

AVA-BERLIN, ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 11, 2016 – HIGHLIGHTS

► ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

1. Last year, our annual business meeting was held on December 13, 2015, at La Parrilla, Albrechtstrasse 11 near Bhf. Friedrichstrasse. We reviewed the past year and made plans for 2016. Executive Committee officers were elected for 2015: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair), PAM SELWYN (vice chair), ADAM WILKINS (secretary), ALAN BENSON (treasurer), JANE HARTMANN-ZEILBERGER (assistant treasurer), ISABEL COLE and MICHAEL STELTZER (associates). You can find the minutes of the 2015 annual business meeting as taken by ADAM WILKINS at the end of this report.
2. ANN WERTHEIMER took over the job of mailing list administrator and PAM SELWYN was the mailing list administrator backup. ANN took over this job when DAVID MACBRYDE was too weak to do so. Glitches resulting from password problems have now been resolved.
3. Thanks to JON WOLFE, who continued as our web master. Check our web site www.avaberlin.org for event updates including KAREN AXELRAD's great documentation.
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.
5. KAREN AXELRAD also 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. See www.avaberlin.de and then click on MEMBERSHIP 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 in the EVENTS CALENDAR. CAROLYN PRESCOTT takes care of NPRBerlin matters for us.

9. We held our monthly Stammtische at Michael Kavanaugh's Crunch Kantine until May when we moved to Raamson in Schöneberg, Kolonnenstr. 48-49, right at the S-Bahn station Julius-Leber-Brücke. Raamson is a Tamil restaurant offering Sri Lankan and South Indian specialties with many vegetarian dishes available at moderate prices. In August we moved to Café Daddy, a family-run Turkish Café with homemade food, where we happily stayed until the end of the year. The address is Kolonnenstr. 50 in Schöneberg.

► OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

1. At the August 4 Stammtisch, our own RICH ROSEN talked to us about the policies that would really mitigate climate change. This was a continuation of RICH's presentation to us last year.
2. In September, AVA organized an American section for the anti-CETA/TTIP demonstration on September 17. We got materials from Campact, contacted other American groups and devoted our September Stammtisch to preparing for the demonstration. See KAREN AXELRAD's photos at www.avaberlin.org.
3. On October 6, we received an update on the trade treaties (TTP, TTIP, CETA) from Miguel Verde from the Berlin Forum on Global Politics, FU-Berlin. This was a continuation of Miguel's talk to us last year. See photo at www.avaberlin.org.
4. On October 10 we joined Exberliner magazine and realeyz.de for a movie night at the Lichtblick Kino in Prenzlauerberg. We saw DJ Spooky's Rebirth of a Nation, "a film project based on a remix of D.W. Griffith's infamous 1915 film Birth of a Nation.... The original film was based on a novel and theater play by Thomas Dixon entitled The Clansman, which propagated a founding myth of the Ku Klux Klan as a 'self-defense' organization. Almost as if he were seeking atonement, Griffith subsequently directed such classic films and cinematic appeals for cultural understanding as Broken Blossoms and Intolerance. Yet Birth of a Nation confounds and disturbs to this day." We thank NATALIE GRAVENOR for her very personal engagement.
5. AVA spent the weeks after the election trying to connect with other groups, both in the U.S. and here in Berlin. We attended meetings of the Anti-Trump Resistance in Berlin and hope to continue participating as actively as possible (thank you, ISABEL). We spent the December Stammtisch talking about networking and possible coalitions. It's a beginning....

► LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED AND SPEECHES GIVEN

1. At the beginning of February, AVA-Berlin was among the initial signers of a Move-On petition organized by Robert Naiman, policy director of Just Foreign Policy, which called on the U.S. government to end all criminal investigations and threats of prosecution against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.

Background: The UN working group on arbitrary detention determined that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was being arbitrarily detained in London and should be released immediately. "In light of this decision," according to Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, "it's clear that any criminal charges against Mr. Assange in connection with WikiLeaks' publishing operations would be unprecedented and unconstitutional. Indeed, even the prolonged criminal investigation of WikiLeaks itself has had a profound chilling effect. The Justice Department should end that investigation and make clear that no publisher will ever be prosecuted for an act of journalism."

2. In April, AVA-Berlin endorsed the Democracy Awakening mobilization in Washington, D.C. Democracy Awakening is a broad coalition of organizations representing the labor, peace, environmental, student, racial justice and money in politics reform movements. Go to www.democracyawakening.org to see a list of these organizations. The focus is on combating attacks on voting rights and on the integrity of the vote by big money.

