



Karin Bauer, ed. *Everybody Talks about the Weather--We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008. 268 pp. \$16.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-58322-831-9.



Jutta Ditfurth. *Ulrike Meinhof: Die Biografie*. Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2007. 478 pp. EUR 22.90, cloth, ISBN 978-3-550-08728-8.



Kristin Wesemann. *Ulrike Meinhof: Kommunistin, Journalistin, Terroristin - eine politische Biografie*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2007. 439 pp. EUR 49.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-8329-2933-6.



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The occasion of the thirty-year anniversary of the *Deutscher Herbst*--the term used to describe a series of violent attacks launched by the second generation of the Red Army Faction (RAF, or Baader-Meinhof Gang) in the autumn of 1977--resulted in a plethora of popular and scholarly treatments

of the RAF and its most notorious members.[1] Although no consensus emerged from these popular and scholarly accounts about the origins of terrorism in 1970s Germany, the threat it posed to West German democracy, or the long-term legacy of the RAF, it is clear that the memory of the RAF re-

mains divisive for German society. This polarization of German memory informs the three works reviewed here on Ulrike Meinhof, one of the founding members of the RAF. In each case, the reader learns as much about the authors' political orientations as he/she does about Meinhof's conversion from journalist to terrorist and, by implication, the shift from peaceful protest to violence by some elements in the student movement.

In the wake of the anniversary, the narrative has once again become familiar to most historians. On June 5, 1970, following its successful freeing of Andreas Baader from police custody, the RAF released its first public statement to the press, which announced armed resistance against mainstream German society. Meinhof had participated in Baader's escape, during which a bystander was shot and critically wounded, and fled with other participants. The once respected leftist journalist became the subject of a nationwide manhunt of an intensity that paralleled and at times exceeded that of the search for Nazi war criminals. Arrested in June 1972 following a series of bombings, Meinhof was found dead in her cell on May 9, 1976--an apparent suicide. At her funeral, members of the political Left eulogized her as a moralist, a revolutionary martyr, and a victim of the system that she had set out to change. The Right depicted her as a ruthless killer intent on destroying West German democracy. So who was Ulrike Meinhof? Thirty years later, the answer to this question still depends on one's political perspective.

In her biographical account, Jutta Ditfurth, sociologist, author, and environmental activist, openly acknowledges her empathy for her subject. She concentrates on Meinhof's interpersonal relationships and changing mental state to explain her transformation from journalist to terrorist. Although this emphasis on intimate personal details makes the book a fascinating read, it also leaves the reader wondering how the author could possibly know so much about the mental

state of her subject. For example, Ditfurth claims that Meinhof had a lifelong fear of thunderstorms, which the author attributes to her mother's death on a stormy night when Meinhof was only fourteen years old. However, Ditfurth does not cite her source for this assertion.

In fact, throughout the book, Ditfurth rarely provides citations, making the work of limited scholarly value. Even so, Ditfurth's emphasis on interpersonal relationships is not without value. Generationally, Meinhof stood between the 1950s West German Communist Party opposition and the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO)--a connection that Ditfurth makes clear in her detailed account of Meinhof's ambivalent personal relationship to Renate Riemecke, her mother's female partner. Riemecke, a communist career woman who raised Meinhof after her mother's premature death, had in the 1950s vehemently opposed the rearmament of West Germany, the escalation of East/West tensions, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons--recurring themes in Meinhof's own early writings. Ditfurth also offers a clear description of the contacts between student activists and the Communist Party leadership in East Berlin. Thus, Ditfurth raises important questions about the extent to which the 1960s protest movement had its origins in the communist opposition of the 1950s and its connections to the German Democratic Republic.

Ditfurth's analysis of Meinhof's radicalization in the late 1960s would have benefited from a more serious engagement with Meinhof's articles in the leftist-radical periodical *konkret*. Instead, Ditfurth focuses more on Meinhof's often stormy relationship with Klaus Rainer Röhl, the journal's publisher and Meinhof's husband, than she does on the changing political context in which Meinhof wrote; Meinhof's growing frustration with the limitations of journalism as a form of political work; and her experimentation with collective authorship as a way of empowering marginalized groups and challenging the status quo in publish-

ing. As a result, Ditfurth communicates a great deal about Meinhof's way of life, its inconsistencies, and its tragic quality, but she fails to capture fully the complex social processes in West German society that helped shape Meinhof's transformation.

