

AVA-BERLIN, ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 2015 – HIGHLIGHTS

► ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

1. Last year, our annual business meeting was held on December 9, 2014, at La Parrilla, Albrechtstrasse 11 near Bhf. Friedrichstrasse. We reviewed the past year and made plans for 2015. Executive Committee officers were elected for 2015: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair), PAM SELWYN (vice chair), DAVID MACBRYDE (secretary), ALAN BENSON (treasurer), JANE HARTMANN-ZEILBERGER (assistant treasurer), ISABEL COLE and ADAM WILKINS (associates). (We also discussed the possibility of streamlining the election of officers, and asked the EC to find a new modus. So at the beginning of the year the EC changed the election procedure by agreeing to set up a 7-member slate rather than voting for individual officers one by one, and by accepting in absentia candidates.) You can find the minutes of the 2014 annual business meeting as taken by CAROLYN PRESCOTT at the end of this report.

2. DAVID MACBRYDE continued as mailing list administrator until he no longer could. ANN WERTHEIMER and PAM SELWYN were the mailing list administrator backups and continued sending out AVA mail.

3. Thanks to JON WOLFE, who continued as our web master. Check our web site www.avaberlin.org for event updates including KAREN's great documentation. ALAN BENSON is her backup.

4. 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 and wherever AVA has a presence. KAREN also compiled the memorial slideshows for the very sad Stammtisch events that we faced this year.

5. KAREN AXELRAD takes care of our Facebook and Twitter presence, updating our Facebook page with all the links to events, articles and petitions that may be of interest to our membership.

6. 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 <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/> where you can find us on the "members map of the world"!

7. The dues for full membership with voting rights in AVA-Berlin are still €30 per year, or a self-assessed smaller amount. Check www.avaberlin.de for details.

8. NPR Berlin (UKW104.1) continues to post our first Thursday of the month Stammtisch on its web site. You can go to the www.nprberlin.de homepage and find our listing each month. CAROLYN PRESCOTT takes care of NPR matters for us.

9. We held our monthly Stammtische from February through October at Café X-Zeit at Welsnerstrasse 10-12 just off Viktoria-Luise-Platz. The November Stammtisch was at Montevideo at Viktoria-Luise-Platz 6. The December Stammtisch was cancelled because Café X-Zeit closed and because of our many winter activities.

► OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

1. For the first time ever, we cancelled a Stammtisch: the first Thursday in January fell on New Year's Day. So we didn't get together until February 5, sadly to reminisce about our dear friend PHIL HILL, who died on December 22. Twenty of us gathered to tell stories about Phil, and KAREN AXELRAD compiled a series of photos showing Phil and AVA. We read mail from members who couldn't attend and all letters and photos were put into a folder for Gabriele, Phil's Lebensgefährtin. This Traueranzeige, written together with The Berlin Translators' Stammtisch, was published in the TAZ, Phil's preferred newspaper:

We mourn our dear friend, colleague and 'Mitstreiter' PHIL HILL.

We will miss his encyclopedic knowledge, his inexhaustible energy and his warm heart. We are grateful to have known Phil and to have had him at our side all these years.

Unser Mitgefühl gilt seiner Frau Gabriele und seinen Angehörigen

2. At the March 5 Stammtisch, Henriette Litta, Head of Office of the Expert Council of the German Foundations on Integration and Migration, spoke about "Facts and Trends in Immigration." See photo at www.avaberlin.org. GRETCHEN KLOTZ introduced Henriette.

3. On June 4, AVA-Berlin dedicated the monthly Stammtisch to DAVID SOLOMON, who died of injuries sustained in a bicycle accident a few days before. ANN WERTHEIMER read emails she received about DAVID, KAREN AXELRAD's photos were shown as a slideshow, and other friends of DAVID shared reminiscences. More of KAREN's photos can be seen at www.avaberlin.com and in the [album on flickr](#), which shows the memorial service and some old photos of DAVID.

4. Our October 1 Stammtisch was dedicated to DAVID MACBRYDE, who died of pancreatic cancer a few weeks before. DAVID was a member of AVA from the beginning and many of us were close to him. KAREN AXELRAD showed us the slideshow that she had compiled, and NANCY GREEN brought some additional pictures. PAM SELWYN read aloud from the mail that had come in from those who couldn't be with us that night. Lots of folks talked spontaneously about DAVID. Finally MICHAEL STELTZER, personally and on behalf of Democrats Abroad, and ANN WERTHEIMER read the English versions of the eulogies they had delivered at the funeral the day before. Here is ANN's eulogy:

It seems to me that David was one of the few men that I knew who actually enjoyed talking on the telephone. And so we talked – once every week or two in the late morning or early afternoon – a little bit of gossip and a lot about what was in the news. That was how I got to understand not only David's beliefs but also what was behind them, and what David thought was important. I can tell you about some of these things.

