

Social Movements after '68: Germany, Europe, and Beyond

Veranstalter: Center for European Studies, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Datum, Ort: 07.11.2018–09.11.2018, New Brunswick

Bericht von: Dustin Stalnaker, Department of History, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

With half a century passed since 1968 – a year widely regarded as a high-water mark of postwar social activism – we can now look back from a sufficient distance to warrant revisiting conventional wisdom that soon emerged in connection with that momentous year and its aftermath. Scholarly research on activism after 1968 developed under the influence of various social scientific approaches, such as the New Social Movement theory, which posited that 1968 represented a moment of political breakdown within developed capitalist societies, defined by conventional categories, such as class, and initiated a departure from a mode of politics rooted in material concerns in favor of one preoccupied with „quality of life“ issues. These theories suggest that political mobilization after 1968 unfolded on a terrain which was de-centered, disorganized, and ineffective in comparison to what preceded it. In light of more recent approaches that have cast doubt on these conclusions – particularly within the field of history – this conference questioned prevailing assumptions about the nature of social movements after 1968, aiming to refine our understanding of popular politics and social change in Europe during the final decades of the twentieth century.

In his opening keynote lecture GEOFF ELEY (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) spoke of 1968 as a moment of rupture in the evolution of societies that had undergone democratic enlargement after the Second World War. Made possible by the suturing together of democracy and social justice after 1945, the radicalisms unleashed 1968 „stood in a complex dialectical relationship“ with postwar achievements; they were impossible without them and yet impatient with what they had yielded. Eley argued that the departure of 1968 resulted from a conjuncture of three historically-specific conditions of pos-

sibility: a heightened sense of moral outrage over pervasive and escalating violence then unfolding globally; a compelling eventfulness associated with collective action, which created an inflated sense of possibility; and a youth culture shaped by the reasonable expectation of an assured and stable future – a condition both characteristic of and unique to the two postwar decades. Departing from the socialist tradition that had theretofore hegemmonized the left for roughly a century, the political goods of 1968 manifested not in lasting, formal organizations but rather in what Raymond Williams termed „structures of feeling,“ which reflected an entire generation of participants' shared experience of the remarkable events of that year and their aftermath. For this reason, we must reject retrospective pessimism and recognize 1968 as a truly generative political moment.

The conference's first panel „Beyond the Single Issue“ was opened by CRAIG GRIFFITHS (Manchester Metropolitan University), who detailed the multidimensionality of the gay liberation movement in 1970s West Germany. Focusing especially on the *Tuntenstreit*, or „Queen's Dispute“ Griffiths showed that activists of the gay movement understood the plight of homosexuals to be but one manifestation of oppression within a wider system of structural injustice, symptomatic of a capitalist order. While there existed a variety of conflicting perspectives within the movement concerning strategy and priorities, these holistic diagnoses connected the gay liberation movement to many other emancipatory projects within the left-alternative spectrum of the time. Next, SUSAN COLBOURN (Yale University, New Haven) offered an overview of various anti-nuclear campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s and explored responses to these challenges within NATO policy circles. Situating German opposition to nuclear weapons within a transnational framework, Colbourn showed that anti-nuclear sentiment found expression within a diverse array of political currents on both sides of the Atlantic, challenging the tenability of nuclear expansion. The broad-based nature of anti-nuclear activism rendered it inscrutable to contemporary policymakers and social scientists alike, who interpreted this sentiment as a

generational phenomenon. In a third paper exploring collaborations between West German Maoists and African decolonial movements, DAVID SPREEN (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) stressed the transnational dimensions of post-1968 activism. Focusing on West German support for the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Spreen disputed widely-held perceptions of West German Maoists as one-dimensional dogmatists. In their interactions with the ZANU, they rather demonstrated an unmistakable willingness to defer to the authority of their African allies because they understood such self-assertion to be conducive to the goal of fomenting revolution on a global scale.

