

# Anti-Nazi Exiles

German Socialists in Britain and  
their Shifting Alliances 1933-1945

by  
**Merilyn Moos**



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Front and rear cover illustrations: *Details from "Allies inside Germany" by H A Rothholz*

Born in Dresden, Germany, Rothholz emigrated to London with his family in 1933, to escape the Nazi regime. He retained a connection with his country of birth through his involvement with émigré organisations such as the Free German League of Culture (FGLC) in London, for whom he designed a series of fundraising stamps for their exhibition "Allies Inside Germany" in 1942.

Community Languages  
53 Fladgate Road  
London  
E11 1LX

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**To those of us who came after and carry on the struggle**

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# **Left-wing German refugees who came to the UK before and during the Second World War**

## **Introduction**

What are you doing researching material from almost hundred years ago, friends ask. And I reply that, apart from its intrinsic interest, looking at the active resistance from the left to the Nazis, is becoming increasingly relevant, as populism, racism and authoritarian rule strides across parts of Europe and the USA. Indeed, I am intrigued by how many people are showing an interest in Steve Cushion's and my recent book: 'Anti-Nazi Germans' or have said that they too are researching some far distant anti-Nazi family member.<sup>1</sup>

The refugees included here almost all fled Germany as political activists, most from a working class background. They risked their lives again and again in Germany, often escaped arrest and probable death without knowing where they would end up. Some of them risked their lives all over again, working with the Allies. Many returned to Germany, a few settled in the UK. Their extraordinary lives deserve more attention than they have received.

As always with a piece of work which focuses on the individual, there arises the questions as to how far these are unrepresentative fragments or how far their stories lets us see a bigger picture. This introduction sketches a more generalised background, particularly of the position of refugees in the UK in the years leading up to and during the Second World War. For anybody interested in the active working-class resistance in Germany, check out our book: 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.

The people included here were political refugees. Where I have included 'cultural' refugees, it is because they were also active anti-Nazis, though in the Germany of the 1920s and early 1930s, cultural activities were often understood as inseparable from politics. Noticeably, most of the political refugees came from a working class background, while the 'cultural' refugees were more likely to be 'professionals'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion, *Anti-Nazi Germans*. M. Moos: *Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working class Movement*; S. Cushion: *German Volunteers in the French Resistance*. Community Languages, 2020

<sup>2</sup> There were many other left-wing anti-Nazi refugees who came to the UK and made their mark in cultural and scientific fields. Anybody who wants to read more widely would do well to look at the many works by Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove and the many books produced by the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies.

Not included here are those, such as the Kindertransport, who were too young to have already been politically active, even if they then became so in the UK (Lord Dubs being one example). I have also preferred people who were active at a grass roots level rather than fleeing as a result of holding bureaucratic positions in left-wing organisations, primarily escaping anti-Semitism or because they later became famous in the UK.

The roots of the Nazi state lay in the failed revolution in 1918/19 when the Spartacists (the predecessor of the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) firstly opposed the continuation of the First World War and then succeeded in briefly setting up a type of soviet in Munich. Like today, the German establishment did not like Communist revolution: the Social Democratic government sent in the *Freikorps*, an unofficial army largely of ex-soldiers, who destroyed the revolution in blood. History has a long arm: the Nazi street army, the SA (*Sturmabteilung* or Stormtroopers) were rooted in the *Freikorps* and their bloody counter-offensive against the revolution in Bavaria, the birthplace of the Nazis. It was only fifteen years between the suppression of the Spartacus rebellions of 1918/19 and the Nazis taking power: many of the refugees included here participated in the revolutionary days of 1918/19 in Berlin, Munich and elsewhere.

We have become so accustomed to equating Nazism with the Holocaust, that the arguments that the Nazis' first victims were, generally, the left-wing activists has become controversial. Yet, from its beginning, the Nazi Party's intent was to break the German organised working class and the militant left. Indeed, civil war had in effect broken out in many working class areas between, usually, members of the KPD, in particular the Red Front, (the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* or RFB) the para-military grouping loosely attached to the KPD, and the SA street gangs in some cases supported by the police - from the late 1920s. A crucial feature of the Nazi regime was that it was built on and installed itself through the use of organised street violence, a violence which was orchestrated by the Nazi Party itself, often abetted by the police, rather than being based in largely spontaneous action.

On the night of the Reichstag fire itself in February 1933, one month after Hitler became Chancellor, the SA killed about five hundred anti-Nazis. Within weeks, some 60,000 Communists were arrested out of a membership of around 300,000. Another



15,000 new or repeat arrests occurred during 1933-34. Of these, 2000 were murdered. Some 20-30,000 KPD members were executed by the end of the war. Of the 422 main KPD functionaries in January 1933, 219 were immediately arrested, shattering the KPD hierarchy. Only 12 KPD functionaries in 1933 had not been arrested by 1945.

But, as ‘Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working Class Movement’ painfully demonstrates, most of the organised anti-Nazi left stayed in Germany and organised the underground resistance, at a terrible personal cost.<sup>3</sup> It was only in May 1933, that the KPD Politburo finally decided it needed to send its leading cadre abroad, though even then, the assumption was that the rank and file would stay put. Some 10,000 out of 300,000 members of the KPD fled, a few to the UK, some of whom we feature here. I have not found figures on how many SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) members fled altogether but I suggest that is partly because there were relatively few outside the leadership. The leadership, on the other hand, almost all departed from Germany within months of the Nazis seizing power, mostly, initially, to Czechoslovakia and then a large handful to the UK.

A very small number of anti-Nazis escaped to Britain and even fewer settled here. Many of the refugees included in this account fled Germany soon, or even immediately, after the Nazis seized power early in 1933, though usually not directly to the UK.<sup>4</sup> By 1937, fewer than 5000 refugees altogether had reached the UK.<sup>5</sup> Even at this early point, the majority here were cultural figures or scientists, rather than active anti-Nazis, who formed a tiny select band. Though all the figures are guestimates, of the roughly 70,000 refugees (some estimate up to 80,000) in the UK, of whom about 40,000 were German, the number of committed left-wing German refugees were in the hundreds.

The reasons for flight were varied and are closely connected to the level and type of repression in Nazi Germany. The refugees arrived largely in two separate cohorts: there were those who had actively opposed the Nazis before 1933, mostly Communists, who escaped in 1933 or soon after. Then, in 1938/39, two events quickly

<sup>3</sup> Moos in Moos and Cushion ‘Anti-Nazi Germans’

<sup>4</sup> <https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/reviews/44329/roth-herbst-and-weber-deutsche-kommunisten-biographisches-handbuch>

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in exile. The anti-fascist emigration in Europe and America*, M.Moos: *Beaten but not defeated. Siegfried moos. A German anti-Nazi who settled in Britain*, Chromos, 2014

followed one another. After ‘*Kristallnacht*’ in early November 1938, many ‘historically Jewish’ German refugees fled. They vastly outnumbered the ‘political’ refugees’, although some of these were also active anti-Nazis.<sup>6</sup> The numbers then further escalated after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, in part because many leftwing refugees had fled there from Germany and Austria. In addition to the people included here, Theo Balden, William Bomberger, Willi Barth and Adolph Bechholz, all members of the KPD and active anti-Nazis fled first to Czechoslovakia and then, again, to the UK.<sup>7</sup> Czechoslovakia had held the advantage for those fleeing Nazism that it had a long border with Germany (presently over 800 kms) which theoretically enabled anti-Nazis to organise resistance in Germany. (The biographies of the extraordinary Kozleckis included here are just one example of this.) The other popular destination was Paris, not foggy insular Britain, lying on the edge of the world, speaking a very foreign language, with a strange culture, and too far away to facilitate clandestine organising in Germany. By 1936, 9,000 German anti-Nazis had arrived in France, many of whom were arrested either under Pétain or the Germans, or fled elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> A handful of Social Democratic politicians also succeeded in getting into the UK in 1939/40, fleeing for a second time. Another 5,000 Germans went to fight in the Spanish Civil War: those who survived had to flee again, though only one or two came on to the UK.<sup>8</sup> One refugee, Gerhard Heinz had first gone to the USSR. As late as 1940, only about 5,000 political refugees had arrived in Britain.

But flight was double-edged. While remaining in Germany for the political activist risked arrest at best, fleeing Germany, while saving one's life, was deserting the struggle and one's comrades. This was not an easy decision. The number of those fleeing in the early days was also limited because the left, both SPD and KPD, did not generally anticipate the immediate and overwhelming repression of Nazi rule (though a few did). Flight also required money for one cannot live on politics alone. Most

<sup>6</sup> In Britain, a thousand scholarships were granted to exiled students, while British universities and colleges took on about fifteen hundred refugee teachers.

<sup>7</sup> Hamacker, Gottfried et al, *Against Hitler*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Also see Steve Cushion's *German Volunteers in the French Resistance* in *Anti-Nazi Germans*. One group who the Pétainiste government and even more so the Nazis consistently arrested were the veterans who had fought on the side of the Republicans on the Spanish Civil war.

<sup>8</sup> One group whom the Pétainiste government and even more so the Nazis consistently arrested were the veterans who had fought on the side of the Republicans on the Spanish Civil war and escaped to France. They were generally sent to ‘camps’ though some were sent back to Germany with terrible results.

working class members were unable to leave. How was an employed or unemployed worker supposed to survive outside Germany without a job? Thus, those able to flee were more likely to be from a professional (or occasionally monied) background, or, as sometimes the case in these biographies, have international contacts or a network as a result of their political activities. Those included here are the 'lucky' ones.

As the biographies reveal, once here, the Communists and 'fellow travellers' succeeded in building a number of small faction-ridden exile organisations which functioned as a focal point as well as in theory providing a basis for clandestine intervention in Germany. The Free German League of Culture (FGLC), established in March 1939, was the key organisation and features in many of the exiles' lives. At its peak, it had some 1,500 members, but many more people attended. Its aim was primarily to encourage anti-Nazi support but also to provide a fulcrum for refugees and English sympathisers. Advertising itself as non-partisan, it drew in a wide range of political support. Of the eight members of the EC, only three, Hans Schnellenberger, the League's secretary, the composer Ernst Hermann Meyer (see biography) and the actor Gerhard Hinze (see biography) were Communists, though KPD influence was strong. It was a product of the 'popular front' tactics adopted by the Comintern in 1935 which attempted to represent some sort of 'collective' opinion of leftish German anti-Nazis. But it was strongly resisted by the Social Democratic exile leadership.

FGLC was divided into five sections – for writers, actors/cabaret, artists, musicians and scientists, where much of its work was carried out. From 1940 to 1945, the FGCL published the newsletter, *Freie Deutsche Kultur*, edited by Max Zimmering (see biography). In the summer of 1942, aiming to influence public opinion, they opened a popular and significant travelling exhibition 'Allies inside Germany' (which greatly concerned the government). The FGCL also had as an unstated function: the production of anti-Nazi propaganda to be smuggled into Germany but it is unclear how far this had any success. Some of the FGCL's leading German members are featured here: Jan Petersen, John Heartfield and Ernst Hermann Meyer. The FGLC suffered a split in early 1943, partly as a result of a group of Jewish refugees whose interest was the right to remain in the UK (and formed Club 43), not to return to Germany as many Communists wanted.<sup>10</sup> FGLC was in effect run by members of the

<sup>10</sup> Brinson and Dove, *Politics by Other Means: The Free German League of Culture in London 1938-1945*, London, Valentine Mitchell, 2010).

KPD, though with many non-Communists involved, including in the leadership. The FGLC provided the refugees, mostly professionals, with a relatively safe social and cultural network, where they could speak German and not feel like outsiders. A meeting held in March 1942 was attended by roughly 100 people. (A police spy kindly provided a list of the most significant people in attendance.)<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the FGLC, the Free German Movement (FGM, *Freie Deutsche Bewegung in Großbritannien*) was set up in September 1943, under the umbrella of the FGLC, with explicitly political purposes. The refugees, designated as ‘enemy aliens’, had to be careful about their political involvement. So the FGM, as Brinson and Dove argue, provided anti-Nazi German-speaking refugees with a route to ‘politics by other means’. A number of Communist refugees whose biographies are included: Johann Fladung, its chair, and Wilhelm Koenen, became its leadership. Planned as a broad front, the leadership also included a couple of SPD activists, such as Adelle Screiber-Krieger (see foot-note), though the SPD leadership again rejected collaboration. At its inaugural meeting, there were around 400 people from a wide political range including the pacifist Otto Lehmann-Ruesbuelst (see biography).

The attitude of these refugees towards how best to defeat Nazism varied significantly both between different groupings and over time. What role could the refugees play, especially given that the UK is so far from Germany that effective support for the illegal underground was exceedingly difficult. There are many issues raised here which will be explored in more detail in the individual biographies: could the internal resistance overthrow or even contribute to undermining the Nazi state? Could Nazism only be overthrown by external intervention by the Allies and if so, what was the position of revolutionaries who were theoretically committed to overthrowing these class - based capitalist systems? How did Otto Lehmann-Ruesbuelst resolve his strong commitments to being both a conscientious objector and an anti-Nazi?

What ‘complicated’ the different positions was the near-complete destruction of the working-class based resistance movement in Germany by 1935/36. While hundreds of

<sup>11</sup> KV2/3502. I have made much use of National Archive material and numbers such as these always are from that source. MI5 archives have provided a valuable window onto the refugees. Of course, these sources have to be read critically. Some reports are more reliable than others. There were spies for the British Government within the refugee community whom even MI5 described as unreliable.

brave German comrades did organise against the Nazis after the outbreak of war in 1939 and increasingly in its last two years, by then the political character of the resistance had shifted towards a largely uncritical support for the Allies as the only way to bring down the Nazi system.<sup>12</sup> What also complicated the position for the anti-Nazi refugees was that the British Government saw defeating the Nazis in terms of defeating Germany, not defeating the Nazis, explored further later. In particular, the tiny SPD leadership in exile was split over whether Germany or the Nazis needed to be smashed.

While the KPD/FGLC saw the war initially as a war against Nazism, it changed its position during the Nazi-Soviet Pact, in line with the Comintern, to "we do not take sides in an inter-imperialist war between Germany on the one side and Britain and its allies on the other". This came as a blow to most of the anti-Nazi refugees, especially members of the KPD. After 1941, the invasion of the USSR and the breakdown of the Pact, the KPD exiles' political lives became much easier as they could, with good conscience, again take sides.

Yet one might suppose that the KPD/Communist Party of Great Britain (CP)/FGLC leadership would have had problems supporting the Allies, which were after all controlled by the very ruling classes that they were in theory committed to overthrow. (I am not going to enter the arguments about the nature of the USSR, the Comintern's 'socialism in one country' position or the probable Soviet-Nazi Germany collaboration.) In fact, after the collapse of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the FGLC and its adherents increasingly supported the Allied war effort. They went further. Gone is any suggestion of class-based resistance. In one of their '*Freie Deutsche Kultur*' monthly bulletins as early as 1942, addressed to the '40,000 German refugees in this country [UK]', they talk of the fate of the 'German people' in the 'German motherland' which produced Beethoven, Goethe, Hegel, Marx and Engels and which called for all Germans to unite in the struggle against Hitler.<sup>13</sup>

A significant minority of the refugees, whose biographies are included here, even those who had originally held a class perspective and believed the Government was

<sup>12</sup> For more about the debates on what is meant by this and the patterns of resistance, see 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.

<sup>13</sup> In a revealing memorandum from October 1944, it appears that there was bitter disagreement within the EC of the FGCL as to whether to support the Allies in granting lenient peace terms to a post- Nazi Germany, which led to resignations. The memo does not tell us which side won (PF47192).

their class-enemy, started to work, largely uncritically, for an Allied victory. They wanted to contribute to the war effort and to campaign for a free and democratic (rather than socialist) post-Nazi Germany. In a couple of instances, they found working with the class enemy meant they had to hold their political noses! Refugees were increasingly drafted into war production during 1941, especially in armaments. Others volunteered for various forms of civil defence units. They also wanted to become propagandists in the German Service of the BBC (under the control of Richard Crossman) but Communists were not welcome. It has been argued that the exile KPD leadership's craven position towards the USSR allowed them to square the circle: they expected that the USSR's presence would prevent post-Nazi Germany being turned into a bourgeois state.<sup>14</sup>

The British Communist Party's line makes explicit the position essentially held by many in the leadership of the KPD refugees. Harry Pollitt, the CP's General Secretary, in a position with echoes of Vansittarism (see further on), tended towards an equation between Nazis and Germans, and that it was Germany, not the Nazis that needed defeating. Pollitt was generally unsympathetic to the plight of the German Communist refugees.<sup>15</sup> The CP's line was nationalistic: no strikes, no disruptions, all out for Britain. Pollitt ordered that all opposition must stop and members must focus on maximising war production. He published: *How to Win the War* (1939): "The Communist Party supports the war, believing it to be a just war. To stand aside from this conflict, to contribute only revolutionary-sounding phrases ...would be a betrayal of ...[the] struggle against capitalism"<sup>16</sup> (He soon after had to resign as General Secretary over his line on the Hitler- Stalin pact). This anti-German position contributed to the CP officially avoiding fraternisation with the KPD in exile.

On the other hand, a series of English-language pamphlets, published by I.N.G publications, among them Paul Merker's '*Germany Today and Germany Tomorrow*', originally published in Mexico, deliberately took on those amongst the KPD exiles, such as Keonen (see biography), who saw little chance of resistance in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Roder, Werner, *German Politics in Exile, 1933-1945*, 1991, [www.persee.fr/doc/efr](http://www.persee.fr/doc/efr)

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, Kevin, *Special road or German Irrweg? British communists and the KPD/SED as Stalinist exemplar*, [www.academia.edu/33803385/Special\\_road\\_or\\_German\\_Irrweg](http://www.academia.edu/33803385/Special_road_or_German_Irrweg)

<sup>16</sup> <https://spartacus-educational.com>

<sup>17</sup> Paul Merker, originally a waiter, USPD, KPD CC (strongly Third Period), member of the Prussian State Parliament, leader of RGO, fled to France in 1934, where he was secretary/leader of the KPD Central Committee from 1937, with special responsibility for foreign work. Interned in 1940 by the Germans, he somehow managed to escape, lived in hiding



Instead, they argued that Germans did not have a collective guilt, that Nazism had failed to win over most Germans and that left resistance was therefore possible.

The FGLC and the FGM proved of intense interest to MI5 and the Special Branch, who telephone tapped and intercepted mail to their hearts' content. There lurks an underlying question: why was the 'secret state' quite so diligent in their pursuing of the Communist left? Weren't their enemies the same? One possibility is that the British CP had been supportive of the independence struggle in India and if there was one thing the British establishment were dedicated to, it was maintaining the British Empire.<sup>18</sup> While there were enough KPD refugees for them to adopt 'a line', those refugees who criticised them from the left were very few in number and came from disparate and often feuding groupings. Only a handful of refugees from the SAP, ISK and Neu Beginnen (see 'Anti-Nazi Germans' for more detail) got into the UK. Apart from there being far fewer numbers in Germany than in the KPD/SPD, the working class character of most of these German organisations militated against their members being able to flee. These tiny groups of exiles generally came from groups which supported a united front policy, which the leaderships of both the SPD and KPD tragically failed to do. Because there were so few of them, those who continued political activity generally had to join existing British groups rather than forming their own separate organisations.

It is easy to forget amongst the jingoist celebrations of 'British victory' against Nazi Germany, that a well-respected though minority revolutionary left position in the late 1930s in the UK saw the growing hostility between the UK and Germany as a dispute between rival imperialists.

What emerged amongst the tiny feuding groups to the left of the CP/KPD is that they were all deeply critical of the KPD's nationalistic line and even more critical of

in Marseilles for a year and then June 1942 with the help of Noel Fields fled to Mexico in 1942. Here he became secretary to the Latin-American Committee of the Free Germany movement (KV 2/2980. He had close links to Kuczinski - and was followed by MI5 and Special Branch. He became a strong campaigner for compensation for Jewish victims. Philby (KV2/2980) provided much information about him, including that he had directed the Comintern 'Negro' activities.

He was arrested in East Germany in the context of the Slansky trial in Prague in November 1952, imprisoned and sentenced to eight years in a secret trial in March 1955, though released a year later. His earlier contact with Noel Fields, an American Communist activist, was also used against him ([www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/)), KV 2/2980.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Jones, Ben Bradley: *Fighter for India's Freedom*, Socialist History Society, 1993

the Hitler- Soviet pact.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, there was the Socialist Anti-War Front, organised by the Revolutionary Socialist League (see Kathe Kozlecki's biography) which argued against taking sides in an imperialist war and therefore supported conscientious objectors. The other position, which distinguished them from the KPD/CP position, broadly, was to continue organising within the British working class: the so-called Proletarian Military Policy: the militarisation of workers' groups in preparation for taking on the Nazis (no example amongst the refugees of this position but look to the very British Wintringham who demanded of the state that they train a workers 'Home Guard') and that, as after World War 1, to prepare for a revolutionary situation and socialism after the end of the war. Hence, they argued, comrades should enter the armed forces and agitate there.<sup>20</sup> This analysis did not suggest much of a strategy and insofar as they recruited members, it was largely because the CP's nationalism did not chime with the more militant sections of the British working class, who - rightly- suspected a ruling class which had battered and bruised them for the past twenty years- and more - and were uncertain about risking their lives fighting on their behalf. But the profound issue of whether, when faced with a qualitatively more destructive form of capitalism, to argue for conscientious objection or for taking up arms, divided them.<sup>21</sup> It is worth reminding ourselves here of the economic/political context the refugees were operating in: it was a myth that class struggles ceased with the outbreak of war, although both the Labour Party (in the Coalition) and the Communist Party claimed any strike would harm the cause of the anti-Nazi fight. The number of strikes in Britain increased year-on-year from 1939 to 1944, by which point over 3.7 million working days were lost to strike action – a figure that would not be matched for another decade. In January 1942, a 19-day strike for better pay by miners at Betteshanger colliery in Kent was met with the prosecution of 1,050 miners and the

<sup>19</sup> While Orwell was not close to Trotskyism, his perspective illustrates how far there was a position to the 'left' of the Communist Party in the Second World War. He supported the occupation of empty West End houses for the homeless and believed that the Second World War could become a 'revolutionary war'. 'When you see how the wealthy are still behaving, in what is manifestly developing into a revolutionary war, you think of St. Petersburg in 1916'. Orwell believed that Britain would not win the war against Germany without a social revolution ([www.bl.uk/collection-items/orwells-political-diary-1940-41](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/orwells-political-diary-1940-41)).

<sup>20</sup> Although just post-war, the nearest example of this tactic I can find is that of Duncan Hallas, who at the time was a member of the Trotskyist Workers International League (which would become the Revolutionary Communist Party) and was much later to join IS. In 1946, he was involved in leading a mutiny in Egypt (and Palestine) of his air force unit. The immediate cause was that, although the war was over, his unit was still being deployed. Hallas ended up in jail. (My thanks to Ian Birchall for drawing my attention to this.)

<sup>21</sup> There were a tiny number of refugees from a Trotskyist position, who argued for fraternisation with German soldiers: see Steve Cushion's section of 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.



imprisonment of three union officials, leading to more pits coming out in solidarity and the government backing down, despite various attempts by the CP to undermine the strike, including by spreading the message that the Trotskyists and their strike supporters were aiding Hitler. In early 1943, workers at the Neptune ship repair yard on Tyneside struck for six weeks in defence of the 'closed shop' agreement. Engineers in Barrow also struck that year at the Vickers Armstrong yard over the question of pay, initially unofficially. The CP tried to break; a strike at Rolls Royce near Glasgow, organised mainly by women workers about low pay. Also in 1943, workers, many of them women, in the Chrysler factory in London, which had been converted for war production, combined to demand better treatment at work and an increase in the minimum wage, which they won. In 1944, 180,000 of the war-vital coal miners struck over pay and conditions.<sup>22</sup> Included in these biographies are a tiny handful who gravitated towards 'Trotskyist' or anarchist positions.<sup>22</sup> Margaret Dewar (biography included), first joined the ILP but ended up in the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Kathe Kozlecki (biography included) was to join the Revolutionary Communist Party.<sup>22</sup> Then there was the extraordinary Stanislaw Retlaw (biography included) who set up his own group of the Trotskyist Fourth International: the *German Revolutionary Socialist Bund*, with a tiny membership, while also working for SOE! Toller (biography included) developed ties with the ILP, which had been connected to the USPD.<sup>22</sup> And then there was the remarkable anarchist, Helmut Klose (biography included). Very few Social Democrat refugees arrived here. Although a larger organisation than the KPD in Germany (1million as opposed to 300,000 KPD

<sup>22</sup> libcom.org/blog/review-war-international-history-trotskyist-movement-britain-1937-1949).

<sup>22</sup> Probably the best known of the Trotskyist groupings were the Workers International League (which was to become the 'Militant' group and attracted pissed-off working-class ex-CP and LP members) and the Revolutionary Socialist League/Revolutionary Communist Party, each with only a few hundred members. Unlike the Communist Party, they stressed the importance of the united front from early on. The groups were split over whether to adopt entry tactics into the Labour Party. They grew during the war, not least because the Communist Party had vacated the industrial stage but this became their major political arena.

<sup>22</sup> The RCP was a Trotskyist group, formed out of earlier Trotskyite factions in 1944 and active until 1949, which published the newspaper *Socialist Appeal* and a theoretical journal, *Workers International News*. At the time of its foundation, the RCP was committed to "open work" e.g. operating as a separate entity rather than working inside the Labour Party, but disagreements over this policy led to a major split in 1947.

<sup>22</sup> The Independent Labour Party (ILP), established in 1893, helped form the Labour Party in 1900/1906. The party was positioned to the left of the Labour Party. But around 1932, it voted to disaffiliate. They were particularly active in supporting the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War: Orwell, for example, was part of an ILP contingent to fight with POUM. The USPD was set up in 1917, largely in opposition to the SPD's support for the war. But in 1920, it split: the majority (about 400,000 members) joined/formed the KPD, while the other part, with about 340,000 members, continued under the name USPD. By 1922, many of its members joined the SPD. The USPD continued as an independent party but merged with the SAPD in 1931.

members by 1933), they were generally not the Nazi's early targets. The SPD leadership believed in the parliamentary road. As long as you kept your head down, it would all pass. Active resistance seemed pointless or, worse, counter-productive. They did not prepare for illegality. Few active anti-Nazis remained in the SPD.

The Nazi government banned the SPD in June 1933. The SPD EC moved its HQ from Berlin to Prague and formed *SOPADE* (Social Democratic Party of Germany), theoretically to control and coordinate illegal work in Germany. Otto Wels and Hans Vogel (see biographies) were the joint chairs.

SOPADE then had to move on to Paris. But there was serious dissension within the SPD leadership in exile about then going to the UK and obtaining the necessary visas. Herbert Morrison, one of the Labour Party representatives in the Coalition War government, and perceiving himself to be all the more important because of it, was approached but decided against providing visas for the SPD leadership in exile as a collective. Backed by Hugh Dalton, the Labour Minister for Economic Affairs and responsible for 'black ops' in Germany and who also wished to counter Communist influence, individual visas were finally issued and accepted by Vogel and Erich Ollenhauer.<sup>22</sup>

The leaders of the exile Social Democratic community profiled here – which only numbered about 160 refugees altogether - arrived in the UK in 1940/41, were profoundly faction ridden, and despite a few attempts, unlike the Communists, failed to build any sort of lasting refugee organisation and did not develop roots even within their own circle of refugees.<sup>27</sup> A handful of German trade-union refugees (cf the biography of Fritz Bieligk) were even thrown out because of their criticism of the SPD's leadership's continuing backwardness in coming forwards.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the SPD leadership were also refusing any sort of cooperation with members of the KPD, who at least professed support for a Popular Front. In 1944, they eliminated all references in their programme which indicated the slightest revolutionary or Marxist tendency. The SPD leadership made no attempt to establish any sort of exiles 'broad

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, Jennifer in *German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain, Volume 2*, eds Ian Wallace, Anthony Grenville Ollenhauer joined the SPD in 1920. In 1933, he fled Germany for Prague, then Denmark, then France, Spain and Portugal and finally the UK. He returned to Germany after the war and became a leading member of the SPD.

<sup>27</sup> This interpretation is not universally agreed. For example, Anthony Glees argues that just politically surviving till 1945 was an achievement - see *The Secrets of the Service: British Intelligence and Communist Subversion, 1939-1945*.

<sup>28</sup> Brinson, C: *Autobiography in exile*, in 'German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain', Volume 3 edited by Ian Wallace, James M. Ritchie.

front' such as the KPD had done in the FGLC or even to draw in people who lent towards a social democratic position. But they were concerned about assisting their fellow party members escape from France to the UK.

Moreover, the SPD's thin ranks were profoundly split by a disagreement over what came to be called Vansittartism. Robert Vansittart, a leading and influential civil servant in the British Foreign Office who worked closely with Sir Vernon Kell, the head of MI5 and who was an advisor to Winston Churchill, argued that Nazism was a natural outcome of the German national character, Germany's aggressive, militaristic and expansive nationalism and that Germany had to be defeated by any means. He called the German people "the moral and political scum of the earth". He even argued that some German refugee anti-Nazis were like a fifth column, even Goebbel's spies, trying to fool the British by pretending the German nation was not involved. German exiles who were against unconditional surrender were interfering in British politics (a position he shared with Churchill). German refugees were therefore all suspect, including anti-Nazis, and had to be spied on.<sup>29</sup>

British officials felt that anti-Hitler propaganda did not fit their present or future agendas, fearing the exiles could have too great an influence on a post-war Germany. The BBC resisted employing them, fearing an excessively socialist make-up of their programmes. Not surprisingly, though maintaining some sort of Social Democratic presence here, the SPD in exile does not appear to have been very effective in influencing other UK organisations.

The group's emphasis was to make plans for post- Nazi Germany. One of their final acts was a brochure published in the autumn of 1945 containing a compilation of ideas for a new political order for Germany. Almost all of them returned to (West) Germany where many achieved high positions in SPD and government circles, maintaining their bureaucratic traditions.

One group within the leadership of the SDP exiles who supported the Vansittarist position were either expelled or left. They then formed: 'Fight for Freedom' which emphasised the culpability of the German people for Nazism. propagandised around the position of German responsibility and emphasised the continuity of aggressive

<sup>29</sup> Goldman, Aaron, *Germans and Nazis: The Controversy over 'Vansittartism' in Britain during the Second World War*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 1

German nationalism.<sup>30</sup> Participants included Fritz Bieligk (see biography), Curt Geyer, who had been a leader of SOPADE (see biography), Karl Retzlaw (see biography), Walter Loeb (see biography)), Carl Herz, Kurt Lorenz and Bernhard Menne (see end-notes).<sup>31</sup> But there was a spectrum of attitudes, so, for example, Retzlaw argued that there was some resistance in Germany, eg in the ports, but that German society did not oppose the Nazis.<sup>32</sup> Most SPD exiles, on the other hand, maintained they represented “the other Germany”. This split further intensified existing political - and personal - differences amongst the SPD émigrés. There was also unease and division amongst those who held a pro- Allies position. In 1943, Vogel, a leading SPD exile (see biography), unsympathetic to Vansittarism, gave voice to the concern that the Allies were out to punish Germany, not the Nazis, a crucial distinction.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, this obfuscation runs through a few of the biographies included here. The SPD exile leadership’s emphasis on and arguments over planning for a post-war Germany was one consequence. The links between the exiled members of the SPD and the Labour Party were even more attenuated than between the KPD exiles and the CP. Members of the Labour Party were in government from 1940, although as junior partners and they were therefore implicated in the anti-refugee measures taken. Moreover, the Labour Party remained suspicious about their foreign brothers and sisters. They broadly agreed with a Vansittartist position, promulgated especially by the International Secretary, William Gillies, which effectively encouraged anti-German refugee sentiment within the ranks of the Labour Party. Vansittarism became the dominant –though contested - tendency within the Labour Party. Hugh Dalton, on the right of the party, their principal spokesperson on foreign affairs, and later Chancellor, was concerned that Germany had for a long time posed a threat to European stability

<sup>30</sup> The Board of Directors of Fight for Freedom included eleven British Labour or TUC members, among them one member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee, Alfred J. Dobbs, and five members of the General Council of the TUC (Tombs, Isobell, *The Victory of Socialist 'Vansittartism': Labour and the German Question, 1941-5* <https://watermark.silverchair.com/287.pdf>)

<sup>31</sup> Bernhard Menne (1901-1968), USPD and later the KPD, also participated in the March events. He then became an editor at Rote Fahne. In 1927 he travelled to the USSR but a year later, was expelled as a rightist and joined the SPD. In 1933, he escaped to Prague, then to the UK, again in some form under the protection of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund.

<sup>32</sup> Although I do not go into the minutiae of these highly factional and personalised disputes, one argument put by Loeb and Geyer against Vogel, was that they were accusing the leaders of German social democracy of having failed to resist the rise- and then actuality –of Nazism, and of promoting nationalism (eg over the First World War), not the German working class. Their emphasis was on German nationalism as the most powerful political force amongst all Germans (Lindner, Heiner, <http://library.fes.de>).

<sup>33</sup> Werner Roder, *German Politics in Exile, 1933-1945*, 1991, [https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr\\_0000-0000\\_1991\\_act\\_146\\_1\\_4149](https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr_0000-0000_1991_act_146_1_4149)

and British democracy. A key ally was Gillies whose position could be characterised as the majority of the SPD being responsible for Nazism. Denis Healey, Gillies' successor as international secretary, described Gillies as a 'cantankerous Scot who distrusted foreigners and hated all Germans'. Labour if anything became more 'patriotic' during the war than the Tories.<sup>34</sup> 'Fight for Freedom' acted as an important influence on the highest levels of the party.<sup>35</sup> The finances of the leading SPD exiles (including Vogel, Ollenhauer, Geyer) had been guaranteed by grants from the Labour Party, but as a result of the disputes over Vansittartism, the payments were stopped in 1942, largely instigated by Gillies. (The availability of money proved a further source of contention amongst the SPD leadership.) In 1941, James Walker, the Chair of the Labour Party conference in 1941, stated that the 'German Frankenstein' ought to be crushed for ever' and that the Germans, who had brought Hitler to power, were responsible for all the acts of savagery that had been committed in Europe.<sup>35</sup> In 1942/3, the Labour Party Conference passed a resolution which laid responsibility for Hitler at the door of the German people as a whole and did not even allow fraternal delegates from "enemy" countries to be represented at the Conference! Charles Dukes, the General Secretary of the Municipal and General Workers' Union, who was representing the TUC, supported, stating that the overwhelming majority of German trade unionists had gone over to Nazism".<sup>35</sup> What also caused the leadership of the Labour Party to distance itself from the SPD exiles was their fear that the exiles, who were intent on drawing up plans for a post-war Germany, would tie their hands politically. So much for international comradeship.

But at the same time, a few individual Labour MPs helped to save the lives of some of the people included here. The leading example is Ellen Wilkinson, who had already been involved with the League against Colonial Repression, part of Saklatvala's campaign for Indian independence and later, the Reichstag fire trial 'mock-trial' about the Reichstag fire. She had been a part of the formation of the British German Relief Committee for the Release of the Victims of Fascist Terror, along with Isobel Brown, Paul Robeson, James Maxton and Fenner Brockway, and 'had the honour' of being

<sup>34</sup> Ward, Paul, *Preparing for the people's war: Labour and patriotism in the 1930s*, Labour History Review, Vol. 07, No. 2, August 2002 <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/465/1>)

<sup>35</sup> Tombs, Isobel, *The Victory of Socialist 'Vansittartism': Labour and the German Question, 1941-5* <https://watermark.silverchair.com/287.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Op cit.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, Ted, *Labour leaders back Vansittartism*, [www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1943/07/vansittartism.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1943/07/vansittartism.htm)

attacked in 1934 by Herbert Morrison, a Labour MP (who would become Home Secretary in the Coalition Government) for her involvement. She was to provide critical support to get three KPD or ex-KPD refugees included here into the UK: Hinze, Kahle and Koenen and helped get Heartfield out of internment. Another MP who helped get left-wing refugees (such as Siegi Moos) into the country was James Maxton. Maxton was first elected to Parliament for the ILP in 1922 and remained as an MP until his death in 1946. The ILP subsequently disaffiliated from the Labour Party but he joined the Labour Party in 1938. Maxton took the issue of German exiles seriously enough to raise the matter in the House of Commons. As early as 16 November 1933, he asked the Home Secretary: 'Is the Right Honourable Gentleman putting any difficulties in the way of Germans landing here – difficulties that would not apply to the nationals of any other country?' While he got the inevitable denial, the question suggests this was indeed the case. He was also active in the League against Imperialism, launched by Münzenberg, a German KPD member, and became its Chair. The International Socialist Group (ISK), which had broken away from the SPD to the left, was also represented in the UK by Willi Eichler, the secretary, Jahn, Kappius and Meisel (see biographies) who all continued to be active in the ISK, indeed, probably became the centre of ISK's overall activities.<sup>38</sup> Ernst Fraenkel, who is not included here but who lived in the UK for a year and who aligned himself with the ISK was a leading lawyer, whose seminal though contentious book about the legal origins of the Nazi state fed into the debates. He saw its rise as the result of a duality: on the one hand, the continuation of the 'bourgeois apparatus', on the other, a 'prerogative' and parallel state controlled by the Nazis and unrestrained by legal guarantees.

<sup>38</sup> The ISK, a small cadre organisation made up of people expelled from the SPD from its left, had no more than 200 members in Germany, though with a periphery of between 600 to 1,000 people, most of whom became deeply involved in resistance work and who were deeply committed to the united front.. The Socialist Vanguard Group was a British byproduct of the German ISK, indeed, became its largest group. During the 1930s, the group opposed the Labour Party, instead supporting the Popular Front, but became entrists in the early 1940s. The group's priority was to influence foreign policy. One of its main goals was to counter support for the Soviet Union on the British left. A key German refugee in the Socialist Vanguard group was Maria Saran (July 1897 – February 1976) .born in what was then East. Prussia, a journalist and writer. She first joined the USPD but when it they split, joined the SPD, while becoming increasingly involved in the ISK and, in 1932, signed their 'Urgent Call for Left Unity'.

In early 1933, Maria Saran escaped with her twelve-year-old daughter, initially to France, then to Denmark and then, by the end of 1933, to the UK. Here she worked with the Socialist Vanguard group. She stayed here working as a freelance journalist, took over from Eisler editing 'Europe Speaks' when he returned to Germany and was active in the Labour Party. I could however find little else about her.



Another organisation whose members had generally left the SPD in 1931 and which had some significance in Germany was the SAP (or SAPD, the Socialist Workers Party), which a minority from the KPO had also joined in 1932.<sup>39</sup> (Their most famous member was Willi Brandt.) It was arguably the most important of the underground proletarian small-scale organisations.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the SPD and the KPD, their position was that fascism represented a qualitative break and that the Third Reich represented a long term defeat for the workers movement.<sup>41</sup> As early as 1932, they had made preparations for illegality. They were represented here by the energetic and courageous Dora Fabian, almost certainly murdered for her efforts (see biography). A group which sits between the SPD and KPD was *Neu Beginnen*, represented by Erwin Schottle and Richard Lowenthal (see biographies),<sup>42</sup> plus Hans Gottfurcht, a representative of the trade unions. Their leadership had fled early and briefly formed a grouping of sorts in the UK though their emphasis was theoretical. They ended up under the Social Democratic umbrella. Hans Gottfurcht (1896 – 1982) worked in the textile industry, joining a trade union when he was 17. He began working full-time for the Central Association of Employees. After 1933, he created an illegal trade union organisation in Saxony, Thuringia and Silesia. Arrested in 1937, he was able to leave in 1938 and came to the UK. Here he became an active member of the Labour Party. Interned in 1941, he then set up an organisation of German trade unionists, the *Landesgruppe*. Letters between Gottfurcht and TUC representatives, including the TUC's General Secretary Walter Citrine, show the close relationship between the *Landesgruppe* and the TUC which financially supported their monthly publication, *Die Arbeit*, which stood for international solidarity and called for German trade-unionists in exile to collaborate with their British comrades in their fight for democracy. After the war till 1950, Gottfurcht was employed by the TUC as a liaison officer with the newly-formed German unions.<sup>43</sup> But the relationship between the SPD in exile/SOPADE and its former breakaway groups, such as ISK and *Neu Beginnen*,

<sup>39</sup> The KPO first represented the so-called Right Opposition in the KPD, led by Heinrich Brandler. Expelled from the KPD in December 1928, Brandler and Thalheimer then formed the KPO with a membership, at its maximum of around 8000 and a readership of about 25,000 but soon it became dominated by a faction which saw the group as in opposition to the KPD. Brandler et al were strongly in favour of a united front. Brandler and most of the KPO leadership fled to France in 1933 but many of the membership were active in the resistance.

<sup>40</sup> Ulrich, Axel, *Fight against Hitler*, p.9

<sup>41</sup> Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, p.189

<sup>42</sup> See separate biography. For anybody who wants to know more about these organisations, check out Steve Cushion and my book: 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.

<sup>43</sup> <https://tuc150.tuc.org.uk/stories/hans-gottfurcht/>

was fractious, partly because of profound political differences but also because they were competing in the same tiny pool. That there was finally some, brief, cooperation: the "Union of German Socialist Organisations in Great Britain "chaired by Hans Vogel, was significant because of Labour Party intervention. But, inevitably, there was a schism over attitudes to the USSR and neither the Wartime Government nor the Labour Government of 1945 paid their plans for a post-war Germany any attention. They quickly dissolved. There was much hostility towards the SPD/SOPADE, in part because of the SPD's assumption that they were the legitimate heirs of German social democracy.

The KPD and SPD refugees did not generally collaborate. The deeply divisive 'Third Period' policy of the KPD up till roughly 1936: Social Democrats were 'social fascists' and the highly sectarian SPD generally precluded members of these groups working together in the UK, just as had been the case in Germany. Even when the KPD adopted the Popular Front policy around 1936, leading members of the SPD exile group by and large refused to have anything to do with them, although one or two did in the last years of the war. The handful of refugee comrades from the tiny organisations who had been committed from early on to some sort of United Front strategy were far too few to bring about collective anti-Nazi cooperation.

The refugees not only had lost their homeland, their families and their political hinterland. Once here, many of them did not understandably manage to rise above the terrible traumas endured. Indeed, their responses have, whether rightly or not, sometimes been labelled as 'pathological'. The struggles amongst and between the different groupings were vicious. Old political enmities were not overcome despite their being in a foreign land and with a common enemy. People within the same group fell out disastrously with each other: mistrust flourished and old friendships terminated. People with reason suspected one another of spying for the British, or even for the Nazis. The refugees were rarely given rights of residence before the end of the war, leaving them fearful of betrayal.

Because of its restrictive immigration policy, Great Britain was not generally seen as a likely place of refuge for Germans in the first years of Nazi rule. The Britain Government made successful efforts to keep out refugees but especially left-wing refugees in the years from 1933, though their numbers were tiny. They were



represented as threatening to take British jobs. They had to be sponsored, had to commit not to work and only remain in the UK for a brief time.

The Tory Home Secretary in the second Coalition Government, Mr Gilmore, stated: ‘Any foreigner seeking admission to this country is required under the Aliens Order 1920, to satisfy the immigration officer that he is in a position to support himself and his dependants and, if he is desirous of entering the service of an employer in the United Kingdom, leave to land cannot be granted to him unless he is in possession of a permit issued to his prospective employer by the Minister of Labour. If an immigration officer thinks fit, he may, in granting leave to land, attach a time condition limiting the alien’s stay in the country. ... An alien who is given leave to land as a visitor is not at liberty to take up employment or otherwise establish himself in this country without my consent. On any application which is made to me, my practice is to consult my right honourable friend the Minister of Labour. While the Government has every desire to accord sympathetic and liberal treatment to persons who have been obliged through force of circumstances to leave Germany and have been admitted to this country as visitors, the policy of the Government, as announced on several occasions, is to give first consideration to the interests of our own people and no consent to employment is given unless it is clear that no displacement of British subjects will result.’<sup>44</sup> Far from ‘*Kristallnacht*’ leading to a loosening of Government controls, the Government initially introduced a more stringent selection process, an inexcusable response which some have, reasonably, interpreted as revealing antisemitism. In fact, so great was the demand, the government handed over the process of selection to the Coordinating Committee for Refugees but they acted as the Government’s door-keepers. Lord Hailey, a Chair, promised to try to avoid giving refugees admission.

The early low numbers of Communist exiles had been in part a consequence of MI5, the Home Office and the British immigration authority’s desire to keep them out. Although the USSR was to be an ‘ally’, Sir Vernon Kell of MI5, as late as 1940, wrote to the Home Office about the danger of the close link between German exiled Communists and Soviet Secret Intelligence.<sup>45</sup> Once admitted, the refugees were heavily circumscribed by the government’s ban on political activities. Their fear of

<sup>44</sup> HC,16.11.1933, vol 281 cc1094–5

<sup>45</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*, Manchester University Press,2014, p.144

being thrown out was kept alive by the government's system of only offering short-term visas which might not be renewed if there was evidence of political involvement. Indeed, Helmut Goldschmidt, the first leader of the exiled SAP group in Britain, was deported in February 1934 after he had been overheard speaking at a political meeting.<sup>46</sup> As an analysis of the shifting patterns of diplomacy reveal, the British government and their civil servants were for some years far more hostile to the USSR than they were to Nazi Germany.

In 1939/40, after the fall of France, Churchill decided to 'collar the lot', though on a somewhat random basis: roughly 30,000 were interned but roughly another 50,000 were not. Their internment was another expression of British, especially overnmental, attitudes towards foreigners, especially of a left-wing variety and 'Jews'. Most of the refugees included here were interned. MI5 were keen on the internment of Communist refugees. As it was so difficult to detect political activity, which was banned, the best thing was to intern all the refugees, thereby reducing the danger they posed. We all know how treacherous they are.<sup>47</sup> Refugees were generally seen as a potential threat (from left and right) in the event of invasion and war. Along with the Government's tight restrictions on admittance, employment and political activity, internment was another indicator of the Government's inhuman policies towards the refugees.<sup>48</sup>

All Germans and Austrians supposedly had to attend the 'enemy alien' tribunals to determine their security risk. There was no distinction made between anti-Nazis who had fled because of their politics and other refugees from Germany (or Austria): Nazis and anti-Nazis were bundled together in the camps. Thousands, especially Communists, were forcibly deported to Canada and Australia, as some of the biographies will show.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.41. It is suspected this was the handiwork of Weseman, the Gestapo spy, doing the British Government a 'favour'.

<sup>47</sup> PF47192, memo dated 12.7.40.

<sup>48</sup> I am aware that this footnote is not strictly relevant except for its horrible similarities with today. A Mr Wilson and then Mr Silverman asked about how many class C refugees had been deported without the consent of their parents... unaccompanied by any adult relative, who do not know where they are, despite having tried to trace them? Sir John Anderson, briefly the Home Secretary, finally replied: 'Any parent can find out where his child is by reference to the inquiry bureau which has been set up at Scotland House.' (HC Deb 15 August 1940 vol 364 cc947-8947)

The internment of ‘enemy aliens’ physically removed the refugees from their fragile networks and regularly filled them with terror, especially as this was a group who had already been hunted by the Nazis and, in some cases, been ‘interned’ in Germany, escaping by the skin of their teeth. Many of the internment camps were like prisons, though some, like on the Isle of Man, to quote my mother, Lotte Moos, were like ‘universities on sea’. But being interned by their ‘host’ nation and even more so, sent to the ‘Dominions’, must have shaken many of the refugees profoundly.

Internment also effectively silenced the internees while they were incarcerated and discouraged them from speaking out subsequently for fear of re-internment or worse. Does this help explain the silence of so many of the Communist refugees about the Non-Agression Pact between the USSR and Germany, or that so many of the political refugees disappeared into silence here?

The refugees had other reasons for their fears. The political groupings were infiltrated by spies (a couple included here), often placed there by MI5, some of whom had been left-wing activists in Germany, who provided information for the British Government. Their motives were mixed but for many, it was a way of ingratiating themselves with the government so as to increase their chances of being allowed to remain. One infamous case was that of Claud Sykes, a British writer, translator and MI5 agent, who penetrated the Karl Otten group and who pops up regularly. Otten (see biography), who was himself suspected of spying for the Nazis, was eventually recruited to the British security services.

In addition, there had been a history of collaboration between the German and British secret services prior to 1933 which however continued after the Nazis seized power. They were united in their hatred of communism. For example, Wilhelm Koenen, a KPD deputy in the Reichstag, had been refused entry to the UK in 1932, though later admitted in 1938. MI5 then bombarded the Home Office with memoranda about the danger of allowing in men such as Koenen (see biography), who should be interned. Nor should the antiemitism of the establishment be underestimated at the time, which got mixed with both a heady anti-German sentiment and a hatred of Communists.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*, 91-93

More serious were the spies for the Gestapo, such as Wesemann.<sup>50</sup> Wesemann, who had edited the Social Democratic journal 'Vorwärts' in Germany, became an agent for the Gestapo in Britain and, at least at the beginning, managed to present himself in Britain as a socialist and to infiltrate both Socialist exile and progressive British circles in order to report back to Germany on anti-Nazi activities, such as on the pacifist Otto Lehmann Russbuelst (see biography) and the writers Rudolph Olden and Ernst Toller (see biograph).<sup>51</sup> The Nazi regime monitored British based anti-Nazi protests. 'Der angriff', a Nazi paper, kept a correspondent in London until the war began and was quick to 'expose' 'Jews'. The Nazi government let it be known that they hoped the British government would restrain refugee political activity, even sending a list of refugees they wanted tailed.<sup>52</sup>

By marginalising the refugees, the British government cut off an invaluable potential source of information about attitudes amongst the German civilian population and the level of resistance, about which the anti-Nazis, more than anybody else, knew the details. Yet this marginalisation was a deliberate government policy. The refugees were not to be trusted.

I found two members of the KPD who had fought in the International Brigades (IB) and then - sort of - allied with Britain. Gustav Dorf, a . Active in the German underground, he was arrested in August 1933, but escaped, and went to Holland, then France and then the IB, where he was the political commissar of the Edgar Andre battalion. After he escaped to France, Dorf was interned, including in North Africa from 1941 to 1943 . In 1943, he was recruited, some sources state by OSS, others by the British Army. He fought in Italy both with the Allies and as a partisan. In 1945 he returned to Germany.

Victor Preiss, employed in the M apparatus of the KPD, fled to Norway in December 1933 because he had not been given permission to leave by the KPD and was expelled. He foughtHe, fought with the International Brigades and was readmitted to the KPD,. In 1939, he was interned in France, then Algeria and in

<sup>50</sup> It's a different story but anybody interested in the many spies on the refugees, go to Brinson and Dove: *A Matter of Intelligence*. It has been suspected- though never proved- that spies for the Gestapo had a hand in Dora Fabian's death.

<sup>51</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A matter of intelligence*, 47-50. Amongst many others, he also reported on the Social-Democrat Gerhard Seger who had escaped from Oranienburg concentration camp and Hans Preiss, who ran an antifascist bookshop in London where refugees, including Toller, regularly met.

<sup>52</sup> Pennybacker, Susan, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, Princeton University Press, 2009, 217

1942/4, he became a member of the British Army. From there he went to the USSR, where he was deported to Siberia and sentenced to death but somehow survived.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, as some of the biographies reveal, even though MI5/SOE would not touch supporters of the FGLC with a barge pole,<sup>54</sup> the American OSS (the Office of Strategic Services, a US wartime intelligence agency, which became the CIA) welcomed FGLC members with open arms.<sup>54</sup>

Following the Allied landing at Normandy in June 1944, the OSS decided to send agents into Germany to try to undermine from within.<sup>56</sup> The OSS's London office dispatched over 100 missions from September 1944 to April 1945. Their agents were recruited from church dissidents, Spanish civil war veterans and political refugees, including seven exiled German trade-unionists based in the UK. Arthur Goldberg (later appointed to the US Supreme Court by President Kennedy) had joined the OSS in London in 1943 and convinced colleagues of the need to establish contact with refugees from underground labour groups. They constituted a ready-made source of military and political intelligence.

The exiled German trade unionists, introduced to Joseph Gould in London by Jurgen Kuczynski (see biography), included Paul Lindner, a German machine turner, Anton "Toni" Ruh, Kurt Gruber, a coal miner from the Ruhr Valley and Adolph Buchholz, a metal worker from Spandau-Berlin (see separate biographies). They risked their lives working for the Allies. They also recruited another handful of very left-wing German refugees included here (Kappius, Meisel, Beyer, Lindner) who had the advantage of speaking the language (and even the dialect) and, for example, parachuted them back into Germany. The intention was to drop the agents into Berlin, the Ruhr, and the Bavarian Alps to monitor German troop movements, railroad junctions, armaments plants and the political mood of the population.

<sup>53</sup> Rosa Luxemburg Foundation manuscripts 53.pdf

<sup>54</sup> Around 10,000 German and Austrians enlisted in the British forces, a few of whom, like Eric Sanders, volunteered for the Pioneer Corps and from there, were approached to become part of SOE. However he did not see 'action', which he, in part, attributed to not being British. He was then used to 'translate' for German POWS and found a significant number to be anti-Nazis (Sanders, Eric, *Secret Operations*. History web, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> The Special Operations Executive (SOE) arose from the amalgamation of three existing secret organisations and worked with OSS. Like them, its purpose was to conduct espionage, sabotage and reconnaissance. Although an aside, SOE did recruit some British people who were definitively left-leaning. Basil Davidson, for example, from late 1942 to mid-1943, the chief of the SOE Yugoslav Section, became very sympathetic to the partisan movements he worked with, in particular Tito.

<sup>56</sup> O'Connor, Bernhard, *The Tempsford Academy*, 2010, 75-77

The different approach of the USA to that of the British may well have been that it did not object that the KPD/CP had backed a free India, the British establishment's 'jewel in the crown'. Though this is conjecture, the Americans if anything would have viewed the Indian struggle for independence positively, not so much for humanitarian reasons but because it undermined the British Empire.<sup>57</sup> Another possibility, though this is conjecture, is that some of those in positions in authority in the US were or were related to anti-Nazi German refugees (Jewish and non-Jewish) as opposed to the British establishment with its anti-Semitic underbelly. Maybe, another reason for the difference between American and British approaches to the German exiles was that, unlike the Americans, British SOE rarely sent – or even planned on sending - its agents into Germany.

