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Anarchism in Germany 1945-1960s

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“Those who have succeeded and survived the fall of Nazism, are the bourgeoisie, which always has the economic means, forming a state within the state, and starting point of the new reaction ... the workers of the factories carry the full weight of production, but wages are insufficient to buy the meagre rations available ... the situation is very bad, and it is not impossible that we, who are so weakened by prisons and camps, will be the first victims of this misery ... The militant syndicalists and anarchists, members of the FAUD here in the south-east of the country, rendered great services and had to make great sacrifices in the clandestine fight against Nazi fascism. The prison, the concentration camp, the prison for many years [penitentiary], that’s what we had to undergo. The sufferings of the Nazi hell cannot be described ... All these activists are physically exhausted; and in addition they destroyed us morally.”

German anarchist Georg Hepp after coming out of the camps at the end of World War Two

In the aftermath of the Second World War the anarchists who had been within the anarcho-syndicalist union the Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (FAUD) attempted to re-organise in Germany. Many had died under Nazi persecution, many had gone into exile. Those who had survived the concentration camps were in poor health and discouraged. The starvation years of 1945 to 1948 saw the deaths of others weakened by their experiences in the camps and prisons. However small discussion groups began to spring up in different cities and towns, composed of those who wished to continue the activities that had been terminated by the Nazi rise to power in 1933. They received support from old FAUD activists in Sweden like Helmut Rüdiger, Fritz Benner and Gustav Doster

and in the USA like Rudolf Rocker, with the assistance of the Swedish SAC [Svensk Arbetaren Centralorganisation] and [anarchist] Jewish women workers in the USA which organised auxiliary supplies for over 200 German comrades. Assistance came likewise from the Working Group of Libertarian Socialists in Basel in Switzerland, the French Federation Anarchiste and other anarchist emergency committees, as well as the International Workers Association (IWA) - the anarcho-syndicalist international. Alfred and Gretel Leinaw¹ in Darmstadt organised a series of meetings from 1945 onwards with the aim of establishing a new anarchist organisation.

The Föderation Freiheitlicher Sozialisten (FFS) was founded at a congress on the Whitsun weekend 1947 at Darmstadt [May 24th-25th]. It represented around 30 delegates from fifteen towns in West Germany. From the start Fritz Linow² of Berlin, former member of the business commission of the FAUD took part organising the FFS. However, Linow held similar views to Rocker and Rüdiger and Augustin Souchy which put them on the right of the anarchist movement. Rocker and Rüdiger had supported the Allies during World War Two and Rocker had revised his concept of anarchist communism as not possible through revolution but through an evolutionary process and moved away from class struggle anarchism towards a liberal humanist approach. For his part Helmut Rüdiger, as a result of his experiences in Spain had become a fierce anti-Communist ("Since 1937, I hate the Communists as my real mortal enemies") Unfortunately this anti-communism led him into

¹ Alfred (1902-1983) was condemned in 1937 to 4 years and six months prison which he served at Butzbach prison. This was as a result of an illegal contact with exiled anarchists.

² Friedrich Ferdinand Linow (1901-1965). Carpenter. Joined the anarchist youth movement in 1921 and the FAUD after that. Engaged in joint illegal work with Communists and Social Democrats in 1933 in Mecklenburg.

the model of *Die Freie Gesellschaft* containing mostly articles from foreign anarchist writers.

In the 1960s the FFS slowly dissolved with the last group in Munich disappearing in 1970. Rocker's revisionist model had failed and it was not until 1968 that a revival of German anarchism was possible.

Sources

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Erich Mühsam who had been murdered by the Nazis in 1933. She had fled to the Soviet Union, where she was arrested for taking part in “counter-revolutionary” activities, ending up spending many years in camps and prisons. The pamphlet was part of the campaign initiated by Rocker in 1949.

The membership of the FFS reached its height in 1948 with between 350 and 400 members, 80 of these in Berlin and 113 in Cologne. Other large groups existed in Hamburg, Ludwigshafen, Mannheim, Munich, and Wuppertal. Gretel Leinau carried out a huge amount of work keeping in contact with isolated comrades.

The FFS failed to recreate the FAUD and concentrated on cultural activities as well as working within the DGB and the cooperatives, as already noted. Rocker’s book *Nationalism and Culture* was published by the FFS publishing house as well as Souchy’s book on Spain. In addition, the old Guild of Libertarian Book Lovers (Gilde freiheitlicher Bücherfreunde GfB) was re-established, which had been a success for the FAUD in the 1920s. This was according to the FFS because “such cultural work is doubly necessary in Germany today to clarify and to carry our views into wider circles where they can be fruitful in rebuilding the country”.

However, the FFS received no new young members and the old guard was debilitated by the travails of Nazism. The DGB bureaucrats remained in control of the unions, the councils had been incorporated back into the State and there was little interest in anarchism. At the last regional conference of the FFS in 1952 Leinau stated that: “Today we have reached the zero point, and organisational life is completely quiet.” This was at a time when the FFS still had 150 members.

