published in *SoPo*, 5, no. 2 (1958).

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Arbeiterklasse, Staat und Verfassung. Volksbefragungsverbot und Programmwurf,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 238-41, originally published in *SoPo*, 5, no. 10-11 (1958).

⁵⁷ Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Zur Grundsatzdebatte: Langatmig – zu wenig konkret,” *Berliner Stimme* (Mar. 28, 1959).

witch-hunt atmosphere that threatened both inner-party democracy as well as the theoretical consciousness necessary for a socialist transformation of society.⁵⁸

In 1958 Abendroth wrote an article in the journal *Junge Kirche* dedicated to the question, “Is Marxism ‘Obsolete’?” Obviously his answer was “no.” Abendroth outlined four major areas of Marx and Engels’ thought that had unjustly come under attack in the context of West Germany’s economic miracle: the phenomena of alienation and reification in history; the moment of totality in social-historical development; class struggle; and the shape of the future “communist society.” Drawing on Lukács and the interwar Marxist humanists, Abendroth demonstrated how the basic problematic of alienation [*Entfremdung*] remained relevant both as a framework for interpreting the worker’s relationship to the means of production and the individual’s place in society more generally. Nuclear armament and the continuous advancement of technology furthermore made the problems of reification and humans’ unreflective domination of nature into contemporary themes, as evidenced by Horkheimer and Adorno’s magisterial *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/47). As for the moment of totality or “unity,” Abendroth again drew on the interwar thought of Lukács but added that the new global concerns of the postwar world made the perspective of totality even more necessary. Through commerce and imperialism, capitalism had actually manufactured the unity of the globe. Marxist method provided a means of dialectically mediating between isolated political events and their broader social, historical, and global significance.⁵⁹

One of the greatest challenges to Marxist theory came in form of West German sociologist Helmut Schelsky’s model of a “leveled middle-class society” [*nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft*]. To adherents of this model the classical assumption of bourgeois versus proletarian class conflict no longer applied. But Abendroth cited several factors that belied this perception. Drawing on C. Wright Mills popular book *The Power Elite* (1956) he argued that the tendency toward centralization of power into the hands of a few had accelerated. The allegedly “new middle classes” in fact constituted an

⁵⁸ Wolfgang Abendroth, “‘Ethischer’ Sozialismus, Marxismus und Demokratie. Eine sozialdemokratische Antwort an Gerhard Weißer und Ulrich Lohmar,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 580-83, originally published in *Vorwärts* (Dec. 30, 1955). The debate between Abendroth and Lohmar continued with the former’s letter to the editor of *Vorwärts*, which the paper elected not to publish. In it Abendroth further critiqued Lohmar’s elitist and bureaucratic conception of pluralist democracy (i.e. a social balance between competing groups of “interested and capable” people) and asked what gave Lohmar the right “to reproach [certain] social democrats for deviating from the present objective of the party.” Abendroth, “Das Problem der Demokratie in der Parteidebatte. Eine zweite Antwort an Ulrich Lohmar und Gerhard Weisser,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 85-88, originally published in *Funken*, 7, no. 3 (1956). He was also very critical of Lohmar’s editorial practices at *Die Neue Gesellschaft*. Within the first few issues, Kurt Hiller and Rolf Reventlow complained that their articles had been cut down without their permission. Abendroth wrote to Lohmar that such practices were “journalistically outrageous [*unmöglich*] and should *under no circumstances* happen again.” Letter from Abendroth to Ulrich Lohmar (Cologne-Niehl), Aug. 23, 1954, NL Abendroth, 10, emphasis in original.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Ist der Marxismus ‘überholt’?” [1958], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 347-63, originally published in *Junge Kirche* (1958), 65ff. On the seventieth anniversary of Marx’s death in 1953, Abendroth had already argued that history had proven Marx right. Abendroth, “Die Geschichte gab Marx recht. Eine Studie zu seinem 70. Todestag,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 302-5, originally published in *Hannoversche Presse*, no. 62 (Mar. 14, 1953). See also Abendroth, “Thesen zum Referat ‘Die heutige Bedeutung des historischen Materialismus’,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, 392-93, originally delivered at a meeting of the Kommission sozialdemokratischer Wissenschaftler, Apr. 12-14, 1954, in Mehlem.

expanded working class, which he grouped under the category of “jobholders” [*Arbeitnehmer*]. Not limiting himself to the traditional industrial proletariat, he called everyone who worked for a wage or salary and did not actually own the means of production (or earn most of his or her pay from stock dividends, like managers and CEOs) “workers” in this most general sense. Finally, Abendroth engaged with the prevalent theory of the “managerial revolution” (James Burnham) by noting that Marx and Engels had actually foreseen it already in the mid-nineteenth century. The functional divide between managers and owners did not change the essence of class struggle. Advanced capitalism was structurally different from the “high capitalism” of Marx and Engels’ day, he admitted, but the basic problems of capitalist development remained the same. Marxist method would stay alive by mastering ever new “moments.” With these counterarguments that demonstrated the actuality of class antagonism, Abendroth portrayed Schelsky’s model as the true ideology of a classless society.⁶⁰

Marx’s idea of a classless society looked much different. Abendroth addressed the frequent criticism that the “communist society” claimed to be a paradise and to mark the end of history by observing how Marx and Engels’ idea of a future classless society did not exclude new antagonisms—these would just not be class antagonisms. Their socialist goal thus did not function as the “end of history” in a chiliastic or Hegelian sense. Engels had written explicitly that history would go on after reaching the final stage of socialist transformation, but only from that point “would humans make their [own] history in full consciousness.” And even if socialist society symbolized a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom, labor would persist and jobs still had to be done (*Capital*, Vol. 3). The difference lay in socialism’s conscious and rational control over natural necessity and the means of production.⁶¹

Challenges to Marxism in economic policy arose from a resurgence of free-market ideology that influenced even prominent social democratic ideologues like Heinrich Deist.⁶² As the SPD executive board member responsible for economic and social policy, Deist drafted the economic section of the Godesberg Program on the philosophy that “socialization” and “nationalization” were antiquated remnants of socialist tradition that the modernized party should abandon. Because Abendroth and the other left socialists put so much weight in the socialization article of the Basic Law (Art. 15), which they saw as the only guarantee for the future transformation of the Federal Republic into a genuine social democracy, they were bound to greet Deist’s ideas with skepticism bordering on contempt. “How should we defend the constitution and democracy,” Abendroth wondered, “when we ourselves scrap that constitutional article created by us [social democrats] . . . which not only allowed but demanded socialization measures?” Despite his logical critiques, Abendroth was wrong when he predicted that

⁶⁰ Abendroth, “Ist der Marxismus ‘überholt’?”

⁶¹ Abendroth, “Ist der Marxismus ‘überholt’?” Flechtheim also published several defenses of Marxism at this time, even if tended to be more critical of Marx and Engels. See for example Flechtheim, “Über Marx hinaus?,” *Vorwärts* (June 26, 1959); “Karl Marx und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie” [1961], *Eine Welt oder keine?* (1964), 151-71, originally published in *Marxismus-Leninismus. Geschichte und Gestalt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961).

⁶² On the origins of neoliberal ideology in West Germany, see Anthony J. Nicholls, *Freedom with Responsibility: The Social Market Economy in Germany, 1918-1963* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1994).

the new free-market ideology of the SPD would drive voters away and lead to “precisely those electoral defeats that it wanted to avoid.”⁶³

While left socialist critics like Abendroth, Flechtheim, and the Hannover political scientist Peter von Oertzen attempted to demonstrate the adaptability of Marxist method to the new challenges of advanced capitalism, they lamented the unhappy “adaptation” of the SPD to existing society and bourgeois political norms. For several years left socialists had criticized the institutionalization and bureaucratization of the party apparatus. In the broader context of Christian Democrat hegemony and the “restoration” of pre-1933 and even ex-Nazi elites in society and the economy, Abendroth and Flechtheim developed a theory of Social Democracy’s adaptation or conformist accommodation [*Anpassung*] to the dominant power structure.

In a critique published just before the Godesberg party convention, Abendroth contrasted the social democratic tradition of robust party programs that nearly always contained “a critical scientific analysis of existing society” (he had the Erfurt and Heidelberg programs foremost in mind, regardless of their other shortcomings) with the present program draft of “adaptation and resignation.” Even the Bernsteinian revisionists, he claimed, had not dared displace the working class from the center of party theory and political orientation. By abandoning the working class in favor of the broad middle class, the program draft broke decisively with the socialist tradition. Instead of summarizing the socialist standpoint from the perspective of the social and historical totality, the program draft spoke only of “core values” [*Grundwerte*] in a manner no different from the other bourgeois parties. The program furthermore limited itself entirely to the liberal model of representative democracy without mentioning the need for active and direct participation of the entire people in political life. Abendroth accused the drafters of the program, most of whom belonged to the renewers generation, of ironically forgetting the key experiences of their own generation: the interwar crisis, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, and the defeat and division of the workers’ movement by fascism. The “neoliberal pipe dreams” and ideology of “freedom” (“for whom?” he asked) that suffused the program draft did nothing to combat monopoly capitalism; it even helped it. Abendroth took it as a bad sign that the program had found a “friendly echo” in the bourgeois press.⁶⁴

Abendroth and the left socialists’ critique of the Godesberg moment was threefold: *adaptation* to the language and thought of existing capitalist society; *resignation* of the task of transforming existing society in any substantive way; and *alienation* of the party organization from genuine socialist ideals and traditions. The program draft, argued Abendroth, panders to “the illusions of the average voter” in restorationist West Germany during a period of economic growth. It “obscures and flattens” the differences between the political parties, rendering the SPD essentially the same as the CDU or FDP. Social Democracy’s new program should instead offer voters a real alternative to existing society. If the current draft were actually adopted as the party’s

⁶³ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Vom Revisionismus zur ‘freiheitlichen Wirtschaftspolitik’. Einige Bemerkungen zu der programmatischen Broschüre von Dr. Heinrich Deist,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 184-89, originally published in *Funken*, 8, no. 10 (1957).