To open the second panel „All Politics is Glocal“ ADAM SEIPP (Texas A&M University, College Station) explored the West German „anti-militarization“ movement, which campaigned against foreign and especially American military presence on German soil. The disruptive nature of the NATO military presence and the growth of the West German environmental movement combined to inspire popular hostility that contested the system of incomplete, „modulated sovereignty“ that Germans had experienced since 1945. Even though the subsumption of anti-militarization activism under other, related campaigns against NATO prevented it from gaining sufficient political space to jeopardize NATO's presence in West Germany, it nonetheless forced NATO commanders to curb certain intrusive practices. Next, FÉLIX JIMÉNEZ BOTTA (Boston College) considered how interactions between Latin Americans and West German solidarity activists aided the latter in preserving an oppositional and unassimilable politics within the discourse of human rights. Once the language of human rights was appropriated by elements hostile to transformative visions of social change (such as that championed by the Nicaraguan Sandinistas), left-wing solidarity activists redefined their operative conception of human rights accordingly. Contrary to a growing scholarly consensus, Jiménez Botta showed that the deployment of the human rights discourse in no way necessitated an abandonment of redistributive or revolutionary projects. A third paper by PAVLA

VESELÁ (University of Prague) highlighted the transnational connections of left opposition groups in Czechoslovakia before and after the Czechoslovak Spring. Focusing on groups like the Revolutionary Youth Movement, which drew intellectual inspiration from various strains of global Marxist thought and became the object of transnational protest demonstrations following a regime crack-down on its members, Veselá charted the legacy of such elements within Czechoslovak society, demonstrating that their persistent if muted political engagement defied Cold War binaries throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

A third panel „Identities and the Self after 1968“ began with a paper from FRIEDERIKE BRÜHÖFENER (University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley, McAllen), whose contribution explored how changing notions of gender, emotions, and selfhood strengthened an emerging culture of peace in West Germany after 1968. Brühöfener showed that activists of the women's, peace, and ecological movements sought to challenge oppressive masculinity incubated in toxic institutions like the *Bundeswehr*, which they viewed as the source of an atmosphere of detached rationality that made the Cold War possible. By cultivating new spaces in politics for emotion, such as fear of nuclear annihilation, activists endeavored to promote intimacy and refashion masculinity in ways that might redeem society in general. In a second paper, DAVID TEMPLIN (University of Osnabrück) investigated the significance of principles of self-organization and grassroots democracy among West German leftist groups after 1968. Within the *Lehrlingsbewegung* and *Jugendzentrumsbewegung* –Templin argued – self-organization was at the same time a slogan of struggle, a new mode of organization, and a new method of governance, aimed at transforming structures of West German society they deemed authoritarian. However, due to the persistence of materialist commitments evident in these movements, Templin proposed that social scientific schemas, positing a distinction between „old“ and „new“ social movements on this basis, obscure meaningful continuities across the 1968 divide. A final paper by FREIA ANDERS (University of Mainz) explored connections between the extreme vio-

lence of the Vietnam War and violent protests in opposition to it by various West German communist and spontaneist groups. Emphasizing the roles played by migrant laborers and the protests' ties to other solidarity movements and liberation struggles, Anders rejected diachronic explanations positing a link between West German antiwar protest and the German national past; instead she advocated for a synchronic explanation based on contemporary moral outrage. Hardly an aberration, Anders argued, these West German protests should be contextualized within worldwide networks and cross-movement mobilizations that emerged prior to 1968 and continued long afterwards.

In a second keynote lecture INGRID GILCHER-HOLTEY (University of Bielefeld) argued that the redefinition of the role of intellectuals within the political arena constitutes a vital legacy of 1968 that has not yet been fully appreciated. Gilcher-Holtey began by sketching a critique that emerged in the course of 1968 of what she terms the „classical“ or „universal“ intellectual. To this end, she juxtaposed political engagement by leading intellectuals, such as Jean Paul Sartre, who – as she argued – commented ineffectually from the sidelines of the events of that year, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who suspended detached intellectual pursuits to involve himself more directly. The new intellectual that emerged from 1968 pursued enlightenment for the sake of action, became a „fellow fighter“ in a collective struggle, renounced the possibility of influencing consciousness from outside or above the movement, and eschewed charismatic leadership. This new intellectual was defined as „specific intellectual“ by Michel Foucault – a mediator of knowledge with the task of interpreting power systems of the rulers for the ruled. For Gilcher-Holtey, the lasting fruit of this legacy is best exemplified by present-day activist-intellectual Naomi Klein.

