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**The Historical Development of West Germany's New
Left from a Politico-theoretical Perspective with
Particular Emphasis on the *Marxistische Gruppe* and
Maoist *K-Gruppen***

by

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Humanities

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Abstract

There is a gap in the existing literature as to why the New Left in West Germany entered a phase of rapid decline by the end of the 1970s. The overarching aim of this thesis is to offer a politico-theoretical explanation for the historical development of the New Left and why the ‘red decade’ between 1967 and 1976/7 ended so abruptly. Within this context, the thesis will focus on the Maoist *K-Gruppen* and particular emphasis will be placed on the *Marxistische Gruppe*, which defied the general decline of West Germany’s New Left and developed into its largest organisation during the 1980s. Furthermore, the Red Cells movement will be analysed from which both currents emerged in the wake of the student movement.

Key works of the *Marxistische Gruppe* will be analysed with particular emphasis on politico-theoretical aspects. The analysis of the group’s theoretical work will provide a better understanding of the New Left’s historical developments against the background of the changing political environment.

This thesis will conclude with reflections on developments of the radical left after the collapse of the New Left in 1989/91 and how the red decade’s legacy is still prominent in the work of the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house (the *Marxistische Gruppe*’s ideological successor).

In conclusion, this thesis will reveal that the influence of politico-theoretical aspects on the historical development of the New Left has been given too little consideration and that the New Left’s fate cannot be adequately explained by external factors, but demands the consideration of the very development of theories and the practical conclusions organisations reached regarding their social, economic and cultural circumstances. This work will be the first to provide an insight into the potential of such a theoretical explanation for an understanding of the specific developments of the post-1968 West German New Left.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisors, Dr Maud Bracke and Dr Myrto Tsakatika, who provided me with the opportunity to master this project, and with it, review a very interesting aspect of modern German history. Thanks also to Dr Karin Bowie for her valuable comments during the annual progress review.

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I would like to thank my family for their support during these last 4 years.

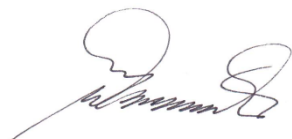
I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Crawford family in Cardigan, Pessac and Hinsdale for their diverse help during the compilation of this work. Chopping my way through the undergrowth of the English language would not have been possible without your help during this time.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank Megan for sacrificing her time and effort at different stages of this work, partially even during the completion of her own PhD thesis. The journey is not always its own reward. After all these years, we can finally look forward!

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except when explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthias Dapprich', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Print name: **Matthias Dapprich**

List of abbreviations

AB	Arbeiterbund für den Wiederaufbau der KPD, <i>Workers League for the Reestablishment of the KPD</i>
ABG	Arbeiter-Basis-Gruppen, <i>Workers Action Groups</i>
AfaS	Archiv für alternatives Schrifttum, Duisburg
APO	Außerparlamentarische Opposition, <i>extra-parliamentary opposition</i>
APO-Archiv	Archiv der Außerparlamentarischen Opposition an der Freien Universität Berlin, Berlin
BStU	Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, <i>Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR</i>
BWK	Bund Westdeutscher Kommunisten, <i>League of West German Communists</i>
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, <i>German Federation of Trade Unions</i>
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei, <i>German Communist Party</i>
FAU/R	Freie Arbeiter-Union/Rätekommunisten, <i>Free Workers-Union/Council Communists</i>
FRG	Bundesrepublik Deutschland, <i>Federal Republic of Germany</i>
GDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik, <i>German Democratic Republic</i>
GIM	Gruppe Internationaler Marxisten, <i>Group of International Marxists</i>
GSP	Gegenstandpunkt publishing house
GSPQ	GegenStandpunkt – Political Quarterly
KBW	Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschlands, <i>Communist League of West Germany</i>
KB	Kommunistischer Bund, <i>Communist League</i>
KHB (ML)	Kommunistischer Hochschulbund (Marxisten/ Leninisten), <i>Communist Higher Education League (Marxists/Leninists)</i>
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, <i>Communist Party of Germany</i>
KPD/AO	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Aufbauorganisation, <i>Communist Party of Germany/ Setup Organisation</i>
KPD/ML	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten, <i>Communist Party of Germany/ Marxists-Leninists</i>
KSB	Kommunistischer Studentenbund, <i>Communist Student League</i> (student organisation of the KBW)
KSV	Kommunistischer Studentenverband, <i>Communist Student Organisation</i> (student organisation of the KPD/AO)
KSZ	Kommunistische Studentenzeitung, <i>Communist Student Paper</i>
KVZ	Kommunistische Volkszeitung, <i>Communist People's Paper</i>
LCW	Lenin Collected Works
MECW	Marx Engels Collected Works
MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, <i>Ministry of State Security of the GDR</i> (a.k.a. <i>Stasi</i>)
MG	Marxistische Gruppe, <i>Marxist Group</i>
MG/EN	Marxistische Gruppe/Erlangen-Nürnberg, <i>Marxist Group/ Erlangen-Nuremberg</i>
MG/tf	Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion, <i>Marxist Group/ theory faction</i>
MHZ	Marxistische Hochschulzeitung, <i>Marxist Higher Education Paper</i>
ML	Marxism-Leninism

MLPD	Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, <i>Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany</i>
MSB Spartakus	Marxistischer Studentenbund Spartakus, <i>Marxist Student League Spartacus</i> (student organisation affiliated with the DKP)
MSZ (1970-7/1974)	Münchener Studentenzeitung, <i>Munich Student Paper</i>
MSZ (10/1974-1979)	Marxistische Studentenzeitung, <i>Marxist Student Paper</i>
MSZ (1980-1991)	Marxistische Streit- und Zeitschrift — Gegen die Kosten der Freiheit, <i>Marxist Pamphlet and Magazine — Opposing the Costs of Freedom</i>
MZ (1983)	Marxistische Zeitung, <i>Marxist Paper</i>
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus, <i>Party of Democratic Socialism</i>
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion, <i>Red Army Faction</i>
RC	Republikanischer Club, <i>Republican Club</i>
RCDS	Ring christlich-demokratischer Studenten, <i>Association of Christian Democratic Students</i>
RK	Revolutionärer Kampf, <i>Revolutionary Struggle</i>
RL	Radikale Linke, <i>Radical Left</i>
RZ	Rote Zellen, <i>Red Cells</i>
RZ/AK	Rote Zellen/Arbeitskonferenz, <i>Red Cells/ Working Conference</i>
SB	Sozialistisches Büro, <i>Socialist Bureau</i>
SDS	Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, <i>Socialist German Student League</i>
SDS/US	Students for a Democratic Society
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, <i>Socialist Unity Party of Germany</i>
SEW	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins, <i>Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin</i>
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, <i>Social Democratic Party of Germany</i>
Stasi	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, <i>Ministry of State Security of the GDR</i>
SWP	Socialist Workers Party (United Kingdom)
taz	German left-wing daily newspaper
tz	Tageszeitung (Munich), daily newspaper
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
US	United States of America
WASG	Wahlalternative: Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit, <i>The Electoral Alternative: Labour and Social Justice</i>

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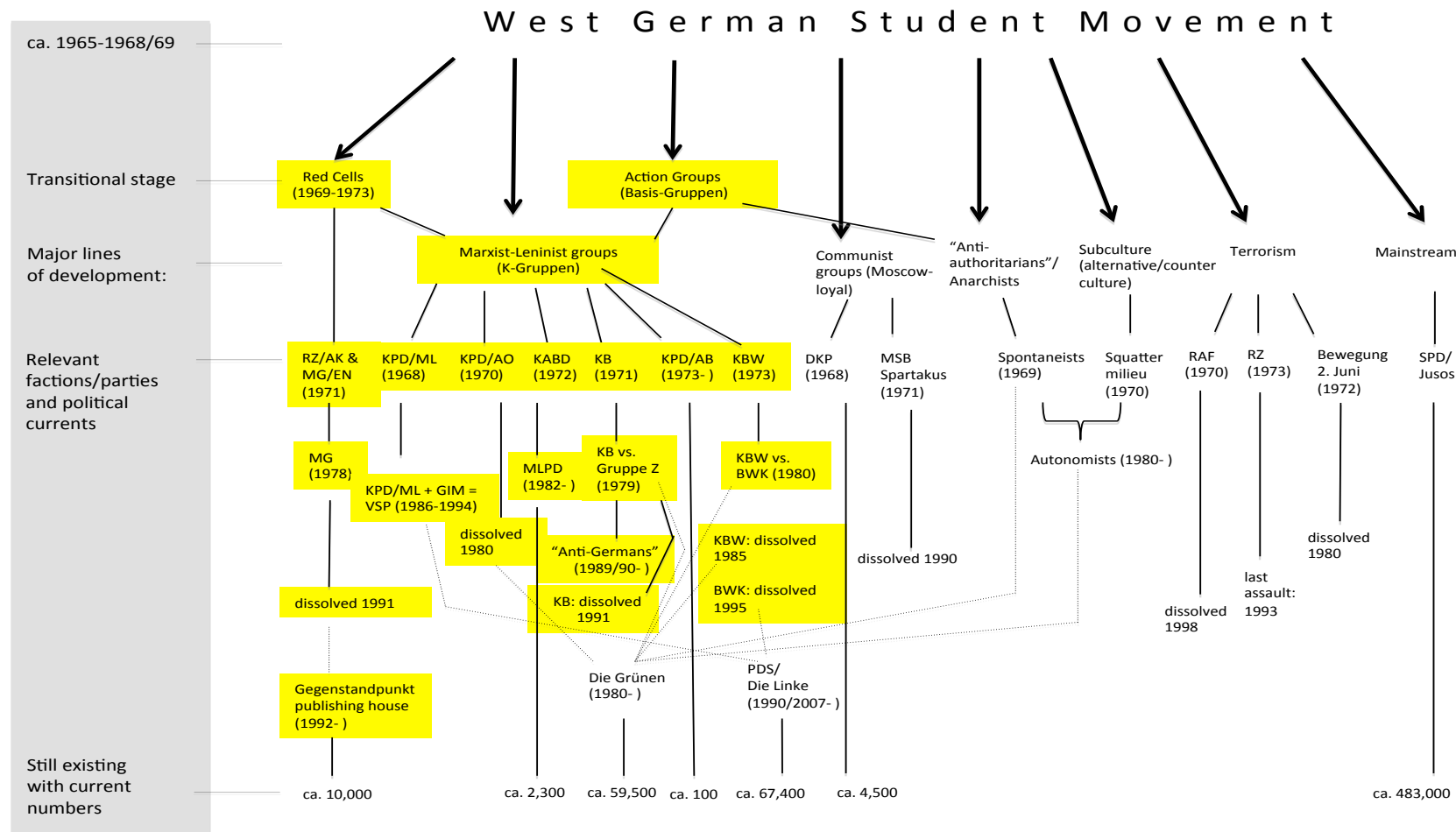
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**Figure 1**

A simplified graphic account of the developments of relevant organisations and political currents of the West German New Left. Dotted lines indicate a significant portion either joined or co-ordinated with the subsequent group. The fields highlighted in yellow mark the groups that are the main focus in this thesis, "vs." indicates an important split in the relevant group and the "+" refers to an important fusion between individual groups.

0. General introduction

0.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyse the historical development of West Germany's New Left following the student movement and develop a conceptual understanding thereof, with particular emphasis on its politico-theoretical background. To avoid losing oneself in the mere listing of the countless organisations, rivalries and fissions, centre stage is given to Maoist cadre factions, the so-called *K-Gruppen* (communist groups), the *Marxistische Gruppe*, West Germany's largest organisation during the 1980s and the Red Cells movement, from which both strands of revolutionary Marxism emerged in the early 1970s. A presentation of these strands and their particular theory formation represents a suitable contribution with which to make sense of historical developments after the end of the 'red decade' between 1967 and 1976/77.

In West Germany, Marxism was treated in academia and politics as a 'dead dog' and precursor of 'totalitarian regimes' in Eastern Europe until the popularisation of Marxist literature within the context of the emerging student protest movement in the mid-1960s. It constituted the predominant ideological framework in which activists and intellectuals leaning to the political left operated in the years of and following 1968. For the next decade, Marxist theory influenced the discourse regarding self-understanding of the social sciences and arts in academia and, even more importantly, the sphere of left-wing political radicalism. Particular focus was put on the 'reconstruction' of the Marxist critique of political economy and political activism on the basis of numerous Marxist-Leninist strands, most notably of Maoist origin.

In the late 1960s, a new generation of academics, politicised in the context of the emerging New Left, confidently postulated the integration of Marx's legacy into the social scientific canon. Alfred Schmidt, Oskar Negt, Elmar Altvater and Ernest Mandel, amongst many others, supported this integration.¹ Marxism was understood as the decisive means with which to distinguish between actual 'science' and 'ideologies'. A plethora of factions and small parties were formed concurrently from the student movement. In contrast to the academic objective of reconstructing Marxism, activists from these organisations relied on the existing revolutionary literature and its interpretation, and believed that all relevant issues of

¹ See Walter Euchner and Alfred Schmidt, eds, *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie heute – 100 Jahre 'Kapital' / Referate und Diskussionen vom Frankfurter Colloquium 1967* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1974).

Marxist theory had already been answered in the classic works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. Thus, open and unbiased theory formation was of subordinate interest to New Left activists supporting the working class ‘masses’ and their daily political and economic ‘struggle’. In this context, the role of communist factions relying on the teachings of Mao Zedong was of particular importance. Fascinated by the revolutionary optimism engendered by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the *K-Gruppen*, also referred to as the Marxist-Leninist movement, functioned as a self-styled avant-garde, willing to take up the revolutionary struggle in the developed world and guide the proletariat in fulfilling its supposed historical mission, namely, to overthrow bourgeois society.

By the late 1970s, the situation was different. New Left factions that based their political work on the writings of Marx, Mao and Lenin were in decline in West Germany. In fact, the proletariat as revolutionary subject, which carried the hopes of communist organisations during the ‘red decade’ of 1967 to 1976/7, refused to give its allegiance to any anti-capitalist project. The inability to gain social efficacy beyond the boundaries of the radical left milieu engendered self-criticism among *K-Gruppen* activists and caused disappointment with the outcome of political activism in the wake of the student revolt. In light of the growing influence of new social movements, of which a significant part merged into the Green Party in the early 1980s, the process of dissolution among *K-Gruppen* accelerated.

Chapters One, Two and Three of this thesis scrutinise the historical development of West Germany’s New Left from the perspective of political theory and focus on its major ideological lines of development. In the existing literature, the New Left’s historical development is primarily explained by external factors: changes in global politics, economic production, and the emergence of new social movements.² Koenen and Kühn were the most recent authors to insist that external factors in general, and the new social movements in particular, were the main reason for the demise of the New Left and the *K-Gruppen*, respectively. Kühn, for example, concludes his study on the *K-Gruppen* with the assertion that the strengthening of grassroots democratic approaches primarily caused the demise of West German Maoism.³

² See, among others, Andreas Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne: Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2005); Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2007), 4th ed.; Michael Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein: Politik und Organisation des Kommunistischen Bundes 1971 bis 1991* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2002).

³ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, p. 300.

In contrast to this hypothesis, I contend that the historical development of West Germany's New Left after 1968 can be explained by analysing its theoretical foundations. Arguments ignoring the specific theory formation are weak because of their inability to convincingly explain why and how, for example, the emergence of new social movements was able to have such a substantial impact on certain organisations when other groups were unaffected by their existence. The basic idea here is that being confronted with specific historical conditions does not determine how individuals and entire organisations respond to them. The presumed automatism of a changing environment and ideological alignment is challenged in the context of the present thesis. In addition, these conditions were identical for all revolutionary organisations of the 1970s and therefore can be ruled out as an adequate explanatory approach. Accordingly, it is argued that the responsiveness of different Marxist strands to the changing historical context was inherent to the respective ideologies they advocated. Historical developments and theory formation were interrelated insofar as the latter explains why these developments could actually take effect on the vast majority of Maoist activists and, on the other hand, why the *Marxistische Gruppe* took the changing political, economic and social environment as an opportunity to formulate severe criticism of the bourgeois society.

Complementary to this crisis at the organisational level was the 'crisis of Marxism', proclaimed by Louis Althusser at a conference in Venice in 1977. Althusser's talk of crisis was adopted in West Germany, albeit with different intentions. Unlike in France (and Italy), where the 'crisis' was primarily with regard to a realignment of revolutionary praxis, in West Germany, discussions were predominantly of an academic nature. Analogous to the developments of revolutionary Marxism, the 'reconstruction' of Marxist theory in academia lost its momentum by the late 1970s and hitherto developed theories were abandoned.

Moreover, the reconstruction not only took place in order to contribute to the ideological criticism of bourgeois society, to prove the 'superiority' of Marxist theory over positivistic and empirical approaches, but also intended to offer the conclusive explanation of modern capitalism and therefore contribute to its transformation. These political-emancipatory intentions disappeared when it became obvious that the 'crisis of Marxism' would no longer revolve around the critique of mainstream academic theories and bourgeois society, but instead the self-criticism of Marxist intellectuals. Central to this was the assumption that all practical and theoretical approaches applied since the steering towards Marxism after 1968 challenged, as the political scientist Joachim Hirsch argued, the "set of

[Marxist] traditions of political analyses, concepts and strategies.”⁴ Hirsch concluded that Marxist theory “ha[d] been lastingly denied by the developments”⁵ of the 1970s, such as the incipient substantial shift from the secondary to tertiary economic sector, increasing levels of unemployment and the aggravation of the political situation between the two superpowers, not to mention the turn in a conservative direction taken by leading industrial countries.

Although these developments provided ample opportunities for theoretical clarification and practical criticism, the majority of the West German New Left qualified its theoretical criticism formulated against the bourgeois order during the ‘red decade’ and thus abandoned its interest in overthrowing the politico-economic order.

Contrary to the decline of the West German New Left and the apparent crisis of Marxist theory formation at the turn of the decade, the *Marxistische Gruppe* was formed in 1979 and established itself as the largest and most lasting faction. As with most of the *K-Gruppen*, the *Marxistische Gruppe* emerged from the student movement and subsequent transition phenomenon: the Red Cells movement. Although the politicisation of activists took place under identical historical circumstances, members of the later formed *Marxistische Gruppe* adopted a different course than the *K-Gruppen*. For the *Marxistische Gruppe*, the theoretical penetration of social reality from an overtly Marxist perspective was more important than the practical support of the working class and its ‘daily’ and ‘democratic struggle’.

In line with their self-concept of being a ‘corrective’ of the left movement, the *Marxistische Gruppe* developed a specific theoretical contribution to the Marxist body of thought. Chapters Four and Five briefly analyse two of their most significant contributions. The theory of ‘abstract free will’ and the group’s theory of state are of interest in two different ways. First, in light of the historical developments of revolutionary and intellectual Marxism since the peak of the student protest movement and the decline of the New Left by 1976/77, the question emerges as to why the *Marxistische Gruppe* constituted an exception of this process. In other words, what kind of role did the group’s theory formation play in becoming the most stable and largest organisation on the far left of the political spectrum? What were the theoretical overlaps between these groups of the New Left in the early stages of the post-1968 era? How far did the *Marxistische Gruppe* go beyond the limits of traditional Marxist theory and some of its major premises?

⁴ Joachim Hirsch, *Der Sicherheitsstaat – Das ‘Modell Deutschland’, seine Krise und die neuen sozialen Bewegungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1980), p. 132.

⁵ Ibid.

Second, the crisis of the New Left movement raises a further issue for exploration: can the historical development that culminated in the crisis of practical and theoretical Marxism be interpreted as the immanent result of the conceptualisation of Marxism as a theory and prediction of crisis? Is there an overarching historical development process that explains the abandonment of influential pro-Marxist ideas in the late 1970s?

While the theory of abstract free will is an attempt to understand and criticise the specific mindset of individuals living within capitalism, which also can be read as an explanation for the difficulties of Marxists to agitate the ‘revolutionary subject’, the theory of state aims to logically derive the existence of the democratic state from the abstract free will of its citizens. Based on its critique of freedom and equality, the *Marxistische Gruppe* seized upon the anti-state elements of Marx’s at times inconsistent work.⁶

Since the ‘reappropriation’ of Marx’s work was at the centre of intellectual attention in the 1960s and 1970s, both chapters start with a brief discussion of Marx’s own reflections on the issues of consciousness and the capitalist state. These discussions will be followed by a substantial description and analysis of how the *Marxistische Gruppe* reflected upon these two issues and with reference to Hegel’s work, how it contributed to the extension of Marxist theory formation. Bringing forth the *Marxistische Gruppe*’s implicit reference to aspects of Hegel’s work is worthwhile because it highlights the group’s distinct ideological framework among New Left factions. Some criticism I formulate in particular in Chapter One partially overlaps with the *Marxistische Gruppe*’s theory discussed in Chapter Four, which results from the common interest in and appreciation of Hegel’s many-faceted work.

As the focus of the present work is to consider aspects of political theory with which to understand the historical development of the West German New Left, the following chapters do not aim to analyse the *Marxistische Gruppe*’s theory against the background of a complete Marxist genealogy on these two matters or criticise its work in detail. Although this would provide an interesting contribution to the Marxist history of ideas, such an undertaking would go beyond the scope of this thesis and would also not contribute to the better understanding of historical processes. However, in the chapter on the consciousness of modern individuals, ideas of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory are nonetheless considered because of the relevant influence of its works on the student movement.

⁶ “The *state* will never discover the source of social evils in the ‘state and the organization of society’ [...]. Wherever there are political parties each party will attribute *every* defect of society to the fact that its rival is at the helm of the state instead of itself. Even the radical and revolutionary politicians look for the causes of evil not in the *nature* of the state but in a specific *form of the state* which they would like to replace with *another* form of the state.” Marx, ‘Critical Notes on the Article: ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian’’, in *MECW Vol. 3*, p. 198.

The chapters on the *Marxistische Gruppe's* theory should be primarily read from a *functionalist* perspective and are primarily for the purpose of understanding the historical developments. Even though the theory was not formed to function as a bulwark against the general crisis of Marxism in the late 1970s, it was integral to the *Marxistische Gruppe's* success in the 1980s and the reason for withstanding the process of disintegration among the organised radical left in West Germany. The following chapters therefore do not amount to an apologia for the *Marxistische Gruppe's* theoretical work; the length conceded to the description of their analysis is due to the group's approach to 'logically' derive the object of its research, which necessitates at least a superficial understanding of its individual steps. Furthermore, it is also an attempt to make the work accessible for further analysis, depoliticise the handling of their major theoretical work that in the past too often fell victim to political considerations, rather than content-related objections and also to show some of the arguments the group adopted from Hegel.

To address the research questions outlined above, I will also analyse the theoretical foundations of the early New Left, up to the point when the Marxist-Leninist shift of paradigms occurred in the wake of '68'. During this process, I will answer the following questions, enabling me to forge a bridge between the student movement and developments in its aftermath: does the first wave of politicisation in 1967/68 imply theoretical considerations that paved the way for the further development of the West German New Left? If so, how did the criticism formulated in '68' resurface when the New Left movement began to fall apart after 1976/7?

The objective of this work is to fill the gap in the existing literature regarding the course of the New Left's project in West Germany between 1969 and 1991 from a critical perspective and trace the common denominator of its key protagonists. Furthermore, this work continues recent research conducted on the New Left after 1968. In particular, the work of Koenen, Steffen, Kühn and Benicke has contributed to further understanding of the New Left movement and in particular its Maoist factions. However, in a literature review in 2010, which supported Backes' idea of the New Left as desideratum of research, Pfahl-Traugher identified numerous gaps, of which two are intended to be filled by the present study: the

history of the *Marxistische Gruppe* and a theory of the New Left's demise.⁷ Thus, the interdisciplinary approach is caused by the object of study.

Indeed, these two gaps seem to be interrelated. The way in which individuals and organisations developed over years of protest can be derived from how they theoretically conceptualised their political, economic and cultural environment; thus, I assert that the *Marxistische Gruppe*'s relative success in becoming an important factor among the radical left can be largely attributed to its theory formation. Conversely, the relevance of the group's approach can also be measured according to the criticism of opposing political organisations implied in the group's theory.

Before devoting my attention to the methodological basis of the present thesis, a few essential research strategic implications and premises require explication. There might be obvious objections against analysing the historical development of West Germany's New Left between 1969 and 1991 from a politico-theoretical perspective: are the theoretical strands and specific works discussed representative of the plethora of ideologies held by other individuals and organisations involved with the West German New Left? Are these approaches not the result of divergent theoretical traditions and conditioned by equally divergent ways of looking at political, economic and cultural problems, rendering the development of a holistic theory of the New Left almost impossible? Is the *Marxistische Gruppe* ultimately not a 'special occurrence' among New Left factions, and hence is it even worth the particular emphasis it receives in the present thesis?

Moreover, will the analysis of the group's theory formation and historical development contribute to the understanding of fellow radical left organisations? Finally, to what extent can the theoretical strands predominant at the peak of the West German student movement compared to those developed thereafter, considering the changing historical contexts and their different implications?

Against these potential objections, I would like to bring two thoughts to the reader's attention: first, with regard to the plethora of other theories, it is important to note that it is not possible to justify *a priori* why the specific works selected here, to exemplify general

⁷ See Armin Pfahl-Traughber, 'Expertise: Aktuelle Strömungen und Entwicklungen im Themenfeld Linksextremismus in Deutschland. Forschungsstand und Forschungsdefizite' (2010) <http://www.demokratie-staerken.de/fileadmin/initiative-demokratie-staerken/Redaktion/Expertisen/DJI_Expertise_Lex_Pfahl-Traughber_05-11.pdf> [22 October 2012]; Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1989), p. 222.

practical and theoretical trends in the New Left, are representative when compared to others. Likewise, it is impossible to identify *in advance* the extent to which the quoted works here are essentially in accordance to one another with regard to their political implications and self-criticism. Although the selected works have been considered for their appropriateness and importance, the ultimate justification as to whether or not and to what extent the authors and organisations I chose are actually the *most* suitable to elaborate on can only be made in due consideration of the below analysis. Furthermore, whether or not the analysis of the *Marxistische Gruppe*'s theory adequately explains the specific development of the *Marxistische Gruppe* as an antithesis to the general trend among New Left organisations of disintegrating by the late 1970s, and non-partaking in the 'crisis of Marxism', will be discussed by the respective chapters. The same will apply to the selection of theoretical fragments of the *Marxistische Gruppe* to be discussed.

Second, the development of any holistic theory requires the analysis of the sum of its individual parts. In other words, the varying historical developments, politico-theoretical traditions and practical approaches applied by individuals and organisations involved with the West German New Left constitute an inherent requirement in the development of a holistic theory of the New Left, and when studying the logic of its historical germination. To avoid any misunderstanding resulting from the use of 'logic' in the context of this work, it should be emphasised that it is exclusively used in Hegelian terms to identify general 'laws' of the historical and theoretical issues at stake.

The phrase 'logical connection', for example, makes reference to the idea that in retrospect, the developments of the New Left followed their own rationale and were thus not coincidental. This approach, however, does not claim that the course of history is pre-determined. Similarly, the application of the adjectives 'necessarily' and 'inevitably' refers to theoretical and practical transitions, which require specific premises for them to occur. The identification of these premises is a necessary moment of theory formation and allows for the understanding of a phenomenon's inherent connection — its logic — in the above described way.⁸

The research strategy should be highlighted here again. By critically analysing the influential ideas at the peak of the West German student movement, during the peak years of the

⁸ This approach has already been applied in studies on different subjects by the author and published in peer-reviewed journals. See, for example, Matthias Dapprich, 'Making Sense of the 'Senselessness': Critical Reflections on Killing Rampages', in *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, 1 (2011), pp. 80-85; Matthias Dapprich, 'A Contribution Towards a Critical Theory of School Shootings', in *Cultural Logic: Journal of Marxist Theory and Practise* (in press).

prevailing Maoist-influenced New Left in the 1970s until its demise in the context of the general ‘crisis of Marxism’, it is intended to establish an approach that prevents merely narrating historical events and developments. Therefore, the present thesis does not simply contribute to the existing literature which already focuses on the post-1968 era in West Germany and specific organisations; but in fact, provides a holistic theory by examining the New Left’s development from a critical perspective through the presentation of selected organisations, i.e. the *K-Gruppen* and *Marxistische Gruppe*. The term ‘holistic’ implies the intention to expand on the existing historiography with reflections on its political theory. These theoretical considerations shed light on how the actual historical processes are related. Accordingly, this approach aims to forge a bridge between the most important stages passed through by the New Left.

Sources were carefully selected according to the research questions stated above. The sources were analysed in line with the hermeneutical approach, focusing on the motives and intentions of the known and, due to the subject of research, often anonymous authors within their historical context. This helped source further information about the text, its background and possible interpretations. In order to provide an integral perspective of the topic, multiple resources were considered: primary and secondary literature, audio and visual recordings, web sources and finally, transcripts of conducted interviews. The reliability and integrity/validity of these sources was ensured.

Primary literature was sourced from original works of the *Marxistische Gruppe* and Maoist factions, as well as leading intellectuals of the New Left. These were found in the three major archives I visited. Collections at the *Archiv für alternatives Schrifttum* in Duisburg; the *Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv* in Munich; and in particular, the *Archiv der Außerparlamentarischen Opposition an der Freien Universität* in Berlin, proved highly valuable resources. Moreover, a private collection allowed me to work through early publications of the *Marxistische Gruppe*, not available in the major archives. In order to discuss the relationship of the *Marxistische Gruppe* to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), I also used information provided by the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR: the then so-called *Birthler Behörde* in Berlin. The primary literature was only accessed either in its original form or from copies or facsimiles of the original, thereby ensuring its integrity.

The secondary literature predominantly deals with the particular developments in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s and was largely accessed from the university libraries of

Glasgow and Bremen. Integrity of this secondary literature was chiefly ensured by selecting literature from peer-reviewed journals and widely discussed books. Numerous websites offering discussion forums for interested people to discuss the past and present of Germany's radical left provided useful material. The anonymity of authors, limited censoring and verifiability are potential limitations of these types of electronic resources. Where verification was necessary, the relevant authors were contacted. This aimed to reduce the impact of the previously outlined limitations, and partly ensured the validity of these resources.

Finally, I also conducted nine interviews with both former activists of the *Marxistische Gruppe* and individuals involved with the red cells movement in the early 1970s. The interviewees were recruited through a) contacting identifiable actors of the New Left movement; and b) professional contact with former activists during university education. Subsequently, nine individuals agreed to participate, of which six completed face-to-face interviews and three took part in email conversations: the latter owing to logistical issues and personal preference.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion. This allowed for the collection of valuable, rich information not available in existing sources described above. The pre-determined interview schedule enabled partial uniformity regarding interviewee responses. The format of the three interviews conducted via email was structured, thereby reducing the burden of the interviewees. Conducting an oral history project proved to be a difficult task in the context of the present thesis. At first it was difficult to recruit participants for the interviews. Because of the existence of the *Marxistische Gruppe's* ideological successor, the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house, and the *Verfassungsschutz's* ongoing minor surveillance activities, it was not possible to find leading personnel of the publishing house to agree to speak about the history of the Red Cells and/or *Marxistische Gruppe*. This also explains why only five ordinary members were willing to give interviews; interviews that were, however, characterised by ensuring confidentiality of members and inner structures and the reproduction of the group's stance already available in written form. Consequently, the interviews proved to be relatively unproductive and contributed only marginally to a more intimate understanding of the *Marxistische Gruppe's* development. In addition, critics of the *Marxistische Gruppe*, individuals that either published on the group or raised criticism on the internet, were contacted by the author, but were unavailable for interviews. Thus, my ambition to uncover new facets of *Marxistische Gruppe* compiling narratives about individuals, events, disputes surrounding specific decisions and organisations did not materialise as hoped. Any investigation of 'history from below' was refuted because

the specific history of the *Marxistische Gruppe* was not considered relevant in itself or for the understanding of current political events and debates among the radical left. In order to minimise the impact associated with the difficulties to recruit unbiased interviewees for the present thesis, individuals critically related to the *Marxistische Gruppe*, were also contacted; however, they proved unavailable for comment. In light of the ongoing secret-mongering surrounding much of the history of the radical left and personal involvement during the 1970s and 1980s, the knowledge acquisition through an oral history project was stretched to its limits.

Despite the limitations considering data acquisition, these difficulties do not substantially interfere with the approach to explain the New Left's post-1968 development from a politico-theoretical perspective, an approach that first and foremost relies on theoretical work and its analysis.

An in-depth consideration of the New Left's development beyond West Germany — in particular, in France, Italy and the United States (US) — would have been problematic when considering the systematic focus of my research. The specific political and intellectual backgrounds of the respective New Left movements in these countries would also have gone beyond the scope of the present study. However, at various points throughout, the thesis will refer to developments in these states: because it supports the idea that the particular historical developments in West Germany reflected the zeitgeist in Europe and North America to at least a certain extent, if not on a global scale.

A significant part of both the West German New Left and Marxist theory formation between the 1960s and early 1980s is not considered by this study. For example, neither the Trotskyist organisations nor Communist groupings loyal to Moscow are discussed; similarly, historical and dialectical materialism in the tradition of really existing socialism and the corresponding theory of state monopoly capitalism, whose proponents were not involved in the discussions surrounding the 'crisis of Marxism', were, despite its popularity in some circles (e.g. organisations loyal to the East German regime), also not considered beyond their function as the New Left's subject of severe criticism. This indicates the particular path which Marxist theory formation took in Eastern Europe. Although interesting, the consideration of these theories extends beyond the scope of this thesis; and more importantly, these groups, in particular Trotskyist organisations, formed only an insignificant minority within the West German New Left.

0.2. Terminology

The historiography of the West German New Left has been dominated by different ideological preferences. This not only results in the often mutually exclusive interpretations of the events and processes between the mid-1950s and German unification in 1990, but also in the terminology employed in specific works. Thus, in order to limit the potential risk of entering what March and Mudde coined a ‘terminological minefield’, I will now define terms central to my thesis, which could otherwise cause misunderstanding and confusion.⁹

0.1.1. New Left

As a political and cultural phenomenon, the New Left had many faces. This is also reflected in the different meanings attached to the term ‘New Left’. As Lucardie notes, in France, one generally distinguishes between the *nouvelle gauche* of the 1960s and the *gauchisme* of the 1970s; while in Germany, the *Neue Linke* are chiefly referred to in the context of the developments which led towards the formation of the West German student protest movement in 1967/8 and its subsequent continuation until the early 1980s. In the Netherlands, the *Nieuw Links* was merely a faction within the Dutch Labour Party.¹⁰ Thus, the meaning of the term ‘New Left’ substantially varies depending upon different national contexts and therefore requires terminological clarification.

According to Lucardie, the New Left movements “seemed to share two characteristics: they refused to take sides in the Cold War between Western capitalism and Eastern socialism; and they emphasised democracy which seemed endangered by both camps and in need of revitalising and radicalising somehow.”¹¹ Although this characterisation offers a valuable basis for a thorough definition of what is to be understood by the ‘New Left’, it is important to emphasise that “the New Left’s creative and euphoric phase of the late 1960s disintegrated in a number of directions by the early 1970s.”¹²

Thus, throughout this thesis, these various directions, bound to different strands of Maoism, Trotskyism and tendencies of political autonomism and spontaneism, are subsumed

⁹ Luke March and Cas Mudde, ‘What’s Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation’, in *Comparative European Politics*, 3 (2005), p. 24. For a discussion on the meaning of terms such as ‘radical’, ‘extremist’, ‘left’ and ‘right’ see also Cas Mudde, ‘Radikale Parteien in Europa’, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 47 (2008), pp. 12-19.

¹⁰ Paul Lucardie, *The New Left in France, Germany and the Netherlands: Democratic Radicalism Resurrected?* (2008) <<http://dnpp.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/publicatieLucardie/newleft/DemRadRes-08.pdf>> [02 December 2008], p.1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Andrei S. Markovits, ‘The West German Left in a Changing Europe’, in C. Lemke and G. Marks, eds, *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 1992), p. 177.

under the term ‘New Left’. In other words, the meaning applied by this thesis follows the definition generally employed in the German literature. In the narrow sense, it refers to all factions and parties that established themselves as political entities independent of traditional communist parties and to the left of social democracy between 1967, the year of the first student protests, and 1980, when the Green Party was founded in West Germany.¹³ Even though some organisations of the New Left were active until the early 1990s, the establishment of the Green Party is identified here as denoting the end of West Germany’s New Left, considering its integrating function for parts of the new social movements and numerous cadres formerly active in the plethora of New Left factions. It coincided with the end of Marxist-inspired political activism aiming to overthrow the capitalist society on the basis of the contradiction between capital and labour. It also symbolised the transition from the alleged ‘crisis of Marxism’ to the actual dissolution of most organisations established in the years of the shift from anti-authoritarian to predominantly Marxist-Leninist ideologies in the wake of the student movement.¹⁴

The New Left is thus defined as a complex variety of leftist ideologies that delimited itself from Soviet-dominated communism – above all, its Stalinist version – and its affiliated parties in the capitalistic bloc, as well as social-democratic currents, i.e. the ‘Old Left.’ Emphasis on democracy was also considered as vital. However, it is important to stress that discourses on democracy in radical left circles should not be confused with loyalty towards constitutional democracy: the specific form of democratic rule, which is common in the 21st century and usually equated with the term ‘democracy.’¹⁵

0.1.2. Radical left

According to March and Mudde, academics have been occupied in recent years with an “ongoing debate over the utility of alternatives such as ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’ in analysing the poles of the political spectrum.”¹⁶ Given this, it is imperative to clarify what is precisely meant by the term ‘radical left’ in the present study.

Considering the diversity of approaches developed by New Left factions and intellectuals during its zenith in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it would be misleading to

¹³ See Gerd Langguth, *Protestbewegung* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983).

¹⁴ See Philip Wilke, *Geschichte: Die grüne Wahlbewegung und die Alternativszene* (2012) <<http://www.boell.de/demokratie/zeitgeschichte-gruene-wahlbewegung-alternativszene-14211.html>> [2 June 2012]. For a discussion on the differences between the New and Old Left see also Stuart Hall, ‘Life and Times of the First New Left’, in *New Left Review*, 61 (2010), <<http://newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=2826>> [3 June 2011].

¹⁵ Cas Mudde, ‘Radikale Parteien in Europa’, p. 12.

¹⁶ March and Mudde, ‘What’s Left of the Radical Left’, p. 24.

categorise most activists as ‘extremists’, in the sense of being in fundamental practical and theoretical opposition to constitutional democracy, and refusing the sovereignty of the people.¹⁷ In West Germany, the term ‘extremism’ was officially introduced by the Ministry of the Interior in 1973 to further differentiate between radical groups and those extremist factions, parties and ideologies that were, *per se*, in opposition to democracy and capitalism.¹⁸

What precisely was meant by ‘*per se*’ in this context remained vague. In recent scholarship, the acceptance of people’s sovereignty has been commonly identified as the line of demarcation between ‘extremist’ and ‘radical’ political activism. However, what exactly constitutes the sovereignty of the people is again unclear. If we differ from Mudde’s view that radicalism means the support of democratic procedures in the sense of ‘one man, one vote’, whilst any form of political extremism denies this basic principle of the sovereignty of the people, the radical left represents the central theme of the present study.¹⁹ Yet it is nonetheless important to keep in mind that the support of some principles associated with modern democracy is not identical to taking sides with its politico-economic and political-legal organisation. Although left radicals are committed to systematic change, they do not necessarily reject the common principles on which modern democratic societies are based (e.g. human rights, the ideas of freedom and equality).

Moreover, in a different socio-economic setting, democracy and the sovereignty of the people, for example, could also materialise in the form of abolition of the state. People’s sovereignty is by definition not limited to awarding mandates to representatives, as Schumpeter and others have argued. For Schumpeter, democracy is merely

an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.²⁰

Thus, it is important to state clearly that left radicals are anti-liberal democratic, but not anti-democratic *per se*. Consequently, even if ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’ are sometimes used interchangeably, they are in fact heterogeneous concepts with ideological intersections.²¹

Furthermore, Stöss emphasises that both terms are value-laden and the application of one or the other often expresses a political *weltanschauung*, in the sense that the political centre, representing the majority society and its political proponents, is considered to be

¹⁷ Mudde, ‘Radikale Parteien in Europa’, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ Gero Neugebauer, ‘*Extremismus – Linksextremismus – Rechtsextremismus: Begriffsdefinitionen und Probleme*’ (2008) <http://www.bpb.de/themen/UXBBFN,0,0,Extremismus_%96_Linksextremismus_%96_Rechtsextremismus.html> [25 June 2011].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Schumpeter, Joseph A., *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 250.

²¹ Mudde, ‘Radikale Parteien in Europa’, p. 13.

‘normal’, whereas deviant political ideologies are stigmatised as inflexible and intemperate.²² Klärner and Kohlstruck concur that from the viewpoint of the logic of language, ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ can only be meaningfully used against the background of the political centre.²³ Above all, ‘extremism’ carries a particularly negative connotation, because it is generally identified with a propensity towards violence and terrorism. Kailitz, for example, determines the creation and preservation of a dictatorship as the common interest of political extremism.²⁴ Although March and Mudde stress that this does not necessarily have to be the case, I prefer to use the term ‘extremist’ exclusively with reference to those political actors and ideologies that propagate or apply the means of political violence to reach their goals; and in so doing, deny the people’s sovereignty and their right of self-determination. Thus, the term ‘radical’ is used in a broader sense throughout this work, albeit with caution and in full awareness that there are plausible arguments to suggest doing otherwise.

The term ‘left’ still refers to those political actors that, first, identify economic inequality as the basis of existing politico-economic and socio-cultural arrangements; second, are critical of capitalism; and third, follow an international approach “both in terms of its search for cross-national networking and solidarity, and in its assertion that national and regional socio-political issues have global structural causes.”²⁵

In line with the definition of ‘radical’ and ‘left’ given above, I refer to the *Marxistische Gruppe* as a typical representative of West Germany’s radical left in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the discussion of their theoretical work in Chapters Four and Five suggest that the *Marxistische Gruppe* should be categorised as an actor of the extreme left, because of its immanent critique of the ideas of freedom and equality, its origin and strict refusal of violent means in following its political goals are crucial in ultimately categorising the organisation as radical and part of the New Left.

Finally, Langguth and Steffen indicate the problems of identifying the terms ‘New Left’ and ‘radical left’ as synonymous.²⁶ Even though, in most cases, the radical left was identical to the New Left in the historical context of the student protest movement of 1968 and its aftermath, it is important to stress that New Left factions were generally radical; but not all radical organisations were part of the New Left movement. The *Deutsche*

²² Richard Stöss, ‘Extremistische Parteien – Worin besteht der Erkenntnisgewinn?’, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 47 (2008), pp. 3-6.

²³ Andreas Klärner and Michael Kohlstruck, ‘Thema der Öffentlichkeit und Gegenstand der Forschung’, in Klärner and Kohlstruck, eds, *Moderner Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), p. 13.

²⁴ See Steffen Kailitz, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004).

²⁵ March and Mudde, ‘What’s Left of the Radical Left’, p. 25.

²⁶ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, 1983; Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein*, 2002.

Kommunistische Partei (DKP, German Communist Party), for example, was radical, some might argue even extremist, but because of its close relationship to the East German Socialist Unity Party it was not categorised as a New Left organisation.

0.1.3. Bourgeois society and science

The Marxist term ‘bourgeois society’ refers to the social formation in which the commodity relationship — that of buying and selling commodities and services — has spread into every corner of life.²⁷ Capitalism is considered to be the ruling political economy: on which typically, but not necessarily, a democratic political system arises. The term ‘bourgeois society’, originally translated from Marx’s early writing, could also be translated into ‘civil society’. However, Engels himself was quick to comment on the difficulties of translating the German word ‘*bürgerlich*’ appropriately.²⁸ For him, the term ‘civil society’ would inadequately reflect the specific nature of the capitalist society. Accordingly, I use the term ‘bourgeois society’ in this work.

Moreover, the adjective ‘bourgeois’ is frequently used in the context of Marxist conceptions to specify the character of, for example, academic ideologies advocating the maintenance and advancement of capitalist society and its adequate political and cultural patterns. Thus, whenever I refer to the ‘critique of bourgeois science’ as a means of political agitation deployed by Marxist organisations and intellectuals, I refer to their immanent criticism of those theories allegedly affirming the principles of the bourgeois society, i.e. capitalism and constitutional democracy. ‘Bourgeois’ is therefore not to be confused with ‘private individual’, often attributed in the context of civic education to distinguish between the private character of an individual and its public appearance as ‘citoyen’.

Further, the term ‘science’ is taken from Marxist literature and applied in this thesis, even though it is generally used in English to lay emphasis on natural and physical sciences as distinguished from the arts and humanities. There are two reasons for this: first, Marx himself claimed to have established the theoretical foundations for ‘scientific socialism’. Marxists therefore do not question the possibility of objective insights as a matter of principle in the academic fields of arts and humanities. Second, the German term ‘*geisteswissenschaften*’, the equivalent to ‘arts’ and ‘humanities’, is more comprehensive and does not deny the idea of ‘science’ in a broader sense: namely, to produce knowledge about a specific subject matter.

²⁷ ‘Bourgeois society’, *Encyclopaedia of Marxism* <<http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/b/o.htm>> [6 June 2011].

²⁸ See Frederick Engels’ remarks in ‘Letter to Marx, 23 September 1852’, in *MECW Vol. 39*, p. 20.

1. The emergence and development of West Germany's New Left before 1968

Vester also warned Hayden of not simply reiterating the 'uncommitting generality of the American creed' in the section on values, but to underline that good values can unfold their power only in a good society, where they can gain broader currency.²⁹

1.1. Introduction

In his essay, *Periodizing the 60s*, Jameson began his analysis from the position that "history is [a] necessity"; and accordingly, claimed that the 1960s "had to happen the way it did."³⁰ He further argued that the opportunities and failures of that period "were inextricably intertwined, marked by the objective constraints and openings of a determinate historical situation."³¹ In a different analysis but similar to Jameson's structural argument, Tarrow claimed that "movements are born, diffused and processed through the logic of political opportunities."³² According to his approach of generalising social conflict into a cycle of protest, the radicalisation at the peak of the protest cycle changes into disillusionment and produces defection among parts of the protest movement. Moreover, some groups, embittered by the failures of mass activism, turn to utopianism and violence.³³

Without calling into question the reasonableness of both Jameson's and Tarrow's levels of analysis, and despite the great differences between both authors' approaches, it is argued here that their analysis does not allow for a satisfactory understanding of the post-1968 developments in West Germany. This chapter will establish the basis for a theory of the post-student movement era beyond the idea that historical developments had followed a set pattern. It is argued that only the prevailing revolutionary theory and practice of the 1960s and its aftermath allows a proper understanding of the New Left's further development after 1968 and in particular of specific strands and organisations. Thus, in contrast to authors such as

²⁹ Michael Vester was a representative of the West German SDS, who became integrated into the leading circles of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS/US). He contributed to the formation of an intellectual position that resulted in the publication of the influential Port Huron Statement in 1962. Tom Hayden, primarily responsible for its final version, was the Field Secretary of the SDS/US at that time. See Martin Klimke, *The other alliance: student protest in West Germany and the United States in the global sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 19.

³⁰ Frederic Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', in *Social Text*, 9/10 (1984), p. 178. Even though Golz stresses the importance of '68' as a mythical yardstick for the constitution of different 'generations' in the German collective memory, in the context of this study, '68' usually refers to the generation of New Left activists. See Anna von der Golz, 'Generations of 68ers Age-Related Constructions of Identity and Germany's '1968'', in *Cultural and Social History*, 4 (2011), pp. 473-491.

³¹ Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s', p. 178.

³² Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 177.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-186.

Jameson and Tarrow, I posit that historical events in general, and those co-occurring in the 'years of 1968', are not the result of an inherent 'historical necessity'.

The volitional and purposeful nature of human activity is at all times exerted in a specific historical context, which urges an individual to act and reflect upon its economic, social and cultural constraints. These constraints, however, do not nullify the possibility of opposing them theoretically and, if possible, practically. Jameson's idea of objective, effective 'constraints' and 'openings' in specific historical situations is, therefore, an attempt to make sense of developments that, in fact, were not pre-determined. Ultimately, historical developments depend on how individuals and social groups conceptualise reality and the conclusions they draw from their intellectual dealings with the world they are living in.

Studying the development of the New Left without referring to the predominant theoretical strands that emerged within a broader historical context would constitute a hopeless endeavour. By focussing on revolutionary theory, the scope of this work exceeds the explanatory limitations of quasi-law-like theories regarding the aftermath of 1968. For example, Tarrow explained the radicalisation of the New Left in the 1970s and retreat of a considerable number of activists into privacy over the following decade as the expression of a recurring cycle of protest; and thus, even implicitly, negated the theoretical and practical conclusions drawn over the course of the New Left's further development. In contrast to Tarrow's schematic approach, I argue that major developments of the post-1968 era were already latent in the New Left's emergence and how its proponents dealt intellectually with historical circumstances and 'structural limits'. The developments of Maoist *K-Gruppen* and *Marxistische Gruppe* (MG, Marxist Group) reflect the relevance theory formation, which should not be confused with yet another deterministic interpretation of the subject.

The intellectual transitions implied in abandoning certain schools of thought in order to adopt new theoretical approaches are key to analysing post-1968 developments. The main task of the following chapter is thus to expose the logical links between the manifold manifestations of radical leftist opposition at the height of the student movement and in its aftermath.

1.2. The historical context of the emerging New Left in West Germany

The '68' movement and its defining protagonist, the New Left, had already begun to evolve in the Cold War era during the mid-1950s. Its historical origin is closely linked to Khrushchev's Thaw in the aftermath of his 'secret speech' in 1956. This speech not only initiated the

process of de-Stalinisation in the Soviet Union and the transformation of its society by opening up to certain economic, cultural and political exchange, but also allowed for a reconsideration of Marxist ideas in Western societies from which the nucleus of West Germany's New Left originated.³⁴

Beside the overarching conflict of the Cold War, from the mid-1950s to early 1960s, various other incidents shaped international political, economic and cultural landscapes. Although most are familiar and require no need for further emphasis — they have been thoroughly documented, for example, in Eric Hobsbaw'n's *The Age of Extremes*— this thesis draws attention to three particularly relevant events and processes of that era. First and foremost, the twin crises of Suez and Hungary in late 1956, which provided evidence to liberal parts of the political left that neither the great powers of the West (e.g. Great Britain and France), nor the Soviet Union were willing to abandon the traditional power politics of the pre-war world. Second, the anti-imperialist Cuban Revolution, which morphed into a serious socialist project in the early 1960s, functioned as a role model for the emerging New Left in Western Europe, in so far as it demonstrated the practical possibility of opposing and even partially defying the American political, economic and ideological sphere of influence. For a short period of time, Cuba became an inspiration for an entire generation of political left activists. By pursuing a socialist project in the 'backyard' of the US, Cuba exemplified the prospect of substantially altering the political *status quo* of a single nation under Cold War conditions, without support of one of the two political superpowers.³⁵

Third, the often violent decolonisation process and emergence of the Third World, illustrated by the Algerian and Vietnam Wars, bore opportunities for left-wing forces to express their solidarity with those fighting off both old European imperial powers and the military forces of a neo-colonial power, namely, the US. These conflicts reinforced the basic criticism of post-war politics and the current world order, especially pertaining to global distribution of wealth. In Germany, the Third World question had an important influence on the development of the New Left and shaped it, though with a smaller impact, until the late 1970s, expanded on further below.³⁶

Yet alongside these events and developments, capitalism continued in its 'golden age'. The first two decades after World War II were characterised by unprecedented economic

³⁴ See William D. Graf, 'Anti-Communism in the Federal Republic of Germany', in *Socialist Register*, 21 (1984), pp. 164-213.

³⁵ How the Cuban Castroists nonetheless came under the influence of the Soviet Union, were entangled in the ideological conflict of the Cold War and became an important factor in international relations is, among others, analysed by Zeuske. See Michael Zeuske, *Insel der Extreme. Kuba im 20. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, 2004).

³⁶ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

growth in the industrialised world. In Western Europe as well as in North America, this era oversaw low unemployment and steady growth rates until the late 1960s. Along with economic expansion came a significant increase in educational participation. However, this increased participation was not matched by changes in the structure of the university system, or of attitudes among academic personnel; a criticism reinforced in West Germany given the Nazi past of many of its academics.³⁷

Moreover, three particularly significant events influenced the West German left and laid the foundations for what eventually became known as the *Neue Linke*. Aspirations for a new form of popular participation were first ignited by the West German government's ambition to acquire tactical nuclear arms for the newly established *Bundeswehr*, the armed forces of the Federal Republic. Although the US did not agree to West German nuclear armament specifically, the capitalist superpower nonetheless stationed nuclear warheads in the Federal Republic of Germany. This resulted in the first flaring up of extra-parliamentary opposition, which had a strong pacifistic orientation, and institutionalisation of new left-wing approaches to politics from an unorthodox Marxist perspective. For example, *Das Argument*, a leading Marxist journal even now, had its roots in these protests and was therefore a precursor for the developments of the late 1960s.³⁸ Second, the West German social democrats, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), officially renounced Marxism from their party programme in 1959, because of their ambition to become West Germany's second mass party to the left of the ruling conservatives. Instead of calling for the nationalisation of key industries, the *Godesberger Programm*, the SPD's official party programme until 1989, emphasised the forces of the market economy and values of democratic socialism.

Although the terminology of the new party programme was, in some respects, still radical, the practical consequences stood in opposition to this radical rhetoric. With its new programme, the SPD finally dismissed any remnants of social-revolutionary ambitions and even qualified itself for a potential grand coalition with the ruling Conservative Party.³⁹

Related to these developments, and the second catalyst for the emergence of the New Left, was the separation of the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS) from the SPD, as a consequence of the *Godesberger Programm* declaring in 1961 that membership of the SPD

³⁷ See Marcel van der Linden, '1968: *Das Rätsel der Gleichzeitigkeit*', in Jens Kastner and David Mayer, eds, *Weltwende 1968? Ein Jahr aus globalgeschichtlicher Perspektive*. (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2008), pp. 23–37.

³⁸ See Hans K. Rupp, *Außerparlamentarische Opposition in der Ära Adenauer: Der Kampf gegen die Atombewaffnung in den fünfziger Jahren* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1984).

³⁹ The State of Emergency Laws in 1968 was pushed through by a grand coalition of social-democrats and conservatives that was in power since 1966. In 1969, Willy Brandt became the first West German chancellor with a SPD membership book.

was no longer compatible with that of its student organisation. The SDS, led by West Germany's later chancellor Helmut Schmidt after its establishment in 1946, developed alongside the SPD in the 1950s and was targeted with increasing intensity by party leaders' intent on removing Marxist influences from its student organisation and preventing further radicalisation. From the mid-1960s onwards, the SDS became the ideal student-organised platform for young leftist activists and intellectuals, who sought an alternative to the political, economic and socio-cultural *status quo*.⁴⁰ In this context, Klimke stresses how positive institutional independence was in the further development of the SDS. Now acquitted from the constraints of party politics, it was able to allocate the concept of a 'New Left' with a prominent role in internal debates. Before its split from the SPD, the SDS already regarded itself as a promising 'point of crystallisation of a New Left' and part of an international movement, supporting, for example, the anti-colonial war in Algeria.⁴¹

Third, in 1956, the Constitutional Court banned the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) because of its anti-constitutional goals, which complicated any serious or concerted communist campaigning. This ban, however, helped lead to a thorough reconsideration of Marxist ideas, in critical distance to the Soviet Union and its affiliated parties. As there was no traditional Communist party in West Germany after 1956, the discourse among leftist intellectuals was mostly open and unaffected by Moscow-loyal party politics. West Germany, frontline state of the Cold War, and in spite of its pronounced anti-communist attitudes, nonetheless provided its emergent New Left with unique development potentialities.

Considering this context and the incipient changes in the socio-economic structure of industrialised states, it came as no surprise that the West German New Left, which developed during the mid-1960s, soon went beyond the boundaries of academia, within which a first wave of young intellectuals and activists had been strongly politicised.⁴² These thinkers, however, were different from their predecessors of the late 1950s. Although Geoff Andrews refers to the British situation, his words nonetheless outline major characteristics of the new radical left throughout Western Europe:

Younger, more privileged backgrounds, less assimilated into — indeed, at times openly hostile to — the political culture of British socialism [...]. Their inspiration was from theory [...] much broader in scope [and] defining features were derived from

⁴⁰ See Tilman Fichter and Siegward Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund von Helmut Schmidt bis Rudi Dutschke* (Essen: Klartext, 2007).

⁴¹ Klimke, *The other alliance*, pp. 14-15.

⁴² See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

the new analyses of capitalism and in particular the renaissance in new forms of western Marxism.⁴³

Although specific developments differed significantly in time and space within and between countries, some commonalities of the New Left movement in the 'years of 1968' and thereafter can be identified. Paul Lucardie rightly emphasises two central characteristics of what he refers to as the second wave of the New Left, i.e. the '68er': first, in contrast to social democratic currents and orthodox communists, the New Left in Europe and elsewhere "refused to take sides in the Cold War between Western capitalism and Eastern socialism."⁴⁴

Second, even though the dominant framework for alternative approaches to politics in the late 1960s was inspired by Marxist theory, the New Left actually acted upon various radical concepts based on the idea of people's democracy. This was also true of the majority of factions and parties established both in and shortly after 1968 in West Germany. When the student protest movement fragmented in different theoretical directions, because vaguely formulated revolutionary hopes did not materialise in the short term, a considerable number of activists reassessed differing concepts of democracy — often termed as 'real' democratic approaches — as appropriate means for substantial political change. This support of alternative forms of democracy, an approach that implied the support of the fundamental principles of freedom and equality, albeit based on very different interpretations than those of modern parliamentary democracies, proved decisive in the further development of the 'red decade', the years between 1967 and 1976/77.

In such a context, Dan Diner's interpretation of world history in the 20th century as a 'world civil war of social values' must be rejected. Although it might seem plausible to argue that the politico-theoretical poles of socialism and liberalism differ regarding their emphasis of freedom and equality, this interpretation becomes highly fraught when Diner, and, in line with him, Jan Gerber, identify left-wing forces as synonymous with the political current promoting *égalité* and the centre-right as supporting *liberté*.⁴⁵ This is an oversimplification and, from a theoretical point of view, incorrect. In fact, both left-wing and centre-right intellectuals and activists rest their conceptions of society upon *specific ideal realisations* of freedom and equality. It is thus no coincidence that in 1962 the *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS/US), influenced by West German student activists, demanded "that the United

⁴³ Geoff Andrews, 'The Three New Lefts and their Legacies', in Geoff Andrews et al., eds, *New Left, New Right And Beyond: Taking the Sixties Seriously* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 73.

⁴⁴ See Lucardie, *The New Left in France, Germany and The Netherlands*, 2008.

⁴⁵ See Dan Diner, *Das Jahrhundert verstehen. Eine universalhistorische Deutung* (Munich: Luchterhand, 1999); Jan Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 2010).

States live up to its democratic ideals of liberty and social and political equality,”⁴⁶ a demand that also articulated the attitude of the West German SDS towards social change in the early 1960s. Chapter Five will return to the apparent tension between the concepts of freedom and equality when discussing the *Marxistische Gruppe*'s theory of the modern state and its impact on the organisation's development.

Activists organised in revolutionary factions in the wake of the student movement were proponents of a specific form of state idealism. This facet of the generation of '68', whose politicisation occurred because the democratic state was perceived as not acting in line with its own principles, plays a crucial part in explaining the historical development of the West German New Left.

The second generation of the European New Left, generally referred to in the West German context as *the* New Left, emerged within such circumstances, which provided the foundation of various new and reconsidered Marxist schools of thought, such as different interpretations of Maoism. Amid this context, the role of the *Rote Zellen* (RZ, Red Cells), which became a recruiting reservoir for Maoist organisations, was of particular importance.

The Red Cells founded in the vast majority of university towns, also provided the origin of the MG, to which the Bavarian Under-secretary of State and later Minister-President, Günter Beckstein, referred as “the most powerful organisation of the New Left”⁴⁷ in 1989. Although particular emphasis is put on the un-dogmatic MG and the Maoist *K-Gruppen* in this work, other important ideological strings of the West German New Left will also be touched upon, demonstrating that relevant developments in the 1970s had already surfaced in the ‘years of 1968’. Moreover, an analysis of these ideological strings will reveal the many points of intersection that allowed the New Left in general and Maoist *K-Gruppen* in particular to reconnect with the bourgeois society criticised vehemently both during and after the student movement had peaked.

1.3. On the peak of the West German student movement and major ideological influences: the years of '68'

In spite of the aforementioned historical developments against the background of the Cold War, the actual West German student movement was primarily sparked by the students' critique of the higher education system and proposed passage of state of emergency laws that was interpreted as providing for a new fascistisation of the West German state. Starting at the

⁴⁶ Klimke, *The other alliance*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Günter Beckstein in Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

local and national level, the movement rapidly began to touch on international issues. Criticisms were also soon directed at the existing social order. This can largely be attributed to the influence of the Frankfurt School, which provided students with a broader analysis of the enmeshment of Nazi rule and capitalism.⁴⁸

The following section reflects on various ideological facets of the 1968 West German movement, in order to lay the politico-theoretical ground with which to make sense of the historical development of West Germany's New Left and its existential crisis by the late 1970s and beyond.

1.3.1. The emergence of the student movement and transition of protest from local to national and international level

In order to further develop the necessary conditions with which it could assert itself in the international arena, the West German government began to invest in expanding higher education on an unprecedented scale in the early 1960s. Improving the production and teaching of knowledge was designed to satisfy the demands of commodity production and changing requirements of the labour market. Among other things, this led to a fragmentation of academic disciplines, criticised by many students as forcing blinkered specialisation. Furthermore, the system of tenured professorships, which granted deans the full power to make decisions regarding the organisation of studies, came under growing pressure. Already, in the early 1960s, the SDS demanded collegiate administration in academia and student participation in appointment procedures and research projects. At the height of the student protests in 1968, this demand had intensified to such a degree that students called for the implementation of an equal-say system in decision-making.⁴⁹ Another, more politically sensitive reason for the students' criticism lay in the fact that a considerable proportion of professors were already in post during the Nazi regime and had ideologically supported it: 'Under the gowns / Is the musty odour of a thousand years'.

Both the demand for equal student participation in cases of departmental issues and criticism of the continuity of staff at universities morphed into a general critique of the existing political economy and bourgeois society. The student movement was convulsed by the twin demands of further democratising West German society and coming to terms with

⁴⁸ See, among others, Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, Vol. I-II* (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard, 1998).