⁶⁴ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Ein Programm-Entwurf der Anpassung und Resignation,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 320-23, originally published in *SoPo*, 6, no. 10 (Oct. 1959), and the SDS journal *Standpunkt*, no. 3-4 (Oct.-Dec. 1959).

official program, Abendroth seemed almost to threaten, then any future success by the socialist party of the working class would occur not because of but “in spite of the program.”⁶⁵

The SPD executive board might easily have interpreted that as a threat of factionalism or inner-party manipulation. Although he had always avoided open confrontation with the party leaders, preferring instead to retain a critical foothold within the ranks of Social Democracy, Abendroth’s frustration with the Godesberg moment prompted more provocative behavior. Just before the Godesberg convention he published an alternative program in the party periodicals *Vorwärts* and *Der Sozialdemokrat* (Frankfurt). Sharing the same title as the official draft, “Tasks and Aims of German Social Democracy,” Abendroth wrote this left socialist “counter-program” because he believed the official draft was “irreconcilable with the tradition of the socialist workers’ movement”—an ironic formulation given events to come.⁶⁶

In contrast to the official program, which began with a poetic list of the party’s hopes and fears plus an introductory section on the “Core Values of Socialism,” Abendroth’s counter-program began with an analysis of “The Social Situation in the Capitalist-Organized Part of the World.” He emphasized the disjuncture between the “juristic form” of capitalist society and its socioeconomic reality—another way of expressing the contradiction of political democracy and social antagonism. The picture he painted of the world was dire: increasing monopolization, centralization, concentration of power into the hands of a financial power elite, rampant globalization, imperialism, an ever-present threat of war, and a looming descent into barbarism. To avoid this doomsday scenario, the counter-program declared, the industrialized countries must rein in the anarchy of the capitalist market by instituting a system of democratic economic planning. A faint echo of Sering/Löwenthal’s *Jenseits des Kapitalismus* could be heard in Abendroth’s critique of the bourgeois state and prescriptions for more democratic planning.⁶⁷

The bourgeois state in advanced capitalism, the counter-program continued, exhibited a tendency toward the abolition even of liberal freedoms. Drawing an analogy to the collapse of the Weimar Republic, it warned of the renewed danger to the democratic order posed by reactionary elites. Only a robust Social Democracy, the party of the workers [*Arbeitnehmer*], could forestall such a catastrophe. Contrary to the

⁶⁵ Abendroth, “Ein Programm-Entwurf der Anpassung und Resignation.” He later provided the historical background for his theory of adaptation and alienation in the short book *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Sozialdemokratie. Das Problem der Zweckentfremdung einer politischen Partei durch die Anpassungstendenz von Institutionen an vorgegebene Machtverhältnisse* (Frankfurt/Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1964). Flechtheim too picked up on the theme with the article “Die Anpassung der SPD: 1914, 1933 und 1959,” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 17, no. 3 (1965), 584-604.

⁶⁶ Letter from Wolfgang Abendroth to Erich Ollenhauer, Apr. 14, 1959, cited after *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, editorial note to p. 278.

⁶⁷ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Aufgaben und Ziele der deutschen Sozialdemokratie. Programm-Entwurf 1959,” *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 407-28, originally published in *Vorwärts*, no. 34 (Aug. 21, 1959), and *Der Sozialdemokrat*, no. 5-6 (1959). The Senne (Bielefeld) party chapter submitted Abendroth’s counter-program as Resolution 14 during the convention’s preparatory phase, which accounted for why official party periodicals like *Vorwärts* and *Der Sozialdemokrat* would have also published it. See Antrag 14 (Ortsverein Senne), *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des Außerordentlichen Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 13.-15. November 1959 in Bad Godesberg* (Hannover; Bonn: Neuer Vorwärts-Verlag; Nau & Co., 1959), 397-412.

Godesberg reformers, Abendroth never accepted the redefinition of the SPD as a middle-class or “popular” party [*Volkspartei*]. Political democracy was the necessary prerequisite of the struggle for socialism, but the party of the working class must expand it into a full, social democracy. Only then would the state lose its oppressive character. Abendroth’s counter-program called for a lively and broadest possible participatory democracy, which required stepping beyond the parliamentary formalism of political democracy. The SPD and the socialist trade unions were ideally placed to foster the development of a healthy, extra-parliamentary opposition. Direct political participation outside the representative strictures of the parliamentary system would help build the active democratic citizenry needed to withstand the forces of “restoration.”⁶⁸

Unrestricted capitalist development rendered political democracy an “empty farce.” The counter-program observed how elections transformed into “battles of labels without content” [*inhaltslose Reklameschlachten*]. Bearing that in mind, the activity of those original models of extra-parliamentary opposition, the trade unions, became all the more important. The practice of factory co-determination, for example, served as the “school of democratic administration of the socialist common property of the future.” Unions were also a school of solidarity. In the wider public they would help alter the reigning spirit of advanced capitalist society, replacing profit motive with democratic cooperation.⁶⁹

The SPD should also commit itself to redressing inequalities in the education system. From the general norm of social equality and from the democratic political need for an autonomous, critically thinking populace, Abendroth logically derived a model of higher education freed from financial dependence on the capitalist economy. He departed from the neutral or objectivist claims of most liberal professors when he had the SPD favor a reform of university curriculum that fostered consciousness of social antagonisms. He called for more leftist faculty appointments to counterbalance the old, conservative mandarins who by and large had discredited themselves under the Nazi regime. For Abendroth, freedom of scholarly opinion meant freedom from the conformist and restorationist tendencies of post-fascist Germany. Likewise, his conception of the liberal freedom of the press meant freedom from usurpation by corporate mass media, an argument that would align closely with his Habilitation advisee Jürgen Habermas’ book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). The counter-program promised that a democratically controlled media would enable constant public discussion and rational debate.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Abendroth, “Aufgaben und Ziele der deutschen Sozialdemokratie.”

⁶⁹ Abendroth, “Aufgaben und Ziele der deutschen Sozialdemokratie.”

⁷⁰ Abendroth, “Aufgaben und Ziele der deutschen Sozialdemokratie.” See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [1962], trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), which cited Abendroth’s conference talk on the “Begriff und Wesen des sozialen Rechtsstaates” (1954) on the need for “extending the idea of a substantively democratic constitutional state . . . to the entire economic and social order and thereby giving real content to the ideal of the concept of the state committed to social rights” (qtd. 226-27). Habermas wrote of “liberal basic rights which, even if their original formulations have been preserved in the currently valid constitutions, have to shift their normative meaning to remain true to their own intention” (226). The mere guarantee of freedom of expression (a liberal right), he argued, must be expanded into a guarantee of “[e]qual access to the public sphere” (227). This dialectical transformation of the *Rechtsstaat* into the *Sozialstaat* was one of Abendroth’s foremost concerns in the early to mid-1950s. On the postwar debates over constitutional law in connection to Habermas’ intellectual maturation, see Matthew G. Specter,

Finally, the counter-program turned its attention to foreign policy. The inhumanity of capitalist classes around the world, it provocatively claimed, often surpassed the brutality of Stalinist dictatorship. But democratic socialists had learned their lesson from the interwar years: the geopolitical interests of USSR often contradicted the interests of the socialist movement at large. Abendroth saw a possibility for democratization of the Soviet economy (i.e. reform communism) and stressed the need for détente. Nuclear war would result in barbarism of a degree unimaginable even by Rosa Luxemburg. The counter-program took a clear stance against Cold War escalation, against West German armament, and for a peaceful German reunification. In a gesture to Marxian totality, the counter-program noted that “[f]or Social Democracy foreign policy, domestic policy, economic policy, social policy, and cultural policy form an inseparable unity.” It ended by affirming the international solidarity of workers and the SPD’s vital essence as a workers’ party.⁷¹

Although Abendroth’s counter-program may have rallied left socialists who were critical of the majority trend toward liberalism and the abandonment of Marxism, it did little to alter the fact that by November 1959 they constituted only a small minority within the party. They were unable to mobilize more than a paltry sixteen votes against the official program at the Godesberg party convention that month⁷²—and those sixteen included some who could hardly be called “left socialists.” Almost as important as the final form of the new program was the debate during and after the convention about inner-party democracy and the prospects of sustaining a minority opposition within the party.⁷³ This debate came to a head in 1961 with the controversy over the radical, party-sponsored Socialist German Student League (SDS).

