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“They Want To Destroy Us”

Interview With RAF Prisoners Lutz Taufer, Karl-Heinz Dellwo, Knut Folkerts, June 1992

The following interview is from Konkret (a monthly magazine for left theory, discussion and culture), June 1992. The participants in this talk are: Karl-Heinz Dellwo, Knut Folkerts and Lutz Taufer, captured members of the RAF - prisoners since 1975 (Knut Folkerts since 1977), Rosita Timm, member of the Green Party in Hamburg and involved in the movement to free the political prisoners, Thomas Ebermann, former member of the Green Party, and Hermann L. Gremliza, publisher of Konkret. This English translation first appeared in Arm the Spirit #14/15 - August-December 1992.

Gremliza: “If it is true that American imperialism is a paper tiger, i.e. that it can be defeated in the end and if the Chinese communists are correct that the victory against American imperialism has become possible because the struggle is being waged all over the globe and imperialism’s strengths have been spread thin and have splintered, which makes imperialism surmountable - if all this is true, then there is no reason to exclude any particular country or region from the anti-imperialist struggle because the reactionary forces happen to be especially strong in that country. As wrong as it is to discourage the forces of revolution by under-estimating them, it is equally wrong to suggest points of confrontation to them where they can only be destroyed and used as cannon-fodder.”

This was a quote from the April 1971 RAF-document *The Urban Guerilla Concept*¹. Exactly 21 years later, the most recent RAF-declaration which we want to discuss here², draws the conclusions from the founding document: because imperialism turned out not to be a paper tiger, but to be invincible, the proposal is made not to waste any more energies in a hopeless struggle. Is this the meaning of the declaration?

Taufer: The world of the 1970’s is different than the world of the 1990’s. 20 years ago we were thinking, living and fighting as a part of the world-wide uprising against U.S. imperialist hegemony. The world was divided into two parts. The Soviet Union forced imperialism into a global balance of power that limited imperialism’s options against the peoples and liberation movements in the Third World. There was at least one liberation movement in armed struggle in each country of Latin America for example. Successful, victorious liberation organizations were in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Especially

¹ A slightly different translation of this document can be found at <http://www.germanguerilla.com/raf/documents/71-ugc.html>

² A reference to the RAF’s declaration “To All Who Are Looking For Ways to Organize and to Push Through a Human Life in Dignity Here and Worldwide On Really Concrete Issues” released on April 10th 1992. (see http://www.germanguerilla.com/raf/documents/92_04_10.html)

in Vietnam there was a people of peasants in pajamas and tire sandals pushing the world's most powerful military machine against the wall. And then there were the revolts in the metropolises. As we know today, the movements against the Vietnam War - especially in the U.S. - contributed to a large extent to the fact that Nixon and Kissinger considered the war lost as early as 1969.

The wide-spread sense of the global situation being at a point of decision was marked by West German politicians referring to a spreading "lack of confidence in the State", by a Trilateral Commission³ investigation titled *Crisis of Democracy*⁴ - while a fresh wind of grass-roots democracy was ventilating through the metropolises. And former chancellor Willy Brandt was talking about the freedom of West-Berlin being defended in Vietnam.

Our assessment in those days was: strategically, imperialism is put on the defensive. There had been growing forces against the U.S. dominated imperialist world system simultaneously all over the world. And with the background of Auschwitz and Vietnam it was worth to think about (morally and politically) joining the uprising with the attempt of armed struggle in the centers of imperialism. The ambivalent position of the political, economic, judiciary and military elite on the fascist past⁵ and their clear support for the genocide in Vietnam, left the question unanswered whether or not fascism in Germany could reappear. To some extent, aimed struggle in the FRG was an attempt to make up for the previous lack of anti-fascist resistance.

To expect an approaching breakdown of the US-imperialist system turned out to be a mistake. Today we live in a completely different world. By creating "two, three, many Vietnams", the goal in the 1960's and 1970's was to take away the sources of exploitation and enrichment from the Western system. Supported by this, the Non-Aligned Movement⁶ demanded a New Global Economic Order. Today the situation is reversed: it is imperialism which is discarding entire peoples like squeezed lemons. Their cheap resources and labor power is no longer needed, and therefore they have lost their right to exist.

³ The Trilateral Commission is an elite planning body founded in the 1970s by a group of multinational corporate executives, bankers, academics and politicians from North America (the U.S. and Canada), Western Europe and Japan. Its goal was to elaborate a sophisticated response to the global wave of decolonization in the Third World and the rise in militancy "at home". In short, it can be seen as an attempt by more far-sighted members of the ruling class to develop a "smart" response to "the sixties". (See http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Ronald_Reagan/Standing%20Tall_ReaganTrilat.html)

⁴ In 1975 Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watnuki authored *The Crisis of Democracy* for the Trilateral Commission. They argued that democracy was being undermined by an erosion of traditional forms of public and private authority and the widespread questioning of "the legitimacy of hierarchy, coercion, discipline, secrecy, and deception-all of which are in some measure, inescapable attributes of the process of government." In other words, there was too much freedom in contemporary "democracy". (See http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Ronald_Reagan/Standing%20Tall_ReaganTrilat.html)

⁵ Denazification after World War II was haphazard and ineffective, so that as of 1965, fully 60 percent of West German military officers had fought for the Nazis, and at least two-thirds of judges had served the Third Reich. (Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, p. 33).

⁶ The Non-Aligned Movement was established in the mid-1950s as a vehicle for Third World countries to combat imperialism and assert their right to self-determination while staying outside the orbit of either the United States or the Soviet Union.

