



DECEMBER 2011

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

◆ Last year, our annual business meeting was held on December 5, 2010, at La Parrilla at Albrecht Str. 11, 10117 Berlin. <http://www.la-parrilla.de>. The past year was reviewed, executive committee officers were elected for 2011, and plans were made for the coming year. The officers are: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair), PAM SELWYN (vice chair), DAVID MACBRYDE (secretary), ALAN BENSON (treasurer), JANE HARTMANN-ZEILBERGER (assistant treasurer), ISABEL COLE and PHIL HILL (associates).

◆ DAVID MACBRYDE continued as mailing list administrator. Contact DAVID to make any changes in your address or to add someone to the mailing list. davidmacbryde@web.de He is also the person to contact if you would like to announce something that you are publishing, performing or exhibiting.

◆ JON WOLFE continued as our web master. Check the web site to see our new, improved layout: www.avaberlin.org. JON works completely behind the scenes as good web masters do. He deserves all of our thanks.

◆ KAREN AXELRAD continued to photograph, and now to film, AVA-Berlin events. And thanks to KAREN we always have an up-to-date information leaflet. Please see KAREN's links throughout this report. KAREN also improved our logo so that we could have it printed on a new banner: see <http://flic.kr/p/9ttcKx>

◆ ANN WERTHEIMER continues as liaison to the United for Peace and Justice coalition, which we joined in 2006. As a local group with no employees, AVA-Berlin pays \$50 dues a year to UfPJ. See www.unitedforpeace.org for details.

◆ The dues for full membership with voting rights in AVA-Berlin are €30 per year, or a self-assessed smaller

amount if necessary. Check our web site for details.

◆ American Voices Abroad Berlin now has a Facebook page thanks to FLORIAN SCHIEDHELM. Please consider becoming a fan of AVA-Berlin on Facebook. We'll be updating our Facebook page with links to events, articles, petitions, etc. of interest to our membership. www.facebook.com/AmericanVoicesAbroadBerlin

◆ Thanks to KAREN AXELRAD, we also have a Twitter account. Please follow us on twitter: http://twitter.com/AVA_Berlin.

◆ Our Stammtisch on the first Thursday of every month at the Seerose, Mehringdamm 47 in Kreuzberg. www.seerose-berlin.de

◆ Our spin-off Ava's Transatlantic Green Salon has blossomed. See OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS below: www.avasgreensalon.wordpress.com

LETTERS WRITTEN AND PETITIONS SIGNED BY AVA-BERLIN

◆ In mid-February, efforts to re-name a central square in Berlin provoked this letter from AVA Berlin (written by Phil Hill):

An: *Die Bezirksverordnetenversammlung
Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf von Berlin
Die Fraktion der CDU in der BVV Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf*

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren:

Die CDU-Fraktion stellt laut Presseberichte in der BVV den Antrag, den Joachimstaler Platz in „Ronald-Reagan-Platz“ umzubenennen. Als in Berlin lebende US-Amerikaner/innen bitten wir Sie dringlichst, dieses Anliegen fallen zu lassen bzw. nicht zu entsprechen.

Die CDU-Fraktion erwähnt zwar die Frage auf ihrer Homepage mit keinem Wort, aus der kurzen Begründung des Antrags ist aber zu entnehmen, dass die Rede, die der damalige US-Präsident 1987 vor dem Brandenburger Tor hielt, in dem er den Staatschef der Sowjetunion Gorbatschow aufforderte, „dieses Tor aufzumachen, diese Mauer abzureißen“, ihm zu einer solchen Ehre berechtige: Sie habe die „Diskussion um die Beseitigung der Berliner Mauer wieder belebt und die damalige Sowjetunion auf ihre Verantwortung für die deutsche Teilung aufmerksam gemacht.“

So richtig die Forderung, sie war weder besonders originell noch wirksam: Weder war die Mauer von der Öffentlichkeit akzeptiert worden – jede/r Mauertote rief Empörung hervor! – noch hatten die Sowjets die Sache einfach vergessen. Nicht wegen dieses Stücks Kalter-Kriegs-Rhetorik, sondern aus eigenem Reformwillen und dem Wunsch, ein friedliches Zusammenleben in Europa zu ermöglichen, hat Gorbatschow die Maßnahmen eingeleitet, die zum Fall der Mauer führten. Gorbatschow, nicht Reagan, gebührt die Ehre. Auch die Menschen in der DDR, die letztlich die Mauer aufmachten, sind nicht erst durch Reagan auf diese Idee gekommen.

