

A Brief History Of The Red Army Faction

Spring 1994

[N.B. Footnotes #29 and #37 appeared in the original document, all other footnotes in this document were added by the editor.]

In April 1992, the Red Army Faction (RAF) took the step of unilaterally calling off its campaign of assassinations of key members of the political and economic apparatus as a first step towards a negotiated settlement with the state, a settlement which they insisted must include the release of prisoners, particularly those, such as Bernd Rössner and Ali Jansen, who were in poor health and those who were amongst the longest held, such as Irmgard Möller, who after 21 years had spent close to half of her life in prison, as well as an agreement which would allow those who were underground to surface. The reactions both amongst the prisoners and within the broader anti-imperialist and autonomist movement was predictable. All hell broke loose. To some, if not most, the decision was treason. The decision was portrayed as a betrayal of 23 years of history. And in the spirit of the German left, a hot and heavy debate, much of which was immortalized on paper, has followed. Since we, Arm The Spirit, have translated a number of different documents concerning the RAF and the situation of political prisoners in Germany, we feel that some background is in order to help our readers understand the parameters of this debate. What follows, as such, is a brief examination of the history of the RAF.

The RAF was not the first expression of armed action on the part of the New Left in West Germany in the 60s and 70s. It was, however, the first organization to give armed struggle a consistent and structured form within the context of the international anti-imperialist movement of the day. The RAF, as such, can be said to have been formed on May 14, 1970, when Ulrike Meinhof led an armed unit in freeing Andreas Baader, then serving a prison sentence in connection with 2 firebombings carried out in April 1968. In it's first Manifesto, *The Concept Of The Urban Guerilla*¹, a document steeped in the Marxism-Leninism of the day, the RAF stated, "We affirm that the organization of armed resistance groups in West Germany and West Berlin is correct, possible, and justified. We further state that it is correct, possible, and justified to conduct urban guerilla war now. (...) It can and must be started now, and without it there will never be an anti-imperialist struggle in the metropolises." Further on they added, "The concept of the urban guerilla comes from Latin America. It can only be here, as it is there, the method of revolutionary intervention of generally weak revolutionary forces." The RAF closed this document by placing itself within the international context. "To carry out urban guerilla warfare means to lead the anti-imperialist struggle offensively. The Red Army Faction creates the connection between legal and illegal struggle, between national struggle and international struggle, between political struggle and armed struggle, between the strategical and tactical position of the international communist movement."

¹ A different translation of this document can be viewed online at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/71_04.html

In May 1972, the RAF carried out a series of bombings. The first, on May 11, against the U.S. 5th Army Corps stationed in Germany, was in solidarity with the Vietnamese liberation struggle². The following day they detonated 3 bombs at the Augsburg police headquarters in retaliation for the police killing of RAF member Thomas Weisbecker³. On May 15, the RAF deployed a car-bomb against Karlsruhe federal court judge Buddenberg in retaliation for the mistreatment of arrested RAF members⁴. May 19 saw the bombing of the Springer building in Hamburg in response to the ongoing campaign of anti-left propaganda conducted by the Springer Press⁵. Finally, on May 24, the Heidelberg headquarters of American Armed Forces in Europe was bombed in response to the U.S. mine blockade and carpet-bombing of Vietnam⁶. Although people were injured or killed in most of these bombings, with the exception of the Buddenberg bombing, they differ from later RAF attacks in not being directed against specific individuals, a point that should be kept in mind when examining the RAF's history.

Between June 1 and June 15, 1972, virtually all leading members of the RAF were arrested, bringing to an end what might be seen as the first phase of the RAF's struggle. Although two other guerilla groups, the 2nd of June Movement (which would dissolve and partially integrate into the RAF in June 1980) and the Revolutionary Cells (currently engaged in its own debate about the future of armed struggle in Germany), continued to carry out armed attacks, the RAF was not to carry out another military action until April 1975.

