



**ROSA  
LUXEMBURG  
STIFTUNG**

EDITED BY  
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# **NO FUTURE WITHOUT MEMORY**

*or, archives require a present*





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# EDITORIAL DAGMAR ENKELMANN

*Dear Readers!*

When I think about our Archives for Democratic Socialism, this quote from Peter Weiss comes to mind: “Speaking, reading, and writing are in flux over the course of time. Sentences beget their opposites, questions beget answers, answers beget new questions. Claims are revoked, what has been revoked is subject to renewed evaluation. The writer and reader are in motion, they are always subject to change.”<sup>1</sup>

Archives provide generations to come with information about specific periods of time, about views and insights, about events and

processes, about political actors, and their thoughts and decisions. The documents in the files, the pictures, the sound and video recordings preserve what has been said and written as testimonies to certain historical periods. They are a prerequisite for future generations to be able to authentically engage with this period of time, ask new questions, and perhaps find surprising answers and other assessments.

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung archive has existed for 20 years, and it is no secret that our Archives for Democratic Socialism is something special. It is one—perhaps even the—memory of leftist movements, socialist ideas, left-wing party-political developments, and democratic action since 1989. And yet our archive is only as good as we make it.

Of course, sifting through personal documents after an active political life and entrusting them to an archive requires effort and can in some instances even be painful; it is not an easy decision to make. But let us be honest: when held in private ownership, documents are often stored in boxes in a basement or on the floor, of course always with the intention of taking good care of them, of one day looking through them, perhaps writing a book, or considering professional archiving at a later date.

It is up to us to keep our history and that of Die Linke and its predecessors—be it the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)/ Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), Die Linke. PDS, or Labour and Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG)—authentic and alive in historical memory. But we are not starting from scratch. Twenty years of archival work have made numerous documents on the origin and development of our party and leftist movements available, as well as on the effect of left-wing forces on democratic decision-making processes. The archive also includes documents on individuals that were part of these developments and processes. Scholars, students, and journalists already actively use our archives. Every archive is part of the collective memory of society as a whole, including our Archives for Democratic Socialism. We have chosen to seize the archive's 20th anniversary as an opportunity to take stock and formulate new goals. This includes presenting its various functions as the memory of the party, the memory of the RLS, the memory of parliamentary work, the memory of social movements, and the memory of political figures, in addition to encouraging reflection and participation. This publication should help you recognize the value of your own documents and motivate you to add them to the

collective memory of the left. The authors describe what they associate with left-wing memory from the perspective of the writers and readers, as well as why they consider such memory necessary, what it consists of, whom or what it serves, and what demands it must meet. For the most part, these are personal views and assessments. I would like to thank all those involved.

I wish you a thought-provoking read!

Yours, Dagmar Enkelmann

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<sup>1</sup> Weiss, Peter, „Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Sprache“, *In Gegensätzen denken: Ein Lesebuch*, Frankfurt am Main: 1986, p. 217.

# FLORIAN WEIS

## *The Value of Breathing Deeply*

### 20 Years of the Archives for Democratic Socialism

As of autumn 2019, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) had existed for 29 years, initially as an association for critical social analysis and political education, and since 1999 under this main name.<sup>1</sup> The RLS began receiving public funding in 1999, and the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS) began its work. The name itself is striking and programmatic for two reasons. First, for many years it was the only explicit reference that the various structural units of the RLS had to the democratic-socialist groundswell

of which the RLS is a part; a groundswell in the same way the landmark ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court in 1986 formed a central pillar of the political institute. It is no coincidence that the party affiliated with the RLS was called the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). It was not until the Historical Centre for Democratic Socialism was founded in January 2017 that the direct reference to democratic socialism was taken up again clearly in organizational policy. This new department brought the archive and library department together with a number of other colleagues who had worked within the RLS on Rosa Luxemburg and her left-wing socialist environment, as well as on various historical topics. The name of the new department was jointly proposed by the employees and approved by the executive board. The name consciously refers both to the archive's twenty years of work and to the basic political tenets of the RLS. On the other hand, the name "Archives for Democratic Socialism" was intended to make clear that the times when certain left-wing groups or parties could claim to be the sole representatives of a tendency should have been over by 1999. Democratic socialist movements, organizations, and people associated with them have a diverse traditional lineage; it would be presumptuous to claim only one site for them, both politically and in archival records. This starting point of the Archives for Democratic Socialism points far beyond the immediate archival work to the orientation of the entire RLS; to a plural left, whose most important reference point is the party Die Linke, but which also includes many other actors and figures. This diversity is increasingly reflected in the areas of collection of the RLS archive, which now also include the records of organizations, groups, and in-



dividuals who come from the West German or, since 1990, the pan-German social left. To this end, our archive has been modified over the years to include materials from a broader time period: the archive collections for Die Linke, or previously the PDS and later the Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (WASG), begin in December 1989 with the transition from the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) to the SED-PDS to the PDS. The RLS was never tasked with collecting the holdings of the SED; instead these are stored and accessible in the Foundation Archive of Political Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR (SAPMO) in the Federal Archives.<sup>2</sup>

For the RLS and its archive, the transition from the SED to the PDS also serves as a political starting point. That the PDS has roots in the SED cannot and should not be denied, but the PDS and later Die Linke represent a break with Stalinism and an authoritarian state-socialist perspective. The documents held in the collections of the RLS archives unmistakably reflect this break, for example in the minutes and other materials from the work of the PDS Federal Executive Board during the period from December 1989 to January 1993, when Gregor Gysi was party chairman.<sup>3</sup> Ever since the RLS was founded, the debate on state socialism has been thematized extensively in numerous publications and events.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the debate on Stalinism, which represents a reductive yet conceptually justifiable placeholder for the politics of the time, was of central importance for both the RLS and the PDS. On the one hand, it was a necessary, self-critical, and painful examination of why the socialist movement had in many cases developed in an undemocratic, even deeply anti-democratic manner, which necessarily

includes remembering the victims of Stalinist rule. On the other hand, it was necessary to re-formulate a socialist approach, even after the failure of Soviet-style socialism and under the conditions of the supposed lasting success of a liberal and capitalist order in the 1990s. The RLS of today owes much to this foresight and the two-pronged approach required to develop it.

When the RLS came into existence in 1990, nobody was certain that socialism would again become democratic and exciting in the foreseeable future, rather than remaining historically burdened and old-fashioned. When the RLS archive was founded in 1999, militant anticommunism and the bourgeois-capitalist exuberance of victory had lost some of its appeal, but a renaissance of democratic-socialist thinking still seemed inconceivable at the time. The defeat of the PDS in the 2002 federal elections also had a direct impact on the archive's financial situation, since it received funding from the Administration of the German Bundestag—as did the archives of all the political foundations until 2008. Since then, the archive's work has been financed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior's global funds for political foundations. What was debatable above all was whether a democratic-socialist party could be permanently established in the Federal Republic of Germany. The archival work of the RLS nonetheless continued, albeit under considerably more difficult conditions in terms of personnel and finances, so that from 2005 onwards, with the re-entry in 2007 of what would later become Die Linke, the RLS and its archive, now also with a collection area for the WASG, could secure its future for the long run.

Deep breathing is an essential part of working in archives in general and of working

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in the RLS archive in particular; it includes avoiding getting caught up in trends and fashions, and enduring (often in the literal sense) being considered dusty and boring. Perseverance and the capacity to breathe deeply while sorting through the archives make it possible to process collections and thus also views and topics that will one day become relevant again, which often happens. In no way does this exclude necessary modernizations, such as those that our archive and the RLS as a whole will have to undergo—neither in terms of technological changes in the basis and means of our work (a key term in this regard is digital long-term archiving), nor in terms of the requirements of users. In this respect, archival work in the RLS is also being modernized considerably without compromising its essential qualities of permanence, thoroughness, and systematicity. In the best possible sense, the archival work represents a stubborn deceleration in phases of constant overheating and over-acceleration, a renunciation of hectic adjustments to fast-moving trends and, above all, a solid foundation for scientific work. As an historian this is something I have come to develop a particular appreciation for. Of course, a single source does not change an overall picture; the appearance of a new document does not necessarily “rewrite history”, as journalists like to sensationally declare, because documents constitute only one part of an overall view. But without them, historical work and our capacity to explain current developments would be primarily and overly defined by the realm of the purely subjective. Although archives may appear unspectacular, they form a very tough line of defence against fake news and “alternative facts”.

As a publicly funded but non-governmental institution, the RLS archive is guided by the principles of the rule of law and transparency. At the same time, our archive is committed to the concerns of those who place a great deal of trust in us by making their materials available to us. We consider the archival work of the RLS to be independent in two respects: it is conducted independent of state or governmental action, because our archive serves society’s surging interest in democratic-socialist politics. A great strength of the federalism that is guaranteed by the German Constitution and the political tradition of the Federal Republic of Germany is that archives remain publicly accessible to many sectors of society, not just on a national state. The archive of the RLS is also independent because it makes its documents available to the public and thereby aims to facilitate serious research. Many dedicated archivists have helped build up and shape our archive over the past 20 years. Special thanks are due to Jochen Weichold, a founding member of the RLS, temporary member of the executive board, and head of the archive and library department until 2013, as well as Christine Gohsmann, who has helped to build up the ADS since 1999 and then led it from 2013 to 2016. The members of the executive board and especially its executive committee in 1999, Evelin Wittich, Lutz Brangsch, and Michael Brie also deserve an honourable mention, since they made it possible to create the archive structure.

We consider this archival work to be among our seven essential functions.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely this task, which may seem unimpressive to some, that clearly illustrates why political institutes such as the RLS are established for the long term and why they seek to

and need to work beyond the politics and commotion of everyday life. Bearing this in mind, 20 years is not a long time for an archive. The foundations have been laid and there is more than enough work to be done in the years ahead. In 2020, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung moved most of its organizational units and staff to its new domicile on the Pariser Kommune Straße in the Berlin district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. This means that in future the archive will also become even more visible to those who are interested in the RLS and increasingly in a democratic-socialist perspective, and who should be familiar with its foundations and sources.

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**1** On this, see “Ich lebe am fröhlichsten im Sturm”. *25 Jahre Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung: Gesellschaftsanalyse und politische Bildung*, edited by Enkelmann, Dagmar and Weis, Florian: Hamburg, 2015. **2** See the collection overview of the Federal Archives and the BStU Archives, accessed 29 October 2019, at: [www.argus.bstu.bundesarchiv.de/Bestaendeuebersicht/index.htm?kid=ZA13F-C86229C4892A97DC68C846C5A13](http://www.argus.bstu.bundesarchiv.de/Bestaendeuebersicht/index.htm?kid=ZA13F-C86229C4892A97DC68C846C5A13). **3** See ADS, collection “Parteivorstand der PDS – Die Ära Gysi (1989 bis 1993)”. **4** See, for example, Nakath, Detlef, “Antistalinismus, Zeitgeschichte und Pluralität”, *Ich lebe am fröhlichsten im Sturm*, edited by Enkelmann and Weis, 2015, p. 42; Schütrumpf, Jörn, “Den Augiasstall ausmisten – Wilfriede Otto”, *ibid.*, p. 178; Vietze, Heinz, “Bruch mit der Schönfärberei – Michael Schumann”, *ibid.*, p. 179. **5** *Das politische Selbstverständnis der Stiftung und ihre Funktionen*, 2018, p. 6: “Our tasks can be roughly summarized in seven points (which are usually also named in the grant decisions): critical social analysis, political education, political advice and support, international dialogue work, networking and partner work, scholarships for gifted individuals, and archival work. A business or organization will usually dedicate itself to performing one or two of these tasks. One of the special features of the RLS is that it brings these components together; no other organization in the fields of political education, development cooperation, or in scholarships for studies combines all of these tasks — only the political foundations.” [Organization Manual of the RLS]

# EVELIN WITTICH

## Founding Moments

### Memories from the founding of the Archives for Democratic Socialism

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's archive was founded in 1999, which was a turbulent year for the RLS as a whole. The content and conceptual orientation of the RLS was solidified while all its structures were still being built, including the recruitment and hiring of colleagues, and operations continued to grow rapidly throughout this process. The executive board met on a regular basis. Two general assemblies were held in the first half of 1999—one on 26 February and one on 25 June—in which the shape of future de-

velopments was discussed and determined. Both general assemblies led to inspirational discussions that led to decisions being made regarding the name of the foundation, among other things. On 25 June, the name Rosa Luxemburg was chosen.

There was a project group called Building the RLS, which was composed of various working groups dedicated to specific topics, including political education work, social analysis in the alternative future commission, work abroad, work in the West, scholarships, the transfer of the magazine *Utopie kreativ* to the RLS, and also the establishment of an archive and a library. The results of the deliberations from all these working contexts had to be brought together, discussed, and decided on in a transparent manner in the general assembly.

Jochen Weichold, founding member of the RLS, long-standing board member, and member of the executive committee, took responsibility for the development of the archive and library. We quickly defined precisely what components a prospective left-wing memory would need: the archives of the PDS members of the German Bundestag, but also those of the last Volkskammer (People's Parliament) of the GDR, and the estates of important individuals who form part of the political left in all its diversity. The archives of the institute itself would also be needed: those of the Association for Critical Social Analysis and Political Education, which, as of 1999, became the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Institute for Critical Social Analysis. The library's collection areas were intended to reflect the fields of activity of the RLS and its regional associations, which also includes literature on the RLS's eponym. In addition to this, many book donations were received, espe-

cially of GDR literature, but also entire private libraries—this posed quite a challenge, which our colleagues managed to handle calmly. The general mood during this exciting time was characterized by the joy of being involved in the development of this foundation, of being able to contribute, and of breaking new ground with like-minded people. Intense debates over differences of opinion were an essential part of this.

Building the archive was now a matter of acquiring eligible archival materials. This did not happen on its own, since the members of Bundestag who were asked to provide their documents sometimes had to be convinced that their files from their work in the Bundestag were important for a leftist memory and that this was the archive in which they belonged. The incoming archival materials were immediately examined to ascertain how much space they would take up in metres, in order to comply with the legal conditions for subsidies. Jochen Weichold made sure that we were constantly up to date on these requirements. Choosing the archive software was an important decision with long-term effects. Several products were tested until the decision was made in favour of AUGIAS-Archiv, which proved to be very useful for the needs of our archive. Once AUGIAS-Biblio was acquired for the library, the archival work began with preparing the first finding aids. As I recall, Jochen Weichold had to explain what a finding aid was to every single committee in the RLS: the executive board, the management, the board of trustees, the Council of Regional Foundations, the different departments of the RLS, the initial discussion groups, and working contexts beyond the RLS itself all needed clarification. The first finding aid that could be proudly presented took account

of PDS deputies of the final Volkskammer of the GDR. The establishment of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung provoked considerable public interest. There was a great need for information and the desire to exchange viewpoints, especially in the affiliated party with its various structures. This also applied to the nascent archive. On 19 November 1998, a meeting was conducted between the Central Historical Commission and the PDS Communication and Information Centre, in which the relationship between the historical archive of the PDS and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Archives for Democratic Socialism was discussed. How should the archives of the state parliamentary groups be handled, or significant estates from district organizations? How should materials from the RLS archives be published, how could the archivists' professional training be carried out and what new acquisitions could be considered?

On 26 August 1998, a conference was conducted involving all the regional branches of the RLS. The conference became a main reference point for the RLS, and became known as the Potsdamer Konsens (Potsdam Consensus); in it, we decided on fundamental questions of cooperation—thematic focal points, division of labour, shared information, and, of course, finances. The archive and the library were also topics of discussion. This meeting, which was by no means free of conflict, formed the decisive basis for surviving even the most difficult years with a sense of unity and solidarity, such as those that followed 2002, when our affiliated party only had two members in the Bundestag, which led to funding cuts for us. This process would determine the atmosphere in the RLS for years to come.

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It now had to be made convincingly clear to the funding agency that we were in a position to build up the archive and were therefore also eligible to apply for funding. Discussions on this topic took place in Bonn on 6 May 1999. The application to receive funding for the preparation and preservation of contemporary archival materials was submitted in May 1999, in order for the funds to be distributed in August, at the same time as the first general grants. A request for the release of funds had to be submitted to the budget committee together with the general grants from the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

Another topic was of course the proper storage of the archives. When the first staff members were hired in August 1999, some of them sat at trestle tables they had brought themselves until the office furniture was delivered. One of the highlights of furnishing the RLS was the delivery and installation of the shelving system for the archive. We marvelled at the mobile shelving units and had the system of storing the archival documents explained to us. Now groups that visited the archives were also able to gain a vivid impression of the growing “left-wing memory”.

The Archives for Democratic Socialism is also a repository of knowledge for the development of left-wing political education work nationwide and the history of all departments of the RLS: the project group (which later became the Institute for) Critical Social Analysis, the scholarship department, the work abroad, and the various acts of cooperation with social partners. Just like the representatives, employees of the RLS also had to be convinced of the importance of submitting their documents to the archive. Plans for the files were drawn up and gra-

dually working materials were received from the RLS’s different departments. Such is the breadth of documentation that a history of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung could one day be written from this archive. In 1999, ten years had passed since the serious societal shifts of 1989, which the RLS naturally thematized in its work, for example in the Herbststürme event. The developments in Eastern Europe were also an important topic, as were feminism and gender equality, technology and society, and the study of Western marxists and social scientists. Since the very beginning, the RLS has examined the causes of the failure of actually existing socialism, with the role of culture as an indispensable component of education playing a fundamental role in all of these projects. Several meetings were conducted with cultural workers and artists who expressed an extraordinarily active interest in helping to establish the RLS. The archiving of cultural assets and artistic works and what the RLS could contribute to this was also addressed. Although this was only possible to a limited extent, a few works found their way into the archive.

Every generation desires to break new ground in terms of social development, no matter what the field—be it science, technology, education, or politics. However, this can only be successfully achieved if the experiences, mistakes, successes, and conflicts of previous generations are respectfully taken into account.

Archives as “memory” and libraries as “repositories of knowledge” are indispensable for the creation of new knowledge. A lot of interesting information is still preserved in archives and is waiting to be discovered. Incidentally, this is only completely possible during times of peace.

## INTRODUCTION

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The Archives for Democratic Socialism provides both the German left and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung with the opportunity to bring their own reality and perspective into dialogue with historical experiences.



TWENTY-YEAR ARCHIVES OF THE ROSA-LUXEMBURG-STIFTUNG



# CREATORS OF MEMORY

PARTY

PARLIAMENT

FOUNDATION

MOVEMENT

PEOPLE

# BERND RIEXINGER

## Memory

Working-class children are not born with access to books. There were no books in the house I grew up in, but as a child, I quickly became a bookworm nonetheless. Anyone who grows up in a small Swabian village has limited access to left-wing history. Without access to the experiences of others, we had to organize ourselves. First, we did this in the village, then in Weil der Stadt, where we built a self-organized youth centre together. Today, the memory of our youth activities hardly extends beyond those of us who are

still politically active. But what is perhaps more important is the fact that the youth centre still exists today. The left-wing memory started out small, but the small left-wing struggles have ended in victories. Once a victory is achieved, it is easy to forget that it was won. The political-historical memory also functions as a kind of DIY guide.

### LONG LINES

It was the Scout movement, of all things, that put me in touch with the broader history of the left. At that time, the Bund der Pfadfinderinnen und Pfadfinder (German Association of Guides and Scouts, BdP) was strongly influenced by young students engaged in the movements and protests of 1968. We read Marx and many other classics together. Without these left-wing Scouts, I would have been less likely to come into contact with Marxist ideas while living in the Swabian province. Every generation must re-evaluate what is actually worthy of remembrance and what will be passed on; this applies above all to political movements and their economies.

I came into contact with the organized labour movement by way of the union and the former comrades from the Communist Party of Germany (Opposition) (KPO). Large left-wing organizations like the SPD, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), and their respective trade unions usually have their own history of organization. Which part of the archives is opened and which writings are read is often a matter of dispute. These disputes can be gleaned in the history of the KPO. In the 1920s, the KPO was the strongest organized movement within the KPD. Its members included former KPD chairman Heinrich Brandler, and August Thalheimer, one of the greatest communist theorists.

Thalheimer had warned of the imminent fascist takeover of power as early as 1928, and developed a theory of fascism that is still worth reading today. The KPO demanded early on that the KPD build a united front against fascism. It consequently criticized the KPD's disastrous social-fascism thesis as well as the (unsuccessful) building of the Revolutionary Union Opposition (RGO), its own trade unions (RGO), and fought against the Stalinization of the KPD. History would have been much different if their line had prevailed. History can no longer be changed, but we can learn from the mistakes of our predecessors. Important figures of post-war history, such as Wolfgang Abendroth, Willi Bleicher, or Theodor Bergmann, were members of the KPO.

What sounds like mere theory comes to life when you imagine the impression that physical anti-fascist resistance fighters made on young leftists in the 1960s and 1970s. My friend Theodor Bergmann, who died two years ago at the age of 101, was one of those people. National Socialism destroyed much of the active memory of the German left, along with its members and organizations. This made it all the more important to have these old traditions told by Theodor Bergmann or Willi Bleicher, so as not to have to start again from scratch. Even for me, some of the debates of the 1920s were brought back to life and our disagreements thus (again) became part of a larger history of the left. Especially as different political tendencies came into conflict with each other, it was important to shed light on these intermediate positions between social democracy and the Marxist-Leninist tradition: for me, democracy and socialism belong together. It is not always clear which traditions will become important again in fu-

ture, which is why it is so important for us to develop a collective memory of the left in its entirety. If a witness to a past event or time period is dead, it is often only archives that will be able to bring their thoughts back to life.

### **THE SECOND BREAK IN 1990**

The neoliberal era began as early as the 1980s. The entire left was plunged into a crisis almost worldwide, and unions were also forced onto the defensive. The history of defeats needs to be recounted precisely because history is usually told from the perspective of the victors. Those who fail to learn from past mistakes will never make progress. But even in the worst of times, there is always hope and resistance.

The PDS emerged during the difficulties of the 1990s. Unions were still able to achieve some successes here and there, despite the fact that they were shrinking nationwide. Neoliberalism never ceased to be controversial, even in its heyday. The PDS was a voice for the disenfranchised in the neoliberal experimental laboratory of East Germany. The peace movement experienced an enormous influx in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s as it mobilized against rearmament and war. In 1997, the trade unions were able to win sick leave in an important struggle. Despite this, the deindustrialization of entire regions, especially due to political turmoil in the East, as well as the rationalization, globalization, and restructuring of the economy left a tremendous trail of social devastation in its wake in both the East and the West. The unions continue to struggle with restructuring the workplace to this day. But not everything has gone downhill: new industries were successfully opened up in the service sector, and the scope of ac-

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tors in the union movement has expanded, including strikes in the retail sector, in civil service, the education and health care sectors, and even at Amazon; all of these have developed new forms of strikes and have had successes in collective bargaining processes. This wave of innovate strike actions has provided some glimmer of hope, just as the anti-globalization movement did at the beginning of the 2000s.

### **APPRECIATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

Rosa Luxemburg once argued that the masses learn primarily in large movements. The protests against Hartz IV and Agenda 2010 turned something that sounded old-fashioned into a reality. As a union member and later as a co-founder of WASG, I took part in these huge social protests from the very beginning. The devastating cuts to social programmes carried out by the SPD and The Greens under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder were met with immense resistance, which enabled PDS and WASG to unite and form Die Linke; as a result, there has been a pan-German party to the left of the SPD represented in the Bundestag since 2005—something that previously had not happened since 1933. That was an historic moment. However, this unification should not cause us to forget the many different sources and traditions of this party and its members. Our memory is as diverse as our traditions.

It is political parties and their various affiliated organizations that bear and transmit the memory of social movements both past and present. They form part of the collective memory of the entire left; their debates, their actions, and their experiences are a treasure that we sometimes underestimate. The very

existence of a left-wing party has the potential to shift social discourse, as a glance at the current situation in Austria or Hungary painfully demonstrates. It is important that we all play a role in helping shape the social debates about our past. Achievements such as the welfare state, peace, or democracy are too easily taken for granted. But almost all of our social and democratic achievements have been the result of grass-roots struggles. The conservatives in particular would like all of this to be forgotten.

### **LEARNING AND FIGHTING PARTY**

Die Linke has been greatly rejuvenated in recent years. Upheavals in the workplace present great challenges for us and for the unions. While one part of society is becoming more and more highly qualified, the other side is experiencing a continuing consolidation of precarious employment relationships and conditions. As chairman of Die Linke, I consider connective class politics to be a matter of life and death. One of the central tasks of left-wing politics is to counter the precarization, exclusion, and division of the various groups of wage-earners with a praxis that connects their interests and thus promotes class consciousness. Solidarity of the many against the rule of the few. It is important to take account of the fact that today's class of workers is comprised of a higher percentage of female and migrant workers and is more precarious than ever before. We should no longer fix our gaze on the classical industrial proletariat, but instead must increasingly direct our attention to new occupational groups, for example in the social and educational sectors, in healthcare and nursing, in trade and logistics. Climate change must be un-

derstood as an existential class issue. Social justice and climate protection are mutually dependent.

Being a part of an active organizing party was and still is important to me. It makes me proud that Die Linke has established itself as a strong coalition partner in almost all relevant protest movements. This has helped integrate the party into these movements and introduced parts of the movements and their activists to the party. Thematic campaigns

as well as pilot projects involving organizing and canvassing door to door in focal city districts are also starting to bear fruit. The goal is to remain anchored in society; this is a central prerequisite for changing society.

Learning from history can help us answer a great many of our questions. There is a long and rich eco-socialist and anti-fascist tradition that movements for climate protection and against the rise of the right can draw from.

# THOMAS HÄNDEL

## *Learning from History*

An essential task of left-wing politics is to bring up the painful subject of social injustices, and a sound memory is needed for this. This is true for hard-won victories, as well as for mistakes and defeats. That is why archives, and especially the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS), are indispensable for the left. In addition to many important documents, this archive also contains traces of the emergence of the West German left, which had been fragmented prior to the creation of the archive.

In March 2004, we, the initiators, wrote in the call for the Initiative for Work and Social Justice: “The last few years, but especially the policies of the Social Democrat-led federal government in recent months have shown that the SPD has abandoned its principles. Contrary to its election promises of 1998 and 2002, which made it appear to be an alternative to the neoliberal policies of the previous governments, it has become the main actor in implementing the cuts to social services and in the redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top. None of us expected that a party with such a rich social tradition would mutate in such a short time into a party that blindly supports the chancellor, whose current political goals negate almost everything that this party has represented for over a hundred years.”

This might help the reader understand why we founded this initiative in 2004—an open alliance for the defence of our welfare state and for the just structuring of our social systems—and wrote a call that has generated tens of thousands of responses, both nationally and internationally. The public appeared to have been waiting for it.

As a result, the call we put out contributed significantly to the successes of the left throughout Germany. It was and is, as it were, a “notepad” for the memory of the left, but also for that of the SPD and, in the future, will probably also serve as a notepad for the memory of The Greens. The initiative culminated with the founding of the WASG (Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative) in 2004, which, together with the PDS, founded Die Linke in 2007. That was and is a success story. For the first time in recent German history, a party to the left of the SPD has been able to form and establish itself nationwide. A western expansion of

the PDS had been attempted several times before, but was doomed to fail because of the deep-seated anti-communist sentiment in West Germany. The formation of a truly left-wing party was only made possible by the SPD's departure from its own history and its orientation towards the welfare state. It is therefore safe to say that Die Linke changed politics; neoliberalism's threatening advance was stopped. Many no longer consider the privatization of public property, the health care system, or pensions to be a cure-all for social ills. The deregulation of the labour market could be largely slowed down and partially revised; without Die Linke there would be no legal minimum wage, although the minimum wage that exists in Germany today is still insufficient.

The left has been effective, even at the European level. Rarely have so many successes been achieved in the areas of employment, social policy, and consumer protection as have been achieved in the European Parliament over the last ten years—much of which has been initiated and broadly supported by the left.

But we are far from the end of the road. The politics of the past is still having an impact today. Precariousness continues to spread and impoverishment is growing. Powerful forces are at work at a national and European level to prevent the equalization of living conditions towards a more social Europe. Speculation and rent profiteering are on the rise, while militarization and rearmament increase the threat of war. Digitalization and climate change present hazards that overwhelm us and threaten our very existence. There is a clear need for a strong and convincing left-wing alternative.

Today, Die Linke is an important element of the German party system and has estab-

lished itself above all as a socio-political correction factor within the political landscape. It has achieved a number of successes that were unprecedented in the history of Germany's political parties. In order for it to continue to do so, however, a more offensive line-up is necessary. The future of Die Linke will be determined less by its human resource policies than by whether it proves to lead popular opinion at the focal points of social conflict.