Im Gegenteil: Reagan hatte in den vorausgegangenen Jahren alles getan, um eben diese friedliche Annäherung unmöglich zu machen, v.a. mit der Raketenstationierung in Westdeutschland. Hätte die Sowjetunion so regiert wie gehabt, der Kalte Krieg wäre wieder in die Minusgrade gerutscht, stattdessen hat der neue, besonnene Staatschef in Moskau nicht wegen sondern trotz der Handlung seines Gegenübers den Frieden eingeleitet. Das haben die Menschen hierzulande auch damals verstanden: Gorbatschow wurde bei Deutschlandbesuchen – West wie Ost – behandelt wie ein Rockstar, Reagan musste seine Rede vor ausgesuchtem Publikum halten.

Doch eins hat Reagan für Deutschland getan: Nach einem Jahrhundert der Konkurrenz zwischen diesen beiden technologischen Spitzenindustrieländern hat die USA unter seiner Ägide das Handtuch geworfen und Deutschland das Feld überlassen, die USA desindustrialisierte sich und wurde zum „Finanzplatz“ – mit den inzwischen bekannten Folgen. Deutschland geht es, dank Reagan ohne Konkurrenz, ganz gut, uns weniger. Wenn also eine Ehrung, dann

bitte mit dieser ehrlichen Begründung.

◆ At the beginning of March, DALLAS SELLS and CAROLYN PRESCOTT composed this solidarity letter on behalf of AVA-Berlin. (At the March 3 Stammtisch we took a photo to go with the letter, both to be sent to the U.S. See KAREN AXELRAD's photo here: <http://flic.kr/p/9pZsDL>.)

The current war on public sector workers and their unions now taking place in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and a growing number of other states is not about fiscal responsibility, financial prudence, or balancing budgets. Indeed, as public sector workers in Wisconsin have already agreed to make the sacrificial concessions necessary to meet these goals, it is clear that the rhetoric of fiscal responsibility is a ruse to mask the true intentions of the rabidly anti-union, anti-worker far right and its corporate sponsors.

The American trade union movement has historically been the most significant institutional force in advancing progressive social change. Trade unions have played the pivotal role in making middle-class American life a reality. Equally important, unions have consistently used their significant resources to protect the public good when confronted with profit-driven, opportunistic forces. These forces seek to privatize public assets and make profits from the essential public functions that support the quality of life of mainstream Americans.

The current onslaught against public sector workers and their unions is both politically and economically driven. The goal of Governors Walker, Kasich, and others who share their extremist ideology is not only to destroy the one organized base of power that continues to fight against the corporate agenda, but also to undermine the very foundation of middle class life. These governors seek to destroy the major impediment to the privatization of public sector services. Their vision is a world in which voiceless and powerless workers are marginalized and their benefits drastically reduced while private entities become richer as they draw from the public till.

We are Americans who live in Berlin, Germany. Although overseas, we care deeply about our country. We believe that this war against the unions is really a struggle between competing and radically different vi-

sions of what America should be – an America whose democracy is grounded in a solid, broad middle class or a draconian alternative in which the middle class is destroyed and money dominates the political process. Our choice is obvious – not because of any ideological predisposition, but out of a recognition of the long-term positive importance and stabilizing economic influence of unions in America, for which there is overwhelming and irrefutable empirical evidence.

Because we live abroad, we are able to observe other societies where workers have a collective political and economic voice in health care and educational issues, where labor unions have an accepted role in creating a society that is economically healthy, a society for all its members. Capitalism is alive and well in Germany, but the social safety net has been defined differently than it is in the United States. The point is not to turn the U.S. into Germany or any other European nation. But from here we see that as long as viable unions exist, the political table can be set for all members of society, rather than only for the moneyed few. We believe that the defense of the public sector workers, their unions and the emergence of a strong labor movement in the United States are critical to protect a genuinely democratic vision of America.

To this end – to protect the rights and way of life of public sector workers, to protect and ensure a real democratic vision of America – and in the hope that the political debate might truly be broadened, we rise in support of our brothers and sisters in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and elsewhere in the U.S. We believe unequivocally that American democracy is only possible when working people have a collective voice, a strong labor movement, and a vibrant and growing middle class. United for these principles, we are all Wisconsin. We are all Ohio. We are all Indiana.