However, the RAF was far from inactive. Both in prison and within the context of the trials, RAF members worked to clarify their perspective and strategy for armed struggle. Some of this is clarified in Ulrike Meinhof's September 13, 1974 statement⁷ regarding the liberation of Andreas Baader. She states, "The struggle against imperialism (...) has as its goal to annihilate, to destroy, to smash the system of imperialist domination, on the political, economic, and military planes; to smash the cultural institutions by which imperialism gives a homogeneity to the dominant elites; and to smash the communications systems which assure them their ideological ascendancy." She adds, "Faced with the transnational organization of capital, the military alliances with which U.S. imperialism encompasses the world, the cooperation of the police and secret services, the international organization of the dominant elite within the sphere of power of U.S. imperialism, the response from our side, the side of the proletariat, is the struggle

² The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/72-05-14.html>

³ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/72-05-16.html>

⁴ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/72-05-20.html>

⁵ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/72-05-20-springer.html>

⁶ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/72-05-25.html>

⁷ This statement can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/74-09-13-meinhof.html>

of the revolutionary classes, the liberation movements of the Third World, and the urban guerilla in the metropolises of imperialism. That is proletarian internationalism."

It is in a paper called *Conduct The Anti-Imperialist Struggle!* that the RAF most clearly outlines how it understands this anti-imperialism and internationalism. "If the peoples of the Third World are the vanguard of the anti-imperialist revolution, meaning that this revolution is objectively the greatest hope of the people in the metropolises for their own liberation, then it is our task to present the connection between the liberation struggle of the peoples of the Third World and the longing for liberation wherever it emerges in the metropolises..." As to the practical implications of these observations, in an interview with *Le Monde Diplomatique*, RAF members stated, "If it was and is possible for the RAF to develop an idea of the Federal Republic's role in West Europe, from which resistance develops nationally and internationally (...) then that means the RAF will reach its tactical aim, that is the dialectic of anti-imperialist action and reaction, from which the armed resistance of small social revolutionary groups becomes a strategic possibility for proletarian internationalism."⁸

When the RAF did act in an armed capacity again on April 24, 1975, it was to seize the German embassy in Stockholm, Sweden⁹. The commando had one simple purpose, to secure the release of 26 political prisoners, most, but not all, members of the RAF, in exchange for the military and economic attaches being held hostage. This action was doubtless modeled on the kidnapping carried out by the 2nd of June Movement in February and March of the same year. Peter Lorenz had been kidnapped and successfully exchanged for 6 imprisoned members of the 2nd of June Movement. In this case, however, rather than negotiate an exchange, the police stormed the building, killing two members of the commando and injuring five others. It is worth noting in passing that the commando was made up entirely of former members of the SPK (Socialist Patients Collective), a group of former psychiatric patients involved in a radical anti-psychiatry project in Heidelberg who had come under extreme police pressure for corresponding with imprisoned RAF members.

On September 5, 1976, Ulrike Meinhof was murdered in her prison cell. The remaining months of 1976 saw the arrest of all of the key lawyers representing RAF prisoners as well as many other supporters. In virtually all cases these people were charged with support for a terrorist organization under paragraph 129a of the West German criminal code. 1976 also saw 2,956 demonstrations, the greatest number in one year in German history. Against this backdrop, the RAF began a campaign that was to culminate in the most significant political event in post-war Germany, the so-called "German Autumn". On April 7, 1977, the RAF executed Chief Federal Prosecutor Siegfried Buback¹⁰, holding him responsible for the deaths of Holger Meins (a leading RAF member who died during a hungerstrike to end isolation in 1974) and Siegfried Hausner (who died due

⁸ This interview can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/76_07.html

⁹ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/75-04-24.html>

¹⁰ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_04_07.html

to lack of medical treatment while in prison following the police attack on the German embassy in Stockholm).

This attack marked a shift to a strategy that would be marked by an overwhelming focus on assassinations of key members of the state apparatus and the business elite. Although this might not have been recognized at the time, it was a shift to an entirely new phase in the RAF's practice. On July 30, the RAF struck again, this time executing Jürgen Ponto¹¹. Ponto, who served on the boards of 30 banks and companies in Germany and was the president of Germany's second largest bank, the Dresdner Bank, was seen as one of the five most important German businessmen at that time, playing a key role representing Germany both at NATO and elsewhere in the international arena. It is possible that the RAF intended to kidnap Ponto in the hope of releasing him in exchange for prisoners. On September 3, the Federal Prosecutor's Office was bombed as part of a pressure campaign to have political prisoners, who were being held in isolation, placed together in groups of fifteen¹².

