

AVA-BERLIN, ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 9, 2018 – HIGHLIGHTS

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

1. Our last annual business meeting was held on December 10, 2017, at La Parrilla, Albrechtstrasse 11 near Bhf. Friedrichstrasse. We reviewed the past year and made plans for 2017. Executive Committee officers were elected for 2018: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair), PAM SELWYN (vice chair), ADAM WILKINS (secretary), ALAN BENSON (treasurer), JANE HARTMANN (assistant treasurer), ISABEL COLE and MICHAEL STELTZER (associates).
2. Until approximately mid-year, ADAM WILKINS was responsible for all secretarial duties, while ANN WERTHEIMER was mailing list administrator and PAM SELWYN mailing list administrator backup. Then ADAM resigned and we re-shuffled the tasks. The EC decided that instead of a secretary, we wanted another associate. The secretarial duties were divided up among several people: ANN continued as post-mistress, with PAM as back-up; all minute-taking would be done on a voluntary basis as occasions arose. Our non-binding guidelines have been changed accordingly.
3. JON WOLFE continued as our web master.
4. KAREN AXELRAD and CAROLYN PRESCOTT posted all relevant information on our web site www.avaberlin.org – including KAREN's great photo documentation.
5. KAREN AXELRAD posted links to events, articles, and petitions of interest to our membership on Facebook, and PAM SELWYN responded to incoming questions.
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/member-groups/> to 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. ALAN BENSON, with JANE HARTMANN as backup, kept dues records, answered questions, and wrote reminders.
8. CAROLYN PRESCOTT also posted our announcements to The Coalition Berlin newsletter, which is published weekly.
9. We held our monthly Stammtische at Café Daddy, a family-run Turkish café with homemade food at Kolonnenstr. 50 in Schöneberg.
- 9a. At the June Stammtisch, RICH ROSEN brought us up to date on climate change policy and legislation, including the upcoming IPCC report on scenarios that might hold the global temperature increase to only 1.5 degrees Celsius, as hoped for in the Paris Agreement.

9b. At the July Stammtisch, ELLEN ROSEN talked about Frances Perkins, FDR's labor secretary for his entire presidency. Perkins was one of the major thinkers behind the New Deal and is the subject of Ellen's new book.

9c. At the September Stammtisch, CAROLYN LOEB, just retired from Michigan State, told us all about her analysis of the Berlin War Memorial on Bernauerstrasse.

OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

1. On March 24, AVA organized a March for Our Lives demonstration in solidarity with the Florida students' initiative for strict gun control laws. AVA and many allies, particularly the Democrats Abroad Berlin, gathered at 2:30 pm at Pariser Platz (the east side of the Brandenburg Gate) for a solidarity rally. Solidarity marches and rallies were planned all over the United States and Europe. In Germany, the rally in Berlin was one among many.

The idea for a local demonstration was initiated by MIRIAM VOLKMANN and ELLEN BRÄNDLE, who took over all communications with the March for Our Lives organizers in the U.S. ANN WERTHEIMER registered the demonstration with the police and her name and postal address (ViSdP) were on the advertising postcard designed by KAREN AXELRAD. AVA paid for the sound system.

A planning committee organized the sequence of events. (See KAREN AXELRAD's photos at www.avaberlin.org and FLORIAN SCHIEDHELM's videos of the speeches on the AVA Facebook page.) ELLEN introduced the event bilingually with two short speeches, each directed to its specific audience. Then EVA ADAMS sang "We Stand with the Students," a song that Lauren Mayer wrote for the students from Parkland.

The two keynotes: JACQUELINE ROUTIER moved the listeners as she spoke about her family in southern Florida. And CHRIS SAUCA delivered a rousing speech, which culminated in a lie-in when he said 'Enough is Enough'!

HANA MILLER, a 14-year-old from Minnesota who was spending a few days in Berlin, spoke spontaneously about the gun violence that young people are facing today. And finally, ADRIANNE OLDHAM called us all to action, reminding everyone to vote, donate, and raise their voices. After the program, YARA GOMAN from the JamieDarkBand sang us home.