For example, David often mentioned the concept of the 'big tent,' which means that members of a group do not have to be like-minded. David knew what he believed in, so he never felt threatened by those who were of a different opinion. He was completely immune to dogmatism and sectarianism and could not be contaminated by someone else's pessimism.

David also believed in 'speaking truth to power' and he often used this expression. It means that you need to tell the truth to those who need to hear it; it was one thing you could always do. It was a form of resistance. But David also meant it in the pacifist sense: that speaking out is an action, that pacifism didn't mean passivity. By the way, David and I never decided how pacifist either of us were, but I think the last time he mentioned it, he called himself a 98% pacifist.

David believed in incremental progress, that baby steps were nevertheless steps forward. He also believed that 'the perfect is the enemy of the good,' meaning that he wasn't going to hold out for an unrealistic goal and let an acceptable but imperfect goal pass. David felt that feelings of disappointment were politically useless, that they encouraged passivity when the opposite was necessary. He also disliked political paranoia and conspiracy theories, and felt that they stand in your way, that they hold you back.

Finally, I learned that David believed that people live on after their death, but only in the memory of others. In this sense you are immortal: when other people think about you, how you were, and what you did in your life. And that's why we're here today.

By the way, about our last phone conversation: David was already in the hospital, he couldn't eat or drink, and talking was difficult, so we were very brief and we didn't talk about what was in the newspaper. But I will never forget what he said at the end – clearly, and in that selfless way of his, he said, "I'm so glad that Sabine is coming to your house for dinner tonight."

David had an essential thoughtfulness, which was extended not only to his life's companion, Sabine, and to family – not even only to friends and to those with whom he shared political activities – but to almost everyone with whom he came in contact. Both his kindness and his vision were large and we will miss him sorely.

5. At the November 5 Stammtisch at the Montevideo, Miguel Verde, a doctoral student in global politics at the Freie Universität Berlin and a co-founder of the Berlin Forum on Global Politics, gave an excellent talk on the big new trade treaty, the TTIP, at the AVA Stammtisch. The TTIP is often criticized for the way it will, if it goes into effect, allow multi-national corporations to override many national laws (pertinent to labor, health, environmental issues). Miguel explained that this aspect of the treaty, and its sister treaty for the Pacific region, the TTP, is actually central to its purpose – to boost trade and corporate

growth without the impediment of restraint by participating nations. His talk was followed by more than an hour of active discussion. ADAM WILKENS, who organized the evening, moderated the discussion afterwards. See photos at www.avaberlin.org. This is surely just the beginning of AVA's engagement with this issue.

6. On November 22, AVA sponsored a film at the One World Berlin Human Rights Film Festival: "3 ½ Minutes, Twelve Bullets" directed by Marc Silver. PAM SELWYN and ANN WERTHEIMER did the organizing for AVA and KAREN AXELRAD designed the advertising postcard. About 80 people attended the screening at the Movimiento theater on Kottbusser Damm. Afterwards ANJANA SHRIVASTAVA moderated a discussion in which many people from the audience participated. Special guests were Paul Edwards, DAAD fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute (FU Berlin) and Martin Lüthe, junior professor at the FU. We thank Natalie Gravenor from the festival for her very personal engagement. See photos at www.avaberlin.org.

7. On November 29, one day before the opening of the Paris climate conference and a day of demonstrations all over the world, AVA joined the Berlin climate march calling for 100% renewable energy by 2050. We met under our banner at the Hauptbahnhof and marched to the Brandenburg Gate along with marchers from, among many others: AVAAZ, Campact, Greenpeace, NABU, Klima Allianz, Oxfam, WWF, 350.org, Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen.

► LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED AND SPEECHES GIVEN

1. On occasion, groups, rather than individuals, are asked to sign letters or petitions, and AVA-Berlin tries to take advantage of these opportunities. In March, we signed a letter composed by the Coalition on Human Needs. To read the entire letter, click on the [SAVE for All](#) link. It is addressed to our Representatives and Senators and includes this paragraph:

We come together to urge you in your budget decisions to preserve the capacity of the federal government to invest in shared prosperity and to help people escape poverty. Our organizations, representing millions of people, agree that federal budget choices should be based on four principles espoused by the Strengthening the Values and Economy (SAVE) for All campaign: (1) protect low-income and vulnerable people; (2) invest in broadly shared prosperity that raises incomes across the economic spectrum; (3) increase revenues from fair sources; and (4) seek responsible savings by targeting wasteful spending in the Pentagon and elsewhere.

2. On July 11, the Executive Committee forwarded the following declaration on the 60th anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto. We usually don't forward messages like this because we assume that most of us have already received them from other sources. But here we made an exception. First of all, this declaration had not yet been widely circulated and, second of all, it focused on the dual threats of war and climate change, and very clearly relates the two. Of course we know it is just words, but words, as we have all learned, still matter. See <http://diy.rootsaction.org/p/man> for more details.

Declaration on the 60th Anniversary of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto

In view of the growing risk that in future wars weapons, nuclear and otherwise, will be employed that threaten the continued existence of humanity, we urge the governments of the world to realize, and to acknowledge publicly, that their purpose cannot be furthered by a world war, and we urge them, consequently, to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them.

We also propose that all governments of the world begin to convert those resources previously allocated to preparations for destructive conflict to a new constructive purpose: the mitigation of climate change and the creation of a new sustainable civilization on a global scale.

3. On Friday, October 16, a session of the United Nations General Assembly First Committee was dedicated to statements by civil society organizations. All organizations of any size around the world were invited to sign on to the statement below: **The Challenge of Disarmament: Still Nonviolence or Nonexistence**, highlighting the growing dangers of war among nuclear-armed nations. It is a presentation of the Western States Legal Foundation to the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, October 16, 2015, drafted by Andrew Lichterman, Senior Research Advisor. AVA-Berlin signed and is listed among German groups.

As this Committee meets, the nuclear-armed countries are edging ever closer to direct military confrontation in conflict zones around the world, from Ukraine to Syria and the broader Middle East to the Western Pacific. The danger of nuclear war is growing again on a scale measured in months or years. Those who rule in the nuclear-armed states appear comfortable approaching disarmament on a time scale measured in generations—and show no interest in taking up the task again anytime soon.

In closing remarks, the chair of last year's First Committee said, "I believe that one of the most urgent messages that rang out loud and clear from the deliberations and draft resolutions of the First Committee ... is the need to revitalize the disarmament machinery, which is in danger of losing both credibility and relevance."ⁱ Consider the contrast between the Chair's assessment and the view on prospects for disarmament two decades ago. Then, a General Assembly resolution concerning the work of the First Committee could declare that the assembled states were "Encouraged by the changed political climate in the post-cold-war era, which is conducive to further bilateral, regional and multilateral efforts in disarmament..."ⁱⁱⁱ

No amount of tinkering with the disarmament machinery can turn it into a vehicle for disarmament progress when those in the driver's seat have no intention of moving forward. The new round of conflicts and confrontations, and the resumption of arms racing, are driven by those who have the power to shape policy in the nuclear-armed states. Primary responsibility for the continued scourge of industrialized warfare world-wide lies with the military-industrial complexes and national security state elites at the apex of the global war system, and those in the United States above all. Nuclear-armed states account for three quarters of global arms exports; the United States and Russia together for over half.ⁱⁱⁱ They provide the kinds of weapons that turn

local, low-intensity conflicts into industrial-scale wars that fragment societies, destroy vital infrastructure, and destabilize entire regions. These human catastrophes are used to justify competing armed interventions that raise the stakes even higher, with nuclear-armed militaries operating in close quarters in proxy confrontations that easily could spiral out of control. A small fraction of humanity benefits in the short run from these high stakes competitions; all of us bear the risk.

A civilization in which endless competition is the motor for development is approaching its limits. The quest for advantage within economies has generated immense disparities of wealth, and with it endless conflict. The project of control of the many by the few—an inescapable characteristic of a society that generates stark inequality both within and among states—has brought with it the endless perfection of state violence. The quest for advantage among states has created weapons that can destroy all states. Heedless extraction of natural resources in the service of endless wealth, and the endless state power that sustains it, threatens to destroy the ecosystems all else depends on.

Progress towards a global society that is more fair, peaceful, and ecologically sustainable is interdependent. We are unlikely to get far on any of these objectives without progress on all. They are not “preconditions” for disarmament, but, together with disarmament, are preconditions for human survival. In our relationships both with each other and the planet, we are now hard up against the choice: nonviolence or nonexistence. Our time is running out.