On September 5, 1977, the RAF undertook what was certainly its largest action, kidnapping Hans Martin Schleyer¹³, who, as the president of the Federal Association of German Industries and the president of the Federal Employers Association, was probably Germany's most important and influential capitalist. They demanded the release of eleven leading RAF prisoners in exchange for Schleyer. This kidnapping elicited a state of emergency and widespread draconian police activity. A stalemate punctuated by police actions against perceived RAF supporters continued until October 13 when a Palestinian commando calling itself "Commando Martyr Halimeh" of the Struggle Against World Imperialism Organization (SAWIO) hijacked a Lufthansa airliner en route from Palma de Majorca to Frankfurt, Germany. They demanded the release of the eleven aforementioned RAF prisoners, as well as two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) being held in Istanbul. The RAF also issued a communiqué supporting this action and reiterating the demands.

Following 5 days of tense negotiations, negotiations which saw Secretary of State Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski visit Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq seeking a country willing to accept the prisoners, and during which the prisoners were put in complete isolation and even denied access to their lawyers and any form of media ('Kontaktsperre'), the hijacked jetliner was stormed in Mogadishu, Somalia by Germany's crack anti-terrorist unit the GSG-9. Three of the four hijackers were killed and the fourth was severely injured. On the same night Gudrun Ensslin, Jan-Carl Raspe, and Andreas Baader died in prison.

¹¹ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_08_14.html

¹² The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_09_03.html

¹³ The RAF communiqués released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_09_06.html and http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_10_13.html - the communiqués from the Commando Martyr Halimeh can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_10_13_okk.html and http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/77_10_13_ultimatum.html

Although the state claimed the deaths were the result of a suicide pact, evidence, including medical evidence, contradicts the suicide thesis at virtually every point. Only Irmgard Möller, who was stabbed, survived this attack.

In retaliation for the killings of the Commando Martyr Halimeh and the prisoners, the RAF executed Schleyer, leaving his body in the trunk of a car in the French border town of Mullhausen.

On November 12, Ingrid Schubert, one of the 11 prisoners whose release had been demanded in exchange for Schleyer was found hanging in her cell.

With Meins, Meinhof, Ensslin, Raspe, Baader, and Schubert dead, virtually the entire leadership of the RAF had been eradicated.

The RAF was not heard from again until June 25, 1979, when they attempted to assassinate the Commander-in-Chief of NATO, U.S. General Alexander Haig¹⁴. This failed assassination attempt was followed by another lengthy silence, broken on August 31, 1981 with a bomb attack on the headquarters of the U.S. Air Force in Europe in Ramstein¹⁵, followed 2 weeks later by a failed attempt to assassinate Frederick Kroesen, Commanding General of the U.S. Army and of the NATO Middle East Section¹⁶. These actions, although unsuccessful from a material point-of-view, established that the RAF was not entirely defeated and allowed them the opportunity to put forward their analysis of the political situation faced by the German and the West European left in the 80s. The Haig communiqué contained the first hint of a significant change in perception that would subsequently harden into a strategic shift. In clarifying their perception of the international balance of power in the post-Vietnam era, it stated:

"The people of the world are confronted with a new American offensive, which, at the same time, marks a qualitative leap forward in the development of the relative strength between the forces of revolution and the forces of counter-revolution; or, as we have already said, the worldwide revolutionary process is the encirclement of the metropole by the people of the hinterland.

"With the victorious liberation of Southeast Asia and Africa, the front is moving nearer the centre, it is coming closer to the metropolises and makes the tactical and strategic retreat of U.S. imperialism inevitable. In other words, the so-called 'displacement of the strategic crucial points' is towards West Europe."¹⁷

In the Ramstein communiqué they further developed this theme:

¹⁴ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/79_06_25.html

¹⁵ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/81_08_31.html

¹⁶ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/81_09_15.html

¹⁷ The communiqué can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/79_06_25.html

*"The imperialist war of destruction is now returning from the Third World to Europe, from whence it began. The people of Europe, of the FRG, are realizing that this development will mean their destruction if it cannot be stopped. They are now getting a direct, physically close concept of what has been reality for people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America for hundreds of years: imperialism, when you yourself are in the position of the oppressed."*¹⁸

And again and more clearly in the Kroesen communiqué:

*"West Europe is no longer the hinterland from where imperialism is waging the war. Now, with the victories of the wars of liberation in the Third World, with the development of the guerilla in West Europe, now that the whole of imperialism is suffering crises, West Europe has become part of the worldwide front line. It is the part where they possess everything. But it is also the part that has become vital for the process of liberation for the entire worldwide front line."*¹⁹