2. On June 22, AVA-Berlin joined the demonstration organized by KitaKrise to protest the atrocities at the U.S.-Mexico border. You can read the speech that ANN WERTHEIMER delivered at LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED AND SPEECHES GIVEN, item 3. (See KAREN AXELRAD's photos of the demonstration at www.avaberlin.org.)

3. On June 30, AVAers joined with The Coalition Berlin and several other groups at Ebertstraße/Behrenstraße for a solidarity rally for the hundreds of #FamiliesBelongTogether protests across the United States on that day. ANN WERTHEIMER again delivered a slightly modified version of her June 22 speech. (See KAREN AXELRAD's photos at www.avaberlin.org.) (See FLORIAN SCHIEDHELM's photos of the demonstration at www.avaberlin.org.)

4. On September 2, 15 people from AVA and CIEE (the open campus college study abroad program) participated in the kick-off to the international literature festival berlin: the *Berlin reads!* campaign. We gathered at CIEE (Gneisenaustr. 27 in Kreuzberg) at 5:00 pm to read aloud selections of English-language nature writing. CAROLYN PRESCOTT organized the evening and ISABEL COLE introduced the concept of nature-writing. (See KAREN AXELRAD's photos of the reading at www.avaberlin.org)

5. On September 8, AVA-Berlin had a small contingent at the *Unsere Erde brennt!* protest in front of the Kanzleramt.

6. On October 13, AVA sent a contingent to the huge #UNTEILBAR solidarity protest. An estimated 240,000 people marched from Alexanderplatz to the Siegessäule to support "a Europe of human rights and social justice!"

"Alle 242.000 Menschen, die am 13.10.2018 auf der Straße waren, und viele mehr haben verstanden, was gesellschaftlich auf dem Spiel steht, wenn Sozialstaat, Flucht und Migration weiterhin gegeneinander ausgespielt werden. Wir wissen, dass die weitere Einschränkung von Grund- und Freiheitsrechten, die permanenten Angriffe auf die Humanität, auf Menschenrechte und Religionsfreiheit Angriffe auf uns alle sind."

Für ein Europa der Menschenrechte und der sozialen Gerechtigkeit!

Für ein solidarisches und soziales Miteinander statt Ausgrenzung und Rassismus!

Für das Recht auf Schutz und Asyl – Gegen die Abschottung Europas!

Für eine freie und vielfältige Gesellschaft!

Solidarität kennt keine Grenzen!

7. On October 19 and 20, AVA sponsored the showing of the 6 episodes of "Rest in Power: The Trayvon Martin Story" as part of the One World Berlin Human Rights Film Festival at the Aquarium at Südblock, Skalitzer Str. 6 at Kottbusser Tor. NATALIE GRAVENOR organized the screenings and PAM SELWYN provided introductions on both evenings. PAM also organized the discussion on Saturday with PAUL MATTHEWS, who is investigating racist policing in Baltimore; and BIPLAB BASU from ReachOut (a counseling service for victims of right-wing, racist, and anti-Semitic violence in Berlin) and KOP (a campaign against racist policing). ALAN BENSON, ALLISON BROWN, and LARRY BROWN offered help with voter registration on those evenings.

LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED AND SPEECHES GIVEN

1. On December 18, as our last action of the previous year, American Voices Abroad Berlin was asked by Public Citizen and MoveOn to add our name to the following joint letter to Congress supporting Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. The letter supported the anticipated introduction of a bill consolidating existing legislation that would make it impossible for Donald Trump to fire Mueller unilaterally.

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Leader Schumer, and Leader Pelosi,

As Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election continues, it is critical that the investigation be allowed to conclude its work unimpeded. We the undersigned ask that you do everything in your power to support the integrity of the investigation, including supporting bipartisan legislation designed to protect it.

Following the indictment of General Michael Flynn, Donald Trump's former national security adviser, Trump lashed out at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), saying the agency's reputation for fairness is "in

tatters” [1] and that its standing is the “worst in history.” [2] This is not the first time Trump has attempted to undermine the credibility of the investigation, including calling it a “witch hunt,” [3] or the recent affront of Trump’s attorney Jay Sekulow calling for a “special counsel to investigate the special counsel.” [4] The far-right media echo chamber has taken a cue and is also attacking the credibility of the investigation.