Socialists Faithful to Socialism, Expelled

The more prominent left socialists such as Flechtheim and Abendroth (and particularly the latter) wanted to remain in the party at all costs and continue the struggle for a socialist reorientation from within. These renewers bitterly recalled their experience with sectarianism and political isolation during the 1930s. But the transformation of Social Democracy after the Godesberg convention made the task of inner-party

Habermas: An Intellectual Biography (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2010), Chs. 1-2. Specter interprets Habermas’ choice of Abendroth as Habilitation mentor as “a legible trace of his discontent with the prevailing dominance of social and cultural theoretical paradigms over political and legal ones at the Institute [for Social Research] in the 1950s and [a] sign of his relative radicalism on the question of workers’ rights” (34).

⁷¹ Abendroth, “Aufgaben und Ziele der deutschen Sozialdemokratie.”

⁷² Aside from the handful of official left socialist delegates, Jürgen Seifert recalled how he and a few other SDS friends finagled guest passes in order to attend the convention proceedings. They booed at several points, and the executive board member Waldemar von Knoeringen was apparently none too pleased. Tilman Fichter, *SDS und SPD. Parteilichkeit jenseits der Partei* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988), 284-85n6.

⁷³ See for example Jürgen Seifert, “Innerparteiliche Opposition,” *Frankfurter Hefte*, 15, no. 11 (Nov. 1960), 765-72; Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Zur Frage der innerparteilichen Demokratie,” *neue kritik*, 2, no. 8 (Nov. 1961), 19-22; Wolfgang Abendroth, “Das Problem der innerparteilichen und innerverbandlichen Demokratie in der Bundesrepublik” [1964], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie*, 272-317, originally published under the title “Innerparteiliche und innerverbandliche Demokratie als Voraussetzung der politischen Demokratie” in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 5, no. 3 (Sept. 1964), 307-38.

opposition ever more difficult. Looking to capitalize on the momentum and enthusiasm generated by the new program among the “modernizers,” the party executive board started distancing itself from all manifestations of radical or left socialism. What began as a manageable if heated inner-party rivalry developed after 1959 into open conflict between the reformers and the recalcitrant Marxists. For the latter, the problem of renewal within the existing socialist organizations turned into a question of beginning anew entirely outside them.

In May 1959, several months before the Godesberg convention, the chairman of the SDS Oswald Hüller organized a provocative “Congress for Democracy – Against Restoration and Militarism,” which gathered together in Frankfurt several hundred delegates from a range of socialist youth groups including the Falken, Naturfreundejugend, Jusos, and SDS. Abendroth, Flechtheim, and a number of other left socialists addressed the enthusiastic crowd on the subjects of West German rearmament, militarism, NATO, the origins of authoritarian “restoration” in the Federal Republic, and authoritarian tendencies in the West German justice system. The SPD executive board had not formally authorized the Congress, which involved several youth organizations sponsored by the party, and it strongly disapproved of the dominant critical tone of the proceedings. None of the mainstream SPD reformers like Waldemar von Knoeringen or Herbert Wehner were represented among the speakers, who almost unanimously denounced the policies of the Adenauer government and by implication the SPD’s own overtures to the CDU. Moreover, the SPD leaders suspected Hüller and other members of the SDS’s new leftist leadership of harboring “East contacts” and wanting to manipulate the organization with communist means. One of the Congress’ keynote speakers was (incredibly) Ruth Fischer, the former ultra-leftist leader of the Weimar KPD who had turned virulently anti-communist after the war but now, after the Khrushchev Thaw, again identified herself with the radical Left. And a far-left faction around the magazine *konkret* that included Ulrike Meinhof, the later terrorist outlaw, did maneuver behind the scenes, formulating a resolution that called for a complete, one-sided disarmament of the Federal Republic without making the same demand of the GDR. The resolution passed with a large majority, even though Abendroth, Flechtheim, and many of the other older left socialists opposed it.⁷⁴

After the Congress, Knoeringen called for an immediate discussion between the SPD and SDS executive boards about “the situation in the SDS.” Frustration with the uncontrollable leftward turn by the socialist students prompted Helmut Schmidt, one of the first chairmen of the SDS in 1947-48 but now a top SPD functionary, to call for the creation of new, rival student organizations loyal to the party. The consequences within the SDS were also chaotic. Jürgen Seifert, Monika Mitscherlich, Günter Kallauch, and Horst Steckel voted the Congress convener Oswald Hüller out of the SDS executive board, and they made plans to distance the organization from the far-left *konkret* faction. The SPD leadership considered these measures satisfactory for the moment, but Helmut Schmidt and others continued to lobby for a new student organization to displace the renegade SDS.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ For overviews of the Kongreß für Demokratie, see Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 274-77, and Willy Albrecht, *Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS). Vom parteikonformen Studentenverband zum Repräsentanten der neuen Linken* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1994), 325-30.

⁷⁵ Albrecht, *Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*, 330-34.

The activist scholars Tilman Fichter and Siegward Lönnendonker recalled that “[a]lthough the new executive board of the SDS tried to the utmost limits not to give the SPD any further pretense for reprisals,” the party leadership nevertheless voted in February 1960 to extend its financial and official support to other student organizations besides the SDS that supported the Godesberg Program.⁷⁶ Three months later Helmut Schmidt and fellow critics of the SDS finally got their wish when students loyal to the party founded the Social Democratic Collegiate League (SHB). Significant numbers of SDS members who opposed the leftward shift in their leadership voted to dissolve into the ranks of the new group.⁷⁷ The second great schism of German socialism began among the students of the proto-Sixty-eighter generation, who were now divided between reformists loyal to the party and radicals aligned with the “undogmatic Left”—that is, non-communist left socialism.

Besides the unauthorized Congress for Democracy Fichter and Lönnendonker listed several more factors that they could only assume prompted the SPD’s decision, for the party executive never officially explained its position: the “Unpunished Nazi Justice” action in Karlsruhe in November 1959, which exposed the authoritarian “restoration” in the FRG and occurred right after the party convention; the protest demonstration by the Bonn SDS against an official visit by the Spanish foreign minister Fernando María Castiella y Maíz; the participation of the Berlin SDS in a mass protest against the wave of antisemitic swastika vandalism [*Hakenkreuzschmiererei*] throughout West Germany at the end of 1959; and, not least, the reprint by the SDS journal *Standpunkt* of Wolfgang Abendroth’s biting critique of the party, “A Program Draft of Adaptation and Resignation.”⁷⁸

The next decisive move in the SPD’s feud with the SDS came in July 1960, when the party executive cut off all funding to the SDS and called on its members to join the SHB. Relations between the party and the radical students were officially “broken off.”⁷⁹ Over the next year, the SDS struggled financially but succeeded in developing an independent theoretical and political line. At that time, wrote Fichter and Lönnendonker, the party had “the notion that a political student association that can no longer be roused with coffee and cake in its own country house would lose its attractiveness for the students. That there existed in the student body an interest in political theories, discussions in working groups, etc. lay and lies beyond the imaginative power of

⁷⁶ Tilman Fichter and Siegward Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS. Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund von 1946 bis zur Selbstaflösung* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1977), 64, online at <<http://web.fu-berlin.de/APO-archiv/Online/SDS-Gesch.htm>> (accessed April 2015).

⁷⁷ The turnover was high, but not enough to give the SHB a majority. By the summer of 1960, the ratio of SDS to SHB members was still 4:1. Albrecht, *Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*, 390.

⁷⁸ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 65, 157n63. “Despite the intervention of the SPD executive board, Abendroth’s article ‘Ein Programm-Entwurf der Anpassung und Resignation’ appeared in Issue 3-4 of *Standpunkt* in October-December 1959 after it had lain with the editors for a year and a half. It is certainly understandable that this reprint shortly after the Godesberg party convention was invoked by the SPD executive board. It became clear through this complete and uncut release that the publication of [Abendroth’s] letter to the editor in *Vorwärts* on October 9, 1959—that is, right before the Godesberg party convention—under the same title was a considerably shortened version that defused Abendroth’s line of argument” (167n111). Even though *Sozialistische Politik* had already published the full version of Abendroth’s article, that journal was not officially sponsored by the party like the SDS’s *Standpunkt*. For a discussion of the critique, see above.

⁷⁹ Qtd. in Albrecht, *Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*, 389.

mediocre pragmatists.”⁸⁰ Awakening such an interest among the students was precisely what left socialists like Abendroth and Flechtheim had in mind. These dissident intellectuals functioned as gurus or what Fichter called “local minds” [*Ortsgeister*] who mentored SDS circles in various places throughout the Federal Republic. Other examples included Willy Huhn and Michael Mauke (Berlin), Fritz Lamm (Stuttgart), Leo Kofler (Cologne), Erich Gerlach and Peter von Oertzen (Göttingen; Hannover), Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt), and later Ernst Bloch (Tübingen). Most belonged to the renewers or adjacent generations and thus transmitted the experiences of interwar socialist politics and Marxist humanism to a new generation and a New Left. Through their mediation, “the roughly 20 SDS university groups adopted—at first still quietly—the mostly forgotten left theories and utopias of the Weimar period.”⁸¹

On October 8, 1961, several hundred of these gurus and other supporters of the SDS gathered in Frankfurt to form the “Socialist Booster Club of Friends, Patrons, and Former Members of the Socialist German Student League,” soon known simply as the Booster Club [*Förderergesellschaft*] or SFG. Abendroth was elected the first chairman, and Flechtheim sat on the board of trustees. In a confidential letter to the SPD general secretary Erich Ollenhauer, Abendroth explained his rationale:

I have always considered [the distancing of the party from the SDS] misguided and in my position as university professor consider it my responsibility not to abandon the most important social force at German universities, the SDS, and thereby put students tending toward socialism at risk of slipping into sectarian trains of thought or being influenced by Stalinist-influenced forces or the DFU [i.e. the German Peace Union, a pacifist but non-socialist splinter party formed in 1960].