Here's the agenda we're calling for Congress to pass:

- Fair consideration of the nominee to fill the Supreme Court vacancy, including timely hearings and a vote by the full Senate.
- The Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 2867, S. 1659), legislation that would restore the protections against voting discrimination that were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, and make additional, critical updates to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- The Voter Empowerment Act (H.R. 12), legislation to modernize voter registration, prevent deceptive practices that keep people from the ballot box and ensure equal access to voting for all.
- The Democracy For All Amendment (H.J.Res. 22, S.J.Res. 5), a constitutional amendment that would overturn U.S. Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United* and allow elected representatives to set commonsense limits on money in elections.
- The Government By the People Act/Fair Elections Now Act (H.R. 20 and S. 1538), a small donor empowerment measure that would encourage and amplify small contributions from everyday Americans.

The actual mobilization took place on the weekend of April 15-16 and AVA-Berlin was with the activists in Washington, D.C., in spirit.

3. We don't usually forward petitions because we figure you get enough petitions yourself directly. But once in a while there is a petition especially relevant to AVA-Berlin. So on June 17, AVA sent to entire mailing list The RootsAction petition supporting Edward Snowden's right to receive Norwegian PEN's Ossietzky Prize. Carl von Ossietzky (3 October 1889 – 4 May 1938) was a German journalist and pacifist and the recipient of the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize (presented in 1936) for his work in exposing clandestine German re-armament. The German government refused to release him from so-called protective custody to receive the prize. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_von_Ossietzky

The Norwegian PEN prize - for outstanding achievements as a whistleblower - will be awarded to Edward Snowden on November 18, 2016. For more details see http://norskpen.no/nb_NO/2016/03/07/edward-snowden-ossietzky-of-our-time/. This petition asks the Norwegian government to protect Snowden from extradition to the United States.

► OTHER PEOPLE'S PROJECTS THAT AVA-BERLIN SUPPORTED

1. AVA-Berlin is always pleased to support The Clearing Barrel and the non-profit Military Counseling Network in Kaiserslautern. They are the only places outside the United States where U.S. soldiers have space to organize and to get counseling and information, for example, about conscientious objection.

2. On Saturday, September 17, an AVA contingent took part in the anti-TTIP/CETA demonstration here in Berlin. We joined our German friends from Campact, the Berliner Wassertisch, the World Wildlife Fund, Brot für die Welt, Oxfam, Greenpeace, Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz, Attac, the DGB and many other organizations. See Jane Hartmann's photo at www.avaberlin.org.

3. On November 2, our own MICHAEL STELTZER was the featured speaker at the August Bebel Institute in Wedding. The topic: Eine gespaltene Gesellschaft vor der Richtungsentscheidung

Die USA ist gespaltener denn je: Am 8. November entscheidet sich, in welche Richtung die Amerikaner*innen gehen werden. Warum verlieren die etablierten Parteivertreter*innen an Glaubwürdigkeit? Was macht Donald Trump vor allem bei männlichen weißen Arbeitern so erfolgreich? Welche Chancen hat die linke Bewegung unter Hillary Clinton?

4. On November 12, AVA answered an anti-Trump call to demonstrate at the Brandenburg Gate and JANE HARTMANN brought her 13-year-old "We Say No" flag, which suddenly became relevant again.

► OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Although AVA-Berlin has no affiliation with any political party in the U.S. or in Germany, we are always happy to explore our common interests with the Berlin chapter of the Democrats Abroad.
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. NPR Berlin is the only NPR station outside the United States.
4. AVA-Berlin staffed registration tables independently or with Democrats Abroad Thank you ALAN BENSON for all this organizing.
5. On July 3, AVA joined DA at the traditional Independence Day celebration at Tempelhofer Feld. We thank DA for organizing the event. MICHAEL STELTZER was happy to compose the political quiz that has become part of the Berlin celebration.
6. Several AVAers attended the 2016 World Congress of the International Peace Bureau on the weekend of September 30.
7. We are very happy to welcome the Progressive Democrats in Berlin (formerly Berliners for Bernie) and have high hopes for a productive partnership.
8. Let us know about your own exhibitions, publications, openings and performances. Just send the information to wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de.

► MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AVA ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING – DECEMBER 13, 2015, as recorded by ADAM WILKINS

American Voices Abroad Berlin

Minutes for the Annual Business Meeting of AVA; 13 December, 2015, held at the Steak-Restaurant La Parrilla, Albrechstr. 11, Berlin

Thirteen members were in attendance and the meeting began promptly at 12 noon, with Pam Selwyn chairing.

