

Berlin 1970 - Manifesto for Armed Action



Build Up the Red Army!

Let the Class Struggle unfold!

Let the Proletariat organize!
Let the Armed Resistance begin!

So reads the angry manifesto of the Red Army -- not the well-known Soviet force, but the 1970 formation of angry West Berlin leftists who set out to create an urban guerilla force that would model itself on groups that they admired in other countries: the Black Panthers of the United States, the Palestinian groups, the Tupamaro guerillas of Latin America. From the perspective of 1969 and 1970, these groups appeared to be on the brink of great successes as

armed representatives of downtrodden people. To some Germans on the Left, the arrival of a Socialist-Liberal coalition under Willy Brandt had done nothing to bring change from the earlier post-World War II conservative governments. Those who marched and signed petitions and organized democratic political groupings, perhaps the young men in the photos on this page as an example, were seen by the Red Army organizers as too soft. Change would have to come at the point of a gun.

At the core of the Red Army's issues were legitimate problems. That is a useful way to mobilize support, but in the Germany of 1969-70, the issues as presented in this paper did not light the fire that the group yearned for. Much additional information on this group and parallel organizations may be found through the Links section of the Berlin 1969 website. In the following translation, we attempt to let the "Extra-parliamentary opposition" speak in their own words, as published in "883" magazine; the document is dated 5 June 1970. Following the document translation is a discussion of the translation itself. I have added numbered paragraphing for the purpose of providing notes without interrupting the flow of the original.

1. Comrades of 883 - there is no point in trying to explain the right way to the deceitful people. That we have done long enough. We don't have to explain the Baader-Release Action to the intellectual prattlers, the pants-shitters, the know-it-all, but rather to the potentially revolutionary segment of the people. That means to those who can immediately grasp the deed, because they themselves are imprisoned. To those who think nothing of the prattle of the Left because it has remained without consequences or deeds. [In other words] to those who have enough!

2. You have to explain the Baader-Release Action to the youth in the Markisch Quarter, to the young women in Eichenhof, in the Ollenhauer, in Heiligensee, to the youths in the Young Peoples Home, in the Green House, in the Kieferngrund. To the large families, to the young workers and apprentices, to the junior high schoolers, to the families in the urban renewal districts, to the working women of Siemens and AEG-Telefunken, of SEL and Osram; to the married women workers, who [in addition] to the household and children must also bargain [i.e., come to work agreements] -- damn it!

3. You have to convey the Action to those who get no compensation for the exploitation which they suffer, who get no compensation through living standards, consumption, savings agreements, personal credit, middle-class autos. To those who cannot afford all the stuff [junk], to those who don't care about it. To those who have exposed as lies all of the promises of the future by their nursery teachers [discussion below in item 3] and school teachers and property managers and welfare workers and foremen and craft masters and union functionaries and district mayors, and still fear only the police.

4. To them-- and not to the *petit bourgeois* intellectuals-- you have to say: that that's enough, that it's now beginning [breaking loose], that the release of Baader is only the beginning! That an end of police power [rule] is in sight! To them you have to say that we are building up the Red Army, that is their army. To them you have to say, that it's starting now. They will not ask stupidly, why right now? They have the thousand paths to bureaucracy and officialdom already behind them-- the dance with processes-- the waiting times and waiting rooms, the date on which it was promised that something would be done and nothing was done. And the discussion with the nice teacher who then didn't hinder the transfer to the remedial school and the helpless kindergarten teacher, for whom no place [position] was open. They don't ask you, why right now? Damn it!

5. Naturally, they don't believe a word you say, if you yourself are not even able to distribute the newspaper before it is confiscated.

6. Because you do not have to agitate the leftist arselickers, but rather the objective leftists, you have a marketing [sales] network to build up, that the pigs can't get hold of. Don't talk rubbish and say that is too difficult. The Baader-Release Action was also no doily embroidery work.

7. What does it mean, to carry the conflicts too far? That means to not let yourselves be slaughtered. That's why we are building up the Red Army. Behind the parents stand the teachers, the Youth Authority, the police. Behind the foreman stands the master craftsman, the personnel office, the factory security force, the welfare service, the police. Behind the building superintendent stands the administrator, the landlord, the bailiff, the eviction notice, the police. What the pigs manage with censorship, dismissals, notices of termination, with the bailiff's seal for seized belongings and the nightstick, they do with those things. Of course, they grab for the service pistol, the tear gas, hand grenades and machine pistols. Of course they escalate the [means of oppression] weaponry, if they are otherwise bogged down ["...nicht weiterkommen" is a military term for an advance that is being held up]. Of course, the GI's in Vietnam were retrained in guerilla tactics, the Green Berets given a course in torture. So what? Of course, the execution of sentences for political [prisoners] is intensified. You have to make clear that that it is Social Democratic garbage to assert that imperialism, including all the [Kurt] Neubauers and [Gen. William] Westmorelands, Bonn, the [Berlin] Senate, the State Youth Office and the borough offices, that the whole filthy bunch would allow itself to be infiltrated, to be led around by the nose, to be overpowered, to be intimidated, to be abolished without a struggle. Make it clear that the Revolution will not be an Easter Parade, that the pigs will naturally escalate the means as far as they can, but also not further. In order to push the conflict as far as possible, we build up the Red Army.