The world is no longer polarized between the Third World and the metropolises. There are two worlds now: the world of the haves and the world of the have-nots. The two worlds exist within the FRG, within the U.S., in Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Nigeria. They are everywhere. Today in the U.S., the demand for a new world order and the un-focused uprising are only separated by a few blocks. After the marines had gone into Grenada and Panama, they now go into Los Angeles⁷. The marginalized, that is the vast majority of all humankind, find themselves in the situation of Robinson Crusoe. The washed-up of imperialism and of the world market are forced to depend on what they find in themselves and in their immediate environment, when they organize their lives and their social world.

The coming era will be the era of the social movements, of economic and social inventions. Suppose we are successful in opening the necessary space to give concrete utopian schemes some global meaning. The alternative would be spreading, scattered violence and destruction from those and against those who fight for their survival. And the RAF's answer to the "question of violence" would be one of no importance - facing this increasing gravity of the situation.

The RAF's declaration is talking about this changed world situation. It's not a surrender, it's a principled new orientation towards a situation. Armed struggle goes against the grain of this new situation.

Gremliza: Do you want to add anything to this declaration or do you have any criticism?

Dellwo: I think this declaration is right. Its heart is that we have reached certain boundaries on the one hand and we shouldn't give up on the other hand. I wouldn't criticize what others find out for themselves and how they express that.

The RAF has reached a limit, a boundary. Everybody has a sense that a lot of work has been done over the last twenty years, but that we're walking on one spot now. The RAF during its founding period, the concept of a metropolitan guerilla - that meant: putting the question of power on the table. And breaking open our position of powerlessness, in which we found ourselves again and again in our specific struggles against the policies of the ruling class. We wanted to create a space for the Left, the space of illegality in which you are able to create yourself as a subject. As a political subject in a position of attack. The State and the politics of the ruling class, the question of the system itself - that was a taboo. Those at the bottom have to be subordinated - that idea, too, had to be attacked. It's the logic of power to keep people down. We were shooting back. We reversed the relationship they had to the bottom of society, and turned it against them.

Today, something else is missing. It's not limited by the power of the State. There is a lack of new social ideas, something like a new historical social sense for society. I know that it has something to do with the self-validity of human beings and of nature, which we

⁷ The United States had invaded Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989. In 1992 the marines (along with the army and National Guard) were used to suppress the "Rodney King riots" in Los Angeles.

have to win back. But the first boundary today is the alienation in society.

Of course, we also had in mind an expropriation or socialization of the means of production. This is one goal and we can do a lot with it. But it remained vague. It was more this: you couldn't live here - not in this capital-dominated present period. And you didn't want to watch the worldwide crimes - not with that history. You were already made for this system before you even woke up and first you have to get up and hold your own against that. Our orientation didn't fall apart with the collapse of State socialism (real-existing socialism). Its structure of society was not one of our aims. But it was the existing counter-system to capitalism. And another idea about society as a whole has not been born yet. We always said that we don't have a history, we are starting at point zero. Today I think, this was even more true than we understood at the time. No there is no centralized perspective any more and perhaps there will never be a centralized perspective again - but this doesn't have to be a loss. The old perspective remained external to human beings. It was not helpful to watch the world and life in a new way. We have to find something new in the concrete questions. This concrete question is the same as the everyday aspect of society. We have to bring the moment of transformation to this everyday life. It's the only way to create a new view for society as a whole. I want to create a break with the whole system in this everyday life. We have to search for that.

Gremliza: When I compare the situation of 1970/71 to today I see only one significant change: State socialism doesn't exist anymore and along with this: most of the movements which had a sort of rear cover from it don't exist anymore, either.

Taufers: The question is: is this a positive or a negative change. This kind of rear cover was always an ambiguous affair, as early as during the Vietnam War. It maintained a certain mentality of centralized perspective. In today's discussions we learn from the Tupamaros⁸, that this collapse of State socialism had a liberating aspect for the Left, for the political movements. They have to rely upon themselves and are working on developing an emancipatory perspective out of their own concrete conditions and their own history. That's what the Left has to do here, too.

Gremliza: When I look at the Left and especially at the parts of the Left that always had the sharpest criticism of State socialism, I don't see anyone taking a free deep breath and searching for new, liberating perspectives. I see a final farewell from any resistance and a joining of the victorious fatherland.

Taufers: This love of fatherland, which many are discovering now originates in the liquidation of the spirit of fundamental opposition against capitalism in 1968. This spirit has been liquidated by the myth of the definitive democracy, that was supposedly effected by the 1968 movement. The discussion now begun by the RAF also gives the chance for evaluating the past 25 years in a new way.

⁸ The Tupamaros were a guerrilla group active in Uruguay in the 1960s and 70s. In the 1980s they became a legal political party, the Movement of Popular Participation, members of which ended up playing an important role in the government.

Ebermann: Reading the declaration of the RAF, my sense was: It draws a good conclusion but it is partly based on very bad reasoning. It scans to me as if there is not enough admission of the depth of defeat.

Dellwo: And what if we don't have the feeling of defeat?

Ebermann: It's a political disagreement then. If one is not a cynical person, there is the hope to be less correct in the end compared to the person who painted the situation in extremely dark colors.

Folkerts: Victory and defeat are really relative terms. We had to get along with defeats and losses. We went through extremely tough situations inside and outside of prison. But even now, being confronted with a very difficult situation of transition, we are never talking about 'being defeated'. We accumulated a lot during those years and we'd like to socialize that, connect it with other experiences. For this we want communication with many. With the Left - and what's left of it, and with all the forces, that are newly emerging from the contradictions now. During this long confrontation we gained experiences, got a consciousness about our power. Even if we can't show weighty victories (perhaps they are plain and not spectacular) we certainly gained something by fighting.

