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Cultural Revolution or Cultural Shock? Student Radicalism and 1968 in Germany

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The sixties generation came to power recently in Germany. Its symbolic figure is Joschka Fischer of the Green Party, who was a student radical in 1968 and thirty years later was appointed foreign minister. While foreign and domestic policies have changed fundamentally since reunification in 1989, diminishing the historical impact of the sixties in West Germany, Germans today still debate the meaning of 1968. Former activists claim that their protest movement created a cultural revolution and a political enlightenment which marked the actual birth of a *democratic* Federal Republic. Conservative critics disagree; to them, the year was a cultural shock which led to social disintegration. As in many Western countries, the German legacies of 1968 are mired in debate.

Who belonged to the sixties generation in Germany and what was its impact on society? What were the differences between the protest in Germany and elsewhere? To what degree was German protest influenced by demonstrations in other countries, especially the United States, and to what extent was it based on local German conditions?

These questions will be the focus of this article. I will discuss the factors contributing to the rise of student radicalism in Germany. Then, I will analyze the leading organization of protest, the Sozialistischer Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS), which will be compared with the American Students for a Democratic Society, who shared the same abbreviation and New Left ideology (Neue Linke). These ideas had a great impact on the protest dynamic, but SDS was not the sole cause of the German 1968. Thus, I will examine other developments during the decade that culminated in 1968, and finally the controversy about what Joschka Fischer labeled that "magic year."¹

Spawning Grounds

One of the most important factors for the youth eruption of the sixties in the United States was the baby boom. If the sixties

generation is defined to include anyone who turned eighteen during the era from 1960 to 1972, then this generation numbered forty-five million Americans. In contrast, a baby boom played no part in the protest movements in Germany. There, the birth rate dropped after World War II because many young men died during the war and because of postwar dislocation and destruction. The number of births did not increase until the economic boom of the late fifties. The subsequent German baby boom between 1958 and 1968 thus had no impact on stimulating student protests at the end of the sixties.

Yet, there were more students in West Germany by 1968. That was because of the immigration of 3.5 million people from the Communist German Democratic Republic before the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961. Student leaders like Rudi Dutschke or Bernd Rabehl were born in the GDR, emigrated, and studied in West Berlin. Moreover, prosperity allowed more middle-class parents to be able to afford higher education for their children. The number of students who entered universities increased from 195,000 to 281,000 between 1960 and 1966, with a proportionate increase in faculty and graduate teaching assistants. This resulted in overcrowded facilities and a decrease in personal contact between students and professors.

Crowded campuses were a factor in the student revolt in Germany, but were much less of a reason than they were in the United States. The main cause of student protest was a change within the political system. The Constitution of 1949 that established the Federal Republic of Germany increased the power of the parliament and the political parties and decreased the authority of the president. The reason was the failure of the Weimar Republic and the experience of Nazism. Furthermore, the Constitution dictated a 5 percent rule; that is, a political party needed that proportion of the vote to enter parliament, meaning that only a few parties dominated the political process by the sixties. One of the two dominant parties was the Social Democratic Party (SPD) which changed their structure from a class-oriented party (*Weltanschauungspartei*) to a popular party (*Volkspartei*) after their electoral defeats during the fifties. At the Party Convention in 1959 in Bad Godesberg the SPD abandoned its Marxist tradition in favor of a social market economy (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*). This "de-ideologization," as it was called, reduced the differences between the two main parties, SPD and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), and eventually became an important factor contributing to the protests later in the sixties. The de-ideologization continued in 1966, when SPD and CDU/CSU built a government coalition (*Große Koalition*), in order to cope with the first economic recession after years of strong growth. The recession was less an economic crisis than a psychological shock after years of believing in technological and economic progress. It was no surprise that the formation of an extraparliamentary opposition in Germany began that year.