For all that, broadly defined, about 500 Germans did join the British armed forces in some capacity, although there is apparently no record of who survived and who died. A few joined the 'Home Guard, some were allowed into the Pioneer Corps (such as Werner Kapp; also see footnote on Eric Saunders). Alfred Dollheim, a member of the KPD, was allowed to join the British army in 1943, when he was still only 19, fought in Holland and survived to return to Germany in 1947. Karl Eisenberg, aged 21, joined in 1944. Gustave Dorf ('Eskar Aude'), another KPD member, also enrolled in the British army but was then sent into Italy by the OSS, returning to Germany in 1946. None of these men had been active politically in the UK. But the British Government stopped various young German refugees who wished to enrol by interning them, however several, after release, joined the US Army.<sup>58</sup>

The majority of refugees included here are men. Of the 60 or so refugees included, about ten were women. That there were as few female left-wing refugees can be at least in part attributed to there being fewer women active in the resistance in Germany and, those that were, had the 'advantage' that the Nazis were less likely to suspect them. Women were also less likely to flee and if they did, not to the UK. It is noticeable that the women included here almost all belonged to the groups to the left of the KPD or, in a couple of cases, to the KPD. Only one woman refugee, Adele Schreiber-Krieger, came from the stable of the SPD and she was one of the few

<sup>57</sup> Gould, Jonathan, *The OSS and the London "Free Germans". Strange Bedfellows* ([www. cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications](http://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications))

<sup>58</sup> Hamacher, Gottfried et al, *Against Hitler*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, [http://library.fes.de/fulltext/sozmit/einl-03.htm#P435\\_129172](http://library.fes.de/fulltext/sozmit/einl-03.htm#P435_129172)

‘rebels’ who worked alongside the KPD. (She went back to Switzerland in 1947. Was this pattern of allegiance because of the ‘patriarchal’ nature of the KPD and revolutionary groupings? Moreover, for reasons one can only guess at, the majority of the women whose biographies are included here and who were not attached to men who returned to Germany, stayed in England eg Edith Bone, Margaret Dewar, Margaret Mynatt and Rosa Levine-Meyer. Lotte Moos also stayed here as did her husband. One woman, Dora Fabian, was murdered. One woman, Hilde Meisel, was killed working for OSS, while based here. Three returned to Germany. At least two of the women included became spies of one sort or another. Maybe their usefulness was predicated on their links in the UK. Though a few of the men included became ‘agents’ during the war, none of them became spies for either side.<sup>59</sup> Did it also make a difference that the disruption of refugee women’s lives meant the disappearance or near-disappearance of their child-bearing years (then perceived as much briefer than we do today)?

Although these biographies do not generally enter the personal sphere, it is clear that relationships of the refugees often suffered. The level of relationship breakdown is noticeable. Men and women who had fled for their lives seem to have had subsequent - and probably consequent - difficulties in commitment, amplifying attitudes developed in a previous milieu in which the constraints of settled relationships were rejected.

It was particularly those who had fled because of the threat - and reality of - political persecution by the Nazi regime, who were most likely to want to return. It has been suggested that around half of all German political refugees eventually returned to Germany, though I suspect the figure is higher for those who came to the UK. This is one crucial difference from those who primarily fled anti-Semitism, where the percentage of returnees was tiny. Why did so many of the political refugees want to go back? Germany was in ruins. But living in a ‘borrowed’ land is never easy. The new language does not roll off one’s tongue. There is a strangeness to living in a foreign land: their anti-Nazi activities had been rooted in a different soil. Germany was also the enemy which meant (as I discovered in other research) that some people, especially women stuck at home, felt they were seen as the ‘outsider’ in the UK and

<sup>59</sup> The following is guess work but is it possible that women were not so involved in underground resistance work as it was often with male workers and unemployed

were very lonely. But, I suspect, more than anything, these comrades had already risked their lives trying to stop Nazism. That is what gave their lives meaning. Now they saw a new beginning in which to build a socialist Germany.

A small irony: having spied on every move made by the exiled Communists and their networks, the Government then did not want to allow them to go back to Germany.

The British Government created one obstacle after another for the refugees who wanted to return. The Free German Movement put pressure on the Government, attempting to organise a return to Germany for around 600 KPD Germans at the end of the war. But the Foreign Office initiated a process of delay, indeed issuing a secret memo that interested bodies should 'refuse permits to any German refugee...who is or has been an active member of any German political organisation... including of course organisations like the Free German Movement.' Later, it agreed to 300 anti-fascist refugees and their families returning to the Soviet zone of Germany. Finally, in August 1946, the first group were allowed to leave and by the end of 1947, most who wanted to return had been able to do so.<sup>60</sup> The reasons, though not given, were that the last thing the British Government wanted was for Communists to try to enter a 'broad front' German Government or even to form a strong German Communist Party. Once it existed, the KPD members who returned, usually went to East Germany. The SPD refugees almost all left and went to the West, indeed in the 1940s and 1950's, more than half of the EC of the SPD were 're-emigres'. (The figure in the Saarland was 90%)<sup>61</sup>

A handful of the anti-Nazi refugees did stay in the UK, mostly women as already mentioned, after the end of the war but they all were the exceptions. For a few of the refugees who had belonged to the KPD, the combination of the Soviet trials, the attack by Comintern forces on the anarchists in Spain and the increasingly visible bureaucratised nature of the Communist movement caused them to start to drift away, a process accelerated a few years later by the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1940. These reasons cannot always be distinguished from their success in getting jobs (see biographies of Heinz and Siegi Moos) or having a family here.

<sup>60</sup> Brinson, C and Richard Dove, *Politics by Other Means. The Free German League of Culture in London 1939-1945*, 194-196

<sup>61</sup> Roder, Werner, *German Politics in Exile, 1933-1945*. [https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr\\_0000-0000\\_1991\\_act\\_146\\_1\\_4149](https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr_0000-0000_1991_act_146_1_4149)



I have categorised people by roughly when they arrived in the UK between 1933-1940/41, as the year of escape generally provides a clue as to why they left. But the date of arrival is not a sufficient indicator. As the biographies reveal, many of the active anti-Nazi refugees fled from country to country, particularly from Czechoslovakia to keep ahead of the Nazis and so got to Britain in 1939, though they had fled soon after the Nazis took power. A few people, mostly Social Democrats, even arrived here in 1940, driven out by the Nazi's occupation of France. One woman came early but I have categorised her by when she became politically active.

The final biography is of an anti-Nazi, a member of the KPD and a militant sailor, who, despite his attempts, was not allowed into Britain and was subsequently killed. His name was Werner Lehmann. I guess, buried in police and Home Office files, are details, still unresearched, of others who were refused entry and consequently were murdered.

Why has a work like this not already been written? Many of the figures included here led extraordinary lives, fit for fame. Books on the resistance in Germany as a whole have rarely focused on working-class resistance. (Merson is the honourable exception to this.<sup>62</sup>) A concern with working class resistance, imbued as it was with Communists, was not seen as legitimate, especially during the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> Even the recent book by Catrine Clay: 'The Good Germans', which certainly touches on working-class resistance, focuses elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> (It is also not about 'good German' refugees in Britain.) One reason, I suspect, is that she depended on interviews with the children and grand-children of those who had organised against the Nazis. But most of the 'ordinary' men and women of the resistance were young. Many, if not most, did not yet have children when they fled or died. I suspect (though that is all it is), that it was the leading functionaries of the KPD and SPD who were more likely to have got out, to have been older and already have children. Thus, the footsoldiers of the resistance were less likely to have a family to provide later details of a dead loved one, whose life therefore is more likely to remain unknown. Moreover, the lives of the refugees included here were badly disrupted. Many of them went back to Germany.

<sup>62</sup> Merson, Allan, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1985

<sup>63</sup> East Germany did not do much better as it was not keen on anti-Nazis who did not follow the right party line.

<sup>64</sup> Clay, Catrine, *The Good Germans. Resisting the Nazis 1933-1945*, Weidenfeld, 2020

By the time they ‘settled down’ again, their time for having children may well have passed, especially for the women. And for the few who stayed in the UK, whose biographies are included here, and who did have children, my hunch is that they often did not want to talk of the past to their children.<sup>65</sup> Britain was their home now and it did not bring anybody back to dwell on past lives. Of course, it is not only family which provides ‘memories’, but it helps. In addition, the remarkable proportion of people included here who worked in differing ways for SOE, MI5 or spied in one sense or another for the USSR, were unlikely to open up on secrets they had needed to keep secret for so long.

While these biographies do not go into any details of the lives of the refugees who returned to Germany, it is worth noting and quoting the prominent conservative politician Josef Strauss who spoke the mind of many leading West Germans when during the 1951 parliamentary election campaign, he called Willy Brandt, a member of the left SPD breakaway: the Socialist Workers Party, who had taken the side of the Republicans in Spain and then fled to Norway, and who was later on to become the Chancellor, ‘a traitor to his country and a deserter’.<sup>66</sup> Though more members of the resistance were celebrated and some of the people included here landed jobs in the security and police services, East Germany too had a problem in its attitude to the returnees given the Soviet’s murder of so many of the German refugees who had fled there, that so many in the resistance had not towed the KPD line and that it despised or/and mistrusted many of who had fled West.

These mini-biographies vary in length and depth. It was often difficult to establish the details of people’s activities in Germany, especially as these were mostly kept hidden. More detailed biographies await those with the commitment and expertise to interrogate Gestapo and Russian archives!

This work builds on the book written by Steve Cushion and me on German anti-Nazi refugees, the vast majority of whom did not live to see the fall of the Nazi regime. Here are some details of a few who did.

<sup>65</sup> See my novel: ‘The Language of Silence’.

<sup>66</sup> Scheding, Florian, *The Splinter in your Eye’: Uncomfortable Legacies and German Exile Studies*, [https://www.academia.edu/10032552/\\_The\\_Splinter\\_in\\_your\\_Eye\\_Uncomfortable\\_Legacies\\_and\\_German\\_Exile\\_Studies](https://www.academia.edu/10032552/_The_Splinter_in_your_Eye_Uncomfortable_Legacies_and_German_Exile_Studies)

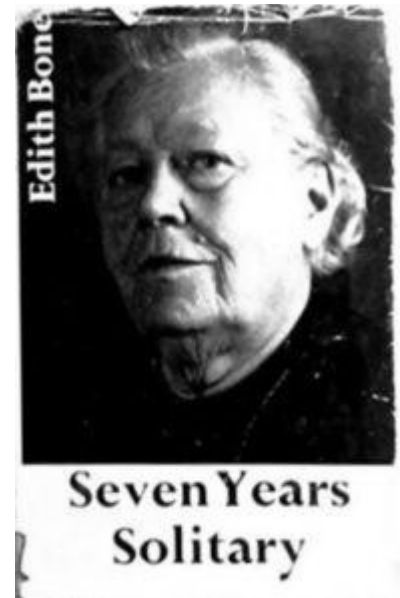
## 1933

### Edith Bone (1889-1975)

Edith Bone is an enigmatic figure who kept her political life well hidden but has sometimes been seen as being a significant figure in communist espionage (which I do not go into). She is one of the few women who was as deeply involved politically as any of the men included here. She died in the UK in almost total obscurity.

What emerges from her MI5 files during the 1930s is of a comrade who focused on organising the rank and file, rather than working within the bureaucracy or, unlike almost all the other refugees included here, focused on building British working class anti-fascist organisation. It is difficult to find information on her pre-war years: MI5 voiced much exasperation at her frequent changes of address, of names, of ‘post-restante’ and her regular disappearances. The suspicion has been voiced that she became a crucial ‘spy-master’ for the Comintern from the late 1930s and may well have helped them recruit spies. This mini-biography does not look at her many adventures after the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 (see autobiography for that, pictured above) by when MI5 had damned her as a committed Communist (and, ironically, kept Philby well informed).

Edith Bone was born Edit Hajós in 1889 in Hungary where she took part in the uprising of 1919 and became a doctor. But from 1923 to 1933, she lived in Berlin where she worked for the Comintern. She fled after the Bulgarian Communist Dimitrov, for whom she had been doing translating work, was arrested in 1933 and charged with responsibility for the *Reichstag* fire. Bone went to Paris where Münzenberg sent her on to the UK to do party work, arriving here in September 1933. Prof Haldane seems to have helped her to gain admittance as a ‘tourist’. Her vast ability as a translator, at one point translating for the BMA, gave her both opportunity and cover. (The BMA had to get permission from the Home Office to employ an alien.)



She stated that her purpose here was putting British and German trade unions in contact with each other, confirmed by a letter of September 1934, when, according to MI5 files, she wrote an impatient letter to 'Bernard' about putting British and German firms in touch. 'The Marsden printing office would like to make contact with the Reichsdruckerei', (a printing house including of bank notes). The busmen have only just formed their anti-fascist group. It might be good if the Berlin people wrote to them'.<sup>67</sup> An undated circular of about the same period, signed, apparently, by the printers of Ogham, states that the printing office received a letter from the printing workers of Ullstein (a large Berlin publishing company), reporting about the awful working conditions under the Nazis which has been widely distributed. An anti-fascist meeting of printing workers consequently was organised in Kingsway Hall which sent their support and solidarity.

In 1934, she married Gerald Martin, a translator, became a British subject and photographer and joined the communist party. MI5 certainly believed the purpose of the marriage was to acquire British citizenship. She then spent six weeks in the USSR. In August 1934, she probably addressed anti-fascist meetings in Houghton le Spring and Sunderland, though the Durham police were not absolutely sure that the foreign woman was her! She certainly spoke elsewhere, including to Workers' Education Association branches and to a meeting held at the Red Lion Hotel of the National Union of Vehicle Builders, organised by William Ferrie.<sup>68</sup> Her file also contains a letter from January 1934 headed 'London Busmen's Rank and File movement', Treasurer, W. Payne, from R. Willis, the secretary of the 'British anti-war movement' to the transport workers of Berlin, describing the poor conditions they were working under, asking about what was happening in Germany and how they could help in the fight against fascism. While MI5 may well have assumed any such letter was by Bone, she probably was involved. Such collaboration appears to have greatly concerned them. By 1935, her MI5 file included a limited number of suggestions about her political leanings. She had been observed in February 1935 participating in a demonstration in support of the unemployment bill, but nothing much was made of this. Then, in September, 1935, there is the first explicit reference to Communists: Siegfried and Margarete Moos, 'Jewish refugees from Germany are friends with Dr

<sup>67</sup> KV2/2011

<sup>68</sup> KV2/2011

Edith Bone' and 'Mrs Moos is a common visitor'. The address, 158, Haverstock Hill, was 'a well-known rendezvous of persons interested in Communism', signed A.W.<sup>69</sup> Another slightly earlier entry, dated August 1935 from the Special Branch relates to my mother, Lotte Moos's co-residence at 9, Lawn Road flats, NW3 with Brian Gould Verschoyles and her friendship with Edith Bone who lived at No 4.<sup>70</sup> Here lived not just Brian Gould Verschoyles, a low level spy for the USSR, but also Rene Kuczinski, who was regularly visited by her infamous brother, Jurgen. (See separate biography for 'Kuczinski clan'.) Edith Tudor-Hart (see separate biography) also lived here whom Bone knew and was to get to know better (though they may not have been friends). Also living here was Arnold Deutsch who became a successful Soviet spy in London, and who recruited the 'Cambridge Five'. The Lawn Road flats were of great interest to MI5, who supposed that a network closely tied to the Soviet regime lived there.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, although in receipt of an anonymous letter detailing Dr Bone as a Communist agent, MI5 does not appear to have successfully followed this up.

She was a member of the NUJ, Periodicals branch and it was certainly supposed by Special Branch that she continued to campaign amongst journalists in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> In April 1936, she moved a motion at the conference of the NUJ in Carlisle to support Carl von Ossietzky, imprisoned and later murdered by the Nazis, and calling on the NEC to support his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, which was duly passed. (A determined pacifist and critic of authoritarianism, Carl von Ossietzky was hated by the nationalists and Nazis. In 1932, a court sentenced Ossietzky to imprisonment for treason. The Nazis then arrested him hours after the Reichstag fire and sent him to a number of camps. In November 1936, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but was not allowed to accept it. He died in May, 1938.)<sup>73</sup> In a reply by Hilde Walter to the Branch resolution sent her by Fischer, it is stated that German journalists were unable to campaign for Ossietzky and that therefore it was all the more important for foreign journalists to do so. Hilde Walter did not come or aim to come to the UK so does not fit into these biographies. She was born in Berlin in

<sup>69</sup> PF43401

<sup>70</sup> PF 43401 Anybody interested in the terrible story of Brian Gould Verschoyles should refer to Barry McLoughlin (2007). [\*Left to the wolves: Irish victims of Stalinist terror\*](#)

<sup>71</sup> David Burke, whose book is not to be read uncritically, calculated there were 7 Soviet spies living there at about the same time: *The Lawn Road Flats: Spies, Writers and Artists*, xviii, xx, 97 Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> KV2/2102

<sup>73</sup> KV2/2102

1895, became a left-wing free-lance journalist and was involved in campaigning around working and middle-class women. She was very active attempting to get Ossiewsky freed. Twice arrested and interrogated, though never formally arrested, she fled to France in 1933, though she felt she was turning her back on the anti-Nazi struggle. She wrote: 'After Hitler had gained power in January, members of the political opposition were the first victims of the new regime's policy' but she was not taken seriously (though Jewish) because she was 'only a 'second rate' oppositionist and considerably unimportant compared to ... politicians who were arrested at that time' and because women "were not taken seriously in general'.<sup>74</sup> In July 1936, Edith Bone and her long standing friend, Felicia Browne, drove to Spain, wishing to reach Barcelona in time for the Peoples Olympiad. But they arrived shortly before Franco's rebellion. Bone was then involved both as a doctor, with the establishment of the Communist 'Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia' and sent regular reports to the 'Daily Worker' and also the 'News Chronicle'. Browne, whom my father, Siegi Moos, knew, lived in Berlin between 1928 and around 1933, was deeply involved in anti-Nazi activities, including street-fighting. On 25 August 1936 she was killed in action on the Aragon front.

On her return (initially back to Lawn Road), she attempted but failed to secure a stable job, using her photographic skills (which of course also interested MI5). According to a Metropolitan Police Report, she was dismissed for (essentially) incompetence by, in order, Reprodex, Eddonas, Anscombe Publishers and even, later, by Tass.<sup>75</sup> She also worked as a translator for the Imperial Bureau of Animal Health but did not keep that job either after her employers contacted the local police about her. She also seems to have been building up contacts with exiled Hungarian and Czech communists during this period. Though she had lived for the previous ten years in Germany and was only recently a British citizen, Bone did not join the German speaking KPD exile group. The CPGB strongly discouraged her from having contact with the KPD exile group as she was active as a British communist, the Comintern line at the time. MI5 were suspicious of her but seem not to have caught on to her

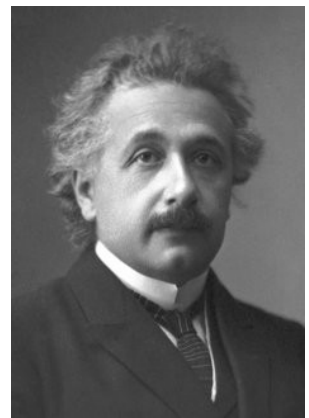
<sup>74</sup> She was arrested in France and interned at Gurs Internment Camp in 1940. After being released, she lived illegally in the South of France and obtained an emergency visa for the USA in 1944. She returned to Berlin in 1952, became a journalist and co-authored books about the resistance movement in Nazi Germany. (Oppermann, Paula *Beyond a Biography: Hilde Walter's Testimony and a Research Journey through the Wiener Library Archives*, <https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/Blog?item=123&returnoffset=20>)

<sup>75</sup> PF43401

importance.<sup>76</sup>In 1949, Bone went as a free-lance correspondent to Budapest for the Daily Worker. Accused of spying, this time for the British government, she was detained – or ‘disappeared’ - into solitary confinement for seven years. (She was freed during the last days of the Nagy Government of 1956 when a student group seized control of the political prison where she was held.) She died in 1975 in the UK, it would appear a lonely figure who had buried herself in translation work, including of historically ‘Jewish’ literature.

### **Albert Einstein (1879-1955)**

Einstein is not usually thought of in the context of being an anti-Nazi but, while still in Germany, he was an outspoken critic and notoriously disliked by the Nazis. During his brief time in Britain, his left wing views were again much in evidence.<sup>77</sup>Although one must beware the fierce anti-Communism of FBI files, especially from the early Cold War period, their records bring to the fore Einstein’s left-wing profile in Germany (which they wished to use to stop him gaining US citizenship).<sup>78</sup>



Their first accusation against him was that he was friends with and drew his secretarial staff in Berlin from people close to the *Klub der Geistesarbeiter* (Club of the Scientists), which, they claimed, was a Communist cover organisation recruiting young promising intellectuals. Einstein also was accused of having Communist friends, at least one of whom (Grosskopf) was arrested in 1933 by the SS. Einstein also appears to have allowed his address to be used as a ‘letter drop’ even before 1933 (presumably assuming it was relatively secure) by people on the left, many of whom were executed by the Nazis or died in Spain. He was a member of Red Aid, spoke at meetings and was on its Board which raised funds for children’s homes that Red Aid supported, and, as early as 1926, supported Red Aid’s Christmas appeal for the families of political prisoners. He also knew Alfred Kattner, a leading KPD functionary, who was arrested in 1933, turned by the Gestapo and was then himself

<sup>76</sup> MI5 were profoundly suspicious of the British Communist Party at this time, assuming it was a nest of spies for the USSR. It has been suggested that this focus was how they missed the Cambridge 5.

<sup>77</sup> Anybody interested in more detail, see Andrew Robinson: *Einstein on the run. How Britain Saved the World's Greatest Scientist*

<sup>78</sup> Albert Einstein’s FBI file, 61-7099 file/2005\_Bookmatter\_TheEinsteinDossiers.pdf



responsible for a number of arrests. Branded a traitor by the now illegal KPD in early 1934, Kattner was shot and killed by Hans Schwarz on behalf of 'M', the KPD's secret apparatus

On 11 June 1932, Einstein gave testimony in support of eight members of International Workers Relief. Horror: the defendants were acquitted. On 11 July 1932, the chief of the Berlin police informed the Minister of the Interior that Albert Einstein was a member of a committee with three communists: Erich Mühsam, Willi Münzenberg and Klara Zetkin. He was also, apparently, a member of the "German Militant Committee against War" (including Otto Lehmann-Russbüldt: see biography) which mobilised against imperialist war, especially amongst munitions workers. It is very possible that much of this was made-up. What is certain is that in June 1932, he did sign the ISK's 'Urgent Call for Unity'.

During March–April 1933, Einstein gave up his German citizenship, resigned from the Prussian Academy of Sciences, and was then relentlessly attacked in the German press; one publication showed his photo with the caption: "not yet hanged". His scientific works were burned (a Jew and a leftist: no chance) and his flat ransacked. The Nazi government confiscated his and his wife's bank accounts and his house was searched.

Einstein was able to leave Germany with the help of the British Academic Assistance Council, established by William Beveridge. He arrived in Britain in late July 1933 and went into hiding in a small cottage near Cromer, frightened, with good reason, that Nazi agents were out to kill him.

On 30 August, 1933, Theodor Lessing, a German, Jewish, Zionist, anti-Nazi philosopher and friend of Einstein, was indeed killed. He had fled to Czechoslovakia but on 30 August 1933, was shot by Sudeten Nazi extremists. Locker Lampson, an English aristocrat with many properties and a tendency to admire Hitler, surprisingly offered Einstein a place to hide in Norfolk. It was little more than a hut but it was guarded by local gamekeepers and farmers with guns. One local woman with a pram even accompanied him to the local Post Office, while her son hid behind a hedge with a gun. Though it may be apocryphal, years later, one of the game keepers when interviewed stated that there had been an attempt by Nazi agents to bribe him to hand this person over. (Only afterwards did the 'locals' establish who he was.)

Einstein had been closely associated with Münzenberg's Brown Book about the *Reichstag* Fire. Its documentation whose purpose was to point the finger at the Nazis as responsible for burning down the Reichstag, included Einstein's statement to the French 'International League for Combating anti-Semitism', set up in Paris in 1927. (It had about 10,000 members, many of whom apparently were later to join the French resistance.) Einstein was a member of its committee but denied his involvement was political or being a Communist. Einstein's belief was in committees of 'good' people, not rank and file action. For him, 'socialism' meant social justice and solidarity.

On 3 October, 1933, Einstein addressed a mass rally in the Albert Hall, where he gave a rousing speech, exhorting the audience to resist the Nazis and calling for Britain to accept many more refugees. It was rumoured that the Nazis were out to kill him and thousands of police were inside and outside the Hall to protect him. Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* had urged its readers to stay away from the meeting as they regarded Albert Einstein as a communist threat. (Rothermere was at the time close to the British Union of Fascists.) Other speakers included Beveridge and the aforementioned Locker Lampson who had helped organise the event.

Soon after, Einstein left for America. He campaigned for the anti-Franco forces in the Spanish Civil War. After the war, he became an active co-chair with Paul Robeson of the 'American Crusade to End Lynching', supported the new Progressive Party, formed by the left wing of Roosevelt's old New Deal coalition, and called for international control and outlawing of nuclear weapons. In August 1940, he wrote to the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning on behalf of the celebrated Austrian scientist, Karl Weissenberg, who had been interned at Huyton, UK, supporting his release and requesting that the Society take up the case. They did so and Weissenberg was released, though maybe coincidentally.<sup>79</sup> In 1953, he campaigned hard in support of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. He remained, he told a friend in the last year of his life, a "revolutionary".

### **Dora Fabian (1901– 4 April 1935)**

Born into an assimilated, socialist, Jewish, German family, Dora Fabian herself became a socialist and anti-Nazi activist. Her present day fame is more attached to her death in Bloomsbury (in Guilford St), London in 1935 and the questions that still

<sup>79</sup> HO382/84/1

raises as to whether it was murder or suicide. But in this very short political biography, my focus is her political role first in Germany, then the UK.<sup>80</sup> Initially a member of the SPD, she opposed the First World War. Active in the student movement, she participated in a student demonstration to protest the assassination by the Nazis of Germany's Jewish foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, in 1924. She was very aware that women could move right politically and was concerned about the SPD's lack of focus on the position of women, highlighting the British Labour Party's successful female organisation. In an April 1932 article on "Hitler and Women" in the SAP newspaper, (which she had joined by then), she argued that the Nazis were only using women as "voting beasts".

Expelled from the Social Democratic Party in 1931, with which she was already disillusioned, she, along with others, formed a new party, the Socialist Workers' Party (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei*; SAP) which was critical of both the KPD and SPD and campaigned for a united anti-Nazi labour movement. It was a strongly anti-Nazi group which saw the SPD leadership as having vacated the anti-Nazi stage. In early 1933, its membership was 25,000-30,000, including a significant number of young people, Fabian was detained by the Nazis in March 1933, immediately after the *Reichstag* fire, at least in part because she had been a friend of and worked as secretary for Ernst Toller. She boasted that she was the first woman to be jailed by the Nazis. Quickly released, she fled, taking with her into exile, a large trunk filled with several of Toller's unpublished manuscripts, which she had rescued from Toller's study and which would doubtless otherwise have been destroyed by the Nazis. The story goes that she hid herself in a large trunk, covered by Toller's papers and was then 'transported' across the border into Czechoslovakia. She then fled to Paris and finally to London in September 1933.<sup>81</sup> She was given permission to stay for one month and, like so many of the refugees, had to persist in applying to renew her right to remain. Her primary reason for coming to London was to give support and act as translator at the Reichstag Fire Counter Trial, which began in London in August 1933, instigated by Münzenberg with the intention of shedding light on the real but fraudulent trial about to begin in Germany.<sup>82</sup> The Nazis were about to put on a show trial of Georgi

<sup>80</sup> Anybody interested in more detail, check out Brinson, Charmian *The strange case of Dora Fabian and Mathulde Wurm: a study of German political exiles in London during the 1930s*, which this is partly drawn from.

<sup>81</sup> Barnes, James, *Nazi Refugee Turned Gestapo Spy: The Life of Hans Wesemann, 1895-1971*

<sup>82</sup> Münzenberg (1889-1940) broke with Stalin in 1937. Found hanged in suspicious circumstances in 1940. It has been suspected ever since that Stalin had him murdered because he knew too much (Mike Jones).

Dimitrov and other leading Communists to prove they were behind the fire which had destroyed the Reichstag. Münzenberg, a leading member of the KPD and of the Comintern and a brilliant publicist, organised the Reichstag Counter Trial, even though this was still under the Comintern's 'Third Period' line. Amidst much publicity, the Counter Trial concluded that the 'defendants' were innocent and the true initiators were likely to be part of the Nazi Party elite. Remember this is still 1933 when the Nazis were still far more tolerated. The trial was an anti-Nazi propaganda victory. For Fabian to become involved politically was deeply risky. She was a skilled linguist but she had only been granted a visa to enter the UK on the grounds she would not participate in political activity. Fabian was taking a great personal risk. The Counter Trial received worldwide media attention: MI5 must have known of her activities which could have resulted in instant deportation. (This happened to a few German exiles in the UK, although a significant number of refugees appeared before the trial, suggesting MI5 was not too exercised by these proceedings. Münzenberg, however, was denied a visa so was not at the trial!)

Secondly, although the Counter Trial drew in many non-Communists and was supported by much of the British left, its inspiration was Münzenberg, who, at the time, represented the Comintern line, under the guise of the 'The League Against Imperialism'. One of the main – false - allegations against the Counter Trial was that it was a Communist plot. Fabian was personally committed to revealing the horror of Nazism.

Over three brief years, Fabian threw herself into anti-Nazi politics in the UK. She became an important source of information on Nazi Germany for the left. Her (ex-) husband, Walter Fabian, who was still part of the anti-Nazi underground and of the SAP, was an invaluable source, passing on information from within military circles. She helped to co-author a publication on the situation of women in both Nazi Germany and the USSR. From March 1935, she prepared the details for the, unsuccessful, International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture (under the patronage of Maxim Gorky!) to be held in Paris in July, promoting popular front politics. She also renewed her contact with Toller, who was living nearby.

Crucially, she raised money for the defence of SAP prisoners being tried in Germany (despite having formally left the SAP), with the help of Fenner Brockway

and the ILP (which was loosely aligned with the SAP) and managed – critically - to arrange for a British lawyer to attend the trial of Max Kohler and 25 other SAP members which was held in November 1934.<sup>83</sup> Another woman, Ruth Heinrichsdorff, a German SAP activist, also helped. Ruth had fled Germany and arrived in the UK in 1933. She and her husband came to lead the London based SAP where she was instrumental in the production of the short-lived English language SAP bulletin: *The Other Germany*. It was in conjunction with Dora Fabian that she campaigned for the release of the arrested German SAP members.<sup>84</sup>

Probably nobody will ever know for sure what caused Fabian's death. One real possibility is that she was murdered by a Nazi agent. This is not as farfetched as it sounds. Dora Fabian was regarded by the Nazi regime as dangerous both because of her earlier reputation from her time in Germany, but also, crucially, because of her continuing contacts with anti-Nazis. The German anti-Nazi journalist Berthold Jacob had been kidnapped by Nazi agents in Switzerland, probably by Hans Weserman, who had been passing himself off as a German socialist refugee in Britain (Jacob had survived the first but not the later kidnap.) This alone would have considerably worried the exile community: Dora seems to have obtained secret documents early on which indicated Weserman was a spy and had been helping the Swiss police to look into his British based activities. But there were others. Dr Georg Bell, who appears to have known about the splits in the Nazi leadership, had been pursued over the German border into Austria and killed there. Theodor Lessing, a long-standing and vociferous anti-Nazi, had been murdered in Czechoslovakia in 1933. The German embassy was also suspected when there were two burglaries in Fabian's flat and every bit of paper turned over.<sup>85</sup>

The inquest into both Dora Fabian and Mathilde Wurm who also died at the same time in the same flat has attracted a great deal of interest ever since. Mathilde Wurm (30 September 1874 – 4 April 1935) was a German socialist, representing first the

<sup>83</sup> Brinson and Dove Max Kohler (26.6.1897 -15.12 1975) Joined the Spartakus Jugendverband. Sentenced to six years jail in 1917 but released 1918. Joined KPD. Editor of *Junge Garde*. Expelled 1928 from the KPD as a leading 'rightists' for refusing to agree to give up his opposition to ultra-leftism. Joined KPO, then SAP in March 1932. Arrested and sentenced to three years prison in 1933, a sentence which would almost certainly have been far worse had he not been for being legally represented. Upon release, he fled to Denmark. He returned to Berlin in 1955, joined SPD in 1956 and was expelled in 1961 (Mike Jones).

<sup>84</sup> Charmian Brinson, 'Ruth Heinrichsdorff: an SAP activist in British exile' in *Keine Klage über England*, eds Brinson, Dove, Grenville, Malet and Taylor

<sup>85</sup> Brinson and Dove

SPD, then the USPD in the Reichstag from 1920 to 1933. In 1933, Wurm initially remained in Germany but when her property was confiscated, she fled first to Switzerland and then, in February 1934, to London where she lived in the same flat as Dora.

The hearing was attended by Fenner Brockway and James Maxton. Toller travelled especially from Paris to attend. Franz Neumann (see biography) was there, representing the SPD. The verdict was suicide, but neither her friends nor comrades ever really believed this.

### **Hans Hess (1908-1974)**

Hans Hess was closely associated with Kamnitzer in the late 1930s in the UK, so, although he only arrived here in 1936, I have placed his brief biography after Kamnitzer.

Hess, born in Erfurt, grew up amongst family friends such as Kandinsky and Klee. He left Germany for the US, then moved on to Paris post 1933 and, in 1936, came to London, unable to return to Germany because of his Jewish ancestry.

He was associated with 'Germany Today', a monthly publication published during 1938-9 by the Committee of the Friends of the German People's Front. He shared a flat with Hans Kamnitzer, a key figure in the FGLC, and became a founding member. He and Kamnitzer were responsible for 'Inside Germany', which Stevenson ascribes to the 'Friends of the German People's Front'.

Interned on the Isle of Man and then deported to Canada as an 'enemy alien', Hess returned to England in 1943 and worked for a short time as an agricultural labourer in Leicestershire (though he appears to have inherited his shoe manufacturing family's 'fortune').

In 1944, he was appointed as an Art Assistant to the Leicester Museum just before the opening of an exhibition titled 'Mid-European Art', supported by the FGLC, where he collected German expressionist art, then became curator at the York Art Gallery, which he left for a post at the University of Sussex.<sup>86</sup> In the meantime, he studied and wrote about Georg Grosz. In the late 1950s, Hess was denied a visa to visit the USA due to his involvement in the FGLC, a 'Communist front organisation', but was

<sup>86</sup> Leicester Art Gallery still has some stunning Kandinsky works and other German prints (Steve Cushion).

awarded an OBE in 1958! Throughout his life, Hess wrote for and lectured on behalf of 'Marxism Today'.<sup>87</sup> Hess was one of the very few Communist-aligned refugees who stayed in the UK, no doubt, in part, because of his successful career here.

### **Heinz Kamnitzer (1917-2001)**

Kamnitzer, who lived in the UK from 1933-1946, became a died-in-the-wool member of the KPD, even surviving expulsion. Born in Berlin, he had been a member of the Socialist School Association in 1931.<sup>88</sup> Aged only 16, he was arrested in 1933 because of his illegal political work. After release, he fled to Britain in October 1933, according to MI5, under the umbrella of the Jewish Aid Committee (though it is not clear what this is). He continued his studies at a Polytechnic in London. In 1935/36, he left for Palestine where his parents apparently lived (though this is not definitive) and became an apprentice carpenter but returned soon afterwards to London because, he stated, he was not a Zionist. In 1938, he became a member of the exiled KPD group. Between 1936 and 1940, he shared a flat with two other German communists at the infamous Lawn Road Flats in Hampstead, which MI5 suspected of being a hot-bed of Russian spies and where others included in these biographies also lived (eg Lotte Moos, Edith Tudor Hart and the Koplowitzes).



Still in his early 20s, he wrote for and then became editor of the short-lived magazine: 'Inside Nazi Germany'. This has been attributed to a number of diverse groups: the 'Free German League' youth organisation, 'The Friends of the German People's Front' (chair Professor Meusel) and the 'Committee of the German Opposition', linked to ING (chair Heinrich Mann). What seems likely is that it was produced by Kamnitzer and Hans Hess, with whom Kamnitzer shared a flat in Lawn Road. Its print run in October 1939 was 80,000. Amazingly, 'Inside Germany' featured smuggled letters or reports from members of the German resistance: its aim was to inform the British public of the existence of 'good' Germans.

What happened thereafter is not clear. It appears that the British Communist Party withdrew its financial backing from the magazine a few months after the signing of

<sup>87</sup> Much of the information included here is drawn from <https://grahamstevenson.me.uk/2012/08/17/hess-hans/>

<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out any further details about this Association or about Kamnitzer's pre-1933 political activities. Much of the material for this article has been drawn from Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur: Biographische Datenbanke.



the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and the paper folded in March 1940, having survived about six months. Reading between the lines, I suspect the journal was critical of the Pact but it is also possible that the finances dried up after the Pact. Anyway, Kamnitzer was expelled, excluded or resigned (depending on which version one reads) from the KPD in 1940, supposedly because of the interest Scotland Yard was showing in 'Inside Germany'. He resumed his membership in 1945. The Metropolitan Police have him as being in attendance at a meeting celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Soviet Union on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1942, at which German Communists and *Neu Beginnen* were present.

'Inside Nazi Germany', according to Stevenson, was turned into ING Publishing which published Kuczinski's "300 Million Slaves and Serfs: Labor Under the Fascist New Economic Order", selling 20,000 copies and some fifteen pamphlets including "Report from Berlin", a letter by "A German Communist" giving a direct report on the current state of opinion inside Germany.<sup>89</sup> John Heartfield contributed designs. In what I suspect was a political misreading, one MI5 report, signed JML, stated that this 'bulletin' was an 'asset for the British Government' because it drew on underground sources in Germany.<sup>90</sup> Near the end of the war, ING titles in German began to appear, presumably in anticipation of liberation. Its work increasingly merged with the FGLC as the war drew to a close. In 1940, Kamnitzer was interned and then sent to Canada but returned to London in 1942. He had somehow applied to move to the US as so many of the refugees did, but this application seems to somehow have got lost, maybe as a result of Captain Liddell, on behalf of the Home Office, carefully sending the US all their notes on him. He became an editor for the 'business' newspaper: 'Petroleum Press Services', an organisation which, as far as I can see, was not, as it sounds, a capitalist enterprise but was researching into the importance and availability of oil supplies to the USSR and Germany.

Hitler believed that the capture of oilfields in the Caucasus was an essential prerequisite to waging a prolonged war. Baku, situated on one of the world's richest oilfields, alone produced 80 per cent of all Soviet oil. It consisted of several fields, including the new Nebit-Dagh 'oil base' near Krasnovodsk, which Hitler understood

<sup>89</sup> <https://grahamstevenson.me.uk/2012/08/17/hess-hans/>

<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, it has not proved possible to find out enough about this magazine to clarify the details. Further information very welcome.

as indispensable to win the war. Stalingrad and the 'need' for a prolonged war made the issue of oil even more fundamental.<sup>91</sup> In 1942, Kamnitzer was employed by the Association of Scientific Workers, of which Jurgen Kuczinski was the Chair. He had become closely associated with Kuczinski and the Free German League of Culture, where he was at one point the (probably Honorary) Secretary. He was also an employee of the 'Jewish Aid Committee for the USSR', though I am not able to establish what exactly this organization was.

He attended the inaugural meeting of the Free German Movement (FGM) in 1943 (see 'Introduction' for details) and subsequently became involved.<sup>92</sup> In January 1944, he was a sufficiently trusted comrade to be on the press desk at the FGM's meeting on 'Zero Hour for Germany-Destruction or Revolt', a significant title.<sup>93</sup> His domestic life was also ever changing. Helga Kamnitzer, who arrived in the UK from Munich in 1933 to study at the LSE, was another of the Lawn Road residents, an address she shared with Kamnitzer, though it is not clear from when this implied a partnership: another person (Hans Hess) shared their flat. But she married Kamnitzer in December 1941. She was also suspected by MI5, almost certainly rightly, of being a member of the Communist Party. In 1938, she got a job as foreign correspondent to the Immigration department of the Jewish Aid Committee

She then became Secretary of 'Inside Germany' and an active member of FGLC, though MI5 suggest that after she split up with Heinz in 1943, her level of activity reduced. Despite having almost nothing to record, MI5 continued to spy on her, including listening in to her phone conversations (even complaining about the sound quality) up till at least 1950.<sup>94</sup> For whatever combination of reasons, she attempted suicide after the split with Kamnitzer. (MI5 recorded that Heinz left her, according to a police report, because of her 'immorality and association with other men'!) Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out more about her. MI5 followed Heinz Kamnitzer closely up till the point he left the UK and beyond. (MI5's continuing interest in him was of course as a Communist. His file includes material on a 'World Peace Movement' Conference from 1956.) Scandalously, his file KV-2-2883 continued to be labelled 'Kamnitzer, Heinz, Israel', even referring to a book of his on

<sup>91</sup> Hayward, Joel, *Hitler's Quest for Oil: the Impact of Economic Considerations on Military Strategy, 1941-42*

<sup>92</sup> KV-2-2883\_3

<sup>93</sup> PF.49004.

<sup>94</sup> KV2-3504.

the importance of oil for international relations (presumably a development on his earlier research) which came out in 1949 as being written by Heinz *Israel* Kamnitzer. In an earlier submission, the following was stated, signed 'FDG' from April 1942: 'Kamnitzer has been described by the police as a very objectionable type of German Jew'.

In 1946 Kamnitzer returned to Berlin where he made a successful academic career for himself as a writer and historian, becoming a vocal supporter of the East German Government.

### **Ruth Koplowitz (1906-2001)**

Koplowitz was only briefly in the UK in 1933 when she was a key figure in SAP, though had she not been arrested on a return 'visit' to Nazi Germany, her plan was to continue to live here. A cousin of Dora Fabian, Ruth Koplowitz was involved in left student groups. In 1930 she met Paul Heinrichsdorff in the Red Student Group in Frankfurt. They were involved in the SAP and, in 1933, helped the SAP functionary: Paul Wasserman (see elsewhere) to flee Germany.<sup>95</sup> In May 1933, they left for the UK, where she participated in the establishment of a new SAP branch in London, becoming its temporary head and responsible for the 'Other Germany'. The Heinrichsdorffs tried to start an international campaign to support the arrested SAP members Edith Baumann, Max Kohler and Klaus Zweiling<sup>96</sup>, and to help Walter Fabian (see separate foot-note) and Dora Fabian (see separate biography) financially.

She then alone went to Paris to work near the SAP party leadership. In 1935, Ruth Koplowitz undertook a conspiratorial journey from Paris to Basel, from there to Prague and then to her parents in Königshütte. The journey was then to be continued via Berlin to London, but she had been betrayed and the Gestapo were waiting for her at the German-Polish border. Ruth was sentenced to five years in prison, which she

<sup>95</sup> My thanks to Charmian Brinson for drawing Ruth Koplowitz to my attention. Much of this biography is drawn from Charmian Brinson: *Ruth Heinrichsdorff: An SAP Activist in British Exile*, in: Charmian Brinson (Ed.): *No complaint about England? : German and Austrian exile experiences in Great Britain 1933–1945*. Munich: iudicium, 1998

<sup>96</sup> In 1931, Baumann joined the Socialist Workers party (SAPD) and was in the leadership of its youth wing. Elected to the executive committee at the SAPD party conference in March 1933, she was arrested in autumn 1933 and was imprisoned until 1936 but survived. Zweiling joined the USPD in 1920 during the Kapp Putsch and in 1922, the SPD where he worked as a journalist. In 1931, he took part in the founding of the SPD left-wing split-off, the Socialist Workers Party, where he played a leading role, again working for them as a journalist. Arrested by the Gestapo August 1933, he was sentenced to three years in prison. In 1943, he was sent to the 999s but survived.

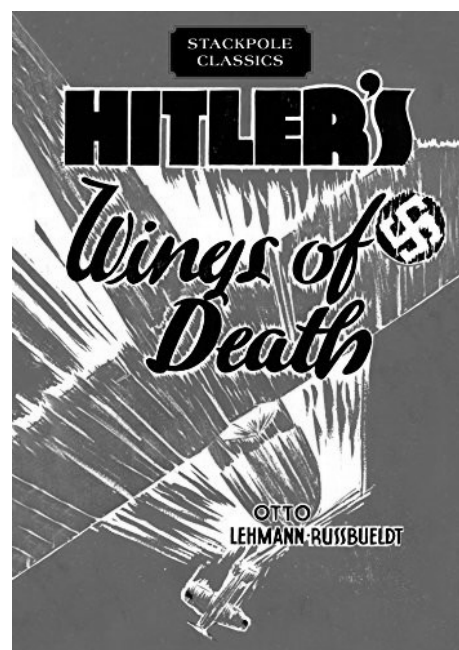
served, temporarily in solitary confinement, in the Jauer women's penal institution in Silesia.

She survived and managed to travel to Shanghai in 1940. After the war ended, she went to Australia, where she found work as a teacher of modern languages.

### **Otto Lehmann Russbueldt, 1873-1964**

Lehmann-Russbueldt was not an activist or a socialist but was a significant and committed anti-Nazi pacifist, who lived in the UK from 1933 to 1951. His story reveals how unsympathetic the British state were to somebody whose only purpose was to stop the Nazis and who, had they had a more open frame of mind, could have provided them with much useful information about Nazi Germany. And though this is not a spy story, it also reveals how the fear of Nazi spies amongst anti-Nazi refugees in the UK was well-founded.

Lehmann Russbueldt was a long standing pacifist, a campaigner against the arms trade and against German militarism. After participating in the First World War, he first co-founded and later became the General Secretary of the 'German League for Human Rights' which exposed the illegal activities of the growing Nazi party.<sup>97</sup> The League was close to the SPD, but, unusually, it also cooperated with the KPD, and some League members advocated some sort of early 'Popular Front'. According to 'S8' reporting to M11 in May 1934, Lehmann Ruesbueldt had also been close to the 'League against Imperialism' in the 1920s, despite it being a KPD-run organisation. He apparently spoke at its inaugural meeting In 1926 and attended a further meeting, probably in 1931. He was a committed internationalist: he



<sup>97</sup> The origins of the German League for Human Rights, a secular, pacifist, internationalist and anti-racist human rights organisation lay in the pre-First World War peace movement, when it was affiliated with the French *Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme*, which began in protest against the Dreyfus Affair. Among its members were Albert Einstein, Kurt Eisner, Gustav Landauer, Ernst Meyer, Clara Zetkin and Stefan Zweig. Lehmann-Russbueldt remained committed to the League during the 1930s and 1940s. Robert M. W. Kempner, head of the League's legal aid office (and later a U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials) had the good sense (so different from the KPD) to destroy the League's files before fleeing early in 1933 (Lora Wildenthal, *The Origins of the West German Human Rights Movement, 1945-1961*, 2004)

attended a committee on Syrian atrocities and workers relief (during mass and frequently armed protests against French imperialist forces) and sent a declaration of sympathy to the Meerut prisoners.<sup>98</sup> Arrested on the night of the *Reichstag* fire when the SA went hunting 'Communists', Lehmann Russbueldt was imprisoned in the fortress of Spandau, then released in April 1933, possibly through a mistake, possibly through having a 'friend in court'.<sup>99</sup> He was one of the very first people to have his German nationality removed. Within three weeks, accompanied by two Catholic priests, he had crossed the border into Holland, pretending to be one of a group of psychiatric patients, wagging his head and burbling to himself. From there, he went on to the UK on a Czech passport, aided by Lord Robert Cecil and Mr Wickham Steed with whom he had collaborated on work for the League of Nations. He arrived here on 5 November 1933.

Already 60, so far older than most of the other refugees in the UK at the time, Lehmann Russbueldt had contacts with a number of prominent figures, including, crucially, Mr Wickham Steed and Dora Fabian (see separate biography).<sup>100</sup> He aimed to alert the British government as early as 1934 of Germany's unofficial and illegal rearmament and development of gas warfare and to warn of the dangers of Nazi German expansionism. He wrote prolifically and had published 'Germany's air force' plus further books and many articles, though he sometimes had difficulty getting published. In 1934, Lehmann Russbueldt had received information from internal sources in Germany about Germany's production of deadly gas and germs to be distributed through the air. He had passed this information on to Wickham Steed, one of his supporters, who successfully publicised it. Different layers of the State were concerned but the general tone is represented by a letter from Colonel Vernon Kell to C.D. Kirwan, Home Office, on 5 July 1934, where Kell wrote that the fuss being created by Mr Wickham Steed about Germany's production of deadly poison gas and germs 'had been fabricated by Left Wing Socialist Pacifist refugees for anti-Hitler propaganda purposes.'<sup>101</sup> A year after the Nazis took office, leading members of the

<sup>98</sup> KV-2/2001, PF42816. For more on the 'Meirut conspiracy', see footnote under Eisler.

<sup>99</sup> KV2/2004, PF42816

<sup>100</sup> Wickham-Steed, a leading British journalist, historian and an early anti-Nazi, publicised the secret German experiments in airborne biological warfare, evidence probably provided him by Lehmann -Russbueldt.

<sup>101</sup> KV2/2201, PF42816 Kell, was the first director of MI5. In October 1931 MI5 was given responsibility for investigating communism in the UK, in 1934, of investigating fascism, but Kell was virulently anti-Communist. In June 1940, he was dismissed.

British establishment did not want to believe anything bad about them. In fact, I.G. Farben was producing a nerve agent (Tabun) from 1936. Another nerve agent (Sarin) was first produced in 1938, and a third (soman) in 1944.<sup>102</sup> It gets worse. Biological weapons were tested on mental patients, Jews, Russian POWs and Gypsies in Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz and other locations. Kurt Blome worked on aerosol dispersants and methods of spraying nerve agents like Tabun and Sarin from aircraft, and tested the effects of these gases on prisoners at Auschwitz.<sup>103</sup>

Much of the information Lehmann-Russbueldt received was smuggled out of Germany at great risk (including by a KPD member which was even more suspicious) and then passed on through a network of contacts who supplied Dora Fabian, and through her him, with secret documents. (She may well have paid with her life for this.) His early book on 'Germany's air-force', a highly detailed expose of Germany's secret rearmament, was in effect suppressed by the publishers at the request of the British government. And a subsequent putative book on aviation technology, which was to become 'Hitler's Wings of Death' in 1936/37 caused MI5 much concern, as did his approach to Imperial Chemical Industries for information on explosives for his book.<sup>104</sup>

Lehmann Russbueldt's concerns about German build-up of chemical warfare and Germany's secret aircraft programme were subsequently raised in Parliament by the Labour MP, Mr Seymour Cocks, in February 1934. Cocks laid a document before the Commons giving exact details of the secret building programme of German military aircraft and that about 2000 planes, including military aircraft, and around 6000 engines would be ready for operation in three months. Both Chamberlain and Eden supposedly took note but not one paper, even the Daily Herald, publicised these ominous revelations.<sup>105</sup> It seems Lehmann-Russbueldt had contacts with the Czech legation, whom he provided with military information, which Karl Groehl had given him and which Groehl largely acquired from agents he met in France or Switzerland

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/technology/chemical-weapon>

<sup>103</sup> Blome was tried at the Nuremberg Doctors Trial in 1947 on charges of practicing euthanasia and conducting experiments on humans. It is believed that American intervention saved Blome from being executed in exchange for information about biological warfare, nerve gas, and providing advice on chemical and biological weapons programmes. In 1951, he was hired by the U.S. Army under Project 63 to work on chemical warfare. His file neglected to mention Nuremberg (Deichmann, U, *Biologists Under Hitler*, 282)

<sup>104</sup> Dove, Richard, "Flying and Spying: Claud W. Sykes, MI5 and the 'Carl Otten Group'" in *Political Exile and Exile Politics in Britain after 1933*, eds Grenville and Reiter, 187-207

<sup>105</sup> The source for this is Lehmann Russbueldt's own book, *Hitler's Wings of Death*, corroborated by Hansard.



(see separate biography). MI5 suspected both that Lehmann Russbueldt's information was exaggerated but also that he was passing it on to foreign bodies. One source suggested that his revelations could damage British-German trade: remember this is the mid-1930s and there was a strong collaborationist wing within the British establishment. Another of their concerns was to 'follow the money': was Lehmann-Russbueldt living on Russian gold or some other ill-gotten gains? In reality, he seems to have received a regular though small allowance from Wickham Steed.<sup>106</sup> MI5 set Sykes onto Lehmann Russbueldt who was not fluent in English, in the guise of a friendly translator with publishing contacts who tried to follow his every move.<sup>107</sup> What National Archive files also reveal is that Lehmann-Russbueldt was following the minutiae of the fallings out in the different exiled German revolutionary groupings. He also supported petitions, including 'An Appeal for a 'German Popular Front', signed by the SAP, SPD and, probably, the KPD (much to some comrades disgust), published in *l'Humanite*. (The Volksfront was an attempt in 1936 by the SPD to set up a German Popular front, backed by *Neue Beginnen*. Lacking real roots in the resistance, it died in 1938.) It appears he may then have regretted signing the petition. Berthold Jacob amongst others wrote to him saying he hoped the Committee had 'usurped' his name, in the way they did: this Front was all talk and no action.<sup>108</sup> The British Home Office was not kind to Lehmann-Russbueldt, repeatedly requesting copies of his different landing and registration cards and questioning his rights of residence here. They suspected him, a pacifist, of being in touch with Soviet espionage and with Münzenburg. MI5 also inevitably viewed him with suspicion, seeing him as a contact point with Germans and unsure whether this meant he was a spy, a Communist or, as was the case, 'merely' in touch with oppositionists. He was in contact with Hellmuth Simons, who worked at I.G. Farben, and who was convinced Germany was developing biological weapons. Simons fled Germany and at some point visited the UK and came to know Wickham Steed. This confirmed MI5's suspicions about Lehmann-Russbueldt and the need to continue their surveillance. They did not even believe his – true - story that the only way he could get out of Germany was to walk.

<sup>106</sup> Dove, Richard, *Flying and Spying*, in *Political exile and exile politics in Britain after 1933*, eds A. Grenville and A.Reiter, 195 Wickham-Steed, a leading British journalist, historian and an early anti-Nazi, publicised the secret German experiments in airborne biological warfare, evidence probably provided him by Lehmann -Russbueldt.

<sup>107</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*, 47-61, KV2/2006

<sup>108</sup> PF43895



The Home Office raised many questions about how Lehmann-Russbueldt was travelling on Czech papers.