In May 1982, the RAF released a strategy paper entitled *The Guerrilla, The Resistance, And The Anti-Imperialist Front*²⁰. This paper, which came to be known simply as "The May Paper", marked a major re-evaluation and reorientation of RAF strategy, both analytically and practically. Building on statements made in the communiqués accompanying the post-77 actions, they stated that "it is now possible and necessary to develop a new phase in the revolutionary strategy in the metropolises." The basis for this new strategy was to be "The Guerrilla And The Resistance...A Single Front." For the RAF, the period up until '77 was distinguished by "that which built the armed struggle or prepared its path." What was important, however, from their point of view by '82 was "to regroup the guerilla movement and the militant political struggles into an integrated whole from the perspective of a strategy of development in the metropole." For the RAF this front was more than a possibility, it was a necessity. "The anti-imperialist front is urgently needed and even though it is underdeveloped, it could be strong in West Europe, creating enormous possibilities on the level of the international war of liberation."

As had been suggested in the communiqués from '79 and '81, the RAF saw a special significance for resistance in Western Europe. "On the level of the entire imperialist system, their global project of restructuring can only function if the plan of development in the interior of the imperialist centres unfolds in a relatively easy fashion without serious or profound friction. This project could not withstand the rupture caused by an anti-imperialist struggle here..." And finally, in this vein, they state, "The Revolution In West Europe Has Become The Cornerstone Of The Worldwide Confrontation." And vis-à-vis West Germany in particular, "The offensive within and from West Europe,

¹⁸ The communiqué can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/81_08_31.html

¹⁹ The communiqué can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/81_09_15.html

²⁰ This strategy paper can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/82_05.html

supporting itself on the central state, i.e., West Germany, is essential for imperialist strategy to assure itself in a new round both its domination as a functioning system on the world scale and the reproduction of capital. From our side, in the face of this offensive, the frontal development in the metropole is asserted as simply and vitally necessary, as a necessary condition to break the present tendency of the global process of liberation from stagnating in the East-West opposition and, for the countries where there has been national liberation, from the fact of their obligations for the development of their state." Quite plainly this line of reasoning pointed to a substantial shift in the RAF's perception of its role. Up until '77, there is no indication that they saw themselves anything more than the armed expression of an anti-imperialist movement lending rearguard support from within the metropole to national liberation struggles in the Third World. "The May Paper" indicated that they now saw their role as key to international liberation. Such a shift was no small issue and it didn't sit well with many of those who had supported the RAF's earlier anti-imperialist strategy.

"The May Paper" was destined to be the hotly debated, with various segments of the anti-imperialist movement and the far-left in general taking pro and con positions. Some felt that the RAF was using its front strategy to gain hegemony over the growing, but largely unstructured, new young left of the early 80s. Others felt that the front strategy would leave segments of the legal movement open to prosecution under the paragraph 129a of the criminal code, a paragraph which was open to a broad interpretation in criminalizing activities deemed to constitute "support for a terrorist organization". Still others sensed a betrayal of fundamental principles of anti-imperialist theory and practice. This latter is perhaps the most important criticism. In July 1984, *Antiimperialistischer Kampf* (Anti-Imperialist Struggle) issued its critique, perhaps the most systematic and thorough, which juxtaposed the early RAF position with that of "The May Paper". In reference to the first generation of the RAF, they stated, "They consciously placed the anti-imperialist struggle in the West German metropole under the hegemony of the national liberation struggles of the peoples and nations of the Third World whom imperialism oppressed." In this regard, they stated, "The RAF's 1982 May Paper (...) indicates a complete revision of the line that formed the basis of the RAF's struggle in the 70s..." This rift continued to divide the anti-imperialist movement until the end of the 80s and to some degree it marked the beginning of the process that led to the cease-fire of April 1992.

The RAF carried out their first action after the release of "The May Paper" on December 18, 1984. A commando placed a car bomb at the SHAPE School for NATO officers in Oberammergau²¹. The bomb was discovered and defused.