Since 2010, however, the history of this young party has also included a phase of stagnation coupled with bitter defeats in elections, steadily declining approval ratings in polls, and losses among its core voter strata. We can only guess what consequences this has for the party's external political image and its social anchoring.

The core branding of the WASG has always been identical with the core principles of Die Linke: work and social justice. Neglecting these principles would have negative consequences for the programmatic-strategic development of Die Linke. The WASG was strictly oriented around improving the working and living conditions of workers, pensioners, and the unemployed, as well as popularizing alternatives. This was a strategic response to the impositions of the Agenda 2010, which itself was the Red-Green reaction to the crisis resulting from the implementation of financial capitalism. This decision to prioritize defending the welfare state is part of a larger debate about Die Linke's trajectory. The threatened centre made up of workers (in the West) was introduced to Marx's *Capital*, which the WASG brought into the newly formed Die Linke. If this historical and political reference point disappears, the approval and support for Die Linke will also dwindle. This will have nega-

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tive consequences for its membership base and ability to mobilize. The widely lamented exodus of active trade unionists from Die Linke has now reached a critical point, as has the proportion of trade union members who voted.

Nobody would claim that the problematic developments we are currently facing are due to the disappearance of the WASG. However, Die Linke's loss of appeal can be traced back to the disappearance of work and social justice from its core branding. As previously emphasized by the former chairman of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Heinz Vietze, it is therefore a worthwhile project to dedicate resources to the safeguarding of the historical and political heritage of WASG as a reservoir for the traditions of Die Linke. This project is not an end in itself. It is not enough to place the history of the WASG beside the history of the PDS and simply let both traditions stand side by side without offering any further explanation. Die Linke can win by taking up the history of these two original parties and thus creating a common history of Die Linke. The debate about the different roots and traditions of the left enables a process in which differences and similarities are worked out and common lines of tradition are identified.

The interviews with the founding generation of WASG, which are already in our archive, help to preserve their legacy. But these interviews constitute neither a definitive presentation of the history of WASG, nor an analysis. Instead, they present the subjective views of those who founded the party and followed its course until Die Linke was established; the interviews may provide important impetus for further examination of the history of Die Linke and its continued development.

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Archives for Democratic Socialism which is responsible for the administration Die Linke's archival material, has also taken on the difficult task of systematizing WASG's available archival material. The archival materials received from WASG have been catalogued, but there are still gaps that need to be filled in. To what extent these gaps can be filled by privately owned source material or the archival material of regional branches remains to be seen. Compiling fairly closed archival collections on the history of WASG and making them accessible would be a worthwhile as well as difficult and resource-intensive task, which is yet to be completed. So far, there is still no analytical and systematized approach to the history of WASG which would acknowledge and investigate this formation as an independent phenomenon within Germany's political history.

Finally, the dynamic character of WASG's brief history has barely been acknowledged. The formation started as a leftist coalition movement to advocate the welfare state, before becoming a party in order to run in election campaigns; practically immediately after becoming a party, it fell into a new dynamic that eventually culminated in its own dissolution. How this sequence of extraordinary events and challenges could be reconciled with the requirements of building a party on the ground, internal party democracy and communication, and organizational stabilization, has been virtually unexamined. It is precisely this intertwining of party building and breathless haste that the archived interviews make explicitly clear.

One of the archive's major goals would be achieved if it were to generate a renewed interest in the history of Die Linke by coming



to terms with this piece of the party's history. This task is absolutely fundamental. Especially today, it is crucial that we conjure up this memory once again, because the WASG's core principles of mobilization are still relevant. It is still about defending the social interests of the majority. It is still about the conflict between "them up there – us down here";

in other words, it is about class struggle. The concepts of good work and social justice are among the supporting pillars of our programme. To neglect them would not only be to abandon a substantial part of the heritage of the labour movement, but also directly contradict the imperative to "learn from history".

# JOCHEN WEICHHOLD

## *In the Footsteps of Die Linke's Council of Elders*

When I was asked at the beginning of 2018 to write or rather compile a history of Die Linke's Council of Elders, or at least splinters of such a history, I did not immediately say yes. Rather, I carried out preliminary research on the following aspects: Could any information about the *Ältestenrat* (Council of Elders) and its predecessor in the PDS, the *Rat der Alten*, be found on Die Linke's website? What sources of information were held in the collection titled *Parteivorstand der PDS – Die Ära Gysi* (Party Executive of

the PDS – The Gysi Era, 1989 to 1993) in the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS)?

A brief reference was made on Die Linke's website to the fact that the *Rat der Alten* had been created at the extraordinary party congress of the SED/PDS in December 1989. In particular, this site contained all the statements and commentaries that the *Rat der Alten* had made since 2002. Research in the finding aids for collections on *Parteivorstand der PDS – Die Ära Gysi* (1989 to 1993) yielded six references with individual documents. Archivist Jan Runkwitz used the delivery lists from the collections of the executive of the PDS that had not yet been catalogued to dig up a "cleaned-up" file of the *Rat der Alten* that promised to span the period from 1993 to 1997, but only contained documents from 1997. The file had been delivered by Horst Siebeck, the long-time secretary of the *Rat der Alten*, who passed away in June 2006. I agreed to take on the assignment in the hope of coming across some more revealing documents in the secretary's office of the Council of Elders.

Although this hope was ultimately dashed, I found a copy of an article by Edwin Schwertner titled "Dem Grundkonsens der PDS verpflichtet. Zur Geschichte des 'Rates der Alten' beim Parteivorstand" (Committed to the Basic Consensus of the PDS: On the History of the 'Rate der Alten' in the Party Executive Committee) from a 2003 issue of the members' magazine *Disput* in a clear plastic sheet, along with the current list of Council of Elders members and their contact information. This article not only provided a brief outline of the council's history, but also contained a valuable clue for further work, namely that the statements and commentaries of the *Rat der Alten* had mostly been published in the PDS-Pressedienst (press

service). A perusal of the PDS-Pressedienst, which is preserved by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung library in association with the ADS, fills significant gaps in the transmission of information from the 1990s. It contained not only statements and commentaries made by the council, but also short reports on the discussions conducted by the *Rat der Alten*, which Georg Fehst, the editor of the PDS-Pressedienst and member of the council, observed and vividly transmitted. Edwin Schwertner is not only the author of the aforementioned article; he was also a member of the *Rat der Alten* from as early as the beginning of 1991, and worked from the mid 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s as a spokesperson for the committee. He also authored an illustrated chronicle of the PDS alongside Otfried Arnold, Helmut Zessin, and others, which contains interesting facts about the history of the *Rat der Alten*. Having borne witness to this time period, he would surely have been a fruitful source of information, but he had unfortunately already passed away by the time this history was being processed. I hardly had better luck researching Moritz Mebel, who was a member of the *Rat der Alten* from 1990 onwards and many years later became a spokesperson. He left the council at the end of the 1990s due to his disappointment at its only sporadic contact with the executive board and the executive committee, which made the council's advisory function seem obsolete. When I called Moritz Mebel in the latter half of March 2018, he regretfully informed me that he was not able to help me. He said that he could not remember the details of the many things the council had discussed and had thrown the documents from the council's activities away a long time ago. Hermann Klenner, Thomas Falkner, and

Heinz Vietze, who had also lived through this period of history, were more fruitful sources for my endeavour. Hermann Klenner, who has been active in Die Linke's Council of Elders since 2008, provided interesting insights into the committee's discussion culture and into how the statements and commentaries found in the archive had been produced. Thomas Falkner, who spent many years working on strategy and the party leadership's foundational issues, provided insider knowledge about the fact that the council—and especially Hans Modrow—were always busy tending to the party's development in the rural region of Brandenburg. Both the council and Hans Modrow handled topics ranging from critical and constructive support for the participation of Die Linke in the government to the work of the committee of inquiry "On coming to terms with history and the consequences of the SED dictatorship and the transition to a democratic constitutional state in the state of Brandenburg", which covered constitutional issues and questions of respect for East German ways of life, as well as an analysis of the reasons why Die Linke had lost votes in the Brandenburg state elections in September 2014. In a series of lengthy telephone conversations conducted in April 2018, Heinz Vietze, the long-time deputy or head of the PDS parliamentary group in the Brandenburg state parliament, told me about the beginnings of the *Rat der Alten*, in which he had been involved. In order to ensure the new committee was truly representative, it was necessary for its personnel composition to span a particular political-social spectrum. In particular, Michael Schumann, member of the federal executive committee of the PDS, was devoted to the selection and recruitment of the members

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of the *Rat der Alten*. Heinz Vietze also took up this role in 2007 when Die Linke formed its Council of Elders, together with Thomas Händel, the treasurer of the WASG.

The aforementioned illustrated chronicle of the PDS by Edwin Schwertner, Otfried Arnold, Helmut Zessin, and others contained facts about the *Rat der Alten*, which offers a starting point for elaborating and vividly explaining these facts with documents from the ADS's still untapped collection *Parteivorstand der PDS – Die Ära Gysi (1989 to 1993)*. These documents pertain, for example, to the meeting of the PDS party leadership on 31 January 1994, which dealt with the continuation of the activities of the *Rat der Alten*, as well as documents pertaining to the party executive committee's decision to continue the activities of the council in order to make use of the experience it had gathered; to expand the council with qualified figures, and to conduct consultations on the party's election platform, on historical problems, and on the evaluation of the results of state, European, and federal elections.

To continue my research into the *Rat der Alten*, I also looked into the brief reference mentioned at the beginning and re-checked the minutes of the deliberations from the special party conference of the SED/PDS in December 1989, which were published by Dietz-Verlag in Berlin. The original documents from this conference are held together with the corresponding shorthand notes in the ADS. On December 16, 1989, Wolfgang Berghofer, then deputy chairman of the party, declared on behalf of the conference leadership that the party's execu-

tive committee had deemed it appropriate for party chairman Gregor Gysi to appoint a council of "older comrades with experience in the struggle ... to consult with them on basic questions of theory and practice, of politics, as necessary". Those with more experience were to play an advisory role to the party chairman, who was younger. Berghofer then explained which comrades would be asked to participate in this council. On 12 January 1990, the SED/PDS party's executive board officially constituted the *Rat der Alten*.

Archival materials and other written sources constitute one thing, as does questioning people who lived through the era in question. The other—no less important—thing is forming one's own opinion. This is why I seized the opportunity to participate in a meeting of Die Linke's Council of Elders on 26 April 2018, where the members of the committee and party chairs Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger discussed preparations for Die Linke's Leipzig Party Congress in June 2018, and critically examined the work of the party leadership. I was able to incorporate some "splinters" from this discussion into the final version of the outline of the history of Die Linke's Council of Elders, which confirmed Hermann Klenner's claim that the council had always been to the left of the official party line. Originally conceived as an advisory body to the party chairman and the party executive board of the PDS, the *Rat der Alten* increasingly mutated into an admonisher of the party and its leadership—a function taken up in a similar form by Die Linke's Council of Elders.

# CLAUDIA GOHDE

## *On Archiving in Die Linke's Party Central Office*

In the past, the old folders would have to be emptied and labelled with a cover sheet detailing their contents. The stack would be bound with natural white cord and tied with a special knot known as an archivist's knot. Then the archivist would be notified and they would pick up the files—to my surprise, with great pleasure—and would store them in the basement. At some point, they would be transferred to the RLS. Little has changed in this regard over the years: The archivist from that time has since retired, the offices

of the party headquarters take care of transferring the files to the RLS, the file folders remain complete, the knotting is no longer necessary, and the knowledge of how to tie an archivist's knot has become as superfluous as the knowledge of how to change a typewriter ribbon.

In this sense, archiving is viewed as a rather bureaucratic process from the point of view of the party headquarters. How happy I was to empty 80 square metres of my basement and two other rooms in one fell swoop when the Archives for Democratic Socialism picked up many metres of files from me in the 1990s. Sooner or later you realize you need the shelf and storage space, and the old stuff simply has to go.

But in addition to the technical aspects of the work, there is also the personal, everyday-life aspect. The most difficult part of archiving is deciding which files are so old and superfluous to one's everyday work that they can be given away; only that which is no longer needed enters the archive. And is what I want to give away even worthy of being archived?

Many files that I have submitted to the archive over the years form part of my political life: files from the party's executive board in the early 1990s, the AG West documents of the 1990s, papers from the first attempts at membership recruitment and political education, files documenting the party reform at the beginning of the 2000s, the party merger, the minimum wage campaign, and various citizens' correspondence during turbulent times—most of what is archived still bears traces of my personal use and reflects what I considered was important to document. I have always found it difficult to part with them and have hoped that someone would be able to use them. It is a bit like your

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favourite clothes that no longer fit: it would be a shame to throw them away, but they might still serve a good purpose in a used clothes store.

What would prospective readers do with the files that my colleagues and I delivered to the office of the national party headquarters? Do the campaign management documents really reflect the debates we had about the poster campaigns? Do the documents of the proposal committees from the party congress reflect the strategic differences? Does the study of several years of correspondence with citizens allow us to draw conclusions about how the citizens' expectations of the party changed? My questions reveal scepticism. What do others see in our files? For those of us in Die Linke, how we handle the files is influenced by two political dimensions: data protection and the processing of history. While data protection is largely formally regulated and for political reasons must be implemented by a left-wing party, there is a dilemma when it comes to dealing with history, because experience has shown us that a plethora of different histories can be written from the same file.

In some cases, I was able to experience first-hand what it is like to learn about history from party files: in the 1990s I read several files from the Ministry of State Security in the GDR, in which the SED was also mentioned. Later I read SED files pertaining to their organizations in the West. Surprisingly, files from the SED cultural administration turned up a few years ago in the basement of the Karl Liebknecht House. Files had been neatly created for all those active in the cultural sector in the GDR, which documented the more or less unsavoury (on the part of the government) correspondence with Stephan Hermlin, Heiner Müller, and Christa Wolf.

I have learned that some files are written to be recognized in a system, or are simply of special interest. On the other hand, many matters are not kept on file (for very different reasons). It is for this reason that files always reveal only one part of the truth. Knowing this makes it difficult to publish files that deal with emotional events, visions, and critical decisions, because in 30 years, the files might tell a completely different story than the one I experienced.

It is no longer possible to write about archiving without talking about digitalization. This not only concerns the fact that digital files will be handed over to the archive, but also that these days an incredible number of facts can be accessed online, and many events are documented on websites and blogs without their having been actively archived. Google, social media, and the internet overall have everything, know everything, and can find everything. My Google search just turned up 84,800,000 results in 0.36 seconds for the word "PDS", 54,900,000 results in 0.56 seconds for "Die Linke", and 3,750,000 results in 0.34 seconds for Archives for Democratic Socialism. Who was it—Bisky, Gysi, Schumann, or Brie—that made the apology at the SED special party congress? How did the members of the PDS Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state association vote in the strike ballot for the merger with the WASG and for the foundation of Die Linke? The answers to all of these questions are likely to be available on the internet. If this is the case, then is there still a need for archives?

The almost infinite accumulation of facts on the internet is at the same time an almost infinite accumulation of "alternative" facts. For this reason alone, it is important to secure facts and documents in a more reliable

framework—a framework that is offered by professional archives. For example, if we look at the history of the SED through the lens of documents pertaining to the early PDS, then we will write a completely different story than an article written on the same topic for *Die Welt*. However, due to the algorithms of internet memory, those conducting internet searches are far more likely to find the latter than documents pertaining to party history.

It is therefore also crucial that the files be stored in a secure, trustworthy place. That is why I am glad that the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Archives for Democratic Socialism is a professional archive that en-

sures careful storage and processing and is aligned with the tradition of engaging with history in a critical manner. Politics is realized through the actions of the people, through the spoken and written word, and through the visualized message. These three forms were and remain the most important forms of expression for (left-wing) politics. Even though many politicians now limit their messages to 280 characters on Twitter and 140 characters on WhatsApp, the most important testimonies are still texts, photos, and audio and visual recordings. Preserving them, preparing them, and making them available to future generations as a form of memory is an indispensable task.

## My Blue Notebook

When I was first elected to the German Bundestag, I was gifted a thick blue notebook in which to record everything I experienced and encountered, as long as I found it remarkable. The notebook was recommended to me as a memory aid.

Several years later, I was elected by the Bundestag to the Board of Trustees of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship. This foundation deals with the history of the GDR, but also with events in the old Federal Republic and since Ger-

man reunification. To find out more precisely what they were working on, I immediately made an appointment with the foundation's executive director. My youngest employee accompanied me to the meeting, but I very quickly got the feeling that she had lost all interest in the meeting. "What are these two old women even talking about?" she must have asked herself. And indeed, she had never heard of many of the things that the executive director and I discussed. She was born in 1993, but I had told her some stories here and there.

Back in my office, we went over some of the stories again. A long-time companion asked about the blue notebook. It was empty. And so we began to reconstruct different memories together. That is how my book *Gottlose Type – meine unfrisiereten Erinnerungen* was finally written. It was published in 2015 and contained 53 episodes from 25 years of my political action. It was cheerful, surprising, and serious all at the same time.

The story of how my 1998 premiere in the Bundestag came about can be read in the section titled "Rotes Ampelmännchen" (Little Red Traffic Light Man). The story goes like this:

*"If someone had told me in 1990 that I would one day become a member of the Bundestag, and even its vice president, I would have told them they needed to see a doctor. In 1998, I did not want to run for the Bundestag, and the thought did not occur to the party's intellectual leaders either. They were looking for a celebrity politician who could defend Berlin's Mitte-Prenzlauer Berg constituency, which the unaffiliated author Stefan Heym had won over to the PDS in 1994. They thought about Elmar Schmähling, the former admiral who had become an icon of the West*



German peace movement. It seemed likely that he could gain popularity, especially in the trendy Prenzlauer Berg district.

The plan had only one tiny catch. Elmar Schmähling owned several small businesses, which, for whatever reason, had now gone bankrupt. He was accused of criminal delay in filing for bankruptcy, which the media seized upon and transformed into a scandal. Their message was:

*'PDS campaigns for white-collar criminals: Ineligible!' Unfortunately there were not many options for remedying this constant bombardment by the tabloids and the public authorities.*

*So Elmar Schmähling could no longer be counted on to defend the constituency. Did he still stand a chance of winning, and if so, who would run with him? Soon everything came down to me. Pau instead of Schmähling. But what did the 'big four' of the PDS leadership think about all of this? There was a conference call and a vote—I was there for it. It was a close call, but I won three votes to two.*

*Suddenly it was time to begin the election campaign. I had to hurry, as Wolfgang Thierse (SPD), Günter Nooke (CDU), Marianne Birthler (Coalition 90/The Greens), and Martin Matz (FDP) were weeks ahead of me.*

*I was on the road from morning to night in an attempt to catch up. I could make whatever political statements I wanted; I hardly ever appeared in the media since my main competitors were simply more present. We went to extremes and quickly declared that the red Ampelmännchen from the GDR era was now the symbol of my campaign. However, we did not opt to use the one that tells peo-*

*ple to 'stop', but instead to use the one that is clearly sprinting to the left. I still remember some insulting emails that accused me of trying to lure seniors into the middle of the road at the wrong time instead of protecting them from fast drivers. Anyway, we called for a press conference and lo and behold: almost all the relevant media outlets came, filmed, and wrote about my red Ampelmännchen. From that point on, I carried a few dozen Ampelmännchen badges with me wherever I went. People gladly took them, and after two or three weeks they were starting to appear on the lapels of all kinds of people. Whoever saw them and knew about them, grinned: of course, vote for Petra Pau!*

*Shortly before the finale, our PDS campaign manager at the time made another public speech. He unceremoniously announced the winner of the former Heym constituency: it was me. It was the year in which the German song "Guido hat euch lieb!" (Guido loves you) was playing on every station as part of the Eurovision Song Contest. What came as an even greater surprise was the moment I won my first direct mandate with the Ampelmännchen on 27 September 1998. Small red things should never be underestimated."*

In the meantime—that is, since 2014—I have been writing down new experiences as they occur. My blue notebook is now black and is generally called a laptop. Of course, I had already made use of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's archives as I wished, and I will continue to do so. After all, what we are dealing with is a left-wing memory that needs to be nourished and propagated.

# SAHRA WAGENKNECHT

## *Homesick for the Future*

“Young people are homesick for the future.” This quote from Jean-Paul Sartre can be reconsidered in today’s context. In many countries around the world, (not only) young people are taking to the streets because they are afraid of what the future holds; because they yearn for a time when people lived free from worry, before climate change and the destruction of the environment made life on this planet into a living hell. Because they yearn for a society in which they can put their skills to use; a society that they can

help shape—without having to worry about being unemployed, ending up in poorly paid jobs, or wasting their time at work performing meaningless tasks. They yearn for a government that will provide affordable housing and other necessary services across the board, instead of prioritizing the interests of major corporations.

### **HOLDING THOSE RESPONSIBLE TO ACCOUNT**

Why has our society been on the wrong path for so long? Who flipped the switch to put it on the wrong track? Who is to be held accountable—for plundering the earth’s natural resources just as much as for the meagre pension payments that keep people in poverty, the exploding rents, the investment bottlenecks, the personnel shortages in hospitals and aged care facilities, and for the mounting levels of social division? Is it even possible to hold any one person or corporation accountable for this, or are we all just tiny wheels in a nonsensical system that disallows any kind of tangible alternative? What is clear is that anyone who attempts to hold others to account must also allow themselves to be held accountable. Is that possible? Despite all the mistakes and wrongdoings, I believe that it is. Just as, when people from the GDR had their lives turned upside down after Germany’s apparent reunification, we said no: no to letting the East be colonized by trusts and West German corporations; no to the monetary union between East and West Germany, which led to deindustrialization and mass unemployment in the East; and no to a European monetary union, which would later drive so many countries into debt crises, as well as contribute to social devastation and nationalism.

We protested against military interventions by the German Armed Forces and warned that the so-called war on terror would only beget more terror. We were up in arms against Agenda 2010, which has mutilated our welfare state and brought us nothing but low wages and poverty-level pension schemes. We have criticized the privatizations, social cuts, and the deregulation of the markets, and fought to ensure that the public does not inherit the financial losses accrued by private banks. We brought up these painful topics when politicians allowed themselves to be bought out by big corporations. And many of us have fought for improvements for the people through our unfaltering commitment, have taken care of the problems of employees, unemployed or single parents, where many others simply looked the other way.

### RE-EVALUATING THE PAST

It is always important to reappraise history, especially if we want to find a different way of organizing the future. For example, this year the left-wing parliamentary group once again demanded to create a committee to investigate the work conducted by the Treuhänder. The former Minister President of Brandenburg, Matthias Platzeck, spoke of an “idiosyncratic atmosphere” when referring to East Germany, as if “the grievances that had accumulated, especially during the upheavals of the 1990s, were now coming to the surface after a period of delay”.<sup>1</sup> Such an atmosphere can be dangerous, but it can also create a climate of opportunity. Last year, a similar atmosphere could be observed in France, which developed into a surge of fury directed at “those up top”, and ultimately culminated in the yellow vest popular uprising. We have a special

responsibility in situations such as these, in which past grievances boil up to the surface. Sometimes, sections of the past need to be re-evaluated so that they can be overcome in a reasonable manner. Archives are invaluable when it comes to performing this task because they secure our past for the present and the future.

### AGAINST THE TIDE

A political party’s memory is shaped by the experiences of all of its members. The parliamentary memory consists of the experiences of elected members of parliament—and all those who work for them in personal offices or parliamentary groups. My own “parliamentary memory” begins in Brussels and Strasbourg. From 2004 to 2009 I represented the PDS in the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. Due to the fact that there was an overwhelming conservative and liberal majority on this committee, I was not able to have much impact. The majority of the representatives in the committee were convinced that financial markets work best when they are not subject to any rules or laws. They believed in a neoliberal policy of competition that would prohibit state aid and make strategic industrial policy almost impossible. They were either convinced that a policy in the interest of big European corporations would automatically benefit everyone—or they allowed themselves to be roped in by lobby groups advocating this policy.

I remember discussions with Jean-Claude Trichet, the ECB president at the time, about the dangers that had arisen for financial markets as a result of monetary policy and deregulation policy, or discussions about the creation of an EU-wide system of deposit insurance for banks, whose basic functioning

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could not be agreed upon. Most of the time, I was the only one in the entire committee to vote against draft directives or reports. It was not until the big economic crash of 2007 that many people woke up, at which point everyone in the committee agreed that nobody could have foreseen such a crisis. Disappointed about the limited influence I had in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, I tried to educate the public about the neoliberal EU projects and win coalition partners outside of parliament. I informed people about the dangerous draft directives and projects. Upon my invitation, ver.di leader Frank Bsirske was able to explain to the European Parliament why the Services in the Internal Market Directive 2006 on the deregulation of services for employees was not acceptable and opened the door to wage and social dumping. I do not know how many representatives were convinced by his good arguments, but at the very least, the transnational protests did not go unnoticed, and at least some aspects of this horrible directive could be mitigated.

### **UNITED FOR A NEW STRENGTH**

“Without memory, we would be nothing”, wrote Eric Kandl, a US American neuroscientist, psychiatrist, physiologist, behavioural biologist, and biochemist who was forced to flee from the Nazis because of his Jewish origins. “Memory is the binding agent that holds our spiritual life together.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it connects us with other forms of life, since, as Kandl discovered, certain learning mechanisms related to the faculty of memory are the same for all living beings. Our memory does not function like an archive, in which events are organized chronologically. Our brain is not a vessel that is filled piece by piece with content. We

learn because fires are kindled within us or around us. These fires can be painful and destructive, can fill us with fear and terror—as is the case in times of war and crisis, or in the face of environmental disasters. They can also enlighten us, warm us, give us hope. Either way, there are times and events that leave a deep impression on our memory and herald change in our lives. My life was shaped this way during the global economic crisis that began in 2007, which also happened to be when people with very different backgrounds from both East and West Germany came together in one party.

Recourse to good traditions makes us strong. Organizations from 50 countries came to Die Linke’s founding congress on 16 June 2007 in the hope that a people’s party to the left of the neoliberal SPD would form in Germany. It was a party congress with charisma and with moving speeches that conveyed a spirit of optimism. At that time we set out to achieve great goals together: to rebuild the social state, to fight for democracy and the interests of the wage earning majority against a globalization dictated by finance, to connect the ecological question with the social question, and to put the question of peace on the agenda. In the 2009 federal elections, we achieved our best result to date with almost 12 percent of the votes. Two years later, we set ourselves a forward-looking program, which was confirmed in a member vote with 95.8 percent of the votes. Less concern for ourselves, and more concern for other people’s problems—this was something else that we aspired to back then. We did not always succeed in living up to this in the years that followed. We certainly need lively debates, because it is only by exchanging viewpoints that we will be able to find the right path forward. In

fact, our members should be much more involved in these debates, because this is the only way we can achieve good results that can be collectively represented to the outside world and thereby become effective.

### LEAFING THROUGH THE PAST

“Those who want to read the future must leaf through the past”, wrote André Malraux, who, like Sartre, was an important French author and politician. As true as this sentence is, from today’s perspective we must ask: does anybody “leaf” through archives anymore these days? What is digitalization making of our collective memory? Will all of our most important experiences and thoughts be obliterated? Will they at best be available in the form of printed paper, but not as files that are accessible to the broader public? And what does that mean for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung’s Archives for Democratic Socialism? Does it make sense to limit ourselves to documents produced since 1989 if we want this left-wing “memory” to be valuable?

Not long ago, a young comrade approached me. He was concerned that forward-looking contributions by left-wing theorists from the period before 1989 would fall into collective oblivion if we could not work together with left-wing publishers (who often do not have the money for them) to save these texts for the digital age. The history of our party does not begin in 1989. The older generations among us gained valuable experience before 1989—in the upswing of the 1968 movement, in the peace and environmental movements, or in the GDR. It would be a pity if these experiences were only available to future generations in the distorted form of reports by the German Secret Service, or in the Gauck files.

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1 Cerstin Gammelin, “Eigentümliche Stimmung”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 August 2019. 2 Osterloh, Falk, “Ohne Gedächtnis wären wir nichts” (film review), *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, 106/2009, p. 28, available at: [www.aerzteblatt.de/archiv/65395/Filmkritik-Ohne-Gedaechtnis-waeren-wir-nichts](http://www.aerzteblatt.de/archiv/65395/Filmkritik-Ohne-Gedaechtnis-waeren-wir-nichts)

# DIETMAR BARTSCH

## *On Elation and Remaining Grounded*

“Happy people have a bad memory  
and abundant memories.”