8. Without simultaneously building up the Red Army, every conflict, every political effort in the workplace, in Wedding and in the Markisch Quarter and in the Ploetze and in the court room degenerates into reformism, i.e., you set up only better means of discipline, better methods of intimidation, better methods of exploitation. That only breaks the people, it doesn't break what breaks the people! Without building up the Red Army, the pigs can continue, they can go on locking up, dismissing, seizing, stealing children, intimidating, shooting, ruling. To bring the conflict to a fever pitch means that they no longer can do what they want, rather they must do what we want.

9. You have to make it clear to them, to those who gain nothing from the exploitation of the Third World, from Persian oil, Bolivia's bananas, South Africa's gold, who have no

ground to identify themselves with the exploitaters. They can understand that what is now being launched here has already been launched in Vietnam, Palestine, Guatemala, in Oakland and Watts, in Cuba and China, in Angola and New York.

10. They'll get that, if you explain to them that the Baader-Release Action is no isolated action, never was, but [rather] only the first of this type in the FRG. Damn it!

11. Don't sit around on the shabby, ransacked sofa and count your loves, like the small-time shopkeeper souls. Build up the right distribution apparatus, let the pants-shitters lie, the red-cabbage eaters, the social workers, those [who] only suck up [buddy-up], this rabble. Get out where the homes are and the big families and the sub-proletariat and the proletarian women, [they] who are only waiting to smash the right people in the chops. They will assume the leadership. And don't let yourself be nabbed and learn from them how one keeps from being nabbed-- they understand more about that than you.

Let the class struggle unfold! Let the proletariat organize! Let the armed resistance begin! Build up the Red Army!



Notes on the photos:

Scenes from the Nov 69 anti-Vietnam War parade in West Berlin. Organizers coordinated it with the Berlin police, so that it went off without the violence that marred events in the previous year. That violence is referred to in the text above as a justification for violence from the Left. Note the senior police officer, circled in blue, keeping pace with the young parade leaders. The latter were cooperating in keeping the peace, but wore hard hats, just in case. Copyright by R. W. Rynerson, 2013.

Notes on the text:

Who wrote the document? Richard Huffman and others surmise that this was written by Ulrike Meinhof. My experience in translating it makes me think that parts of it were written by someone else, or were heavily-edited by either Meinhof or someone else. I have formed this idea by finding that the writing style changes in various paragraphs. Some of these entire paragraphs marched smoothly into English, while others were somewhat poetic and therefore convoluted in the literal translation.

Paragraphs:

1. 883 magazine was a Left periodical. Its number-name stems from its telephone exchange. The date of this publication, 5 Jun 70, is three days after the date cited by Richard Huffman for release of this manifesto to DPA, the German Press Agency. Differences between the texts indicate that either the author/s or the magazine editor did some minor editing for the magazine version. The name of the group, *Rote Armee Fraktion*, is a cross between the military term "Army" and the political term equal to "Faction" or "Party" in English. *Fraktion* had also been used previously to describe a cell of a larger radical organization. In any case, this group followed the pattern of radical groups that choose names that indicate that they are part of a large movement.

2. This paragraph provides a sweeping vision of the old working class neighborhoods and the newest, the Markisch Quarter. The latter area was, upon its opening in 1969-70, a bleak wasteland of concrete at a formerly suburban location far from activities and social events, only topped in its look of despair by new housing in East Berlin. An article in the *National Geographic* many years later showed that with the growth of trees and completion of the projects around it, conditions had improved. The word *Akkord* in the original, referring to labor negotiations, also might refer to piecework labor. This may have been an intentional use of a word that describes in either meaning a painstaking process that would certainly have been difficult when also carrying out family duties.

3. At this point in the German economic miracle, many families were buying their first car, or their first "big" car. The used-car market did not have the backlog of cars for lower income buyers that their North American counterparts accessed. The term for "nursery teachers" in the original is the feminine version of the word for "educators". However, this is a situation in which the feminine version of the word veers off from the masculine meaning in my older *Lexikon*. Because the roots of the Baader Meinhof group lay in child care issues, I have chosen to use the "nursery teachers" translation. This also fits the sequence of the author's panorama of oppressors.