The FFS never officially dissolved itself, it just had a long lingering death, it appears. The Leinaus withdrew from the movement in 1953. Between 1954 and 1956 *Unsere Stimme* (Our Voice) a joint production of the FFS and the GfB appeared, edited by the Munich anarchist Hans Weigl. It based itself on

distinctly dubious alliances. Between 1960 and 1962 he wrote for the “neutralist” journal *Opposition und Ziel* (Opposition and Target) under the pseudonym Stefan Stralsund alongside the old Strasserite Karl-Ernst Naske. Linow also wrote for this journal. Linow and his group in West Berlin were as anti-Communist as Rüdiger and were ready to call for Allied support in case of Soviet expansionism, which contradicted the anti-militarism of the FFS. These views were noticed by East German comrades attending meetings in West Berlin.

Indeed, Rocker produced a pamphlet aimed at the FFS - *Zur Betrachtung der Lage in Deutschland* (Considering the Situation in Germany) - where he gave advice on tactics that should be used like making propaganda for federalism against centralism, participation in municipal elections to help in the reconstruction of the country and thus give positive examples of anarchism (!) to a population suffering from hunger and with little interest in anarchism after the war. Indeed, militants like Karl Dingler and Hugo Rentschler had been elected to the council in Göppingen. Shortly after being liberated from a concentration camp on April 19th 1945 Dingler had, with Rentschler, taken part in the consultative assembly in Göppingen to run the daily life of the ruined city. This assembly was dissolved in April 1946, to be replaced by another one based on elections. “After long debates.... not without hesitation, we made the decision to present ourselves to these elections as individuals, but on the socialist list.. It was impossible to stay out of any responsible intervention, people everywhere were insisting that we put ourselves forward, and finally it was my name that received the greatest number of people’s votes” (Dingler). There was a similar scenario with Karl Preiss in Ulm. Not all German anarchists subscribed to Rocker’s revisionism and the veteran Willy Huppertz described it bluntly as reformism. Attempts to run FFS candidates proved to be a failure and the makeshift bodies set up to run destroyed cities were soon integrated back into the state structures.

Participation in parliamentary elections was rejected. Some FFS members joined the DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund-German Trade Union Confederation) unions and the works councils whilst at the same time offering substantial criticism of these bodies. The subject of the refounding of the FAUD was raised again and again by FFS members. For example, Theodor Bennek³ in Hildesheim, active in the unemployed movement there, called for the re-establishment of the FAUD in March 1951. This was rejected by the FFS.

The FFS affiliated to the anarcho-syndicalist international the International Workers Association in 1947. However there was criticism of the IWA within the ranks of the FFS, Leinau writing that: “with the demise of the old FAUD, the IWA has lost its meaning, too.” For his part August Kettenbach regarded the IWA as a relic and indeed the FFS disaffiliated from the IWA in 1952.

A news sheet *Die Internationale* was set up edited by the Leinaus after the first FFS conference. This hectographed publication first appeared in December 1947 with a print run of 500, continuing until 1949 when it was replaced by a monthly magazine *Die Freie Gesellschaft* (The Free Society). Number 1 contained its statement of intention:

“With this journal, a new champion of freedom and socialism is fighting for the cause. It wants to be an organ that examines all questions of social life economically and culturally, but it also wants to fulfil the task of collecting the forces of libertarian socialist self-assertion and expressing their will. It will consistently be libertarian socialist. But it will not be doctrinaire. It does not want to serve fixed programs ...It wants to contribute with its large international staff to information, convey

³ Born 1897. Arrested and imprisoned at Sachsenhausen concentration camp from 1935-1945.

many views and knowledge and bring the state of mind in other countries to its German readership.

It wants to help determine the location of libertarian socialism.

It opens its columns to all people who are of goodwill. Any restriction of freedom, any disregard for human dignity and any violation of human rights will find it on the battlefield...In the direction of a free covenant of the peoples of the world, a federation of Europe on a libertarian socialist basis, a reorganisation of public life from the municipalities, lies their political conception.

In the socialist initiative of the trade unions, in the transformation of the forms of private enterprise into production and consumption co-operatives lie important aspects of its economic direction.”

The academic tone of the magazine was not popular with many members of the FFS who saw it as not relating to everyday life. Fritz Benner who had returned from Sweden to Wuppertal in 1949 wrote: “one cannot develop a movement with it...One can create a movement only if one turns to material interests. The comrades in the Ruhr district want to recruit. The comrades are tired of sacrificing everything just for the magazine, no meetings, nothing. They do not consider the magazine suitable.” In addition, the magazine made a consistent loss for the organisation.

An important point for the FFS at their first conference was the legalisation of their movement by the Allied occupying powers. However, this was consistently refused in all the different occupied zones, hindering the power of the FFS to operate effectively.

The FFS also pushed a pamphlet on the plight of Zensl Elfinger-Mühsam, the partner of the prominent anarchist