Dellwo: Neither do I think we are coming from defeat. We are imprisoned for 17 years now, Knut for 15 years. And this is our experience of all that time: they want to silence us. But they didn't succeed. Quite the contrary. We have that feeling that we made it. We went through all this. As the RAF we have reached a boundary. And I am asking myself, did we achieve anything or didn't we? Did we set something historically new, which is what we wanted? What about the experiences that didn't exist before we made them?

Taufer: It has become a bit fashionable among the Left to chat about all kinds of defeat. Personally, I never understood that - from prison. If there ever was a strong Left in Western Europe after 1966, it was in the FRG, beginning with the first sit-in at the university in Berlin up to the last action of the RAF. Where else in Western Europe did there exist a Left with such a potential of regeneration? I am all for a thorough search for mistakes and weaknesses over the past 25 years. Our search will depend on whether we start this work with a fundamental historical pessimism or with trust and confidence. The Left has reached a limit, and has fallen into a deep crisis, in the FRG and worldwide. This is a unique chance to learn everything from the past we never thought we would have to.

A lot of experiences have been accumulated, including by us. We have been in this totalitarian situation, ten years in maximum security. It was like a miniature 'Third Reich'. And, although they scanned every expression of life with video-cameras, microphones, brainwashing-programs, everything you can imagine, they didn't defeat us. There are experiences you can only accumulate in maximum security units, at least in the northern hemisphere. And that's what we did. We know a lot about this question of defeat and victory. This knowledge is now needed outside of prison.

Ebermann: O.K. You can say that: It's only then a defeat when they break us, when they take away our political thinking, our fundamental opposition. If this is the understanding of defeat - then neither are you defeated nor am I. It's not at that point now and I hope it never will be.

But there is a second sense of defeat. When every experience is buried, no future rebel will be able to learn from it. A lot of people act like that, when they fail in their concrete goals. There is also a disgusting sort of criticism towards State socialism. Everybody is rushing to say: I didn't agree with it anyway. I wrote a lot of criticism towards State socialism. But I always hoped that the GDR [East Germany] can survive against the FRG [West Germany]. I always hoped that certain projects (e.g. the plans to kill the East and spare the West at the same time) will fail. I did hope that this arming to death and economic penetration of the east will not work. When I eliminate all this now and say: this was no socialism at all, where did they have real emancipation, wasn't alienation the same or didn't they have the same commodity relations - then I'm going to destroy the subject I could be able to learn from.

I don't mean this second term of defeat. When I'm talking about defeat - I'm talking about a balance of power within society. They didn't break you and they didn't break me. And I'm not talking about a time we all were doing shit. But this balance of power brings us in such a deserted and lonely position unlike anything I've ever experienced.

Dellwo: Do you claim that this system is more stable than it was 20 years ago?

Ebermann: Yes, that's what I think. And I refuse to say that our hopes were pure craziness that, with our help, an encircling of the metropolises might be successful. I try to keep our biography and history in sight, try to keep in everybody's mind that it once was an open question - an open question for years - which forces will succeed in the world. We didn't yell this slogan "Create two, three, many Vietnams" because we were crazy. At that time, it was a real possibility.

There is this horrible re-writing of history now: We all were dreamers, idiots, and if we had been realistic, we would have anticipated the victories of imperialism. It's a history for couch-potatoes, still happy that they didn't pick up one stone 20 years ago.

But today, with certain views we are beyond the parameters of legitimate debate. For me, it was always like that: If there was a controversial debate in society there was always a certain range of views. We were an extreme wing but always in touch with a pool of left reformists. In contact with one or another progressive member of parliament or an interested radio or TV moderator. Today there are a lot of discussions about the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, about the public debt, about what should happen with the former GDR. And suddenly we have no voice in this discussion.

Folkerts: This is just a sign that the Left's frame of reference has fallen apart. The East-West line of demarcation, the struggles against colonialism, the metropolitan movements and the relations between these struggles including their realistic revolutionary

possibilities - this historical period (beginning with the October Revolution in 1917) has ended. This fact demands that a break be made. A new combination of emancipatory forces can not and will not drive in old lanes.

New social space, situations, relations - national and international - will be created. The lonely position you are talking about - we don't make ourselves dependent on that. In times of illegality we learned to swim against the stream. What we learned from the loneliness of isolation is to hold up against a superior force. These experiences are the origins of our basic confidence. A basic confidence in ourselves and the potential abilities of human beings.

Taufer: If there is a weakness of the Left at the time, it has a lot to do with its inability to create a credible utopian scheme.

Ebermann: No, you are wrong! There is no lack of utopian schemes. There is just nobody listening to them. Take this critique of productivity. It was a wide-spread phenomenon some years ago. Both good and bad sides in it. The idealization of alternative firms and companies, the romanticizing of former crafts, the absurd self-exploitation - in spite of that there was a discussion about productivity, the chaining of human beings to industrial work, the humiliation of human beings by machines and assembly lines. There was a discussion about the question of fighting this kind of production.

Something like 5 or 10 percent of this society dreamt of somehow organizing life in a better way. This is the origin of each utopian scheme. And this has disappeared. The desire to overcome alienation is not very present in this society. You have to admit, they momentarily won ideologically, they were able to plant into people's minds that this is the best of all worlds imaginable.

Folkerts: This is because you look at the present time in old patterns. You have to learn to watch exactly how contradictions are expressed in a new way, where they are articulated in a new way. Of course they need a Left. And this becomes a circle: the Left doesn't exist and everything is dominated by reactionary forces.