Several days after, RAF prisoners began a hungerstrike for the end of isolation and free association in large groups²². This hungerstrike allowed for the first concrete expression

²¹ While to the best of our knowledge there is no communiqué related to this bombing available in english online, the action is discussed in an interview with the RAF available at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_04.html

²² The prisoners' statement released regarding this hungerstrike can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/84_12.html - a related prisoners' statement can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/84_12b.html

of the front strategy in practice. For the remainder of December and throughout the month of January 1985, RAF supporters carried out hundreds of small and medium level bombings in support of the prisoners' demands. These actions culminated in the RAF assassination of arms industrialist Ernst Zimmerman²³. The prisoners subsequently called off their hungerstrike the same day²⁴. This campaign, impressive as it was, was to prove to be the glory days of the West German anti-imperialist front.

In January 1985, the RAF and the French guerilla group Action Directe (AD) issued a common statement calling for the construction of a West European anti-imperialist front²⁵. This paper set the stage for an action that would ultimately prove to be the RAF's most controversial and divisive. On August 8, 1985, the RAF and Action Directe claimed responsibility for the bombing of the U.S. Air Base in Frankfurt²⁶. The action, which succeeded only in killing two passers-by, would probably only have been seen as significant in anti-imperialist circles because it was the first (and ultimately only) common action of the RAF and Action Directe were it not for the fact that the RAF kidnapped and executed GI Edward Pimental so as to use his ID card to gain access to the Air Base. Even to many of the RAF's supporters this killing seemed unnecessary. Some commented on the irony that while the RAF prisoners were demanding to be treated as prisoners-of-war, the RAF had executed a prisoner to acquire an ID card which they could have acquired without killing him. Criticisms within the anti-imperialist movement and amongst even the RAF's closest supporters were so intense that the RAF took the extraordinary step of answering criticisms in a September 1985 interview carried out by supporters:

Q: You know that there has been and still is a very controversial discussion about the Air Base action and the shooting of GI Pimental. Most important, you gave the cops a chance to construct their propaganda against the action.

A: It was certainly a mistake not to send the second communique and the ID card together. We presumed that those who understood the action would make the connection.

(...)

Q. But there is still a difference between the two deaths on the Air Base and the GI. The determination of the action as you have outlined it doesn't explain the case of the GI. Isn't this a contradiction?

A: No. Basically the relationship between us and them is war. We needed his card, otherwise we could not have accomplished the attack. Of course, we wouldn't say we

²³ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_02_01.html

²⁴ This statement can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_02b.html

²⁵ This statement can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_01.html

²⁶ The first communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_08_08.html

*should now shoot every GI who comes around the corner or that other comrades should do so. One can clarify this only by considering the actual situation, the political-practical determination of the attack, i.e., it is a tactical question.*²⁷

These responses failed to satisfy many of the critics and the RAF was forced to issue a "self-criticism" of sorts in January of 1986²⁸. This paper, entitled *To Those Who Struggle With Us*, which was largely a reiteration of the RAF's front strategy, dealt with the Pimental killing at several points. The opening paragraph read:

"Today, we say that the shooting of the GI in the concrete situation in the summer was a mistake which blocked the effect of the attack against the Air Base and the debate about the political-military purpose of the action, as was the case with the offensive overall²⁹. It is clear that shooting the GI was a degree of escalation which, in itself, had a strategic quality, because it means sharpening the war against U.S. imperialism, in the sense that, for all of us, all things connected to the U.S. forces are everywhere and at all times targets for military attacks. To justify this step as a 'practical necessity' is politically impossible, because it can only develop from a strategic quality. However, this does not correspond to the subjective development of the resistance and the objective situation which exists here today."

Later on, the same text states:

"Naturally, we have, as a result of our mistake, that is not making it politically clearer how we understood the attack and our silence about the GI, which prevented people from knowing if it was a counter-action, made the discussion very difficult and triggered debates that were not, in themselves, relevant."

Although this statement purported to be a self-criticism of errors, it was perceived by many people in the anti-imperialist movement and in the left at large as a critique of the movement. The RAF presented any errors on their part as merely technical oversights. The real problem apparently was a lack of maturation and clarity on the part of the West German left, a lack of maturity and clarity which led them to engage in "debates that were not, in themselves, relevant." If this statement was meant to defuse the growing critique, it backfired seriously, offending the sensibilities of many critics who felt that there were real political and human issues which needed to be discussed. In many cases divisions within the anti-imperialist movement hardened as a result of this statement. Such divisions left the anti-imperialist movement in a weak position and open to attack, and such an attack was not far off.