The fourth and final panel of the conference „Hopes, Goals, and New Understandings of Change“ began with JULIA AULT (University of Utah), whose paper rejected attempts to examine East German social movements through the lens of New Social Movement scholarship based on western cases. En-

couraged by the similarly grassroots nature of these movements, by the transnational connections forged with western partners in the course of them, and by scholars' tendency to think in terms of a teleological pull towards 1989, these analyses, Ault argued, fail to appreciate the local, contextually specific factors that provided the impetus for action and informed the shape of movements in East Germany. In a second paper, BERNHARD GOTTO (Institute for Contemporary History, Munich) proposed dispensing with the generational paradigm as a framework for understanding the evolution of the West German women's movement after 1968. In its place, he advanced a model treating variation in attitudes as a product of individual movement experiences. Identifying emotions tied to anxieties over the trajectory and ultimate fate of the movement as an experience encompassing women of all generations, Gotto interpreted debates in which emotions manifested in various movement forums as evidence of a search for common ground on which a collectively meaningful political project might be articulated. A third paper by MICHAEL HUGHES (Wake Forest University) explored evolving concepts of democracy in West Germany after 1968. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, disagreements between activists and their parliamentary antagonists appeared to revolve around whether an expansion of, or curbing upon, democratic citizenship best served the aim of avoiding a tragic repeat of the national past. Hughes showed that, while the citizen activism of these years yielded an outcome that neither the more radical elements of West German social movements nor the architects of the *Grundgesetz* could fully embrace, it did lead to a new and more expansive norm of political citizenship.

Keynote speakers Geoff Eley and Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey were joined by BELINDA DAVIS (Rutgers University, New Brunswick) in a concluding roundtable discussion. Reflecting upon conclusions reached over the course of the conference, participants agreed that the decades after 1968 witnessed the emergence of an enlarged concept of democracy and a lasting expansion of the concept of the political. This expansion was not limited to a penetration by politics into new, post-

material realms of human activity. A spatial expansion of politics outward was evidenced by its more regular transcendence of national and also geopolitical boundaries, which created conditions for the rise of a universal language of liberation that reflected an awareness of the growing interdependence and portability of localized struggles. At the same time, as suggested by the slogan „the personal is political,“ the decades after 1968 also witnessed the migration of politics inward. Yet rather than signaling a solipsistic retreat from, or narrowing of, politics, this constituted political evolution. Redefined as an intersubjective pursuit, politics after 1968 entailed a new imperative of self-cultivation: one had to learn to live differently.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Address I

Geoff Eley (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor): Leaving the Borderlands... but for Where? 1968 and the New Registers of Political Feeling

Panel 1: Beyond the Single Issue

Craig Griffiths (Manchester Metropolitan University): The Gay Movement in 1970s West Germany: Liberation in Its Multi-Dimensional Context

Susan Colbourn (Yale University, New Haven): Evangelicals, Environmentalists, and the Euromissiles: Anti-Nuclear Activism in the Late Cold War

David Spreen (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor): No Retreat to 'Single-Issue' Politics: West German Maoists and the Zimbabwe African National Union

Comment: Temma Kaplan (Rutgers University, New Brunswick)

Panel 2: All Politics is Global

Adam Seipp (Texas A&M University, College Station): 'One does not casually run over trees in Germany': Social Movements and the U.S. Military, 1975-1989

Félix Jiménez Botta (Boston College): Between Solidarity and Human Rights: West German Activists and Latin America's Cold War, 1973-1990

Pavla Veselá (University of Prague): From the Local to the Global and Back: Remarks on the Czechoslovak Radical Left after August 1968

Comment: Stephen Milder (University of Groningen)

Panel 3: Identities and the Self after 1968

Friederike Brühöfener (University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley, McAllen): The Self, Emotions, and Gender in West German Social Movements

David Templin (University of Osnabrück): Initiative Groups and the Paradigms of Self-Organization and Grass-Roots Democracy in 1970s Germany

Freia Anders (University of Mainz): Between Protest and Belligerency: The West German Militant Left and the Vietnam War during the Early 1970s

Comment: Anna von der Goltz (Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.)

Keynote Address II

Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (Bielefeld University): New Social Movements and the Role of the Intellectual, 1970s to 2000s

Panel 4: Hopes, Goals, and New Understandings of Change

Julia Ault (University of Utah): Environmental Activism in East Germany: A Local and Transnational Movement under Communism, 1975-1989

Bernhard Gotto (Institute for Contemporary History, Munich): The Best Thing that Remained of 1968? Experiences of Protest and Expectations of Change in the West German Women's Movement during the 1970s and 1980s

Michael Hughes (Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem): Conceptions of Democracy and West German NSM Activism

Comment: Belinda Davis (Rutgers University, New Brunswick)

Roundtable Discussion

Belinda Davis (Rutgers University, New Brunswick) / Geoff Eley (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) / Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (University of Bielefeld): Looking Back into

the Future: Post-'68 and a Longer Historical
View

Tagungsbericht *Social Movements af-
ter '68: Germany, Europe, and Beyond*.
07.11.2018–09.11.2018, New Brunswick,
in: H-Soz-Kult 11.03.2019.