Thomas Brussig

I have taken over roles in the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) or Die Linke since 1991, with some interruptions. I was Federal Treasurer from 1997 to 2002 and Federal Executive Director from 2005 to 2010. I was a member of the Bundestag from 1998 to 2002 and again from 2005. In 2015, Sahra Wagenknecht and I were elected parliamentary chairpersons. I have always felt responsible for all areas of policy, a sentiment Lothar Bisky and Gregor Gysi have promoted as party or parliamentary chairpersons. Cle-

arly defining responsibilities does not mean restricting your viewpoint to a single department. For this reason, my memory is shaped by a perspective on the political situation and the situation within the party. I stand for a triad that combines a democratic-socialist perspective with an organizational aspiration and democratic resistance. I have no personal archive that I can draw from. I have an abundance of rich memories, but I have questioned my memory less about episodes and more about contradictions—about what we should not forget.

### **OPPORTUNITIES SEIZED – OPPORTUNITIES MISSED**

In 1994, the unthinkable came to pass in Germany: following the state elections in Saxony-Anhalt, the SPD and The Greens formed a minority government. Reinhard Höppner, Minister President of the SPD, and Hans-Jochen Tschiche, parliamentary chairperson of Alliance 90/The Greens, were prepared to tolerate the PDS. But instead, the “Magdeburg model” of indirect participation in government was born, and a spell was broken: governmental responsibility followed for us in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in 1998, in Berlin in 2001, in Brandenburg in 2009, and in Thuringia in 2014. In the West German states, the Social Democrats shied away from the prospect of forming coalitions with the Democratic Socialists. In Saarland, Hesse, and North Rhine-Westphalia, they did not have the courage to do so, or they did so too late, or only half-heartedly. The breakthrough was not achieved there until 2019, when Die Linke moved into the Bremen Senate. At the federal level, there could have been a red-red-green government following the 2013 federal elections, but the SPD did not even

hold talks with Die Linke. I am a supporter of centre-left coalitions at both the federal and state level, among other reasons because our aim should be not only to criticize conditions, but also to take responsibility in helping to shape them. As Marx said, we do not want to be right—we want to change the world. In my view, at the very least this has to do with starting to redistribute social wealth, is about a sustainability strategy, and a substantial reduction in arms exports. I am for proposals, not for blockages.

### **PUT YOUR HEAD UP, NOT YOUR HANDS**

The PDS had been in the Bundestag since 1990, where it had been openly hostile for many years. These hostilities reached a sad culmination point when Gerhard Riege, one of our representatives who was also a clever and sensitive scholar from Jena, committed suicide. “I am afraid of the hatred that is directed at me in the Bundestag”, he wrote in his farewell letter. In 1994, Helmut Kohl insulted the PDS, calling them “red-painted fascists”. In the same year, the federal SPD passed a resolution saying that it would not work with the PDS. CDU General Secretary Peter Hintze had 200,000 posters made for the 1994 federal election campaign which had red socks printed on them (a pejorative term for communists in Germany), and the slogan “Into the future, but not in red socks!” We did not miss this great opportunity, and red socks soon became our number one election campaign hit. This story is a great example of our members’ attitudes: we are not easily discouraged. The PDS, later Die Linke, expanded the political spectrum to the left and thus extended what was normal elsewhere in Europe into Germany. I am not afraid to call this an historic achieve-

ment. Neither East nor West Germany had a democratic socialist party. At a time when the right is gaining ground, this is should not be underestimated.

### **THE HOUSE IS BUILT FROM THE BOTTOM UP**

There were many occasions in the 1990s on which I had to explain the PDS’s meagre election results in the West to the party representatives. My standard saying, that the house is built from the bottom up, was nothing more than whistling in the woods, but at the same time it expressed a firm conviction: a party draws its strength from a committed base, from voluntary commitment. I take my hat off to our comrades in the West German states, which for a long time was the site of our diaspora, as well as to the strong structures in the East, which gave advice to many people on issues such as pensions or rents. I have always been heavily involved in local political work. Close contact with Angelika Gramkow in Schwerin, with our first female mayor of a state capital, with Steffen Harzer, Hildburghausen’s long-serving mayor, or with Michaelae Sojka, the district administrator of Altenburg, reminded me to always think about the needs of the cities and communities when making federal political decisions. Being firmly rooted in my home state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is very important for me.

### **RIDICULED AND COPIED**

In 2002, we introduced our first proposal to the Bundestag for a statutory minimum wage that would ensure a decent standard of living. All other parliamentary groups, including most unions, rejected our proposals. From that point onwards, we pressed the issue consistently. It was not until 2015

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that minimum wage legislation was passed. Since then, the SPD has prided itself on having authored the proposal. Of course, there are no copyrights for political ideas, and it would be narrow-minded to insist on claiming authorship rights for progressive social causes. Many of our policy proposals were initially downplayed as unrealistic or as being not financially tenable—a sentiment that the media often helped disseminate. I could name several examples of positions for which we were initially ridiculed or reprimanded, but that have since either been implemented or adopted by the relevant political groups: opposing military interventions in other countries, opposing fees for university courses or apprenticeships, opposing weapons exports to war zones. In the spring of 2015, when I spoke in the Bundestag about preparing our country for the arrival in our country of upwards of 500,000 refugees, the unions in particular accused me of pessimism. How things played out after that is well-known.

“Change begins with opposition” was one of our party’s slogans in the 1990s. We have kept our word. But this also led to quite a few people coming to consider Die Linke to be part of the Establishment and also perceiving the party as a venue for protest. We are in a position where many people agree with our analyses and goals, but struggle to believe that we are capable of implementing our policies.

### **BETWEEN FRUSTRATION AND JOY**

Opposition is not a walk in the park, and sometimes it can be very frustrating. Time and time again, our members of parliament and their qualified staff draw up motions and draft laws that are then consistently thrown

out in parliament. There is a reason why the picture *Sisyphus macht Pause* (Sisyphus Takes a Break) by Siegfried Schütze is hanging in our office. The work mentioned above is nonetheless indispensable, since our task is not only to critically engage in government, but also to develop left-wing alternatives. We have repeatedly achieved public success with one form of parliamentary initiative: parliamentary inquiries. We are the most inquisitive group in the Bundestag. This has often led to remarkable admissions on the part of the government.

### **POLITICS NEEDS TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH**

While the relocation of the Bundestag and the federal government from tranquil Bonn to Berlin was already followed by a considerable acceleration of communication, the emergence of social media has heralded the onset of an entirely new set of dimensions that have been detrimental to the quality of said communication. In the past few years, 30-second statements or 280-character tweets became the standard for expressing political opinions; a four-minute interview is already considered a feature article. If the current job market figures are published at 10:00, I have to be present at 10:10 with a standpoint in order to be noticed. The events that are currently occurring around the world force me to be attentive around the clock; there is barely any time for me to breathe and think. We, too, have learned the hard way. In 2002, Michael Schumann, whom I hold in high esteem, stated on behalf of the PDS: “We are the smallest of the parties, but we have the greatest ambition to achieve change.”<sup>1</sup> He concluded that a socialist party in particular could not reduce itself to a politics of everyday life. Contrary to



Lothar Bisky's urgent advice, after our initial powerful entry into the Bundestag in 1998, the party failed to quickly proceed with the elaboration of a new party programme.

This contributed to our failure to reach the five-percent hurdle in 2002. Voters naturally do not read a lot of manifestoes, but parties require a reliable compass for their actions. I therefore strongly advocate that our party be guided by the fight for social justice, peace, democracy, and sustainability and that our parliamentary group continue to expose Hartz IV as *Armut per Gesetz* (legislated poverty), to stand up for fair pensions and against child poverty, to condemn participation in wars, and to fight against two-tier health care. This also includes our continuing commitment to East Germany, although this has not always been — and is still not

always — uncontroversial within the parliamentary group. It is also part of our working method to include external expertise and to allow critics of our positions to have their say in the parliamentary group's meetings or retreats. I would like to mention the journalists Hans-Ulrich Jörges and Jakob Augstein, the authors Jana Hensel and Sabine Rennefanz, the political scientist Albrecht von Lucke or General Harald Kujat as examples. They make arguing fun and allow it to sharpen the senses.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schumann, *Hoffnung PDS: Reden, Aufsätze, Entwürfe 1989–2000*, edited by Wolfram Adolphi, Berlin: 2004, p. 158.

# MARGRET GEITNER

## *Who Writes History?*

Walter Benjamin wanted to ensure that “nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history”, even if it required humanity to first be redeemed before it could invoke and correctly interpret all its past moments.<sup>1</sup> He opposed conformist modes of memory and the naïve chronology of victory. The ruling class forged the historical memory of the citizens with memorials, holidays, school books, and the histories of great men who are absent from

most people’s everyday context. Even the highest cultural artefacts like castles and churches contain something barbaric, Benjamin wrote, not least because they came about from the “anonymous toil” of those who remain invisible in the writing of history, whose pain is unfulfilled and unredeemed, through which the past takes on an explosive force for the present. The task is “in every epoch ... to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it”. The potential for the liberation of mankind lies “not in the future, but in history and in memory”. The task for the revolutionary classes is not to carry out the objective laws of development, but rather to break open the continuum of history. Consequently, it is always a matter of including the struggles of the oppressed, the struggle for dignity and one’s livelihood, for rights, and for participation in our historiography.

That “the ruling ideas of an era are always only the ideas of the ruling class”, as Marx and Engels formulated it in “The Communist Manifesto”, applies in particular to the traditions written by the nobility and adapted to the needs of the ruling class in each case. Thus, historiography is predominantly characterized not by the search for knowledge, but by the rulers’ interpretation of events. True memory therefore includes both the sketches of the current epoch and the correction of false traditions through new insights, through the liberation of history from the ruling calculus and through symbols of truth. Otherwise, the living conditions and struggles of the oppressed will disappear from memory, while false accounts shape traditions that in turn form the foundation for fatal errors and lies, but also for curiosities.

## WHO FOUNDED EUROPE, AND WHEN?

If it was not Zeus who is said to have transformed into the shape of a white bull and made love to the goddess Europa on the beach of Crete, then it was at the latest Charlemagne, whom we encounter in the history books as “the father of Europe” or “the lighthouse of Europe”. Every year, the dignitaries of the city of Aachen award the Charlemagne Prize to an “outstanding European”. What is not mentioned is that Charlemagne was a mass murderer who, in the name of Christ, confronted all Europeans with the choice: “Baptism or death?” Eastern Europeans who refused to be baptized were murdered or enslaved by him. Even today, ethnologists refer to them as Slavs (slaves). The history of his victims is hardly known, and they are certainly not honoured with prizes. Instead, the stories of his royal biographer Einhard have been passed down: “Karl ... had a round head, his eyes were very large and lively, his nose somewhat long; ... his appearance was always imposing and dignified, no matter whether he stood or sat.”<sup>2</sup>

## IS LUDWIG ERHARD THE FATHER OF THE SOCIAL MARKET ECONOMY?

Even some leftist professors praise the “Keynesian social-democratic century after 1945”, which we have Ludwig Erhard to thank for. This is one of history’s greatest lies. When Adenauer, Erhard, and several Nazis governed the West German state, working class families were only able to make ends meet through under-the-table work and child labour; people who were retired had to visit relatives in order to stay warm, children were sent to labour camps, where they were rented out to farmers. Er-

hard imposed wage freezes at 20 percent inflation and described state welfare as “modern mania”. Governments were right-wing and “neoliberal,” yet most social improvements were made during this time. Why is that the case?

Social improvements do not come from economic doctrines or bourgeois governmental constellations, they are the price that the ruling class pays to pacify resistance and integrate renegades. Metal workers in Schleswig-Holstein had to go on strike for an entire winter in order to win the right to sick pay. Social reforms such as improvements to pensions or co-determination in the coal and steel industry were the prices paid to pacify the anti-nuclear movement and the movement against rearmament. In this respect, the legend of Ludwig Erhard as the father of the social market economy is fatal in that it erases from memory the acting subject who alone is capable of fighting for improvements or of preventing things from getting worse, and attributes his victories to a state doctrine or a reactionary politician. The economic miracle was based on a functioning industrial base that was created by millions of forced and enslaved labourers during the Second World War, and on 13 million migrants from the East who received welcome premiums and home construction loans, which in turn gave industry a boost.

## HAMBURG CITY HALL – KAISERSAAL?

In an effort to correct a number of symbols that convey a false sense of history, Die Linke’s parliamentary group in Hamburg has taken on the Kaisersaal (Emperor’s Hall). The Kaisersaal is the second-largest and most frequented hall in the Hamburg City Hall. It was named after Kaiser Wilhelm, who once

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visited Hamburg in 1895 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Kiel Canal. The hall is adorned with all kinds of colonial decorations, with busts of emperors and paintings of other rulers of the Hanseatic League. In 2019, Die Linke's parliamentary group applied for the hall to be renamed Republican Hall. After 100 years, the November Revolution, which stands for the beginning of republican-democratic conditions in Germany and also in Hamburg, was to be brought out of the shadows of Hamburg's cultural memory. The workers' and soldiers' councils, which formed the official Hamburg government at the turn of 1918–1919, were ousted in the spring of 1919, and the direct council democracy became a parliamentary democracy. But there is nothing in the town hall to commemorate them either.

The renaming of the Kaisersaal is a political act that fights for an emancipatory, liberatory memory—for memory from below. And the November Revolution has always been more historically important than an emperor's fleeting visit. The November Revolution is an important reminder of the struggles for social liberation and provides an impetus to debate the meaning of left-wing politics; a rebellion against the prevailing conditions, which is carried over into the parliaments. The knowledge of and feeling for this past, the struggles of many people over many centuries, including the lessons of defeat, are a constant source of stimulation.

Hope for liberation lies in the memories of historical moments in which dynamics of political dominance and control were overturned and subverted—in the Paris Commune, the October Revolution of 1917, in the Spanish Civil War of 1936, the liberation movements of the "Third World", the uprising of 1968, the liberation struggle in Beijing in 1989, and many more. Taking as a starting point the young Marx's categorical imperative to overturn all conditions in which man is an enslaved being, these events, to paraphrase Benjamin, blew up the continuum of domination in a brief flash. Marx described it thus: "Reforming consciousness consists only in awakening the world ... from the dream about itself."<sup>3</sup> This requires keeping track of our activities and liberating traditions from conformism. For these tasks we need critical, non-conformist minds, even in times of evil, for "the almost insoluble task consists of refusing to allow oneself to be rendered dumb, either by the power of others or by one's own powerlessness".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin belonged to the circle of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, which also included Adorno and Horkheimer. Questions of historical reflection play an important role both in Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle" from 1932 and in the unfinished *Arcades Project*. After his escape from the German Wehrmacht and shortly before his suicide, he wrote the famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in 1940. This text is considered to be one of the most beautiful, but also one of the most enigmatic philosophical texts of the 20th century. <sup>2</sup> See [www.route-charlemagne.eu/Charlemagne/Karl/Karl\\_unbekannt\\_08/index.html](http://www.route-charlemagne.eu/Charlemagne/Karl/Karl_unbekannt_08/index.html) <sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Briefe aus den Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern*, *ibid.*, / Friedrich Engels: Werke, Vol. 1, Berlin 1976, p. 346. <sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Frankfurt, 1994, p. 64.

# JAN KORTE

## *Die Linke's Memory Work in Parliament: "Parliamentary File Creators?"*

When I was asked to contribute to this volume, I did not think about it for very long at all before accepting. I began mulling over what it was that I wanted to write about, and what I should write about. Questions arose: What is a left-wing memory of the parliamentary group and how does it come about? What about my responsibility as a member of parliament? Who is really interested in how I have positioned myself as a left-wing member of parliament? And why do we need a left-wing memory in the first place?

As a parliamentary group in the Bundestag that throws itself into the political turmoil every day, develops positions, is the progressive voice of the opposition, and criticizes the government from a left-wing perspective, we certainly have a special significance and responsibility. We have to make sure that our policies are comprehensible, both in our daily work as members of parliament and as a parliamentary group, as well as in the development of a left-wing memory that will enable us and subsequent members of Die Linke to evaluate our policies and to discuss them.

According to Maurice Halbwachs's theory of "collective memory", social thought is essentially a memory "whose entire content consists solely of collective memories, but only those that each society in its respective epoch can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference".<sup>1</sup>

The capacity to reconstruct something requires traditions. For Aleida Assmann, there are two different modes of handing down traditions from the past to future generations, and therefore also two different types of "memory" whose interaction shapes cultural memory and thus the development of the culture in question: on the one hand, "messages" that are consciously written and presented for this purpose, which determine what is considered necessary for the functioning of a society, and which therefore also—as the "functional memory" of this society—must always be present and cherished. On the other hand, "traces" are material testaments of the past that often arose unintentionally, or, so to speak, *en passant*. Aleida Assmann describes them as follows: "They are at first mute witnesses who must first be made to speak again by specialists through the creation of a context."<sup>2</sup> They are

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a large and constantly changing repository of memory that must be used in order to be of use to its users. This second category is also where Aleida Assmann locates the archives that collect and preserve the manifold elements of this “memory repository” and make them available to the interested, to the curious.

To a certain extent, these two kinds of memories can also be found in Die Linke’s work in the Bundestag. “Messages”: these are our positions in the form of printed materials from parliament, that is, motions and draft laws which are discussed in committees and debated and voted on in plenary sessions; as well as the large and small inquiries with the more or less informative responses of the federal government. They document what the parliament and its members have worked on and how, and this information is then presented and transmitted accordingly. They are accessible via the internet, but are also held in the parliamentary archives, and fill tonnes of shelf space in public libraries in the form of representative folio volumes.

In addition, representatives also have their own websites where they present these materials together with personal “messages” — press releases, position papers, events—in a sense as an individual “message”. The business and other regulations are also part of the “messages”, as are the minutes of individual parliamentary groups and executive board meetings, which show how these groups work, what they have worked on and decided, and these groups’ election and event programmes.

“Traces”, on the other hand, are all those materials that are necessary for the development of a “message”. This also includes all the ideas and considerations that did not become a “message”. They have been worked

on, drafted, debated, amended, reworked, and finally it was decided that they would not become a “message”. As a result, they do not leave the office of the parliamentary group or the representative.

The “traces” also include the materials that are created for the organizational needs of the party—from personnel files, to invoices, to the documentation of events. The majority of these “traces” never go beyond the internal discussions of the parliamentary group or its office; they are subject to legal provisions governing their retention period and—especially in the case of personal data—their destruction.

All this constitutes the memory of parliamentary work, and is available in the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS) as a resource to assist in the formation of “Die Linke’s memory”. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the story. The materials must first be collected and ordered by designated personnel before they enter the archive and become part of that memory. And a decision must be made as to what can and may be handed over to the archive—since we also work with materials that may not leave the Bundestag or that are protected as personal data and cannot simply be “handed over”.

However, what is collected and stored in the parliamentary group and the representatives’ offices are not files in the general sense, hence the question mark in the title. We are a parliamentary group, not an administrative authority (even though one might sometimes get that impression). We do not have a strictly regulated order of operations with precisely defined responsibilities. The goal is to develop a “message”; how it is delivered is ultimately less important than the fact that it exists and that everyone can somehow help to convey it.

In other words: what we can offer “Die Linke’s memory” are mostly collections of material from the preliminary stages of our “messages”, and these can be quite exciting. For example, when we drafted a bill in 2006 for the long-overdue rehabilitation of the so-called war traitors, it was not foreseeable that this would trigger a debate in and outside of parliament that would last three years and would result in one of the greatest parliamentary successes of a parliamentary group in the contentious field of the politics of history. There were so many “messages” and “traces” of various kinds that Dominic Heilig and I ended up writing an entire book entitled *Kriegsverrat. Vergangenheitspolitik in Deutschland – Analysen, Kommentare und Dokumente einer Debatte* (War Treason: Policies for Dealing with the Past in Germany – Analyses, Comments, and Documents of a Debate), which was published 2011.

Sure, there are exceptions. But considering the fact that we often mischaracterize our own work, much of what may seem rather unimportant to us today could later be of interest to other members of Die Linke or the general public.

As any quasi-authority should do, we have neatly regulated our data storage: since 2009, we have had a filing structure for documents called a “file plan”. This file plan states generally valid principles and rules for filing, defines access rights and provides a detailed overview of the filing structure in force. In order to make it clear how the filing works in this structure, we have also implemented rules for work documentation since 2019. These rules define the creation and naming of folders and files in the file plan, making it easier for everyone to find the “traces” they are looking for. All the organizing structures and rules are adjusted to

suit our working needs, meaning files and documents are edited, changed, moved, resaved, and sometimes even deleted. This part of the memory is thus subject to constant change and is growing more and more, especially media data: photos, audio recordings of meetings and events, but above all video files now require more storage space on our servers than all the other files. In contrast, the share of “paper” traces is continuously decreasing.

In order to include these “traces” (and also “messages”, especially from the parliamentary group, since they do not fall within the area of responsibility of the parliamentary archives, we are responsible for these ourselves) in “Die Linke’s memory” in the ADS, we made a transfer agreement with the archive in 2006, which was supplemented in November 2010 to account for digital documents, and was revised again in 2017 in view of the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Within the group, an archiving policy regulates the jurisdictions and responsibilities for the provision of the data to be handed over. In addition, the file plan contains information for each individual structural element in terms of whether or not the files located here should be transferred to the ADS. This handover is then organized by the party staff member(s) responsible for questions about the archive who work in consultation and cooperation with colleagues in the archive.

In the party’s early years in the Bundestag, contributions were often connected with intensive persuasive work; both in the party and among the members of parliament, the opinion that the most important things, the “messages”, were presented and saved by the Bundestag anyway, or could be retrieved via the party’s internet pages and

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“stored” there became increasingly popular. Everything else was “not so important” and most people were not overcome by the vain desire to depict themselves with some scribbled drafts for the sake of posterity (well, maybe some did). Last but not least, another element that played a role was people’s fear of losing control over their data by handing it over to the archive: would it be safe there? Who would be allowed to see the files? This was not and is not an entirely unjustified fear in view of the not especially friendly treatment that the media has been known to give to a number of party members. However, the ADS and the parliamentary archives were luckily able to calm these fears through a corresponding practice: without the consent of either the representative donating their files or the parliamentary party manager, no one was to be given access to the archive records before the expi-

ration of the specified retention periods—and this promise was kept. The willingness to entrust one’s own data to “Die Linke’s memory” has grown with the confidence in the reliability of the ADS, but there is still room for improvement.

In the end, one thing is certain: the history of a parliamentary party can be written, but we can hardly influence by whom. But it should be written on the basis of our “traces” and “messages”, and not on the basis of the messages provided about us by others. We can ensure this by handing over the “traces” of our stories and histories to the ADS.

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**1** Maurice Halbwachs, *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*, Frankfurt, 1985, p. 360. **2** Aleida Assmann, “Archive als Medien des kulturellen Gedächtnisses”, *Lebendige Erinnerungskultur für die Zukunft: 77. Deutscher Archivtag 2007 in Mannheim*, Fulda: 2008, pp. 21–33.



# BERND HÜTTNER

## Preserving Movements

### The archives of new social movements

Fridays for Future, the *unteilbar* protests, protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg, the International Women's Strike, and the ongoing actions against Nazis all prove that emancipatory protests are a part of modern societies, have shaped them in their contemporary form, and continue to do so. But where will the documents produced by these resistance movements be archived to preserve them for posterity?<sup>1</sup>

The archives for these and other social movements collect and preserve the forms

of counter-knowledge that movements generate. There are approximately 40 or 50 large archives throughout Germany that are dedicated to collecting materials either on specific topics or on a broad range of topics, and probably around 150 smaller archives. In addition, there are several dozen environmental libraries.<sup>2</sup> Many of these archives were created as the result of movements, are in a sense connected to each other, and are based on voluntary work.

Beyond that, there are semi-governmental archives and libraries on the topic of social movements that have paid positions and also gather, save, and make materials from the variety of different resistance and protest movements of the last century accessible.<sup>3</sup> The holdings in these archives are based around certain topics, such as National Socialism and anti-fascism, the Außerparlamentarische Opposition (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, APO), the Socialist German Student Union (SDS), the student movement, the feminist and lesbian movements, the environmental and peace movements, the internationalist movement, and of course also the entire spectrum of oppositional, leftist, and alternative groups. Since they are the easiest materials to archive, all of these archives have large collections of newspapers as well as a comprehensive collection of brochures and "grey" or even "illegal" literature, which are not collected anywhere else. Generally, they also catalogue books, flyers, posters, stickers, and other memorabilia. The amount of institutional support these archives receive varies: While many of the institutionalized archives of the new social movements have fixed structures and paid jobs, which affords them a great deal of continuity, the independent archives of the social movements

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find themselves in a much more tenuous position, even though many of them have been operating for 20 years or more. In other words, much of the legacy of the new social movements ultimately rests on private shoulders and unpaid work.

### **WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?**

Individuals and institutions are under no obligation to deliver files to archives such as these, and there are also no assigned facilities for building up files. The materials come together through donations, for example from (former) activists, political groups and organizations that have dissolved and opt to donate their organizational archives, from duplicates from the archives of other movements, and oftentimes through info-shops that cooperate by giving their newspaper subscriptions to the archive. For this work in particular, a relationship of trust between the groups and people donating the materials and the archive itself is indispensable. Both must see themselves as a part of the same milieu of oppositional solidarity, be committed to similar ideas, and the donors must trust these independent archives more than state archives to make a correct and appropriate assessment of the content and thus to process the material.

### **WHO DO THEY DO IT FOR?**

Even though the past is an ever-present topic for the media, neoliberalism has produced a strange form of ahistoricity. Many new activists today know very little about the struggles and protests of previous centuries. This ahistorical attitude is the result of an undogmatic leftist approach that has long been characterized by spontaneity, and which eschews planned, strategic politics, as well as more conventional forms of

organization. In the event that they do take history into account, it is mostly evoked as a means to legitimize their own traditional praxis. It is for this reason, and due to unconsolidated structures and membership fluctuation, that a collective memory is so difficult to establish.<sup>4</sup> As the hegemonic politics of history proves every day, remembering is not harmless: it not only creates understanding and reassurance, but also creates standards. What should be remembered and what should be (forcefully) forgotten?

The archives that consider themselves to constitute part of the existing political movements see their work as a contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary struggles. As the saying “learn from history” suggests, their primary target group is contemporary political movements. However, these archives are also frequented by students, academics, and people who work in the media, which are also the largest user groups of the institutionalized archives.

### **NETWORKING, PORTALS, AND SEARCHES**

Many archives of social and political movements meet once a year on the invitation of the Heinrich Böll Foundation at an event that is intended to foster an exchange between colleagues working in different disciplines.<sup>5</sup> For those archives that do not have any paid positions, (transregional) cooperation or even the idea of an actual “preservation of a tradition through a network” very quickly puts them at the limits of their capacities.

The online database “dataspace” enables a more extensive search in the holdings of various info-shops and movement archives.<sup>6</sup> A relatively high number of move-

ment archives, such as the archives of the Informationszentrums Dritte Welt (Third World Information Centre) in Freiburg, the Antifaschistische Pressearchive und Bildungszentrum (Anti-Fascist Press Archives and Education Center, apabiz) in Berlin, the Bibliothek der Freien (Library of the Free), the largest library on the subject of anarchism, as well as the archives of party-related foundations and other institutionalized archives and libraries have at least entered their collections of periodicals into the periodicals database of the German National Library (ZDB). A selection of recommended books on the history of social movements can be found under the corresponding keywords in the collective bibliography on critical history.<sup>7</sup>

## OUTLOOK

The different archives introduced here resist any unambiguous or uniform definition. What they have in common is that they are depositories of knowledge that make available an almost inexhaustible source of materials for understanding social change.<sup>8</sup> The archivists will continue their work despite all adversity and the fact that their work is unpaid. The historicization and scholarship that deals with working through the 1980s and 1990s in both the East and West has only just begun. Therefore, such archives will be unique places where important sources of information can be found.

Some of those involved in the archives of social and political movements have been demanding a closer working relationship between state and movement archives for years. For example, a working group on Traditions of the New Social Movements<sup>9</sup> has existed within the official German Archivists Association (VdA) since 2009, and there are

now groups dedicated to new social movements at conferences of historians and archivists. In 2016, a position paper from the VdA on the Traditions of the New Social Movements was introduced, although it is yet to lead anywhere to this day.<sup>10</sup>

The requests made for public support on behalf of the movement archives are being blocked, which makes it clear that issues concerning archives are always also issues concerning domination. In earlier uprisings, archives were often the first things to be burned down because they were considered symbols of ecclesiastical and feudal power. Even today, many people are not interested in creating an historical awareness of the possibility of fighting against injustice, for freedom, and for solidarity. Scholarship and political education can (and should) enhance and advance this awareness, and the archives discussed here contain plenty of materials to contribute to this.

