



Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F.

By Stefan Aust, Anthea Bell

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Book Description

The Baader-Meinhof Group--later known as the Red Army Faction (RAF)--was a violent urban guerilla group which terrorized Germany in the 1970s and '80s, killing 47 people, wounding 93, taking 162 hostages, and robbing 35 banks--all in an attempt to bring revolution to the Federal Republic. Stefan Aust's masterful history of the Group presents the definitive account, capturing a highly complex story both accurately and colorfully. Much new information has surfaced since the mass suicide of the Groups' leaders in the 1980s. Some RAF members have come forward to testify in new investigations and formerly classified Stasi documents have been made public since the fall of the Berlin Wall, all contributing to a fuller picture of the RAF and the events surrounding their demise.

Aust presents the complete history of the RAF, from the creation in 1970 to the breakup in 1998, incorporating all of the new information. For instance, there is growing evidence that the German secret service eavesdropped on Baader, Meinhof, and the other RAF members imprisoned in Stammheim and that they knew that the terrorists planned a mass suicide, but did nothing to prevent it. Also, there is new information about the role of the RAF lawyers (among them Otto Schily who later was Minister of the Interior in Gerhard Schroder's cabinet), and the roles of the different RAF members and the rivalry between them. The volume will also contain numerous photos. Terrorism today is never far from most people's thoughts. Baader-Meinhof offers a gripping account of one of the most violent terrorist groups of the late twentieth century, in a compelling look at what they did, why they did it, and how they were brought to justice.

Questions for Stefan Aust

Q: Given your background as an editor of *Konkret* and your previous friendship with Ulrike Meinhof, how was the original version of your book received by the left when it first came out? Though you did not explicitly state it at the time, your book very conclusively seemed to demonstrate that the strange deaths in Stammheim prison were in fact suicides, yet it seems to be an article of faith amongst leftists that Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe were murdered. How was your book received by the left at the time? And has that changed with the new edition, especially now that you clearly state that their deaths were suicides?



Undated photographs of R.A.F. leaders
Andreas Baader (left),
Jan-Carl Raspe and Gudrun Ensslin (below)



A: When the book first came out in 1985, a lot of copies were being bought by RAF members who were sitting in jail. Some of them learned about the first generation of the group mainly by reading the book. But that didn't stop them--or their sympathizers--from being very critical of it. On a talk show, Hans Christian Ströbele, who was a former RAF lawyer and later a member of parliament (Green Party) said that Baader and Meinhof would roll over in their graves if they read the book...After more than twenty years, I now have the feeling that even people from the left see the book as a rather fair and correct work of journalism. Now their main argument

is that the book has the Deutungshoheit about the subject--which means something like opinion leadership about the subject of RAF-Terrorism.

Q: There are many of people who romanticize the leaders of the RAF without understanding the devastation that they wrought. The Baader-Meinhof Complex, the Oscar-Nominee movie that you wrote last year, was accused of glorifying terrorism. What are your thoughts about those criticisms? Is there even a way to portray the Baader-Meinhof saga without being accused of glorifying or romanticizing terrorism?

A: The moment you write or make films about groups like the RAF you support their immorality. I wanted to portray this group as accurately as possible. It would be impossible for a book reader or film viewer to understand why so many people followed them if they were portrayed only as villains and criminals. It was their charisma that made them so dangerous. One of the reasons why we showed the group's bombings and killings in such detail was that we wanted to explain what terrorism really is: the terror and killing of people--of human beings--not of lifeless character masks. The aim was to make viewers understand why people of such high moral standards turned into ruthless killers, how hyper moral turned into immorality.

Q: Do you see any homegrown, leftwing terrorist movements taking root in Europe or America again? One of the reasons that the Baader-Meinhof Group was able to rise to prominence early in the 70's was partially because of ineffective police work. It seems that in the modern climate, particularly since 9/11, it would be extremely hard for any band of urban revolutionaries to wage a similar war without being quickly caught. Do you agree? What kind of left-wing radical movement COULD succeed?

A: Any kind of terrorist activity is always a part of a bigger radical movement. A terrorist group can evolve only when a bigger radical movement of any kind exists--left, right, nationalist or religious. Organizations like al Qaeda can only function from inside a global Islamist movement. Similarly the RAF was a part of the radical left in Germany, at least in the beginning. And only if this terrorist group is imbedded in a major movement can it have enough supporters to operate for a longer period of time. The members of the RAF were mainly arrested because normal people--even leftists--called the police. The enormous buildup of the police and the security agencies in Germany could not have been as effective without the cooperation of the people. The only way for a left-wing radical movement to succeed is by using the power of convincing the people rather than employing violence of any kind.

Q: The single hardest concept for an American living in the early 21st century is to understand is the notion that the members of the RAF felt that by attacking the state and having the state respond with massive retaliation, that there would be an enormous number of German people who would then take up their cause and overthrow the state. It just seems utterly delusional, especially coming from clearly intelligent people. How could they get to the point where this seemed rational?



Leftist students clash with police in the Battle of Tegeler Weg (1968, Ullstein Bilderdienst)

A: I can only quote Ulrike Meinhof who often said “wie kommt die Dummheit in die Intelligenz?” which means “how can stupidity invade intelligence?” The first mistake the RAF made was not seeing reality. For me the whole struggle from the very beginning of my research was to realizing that the RAF had a quasi-religious character more than a rational political character. To think that in Germany the masses would overthrow the capitalist system was completely irrational. I cannot believe that they really believed that. Rather, they acted like political or religious martyrs to show that the state was as brutal as they thought it was. It was an experiment with their own--and others’--lives.

Q: What was Ulrike Meinhof like as a person before going underground? Reading her *Konkret* essays in chronological order, one is struck by how much more hardened, desperate, and humorless she became in her later columns. Was she like that in her personal life? Did she have fun and socialize? Did she seem like she had an internal conflict?

A: Ulrike was a very impressive person. She was well-educated and could get her point across very convincingly. At the same time she was quite an intolerant individual who thought she knew things better than others... However, people of the liberal movement adored her, and she socialized a lot during her time in Hamburg and with *Konkret*, where at this time she wrote about the poor, about people in sweat shops and in prison. In the end she could not live in these two worlds. When she went to Berlin she grew more and more depressed. Ultimately, I think her involvement in the RAF was due to many personal and psychological reasons. **Read more**

Review

"This is one of the best books I've read this year in any genre."--John Wilson, Christianity Today

"Aust writes about his subject with admirable dispassion and clarity and in exacting detail, tracking the cat-and-mouse movements between the group and the German police and its political leaders not just over several years, but down to the hour... one could not ask for a better guide to this story, and baring some significant new revelations, "Baader-Meinhof" is certain to be the final word on the subject."--The Seattle Times

About the Author

Stefan Aust is a journalist and editor living in Germany. He has been chief editor of Spiegel TV, and was chief editor of Der Spiegel in Hamburg from 1994-2008. Aust is co-writer of the film script for the German movie Der Baader Meinhof Komplex, which released in Germany in Fall 2008 and was nominated for an

Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Boggs:

The book untitled Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F. contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains your ex idea with easy method. The language is very straightforward all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was written by famous author. The author brings you in the new period of time of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can keep reading your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can open up their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice learn.

Edward Florez:

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new friend when you're sense alone and confuse with what must you're doing of this time.

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