He objected to the party’s “distancing resolution” [*Distanzierungsbeschluss*] not only because it seemed to arrive without adequate justification or transparency, but also because it would not at all help “democratize the student body or promote social democratic influence in the student body.” The Booster Club, which consisted primarily of left socialist academics, trade unionists, and other intellectuals dissatisfied by the party’s decision, would therefore “work against the threatening tendencies toward alienation between the socialist students and the party and help the SDS” pursue its own independent socialist line.⁸²

The response by the SPD executive board to the formation of the Booster Club resembled a historical precedent from the interwar years: the 1932 executive board’s

⁸⁰ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 68.

⁸¹ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 244, 18. In his Foreword, Fichter identified four small generations that made up the history of the SDS from its foundation in 1946 to its dissolution in 1970: first, the front generation (i.e. those who had served in the Second World War and more or less corresponded to Schelsky’s “skeptical generation”); second, the Hitler Youth and Flakhelfer generation (i.e. those too young to have fought on the front); third, the “Kampf dem Atomtod” generation (i.e. the anti-nuclear activists who participated in the Easter Marches); and finally, the 68ers who made “SDS” into a household name. I follow contemporary historical scholarship in identifying much broader generations. For example, the term “Forty-fivers” would encompass Fichter’s first two (and perhaps three) groups, while the term “Sixty-eighters” would cover the second two.

⁸² Letter from Wolfgang Abendroth to Erich Ollenhauer, Oct. 13, 1961, qtd. in Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 346. By supporting the radical students and preventing them from veering off down futile sectarian paths, the renewers in the SFG played the same role as the original Org/NB when it had convinced the leaders of the Berlin Socialist Workers’ Youth (SAJ) in 1932 not to defect from the SPD to the separatist SAP.

decision to expel the leaders of the Berlin SAJ (including Fritz Erler) for preparing illegal resistance to the Nazi regime.⁸³ “Membership in the association Socialist Booster Club,” read the official resolution of November 6, 1961, “is irreconcilable [*unvereinbar*] with membership in the German Social Democratic Party as it is also irreconcilable to be both a member of the SDS and of the German Social Democratic Party.”⁸⁴ The irony seems to have been lost on the renewers in the party executive such as Erler and Knoeringer, who now undertook the same punitive measures used in the 1930s against their former selves, the radical young socialist intellectuals.

As the SFG’s first chairman, Abendroth was immediately expelled from the party.⁸⁵ Herbert Wehner, himself a former communist and former ally of Abendroth on the SPD’s left wing, had transformed himself after the Godesberg convention into one of the party’s most ardent reformers. At his initiative, a 27-page investigative dossier on the SDS and its supporters had circulated among the party executives several years before. In it he accused the SDS of having gotten “in close with extremist forces” especially in an “Eastern sense” (i.e. communist influence). The radical students were allegedly and somehow simultaneously Titoists, Leninists, Trotskyists, and Stalinists. “Instead of political arguments,” so Fichter, “accessible and inaccessible material by and about the SDS were again presented. The sources were . . . either not named or concealed. An analysis of the results obtained was moreover often replaced by wild speculations.” The irreconcilability resolution was the “result of a growing intolerance in the SPD executive board for leftist intellectuals.”⁸⁶

Flechtheim resigned voluntarily in January 1962 along with Peter Furth, Wilfried Gottschalch, Wolfgang F. Haug, and Carola Stern on the occasion of Wehner’s condolences to the widow of the deceased ex-Waffen-SS general Kurt Meyer. But their justification stemmed primarily from the SDS/SFG resolution: “We do not identify ourselves with every step taken by the SDS. The expulsion of the SDS members and patrons [nevertheless] establishes in itself a failure to recognize the principles of academic freedom and an injury to the inner-party democracy demanded by the Basic Law.” While regretting leaving “a party in which many good democrats and socialist [still] operate,” Flechtheim and his associates could not tolerate the “authoritarian manipulation” that they detected in the party’s heavy-handed treatment of dissidents within its ranks.⁸⁷

⁸³ Erich Ollenbauer incidentally belonged to both committees.

⁸⁴ Qtd. in Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 69.

⁸⁵ Abendroth was the constant thorn in the party’s side, having published shortly before the irreconcilability decision a critical analysis of the SPD’s defeat in the 1961 federal elections, “Der ausgebliebene Sieg – Die Bundestagswahlen 1961. Analyse des sozialdemokratischen Wahlkampfes” [1961], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie*, 82-91, originally published in *Sozialistische Politik (SoPo)*, no. 9 (1961), 9ff., and *Frankfurter Hefte*, 16, no. 11 (Nov. 1961), 723-26. He apparently circulated this text to SPD members but his views, according to *Der Spiegel*, remained in the “3%” critical minority. “Noch weiter voran,” *Der Spiegel*, 52 (Dec. 20, 1961).

⁸⁶ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 345, 351.

⁸⁷ Qtd. in Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 352-53. Flechtheim hoped that the post-Godesberg resignation of the SPD and its authoritarian conduct in the SDS affair would not end so “catastrophically . . . as in the past”—he meant August 1914 and January 1933. “All the same I ask myself more and more whether it was an error to return to Germany in 1951 and whether it’s not high time to prepare for a new emigration!” Letter from Flechtheim (Berlin) to Fritz Erler (Bonn), Feb. 27, 1962, NL Erler, 192B. See also Flechtheim, “Zur Frage der innerparteilichen Demokratie,” *neue kritik*, 2, no. 8 (Nov. 1961), 19ff., and “Gedankenfreiheit in

As a registered association (e.V.), the SFG at first limited its activity to providing financial support and scholarly advising for SDS members.⁸⁸ “In the first year after the irreconcilability resolution,” wrote Fichter, “the Booster Club transferred 4,500 DM to the SDS-Bundesvorstand. There were organized friend circles of the Booster Club at that point in Kiel, Berlin, Hamburg, Solingen, Frankfurt/Main, Stuttgart, Hannover, Bielefeld, Dortmund, Wuppertal, Duisburg, Ulm, Marburg, and Munich. At the end of 1962 it had ca. 300 members.”⁸⁹ Despite the relatively narrow scope of such activity, the expelled students and their patrons started to develop a refreshing, cross-generational consciousness of working against the current of existing society and its political possibilities. As Fichter and Lönnendonker put it, “the critical intelligentsia must get out of the party!”⁹⁰

Even though the second great schism had set in, many left socialists did not yet lose hope for repairing the damage. In the spring of 1962, Abendroth had brought a lawsuit against the SPD executive board for libel. Over the course of the next year Flechtheim appealed to his fellow renewer Fritz Erler to come to a compromise. The SPD’s lawyer Gerhard Jahn had proposed a settlement that would end the lawsuit, and after convincing Abendroth to accept it, Flechtheim urged Erler to get the party executive to sign off too. In this “unfortunate trial” Flechtheim posed as a pragmatic conciliator between the two warring factions within the West German Left—the renewers generation divided against itself. The case was settled out of court.⁹¹

The fallout from the second great schism left its mark on Jürgen Habermas’ first important work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). In this broad historical-sociological analysis of “publicness” [*Öffentlichkeit*], Habermas wrote that “under conditions of the large, democratic social-welfare state the communicative interconnectedness of a *public* can be brought about only in this way: through a critical publicity brought to life within *intraorganizational public spheres*, the completely short-circuited circulation of quasi-public opinion must be linked to the informal domain of the

Parteien bedroht? Führungsgremium strafen abweichende Meinungsäußerungen und Kritik oft mit dem Ausschluß,” *Westdeutsches Tageblatt* (Jan. 8, 1962). For news coverage of the very public expulsions/resignations, see “Sind unbequem. SPD-Führung schließt SDS-Anhänger aus,” *Berliner Zeitung* (Nov. 8, 1961); “Professoren trotzen Wehner. Förderergesellschaft des SDS gegen Ausschlußverfahren aus SPD,” *Neues Deutschland* (Nov. 15, 1961); “Ausgeschlossen,” *Neues Deutschland* (Dec. 8, 1961); “Geist und Macht,” *Der Spiegel* (Dec. 13, 1961).

⁸⁸ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 69.

⁸⁹ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 344.

⁹⁰ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 69. For more on the history of the SDS by both scholars and activists, see Andrea Wienhaus, *Bildungswege zu “1968”. Eine Kollektivbiografie des Sozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbundes* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014); Eberhard Dähne, “SDS und Neue Linke 1959ff: ‘Vorwärts und nicht vergessen, worin unsre Stärke besteht . . .’,” *Z. Zeitschrift Marxistische Erneuerung*, no. 74 (June 2008); Tilman Fichter, “Meine Uni war der SDS,” *Ästhetik & Kommunikation*, 39, no. 140-141 (2008), 17-28; Siegward Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte. Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund nach der Trennung von der SPD*, Vol. 1: 1960-1967 (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002).

