



17.10.1977

Night of 17 into 18 October: Suicide of RAF terrorists Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe in the Stuttgart-Stammheim jail



At first, department stores go up in flames, and then people are killed. Emerging from the largely university student based “Extra-Parliamentary Opposition” (APO), the terror organisation “Rote Armee Fraktion” (“Red Army Fraction”) (RAF) forms as a radical breakaway group. Corrupt German traditions from left and right wing politics combine in the RAF: radical idealism, socialist anti-capitalism connected with anti-Judaism, great readiness to use violence, and authoritarian leadership principles. Using kidnappings and political assassinations, RAF terrorists want to overthrow what they call the “Schweinesystem” (“system of pigs”). The group sees itself as “anti-imperialistic” and internationalist. In what they perceive as their fight, the RAF’s methods are oriented towards the South American concept of the “urban guerrilla”. Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof are the founding members of the RAF’s first generation. Baader is an authoritarian petty criminal who has very little regard for women but, at the same time, undoubtedly possesses great charisma. Not highly educated, he nevertheless melds a hybrid of socialist and anarchist ideas and becomes the “face” of the RAF. Gudrun Ensslin is the daughter of a Swabian pastor, and is studying to become a primary school teacher. Like many of her generation, she is radicalised by the “murder” of Benno Ohnesorg and by the Vietnam War. Ulrike Meinhof is certainly the most sophisticated personality of this leading trio, renowned throughout Germany as a political journalist. Meinhof is also the only genuine intellectual of the three RAF terrorists.



After Baader and Ensslin participate in an arson attack on a large department store in Frankfurt, as a protest against Western consumerism and the Vietnam War, they each receive a prison sentence. On 14 May, 1970, Meinhof and two other terrorists liberate Baader using open violence at a faked press conference. An innocent bystander is seriously injured in the process. Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and other terrorists are driven underground. In the aftermath, they hold up banks, and conduct a number of terrorist attacks, in which many people are killed or seriously injured. In the month of May 1972, six bombings are perpetrated, including attacks on the publishing building of the Axel Springer press empire, the headquarters of the 5th Corps of the US Armed Forces in Frankfurt/Main, the headquarters of the 7th US Army in Heidelberg, and various police stations. The West German state is unrelenting in their response, and searches for the bank robbers and bomber with every available new, and also repressive, means to hand. The RAF’s goal, which in retrospect was quite naive, is to provoke the state



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to undertake practices that the German population will perceive to be oppressive, consequently causing the general populace to rebel against this authority. In this way, the RAF hopes to kindle the socialist revolution. However, the majority of Germans is horrified by the RAF's violence, and is not considering revolution in any way, shape or form. Shortly after the May attacks, Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and a number of other RAF terrorists are arrested. The prisoners are incarcerated in the high security Stuttgart-Stammheim Prison. With the help of a large group of supporters, they succeed in discrediting their conditions of detention in the eyes of the public as "Isolationsfolter" ("isolation torture"), and thereby stylise themselves as martyrs.



The RAF's second generation sets itself the target of liberating the founding generation from prison. One of this second generation's leading figures is Brigitte Mohnhaupt. New kidnappings and more terrorist attacks are organised, with the aim of forcing the release of the alleged "political prisoners". The German embassy in Stockholm is taken hostage in 1975, ending in a bloody disaster. In 1977, two terrorists whose identity remains unknown to the present day - former and surviving RAF members continue to this day to remain silent about the circumstances - shoot the Attorney General of Germany, Siegfried Buback, his driver and a judicial officer in Karlsruhe. The Chairman of the Dresdner Bank Board of Directors, Jürgen Ponto, is shot dead in the same year. Ultimately, the President of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, Hanns Martin Schleyer, is kidnapped on 5 September 1977 in Cologne. Four of those travelling in the police escorted cars are killed in the process. The kidnappers demand the release of the prisoners and threaten that they will murder Schleyer. However, the federal government, under the leadership of Helmut Schmidt, remains firm and will not bow to the extortion demands. Finally, in October 1977, Palestinian terrorists, in consultation with the RAF, hijack the passenger flight "Landshut", and threaten to murder all the passengers. However, even this final attempt to force the release of the RAF first generation members from Stammheim is doomed to failure. In a high-risk operation, an elite unit of the German federal police, GSG 9, storms the plane in Mogadishu (Somalia) on 18 October, and frees all passengers. During the same night, as the "Landshut" plane is liberated, the Stammheim prisoners, Baader, Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe, another protagonist of the first generation, commit suicide. Ulrike Meinhof had already taken her own life in 1976 while in prison. Schleyer's corpse is found on 19 October in a parked car in French Alsace. Federal Chancellor Schmidt sacrifices Schleyer's life to the policy of a constitutional state that does not want to appear to be open to blackmail. To his dying day, Schmidt considered this decision to be the heaviest burden of his time in government. The tragic events surrounding the kidnapping and murder of Schleyer, the storming of the "Landshut" plane and the suicide of the leaders of the RAF first generation are now frequently referred to as the "Deutscher Herbst" ("German Autumn").

The second generation is followed by a third generation of the RAF, which continues to undertake indiscriminate bombings, causing the deaths of countless more people through until the 1990s. It is not until 1998 that the RAF announces the end of their so-called "Kampf" ("battle") in a letter purportedly

leaked to the press. Former terrorists continue to elude capture to the present day.

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