⁴⁹ For the reasons why students revolted against the higher education system of the 1960s see Martin Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz. Die 68er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und den USA* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2003), pp. 202-219; Gerhard Fels, *Der Aufruhr der 68er: die geistigen Grundlagen der Studentenbewegung und der RAF* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1998), pp. 134-144.

the fascist past of the two German states.⁵⁰ Their Nazi heritage had two significant roles for student activists. First, the generation conflict was fierce between those born during or in the early years after the Second World War and their parents who actively supported or at least tolerated the fascist regime and its warfare. In fact, the particularities of the German history and the unwillingness of the war generation to deal with its past, added a unique political dimension to the generation conflict that allowed the majority of students to sympathise with the criticism formulated by New Left activists. In society as a whole, the experienced 'ideal world' created in the years of the *Wirtschaftswunder* during the 1950s and the postwar consensus were challenged. Second, the impact of the Frankfurt School on student activists was grounded in its critique of the linkage between fascism and the logic of the capitalist system. Both aspects, the specifics of the generation conflict and theoretical underpinning of the relationship of Nazism and capitalism resulted in a strongly politicised movement exceeding, for example, the rather pop-cultural protests in the UK.⁵¹

In line with the higher education reform programme, which aimed to maintain the international competitiveness of the young West German republic within a changing economic environment, the draft of the new state of emergency laws intended to resume the unrestricted political sovereignty of the Federal Republic. Even though this sovereignty was recognised by the occupying powers according to formal law, the state of emergency was *de facto* regulated in the General Treaty regarding the West German state in 1954. In this treaty, the US, United Kingdom (UK) and France granted themselves special rights to intervene and take over the authority in the case of interior or exterior states of emergency. The definition of such a 'state of emergency' was incumbent on the Allied Occupying Powers. Already in 1960, the Federal Republic had made a legal advance to deal with such potential cases in sovereign laws. This was opposed by the German Federation of Trade Unions and the majority of social democrats, but remained on an institutional level before the protests were taken to the streets in 1966, which marked the actual birth of the broader *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (APO, extra-parliamentary opposition).

Apart from trade unions, the APO consisted mainly of left-wing forces which belonged to the *Kampagne für Abrüstung* (KfA, Campaign for Disarmament), and the *Republikanischer Club* (RC, Republican Club) in which academics, politicians and media representatives were politically organised.⁵² The proposed passage of emergency laws was

⁵⁰ See Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, 2003.

⁵¹ See Jens Benicke, *Von Adorno zu Mao: Die schlechte Aufhebung der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 2010).

⁵² See Markus Henning and Ralf Raasch, *Neoanarchismus in Deutschland: Entstehung – Verlauf – Konfliktlinien* (Berlin: OPPO, 2005).

interpreted by APO representatives as the manifestation of a process leading to a new 'authoritarian state'. This perception was reinforced by the establishment of the grand coalition of conservative and social-democrats in 1966 and the often disproportionate response of police units to protesting students. Accordingly, the concept of an 'authoritarian state' became an integral part of criticism of the social order, discussed with particular vehemence by the students after the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg during the course of protests against the Persian Shah on 2 June 1967 in Berlin, an event that caused a rapid and unprecedented politicisation of the West German student body.⁵³

This radicalisation of the students took place against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the US' brutal military campaign in South-East Asia. In this context, domestic political criticism was generally linked to that of the existing politico-economic order. Scores of students began to challenge the principles of capitalism, which led to the rejection of reformist approaches and increasingly intense discussion of alternative forms of society. These discussions of contemporary imperialist policies of industrialised states in general, and the American military campaign in Vietnam in particular, resulted in an International Desertion Day in May 1968. In the course of this action, organised by American, German and French students, assaults on American cultural centres, consulates and the American Forces Network were carried out. In West Germany, students also attacked the stock exchange in Frankfurt, the widely-known department store *Kaufhaus des Westens* in Berlin, town halls and police stations with Molotov cocktails and cobblestones. For the student movement, the international co-operation was characteristic. Strong ties existed to American French, Italian and other West European student activists. The internationalist outlook also contributed to the formulation of criticism against the Western superpower which was the main driving force behind the freeing of Germany from Nazi rule; it also helped to partially transcend the constraints of the Cold War era by penetrating the rigid anti-communism of the West German society and its unquestioning support of the US.⁵⁴

For many student activists, the 'grimace of capitalism' was manifest in the continuing fight of the capitalist superpower against the Vietnamese population. However, the revolting generation of 1968 were not merely preoccupied with the situation in South-East Asia. The 'excesses' of the capitalist system were identified across the entire so-called Third World. Western democracies were held as mere character masks of international imperialism, meaning that, by 1967, a majority of students had begun to transpose their criticism of the

⁵³ See, for example, Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, pp. 126-131.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 272. The concerted action on this day also highlights the international co-operation among students. See also Klimke, *The other alliance*, pp. 236-238.

political *status quo* in West Germany and the world into a general critique of capitalism per se, a development largely initiated by the Frankfurt School.⁵⁵ An analysis of the student movement's discourses shows that the critique was often based on a supposed dualism between industrialised nations and the states of the Third World; the basic idea was that the first would be characterised by material affluence, whereas the poverty of individuals living in those countries would be for the most part of an ideational nature. Julcher, for example, highlights that the world was dichotomised by student activists into poor and rich countries. This involved an abstraction from the bloc confrontation of the Cold War. In this approach, nations were classified according to their level of industrial development.⁵⁶

Ideational poverty was primarily traced back to the 'manipulation' of individuals in Western bourgeois societies. With reference to Marcuse, arguably the most prominent representative of the Frankfurt School during the years of protest and appreciated for his practical support of their political concerns, students argued that individuals in modern developed societies are corrupted by their relative material affluence and manipulated by their respective socialisation. Socialisation in contemporary societies was criticised in the 1960s for how it affects individuals. It was argued that it would reduce human existence, the way in which individuals think, feel and act, to fulfil the demands of capitalist production.⁵⁷

The idea that individuals would, in one way or another, be manipulated by the media, their relative wealth and the state apparatus, formed a key *topos* of the socio-economic criticisms propagated by student activists during the late 1960s. 'Break the power of the manipulators' was, for example, a common motto of the *Anti-Springer* campaign, which attempted to break up the media empire of Axel Springer, who published, among other newspapers, *Bild*, West Germany's leading daily tabloid.⁵⁸

What generally had been understood by the expression 'manipulation' was the idea that thoughts, decisions and actions of individuals would be imposed on them from outside and beyond their conscious perception. In other words, student activists following Marcuse's

⁵⁵ See Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, 2003. The key role of the Vietnam War in the radicalisation for '68' is also emphasised in Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten und der BRD* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996); Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

⁵⁶ See Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung*, pp. 81-82.

⁵⁷ The idea that humans would be determined in their thinking and actions by their socialisation was developed by Marcuse in his work *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. In *One-Dimensional Man*, he formulates his thoughts on workers being corrupted by material affluence. A valuable analysis of Marcuse's theoretical work can be found in Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Macmillan: London, 1984).

⁵⁸ An original leaflet of this campaign calling for protests against the newspaper is, for example, available in *Chronik der Mauer/1968* <<http://www.chronik-der-mauer.de/index.php/de/Start/Detail/id/659537/item/5/page/0>> [26 October 2011].

work assumed that the consciousness of individuals would be forced to adopt ideas about the world and how they experience their lives contrary to their attitude of mind. A thought would, thus, be only seemingly a declaration of one's will; as the formation of thoughts is not reproducible, they are confronted with the individual's allegedly genuine attitude.

Supporters of manipulation theories, such as Marcuse, construct an ideal of thinking that offers guidance for what individuals supposedly have to think according to their generational, sex or class identities. In consequence, only those thoughts that run contrary to the interests of the theory's apologists are suspect to manipulation. Thus, manipulation theories imply a critique of ideas and judgements in conflict with the general intellectual attitude of its exponents. This criticism, however, is not based on a content-related analysis of specific thoughts, because the latter are exclusively confronted with idealised thought content. The revolting students therefore defined the individual's consciousness as caused by heteronomy.

By confronting individuals with a variety of political, cultural and commercial messages, 'manipulators' would evoke appropriate behaviour; accordingly, supporters of the theory emphasised that the manipulating force is unfolding in the subconscious mind and thus takes place behind the actual consciousness of individuals. Moreover, and running counter to their own theoretical premises, it remained unclear why and how proponents of manipulation theory were able to be aware of others being manipulated by the media and the state. The application of the theory's basic idea on its proponents appeared to be a logical impossibility.

With the beginning of the disintegration of the student movement in the summer of 1968, such disputes became more intense and even represented a criterion for demarcation among the many radical factions emerging from the movement. The success and influence of manipulation theory was based on its simple, elitist nature. It allowed students to explain a complex phenomenon, namely the submission of majority society to state and capital without profound theory formation, and reflect on themselves as 'experts', able to decipher the delusion caused by the 'system'. Rudi Dutschke and Hans-Jürgen Krahl, both influenced by the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School, were the leaders of student thought in the tradition of Critical Theory, who assumed that the repressive system was able to utilise sophisticated manipulation techniques in order to influence the powerless object, i.e. the proletariat.⁵⁹ This idea was, in different ways, taken up by *K-Gruppen* and the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF, Red Army Faction) in the 1970s.

⁵⁹ Ideas on manipulability, as discussed in the student movement, are outlined in Hildegard Weiss, *Ideologieentwicklung in der deutschen Studentenbewegung* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1985). See also MSZ, 10 (1976), pp. 10-12.

In Chapter Four, the MG's theory of the bourgeois psyche will be discussed. The group's approach also implies severe criticism of manipulation theories and in particular of Marcuse, the 'father of the New Left'. The relevance of the MG's theory's analysis for the further development of the organisation will also be stressed.

The social-cultural destitution of industrialised nations contrasted with the material hardship of those individuals living in the Third World. It was assumed by many students that any fundamental change of the socio-economic order had to originate in the Third World and expand in concentric circles to the industrialised states of the Western hemisphere. The Third World was considered to be the epicentre of social revolution. This idea was taken up most radically by the Maoist *K-Gruppen*, for which every movement that understood itself as 'progressive', 'anti-imperialist' or 'socialist' proved the validity of being in line with the general historical tendency of world revolution.⁶⁰ This dependency on revolutionary individuals and organisations in the Third World had an important influence on the development and eventual demise of the *K-Gruppen* which I will refer to in Chapter Two.

Constructed dualism between the ideational poverty in developed countries and material poverty in the Third World was not undisputed among student activists. Those that studied, in depth, the critique of political economy stressed that production in capitalism was aimed to augment abstract wealth and implied the expropriation of the working force as a matter of principle. Critics of the dualist concept did not deny the significant difference regarding the level of economic development and poverty between industrialised and so-called *Trikont*⁶¹ states. However, any idealisation of the political struggle and social situation in these countries was refuted. The MG and its predecessors took up this criticism and refused to link their political goals to the idealised struggle elsewhere. The consequences of this approach are discussed below.

1.3.2. Criticism of the state (I): critique of 'state monopoly capitalism'

The 1968 movement reinterpreted, further developed and criticised the classical works of various Marxist thinkers. The theory of state monopoly capitalism (*stamocap* theory) developed in the aftermath of World War I was among the concepts debated.⁶² Proponents of

⁶⁰ On the idea of the Third World as the ideal 'epicentre' of revolution, see Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, p. 263.

⁶¹ The term 'Trikont' refers to the three continents of South/Middle America, Africa and Asia, which were equated in the anti-colonial perspective of many student activists.

⁶² In West Germany, the theory of state monopoly capitalism was held in particular by the *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei*, established during the end phase of the broader protest movement in 1968. However, Maoist organisations also developed an affinity towards this theory. See Arbeiter-Basis-Gruppen,

the *stamocap* theory assumed that capitalism would no longer develop according to its own logic. Further, capitalism is interpreted as in a dying, decaying stage reflected in the fact that major corporations are forced to use their economic power to subject the state apparatus to their interests and goals. This apparent amalgamation of private economic, public and military interests would result in policies pursued by the capitalist state that solely represent the interests of major corporations in the respective society and abroad. By exploiting the state for their economic purposes, 'big business' would affect all other interests existing in democratic societies. It was also argued that historically, this had raised the potential of social unrest, and hence why state authorities would have to (re-)act in an increasingly authoritarian way.⁶³

Similar to the dualistic division of the globe into wealthy developed and poor 'Third World' countries, *stamocap* theory did not remain unchallenged among student intellectuals. Critics referred to the paradox inherent in the idea that the supposedly impotent ideal practical capitalist, the modern bourgeois state, would be subjected to the interests of major corporations while assisting these interests by wielding its monopoly of force. The state, in its capitalist form, was therefore identified as a 'foreign element' to capitalist relations. *Stamocap* theory could thus not adequately explain the existence and *raison d'être* of capitalist states.⁶⁴ Critics argued that the capitalist's interest in competing for economic success would override any considerations at a higher level, leading to the hypothesis that economic players in capitalism would develop an interest in the basic conditions of their existence only to an extent. Critics also emphasised the state's monopoly of force asserts, and maintenance of the legal modes of capitalist competition. In contrast to the assumptions of *stamocap* theory, they insisted that the bourgeois state's interest in capital accumulation would differ from that of equity holders, and also that for the modern capitalist state, the accumulation of abstract wealth would constitute the material basis for its power.⁶⁵

Moreover, the bourgeois state, willing to retain and expand its power, would formulate an interest in the augmentation of producing abstract wealth on its territory. This public

Programmatische Erklärung, (1970) <http://www.arbeiterbund-fuer-den-wiederaufbau-der-kpd.de/Archiv/Organisation/Dokumente/1970_Programmatische_ErklärungABG.pdf> [5 March 2010].

⁶³ Historically, *stamocap* theory dates back to V.I. Lenin, who developed the theoretical basics in his work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, published in 1917. Activists of the 1968 movement criticising 'state monopoly capitalism' explicitly referred to Max Horkheimer's annotations. In *The Authoritarian State* he formulates his thoughts on *stamocap* theory. See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, eds, *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis* (New York: Institute of Social Research, 1942). Horkheimer's influence on the student movement's criticism of the state is described, for example, in Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung*, p. 242. For a critique of the theory of state monopoly capitalism, see Margaret Wirth, 'Towards a critique of the theory of state monopoly capitalism', in *Economy and Society*, 3 (1977), pp. 284-313.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 288-290.

⁶⁵ See Joachim Hirsch, John Kannankulam and Jens Wissel, eds, *Der Staat der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: Zum Staatsverständnis von Karl Marx* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008).

interest would thus not coexist with that represented by capitalists. By claiming that the damage suffered by individuals in capitalist societies would increase the 'potential of social unrest', proponents of *stamocap* theory projected their goal of substantial change, onto proletarians and the unemployed; yet could not bring themselves to consider the existence of the bourgeois state as the necessary condition for the proletariat to pursue its own personal and material interests.⁶⁶

In the 1970s those involved in the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, an exclusively West German attempt to logically derive the essence of the modern capitalist state, aimed to overcome the theoretical inconsistencies implied in both hitherto prevailing leftist concepts of state: the social-democratic and *stamocap* theory.⁶⁷ Whereas the traditional social-democratic theory of state emphasises the state's high degree of autonomy, proponents of *stamocap* theory, as outlined above, assume a 'fusion' between state and monopoly capital. The *Staatsableitungsdebatte* explicated the separation of state and capital, only to reconceptualise the phenomenon of the bourgeois state. Importantly, it concluded that the state's relative autonomy was constitutive for capitalist modes of production, because this would enable the bourgeois state to act as an adequate and efficient representative of national capital.⁶⁸

The MG's contribution to this debate will be discussed below. It will also be revealed how far the group attached its theory formation to Karl Marx's fragmented theory of state and therefore stands in his tradition.

1.3.3. Criticism of state (II): anarchic ideas and the fascist continuity thesis

Beside the influence of the Frankfurt School on the criticism of state and interpretation of *stamocap* theory, anarchic ideas experienced a renaissance in the student movement. Anarchism appeared an attractive ideology with which to utilise the antinomies of (neo-) imperialist rule for the purposes of oppressed peoples and, in consequence, for the liberalisation of societies in the developed world.

Even though various anarchist currents existed during the years of the student movement, e.g. individualist, collective or communist anarchism, the desire to abolish any form of authority was their common ground. The state embodied the incorporated authority in the view of anarchists, a view that mystified the capitalist state's *raison d'être*, because

⁶⁶ See Weiss, *Ideologieentwicklung*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ For an overview see John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, eds, *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978).

⁶⁸ See Tobias ten Brink, *Staatenkonflikte: Zur Analyse von Geopolitik und Imperialismus* (Stuttgart: Lucien & Lucien/UTB, 2008), p. 119.

'authority' is a category of analysis devoid of any specifics and objectives pursued by a particular public authority.⁶⁹

In continuation of Bakunin's work, freedom was defined as a characteristic trait of human beings, and thus deduced from jus-naturalistic ideas.⁷⁰ According to these ideas, human beings are free and equal in a natural state and would thus also have the natural right to defend their individual freedom. Whereas this assumption led philosophers of natural law to act as advocates for the state, e.g. John Locke, Bakunin and student activists concluded the exact opposite, because freedom would be a fundamental principle of human existence that can exclusively be preserved in her state of nature. The anti-authoritarian movement and with it the SDS as its leading organisation drew heavily on anarchist ideas. Numerous commentators interpreted the SDS as an anarchist organisation that applied the propaganda by the deed in a creative and spontaneous way.⁷¹

In general terms, the criticism of modern forms of state was a common phenomenon during the years of the West German student movement and referred to, albeit with different emphasis, capitalist and socialist regimes. This student criticism occurred because of a 'vague feeling of unease' regarding public institutions. After Benno Ohnesorg, a young German language student, had been shot at a demonstration against the autocratic Persian regime on 2 June 1967, discussions on the 'authoritarian character' of the Federal Republic reached their culmination.⁷²

For many revolutionary students, this 'authoritarian character' was manifest in the resolute response of police forces. The passage of state of emergency laws represented further 'evidence' of the growing tendency of the Federal Republic to act in an 'authoritarian' way; and hence, to move closer to the behaviour of its notorious predecessor.

The assumed affinity between the existing social order and fascism was justified by revolting students, who referred derisively to the system of 'state monopoly capitalism' and the state's one-dimensional function therein. In leaflets and political actions, the Federal Republic was often and openly referred to as being 'fascist'.⁷³ Activists of the 1968 movement criticised the West German state not only for its planned implementation of state

⁶⁹ Esther Almstadt, *Realität und Fiktion in Uwe Timms Roman Morenga* (pending).

⁷⁰ See Mikhail Bakunin, 'Man, Society, and Freedom' (1871) <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1871/man-society.htm>> [17 October 2011].

⁷¹ *Der Spiegel*, 'Anarchismus', 47 (17 November 1969), pp. 193-204.

⁷² See, among others, Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, pp. 135-43. See also *Die Bedeutung der Faschismuskussion in den 1960er Jahren* <<http://www.glasnost.de/hist/apo/apo882.html>> [4 January 2012].

⁷³ See Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz? Germany's 1968 generation and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Benicke, *Von Adorno zu Mao*, 2010. Both authors elaborate on the fascist-like rhetoric of parts of the student movement and anti-Semitic tendencies of Maoist *K-Gruppen* in the 1970s.

of emergency laws and the sometimes brutal acts of police forces against peaceful demonstrators, but also for its historical unwillingness to rigorously bring the process of 'denazification' to an end, to a large extent, the judicial system consisted of civil servants who had served under the Nazi regime; whereas only a few current professors had devoted themselves and their academic work to the ideology of National Socialism. Moreover, the Federal President at the time of the protests, Heinrich Lübke, had drawn up construction plans for concentration camps during World War II and, therefore, typified, as far as the students were concerned, the continuity of public sector personnel.

Schmidtke contends that the SDS had been pointing towards this continuity since the late 1950s. At first, the critique was formulated in written form in student journals and leaflets. However, during the years of the student movement, activists opted for a direct approach and confronted professors with their criticism by organising, among other things, go-ins. By doing so, they disrupted or even broke up lectures of academics with a Nazi past. These actions were successful in the sense that they drew media attention in the months following the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg. In addition, the denouncement of academic professionals led to a personalisation of the process of coming to terms with Germany's National Socialist past. This was demonstrated through the example of the SDS-organised 'Anti-Lübke Week' in 1968.⁷⁴

During the week of protest, students aimed to raise public awareness of the President's suspect past as a member of an engineering corps during the war.⁷⁵ Given this continuity in personnel, parts of the student movement concluded that 'authoritarian' and 'fascist' rule would continue in the post-war era. Yet this conclusion was based on reductionist lines of thought and oversimplified the complex relationship and ideological intersections between the fascist and democratic order. Accordingly, qualitative differences between a dictatorial form of rule and democratic governance were often ignored. Indeed, it appears that activists applied the attribute of 'fascist' to express their disappointment regarding certain political decisions, such as the curtailment of civil rights in the case of a potential state of emergency.⁷⁶

Although this attribution of the term hindered the formation of a thorough theory of bourgeois society, students rightly emphasised that fascism and democracy would not stand in a dichotomous relationship to one other. Criticism of the state and its ideological basis formulated by protagonists of the student movement was, however, not exclusively fixed on

⁷⁴ Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, pp. 146-148. On the criticism of students against the employment of professors with an active Nazi past, see also Fels, *Der Aufruhr der 68er*, pp. 18-20.

⁷⁵ See Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, p. 147.

⁷⁶ See Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?*, 2009.

industrial nations. Regimes of the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union, in particular, were also confronted by severe criticism. However, the criticism was idealistic in the sense that the institution 'state' itself was not inherently criticised; rather, its specific structures and policies were derided as being akin to fascism.

Furthermore, Henning and Raasch emphasise that students were oriented towards the work of Herbert Marcuse in their criticism of really existing socialism. The proponent of Critical Theory made no explicit recourse to the anarchist school of thought in his critical evaluation of the Eastern bloc. One important aspect of the anarchist tradition of thought is nevertheless inherent in his critique: Marcuse vigorously opposed the socialist reality of his time on the basis of his objection to any forms of authority. The authors also referred to criticism of the student movement which did not exclusively focus on traditional forms of organisation in capitalist societies, such as parties, trade unions and the party organs of the Eastern bloc.⁷⁷

Moreover, this discussion of Marcuse and other authors of Critical Theory led to the examination of the 'authoritarian state' and its 'repressive' nature. Anarchist-inspired criticism was continued in circles such as the spontaneist movement; but more importantly, transformed into a general interest in the essence of the capitalist state. The MG's contribution to the state debate of the 1970s will be analysed in Chapter Five. As with Marcuse, the opposition to any form of authority characterised the group's theory, and thus rejected the prevailing idea among many student activists that state power could be deployed in a humane way.

1.3.4. Declaring its solidarity with the liberation movements of the Third World: the student movement and its relationship to the world's poor

During the '1968 years', student activists frequently incorporated resistance movements and their protagonists in foreign countries into their ideals, involving almost unconditional partisanship in favour of resistance forces all over the world, most notably, the Vietcong in South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Vietnamese Democratic Republic and Che Guevara. In consequence of this, the liberation movements in underdeveloped regions were

⁷⁷ See Henning and Raasch, *Neoanarchismus in Deutschland*, p. 40.

theoretically and practically linked to the political protest articulated in industrialised parts of the world.⁷⁸

The majority of the West German student movement vehemently opposed the Vietnam War and supported the forces of the Vietcong and North Vietnam, because they were viewed as the spearhead of a global struggle of progressive elements against the imperialism of Western industrial states.

Initial evidence of the students' pro-Vietcong partisanship and their backing of Third World liberation movements appeared in the form of a fly-posting campaign in 1966. It was organised by members of two study groups of the Berlin branch of the SDS. In particular, the 'Marxism and formed society' circle, led by Rudi Dutschke and Bernd Rabehl and the 'Vietnam' study group implemented this campaign. Posters were placed across West Berlin and the campus area of the local *Freie Universität*, which ultimately became the national centre of student protests a year later. On the posters, the SDS approved the resistance of Third World countries as the only opportunity to liberate these nations from First World oppression.⁷⁹

This open support for oppressed peoples also manifested itself in the statements of West Berlin SDS activists at the congress, 'Vietnam – Analysis of an Example', held in Frankfurt at the peak of the student movement in 1968 and organised by the federal executive board of the SDS. In their paper, the armed fight of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* in the late 1950s and early 1960s was interpreted as a 'revolutionary war'. The authors concluded that the function of the congress was to call for the expansion of such 'anti-imperialistic struggles' to the centres of capitalism. Political campaigns of West German students were, therefore, considered an integral part of these international protests.⁸⁰

In some student circles, the resistance fight of the Vietcong was frequently equated with their own protests. This was evident in the self-designation of parts of the movement as representatives of a new 'urban guerrilla', a parallelisation that was not free from romanticising the brutal and for hundreds of thousands deadly struggle of the Vietcong.⁸¹ In their early years of existence, this idea was not only taken up by the terrorist Red Army

⁷⁸ See Hans-Jürgen Krahl's contribution to the discussion at the International Vietnam Congress in West Berlin in which he emphasises the "new world-historical topicality of revolution." Krahl, cit. in Kraushaar, ed, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, Vol. 2, p. 345.

⁷⁹ See Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung*, pp. 114-115.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁸¹ See Weiss, *Ideologieentwicklung*, p. 50; Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), pp. 84-87. Kraushaar points out that the term 'urban guerrilla' in the West German context was essentially coined by Rudi Dutschke. The term aimed to establish a link between the political actions in West Germany and those conducted by the international guerrilla movement. Dutschke and fellow campaigners, however, rejected the threat and use of force and therefore the paramilitary aspects of guerrilla warfare in West Germany.

Faction, which understood itself as part of a revolutionary global guerrilla movement, working from the metropolises.⁸² The concept of urban guerrilla was also taken up by Rudi Dutschke who assigned this concept a less violent meaning in industrialised states and, even though rather vaguely, differentiated between violence against property and violence against persons, supporting the first as potentially 'emancipatory' while he refused the latter.⁸³ The perception of the passive worker in West Germany contributed further to the excessive steering towards movements in *Trikont* states in the early 1970s.⁸⁴

According to the idea that any substantial change of developed capitalist societies would emanate from Third World countries, parts of the student movement supported almost all struggles in the respective regions, no matter whether the 'revolutionary' conflict party aimed to achieve national independence, set up socialism, or a conflation of both. The oppressed were ideationally defended against any form of 'reaction'. The intellectual affinity towards the problems in these countries found its expression in intensified discussions after the Vietnam congress in 1968. Such discussions were usually organised in study groups loosely affiliated to the SDS.⁸⁵

On the basis of their overt support for the struggle of liberation movements, it is evident that revolting students often abstracted from the particular goals pursued by these movements; and thus ideologically monopolised their political ideas. This involved an idealisation of armed struggles in *Trikont* states. Struggles were interpreted as morally superior to the 'reactionary' interests of those established regimes determined to maintain good relations to the developed world and its international institutions.⁸⁶ In the wake of the student movement, *K-Gruppen* continued this approach and, among other regimes, supported the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.⁸⁷

From a theoretical point of view, solidarity with the liberation movements of the Third World was mainly justified by referring to the works of the leader of the Bolivian resistance, Che Guevara; Frantz Fanon, a French writer, psychiatrist, political activist and leading proponent of decolonisation in Algeria; and Mao Zedong. Fanon took an active role in the Algerian War of Independence and famously authored *The Wretched of the Earth*, written

⁸² See Jens Benicke, 'Leninisten mit Knarren: War die Rote Armee Fraktion nur eine bewaffnete K-Gruppe?', in *Initiative Sozialistisches Forum*, 30 April 2008 <<http://www.isf-freiburg.org/isf/beitraege/benicke-leninisten.html>> [12 December 2012].

⁸³ See Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Rudi Dutschke und der bewaffnete Kampf' (2007) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/geschichte-der-raf/49209/rudi-dutschke?p=all>> [12 June 2013].

⁸⁴ See Karl Schlögel, Willi Jasper and Bernd Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt: das Scheitern der KPD und die Krise der Linken* (Berlin: Olle & Wolter, 1981).

⁸⁵ See Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung*, pp. 123-124.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁷ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

during Algeria's years of fighting off French rule. This book became a standard work for critical activists during the peak of student protests.⁸⁸ It was introduced to the West-Berlin SDS by Rudi Dutschke, who considered its content relevant for strengthening solidarity with the Third World and to seek a partial application of Fanon's anti-colonialist theory in legal and illegal protest actions.⁸⁹ The Algerian conflict between 1954 and 1962 had already resulted in the emergence of the first internationalist solidarity movement in West Germany. Even though this solidarity movement was only of marginal importance, it was mostly propelled by intellectuals and consisted of a few dozen groups, it had important effects for the formation of a New Left movement. In fact, the transnational solidarity with the Algerian people entailed a shift in the perspective of West German intellectuals away from being exclusively occupied with Germany's post-fascist state of affairs. The at times highly influential internationalist *Kursbuch* periodical was founded by former supporters of that movement in 1965. Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Karl Markus Michel facilitated New Left intellectuals to publish papers and initiate important debates. Even more importantly, the Algerian conflict led to the first wave of student internationalism and the 'deprovincialisation' of political activism and brought focus to political, economic and social issues in developing countries and the role of the French and American government in international relations. It was also a first step in transcending the ideological rigidity of Cold War, enabling students to formulate open criticism against the occupying Western Allies and, thus, break with the early Cold War consensus of unconditional support for the US and France and its foreign policy by the West German government and the media.⁹⁰

For leading activists of the student movement, the Algerian conflict was also of importance because it showed the potential impact of students on the revolutionary war between leading capitalist countries and the Third World. Fanon's theory and legitimisation of violence was also taken up by circles discussing the application of terrorist means in West Germany and its legitimacy.⁹¹

Che Guevara, meanwhile, developed the so-called Foco theory. According to this theory, a variety of localised assaults on important public institutions in the Third World would cause nationwide societal upheaval. It would thus not be required to wait until adequate conditions emerged to launch either an insurrection or a people's war. Instead, Guevara was convinced that a small group of revolutionaries could launch small-scale guerrilla warfare at

⁸⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

⁸⁹ See Klimke, *The other Alliance*, p. 130.

⁹⁰ See Dorothee Weitbrecht, *Aufbruch in die Dritte Welt* (Göttingen: V&R, 2012), pp. 65-72. Weitbrecht shows how the internationalisation of political discussions was reflected in nationally distributed student magazines.

⁹¹ See Klimke, *The other Alliance*, p. 130.

any time, which would serve as a focus and inspiration for the rapid growth of general guerrilla warfare and opposition to the current political order. In theory, a group of revolutionaries can actively create the necessary conditions for revolution. Their vanguard actions and moral example would establish such conditions.

Unlike genuine people's war, Foco theory is based on the assumption that the mere existence of the 'focus' makes it a vanguard, without any necessity to establish a strong practical bond with the genuine interests of the masses. Foco theory is therefore an elitist theory of revolution and implied the refutation of the Soviet Union's directive to maintain peaceful co-existence between socialist and capitalist countries.⁹² Both aspects were appealing to students. In search for a third way beyond the politico-economic, ideological and cultural boundaries of capitalism and socialism, yet marginalised in West German majority society, the elitist nature of Focoism corresponded with the students' own situation. The theory emphasised the possibilities of revolutionary politics, and therefore offered a promising vision for revolting students that only needed adaptation to the German context.

The legitimacy of violent and political resistance was also stressed by Mao Zedong, who was widely cited by the RAF in its first public statements. In contrast to the violent resistance of terrorist factions, political Maoists stressed the importance of political resistance to the bourgeois society.⁹³ Moreover, for parts of the student movement, the contemporary exertion of influence of former colonial powers on Third World states was a mere continuation of traditional colonial policies, albeit executed through different means. Marxist theories of imperialism, which went beyond conceptual boundaries associated with the historical 'Age of Imperialism', were rediscovered and further developed.⁹⁴

In line with this modern manifestation of imperialism, student activists generally accepted the use of violence under certain conditions as an appropriate means for achieving the political goals pursued by liberation movements. In the West German student movement, lively discussions on the issue of when and where socio-economic change could only be implemented through violence developed. Some voiced their objection in principle to any use of violence, and thus stood in the tradition of the early *Ostermarschbewegung*.⁹⁵ Others

⁹² For an introduction to 'focoism' see Michael Löwy, *The Marxism of Che Guevara* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

⁹³ See Benicke, 'Leninisten mit Knarren', 2008.

⁹⁴ See ten Brink, *Staatenkonflikte*, 2008. In the 1970s, the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, although a genuine project to conceptualise the 'interior' relations of capitalist societies, also reflected and influenced the debates on the bourgeois state's relation to 'third parties'.

⁹⁵ The 'Aldermaston marches', an inspiring example for the *Ostermarschbewegung*, were protest demonstrations organised by the British anti-war Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast to CND-organised campaigns, the West German *Ostermarschbewegung* had a revival of mass popularity in the early 1980s.

vindicated the decision to deploy guerrilla warfare in *Trikont* states, but refused any application of force in the industrialised world in general and against individuals in particular. In the phase of disintegration, a small circle of activists decided to fight for the intended overthrow of capitalism by applying violence. These activists understood themselves and their actions as the practical expression of legitimate opposition to the ruling political class. From this circle, the first activists of the infamous RAF were recruited and adopted the concept of urban guerrilla to the West German situation.⁹⁶

1.3.5. The positive affirmation of spontaneity

The accentuation of creative spontaneity, through which social change would primarily be carried out, was another key element of the New Left's body of thought. Emphasis on the relevance of spontaneous actions implied a vehement objection towards established forms of organisation. This anarchist-inspired anti-establishment position was interpreted as a practical alternative to the social system of the bourgeois society.⁹⁷

In line with theorists, such as Carlo Pisacane and Mikhail Bakunin, the influential anarchist wings of the SDS and extra-parliamentary opposition propagated that

we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda.⁹⁸

Spontaneous political campaigns were supposed to raise awareness among the people as to their 'undignified' existence and therefore stimulate the reawakening of their natural desire for freedom: an idea closely related to manipulation theory. On the basis of the unverifiable assumption that humans have a natural desire for freedom, anarchist activists, however,

⁹⁶ Dutschke reflected on the issue of 'legitimate violence' in 1967. In *Oberbaumblatt*, he differentiates between forms of violence used in the states of the Third World and those which ought to be applied in Western industrial states. While viewing assassinations of leading politicians in the *Trikont* region as justified 'revolutionary terror' against oppressors, Dutschke rejected these 'forms of fighting' in Western societies. Because of the alleged superiority of 'bureaucratic apparatuses' that would consist of changeable 'character masks', assassinations of politicians would be 'inhuman and counter-revolutionary'. Instead, it was important to oppose state apparatuses and their 'manipulation instruments' through 'organised refusal'. Dutschke, cit. in Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegung*, pp. 235-236. For the RAF's concept of urban guerrilla, see Martin Hoffmann, ed, *Rote Armee Fraktion. Texte und Materialien zur Geschichte der RAF* (Berlin: ID-Verlag, 1997), pp. 27-48.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, 'Letter to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis' (1870) <<http://marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1870/letter-frenchman.htm>> [18 September 2011]. See also Carlo Pisacane, 'Political Testament' (1857) <<http://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2011/09/22/carlo-pisacane-propaganda-by-the-deed-1857/>> [13 October 2011].

neglected to argue thoroughly against the prevailing socio-economic circumstances of their time.⁹⁹

The spontaneity of individual and political actions enjoyed a renaissance in the West German student movement. This resulted primarily from the criticism of 'authoritarian' institutions. For parts of the critical student body, the concept of spontaneity appeared to be a positive counter-draft to the rigid, allegedly oppressive traditional forms of organisation, such as both the party structure of the social-democratic party in West Germany and the socialist one-party system in the GDR.¹⁰⁰

The accentuation of spontaneity was particularly apparent in the activists' political action: in small groups, planned on short notice and without official admission, spontaneous action was aimed to provoke state authorities. In most cases, it was intended to demonstrate the state's violent nature to the general population.¹⁰¹ As with the proponents of anarchism in the early 20th century, those student activists who shared the tradition of anarchist thought assumed that the population would *in principle* oppose the Federal Republic. To bring forward this opposition, it would only be necessary to reveal the state's violent nature. Yet it is evident here that these activists could not, or were not willing to conceptualise the individuals' voluntary submission to the principles of constitutionality and capitalism.

The rediscovery of the spontaneous element also became apparent when members of the anarchist wing proposed to restructure the SDS. These members advocated a less centralised form of organisation and argued the case for establishing loosely associated task forces and grassroots groups. Those West German students who defined spontaneity as the 'driving force' of social change and their political activism were euphoric on hearing of the developments in Paris in May 1968 and wanted their theoretical convictions to be reflected in the organisational structure of the SDS.¹⁰²

Although the affirmation of spontaneity is not to be confused with a fundamental steering towards anarchism, it is, nonetheless, important to point out that the theory gained popularity among left-wing activists when the French Fifth French Republic almost collapsed under the pressure of a general strike. The influence of anarchic spontaneism is, for example,

⁹⁹ See Rolf Cantzen, *Weniger Staat – mehr Gesellschaft: Freiheit – Ökologie – Anarchismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2000), p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Weiss, *Ideologieentwicklung*, pp. 49-53.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² At the 23rd Delegate Conference in September 1968, held in Frankfurt/Main, a fraction from Hamburg proposed to dissolve the hitherto centralised student organisation and restructure the SDS around local and regional project groups co-ordinated by regional councils. It was further planned to organise an inter-regional exchange of ideas by establishing a central council from regional spokesmen. This application, however, was vetoed by a small majority. See Günther Bartsch, *Anarchismus in Deutschland, Vol. 2* (Hanover: Fackelträger, 1973).

reflected in an issue of *Kursbuch*.¹⁰³ In the 1970s, this ideological string was continued by spontaneists — i.e. the so-called *Spontis* — and by the autonomist movement since the early 1980s.¹⁰⁴

1.3.6. The ideal of egalitarian concepts of life

That industrialised societies seemed unable to overcome existing social drawbacks, such as race, class and gender, resulted in persisting criticism among the political left by the 1960s.¹⁰⁵ In light of this criticism, parts of the movement put into practise, for its time, a provoking concept of life, emphasising the collective aspects of human existence: the commune. Those formed during the years of the student revolt were influenced by the concept of anarchist voluntarism. According to voluntarists, individuals cannot be coerced into freedom; activists are therefore supposed to anticipate the 'new' libertarian society through their personal and political actions. As per the vision of libertarians, this social order would be based on common property. Throughout the 'years of 1968', communards therefore attempted to abolish private property within their own ranks. Moreover, they intended to break with the traditional principles of bourgeois family life and gender relations.

With this criticism came new forms of artistic expression (partly based on earlier avant-garde movements, such as the Situationist International); an aspect of the 1960s protest movement that Luc Boltanski summarises under the term, 'artistic revolution'. I will return to this in the following paragraphs, because the longing for 'total revolution' was arguably the most important and long-term impact generated by the West German student movement and the New Left.¹⁰⁶

Living together was supposed not to be dictated by authoritarian father figures, but grounded on democratic decision-making and gender equality. The criticism of the bourgeois family structure was closely linked to opposing the rigid sexual morality of the post-war era, succinctly summarised in the catchphrase 'he who sleeps twice with the same woman is part of the establishment'; a catchphrase which went for women too.

In the communes, the issue of prudishness was frequently discussed, though most revolting students, raised in the spirit of conservative sexual morality, aimed to practically overcome such traditional approaches. Moral laxity was displayed in order to provoke the

¹⁰³ In December 1969, the brevier of West Germany's left-wing intellectuals dealt exclusively with anarchism.

¹⁰⁴ See Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme: Zur Geschichte der Autonomen* (Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ See Alan Hooper, 'A Politics Adequate to the Age: the New Left and the Long Sixties', in Geoff Andrews et al., eds, *New Left, New Right And Beyond: Taking the Sixties Seriously* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Luc Boltanski, 'The Left after May 1968 and the Longing for Total Revolution', in *Thesis Eleven*, 69 (May 2002), pp. 1-20.

general public: based on the motto, 'the private is political'. Thus, parts of the student movement reversed the imperative of monogamy into its opposite extreme and advocated polygamy without considering the specific needs of individuals. By abstracting from these individual needs, activists partially reproduced the rigidity of those moral values they attempted to overthrow, instead of criticising their basic concept.

Communards understood the testing of alternative forms of social coexistence not as an isolated learning process disconnected from society, but instead assumed that the public demonstration of their living together would challenge prevailing norms and values. Despite its failure to change society's moral agenda in the short-term, the demonstration of alternative forms of living proved to be highly influential in the long run. The communards of the late 1960s based their activism on the idea that a quasi-natural demand for egalitarian living together would exist among the population in West Germany. In order to stimulate this demand, it would only require an open demonstration of freedom.¹⁰⁷

The attempt to anticipate a society free of any form of domination by creating alternative spheres of living was manifest in transcendental features. Their concepts of living together abstracted from existing legal regulations of democratic societies, asserted by the state through its monopoly of force. Communards felt the effects of this, in particular, with regard to the issue of private property. Whereas they were eager to abolish private property within their commune (they shared all available goods), activists were, nonetheless, forced to acquire products from capitalist marketplaces to keep their project running. Establishing communes under the regime of abstract wealth production was thus an illusory task, which failed to accomplish its radical political goals.

However, alternative forms of living together, such as living communities, were nevertheless popularised in the wake of the student movement and beyond the anarchy-influenced ideas of communes. The demonstratively displayed sexual and moral laxity also had a long-term effect on the realisation of egalitarian concepts of life, because it challenged the hitherto existing socio-moral consensus of the post-war era.

In the wake of the student movement, the ideal of egalitarian concepts of life was expressed in the form of an influential new feminist movement. This movement, shaped by protests against abortion laws, not only initiated the process to achieve legal and actual equality between the sexes, but also changed traditional gender roles in West German society. It was now easier for woman to pursue careers, for example, in academia, where an

¹⁰⁷ Although concepts of life in the commune were influenced by anarchist ideas, it is nevertheless inadequate to conclude that all communards were, according to their self-conception, overt anarchists. See Bartsch, *Anarchismus*, p. 63.

unprecedented number of women were appointed professors in the early 1970s. Moreover, the new feminist movement was an important precursor for the emergence of other egalitarian movements, such as the gay rights movement, which contributed to the success of the 'artistic revolution' described by Boltanski.¹⁰⁸ The feminist aim to overcome gender-specific repressive living conditions and its critique of the New Left were major factors in the demise of the student movement after the summer of 1968 when the 'Action Council for the Liberation of Women' expressed its ideological distance to the SDS and established feminist opposition within the SDS. Despite supporting traditional gender roles, *K-Gruppen* partially adopted a pseudo-feminist approach in women's groups and were involved in the anti-§218¹⁰⁹ protests. In chapter 2.3.2 I will discuss the *K-Gruppen's* intentions and discuss why the feminist movement had no particular influence on the communist radical left.¹¹⁰

1.4. Conclusion

From its origin during the late 1950s anti-nuclear weapons and Algerian solidarity movement to the student revolt in the 'years of 1968', the early history of West Germany's New Left was characterised by an increasing level of dissatisfaction with the political, social and cultural post-war consensus. With the death of Benno Ohnesorg at the rally against the Persian Shah on 2 June 1967, this rather latent dissatisfaction broke through, instantly politicising a significant portion of the student body. All the issues already discussed in the SDS, such as the idea of a 'formed society', the Vietnam War and the continued influence of civil servants who had supported the Nazi regime on the Federal Republic, now found their way into public discourse.

The SDS was the means that enabled left-wing intellectuals to formulate criticism on the basis of Marx's work and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. The student movement was able to partially break with anti-communism in West Germany and create scope for critiques of Western capitalism and Eastern orthodox socialism. Accepted rules of society were challenged along with the deceptive 'ideology of the economic miracle'. Norms of consumer society and meritocracy were criticised and the aspiration towards new manifestations of political morality broadened criticism of the political and economic system during spring and summer in 1968. However, the diversity of political opposition —

¹⁰⁸ See Boltanski, 'The Left after May 1968', 2002.

¹⁰⁹ §218 of the German criminal code regulates abortion.

¹¹⁰ See Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland/Kunstgruppe Braunschweig, '75: Wachsende Proteste – wachsende Selbständigkeit; '76: 1. Mai - Internationaler Kampftag der Arbeiterklasse', April 1976, p. 32. See also 15 Jahre Kommunistischer Bund (KB) / mpz Hamburg 1987 – Teil 1 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfRhTVTLzX0>> [15 June 2012].

incorporating communist, anti-authoritarian, feminist, anarchist and cultural revolutionary facets of diverse ideological backgrounds — overwhelmed the SDS, which promptly broke apart.

Various schools of thought converged within an idealistic-normative interpretation of the political *status quo*. The maxim that there is no socialism without democracy and no democracy without socialism on the basis of freedom and equality was an important ideological cornerstone of the New Left during and after 1968. Given that, the ideal of social revolutionaries to represent the 'genuine' interests of ordinary people was common and legitimised political efforts to substantially change the West German republic. By fighting for the interests of the 'oppressed' masses, activists transcended their *per se* limited range of actions and were people's representatives in spirit. In this context, and inspired by wildcat strikes in West Germany, the initially provocative flirt with Mao Zedong morphed into the founding of several factions based on Maoist ideas. In the early 1970s, the People's Republic of China became a role model for likeminded activists. The anarchy-inspired criticism of the state was therefore not further developed but rejected in favour of an actual state, such as China, which many interpreted as a 'concrete utopia' at that time. Thus, belief in the beneficial nature of state power was not shattered but retained.

Through the example of the communist Red Cells movement and its organisational spin-offs, the *K-Gruppen* and the *Marxistische Gruppe*, the next chapter elucidates the logic of the New Left's further development in the 1970s and 1980s and its realignment with the principles of the bourgeois society, in the context of the general 'crisis of Marxism'.

2. **The further development of West Germany's radical left after 1968: with particular emphasis on Red Cells and their most important offspring, the *Marxistische Gruppe* and *K-Gruppen***

2.1. Introduction

With the SDS' organisational structure overwhelmed and left in tatters during the peak of the extra-parliamentary opposition of the summer of 1968, the leading student organisation lost its influence over the myriad of factions already in existence within its own ranks and the protest movement as a whole. This influence peaked in early 1968, when SDS groups organised their own May Day marches, attracting 40,000 people in West Berlin alone. This political broadening, related to the SDS's orientation towards trade unions and the working class, collapsed when the student organisation was not able to pool all extra-parliamentary activists during the anti-emergency law protests. Even though the SDS, in co-operation with trade unions, liberal student representatives, publicists and single members of the social-democratic party, was able to mobilise 60,000 participants to a march in Bonn on 11 May 1968, it failed to convince the German Federation of Trade Unions to call a general strike.¹¹¹

Difficulties in popularising the SDS's social criticisms and mobilising the West German proletariat in support of substantive political and economic change resulted in the recurrence of the question of organisation. Groups and currents of the New Left followed different ideological and strategic directions. Local SDS groups in Cologne and Marburg, for example, almost entirely joined the newly established DKP, whereas other groups momentarily continued their work within the organisation, albeit the SDS as such no longer had integrative strength and was dissolved in early 1970.¹¹²

In 1969, a new and, among left-wing students, temporarily highly influential political phenomenon emerged from the remnants of the SDS' communist wing in university towns: the so-called Red Cells movement. The Red Cells proved the most important transition phenomenon of the early post-SDS phase and also represented an important link between the anti-authoritarian wave of protests and radical left milieu of the 1970s. Thus, the appearance of the Red Cells movement, which lasted mainly from 1969 until 1973, marks a significant change of paradigms towards Marxist-Leninist approaches.¹¹³

¹¹¹ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

¹¹² See Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme*, 1995.

¹¹³ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

Maoist factions either emerged directly from the Red Cells movement or at least recruited many of its activists. Another consequence of this movement was the occurrence of undogmatic factions in Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg; factions that distanced themselves from established Marxist-Leninist dogmas and eventually formed the core of the *Marxistische Gruppe*, the largest organisation of the New Left, which was not founded until 1979. Thus, the Red Cells movement can be viewed as an important contributor to the further development and radicalisation of the New Left in the aftermath of the West German student movement, which shaped a significant portion of radical left activists during the years of realignment following the organisational collapse of the SDS. The Red Cells' short history not only anticipated important lines of conflict within the New Left in the 1970s and early 1980s, but also reflected traditionally contentious points among its activists, such as the relationship of theory and praxis. Red Cells also broke with the strong internationalist orientation of the anti-authoritarian student movement and therefore mark a return to a German perspective in the sense that neither the cells nor their successor organisations established significant relationships to likeminded organisations beyond the German-speaking world. It can thus be argued that the radicalisation of groups by 1969, except for those deploying terrorist means, led to a specific re-provincialisation of political activism, focussing on the setup of a powerful national communist party.¹¹⁴

The hitherto unexplored history of the Red Cells movement is the subject of the following analysis. Due to the scope and thematic focus of the present work, the analysis mainly focuses on developments at the Universities of Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg. This, however, will not limit the wider relevance of the analysis, because developments in these university towns were mostly representative of what happened elsewhere and of the problems caused by the decentralised organisational structure of the Red Cells.

First, this chapter addresses the general historical developments and events, against whose background the *K-Gruppen* operated and the *Marxistische Gruppe* took shape, in order to contextualise the demise of the New Left by 1976/77.

2.2. The historical context of the West German New Left in the 1970s

In West Germany, the years between 1969 and 1973 were the time of 'reform euphoria' and Chancellor Willy Brandt's new *Ostpolitik*, which launched a policy of détente between both German states. A wave of new members joined the *Jusos*, the youth organisation of the social-

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

democratic party, which pursued a 'double strategy' of supporting Brandt's idea to 'dare more democracy' and incorporate grassroots initiatives into their own policy. The demise of the student movement resulted in the emergence of four major currents. Beside the Marxist-Leninist movement and the *Jusos*, the DKP and unorganised anti-authoritarians were key actors of the post-1968 era.

At its peak in 1968, the student revolt consisted of approximately 20,000 organised campaigners, whereas the influential SDS had 2,500 registered members.¹¹⁵ In contrast to this, approximately 80,000 individuals were involved in the New Left movement of the 1970s.¹¹⁶ In the early 1970s, 100 to 150 pro-Maoist groups alone existed in the Federal Republic and West Berlin.¹¹⁷ However, the emergence of Maoist *K-Gruppen* between 1969 and 1973 was only the observable peak of a more widespread phenomenon, which resulted in the formation of a left-wing sub-culture during the 1970s.¹¹⁸

In this period, a plethora of radical left organisations was established. For these organisations, the movement of 1968 did not achieve what activists longed for: the 'total revolution' of bourgeois society. These new organisations, unified in the belief of being able to change society, pursued a variety of ideological approaches, accentuating different ideas of the student movement's ideological reservoir.

Although the specific historical developments of political organisations and currents differed in terms of longevity, influence and ideological rigor, the New Left's decline by 1976/7 was a common phenomenon not only in West Germany but across Europe and the entire Western world. In West Germany, seemingly paradoxical, the decline occurred against the background of wildcat strikes in 1973, economic difficulties caused by the first oil shock in the same year and the subsequent economic downturn. The oil crisis, which contributed to relatively high inflation levels, increasing unemployment rates and a wave of strikes in 1973/4, ended a quarter of a century of exceptionally high rates of economic growth across Western Europe.¹¹⁹ Although economic depressions are usually associated with strengthening more radical approaches to politics, Hobsbawm has emphasised that

¹¹⁵ See Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Kleine Geschichte des SDS*, 2007.

¹¹⁶ See Benicke, *Von Adorno zu Mao*, p. 18. According to official statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior in 1971, about 84,300 activists were involved with radical left factions, parties and organisations following this paradigm shift. According to the *Verfassungsschutz*, this number had dropped to less than 32,000 by 2008. See Bundesministerium des Innern, ed, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2008* (Berlin, 2009), p. 32.

¹¹⁷ *Der Beauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (BStU, The Office of the Federal Commissioner preserving the records of the Ministry for State Security of the GDR), MfS - HA XXII (5740/2), p. 173.

¹¹⁸ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 17-19.

¹¹⁹ Hartmut Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe: A Period of Disillusionment or Promise?* (London: German Historical Institute, 2010).

[a]fter twenty years of unparalleled improvement for wage-earners in economies of full employment, revolution was the last thing in the minds of the proletarian masses.¹²⁰

Given the disinterest of the working class in overthrowing capitalism, the majority of New Left organisations had entered a 'stage of resignation' by the mid-1970s, in which they found themselves politically impotent and isolated in West German society. The revolutionary hope sparked by wildcat strikes in 1969, which seemed to break with the total passivity of workers, turned out to be devoid of any real substance.

In the early 1970s, the West German state also followed a 'double strategy' with regard to the significant levels of left-wing criticism. Repression of radical intellectuals and activists culminating in the so-called *Radikalenerlass*, an employment ban for political radicals in the civil service, was accompanied by a window of opportunity for Marxist intellectuals to earn professorships. Reform of the education sector led to the founding of numerous 'reform universities': a playground for New Left intellectuals. This development was also supported by trade unions. By the mid-1970s, however, this window closed never to be reopened.

The practical problems of left-wing opposition to capitalism were accompanied by severe theoretical shortcomings in actually conceptualising economic change during the 1970s. In this context, Neusüß stressed that the existence of structural unemployment, stagflation and the scale of the international division of labour could not be understood through available Marxist theories of economic crisis, class and revolution. Further, Neusüß points to the inadequacy of the established analytical framework for the understanding of the neoclassical economic policy in West Germany following the first oil crisis in 1973 and emergence of new social movements. By the later 1970s, these difficulties were being discussed as representing a 'crisis of Marxism'.¹²¹

The German Autumn in 1977, with its diverse implications for political work from the left wing of society, proved the turning-point of the post-student movement era. The political left as a whole had to deal with a series of terrorist events, which culminated in the suicide of leading members of the Red Army Faction. Although the *K-Gruppen* were critics of the 'petty bourgeois' acts of terrorism conducted by the Red Army Faction, they were nonetheless themselves affected by the German Autumn¹²², as conservative politicians urged for party-ban

¹²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 298.

¹²¹ See Christel Neusüß, 'Welche neuen Momente bestimmen die gegenwärtige Stagnationsphase', in *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, 36 (1979), pp. 111-132.

¹²² The German Autumn was a set of events associated with the killing and kidnapping of Jürgen Ponto, CEO of the Dresdner Bank, and Hans-Martin Schleyer, President of the *Federation of German Industries* (BDI). The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked a West German plane and demanded the release of ten

proceedings.¹²³ The aggravation of political terror in West Germany and abroad, e.g. Operation Entebbe¹²⁴, also increased the repression of the state against the radical left. It is thus no coincidence that the radical left's quantitative extension peaked with approximately 82,000 activists in 1976.¹²⁵ For the radical left, events in the autumn of 1977 marked a historical 'break', which led to a return to institutional approaches to political change beyond the idea to overthrow the bourgeois state power.¹²⁶

The growing emphasis on hedonistic values in the aftermath of the student movement, which contributed to the emergence of new social movements in the 1970s, also failed to favour radicalisation of the workers' political consciousness. In fact, these values, which were also essential to the concept termed by Boltanski as 'artistic total revolution', shifted the focus from the reproduction of the capitalist society as a whole to the domain of human reproduction. Change in this sphere, however, proved to be "compatible with the maintenance of property rights under their present form and with the expansion of global capitalism."¹²⁷ This fact played a vital role in the New Left's reconnection with mainstream society: the politicisation and transformation of the private was an important aspect of the student revolt. The liberation of the domain of human reproduction was an accepted issue within Maoist factions, though only treated as a side contradiction.

In addition, the ending or substantial redirection of communist projects in China and Cambodia; the growing *Solidarność* (Solidarity) and dissident movements in Poland and Eastern Europe and, from a left-wing perspective, the disappointing developments in Chile and Portugal, changed the international context in which the West German New Left operated. The *zeitgeist* had altered significantly in West Germany and further narrowed the room for radical left ideologies caused by the 'conservative turn'.¹²⁸

The well-documented historical context of these years is, however, inadequate in explaining the decline of the radical left because it almost exclusively considers external

RAF members detained at the Stammheim prison in Stuttgart. These events culminated in the suicide of leading RAF prisoners and the murder of Schleyer after the failed attempt to obtain the terrorists release.

¹²³ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, pp. 168-174.

¹²⁴ On 27 June 1976, an Air France plane with 248 passengers was hijacked by terrorists representing the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Revolutionary Cells, a West German terrorist faction; and flown to Entebbe, the capital of Uganda. Non-Israeli hostages were released, but Israeli and Jewish individuals remained as hostages. A week later, on 4 July 1976, commandos of the Israel Defence Force rescued the hostages and killed all hijackers.

¹²⁵ Kundnani, for example, stresses the impact of these events on Joschka Fischer and his decision to leave the radical left's ghetto. See Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?*, 2009.

¹²⁶ For non-violent conceptions of state, see Holger Nehring, 'The Era of Non-Violence: 'Terrorism' and the Emergence of Conceptions of Non-Violent Statehood in Western Europe, 1967-1983', in *European Review of History*, 3 (2007), pp. 343-371.

¹²⁷ Boltanski, 'The Left after May 1968', p. 17.

¹²⁸ See Kaelble, *The 1970s in Europe*, 2010.

factors. While an analysis of political, cultural and economic developments might explain why the recruitment reservoir of the New Left shrank over the course of the 1970s, it is not possible to explain the specific developments of political currents and organisations. A holistic elucidation of the New Left's history is only made possible by considering how the changing world, specific phenomena and events were conceptualised by its different currents. That the largest organisation of West Germany's New Left was not established before 1979, and went on to expand throughout the 1980s, is no historical accident but rather has its roots in the formation of its specific theory.

It is thus worth scrutinising the theory formation of the MG and *K-Gruppen*. Accordingly, the next section analyses the historical development of the Red Cells movement, from which the MG and majority of *K-Gruppen* activists originated. Debates within the Red Cells already implied the major differences held by the Maoist *K-Gruppen* and the undogmatic MG, and contribute to answering the following questions: why did the *K-Gruppen* fail to endure the general crisis of Marxism in the late 1970s? Why was the inability of *K-Gruppen* to ally with the working class interpreted by its supporters as an argument against Marxism? What were the basic theoretical flaws that made the adoption of a long-term perspective impossible for *K-Gruppen*?

2.2.1. The Red Cells movement: general developments between 1969 and 1971

With the academic year 1968/69 the 'politico-moral scandal', the idea that democratic states would not act in keeping with their principles retreated into the background while student criticism frequently turned into a broader critique of the politico-economic system.¹²⁹ The 'cultural-revolutionary paradigm' lost its appeal as a substantial number of students reflected self-critically on their role and that played by academia during previous protests.¹³⁰ In this process, initiated by the most active parts of the student movement having studied the critique of political economy and the history of the labour movement, activists concluded that the academic sphere could not take on the central historical role which anti-authoritarian students had previously assigned to it.¹³¹

Moreover, anti-authoritarianism was now criticised by Red Cells as a form of bourgeois ideology with a primary interest in maintaining privileges rather than seriously

¹²⁹ Norbert Frei, *1968 – Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), pp. 78 and 151.

¹³⁰ Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein*, p. 15.

¹³¹ See Rotes Blatt München, 14/15 (28 September 1970), p. 1; MSZ, 8 (20 October 1971), p. 1.

questioning the politico-economic roots of social inequality. In this context, Red Cells activists not only questioned the anti-authoritarian fixation on the idea of West Germany as an 'authoritarian state', but also criticised the student movement's hostility towards any stringent political organisation as an expression of its mistaken glorification of individualism when a form of concerted political struggle would be inevitable. Red Cells, which consisted of students and young academics, systematically organised their politico-theoretical training autonomously, as a critical appendix to the official teaching at universities. This training in both classical and contemporary Marxist theory was called the 'socialist study programme'.¹³²

Red Cells played a leading role in this 'revolt within the revolt'. As cultural-revolutionary criticism receded into the background, academic courses were frequently exploited for the propagation of critical ideas which affected students and teaching staff in equal measures when the 'critique of bourgeois science' found its way into academia.¹³³ In 1970, at least 61 Red Cells existed nationwide and although the movement was particularly influential in Berlin and Munich, with approximately 500 to 700 activists each. Red Cells also existed in Marburg, Freiburg, Hanover, Kiel, Münster, Göttingen, Karlsruhe, Erlangen-Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Bonn and other university towns.¹³⁴

At the turn of the decade, the Red Cells established themselves as an influential 'intra-university movement'.¹³⁵ Although a few groups acted under the name Red Cells until the late 1970s, the movement reached its zenith between 1969 and 1973. Given the estimates for Berlin and Munich, where two to three per cent of the student body were considered to be affiliated with Red Cells, a nationwide pool of activists was not likely to have been larger than around 2,500/3,000. However, as with the SDS, the influence of the Red Cells movement significantly exceeded its membership numbers. In Munich, Marburg and Kiel, for example, general students' committees were led by Red Cells and affiliated groups. In Munich, local Red Cells controlled 37 of 59 seats of the student council in 1971. Given the election turnout (36.4%) and the total student numbers, approximately 6,500 students actively supported or at least sympathised with the Red Cells project at Munich's Ludwig-Maximilians University alone.¹³⁶

Red Cells defied the concept of traditional political parties. In line with the 'critique of bourgeois science', cells were generally formed with an emphasis on particular study

¹³² See *APO-Archiv*, shelfmark 820, 'Rote Zelle Philosophie gegründet' (1970), pp. 1-5.

¹³³ See *Der Spiegel*, 'Rote Zellen', 8 (16 February 1970), pp. 68-70.

¹³⁴ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 47.

¹³⁵ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 200. See also Jörg Schönert, 'Versäumte Lektionen?', 8 (2008) <literaturkritik.de> [13 August 2008].

¹³⁶ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, pp. 47-49; Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 48.

programmes; and early on, were only loosely associated with each other at local level. Accordingly, cells were named as follows: *Rotzeg* (abbreviation for *Rote Zelle Germanistik* or Red Cell German Studies); *Rotzök* (Red Cell Economy); *Rotzjur* (Red Cell Law); *Rotzphil* (Red Cell Philosophy). Except for the *Rotzschwul* (Red Cell Gays), which was founded in Frankfurt/Main 1970 and combined its radical left ideology with the political struggle for gay rights, on the basis of the critique of specific academic disciplines, Red Cells had a 'holistic' social-economic approach, which focused on the overthrow of bourgeois society.¹³⁷

The Red Cells comprised a transitional phenomenon, which initially provided a forum for radical criticism of capitalism and its socio-cultural epiphenomena. Moreover, the question of a potential revolutionary professional practice was of central importance for activists. Maintaining an open exchange of ideas among different schools of thought, of which Maoist ideology was the most commonly received, proved illusory. Similar to the student movement, the common basis of the various Red Cells and among activists within these cells was often of sparse nature and also differed significantly between different universities. Despite their shared advocacy of historical and dialectical materialism, severe ideological frictions appeared soon after most Red Cells were established in 1969/70. The major lines of conflict-fuelling disputes among activists, which rendered impossible the establishment of a new, unified revolutionary organisation — the purported long-term goal — were as follows: first, the relationship between intellectual and manual labour; second, the praxis of the socialist study programme and, as a consequence thereof, the role of the intellectual and the labour division between avant-garde and proletarian masses; third, the unification process of the Red Cells as a result of revolutionary praxis versus the idea of an unifying theory and fourth, the problem of revolutionary professional practice in the context of an increasingly repressive state apparatus.¹³⁸

Given these conflicts, the movement failed because of controversial issues recurrently affecting the far left milieu and often making co-operation among different socio-critical strands impossible. The negative momentum implied in the shared opposition to the capitalist system did not result in the establishment of a common basis for further political activities. In this sense, the history of the Red Cells re-enacted the developments of the SDS, albeit on the basis of supporting total social revolution. Hans H. Hiebel, a former Red Cells activist, places this dogmatisation at 1971/72, which coincides with the splitting of local Red Cells in

¹³⁷ See Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Extremismus-Berichte des Innenministeriums NRW an den Landtag oder Landesbehörden 1970*, (1970) <<http://www.im.nrw.de/sch/doks/vs/ib1970.pdf>>, [07/09/2009], p. 33. For the *Rotzschwul* see also *Der Spiegel*, 'Bekannt, daß ihr anders seid', 11 (12 March 1973), pp. 46-62.