⁹¹ Letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim to Fritz Erler (Bonn), Jan. 14, 1963, NL Abendroth, 86. The lawsuit accused Erich Ollenhauer, Herbert Wehner, and Franz Barsig (SPD press spokesperson) of calling Abendroth an “enemy of the state” and an “enemy of the constitution.” Erler agreed with Flechtheim that the trial was “most unnecessary,” but accused Abendroth of hypocrisy for engaging in the same slanderous style of polemic against the SPD. Letter from Erler (Bonn) to Flechtheim (Berlin), May 16, 1962, NL Erler, 192B.

hitherto nonpublic opinions.”⁹² Clearly the problem of inner-party democracy and debate was on Habermas’ mind. Furthermore, he seemed to allude to the bureaucratization and adaptation of the SPD when he described how the “kind of integration-bound cooperation of organization bureaucracies that tended to become independent from their member publics could only win out to the extent that the forms of a critically debating public in the political realm—in this case, the organization-internal public of organization members—were replaced by the depoliticized sphere of a mediatized public whose explicit acclamation or implicit toleration was brought about by a manipulative or staged publicity issuing ‘from above.’”⁹³ The SPD had turned away from its critically debating member public toward the broader electoral public in hopes of receiving acclamation at the polls once every few years.

The historian of the Frankfurt School Rolf Wiggershaus picked up on this connection when he wrote that “[w]hat the party executive was therefore expelling was, precisely, a critical public sphere within the [party] organization, initiated by left-wing intellectuals.” But did he go too far when claimed, citing Habermas, that “[t]he SDS continued to exist—as a kind of extra-parliamentary critical public without any roots in mass organizations, and therefore condemned to impotence”?⁹⁴

Conclusion: A Left Opposition Takes Shape

The SDS indeed seemed impotent during the period 1961-64. The radical young intellectuals as well as the older left socialists struggled to find new languages and organizational forms to combat what they viewed as the growing forces of authoritarian reaction in West Germany. Amid the controversies surrounding the introduction of emergency laws and the infamous *Spiegel* affair that involved the conservative government’s illegal reprisals against a critical media outlet, Abendroth wrote of the “de-liberalization of the Federal Republic” and Flechtheim of “emergency: a cement bunker for our government.”⁹⁵

⁹² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* [1962], trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 249-50. Emphasis mine.

⁹³ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 288-89n49.

⁹⁴ Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* [1986], trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge, MA: MIT/Polity Press, 1995), 562.

⁹⁵ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Die Entliberalisierung der Bundesrepublik und der politische Funktionswandel des Bundesverfassungsgerichts” [1961], *Arbeiterklasse, Staat und Verfassung* (1975), 166-69, originally published in *Sozialistische Politik (SoPo)*, 8, no. 5 (1961); Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Notstand – ein Zementbunker für unsere Regierung,” *Westdeutsches Tageblatt* (Oct. 29, 1962). See also Abendroth, “Vom Notstand zum Notdienst” [1960], *Arbeiterklasse, Staat und Verfassung* (1975), 162-65, originally published in *Sozialistische Politik (SoPo)*, 7, no. 6 (1960); Abendroth, “Zur Notstandsgesetzgebung,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 382-83, originally published in *Pläne. Eine junge Zeitschrift für Politik und Kultur*, no. 9-10 (Nov. 1961); Abendroth, “‘Spiegel’ und Notstand” [1962], *Arbeiterklasse, Staat und Verfassung* (1975), 170-73, originally published in *Sozialistische Politik (SoPo)*, no. 12 (1962); Flechtheim, “Notstandsgesetze würden die Freiheit des Bürgers dauernd bedrohen,” *Westdeutsches Tageblatt* (Apr. 6, 1963); Flechtheim, “Das Dilemma der Demokratie” [1963], *Eine Welt oder keine?*, 101-22, originally published in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, 49, no. 2 (1963); Abendroth, “Nach der Bundestagsdebatte über die Notstandsgesetze,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 552-53, originally published in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 8, no. 3 (1963); Abendroth’s contribution to Eugen Kogon et al., *Der totale Notstandsstaat* (Frankfurt/Main: Stimme-Verlag, 1965).

In the late summer of 1962 leading members of the Booster Club began discussing the possibility of expanding their activity beyond mere material and moral support for the socialist students. Heinz Brakemeier and Heinz-Joachim Heydorn in particular wanted to formalize the SFG as an alternative left political organization and to recruit a broader membership base. But not everyone agreed on this new course. Flechtheim wrote to Abendroth on August 20 that he thought such “an expansion of the activity of the Booster Club should have no success and indeed could probably even do harm.” Given that the SPD had gained votes relative to the CDU in the 1961 federal elections, left socialists’ previous thesis that the Godesberg Program would ultimately weaken the reformers’ position in the party had proven false. “In this situation,” he wrote in a conscious allusion to the socialist splinter groups of the 1930s, “work only makes sense if it occurs in the most intimate of circles. Quality, not quantity!” Echoing the original conception of the Org/New Beginning, Flechtheim urged left socialists to avoid “forming a new political organization that would go the same way as the old ones, that is, would even be much weaker than the SAP or even the USP.” Instead one must first “take stock of the situation and the possibilities,” a task that demanded “thorough theoretical work” among “the most intimate personal contacts.” Despite his “complete sympathy for certain activists” who wanted to expand the organization and engage in political action, he thought that the SFG should remain true to its original goal of supporting the students and fostering critical enlightenment.⁹⁶

But by that October, the advocates of expanding the SFG’s activity had won out. Brakemeier and Heydorn proposed a new name for the organization involving the term “New Left,” but other members including Abendroth favored something less antagonistic to the existing workers’ party and unions: the Socialist League (SB).⁹⁷ In their original “Short History of the SDS” (1977), Fichter and Lönnendonker mischaracterized Abendroth as the main impetus behind the formation of the League. In 1962 he did not, as they claimed, “have in mind the founding of a new socialist party left of the SPD.”⁹⁸ In his more balanced and carefully researched study “SDS and SPD” (1988), Fichter corrected this portrayal: Abendroth “strongly opposed all attempts by individual SDS members to support” socialist organizations besides the SPD and DGB. “In that respect,” he concluded, “Abendroth still saw at that time his political home in social democracy. He rejected furthermore every form of long-term cooperation with bourgeois-pacifist or leftist fringe parties. For all his sympathy for the ‘New Left,’ politics remained for Abendroth a lifelong affair of the traditional mass organizations of the workers’ movement.”⁹⁹ According to his Socialist League comrade Jürgen Seifert, Abendroth “fought tooth and nail against being thrown out of the SPD” and thought that the party had dropped him like “a hot potato.”¹⁰⁰

In a way Fichter and Seifert were correct in labeling Abendroth a “traditionalist,” and indeed he thought of himself as representing “the left within the [old] left.” This was

⁹⁶ Letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim to Wolfgang Abendroth (Marburg), Aug. 20, 1962, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

⁹⁷ See letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim to Wolfgang Abendroth (Marburg), Oct. 1, 1962), letter from Abendroth to Flechtheim (Berlin-Dahlem), Oct. 11, 1961, and letter from Fritz Lamm (Stuttgart) to Abendroth, Nov. 1, 1962, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

⁹⁸ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 69.

⁹⁹ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 346-47.

¹⁰⁰ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 347n45.

also how he described the first radical Left that arose from within German Social Democracy and fell on the opposite side of the first great schism, that is, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and the other discontents who eventually formed the Spartacus League and the German Communist Party. Those socialist intellectuals remained “at first totally isolated” within the existing workers’ organizations before finding a mass basis of support.¹⁰¹ In response to a critique of the Socialist League by the SDS member Thomas von der Vring, Abendroth wrote in 1963 that the radical students and the “new left” should not so hastily sever themselves from all that seemed “old” in the socialist movement. By breaking with the left socialist renewers, or the “left within the left,” the SDS risked breaking entirely from the socialist tradition. The students needed to learn from the experiences of the renewers generation. Just because left socialism had a history of failure, he argued, did not mean that it had never offered viable alternatives. He agreed with Vring that the SB should not pose as a new socialist party but also believed that the new left should not exclude the SB simply because it represented working-class perspectives. Abendroth called for generational cooperation between the SB and the SDS in order to sustain the “continuity” of the socialist movement. In this partnership, the left socialist renewers would play the role of transmitters or mediators [*Vermittler*] of the socialist tradition. The new left, he concluded, needed a historical consciousness and a real social basis in order to develop a “concrete” (as opposed to abstract) critique.¹⁰²

The workers remained at the center of Abendroth’s thinking about a West German left alternative. But he used a new definition of the working class better suited to the conditions of postwar democratic capitalism: “dependent workers” [*unabhängige Arbeitnehmer*], which included all those civil servants, salaried employees, and wage workers “who exist exclusively from the utilization of their own labor power, whose employment is directed by others.” In departing from the classical definition of workers as the industrial proletariat [*Arbeiter*], Abendroth was able to claim that the percentage of dependent workers [*Arbeitnehmer*] had continued to grow in postwar West Germany, having reached 77% of the population by 1960.¹⁰³

The biggest problem for a new left, he argued, was that fascism and the restorationist Federal Republic had almost completely destroyed the class consciousness of the working class [*Arbeitnehmerklasse*]. Contrary to what the bourgeois social scientists like Helmut Schelsky claimed, just because there was no more subjective class consciousness did not mean objectively that there were no more antagonistic classes. He understood why many of the critical young intellectuals and radical students lamented the “passivity” of the workers and considered them too integrated into existing capitalist society. But they should not therefore abandon the workers. Precisely the problem of reawakening working-class consciousness, Abendroth claimed, should animate the work of the new left and its supporters. And the Socialist League was just one “starting point”

¹⁰¹ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Aufgaben einer deutschen Linken,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 504-25, originally published in Horst Krüger, ed., *Was ist heute links? Thesen und Theorien zu einer politischen Position* (Munich: P. List, 1963), 130-57.

