

AVA-BERLIN, ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

DECEMBER 15, 2019 – HIGHLIGHTS

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

- 1 . Our last annual business meeting was held on December 9, 2018, at La Parrilla, Albrechtstrasse 11 near Bhf. Friedrichstrasse. We reviewed the past year and made plans for 2019. The Executive Committee had previously decided that we really wanted another associate, and instead of expanding the EC, we decided to rotate the few secretarial duties among volunteers. All minute-taking would be done on a voluntary basis as occasions arose. Our non-binding guidelines have been changed accordingly.
2. The following Executive Committee officers were elected for 2019: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair); PAM SELWYN (vice chair); ALAN BENSON (treasurer); JANE HARTMANN (assistant treasurer); ISABEL COLE, MICHAEL STELTZER, and JON WOLFE (associates).
3. ANN WERTHEIMER continued as mailing list administrator and PAM SELWYN as mailing list administrator backup.
4. JON WOLFE continued as our web master.
5. CAROLYN PRESCOTT and KAREN AXELRAD posted all relevant information on our web site www.avaberlin.org - including KAREN's great photo documentation.
6. KAREN AXELRAD, CAROLYN PRESCOTT, and PAM SELWYN posted links to events, articles, and petitions of interest to our membership on Facebook and responded to incoming questions.
- 7 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.
8. 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.org and then click on MEMBERSHIP for details. ALAN BENSON, with JANE HARTMANN as backup, kept dues records, answered questions, and wrote reminders.
9. We held our monthly Stammtische at Café Daddy, a family-run Turkish café with homemade food at Kolonnenstr. 50 in Schöneberg.
 - 9a. On March 7, Bella Grief talked to us about the neo-Nazi terror group NSU.
 - 9b. On August 1, Carolyn Prescott read her new poem *A Call for Solidarity*.
 - 9c. On September 5, Rich Rosen gave us the details of The Green New Deal.

OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

1. On May 24, AVA joined the weekly Fridays for Future protests (<https://fridaysforfuture.de/>), this time at a larger demo planned for noon at the Brandenburg Gate to mark the Europawahl. ISABEL COLE organized our contingent there. See photos on our web site www.avaberlin.org. An American journalist got a group together (tentatively called "Freelancers for Future") to attend the weekly protests on a regular basis. He wanted to launch this initiative at the protest on May 24 so AVA agreed to join the Freelancers. This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. See photos at our web site: www.avaberlin.org.
2. On July 12, AVA (along with the Democrats Abroad Berlin and The Coalition Berlin) held a solidarity vigil with Lights for Liberty, whose demonstrations were taking place all across the United states at the same time. These vigils were intended to shine a light on the detention camps at the U.S.-Mexico border. See www.avaberlin.org for photos and 3 below for Ann Wertheimer's speech.
3. On September 11, AVA, along with the Humanistische Union, sponsored a screening of *Knock Down the House* (USA 2019, dir. Rachel Lears) at the Aquarium at Kottbuser Tor, Skalitzer Str. 6. The evening was organised by NATALIE GRAVENOR.

“At a moment of historic volatility in American politics, these four women decide to fight back, setting themselves on a journey that will change their lives and their country forever. Without political experience or corporate money, they build a movement of insurgent candidates challenging powerful incumbents in Congress. Their efforts result in a legendary upset.

When tragedy struck her family in the midst of the financial crisis, Bronx-born Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez had to work double shifts in a restaurant to save her home from foreclosure. After losing a loved one to a preventable medical condition, Amy Vilela didn't know what to do with the anger she felt about America's broken health care system. Cori Bush was drawn into the streets when the police shooting of an unarmed black man brought protests and tanks into her neighborhood. Paula Jean Swearengin was fed up with watching her friends and family suffer and die from the environmental effects of the coal industry.”

Over 40 people attended and the discussion afterwards was lively. Our voter registrar ALAN BENSON staffed a table in the lobby before and after the film to inform people about voter registration in the various states.

4. On September 20, an AVA contingent joined the Global Fridays for Future protest at Pariser Platz, near the U.S. Embassy. See avaberlin.org for a photo of our banner amid the crowd. We again joined a Global Fridays for Future protest on November 29.

LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED AND SPEECHES GIVEN

1. On January 21, American Voices Abroad Berlin signed the Basel Appeal on Disarmament and Sustainable Security. Here is the basic text:

Last year, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 2 Minutes to Midnight citing “the failure of world leaders to deal with looming threats of nuclear war and climate change”, and highlighting the increasingly high risks of a nuclear exchange by accident, miscalculation, conflict escalation or intent. We applaud the Korean peace and denuclearization process which commenced since then, and we give our full support for continuing diplomacy to ensure success. And we welcome adoption by the United Nations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

However, we are extremely concerned about the deteriorating security environment in Europe and internationally during 2018 arising from the erosion of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty; United States withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear non-proliferation agreement); unresolved conflicts between Russia and the West including over Crimea and Syria and between nuclear armed states in other regions including South Asia and the South China Sea; further development and modernization of nuclear weapons and related military systems; and provocative war games and nuclear threat postures.