Robert Mueller is a Republican who was tapped to lead the FBI by President George W. Bush. And more critically, he’s a widely respected investigator and prosecutor with the highest credentials. He received ongoing praise from Republicans on Capitol Hill, from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein in a recent House Judiciary Committee hearing, and in the past even Trump’s lawyers; however, as the investigation has gathered steam, the administration, along with several other partisan voices, has changed its tune.

Regardless of the troubling nature of Trump’s statements and the attempts by his allies to undermine the special counsel, the investigation’s work is an issue of national security. Failing to protect the investigation will make it almost impossible to fully determine the extent of Russian involvement in the 2016 election and will expose our nation to further attacks from adversaries in elections. The constitutional order of our country depends fundamentally on a system of checks and balances and the bedrock principle that no one is above the law, and to maintain constitutional order, the investigation must continue.

Legislation has already been introduced to protect the special counsel and the investigation. On August 3, 2017, Senators Lindsay Graham (R-SC) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced bipartisan legislation (S.1735) that would require approval from a federal three-judge panel before a special counsel could be dismissed. On the same day, Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Chris Coons (D-DE) introduced bipartisan legislation (S.1741) to allow a special counsel who was fired without cause to seek review and possible reinstatement from a panel of three federal judges.

The numerous senators and representatives who have expressed their opposition to the idea of Donald Trump firing Special Counsel Mueller must now speak out again to show their support for the special counsel, and they must take meaningful action. Congress must demonstrate strong bipartisan support of the independent investigation and underscore that no one is above the law.

2. On March 24, AVA-Berlin organized a solidarity rally for the students from Parkland, Florida. (See OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS above, item 1.) Here is the text that we distributed at the rally along with the AVA brochure:

March for Our Lives: The Bigger Picture
by Ann Wertheimer, chair, American Voices Abroad Berlin

In his Riverside Church speech almost 51 years ago, Martin Luther King connected racism, militarism, and extreme materialism, all of which, he said, ride on the tide of hate. He said that our loyalties must become “ecumenical rather than sectional,” meaning that racism, militarism, and extreme materialism intersect and reinforce each other.

What we are seeing in the United States today and to some measure, here in Europe, are these same forces: racism, especially in online discourse and out of the mouths of elected officials; militarism, reflected not only in real war but in NRA-sponsored sharp-shooting courses in our public schools; and extreme materialism, which can be seen in our political lobbies, in the Citizens United decision, in the corruption of Congress that is so obvious.

The huge amount of money pouring into politics promotes the agendas of large donors. Let’s be clear: Those ads we see on social media and television are designed to divide us, to weaken our voices, to distract us, and to hinder true debate. They are designed to focus our attention on one issue at a time and one group at a time rather than on the society as a whole.

We need to take back the political discussion, to see how issues are connected and how individuals are connected — across communities of color, economic class, sexual orientation, and religion.

In this as in other ways, the students in Parkland, Florida, are setting us an example: two weeks ago they met with high school students from Chicago, one of the cities in America most affected by gun violence. These young people – black and white, urban and suburban – sat down together to talk about the future they want to create.

These young people refuse to be divided; they refuse to ride the tide of hate. They are educating themselves and organizing themselves, as we must also educate and organize ourselves.

In that speech 51 years ago, Dr. King also talked about the “urgency of now.” We must also recognize the urgency of now. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice. Or else it really will be too late. Right now we still have choices to make. Let's all start right here, right now – with gun control.

3. On both June 22 and June 30, ANN WERTHEIMER delivered this speech at protests against the atrocities at the border. (See OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS above, items 2 and 3.)

Atrocities at the Border written by Ann Wertheimer and Carolyn Prescott

I would like to say a few words about the atrocities at the U.S.-Mexico border. I am choosing my words carefully, because words, I believe, do matter.

The day before yesterday, the President of the United States signed an executive order that read: “This Administration will initiate proceedings to enforce...criminal provisions of the INA [the Immigration and Nationality Act] until and unless Congress directs otherwise.... It is also the policy of this Administration to maintain family unity, including by detaining families together where appropriate and consistent with law and available resources.”

