



# DECEMBER 2013

## ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

### ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

◆ Last year, our annual business meeting was held on December 9, 2012, at La Parrilla at Albrecht Str. 11 (in Mitte): [www.la-parrilla.de](http://www.la-parrilla.de). The last year was reviewed, executive committee officers were elected for 2012, 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 CAROLYN PRESCOTT (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: [members-berlin@avaberlin.org](mailto:members-berlin@avaberlin.org). He is also the person to contact if you would like to announce something that you are publishing, performing or exhibiting.

◆ Thanks to JON WOLFE, who continued as our web master. Check our web site, [www.avaberlin.org](http://www.avaberlin.org).

◆ KAREN AXELRAD continued to photograph and film AVA-Berlin events. And thanks to KAREN we always have an up-to-date information leaflet. Please see links to KAREN's photos throughout this report.

◆ ANN WERTHEIMER continued 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](http://www.unitedforpeace.org) where you can find us on the "members map of the world"!

◆ 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.

◆ KAREN AXELRAD takes care of our Facebook [www.facebook.com/AmericanVoicesAbroadBerlin](http://www.facebook.com/AmericanVoicesAbroadBerlin) and Twitter @AVA\_Berlin pages. We'll be continuously updating our Facebook page with links to events, articles, petitions, etc. of interest to our membership.

◆ AVA-Berlin celebrated its 10th birthday at PAM SELWYN's house on March 16. ISABEL COLE delivered a brief speech, KAREN AXELRAD presented a historical slide show and EVA ADAMS sang two terrific songs, one of which you can hear at [www.avaberlin.org](http://www.avaberlin.org) by scrolling down to AVA-Berlin Celebrates 10th Anniversary.

◆ NPR Berlin (UKW104.1) continues to post our first Thursday of the month Stammtisch on its web site under its Upcoming Events: [www.nprberlin.de](http://www.nprberlin.de) and then scroll down a bit to find Events.

◆ Our Stammtisch continued on the first Thursday of every month at the Seerose, Mehringdamm 47 in Kreuzberg, [www.seerose-berlin.de](http://www.seerose-berlin.de). See OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS for details of our special Stammtisch themes and events.

### LETTERS WRITTEN AND PETITIONS SIGNED BY AVA-BERLIN

◆ On February 7, the executive committee of AVA-Berlin signed the letter below. The letter simply asks members of Congress (1) to raise additional revenue by requiring the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share, and by closing tax loopholes for corporations, for the wealthiest 2 percent as well as for companies that outsource jobs overseas; and (2) to

rein in wasteful Pentagon spending.

It is not often that open letters and petitions can be signed by a group rather than an individual. But we're always looking for ways to make our voice heard. And we're in good company: Among the many groups that have signed this letter are the American Friends Service Committee, the Children's Defense Fund, Common Cause, Greenpeace, Democratic Socialists of America, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Move-On, Peace Action, Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), United for Peace and Justice and U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), to name just a few.

*Dear Members of Congress:*

*The undersigned organizations represent millions of Americans with a tremendous stake in the outcome of the ongoing budget process. As Congress debates the debt ceiling, automatic spending cuts and spending in 2013 and going forward, our organizations urge you to ensure adequate funding to preserve the basic functions of government and real security for all our people.*

*There are two paths toward accomplishing this goal and both must be followed. First, additional new revenues must be enacted. President Obama has identified at least \$600 billion in new revenues if the wealthiest Americans are required to pay their fair share. We can raise more than \$600 billion by closing tax loopholes for corporations, for the wealthiest 2 percent and for companies that outsource jobs overseas.*

*Second and just as important: we must rein in wasteful Pentagon spending. We believe Pentagon spending should be cut by a minimum of \$500 billion to \$550 billion over 10 years – similar to the automatic cuts to the Pentagon that go into effect beginning in March if Congress does not act (the “sequester”). We note that many military experts say cuts could be as high as \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion over the next decade without compromising national security.*

*Pentagon spending, which comprises more than half of the current discretionary budget, continues to absorb the lion's share of the money Congress appropriates. Without more cuts to Pentagon spending, even*

*very deep cuts to all other discretionary funding taken together will fall far short of alleviating deficit spending and the rising debt.*

*We view reining in wasteful Pentagon spending as a mandate. We must stop paying for the things we don't need so that we can afford to pay for the things we do need. This includes Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and the Affordable Care Act. And it includes discretionary domestic programs such as Head Start, nutrition aid, job training, education and cancer screening, just to name a few.*