1) INF Treaty

We are particularly concerned about the unravelling of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, an historic agreement reached in 1987 between the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometres, and to utilize extensive on-site inspections for verification of its implementation. We call on the United States and Russia to refrain from developing and deploying weapons systems that could violate the Treaty, and to resolve compliance issues through dialogue and through enhanced work of the Special Verification Commission established by the Treaty.

We call on the Russian Duma and U.S. Congress to refuse to authorise, or allocate funding for, the development of weapons systems which could violate the Treaty, such as the Russian 9M729 missile and the proposed new U.S. nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

And we call on European member States of NATO to re-affirm their opposition to any deployment of nuclear missiles in Europe.

2) New START Treaty

We are also concerned that the current conflicts may undermine the new START Treaty which provides common-sense limits and verification on the numbers of U.S. and Russian deployed strategic weapons and delivery vehicles, and which is set to expire in February 2021. We call on the US and Russia to extend the New START Treaty until 2026 and to undertake additional cuts to their nuclear stockpiles, either unilaterally or through negotiations.

3) Nuclear risk-reduction including No-First-Use

In order to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use by accident, miscalculation or escalation, we call on Russia, the U.S. and NATO to re-affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be launched, and to implement such a declaration by adopting policies to never initiate the use of nuclear weapons ('no-first-use' policies). And we call on Russia and the U.S. to rescind their 'launch-on-warning' policies and to end their high operational readiness to use nuclear weapons.

4) Achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world

We highlight the universal obligation to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world, and we welcome the commitment made by NATO and the United States to 'create the conditions' to realise this goal. We call on them to implement this commitment through:

- a) enhanced dialogue and engagement with other nuclear-armed States;
- b) developing an action plan for the comprehensive phase-out of nuclear deterrence and its replacement by common security;
- c) undertaking initial steps by reducing nuclear stockpiles, cancelling nuclear weapons modernisation programs, cutting nuclear weapons budgets and reallocating these funds to support sustainable development; and
- d) joining with other nuclear-armed and reliant States to negotiate a global nuclear weapons convention (to eliminate all nuclear weapons) as already supported by China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and most non-nuclear countries.

We reaffirm that disarmament helps create security, and we commit to acting resolutely for a nuclear-weapons-free and less militarised world. We call on cities, parliaments, governments and civil society around the world to join us in this endeavour.

2. On July 12, AVA joined the Lights for Liberty rally at Pariser Platz. Here is Ann Wertheimer's speech, a video of which you can see at www.avaberlin.org.

We stand here today in solidarity with thousands of people at hundreds of protests all over the United States. These are the Lights for Liberty: The Vigils to End Detention Camps at the U.S.-Mexico Border.

Tonight, thousands of Americans will go to detention camps at the border, as well as into the streets of their hometowns, to protest the inhumane conditions faced by refugees. The Lights for Liberty demonstrations will shine light on the horrific abuses of the Trump administration.

We may be a small group here tonight in Berlin, but we are in good company. We stand with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), with Indivisible, with Code Pink, the Women's March, the United Farm Workers Foundation, The Dolores Huerta Foundation, the New Sanctuary Coalition, the Black Movement Law Project, V-Day, the ACLU of Southern California and many, many more civil society organizations who have agreed to sponsor this mobilization.

The barbaric policies of the Trump administration have created what is being called a crisis of American values. In fact, no children anywhere should be separated from their parents, and no children should suffer these conditions, and, certainly not children in the care of the American government. [The New York Times, editorial, June 24, 2019]. That is why we are here tonight at Pariser Platz, just steps away from the United States Embassy, and around the corner from the Holocaust Memorial.

A few reminders to our government:

- The United States has a history of intervention in some of the countries from which these refugees are now fleeing. We have toppled governments, supported murderous heads of state, aided in the plunder of natural resources. . . . 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]
- And the United States continues to support violence and inequality in the countries from which refugees come. Our government has a particular 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.
- Finally, children are always in a special category. We try to protect them because they are especially vulnerable and because they are not in a legal position to enact decisions on their own behalf. We don't use them as hostages in political power struggles.

This administration has tried to make immigration appear to be our country's greatest problem – lying about crime statistics; lying about the numbers of people entering the United States; and ignoring and denying the economic and social contributions made by immigrants. These fabricated threats are intended to prevent us from having an honest national discussion about immigration. They are meant to validate the President's America-first narrative and to advance his political agenda.

These lies about immigration help to distract us from the real threats to America: the destruction wrought by climate change; the economic insecurity of the poor and the middle class; the instability of a health care system under ongoing attack by Republican lawmakers; the inequality of educational opportunity; and the threat of big money in politics that corrupts our electoral and governing processes. These are the real threats to America.

When children are separated from their families, when asylum seekers and others who want to emigrate are held under inhumane conditions – whether we call them detention camps, concentration camps, or cages – we must remember that the intent is to reinforce power through hate and bigotry.

We know this and so we are here tonight in solidarity with Lights for Liberty. We must close the camps!

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 always happy 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 2019 voter registration campaign. In this non-election year, ALAN provided information about (re-)registration in the various states, especially at special events like the *Knock Down the House* screening on September 11.