The movement archives contain a great deal of material about the ideas and political tendencies of the people who joined the PDS from 1990 to 1992, and those who joined Die Linke from 2004 to 2007, and who subsequently helped shape its development in both a programmatic and an habitual sense. The movement archives also contain an abundance of information pertaining to these people's extra-parliamentary work, presumably more than the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS) itself. Of course, the ADS is not a movement archive, nor should it become one. But it would be important to make the ADS receptive to the concerns and problems of the movement archives. We do not have to immediately dream of a meta-database that could be financed and implemented in the medium term with the support of the academic com-

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munity. But something similar to this is ultimately going to be necessary. The women's archives are demonstrating how this can be done with a meta-catalogue and the digitization of selected documents.<sup>11</sup>

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**1** The fact that newer movements produce their legacies primarily in a digital form raises new and unresolved questions for archives, as well as for prospective research on contemporary history. These questions have been deliberately omitted from the conversation here and would warrant a text of their own. **2** An online directory can be found at <http://afas-archiv.de/verzeichnis-freier-archiv/> or [www.umwelt-bibliotheken.de](http://www.umwelt-bibliotheken.de). Hüttner lists 270 addresses; see Bernd Hüttner, *Archive von unten. Bibliotheken und Archive der neuen sozialen Bewegungen und ihre Bestände*, Neu-Ulm: 2003. For an up-to-date overview with commentary see Jürgen Bacia and Cornelia Wenzel, "Was bleibt? Archivierung von Protesten und Widerstand seit 1968: Ein Bestandsaufnahme", *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie*, 4/2018, pp. 173–81, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3196/186429501865425>. For more references, see <http://kobib.de/kg/index.php/keywords/single/58>. **3** Examples include the archives and libraries of the foundations affiliated with the party, but also facilities such as the Institut der sozialen Bewegungen in Bochum, the APO archive at the Freie Universität Berlin, and the Institut für Sozialforschung in Hamburg. **4** See, among others, "Jahr der Jahrestage, interview mit Bernd Hüttner zu Geschichtssarbeit", *anti-atom-aktuell*, issue 180, May 2007, available at: [www.anti-atom-aktuell.de/archiv/180/180jahrestage.html](http://www.anti-atom-aktuell.de/archiv/180/180jahrestage.html). **5** See the materials at [www.bewegungsarchive.de](http://www.bewegungsarchive.de). **6** See <http://ildb.nadir.org/>. **7** See [www.kobib.de](http://www.kobib.de). **8** The central "institution" for research into social movements is the Verein für Protest- und Bewegungsforschung; see [www.protestinstitut.eu](http://www.protestinstitut.eu). **9** See [www.vda.archiv.net/arbeitskreise/ueberlieferungen-der-neuen-sozialen-bewegungen.html](http://www.vda.archiv.net/arbeitskreise/ueberlieferungen-der-neuen-sozialen-bewegungen.html). **10** "Zur Zukunft der Archive von Protest-, Freiheits- und Emanzipationsbewegungen", in: *ibid.* **11** See [www.ida-dachverband.de/ddf/](http://www.ida-dachverband.de/ddf/) and <https://www.meta-katalog.eu>

# PETER DELIS

## *Specific Features of the Tradition of the German Peace Union<sup>1</sup>*

The Deutsche Friedens-Union (German Peace Union, DFU) was founded in 1960 in Frankfurt am Main. Renate Riemeck, a professor and peace activist from Southern Hesse, was an important reference point for this project because she embodied a certain “leftist” standpoint that gave her the opportunity to be elected, even after the KPD had been banned.

Although the DFU’s federal office, managed by Heinz Dreibrodt, Willi van Ooyen, and Horst Trapp, was located on Amster-

damer Straße in Cologne, the state office in Hesse played an important role in the union’s activities, and many events and demonstrations were organized out of the Frankfurt office. There were several reasons for this.

For one thing, there was excellent contact with the trade unions. For example, the headquarters of the Industrial Union of Metalworkers (IG Metall) and the federal office of the Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (VVN BdA) were located in Frankfurt am Main. Influential officials of the German Communist Party (DKP), founded in 1968, also lived nearby. They often coordinated with us, mostly in personal conversations, as it was suspected that their office was bugged with surveillance devices. The DKP was too weak, not flexible enough, and did not have a good enough image among the middle class to successfully convert its policies into votes. The DFU was created in order to solve this problem and bring the issue of peace to the middle classes. Thus, in close coordination with the DKP, the Friedensliste was established as a party, in the hope that at the peak of the peace movement, a party would enter the Bonn Bundestag that would represent the interests of both the DKP and the peace movement.

There was another reason why people came together more often in Frankfurt am Main. Willi van Ooyen and Horst Trapp were based in Frankfurt, while Heinz Dreibrodt lived in Hamburg. For all three, work on Friday afternoon did not end at 4 p.m. They kept working through the weekend.

With the exception of Saarland, each state had a regional association and an office. Thus, there were plenty of structures put in place for coalition work. The state office on Frankfurt’s Lersner Straße was located

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in a strategically convenient place, so that the staff members who worked there were also available when needed. Since events and demonstrations often took place on public holidays or on weekends, it is not surprising that many of the DFU's organizational papers had a return address in Frankfurt. Unlike at other offices, the occupational ban committee at the office in Hesse employed Uli Breuer as a full-time staff member in order to establish contacts with politically interested people who had not yet been organized. Other offices had designated employees to handle this matter as well.

Heinz-Joachim Nagel was the state chairman of the DFU in Hesse until the DFU was dissolved in 1990. After that, he was no longer able to be actively involved due to health reasons, but was available as a contact person for the Peace and Future Workshop.<sup>2</sup> Willi van Ooyen kept the promise made by Heinz-Joachim Nagel and brought the DFU documents that were in his house (the central storage location) to the federal archive in Koblenz.

Willi van Ooyen was a leading figure in the peace movement; of particular importance was his role in organizing the Peace and Future Workshop, which took place at the Frankfurt Union Building. Local peace initiatives and Easter marches in Hesse, the Kassel Peace Council, the "No war in Afghanistan" petition, and the nationwide Easter march information centre were just some of the activities organized by Willi van Ooyen. Beyond that, beginning in 2008, he was Die Linke's parliamentary chairperson in the state parliament in Hesse. He wanted to hand over the files documenting his activities in the DFU and as a member of the state parliament in

Hesse to the Archives for Democratic Socialism (ADS).

A van picked up the DFU documents from Willi van Ooyen's basement and delivered them to the Verlagsgebäude des Neuen Deutschland in Berlin. There, former regional manager Peter Delis prepared the documents for archiving and created informative lists of all the materials that had been delivered. Since the documents had originally been filed in Cologne and Frankfurt am Main in a variety of different forms, they first had to be brought into a consistent format. With a lot of effort, the documents were put in chronological order, and multiple deliveries could be cleaned up. The work on the inventory led to an intensive study of the history of the DFU and kept the memories of various actions and actors alive.

The documents illustrate how different the communication channels were at that time. If you had appointments, you were difficult to reach, cell phones did not yet exist, although there were telephones and typewriters in all the offices. Since Willi van Ooyen had previously lived in Paris and had lived with a French woman, he placed a great deal of importance on maintaining a relationship with the French Communist Party and the French peace movement. He had very good contact with the party leadership, and German-French peace talks were held annually in Alsace. Beyond that, regular working meetings also took place.

The Archives for Democratic Socialism was chosen because of its ideological proximity to the DFU. This guarantees that all the documents remain available to us, which should be the norm. The value of the documents is supplemented by the knowledge of contemporary witnesses. Misinterpretations would

be conceivable without explanations of how decisions were made. Sometimes the old GDR saying can be helpful: who benefits from what?

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**1** On the history of the DFU, see Bundesarchiv, collection B442 Deutsche Friedens-Union, Christoph Stamm, "Einleitung zum Findbuch", Berlin 2011. **2** The Peace and Future Workshop does not see itself as a successor to the DFU. It works exclusively with volunteers on contemporary issues.

## *Archives and Personal Testimonials*

When I embarked upon the task of writing my autobiography, I was briefly tempted to visit the Archives for Democratic Socialism, but I ultimately never ended up doing so.

An autobiography is meant to record that which can be accessed from personal memory. However, as psychologists and lawyers know, memories are not always entirely reliable. Human memory cannot be compared to a photo, since it is not a faithful representation of a past event, but rather an active process—an act of production.

In other words, the act of remembering is the production of a memory. Memories often get embellished, or more importantly: coherence is forced upon them. This is how memory unintentionally and unconsciously deviates from an exact rendering of an event. Confronting the difference between my memory and how events are recorded in archives would certainly have been interesting for me as a personal experience, but it would have made writing difficult.

Autobiographies are not entirely uninteresting to historians; they are examples of texts that historians can put into relation to their own research. Another fascinating thing about autobiographies is how they allow the spirit of a time to be relived, especially when the zeitgeist is only ever expressed through individuals. But autobiographies are not texts that can be passed off as historical tracts. If someone wanted to write a scholarly biography about a person, an autobiography would probably not be their first source. Newspaper articles would probably be more important for this task, regardless of how the person is portrayed therein. The files stored in various archives, not least of all the materials from the PDS and Die Linke, would also be important if the person were a leftist. The different archives have more or less to offer, depending on the topic of interest.

Of course, one should not take what is archived literally. The archive is organized knowledge. But what kind of knowledge? And what organizational principles are at work? A good historian would never believe what is written in any old file. They would also always work to determine the credibility of the file. This is what the term “source criticism” refers to. Moreover, the structure of the archive always provides a pre-interpretation of what it archives.



Finally, regardless of everything that has been said so far, the question always arises as to what an event is. The execution of Louis XVI is certainly an historical event. What he ate or did not eat the day before, however, is perhaps of little historical interest. History is not simply the collection of any old facts, but rather an investigation of certain events. There is always interest and relevance for the latter. The fact that Louis XVI was executed is a relevant fact because it makes clear how resolute France's decision to turn away from the monarchy was at that time. And it is interesting because our democratic societies should at least have an interest in their own genesis. This is how facts turn into events. That is why we cannot know whether we ourselves will achieve historical significance; at best we can only claim it. It is only when others look back at us that history is constituted.

Thus history—both that which is written and that which has “happened”—is never merely a component of an archive. But the archive does have an important verification function. Without a transcript of the party conference, for example, myths could easily be formed. For roughly 50 years, the minutes of the KPD's founding conference were con-

sidered lost. It was not until 1968 that the historian Hermann Weber was able to present his discovery of the minutes. And such a thing really is a valuable find. Much can be said in 50 years, a great many stories can be told, but who is there to keep looking at the minutes of a party conference? It is precisely notes such as these that form the basis for the tireless work of dismantling myths.

At one point, however, I regret not having been in the Archives for Democratic Socialism when I wrote my autobiography. There was a meeting of the presidium of the party executive board (I had not been the party chair for very long at that time) and I gave a letter to the committee, which I wished to have sent to the party members. Lothar Bisky then requested that I be sent home immediately and that I not return until I had slept for 48 hours. He also requested that the letter be destroyed immediately. Unfortunately, I cannot remember what it was that I had written in that letter that had caused such a reaction. I assume that the letter is irretrievably lost. And there are indeed worse things. But perhaps it is not lost. Perhaps it still exists somewhere. If I had visited the archives, I would at least know whether or not this draft letter still existed.

# FRIEDRICH BURSCHEL

## *Your Own History*

A personal approach to the importance of preserving and remembering

If I wanted to write about the importance of preserving and securing documents, vestiges and traces of a “left-wing history”, about the “memory of the defeated” (Michel Ragon), to which we and our histories have too often belonged and continue to belong, then I would need to recount several stories simultaneously. The result would be a cacophony of memories, in which an individual’s very own personal story about their family history would be interwoven again and again with the “bigger” history—sometimes

even fused together, causing immediate disorientation. When did I learn how important it was to write my own history?

As it happens, I learned this rather late. Yet without being aware of it, I had been part of this left-wing counter-history from the time I was in school, starting from when we took to the streets with our own version of Fridays for Future in outrage at the atomic armament, the Pershing-II, SS-20 rockets, and the NATO Double-Track Decision, and were admonished by the school administration for conducting a “peace circle” outside the school grounds during class. Back then, more than 350,000 people protested on the Rhine meadows in Bonn. But it was not until 19 December 1999—I was 34 years old at the time—that something became entirely clear to me that I had previously only suspected: I was part of a history that others spoke and wrote about in a hostile way. It was they who had established hegemony over the meaning of this history and caused our counter-story of the events to be erased from public view, or be depicted as a caricature. On 19 December of that year, 1,000 members of the Berlin police stormed the Mehringhof social centre on Gneisenauerstraße. Members of SEK police tactical units arrested—along with several more people in Frankfurt—the manager of Meringhof and my friend and colleague Harald, with machine guns drawn. The entire building in Kreuzberg was torn apart, all the doors broken open and the hollow spaces between walls and staircases were opened up in the search for explosive devices. A state witness had indicated to police that explosives were hidden in the building. This is also why the police raid occurred so shortly before the turn of the century: the leniency programme for state witnesses that was in effect at the

time was due to expire on 31 December. But even though the witness in question was connected to a remote-controlled robot camera during the raid, not a crumb of explosive material was found in Meringhof. The raid left us in a state of utter despair.

I wrote a text at the time, which was nicely prefaced with a Hölderlin quotation — as befitted the offspring of an educated middle-class professor —, under the title “Where danger lies...”, and posted it on the internet and in the Hamburg scene newspaper *Off limits*. In the article, I attempted to discern why such a completely disproportionate amount of effort and violence had been employed, when a few specialists could have quickly determined that there were no explosives. I wrote: “But of course, such a discreet procedure would not have elicited the desired side effect that the police could appear to be in the service of a public that was already trembling in fear of the millennium attack plots and once again locate the spectre of ‘terrorism’ where they wanted it to be: on the left.” At the time, the scene was in a state of emergency, paralyzed by the state’s raids on our structures almost a decade after the end of the phase of “armed struggle” carried out by the Revolutionary Cells (RZ). We organized solidarity for the five prisoners held at the time and tried to counter the narrative that was being disseminated by the mainstream media with a more nuanced version of events. “We must write our own history”, an older colleague we had worked closely with implored us. Leading up to the pending criminal trial in Moabit, we published Zitronenfalter. We distributed reading and discussion materials from the various scene archives and distributed them to many who were not

yet familiar with the history of the Revolutionary Cells (including myself). Finally, we removed the two black volumes of *Früchte des Zorns* (Fruits of Wrath) from the bookshelf in our apartment, where they had been standing idle as decorations or bookends for too long. The publishing house Informations-Dienst zur Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten (ID Verlag) had carried out the honourable work of publishing these volumes, which had given us the opportunity to reconstruct the history of the Revolutionary Cells and to relate it to the policies of the federal government during the time the Revolutionary Cells were active, and to the policies that were current at the time: “In the present situation of speechlessness, however, a very strong need for discussion and transmission of history and events can be felt in all corridors, especially among the youth. For these contemporaries it will be instructive to proceed by reading the explanations and corresponding background literature. Suddenly the memory of Kemal Altun, of the scandalous decisions on deportations in torture states by the Federal Court of Justice (BGH), ... the memory of the fire in police custody at Augustaplatz in Berlin ... in which six prisoners set for deportation were torturously burned to death in an overcrowded cell, the so-called Berlin hole through which many refugees and migrants found their way to Western Europe and which the FRG tried to close by way of all possible means, and the emerging instruments of defence against refugees, which are still familiar to us today in an idealised way, such as the Central Register of Foreign Nationals (AZR)”, my article said.

Anyone born as a white German in this country is bound by their ancestry to the

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history of National Socialism, the utter betrayal of civilized values that was the Holocaust, and the wars of extermination. In many families, somewhere in the cavities of their memory, in attics, knee walls, and cellars, there were boxes, crates, and cases containing letters, documents, photos, and other artefacts from the thousand years between 1933 and 1945, which had survived the lengthy stretch of time since the end of the Nazi regime. Malte Ludin's impressive documentary film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Him* is centred around one such wooden box, and what this box reveals to the director about his father, who was a member of the extermination elite of the Third Reich. It is no wonder that these boxes were not opened until the end of the 20th century, giving way to a new genre in literature and art: working through one's familial past and interrogating and confronting how the perpetrators are entangled with their grandchildren. Simply because they had grown up enough to expose tabooed connections with their own family history. Five years after the events in Berlin, the same thing happened to me, but it concerned my grandfather.

History catches up with you again and again, and archiving, publishing, editing, or the new format of posting left-wing content online certainly involves risks. In the text I mentioned above, I also wrote the following: "So all that remains is personal access: the author, for example, has not been concerned with any 'militant actions' in the Federal Republic of Germany, since he found these to be rather suspicious, and yet he stumbled through clouds of tear gas and was absorbed by them, his open gaze drowned. Admittedly, it was often 'more than just secret joy' that he and those around him at the

time felt after a number of excellent actions, especially when they damaged property." At that time, I was thinking about the attacks on construction machines in Wackersdorf, where Franz Josef Strauß's "nuclear reprocessing plant" was to be built, or of the fact that the Revolutionary Cells had prevented a supermarket from being built on the grounds of the former Ravensbrück concentration camp with an attack. The nuclear reprocessing plant does not exist, the ruins of the supermarket can still be seen today in Fürstenburg/Havel. But such statements, especially with reference to the tiresome debate around Göttinger Mescalero, have not been forgiven by the German federal government and its population. Left-wing terrorism continues to function as a source of national trauma, and declaring enemies has a unifying effect that strengthens the cohesion of society.

In the following years, this tiny snippet from the archives twice cost me my job. And in 2007 the article earned me the refusal of accreditation as a freelance journalist for the G8 summit in Heiligendamm: The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution had identified me as one of the "dirty dozen" journalists who were denied access to the high-security wing around the Grand Hotel Heiligendamm. Two lawsuits against this "sovereign discretization" (Jürgen Seifert) before the Cologne regional courthouse ended successfully; the court declared my ostracism to be illegal and then instructed the federal agency to delete the information about me that had been collected over the course of ten years.

The fact that this domestic secret service, acting as a fatal legal guardian of the "domestic security", has approached me time

and time again probably has to do with my journalistic research work as an anti-fascist. Anyone who talks about Nazis in Germany cannot remain silent about the domestic secret service. Since 4 November 2011 at the very latest, it has no longer been possible to deny this connection. To a large extent, this knowledge and these alarming findings stem from anti-fascist archives and the quasi-scientific and incorruptible research of an anti-fascist—in the best sense of the word—counterintelligence, which always keeps track of the involvement of state actors in the networks of the German Nazi scene. Concerning the National Socialist Underground (NSU) complex, but also more recently with the murder of Kassel's municipal-oversight president Walter Lübcke on 2 June 2019, it was Antifa that was able to present valid and explosive information, often exclusively, early on. An expert report from the federal office of the nationalistic party Alternative for Germany (AfD) took information from the same Antifa sources, which it classified as "left-wing extremist" in its annual reports.

Even my ageing grandmother's last apartment still contained the box that she had had a carpenter make for her in which to keep my grandfather's sacred letters. I, the historian among her nine grandchildren, was once set to inherit this box and was allowed to open it. Shortly before her death at the age of 94, she had tried to have the box destroyed and literally "disposed of", for she suspected what kind of effect my grandfather's 600 letters from France and the Soviet Union might have on the person reading them. This box also contained about 1,000 of her own letters to her husband Heinrich. He had regularly sent bundles of carefully

numbered letters to her at home before he lost track of them in Stalingrad in late January 1943. It then turned out to be quite different from what I had thought, because to this day I have not processed these letters; their contents were far too disturbing. At the time I thought to myself that the German perpetrators had received sufficient space for their view of things and their version of history in the decades since the end of the war. Their narrative had overshadowed the interpretation of the German past and helped create the image of the "immaculate shield of the Wehrmacht", which contrasted with the reality of the crimes of the SS, Gestapo, and Sicherheitsdienst. The trend-setting exhibition on the *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* in the mid-1990s helped put an end to this image.

It was only much later that I came to truly understand the enormous scale of the Shoah and Germany's sprees of destruction. In school, the subject was fobbed off, leaving me with very little reliable knowledge. In addition to this, I was raised in an environment with a fair deal of "Führer" fixation—among others, books from the historical denier Joachim C. Fest were cobbled together with those of "Albert Speer" and "Hitler", on our bookshelves at home. It was only trips to the scenes of the crimes, beyond Auschwitz into the backwoods of Poland, sometimes accompanied by the estimable Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz Institute, that made it unmistakably clear what the extermination of millions of Jews and many other people, carried out partly through industrial division of labour and efficiency or by unimaginably cruel mass executions in the Soviet Union, meant. It was only in recent times and also only after the US television series "Holocaust" had made its way into the cosy living

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rooms of West Germany at the end of the 1970s that large numbers of testimonies from survivors and contemporary witnesses began to appear. In an atmosphere characterized by threateningly successful attempts to downplay the history of Germany's crimes against humanity as "bird shit" (AfD leader Alexander Gauland) in the long stream of history and the desire shared by many to once again be proud "of the achievements of German soldiers in the two world wars" (more precisely) beyond a German "cult of guilt", these testimonies have made it possible for those eager to know more to discover the whole truth. Perhaps with the late publication of Raul Hilberg's monumental work *The Destruction of the European Jews* in German in the early 1980s and Claude Lanzmann's deeply harrowing nine-hour documentary *Shoah* in 1985, something began which is far from over and which is based in part on documents believed to have been lost, such as the unsettling memoirs of survivor Kalmen Wewryk titled *To Sobibor and Back*, of which a German translation was first published in November 2019. After the concentration camps were liberated from German forces, knowledge about the suffering and death of millions was discovered in secret messages that people had hastily noted down during the ongoing extermination process, and had often buried or hidden at the sites of the executions shortly before their own murder, out of the existential feeling of witnessing the unthinkable and indescribable and needing to set it in writing for some kind of posterity. Much of it, whether the Ringelblum Archive in the Warsaw Ghetto or the messages from the inside of the extermination chambers, was quickly hidden in mortal fear in the inferno of the incinerators, and today forms the basis of knowledge about the Shoah. Much

of what people could have left behind then, whether intentionally or accidentally, disappeared with their execution or with the destruction of the traces of the mass murders. The little we have can be considered a guarantor of the truth.

The knowledge of very many perpetrators, on the other hand, has survived with them and—contrary to the alleged tabooing of the subject—has flowed into the stream of post-war German history in an heroic or trivialized form, which characterizes the half-heartedness of the much-praised "coming to terms with the German past" and forms the breeding ground for the resurgence of nationalistic ideologies in our time. So what do I do with the letters of my perpetrator grandfather, who was definitely a Nazi and also a fervent anti-Semite, just like my grandmother? When I began to work on this ambivalent heritage, the biggest surprise was not that my grandfather was a Nazi. This is quite clear, but more passim in his letters. What was most disturbing about the letters I had read at the time is something else entirely: they are highly erotic letters that he had written to his wife, my grandmother, full of sexual desire and physical longing. It was only once I had read Dagmar Herzog's excellent book *The Politicization of Lust* that I was able to understand these surprisingly pornographic scenes, which certainly determine the tone of the letters, and to adjust my image of my grandfather as a cruel, asexual Nazi disciplined to be body-phobic, and then to put the reading of the letters aside in a state of irritation.

The surveillance state, which keeps a domestic secret service called the *Verfassungsschutz* in order to watch out for "anybody

who does something criminal at night" (Extrabreit), and which I hardly took any notice of for a long time, has been with me since the encounter described above—literally. The role of the *Verfassungsschutz* (protection of the constitution) in the NSU complex has completely strengthened my opinion that the "secrets" and "secret service" of these 16 state secret services, plus the federal office pose a threat to an open and democratic society. After the disaster of the first proceedings to ban the NPD in 2003 and with the uncovering of the NSU's terror network in 2011, it must have become clear to every halfway attentive person in the country that the *Verfassungsschutz* was part of, rather than the solution to a massive problem with right-wing structures that are prepared to commit acts of terror in Germany. The growth and development of the Nazi structures in Thuringia, for example, would simply be unthinkable without the lavish financial support and material contributions of the local state office's undercover agent Tino Brandt. It has been proven that there were at least 40 informants placed within the NSU and its support network, which should make clear to even the most law-abiding people what kind of a horrible institution we are dealing with here. But not even the fact that then on 11 November 2011 (11/11/11)—seven days after the NSU had been exposed—a head of department in the federal office (presumably at the beginning of the carnival at 11:11) ordered the destruction of all files in the federal office pertaining to the NSU, thereby violating the constitution. Although the head of department was sentenced—after relatives of one of the ten murder victims of the NSU sued him—to pay 3,000 euros for "breach of custody", the proceedings were discontinued, despite the fact that he had been falsely as-

serting since the very beginning that the files had been shredded for reasons of time and data protection. It was only much later that he was confronted with his own statement before the second parliamentary NSU investigative committee, which he had made to the Federal Criminal Police Office and which stated that he had had the information about the Nazi informants recruited in Thuringia as part of "Operation Rennsteig" collected and destroyed specifically and in order to avert repercussions from the authorities. But this original sin initiated a lively trend of document destruction in other state institutions dealing with criminal prosecution and the *Verfassungsschutz*, so that approximately 400 NSU-related files had disappeared after a one-year period. But even after the grandiose announcement of a moratorium on file destruction, the destruction or disappearance of relevant archival materials occurred again and again throughout the course of the NSU trial at the Higher Regional Court in Munich, which lasted over five years. In those cases where the secret service authorities could not avoid handing over their files, however, this duty of disclosure of their "work results" to the sovereign, which is to say the parliaments at the federal and state levels, was marked by obstruction, inexplicable delays, arrogant rejection of the demands of the investigative committees, and even the extensive sanitization of entire files. In the course of the work of the Hessian NSU investigative committee in Wiesbaden, the Ministry of the Interior even resorted to blocking a classified internal report on connections from Hesse to Thuringia in connection with the NSU for an outrageous and extremely unusual 120 years. However, due to protests, this classification was reduced to 30 years, and Dirk Laabs—basically the only truly investigative

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journalist within the bourgeois press — at least filed a lawsuit to disclose some detailed information from the report, such as how often the alleged murderer of Walter Lübke and his alleged accomplice are mentioned in the official text. The fact that the suspect is mentioned eleven times once again reinforces the pressing suspicion that explosive findings and connections are being deliberately concealed. But as the secret service coordinator in the Federal Chancellery, Klaus-Dieter Fritsche, who himself was Vice President of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution while the NSU was active, said so beautifully: “State secrets that undermine government action must not be made public.” A small anecdote in passing: after his retirement, Fritsche officially became an advisor to the right-wing national former Austrian Minister of the Interior Herbert Kickl for the restructuring of the *Verfassungsschutz* in Austria.

I hope that my very personal reflections on the subject of archives have made clear the importance of securing and preserving documents and archival materials of all kinds, as well as the sensitive handling of the property collected. I emphasize the importance of this not only for my own, left-wing historiography, but also for any kind of investigation into social and political conflicts, ruptures, and upheavals, into state and war crimes; as for investigations into the reconstruction of what has been thwarted, smoothed out, lied about, and falsified in a national frenzy, out of authoritarian dogmatism, or in some other way guided by special interests. For these reasons, we must visit archives, collection points, libraries, view their databases and digital volumes, and incorporate them into our work. Even if one can only ever approach the “whole truth”, we are obliged out of our own interest to at least attempt to approach it.

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# WOLFGANG GEHRCKE

## *Looking back without anger*

I like to look back, and not in anger, even though some of my mistakes bother me. Retrospection is crucial when it comes to understanding the present. Perhaps Die Linke engages in too little retrospection these days, choosing instead to focus too much on day-to-day operations. The process of retrospection is likely to conjure up very different images and memories in the East and West; after all, an entire state and social order were collapsing in the East just as the West was bourgeoning. This is a pro-

found historical turning point. Meanwhile, the fall of actually existing socialism has left far more mourners than surviving dependents in its wake. In the West, there were political struggles that have not led to the desired outcome of radical social change, but still leave their mark on people today. In my life, both Germanies collide with one another. In the West, at any rate, which is where I lived—until the fall of the Wall, I primarily resided in Hamburg, and spent a number of years in the Ruhr district—but also in the East. After nine years of primary school education, it was comrades from the GDR who granted me access to the world of art and culture and also opened the door to the Soviet Union for me, which was integral to European security and peace—just as the door to Russia is today. With the help of the GDR, we were able to organize classical music concerts, concerts for workers in the West. The large exhibition in Hamburg about the artwork of Willi Sitte was as much a political undertaking as the study circle in which we explored the wonderful world of works by Marx and Engels.

My historical awareness was enhanced during the struggle against rearmament and the great silence that cloaked Europe between 1933 and 1945. I got into strife with my father—and with almost everyone in his generation—because I wanted to know about how they had behaved during the period of fascist rule. It was not the perpetrators or fellow travellers who spoke about what had happened, but rather those who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime. I suspected that they were communists; their party had already been banned. It was from them that I acquired the motto “Never again fascism, never again war”, which led to my being kicked out of the SPD and its

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youth organization Die Falken (The Falcons) in 1961, around the same time that the wall was built.

