

## ► ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

1. The 5th anniversary of American Voices Abroad Berlin was celebrated at ISABEL COLE's house on February 15.

ISABEL wrote: "Just about 5 years ago, two groups of antiwar Americans marching from opposite ends of Berlin's biggest Iraq demonstration on February 15, 2003 got wind of each other and arranged to meet in the middle. Needless to say, this proved to be an impossible endeavor in the crowd of 500,000 people - but find each other we did, if not that afternoon. And here we are today.

While the impending 5th anniversary of the start of this senseless war is profoundly sobering, we would like to take an evening to celebrate our 5 years of activism. Friendships have formed, minds have been broadened, barricades have been stormed, balloon permits have been obtained, the dogs of peace have been loosed... And the "radically" critical positions which we have held all these years have come to dominate the mainstream. That, at least, is some cause for celebration.

Mostly, though, I'd like to celebrate the people of AVA - Berlin, their dedication, their wonderful ideas and strong opinions. So whether you're an AVAer "der ersten Stunde", or a newcomer who's been waiting for a good chance to get to know us better."

2. DAVID MACBRYDE continues as mailing list administrator. Contact DAVID at [davidmacbryde@web.de](mailto:davidmacbryde@web.de) to make any changes in your address or to add someone to the mailing list. He is also the person to contact if you would like to announce something that you are publishing, performing or exhibiting.

3. KAREN AXELRAD has continued to photograph AVA Berlin events. For examples, see [http://www.pbase.com/karenaxe/ava\\_berlin](http://www.pbase.com/karenaxe/ava_berlin) for photos of our annual meeting in December 2007. Karen's exhibition at Amerika Haus, *American Protest*, featured photos going back to our 2003 filibuster at the Brandenburg Gate. At the time we called ourselves Americans Against the War: [http://www.pbase.com/karenaxe/american\\_protest](http://www.pbase.com/karenaxe/american_protest).

4. AARON RICHARDSON, who has been our webmaster since we set up the site several years ago, has returned to the U.S. JON WOLFE is now our new webmaster, with layout responsibilities being shared by Karen Axelrad.

5. Thanks to KAREN AXELRAD and ANN WERTHEIMER we have a newly revised leaflet.

6. ANN WERTHEIMER continues as liaison to the United for Peace and Justice coalition, which we joined in 2006.

7. The dues for full membership with voting rights is still €30 per year, or a self-assessed smaller amount if necessary. Details in the treasurer's report.

8. The question of a name change for AVA Berlin arose in various contexts several times this past year. The pros and cons of a change were discussed informally, most recently on November 16 at Isabel Cole's Sunday brunch. Then the entire AVA-Berlin list received a letter on November 23 asking for suggestions. There will be a final discussion and a vote on this question at the annual business meeting on December 7.

## ► LETTERS WRITTEN AND PETITIONS SIGNED BY AVA BERLIN

1. In July, AVA Berlin sent out this open letter to Sen. Obama on Iran for all to sign using the American Voices Abroad affiliation after their name. The letter was originally signed by Phyllis Bennis, Noam Chomsky, John Feffer, Bill Fletcher Jr., Tom Hayden, Doug Ireland, Nikki Keddie, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Manning Marable, Katha Pollitt, Matthew Rothschild, Meredith Tax, Cornel West, and Stephen Zunes. Other signers include Medea Benjamin, Marjorie Cohn, Carl Davidson, Martin Duberman, Chris Hedges, Jan Kavan, Paul Lauter, Ray McGovern, Deborah Meier, Micah Sifry, Norman Solomon, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow.

Dear Senator Obama,

We the undersigned may have different views on U.S. foreign policy with respect to Iran. We all, however, are deeply concerned about the stories in the press in the past few weeks suggesting that the Bush administration might be considering a military strike on Iran, that it might give a green light to such an attack by Israel, or that it might engage in other acts of war, such as imposing a blockade against Iran.

