

Anarchist Media in Germany

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Anarchist and Libertarian Media, 1945–2010 (Federal Germany)

Right after the end of World War II, the few anarchists who had survived war and fascism started to reorganize the anarchist movement, which had been shattered during the Nazi dictatorship. On May 20, 1945, German anarchism once again raised its journalistic voice, with the journal *Mahnruf* (Warning Cry), published by Otto Reimers in Hamburg.

In 1947, the journal *Befreiung* (Liberation) was published for the first time in Mühlheim. This newspaper went through several editorial changes and inconsistencies in its content. During its final years in Cologne until its closedown in 1978, it linked old and young anarchists and represented anarcho-syndicalist positions. It had a national circulation of 1,500 copies.

Many early postwar anarchist journals were produced on a duplicator. Not so *Die Freie Gesellschaft* (The Free Society), published by the Föderation Freiheitlicher Sozialisten (Federation of Free Socialists). This “monthly journal for social criticism and free socialism” (subtitle) saw 43 issues between 1949 and 1953.

Anarchism’s Renaissance And New Libertarian Media

Neoanarchism was mainly influenced by 1960s anticolonialist liberation struggles. The majority of the antiauthoritarian and Außerparlamentarischen Opposition (APO; Extra-Parliamentary Opposition) movement tried to challenge the U.S.-Vietnam War, which was supported by the authorities of the German Federal Republic and the mass media. The APO also opposed the emergency laws of the “grand coalition,” consisting of the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the conservative parties (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) and Germany’s mediascape, dominated by the Springer media conglomerate. They contested Germany’s “sclerotic institutions” and their representatives, old-fashioned ideas about morality, and the indifference and complacency of society at large.

In June 1967, after the student Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by a police officer during a Berlin demonstration against the visit of the Iranian despot Shah Reza Pahlavi, many activists within the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Union) became increasingly radical. Only a year later, anarchist literature gained currency on a hitherto unimaginable scale. At first, classical anarchist writings were published as pirate editions; later on they were produced in high print runs by big publishing houses. Anarchism saw a renaissance. The new anarchist movement consisted mainly of students, pupils, and apprentices. There was no continuity with the old, working-class anarchists, who looked very skeptically at the younger ones from middle-class families.

Anarchism researcher Rolf Raasch has argued that there were theoretical divisions between the younger and the older generations. The students initially were committed to a critical version of Marxism. Their attempt at mediation between Marxism and Anarchism, cheerfully unconcerned with past grievances, was inevitably repugnant to seasoned anarchists, who had deeply internalized the historical clashes between both movements—not least because some of them had personally experienced Marxist socialism as practiced in the German Democratic Republic.

From February 1968 onward, the neoanarchist movement sharply increased its presence. Neoanarchist, undogmatic, and antiauthoritarian magazines were launched in 1968, particularly in West Berlin. They were models for many subsequent “underground papers.” Their scene jargon

and their layout, inspired by Dadaism, differed clearly from the magazines of the old anarchists with their tidy composition and simple layout.

Linkeck

Linkeck (Left Corner), which called itself “the first anti-authoritarian paper,” was the organ of a Berlin anarchist commune by the same name, founded in 1967. It was published nine times from May 1968 and had a circulation of about 8,000. It became known nationwide because Germany’s biggest yellow press daily, *Bild*, ran editorials against the “left terrorist paper.” Four *Linkeck* editors were charged with “libel” and “distributing obscene writings.” The commune broke up in 1969, due to overwork, legal problems, and internal conflicts. Its paper ceased to be published. The anarchist publishing house Karin Kramer Verlag in Berlin, which still exists, emerged from *Linkeck* in 1970.

agit 883

With a similar layout, *agit 883* was published every 10 to 14 days, beginning in February 1968. It achieved a circulation of up to 7,000. It was a left-wing information bulletin from Berlin, served as a “leaflet for agitation and social practice” (its subtitle) and dealt with current events.

On April 11, 1968, a man “incited” by the politics of *Bild* tried to assassinate student activist Rudi Dutschke. As a reaction, crowds of protesters spontaneously blocked buildings of the Springer media conglomerate to prevent deliveries from its premises (including *Bild*). This conflict went down in history as Osterkrawalle (the Easter riots).