There were other reasons why some students had little confidence in the Great Coalition government. The SPD accepted Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger of the CDU—a person who had played an active role in the foreign ministry during the Third Reich. The new government also appointed Franz Josef Strauß of the CSU as finance minister. In 1962, Strauß had been forced to quit his position as

defense minister after the Spiegel Affair, when the Federal German bar (Bundesanwaltschaft) charged *Der Spiegel* with treason and began legal proceedings in the wake of the magazine's publication of a detailed and critical report of a NATO maneuver. Public opinion turned against the defense ministry after the police and army searched the magazine's editorial office and arrested the publisher Rudolf Augstein and editor Conrad Ahlers. Thus, critics charged that the coalition of the SPD with Kiesinger was a continuation of the undemocratic (obrigkeitsstaatliche) tradition in German political culture. The Great Coalition meant an interruption of the democratic process within the political parties, especially the SPD, and was considered as a step back toward the Nazi past. And significantly, the coalition promoted a generational conflict between the Hitler era parents and their adolescent children, an important aspect which distinguished the German generational clash in 1968 from those of other countries.

Critics also attacked the reform proposals of the Great Coalition, especially their plans for higher education and emergency laws. In the sixties the German university system remained the hierarchical institution developed in the nineteenth century (Ordinarienuniversität). Many students clamored for democratizing the system, but the government did not listen. The Coalition concentrated on expanding the faculty in an attempt to make German universities competitive with foreign institutions. This irritated the new generation of students. They had been influenced by the postwar re-education programs aimed to democratize the nation, and as they attended classes in the mid-1960s they realized that a gap existed between their democratic ideals and the undemocratic culture of their universities.

Many students also were concerned about another reform plan of the Great Coalition, that of the "emergency laws" (Notstandsgesetze). These laws regulate the use of power in crises such as natural disasters or war. President Paul von Hindenburg used them in 1930 and 1933 to create a government independent from parliament, after the democratic parties had lost the majority, and this had made it easy for Hitler to assume dictatorial power in 1933. After World War II such powers were based on the Germany Treaty (Deutschlandvertrag) of 1954, which had been ratified by Germany and the Western Allies. Yet by the sixties, many Germans wanted to demonstrate sovereignty by creating their own form of emergency laws, and the Great Coalition introduced new statutes as part of their reform plan. Critics complained that the legislative process for these laws was similar to the 1930s, giving excessive powers to the executive, and this prompted a growing backlash against the laws which contributed to the formation of the protest movements in 1968.

All of these factors were connected to the democratic development in Germany after World War II. But there was another component which could be found in other Western countries as well: anti-communism. Like the United States during the McCarthy era, anti-communism was a powerful weapon used to stigmatize people as public enemies, and the government used such allegations against many forms of radical opposition, including protesters favoring nuclear disarmament.

Consequently, by the mid-1960s there existed a German Constitution that declared democracy, but a political culture that repressed democratic values,

making it nearly impossible to articulate opposition views outside of the two dominant political parties. Then in 1966 the two parties established the Great Coalition which increased political and social opposition and resulted in emerging radical organizations becoming more influential in society and on campuses.

Political radicalism also was aided by the economy and technology. With booming growth, a postwar consumer society was developing in West Germany. New mass consumer products like magazines, radio, and especially television created a profound change in living conditions—and fostered a mass media which reinforced the message of an awakening youth faced with an older generation of conservative politicians.

Rise of Radicalism

One of the most important groups in the protest movement was the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund. SDS began as the youth group of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), but as early as 1955 they clashed with the SPD over the issue of establishing contact with communist youth groups in the German Democratic Republic. By 1958 SDS was demanding official recognition of the borders between East and West Germany, which angered SPD officials, as was the case when SDS refused to expel several members who were sympathetic to communist groups in West Germany. Like the later American SDS, the German group denounced the emotional anti-communism of the Cold War, but unlike the Americans, the German SDS saw a relationship between anti-communism and anti-Semitism in Germany. They held anti-communism responsible for a lack of critical opposition within the SPD and in the entire German political system. In 1959 the Social Democrats abandoned their Marxist tradition at the party convention at Bad Godesberg, meaning that SDS became the only platform for a radical left, and two years later the SPD and SDS split. During the early sixties, SDS was little more than a number of study groups of students and dissident intellectuals; this period was important, nevertheless, because members were developing the theoretical sophistication through which they later had strong influence on the protest movement.