Timm: The main contradiction between Thomas [Ebermann] and you all is the assessment of imperialism's stability. And my impression is, that Thomas is mainly looking at the economic side. The economic stability and expansion, the economic opportunities which have opened up and play an important role in the countries of former State socialism. But remembering Vietnam and what took place there: the economic and military power of the U.S. against a people who had little more than their own idea, their own will to be independent. And this couldn't be broken by economic and military power.

Today we see this economic power on the one hand. On the other hand we see bourgeois, humanist ideas and ideals thrown out. Nobody, including the ruling class, keeps them. If they would be starting with slogans like: "Let's dare more democracy" (1969 election

campaign slogan) or something like that, everybody would laugh - it would be so ridiculous. Today it is difficult to determine: which point we are starting from, under which conditions? How can you analyze something when you keep staring at the media? If everything that is really moving does not get published, it will remain within small circles - like in the St. Georg neighborhood in Hamburg, where a social initiative, a neighborhood association, the Gray Panthers, the children's schools and some others came together because of the drug policy made by the Hamburg government. This is not the ideological direction of "Free distribution of Heroin". They say with a great sense for practical decisions: "What the police is doing here in St. Georg is to our disadvantage. When the junkies are banished from the public space of the main train station they come to the entrances and backyards of our houses. This is why the needles are laying around here." So they come together and demand: "Police out of this community". This is something concrete you can start with today.

Ebermann: They are probably doing useful things there. But you can't talk about politics and society this way.

Timm: Why not?

Ebermann: I'm giving another example. The State government of Schleswig Holstein crowded all the refugees in front of the welfare offices - to document the so-called abuse. And there was a demonstration against this. Less than 200 people were at this demonstration. But the basis for the current hegemony of the ruling class is that they have been successful in establishing ideologically that the world is fucked up, and that it is "everyone for her/himself". This is reflected in the total lack of opposition against the racism that is directed at the refugees.

Taufer: That's what I think, more or less. But often in history, when forces of solidarity and freedom have been kept down and the power was in position of hegemony, counter forces emerged from below. You can see that clearly in the United States. The ruling class has no solution anymore for a practicable civil society. This is not only an issue for Blacks in the ghettos. This is also an issue for the middle class, although it is moving to the right at the time. But the question is: how can we develop these forces. That includes an examination of the past 25 years history to learn from the mistakes and strengths.

Dellwo: Thomas [Ebermann] thinks that this system has become more stable over the past 20 years. I don't see that. We had to go through a certain process and had to walk certain wrong streets. And we walked many wrong streets. We're not going to repeat that but they had to be walked. All this, our lack of ideas, the momentary vacuum because we have no answer to the question of centralized perspective, that State socialism has failed as the first break with history (and we don't know how to start again) - all this doesn't mean the system has become more stable.

We can list a lot of reasons why we see the system as weaker, less stable than before. But that doesn't help. Because the weakness of the other side doesn't mean our power. There is no automatic relationship between misery and liberation.

Vice versa, if the system was stable, this wouldn't be the origin of our weakness. But I cannot think like that. Whether it is more stable or not - everybody who doesn't give up life in this society has to break away from that consensus and has to develop their own good sense, has to live and fight that it will come to existence as a developing subversive reality. This way I understand the declaration of our comrades.

We are coming to this situation from a different history. We accepted our isolation in those days as an initial condition. It was hard sometimes but we didn't lose ourselves. That means: we always came to a break with this system in a material way. Others had a lot of fear towards this isolation, but today they find themselves in that isolation, against their own will. It's wrong to declare it's all about the power of the system rather than criticizing yourself that you always kept surrendering, too. So many people maintained that breaking with the system has to be something real in your life. And if it's right it becomes insignificant if you're alone with it. And it comes back to us as a pre-condition for any further development.

It should be easier today because the question of competence has become more clear now. How much confidence do people put in the capability of capitalism to solve the existential problems of life? And isn't that a sign that this system is politically less stable?

Taufer: Except if one defines this stability as follows: all this brutality, egoism, unrestrained greed are mechanisms to keep and develop this scheme of society. Then one can speak of stability. But this egoism and brutality are immensely destructive against any scheme of society.

Ebermann: Maybe I can explain my thoughts by reading a part of the RAF's declaration. "It is an important question for how much longer the State will be able to feed into the racism against refugees and to treat the refugees as sub-human in order to avoid its responsibility for unemployment, lack of housing, poverty among the elderly, etc. - and how much longer the State will be able to send these people back into the misery that it keeps contributing to in the first place."

This is cruel. We are living in times when almost everything from us that was able to take root in society - the demand for "open borders," e.g., sounded good to liberal church circles - is replaced by a consensus to deal with refugees hard and ruthlessly. There is no relevant resistance against this any more. Now I am comparing this with the part of the declaration that suggests that the future remains a somewhat open question and perhaps even suggests that the ceasing of armed actions is related to this. It seems to me that the authors still need to claim that they just won grand victories and are therefore able to take such and such specific steps.

This is even more clear at another point where it says: "...there are factions within the ruling apparatus that have realized they can't suppress resistance and social contradictions through police-military means." First, all factions within the State have

always known not to use these means in a pure fashion. And second, there will be one element structuring politics in future, which is repression. Both quotes seem to be in a relation. It sounds like: "Because everything is going well, we can change the form of struggle."