We welcomed your stand against the war on Iraq in 2002. And we were encouraged by your early campaign statements emphasizing diplomacy over military action against Iran. Today, you have an opportunity to forestall a repeat of the tragic Iraq war. We hope you will use that opportunity.

We agree with the conclusion of Muhammed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, that "A military strike ... would be worse than anything possible. It would turn the region into a fireball..." A military attack, he said, "will mean that Iran, if it is not already making nuclear weapons, will launch a crash course to build nuclear weapons with the blessing of all Iranians, even those in the West." (Reuters, June 20, 2008.)

We don't know, of course, whether an attack on Iran is in fact being considered, or if there are serious plans to initiate other acts of war, such as a blockade of the country. But we call on you to issue a public statement warning of the grave dangers that any of these actions would entail, and pointing out how inappropriate and undemocratic it would be for the Bush administration to undertake them, or encourage Israel to do so, in its closing months in office.

An attack on Iran would violate the UN Charter's prohibition against the use or threat of force and the Congress's authority to declare war. Moreover, the public right to decide should not be foreclosed by last-minute actions of the Bush administration, which will set U.S. policy in stone now.

We were heartened by your earlier comments suggesting that an Obama administration would act on the understanding that genuine security requires a willingness to talk without preconditions (something Iran has offered several times to no avail), and that threats and military action are counterproductive. We hope you will follow through on these commitments once in office, but also that you will speak out now against any acts of war by the Bush administration.

## 2. Here is our press release regarding Sen. Obama's speech at the Siegessäule:

American Voices Abroad Berlin, eine nicht parteigebundene Organisation, die seit fünf Jahren gegen die Bush-Politik protestiert, begrüßt die Absicht des Senators Barack Obama, Berlin zu besuchen. Sein Vorhaben ist geeignet, die guten Beziehungen, die die meisten US-Amerikaner/innen hierzulande tagtäglich erleben, in die zwischenstaatliche Ebene hineinzutragen, wo sie in den letzten Jahren eher gefehlt haben.

Falls die Stadt Berlin und der Bezirk Mitte es genehmigen, wäre ein Auftritt am Brandenburger Tor für uns alle eine große Ehre. Es wäre kein Wahlkampfauftritt, sondern ein Zeichen des Engagements eines prominenten US-Parlamentariers, um die internationalen Beziehungen zu verbessern. Wie die Berliner insgesamt wollen wir Obama hier hören.

## 3. On August 21, we sent this open letter (taken from *The Nation* magazine) calling on Sen. Obama to stand firm on the principles he so compellingly articulated in the primary campaign. We hope that many AVAers signed.

Dear Senator Obama,

We write to congratulate you on the tremendous achievements of your campaign for the presidency of the United States.

Your candidacy has inspired a wave of political enthusiasm like nothing seen in this country for decades. In your speeches, you have sketched out a vision of a better future--in which the United States sheds its warlike stance around the globe and focuses on diplomacy abroad and greater equality and freedom for its citizens at home--that has thrilled voters across the political spectrum. Hundreds of thousands of young people have entered the political process for the first time, African-American voters have rallied behind you, and many of those alienated from politics-as-usual have been re-engaged.

You stand today at the head of a movement that believes deeply in the change you have claimed as the mantle of your campaign. The millions who attend your rallies, donate to your campaign and visit your website are a powerful testament to this new movement's energy and passion.

This movement is vital for two reasons: First, it will help assure your victory against John McCain in November. The long night of greed and military adventurism under the Bush Administration, which a McCain administration would continue, cannot be brought to an end a day too soon. An enthusiastic corps of volunteers and organizers will ensure that voters turn out to close the book on the Bush era on election day. Second, having helped bring you the White House, the support of this movement will make possible the changes that have been the platform of your campaign. Only a grassroots base as broad and as energized as the one that is behind you can counteract the forces of money and established power that are a dead weight on those seeking real change in American politics.