¹³⁸ *Hochschulkampf*, 'Aus Fehlern lernen', 19/20 (1 November 1971), pp. 1-3.

Erlangen-Nuremberg and Munich, but also with the intensified unification process and concomitant struggle between various lines, reflected in the publications distributed by the various groups.¹³⁹

For the majority of activists involved, Red Cells marked the transition from anti-authoritarian to Marxist-Leninist (more precisely, Maoist ideologies) which predominated among the West German radical left during the 1970s and involved an adulation of the proletarian masses.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, especially in the first phase of 1969 to early 1971, the Red Cells proved a melting pot for an entire generation of left-wing academics and intellectuals. The economists, Jörg Huffschmidt and Hans G. Ehrbar; the historian, Goetz Aly; pedagogy professor, Freerk Huiskens; Germanists, Helmut Lethen and Hans H. Hiebel; and political scientists, Peter Meyns and Margaret Wirth, were amongst the group of activists who supported the Red Cells at one point or another.¹⁴¹ Many went on to develop respectable academic careers after leaving the Red Cells. In this context, Koenen speaks polemically of an unrivalled 'placement bonanza' among young left-wing academics in the early 1970s. He argues that the Red Cells often functioned as an equivalent to duelling fraternities and allowed many spokespersons to utilise career-enhancing political connections.¹⁴²

In concordance with their transitory character, the influence of Red Cells at most universities had already peaked during the years of 1970 and 1971 after which many activists left the 'movement' to join one of the self-proclaimed Maoist 'vanguard organisations', which soon became known as *K-Gruppen* or other factions, such as the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei West-Berlin* (SEW, Socialist Unity Part of West Berlin).¹⁴³ Moreover, Matthias Brockmann and Thomas Kram, two former editors of the Berlin-based Red Cells journal *Hochschulkampf*, joined the *Revolutionärer Kampf* (RK, Revolutionary Struggle), a terrorist network linked to the autonomists' milieu, active until the late 1990s.¹⁴⁴

In light of these developments, the comment of the *SDS-Info*, (the periodical of the student organisation of the same name), regarding the founding of the first Red Cells in Berlin

¹³⁹ Hans H. Hiebel, email to the author, 23 October 2011. See also *Rotes Blatt München*, 1970-1972.

¹⁴⁰ In 1971, the *Hochschulkampf* editors, for example, claimed that "the real heroes are the masses." See *Hochschulkampf*, 17/18 (11 October 1971), p. 16. The first public reflection of organised West German Maoism can be found in the 'Spartacus letters', published by the Spartacus group in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1966/67. See *Gegen die Strömung*, 2 (January 1975), pp. III-XI.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Günter Platzdasch, 'Die letzten 30 Jahre – Erinnerungen an Rote Zellen und andere Linke' <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/71628563/Rote-Zellen>> [22 March 2012].

¹⁴² Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 202.

¹⁴³ Innenministerium des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, *Extremismus-Berichte des Innenministeriums NRW an den Landtag oder Landesbehörden 1971*, (1971) <<http://www.im.nrw.de/sch/doks/vs/ib1971.pdf>> [14 September 2009]. In North-Rhine Westphalia, the interior ministry noticed a considerable decline of the Red Cells' influence as early as in 1971. For Berlin, see also *Der Spiegel*, 'Vierteln und achteln', 45 (1 November 1971), p. 58.

¹⁴⁴ See editorials of the *Hochschulkampf* journal in 1971 and 1972.

in 1969 which the authors interpreted as “the practical, organisational bracket that means the highest degree of organisation in the present necessarily decentralised condition of practice”,¹⁴⁵ soon found itself overtaken by historical events. Decentralised conditions of practice could not be transferred into a unifying approach when the ideological differences became manifest and caused tensions within the weak organisational structures of the Red Cells.

The first genuine Maoist spin-off of the Red Cells movement was the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/ Aufbauorganisation* (KPD/AO, Communist Party of Germany/Setup Organisation). Founded in Berlin in 1970, the organisation's major goal was to develop the basic structure for a re-unified national Communist Party, “on the principle of unity of class analysis and organisation.”¹⁴⁶ As a practical consequence of the decentralised organisational structures within the Red Cells movement, developments proceeded at different pace across West Germany. For example, whilst the majority of Red Cells had already been disbanded in Berlin, under the motto ‘Overcome the Red Cells movement!’ and mostly transformed into the party base of the KPD/AO and SEW, their Munich counterparts were still involved in discussing the necessary steps to further consolidate the Red Cells as an influential local organisation.¹⁴⁷

The aim to compensate for theoretical deficits accumulated in the years of anti-authoritarian focus on revolutionising the political and social culture in West Germany found its expression in the Red Cells, its rigorous internal organisation — merely a two-time unexcused absence from plenaries led to debates regarding the suitability of members — and a tightly organised study programme contrasting the impromptu approach of the student movement.¹⁴⁸ Red Cells thus also constituted an important development with regard to the willingness of disciplined political work among student activists and therefore represented a prelude to the highly time-consuming and strictly organised revolutionary efforts of radical leftists in the 1970s.¹⁴⁹ For members of Red Cells in West Berlin, it was obligatory to attend training courses, pay membership fees of between ten and 100 DM for students and academics respectively, and

¹⁴⁵ *SDS-Info*, cit. in Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ See Rotes Blatt München, 34/35 (13 September 1971), p. 2. See also Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, pp. 87-89.

¹⁴⁷ Rotes Blatt München, 5 (29 March 1970), p. 2. For the Red Cells in Berlin, see *APO-Archiv*, bookshelf 1542.

¹⁴⁸ Rote Zelle Philosophie, ‘Statuten der Rote Zelle Philosophie München’, in *AfaS*, archive file number: 81.V.5.0.1.1969:p.2. (1969).

¹⁴⁹ The consequences of this extreme form of politicisation are described in Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, esp. pp. 258-259 and pp. 434-441. See also Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein*, pp. 347-377. Kühn analyses the daily life in the world of *K-Gruppen*. See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, pp. 39-99.

take part in political campaigns.¹⁵⁰ This new dimension was also reflected by the Red Cells' diverse boards, responsible for specific tasks: e.g. recruitment of new members, support and organisation of training courses, teach-ins and central campaigns within faculties, and utilisation of academic resources for political agitation.¹⁵¹

Although decentralised, Red Cells were organised according to the principles of communist cadre organisations.¹⁵² Thus, membership applications were bound by knowledge of Marx's critique of political economy, active committee work and the acceptance of decisions taken beforehand. Any opposition to these decisions in public implied the risk of being expelled by the organisation. The political commission represented the Red Cell, managed its political campaigns and plena, and developed program proposals. It was accountable, and subject to election every four months.¹⁵³ During the 1970s, and based on the principles of democratic centralism, the *K-Gruppen* carried this disciplined approach to political practice to the extremes, with disastrous consequences for many activists and their regular living conditions.¹⁵⁴

In West Berlin and Munich, the two strongholds of the Red Cells movement, the agitation strategy of confronting teaching staff with the supposed insufficiencies of its theories, efforts to systematically uncover inherent contradictions of conventional approaches, and to challenge the domination of bourgeois ideologies, provoked most academic personnel, and caused state authorities to intervene. In 1970, almost half of all tenured professors at the Free University of Berlin considered a move to a different university because of the tense situation on campus, to which the Red Cells contributed significantly.¹⁵⁵ For many professors and other teaching personnel, academic life became so difficult, that some foresaw a 'red takeover' or 'Sovietisation' of the university, others that the Berlin Senate sought to impose a ban on tutorials and lectures held by members of Red Cells in 1971.¹⁵⁶ The authorities believed these were merely socialist study courses disguised as official university events. The senate lost the law suit, because it was unable to provide evidence that these lectures were directed against the free democratic order and, thus, transcended ideological criticism.¹⁵⁷ In fact, activists predominantly agitated on the basis of a criticism of ideology; providing tutorials represented an important cornerstone of this strategy during the early 1970s, allowing

¹⁵⁰ See *Der Spiegel*, 'Rote Zellen: Hoher Einsatz', 41 (5 October 1970), p. 101.

¹⁵¹ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 49.

¹⁵² *Rotes Blatt München*, 14/15 (28 September 1970), p. 3.

¹⁵³ *Rote Zelle Philosophie*, 'Statuten', 1969.

¹⁵⁴ See Schlögel, Jasper and Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt*, 1981.

¹⁵⁵ *Der Spiegel*, 'Rote Zellen', 8 (16 February 1970), pp. 68-70.

¹⁵⁶ For comments of conservative academics on the situation at the Free University of Berlin and the Red Cells, see *Der Spiegel*, 'Rote Zellen: Hoher Einsatz', 41 (5 October 1970), p. 101.

¹⁵⁷ See *Die Zeit*, 'Im Kampf um Rote Zellen: Der Berliner Senat im Unrecht', 13 (26 March 1971), p. 14.

them to approach first-year students. The lawsuit, however, proved a stimulus for further action against Red Cells and other radical student organisations. The policy of instituting proceedings against Red Cells activists in particular, and 'ultra-left forces' in general, culminated in the prohibition of executive student committees in Bavaria in 1974 and the cumulative occurrence of temporary occupations of universities by police forces in order to prevent 'communist gatherings'.¹⁵⁸

After the academic year of 1973/4, organisations still operating under the name of Red Cells usually supported the theories of the *Rote Zellen/Arbeitskonferenz* (RZ/AK, Red Cells/Working Conference), and its affiliated *Marxistische Gruppen* (Marxist groups), which formed the actual *Marxistische Gruppe* in 1979.¹⁵⁹ One of the few exceptions was the publication of a series of pamphlets at the University of Kiel, distributed in 1977 by a local group affiliated to the *Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland* (KBW, Communist League of West Germany).¹⁶⁰

2.2.2. The Red Cells/Working Conference faction in Munich

Within the course of the Red Cells' short history, which Koenen rather imprecisely describes as "manifestly turning towards Marxism-Leninism in its antagonistic variations,"¹⁶¹ the RZ/AK faction in Munich began to establish itself as an influential organisation in the summer of 1971.¹⁶² This questions the idea that the Red Cells movement was entirely Marxist-Leninist; in fact, it was considerably more ideologically complex. Besides the undogmatic currents that gathered around the RZ/AK in Munich, a major Trotskyist Red Cell existed in Bonn.¹⁶³ Moreover, many left-wing intellectuals rejected such ideological dogmatisation and left the Red Cells, Hans H. Hiebel among them, or turned their attentions to other political projects.¹⁶⁴ Jörg Huffschmid, an influential intellectual of the *Rotzök* in Berlin and later professor of economics, for example, supported the DKP in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ See MSZ, 6 (18 July 1974), p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ See, amongst other publications, *Rote Zellen München, Fachbereichszeitung/Rote Zelle Politologie* (Munich: Verein z. Förderung d. studentischen Pressewesens, 1977); *Rote Zellen/ Marxistische Gruppen, Die linken Kritiker* (Munich: Resultate, 1977).

¹⁶⁰ See *Rote Zellen Kiel* (Kommunistische Studentenzeitung), *Die bürgerliche Theorie des 'essentiellen' Hochdrucks* (Kiel: self-published, 1977).

¹⁶¹ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 200.

¹⁶² See *Rotes Blatt München*, 33 (6 July 1971), pp. 1-4.

¹⁶³ See *Rotes Blatt München*, 5 (29 March 1970).

¹⁶⁴ Hans H. Hiebel, email to the author, 23 October 2011.

¹⁶⁵ See Georg Fülberth, 'Jörg Huffschmid: Nachruf', in *Forum Wissenschaft*, 1 (2010) <<http://www.bdwi.de/forum/archiv/archiv/3774943.html>> [15 June 2012].

The break-up of the Red Cells two years after their founding was the result of theoretical disputes between factions that were either tied ideologically to Marxist-Leninist Maoism, and hence had pressed for close co-operation with proletarians and their 'class struggle', or those that supported the idea of a long-term working conference to advance the development of a coherent Marxist theory as a prerequisite for political praxis. For the Maoist factions, the occasional support of student groups working in different industries to promote revolutionary ideas between 1969 and 1971 was insufficient and required a more systematic strategy. For their political opponents, 'blind' politicking was a senseless act when considering, despite the occurrence of wildcat strikes in 1969, the overall passivity of the West German working class.

The collapse of the local Red Cells in Munich's student committee pointed to the basic ideological differences between Marxist-Leninist *K-Gruppen* and the RZ/AK faction. Indeed, after the RZ/AK terminated collaboration with other factions of the local Red Cells plenum, of which most activists became involved with the *Kommunistischer Studentenverband* (KSV, Communist Student League, the student organisation of the KPD/AO), the RZ/AK continued its working conference; a move criticised by the remaining Red Cells factions as the 'depoliticisation' and 'sell-off' of Marxism.¹⁶⁶ The RZ/AK's fundamental questioning of alleged Marxist-Leninist 'wisdoms' resulted in fierce debates and polemics about the function of Marxist theory.¹⁶⁷

In September 1970, the establishment of a working conference had been proposed for the first time by a faction of the *Rotzeg*, the so-called *Ungerstraßen-Fraktion*, in which Karl Held, later the chief agitator of the MG, had a leading role.¹⁶⁸ The major goal was to foster the process of theory formation within the decentralised Red Cells movement by analysing the current appearance of capitalism in West Germany. Since the organisational structure of independently working cells made a systematic and coherent theory formation impossible, the *Rotzeg*'s political commission saw no alternative to holding such a conference. They argued that theoretical issues around the centralisation process could not be solved by the limited capacities of the *Rotzeg*, but demanded intellectual efforts of the pre-qualified 'masses' of the entire Red Cells movement, in Munich and beyond. The *Rotes Blatt* journal, established as a

¹⁶⁶ See *Rotes Blatt München*, 25/26/27, 16 March 1971, pp. 1-9.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. See also Kommunistischer Hochschulbund (Marxisten-Leninisten), *Seminar-, Marxismus' und Kapitulantentum am Beispiel der Münchener AK-Gruppierung* (Munich: self-published, 1973).

¹⁶⁸ See *APO-Archiv*, 'LFB/RZ Wahlbroschüre' (1972), shelfmark 143/144, p. 1; *ibid.*, 'Der Kommunismus läßt sich nicht verbieten' (1970), shelfmark 820, p. 2.

forum for discussion, proved an inadequate means with which to promote the ideological centralisation of even the local, let alone the nationwide, Red Cells movement.

The working conference was a first attempt to overcome the political alienation of various currents within the Red Cells, and develop a new concept regarding their organisational structure. By autumn 1970, the further unification of the Red Cells had become an urgent problem. Stances on higher education policy, the anti-imperialist struggle and the level of support for political work in the professional sphere differed widely among numerous different factions.¹⁶⁹

To accomplish the goal of re-organising and unifying Red Cells in Munich, the working conference was at first borne by all factions. In its first year of existence, between mid-1969 and 1970, the Red Cells merely existed in the form of a postulation unable to clarify its relationship with non-university groups, such as the *Arbeiter-Basis-Gruppen* (ABG, Workers Action Groups), which agitated in factories and large companies for the proletarian revolution. Moreover, Red Cells did not develop a consistent political practice, transcending the disjointed campaigns they supported at universities in Munich and in collaboration with ABGs in various industries.

The working conference initially served three major goals: first, to produce an analysis of the current relationship between capital and labour; second, to critically reflect on hitherto attempts to define the capital movement and third, to self-critically study the Red Cells' involvement with the higher education, reproduction and production sectors. A key objective also lay in scrutinising the role of the bourgeois state, initially scheduled for completion 'within several months' of September 1970.¹⁷⁰

In order to leave the working context of the Red Cells movement intact and avoid any further fragmentation, the conference was included in the general political process at that time, which largely consisted of teach-ins, awareness campaigns and demonstrations. Although the working conference was at first supported by all factions, some commentators voiced criticism in the organisation's organ at an early stage. A major argument against the project was the plausible assumption that the results of the conference would not guarantee the implementation of adequate political and organisational decisions.¹⁷¹

Moreover, the primacy of the working conference over the regular Red Cells' committee work was intensely discussed, some fearing that the emergence of an overly theoretical approach would contradict the goal of promoting political work in bohemian

¹⁶⁹ Rotes Blatt München, 14/15 (28 September 1970), pp. 1-11.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 6.

quarters, proletarian neighbourhoods and large companies.¹⁷² The propagation of the 'proletarian stance' and the possibility of revolutionary professional work, an approach that finally broke with the cultural-revolutionary paradigm of the student movement, was challenged by supporters of the working conference. The latter proved particularly contentious, because the goal of preparing students for the revolutionary exercise of their profession had been an important motivation behind the forming of Red Cells after 1968.

For many student activists, the lack of any post-graduation strategy represented a decisive limitation of the anti-authoritarian movement. Transcending the boundaries of the university therefore constituted the primary objective of the Red Cells in 1969/70. In this context the local *Rotzcg* even discussed establishing a *schülerladen* ('student shop') to support and agitate pupils from 7th to 9th grade.¹⁷³ For critics of the working conference, there appeared the real prospect of the Red Cells relapsing into the 'scholasticism' of the student movement.¹⁷⁴

Several committees were established during the first phase of the working conference, dealing with issues such as the capitalist state, trade unions and the capital-labour relationship. With the realisation of the working conference, training courses were also restructured, streamlined and unified.¹⁷⁵ First results of the working conference's theory formation were published in October and December 1970 in two articles on the 'crisis of capital' and 'function of the state'.¹⁷⁶ With regard to the purpose of the modern state, the idea of 'conflicting particular interests', which became central to the MG's theory of state, was the object of theoretical reflections for the first time. In reference to the work of the Arkadij Gurland, an influential social-democratic theorist in the interwar period, who had published a thought-provoking book on the idea of democracy as a thorn in the side of Marxism which was rediscovered in the years of student protest, the concept of conflicting particular interests, an idea already mentioned by Hegel and Marx, was taken up and further developed.¹⁷⁷ The MG's takeover of this concept will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The start of the working conference coincided with the severance between the Munich-based Red Cells and the ABG after negotiations on the establishment of a common

¹⁷² Rotes Blatt München, 9 (1 June 1970), p. 10.

¹⁷³ Karl-Walter Beise, Monika Hübner and Lutz von Werder, 'Die Revolte gegen die technokratische Schulreform', in *Erziehung und Klassenkampf - Zeitschrift für marxistische Pädagogik*, 2 (1971), p. 27.

¹⁷⁴ Rotes Blatt München, 5 (29 March 1970), p. 29.

¹⁷⁵ Rotes Blatt München, 18/19 (28 October 1970), p. 30.

¹⁷⁶ Rotes Blatt München, 16/17 (13 October 1970), pp. 1-13; Rotes Blatt München, 21 (2 December 1970), pp. 3-12.

¹⁷⁷ Rotes Blatt München, 21 (2 December 1970), p. 10. See Arkadij Gurland, *Marxismus und Diktatur* (1930; Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1981).

platform had failed.¹⁷⁸ In particular, the theoretical basis of the ABG's political activism — its 'moralising' and 'proletarian' approach — was increasingly challenged by Red Cells activists supporting the working conference.¹⁷⁹ The goal to train pupils and students to become 'allies' of and to submit themselves to the interests of the proletariat conflicted with the Red Cells' need for theoretical clarification of hitherto unresolved issues, which they began to address in their respective committees.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, the ABG's political work in companies and neighbourhoods was criticised as the result of inadequate reasoning, which expressed itself in proletariat-glorifying campaign slogans and continued calls for perseverance.

On the basis of their critical reassessment, those sections supporting the working conference argued early on that "their [the proletarians'] interests are of a capitalist nature, nothing else."¹⁸¹ The AGB's optimistic projection that the 1970s would constitute the epoch of the ultimate demise of capitalism and bear witness to the 'worldwide triumph of socialism' was fought by factions calling for an in-depth research project as a necessary transitional phase of a future Communist Party.¹⁸²

Although the working conference was understood as an integral factor in the formation of a revolutionary party-to-be, its length, resulting from the comprehensive approach of the project, intensified political tensions between Marxist-Leninist activists and those forces that ultimately founded the RZ/AK in July 1971. The idea to functionalise academia for the intended party set-up required the national co-ordination of theoretical work: a postulation made in late 1970, when most Red Cells already expected results of the working conference, which ultimately lasted another eight years, before the MG was formally established in 1979 and published its major work on the theory of the democratic state.¹⁸³

Moreover, for proponents of an ongoing working conference the higher education system was an opportune means enabling the 'massification' of radical critique of the bourgeois society. At first understood to be a transitional phase, the phase of 'massification' was neither overcome by the RZ/AK nor the MG over the course of two decades.¹⁸⁴ The higher education system nonetheless proved a suitable vehicle for recruiting new

¹⁷⁸ Rotes Blatt München, 16/17 (13 October 1970), p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ Rote Zellen München, *Von den Gegenständen, Zwecken und Schwierigkeiten kommunistischer Politik* (Munich: Verein z. Förderung d. studentischen Pressewesens, 1972).

¹⁸⁰ For a concise analysis of the ABG's historical development and ideas see Gerd Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, pp. 108-113.

¹⁸¹ RZ/AK activists cit. in *Kommunistische Studentenzeitung*, 'AK: Selbstmörderisches Kapitulantentum', 19 (December 1973), p. 9.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ In 1974, roughly four years after the working conference started, the first official 'results' was published. See Rote Zellen/AK München, *Programmatische Erklärung*, (1974) <<http://www.dearchiv.de/php/dok.php?archiv=amg&brett=CHR157&fn=AK.RES&menu=amginh>> [20 August 2009].

¹⁸⁴ See also Karl Held's comment in Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

sympathisers. By confronting regular academics with their Marxist criticism, proponents of the working conference aimed to recruit supporters from all levels of qualification and politicisation. 'Mass-political work' at universities was therefore identical to the RZ/AK's critical academic work and its propagation. 'From the critique of bourgeois science to the struggle against the capitalist society' became a popular slogan of the RZ/AK faction.¹⁸⁵ Activities focussed on raising students' awareness of their career prospects and the function of their intended occupation in capitalism.¹⁸⁶ This was accompanied by a general critique of educational economics in modern capitalist societies. Moreover, a rigorous critique of all 'bourgeois science', its methods and contents at all levels, was developed and propagated in conjunction with a general critique of political economy, concretised through topical issues.¹⁸⁷

The provisional political commission of the *RotzPhil* reduced the disputes of the post-1968 era to the essential by stating in 1971 that without an adequate analysis of the current relationship of capital and labour, the organisational question could not be addressed.¹⁸⁸ *RotzPhil* activists took up an idea that Lukács had already pondered:

The pre-eminently practical nature of the Communist Party, the fact that it is a fighting party presupposes its possession of a *correct theory*, for otherwise the consequences of a false theory would soon destroy it.¹⁸⁹

The RZ/AK cultivated a like-minded approach by concentrating its activities during the 1970s on revolutionary theory formation and teaching. For this group, socialist intelligence, the bearer of scientific socialism could exclusively relate itself to the movement of the working class in a mediated, negative and corrective way.¹⁹⁰ For this reason, any struggle-criticism-transformation campaigns inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution and practised by Marxist-Leninist factions were rejected.¹⁹¹

Considering its process of theory formation, the RZ/AK's fundamental critique of other Communist factions can be summarised by its refusal to take up a 'proletarian stance' or

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, *APO-Archiv*, 'LFB/RZ Wahlbrochure' (1972), shelfmark 143/144, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ See Marxistische Gruppe, *Jobs der Elite: Eine marxistische Berufsberatung* (Munich: Resultate, 1987). The *Verfassungsschutz* misinterpreted this critical work as serious attempt to offer career counselling for Marxist students. See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe (MG). Ideologie, Ziele und Arbeitsmethoden eines kommunistischen Geheimbundes* (Cologne: Bundespressedienst, 1991), p. 67.

¹⁸⁷ Rotes Blatt München, 20 (11 November 1970), pp. 7-13.

¹⁸⁸ Rotes Blatt München, 25/26/27 (26 March 1971), pp. 16-17.

¹⁸⁹ Georg Lukács, 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation' (1922) <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/ch08.htm>> [31 March 2012].

¹⁹⁰ Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion, *cirkular 3* (Erlangen: Politladen, 1973), p. 37.

¹⁹¹ See, for example, *Hochschulkampf*, 4/5 (29 March 1971), p. 7.

commit itself to 'class analysis'. Consequently, the RZ/AK 'blistering criticism of ideology' became its major attribute.¹⁹²

On Marx, the group argued:

When a man seeks to accommodate science to a viewpoint which is derived not from science itself (however erroneous it may be) but from outside, from alien, external interests, then I call him 'base'.¹⁹³

Accordingly, the RZ/AK declared that "communist politics is scientific politics or it is no communist politics,"¹⁹⁴ and criticised any support of the working class if and when this was the consequence of a moral decision or based on practical and theoretical traditions of the working class movement.¹⁹⁵ Old ideas of the Red Cells movement such as the need to establish academic theories that 'serve the people' were abandoned.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, in contrast to other communist organisations, the RZ/AK and MG did not "practise the virtue of solidarity [...]. The MG agitated with Marx against organisations of the same background. That hurt."¹⁹⁷ The sole focus on being the corrective of the working class movement and socialist intelligence did not leave room for solidarity distinct from developing and propagating a coherent revolutionary theory. Support for other New Left groupings only occurred in 1969 and 1970 before the establishment of the RZ/AK when, for example, Karl Held called for a demonstration to express solidarity with the SDS in Heidelberg that was banned in June 1970.¹⁹⁸

In July 1971, the Red Cells movement broke up amid increasingly heated debates about the function of the working conference, the first theoretical analyses produced by committees of that conference and its alleged gain of independence within the general organisational environment. Although the RZ/AK group was the minority faction within the Red Cells movement, it held the majority of seats on the student executive committee. As the RZ/AK utilised the resources of the student committee for the propagation of their ruthless criticism, the university's vice-chancellor, Prof. Nikolaus Lobkowicz, fought vehemently against the

¹⁹² Georg Fülberth, 'Ein Fall von Panik', in *Konkret*, 7 (July 1991), p. 24.

¹⁹³ Marx, 'Economic Manuscripts', in *MECW Vol. 31*, p. 349.

¹⁹⁴ MSZ, 6 (18 July 1974), p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ See Studentenschaft Bayerns, *Informationen zur Hochschulpolitik* (Munich: self-published, 1973), p. 11. See also Rote Zellen München, *Von den Gegenständen, Zwecken und Schwierigkeiten kommunistischer Politik* (Munich: Verein z. Förderung d. studentischen Pressewesens, 1972).

¹⁹⁶ See Rote Zellen München, 'Rote Zellen' (1970), in *APO-Archiv*, shelfmark 820, p. 5. The editors were Theo Ebel and Herbert L. Fertl, who eventually became leading activists of the RZ/AK and MG.

¹⁹⁷ Initiative Arbeiterzeitung und-zentren, *Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe (MG): Die Arbeiter und ihre Perspektive* (Frankfurt a. M.: self-published, 1985), p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ See Rote Zellen München and Arbeiter-Basis-Gruppen, 'Der Kommunismus läßt sich nicht verbieten', in *APO-Archiv*, shelfmark 820, p. 2. Karl Held was the responsible editor of this leaflet.

publication of articles dealing with general political issues. As a result of several convictions, student representatives were prohibited from articulating their criticism in the name of the student body.

Moreover, the Bavarian education ministry intensified its efforts to 'drain the leftist swamp' at universities.¹⁹⁹ These efforts were ultimately settled by the Bavarian government, which prohibited obligatory student unions by the end of the 1973/74 academic year.²⁰⁰ This decision had consequences for the financial position of the RZ/AK, which profited from public university funds and organised considerable parts of its political work through obligatory student fees. As a solid financial base, these funds cannot be under-estimated. In Munich, for example, funds at the local university amounted to the sum of DM 321,920 in 1970 (about £414,000 today).²⁰¹

Even though only parts of the total budget could be alienated for political purposes, the factual monopolisation of the student press alone was invaluable for the propagation of the RZ/AK's critical theory. This strategy, to utilise the resources of the university for the group's political purposes, began in 1970.²⁰² With the first Red Cells-led student committee in Munich, student representatives, such as Herbert L. Fertl, Theo Ebel and Anselm Kreuzhage, who later became leading theorists of the MG, began rigorously to exploit the official student periodical, the *Münchner Studenten Zeitung* (MSZ, Munich Student Paper), for their political intentions. Although the MSZ was financed through general student fees, the responsible editors not only declared that the paper "functions as a periodical for the propaganda of socialist politics among students" and that "the MSZ is tendentious and biased,"²⁰³ but also developed the MSZ into a regionally distributed organ of Marxist propaganda, with a circulation of 37,000.²⁰⁴ Moreover, between the establishment of the RZ/AK in 1971 and banning of the student executive committee in 1974, the group's leadership collective developed the MSZ from a local student journal into a "nationally distributed and considered socialist pamphlet."²⁰⁵ In return, the *Rote Blatt*, the original discussion forum of the Red Cells movement in Munich, was only published by the remaining Marxist-Leninist factions for another year, until these factions merged into different *K-Gruppen*.

¹⁹⁹ The website of the Munich student convention outlines the historical development of student committees at the LMU. See *Geschichte 1974-2007* <http://stuve.uni-muenchen.de/ueber_die_stuve/geschichte/1974-2007> [05 September 2009].

²⁰⁰ See MSZ, 5 (4 July 1974), p. 6.

²⁰¹ See MSZ, 1 (14 January 1970), p.1.

²⁰² See MSZ, 6 (18 July 1974), p. 1.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ See MSZ, 1 (14 January 1970).

²⁰⁵ See comments of the ruling conservative party in Bavaria, cit. in MSZ, 6 (18 July 1974), p. 1.

The MSZ became the periodical of the RZ/AK and later the political magazine of the MG. Although the official name of the newspaper was changed to *Marxistische Studentenzeitung* (Marxist Student Newspaper) in October 1974 and to *Marxistische Streit- und Zeitschrift – Gegen die Kosten der Freiheit* (Marxist Pamphlet and Magazine – Opposing the Costs of Freedom) in early 1984, the abbreviation remained the same until the MG's dissolution in 1991.²⁰⁶

After all, it was no coincidence that intensified efforts to develop the RZ/AK into a regional organisation, with significant affiliations in Erlangen-Nuremberg, Regensburg, Würzburg and Marburg, and later to a national Communist organisation, concurred with the intended prohibition of financially and organisationally independent student committees in the RZ/AK stronghold of Bavaria.²⁰⁷

2.2.3. The cradle of the *Marxistische Gruppe*: developments at the university in Erlangen-Nuremberg

Behind only the RZ/AK faction in Munich, the *Marxistische Gruppe* in Erlangen-Nuremberg (MG/EN) represented the second influential foothold of the later MG. Karl Held, founding member of the SDS in Erlangen, moved to Munich in 1969 and developed close collaboration between both factions. The name of the national organisation that became better known during the 1980s as *Marxistische Gruppe* (MG), had its origin in this local group and was established in Franconia on 17 June 1971 out of the Red Cells movement; the group consisted of 60 students and 10 workers.²⁰⁸ This coincided with the disintegration of the Red Cells in Munich and was indicative of both factions sharing numerous ideas regarding Marxist theory formation.²⁰⁹ These ideas influenced the naming of the MG/EN, explained in the group's first leaflet as follows:

The name MARXIST GROUP is supposed to express that the ambition to be communists as understood by Karl Marx in the 'Communist Manifesto', namely as those who have 'the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement', is yet to be

²⁰⁶ In fact, in 1983, two issues were published under the name *Marxistische Zeitung* (Marxist Paper, MZ), before the political magazine was renamed for a second time within months. See MZ November 1983; December 1983.

²⁰⁷ For the expansion of the Bavarian faction, see *MAO-Projekt*, 'Regensburg - Hochschulen', (2006) <http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/BAY/OPF/Regensburg_Hochschulen.shtml> [28 November 2009].

²⁰⁸ See *Arbeiterstimme* (Nuremberg), 5 (3 December 1973).

²⁰⁹ *Marxistische Gruppe*, 'Die Marxistische Gruppe (MG) Erlangen/Nürnberg konstituiert sich am 17.6.1971', in *MAO-Projekt*, 'Marxistische Gruppe (MG) Erlangen-Nürnberg', (2011) <http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/BAY/MFR/Erlangen_Marxistische_Gruppe.shtml> [3 March 2011].

fulfilled. We can only say about ourselves that we will go about our political tasks based on Marx's theory as the comprehensive critique of capitalism.²¹⁰

Aware of their theoretical deficit, the MG/EN did not attempt to compensate for these by applying the 'always valid' truths of Marxist pioneers to the West German situation but instead decided to pursue its own path of theory formation. This decision also implied the main reason behind the MG/EN not establishing itself as another self-proclaimed 'vanguard organisation', guiding the struggle of the proletariat. The self-styling of an organisation's own praxis to that of the 'proletarian avant-garde' requires reference to the political and theoretical tradition of the socialist movement, in order to vouch for the 'trueness' of its political line.²¹¹ Instead, on the basis of Marx's three volumes of *Capital*, and continuing from his 'Trinitarian formula' regarding the three forms of revenue at the end of Volume Three, the group developed its distinctive theory, and for the most part restrained itself from practical political work in the form of *K-Gruppen* and spontaneists, e.g. agitation at the workplace, withdrawing from regular working life or violent demonstrations, and rarely referred to intellectual authorities in its work.²¹²

The collapse of the student movement and experience of wildcat strikes in September 1969 — which were unconnected with student agitation, but initially resulted in an optimistic outlook regarding the chances for a renewal of the working class movement among current and future Red Cell activists — contributed significantly to the MG/EN's goal of thoroughly and self-critically revising its own practical efforts.²¹³ By reflecting on the discrepancy between its Marxist analysis of West German society, and the fact that workers had not developed any political consciousness of their, from a Marxist perspective, objective situation, the MG/EN identified itself in critical continuation of the student movement's revolutionary aspirations. As a practical consequence, the group in Erlangen-Nuremberg argued that only after the immense theoretical deficits of Marxism were overcome would political reorganisation from a theoretical circle to a revolutionary party be advisable.²¹⁴

Moreover, in terms of the ambitious programme of further developing Marxism into a holistic theory of bourgeois society, the MG/EN proposed a nationwide co-operation of

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Karl Schlögel, 'Was ich einem Linken über die Auflösung der KPD sagen würde', in Schlögel, Jasper and Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt*, 1981, pp. 20-21.

²¹² See Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion, *cirkular* 3, pp. 1-2.

²¹³ See Marxistische Gruppe/Erlangen-Nuremberg, 'Materialien zur Hochschulpolitik, Januar 1972', in *MAO-Projekt*, 'Marxistische Gruppe (MG) Erlangen-Nürnberg', (2011) <http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/BAY/MFR/Erlangen_Marxistische_Gruppe.shtml> [3 March 2011].

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Marxists.²¹⁵ As a result, the group for example took part in meetings of the undogmatic Socialist Bureau (SB, *Sozialistisches Büro*) in 1972.²¹⁶

Similar to the developments among Red Cells in Munich and elsewhere, the MG/EN was divided on whether to prioritise the practical political or theoretical work of its members. Initially, the MG/EN intended to focus its political activities on three major purposes: realisation of a long-term working conference on central theoretical issues of revolutionary politics in West Germany, political enquiry activities in companies and the set-up of action groups in different industries and political activities in the higher education sector in order to gain support of intellectuals for the theoretical and practical work on working class issues.²¹⁷

In 1972, a year after they had constituted the MG/EN, the members divided into two factions. One faction, representing the majority of activists, took the view that the practical work in and set-up of action groups in large companies would be essential for the further development of the organisation and its theory, because this would prevent any scholastic tendencies 'detaching' the MG/EN from the proletariat. The minority group, meanwhile, gathered around Theo Wentzke, who became the editor of the student journal, *Cirkular*, in Erlangen-Nuremberg, and even today remains an active member of the *GegenStandpunkt* periodical's team of authors.

Because it was in favour of a long-term working conference, the minority faction was disparagingly referred to as *Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion* (MG/tf, Marxist Group/theory faction) by its opponents in order to highlight its focus on theory formation. The theory faction published a booklet in which they portrayed the process and arguments of the inner-organisational debate, leading to the disintegration of the original MG/EN. Furthermore, the MG/tf documented in *Cirkular 1* its understanding of an adequate relationship between theory and practice.²¹⁸ Just like the RZ/AK in Munich, the MG/tf argued that in the absence of insight on the modern appearance of capitalism and the state, any political strategy aimed at overthrowing the bourgeois system must fail. In contrast to the MG/tf, the majority faction dissolved only half a year after the MG/EN's break-up due to irreconcilable differences regarding their political praxis, issues of socialist moral philosophy and revolutionary professional practice.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Marxistische Gruppe, 'Die Marxistische Gruppe (MG) Erlangen/Nürnberg konstituiert sich am 17.6.1971', in *MAO-Projekt*, 'Marxistische Gruppe (MG) Erlangen-Nürnberg', (2011) <http://www.maoprojekt.de/BRD/BAY/MFR/Erlangen_Marxistische_Gruppe.shtml> [3 March 2011].

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion, *Cirkular 1* (Erlangen: self-published, 1972), pp. 1-5 and pp. 19-23.

²¹⁹ See *Arbeiterstimme* (Nuremberg), 5 (3 December 1973).

The MG/tf published two further issues of *Cirkular* before the group further enhanced its ties with the RZ/AK in Munich, and thus realised its intention of closely co-operating with Marxists beyond the boundaries of Erlangen-Nuremberg for the purpose of theory formation. Through *Cirkular* 3, published in two editions with a total circulation of 7,500 and distributed nationwide, the work of the MG/tf became widely known and discussed in radical left circles across West Germany. In Bremen, for example, the *Kommunistischer Studentenbund* (KSB, Communist Student League) commented on the MG/tf's work in which the group extensively outlined its ideas on the relationship between socialist intelligence and the proletarian movement, criticising the MG/tf for its critical analysis of existing approaches of the political left. The MG/tf was defamed as a circle of 'super-Marxists' and 'quitters', who stood out through their refusal to participate in the revolutionary struggle.²²⁰

The polemic of the KSB not only took over the critique of the majority faction in Erlangen, but also set the tone for most disputes between the MG/tf, RZ/AK and other factions of the radical left during the 1970s. From the beginning, allegations against both groups of refusing to provide practical support for the 'historically inevitable' class struggle, and accepting the 'leadership of the proletariat', were common. Even though the MG/tf and RZ/AK stressed that scientific socialism was first and foremost a general theory of bourgeois society, but one aware of why it necessarily transcended the realm of theory formation and intended to change society, political opponents maintained their criticism. Accordingly, the MG/tf's argument that scientific socialism and the practical critique of bourgeois society in the form of the working class movement would not be identical, and that socialist intelligence could only act as the 'corrective' of such a movement, was opposed as an 'elitist' deviation from Marxism.²²¹

This contentious issue, the relationship between theory and practice and the role of the socialist intelligentsia in its mediation, distinguished the MG/tf and RZ/AK from other New Left factions. By criticising the MG's predecessors for their 'looking down' on the working class, these factions expressed their high opinion of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject. On the basis of this unquestioned support for the working class, Maoist opponents repudiated the critique of it in the strongest terms.²²²

By conceptualising the working class as revolutionary, thus assuming its 'real' interests to differ from its expressed ones, Marxists of the New Left predominantly interpreted

²²⁰ See Kommunistischer Studentenbund (Bremen), 'Die Hunde kläffen - Die Karawane zieht weiter', in *Unter dem Roten Banner*, special issue 2 (January 1973), pp. 10-16.

²²¹ For a detailed account of the MG/tf's arguments, see Marxistische Gruppe/theoriefraktion, *cirkular* 3, pp. 32-39.

²²² See *Hochschulkampf*, 17/18 (11 October 1971), p. 16.

the proletariat as opponents of the politico-economic system and not as an integrally affirmative part of it. In particular, the *K-Gruppen* and German Communist Party believed that they embodied the decisive vanguard organisation, enabling the working class to organise itself as a class for itself. In other words, they were the ideal representatives of the proletariat's 'true' interests.²²³

The MG's stance on the relationship of theory and practise exemplifies why the organisation has been frequently understood to be a 'special occurrence' among the West German New Left. Chapter Four will return to this issue in more detail, when discussing the MG's theory of abstract free will: a theory challenging the idea of the working class as the quasi-natural ally of the socialist intellectual.

The intensified expansion and formation process between the break-up of the Red Cells movements in Erlangen-Nuremberg and Munich in 1971, and the establishment of the MG in 1979, did not occur without inter-organisational controversies and tensions. Above all, the perceived rejection of any practical approach to politics beyond the propagation of their theoretical work and their critique of 'bourgeois science' caused further controversies among MG/EN and RZ/AK activists. With regard to the RZ/AK, in 1974, Wolfram Pfreundschuh described this dispute as the collision of two approaches to the question of the identity of Marxist intellectuals. To be more precise, the role of socialist intelligence and relationship between subjective and objective consciousness was intensely discussed, and resulted in the break-up of the RZ/AK. Pfreundschuh summarises these discussions in the following question: is the opposition to bourgeois society the product of an intellectual suffering, or do Marxists exclusively follow an interest in explanatory work that has to be politically mediated?²²⁴

Favouring the second approach, the core members of the later MG continued the work of the RZ/AK and its affiliated groups in Munich and elsewhere. The *K-Gruppen*'s approach of forcing the existing class struggle to overcome all class struggles, which always implied the idea that the miseries of capitalist life would contain their quasi-automatic condition for being overthrown, was therefore rejected by those groups following the RZ/AK's political line. Instead, focus was on the creation of a materialist will with which to antagonise class misery beyond intellectual or moral 'suffering'. The implicit point at issue here is also of epistemological nature. Is scientific socialism feasible without at least one normative

²²³ See Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, *Programm und Statut* (Mannheim: Ehlert, 1973).

²²⁴ Wolfram Pfreundschuh, 'Politische Entwicklung' <<http://kulturkritik.net/autoren/index.html>> [24 February 2012].

assumption, or is the materialist overcoming of bourgeois society implied in the inherent critique of that society's own categories and standards?²²⁵ The RZ/AK followed Marx's approach in *Capital*, in which he attempted to develop a critique of political economy and the possibility of historical change from the contradictions inherent in capitalism.

Michael Stamm, a leader of the Red Cells in Marburg (affiliated with the RZ/AK in Munich), criticised its unwillingness to act politically, its tightly centralised organisation and ideological rigidity.²²⁶ When he retired from his position in 1975, he built upon earlier discussions regarding the primacy of theory formation and the function of political praxis and he therefore opposed the RZ/AK's 'theory fetish', stressing the dialectical interconnectedness of theory and practise in Marxism. In his final teach-in, Stamm criticised the development of the Red Cells from an open forum of Marxist theory formation into a cadre organisation, and its wilful failure to directly support the working class. The sheer scale of this event underlined both the significance of the Red Cells movement in particular, and the exceptional quantity of politicised students throughout the 1970s in general. An audience of 1,500 people followed and discussed his arguments.

The RZ/AK rejected intellectual individualism because of its goal to further develop 'scientific' Marxism. It was therefore argued that the concept of intellectual individualism, in the sense of taking pleasure in one's own intellectualism beyond the ambition to develop the 'notion' of a subject matter, would be counterproductive for the formation of an adequate revolutionary theory. According to the group's understanding, Marxism and intellectual individualism would not complement one another. Thus, for the RZ/AK, intellectual individualism did not carry value in its own right but always had to relativise itself in relation to the object of study. Freedom of opinion was consequently criticised on the grounds that unscientific idealism ought to be overcome by the development of an object's 'rational notion' as outlined in Hegel's *Science of Logic*.²²⁷

Ever since the break-up of the Red Cells in Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg, remarks regarding the group's habitus repeatedly went along the same lines as disputes on the

²²⁵ See Thomas Engelhardt, Günter Lukas and Karl-Heinz Stammberger et al., *Zur Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe (theoretisches Organ)* (Erlangen: Politladen, 1973).

²²⁶ See Michael Stamm, 'AK-Kritik', in *diskus – frankfurter studentenzeitung*, 3 (1975). Michael Stamm later joined the *Kommunistischer Bund*, and was affiliated with the PDS in the early 1990s. See *Der Spiegel*, 'Kader mit Promis', 40 (1 October 1990), pp. 59-60.

²²⁷ See Peter Decker, *Der verordnete Pluralismus in den Geistes- und Gesellschaftswissenschaften. Anstandsregeln einer falschen Wissenschaft*, Berlin [147 min.] (2006) <<http://sozialreferat.com/vortraege.htm>> [12 August 2010]; Peter Decker, *Marxismus: Anpassungslehre oder Kritik?*, East Berlin [210 min.] (1990) <http://archive.org/details/MG_Decker_Marxismus_Anpassungslehre_oder_Kritik_1990> [17 June 2012].

substance of their respective theory.²²⁸ Allegations of having a 'rigid ideology', however, were rejected by RZ/AK and MG/EN activists and exposed as politically motivated defamations of rival left-wing factions and the bourgeois public. In this context, the group argued that rigidity is not a criterion for rational assessment of academic theories, because confronting a theory with accusations of being the product of 'dogmatic' or 'ideologically rigid' theory formation would not reveal any fundamental errors in reasoning, but instead amount to a form of criticism resulting from external interests.²²⁹

The conflict that caused the break-up of the MG/EN in 1972 remained the main contentious issue between those factions that merged into the MG in 1979 and other New Left organisations in the years following this split.

2.2.4. Summary

The revolutionary discussion circles of the Red Cells movement significantly contributed to the rapid demise of the SDS after the summer of 1968. Prior to its dogmatic shift in 1971/2, the movement influenced an entire generation of radical left intellectuals, academics and activists. Most activists were former members and supporters of the SDS, belonging to its non-traditionalist but social-revolutionary wing who were willing to carry their revolutionary consciousness into the professional sphere. In this respect, the Red Cells movement acted in critical continuation of the West German student movement.

Despite the departure of numerous members as the Red Cells began its ideological and organisational consolidation in 1971/2, resulting in the break-up of several local Red Cells and the merging of factions within existing party projects, the most important long-term effect on the New Left resulted from a minority position within the movements in Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg. The RZ/AK and MG/tf, dissatisfied with the theory formation of the student and Red Cells movements, established a perennial working conference to further develop Marxist theory. This conference led to the formation of the *Marxistische Gruppe* in 1979; and hence represented the origin of West Germany's largest New Left organisation. In this process, however, revolutionary professional practice, initially a central issue of the Red Cells movement, was abandoned. The MG strictly separated political praxis from professional life and therefore occupied a special position among the myriad of New Left factions.

²²⁸ See, among others, Initiative Arbeiterzeitung und -zentren, *Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe*, 1985; Bernd Gäbler, ed, *Das Prinzip Ohnmacht: Eine Streitschrift zur Politik der 'Marxistischen Gruppe'* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983).

²²⁹ See Karl Held, *Wissenschaftstheorie* (sessions 1-5), Munich [755 min.] (1982) <<http://archiv.argudiss.de>> [12 March 2009].

2.3. The *K-Gruppen*, the emerging MG and the practical crisis of Marxism

2.3.1. Introduction

With the exception of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten* (KPD/ML, Communist Party of Germany/Marxist-Leninist), the *K-Gruppen* were founded between 1970 and 1973 (see **figure 1**). The general process of realigning political positions and organisations in the wake of the student movement lasted mainly from 1969 to 1971. During the following consolidation phase of 1971 to 1976/7, the Maoist *K-Gruppen* dominated the New Left.²³⁰

Although many *K-Gruppen* activists had a background in the Red Cells movement and, therefore, had supported the 'critique of bourgeois science' at least at one point, theory formation was usually denounced as 'petty bourgeois' and a 'student delusion'.²³¹ In particular, the KPD/ML, led by Ernst Aust, a former cadre of the original KPD banned in 1956, was considered to be anti-intellectual and sceptical about the influx of students into the party. For Maoist factions, the relevant aspects of Marxist theory formation had already been resolved through the standard Communist work of its five thought leaders: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong.²³² This attitude prevailed among *K-Gruppen* despite the publication of theoretical organs, such as the KBW's *Kommunismus und Klassenkampf* (Communism and Class Struggle) and the KPD/ML's *Der Weg der Partei* (The Party's Way), in which theoretical guidelines for the legitimisation of political praxis were proclaimed.²³³

For this task (of gaining influence among the proletariat and setting up a new Communist organisation) we don't need people who abstractly blather about Marxism-Leninism, but we need cadres who are able to apply Marxism/Leninism to every situation of class struggle and pass it on as a weapon of class struggle.²³⁴

Because of these practical considerations, the dogmatism of *K-Gruppen* was often accompanied by a 'capricious handling' of its ideology.²³⁵ This 'capricious handling' was the practical consequence of utilising theory for political goals that existed prior to theory

²³⁰ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

²³¹ See MSZ, 8 (20 October 1971), p. 3.

²³² In 1977/8, the KPD/ML officially dropped Mao Zedong as a relevant revolutionary intellectual and replaced him with Envrher Hoxha.

²³³ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Mao Söhne*, pp. 21-27; Frank D. Karl, *Die K-Gruppen*, (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft), pp. 31-86.

²³⁴ KBW cit. in *ibid.*, p. 32.

²³⁵ See Jürgen Schröder, *Ideologischer Kampf vs. regionale Hegemonie. Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung der K-Gruppen*, (undated) <<http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/ALG/Schroeder.html>> [15/03/2010].

formation. The question whether or not a specific subject matter could be adequately and consistently explained was sacrificed to various ideological and strategic considerations that had nothing to do with the explanation of the matter in hand. This is what Marx referred to in the *Economic Manuscripts*, when he criticised that to accommodate theory formation to a viewpoint which is derived not from science itself, but from external interests is eventually a contradiction in itself.²³⁶ A profound theoretical understanding of a subject matter has a quality of its own and is therefore – in a first step – indifferent to specific political ideologies, interests and practices. A person conducting theoretical work seeks to understand the essence of the object he studies. The Maoist *K-Gruppen* as the self-proclaimed most conscious part and 'ally' (*Bündnispartner*) of the proletarian masses on the other hand supported the definition of Marxism-Leninism as defined in the SED's official handbook:

Marxism-Leninism does not serve the purpose of explaining the world but to function as a manual for changing it. (...) As the worldview of the working class Marxism-Leninism is directed towards the goal of socialism/communism and, thus, has to fulfil specific functions (...).²³⁷

Considering this, Maoists were constantly in need of altering their theoretical interpretations when being confronted with the nonconformity of their politico-ideological self-conception and reality. In fact, the ambition to change the existing world necessitates the understanding of its functioning principles to avoid the application of misguided political actions and formulation of criticism. The idealistic function of theory in the Maoists' approach to politics inevitably resulted in tensions between ideology and theory.

As a consequence of this, *K-Gruppen*'s reflections were strongly influenced by global and national affairs pursuing the pragmatism implied in the concept of 'enemy mine'. West German Maoists were not reluctant to break with distinctive features of Marxism if necessary to advance their political project. For example, when China proclaimed the Three World Theory, resulting in the isolation of the 'social-imperialistic' Soviet Union and the building of diplomatic and economic relationships with capitalist states, the KPD/AO not only supported this theory, but derived from it the political demand of establishing an 'independent, unified and socialist Germany'. This resulted in great appreciation for Franz Josef Strauß's visit to China. Strauß, who later became Minister-President of Bavaria, was an arch-conservative politician and outspoken anti-communist.

²³⁶ See Marx, 'Economic Manuscripts', in *MECW Vol. 31*, p. 349.

²³⁷ Cit. in Karl, *K-Gruppen*, p. 32.

The legitimacy and practical ambition to 'substantiate' the 'general valid truth of Marxism-Leninism and the history of the working class movement' at the *current stage of class struggle* resulted in the here exemplified 'flexibility' or inconsistency of theory formation and exegesis of revolutionary literature. Because of the Maoists' belief in the historical tendency of communism to succeed the bourgeois society, it was essential to constantly assess the 'balance of power' in West Germany and over the world. The balance of power was so important because the *K-Gruppen*, particularly in their early stage, interpreted it as the 'objective' verification of their assumption to be on the right side of history and a step closer to their final goal of overcoming capitalism. Accordingly, the balance was understood to permanently shift towards the 'inevitable' and ultimate political goal. The 'general conditions' for political success seemed to improve in lockstep with shifting balances of power, both nationally and globally, which also showed the degree of amalgamation of the revolutionary vanguard and proletarian masses that was understood to be a key element of the party's success.

The critique of political economy is often the only point of reference among Marxists. This theoretical basis, however, is deeply fragile when we consider the many heterogeneous interpretations, further developments and contemporary adjustments of Marx's analysis in both *Capital* and his political work.²³⁸ In West Germany, the issue of whether Marxism is a specific philosophical worldview (i.e. Marxism-Leninism) or a form of 'rational social science' proved the decisive demarcation line between Maoists on the one hand and the MG on the other. The *K-Gruppen* and MG were distinctive proponents of these two opposing currents during the 1970s. The following section reflects upon the *K-Gruppen*'s and MG's approach and their consequences for the organisations and individuals involved. How far did theoretical considerations play a role in the historical development of both currents, and to what extent can this explain the New Left's second, shift of paradigms in the late 1970s? This question will also be discussed with the example of the relationship of Maoist factions and the MG to the feminist movement.

2.3.2. The *K-Gruppen*'s Maoism: on the rise and decline of political activism for the 'proletarian masses'

When, in 1968, the idea of universities as a transmission belt for the transformation of capitalist society proved no more than an illusion, student activists looked for alternatives to overcome their lack of support in society as a whole. Without possessing significant

²³⁸ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, 1983.

connections with the working class, it needed the occurrence of wildcat strikes in 1969 to spark the revolutionary *hopes* of many students. The objective of agitating the working class, understood to be 'natural' fundament of any communist party, on the basis of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism marked the first shift of paradigms.²³⁹

During this process, Mao Zedong turned from a mere symbol of disapproval with the bourgeois way of life into a political and ideological alternative to the 'official' Soviet-dominated Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The answers that Maoism was able to provide in times of ideological realignment after the student movement had collapsed were attractive to many circles: especially those willing to make sacrifices for their revolutionary convictions.²⁴⁰ The social place university was now considered to be an 'alliance zone' of the proletariat and students as a part of the intelligence (i.e. academic proletariat) were expected to assist the set up of *the* revolutionary party outside higher education.²⁴¹ In this context, the student protests in 1967/68 and the strikes a year later were reinterpreted as the 'most recent struggles of the working class and the people', which already points to the Maoist idea of the good 'people' and the 'masses' as the decisive historical subject and its apotheosis by young revolutionaries.

Although *K-Gruppen*, especially by the mid-1970s, sympathised with different ideologies and regimes which offered a *successful* alternative to Moscow's doctrine — 'successful' solely referred to the mere existence as a socialist state in political opposition to the 'social-imperialistic' Soviet Union — Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became the object of politico-ideological admiration and the manifestation of 'unity of class analysis and organisation'.²⁴² Only later, when Mao's foreign policy, the Three Worlds Theory and ultimately the developments after his death, e.g. overthrow of the Gang of Four and economic reforms, resulted in severe disputes regarding China's role model function for Western Maoists, did *K-Gruppen* also develop strong affinity towards Enver Hoxha's regime in Albania, Cambodia's *Khmer Rouge*, Robert Mugabe's ZANU party and other parts of what West German communists perceived as the 'international revolutionary movement' also received substantial political and financial support.²⁴³

Maoist factions delimited themselves from 'revisionist' versions of Marxism-Leninism, which they identified in the existing socialist states of the Eastern Bloc and,

²³⁹ See Michael Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein*, 2002.

²⁴⁰ See Benicke, *Von Adorno zu Mao*, 2010.

²⁴¹ See Rotes Blatt Munich, 34/35 (13 September 1971), p. 2.

²⁴² See, among others, Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007; Christian Semler, 'Wiedergänger', in C. Landgrebe and J. Plath, eds, *68 und die Folgen. Ein unvollständiges Lexikon* (Berlin: Argon, 1998), pp. 133-137. See also MSZ, 8 (20 October 1971), p. 4.

²⁴³ While, for example, the KPD collected donations for the communist regime in Cambodia, the KPD/ML became the sole distributor of the German translation of Enver Hoxha's works by the mid-1970s and remained a faithful ally until 1984. See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

instead, build on the tradition of the Communist Party of Germany and *Comintern* of the 1920s. Their literalism focused in particular on Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, Stalin's *Question of Bolshevisation* and Mao's *Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement*.²⁴⁴ Above all, Maoists criticised the bureaucratic outgrowth of the Soviet-Russian model and its 'theory of peaceful co-existence' with the Western bloc, which *K-Gruppen* interpreted as a manifestation of the Soviet Union's non-revolutionary and therefore 'revisionist' strategy. Activists held Stalin's 'implacable attitude' towards social democracy in high esteem and followed Mao Zedong, who argued that it was essential to maintain a belligerent attitude towards capitalist states. This attitude, however, was qualified already in the early 1970s, when China established trade relationships with the U.S. and other capitalist countries and most notably after Deng Xiaoping's implementation of economic reforms in 1978 that practically established a new theory of peaceful co-existence, gradually implementing capitalist elements in the state socialist system.²⁴⁵

Following these reforms, the *K-Gruppen*'s relationship with China, except for the KPD/AO, cooled or at least resulted in internal disputes regarding China's role for the international revolutionary movement. The visits of KPD/AO and KBW delegations to China between 1977 and 1979 marked the peak of official recognition on the part of the People's Republic and the beginning of an ideological dissociation of *K-Gruppen* from the Chinese model. By 1977, the KPD/ML had already broken with China because of Mao's Three Worlds Theory. A year later, the new party programme was officially cleared of references to Maoism.²⁴⁶

As argued above, the attractiveness of Maoism for West German leftists did not originate from a detailed analysis of specific developments in China. Disregarding many aspects of the political situation in the world's most populous country, the New Left was first and foremost interested in the legitimisation of its own socialist ideals. Supposedly basis-democratic and international-revolutionary in their approach, Chinese communists were revered. Catchwords such as 'people's commune' and 'cultural revolution' were received eagerly, although Mao Zedong's theoretical work lacked coherence. Mao's approach was characterised by his

²⁴⁴ See Schlögel, Jasper and Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt*, p. 45.

²⁴⁵ Dillmann scrutinises the creeping implementation of capitalist elements into Sino-Communist state doctrine in the 1970s and early 1980s. See Renate Dillmann, *China: Ein Lehrstück über alten und neuen Imperialismus* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2009), pp. 139-152. For the problematic relationship between West German Maoists and the People's Republic of China after Mao's death, see also *Der Spiegel*, 'Risse im Überbau', 43 (23 October 1978), pp. 82-83.

²⁴⁶ See Jürgen Bacia, 'Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten, in: Richard Stöss, ed, *Parteien-Handbuch. Die Parteien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1980, Vol. III* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986), pp. 1831-1851.

attempt to amalgamate Marxist, Leninist and Stalinist elements and apply them to the particular situation in China. In particular, the structure and function of the Communist Party was taken from Stalin.²⁴⁷ Frank Karl, therefore, plausibly argues that any systematic description of the ideology and strategy of Maoism is difficult.²⁴⁸

The personality cult around Mao Zedong was the most obvious expression of this connection between Maoist and Stalinist elements. Since relevant principles of the Maoist ideology were developed in a process that culminated in China's revolution in 1949 and its subsequent economic development, Mao's theory was not a holistic system of philosophical reflections. As a result of this, the MSZ collective disdained Maoism as a 'collection of aphorisms' and a 'peasant philosophy'.²⁴⁹ Even though this appraisal represents a polemical exaggeration, the collective was correct in the sense that Mao's thoughts were frequently influenced by practical considerations; and therefore often appeared as a mere means for moral edification rather than thorough theorising. The former activist Max Elbaum concluded likewise that "Mao Zedong Thought was not a consistent doctrine."²⁵⁰ As argued above, it is important to understand the inconsistency of Maoism from its purpose to function as a manual for revolution and its practical reference to the 'masses' for legitimating functions. The contradiction to agitate the masses *and* refer to their experiences was condemned to make systematic theory formation impossible: 'from the masses, to the masses'.

Words from the Chairman, commonly regarded as the 'Mao bible', embodied this quality. For student activists affiliated with *K-Gruppen*, the exegesis of the movement's 'bible' represented a continuous challenge in itself. At some universities in the early 1970s, left-wing academics offered study courses dealing exclusively with the interpretation of Mao's work and its applicability to the situation in West Germany.²⁵¹

Thus, in spite of his theoretical contributions to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and military strategies (e.g. the concept of the 'people's war') and his ideas on campaigning and permanent revolution (e.g. China's Cultural Revolution), it is no surprise that Mao's intellectual work did not have a lasting impact on Marxist discourse. Apart from some rebel organisations in developing countries, which fought a 'people's war' against the state (e.g. Maoist rebels in India), Maoism vanished into political and philosophical oblivion.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Karl, *Die K-Gruppen*, p. 33. See also Dillmann, *China*, 2009.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ See MSZ, 1 (23 January 1974), p. 1.

²⁵⁰ Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York/London: Verso, 2006), p. 140.

²⁵¹ Interview with W.D. on 17 January 2013.

²⁵² The sole exception is the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). It is the largest faction in the national assembly and its chairman Prachanda was Nepalese Prime Minister from 2008 to 2009.

The uncompleted decolonisation process and experience of the Vietnam War led many Maoists in the 'urban world' to believe in the idea that they could link their efforts to the revolutionary struggle and emancipation process in the 'rural world'. China, and especially the Cultural Revolution, was an adequate object of projection for revolutionary commitment. It was perceived, as Christian Semler, the former chairman of the KPD/AO, put it, as the 'garden of utopia'.²⁵³

Maoist factions understood themselves as the vanguard of the proletarian struggle in West Germany. Accordingly, the form of agitation both exaggerated and, rather pathetically, emphasised the coincidence of the *K-Gruppen's* politics with the general historical trend towards Communist dominance. To find "self-satisfaction in its bombastic pathos,"²⁵⁴ these groups were not reluctant to prevaricate. For example, numbers of strike participants were revised upwards and influence in certain companies exaggerated when it fitted into the agitation strategy.²⁵⁵ This was because the quantity of support for any given Maoist organisation was re-interpreted by its members as an expression of the level of amalgamation of the 'vanguard party' and the proletarian masses. True to Mao's conviction that the future belonged to communism, every vote at elections, any form of practical support by the 'working class' was understood to be a reward for perseverance and another step towards the 'inevitable' revolution.²⁵⁶

An analysis of the *K-Gruppen's* periodicals during the 1970s shows that the political will to represent the 'true' interests of the proletarian masses, what Kühn described as the "slavish orientation"²⁵⁷ towards this class, resulted in the taking up of any discontent within the population. This discontent could concern parents wanting more places for their children in the kindergarten system, the alleged waste of public funds through the erection of a waste incinerator, or pay demands of workers or political strife over the education system in one *Bundesland*. Public discontent of any kind was viewed as the *K-Gruppen's* object and so they competed with the established political parties in order to represent the people's interests. This also led to the specific support of the women's movement that will be discussed below.

To lend weight to the idea that the interests of the working class were curtailed, Maoist activists applied various means. Besides the organisation of rallies, the KBW disrupted, for

²⁵³ Christian Semler, 'Wiedergänger', p. 135.

²⁵⁴ Helmut Gollwitzer, 'Studentenbewegung – und was danach?', *Das Argument*, 98 (1976), p. 566.