*As a community of advocates, we are committed to creating good jobs here in America, providing our families with security and building a brighter future for our children. If we invest some of the billions we spend on the Pentagon in other sectors of our economy, we would actually generate MORE jobs, strengthening the middle class and protecting essential services that help our families. Economists at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst found that public dollars invested in clean energy, health care, and education all create significantly more jobs within the U.S. economy than investing an equivalent amount in the military. As we struggle with high unemployment rates across the nation, this is a critical point to consider.*

*We want a safe and secure nation. The safety of our residents is of utmost importance. Proposals to rein in wasteful Pentagon spending should not threaten that priority. But the Pentagon budget should not be immune from oversight and fiscal responsibility. Like any other department, the Pentagon must be held accountable for its spending and be able to prove that its programs are a responsible and worthwhile use of our limited tax dollars.*

*We believe budget decisions reflect our values, and we believe that we can responsibly pare down wasteful Pentagon spending without compromising our nation's security. We can shift from spending on outdated, unnecessary weapons to investments in projects that keep us secure and help us prosper – first responders, teachers, bridges, roads, and rails. As you face some of the most difficult budgeting challenges in our nation's history, we urge you to consider all the paths we must embark upon in order to achieve responsible investments at home.*

◆ American Voices Abroad Berlin signed a petition on February 21, this time organized by the Jobs-Not-Wars Campaign. And once again we are in good company: Other signees include Codepink, Credo Action, Global Exchange, Green Party of NY State, Historians Against the War, Peace Action, RootsAction, United for Peace and Justice.

### **The Jobs-Not-Wars Campaign has launched a petition to the President and Congress to:**

1. *Rapidly end the war in Afghanistan, bring all our troops home and care for and support them when they return;*

2. *Invest in our communities and our people to grow the economy and put people back to work;*

3. *In communities devastated by hurricane Sandy, assure that reconstruction is performed in the public interest with full transparency under the direction and control of local, state and federal governments answerable to the people, not to fatten the profit margins of private developers, large corporations, banks and speculators;*

4. *Transform tragedy into opportunity by training and hiring veterans, the unemployed and youth from historically disadvantaged communities to work on the cleanup and reconstruction, build affordable energy-efficient homes and public infrastructure to better protect our people, their communities and the environment;*

5. *Redirect our nation's resources from war and bloated Pentagon spending to fund social programs and public services, protect and improve Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, repair the social safety net, meet the threat of climate change, and reduce poverty and inequality;*

6. *Rely foremost on persistent diplomacy and patient negotiation, rather than military power to respond to international disputes, differences or conflicts;*

7. *Require those at the top of the income ladder to pay their fair share.*

This campaign seeks to involve racial, economic and other social justice, faith, labor, youth and environmental movements, not just the antiwar movement, in a Big Tent effort to mobilize popular opposition to the drive for austerity.

Its “Jobs Not Wars” theme is one under which a broad range of issues, movements and constituencies can unite to demonstrate popular rejection of deficit reduction at the expense of the poor, the elderly, working families and the middle class, while further chopping the public sector and denigrating public service. “Jobs Not Wars” reflects the mainstream public sentiment that overwhelmingly supports these objectives. It speaks to a broad audience, not just committed political activists and those identified with the peace movement and political left.

◆ At the March 7 meeting, the EC agreed to endorse HR 597 via PopVox. HR 597 is the House of Representatives bill to establish a commission to study how Federal laws and policies affect United States citizens living in foreign countries.

PopVox “bridges the gap between the input the public wants to provide and the information Members of Congress want and need to receive.”

*Constituent communications are flooding and overwhelming Congressional offices. POPVOX verifies, aggregates, and simplifies communication with Congress on an open and trusted (and nonpartisan) common ground. Advocacy organizations, trade associations, unions and other groups send their members to POPVOX to take action on bills pending before Congress. Congressional staff and lawmakers log into POPVOX to measure the pulse of their district. POPVOX provides a curating interface for anyone — including Congressional staff, the public and the media — to access and understand the voice of the people.*

◆ On July 8, ANN WERTHEIMER signed the following letter calling on President Obama to stop prosecuting whistle-blowers.