We urge you, then, to listen to the voices of the people who can lift you to the presidency and beyond. Since your historic victory in the primary, there have been troubling signs that you are moving away from the core commitments shared by many who have supported your campaign, toward a more cautious and centrist stance--including, most notably, your vote for the FISA legislation granting telecom companies immunity from prosecution for illegal wiretapping, which angered and dismayed so many of your supporters.

We recognize that compromise is necessary in any democracy. We understand that the pressures brought to bear on those seeking the highest office are intense. But retreating from the stands that have been the signature of your campaign will weaken the movement whose vigorous backing you need in order to win and then deliver the change you have promised.

Here are key positions you have embraced that we believe are essential to sustaining this movement:

§ Withdrawal from Iraq on a fixed timetable.

§ A response to the current economic crisis that reduces the gap between the rich and the rest of us through a more progressive financial and welfare system; public investment to create jobs and repair the country's collapsing infrastructure; fair trade policies; restoration of the freedom to organize unions; and meaningful

government enforcement of labor laws and regulation of industry.

§ Universal healthcare.

§ An environmental policy that transforms the economy by shifting billions of dollars from the consumption of fossil fuels to alternative energy sources, creating millions of green jobs.

§ An end to the regime of torture, abuse of civil liberties and unchecked executive power that has flourished in the Bush era.

§ A commitment to the rights of women, including the right to choose abortion and improved access to abortion and reproductive health services.

§ A commitment to improving conditions in urban communities and ending racial inequality, including disparities in education through reform of the No Child Left Behind Act and other measures.

§ An immigration system that treats humanely those attempting to enter the country and provides a path to citizenship for those already here.

§ Reform of the drug laws that incarcerate hundreds of thousands who need help, not jail.

§ Reform of the political process that reduces the influence of money and corporate lobbyists and amplifies the voices of ordinary people.

These are the changes we can believe in. In other areas--such as the use of residual forces and mercenary troops in Iraq, the escalation of the US military presence in Afghanistan, the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the death penalty--your stated positions have consistently varied from the positions held by many of us, the "friends on the left" you addressed in recent remarks. If you win in November, we will work to support your stands when we agree with you and to challenge them when we don't. We look forward to an ongoing and constructive dialogue with you when you are elected President.

Stand firm on the principles you have so compellingly articulated, and you may succeed in bringing this country the change you've encouraged us to believe is possible.

4. In September, Bobby Kennedy Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson and Greg Palast invited organizations like ours to co-sponsor their voter guide, "Steal Back Your Vote." "Steal Back Your Vote" lays out the Six Ways They're Stealing the Election - and the Seven Ways you can Steal It Back. It's a 24-page downloadable graphic guide - an investigative comic book. It's non-partisan, it's humorous, it's harrowing and it's helpful. And here it is: <http://www.stealbackyourvote.org/> The guide was also published in the October 27 issue of *The Nation*.

5. After the elections, AVA Berlin signed the following petition as formulated by People for the American Way:

Dear President-elect Obama:

I urge you to uphold your commitments to restore constitutional rights and the rule of law. The Bush administration has run roughshod over Americans' civil liberties and its intelligence policies must be reversed, not continued.

The change you were elected to bring must include adherence to our core constitutional values: NO MORE torture... NO MORE domestic spying that violates Americans' rights... NO MORE excessive government secrecy... NO MORE gross violations of due process and habeas corpus. □□

## ► OTHER PEOPLE'S PROJECTS THAT AVA BERLIN SUPPORTED

1. AVA Berlin was happy to publicize the Democrats Abroad Global Presidential Primary at the beginning of February.

2. We are always pleased to publicize the activities of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung and the Green Party here in Berlin. Events included the Christoph von Marschall lecture (“Wer ist Barack Obama?”) in the Galerie of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung on January 21 and the Grüner Friedenskongress on March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>.

3. AVA Berlin is always pleased to announced English-language events around the city, especially those at the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, the American Academy at Wannsee, and the Heinrich Böll Forum in Mitte.