¹⁰² Wolfgang Abendroth, “‘Alte’ und ‘neue’ Linke,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 557-62, originally published in *neue kritik*, 4, no. 15 (Mar. 1963). Tilman Fichter later adopted the “transmitter” thesis in his analysis of the influence of older left socialists on the SDS. Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 244, 18.

¹⁰³ Abendroth, “Aufgaben einer deutschen Linken.”

for this kind of work, not an “ersatz party” that could claim any kind of organizational monopoly on the new left.¹⁰⁴

Even though he stressed repeatedly the formula of critical young intellectuals plus reawakened workers, Abendroth already in 1954 did not rule out the possibility of democratically organizing “other social groups” besides the workers.¹⁰⁵ Ossip K. Flechtheim developed a much more forward-thinking conception of alternative modes of left organization. In observing the nascent civil rights movement in the United States and decentralized citizens’ movements like the anti-nuclear Aldermaston marches in Britain, he began reevaluating the relationship between “party, movement, and pressure group” in the early 1960s.¹⁰⁶ These “single-purpose movements” mobilized diverse sectors of the population in typically short-term manifestations of grassroots democracy. Most importantly, they liberated themselves from the monopoly previously exercised on progressive politics by the political parties and unions of the workers’ movement. At the same time he urged the burgeoning new left to examine critically the history of “groups like ‘New Beginning’ or the ‘International Socialist Fighting League’ (ISK),” which provided models for “a small community.”¹⁰⁷ As Fichter and Lönnendonker positively recalled, Flechtheim provided the nascent new left with a critique of the West German party system that prompted the SDS and other groups to look elsewhere for models of “informal clubs,” “theoretical avant-garde organization[s],” and associations for “all underprivileged members of the university”—not just working-class students.¹⁰⁸

The mid- to late-1960s also saw a resurgence of futurology. Falling mostly on deaf ears in the previous decade, Flechtheim’s method of futurology now found greater resonance in the utopian sensibilities of the Sixty-eighters. In a 1972 book dedicated to “the friend, fighter, and scholar” Wolfgang Abendroth, he accounted for this futurological renaissance by quoting another renewer, Waldemar von Knoeringen: “Our Federal Republic lacks an antenna into the future.” Drawing a distinction between two kinds of futurology that had developed over the twentieth century, namely “a critical-humanistic one and a rather conservative-technocratic one,” he even discussed Miles/Loewenheim’s 1933 *Neu beginnen!* pamphlet as a good example of the former. He also approvingly cited Sering/Löwenthal’s 1946 book *Jenseits des Kapitalismus*.

¹⁰⁴ See Wolfgang Abendroth, “Die gegenwärtige Situation und die Aufgaben des SB,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 567-74, originally published in the internal bulletin *Informationsdienst des Sozialistischen Bundes*, no. 5 (1963); Abendroth, “Die Aufgaben der jungen Intelligenz im Klassenkampf,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3, 595-600, originally published in *neue kritik* (Nov. 18, 1963). For his subsequent work on the necessity of a worker-intellectual partnership, see Abendroth et al., *Für eine neue linke sozialistische Bewegung* (Frankfurt/Main: Sozialistischer Bund, 1964), and his only book translated into English, *A Short History of the European Working Class* [1965], trans. N. Jacobs and B. Trench (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

¹⁰⁵ Abendroth, “Demokratie als Institution und Aufgabe,” op. cit., 415.

¹⁰⁶ Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Partei, Bewegung, Pressure Group” [1962], *Zeitgeschichte und Zukunftspolitik*, 59-78.

¹⁰⁷ Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Die neue Linke in der neuen Welt,” *Frankfurter Hefte*, 18, no. 3 (Mar. 1963), 148-50. See also his review of several books by Abendroth’s doctoral students on the socialist splinter groups, “Sekte oder politische Kraft?,” *Die Zeit* (Nov. 12, 1965). For his reflections on the relationship between intellectuals and progressive politics, see Flechtheim, “Politik und Intelligenz” [1964], *Zeitgeschichte und Zukunftspolitik*, 117-41, originally published in R. Jungk and H. J. Mundt, eds., *Modelle für eine neue Welt* (Munich: K. Desch, 1964).

¹⁰⁸ Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 73-74, 77.

Flechtheim thus conceived of futurology as a sort of compendium of the theoretical perspectives developed by the renewers generation, at least in its left socialist moments. Noting that a “futurology club” had opened during Prague Spring in 1968, he considered the critical study of utopias and dystopias the logical development of Marxist method and a necessary complement to the socialist “third way” between capitalism and communism. Past- or present-oriented philosophy can only “interpret” the world as it is, according to his reformulation of Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach; only a future-oriented science can change it.¹⁰⁹

The utopian mentality of the Sixty-eighters, critical or not, caused a great deal of skepticism in the mainstream press—“Are futurologists charlatans?” asked *Die Zeit*.¹¹⁰ That futurology should appeal to the SDS and the New Left was no surprise given the voraciousness of their theoretical appetite. “[T]heoretical diversity was one of the essential strengths of the [SDS],” observed Fichter, “but it was also the germ cell of its later decline.”¹¹¹ The experience of the German Left in the 1960s generally resembled one protracted “search for a method,” to borrow the English title of Jean-Paul Sartre’s confrontation with Marxism.¹¹²

Jürgen Seifert argued that the term New Left caught on so quickly in West Germany because it was not organizationally “hardened” [*verfestigt*] and therefore transcended the limitations of the existing parties, unions, etc. The New Left stood for a “renewal movement” of forces within and outside the old organizations of the Left.¹¹³ But the gradual shift during the 1960s from the lower-case “new left” to the upper-case “New Left” symbolized the same dialectic of renewal that the original Org had experienced in 1933 when its call to “begin anew!” [*neu beginnen!*] yielded the name “New Beginning” [*Neu Beginnen*]. In both cases, a dynamic process of renewal had given way to a discrete political program with all its limitations.

The second great schism of German socialism proceeded parallel to a political split of the renewers generation. In a 1962 “Balance of the Socialist Idea in the Federal Republic of Germany,” Abendroth claimed that his fellow renewers Fritz Erler and

¹⁰⁹ Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Futurologie. Der Kampf um die Zukunft* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1972), 15, 64, 162, 195-98, 300. Flechtheim’s dedication was returning the favor for Abendroth’s *Das Grundgesetz. Eine Einführung in seine politischen Probleme* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1966), dedicated to “my friend and colleague Ossip K. Flechtheim.” For Flechtheim’s futurological studies during this period, see for example *History and Futurology* (Meisenheim/Glan: Hain, 1966); “Von der Wissenschaft der Zukunft zur Futurologie,” in C. Böhret and D. Grosser, eds., *Interdependenzen von Politik und Wirtschaft. Festgabe für Gert von Eynern* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1967); “Warum Futurologie?,” in E. Schmacke, ed., *Zukunft im Zeitraffer* (Düsseldorf: Droste-Verlag, 1968), 53ff.; *Futurologie – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen* (Frankfurt/Main; Berlin: Ed. Voltaire, 1968); “Futurologie – eine Antwort auf die Herausforderungen der Zukunft?,” in Robert Jungk, ed., *Menschen im Jahr 2000. Eine Übersicht über mögliche Zukünfte* (Frankfurt/Main: Umschau Verlag, 1969), 43ff.; “Futurologie – eine neue Wissenschaft?,” in Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, ed., *Wache im Niemandsland. Zum 70. Geburtstag von Alfred Kantorowicz* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1969), 61ff.; “Futurologie und Dritter Weg” [1974], *Zeitgeschichte und Zukunftspolitik*, originally published in *Neue Politik* (Mar.-Apr. 1974). For one contemporary revival of critical utopian studies that seems sadly unaware of Flechtheim’s precedent, see Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London; New York: Verso, 2010).

¹¹⁰ “Sind Futurologen Scharlatane?: Zukunftsforschung ohne Zukunft,” *Die Zeit* (Nov. 21, 1969).

¹¹¹ Fichter, *SDS und SPD*, 245.

¹¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* [1957], trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968).

¹¹³ Jürgen Seifert, “Die Neue Linke. Abgrenzung und Selbstanalyse,” *Frankfurter Hefte*, 18, no. 1 (1963), 30-40.

Waldemar von Knoeringen were not “real socialists” and that their post-Godesberg SPD stood only for a “modified advanced capitalist society.” Real socialists such as himself, the SDS, and the SB were confined to “small circles” not unlike the socialist splinter groups of the interwar years. But he worried that what was “illegal” in 1933-45 was now just “irrelevant.” These “small groups of remnants of the old workers’ movement, of intellectuals, and the youth” furthermore ran the danger of “sectarian atrophy.” But he held out hope for another socialist revival.¹¹⁴ The left socialist renewers now looked to the youth much as three decades earlier their parents and grandparents’ generations had looked to them.