Dissident Intellectuals

In Germany, as in other Western countries, the formation of a theoretically sophisticated radical left was inspired by the New Left (Neue Linke). Since the end of the fifties, various dissident intellectuals had created a new image of the left which disagreed with the ideas of the Communists, Liberals, or Social Democrats that composed the Old Left. The reasons for the formation of the New Left were many, including the Cold War, the repression of Hungarian protests in 1956, and the XX Convention of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, which confirmed the use of terror during the Stalin era.

One of the intellectuals who became a central figure in New Left was Columbia University sociologist C. Wright Mills. In response to the British book, *Out of*

Apathy, he wrote his "Letter to the New Left" in Autumn 1960, which advocated that the labor class should no longer be considered the only revolutionary agent; instead, students and some young intelligentsia were beginning to escape apathy, and they would develop a new social change theory and confront institutions.² Mills was not the only intellectual who criticized the Old Left and classical Marxism, but his "Letter" soon became a symbol to student organizations like the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund in Germany or the Students for a Democratic Society in the U.S.A. On both sides of the Atlantic they began to turn against the Old Left, organize, and form a collective identity. In 1962 the German and American SDS established initial contacts.

Analyzing Society

To the German SDS the "Frankfurt School" was very important in their analysis of society. This group of sociologists—Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas—were the bearers of Marxist tradition in sociology. An exiled member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, later became very important. According to this school, repression in advanced capitalist societies was not just a matter of police and the courts. It was inherent in all institutions. In schools, corporations, culture, and in language itself, society limited its members and prevented them from realizing that there might be alternative ways of living. Some scholars of the Frankfurt School developed their critique of the "culture industry" (Kulturindustrie) and the "authoritarian state" (autoritärer Staat) during their immigration to the United States in the 1930s where they had to face what they considered the crude realities of an advanced capitalist society. To Adorno, American broadcasting and films were prime instruments of "manipulation" which integrated the "unity of the system even closer." Along with studies concerning the relationship of anti-Semitism and the authoritarian personality, the Frankfurt School perceived the individual in a capitalist society as a subconsciously "uniformed" mass-man, lacking autonomy and thus capable of authoritarian surrender to powers which require large numbers of consumers. These consumers were given the semblance of free choice while they reinforced the ideology through which they were enslaved.³

German student groups such as the SDS popularized the Frankfurt critique at universities during the sixties. To them, the manipulation by the culture industry with its hidden authoritarianism paralleled the traumatic Weimar experience. Analyzing post-World War II German politics, Jürgen Habermas came to the conclusion that "liberal democracy either will . . . fulfill its own intention as Civil Society or it will change the character and will exhibit, more or less open, an authoritarian form."⁴

Also important to SDS and New Left analysis was the Cuban Revolution. Revolutionary leaders like Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, who were also former students and representatives of the young intelligentsia, provided an analysis that differed from the Old Left. The Cuban model declared that the United States and most of the West were capitalistic imperialists, an idea that

became more important with the escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965. By the resolution of the OLAS Conference in Havana during summer of 1967 Che attacked imperialism, urging a “global liberation struggle” with the slogan “Two, Three, Many Vietnams!” Many radicals in Germany, especially SDS members, were listening.

Agencies of Social Change

The New Left did not agree with the Old that the proletariat was capable of breaking out of the internalized repression and encouraging social change. From Marcuse to Mills, these scholars felt that the working class reinforced the existing majoritarian demands, and that they were incapable of emancipating the masses from their subconscious chains. This was labeled “depoliticization,” and it also was true of the leading left party, the SPD. Their party bureaucracy, formalistic procedures, and opinion manipulation, all demonstrated to the German New Left the hidden authoritarianism of the SPD. New Left critics complained that the SPD kept important issues away from the political arena, manipulated the consensus, and prevented alternatives and challenges to decision-making. Jürgen Habermas questioned the party and the autonomy of “public opinion” as a force capable of influencing political power. In his influential 1962 book, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, he contrasted the manipulated “mass” of German reality with the “public” demanded by democratic theory.

Habermas and other New Left critics influenced many university students and SDS members. To them, there was a gap between democratic ideals and reality at their institutions. The university had become part of the system; it no longer was autonomous and now was unable to emancipate itself from economic and political forces. The classical university, a venue of research and freedom, had become a myth in advanced capitalist societies such as Germany.