1. The proposed Agenda was discussed and a few additions were made, to be taken up at the end.

2. The Chair's report, by Ann Wertheimer, was given. Highlights for the year included: the endorsement and signing of four petitions; participation in both the Berlin Open Salon movement (July) and the big climate march (29th November); two talks at our Stammtisch (on immigration at the February meeting, and on the TTIP at the November meeting), sponsorship of the film "3 ½ minutes, 10 bullets" at the One World Human Rights Film Festival, held on 22nd November (with practically a full auditorium for the showing) and commemoration of the lives of David MacBryde (our Secretary), Phil Hill (colleague and "Mitsstreiter"), and David Solomon (member), all three of whom will be sadly missed. We also discussed the loss of the long-time venue for our Stammtisch, the Café X-Zeit, which closed suddenly and unexpectedly in October. The next Stammtisch, on 7th January, 2016, will be held at the "Crunch Kantine", Siemensstr. 16, in Berlin-Moabit. It is not clear how permanent this arrangement will be.

3. The Treasurer, Alan Benson, delivered his annual report. Basically, we are in good shape, with a net gain of 148.42 euros for the year and currently 625.05 euros in the bank.

4. Election of the officers was held. For the first time, a slate of candidates was presented, requiring only one vote per member (though with the opportunity to register dissenting votes) rather than the old system of individual votes for each position. The vote was held, by secret ballot (as before), and the following were elected unanimously: Chair, Ann Wertheimer; Vice-Chair, Pam Selwyn; Secretary, Adam Wilkins; Treasurer, Alan Benson; Assistant Treasurer, Jane Hartmann; Associate, Isabel Cole; Associate, Michael Steltzer.

5. There was an informal review of the year, touching, in particular, on several of the matters covered by Ann in her report. This included a long discussion of the evening devoted to the TTIP, at which Miguel Verde (a young political scientist from the FU) spoke, and a review of the Open Salon movement, in particular the summer weekend meeting at Schloss Wartin in the Brandenburg countryside. The latter had been ably organized by David MacBryde, Justine Kolata and Chris Stiller and a number of us participated, not least as discussion leaders for several of the topics. Yet, the monthly meeting format seems to have been abandoned. It was agreed that Adam would contact Chris Stiller, another of the organizers, to find out how or whether this movement will be continuing (especially given David's death and Justine's move to

Cambridge, England.)

6. Various miscellaneous matters were discussed.

- a) “Outreach”. Based on an initial discussion held at our July Stammtisch, it has been decided to convene a small sub-group, consisting of Carolyn, Margret, Gretchen and Adam (at least initially) to discuss how we might expand the membership, activities, and influence of AVA. Provisionally, it was decided that this group would convene, for the first meeting, in January.
- b) Arrangements for “back-up” of key functions were made. Pam volunteered to be the back-up person for Adam on mailings, if need be; and Michael agreed to be the back-up for Karen in posting things on Facebook, our website and other places, as and if needed.
- c) Satisfaction was expressed at the showing of “3 ½ minutes...” at the One World Human Rights Film Festival in late November. It was agreed that we should now start looking for the next film to sponsor in 2016.
- d) There was vigorous discussion of possible topics for themed Stammtische in 2016. While it was felt that not every Stammtisch should be dominated by a theme and a talk, it was also agreed that we should have more of these each year than we have had. Four topics in particular that would be good to explore this coming year, it was agreed, were: the state of the conflict(s) in Syria; the refugee crisis in Europe and the refugee situation here in Berlin, specifically; the recent Climate Change conference in Paris and exactly what it produced and means; and the state of the EU. Rich Rosen volunteered to give a talk and lead the discussion on the Climate Change conference, probably at the June Stammtisch, and Adam volunteered to find a speaker on the EU (no date set).
- e) There was a further brief discussion of the refugee situation here in Berlin and it was mentioned that Meredith Wheeler (from

Lautrec) is interested in organizing Americans who are involved with helping refugees and that she will probably liaise with us on this soon. She had been involved with the southwestern France chapter of AVA some years ago.

- f) Four more matters briefly touched on: 1) Alan Benson reviewed voter registration efforts here in Berlin; 2) the importance of the Global Primary (for Democrats) was discussed by Michael Steltzer; 3) the amount of the donation for the recent NY Times advertisement decrying xenophobia was debated and an amount (50 euros) decided; 4) the importance of supporting the “Clearing Barrel”, a café for dissenting American GIs was discussed. We have made a donation of 150 euros to the “Clearing Barrel” and 50 euros to the Military Counseling Network.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 14:45.