²⁷ This interview can be viewed can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/85_09.htm

²⁸ This paper can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/86_01.html

²⁹ The RAF referred to their 1986 actions as the 1986 offensive

On July 9, 1986, the RAF assassinated Karl Heinz Beckurts³⁰, the president of Siemens and a key figure in SDI (Star Wars) production. Less than a month later, on August 2, 1986, RAF member Eva Haule and supporters Luiti Hornstein and Chris Kluth, both residents of the Kiefernstrasse squats in Dusseldorf, were arrested in a Russelheim cafe. Less than two weeks later, on August 13, two more supporters, Barbel Perau and Norbert Hofmeier, were arrested in Duisburg. The following day there was a third arrest in Duisburg. These were the first of a series of arrests aimed at criminalizing supporters of the RAF who were functioning in the legal left within the context of the front strategy outlined by the RAF in 1982 in "The May Paper". The state attack that many people had anticipated with the advent of the front strategy was, in fact, beginning.

On October, 10, 1986, the RAF assassinated Gerold von Braunmuhl³¹, the political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a key figure in the development of Europe's imperialist strategy, particularly in relation to the Middle East. The police responded with a raid of the Kiefernstrasse squats on October 29.

On December 18, the Kiefernstrasse squats were again targeted with the arrest of residents Andrea Sievering and Rico Prauss. The attack against Kiefernstrasse continued with the arrests of Thomas Klipper on September 8, 1988 and Rolf Hartung on October 4.

On September 20, 1988, the RAF failed in their attempt to assassinate Hans Tietmeyer³², a German representative to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

On February 1, 1989, RAF prisoners began a hungerstrike to end isolation conditions and to gain recognition as political prisoners with the right to associate with each other and with people outside the prisons³³. The demand for humane treatment garnered wide support on the left and amongst liberals. Although the prisoners called off their strike without achieving their goals, it was widely perceived that they had reached layers of the population that had never before stood with the prisoners in their demand for humane treatment. But a letter written by Karl-Heinz Dellwo in May 1989 gave the first indication of what was to come:

"By ending the hungerstrike we will be maintaining the political level on which the struggle for association can and will continue, after the confrontation was blocked politically and practically.

³⁰ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/86_07_09.html

³¹ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/86_10_10.html

³² The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/88_09_20.html

³³ The prisoners' statement regarding this hungerstrike can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/89_02_01.html - another prisoners' statement directed "To the Revolutionary Prisoners in the Imperialist Prisons of Western Europe" can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/89_02.html

"It would, at this point, only have been a qualitative development. We have long been the antagonistic core, and our comrades on the outside no longer need us as the motor for them on their terrain. They themselves are it.

"This is a new political quality and we must all struggle to give it content and depth. For our part, we want discussion with everyone. In order for this to occur, we must find a common political denominator. It can't be any other way.

"It is possible to find such a common denominator today because the concept of a fundamental reversal doesn't only emanate from the revolutionary core within society, but from everyone. The concept, however strong or weak, is there, is already ripe. It results from the experience that there isn't a productive solution for anything in this system."

This letter indicated two developments within the RAF, developments which set the stage for the April 1992 cease-fire and the subsequent internal struggle. For the first time a key political prisoner was suggesting that the prisoners were not at the ideological core of the RAF, a role that the prisoners had always de facto played since the first arrests in 1972. As well, Dellwo was suggesting that the conditions existed for a multi-party discussion with everyone. Later in the same letter, he would suggest, in relation to ending the hungerstrike, that such a discussion might even require a tempering of RAF actions. "Because everyone must also be a subject in their own process of awareness, we did not want to escalate the struggle to a level which many people would have experienced as going beyond them and which would have, as such, reproduced the same old divisions in a new way."

Between Dellwo's May 1989 letter and the cease-fire communiqué of April 1992, the RAF carried out two more actions. On November 11, 1989, they assassinated Alfred Herrhausen³⁴, president of the Deutsche Bank and Germany's most influential capitalist. And on April 4, 1991, they assassinated Detlev Korsten Rohwedder³⁵, president of the Treuhandanstalt, the body responsible for integrating the East German economy into that of West Germany.