As did so many of the refugees, Lehmann-Russbueldt had to regularly put in for extensions to his visa, reopening the possibility each time that the Home Office could refuse, although he at least had a few powerful backers. It was only in February 1939, so six years after arriving here, that he was granted permission to work as a freelance writer. In December 1939, he was summonsed before an Aliens Tribunal. Initially exempted from internment, he was subsequently interned in Huyton camp but he was released. On the day of Lehmann-Russbueldt's release on 20 August 1940, Home Office minutes stated: 'The fewer of these political agitators at large during the War the better. Refuse [earlier] appeal.' He later published articles about interning the 'loyal foes of Hitler'.<sup>109</sup>

As with so many of the other anti-Nazi refugees, there was a constant check on Lehmann-Russbueldt, to the point of a 'spy' following and checking on his research in the British Library. This surveillance was briefly lifted as he was a pacifist and understood as harmless but the Home Office reimposed surveillance in late 1936 because of his contacts, including with Groehl.<sup>110</sup> From 1936, they followed his correspondence closely, including with people in Prague, Paris, Amsterdam (to and from Edo Fimmen, amongst others) and to and from Ernst Toller relating to Jacob's kidnapping.<sup>111</sup> In 1937, his mail was still being opened and perused, including to and from the *Comité Internationale de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine*, the *Fédération internationale des Ligues des droits de l'Homme (FIDH)* and *Fédération des Émigrés d'Allemagne en France*. In September 1942, he signed 'Klub Konstruktivisten's' founding statement which stood against Nazism and militarism and for a new Germany. Later, in November 1942, he must have been spotted at a gathering of the Free German League of Culture (where he also spoke on a couple of occasions) and, despite his pacifist politics, Special Branch banged in an incriminating report, as they did after he spoke at a debate against Kahle (see separate biography) in August 1943 at a Free German Youth meeting. (On the other hand, this intervention led the 'spy' to observe with approval that maybe he was

<sup>109</sup> Brinson/Furness, 128

<sup>110</sup> KV2/2204

<sup>111</sup> See footnote in biography of Groehl. KV2/2002, from PF42816

not a communist after all.) Lehmann-Russbueldt was deeply concerned about what could be done to help many erstwhile comrades left, imprisoned or being persecuted in Germany (though they are usually referred to by their pseudonyms or initials which makes it difficult to know who they really were). Correspondence from and to Berthold Jacob, with whom he appears to have been friends, highlight widespread concerns about obtaining 'O's' (probably Ossietzky) release by, for example, eliciting the support of a well-established scientist living in Germany.<sup>112</sup> He also worked with the Quakers and others on behalf of Hans Litten (the lawyer famed for confronting Hitler in the witness box who paid with his life).<sup>113</sup> (See biography of Karl Retlaw for their - tragically unsuccessful - attempt to help Berthold Jacob, a failure which apparently haunted him for years.) In addition to being systematically spied on, Lehmann Russbueldt was also concerned with the growing threat of Nazi spies. Hans Weseman, a German agent, had indeed early on identified him.<sup>114</sup> A German spy pretending to come from Scotland Yard did try to get into his room to gain access to his papers. Dora Fabian almost certainly had first been burgled and then murdered by Nazi agents in her London flat, and Berthold Jacob, a German anti-Nazi and the source of some of his military intelligence, had been kidnapped by the Nazis from Switzerland. Berthold Jacob, an active and persecuted pacifist, highly critical of the Nazis' preparations for war, left Germany in the summer of 1932.

In March 1935, the Gestapo used an informer, Hans Weserman, a journalist, to entice Jacob to Basle in March 1935. Jacob had known Wesemann for some time and been the best man at his wedding.. He was kidnapped, taken to Germany and imprisoned. He survived the first time but was subsequently again kidnapped and did not. In addition, Herr Schwartz, a German police inspector, had turned out to be a (Jewish) agent sent here by the Gestapo who engaged in espionage activities against political refugees (and to have acted as a Nazi spy at the World Zionist Congress)

<sup>112</sup> KV2/2204. Carl von Ossietzky (1889 – 1938) was a German journalist, editor, strongly opposed to antisemitism and a pacifist, who received the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in exposing clandestine German re-armament (including training pilots in the USSR), partly as a result of much campaigning by anti-Nazis. He had been convicted of treason and espionage in 1931. Released, he was re-arrested and sent to a variety of camps as a result of which he died. Jacob was also killed by the Nazis.

<sup>113</sup> Brinson, C and Furness, N, 'Otto Lehmann-Russbueldt in British Exile', 124, in *German speaking exiles in Great Britain*, ed Ian Wallace, Rodopi, 1999

<sup>114</sup> Brinson, C and Furness, N., Otto-Lehmann-Russbueldt in British exile in *German-speaking exiles in Great Britain*, ed Ian Wallace, 120

under the alias of Dr. Harry Beneber. He was expelled from England in 1935.<sup>115</sup> Though one has to beware the high level of understandable paranoia which reigned in these refugee communities, 'Simons' (almost certainly Dr Helmut Simons) wrote to Lehmann-Russbueldt in June 1936, stating that there were about 250 Nazi agents in England, from Cambridge, to Norwich, to Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight.<sup>116</sup> Even if exaggerated, this letter is indicative of how frightened many of the refugees were, not just of being thrown out by Britain but also of being kidnapped or killed by Nazi agents.

Simons is himself interesting. A German anti-Nazi, he fled Germany in 1933, lived in Switzerland and then came to the UK. He was an expert on chemical and bacteriological warfare. He moved on to France where he was interned and tortured. According to a letter preserved by MI5, the Maquis bribed the guard, managed to release him and succeeded in smuggling him over Mount Saleve into Switzerland. Here he was in touch with Allen Dulles about Nazi use of biological and chemical warfare.<sup>117</sup>

Lehmann Russbueldt worked for German emigrant newspapers; from 1941 to 1946 (though one source states '1948'), he published 25 editions of the 'Newsletter of the Refugee', one of the most significant publications by refugees. He was prolific, producing many news sheets and articles for refugee papers and letters to the press, where he commented on many topical issues. He was however as always hampered by financial issues and his correspondence is laden with concerns over – not always successful - attempts to distribute and publicise his writings.

In 1944, he gathered a handful of refugees into the "German League in Exile". There was however a deep division amongst them as to whether or not to return to Germany.<sup>118</sup> In an open circular letter from December 1944 to General von Seydlitz and other generals in the Moscow - based 'National Committee for a Free Germany', Lehmann Russbueldt, who had written 'Neues um Schwarz-Weiss-Rot' in 1944, welcomed the creation of this movement but disapproved of their use of the black-

<sup>115</sup> KV2/2006

<sup>116</sup> KV2/2003, PF42816.

<sup>117</sup> PF42816

<sup>118</sup> Dove, op cit, *Political Exile and Exile Politics in Britain after 1933*, eds Grenville and Reiter

white-red flag, the flag of the *Freikorps* as well as of Bismarck.<sup>119</sup> To have Bismarck as the reference point only encouraged rather than challenged the old rotten German values. Unlike some of the refugees, he wanted to demonstrate the possibility of a 'new Germany'.

The security services were still keeping an active eye on him (and many of the people he was in contact with) up till at least 1951. Lehmann Russbueldt was still a pacifist, seeking programmes to educate the young about world peace, the memorialisation of murdered comrades and critical of the post-war Allies, while MI5's concern was now explicitly anti-Communist.<sup>120</sup> He was also trying to follow up on German friends who had 'disappeared'.<sup>121</sup> He only returned to W. Berlin in 1951, aged seventy eight, where he died in 1964, prolific to the end.

### **Ernst Meyer (sometimes known as Ernst Hermann Meyer or Peter Baker) (1905-1988)**

Ernst Meyer, born in Berlin, was a pupil of Hans Eisler (see separate biography), as well as a specialist in old English music and music critic. He joined the KPD in 1931 and fled in July 1933, apparently tipped off by a friend who told him in a chance encounter that the Nazis were waiting at his house. Meyer left with only the money he had in his pocket - and without his wife, Ilse - and somehow got to the UK. It is supposed he may have been one of the few who positively chose the UK because of his interest in the English 17th



century composer, Henry Purcell. Meyer lived in a flat in Hampstead, London, owned by the Communist film director Ralph Bond, for whose films he wrote scores. In October 1933, soon after arriving, Meyer was in contact with Lord Marley's Relief 'Committee for the Victims of German Fascism', so-called because Marley (Labour Party) was its chair but it was actually set up by Willi Münzenberg. Einstein was its Honorary Chair. It drew from a wide political spectrum but was inevitably accused of

<sup>119</sup> KV2/2006, LIV/SK/15/45. For further information on the Moscow Committee, the issue of the flag etc, see 'Anti-Nazi Germans' by M. Moos and S. Cushion.

<sup>120</sup> KV2/2006/1

<sup>121</sup> KV2/2006/2

pro-Communist bias. As early as June 1933 (so before Meyer arrived), it had held a fund-raising meeting attended by about 2500 people.

As ever within the refugee groups, there were MI5 informers who keep popping up. One such is 'Kaspar'. His real name was Josef Otto von Laemmel, an Austrian aristocrat, who fed MI5 information on fellow exiles till 1945, especially Austrians when he thought they were communists, which he frequently did. But he also reported on Germans such as Ernst Hermann Meyer, Heinz Schmidt,<sup>122</sup> Wilhelm Koenen and accused a few of homosexuality. Kaspar, who was keenly spying on Meyer's every movement for MI5 could never quite make out how politically significant a KPD figure he was.<sup>123</sup> SO2 (a subsection of SOE which dealt with active operations) certainly believed him to be a leading KPDer in the UK but this was contested. The most knowledgeable of the informants was 'Conquest', who knew Meyer personally, and probably was a fellow member of the William Morris Musical Society. As opposed to other informants, 'Conquest' saw Meyer as more interested in music than politics. He wrote in June 1941 that the suggestion that Meyer was in a position of 'supreme political leadership' was 'very surprising'. The ambiguity about Meyer's political role is shared. He joined the KPD exile group in London.<sup>124</sup> According to 'official' records of the time, while Siegi Moos was Secretary of the exile group until his 'resignation' in 1937, another account, by Leske, written in the early 1980s in East Germany and with questionable sources, suggests Meyer provided the leadership within the group and was the contact person with the KPD external leadership in Paris rather than Moos or, from 1937, Kuczcinki (see separate biography). But judging from Kuczynski's own memoir, from a personal conversation with Kuczynski's son and from the Bundesarchiv's archives on Siegi Moos, this seems most unlikely.<sup>125</sup> According to Brinson and Dove, Meyer may have been instructed to pretend not to belong to the KPD - or maybe was instructed to leave the KPD so as not to appear to be a member.<sup>126</sup> This is more than possible. The Communist Party used this tactic towards members here as well as in Germany. Just think of Kim Philby.

<sup>122</sup> Heinz Schmidt, SPD, then KPD, an activist, was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1934 and got to the UK in 1937.

<sup>123</sup> KV2/3502, Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*.

<sup>124</sup> For further information on the exile group, see my biography of my father: *'Beaten but not defeated'*.

<sup>125</sup> Leske's source material was apparently based on a highly unreliable and disrespected MI5 'source' (Brinson and Dove). I suspect she was being 'economic with the truth' to fit the East German Party line of the time. (Leske, Birgid (1983) *Des Eingens der Organization der KPD in Grossbritannien um die Verwirklichung der Einheits-und Volksfront-politik der KPD, 1934 bis Mai 1945* (Ph.D: Institut fur Marxisme-Leninismus beim CC der SPD, 1983) .

<sup>126</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence. MI5 and the Surveillance of Anti-Nazi Refugees, 1933-50*, MUP, 2014

This way Meyer could be a more effective front-man. Other sources however stress his party membership. Whether or not true, the MI5 source 'Sloane' wrote that Czech sources had stated that Meyer was a member of the exiled KPD 'control commission' here to purge anti-Stalinists through denunciation.

In 1939, the Aliens Tribunal exempted him from internment, at least in part because he was working as a composer for the GPO (Post Office) film unit, although the police wanted him interned. In August 1940, he was engaged by the Ministry of Information to compose music for their propaganda films e.g. 'Mobilise your scrap'. Though one must beware any memo from MI5 spies, it is still worth noting that Mr. Claud Sykes<sup>127</sup> wrote to B4 (responsible for Soviet counter-espionage under MI5) in June 1941 about Dr Meyer that he was 'a very reliable source of information'.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, Meyer became involved with the Free German League of Culture (FGLC), established in 1938, a product of Popular Front politics, professing itself to be an anti- Nazi group open to all. (See introduction for more detail.) Thought of as a KPD front, Meyer was, in fact, one of only three KPD members to sit on its EC. He became an active member and speaker. In 1942, he became its chairperson, though soon deposed. There were many faction fights, including over the degree to which the League should prioritise cultural rather than political activities. In June 1942, he chaired a meeting to protest at the destruction of Lidice in Czechoslovakia by the Nazis and the murder of its inhabitants after Heydrich's murder.

From 1940-1945, Meyer ran the active Cooperative Society choir. He was also close friends with Alan Bush, head of the William Morris Workers' Musical Association and member of the British Communist Party. Meyer also lectured at the Workers' Educational Association as well as at various universities. He played a leading role in the Workers' Musical Association, of which there was a communist party faction (apparently of four), despite it only having about 100 members altogether. Indeed, there was a debate as to whether to maintain the faction's separate existence. Its main function appears to have been to publicise Soviet freedom songs. Meyer became a leading figure in orchestrating a number of concerts which included some of the refugees' avant-garde music for the Music section of the FGLC, including

<sup>127</sup> Sykes, a British writer and translator, was a spy for a Mi5 agent, charged with infiltrating German refugee circles in London and was connected with the Home Office. His official job gave him an excellent cover for 'translating' for non-English speaking refugee authors (op cit 63-76).

<sup>128</sup> KV 2/3502, 46a

concerts to raise money for Russia. Where he failed to get a foothold was in the BBC, who turned down him and his music, an example of the difficulties even prestigious refugee musicians had in getting 'standard' jobs at the time.

MI5 finally caught up with him and in March 1945, he was stopped from giving a lecture on music to British troops, the commander having been told that Meyer was not the sort of man to be released on the troops.<sup>129</sup> Meyer returned to the GDR in 1948 and became a highly influential figure in the world of music as well as continuing his political involvement.

### **Margaret Mynatt (1907-1977)**

Born in Austria to an English musician father (and therefore blessed with a British passport) and a Jewish Austrian mother, she moved to Berlin in 1929. Unlike almost all the refugees included here, she became active in British politics and a stalwart member of the British communist party. She lived here till her death. Her life reveals quite how heavy-handed MI5 could be towards refugees but especially Communists.

In Berlin, she had joined the KPD, worked as a journalist and became involved in the dramatic circle around Bertolt Brecht. She fled to Prague immediately following the Reichstag fire (along with John Heartfield). Briefly imprisoned, she moved on to Paris, then London. At some point, she became a 'Soviet spy' and worked as an underground courier for the Comintern. (Ironically, judging from the relative absence of earlier files about her, MI5 seemed to have only twigged her wider political commitments after the war.)

Dora Fabian and Mathilde Wurm had died in suspicious circumstances in April 1935, deaths the British Government was not over-concerned about. In 1937/38, Clara Leise, an American journalist, finally decided to investigate, and took on Margaret Mynatt and Yvonne Kapp as research assistants.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Mynatt carried out clandestine activities for the KPD, including acting as a courier to the Comintern, carrying money from the USSR. Unusually she joined the British CP rather than being involved in the KPD exile group or the League.

<sup>129</sup> Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*

<sup>130</sup> Yvonne Helene Kapp (1903 – 1999) was a British writer and political activist and a communist. In 1938 she was co-author, with Margaret Mynatt, of *British Policy and the Refugees*, not published until 1968, and she was also employed by the CRTF. Her best known book is on Eleanor Marx.



MI5 were of course interested in her but especially after she became an officer of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund (CRTF), where she was Head of Tribunals from 1938-1941.<sup>131</sup> This was a position, MI5 deemed, which gave her unparalleled access to potential refugees' records and therefore allowed her to influence who would be one of the chosen. MI5 saw the CRTF as a nest for British Communists, including Mynatt.<sup>132</sup> According to MI5: 'The CRTF staff and hostels were heavily penetrated by Communists who on occasions provided to the Aliens Tribunals false allegations of Gestapo connections against non-Communist refugees'!<sup>133</sup> A memo from January, 1940, signed 'MI5' calls for the dismissal of Communist Party members in Executive positions and the removal of foreign Communists.<sup>134</sup> Mynatt qualified on both counts and, after a short while, she and Kapp were dismissed from their positions in the CRTF by the Foreign Office. One positive outcome of having time on their hands was the writing of *'British Policy and the Refugees'* with Kapp, a stinging critique of Government policy towards the refugees, still worth reading today. Mynatt then made a career in journalism: she became Head of Reuters Soviet Monitor (1951-1951), and, in 1951, worked for the Soviet Tass Agency radio-monitoring station in Whetstone, North London. She became manager of Central Books (1951-1966), and a director at the publishers Lawrence and Wishart (1966-1977). At the time of her death, she was editor-in-chief of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels.

### **Arthur Rosenberg (1889-1943)**

Arthur Rosenberg was only briefly in the UK but he played such a key role in the German Communist movement and has remained so remarkably unheard of that I am

<sup>131</sup> The CRTF is a subject unto itself! The Czech Refugee Trust Fund (CRTF), the successor to the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, established and run by the British Government after its sell-out in Munich, provided entry visas to the UK, which some Germans who had fled to Czechoslovakia qualified for. It brought about 15000 refugees to the UK altogether, Communists and Social Democrats. But the CRTF was suspected, especially by MI5, of also being a conduit both for members of the KPD: they suspected about a third were Communists. and of the Gestapo, the later posing as refugees. While both possibilities were taken seriously, MI5 was especially concerned about communists, both on the staff, including Mynatt, and the refugees being sponsored ( Brinson and Dove, *A Matter of Intelligence*, 142-144, MUP, 2014), MI5 were very aware of the extraordinary hostility between the Social Democratic and Communist refugees, including the charge that the Communists conspired to keep out the Social Democrats: 'political terrorising' as one memo put it, which continued even after they had got to the UK. Mr William Gillies, of the International section of the Labour Party and sympathetic to Vansittartism and the 'Fight for Freedom' faction in the Labour Party, hardly helped. He wrote to the Home Office in 1939 asking them to do something about how the horrid Communists were 'persecuting' the Social Democratic exiles, a charge which, the papers show, legitimated MI5's existing assumptions (KV 2/2714).

<sup>132</sup> KV 2/2714

<sup>133</sup> KV 2/2714

<sup>134</sup> KV 2/2714

including him. He is also of interest because of his – horribly relevant - analysis of the rise of Nazism, written in the mid-1930s in the UK.<sup>135</sup> During the First World War, Rosenberg was drafted into the public relations wing of the German military apparatus. As soon as revolution broke out in Munich and Berlin, he joined the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) in 1918 and strongly supported Eisner's policy of 'direct democracy' through workers' councils in Bavaria, which he saw as a type of 'council democracy'. Eisner had briefly led the Munich Soviet in 1918 before being assassinated by a right-wing nationalist in 1919.

In 1920, Rosenberg joined the KPD and, when the 'left' gained dominance in 1924, became a Reichstag deputy, playing a significant – left - role in the KPD leadership, and becoming a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. From 1922 to 1924, Rosenberg was foreign editor of the International Press Correspondence, a journal of the Comintern.



Rosenberg was a key part of the left-wing tendency from 1921 to his final departure from the KPD in 1927. In 1922, he supported a workers revolution based on workers councils. He was also against being soft on the SPD. In 1922/23, Germany was – mistakenly - understood as close to socialist revolution which ruled out joint work between the Communists and the Social Democrats, whom he described as a “party of despair” and “politically dead.” He was almost alone in predicting that disillusionment with the policies of the SPD-led governments would lead to a swing to the right, towards forces like the recently emerged Nazi Party. This made the role of the KPD in drawing in working class support vital.

Instead, Rosenberg argued that the KPD should pursue a revolutionary offensive against the Weimar Republic. From the spring of 1925, he was part of the leadership of the left opposition primarily with Werner Scholem, arguing that the KPD was failing to give concrete support to workers in struggle.<sup>136</sup> By 1925, Fischer who was briefly in the leadership of the KPD arranged for Rosenberg and others to be removed

<sup>135</sup> The following only gives a feeling of his very active life in the KPD in the 1920s: for anybody who would like to know more, see Banaji, Jairus, *The Political Odyssey of Arthur Rosenberg, Germany's Forgotten Marxist*, <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/01/arthur-rosenberg-germany-marxist-historian>.; I have used other sources such as <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/>

<sup>136</sup> See my review of the biography of Werner Scholem elsewhere in Community Languages.

from the Berlin district leadership for opposing the Comintern. In fact, it was Fischer who was purged, to be replaced by

However, by 1927, Rosenberg had become openly critical of Soviet interference in the affairs of the KPD, that the party was isolated and failing to provide leadership in struggle against the employers' offensive and that Stalin was encouraging the Chinese Communist party to maintain a pact with Chiang Kai-shek. He also opposed –earlier than most - the notion of 'socialism in one country'. In 1927, after much internal wrangling, Rosenberg, resigned from the KPD. Predictably, Rosenberg was attacked from all sides (His only defender was Carl von Ossietzky: see references elsewhere).<sup>137</sup> After he left the KPD, Rosenberg became more of an academic. He was part of an informal circle that met at Karl Korsch's house. They described themselves as "libertarian socialists," and included figures such as the novelist Alfred Döblin, Bertolt Brecht, Karl Liebknecht's older brother Theodor, as well as the Indian Marxist M. N. Roy and the photographer Jenö Friedmann — later better known as Robert Capa.<sup>138</sup> Rosenberg's two major works during these years till he fled were *The Birth of the German Republic, 1871–1918* (1928) and *A History of Bolshevism*. At this early point, Rosenberg argued that in the USSR, "a state-capitalist ruling apparatus' had been formed which had established its independence vis-à-vis the producing strata."<sup>139</sup> When the Nazis took power, Rosenberg fled to Zurich and then to Britain in September 1933. After he was generally cold-shouldered, by British academia (including the left), in February 1934 he finally obtained a temporary post at the University of Liverpool. Here, he and his family were supported by the Academic Assistance Council. (In one of those strange quirks of history, the historian who strongly supported his application to the AAC was Friedrich Meinecke, who had been his well-respected tutor in Germany but who had distinctly anti-Semitic views. Meinicke described Rosenberg as a 'particularly gifted researcher'.) But with no further prospect of a job in the UK, he and his family left for the United States in October 1937 (an arduous journey via Canada and Cuba because of the US's immigration laws),<sup>140</sup> Rosenberg's first published work in exile: *Fascism as a Mass Movement*, argued that fascism was a consequence of the decline of liberal ideas of equality, the development of

<sup>137</sup> Banaji, Jairus, 'The Political Odyssey of Arthur Rosenberg, Germany's Forgotten Marxist', <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/01/arthur-rosenberg-germany-marxist-historian/>

<sup>138</sup> Op cit.

<sup>139</sup> Op cit.

<sup>140</sup> Ritter, Gerhard *German Refugee Historians* and Friedrich Meinecke: Letters and Documents

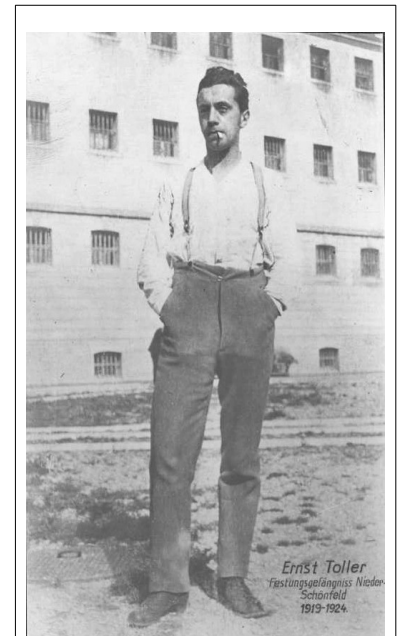
protectionism and of a strong state that would buttress the interests of big business. Instead, traditional forms of economic and social (including racial) hierarchy were increasingly acceptable which were irreconcilable with democracy and gave rise to “racial frenzy” and demagogic nationalism that mobilised the masses against minorities. He argued that there was crucial ideological common ground between fascist movements and wider forms of authoritarian conservatism. What was new and distinctive about fascism was both the calculated use of storm troopers against a threatening working-class and its mass base

### **Ernst Toller (1893-1939)**

A figure who has received surprisingly little attention in the UK is Ernst Toller. (The honourable exception is Richard Dove’s *He was a German. A biography of Ernst Toller*, from which I draw.) Toller was a leading figure in the failed German revolution of 1918/19 and later became a strong campaigner in the UK against the Nazis. According to Richard Dove, once in exile, England was the country Toller felt most at home. But he was, like the other exiles, torn from the literary and political soil from which he had gained his political experiences and had flourished.

Toller, born in 1893, was disabused of any illusions about Germany when witnessing the horrors of World War 1 in the trenches. Initially influenced by Gustav Landauer’s brand of anarcho-syndicalism and pacifism, Toller was precipitated into the revolutionary movement by the outbreak of strikes in Munich, led by Kurt Eisner (1867 – 1919),. Ever since, there has been a debate, sometimes heated, about how far Toller’s initial anarchistic tendencies continued to influence his politics.

On 29 October 1918, the sailors of the German fleet had mutinied when ordered to continue the fight against the British, precipitating mass strikes across much of Germany. Eisner a journalist and theatre critic, was a member of the USPD from 1917, a breakaway from the SPD on an anti-war platform, who had been deeply opposed to the First World War from its beginning and the Social Democrats collusion with it. On



*Ernst Toller during his imprisonment in the Niederschönenfeld fortress (early 1920s)*

7 November 1918, Eisner marched on the city's barracks and persuaded the soldiers to join them; many soldiers, with their arms, deserted their barracks and flocked to support the demonstration. About 75,000 defence workers participated in the strike, demanding the end of the war. In Munich, there were over 10,000 strikers. Munich was paralysed by the strike. Eisner proclaimed the People's State of Bavaria in November 1918 and became its first republican leader. On 9 November, the Kaiser abdicated and the new republic was declared, the government to be run by the Social Democrat, Ebert.

The war ended but the upheavals rolled on. By the end of January 1919, workers across Munich were on strike including at Krupps and other factories producing war material. Toller was elected onto a new strike committee formed to win support for the thousands on strike. A brilliant orator, he made many speeches to galvanise support at factory meetings. Workers' councils and committees were established but were never properly coordinated. Armed groups of workers and militia took over the streets of Munich. In a situation where neither the soviets nor the government held power, Eisner briefly formed a left coalition government with the Social Democrats in early January 1919. But Eisner's People's State of Bavaria was dependent on the Social Democrats to stay in power. About to resign, he was assassinated by far-right German nationalist Count Arco-Valley in Munich. After Eisner's assassination on 21 March 1919, the Social Democratic Johannes Hoffman briefly succeeded as 'Prime Minister' of Bavaria.

But on 6/7 April 1919, the Spartacist leader, Max Leviné, declared the establishment of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in Munich.<sup>141</sup> Leviné was dispatched by the KPD Central Committee to avoid another blood bath as had occurred in Berlin and to emphasize the importance of –the largely- absent workers' councils. Again, workers' militias were created, especially in the large metalworking companies and working-class areas. Hoffman under pressure from the workers' movement fled. But there were deep divisions over the viability of the Soviet, in particular between Eugene Leviné representing the young German Communist Party (KPD) with Toller and other

<sup>141</sup> During the November revolution, Leviné was active in the soldiers' councils, working closely together with anarchist writer and activist Erich Muhlsam. He became chair of the Munich Soldiers' Council and the Munich Spartacus group, and participated as a delegate in the founding convention of KPD, then becoming party chair for KPD in Bavaria. He became the new leader of the revolution and, on 7th April, 1919, declared the establishment of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Leviné managed to escape to Austria after the fall of the Soviet and went from there to the USSR. Arrested, Leviné was executed on 16th June, 1937.

‘independents’ (though the USPD was itself split). Leviné understood how fragile this ‘revolution’ was, without proper grounding in workers’ councils, and attacked the ‘pseudo soviet republic’.

On 7th April, the Bavarian Soviet Republic was declared with Toller as its elected head. His ‘cabinet’ included anarchists and pacifists, such as the writer Gustav Landauer and playwright, Erich Muhsam. Toller issued an appeal for working class unity and for Hoffman’s government to be deposed. But lacking a sufficient working-class base and any sort of armed insurrection, the Soviet stood little chance. On Saturday 12 April 1919, the KPD, led by Leviné, took over power.

In the meantime, Hoffman had fled and began gathering about 8,000 troops, including members of the *Freikorps*<sup>142</sup>, outside of Munich to attack the Bavarian Soviet Republic. There was a massive general strike in Munich, but nowhere else. Hoffman essentially blockaded Munich, which ran out of food. It was Toller who became the ‘red general’ for an ‘army’ made up of armed workers and soldiers. Toller with his 30,000 republican guard clashed with Hoffman’s unit at Dachau on 18 April and repulsed them.

Ebert, the Social Democrat President of Germany, then gathered 30,000 *Freikorps* to take back Munich. Munich fell after a couple of days and the Soviet Republic ended on 1 May 1919 after holding power for six days. The revolutionary uprising was defeated in a bath of blood. An estimated 700 men and women were captured and executed, many more arrested.

Toller was lucky. Condemned for high treason, he was merely imprisoned for 5 years; at least 700 other people were executed including Leviné by firing squad.

Toller was deeply influenced by these events. He threw himself into writing poetry and plays which he wanted to always have a political purpose and which were almost all directed against the escalating threat of Nazism. Later in the 1920’s, he supported a defence alliance of workers’ organisations (as opposed to the KPD’s Third Period line). The Nazis’ growing anti-Semitism also alarmed him leading him to question his

<sup>142</sup> The *Freikorps* was effectively the old German Army, banned by the victorious Western allies, but now operating as mercenaries under the command of rightist generals. They were the force which both destroyed the Bavarian revolution and the uprising in Berlin and were to have a strong influence on the SA.

estrangement from Judaism and to ask rhetorically whether being Jewish meant he couldn't be German, the country of his birth and the language he spoke.

By mid- 1932, the right-wing Government and the Nazis were threatening progressive writers. Toller first hesitated to flee when Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933. On February 27, 1933, the *Reichstag* was set on fire. The Dutch left-winger Marinus van der Lubbe was arrested soon after. The Nazi leaders accused the KPD of having committed the arson. The Nazis had been in power for less than a month; the *Reichstag* fire provided the perfect excuse for the arrest of thousands of Communists (and to a lesser degree Social Democrats) and others active in the workers' movement (many later murdered).

Whether by luck or design, Toller was speaking in Switzerland on the night of the *Reichstag* fire, when the SA stormed into his and many other anti-Nazis' flats. That night the police and SA attempted to arrest, amongst others, Brecht, Erich Muhsam (of Bavarian fame), Heinrich Mann and Arnold Zweig, both writers, Georg Grosz, the painter and caricaturist, John Heartfield, the artist, Erwin Piscator, the dramatist, and Kurt Hiller, of whom more anon, and many leading members of the KPD.

Toller was lucky to have Dora Fabian as a friend (see her biography). She got into his flat on the night of the fire and rescued two large suitcases of his papers. The rest of his literary archive basically 'disappeared'. Toller was then deprived of German citizenship, much earlier than most on the left. In a speech on 1st April, 1933, Goebbels specifically denounced Toller as a public enemy of the Third Reich.

Toller stayed briefly in Switzerland but had moved on to Britain by September 1933, where he lived in Hampstead till late 1936. He became active in International PEN.<sup>143</sup> German PEN, which had already expelled him, was being torn apart because of its failure to criticise the book burning in Germany. Toller was invited to PEN's International conference in May 1933, as a member of the English delegation. H.G. Wells, the chair, invited him to speak, whereupon he gave a rousing speech, emphasising the importance of uniting in opposition to the barbarism and irrationality of Nazism. The German and Dutch delegations walked out. Toller was a witness at Münzenberg's 'Commission into the Burning of the Reichstag'. This was an unofficial

<sup>143</sup> Originally just called PEN, it was founded in 1921 and within a few years had centres in most European countries. It was the first international bodies supporting human rights for all writers.

investigation by a group of European lawyers established to investigate the cause of the Reichstag fire, held in England. It concluded, contentiously, that it was the Nazis themselves who started the fire.

Toller had already visited the UK in 1927, 1928 and 1929. He had met with the ILP and become involved in the setting up of the League against Colonial Oppression with Münzenberg, a German KPD member, acting for the Comintern (with a commitment to the Third Period line). Fenner Brockway, a leading ILP member, was the League's first International Chair, later replaced by James Maxton.

Toller knew Brockway and was close to the ILP, giving advice and contacts for illegal work in Germany. Toller's almost unknown play; 'Berlin', produced in 1930, using 'documentary realism', depicts a scene based on Brockway's denunciation of British policy in India in the House of Commons in July 1930. (for which Brockway was suspended from the House of Commons.)<sup>144</sup> They had close relations with some of those opposing Hitler. Brockway, representing the ILP, had no problem endorsing the supposed 'illegality' of those resisting the Nazi regime post 1933. Brockway, initially a pacifist after the First World War, as General Secretary of the ILP, went to Spain to rescue those opposing and being murdered by the Communists, rather than from the Francoists. His particular concern was George Orwell. The ascendancy of fascism persuaded him that one has to fight against fascism. The ILP had ties with members of the USPD, some of whom Toller was still in contact with. (The SPD were understood as supine.) Brockway was involved in organising forged passports for refugees from Nazism, and getting refugees out of Germany and the Saarland, without valid passports, right up to the outbreak of war. They also printed and smuggled into Germany 3 inches square newspapers in support of the struggle against Nazism.<sup>145</sup> Toller also campaigned for the rights of refugees, which he viewed as part of the struggle of humanity over barbarism. He became convinced that there would be a European war and, in a shift from his earlier position, argued for the importance of the popular front against fascism and became, at least temporarily, sympathetic to the Soviet Union as a result.

<sup>144</sup> Dove, Richard, Fenner Brockway and Ernst Toller, *Drame In Berlin*, 1984,, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.1984.tb00615.x>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80004783>



Toller had become increasingly convinced he needed to emphasise political, rather than literary, activity. He wrote for the left-wing *Reynolds News* (hands up those of us who still remember this paper!), explaining that one has to always struggle for political freedom against the power of the State, the capitalist system and the ruling class.

The publication of virtually his entire work in Britain gave him relative financial independence, which he used to launch a major campaign to help fellow-refugees in Britain and France. Toller was in great demand as a speaker and became a popular campaigner in the UK against Nazism. He spoke at a variety of writers' conferences, speeches which all received wide publicity, as well as at the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Workers Education Association, various universities and the Anglo-Soviet Friendship League. Toller's denunciations focused on Nazism's attack on intellectual freedom and on innocent German writers, maybe to avoid being seen as politically active in order to avoid deportation.

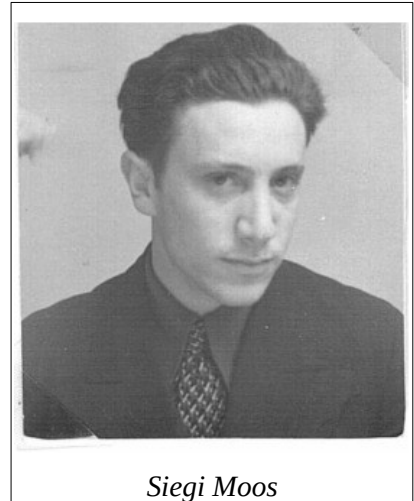
In 1938, Toller who by then had moved to the US, travelled to Spain, where he spoke to International Brigades on the Ebro front. He organised relief for Spanish civilians. He argued that Germany's involvement was a dress rehearsal for a wider conflict and was critical of appeasement and the sham of "non-intervention". On 21st September 1938, he returned to London and campaigned for support for the Spanish Relief Plan. At this point, even Leon Blum, Socialist Prime Minister of France, held a non-interventionist perspective. The British government did not want to upset the German government. On August 26 1938, in Madrid, Toller gave a radio speech urging all the democratic powers, but especially President Roosevelt, to lend their support. Note how Toller had moved from a 'united front' to a 'popular front' position. Toller travelled to France, Great Britain, the Scandinavian countries and finally the US in support of his relief project. But the Republic lost.

In the spring of 1939, Toller, back in the US, exhausted, deeply disheartened by the defeat of the Republicans, the successes of the totalitarian regimes and cut off from both Germany and Britain, sank into depression and killed himself on the 22nd May 1939. In his eulogy at Toller's funeral, the writer, Sinclair Lewis, described Toller as "a symbol of the revolution."

## 1933/34

### Lotte (1909-2008) and Siegi Moos (1905-1988)

Siegi Moos was a significant and stalwart Communist in Berlin who later led the UK KPD exile group but then left the KPD as early as 1937. This was not just unusual in Britain but across much of Europe at the time. He and Lotte were also one of a very select band who did not return to Germany (despite Siegi being invited to work in East Berlin). Lotte Moos, also very much on the left but more of a 'by-stander' in Berlin, following various adventures after she arrived in the UK, became of great interest to MI5.



Siegi Moos

Siegi Moos was an active member of the KPD, a local leader of the Red Front in Berlin who carried arms, an officer of the Proletarian Freethinkers in Berlin (and maybe nationally: they were a KPD associated humanist group though in practice they probably were rather more), the leader of a local agit-prop group: *Rotes Sprachrohr* (aiming to encourage class struggle and anti-Nazi- and probably also anti-SPD - activity and beliefs)<sup>146</sup>, a major theoretician about the role of left-wing theatre and a well-known left-wing lyricist, who worked alongside some of the 'greats'. He went underground on the night of the *Reichstag* fire and, hunted by the Gestapo, had to escape on foot out of Germany. After too many adventures en route, he finally arrived in the UK in February 1934, endorsed, crucially, by the MP, Maxton.<sup>147</sup>

According to MI5 files, a 'Moos', almost certainly Siegi, had also acted for the Comintern in the early 1930s, as the link between the Comintern and India, to sell oil from 'Russian Oil Products' to India. The meetings were in London. By 1924, the Comintern had passed 'responsibility' for India to the British CP. Percy Glading, a leading British CP member, was sent there to investigate and later on, a number of links were forged. Glading got a job with Russian Oil Products in the early 1930s and

<sup>146</sup> The Red Mouthpiece' was the most important German agitprop theatre during the Weimar Republic, founded by M. Vallentin and associated with the Communist Youth Organisation.

<sup>147</sup> James Maxton (1885 –1946) was a Scottish Labour MP, a leading figure in Red Clydeside, a bitter critic of Labour under MacDonald and the leader of the ILP. In 1927, he was also elected International Chairperson of the League against Imperialism, a possible contact point with Siegi, also overlapping with Siegi's involvement in India.

became the link between that company and the CPGB. This is the very time Siegi was involved. MI5 believed Glading then ran a spy ring for the USSR.

Siegi Moos was the Secretary of the tiny German-speaking Communist exile group. A document obtained from the *Bundesarchiv* stated that Siegi ‘was put in by us as group leader [of the KPD exile group], the only active and willing comrade.’ This certainly suggests he was under some form of ‘instruction’.<sup>148</sup> Its prime purpose was to smuggle anti-Nazi literature into Germany and to provide a fulcrum for left-leaning German refugees. Siegi left or was thrown out according to Lotte’s testimony during her interrogation from the KPD in early 1937. A combination of what Lotte had witnessed and experienced in Moscow, at the very time that the trials were beginning, and the deadly role played by the Comintern in the Spanish civil war left him -and her - wanting nothing more to do with the Comintern or the KPD. (Later, the Hitler- Stalin pact confirmed Siegi’s antipathy.) He was replaced, or more probably bounced, by Jurgen Kuczinski, a far more orthodox KPD member. (See separate biography) The MI5 notes focus on Siegi Moos’s academic career in the UK from then on, unlike most other profiles which concentrate on the refugees’ political activities.

Siegi no longer felt he had a left-wing ‘home’ and basically became a left wing academic, although deeply involved in his university union branch and also the WEA. Unlike many ex-Communists, he never moved to the right but also never really sympathized with a broadly Trotskyist critique of the USSR. Later, he became an advisor to Harold Wilson.<sup>149</sup> Ironically he always refused to have anything to do with the Labour Party, having witnessed the bloody betrayals of the SPD.<sup>150</sup> I sang him the Internationale on his death-bed.

My mother, Lotte Moos, was also a German socialist, well to the left of the SPD, though it has proved impossible to find out about any activities in Germany. (She was probably sympathetic to the Brandlerites.) She met Siegi in the left-wing agit-prop

<sup>148</sup> The group’s membership, again drawn from the *Bundesarchiv* list, includes a few others included in these biographies: Guenther Reimann, Rosa Leviné-Meyer, her son Genja Leviné, her stepson Rudi Meyer, Ernst Meyer and his unnamed wife (Ilse Meyer), Lucia Moholy (a well-known Bauhaus photographer and partner of Theodore Neubauer, who was to become a major Communist resistance hero), Edith Bone, Lisa Cocker, Egon Schulenburg, Max Berger, Heinero Cassirer, Paul Berliner, Hans Eisler and his wife, Lou Jolesch (‘temporarily’), the unnamed daughter of the CP academic Professor Kuczynski, Gerhard Friedlander (son of Ruth Fischer and Paul Friedlander), and Siegfried Moos the ‘only trusted comrade’. Despite being microscopic, MI5 continued their surveillance. (M. Moos: *Beaten but not defeated*)

<sup>149</sup> Strangely there is no separate file on him, which, it might be suspected, could be because the Wilson Government wanted to conceal the politics of some of their advisors.

<sup>150</sup> Anybody interested in further detail, can read my biography of my father: *Beaten but not Defeated*.

group he was directing and they moved in together after the horrors of the shootings on the May 1st, 1929 demonstration, which they both took part in but separately. They married in 1932. She insisted she would flee after Hitler became Chancellor, thus probably saving Siegi's life.

After briefly living in Paris, but again 'smelling' the growth of the ultra-right, she successfully got into the UK, to be followed some months later, by Siegi. But all was not well. She met Brian Gould Veschoyles, a low grade spy for the Soviet Union, and followed him to the USSR in early 1936. She had to 'escape' as the attention they were receiving from the Soviet Secret Police rightly terrified her. (Brian was to die in the gulag.)



*Lotte Moos*

Back in London, in 1937, and at some point reunited with Siegi, they then started to have to jump the hoops like most of the refugees for ever applying for extensions to their right to stay in the UK, sometimes monthly, supported by the Quakers.<sup>151</sup> Siegi's application for an extension includes reference to his working relationship at the LSE with the illustrious anti-Nazi refugee and economist Dr Kuczinki, Jurgen's father.

Lotte then wanted to go to the US to finally finish a degree. She successfully enrolled at Swarthmore but yet again failed to finish as she had to make the choice between getting stuck in the US for the duration of the war or coming back to the UK and Siegi. But in the meantime, she had visited Krivitsky, a double agent for the USSR and the USA, who had had an article published about Brian (and was soon himself murdered). "MOOS came to the UK as a Jewish refugee from Germany in 1933. Subsequent contacts with Communists in the UK, two of whom had connections with Russian Intelligence, led to suspicions about her own position. Walter KRIVITSKY, a senior OGPU figure, considered her an OGPU agent of great importance".<sup>152</sup> Back in London, MI5 did not just keep tabs on her but all her, highly

<sup>151</sup> KV2/1242

<sup>152</sup> Krivitsky was a Soviet intelligence officer who defected in 1937 and later revealed plans of the Hitler- Stalin pact, as well as 'fingering' supposed Soviet spies to the British Government. He was almost certainly murdered by GPU agents. His position (in 'I was Stalin's Agent') is interesting, even if probably an exaggeration: 'If one can speak of a pro-German in the Kremlin, Stalin has been that figure all along. Stalin favoured cooperation with Germany from the

conventional, family and others with whom she was acquainted. Lotte had some interesting, and suspicious, friends, according to the MI5 records. One was Béla Menczer, also friends with Siegi, who translated 'Fascist Italian brutality in Ethiopia, 1935-1937: an eyewitness account' by Sáska László, with an introduction by Sylvia Pankhurst.<sup>153</sup> Another was Theodor Heinisch, even finding him a place to stay at the Lawn Road flats in 1935.<sup>154</sup>

Theodor Heinisch (1908-1998), KPÖ, co-founder of and activist in the Austrian underground free white-collar workers' union. He was imprisoned most of the time between 1939 -1943. After 1945, he was secretary of the Federation of Austrian Resistance Fighters. MI5 also were very interested in her friendship with Edith Bone (see other biography) and with Edith Tudor Hart, whom MI5 had Lotte living with for some time in 1934. Edith Tudor-Hart (née Suschitzky; 1908 – 1973), who fled with her husband to London in 1933, was an Austrian photographer who trained under Gropius at the Bauhaus- and whose photographic documentary work has often been significantly underestimated. She is seen as being instrumental in the recruiting of the Cambridge 5, though MI5 were slow to catch on.

Finally back with Siegi, she was then sent to Holloway Prison in 1940 as a suspected spy. Whether she ever was a member of the KPD is a moot point but, under interrogation in Holloway, she claimed she was between 1934 and 1936. But then she claims she thought she was suspected of being a Nazi and she may well have felt she needed to establish her left credentials. Finally, categorized as a B under the internment procedures, she was sent on for more regular internment on the Isle of Man. Siegi campaigned for her release, and based at the University of Oxford, succeeded in getting the 'great and the good' to lobby on her behalf. Upon release, and after having had to escape from or been imprisoned by three different political

moment of Lenin's death, [to counterpoise other European countries] and he did not alter this basic attitude when Hitler rose to power. On the contrary, the triumph of the Nazis strengthened him in his quest for closer bonds with Berlin.' There is an irony that Krivitsy, who was developing a sympathy with Trotskyism, fingered Lotte.

<sup>153</sup> Bela Menczer was a Hungarian and academic. He emigrated to Paris, Berlin and London, advised the exiled Ethiopian Government and served in De Gaulle's army.

<sup>154</sup> Theodor Heinisch (1908-1998), KPÖ, co-founder of and activist in the Austrian underground free white-collar workers' union. He was imprisoned most of the time between 1939 -1943. After 1945, he was secretary of the Federation of Austrian Resistance Fighters.

regimes, she became phobic about political involvement, though she remained very much on the left as her many plays, stories and poetry reveal.<sup>155</sup>

Though these biographies do not look into the psychological effect of becoming ‘derooted’, I want to develop briefly on this in the case of Lotte and Siegi and suggest some differences between them. Lotte and Siegi both made successful lives here, Siegi as a lecturer, Lotte as a writer. But their experiences and the fate of their families deeply marked them. Siegi carved out a successful career for himself which did not compromise his beliefs, and, though he had lost all he had stood and fought for (and his family and comrades), he was able to make a second life for himself. But Lotte never felt at home here: she felt, as she wrote, like ‘a stranger in a foreign land’. Unlike Siegi, she became stuck at home, looking after a child, a fate I suggest which distinguished the experiences of many anti-Nazi women from the men, and left many of these previously anti-Nazi warriors far more isolated than the men. After one too many dances with death and imprisonment (and the murder of virtually all her family), she found any form of closeness almost impossible. Neither of them trusted anybody, not surprising after their experiences and the Cold War but not conducive to political or person engagement.

Neither of them, unusually, considered returning to either Germany: the East because of its Stalinist (and lethal) character, the West because of its failure to de-Nazify. And, anyway, what was there to return to. Siegi received a couple of ‘invitations’ in that brief period between the opening up after the end of the War and the closing down by the Cold War, to participate in or join cultural/political organisations in East Germany but he refused. MI5 kept regular tabs on Lotte till at least 1953, illustrating their continuing obsession with anything ‘Communist’. Not for them a slide into passivity or cynicism: they both died convinced socialists.

## 1934

### Hans Eisler (1898-1962)

Eisler’s time in London was spasmodic and brief but he was, more than many of the exiles, an active anti-Nazi campaigner. He is a better known figure than some of the

<sup>155</sup> David Perman has written Lotte’s biography; *Stranger in a Foreign Land*, although its focus is more on her – considerable – cultural output rather than her politics.

exiles, not so much because of his time in the UK but because of his collaboration with Brecht, his infamous appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee and his return to East Germany where he wrote its national anthem.

Though born in Germany, he grew up in Vienna where he became an active socialist at an early age. But he returned to Berlin where he joined the KPD and wrote as the music critic for its paper, *Rote Fahne*. A student of Arnold Schoenberg and his 12-tone method, Eisler rejected that style for a simpler one, so as to try to express a working-class Marxist ethos. To Schoenberg's dismay, Eisler's music became increasingly geared towards the agit-prop movement. He developed anti-Nazi 'fighting' songs (*Kampdlieder*), frequently performed by the left-wing (often Communist) agit-prop groups in Berlin's working class neighbourhoods. Eisler also wrote the music for many of Brecht's plays and his socialist songs were popular throughout the left. He also wrote many songs for the famous Ernst Busch, a working-class singer, who performed in the workers' clubs and pubs in the last years of the Weimar Republic.<sup>156</sup> One example of his collaboration



with Brecht and Busch tells the story of how an initially enthusiastic Nazi brown-shirt sees the error of his ways upon being ordered to shoot at fellow workers. After 1933, Eisler's music and Brecht's poetry were banned. Fortuitously, Eisler was in Vienna when Hitler became Chancellor and knew not to return. First he fled to France where in February 1934 he witnessed and demonstrated against an attempted putsch by French far-right. Then he arrived in the UK, where he was a member, at least briefly, of the KPD exile group. MI5 showed much interest.

It is worth noting that two years before he arrived here, Eisler was already being monitored by the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).<sup>157</sup> The earliest document in

<sup>156</sup> Busch was a well-known performer of left-wing songs, associated with Brecht, and a member of the KPD. He fled the Nazis to the USSR, where, according to my mother, who knew him in Moscow, he betrayed various 'off-line' comrades, who were then deported back to Germany and death. Her hatred of him was so great that she would not accept a gift of a record of his famous Spanish civil war songs.

<sup>157</sup> My very real thanks to Eric Levi for sending me his invaluable article 'A Composer under Surveillance -Hanns Eisler and England, 1925-1962', originally in ['Proceedings of the International Hanns Eisler Conference, London 2010](#).

the file devoted to Eisler in the National Archives is dated 19 June 1932. A letter addressed to the SIS and the British Board of Film censors details Eisler's work as a German proletarian composer and author of many revolutionary songs, who had collaborated with Piscator in Berlin and was now working in Moscow composing music for a film about the *Konsomol*.<sup>158</sup> Christopher Andrew, MI5's official chronicler, describes how MI5's primary targets were communists. On this, they shared an interest with the Nazis. Indeed Guy Liddell, the head of counter-espionage for MI5, accepted an invitation to meet with the future leader of the Gestapo in Berlin on 30 March 1933. Liddell's subsequent report was called 'The liquidation of communism and left wing socialism in Germany'.<sup>159</sup>

Eisler, like so many of these early lefty exiles, was initially denied the right to work, the Home Office arguing that the services of a British composer would suffice. Remember this is 1934 when only a few thousand refugees had arrived here. The whiff of xenophobia and probably anti-Semitism is strong. Finally, it was agreed that Eisler could have paid employment on the basis he soon afterwards left the UK. A squabble broke out between bits of MI5 with a more relaxed attitude and the Aliens Department of the Home Office's with their suspicions about communists. Eisler, they claimed 'conclusively', had shown sympathy for the Meerut prisoners (which he almost certainly had).<sup>160</sup> There had to be a question mark over a work permit.<sup>161</sup> Eisler was one amongst hundreds of refugees who needed to earn a musical living here yet was seen as very much of a threat in the music industry, and a Jewish threat at that.<sup>162</sup> W. Gillies Whittaker, writing in the 'Music Journal of the Incorporated Society of Musicians' in November 1934, warned against the prospect of a 'foreign invasion' and the 'very serious situation' facing the music profession as a result of the political and racial (sic) expulsions from Germany.<sup>163</sup>

(10,11). His sources referred to here are drawn from the National Archive.

<sup>158</sup> Erwin Piscator was a famous left-wing German theatre director and theorist about the role of agit-prop.

<sup>159</sup> Brinson and Dove, 12, 16.17

<sup>160</sup> The Meerut Conspiracy Case, 1929 - 1933 refers to trade-unionists arrested for organising an Indian railway strike. The British Government, concerned about the influence of the Indian Communist Party and of the anti-imperialist 'League against Imperialism' (established by Münzenberg from Berlin), and riddled with imperialist notions of 'natives', falsely convicted 27 of them. (For further information on the close link between the KPD, LaI and the Indian Communist party, see my book 'Beaten but not Defeated'.

For a more detailed analysis, see *Ben Bradley: Fighter for India's Freedom*.

<sup>161</sup> Levi, 13, 14

<sup>162</sup> Michael Haas, *Exiled Austrian and German Musicians in Great Britain*,

<sup>163</sup> Levi, 16



Nevertheless, his avant-garde musical understanding was on occasion recognized, for example at the International Society for Contemporary Music Conference in 1938 where he spoke on the 12 note system. Alan Bush, a prolific but largely unrecognized British composer and a Communist activist, committed to the USSR, who was treated with great suspicion by MI5, and the composer, Michael Tippett were responsible for mounting the first concert exclusively devoted to Eisler's music at Morley College in March 1935 which featured Communist, Labour and Co-operative groups, the Hanns Eisler Orchestra, London Labour Choral Union, the Labour Speaking Chorus, London Workers Choir, West London Ladies' Cooperative Choir, the Workers' Music League and the Young Worker's Ballet. It was committed to giving a practical demonstration of the ways in which music could be used to further the class-struggle.<sup>164</sup>

After much disputation, another milestone was the premiere of Eisler's *Kleine Sinfonie*, by the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 12 April 1935. But his modernist music (never mind his politics) really offended the British bourgeoisie. A subsequent plan by Bush to put on the first performance in England of Eisler's recent 'Lenin Requiem' had to be abandoned after Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Henry Wood declined the invitation to conduct, at least in part because the text exhorted the masses to rise up and fight the capitalists.<sup>165</sup> Eisler had by now left the UK but requested another visa in 1936 and a subsequent extension, he explained, to collaborate with Ernst Toller (see separate biography) whose play 'No More Peace' with lyrics adapted by W. H. Auden was to be produced at the Gate Theatre on 11 June 1936. Once again MI5 tracked his movements from the moment he landed in the country, though this time, their response was more conciliatory.<sup>166</sup>

Like many other refugees, he saw the UK as a stepping stone to the US and in 1937/38, he succeeded in getting into the US where he continued to write and have his music performed. He was nominated for an Academy Award for 'Hangmen Also Die' (1942) which depicts the assassination of Heydrich.

The American intelligence services were already onto him and they kept in touch their British counterparts. In February 1941 the British authorities requested information from New York as to whether Eisler was involved in an American

<sup>164</sup> Levi, 15

<sup>165</sup> Levi, 18, 19

<sup>166</sup> Levi, 17, 18

equivalent of the Free German League of Culture and he was subsequently added to the US blacklist. He was one of the first artists placed on the Hollywood blacklist and was hauled before the House of Un-American activities. In one American communication to their British counterparts, Eisler is described of heavy build, very prominent stomach, prominent nose and of Jewish appearance. When accused of being the Karl Marx of music, he replied that he would be proud. (Among his accusers was his sister, Ruth Fischer!) <sup>167</sup>

He avoided actual deportation in 1948 by flying out to Prague, protesting that while he understood the need to become an exile from Nazi Germany, being forced into exile a second time by the supposedly democratic US was devastating! He came on to the UK, where he claimed he had been strip searched at the airport. On his stop-over, he met with Ernst Meyer (see other biography) and Ernst Bush. He first returned to Austria but, badgered by the SED to come back, he arrived in East Berlin in October 1948, reuniting with his old friend and comrade, Bertholt Brecht. He had a complicated relationship with the GDR where his music was not popular. He died there in 1962.