Soon afterward, “urban guerrilla units” emerged. Discussions about the activities of these armed groups were intense in many far left and anarchist papers. In May 1970, the first public statement from the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, RAF) was published in *agit 883* under the headline “Building the Red Army Faction.” At that time, *agit 883* was a largely uncensored discussion organ of militant left-wing groups with a focus on anarchist and Marxist theories. They rejected the avantgarde claim and the authoritarian dogmatism of those they saw as Leninists with guns (*agit 883* about RAF). They agreed, however, with the internationalist principles of RAF and its perception of the strategic use of violence as an essential weapon against the state and U.S. imperialism.

The *agit 883* editorial collective was frequently raided, the paper often confiscated or banned. After 88 issues and a number of conflicts among the editorial staff, *agit 883* closed down in February 1972. The collective had already split up in 1971 over evaluating RAF.

FIZZ

Former *agit 883* editors left the collective, and in 1971 in Berlin, they formed the militant underground paper *FIZZ*. It declared its solidarity with RAF in contrast to *agit 883*, which appeared simultaneously. *FIZZ* appeared for 1 year. Nine of its ten editions were confiscated and banned. *FIZZ*’s successors were *Berliner Anzündler* (Berlin Incendiary, 1972), *Hundert Blumen* (Hundred Flowers, 1972–1975) and *Bambule* (German prison slang for “shindig,” 1972–1974).

MAD

In September 1971, the Föderation Neue Linke (FNL; New Left Federation) published the first edition of *MAD* with “Materials, Analyses, Documents” as its subtitle. When the FNL, which understood itself as a “federation of autonomous, local anarchist and grass-roots groups,” dissolved, *MAD* was published as an “anarchist magazine” (subtitle). It published anarchist calls for action and Situationist texts and articles about strategies of industrial struggle. Looking back, one of its editors commented on how important it was felt at that time to show that poetry and revolution belonged together and to include Dadaism and surrealism into the origins of the new anarchism.

After the U.S. “satirical magazine” *MAD* took legal action against the anarchist project having the same name, it was discontinued in 1973, after magazine issue number 4/5 had been published. After that, the anarchist *MAD* was published under the name *Revolte*, until issue number 6/1973 with the subtitle “anarchist journal, formerly *MAD*—anarchist magazine.” From 1977 until 1982, *Revolte* was published by Hanna Mittelstädt and Lutz Schulenburg of the publishing house Verlag Edition Nautilus. From 1981 onward, they published *Die Aktion* as a “journal for politics, literature and art.”

***Graswurzelrevolution* (Grassroots Revolution)**

In the summer of 1972, the pilot issue of the *Graswurzelrevolution* (GWR) came out. The editorial collective was inspired in concept and orientation by *Anarchisme et Nonviolence* (Paris), which was published between 1965 and 1974 in the French-speaking regions of Europe as a non-violent and anarchist paper; by *Peace News*, published in London since 1936; and by *Direkte Aktion—Zeitung für Gewaltfreiheit und Anarchismus* (Direct Action—Newspaper for Nonviolence and Anarchism), which was published in Hannover in 1965–1966. The GWR editorial group was oriented toward movements in other countries, for example, Britain and the United States. Gandhi’s methods had undergone further development in the fight against the nuclear bomb and for civil rights, and the “grassroots movement” had taken a new shape.

From its beginning, GWR tried to widen and develop the theory and practice of nonviolent revolution. Besides critique of existing conditions, the GWR tried and continues to try to organize at least the seeds of a just and livable future society. It is the newspaper’s declared aim to point out the connection between nonviolence and libertarian socialism, to contribute to the pacifist movement becoming libertarian socialist and the left-wing socialist movement becoming nonviolent in their forms of struggle.

Since issue 52 in 1981, the periodical has been published monthly with a July-August break. Before that, it was published every 2 to 3 months. Since 1989, it has had an eight-page supplement of “libertarian book pages” every October. It has been published by different editors in Augsburg (1972–1973), Berlin (1974–1976), Göttingen (1976–1978), Hamburg (1978–1988), Heidelberg (1988–1992), Wustrow (1992–1995), Oldenburg (1995–1999), and Münster (since 1999). The different editorial collectives each determined their own style. 2009 was GWR’s 38th year of publication, circulating between 3,500 and 5,000 copies. It is the longest-lived anarchist newspaper in the German-speaking area and a leading outlet for grassroots activists.