[1] Closing Remarks by H.E. Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations and Chairman of the First Committee, 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 3rd November 2014

[2] United Nations General Assembly, 48th Session, Resolution 48/87, Rationalization of the work of the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee), A/RES/48/87 13 January 1994.

[3] Pieter D. Wezeman And Siemon T. Wezeman , “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2014,” SIPRI Fact Sheet, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, March, 2015 (Table 1: The 10 largest exporters of major weapons and their main clients, 2010–14).

4. AVA signed on to the following full-page ad published in the December 10th issue of the New York Times. The ad was sponsored, among others, by MoveOn and the National Domestic Workers Alliance.

Is this America?

We grieve the many lives that have been lost or painfully transformed in recent weeks through extreme acts of violence. And we are appalled by the surge of divisive rhetoric that sows the seeds of more violence to come. A dangerous tide of hatred, violence, and suspicion is rising in America -- whether aimed at Arab and Muslim Americans, women and the places we seek health care, Black people, immigrants and refugees, or people just going about their daily lives. This tide is made more dangerous by easy access to guns.

When has hate ever led to progress? Is this really what we want America to be?

We Are Better Than This.

We call upon our politicians, leaders and the media to stop the spread of hate and division. And we pledge to stand with any community that is targeted by hateful rhetoric and violence. This campaign is supported by the undersigned, and others listed at <http://www.wearebetterthanthis.com/>. Please sign on to pledge your support.

#WeAreBetterThanThis

► OTHER PEOPLE’S PROJECTS THAT AVA-BERLIN SUPPORTED

1. AVA Berlin is excited to be participating in the development of the “Open Salon Berlin,” along with the Yale University Alumni Association in Germany e.V., the Stiftung Collegium Wartinum and others. At the March 10th salon, ADAM WILKINS presented his upcoming book “The Evolution of the Human Face” in the Bel Etage upstairs at the Wirtshaus Max und Moritz.
2. In mid-June, several AVA members participated in the Summer Salon at Schloss Wartin, an initiative designed to help revive salon culture as a form of meaningful human interaction on a political, cultural and social level. Our own DAVID MACBRYDE, a founder and board member of the Collegium Wartinum Foundation, was one of the dreamers whose thinking led to the Salon and, along with Justine Kolata and Hans Christian Siller, was one of its three organizers. AVA members who gave presentations were GRETCHEN KLOTZ on “The Anti-Authoritarian Movement in the 1960s and its Role in the Development of German Democracy,” ADAM WILKINS on “Does Existentialism Still Speak to Us Today?” and Rich Rosen on “The Physics of Climate Change and the Economics of Preventing It.”

The 80-some attendees crossed several nationalities and all adult age groups, although young people were in the majority. Apart for three key lectures – “The Future of Humanity,” pertaining to global versus national interests; “The Fate of Cities,” on mega-cities and those who live on their margins; and “Dialogue or Coexistence,” pertaining to the Islamist group IS – no one knew exactly what to expect from the weekend, yet all seemed to come with an open heart and mind, and the conversations began immediately and continued sincerely and intensely for three days. It was an exhilarating gathering of people who were eager to think about and talk about fundamental questions, and it will surely resonate for a very long time. More Schloss Wartin Salon weekends and salon evenings in the spirit of Schloss Wartin are expected in the future.

3. AVA-Berlin is always pleased to support The Clearing Barrel and the non-profit Military Counseling Network in Kaiserslautern. They are the only places of this kind outside the United States where U.S. soldiers have space to organize, and to get counseling and information, for example about conscientious objection. Online donations can be made at: <https://www.betterplace.org/en/fundraising-events/von-meike-4fb2f44>

► OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. 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.
2. AVA-Berlin is always pleased to announce English-language events around the city, especially those at the Einstein Forum in Potsdam and the American Academy at Wannsee.
3. NPR Berlin (104.1 FM) publicizes our regular Stammtische and special events on its web site. We are always happy to remember that NPR Berlin is the only NPR station outside the United States.
4. Let us know about your own exhibitions, publications, openings and performances, publications, openings and performances. Just send the information to our email administrator at members-berlin@avaberlin.org.

► MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AVA ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING – DECEMBER 7, 2014, as recorded by CAROLYN PRESCOTT

1. The meeting was chaired by Pam Selwyn. The agenda was discussed, items were added and the agenda then approved.
2. Ann Wertheimer gave the Annual Report from the Chair, summarizing the activities of AVA-Berlin in 2014 (copies distributed). A brief discussion followed about AVA's profile in Berlin and Germany (How well-known are we? To what extent do journalists or others turn to us for reflection on U.S. political issues?) There was some clarification of AVA-Berlin's relationship to Democrats Abroad – amicable but distinctly different in terms of function (DA has a responsibility to the Democratic Party; AVA is committed to consideration of issues regardless of the positions taken by political parties) and often also in terms of perspective (in contrast to DA, AVA was founded as an anti-war group, for example).
3. Treasurer Alan Benson presented the financial report (copies distributed). We talked briefly about budget matters, concluding that we have spent our very limited funds well.
4. Officers were elected to the seven-member executive committee, with Joan Klakow managing the election process. The 2015 Executive Committee: Chair - Ann Wertheimer, Vice Chair - Pam Selwyn, Secretary - David McBryde, Treasurer - Alan Benson, Assistant Treasurer - Jane Hartmann, Associate - Isabel Cole, Associate - Adam Wilkins.
5. The coming year was discussed. Some helpful ideas about AVA's development and identity emerged and several specific projects were described:

- While we are eager for additional members – young or old – the current number of active members seems fairly effective for exploring issues and considering actions to be taken. There was some discussion about two aspects of AVA's size – whether AVA-Berlin needs to be larger in its core group of active members and whether we should actively seek to bring in younger members. It was pointed out that AVA's ratio of active to passive members is around 10%, which is considered an effective ratio among activist organizations. AVA in its present form seems to efficiently leverage the amount of energy and time that active members can give to it.
- AVA-Berlin could further leverage its actions and raise its profile – including among young people – by continuing to network actively with other organizations through communications and invitations to join us for selected themed Stammtische, demonstrations, projects, etc. There was support for continuing to network with Writers against Mass Surveillance (through Isabel Cole's involvement), Amnesty Berlin-Brandenburg, Democrats Abroad Berlin, and other organizations with similar interests, including the new Open Salon Berlin (see below).
- David McBryde reported on the new Open Salon Berlin. The Salon will hold its first, exploratory meeting on December 10, 2014, and AVA is an official co-sponsor of this first effort. The Salon is expected to address the underdiscussed issue of class and other issues that overlap with AVA's interests.
- The themed Stammtische have generated interest, have seemed to fill a need, and we should continue to hold them. (It should be clarified that the Stammtisch is not AVA; it is a subset of AVA.) The list of topics to be considered for themed Stammtische include: the justice system in the U.S. (racism and policing); the surveillance state and intelligence gathering; the expansion of presidential war-making activities; corruption through Citizens United and campaign financing; the report on CIA torture; part II of Rich Rosen's Climate Change talk this past summer.
- AVA-Berlin should prepare itself to respond to a number of issues on the near horizon. AVA-Berlin could also raise its profile with the press, through formal and informal communication. We already have connections with ExBerliner magazine. We could also seek to be on the radar of the NYTimes bureau chief in Berlin.
- AVA-Berlin could become a registered organization, that is, an e.V. (eingetragener Verein). Phil Hill agreed to look into the advantages and disadvantages that that would entail and to report back to us in February.
- AVA members are asked to keep an eye open for a film to sponsor for the 2015 One World Berlin documentary film festival next November, particularly English-language films on political themes relevant to the U.S.
- AVA will continue to meet at Cafe X-Zeit until or unless a slightly more central meeting place is found.

- The discussion yielded the following general description of AVA's identity: AVA is a community of politically engaged individuals who meet to explore various significant issues of the day – and, as appropriate, to plan, support and/or carry out collective actions – including demonstrations, forums for discussion with knowledgeable speakers, film viewings, and commemorative events.

6. Immediate action: AVA unanimously agreed to react to the brochure for the "RAF – Terroristische Gewalt" exhibition at Deutsches Historisches Museum. The brochure developed at the Museum shows a photo of Rudi Dutschke juxtaposed with a headline including the words "RAF" and "terrorist," neither of which term applied to him. AVA-Berlin would like to raise this issue with the Museum out of concern for its misrepresentation of history in its advertising. We also want to demonstrate our solidarity with AVA member Gretchen Klotz, Rudi Dutschke's widow. Phil Hill agreed to check with Gretchen this week to find out what kind of support would be most helpful.