### **Rosa Leviné-Meyer (1890-1979)**

Rosa Leviné -Meyer's significance is more to do with her life in Germany, than in the UK.

Rosa Broido, the daughter of a rabbi, was born in Poland in 1890. She moved to Germany where she met the Russian émigré, Eugen Leviné whom she married in 1915. A committed early member of the KPD, in March 1919, Eugen Leviné received instructions to go to Munich to take control of the attempt to create a Soviet Republic. Rosa argued: "The streets were filled with workers, armed and unarmed, who marched by in detachments or stood reading the proclamations. Lorries loaded with armed workers raced through the town, often greeted with jubilant cheers. The bourgeoisie had disappeared completely; the trams were not running. All cars had been confiscated and



<sup>167</sup> Levi, 20, 21

were being used exclusively for official purposes. Thus every car that whirled past became a symbol, reminding people of the great changes. Aeroplanes appeared over the town and thousands of leaflets fluttered through the air in which the [Social Democratic] Hoffmann government pictured the horrors of Bolshevik rule and praised the democratic government who would bring peace, order and bread."

But as we know (see biography on Toller), the Munich Soviet went down in blood. Leviné tried to hide but was arrested. In a famous quote in court, he said: "We Communists are all dead men on leave'. Rosa reported him saying to her during their last conversation: 'Don't forget: you must not live a joyless life'. Leviné was sentenced to death on 3rd June and shot on 5th July, 1919.

In 1922, Rosa married Ernst Meyer, later Chair of the KPD and one of the 'compromisers' who came to strongly support the 'united front' line. Later, Rosa was to write *'Inside German Communism'* about the attempts, in particular by Ernst Meyer, to build a mass revolutionary party after the defeats of the first wave of revolution and the historic mistakes that were committed in calling for revolution in 1921. A few years later, Ernst Meyer and Rosa Leviné-Meyer were among those who tried to resist the KPD's calamitous shift to the Third Period line, when Social Democrats were seen as 'social fascists'.<sup>168</sup> After Ernst Meyer's death, Rosa moved to the USSR, where she became increasingly disillusioned, later pleading ignorance of what was taking place there. She left in January 1933 for Germany. Highly critical of Ernst Thälmann, she is considered a supporter of the Right Opposition.

She had to flee Germany later that year. After living in France for a year, she moved to England in October 1934. Here she moved in left circles. She was a visitor to Scholem's wife in London,<sup>169</sup> along with Dora Fabian (see earlier biography) and Willy Brandt. At first she was still active in the the KPD exile group in London, but after the Moscow show trials in 1938 she broke with the party and renounced a Soviet

<sup>168</sup> Eds Ralf Hoffrogge and Norman LaPorte *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement 1918-1933*. Despite being one of the most notable leaders of the early German communist movement, Ernst Meyer remains relatively unknown, despite Rosa Meyer-Leviné-Meyer's biography. He assumed – initially acting - leadership of the KPD and head of the Politbüro, taking over from Heinrich Brandler, who had been arrested during the 'March action'. But Brandler's release in August 1922 marked a gradual though uneven decline in Meyer's power, though he remained key in opposing the ascendancy of the party's left wing around Ruth Fischer, Arkadij Maslow, and Werner Scholem in early 1924. In 1929, during the KPD's 'left turn', Meyer was again removed from leadership and died in February 1930.

<sup>169</sup> Werner Scholem was a leading light of the left wing of the KPD in the 1920s. In 1933, Scholem was taken into "protective custody"—for the Nazis he was the perfect example of Jewish Bolshevism. His wife fled to the UK, hoping that the international outcry would help free him but in 1940, Scholem was shot.

pension.<sup>170</sup> My mother, who knew her from mixing in the same circles, described her as ‘poisonous’, Though she briefly returned to Heidelberg in the 1960s, she had settled in London where she lived till her death.

### **Alfred Meusel (1896-1960)**

Meusel, more of an academic than an activist, belonged, first, to the SPD and then was close to the KPD. In the spring 1933, the student leaders at the Technical University of Aachen, where he taught economics and sociology, formed a ‘denunciation committee’ which successfully argued that Meusel had an undesirable political stance and should be deprived of his teaching license. In practice, Meusel was taken into “protective custody” in April – May by the Gestapo. Upon release the following year, 1934, he fled to the UK under the umbrella of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning.<sup>171</sup>

In 1937, Meusel joined the KPD exile organisation, enthusiastic about the KPD change of line to support for the Popular Front. Through his colleague Jurgen Kuczinski, he became involved in the Free German Cultural Association (FGCA) where he played a leading and combative role, including speaking at their meetings. In 1938, he had already founded the communist party based ‘Committee of Friends of the German People’s Front, the precursor to the FGCA. He worked here on examining the situation of German emigrants. He was responsible for the very brief publication by the ‘German Peoples Front’ and the ‘Committee of the German Opposition’ of *Inside Nazi Germany*, a pro-popular front journal. He also became deeply involved with the ‘Free German Movement’, the political arm of the FGLC, where it seems he took a strong pro-USSR line. Denounced by a fellow refugee (and spy), Karl Otten, MI5 were interested in him, and saw him as partly responsible for running an ‘anti-war’ and defeatist campaign during the Stalin-Hitler pact when the Comintern line was that Britain and Germany were equally imperialist powers.<sup>172</sup>

**In 1946, he returned to Berlin, where he had an illustrious academic career.**

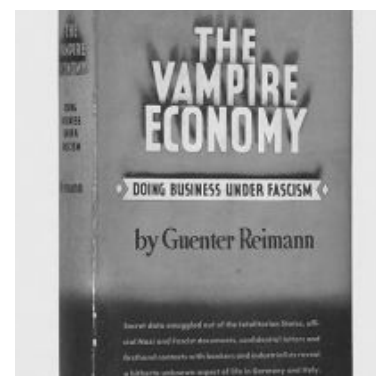
<sup>170</sup> <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118581996.html>

<sup>171</sup> The Society for the Protection of Science and Learning was first set up in the UK in April 1933 by the British economist William Beveridge, thought of as the architect of the modern welfare state, who had recognised a need to help academics escape Nazi persecution. It helped rescue more than 2500 of the more prestigious ‘scholars’ from Germany and occupied countries.

<sup>172</sup> Brinson and Dove, *Politics by Other Means*

## Gunther Reimann (1904–2005)

Günter Reimann was born Hans Steinicke, to a Berlin Jewish bourgeois family. Hans adopted Reimann as a pen-name when he became economics editor for the KPD newspaper in about 1925. In 1923, he had already joined the KPD's Youth League. From 1923 to 1927, he studied economics at Berlin University and became the leader of the Revolutionary students' league in about 1925. In 1931, he was a member of the KPD Central Committee, an editor in chief of *Die Rote Fahne*, the Party's daily paper, and was friends with Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944), the leader of the KPD from 1925 to 1933 and a committed Stalinist, and Walter Ulbricht (1893-1973).<sup>173</sup> (Thälmann's arrest in early March 1933 is a terrible sign of how unprepared the KPD were and how wrong their analysis of Nazism was. On the afternoon of 3 March 1933 Thälmann met openly with a few leading comrades at a house in Charlottenberg which they had met in before and which the police knew about. )In 1932, Reimann had allegedly belonged to the group that wanted to replace Stalin with Bukharin.<sup>174</sup> In 1933, Reimann resigned from the KPD. He then led a resistance group made up, unusually, of KPD and SPD dissidents, against the sectarian policies of both parties and became the Berlin Editor of the underground weekly, *Gegen den Terror*. Reimann's flat was searched by the Gestapo in 1934.



By then, Reimann had disappeared, first walking out of Germany to Vienna, unable to risk catching the train. There he was 'adopted' by the Quakers and able to catch a train to Paris. He came on to London in 1934.

In London, he joined the KPD exile group, although whether this indicates a softening of his attitude to the KPD is not known. The exile group may well have offered as much comradeship and discussion as a political line. But he soon left the group. Although he kept to the government edicts that refugees must desist from

<sup>173</sup> Ulbricht, an early and influential member of the KPD's Central Committee, fled principally to the USSR, became the First Secretary of the 'Socialist Unity Party' in East Germany from 1950 to 1971 and from 1960, became the official head of state until his death in 1973.

<sup>174</sup> Here we are into the complexities of post-Lenin factionalism. Bukharin supported the policies of the New Economic Policy and 'Socialism in One country' and became the Comintern's General Secretary. But he eventually led the Right Opposition, opposing Stalin's decision to proceed with collectivisation, fearing "military-feudal exploitation" of the peasantry and preferring a more moderate approach. He was expelled from the Politburo in 1929. Arrested in February 1937 and charged with conspiring to overthrow the Soviet state, he was executed in March 1938.

political activity, in 1937 he was threatened with deportation back to Germany after the secret service had intercepted one of his letters. Fortunately, the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organisation, again intervened to help him obtain political refugee status in the US. He arrived in New York clutching the manuscript of 'The Vampire Economy', his critique of the economic incompetence of the Third Reich, in particular towards private industry.<sup>175</sup> He remained an economist, a pioneer of global financial analysis, moving ever rightwards.<sup>176</sup>

## 1936

### **Luise Dornemann (1901–1992)**

Luise Dornemann almost does not fit in here. Although she spent about ten years in the UK after fleeing Germany, little is known about her time here. But I am including her because she represents a political current otherwise not touched upon here: the issue of sexual politics under Weimar. Dornemann joined the KPD in 1928 and became chair of the 'Unified League for Proletarian Sexual Reform and Protection of Mothers' (sometimes translated as Unified 'Organisation'), a group attached to the KPD. (see on for further details.)

Although I shall not go into detail on this, the issue of sexual reform was much fought over after 1918. Partly this was a consequence of two separate and to a large extent opposing phenomena. On one hand, there was a desire, driven by the right-wing and the anti-contraceptive movement, to protect the German 'homeland' after the dreadful number of deaths of the First World War. A strong anti-abortion movement was also spearheaded by the Catholic Church which denounced sex without the intention to procreate. Coinciding though not consistent, the ever stronger eugenics movement also argued that medical intervention and state interference was keeping alive the misfits and preventing 'natural selection', leading to a 'degeneration' of the German people. Sterilisation and more came increasingly to be seen as a way of dealing with unfit and (racial) inferiors.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>175</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/mar/01/guardianobituaries.germany>

<sup>176</sup> M. Moos: *Beaten but not defeated*

<sup>177</sup> The eugenics movement was however not unidimensional. While one strand was 'racially' oriented, another (though less influential) was welfare oriented and concerned with the negative effects of rapid urbanization and industrialisation on the 'working class' family. In addition, although this has nothing to do with this biography(!), the eugenics movement had 'primitive' peoples outside Germany also in mind; Germany after all had only recently 'lost' its colonies and eugenic theories had flourished well before the First World War. .

On the other hand, the left campaigned to prevent the high level of illicit abortions and for freely available contraception amongst working class women. According to a survey conducted by the left-wing sexologist Max Marcuse in Germany in 1913, 41 percent of working women and workers' wives admitted having had an abortion due to economic hardship, often 'criminal'. Among the proletarianised rural population of East Prussia this proportion was 60 percent.<sup>178</sup> Rich women on the other hand had ready access to contraceptives. The demand for free and easily available contraception and abortion was a class issue.

Thus Weimar is marked by two strongly contesting forces firstly around the rights of women to control their own bodies but secondly and increasingly over 'racial hygiene'. Dornemann and indeed the KPD (who took these issues more seriously than the SPD) were operating in an increasingly contested field ideologically and practically. Nazi eugenics therefore were not some sort of inevitable outcome from Weimar, as sometimes depicted.

There was a campaign against Paragraph 218, which had been passed in 1871/72 and which essentially banned abortion, requiring a penal term for both the women and the doctor involved. In October 1929, the KPD Congress of Working Women called for the removal of para 218 and by 1931, there was briefly a joint committee with members of the SPD. But unlike the KPD members, the SPD only wanted exemptions from the law, not abolition, and the alliance quickly fell apart.<sup>179</sup> The campaign drew in much support from the sexual reform movement, but also from Magnus Hirschfeld<sup>180</sup> and his campaign against the criminalisation of homosexuality, the small bourgeois radical wing of the women's movement (and again Albert Einstein), and was briefly backed by both the SPD and, crucially, the KPD.<sup>181</sup> One major slogan was "Your Belly Belongs to You!"

<sup>178</sup> This biography has drawn from a wide number of web-sites. The source here is Rosemarie Nünning, *Between "birth strike" and "race treason": The history of Paragraph 219a of the German Criminal Code*, ISJ, 160. The 219a law, passed by the Nazis in 1933, prohibited medical professionals from advertising or informing women about the provision of abortion services. See further on in main text for more detail. Amazingly, this law remained on the statute book until 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Fowkes, Ben *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A Selection of Documents*, 244-247

<sup>180</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld (1868 – 1935) was an influential German sexologist who campaigned for gay and transgender rights. Hirschfeld was repeatedly targeted by Nazis for being Jewish. In 1933, his Institute was ransacked but by then he had, fortuitously, already fled, first for Switzerland and then France.

<sup>181</sup> Fowkes, op cit

There were also campaigns over the availability of abortion and contraception, especially for working class women, which were not ‘attached’ to political organizations. The *Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexual reform* sponsored a number of sexual health clinics across Germany, which employed both lay and medical personnel, where women and men could go for contraception, marriage advice, and sometimes abortions and sterilisation. Most of its members were from the radical wing of the bourgeois women’s movement but it also drew in women from the SPD,

Very much under the influence of Reich, who had come to believe that only a revolution in sexual attitudes and behavior could bring about a political revolution, members of the KPD set up the Unity Committee for Proletarian Sexual Reform - or EpS (Einheitsausschuss für proletarische Sexualreform; this is sometimes translated as “Unity League or sometimes ‘Association’) which overtook the campaign against para 218.

Dornemann ran the EpS centre in Dusseldorf. The EpS claimed to represent ten thousand members just in the lower Rhine and Ruhr regions and, it has been claimed, had somewhere between 150,000 to 300,000 members across Germany. It seems that the appeal of the local Leagues was less to do with the ideological emphasis on women’s liberation than on women being able to access free contraceptive advice.

There were substantial divisions in these campaigns between the SPD and the KPD. The EpS asserted that only Communist leadership could guarantee a class-struggle perspective, firmly rejecting any connections with capitalist or bourgeois interests. The demands of the League included: 1. decriminalization of abortion. 2. Free prescription of contraceptives and advice on birth control (though apparently this often amounted to no more than advice on how to use a diaphragm) 3. Availability of sex-counseling clinics 4. state control and production of contraceptives in the interests of working people's health and the elimination of commercial competition. 5. abolishing all punishment for sexual deviations (including the ‘normalisation’ of masturbation) .

<sup>182</sup>Crucially, these demands were seen, not so much in terms of economic position or health, but in terms of personal and sexual fulfillment: sexuality was one of the few pleasures the working class could claim for itself.

<sup>182</sup> Elkind, David, *Wilhelm Reich— The Psychoanalyst as Revolutionary*, April 18, 1971, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/04/18/archives/wilhelm-reich-the-psychoanalyst-as-revolutionary-wilhelm-reich.html>



The KPD, along with Wilhelm Reich, who was highly influential at the time, emphasised how far this was a class issue: the proletarian's living conditions led to sexual deprivation in a way that the bourgeoisie with its access to medical contraception and safe abortions did not suffer. (Reich ran the Berlin EpS clinic, which was oriented towards working-class youth, the one point where Reich's 'Sex-Pol' perspective appears to have had a real impact.) Reich moved to Berlin at least in part because of the existence of the Committee's organisation there and, it is said, to get away from Freud's influence in Vienna. Reich spoke at numerous KPD organised meetings, such as on 'The Sexual Question in bourgeois society'. But Reich's emphasis was different from the KPD's with whom he fell out. Reich believed that a revolution in sexual attitudes and behaviour was a prerequisite for a political revolution, Reich was a little too successful in recruiting people to his sexual politics platform which the KPD did not like. Party functionaries put out orders that all of Reich's books and pamphlets were to be removed from Party bookstores.

One of the other organisations, associated with the KPD, campaigning for greater sexual freedoms was run by Richard Linfert, a member of the KPD, who organised the Coalition to reform the sex laws, which campaigned alongside the Committee on birth control, easier divorce, abortion rights and homosexual emancipation (which surprisingly the KPD was apparently sympathetic to). Linfert is himself an interesting figure: he was partly responsible for the little known 'M apparatus', the secret military and intelligence organization to shield KPD leaders, was high up in the Red Front and a comrade of Münzenbergs. KPD members active on the front of sexual liberation were not, it appears, placed in a separate political 'compartment'.

The KPD seems to have been open to its members campaigning around issue such as birth control. This is a period when many of their membership were unemployed so lacking a work based organisation. Issues around contraception and abortion drew proletarian –and often impoverished - women into the political struggle. But the KPD, like so many other revolutionary organisations, kept stumbling over whether or how far to allow women's only campaigning or how far these issues had to be understood and organised as part of class struggle. As now, one key argument was about the need to unify proletarian sex-reform organisations under a class-conscious, rather than reformist or gender-led, leadership.

The League and demands for birth control and rights to abortion were anathema to most Nazis who wished to reverse the declining birth rate. At the same time, a eugenicist movement grew ever stronger from 1918. A number of well respected scientific institutions who were influential in social policy and on right-wing political parties promoted the view that biology could be used for national reconstruction. ‘Racial biology’ was intrinsic and frequently combined with a view of the working class as an unhealthy cess pit which had to be cleansed.

So Nazism was operating along twin - and not always consistent - tracks. In May 1933, abortion or performing an abortion became illegal. The sexual counselling centres were closed and their members persecuted. The new ‘centres’ goal was ‘racial improvement’. “National Socialist” women lived to have children.

Whilst compulsory sterilisation and the killing of mental patients came to a head under Nazism, many doctors and scientists had accepted the concept of mental or physical ‘degenerates’ and the power of inherited bad genes under Weimar. These ‘social problems’ had to be resolved – and by them using ‘scientific’ methods. Such ideas also crop up in the USA and the UK but with less disastrous consequences. In a detail which shows up how important the League’s clinics were, especially for working-class women, from 1925, hundreds of marriage heredity counseling clinics were established, particularly for premarital examinations to establish hereditary and ‘racial) health! Nevertheless, while many doctors did become Nazis’ henchmen, one must beware assuming all geneticists did.<sup>183</sup> In 1933, Luise’s husband, Johannes Dornemann, was murdered by the Nazis. In 1936, Dornemann left for the UK. Here, she was a member of the Communist-led ‘Allies Inside Germany’ Council (referred to elsewhere), and also an active member of the Executive Committee of the ‘Free German Cultural League’. Although I cannot find a copy or details of what it said, Dornemann compiled and the League published ‘German women under Hitler fascism: a brief survey of the position of German women up to the present day’ during the war. From 1942 to 1947 she worked as a political secretary at the ‘British Council for German Democracy’ in London, a Communist front organisation, which campaigned for a united post-Nazi Germany.<sup>184</sup>

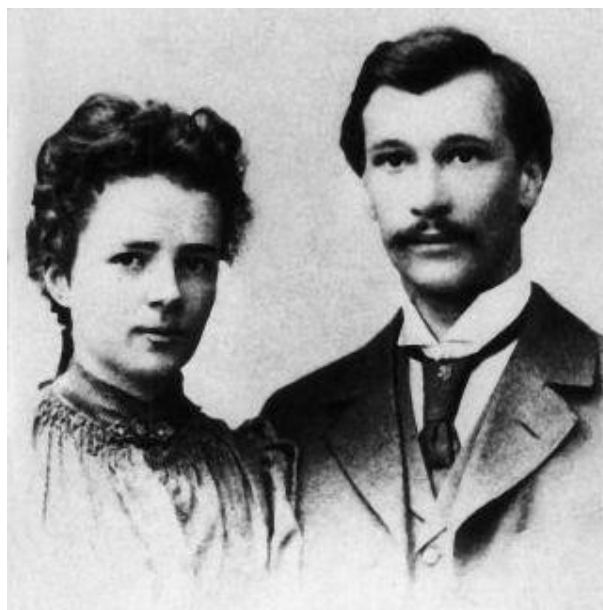
<sup>183</sup> Paul Weindling, *The Survival of Eugenics in 20th-Century Germany*, Am. J. Hum. Genet. 52:643-649, 1993)

<sup>184</sup> It drew in as Vice-Presidents Tom Driberg, Eleanor Rathbone and Harold Laski as well as, later, getting support from D.N. Pritt, Michael Foot and Eric Hobsbaum who briefly edited ‘Searchlight’ on their behalf. (Stefan Berger, Norman LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990*) Unfortunately, I have not been able to find anything on

In 1947 she moved to East Germany and wrote two well-received books on Eleanor Marx and Klara Zetkin, suggesting a continued and still unusual interest in the role of women on the revolutionary left.

### **Käte (1871-1953) and Hermann Dunker (1874-1960)**

Käte and Hermann Dunker were both leading and significant members of the KPD who, after they had fled after the Nazis took power ended up fleeing from one country to the next, including, briefly the UK. Their period of left-wing activity largely came to an end once they had fled Germany and I can find next to nothing about what they actually did in the UK. They were far older than most refugees which is probably part of the explanation. Hermann is the better known. One reason, one suspects, is that Kate's life was more dominated by family and its many tragedies and her intermittent but serious illnesses,



In 1893, Hermann Dunker joined the SDP and became a regular contributor to *Vorwärts*, the SPD's official daily newspaper. In 1903, he became a full-time worker for the party but fell out with the SPD because of his anti-militarist views. In 1911, he taught with Rosa Luxemburg at the SPD's Central Party School.<sup>185</sup>

Immediately after the vote on war credits in the Reichstag, a group of SPD anti-militarist activists, including Dunker, met at Luxemburg's home and agreed to campaign against the war but, at that point, decided against forming a new party, instead agreeing to continue working within the SPD. But, after the release of Luxemburg from prison in February 1916, it was decided to break with the SPD and to establish an underground political organisation: Spartakusbund. Hermann, who had been a member of the Internationalist Group, a loose gathering of a number of dissident locally organized groupings within the SPD, became a co-founder of the

Dornemann's role.

<sup>185</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/broue/1975/germrev/biog.html>

Spartacus League along with Liebknecht and Luxemburg.<sup>186</sup> Kate too became very active,

In May, 1916, the Spartacus League organised a demonstration against the First World War in Berlin, supported by about 10,000 workers. Hermann took the Spartacist line, arguing that socialists should turn the nationalist conflict into a revolutionary war. Radek, dispatched by the Bolshevik Central Committee to Germany, along with Dunker, Luxemburg and Liebknecht and a few others, founded the KPD. Duncker became a member of its Central Committee, re-elected in January 1919, but not in 1920. He became Secretary of the Independent government of Gotha region.<sup>187</sup>

The USPD, a left-wing breakaway of the SPD, was founded in Gotha, the capital of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in Thuringia, in 1917 in opposition to the SPD's war policies. In November 1918, the presiding Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, was forced to abdicate and a far-left, anti-Weimar government was elected in Gotha in 1919. During the Kapp putsch in 1920, the military commander in Weimar, Hagenberg, declared the left-wing state government deposed. The commander of the Erfurt garrison, von Selle, occupied Gotha, which had, in 1918/19, set up a Soviet republic. Around 250 people were violently killed, many more injured and many arrests were made during the fighting with the workers. Hermann lost his job and had to become an itinerant teacher working for the KPD.

In 1925, Hermann co-founded the Berlin Marxist Workers' School. In the KPD central committee, he was responsible for education and instruction. He represented the relatively moderate "Middle Group" within the party that aimed for a united front with the Social Democrats. Therefore, he was sidelined by the KPD leadership during the Third Period after 1929.<sup>188</sup>

Arrested immediately after the *Reichstag* fire, he was released in November 1933 and then lived under police supervision. He fled to Denmark in 1936, then to the UK.

<sup>186</sup> The Bremen, Brunswick and Berlin Lefts founded the *Internationale Sozialisten Deutschlands* and briefly put out *Lichtstrahlen*, but the SPD shut down the journal in April 1916. In December of 1916 they ceased to pay their dues to the SPD. Their position was that they needed to create a left organisation totally independent of the SPD (ibid).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Hermann Weber; Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*. K. Dietz. 2008, p. 202–203.

Whilst here, Dunker was distraught over the persecution of his son, Wolfgang as well as his comrade and friend, Bukharin during Stalin's first purge.<sup>189</sup>

In 1938, he left for Paris, I assume because the KPD Secretariat in exile, of which he was not a part, was based there. As opposed to most leading Party comrades, Dunker fell out with the KPD's Moscow-based leadership over the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939, which he strongly opposed. From Paris, he wrote to Käte about the pact. Initially, he merely disapproved but then, one month later, when Poland had been divided up, he wrote to her 'I am horrified about the new negotiations between Hitler and Stalin. I would not have thought this possible... An about-face of all values. I can't go along anyone with *this* dialectic. One can never build socialism on the basis of *Hitlerism*...[italics in original].'<sup>190</sup>

In the summer of 1940, after the *Wehrmacht* had invaded France, he travelled to the 'zone libre' in the south. In the meantime, Käte somehow organised a visa for Dunker's entry to the US in 1940. But in a story straight out of the film, during a stopover in Casablanca, he was detained, and only arrived in New York in September 1941.

In the US, Dunker joined the Council for a Democratic Germany (CDG) in 1944.<sup>191</sup> The political refugees in the US (who appear to have significantly outnumbered those who fled exclusively because of anti-Semitism) were, as always sharply divided in belief and organisationally. Of the nineteen members of the CDC committee, two were KPD which led the SPD exile organisation to officially boycott them though a couple individually did participate. The CDC was set up largely by Paul Hagen, a German political refugee who does not appear to have belonged to any organisation. It campaigned for the defeat of the Nazis and the prosecution of German war-criminals. But its main purpose was to act as a counterweight to the Communist's newly established 'National Committee for a Free Germany', to minimize the growing influence of Vansittarism and a belief in 'German guilt', and also to put pressure that America should respect post war German democratic processes and decisions in the rebuilding of a united post-Nazi Germany. It had significant influence on both public

<sup>189</sup> Hermann Weber; Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*. K. Dietz. 2008

<sup>190</sup> Epstein, Catherine, *The Last Revolutionaries. German Communists and their Century*, Harvard University Press, 2003. Many letters between Hermann and Kate have been preserved which give a flavour of his vituperative disappointment about this pact, unusual amongst Party stalwarts.

<sup>191</sup> Hermann Weber; Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*. K. Dietz. 2008

opinion and political insiders but created a massive backlash based on a perception of *Germany's* culpability.<sup>192</sup> It was an intriguing political choice by Dunker.

Käte and Hermann had met when she attended evening classes organised by the Leipzig Workers' Education League. Käte was a leading socialist in her own right and Hermann's commitment to socialism is indeed attributed to her. After being a teacher, in early 1900's, she became a full time worker for the SPD. An outstanding speaker, in 1906, she gave a presentation to the fourth SPD Women's Congress on the care of women during and following pregnancy. (Remember that women were only allowed to participate in politics legally from 1908.) She released a publication against child labour and started editing a women's magazine. In 1910 she was a delegate at the International Socialist Women's Conference at which she gave a talk on motherhood and childcare. She also became an assistant editor of the SPD publication for women *Gleichheit*, and a part of the SPD educational committee with Rosa Luxemburg. She was also involved in the resolution to introduce International Women's Day, proposed at the conference by her friend, Clara Zetkin. In 1911, she first met Rosa Luxemburg at a SPD Party Conference.

She too could not go along with the SPD's support for the First World War. In 1915, she was a co-founder of the news sheet, "The International", called after the 'International Group', initiated by Rosa Luxemburg. Käte became a frequent contributor, one of the few who Rosa Luxemburg trusted.<sup>193</sup> (The International Group was to become part of the Spartacists). When she spoke to delegates at the last unified National Conference of the SPD in Berlin on 21-23 September, 1916, she explained the need for revolution to end the First World War. The vote by SPD parliamentary representatives in the *Reichstag* in support of German war spending on 4 August, 1914, had split the party. Kate spoke strongly about how the SPD pro-war credits vote had destroyed the SPD and the (Second) Socialist International, undermined any understanding of imperialism and of working class solidarity. She demanded: "Use workers' power to end the war". At the end of her speech, she said: "If we were unable to prevent war, not to defend the fatherland but to use every means to end the war

<sup>192</sup> Lamberti, Marjorie, *German Antifascist Refugees in America and the Public Debate on "What Should Be Done with Germany after Hitler," 1941-1945*, Central European History, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), 293-296, <https://www.jstor.org/>

<sup>193</sup> <https://www.rosalux.de/historisches-zentrum/rosa-luxemburg/letter-to-clara-zetkin-5>

rapidly and to utilize the crisis it creates in political and economic life to speed the abolition of capitalism".<sup>194</sup>

She, as well as Hermann, joined the Spartacus League and she became a leading member, working in Berlin with Leo Jogiches to coordinate anti-war efforts across the country. She produced the illegal "Spartacus Letters" ("Spartakusbrieife").

Käte Dunker was arrested on 16 January, 1919, briefly detained and interrogated. She then moved back to Leipzig, where there seemed less risk of further arrest than in Berlin. During the war, they had sent their sons to Denmark, and she (alone) now followed them after the Spartacus uprising was crushed, but quickly, had to move on to Sweden. She returned from Sweden towards the end of 1919 and embarked on a short series of lectures at the Workers' Education College in Berlin, also supporting herself with translation work.

In December 1919, she and Hermann moved back to Thuringia. In the late summer of 1921, Kate was invited by the KPD to stand as a candidate for the Thuringian regional parliament, which was run by a coalition between the SPD and KPD. Already fifty, she was elected and focused on childhood issues, in part influenced by the Montessorri movement, and continued to organize groups of women across the region. But there were endless factional wrangles and she became exhausted. After 1925, she joined with her husband in his teaching work and political journalism, also teaching at the Marxist Workers' Academy in Berlin. She visited the Soviet Union in about 1927, then writing "Women in the Soviet Union" (*Die Frau in der Sowjetunion*).

When Hermann Dunker was arrested in February 1933, she campaigned tirelessly for his release, a dangerous activity, writing him frequent letters, consulting lawyers and bombarding the authorities. Inevitably, their flat was totally ransacked by Nazi officials and she wrote in a letter to Hermann how she also felt hounded by her neighbours. Unusually Hermann was released in November 1933. Kate fled to the US, joining their son Karl.

Their first son, Karl, a famous psychologist, committed suicide in 1940 in exile in America. The younger son, a Communist, was the victim of the purges in the USSR,

<sup>194</sup> <https://johnriddell.com/2016/09/21/kate-duncker-1916-use-workers-power-to-end-the-war>. Translated by John Riddell.

which killed hundreds of German refugees, and died in a Soviet labour camp in 1942, though they were not to establish this for many years.

In May 1947, Käte and Hermann Duncker went to East Germany (despite the fate of their younger son) and settled there together. Despite his earlier disaffection, Hermann was much rewarded.

### **The Kuczinski clan**

Jurgen Kuczinski is better known than most left-wing German refugees, partly thanks to the book by John Green, the work by Professor Brinson and partly because members of the family clan keep his memory alive in both the UK and Germany.

The father of the clan, Robert R. Kuczynski, a left-leaning and much respected statistician, emigrated to Britain in 1933 where he obtained a post at the LSE (and was to die here soon after the end of the war). The six children then also took refuge in Britain, at different times: Jürgen and the five daughters: Ursula, Brigitte, Barbara, Sabine and Renate.



Jurgen joined the KPD in 1930 but, unlike many of the refugees considered here, does not appear to have ever been a ‘grass-roots’ anti-Nazi activist. Though his entanglements with the USSR and Russian spies might seem exciting, his contribution to the anti-Nazi struggle was from the easier slopes of left academia and ‘counter-cultural’ institutions.

He contributed to *Die Rote Fahne*, especially in his role of economics correspondent right up to 1936. Kuczynski went to Moscow in 1936 to meet with exiled KPD leaders. He agreed with their suggestion that he ‘rejoin his family in England’.

Sometime in 1936, Kuczinski was able to travel safely out of Germany and move to the UK, a move triggered by his instructions from Moscow.<sup>195</sup> He arrived in Britain in

<sup>195</sup> As I wrote about in the biography of my father: ‘Beaten but not Defeated’, my father had told me about having to walk across Germany because he could not risk catching a train. That was in early 1933. Ever since, I have noted who was not too fearful of being arrested to leave Nazi Germany by train, especially as late as 1936,



late 1936 and probably took over the exile group in early 1937, though whether Siegi Moos was pushed or jumped is not known. In his biography, he was dismissive of the KPD exile group's earlier effectiveness as essentially a group of disorganised intellectuals, dilettantes and student types. But he had the advantage of the arrival of two experienced comrades: Kurt Hager and Hans Kahle (see relevant biographies). The Government had banned all political activity on risk of deportation so activity had to be covert.

But his leadership was more than a change in personal. By 1937, the KPD leadership had finally understood that the Nazi regime, far from collapsing, was well established. According to Merson, the issue of the popular front, which had been 'accepted' in 1936, was still causing major splits amongst the émigré communities especially in Spain or France but those debates also impacted here.<sup>196</sup> Unlike between 1934 and 1936, the emphasis was not primarily on building up contact with KPD exiles and getting anti-Nazi publicity into Britain but rather finding and working with anti-Nazi allies of almost any political hue. The Popular Front position also encouraged a loose membership, with a 'near-party' established from 1936 for sympathizers. Lotte Moos, when being interrogated in Holloway prison by MI5 in 1940, stated, for once, I suspect, accurately, that there had been two levels of membership: an inner and an outer grouping, whose purpose was united front work, but, she stated witheringly, that in reality all membership was loose.



*Jurgen Kuczinski*

It is not clear what the membership or effectiveness of the group was from 1937 till the outbreak of war. Certainly *Exil*, written later under the aegis of the GDR, provides a very different list, probably from 1937/38, of about a dozen German Communists, most of them from 'bourgeois, Jewish backgrounds' [sic]. (The size of the group grew in 1939 following the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia but, as we can see from other biographies here, very few of the post 1938 refugees became involved or active in the exile group).

Though not all accounts agree on this, in all likelihood, Kuczinski was the link with the KPD's exile organisation in Paris. This is where Merker (see introduction for more

<sup>196</sup> Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, 1986

details), an ex-Comintern man, was based, the co-leader with Ulbricht of the KPD exiled Central Committee, with responsibility for foreign links. Various files in the National Archives reveal regular correspondence between Merker and Kuczinski, including Merker's suggestion of some formalised link between his Free German Movement group in Mexico and the FGLC. But Kuczinski was not keen.<sup>197</sup> But was Kuczinski not concerned about being refused readmission by British authorities as he travelled to and from London? (My father, Siegfried Moos, would never have dared to leave the UK at this point for fear he would not have been let back in.) At any rate, MI5 raised no objection to a Home Office proposal to grant Kuczinski permanent residence, a rare privilege for a Communist at the time!<sup>198</sup>

Kuczinski also worked with Palme Dutt, the British Communist Party's leading theoretician, with whom he developed a friendship, and became a member of the Communist Party's *Labour Monthly* editorial committee, which provided an outlet for the German refugees, especially Kuczinski himself, writing on capitalism and immiseration.<sup>199</sup> In 1939, under the auspices of the Left Book Club, set up by the publisher Victor Gollanz, he travelled round the UK, giving many lectures about Nazism and economics and adopted the pen-name: John Knight.<sup>200</sup> In 1939, the Left Book Club published his short book on labour conditions: *Conditions of the Workers in Great Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union 1932-1938*. Kuczinski played a leading role in the establishment and running of the Free German League of Culture FGLC, indeed boasting he was its first member.

He supported the line on the Hitler - Stalin pact, publishing a pamphlet in October 1939, so a month after the pact was sealed, in which he argued that there was a fascist plot against the world in which the British Government was assisting, evidenced by their failure to raise a finger over Poland.

Kuczinski was interned in January 1940. There, according to the spy 'Otten' and therefore unreliable, he busied himself converting 'fellow internees and Nazi POWs into Nazi Communists'!<sup>201</sup> He was released quickly, following the Home Office's

<sup>197</sup> KV-2-2980\_3.

<sup>198</sup> Brinson and Dove, 81

<sup>199</sup> *Labour Monthly* while not officially a CP organ, was closely associated with the CP and was edited throughout most of its existence by Palme Dutt. Its semi-autonomous status was primarily in case the CP was banned.

<sup>200</sup> Stefan Berger, Norman LaPorte. *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990*, Berghahn Books, 2010, p49

<sup>201</sup> PF47192, 23.4. 40. SIS memo.

intervention, against MI5 wishes, who, as it turned out correctly, had long suspected him of espionage. But the Home Office had been lobbied by an array of the left's great and good. Pritt,<sup>202</sup> in particular was instrumental in Kuczynski's release from internment in 1940, claiming Kuczcinski had never been a communist!<sup>203</sup> Kuczinski continued to feed the Russian embassy with economic forecast without apparently any hindrance, following in the footsteps of his sister spy, Ursula. (Though it lies outside our concerns, it does appear Kuczinski provided the link between Klaus Fuchs and the USSR.)

He returned to activity at the FGLC: he was a regular well-thought of speaker and contributed to some of their political pamphlets, including 'Allies inside Germany' (1942), in association with the exhibition. Also in 1942, under the ING imprint, closely associated with the FGL, his highly successful '*300 million slaves and sefs; labour under the Fascist new Economic Order*' (cover-piece by John Heartfield) was printed. In 1944, he had published '*Freie Deutsche damas und heute*', on what should be their aim in a post-Nazi Germany. Speaking in 1943, he argued strongly for the Popular Front, the KPD line at that time, raising the tricky issue of how far it was possible to work with SPD exiles.<sup>204</sup> Though there were some serious fallings out, he became a leading figure in the Free German League of Culture and a key link to other groupings. For example, 'Allies inside Germany' council, made up of British supporters of the FGLC, organised a conference in 1942 under the presidency of Eleanor Rathbone: 'Hitler's new order and anti-Nazi forces inside Germany' at which Jurgen Kuczinski and Lowenthal from Neu Beginnen spoke.<sup>205</sup>

A Home Office note from June 1941, about Kuczinski, raises a question about his loyalty, stating he was spreading defeatist propaganda but that it had no evidence.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>202</sup> In April 1933, Pritt amongst others signed a letter urging the Labour Party to form a United Front with the CP etc against fascism, rejected at that and the following year's Party conferences. A lawyer, in 1934 he successfully defended the veteran socialist Tom Mann, on trial for sedition and won damages against the police for the organisers of the National Unemployed Workers Movement. From 1936, a Labour MP and member of the Labour Party's Executive Committee, he was sympathetic to Stalin, including over the Moscow Trials. In 1940 he was expelled from the Labour Party for defending the Soviet invasion of Finland. He later defended many of those accused in the anti-colonial struggle including those accused of being MauMau.

<sup>203</sup> Morgan, Kevin, *Special road or German Irrweg? British communists and the KPD/SED as Stalinist exemplar* [www.academia.edu/33803385/Special\\_road\\_or\\_German\\_Irrweg\\_British\\_communist\\_and\\_the\\_KPD\\_SED\\_as\\_stalinist\\_exemplar](http://www.academia.edu/33803385/Special_road_or_German_Irrweg_British_communist_and_the_KPD_SED_as_stalinist_exemplar)

<sup>204</sup> Brinson, C and R. Dove: *Politics by Other Means. The Free German League of Culture in London 1939-1945*

<sup>205</sup> Brinson and Dove, *Politics by Other Means*

<sup>206</sup> KV 2/1873

Kuczinski was certainly of great concern to MI5: his released MI5 file extends to nine volumes!<sup>207</sup> MI5 continued their surveillance of him throughout his time here.<sup>208</sup>

Kuczinski was recruited by the US intelligence agency as a statistician and worked for the prestigious US Army Air Force Strategic Bomber Survey to get hold of information on German armaments production, almost certainly providing the USSR with what he found out.<sup>209</sup> Here he acted on behalf of OSS, the American Office of Strategic Services, who asked for his help in recruiting Free German volunteers to run clandestine missions in Germany. As suggested earlier, this is very different from the SOE who wouldn't touch them with a long barge-pole. Kuczynski approached four exiled German trade unionists: Paul Lindner, a German machine turner, Anton "Toni" Ruh, Kurt Gruber, a coal miner from the Ruhr Valley and Adolph Buchholz, a metal worker from Spandau-Berlin. Later Werner Fischer, Walter Struwe, and Emil Konhäuser were approached, all of whom had also gone underground in Germany and spoke colloquial German. (See separate biographies).<sup>210</sup>

At the end of the war, Kuczynski returned to Germany, against the will of the British Government who feared the influence of Communists but with the help of the Americans. It was as a Lieutenant Colonel in the US army that he first went to the West, then the East. He did well in the East, though never fully trusted.

Jurgen's family were unusual in that only two of the siblings went back to Germany, one of whom was Ursula.<sup>211</sup> The others: Brigitte (1910–1997), Barbara (1913–2003), Sabine (1919–2005) and Renate (1923–2013), remained in Britain after the war, where they married and had children.

<sup>207</sup> Kuczinski was known to MI5 before 1936 because Germany's secret intelligence service had passed on his name! He got into the UK by pretending he needed British library facilities to complete a book (Brinson and Dove, p79,80)

<sup>208</sup> KV2/12410

<sup>209</sup> It is always worth asking where these - generally impecunious - refugees got their money from, especially as the British state had made getting an established post close to impossible. Although one must always beware the words of a spy, Otten reported to MI5 that Kuczinski was surprisingly flush with money which came from KPD party funds and which he invested in the stock market ( Brinson and Dove, *Politics by Other Means*, p160)

<sup>210</sup> Jonathan S. Gould, *Strange Bedfellows, The OSS and the London "Free Germans"*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no1/article03.html> (Note source!)

<sup>211</sup> Born in 1907, Ursula Kuczynski (codename Sonya) did go back. She represents a strand of resistance which is not the concern here. She joined the KPD in 1926 but does not appear to have been much of a political activist. Recruited to work for Soviet Army intelligence in 1930, by 1938, after assignments in China, Poland, and Switzerland, she married an English man and moved to Great Britain where she remained for the rest of the 1940s. Here, she resumed her work as "Sonya" for the Soviet Army, transmitting atomic secrets given to her by physicist Klaus Fuchs, another communist refugee from Germany. She was to live in Berlin until her death in 2000, aged 93.

### Walter Loewenheim (1896-1977)

About twelve members of *Neu Beginnen*, a group formed in 1929 mostly by left-wing ‘intellectuals’, became exiles in Britain. Loewenheim, their main theoretician and the original founder of the group, unlike the others, then remained in the UK.

Loewenheim first joined the *Wandervogel* (‘Wandering Bird’), the principal German youth group with around two million members, whose activities centred on hiking and nature and a Jewish youth group, the *Judische Jugendbund*.<sup>212</sup> A soldier at the front during the First World War, Loewenheim then joined the Spartacist League and participated in the uprising of 1918-19. He then joined the KPD and quickly rose to prominence. In 1920 he was sent to the 2nd Comintern Congress as a youth delegate, meeting Lenin there and became part of the leadership of the Communist Youth International.



On the left-wing of the KPD and influenced by his friend, Paul Levy, early on, he had disagreements with the party line. He began to take an interest in Trotsky’s critique of Soviet domestic and foreign policies and resigned from the KPD in 1927. Loewenheim joined the Social Democrats two years later.

He began to gather a group, the ORG (short for ‘Leninist Organisation’), who criticised both the KPD’s and SPD’s sectarianism and their splintering of the workers’ movement. Aware of the economic crisis at the time, he analysed the threat of fascism, including in Germany, earlier than many on the left. He aimed to build a new, cadre based, non-sectarian Marxist party.

But the SOPADE underwent a crisis of legitimacy in the winter of 1933-34 that made them more receptive to radical reorientations. The active support for New Beginning by what Lewis J. Edinger called the “Old Left”—Siegfried Aufhäuser, Karl Böchel, and the German Revolutionary Socialists (RSD)—as well as by Paul Hertz, a member of the SOPADE executive board until 1938, probably accounted for why the

<sup>212</sup> There was a strong current of anti-Semitism in this group, some regional branches even excluding Jews. It evolved into the super-patriotic Bundische Jugend by 1939. There were alternative groups: the non-Zionist Kameraden, the Zionist Blau-Weis and the socialist Haschomer Hazair

SOPADE agreed to publish the pamphlet and to help smuggle it into Germany in the first place. But it soon became clear to the moderate and right-wing members of the board like Otto Wels, Hans Vogel, Erich Ollenhauer, and Siegmund Crummenerl that the widespread success of *New Beginning* required an official response.<sup>118</sup> That response came in January 1934 with the so-called “Prague Manifesto,” published on the front page of the émigré newspaper *Neuer Vorwärts* and smuggled into Germany disguised as a promotional booklet for razor blades.

Unlike Miles, the SOPADE did not consciously choose a more militant course; the new course had been forced upon it. And the SOPADE still clung to its faith in the spontaneous action of the masses: the Nazis’ exploitative economic policy, for example, would “compel the masses to fight for the security and improvement of their material existence.” tried-and-true reformist strategies.

*New Beginning* in exile should now infiltrate the socialist parties of Europe in an attempt to steer them toward antifascist unity.

It recruited from the KPD, SPD, KPO and SAP but by early 1933, still only had about 100 members, though that was to grow briefly to about 500. It had many contacts among Berlin’s working-class, in particular amongst railway workers and he recruited several dozen trade-union leaders, several leaders of Communist Youth and much of the leadership of the Socialist Workers Youth (SAJ) to his group in 1931.

But the emphasis of the organisation on clandestine work well before 1933 (so different from either the KPD or SPD), while limiting, did prepare the organisation to work illegally once the Nazis were in power. In his 1979 memoirs, former ORG member Gerhard Bry wrote about the period *before* 1933: ‘We learned how to use concealed code in writing and in telephone conversations, shift meeting times and places by pre-arranged rotations that made them different from those agreed upon by phone, arrange for danger signals, avoid being followed, discover tails, shred carbon and other papers. We also had technical experts in micro-photography, chemists who developed quick burning paper which left little residuals and capsules in which undeveloped microfilm could be carried in the mouth and quickly destroyed, carpenters who built really hard-to-discover hiding places’<sup>213</sup>

<sup>213</sup> This quote is from John Cox ‘Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany’, 2009, Peter Lang, p37



In April and May 1933, he and others established a connection to the exiled SPD in Prague and set up a foreign secretariat there, though attempts at a limited alliance failed.

In August 1933, Walter Loewenheim wrote the programme “*Neu Beginnen*” which gave the group its name, sub-titled: ‘Fascism or Socialism: a Basis for Discussion among Germany’s Socialists’ which Prague SOPADE –surprisingly- published.. The pamphlet suggested a programme for labour leaders (sic) to fight fascism. Loewenheim understood that the world economic crisis and the ever-deepening instability of German politics would not inevitably lead to the radicalisation of the working class and a victory of socialism. It brought out the crucial factor of fascism’s mass character as well as its appeal to the petty-bourgeoisie. It attributed the Nazi’s success to the disunity of the labour movement and emphasised the importance of anti-fascist propaganda. It also argued that the struggle against Nazism would not be in Germany but abroad. Loewenheim criticised the SPD and SOPADE for waiting for the masses to make the first move, The established workers’ parties needed new anti-fascist leaders which could only emerge from the underground struggle itself to reactivate revolutionary consciousness. Loewenheim’s controversial analysis of the failure of the workers’ parties in confronting Nazism attracted considerable attention, and was seen as opening the door to an endorsement of ‘flight not fight’.

In 1934, a division took place between the majority around Richard Lowenthal who wanted to ‘fight on’ and Loewenheim’s so-called ‘defeatist’ position that they should emigrate because staying was futile and dangerous. Loewenheim thought that Nazism was not temporary (as indeed the KPD still believed) and that resistance could not succeed.

Loewenheim fled but small groups continued to organise in Germany, apparently in particular spying on German arms transport, information they then got to the exiled Social Democratic leadership. They also illicitly distributed pamphlets and their newspaper, Socialist Action, exceedingly risky activities (27000 copies in 1935 but this was its peak). But there were hundreds of arrests, including of the leadership and the organisation had essentially collapsed well before the war began.

Loewenheim had fled to the Czechoslovakia where it appears he and other leading members of *Neue Beginnen* attempted to stage an - unsuccessful- ‘coup’ against the

SOPADE leadership, claiming that it was they who represented German Social Democratic workers. Hilferding, who, though exiled in Switzerland then France, had become in effect the leader of SOPADE, backed SOPADE's executive against *Neu Beginnen*, although their demands for a restructuring of the SPD to build up a resistance movement in Nazi Germany were similar to what he had previously argued, in large part because he saw it as the only faction within social democracy that would consistently fight the communists.<sup>214</sup> Loewenheim went to London in 1936. Here he took the name *Walter Lowe*. He was interned from 1940 to 1941. After 1945 it was former members of *Neu Beginnen*, like Erwin Schottle<sup>215</sup> and Richard Löwenthal<sup>216</sup> (but not Loewenheim) who worked most actively for the reconstruction of the SPD in West Germany. Loewenheim however remained in England where he ran an engineering company together with his brother and was no longer active politically. *Neu Beginnen* is a group that is relatively well-known and well thought of, especially by leftish academics. Its apparent non-sectarianism and early relatively sound analysis of Nazism has an appeal but, the reality is that it never deserted the Social-Democratic umbrella.

### **Karl Otten (1889 -1963)**

While Otten started off as an active socialist in Germany and continued to see himself as organising left-wing opposition to the Nazis in the UK, he informed on

<sup>214</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, a leading social democratic theoretician, fled via Denmark to Switzerland in March 1933, and then to France in 1938. Hilferding wrote SOPADE's first programmatic statement, the Prague Manifesto in 1934 which argued for revolutionary change in German society and called for the overthrow of despotism, which was secretly distributed in Germany. At the end of 1940, although Hilferding already had an emergency visa for the USA, the Vichy government handed him over to the Gestapo. He died in custody on February 12, 1941.

Smaldone, William, *Social Democracy and the Paradox of the Vanguard: Rudolf Hilferding's Odyssey*, <https://againstthecurrent.org/>

<sup>215</sup> Erwin Schoettle, a leading member of the SPD, fled Germany in 1933. In exile he headed the SOPADE border secretariat for southwestern Germany from Switzerland until 1939. Then he came to London where he headed the *Neu Beginnen* group and played an important role in the establishment of the Union of German Socialist Organisations, which brought together SOPADE, the Socialist Workers Party ISK, *Neu Beginnen* and a representative of trade unions. In 1946, he returned to Stuttgart and resumed his career in the SPD. He exemplifies how close *Neu Beginnen* was to the SPD, despite it wanting to appear non-partisan.

<sup>216</sup> Richard Löwenthal joined the KPD. He demanded rapprochement between Communists and Social Democrats to enable them to fight the Nazis. He was expelled from the KPD in 1928 after criticising the KPD's theory of social fascism. From 1929 to 1931, he belonged to the KPDO and then joined the circle around Walter Loewenheim. Unlike Loewenheim, Löwenthal advocated open resistance against the Nazis. In August 1935, Löwenthal also emigrated to Prague, where he co-ran the foreign bureau of "*Neu Beginnen*". In 1939, Löwenthal fled to London, where he worked as a journalist. In 1948 he returned to Germany as German correspondent for Reuters News Agency.



many left wing refugees here. His MI5 files were only recently opened and now provide us with much interesting material.

Originally an anarchist, Otten was imprisoned in August 1914 for trying to incite troops to rebel through distributing anti-war leaflets. He later joined the Central Soldiers Council and the Spartacus League. The Germans informed the British Secret Service about these activities before he even came to the UK. The Gestapo began proceedings to deprive him of his German citizenship as early as 1934 and succeeded in 1936.



In 1933, Otten fled to Majorca soon after the Nazis took power, occasionally taking brief trips, as a 'journalist' to France, the Spanish mainland and the Saarland, where he was active in the failed campaign which preceded the plebiscite to unite the Saarland with Nazi Germany. In Spain, he is said to have worked for the Comintern, supposedly becoming its principal agent at the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>217</sup>

Penniless, he and his wife arrived in the UK in 1936, having chosen to go there largely because of its physical security. Gaining admittance was not easy. He believed it was down to luck. In his interview with the immigration officer, which had to be conducted in French, the officer was keenly interested in his activities in Spain. Once here, he started writing prolifically, though he continued to struggle financially.<sup>218</sup>

By May 1938, Otten had gathered around him a tiny group of about six left-wing but unaligned German anti-Nazis, known as the Karl Otten group or 'Primrose League', nominally under the umbrella of the LEX group, which was under SOE control; their, largely unsuccessful, aim was to distribute propaganda in Germany. The Primrose League's goal was to smuggle military information out of Germany into France and thence to Britain. One member of the short-lived group was Lehmann-Russbuedt who still had contacts in Germany and followed the Nazi's military plans closely (see separate biography). Indeed, Otten met at and temporarily moved into his flat.<sup>219</sup> It seems Lehmann-Russbuedt had contacts with the Czech legation, to whom

<sup>217</sup> HS 9/1129/2

<sup>218</sup> Dove, Richard, 'Karl Otten: the shadow of Spain' in *Journey of no return* by Richard Dove.

<sup>219</sup> Dove, R, 'Flying and Spying: Claud W Sykes, M15 and the 'Carl Otten Group' in eds A.Grenville and A. Reiter, *Political exile or exile politics in Britain after 1933*, 194. Ironically, Groehl sent his information to Otten by post which

he provided military information, which Karl Groehl had given him and which Groehl had largely acquired from agents he met in France and Switzerland. (See separate biography.) Another member was Hans Wolffsohn, a well informed expert on military technology and former war pilot. Otten appears to have obtained some limited information eg on airports, but, according to a letter from July 1939 from Major Vivian (vice-chief of the SIS or MI6 and the first head of its counterespionage unit who kept a close eye on Otten), Otten sometimes reproduced already published material and was not always a reliable source.<sup>220</sup>

A cryptic letter addressed to Charles Williams, SIS, (Otten's pseudonym), from SCHR, dated 12 April 1939, mentions sabotage and goes on to say that everything in 'Leuna' depends on the waterworks (presumably code). 'If the water work is dealt with, everything else can go hang.' The sender knew what they were talking about: the Leuna works was one of the biggest chemical industrial complexes and producer of synthetic oil in Germany and became a key target for Allied bombing. Oil was crucial for the German war effort and the bombing raids are seen as contributing significantly to Germany's defeat.<sup>221</sup>

Otten was of keen interest to MI5 who followed his every move and intercepted his correspondence, believing, amongst much else, that he was working for Czech intelligence. That at least was the opinion of the key spy, Claud Sykes, who had succeeded in persuading Otten that the close attention he paid him was a result of friendship. Sykes, a writer of fictional books on aviation and a translator, the perfect cover, ended up working for MI5 and fed them regular information on the Primrose League. Leaving aside the underlying issue of socialists collaborating with MI5, it is worth noting that Czechoslovakia, if not already invaded, was soon likely to be, yet the British secret service saw providing them with information on the German military as a potential threat to British security.