Dellwo: My understanding is different. There were times when a guerilla came into being here. And it's not possible to eliminate this from history - even if they would quit. And it can come into being again at anytime. That's what they want to say. What the RAF meant to me is: to break out of a certain relation of extermination by the State towards minorities and opposition. We know what they did to the KPD after 1945⁹ and we know how the State responded in 1968. And I know how they cleared our squatted house in Hamburg with special forces and with machine guns - and they were ready to shoot us. We set something against that until today. They couldn't destroy the RAF. They couldn't break the prisoners in jail.

And we fought for the ability to practice a certain kind of resistance when it is necessary. That remained limited to us who were living underground or in prison, and to a few people around that. And I'd like to disseminate and to broaden this attitude, the willingness to stand up for something. I'm not talking about the form of our struggle, which has to be determined anew. I am talking about the willingness to assert something, and to carry through with it - a willingness to determine a question from our point of view and to demand an answer.

It was not the attitude of most in the Left. They always stopped and surrendered at certain boundaries. And this is one of the subjects in the RAF declaration: You should fight for the ability to resist. This noon I thought, look, both of you have been part of the Left for much longer than I have. And you have never been in jail. Why is that? Why didn't you carry through with a certain thing, paid a price too? There is something missing in this Left. We have to reach that point, I suppose.

Gremliza: Make the Left go to prison?

Dellwo: Not make the Left go to prison. But we have to reach the point where we insist on certain things. When we fought for regroupment we reached that boundary, we had dead prisoners, too. But we knew we had to pay this price, otherwise you won't be able to survive. You have to fight. You are here in this maximum security unit and you realize that the whole thing is going to wipe you out - wipe you out as a human being. You know this would be a defeat, you have to set something against it, your self-affirmation. Then you can carry through. And if you say that so much has disappeared, then one of the reasons might be that you never insisted: "We refuse to have this taken away from us." A little bit of self-criticism won't hurt you.

Timm: If the subject is discussion and a new orientation now, it must be possible to criticize certain things with this RAF declaration. There is a mistake, an imprecise

⁹ The German Communist Party KPD was banned in 1956, followed by 150,000 political trials against its members and other progressives.

political assessment. The RAF is talking about the change in the balance of power and they are basing this on Kinkel's remarks about the political prisoners¹⁰. They take the fact that he is saying anything as proof for the existence of certain factions within the State, factions that are willing to handle contradictions in a different way, for example regarding the question of foreigners and asylum. But this is one of the areas where we haven't achieved anything. There is no indication for a decline in repression, but only for an intensification.

Dellwo: But you agree, that ten years ago they never would have been doing the things Kinkel is doing today?

Timm: There's some moving in the question of political prisoners. But we don't know the reasons why.

Folkerts: There is a misunderstanding. The RAF is not taking the State policies against immigrants as an example to suppose the existence of factions within the apparatus handling the contradictions in a different way. The subject matter of their declaration is starting from the opposite and is referring to the necessity of social struggles. These struggles will settle the questions of winning space for all the essential questions politically. In these struggles we'll learn to demolish the ruling consensus.

And in the question of political prisoners: there are factions within the institutions. But we are not overestimating them. Those who are searching for new ways still have the same aims. However, Kinkel's remarks are a political expression of these contradictions that have matured for a long time. This is especially remarkable because it's an apparatus with a very strong ability to persist. We are talking about the complex of State security with its fascist roots and its relative autonomy which is - together with the media - a machine of self-legitimation. Although it has long been obvious from the facts that they are unable to break the RAF or the prisoners this way, they have been going on and on for years. The psychological campaigns, the lies and the frauds were meant to prevent the political consequences of a situation without a way out. The invention of "successful searches for fugitives" (like the "absolutely credible witness of the prosecution" in early 1992) is to simulate the capability to vanquish the RAF - in a moment when one of the RAF's heart has supposedly deserted to the State. After 22 years, they are revealing their true essence: the reality pretended by BAW (Federal Prosecutor), BKA (Federal Police), VS (Domestic Political Intelligence) and the media is identical to the fancy world of a mentally ill person.

Taufer: I think, it's important to emphasize that the RAF's declaration is not a reaction to Kinkel but the first result of an ongoing discussion which started 2 years ago. This discussion was a result of the tremendous changes in the world which called for a new determination.

Gremliza: But one can hardly deny that the effect of this declaration is going into a

¹⁰ In early 1992, Kinkel suggested that some political prisoners could be released under certain conditions. Kinkel used to be Minister of the Interior and Law Enforcement He has since become Foreign Minister.

direction that you consider to be a misunderstanding. The RAF responds to Kinkel's demands and hoists the white flag to get the prisoners out. You can say: the public got the wrong picture and Kinkel got the wrong picture. But for me it's hard to believe that the authors of this declaration didn't anticipate this effect and therefore didn't want it.

Folkerts: Perhaps the sequence of events gives you that impression. But it's a necessary and right decision within the whole development. How people will work with this decision in the future will depend on how the Left will intervene into the situation in order to prevent a defeatist tendency. Of course, it's an open situation - which the other side knows. They, of course, want everything for themselves and nothing for us.

Ebermann: The whole movie is directed towards two different audiences.

Folkerts: The declaration is directed to society, to everyone who is searching for ways to assert a life worthy of human beings. It's the same with the declaration from us, the prisoners. Our remarks towards the State are clear. So the State can start from facts and not from illusions and the primitive calculations of its "specialists" - like when they recently announced to release some of the prisoners and to start additional trials against others at the same time.