In keeping with assurances offered in their April 1992 communiqué, the RAF has not carried out an armed attack aimed at any representative of the German state apparatus or German capital. Their one action, the March 1993 bombing of the new high-tech prison in Weiterstadt³⁶, was meant to prevent this prison from coming on line. Although this action was perceived favorably throughout the world, it was not immune to criticism within the ranks of the German anti-imperialist movement. In October 1993, RAF political prisoner Eve Haule wrote, "We have seen where this process of political self-

³⁴ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/89_12_02.html

³⁵ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/91-04-04.html>

³⁶ The communiqué released regarding this action can be viewed at http://www.germanguerilla.com/red-army-faction/documents/93_03_30.html

dissolution has led. The story of the 'Verfassungsschutz' infiltrator and the subsequent events was only the end-point³⁷. And armed actions like Weiterstadt further cement this process. Their only function is to signal populism and retaliation - because the state hasn't changed its policy towards the prisoners."

It is a virtual certainty that the struggle currently being waged both within the RAF itself and in the broader anti-imperialist and autonomist left will spell the end to the RAF. It is equally clear and has been argued that errors made by the RAF since 1982 and particularly since 1986 contribute in no small way to the current crisis. Some people have even argued that the current crisis stems from the errors made in 1977. It is beyond a doubt that a consistent argument can be raised to support any and all of these positions. However, the decline of the RAF must also be placed in the larger picture. The RAF has certainly been adversely effected by its errors, but it has also been effected the overall decline in armed struggle in Europe. The 80s saw the definitive defeat of Action Directe in France, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Fighting Communist Cells (CCC) in Belgium, and GRAPO in Spain. The IRA and the Basque ETA have also faced crises that throw their continuity into question. Within Germany itself the Revolutionary Cells (RZ) is undergoing its own process of re-evaluation and at least part of its structure has publicly broken with armed struggle. Although little is known about the internal debate within *Rote Zora*, the organization itself has been effectively inactive for some years.

It is equally important to consider the impact of recent developments in global geopolitics on the West German left. While the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the Eastern Bloc has had a profound influence on politics throughout the world, nowhere in the First World has the impact been greater than in Germany. Overnight the German left found itself faced with an entirely new constellation of social and political issues. The former GDR was suddenly to be integrated into West Germany and with it came an influx of former East Germans into the west sector in search of employment as uncompetitive industries in the east closed down. As the former Eastern Bloc dissolved entirely, the influx of economic refugees swelled, putting further pressure on Germany's declining economy. These East European refugees joined Third World asylum seekers and southern Europeans to exert enormous pressure on Germany's employment and housing markets. The extreme right moved quickly to capitalize on growing social discontent, forging an neo-nazi movement that has gained international attention for its extreme violence. On an official level the state moved to stem the flow of refugees by drafting draconian laws meant to severely limit the number of people who would be eligible for asylum.

The impact of these changes has been seen on guerrilla groups throughout the world. Latin American guerrilla groups such as the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the FMLN in El Salvador have given up armed struggle to enter the electoral arena. The ANC and the PLO find themselves forced to negotiate settlements within the context of international capitalism. Even Sinn Fein, the effective legal arm of the IRA, is showing an increasing desire to achieve a settlement at the negotiating table. Talk of socialism, when it arises at

³⁷ This is a reference to the June 1993 ambush and murder of RAF member Wolfgang Grams. RAF member Birgit Hogefeld was arrested during this action.

all, is more form than substance. While Third World national liberation struggles are in retreat, sectarian warfare is wracking both the former Eastern Bloc and parts of Africa.

In this context the RAF cannot posit itself as a rearguard of national liberation struggles as it did in the early and mid-70s. Nor, however, can it realistically call for an anti-imperialist front in Germany or a West European guerrilla front as it did in the 80s. While Dellwo may talk about a widespread sentiment within society in favor of "a fundamental reversal" which favors a new open dialogue as the basis for a renewed left, this is rhetoric at best and delusion at worst. However, any call to stay the course is no less deluded. In fact, the crisis facing the RAF, which is not realistically addressed by either position which has arisen from within its own ranks, is the same crisis which the left faces everywhere in the world. How are we to respond to western imperialism in a situation where transnational capitalism has effectively deprived national struggles of much of their revolutionary potential? How do we rebuild an egalitarian option to global capitalism given the virtual blanket defeat of the socialist option? How do we respond to the permanent marginalization of growing numbers of people resulting from the growth of technology as the central force in production? The pertinency of the current debate within the RAF and the anti-imperialist and autonomist left lies in its ability to address these and other questions.