²⁵⁵ See Betriebsgruppe bei Osram Westberlin, 'Die Trommel ruft – die Banner wehn oder: wie die KPD-AO bei Osram streikte', in *Probleme des Klassenkampfes (Prokla)*, 11/12 (1974), pp. 273-286.

²⁵⁶ Koenen, himself a former KBW activist, describes the absurdity of this approach through the example of the KBW's participation at general elections. See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 415-468.

²⁵⁷ Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, p. 296.

example, a city council meeting in Bremerhaven, while the KPD/AO stormed the town hall in Bonn. At times, Maoist activists resorted to the use of force, legitimised through references to the people and democracy.²⁵⁸ However, the most important means with which to connect with the workers lay in the plethora of publication organs. The Maoist press often put less emphasis on fair and content-related criticism, but scandalised over the 'misconduct' of politicians, trade unionists and capitalists, reproducing the way mainstream press dealt with certain issues from a different ideological perspective.²⁵⁹ Its level of professionalism was unparalleled; the KBW even had its own foreign correspondents, an intra-organisational information system that was taken over by IBM after the league's dissolution and a large fleet of cars for leading activists. Such professionalisation, however, led to the corrosion of Marxist categories of analysis, because existing power structures, here the hierarchical level of party functionaries, thwarted solid theory formation to enhance the organisational consolidation.²⁶⁰

The approach to 'act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses' and 'serve the people' did not narrow the alleged discrepancy between the proletariat's 'objective' and 'subjective' needs.²⁶¹ Nor did the assurance to adhere "firmly to the political main interest of the proletariat, the set-up of socialism as the transition stage to the classless society: communism"²⁶² alter the status quo. In fact, the excessive revolutionary commitment of *K-Gruppen* members — in conjunction with the Leninist cadre principle, borrowed from the interwar era — manifested itself in the psyche of many activists, which is thoroughly explored by the literature.²⁶³

The psychological and even physiological stress was overpowering: subordination of the individual to the party was comprehensive and frequently consumed, directly or indirectly, 16 hours of the day, often for seven days a week.²⁶⁴ Not unnaturally, individuals were only willing to bear this as long as they anticipated political success and had real hope that their concerns and proposals would have an impact on the organisation.²⁶⁵ Robert Kurz even

²⁵⁸ See *Unsere Stadt (Bremerhaven)*, 'Sparschweinen...', 10 (January 1976), p. 2. For the KPD/AO see *Der Spiegel*, 'Das blanke Eisen', 21 (21 May 1973), pp. 83-86.

²⁵⁹ This conclusion is based on the analysis of the KBW's *Kommunistische Volkszeitung Mannheim*, KB's *Unsere Stadt (Bremerhaven)*, and the KPD/AO's *Rote Fahne*.

²⁶⁰ See Schlögel, Jasper and Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt*, 1981; Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

²⁶¹ Mao himself elaborated that in order "to link oneself with the masses, one must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses [...] It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need [...]." Mao Zedong, 'The United Front in Cultural Work' (Oct. 30, 1944), in *Selected Works Vol. III*, pp. 236-237.

²⁶² *Rote Fahne*, 13 (1971), p. 1.

²⁶³ See, among others, Autorenkollektiv, *Wir war'n die stärkste der Partei... Erfahrungsberichte aus der Welt der K-Gruppen* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1977).

²⁶⁴ See also *Der Spiegel*, 'Das blanke Eisen', pp. 83-86.

²⁶⁵ See Autorenkollektiv, *Wir war'n die stärkste der Partei...*, 1977.

claimed that *K-Gruppen* “became empirically insane about their own ‘working class’ myth.”²⁶⁶ The excessive commitment to the party and its political programme reflected the ideological convictions of Maoists to stand on the brink of revolutionary change in times of an allegedly dying capitalism.

However, when the ‘objective’ interests proved an ideological chimera, re-orientation with the ‘subjective’ needs of individuals together with recourse to the cultural-revolutionary paradigm of the student movement allowed for reconnecting with the interests of the ‘masses’. This development, however, did not occur, as for example claimed by Kurz, as the mere running after everything that was moving in the political arena.²⁶⁷ This understanding of the developments is reductionist. In fact, the recourse to the ‘masses’ and the Maoist ambition ‘to learn’ from their ‘daily experiences’ implied the permanent reassessment of ideological convictions and to take any issue disputed over in West Germany as a chance to demonstrate one’s alliance with the revolutionary subject and to distinguish oneself as the ‘real’ advocate of the citizens’ alleged interests by serving them. The broad support of the new social movements — especially in the case of anti-nuclear energy protests — which almost immediately exceeded the influence of *K-Gruppen*, disillusioned many of the latter’s supporters, a process that began with ‘mass organisations’ and advanced from the outset to the centre of the party.²⁶⁸ These ‘mass organisations’ were supposed to function as ‘transmission belts’²⁶⁹, set up in order to extend the party’s influence. Yet ironically, these organisations actually became ‘inverted’ transmission belts, contributing significantly to the rapid decline of the Maoist New Left. The temporary influence of these organisations, such as the KPD/AO’s *Liga gegen den Imperialismus* (League against Imperialism), and the KBW’s *Gesellschaft zur Unterstützung der Volkskämpfe* (Society for the Support of Popular Struggles), beyond the *K-Gruppen* milieu during the mid-1970s seemed to support the Maoist idea that many individuals possess a ‘potentially inexhaustible enthusiasm’ for socialism. By 1976 it turned out that Marxist-Leninists were able to gain a certain degree of social efficacy through and within the new social movements, as long as these individuals constructively contributed to the furtherance of the anti-nuclear energy movement, its political goals and practised grassroots democracy. This ‘offer’ was the gate opener for abandoning the maximum goal of a revolution and many activists distinguished themselves in the struggle against new nuclear

²⁶⁶ Robert Kurz, *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen sozialistischen Ziel. Manifest für die Erneuerung revolutionärer Theorie* (Erlangen: self-published, 1988), p. 49.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, 2005.

²⁶⁹ See Frederick C. Teiwes, ‘The Chinese State During the Maoist Era’, in David Shambaugh, ed, *The Modern Chinese State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 105-160.

power plants before joining the ranks of the Green party or finding other ways back into the bourgeois society and its political system. That this process advanced from the outset of the party to its centre was due to the fact that individuals of the first were often in practical contact with the new social movements and elements of grassroots democracy while the *K-Gruppen's* inner circles were mostly cut off from political actions. When, against the background of not being able to penetrate the proletarian consciousness, the growing debates regarding the pros and cons of these social movements were taken up by leading cadres the crisis of political Marxism in West Germany became terminal: organisations split or dissolved.²⁷⁰

For years after the student movement had first flourished, the reconstruction of Marxist theory and the practical approach pursued by Maoists failed to develop into the decisive politico-theoretical means with which to bring about substantive socio-economic change in West Germany. As a result, Marxism, in its academic and practical-political forms of appearance, became the subject of criticism and consequently a 'crisis of Marxist theory' was identified.²⁷¹

Decisive for the crisis of Marxism, however, is the non-fulfilment of revolutionary strategic expectations regarding the constitution and radicalisation of the proletarian consciousness.²⁷²

The crisis of Marxism was, first and foremost, an expression of disappointment of activists and intellectuals with the practical outcome of their commitment to promote the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois society.²⁷³ The feeling of disappointment is the consequence of unfulfilled hopes, which in the context of the West German New Left in general, and Maoist factions in particular, referred to the initial expectation of activists that they were on the right side of history. The writing on the wall was supposed to favour the Marxist-inspired transformation of capitalism into socialism. Representative for this was the KBW's statute in which the league interpreted capitalism as 'dying' in 1973; and thus claimed that "proletarian world revolution has translated from a scientific prediction into reality".²⁷⁴ These allegedly objective tendencies and realities, however, did not exist; they had no empirical foundation and were exclusively formed in the consciousness of activists, who re-interpreted the popularisation of idealistic criticism in the late 1960s as the beginning of a historical process

²⁷⁰ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

²⁷¹ See Dozekal, Egbert, *Von der 'Rekonstruktion' der Marxschen Theorie zur 'Krise des Marxismus' – Darstellung und Kritik eines Diskussionsprozesses von 1967 - 1984* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1985).

²⁷² *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, 'Editorial', 36 (1979), p. 6.

²⁷³ See *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, 'Krise des Marxismus?', 36 (1979) and *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, 'Probleme mit dem Klassenkampf', 43 (1981).

²⁷⁴ See Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, *Programm und Statut*, pp. 1-3.

that would eventually lead to world revolution. Therefore, the demise of *K-Gruppen* in particular and the radical left in general cannot primarily be attributed to defects in Marxist theory formation in principle.

Confronted with the reality not to live up to their own revolutionary expectations, *K-Gruppen* blamed other factors for the discrepancy between the status quo and their supposed historical function as an advocate of the proletariat's intrinsic interests. To begin with, *K-Gruppen* held the subversive influence of other leftist groupings responsible for their not having secured the amount of support they believed was due to them. Accusing other factions of 'revisionism' was common among *K-Gruppen* activists; the same held true for mutual insults. The Marxist-Leninist precept of proletarian masses having an intrinsic interest in overthrowing the capitalist system impeded a critical approach to the reality of 'class struggle' for most of the 1970s. Consequently, other leftist organisations were criticised for being what proletarians had been: proponents of the bourgeois state and its politico-economic interests. In periodicals and pamphlets, for example, the 'K' in the names of opposing organisations was usually placed in inverted commas in order to ridicule and delegitimise their efforts.²⁷⁵

Moreover, activists also condemned their own and others' 'bourgeois habits'. Since in principle, the identity of interests was taken for granted, the failure was identified in the specific approach favoured by activists. What might at first appear to be a form of self-criticism was, in fact, an anti-critical reproach. Like their Chinese counterparts and in line with Mao, they thought of "the Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism"²⁷⁶ as an important instrument for the advancement of their political project, because "inner-Party criticism is a weapon for strengthening the Party organisation and increasing its fighting capacity."²⁷⁷ However, the 'weapon of self-criticism', generally deployed to realign dissenting views with the central committee's political directives, was only effective as long as the contradictions caused by the over-estimation of the Marxist-Leninist movement's strength had not become the object of criticism in light of the new social movement's ongoing influence. 'Corruptive' trade-unionists also found themselves attacked for their opportunistic efforts and blamed for betraying the proletarian struggle.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, pp. 175-180.

²⁷⁶ Mao Zedong, 'Report to the Sec. Plen. Sess. of the Sev. Centr. Comm. of the Comm. Party of China', (March 5, 1949), *Selected Works Vol. IV*, p. 374.

²⁷⁷ Mao Zedong, 'On Correcting the Mistaken Ideas in the Party', (December 1929), *Selected Works Vol. I*, pp. 111-112.

²⁷⁸ How this idea affected the *K-Gruppen*'s daily political struggle is described in Karl, *K-Gruppen*, pp. 50-51. With the example of the chemical industry, Karl cites trade unions' descriptions of how activists tried to infiltrate works councils by defaming colleagues as 'bribed' trade unionists in order to gain the workers' confidence and proceed in taking up revolutionary agitation. Another representative example of this approach

As the majority of activists rejected any self-critical evaluation of their practical and theoretical approach within the Marxist framework, they considered that their turn away from Marxist-Leninist reasoning was nonetheless consistent with their initial motives when commencing this ideological liaison. The political will to participate in a critical and successful 'mass movement', to be *avant-garde* in social change and justice in competition with bourgeois parties, was modified and modernised in the late 1970s. As the quantity of political support amounted to both the criterion of success and the point of reference for moral authority, the *K-Gruppen*'s cultivation of a capricious handling of their revolutionary ideology was inherent in their fixation on the 'masses'.²⁷⁹ It was no coincidence that Maoists, in particular, were open to the emerging new social movements. Like other New Left currents, *K-Gruppen* "were all fascinated by the political potential of the protest movement against nuclear power plants."²⁸⁰

Environmentalism now became the new meta-subject for 'progressive' and 'critical' citizens. In contrast to the post-1968 radical left, the respective movement initiated by the protests against nuclear energy, was successful in gaining substantial political support. For many, the environmentalists' *realpolitik* and grassroots democracy offered a lifeline out of the radical left ghetto, whereas the success of the green-alternative movement became a major argument against 'antiquated' and practically 'disproved' Marxist ideas.²⁸¹ As Jürgen Schröder emphasises, Maoists were politically rooted in a 'pragmatic context', which enabled most *K-Gruppen* activists to lay aside their *weltanschauung* 'like an old garment'.²⁸² This pragmatic context was a consequence of the idea to 'serve the people' and be its ideal representative. Accordingly, those Marxists who could not see the writing on the wall in the early 1980s were not criticised from a content-related point of view, but blamed for their 'dogmatism' and 'intransigence'.²⁸³ Marxism *per se* was denied any explanatory power:

'[T]he' Marxism does not exist in an abstract form, but in its capability of penetrating social reality and gaining social efficacy.²⁸⁴

Thus, although *K-Gruppen* initially intended to utilise new social movements as a transmission belt for their purposes the aimed for radicalisation of ecological criticism fell

can be found in Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, *Der Streik der Metallarbeiter Bremen März 1974* (Heidelberg: Sendler, 1974), pp. 21-38.

²⁷⁹ Jürgen Schröder, *Ideologischer Kampf vs. regionale Hegemonie*, (undated).

²⁸⁰ Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?*, p. 154.

²⁸¹ See *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, 'Probleme des Klassenkampfes', 43 (1981).

²⁸² See Jürgen Schröder, *Ideologischer Kampf vs. regionale Hegemonie*, (undated).

²⁸³ See Marxistische Gruppe, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980 – und was Marxisten in den 80er Jahren an ihr zu ändern haben* (Munich: Resultate, 1980).

²⁸⁴ KPD/AO cit. in Marxistische Gruppe, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980*, p. 141.

victim to political realism. The political process after 1968, which, according to the KPD/AO, had left only “fragments of hope”²⁸⁵ had not yet eliminated the Maoists' idealistic opportunism, albeit they found themselves confronted by an ideological and political impasse. Given the background of their specific Marxist ideology, which frequently equated ‘social’ with ‘socialist’, this dilemma resulted in the almost seamless transformation of the majority of activists from radical critics into critical devotees of bourgeois society. This marked the second and final paradigm shift of the radical left after 1968. In other words, the *K-Gruppen*'s ambition to gain social efficacy and their state idealism superseded the Marxist critique of the bourgeois society.

The *Kommunistischer Bund* (KB, Communist League), for example, took a stand for the right to education, promoted gender equality and published on the nuclear energy programme.²⁸⁶ This topical interlocking between *K-Gruppen* and the emerging new social movements was an important breeding ground for the former to merge into the latter.

In summary, Maoism in West Germany was an atavistically oriented communist ideology based on the ideas of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. It attempted to link its political activities ideally to the remnants of the inter-war working class movement. The ‘praxis fetishism’ of Maoists, combined with their messianic spirit – ‘from the masses, to the masses’ – was uncritically applied to the West German situation. In the early 1970s all Maoist organisations stressed the ‘universal truth’ of Marxism-Leninism and argued that the most relevant theoretical questions had already been resolved and presented in the standard works of Marxism.

In the immediate aftermath of the student movement, the diffuse Maoist body of thought provided revolutionaries with an elaborate framework and offered intellectual and practical guidance for future political struggles. At this point, various threads that constituted Maoism appeared to form a coherent whole. However, Maoist ideology was influential only between 1969 and 1976/7. After that, the failure to connect with the mystified proletarian masses against a background of the Maoists' idealistic interpretation of democracy and the state allowed for a rapprochement with democratic capitalism. This back-to-the-mainstream turnaround was favoured by the emerging new social movements and the founding process of the Green Party as well as developments in China and Cambodia. The need to come to terms

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ See Kommunistischer Bund, *Warum kämpfen wir gegen Atomkraftwerke* (Hamburg: Arbeiterkampf, 1976). See also *15 Jahre Kommunistischer Bund (KB) / mpz Hamburg 1987 – Teil 2* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Noo930YRND8&feature=relmfu>> [14 July 2012].

with the upheaval of trade unions in Poland and the Eastern European dissident movement also contributed to this, albeit West German Maoists at least did not suffer the 'Gulag shock' of their French comrades.²⁸⁷

2.3.3. Maoists and their goal to exploit the feminist movement during the 1970s: an example for the *K-Gruppen's* approach to political praxis

The feminist movement was one of the most significant and influential outcomes of the student protests during the late 1960s. For the Maoist factions the critique formulated by and in the name of women was another opportunity to strengthen their ties with the masses by laying down the party line and learning about and participating in the struggles of the people. Seen from the basic Maoist assumption that the people and proletariat *in potentialis* have an insatiable enthusiasm for socialism, the involvement of the class-conscious avant-garde with the feminist movement was consistent with its general political strategy. Maoist factions, in particular the KBW, however, were not interested in promoting gender equality as an end in itself. Based on the classic Marxist interpretation of gender inequality as a side contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, Maoists intended to use the anti-§218 protests as a platform for the promotion of the realised liberation of women in China and other socialist states such as Vietnam and Mozambique. Moreover, *K-Gruppen* distinguished themselves from the 'bourgeois' feminist movement in West Germany by criticising the latter's approach for necessarily reaching an impasse

because the struggle for the liberation of women can only succeed if it is clearly directed against the capitalist class and conducted for the unity of the working class.²⁸⁸

The largest rally against the §218 in West Germany was a significant event of the 1970s; according to the historian Kraushaar a 'curiosity', the majority of the approximately 25,000 activists that gathered in Bonn to express their discontent with the abortion laws in West Germany was organised by *K-Gruppen* with the KBW leading the way.²⁸⁹ Protagonists of the feminist movement fighting for the legalisation of pregnancy termination, one of its most prominent issues, had no leading role in the organisation of these protests. Bearing in mind the *K-Gruppen's* folksy attitude as a consequence of their applied 'mass line' concept and

²⁸⁷ See U. Ackermann cit. in Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, p. 300; Joscha Schmierer, 'K-Gruppen', pp. 49-54.

²⁸⁸ Arbeitsgruppe Frauen Kommunistischer Bund/ Gruppe Hamburg, 'Feministinnen im Kampf für die Befreiung der Frau?', in *Arbeiterkampf*, 66 (2 October 1975), p. 48.

²⁸⁹ Kraushaar, *Achtundsechzig*, p. 229.

their self-conception as ideal people's representatives, the alleged curiosity is, however, only the logical result of the Maoist influence on the radical left during the mid-1970s. Any form of considerable political discontent expressed by citizens was seized upon and intended to be channelled in a pro-socialist direction. Thus, the West German Maoists, often disparagingly criticised as a 'syndicate of men' and 'preachers of the main contradiction', developed a strong interest in participating in an issue understood to be only of side-contradictory nature.²⁹⁰

By 1974/75 discussions regarding the West German abortion laws emerged in the Maoist scene and were from then on considered to be an important field of political agitation. Almost a year before 21 September 1975, the day of the rally in Bonn, *K-Gruppen* started to publish frequently on current discussions regarding §218. Considering this, one might think of Maoist cadre factions as being able to overcome their strictly economistic outlook on social phenomena. In fact, the question of women's rights was not so much an expression of overcoming class-related political agitation but an expression of Marxist orthodoxy. The liberation of women from any forms of oppression was interpreted as an elementary aspect of proletarian class struggle but, in line with the main/side contradiction hypothesis which derives every aspect of social life from the contradiction of capital and labour, its realisation was tied to social revolution. In opposition to the various women's groups (*Frauengruppen*) that were involved in the political struggle against the §218, an on and off struggle that had been present since the late 19th century resurfacing in the post-1968 years, Maoist factions were convinced that the true liberation of women could not be achieved under the conditions of capitalism:

Only with the struggle for socialism and abolition of the capitalist class the preconditions for real equality of women and men will be created. The struggle for emancipation of female workers is a necessary part of the struggle of the entire working class for a socialist social order.²⁹¹

In line with Rosa Luxemburg, arguably the most prominent female theorist of the proletarian movement, it was argued that no common interests would exist between women of different classes. This idea was derived from the assumption that the social, cultural and economic situation of women was first and foremost a consequence of the capitalist mode of production and thus, any reformism within the bourgeois parliamentary system is seen to be an

²⁹⁰ See Sebastian Kasper, 'Die vertagte Emanzipation', in *Jungle World*, 23 (6 June 2013) <<http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2013/23/47849.html>> [15 June 2013].

²⁹¹ *Arbeiterkampf*, 'Für die Emanzipation der Arbeiterin – Für die Einheit der Arbeiterklasse', 18 (May 1972), p. 16.

inadequate means to the end of liberating women. Considering the *K-Gruppen*'s fixation on capitalism, any discrimination of women beyond prevailing relations of production was ruled out.²⁹²

In capitalism the liberation of women is impossible, because the basis of their oppression is the enslavement to the household. This work, [...] the reproduction of labour as a commodity, is work with which the capitalist class cannot make profit at all. For this reason, it is up to the bourgeois small family, and thus to women, to fulfil this reproduction. [...] The occupation of women in capitalism is also not an alternative. Women are treated as an industrial reserve army. In times of austerity women are the first to become redundant.²⁹³

Without offering a plausible and consistent answer to the question why exactly women and not men would have to fulfil the task of providing the basis for reproduction remained unanswered in the theoretical works of Maoist organisations. The factions therefore failed to provide systematic evidence as to why primarily men would perform profitable labour and women most of the non-profitable work. This inability to theoretically derive the disadvantage of women strictly from the capitalistic mode of production came along with the Maoist advocacy of traditional gender roles in its own ranks. Antiquated in how factions split labour among each other, men were usually focussed on political work while a considerable part of female members primarily organised the household and had other supportive roles. Many women perceived this as gender-related discrimination in Maoist organisations. An aspect that was discussed by different female activists who left the *K-Gruppen* by 1977 in the miscellaneous *Wir waren die stärksten...* Studying available literature, it also becomes apparent that Maoist factions idealised traditional heterosexual relationships and fostered the solemnisation of marriage. In line with the 'Chinese mass line' the liberal sexuality propagated by the West German student movement was stigmatised as 'imperialistic' because it would result in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The open support of traditional gender roles culminated in the idea that getting married in itself would be a revolutionary act. This romanticising of marriage stood in stark contrast to the critique formulated by student activists; critique that focused on material dependencies which were understood to be the reason for and also a result of marriage under the regime of capitalism. For *K-Gruppen*, marriage and family were considered to act as a school of ethical life for the proletariat. The politicisation of private life, initiated by anti-authoritarian students in the mid-1960s,

²⁹² See Kasper, 'Die vertagte Emanzipation', 2013.

²⁹³ *Rote Fahne*, 'China und Albanien: Frauen im Sozialismus, 17 (August 1975), p. 10.

continued in the 1970s. However, the ideal type propagated after the Marxist-Leninist turn was in many ways archconservative.²⁹⁴

On the contrary, and against the idea that Maoists were strictly patriarchally structured, it is important to stress that a minority of women had important roles within the organisation and were, for example, nominated as direct candidates for the *Bundestag* by the KBW. Ulla Schmidt, who became Minister of Health for the social democrats in 2001, Adelheid Biesecker, professor of economics at the University of Bremen, and Barbara Gentikow, an expert in the field of Scandinavian studies who became professor of media science in the 1980s, were arguably the three most prominent Maoist figures qualifying the idea of any systematic discrimination within the KBW in particular and the *K-Gruppen* in general.²⁹⁵ Yet the fact that only a few women had a rather prominent role – neither of them was a member of the national party executive – supports the idea of *K-Gruppen* as ‘syndicates of men’.

By calling into question any emancipatory qualities of feminist reform programmes West German Maoists also projected their ideal-typical gender roles onto existing socialist societies. In 1974 the KBW, for example, claimed that

the thousand year long subjugation and oppression of the Chinese woman is over. The setup of socialism paved the way for the woman's total liberation.²⁹⁶

A similar conclusion was drawn by members of the KB's women's group for the present and future of women in South Vietnam after the end of the Vietnam War and Mozambique after becoming independent from Portuguese rule in 1975. The KB claimed that, among other things, hunger, torture, rape, unemployment and enforced prostitution were social phenomena of the past and overcome by the implementation of state socialism in both countries. This naïve glorification of national-revolutionary movements that were led by men with often misogynistic attitudes was the consequence of the Maoists general approach to really existing socialist states beyond the Soviet-influenced Eastern bloc. Even the possibility of gender discrimination in socialist states was denied by definition as much as any reformist stance on women's liberation in capitalism was criticised. For *K-Gruppen*, these two theoretically unverified suppositions were fundamental for their ideology and their self-conception as proponents of a revolutionary-progressive movement.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, pp. 82-84.

²⁹⁵ *KBW-Mitglieder* <<http://artikel20.com/index.php/wissen-und-fakten/kbw-mitglieder>> [7 February 2013].

²⁹⁶ KVZ, ‘Grundlegende Änderung der Stellung der Frau’, 8 (17 April 1974), p. 13.

²⁹⁷ See Kasper, ‘Die vertagte Emanzipation’, 2013.

Where the idealised situation of women in socialist states contradicted reality to such a degree that not even Maoist factions could deny the ongoing discrimination of women, the all-encompassing economism was replaced by voluntaristic explanations. The fact that the Chinese development did not imply the 'total liberation' of women was therefore explained by traditional ways of thinking, values and attitudes. This voluntaristic interpretation of current developments contradicted the classic Marxist-Leninist belief in economic determinism and was not resolved by *K-Gruppen* for as long as they existed. The coexistence of these two allegedly mutually exclusive interpretative patterns was possible because each was assigned to different groups of women. Female workers in industrialised nations were described as unfree and determined by their economic existence whereas women in resistance movements in developing countries were depicted as subjects of their own fate. The anti-imperialism of Maoist factions did not allow for anything other than the construction of a romanticising and transfiguring image of women in societies fighting off the economically potent powers of the West. This interpretative pattern led to the ideological absurdity that even the implementation of sharia law in Iran after the Islamic Revolution was interpreted as an emancipatory act for women by leading cadres of the Maoist KPD/AO and KBW. In this context, the Muslim veil was interpreted as a 'symbol of resistance' and, thus, ideally utilised for the political interests of *K-Gruppen* in West Germany.²⁹⁸

The Maoists' pronounced anti-reformist stance on the issue of women's discrimination defined their relationship to the feminist movement. The KBW-influenced *Komitee gegen den §218 Hamburg* (Committee against §218 in Hamburg), for example, published a brochure in November 1976 in which its political struggle with women's groups was thematised.²⁹⁹ These groups on the other hand criticised the dogmatism of Maoist factions and argued in favour of women's liberation in democratic capitalism. Ideological demarcation was important for both politically hostile groups. It was, however, a distinctive feature of Maoist groups to criticise the feminist movement not exclusively from a content-related point of view but to blame feminists for their undermining of class unity and the unity of the masses. Feminism was thus interpreted as a politico-ideological means to the end of separating women from the proletarian unity front: "Women stab their men into the back and keep them from fighting capitalists!"³⁰⁰ By referring to their characteristic conspiracy theory, Maoist factions could only explain the existence of the political movement they were keen to infiltrate and utilise for

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Komitee gegen §218 Hamburg, *Der Kampf gegen den §218 wird fortgesetzt* (Hamburg: self-published, 1976).

³⁰⁰ Arbeiterkampf, 'Für die Emanzipation der Arbeiterin', 18, 1972, p. 15.

their political goals by understanding it as a ploy of the capitalist class. Accordingly, the entire feminist movement was frequently reductionistically referred to as 'anti-communist demagogy'. The fact that the 'bourgeois' women's movement was influential and not the self-proclaimed most class-conscious avant-garde of the working class masses called, according to *K-Gruppen*, for the realignment of the led-astray female workers to their 'true interest'. This allegedly true interest was the transformation of the bourgeois society into socialism and thus nothing but the interest Maoists pursued and assigned to the masses, i.e. the revolutionary subject. Accordingly, the political struggle for the abolition of §218 was in its essence not a struggle for the liberation of women; it was in fact re-interpreted as a struggle of the people against the capitalist state.³⁰¹ The issue of pregnancy termination was reduced to a mere question of class affiliation. As a consequence thereof, it was argued that the entire working class – men and women – should make a decision on how to deal with the issue of unwanted pregnancies: "The people must decide on its own behalf!"³⁰² Hence, the strong interest in the feminist movement during the mid-1970s is another example for the Maoists' fixation on proletarian masses and the glorification of the will of the people, which they believed could only adequately be executed by Marxist-Leninists.

Only by late 1970s, when the *K-Gruppen* entered the phase of decline, did the policy on women's issues change. In particular the less dogmatic KB was open to new ideas and aimed to establish an 'independent communist policy on women'. This resulted in the sacrifice of communist principles, such as the primacy of class struggle over 'individualistic' tendencies, a development that became the subject of controversial internal discussions because it implied a fundamental critique of the main/side contradiction hypothesis. The KB even implemented an anti-discriminatory women's statute that, among other things, resulted in the preference of female members if men and women have equal qualifications for specific tasks. It is, however, important to stress that these developments took place when the KB was already in its abandonment phase in 1980 suffering from the impact of the Green Party's establishment, in which many former KB activists, such as Thomas Ebermann, gained immediate influence.³⁰³

The *K-Gruppen's* relationship with the feminist movement exemplifies why the latter had no significant impact on the Maoist discourse. Understood to be of side-contradictory nature, the issue of women's liberation was subsumed to the ultimate intention to transform the bourgeois society with a social revolution. However, dealing with the anti-§ 218

³⁰¹ See Kasper, 'Die vertagte Emanzipation', 2013.

³⁰² Komitee gegen §218 Hamburg, *Der Kampf gegen den §218*, pp. 25-28.

³⁰³ See *Arbeiterkampf*, 'Erstes kommunistisches Frauenstatut der BRD verabschiedet', 184, 1980, pp. 28-30.

movement led to a process that allowed for the KB's communist policy on women and, even more importantly, resulted in the processual alienation of many female activists with the Maoist radical left and its strict focus on class issues.

In contrast to the attempted re-proletarianisation of the women's movement by Maoist activists, the MG formulated critique from a different angle. In line with classic Marxist interpretations, the issue of women's discrimination was understood to be a side contradiction and thus subordinated to the contradiction between capital and labour. From the MG's materialist point of view, discussions regarding gender equality were missing the relevant point. What the practical implementation of equal opportunities for men and women would mean for individuals was answered in following:

The political demand to implement equal opportunities for both sexes is in fact the political demand to realise gender-neutral distribution of individuals within the hierarchy of jobs and income. (...) It is not a common material interest articulated by a group of individuals but an interest in fair competition between individuals. Thus, activists of the feminist movement do not have a *positive* identity of interests beyond the interest in an idealised competition which is in itself a question of mutual exclusion from material resources.³⁰⁴

The question of women's rights and the implementation of equal opportunities was therefore criticised as redundant and relevant only for those who aimed to improve the principles of capitalism. In addition, the Maoist idea to assume an ideal identity of interests between Marxists and proletarian women was refused. The same applies to the whole idea of women as a separate political entity sharing a common interest by birth. Even though certain aspects of the *K-Gruppen's* critique of the feminist movement were shared by the MG, the latter criticised the Maoists' populist demand for referendums on the issue of §218. The expression of political discontent on the side of 'bourgeois' activists was not understood to be a chance to channel 'the people's' discontent in a pro-revolutionary direction. Hence, neither the MG nor its predecessor organisations participated in demonstrations against the §218 or paid special attention to this issue. Besides, promotion of ideal-types of sexual relationships did not occur within their ranks and were left to the judgement and preferences of each member.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Margaret Wirth, *Warum der rationelle Kern der Frauenfrage mit der Forderung nach Gleichberechtigung nicht erledigt ist* [audio] <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#268>> [12 January 2013]. Even though the audio tape was recorded in 2008, it comprises the central arguments formulated by the RZ/AK and MG during the 1970s.

³⁰⁵ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

To sum up, the historical curiosity marked by the rally in Bonn in September 1975 was therefore another example for the Maoist fixation on the proletarian masses and the ideological necessity of the 'revolutionary avant-garde' to get involved with any form of political discontent and to promote as well as raise the political consciousness of the masses. In fact, the involvement with the women's movement contributed to the undermining of the *K-Gruppen's* ideological cohesion as a growing number of female activists qualified the merely side-contradictory nature of women's discrimination and demanded the consideration of specifically female issues if they remained within the organisation at all.

2.3.4. The *Marxistische Gruppe/ Erlangen-Nuremberg* and *Rote Zelle/ Arbeitskonferenz*: Marxism as 'rational science'

As 'organisations of intellectuals', the MG/EN's and RZ/AK's development during the 1970s differed significantly from that of the *K-Gruppen*. Although both were spin-offs from the Red Cells movement, differences in ideology, strategy and internal organisation were significant. The *K-Gruppen* believed in the "class power of the 're-awoken proletariat'",³⁰⁶ and agitated in companies, the military and at countless demonstrations for their revolutionary ideals, while occasionally resorting to violence. Meanwhile, the MG/EN and RZ/AK centred its efforts on the immanent critique of the bourgeois society and its corresponding academic theories.³⁰⁷ For both predecessor organisations of the MG, theoretical penetration of bourgeois society and an adequate revolutionary practise represented two different things mediated by specific historical circumstances which, according to both groups, were not actually revolutionary. As these groups therefore reduced themselves to the organisation of teach-ins, the distribution of leaflets at universities/companies and some demonstrations, political opponents referred to them as 'seminar Marxists'.³⁰⁸

K-Gruppen concurred with Lenin on the idea that

the existence of exploitation, will always engender ideals opposite to the system both among themselves, the exploited and among certain members of the 'intelligentsia'.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ KPD/AO cit. in Marxistische Gruppe, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980*, p. 140.

³⁰⁷ For the stance of *K-Gruppen* to violence, see Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, p. 161-167.

³⁰⁸ See, for example, Bernd Gäbler, 'Siehst du nicht, wie perfekt die Herrschaftsmaschinerie läuft? Dann paß dich doch an, du Idiot!', in Beate Landefeld and Franz Sommerfeld, eds, *Sackgassen und Irrwege* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1979), pp. 123-151. Already in 1976, the MG faction in Bremen distributed its 'company newspapers'. See Marxistische Arbeiter-Zeitung, *Betriebszeitungen der MG Bremen Sept. 1976 – März 1977* (Munich: self-published, 1977).

³⁰⁹ Lenin, 'A Criticism of Narodnik Sociology', *LCW Vol. 1*, p. 431.

The later MG rejected this, contending instead that exploitation neither engenders ideals opposite to the system, nor social criticism. In contrast to Maoist factions, who mainly focused on the adequate interpretation of revolutionary classics, the MG/EN and RZ/AK continued the working conference that began in 1970, and in the process, developed a distinct anti-state Marxist theory.

Referring to the work of Hegel and his 'doctrine of the notion', the groups that eventually merged into the MG in 1979 conceptualised Marxism as the scientific critique of political economy and bourgeois society. Accordingly, the theory that took shape during the 1970s was not subject to any practical political considerations. This 'immunised' supporters against the realignment of their approach to the changing *zeitgeist* of the late 1970s and the 'crisis of Marxism'. Moreover, in line with their idealistic understanding of Marxism as 'rational' social science, members of both groups did not interpret lack of support as an argument against their theoretical considerations.³¹⁰

As will be demonstrated in Chapter Six, the later MG's agitation was not based on confronting bourgeois society with an alternative interpretation of democracy, freedom and equality. For the MG and its predecessors, the concepts of freedom and equality had no emancipatory nature. Hence, the group instead provided polemics against the popular idea among New Left activists that "the destiny of socialism was inseparably intertwined with real freedom and meaningful democracy."³¹¹ The socialist practice in and after the student movement that coalesced around the democratisation of society and the realisation of 'real' freedom and equality during the post-1968 era was therefore heavily criticised.

To anticipate one of the essential results, the MG challenged the idea of an identity of interests between communists and the proletariat and, as a consequence thereof, freed itself from the necessity to learn from and serve the masses, this abstract subject *K-Gruppen* canvassed and whose 'real' interests legitimised their existence. Maoists' focus on daily struggles and the support of the working class was countered by the MG's ruthless criticism of the existing order. This, however, did not offer any practical or theoretical alternatives to democratic capitalism, but was exclusively aimed at establishing a profound critique that would, *ex negative*, indicate the political objectives of the group's revolutionary agitation. In critical continuation of Marx's *Capital*, the MG attempted to develop Marxism further as a 'rational science': deriving its results from the contradictions inherent in bourgeois society

³¹⁰ See Marxistische Gruppe, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980*, 1980.

³¹¹ Tariq Ali cit. in Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz?*, p. 9.

and without any normative utterances.³¹² Against the approach of the early socialists, who derived their critique from the suffering of the working class, the MG followed Marx and sought to justify the possibility of historical transformation solely from the contradictions immanent in capitalism. This facet of the MG's work was correctly criticised as 'idealistic', because it would be practically impossible to develop social theories without at least one normative utterance; a problem which remained the subject of keen debate among the MG and its critics.³¹³

2.3.5. Summary

This chapter has argued that New Left factions in general and Maoist parties in particular understood Marxism as a critical worldview, supporting their hopes for revolutionary change with reference to 'incontrovertible' historical tendencies. *K-Gruppen* adhered to ideals located in the entire history of Marxist theory formation and praxis, but distanced themselves from what they perceived as an inadequate realisation of these ideals in the Eastern and Western bloc. Specific interpretations of democracy, freedom and equality were key ideals on which the political activism of *K-Gruppen* rested; interpretations that differed significantly from those in liberal democracies. Moreover, the positive stance towards statism not only led to the formation of a specific nationalism, but also provided the basis from which socialist Third World countries could be admired and the state viewed a potential vehicle through which capitalist society could be transformed.³¹⁴

In light of this, the *K-Gruppen*'s focus on China and Maoist theory represented a reaction to the political status quo of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The 'success' of the Chinese model was attractive and linked West German organisations to a global revolutionary movement. However, as any hopes for revolutionary change in the Federal Republic proved illusory and the popularity of the emerging green-alternative movement became evident, the demise of the New Left and especially its revolutionary avant-garde took swing. The lack of any real prospect of changing the socio-economic foundations of capitalist society from the edge of the political spectrum demanded a critical realignment of political activism and theory. Practical discrepancies from the 'masses', in whose name Maoists operated was eliminated by either renouncing Marxism for green-alternative ideologies, or retreating into

³¹² See Karl Held, *Marxismus und bürgerliche Wissenschaft*, Munich [110 min.] (1982) <<http://farberot.de/>> [17 July 2010].

³¹³ See Engelhardt, Lukas and Stammberger et al., *Zur Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe*, 1973.

³¹⁴ For the nationalism of the *K-Gruppen*, see Kühn, *Stalins Enkel*, *Maos Kinder*, 2005.

privacy. The cultural-revolutionary paradigm of the student movement was taken up, modernised and amalgamated with a less dogmatic form of social criticism.

The political will to become a socialist *alternative* beyond capitalist statism and the longing for state power proved an invaluable incentive for Marxist-Leninist activists to envisage themselves as an alternative *within* the bourgeois political system. Indeed, New Left activists involved in factories, action groups and trade union work, demanding the far-reaching democratisation of the bourgeois world and criticising the utilisation of nuclear energy as an act of political 'irresponsibility', had not entirely broken with West German society and its 'problems'. Thus the transition from being fundamental opponents of capitalism to becoming critical proponents involved less ideological difficulty than might be assumed.

Based on the idea that communism must be based on 'scientific' insights, the factions that merged into the MG in 1979 developed a fundamental criticism of theoretical and practical Marxism. For the MG, theory formation in the tradition of Marx was identical to the 'rational' critique of bourgeois society; not an alternative worldview which could be affected by the short-term vicissitudes of political developments. This confidence in theory formation 'preserved' the group from being affected by the crisis in West Germany's New Left after 1976/7. The most influential transitional phenomenon in the wake of the student movement, the Red Cells, anticipated this development when, in 1971, minority factions in Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg dissociated themselves from the Maoist-influenced Red Cells in order to focus on their working conference, and the 'critique of bourgeois science'.

3. **Bucking the trend of the declining New Left: on the history of the *Marxistische Gruppe* between its founding in 1979 and dissolution in 1991**

3.1. Introduction

Only after the MG had finished its major theoretical work, *The Democratic State*, the final product of the working conference that the RZ/AK had begun some eight years previously, did the group establish itself nationally under a single name. Countering the general trend of other influential ideological strings to either dissolve or erode significantly through factionalising and falls in membership, the MG did not experience such difficulties, nor did it adjust its theoretical approach caused by the growing influence of new social movements. In fact, other major publications, addressing imperialism, the psychology of bourgeois individuals and West German trades unions, led the organisation to establish itself as the largest organisation on the New Left by the early 1980s.

Thus far, this thesis has analysed the New Left's historical development between its beginnings in the mid-1950s and the demise of Maoist factions by the late 1970s. This chapter will analyse how the MG developed between 1979 and 1991, the year of its dissolution. What were the commonalities and differences between the MG and *K-Gruppen* regarding their political practice, hierarchy within the organisation and financing? How far can this contribute to a better understanding of the MG's unique development during the 1980s? With regard to financing, was there any influence played by the East or West German secret service on the group, as was often claimed by political opponents? What role did the *Verfassungsschutz* play in the dissolution of the MG and was the group's decision to dissolve in line with its general political practice? What have been the shortcomings of existing explanations for the relative success of the MG during the 1980s?

3.2. The *Marxistische Gruppe* and the declining New Left: developments and strategies until the mid-1980s

3.2.1. The *Marxistische Gruppe*'s strategic direction and its relationship to factions of the disintegrating radical left

The emergence of social movements in critical continuation of the anti-authoritarian student protest movement, emphasising new forms of politicking beyond the traditional left-right cleavage, enabled many New Left activists to leave behind their existence as ideal

representatives of the masses in the political ‘ghetto’ the radical left formed during the mid-1970s and to reconnect with the isolated discontent of politicised citizens. The new focus on local and on individuals directly impacting upon political issues was in fact a return to the principle of *realpolitik*; it drew upon those ideological aspects of the student movement that stressed the ‘artistic total revolution’ and especially, the egalitarian concepts of life (as described in Chapter One).

This shift of paradigms, from critics of the bourgeois society, with the objective of overthrowing the capitalist system, to one of critical acceptance of democratic capitalism in all its facets, which started in 1976/7, was largely completed by 1982/3. Since then, no potent radical left movement has called into question the general acceptance of capitalism and its principles.

The MG was perceived soon after its formation as an enemy of the disintegrating radical left because of its severe criticism of this shift of paradigms and the ‘democratic struggle’ pursued by remaining *K-Gruppen* activists. From an organisational perspective, the disintegration of the New Left set in with the disengagement of the *Gruppe Z*³¹⁵ from the KB in 1979 and found its expression in the following thought:

Capitalism in West Germany itself raises concerns since it is not guaranteeing economic growth, employment and an increasing government share any more. The mere insistence on overthrowing capitalism in this situation is not adequate to solve any of these problems.³¹⁶

The MG’s criticism of all efforts of left-wing activists to come to a mutual understanding of the chances for a renewal of emancipatory politics in light of the environmental, anti-nuclear and peace movement caused furious reactions among those attacked by the group.³¹⁷ This animosity became blatantly obvious at the Socialist Conferences organised in 1980/1 to pool the strengths of the fragmenting political left and establish a new working basis. Prominent left-wing intellectuals, such as Elmar Altvater, Rudolf Bahro and Frank Deppe, but also many organisations, ranging from the orthodox DKP to the social-democratic youth league, the *Jusos*, attended these conferences.

³¹⁵ The *Gruppe Z* (Group Z) was the self-proclaimed centre faction, consisting of approximately 200 former members of the KB and merged into the Green Party. Here, former *Gruppe Z* members belonged to the eco-socialist wing: highly influential in the 1980s. Rainer Trampert and Thomas Ebermann were the most important representatives of this group.

³¹⁶ Redaktionsgruppe ‘Sozialistische Konferenz’, ed, *Der herrschende Block – und die Alternativen der Linken* (Hanover: Verlag der Sozialistischen Konferenz, 1981), p. 3.

³¹⁷ For the MG’s analysis of the state of West Germany’s New Left in the late 1970s, see Marxistische Gruppe, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1980*, 1980.

Despite the changing political tides in the early 1980s, the question of whether the political left should focus on the proletariat or entirely turn towards new social movements caused as much tension as the controversy about whether the industrial system or capitalism itself should be opposed. These sources of controversy were complemented by provocative discussions about the prospects of success regarding a new entryist strategy, with the Green Party at its centre. The allegedly contentious relationship between socialism and environmentalism was another major issue of conflict that contributed to the abandonment of the entire project in 1981.³¹⁸

The MG's rejection of any theoretical concessions was based on its understanding of Marxism as a form of 'social science', dealing with aspects of political, economic and cultural life within capitalism.³¹⁹ This 'scientific' approach also had an effect on its stance on the question of organisation. Because of that, certain aspects of the MG's organisational structure were different from Maoist factions. In contrast to *K-Gruppen*, the MG was not interested in setting-up *the* revolutionary party based on the Leninist principles of 'democratic centralism', principles that communist organisations had already applied during the 1920s and demanded the complete submission of an individual to the organisation and the submission of the entire organisation to its leadership.³²⁰

Instead, under the condition of seeking unity through theory, the MG was able to distance itself from practical constraints inherent to leading the 'democratic struggle' to establish the foundations for social revolution. This theory-first approach found expression in the flat hierarchy of the organisation.³²¹ By deciding to rely on theoretical unity as the quintessence of its political organisation in the aftermath of the student movement, the RZ/AK had already established the organisational fundament for the MG's uncharacteristic development as early as 1970/1.

The focus on theory formation also indicates that 'authority of trueness' was not dominated by 'trueness of authority', an aspect vital in guaranteeing the cohesion of *K-Gruppen* until 1976/7.³²² Interviewees argued that any forms of submission would have contradicted the concept of a Marxist organisation as a free co-operation of men and women with a common political goal. They also argued that the goal of the MG, to enable its

³¹⁸ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 127.

³¹⁹ See Peter Decker, *Was ist Dialektik? / Teil I*, Hamburg [164 min.] (1984) <<http://farberot.de/>> [10 July 2010].

³²⁰ For the *K-Gruppen* see *Der Spiegel*, 'Das blanke Eisen', pp. 83-86.

³²¹ Interview with W.D. on 17 January 2013.

³²² See Schlögel, Jasper and Zieseimer, *Partei kaputt*, pp. 24-26.

supporters to criticise bourgeois society and academia, stood in stark contrast to the submission of individuals to a central committee and its directives.³²³

However, it would be naïve not to assume, for example, a certain influence of group dynamics on the organisation: especially through the form of ideological submission of less trained supporters to higher-ranking members. Severely criticised by Stamm in 1975, this submission constituted a loophole for the otherwise rejected ‘trueness of authority’.³²⁴ Even if this was not intended, the epistocratic structure of the MG created dependencies in the sense that part of the rank and file ‘collected’ arguments and trains of thought at meetings, instead of proactively acquiring critical knowledge on their own by studying the relevant literature.³²⁵

Thus, the idea that focus on intellectual training eliminated any forms of authority was idealistic, despite the interviews stressing the flat hierarchy within the organisation; a factor that presumably contributed to the MG’s stability and its supporters’ extraordinary loyalty.³²⁶ Its success in both existing and prospering as a Marxist organisation during the 1980s, after the ‘conservative turn’, was therefore not the result of a submission of individuals to a ‘dictatorial’ central committee, as argued by Schnädelbach and Käsler, but a consequence of its objective to train individuals to be potent Marxist theorists.³²⁷ In line with the epistocratic structure, contributors to the group’s periodical, course instructors and speakers were co-opted according to their mastery of the MG’s theoretical work and epistemological approach. Elections therefore did not take place.³²⁸

The MG’s internal structure differed from those of other New Left factions. For example, the control-mania of *K-Gruppen*, described at length by Kühn, which even influenced when and where members of the KPD/AO spent their holidays and forced them to obtain approval from the standing commission of the party’s central committee regarding any change of career or residence, was criticised by former MG members.³²⁹ Moreover, to the MG, the popular idea among Maoists of expressing their group cohesion through a specific dress code or folkloristic events, such as the joint singing of revolutionary songs, was, as out by one former MG member, as

³²³ Interview with E.A. and U.F., 18 and 19 January 2013, respectively.

³²⁴ See Michael Stamm, ‘AK-Kritik’, 1975.

³²⁵ See Fülberth, ‘Ein Fall von Panik’, 1991.

³²⁶ See also the lengthy discussions on this in *Luckyjumper zur MG(-Auflösung)* <<http://neoprene.blogspot.de/2009/11/18/luckyjumper-zur-mg-aufloesung/>> [7 July 2012].

³²⁷ For the idea of a ‘dictatorial submission’, see Herbert Schnädelbach and Dirk Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe (MG)*, (1985) <http://antikapitalismus.spaces.live.com/?_c11_BlogPart_BlogPart=blogview&_c=BlogPart&partqs=cat%3DMarxistische%2520Gruppe> [05 June 2009].

³²⁸ Interview with E.A., 18 January 2013.

³²⁹ Interview with M.T., 20 January 2013.

inconceivable because the cohesion of our organisation was solely based on theoretical considerations. [...] There was no connection between our efforts and a specific habitus we cultivated to express our ideological convictions. How is it even possible to turn such convictions into a dress code?’³³⁰

Although its members were not concerned about their habitus, the MG was all the more known for its linguistic style, described by Peter Hacks, prominent figure of East German socialist classicism, as a form of ‘terrorist Hegelianism’.³³¹ This linguistic adaptation was most evident in the group’s publications; thus, Hacks referred to the MG’s mostly unknown group of authors, the ‘ZK’, as the ‘*Zentralkomputer*’ (central computer), instead of ‘*Zentralkomitee*’ (central committee). Furthermore, even though the acquisition of the MG’s linguistic style was not a formal aspect of the regular training courses and teach-ins, ordinary members usually adapted the way in which the ‘ZK’ expressed itself.³³²

The MG’s ‘scientific’ approach to Marxism, based on Hegelian ideas and methods, also allowed the development of an undogmatic openness to ideas outside the box of revolutionary classics, such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. Thus, the group stood in stark contrast to the *K-Gruppen*’s exegesis of Marxist standard references and many traditional Marxist ideas, such as the concept of historical materialism; a circumstance that however led Langguth and Koenen respectively to describe the MG’s theoretical work as ‘confusing’ and a ‘theoretical stew’.³³³

The impression that the MG “severely criticised everything that was argued for at anytime by anyone,”³³⁴ however, did not stop the group from having an exceptionally loyal membership base. Whereas the Marxist-Leninist cadre organisations suffered from a high level of fluctuation, primarily resulting from the disillusionment and subsequent turning away of many ‘apparatchiks’ from the *K-Gruppen*’s specific form of revolutionary work, the MG did not experience a significant fluctuation of its members and supporters.³³⁵ In the late 1980s, the *Verfassungsschutz* even noted that resignations ‘do not occur’.³³⁶

³³⁰ Interview with P.E., 21 December 2012.

³³¹ See Peter Hacks und die MG: ‘Um die Wirklichkeit zu begreifen, sind sie manchmal zu klug.’ <<http://ofenschlot.blogspot.de/2009/06/30/peter-hacks-und-die-mg-um-die-wirklichkeit-zu-begreifen-sind-sie-manchmal-zu-klug/>> [10 December 2011].

³³² Interview with W.D., 17 January 2013.

³³³ See Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 128 and Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 312.

³³⁴ Schnädelbach, cit. in Marxistische Gruppe, ‘Diesmal von der SZENE: MG entlarvt!’, in *AfaS (Duisburg)*, no archive file number available.

³³⁵ See Autorenkollektiv, *Wir war’n die stärkste der Partei...*, 1977. Kurz refers to the *K-Gruppen*’s activism as a sort of ‘manic-depressive cycle’, varying between the two poles of enthusiastic ‘praxis fetishism’ and depressive phases of reflecting their insufficient theoretical background. See Kurz, *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen sozialistischen Ziel*, 1988.

³³⁶ See *Oberverwaltungsgericht Nordrhein Westfalen*, 15 April 2005, file number 21 A 4183/03 <<http://openjur.de/u/105854.html>> [16 November 2010].

Regarding the MG's leading authors, Koenen remarks polemically that other than it, "only the Red Kmhler had such a homogenous leadership in the history of communism in the 20th century."³³⁷ Indeed, the editors of the current periodical *GegenStandpunkt – Political Quarterly* (GSPQ), insofar they are still alive, are identical to those who published the MSZ between 1971 and 1991. Herbert L. Fertl, for example, was already a press aide for the MSZ during the time of the Red Cells movement prior to its disintegration. He has been authoring essays and books for the Red Cells in Munich, the RZ/AK, MG and *Gegenstandpunkt* since 1970. Moreover, other leading cadres, such as Karl Held, Theo Ebel, Theo Wentzke and Peter Decker, the current editor-in-chief of the *Gegenstandpunkt*'s periodical, were politically socialised in Munich and Erlangen-Nuremberg between 1967 and 1974 and have collectively organised their theoretical work since that time.³³⁸

This group of authors enabled the MG to enjoy a kick-start in 1979 because the theoretical foundations had already been laid by the working conference that began in 1970; a process greatly influenced by these five commentators.³³⁹ Its exceptionally homogenous intellectual leadership was a key factor in the formulation of a distinct Marxist body of thought in the years after 1979. The MG's theoretical work was renowned among New Left factions for its high level of intellectual underpinning. Not only those activists involved with the Red Cells movement in Erlangen-Nuremberg during the early 1970s, such as the Germanist Hans H. Hiebel, but also political opponents, such as the DKP-affiliated political scientist Georg Fülbert have stressed the intellectual level of the group's analyses.³⁴⁰ The latter even claimed that the MG's chief theoreticians, namely, Karl Held, Herbert L. Fertl and Theo Ebel, were the New Left's "most talented group of Marxists"³⁴¹, who made "significant contributions to the understanding of the capitalist society"³⁴², as argued by another opponent.

As outlined in Chapter Two, the 'crisis of Marxism' in West Germany occurred as a result of both the practical failure to overthrow capitalism and the New Left's inability to explain issues, such as the working class' continued support of capitalism, the impact of the new social movements and, on a more general level, the aforementioned political and economic developments of the 1970s.³⁴³ The MG sought to fill this theoretical vacuum by virtue of major works published between 1979 and 1983, challenging various assumptions of

³³⁷ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 310.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Interview with W.D., 17 January 2013.

³⁴⁰ See Hans H. Hiebel in an email to the author on 23 October 2011; Georg Fülberth, 'Ein Fall von Panik', pp. 24-25.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁴² Initiative Arbeiterzeitung- und zentren, *Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe*, p. 7.

³⁴³ See Dozekal, *Von der 'Rekonstruktion' der Marxschen Theorie zur 'Krise des Marxismus'*, 1985.

which large parts of the New Left had referred to while re-appropriating Marx's work in the wake of '68'. These works dealt with the democratic state, psychology of the private individual, modern manifestations of imperialism, trades unions and the status quo of the West German New Left at the turn of the decade. We will return to the first two of these and the question of their relevance in understanding the MG's development in Chapters Four and Five.

In an advertisement, the group praised its work in typically sophomoric jargon:

Marx began the critique of bourgeois society with the theory of capital. Since then, the program of work he outlined has been more or less filled out... with theoretical nonsense about the alleged difficulties and, yes!, even impossibilities of theorizing. MHB-USA (i.e. U.S. branch of the MG's publishing house) is dedicated to putting an end to these philosophically-inspired excuses for failure, by distributing works that complete the Marxist program.³⁴⁴

During the 'crisis of Marxism', much of the New Left concluded that Marxism itself was deficient and therefore distanced itself from it; whereas others remained positive about the possibility of thoroughly conceptualising capitalism and democracy through a Marxist line of reasoning. Some of these, who would later join the MG, noted in 1979 that most members of *K-Gruppen*

[r]ather deal with the self-made rules of their organisation than worry about their knowledge of the bourgeois society. This indicates that they believe to find cohesion less in insights but in maintaining discipline. [...] The likewise persistently repeated demand for basic training courses in Marxist theory and its permanent non-compliance demonstrates that theoretical work leaves much to be desired for.³⁴⁵

The MG was able to satisfy this demand for intensive theoretical work and, thus, attractive to defectors of *K-Gruppen*, who affirmed the idea that 'the only way to establish an actual cohesion is to be found in the systematic debate and analysis'³⁴⁶, instead of following an entryist approach. Indeed, the MG offered various opportunities for activists interested in studying the basics of Marxist and Hegelian theory and the inherent contradictions of contemporary academic theories, including its critical alternatives, and theorising daily affairs. Steady growth in membership figures after its establishment can be ascribed to the MG's intention to 'complete' the work which Marx began and intensively train supporters in socio-critical theory. Membership levels rose from 700 members and approximately 4,500

³⁴⁴ MHB-USA advertisement from 1997, found at <http://rhr.dukejournals.org/cgi/issue_pdf/advertising_pdf/1997/68.pdf> [11 February 2011].

³⁴⁵ 'Erklärung der 13 aus dem KSG ausgetretenen Genossen in Würzburg', in *MAO-Projekt*, 'Materialien Würzburg' <http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/BAY/UFR/Wuerzburg_KSG.shtml> [22 April 2011].

³⁴⁶ 'Beiträge zur Diskussion, Nr. 1', in *ibid*.

actively involved sympathisers in 1980 to 10,000 ‘intimately involved’ activists, plus several thousand participating in training courses and teach-ins by 1990/1.³⁴⁷

In the tradition of the Red Cells’ socialist study programme, the MG continued its approach to qualify its members and sympathisers as Marxist thinkers: disengaging itself from critical discourse by rejecting ‘affirmative moments’ in its attempt to penetrate theoretically bourgeois society.³⁴⁸ During the 1980s, members of the MG typically attended three courses and discussion circles per week.³⁴⁹ As the coherence of the MG was solely based on its members’ consent regarding the group’s basic theoretical work, on which, according to interviewees, controversial debates indeed occurred, the group served the interest of many activists, disillusioned by the radical left and its dogmatic political practise in seeking answers to theoretical issues with which Marxists had grappled throughout the 1970s. However, the majority of activists who joined the MG during the 1980s had no background in other New Left organisations. Of the six interviewees, for example, only two participated in the MG’s predecessor organisations, whereas four became members over the course of the 1980s. Considering the expansion of the organisation during that decade, this late joining of most activists was representative for the MG, which was able to attract the majority of its supporters between 1980 and 1990.³⁵⁰

The political background of these interviewees was diverse. Two were politicised during the late 1970s in a church-affiliated organisation, one in the feminist *Antifa* and another in the youth organisation of West Germany’s conservative party. One person was introduced to the MG by their parents. Interviewees confirmed the idea that there was no typical path leading to the involvement with the MG; statements, which accord with other studies conducted on the West German New Left.³⁵¹

The MG’s theory-first approach also had an impact on its membership composition. Unlike the KPD/ML, which had personal ties with the banned KPD and whose leaders had a blue collar background, but in accordance with the New Left in general, the vast majority of MG activists were academics.³⁵² All six interviewees had an academic background and

³⁴⁷ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, p. 11. See also Schnädelbach and Käsler, ‘Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe’, 1985.

³⁴⁸ See MSZ, 7 (2 November 1973), p. 2.

³⁴⁹ Interview with E.A. on 18 January 2012.

³⁵⁰ See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991.

³⁵¹ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, 2005.

³⁵² Willi Dickhut, one of the leaders of the original KPD/ML, cultivated an extreme form of anti-intellectualism and during the early years of the organisation, demanded a freeze on admissions of students and young intellectuals. He later became the leader of the KPD/ML (Revolutionärer Weg), a breakaway faction which merged into the KABD in 1972 and the *Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands* (MLPD, Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany) in 1982 and has existed until the present day. See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, pp. 25-38.

worked or had retired from positions in the education sector. One activist holds a professorship; another is a retired professor of social work; whereas the other four work as teachers at vocational and grammar schools, with backgrounds in languages, social sciences and the humanities.

Interviewees emphasised that over the long run, trickle-down effects had resulted in the recruitment of new sympathisers studying these academic disciplines. For example, at the University of Bremen, three professors involved in the training of teachers were able to utilise their positions for the dissemination of the MG's theory. This, however, occurred under the guise of the 'critique of bourgeois science' because public support for the group's body of thought would have resulted in disciplinary proceedings. Fellow students, who distributed leaflets, agitated in lectures and seminars and invited interested students to participate in sympathiser meetings, therefore carried out the actual recruitment. In the interviewees' estimation, the share of academics in the MG was well above the 90% mark.³⁵³

The interviewees' statements are validated by their political opponents, who even today, polemically refer to teach-ins of the *Gegenstandspunkt* publishing house in Bremen as local meetings of the German education and science workers' union.³⁵⁴ Moreover, a disproportionately high number of activists had a middle-class background, relatively high social status and educational attainments; something, however, applicable to the entire New Left.³⁵⁵

However, the MG was able to attract the interest of intellectuals in its theoretical work; the group struggled to obtain support among the 'classical' proletariat. With regard to the extremely high proportion of academics, one interviewee asked rhetorically, 'how could it be otherwise?' and referred to the central importance of the 'critique of bourgeois science' for the MG. The interviewee further stressed that this critique did not aim to apply existing academic standards and theories to issues 'concerning' the proletariat and that the group did not intend to propagate an alternative 'Marxist-Leninist worldview' on the basis of a revolutionary 'class point of view'. Instead, "we intended to critically question the issues debated in academia and, thus, to reveal the conformism [...] and total lack of practical consequences of academic life in capitalism."³⁵⁶

As membership was not to be achieved by confessing to a political programme but instead through extensive studies and was only of an 'ideal' nature, the interviewee amplified

³⁵³ Interview with K.M., 24 January 2012.

³⁵⁴ See *Menschenfeinde laden ein* <<http://www.verbrochenes.net/2009/01/27/menschenfeinde-laden-ein/>> [25 May 2010].

³⁵⁵ See also Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 18.

³⁵⁶ Interview with E.A., 18 January 2013. This comment refers to the humanities and social sciences.

that “a certain educational background and disposable time, which people used to enjoy in the higher education sector [...], are required or, more precisely, made it more likely to become interested in Marxism in general and the MG’s theoretical work in particular.”³⁵⁷ In addition to the realities of professional and private life, acquiring the requisite knowledge of areas ranging from a critique of political economy to the inherent deficits within moral philosophy, literature theory and methodologies of social sciences and humanities, constituted a hugely demanding task. Hence, the interviewee indirectly supports a central criticism against the MG and its predecessors: namely, its assumption that the only path of becoming a socialist was that of the bourgeois intellectual, who works himself through to a full understanding of the Marxist movement and its systematic critique of capitalism, bourgeois life and concomitant ideologies. The reproach of being elitist had its origin in exactly this circumstance.³⁵⁸ Hence, the MG’s aspiration to find cohesion in theoretical debate and analysis necessitated its own problems.

3.2.2. The Marxistische Gruppe’s agitation strategy and change of emphasis

Intense efforts were made by the MG during the first years of its existence to recruit new members and expand its influence on West Germany’s radical left. Between 1979 and 1983, the group produced the majority of its relevant theoretical works. Its book series, ‘dissenting views’, for example, dealt with issues such as developments in Poland, the Falklands and Israel-Lebanon Wars. Although these publications were largely sold to supporters of the MG, the group was nonetheless able to find an audience beyond its own ranks and recruit new sympathisers because of its intensive training and presentation of its theory at public teach-ins. Between 1980 and 1983 alone, the MG more than tripled its membership base from 700 to 2,500.³⁵⁹

In the early 1980s, the MG’s theory-centred approach was attractive to many young intellectuals leaning to the political left. Among them was Rainald Goetz, author and proponent of capitalist realism, who insinuated his view on the MG and especially Karl Held through two novels.³⁶⁰ In 1983 and 1986, he commented self-ironically on the idea of joining the MG and its leading “Marxist thought-warrior”, Dr Karl Held, whose “wonderful,

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Gruppe Rheinische Zeitung, ‘Akademischer Kommunismus. Die Politik des AK München’, in *Rheinische Zeitung*, 4/5 (1976), p. 30.