Ebermann: Everything that is somehow useful to free political prisoners is more than legitimate. It's above any criticism. I think that you defined the boundaries yourself. And if I caught that right there are two boundaries: the first is when you drag other people down and the second is to drag your own history through the mud so that nobody feels the desire to learn from it. Everything else has to be done. And you got to know that we are not very helpful in pushing your release. This is a decision by the structure of ruling politics, or of the accepted opposition within the frame of that politics. And so they are the correct addressees for that RAF declaration.

The other addressee is the remaining Left. And we really have to watch out that your success which hopefully has become possible now will not get registered as being a part of a "civilizing" and "liberalizing" development. Strong forces are trying to play this music, calling for certain self-criticisms.

And I think those quotes of the declaration which are suggesting things are going well in Germany, are harmful under these aspects. For me, Robert Kurz¹¹ - whom you quote many times - does not so much represent an economic analysis, but for a political assessment that liberalization broke out in Germany: liberalization because assistant judges (or whatever the name of that sort of rabble is) are wearing ear-diamonds, wearing their hair in ponytails. The cosmopolitan is growing up here and a nazi can't be a nazi because he bought his wife in Singapore. Kurz stands for all these smuggled substitutes of ideology.

Dellwo: I disagree. I didn't understand Kurz this way.

¹¹ A Marxist economist.

Ebermann: Two themes have preoccupied the world for centuries. One: is the world going down with all hands? And the other: is humankind going to civilize? Kurz is the prophet of the latter.

Folkerts: His assertion that capitalism's victory over socialism lasted just one second and that this victory will intensify capitalism's own crisis is much more important. If you don't only watch superficial appearances but the growing potential of global crisis coming back to the centers - accelerated in the FRG by the annexation of the GDR - you can't talk anymore about this system becoming more stable.

Ebermann: How does one define this stability? Any stupid reformist says that IMF and World Bank have failed. You recognize this by the gap between the stated ideals of these institutions and reality. Somehow all the ideals never become reality. But in reality these institutions are functioning perfectly. Of course, I can say there is no stability because there is no tranquility for them. But they don't need this tranquility. They can leave huge communities in New York without supervision as long as they can be sure that people are killing each other, selling drugs to each other. As long as it's not concerning materials they want to turn into commodities, they don't care.

Folkerts: The idea of emancipation should be grounded anew from deep down and from historical maturity because a whole epoch has ended. Liberation - what does that mean today? Today there is the possibility of suspensions and it never was before. Structural mass-unemployment is the negative expression of the eventual possibility to suspended labour. We do need a real and an obvious moment at the present time because it will be a long lasting process of transition. Liberation can't remain an abstraction or a distant goal. Goals have to start from living reality, as a movement of acquisition.

Ebermann: I read T's letter to the people in Tübingen where he quotes this Tupamaro who talks about the situation when he is coming into the slums and about what it means to be a talking head when people live in extreme misery. For those who don't live in such conditions, who don't have to worry about having a bed when they get sick or about feeding their children the next day - that is: for many in this country emancipation can only mean a critique of needs.

Gremliza: The view that every improvement of any other human being's situation on earth will lead to a degeneration of their own situation has grown up in the mass consciousness of the FRG. This view is correct. And this is why every glimpse at the misery of the world is avoided. Otherwise there would have to be a support for emancipatory movements. Down with international solidarity! If you want to do something for yourself and your needs you are well advised to join the wealthy German fatherland. This is why I think the chances that you claim to have discovered in guiding the needs of German masses into emancipatory politics are almost pathetic.

Taufer: We were talking about the Left and its history and not about the German masses. The critique of needs is a crucial point within this context. The illusory process which was guided by the Left (and especially the metropolitan Left) which is ending now, failed

because they didn't give birth to new needs. This is what the Tupamaros are trying now in Uruguay. If you are talking about socialism to people, who are living in slums, who don't have food, who are selling their 12 year old daughters - they feel that you aren't taking them serious.

Gremliza: If one criticizes the need for food towards people who are living in slums, selling their 12 year old daughters just to survive, instead of sending them a freighter full of wheat (in a real socialist manner) one deserves to get punched in the face.

Taufer: It's one of the basic problems within the socialist movement during the last hundred years that it always tried to talk people into an idealist aim. But wherever capitalism offered real-life possibilities to unfold - in the manner of wolves generally - there was a blind spot in State socialism. Critique of needs - we were talking about that in 1968 already. We gave birth to something new in this country. And a friend from Uruguay experienced this as an achievement when he came into contact with it here. He didn't know it from Uruguay.

In 1968 the critique of needs broke either down on a field of moralistic signposts - and I'm saying nothing of the cruelties - or wherever alternatives were tried the whole thing stayed cautious or sometimes naive. Nothing of that imagination and the certain courage one had to learn with us. And so the return to the status quo looked like a realistic compromise. The need for fundamental change is going to arise, wherever you can feel the life in and from another land of needs. And it will taste so well, that the other needs will be looking rather old.

In the examination of State socialism you now often hear the term use-value. Just like the market economy, real-existing socialism was not the suspension of commodity relations and particularly not the suspension of commodity fetishism which makes people passive. A society focused use-values would be a society of prioritizing the self-initiative and self-determination and not the traditional satisfaction of needs. Self-determination - this is not just the different organizing of the individual-subjective expression. Wherever such a new mentality can rise, the needs for consumption will become less important because a personal and social activity is quite another way to satisfy needs than consumption is. The world is going to be destroyed by these orgies of consumption and economic abscesses. I can't imagine that Kurz's book won't be discussed within the next year.

Dellwo: Hermann, you seem to be impressed by our optimism?

Gremliza: Not impressed, but devastated. This is not optimism. We are talking about different worlds.