The Primrose League quickly collapsed, not least because of a serious falling out between Otten and Lehmann-Russbueltdt but also because of the understandable fear

MI5 intercepted and is now publicly available!

<sup>220</sup> NS , 1184, KV, 112-1. One internal memo from March 1939 states that Otten has been trying to persuade everybody that Hitler was dead and being impersonated by a double!

<sup>221</sup> 152B, KV 112-1. A background note: in the 1920s, Leuna works were a centre for the KAPD and the General Workers Union to which half of the 20,000 workforce belonged. Peter Utzelmann who had participated in the sailors uprising, joined and left the KPD for the KAPD, had coordinated the strike committee during the March Action in March 1921.

of at least one other participant that his involvement could damage his chances of being allowed British naturalisation.<sup>222</sup> For many of the exiles who did not plan on returning to Germany, the need to obtain the right to stay in the UK was pressing and anxiety provoking.

MI5's attitude to Otten was ambiguous: while they consistently spied on him, in this world of shadows and make-believe, Otten continued to work for the Foreign Office with responsibility for anti-Nazi propaganda under Department EH (Electra House), a secret part of the Foreign Office, later SOE. Unlike almost all the left-wing refugees, he does not appear to have been interned: no doubt, one of his rewards. There is a letter addressed to Liddell, head of counter-intelligence for MI5, dated April 1939, from VV (presumably Major V. Vivian) stating the there are only four 'alien refugees' likely to be useful for 'propaganda purposes', one of whom, the memo stated, was Otten, who needed to be considered for 'exemption' (presumably from internment).<sup>223</sup>

What this missive betrays is MI5's inability to appreciate how willing most of the anti-Nazi refugees would have been to participate in anti-Nazi propaganda. It also reveals how far MI5 were from understanding the refugees' motives. In an extraordinary unsigned 'secret' official letter, it states: 'In the case of the Jews and the extreme left organisations, a feeling of revenge is the leading motive for their activities and they are quite as unscrupulous in their methods of combating the present regime and inducing others to participate in the struggle, as the Nazis have been in dealing with them' <sup>224</sup>

Otten informed systematically on other anti-Nazi refugees, in particular on members of the Free German League of Culture, and was, unusually, paid for doing so by British intelligence.<sup>225</sup> His ardent spying was fuelled by what had become an avid anti-Communism. Like others, he pinpointed the Kuczinkis as prime suspects, whom he believed were receiving Moscow gold, though his MI5 handler seemed dubious about this. In one extraordinary and revealingly paranoid reporting back, the informant stated that Otten had told him that Prof Kuczinsky, Jurgen's left-wing anti-Nazi non-

<sup>222</sup> Brinson and Dove, 67, 75

<sup>223</sup> NA KV11/21, 165B. (Although not relevant here, what much of this correspondence in the National Archive reveals is how much MI5 etc were gathering information about the balance of forces in Europe.)

<sup>224</sup> KV2/1121

<sup>225</sup> Brinson and Dove, 168

Communist prestigious economist father, was ‘spreading defeatism by running down everything British and praising everything Russian... He thought the war should be stopped at once’, signed B5.<sup>226</sup> Who really thought this is unclear. Otten was also attributed with making an anti-Semitic speech in Hampstead which, he is reported to have said, ‘was packed with Jews’.<sup>227</sup> Otten was not above suggesting to his handlers that ‘his comrades’ were Gestapo or ‘GPU spies’ (the USSR’s secret police), Otto Katz amongst others.<sup>228</sup>

Otten, a writer from early in his life, understood his literary work to be an expression of political commitment, in a way which was rarely the case in the UK. But Otten’s literary career did not flourish in the UK. His novels were not always accepted for publication, although he kept on writing. One consequence of MI5’s suspicions of him was that the BBC rejected one of his plays though others were broadcast. After a gradual diminution in eye-sight, he finally went blind in 1944 which limited his usefulness for MI5. He became a naturalised British citizen in 1947 and continued to work as a publisher. In the end, he died in Switzerland.

Otten saw betraying anti-Nazi refugees to MI5 as somehow helping the Allies stop the Nazis, though some of the refugees he fingered could consequently have been thrown out by the UK government and ended up back in Nazi Germany. Certainly he exacerbated the refugees’ sense of insecurity and fear. What Otten’s MI5 records also demonstrate is how profoundly the State distrusted most of the anti-Nazi refugees or saw them as their primary enemy.

### **Hans Siebert (1910-1979)**

Siebert first joined the USPD, then the SPD and then, in December 1931, the KPD. In his early 20’s, the local KPD put him to work building the Communist youth movement and propagandising for the 1932 elections. He also became involved with the ‘Friends of the Soviet Union’. A teacher in an elementary school, he participated in the organisation of school strikes (further details unknown) and was dismissed from his teaching post in February 1933 i.e. immediately after the Nazis had taken power

<sup>226</sup> NA 223A, KV2/1122.

<sup>227</sup> NA 229a, KV2/1122. Anti-Semitic attitudes were not uncommon. In a later document in the same file, there is a letter, unfortunately without a clear signature, to MI5, praising a business man ‘though a Jew’.

<sup>228</sup> This is not beyond the realms of possibility. Katz, a Czech, was an influential and uncritical agent for the Comintern, including in the UK, which he regularly visited, also apparently, spying (and maybe more) on Münzenberg before replacing him. He is suspected of involvement in Trotsky’s murder. He was hanged as a result of the Slansky trial.

but before the Reichstag fire. In April 1933, he was arrested for political reasons and not released till 1935.

In September 1936, he fled to the UK, where he seems to have continued teaching in some capacity and became the head of the German section of the 'Teachers Union'. From 1937-1940, he was the secretary of the 'Committee for Spanish refugee children', a cross-party group, which helped bring over and accommodate 4000 Spanish refugee children.<sup>229</sup> The British Government's position was deplorable. They refused to accept any Spanish refugees. Following the outrage at the bombing of Guernica in April, the government reluctantly agreed to allow in 4000 refugee children, if they had financial sponsors. Except for 250, they were returned to Spain in 1939, often with terrible results. He became the Warden of the Eventide boys' home, and then at 'The Grange', a home in Somerset, lent by the Clarks (a Quaker family which ran the company still associated with shoes). In August 1940, he became co-founder, fund raiser and secretary of the "Refugee Children's Evacuations Fund", which increasingly supported Jewish refugee children and which appears to have been under the 'umbrella' of the German League.

Only briefly interned on the Isle of Man, he then became an energetic board member of the Free German League of Culture (FGLC) and, along with Jurgen Kuzinski, organised the first international conference of anti-fascist scientists.<sup>230</sup> He played a leading role in the small but prestigious scientists section of the FGLC. The section had been given impetus by the support of the 'Association of Scientific Workers' in 1940 and then the 'British Association for the Advancement of Science' which, in 1941, organised a conference 'Science and World Order', involving, unusually, refugee scientists but internment put all plans on hold. The aim of the scientists section and of the newly established 'Free German Institute of Science and Learning', in July 1942, Siebert stated, was to promote free research and learning and to educate German refugee youth. (Later the Institute's purpose was expanded to include the struggle against fascism.) Siebert became its Honorary Secretary and they published some of his work. Meusel was director. He argued persistently for the need for a new post-Nazi German culture and education system. But it appears there may

<sup>229</sup> Gert Geissler Hans Siebert, *Zur erziehungsgeschichtlichen Spur eines emigrierten politischen Pädagogen*

<sup>230</sup> I have not found information on this but its significance has to be understood in a period when the scientific competition about the bomb etc between the 'Allies' was escalating fast. The next Conference was apparently held in Moscow.

have been tensions with the KPD in exile, who saw the whole operation as a bit bourgeois. He was also a member of the Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committee ( which was to become the British-Soviet Friendship Society). From 1945, he headed the remnants of the tiny exile KPD group, and was responsible for their members' repatriation, as well as helping formulate plans for cultural and scientific life in the new Germany.<sup>231</sup> In September 1947 he returned to Berlin and became a SED activist and educational reformer.

**1937**

### **Anna Beyer (1909-1991)**

Anna Beyer was an active member of ISK who briefly lived in the UK before emigrating to the US in 1941. Very little is known about her time in the UK.<sup>232</sup>

Beyer actively supported the work of the ISK in one of its largest bases in Frankfurt where she lived. In 1933, she took part in ISK resistance actions, sold its paper, *Der Funke* and ran her 'suitcase' campaign. When the case was put down, it imprinted the slogan *Nieder mit Hitler* on the pavement as the attached sponges had been soaked in special ink.

Beyer opened a vegetarian restaurant in 1936 to finance the ISK: she, and the ISK, were committed to vegetarian food. They used the restaurant both to provide a gathering place, including for Jews and also for couriers: the table legs were hollowed out to hide material. Inevitably the Gestapo got wind of the enterprise within the year and the network was smashed.



Beyer fled to the UK in 1937 via Belgium, France and Switzerland. In Paris, she worked with the ISK group around Willi Eichler (see separate biography). A small publishing house financed by the vegetarian restaurants in Germany printed books, magazines and articles which were then smuggled into Germany..But in 1938, after

<sup>231</sup> Brinson and Dove, *Politics by other means*, passim

<sup>232</sup> There does not appear to be much written about Beyer: much of the information here comes from a detailed Wikipedia article.

the collapse of the Popular Front, political refugees were being 'returned' to Germany: Beyer fled to Switzerland but as the Swiss authorities did not renew her residence permit, she came to the UK. In 1939 she went back briefly to France to bring a group of children to safety in England.

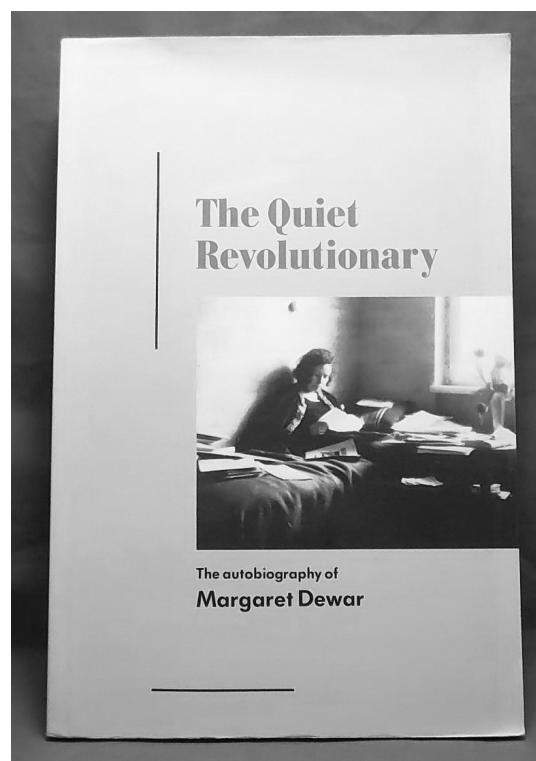
In London, she received a work permit as a housekeeper for private households and later worked in the kitchen of a vegetarian restaurant. Beyer also became involved with a group of German trade-unionists and focused on educating young German union members. She became a member of the 'Free German Movement in Great Britain' which pledged support for Allied policy.

In September 1944, Anna Beyer, together with Hilde Meisel (see separate biography) became agents of the OSS. Originally trained in Scotland, she was dropped as part of a special unit near Lake Geneva. Although 'invited' to 'get into' Germany, Beyer refused. After the war, Beyer returned to Germany and represented the SPD on different local and national committees.

### **Margaret Dewar, 1901-1995**

Dewar was born in Latvia but moved to Moscow in the aftermath of the Civil War. Only a teenager, her chief memories are of hunger and rationing but she was not yet particularly political. Seeking a better life, her stepfather went with his family to Berlin in the early 1920s, when she was still a teenager, where she lived till approximately 1936. She became a committed leftist who ended up in the UK where she lived for most of her life. We have the advantage of her autobiography.

Her first job in Germany was with Willi Münzenberg's International Workers' Relief and she soon joined the KPD. She developed an analysis of the Stalinisation of the USSR and the failure of the KPD to do much beyond accept the official line. In the spring of 1933, she joined the Left Opposition, disillusioned by the Comintern's increasing



bureaucratisation. She increasingly leaned towards a sympathy for Trotsky's analysis of events in Germany. Her autobiography, *The Quiet Revolutionary*, documents in some detail how dangerous her underground work in Berlin was, virtually an underground within an underground. It was difficult to know who could be trusted.

By early 1936, she was in danger: the Gestapo wanted to use her as a spy at her Soviet-owned workplace, as then did the Stalinists. Under cover of a skiing trip, she escaped to Prague. But her description of political exile there is depressing. There were destructive faction fights amongst the small isolated band of Trotskyists who had very little else to do. And the Communist Party, whose hatred of Trotskyists was if anything growing, refused to sign an essential declaration that she was an anti-fascist refugee. She was also publicly accused of contact with the Gestapo, (the Stalinists denounced her to the local liberal press as a Gestapo agent), a calumny that was to follow her. There had been talk of moving her to Norway as a secretary to Trotsky but this rumour put paid to that. In August 1937, she left for Paris where the factional struggles were if anything sharper.

She got into the UK around 1937, supposedly to work a servant in North London. She then married Hugo Dewar. She was active in the Socialist Anti-War Front, a group organised by the Revolutionary Socialist League, a group orientated on the working class, whose position seems to have been to oppose the war and conscription.<sup>233</sup> Only socialism could stop war and workers should oppose military preparations.<sup>234</sup> This does not concur with many of the Trotskyist groups who emphasised the importance of the 'militarisation' of revolutionaries, in order to take on the Nazi invaders.

Dewar then joined the Independent Labour Party, opposing its re-affiliation to the Labour Party and working alongside a small group of Trotskyists, a few of whom, including Dewar, in 1942/43, took over the open forum 'Free Expression', which carried material by Trotsky and became Trotskyist, critical, for example, of the Labour

<sup>233</sup> See introduction

<sup>234</sup> From 1939, Reg Groves, ex-Communist, flirter with Trotskyism and an occasional member of the Labour Party, was the motivating influence in the Socialist Anti-War Front. After war had broken out, he argued in 'Call of the Socialist Anti-War Front', that the war was like in 1914–18, a product of imperialist rivalry. Workers should oppose it and fight for wage increases, controls over prices and profits and the socialisation of industry. His attempts to revive the anti-war traditions of 1914–18 incurred the wrath of the Trotskyists, who believed he was sowing illusions in the state and that revolutionaries should acknowledge the fascist threat by agitating within the armed forces for workers' defence.

(<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/groves/bio.htm>)



Party's kowtowing to big business interests and the trade-union leaders' deals with management and rejection of nationalisation.<sup>235</sup> They carried an obituary of Trotsky in July 1943: 'The Murder of Trotsky' by Victor Serge.<sup>236</sup>

Given her politics, there was no country to draw her back from the UK after the end of the war. Margaret intensified her political activities in her final decade or two, joining the Socialist Workers Party. She supported and joined the anti-poll tax demonstration in 1990 when she was 89, near to where she lived in Haywards Heath, an activist till the end.<sup>237</sup>

### **Fritz Eberhard (1896-1982)**

Fritz Eberhard, born Helmut von Rauschenplat, joined, then left the SPD and then joined the ISK. He became editor of their paper *Der Funke* and tried in 1932/33 to establish a non-KPD united front against the Nazis. In 1933, Eberhard had to go underground, then, in 1934, became head of the banned ISK in Germany and worked on building the Independent socialist trade union (*Unabhängigen Sozialistischen Gewerkschaft*). He worked closely with the ITF and Jahn. In 1936/37, he planned (suicide) bomb attacks on Hitler.

At the end of 1937, he fled to London via Zurich and Paris. In London, he first maintained contact with the ISK leadership and Willi Eichler, but fell out with them over his advocacy of direct action. He was employed in the UK by the Political Warfare Executive as Mr H Russell and in the BBC propaganda division.<sup>238</sup>

In April 1945, Eberhard was able to return to Germany with the help of the OSS and became the director of the US-run Radio Stuttgart. He re-joined the SPD and became Secretary of State for Wurttemberg.<sup>239</sup>

### **Kurt Hiller (1885-1972)**

It is worth briefly mentioning a most untypical refugee who sold his soul, if only because it helps us understand the paranoia amongst so many of the anti-Nazi

<sup>235</sup> [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0796zcvqjsk0rjt/AABWyx-i7pcbEl4lqPhbRe\\_\\_a?dl=0&preview=Free+Expression+1943+no3+February.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0796zcvqjsk0rjt/AABWyx-i7pcbEl4lqPhbRe__a?dl=0&preview=Free+Expression+1943+no3+February.pdf)

<sup>236</sup> [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qdg3ppm5hobr13w/AAAh38sdrk5uSe\\_juI-6SY2a?dl=0&preview=FE+July+43+article-+Murder+of+Trotsky.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qdg3ppm5hobr13w/AAAh38sdrk5uSe_juI-6SY2a?dl=0&preview=FE+July+43+article-+Murder+of+Trotsky.pdf)

<sup>237</sup> Obituary by Logie Barrow, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol5/no4/barrow.html>

<sup>238</sup> NA, KV6/106

<sup>239</sup> <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz104557.html>

refugees. A gay activist, Jewish, German anti-Nazi (who saw himself as a socialist) and an apparently brilliant, well-respected literary and political figure, Hiller had made pertinent criticisms of the 'left', highlighting that economic crisis, far from encouraging a move leftwards, drove people to the ultra-right. His conclusion was the need for an intellectual elite to take power whom all the left could unite around.

He had been having his mail intercepted from as early as 1927, intercepts the Germans kindly passed on to MI5. Hiller had been an influential writer in the early German gay rights movement and in 1929, took over as chairperson of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee which campaigned for gay rights. His lodgings were ransacked by the SA and he was then arrested in 1933, tortured and sent to a number of camps. Released, he fled to Prague in 1934, and then to London in 1938. Hiller got out of Czechoslovakia with the assistance of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia.<sup>240</sup>

Hiller had kept some strange company in Prague: Otto Strasser.<sup>241</sup> Strasser, an early 'left' member of the Nazi Party, who had served in the *Freikorps*, been part of the bloody suppression of the Bavarian revolution and been expelled from the Nazi Party, then called for a "struggle against Nazism". He retained a strong nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-Communist perspective, as expressed in his grouping: 'Black front'.<sup>242</sup>

In January 1938, a MI5 report on 'Free German' activists was signed by both Hiller and Strasser. MI5 also reveals their earlier correspondence. But Hiller, though denying he was a 'Strasserite', defended Strasser: 'a significant anti-Hitler fighter', even if he had made a few mistakes. In 1941, he and Strasser put out a joint declaration. Hiller, who headed the miniscule Socialist United Front (*Freiheitsbund Deutscher Sozialisten*), wanted an alliance with the Strasser group (though not an amalgamation which was Strasser's position). Hiller wrote that he saw Strasser as a key part of the future post-war Germany. On the other hand H.G. Wells for one wanted Strasser interned.

<sup>240</sup> See Heartfield's biog for more detail on the Committee.

<sup>241</sup> Brinson and Dove, p146

<sup>242</sup> Palmier, Jean-Michel *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, p; 108. Himmler attempted to have Strasser killed in Prague, but killed instead Rudolph Formis, in charge of Strasse's illegal 'black' radio station.

Hiller was recruited as an informer by Claud Sykes, an MI5 controller.<sup>243</sup> MI5 kept close tabs on him, and though the meaning is not laid out, wrote in one report about having something ‘in case we need to use it against him.’ They need not have worried. He was a prolific informer on his fellow refugees, driven by his fervent anti-communism. This led MI5 to state that ‘his loyalty [to the UK] does not seem doubtful’, though his reliability was sometimes questioned. Hiller wrote many letters, which MI5 thoughtfully opened, giving us the chance to see how vituperative he was against fellow refugees, accusing them of the very sectarianism that he displayed. He even accused the pacifist Russbuelst of working ‘defacto for Goebbels’. He wrote of other anti-Nazis here as confused, amateurish, arrogant, a rabble and, in effect, stupid, unlike him. He even referred to *Die Zeitung*, an, in effect, British Government paper for exiled German speakers which refused to allow Communists to contribute, as being a newspaper only fit for the sewer and a disgrace. It was run, he wrote in October 1941, by a clique, and in a phrase with terrible Nazi overtones, ‘supported by rich people.....’.<sup>244</sup>

Even when interned on the Isle of Man, Hiller reported on his fellow internees.<sup>245</sup> The super MI5 informant, Sykes did a tour of internment camps and had a nice long chat with Hiller.

Hiller saw the Communists as his enemy. He reported endlessly on the Free German League of Culture which he denounced as a communist front: ‘the most prolific informant on the League’.<sup>246</sup> He especially targeted the League’s main officers, including the chair, the unaligned Hans Flesch, a ‘catspaw of the communists’. Whether Flesch’s subsequent dismissal from the BBC was a consequence is unproven. Hiller also went for Heartfield (see separate biography) who had already been refused admission to the UK and then only after the intervention of two MPs, given rights to reside for a mere 2 months, and who was therefore very vulnerable. Another early

<sup>243</sup> From 1937, Claud Sykes was a leading informant for MI5, charged with infiltrating German refugee circles, something to which MI5 gave high priority. He covered some of his activities by ‘posing’ as a translator from German to English.

<sup>244</sup> KV 2/2811

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. In internment, he requested the help of PEN with the Tribunal for Enemy Aliens, and expressed his desire (written in fluent English) to become involved in broadcasting appeals to anti-Nazi Germans, “impossible from concentration camp”!

<sup>246</sup> Brinson and Dove, 116-118, 154, 164,165.

Hiller set up his own rival splinter groups, the microscopic *Gruppe Unabhngiger Deutscher Autoren* with himself as chair and the tiny *Freiheitsbund Deutscher Sozialisten*.

target, whom Hiller reported on, was Jurgen Kuczinski, the KPD's exile group organiser from 1937 and a leading light. Whether Kuczinski really told Hiller that he approved of the Hitler-Stalin pact or hinted at KPD led strikes in British war industries is open to question.

Whether Hiller knew it or not, in this world of spies and shadow spies, MI5 had their files open on him too, presumably enabling them to put further pressure on him. It seems doubtful that Hiller's reports were important or reliable but they certainly were a sign of quite how hostile the environment towards refugees was.

After the end of the war, he remained so adamantly anticommunist, that, although he, amongst others, had been saved by the Czech Refugee Trust, he condemned Beatrice Wellington for allowing communist refugees to gain undeserved priority. (Wellington is a less renowned or feted organiser of the kindertransport out of Czechoslovakia, maybe because she was suspected of having Communist sympathies.)<sup>247</sup> From early on, the Czech committee was riven politically.<sup>248</sup> Hiller, who had no problem informing on his fellow refugees, had accused the Czech Committee early on of being under the control of communists, a charge MI5 had taken seriously.

In 1955, Hiller returned to Germany, where he lived and wrote in Hamburg until his death, continuing to campaign over gay rights.

### **Gerhard Hinze (1904-1972)**

Hinze is worthy of inclusion because, after rather too many experiences, he was one of the few members of the KPD who settled in the UK rather than returning to Germany, making a successful second career for himself here.

Born in Hamburg, he became an actor, and joined the KPD in 1930 which led to his being dismissed. He then set up his own anti-Nazi theatre company in Hamburg in 1932 but the performances were regularly disrupted by the SA. Despite leaving Hamburg when Hitler gained power, he was arrested by the SA after arranging to

<sup>247</sup> Brinson and Dove, 146

<sup>248</sup> Apparently, when whether the Czech committee gave their backing could make the difference between life and death, the Communists were not above accusing non-Communist refugees of having Gestapo connections. After the war and back in Germany, Hiller wrote – but without providing evidence – that the German communists in Prague had denounced him as a Nazi collaborator (one can see why they might) and had tried to remove his name from the list of those to whom Britain had granted visas. (NA, Czech fund)

meet, in a cafe, a comrade, Hans Otto, a brilliant and much loved left-wing actor who was then beaten to death. Somebody had betrayed them. Severely tortured, he ended up in a number of camps.

Although the trajectory is not clear, upon release in 1935, he moved to Berlin, hoping to be less well-known and so safer there, and became involved in underground activity, such as handing out leaflets. Warned he was under suspicion, he fled, first to Switzerland, then Prague, then the Ukraine. Here he joined the Kolkotz theatre, originally established by Piscator, an anti-Nazi propaganda troupe. Disbanded in 1936, Hinze then became the director of the 'Collective theatre', which, as in the immediately post-revolutionary days, toured the Russian countryside with its propaganda anti-Nazi plays.



However, he then came on to the UK. At Harwich, he was refused entry because his papers were not sufficient. His wife fortunately got hold of the campaigning Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, who managed to persuade the port authorities to let him land in the nick of time, just before the boat sailed.

He was categorised as a 'B' for internment purposes (for refugees who were 'higher risk') and in May, 1940 was taken to the Isle of Man (organising drama performances in the camp whilst there, including by Brecht) and was then sent on to Canada. Appearing before the Aliens Tribunal, he had denied ever having been a member of the KPD, although this appears unlikely! There were Nazis in their camp, which he and others complained about. He was shipped back to the UK in November 1941, theoretically to appear before an appeal (which never took place) but was mistakenly released.

He became involved with the German League for Culture, became one of its secretaries and active in its Theatre group, where he encouraged the production of European cabaret and theatre. Inevitably, MI5 started to track him.

Unlike the majority of political refugees who returned to East or West Germany, after the war, he stayed, anglicising his surname to Heinz. Though impossible to be sure, his disillusionment with the Communist scene may well also have been part of his desire to ‘anglicise’ himself. Maybe he also saw a better chance of a career here; maybe his many difficult experiences had left him desiring an easier life than in war and politically - torn Germany. He was granted British citizenship in 1948 and threw himself into British theatre and film, in which he made a successful career, appearing in dozens of plays and films, while remaining committed to German exile theatre.<sup>249</sup>

## 1938

### Willi Eichler (1896-1971)

Eichler was a leading member of ISK who campaigned tirelessly against the Nazis and for a united front, finally fleeing first to France, then to the UK in 1938.<sup>250</sup> He deserves to be better known.

Eichler joined the SPD in 1923 but then became actively involved in the ISK, its chair and editor of *Der Funke*, its anti-Nazi paper. It published an ‘Urgent Call for Unity’ in June 1932 between the SPD and the KPD. Amongst the many signatures were Einstein (see biography), Kurt Hiller (see biography), the artist Kathe Kollwitz, the writers Heinrich Mann and Arnold Zweig and Ernst Toller (see biography). After the death of the ISK leader, Nelson, in 1927, Eichler took over as chair of the ISK and published the theoretical party organs “ISK - Information Journal of the International Socialist Combat League” and “Der Funke” (The Spark)



<sup>249</sup> I am indebted to Dove, Richard, Gerhard Hinze or Gerhard Heinz, in ‘German-speaking Exiles in the Performing Arts in Britain after 1933’, eds Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove, from which much of this information is drawn.

<sup>250</sup> The *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund* (ISK) was set up by members expelled from the KPD in 1922 and the SPD in 1925. The ISK with at most 1000 member and sympathisers, mainly young, were a strongly anti-Nazi and pro-united front cadre organisation which, because they adopted underground conspiratorial methods early on, managed to survive after 1933, having destroyed all written party records. It remained undetected till 1938 so was able to continue helping political refugees leave the country, conduct sabotage and distribute leaflets. Their aim was to build a clandestine trade-union, *Unabhängige Sozialistische Gewerkschaft* (Independent Socialist Union), a position supported by the International Transport Workers Federation. It supported the ITF which distributed their illegal material in Germany. Members were bound to an ethical code: abstention from nicotine, alcohol and meat and organised religion.

In November 1933, Eichler fled to the Saarland (still under the League of Nations) and, a month later to France where he established an exile centre in Paris to support clandestine ISK groups in Germany. He continued to campaign actively for a united front and produced underground materials, in cooperation with Hans Jahn (see separate biography). The International Transport Workers' Federation, because of their network, in particular of former trade-unionists, were able and willing to distribute their illegal material and gather information in Germany.<sup>251</sup> The ITF's participation in the Second World War was openly anti-Nazi and pro-Allies. *'Its task was to... encourage the sabotage which everywhere harassed the enemy, ... to strengthen the morale of our own people and undermine that of the enemy...'* *'it was engaged in a fight to the death against 'the Nazi and Fascist régimes which had crushed the free labour movements... , which had persecuted, imprisoned and murdered so many of its [the ITF's] friends, and which aimed to enslave the workers of the world.'*<sup>252</sup>

They distributed the monthly ISK periodicals *Reinhart letters* (Reinhart Briefe) and the *Socialist waiting room*. (Socialistische Warte) which were produced by the International board of the ISK in Paris and were then smuggled into Germany via Basel or Cologne with the help of the ITF (see biography on Edo Fimmen). It was mostly a four-page thin-print pamphlet that the comrades were instructed should be swallowed in an emergency. Apparently, in March 1934, Hans Jahn complained to Eichler that the leaves could not be swallowed and smaller, thinner sheets were necessary<sup>253</sup>

The rail workers distributed the material in towns where they were bases, such as Göttingen and Hannover, where around 300 to 400 copies each seem to have been picked up at the station. The ITF railroad workers deposited the smuggled pamphlets in the sleeping cars of the express trains. The local ISK members, who miraculously knew the exact train and its number, then pulled the pamphlets out when the train stopped. Others smuggled the newspapers in a briefcase with a secret compartment.

<sup>251</sup> The following invaluable material comes from <http://www.stadtarchiv.goettingen.de/widerstand/texte/itf-verbindungsweg-illegale-schriften.html#sdfootnote5sym>

<sup>252</sup> Dieter Nelles, *Nationalsozialismus Im Unterricht Der Sekundarstufe*, 2007

<sup>253</sup> International Youth Federation (IJB) / International Socialist Struggle Association (ISK), file group: ISK, correspondence B (1933 - 1946), p. 4, March 30, 1934, Hans Jahn to Eichler.

In addition, the Rhine boat men helped maintain contacts in Germany. Eichler wrote in a report to Edo Fimmen, the General Secretary of the ITWF,<sup>254</sup> in March 1936: *A number of seafarers and inland boatmen who had previously worked under the leadership of the so-called 'Red International' have disgustingly turned away from their practices and readily submitted to the ITF.[International Transport Workers] I have been with them in Rotterdam and Antwerp half a dozen times and have the fullest trust in the people. They are honest proletarians and through them we have good connections today on 96 German seagoing vessels and over 100 Rhine barges and tugboats .'*<sup>255</sup>

In April 1938, Eichler was expelled from France because of his political activity, but found asylum in London, where he headed a small ISK group and published ISK journals and pamphlets. In 1941 Eichler and his Combat League joined the Union of German Socialist Organisations and inaugurated unification with the SPD which finally succeeded in August 1945. He also became a member of the National Group of German Labour Unionists in Britain.

He also worked with the Allied services. Eichler pressured George Pratt of the US Labour Department into sending left-wing activists back into Germany. Eichler, correctly feared that capitalist relationships would continue after Nazism's defeat and, in addition to defeating Nazism, wanted to help build an alternative Germany. The first to be sent were Jupp Kapius (see separate biography) and Willi Drucker, with Hilde Meisel (see separate biography) and Anne Beyer (see separate biography) as couriers. Eichler also worked at the BBC making broadcasts aimed at German workers and published *Europe Speaks*.

Eichler returned to West Germany at the beginning of 1946. Having repeatedly risked his life to defeat Nazism, he ended his days as an influential SPD theoretician.

<sup>254</sup> In the period from the mid 1930s to the beginning of the Second World War, a group of German seamen based in Antwerp combined with Amsterdam-based Edo Fimmen, Secretary of the International Transportworkers Federation, to campaign against the Nazi government amongst the sailors of the German merchant fleet. They organised cells of supporters on German ships, encouraged informal resistance, circulated propaganda and planned sabotage. The Antwerp Group were a breakaway from the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, a Comintern-aligned organisation. A number of the Antwerp Group's key leaders were rooted in a radical syndicalist tradition rather than main-line Communism. Fimmen criticised the Comintern for its sectarianism. He and his circle also were strongly anti-racist and supported labour organisations in colonised countries, highly unusual at the time amongst western European trade unions (or by then, indeed, the Comintern).

<sup>255</sup> Gottwaldt 2009, p. 86, ISK - receipt of illegal material via ITF - Reinhardt letters and socialist control, redistribution.



## **Johann Fladung (1898-1982)**

Originally a mechanic, then a Communist politician and anti-Nazi activist, Fladung, once exiled in the UK, threw himself into the ‘cultural’ end of refugee politics.

Like so many others committed to anti-Nazism who ended up in the UK, Fladung had been deeply influenced by his participation in the events of 1918/19. He had been a member, or some sources suggest, on the committee of the especially militant Hanover Soldiers' Council in 1918, calling for the end of the war and the fall of the Kaiser.<sup>256</sup> In December 1920, he was a delegate to the KPD and USPD unification conference. He then worked as a KPD official in Kassel, Szczecin, Pomerania and Krefeld. In December 1924, he was elected to the Prussian state parliament, re-elected in 1928 and 1932 and, from 1930 to 1933, was also a Dusseldorf councillor. He also edited various communist newspapers.

In May 1932, he was seriously injured in a fight with Nazis. Arrested by the Gestapo in September 1933, in August 1936, he was released from Oranienburg concentration camp, partly as a result of the intervention of the British Quakers. He was almost deaf because of his severe mistreatment. He fled to Switzerland in early 1938 and went on to Paris and from there by plane to London. Although unclear how far he was a part of the Quaker movement, he was also greeted here by Quaker representatives.

At the end of 1939, Fladung was one of the co-founders of the Free German League of Culture, became its chair and contributed to its publications. Fladung was also good friends with Hermann Meyer. (See separate biography) As the Vice-Chairman of the Refugee Children's Evacuation Fund (RCEF), he coordinated a number of exhibitions of pictures by children from different nations on how they perceived the war. The Free German League of Culture also put on an exhibition in September 1941 to raise money and awareness for the RCEF whilst also promoting, in Fladung's words, ‘a better world after the war’. At its height, the two organisations shared the same address in Hampstead.

<sup>256</sup> The revolutionary period lasted roughly from November 1918 until April 1919. The first acts of revolution were triggered by the Naval Command insisting on a battle with the British Navy when Germany had already evidently lost the war. Around 4 November, delegations of the sailors dispersed to all of the major cities in Germany. By 7 November, the revolution had seized all large coastal cities including Hanover. The revolt led to the proclamation of a republic on 9 November 1918, but was brutally crushed.

Fladung had a keen interest in building some sort of mass anti-Nazi exile grouping. The leadership of the exiled SPD would not touch the Free German League out of long-standing sectarianism. Fladung examined the possibility of a joint exile group which led on to the establishment of a branch of the Free German Movement. (For more details, see Introduction and section on Koenen.)

While the SPD leadership continued to refuse to take part, a couple of SPD members, Adele Schreiber-Krieger and Karl Rawitski, defied the party line and did participate. Adele Georgine Schreiber-Krieger (1872 - 1957), born in Austria to a bourgeois family, from an early age contributed articles to left journals. She moved to Berlin, was on the radical wing of the women's movement, concerned with class struggle, campaigning for single mothers rights and suffrage. From 1920 to 1924 and from 1928 to 1933, she was a Social Democratic member of the Reichstag. In 1939, she came to the UK, from Switzerland, where she had fled in 1933. Here, she gave classes on democracy to German POWs on behalf of the British government. She became a member of the Labour Party. She returned to Switzerland in 1947.

Others who were non-aligned also took part, such as Irmgard Litten, the mother of the, in effect, murdered lawyer, Hans Litten.<sup>257</sup>

By 1944, the importance of planning for Germany's future became more pressing. Fladung addressed these issues in 'ein schritt ins freie', arguing for the importance of cultural reconstruction, and reforming the State, not rebuilding a battered working class. It was Johann Fladung, FGLC's chair, and Siegfried Zimmering who announced the League would be dissolved by May 1946.<sup>258</sup>

In 1946, Fladung returned to Düsseldorf. Many years later, he wrote his memoirs but by then, sadly, his memory was not at his best. In 1964, the Grand Political Criminal Chamber of the Dusseldorf Regional Court suspended a political trial against him for 'endangering the state' because the defendant was unable to stand trial.

<sup>257</sup> Brinson and Dove, 'The continuation of politics by other means in 'I didn't want to float; I wanted to belong to something. Refugee organisations in Britain 1933-45, Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies, 2008, Eds Anthony Grenville and Andrea Reiter, p14

<sup>258</sup> Brinson and Dove, *Politics by other means. The Free German League of Culture in London 1939-1945*, 2010

### **Hugo (1892-1958) and Herta Graf (1911-1996)**

Hugo Graf, a farm labourer and then a pipe-fitter, became a prominent member of the Metal Workers Union and joined the SPD. Conscripted into the German Army, he lost his left leg during the First World War. He joined the USPD, the Spartacus League and then the KPD. In January 1918, he played a leading role in organising mass strikes in Erfurt, Thuringia.<sup>259</sup> But in 1920, Graf was thrown out of the KPD for 'anti-parliamentarism' though readmitted in 1923. He was elected to the *Reichstag* but was arrested in March 1933. Badly tortured, he was held in "protective custody" in Sachsenburg concentration camp, then Colditz, till June 1935, where he was the leader of the illegal KPD group and head of the camp library. He then fled to Czechoslovakia in 1935, where he lived, although spending some time studying in Moscow.

He then fled to the UK. He was interned on the Isle of Man from July 1940-October 1941. He then settled in Glasgow in Scotland where he organised an Emigrants Club and returned to being a toolmaker. He was active in the FGLC, the local secretary of the German KPD exile group (as confirmed by the British spy Kaspar!) and a founding member of the Scottish Free German group. He returned to Germany in August 1946 and became active in the SED.<sup>260</sup> Born in Latvia, Herta Graf was a KPD activist in the underground up till 1936 when she fled to Czechoslovakia and then in 1936 to the UK. Like Hugo, she became one of the leaders of the Emigrant Club in Glasgow and also, from 1943, the head of an emigrant childrens' home. She became an ambulance driver at the British air defences and a member of the Transport and General Workers Union. In 1945, she became a seamstress in London and returned to Germany in 1947.<sup>261</sup> Unfortunately, I could not find anything further about her. Ernst Langguth 1908-1983

Langguth exemplifies a member of the KPD who accepted the Third Period line uncritically. He is also of interest because, unlike most of the refugees included here, he became active in Scotland.

<sup>259</sup> The German strike from 25 January 1918 for about one week was against the First World War. It began in Berlin: 400,000 workers went on strike primarily in munitions and metal.

<sup>260</sup> Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur: Biographische Datenbanken, <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/hugo-graef>

<sup>261</sup> The only source for this material came from: Hamacher, Gottfried et al, *Against Hitler*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Langguth, from a Berlin working class background, became associated with the KPD in 1919 and, aged 11, became active organising youth groups. In 1921 he became a member of the KJVD. In 1922, by now aged 14, he became a member and then group leader of the popular 'green' Friends of Nature youth movement (which fed many of its supporters into revolutionary left groups) and in 1926 in the sports club "Fichte". Unemployed, in 1927, he became the youth leader of the Berlin branch of the Solidarity Workers-Cyclists Association, though an SPD member stood against him for the position which meant Langguth had to campaign for the position. The Association discouraged competition (unlike the KPD's Red Sports) but Langguth had formed a Red Sports faction within the Solidarity branch. The Association was banned in 1933. In 1928, he had joined the KPD and, working as a carpenter, campaigned for the KPD Red Unions, the RGO.

Langguth wrote a document about 1932/33, unfortunately undated, but which looks as if was written a long time later. This illustrates more than anything the vituperative and sectarian nature of KPD Third Period politics at the time and its failure to recognise the significance of the Nazis taking power. It provides a mix of, somewhat chaotic, detail about local anti-Nazi activity and absurd Stalinist rhetoric. But such local details are rare and therefore worth considering. (Their rarity is mainly because so many participants did not live to tell the tale.) He explains the background: 'I then very quickly became a deputy in the Military Defense Department, headed by Comrade Herbert Hanisch, who directed all anti-opponent work for Prenzlauer Berg, Pankow and Weißensee, and Deputy Head of Defense.' He described how the Red Front (RFB) and some other left wing formations had combated the SA in the local streets prior to 1933, deploring the absence of SPD members. Nevertheless, when the SA wanted to raid the SPD in Immanuelkirchstrasse, the RFB and workers from the residential area prevented the SA attack, with injuries on both sides but they were condemned by the SPD for causing the fracas.

Langguth emphasised how important it was to break local people from the Nazis in the years up to 1933 and how they would only put on their uniforms when out of sight. Working class people were unemployed and so poor, they could not even afford clothes and this led to unrest. He followed this with a long rant against Ruth Fischer for colluding with the SPD and denouncing "Comrade" Heinrich Brandler as a renegade, anti-Stalinist, dung-heap.

A high point of the struggle against fascism, he wrote, were the actions against the march of the SA, with police officers alongside, in front of the Karl Liebknecht House in Berlin on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1933, but he neglected to say that Hitler was appointed Chancellor eight days later or that Nazi thugs stormed and closed the KPD headquarters, Karl Liebknecht House, on 23 February 1933 and banned their newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*, four days before the Reichstag fire, when thousands of Communists were arrested or murdered.

In an extreme under-statement, Langguth went on: 'We were no longer able to take full action during the *Reichstag* elections on March 5, 1933 and the city council elections on March 12, 1933....' He described how they rented a horse and cart with a loudspeaker system decorated with election posters and collected money.<sup>262</sup> In 1933, he became the head of the organisation of the illegal Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg sub-district of the KPD. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933, days after the *Reichstag* fire, he was arrested by the SA and tortured. After release, he helped with illegal newspapers and reorganised the KPD underground.

In April 1934, Langguth was sent to Prague by the KPD where he quickly became the leader of the exiles. Rapidly expelled, he managed to live underground but still remained a key organiser. Following a denunciation, he was arrested and expelled after several weeks in prison.

Langguth – somehow - arrived in the UK in November 1938, where he became political leader of the KPD group in Bristol. In June 1941 he was interned but released a few months later, and became a local forest worker. From January 1942, he lived in Glasgow, where he became head of the Scottish "Movement for a Free Germany". He also became an official in the Scottish trade unions and a member of the works council in the Scottish Consumers' Co-op, Transport Dept. and member of the Glasgow Trade Union Council. I suspect the hand of Ernst Langguth is visible in the following statement by Glasgow Trades Council from November 1939: "*Glasgow Trades Council, representing 100,000 trade unionists, sends its warm fraternal greetings to the working people of Germany, and desires to convey to them expression of firmest solidarity in our common struggle to end the menace of Fascism which destroys our organisations and negates our elementary liberties.*"

<sup>262</sup> Memories of Comrade Ernst Langguth [docplayer.org/191412911-Erinnerungen-des-genossen-ernst-langguth.htm](http://docplayer.org/191412911-Erinnerungen-des-genossen-ernst-langguth.htm)

“The present war, with its horror and frightfulness, is the outcome of the imperialist policy of robbery, plunder, and oppression of the peoples of all countries, and its continuance can bring no benefit to the working people, but on the contrary, must increase the burden for many generations to come

*“We, like you, seriously and fervently desire peace, to permit us to strengthen our movement and build a system of society in Europe where war and its causes will be abolished for all time. We ask you to accept our greetings, and pledge ourselves to work unceasingly with you towards our common goal...”*<sup>263</sup> Langguth was also attached to the Scottish Refugee Council, and became the organiser of their youth wing. Another National Archives memo, from March 1942, suggests that the Refugee Youth Club had originally been set up by the Free German League and was being used to spread a United Front message. (There is no way of knowing what the report writer meant by ‘united front’ however.) Apparently, various other KPD ‘officials’, including Hugo Graef (see biography) were coming up to Glasgow ‘to assist’ him. Glasgow as especial interest because of the working-class character of the city and the high number of refugees who had settled there.<sup>264</sup> But, according to a local police report from March 1942, other locally based German refugees (whom the report stated had talked to the Assistant Chief Constable anonymously) did not feel happy about Langguth’s politics, instead believing that they should blend in and ‘serve the common cause’.<sup>265</sup> On August 22, 1946, Langguth returned to Berlin with his wife and became an active member of the SED. Due to his many years of experience in illegal party work, he was deployed to support the political work of the KPD after it was banned in West Germany in 1956.<sup>266</sup> Adolf Buchholz (1913-1978)

In 1926, Adolf Buchholz, became a member of the Workers' Sports Association. In 1929, now aged 16, he joined and then became head of the local KJVD and in 1932, he joined the KPD. A metal worker, from February 1933, he worked underground for the KJVD and was arrested in March 1934, and imprisoned till 1936.

<sup>263</sup> <https://www.transdiffusion.org/2020/11/06/the-german-freedom-radio-station>

<sup>264</sup> PF47192

<sup>265</sup> PF47192

<sup>266</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, much of the material used here has been drawn from the wonderful Hans-Rainer Sandvoss:: *Resistance in Prenzlauer Berg and Weissensee*. For a film about Langguth’s life, see [www.kiezhaus.org/rote-bergsteiger-serienkino-politisch-historischer-austausch-zu-antifaschismus-in-den-bergen/](http://www.kiezhaus.org/rote-bergsteiger-serienkino-politisch-historischer-austausch-zu-antifaschismus-in-den-bergen/)



After his release, in June 1937, he managed to get to Czechoslovakia. In May, 1938, he founded and then became chair of a "Free German Youth" group for young German refugees in Czechoslovakia. But later that year, he had to flee again and got to the UK via Poland, which was still possible. Here, he became deeply involved in helping Germans, especially young Germans, get out of Czechoslovakia, particularly raising the necessary finance. In June 1939, he became the founder and then chair of the antifascist Free German Youth. He was then briefly interned on the Isle of Man. In 1941 he had to stand down following various internal disputes within Free Germans League. He then held various positions within the KPD. From 1941 to 1944, he worked as a moulder in a British arms company.<sup>267</sup> In autumn 1944 he was recruited by OSS and, on 10 April 1945, was parachuted as "Dolf" to near Berlin, the first of the agents to be dropped (and the youngest), disguised as a Gestapo official. But the Russian troops were already closing in on Berlin so he became superfluous. He made contact with the Red Army and was later transferred to the American military authorities who later transferred him back to the UK.<sup>268</sup> In September 1946 he returned to Germany.<sup>269</sup>

### **John Heartfield (born Helmut Herzfeld) (1891 – 1968)**

It is extraordinary that although John Heartfield was in exile in London for twelve years, he is hardly known about here, never mind celebrated. Probably the most famous of the German anti-Nazi artists, a founder of the Dadaist movement, a pioneer of photomontage and friends of Brecht, Ernst Toller, Georg Grosz and Piscator, who used art as a political weapon against the Nazis, he continued his anti-Nazi activities insofar as possible while in exile in the UK but it is as if he never had lived here.<sup>270</sup> No

<sup>267</sup> Rosa Luxemburg Foundation manuscripts 53.pdf

<sup>268</sup> Information DRAFD, [www.drafd.de/files](http://www.drafd.de/files)

<sup>269</sup> Gould, J. S, "Strange Bedfellows. The OSS and the London "Free Germans". In: *Studies in Intelligence* (2002)

<sup>270</sup> It is possible I just could not find it but there does not appear to have been any exhibition of Heartfield's work here, except at the ICA in 1969, fifty years ago, which had an accompanying booklet, or any comprehensive British published study of his life and work in the UK. (There are both German and American studies, though Heartfield's art as propaganda for the KPD is often sidelined) I found one short article in a British collection: Anna Schuilz : John Heartfield: *A Political Artist's Exile in London* in 'Burning Bright Book. Essays in Honour of David Bindman', eds: Diana Dethloff, Tessa Murdoch, Kim Sloan and Caroline Elam, UCL, 2015. There is also an excellent article by Carolyn Kay, *Art and Politics in Interwar Germany The Photomontages of John Heartfield*, Toronto, dedicated to Timothy Mason, 'whose encouragement was instrumental' but which, as the title indicates, is looking at Heartfield's time in Germany, not the UK. It also touches on the relationship between the KPD and Heartfield's work, a theme somebody should explore!

Thanks to the present pandemic and the enforced closure of museums etc, the Academy of Arts (Akademie der Künste—ADK) in Berlin, which controls Heartfield's estate, has just placed online a virtual, multimedia presentation of photos,

doubt being a founder member of the KPD didn't help. The British State, having tried to stop him coming here, spied on him whilst here, then basically threw him out after the war. Despite - or should that be, 'because of' - the continuing poignancy and immediacy of many of his political images, he has remained hidden ever since.

Heartfield pioneered the use of art as an anti-Nazi weapon. With Heartfield, the purpose of art is not as before to reify bourgeois relationships but to comment on politics and encourage political action. Heartfield used modern popular media, such as cuttings and photos from newspapers, montage and slogans to create an easily recognised but damning critique of Nazism. But, as Kay argues, the way Heartfield used montage – the combination of the recognisable and of 'deception' made "the absurd appear true and the true appear absurd", thereby demystifying the 'appearance' of leading Nazi figures<sup>271</sup>



His father was a socialist writer (and historically Jewish) and his mother a textile worker and a trade union activist. As a result of their politics, the family was forced to flee Germany to Switzerland in 1896. In 1916, back in Berlin, Heartfield, disgusted with the anti-British fervour sweeping Germany informally changed his name from Helmut Herzfeld to John Heartfield! He was drafted into the Army in 1915 but succeeded in evading military service, possibly due to simulating a mental condition. In the early interwar years, the turbulence of German politics and the horrors of the war provided yeast for remarkable left-wing committed art: Berlin Dadaists, (who came out on the side of Luxemburg and Liebknecht), whose techniques of connecting photographs, newspaper cuttings, and magazine advertisements in photomontages deeply influenced Heartfield, the work of George Grosz (whose work also influenced him but who was never as much a KPD loyalist as Heartfield), Kathe Kollwitz, Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator and the Russian constructivists.<sup>272</sup>

documents and audio-visual testimonials dealing with Heartfield's life and work, though (inevitably?) not as fully as one might wish! It had been due to open at the end of March 2020.

<sup>271</sup> Kay, op cit.

<sup>272</sup> Heartfield explained in a radio interview in 1966 that the Dadaists were almost all from a bourgeois background, with no connection to the working class. But that they had such an extreme reaction to German barbarity during WW1, that '*the Dadaistic man had to be a radical opponent to exploitation*'. (<https://heartfield.adk.de/en/john-heartfield-biography>)



In December 1918, Heartfield joined the KPD the day after it was formed. According to his brother, they both initially became interested in the radical left when they heard Karl Liebknecht's anti-war appeal in 1916. Heartfield then began to support the USPD (the Independent Socialist Party) and the Spartacists. The Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 further inspired Heartfield and his brother.<sup>273</sup> In 1919, Heartfield was dismissed from the film service because of his support for the strike that followed the assassination of Liebknecht and Luxemburg.

Heartfield's work can only be understood in terms of his commitment to revolutionary politics: an expression of his hatred of Nazism, militarism and imperialism. In the second half of the 1920s, Heartfield directly worked for the KPD, designing election posters and creating photomontages for particular political issues set out in the newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag). 'I made posters for party meetings, for demonstrations and elections, for the party's agit-prop, designed the emblem for the Red Front... and edited the party's satirical comic paper 'Der Rote Knuppel' (The Red stick) which, amazingly, seems to have lasted for a few years!<sup>274</sup>



After 1929 Heartfield concentrated on photomontage for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierter-Zeitung* (AIZ), an ostensibly independent newspaper, in fact financed and indirectly controlled by the Comintern and not by the KPD and, fortunately for heartfield, it was directed by Münzenberg who appears to have found heartfield's unconventional talented propaganda appealing. Aiz had with a readership of up to half a million! In 1927/28, Heartfield worked in the KPD central committee agit-prop section. But this was not an unproblematic relationship. Surely humour isn't compatible with

<sup>273</sup> Kay, Carolyn, *Art and Politics in Interwar Germany The Photomontages of John Heartfield*, Toronto, p21

<sup>274</sup> <https://heartfield.adk.de/en/john-heartfield-biography>

disciplined party politics. God forbid, Der rote knuppel smacked of individualism and modernism. In fact these debates will soon become centre stage in the arguments about socialist realism but this run-in presaged future disagreements in which the agitprop section's 'loyalty' was viewed with suspicion.<sup>275</sup>

Heartfield created hundreds of popular images and produced 35 front-covers for AIZ, some still recognisable. In the years around 1928/29, before Nazis had become such an obvious threat, his extraordinary photomontage played on the horrors of the first world war. But soon, His photomontages for AIZ focused on the threat of Nazism and became part of the KPD's attempt to win the elections of 1930 and 1932, the KPD leadership having woken up to the potential power of art as propaganda.<sup>276</sup> (Apparently, his work was so 'successful' that a number of industrial companies tried to tempt him to work for them with large amounts of money. He refused.) His other job was to design many book jackets for the newish Malik Verlag publishing house which he and his brother had founded about ten years earlier.



This poster is from the first edition of 'The Red Stick'.<sup>277</sup> From April 1931 to January 1932, Heartfield worked in the USSR where he exhibited his work, gave lectures and courses on photomontage, designed a couple of magazines and helped with stage sets. In Odessa, he worked with Piscator on the film 'The Revolt of the Fishermen'. This reproduction reveals both how far he stuck to photomontage but also how very much more 'realistic' it was in its implementation!

Back in Germany, Heartfield continued to produce hundreds of anti-Nazi photomontage images (see below). It is too easy to look back and assume Heartfield would focus on undermining the growing threat of Nazism. But remember that for the KPD

<sup>275</sup> John Heartfield photography plud dynmie, p43

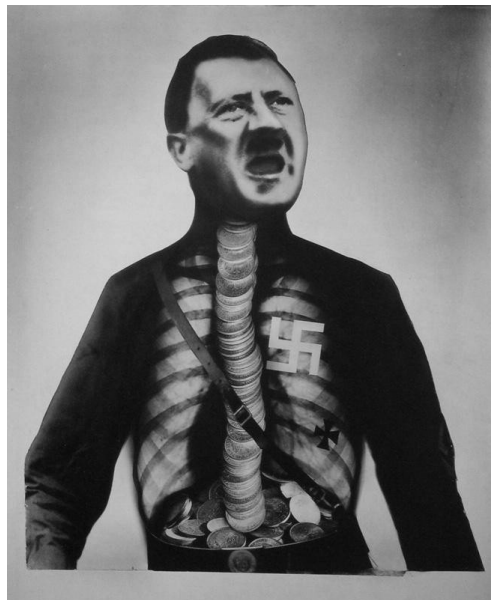
<sup>276</sup> Heartfield unfortunately took the party line on social fascism. In 1930 he created a photomontage for AIZ of a passive, faceless figure, entitled 'Whoever Reads the Bourgeois Papers Will Become Blind and Deaf Away With the Stupefying Bandages'. The face of the man is wrapped with two SPD newspapers. To the modern eye, it looks as if today's mass media is stupefying but that was not its original purpose

<sup>277</sup> Both these posters are from the archive of the Imperial War Museum, with my thanks. The museum appears to have dozens of Heartfield productions. Maybe we should all write to them suggesting they put on an exhibition!

leadership, it was the ‘social fascist’ SPD who were the main enemy, not the Nazis. Heartfield’s political nose was, fortunately, sharper than theirs.

in April 1933 when the SA and SS broke into his flat, he saved himself by jumping from his balcony, spraining his ankle; he was apparently number five on the Gestapo’s most-wanted list. The Nazis made a search of the courtyard but failed to spot an old metal dustbin. For the next seven hours, Heartfield hid amongst the rubbish. But ‘the barbarians’ did succeed in destroying his entire work up till then.