Direct Action and Transformation of Consciousness

By the mid-1960s, then, SDS considered neither the working class, SPD, nor the public capable of resisting the tendencies of “depoliticization” in society, and they began developing action strategies within the student New Left. While intellectual ideas were important, they were less so than demonstrations conducted by the civil rights movement in the U.S.A. In particular, German students were impressed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the American South. There, African Americans and white students were acting out New Left ideals by launching peaceful sit-ins at lunch counters and in public facilities. Then in fall semester 1964, students at the University of California at Berkeley began massive protests to end censorship, the Free Speech Movement, and that action was discussed and analyzed at German universities.

The German SDS began copying these forms of direct action. On 22 June 1966, the SDS initiated the first German sit-in at the Henry Ford Hall of the Free University of Berlin (Freie Universität). Some 3,000 students sat-in to prevent a

proposed Free University reform that would limited student tenure to eight semesters and give administrators the power to expel. This first sit-in was a success, for the limitation rule was not adopted by Free University administration.

Once imported from America, direct action took on a German form, and this was a result of the influence of avant garde groups within the student New Left. One was "Subversive Action" (Subversive Aktion), which had its roots in a movement of European artists called Situationist International. Rudi Dutschke, a member of the Subversive Action and SDS, explained that action could result in "moments of self-consciousness" for the protester, and that could spread radical opposition and transform consciousness.⁵

Inspired by the Situationists and the Frankfurt School, Subversive Action members such as Dutschke and Bernd Rabehl developed a strategy which aimed to create situations where power structures would be unveiled, and where participants would define themselves independently from authority; they aimed to transform the individual. The subversive actions were directed against the manipulation of consciousness by the mass-media, against the puritanical oppression of sexuality, and against an achievement-oriented society.

One of the most significant subversive actions was the "go for a walk demonstration" (Spaziergangsdemonstration) at the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin on 10 December 1966. During this anti-Vietnam demonstration of 2,000 people, 200 SDS members and the counterculture group Commune Number One (Kommune 1) left the march, which the police had mandated would only go through empty suburban streets, and walked into the city where demonstrations were forbidden. The protesters broke the mandate, but attempted to prevent a confrontation with the police by dispersing and then regrouping at the signal of a child's trumpet. Nevertheless, the police reacted with repression and arrested 74 people, most of whom were shopping for Christmas presents.

More SDS study groups were turning to action in 1967 and 1968, carrying the struggle to the government and to many institutions. In February 1967 SDS began to organize high school chapters to spread radical opposition within the education system. By 1968 this activism converged into a mass movement that mobilized thousands to protest against the social system. They marched to confront what they perceived as the three evils in Germany—higher education, emergency laws, the Springer press monopoly—and to support global liberation.

Student Radicalism and Higher Education

The German SDS always considered the university as the focal point for social change. As early as their statement on "The University in a Democratic Society" in 1961 the SDS had advocated a university that would train them to think critically and to act politically, which would result in more democracy at the university and in the society. Georg Picht's book in 1964, *The Catastrophe of German Higher Education*, also stimulated discussion about university reform. But the government failed to act.

Until 1967 the student movement only involved a few hundred students and was confined to Berlin. But one event caused the protest to spread to West Germany—the killing of Benno Ohnesorg. On 2 June 1967 the SDS in Berlin organized a march to protest the state visit of the Shah of Iran, who the students believed was a brutal dictator supported by the western countries. Four days earlier, the Shah had visited Munich, where some 6,000 students demonstrated, and the evening before the Shah arrived in Berlin, 3,000 students at the Free University listened to Bahmam Nirumand, an Iranian exile, castigate the Iranian leader. The police tried to avoid a confrontation in Berlin streets, and banned the SDS march, but several thousand students gathered that evening in front of the Opera. While the Shah and German politicians were listening to Mozart, the police attacked and beat the protesters, arresting many. During the fray, a police officer shot a twenty-six year old student, Benno Ohnesorg, in the head, killing him.