¹¹⁴ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Bilanz der sozialistischen Idee in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” [1962], *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie* (1967), 429-62, originally published in Hans Werner Richter, ed., *Bestandaufnahme: Eine deutsche Bilanz 1962* (Munich: Desch, 1962).

CONCLUSION:
From New Beginning to the New Left

From New Beginning to the New Left

Everything changes. You can
 Begin anew with your last breath.
 But what happened has happened. And the water
 You poured into the wine, you can
 Never pour out again.

What happened has happened. The water
 You poured into the wine, you can
 Never pour out again, but
 Everything changes. You can
 Begin anew with your last breath.

Bertolt Brecht¹

In July 1967, one month after a policeman shot and killed the twenty-six-year-old student Benno Ohnesorg during a protest demonstration in West Berlin, several prominent intellectuals met at the Free University for an open panel discussion about the problems of advanced capitalism and the current political crisis in the Federal Republic. With the auditorium packed chiefly with students, the panelists represented several generations and ideological orientations: Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt School; Richard Löwenthal of the renewers generation; Dieter Claessens, Jacob Taubes, Peter Furth, and Alexander Schwan of the Forty-fivers; and Wolfgang Lefèvre and Rudi Dutschke of the Sixty-eighters.

Löwenthal contested the radical student leader Dutschke's passionate claim that the technological advancements of capitalism had made possible a society free from domination, if only one could abolish the capitalist class. Instead he argued that "no society can exist without people being forced to make partial sacrifices, to forgo parts of their interests and their drives—in other words, every society in history . . . has involved what Freud called civilization and its discontents." Although he empathized with the human wish to escape domination, Löwenthal believed such a wish offered no realistic political alternative. And Lenin's old dictum that every cook must learn to run the state, he added, simply did not accord with the level of expertise necessary to administer a highly industrialized country.

¹ Alles wandelt sich. Neu beginnen
 Kannst du mit dem letzten Atemzug.
 Aber was geschehen, ist geschehen. Und das Wasser
 Das du in den Wein gossest, kannst du
 Nicht mehr herausschütten.

Was geschehen, ist geschehen. Das Wasser
 Das du in den Wein gossest, kannst du
 Nicht mehr herausschütten, aber
 Alles wandelt sich. Neu beginnen
 Kannst du mit dem letzten Atemzug.

Bertolt Brecht, "Alles wandelt sich" [1944], *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Reinhold Grimm (New York; London: Continuum, 2003), 124-25, translation mine.

Rudi Dutschke—his long hair, casual clothes, and brazenly militant demeanor marking him as the prototypical German student radical—countered Löwenthal’s criticism by reading out a set of quotations: “‘From this moment on the fate of the nation depends on the revolutionaries’ clear sense of purpose. . . . In order for the next German revolution to succeed, the revolutionary party must be created so as to prepare in equal measure for organizing mass action and running the economic apparatus. . . .’” The author of these words was none other than “Paul Sering,” Löwenthal’s New Beginning alter ego. By summoning this voice from the 1930s, Dutschke reminded his antagonist that he too once believed that a revolutionary party could practice realistic politics with the necessary administrative expertise. Since the 1930s, however, Paul Sering had transformed into Richard Löwenthal, New Beginning into the conformist post-Godesberg SPD, and the renewers generation (except for a dissident minority) into defenders of the established order. Löwenthal replied ironically that the young student leader had “proven himself to be my posthumous disciple,” for Sering was long dead.²

By the late 1960s, the New Left had fully inherited the mantle of revolutionary socialism from the renewers generation—but under different conditions. Eric Hobsbawm described a “certain rejuvenation of politics” after “the elderly gentlemen who had presided over the stabilization and revival of the capitalist system left the scene.” The interwar experience of “mass unemployment, insecurity, stable or falling prices” was completely foreign to the new generation entering its twenties. These Sixty-eighters had “got used to having or finding work,” and their middle-class sense of entitlement convinced them that more “could be screwed out of the market.” The broad consensus that had buttressed postwar democratic capitalism rapidly crumbled.³

Furthermore, the radical students and young intellectuals redirected their attention beyond German and European borders to the Third World. Mounting Cold War tensions and often violent processes of decolonization had made places like Algeria, Kenya, and Vietnam into projection screens for deep anxieties about imperialism, capitalism, and authoritarianism at home. In his response to Jürgen Seifert’s 1963 analysis of the West German New Left, Ossip K. Flechtheim pointed out two transnational phenomena that shaped the political prospects for socialism in Germany. First, the Federal Republic was becoming provincial and increasingly subject to the external pressures of the Cold War and other global developments. And second, due to the advance of what Werner Sombart once called “social capitalism,” the materially well-off workers of the West had turned into the world’s “labor aristocracy.” Only in the Third World could one still find those “pariahs” with nothing to lose and everything to gain that Marx and Engels once identified as the international proletariat. There, on the former colonial periphery, Flechtheim argued, the New Left must seek models for non-violent, non-conformist, and extra-parliamentary opposition.⁴ The high number of Third World foreign students in

² “Anstelle eines Vorwortes ein Auszug aus eine Podiumsdiskussion . . . (Berlin, Juli 1967),” in Richard Löwenthal (pseud. Paul Sering), *Faschismus und Monopolkapitalismus. 6 frühe Aufsätze* (Berlin: Guhl, 1979). For a fuller transcript of the discussion, see Herbert Marcuse, *Das Ende der Utopie. Vorträge und Diskussionen in Berlin 1967* [1968] (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1980).

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* [1994] (New York: Vintage, 1996), 283-86. Aside from the murder of Ohnesorg, the spark that set off the student revolt in West Germany was actually an economic recession in 1966-67.

⁴ Ossip K. Flechtheim, “Die neue Linke in der neuen Welt,” *Frankfurter Hefte*, 18, no. 3 (Mar. 1963), 148-50. See also Jürgen Seifert, “Die Neue Linke. Abgrenzung und Selbstanalyse,” *Frankfurter Hefte*, 18, no. 1

Germany helped realize Flechtheim's vision by radicalizing German students, forging international anti-imperialist solidarity, and proving that militant young intellectuals could make a difference.⁵

Improving the material welfare of workers in the developed countries did not necessarily render them uninterested in or unavailable for a socialist renaissance. As Wolfgang Abendroth poignantly remarked, “[a] cow can feel extraordinarily well without ceasing to be a cow ready for slaughter.”⁶ But that did not change the fact that the New Left started to look elsewhere for its revolutionary subject. Herbert Marcuse, who unlike most of his fellow Frankfurt School alumni remained politically engaged, claimed in 1965 that “the proletariat has decayed into the generality of the working masses of the great industrial nations, who bear and preserve the apparatus of production and domination.” Because the revolutionary working class “pertained to a past stage in the development of industrial society” but no longer functioned as an oppositional force within advanced capitalism, he argued, the New Left should focus its attention on “marginal groups” [*Randgruppen*], radical students, young intellectuals, ethnic minorities, etc. This “substratum of outcasts and outsiders” could prepare the mental space of advanced capitalist societies for transformation by “not playing along” [*nicht mitmachen*], local non-participation, and civil disobedience.⁷

Marcuse's identification of marginal groups rather than the traditional working class as the agent of social change inspired the New Left and resonated with proposals by some left socialists such as Flechtheim. But others like Abendroth thought that groups outside the social production process could not carry on the struggle alone. The radical young intellectuals “can transform themselves into real social power,” countered Abendroth, “only if such political centers are formed that can serve as the basis for a future mass movement of workers [*Arbeitnehmer*].” Without this mass support, without mobilizing the core elements of the Old Left, and without renewing the entire socialist

(1963), 30-40; Flechtheim, “Läßt sich der dritte Welt vermeiden? Rede auf dem Ostermarsch 1964,” *Blinkfeuer* [Hamburg] (Mar. 6, 1964); Flechtheim, “Der Sozialismus zwischen Skylla und Charybdis” [1964], *Zeitgeschichte und Zukunftspolitik* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1974), 244-59, originally published in *Werkhefte*, 18 (1964), 75ff., and also reprinted in *Eine Welt oder keine?* (1964). This last article repeated verbatim and expanded on his arguments that had appeared in the *Frankfurter Hefte* (Mar. 1963) about the Third World and the transformation of the Western working class.

⁵ Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012). See also Timothy S. Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013).

⁶ Qtd. in “Kuh und Klasse,” *Der Spiegel* (Nov. 11, 1964).

⁷ Herbert Marcuse, “Epilogue to the New German Edition of Marx's 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon” [1965], *Radical America*, 3, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1969), 55-59 (58); Marcuse, “Socialist Humanism?,” in Erich Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1965), 107-17 (117); Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Marcuse, Robert Paul Wolff, and Barrington Moore, Jr., *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 95-137. See also Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 256-57. On the differences of opinion about the Sixty-eighters within the Frankfurt School milieu, see Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement” [1969], *New Left Review*, no. 233 (Jan.-Feb. 1999), 123-36; Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* [1986], trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity/MIT Press, 1995), 609ff.

movement, the students and young intellectuals would succumb to “provocative-anarchoid tendencies” and drift into political isolation.⁸

Marginal groups, precisely because of their marginal status, stood outside the socialist tradition and thus constituted a problematic object for socialist renewal. Abendroth’s hope that the students would escape the ghetto of the university to find mass support among the workers was not fulfilled in Germany, although in France for example students and workers did form an alliance during the general strike of May 1968. The results were not much better: de Gaulle’s government fell, but the new elections resulted in a victory for the Right.