According to his ‘Lebenslauf’ of 1951, the Party then ordered him to emigrate. He somehow made contact with the underground network that would soon smuggle him on foot through the Sudeten mountains and over the border into Czechoslovakia. (It always worth noting how refugees escaped Germany: it is those who walk out who know they can’t risk being caught on a train.) He had no documents.



The photomontage of ‘Adolf the Superman’ from 1932 satirises Hitler by showing an x-ray view of his spine constructed out of gold coins and thus fuelled by capitalist interests. Try not to look at this with the eyes of somebody almost 100 years later. This supposedly- and apparently actually- helped undermine the myth Hitler was constructing of himself.

In this photomontage from 1934, *Göring: The Executioner of the Third Reich*, Heartfield exposed Hermann Goering as The Third Reich’s executioner. Goering had blamed the Reichstag fire that helped Hitler seize power as the work of Jews and communists.

Heartfield denied Party membership in Prague, but this was probably a tactical decision, especially as the Czech government had put out a memo warning of refugee subversives. Indeed the Czech government, although offering a limited sort of

sanctuary as early as 1933, issued a warning about the influx of German communists and Jews.<sup>278</sup>



Heartfield continued to produce anti-Nazi photomontages for AIZ which started being produced in Prague from 25 March 1933. As previously, the main source of funding was Münzenberg. Heartfield was prolific in Prague, producing many coverpiece photomontages for AIZ, now called *Volks-Illustrierte*. Heartfield concentrated his attacks on Hitler and on the industrialists who supplied the Nazi state with arms. However, it was very difficult to smuggle the magazine back to Germany and circulation dropped dramatically. AIZ limped on till November 1939.

Heartfield's participation in the International Exhibition of Caricatures in Prague in 1934 then led to Germany threatening to discontinue diplomatic relationships with Czechoslovakia. The Nazi Government tried to persuade the still independent Czech government to throw Heartfield out. The Czech government first agreed to ban Heartfield's work but after an international outcry, a 'compromise' was reached: only some of Heartfield's work was taken down. Heartfield's friends in Europe also helped to get published eight photomontages on the Spanish civil war in an anti-Franco magazine; *The World in Pictures*<sup>279</sup>

Although Jewishness had never been an apparent concern or theme in Heartfield's work, at this point, against the background of rising antisemitism in Germany and beyond, some of Heartfield's photomontages targeted the treatment of Jews in Nazi

<sup>278</sup> John Heartfield, 191

<sup>279</sup> <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWheartfield.htm>

Germany, a focus he was to continue in London.<sup>280</sup> The Nazis certainly did not miss an anti-Semitic trick and in 1938, Nazi propagandist, Erwin Schockel, denounced Heartfield as a disorderly Jew dressed in dirty clothes and lacking originality. Heartfield produced a Nazi photo featuring a German peasant having his nose measured and his last photomontage in London in December 1939 for Reynolds News 'Reservations' showed 'Himmler standing over a fenced-in mass of people swinging a whip and holding a dagger in his hand.

Heartfield then briefly went to Paris for six months from March to August, 1935 where he met with Oskar Kokoschka, and Walter Benjamin, amongst others. His exhibition *150 photomontages politiques et satiriques d'actualité* takes place from April to May and he also participated in the 'First international Writers Congress for the Defense of Culture'. At this point, he also designed the book cover for Munzenberg's 'Brown Book'. 5

But, in 1937, when his satires were again exhibited in the gallery Manes in Prague, the Czech Ministry of Cultural Affairs succumbed to Nazi pressure and had most of Heartfield's polemical works against Hitler and his followers removed from the exhibition. In 1938, the Nazis demanded that the Czech government hand him but this, the Czech government refused.<sup>281</sup>

Now, Heartfield then had to flee for a second time, afraid of what would happen when the Nazis arrived. He was rescued from Prague with the help of the British Committee for Refugees, entering Britain on an interim Czech passport.<sup>282</sup> Also

<sup>280</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/36146309/2008\\_%C3%89migr%C3%A9\\_Traces\\_John\\_Heartfield\\_in\\_Prague](https://www.academia.edu/36146309/2008_%C3%89migr%C3%A9_Traces_John_Heartfield_in_Prague)

<sup>281</sup> Johnheartfield.com/John-Heartfield-Exhibition/helmut-herzfeld

<sup>282</sup> The Czechoslovak Refugee Trust was created on 21 July 1939 by the Treasury, the Home Office and three Trustees appointed by the Home Secretary. It developed from the British Committee for refugees from Czechoslovakia, established in October 1938. In some sort of strange financial arrangement, It was funded by the British Government, the Czech government and by private donation. (This formulation raised many concerns as the Czech government was by then under Nazi directorship.) So the British government did not have clear responsibility of the Fund's operations. Its terms of reference were to rescue those who had challenged Nazism, thereby putting their lives at risk, who sought refuge from Nazi persecution following the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, and the subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. The terms of eligibility created were also much argued over. It appears the Czech government wanted to exclude Jews and there was also a question as to whether Sudeten Germans could apply. ([https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1939/feb/07/czecho-slovakia-financial-assistance-bill#S5CV0343P0\\_19390207\\_HOC\\_310](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1939/feb/07/czecho-slovakia-financial-assistance-bill#S5CV0343P0_19390207_HOC_310) ). In a debate about refugees from Czechoslovakia, it is astonishing to read the Prime-Minister, Balfour, informing the House of Commons two week before The Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia in March 1939 that no aggression against Czechoslovakia had taken place. ([https://api.parliament.uk/historichansard/commons/1939/mar/14/czecho-slovakia#S5CV0345P0\\_19390314\\_HOC\\_331](https://api.parliament.uk/historichansard/commons/1939/mar/14/czecho-slovakia#S5CV0345P0_19390314_HOC_331)) It gives a sense of the precariousness of getting into the UK as refugee. It has been suggested that the Government's unusual generosity towards refugees was 'guilt money' for selling out Czechoslovakia. The British Government's policy

apparently giving him support was the British group, Artists International (AIA), adherents of the CP and strongly pro-Soviet. They listed the artists at risk in Prague, putting Heartfield as their first priority. They found Gilbert Murray, a friend of Heartfield's, to stand surety for him. Heartfield was then able to leave Prague on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1938.

He first stayed in Britain with Yvonne Kapp, a Czech journalist and active member of the Communist Party.<sup>283</sup> After an initial refusal, it took a request by Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, for a visa to be granted without delay. It was then issued for a mere two months.<sup>284</sup> The party group of exiles, in the person of Koenen (see separate biography), organised accommodation for Heartfield with Fred Ullmann, the refugee painter and member of the SPD who was the Chair of the Free German League.

MI5 viewed Heartfield with alarm. Moreover, Krivitsy identified him in February 1940 as an agent of OGPU (later KGB, the Russian secret police) (National archives, KV 2/802) and formerly a GRU (Russian Secret Intelligence) agent who also had contacts with the Communist Party member, Yvonne Kapp.<sup>285</sup> (Krivitsky, who had turned from being a Soviet to an American spy, had a predilection for naming unlikely people as spies, including my mother.) MI5 also spotted Heartfield's subsequent involvement in the "Free German League of Culture", which, as they put it, was a KPD "front" organisation. Hiller, whom we shall meet again, reported to MI5 on Heartfield.

Heartfield was interned as an enemy alien in 1940, and though it was only for six weeks, he passed through three different camps and his health began to deteriorate. (He suffered from intermittent epilepsy.) Again the MP, Ellen Wilkinson, and also MP

was that the refugees could only be accepted as transmigrants.

By December 1939, the British Committee had brought nearly 12,000 refugees from Czechoslovakia to Britain, including 6000 Czechs, 3000 Sudeten Germans, 300 other Czech minorities and 1000 [Reich] Germans, many having to flee for the second time. (Jana Buresova *The Czech Refugee Trust Fund in Britain 1939–1950* In *Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, Volume: 11, Editors: Charmian Brinson and Marian Malet) MI5 was deeply suspicious of it, largely because of the numbers of suspected Communists they got out and because British Communists, such as Kapp, were on its staff (at least for some time). MI5 employed numerous informants to spy on its activities.

<sup>283</sup> <https://hetrtfield.adk.de/en/john-heartfield-biography>

<sup>284</sup> <https://heartfield.adk.de/en/john-heartfield-biography>

Brinson and Dove, 92, 118

<sup>285</sup> National archives, KV 2/802



Eleanor Rathbone<sup>286</sup> raised questions in Parliament which led to his release. MI5 opined he should be re-interred forthwith but the Home Office demurred.

Indeed, Heartfield remained in constant fear of being re-interred until a letter from the Parliamentary Committee on Refugees in January 1941 informed him that his case was closed. However, his permit to reside in Britain was dependent on a decision to be taken by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund in London, to which he wrote increasingly desperate letters begging for permission to stay. Finally, he received a certificate, confirming his status as a 'political refugee, because of the danger in which he stood as a result of his political activities'.<sup>287</sup>

Being an avowed communist did not help. He had difficulty placing his work. In addition, like other refugees, he was not allowed to get paid work. And, although he did continue his anti-Nazi 'propaganda' he became less productive, as so often happens in exile, when people are 'derooted'. But over the next few months, his work did appear in the left-wing 'Reynolds News', and the newspaper: Lilliput.<sup>288</sup> On 23rd September, 1939, Picture Post used one of Heartfield's earlier anti-Hitler photomontages. His work was also shown in the London and the Arcade Galleries. The League also mounted a number of small exhibitions of their members' work: he got a one day show, sub-titled: 'One man's show against Hitler!' His aim was to make the public aware of the threat of Nazism both within Germany but also to Europe as a whole. But, a committed Communist, the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939/40 upset him.<sup>289</sup>

He spoke at political rallies, organised anti-Fascist groups, and co-organised the political cabaret, 'Four and Twenty Black Sheep' for the Free German League of Culture. This drew heavily on the traditions of German political cabaret, was itself in German and had as much to do with the experience of the refugees themselves as it was geared to an English audience. The audience here were not that responsive to Heartfield's photo-montage, partly because it was primarily aimed at galvanising a German audience and partly because the cultural 'elite' here were not acquainted with

<sup>286</sup> MP for the Combined English Universities May 30, 1929 - January 2, 1946

<sup>287</sup> Schulz, Anna: *John Heartfield: A Political Artist's Exile in London* cf earlier footnote

<sup>288</sup> He stopped working for Reynolds News after they had split and spliced his work once too often: 'vandalism' as he called it, yet another sign of how unappreciative even the left were of his work.

<sup>289</sup> In November 1939, Heartfield's brother Wieland Herzfelde, was denied permanent residency in England but, having 'accidentally' been born in Switzerland, he and his family were granted permission to emigrate to the USA. Heartfield applied to follow him, but permission was denied.

this sort of imagery. Moreover, the artistic establishment judged refugee ‘art’ on ‘artistic criteria’, which cannot have helped their understanding of Heartfield’s work!

Heartfield threw himself into the League’s activities and can be seen as one of their leading lights. He created stage designs for the League’s ‘little theatre’, wrote articles for its journal, and gave lectures. In June 1941, the League held an exhibition of his work to celebrate his fiftieth birthday.<sup>290</sup> In July 1942, again under the League’s umbrella, Heartfield organised the successful and popular exhibition ‘Allies Inside Nazi Germany’ (with Hans Fladung as its director), attended by about 15,000 people. The striking image by H A Rothholz on the front of Steve and my book on ‘Anti-Nazi Germans’ was taken from one of the exhibits.<sup>291</sup> ‘Allies Inside Germany’ which sought to draw attention to the resistance of anti-fascists in Germany and abroad, The message-that Germany was worth liberating (remember this is 1943) was well received.

In fact, one of Heartfield’s main montages for this exhibition was not used. It depicts Hitler, Goebbels (with his club foot) and Göring (in uniform) in an attempt to stop a French clock striking twelve. It referred to the launching of the Second Front, requested by Stalin in 1942, but only created in 1944. The fear of it can be clearly seen on the faces of the three Nazis. Apparently similar in style to Heartfield’s earlier work, the decision reminds us of how unsympathetic even his left-wing audience were to his style. On a subsequent occasion, the League banned a caricature of Hitler as a savage, sitting in a gorilla-like manner on a globe and holding a bloody sabre in one hand and a frog in the other, to be used as a book cover.

During the war, Heartfield was also an active member of the Artists International Association.<sup>292</sup> Heartfield’s work here does not deviate from the defeat of Hitler. Not for him a softening of the edges or a concern with Britain.

Despite extensive efforts, and various letters of reference, Heartfield did not obtain permission from the Home Office to work as a ‘freelance cartoonist’ until January

<sup>290</sup> Op cit 118,119

<sup>291</sup> Rothholz fled Germany for the UK in 1933, and was involved with the League.

<sup>292</sup> <https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWheartfield.htm>

The Artists International Association, a radically left political organisation, was founded in 1933 and drew in about 1000 people. It held a series of large group exhibitions on political and social themes beginning in 1935 with an exhibition entitled *Artists Against Fascism and War*. It supported the left-wing Republican side in the Spanish Civil war through exhibitions and other fund-raising activities. It was also involved in the settling of refugee anti-Nazi artists.



1943.<sup>293</sup> (It is often forgotten that one of the Home Office's tricks was to refuse a work-permit to many of the refugees, seeing them as a source of competition for British workers, though this position was no doubt laced with a good dose of racism and on some occasions, antisemitism.) He was therefore forced to explore other possibilities. Although he received a grant from the Czech Refugee Trust Fund, it did not cover his expenses. His finances become so desperate, he attempted to learn how to become an inspector in the metal industry, a course run by the League. Finding work was hard. He then found work as a graphic designer for English publishers, including the new publisher: Lindsay Drummond Ltd, thanks to the influence of Ian Carlile. Lindsey Drummond, together with Victor Gollancz, were the first British press to publish anti-fascist books. After his work permit finally came through in July 1943, he was able to get a fixed contract with them which lasted until the publishing house closed in 1950 and which allowed him to become a production manager. From mid-March to June 1950, Heartfield also worked for the prestigious Penguin Books, a job he received through Uhlman.<sup>294</sup> He also produced political covers for the publication of the Free German League youth organisation in 1943: 'Inside Nazi Germany', ten years after the Nazis took power. Altogether, Heartfield produced over 200 covers for books while in London. But by now his work has lost some of its 'bite'.

To keep himself busy and earn money, he gave lectures, for example on Daumier (whom he saw as an inspiration), and the work of his friend Grosz. Heartfield also collected the anti-Nazi cartoons of David Low but although both shared sympathy for the USSR, Low's work was rooted in an 'Englishness' to which Heartfield did not aspire. (He also had little talent as a cartoonist!)

After the war, he designed a series of propaganda brochures for the Soviet News. But Heartfield was denied his written applications to remain in England for "his work and his health", despite his appeals to the Czech Refugee Fund, who appear to have withdrawn their support from him.<sup>295</sup> The Cold War was starting to heat up and here, Communists were even more 'persona non grata'. In this post-fascist world where

<sup>293</sup> <https://www.johnheartfield.com/John-Heartfield-Exhibition/helmut-herzfeld-john-heartfield-life/famous-political-artist/heartfield-england-1942>

<sup>294</sup> Jutta Vinzent, *Identity And Image Refugee Artists From Nazi Germany In Britain (1933–1945)*, Weimer, 2006, p48

<sup>295</sup> I have unfortunately not been able to find more detail on this.

But, as a generalisation, the political refugees wanted to go back, those who had fled anti-Semitism wanted to stay put. It was unusual to find the (Labour) Government refusing to allow refugees to stay who wanted to.

Heartfield would not have been willing to lend his art to anti-Sovietism and where there was anyway little demand for his work, Heartfield was not doing well.

In 1947, he was offered a professorship in satirical graphics in the Department of Applied Arts of Humboldt University, East Berlin. But Heartfield was hesitant about returning to East Germany. Did he have a sense that he would also not fit in there? He is quoting as querying as to why he had to become a professor. The British security service was still interested in him. They report checking his mail and phone calls in October 1949, which produced interesting but not conclusive results.<sup>296</sup> But after accepting the appointment, Heartfield did go to East Germany, though not till 1950. To what degree he is forced to leave and to what degree he chose to leave is unclear but it has certainly been suggested that he was essentially thrown out.

In 2019, his grandson, Bob Sondermeijer, gave an interview to Ralph Keuning, one of the principal organisers of the putative exhibition of Heartfield's work in 2020/21, which sheds some limited light on Heartfield's decision to leave the UK. It seems his wife, Tutti, very much wanted to return to Germany, though she later said it was her biggest mistake. In addition, in London he did not have a high profile and they still hoped for more in East Germany.<sup>297</sup>



But East Germany treated him shabbily: he had stayed too long in the West and was a traitor.<sup>298</sup> His admission to the SED, and then to the East German Academy of Arts only took place following the personal intervention of Brecht in 1957. Heartfield's work appears to veer towards a more socialist realist style even if certainly not one that most socialist realists would appreciate

There is something horribly familiar about Heartfield's life and the degree to which the British artistic establishment have chosen not to remember him. That this was connected to his politics is unquestionable. That Heartfield continued to be productive after being forced to flee on two separate occasions, having to learn a new language, make new friends and adapt to new political situations, is remarkable. And although

<sup>296</sup> David King and Ernst Vollaed *John Heartfield. Laughter is a devastating weapon*, p166

<sup>297</sup> *John Heartfield, Photography plus dynamiter*, p243 This is the book that was supposed to accompany the 2021 exhibition at RA.

<sup>298</sup> <https://www.johnheartfield.com/John-Heartfield-Exhibition/helmut-herzfeld-john-heartfield-life/famous-political-artist/england-east-berlin>

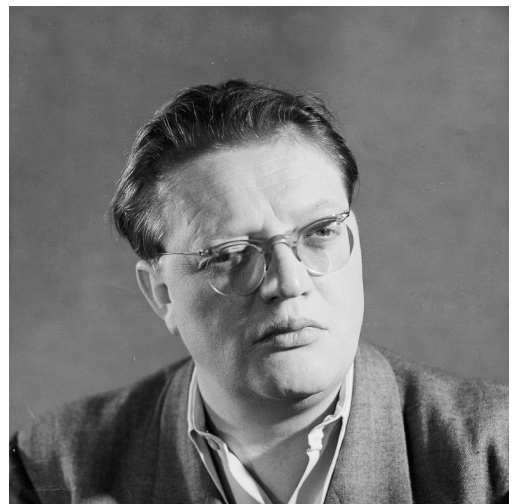
East Germany was a form of return, it was to a very different land to the one he knew up till 1933. Heartfield was a product of his time: an implacable fighter against Nazism. The post-Nazi Cold war was not such an obvious target for him (and, lest we forget, he was already about sixty the year he went to East Germany). Now it is time for us to recognise and celebrate him.

## 1939

### Kurt Barthel (1914-1967)

Barthel does not quite fit as he was not an active anti-Nazi in Germany though he did carry out many anti-Nazi activities during his forced wanderings through Europe; he is also representative of an East German post-war group who were uncritical Stalinists and at whom Brecht's famous quip about elections was directed.

A young member of the *Socialistische Arbeiter Jugend* (SAJ), in 1933, he joined the SPD and fled to Austria, where he was active in the resistance to the attempted 1934 July coup.<sup>299</sup> He then escaped first to Yugoslavia and then to Czechoslovakia, still only aged 19. In 1935, the SPD expelled him because of his cooperation with the KPD.



From 1937 to 1939, he was active in helping those fleeing Germany to illegally cross the border into Czechoslovakia.. From 1937 he was editor of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, was involved in a Jewish youth organization and in agit-prop groups.

In 1939 he fled to the UK via Poland (still possible before the German and Russian invasion). In Wales, he worked on farms and in construction, and became a member of the Free German Youth. In 1940, he was interned.

<sup>299</sup> The July putsch was a failed attempt against the Dollfuss regime by Austrian Nazis and the German SS when they attacked the Chancellery in Vienna in an attempt to depose the government and replace it with a more pro-Nazi government.

In 1946 Barthel returned to East Germany and joined the SED. He condemned the uprising in June 17<sup>th</sup> 1953 in East Berlin, declaring that the workers were immature. It was then that Brecht replied: “Wouldn’t it be easier if the government dissolved the people and chose another?”

During a performance of the Revolutionary Revue *50 Rote Nelken* in November, 1967 in Frankfurt, there was “tumult” by “students, referred to as ‘Mao followers’”. Having been ill for some time previously, Barthel collapsed and died of cardiac arrest.<sup>300</sup> Jan Peterson

Another figure who came to the UK shortly before the outbreak of the war and left again soon afterwards but is certainly worthy of a mention - and should be better known - is Jan Peterson (originally Hans Schwalm). Peterson was one of the leading members of the tiny ‘League of Revolutionary Proletarian writers’, re-established in 1934 by the KPD in the death-throes of the ‘Third Period’ and used it to publish material about life under the Third Reich. (By October 1935, the Gestapo had tracked down almost all of its dozen or so members, most of whom did not survive.) Active in the Communist underground against the Nazis, Peterson dedicated his book, ‘Our Street’ to the victims of Nazism and explicitly ‘For Socialism’.

‘Our Street’ is the only anti-Nazi book to have come out of Nazi Germany written, moreover, by an actual participant. It thus carries much historical significance. Written in 1933/34, Peterson saw the book as part of the struggle in the overthrow of Nazism but also, in a criticism of the KPD, as a call for an anti-Nazi united front with Social Democrats (Social fascists according to the KPD official line of the time. A worker-writer, he typed down the events as he saw them happen. The book draws on much original material, such as leaflets.

Set in Charlottenburg, Berlin, it documents how SA33 attacked working class anti-Nazis and Communists in ‘Our Street’ and were in a type of civil war with the Red Front (a well-rooted KPD associated anti-Nazi defence grouping) over control of the working class streets, community centres and taverns in the period leading up to the Nazi’s seizing power, as well as in the months following. Peterson focuses on the resistance to the violence exacted on the street’s working class inhabitants in revenge for the killing of a stormtrooper (though in fact he was killed by his own side during

<sup>300</sup> Almost all the information here was drawn from <https://www.rosalux.de/historisches-zentrum>

one of the ruckuses). It opens by printing the names of 18 actual victims, seven before January 1933 and eleven after (though one beheaded in prison).

In 1960, Peterson wrote in a new introduction to his book: 'Work on their [anti-Nazis] story was often interrupted: when comrades with whom I was immediately in contact in the underground resistance movement were arrested, as was often the case. Or when the Gestapo put my name down on their black list, which happened twice.... After they came to power, the SSs would burst into our lodgings, revolver in hand, and search the whole house. I was lucky – I had moved shortly before.'<sup>301</sup> Writing the book itself took courage. But so did getting it out of Germany. After two failed attempts, Peterson baked the manuscript into two cakes, dressed up as if he were going skiing and smuggled it past the SS guards at the Czech border. An English translation was published in 1938 by Gollancz's Left Book Club.<sup>302</sup> Somehow, he managed to travel from Berlin to the popular front conference in Paris in summer 1935 on how to use 'culture' against the Nazis, where, apparently he wore a mask throughout and Gide read out his work. He never returned to Germany, finally arriving in the UK in the late 1930s. Little is known about his time here, except that he continued to write, was associated with the KPD German speaking exile group, and was an active member of the writers section of the Free German League of Culture. He returned to East Germany after the war.

### **Kurt Hager (also known as Felix Albin) (1912 - 1998)**

Kurt Hager lived in the UK between 1939 and 1946. His main claim to fame is his Stalinism. Although an active and brave anti-Nazi in Germany and then Spain, he was always a Party man.

He joined the Communist youth organisation KJVD in 1929, the KPD in 1930 and the Red Front in Wurtemberg 1932. He worked as a journalist for the KPD's Agitprop section. Arrested in Stuttgart on 1.3.1933, so two days after the Reichstag fire, he was imprisoned in the Heuberg concentration camp. Upon release, acting on Party instructions, he continued his underground activities during 1934-36, working as a courier in and out of Switzerland, France and Czechoslovakia (as "Leo" and "Georg"),

<sup>301</sup> <https://www.faber.co.uk/blog/an-introduction-to-our-street-1960/>

<sup>302</sup> Peterson: *Our Street: A Chronicle Written in the Heart of Fascist Germany*

a highly risky activity. Imprisoned in Switzerland, upon release in 1936, he fled to Paris.

He was then sent to Valencia, Spain as director of the German service of Radio Madrid, responsible for the Radio Freedom transmitter, where he organised international broadcasts. He remained there until the fall of the Republic in 1939 when he fled to France. A leading member of the exile KPD leadership, he was briefly Interned in the, appalling Argelés camp, in the South of France. Supported by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund (presumably because of his earlier courier links), he managed to gain entry into Britain.<sup>303</sup> Hager ignored the Government's injunction to remain out of politics and, some time during the war, became the political secretary of the exile KPD organisation in Britain after Kuczinski (see biography), whom, it appears, he removed from this position. Hager was also prominent in the Free German League of Culture, writing under the pseudonym "Felix Albin" and was active, as best he could, in other KPD exile committees during his time in the UK.



In 1940, Hager was interned, first at Huyton, then the Isle of Man. British trade unionists and left-wingers successfully campaigned for his release. He was then assigned to forestry work and later worked as a welder. In 1946, Hager was repatriated to Germany, where he lost no time in continuing his KPD career, becoming a member of the Central Committee and the SED's chief propagandist.<sup>304</sup>

### **Hans Kahle (1899-1947)**

An active and committed anti-Nazi and member of the KPD both in Germany and Britain, whose activities during the Spanish Civil War raise many questions, as, to a lesser degree, do the war years he lived in the UK.

An officer in the German army in the First World War on the Western Front, he was captured by the British, became a POW in France and was discharged in 1920. After

<sup>303</sup> <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/leonhard-kurt-hager>

<sup>304</sup> David Childs, Obituary, Independent, 21 September 1998

the war, he got a job in Mexico, where he became a fluent Spanish speaker, a skill important later. From 1928, he became an active member of the KPD, Kahle became the head of the military apparatus of the KPD: 'M' (a group about which little is known, set up to protect the KPD leadership who did not trust the Red Front). During 1930–1933, he served as editor, publishing director and later chairperson of the independent radio-federal employees. According to Kaspar (to Mrs Bosanquet), not always the most reliable of sources, as head of his local Red Front unit, Kahle raided a local Nazi HQ in Schoenberg and in the ensuing fracas, a police officer was killed and so he had to flee.<sup>305</sup> Hunted by the Gestapo, he fled to Switzerland, and in 1935, to Moscow. There he edited a newspaper for German comrades. He was then sent to France, via Switzerland, entering illegally. Here he worked as a journalist and organised International Red Aid for Spain.

In 1936, Kahle went to Spain as commander of the (German) Thälmann International Brigade, whom he would lead into battle, including in the defence of Madrid, and was much admired by his troops<sup>306</sup> He was also said to be the senior representative there of the OGPU.<sup>307</sup> At some point, Kahle also became a wireless expert and worked for the Communist



'German Freedom station', which succeed in somehow briefly and illegally transmitting to Germany on the 29.8 wave-length.<sup>308</sup> It also produced a booklet, "Freedom Calling," (published by Frederick Muller, Ltd., London) to bring its activities to the notice of the British people. According to both the source 'Kaspar' and later the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police 1946 report, acting on behalf of the Comintern, Kahle was 'directly responsible' for attacking the POUM, arresting some of its combatants and murdering other 'non-Communists' and those who politically opposed the Communists and their close alliance with Russia (See Helmut Klose's separate biography).<sup>309</sup> During 1938 and 1939, he was interned as an enemy alien in

<sup>305</sup> PF47192

<sup>306</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *Stuck on the Flypaper, on MI5 and the Hobsbawm File*, LRB, Vol. 37 No. 7 · 9 April 2015

<sup>307</sup> KV 2/1565

<sup>308</sup> <https://www.transdiffusion.org/2020/11/06/the-german-freedom-radio-station>

<sup>309</sup> PF 60741, KV-2-1565\_021

France. In 1938, Kahle's application to come to the UK for two months on his way to Mexico was actively supported by Ellen Wilkinson, the Labour MP (who was to later deny any responsibility for him). In February 1939, he got to London, with some difficulty, on a Spanish document of identity (after his German nationality and passport had been withdrawn) and 'on the invitation of Miss Wilkinson and Major Atlee to gather material for a book on the Spanish Civil war.'<sup>310</sup> He busied himself in trying to get his comrades out of Spain and stopping them being sent back to Germany. Then he was interned in May 1940 (and his room searched) as an 'enemy alien' on the Isle of Man (where 'he made a lot of trouble'), before rapidly being deported to Canada. There he became friends with Klaus Fuchs.<sup>311</sup> (A disproportionate number of deportees to Canada and Australia were Communists.) He was released very early at in December 1940/January 1941, without being subsequently interned, apparently as a result of the Admiralty having applied for his release as he had offered himself as a 'victim' for Prof. Haldane's experiments on nitrogen narcosis, in connection with the saving of lives on sunken submarines.<sup>312</sup> (In an extraordinary memo with an illegible signature, the writer states that 'if something goes wrong, there is a good chance you won't have to worry any more about KAHLE'!)<sup>313</sup> Kahle returned to London and campaigned tirelessly to rescue Spanish and other volunteers from Franco's Spain and from the internment camps in France. He worked as a military correspondent for various newspapers, including the Daily Worker and the 'Volunteer for Liberty', an anti-Franco British news-sheet.<sup>314</sup> According to the Special Branch, he also became the Secretary –or leader– of the KPD exile group in England.<sup>315</sup> He campaigned vigorously throughout England and Scotland, especially in Trades Councils and left-wing Youth groups, for the opening of a Second Front. Although unfortunately undated, a report from the Glasgow police, which appears in the MI5 records, has Kahle stating to a meeting that the ruling class were more an enemy than Hitler.<sup>316</sup> To which, the retort came back (presumably

<sup>310</sup> He arrived here with his wife Gertrud, but like so many of these refugee couples, the relationship did not last, as far as I can see, on either side.

<sup>311</sup> KV2-1566, December 1949

<sup>312</sup> Signed, MJEB, May 1942, KV 2/1563. This release was inevitably viewed with great suspicion, including by the spy 'Sykes' who, in April 1941, thought Kahle was anti-British and defeatist.

<sup>313</sup> KV 2/1562

<sup>314</sup> Few governments would open their doors to these refugees: the US Government refused though the Polish Government was apparently considering allowing them re-entry.

<sup>315</sup> PF47192

<sup>316</sup> KV2/1563. Kaspar again was spying on him and providing information.



observing Kahle's class) that: you're a fine lot of fighters who shot down the Indians and the Irish, a rather wonderful confusion, where Kahle's class was seen as outweighing his (presumably evident) German roots! Though this may tell us as much about the infighting between anti-Nazis or about wanting to please one's interrogators as much as providing information, Moeller -Dostalli,<sup>317</sup> when interrogated, declared that Kahle directed the KPD/Communist party's 'intelligence service' in the UK, 'organised the campaign against anti-Stalinist political emigrants and dictated the methods by which embarrassing opponents might be eliminated.'<sup>318</sup> (These charges were generally supported in a memo from the ever unreliable spy: Sykes.<sup>319</sup>) With comrades such as these, it is not surprising that some ex-KPD members, such as Lotte and Siegi Moos (my parents), became jittery, even paranoid.

After a speech to the *Kulturbund* in October 1941, Kahle was asked by John Heartfield (see biography) why the Allies had not bombed the armaments factories of Renault, Schneider-Cruzot, Krupp and Skoda. Kahle's reply shows how far by late 1941 he was already uncritically pro-Ally. He stated that he was surprised at the question, as the British public would not support it and that there were insufficient offensive weapons.<sup>320</sup> Indeed, in another meeting in July 1941, a 'spy' reported that Kahle sounded like a member of British military command. A memo from a C.C. Birmingham, in August 1942, describes Kahle as aiming to become the de Gaulle of a Free German Fighting force, 'leading a German battalion as a symbolic army of liberation' and as Moscow's man.<sup>321</sup> His aim is to be 'at the core of a revolutionary uprising'. An earlier missive from an 'E.3' from November 1941 corroborates this: Kahle's real purpose is to head another organisation in Germany like the International Brigades. 'It is true that they would fight like heroes ...and would arouse untold sympathy... which would be cleverly used...to concoct their criminal brew.'<sup>322</sup>

<sup>317</sup> Rudolf Moeller -Dostalli, first SPD, then a KPD member and journalist, after training in Moscow in 1932, became a party functionary, suspected of working for Soviet intelligence. He went to Prague but was denounced by communists within the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. He came to the UK in late 1938 and continued to be much suspected here. Doubts by the British Government about whether he was a double agent led to his internment but during and after his internment, he informed regularly to MI5. After the war, he worked for the SPD (PF 47772).

<sup>318</sup> My parents, Lotte and Siegi Moos (see biography) who had crossed swords with the KPD/Communists, lived in a state of overwhelming paranoia when I was growing up.

<sup>319</sup> KV2/1562

<sup>320</sup> Signed Hi, KV 2/1562

<sup>321</sup> KV 2/1563. Heartfield asked a question at another meeting Kahle spoke at, when he argued, in August 1941, for the opening of a second front while Germany was marching east and getting stuck and before winter set in. Kahle did not even reply.

<sup>322</sup> KV 2/1562.

Morrison, the (Labour) Foreign Secretary, was, of course, against such an idea, claiming other German refugees would not welcome it.<sup>323</sup>

In late 1942, Kahle started to try to recruit anti-Nazi refugees for a 'Free German' Brigade, associated with the Free German movement. The Free German organisation, of which he and others from the FGLC were leading members, had been set up as a result of the Free German committee in the USSR. He wanted to recruit refugees in the UK to this Brigade and that they would arrive in Germany alongside the Allied forces. An alternative would be units of refugees within the Army itself. Both would ensure the British would be seen as an army of liberation rather than occupation in a defeated Germany, and would rally the revolutionary forces and then, with Moscow's help, become pivotal in the reorganisation of Germany.<sup>324</sup> There was also a suggestion of a specific Free Austrian and Free German Brigade, made up of refugees in the UK. An interesting division appears in 1941 between the War Office's position which was that it was more expeditious to ignore these proposals, and MI5 who wanted Kahle locked up. Hollis, MI5, stated that Kahle is breaking the terms on which he was admitted to the UK and therefore could be re-interned, should the War Office agree. It looks like the War Office won.<sup>325</sup> But by 1943, M.J.E. Bagot, MI5, in July 1943, picked up that these recommendations were in conflict with one another and considered that any ensuing friction would be dealt with internally.<sup>326</sup> This call to arms had an unexpected response from young German and Austrian refugees, being kept at the Hutchinson camp, who declared that 'we would only be too glad to fight Hitler with arms in our hands'.<sup>327</sup>

MI5 believed him to be a high level Soviet Agent and spy.<sup>328</sup> At the same time, from July 1944, Kahle became a correspondent for the American periodical: 'Time and Life'.<sup>329</sup> Kahle considered that there was significant and increasing internal resistance and disaffection, though neither should be exaggerated. In a speech to the Hounslow Trades Council, Kahle stated that in Hamburg, half of the dockers were on strike to

<sup>323</sup> KV 2/1562

<sup>324</sup> National Archives, KV2-1563

<sup>325</sup> KV 2/1564.

<sup>326</sup> Milicent Jessie Eleanor Bagot appears regularly in the National Archives. She was a British intelligence officer and apparently the model for the character Coonie Sacks in Le Carre's *Tinker, Tailor Soldier Spy*. She worked for both MI5 and MI6 and became one of the security service's Communist experts, warning early on about the Cambridge 5.

<sup>327</sup> KV2/1562

<sup>328</sup> <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11190913>, KV2 1563, passim

<sup>329</sup> PF47192

protest against the execution of three of their co-workers and there had been food riots when many were killed in the clash with the police, The German people needed to rise up against Hitler and his henchmen. (The ‘spy’ in this meeting, who does not provide his name, seems to understand the politics of what is being said!)<sup>330</sup> The KPD’s continuing interest in the Indian struggle is suggested by Kahle speaking at Swaraj House in London in 1943 and the issue being raised in the International Brigade Committees he led.<sup>331</sup> Swaraj House was to the left of the India League and, in 1943, had organised groups of Indian protesters to picket Whitehall and the Houses of Parliament to demand the release of Gandhi and other Congress leaders.<sup>332</sup>

In January, 1944, Kahle also became involved through the Free German Movement, along with Ernst Schoen, in an attempt to persuade the BBC to set up a German (propaganda) programme, an initiative supported by Lord Wedgwood.<sup>333</sup> Schoen was to be responsible for finding out what the BBC’s present propaganda programmes were. This missive was addressed to Miss Bagot but the writer, unsigned, was suspicious that this was really planned as a ‘voice of Moscow’ initiative.<sup>334</sup> The BBC refused to get involved in the discussions. Kahle took the position that the Allies would not punish all Germans if there were a strong German resistance movement.<sup>335</sup> (How far this was because of his belief in the USSR or in the Western allies is unclear.) Asked in a debate at the Austrian centre in September 1944, what would happen to the Nazi criminals, he assured the audience that the Allies would arrest them or demand their extradition, and had asked for the help of members of the FGLC in tracing them. In answer to a further question, he stated that once Germany had become democratic, it should have back East Prussia, the Rhineland and the Saar restored to

<sup>330</sup> KV 2/1563

<sup>331</sup> See Introduction: the British CP did not support this struggle during the war.

<sup>332</sup> KV 2/1564, <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/>, It also campaigned for the release of Suresh Vaidya, one of its secretaries, after he refused to obey a military call-up notice in January 1944, a campaign taken up by the ILP. In August 1946, Swaraj House purchased *New Vision*, the organ of the ILP, which became *India: A Nationalist Review of India Affairs*. In 1946, Swaraj House was ‘asked’ by Congress and Nehru to align itself more closely with the India League because of the House’s political clout and close connections with British MPs, contributing to its rapid decline.

<sup>333</sup> Ernst Schoen, a musician, was the previous director of Radio Frankfurt and friend of many of the ‘greats’: Walter Benjamin, Brecht, Eisler etc. Because he had sponsored ‘Jewish and socialist colleagues’, he was arrested twice by the Nazi regime. He fled in 1934 and got work at the BBC in a musical capacity. After his return to W. Berlin in 1952, he failed to gain a foothold professionally.

<sup>334</sup> KV 2/1564

<sup>335</sup> PF47193

it.<sup>336</sup> In September 1945, Kahle wrote to Franz Dahlem, pleading with him to use his connections to get him out of England.<sup>337</sup>

He wanted to be back in Germany and to help in mopping up the remaining fascist elements and building a new democratic Germany.<sup>338</sup> The Government's 'suspicions' about allowing German exiles to return were not completely misplaced: according to MI5 notes, Kahle, amongst others, believed that the Free German Committee would form the basis of the new German Government.<sup>339</sup> In February 1946, he was allowed to return to Germany much earlier than most after some pressure which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (a largely advisory Government position, presented filled by Michael Gove) acceded to. (The Government were fully aware that this permission made out that the Government/Foreign Office was not actually stopping KPD members from returning, which of course they were.)<sup>340</sup> He became head of the newly established People's Police in Mecklenburg and chair of the local SED. He died in 1947.



<sup>336</sup> Kahle however anticipated that these areas would first fall under Soviet Union jurisdiction after the war, something Koenen objected to strongly, indicative of the divisions even within the committed KPD exiles. PF47192. Kahle's softness towards the Allies did not compensate for his softness towards the USSR as far as Lord Vansittart was concerned who objected to the War Office that Kahle's was giving lectures to the troops. (He had given a lecture to cadets.)

<sup>337</sup> Franz Dahlem is another significant figure. In the leadership of the KPD, he became a deputy to the Reichstag from 1928 on. Wanted by the police, Dahlem fled to France in 1933, where he was a member of the KPD's leadership in exile. He took part in the attempts to build a "German Popular Front". In the Spanish Civil War, he was chief of the Political Commission of the International Brigades. After he returned to France, in 1939, Dahlem was interned by the French authorities and in 1942, the Vichy police handed him over to the Gestapo. He was imprisoned until 1945 in Mauthausen KZ, where he was a member of the International Camp Committee. In the UK, early in 1942, a petition was signed by 350 people including 98 members of the House of Commons and 40 members of the House of Lords, calling for his release. The Red Army liberated Dahlem from Mauthausen on 7 May 1945, and he was taken to Moscow. He arrived back in Germany on 1 July 1945. Between 1945 and 1953 he played a key role in creating the German Democratic Republic.

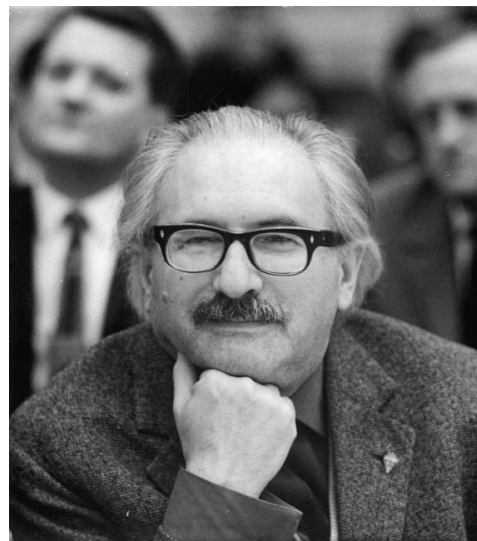
<sup>338</sup> McLellan, Jose, *AntiFascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades*, Oxford, 43

<sup>339</sup> PF47192

<sup>340</sup> KV-2-1565

## Jan Koplowitz (1909-2001)

Born in Bad Kudowa, Lower Silesia, then Poland, to a Jewish family, Jan Koplowitz supported a strike of spa employees at the age of 16, and was then expelled from his middle-class parents' home. In 1923, he moved to Breslau and, in 1928, joined the communist movement, wrote for workers' newspapers and joined the Association of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers, founded in 1928, essentially by the KPD. In 1931, he became editor of the *Breslauer Arbeiterzeitung* and head of the agitprop group "Roter Knüppel", whose texts he also wrote.



An activist who had already been arrested a couple of times, in February 1933 he broke a SA's skull. Imprisoned, he managed to escape but was from then had to go underground. He began illegal work for the KPD in northern Bohemia (or the Sudetenland), including 'border work'. He became an illegal party organiser in 1938 after the KPD leadership had fled. He too soon fled, arriving in the UK in 1939 via Poland, Sweden and Czechoslovakia, post Munich Agreement.

He was interned at Huyton Camp <sup>341</sup> in 1940; afterwards, he worked for the Free League of German Culture and in its amateur theatre subgroups. (He also apparently at one point got a job as a butler!) He then left in 1945 for what would become East Berlin where he became active in amateur theatre groups and became a prolific writer. Elfriede Brüning, a well-known East German writer and member of the KPD from the 1930s later wrote about him: "We younger people were standing at the beginning of our literary development, which Hitler suddenly interrupted. Some never got over the shock. ... Others had to start all over again after 1945." <sup>342</sup>

<sup>341</sup> Huyton internment camp, opened in 1939 and one of the biggest in the UK, 'took in' German socialist refugees (including Kurt Hager: see separate biography) and some of the 'intelligentsia'. Conditions in this camp seem to have been very bad with many inmates living in tents without beds or bedding.

<sup>342</sup> [https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls\\_uploads/pdfs/Utopie\\_kreativ/134/klein134.pdf](https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Utopie_kreativ/134/klein134.pdf), <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/jan-koplowitz>

## **Wencelas and Kathe Kozlecki**

The Kozleckis were an amazing couple who, under the guise of being mountaineers, got wanted people out of Germany to Czechoslovakia, at great danger to themselves. They also stand out because they were a part of a Trotskyist group. Kathe, though not Wencelas, fled to the UK after time in Czechoslovakia.

Originally active members of the youth movement 'Friends of Nature' in Dresden, this involvement led them on, as it did many others, towards left wing activism. Disillusioned with the reformism of the SPD, they joined the KPD, but immediately came into conflict with its "ultra left" idea of "social fascism". They then came into contact with the Trotskyist movement, which they joined in 1932.<sup>343</sup> There were two Trotskyist groups belonging to the Left Opposition, formed in 1928-29, the larger the 'International Communists'. The Trotskyist analysis broadly was critical of the KPD/Comintern for its belief in an imminent revolutionary upswing, for arguing that it was "defeatist" and "anti-party" to accept Nazism had been a "defeat of the German workers movement' and for its sectarian rejection of a united front policy.

In the area to the south of Dresden where Czechoslovakia (Sudenland) meets Germany, in what is called "Saxon Switzerland", there was a Trotskyist group which had been formed at the end of the 1920s in a working-class suburb within the framework of the "Friends of Nature", specifically its mountaineering section. The Dresden comrades knew the frontier area well and were generally, though unfortunately not always, able to evade the border controls of the Nazi police. They smuggled banned material into Germany and people out. Except for the few who had successfully fled, in 1937 the Dresden group essentially ceased operating, its members having been arrested and sent to prisons or concentration camps.

In August 1933, the Kozleckis, leading members, were got into Czechoslovakia, where they cooperated with the Sudeten German Trotskyists. Under the pseudonym Julik, Wencelas then became centrally involved in organising the smuggling of illegal anti-fascist - and often Trotskyist - material into Nazi Germany, keeping contact with

<sup>343</sup> There exist two autobiographies of Left Opposition activists: Karl Retzlaw: *The Rise and Fall of Spartakus: Memoirs of a Party Activist* (Frankfurt 1971) (but not translated. See biography included here) and Oskar Hippe, *Und unsere Fahne ist rot* (Hamburg 1979), translated as 'And Red is the Colour of our Flag: Memories of Sixty Years in the Workers' Movement'.

the couriers from Germany as well as the rescue of endangered anti-fascists from Germany. They also worked with comrades from the SAP.

Although, fortunately, they had been given Czech citizenship, and although Katchen was therefore able to find some domestic work ('drudgery'), and though the Dresden comrades managed to get them occasional money, Wenzel and Käthchen Kozlecki were both basically homeless and destitute - and of course their border work was illegal and dangerous. Moreover, they regularly had nocturnal visitors, comrades who loaded up their heavy rucksacks and disappeared into the night. They also tried to maintain contacts with the IKD international network, based in Paris. But when the Nazis invaded the Sudetenland in early November 1938, their political work ended.

The Czech police spied on them but thought they were essentially harmless – they were still trying to give the illusion of all being dedicated mountaineers, but more dangerous were the German spies: members of the Gestapo tried but failed to abduct them, and the right-wing Sudeten German Party who saw them as a 'Communist nest' before realising they were even more dangerous: Trotskyist. The KPD did not help either: "In the second half of the 1930s, when the KPD publicly called for the abolition of the right of asylum for 'Trotskyists': "Every critic a Trotskyist, every Trotskyist a Gestapo agent."<sup>344</sup> It was not easy. They also feared that the Gestapo could blackmail and imprison members of their families still in Germany, indeed Wencelas' mother was harassed. In December 1937, the German state revoked their German citizenship. As German troops invaded the Sudetenland, the Kozleckis had again to flee. By now, they had separated: the political struggle had become a personal struggle.

Wencelas and Kathe's paths diverged. Trotsky's had already warned Wencelas about the need to get out of Czechoslovakia and he got into Mexico through Trotsky's intervention and invitation, though obtaining a visa was difficult. In 1934 Wencelas had been a delegate to a Trotskyist conference of the IKD (the German Internationalist Communists) in Zurich and was in correspondence with Trotsky in 1938. Wencelas wrote in 1939 that the IV. International (Trotskyist) will lead the world proletariat in its decisive great struggle and triumph and about how only his German and Czech comrades in Czechoslovakia did not give way and tirelessly, put out their newspapers.

<sup>344</sup> Barbara Weinhold, *Eine trotzkistische Bergsteigergruppe aus Dresden im Widerstand gegen den Faschismus* p82. My thanks to Reiner Tosstorff for sending me the web connection.

But soon after arriving in Mexico, he ceased to be politically involved.<sup>345</sup> Käthe found exile in the UK, where she came into contact with the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and took part in forming a small German-speaking Trotskyist circle, which after 1945 tried to exercise influence in Germany through a paper 'Solidarity'.<sup>346</sup> Käthe also returned to W. Germany but in the 1950s, went back to Dresden in the East and gave up political activity.<sup>347</sup> They both died in Germany.<sup>348</sup> Herbert Ansbach (1913-1988)

Ansbach was an especially energetic anti-Nazi activist and a leading member of the famous anti-Nazi Baum Group, who ended up in the UK from 1939-1946. Given the prominence, and notoriety of the Baum group, there is more information on Ansbach's anti-Nazi activities than many of the exiles, which allows us a better glimpse of what underground work involved; Ansbach's 'fame' makes it all the more surprising that he has received so little attention here.<sup>349</sup>

Although Ansbach had fled Germany by then, the Baum group are known for attempting one of the few acts of actual sabotage when they tried, and failed, to burn down the Nazi propaganda anti-Soviet art exhibition in 1942 in Berlin. The group was split over whether to proceed with the action but Baum believed Germany had started to lose the war and their action would rally anti-Nazi sentiment and activity. It resulted in the Nazis killing many of their members as well as hundreds of uninvolved Jewish people whom they – literally - picked at random from the streets.

Originally trained to be a shoemaker, Ansbach was dismissed from his apprenticeship following his participation in a strike. He then joined the Communist

<sup>345</sup> Op cit, 34.

<sup>346</sup> Unfortunately, I have not found any further information on this. If anybody knows anything more, do contact me!

<sup>347</sup> The old Trotskyist group had disintegrated as a result of Nazi policies of extermination and then (though I am not suggesting any equivalence) repression under the GDR. Thus what had inspired their anti-Nazism and sent Käthe into exile could no longer be publicly acknowledged.

<sup>348</sup> My thanks to 'The Historiography of German Trotskyism' in <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol9/no4/workinprogress.html>

<sup>349</sup> Another far less prominent and younger member of the Baum group who also fled to the UK was Gerhard Zadek (1919-2005). He was a member of 'Deutsch Judische Jugend Gemeinschaft', where he met Baum. They all went for long walks in the countryside and discussed Marx and regularly were attacked by Hitler Youth. He joined the left fichte sporting club and the communist scouting group: Rote Pfadfinder. Encouraged by Baum, he learnt to become a machinist and apparently became an active propagandist at work. He collected money for Rote Hilfe from his co-workers, especially to support Germans fighting in the Thaelmann brigade. In 1939, still only 20, he fled to England. Here he studied mechanical engineering, was a founding member of the communist Free German Youth, and in 1943 became a member of the KPD. In 1947 he returned to Germany and became a model citizen (Brothers, Eric, *Berlin Ghetto. Herbert Baum and the antifascist resistance*).



Youth Federation, KJVD, in about 1929, which had about 55,000 members by 1932, and became its head. He joined the KPD in 1931, focusing on organising youth KPD groups. Ansbach explained the reasons he and many other young people from a historically Jewish background joined the KJVD, the Communist Youth organisation. Marxism provided an explanation for the poverty and for wars and a solution.<sup>350</sup> Ansbach's father was Jewish but, as with so many young left-wingers of the time, Ansbach's Communism was as, if not more, important to him. Many young Jews regarded communism as the answer to the political crisis in Germany, and were antagonistic towards a collective Jewish identity, seeing the leadership of the Jewish community as bourgeois. The KPD encouraged Baum to ride both horses so as to draw people from the Jewish Youth organisations towards the KPD, which indeed he did. Non-Zionist Jewish youth organisations were legal until 1936, so the KPD, who were banned, encouraged their Jewish comrades to campaign within these groups.

Hunted by the Gestapo, Ansbach fled to Paris in June 1933, but, with extraordinary bravery, returned to Berlin in late summer 1934 to become the political director of the underground KJVD for the sub-district of Berlin-Southeast.

Ansbach then also became one of the leading members of the resistance group led by Baum, along with Steinbrink, and was one of the 3 people on its committee. He was part of the tiny coterie who met in Baum's flat, including KPD organisers and other leading members. It is sometimes seen as a Jewish anti-Nazi group. Although there is inevitably a continuing debate about this, my understanding is that, although many of their members were historically Jewish, they mostly defined themselves primarily as revolutionaries. Ansbach was involved in organising a 'Jewish' cell within the Baum group. Although the memoirs he wrote in the early 1960s were published in East Germany, and have to be read within that prism, that he hardly mentioned the issue of Jewishness, this, I suggest, is largely because that was not how he viewed the struggle or himself.

Ansbach was involved in many illegal activities, including organising the printing and distributing of banned newspapers such as *Rote Fahne* and their paper, *Junge Garde sud-ost*, leaflet 'bombing' eg from roof-tops and organising illegal meetings. Baum devised an extraordinary 'leaflet-bomb': a can which was timed to explode'

<sup>350</sup> Brothers, Eric, *Berlin Ghetto. Herbert Baum and the antifascist resistance*

leaflets (which led on to arrests).<sup>351</sup> He organised a 'leaflet-drop' at an armaments factory where they worked and distributed leaflets at *U-Bahn* stations, both highly risky activities.<sup>352</sup> The leaflets, which they distributed at other factories as well, warned against the exploitation of workers and against monopolies. They had to keep finding new places to hide the duplicator. They even pasted up a flyer celebrating the October revolution. As late as 1936, Ansbach formed a resistance grouping amongst theatre workers. They aimed to infiltrate Nazi dominated youth sports clubs. In one of those extraordinary stories, Ansbach once met up with left-wing members of the German Workers Front (the alternative 'trade-union' set up by the Nazis) who were wearing swastikas in woods near Berlin in order to hold a secret discussion!<sup>353</sup> One has to bear in mind, as I was informed by a man I interviewed, now sadly dead, who had been a leader in Wedding KJVD, the members of the local Nazi gang had been to school with them, had worked alongside them and visited the same taverns. The KPD comrades and the Nazi youth sometimes knew each other intimately.