### **CODENAME:**

#### **CHRISTIAN HAMMERER**

I then started telling everybody that if I were to join a party ever again, it would only be the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). At some point, my wish was granted. My entry to their ranks was marked with a small ceremony. My two guarantors and the party secretary are no longer alive, but I think back on them with gratitude. At one of the first party conferences to which I was invited, which took place in East Berlin, somebody asked me what my name was. My answer, "Wolfgang Gehrcke", triggered looks of horror and dismay. It was then that I was asked whether I had a codename. I didn't have one, and had to make one up on the spot. The only thing that came to mind was my mother's maiden name, Hammerer. In the list of those working undercover, the name Christian was not yet taken. From now on, I would be known as Christian Hammerer in these circles. Under my alias, I designed leaflets, spoke at rallies, and—something that was very important for me—was involved in developing the KPD's youth policy, which led in 1968 to the establishment of the Socialist German Workers Youth (SDAJ). I was involved in its management, and was its chairperson for a number of years.

#### **EVERYTHING IS NOTHING WITHOUT PEACE**

But beforehand, I had other party objectives to fulfil—namely to participate in the peace movement. At the time, the movement was chiefly constituted by the Aldermaston marches conducted by the anti-nuclear

activists, a tradition that had been brought back from Britain by Konrad Tempel, who was a Quaker, and his partner Helga Stolle. The first Aldermaston march to be conducted in Germany took place in 1961 over a three-day period and travelled from Hohne, an area near the village of Belsen and the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, over the Lüneburg Heath, to Hamburg. I helped organize the march. I was enthralled by it, perhaps even because of its "loneliness"; we were but a few hundred people, and our supporters. Sleeping inside barns and windmills, with a whole lot of love in between—that was rather enticing.

*Anti-fascism and the struggle for peace are inextricably linked. At the Ohlsdorf cemetery in Hamburg, there is a memorial grove for deceased and murdered anti-fascists. The memorial for Ernst Thälmann, whose board of trustees I worked on for a number of years, should also be seen in this context. Thälmann was murdered at the Buchenwald concentration camp; the plight of the German working class is reflected in his life and death. One can reproach him for his strategic mistakes, but the fact remains that he gave his life in the fight against fascism.*

#### **NO MASS MOVEMENT WITHOUT CULTURE**

In the beginning, the peace movement was also a youth movement; it became a big cultural movement with communists right at the heart of it. Without culture, there can be no mass movement, and vice versa: mass movements are simultaneously the breeding ground for culture, and that which it yields. At the time, there were artists like Hannes Wader, Franz Josef Degenhardt, Dieter Süverkrüp, the great Fasia Jansen, who had already taken to the streets dur-

ing the first Aldermaston march, cabaret artists like Hanns Dieter Hüsch, painters like Adolf Wriggers and Willy Colberg, or cartoonists like Stefan Siegert. These days there are other names for it, but to this day, the peace movement remains a cultural movement, as seen in Ramstein; (still) only somewhat smaller than the movements against the emergency powers, or the NATO missile decision. I will never forget the peace demonstration that took place in Bonn in 1981 and drew a crowd of 350,000; I was a member of the central action committee that was in charge of preparing for the demonstration.

Artists were well aware of what they were doing when they became a part of these movements, and sometimes a driving force: they were cut by the established institutions, and this is still the case to this day. For example, in the music index kept by the Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR), there were instructions filed under the name Franz Josef Degenhardt: "Only with authorization from the artistic director." Brilliant artists were to be silenced, similar to what had been done in the USA under McCarthy. But here, just as in the USA, there were people who discovered and revealed these underhanded schemes; in the "case" of Degenhardt and the NDR, the people in question were members of the local DKP works group.

Today, we can choose to either mourn this breadth of politics and politicized social life, or we can make attempts to pick up the thread. *Doing this, to name just two names: artists like Diether Dehm, whose popular songs are also poignant and moving, or the visual artist Heidrun Hegewald, whose magnificent works the official art establishment would like to retroactively remove from GDR culture.*

## POLITICAL PERSECUTION

The political left in West Germany never enjoyed particularly extensive periods of respite from discrimination or persecution. As many as 200,000 preliminary proceedings were launched in connection with the 1956 banning of the KPD, which often led to people losing their jobs and their "good reputation"; as many as 10,000 people received prison sentences (among some 6,000 to 7,000 KPD members at the time). Then in 1971, under the Brandt government, professional bans came into effect with unlimited spying in the form of 3.5 million (!) enquiries to the *Verfassungsschutz* (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) about the "loyalty to the constitution" exhibited not only by those applying for the civil service, but also by former employees. Postmen were found to be too disloyal to be entrusted with the task of delivering letters, and honest and upright customs officers were declared unreliable and untrustworthy. And there were also professional bans that were intended to keep an entire generation of young, politically aware, left-wing intellectuals involved in the 1968 movement out of schools and universities. Willy Brandt later made the mistake of referring to the move as the *Radikalenerlass* (Radicals Decree). But to this day, those affected are still fighting for their rehabilitation.

Defending democracy, taking part in the peace movement, maintaining an open mind towards political opponents, being involved in trade unions—I incorporate all of these elements from my past into my political work in the present. I also incorporate my love for Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and their liberation movements. Some comrades travelled from Hamburg to Cuba to help with construction efforts, where they

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also harvested sugarcane; in Nicaragua, they helped with electrification; in El Salvador, in a collaborative action with others, we supported the establishment of a rebel radio station in the fight against the right-wing-bandit leadership, and, yes, we also collected money for weapons for the liberation movement Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

### **STANDING TALL AS WE WALK THROUGH THE GATE**

Forms of action from the extra-parliamentary movement such as blockades and occupations managed to find their way into the political struggles of trade unions; one example of this is the fight to preserve the Krupp steel works situated in the areas of Rheinhausen, von Hoesch, Westfalenhütte, and Union in Dortmund, and the large shipyard Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft (HDW) in Hamburg. It was always the workers in the companies themselves who took the initiative to conduct actions of this kind, but it was possible for those outside the companies to support them. A great deal of support came from artists, the women's movement, which had developed parallel to the labour movement, and from church circles. I was directly involved in all of the aforementioned company actions, in particular the occupation of HDW in Hamburg. I was involved in an action with a small communist action group: after consulting with our colleagues on the works council, we sailed across the Elbe by night and boarded a dry dock. This involved a great deal of effort on my part because I am afraid of heights, and from the water, a dry dock is as tall as a skyscraper. Chained

together, we managed to hold out for a few hours with our banner of solidarity, but the security guards were equipped with big bolt cutters and had burly men to take us away. I will never forget the image of the HDW workers who, after losing the battle, left their factory in a protest march carrying a banner emblazoned with the words *Standing tall as we walk through the gate*.

The notion of standing tall as we walk through the gate still persists to this day; failing to achieve a goal is one thing, but not giving in to coercion is another thing entirely.

### **MY FILES SHOULD BE MADE PUBLIC**

It is likely that you can read about all of this and much more in the file that the *Verfassungsschutz* created about me, which contains more than 10,000 sheets of paper. I want this file to be made public. Everyone should be able to read what the spooks have collected about me. While I was in the process of attempting to obtain (access to) my files, I went as far as the Federal Administrative Court and offered to have them placed in the federal archives and thus made accessible to the public. The *Verfassungsschutz* refused my request at the time, and the courts unfortunately followed suit. It is not destroying the files that is important, but rather having them published, because files such as these constitute part of our collective memory. With this in mind, I would also like to thank the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung for their efforts in creating and maintaining an extensive archive on left-wing politics in Germany.





TWENTY-YEAR ARCHIVES OF THE ROSA-LUXEMBURG-STIFTUNG

# USERS OF MEMORY

POLITICS

SCIENCE

JOURNALISM

# TOM STROHSCHNEIDER

## *A Question of Transmission*

### Why left-wing memory is so important in the quest for a different kind of future

At some point in the scorching summer of 2019, a manuscript arrived that could be used as a basis for reflecting upon left-wing memory. The text revolved around the question of whether the movement Fridays for Future, which at that point was still in its infancy, was on the right political track: whether it had made a sufficient emotio-

nal appeal to the baby-boomer generation; whether it had learned the necessary lessons from left-wing history. Then, an older person penned a text accusing the younger generation of not yet having “fully understood” fundamental problems, issues, and perspectives.

It would be easy at this juncture to get politely upset about pretensions such as these, which stem from a know-it-all attitude towards new social movements and younger generations of left-wing activists. A paternalistic perspective such as the one cited above will naturally come up against accusations of arrogance. But do we really want to be so quick to point the finger at others? How often have you had the first-hand experience of mentioning a name that you consider to be important from your own historical perspective, only to find that it is met with uncomprehending stares? How often have you thought, with eyebrows raised, that this is a brand-new idea that is only now being discussed—an idea that had thrice been rejected years or decades earlier.

It is also possible to interpret the phrase “not yet fully understood” as a benevolent piece of sympathetic advice. We do not have to make the mistakes of the past all over again; not every debate has to be rehashed in every era or generation; there is a kind of history of experience that we should draw from in order to create the future. Whether the issue at hand is expropriation, alternative economic strategies, questions of authoritarian populism, the criticism of racism, gender relations—all of these and many more have been discussed in the past. Being left-wing sometimes means being ahead of one’s time: today, there are issues on the agenda in which the search for answers could benefit from this left-wing memory.



“Trivializing environmental issues by appealing to consumers (to drive their cars less often, to purchase phosphate-free detergents, or to buy their groceries from organic food shops) is an attempt to conceal a politically motivated aversion to industrial intervention and an unwillingness to break through the logic of capital.” This was stated decades ago in a draft of a text titled “Grundlagen der Radikalen Linken” (Fundamentals of the Radical Left). It was the autumn of 1989, and those in the progressive camp of the Federal Republic of Germany were looking for new opportunities to forge alliances and develop new approaches that would enable them to go on the socio-critical offensive, while a few kilometres to the east, opposition groups were speaking out. In the opening appeal of the grass-roots movement Neues Forum (New Forum), warnings were issued regarding the ecological costs of a consumer society, and pleas were made to “curb uncontrolled growth”. They wanted to “make room for renewal in order to live in a more economical and environmentally friendly manner”. In its day, the movement Demokratie Jetzt (Democracy Now) contended that democratic socialism was necessary “because when humanity is under threat and in search of viable, long-term modes of human coexistence, it will require alternatives to Western consumer society, whose affluence the rest of the world has had to pay for”.

Both of these examples have something in common, namely that what was discussed, desired, criticized, and demanded would, from a contemporary perspective, be branded a “failure”. The attempts made by the radical left in the West to reorganize failed not least due to the same national dynamics that also pulled the rug out from un-

der the feet of those in the GDR who were calling for a “third way”. Today, when we look back on the events of 1989 and 1990, it is generally from the end of history, which historically devalues part of the Peaceful Revolution: the left-wing, social, and ecological awakenings of that era do not fit into an image of memory marked by national unity and capitalist triumph. And the same can be said of the left in the West: they were among those who resisted the furious, thunderous march towards reunification. But, because the predominant view of history now deems this “reunification” to be the “right” outcome of that course of events, other perspectives and positions, alternative answers, and radical lines of questioning are “written out” of the general population’s collective memory.

It is therefore possible to make generalizations about the things that apply to these two examples: if it is true that past endeavours—successful or otherwise—can also be useful in the search for answers, then the left needs to think about how it engages with its own memory, how it nurtures it, and also how it employs it. This leads to two sets of problems. One revolves more around questions of the left’s self-image—in other words, the characteristic of needing to search for answers about the future in the past. The other is of a somewhat more formal, institutional nature: how can we safeguard the process of collecting and the material storage requirements; how can we ensure that these collections are “kept available”, even beyond the generally finite lifespan of individual organizations, cycles of movements, and even beyond our own individual biographies? When it comes to this subject, it would be a little odd to omit from a text the great many past endeavours

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that revolve around questions of left-wing memory. The Berlin-based *Papiertiger* (Paper Tiger), an archive that seeks to “assist in the reappraisal of its own history in this form”, has long said that a “pervasive sense of ahistoricity, the coexistence of different currents and approaches, and a general sense of detachment within the structures of movements hinders the collective reappraisal of political experiences and the emergence of intergenerational learning processes”, by “functioning as a kind of ‘memory for the left’, collecting materials, and making them available to those interested in historical work”. There are a great number of these “free archives”; many of them operate under precarious conditions, and their future is not entirely secured. A few years ago, the Verband deutscher Archivarinnen und Archivare e.V. (Association of German Archivists) drew attention to this fact and formulated a series of proposals titled “Zur Zukunft der Archive von Protest-, Freiheits- und Emanzipationsbewegungen” (On the Future of Archives for Protest, Freedom, and Emancipation Movements), which included plans to establish a foundation that would be “made available as a central institution for receiving those archives that are about to be destroyed”. Recent shifts in modes of communication present a relatively new problem for preserving left-wing memory. The internet has not only shifted people’s perception of the world, but has also in a broad sense shaken up the ways in which content is produced and disseminated. Who collects tweets and Facebook calls, or the debates conducted in social networks, or the photos and flyers that are only available electronically? Already precarious business models, such as those of independent publishers, are also coming under even greater

pressure in this internet era. The difficult situation in which newspapers—including political and scientific periodicals—find themselves should also be taken into account here.

Without papers such as these, the aforementioned critical traditions would not have been able to take shape in the first place. No debates would have been conducted, and we would not have the concepts and theories that were developed in the struggle for analytical quality, political points, and social effectiveness.

Part of this memory of critical thinking is in danger of disappearing—namely the archives, backlists, experiences, and contexts. What we are dealing with here is the material existence of projects that contribute to the preconditions of social criticism. This applies not least to the period since 1989: three decades in which much has occurred on the left both on a local and global level, and in which critical self-reflection, radical new beginnings, and attempts at political practice have taken place under hitherto unknown technological and social conditions.

Those who wish to talk about left-wing memory must expand the conversation beyond the question of how the preservation of “our history” can be safeguarded at an institutional level. If we are honest, this is usually done with other people’s money. We also need to talk about the culture of making collections available, of entrusting them, and also of the openness it takes to hand a part of one’s own biography to another person, knowing full well that it will not remain under lock and key, but rather will only have an educational impact when it is public issue once again, when political allegiances and learning processes are possible. This is not easy, especially in a political scene that

seems to have a tendency towards internal division and conflict hardwired into its DNA. Something can be done, however, to combat these gaps in left-wing memory, which stem from gaps in transmission.

First, a culture of mutual respect and appreciation might be helpful—one that is also maintained when political controversies have increased. Secondly, it would be helpful to cultivate a self-image that does not measure learning resources according to some sort of “authority” of earlier think-

ers, but rather according to whether the resources are helpful when it comes to solving contemporary issues. The idea might also be disseminated that all actions towards changing conditions always have an historical side whose usefulness for cognitive processes and creating strategies should be discussed. We are not in need of new classics or saints, but we do need the desire to seek and find something in the past that sharpens the critique and facilitates the practice on a political level.

# ALEX DEMIROVIĆ

## *Archives and Politics*

If everything were preserved, there would be no history, because history is connected with loss, and the ephemeral. Not every loss is cause for regret. There is much that we would like to rid ourselves of, unburden ourselves of. It is only in retrospect that we sometimes realize that it was a mistake not to have preserved something; because it would have been a memory, because it would have proved useful, because in retrospect we can see that there would have been alternatives. We do not contemplate

the transience of action in our everyday dealings; instead, we live and carry out the requirements or freedoms of the day-to-day. Everyday life represents the familiar and, in its nowness, seems certain to us. It manifests often enough as the repetition of the same actions, that is, habits; this is normality unfolding. It is absolutely positive to live life, provided it is possible to do things in one's familiar environment with some degree of regularity, to spend time with people one likes, or to resolve conflicts that one might miss. In all of these repetitions, small, sometimes barely perceptible shifts take place, which develop their own rhythm. They lead to a different economy, one that sometimes creeps up on us slowly, but at the same time has the power to suddenly shift our perspective. Then, looking back, we know that something has shifted and changed. We come to understand that that sense of normality cannot be retrieved; the memory is unreliable, the steady rhythm engulfs events and experiences. We only remember selectively and unreliably; much is lost, but some things live on in our memory with the clarity and precision of a photograph: an action, a decision, an argument, a gesture, a facial feature. When habits and routines are shifted, everyday life is shifted—space is made for other topics of conversation, other people, other behaviours. We still think we would know what we were doing and would remember anyway. But then we have to realize that the degrees of relevance have changed and, when it comes to people, the common points of reference, experiences, and knowledge. We have to reflect on and strive to remember how it was: which issues we dealt with, which people we argued with and where, and what the cause of the conflict was.

Some of these processes can be distinguished according to their external rhythms: the chairs of a political group, party, or foundation, the election campaigns and parliamentary terms, the party conferences, and the commissions. Discussions and events, arrangements and plans take place around events such as these, which have their own kind of regularity. We may not want all things to be preserved; in which case it will then become part of that story that we can at most suspect existed.

These experiences are incorporated into the institution of the archive: it is a site of preservation that defies history and transience. But, at the same time, it constitutes history, because, through the act of preserving, it allows us to remember and understand that the present is the present of this history—that we had challenges, conflict, and alternatives. It is therefore good that we are able to know about it without having to rely on the testimonies of those who bore witness to past events. But an act of preservation always represents an act of selection. This means that aspects of the present determine how institutionalized memory is ordered—that is, that which in future will appear to us to constitute the past, but will then seem inadequate and be evaluated as a wrong decision from the perspective of the future present. Every archive is bound to fail, because archives require criteria that guide the selection process; criteria that have been obtained from history, interrogated, and overhauled. This is why it makes sense to assemble a generous selection. This puts each archive in relation to other archives.

It is of great importance to the left that it have its own historical memory, for domination also involves the ability and the endeavour to have time at one's disposal and to

dispossess the dominated of their memory, to mock them, or to put them in the wrong. This would imply that all the present endeavours of the contemporary left, all of the practices and the alternatives are suppressed. This includes memories of defeats, nasty conflicts, aborted attempts, even on the left itself. People are easily mistaken when it comes to their own actions and often overestimate their own importance, or the importance of their experiences and decisions. They also believe that their ideas, objectives, achievements are original; wherever these represent a repetition, or are reversed in retrospect as an action or a line of thought with far-reaching implication, it is essential to take a look in the archives. The prospect of historical research is essential, the prospect of a retrospective view that allows us to flesh out the details of the new, that picks up the thread of past ideas, recalls that which has not reached its conclusion, or warns against once again trying out strategies we know to be futile. Perhaps history does not teach us directly, but rather is that experience that is perceptible just below the surface, which one encounters in archival materials; that tacit knowledge that suggests that we not go down certain paths again, that we examine present-day actions in light of the past, or to see itself confirmed. The archive represents an attempt to keep this knowledge alive and to make it available for critical analysis. The history of the left and lines of socialist development must be wrested from the supremacy and dominance of bourgeois history. According to Walter Benjamin, it is the victors who write history, and they have yet to stop winning. And the speed with which decades of efforts to achieve historical truth can be devalued is exemplified in the activities conducted by the AfD,

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or in the newspaper attacks on supposed political correctness—a magic formula that denounces historical experience and knowledge acquired through painstaking efforts to remember and preserve the past. Society’s experiences of violence—also the

violence within the left itself—are cause for a precise historical analysis that will enable us to do things differently next time and perhaps also to overcome those traumas that are caused by the things people do to each other.

# ALBERT SCHARENBERG

## *Wresting History from the Grips of Conformism*

On the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's  
historical perspective

**I. "IN EVERY EPOCH, THE  
ATTEMPT MUST BE MADE  
TO DELIVER TRADITION ANEW  
FROM THE CONFORMISM  
WHICH IS ON THE POINT OF  
OVERWHELMING IT." –  
WALTER BENJAMIN**

In his fragmentary essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History", Walter Benjamin compares the predominant "bourgeois" interpretation of history, historicism, with a

fundamentally different approach to history. As many are well aware, the historiography involved in historicism seeks to empathize with the people concerned in past events in order to understand history. But who exactly does it empathize with?

"The answer is inevitable", writes Benjamin, "with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers ... Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate."

The critical among us might not join in this triumphant howl. After all, a left-wing—that is, critical—interpretation of history does not engage in the work of court clerks, which always served the interests of princes, kings, and autocrats, nor does it formulate a self-satisfied *l'histoire pour l'histoire* (history for the sake of history), but rather directs our attention to the past with the explicit objective of permeating and disrupting the historical continuum of the victors and exploring strategic spaces for emancipatory action. A left-wing, democratic-socialist historiography that strives for emancipation and liberation would thus interrogate the rulers' lengthy chain of victories and would respond with empathy to those who were deprived of the means to pass on their own experiences; whose histories were not afforded the same value. Left-wing historiography resists the allure of the blathering sycophants of eras past—not least on behalf of those who today, in the present, are ruled by the heirs of the ruling classes of the past.

Bertolt Brecht's famous "Questions from a Worker Who Reads" vividly expresses the shift in perspective that is connected with such an approach: "Who built the seven

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gates of Thebes? / The books are filled with names of kings. / Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone? ... And even in Atlantis of the legend / The night the seas rushed in, / The drowning men still bel-lowed for their slaves.”

Left-wing historiography, as we understand it, prizes an alternative narrative from the past, a history forgotten beneath the depths. “The materialist presentation of history”, Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*, “leads the past to bring the present into a critical state.”

**II. “FREEDOM ONLY FOR THE SUPPORTERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, ONLY FOR THE MEMBERS OF ONE PARTY – HOWEVER NUMEROUS THEY MAY BE – IS NO FREEDOM AT ALL. FREEDOM IS ALWAYS AND EXCLUSIVELY FREEDOM FOR THE ONE WHO THINKS DIFFERENTLY.” –**

**ROSA LUXEMBURG**

As the reference to its Jewish-Polish eponym already demonstrates, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung considers itself to constitute part of the fundamental social current of democratic socialism. For the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the two terms “democracy” and “socialism” are inextricably linked.

The interrelationship between “democracy” and “socialism” is at the core of our historical self-image, and there is a good reason for this. Mistakes have been made and crimes have been committed in the name of socialism and communism; we understand the roots of these mistakes and crimes and wish to prevent them from being repeated. The call expressed by Marx in the introduction to the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of*

*Right*, “to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being”, remains for us the categorical imperative, even with a view to the catacombs of Stalinism and “post-Stalinism”, because historical justice is indivisible. We are convinced that those who fail to confront the mistakes made and the crimes committed in the name of socialism not only lose their credibility, but also lay the groundwork for its resurrection. In this sense, democratic socialism is based upon a fundamental anti-Stalinist consensus.

In contrast to the “new right” — people like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán — who are fighting for an “illiberal democracy”, we consider individual freedoms and constitutional guarantees to be constitutive of democracy. Democratic co-determination is impossible without defence against despotism. In this sense, freedom and equality belong together, they constitute a tandem, a point stressed by Michael Brie: “Freedom without equality is exploitation; equality without freedom is oppression. Solidarity is the common root of freedom and equality.” At the same time, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung argues for a high degree of historical differentiation. Instead of stoking the embers of ideologically motivated prejudices, we should make the effort to look more closely. This explicitly applies to the historiography of the GDR and the individual biographies of its citizens.

**III. “CONTRADICTION ENLIVENS THE CONVERSATION; THIS IS WHY IT’S SO QUIET ON THE FARMS.” – GERMAN PROVERB**

Critical historiography inevitably contradicts the legitimation of power; from its perspective, contradiction is the vehicle of intellec-



tual development, and resistance is the engine that drives social development.

There are historical facts. There are both true and fictitious statements. But what does not exist is a “correct” interpretation of the past. In this respect, too, the party-communist logic has proved fatal: according to this logic, the “historical subject”, the working class, fulfils an “historical mission” which can ultimately only be implemented by the “leading role” of the party, which is consequently “always right”. The logical consequence is therefore that Stalinism did not hesitate to falsify historical facts—in contemporary vocabulary, fake news. One need only think of the retouching and editing of photographs.

But if the key to a critical, dialectical interpretation of history is inherently rooted in contradiction, then there is a need for democratic pluralism. In other words, different lines of inquiry, interpretations, and evaluations of historical events and contexts form the foundation of a democratic historiography.

But pluralism has another dimension. For far too long, even left-wing historiography that extended beyond party communism has regarded history as essentially the product of white male protagonists—and has tended to define the “historical subject” in accordance with this perspective. In this way, however, the majority of people who lived through past eras—women, the colonized, the marginalized—are simply conjured out of being. Fortunately, emancipation movements—from the women’s movement, to movements for racial justice, to the LGBT-QIA+ movement—have made significant efforts to go against the historical grain. In doing so, it is necessary to look at the whole picture: for example, if we were to examine the history of the Atlantic triangular slave

trade from the perspective of shipowners and merchants, we would sketch an entirely different image of the past than an historian who places enslaved people at the centre of their investigation. Knowledge and interest are also closely linked in this regard. Anyone who directs their gaze towards those who have historically been oppressed will find that it is impossible to avoid touching upon topics such as exploitation by way of capitalist wage labour, gender hierarchy, colonialism, and other forms of social domination.

#### **IV. “THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IN THE HANDS OF THE OPPRESSOR IS THE MIND OF THE OPPRESSED.” –**

**STEVE BIKO**

The politics of history, in particular for the German left, means not putting the Nazi past to rest, but instead, being committed to confronting and countering the Nazis and their “populist” apologists. “The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again”, wrote Theodor W. Adorno in his essay “Education after Auschwitz”. In other words, we must prevent the “180-degree turnaround in the politics of memory” demanded by the AfD.

History, however, does not only—or even primarily—influence the present through historical-political confrontations. On the contrary, that which has a significant influence on people’s consciousness, as well as the image they draw of the society in which they live are the changing yet persistent material, political, and cultural conditions of domination—and thus also the generational transfer of experiences and traditions. In this way, their consciousness becomes a weapon of those in power, as Steve Biko put it. “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a

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nightmare on the brains of the living”, wrote Karl Marx in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon”. For Antonio Gramsci, this led to the call made in “Prison Booklets” for people to “criticize all previous philosophy insofar as it has left behind firmly established stratifications in popular philosophy”. One thing is certain: there is no “zero hour” — neither in the past nor in the future —

that created a tabula rasa in the minds of individuals. Life and thought inevitably take place within a space of contradictions, and no Francis Fukuyama, no Hegelian *Weltgeist* will lead us to the “end of history”. On the contrary: the knowledge of this inconsistency remains an essential prerequisite for a history and a politics of memory whose objective is emancipation.

# JÖRN SCHÜTRUMPF

## *Archives Against Historical Amnesia*

The socialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has—at least in Europe—been relegated to the past; a past, however, that does not want to fade.<sup>1</sup> This socialism, which was once routinely depicted by those who championed it as “scientific”, “humanistic”, and “actually existing”, represents all but one thing: emancipation from all conditions “in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being”.<sup>2</sup> (This is how a Karl Marx, following Ludwig Feuerbach, once imagined it.) Instead, this socialism rhymed

with paternalism and degradation, with slander and betrayal, and, yes, even with torture and murder. For those who still believe that they have sound reasons for holding on to an alternative to social relations that are otherwise dominated by capital, this socialism weighs on their minds like a nightmare. The socialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offers the most convincing arguments against overcoming the dominance of capital; with regard to civilization, socialism has never managed to reach beyond its condition at birth, that of violence: “Revolution always means a state of social emergency, restriction, and extreme conditions; a return to a state of ‘normality’ is generally only possible at a higher historical level at the price of a Thermidorian Reaction. In the bourgeois revolution, the state of extreme violence (which culminated in the Reign of Terror) was a temporary phenomenon that preceded the imposition of the institutionalization of ‘civil society’, which came at the inevitable cost of the retreat of maximalism. For socialism, on the other hand, the permanence of direct violence remained the determining factor; the exceptional social situation became ‘normality’. Violence not only became the ‘midwife’ (Marx) of the new society, it remained its crucial pillar.”<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the perspective held by the political left (in its broadest sense) in terms of the 70 years of “real socialist” practice, the left—as a whole and in its entire breadth—remains chained to the gulag, the wall, and the barbed wire. At least, it will remain this way as long as the left fails to understand that a nightmare can only be brought to an end by way of systematic and repeated confrontation with all of its aspects; never by trying to repress, or even ignore it. This will only preserve it—for generations.

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However, this ultimately non-socialism from the past also offers opportunities that are often overlooked: unlike the period leading up to 1917, socialism is no longer a vague idea today—there are 70 years of practice from which one can learn how to bring the concept of socialism into discredit for a long time, but also learn about all the things that socialism definitely is not. It is, however, not sufficient to simply know what happened—historians have long since answered these questions, at least for the most part. The questions that need to be asked pertain to the why and how, and not just the who, what, and when.