The organizational forms and theoretical consciousness developed by the young intellectuals of the West German New Left resembled to a remarkable degree the primary configuration of the renewers generation during the 1930s: socialist splinter groups. The myriad extra-parliamentary organizations, General Students’ Committees (AStA), working groups, underground organizations like the cadre groups (K-Gruppen) and Revolutionary Struggle (RK), and political associations like the Club Voltaire, the Republican Club, and the rebranded Socialist Bureau—all these, despite their vast differences in composition and goals, followed the fragmentary and decentralized style of New Beginning, ISK, the SAP, the KPO, et al. during the interwar years. The generation unit that exerted a magnetic force analogous to the old renewers was now the Sixty-eighters, who also pulled in supporters from older cohorts. Although the sociologist Göran Therborn has described the New Left’s intellectual affinity for interwar Marxist humanism as “the encounter of a young generation of revolutionary hope with an old one of revolutionary defeat, holding out against hope,”⁹ the new generation too tasted the bitterness of revolutionary defeat.

What sometimes gets eclipsed by the momentous if tragic generational revolt of the late 1960s is the process of self-criticism and genuine adaptation by the older generation of renewers. Fritz Erler, whose prestige in the SPD was surpassed only by Willy Brandt, reflected that “[j]ust as in my youth I stood somewhat to the left of my father, so my children even today would stand within the general spectrum of social democracy rather somewhat to the left of me.” In trying to understand the larger generational context of the crisis, he lamented the fact that the Jusos and members of other social democratic youth organizations no longer addressed older party members as “Comrade” or with the familiar “Du.” The shift to the formal “Sie” indicated a broader “generational problem.” The gap of experience that separated the renewers generation from the Sixty-eighters was too wide. Erler observed that “one cannot simply transplant the traditions of the youth movement of the ‘twenties into the ‘sixties.’”¹⁰

⁸ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Zum Problem der Rolle der Studenten und der Intellektuellen in den Klassenauseinandersetzungen der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft. Kritische Bemerkungen zur Analyse Herbert Marcuses,” *Das Argument*, 9, no. 45 (1967), 408-13. Critics of the student revolt such as Leszek Kołakowski often expressed disdain for “the whims of spoiled middle-class children.” Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [1976], Vol. 3, trans. P. S. Falla (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1978), 490. Kołakowski’s own negative impression of the New Left and the student movement likely resulted from his brief, traumatic tenure as professor at Berkeley in 1968-69. See Martin Jay, “A Missed Opportunity: Leszek Kołakowski in Berkeley,” *Salmagundi*, no. 166-167 (Summer 2010), 3-9.

⁹ Göran Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 81.

¹⁰ Interview of Fritz Erler by Günther Gaus, broadcast on ZDF on Jan. 7, 1965, transcript in Erler, *Politik für Deutschland. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Wolfgang Gaebler (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1968), 19-44 (25-

The tasks of renewing socialism and imparting the socialist tradition came into open contradiction during the broad transition from New Beginning to the New Left.¹¹ Waldemar von Knoeringen’s “mobilization of democracy” campaign in 1966-67, which directly anticipated Willy Brandt’s 1969 election slogan “Dare more democracy” [*Mehr Demokratie wagen*], tried to revive the kind of discussions about democratization that had characterized the early years of postwar reconstruction. He enlisted a number of New Beginning alumni like Richard Löwenthal, Fritz Erler, and Evelyn Anderson to participate in lectures and discussions.¹² But he worried that mainstream social democrats had lost touch with the New Left. “What should one say to young people when one wants to convince them that they should join the cause of social democracy,” he wondered anxiously, “and they ask about ‘socialism’?” Increasingly pessimistic and skeptical of the efforts of the renewers generation, Knoeringen thought that the SPD, despite its newfound electoral success, no longer had an answer.¹³

Richard Löwenthal was more optimistic. He remembered himself as an advocate of “a newer politics, a freer politics, a more active politics” that accompanied West Germany’s return to the global stage through the SPD’s Ostpolitik. Although he thought there were some “personally very decent and very qualified” people among the radical young intellectuals—not least his “posthumous disciple” Rudi Dutschke, with whom any argument “was always an argument between people who respected each other”—Löwenthal dismissed “conflicts among the students that went on as if nothing else mattered.” He simply could not countenance the harsh new tone of debate adopted by young people “who wanted to talk about Vietnam at every assembly [and] at every conference” regardless of the program.¹⁴ Fed up with so much politics in the classroom, Löwenthal joined the conservative League for Academic Freedom [*Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft*] in 1970—a move that alienated many of his former comrades on the Left.¹⁵

The 1970s saw some of the renewers turn into stereotypical “angry old men,” as suggested by the title of a 1979 book including essays by Flechtheim and Abendroth. The latter did not think the terms “angry” and “old” automatically meant isolated and

26). Another aspect of the generational gap concerned the Sixty-eighters’ libertarian countercultural agenda. The renewers had little interest in smoking pot, free love, rock and roll, etc. See Sabine von Dirke, “*All Power to the Imagination!*” *The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997).

¹¹ Harold Hurwitz detected a similar tension between socialist renewal and authoritarian tradition [*Tradierung*] in the early postwar reconstruction of the Berlin SPD. Hurwitz, *Demokratie und Antikommunismus in Berlin nach 1945*, Vol. 4: Die Anfänge des Widerstands, Pt. 1: Führungsanspruch und Isolation der Sozialdemokraten (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990).

¹² Waldemar von Knoeringen, *Mobilisierung der Demokratie. Ein Beitrag zur Demokratiereform* (Munich: Bavaria-Druck, 1966); Hartmut Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen – Eine politische Biographie. Der Weg vom revolutionären Sozialismus zur sozialen Demokratie* (Munich; New York: Saur, 1989), 384; Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen to Evelyn Anderson (London), Jan. 12, 1967, NL Knoeringen, 23; Knoeringen, “Dem Gedenken Fritz Erlers,” *SPD Informationen des Landesvorstandes* (Munich), no. 3 (Mar. 13, 1967), NL Knoeringen, 44.

¹³ Letter from Waldemar von Knoeringen to Richard Löwenthal (Berlin-Schöneberg), Nov. 2, 1966, NL Knoeringen, 84; Mehringer, *Waldemar von Knoeringen*, 384. See also Knoeringen and Ulrich Lohmar, eds. *Was bleibt vom Sozialismus?* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1968).

¹⁴ Interview of Richard Löwenthal by Hans-Christoph Knebusch on *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts*, 1989, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbLO3xKC2rA>> (accessed Jan. 2015).

¹⁵ Letter from Ossip K. Flechtheim to Richard Löwenthal (Berlin), Nov. 23, 1970, NL Flechtheim, EB 98/179.

irrelevant. On the contrary, Abendroth argued that only by staying “angry”—and here he distinguished between rationally controlled *Zorn* versus irrationally destructive *Wut*—could the old generation transmit the necessary historical consciousness to the youth. The elderly have always played this transmitter role, he admitted, but in post-fascist Germany it assumed much greater proportions. Repressing or forgetting the Nazi past could lead to even worse historical consequences. By educating the young generation about the history of the socialist antifascist resistance and the struggle against conservative restoration in the Federal Republic—i.e. the core biographical experiences of the renewers generation—Abendroth hoped that he and his fellow angry old men might awaken the young, active generation to “outrage” at existing society’s injustices.¹⁶

In general, this dissertation has shown the limits of renewal within the multi-generational German socialist movement. Socialism may still exist today as an idea, a memory, or even a promise for the future, but within Europe and the West it is disembedded from any kind of mass movement or effective political organization. Already in the mid-1960s Flechtheim and Abendroth acknowledged this problem when they warned young socialist intellectuals about isolation and the danger of political sectarianism. Göran Therborn has observed, however, that “[c]apitalism still produces, and will continue to produce, a sense of outrage. To that extent, a line of continuity from the nineteenth through the twentieth [and into the twenty-first] centuries will remain, in resistance as well as in critique.”¹⁷ So long as some form of capitalism and liberal individualism remains the dominant mode of socioeconomic, political, and cultural life, hope for restarting socialism will continue to inspire those groping in the dark for the great alternative.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Abendroth, “Haben wir ‘Alten’ noch etwas zu sagen? Sind wir ‘zornig?’,” in Axel Eggebrecht, ed., *Die zornigen alten Männer: Gedanken über Deutschland seit 1945* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979), 143-64. Abendroth’s description of the old generation’s duty to inspire the young to act resembles the 2010 intervention by the French Resistance fighter Stéphane Hessel, *Indignez-vous!*. Flechtheim’s contribution to the collection was “Blick zurück im Zorn. Westdeutschland 1945-1960,” 29-70. Abendroth regretted that the editor had not asked any angry old women to contribute as well.

¹⁷ “Twenty-first-century anticapitalist resisters and critics are unlikely to forget the socialist and communist horizons of the past two hundred years. But whether they will see the dawn of a different future in the same colours is uncertain, perhaps even improbable.” Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*, 179.

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