◆ Here is a copy of the letter sent by ANN WERTHEIMER to info@boldprogressives.org on March 12 along with the photo taken at the Brandenburg Gate: <http://flic.kr/p/9pZsDL> by KAREN AXELRAD.

We are standing in the heart of Berlin but are with you in spirit in Madison and elsewhere in the United States where union rights are in danger. American Voices Abroad Berlin has been joined by Democrats Abroad Berlin and Verdi, the trade union for public service workers in Germany.

...to protect the rights and way of life of public sector workers, to protect and ensure a real democratic vision of America – and in the hope that the political debate might truly be broadened, we rise in support of our brothers and sisters in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and elsewhere in the U.S. We believe unequivocally that American democracy is only possible when working people have a collective voice, a strong labor movement, and a vibrant and growing middle class. United for these principles, we are all Wisconsin. We are all Ohio. We are all Indiana.

◆ In August, the Executive Committee of American Voices Abroad Berlin unanimously decided to support Rebuild the American Dream. AVAers could sign the ‘contract’ at <http://tinyurl.com/3buwhvt>. Note the wide variety of groups on the list, not just Move-On: Color of Change, Uncut US, Planned Parenthood, True Majority, Code Pink, Peace Action, and many others. Phyllis Bennis drafted the talking points work sheet on the costs of war for the contract: <http://tinyurl.com/7pm9yck>

◆ In September ANN WERTHEIMER called the District Attorney of Chatham County, Georgia, on behalf of AVA-Berlin, to add our voices to the many others asking the D.A. to seek withdrawal of the death warrant against Troy Davis and to seek clemency. ANN also signed the Color of Change petition on behalf of AVA-Berlin: <http://tinyurl.com/culnrpm>

OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

◆ At the January Stammtisch, we were all impressed by the proposal of Meike Schubert and Chris Capps-Schubert for a GI café in Kaiserslautern. You can track the progress of the café at www.betterplace.org/en/projects/5543-gi-cafe-germany.

◆ The month of March was taken up with Wisconsin. See LETTERS WRITTEN AND PETITIONS SIGNED BY AVA-BERLIN above. Here are two interesting responses from Wisconsin:

1) From John Nichols, associate editor of *The Capital Times* and the author of seven books on politics and the media. He writes about electoral politics and public policy for *The Nation* magazine, and is a contributing writer for *The Progressive* and *In These Times*: “This is fabulous. Your encouragement

means the WORLD to us. I am sending this on to Mary Bottari, who is maintaining the best blog on everything happening in Wisconsin! With love and solidarity, JN“

2) And from Prof. Joe Salmons at University of Wisconsin via CAROL PFAFF: “Hurrah!!!! That's cool. I'll print some color copies and put them up around. Thanks! The big effort now is toward the recall of some key Republican senators. And we have a supreme race coming where a victory could be key to future court decisions. It's much appreciated. Please pass on word that stuff like this matters deeply to people here. We're aware of the national implications and when people are exhausted from marching in the cold and sleeping in the Capitol on the marble floors and so on, just knowing that we've got such broad support really helps keep people going. Thanks to you and everybody.“

◆ At the June Stammtisch, AVA-Berlin heard from representatives of JedeStimme2011 who came to talk to us about their project: “Ausländerwahlrecht in Berlin einführen – für eine stärkere Demokratie” and the symbolic elections for Berliners without German citizenship that are to run parallel with the Berlin Abgeordnetenhaus elections this fall. (Thank you, Lisa Pettibone!) www.jedestimme2011.de. Here is a quick summary of the project in German taken from the Jede Stimme 2011 site:

Rund 470 000 Menschen in Berlin haben keinen deutschen Pass. Diese Menschen leben und arbeiten hier, zahlen Steuern und sind wie alle anderen von politischen Entscheidungen betroffen. Wählen dürfen Menschen ohne deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit aber nicht. Rund 14% der Berliner Bevölkerung sind somit von den Wahlen zum Abgeordnetenhaus ausgeschlossen.