A special antimilitarist edition of GWR about the war in Afghanistan in 2003 had a circulation of 55,000. The nonviolent-anarchist youth paper *Utopia*, a bimonthly since 2007, is a supplement

to GWR. It has a much wider distribution than GWR and in March 2009 it rose from 18,000 to 25,000.

direkte aktion

In November 1977 the first issue of the anarcho-syndicalist paper *direkte aktion* appeared in Hamburg. Initially it was supposed to serve as a regional voice of antiauthoritarian people who were organized in local groups of the Initiative-Freie Arbeiter Union in northern Germany and who had just started.

The editors followed the tradition of the anarcho-syndicalist Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (FAUD; Free Workers Union of Germany), which was smashed by the Nazis. The FAUD had at times 150,000 members and was the most influential anarchist organization in Germany. Its main publication was *Der Syndikalist*, and in 1920 its weekly circulation amounted to 120,000 copies.

The formation of *direkte aktion* is to be seen as an attempt to get a new start for anarcho-syndicalism in Germany. Inspired by the reactivation of the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, people from several cities came together to build a new anarcho-syndicalist organization at the beginning of 1977, the Freie ArbeiterInnen Union (FAU; Free Workers Union [*Innen* is capitalized to pinpoint women's activism rather than incorporating it under the masculine *Arbeiter*]). It started with the experience of many people in their work situation and with the politics of the DGB (Federation of German Trade Unions) and its member unions, who were "stifling initiatives from the grassroots."

They argued that the reformist unions were organized undemocratically; they would hold their members dependent on the leadership, and this would mean to keep the capitalist economy in existence. Many people had tried to reform the apparatus from below, but all had failed, were shunted aside, or expelled, or had become part of the union bureaucracy. Another reason to form an anarcho-syndicalist union was the disorganization, isolation, and lack of new perspectives in small groups and individuals among the libertarian-socialist people. They argued that anarcho-syndicalism presented important opportunities for organizing political action on a libertarian basis, to deal with the problem of political isolation, and to create networks and forums for joint discussion.

From July 1978 onward, *direkte aktion* has been published as a joint paper of anarcho-syndicalist initiatives from all over Germany. It continues to be produced bimonthly by changing editorial groups in different cities and has a nationwide circulation of 2,000.

The Anarchist Press in Federal Germany Today

Between 1986 and 1995, at least 310 different libertarian and autonomous periodicals were started but ceased publication to a great extent. Today anarchists start much less anarchist print media mainly because many anarchists are active on the Internet. Ever since 2006, for example, supporters of the Projektwerkstatt Göttingen have published *Fragend Voran* (Questioning Forward), which appears irregularly. Anarchists in Berlin produce *Abolishing the Borders From Below*, which is mainly a voice of anarchist groups in eastern Europe. In Leipzig, the regional anarchist paper *Feierabend* (Quitting Time at Work) is published approximately biweekly with a circulation of 600. The individualist-anarchist *espero* appeared irregularly with a circulation of about

500 since 1994. *Contraste*, published in Heidelberg, is a monthly on workers' self-management. It has a strong anarchist tendency and a circulation of 2,000. In Magdeburg, *Grüne Blatt* (Green Leaf) has an ecological orientation and a circulation of 800. The quarterly *DIE AKTION* (The Action) is a sophisticated intellectual journal about libertarian theory.

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See also Anarchist and Libertarian Press, 1945–1990 (Eastern Germany) ; Anarchist Media ; Culture Jamming ; EuroMayDay ; Free Radio Movement (Italy) ; Industrial Workers of the World Media (United States) ; Indymedia (The Independent Media Center)

Further Readings

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Anarchist and Libertarian Press, 1945–1990 (Eastern Germany)

After World War I, the anarchist movement in Germany had, for some time, boasted more than 150,000 active members. After World War II, the few anarchists who had survived 12 years of Nazi dictatorship tried to reorganize the movement. In Eastern Germany, in spite of extremely serious obstacles, the movement survived underground in minimal versions but came to play a pivotal role in the latter years of the Soviet system, in significant measure because of some printing concessions reluctantly conceded to the Protestant Church.

Anarchists had a hard time asserting their anti-authoritarian and anti-Stalinist positions, especially in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ, 1945–1949). The SBZ ruling powers and, later on, the Communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) were hostile toward libertarian socialists. Following Lenin, they defined anarchism as a petty-bourgeois, pseudo-revolutionary political and ideological current, objectively functioning to divide the anti-imperialist movement and strengthen monopoly capitalism.

Because paper was scarce postwar and the Soviet Military Administration was repressive, libertarian socialists in the SBZ were able to circulate only a small number of leaflets and circulars. Some activists, like Willi Jelinek, an agitator from Zwickau who tried to organize a libertarian-socialist network in the SBZ as early as 1945, were arrested.