³⁵⁹ See Bundesministerium des Innern, ed, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1984* (Bonn, 1985).

³⁶⁰ See Rainald Goetz, *Irre* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1983); Rainald Goetz, *Hirn* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

magnificent brain” could be enjoyed when he, “the ‘pontiff’, presided over his entourage at teach-ins as the hero (‘Held’ is German for hero), as the brain, as a true philosopher.”³⁶¹ During the 1980s, the MG was noticed beyond the radical left’s niche.³⁶² At this time, Held and Ebel even published on the political economy of world peace in the prestigious Suhrkamp publishing house.³⁶³

In addition to its popular, extensive public lecture programme, the MG gave around 300 teach-ins at more than 30 locations across Germany and Austria, which drew audiences of up to 1,500. On occasion, three events were held simultaneously in Munich alone; the group printed up to ten million pamphlets and organised sympathiser meetings at more than 20 universities each year.³⁶⁴ Moreover, the MG organised book tables at up to forty universities and a dozen book shops around the country; advertised its publications in left-wing newspapers; produced pamphlets for specific companies, industries, universities, departments and pupils in one of its six print shops and sometimes distributed leaflets to regular households.³⁶⁵

In 1980, for example, the group distributed an inflammatory pamphlet owing to the state visit of Pope John Paul II to West Germany.³⁶⁶ Tens of thousands of ‘arguments against the Pope’ pamphlets were distributed to regular households, resulting in hostility and fierce criticism. In its polemic, the MG attacked the basic antinomies of the Christian belief system. Several reactions to the group’s agitation project were published, ranging from threats to stop its circulation, to those of violence.³⁶⁷

Despite this, leaflets were an important cornerstone of the MG’s strategic direction: they provided a relatively low-priced means with which to reach a wide audience.³⁶⁸ Although its ambition to attract a sufficient number of new members to ignite a revolutionary movement failed to materialise, the MG established itself as the ‘notorious evil in charge’,

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 96.

³⁶² For example, Ernst Jünger, author of *Storm of Steel* and an arch-conservative proponent of Germanity and allegiance to the state, positively referred to the MG’s theory of suicide. Jünger, however, completely missed the group’s critical message and its intention to criticise suicide from a materialist perspective and analyse the rationale behind an individual committing it. See Michael Klein, ‘Jünger, Marx und der Selbstmord’, in *Ossietzky*, 15/16 (2011) <<http://www.ossietzky.net/15-16-2011&textfile=1540>> [18 June 2012].

³⁶³ See Karl Held and Theo Ebel, *Krieg und Frieden: Politische Ökonomie des Weltfriedens* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).

³⁶⁴ See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991; *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv*, Flugblattsammlung 1019.

³⁶⁵ See *Tageszeitung*, 20 August 1982, p. 9 in *APO-Archiv*, book shelf 826. See also *APO-Archiv* book shelves 821 - 822, 825, 827, 829 – 831; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991.

³⁶⁶ Marxistische Gruppe, ‘Argumente zum Papst’, in *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München*, Flugblattsammlung 1019.

³⁶⁷ See *MSZ*, 6 (1980), p. 2 and p. 4.

³⁶⁸ Interview with W.D., 17 January 2013.

destructively leading the discourse of the political left.³⁶⁹ However, if we consider that approximately ten million of its pamphlets were distributed each year, the political impact and recruitment of new supporters beyond the radical left scene was incommensurate with the level of effort invested.³⁷⁰

Besides its agitation at universities, teach-ins and handing out leaflets to the general public, the group organised large rallies in Bonn, West Germany's capital, to address its abrasive criticism to larger audiences. At the first of these rallies, the MG mobilised political resistance against Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Union. On 22 November 1981, approximately 7,000 demonstrators gathered to protest 'Against FRG-Imperialism and NATO-World Dominance'. At the closing rally, Herbert L. Fertl held a speech, in which he warned the Soviet leader that the Eastern bloc would end up the mere plaything of hostile interests and that the NATO alliance would not stop the arms race and the economic 'infiltration' of the communist world until the Soviet-led bloc fell.³⁷¹

Such were the all-embracing interests inherent in the principle of capital accumulation, the MG argued that the 'free world' would not rest until all antagonistic interests hindering the free movement of capital had been overcome. The idea of 'peaceful co-existence' would be a systemic impossibility of capitalism and, thus, predicted that the 'free world' would not slow down and insist on reform programmes for socialist states until either access to the interests of capital was unconditionally granted or the states themselves had ceased to exist.³⁷²

In June 1982, the MG demonstrated in parallel with a mass rally of the peace movement, under the slogan 'Against NATO-Imperialism and the German-American War Alliance'. This time, around 20,000 demonstrators gathered in Bonn. Despite different stances on the NATO alliance, modern manifestations of imperialism and the role of the West German armed forces, the MG was supported for the first time by the *Bund Westdeutscher Kommunisten* (BWK, League of West German Communists), a 400 member left-wing spin-off of the disintegrating KBW. Considering that in 1977, when faced with potential party ban proceedings, all *K-Gruppen* had only been able to mobilise a similar number of activists, the MG's impact on the radical left was substantial. Almost a year later, on 17 June 1983, the MG called for a third large demonstration in Bonn. Again, the group co-operated with the BWK, which disbanded two years later due to ideological issues and protested against 'FRG-

³⁶⁹ *Die Zeit*, 'Die letzten großen K-Gruppen der siebziger Jahre stellen ihren Betrieb ein', 25 (14 June 1991) <<http://www.zeit.de/1991/25/Revolution-kaputt>> [01 November 2009].

³⁷⁰ For the total circulation see Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, p. 37.

³⁷¹ See also MSZ 6 (1981).

³⁷² See also Marxistische Gruppe, *Imperialismus I* (Munich: Resultate, 1979); Marxistische Gruppe, *Imperialismus 3* (Munich: Resultate, 1983).

Imperialism and the Violent German Reunification through NATO-War'. Around 15,000 demonstrators answered the call.³⁷³

In addition, the MG held numerous other smaller demonstrations. On 14 July 1982, for example, it joined forces with the BWK and Trotskyist *Gruppe Internationaler Marxisten* (GIM, Group of International Marxists) in Munich, to protest against Israel's war against Lebanon. Under the motto, 'Against the Genocide in Lebanon under NATO Protection', the factions criticised what they held to be the ideological whitewashing of Israel's military campaign and its underlying political and military-strategic interests. This co-operation between the MG and the GIM, the German section of the Fourth International, was a rare exception but provides evidence of the MG's pragmatism and its interest in finding support for specific arguments beyond otherwise existing ideological rifts.³⁷⁴

However, it should be remembered that during this time, the peace movement as a whole was also able to mobilise millions of protesters against the NATO Double-Track Decision and deployment of atomic warheads by the US military in West Germany.³⁷⁵ The remarkably high mobilisation potential of the MG between 1981 and 1983 must be understood against the background of these peace protests. In fact, the MG's mass rallies took place against competing and larger rallies by less radical groups over the same issue organised on the same days in West Germany's capital. Hence, demonstrators made a radical choice by attending the MG's rallies and did not participate in the absence of ideologically more suitable alternatives. Considering the still deep-seated animosities among organisations of the radical left in those years, it is also improbable to assume that a substantial number of other groups' supporters, except for those of the BWK, joined the MG and its sympathisers on these occasions. The numbers of participants therefore adequately reflect the mobilisation potential of the MG in the early 1980s.

Yet, that said, even at these demonstrations, 'the small and disciplined army of 'professional proletarians', chanted slogans with solid arguments'³⁷⁶ and thus, unlike the *K-Gruppen*, renounced the folkloristic as well as violent accompaniment of its political viewpoint.

³⁷³ See MSZ, 4 (August 1983), p. 14.

³⁷⁴ Marxistische Gruppe, 'Aufruf zur Demonstration: Gegen den Völkermord im Libanon unter NATO-Schutz', in *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München*, Flugblattsammlung 1019.

³⁷⁵ On 12 December 1979, NATO imposed upon the Warsaw Pact a mutual limitation of medium-range ballistic missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, as well as the threat that in case of disagreement, it would deploy more middle range nuclear weapons in Western Europe. This decision led to another power bloc confrontation in the early 1980s, culminating in the arms race initiated by President Reagan in 1983. See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

³⁷⁶ *Le Figaro* cit. in MSZ, 6 (1981), p. 9.

After 1983, confronted with the end of the peace movement, the MG changed its strategic direction and discontinued its organisation of rallies. This decision can be explained by two major considerations. First, the group concluded that demonstrations were an inappropriate means for agitating people because societal circumstances changed in such a way that it became increasingly difficult for Marxists to find an audience for their criticism, even among those leaning to the political left. With the demise of the New Left in the early 1980s, the authority attached to Marxism as an adequate analytical tool with which to make sense of the social order was lost, even among the majority of left-leaning activists. While the influence of academic Marxism had already peaked in the early to mid-1970s, politically independent activists involved with new social movements and the Green Party were hostile towards Marxist lines of reasoning and activism, despite capitalising on professional organisational structures, as well as the political experience of former *K-Gruppen* activists.³⁷⁷ Second, there was an increasing fear of risking the civil existence of its members, considering their exposure to police surveillance and that many supporters worked or pursued careers in the public sector. Surveillance activities of the *Verfassungsschutz* increased at the same time.³⁷⁸ The MG therefore concluded that the political results of organising rallies were not worth the effort; no demonstrations were staged after 1983, the year when West Germany's decision to deploy more middle range nuclear weapons passed into law.³⁷⁹

By way of an alternative, the MG instead intensified efforts to disseminate its ideas among trades unions. In addition to two monographs on the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) published in 1979 and 1982, agitation material was distributed to workers. Often produced for particular companies and industries, most articles published in regional, company and industry-specific editions were identical.³⁸⁰ The widespread idea of the MG as an organisation disregarding the importance of the working class can therefore be seen here to have been rather one-sided. Rival factions, accusing the group of being 'quitters' and 'elitist' for not becoming involved with the 'daily struggle', simply ignored that the group pursued a goal of recruiting new members among the working class.³⁸¹

However, unlike the Maoist *K-Gruppen*, the MG it did not subscribe to a 'proletarian point of view' and curry favour with the working class but instead agitated workers through

³⁷⁷ For the impact of the *K-Gruppen* on the Green Party in the early 1980s, see Wilke, *Die grüne Wahlbewegung und die Alternativszene*, 2012.

³⁷⁸ Interview with W.D., 17 January 2013.

³⁷⁹ Interview with M.P., 20 January 2013.

³⁸⁰ See *APO-Archiv*, bookshelf 825.

³⁸¹ See Marxistische Arbeiter-Zeitung, *Betriebszeitungen der MG Bremen*, 1977. For a polemic against the MG's approach see, for example, Gäbler, ed, *Das Prinzip Ohnmacht*, 1983; Freie Arbeiter-Union/Rätekommunisten, 'Einige Anmerkungen zur Marxistischen Gruppe', in *Alles wird gut*, 1 (1984), pp. 27-32.

theoretical arguments, rejecting all manifestations of materialism within capitalism as ‘phony’. Revolutionary phrases, Maoist sloganeering was actually one of its striking characteristics, were frowned upon as creating political attitudes, rather than allowing the ‘revolutionary subject’ to see reason in their material life conditions. Accordingly, double-sided A2 sheets were distributed and most articles authored with less academic terminology.

Between 1984 and 1986, circulation of the MAZ, the *Marxistische Arbeiterzeitung* (Marxist Workers Paper), peaked. Although exact numbers are not available, it is plausible to assume, considering the information provided by the *Verfassungsschutz*, that a few thousand papers were distributed up to a dozen times, in some periods even bi-weekly, per year for free. In and around Munich alone, at least 18 different papers were distributed at large companies, such as Krauss-Maffei (defence contractor), Linde (gas and engineering), MAN (commercial vehicles), AEG (electronics group) and to insurance and department store industries.³⁸² In contrast to *K-Gruppen*, however, the MG did not follow a strategy of commencing operations within companies and establishing ‘cells’ with which to support workers in their fight for wage increases, improvement of employment standards and occupational health.

In response to the MG’s agitation and its attempt to find support in trade unions, the regional head office of the DGB in Hesse initiated a resolution, declaring that membership of the MG was not compatible with that of any union affiliated to it. This was confirmed in July 1985 by the federal executive board that declared the MG to be an ‘adversarial organisation’ and referred to the ban of *K-Gruppen* activities in 1974. As a consequence, disciplinary proceedings were initiated against members supporting viewpoints of the MG or immediately expelled from the union.³⁸³

Efforts to promote fundamental criticism within the trade union sector were abated by the group in the aftermath of the DGB’s resolution. However, until its dissolution in 1991, the MG continued to distribute its papers, especially in the context of major political events, such as mass protests in Rheinhausen against the closure of steel mills in 1988. Between summer 1987 and the following spring, a total of 14 different pamphlets critically reflecting on the state of the protests were distributed in Rheinhausen, the Ruhr valley and other important steel production facilities across West Germany.³⁸⁴

Despite its agitation efforts in the private sector and trades unions, the MG became particularly notorious for its behaviour at universities.³⁸⁵ Although never conceived as a

³⁸² See *APO-Archiv*, bookshelf 831.

³⁸³ MSZ, 10 (1985), p. 2 and pp. 28-30.

³⁸⁴ See *Marxistische Arbeiter-Zeitung, Klöckner (special issue)* (Munich: self-published, 1988).

³⁸⁵ See *Die Zeit*, ‘Die letzten großen K-Gruppen’, 1991.

student organisation, in contrast to *K-Gruppen* and the DKP, the MG was a coherent political entity and thus had no affiliated student or affiliated ‘mass organisations’; the ‘organisation of intellectuals’ utilised universities in West Germany and Austria to promote its ‘critique of bourgeois science’ and thus recruit new sympathisers. In order to achieve this, the MG’s local branches distributed *Hochschulzeitungen* (university papers) and organised teach-ins. The papers were usually handed out bi-weekly during semesters and had a total circulation of up to 10,000 at any given university where the MG was active. Between 1979 and 1991, around 150 issues were produced in at least two dozen universities.³⁸⁶

Moreover, lectures in the social sciences and humanities were also systematically broken up; a device inherited from the heyday of the student and Red Cells movement. Thanks to this, the MG became not only an inveterate antagonist to intellectuals of the academic and political mainstream, but also to many left-wing academics appointed as professors in the wake of the student movement.³⁸⁷ This feud gained its own momentum when students at the University of Hamburg ran small advertisements in newspapers to develop counter-strategies and gather information on the political work and organisational structure of the MG.³⁸⁸ In 1985, two professors of the same university, annoyed by the aggressive presence of MG activists in their seminars, took an active part in driving the students’ project forward: most students and lecturers at all levels felt infringed in their rights to give and follow lectures and seminars without being disturbed by the ideological criticism imposed upon them by the MG.³⁸⁹ From a strategic point of view, the breaking up worked as follows: a small group of at least three students attended introductory courses and confronted the lecturer with the alleged deficiencies of the particular subject being lectured. The main agitator stuck tenaciously to his immanent critique and was joined by at least one other MG supporter. Both put forward their critical objections to the lecturer’s speech, while the third person recorded the dispute for further analysis and to gather information on specific patterns of arguments regularly presented by ‘bourgeois’ academics and fellow students.³⁹⁰

It is, however, important to take account of the West German higher education system at that time. Until the Bologna Process was launched in 2001, it was common practice at German universities to study without significant time limits. Some graduates even re-enrolled at their alma mater to utilise the benefits implied in the status of being a student. The MG benefited from this: in Munich, for example, its chief agitator, Karl Held, was one of the

³⁸⁶ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991. See also *APO-Archiv*, book shelf 827.

³⁸⁷ See, for example, Rote Zellen/ Marxistische Gruppen, *Die linken Kritiker*, 1977.

³⁸⁸ See MSZ, 4 (1981), p. 68.

³⁸⁹ See Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985.

³⁹⁰ See *Die Zeit*, ‘Die letzten großen K-Gruppen der siebziger Jahre’, 1991.

student representatives to the academic senate in the early 1980s, despite holding a Ph.D. in German Studies and already being in his late 30s.³⁹¹ Thus, lecturers often found themselves challenged by young intellectuals substantially trained in Marxist and mainstream theories. This explains why the MG's theoretical work received credit among academics, some of whom had actually endured the experience of public disputes with MG members.³⁹²

The group gradually reconsidered its approach in the mid-1980s because activists were exposed to an increasing level of persecution in academia and by state authorities. After this point, the number of broken up lectures fell. An increasing number of activists experienced problems with state authorities. For example, there were several cases in which candidates for teaching positions were rejected even though they had only been in loose contact with the MG. Some of these individuals only attended sympathiser meetings and teach-ins once or twice.³⁹³ Once again, the MG was forced to assess whether or not the means were worth the expense; in other words, the group decided to reduce its aggressive political agitation at higher education seminars in order to reduce the risk of its supporters being exposed as such.

3.3. The demise of West Germany's largest New Left organisation: the *Marxistische Gruppe* from the mid-1980s until its dissolution in 1991

In 1985, students, lecturers and professors of the University of Hamburg joined forces to gather information on what the Bavarian interior ministry rated as "Germany's most powerful organisation of the New Left, an organisation that has not participated in the general decline of Marxism-Leninism."³⁹⁴ This seemingly trivial incident proved rather important because the booklet published by the *Verfassungsschutz* in 1991 made numerous explicit and implicit references to the work of Käsler and Schnädelbach, the two professors from Hamburg, published six years earlier. Although actual links between those gathering information via advertisements in leftist magazines as well as circular letters among the academic personnel at the University of Hamburg and the *Verfassungsschutz* are unverifiable; the content of both publications suggests that the assumption that Käsler and Schnädelbach's work was a 'blueprint' for the *Verfassungsschutz* was not unsubstantiated. In fact, several lines of thought

³⁹¹ See Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München, *Flugblattsammlung 1019*.

³⁹² See, for example, Marxistische Gruppe, 'Einladung zum Streitgespräch zwischen H. Kramer und der MG', in *AfaS*, no archive file number available (Munich: self-published, 1986); 'Einladung zum Streitgespräch zwischen E. Krippendorf und Karl Held in Tübingen', in *AfaS*, no archive file number available (Munich: self-published, 1986); 'Einladung zum Streitgespräch zwischen P. Pilz und der MG in Wien', in *AfaS*, no archive file number available (Munich: self-published, 1986).

³⁹³ See MSZ, 4 (1991).

³⁹⁴ Günter Beckstein in Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

regarding the MG's 'pseudo-Marxist' approach, its 'methods of inclusion' or alleged 'system of gratifications' appear in both publications.

Moreover, the *Verfassungsschutz* explicitly refers to the work of 'two professors from Hamburg', which declared the MG to have a 'nihilist-cynical attitude that is from the viewpoint of a history of ideas well-known from pre-fascism'.³⁹⁵ Both publications mark the start and end point of a public denunciation campaign that eventually led to the dissolution of the MG. The campaign was of denunciatory character in the sense that the group's theoretical work was, if anything, of subordinate importance to its critics. It is important to stress that this subordinate interest in theory is not only fundamental to anti-Communist denunciation, but also reflects the purpose of intelligence services not to discount the theoretical basis of political organisations but to identify a discrepancy between these theories and constitutional principles, in order to adopt appropriate measures to protect the latter, i.e. concept of 'militant democracy'.³⁹⁶

Thus was the intra-organisational structure and evaluation of the MG's potential and actual threat to the West German Constitution in general and academic life in particular central to the reconnaissance activities of the *Verfassungsschutz* and academics in Hamburg.³⁹⁷ Above all, the MG's clandestine organisation principles, a practical reflex to the reprisals of West Germany's state authorities and its intelligence apparatus, were the subject of interest. For this purpose, the *Verfassungsschutz* aimed at recruiting confidential informants upon the members and sympathisers of the MG.³⁹⁸

Another institution which developed an interest in the group was the *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, the Bavarian branch of Germany's public broadcaster, which aired two investigative reports on the 'political phenomenon' of the MG. On 22 June 1988, and again in December 1989, the public broadcaster occupied itself with the group's political activities. In response to the first report, the MG organised teach-ins to defend its political agitation against the strategy of 'systematic and public denunciation'.³⁹⁹ The second report focused on the MG's financing and uncovering of members working for a regional vocational training facility. As a result, four members lost their position without ever utilising their occupational

³⁹⁵ See Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985.

³⁹⁶ See Augustin Simard, 'The Failure of Weimar and the Origins of the 'Militant Democracy' in West Germany', in *Jus Politicum*, 1 (December 2008) <<http://www.juspoliticum.com/The-Failure-of-Weimar-and-the.html>> [15 September 2012].

³⁹⁷ See Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985.

³⁹⁸ See MSZ, 2 (1990), pp. 2 and 4; interview with W.D. and P.E., 17 and 21 January 2013, respectively.

³⁹⁹ Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

responsibilities for their political work, a fact that was also confirmed by the President of the regional office of the *Verfassungsschutz* in Hamburg.⁴⁰⁰

Considering the MG's emphasis on the separation of professional and political work, the group was convinced that any sacrifices "in the current political situation would have no positive effects on the Marxist project [...] but constitute a meaningless political signal."⁴⁰¹ The dismissed supporters acted consistent to the MG's theoretical body of thought. This attitude, distinctive among the New Left and indicative of the MG's realistic assessment of the prospects for a revolutionary overthrow of West German society in the 1970s and 1980s, stood in opposition to the Maoist belief that it would be a good thing to be attacked by one's political opponent; a belief that led, among other things, to the 1977 dismissal of dozens of teachers affiliated to the KBW that aimed to 'mobilise the masses' in their struggle against the grading system in Lower Saxony's schools.⁴⁰²

For Georg Fülberth, Marxist intellectual affiliated to the DKP, the decision to dissolve the MG in 1991 was only the consequence of prolonged strategic discussions that surfaced in the late 1980s and occupied the organisation's leading circles and regular members.⁴⁰³ This is indirectly supported by both the group's own statement from a year before its dissolution and former members who reported recurring debates on the adverse effects of surveillance activities on the MG since the mid-1980s.⁴⁰⁴ In particular, the banning of supporters from positions in the civil service caused discussions on the long-term strategy of the MG and the appropriateness of its form of organisation. As the criteria for being categorised as an enemy of the constitution were thin, attending a discussion meeting once or providing a car for the distribution of leaflets could be all that was required, the room for political manoeuvre became narrow.⁴⁰⁵ Already, the 'reasonable suspicion' that an individual would support the MG led to the rejection of applications for the civil service.⁴⁰⁶

In line with this, the MG declared in the final issue of its periodical in 1991 that:

We do not resign because the lacking demand for communist critique would have raised any doubts about our way of thinking. Moreover, we do not resign, because the world declared communism to be dead. We dissolve, because the liberal democratic

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ See MSZ, 4 (1991).

⁴⁰² See *Der Spiegel*, 'Gegen Notenterror', 2 (9 January 1978), pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰³ See Georg Fülberth, 'Ein Fall von Panik', pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with K. M., 24 January 2013.

⁴⁰⁵ See MSZ, 4 (1991), p. 16 and 18.

⁴⁰⁶ See *Oberverwaltungsgericht Nordrhein Westfalen*, 15 April 2005, file number 21 A 4183/03 <<http://openjur.de/u/105854.html>> [16 November 2010]. See also Bundesverwaltungsgericht, 'Urteil vom 27.9.2006 – 3 C 34. 05; OVG Münster' <<http://lexetius.com/2006,3747?version=drucken>> [27 September 2009].

rule of law does not offer us any other possibilities with his persecutory delusion. And providing the state power intelligence service with martyrs is too ridiculous to us.⁴⁰⁷

Thus, the MG's dissolution in 1991 was the consequence of its political realism against the background of the broader historical context, i.e. collapse of the Eastern bloc and the subsequent hegemony of democratic capitalism. In light of the MG's ambition to protect its rank and file from being publicly exposed as critics of the German constitution, it is no coincidence that it was the only New Left organisation, which dissolved in consequence of the *Verfassungsschutz*'s activities. While the *K-Gruppen* either disappeared because of factionalism resulting from intra-organisational debates regarding political re-orientation in the late 1970s (e.g. KBW and KB), early to mid-1980s (KPD/ML) or liquidated themselves in anticipation thereof (KPD/AO), the MG did no such thing. By maintaining its critique of capitalism and democracy, it avoided being caught up in the maelstrom of the New Left's ultimate decline. Quite the contrary, the MG was still in its prime and ideologically unaffected by the historical developments of 1989-91 and the decline of regimes whose 'really existing socialism', had been criticised by the MG's predecessor in detail already in the 1970s.⁴⁰⁸

3.4. The Marxistische Gruppe, the German Democratic Republic and intelligence activities in East and West

3.4.1. Introduction

From the beginning, the MG's development was accompanied by rumours aimed at defaming the group regarding its presumed links with the East (and also West) German regime. In particular, the organisation's extensive financial resources gave rise to all sorts of speculation;⁴⁰⁹ yet given the way in which it formulated very strong criticism of the GDR's political economy and moral superstructure, this would appear rather far-fetched.⁴¹⁰

In the context of the Cold War, the ideological confrontation between capitalist and socialist states had a substantial influence on leftist discourse in West Germany. In particular,

⁴⁰⁷ MSZ, 4 (1991), p. 20.

⁴⁰⁸ See MSZ, 1 (1974), p. 11. See also Karl Held and Audrey Hill, *From 1917 to Perestroika: The Victory of Morality over Socialism* (Munich: Resultate, 1989); Karl Held, ed, *Von der Reform des 'realen Sozialismus' zur Zerstörung der Sowjetunion* (Munich: Gegenstandspunkt, 1992). The latter is a collection of essays written over the course of the 1980s.

⁴⁰⁹ See MSZ, 4 (1981), p. 68.

⁴¹⁰ The MG's central arguments against the GDR's political and economic system, which representatives of the group presented at lecture tours of East Germany in 1989/90, cannot be discussed in detail here because of the thesis' scope. For the MG's critique of the GDR, see the following: Held and Hill, *The Victory of Morality over Socialism*, 1989; Peter Decker and Karl Held, *DDR kaputt Deutschland ganz* (Resultate: Munich, 1989); Peter Decker and Karl Held, *DDR kaputt Deutschland ganz 2* (Resultate: Munich, 1990).

the GDR was the object of continual, controversial discussions among activists and intellectuals of the New Left throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁴¹¹ Contrary to the idea raised by Markovits that one shared value of the radical left in 1968 and thereafter “was never to criticise the GDR and other communist regimes in Eastern Europe, even if one disapproved of certain concrete measures and policies,”⁴¹² it is important to emphasise that for West Germany’s New Left after 1968, the GDR was a central object of criticism. The Maoist *K-Gruppen*, for example, criticised the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany) from the viewpoint of their ideological fixation on the Chinese or Albanian regimes as ‘revisionist’, ‘non-revolutionary’ and ‘bourgeois’.⁴¹³ Such depictions were also complemented by the idea of the GDR representing a specific form of modern ‘social fascism’.⁴¹⁴ These Communist factions, however, retained an ambivalent attitude towards really existing socialism because, as a matter of principle, they were positive about the very existence of a socialist opposition to the capitalist societies of the Western bloc, despite the GDR’s failure to meet their expectations of a socialist society.⁴¹⁵

The following section examines the relationship between the GDR’s intelligence service and the MG, to shed light on the rumours mentioned above. To achieve this, the thesis will refer to hitherto unconsidered sources from the *Stasi* archives in Berlin. It will also briefly reflect upon the MG’s relationship with the West German *Verfassungsschutz*.

3.4.2. The *Marxistische Gruppe* as an enemy target of the *Stasi*

The critical interest of West German radical leftists in the politics of the GDR was paralleled by East German interest in evaluating the actual and potential political impact of the New Left on West German society. Thus several New Left organisations became *Feindobjekte* (enemy targets) of the GDR’s secret police force and intelligence service, the *Staatssicherheitsdienst* or ‘*Stasi*’ (MfS, Ministry for State Security). The MfS systematically collected information on the extra-parliamentary opposition, the APO and evaluated its political impact and ideological

⁴¹¹ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007.

⁴¹² Markovits, ‘The West German Left in a Changing Europe’, p. 178.

⁴¹³ See report of the GDR’s intelligence service on radical left opposition in West Germany. See BStU, MfS - HA IX, no. 19214. See also Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, 2007, pp. 257-315; *Der Spiegel*, ‘Rote Mühle’, 22 (26 May 1975), pp. 33-34.

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten, *Vereinigungserklärung* <<http://cpgerml.50g.com/dokumente/vereinigung1991.html>> [30 June 2012].

⁴¹⁵ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 223-232.

development.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, the MfS continued to investigate political organisations of the radical left until its dissolution on 18 November 1989.⁴¹⁷

Both financially and ideologically, the East German regime supported the West German DKP and its associated student organisation, the *Marxistische Studentenbund Spartakus* (MSB Spartakus, Marxist Student League Spartacus).⁴¹⁸ All other political organisations of the West German New Left were declared ‘enemies of the German people’. In order to anticipate any ‘potential concentration of enemy agencies filled with hatred’⁴¹⁹, these organisations were investigated either by the *Hauptabteilung II*, the counter-intelligence unit of the MfS, or *Hauptabteilung XXII*, which dealt with ‘terror defence’.⁴²⁰

In light of the MfS’s extensive intelligence operations, it was only a matter of time before the MG became an enemy target for the GDR. However, after the MfS had received detailed information on the RZ/AK from a West German defector in 1975, the GDR’s secret police temporarily lost interest in this newly established Marxist organisation in Munich.⁴²¹

In contrast, when the MfS took official notice of MG activities for the first time, on 7 January 1981, it pursued an immediate investigative interest in the group; even though, according to an unofficial source, the MG’s agitation in West Berlin was met with negative feedback by workers of a local machine tools factory.⁴²² The MG’s pamphlet, in which it agitated against the approach followed by trade unions, was apparently dismissed by workers as ‘rubbish’. Nonetheless, the report of the unofficial source in West Berlin was declared ‘top secret’ by the counter-intelligence unit and resulted in further intelligence activities.⁴²³

During the following year, the MfS noted that:

The ‘MG’ almost exclusively operates at universities and appears with a ‘leftist’ verbal radicalism in public. [...] The really existing socialism is defamed as a ‘copy’ of the capitalist world. Activities against socialist states are hitherto unknown.⁴²⁴

Even if the MfS was realistic about the revolutionary potential of the MG’s political efforts, the GDR’s secret police and intelligence service established ‘stable contact’ with MG officials in 1984.⁴²⁵ Via a ‘reliable’ unofficial employee, active under the pseudonym ‘*IM Künstler*’

⁴¹⁶ BStU, MfS ZAIG, no. 25738, part 1 of 3, pp. 33-66; MfS - HA IX, no. 19214.

⁴¹⁷ See, among others, BStU, MfS - HA XXII, no. 5198/14.

⁴¹⁸ Among others, Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 269-270.

⁴¹⁹ BStU, BVfS AG XXII 207, p. 86.

⁴²⁰ See Siegfried Suckut, Ehrhart Neubert, Clemens Vollnhals et al., eds, *Anatomie der Staatssicherheit* (Berlin: Der Beauftragte für Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2001), 2nd ed.

⁴²¹ BStU, MfS - HA IX, no. 17500.

⁴²² BStU, MfS - HA XXII, no. 19367, p. 17.

⁴²³ BStU, MfS - HA II, no. 33025, pp. 1-2.

⁴²⁴ BStU, BVfS Leipzig AG XXII, no. 207, pp. 94-95.

⁴²⁵ BStU, BVfS Leipzig AG XXII, no. 19, p. 26.

(artist), the MfS was in regular touch with Theo Ebel, one of the MG's leading intellectuals and organisers. For approximately six months, the 'operative contact' remained stable; before Ebel, himself, without further explanation, referred '*IM Künstler*' to a different MG contact. Between 1984 and 1986, various attempts of the MfS' employee to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the MG's contact in East Berlin or Leipzig failed because of the MG's lack of interest.⁴²⁶ None of the source material (archives and interviews) indicates that this contact had an impact on the already minimal operations in the GDR. Because of the terror defence unit's responsibility for the general security of the GDR, the creation of an enemy target file (FOA) had nonetheless been projected for the fourth quarter of 1985.⁴²⁷ However, it seems that this plan that would have resulted in intensified intelligence service activities was never implemented.⁴²⁸

Moreover, members of the secret police kept Karl Held, the leading agitator of the MG and his female company under close surveillance when they visited the GDR for three days in April 1987.⁴²⁹ After the MfS's contact proposed a personal meeting on several occasions, and in light of the regular written contact, that was occurring, the MG leadership must have finally decided to explore the situation in Leipzig and Dresden on its own. The official purpose of the group's entry into GDR territory was to work on a scientific paper: a frequently stated motivation at that time.

However, in its official report, the MfS remarks that the MG's delegation was interested in neither doing research nor enjoying cultural landmarks in both cities. In fact, the three members of the MG that visited Leipzig and Dresden investigated the contact person's real existence by scrutinising his official address and telephone number while checking any potential interest of the MfS in their visit. Such was the group's efficient 'counter-intelligence' that they sought to make any systematic observation difficult for MfS officers and given the *Stasi's* conviction that any suspicious behaviour must be classified as intelligence activities of foreign states, several officers were positive about the idea that Karl Held and his company were actually affiliated to the West German secret service.⁴³⁰ However, neither archive sources nor interviews confirmed the *Stasi's* suspicion.

As a result, it was proposed that intelligence activities regarding Held were intensified. This presumably implied the extension of such activities to the Federal Republic. However,

⁴²⁶ Ibid., pp. 110-111, p. 128, pp. 131-132.

⁴²⁷ BStU, HA XXII 5199/2, p. 46.

⁴²⁸ The BStU could not trace the projected files in its archives.

⁴²⁹ BStU, BVfS Leipzig AG XXII, no. 19, pp. 26-28.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

according to the BStU's records, no other activities of MG members in the GDR were compiled until the state's secret police and intelligence apparatus collapsed in early 1990.

The MG frequently used fake addresses in West Germany and Hungary when sending periodicals and books to the GDR. In light of their experiences with the West German *Verfassungsschutz*, the group was aware that the chances of encountering intelligence activities on both sides of the 'iron curtain' were extremely high.⁴³¹ Thus, they warned their East German contact, '*IM Künstler*', to be cautious regarding correspondence, most likely not knowing whether the contact person was a member of the *Stasi*, in order to avoid attracting any further attention beyond what was already inevitable.

Although it is unknown whether the MG sustained this correspondence following their delegation's stay in the GDR, it is plausible to assume that the MG terminated its contact with the MfS' unofficial employee: no further reports of '*IM Künstler*' were recorded after April 1987. There is no evidence that the MG intended to establish a branch in the GDR or set up a secret distribution network for their publications. Unlike the KPD/ML, which organised and maintained a 'Section GDR' for almost a decade, the MG refused to sacrifice potential supporters given the repressive political environment in the GDR. Indeed, the KPD/ML section in the GDR was infiltrated by MfS officers and dismantled eight years after its official formation in 1976. For many of its roughly 100 supporters, infiltration of their party cells resulted in prison sentences, which ended only when the GDR released its political prisoners after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁴³² There is also no evidence for any financial links between the East German regime and the MG suspected by conservative circles in the early 1980s, an allegation that, even today, still appears in internet blogs.⁴³³

This political and ideological hostility was mutual. The MG not only criticised the historical development of the socialist bloc in general, but that of the GDR, in particular. In 1989, Peter Decker and Karl Held published *Dissenting Views on the 'German Question'*, in which they analysed the political developments of 1989 in the context of West Germany's historical goal to re-unify Germany under the rule of democratic capitalism and the Eastern bloc's fascination for the productive forces inherent in capitalism.⁴³⁴ German national euphoria was scrutinised and criticised in a subsequent book; both publications were

⁴³¹ Ibid, pp. 110-111; interview with P.E., 21 January 2013.

⁴³² Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, pp. 301-303.

⁴³³ See MSZ, 4 (1981), p. 68. For internet blogs, see, amongst others, *Burghart*, 5 December 2011, 11:08 pm <<http://www.explorat.de/Forum/printthread.php?t=20581&pp=40&page=3>> [19 January 2013].

⁴³⁴ See Peter Decker and Karl Held, *Abweichende Meinungen zur 'deutschen Frage': DDR kaputt Deutschland ganz* (Resultate: Munich, 1989). The goal to reunify Germany was part of the preamble of the West German Constitution as of 1949.

discussed at various lecture tours of East Germany in late 1989/90 and enjoyed a total circulation of at least 60,000.⁴³⁵

3.4.3. The West German *Verfassungsschutz* and the *Marxistische Gruppe*

The MG's severe criticism of other New Left organisations and its seemingly good financial situation led some activists to assume a link between the *Verfassungsschutz* and the MG aimed at splitting the radical left and its revolutionary potential.⁴³⁶

Although I was not allowed to examine the files of the *Verfassungsschutz* regarding the MG, it is nonetheless possible to draw conclusions regarding the relationship from available sources.⁴³⁷ First and foremost, the *Verfassungsschutz* analysed the MG in its annual reports during the 1980s. The surveillance activities, which, according to interviewees, increased in the mid-1980s, culminated in the booklet, the *Verfassungsschutz*, published in 1991. Prior to this, the MG had already complained about the high level of surveillance, the attempted acquisition of members in order to 'dissolve the organisation' and the non-consideration of applications by MG members and sympathisers for the civil service.⁴³⁸ Moreover, even in 2005, putative former members were not allowed to exercise certain positions, which involved the handling of sensitive government data.⁴³⁹

Considering this circumstantial evidence, it is extremely unlikely that the hitherto inaccessible files of the *Verfassungsschutz* would reveal a different reality. In fact, like other organisations of the New Left, the MG and its supporters were considered to be enemies of the West German constitution and treated accordingly. Therefore, allegations of political opponents in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be interpreted as an attempt to explain the different developments that the MG and *K-Gruppen* went through during this period.

3.4.4. Understanding the *Marxistische Gruppe*'s financial resources

As explained above, the extent of the MG's financial resources gave rise to speculation about its relationship with the *Stasi/Verfassungsschutz*. Interviews, however, suggest that the group

⁴³⁵ Ibid. See also Peter Decker and Heinz Scholler, *Die politische Ökonomie der DDR* (sessions 1-5), Berlin [624 min.] (1989/1990) <http://www.archive.org/details/MG_Peter_Decker_Die_DDR_Oekonomie_Teil_1_5/ [20 March 2011]. For the total circulation, see Decker and Held, *Abweichende Meinungen zur 'deutschen Frage'*, 1989.

⁴³⁶ See MSZ 4 (1981), p. 68.

⁴³⁷ Email of the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* to the author on 22 February 2011. According to German law, the *Verfassungsschutz* is not obliged to release files. The Federal Office denied access to its extensive material.

⁴³⁸ See MSZ 2 (1990), p. 2; interviews with K.M., E.A. and U.F., 24, 18 and 19 January 2013, respectively.

⁴³⁹ See *Oberverwaltungsgericht Nordrhein Westfalen*, '21 A 4183/03', 2005.

was mainly financed by its members' donations. In this respect, the MG did not differ from its Maoist opponents, which also heavily relied on the financial commitment of its supporter base.

Interviewees stressed that the MG distinguished itself from *K-Gruppen* because the MG did not cap the income of its supporters or collect a certain proportion of their gross income. Unlike the KBW, for example, which forced its members to 'donate' income in excess of DM 1,000 by 1976, the MG did not impose such obligatory contributions.⁴⁴⁰ Members and sympathisers made arbitrary financial contributions according to their disposable income. In this context, one interviewee argued that "[i]f you could afford to give that amount of money to the organisation, fine; if not, no-one ever forced you to do so. I am aware of the allegations against the MG stating that individuals were 'milked', but this is just counter-factual."⁴⁴¹ Compulsory enforcement measures and wage attachments against members, means that were at times employed by the KBW did not occur. The MG nonetheless recommended donating money according to the following formula:

$$\text{Membership fee} = \text{income} / 100 \times (\text{income} / 100 - 3).^{442}$$

Although some activists spent up to several thousand *Deutsche Mark*, one interviewee stressed that any compulsory measures "would contradict the whole idea of Communists as a voluntary association of free individuals, which demands certain financial sacrifices for the sake of the shared political objective."⁴⁴³ According to the interviewee, "however, [...] lots of members achieved material affluence, for example, in the form of expensive holidays and properties albeit donating money to the organisation."⁴⁴⁴

How far these statements reflect reality is difficult to assess. Even if the MG did not impose obligatory membership fees, members might have felt obliged to donate considerable proportions of their income to the organisation because of peer pressure. Although no interviewee admitted to this, the threat of being socially rejected for failing to conform to a group standard, e.g. donations/membership fees, often has a considerable effect on individuals

⁴⁴⁰ See Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne*, p. 61. The *Verfassungsschutz*, however, asserts that members had to pay a monthly fee of ten percent of an individual's gross income. See *Innere Sicherheit*, 'Finanzen des Kommunistischen Bundes Westdeutschland (KBW)', 38 (1977), p. 8.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with M.P. on 20 January 2013.

⁴⁴² See the statements of the confidential informant in Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

⁴⁴³ Interview with M.P. on 20 January 2013.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

and how they commit to the peer group and its interests.⁴⁴⁵ There are various references in the literature to the influence of group dynamics on individuals with regard to the *K-Gruppen*.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, even though it is plausible to assume that the MG's funding was in fact based on voluntary donations, socio-psychological constraints cannot be ruled out. The interviews, though, revealed that the organisation was not dependent on a few generous donors but financed itself through donations of all its members and selling its literature. Accordingly, no individual or faction exerted influence on the group's theory formation and practical efforts through its financial resources.⁴⁴⁷

3.4.5. Summary

There is no evidence of any connection between the East or West German secret service and the MG between 1979 and 1991. In the official records of the *Stasi*, the MG was classified as an 'enemy target', whereas the *Verfassungsschutz* practically treated the MG as an enemy of the Constitution.

Because of the MG's spread in the early 1980s, the *Verfassungsschutz* increased its surveillance activities and gathered information with which to increase pressure on the organisation, without becoming involved in party-ban proceedings. The GDR's intelligence service was interested in establishing and maintaining operational contact with the MG to serve the purpose of gathering information with which to anticipate potential threats for the 'socialist fatherland'. Considering the GDR's state ideology and its comprehensive intelligence activities, approaching the MG, an outspoken and relentless critic of the country's political economy and moral superstructure, was as necessary to avoid further MG-influenced opposition because it was redundant from a political perspective, given the MG's negligible 'influence' in East Germany. Its level of influence never exceeded the distribution of a few publications and ultimately, the MG dissolved itself in response to the publication of a booklet by *Verfassungsschutz* in 1991.

Like other New Left organisations, the MG was exclusively financed through donations/membership fees and the sale of publications. No evidence could be found supporting rumours the MG was either funded by the GDR's intelligence service or its West German equivalent.

⁴⁴⁵ See Michael A. Hogg and Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology* (Harlow: Pearson, 2011), 6th ed., pp. 271-312.

⁴⁴⁶ See Autorenkollektiv, *Wir war'n die stärkste der Partei...*, 1977.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with W.D. and U.F., 17 and 19 January 2013, respectively.

3.5. The *Marxistische Gruppe*'s unique development: an analysis of the existing literature

3.5.1. Introduction

In Chapter Five, this thesis turns its attention towards the central aspects of the MG's theory, in order to support the idea that its theory formation was key to the group's specific development. However, authors and political opponents have already commented on the question of how the MG could have remained a stable source of Marxist criticism at the time of a declining radical left, whereas former *K-Gruppen* cadres agonised over a "feeling of paralysing, uncatchable antiquatedness."⁴⁴⁸ Thus, I would like to conclude this chapter by discussing these explanations and their respective shortcomings.

3.5.2. The psychologisation of a political phenomenon

Käsler and Schnädelbach were two of the most outspoken critics of the MG's political and theoretical efforts in the 1980s. The two authors, musing about the successful establishment of the MG at higher education institutions in Hamburg, argued that the 'youthful nihilism' of young adults was the foundation of this development. This nihilism was understood to be part of "a general adolescence crisis" that enabled the MG to recruit new members if they were willing to accept the "authority of a dictatorial leadership."⁴⁴⁹ Even today, Schnädelbach concludes that the MG was a "fascist and cynical organisation."⁴⁵⁰ Likewise, both authors derive the ability of MG cadres to 'control themselves even in extreme minority positions' from specific 'psychological energies' and thus, claimed that the MG's prosperity across Germany and Austria during the 1980s could only be explained by considering theories of developmental psychology.⁴⁵¹

State authorities argued analogously, insinuating that the MG manipulated its sympathisers and forced them to give up 'self-determined thinking'.⁴⁵² The *Verfassungsschutz* also highlighted 'disorientation' and a 'feeling of helplessness' as factors for becoming interested in the MG's theory.⁴⁵³ Should the expansion of the MG, which coincided with the demise of most socialist and Communist organisations by the late 1970s, be a phenomenon that must strictly be approached by political psychology? Is it inevitable to consider

⁴⁴⁸ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 467.

⁴⁴⁹ All quotes from Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985.

⁴⁵⁰ Schnädelbach in an email to the author, 30 October 2009.

⁴⁵¹ Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985.

⁴⁵² See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, pp. 56-59.

⁴⁵³ See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991.

‘psychological gratifications’ and ‘modern profaned forms of mystical rituals’ in order to understand the MG’s specific development in which it became the New Left faction with the largest ‘expansion’ and ‘stability’?⁴⁵⁴ Was the historical existence and relative success of the MG the result of psychological dispositions and subtle manipulation strategies?

Bordens and Abbott demonstrated the tautological nature of constructs, such as ‘psychological energies’ and other dispositions. The authors correctly discounted them as pseudo-scientific because the supposed existence of ‘psychological energies’ can only be proven by its own manifestation and vice versa.⁴⁵⁵ Besides, the idea of being forced to give up one’s own reasoning during the integration process is also misleading. The adoption of a particular ideology is inevitably the result of an intellectual dealing with this ideology; it is an intellectual achievement of a thinking individual, regardless of the ideology’s plausibility and consistency. Thinking is a necessarily active process; thus, the idea of someone’s thoughts being manipulated by others constitutes an inadequate attempt of explaining the spread of the MG’s ideas. Accordingly, the *Verfassungsschutz* portrayal of activists as victims of the MG’s subtle methods of inclusion misses the point.⁴⁵⁶ Similar to Schnädelbach and Käsler’s approach, the *Verfassungsschutz* is unwilling to attach rational motives for activists to commit themselves to the study of Marxist theory in general and the MG in particular.

For the same reason, Langguth’s remarks on ‘eloquence’ and ‘charismatic capabilities’ of leading MG functionaries as a major reason for the group’s development have to be criticised here.⁴⁵⁷ Both features are widespread among different political currents; put simply, the explanatory power of extraordinary charismatic leadership cannot adequately explain why activists specifically joined the MG and not another political organisation with such a leadership. Moreover, without referring to psychological dispositions, it is not possible to explain why certain individuals fell victim to the ‘eloquence’ and ‘charisma’ of leading MG cadres, whereas others developed no interest in the group. The same is true for the ‘feeling of security’ or ‘corporate feeling’, which can also be offered by right-wing parties, sports clubs and parishes. All specifics are lost when the shared politico-ideological basis on which organisations rest and the goals they follow are not considered adequately.

Goetz took the elimination of content-related explanations to the extreme by arguing that the MG, a *political* organisation, exclusively served as a psychological end in itself and

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 11 and p. 63.

⁴⁵⁵ See Kenneth S. Bordens and Bruce B. Abbott, *Research Design and Methods* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1998), 4th ed.

⁴⁵⁶ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁵⁷ Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, p. 128.

established radical politics as the central purpose of the life of its members.⁴⁵⁸ These psychological explanations are, de facto, the *depoliticisation* of a political phenomenon. In contrast, the historical analysis of a political organisation and its process of formation must focus on politico-theoretical aspects and enable us to understand the specifics that substantially distinguished the MG from other New Left organisations.

The MG's theory was both a product of its time because it dealt with issues that the entire New Left concerned itself with and also a critique of those *ideals* predominant among the New Left (as shown in Chapters One and Two). This rigid criticism of bourgeois and socio-critical idealisms was formulated in continuation from Marx, who asserted that '[a] rotten spirit is making itself felt' in his critique of left-wing activists

[w]ho want to give socialism a 'higher ideal' orientation, that is to say, to replace its materialistic basis (which demands serious objective study from anyone who tries to use it) by modern mythology with its goddesses of Justice, Freedom, Equality and Fraternity.⁴⁵⁹

The MG's continuation of this polemic line of thought was based on severe criticism of all forms of statism, even its democratic forms of appearance. Not only was this anti-statism a rare exception among the West German New Left but it also contributed to its organisational stability because it allowed its members to disengage themselves theoretically and practically from affirming in one way or another the practical problems inherent to both democratic capitalism and the 'democratic struggle' of the working class.⁴⁶⁰

3.6. Summary of chapter

In contrast to the general demise of New Left organisations, in particular, the Maoist *K-Gruppen*, by the late 1970s, the MG was able to significantly expand its supporter base. Even though certain aspects of the MG's organisational structure and agitation strategy were similar to those of the *K-Gruppen*, the focus on theory formation and its propagation resulted in a flat hierarchy: a factor that significantly contributed to the loyalty of its supporters. The idea of a dictatorial relationship between chief ideologists and the rank and file members could not be substantiated. The same is true for any links between the MG and the East German *Stasi* as

⁴⁵⁸ Goetz, *Irre*, p. 99.

⁴⁵⁹ Marx, 'Marx to Friedrich Adolph Sorge (19 October 1877)', in *MECW Vol. 45*, p. 282.

⁴⁶⁰ See Dillmann, *China*, p. 41. See also David McLellan, *Marxism after Marx* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Berch Berberoglu, *The State and Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) or Darrow Schecter, *The History of the Left from Marx to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2007). These works indirectly support Dillmann's hypothesis because they show that anti-statism was not an important aspect of Marx's legacy.

well as its West German counterpart, the *Verfassungsschutz*. The ideological loyalty of its supporters allowed the MG to finance itself mostly through donations and literature sales.

The agitation strategy and focus of the MG was subject to continuous evaluations. This explains, for example, why it ceased organising rallies after the peace movement collapsed in 1983 and with it the potential to address its criticism to a wider left-wing audience. Moreover, the MG greatly reduced its strategy of ‘breaking up’ lectures at universities after the pressure of persecution increased in the mid-1980s and an increasing number of members and sympathisers faced problems with public authorities, which prevented them from working in the public service sector. This also led the MG finally to dissolve itself in 1991 after the *Verfassungsschutz* published an extensive booklet on the organisation. Such was the increasing risk of members being publicly exposed, the MG, especially when considering the demise of radical left organisations and the respective milieu following the collapse of the Eastern bloc and re-unification of Germany, simply decided to dissolve what had been West Germany’s largest New Left organisation.

Moreover, the MG was engaged in agitating workers by 1979 as it did not limit its activities to the universities, which were nonetheless understood as the most important recruitment reservoir. Yet in contrast to its Maoist opponents, the MG did not refrain from formulating criticism regarding the working class’ support and proactive role in the reproduction of capitalism.

Although the MG’s intellectual approach resulted in blistering attacks from fellow leftist factions, some of whom demanded a rather tabloid-like agitation of the working class, it was in fact the MG’s insistence on arguments rather than revolutionary catchwords that resulted in its relative success in retaining both members and sympathisers during the 1980s.⁴⁶¹

Thus, in conclusion, the key to understanding this question can be found in the group’s undogmatic ‘scientific’ approach and its specific theories that won support from many young, left-leaning academics.

The next chapter will analyse two of the MG’s major contributions to Marxist discourse in West Germany: its theory of the democratic state and that of abstract free will. Exploring both theoretical works will help us arrive at a final understanding as to why the MG defied the disintegration process endured by the New Left from the late 1970s onwards and hence its unique historical development among New Left factions in West Germany.

⁴⁶¹ For a critique of the MG’s focus on theory formation see, among others, Initiative Arbeiterzeitung und –zentren, *Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe*, 1985.

4. **The *Marxistische Gruppe*'s contribution to a critique and further development of the theory of the 'subjective factor' and its political implications**

4.1. Introduction

The history of Marxism is one of theorising the 'revolutionary subject' and its ability and willingness to overthrow the ruling bourgeois sovereignty: the 'subjective factor'. This idea was introduced by Karl Marx himself who linked his critique of capitalism to one of bourgeois individuals' corresponding psyche and therefore argued that:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely [the] relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond *definite forms of consciousness*. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, *but their social existence that determines their consciousness*.⁴⁶² [emphasis added]

Following Marx's lead, numerous intellectuals have studied the relationship of the material being and individual consciousness in bourgeois society. Their work touches upon, from a Marxist perspective, the discrepancy between the objective class situation and subjective class consciousness of the proletariat. Leading theorists of the Frankfurt School, which established Critical Theory as a major approach to the humanities and social sciences in the 1960s, focused extensively on this area.

The following paragraphs briefly discuss Marx's original reflections on this topic and comment on the shortcomings of his contributions. The chapter then moves on to scrutinise the approach developed by representatives of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, namely, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, whose combination of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis not only substantially impacted upon the German student movement, but also had a considerable effect on the further development of critical approaches to sociology and social psychology.⁴⁶³ Their work will be analysed, especially the influential *Studies on Authority and Family*, a standard reference of the student

⁴⁶² Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', in *MECW Vol. 16*, p. 465.

⁴⁶³ For the impact of Critical Theory and psychoanalysis on the West German student movement, see, for example, Heide Berndt and Sylvia Bovenschen in Siegward Lönnendonker and Jochen Staadt, eds, *1968 - Vorgeschichte und Konsequenzen*, (1988) <<http://web.fu-berlin.de/APO-archiv/Online/RING88.htm>> [24 July 2012].

movement, which was edited by Horkheimer and contained research reports from important representatives associated with his Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt.⁴⁶⁴

The question was posed as to why individuals affirmatively participate in capitalism and authoritarian political systems even though, from a materialistic point of view, this system disadvantages the majority. This conformity with the prevailing interests of bourgeois society and its fascist form of appearance represented one central aspect of the Frankfurt School's research programme. It will be argued that their work implies theoretical deficits, which are an inevitable consequence of combining Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis, and therefore contributing inadequately to an understanding of the alleged revolutionary subject's practical connection to capitalism and its political order.

Although this thesis refers to Marx and the Frankfurt School, arguably still the two most important sources which German Marxist intellectuals draw upon in order to demonstrate how the MG further develops the Marxist theory of the revolutionary subject, the intention is not to offer a comprehensive Marxist genealogy of this issue. This would move beyond the scope of the present work; and in any case, is not essential in understanding historical developments, because modern critical psychology, such as the school of thought established by and in the tradition of Klaus Holzkamp in the wake of the student movement, persists in its premise of individuals as determined existences, and thus continues the basic ideas which Marx and the Frankfurt School laid out.⁴⁶⁵

All approaches of critical social psychology mentioned above have one common denominator: they rest on the presumption that human beings are not in possession of and have no control over their freedom of mind. Freedom is interpreted as a condition to be externally imposed, through social or scientific conditioning or therapeutic catharsis, on an otherwise not free individual. In other words, the 'manipulated' subjectivity needs to be 'emancipated'. Of all these approaches, the Frankfurt School is deemed most appropriate to be covered in more detail; it is representative of other approaches, highly influential during the student movement and functioned as an implicit point of reference for the MG's critique and theory formation.⁴⁶⁶

This will be followed by a discussion of the MG's theory of abstract free will, through which the group distanced itself from Marx's reflections and the psychoanalytically

⁴⁶⁴ Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, eds, *Studien über Autorität und Familie. Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (1936; Lüneburg: Klampen, 2005). In particular, Marcuse's work, *Eros and Civilisation*, also had a practical impact on the formation of *Kinderladen*, i.e. anti-authoritarian Kindergarten. Martin Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz*, pp. 163–164.

⁴⁶⁵ See Klaus Holzkamp, 'On Doing Psychology Critically', in *Theory and Psychology*, 2 (1992), pp. 193–204.

⁴⁶⁶ See Decker's Ph.D. thesis: Peter Decker, *Die Methodologie kritischer Sinnsuche* (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1982).

influenced Marxism of the Frankfurt School, as well as existing mainstream and critical theories; and instead established the analytical foundation of a *sui generis* Marxist theory of the 'bourgeois consciousness'. The MG's theory, although it has its weaknesses — notably, the idealistic totalisation of the will — offers an inherently consistent explanation of the difficulties of Marxists regarding the agitation of individuals being subjected to the interests of state and capital. By starting from the premise that free will is a matter of fact, the group offers a distinct answer to the often mystifying and thus hotly debated issue of how 'being determines consciousness'.

The concept of abstract free will had a direct impact upon the MG as a revolutionary organisation and its political practice. The group was the only organisation to develop its own theory of the revolutionary subject's psyche. Moreover, the theory of abstract free will provides important indications regarding the demise of West Germany's New Left from the perspective of Marxist theory.

The purpose of dealing with the MG's theory in detail is, first and foremost, to understand the specific developments of the organisation during the 1970s and 1980s. In light of this, the group's relative success cannot be sufficiently attributed to psychological needs satisfied by group membership (e.g. generation of a sense of superiority over the proletarian masses and fellow students), as argued by the *Verfassungsschutz*, Schnädelbach and Kessler as well as Stamm and Goetz.⁴⁶⁷ Nor was it mere historical coincidence as, for example, argued by Fülberth.⁴⁶⁸

To paraphrase Plato, the first to correlate virtues in the state with those in the soul, and who thus established the idea of a reciprocal relationship between politics and psychology, the MG appears to implicitly cling to the idea that *where freedom, in the sense of an autonomy of will, remains psychologically ambiguous, so too must the ideal of a free association of human beings, i.e. communism, in principle unfulfilled.*⁴⁶⁹ For the MG, the issue of the relationship between politics and psychology was not mere blue-sky thinking, but integral to their political efforts. Finally, the term 'bourgeois individual' is applied throughout this chapter, not only in reference to the working class, but to all individuals living in capitalist democracies.

⁴⁶⁷ This argument negates the actual political purpose the MG pursued and assumes indifference among its members towards the group's efforts for as long as the organisation fulfils its function of satisfying their psychological needs. The actual reason to form a political party is thereby negated. See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991; Schnädelbach and Käsler, *Aufklärung über die Marxistische Gruppe*, 1985; Stamm, 'AK-Kritik', 1975; Goetz, *Irre*, 1983.

⁴⁶⁸ See Fülberth in an email to the author, 16 April 2011.

⁴⁶⁹ See Plato, *The Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), transl. by C.D.C. Reeve.

4.2. 'Being determines consciousness': concise reflections on the deficits of Marx's ideological criticism

According to the framework developed by Marx and Engels, ideologies are conceptualised as an expression of 'false' consciousness, which would not reflect objective relationships, but merely its ideologically 'distorted' form of appearance. Ideological criticism is therefore equated with a critique of prevailing 'bourgeois' consciousness. These ideologies, however, do not come into existence arbitrarily, but originate from specific politico-economic exchange relations. For Marx and Engels, the consciousness of individuals in capitalism is a product of their social being. Specifically, the oversimplifying idea that 'being determines consciousness' has caused much misunderstanding and requires further qualification.

Engel's comment — that social being would be determining, but 'only in the last instance' — has further contributed to debates among Marxists, especially in the wake of the student movement. It is thus important to distinguish between the rational components of this theory and some self-contradictory aspects. For this reason, I will briefly discuss Marx's ideas as presented in *German Ideology*. This will enable us to understand the basic theoretical misconceptions of Marx's reasoning that was the subject of numerous controversies among his intellectual successors and New Left activists.

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour.⁴⁷⁰

Whereas Marx's contemporaries, particularly the Young Hegelians, claimed that spirit and consciousness create their own world, Marx argues that material activities or modes of production generate their own consciousness. Marx therefore inverted the prevailing thought of his time to the other extreme.

The fact that, despite Marx's claims of the existence of quasi-determining 'interweavements', individuals are still consciously concerned with their politico-economic being, i.e. their 'material intercourse', is not explicated in his work. This state of being, from which a specific intellectual stance does not arise automatically, functions in Marx's analyses as a determinant for the formation of human consciousness. A detailed explanation of the mechanisms that cause the economic being to materialise in a certain consciousness was not provided by Marx. This deficit fostered the common misunderstanding that Marx set the theoretical foundations for a simply structured deterministic approach.

⁴⁷⁰ Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', in *MECW Vol. 5*, p. 26.

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.⁴⁷¹

Thus, what appears to be a mere tautology — consciousness means per se consciousness of something, in other words, an individual that is aware of its specific separation from objective reality and therefore identifies objects and differentiates between them — in fact emphasises the particular content of consciousness. Marx continues to argue that:

The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.⁴⁷²

With this, Marx transforms the practical adaptation to socio-economic constraints into a total abstraction; and thus reinterprets the precondition of living in bourgeois society as a necessity of consciousness-raising. Marx thus misses the only rational interpretation of how 'being determines consciousness' and why the occurrence of 'false' consciousness is 'necessary' because in capitalism, every individual is forced, under threat of absolute poverty and social exclusion, to develop an active interest in acquiring money to pay for general living expenses.

Yet no practical constraint hinders the intellectual disengagement of oneself from the necessities of the bourgeois society or from simultaneously developing a critical attitude towards them. Marx, however, remains inexplicit about this relationship between being and consciousness and gives the impression that the specific thoughts of individuals are a mere 'sublimate' of the actual material life-process.

Interestingly, the theory of determinism is disproved the moment he formulates these ideas. Thoughts are still the product of an active rather than passive, deterministic process. The intellectual acquirement of objects of the material and spiritual world is an achievement of thinking individuals, not the product of their 'being', even though they incessantly relate their intellect to this. In lieu of this, consciousness which is the direct efflux of socio-economic conditions, and therefore unable to conceptualise reality as separate from Marx's 'upside-down as in a *camera obscura*'⁴⁷³, would not require any criticism.

Marx anticipates the overthrow of the ruling mode of production, even though 'phantoms' formed in the human brain by the 'material life-process' appear to make any change impossible:

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

The real, practical dissolution of these phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of men, will, as we have already said, be affected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions.⁴⁷⁴

Considering Marx's vague arguments, it remains unclear which subject is even able to change these socio-economic circumstances. If consciousness, constructed in his work as incapable of comprehending the ideological nature of its social being, does not contribute to the active overthrow of the politico-economic order, why should one expect any change at all? Capitalism has no logical terminus that would render any critique of political economy obsolete.