So: now we will incarcerate babies WITH their families instead of putting them in baby jails. This is the government's zero-tolerance policy. They own it. They didn't have to issue an executive order; they just had to stop the practice.

I am reminded of a wild fire in California a few years ago. It was said to be arson and turned out to have been set by a firefighter who wanted a chance to extinguish a wild fire: He was bored, he wanted some overtime pay, and, most of all, he wanted to impress his friends. Now we have an arsonist in the White House.

The president and his supporters, his base, were ready to accept so-called tender-age shelters. These are people who say they are pro-life – meaning in our strange language that they are FOR the death penalty but AGAINST reproductive rights for women. But this moral perversion comes as no surprise. We've been seeing it for a while. And now: They care about the unborn but not about incarcerating babies in diapers.

We have heard these people quote scripture. We always knew the devil could do it, but now it's the Attorney General. He said that the Bible tells us to obey the law. Well, as Coretta Scott King pointed out in that famous letter that Elizabeth Warren tried to read on the Senate floor, Sessions didn't care much about the laws banning segregation nor did he feel compelled to enforce the Affordable Care Act.

So – what would a humane immigration policy look like? This is a complex question and I don't want to oversimplify it. But there are several factors that Congress ought to consider when they craft this legislation:

Congress should consider the children: Children are in a special category. We protect children because they are vulnerable. We oppose laws and policies that put the burden of adherence on children. That's why we have the DACA policy [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals].

They should consider our history: The United States has a history of interference and intervention in some of the countries from which refugees are fleeing. We have toppled governments, supported murderous heads of state, aided in the plunder of natural resources. These refugees, to a significant extent, "represent the legacy of American policies that go back decades. After all, it was the United States that financed the infamous US Army School of the Americas and trained genocidal warlords, such as Efraín Ríos Montt, who went on to destabilize all of Central America. If countries like Guatemala and Honduras have fallen into chaos since the 1980s, it's partly because those wars took a toll on their social structures: the trauma of families wiped out and entire villages disappeared. The refugees at our southern border are part of the blowback from the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people still seeking safety from US-financed violence." (Patricia Williams, *The Nation*, June 20, 2018).

Congress should consider the ways in which the United States continues to support violence and inequality in the countries from which refugees come. The United States has a responsibility, not just because we are a rich country, but because we are on the demand end of the drug trade and the supply end of arms dealing. This flow of drugs and arms is inherently destabilizing and has to be addressed.

Finally, when drafting legislation, Congress should consider the facts. Our president and many other politicians have tried to make immigration appear to be our country's greatest problem. They have lied about crime statistics, even lied about the crime statistics in Germany; lied about the numbers of people entering the U.S.; denied the economic and social contributions made by immigrants.

And what about us now? What should we do? Let's watch if children already separated are re-united with their parents. Let's see how long whole families are incarcerated. Let's see if the administration stays in their fact-free zone. And let's follow the money: Which private companies own the detention centers and the foster-care services? Let's not look away when we need to watch. Let's not be paralyzed when we need to act. Let's vote and let's organize.

4. This is the call to action that AVA-Berlin signed in support of the #Unteilbar demonstration on October 13:

Es findet eine dramatische politische Verschiebung statt: Rassismus und Menschenverachtung werden gesellschaftsfähig. Was gestern noch undenkbar war und als unsagbar galt, ist kurz darauf Realität. Humanität und Menschenrechte, Religionsfreiheit und Rechtsstaat werden offen angegriffen. Es ist ein Angriff, der uns allen gilt.

Wir lassen nicht zu, dass Sozialstaat, Flucht und Migration gegeneinander ausgespielt werden. Wir halten dagegen, wenn Grund- und Freiheitsrechte weiter eingeschränkt werden sollen.

Das Sterben von Menschen auf der Flucht nach Europa darf nicht Teil unserer Normalität werden. Europa ist von einer nationalistischen Stimmung der Entsolidarisierung und Ausgrenzung erfasst. Kritik an diesen unmenschlichen Verhältnissen wird gezielt als realitätsfremd diffamiert.