The GDR statist Marxists continued quite successfully suppressing anarchist, or libertarian-socialist, tendencies. In journalism, anarchist groups had hardly any perceptible influence up to the mid-1980s. However, there had been illegal leaflets even in the 1950s and 1960s. Traces of East German subculture did exist—especially in niches created by the well-educated. The Extra-Parliamentary Opposition movement, which came into being in the Federal Republic of Germany

in the mid-1960s, and the neoanarchist groups following in its wake, also contributed to the GDR opposition movement.

From the 1970s, GDR oppositionists largely advocated socialism. However, as Wolfgang Rüdendeklau, editor of the *Umweltblätter* (Environment Pages) magazine, used to put it, the socialism they wanted was real, democratic, based on workers' councils, or anarchist—quite opposed to the ruling regime. The more explicitly anarchist, being but a small part of a poorly structured opposition, were virtually forced to act in a conspiratorial fashion.

In the GDR's "real socialism," the media published only official opinions and reports approved by the authorities. There was hardly any legal access to other sources of information. There were photocopiers in office and company buildings, but they were under strict surveillance, and their use was limited to an elite group loyal to the party.

The late 1970s brought changes in the media that were inspired by the ideas of grassroots democracy and anarchism. Erich Honecker, the long-time GDR leader, was facing a growing crisis in economic and social policy. To ease tension, in 1978 he entered into negotiations with Albrecht Schönherr, the bishop of the East Berlin Protestant churches. As a result, he granted the church a printing permit for internal information leaflets, announcements, and the like.

In the following years, this printing permit became a loophole heavily used by opposition groups. In the early 1980s, a serious civil rights movement grew up under the auspices of the Protestant Church, completely independent from the ruling Communist Party. Part of this movement became increasingly radical and outspoken about their anarchist positions. In 1982, for example, a politically active group was founded in Dresden's church organizations. It became known throughout the GDR by the name of Anarchistischer Arbeitskreis Wolfspelz (AAW; The "Wolf's Clothing" Anarchist Working Group). With the quiet help of a printer at the newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung*, they managed to circulate leaflets—some of them numbering more than 20,000 copies—and to call people to action.

Other anarchists typed, stenciled, and circulated texts by Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Peter Kropotkin, and other anarchist classics. However, due to the poor copying techniques available, many of the texts were nearly illegible.

The first libertarian-socialist, underground periodicals in the GDR appeared in 1986. Like almost all the opposition's publications, they were printed and distributed under the relative protection of the Protestant Church.

Kopfsprung (Header [a soccer move], 1987–1991) was the name of an overtly anarchist underground magazine. It dated back to the GDR Protestant Church Congress in 1986 where a group called *Kirche von Unten* (Church From Below, KVV) formed "in opposition to the existing church bureaucracy." This rather atheistic group did not see themselves as a Christian base community acting against highly privileged church dignitaries or as a religious reform group. Instead, they were mainly anarchists and punks acting against the existing system. Over time, rather than remaining a mere "anti" movement, KVV grew up to be a group with positions of its own.

The movement later split into several groups focusing on a variety of topics. In 1986, KVV issued at least three issues of *mOAning-STAR*, a hectographed periodical promoting libertarian-socialist views. The first issue of *Kopfsprung*, edited by an anonymous group, appeared in East Berlin in spring 1987, without stating either date or place of its publication. The next issues were stenciled and duplicated. The typewritten, single-column political texts were embedded in a sparse layout but enlivened by handmade drawings and lyrics.

In 1986, the liberal-left Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte (Peace and Human Rights Initiative) in East Berlin launched the uncensored *Grenzfall* (Marginal Case), which became widely distributed throughout the GDR. Unlike the *Umweltblätter*, the editors of *Grenzfall* did not consider their project anarchist.

The goals pursued by anarchist groups such as KVV, AAW, and Umwelt-Bibliothek Ostberlin (East Berlin Environment Library) were different. They believed that, by expanding on the freedoms to be gained after a reform of the GDR or by undermining the state structure, they would be able to start the process they wanted—the process of growing a “new society from below.”

Umweltblätter/telegraph

In the fall of 1986, *Umweltblätter*, subtitled “Informational Bulletin of the Peace and Environment Circle,” appeared in East Berlin, initially published by the Umwelt-Bibliothek, an anarchist group founded that year under the Zion Parish Church’s “umbrella.” *Umweltblätter*, like most, was stenciled and duplicated in A4 format, with the heading “Internal church information only.” Due to the poor print and layout quality, the single-column texts were often difficult to read.