Ansbach, who had a large circle of left-wing friends and comrades (possibly including Fuchs) had also formed a rental car company which provided a cover for a courier system to distribute anti-Nazi leaflets and papers as well as making illicit meetings easier.

Arrested at the beginning of 1936 for planning to commit high treason, he was convicted of possessing an illegal newspaper. Ansbach, now very ill, was released from Brandenburg prison in 1937. (In a world of never-ending vigilance when it was easy to become paranoid, a few of his comrades were suspicious about his early release.) He went to work for Jewish Winter Help in their archives, who apparently knew nothing of his resistance activities.

Amazingly, Ansbach renewed his contact with the Baum group, but was immediately hunted by the Gestapo and hurriedly left for Czechoslovakia in January 1938, not an easy decision. (Baum saw the cause as too important to leave Germany himself but encouraged many others to do so.)

Ansbach arrived in the UK in March 1939. Here, he was interned as an 'enemy alien' and then deported to Australia. He was able to return to England in 1941, where he

<sup>351</sup> Op cit

<sup>352</sup> Cox, John, *Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany*

<sup>353</sup> Brothers, Eric, *Berlin Ghetto: Herbert Baum and the Anti-Fascist Resistances*

worked for the KPD and was involved in the Free German Cultural Association. He returned to Germany in August 1946 (to what became East Germany).

Like so many of these anti-Nazis, who were in some sense Jewish, including the few survivors from the Baum group, he felt it was better to build an anti-racist socialist state, even if ‘in one country’ than struggle to build a Jewish state on someone else’s land. He became a leading and loyal SED member and the Director of the German Institute of Economics, though, as with many of the refugees who had fled Westwards during the war, rather than to the East, especially if ‘historically Jewish’, he fell under suspicion.<sup>354</sup>

### **Josef Lampersberger (born 1912)**

Lampersberger is an intriguing resistance fighter, one of the few who stayed with the SPD and who repeatedly risked his life in Germany and Czechoslovakia, but whose later role in the UK raises concerns about his political sympathies.<sup>355</sup> Most of the anti-Nazis whose biographies are included here came from Berlin and the large cities and it is easy to forget that Munich was at the centre of the Spartacus uprisings of 1918/19 which created a lasting left-wing political legacy. In autumn 1933, Josef Lampersberger, a waiter on the Mitropa ‘wagon-lits’ from and to Munich, was trying to build an underground trade-union network amongst the railway workers: his job gave him unusually good access to other railway workers and also made it possible for him to smuggle anti-Nazi literature.

Lampersberger then came into contact with another railwayman, Franz Faltner, a train worker and driver, who was couriating on behalf of the SOPADE in the Czech border area. Lampersberger and Faltner founded a large resistance group of about 100 people: ‘*Die Rote Rebellen*’ (the Red Rebels) in Ramersdorf and Haidhausen near Munich.<sup>356</sup> Many of the resistance fighters worked at the Reichsbahn repair shop in

<sup>354</sup> Cox, 144, 145

<sup>355</sup> Some of the following material is from National Archives which includes material about and by Lampersberger. But some suspicion has to be raised over his reliability. During one ‘interrogation’, he claimed that during the Spartacus uprising, he had been appointed Police President of Munich for two months by the Social Democratic Ebert, though he was at most only seven years old! His interrogator at the time does not appear to have done the maths. Much of the material presented here is however corroborated from other sources.

<sup>356</sup> Franz Faltner, another extraordinary figure from Bavaria, had been a *Reichsbahn* worker and train driver and belonged to the workers’ sports club in Munich. He had contacts with Waldemar von Knoeringen, one of the first Munich Social Democrats to flee and a pivotal figure, who organised SOPADE resistance and the smuggling of small-format illegal documents across the Czech-German border. On April 27/28, 1935, Franz Faltner, his wife Anna and 56 members of the group were arrested. Faltner was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Neuaußing,<sup>357</sup> were former members of the *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* (Black, Red, Gold Banner of the Reich, essentially the SPD's paramilitary force) or workers' sports clubs.<sup>358</sup> Lampersberger supplied the group with large quantities of illegal literature. The group went in for regular leafleting and distribution of pamphlets, including at the BMW factory. As early as 1934, they risked their lives obtaining photos of Dachau KV. In Munich, the group called for a boycott of the referendum in August 1934.<sup>359</sup> They even planned a bomb attack on Munich Central station. Lampersberger believed the Nazis could be defeated by force, a position about which leading SPD members such as Knoeringen, the border secretary of the *SOPADE*, were most unhappy. Lampersberger also belonged to the *Schutzformation*, a militant SPD youth group, who offered physical protection against the Nazis at SPD meetings and events. In April 1935, dozens of the Red Rebels were arrested and sent to prisons and camps. His and others' underground work left a remarkable legacy around Munich, even after he had arrived in the UK. Munich was at the heart of underground activity on foreign forced labourers and POWs, who regularly went on various forms of 'go-slow' (with often deadly consequences). (For more on this virtually unknown topic, see chapters in 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.) Probably the largest resistance grouping in the POW camps was the "Brotherly Cooperation of Soviet Prisoners of War". In 1943, in Munich, it allied with the 'Anti-Nazi Germans Peoples Front' (established by rank and file members of the KPD and aimed mainly at forced labourers and POWs) to make plans for an armed uprising but the Gestapo were onto them and hundreds were murdered.

From the beginning of 1935, "Theo" was at the head of the KPD resistance in Munich, inciting his "comrades" to increasingly careless activities. 'Theo' informed the police/Gestapo about everything.<sup>360</sup> Hundreds of people were his victims. For a

After 1945 he was again employed by the *Reichsbahn* and rose to be head of the Upper Bavarian Railway Police. He rebuilt the Munich SPD but, in 1951, the SPD excluded him for left- deviation!  
(<https://www.hdbg.eu/zeitzeugen/detail/widerstand-gegen-das-ns-regime/franz-faltner/1216>)

<sup>357</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out more about this, but Neuaußing is close to Dachau, the first KZ, and gets referred to as somehow linked to Dachau.

<sup>358</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20010728051637/http://www.widerstand.musin.de/w1-2.html>

<sup>359</sup> The referendum was technically on the merging of the posts of Chancellor and President, following Hindenburg's death though in practice, Hitler had de facto already become both. The referendum was associated with widespread intimidation of voters, so calling for a boycott took organisation and courage.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20010728051637/http://www.widerstand.musin.de/w1-2.html>

few years after 1937, there was no communist resistance in Munich. Moreover Lampersberger and Faltner had sent each other letters every two weeks. But the courier who passed the reports and letters between Lampersberger and Faltner betrayed them. A silver cleaner also from the Mitropa dining car company, played a triple game - he worked for SOPADE, the Czech secret service and for the German police.

Still only 22, Lampersberger had to get out of Germany in a hurry ( after, it appears, being warned by a high ranking local member of the Stalhelm<sup>361</sup> of what was to come) and was smuggled into Czechoslovakia, hidden in a storeroom of a train by a comrade. But, on April 27, 1935, he was kidnapped by German agents near Eisenstein on the Czechoslovak side of the border. Eisenstein is a border town and he had gone there to hand over leaflets to a German comrade. Some reports state he was snatched by German police, but Lamsberger himself said it was by the Gestapo<sup>362</sup> (who had forged papers). He was badly beaten up on the way to Munich, where he was then interrogated and taken to the Munich police prison. An international press campaign and intervention by the Czechoslovak government led to his release back to Czechoslovakia on May 3, 1935, after six weeks. Continuing suspicions were subsequently raised at the speed of his release: he was suspected of having agreed to work for the Gestapo, suspicions which never appear to have gone away. Many questions were also raised as to whom he associated with in Czechoslovakia and whether they included refugees sympathetic to Strasser, previously on the 'left' of the Nazi Party though by then outside it. Lampersberger then worked as an agent for the Czechoslovak secret service, including giving them names of German refugees he suspected of being Nazi spies. While the Czech Refugee Fund thought he had himself 'been turned', the Czech secret service expressed full confidence in him, including to MI5! Later, he was also to pass on to MI5 the names of people he suspected in the refugee circles in Czechoslovakia, including members of SOPADE.<sup>363</sup> From a Catholic family, he had been in touch with the Catholic Committee for Refugees, who appear to have obtained him a visa for the UK from Czechoslovakia in 1939 (though for three months only). The Czech Refugee Trust Fund did not support getting him a visa.

<sup>361</sup> Earlier, the paramilitary wing of the monarchist German National Peoples' party, in 1935, after much jockeying, it was fused with the SA.

<sup>362</sup> <https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/archiv/zs/zs-3146.pdf>

<sup>363</sup> PF48682

Strong Communist influence, noted MI5. (The CRTF was riven by profound disagreements, its members far too willing to 'tell' on each. It was suspected at different times by different people as both a front for the KPD and a nest of Nazis. The paranoid atmosphere will have been exacerbated by the Prague police having been infiltrated by Nazi spies: they handed back some refugees to Germany.)<sup>364</sup> Unusually, Czechoslovakia expelled Lampsberger which raised further suspicions about him.<sup>365</sup> He fled to the UK, leaving Czechoslovakia in January, arriving here in March 1939. According to one interview with him, he flew to Paris and from there went to Holland for six weeks where he lived in a refugee camp. There he received Dutch identity papers and then was supported by the Dutch Catholic Committee for Refugees to get to the UK. But a suspicion was raised that when he left Czechoslovakia in January, he returned to Germany, a potentially deadly detour and yet another cause for suspicion. Some in MI5 believed that it was the Communists who were making aspersions about him (which could be true). Lampsberger explained in an interview, while not agreeing that he did go to Germany, that, to gain his release after capture, he had to sign a Gestapo document committing to return to Germany (after he had visited his ,girlfriend in Czechoslovakia), or his parents would be arrested. Indeed his father was detained for three and a half years. Later, Lampersberger, for all his bravery as an anti-Nazi organiser, does not appear to have been trusted by other refugees in the UK.

He was categorised as an 'enemy alien, class A' (the highest risk), and interned for several months from December 1939 on the basis of reports from the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. (It is unclear what these stated, from MI5 files, it appears he was suspected of being a Strasserite, but bear in mind that the Czech Government at this time did not want to upset Germany.) He was released after many appeals, much interrogation and insistent representations by MI5 who wanted him to work for them.

During one interrogation, he was asked persistently whether he was willing to serve the British government and whether he could provide information on refugees in Czechoslovakia. He always answered yes. He was employed by MI19, although the precise timing is not clear. M119, a section of the British Directorate of Military

<sup>364</sup> In fact, some Social Democrats equated the two. Ziehm, a mechanic, SPD and a member of the Schwarz-Rot-Gold fled to Czechoslovakia in May 1933 and worked with SOPADE. In January 1939, Ziehm moved to the UK and was interned. But, in a letter from him to Lamperberger in the MI5 files, he wrote that (interned) Communists were 'friends of Hitler' and 'connected with German propaganda'. That he felt able to write this to Lampersberger, suggests he expected Lampertsberger to be sympathetic.(KV2/2690)

<sup>365</sup> KV2/2690



Intelligence in the War Office, created in December 1940, was responsible for interrogating POWS, both Nazi and non-Nazi. Although having Wikipedia as the sole source is not usually sufficient, according to them, also in 1940, Lamperberger worked at the internment camp at Seaton in Devon (an ex-holiday camp). It housed the most dangerous (mostly category 1): Nazis, anti-Nazis and Jews (presumably an overlapping category) who were locked up together in generally poor, underheated conditions.<sup>366</sup> My guess is that Lampertsberger was interrogating inmates at Seaton. In addition, according to PF48697, Lampertsberger and three others formed a group to study and contact communists and former members of the KPD to 'extract all possible information from them' i.e. interrogate them, presumably again under M119. Though Lamperberger started off as an anti-Nazi militant, it seems he had retained a social-democratic perspective. What mattered was parliamentary stability: the Communists could well have been seen as a threat. He stayed in Great Britain after the war ended and, in 1946, took British citizenship.<sup>367</sup> What happens next is obscure. The most up to date National Archive file (HO405/33529) which went up to 1951 is closed till 2052. According to the London Gazette of 12 November, 1984, Josef Lampersberger, a director, was appearing at a court in Bridgend on 20th November 1984 at the Official Receiver's Office, which I take it means his business had become bankrupt.<sup>368</sup> There is no further trace of him.

### **Max Zimmering (1909-1973)**

Max Zimmering was a youthful member of the Jewish 'Blue and White' youth movement and, in a typical transition, joined the KPD Youth Association in 1928. He wrote for the KPD paper: *Die Rote Fahne* and was its agit-prop leader in Dresden, where he lived. He also joined both the Jewish Workers and Employees Youth group and the Revolutionary Trade union Opposition (the KPD split-off). In 1929, he joined the KPD.

While a poet, he trained as a decorator but was sacked for his union organising. He fled in mid-1933 and first went to Paris, then Palestine where he worked for the illegal Palestine Communist Party. Then he went to Prague and worked for different left-wing papers. After the Munich agreement, he fled to the UK in 1939 under the

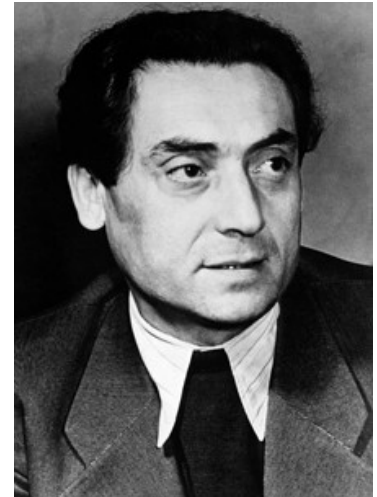
<sup>366</sup> <https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/mystery-surrounds-fascinating-history-devons-3539553>

<sup>367</sup> <https://archive.vn/20120918144924/http://www.widerstand.musin.de/w4-5.html>

<sup>368</sup> <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/49925/page/15296/data.pdf>

auspices of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund.<sup>369</sup> In 1940, the British government interned him as an enemy alien. Like many other KPD refugees, he was sent to Australia (which he referred to as ‘the involuntary trip around the world’) but was then returned, after much campaigning by PEN, to the Isle of Man camp, and, again, after much campaigning on his behalf, was finally released in November 1941.

Once back in London, he became the long-term editor of the Free German League of Culture’s (FGLC) magazine ‘Free German Culture’, breathing life into it. He also worked for a number of anti-fascist magazines including "*Rote Fahne*", based in Prague, "*Freie Deutschland* (established in Mexico in 1942, under the influence of the KPD exiles)<sup>370</sup> and ‘*Freie Tribune*’ which, from 1943-1946, appears to have been a fortnightly anti-Nazi magazine geared towards German youth, based in London. He also participated in the KPD exile group.



In 1946, Zimmering was able to return to Berlin’s Soviet zone on a Czech Repatriation passport.<sup>371</sup> There, he became an active, even militant, member of the SED and resumed a well-regarded literary career, including writing his memoir.

## 1940

### Fritz Bieligk (1893-1967)

An anti-Nazi who was, crucially, active against the Kapp putsch, I’ve included Bieligk to shine a light on the profound rifts amongst SPD/SOPADE in the UK during

<sup>369</sup> The British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia was in effect set up as a sop by the British Government after the Munich Agreement. Many of those who came to the UK were not Czechs, but German and Austrian political refugees.

<sup>370</sup> Unfortunately, I have not found the link but my guess is he knew or was friends with Egon Kisch (see footnote below) who worked on the paper in Mexico.

<sup>371</sup> He was helped by the fascinating figure; Egon Kisch. Kisch was arrested on the night of the Reichstag fire and charged with ‘high treason’ but released within months. He fled to France but then, in 1934, went to Australia to take part in the Anti-War Congress. (Initially, he was denied entry because of his communist sympathies. He literally jumped ship and finally gained entry after much popular protest.

Back in Europe, he participated in 1935 in the *1st International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture* in Paris, where he gave a report on art as a form of struggle. He then reported from the Spanish Civil war, interviewing members of the International Brigades.

Kisch managed to escape from France to the US in late 1939 and then went on to Mexico, where he wrote for the exile newspaper *Free Germany*. He returned to Prague in 1946, two years before his death.



the war, and to give an example of what strange bedfellows some anti-Nazi refugees developed.

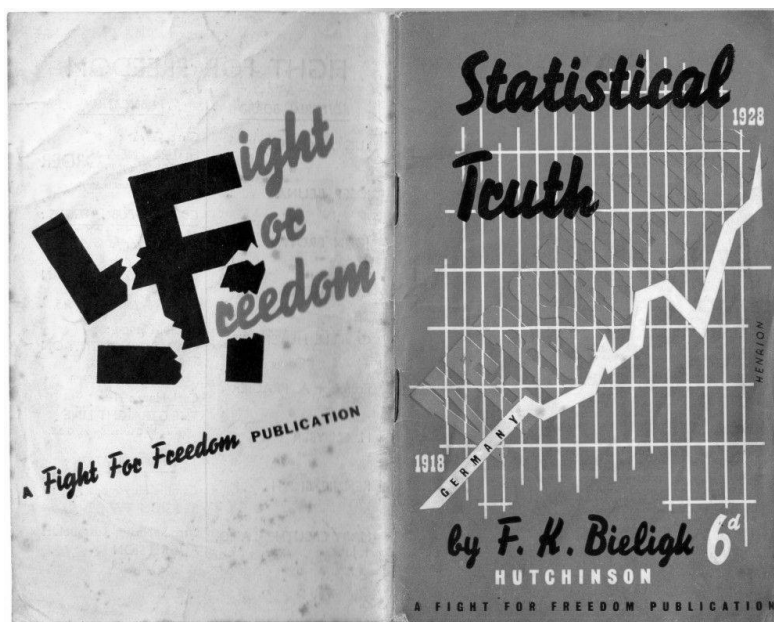
In 1911, Bieglitz, who was from Saxony, joined the SPD. After action in the First World War, he became the editor of the USPD's paper in Saxony and Chair of the Workers 'and Soldiers' Council during the Kapp Putsch. Unlike the majority of the USPD, he returned to - and became a leading figure in - the SPD, though on its left around the 'class struggle' faction. Like

Paul Levi, he worked for the left-wing socialist organ "The Class Struggle". After the secession of the SAP in 1931, he co-published the magazine "Marxist Tribune". In 1931 he was also a contributor to the book "The Organisation in the Class Struggle: The Problems of Political Organization of the Working Class", which appeared in the "Red Books of the Marxist Book Community". He edited the daily and well-thought of Social-Democratic paper *Leipsiger VolksZeitung*.

Instantly arrested in 1933, Bieglitz was sent to Sachsenburg K. Upon release, he left for Czechoslovakia where he joined and became a principal contributor to the 'Revolutionary Socialists of Germany' who argued for a united front, which was against the SPD line at the time.

Under the patronage of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, in 1940, Bieglitz was enabled to escape, apparently via Norway, to London.

The Social Democrats in exile were deeply split over Vansittarism which emphasised the culpability of the German people for Nazism. In 1941, he and three other trade-unionists (Bernhard Menne, Kurt Lorenz and Carl Herz) accused the TUC of behaving like the union leadership in Germany in March/April 1933, i.e. in the spirit of coordination with the Nazis'. They also resigned from SOPADE and, in June



1942, were subsequently expelled.<sup>372</sup> This led on, in March, 1942, to his signing a joint manifesto highlighting the SPD's complicity in the rise of Nazism and denying the existence of any significant resistance to Nazism in Germany. At this point, he, Loeb and others, founded the research group and publishing company "Fight for Freedom". In 1944, he worked for the secret radio station: 'Soldatensender Calais' as a 'black propagandist', operated by the British Political Warfare Executive Committee (or, officially, the Political Intelligence department), which reported to the Foreign Office.<sup>373</sup> Formed in August 1941, it drew from SO1 (the propaganda arm of the SOE), the Ministry of Information, SOE and the BBC. It pretended to be a station of the German military broadcasting network and in order to retain its cover, it relayed Nazi speeches, including by Hitler but also provided misleading military intelligence.<sup>374</sup> Bieligk's earlier time as a journalist came in handy. At the end of the 1950s, Bieligk, who had withdrawn from politics, returned to Germany.

### **Hans Ebeling (1897 - 1968)**

Another German who was in touch with Section D of the British Special Intelligence Service (SIS) was Hans Ebeling (1897 - 1968).<sup>375</sup>

Born in Krefeld, Germany, the Roman Catholic son of a textile manufacturer, Ebeling had served in the First World War and then became leader of the Katholische Bundische Jugend and the editor of its newsletter, Kameradschaft. In August 1934, Ebeling had to flee Germany to avoid arrest and settled in the Netherlands. From here, he tried to build German non-Nazi youth groups and distribute anti-Nazi propaganda. In 1939, his German citizenship was revoked.

He came to England in February 1940 and was recruited to work for the (propaganda) Joint Broadcasting Committee of Section D. Here he used his German Catholic opposition contacts to try to get propaganda into Germany. Despite being seen as useful as non-Jewish and non-socialist, he was seen as too gentle, was dropped as a useful propagandist and lengthily interned. Nonetheless, he became a British

<sup>372</sup> Tombs, op cit.

<sup>373</sup> *Presse Im Exil Beitrag Zur Kommunikationsgeschichte Des Deutschen Exils 1933-1945* ('Press in exile: Contribution to the communication history of German exile), Hardt Hanno (editor)

<sup>374</sup> David Garnett, *The Secret History of PWE—Political Warfare Executive 1939–1945*.

<sup>375</sup> The purpose of Section D of the SIS, formed in April 1938 on the instructions of the chief of SIS was to prepare for underground warfare against the Nazis, including sabotage. It commenced active operations in March 1939, focusing mainly on interrupting supplies reaching Germany. It operated mainly through agents drawn from dissident and resistance groups, including from Germany, and drew strongly from the ITF.

citizen and worked as a freelance journalist and also wrote about the German youth movement.

Ebeling returned to Germany in 1949 and from 1950, he headed the British Information Centre in Dusseldorf. He ended his life in poverty and died in 1968.

### **Wilhelm Koenen (1886-1963)**

After an early period of militancy, Koenen became more of an organisation man than many people included here, though his intermittent success within the KPD was dramatically affected by the persistent faction fights. His remarkable history is still illustrative of how far the German left's roots lay in the revolutionary years and upheavals of 1918-1923 and what a small sectarian fishbowl anti-Nazi refugees jostled in in the UK.

Born in Hamburg, the son of a socialist carpenter and a cook, he joined the SPD in 1903 and later became one of their newspaper correspondents. He opposed the First World War and, as opposed to Kautsky, denounced imperialism and the arms race, arguing that a mass socialist revolution was the only solution to imperialism and war.

In 1917, he joined the USPD (the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany: *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), and soon became the secretary of the Central Committee. Together with Walter Stoecker, both in the left USPD faction, advocated the USPD joining the KPD and the Comintern.<sup>376</sup> The USPD then split; Koenen became one of the main organisers of the merger between the left USPD and the KPD, and joined the KPD in December 1920. By then, he had been the Commissar of the Worker and Soldiers' Council for the Halle-Merseburg district in 1918/19, where there was a strong working-class movement, and fought during the November Revolution of 1918/1919. A General Strike broke out in Central Germany on the 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1919. Koenen became its leader. He and the Left Independents did a remarkable job of organising the railwaymen, the coalminers, and workers in the chemical industry and organising a provisional regional workers council. In January, they had already succeeded in organising a provisional regional Workers Council. On the 29<sup>th</sup> January, Koenen presented a report for the socialisation of the mines, thus

<sup>376</sup> Stoecker, a leading participant in the Cologne Workers and Soldiers Soviet, an early member of USPD, a Cologne city councillor and on the Prussian state assembly, in June/July 1919, was appointed secretary to the USPD's national leadership,

maintaining a tentative unity between the revolutionaries and the miners. The delegates, workers from different workplaces in Central Germany and all democratically elected, met in Halle and successfully called for a general strike to commence on 24 February but this was forestalled by the SPD sending in General Maercker who brutally crushed the uprising. Koenen only just escaped being kidnapped. As this strike was defeated, a new stroke broke out in Berlin and 'the rest is history'.<sup>377</sup>

From the end of 1920-1924, Koenen was a leading member of the KPD and on its 'left', in 1921 and 1922 delegated to Moscow, where he presented the draft Comintern constitution to its Fourth Congress.. In 1921, he worked briefly for the Communist International, even meeting Lenin. Not appointed to the HQ at the Jena Party Congress in 1921, he was co-opted by them in 1922. He was elected to the Reichstag and thus became a full time member of the apparatus.<sup>378</sup> During the Kapp putsch, he helped organise the strike which stopped the putsch. A delegate to the Trade Union confederation, he argued that a workers government be formed but these proposals did not garner much support. A few years later, Koenen defended the March Action. The March Action was a 1921 failed Communist uprising. The KPD which for the first time had become a mass party had called for a general strike, influenced by the new 'theory of the offensive'. But they lacked the roots and the workers were not insurrectionary though spasmodic actions took place, bloodily suppressed and of little long term significance



Wilhelm Koenen

Without a thorough knowledge of the infighting in the KPD in the 1920s, it is not easy to follow all the ups and downs but briefly, the 'Conciliators' (see on) and, more expressly, the 'Rightists' rejected the 'left'/Stalinist notion that a 'new revolutionary wave' was underway and later, opposed designating Social Democracy as Social Fascists. Koenen had become one of the leaders of the 'Conciliators'(also known as the 'middle group' or 'centre tendency')<sup>379</sup> in the KPD after the fall of the Brandler

<sup>377</sup> Broue, *The German Revolution 1919-1923*, p 269-271

<sup>378</sup> [www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen)

<sup>379</sup> This faction, sometimes called the 'conciliation faction', emerged in the mid-1920s from the "middle group" aligned with Ernst Meyer and was a part of the KPD leadership from 1926 to 1928. They supported a united front with the SPD, but the adoption of the 'Third Period line largely put pay to that..

leadership, which represented the 'right' tendency in November 1923. The 'right' faction, led by Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, presented the strongest opposition to Stalin and was later to establish the KPO (sometimes referred to as the KPDO, the Communist Party Opposition),<sup>380</sup> In a move backed by Koenen, the defeat of the October 1923 uprising led Zinoviev to replace Brandler and Thalheimer with Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow, the 'lefts'.<sup>381</sup> In 1924, the Left leadership then marginalised Koenen and he ceased to work for the HQ, though, they did not last long: following a commission which included Koenen, on 19 August 1926, the Central Committee expelled Fischer and Maslow from the KPD, who were replaced by Ernst Thaelmann, a Moscow clone. From 1926 to 1932, Koenen remained a member of the Prussian State Council and of the Berlin city council. Koenen worked his way back into favour and, at the Weddinger Party Congress in June 1929, he was re-elected as a member of the Central Committee. I have not been able to follow the details of these manoeuvres but apparently Koenen had by then acted on behalf of the CC against the 'centre tendency' in Thuringia.<sup>382</sup> From 1929-1931 he was political secretary of the Halle-Merseburg district, But internal KPD politics again led to his marginalisation and in 1931 he lost his party function in Halle and what had been his secure place on the [party list](#) and in 1932, ceased to be a Deputy, while remaining a member of the Prussian state parliament<sup>383</sup> In the years leading up to 1933, he was committed to organising anti-Nazi action (unlike many of the KPD leadership) Although he had fallen out of favour with the KPD leadership by 1933, he was one of some 40 people at the ill-prepared and ineffective 'Sportshall' meeting of the KPD Central Committee on 7 February 1933. Koenen fled Germany in June 1933 on the decision of the party

<sup>380</sup> Brandler, one of the key leaders of the KPD, supported a 'united front' but from above, rather than from below. He was head of the KPD during the aborted uprising of 1923 (see above footnote), was held responsible and recalled to the USSR by the Comintern in January 1924, where he remained for almost four years. He was expelled from the KPD in 1928 and co-founded the KPO.

<sup>381</sup> In a period of growing militancy and worker desperation at growing inflation, and after much planning and dithering, the KPD, led by Brandler and with Comintern support, decided to set a date for an uprising with a view to the seizure of power and establishment of a workers government. Although a national uprising was called off at the last moment, Hamburg rose on 23 October 1923. Rebels stormed 24 police stations, 17 in Hamburg and seven in Schleswig-Holstein Province in Prussia. The central government sent in troops and the *Freikorps* under General Müller. This was the last throw of the revolutionary dice. The consequences of the defeat were considerable; the loss of the eight-hour day etc: the gains from the revolution of 1918-19, but it also left the KPD deeply split. (Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution, Germany 1918 to 1923*).

<sup>382</sup> [www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen)

<sup>383</sup> [www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen)

leadership, who had technically to give permission. He had the honour of being accused by the NSDAP of instigating the Reichstag fire. At the beginning of June 1933, he fled, under the party name Bernhard Schulz, via the Saar region to France, then to Czechoslovakia. Here, from January 1935, he became the head of communist emigration. He also participated in the VII World Congress and the "Brussels Party Conference" in Moscow in 1935, when the line was officially shifted towards, in effect, the Popular Front and, in December 1936, and signed the "Appeal for a German Popular Front'.

He became a candidate for the International Control Commission of the Comintern and a member of the Control Commission of the Central Committee of the KPD, the executive body between Congresses, and, between 1936-38, was involved in its border work.<sup>384</sup> He had already once attempted to reach the UK but had been blocked from doing so and had great difficulty getting in now. Ellen Wilkinson, a Labour MP,<sup>385</sup> obtained a British permit for Koenen on the basis that D.N. Pritt would provide him with the necessary support. He was taken into custody as an "enemy alien" in 1940 and sent on to Canada but brought back to the Isle of Man in December 1941. He was then released following the intervention of Eleanor Rathbone, MP, and D.N.Pritt. On February 26<sup>th</sup>, he appeared before the Home Office advisory committee to whom he gave assurances that he would not take part in British politics. But he did not see this as debarring him from involvement in German exile politics. In September 1943, he was a founding member of the – explicitly political - Free German Movement (FGM) on behalf of German KPD members in the UK (not to be confused with the Free German League: see introduction). The FGM is also significant because by and large it rejected Vansittarianism and considered it was possible to overthrow Nazism from within and without but its emphasis was not on class struggle. This initiative was a consequence of both external factors: the Battle of Stalingrad and Germany starting to lose the war as well as internal party politics: the formation of the National Committee for a Free Germany in Moscow in July 1943.

<sup>384</sup> [www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen)

<sup>385</sup> Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP for Middlesbrough East October 1924 - October, 1931 and for Jarrow November 1935 - February, 1947. Wilkinson, originally on the left of Labour, visited Germany shortly in 1933 and wrote '*Why Fascism?*', which condemned the Labour Party's gradualism, arguing for grass roots workers' unity against fascism. She was to become Minister for Education in the 1945 Labour Government by when she seems to have left her radical roots behind.



At the first meeting of the FGM, attended by about 400 people drawn from a wide range of the German émigré community, including a handful of SPD members (though the SPD leadership refused to take part), Koenen called for unity, with an eye especially on the SPD, lamenting how the splits between the SPD and KPD had opened the door to the Nazis. Over the next year or so, hundreds of German left-wing refugees joined. Its stated purpose included support for the British war effort and propaganda, supporting antifascists in Germany, re-educating German POWs and plans for a post-war democratic Germany. This incorporates a wide range of aims and there was the inevitable conflict as to whether their emphasis should be more on aiding the resistance or on organising refugees the UK. The other serious point of dissension arose from the proposed division of Europe at and after the Tehran conference into spheres of influence. Kuczinski who had become its chair attempted to hold the group together and indeed it took over much of the political work previously carried out by the FGL But Koenen seems to have got into serious political wrangles with Kuczinski, amongst others, in part over the degree to which Germans, given the low level of resistance, were responsible for Nazism. This finally led on to his deposing Kuczinski from the leadership. (Charges of who was spying for whom also abounded). The 'secret' state, in particular Special Branch, followed the group's every move, aided by Kurt Hiller.<sup>386</sup> In 1944, he, along with others included in these biographies, decided to work with the British state and worked for Sefton Delmer's 'Soldatensender Calais'. In September 1940, Delmer had been recruited by the Political Warfare Executive of the Foreign Office to organise psychological broadcasts to Nazi Germany, but these were highly contentious in sections of the Government. Then Delmer directed a clandestine radio station 'Soldatensender Calais' directed at the German armed forces with the aim of appearing to be a real German forces station which broadcast a combination of popular music "cover" and items to demoralise German forces eg German soldiers' wives were sleeping with foreign workers. That Koenen's MI5 file is closed till 2064 suggests there is much more to come out: Koenen's role there is as yet unknown!



<sup>386</sup> Brinson, C and R. Dove, 'Politics by Other Means. The Free German League of Culture in London 1939-1945', 152-170.

In December 1945 he returned to Germany via Prague and took part in rebuilding the KPD/SED where he appears to have taken the party line and was initially rose successfully in the SED, though he was temporarily removed from the Secretariat because of his emigration to the West and then again reprimanded in May 1953, after which he was no longer politically active.<sup>387</sup>

## 1940 /41

### Friedrich Geyer

While Geyer started out deeply involved in grass-roots struggle, his career represents the ambiguities of left reformism.

A member of the SPD from 1911, on its left-wing, he worked for various German social democratic daily newspapers, then in 1917, joined and became a leader of the newly founded USPD in Leipzig, a highly industrialised and radical area. Here he became a popular public speaker, including against the early ultra-right, and ended up as a USPD delegate to the Reichstag. In 1919 he became the Chair of the Leipzig Workers' Council where, representing USPD politics, and much attacked by the SPD, he played a crucial role, though the strikes were ultimately defeated.<sup>388</sup>



He was elected onto the National Assembly, then as a delegate to the Reichstag and was the editor of the *Hamburger Volkszeitung* in 1920. He rejoined the rump of the

<sup>387</sup> His son Heinrich Koenen (1910-1945) fled to the USSR in 1933 and completed various military and intelligence training courses. On October 23, 1942, he parachuted over East Prussia, made it to Berlin, where he was "received" by the Gestapo. He was probably shot at Sachsenhausen in February 1945.

([www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/wilhelm-koenen))

<sup>388</sup> After the end of the war in 1918, in and around Leipzig, first the miners struck (against the advice of their leaders) for better wages, then the potash miners, then the copper miners, then in January 1919, the rail workers, then the tram workers, then the utility workers, and then the textile workers (mostly female) came out on strike. This led both to the setting up of Works Councils (outside the formal trade-union movement) and then led, in March 1919, to a general strike.. In April, the Government used the Freikorps (once again) to place Saxony under siege, as they did with the 'Soviets' in Munich and Berlin. Geyer had not prepared for any sort of military defence, later arguing that would have provoked a bloodbath. The Freikorps laid siege to the city, shooting into the crowd and killing and injuring many hundreds of people. (Dobson, Sean, *Authority and Upheaval in Leipzig, 1910-1920: The Story of a Relationship*)



USPD and participated in USPD-KPD fusion in 1920, becoming a committee member of the KPD but was in the Paul Levy faction over the March action and was therefore expelled from the party in August 1921.<sup>389</sup> By 1922, Geyer had wandered back to the SPD where he rose up its ranks, becoming a leading – and strongly anti-KPD-member.



*USPD Board of Directors. December 5, 1919. Friedrich Geyer, first row, second from the right*

Geyer fled in 1933 to Prague where he served on the SPD executive in exile (SOPADE), joined the editorial board of SOPADE: *New Forward* where he argued against cooperation with the KPD. In 1937 he moved to France, in 1941, helping to organise the escape of German refugees from Marseille. He then had to flee and came to the UK via Portugal.

<sup>389</sup> The March campaign in 1921 refers to an armed workers' revolt to bring down the SPD/Ebert government, led by the KPD in the industrial region around the Ruhr and Hamburg. It was defeated and split the KPD, leading to the expulsion of the former leader, Paul Levi. It was also the last throw of the revolutionary dice in Germany, leaving the USSR isolated. The event and its aftermath is still argued over.

A member of SOPADE, here he sympathised with the position of the Vansittarts and assumed there was virtually no resistance – or any possibility of resistance - in Germany. He had also become very suspicious of Communists. Unlike some of the SPD leadership, Geyer's perspective was that Germany should be held responsible for what happened during the war and that there should be a military occupation of Germany to ensure a new peaceful and democratic Germany. So deep were the disagreements, that Geyer resigned from SOPADE.

He was consequently excluded –or did he leave - the Union of German Socialist Organisations in 1941 and became a member of the group 'Fight for Freedom' under the leadership of Walter Loeb.

Geyer became an advisor to the Foreign Office and a British citizen. From 1945, he worked as a correspondent for various West German newspapers in London. He died in 1967.

### **Karl Friedrich Groehl (1896-1979)**

(sometimes spelled Grohl), aliases Stanislas RETZLAW, also occasionally Erde Friedberg and Spartacus (1896- 1979)

Groehl is another little known and intriguing figure in the UK, whose life stretched from involvement with the Bavarian soviet, via the Comintern and Trotsky to working for SOE in the UK. But he is also interesting because, unlike so many of the left-wing refugees, he remained some sort of socialist.

He used a variety of names: where the sources use Retlaw, I do too. MI5 also were confused, not realising for some time that one of Groehl's pen names was Spartacus.

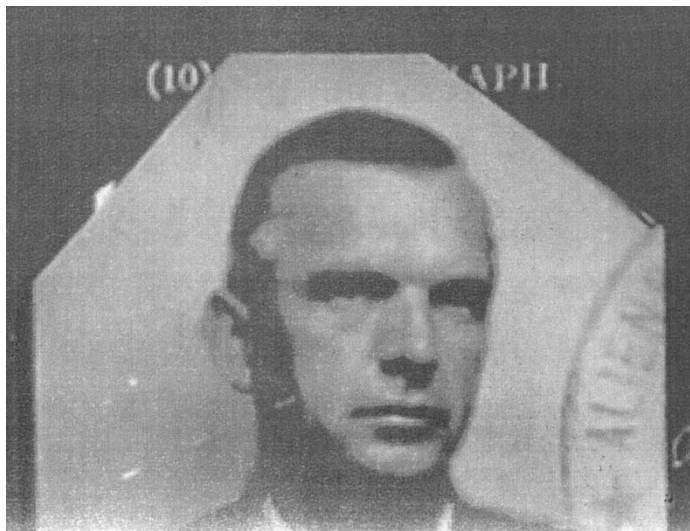
I could find little about him except from MI5, my main source. So the following needs to be read cautiously.<sup>390</sup> MI5's interest in him, for reasons unknown, reappeared in 1946 when they made sure to keep the US War Department well-informed and when, intriguingly, he seems to have been of great interest to Roger Hollis and Kim Philby.<sup>391</sup>

<sup>390</sup> The trouble with reading the memos which emanate from deep in this world obsessed by traitors, is it is impossible to always gauge which section of this secret world they are from or their reliability.

<sup>391</sup> The NA files include KV2/2172, PF 46464/B, PF4646

Groehl was from a Baptist working class Berlin family, though born in Schneidemuhl, then German, now Polish.

Initially a foundry worker, he went on to a tool grinder at the Cassirer cable works and was elected as a shop steward by the unionised workers. He joined a socialist youth worker group but no more detail is available. He then refused to be conscripted and was



sent to prison for six months. He became a leading member of the Spartacists. From 1917, he organised the USPD.<sup>392</sup> He collaborated with Karl Liebknecht and participated in the 1919 Berlin uprising and then had to flee Berlin and went to Munich. (In 1942, writing a letter to the British press, he still signed himself 'Former official of the Spartacus Bund.) During the brief Bavarian Soviet in April 1919 (gunned down by the *Freikorps*, sent in by the Social Democratic government) ),Groehl held the position of Munich police chief. Retzlaw ordered the destruction of all police files as a security measure. (From now on, at times, he adopted a false identity.).

Groehl/Retzlaw then had to flee the savage repression and returned to Berlin. He became a founder member of the KPD, a full-time functionary, and secretary of its Berlin-Brandenburg branch. Between 1919 and 1926, Retzlaw made several trips to the USSR together with other communists, such as Ulbricht. He was involved in the W. European section of the Comintern; in 1920; Paul Levi instructed him to set up/expand and run the illegal intelligence service of the KPD and to take over its management, which he did, calling himself Karl Friedberg.<sup>393</sup> He became head of the illegal paramilitary apparatus of the KPD and went in for trying to free imprisoned communists eg Max Hoelz.<sup>394</sup> A journalist, he headed Münzenberg's publishing

<sup>392</sup> <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/karl-retzlaw>

<sup>393</sup> Robert Jackson- Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, Duke University Press, 1991.

<sup>394</sup> Max Hoelz (1889 –1933) became involved in the Falkenstein Workers and Soldiers Council in November 1918, then became a USPD activist. He organised widespread expropriations of banks and post offices, redistributing goods to

organisation up till 1933. According to MI5 records, he was also a leading member of the Red Front. But Retzlaw's career was regularly interrupted: he kept on being arrested eg in February 1926, when he was sentenced to two years and six months imprisonment by the Leipzig Reich Court for his political activities and given an amnesty in July 1928.

In 1930, Retlaw secretly joined – or at any rate became sympathetic to - the Communist Left Opposition and Trotskyism. Nevertheless, in February 1933 Retzlaw travelled to Moscow and reported to the Comintern leadership about the situation in Germany. He warned them against the Soviet Union expecting any sort of peaceful alliance with Hitler. At the same time, he delivered conspiratorial letters from Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, to sympathetic comrades and met with Erich Wollenberg (see other biographies). In his letter of 1 March, 1933, addressed to Stalin, which he left as he fled, he criticised the Comintern and the KPD's central committee for its failure to understand the need for a real united front to include the SPD at the level of leadership as well as membership.<sup>395</sup>

He fled Germany in 1933. Here the sources differ as to what Groehl exactly did next. According to the MI5 papers, Groehl then went to Basle, Switzerland where he became one of the first members of a Trotskyist group, International Communists of Germany (IKD), founded by Fritz Belleville (ex KPD, who had also fled Germany), acting as their representative in Central Europe. He was, it seems, already in touch with British secret service.

But he was then expelled from Switzerland and went to Saarland. Jackson-Alexander has him being sent by the KPD to help lead the party in Saarland, where he headed the Saarland League for Human Rights but with no reference to Switzerland.

workers and the poor. During the Kapp Putsch, Hoelz helped form a mobile detachment of about 200 armed men in Vogtland (edge of Saxony), which took on government troops and lost. Brandler then expelled him from the KPD and he joined the KPDO. He was eventually arrested in Czechoslovakia and deported to Austria. After returning to Vogtland in late 1920, Hoelz organised a band of around 50 armed men to free those detained after the Kapp Putsch. The first bombing he organised was of the Falkenstein *Rathaus* on 6 March 1921 and others targeted courthouses throughout Germany. In 1921, he was involved in the March action and imprisoned. Released by an amnesty in 1928, he moved to the USSR where he remained critical of the KPD and the Comintern. According to the official version, he drowned in September, 1933. ( Walker, Ed, *The German Robin Hood: Soldier, revolutionary, political prisoner: the extraordinary life of Max Hoelz*) But, more probably he was murdered by the NKVD, the Soviet secret after he began to speak out against mistreatment of the working class in the USSR ( <https://libcom.org/history/articles/1889-1933-max-hoelz>)

<sup>395</sup> <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/karl-retzlaw>



Both sources agree that here he campaigned in the German plebiscite against German annexation. According to the Handbook of German Communists, at this point, Retzlau was using the name Karl Erde.<sup>396</sup> Now a journalist, he helped refugees with, among other things, forged passports.

While in the Saarland, he visited Trotsky for four days in St Palais sur Mer in SW France.<sup>397</sup> In November 1933, he broke publicly with the KPD and the Comintern. He published an obituary for Max Hoelz (see above and earlier foot-note) in the Trotskyist magazine *Unsere Wort* and sent an "open letter" to Pyatnitzki in which he announced his break with the "official Communist Party and the Comintern.

Retzlau then moved on to France, broke with Trotsky and worked for the *Deuxieme Bureau*, France's external military intelligence agency. Groehl started to collaborate with D branch (sabotage grouping under MI5) in Paris.<sup>398</sup> I do not know of his explanation for this profound change of tactics but I assume he must have decided, like others in 'Trotskyist-lite' groupings that defeating the Nazis required strange alliances.

Here Retzlau ran an extensive network in Switzerland<sup>399</sup> but probably also in Germany and Austria, gathered military information from Germany and also it appears on Germany via Scandinavia. At one point in 1938, he provided information on German air armaments, including sketches<sup>400</sup> One concern of MI5 was whether Switzerland would resist if Germany occupied it: Groehl's informants thought definitely not. He also had contacts in Yugoslavia for whom he feared. From one report from 'a friend', he probably obtained, or certainly was asked to obtain, explosives.

Groehl was recognised as the key person to send reports to, mainly from the SPD, including from the police (many sympathetic in the SPD), Inland Revenue officers, engineers, electricians etc and mainly from Westphalia, Rhineland and a few from Hanover. They got the information out through Aachen and Saarbrücken.<sup>401</sup> Groehl, to

<sup>396</sup> Op. cit. Some future socialist historian needs to ferret out the shifts in Retzlau's attitudes towards Trotskyism and the KPD.

<sup>397</sup> Jackson-Alexander op. cit.

<sup>398</sup> a secret memo from 'c/o LANDES', probably in SOE, 10.3. 43

<sup>399</sup> 2/2172,

<sup>400</sup> PF45807

<sup>401</sup> PF46464 This was written in 1948. Groehl might have appreciated this recognition a tad earlier.

use cold war terminology, became the 'letter-box'. In a report about what Otten had said to 'B.5b' about Groehl in September/October 1938, so hardly reliable, Groehl supposedly reported that there were 50-60,000 active underground workers in the KPD, in touch with Moscow, who can be relied upon to initiate sabotage in factories, are already doing so and intend to risk their lives to continue. (Apparently, sabotage was on the increase in the aircraft factories, leading to six crashes.) Earlier, in further memos from August and September 1938, from 'B4b', Groehl is reported as having given information on underground barracks in southern Germany, and the exact names and places of all German army units, something the writer of the memo for once welcomed.<sup>402</sup> There is a constant underlying questioning of the reliability and originality of such reports, not just from MI5 but also from Groehl, for instance assessing others reports on German troop movements which, he suspected, emanated from MI5 itself.

France was becoming an increasingly difficult and dangerous place to be an anti-Nazi refugee. In a letter from Groehl to Otten in December, 1938, Groehl states that during the recent visit of Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, to Paris, a certain number of German communists had, at the request of the German authorities, been detained by the French government then under Daladier, who had just co-signed the Munich agreement and was generally sympathetic to the Nazis.<sup>403</sup>



<sup>402</sup> PF5807

<sup>403</sup> Original in 45807. Otten is reported as stating that Chamberlain and the Cliveden set wanted to keep Hitler for fear of Bolshevism. He states this in September 1938 but at other times too (from B5b, KV2/2171). Otten also reports to his handlers that his group (the Primrose League) have attempted and failed to elicit interest in their anti-Nazi endeavors from British politicians.

In a letter to Otten in 1939, Retzlaw sends news from Bayern, Germany.<sup>404</sup> There had been a mutiny in Ingolstadt amongst the 27<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment stationed there who are untrustworthy and have been moved on to Poland. In Munich there had also been minor riots in a 'foot' regiment. 'The troops were discontented with the hard work and poor food.' There was also something Retzlaw referred to as the "Munich affair", which involved some sort of sabotage. Unfortunately, there were no further details but Retzlaw saw this as probably the result of an anti-Nazi group and significant. The SS camp in Constance had also been burned down by anti-Nazis. My suspicion is Otten was not interested in this unofficial sort of anti-Nazi action.

Retzlaw is another of the handful of comrades aware of the importance of anti-imperialist struggles. In July 1939, he informed Otten about contact with A. Nambiar, who he presents as a significant and well-informed anti-Nazi and friend of Nehru's.<sup>405</sup>

Retzlaw sent regular 'news' to Otten, on at least one occasion, in 1939, staying with him in London. ('Grohl' had already visited London in May and July 1938, travelling on a Nansen certificate, 'a political Aryan refugee from Germany'.<sup>406</sup> He planned on arriving in London in July 1939 but without success. By November 1939, he had appealed twice, with an increased urgency in tone, to Otten to get him a visa so he could come to England permanently. (Later, he had Otten's measure.) The local Paris police had come to visit his landlady in November 1939, wanting to know about the mail he received from abroad, he wrote to Otten. He also had to report to the local police station and inform them about his income and his activities. He was not allowed to leave Paris and feared they could deport him to Germany. Please would Otten pull his finger out and get him a permit to stay in the UK.<sup>407</sup>

First interned in France (in La Sante prison from September 1939, according to an unsigned memo to Colonel Vivian of the British Secret Intelligence Service, he was released apparently after British intervention.<sup>408</sup> After the collapse of France, he went

<sup>404</sup> Original in PF45802

<sup>405</sup> PF45807. Nambiar (1896–1986) was an Indian nationalist who, in the end, threw in his lot with Bose. He had been working in Germany as a left-wing journalist and was close to –or involved in –Münzenberg's League against Imperialism. He, was beaten up by the SS, imprisoned, and then deported to Prague. He then moved on to Paris. According to MI5 documents that remained classified until 2014, the British –almost certainly incorrectly- believed Nambiar was a Soviet spy. He was imprisoned after the war for collaboration with the enemy but escaped to Switzerland. Against the wishes of Britain, Nehru's government gave him an Indian passport

<sup>406</sup> HO file, G.10661.Nansen passports were given to some stateless refugees, issued by the League of Nations.

<sup>407</sup> PF45807

<sup>408</sup> original in 45807, KV 2/2171

via Spain to Portugal, a journey which apparently caused ‘great privation’. (One sub-theme throughout is his desperate shortage of money.) Accounts differ here. The French passport office created difficulties -or maybe it was British immigration/the Foreign Office. He acquired Polish papers in the name of Stanislas Retzlaw, nationality Polish, issued in Toulouse on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1940, in unoccupied France. (Some sources incorrectly state papers issued in Portugal.) As Groehl stated in an interview, he arrived in the UK at Bristol airport on 10th October 1940 using these papers.<sup>409</sup> One version, confirmed in MI5 memos, has the British secret service flying him to the UK from Lisbon. At Bristol airport, the authorities smelled a political rat but MI5 was there to dig him out and send him on his way to Lexham Gardens, Kensington.<sup>410</sup> But the Chief Constable and Chief Inspector then showed interest in his registration card: No 1020732; a subsequent unsigned note, written in capitals, notes that place and date of birth were wrong. Of course, so was the name. Though Retlaw benefited from the fissures in the establishment, his story exemplifies the profound insecurities these left-wing refugees experienced, even when they were working for British security.

Around this time, according to the ever-reliable Dieter Nelles, Retlaw worked with a Mr Williams (no more details available), of the British Ministry of Interior, who continued to fund leaflets distributed to Retlaw’s associates in Belgium and via them, into Germany: Ruth Austria in Verviers and Schmitt in Antwerp. Schmitt, who worked with Eckardt and Benninghaus, received glass vials of flammable liquid to be used for acts of sabotage; indeed, in May 1940, a sabotage plot was carried out on a German Rhine ship, but it did not cause any major damage.<sup>411</sup>

Here, he both founded the tiny German Revolutionary Socialist Bund/League, a part of the Trotskyist Fourth International and worked for the SOE during 1941/42 in what was called S.O.2 (the sabotage section of MI5). In 1941, in the UK, one report states, he gave the names of his collaborators in Switzerland, maybe to French and Austrian contacts. SOE was displeased: he had no right to do such things, had been ‘indiscrete in connection with contacts in Switzerland’ and ‘should be removed to a safe place immediately’! One memo suggested he was doing all this for money! Some

<sup>409</sup> KV2/2172

<sup>410</sup> 2/2171

<sup>411</sup> Dieter Nelles *Widerstand und internationale Solidarität Die Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation (ITF) im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*



explanation may be offered in a report on Groehl's dismissal as a member of SOE.<sup>412</sup> 'On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Retzlaw wrote a subversive letter to the agents in Switzerland' which he initially refused to withdraw. 'I gave him a severe warning that the result of such action [purportedly exposing his role for the SIS] might easily bring about his internment...' 'His pay therefore was stopped.' He was, an earlier memo stated, a prima-donna, misanthrope, suspicious, vain and ill-tempered. Another memo (13.2.42), through Sykes, accused him of being a Trotskyist (and a German one at that), conducting subversive activities against the British Government and only interested in revolution. (The standard of accuracy is such that in one memo, from 'M.D.', Groehl and Retzlaw are two separate people.)

Groehl's grouping, founded in 1942, went under a variety of names: German Revolutionary Socialist Bund/League, German Socialist Federation, League of German Revolutionary Socialists and German Democratic Socialist federation. As a result of Otten's typical indiscretion (Groehl had a lot to do with Otten), and via the spook, Skyes (see Otten biography), we know that Groehl maintained a network of German informants who crossed out of Germany at Aachen (bordering Belgium) or via Saarbrücken. Certainly, in a subsequent source, Retzlaw is reported as saying that the League of German Revolutionaries regularly received information, for example about German troop transports, security clampdowns, Bavarian resistance and parachute landings.<sup>413</sup> The 'agent' believed Retzlaw, if only because he insisted he did not want money.<sup>414</sup>

A couple of long letters/critique, Groehl/Retzlaw wrote, on 1 December 1941, 30 July 1942 and November 1, 1942, copies of which MI5 has conveniently preserved, lay out the aims/programme of the Revolutionary Socialist League: to defeat Nazism by any means, including sabotage in Germany and German organisations abroad, to issue anti-German and pro-Socialist propaganda, including amongst POWs, to create a German confederacy of states, to socialise big industry and collectivise large landed property within a planned economy, to disarm Germany completely, to 'abolish militarism and bureaucracy as the backbone of German imperialism and capitalism and to repair war damages and to prosecute war criminals'. The German police and the

<sup>412</sup> 31.3.1942, signed GS

<sup>413</sup> Ri/E5L

<sup>414</sup> P1.P.A. 46464

army needed to be dissolved. He also demanded Germany quickly paid reparations. Retzlau also unusually raised the need – in 1942 - for all Nazis to be removed from their positions after the war. These demands received little support, or were actively opposed by other left political groupings.<sup>415</sup>

Retzlau argued that the SPD had betrayed the working class in 1918/19 and that is why the Nazis were so successful. Noske is similar to Hitler. The German trade unions had become no more than insurance clubs. The KPD are nationalistic and had adopted Nazi methods.<sup>416</sup> The main parties in exile are at best an irrelevance, in fact, if anything, damage the real resistance. Moreover, the underground 'is neither led nor influenced by self-important German [exiles] in England or the USA'. 'German emigrants in their mental sterility have not supported the fight.' Already 'small' Nazis are probing the possibility of hiding themselves away after the war is lost in left-wing parties, which, Retzlau suggests, will let this happen. What we needed to call for was socialist revolution<sup>417</sup>

In a critique of the 'Allies inside Germany' exhibition, organised by the Free German League, dated 30 July 1942, Retzlau argued that the exhibition created a deliberately false illusion of a growing resistance within Germany while failing to mention the real resistance that does exist. Why is the émigré Prof Haber praised when he is a warmonger and exponent of chemical warfare? Retzlau continued by listing other refugees praised in the exhibition who had been responsible for putting down the workers' councils and were German nationalists or worse. This all, he suggests, is typical of KPD nationalism. Instead German underground workers welcome the attacks on Germany.