Marx, who aimed to formulate a critique of idealists who emphasised the pre-eminence of consciousness in relation to actual material life, and understood the former as the decisive element shaping society, unintentionally constructs a discrepancy between the knowledge of these circumstances and the potential overthrow of capitalism. The 'subjective factor' is neglected in this theoretical approach, because Marx himself is trapped in the unsubstantiated idea that the envisaged overthrow of bourgeois sovereignty inevitably results from the further development of the economic structure of capitalist society. This firm belief in the idea of politico-economic self-regulation is an integral part of the concept of 'historical materialism'. Yet the paradox of Marx continuing to agitate for his political goals, while failing to be explicit regarding the implications of his own line of thought, continues to pose a great problem here. Ultimately, his historical optimism supersedes any theoretical assurance regarding the relationship of being and consciousness and manifests itself as follows:

For the mass of men, i.e., the proletariat, these theoretical notions do not exist and hence do not require to be dissolved, and if this mass ever had any theoretical notions, e.g., religion, these have now long been dissolved by circumstances.⁴⁷⁵

Here, the line of argument presented by Marx reaches its logical end. If ideologies are quasi-naturally discredited over the course of time and dissolved by circumstances, it follows that ideologies that adequately reflect and legitimise the ruling mode of production ultimately do not obstruct the overthrow of the bourgeois order. This theory, however, is formulated at the expense of endemic theoretical flaws.

To sum up, Marx and Engels understood that the material life-process has a particular impact on how individuals conceptualise the bourgeois order and why its corresponding ideologies are so persistent. However, they fall well behind their own insight that "men can be

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

distinguished from animals by consciousness”⁴⁷⁶ in their vaguely formulated ideas. As a result, any potential revolutionary subject willingly interested in promoting social change on the basis of theoretical insights into the ‘laws of motion’ of capitalism and its ideological ‘superstructure’ is absent from their theory. The capitalist life-process is simply expected to result in its own overthrow.

Even though the very act of Marx's theory formation confuted this idea, throughout his life, he remained unable to develop a more rational analysis of the reciprocal relationship between being and consciousness in bourgeois society. This is the key deficiency in his approach: he is unable to explain thoroughly the reasons for those social strata maintaining a positive attitude towards capitalism despite this economic order being to the systematic disadvantage of their material interests.

Theorists of the Frankfurt School contributed to the further development of the ‘subjective factor’ to this issue and were first to develop a systematic Marxist approach to the socio-psychological phenomenon of ‘being determines consciousness’ by integrating Freudian psychoanalysis into their socio-critical studies. With the introduction of Freudian concepts to the analysis of modern society, these theorists either challenged the possibility of overthrowing capitalism or, in the form of Herbert Marcuse, the most influential proponent of this school during ‘68’, shifted their revolutionary hopes from the working class to groups at the fringe of society, such as the unemployed, incapacitated and persecuted.⁴⁷⁷

4.3. The Frankfurt School and the theory of the ‘subjective factor’

The protagonists of Critical Theory developed their own theory regarding proletarian involvement in bourgeois society. Fromm, Horkheimer and Adorno linked the Marxist framework with Freudian psychoanalysis and constructed the theory of the authoritarian personality, refuting the idea that human behaviour originates from the economic base alone:

Marxism and psychoanalysis [not only] overlap but [...] there is also an intrinsic interdependency between the two. This means, [...] a synthesis is [not only] possible but also an existential necessity.⁴⁷⁸

Against Marx's ideas, the Frankfurt authors stressed the autonomy of the ‘subjective factor’; and thus attempted to find the reasons for its conformity to the requirements of state and capital. This advancement of the theory of the individual's consciousness being subject to

⁴⁷⁶ Marx and Engels, ‘The German Ideology’, p. 23.

⁴⁷⁷ See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964; London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁷⁸ Erich Fromm, ‘Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Reality’, in *Tagebuch. Monatshefte für Kultur, Politik, Wirtschaft*, 9 (1966), p. 5.

bourgeois rule was groundbreaking; it included both Freudian and Weberian arguments, in order to account for the perceived omissions in Marx's work. While Marx and Engels put emphasis on the idea that consciousness is determined by its economic being, leading proponents of Critical Theory focussed their research on the mind's structure as developed by Freud, i.e. the trinity of 'id', 'ego' and 'super-ego', hoping to move beyond Marx's rather one-dimensional economically deterministic views.⁴⁷⁹

However, by applying Freud's framework to their own studies on the 'subjective factor', the Frankfurt School also adopted the theoretical flaws involved in Freudian psychoanalysis. The following section presents their theory, discusses how they went beyond the scope of Marx' ideas and analyses their own deficiencies, which played an important role in the theory formation of the MG. Unlike the authors of Critical Theory, the MG rejected psychoanalytical viewpoints and developed their own theory of bourgeois consciousness based on Hegelian ideas, i.e. the assumption that the free will is a pleonasm and thus a matter of fact.⁴⁸⁰ The group offers a significant contribution to the undogmatic theory of the alleged 'revolutionary subject', which exceeds the Marxist tradition, while at the same time allowing for a reinterpretation of 'being determines consciousness' and the overcoming of the Frankfurt School's Freudianism, as further explained in Section 4.4.

4.3.1. The rational starting-point of the Frankfurt School's research project and its paradoxical results with the examples of Erich Fromm⁴⁸¹ and Max Horkheimer

Interestingly, for the theorists of the Frankfurt School, despite being outspoken Marxists, the capitalist economy and its corresponding forms of state power were of no particular interest when it came to explaining the 'false' consciousness of the proletariat. This is almost paradoxical when we consider that the underlying research question — why do the working class masses take part in bourgeois society? — insinuates an antagonism of interests between those amongst the masses subjected to the interests of state and capital and those benefiting from them. The specific characteristics of bourgeois sovereignty are generally disregarded in

⁴⁷⁹ Already in 1929, Wilhelm Reich had published the basic work of the so-called Freudo-Marxism, *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*. Erich Fromm, member of Reich's study group, brought the ideas of Marxist-inspired psychoanalysis to the Frankfurt School and significantly contributed to their groundbreaking early work *Studien über Autorität und Familie* ('Studies on Authority and Family').

⁴⁸⁰ For Hegel's psychological theory, see also Francis L. Jackson, 'Hegel's Psychology of Freedom', in *Animus*, 5 (2000) <www.swgc.mun.ca/animus> [15 November 2012], p. 103.

⁴⁸¹ Although Erich Fromm had already broken with the Frankfurt School by the late 1930s, he is considered in this work as one of their influential theorists, because when the studies on authority and family were published in 1936, he was still closely associated with this school of thought. Furthermore, his later socio-psychological work contained various theoretical intersections with the Frankfurt School.

their socio-psychological studies. This is exemplified in Erich Fromm's psychoanalytical line of thought:

His [Freud's] theory provides an important contribution to answering the question of how it is possible for the ruling authority in a society to actually be so effective, as has been evident throughout history. The external force and power embodied in, for a respective society, the decisive authorities, is an imperative feature of the occurrence of conformity and submission of the masses to this authority. On the other hand, it is obvious that this external coercion not only has a direct effect as such, but also that, if the mass submits itself to the demands and prohibitions of these authorities, this not only occurs in fear of physical force and physical means of coercion. [...] It arises that, if the external force conditions the conformity of the masses, it must, however, change its quality within the individual's psyche. The resulting difficulty is partially solved by the formation of the super-ego. [...] The authorities, as the representatives of the external force, are internalised; and now the individual acts, according to its imperatives and prohibitions, not merely for fear of punishment, but for fear of the psychic instance that it has been raised within itself.⁴⁸²

By abstracting from any specific economic and political interests promoted within bourgeois society, the purposes that guarantee social cohesion and the means through which state authority influences the life of its people are ignored; only the empty category of 'authority' remains. A political authority constructed in this way has no purpose other than enforcing the compliance of the masses. This is misleading for two reasons: first, state authority is a means to an end, not an end in itself. State authority is applied to achieve certain political and economic goals, which is the only constant over time and space, implied in the concept of state authority. Second, any subjective calculation is deemed irrelevant. None of the motives for individuals to subject themselves to the interests of state and capital are considered to have explanatory power. Thus, the relationship between 'authority' on the one hand and 'submission' on the other is abstract and remains undefined. Fromm makes attempts to clarify this but remains ambiguous when arguing that submission owing to the fear of real means of coercion

[w]ould paralyse the quality of the output of individuals obeying merely because of an external coercion, which is at least unbearable for the production in the modern society, and it would furthermore cause lability and disturbance of social relations, which would also be inconsistent with the demands of production over the course of time.⁴⁸³

By pointing towards material criteria as critical to the success or otherwise of state authority, he confutes the reductionist idea that 'authority' would achieve formal success by causing 'submission'. Yet Fromm does not draw the conclusion that the capitalist need to accumulate

⁴⁸² Erich Fromm, *Autorität und Familie*, pp. 83-84. Since there is no official translation of this work available, this and the following quotes from *Autorität und Familie* are translated by the author.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

abstract wealth, and the legally organised exclusion of the masses from the means of production, imposes actual economic constraints on the individual. Instead, conflates the obvious relationship between capitalism and submission of the masses to it through the theoretical abstraction described above.

Moreover, although Fromm is aware that the practical loyalty of citizens cannot be exclusively explained by external factors, thereby implicitly referring to consciousness as the decisive study object, he argues that external coercion is complemented by its internal appearance. This transition, however, is not convincing, Fromm omits from his analysis any specific calculations that individuals might make, meaning that it remains unclear as to why they 'internalise' the external authority and do not, for example, revolt against it. Their submission is therefore derived in Fromm's theory as strictly functionalist. For him, internalisation of the external order is almost inevitable, simply because power would otherwise remain external.

This tautological position explains the 'transformation' of external forces into the formation of the super-ego in Fromm's concept. Plausible reasons on why individuals should add internal to external coercion are not provided; instead, explaining why bourgeois individuals submit themselves to existing political and economic authorities and how they subjectively realise this intellectual accommodation is replaced by the assumption of psychological mechanisms quasi-automatically resulting in submission.

Fromm, who emphasised that

Marxism needs the addition of psychological concepts, because otherwise one would discuss man, who is the major theme of the Marxist thought, only in abstract-philosophical terms,⁴⁸⁴

is unable to meet his own claims in the process of his theory formation. The individual, the so-called subjective factor, which the Frankfurt theorists aimed to introduce as an argument against the alleged economic determinism of Marxist theory, does not exist in their work as a being consciously dealing with its politico-economic circumstances.

Max Horkheimer, albeit in a different way, followed the same line of thought. To Horkheimer, the economic base plays only a minor role in explaining the submissiveness of individuals. Instead, he derives the actual submission from the appropriate character of individuals; and thus forgoes to mention the specific politico-economic circumstances in which individuals form their character.

⁴⁸⁴ Fromm, 'Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Reality', p. 5.

[...] So it is actually not possible to explain the behaviour of individuals at a given point in time exclusively by economic processes that have been taking place in the immediately preceding moment. Rather, individual groups react according to the typical character of their members, which has been formed both in the context of the past and current social development. This character emerges from the influence of the entire social institutions that function for each layer of the social strata in a peculiar way. [...] Understanding the issue of why a society functions in a specific way, why it coheres or why it is in a state of dissolution, requires the awareness of the respective psychic constitution of individuals in the different social groups, the knowledge of how their character has been formed in the context of all the culturally influential variables of its time.⁴⁸⁵

Horkheimer constructs a tautology by deducing the functioning of society from the character of individuals living within it. These individuals fit into it perfectly, because it would inevitably result in certain character traits. As with Fromm's line of thought, the theoretical goal of reflecting on subjective aspects, in order to adequately conceptualise the success and permanence of capitalist rule, results in the construction of specific (psychological) features whose sole purpose is to conform to state power. Paradoxically, the existence of submissiveness thus becomes the decisive argument for its own practical necessity. For Horkheimer, the 'subjective factor' is merely a replica of its objective societal circumstances. He therefore negates the autonomy implied in the existence of human consciousness and adds a psychological disposition to the idea of economic determinism.

4.3.2. Concluding remarks on the deterministic approach of the Frankfurt School

The intellectual goal of scrutinising the subservient mind of individuals by utilising Freudian psychoanalysis led to various theoretical flaws in the work of the Frankfurt School's proponents. This was inevitable considering the original intention of exploring the reasons why bourgeois individuals comply with their own economic exploitation, their existence as a subject of state power; and by answering this research question with the inner determination of human behaviour, hence not considering freedom in human nature. In his contribution to the miscellany on authority and family, Erich Fromm takes this underlying logic to the extreme:

The decisive feature of the relationship between the ego and super-ego, as well as the individual to the authorities, is its emotional character. The human being wants to feel loved both by the super-ego and the authority, fears its hostility and satisfies his self-love when he pleases his super-ego or his authorities with whom he identifies. With the

⁴⁸⁵ Max Horkheimer, *Autorität und Familie*, pp. 9-10.

help of these emotional forces the individual is able to suppress the socially objectionable and dangerous impulses and desires.⁴⁸⁶

This quote is paradoxical, but also representative of the theoretical reflections of the Frankfurt School for two reasons. First, Fromm does not make a clear distinction between super-ego and authorities. The objective existence of state power is therefore mixed in with the idea of the super-ego, a concept whose theoretical construction lacks plausibility and stringency. The individual subjected to an unspecified 'authority' is, on the one hand, described as a mere object, the quasi-plaything of emotional energies; yet on the other, as a calculating being pondering how to suppress negative attitudes to authorities most efficiently.

The quintessence of the Frankfurt School's theorising lies in the deduction of the individual's practical submissiveness from its drive structure or character.⁴⁸⁷ In other words, bourgeois society and previous forms of rule correspond with the psychological needs of the masses.

4.4. The Marxistische Gruppe's Concept of the Abstract Free Will: A Radical Marxist Approach to Psychology

4.4.1. Introduction

Considering what this chapter has identified thus far, it is surely not surprising that the idea that revolutionary Marxism and the academic discipline of psychology do not complement one another is widespread.⁴⁸⁸ Although it is entirely possible to concur with the critical psychologist, Grahame Hayes, that Marxists working as psychologists are confronted with particular difficulties regarding the application of their theoretical insights in support of their patients, it remains unclear why a thoroughly developed theory of the bourgeois individual's psyche should contradict the critique of political economy, and not rebound to the advantage of Marxist theory formation.⁴⁸⁹ In line with the view that, "the sheer variety of approaches inside the [psychological] discipline [...] makes it difficult to [...] provide an alternative that

⁴⁸⁶ Fromm, *Autorität und Familie*, p. 95.

⁴⁸⁷ As Hegel put it, "[i]t is often said that the nature of Force itself is unknown and only its manifestation apprehended. But, in the first place, it may be replied, every article in the import of Force is the same as what is specified in the Exertion: and the explanation of a phenomenon by a Force is a mere tautology. What is supposed to remain unknown, therefore, is really nothing but the empty form of reflection-into-self, by which alone the Force is distinguished from the Exertion – and that form too is something familiar. It is a form that does not make the slightest addition to the content and to the law, which have to be discovered from the phenomenon alone." (Gesammelte Werke 8, § 136 / translation from www.marxists.org)

⁴⁸⁸ See Ian Parker, 'Critical Psychology and Revolutionary Marxism', in *Theory and Psychology*, February 2009, pp. 71-92.

⁴⁸⁹ Grahame Hayes, 'Marxism and critical psychology', in D. Hook, ed, *Critical psychology* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2004), pp. 162-186.

solves every conceptual, methodological or ideological problem”⁴⁹⁰, this section explores and elaborates upon the psychological theory of the MG, *abstract free will*, to demonstrate that this Marxist critique of existing theoretical concepts provides a noteworthy contribution with which to overcome the divergence between political and psychological theory and better understand how people use their intellect to submit themselves willingly to the dictates of state and capital.⁴⁹¹

As outlined above, existing approaches suffer from their deterministic interpretation of an individual's behaviour and thus neglect free will as the decisive feature of human behaviour. In contrast, unbeknown to the English-speaking world, the MG's proposed concept of an abstract free will provides an alternative, consistent explanation of the 'subjective factor' and offer a link between the critique which Marxists make of capitalist society and the specific consciousness developed by bourgeois individuals.

The following paragraphs present a description of the MG's theory of abstract free will: first, through illustrating its basic assumption; second, by looking at its theoretical derivation; and third, by discussing its psychological theory in the context of historical developments.

4.4.2. Critique of mainstream psychology as the theoretical basis for the derivation of the *abstract free will*

As part of its 'critique of bourgeois science', the MG published extensively on various subjects covering the entire spectrum of humanities and social sciences. *Psychology of the Private Individual: Critique of Bourgeois Consciousness* was released in 1981 and was an attempt to develop a theory of its own beyond the formulation of mere criticism. The basic arguments presented in this work are even today repeatedly applied to psychological phenomena and subjects, such as youth violence or the critique of neuropsychology.⁴⁹²

In order to explain the concept of abstract free will and emphasise the categorical differences between this theory and contemporary approaches within the discipline of psychology, some basic theoretical objections formulated by the MG against 'bourgeois

⁴⁹⁰ Parker, 'Critical Psychology and Revolutionary Marxism', p. 71.

⁴⁹¹ The MG's theory has been outlined in *Psychology of the Private Individual: Critique of Bourgeois Consciousness*. An English online version has been available since 2009. See <<http://www.gegenstandpunkt.com/english/psych/0-contents.html>> [14 July 2011].

⁴⁹² Apart from Freerk Huiskens's work on youth violence published in 1996, Albert Krölls and Suitbert Cechura have also published scholarship on the concept of abstract free will and its implied criticism of traditional approaches in recent years. See Freerk Huiskens, *Jugendgewalt* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1996); Freerk Huiskens, *z.B. Erfurt* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2002); Albert Krölls, *Kritik der Psychologie* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2006); Suitbert Cechura, *Kognitive Hirnforschung* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2008).

psychology' require brief discussion.

The MG's critique of psychological theorising and research is fundamental. This is already implied by its' clinging to Hegel's idea of a free inner life thrust into oblivion by present day psychology. Thus, the MG's criticism includes all major approaches to modern psychology, i.e. Marxist inspired Critical Theory⁴⁹³; as well as classical approaches, such as Freud's psychoanalysis,⁴⁹⁴ Skinner's behaviourism⁴⁹⁵, modern empirical research and neuropsychological approaches.⁴⁹⁶

In their introduction to the *Psychology of the Private Individual*, the MG's team of authors stresses that psychological theories today enjoy enormous popularity beyond the academic circle of experts; and that apart from academia, the media frequently produce articles, documentaries and magazines that "regard every single thing done by anyone [...] as a psychological case."⁴⁹⁷ Accordingly, Krölls, proponent of the *Gegenstandspunkt*'s psychological approach, claims that psychology has become "the modern opium of the people."⁴⁹⁸

This phrase stresses the idea of psychology as a

critical self-manipulation of the individual's difficult will to achieve (self)-satisfaction in a society that offers the vast majority of its members' poor expectations for their lives.⁴⁹⁹

Furthermore, Krölls asserts that psychological thinking per se would imply an affirmative stance towards the social circumstances with which one is confronted; and the indirect expression of indifference towards the objective reasons for a person's particular situation, e.g. unemployment. To take a single example, the current economic recession is assumed to have a negative impact on mental health.⁵⁰⁰ However, the idea that many individuals transform unemployment (or fear thereof) into a psychological problem is, according to the MG's concept, not self-evident. In such cases, it would be important to pose the question of how an individual conceptualises the world he lives in and, consequently, how he transfers the

⁴⁹³ See Krölls, *Kritik der Psychologie*, 2006; Marxistische Gruppe, *Argumente gegen die Psychologie* (Munich: Resultate, 1990).

⁴⁹⁴ See ibid. and Herbert L. Fertl, *Kritik an Freud*, [197 min.] (1979) <<http://www.farberot.de/>> [16 July 2010].

⁴⁹⁵ See Marxistische Gruppe, *Argumente gegen die Pädagogik* (Munich: Resultate, 1990), pp. 22-25.

⁴⁹⁶ See, for example, Cechura, *Kognitive Hirnforschung*, 2008; Freerk Huisken, *Zur Kritik der Bremer 'Hirnforschung': Hirn determiniert Geist – Fehler, Folgen und Funktion* (Bremen: Repliqué, 2005). For a critique of the accompanying philosophical and epistemological discussions of neuropsychological research, see Werner Pfau, *Eine Kritik des Radikalen Konstruktivismus* (Bremen: AStA, 2002).

⁴⁹⁷ Gegenstandspunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Krölls, *Kritik der Psychologie*, p. 10.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ World Health Organization (Regional Office for Europe), *Impact of Economic Crisis on Mental Health* (2011) <http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/134999/e94837.pdf> [16 January 2013].

status of being unemployed to himself as an individual, rather than reflecting critically upon the objective socio-economic situation which he must cope with.

Hence, neither the individual's psychological ability to deal with bourgeois society, nor its economic foundations, finds itself the object of analysis and potential criticism. In consequence, such a psychological phenomenon could only be explained inadequately by mainstream psychologists.

The MG argues that, precisely because they pretend to be objective and apolitical, existing psychological approaches merely aim to re-integrate 'failed' individuals as functioning members of its unquestioned social conditions, rather than seek to fully reflect on the economic nature of unemployment and the purposes of a mode of production that constantly endangers the reproduction of individuals. By rejecting this holistic approach, mainstream psychology would reveal itself as essentially affirmative towards the capitalist system and thus biased in its aim to understand human behaviour.

Mainstream psychology's denial of any "objective content and purpose to the ambitions individuals harbour and the actions they carry out"⁵⁰¹ is criticised by the MG, which challenges the basic assumption of human behaviour as being conditioned by internal and external factors.⁵⁰² Identified by Krölls as a judgement without any convincing theoretical foundation, the latter would reveal the concept of (complex) causality as the core of mainstream psychology.⁵⁰³

Given modern psychological research methods, the MG's argument is worth considering because in its current form of appearance, 'causality' is identified an inevitable premise of experimental-statistical research methods, which search for correlations between dependent and independent variables. In line with Güßbacher, the MG argues that although the existence of statistically significant correlations does not reflect a form of causal dependence, but rather a specific probability of co-occurrence, the application of mathematical laws for producing evidence is ultimately based on the abstract idea of some sort of 'causality' between variables.⁵⁰⁴ Hence, the MG concludes that if there would not be an implicit assumption of causality, conducting correlational analysis would be a redundant process.

To highlight this argument, the following example can be considered: a prominent hypothesis states that unemployment and the percentage of votes for right-wing parties

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Zimbardo, Philip G. Gerrig and Richard J. Gerrig, *Psychologie* (Berlin: Springer, 1999), 7th ed.

⁵⁰³ Krölls, *Kritik der Psychologie*, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁴ See Heinrich Güßbacher, *Hegels Psychologie der Intelligenz* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1988), pp. 339-345.

correlate. Indeed, research has shown that a statistically significant correlation exists between high percentages of votes for far right parties and relatively high rates of unemployment.⁵⁰⁵ What does 'correlation' refer to in this context? For the MG, empirical research suggests an undefined link between both phenomena. In the case of unemployment and voting for right-wing parties, the increase of the former has an impact on the latter. The more unemployed voters are concentrated in one constituency, the higher the chances are for parties of the political right to gain a high percentage of votes. Yet, if one assumes such a link, the economic phenomenon of unemployment itself must 'cause' the political decision of individuals to support right-wing parties.

Unemployment, however, does not result in any specific political attitude. An individual could also conclude that the economic system of capitalism and the interest in capital accumulation inevitably produces a 'relative surplus population'; so vote for socialist parties or support conservative politicians simply to stimulate the supply side of the economy and create new jobs through economic growth. Here, the MG argues that political attitudes are the result of specific conclusions at which an individual arrives given their being unemployed. If this does not result in a specific attitude, the application of mathematical laws for producing statistical 'evidence' therefore constitutes an inadequate method of theory formation. According to the MG, the concept of causality, implicit to the idea of statistically significant correlations, does not exist.

Against the prevailing approach in empirical social research, where statistical results are understood as fundamental and self-explanatory to the comprehension of specific relationships, the MG contends that these results present a mere basis for describing the actual *theoretical* explanation. In other words, even the occurrence of a perfect correlation would require a theoretical foundation in order to fully understand the relationship.⁵⁰⁶ Given that empirical research cannot provide content-related evidence, the MG draws upon its derivative approach. Krölls asserts that this, the search for factors influencing an individual's behaviour

⁵⁰⁵ Armin Falk and Josef Zweimüller, *Unemployment and Right-Wing Extremist Crime*, Discussion Paper 1540, March 2005 <<http://ftp.iza.org/dp1540.pdf>> [16 July 2012], p. 21.

⁵⁰⁶ In this context, the group supports Hegel's ideas presented in *The Doctrine of the Notion*, in which the philosopher criticised the ideal of an empirical allness: "Empirical allness remains a *task*, something which *ought to be done* and which cannot therefore be represented as *being*. Now an empirically universal proposition — for nevertheless such are advanced — rests on the tacit agreement that if only no contrary *instance* can be adduced, the *plurality* of cases shall count as *allness*; or, that *subjective allness*, namely, those cases which *have come to our knowledge*, may be taken for an *objective allness*." Hegel, *Logic II*, § 1399, p. 332. See also Güßbacher's annotations in *Hegel's Psychologie der Intelligenz*, pp. 339-345.

and thinking, is the relevant mistake of bourgeois psychology, because it would prevent the development of an adequate theory.⁵⁰⁷

Here, we can seize upon the similarities between the MG's position and Hegel's perspective on causality:

One seems to say the following: my will has been determined by these motives, circumstances, stimuli and drives. This concept implies in the first instance that my behaviour was passive. In reality, I was not only passive but considerably *active* in the way that my will absorbed these motives, accepted them as motives. Here, *the relationship of causality does not exist*. The circumstances do not act as a cause and my will does not act as a result of their effect. [...] Insofar as a human being refers to circumstances, stimuli etc. as the reason of his behaviour he wishes to push this behaviour away from himself. This however implies the *belittling of his existence* to that of an unfree or natural creature [...]. Circumstances and motives have only so much power over a human being as he wishes them to have.⁵⁰⁸

Hegel identifies human behaviour as an expression of intelligence dependent only on its own doing and concludes that it is, by implication, free. According to this, freedom of mind commences with the intellectual occupation of the external world. In this process, the will, as the concrete form of appearance of intelligence, is free to concentrate its interest on any given subject.⁵⁰⁹ In line with this, the MG concludes that the existence of free will would not mean very much: "It only means that you know what you want, are aware of your needs and wishes, can judge them and take appropriate actions."⁵¹⁰

The MG asserts that mainstream psychologists, by rejecting freedom of will, must in principle "*fight every explanation* of perceptions and feelings, of consciousness and speech, of free will itself."⁵¹¹ As a consequence of this, the protagonists of academic psychology would not study a specific research object, i.e. certain behaviour; but rather, search for 'hidden' factors facilitating its occurrence. When limited to examining only the determinants of the particular behaviour, the bourgeois individual's efforts and his applied psychological techniques to go about their business in capitalist society would be ignored:

"The dogma of the psychological outlook on the world is that the [...] techniques of self-control [...] are themselves the key to knowing the real purpose of what people do."⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁷ Albert Krölls, *Kritik der psychologischen Weltanschauung*, Berlin [254 min.] (2005) <<http://www.sozialref.com/vortraege.htm>> [10 July 2009].

⁵⁰⁸ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke Vol. 4*, § 15, pp. 222-223 (own translation).

⁵⁰⁹ Güßbacher, *Hegels Psychologie der Intelligenz*, 1988.

⁵¹⁰ Ruthless Criticism, *Arguments against psychology*, (undated) <<http://www.ruthlesscriticism.com/bourgeois-thoughtindex.htm>> [18 September 2010].

⁵¹¹ Gegenstandpunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 3.

⁵¹² Ibid.

Here, self-control refers to the phenomenon that individuals are able to remain affirmative towards capitalist society, despite their material interests being systematically rejected. More explicitly, the MG expresses the need to examine what kind of norms and standards an individual must possess in order to arrive at a specific content of will (e.g. application of force), as opposed to examining the potential determinants of the will (e.g. violent computer games, limited social support, bullying) through empirical research. Moreover, if an individual is restricted by social, financial and political, i.e. external factors, and is therefore unable to apply her/his will, the implementation of what s/he wants would not be a practical question any longer.⁵¹³ According to the MG, this would result in the theoretical necessity of analysing the nature of these barriers in detail and result.

The MG contrasts mainstream discourse on psychological phenomena with its Hegelian ideas and throws new light on debates in which certain social behaviour is frequently interpreted as an expression of amentia, delusion or any other mental abnormality; rather than analysed for the specific content of will practically applied by an individual. In this respect, the MG's theory of abstract free will offers a critical framework for further socio-critical theorising of psychological phenomena; and events such as the rampage of Anders Breivik in Oslo in 2011. Breivik's sanity proved the key question to be resolved in court, which received two psychiatric reports, one claiming him to be insane, the other asserting the opposite. In contrast, the *Gegenstandpunkt*, premising freedom of will and thus his sanity, focused on Breivik's moral convictions, nationalism and critique of the political status quo.⁵¹⁴

By applying Hegel's basic thoughts on will, consciousness and intelligence, the MG not only insisted that thoughts are ultimately not influenced by conditions, but stressed the idea that the necessity of human behaviour results from appropriate forms of will.⁵¹⁵

4.4.3. The basic principles of an *abstract free will*

In bourgeois society, the free will of individuals is the basic principle of law; and thus a matter of fact.⁵¹⁶ From this, the MG concludes that by conceding its citizens the right to act as a legal entity, and thus as individuals with their own interests and purposes, the bourgeois state substantially harms the free will of individuals living under its rule. The legal act of

⁵¹³ See also G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kitchener: Batoche, 2001), § 4-14, pp. 28-38.

⁵¹⁴ For an analysis of Breivik's behaviour, see *GegenStandpunkt* 3 (2011), pp. 38-44.

⁵¹⁵ For a detailed study of Hegel's approach to intelligence, see Güßbacher, *Hegels Psychologie der Intelligenz*, 1988.

⁵¹⁶ In the context of modern jurisdiction, the free will is by implication identified as the *sine qua non* of human behaviour. Only in certain circumstances can this premise be challenged: namely, those of legal insanity.

accepting these individuals' free will, which naturally exists prior to and independent of this acceptance is, according to the MG, implicitly identical to the subjection of this will to the interests of the authority guaranteeing such rights. Thus, the legal acceptance of an individual's will is defined both as the most abstract but also most comprehensive form through which to submit the specific content of this will to bourgeois rule. In line with Hegel, who noted that "the positive form of command having in the last resort a prohibition as its basis",⁵¹⁷ the MG argues that no sphere of bourgeois life is excluded from legal regulation and, consequently, the state would provide the exclusive conditions in which the individual is able to exert its free will.

Moreover, because the individual's will is accepted, none of its particular interests are acknowledged by the bourgeois state. The bearer of such a will is free to accept state-imposed restrictions as the quasi-natural condition for the application of his or her will. According to the MG's derivational analysis, the bourgeois individual accepts these legal conditions as the starting-point for its behaviour and merely wants to do what it has to do anyway.⁵¹⁸ Thereafter, the will would be abstractly free, because by incorporating the legal requirements of the bourgeois state into their formation of will, the private individual abstracts from these restrictions and acclaims the realm of freedom. In other words, with the theory of abstract free will, the MG introduces a genuine 'psychology of freedom' to the academic and broader left discourse by stressing Hegel's notion, and claiming that individuals are not only passive but 'considerably active' in the way they absorb and interpret their living environment.

The MG's concept of abstract free will attempts to explain how individuals modify their free will to reproduce the system of exploitation. The following further clarifies how abstract free will is derived:

- (1) 'I live in a world, in which decency *results in* success';
- (2) However, success in a competitive society is not a matter of course: 'Therefore I have to act with decency, so that I *might be* successful';
- (3) 'Because the identity of success and decency in most cases does not occur, I have to *accentuate* my *decent manners*, so that other people are willing to concede success to my ambitions';
- (4) 'While the world does not stick to its own ideal of an identity of decency and success, I adhere to that ideal; I will be *my own identity* of decency and success.'

⁵¹⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §38, p. 54.

⁵¹⁸ Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz – ein Grund zum Feiern?* (Hamburg: VSA, 2009).

Because the MG's theory is conceptualised within derivational tradition, which enjoyed strong influence over German Marxist discourse during the 1970s, it is important to note that in my analysis, I apply the structure presented by the MG. This implies that the four steps are to be understood not as a chronological, but a logical explanation; one step is necessarily based on the former.⁵¹⁹

4.4.3.1. Step 1) "Phony materialism of permissible success": capitalism as an offer for the materialism of bourgeois individuals

The MG rests its derivation of bourgeois individuals' consciousness on the premise that fierce competition among individual for the best positions in the 'hierarchy of occupations' is first, restricted and second, canalised by state authorities to *law and order*.⁵²⁰ Hence, in contrast to historical societies, in which people fought directly against each other through the means of their physical strength and sheer cruelty in order to preserve their material well-being, the individual's materialism is generally acknowledged and officially authorised in bourgeois societies.

According to the competitive, exclusive character of the capitalist system, the first important hypothesis of the MG is that any person is dependent on "other people's interests and the means at their disposal."⁵²¹ The argument here is that everyone is confronted with the necessity of working hard if they are to succeed through utilisation of their own physical or intellectual means. However, caricatured as an expression of false consciousness, the MG argues that the individual is always dependent upon someone else being interested in employing them, rather than having the means of production at its own disposal.

Accordingly, in the case of someone with the opportunity to start a new occupation, the MG argues that an individual was simply lucky enough to attract the other's interest in exploiting their working force. In contrast, individuals interpret this as a successful application achieved thanks to their very *personal capabilities*; yet in fact, they will necessarily have submitted themselves to the requirements set by and the interests of other people, i.e. public institutions or companies.

⁵¹⁹ Here, it is worth highlighting Marx's own comment on this approach: "Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction." Marx, *Capital I*, in *MECW Vol. 35*, p. 19.

⁵²⁰ Gegenstandspunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 3. The MG's analysis of the bourgeois psyche premises the knowledge of capitalism in which abstract free will is applied.

⁵²¹ Gegenstandspunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 3.

The public power, whose only reason for existence and therefore purpose is the useful advance of competition, also makes clear to its citizens from the start what is *permitted* and what is *forbidden*.⁵²²

The MG argues that the materialism of the people is recognised as a matter of principle “but only within the limits of necessities imposed on them to make them useful to state and capital.”⁵²³ For the MG, the bourgeois order is therefore not anti-materialistic in the sense that any form of materialism is prohibited. Quite the opposite: materialism is ideologically and practically promoted, but exclusively within the legal framework of democratic capitalism. The MG argues that this political-economic framework is acknowledged by the private individual as the ‘natural basis’ of its material striving. By accommodating its intellect, character, consciousness and feelings “to the freedom to compete as specifically defined by his particular place in society”⁵²⁴ the bourgeois individual would “cultivate the special bourgeois use of the mind: *he plots his success within the framework of what is permitted*.”⁵²⁵

Thus, individuals in democratic societies are willing to prove themselves solely within the existing politico-economic conditions which they interpret as an offer to their materialism. Proactive participation is therefore identical to fulfilling the requirements imposed by state authorities; and the principles of capitalism on private individuals.

This first argument distinguishes the MG's approach from that of other theorists. To the MG, individuals are not ‘victims’ of the ruling politico-economic order, but active supporters of it. Consequently, the frequently emphasised theoretical-practical common interest of Marxist intellectuals and the proletariat is overcome and replaced by intellectual antagonism to the actual interests of the masses. The working class therefore finds itself under fierce criticism and rejected as a point of reference. Indeed, the often communicated idea of leftists as ideal representatives of the people is severely criticised by the MG.

As a consequence of competition, bourgeois individuals would “continually assess and praise or condemn”⁵²⁶ the behaviour of other people, they are interested in comparing their performance to that of others’. The concept of an abstract free will provides the criterion for such individuals’ incessant comparisons: ‘standard of successful decency’ or ‘permissible success’. MG theorists argue that bourgeois individuals apply this criterion whenever they judge their fellow citizens, because it refers to the two major principles of bourgeois society:

⁵²² Ibid., p. 7.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

competition and the rule of law.

They further explain that in a social system, in which everything from education to earning money and even private life is dependent upon and subject to competition, individuals are educated and willing competitors. By assessing their specific position within bourgeois society, moral individuals assure themselves of their relative success. Moreover, as the democratic order is interpreted as the starting-point from which to compete with others for one's own personal benefit, the bourgeois individual has to ensure that its competitors tie their behaviour to law and order (i.e. decency).

By integrating politico-economic circumstances 'into its own agenda' the bourgeois individual transforms "the forced decision to adapt to the world as it is, to move only within prescribed paths, as a free judgment about the world."⁵²⁷ Consequently, although the bourgeois regime obliges its citizens to acquire money in order to satisfy their needs, individuals would re-interpret the different choices they have on how to earn money as their *individual freedom* and an opportunity to appropriately apply their particular talents.

By adapting their will according to "the limits of necessities imposed on them,"⁵²⁸ the modern world is interpreted as the mere means for individual purposes; indeed, the materialism of bourgeois individuals is identified by the MG as 'phony' because it is not the purpose of production in capitalism, but merely the means of capital accumulation. Moreover, from a physical and mental perspective, this 'phony materialism' would be harmful to them, but also a logical consequence of facing the world according to the practical question: "to what extent does it suit me and my intentions?"⁵²⁹ As if the capitalist society were solely arranged for the purposes of the bourgeois individuals, they refer every single aspect of life to themselves and their interests. This theoretical indifference towards the ruling interests of the democratic-capitalist society is determined from the MG's materialistic viewpoint as the key flaw in bourgeois existence.

4.4.3.2. Step 2) Believing in 'opportunities': the idealism of self-control that pays off

In the first step of the analysis, the MG describes the modern individual as someone who "considers the world to be one big offer for himself"⁵³⁰; consequently, "he enjoys nothing but liberties."⁵³¹ Thus, freedom in its different facets would be understood and celebrated by those

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

with a bourgeois consciousness as the highest value of democratic societies, rather than criticised as the most abstract form of submission to the interests of state and capital.⁵³²

However, although the materialism of modern individuals is recognised in principle, living in a capitalist society would not and cannot guarantee success on the economic, political and private level. The MG therefore argues that free submission to the legal an, as a practical consequence of that, the moral agenda of a democratic state coincides with different problems faced by the individual in the process of trying to obtain personal advantages within the ruling politico-economic system.⁵³³

The MG enunciates that, in contrast to the scenario outlined in step one above, in step two, a “sum of good and bad opportunities”⁵³⁴ becomes the rule. Opportunities are, by definition, uncertain occurrences, and because of that social reality is constantly monitored for such chances. This, however, rather puts into perspective the original idea that bourgeois society is full of means for an individual's ends to be fulfilled.

Moreover, the MG uses the phrase ‘opportunities’ to highlight the individual's positive attitude towards capitalist society, cultivated as a matter of principle. Their approach therefore remains entirely affirmative at the underlying level; the MG stresses that “the moral individual wants to prove himself *in* bourgeois society,”⁵³⁵ despite experiencing the divergence between success and decency.

According to these lines of thought, although still generally affirmative, the relationship of the bourgeois individual to his social environment alternates. As all people have positive as well as negative experiences when competing for rewarding positions in the hierarchy of jobs and success in private life, the attitude towards the ruling system is constantly changing. However, according to the MG, the bourgeois individual never challenges competition *per se*, but merely engages in considerable and incessant criticism of his position in this competition.

In accordance with Marx, who claimed that moral individuals are ‘idealists of the state’ believing in the beneficial nature of state power, the MG argues that these idealistic individuals think of themselves as *entitled* to reflect critically on daily and world affairs.⁵³⁶ The bourgeois individual varyingly applies the standpoint of success and decency to his own

⁵³² See also Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz*, 2009.

⁵³³ Like Hegel, the MG deduces the moral agenda as a complexly subjectified form of rights. See Marxistische Gruppe, ‘Kommentar zur Rechtsphilosophie Hegels’, in *Fachbereichszeitung Philosophie* (Munich: self-published, 1988).

⁵³⁴ Gegenstandpunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 10.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ See Margaret Wirth, *Demokratische Öffentlichkeit*, Munich [126 min.] (2006) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD>> [12 July 2009].

behaviour and that of others, depending on the progress of his own strive for success and acknowledgement.⁵³⁷ Too often, the success of people seems to be accompanied by a lack of decency. On the other hand, decency "is seen to be the reason for many a setback, especially for oneself."⁵³⁸ Even though both sometimes go hand in hand, or both are violated, the criteria for the judgement of other individuals remain the same. By applying these two criteria to his social environment, the bourgeois individual becomes acquainted with 'cold-blooded careerists', 'lovely losers', 'enviable winners', 'failing idiots' and everything in between.

Consequently, feelings alter somewhere between having deep respect for a person and despising their mere existence. Hence, the bourgeois individual's consciousness "*judges by a double standard*".⁵³⁹ This presents an interesting thought, as it may offer a materialist explanation of phenomena such as the interest in tabloid press or the ongoing success of televised casting shows, in which the audience is free to form an opinion on the myriad of 'failing idiots' and 'enviable winners' on the basis of the shared will of candidates and the audience to compete.

At this stage of the MG's derivation of bourgeois consciousness, the individual has transformed all objective economic and political restrictions, to the point of subjectifying them.⁵⁴⁰ Accordingly, by believing in the opportunities that life offers them, individuals are convinced, at least to a certain extent, that they are in control of the restrictions they face, so hope to be able to overcome them in practice.

The MG reasons that successful businessmen, sportsmen, artists or academics seem to the moral individual as the practical proof of this assumption. It therefore appears to bourgeois individuals that some people would have the required individual skills in 'exploiting the chances' that arise in the course of their educational and/or professional career. By reflecting merely on individual skills, any reference to the politico-economic principle of competition becomes dispensable. As a practical consequence of this, calculating behaviour, i.e. adequate employment of intellect and morality is, according to the MG, fundamental to being an 'obedient materialist'. The bourgeois materialist aims to be successful in competition against individuals with similar ambitions.

In summary, the MG depicts bourgeois individuals as being critical towards life in democracy and capitalism, but remaining affirmative regarding bourgeois rule as a matter of principle. More specifically, bourgeois individuals criticise occasions where decency and

⁵³⁷ Gegenstandpunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 10.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

success diverge. With this occurring frequently, the individual holds on to its decent approach, in the conviction that it will materialise in success. For the MG, this enables them to preserve their “standpoint of *self-control that pays off*”⁵⁴¹, so the *idea* of an identity of success and decency is, in principle, retained.

4.4.3.3. Step 3) Hypocrisy and complaining about the world: the falling apart of submission and success

The MG asserts that self-control does not materially pay off for the majority of bourgeois individuals. Here, the term self-control refers to the supposed fact that the individual retains the idea that success and decency complement one another, even though this ideal is not always supported in reality. The moral self holds on to those personal interests rejected by society through the continued attempt to have its claims honoured.⁵⁴²

As the identity of decency and success would too often remain an illusion, moral individuals constantly refer to the principles of their political and economic circumstances, e.g. justice, common welfare and solidarity. Although these principles do not guarantee the success of an individual's life programme, the MG theorises that the moral individual “stages every purpose and every act as a *right* of his subjective will, continually pleads and swears that his deeds conform to the standards he acknowledges.”⁵⁴³ In other words, the individual expresses its wishes hypocritically, in order to claim what s/he deserves, rather than articulating their interests more truthfully.

To exemplify this abstract line of thought, we might take a look at how a trade union, in this case, Germany's association of workers of the heavy duty industry, *IG Metall*, makes the case for its members' material goals:

The *IG Metall* wants to improve the demand for goods and services in Germany with a high increase of its members' wages. Such demand is missing. The *IG Metall* wants to contribute to further economic growth and to avoid any further job cuts. Workers of the heavy duty industry commit themselves to goals that are beneficial for all of us. [...] The *IG Metall* is interested in more [than money], more justice in our society, more growth for the creation of more jobs [...].⁵⁴⁴

The union brings forward its demands in a way that, at least in principle, allows for other social actors to consent. Rather than insisting exclusively on wage increases in order to improve living conditions, the argument put forward considers interests that are generally

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁴⁴ IG Metall-Vorstand, *Tarif 2008: Es geht um mehr* [leaflet] (Frankfurt/Main: self-published, 2008).

accepted in capitalist societies because the union's representatives are aware that the insistence on personal interests being met would be improper, considering the *particularity* of these.⁵⁴⁵ For this reason, according to the MG's theory, *IG Metall* refers to 'demand', 'growth', 'jobs', and 'justice', all of which are generally accepted requirements of the improvement of the capitalist commonwealth (the first three) or an unquestioned value of democracy (the latter).

The transformation of rejected interests into rightful claims, however, in no way guarantees the practical acknowledgement of them. As a result, bourgeois individuals often perceive the world as an accumulation of injustices. Social reality seems not to follow its own norms and values. According to the MG's analysis, this non-identity of an individual's idealistic worldview and the social reality he has to face, does not translate into critical reflection of the norms and values of his society; instead, the individual simply maintains their claims: "The world wants to be deceived."⁵⁴⁶

In other words, the individual believes that others are depriving him of the realisation of these claims. Again, a critique of capitalist society is missing here; rather, the individual feels the need to achieve this realisation by violating the norms and values it theoretically supports (e.g. illicit work, tax evasion or utilising the workplace for private purposes), in order to materialise his claims. The MG asserts that the moral self is aware that the practical violation of standards it acknowledges is, more or less often, necessary to get on with one's social, economic and political existence.⁵⁴⁷

What at first appears as a paradox can be explained within the MG's theoretical framework as an individual's 'pathetic ruse' that would constitute the habit of hypocrisy: the bourgeois individual disobeys ethical standards, and simultaneously identifies its actions as the realisation of his subjectively held higher rights, norms, and values, thereby restoring their validity. An individual, who engages, for example, in tax evasion, acts neither in opposition to capitalist society or the idea of common welfare, but is merely claiming the 'fair share' of his economic input and efforts. For the MG, hypocrisy of this kind is an omnipresent phenomenon; and nothing but the 'moral materialism' of bourgeois individuals compensating, even if inadequately, for their hindered materialism.

⁵⁴⁵ This consideration of the 'general interests' of trade unions is a key element of the MG's general critique of them. See Marxistische Gruppe, *Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (Munich: Resultate, 1982); Marxistische Gruppe, 'Der 1. Mai des DGB', in *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv*, Flugblattsammlung 1019.

⁵⁴⁶ See Gegenstandspunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 11.

⁵⁴⁷ Rolf Röhrig, *Die Moral und ihre großen Werte – nichts wert!* [audio], 2009.
<<http://doku.argodiss.de/?Kategorie=Mul#189>> [10 July 2009].

The individual justifies this hypocrisy to himself by asserting that he was forced to disobey ethical standards; yet the question remains: how does s/he ensure the credibility of this position? The MG argues that the moral individual permanently demonstrates his particular good conduct, setting the same expectations for others.⁵⁴⁸ In this way, he acts as the keeper of ethical standards. According to the group, an institutionalisation of calculated and habitually friendly behaviour takes place as a result of this expectation of meeting the standards generally acknowledged. The practical manifestation of this decency is 'politeness'.

In line with the idea that decency does not guarantee success, good manners prove not to be sufficient for material, personal and political success. Yet moral selves have a vital interest in expecting and engaging in decent behaviour, i.e. politeness, as a matter of principle. This at first seems paradoxical; however, the MG resolves this by emphasising that morality and self-control as a ritualised habit are the *conditio sine qua non* for any success and constitute the most abstract form of expressing one's compliance with the standards of capitalist society.

4.4.3.4. Step 4) Righteousness: the 'second nature' of bourgeois individuals

As per the MG's analysis, the moral self behaves in accordance with the accepted standards of decency; and as a result, claims a right to its own welfare. However, this persistent approach does not equate to economic private and political success, because hypocrisy and good conduct would themselves lead to the desired realisation of one's interest.⁵⁴⁹ However, for bourgeois individuals, those with success prove that the identity of ideal and reality is still possible. In combination with luck, decency and the proper personality would actually result in the satisfaction of an individual's material interests.⁵⁵⁰

Accordingly, the bourgeois individual deals with the vicissitudes of life in capitalism in a biased way. Rather than objectively analysing the reasons for its inadequately fulfilled materialism and personal success, it believes in its own hypocrisy and generally acknowledged ideals. Each deviation from this idealistic and moralist worldview, which assumes that the capitalist order serves the interests of individuals, is the beginning of complaining about the world and its 'injustices' and 'moral misconduct'. This occurs on the basis of the conviction that the capitalist society is in principle the adequate means for the fulfilment of an individual's materialism, as outlined in step one. Consequently, "the bad

⁵⁴⁸ See Gegenstandpunkt, *Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 12.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

opinion about [immoral] humans is the positive opinion about state and capitalism”⁵⁵¹, so bourgeois individuals retain their moral stance on the course of life and their affirmative attitude towards capitalism. Röhrig, theorist of the *Gegenstandpunkt*, further highlights the consequences of this agitation for morally adequate behaviour:

If a moralist is forced to agitate continuously for the ‘good’, the ‘good’ is obviously not immanent to those interests people follow in our modern society. [...] This must be a society, in which the interests that people follow result in antagonisms among them. Morality does not aim to eliminate such antagonisms, but wants to restrict them to the ‘correct level’. [...] A moralist is indifferent to the content of interests that lead to socio-economic antagonisms.⁵⁵²

For the MG, morality is thus an adequate complement to the competitiveness of capitalist societies and refers to the difficulties of individuals in satisfying their material needs. It is identified as the bracket that holds together a society with conflicting interests. Through this concept, the MG develops a radical counter-draft to the prevalent idea among Marxists to connect with the people's values: frequently understood to be the actual ‘soul of socialism’.⁵⁵³ Thanks to the understanding that moral values have their origin in the specific capitalist communisation, the MG concludes that they have to be the object of criticism; and by definition, cannot provide the decisive leverage for politico-economic change.

Finally, bourgeois individuals continually demonstrate their free decision to participate in capitalism and democracy. Therefore, their accommodation in state and capital is accompanied by the clear conscience of individuals. Bourgeois individuals can, however, only maintain this clear conscience

“by continually struggling against the bad conscience they get when comparing the requirements of bourgeois life, its criteria for success, with their ‘failure’ to meet them.”⁵⁵⁴

For the MG, the constantly alternating feelings of good and bad conscience prove that individuals living in capitalism have eventually begun to reflect on themselves; and consequently, to cultivate a way of dealing psychologically with their positive and negative daily experiences. This means that bourgeois individuals psychologise all vicissitudes of life; yet how do they maintain a positive attitude towards themselves despite the ongoing

⁵⁵¹ See Röhrig, *Die Moral und ihre großen Werte* [audio], 2009.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ For a current support of this idea, see Stephen J. Fortunato Jr., ‘The Soul of Socialism: Connecting with the People's Values’, in *Monthly Review*, 3 (2005) <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/0705fortunato.htm>> [6 December 2010].

⁵⁵⁴ See *Gegenstandpunkt, Psychology of the Private Individual*, p. 14.

curtailment or, at least, the endangerment of their interests?

Proponents of the idea of successful decency would conceptualise themselves as excellent personalities, entitled to confront the rest of the world with their moral attitude.⁵⁵⁵ The MG considers it a simple task for bourgeois individuals to let others look like fools against their individually set moral standards. It further claims that 'skilled' moralists (and every bourgeois individual is identified as such), face the world as judges; and through this, are able to maintain their ideal identity of decency and success. In other words, even though the majority of people are excluded at least partially from the material wealth of capitalist society, or does not enjoy success in private life, moral individuals rarely abandon what the MG terms the "*ideal of themselves*."⁵⁵⁶ This is the final transition in the MG's abstract derivation of the bourgeois psyche.

This idealism of the self, construed by the individual, rarely coincides with reality.⁵⁵⁷ Yet the individual separates their actual achievements from their abilities; and is thus not mentally hurt by failure, but holds on to the belief that it is, in principle at least, capable of more. This is thanks to self-confidence, which is therefore not derived in the MG's theory as an important precondition for success and self-identity, but as a product of conformity with the principles of bourgeois society. The ideal of developing appropriate 'ego-strength' is thus the need to develop the ability of distinguishing between one's own feeling of self-worth and experiences of bourgeois life. According to the MG's analysis, separating the results of competition from the image of oneself is the quintessence of self-confidence and, therefore, a genuine aspect of bourgeois consciousness.⁵⁵⁸

This bourgeois individual is assumed to be the instrument for realising the identity of success and decency. Inevitable doubts about his ability to converge these two aspects emerge in every individual, according to the MG. This leads to the psychologisation of all experiences in capitalism; a process that involves the formation of appropriate 'techniques', e.g. morality and self-confidence not to lose faith in oneself and, in reverse, diminishes the receptiveness of bourgeois individuals towards materialist criticism.

4.4.4. Discussion

In light of Marx's vaguely formulated remarks on the consciousness of individuals in

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ See Peter Decker, *Die Psychologie des bürgerlichen Individuums*, Erlangen [404 min.] (1980) <<http://farberot.de/>> [10 July 2009].

capitalism, and the misunderstandings resulting from his idea that being determines consciousness, Marxist theory formation progressed to consider psychological theories, in order to better understand the relationship of the 'revolutionary subject' to bourgeois society at the end of the 1920s. Although intellectuals affiliated with the Frankfurt School were not the first to elaborate on this issue, the miscellaneous *Studies on Authority and Family* which they published in 1936 became a standard reference of the West German student movement.

Adorno's theory of the authoritarian personality, a theoretical offspring of the Frankfurt School's earlier studies, was another concept which influenced the intellectual debates during those years.⁵⁵⁹

In addition to *Studies on Authority and Family*, the later work of Adorno and, in particular, Marcuse had a significant impact. Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man* became a manifesto of the student movement. Although he legitimised opposition to advanced industrialised societies, Marcuse further developed the deterministic basic concept which the Frankfurt School relied upon. His main hypothesis was unambiguous: in late industrial capitalism, human beings would be made and kept stupid. Socially predefined culture aims to limit their thinking and intellect and thereby creates one-dimensional beings, whose thinking is reproduced without contradictions through the norms of capitalist cultural industry.

In Adorno's work, from which Marcuse drew heavily, the supremacy of society over the individual appeared to be without limits. Marcuse, however, became popular because he believed in the potential liberation of the masses through repression of their heteronomous needs.

Marcuse's criticism of the cultural industry was criticised in the MG's framework. The alleged manipulation implied by Marcuse in this industry finds itself deconstructed as a chimera. Although the MG does not deny the specific bourgeois quality of culture and media, it rejects Marcuse's idea that this would result in one-dimensional individuals. As Marcuse himself was able to break from the influence of late capitalist culture to formulate his theory, it is obvious, from the MG's perspective, that the idea of a manipulative character of this culture is flawed.

Here, capitalist culture supplies a need, originating from the specific bourgeois requirement to deal with life in capitalism. Unlike Marcuse, the MG did not centre its hopes for the emergence of a revolutionary movement on fringe groups. Instead, as far as it was concerned, its continuous efforts of persuasion would be the basis of the political overthrow of bourgeois society because the mere experience of exploitation and material hardship does

⁵⁵⁹ See Bovenschen cit. in Lönnendonker and Staadt, 1968 - *Vorgeschichte und Konsequenzen*, 1988.

not result in a specific stance towards the principles of capitalism.

Even today, Marxists preserve the Frankfurt School's deterministic outlook on an individual's behaviour. In a recently published paper, Piekkola, for example, asserts, in continuation of Marcuse's idea, that cultural and socio-economic forces dominate biological factors in directing human action; and thus negates the autonomy of the human will.⁵⁶⁰

Behavioural determinism remains the dominant premise of critical and mainstream socio-psychological research. The MG's approach is not based on absolute arbitrariness regarding the content of the will, but aims at producing a holistic theory of human consciousness, which actively and willingly deals with given socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, the MG's *Psychology of the Private Individual: Critique of Bourgeois Consciousness* not only has a strong political dimension, but is an attempt to criticise psychology as an academic discipline as outlined in section 4.4.2.

Through recourse to the most prominent proponent of German idealism, the MG's theory formation took a path, which broke with many conceptual traditions associated with Marxist thought. In particular, its adoption of Hegel's ideas on consciousness and intelligence, based on the concept of freedom of will, separated the group from all traditional Marxist approaches to social psychology.

This naturally led critics to challenge the actual Marxist substance of the *Marxistische Gruppe*.⁵⁶¹ The MG was attacked on two grounds: one faction criticised the group's vehement rejection of the Frankfurt School's psychoanalytical approach and its idea of the dominant impact of late capitalist culture on the formation of an individual's will.⁵⁶² Others criticised its autonomous philosophy and deviation from Marx's original idea, which emphasised the decisive impact of being on an individual's consciousness.⁵⁶³

On the basis of its adoption of the concept of free will, the MG was able to offer a new perspective on the meaning of 'being determines consciousness'. Against Marx's ambiguities,

⁵⁶⁰ See Brad Piekkola, 'To sell Marx in North America is not to sell Marx', in *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 9, 2011 <<http://www.discourseunit.com/arcp/arcp9/Piekkola%20.pdf>> [2 January 2012], pp. 78-83.

⁵⁶¹ See Bernd Gäbler, 'Mit Marx gegen die MG', in Bernd Gäbler, ed, *Das Prinzip Ohnmacht: Eine Streitschrift zur Politik der 'Marxistischen Gruppe'* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983), pp. 12-33. The book cover of Bernd Gäbler's polemic features paralysed midgets adorning themselves with masks, depicting a grim looking Karl Marx. From a methodological perspective, MG arguments are confronted with remarks made by Marx in his work to 'prove' the erroneousness of the MG's view and challenge its Marxist quality. An example from Jantzen: "Taking a look at *Capital* proves that Marx exclusively applied the term 'character mask' to the analysis of the economic exchange process and that he understands the term as a reflection of objective economic relations" (p. 130). The question from an intellectual perspective of whether the idea of 'character masks' can also be usefully applied to non-economic phenomena is of no interest to Jantzen. See Wolfgang Jantzen, 'Die Psychologie des 'freien Willens': Bemerkungen zum Menschenbild der MG', in Bernd Gäbler, ed, *Das Prinzip Ohnmacht: Eine Streitschrift zur Politik der 'Marxistischen Gruppe'* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983), pp. 124-132.

⁵⁶² See Initiative Arbeiterzeitung und -zentren, *Kritik der Marxistischen Gruppe*, 1985.

⁵⁶³ See Jantzen, 'Die Psychologie des 'freien Willens'', 1983.

the MG stresses the autonomy of individuals in accommodating with the principles of capitalism for the chance for a life in material abundance. However, no matter how much an individual theoretically dissociates itself from the capitalist system, the socio-economic being nevertheless 'determines' the consciousness of all individuals; in the sense that, from a practical perspective, everyone is forced to develop an interest in dealing with the principles of the capitalist economy and generate income. 'False consciousness' is understood to be as practically necessary as it is theoretically unnecessary.

How the individual, who affirms the capitalist exchange process as an appropriate means for their materialism, develops a specific habitus and mindset or 'character mask', is the subject of the MG's derivation. While the acceptance of competition in capitalism forms the logical starting-point in the group's study, the righteousness of self-confident individuals who psychologically deal with the outcome of their efforts in capitalism is the endpoint. Here, the idea that success coincides with the acceptance of generally acknowledged standards has given way to the psychological handling of its divergence.

By disabusing Hegel's legacy from his apologetic implications, the MG aimed to set the theoretical foundations for its project of an amoral critique of bourgeois individuals' loyalty towards state and capital. Thus, the group distanced itself from the idea, advocated by leading representatives of Frankfurt, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, that capitalism would obstruct the validity of moral behaviour.⁵⁶⁴ In contrast, the MG derives the righteousness and morality of the bourgeois self from the specific interests followed in capitalism and the rule of law, which recognises the materialism of individuals.

Since the content of such interests would explain the omnipresence of morality in capitalism, the MG opposed the idea of restoring the validity of moral behaviour in a post-capitalist society. Moreover, this opposition and the freedom conceded by the MG to the behaviour of individuals resulted in the ruthless criticism of those affirmatively participating in capitalism and willingly interpreting competition as a suitable means for pursuing their materialist interests. As a result, any practical and ideal support for the working class was rejected by the MG, which identified this class not as passive victims of capitalism, but proactive proponents of state and capital. The political line of conflict between the capitalist class and proletariat, whose interests Marxist would ideally represent, was thus shifted; and drawn between bourgeois society as a whole, and the Marxist activists of the MG, in particular.

⁵⁶⁴ For a discussion of the Frankfurt School's reflections on the relationship of materialism and morality and its place within the general philosophical tradition, see Werner Rudolph, *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Sinn* (Berlin: Schelzky & Jeep, 1992), pp. 126-136.

In summary, the theory of abstract free will formed a key element of the MG's body of thought, and defined the group's approach to the object of its agitation. According to the MG's theory, the content of the will of bourgeois individuals is not arbitrary, but deals with material relationships in capitalism; and thus, how consciousness is 'determined' by its material being. For this reason, the will is conceptualised as 'abstract free'.

Although the MG's derivational approach is unusual; and the concept of the free will, especially in light of latest neuroscience research, highly controversial and apparently idealistic, its psychological studies aim to transcend the scientification of coincidence, manifest in the idealisation of empirical research; and thus contribute to a holistic theory of consciousness in capitalism. However, from a methodological point of view, the theory of abstract free will can only be interpreted as a first step towards amalgamating the atomistic discoveries of experiments with the derivational 'notion' of specific psychological phenomena, something that is missing in the MG's work. This synthesis could ultimately merge the laboratory-based experimental psychology with the laboratory-free phenomenology of intelligence, in order to develop an objective, holistic science of psychology.⁵⁶⁵

4.4.4.1. The importance of the theory of abstract free will in light of historical developments

In consequence of its theory of an autonomous will, the MG did not perceive itself as in line with the prevailing leftist *zeitgeist* after the student movement; nor did the group possess any unrealistic hopes regarding the prospect of overthrowing capitalism. Accordingly, the MG's theory can also be read as an explanation of why the developed societies of the First World have been so stable in their support of capitalism and the chances for revolution were so small. As Decker puts it, the morality of individuals has been the 'toughest nut to crack' for the past 40 years.⁵⁶⁶ Considering the MG's theory, the discrepancy between Marxist theorists and bourgeois society in general, and the alleged revolutionary subject in particular, is even more extreme than identified in theories emphasising manipulation or bribery, taken on, among others, by Marcuse.

As ideational people's representatives and proponents of the common good, the New Left, especially those organised within a revolutionary party, had a positive stance towards the 'masses'. A significant part of the New Left was thereby attracted by the new social movements which began to emerge in the mid-1970s. These allowed those activists

⁵⁶⁵ See Güßbacher, *Hegels Psychologie der Intelligenz*, 1988.

⁵⁶⁶ See Peter Decker, *Die Moral – Das gute Gewissen der Klassengesellschaft*, Bremen [149 min.] (2005) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=Mul#189>> [10 July 2009].

disappointed in their failure to have a significant political impact to reconnect their hopes for political change through the emerging enormous protests against the construction of nuclear power plants, ecological destruction and NATO military build-up.⁵⁶⁷

Even though, during their early stages, many activists merely took a tactical decision to participate in these democratic movements, numerous members of *K-Gruppen* joined so-called alternative or 'coloured' lists (*Alternative* or *Bunte Listen*), the politico-theoretical analyses and ideas developed during the West German student movement and radicalised in the 1970s offered the decisive link with which to reconnect with democratic capitalism.