*President Obama:*

*Many of us signing this petition were among the tens of millions of people who imagined that in your second term in office, freed from the political constraints of electoral politics, you would become the champion of human rights and civil liberties you portrayed yourself as being when you first ran for public office. Your Administration's frenetic struggle to imprison Edward Snowden for revealing that tens of millions*



*of Americans are having their communications monitored by the NSA, and your allowing the Army to continue to prosecute Private Bradley Manning, is shocking, immoral, and unacceptable.*

*The message your Administration is giving is clear: Americans do not have the right to know that they are being spied upon by their government, nor the right to reveal crimes being perpetrated by their government. But this, President Obama, is morally outrageous.*

*Manipulating public opinion by appeals to fear about terrorist attacks as a justification for invading our privacy puts your Administration at the same low level of credibility as the Bush Administration whose values you promised to replace with a more open and honest government. Threatening Russia, China, and Ecuador with unspecified negative consequences because they would not cooperate in your government's pursuit of Edward Snowden makes your Administration appear to have lost all sense of proportion.*

*President Obama, please come back to your highest self. Stop being a puppet of the national security state and become a champion of our privacy, our human rights, and human decency. If you want to look "tough" on crime, prosecute those who tortured detainees at Guantanamo and other US prisons, those bankers and investment firms who caused millions to lose their homes and their jobs in the continuing Great Recession, those who run corporations that are destroying the earth's environment for future generations, and those who exploit the poor and the powerless. If instead your legacy is to prosecute the whistle blowers who call attention to the misdeeds of government, the military, the national security apparatus and the corporate elites, you will rightly be scorned by future generations of Americans.*

*Signed by: Rabbi Arthur Green, Rector, Hebrew College; Rabbi Michael Lerner, Editor, Tikkun & Chair, The Network of Spiritual Progressives*

## OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

◆ On January 21, ANN WERTHEIMER gave an Inauguration Day speech on behalf of AVA at a non-

partisan event sponsored by Democrats Abroad. Here is a copy of the speech preceded by a letter to the President:

*Dear President Obama,*

*As Americans from all of the 50 states who presently reside abroad, we have a unique perspective on our home country. From this distance, we perceive its strengths and admire its spirit. We are not disgruntled expats – we are here because of our work, service or other circumstances – but rather Americans who want our country to live up to its promise. So please, Mr. President, take the time to read this speech, which was delivered here in Berlin on the occasion of your second inauguration at a non-partisan event hosted by the Democrats Abroad Berlin. We are also suggesting to our members that they send a copy of this speech to their senators and representatives.*

*Yours,*

*Ann Wertheimer, on behalf of American Voices Abroad Berlin\**

*\*American Voices Abroad Berlin, or just AVA-Berlin for short, offers a community for engaged US citizens and provides a forum for a wide spectrum of views. AVA seeks to foster open and constructive discussions on the sometimes contentious issues most important to Americans. AVA is independent of all political parties both in the United States and in Germany. Please see our web site [www.avaberlin.org](http://www.avaberlin.org) for more details.*

Here is the speech itself:

*American Voices Abroad Berlin happily celebrates this second inauguration of President Barack Obama because we believe that he shares our vision of the future.*

*We applaud his landmark achievements: the Affordable Care Act, the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Thank you, President Obama, for taking the Federal Student Loan Program out of the hands of loan sharks and for creating the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Thank you for making the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy a thing of the past and for declaring the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional. Thank you for appointing Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court. Thank you for withdrawing from Iraq.*

*We share with you, Mr. President, a vision of govern-*

ment, both its unique capacities and its limitations.

We believe that government must play a key role in ensuring the integrity of the ecosystems on which we all depend for life, enforcing air and water quality, guarding the safety of our food supply and establishing an energy policy that reduces greenhouse gases.

We believe that government must regulate the marketplace – to ensure fairness and prevent fraud.

We value the contributions of everyone in our society: those who work primarily with their hands, those who care for others, those who clean up after others, those who work in offices, factories, classrooms, in the fields, on construction sites. And we believe that workers have a right to organize themselves in trade unions, and that there should be a path to citizenship for the undocumented.

We believe in the abolition of the death penalty and in the reform of the prison system.

We believe in serious national gun control.

We believe that an excellent public education system is vital to our democracy and our economic self-interest, and that the public has an interest as well in supporting scientific research.

We celebrate, too, a shared vision with you concerning areas in which government should NOT, in our opinion, play a role: in our private lives, in whom we love and whom we marry, in whether or not to have a child.