Ever since the opening of the archives in the former Eastern Bloc, an entire phalanx of historians has been sitting on the legacy of twentieth-century socialism. It is difficult for academics to reach a broader public, regardless of their discipline. It is not entirely surprising that, in the present case, this is for the most part not achieved by those who interrogate the links between ideas and their non-realization, and in doing so investigate all aspects of this complex—but above all by those who serve the mainstream opinion makers by reducing the general perception of socialism to one of crime and terror.

This distorted incarnation of socialism is of use to all political powers, bar one: the political left. If the left has a genuine interest in leading contemporary society—which remains both politically and economically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> now is the time for it to find its way back more consistently than ever before to its former virtues, which were stripped of all meaning in the torture chambers and at party conference productions: to honesty about one's own actions in both the past and present; to the genuine nature of one's own thoughts,

especially when it becomes uncomfortable; to sincerity, also and especially towards one's opponent. At best, dictatorships are built with deceitfulness; but nobody is encouraged either with or through them, let alone empowered, to seek emancipation from exploitation and oppression.

Instead of gleaning new benchmarks from the years of power and megalomania with which to measure every step and decision against them and gradually arrive at a realistic conception of socialism, the political left tends to treat its ancestors like poor relatives who are a source of embarrassment. What the left does not realize is that it is consequently rejecting the only real chance that exists—not to gain absolution from whom-ever, but to uncover a route into a post-capitalist society. When one maintains a forgetting of history, one remains a prisoner of this past and, instead of its analyst, becomes, at best, a case for the same. Every day, the political left goes to the greatest lengths that would allow it to develop a modern socialist politics, which is, in fact, the source of its own origins. The left of today has added resistance to experience to its existing resistance to advice.

Those who deny what sticks to their shoes will never know where those shoes could take them; this is where the real secret of the strategic weakness of the political left lies.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore all the more important to collect, sort, catalogue, and preserve that which has been handed down to us, and to set up and expand skills centres—all of these are things that archives do best. For the period leading up to 1989, this work was carried out by state and other archival facilities, professionally and often with dedicated employees who provided all the necessary assistance for the research. However,

it is by no means just about the day before yesterday, but also no less about yesterday and today, about our current struggle—or lack thereof—for a modern socialist policy, whatever that means; about the past in its entirety, which we daily extend by virtue of merely existing. If we stop, there will be nothing left of our present as part of the past from which we will be able to learn in the future. That would be a failure that we really do not need.

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**1** On this point, Ernst Nolte might be right; see Ernst Nolte, "Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will: Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 1986. **2** Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung", *Werke [MEW]*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Berlin 1956ff., vol. 1, p. 385. **3** Manfred Kossok, "1917 – eine periphere Revolution?", *Utopie kreativ: Diskussion sozialistischer Alternativen*, supplement no. 1 (November 1991), republished in: Manfred Kossok, *Sozialismus an der Peripherie: Späte Schriften*, edited by Jörn Schütrumpf, Berlin, 2016, p. 45. **4** Contemporary society has arrived in the future at least in terms of technology—but even that is not entirely certain. **5** The Greens have been explicitly excluded here; although it is possible to predict the direction in which the party is likely to develop, this is ultimately still not entirely certain.

# MARGA VOIGT

## *“Left-Wing Memory” in Letters: Perspectives of History?*

Scholarly editorial work, such as that of the letters penned by the socialist and internationalist Clara Zetkin, would be unthinkable without the care and discretion exhibited by those who received the letters at the time regarding their whereabouts. In 1933, Clara Zetkin’s unpublished works made their way into the party archives of the KPdSU in Moscow, the site of her political exile. She entrusted the handover of the works in question to her youngest son Kostja. Entrusted with the burden, he was appalled by the way in

which his mother’s legacy was handled. He was not afforded the time that he had requested for sorting and ordering the documents. I was deeply touched when I was allowed to hold originals of the letters in my hands some 80 years later, in the reading room of today’s Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History (RGASPI); 100-year-old paper, the text written or printed tightly, cramped on the page. Among them were letters to Alexandra Kollontai, complete with a handwritten note from the recipient indicating that they were to be handed over to the party archives for conservation. Clara Zetkin’s letters therefore not only tell the story of the day they were written; over the past 100 years, scattered throughout the archives of the world, the letters themselves have become the bearers or conduits of a great many stories.

Locating the letters would have been and would remain unthinkable without the hard work and care of the countless archivists who—then as now—work tirelessly in archives, associations, and organizations for the preservation of the “history” (or rather, histories) of the international labour movement. In my work as an editor, I am filled with a great deal of gratitude and appreciation when I think of the interest and support of my colleagues—especially Götz Langkau and Gerd Callesen, Martin Grass and Henning Grelle, Christine Lauener and Angelika Voß-Louis, Franziska Dunkel and Sabine Kneib, and, last but certainly not least, Grit Ulrich, from the archives in Amsterdam, Vienna, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Zurich, Bern, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Bonn, and Berlin—and the scans of letters and articles they sent to me. Now to another story about letters: one of the courageous couriers who delivered illegal letters was Bertha Thalheimer, a younger

comrade and friend of Clara Zetkin, who later co-founded the KPD. Three of the letters to Bertha Thalheimer can be read in the first volume of selected letters, although they are in the possession of her family. I am incredibly grateful to Theodor Bergmann, the family's now deceased friend, for putting in a good word for me and thus making it possible for me to publish the letters.

I would also like to thank my friends from the Förderkreis Archive und Bibliotheken zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, in particular Annelies Laschitzka, Eckhard Müller, Ottokar Luban, and Heinz Deutschland, and I would also like to thank Ulla Plener, Mirjam Sachse, Florence Hervé, Gisela Notz, John Partington, and Setsu Ito for their expert advice and assistance in annotating the letters. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Archives for Democratic Socialism has now acquired a CD containing the collection of Clara Zetkin's letters, which is stored in the RGASPI—what a long journey from Moscow to Berlin! I am also aware of the ongoing efforts of colleagues from what was then the Zentraler Parteiarchiv (Central Party Archive) in the Institute for Marxism-Leninism of the SED central committees to obtain copies of the unpublished works from Moscow, including Clara Zetkin's letters. They are housed in the collection of the Stiftung Archive der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organizations, SAPMO) in the federal archives. The RGASPI letters written between the years 1921 and 1924 constitute a significant part of the publication of the second volume of letters. I am grateful to the employees at the ADS for acquiring and providing copies of the letters.

Zetkin's legacy of letters is extensive: more than 1,000 letters alone have been passed

on from 1914 until her death in 1933. The first volume of the annotated edition of the Zetkin letters<sup>1</sup> encompasses the years of the First World War. Clara Zetkin's socialist and internationalist work towards achieving peace becomes apparent in the letters. Her commitment to peace, in association with her comrades Inès Armand and Alexandra Kollontai from Russia, Heleen Ankersmit from Holland, and Angelica Balabanoff from Italy—to name but a handful of the socialist activists of the day—was pan-European in nature.

Clara Zetkin is well-known for being one of the founders of International Women's Day. What has hitherto been less well known about her is that she was also the secretary of the Sozialistische Fraueninternationale (Socialist Women's Internationale), which was founded by women in 1907 when the International Socialist Congress was held in Stuttgart. In the years that followed, the socialist congresses also included the meetings and conferences of socialist women. In 1907, the female socialists decided to publish the social democratic women's paper *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), which was edited by Clara Zetkin and printed in Stuttgart by the publisher Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Dietz, as an international women's organization. During the First World War, however, *Die Gleichheit* found itself impacted by strict military censorship. Any unprinted material had to be illegally transported across the border into the Netherlands and Switzerland and then be published there.

One thing we learn from the letters is that social democratic women's magazines existed in a number of countries at the time. The origins of the socialist women's movement and its peace movement during the First World War—especially in the neutral

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countries—can be found in the archives of European political parties and social movements. Their struggle for peace was disregarded, suppressed, and persecuted in the social democratic parties of the warring nations, which had all opted to champion a policy of “truce”.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, Clara Zetkin’s letters constitute part of the “memory” of the socialists’ international and illegal struggle for peace, which has thus far only managed to reach the outer margins of historiography—if that.

From the beginning of the First World War onwards, all contact with foreign countries was prohibited, and Clara Zetkin’s post was censored.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, it is astounding how many letters have managed to be preserved. “I consider it to currently be one of the most important of the tasks of women”, she wrote in a letter to Alexandra Kollontai, “to keep the awareness of international solidarity in the working class alive and to reinforce it.”<sup>4</sup> She appealed to women in all countries: “If men must kill, it is we women who must fight for life. If men remain silent, it is our duty to speak out.”<sup>5</sup> In Zetkin’s opinion, it was the Socialist Women’s International’s “proud prerogative and duty of honour to now awaken and lead women of all classes and nations in the struggle for peace”.

Clara Zetkin was working from the assumption that women’s work in the domestic sphere and in society had become so much more important during the war that the will of women had become a “political factor”.<sup>6</sup> She brusquely declared that, without the involvement of women, “the entire social

mechanism” would have come to a standstill a long time ago. She derived women’s right to share and participate in all future social decisions—as well as decisions pertaining to war and peace—from the active participation of women in the operation of both the wartime and national economy.

Towards the end of the war, Clara Zetkin wrote to the women’s rights activist and socialist Anna Lindhagen, who was in Sweden: “We are fundamentally demanding the right to participate in peace work for the representation of all women by all governments.” “It is because we women are female people”, she added, “and not faulty, botched copies of men”, and “bring with us our own spiritual and moral values that aid us in contemplating and solving the problems at hand”.<sup>7</sup>

Are passion and science not equally indispensable when it comes to ensuring the cohesion of a society? When things that belong together drift apart from one another—man and woman, home and street, city and country, the assets, histories, and cultures of the world—do Clara Zetkin’s letters not provide perspectives of history?

They undoubtedly do.

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<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Die Briefe 1914 bis 1933 – Vol. 1: Die Kriegsbriefe (1914–1918)*, edited by Marga Voigt, Berlin, 2016. <sup>2</sup> On 2 August 1914, union leaders in Germany decided to call off all strikes and avoid wage disputes for the duration of the war. The leadership of the SPD agreed to a standstill agreement within the party. <sup>3</sup> A state of siege was declared in the German Empire on 31 July 1914; the executive power of civil authorities was transferred to military commands. The press was censored, and any opponents of war found their letters subjected to censorship. <sup>4</sup> See Clara Zetkin on Alexandra Kollontai, 2 September 1914, *Zetkin: Die Kriegsbriefe*, vol. 1, p. 22. <sup>5</sup> See the call to action as an open letter in: *ibid.*, pp. 121ff. <sup>6</sup> See Clara Zetkin, “Zum Frauentag der schweizerischen Sozialistinnen”, *ibid.*, p. 119. <sup>7</sup> See Clara Zetkin on Anna Lindhagen, 2 July 1917, *ibid.*, pp. 341ff.







TWENTY-YEAR ARCHIVES OF THE ROSA-LUXEMBURG-STIFTUNG

# CUSTODIANS OF MEMORY

DUTIES

CHALLENGES

DEMANDS

# ANDREY K. SOROKIN

## *The 20th Century: Learning from History*

The legacy of the 20th century encompasses some momentous events: revolutions, local conflicts and world wars, crimes against humanity, economic and social crises, struggles for the ideals of social justice, democracy and human rights, and scientific and cultural achievements. Most of these events are contradictory in nature and are evaluated differently by the different protagonists involved in social development, depending on which political, social, national, religious, ethnic, or other communities they represent.

We have all witnessed how the social sciences have been discredited by way of political manipulation over the course of the last few years, and the study of history has certainly not been spared from this phenomenon. It has been discredited both by the frequently made claim that there is no verifiable past and by the complete and utter domination of speculative constructs and arbitrary interpretations of the historical process in the collective consciousness.

I strongly believe that there is an authentic past that can be verified using scientific methods, just as there is the study of history as such. I am convinced that the study of history does not function as a gravedigger for the recent past, but rather as a tool for analyzing the problems of the present. I am convinced that the magnificent institution of archives can and must play the role of doctor for the collective historical memory, because they contain documentation of every national history; they represent these histories in their entirety, replete with all their defeats, mistakes, and crimes, but also with the triumphs of the human spirit—all of the economic, technological, scientific, and cultural achievements.

It is only the dilettante who mistakenly believes the science of history to be simple, when it is in fact the most difficult of all the sciences; this is not dissimilar to a primary school student who has only just learned the basics of arithmetic thinking that higher mathematics seems simple.

It is science, and the positivist methodology that underpins knowledge, that must limit the scope of arbitrary interpretations of the historical process and gradually teach the proponents of extreme approaches that there are uncomfortable facts and interpretations, and that views that diverge

from their own also need to be accepted by society. This therapeutic function is no less important than the heuristic one. By using the available means to treat, or at least diagnose, the maniacal figures on both sides of the ideological barricades who are responsible for interpreting history, we will enable the rest to feel that they are part of a common civil, political nation—despite the varying perspectives regarding what occurred in the past and what is happening today.

These approaches to historical memory and history's prominent position as a science were of particular importance to Russian historians and archivists in the memorable year that marked the 100th anniversary of the 1917 revolution. This also applies to the series of tragic anniversaries that were to follow, which commemorated the outbreak of civil war in Russia (1918–22), the founding of the Communist International (1919), and the "Great Purge" (1937–38).

Unfortunately, the events that took place 100 years ago have been thrust to the margins of social perception and the adoption of history as a science. The starting point, the nucleus of the entire Soviet era of national history—and even the entire Soviet era itself—was replaced in the collective consciousness, for a number of different reasons, by the image of Stalin. And this occurred despite the fact that Russian society had opted to adopt socialist changes during the revolution of 1917 and 1918. After a degree of hesitation, society also accepted the targets that were initially imposed upon it by way of force, as well as the forms and methods of radical social transformation. This decision determined the physiognomy of Soviet socialism, the excesses of Stalinism, and even the overall outcome of the Soviet development period in many ways. The price of this social decision

that was made a century ago, and the price of the real achievements of the Soviet period has proved to be extremely high. In this sense, it also seems highly symbolic that the 100th year of remembrance of the revolution happens to coincide with another memorable date, namely the 80-year anniversary of the so-called Great Purge or Great Terror, in which hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens were either shot dead or subjected to other forms of unwarranted political persecution in accordance with extrajudicial settlements.

Society has also very nearly forgotten the tragic anniversary of this event, which has carved a deep wound into Russia's national identity. Had the national monument the Wall of Grief not been erected in the centre of Moscow, and had the Russian president not attended its opening ceremony, Russian civil society would have passed entirely unnoticed. The figure of Stalin not only repressed the ideas and methods out of which the phenomenon of Stalinism arose, but also cast a dark shadow over the late Soviet period, in which a state was finally built that, though not without its faults, was nonetheless a welfare state; a state whose cost was an unfathomable number of casualties. Between 1991 and 1993, Russian society jettisoned the state's achievements, just as it had done with the achievements of the previous historical period in 1917. In keeping with its inclination to "start a new life at sunrise", which had already been noted by the well-known 19th century historian Vasily Klyuchevsky, Russian society managed twice in the 20th century to utterly decimate that which had been created by the hard work of previous generations. I would hope that we are able to learn from this experience.

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Endeavours to analyze and comprehend the past are made all the more complicated by the numerous attempts to exploit history for political gain—attempts that are made by a range of political powers in almost every nation state around the world. In light of this, it occurs to me that we are also faced with the task of encouraging—or, if you like, forcing—the collective consciousness to make use of scientifically verifiable knowledge. Russian archivists already took

the first step in this direction some time ago: a few years ago, the Federal Archival Agency of Russia established the website titled “Documents of the Soviet Era”, which provides the general public with access to the central archives on Soviet history. In this scope, we intend to digitize all of the important complexes of documents pertaining to the period of Soviet history and thereby enable the public to have free access to them.

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# ANJA KRUIKE AND ANDREAS MARQUET

## *The Archives of Collective Memory*

### Challenges posed by the example of social democracy

Political archives as they exist today have been evolving since the 1960s. The newest archive, the Green Memory Archive, was established in 1997. Prior to that, from 1967 onwards, a series of parties in the Federal Republic of Germany had opted to no longer retain their documents themselves and use them for their own process of establishing traditions, but instead to hand them over to an archive.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the archives of poli-

tical foundations have taken on the parties' central documents, as well as documents from the organizations and individuals in their orbit, safely preserving them, professionally indexing them, and making them accessible to researchers and to the general public. These duties apply to all political archives, even if they manifest in different ways and have each developed their own special collection areas.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these core tasks—the passive memory function—archives should also actively contribute to memory through targeted and specific research proposals and their own revision in conferences, events, publications, exhibitions, and digital formats, and also merge the history of our bailors with the more general history of Germany and international history. This is what distinguishes the archives of German political parties from most other archives.

Article 21 (1) of the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany) states that “political parties shall participate in the formation of the political will of the people”. The parties' historical documents make this formation of the people's political will visible and comprehensible and constitute the foundation for historical examinations of the political process in Germany. In this way, the task outlined in the *Grundgesetz* is transferred to the historical sphere. This fact renders political archives central to the historiography of Germany, as other archives in the country's vast archival landscape are not able to perform this function at all, or only in part. This is because it is first and foremost these documents that provide us with insight into how discussions were conducted and how political decisions were made; why a party's electoral campaign was either successful or unsuccessful, why an individual or

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a subgroup was able to prevail in a dispute. And—entirely incidentally, but nonetheless significant to our knowledge—sound methods and a good approach can also be employed in order to uncover more about the inner workings of our democracy, about political dynamics (and dynamics between the spheres of politics and the media), unifying rituals and destructive disputes, about processes of renewal and restoration, or signs of wear and tear, about waning levels of attractiveness or the reverse, and about the motivation for political engagement. The material can also be used to examine questions of socio-historical dimensions, of the social and personal basis for political activity, and of links to other social groups and movements. In summary, it is in many respects thanks to the documents that are preserved in political archives that a historiography of our contemporary democracy is even possible.<sup>3</sup>

Archives contain sources for a wide range of perspectives: in both written and audio-visual format, from internal papers, to the citizens' units of the parties, to the perhaps more or less executive decision of a leading figure. The sources stem from all levels: from the local and regional level to the central national level or the European Parliament; they stem from third parties, similar work environments, from people from parties or their sphere, from organizations in the surrounding area, or civic action groups and other NGOs of all civic shades, but also from political groups at all levels. The sources consist of written material of all kinds, audio-visual or three-dimensional collected items, especially in the form of different artefacts from election campaigns.

Political archives actively acquire all documents, and there is no legal deposit. The

bond of trust that exists with the organizations—and especially the political actors—who are donating documents to an archive is crucial for preserving an archive's existence and ensuring it can be made accessible. We differ greatly from state archives in this respect; state archives operate on the basis of a legal deposit of the respective institutions at the different federal levels.

Since the archives of political foundations were established, the work of these foundations has undergone a greater change than was previously apparent. For a long time, the quantitative expansion of written material as mass written material that only exhibited a very limited seriality constituted a challenge that left a lasting impression on the management systems of all the foundations, especially with respect to magazine capacities; now, digitization is at the heart of the endeavours. Ten years ago, we thought that the challenge lay in document management systems and web archiving, but the digital world has long since evolved beyond that.

Documents that have been created digitally require the utmost attention: if we do not at least collect the central documents and archive them according to a set of standards for the long term, the central records from the current era or from the past 20 years will be lost. This requires courage, because sometimes we have to make decisions about things when we cannot be sure how those decisions will work, or for how long, and sometimes items cannot be accepted into an archive from the outset because they do not adhere to certain format requirements. Furthermore, it requires work; it represents a new field, especially in terms of adopting and evaluating materials. The phenomenon of archivists taking responsi-



bility for supervising the technological environment where the documents are created is not yet as present and has yet to be implemented everywhere to the extent that it perhaps should be. And financial resources are of course required for this, because establishing a long-term digital archive in accordance with the Open Archival Information System entails a series of specific requirements, and the files cannot simply be taken and downloaded onto a hard drive. At the same time, digital archiving by no means constitutes the sole area of responsibility for archives in the 21st century, although it does remain a fundamental challenge that has yet to be resolved. On the contrary, to the degree that technological systems are developed, old ones are replaced, and new ones are introduced, archives are put under direct pressure to appropriately respond to these developments.

On the one hand, archives are institutions that are driven by technology. But, contrary to the popular image of dusty, metres-long filing systems that are guarded by a group of socially isolated archivists, rather than being made accessible to the public, archives make use of modern technologies. Research opportunities are available online, enquiries are generally received via email, and archivists use social media platforms to provide people with information about their work. Users have a clear idea of the services offered by archives, and these are by no means technophobic. Even if they wanted to, archives would not be able to escape this without compromising their relevance.

The effects of digitization can not only be observed in the archives' contact with the bailors and users, but also in their own working methods. A major trend is emerging across all fields, namely that work requires a grow-

ing, knowledge-based specialization; in the information age, the days of the generalists have come to an end.

When it comes to archives, this all amounts to nothing less than a paradigm shift: in future, they will preserve information, and no longer the offline media formats to which they are inseparably linked. The internet is the new repertory space, and highly qualified information specialists are replacing universal historians with their affinity for archives. In short: the digital transformation arrived in the world of archiving a long time ago.

The impacts of this transformation can be observed to varying degrees in different facets of society. The landscape of the media has completely changed in the last ten years: no sooner had we archivists—with the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG)—solved the problem of web archiving and integrated it into our standard practices and operations, than social media appeared. Social media platforms herald a new series of requirements and challenges for archiving, both on a technical and a legal level. Along with the informalization of public communication, we are now observing a fundamental shift in political communication and paths for political mobilization. A few years ago we joked that it remained to be seen who apart from the NSA would end up archiving our SMSs and content from other digital messaging channels, but today we are learning that it is about far more than just the communication itself. Here, too, a new problem arises for the archives of political foundations that are dedicated to historical and political education: fact-checking items from the archives against historical fake news is but one example of the range

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of tasks in the field of working with archives and archival materials. In addition to the archives' memory function, something else is also coming to the fore that was previously referred to as the sources' "right of veto", especially within the study of history. Archives tend to be afforded the function of acting as custodians of an historical truth that adheres to a set of historical-scientific principles. And it is precisely the more ephemeral social media sources that question and challenge the rules of authenticity and accuracy through their use.

Criticism of digital sources therefore warrants particular attention. It is the responsibility of archives to explain the technical formation conditions and the necessary processes of change in order to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the digital objects. Archives function as experts in the preservation of information; experts who endeavour to gain the trust of their bailors and users through the transparency and traceability of their actions. Awareness of data security has only just begun to awaken against the backdrop of hacker attacks and tampering, and will without a doubt continue to grow even more important in the years to come. At the same time, it is becoming clear that political communication and mobilization is moving to a section of the web that we know very little about. We can only see 20 percent of these communications through freely accessible websites; the rest is conducted in

private forums, chats, or other closed-system applications. This has an impact on the political culture of a society that is already undergoing a far-reaching transformation from being an industrialized society to a service-oriented society.

This needs to be a challenge and a task of any political archive. How can we respond appropriately to these changes without blindly implementing one interface after another in proprietary technical systems in order to archive a single chat history or call? What does the collection profile of political archives look like today? Which records are deemed to be of archival value? How can we organize the acquisition of such fluid, ever-shifting, ephemeral materials? And finally, these questions must be considered against the backdrop of the resources that we have at our disposal, because the analogue will stay with us well into the future. The period of hybrid—that is, analogue as well as digital—formation of a network of archives will be with us for a while to come—and will require new solutions, especially due to its specific characteristics.

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1 On the history of political archives, see *Die Archive der Politischen Stiftungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Ein Archivführer*, edited by Anja Kruke and Harry Scholz, Bonn, 2010. 2 See the documentation and collection profile of the archives of political foundations in Germany, 2nd edition, Munich. 3 In addition to performing this function, archives such as the Archive of Social Democracy (AsdD) also preserve other kinds of documents, such as those pertaining to people's experiences under dictatorships and resistance efforts against such regimes.

# UWE MICHEL

## *Knowledge of the Future*

The monopoly that archives and libraries had on information for several millennia appears to have been overcome. If a person is seeking immediate information, they can simply “google” a term; if they require more specific information, they can at least consult Wikipedia. Who needs libraries — let alone archives — when we have these options at our fingertips?

As a result of ruminations such as these, librarians are banning their printed books from being put into library stacks, are can-

celling their subscriptions to printed newspapers and magazines, and are happy that the “digital revolution” is making it easier for people to access knowledge from any location and in a space-saving manner; in short, that access to knowledge is becoming more democratic. But is this truly the case? This idea, which is also shared by many library users, that everything is already available in “digital” form, turns out, upon closer inspection, to be more of an ideal than a reality. But whether or not this new digital format for sharing knowledge is in fact desirable is a question that should be discussed at least once by those responsible for mediating knowledge within an archive or library context, before deciding to switch to a system that prioritizes digital options. Such a discussion would also involve questioning the extent to which libraries are still able to make information available to the public for free. What I am primarily referring to here is not the unsolved issue of digital formats. Librarians were so delighted when the advent of CD-ROMs heralded an increase in space and convenience, until their libraries were suddenly supplied with computers that did not have CD-ROM drives (they are no longer needed because everything is stored on “clouds” these days). Scientists today already assume that the decades surrounding the turn of the next millennium will be able to offer future generations the collections that are least developed for the future.

Even when it comes to the inventories of libraries — that is, the “core competence” of transmitting knowledge — discussions are hardly ever conducted regarding how their collections might be maintained. In Germany, there are still approximately 75,000 new books published in printed format every year. In the fields of humanities, social

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sciences, and cultural studies, almost all academically relevant publications still appear on paper. But the situation is different when it comes to recent publications in the fields of medicine, engineering, and the natural sciences.

However, the question of “ownership” arises here: in the past, librarians would select titles from the range offered by publishing houses for a certain section of their collection or a particular target group, which then belonged to the library following the purchase and could therefore be made available to the public.

These days, it is the prerogative of publishing houses to decide whether or not they wish to sell electronic books to libraries at all. And should they “generously” choose to do so, then they are the one to set the terms: specific licensing models not only inhibit the preservation of knowledge, but also determine costs and lending policies. While the reform of German copyright law that came into effect on 1 March 2018 did herald a series of improvements for libraries and their users with regard to duplicating works from their collections and making these works available to the public, there have also been some significant backward steps in terms of which connection uses are permitted (for example, printing out or saving to a hard drive). Furthermore, magazines that are not explicitly professional journals, as well as newspapers will in future generally not be permitted to be electronically reproduced.

The function and task of archives and libraries is therefore nothing less than to defend free access to knowledge against the market power of publishing houses and the dig-

ital expropriation of the common person. This is especially true of the cooperation between libraries and internet groups such as Google, which has been monopolizing (and ultimately privatizing) knowledge at the public’s expense.

The German Digital Library, which provides digitized copies of books, images, and archival materials, provides an example of how things might be done better. Financed by the federal and state governments, this digital library makes cultural heritage available online—free of charge, for everyone, and, above all, unfettered by commercial interests. Another positive example is the Digitales Deutsches Frauenarchiv (Digital German Women’s Archive, DDF), a specialist portal that provides a broad public with digitized versions of selected sources on the history of German women’s movements. This example demonstrates what kinds of great projects are made possible when archives, libraries, and documentation centres are provided with sufficient resources and when their interconnectedness is encouraged and supported.

Libraries are still the most widely used cultural institutions today. This is due in part to the fact that—in a world in which there increasingly fewer non-commercial spaces—they offer a space where people can simply be without feeling the pressure to consume. They are of great importance for cultural participation, education, and social interaction. The knowledge of the future might end up being made public and readily accessible, but it also might not be: making this possible will constitute a significant challenge for the archives and libraries of the 21st century.

# ANDREAS STEIGMEIER AND TOBIAS WILDI

## *A Digital Memory?*

### Archiving and utilizing digital files

It is a truism that data and documents today are primarily created and used digitally—one that applies to the private, political, and professional spheres in which we operate. While some digital information disappears again after being created, there is other digital information that we would like to be able to continue to use far into the future—either

because legal provisions demand it, or because private and public institutions wish to document their decision-making processes and their activities for the long term, or because the data are of particular cultural and historical value.

Digital information manifests in a variety of different ways: for example, as photographs, text messages, “posts” on social media platforms, websites, databases, video messages, or as the program codes of computer games. This diversity renders digital archiving a multidisciplinary affair. But not everything that is digitally generated is worth preserving for the long term—not by any means. Archiving remains a selective process even in the digital realm, and this process involves evaluating what is worth preserving for the future and what can be deleted after a suitable retention period has expired.