The death of Benno Ohnesorg created an uproar at the universities. During the next week some 100,000 students all over Germany participated in funeral marches and silent vigils to protest police brutality. In Frankfurt, where 500 students had marched against the state visit of the Shah, over 10,000 participated in the silent funeral march on 8 June. Even in more conservative universities like Bonn or Tübingen the killing marked the beginning of a larger student protest. Many cities were like Göttingen, where a march of 6,000 students was the largest demonstration since the founding of that university. On the funeral procession at Ohnesorg's college, the Technical University at Berlin, Bishop Scharf stated that Ohnesorg was not a political extremist but a member of the Protestant student union (Evangelische Studenten Gemeinde, ESG). A few thousand participated in the funeral procession from Berlin to Hannover, the home-town of Ohnesorg, where student groups organized a convention with the slogan "Conditions and Organization of Resistance" (Bedingungen und Organisation des Widerstandes). And in Bonn, the historian Karl Dietrich Bracher declared to students after a silent march, "everybody knows that it was not a single mishap, but conscious terror against dissenters . . . It has to do with the right of critical opposition and free speech, which are important for the success or failure of our second German democracy."⁶

In Berlin, students and intellectuals protested police brutality by organizing a march on 13 June. Some 5,000 appeared in an action that resembled the 1966 "go for a walk demonstration." One protester was followed by 50 students who were disguised as marshals—a parody of a police decision to employ one police officer to control fifty protesters. This time the police did not react. The students had too much popular support, not only from intellectuals, professors, clergy, but also from many prominent cultural leaders. Political pressure mounted, and by August both the mayor of Berlin and the police chief were forced to resign. Many students considered this the first victory of their movement.

The protests after the Ohnesorg killing encouraged students to mobilize in an attempt to reform higher education. Without government support, students established the "Critical University" (Kritische Universität) during the fall of 1967

and throughout 1968. They created the first one at the Free University of Berlin with thirty-three alternative seminars, mostly organized by the SDS. The Critical University was not an institution outside of the existing university, like the American "free universities." Instead, it was organized within the university to critique and reform higher education. This model spread to Hamburg, Munich, and Heidelberg, where student groups occupied rooms at their universities and organized seminars about New Left thought, higher education reform, and other issues such as radical opposition.

The creation of the Critical University was not always peaceful. In June 1968 students tried to turn the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt into a Critical University named after Karl Marx. To prevent the occupation of the university, the administration called the police, and the result was a stormy encounter which marked the beginning of future violent confrontations at other German universities and eventually the decline of alternative seminars.

Opposition to the Emergency Laws

There were other focal points of protest in 1968, and one was the emergency law. In 1966 activists created an opposition committee to the emergency laws called "Kuratorium Notstand der Demokratie" (Committee Against the State of Emergency).⁷ The Kuratorium was composed of a large network of peace groups which for years had been protesting against the introduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Germany. During the sixties these groups organized demonstrations at Easter time which often attracted some 300,000 people. Unions also supported the Kuratorium, for they opposed the emergency laws because they feared that the executive branch would forbid strikes and use troops against demonstrations. Finally, the SDS was part of the Kuratorium, and one former SDS president, Helmut Schauer, became the secretary of the Kuratorium.

The presence of prominent SDS members within the Kuratorium was no surprise. In contrast to Rudi Dutschke and the "anti-authoritarian" branch of SDS (Antiautoritären), Schauer and others had not broken the contact with organized labor, which they still considered a potential agency of social change. In October 1966 SDS organized the conference "Notstand der Demokratie" in Frankfurt, which concluded with a march of 24,000 participants. This was the beginning of a broad extraparliamentary opposition to the emergency laws, and by February 1967 the Kuratorium had organized local chapters in over eighty cities.

To the Kuratorium, Benno Ohnesorg's death was not considered the action of a single police officer, but as proof that uncontrolled executive power would use violence against demonstrations in any future state of emergency. Activists distributed this interpretation in some two million leaflets at 500 teach-ins and lectures in 350 cities during June 1967. From then on, many university students joined the movement opposing the emergency laws.