Nach Vorbild der U18-Wahlen veranstalten die Initiatoren eine symbolische Wahl für MitbürgerInnen ohne deutschen Pass. Hierfür werden unmittelbar vor den Wahlen im September 2011 Wahllokale in Berliner Bezirken aufgebaut.

Mit diesem Projekt verbinden wir zwei Ziele:

1. Zum einen wollen wir bei Menschen ohne deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit mehr Interesse für Politik, die einzelnen Parteien und die Wahlen wecken. Bereits die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der

Wahlen durch angeschlossenen Vereine und Kooperationen selbst soll diese Menschen dazu motivieren, sich bürgerschaftlich zu engagieren und sich so am demokratischen Gemeinwesen zu beteiligen.

2. Zum anderen ist es unsere Absicht, in der so genannten Mehrheitsgesellschaft eine breite Diskussion über die Möglichkeiten politischer Teilhabe von Menschen ohne deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit sowie über das Wahlrecht zu initiieren. Eine solche – längst überfällige – Debatte verstehen wir auch als einen Beitrag zur Belebung der Demokratie in Deutschland.

Als „Wahllokale“ möchten wir alle Vereine, Einrichtungen und Institutionen gewinnen, die bereit sind, in der Woche vom 29. August bis zum 4. September an (einem oder mehrere Tage) Ihre Türen für dies symbolischen Wahlen zu öffnen.

And so AVA-Berlin volunteered to organize a symbolic voting booth as one of the many around the city. Ours was at Sprachwerk, DEBORAH COHEN'S language school at Solmsstr. 30 in Kreuzberg: <http://tinyurl.com/74m77ej>. Thank you, PAM SELWYN, for doing the organizing.

◆ **Ava's Transatlantic Green Salon**, our Berlin-American forum for dialogue on sustainability issues, was launched over a year ago on October 7, 2010 with Europe Energized? at the Freie Universität Berlin. U.S. political writer Steven Hill and German Green Hans-Josef Fell discussed the challenges of sustainable energy policy – and politics – in the U.S. and Germany.

Who is Ava? Call her the figurative grande dame of the salon, organized by ISABEL COLE. You can read all about it at <http://avasgreensalon.wordpress.com>.

“Ava” is a spin-off of AVA (American Voices Abroad) – Berlin, founded in 2003 by U.S. citizens in Berlin to protest the Iraq War. Since that time it has come to serve as an informal forum for Americans (and Germans) to learn about and discuss U.S. politics and policy. Ava's Transatlantic Green Salon continues this tradition of critical yet non-dogmatic discourse.

Ava's highlight of 2011 was the August 16 salon, New Ways to Measure Human Prosperity – Beyond GDP. The salon was kindly hosted by the Ecologic

Institute, an international think tank for environment and development, whose resident experts Lucas Porsch and Tanja Srebotnjak opened the evening with presentations on basic GDP issues.

AVA's own RICH ROSEN, Senior Fellow at the Telus Institute in Boston, "began by explaining the relationship between 'indicators' and an 'index': an index is an aggregate of different indicators. The difficulty lies in the fact that the indicators need to be weighed against each other and thus need a common unit of analysis. The advantage of GDP is that it has a very clear unit of analysis – money. Other than that, he argued, GDP is completely useless, as it only measures consumption and investment and is blind to sustainable development. (Particularly within investment, the GDP does not distinguish between good investment dollars that help us achieve sustainability, and bad investment dollars that make things worse.) One key issue is that an index cannot simply allow trade-offs among its indicators (as we did when distributing our 100 points) – some factors simply must be limited or they will reach dangerous thresholds. No single index will suffice; in a complex system, each indicator must be looked at separately." Lisa Pettibone from the FU Berlin's Environmental Policy Research Center moderated the panel discussion that followed.

◆ On October 15, a small contingent of AVAers demonstrated at the Brandenburg Gate in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street Movement. See KAREN AXELRAD's pictures at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjwzpQej>.