4. AVA Berlin was asked to help with the Iraq Conference: Alternatives to War and Occupation. We were able to supply interpreters for all the events. Thank you PHIL HILL and ISABEL COLE.

5. AVA Berlin supported the Winter Soldier event on March 14 and 15, sponsored in Berlin (at the Babylon movie theater in Mitte) by the Stop the War Brigade and Iraq Veterans Against the War.

## ► OUR OWN AVA BERLIN PROJECTS

1. On December 16, AVAers were invited to PAM SELWYN’S house to ‘meet and greet’ AGUSTIN AGUAYO, the conscientious objector whom AVA Berlin has been supporting. We also hosted Augie’s friend JOHN WAYNE (!), who is writing a book on conscientious objection.

AGUSTIN was on his way to Stuttgart to receive the Stuttgarter Friedenspreis (€5000) awarded by “Die AnStifter.” “Mit dem Stuttgarter Friedenspreis der AnStifter anerkennen die Stifterinnen und Stifter Zivilcourage und das besondere Engagement für Frieden, Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit.”

In June, we received a lovely letter from Augie, who writes that he and his wife Helga are devoting their time to

"helping those in similar situations. Almost every day we get calls from desperate soldiers and their families. Many have realized that they, too, are Conscientious Objectors and cannot kill."

Augie and Helga are also reaching out "to young people who are thinking about enlisting and those targeted by military recruiters. This year we are determined to see at least 10,000 teenagers and young adults and provide them with the information that will help them make informed decisions. (We have seen nearly 5,000 this year already — YOU can help us reach our goal of 10,000!) Our mission is to provide young people with an alternative and realistic point of view about military enlistment, and to show them the power of living with conscience. Our message helps young people understand that they don't have to join the military to learn valuable skills, find adventure, pay for college, or serve others."

The executive committee of American Voices Abroad Berlin donated \$100 from its modest treasury to help Augie and Helga continue their work.

## 2. American Voices Abroad Berlin is old enough to have a daughter, our lovely Cafe Americain – a Political Salon!

Cafe Americain is an experiment. We hope to create a political forum which is more structured than a Stammtisch (with themed events, invited speakers, etc.), yet more open and informal than typical speaker events; which enables people to find others on their wavelength while engaging in civil discussion with those not on their wavelength; which promotes the exchange of ideas and information, bringing people together to sow the seeds of new political initiatives, yet is free from organizational pressures.

Our aim is to promote political discussion that gets beyond the rhetoric – be it the rhetoric of the Bush regime, of party politics, or of activism itself! All too often, the pressure to take sides on complex issues leads to dogmatic, divisive discussions which “create more heat than light” and, sadly, causes many concerned people to simply tune out.

We aim to examine US and international political issues in depth and from unexpected perspectives, as well as exploring the border zones between politics and other spheres such as art, science, literature or philosophy – as in our first event with artist Robbie Conal. We welcome suggestions for themes, events and other activities, but ultimately take personal responsibility for shaping the program. We are open to speakers representing all sorts of political views and approaches within the oppositional spectrum, provided that they are interested in substantive and critical discussion. We will not allow the salon to become dominated by any one agenda or initiative, partisan or otherwise, however laudable.

Ideally, Cafe Americain will be a place to challenge ourselves and others, combat the knee-jerk factor, learn from each other and enjoy each other’s company despite (or because of) our differences in opinion!

Ultimately, this salon will be no better or worse than its interpersonal dynamics. Thus, while we welcome strong opinions, the gamut of political positions from stodgy to radical, and healthy doses of (constructive) criticism, we will not tolerate disruptive, harassing or otherwise egregiously uncivil behavior and reserve the right to exclude offending individuals. It goes without saying that we will not tolerate hate speech or statements inciting violence.