That movement climaxed in Bonn on 11 May 1968. Before the second reading of the laws in parliament, some 50,000 activists marched in protest, at a time when students at Columbia University in New York were occupying buildings and

radicals in Paris were setting up barricades in streets. The Bonn demonstrations were discussed in the international press. The *New York Times* wrote:

The crowds included teenagers, pregnant women, peasants and workers. Some wore lederhosen; others were in the favored attire of rebellious West German students, Mao caps and olive paratrooper jackets. Many wore plastic helmets in the expectation of violence. The slogans on their signs disclosed a variety of protest targets. The majority condemned the emergency legislation as Nazi.

The Bonn demonstration was one of the largest in postwar Germany, but it also marked the decline of the movement against the emergency laws. The activists realized that parliament would pass the statutes, yet in a weakened form, and so the movement had been a mixed success. The SPD had adopted a new approach to minimize the power of the executive branch in case of emergency. This satisfied the unions, and they decreased their participation in the Kuratorium. On 30 May parliament passed the law, which eventually ended SDS hopes of creating a permanent coalition between workers and students.

The Springer Campaign

Another target of the protest movements was the press, especially the Axel Springer Verlag newspapers which controlled 78 percent of the daily newspaper and magazine circulation of Berlin and nearly a third in West Germany. The parliament had studied press monopolization for a few years, but lawmakers ended their work in 1968 without results. All the while the Springer Verlag newspapers lashed out at student activism and grumblings about monopolization, labeling them communist, which had great influence in Berlin, a city surrounded by communist East Germany. Nor did the Springer Press reveal all the facts of the Benno Ohnesorg killing, and instead sided with the police. In reaction, students created a counter publicity (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) with demonstrations and leaflets, and some prominent liberals, such as Rudolf Augstein, planned to publish a new Berlin newspaper to challenge Springer. At the Critical Universities students discussed the situation, and in January 1968 held a conference, the "Springer Hearing," where some radicals demanded nothing less than the expropriation of the Springer press.

To the anti-authoritarian wing of the student movement and SDS, Springer reporting exposed the hidden authoritarianism of the culture industry.⁸ They struck back: On 5 October 1967 SDS held a sit-in at the annual meeting of the "group 47" (*Gruppe 47*), where the most prominent poets and publishers met, and discussed an anti-Springer resolution. Also, radicals held discussions with artists such as Wolf Vostell and Joseph Beuys, who were sympathetic to the protest. On 14 October, SDS attacked the book fair in Frankfurt and boycotted the businesses affiliated with the publications of Axel Springer Verlag.

In 1968 the confrontation between the students and Springer escalated. Springer initiated a vendetta against SDS leader Rudi Dutschke, labeling him "Red Rudi"

in the press, and in Berlin that increased popular hostility toward the students. When students held an anti-Vietnam war protest in February, about 50,000 Berliners responded by demonstrating their support of the American war. During the demonstration, police had to save a student who looked like Dutschke from being beaten by the crowd. Then in April, and a few days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., a neo-Nazi from Munich named Josef Bachmann, walked up to Dutschke on a Berlin street and shot him in the head. Dutschke survived.

The violent assault sparked tens of thousands of students all over Germany to attack the Springer Press. For them the relation between the Springer vendetta and the attempted assassination was evident. On 11 and 12 April some 3,000 students attacked Springer Verlag buildings in Hamburg and Frankfurt, which had to be defended by 1,500 policeman. In the South, riots erupted in Esslingen and Munich. Protesters built street barricades in order to stop the distribution of the Springer publications, while in Essen and Köln students overturned delivery trucks. On Easter Sunday, 14 April, a protest march with 12,000 people in Berlin turned into street fighting with the police. Next day, about 45,000 students in twenty cities participated in violent demonstrations against the Springer Press, while at the same time students protested in front of Springer buildings or German embassies in Amsterdam, Rome, Paris, Vienna, Prague, London, Milan, Tel Aviv, Toronto, and New York. Those demonstrations apparently influenced local student movements; a week after the Springer protest in front of the Rockefeller Center in New York City, the SDS began their occupation of Columbia University.⁹

The 1968 Easter riots marked a turning point for the student movement in Germany. During these confrontations more than forty people were seriously injured, and a student and a journalist died. For some radicals, this experience was the starting point that would lead to future violent struggles in the seventies.