Information that is digitally generated must also be archived in digital form, because it is expensive and often impossible to transfer a file or data record to paper or microfilm for archiving. A website, a three-dimensional architectural diagram, or a computer game cannot be “printed out” in a meaningful way. It is imperative to avoid any disruptions or changes to the media for the purposes of archiving; those using the archives would also like to consult the archive material digitally. The aim of a digital archive is to ensure that digital documents remain accessible and usable for as long as possible. This article outlines the fundamental principles for achieving this objective.

#### **WHAT DOES A DIGITAL ARCHIVE SEEK TO ENSURE?**

There are two terms in this description of objectives that require an explanation. “As long as possible” refers to the preservation

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of digital information over generations of computer architecture, operating systems, application programs, and file formats, which amounts to time periods spanning a few decades to many centuries. We still have no concept today of how computer architectures and applications will be structured in the future—or if these metaphors will even continue to exist. The second term is “maintaining usability”. Digital archiving is not an end in itself; it can only be justified if it enables digital cultural assets to be made accessible and used in a variety of ways. The selected target groups should be able to open and display the archived files, as well as interpret and use them for new purposes. If this still is still the case after a long period of time, this means the digital archive works.

#### **HOW IS THIS ACCOMPLISHED?**

Archiving doesn’t mean simply rendering data onto a wear-resistant storage system (which the manufacturer may label as “audit-proof”), making one or two backup copies, and then turning one’s back on the data and forgetting about it. A digital archive has to be serviced and maintained on a regular basis and will change over time. There are four basic measures that need to be taken in order to ensure a digital archive’s continued usability:

First, the dataflow of the files that need to be archived have to be transported unaltered into the future. The majority of institutions today adhere to the following practice: three or more identical copies of the data should exist, and these copies should be stored on at least two different storage technologies that are stored at two different locations.

Today, cloud technologies are playing an increasingly important role in terms of providing cost-effective methods for storing large

volumes of data. Thanks to a high degree of specialization, clouds will generally tend to be more secure than the servers that constitute part of an organization’s own technological infrastructure. However, when selecting a cloud provider, it is important to note where the company headquarters is located; depending on the nation-state context and specific circumstances of the country in question, state actors might be able to gain access to the data stored on a cloud. For example, under the CLOUD Act, US-based technology providers are obligated to provide the United States government with access to their customers’ data upon request, even if the data centres in question are located in Europe. Archival data that document political activity, religious beliefs, or medical diagnoses have no business being hosted by providers such as these. However, there are cloud providers that are absolutely trustworthy and that are able to take over the process of assembling and operating a client’s storage infrastructure. In Switzerland, for example, this provider is SWITCHengines, which is a cloud for the academic community that is operated by the SWITCH foundation. The foundation is non-profit-making and is owned by Swiss cantons, and is intended to provide research-related IT services. Not only is it not possible for the government to access the data stored on this cloud, it would be entirely inconceivable within the Swiss democratic federalist system.

As a second measure, every object in a digital archive must be identified, right down to the file type. The identification process must not rely on a current technical solution. The use of digital object identifier (DOI), which one is more likely to encounter in the library world, and the Archival Resource Key (ARK),

which is more common in the world of archives, is widespread around world. Using persistent identifiers allows digital resources to be cited and located, even after a long period of time.

Thirdly, the context of the archival records must be documented, as is also the case for paper archives. It must be possible for a third party to classify the origin, creation, and significance of the data. This is the only way that the context of the data's creation and their significance can continue to be determined even after a great deal of time has elapsed.

Fourthly, it is important to use open file formats for archiving, which are in common use and not patented or licenced. This increases the chance that the files will still be able to be displayed and used after a long period of time. Archives often opt for the "file-migration-on-stock" strategy: when files are admitted to the archive, they are converted into what are generally referred to as archival formats, which include PDF/A, TIFF, and WAVE. This prevents files from being archived in proprietary office, email, or image formats that will no longer be able to be interpreted after only a matter of years. This is a good strategy, but the original formats must also be saved in addition to the migrated files, because file migration always entails a certain degree of information loss. What's more, the strategy only works for simple digital objects that are based on individual files. Other strategies are necessary when it comes to archiving more complex objects like websites or software systems, such as emulation, which involves reproducing entire runtime environments within the archive.

A digital archive will periodically review the file formats in its collections. If there is any

indication that the formats are becoming obsolete, then conservation measures must be planned, tested, and implemented. The files in question are then converted into new archive formats in a controlled and well-documented process. Such measures will generally need to be repeated every few decades, and this will inevitably lead to further information loss, as in the initial file migration. Modern concepts and practices assume that changes, as well as controlled, documented losses are indispensable to the preservation of an archive's core information.

The measures described here are derived from an internationally observed standard for digital archiving (ISO 14721, OAIS). The metadata schemas used in the archive are also internationally standardized (for example, METS and Premis), which ensures, among other things, that the digital archiving provider can be changed. A manufacturer's trustworthiness will also be increased if its components are licensed as open source and are therefore able to be further developed independent of the manufacturer.

## **WHERE WILL THE JOURNEY LEAD US?**

It is becoming apparent in more and more facets of life that databases need to be kept in a usable state for many decades, even if the data in question do not directly constitute or correspond to digital cultural assets. Documents pertaining to a person's entitlement to a pension and their medical records need to be stored for at least the person's lifetime. Documents pertaining to the management of real estate, the maintenance of a motorway, or the dismantling of a nuclear power plant also need to remain usable for a

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long period of time. Productive systems are generally not able to do this; the technology of digital archives is imposing.

This means that archives have to automate their processes and design their infrastructures to be able to handle large volumes of data. In the future, archives will cease to be isolated systems that operate alongside all the other systems within an organization—this is what previous IT architecture concepts intended. In future, productive systems such as e-file solutions will hand files over to the archive only a few years after a business transaction has taken place and will then access the data in the archive for research purposes. There, the fixed documents that are no longer modifiable are subject to maintenance planning; however, thanks to clear identifiability, third-party systems can still make efficient use of them by way of technical interfaces.

Despite technological upgrades to archives

and archiving processes, the occupation of scientific archivist is not likely to disappear. On the contrary: archives are in urgent need of “digital archivists” and “archival computer scientists”; they are in need of people who not only have a sound knowledge of archives, but also have an understanding of IT architectures, process modelling, and both data and metadata formats. In the German-speaking world, the relevant training courses are only now beginning to orient themselves towards the “digital turn”, which was already underway in the world of archiving 15 years ago.

If we choose to digitalize our economy, our administration, essentially our entire society, then our archives should also document this digital world in an appropriate format and make it easy to understand, just as they did in the past in the analogue world. This is exactly what archivists are working towards today.



# CHRISTIAN KOLLER AND URS KÄLIN

## *Trust is Good – and Essential*

### The example of the Swiss Social Archives

The Swiss Social Archives in Zurich has changed considerably in its first 113 years of existence. The archive was originally established in 1906 as the Centre for Switzerland's Social Literature. Initially housed in a small one-bedroom apartment, it has developed into a research infrastructure for the humanities and social sciences, which includes a special archive dedicated to civil society with written and audiovisual material, a specialized academic library, topic-specific

documentation, and a research fund. The archive collects both analogue and digital material, conducts extensive public relations work, and in 2018 registered more loans than the Swiss National Library, which is approximately ten times larger. The archive and library of the Social Archives now constitute part of the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National and Regional Significance. The institution's development has a great deal to do with the (mutually dependent) trust of various stakeholders: the administrative bodies that subsidize the institution and its projects, those who supply documents to the archives, and those who use the archival services. How did they manage to establish and maintain this sense of trust? Founded in 1906, the institution was renamed the Swiss Social Archives in 1942 and has been supported by a non-partisan association since it was first established,<sup>1</sup> which distinguishes it from many thematically related institutions in other countries that are tied to specific political parties, trade unions, or political foundations. In his role as a founder of the archives, the priest and social-democratic politician Paul Pflüger was inspired by the Musée social in Paris, a sociological think tank established in 1894 that encompassed a museum, library, and research centre. Against the backdrop of mounting social conflicts (in particular in 1906, the year in which the archive was established, Europe was engulfed by a wave of strikes that also led to violent industrial disputes in Switzerland), a similar institution was set up in Switzerland with the goal of making knowledge in the area of the "social issue" available in the service of reformist action, and thus contributing to a sense of social equilibrium. The Social Archive's thematic focus then broadened over the decades to incorporate social, political,

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and cultural change, and social movements, with a particular emphasis on contemporary Swiss history.

From the beginning, a wide array of social and political groups were represented in the board of trustees. Among its members at the time the association was established were the Swiss Federation of Commerce and Industry (SHIV), the Zurich Chamber of Commerce, the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions (SGB), the Schweizerischer Gemeinnütziger Frauenverein (Swiss Non-Profit Women's Association, now Dachverband Schweizerischer Gemeinnütziger Frauen, SGF), and a number of workers' associations, as well as politicians from a variety of political parties, the Bishop of St. Gallen, a banking executive, the Secretary of the Swiss Workers' Association Herman Greulich, Fritz Brupbacher, a workers' doctor who had an affinity for anarchism, and Betty Farbstein-Ostersetzer, a women's rights activist. In addition to Pflüger, the management committee also included representatives of the city of Zurich, the cantonal and municipal library, the right-wing liberal *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the Catholic *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, and the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland, as well as three professors from the University of Zurich and the University of Bern. From the beginning, this broad support base made it possible for the foundation to secure subsidies from both the city and canton of Zurich.

The institution built on Pflüger's private literature collection and its initial acquisitions primarily consisted of books and short writings, whereby they consistently took into account all political orientations. This is how a number of different collections were established and accumulated; for example, rich collections of printed materials per-

taining to the early history of the Swiss and European labour movements, collections on the theories of socialism, communism, and anarchism, on the political and trade unionist Internationals, or on the fascist and anti-fascist movements that were active in the interwar period.<sup>2</sup> A documentation of media resources also emerged from 1943 onwards, which today comprises a total of 1.2 million articles. The newspaper and magazine collections contain a number of rarities and also cover the entire political spectrum. In 1921, director Sigfried Bloch received criticism from a board member that too much communist literature was being acquired, a claim that he countered with the argument that scientific institutes have a duty to collect material stemming from all directions. In the 1930s and 1940s, the institution was among only a handful in the German-speaking world that had both Nazi propaganda books and anti-fascist literature on its shelves. The 1932 annual report—which was composed in the spring of 1933 at the same time that the Nazi book burnings occurred—recorded the foundation's collection strategy: "The choice of acquisitions is based neither upon the personal opinions of visitors, nor upon those of the management. Rather, it is concerned with the preservation of a most precious cultural asset: a documentation of the present for the future. It is essential that this task be approached with a strong sense of responsibility and accountability. That a particular book has been acquired for the collection by no means indicates that the acquisition has been approved by library management." The broad range offered by the foundation attracted many a prominent user; before and during the First World War, this list included illustrious figures from the international labour

movement, and in particular from the Russian exile community—among them Lenin and Trotsky.<sup>3</sup> During the interwar period, a great many women who had been exiled from fascist countries visited the institution (for example, Otto Braun, Joseph Wirth, Anna Siemsen, Wilhelm Hoegner, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Rudolf Hilferding, René König, Robert Jungk, Friedrich Adler, Manès Sperber, and Ignazio Silone); during the Cold War, refugees came from the Eastern Bloc, among them Nobel Laureate in Literature Alexander Solschenizyn.

In 1974, Switzerland acknowledged the Swiss Social Archives as a leading research infrastructure facility in its subject area. As a further official vote of confidence, the Federal Council in 1979 appointed director Miroslav Tuček as the president of the Eidgenössischen Expertenkommission für die sozialwissenschaftliche Dokumentation (Swiss Expert Commission for Social Science Documentation). The subsidization that came along with the governmental recognition made it possible to establish an archival department, whose collections have increased significantly since the 1990s and today encompass approximately 800 corporate archives and personal estates.<sup>4</sup> A number of central organizations constitute the main topics of the Social Archives: for example, important trade unions and workers' associations, political and cultural organizations that form part of the labour movement, social movements and associations from spheres such as feminism, pacifism, ecology, human rights, or the LGBTQ\* community, as well as non-profit organizations and youth organizations in Switzerland. However, there are also archives of communist, Trotskyist, and *neulinke* organizations (Neue Linke or New Left), and collections from the

right-wing populist end of the spectrum, including the unpublished works of James Schwarzenbach, the pioneer of Switzerland's anti-immigration movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the poster archive of Alexander Segert's advertising agency Goal. A separate research fund was established in 1999 thanks to an extensive inheritance from the social scientist Ellen Rifkin Hill. The Social Archives has also systematically collected audiovisual material since 2003.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the institution also managed to successfully cross over into the digital age by digitizing all of its catalogues and finding aids, working on retro-digitization projects for magazines, newspapers, photographs, films, videos, posters, and audio material, developing an infrastructure for assembling authentically electronic archival and documentation collections, as well as a number of online information channels.<sup>6</sup>

The acquisition of privately stored written, visual, and audio materials from social movements—that is, archival material of non-governmental origin—heavily depends on two basic conditions: the degree of confidence and trust that those who created the records have in the archival institution, and the relationships that the archivists have to the personalities, political groups, initiatives, and organizations in question. A special bond of trust is required here, especially where previous and estate collections are concerned. A sense of confidence in the archival institution is forged in particular through its considerable levels of continuity and reliability. As far as an outside perspective is concerned, the archives need to at least appear to be able to ensure the long-term continued existence of the archives and therefore also the archival material stored therein. The issue of sponsorship is also addressed here; a sponsorship's

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configuration and philosophical or ideological character has the capacity to either help or hinder the archive's sustained funding by state institutions. In the case of the Swiss Social Archives, there was a broad-based sponsorship from the beginning, which minimized the risks associated with financing. The services provided for the benefit of the organizations and individuals creating the archives (such as research, and scan and copy jobs) are also important and should be rendered in a timely, accessible, and uncomplicated manner and, if possible, be free of charge.

The technical expertise of the archival institution are of course also of crucial importance. The people responsible for creating the files and records must be certain that the institution in question is able to guarantee reliable, long-term preservation of artefacts. These days, this applies to digital documents in particular. Expertise encompasses a range of aspects: applying recognized standards, participating in networks and collaborating in groups, cooperating with partner institutions, and also visibility, which in many cases is a prime motivation for the submission of archival collections. It is in the interest of the organizations submitting the records that their documents be used for research activities and that the name of their organization be present in scientific contexts and exhibitions.

The important relationship-building and networking that is carried out by the archival institution includes being physically present at external events (such as anniversary celebrations) and demonstrations, as well as actively conducting public relations work by way of panel discussions, private book previews, lectures, source presentations, and participating in exhibitions. The mediation work is thus performed for the benefit

of the archival collections, and the individuals or organizations who created the files are shown that it was indeed worthwhile to hand over their documents, and that the documents are being put to good use. Finally, the Social Archives also endeavour to procure organizations and activists who generate documents as members of the board of trustees. Collaborating with activists can have a snowball effect in terms of building up an archive's inventory, because activists are simultaneously archives' best ambassadors and those who are most familiar with the ins and outs of their respective milieus. In the ideal scenario, they would acquire archival material from within their own social or political sphere: classic examples of this are the Schwulenarchiv Schweiz (Swiss Gay Archives), the collection of state security files (Archiv Schnüffelstaat Schweiz), or the Swiss Music Archives, which documents the rock and pop scenes. These collections are essentially founded upon a sense of private initiative and make possible the preservation of records in sectors that would otherwise be difficult for the Social Archives to access.

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**1** Jacqueline Häusler, *100 Jahre soziales Wissen: Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv 1906–2006*, Zurich, 2006. **2** Hanspeter Marti, "Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zürich", *Handbuch der historischen Buchbestände in der Schweiz*, edited by Urs B. Leu et al., vol. 3, Hildesheim, 2011, pp. 317–325; Koller, Christian, "Weder Zensur noch Propaganda: Der Umgang des Schweizerischen Sozialarchivs mit rechtsextremem Material", *LIBREAS: Library Ideas* 35, 2019, available at: <https://libreas.eu/ausgabe35/koller/>. **3** Christian Koller, "Bibliotheksgeschichte als histoire croisée: Das Schweizerische Sozialarchiv und das Phänomen des Exils", *Vernetztes Wissen: Online – Die Bibliothek als Managementaufgabe*, edited by Rafael Ball and Stefan Wiederkehr, Berlin, 2015, pp. 365–392. **4** Anita Ulrich, "Le 'Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv': Stratégies de conservation et de valorisation des archives du mouvement ouvrier", *Archives, histoire et identité du mouvement ouvrier*, edited by Alda De Giorgi et al., Geneva, 2006, pp. 92–101; Urs Kälin, "Fixierte Bewegung? Soziale Bewegungen und ihre Archive", *Arbido* 3, 2007, pp. 74–77. **5** Stefan Länzlinger, "Audiovisuelle Privatarchive im Schweizerischen Sozialarchiv", *Memoriav Bulletin* 25, 2018, pp. 16–18. **6** Christian Koller, "Digitales Sozialarchiv: Was bisher geschah", *Sozialarchiv Info* 1, 2018, pp. 12–15, available at: [www.sozialarchiv.ch/2018/03/12/digitales-sozialarchiv-was-bisher-geschah/](http://www.sozialarchiv.ch/2018/03/12/digitales-sozialarchiv-was-bisher-geschah/).

# BÄRBEL FÖRSTER

## *Ethical, Responsible, Professional, and Comprehensive*

The international network  
of archivists

Archives are an invaluable resource. They constitute a record of human activity expressed in documentary form and as such are indispensable testimonies of past events. They fortify democracy, and the identities of individuals and communities; they strengthen human rights. But they are also fragile and vulnerable and in need of protection.

Founded in 1948, the International Council on Archives (ICA) advocates the effective

management of written materials and the preservation, maintenance, and accessibility of the world's archival cultural heritage.

The ICA is an impartial NGO that is financed by its 1,500 members in 195 countries and fulfils its duties through the activities carried out by its members. For more than 70 years now, the ICA has united archival institutions and archivists from all over the world with the aim of protecting and ensuring access to archives, advocating sound archive management practices and the physical safeguarding of recorded cultural heritage, creating recognized standards and sample solutions, and promoting transnational dialogue, as well as the exchange and dissemination of this knowledge and expertise.

As an international organization, the ICA therefore works with top-level decision-makers and international organizations like UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and liaises closely with other NGOs like Blue Shield International.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the ethos of the ICA involves harnessing the cultural diversity of its members as a means of developing effective solutions to problems and mutually establishing standards for a flexible, inventive métier.<sup>2</sup> This is why the ICA has published four standards for the cataloguing of archival material since 1994, which have fundamentally changed cataloguing practices.<sup>3</sup>

For a long time, the International Council on Archives has dealt with the issue of access to archives. In the wake of the political shifts that occurred in Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, European archivists formulated an "Outline of a Standard European Policy on Access to Archives", which was adopted by the ICA by resolution of the Annual General Meeting in Edinburgh in 1997. This resulted in the "Principles of Access

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to Archives”, which were adopted in 2012. Two other ICA documents emphasize the importance of the professionalism of archival work: the “Code of Ethics for Archivists”

from 1996, and the “Universal Declaration on Archives” from 2010. The key points of all three of the documents mentioned here are printed below.

## PRINCIPLES OF ACCESS TO ARCHIVES<sup>4</sup>

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1

The public has the right of access to archives of public bodies. Both public and private entities should open their archives to the greatest extent possible.

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2

Institutions holding archives make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives.

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3

Institutions holding archives adopt a pro-active approach to access.

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4

Institutions holding archives ensure that restrictions on access are clear and of stated duration, are based on pertinent legislation, acknowledge the right of privacy and respect the rights of owners of private materials.

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5

Archives are made available on equal and fair terms.

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6

Institutions holding archives ensure that victims of serious crimes under international law have access to archives that provide evidence needed to assert their human rights and to document violations of them, even if those archives are closed to the general public.

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7

Users have the right to appeal a denial of access.

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8

Institutions holding archives ensure that operational constraints do not prevent access to archives.

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9

Archivists have access to all closed archives and perform necessary archival work on them.

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10

Archivists participate in the decision-making process on access.

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**CODE OF ETHICS FOR ARCHIVISTS<sup>5</sup>**

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1

Archivists should protect the integrity of archival material and thus guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past.

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2

Archivists should appraise, select and maintain archival material in its historical, legal and administrative context, thus retaining the principle of provenance, preserving and making evident the original relationships of documents.

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3

Archivists should protect the authenticity of documents during archival processing, preservation and use.

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4

Archivists should ensure the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials.

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5

Archivists should record, and be able to justify, their actions on archival material.

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6

Archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival material and provide an impartial service to all users.

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7

Archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation.

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8

Archivists should use the special trust given to them in the general interest and avoid using their position to unfairly benefit themselves or others.

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9

Archivists should pursue professional excellence by systematically and continuously updating their archival knowledge, and sharing the results of their research and experience.

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10

Archivists should promote the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage, through working co-operatively with the members of their own and other professions.

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## **UNESCO UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON ARCHIVES<sup>6</sup>**

Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.

### **To this effect, we recognize:**

■ **The unique quality** of archives as authentic evidence of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as a reflection of the evolution of societies;

■ **The vital necessity** of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens' rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions;

■ **The diversity of archives** in recording every area of human activity;

■ **The multiplicity of formats** in which archives are created including paper, electronic, audiovisual and other types;

■ **The role of archivists** as trained professionals with initial and continuing education, serving their societies by supporting the creation of records and by selecting, maintaining and making these records available for use;

■ **The collective responsibility of all**—citizens, public administrators and decision-makers, owners or holders of public or private archives, and archivists and other information specialists—in the management of archives.



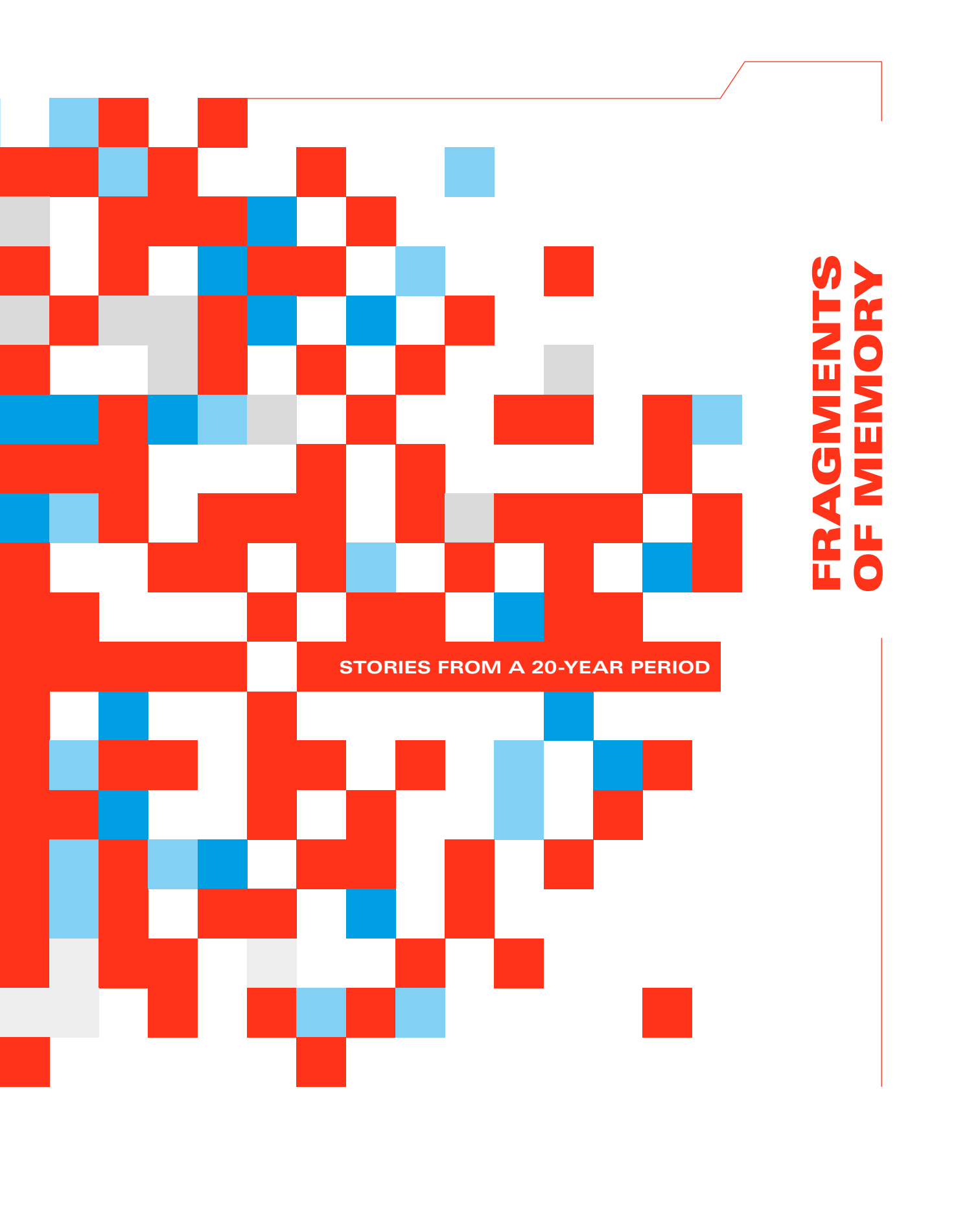
## We therefore undertake to work together in order that

- Appropriate national archival policies and laws are adopted and enforced;
- The management of archives is valued and carried out competently by all bodies, private or public, which create and use archives in the course of conducting their business;
- Adequate resources are allocated to support the proper management of archives, including the employment of trained professionals;
- Archives are managed and preserved in ways that ensure their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability;
- Archives are made accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users;
- Archives are used to contribute to the promotion of responsible citizenship.

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**1** Blue Shield International is an international organization that is affiliated with UNESCO and is based in The Hague. The organization is dedicated to protecting cultural assets from the effects of war, armed conflict, and disaster. **2** <https://www.ica.org/en/deutsch> **3** 1994: ISAD(G), available at: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISAD\(G\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISAD(G)); 1996: ISAAR(CPF), available at: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISAAR\(CPF\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISAAR(CPF)); 2008: ISDF und ISDIAH, available at: [https://vsa-aas.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Normenkatalog\\_Version1-3\\_201312.pdf](https://vsa-aas.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Normenkatalog_Version1-3_201312.pdf) bzw. [https://vsa-aas.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ISDIAH\\_-\\_Internationaler\\_Standard\\_fuer\\_die\\_Verzeichnung\\_von\\_Archivinstitutionen.pdf](https://vsa-aas.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ISDIAH_-_Internationaler_Standard_fuer_die_Verzeichnung_von_Archivinstitutionen.pdf); sowie 2016: RiC (Records in Content), available at: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records\\_in\\_Contexts](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records_in_Contexts) **4** In the spring of 2010, the ICA's Best Practices and Standards Committee commissioned a group of archivists to draw up a document on best practices for public access to both governmental and non-governmental archives. This resulted in the "Principles of Access to Archives", which were adopted by the ICA's annual meeting on 24 August 2012; see [https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA\\_Access-principles\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA_Access-principles_EN.pdf). **5** Code of Ethics for Archivists, adopted by the General Assembly of the International Congress on Archives on 6 September 1996 in Beijing, status: January 1997, available at: [https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA\\_1996-09-06\\_code%20of%20ethics\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA_1996-09-06_code%20of%20ethics_EN.pdf) **6** UNESCO Universal Declaration on Archives, adopted at the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference on 10 November 2011, available at: [https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/20190510\\_ica\\_declarationuniverselle\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/20190510_ica_declarationuniverselle_en_0.pdf)





# FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY

STORIES FROM A 20-YEAR PERIOD

### **FILES SITTING ON THE SHELVES OF STRANGERS?**

On a sunny Tuesday, on 21 June 1999, Evelin Wittich and I travelled to Bonn — she as the managing director of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS), and I as a board member whose task was to tend to issues pertaining to archives — in order to negotiate with the administration of the German Bundestag and the parliamentary archive over financial matters. The topic on the agenda was the use of funds from the Bundestag’s project titled *Aufbereitung und Erhaltung zeitgeschichtlich bedeutsamer Archivalien* (Processing and Preserving Archival Documents Significant to Contemporary History) from German parliamentarians which the RLS was entitled to receive. The PDS delegates’ written material from the last GDR *Volkskammer* and from the last two Bundestag election periods was to be made accessible within the framework of the project. We managed to quickly resolve the question

of using the portion of the project funds reserved for staff costs. But when it came to the material costs, a dispute arose between the advisor from the Bundestag’s administration and the head of the parliamentary archives. The Bundestag representative was anxious to use the budget item to its fullest extent and was therefore of the opinion that the ADS’s archive shelves could also be paid for out of the portion of the budget designated for material costs. “No”, responded the head of the parliamentary archives, “the shelves have always been financed using the foundation’s general funds.” “But”, said the Bundestag representative, “then all your files will end up being stored on the shelves of the Federal Ministry of the Interior.” “That doesn’t matter”, was his terse response. And so the shelves (and later the mobile shelving system for magazines) were paid for using the general funds of the RLS.