The unsuccessful agitation of the 'revolutionary subject', in whose name the *K-Gruppen* were active and legitimised their political programme, was now interpreted as an argument against their political, economic and social criticism, formulated in the wake of the student movement. As a consequence of its practical inability to have an impact on West German society, Marxism in its various forms of appearance became the object of severe criticism. The general 'crisis of Marxism' was the practical manifestation of this. Dissociated from its social efficacy, Marxism was not understood to have an explanatory quality of its own. By willingly maintaining the capitalist system, the 'masses' practically disproved the validity of Marxist theory formation.⁵⁶⁸ As a result, the majority of radical leftists either joined forces with 'progressive elements' embodied by the new green-left-alternative movement or entirely withdrew from the political arena.

In particular, the Maoist *K-Gruppen* fell victim to this development. By criticising the idea of Marxists as both ideal representatives of the people and advocates of the common good, the MG intellectually distanced itself from an idealistic approach and manipulation theory, which had formed a key element of the West German student movement. Their ideas did not imply any theoretical transition through which they could connect with the new social movements; or the emerging Green Party, which absorbed a considerable part of the New Left.

The concept of abstract free will, implying the idea that the 'masses', venerated by the West German radical left after the student movement, are in fact an active part of the capitalist and its political system, formed the basis of the MG's development in the 1980s. Instead of bewailing the 'loss' of the emancipatory subject, the MG answered these developments with its *Psychology of the Private Individual*, a critique and theory of the subject affirming competition in democratic capitalism.

⁵⁶⁷ See Kurz, *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen sozialistischen Ziel*, 1988.

⁵⁶⁸ See, for example, the statement of the 'critique faction' of the Kommunistischer Bund in *Arbeiterkampf*, 156 (25 June 1979), p. 56-57.

5. **The *Marxistische Gruppe's* theory of state: freedom, equality, competition and the abstract free will in a form independent from its bearers**

5.1. Introduction

The New Left's re-appropriation of Marx during the 1960s drew new attention to the development of a consistent Marxist theory of state. Karl Marx, even though he planned to do so, never formulated an elaborated theory of the bourgeois state by himself. In spite of this, Marx commented incisively, for example, in his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, but unsystematically in his extensive work on the issue of the modern state's *raison d'être*.

This theoretical vacuum has been filled with different approaches aimed at interpreting and further developing Marx's reflections.⁵⁶⁹ Research on the capitalist state can be divided into two main strands; both consist of a plethora of diverging approaches deployed in order to justify different political strategies. In particular, in its state socialist form of appearance, Marxist-Leninist theory formation has been used to legitimise existing power relations. After the Russian October Revolution, the Marxist-Leninist school of thought was therefore directly influenced by the interests of the newly established ruling elite. Against this politico-ideological instrumentalisation, the second relevant strand, 'Western Marxism', was able to sustain its independence and thus significantly contribute to furthering a critical theory formation. Moreover, the Marxist reception of the latter was more varied and the developed concepts more productive for further theorising.⁵⁷⁰

Western discourse was dominated by the work of three theorists: Gramsci, Althusser and Poulantzas. In West Germany, however, an exclusive debate occurred on the constitution of the bourgeois state, i.e. the modern political form of the capitalist society. At the most general level of abstraction, the *Staatsableitungsdebatte* occupied left-wing academics and intellectuals throughout the 1970s. This debate, which Kostede attributed to political interest in understanding the state's role at times of economic depression, set against the backdrop of the student movement's demise, was initiated by Müller and Neusüß in 1970 by way of their paper, *The Illusion of the Social State and the Antinomies of Wage Labour and Capital*.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ For a discussion of the various approaches, see Clyde W. Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

⁵⁷⁰ See Joachim Hirsch, John Kannankulam and Jens Wissel, 'introduction', in Hirsch, Kannankulam and Wissel, *Der Staat der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, 2008), pp. 9-21.

⁵⁷¹ Wolfgang Müller and Christel Neusüß, 'Die Sozialstaatsillusion und der Widerspruch von Lohnarbeit und Kapital', in *Sozialistische Politik*, 6/7 (1970), pp. 4-67. An excerpt in English can be found in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, pp. 32-39. For a detailed account of the debate, see Norbert Kostede, 'Die neuere

The importance which New Left intellectuals attached to the capitalist state as a 'theoretical problem' resulted from the student movement's diverging political aspirations and many unresolved theoretical issues, such as debates on revolution vs. reformism, and the question of organisation. Above all, the proposed 'march through the institutions' demanded further clarification of the state's essence and the chances of transforming the system from within.

In addition, the first social democratic-led government of the post-war era took over the affairs of state, and Willy Brandt was inaugurated as Chancellor in 1969. This political development urged the resumption of existing theories about the state. The problem with these was that they 'fetishised' different forms of capitalist social relations, e.g. 'law', 'citizenship' and 'social state', by detaching them from one another and treating them as though they were distinct and independent social relations. Both social democratic theories, and even the more radical analyses of the Frankfurt School, shared this theoretical deficit and ignored the key characteristic that these social relations are only comprehensible in terms of their inter-relationship.⁵⁷²

For all Marxists theorising upon the nature of the capitalist state, two central research questions arose: first, if the production and appropriation of surplus value premises the existence of free labour and efficacy of unrestricted market and exchange relations, which requires the autonomy of coercive power from all class interests, how can the bourgeois state nonetheless function as a class state? Second, why does the state serve the interests of the capitalist class?

A central difference between the bourgeois form of rule and its historical predecessors lies in the formal separation of political and economic power. This detachment of the political entity from the economy, and thus of the state from civil society, is the fundamental characteristic of bourgeois rule. The economically ruling class does not possess the direct means to control the state and its political class, yet still capitalise on its rule. Understanding this dialectical relationship between the state's 'relative autonomy' and its functionality for the purpose of capital accumulation was the goal of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*.⁵⁷³

The dispute among radical leftists on whether a reformist or revolutionary stance towards the politico-economic system was adequate in overcoming social evils was linked to the respective theory of state. Here, the formulation of practical-political goals and strategies are the direct efflux of theoretical considerations. As Rosa Luxemburg argued:

marxistische Diskussion über den bürgerlichen Staat. Einführung – Kritik – Resultate', in *Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Marx'schen Theorie* 8/9 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 150–198.

⁵⁷² See Simon Clarke, *State Debate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), p. 9.

⁵⁷³ See Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State*, pp. 77–78.

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society.⁵⁷⁴

The historical development of the West German radical left reinforces this assertion. Intellectuals critical of the capitalist system, who therefore challenged the ideas implicit in reformism, were eager to further confirm their rejection of the bourgeois system; in so doing, New Left academics revisited a topic first systematically addressed in the work of Pashukanis.⁵⁷⁵ Although the West German approach was not able to carve out a dominant position among critical explanations of the capitalist state, Werner points to the insights provided by this school of thought into the relationship of state and economy as transcending the scope of more recently developed approaches, such as the 'varieties of capitalism' and neo-institutional theories.⁵⁷⁶ This emphasises the topicality of the post-1968 state debate.

5.2. On the *Marxistische Gruppe's* theory of state and the concept of the abstract free will as the essential precondition for the existence of the democratic state

Hitherto widely neglected in academia, partly due to its late publication in 1979 at the end of the state debate, as well as to its political function as an instrument of agitation and training, the MG's theory of state was influenced by Hegel's work and Marx's critique of it. Its implicit reference to Hegel distinguished the MG's group of authors from other academics who sought to find answers to the materialist research question formulated by Pashukanis, namely, to understand why the dominance of a class does not assume the form of official state authority.

The subject matter of the MG's analysis is the bourgeois (i.e. modern democratic-capitalist) state. Even though various historical cross references are made in their respective publication, it was not the group's aim to develop a theory of *the* state, but to explain the

⁵⁷⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution?* (1899; London: Militant Publishers, 1986), p. 74.

⁵⁷⁵ In fact, Evgeny Pashukanis was the first to explicitly address the issue of the capitalist state's relative autonomy in 1924: "Why does the dominance of a class not become that which it is, i.e. the actual subordination of one part of the population to another, but instead assumes the form of official state authority? Or, what is the same, why is the apparatus of state coercion created not as a private apparatus of the ruling class, but distinct from the latter in the form of an impersonal apparatus of public power distinct from society?" See Evgeny Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law and Marxism*, (1924) <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/pashukanis/1924/law/ch05.htm>> [1 January 2012]. See also, 'Tote Hunde wecken? Interview mit Joachim Hirsch zur Staatstheorie und Staatsableitung', in *Arranca*, 24 (June 2002), pp. 4-7.

⁵⁷⁶ Benjamin Werner, 'Kapitalismustheorie ohne Staat? Über den Mehrwert neo-marxistischer Staatstheorie', paper presented at the joint conference of the Austrian and German Political Science Association, Vienna, 24/25 April 2009 <http://www.oegpw.at/tagung09/papers/AG3a_werner.pdf> [15 January 2012].

modern political form of the capitalist state. The analysis is profoundly abstract, and lacks references to specific historical developments.⁵⁷⁷

Yet the group's theory was the only attempt of a revolutionary organisation in West Germany to develop a systematic theory of the state, which only serves to underline the MG as a unique occurrence on the New Left. Furthermore, a discussion of the MG's theory of state, which is also an implicit critique of other approaches, provides a relevant contribution to any understanding of the New Left's history after the student movement.

5.2.1. Abstract free will in a form independent from its bearer: Marx, his critique of Hegel's philosophy of right and the *Marxistische Gruppe*

Hegel was the first theorist to develop an adequate understanding of state and society in the modern world. As demonstrated by Reichelt, neither Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau nor Kant was able to grasp the specific modern difference between state and society. All maintained an Aristotelian approach to the theory of state, i.e. the idea of *polis*, in which the terms state and society are used synonymously.⁵⁷⁸ Marx acknowledges Hegel's achievement in *Philosophy of Right*, which he believed had outlined the essence of the modern state, but criticises its 'inversion' by describing the state as a subject and, therefore, the actual subjects as mere accoutrements to the state's existence.

For Marx, "the political constitution [is] the religion of popular life"⁵⁷⁹, and features the same characteristics as deity does in religious consciousness. A political state would thus be an inverted form of reality in the sense that state does not make man, but that man actually makes the state. Hegel's concept of a subjectification of the bourgeois society is therefore criticised by Marx:

Hegel proceeds from the state and makes man into the subjectified state; democracy starts with man and makes the state objectified man. Just as it is not religion that creates man but man who creates religion, so it is not the constitution that creates the people but the people which creates the constitution.⁵⁸⁰

Further:

Hegel makes the predicates, the object independent, but independent as separated from their real independence, their subject. Subsequently, and because of this, the real

⁵⁷⁷ See Karl Held, *Mein Staat, dein Staat, unser Staat. Staatsableitung*, Bremen [146 min.] (1978) <<http://farberot.de/>> [17 July 2010].

⁵⁷⁸ See Helmut Reichelt, 'Zum Verhältnis von Staat und Gesellschaft im Marxschen Frühwerk', in Hirsch, Kannankulam and Wissel, *Der Staat der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁷⁹ Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', in *MECW*, Vol. 3, p. 29.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

subject appears to be the result; whereas one has to start from the real subject and examine its objectification. [...] sovereignty is nothing but the objectified mind of the subjects of the state.⁵⁸¹

For Marx, individuals represent the starting point for an analysis of the state; objectifications resulting from their consciousness have to be deciphered as their very own predicates. Here, the MG links its concept of abstract free will to Marx's critique of Hegel's analysis and his comment in *German Ideology* in which he stresses the importance of the state to regulate the intercourse of individuals.⁵⁸² For the MG, the state appears to be "the **abstract free will** of its citizens that has taken on a form independent of them."⁵⁸³ As individuals would be willing competitors and therefore have an interest in supplementing their negative relationship to each other, it is a consequence of their economic interests in capitalism to "jointly submit to a power that curtails their private interests."⁵⁸⁴

The issue addressed by Pashukanis, as to why the apparatus of state coercion is not created as a private apparatus of the ruling class, but an impersonal apparatus of public power distinct from society, is explained by the MG, which takes into account the conflicting interests of individuals, competing with their respective sources of income against each other.⁵⁸⁵ On this basis, the general interest in an independent coercive power would emerge in all classes and social strata. The critical inversion of Hegel's idea of a subjectification of the state by its citizens is further explained thus:

By treating citizens equally the state guarantees their freedom, which consists in nothing but the not-so-kind permission to try to get hold of some part of the wealth of society with whatever economic resources they may or may not have, while respecting all the other citizens who are doing the same thing at their expense, against them. It is for the sake of this freedom that they need the state, since without it they could not make use of their resources at all. From their practical point of view, state power is the condition for free competition. They thus want to be recognized as citizens of a state because their economic interests force them to.⁵⁸⁶

According to the MG's study, the political power of the capitalist society, the modern democratic state, allows its citizens the right to pursue their 'conflicting particular interests', by obliging them to respect private property. The decisive means to achieve this are the

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

⁵⁸² See Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', in *MECW Vol. 5*.

⁵⁸³ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, (1993) <<http://www.gegenstandpunkt.com/english/state/toc.html>> [25 December 2009], chapter 1. As the book is no longer available, the link here is to the online version of the MG's work, originally published as *Der bürgerliche Staat* in 1978.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ In a rare reference to the work of other authors, the Red Cells' working conference referred to a publication of Akadij Gurland in 1970. It seems that its group of authors borrowed this idea from this social-democratic theorist. Yet Gurland himself referred to the works of Hegel and Marx. See Gurland, *Marxismus und Diktatur*, 1981.

⁵⁸⁶ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1.

legally guaranteed interests of freedom and equality. Thus, the universally granted right to live a life in freedom and equality is identified here as the 'objectified' interest in maintaining the capitalist mode of production and competition. However, their own societal existence confronts competing individuals in a way that makes it difficult to unmask its true nature.

The implication here is that distinct 'political' categories, such as law, rights and constitutions, have to be seen as fetishised forms of the social relationships of capitalist production. Moreover, only on the basis of an analysis of these as a whole can the political categories be understood. This 'fetish character' of the bourgeois state to which the MG implicitly refers was a key facet of the West German *Staatsableitungsdebatte*.⁵⁸⁷ In the MG's context, this character becomes evident in its interpretations of 'freedom' and 'equality', identified in the group's framework as 'objectified' interests essential for the implementation and maintenance of the capitalist mode of production. The next chapter will return to this idea in more detail.

According to the MG, the continual implementation, maintenance and promotion of economic competition on the basis of freedom and equality is the purpose of the democratic state. In order to enhance the productive conditions of 'its' economy, the modern state acts as an 'ideal practical capitalist' whose interests are not identical to those of any specific class interest and therefore functions to the benefit of those in command of the means of production, or who are otherwise financially well off. Given this, the MG concludes that the democratic state would function 'forcefully as an *instrument*', but only for individuals able to successfully withstand competition.⁵⁸⁸

Although often criticised as 'functionalist', the MG goes beyond other theories discussed in the context of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte* — which ground to a halt due to the general crisis of Marxism — by stressing the importance of free will. The group argues that the democratic state differs from earlier forms of political rule by being dependent on the political will of its citizens in the absence of any direct use of force forcing the maintenance of, for example, absolute rule. From this, the MG draws the conclusion that the democratic

⁵⁸⁷ See Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, 2005. For Marx, the critique of religions is therefore understood to be a starting point for political criticism. He argues: "To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to *give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is, therefore, *in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*. [...] It is, therefore, the *task of history*, once the *other-world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. [...] It is the immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked. Thus, the criticism of Heaven turns into the criticism of Earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law*, and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*." Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction', p. 176.

⁵⁸⁸ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1, section a).

state's 'logical' point of origin has to be the will of individuals to form and maintain this political entity.⁵⁸⁹

The main objection to the systematic derivation of the state from 'conflicting particular interests' is that this approach presupposes the derivation it is supposed to achieve. In other words, the existence of an autonomous capitalist sphere is automatically assumed.⁵⁹⁰ However, it might be argued that from a historical perspective, and the explicit aim of the West German state debate was to synthesise the 'logical' with historical analysis, the capitalist mode of production occurred before the comprehensive implementation of democratic forms of rule. Given this, the modern democratic state presupposes the unfolding of the capitalist forces of production.

Thus, in their endeavour to derive the general form of the democratic state and its principal functions from the surface of capitalism, the MG decided to use a different conceptual starting point than other prominent authors, such as Altvater, Hirsch or Blanke, Jürgens and Kastendiek. The group did not attempt to derive the state from the dual nature of commodities as use-values and exchange-values, the tensions between 'capital in general' and 'particular capitals' or the general relationship between capital and labour.⁵⁹¹ It also avoided any explicit references to the historical development of the modern democratic state.

The MG's derivation of the bourgeois state from abstract free will was the subject of fierce criticism. Martin Schraven, who was affiliated with the DKP and later professor of philosophy, questioned the MG's approach with reference to Marx, who asserted that the relationships of production provide the real basis for the political superstructure. He also finds fault in the MG's idea of taking the content of the individuals' 'false consciousness', their subjective reality, as the point of origin for the understanding of the bourgeois state's objective reality.⁵⁹²

A similar objection was raised by Pfreundschuh, who was active in the Red Cells movement in Munich in the early 1970s and criticised the idea of an 'ideal commonality' between private property owners and the working class. Both Schraven and Pfreundschuh thus challenge the distinctive feature of the democratic state, a form of government that demands the active support of its citizens. They revert back to Marx's original writing, neglecting the intermediary function of human consciousness that eventually explains the

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ See Clarke, *State Debate*, p. 10.

⁵⁹¹ For a list of the most popular points of departure, see Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 49-50.

⁵⁹² See Martin Schraven, 'Der Staat entsteht in deinem Kopf!' in Bernd Gäbler, ed., *Das Prinzip Ohnmacht: Eine Streitschrift zur Politik der 'Marxistischen Gruppe'* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1983), pp. 133-140.

actual transformation of the economic basis into the particular political superstructure.⁵⁹³ Auerbach, on the other hand, criticises the MG for ignoring the will of individuals presupposing any change on the political level; a criticism that seems odd considering the importance the MG attached to an individual's will.⁵⁹⁴

A more elaborate critique was formulated by Reichelt, economics professor in Frankfurt. He holds that the concept of general interest

serves, in a construction developed purely on the level of affirmation, to anchor the class character of every state function in the dimension of the worker who misconceives himself as bourgeois.⁵⁹⁵

Indeed, the concept of general interest impedes an adequate understanding of historical processes, and thus the discussion of definite measures (e.g. social policy) as the outcome of strategic considerations among different social actors, such measures must eventually be attributed to the general interest of proletarians in maintaining private property.

Any definitive measures not aimed at overthrowing the bourgeois state, have been criticised by the RZ/AK, MG and *Gegenstandspunkt* over the past four decades. The fetish character of the state is identified as total. Thus, for the MG, every critique must come to the conclusion that the failure of the worker to understand himself as a bourgeois, and the state as an adequate means for the fulfilment of his material interests, constitutes a cardinal error. The scope for any political agenda within bourgeois society, from which even the revolutionary project of the MG is forced to originate, is therefore extremely narrowed, if not altogether lost.

In the MG's theory, state power is interpreted as a two-fold phenomenon, which acts *forcefully* in its purpose to maintain competition, while citizens simultaneously and *willingly* submit themselves to the politico-economic coercion decreed by the state. Yet in his critique of this, Brodbeck over-emphasises the first, only to criticise the MG for neglecting the relevance of the latter. Brodbeck does not view the MG's critique of bourgeois state power as a general one of any form of state power and violence, but draws the conclusion that the MG wants to obtain state power only to eliminate its political opponents.⁵⁹⁶ In light of the MG's

⁵⁹³ See Wolfram Phreundschuh, *Der Reichtum der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, (1979) <www.kulturkritik.net> [11 October 2009].

⁵⁹⁴ Wolfram Auerbach, *Diesseits von Gut und Böse: Theorie und Moral der 'Marxistischen Gruppe' (MG) und der Zeitschrift 'Gegenstandspunkt'* (Hanover: Verlag für die Gesellschaft, 1996), p. 169.

⁵⁹⁵ Helmut Reichelt, 'Some Comments on Sybille von Flatow and Freerk Huisken's Essay 'On the Problem of the Derivation of the Bourgeois State'', in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, 1979, p. 56.

⁵⁹⁶ See Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Warum die Marxisten an der Erklärung des Staates scheitern: Vorgeführt an der 'Staatsableitung' der MG*, (1983) <<http://www.khbrodbeck.homepage.t-online.de/fehler.pdf>> [15 November 2012].

emphasis on the relevance of abstract *free will* in maintaining democratic capitalism, Brodbeck's criticism is unfounded and seems to be founded upon his political interest to denunciate Marxism from the perspective of anarchism.

In summary, the MG argues that the concept of 'abstract free will' implies that individuals have both an *individual* interest in their material wellbeing on the basis of their economic resources, and that on this a *general* interest is developed, that becomes manifest in the democratic state. This general interest, however, would be in conflict with the material interests of individuals, because the expression of such only perpetuates the contradictions implied in capitalism as analysed by Marx in *Capital*, which would be to the systematic disadvantage of the majority of individuals.

However, through the objectification of their general interest, the bourgeois individual is allowed to apply his will against the interests of other individuals within the limits imposed by public authority and on the basis of freedom and equality.⁵⁹⁷ The group therefore draws upon one of Marx's early notions regarding the bourgeois state:

The separation of civil society and political state necessarily appears as a separation of the *political* citizen, the citizen of the state, from his own, actual, empirical reality, for as an idealist of the state he is *quite another being*, a *different*, distinct, opposed being.⁵⁹⁸

5.2.2. Freedom = capitalism? On the *Marxistische Gruppe's* critique of freedom

Given the universally acclaimed merits of democracy and its corresponding values, the MG's ruthless criticism of democratic principles was a theoretical peculiarity even among the West German New Left.⁵⁹⁹ Although the specific communisation of individuals in capitalism based on the 'common interest' in freedom and equality was extensively criticised in the context of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, other organisations and intellectuals reduced their ideological criticism of freedom and equality to their particular manifestation in capitalism.⁶⁰⁰ Representative for many was the following quote by Blanke, Jürgens and Kastendiek, a group of authors with a strong level of influence on the state debate:

⁵⁹⁷ See Held, *Mein Staat* [audio] (1978).

⁵⁹⁸ Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'', *MECW Vol. 3*, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁹⁹ It is no coincidence that the group of US-based sympathisers of the *Gegenstandspunkt* publishing house works under this name. It is also the leitmotif of a Frankfurt-based faction of GSP activists. See <<http://www.farberot.de/>> [15/09/2011].

⁶⁰⁰ See Ingo Stützle, 'Staatstheorien oder 'BeckenrandschwimmerInnen der Welt vereinigt euch!''', in *grundrisse*, (2006) <<http://www.grundrisse.net/grundrisse06/6staatsstheorien.htm>> [19 June 2012].

In so far as 'freedom' and 'equality' as rights were from the beginning not merely functional in economic terms, but were citizens' rights connecting legal subjects with the extra-economic coercive force (appearing at first only in the form of subjection, then later in the form of the right to political participation and to share in the services provided by the state) these rights concealed within themselves a danger for the bourgeois system. Understood as the claims of concrete human beings (human rights) they constitute to some extent the legitimating point at which class struggle can break into 'politics'. This is true in that people derive from the rights to 'freedom' and 'equality' the right to fight for their 'interests' as well as the right to aim beyond the system of the bourgeois mode of production. This feature inherent in the legally constituted state is of vital importance.⁶⁰¹

Opposing this, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis, the MG criticised the principles of the French Revolution, i.e. *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, as a political power relationship, a method of political rule and the adequate ideology of a society organised on the principle of competition.⁶⁰² Freedom and equality were understood as essential for the maintenance of capitalist rule in its modern political form. The idea that these principles would *in potentialis* offer class struggle the opportunity to break into democratic politics was vehemently rejected. For the MG, the necessary difference between the real and ideal form of bourgeois society would render impossible the realisation of its ideals, which, to employ Marx's terminology, are in fact only the inverted projection of capitalist reality.⁶⁰³

In democracies, the concept of freedom is a major object of legal protection and an essential moral value. In the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, it is expressed in following section of Article Two:

- (1) Every person shall have the right to free development of his personality insofar as he does not violate the rights of others or offend against the constitutional order or the moral law.

⁶⁰¹ Bernhard Blanke, Ulrich Jürgens and Hans Kastendiek, 'On the Current Marxist Discussion on the Analysis of Form and Function of the Bourgeois State', in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, pp. 128-129.

⁶⁰² Fraternité is not discussed in this thesis. In *The Democratic State* solidarity is derived from the following argument: "The foolish vision of a society which has abolished, not the economic conflicts between people, but their individual differences [...] is also cited by politicians, who like to fend off all criticism of the state by magnanimously rejecting all **nonsense about making everyone equal**. [...] Fatuous comparison with the ancient past [...] has the same purpose, by revealing an idiotic "**conflict between freedom and equality**." To get more of one you supposedly have to give up some of the other, so that you can't have everything anyway, so stop complaining and start practicing the third basic value, **fraternity** [...]. One can see that discontent with other people's discontent is also fertile soil for false ideas about the most abstract determination of the state." Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1, section d). In a lecture on the same issue, Peter Decker has formulated the same idea as follows: "Solidarity is communality as virtue." See Peter Decker, *Freiheit – Gleichheit – Solidarität*, Nuremberg [187 min.] (2005) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#124>> [25 July 2009].

⁶⁰³ See Marx, 'Grundrisse' (Notebook II, 1857), in *MECW Vol. 29*.

- (2) Every person shall have the right to life and physical integrity. Freedom of the person shall be inviolable. These rights may be interfered with only pursuant to a law.⁶⁰⁴

Yet for the MG, freedom was not the absence of political power, but the result of public law: an institution established by state power.⁶⁰⁵ The often mutually exclusively interpreted matters of freedom and state power were criticised as complementing one another. Without state power implementing and guaranteeing freedom as a fundamental right, freedom would not exist. Thus, the MG did not derive the origin of freedom from *lex naturalis*. Instead, it argued that the guarantee of something allegedly inherent to the existence of individuals would either constitute a redundancy or that freedom's intrinsic purpose differed significantly from what was usually ascribed to this basic right in bourgeois societies.⁶⁰⁶

Against the idea that the guarantee of freedom would allow individuals to freely follow their interests as long as they did not violate the rights of others, the MG argued that the judicial acknowledgement of free will

is the most abstract but also its most comprehensive form to commit the free will to act in accordance with the requirements of state authority.⁶⁰⁷

The guidance implemented by state power was treated as absolute and any degrees of freedom transcending the logic of capital accumulation were denied.

Legislative provisions were identified as claims which individuals must unconditionally obey. This would also explain why basic rights imply their own partial negation, why freedom is always guaranteed *and* restricted. Here, the MG once again draws upon a Hegelian idea: "The positive form of command having in the last resort a prohibition as its basis."⁶⁰⁸ Identified as an imposition of legal obligations which citizens must follow under the threat of a superior monopoly of force, freedom was therefore denied any emancipatory quality.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁴ Deutscher Bundestag, ed, *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berlin: German Bundestag, 2010), p. 15.

⁶⁰⁵ See, for example, Albert Kröls, *Das Grundgesetz*, pp. 14-23.

⁶⁰⁶ See Radio X, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Solidarität: Eine Kritik der heiligen Kühe der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt [107 min.] (2009) <<http://farberot.de/>> [13 July 2009].

⁶⁰⁷ Kröls, *Das Grundgesetz*, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §38, p. 54.

⁶⁰⁹ As freedom would not have a positive momentum of its own, the MG argued that its acclamation was necessarily a 'historical argument'. What is allowed today was not allowed in feudal societies, under fascism or other authoritarian regimes. This historical evidence would prove that freedom is not a matter of course and, in reverse, contains the decisive argument for its promotion. Yet the MG contended that this reasoning in 'historical' terms merely expressed the moral stance developed by individuals towards the political system. See Peter Decker, *Freiheit*, Nuremberg [184 min.] (2002) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#124>> [26 July 2009].

Against Blanke, Jürgens and Kastendieks, as well as Hirsch's claim that freedom and equality, understood as claims of concrete human beings, allow class struggle to break into 'politics', the MG defended its absolutist interpretation. Dissociated from the question of whether or not the notion of freedom is entirely pro-capitalism, the freedom that the state guarantees is in fact of contradictory nature, and provides social critics with the opportunity to work politically. Yet even though this appears to be a 'side contradiction', any revolutionary efforts nonetheless depend on the degrees of 'freedom' offered by bourgeois society. The fact that the state takes account of this by deploying its superior monopoly of legitimate use of force and intelligence services to curb anti-constitutional activities substantiates Blanke, Jürgen and Kastendiek's assertion.⁶¹⁰

At a more fundamental level, the MG understood freedom as an "antagonistic relation of wills."⁶¹¹ It was further argued that the imperative to tolerate the interests of other people as a matter of principle, a form of tolerance materialising in the compulsory limitation of individual freedom, would indicate fundamental antagonistic interests within democratic-capitalistic societies.⁶¹² In line with Marx, basic rights would result in "every man (to) see in other men not the realisation of his own freedom, but the barrier to it."⁶¹³

The MG reasoned that reciprocal, continued interference of others' interests was the basic principle of politico-economic foundations decreed by the state. Damaging the interests of other legal individuals would imply that the individuality of subjects cannot develop with each other in democracy. Even at the elementary level of social co-existence, the self-realisation of individuals would conflict with one another. Moreover, "the systematic conflict of interests is not only given [...] individuals are obliged to endure these antagonisms."⁶¹⁴

For the MG, the state dictated what kind of damage to the interests of individuals was allowed; and conversely, what damaged subjects must accept as legal. Hence, freedom was identified as indifferent to the economic resources one may or may not have. By guaranteeing private property, for example, the state would allow its citizens to achieve revenue from it; but this is useless for an individual lacking the adequate financial means with which to acquire a means of production or real estate. The MG concurred with Hegel, who concludes: "What and how much I possess is from the standpoint of right a matter of indifference."⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁰ See also Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, 2005.

⁶¹¹ Albert Krölls, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Eigentum, Sozialstaat – So gut wie ihr Ruf?* (Bremen: AStA-Druckerei, 2002).

⁶¹² See also Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz*, pp. 17-21.

⁶¹³ Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *MECW Vol. 3*, p. 163.

⁶¹⁴ Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz*, p. 18.

⁶¹⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §49, p. 60.

To exemplify the MG's idea of the continually interfering interests of individuals in bourgeois societies, let us look at the relationship between landlords and tenants. The interest of the landlord to earn money collides with that of the tenant to have a residence. Whilst the landlord wants to maximise revenue and preserve the value of the property rented out, the tenant intends to minimise expenses and take advantage of the usual wear and tear. Here, public law regulates these mutually exclusive interests and therefore, which legal claims landlords and tenants are allowed to bring to notice.

According to the MG, this does not nullify the antagonistic interests brought forward by both parties, but would merely aim at rendering them legally compliant with each other, and therefore endurable. The MG further argued that the antagonistic nature of interests followed in democratic capitalism can be taken from the essential determination of freedom as 'abstract freedom'.⁶¹⁶ In line with Hegel, it stressed that the guarantee of freedom separates its purpose from the means to put a specific form of it into practice.⁶¹⁷ Having the material means at one's disposal is therefore identified as the *conditio sine qua non* for the realisation of an individual's particular will; and from a juridical perspective, the legal guarantee of property does not include an individual's disposition of the means for the satisfaction of its material needs. Accordingly, the MG arrived at the conclusion that "the subjection of everyone to state power is necessarily to the advantage of those citizens who are *already* advantaged economically."⁶¹⁸

This understanding of freedom in democracy as 'abstract', however, leaves some questions unanswered. Above all, if one criticises 'abstract freedom' in democracy, a critique that implicitly counter-poses 'abstract' with 'concrete freedom', how is it possible to maintain the idea that freedom would exclusively unfold its 'true' nature in democratic capitalism? The MG's refusal to develop a positive outline of this 'concrete freedom', only implicit to their intellectual edifice and widely criticised by political opponents, turns out to be the result of politico-strategic considerations aimed to correct the idealistic notion that freedom in democracy would be the foundation for the liberation from 'bourgeois freedom' and not its overthrow.

Marx himself reflected on this, and argued that

[n]one of the supposed rights of man [...] go beyond the egoistic man, man as he is, as a member of civil society; that is, an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest [...]. Thus, man was not liberated from religion; he received religious liberty. He was not liberated from

⁶¹⁶ See Krölls, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Eigentum*, pp. 10-11.

⁶¹⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §36-§40, pp. 53-55.

⁶¹⁸ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1, section a).

property; he received the liberty to own property. He was not liberated from the egoism of business; he received the liberty to engage in business.⁶¹⁹

In the context of the student movement, and particularly Marcuse's highly influential *The One-dimensional Man*, it becomes apparent what kind of arguments the MG aimed to eradicate. Namely, the idea that:

Rights and liberties which were such vital factors in the origins and earlier stages of industrial society yield to a higher stage of this society: they are losing their traditional rationale and content.⁶²⁰

Marcuse detaches the manifestation of freedom, its 'repressive' character, from its putative critical essence; and consequently laments the systematic obstruction of "other transcending modes of freedom."⁶²¹

Overall, the question if and to what extent freedom would be entirely affirmative regarding the modern capitalist state was a key issue of the German state debate. As argued by Hirsch, who in recent years has resumed work on the Marxist theory of state, the dominant view was that basic rights would stand in an antagonistic relationship to class relations and exploitation; and thus be a potential lever for overcoming bourgeois rule. Hirsch also stresses that this theoretical hypothesis is called into question by the historical-empirical reality since the French Revolution.⁶²² Given this, the MG's analysis that freedom is in accord with its notion in capitalism, still awaits historical refutation.

Marx himself stated clearly that

[t]he exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealised expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power.⁶²³

As freedom and equality are conceptually inseparable, the following section explores the MG's related analysis.

⁶¹⁹ Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *MECW Vol. 3*, p. 167.

⁶²⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 3.

⁶²¹ Ibid., p. 16. Poulantzas argues along similar lines, and assigns 'radical possibilities' to the values of freedom and equality when proletarians recognised the contradiction between their real and ideal existence. See 'introduction', in James Martin, ed, *The Poulantzas Reader* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 4-5. For a post-Cold War version, see Wolf-Dieter Narr and Roland Roth, 'Wider die verhängnisvolle neue Bescheidenheit: Kapitalismus ohne Alternative. Am 'Ende der Utopie' gilt: Demokratie und Sozialismus', in *PROKLA. Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialwissenschaft*, 1995, 3, pp. 431-455.

⁶²² See Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, pp. 22-29.

⁶²³ Marx, 'Grundrisse', in *MECW Vol. 42*, p. 170.

5.2.3. Equality: a method of political ruling?

For the MG's group of authors, freedom was inextricably associated with property rights, because the "legally guaranteed abstract free will has its material means and thus its limitation in the right to private property."⁶²⁴ Implied in the legally protected right to freedom was also competition, the major principle of citizens' social interconnectedness, which accordingly was identified as negative and exclusionary.

Given this, the MG noted a content-related link between the concepts of freedom and equality. It argued that submitting all citizens equally under political ruling could only perpetuate the economic antagonisms in capitalism, restricted by state law to a level below open conflicts. Therefore, equality would be the adequate method of democratic rule and form an inseparable entity with freedom.⁶²⁵

Hence, the MG argued that the phrase, 'beings are born equal', could not refer to the idea of physiognomic or socio-economic equality, but must be understood in straight judicial terms. This interpretation is supported by legal experts. Von Bogdandy and Bast, experts of constitutional law, argue analogously to the MG that "[t]he general principle of liberty should be interpreted as signifying that everyone [...] is a free legal subject and all persons meet each other as legal equals."⁶²⁶

In fact, the natural (i.e. intellectual and physical) differences among individuals, which influence competition between them for the acquisition of abstract wealth, do not require to be guaranteed by public authorities. For the MG, it was merely appropriate that in democratically constituted states, all people were explicitly 'equal before the law'.⁶²⁷ Equality would mean equality before the law, and find its adequate expression in the legal principle under which each individual is subject to the same laws. Freedom would require the equal submission of citizens under law, because this act guarantees the practical functioning and enforcement of politico-economic principles that the state implements through guaranteeing freedom and private property:

By treating citizens equally the state guarantees their freedom, which consists in nothing but the not-so-kind permission to try to get hold of some part of the wealth of society with whatever economic resources they may or may not have, while respecting all the other citizens who are doing the same thing at their expense, against them.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁴ Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz*, p. 21.

⁶²⁵ See Held, *Mein Staat* [audio], 1978.

⁶²⁶ Bogdandy, Armin von and Jürgen Bast, *Principles of European Constitutional Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010), p. 43.

⁶²⁷ See Article 3 (1) of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany.

⁶²⁸ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1, section a).

Here, the group identified free competition as incompatible with legal privileges. Today, this principle would be manifest in the form of prohibiting any discrimination. Further, the exclusion of all elements such as social background, sex, race or religious beliefs implies the legal tolerance of discrimination stemming from differing amounts of private property.⁶²⁹

The MG did not leave scope for any further interpretation of equality beyond its status as a legally protected right. The broader idea of equality, e.g. equality of opportunity, stemming from the omnipresent issue of justice in democracy, is held to be a chimera. To the MG, the issue of justice in democratic societies was only a means to 'perfect' competition under the capitalist regime.

Accordingly, Röhrig argues that proponents of equality of opportunity would not criticise the idea that individuals are subject to a selection process within the education and professional system, but would certainly complain about competition being influenced by 'unjust' factors such as the socio-economic status of parents.⁶³⁰ Given this, any political effort to transform bourgeois society on the basis of equality is therefore doomed to fail, because the idea of an irresolvable tension between freedom and equality, asserted by other Marxist authors, would be an ideological chimera. Hirsch, one of these authors, argues that freedom necessarily generates inequality and vice versa; and would thus provide a gateway for the formulation of social critique.⁶³¹ This gateway, exploited by the MG itself for its agitation, is nonetheless understood to be inadequate for the overcoming of the alleged tension between freedom and equality, which could only be solved through the overthrow of its economic and legal foundations.

For the MG, then, equality amounted to an abstraction. By abstracting from its citizens' particularities, the bourgeois state would demonstrate its interest in maintaining the socio-economic differences among them; and free competition as the decisive organising principle. For this reason, equality is determined as the appropriate method of political rule over a capitalist society:

You are equal from a juridical point of view, but whether you are rich or poor, whether you, as an individual, can afford to satisfy your needs or not, is of no interest to the state.⁶³²

⁶²⁹ See Krölls, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Eigentum, Sozialstaat*, pp. 13-16.

⁶³⁰ See Röhrig, *Die Moral* [audio], 2009.

⁶³¹ See Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, 2005.

⁶³² See Peter Decker, *Der bürgerliche Staat – Prinzipien*, Nuremberg [80 min.] (2009) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#257>> [13 July 2009].

Thus, the often negative consequences of capitalism and democratic rule would primarily be consigned to the private level.

If equal treatment is realised, which the democratic state guarantees by tying its own and every individual's actions to law and inflicting penalties for infringements, any person is, according to the MG, forced to 'tolerate' (lat. *tolerare*, to endure) his/her particular material situation, which cannot be appealed in court. The tension between freedom and equality, stemming from the broader understanding of the term, is criticised; as is the idea that equality would imply any emancipatory momentum.

5.2.4. The MG's radical critique and its practical consequence: Marxism as the necessary triumph over of freedom and equality

The MG's criticism of the ideology denoting freedom and equality was ruthless. The 'holy trinity' of liberty, equality and solidarity, central to the self-understanding of modern societies, was considered to be utterly pro-capitalist. With freedom and equality, fully realised in Western societies, the efforts of New Left activists to put 'real' freedom and equality into practice were viewed as wholly inadequate if social practice was to be transcended.⁶³³

Instead of taking seriously the politico-economic practice of freedom and equality, the MG viewed Hegel's concept of abstract freedom as its essence. Yet this assertion was not limited to bourgeois society; indeed, the concept of freedom in principle was criticised for having no meaning for the rational self-organisation of individuals in a communist society.⁶³⁴ In so doing, the MG took the common Marxist critique of freedom and equality in their bourgeois forms of appearance to its most radical conclusion. Against Marx himself, who conceived the particular form of freedom in bourgeois societies as negative, and contrasted it with his idea of a communist realm of freedom that

actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production,⁶³⁵

the MG, though referring *ex negativo* to this realm and thus an conceptually underdetermined utopia, denied the application of the term 'freedom'. In an informal conversation, one former member went as far as to argue that the aspired goal of a communist society should not be

⁶³³ See Held, *Mein Staat*, [audio], 1978.

⁶³⁴ See Decker, *Freiheit*, [audio], 2002.

⁶³⁵ Marx, 'Capital III', in *MECW Vol. 37*, p. 807.

conceptualised by existing terminology and remarked that “we might introduce a new word to describe this social condition.”⁶³⁶

Given that predicates (not subjects) state something about a given subject and define it, the idea of introducing a new word to adequately describe what is referred to in Marx's work as positive freedom, seems to be paradoxical. However, it emphasises the MG's ambition to develop the new society through a critique of the old, and establish shared criticism of bourgeois society as the starting point for any revolutionary project.⁶³⁷ Concurrent with this ‘destructive’ approach was the MG's critique of all positive visions of Marx's ‘real freedom’; and especially, the idea freedom would exist in any way without state power.

The MG's strict refusal of the application of the terms freedom and equality related to a comment made by Marx in *Grundrisse*, in which he stated “that exchange value or, more precisely, the money system is, in fact, the system of equality and freedom”; and therefore concludes

that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realisation of equality and freedom, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom.⁶³⁸

The immanent reference of both ‘inequality’ and ‘unfreedom’ to its respective positive forms of appearance was not acknowledged by the MG.

In continuation of this, the popular idea of Marx's work as a critical cornerstone for an emancipatory realisation of human ideals and moral values was rejected. The group claimed that an unbiased analysis would reveal the exact opposite: the necessity for Marxists to be in practical opposition to these ideals and objects of legal protection.⁶³⁹ Given this, Lenin's notion that Marxists proceed from the same ideals as their bourgeois counterparts, but argue “exclusively about the construction of these ideals [modern moral ideas] and their realisation”⁶⁴⁰, was challenged by the MG collective.⁶⁴¹

The MG's destructive approach, which lacked any positive contribution to an alternative arrangement of the bourgeois state and its basic legal principles, inevitably resulted in the

⁶³⁶ Informal conversation with E.A., 24 June 2011.

⁶³⁷ See Karl Held cit. in Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

⁶³⁸ Marx, ‘Grundrisse’, in *MECW Vol. 42*, p. 174. For a discussion of Marx's ambiguous stance towards democracy and its epiphenomena, see also Patricia Springborg, ‘Karl Marx on democracy, participation, voting, and equality’, in *Political Theory*, 4 (1984), pp. 537-556.

⁶³⁹ See Marxistische Gruppe Westberlin, *Dokumentation zum Bahro-Kongress* (Munich: self-published, 1979).

⁶⁴⁰ Lenin, ‘The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve's Book’, in *LCW Vol. 1*, p. 431.

⁶⁴¹ See Peter Decker, *Freiheit – Gleichheit – Solidarität*, Nuremberg [187 min.] (2005) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#124>> [25 July 2009], audio sources.

demand to resolve the social institution of 'state' itself⁶⁴². Here, the group touched on a subject discussed by Marx in *The Civil War in France (first draft)*, in which he advocated a distinct anti-state stance.⁶⁴³

The anti-statism of the MG's theory, a peculiarity among the Marxist New Left, had already been expressed in its critique of *abstract* free will, freedom and equality. In contrast, *K-Gruppen* developed a form of left-wing 'state fetishism', for which Mao Zedong's *People's Republic* of China functioned as a guarantor of a radically different manifestation of really existing socialism in particular, and statism in general. Peter Kuntze's *China – die konkrete Utopie* (China – concrete utopia) was not without reason an influential book in the early 1970s, in which the Chinese state was praised for its role model function as an alternative to the (social)-imperialist superpowers in East and West.⁶⁴⁴

5.2.5. Sovereignty, law and justice: the 'sophistication' of the bourgeois order derived from the abstract free will of citizens

In the next three chapters of its derivation, the MG deals with the aspects of sovereignty, law and justice in order to explain the abstract political form of the bourgeois state. According to the group, the citizen of a democratic state wants "to reach his or her goal of private advantage [by] participating in an *abstract* and *general* will"⁶⁴⁵; and is therefore a willing private competitor and constructive contributor to state affairs. Thus, citizens would function in unison as *citoyen* and *bourgeois*. The idea that the bourgeois state is the "abstract will of its citizens that has taken on a form independent of them" implies the transition to the MG's second chapter, in which it was argued that this abstract will "is fulfilled by the **sovereignty** of the state."⁶⁴⁶

Marx claimed that bourgeois individuals are 'idealists of the states' and therein "completely distinct, different from, and opposed to [their] own actuality."⁶⁴⁷ In line with this, the MG argued that individuals, in their function as a *citoyen*, pay attention to affairs that stand in opposition or are indifferent to their existence as private individuals, i.e. their *bourgeois* existence. Individuals in capitalism ideally and practically participate in the state's

⁶⁴² In general, the MG aimed to 'find the new world through the criticism of the old' and thus, in line with Agnoli's castigation of the 'black mould of our *zeitgeist*', interpreted constructive criticism as the — for bourgeois academia — decisive precept of (academic) theory formation. Johannes Agnoli, 'Destruktion als Bestimmung des Gelehrten in dürrer Zeit', in *Gesammelte Schriften II* (Freiburg: ca ira, 1995), p. 10.

⁶⁴³ Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in *MECW Vol. 22*, pp. 307-359.

⁶⁴⁴ Peter Kuntze, *China – die konkrete Utopie* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1973).

⁶⁴⁵ Gegenstandspunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., chapter 2.

⁶⁴⁷ Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', in *MECW Vol. 3*, p. 69.

performance, which expresses an (in principle) positive attitude towards the system of political sovereignty:

The power of the *state* originates with the *people* and complies with their political will by enforcing it, as the public interest, *against* all the private individuals.⁶⁴⁸

Sovereignty of the state is understood to be necessary, because only a public authority can act independently from the specific interests which economic actors bring forward and thus enforce the common good. In accordance with Hirsch, Gerstenberger and other leading authors of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, the MG collective argued that the bourgeois state guarantees the functioning of private property in principle, by abstracting from any particular interest and being sovereign.⁶⁴⁹ Furthermore, with Hirsch the MG argued that modern representative democracy, in which representatives are only bound to their conscience, is the adequate form with which to promote the common good against any specific interests articulated in society.⁶⁵⁰

Complementarily, the 'general will' of individuals to maintain the state transforms a number of individuals into a people. By doing so, the coercive nature of being subject to a state is re-interpreted and expressed in the positive stance of citizens towards the polity. Here, however, the MG differs from authors such as Reichelt and Gerstenberger, who challenge the importance of general will for the formation of the bourgeois state, and criticise this as ahistorical.⁶⁵¹

In compliance with mainstream theorists, constitutional rights are understood to define citizens' legal scope of action, and claims that can be raised by individuals and other legal subjects. This, however, would consolidate "the negative relation *between* competing individuals in the form of rights and duties toward the political power."⁶⁵² In contrast to Hegel, for whom duties were positively associated with rights, the MG identified rights and duties as equal in terms of their actual content. In line with this, duties were understood as the downside to the positive rights granted by the bourgeois state.

Unlike Poulantzas, who criticised Marxists for not being able to formulate a positive concept of human rights, the MG criticised these basic rights for their essentially negative content, and argued that the inevitable 'nature' of demanding constitutional rights for humans

⁶⁴⁸ Gegenstandpunkt, The Democratic State, chapter 2, section c).

⁶⁴⁹ See Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, 1978.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid. See also Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, p. 34-35.

⁶⁵¹ See Heide Gerstenberger, 'Class Conflict, Competition and State Functions', in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, pp. 148-159; Reichelt, 'Some Comments on Flatow and Huisken's Essay', 1978.

⁶⁵² Ibid., chapter 2, section b).

would be the world of competition.⁶⁵³ With this conclusion, anticipated in the group's notion of freedom and equality as a state institution, the MG challenged a central concept of modern political and ethical discourse; and delimited its own approach from general New Left discourse, which assumed human rights to be a potential lever for social change. In 1979, confronted with the general 'crisis in Marxism', Poulantzas, for example, argued that

although we have cast off traditional dogmas as to the merely 'formal' nature of democratic freedoms, we still do not have a real theory of justice. As a result we are unable to formulate a positive concept of human rights and freedoms clearly distinct from neoliberalism.⁶⁵⁴

Considering the MG's analysis, the inability to formulate such positive concepts was no coincidence, but it was an inevitable result of the radical left's failure to grasp the actual notion of freedom and human rights.

With the adoption of a constitution and its basic law, the state, according to the MG, "satisfies the interest of its citizens in competitive social relations",⁶⁵⁵ ties and, if necessary, corrects its actions when they conflict with the constitution. Hence, the rule of law is realised when every legal individual is subject to the law in equal terms. This would also emancipate the constitutional state from any "influence of private interests on its actions, and is accountable only to the constitution in the exercise of its power."⁶⁵⁶ The formulation of a complex, all-encompassing legal system is therefore understood to answer the purpose of codifying every aspect of private property relations in democratic capitalism. The further development of the constitution would therefore materialise through different forms of general law.

In Chapter Five of its derivation in *The Democratic State*, the MG brings its abstract philosophy of right to a conclusion. Here, the group argues that the state exclusively and necessarily claims the monopoly on the *legitimate* use of violence to enforce justice. Justice, however, would refer solely to the fact that citizens are forced to recognize each other's free will. As a result, the MG claimed that the "administration of justice ensures the **protection of person and property** as well as the sovereignty of the state."⁶⁵⁷ Any philosophical reading of the concept of justice is opposed and reduced to its juridical kernel. The productive aspect of justice would thus consist of accomplishing two purposes: first, justice maintains the capitalist

⁶⁵³ See Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 2, section b).

⁶⁵⁴ Poulantzas, 'Is there a crisis in Marxism?', in Martin, *The Poulantzas Reader*, p. 393.

⁶⁵⁵ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 3.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., chapter 4.

mode of competition by tying any practical expression of an individual's will to law; second, by restoring the validity of law, any violation of it is punished.

For the MG, the state abstracts from the specific content of its citizens' actions by relating them to law. In other words, the state is indifferent to their economic, political and private actions as long as they conform to official rules. The penetration of society by law is thus considered to be absolute.⁶⁵⁸

Here, the MG's analysis of the legal framework of bourgeois society came to a logical end. While at the beginning of their derivation, the abstract free will of individuals forces them to "jointly submit to a power that curtails their private interests",⁶⁵⁹ citizens are now confronted with an all-encompassing legal system that regulates every aspect of life in capitalism. However, the penetration of a citizen's life, according to the MG's theory, implies another important transition: morality. In agreement with Hegel, morality is derived from abstract right:

Morality [...] gives an outline of the real side of the conception of freedom. Observe the process through which morality passes. As the will has now withdrawn into itself, it appears at the outset as existing independently, having merely a potential identity with the intrinsic or universal will. Then this abstract self-dependence is superseded; and, finally, the will is made really and consciously identical with the intrinsic or universal will.⁶⁶⁰

Decker, the current chief editor of the *GegenStandpunkt* periodical, specifies this relationship as a two-stage subjectification of law. First, the bourgeois individual would apply existing law as an ethical standard to his/her life, and thus act in concordance with it as a matter of principle. Individuals would also apply the category of success to their legally compliant actions; and as a result, partially relativise existing law by adding a subjective quality to the objective reality of law. Morality is therefore not interpreted as equal to an internalisation of existing law; it is the legal guideline for its emergence, but transcends its rigidity. The frequent knowing violation of law would be integral to the moralist mode of thinking, and maintain its validity. Righteousness, according to the MG, is the consequence of this second subjectification of law. The respective form of thinking, i.e. thinking in the categories of law, is taken over; and materialises in the form of bourgeois individuals as judges of their own 'standards', derived from existing law.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁸ See Karl Held, *Mein Staat* [audio], 1978.

⁶⁵⁹ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 1.

⁶⁶⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §106, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁶¹ Peter Decker, *Die Moral* [audio], 2005.

In contrast to *K-Gruppen* and other New Left organisations, the MG was not involved in exposing the putative violation of basic rights by specific policies and political actors. As a consequence of its analysis, the MG was not interested in claiming rights, and made no political efforts to defend them. On the other hand, the KBW and other *K-Gruppen* fought for the 'rights of the working class and the people'.

The ability of *K-Gruppen* to deal with the advantages and disadvantages of bourgeois state institutions, as already Agnoli, the influential Marxist political scientist during the years of '68', observed, denoted the theoretical prelude with which to transfer the antinomies of proclamation and execution regarding freedom and equality to a 'mechanical-moral' criticism. For Agnoli, such criticism would also be indifferent towards existing constellations and balances of power; and resolved itself into the contrasting juxtaposition of 'good' and 'bad' exertion of political power and constitutional law. Accordingly, this type of criticism would be translated into the demand for 'better' politicians and political rule with a human face revolving around the idea of a more 'justice' state.⁶⁶² Even though Agnoli was not in a working relationship with the MG and severely criticised in other contexts, this view echoes the criticism formulated in the MG's work.

5.2.6. Legally regulated competition and the state's compensatory activities: the *Marxistische Gruppe* on the social state and the state's function as an idealist collective capitalist

The transition from chapters four to five of *The Democratic State* involves the introduction of class to the MG's theory of state. Based on Marx's analysis in *Capital*, competition on the basis of private property is understood to inevitably separate the macrocosm of capitalist society into property owners, and those without appropriate means. According to the MG's group of authors, the rule of law forces individuals to maintain themselves as 'private proprietors'.⁶⁶³ This individual maintenance however, and thus the maintenance of competition, would not regulate itself; the negative effects of competition undermine the ability of a significant proportion of individuals to continue with their economic efforts to generate income.

⁶⁶² Agnoli further argues that this kind of reasoning found its academic expression in the tradition of Critical Theory, which has therefore been integrated into the pluralist canon of the academic sphere. See Johannes Agnoli, 'Von der kritischen Politologie zur Kritik der Politik', in Ulrich Albrecht, Elmar Altvater and Ekkehart Krippendorff, eds, *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende betreiben wir Politikwissenschaft?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), pp. 13-24.

⁶⁶³ See Gegenstandspunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 5.

Given this, the MG concluded that the bourgeois state is forced to deploy appropriate political means to compensate for the inability of individuals to acquire the necessary resources for their reproduction. If the reproduction of individuals is constantly endangered, not only would their individual reproduction be placed at risk, but in the most abstract sense, so would the entire reproduction of capitalist society. Therefore, economic competition requires ongoing supervision, because the unfolded productive forces of capitalism imply the ruin of its base.

From this classical Marxist argument, the MG extrapolated onto the state activities aimed to compensate the deficits of competition, enabling those assisted to maintain themselves as private proprietors, and seek new possibilities from the labour market. Such compensatory activities, however, would not contradict the purposeful construction of the capitalist state. Quite the contrary, they would merely perpetuate the antagonistic social relations inherent in democratic capitalism:

As a **social state** with social services, it preserves the class of competitors with *no* property, so that it can continue being useful as a means *for* private property.⁶⁶⁴

In line with this, the capitalist state would institutionalise, administer and constantly reform the social security, health and education systems, according to its financial resources and interests. For example, the right to an education is not the legal means to equip individuals with knowledge, but the obligation “to acquire the general knowledge equally necessary for all jobs (compulsory education).”⁶⁶⁵

On the basis of this general education, adolescents further develop their skills and specialise for respective careers. Knowledge is therefore understood to be functional in the selection of pupils and their distribution onto different career paths. In turn, this subjects the right to an education to criticism, on the basis that it merely represents a means to the end of economic competition among wage-labourers, which, as argued by the MG, was obvious from the fact that inadequate school performance results in exclusion from further education; not in the overcoming of knowledge deficits.⁶⁶⁶

For the MG, bourgeois society, in which education is a ‘limited resource’, because individuals are subject to systematic selection and exclusion from knowledge, contradicts the idea of producing fully developed human beings, as proposed by Marx.⁶⁶⁷ The ‘education of

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., chapter 5, section c).

⁶⁶⁶ Ideas of the MG were applied in Huiskens's work, *Erziehung im Kapitalismus* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1998).

⁶⁶⁷ Marx, ‘Capital I’, in *MECW Vol. 35*, pp. 485-486.

the future' could only be found in a societal environment that allows individuals to freely develop their abilities; a society in which competition is ceased among students, rather than embodying the major organising principle of the education system.

Accordingly, students protesting for the better funding of the (higher) education system on the basis of ideals, such as social justice, democracy and solidarity are subject to harsh criticism on the basis that they were only demonstrating their will to improve conditions in order to compete more effectively with fellow students at home and abroad for income opportunities.⁶⁶⁸

According to the MG's framework, the modern capitalist state has a vital interest in maintaining individuals as 'private proprietors'. To fulfil this task, the welfare state is considered the adequate socio-political means. Discussions regarding the so-called welfare state illusion, initiated by Müller and Neusüß in 1970, were echoed by the MG theory. In line with other participants of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, the idea that not only would the West German constitution allow the realisation of socialism, but that the welfare state is the decisive legal and practical 'Trojan Horse' with which to do so, was dismissed as a conceptual fallacy.⁶⁶⁹ Furthermore, the apparent disintegration of constitutional reality and potentiality was criticised as 'illusionary'. Accordingly, the social state principle was reduced in the work of its critics to its affirmative kernel, which referred to the welfare state as a means of perpetuating the contradiction between labour and capital instead of overcoming it.⁶⁷⁰

However, implied in the MG's systematic analysis of the welfare state's function is disregard for a historical dimension to its origin, not to mention the role of class struggle. Thus is the historical struggle of the working class and trade union movement narrowed considerably, so as to conform to the notion of the welfare state developed by the MG.

While most critics of the MG's theory stress the "the importance of class struggle, and thus of history, for theory"⁶⁷¹, and thus challenge the group's analysis starting from the surface of the existing bourgeois state, Hans Ehrbar, an American economist, active in the early Red Cells movement in Munich, shows his support for the MG's approach by referring

⁶⁶⁸ See, among others, Ruthless Criticism, *What's there to defend in public education?* <<http://www.ruthlesscriticism.com/march4.htm>> [30 January 2012].

⁶⁶⁹ See Wolfgang Abendroth, 'Zum Begriff des demokratischen und sozialen Rechtsstaates im Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland' in A. Hermann, ed, *Festschrift Ludwig Bergsträsser* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1954); Hans-Hermann Hartwich, *Sozialstaatspostulat und gesellschaftlicher status quo* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1970). For an international perspective on this issue, see Chris Pierson, 'Marxism and the Welfare State', in Andrew Gamble, David Marsh and Tony Tant, eds, *Marxism and Social Science* (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 175-194.

⁶⁷⁰ See Müller and Neusüß, 'Die Sozialstaatsillusion', 1970.

⁶⁷¹ Among others, see Gerstenberger, 'Class Conflict, Competition and State Functions', p. 149.

to the often missing “appropriate logical concepts”⁶⁷² of the Marxist discourse on the theory of state. He therefore concludes in concordance with the MG's theory that the bourgeois state, by enforcing competition “must also enable people to continue competing in the face of the disastrous consequences competition may have for them (i.e. act as a ‘welfare state’).”⁶⁷³

Thus, the modern bourgeois state's interest in maintaining competition for the promotion of common wealth dependent on successful capital accumulation, forces it to also act as social state. For Ehrbar, this conclusion, however, does not contradict the empirical variety and different historical origins of the social state. In fact, the historical tendency of capitalist states to act as social states would become manifest in democratic societies.⁶⁷⁴

Even though the MG's analysis leaves room for discussions of specific ‘relations of class practices’ and how they materialise in the democratic welfare state at a certain point in time, the group criticised the practical struggle for socio-political rights and social security on the basis of its anti-state theory. In principle, individuals, campaigning for the improvement of the welfare state, would express their willingness to accept capitalist exploitation as the condition of their existence. The welfare state, itself a genuine product of economic competition and class struggle, is therefore understood to appear inverted in the consciousness of bourgeois individuals. In its ‘mystified’ form, the social security system would appear as an institution that protects, as an end in itself, individuals from the uncertainties implied in capitalism and their basic material needs. However, as the social welfare system does not contribute to the overcoming of its politico-economic roots and is subordinate to the specific needs of capital accumulation and financial constraints, the system is the ongoing subject of political reform schemes. Accordingly, the ‘historical and moral element’ of the welfare state is defined as an incomplete process.⁶⁷⁵

Following the MG's analysis, competition among owners of productive property necessitates the capitalist state to take responsibility for parts of the social production. It is argued that the production of some material prerequisites of competition, e.g. infrastructure and education, is often not profitable so that the state acts as an ideal collective capitalist. In line with leading theorists of the *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, the MG argued that, for the owners of productive property, the state's function amounts to provision of the basic ‘material conditions of circulation’:

⁶⁷² Hans Ehrbar, ‘The Ruling Class Without Conceptual Preliminaries: A Reply To John Hoffman, in *Science & Society*, 1 (1988), p. 99.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁶⁷⁵ See Gegenstandspunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 5, section c). See also Held, *Mein Staat* [audio], 1978.

As the **ideal collective capitalist** the state provides the real capitalists, the owners of the means of production, with those necessary conditions *for* competition which are not reproduced *in* competition.⁶⁷⁶

However, the democratic state's economic involvement moves beyond the mere provision of material prerequisites, it also directly supports the success of industries and companies through, among other things, subsidies and credit warranties. Thus, the 'ideal collective capitalist' would not only offer government grants to stimulate new or sustain key industries, but also nationalise companies or entire industries under specific circumstances. The interest in contributing to successful capital accumulation on its territory, and to 'its' businesses beyond national borders is, as the MG emphasised, a practical obligation of the democratic state's dependence on tax revenue in order to re-financing its activities.

Accordingly, the MG criticises the idea that lobbyism would force interests on the political class that are contrary to the 'common good' the state is supposed to support. In its theoretical framework, the need for successful capital accumulation necessarily implies the consideration of some particular interests brought forward by pressure groups. What is specifically identified as contributing to the common good, however, would be subject to an ongoing process within the political class and power relations in parliament.⁶⁷⁷

5.2.7. Taxation, financial policy and the common good: the bourgeois state and the 'submission' of public authority to the needs of capital accumulation

In its attempt to logically derive the theory of the modern capitalist state, the MG continues by explaining the necessity of taxation. The necessity implied in the transition from Chapters Five to Six results from the functions of the state as an idealist collective capitalist and welfare state. In order to fulfil these functions, the MG explain, the bourgeois state must collect taxes.