◆ Last year, in late November, AVA-Berlin and Ava's Transatlantic Green Salon sponsored *Gasland* at the One World Berlin Film Festival. Josh Fox's documentary "gives voice to the bitter controversy surrounding 'fracking,' an unconventional form of natural gas drilling..." There were interesting developments in 2011 regarding the film, as Alternet reports: "When the gas industry sent an open letter this month (February 2011) to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences demanding it revoke its best documentary nomination for the gas-drilling exposé *Gasland*, many seemed surprised by this brazen missive. *Gasland* director Josh Fox wasn't one of those people. What this points to is the culture of that industry, which is bullying, which is aggressive, which is outlandish in their

tactics, which will stop at nothing, Fox told Alternet during a nearly hour-long interview. The Oscar nomination, of course, ensures wider attention to the dangers of the natural gas drilling process called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, on our nation's water supply, air quality and overall impact on citizens' health." *Gasland* didn't get the Oscar but *Inside Job* (about the financial crisis) did.

◆ This November's film, *Granito: How to Nail a Dictator* (USA 2010), directed by Pamela Yates, deals with the Guatemalan massacres of the 1980s. "Part political thriller, part memoir, Yates transports us back in time through a riveting, haunting tale of genocide and returns to the present with a cast of characters joined by destiny and the quest to bring a malevolent dictator to justice." The film was excellent and the Q & A afterwards with director Pamela Yates and producer Paco de Onis was impressive. Thank you, PAM SELWYN, for organizing the selection of the film, and thank you, ANJANA SHRIVASTAVA, for moderating the Q & A.

◆ As a sort of prequel to the film, CAROLYN PRESCOTT showed her paintings based on Stephen Kinzer's book *Overthrow*, an analysis of American-sponsored regime change. These small, narrative paintings make use of the traditional genre of Latin American retablos "to envision and make concrete historical events that seem distant and abstract." One painting features Guatemala. See KAREN AXELRAD'S photos of the entire event here: <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjx1eiFx>.

◆ On November 15, AVA-Berlin (DAVID MACBRYDE) and Democrats Abroad (MICHAEL STELZER) organized a discussion via Skype with Tom Hayden in California.

This experiment using the Internet for a discussion — to exchange information and insights on what is happening in the U.S. — was moderated by ANJANA SHRIVASTAVA.

◆ At the December Stammtisch, we organized a photo shoot to show solidarity with Move-On and its "99% Congressional Speak-Out" on December 1st at the local offices of U.S. representatives and senators! Even though we don't have our own member in Congress, we spoke out in solidarity with the

Occupy Movement from here. KAREN AXELRAD took the official photo that we sent to Move-On. Individual AVAers could then send the photo to their Senators and Representative. See the photo at: <http://flic.kr/p/aNX2Gz>.

OTHER PEOPLE'S PROJECTS THAT AVA-BERLIN SUPPORTED

◆ On February 5, AVA-Berlin joined the German-Egyptian Network for Changing Egypt in a march from the Egyptian embassy to the Brandenburg Gate to show solidarity with the people of Egypt. On February 12 we again joined Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters without Borders and many other groups and individuals in celebration and solidarity at the Brandenburg Gate. See KAREN AXELRAD'S photos at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjtJnvt3>.

◆ On March 26, 120,000 people, including AVA-Berlin, protested against nuclear power in Berlin at a demonstration organized by a number of groups including Attac, Robin Wood, BUND and more. See <http://anti-atom-demo.de/2011> – scroll down to the bottom for details. See Karen's pictures at: <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjue8wUy> and her excellent 6-minute film featuring AVA-Berlin in the first two minutes <http://youtu.be/t33xr2qoCVc>. This video has been viewed more than 7000 times!

◆ On October 21, a contingent from AVA-Berlin (with banner) joined the demonstration for Troy Davis at Pariser Platz. See LETTERS WRITTEN AND PETITIONS SIGNED BY AVA-BERLIN for

details of our other efforts for Troy Davis, who was executed in the state of Georgia on September 21, 2011.

OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

◆ The STAMMTISCH took place on all first Thursdays at the Seerose at Mehringdamm 47 in Kreuzberg. <http://www.seerose-berlin.de>. Our occasional 'themed' *Stammtische* (see immediately below) were very successful.

◆ On Sunday, July 3, AVA-Berlin joined Democrats Abroad for an Independence Day picnic at Tempelhofer Feld. See KAREN AXELRAD's photos at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjvb9xQP>

◆ On the Sunday after Labor Day, AVA-Berlin joined Democrats Abroad Berlin for a picnic at Tempelhofer Feld.

◆ 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. Our *Stammtisch* is listed among the local events on the NPR Berlin website.

◆ AVA-Berlin is always pleased to announce 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.