The brief description on the book jacket of Kristin Wesemann's *Ulrike Meinhof: Kommunistin, Journalistin, Terroristin--eine politische Biografie*, immediately tells the reader that a very different Ulrike Meinhof will emerge from this account: "The book clears up a myth: Ulrike Meinhof was neither moralist nor fallen angel, but a communist who wanted to destroy West German society. Thus, the radical enemy of democracy had to end up as a terrorist of the RAF." Wesemann devotes very little space to Meinhof's childhood or family life, but concentrates instead on Meinhof as political actor. Wesemann analyzes many of Meinhof's writings and documents meticulously Meinhof's connections to the East German apparatus. From her interviews with several of Meinhof's former contacts in the SED, the author reveals new evidence that as early as 1971, Meinhof had planned to defect to the GDR. Arrangements had been made with the Politburo, but the move never came about because of alleged intervention by Andreas Baader.

Despite the well-researched quality of the book, Wesemann, who has worked since 2005 as a consultant for the CSU mayor of Schwerin, offers little more than a traditional critique of totalitarianism, which in turn results in a teleological account of Meinhof's life. For example, in contrasting the difference between fascism and Stalinism on the one hand and democracy on the other, her rhetoric often becomes inflammatory: "These worldviews are oriented not towards values, as is the case with democracy, but towards the categories of good and evil" (Wesemann, p. 357). This type of reductive definition causes her to ignore the very inconsistencies and breaks in Meinhof's biography that are highlighted in Ditfurth's ac-

count. Instead, she concludes that Meinhof's early engagement in the anti-nuclear movement already pointed to her later career as a terrorist. Moreover, Wesemann dismisses Meinhof's lifelong advocacy for equal rights for women, for better working conditions, and for social justice "because she only utilized these themes in order to discredit her country" (Wesemann, p. 417).

Read together, these two books point to Meinhof's conflicting afterlife in contemporary Germany memory. These "vertiginously chaotic, inconsistent and charismatic images" of Meinhof, represent one of the themes explored in Karin Bauer's introduction to *Everybody Talks about the Weather ... We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof* (Bauer, p. 93). This volume makes Meinhof's writings available in English for the first time. In her eighty-page introduction, Bauer offers a neutral account of Meinhof's personal life, her political development, the media's coverage of the manhunt, in addition to a brief account of RAF activities up to the group's dissolution in 1998 and a concise summary of the existing historiography on the RAF. Additionally, Bauer argues convincingly that Meinhof's development "from pacifist to terrorist may indeed be seen, not as a radical break from her journalist work, but as an extension of it" (Bauer, p. 19). Her columns expressed "a passionate urgency for change" that led her first to advocate for protest, then resistance and ultimately for political violence (Bauer, p. 19). However, unlike Wesemann, Bauer does not suggest that Meinhof's entire career was dictated by an obsession with destroying West German democracy. On the contrary, in her concluding remarks Bauer makes clear that, like Ditfurth, she empathizes with Meinhof's aims, if not her methods: "We cannot and must not erase the violence associated with her name.... In presenting this selection of columns, my hope is that we can appreciate her writings for its wit, her criticism for its incisiveness and clarity, and her ceaseless engage-

ment for its commitment to democracy and human rights" (Bauer, p. 93).

Although Bauer does not explain the criteria she used to select the *konkret* columns included in this volume, the twenty-four selections do cover the entire time period of Meinhof's career with the journal (1960-68). In addition, the selections elucidate the scope of Meinhof's political interests, her increasing sympathy with the student movement, and her growing desire for active participation. Interestingly, the volume also includes an afterword by Bettina Röhl, Meinhof's daughter and an outspoken critic of her mother's politics. The inclusion of Röhl's essay, "Icon of the Left, Propagandist, and Communist," the reader is informed, was a condition set by Röhl in exchange for obtaining the rights to republish her mother's writings. This essay contrasts sharply with the extremely sympathetic preface provided by Nobel prize-winning German author Elfriede Jelinek. Thus, in one volume, the English reader has the opportunity not only to read Meinhof's writings, but also to experience firsthand the conflicting narratives of her past. These varied perspectives will make the book an excellent addition to a graduate or advanced undergraduate class either on the politics of memory or on the student protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Note

[1]. For popular treatments, see, for example, the Hamburg premiere of Elfriede Jelinek's play *Ulrike Maria Stewart: A Queen's Drama* (2006); the film *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* (2008) based on Stefan Aust's book of the same title and nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category. See also the personal memoir of Anne Siemens, *Für die RAF war er das System, für mich der Vater: Die anderen Geschichte des deutschen Terrorismus* (Munich: Piper, 2007). For scholarly treatments, see, for example, Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006); Klaus Pflieger, *Die Rote Armee Faktion--RAF: 14.5.1970*

bis 20.4.1998 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007); *"The German Autumn" of 1977: Terror, State, and Society in West Germany*. German Historical Institute, Washington DC, Fall 2007 Lecture Series; and the H-German Forum, "Revisiting the *Deutscher Herbst*," http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/dtherbst/dtherbst_index.htm .

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