And so, as you begin your second term and approach the multiple problems of the economy, the deficit, energy and environmental policy, we encourage you to reject the false dichotomy of jobs versus climate change. We believe they belong together in a sustainable economy designed for peace, an economy

- in which energy policies do not lead to war,
- in which war is not regarded as an economic solution,
- in which environmental policies do not leave the public with the cleanup bill,
- in which economic growth is integrated with sound energy and environmental policies,
- in which we do not subsidize oil companies or agri-business, big insurance or big pharma,
- in which the tax code is made more progressive; a financial transaction tax is levied to curb speculation, promote fairness and raise revenue; and long discredited trickle-down fantasies are no longer the

basis of policy.

Mr. President: We know that in your first term you were faced with vicious obstructionism and had to sacrifice some of your goals. We hope that in this second term you will stand your ground: expand Obamacare to include everyone; strengthen our Social Security system, especially by lifting the income cap; secure Medicare and Medicaid; reject the Keystone XL pipeline; tax carbon; and fight to require wealthy donors and corporations to disclose political spending.

And, Mr. President, very specifically, don't give up on diplomacy with Iran, withdraw our troops from Afghanistan, keep the window open for a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine, and reconsider whether your drone policy is really effective counter-terrorism strategy. And one thing we urge you to do right away: close the prison camp in Guantánamo.

We voted for you because we believe you want to do these things. STAND YOUR GROUND, Mr. President, and we will stand with you.

◆ The hot topic of drones was the focus of our Stammtisch on Thursday, April 4. OTFRIED NAS-SAUER, a founder and director of the Berlin Information-Center for Transnational Security and long engaged in peace and security research, joined us for the evening. Otfried explained his thoughts for new international laws regulating drones. Take a look at the BITS site for some interesting reading [www.bits.de/index.html](http://www.bits.de/index.html) and see our web site [www.avaberlin.org](http://www.avaberlin.org) for photos of the Stammtisch.

◆ At the June 6 Stammtisch, ANDREA ALTHOFF talked to us about “The Mayas, the New Religious Pluralism and Democratization in Guatemala.” There were many questions, and everyone left with a much better understanding of the complicated situation in Guatemala. Please see our web site [www.avaberlin.org](http://www.avaberlin.org) for more details.

The following is an excerpt from Andrea's lecture:

Two unprecedented and striking developments form part of the reality of many Guatemalans and, in fact, Latin Americans. Recent decades have seen a dramatic rise of a new religious pluralism, namely the spread

*of Pentecostal Christianity – Catholic and Protestant alike – and the growth of indigenous revitalization movements. This presentation analyses these major transitions and connects them by asking: What roles do ethnicity and ethnic identities play in the contemporary process of religious pluralism such as in the growth of the Protestant Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the indigenous Maya movement in Guatemala? Furthermore, this presentation looks at the specific political and economic connection the neo-Pentecostal movement has with the Guatemalan elite and into the United States. This last aspect is of importance not only because former dictator and president General Efraín Ríos Montt, who was recently convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity, belonged to a neo-Pentecostal church, but also because the peace and democratization process is tied to this issue.*

◆ On June 19, AVA-Berlin joined Amnesty International Berlin-Brandenburg at Potsdamer Platz to remind President Obama, who was to speak at the Brandenburg Gate that afternoon, that we remember his pledge to close the prison at Guantánamo Bay. Here is ANN WERTHEIMER's speech:

*Heute, hier am Potsdamer Platz, spreche ich für American Voices Abroad, eine Gruppe U.S.-Amerikaner, die sich seit über 10 Jahren in Berlin gegen präventive Kriege und für Bürgerrechte engagieren. Wir sprechen heute direkt mit unserem Präsidenten, der bald am Brandenburger Tor eine wichtige Rede halten wird.*

*Mr. President, we are your constituents, from all over the United States of America. We have thanked you, and we do so again today, for your achievements, especially for Obamacare. But we have also criticized you, as friends must. And now we urge you once again: close the prison in Guantánamo.*

*In September of 2006, in a speech on the Senate floor, you said that imprisoning people in Guantánamo without habeas corpus rights (that is, detaining them without the right to be heard in a court of law) is un-American and betrays our long-held principles of justice; you said that unlawful imprisonment is tyrannical; that it doesn't fight terrorism but fuels it; that it provokes anti-Americanism; that it endangers our own captured soldiers and Americans traveling*