Dellwo: I don't think that any positive development can still be expected from this State. Even if they wanted it - it's materially impossible. But the subject is also the self-affirmation of human beings. You are talking a lot about the Left. And that means the political Left which emerged from the movement of 1968. But the contradiction now reaches far beyond that. Would you call the people in the Hafenstrasse/Hamburg leftist?

Or the people in the Mainzer Strasse/Berlin¹²? I disagree. Maybe the term “leftist” has become useless.

Ebermann: Maybe we are living in times when nothing can be done except for some people trying to preserve emancipatory ideas over the years.

Dellwo: What I caught well in the books of Robert Kurz is the difference between the period of “Fordism” when masses of people were absorbed and nowadays, the period of “Automatization” when masses of people are thrown onto the streets and are declared to be useless. In the former GDR, for example - there is no use for anybody who is older than 45 years. These people are kept speechless by retraining programs and social programs until they will be told to resist. Isn't this some thing, where a lot of things can rise from?

I'm not asking: where is the revolutionary subject. In previous times people were looking for it in the “third world” and after that they were searching among the marginalized parts of society. And I once said: “Look into your mirror. Either you see a revolutionary subject there or you don't.” We are being asked: Can we create and develop something where other people can recognize something [they missed?]. Only if we're negating that question, would we be defeated.

Ebermann: When I hear this I am reminded of Poder Popular, people's power: creating a space where the ideological and material influence of the ruling class is limited. And that's why it always comes to the example of the Hafenstrasse because this is the most obvious example - and there is always a need to abstract from the real things going on there. They are advertising for the Hafenstrasse as Pippi Longstocking.

Dellwo: I don't know about that.

Gremliza: It seems to me as if the Hafenstrasse functions as a rather successful model of self-therapy.

Taufer: Isn't this because the process remained superficial there, too? And isn't this related to your pessimism? Of course, I too, see the Left as stagnating. But there was a strong, multi-faceted and very original Left process over the past 25 years which was expropriated by the State again and again. After 1945 only the Left proved its talent to create and to push forward with social innovations - today we need such innovations again. Right wing theoreticians like Rohmoser ascertain a much more pessimistic state of the system than people on the Left. But the Left is sitting on its backside and crying about its defeat.

Gremliza: Precondition for everything is a concept of reality - though it might hurt. Defeat is a reality and only if you don't cheat along this knowledge you'll be able to learn by recognizing your own mistakes - both the avoidable and the unavoidable mistakes which were forced on you by the superiority of the State.

¹² Hafenstrasse and Mainzerstrasse were two large squats.

Dellwo: Do we have to call that “defeat”? We are speaking of boundaries we reached. Of course we wanted more. But we made a lot of very important experiences. And we are steady. It wasn’t easy but it’s possible.

Ebermann: I feel a deep hatred for all the scum commenting on everything with: “there are possibilities and dangers in it”. The reason why we are debating about “boundaries” and “defeat” and why we do this so vehemently, is that the key for all dirty tricks is this notion of inherent “possibilities and danger”.

Folkerts: What does this have to do with us?

Gremliza: Nothing yet.

Taufer: Whether you call it “boundary” or “defeat”, the important thing is a relation of honesty, self-consciousness and self-criticism towards one’s own history.

Folkerts: The occasion to this talk is the RAF’s declaration. And the essential thing is that they took this step. This should be your subject and not criticism of individual points.

Gremliza: I haven’t criticized the declaration yet but I have tried to discover its meaning. What does it mean when the RAF stops the attacks on persons? What are they going to do instead of this? If the prisoners are released, will the RAF still exist? And if, how? I didn’t read about that in the declaration.

Folkerts: One can not determine that yet. It’s an open process.

Gremliza: But the decision to end the armed struggle is your decision, too?

Folkerts: We won’t retreat from that. But if you see the declaration, you see that there is a beginning and an end. You cannot voluntarily eject yourself out of a situation. The transition itself is a process of struggle, which will decide about opening possibilities. So there is something coming back to everyone: the responsibility for the changed situation.

Gremliza: For Kinkel’s reconciliation?

Folkerts: This word “reconciliation” is completely wrong. The contradictions are antagonistic and they will always be. We are coming out of these contradictions, The RAF made public that the contradictions will be carried out in a certain sharpness.

Gremliza: If the prisoners don’t want this reconciliation - i.e. if they don’t offer anything to the State - the subject of release is up to the calculation solely of the ruling class. They can keep you - for security reasons - in prison. Or they can release you, hoping to be able to walk their dogs without bodyguards. This is a subject that Mr. Kinkel, Ms. Vollmer (Green party leader) and Mr. Waigel (government official) have to negotiate with their clientele. This is not a question for the Left.

Folkerts: Indeed, there was influence from the economic elite. They paid 20 years for this State security, which never brought the results they were waiting for. It came to the point where large corporations were sending checks to the BND (intelligence service) to finance secret activities. In these activities hirelings were paid (parallel to the official apparatus) to track and kill RAF-members in foreign countries. The president of this intelligence service (BND) was Kinkel, among others.

Gremliza: Maybe they didn't get rid of you like they wished, but you're not going to claim that this RAF-declaration is a State's document of surrender to the RAF?

Folkerts: It's not self-aggrandizing to point out after 22 years that they couldn't destroy the RAF. The RAF has shown an ability to act politically. You cannot claim that about the other side.

Dellwo: This declaration is addressed to the Left in the first place, with the question if - in contrast to the mid-70s when this was impossible - we can create a connection in different struggles. If we can do that, we can quit this relation of war to the other side. This would enable the other side to change their relation to us. If this is not possible and everybody is just sitting around and lamenting, then we have to ask ourselves what to do then. We are saying to this Left: We all tried certain projects over the past 25 years, and we all made certain experiences. Let's draw some conclusions now.