Global Liberation Struggle

After the Ohnesorg killing, the Berlin SDS invited Herbert Marcuse to their city to speak. "Today radical opposition" Marcuse declared, "could only be regarded on a world wide scale." He encouraged contacts between the American and German student New Left and "liberation movements" of the Third World. Vietnam, he said, unveiled the character of Western society, "its inherent necessity of expansionism and aggression as well as the brutality of its oppression of any kind of Liberation Movement." SDS accepted this interpretation at a conference in September 1967, and they wrote a resolution which declared a global struggle for liberation, and "Solidarity with the American SDS and with the movement of resistance in the U.S.A."¹⁰

In February 1968 the world-wide liberation movement was advanced by the SDS International Vietnam Conference in West Berlin, which was attended by 6,000 representatives of international youth groups, artists, writers, and intellectuals. This was the single gathering that year of the leading international student

organizations such as the American SDS, the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire, and the Partito Socialista d'Unità Proletaria. The German SDS decorated the main lecture hall of the Technical University with Vietnamese National Liberation Front flags; pictures of German revolutionaries such as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Ernst Thälmann; along with slogans by Marx, Ho Chi Minh, and Che: "The revolutionaries' duty is to make the revolution." During the conference the radicals read many letters of protest and received numerous telegrams of solidarity. The affair ended with a march of 15,000 students, most apparently determined to return home and begin the revolution in 1968. In the final resolution, the German SDS called for a second revolutionary front in big Western cities, a strategy that some radicals put into practice during the forthcoming Easter riots, and also in November at the so-called "battle around the Tegeler Weg." This confrontation resulted because of the court case of lawyer Horst Mahler. He had defended the SDS during the sixties, and therefore Berlin officials attempted to withdraw his attorney's license. The subsequent trial prompted about 1,000 students to attack a few hundred police officers at the court building, resulting in some 130 serious injuries.

This militant protest was the last one of 1968 in Germany, and it signaled that a few radicals were headed toward a violent future. Some activists who felt part of the global liberation struggle would go underground and begin guerrilla campaigns; in Germany they became known as the Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion).

Conclusion

The protest movements of 1968 were influenced by various German factors: an outdated university system, the re-introduction of the emergency laws, and press monopolization by Springer Verlag. In the long run, Germany eventually experienced more violent forms of protest than the United States, for the Red Army Faction conducted massive terrorist activities during the seventies. The conflict between the sixties generation and their Nazi-era parents was certainly more intense than in other countries.

Yet despite many differences in politics and culture, there are some common points between the German and American movements. Personal contacts between the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund and the Students for a Democratic Society, as well as the influence of New Left thinkers like Mills and Marcuse, led to similar activities and strategies. Both used tactics of direct action in the form of sit-ins and marches, and both discussed and wrote about "participatory democracy" and "single purpose movements." Free universities (Kritische Universitäten), alternative schools, and underground newspapers (Gegenöffentlichkeit), became influential in both movements, and both eventually debated new issues that resulted in other significant social movements on both sides of the Atlantic, such as environmentalism and women's liberation. In other words, 1968 could be considered the birth of a previously missing democratic culture in Germany.

Now, on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Federal Republic, consequences of the sixties include something that was unintended by student protesters—a cultural debate. Did the rebellion of the sixties generation against social and cultural norms, habits, and institutions, give birth to what Ronald Inglehart claims are post-materialist values? Did the revolt result in a fundamental liberalization, as maintained by Jürgen Habermas, or was the result what Walter Grasskamp labels a hedonist consumer culture?¹¹ Social scientists have not yet arrived at conclusions where the cultural legacies of 1968 are concerned—and this is what gives passion to the debate over that “magic year.”

NOTES

1. “Ein magisches Jahr,” Joschka Fischer, *Spiegel special*, September 1998, 59–61.
2. C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review*, No. 5, Sept./Oct. 1960, 18–23. On the international dimension of new left thinking see Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey ed., *1968—Vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1998).
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9. Jeff Jones of the SDS chapter at the Columbia University remembered the Springer action as “a very militant demonstration,” which influenced activists at his university; many of the same people participated. Jeff Jones. Interview with Ronald Grele, Student Movements of the 1960s file, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 49.
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