Why “Cafe Americain”? That's the "gin joint" Humphrey Bogart runs in Casablanca – with all its associations of heroism, romance, exile, political intrigue, and idealism turned to cynicism turned to idealism!

This year, starting in mid-March, Cafe Americain began its Civics 101: Reading and Interpreting the U.S. Constitution. Join up simply by coming to St. George’s bookstore every other week at Wörtherstr. 27 in Prenzlauer Berg. Check the website for the course at <http://cafe-amicain.org/>.

## 3. Last year, on April 13, 2007, in anticipation of the presidential elections in France, AVA Berlin met with representatives of the ASSOCIATION DEMOCRATIQUE DES FRANCAIS A L’ETRANGER (ADFE) at Leonhardt's restaurant at Stuttgarter Platz. Our friends from ADFE Berlin, which is the Berlin section of a non-partisan but left of center group of French citizens living outside of France, told us about their group, gave us their opinions of the French political parties, the candidates, and what it all means for France, for Europe, and for the rest of the world. This year, on October 31, we were able to reciprocate.

ADFE invited us to Café Brel at Savigny Platz 1 in Charlottenburg to discuss the upcoming US elections, the electoral system, and our prognoses and hopes. The language for the evening was German. About 45 people – half from AVA Berlin and half from ADFE – were present. ANN WERTHEIMER explained the electoral system, questioning from ADFE was lively and many AVAers joined in the discussion. A not fully serious German glossary to help explain the electoral system, prepared by ANN WERTHEIMER and JERRY GERBER, was distributed and is available on our website.

## ► OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. The STAMMTISCH took place on all first Thursdays at BARCOMI'S, Sophienstrasse 21 in Mitte at 8 pm. We thank CYNTHIA BARCOMI and her staff for their hospitality!

2. While voter registration in Berlin is usually handled by the Democrats Abroad, AVA Berlin is especially happy to help out with venues that require non-partisanship. We thank ALAN BENSON for his organizing efforts as well as the many people on his voter registration team. The two organizations registered over 1000 Americans in Berlin for the 2008 elections.

### 3. Your ECONOMIC STIMULUS CHECK and HOW TO SPEND IT

IF YOU RECEIVED A STIMULUS REBATE, PRESIDENT BUSH IS NOW EXPECTING YOU TO GO ON A SHOPPING SPREE. But you can fool him! Of course, if you have outstanding dollar IOUs, pay them off. And, if necessary, buy those made-in-Vermont socks and have them sent as a birthday present directly to your cousin. It might stimulate the U.S. economy.

But otherwise, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED DONATING TO THE ORGANIZATIONS OF YOUR CHOICE, WHICH ARE SURELY NOT THOSE THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD CHOOSE? This might be a real stimulus! You can think about who should get more or less, or simply donate the same amount to several. If you are unfamiliar with U.S. organizations that might suit you and your philosophy of giving, here are a few suggestions, just eight among many.

These are, of course, only my personal choices. I would be interested in hearing about yours. Write me at [wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de).

Ann Wertheimer, Chair, American Voices Abroad Berlin

a. The American Civil Liberties Union [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org) The ACLU is nonprofit and nonpartisan and has grown from a roomful of civil liberties activists to an organization of more than 500,000 members and supporters. It handles nearly 6,000 court cases annually from its offices in almost every state. The ACLU has maintained the position that civil liberties must be respected, even in times of national emergency.

b. United for Peace and Justice [www.ufpj.org](http://www.ufpj.org) UFPJ is a coalition of more than 1400 local and national groups throughout the United States who have joined together to protest the immoral and disastrous Iraq War and oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building. American Voices Abroad Berlin is a member group of UFPJ.

c. The Southern Poverty Law Center [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org) The Southern Poverty Law Center was founded in 1971 as a small civil rights law firm. Today, SPLC is internationally known for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against white supremacists and its tracking of hate groups.