Während der Staat sogenannte Sicherheitsgesetze verschärft, die Überwachung ausbaut und so Stärke markiert, ist das Sozialsystem von Schwäche gekennzeichnet: Millionen leiden darunter, dass viel zu wenig investiert wird, etwa in Pflege, Gesundheit, Kinderbetreuung und Bildung. Unzählige Menschen werden jährlich aus ihren Wohnungen vertrieben. Die Umverteilung von unten nach oben wurde seit der Agenda 2010 massiv vorangetrieben. Steuerlich begünstigte Milliardengewinne der Wirtschaft stehen einem der größten Niedriglohnsektoren Europas und der Verarmung benachteiligter Menschen gegenüber.

Nicht mit uns – Wir halten dagegen!

Wir treten für eine offene und solidarische Gesellschaft ein, in der Menschenrechte unteilbar, in der vielfältige und selbstbestimmte Lebensentwürfe selbstverständlich sind. Wir stellen uns gegen jegliche Form von Diskriminierung und Hetze. Gemeinsam treten wir antimuslimischem Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Antiziganismus, Antifeminismus und LGBTIQ*- Feindlichkeit entschieden entgegen.

Wir sind jetzt schon viele, die sich einsetzen:

Ob an den Außengrenzen Europas, ob vor Ort in Organisationen von Geflüchteten und in Willkommensinitiativen, ob in queer-feministischen, antirassistischen Bewegungen, in Migrant*innenorganisationen, in Gewerkschaften, in Verbänden, NGOs, Religionsgemeinschaften, Vereinen und Nachbarschaften, ob in dem Engagement gegen Wohnungsnot, Verdrängung, Pflegenotstand, gegen Überwachung und Gesetzesverschärfungen oder gegen die Entrechtung von Geflüchteten – an vielen Orten sind Menschen aktiv, die sich zur Wehr setzen gegen Diskriminierung, Kriminalisierung und Ausgrenzung.

Gemeinsam werden wir die solidarische Gesellschaft sichtbar machen! Am 13. Oktober wird von Berlin ein klares Signal ausgehen.

5. On October 30, AVA signed this open letter to the President written by the Pittsburgh Steering Committee of Bend the Arc, a progressive Jewish group that focuses on U.S. domestic issues:

Yesterday, a gunman slaughtered 11 Americans during Shabbat morning services. We mourn with the victims' families and pray for the wounded. Here in Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, we express gratitude for the first responders and for the outpouring of support from our neighbors near and far. We are committed to healing as a community while we recommit ourselves to repairing our nation.

For the past three years your words and your policies have emboldened a growing white nationalist movement. You yourself called the murderer evil, but yesterday's violence is the direct culmination of your influence.

President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you fully denounce white nationalism.

Our Jewish community is not the only group you have targeted. You have also deliberately undermined the safety of people of color, Muslims, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities. Yesterday's massacre is not the first act of terror you incited against a minority group in our country.

President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you stop targeting and endangering all minorities.

The murderer's last public statement invoked the compassionate work of the Jewish refugee service HIAS at the end of a week in which you spread lies and sowed fear about migrant families in Central America. He killed Jews in order to undermine the efforts of all those who find shared humanity with immigrants and refugees.

President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you cease your assault on immigrants and refugees.

The Torah teaches that every human being is made b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God.

This means all of us.

In our neighbors, Americans, and people worldwide who have reached out to give our community strength, there we find the image of God. While we cannot speak for all Pittsburghers, or even all Jewish Pittsburghers, we know we speak for a diverse and unified group when we say:

President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you commit yourself to compassionate, democratic policies that recognize the dignity of all of us.

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 and with The Coalition Berlin.

2. AVA is eager to announce political events around town, especially if they are in English. Let us know if you hear of something that might interest others. And let us know about your own exhibitions, publications, and performances. Just send the information to wertheim@zedat.fu-berlin.de.

3. ALAN BENSON, AVA's chief voter registrar for many years now, led our 2018 voter registration campaign. AVA voter registrars are especially welcome at venues where representatives of political parties can't go – schools, for example. Many, many thanks to ALAN and his team.