

The RAF Is Dead - But The Struggle For Liberation Is Not!

A Few Last Words On The End Of The Red Army Fraction (RAF)

Somewhere. In March 1998, the Red Army Fraction (RAF) announced its dissolution after 28 years of armed struggle. This step was an anti-climax, and one long expected, since nothing had been heard of from the RAF for months. Just like the Left in general, the organization had lost its social relevance over the past few years, and it could not be expected that the RAF would provide any impulses for a re-orientation of the Left. But sighs and the shaking of heads are by no means called for.

For 28 years, the RAF was an attempt to wage resistance to the murderous capitalist system and conditions of exploitation. It arose from the correct consciousness of bringing the anti-imperialist struggle of the liberation movements around the world back here, to the center of power. It arose from the realization that the social movements and the guerrilla movements of the Three Continents, which are confronted with U.S. and NATO interventions and the dirty wars being waged by contra-guerrilla forces trained by the BND [German intelligence agency] and the CIA, can only be successful if there is no peaceful calm in the metropolises, in the belly of the beast. The formation of the RAF was the first serious attempt to transform the '68 slogan "Create One, Two, Many Vietnams!" into a reality. This was expressed in the early years mainly in the form of attacks on U.S. military institutions. In the early 1970s, RAF actions, for example the attack on the U.S. Headquarters in Heidelberg, where logistics for air raids on the Vietcong were planned, enjoyed broad, if silent, support. At that time, around 20% of the population were willing to help shelter RAF militants from state repression. So it's no surprise that the repressive authorities in Germany did everything possible to create a social climate in which the RAF and the Left in general could be isolated and defeated. This chance came during the confrontations in 1977. The surveillance state was prepared to make the most of its searching methods and isolation torture. The political error of the RAF, to approve of the hijacking of a civilian Lufthansa airliner by a Palestinian commando during the Schleyer kidnapping, tipped the balance of public opinion, already heated by media smear campaigns, against the guerrilla once and for all. The pogrom-like atmosphere among the public against the RAF political prisoners gave the government's Crisis Staff the signal it needed: The alleged "suicides" of the prisoners in Stammheim were just a formality following the storming of the airliner by a GSG9 police commando.

The RAF could never recover from its defeat in '77. The state had succeeded in creating a permanent gulf between the guerrilla and a majority of the extra-parliamentary Left, and solidarity from the general public was now completely out of the question. The consciousness that the actions of the guerrilla were only directed at the ruling structures, against those responsible for exploitation, war, and oppression, could no longer be proclaimed. "Anyone who attacks people vacationing on Mallorca would eat their own children..." - it wasn't hard for the ruling powers to make such notions stick in the minds

of the people. After this time, only a small portion of the radical Left showed solidarity with RAF actions.

Even the attempts by the RAF in the 1980s, by means of the Front Concept, to link up with radical social movements at the national level and with Action Directe (France) and the Red Brigades (Italy) at the West European level did not make any new beginnings possible. These only exhibited the developments which the RAF themselves criticized in their dissolution communiqué: The lack of a political-social organization, which needed to have an equal importance as the armed politics of the RAF.

The distance between the actions of the RAF, who were only becoming more isolated, and the repressive social reality of the class whose liberation the RAF propagated became too great. Unlike the early 1970s, when social relationships played an important role in texts issued by the RAF (for example, with reference to the strike movements in 1971, and "Urban Guerrilla And The Class Struggle" of April 1972), the statements by the new RAF militants hovered at the abstract-militarist level. For people involved in concrete social confrontations, like unemployed people, the Latin America solidarity movement, or anti-fascists, there was little common ground for discussion with the RAF. The attempts by the RAF in the 1990s (the execution of Treuhand chief Rohwedder, the destruction of the new prison in Weiterstadt) to renew a concrete relationship with the social situation in Germany and a dialogue with the Left came too late. The lack of an organizational framework, a political-social organization which would have made such a discussion possible, was a major problem. This mistake was the fault of the entire radical Left, because the RAF never had the chance to build up such an organization while operating underground.

The dissolution of the RAF is a natural result of their history. But it is merely the end of the chapter on the RAF in the history of the revolutionary Left in Germany, not the end of armed struggle for all times. As long as social conditions exist "in which a human being is treated as a dirty, pitiful, abandoned, and hated being", so long as the heart of the beast continues to beat, producing new capitalist barbarity with each new day - the struggle for liberation will continue. The means of this struggle will be decided on by the radical Left, not dictated by their enemies.

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