Nevertheless, the small libertarian-socialist movement used *Umweltblätter* as their organ. They tried to “convey an unobtrusively anarchist attitude,” as their editor Wolfgang Rüdtenklau put it. They primarily published articles dealing with suppressed information on everyday life in the GDR. In winter 1986–1987, *Umweltblätter* disclosed the fact that the upper limits of smog concentration had been exceeded ninefold in Berlin. The GDR authorities were not happy to read this and were not happy about the fact that the periodical was developing into a GDR-wide discussion forum used by a variety of independent environmentalist, peace, and civil and human rights groups. Indeed, the magazine, passed from reader to reader, created a counter-public sphere, in spite of its relatively low nominal circulation of 600 copies.

In November 1987, the controversies between the GDR authorities and opposition groups reached a new pitch. The night of November 24, the secret police—known as the *Stasi* (abbreviation for State Security)—for the first time searched the Protestant Church’s premises. Five people were arrested. The raid was aimed at *Umweltblätter*, of which 12 issues had been published by that time, and *Grenzfall*. About 20 *Stasi* and the state prosecutor’s officials confiscated copying machines, manuscripts, and books published in the West.

This prompted public protest and vigils throughout the GDR. Dissidents who had been shunted off to West Germany in earlier years provided a regular flow of information about these events, obtaining international media coverage. In the end all those arrested were released and the charges dropped. *Umweltblätter* continued publishing.

In 1994, Rüdtenklau would observe that the Zion Parish Church affair was the beginning of the end of the GDR. From then on, domestic crises repeatedly showed that the regime could no longer rely on the terror that had kept people in fear and secured the GDR’s existence. Understanding that the emperor had no clothes, people took to the streets in growing numbers until, in late 1989, the regime broke down.

The successful ending of the Zion affair gave an enormous boost to the opposition’s publications. Although the *Stasi* was successful in stopping *Grenzfall* with the help of repeated technical sabotage carried out by an “unofficial collaborator,” *Umweltblätter* simply took over *Grenzfall*’s role as a GDR-wide opposition periodical. Correspondents from numerous towns and villages in

the GDR forwarded news, comments, analyses, and general descriptions of the situation to East Berlin and had them published in *Umweltblätter*.

In early October 1989, things started happening very fast. The *Umweltblätter* editorial group decided to keep pace by issuing 7-to 10-page newsletters every few days, “as needed.” On October 9, when the crisis reached its first crunch point, the magazine appeared under the title *telegraph* for the first time. (This title continues to the present day for a now irregularly appearing publication.)

Troops had been massed against the Leipzig Monday Rally. Armored scout cars and other army vehicles were patrolling the inner city of Leipzig. Rüdtenklau recalled in 1994 that printing the first 4,000 copies of the first issue on rickety duplicating machines was a laborious task. These copies sold out to the demonstrators at the East Berlin Gethsemane Church in a matter of 20 minutes. Another print run of 2,000 copies followed while the next issue was being prepared.

From now on, *telegraph* continued at intervals of 7 to 10 days. The editors did their own investigations, and their work was based on anti-Stalinist as well as anticapitalist views. This was how they critically accompanied the transition from one system to another. There were numerous articles on how to come to terms with the past, on the Stasi, and on the partially anarchist opposition movement.

Conclusion

In 1989, the small oppositional scene grew into a mass movement. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the powerholders in East Berlin under the slogan, “We are the people!” On November 8, the Politburo resigned and instantly reassembled under the leadership of Egon Krenz.

After the Berlin Wall was opened the next day, GDR libertarian-socialist groups began procuring paper and printing facilities outside church facilities. Contacts with groups and printing collectives in the West intensified. Whereas communists and anti-imperialists rejected the anarchist movement in the GDR as being “anticommunist,” many anarchists in the East and the West rejoiced at the fall of the Wall and the “incipient decline of state capitalism.”

Anarchism in the GDR contributed more to the fall of communism than is generally known today.

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See also Anarchist and Libertarian Media, 1945–2010 (Federal Germany) ; Anarchist Media ; Citizens’ Media ; EuroMayDay ; Free Radio Movement (Italy) ; Indymedia (The Independent Media Center) ; Prague Spring Media ; Revolutionary Media 1956 (Hungary) ; Samizdat Underground Media (Soviet Bloc)

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