4. There is much irony in the anger directed against the all-pervasive hand of petty bureaucracy in West Berlin, as an even more pervasive bureaucracy operated on the other side of the Wall in East Berlin. Radicals of this era sounded almost like Libertarians of today, but they promoted a solution that has always led, as Arthur Koestler wrote, in its logical extension, to totalitarianism. Nevertheless, there are indications that the anti-bureaucracy talk made GDR officials feel uncomfortable.

The inclusion of nursery schools, kindergarten references, and other educational references is a link from the child care workers' strikes and protests that linked what were traditional "women's issues" with this group. The "helpless kindergarten teacher" reflects the feelings of women who chose to go into early childhood programs out of their sincere interest in the children, then would find themselves implementing government policies that they opposed.

5. I have not yet found documented evidence on newspapers being seized, although I vaguely recall something about it. Whether this was done by political groups, as happens today on U.S. college campuses, or officially is an important question.

6.

7. Part of the attack on the police here is generic and part of it is personal. Here also is the heart of the matter-- anger at the Social Democrats, who, having taken power after two generations of Nazi and then Conservative governments, did not set out to overturn the *status quo*. Kurt

Neubauer was the West Berlin official responsible for the police, as Senator for the Interior. A machinist by trade, he represented the practical, problem-solving side of the Socialists. Some also were bothered by the thought that this position should be filled by a lawyer, according to Brigitte Grunert in *Der Tagesspiegel* of 7 Dec 99.

8. This is the heart of the break from Social Democracy and even "Euro-Communism" of the time to justifying immediate violence.

9. This paragraph reminds that German revolutionaries were in a sense imitating what they thought was already well underway elsewhere. This puts their movement into the context of the many student-based uprisings throughout 1968 on both side of the Iron Curtain. Mao's Great Cultural Revolution in China might even be considered to be a part of this great tidal wave resulting from post-World War II demographics and social trends. To their credit, the writer/s came up with examples of commodities enjoyed by Germans. However, this also risked losing support from the more liberal Left, which usually attributed exploitation to someone else (prior to WWII, Britain, and after WWII the United States).

10. This prediction is fairly accurate. However, few later events surrounding the RAF showed this much *panache*.

11. The sofa reference is a double-meaning, an ironic reference to a a sofa that is so battered and ripped that it looks like the police have gone through it looking for contraband. The reference to being "nabbed" (or "grabbed" in the original) is in regard to the problems experienced by middle-class revolutionaries who were not used to living with a wary eye on the police. Much additional information on the psychology of this situation is available in Richard Huffman's website.

Notes on the translation:

This may be, as of November 2001, the only English translation of this document on the Internet. The effort to get it translated came about when I realized that the views of the "urban guerrillas" -- as they saw themselves -- were usually paraphrased or not even clearly explained today. Of course, there are many pages of information now coming on-line in German, much of it of the "20-Mark word" variety: analysis and more analysis.

The translation was done in three steps. First, I worked with the document from the website "GLASNOST Berlin" -- which already had edited the original document to a slight degree. Several words in earlier versions were changed in later versions by sympathetic editors, and I accepted the idea that the edited versions were likely what the author/s would have wanted to say, had more thought gone into writing the original. I found that my 1951 Langenscheidt German-English dictionary was very useful, as it contained phrases and nuances that have faded since.

My limited ability with German is usually focused on transportation material and other things that are written in a very direct manner. Therefore, I greatly appreciate what became the second draft, as my German tutor, Mrs. Leonore Dvorkin, made numerous corrections and spotted links between words and phrases that were well-separated by strings of heated words. Subsequently, she used her own library and prior experience to further polish this work, providing a fourth draft. She has much experience with translation work and is a published writer in her own right. You are invited to visit the Dvorkin web site.

The fourth draft, presented here, includes my work on smoothing out the English. This translation is a compromise between the accidentally comic effects of the first literal conversions from German and a possible all-out re-write into my own interpretation of what the writer/s tried to say.

While it is obvious that I have a point of view about all this, I have tried to be fair in this project. If you object to all

or parts of this translation, feel welcome to write to me. If you can help improve the translation, I will revise this page. If you do not want to have a middle-man in your reading, then links to German versions follow.

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Links:

[The Dvorkin web site.](http://www.dvorkin.com)
<http://www.dvorkin.com>

[German edited text in GLASNOST Berlin.](http://glasnost.de/hist/apo/raf1.html)
<http://glasnost.de/hist/apo/raf1.html>

[Earlier text in Richard Huffman's baader-meinhof.com](http://www.baader-meinhof.com/?s=Build+Up+the+Red+Army)
<http://www.baader-meinhof.com/?s=Build+Up+the+Red+Army>

[Return to Berlin 1969.](http://www.berlin1969.com)
<http://www.berlin1969.com>

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