d. EMILY's List [www.emilyslist.org](http://www.emilyslist.org) EMILY's List members are dedicated to building a progressive America by electing pro-choice Democratic women to office. EMILY's List has a three-pronged strategy for victory: recruit and fund pro-choice Democratic women candidates; help them build and run effective campaigns; and, mobilize women voters to help elect progressive candidates across the nation. EMILY stands for Early Money Is Like Yeast!

e. J Street [www.jstreet.org](http://www.jstreet.org) There is no actual J Street in Washington, but there should be! (K Street, as you may remember, is the street of lobbyists.) The organization called J Street was founded in 2008 to support a new direction for American policy in the Middle East as well as a broad public and policy debate about the U.S. role in the region. J Street supports diplomatic solutions over military ones, including in Iran; multilateral over unilateral approaches to conflict resolution; and dialogue over confrontation with a wide range of countries and actors when conflicts do arise. J Street will advocate forcefully in the policy process, in Congress, in the media, and in the Jewish community to make sure public officials and community leaders clearly see the depth and breadth of support for our views on Middle East policy among voters and supporters in their states and districts.

f. TruthOut [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org) TruthOut is a full-service news agency, started in direct response to the mainstream media's coverage of the 2000 election, dedicated to establishing a powerful, stable voice for independent journalism. The core of its mission is educational, as it believes the biggest impediment to responsible decision-making is a lack of information. It provides citizens with reader-supported news instead of advertiser-supported news. Its direction is one of social progress, as it attempts to shed light on issues of vital interest to the community such as health care, the environment, international relations and human rights.

TruthOut scours the global news media for the most important stories it can find. It covers national issues concerning foreign policy, the war in Iraq, ethics in government, voter rights, human rights and the judiciary. It features unique coverage of health, energy, environmental, labor and women's issues. It alerts its readers to pivotal opinion pieces appearing in major newspapers and journals and emails free newsletters to its subscribers featuring the day's top stories.

g. National Public Radio [www.npr.org/worldwide/berlin](http://www.npr.org/worldwide/berlin) NPR Berlin broadcasts in Berlin at 104.1 FM (UKW). NPR is a privately supported, not-for-profit membership organization. You can see the station's weekly program schedule for Berlin at: <http://www.npr.org/worldwide/nprworldwide.html>

There does not seem to be a way to donate to NPR Berlin directly. But if you are a fan of a particular program (for example, The Diane Rehm Show – WAMU or Fresh Air with Terry Gross – WHYI), what about donating to that station. Or donate to the station that broadcasts in your hometown.

h. Agustin Aguayo Defense [www.aguayodefense.org](http://www.aguayodefense.org) Agustin Aguayo is the conscientious objector who received the Stuttgarter Friedenspreis awarded by the AnStifter. Some of you may have met Augie at an American Voices Abroad Berlin reception held in his honor at Pam Selwyn's house last year. See XX above.

Augie writes that he and his wife Helga are devoting their time "to young people who are thinking about enlisting and those targeted by military recruiters. This year we are determined to see at least 10,000 teenagers and young adults and provide them with the information that will help them make informed decisions. (We have seen nearly 5,000 this year already — YOU can help us reach our goal of 10,000!) Our mission is to provide young people with an alternative and realistic point of view about military enlistment, and to show them the power of living with conscience. Our message helps young people understand that they don't have to join the military to learn valuable skills, find adventure, pay for college, or serve others."

4. We have kept up our contact with BridgeBuildersBerlin via DAVID KNUTSON. BridgeBuilders was instrumental in bringing National Public Radio (NPR, UKW 104.1) to Berlin, for which we are all eternally grateful. At the moment, BridgeBuilders is one of the organizations working to save the Berlin Amerika Haus.

5. DEMOCRATS ABROAD BERLIN is the unofficial name of the Berlin Chapter of Democrats Abroad Germany, the official section of the Democratic Party Committee Abroad in Berlin. We are happy to work with the Dems and with their local chair, MICHAEL STELZER when occasions arise, and we are happy to publicize their events.