*abroad.*

*You have always said no to renditions, no to warrantless wiretaps. You said that part of your job would be "to break the fever of fear" that has been exploited by the Bush administration.*

*You said that you would "close Guantánamo and restore the right of habeas corpus, because that's how we lead, not with the might of our military but with the power of our ideals." You said that the prison in Guantánamo has made the United States weaker by diminishing our moral authority and our influence overseas.*

*In the meantime, Congress blocked funds needed for the transfer or release of prisoners held at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. Vicious obstructionism has come from the Republicans as well as from the right wing of your own party.*

*Just a few weeks ago you called on Congress to lift restrictions on transferring detainees that the Pentagon has cleared for release and said that you were ending the moratorium on sending about 50 Yemenis home. You are appointing senior officials at the State Department and the Pentagon to oversee the process. (Just a few days ago you announced that Clifford Sloan would be the State Department*

*You said that the most daunting obstacle to closing Guantánamo is what to do with about 80 prisoners that your administration has decided cannot be tried in court and are too dangerous to be released. But as you recently said: "[T]he politics are hard.... Imagine a future – 10 years from now or 20 years from now – when the United States of America is still holding people who have been charged with no crime on a piece of land that is not a part of our country." You asked: "Is that who we are? ... Is that the America we want to leave to our children?"*

*We say no, this is not the America we want our children to inherit. We believe that these prisoners can be tried in court, that the U.S. legal system is robust and capable of providing Americans the protection they deserve. So we urge you to convene the review boards that you yourself established to examine the cases of the remaining prisoners. Charge the prisoners. If they are proved guilty, transfer them to a maximum-secu-*



city prison in the United States. If innocent, release them.

*We, Americans Voices Abroad, are waiting with the rest of the world for you to live up to your pledges. Mr. President, we call on you to close the prison in Guantánamo.*

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

◆ On July 3, AVA-Berlin publicized the following call to a spontaneous protest “gegen die Ablehnung des Asyls für Whistleblower Edward Snowden” morgen 17.30 Uhr vor der Amerikanische Botschaft /Brandenburger Tor zum Kanzleramt.

*Spontan Protest Asyl für Edward Snowden*

*Bitte lasst uns zusammenarbeiten !!!*

*Parteien und Organisationsübergreifend*

◆ AVA-Berlin has continued its support of *The Clearing Barrel* and its organizers, Meike Capps-Schubert and Chris Capps. *The Clearing Barrel* is a GI café in Kaiserslautern, which is the home of Ramstein Air Base and Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. About 50,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel live in the area.

Today, in the entire world, there are only 3 GI coffee houses: *Under the Hood* at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas; *Coffee Strong* near Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Lakewood, Washington; and *The Clearing Barrel*. During the Vietnam War, GI coffee houses “played a vital role as organizing centers for US active duty military personnel and veterans” and today these three coffee houses “see themselves in this tradition.”

*The Clearing Barrel*, seat of the Military Counseling Network, is part of the GI Rights Hotline. It is the

only non-profit and non-governmental organization overseas providing a place for U.S. military personnel, veterans and their families to socialize, find support and receive free, confidential and accurate information on U.S. military regulations and practices. *The Clearing Barrel* has been supported by the Military Counseling Network, Connection e.V., the Center on Conscience and War, the German Menonite Peace Committee, members of IVAW and Veterans For Peace, and many other German and American friends and activists. You will find a link to *The Clearing Barrel* <http://www.gicafegermany.com> on the AVA-Berlin site.

In 2014 a representative of *The Clearing Barrel* will have the opportunity to go on a unique speaking tour in the U.S., visiting various anti-war and veterans' organizations as well as church and activist groups on the West Coast. Someone from *The Clearing Barrel* hopes to accompany representatives from the two GI Coffeehouses in the U.S. *The Clearing Barrel* is raising \$2000 for travel expenses. AVA-Berlin intends to help.

## OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

◆ Although AVA-Berlin has no affiliation with any political party, we are always happy to join the Berlin chapter of the Democrats Abroad to explore our common interests. Some of us recall a former ambassador greeting volunteers from DA and AVA at a voter registration event at Amerika Haus by saying that he was pleased to see that the voter registration campaign in Berlin was bi-partisan!

◆ AVA-Berlin is 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.