He also attacks 'Colonel' Kahle (see biography) who is responsible for many deaths of men who did not believe in the infallibility of the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. 'These men paid for their views with their death.' 'They were called 'Trotskyites' or 'Anarchists'.' What is Kahle doing here, nestling amongst the British and spouting rubbish about wanting a 'pan-Germany'?<sup>418</sup>

<sup>415</sup> This last paragraph is from a report (KV2/172) presented by Sykes, about a meeting at which Retzlau spoke. Sykes asked a question about who would support Retzlau 's demands in Germany given Trotskyism and anarchism were not popular but did not receive a reply.

<sup>416</sup> KV 2/2/172

<sup>417</sup> PF348-3

<sup>418</sup> PF46464.

Retzlaw was active in the *Fight for Freedom group*‘ and in the Free German Youth movement’,indeed his views, as the MI5 papers suggest, are sympathetic to Vansittarism, though from a far more left position than Vansittart himself.<sup>419</sup> (See introduction) Indeed, in early 1944, Retzlaw wrote a pamphlet ‘German Communists’, finally published in 1946 by Hutchinson and Co, which argued that, while there was resistance in Germany, eg in the ports such as Hamburg and Bremen, overall, German society did not oppose the Nazis.<sup>420</sup>

What one of Retzlaw’s letters from August 1941 reminds us of is how concerned the refugees were about their erstwhile German comrades. The person he seems most concerned about was Berthold Jacob kidnapped (twice) by Nazis.<sup>421</sup> It was, it appears, Jacob who had given Grohl military information told him by German officers, and which, Groehl believes lay behind Jacob being kidnapped by the Nazis.<sup>422</sup> In a heart-breaking letter of the 30 August 1941, Retlaw has to tell Jacob, then in Portugal, that, although he had been seen as a ‘very valuable contact’ by MI5, they would do nothing and there is nothing he – or Lehmann-Russbuehdt (see s biography) - can do for him though ‘Lehmann is intervening on your behalf’. The exiled Social Democrats, in particular Vogel (see biography), won’t lift a finger on his behalf, indeed the Party Committee ‘is spreading calumnies about you’. Jacob was killed in Germany.

In 1946, Retlaw left the UK for the French zone of Germany but then moved back to Saarbrücken, where he became a Saarland Social Democrat, but the Social Democrats then expelled him. He then moved to Frankfurt in West Germany, where he died in 1979.

<sup>419</sup> In a report on a public meeting under the auspices of Free German Youth and the Editorial Board of ‘Freie Tribune’, held on 13.8.1943, it was reported that ‘Retzlaw’ ‘began a tirade against the Moscow committee’ for adopting the old pre-Weimar German flag, and in particular against Hans Kahle. He was consequently ‘removed by two stewards’.  
(PF46464)

<sup>420</sup> KV2-2172

<sup>421</sup> Berthold Jacob, a journalist, pacifist and radical sustained critic of German militarism, repeatedly arrested, left Germany in 1932. In March 1935, the Gestapo used an informer to lure Jacob to Basle, where they kidnapped him and took him to a German prison. Jacob was set free after six months, returned to Switzerland but was then deported to France, where he was interned in 1939/40. He managed to escape and got to Portugal in 1941 but was once again kidnapped by Nazi agents and taken to a Gestapo prison. He died in February, 1944. ([www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index\\_of\\_persons/biographie/view-bio/berthold-jacob](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/berthold-jacob))

<sup>422</sup> PF45807

### **Werner Ilberg (1896-1978)**

Ilberg joined the SPD in 1925, but was soon expelled as a communist. From 1932 he worked as a critic for the communist press in Berlin and became a member of the League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers. After being imprisoned twice by the Nazis, he emigrated to Czechoslovakia in 1933 and in 1939 on to England.

Here, he joined the KPD in London as well as being active in the FGLC. He contributed to 'Das Wort', a German literary exile magazine published in Moscow, and 'Free German culture', the monthly magazine of the FGCA. After he returned to Germany in 1947, he was convicted by a British military court for distributing, in the Soviet Zone, the novel 'Die Fahne der Witwe Grasbach', a semi-autobiographical novel which looked at the failure of the KPD and SPD to stop the Nazis.

### **Hans Jahn (1885-1960)<sup>423</sup>**

Hans Jahn organised anti-Nazi railway workers in Nazi Germany, an act of resistance which deserves far fuller recognition, before fleeing to the UK.

Originally a smelter, Jahn, who joined the SPD in 1903, by 1930, was on the EC of the United Union of German Railway Workers, and an outspoken opponent of the Nazis. More aware of the threat of Nazism than most, in 1932, he prepared for illegal trade union and political work.

He established a network of contacts, including around 100 railway workers groups. In 1933, after the Nazi government had smashed the unions, he produced and distributed anti-Nazi publications, with the financial and logistical support from the International Transport Workers' Federation led by Edo Fimmen.<sup>424</sup> These carried articles by railway workers and sailors about the political balance of forces where they worked and also campaigned around food, supported the Ethiopian and Spanish republican struggles and was strongly anti-nationalistic.

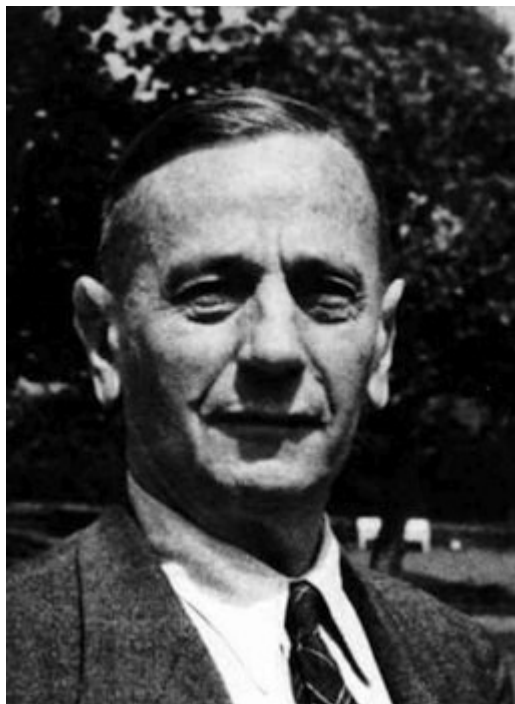
<sup>423</sup> For more details see Merilyn Moos, *Hans Jahn, Biography of an Anti-Nazi Trade Unionist*.

<sup>424</sup> Fimmen never lived in the UK so he does not have a separate biography. But he was another remarkable figure. A deeply religious man, he became the Secretary of the Dutch National trade union when still in his early 30s and then General Secretary of the International Transport Federation in 1919, campaigning for a variety of militant issues: the boycott of arms to Poland during the 1920 Polish-Soviet war and support for the revolutionary left in Hungary in 1919. He was on close terms with Pollitt and Münzenberg..

Jahn also managed to salvage a 17,000 list of former union members in the Ruhr which enabled him to set up a labour resistance group in the Rhine-Ruhr area that collaborated closely with the International Transport Workers' Federation.

In 1935, the Gestapo uncovered some of his network and Jahn was arrested (for the third time). Due to much pressure, he was released and fled to Amsterdam where he continued organising resistance. But again his group was penetrated when a car carrying illegal leaflets was stopped at the German border. Jahn was deported and went to Antwerp, then on to Luxembourg, but when Luxembourg was threatened, he fled to the UK.

(His wife was arrested and sent to a camp but survived.) In the UK, he led sabotage groups of railway men in Germany.<sup>425</sup>



Though it is not as aspect of the Second World war that is often dwelt on, the acquiescence if not support of railway workers (about 420,000 altogether) was crucial to Nazi success.<sup>426</sup> Under Director Julius Dorpmüller, the employers slavishly followed Nazi instructions, dismissing Jewish railway personal and suppliers such as Ernst Spiro<sup>427</sup> and from 1933, even firing German employees married to Jews. A few years later, the railway carried millions of Jews and others to their deaths and shuttled soldiers and supplies to the front. So any form of resistance could save lives. The Social-Democratic and revolutionary left had been strong amongst railway workers, some of whom, from 1933, provided information, helped Jews or handed out leaflets and even, occasionally, sabotaged the trains.<sup>428</sup> Jahn was involved in blowing up a German train though no more details are available.

<sup>425</sup> ITF History, *The first 100 years of the ITF*, <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/reports-publications/history-first-100-years-itf>

<sup>426</sup> Alfred Gottwaldt, *Railway workers against Hitler. Resistance and persecution under the Reichsbahn 1933 – 1945*.

<sup>427</sup> Ernst Spiro (1873-1950, born in the Poznan province of what was then Poland) became the director of the Reichsbahn. Historically Jewish, he had been persecuted long before 1933 by the Nazi Party but then was dismissed. He fled to the UK in 1939.

<sup>428</sup> Gottwaldt, op cit.

In 1935, the Gestapo discovered this underground grouping and arrested Jahn but unaware of his role, released him soon afterwards. He then fled first to Prague and then to Amsterdam. With the support of the International Transport Federation, he re-established a resistance network of about 1300 contacts (at its best) with German railway workers.<sup>429</sup> Between 1936-38, he published an anti-Nazi journal for German railway workers. From Amsterdam, he collaborated with Fimmen and a group of German seamen based in Antwerp to wage a campaign against the Nazi government among the sailors of the German merchant fleet.<sup>430</sup>,<sup>431</sup> He was also in contact with Neu Beginnen and ISK.

In 1940, Jahn escaped to London, travelling via Spain and Portugal. Here he set up a group of German trade unionists which later affiliated to the National Group of German Labour Unionists in Britain.

An International Railwaymen's conference was held in London in September 1943, whose aim was the development of a post-war plan to safeguard the interests of German workers. Remarkably, it was attended by 46 trade unionists from 14 European countries. (I don't know how they got to the UK.) It was committed to working out a suitable post-Nazi programme, far more so apparently than the Labour Party. It established the 'European Transport Committee' whose first demand was for a unified European transport system!<sup>432</sup>

Jahn and the ISK also worked with the SOE. In 1944, Jahn in collaboration with the OSS tried to infiltrate exiled union cadres into Germany and cooperated with the OSS

<sup>429</sup> Based on the work of Dieter Nelles (*Widerstand und Internationale Solidarität: Die Internationale Transportarbeiter Federation*. 2001) quoted in Jonathan Hyslop, *German seafarers, antifascism and the anti-Stalinist left. The Antwerp group and edo finnen's international transport workers federation, 1933-1940*.

<sup>430</sup> The group, called the Antwerp group, collaborated with the ITF in building resistance networks on the ships and elsewhere. They were a breakaway from the International Seamen and Harbour Workers, which was dominated by the Comintern. They were anti-Stalinist because of its sectarianism and ineffective stand against the Nazis. Apparently, by 1939, the Antwerp group had contacts with shop stewards on about 300 ships. They planned sabotage: seamen were issued with mercury to destroy the ship's engines. In a wonderful detail, again drawing from Nelles, Hyslop suggests that the militancy and emphasis on self-organisation of one of the main leaders of the sailors, Hermann Knüfken, was rooted in his experience of mutiny in 1918 in Kiel in which he participated in and also in the subsequent events in Berlin in 1919. He became close to the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) and hijacked a trawler to get to a conference in the Soviet Union where he met Lenin.

<sup>431</sup> [https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index\\_of\\_persons/biographie/view-bio/hans-jahn/?no\\_cache=1](https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/hans-jahn/?no_cache=1), <https://www.gewerkschaftsgeschichte.de/hans-jahn-4404.html> :Dieter Nelles, *Resistance and international solidarity. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in resistance to National Socialism with special attention to seafarers, Essen 2001*.

<sup>432</sup> Ed Walter Lipgens, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945*, p 658

in acts of sabotage in German-occupied northern Italy. But he also participated in oppositional work, for example, he was part of the London group around Hans Gottfurcht, who was the founder of the 'National Group of German Trade Unionists' in the UK, and tried to organise a unified German trade union confederation once the war had ended.<sup>433</sup>

He returned to Germany in 1945. After 1949, he was elected chair of the German Railroad Workers.

### **Jupp Kappius 1907-1967**

Jupp Kappius was an intriguing member of the ISK (International Socialist League). A draftsman, he became an active member of the SAJ (*Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend* / Socialist Workers Youth) in 1924 and in 1933, joined the ISK, becoming responsible for illegal youth and educational work. The ISK, back in the 1920s, made demands about its members' life style, not just their politics: all members had to vow to be vegetarians, teetotalers and childless.



He fled early, hunted by the Gestapo, reaching the UK via France, though it is not clear in which year. He was interned in 1940, deported to Australia and held until 1942; then he returned to Britain.

Early in 1944, he completed a hard training course in cooperation with the OSS, as did other revolutionaries, convinced that defeating Nazism had to be their overriding political priority. The Allied forces now required detailed intelligence reports of what was happening in Germany: whether resistance networks existed and in the possibility of sabotage. But they needed fluent German speakers to avoid the chance of capture and worse.<sup>434</sup> As the war against Germany intensified, the 'Labor Branch' of the

<sup>433</sup> Gottfurcht, who originally worked in the textile industry, joined the SPD and became a trade union official. After 1933, he helped build underground union organisation in Saxony, Thuringia and Silesia. In July 1937 he was arrested by the Gestapo but, in 1938, managed to escape to London. He joined the Labour Party, was interned, became a member of the social democratic working group "Germany and Europe after the war" and broadcast for the BBC German-language programmes.

<sup>434</sup> <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2016/11/22/oss-in-germany>



London-based US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) were finally given the go-ahead to organise clandestine agent operations into Germany.<sup>435</sup> There were the inevitable political/personal tussles for power and influence. Remarkably, unlike British intelligence, the OSS appreciated the usefulness of trade union based resistance groups and turned to the Free Germany League (helped by Kuczinski: see separate biography).<sup>436</sup> This is how they found Kappius and most of the others. It is possible that they had spotted Kappius as early as his internment in Australia. Accusations that these men were Soviet spies only came later. Jupp Kappius was one of the first OSS agents in Germany, along with Willi Drucker.<sup>437</sup> He was so opposed to capitalism that, when he was recruited by the OSS, he would only accept five pounds per week to cover his living expenses; he refused to accept a wage.<sup>438</sup> In September, 1944, he jumped from a plane over Emsland by parachute. His instructions were to create an underground organisation for the purpose of (1) promoting internal resistance to the Nazi regime; (2) committing acts of sabotage against the war effort; (3) encouraging subversion in all its forms.<sup>439</sup> Kappius made his way to the Ruhr area, where he remained till April 1945, first staying, at great risk to all, in the home of a young ISK couple. He made contacts with old comrades in the unions, the ISK and resistance groups.<sup>440</sup> His task was to stir insurrection and build resistance.<sup>441</sup> He had some successes. He organised a group of seven men, each of whom had contact with two to five other men, who were shop stewards or union organisers in the Ruhr, who supposedly passed on propaganda and fostered go-slows and sabotage. He gained information also from a number of ISK couriers. It was difficult to send back information: Kappius had two courier agents, his first wife Anne and Hilde Meusel

<sup>435</sup> O'Connor, Bernhard, *The Tempsford Academy*

<sup>436</sup> It is curious that none of the German refugees who work with OSS appear in the digitized MI5 files. I doubt this is coincidence.

<sup>437</sup> From June 1944, the OSS dispatched over 200 spies: Spanish civil war veterans, political refugees, and members of underground labour groups into Nazi Germany. They wanted the Germans to be conversant in the particular dialect of each German city targeted!

<sup>438</sup> Doria Marie Lynch, *The Labor Branch of the Office of Strategic Services: An Academic Study from a Public History Perspective*, <https://juppkappius.wordpress.com/josef-kappius-die-politische-person/the-oss/>, Persico, Joseph, *Piercing the Reich: The Penetration of Nazi Germany by American Secret Agents During World War II*

<sup>439</sup> <https://juppkappius.wordpress.com/josef-kappius-die-politische-person/the-oss/>

<sup>440</sup> [www.juppkappius.de/jupp-kappius-eine-subjektive-biographie](http://www.juppkappius.de/jupp-kappius-eine-subjektive-biographie). Kappius gave an interview where he gives great detail as to what to do and not to do when landing by parachute in enemy territory:

<https://juppkappius.wordpress.com/josef-kappius-die-politische-person/parachuting-into-the-emsland/>

<sup>441</sup> O'Connor, Bernhard *The Tempsford Academy*. RAF Tempsford appeared to be a disused airfield but was actually used by the RAF's Special Duties Squadrons to carry hundreds of tons of arms and supplies to resistance groups north of the Arctic Circle, east to Czechoslovakia and Poland, south-east to the Balkans and south to the Pyrenees and Italy.



who infiltrated Germany on foot via the mountainous Swiss border. But much of the information Kappius gleaned was not available to the Allies and the OSS until after he was assimilated behind US front lines.<sup>442</sup> Back in the UK, he set up a vegetarian restaurant, "Vega". But he returned to Germany, negotiating the incorporation of the ISDK into the SPD, and became an official of the SPD in the local government of Dortmund. He died in Dortmund in 1967.<sup>443</sup>

### **Helmut Klose (1904-1987)**

Helmut Klose is a fascinating and unheard of German exile who fought in the Spanish Civil war and settled in the UK from 1939; details about him can be obscure.

When only a teenager, he joined the anarcho-syndicalist *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands* (FAUD, Free German Workers' Union), became a professional hobo and a writer. He fled Germany for Austria after he had been arrested a few times, then to Sarajevo, Yugoslavia in the summer of 1933 where he worked as a guide for a tourist agency. He was expelled in February 1937 because of his anti-fascist activity and possession of Spanish anarchist literature as well as Nazi pressure. In the meantime, a Nazi tribunal had condemned him to death. He went on to Barcelona and fought with POUM, but was arrested by OGPU (the USSR's secret police) and then 'made the unwelcome acquaintance of Kahle'.<sup>444</sup> (See separate biography) Though versions vary, according to Kaspar's report from July 1941, Klose was released but rearrested and put on a ship along with falangists and then somehow got to Gurs.<sup>445</sup>

An extraordinary report from Emma Goldmann in 1937 survives: '*Another one [arrestees] is comrade Helmut Klose, a member of the CNT-FAI. He was arrested on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July. No charge has been made up to this date, neither was he brought before a Judge. .... He came to Spain in March. He joined the frontier service of the FAI, in the 'De la Costa' battalion. After the dissolution of this battalion, in June he took his discharge, entered the service of the agricultural collective in San Anores. In compliance with the request from his group he undertook the reorganisation of the Tailors' Collective of the Emigrants Committee. The charge made by the Cheka of his*

<sup>442</sup> Doria Marie Lynch, *The Labor Branch of the Office of Strategic Services: An Academic Study from a Public History Perspective*, <https://juppkappius.wordpress.com/josef-kappius-die-politische-person/the-oss/>

<sup>443</sup> <https://denneyhomeplace.com/2018/12/28/remember-our-ancestors-jupp-kappius>. This was written by his son, who never knew him because he was very young at his death. He does not state what his father's political party was!

<sup>444</sup> Report from Kaspar, PF47192

<sup>445</sup> OGPU used ships to remove leftists they disagreed with. See biography of Lotte Moos.

*having disarmed officers while in the Frontier Service at Figueras is entirely without foundation’.*<sup>446</sup>

In a slightly different version, Klose was imprisoned until 1 December 1938 and then interned in the camp at Gurs, France where he was involved with the committee set up by anarchists to counter the Stalinist control of the majority of prisoners. With the help of a German friend and the mediation of a British artist, Hedda Carrington, who he had originally met in Yugoslavia, he settled in Cambridge in 1939. When World War II broke out, he was interned on the Isle of Man, though only classified as an ‘O’, the lowest category, and was then sent to Canada till the end of 1941.



In the internment camp he became friends with the German zoologist Hans Werner Lissmann. He then worked on a farm in Cambridgeshire, and married a Land Girl, Rita and had a large family. He became passionately pro-British, inactive politically and, according to Caspar’s report, gave information on Communist ‘terrorist methods’ in Spain. He got a job as an assistant in the laboratory of the Lissmann Institute, Cambridge, specialising in animal behaviour. Klose became friends with George Orwell shortly before he dies. He himself died in 1987 at Haslingfield.

### **Werner Lehmann (1904 – 1941)**

Though this is a collection of biographies about refugees from Nazism who got to the UK and survived, Werner Lehmann’s significance is that Britain did not admit him – and he did not survive. This is not the place to discuss Baldwin’s Government’s policy towards refugees but the image of Britain as a welcoming country is far from the case. Its criteria for entry were severe: the *Kindertransport* were the exception. Compare this with the British government’s almost open-armed policy towards ex-Nazis after the end of the war, as Cesarani demonstrates.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>446</sup> <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-political-persecution-in-republican-spain>

<sup>447</sup> Cesarani, David, *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became A Refuge For Nazi War Criminals*: Despite protests from Labour MPs Dick Crossman and Tom Driberg, former members of the Waffen-SS and Nazi police units settled in

Werner Lehmann was a member of the KPD and the Red Navy section of the Red Front. The 'Red Navy' was a sub-branch of the Red Front which was associated with the KPD. From 1930, they were increasingly involved in hard street fighting, sometimes armed, with the SA, who feared them.

Lehmann fled for Antwerp in April 1933 and then went to sea on German ships. He deserted in 1935 and joined the active group of six to eight German sailors in Antwerp, a part of International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), of which his brother Kurt was leader. Sympathisers were recruited on German ships to take illegal anti-Nazi literature and letters on board and bring endangered comrades out of Germany. Antwerp was particularly important because of the large numbers of German ships which docked there. The group was financed through voluntary contributions from ITF shop stewards. Lehmann was also involved in by smuggling and arranging stowaways, but they were transported for free if they were politically persecuted.

The group contacted Edo Fimmen, Secretary General of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), who they saw as sympathetic to their situation, unlike the Communist Party.<sup>448</sup> Lehmann and the rest of the Antwerp group left the KPD in 1936 and joined the International Transport Workers' Federation.<sup>449</sup>

Despite great efforts, the Gestapo was unable to penetrate the seamen's underground network at that time. But things were getting hotter in Antwerp. In September 1936, Werner went to Spain with six other seamen, including his brother Kurt. He fought in the international group of the Durruti column on the Aragon front until January, after first joining the communist UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores), where most of the German refugees were. He was elected shop steward by the entire German group of around 100. Beimler did not accept this decision and

Britain, including becoming agents for British intelligence.

Though it is very unlikely he is the only one, I cannot find any list or study of refugees who were refused entry. Gerhard Hinze (see separate biography) was almost sent back. It was only the last minute appearance and intervention of the Labour MP, Ellen Wilkinson, at the dockside which saved him. My guess, which is all it is, is that refugees who were 'significant' in political groups with connections to British MP's (such as the left Labour MP, Maxwell sponsoring my father, though the link here may well have been through the League against Imperialism) were more likely to gain entry.

<sup>448</sup> Fimmen was one of the few influential trade union leaders who recognised early on the danger of fascism for the international labour movement. Politically independent, the union supported the establishment of illegal trade union groups of transport workers and railroad workers in Germany. (See Cushion and Moos' booklet), from 1933.

<sup>449</sup> Nelles, Dieter, "That we hold our heads high, even if it should be cut off". Wuppertal seafarers in the resistance against National Socialism.'

dictatorially appointed a political commissioner for the group.<sup>450</sup> As a result, 20 men left the group and joined a CNT / FAI militia. The Antwerp group's slogan was: "Today Spain, tomorrow Germany".

Werner became ill and returned to Antwerp. Under increasing pressure from the German Government to hand over politically active refugees, the Belgium government expelled Werner and Kurt Lehmann in 1938, though the Belgium transport union and Camille Huysmans, the Social Democratic Mayor of Antwerp and President of the Parliament, had intervened and gained the brothers (amongst others) provisional residence permits.

The ITF then secured them places on the British freighter *Lucerie* which sailed for Hong Kong. But they were not allowed to stay there and then were banned from disembarking in London by the police. (The reason given for this is not known but is probably linked to his Communist/anarchist role in Spain.)

The brothers then went back to Belgium where they were arrested. After the ITF intervened, they were released with the condition that they leave Belgium forever. Finally in Dunkirk, they were again detained, again Fimmen intervened and they were briefly released, but were re-interned as "hostile foreigners" after the outbreak of war. Fimmen again got them released but, finally they were interned by the French in a North African camp, Suzzoni, and then on to the notorious Berroughia camp. Then the Vichy government extradited both brothers to the Gestapo. They were taken to the "Headquarters of Terror" of the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin. Werner Lehmann was killed on September 21.

Kurt Lehmann somehow withstood the torture and did not give away names, despite his fears that he would. He was imprisoned until April 25, 1945, when he was rescued "dying in the forest near Dachau" by the American Army. After a long stay in hospital, Kurt Lehmann worked as a stoker in the British Army and later in the German Armed Forces. For a short time he went to sea again. At the end of the 1940s Lehmann wrote a short report "On the Resistance of German Seafarers" where he condemned the German generals for jumping on the anti-Nazi bandwagon only at the last moment. He then ceased to be political.

<sup>450</sup> The Foreigners Committee of the UGT was headed by Hans Beimler, the official representative of the KPD in Barcelona and by most accounts, a hard Stalinist, though there were rumours that he was killed by a Stalinist agent

“Among those who first climbed the scaffold of Hitler,” wrote Werner Lehmann, “were German seafarers”.<sup>451</sup>

### **Paul Lindner (1911-1969), Anton “Toni” Ruh (1912-1964)**

There is a small group of German refugees whose main significance is their work with the OSS. Like Kappius (see biography above), the handful of German working class militants included here, risked their lives for the OSS.<sup>452</sup>

**Paul Lindner** grew up in a traditional social democratic household and was active in the German labour movement. By his 18th birthday, he was already well known for his work as an



*Paul Lindner*

*Anton Ruh*

organiser of the German Metal Workers' Union. From the early 1930s, he worked in the "BB Apparat", the intelligence – and 'protective' service of the KPD.<sup>453</sup> In 1932, the SA seriously beat him up and he was hospitalized. In 1933, Lindner was arrested and seriously tortured. But he then continued his underground trade union resistance work: distributing anti-Nazi leaflets, painting anti-Nazi slogans on public street corners, and providing aid to families whose breadwinners had disappeared into the first concentration camps. He organised a secret 'hiking' club attached to the 'League of Labour Youth' of young union members to train them for illegal union work (by 1935, around 400 people). Inevitably, Lindner surfaced on the Gestapo's radar. He fled Germany to Czechoslovakia in 1935. There he took part in "border work", helping those escaping, including Jews, flee across the border, and explored military installations in the border area between Germany and Czechoslovakia for the Czech army. He posed as a ski instructor to mask what he was doing, which included working for the underground trade union resistance.

But Lindner had to flee again. He secured a UK visa in 1939 through the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. Here a local committee of anti-fascist sympathizers supported

<sup>451</sup> Nelles, <https://www.gedenkbuch-wuppertal.de/de/person/lehmann-2>

<sup>452</sup> Keep in mind that the information for this section is drawn almost entirely from Jonathan S. Gould, *The OSS and the London "Free Germans"* <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no1/article03.html>. Again, note the source.

<sup>453</sup> The BB apparatus was supposedly the propaganda section of 'M-Apparat', the illegal intelligence/protective wing of the KPD. The Gestapo smashed it up in 1935.

him. In May 1940, Lindner was interned and deported to Canada, where he was interned with other German political refugees. By late 1941, the British had relocated him to the Isle of Man. He got a job as a machine turner for a British firm, got to know Kuczinski and was recruited to work for OSS.<sup>454</sup> **Anton Ruh** (1912-1964), a printer and lithographer, was a comrade and good friend of Lindners. The son of an ostrich feather worker, his father died in the First World War. His mother was an active Communist. Around 1927, he joined the KJVD and in 1929 the Red Front (RFB), and then the KPD. In 1931, he was sentenced to six months in prison. Due to his birth in Austria, he was expelled to Austria after his release from prison. But in 1933, Ruh worked again in the BB apparatus (the KPD's intelligence service) in Berlin and was arrested several more times.

Upon release, he fled to Czechoslovakia. He smuggled leaflets into Germany and, amazingly, given he was being hunted by the Gestapo, returned to Berlin on six occasions to deliver forged passports to help Jews and political dissidents. In 1938, Ruh settled in London briefly, but, like Lindner, was interned by the British government in June 1940. Deported, he lived in Australia until November 1941. Upon his return, he resumed work. After his release he worked from 1942 in a London armaments factory as a welder. He was also a member of the central leadership of the KPD exile group.

After being thoroughly trained in 'Operation Hammer' (see Appendix 1), Lindner and Ruh parachuted safely into Germany in March 1945, carrying their transmitters and forged "work orders", documenting their status as skilled defence workers, exempt from military service. They had been supplied with contacts in the underground resistance by the Free Germany Committee in France.

After some difficulties, under Operation Hammer, in April, 1945, they were able to transmit crucial military intelligence dealing with German the pattern of troop movements, the location of operational munitions factories, a Berlin power plant and the sinking morale of the German people. They also apparently helped organise a

<sup>454</sup> In September 1942, the OSS had established the Secret Intelligence Branch to organize clandestine agent operations abroad. It was (and is) suspected that Allied Command knew next to nothing about what was going on inside Germany. OSS believed that trade union resistance groups and refugees from such groups could be useful because they hated the Nazi regime, had frequently already organised resistance and German was their first language. The OSS then discovered the FGLC as a ready made source.(See Introduction)

resistance group against the Wehrmacht. After some potentially deadly encounters, they survived to link up with the invading US troops.

In 1946, Lindner returned to Germany and worked for the SED. He became the editor of Radio Berlin International. Ruh rejoined the KPD in 1945, became a member of the SED in 1946 and then worked for and rose in the party hierarchy. From 1961 to 1962 Anton Ruh was at the party college of the Central Committee of the CPSU in Moscow. From 1963 to 1964 he became the East German ambassador to Romania. He committed suicide in November 1964 in Bucharest.

A few others were also sent in by OSS. Two who succeeded and survived were Walter Struwe and Emil Konhäuser. A builder, Struwe had gone underground to continue illegal political work in Frankfurt with other construction trade unionists. He was also a leading figure in the Rhineland branch of the KPD. In 1937, Struwe eluded the Gestapo's pursuit by fleeing across the Polish border on skis in April 1939 and going on to Czechoslovakia. Later he obtained a British visa with the aid of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. He was interned on the Isle of Man and, after release, he settled in Manchester and joined the Free German League of Culture.

Emil Konhäuser, a plumber/builder, had been active in the Municipal Workers union and had spent two years in the Dachau concentration camp from 1933-1935. Konhäuser's role in the underground resistance forced him to seek exile in Czechoslovakia in 1935 where he worked with the Political Refugees Committee in Prague. In 1938, with the support of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund, Konhäuser got to London.

In March 1945 Konhauser and Struwe agreed to the proposal from OSS to be placed in POW camps in the UK where captured German officers were held. It falls outside these biographies but the consequent interviews are fascinating: the German officers remained convinced that Germany would win and that Hitler was holding his best troops and weapons to last. They knew about the mass murder of the Jews. They were very aware however of the dangers to their families should the 'Allies' win. All of the German officers apparently preferred the "Negro" camp guards because they allegedly spoke disparagingly of their senior officers.

A month later, Ruh and Lindner were dropped into Germany where they provided much useful information: on rail and road traffic and depots, communication centres, and troop movements. On May 5, 1945, Walter Struwe and Emil Konhauser were recovered by the American military. They both remained in England until 1947 when their application for repatriation into East Germany was finally granted by the Soviet Union.<sup>455</sup> It is impossible to know from the available sources how far these brave comrades were able to contact the fragments of the resistance operating underground in Germany in the last year of the war. Kappius, we know, never strayed from seeing himself as a revolutionary, forced by the failure of the internal resistance to overthrow the Nazi regime to work for the class enemy: the Allies, against an even worse political system.

### **Walter Loeb (1895-1948)**

Loeb was a banker who became a member of the SPD. He is included because of his significance as the principle supporter of Vansittartism in the circles around the SPD in exile and the Labour Party in the UK.

After the end of the First World War, Loeb became a member of the Workers, and Soldiers, Council in Frankfurt and in 1919 joined the SPD. In 1922, he became director of *Süddeutsche Transportversicherung AG*. He became Vice-President, then President of the State Bank of Saxony and Thuringia in the 1920s during the (exceptional) SPD/KPD coalition government.. He resigned in 1924 after its fall. He would later refer to anti-semitic attacks on him by the Nazis that led him to resign and become an independent business adviser. From 1928 to 1932 he was an active SPD city councilor in Frankfurt.

He left for Amsterdam in 1933 and then, in 1940, to London. In London he met Vansittart and became the major exponent, co-founder, financier (probably helped by Vansittart) and then chair of Fight for Freedom in January 1942 with the support of leading Labour politicians. With Bieligk (see biography), Geyer (see biography) and a few others, he signed a manifesto in March, 1942, that the socialdemocratic labour movement was complicit in the rise of the Nazis and denying the existence of any significant opposition in Germany. The group grew from about twenty to fifty supporters before it disappeared. He was expelled from the Union of German Socialist

<sup>455</sup> Jonathan S. Gould, *'The OSS and the London "Free Germans"'* <https://books.google.co.uk/books>



Organisations. It is too predictable that an erstwhile banker should accuse the German working class of culpability for Nazism. He died in 1948, still in London.<sup>456</sup>

### Hilde Meisel 1914-1945

Hilde Meisel (Hilde Monte), a journalist, is probably the best known member of the ISK in the UK. Given her exploits on behalf of the Allies and the manner of her death, I would have hoped she would be more fully acknowledged. I've placed her here, because while she arrived in the UK in 1933, it was as a student: her anti-Nazi activities, which connect her with Kappius, only start in the late 1930s.

She grew up in a middle-class Jewish German family and joined the International Socialist Combat League (ISK) at the age of fifteen. From 1933, she lived in London where she had come to study. She made a marriage of convenience to a British man, which gave her the protection of being a British citizen. She made several journeys to Germany using documents in the name of Hilda Monte, smuggling in news, books, and letters and helped those under threat to escape Germany. She wrote poems and novellas portraying the "other Germany." She also wrote for *Sozialistische Warte*, the ISK's exile publication, *The Vanguard*, *Left News* (attached to the Left Book Club) and *Tribune* (see footnote). She also campaigned strongly but unsuccessfully for Litten, the German lawyer who had trounced Hitler in court and who was a friend of her sister's.



Hilda Meisel sided with the advocates of a more radical position than the ISK in 1939. Hans Lehnert, for example, was a comrade of Meisel and a founding member of ISK, organising the underground in Munich, Augsburg and beyond. He had also been active in the Freethinkers. In the run-up to the 1936 elections, they distributed leaflets: "Don't vote for Hitler" or "Tear up the ballot papers". They used rubber stamps, inscriptions and symbols, some in the form of a swastika on gallows, to imprint images on walls. They later used a silver nitrate solution that etched itself in

<sup>456</sup> Most of the material in this biography has been drawn from Isobel Tombs (op cit) and Thunecke, Jorg, *Fight for Freedom: A Vansittartist Network of Rightwing German Socialists in Great Britain (1941-1945)* <https://brill.com>

daylight so that the symbols could only be removed by chiseling out. Finally, in October 1937, Lehnert was arrested. After his release in April 1938, he fled. With Hilde Meisel, he represented a strategy of direct action in the fight against Hitler. He resigned from ISK in London in 1939. In 1940 he was interned in Switzerland and died there in 1942.

In May 1939, Meisel had approached George Strauss, a co-member of the secret British anti-Nazi organisation "Union Time Ltd", founded in 1938. "Union Time Ltd" had been set up in 1938 in London to convince the British public of the need for a strong foreign policy towards Nazi Germany, including support for 'illegal' resistance groups. George Russell Strauss was a rich Labour MP, briefly excluded from the Labour Party in 1939 for supporting the 'Popular Front' movement of Stafford Cripps. (He was his Parliamentary Private Secretary and his friend). During the war he became State Secretary in the Ministry of Transport.<sup>457</sup> Strauss and others decided to provide Hilda Meisel's ISK contacts in Germany with the necessary financial means for an attack. A young German, "A", disguised as an electrician, subsequently placed an explosive charge in the central pillar of the Bürgerbräukeller. It ignited moments after Hitler had passed by.<sup>458</sup>

For a few years, she separated from the ISK, whom she saw as not militant enough, along with Fritz Eberhard (see separate biography) and Hans Ledhnert, and worked with Richard Löwenthal in preparation for a "Party of Revolutionary Socialists". At the same time, she took part in German-language broadcasts for the BBC and gave lectures on questions of the post-war order.

In 1941, Meisel had made a failed attempt, closely coordinated with the British secret service, to re-enter Germany from Portugal. Meisel came to the attention of the American Ministry of Economic Warfare, as a result of her many publications, interviews on the BBC and talks to schools about Germany. She was taken on initially to work in the propaganda department but in summer 1944, like Jupp Kappius (see separate biography), Meisel was recruited for the "Faust Project" of the American

<sup>457</sup> Sunday Times, December 15, 1946. <http://www.mythoselser.de/ge-uniontime.htm>. Cripps essentially falls outside our concerns but he does reveal the existence of an organised British anti-Nazi, anti-appeasement presence. An early advocate of a united front, he was the moving force behind a unity Socialist League, which failed, though Tribune, established by Cripps and Strauss, has survived to this day.

<sup>458</sup> Peter Koblanck (2006) 'Union Time, Hilda Monte and the illegal "A"' <http://www.mythoselser.de/ge-uniontime.htm>. As is often the case when considering hidden, illegal activities against the Nazis, the story of 'A' is contentious but what is certain is there was a bomb and it missed.

Office of Strategic Services (OSS), who were looking for some 200 agents to obtain military and political news from Germany. She was then put onto the OSS's intensive training course.

She and Anna Beyer acted as couriers and undertook secret operations in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Portugal, making contact with resistance groups.<sup>459</sup> On April 17, 1945, while trying to cross the border illegally from Germany into Liechtenstein, Meisel was shot and bled to death while still on the border.<sup>460</sup>

### **Hans Vogel (1881-1945)**

The biography of Hans Vogel provides a window onto the Social Democratic exiles in the UK and their continuing bureaucratic orientation and ineffectiveness.

Vogel became an active Social Democrat from 1907. Along with the SPD, he had supported Germany in the First World War on the basis of patriotism but did participate in the Nuremberg workers and soldier's council in Bavaria at the end of the war (I could not find further detail.) He became a paid officer and a member of the Reichstag from 1920-1933. He was elected secretary of the SPD in 1927. In 1931, he became co-chairperson. In January 1933, Vogel fled to Saarbrücken, then to Prague where he became a member and then chair of of SOPADE.



In 1939, Vogel escaped to Paris, where SOPADE had relocated, and then Portugal (where he and others in the SPD leadership got stuck), and after much difficulty, got into the UK in early 1941 as did committee members Erich Ollenhauer and Hans Vogel. Curt Geyer and Fritz Heine were already here.

Vogel, the Chairperson/Secretary of SOPADE since 1938 and Erich Ollenhauer, after difficult negotiations founded the Union of German Socialist Organisations in the UK, including SOPADE, Hans Gottfurcht,<sup>461</sup> a representative of the trade unions

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Werner Röder, *The German Socialist Exile Groups in Great Britain 1940-1945, A Contribution to the History of the Resistance to National Socialism*, Bonn 1973

<sup>461</sup> Hans Gottfurcht (1896 – 1982) worked in the textile industry, joining a trade union when he was 17. He began working full-time for the Central Association of Employees. After 1933, he created an illegal trade union organisation in

and the Trade Union Centre for German Workers, *Neu Beginnen* represented by Erwin Schottle and Richard Lowenthal.<sup>462</sup> the ISK under Willi Eichler, the SWP and the SPD in exile ( but excluding the KPD). As we have seen, there was much dissension amongst their very slim ranks eg over Vansittarism plus there was much hostility between the different exiled groups<sup>463</sup> who, amongst other issues, contested the SPD/SOPADE's assumption that they were the legitimate heirs of German social democracy.

These arguments all exacerbated the split amongst the exiled leadership.<sup>464</sup> The Labour Party leadership felt increasing contempt towards them and terminated Labour's financial contribution towards their maintenance.<sup>465</sup> The Labour Party did not treat them as allies, though seeing them as a bulwark against the Communists.

Vogel died in London just after the war ended and before he was able to realise his plans to return to Germany.

## 1944

### Hermann Knüfken (1893-1976)

Knüfken, originally a sailor and an active anti-Nazi German trade-unionist, had an extraordinary life which stretched from revolutionary activities in the USSR, Germany

Saxony, Thuringia and Silesia. Arrested in 1937, he was able to leave in 1938 and came to the UK. Here he became an active member of the Labour Party. Interned in 1941, he then set up an organisation of German trade unionists, the Landesgruppe. Letters between Gottfurcht and TUC representatives, including the TUC's General Secretary Walter Citrine, show the close relationship between the Landesgruppe and the TUC which financially supported their monthly publication. *Die Arbeit* stood for international solidarity and called for German trade-unionists in exile to collaborate with their British comrades in their fight for democracy. After the war till 1950, Gottfurcht was employed by the TUC as a liaison officer with the newly-formed German unions. (<https://tuc150.tuc.org.uk/stories/hans-gottfurcht/>)

<sup>462</sup> See separate listing. For anybody who wants to know more about these organisations, check out Steve Cushion and my book: 'Anti-Nazi Germans'.

<sup>463</sup> There were many sources of deep dispute around the causes of Nazism. Ernst Fraenkel, who lived in the UK for a year and who aligned himself with the ISK (the International Socialist Fighting Alliance, a left split of from the SPD), was a leading lawyer, whose seminal though disputed book about the legal origins of the Nazi state fed into the debates. He saw it as a duality: on the one hand, the continuation of the 'bourgeois apparatus', on the other, a 'prerogative' and parallel state controlled by the Nazis and unrestrained by legal guarantees. Another extraordinary figure whose ideas influenced the 'debate' was Franz Neumann (born in Silesia). Involved in the failed 1919 German revolution, though a member of the SPD, he was associated with *Neu Beginnen*. He fled to the UK in 1933 where he studied under Harold Laski but then left for the US in 1936. He wrote 'Behemoth: The structure and practice of National Socialism' (1942), still seen as an incisive analysis, which explained Nazism in terms of charismatic rule. During the rest of the war, he worked both for the German section of the OSS and, at one time, probably for the Soviet Union, presumably seeing that as one way of defeating the Nazis.

<sup>464</sup> Another heated issue was the role of the exiled Sudeten SPD and what would happen to them after the war.

<sup>465</sup> Runge, Friederike, German Social Democrats in London Exile during World War II, <https://exilegov.hypotheses.org/438>

and Belgium to working for the British intelligence service. That such a significant anti-Nazi is unknown here is all the more intriguing as he lived in the UK for over 30 years.

Born in Dusseldorf to working class parents, he was a radical socialist from a young age, committed to the ideals of proletarian internationalism. He was drafted into the German Imperial Navy in 1914. He was later to write an autobiography where he provides a rare sense of the growing resistance in the fleet. Revolutionary groups were formed on many ships which garnered increasing support and an illegal coordinating committee slowly developed. He supported "ending the war through organising the sailors open resistance and support for Germany's defeat After his plan to kidnap the "Hyena" was betrayed, Knüfken fled to Denmark with four comrades in May 1917, where he gave British intelligence service agents information about the German Navy, arguing they both wanted Germany defeated.



In 1917 the imperial government issued an amnesty for all deserters and in August 1917 Knüfken returned to Germany and the fleet, still arguing for defeat. In October 1917 Knüfken and a friend again fled to Denmark but were arrested near the border. They faced the death penalty for treason but were freed from Kiel naval prison by insurgent sailors in November 1918.

In 1918/19, Knüfken then became active in the naval uprising of 1918 and the German revolutionary sailors' councils. Though little is known of his role, we do know Knüfken was part of a group that disarmed and arrested 287 officers of the Second Squadron in Brunsbüttel on November 5, 1918. In a rare account of the mutiny, he later wrote: "They [the sailors] were the bearers of the idea of resistance to German militarism...The uprising of seamen...were avant-garde' encouraging the workers 'and soldiers' councils. He and his comrades had believed that the working class would seize power. But, as he wrote, the Social Democratic government sent in the *Freikorps* which led to their bloody defeat. He got off lightly because he had a Scandinavian passport and was able to bribe the commandant: he was released after three weeks of imprisonment. His involvement and the earlier armaments workers'

strike during the First World War persuaded Knüfken of the potential power of grass-roots organisation.

At the founding congress, Jan Appel (Hamburg) and the writer Franz Jung (Berlin) were delegated to represent the KAPD's position at the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow. Their problem was that there were no legal travel options to the Soviet Union at the time. Knüfken made the suggestion "simply to go to Russia with one of the available ships". Ultimately, they went back to his suggestion, which no one had initially believed that it would be realized.

Knüfken joined the KPD but belonged to the left-wing opposition, which opposed participation in parliamentary elections and participation in the free trade unions. He then left in April 1920 to become a founder of the KAPD (Communist Workers' Party of Germany, *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, a left split from the KPD, who supported 'council communism').

At the founding congress, Jan Appel (Hamburg) and the writer Franz Jung (Berlin) were delegated to represent the KAPD's position at the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow. As there was no legal way to go, on April 21, 1920, he helped kidnap the fishing steamer 'Senator Schröder' and took it to the Soviet Union. Already a member of the ship's crew, Knüfken smuggled on board Franz Jung (in 1920, Jung had been expelled from the KPD and founded the KPDO) and Jan Appel, also a leading KPDO member. (The KPDO, or Communist Party Opposition, was set up by Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, the right faction in the KPD who had presented the strongest opposition to Stalin), Under Knüfken's leadership, the crew forcefully arrested the captain and officers, locked them in their cabin and took over the ship. They wanted to land two delegates for the Comintern's 2nd World Congress in 1920 and for the Comintern to admit them. 'The ship... reached Alexandrovsk on May 1st, 1920. They were brought to Murmansk by Soviet pilots....The delegation was received with enthusiasm. "Well, there we have Comrade Pirates"' stated Lenin, expressing enthusiasm. But Lenin, though he met with Knüfken and it seems encouraged him, was critical of the KAPD's left position and, though sympathetic, they did not succeed.

Knüfken returned to Germany in October and was arrested. He was sentenced to five years in prison in May, 1921 but was released early on May 1, 1923 and

immediately returned to the USSR. From 1923, he was a delegate of the International Transport Workers Union (ITF) and headed the International Seamen's Club in Leningrad (part of the Red Trade Union International ), he recruited shop stewards on the ships arriving in Leningrad, who then smuggled on board literature, letters and employees of the Comintern.<sup>466</sup>

Knüfken saw himself primarily as a trade unionist and not as a party communist. In 1925, he supported a strike by Swedish seamen in Leningrad, against Party orders. He wrote later that the leading functionaries in the Soviet Union "understood nothing about an actual trade union movement". Then, in November 1927, Knüfken took part in a demonstration of the opposition against Stalin which was monitored by the ever-stronger secret police, OGPU.<sup>467</sup>

In September 1929 Knüfken was arrested on suspicion of membership of anti-Stalinist opposition groups and was imprisoned in Leningrad, and then in the Lublianka, the headquarters of the OGPU in Moscow. After protests abroad and a demonstration by foreign sailors in Leningrad, he survived and was released in May 1930. He left, though some accounts state that he 'was expelled', from the Soviet Union in January 1932.

He remained a member of the KPD, although at a distance and found work with "*Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*" in the Hamburg area, which advocated a broad anti-fascist opposition movement, not the KPD's "social fascist" line towards the SPD. But after the Gestapo searched his house early in 1933, he fled to Rotterdam, where he set up an illegal group of seamen under the umbrella of the ITF to distribute anti-Nazi literature and provide information on ship movements.

In December 1934, Knüfken was arrested in Rotterdam and expelled to Belgium. He moved to Antwerp where he became an activist in the International Transport Workers 'Federation (ITF), and was, in effect, the leader of the Antwerp group. Very aware of the need for underground work to be clandestine, the Antwerp ITF group developed an ITF network of shop stewards, rather than of members, modelled on the revolutionary groups in the navy. Rooted in his early experiences, he emphasised the

<sup>466</sup> The above paragraphs and the quote are drawn from: Dieter Nelles "*Proletarian Democracy and International Brotherhood*", <https://www.anarchismus.at/geschichte-des-anarchismus/deutschland/611-dieter-nelles-proletarische-demokratie-und-internationale-bruderschaft>

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.



importance of the 'rank and file' group and personal, not formal, contact with the sailors and other sea-farers (a position which conflicted with the instructions of the KPD bureaucrats).

He and Edo Fimmen, the head of ITF, developed a close collaboration, both profoundly committed to the anti-Nazi struggle. Both condemned the leading functionaries of the KPD and SPD as well as the trade unions whom they saw as responsible for the defeat of the German workers' movement in 1933 without a fight and through their sectarianism.

In 1936, Knüfken broke with the KPD and, together with Kurt Lehmann, led the key ITF resistance group.<sup>468</sup> The Antwerp group had at least 300 sympathisers and many shop stewards on German ships and inland waterways and links to two port workers' groups in Hamburg. They succeeded in recruiting many ex-KPD members and kept the Nazis off most of the ships.<sup>469</sup> Knüfken was the only member to continue in the Antwerp group continuously from January 1936 to September 1939.<sup>470</sup> He also was primarily responsible for building up an organisation in other European ports and the USA.<sup>471</sup> In 1944, Knüfken wrote that, in contrast to other German resistance groups, though fully aware of the dangers they faced, the ITF group members actively sought the defeat of Germany by any means possible.

From 1936 on, Knüfken had had contact with the British and French intelligence services. During 1936, Knüfken, on behalf of ITF, had established contact with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6). Here, explanations get blurry. The head of ITF, the strongly anti-Nazi Fimmen, was not averse to working with 'anti-Nazi' intelligence services, a position which became far stronger during the war itself. Knüfken appears to have been the link person. This link has been understood by some as Knüfken in effect spying on his comrades. This, I suggest, is to misunderstand how far many revolutionaries ended up seeing the only way of defeating the Nazis was to work with the Allies.

<sup>468</sup> Kurt Lehmann was first a construction worker and then, in Antwerp, became a seaman. Fortunately at sea when the Nazis seized power, he went to Antwerp and joined the group there. Lehmann was expelled from Belgium and then followed some terrible and unsuccessful attempt to find safety. (See other biography)

<sup>469</sup> Nelles, *Proletarian Democracy and International Brotherhood*

<sup>470</sup> Nelles Dieter, 'Widerstand und internationale Solidarität Die Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation (ITF) im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus'. This is a different publication from above.

<sup>471</sup> Nelles, op cit, 159/60



Whatever the exact relationship, it was probably through Knüfken, that in 1939, SIS became aware of ITF's plans to disrupt the supplies of iron ore to Germany through strike action by dockers and railwaymen in the event of war. SIS, Section D, also agreed to Knüfken's proposal on sabotage.<sup>472</sup> The purpose of Section D of the SIS, formed in April 1938 on the instructions of the chief of SIS was to prepare for underground warfare against the Nazis, including sabotage. It commenced active operations in March 1939, focusing mainly on interrupting supplies reaching Germany. It operated mainly through agents drawn from dissident and resistance groups, including from Germany, and drew strongly from the ITF. Section D planned to send Knüfken to Scandinavia to gather materials and recruit ITF members and shop-stewards from German ports to commit sabotage and to link up with any ITF group that still might exist. Knüfken had also asked the British consulate to send information about German warships and military installations in Swedish ports to the ITF in London, bypassing English censorship. The Swedish government was 'neutral' i.e. they cooperated with the Gestapo, so German refugees were targeted and 'spies' were arrested. The work amongst German seafarers stopped. Moreover, the Gestapo had already circulated Knüfken's photo and in 1939, Knüfken was arrested in Scandinavia. In one of those stories which lend themselves to spy movies, it seems Guy Burgess had probably informed the Soviets who in their turn are suspected of informing the Nazis as these were the days of the Hitler- Stalin pact. But there are alternative explanations. One is that a Swedish worker in the Passport Office (the usual cover for SIS operations) was also an informer for the Swedish police, recognised his passport as a forgery and denounced him to the police. Or that a member of the British delegation in Scandinavia betrayed him.<sup>473</sup> Knüfken was interned, then imprisoned. The Gestapo tried to get their hands on him through an extradition order: both ITF and the British Foreign Office struggled – successfully - to stop him being deported to Germany. After two years in Falu prison, in March 1941 Knüfken was secretly placed in an isolation cell in Longholmos psychiatric hospital under the codename 'Friday'. From there, he was released. In 1944, he was sent to Britain and re-joined the SIS.

<sup>472</sup> Malcolm Atkin, *Section D for Destruction Forerunner of SOE. The Story of Section D of the SIS*

<sup>473</sup> Malcolm Atkin, *Section D for Destruction: Forerunner of SOE: The Story of Section D of the SIS*

In 1944/45, he wrote of the "guilt" and complicity of German workers for Nazism, focusing on 'the surrender in 1933 without a fight'.<sup>474</sup> He wished that the post-war unions should be formed by the "small minority of the upright" who had put up active resistance and who "could not be blamed for complicity in the war" and who would stress the membership, not the leadership. In 1946, he went to work in Germany for SIS to assist in the denazification of Hamburg and to renew contacts with seamen now in the Soviet occupation zone. Apparently, he clashed there with parts of the trade union movement. By then it would seem that his politics had been 'tarnished' by his work with secret services and their emphasis, no doubt, on a 'West is best' perspective. He would not be the only ex-Communist to turn rightwards.

He had become a naturalised British subject in 1947 and returned to Britain in 1950 when he worked for the London Port Intelligence office of the Foreign Office. In a final twist to an eventful life, Knüfken then became a member of the Conservative Party. He died in Brighton in 1976.<sup>475</sup> That there does not appear to be any obituary for him suggests that, even 15 years later, he was still seen as the SIS's man.

<sup>474</sup> Hermann Knüfken: About the resistance of the International Transport Workers Federation against National Socialism and proposals to rebuild the trade unions in Germany - two documents 1944/45, quoted by Dieter Nelles "*Proletarian Democracy and International Brotherhood*", <https://www.anarchismus.at/geschichte-des-anarchismus/deutschland/611-dieter-nelles-proletarische-demokratie-und-internationale-bruderschaft>

<sup>475</sup> <https://www.academia.edu/35641341/>

Section\_D\_for\_Destruction\_Forrunner\_of\_SOE\_Appendix\_2\_Officers\_Agents\_and\_Contacts\_of\_Section\_D\_of\_the\_Secret\_Intelligence\_Service; personal communication from D. Nelles.