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Hunger Strike Statement by Helmut Pohl¹ on Behalf of Political Prisoners in West Germany

February 1st 1989

As of today we are on hunger strike.

We will not give up; association must be achieved now.

Everyone who wants to, knows what isolation is; it is understood and defined internationally as torture. Isolation has become the rule for imprisoned revolutionaries here, whether they are from the guerrilla, the resistance or are foreign comrades; and they are using it against social prisoners who resist. And it is being increasingly adopted internationally as the clean and detestable method of the refined West Germans/Europeans. So isolation must be broken here.

We have carried out nine hunger strikes during which two prisoners have died²; many more of us have damaged our health. These eighteen years of torture must end now. That is our definitive decision; that is how we will resist.

There is not much more to explain. Our situation and our demands are clear. We have gotten sick of talking about isolation and the fact that we want to be together. Those inadequate words, repeated over and over again, have already made a mockery of the reality in the prisons. We will be saying something now and again during the strike, but for now just a few main points.

We will not go on this way any longer.

From the beginning, the goal of isolation was to destroy the prisoners in order to snuff out the politics of the RAF. They failed in that because of us, but we won't put up with it any longer. We don't want to put up with it any longer; that's how it is. That is our political and existential decision now. Although we have been able to assert ourselves against their destruction-assembly line, and we have also won something decisively new for ourselves in this situation; there is a limit for us as to how long individuals can remain in permanent struggle and how restricted a political group behind bars can be.

¹ Helmut Pohl was a member of the RAF arrested on February 4th 1974 and sentenced to five years in September 1976; he was again arrested on July 3rd 1983.

² Holger Meins died on hunger strike in 1974 and Sigurd Debus in 1981.

This limit has now been reached.

It never worked for long; that can be seen in the hunger strike cycle over the years. Through them we defended our identity by struggle and consistently brought collectivity alive again in the solitude, until that which we had achieved for ourselves in these holes through struggle was used up again. We are not going to just add another strike to that now. That is no longer possible; for us, there is nothing now but the material goal.

We want association now, and we also want to close this extremely long phase - and then we want to go further. We will no longer agree to a foreseeable reaction of "isolation will be abolished," that is to say, the cosmetic, single, specific adaptations with which the FRG State hopes to simply neutralize the attacks against isolation while changing nothing for us. Not again after all this time. That must be clear from the very beginning. We always used every little change. We were always ready to take steps. But now there is nothing left except association.

It is a mistake to believe that the ground can be knocked out from under our feet by some new opening, maybe so-called "normal prison conditions." That would mean a new round. There is absolutely no possible outcome except association.

Things have changed - the need for isolation and the possibility of a counter-structure under these conditions - nothing remains as it was in this inferno.

Over time, the demand has taken on a more far-reaching significance for us. We have only been able to make it through these times because of our relationships with one another and their permanent living development, and in that, our interconnectedness has become a part of us like an arm or a leg.

Today, no one can take that away from us - it cannot be undone. It is a material fact created through the struggle against destruction - and so now we can say: it is the dialectical product of their repressive measures. And after these measures have existed for 18 years in every possible variation and no "normality" was able to be established with them, they have to swallow the bitter pill of our association.

It is already a question of more, not only subjectively, but also in respect to the political development. In reality, there has long been a huge gap between our situation and our possibilities and what the real situation as a whole demands in order for us to continue to move forward. Even though we don't have our association yet, the question of a further, more far-reaching perspective for the political prisoners is already developing. It is about us. Everybody wants something from us. For us, things only work collectively. And without us, things don't work. That should have become clear in the

many attempts over the years to do things without us. We want to take part in the whole political discussion now. That is the other side of association.

New questions have arisen out of a whole series of developments here and internationally. On the whole, a new stage has been reached in the conflict, in which everywhere, on both sides, the goals, the formulation of politics, the preparation for the struggle are being taken up anew. It is also a reflection of the fact that the question of the prisoners is being raised again by both sides here. The State is offering pardons, state-conforming groups want amnesty - and the revolutionary resistance is again making it clear that the political prisoners must be free. We also think the time is ripe for this debate. But it will only move forward in a process of discussion and practice through which revolutionary politics become a new and real factor. Our struggle for association shall now become part of that process. Out of many beginnings in the last year, out of the openness and the will that cuts across the various groups in the resistance, we believe a new unity in revolutionary struggle is possible.

We are now seeing a reversal of the degeneration of the left that has taken place since the late 70's. The struggle in the metropolis can also join the international struggle as a new factor. And then real new possibilities will also be opened up in the FRG.

That is our hope.

For us, association now comes first. Then we want to discuss the whole situation - and our freedom. For us, the situation is clearly intensifying around us. Our goal is, of course, freedom. We don't want to establish a part of a political organization in prison; a counter-structure as prisoners is certainly not enough to make us happy.

We believe it is possible then to work for our freedom; there is consensus among us that this is a realistic goal. In order to see how it can be developed further, how it can be brought about, we have to be together. We have determined that association will be a transition.

We are now taking on a new form of collective struggle. In the last strike, they made a new law with which they wanted to prevent us from using hunger strikes as a tactic. The "coma law." That means that the will and the decision-making capacity to keep on struggling should be taken from the ones in a coma in a long drawn-out medical-technical manipulation in the intensive care unit. For the struggle as a whole, that implies they want to contain the critical development and decision within a narrow timeframe, in practice at the one point where many of us, after two or three months, will be close to the edge. Then maybe several would die, but in a short, head-on confrontation - and they would "accept" it, as they said last time. And then, as far as they

are concerned, it would be over. And that would also mean that the tactic would be turned against us politically. Because, in such a final simultaneous confrontation, the entire logic and objective would be thrown into question: When many are dead, how could the others then want to be together?

We will turn that against them and carry on a long drawn-out struggle. Each of us is the collective. We are going to begin together. Then after two weeks, we are going to go over into a chain all except two will temporarily interrupt the strike, then after two more weeks, the next two will join in again, and then the next two after two more weeks, and so on. We're not stopping this time until we have association.

We demand:

- Association of all prisoners from the guerrilla and resistance in one or two large groups into which new prisoners will be integrated, with access to common yard time with the other prisoners; association for all prisoners who are struggling to achieve this objective.
- Release of all prisoners for whom recovery from sickness, injury or torture through isolation is impossible while in prison
- Release of Günter Sonnenberg, Claudia Wannersdorfer, Bernd Rossner and Angelika Goder.
- Free choice of medical care for all prisoners without *Staatsschutz*³ control.
- Access to political information and free communication for prisoners with all groups in society.

For the prisoners from the RAF
Helmut Pohl
February 1, 1989

The two comrades who have been striking since February 1, 1989 are Karl Heinz Dellwo and Christa Eckes.

The ___ comrades joined the indefinite strike on March 1, 1989.

Footnotes

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[2]

³ *Staatsschutz* - State Security..