**CHRISTINE  
GOHSMANN**

## ARCHIVAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

“The role of archive in reconciliation, development and identity politics is central, not only in addressing the past, but also in imagining and facilitating the future.”<sup>1</sup>

This assessment of the significance of archives applies not only to the context of South Africa, but for archives everywhere.

Over the years, the expert opinion of archive managers has repeatedly been requested for archive projects both here in Germany and abroad. We were happy to acquiesce to this request. In 2003, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung opened its first foreign office in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Centre for International Dialogue and Cooperation, which is responsible for the Foundation’s overseas work, began supporting educational projects in southern Africa even back in the preparatory phase leading up to the official opening of the office. Among our first project partners were Khanya College in Johannesburg and the Labour Research Service in Cape Town; subsequent additional project partners included the South African History Archive and the archive of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The South African Labour History Project was launched in 2001 in collaboration with Khanya College and the Labour Research Service in order to promote communication, cooperation, and networking among activists in the trade union sector. The project was funded from 2001 to 2006 and served to construct an online archive of the South African labour movement in the period from 1966 to 1979. In 2002, the project was integrated into a regional project conducted in southern Africa by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung titled Gesellschaftspolitische Maßnahmen (Sociopolitical Measures).

In that instance, the work of gathering expert opinions had already commenced before the project began. Project envoys travelled to Berlin, and we were tasked with providing them with an insight into our work and with organizing visits and events in cultural institutions with online presentations in which we could exchange our experiences. After it commenced in Cape Town and Johannesburg, the project received professional support, and its progression and results were evaluated on site. This demonstrated to us that the tools needed to market such a project differ significantly between Europe and Africa. For example, in Africa, radio programmes still enjoy a high level of distribution, which is why interviews and feature programmes are commonly used as a means of publicizing matters pertaining to the project and of advertising the supplementation of the archival collection. Because access to the internet was not guaranteed everywhere, we were also granted the right to provide CDs containing prominent events of the labour movement such as mass strikes as a means of further disseminating the knowledge gleaned from the archival documents.

The study of South Africa’s archival landscape and our work in a consulting capacity for a number of archival projects brought us into contact with vocational colleges, which invited us to attend workshops, discussion groups, and conferences. Conferences like the one that was organized in 2006 by the Southern Africa Office in collaboration with a project partner under the title Memory, Heritage and The Public Interest led to the development of a special research interest and a broadening of the view of the significance of archives.

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Hamilton and Xolela Mangcu, *Freedom: Public Deliberation and the Archive*, published by the Public Intellectual Life Project of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2006, p. 2.

### **ONLY A “THIN BOOKLET”**

We had our first finding aid, which had been compiled on the subject of the PDS-Fraktion in der Volkskammer der DDR (PDS Parliamentary Group in the GDR People’s Parliament, March to October 1990), printed in a limited edition of 100 copies and bound as a brochure in A5 format. After we had sent the finding aid, status report, and the report on the expenditure of the funds to the Bundestag administration punctually at the end of March 2000, I called Ms Handke-Leptien, the head of the budgetary unit of the German Bundestag administration, in April 2000 to enquire as to whether everything had arrived. “Yes”, responded Ms Handke-Leptien. The finding aid was merely a “thin booklet”, she said, only to follow this observation up with a reassuring comment: “You only had three months’ time.” Aha, I said to myself, the director of the budgetary unit clearly hoped to see something more substantial in return for the money she had doled out for the project.

In the spring of 2000, Christine Gohsmann then paved the way for our fledgling party archives to become integrated into the broader archival landscape and established

the relevant contacts. We visited the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (Archive of Social Democracy, AdsD) in Bonn and the Green Memory Archive (AGG) in Bornheim together in May 2000; these contacts and experiences were of immense benefit to us in terms of coming to grips with the Bundestag project. After all, we lived from this project. During these visits, we took the opportunity to inspect the finding aids that had been compiled there for the Bundestag administration: each of them was a large volume in A4 format with text printed only on one side of the page and made use of spacious text layout; the AdsD’s finding aids were bound in brick-red imitation leather, and the AGG’s finding aids were wrapped in jackets of green imitation leather, and the titles were rendered in silver script. As a result of these archive visits, we opted to produce future versions of the ADS’s finding aids for the Bundestag administration in an A4 format with single-sided text, but in order to ensure they stand out, we have our product bound in deep red imitation leather, with the title rendered in black text.

A red line graphic that starts as a diagonal line from the left, then turns horizontal to the right, and finally turns vertical down to the right.

**CHRISTINE  
GOHSMANN**

**“BUT EVERYTHING IS ONLINE!” –  
AS AN ITINERANT PREACHER IN BRUSSELS**

In November 2013, at the annual conference of the International Council on Archives in Brussels, we were given the opportunity to meet our colleagues from the Regional Office for the European Union of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Brussels, as well as to pay a visit to the staff of the left-wing delegation of the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) political group in the European Parliament. It was on this occasion that the idea was born of organizing a workshop the following year for the members of parliament and their offices.

It took some persistence and an endless barrage of emails and telephone calls before we were finally able to settle on a date for the workshop, which we agreed would take place in Brussels in May 2014. We entered the European Parliament in pairs and presented our work. We started by explaining that our archives at the time only contained a limited number of documents from the work conducted by the left-wing delegation in the GUE/NGL; we endeavoured to impress upon them our desire to achieve the broadest possible transmission of the group's work, while at the same time referring to the range of goods and services provided by the archive. After answering several questions, we accepted an invitation to visit some of the members' offices.

Our visit to the offices provided us with an excellent opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the members' working methods and with their very distinctive propensity for storing the results of their work in an analogue or digital format. Often “only” the final version of the papers was available on the website due to the chiefly electronic nature of the exchange on the topics of the papers that were to be compiled. Information pertaining to processing stages and preparatory work was barely ever stored in the electronic records, true to the slogan “Everything is online!” A meeting with those responsible for the delegation's media and public relations work had also been arranged, and we were able to add to our collections in the period that followed. Among the arrangements made was an agreement that the marketing and communications company Media-Service GmbH, based in Berlin at Franz-Mehring-Platz 1, would in future submit one copy of all advertising material produced for Brussels to the Archives for Democratic Socialism for archiving.

Once back in Berlin, we reported on the workshop and the specific features of this collection. The workshop had once again convinced us that it is first and foremost personal contacts that inspire in institutions and individuals the confidence needed to entrust an archive with their records.

A red line graphic that starts from the left edge of the page, goes down at a 45-degree angle, then turns 90 degrees to the right and runs horizontally across the top of the page.

## THE AUTUMN MEETINGS

There were no laws or regulations stipulating the obligatory submission of documents to the Archives for Democratic Socialism so we had to tend to the task of increasing the number of documents of archival value ourselves. As employees of the Archives for Democratic Socialism, we have always considered ourselves to perform the role of mediator between those who “produce” the documents and the potential users of those records. We saw ourselves as responsible for the tasks of advising the creators in the process of generating the files, as well as in terms of safeguarding and acquisition, and evaluating, preserving, and utilizing the documents.

In order to establish the necessary contact with those responsible for the archives, we invited those in charge to a series of annual autumn meetings involving the party executive of the PDS, its regional associations, *Landesstiftungen* (regional foundations) and associations affiliated with the PDS, as well as the Bundestag parliamentary group of the PDS, which subsequently became the political party Die Linke.

The autumn meetings began with a meeting in Berlin, where the work of the Archives for Democratic Socialism was presented,

including the archive premises and the archiving software. In later years, the meetings led us to the parliamentary group Die Linke in the German Bundestag, to the archive of Die Linke’s party executive in Berlin, to state parliamentary factions of Die Linke, to the regional offices of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in a variety of federal German states, to the Clara Zetkin memorial in Birkenerwerder, and to the Stiftung Archive der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organizations, SAPMO) in the federal archives in the Berlin district of Lichtenfelde. The objective of the autumn meetings was for those in charge of archives to share information about the collections for which they were responsible, as well as the working conditions and the opportunities for utilizing the records on site. The location of each meeting or the institution that would be hosting it was included in the content design of the meeting. This enabled the participants to become familiar with a number of different state parliamentary libraries; for example, they were given a guided tour of Schwerin Castle, which is the seat of the state parliament, and were briefed on the work conducted by the *Landesstiftungen*. The exchange of experiences between the




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 **JOCHEN  
WEICHOLD**

## IN CONTRAST TO THE ARCHIVES OF KING SOLOMON

Since time immemorial, the general public has associated archives with dust. In his book *The King David Report*, writer Stefan Heym outlines the state of chaos in which the royal archive found itself; stored in a stable that had been built to house King Solomon's horses. In these archives, which consisted of piles of clay tablets stacked on top of each other, covered with dust and cobwebs, and numerous leather scrolls strewn about in a state of terrible disorder, one would search for the records of King David's scribe, Seraiah—a pursuit that was at first, unsurprisingly, futile.

The situation was significantly different with regard to the documents that two employees from the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, which was still in its developmental phase at the time, received in July 1999 from the information and documentation unit of the PDS parliamentary group in the German Bundestag. The documents from the PDS in the last People's Parliament to take place the GDR in 1990 and those from the PDS in the Bundestag from the 12th and 13th election terms had been clearly filed over the years in Leitz folders and stored in a dust-free environment in built-in cupboards in the *Bundeshaus* (federal parliament building) in Bonn. This acquisition of files laid the material foundation for the Archives for Democratic Socialism. At the end of 1999, we counted 28.1 running metres of archival records.

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**CHRISTINE  
GOHSMANN**

participating archivists drew upon field reports, and was supplemented by specialist articles. Over the years, the work conducted on the collections of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern PDS (from 1989 to 2007) consistently played a role in a number of different ways, until the autumn meeting conducted in Schwerin in 2016, where the finding aids were finally presented to those responsible for party development in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern; here, the finding aids were able to be assessed in terms of user-friendliness and validity. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

The autumn meeting that took place in 2014 in the Käte Duncker room, Die Linke's meeting room in the regional parliament of Thuringia in Erfurt, and the meeting in 2016 in the office of the Schwerin parliamentary group were dedicated to the recent state elections. An initial analysis of each party's election results and a report on the state of the coalition negotiations in Thuringia provided the meetings with a very up-to-date framework.

The highlight of the 2010 autumn meeting was when a hard drive containing databases pertaining to Die Linke in the German Bundestag from the Bundestag's 16th election term was physically handed over to the director of the Archives for Democratic Socialism.

**JOCHEN  
WEICHOLD**

## **DETAILED FORENSIC WORK**

In 2001, we had a modern mobile shelving system built into our storeroom in the office building at Franz-Mehring-Platz 1; first came the initial construction phase, and then the second phase took place in the first half of 2002. We had expected that the new system would provide us with sufficient space to be able to properly and professionally store new archival material for four or five years. But then the PDS was kicked out of the Bundestag during the federal election in the autumn of 2002. And at the end of October 2002, two removal vans parked in front of the building and unloaded vast numbers of moving boxes containing files. They filled the entire foyer, and it took us several weeks to first classify the removal boxes and then the document folders according to the member(s) of parliament to which they pertained—an undertaking that sometimes involved a considerable amount of detailed forensic work—and then finally to organize the records.

Our storeroom with the new mobile shelving system was now filled to the brim. We accepted the offer made by the Kirchliches Zentralarchiv Berlin (Central Ecclesiastical Archive) to store any further records and also rented additional shelf space in the newly established archive building on Bethaniendamm. Since then, our archival material has been spread out across the two locations.

## **“ARCHIVES AREN’T PROFITABLE, BUT THEY DO PAY OFF!”<sup>1</sup>**

The advantages of an archive for an organization might not always be immediately apparent, because an organization’s history is not necessarily the focus of the archival work at the time when an archive is first created. Archivists therefore never tire of explaining their work in-house, of offering guided tours of the storerooms, or of assisting in developing filing plans, as well as developing standards for the handover of documents to the archive.

For their part, the departments would approach the staff at the archive on specific occasions: for example, when older files were in the way during the moves that repeatedly took place within the building; when the work conducted by the various departments was presented at the Markt der Möglichkeiten (Market of Opportunities) during conferences for overseas employees; or when the introductory seminar of the RLS’s Studienwerk was planned. In April and October every year, we welcome the new scholarship holders, which usually entails their spending two days as guests at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, familiarizing themselves with the foundation and its var-

**CHRISTINE  
GOHSMANN**

ious departments, and what these departments have to offer. The archive and library were merged together to form one single department. This merger also involved the guided tours through the main shared store-room and the information pertaining to the collections and their potential uses, especially in relation to archives or libraries. The participants were keenly interested and continually responded with questions. Unsurprisingly, we were also often asked whether the archive was also home to Rosa Luxemburg's written legacy, to which we had to respond that no, it was not. But we were at least able to draw the visitors' attention to the extensive library collection located on the same premises containing literature by and about Rosa Luxemburg.

In addition to the guided tours, a workshop was offered over a number of years that was conducted in two groups using archival materials (copies of original documents). A series of highly significant and informative documents pertaining to her life and work were selected from the collections of Jürgen Demloff, a representative in the *Volkskammer*, and Christa Luft, a member

of the Bundestag. Corresponding videos were also shown of her appearances in the *Volkskammer* and the German Bundestag, the contents of which the scholarship holders analyzed and then presented to each other. This allowed the scholarship holders to gain an impression of the documents' significance and gave them an insight into the work conducted by the archivists. Over the course of the scholarship, some of the scholarship holders returned to the archive and library.

It was just as important for the Studienwerk to have immediate access to the scholarship holders' documents as it was for those funding the project to have access to the files containing the approvals or rejections of project proposals. Not all employees immediately warmed to the new form used by the archivists for the purposes of logging each new submission of documents, but they have since grown accustomed to its use over the years. Research conducted in preparation for anniversaries of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has illustrated how significant the filing system actually is for the history of our own organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Katharina Tiemann in *Der Archivar*, vol. 3, 2005, p. 196.

## **A LAST-MINUTE VISIT**

Ms Nelles, who is responsible for implementing the Bundestag project in the parliamentary archives, registered at short notice to visit our archives on 15 November 2001. It certainly would have been very helpful to have our colleague Christine Gohsmann there on that occasion; at the time, she was the only archivist in our small archive and library department who had a relevant degree from a university of applied sciences. However, on the day in question, her teaching commitments meant that she was at the Fachhochschule Potsdam and was therefore unable to be present. “Good advice is expensive.” Or so the saying goes. Our librarian Uwe Michel and I not only removed the unsightly moving boxes from the storeroom, but also bought coffee, pastries, and sparkling water in order to create a pleasant atmosphere during our initial conversations with Ms Nelles. We then demonstrated our archiving software AUGIAS-Archiv, which

we used as the only party archive of the parties represented in the Bundestag. (At that time, all other party archives were working with the FAUST archiving software.) Finally, we presented archival material from the Bundestag project that had been indexed in the storeroom on a sample basis. We were able to convince Ms Nelles by way of a visual inspection that the work detailed in the annual reports for the previous years had actually been carried out: removing all metal components, foliating the sheets of the units of description, and transferring them from their original folders into acid-free archive portfolios and containers for archival materials, and applying up-to-date shelf marks to the folders and containers. Ms Nelles was also able to verify that the archival materials had been stored in accordance with the regulations, thereby allowing us to clear an important hurdle in terms of securing future funding for the ADS.

**Dr Dietmar Bartsch**, born in Stralsund in 1958, is an economist and a member of the German Bundestag. He acted as treasurer and federal whip for many years, for the PDS and later for Die Linkspartei.PDS, or the party Die Linke. He has been the chairperson of the Die Linke parliamentary group since October 2015.

**Friedrich Burschel**, born in 1965, is an historian and political scientist who works for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung as an advisor focussing on neo-Nazism and the structures and ideologies of inequality. He supported the NSU Trial in Munich through his work as an employee at NSU-Watch and as a correspondent for Radio LOTTE in Weimar. He is also an author and writes the *antifra*\* blog.

**Peter Delis**, born in 1951, was a full-time employee of the German Peace Union until 1990 after completing his business administration degree. In the mid-1980s, he became the state majority leader in Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland, and later in Hesse. He worked as the advisor for alliance work for Die Linke in the Hessian state parliament from 2008 to 2014. He works as a volunteer at the Friedens- und Zukunftswerkstatt e.V.

**Prof Dr Alex Demirović**, social scientist and associate professor at the Goethe University Frankfurt, is a senior fellow of the RLS, member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the RLS and currently its chairperson, member of the Scientific Advisory Board of Attac and of the Bund demokratischer Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler (Federation of Democratic Scientists). His latest print publications include *Wirtschaftsdemokratie neu denken* (Rethinking Economic Democracy), published

together with Susanne Lettow and Andrea Maihofer in 2018, and *Emanzipation* (Emanicipation), published in 2019.

**Dr Dagmar Enkelmann**, born in 1956, is a qualified historian and has been the chair of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung since 2012. During the period of political change, she was actively involved in roundtable discussions and was elected to the *Volkskammer* of the GDR. She represented the PDS, or rather the party Die Linke, as a member of the German Bundestag and the Brandenburg state parliament for a number of parliamentary terms. From 2005 to 2013, she was the parliamentary whip of the Bundestag political group Die Linke.

**Bärbel Förster**, born in 1959, studied History and Archival Sciences in Leipzig and Berlin. She worked at the Saxon State Archive in Dresden from 1984 to 1994, and then worked in the Federal Archives of Switzerland in Bern and Zurich in a leadership and project management role (from 1995), and in the Swiss Dance Archives (2008), as well as in the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (from 2009), and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (from 2015) in the area of business administration and archiving. From 1999 to 2008, she was a part-time lecturer in information science in Chur, Zurich, and the University of Bern/Lausanne. She has been the director of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's archive since 1 March 2019.

**Wolfgang Gehrcke**, born in 1943, is a politician who has also worked as an administrative assistant and journalist. He was a member of the German Bundestag from 1998 to 2002, and again from 2005 to 2017. He joined the KPD in 1961, and in 1968 he

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cofounded the Socialist German Workers Youth (SDAJ) and was jointly responsible for initiating the Aldermaston Marches and the new peace movement. He was a founding member of the DKP in 1968 and was party executive from 1973 to 1989. In 1990, he cofounded the PDS in West Germany and was its general secretary from 1991 to 1993, and then its federal deputy chairperson from 1993 to 1998. He is a founding member of the Party of the European Left.

**Dr Margret Geitner**, born in 1963, is the chair of Die Linke parliamentary group in the Hamburg city parliament, political scientist, former advisor for foreign policy of the left-wing parliamentary group in the Bundestag. She has been actively engaged in a number of different internationalist and anti-racist groups for many years (kein mensch ist illegal, Welcome to Europe, and w2e, among others).

**Claudia Gohde**, born in 1958, is the manager of the federal office of the party Die Linke. She studied Theology, Ethnology, and German Philology in Göttingen and, in her capacity as a mediator and organizational consultant, oversaw the organizational development of the Linkspartei, as well as the process of the party's merger with the WASG. She was the party executive of the PSD from 1991 to 1997 and is a member of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

**Christine Gohsmann**, born in 1962, is a certified archivist. She has worked with archives in Berlin and Brandenburg since 1985, and has been employed by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung since 1999, where she worked as archive director and acting archive director until 2016. She has been a research assistant at the Historical Centre

for Democratic Socialism since 2017. In 2018, she graduated from the Freie Universität Berlin with a degree in Editing (M.A.).

**Dr Gregor Gysi**, born in Berlin in 1948, is a lawyer, skilled labourer in the area of cattle farming, and member of the German Bundestag. He was a member of the *Volkskammer* of the GDR from 1990 onwards and was the chair of the PDS parliamentary group. From the end of 1990 until January 2002, he was the chair of the group, or rather the parliamentary group of the PDS, and was the chair of the party Die Linke in the German Bundestag from October 2005 to October 2015. In December 2016, he was elected the president of the Party of the European Left. He currently works as a lawyer and publicist.

**Thomas Händel**, born in 1953, is the vice chair of the RLS. An electrician by trade, he studied at the Akademie der Arbeit in Frankfurt am Main. He was a member of the SPD from 1972 to 2004, and from 2005 to 2007 was the managing director and federal treasurer of the WASG, which merged with the PDS in 2007 to become the party Die Linke. From 2009 to 2019, he was a left-wing representative in the European Parliament and chairperson of the employment committee. From 1979 onwards, he worked on the executive board of IG Metall and was the general manager of the IG Metall in Fürth from 1987 to 2012.

**Bernd Hüttner**, born in 1966, is a political scientist and works as an advisor for contemporary history and politics of memory at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. In 1999, he founded the Archive of Social Movements in Bremen. He is a member of the Historical Commission on the federal executive board of the party Die Linke, of the international

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advisory board of the International Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH), and of the executive board of the German Labour History Association.

**Urs Kälin**, born in 1959, studied History, Modern German Literature, and Political Theory at the University of Zurich and completed his doctorate in 1991 with Rudolf Braun. From 1992 to 1996, he was a research associate of the Swiss University Conference in Bern, and since 1996 he has been the vice-director of the Swiss Social Archives in Zurich. He is an executive politician and is the mayor of Altdorf in the canton of Uri.

**Prof Dr Christian Koller** was born in 1971 and studied History, Economics, and Political Science. He worked as a lecturer at the Bangor University in the UK from 2007 to 2014, was a fellow of the Royal Historical Society from 2010, and was also an honorary professor of Modern History at the University of Zurich. He has been the director of the Swiss Social Archives since 2014. He has contributed to numerous publications pertaining to the history of nationalism and racism, historical semantics, sports history, social movements, industrial relations, history of violence, military history, history of intercultural contact and cultures of memory.

**Jan Korte**, born in 1977, studied Political Science, History, and Sociology at the University of Hannover. He has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2005 and has belonged to the executive board of the Die Linke parliamentary group since 2009; he has also been its party manager since 2017. In 2014, he was elected to the executive board of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

**Dr Anja Kruke** manages the Archives of Social Democracy of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, which also includes the house where Karl Marx was born, where a new permanent exhibition has been on display since 2018. She is an historian and publishes content on different topics from the 19th and above all the 20th century.

**Andreas Marquet** manages the department of digital transformation of the Archive of Social Democracy as Chief Digital Officer. As an historian and information scientist, his focusses of interest lie in contemporary history and the points of intersection between digital methods of research and archiving.

**Uwe Michel**, born in 1962, studied Literary Studies and Philosophy in Perugia, Italy. He trained to become a librarian at the Freie Universität Berlin and has been responsible for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's library since 2001. He also supervises the series of events titled Linke Literatur im Gespräch (Discussing Left-Wing Literature) and works closely with the archivists from the Archives for Democratic Socialism.

**Petra Pau** was born in Berlin 1963. She was a member of the SED and joined the PDS in 1990, where she held the position of state party leader for Berlin for ten years and was the vice-chairperson at the turn of the millennium. In 1990, she was elected to the Hellersdorf district assembly and, in 1995, was elected to the Berlin House of Representatives. Since 1998, she has won six direct mandates for the German Bundestag and has been its vice-president since 2006. As a politician focussing on internal affairs, she fights for civil rights and democracy, and against right-wing extremism, racism, and antisemitism.

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**Bernd Riexinger**, born in 1955, trained as a banker and was trade union secretary in the Baden-Württemberg regional management of the Gewerkschaft Handel, Banken und Versicherungen (Trade, Banking and Insurance Union) from 1991, and was later the managing director of the ver.di district of Stuttgart and the region. He became a co-founder of the WASG in response to the Agenda 2010 issued by Gerhard Schröder's federal government and was the WASG's state spokesperson for Baden-Württemberg until its amalgamation with the PDS in 2007. Together with Katja Kipping, he has chaired the party Die Linke since 2012 and has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2017.

**Dr Albert Scharenberg**, born in 1965, is an historian and political scientist who is the director of the Historical Centre for Democratic Socialism of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Prior to that, he was the co-director of the RLS's New York office and editor and associate of the Journal for German and International Politics.

**Dr Jörn Schütrumpf** was born in 1956 and is an historian and editor. From 2003 to 2017, he was the manager of the Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin and currently heads the "Fokusstelle Rosa Luxemburg" (Rosa Luxemburg Research) in the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. His publications include *Freiheiten ohne Freiheit: Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (2010); as an editor, *Angelica Balabanoff: Lenin – oder: Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel* (2013); Paul Levi, *Ohne einen Tropfen Lakaienblut: Schriften, Reden, Briefe* (2016–2018, four volumes so far); *Rosa Luxemburg – or: The Price of Freedom* (third, revised and supplemented edition, 2018).

**Dr Andrey K. Sorokin** was born in 1950 and is an historian. In 1991, he founded the Rosspen publishing house, or Political Encyclopedia Publishers. In 2008, he launched the project *Geschichte des Stalinismus* (History of Stalinism), a collection of relevant publications in 100 volumes. He is a member of the Academic Council of the Russian Federal Archives and director of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI).

**Andreas Steigmeier**, born in 1962, is an historian, archivist, and business economist. He founded the Docuteam GmbH in Baden, Switzerland together with Tobias Wildi in 2003 and is its co-director. With almost 40 employees, Docuteam provides archiving services and advises organizations of all kinds on the lifespan of their business records. Prior to that, Andreas worked for a long time as a freelance historian and was also the founder and partner of a non-fiction publishing house publishing content in the field of history.

**Tom Strohschneider** trained as an historian and has worked as a journalist for many years. Among other things, he was the editor in chief of the daily newspaper *neues deutschland* (New Germany). His most recent publication (as an editor) is *Eduard Bernstein oder: Die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden* (Eduard Bernstein, or: The Freedom of the Dissenters, 2019).

**Marga Voigt** was born in 1953 and is a Slavist and librarian. She was the library director at the Zentrales Haus der Deutschen-Sowjetischen Freundschaft in Berlin (Central House of German-Soviet Friendship) until 1990. Since 2001, she has



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worked on a freelance basis on editorial, proofreading, and her own political education projects within the RLS's network of foundations. She is a member of the Förderkreis Archive und Bibliotheken zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung (Society for the Promotion of Archives and Libraries on the History of the Labour Movement) and the Förderverein der Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte (Society for the Promotion of the Clara Zetkin Memorial) in Birkenwerder. She is the editor of the three-volume edition of Clara Zetkin's *War Letters* (vol. 1: 2016).

**Dr Sahra Wagenknecht**, born in 1969, studied Philosophy and Modern German Literature and completed her doctorate as an economist and author. She was a member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2009 and has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2009. From 2015 to 2019, she was the chairperson of the Die Linke parliamentary group. From 1991 to 1995 and from 2000 to 2014, she was a member of the executive board of the PDS party, or rather the Linkspartei.PDS and the party Die Linke.

**Dr Jochen Weichold**, born in 1948, studied History and German Language and Literature and subsequently worked as a political scientist for many years. He was the director of the Archives for Democratic Socialism at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung from 1999 to 2013. Today, he is primarily concerned with the development of green parties and with issues of European policy.

**Dr Florian Weis** was born in Hamburg in 1967 and is an historian who wrote his doctoral thesis on the British Labour Party dur-

ing the Second World War. He has worked for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Berlin since 1999 and has been its managing director since 2008.

**Dr Tobias Wildi**, born in 1973, is an historian, information scientist, and archivist. He founded Docuteam GmbH in 2003 and has been its co-director since then. Among other things, Docuteam operates and oversees long-term archives and develops open-source software for this purpose, which is used in Germany, France, and Switzerland. In 2016, the Swiss Executive Federal Council elected Tobias Wildi as the president of the Eidgenössische Kommission für Kulturgüterschutz (Swiss Agency for the Protection of Cultural Property). In this capacity, he is involved in developing a national repository for digital cultural assets. He is a member of the Expert Group on Archival Description of the International Council on Archives.

**Dr Evelin Wittich**, born in 1950, was a member of the Geschäftsführender Ausschuss der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (Executive Committee; until 1999 known as Gesellschaftsanalyse und politische Bildung e.V., or Societal Analysis and Political Education) from 1990 to 2003, its sole managing director from 2003 to 2008, and director of the Academy for Political Education, where she also managed the "Fokusstelle Rosa Luxemburg" (Rosa Luxemburg Research). Prior to that, she worked as a structural engineer and problems analyst at the GDR's Bauakademie (school of architecture) and vice-manager of Podium Progressiv, the PDS's educational institution.



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“Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens’ rights and enhances the quality of life.”

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