Gremliza: And what do you expect to be the answer of the State?

Dellwo: Freedom for all the (political) prisoners.

Gremliza: Will the prisoners accept any conditions for their release?

Dellwo: They attempt to make us deny and to reject our own history. They want a creed to their authority. But this is not the end of their demands. The parole hearing of Günter Sonnenberg¹³ shows that. After Günter was shot in the head in 1977, he was in the same situation like Rudi Dutschke¹⁴ was. Günter also had to learn everything anew. They held him in isolation for years and years. Not only did he have to fight against isolation, but also against the consequences of the shooting. The demand in many hungersirikes - Günter participated in all these strikes - was to get him in a group, to be able to learn talking again, against the epileptic attacks, and to give him a comrade he can trust. That was necessary from medical point of view anyway. At one point, they brought him a TV-set to his cell and said: "Okay, here is something you can relate to now." They wanted to turn him into a vegetable. What they said now in the parole-hearing is: "Well, you can

¹³ Günter Sonnenberg was arrested along with Verena Becker in May 1977. He was suspected of participation in the Buback assassination (see http://www.germanguerilla/red-army-faction/documents/77_04_07.html) At the time of his arrest he was shot in the head, and as a result suffered brain damage.

¹⁴ Rudi Dutschke was an SDS-leader in the 1960s and was shot in the head by a worker in 1969, who knew about Dutschke from the media. Dutschke survived this shooting but since that day he suffered from epileptic seizures. He died from one such seizure in 1979.

talk, you're physically in a good condition - you have to admit, we treated you well." They wanted him to deny the pain they did to him, even to thank them. There's no lack of cynicism.

Folkerts: While they presumably don't know of any political prisoners, they wanted a political statement about the RAF-declaration from Günter Sonnenberg. In a statement about Bernd Rössner's¹⁵ serious illness the Federal Prosecutor stated in April 1992 that Bernd needs to remain in prison (after 17 years) to obtain a change of his convictions. And the OLG [senior court] Frankfurt ruled about Ali Jansen¹⁶ that "although there might be a greater sensitivity for punishment because of his asthmatic attacks, no change of convictions has resulted from that yet."

All this shows that the State security apparatus cannot be the resort of jurisdiction. And it should be clear from the past: Stammheim is known worldwide for the failed attempt to eliminate fundamental opposition and to depoliticize the struggle at the same time¹⁷.

Dellwo: Though they want that in first place I'm not willing to reject my past. And though we have reached a certain boundary today, it was right that the RAF was founded. There's a historical and moral legitimation for armed struggle to have existed in this society.

Folkerts: Of course, we're not surprised about their persistence at this point: they are starting with the knowledge that you can determine the future if you define the past. Nothing but their universe of commodities and money is allowed to exist. Caught within this madness, they think they are the end of history. But they couldn't even begin solving any problem within the society.

Ebermann: Your statements seem rather non-tactical to me.

Dellwo: Maybe they are. But they have to take it as it is. We can't use tactics at this point. They can say that they had to fight us and they were right to do it - I don't care. But they have to accept that they couldn't break our awareness of ourselves [political consciousness]. If they can't accept that, we don't see any way for a solution. We will never come to common views with them.

Ebermann: I'm not afraid of the word surrender. If you're succumbed by a superior force (as described by Lenin at the time of the "Peace of Brest-Litovsk") surrender is reasonable, and you have to act against the talking heads who demand heroic postures.

Taufer: The issue is not heroic postures but our history. We didn't fight for 18 years to

¹⁵ Bernd Rössner was a member of the Holger Meins Commando which occupied the West German embassy in Stockholm in April 1975, in an unsuccessful attempt to secure the liberation of RAF prisoners held in West Germany.

¹⁶ A political prisoner.

¹⁷ Stammheim is a high security prison. A special courthouse was built within the prison complex specifically for trials of RAF prisoners, and the prison became a laboratory for how to suppress revolutionary prisoners. For more information see *The Stammheim model: judicial counterinsurgency*.

throw it away now - although it is necessary to deal with our mistakes.

Folkerts: They still want to erase us and our history.

Dellwo: I can't do that. I can't go there and speak tactically. If they are asking for that - you can only stand up for your project. There were always too few within the Left who would stick out their necks and play for all the stakes. I mean this in a quite non-dramatical way. I'm not the person for their moral remonstrances. We have different morals.

Ebermann: This is true. For people like me it is difficult not to mix up what were political disagreements with you and what was simply a consideration for my own safety. The whole history of the Left and the RAF is not exclusively a history of political disagreements, but also a history of the missing will to stand up for something you think is right. We have to defend principled positions against an attitude that promotes success as the only criteria for political action. If we don't do that, we will not be prepared for the things which have to be done in the future, even individually. There are always situations when you can't change the course of history but you still have a lot of different possibilities for your own actions. For example in Nazi Germany: it was impossible to organize successful resistance at that time. But you could still hide someone who was persecuted, although it surely would have been an exaggeration to claim to be involved in a project to bring down Hitler with that. You only could do it or leave it.

Taufer: This is an important point. It's not only about our situation when we insist on a correct and critical examination of our history. It's for the Left outside of prison, too. And talking about "The Peace of Brest-Litovsk": Lenin's tactical compromise was not only a relief for the October Revolution, it was also a burden for others. If we make the peace they want us to make, it would be a burden for the Left in the long run.