However, as competition among private proprietors results in disparate classes and different social strata of wage earners, taxation would serve disparate purposes. The MG therefore concludes that

⁶⁷⁶ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 5.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

by obligating all citizens *equally* to pay taxes the state makes one part of them pay for the security of their property, and the other for the insecurity of their existence.”⁶⁷⁸

Implied in this is the MG critique of the popular ‘taxpayer argument’, which holds that public authorities must appropriately handle taxes collected from its citizens and offer them specific services in return. The compulsory nature of taxation, itself an act of sovereignty, would free the state from having particular obligations towards its citizens. The group also stresses the practical contradictions which the state deals with when determining the tax burden. As the stringent necessity to collect taxes from citizens and businesses entails extra expenses for it, the capitalist state is practically obliged to trade off the interest in augmenting its financial basis against the preservation of capital accumulation, e.g. tax shelter for the agriculture and renewable energy industries, tax-free allowances, level of value-added tax. Adjusting taxes would therefore per se be an unfinished business and subject to the general performance of the national economy, which would also influence the financial scope of ideological debates and competing policies.⁶⁷⁹

From the contradictory nature of taxation, through which the state serves *and* hampers the economic pursuit of its citizens by collecting taxes, the MG derives the next logical transition of its systematic presentation of the democratic state. Implied in the state’s dependence on tax revenue is a quantitative limitation of money that can be collected in the national territory. However, the MG points out that this ‘quantitative limitation’ is not to be understood as a total one. The state partly emancipates itself from financial restrictions imposed on its budget by incurring debt. Any ‘off-budget’ expenses could therefore be adequately and immediately financed. As the MG stresses, in the short term, the capitalist state can acquire money to stimulate the national economy; finance emergency lending for struggling economies whose failure would substantially harm global capital flows; and even military campaigns, all by increasing its debt level.⁶⁸⁰

The subordination of every sphere of life to the interest of capital accumulation, i.e. ‘economic growth’, would not spare the democratic state and its actions, however. Incurring of debt would find its system-compatible limits within the interest rates demanded by investors; a reality exemplified by the current global financial crisis. In an analysis of the contemporary situation, it is argued that since many of the eurozone states experience difficulties in refinancing their debts with interest rates customary to the market, budgetary

⁶⁷⁸ See Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 6.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., section a and b.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

imbalance could not be compensated through new borrowing, which jeopardises the future of affected states. For the MG, incurring of debt is thus only a relative means for the capitalist state to exceed the per se limited resources offered by its society.

This abstract line of thought is reflected, for example in an essay that Decker recently published in *Junge Welt*:

[T]his freedom [to borrow money on capital markets] has its price: for disposal over funds that are unlimited in principle, governments pledge the fiscal rewards of a capital growth that they hope to launch with economic-political expenditures that they could not achieve without it; after all, they govern a private and not a planned economy. The profit striving of private capitalists must yield the growth they aim at.⁶⁸¹

In order to yield the anticipated growth of its economy and its revenue in the form of taxes, the bourgeois state applies the means of economic policy. For the MG, debates regarding the pros and cons of specific measures, such as certain supply- and demand-oriented policies, are of no interest in understanding why the capitalist state is practically forced to have them.

In chapter eight, the MG concludes its interpretation of the state's economic practice by arguing that it "regards all its measures as means to augment the **common good**"; and therefore "evaluates its activities according to their effects on the **wealth of the nation**."⁶⁸² Here, the MG refers to the fact that for capitalist states, the measure of success is expressed, first, in the growth of the gross domestic product; and second, the level of this growth in comparison with other nations.

Economic expansion thus denotes the exclusive means of bourgeois states to increase the output they partly monopolise through taxation. For the MG, the state therefore "make[s] the necessary functions of its power for society contingent on how they contribute to economic growth."⁶⁸³ Through obliging itself to generate its revenue from taxation the bourgeois state subordinates its existence to factual constraints, inherent in the augmentation of capital.

For the MG, the abstraction implied in the concept of the common good, or in economic terms, the 'gross national product', simply underscores the state's practical disinterest in the particular needs of its citizen. Thus, the 'common good' as the criterion of success would also imply the ideological transfiguration of augmenting wealth on the basis of

⁶⁸¹ Peter Decker, 'Wir tun es für uns', in *Junge Welt*, 4 November 2011, p. 10. The paper deals with the dilemma of incurring debt which exceeds the limitations of anticipated national economic development, and the crisis of the common European currency. Decker discusses the inevitable contradictions implied in the capitalist state's economic policy and its dependency on the assessment of rating agencies, which he identifies as the system-conforming result of subordinating "the exercise of [the state's] power to the standards and requirements of the financial sector."

⁶⁸² Gegenstandspunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 8.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

private property. Further, the “wealth of society therefore proves to be [...] an affirmation of their [the citizens'] efforts to exclude others from the wealth that is produced”.⁶⁸⁴

By demanding a contribution to the gross domestic product, the state effectively criticises businesses which negatively contribute to the economic balance, or whose industry is not considered to be of relevance any longer; and enforces laws inherent in the accumulation of capital upon all economic actors.⁶⁸⁵ Given this, the MG argues that the state's services are merely a means for those businesses successfully defying competition. It therefore defines the ‘ideal’ collective capitalist as the political actor enforcing the principles of economic competition with all its consequences on its citizens.

If the state subordinates its budget to the successful augmentation of capital accumulation on its territory, economic policy, according to the MG, must be a ‘simple and one-sided affair’.⁶⁸⁶ For the most part, it would consist of reacting to the business cycles inherent to capital accumulation. The state would also tend to remove the obstacles to business by privatising the public sector and cutting back the social security sector.⁶⁸⁷ Hence, for the bourgeois state, any disturbances to the much desired constant growth are the prelude to stimulate more capital accumulation. Any economic crisis would therefore result in state efforts to overcome the interruption of capital growth “by applying its ‘economic policy instruments’ to make investment profitable *again*.”⁶⁸⁸

As a consequence of this, in its ambition to stimulate growth in times of economic depression, the state affects the life of its citizens in different ways. The following thought, which concludes the MG's abstract derivation of the democratic state's economic activities, can be easily applied to the current situation in the eurozone. It also marks the group's transition to the political sphere of the bourgeois state, because in the context of the state's attempts to revitalise a sufficient degree of capital accumulation, additional means beyond state economic policy are required to fabricate consent regarding the negative effects of reforms and confirm citizens in their ‘abstract free’ decision to practically comply with the state's decisions:

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., section a.

⁶⁸⁵ See Peter Decker, *Der bürgerliche Staat – Prinzipien*, Nuremberg [80 min.] (2009) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#257>> [13 July 2009].

⁶⁸⁶ See Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 8.

⁶⁸⁷ See also Peter Decker, *Euro-Krise und Euro-Rettung*, Nuremberg [102 min.] (2011)

<<http://www.farberot.de/>> [12 February 2012]. In his speech, Decker argues that a major reason for Germany's relative stability during the years of the financial turmoil can be found in the anticipation of cutbacks in the social security sector by the so-called *Agenda 2010*; a welfare state and labour market reform programme, transposed by the majority of the social-democrat and Green Party coalition between 2003 and 2005. After 2005, the programme was further developed by the Grand Coalition under conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel.

⁶⁸⁸ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 8.

This [the economic reforms] means not only making gifts to the capitalists but also applying massive doses of morality and force to keep its damaged exploitable citizens in line. The state thus makes up for its *powerlessness* against the crisis-prone course of accumulation by using *power* against its victims.⁶⁸⁹

In summary, when the state as the political subject of the economy focuses on capital growth as its *exclusive* criterion of success, the MG concludes that it becomes evident that the ultimate purpose of all state decisions must relate to this criterion. Hence, the MG's analysis transcends the 'welfare-state illusion' criticised by Müller and Neusüss in their groundbreaking work; and argues in favour of the abolishment of the Marxist 'state illusion'.

The group's study of the democratic-capitalist state's economic function contributes in the most abstract sense to the explanation for why even the government takeover of left-wing and radical left political forces must result in the reproduction of the adequate conditions of capital accumulation.

5.2.8. When individuals consent to the state's monopoly of force in order to submit themselves to the augmentation of private wealth: the *Marxistische Gruppe's* criticism of democracy

Criticism of democracy formed a central plank of the MG's theory of state, and distinguished the group from the New Left's discourse during the 1960 and 1970s. This theoretical opposition to democracy, as Ehrbar correctly argues, "is one of the [...] strongest innovations"⁶⁹⁰ in their theory, grounded in the idea that states in developed capitalist countries are indeed democracies. For the MG, as already anticipated in the chapters on freedom and equality, any ideals of democracy transcending its modern form of appearance constitute a fatal chimera, because this form would coincide, to employ Hegel's terminology, with its 'notion'. Thus, the KPD/ML's "struggle for freedom and democracy"⁶⁹¹, the KPD/AO's backing of the concept of "people's democracy"⁶⁹² and the AB's, KB's and KBW's political defending of "democratic rights" and the latter's "total democratisation"⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Ehrbar, 'The Ruling Class', p. 98.

⁶⁹¹ See Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten, ed, *Zehn Jahre Kampf für ein vereintes, unabhängiges, sozialistisches Deutschland - 1968/69 bis 1978/79 - Zehn Jahre KPD/ML* (Dortmund: self-published, 1979).

⁶⁹² See Schlögel, Jasper and Ziesemer, *Partei kaputt*, 1981.

⁶⁹³ See Zentralkomitee des Arbeiterbundes für den Wiederaufbau der KPD, *10 Jahre Antwort auf die Frage 'Was Tun?'. 10 Jahre Arbeiterbund für den Wiederaufbau der KPD* (Munich: self-published, 1980); Initiativkomitee Arbeiterhilfe Hamburg des Kommunistischen Bundes, *Ratgeber: Erste Orientierung in Rechtsfragen* (Hamburg: self-published, 1973); Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, *Programm und Statut des Kommunistischen Bundes Westdeutschland* (Mannheim: Verlag Kommunismus und Klassenkampf, 1975).

were all rejected by the MG, whereas, the *K-Gruppen's* approach followed Rosa Luxemburg's idea that there is no socialism without democracy, and vice versa.

Free consent to the state and acceptance of its legal framework when citizens pursue their material interests is the most distinctive feature of democratic rule. Free consent to democratic rule had already been categorised in chapter one of the MG's discussion of abstract free will in a form independent of its bearer, as the logical starting-point for the existence of the modern bourgeois state. Correspondingly, free consent in political rule is re-introduced at this point, with a focus on the actual political sphere. Similar to the start of its derivation, the MG asserts that the positive content of submitting oneself to the state's monopoly of force is identical to the acceptance of competition as the means with which to fulfil one's material aspirations. Bourgeois rule would require that citizens acknowledge the state's activities as the necessary condition for the satisfaction of their material and immaterial interests.⁶⁹⁴

Accordingly, the group argues that capital owners are interested in the monopoly of force insofar as it guarantees the productive use of private property. Complementarily, wage labourers are eager to be acknowledged in their economic function by a public authority guaranteeing their reproduction. This 'state idealism' of economic actors with antagonistic interests equates to making themselves an 'instrument' of the common good as measured through capitalist growth.

In line with the first step of the MG's derivation, the state is interested in the consent of its citizens to guarantee the functioning of its power. Democratic elections, as the MG points out, are therefore carried out periodically, are an important practical expression of the citizens' abstract free will and require the equal weighting of all votes. Given that, the MG's group of authors concludes that the purpose of democratic elections merely consists of appointing representatives who function as instruments for the realisation of the state's purpose to maintain competition and increase the level of the common good. Individuals and parties willing to conduct state affairs would compete for the electorate's approval of their political strategy, and thus contribute to the adequate formation of the general political will.⁶⁹⁵

In the MG's concept of democracy, the sovereignty of the democratic state is fulfilled by representatives being obliged to follow their conscience; and thus through the relative separation of them from the consent of citizens towards specific state measures. The MG therefore criticises political consent and will in democracy being expressed in the most abstract way, namely by putting a cross on a ballot paper:

⁶⁹⁴ See Gegenstandspunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 9.

⁶⁹⁵ Karl Held, *Mein Staat* [audio], 1978.

The individual vote is only of *quantitative* importance; thus, it contributes extremely insignificantly to a mass trend [...]. Accordingly, the vote is devoid of arguments, reasoned political opinions and any articulated statement. It is therefore the adequate expression of commitment to democratic rule.⁶⁹⁶

Any (potential) consideration of the people's political will expressed, for example, through the demonstration of discontent in rallies or polls is missing from the MG's commentary. Any such expression of discontent is reduced to an affirmative political act aimed to improve life under capitalism, but not directed against the state itself. It would show that citizens are not the political subject but have to address their interest to other institutions that *might* consider them.⁶⁹⁷

5.2.9. The democratic public: the completion of the democratic state

For the MG, the general public is, first and foremost, a legal space; and thus a legally protected interest constructed by the bourgeois state according to its principles, and intended to maintain "the disappointment of its citizens as a positive basis for itself, as the desire for a democratic state."⁶⁹⁸ This would be achieved by guaranteeing individuals the right to discontent. By allowing citizens to articulate their dissatisfaction with, for example, the way in which representatives handle their public office duties and all other aspects of their life in capitalism, the state methodically degrades an individual's particular interest to that of mere opinion.

The MG therefore posits that freedom of expression is of central importance for the functioning of democracy because this allows the state to take the edge off an individual's expression of will. Any opinion has to be relativised against other opinions, which results in public "propaganda of **tolerance** and the **diversity of opinion**."⁶⁹⁹ What the MG criticises here is the theoretical indifference inherent to the principle of diversity of opinions. Proponents of their theory argue that it is an error in reasoning to assume equality regarding consistency and plausibility of different arguments.⁷⁰⁰ However, the degradation of interests to opinions is functional insofar as the practical insignificance of any particular expression of will is equal to the state's sovereign implementation of the 'general interest'. For the MG, this

⁶⁹⁶ Gegenstandspunkt, *Demokratie: Die perfekte Form bürgerlicher Herrschaft* (Munich: self-published, 2013), p. 15.

⁶⁹⁷ See also Peter Decker, *Demokratie – kein Menschheitsideal, sondern die Staatsform, die zum Kapitalismus gehört*, Nuremberg [163 min.] (2008) <<http://doku.argudiss.de/?Kategorie=RuD#225>> [15 July 2009].

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., chapter 10.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid. See also Wirth, *Demokratische Öffentlichkeit* [audio], 2006.

⁷⁰⁰ See Decker, *Der verordnete Pluralismus in den Geistes- und Gesellschaftswissenschaften* [audio], 2006; Wirth, *Demokratische Öffentlichkeit* [audio] 2006.

'general will' is identified as the single valid interest alongside plentiful opinions with no practical meaning. Therefore, democratic public is understood to be an efficient leveller of interests:

Opinions must be allowed to be *voiced* so that they *remain* opinions. This is all freedom of speech is. And since there is always the danger of citizens taking seriously opinions criticizing the state, and drawing practical consequences from them, every democratic state puts limits on the freedom of speech and press.⁷⁰¹

Here, the MG implicitly refers to conclusions which Hegel drew in his study on *Philosophy of Right* in which he not only claims that every right is based in the last resort on prohibition, but also argued that

[t]o define the liberty of the press as the liberty to speak and write what one pleases is parallel to the definition of liberty in general, as liberty to do what one pleases. These views belong to the undeveloped crudity and superficiality of fanciful theorizing.⁷⁰²

Accordingly, the democratic public is understood as a 'stomping ground' for the articulation of opinions, whose contents are tolerated as long as they conform to the pro-capitalist legal framework which the bourgeois state decrees. For individuals willing to prove themselves in competition, these restrictions would be redundant, because they would comply with the capitalist order in any case. Moreover, on the basis of their illusions about the state's nature, bourgeois individuals, according to the MG, find consolation in their right to have an opinion. For the MG, constructive criticism is therefore an ubiquitous and inevitable phenomenon in democratic societies; and an adequate means to stabilise a socio-economic system based on the principles of freedom and equality.

In its first chapter on the theory of state, the MG derives the democratic-capitalist state from the abstract free will of individuals which, complementary to this will, would force its rule on all agents of the capitalist mode of production. Their final chapter analyses how the democratic public provides the space in which the system-conforming politicisation of individuals takes place. For the MG, abstract free will can exercise its free submission to the politico-economic system by articulating its subject-related discontent only in order to reaffirm general consent to the principles of the democratic state and the economy it enables to exist.

⁷⁰¹ Gegenstandpunkt, *The Democratic State*, chapter 10, section c).

⁷⁰² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §319, p. 254.

Material for reflections of this kind would be provided by the media and the way in which political, economic and social topics are addressed: namely, as 'problems'. The 'state idealism' of individuals would be manifest in the specific form of media coverage in bourgeois society, which aims to prove that conflicting interests are essentially compatible, if everyone is willing to reach a compromise in pursuit of their interests. Accordingly, it is argued that the demand for 'realism' and non-violent settlement of social conflicts is omnipresent in editorial offices.

For the MG, the idea of the press as the 'fourth estate' of democracy therefore has a true kernel. Bourgeois media make individuals feel intellectually comfortable by offering them adequate material from which they can form their own opinions. For this task, as the MG emphasises, it is irrelevant whether individuals prefer tabloid press over the more elaborated media, or vice versa. Eventually, bourgeois individuals are adequately politicised for the continuation of their participation in competition; and their confidence in the adequacy of the capitalist framework for the satisfaction of their material needs is propagated. For the MG, the bourgeois ideal of the classless national 'we' is cultivated in the democratic public; and the acceptance of the state's political and economic agenda identified as the precondition for gaining access to mainstream media.⁷⁰³

5.3. Discussion

Arguably the most distinctive feature of the MG's analysis is its anti-statism. The idea that the democratic state is a neutral shell that can be filled with a revolutionary core was denied on the basis of Marx's analysis in *Capital*. In consideration of the 'abstract free will', individuals comply with competition under capitalism and, in consequence, its adequate form of government in modern-day democracies. This rigid rejection of the democratic state as a concept and means for transforming society was, however, the object of heavy criticism.⁷⁰⁴

For the MG, the theory of state was the pivotal element of its further theory formation, because it provided its members and sympathisers with notions 'derived' at a high level of abstraction, and offering basic explanations of phenomena such as the constitution, social state, elections and public in democracy, which played a key role in the group's political praxis. Widely criticised among the political left, the MG's abstinence from contributing to 'democratic struggle' that seeks to improve the social circumstances of capitalism, is based to a large extent on this particular work. Moreover, as the MG's theory of democratic state did

⁷⁰³ See Wirth, *Demokratische Öffentlichkeit* [audio], 2006.

⁷⁰⁴ See, for example, Gäbler, 'Siehst du nicht, wie perfekt die Herrschaftsmaschinerie läuft?', 1979.

not offer any theoretical 'hinges' for reconnecting with the democratic reality of the Federal Republic against the background of the historical developments of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the group withstood the New Left's general decline. In fact, the MG proved able to recruit new members and broaden its supporter base throughout the 1980s.

Given this, and the fact that at one point in time, Maoist *K-Gruppen* considered the People's Republic of China, Pol Pot's Cambodia or Enver Hoxha's Albania as concrete manifestations of Utopia, it becomes obvious that the New Left's development was strongly influenced by politico-theoretical reflections regarding the role of the state. Additionally, party leaders in these states received delegations of the KPD/AO, KBW and KPD/ML. These political and ideological ties were already important for the emergence of the *K-Gruppen*, but also a relevant factor in their decline. Respective political developments in these countries had serious repercussions on the legitimacy of a Maoist project in West Germany.

This 'state fetish' not only expressed itself in tying one's own political ambitions to progressive movements as projection surfaces, but also through the *K-Gruppen*'s political appearance as ideal representatives of the people in general, and custodians of the working-class interest in particular. In conjunction with this positive stance towards the concept of 'state', the explicit pairing of socialism and democracy by Maoists, though they were critical of the latter's bourgeois-parliamentary form of appearance, provided the basis for their intellectual-theoretical proximity to the emerging new social movements. In light of this, one might support Mohr's depiction of the West German Maoist as a 'hermaphrodite' figure, combining the political rebel, the critic of the bourgeois state with that of the ideal (and future) public administrator.⁷⁰⁵ This point seems all the more appropriate considering the *K-Gruppen*'s internal structures: portrayed by former members as a 'state within the state'.⁷⁰⁶

In terms of the history of ideas, the MG's recognition of what is termed 'abstract free will' introduced a novel aspect to the Marxist state debate. With this conceptual starting point, the MG derives the most abstract requirements of democratic states, and its general purpose beyond the old cleavage between instrumentalism and structuralism. Whereas the former tends to view the state as a neutral instrument to be exploited and manipulated by the

⁷⁰⁵ See Markus Mohr, 'Der westdeutsche Maoismus und die Partei 'Die Grünen'', in Marcel Bois and Bernd Hüttner, eds, *Beiträge zur Geschichte einer pluralen Linken / Heft 2*, Papers of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (2010) <http://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/rls_papers/Papers_Beitr_zur_Gesch_2.pdf> [6 December 2012], pp. 20-23.

⁷⁰⁶ See Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 288. Koenen refers to the example of the KPD/AO. See also Autorenkollektiv, *Wir war'n die stärkste der Partei...*, 1977.

dominant class, the latter assumes the causal priority of structures over agents and their particular intentions.⁷⁰⁷

Although a product of the West German *Staatsableitungsdebatte*, a debate classified as 'structure-centred'⁷⁰⁸, featuring a simplistic view of the relationship between the state apparatus and the ruling class, the MG's theory considers the relevance of agency. However, in the group's framework, the state as a neutral instrument is not exclusively 'exploited' by one dominant class but all individuals in their function as 'private proprietors'. Here, the class character of the democratic state stems from the principles of competition it promotes and the idea that the equal treatment of all must benefit those having command over the means of production or other financial resources. This idea transcended hitherto existing approaches.

The MG's approach is also compatible with some aspects that Jessop, thought leader of the current state debate, introduced in recent years. His idea to approach the capitalist state from a strategic-relational perspective, emphasising the strategically selective nature of the state and the institutions that comprise it, could be linked with the abstract derivation the MG developed. Jessop's claim that the modern capitalist state is more open to some types of political strategy than others is, from the perspective of Marxism, almost self-evident. It is thus not coincidental when, for example, Hay refers to the value of Jessop's theory beyond the boundaries of Marxist theory formation. In particular, the environmental and feminist movement, according to Hay, could benefit from Jessop's dialectical approach. In his ambition to develop a genuine dialectical approach, Jessop, however, seems unable to adequately reflect the 'fetish character' of the state. His strategic-relational approach, which entails a statement of the contingency and indeterminacy of social and political change, leaves room for both the continued reproduction and demise of the capitalist system.⁷⁰⁹

Here, the MG's systematic approach could complement Jessop's work by establishing a critical basis that puts the dynamic, constant unfolding of the capitalist state in perspective. If one agrees with the MG that competition is the purpose of the modern capitalist state, the absolute limitations of this unfolding can be determined. Even though it seems that the West German debate was, at times, a scholastic task on its own behalf, it provided a firm basis for understanding the relationship between the state and the capitalist economy. This is what Werner seemed to have in mind when he emphasised the relevance of the

⁷⁰⁷ See Colin Hay, 'Marxism and the state', in Andrew Gamble, David Marsh and Tony Tant, eds, *Marxism and Social Science* (London: MacMillan, 1999), p. 152-173.

⁷⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, table 8.1, p. 167.

⁷⁰⁹ See Jessop, *State Theory*, pp. 12-13.

Staatsableitungsdebatte to the current debate, which often lacks the appropriate level of systematic analysis, because of its focus on historical explanations.⁷¹⁰

Poulantzas, to whom many authors turned in recent years in order to further their understanding, criticised the West German state debate as a 'formalist theoreticism', which would be "completely unserviceable in analysing concrete situations, since [related theories] cannot account the differential forms and transformations of the capitalist state."⁷¹¹ Although Poulantzas is right when contending that the often ahistorical concepts developed in the context of the German state debate would not account for the different manifestations of the capitalist state, his non-consideration of the formal aspects of Marxist theory formation results in the conception of the state as an amorphous, inanimate entity. Poulantzas indeed insists on the state's particular materiality beyond his definition of it as the "condensate of a relation of power between struggling classes", stressing the necessity of 'asymmetric' power relationships; but is not able to derive these from the conceptual constraints.

In light of Poulantzas and Jessop's approach, it is important to point towards the potential compatibility of the German *Staatsableitungsdebatte*'s objective to systematically conceptualise the origin of the modern capitalist state; and the analyses of concrete situations which both authors propose. The objectives are not mutually exclusive.⁷¹² In fact, the systematic approach is the theoretical precondition from which to analyse the various forms which modern states assume due to different power relationships between struggling classes that, however, occur within a capitalist corset of requirements.

These requirements are analysed in the MG's study, which does not offer an analysis of the different forms of appearance of the welfare system in Western Europe, the US or South Africa, but provides an abstract explanation of the reason why every democratic state has established such a system. Like other approaches developed during the debate, the group's systematic explanation is not a static theory of state. It does not obstruct the analysis of specific forms of the democratic state over time and in different nations, nor does it deny the 'historical and moral element' comprised in different democratic states.

The notion of the bourgeois state, its abstract determination, to which the MG contributes through its analysis, which explains all facets of democratic rule and politicisation in the bourgeois public according to the overarching purpose of capital realisation, carries a heavily anti-state dimension. This is closely related to the group's interpretation of freedom and

⁷¹⁰ See Werner, 'Kapitalismustheorie ohne Staat?', 2009.

⁷¹¹ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978; London: Verso, 2000), pp. 124-125.

⁷¹² See Ingo Stützle, 'Staatstheorien', 2006.

equality. Although the MG's critique of freedom and equality rests upon implicit references for how to understand freedom and equality in a broader sense, its total rejection of both reflects strategic considerations. In doing so, the MG exceeds the well-worn Marxist idea of a gap between the ideological appearance of the legal form of freedom and equality and the specific interests that sustain it in such an effective way.

Contrary to the idea that the mere form in which these rights appear involve a dynamic of their own, a view put forward by Žižek, the MG's analysis denies the very existence of such a 'gap' and its radical ambiguity. Žižek emphasises the subversive nature of formal democracy, and argues that

[t]his gap can be read in the standard 'symptomatic' way: formal democracy is a necessary but illusory expression of a concrete social reality of exploitation and class domination. But it can also be read in the more subversive sense of a tension in which the 'appearance' of égaliberté is not a 'mere appearance' but contains an efficacy of its own, which allows it to set in motion the rearticulation of actual socioeconomic relations by way of their progressive 'politicisation'.⁷¹³

The MG, though not denying that these rights leave traces in the materiality of the state, its legal structure and the relationships of power, challenges the subversive element implied in freedom and equality. Instead, the group argues that the mere existence of the state stands in the way of social emancipation and thus followed Marx, who stated that:

Only when man has recognized and organised his *forces propres* [own forces] as *social forces*, and consequently no longer separates from himself in the shape of *political power*, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.⁷¹⁴

For the MG, the historical and political emergence of freedom and equality as legally protested interest and moral values is bound to 'conflict particular interests' that individuals follow in capitalism, and the will to compete against each other. Accordingly, the purpose of freedom is derived from the individual's will to receive protection of property and person. Again, the group borrows ideas from Hegel, who argued that

[i]n carrying out his duty the individual must in some way or other discover his own interest, his own satisfaction and recompense. A right must accrue to him out of his relation to the state, and by this right [i.e. freedom] the universal concern becomes his own private concern. The particular interest shall in truth be neither set aside nor suppressed, but be placed in open concord with the universal. In this concord both particular and universal are enclosed. The individual, who from the point of view of his

⁷¹³ Slavoj Žižek, 'Against Human Rights', in *New Left Review*, 34 (July-August 2005), pp. 115-131.

⁷¹⁴ Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *MECW Vol. 3*, p. 168.

duties is a subject, finds, in fulfilling his civic duties, protection of person and property [...].⁷¹⁵

The MG's arguments can also be read as a theory of how it is possible for a society of competing private proprietors with antagonistic interests to persist and reproduce. Within such a reading, abstract free will and the ideologically adequate politicisation of individuals form an umbrella under which the stability of the bourgeois society is explained in abstract terms. Given this, the MG fills an important gap in the Marxist literature on the modern capitalist state. Ehrbar summarises this progress by pointing out that "a democratic state power can seem desirable [...] only for those individuals who have accepted the situation of a competitive war of all against all."⁷¹⁶

The common interest in freedom and equality imputed by the MG to individuals of different classes as the basis of their continuous economic competition established the foundation upon which criticism of the political form of capitalism arises. In line with Marx, who argued repeatedly in *Capital* that in competition, every aspect of modern society appears in reverse, in a distorted shape, the MG claims that this common interest is in fact the mere legal and moral means with which to assert the rule of capital.

This thought-provoking hypothesis, which forms the basis of their derivation and from which the entire line of argument evolves, also implied the key element of the MG's agitation. If an individual gained insight into the inappropriateness of competition for the satisfaction of their material needs, the 'mystified' appearance of the bourgeois society would be resolved. In the MG's theoretical framework, the ideas of freedom and equality are explained as existing in total conformity to the capitalist system; and thus deprived of their emancipatory quality attributed to them, amongst many others, by Zizek and Hirsch.⁷¹⁷

The practical doubling of the will into a private and public variant necessitated by competition and institutionalised in democracy arguably denotes the MG's boldest analytical step; and set the group apart from general Marxist discourse. Ehrbar succinctly summarised the consequences of the group's theory:

Ruling and being ruled are stripped of all their glitter and reduced to their bare economic content. It is the subjection of all society, workers and capitalists alike, to the rule of capital. This is no reason for comfort. The most despotic *human* dictatorship

⁷¹⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 261, pp. 200-201. See also § 236 for Hegel's comment on the insufficiencies of competition without regulation.

⁷¹⁶ Ehrbar, 'The Ruling Class', p. 99.

⁷¹⁷ See Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie*, 2005.

cannot have as much disregard for the consequences of its rule for humanity as is displayed by the anonymous and unflinching rule of capital.⁷¹⁸

The MG's critique of democracy for its one-dimensional implementation of capital's anonymous and unflinching rule, subordinating every aspect of life to the law of capital self-valorisation, does not leave room for substantial social change. The scope for political action is limited to developing different judgements about what is and is not conducive to the general economic-political progress. Since *the* unitary interest in valorisation does not exist, but only in the form of an internally inconsistent conglomerate of individual interests, different agents compete for the realisation of their political perspectives.⁷¹⁹ Thus, ideas, such as the 'long march through the institutions', which both Dutschke and Marcuse postulated at the end of the student movement's cycle of protest, merely exposed a new form of the radical left's 'state idealism'.

In light of discrepancies between understanding freedom and equality either as a subversive element or as concepts that entirely comply with capitalism, we are now able to address the issue of 'artistic and social total revolution' as articulated by Luc Boltanski.⁷²⁰ Boltanski deals with two concepts of 'total revolution', which played a key role during and after the global student movement — Boltanski terms this the 'artistic revolution' — and aims to overcome sources of social inequality without challenging the fundamentals of political economy, and 'social revolution', which intends to overthrow the capitalist system.

The ongoing revolution in the artistic sphere is correctly identified by Boltanski as the most relevant legacy of '68'. He refers to the political left's progress in overcoming traditional issues, such as race and gender, addressed ever since the student movement and now widely acknowledged in society as a whole. Given this, the emancipatory nature of freedom and equality seems to be confirmed by the developments of the last four decades.

However, this 'artistic revolution' is not inconsistent with the abstract derivation formulated by the MG in *The Democratic State*, because the foundations of democratic capitalism have not been challenged by the conceptual broadening of what freedom and equality in modern democracies actually mean. The equal treatment of different races, genders and sexual preferences, for example, does not suspend the capitalist competition organised by democratic states. Boltanski's concluding hypothesis, that the 'artistic revolution', which started in the 1960s might have merely sophisticated the rule of capital,

⁷¹⁸ Ehrbar, 'The Ruling Class', p. 101.

⁷¹⁹ See also Margaret Wirth, *Kapitalismustheorie in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1973).

⁷²⁰ Boltanski, 'The Left after May 1968', 2002.

can be interpreted as a certainty within the conceptual framework provided by the MG. Whether the MG's conclusion, derived from its abstract theory of state, adequately grasps the actual complexity of changes over the last decades, will be subject of future research.

The topicality of a Marxist theory of state results chiefly from the government takeover of potent left-wing forces in Venezuela and Bolivia and the neo-statist strategies pursued by the political left in Western Europe.⁷²¹ Moreover, the popularisation of political slogans such as 'We are the 99%' during current protests against the severe consequences of the global debt crisis requires a theoretical involvement with the role and, from a more fundamental perspective, the purpose of the modern capitalist state.

Finally, bearing in mind that all hitherto existing emancipatory movements aimed their criticism at the state, canvassed for the consideration and realisation of their political objective, and that these movements were usually not even able to think about, let alone truly conceptualise social emancipation beyond the state, this surely justifies the MG's critique of left-wing politics as state-centric. Despite Marx's at various points contradictory legacy, critique of the state appears to be a key facet of Marxist theory formation with which to foster human emancipation. This aspect was also largely disregarded by the early New Left movement in West Germany as outlined in Chapter One.

This anti-state position was first revived in the 1960s by Agnoli, the influential German-Italian intellectual during the West German student movement; then under different premises and with pronounced political intentions by the MG between 1979 and 1991. In light of the practical and ideological hegemony of capitalism, this appears to be the genuine utopian dimension involved in the Marxist body of thought. However, this position was a key element of the MG's relative success during the 1980s and also contributes to the explanation the demise of the New Left after 1976/7.

⁷²¹ See Lars Bretthauer, Alexander Gallas, John Kannankulam and Ingo Stützle, 'Einleitung', in Lars Bretthauer, Alexander Gallas, John Kannankulam and Ingo Stützle, eds, *Poulantzas lesen* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2006).

6. The New Left's legacy in the years following German unification, and the political paralysis of the radical left after 1991

Throughout history there were always
bleak and non-utopian times like these.
And there were individuals who carried
wise thoughts through these times.⁷²²

This chapter summarises major developments in the years following the ultimate ruin of (West) Germany's New Left in 1991. For the continuity of the New Left's political and theoretical legacy, I will scrutinise the developments between the historic watershed of 1989/91 and today. The chapter will conclude with a current application of the *Gegenstandspunkt's* body of thought. Arguably the last potent remnant of West Germany's New Left, the publishing house has become a generation spanning project, continuing the theoretical work of the *Marxistische Gruppe* since 1992.

6.1. The cessation of rigid organisational structures and Marxist theory after 1991

After the crisis of Marxism had surfaced in the late 1970s, the New Left's ambition to organise political opposition to capitalist society was largely abandoned. The concomitant ending of the 'red decade' resulted in the collapse of the majority of West Germany's radical left organisations (see figure 1). The collapse of the 'really existing' socialist regimes in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 caused a second grave crisis for the remaining New Left organisations and circles, which had continued to uphold a critical stance towards capitalism on the basis of Marx's legacy during the 1980s.

In 1991, both the already substantially decimated *Kommunistischer Bund* and the *Marxistische Gruppe* dissolved. The majority of the remaining New Left regarded as obsolete the analytical frameworks and patterns of thinking of the Cold War era. Itself a product of this era, the New Left was suffering from a severe identity crisis by its end. As the post-1968 radical left could no longer explicitly or implicitly refer to the October Revolution as the symbol for the global revolutionary project, no matter how critical the different strands were

⁷²² Thomas Ebermann, former *K-Gruppen* Maoist and eco socialist of the Green party, cited in Holger Schmale, 'Der letzte Querulant', in *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 March 2011, <<http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/einst-fuehrte-der-kommunist-thomas-eberrmann-die--fundis--der-gruenen-an-und-provozierte-mit-seiner-radikalitaet--heute-laedt-er-in-hamburg-in-seine-vers--und-kaderschmiede--laengst-ist-er-ein-aussenseiter-in-einer-gesellschaft--die-sich-eigentlich-nur-noch-fuer-den-mainstream-interessiert-der-letzte-querulant,10810590,10774806.html>> [11 November 2011].

of the actual manifestation of socialism in the Soviet Union and its satellite states, it sank into political abyss.⁷²³ For the first time since 1917, the economic, political and ideological hegemony of capitalism went globally unchallenged. The People's Republic of China, though *de jure* still a Communist state and therefore the last powerful remnant of the ideological conflicts of the 20th century, has been *de facto* no exception to this.⁷²⁴

With the exception of the intellectually and politically insignificant *Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands* (MLPD, Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany), the *Arbeiterbund für den Wiederaufbau der KPD* (AB, Workers League for the Reestablishment of the Communist Party of Germany) and the *Gegenstandspunkt* publishing house, no remnants of the Marxist New Left continued to exist.

Given the grave crisis of Marxism during the years of change, Georg Fülberth, professor of political science and closely linked to the DKP, stated his belief in the end of the organised radical left within a few years.⁷²⁵ Others already declared the ultimate ruin of the entire political left in the aftermath of the historic events of 1989-91; thus supporting Francis Fukuyama's idea of an 'end of history'.⁷²⁶ Even though Fülberth was mistaken in such a bold statement, he was correct in foreseeing the severe difficulties of the radical left in retaining its supporter base and remaining or, more precisely, re-establishing itself as a potent political factor. Indeed, between 1991 and 2009, the total membership figures of all radical left organisations in Germany as a whole remained relatively low: ranging between 25,000 and 29,500, as compared with the approximately 80,000 activists of the mid-1970s in West Germany alone.⁷²⁷

As in other West European countries, the party representing the 'old left' in West Germany suffered the most from the end of the Cold War. The East German-affiliated DKP lost 90% of its membership within a few years.⁷²⁸ In contrast to traditional Communist Parties in countries, such as Italy and the UK, the DKP, however, did not dissolve and remains active even now, albeit without any considerable influence on political and intellectual life.

The impact of the years of change was further intensified by the nationalist rupture that occurred in 1989/90. As activists felt forced to take a position regarding the proposed

⁷²³ See Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷²⁴ See Dillmann, *China*, 2009.

⁷²⁵ See Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷²⁶ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁷²⁷ See Bundesministerium des Innern, ed, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1991* (Bonn, 1992); Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2011* (Berlin, 2012). These figures include the radical factions of the former *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* and *Die Linke* party, respectively. See also Langguth, *Protestbewegung*, pp. 57-58.

⁷²⁸ See Armin Pfahl-Traugher, 'Die 'Deutsche Kommunistische Partei' (DKP)' <<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/linksextremismus/33621/dkp?p=all>> [12 June 2012].

German-German unification and thus clarify their relationship to Germany in particular and nationhood in general, almost all radical left organisations were affected by disputes regarding the 'German question'.⁷²⁹ Even the members of the *Sozialistisches Büro*, a undogmatic and influential forum, in which several prominent New Left intellectuals, such as Joachim Hirsch, Elmar Altvater and Oskar Negt, participated during the 70s and 80s, and which was known for its ideological tolerance, divided over this issue.⁷³⁰

Months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, an important attempt to counteract the political impotence of the radical left was initiated. In April 1989, remnants of still existing Marxist-Leninist factions, DKP members, autonomists and undogmatic leftists formed the radical left coalition initiative, *Radikale Linke* (RL, Radical Left), which aimed to lay the foundations of an informal renewal network.⁷³¹ The use of the term *Radikale Linke* alone was a novelty. Until then, Marxist-Leninist strands used to delimit themselves from 'radical left' movements, which Lenin had criticised as the 'child illness of Communism' three years after the October Revolution.⁷³² In particular, those West German parties and factions supporting the regimes that formed the 'really existing' socialist camp criticised any forms of radical 'leftism' before 1989 as 'petit bourgeois'.

The term 'leftism' itself had pejorative connotations in pro-Moscow circles and amounted merely to a defamation of political opponents with the goal of de-legitimizing their political goals and agitation efforts against the 'really existing' manifestations of socialism in Eastern Europe.⁷³³ The emergence of the RL platform, however, was soon overwhelmed by the historic changes culminating in German unification on 3 October 1990. When the 'German question' became urgent in spring 1990, the RL organised a rally in Frankfurt, attended by approximately 20,000 demonstrators. Under the motto of 'Germany? Never again!' the rally attracted activists from all important strands of the radical left, suggesting that hitherto existing lines of conflict between organisations of the political far left in the post-Cold War era had been overcome.⁷³⁴ Considering its anti-statist approach, the MG did not feel obliged to take positions regarding the pros and cons of a unified Germany and its burdened history.

⁷²⁹ See Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷³⁰ See Gottfried Oy, 'Spurensuche Neue Linke', in *UTOPIE kreativ*, 197 (March 2007), pp. 260-261.

⁷³¹ See Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷³² Lenin, 'Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder', in *LCW Vol. 31*, pp. 17-118.

⁷³³ The DKP, for example, published a miscellany in 1979, in which they analysed existing 'petit bourgeois' tendencies among the West German radical left. Their polemic was directed against influential organisations of the radical left, which, among other aspects, included an essay on the quite recently established *Marxistische Gruppe*. Bernd Gäbler, 'Siehst du nicht, wie perfekt die Herrschaftsmaschinerie läuft?', 1979.

⁷³⁴ See Decker and Held, *DDR kaputt Deutschland ganz*, 1989.

Furthermore, at this demonstration against the unification of both German states on 12 May 1990, the *Antideutschen* ('anti-Germans') strand, which became influential during the 1990s and 2000s, had its public foundation date. Even though the historical 'German question' was solved by the 'Two Plus Four' Agreement in September 1990, with the result of the re-united Germany becoming fully sovereign on 15 March 1991, the practical attitude towards this new German state split the radical left. This occurred soon after the coalition initiative under the leadership of the RL was able to initiate 'red table discussions' to develop further co-operation. The RL also invited like-minded activists to two congresses on the future of Germany's radical left, but failed in their attempt to establish a standing committee or alternative forms of co-operation.⁷³⁵ In fact, diverging attitudes towards Germany's suspect history and disputes over the anticipation of new hegemonic ambitions in Europe terminated the collaboration among different radical left strands. In particular, the second Gulf War in 1991 contributed to the ending of the short-lived 'hunger for discussions' in and around the RL initiative.⁷³⁶

For the majority of individuals involved with the radical left, the existential crisis implied a self-critical evaluation of hitherto applied practical approaches, theoretical foundations and the potential further development of radical left projects. In the context of what historian Eric Hobsbawm describes as the end of the 'short century', the radical left was more than ever concerned about itself and its further existence. The recurring question 'what is to be done?' became once again highly relevant for the radical left, and was controversially discussed.

In June 1993, for example, *Konkret*, publisher of one of Germany's most influential left-wing periodicals, held a congress in Hamburg under that very slogan. Among the participants were Germany's left-wing heavyweights, such as Thomas Ebermann, Karl Held, Jutta Ditfurth, Hermann Gremlitz and the young Sarah Wagenknecht, who has become one of the leading public figures of *Die Linke* and its most prominent thought leader in recent years. Despite the realisation of this congress, which brought together activists representing divergent strands of the German radical left, the early 1990s confirmed the considerable differences between, for example, proponents of the 'anti-German' approach (e.g. Hermann

⁷³⁵ See Jan Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷³⁶ Documentation of an argument between Thomas Ebermann and Joachim Bruhn at a RL seminar in Berlin on the Gulf War in April 1991 can be found in 'Der Golfkrieg, die Linke und der Tod' in *Arbeiterkampf*, 331, 3 June 1991, pp. 34-36.

Gremlitz), the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house (e.g. Karl Held) and former 'eco socialists' (e.g. Jutta Ditfurth, Thomas Ebermann).⁷³⁷

The process of realignment in the early 1990s, however, had various important results, which have shaped the radical left until the present day. First, the fragmentation of the radical left assumed a new form during and after the years of change. Against the interlude of the *Gründungsfieber*⁷³⁸ period in the wake of the student movement, the question of organisation was turned down. No significant amalgamation of radical left activists occurred; whilst the remaining organised forces, such as the MLPD and DKP, have eked out a niche existence with little impact on Marxist, let alone general political or academic discourse. From an organisational perspective, the radical left has been thrown back to the era of the first phase of West Germany's New Left until the mid-1960s, when informal discussion groups and Marxist theory training circles were common practice. Beyond that, many radical left intellectuals and activists began to collaborate with particular periodicals and publishers. Thus, informal organisation structures have become predominant.⁷³⁹

Second, two currents hitherto on the fringes gained strength, and have since the early 1990s shaped the German leftist scene. Both the *Antifa* movement (acronym for anti-fascism), predominantly occupied with fighting nationalism and racism, and the *Antideutschen* current, which opposes a particular form of German nationalism that, according to their premise, has been invigorated after the unification in 1990 and re-assessed the historical debt to Israel, significantly contributed to the development of the radical left. The anti-German current exemplifies the informal organisation of the radical left as supporters group around the periodical *Bahamas* and the publishing house *ça ira*.⁷⁴⁰

Third, the dominant force of the former GDR's single-party system, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, transformed itself into an all-German political force. This was achieved by breaking from its Marxist-Leninist tradition, and positioning itself left of social democracy as a mainstream party and an electoral alternative to its 'new centre' (*Neue Mitte*) policy. The party, already renamed as the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS, Party of

⁷³⁷ See Wolfgang Schneider and Boris Gröndahl, eds, *Was tun? Über Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten linker Politik und Gesellschaftskritik* (Hamburg: Konkret, 1994). Parts of the congress were filmed, and are available online. Both clips offer a rare opportunity to watch, among other influential thought leaders of the radical left, Karl Held, who took part in the main podium discussion on nationalism. See *held gegen antideutsche dichter 1* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOF4fzb9kiQ>> [30 August 2011]; *held gegen antideutsche dichter 2* <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2sWmy8oS84&feature=related>> [30 August 2011].

⁷³⁸ A literal translation of this term is not available. However, *Gründungsfieber* figuratively refers to an enthusiastic rush to establish radical political organisations.

⁷³⁹ Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010.

⁷⁴⁰ See Manfred Dahlmann, 'antideutsch', (undated) <<http://www.ca-ira.net/isf/beitraege/dahlmann-antideutsch.html>> [18 September 2012]; Justus Wertmüller, 'Ideologiekritisch und sonst nichts', (2009) <<http://www.redaktion-bahamas.org/auswahl/web57-2.html>> [18 September 2012].

Democratic Socialism) in the spring of 1990, gradually gained voter support in the post-unification era. At the general election in 1998, it became an integral part of the German political system, which therewith turned into a five-party one. Moreover, after a brief slump in support between 2002 and 2005, the PDS merged with the newly founded West German *Wahlalternative: Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit* (WASG, The Electoral Alternative: Labour and Social Justice) in 2007. Both organisations formed the new all-German party, *Die Linke* (The Left), but have even been able to integrate the radical factions into one left-wing party. The Communist Platform and the Marxist Forum of *Die Linke* and their intellectual heavyweights, such as Sarah Wagenknecht, have been successful in tying Communist activists to a party which, whilst campaigning for democratic socialism, decided to play the game of parliamentary democracy and is already in the middle of a normalisation and de-radicalisation process.⁷⁴¹

Fourth, the *Autonomen* (autonomists), which reappeared as a political factor in West Germany in 1980 after a brief period of prosperity in the early 1970s, established itself as an independent, heterogeneous driving force of radical left politicking vaguely based on anarchist ideologies. The *Autonomen* linked their efforts to the new social movements; however, they frequently exceed the content-related and practical limitations of these both by opposing capitalism and through their propensity towards violence. Thus, they can be understood as the most radical arm of these movements. In particular, ongoing campaigns against nuclear waste transport and neo-fascist tendencies are accompanied by activists associated with the *Autonomen* milieu.⁷⁴²

6.2. The resuming of the *Marxistische Gruppe*'s legacy by the *Gegenstandspunkt* publishing house

The *Marxistische Gruppe*, which emerged from the German unification process without diminution of its political activism or membership, was officially dissolved in 1991 after the *Verfassungsschutz* published its extensive booklet on the organisation's ideology, objectives and working methods.⁷⁴³ This voluntary self-liquidation came as a surprise to political opponents and the media.⁷⁴⁴ Indeed, Fülberth argued in *Konkret* that there was no need to

⁷⁴¹ See Dan Hough, Michael Kloth and Jonathan Olsen, *The Left Party in Contemporary German Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). In recent years, Sarah Wagenknecht, formerly an overt proponent of the Communist Platform within *Die Linke*, has held her membership in abeyance to focus on her career in the party executive.

⁷⁴² See Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme*, 1995.

⁷⁴³ See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe*, 1991.

⁷⁴⁴ See, among others, *Die Zeit*, 'Die letzten großen K-Gruppen', 1991; Fülberth, 'Ein Fall von Panik', 1991.

capitulate to state authorities – namely, the Ministry of the Interior and the associated Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution – because the publication would not have changed the MG's situation at all. He further explained that state authorities had no realistic chance of banning the MG, because the group never stirred up hatred against the democratic order, but merely interpreted its existence and purpose. Fülberth therefore concluded that the MG reacted in a 'state of panic' when dissolving the organisation in consequence of those state activities which had been subject to their ideological criticism since its early days as a Munich-based student organisation.⁷⁴⁵

Without going into detail, Fülberth claimed that there had been discussions within the organisation for years regarding its strategic direction, because the MG, like the entire radical left in the late 1980s, would have been plagued by the nagging consciousness of its absolute political irrelevance.⁷⁴⁶ This idea appears to be indirectly supported by a former member of the MG, who stated that various members decided to discontinue their political work after the MG's dissolution in 1991 and privatise rather than regroup around the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house.⁷⁴⁷ Against Fülberth's assumption, however, the establishment of the *Gegenstandpunkt* by former leading members of the MG in 1992, comments on state surveillance prior to its dissolution and interviews support the idea that he was wrong regarding the group's supposed panic and political irrelevance as the main reason for its dissolution.⁷⁴⁸

However, the MG's dissolution did not take place within a historical vacuum. Although from an organisational viewpoint unaffected by the unification process and the 'national question', it would have been naïve for the MG not to take the far-reaching implications of the new status quo into account. Indeed, two interviewees confirmed that the decision to dissolve the MG was influenced by these historical developments in the sense that the increased risk of endangering the professional careers of members and individuals loosely associated with the MG ultimately became 'disproportional' to the realities of the early post-Cold War era and the ultimate collapse of the left New Left's project.⁷⁴⁹ As an organisation which incessantly insisted on realism given the remote prospect of overthrowing bourgeois

⁷⁴⁵ See *Konkret-Artikel* <<http://www.contradictio.de/blog/archives/1757>> [08 September 2011]. The monthly journal still had a circulation of almost 41,500 in 2011. See *Mediadaten* <http://www.konkret-verlage.de/kvv/txt/konkret_media_daten.pdf> [15 September 2012].

⁷⁴⁶ Fülberth, 'Ein Fall von Panik', 1991. In an email to the author Fülberth confirmed his prior statement, 16 April 2011.

⁷⁴⁷ In an informal conversation with the author on 20 June 2011, K.M. claimed that many of those discontinuing their political activism after 1991 later re-joined *Gegenstandpunkt* discussion circles: "Perhaps they were simply bored with their bourgeois existences."

⁷⁴⁸ See MSZ, 2 (1990), pp. 2 and 4. See also interview with K.M., 24 January 2013.

⁷⁴⁹ Interviews with K.M. and M.P., 24 and 20 January 2013, respectively.

society, the MG interpreted the publishing of the *Verfassungsschutz*'s booklet in 1991 and the state's ever-increasing surveillance activities as bringing a new quality into the political repression against its members. Although it is doubtful to assume that state authorities systematically expanded the employment ban against radicals to the private sector, the MG perceived the release of four of its members from positions in 1988 as a new form of state repression. The private sector companies asked to release employees associated with the MG were education providers funded by the regional federation of employers in Bavaria.⁷⁵⁰ Accordingly, the group of authors editing the MSZ argued in its final volume that the MG had no intentions to further 'sacrifice' individuals for the group's political goals, considering its impotence in igniting political change.⁷⁵¹

In light of all this, the MG was forced to relativise the polemical outlining of its stance towards the societies of really existing socialism a year after the following assertion was published in 1990: "If they [Communists in Eastern Europe] disappear with their system and their state, *our* conditions [for political work] don't change at all."⁷⁵² Even though the group was wise not to confound the political situation abroad with the possibilities for political change in Germany, the MG was nonetheless confronted with the consequences of the disappearance of 'really existing socialism', insofar as *Verfassungsschutz* was keen on liquidating the remaining influential elements of the radical left and thus to draw a line under the ideological conflict which had superimposed itself upon international politics during the 'short century'.⁷⁵³

From a broader perspective, the MG's dissolution, expedited by state surveillance, is another example for the radical left's tendency for retreat in the wake of the collapse of the communist bloc. With the Cold War over, activists grouped around the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house have regressed, from an organisational point of view, to the period before the Red Cells movement began its 're-appropriation' of Marx's work in the wake of the student movement.

Against rumours circulating among the radical left and the assertion of the *Verfassungsschutz* that *Gegenstandpunkt* would be an organisational replacement for the MG, an interviewee stressed that the latter was a revolutionary organisation, while the former is a project to foster Marxist theory formation in continuation of the MG's work.⁷⁵⁴ This, of

⁷⁵⁰ See Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

⁷⁵¹ See MSZ, 4 (1991).

⁷⁵² MSZ, 3 (1990), p. 35.

⁷⁵³ See Bayerischer Rundfunk, *Zeitspiegel*, 19 December 1989 [video source].

⁷⁵⁴ Interview with U.F. on 19 January 2013.

course, would not hinder the re-establishment of a revolutionary organisation on the platform of the *Gegenstandpunkt*. Given this, it could be argued that although the *Gegenstandpunkt* is not an organisation, it provides the potential basis for a renewed 'MG', if supporters believe this step is appropriate in light of general political developments.

Then again, for its members, the MG was merely the means to promote their individual interest in overthrowing bourgeois society; they opposed becoming objectified by the organisation's agenda, e.g. sacrificing themselves for the common good of the organisation, an act which had positive connotations among *K-Gruppen*.⁷⁵⁵ To members, the organisation had no end in itself, but was understood to be the decisive means for the intended (long-term) goal of revolution by its members. Thus, many activists decided not to continue their political work in the informal groups affiliated with the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house, because, as one interviewee emphasised, without the adequate means at a revolutionary's disposal, i.e. the 'party', no rational arguments would exist for continuing an individual's political work and corresponding investment of resources.⁷⁵⁶ The MG, internally referred to as the 'club', was in this sense understood to be a party. However, in contrast to *K-Gruppen*, the MG did not apply for recognition as an official party taking part in the parliamentary system.

The idea of being a political party in the most abstract sense of the word was not taken over by *Gegenstandpunkt*.⁷⁵⁷ Given with the scant prospect of transforming capitalism, groups affiliated with the publishing house currently focus on the ideological training of their sympathisers, to preserve the body of acquired critical 'knowledge' about bourgeois society and academic theories. Training courses are held on Marx's analysis in *Capital Vol. I-III*, the MG's theory of state, the relationship of poverty and wealth, and modern imperialism. One consequence of this approach is that *Gegenstandpunkt* neither agitates for its theoretical work at universities, nor in companies or trade unions. Today, leaflets are only occasionally distributed at larger demonstrations at local or national level. Examples have included the G8 summit in Heiligendamm in 2007 and rallies organised by the German Federation of Trade Unions against the effects of the current financial crisis.⁷⁵⁸

In contrast to the radical left's trend to re-adjust hitherto advocated political beliefs and theoretical positions, *Gegenstandpunkt* and its closely related intellectuals continued on the basis of the MG's work. It further developed the theory formation started by the MG and,

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ See interview with K.M. on 24 January 2013.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ See, for example, *Sonstige Artikel/ Flugblätter* <http://www.gegenstandpunkt-s.de/sonstige_artikel.htm> [16 November 2012].

until the present day, has not corrected its main lines of thought. For *Gegenstandpunkt*, neither the notion of political economy as analysed by Marx, nor the derivations of the democratic-capitalist state, psyche of bourgeois individuals and analysis of the principles of imperialism have lost their cogency.

In recent years, authors of the *Gegenstandpunkt* collective have now and again written guest contributions for various left-wing journals, magazines and newspapers; and thus continued to advance radical left discourse beyond the boundaries of their periodical's readership. For example, both its current editor-in-chief, Peter Decker, and Theo Wentzke, have participated in panel discussions and published articles on various topics in *Jungle World* and *Junge Welt*. The financial crisis has been central to *Gegenstandpunkt*'s publication activities more recently.⁷⁵⁹

In addition, in 1997, it re-started regular teach-ins in numerous university towns, mostly in Germany but also Austria, Switzerland, the US and Denmark. In contrast to the period of the MG's existence, the agitation, however, has become rather less contentious. Moreover, academic 'guest speakers' hold talks and only formally distance themselves from *Gegenstandpunkt*'s theoretical work. Among others, Freerk Huiskens and Margaret Wirth function as guest speakers at events organised by the publishing house. These speakers are an integral part of the *Gegenstandpunkt*'s process of theory formation and, according to interviewees, also contribute to its periodical and otherwise promote the work of the *Gegenstandpunkt*.⁷⁶⁰ Moreover, the VSA publishing house in Hamburg, committed to broadening the discourse of the German political left, has published various books of authors supporting the theoretical work of *Gegenstandpunkt* since the 2000s and established a subgroup of publications of authors related to the GSP.⁷⁶¹ Radio programmes in Hamburg, Vienna, Stuttgart, Munich, Marburg and Frankfurt/Main support all these efforts.⁷⁶²

With its dissenting views on fundamental issues of Marxist theory and current affairs, *Gegenstandpunkt* has remained what Gerber termed the 'enfant terrible' of Germany's radical left in reference to the MG, in doing so, continued the legacy of the New Left.⁷⁶³ Today,

⁷⁵⁹ To list some of the most recent articles published: Decker, 'Wir tun es für uns', 2011; Theo Wentzke, 'Sachwalter des Kapitals', in *Junge Welt*, 26 March 2012, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁶⁰ See interview with E.A., 18 January 2012. See also Maciej Zurowski, 'Antifa, nationalism and democracy. Interview with Freerk Huiskens', in *Weekly Worker*, 911 (2012), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁶¹ Among others, see Freerk Huiskens, *Der demokratische Schoß ist fruchtbar...: Das Elend mit der Kritik am (Neo-)Faschismus* (Hamburg: VSA, 2011); Krölls, *Das Grundgesetz*, 2009; Cechura, *Kognitive Hirnforschung*, 2008; Rolf Gloël and Kathrin Gützlaff, *Gegen Rechts argumentieren lernen* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2005).

⁷⁶² *Gegenstandpunkt Analyse* <<http://www.gegenstandpunkt.de/radio/gsradio.htm>> [15 December 2012].

⁷⁶³ Jan Gerber, *Nie wieder Deutschland?*, 2010. Although not empirically verified and solely based on subjective perception, *Gegenstandpunkt*'s work is until the present day the most controversially debated theoretical approach among Germany's radical left. The appropriate websites and forums therefore suggest that the publishing house still constitutes a 'concept of an enemy' for many of its political opponents, resulting in the

according to numbers provided by the *Verfassungsschutz*, the publishing house has approximately 10,000 supporters, albeit these numbers, which assume a relatively stable supporter base since the dissolution of the MG in 1991, must be treated with caution. Interviewees pointed out that the numbers of active participants in *Gegenstandpunkt*'s theoretical work have tended to decrease slightly until recently.⁷⁶⁴

6.3. Has the radical left entered parliament in Germany? *Die Linke* and its relationship to the radical left

During the early 1990s, the radical left was not consolidated. New lines of conflict increasingly superseded the salient ideological battlegrounds of the Cold War era and many activists reformulated their political positions. During these years, authors associated with *Gegenstandpunkt* published numerous articles in the *Konkret* journal. These collaborations also led to a discussion between Karl Held, then editor-in-chief of *Gegenstandpunkt* periodical, and the political heavyweight of the PDS, Gregor Gysi, then leader of his party in the German *Bundestag*, in 1994. Both debated the question of how to deal with parliamentary democracy in order to foster system-changing politics. Unlike *Gegenstandpunkt*, the PDS decided to work within this system, not to undermine capitalist rule from within, which had become an absolute minority position within the PDS and the recently established *Die Linke* party, but to achieve the best deal for the people's vested interests.⁷⁶⁵

What Cas Mudde describes as the combination of 'soft socialism' and left-populism had already emerged in Gysi's line of argument in 1994.⁷⁶⁶ The general development of contemporary radical left parties in Western Europe from a vanguard of proletarian interests to 'vox populi' — the idea that the electorate needs a new alternative left of established social-democratic parties, which advocates the interests and rights of the populace against 'the powers that be' — is exemplified by *Die Linke* and its predecessor organisations, the PDS and WSAG.⁷⁶⁷

Even though the term 'vox populi' is in the strict sense not novel, because as argued above, the radical left always assumed an identity of interests between its own political-

usual feud among radical left factions. See, among others, *Menschenfeinde laden ein* <<http://www.verbrochenes.net/2009/01/27/menschenfeinde-laden-ein/>> [08/03/2009].

⁷⁶⁴ Bundesministerium des Innern, ed, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2008* (Berlin, 2009). See also interview with K.M., 27 November 2012.

⁷⁶⁵ *Nachdenken in Ingolstadt* <http://www.farberot.de/texte/linke/nachdenken_in_ingolstadt.htm> [08 September 2011]. See also Hough, Kloß and Olsen, *The Left Party*, 2007.

⁷⁶⁶ Mudde, 'Radikale Parteien in Europa', 2008.

⁷⁶⁷ Luke March, 'From Vanguard of the Proletariat to *Vox Populi*: Left-Populism as a 'Shadow' of Contemporary Socialism', in *SAIS Review*, 27 (1, Winter-Spring 2007), pp. 63-77.

economic goals and the actual interests of the 'masses' or the 'people', the distinctive populism advocated by many contemporary radical left organisations has, it must be acknowledged, a new quality. Especially new is the populist idea that society is separated into two heterogeneous groups: the people vs. the elite or the '99% vs. the 1%'.

This idea negates the traditional far left distinction between antagonistic classes and the principles of capitalism as the roots of socio-economic imbalances. Without the politico-theoretical detour of materialist criticism and the arguments derived thereof, far left populism addresses the non-conceptual immediacy of individuals' consciousness and merely seizes upon their socio-economic discontent. Marx's approach to develop a socialist theory from an inherent critique of bourgeois society, rather than the mere miseries suffered by individuals, is thus not considered.

Accordingly, Gysi's ambition to 'aggravate' the German political class from the left wing of the political spectrum had been an expression of the party's transformation from socialist state-party to becoming a successful representative of left-populism, firmly integrated into the system of democratic capitalism, one could even say in its social-democratic tradition. Therefore, the dispute between Held and Gysi touched upon the old line of conflict between reformist and revolutionary approaches that has not lost its topicality or potential to divide the political left.⁷⁶⁸

In recent years, *Die Linke* has established itself as an influential factor on the left of the political spectrum, employing the expression of their ideological beliefs as a cosmetic and rhetoric means.⁷⁶⁹ Considering its apparent strategy to establish itself as 'vox populi' on the left margin of social democracy and a firmly integrated party of the parliamentary system, it appears that the electoral success of *Die Linke* and its development into an all-German party, is the manifestation of the above addressed de-radicalisation of the left-wing discourse in Germany. This is also supported by its recent success at the German general elections, at which *Die Linke* was able to recruit the majority of its new voters from the social democrats.⁷⁷⁰

Bearing this in mind, Hough's analysis that *Die Linke* is Germany's most prominent anti-capitalist party does not stand up. Although Hough himself contradicts this in his essay on the party's new programme, by pointing out that it aims to overhaul instead of overthrow

⁷⁶⁸ In spite of its electoral success, *Die Linke* is officially classified as a radical party and therefore under observation of the *Verfassungsschutz*. In particular, its 'Marxist Forum' and 'Communist Platform' are affected in this way. Bundesministerium des Innern, ed, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2008* (Berlin, 2009).

⁷⁶⁹ For a discussion of general tendencies among the radical left in Europe, see Mudde, 'Radikale Parteien in Europa', pp. 12-19.

⁷⁷⁰ See Dan Hough, 'Small but perfectly formed?: The rise and rise of Germany's smaller parties', in *German Politics*, 1 (2011), pp. 186-199.

the capitalist economic system, he clings to the idea of *Die Linke* as *anti-capitalist*; and thus downplays the party's affirmative stance towards reforming capitalism expressed in its party programme and, more importantly, its political practise in numerous state governments.⁷⁷¹

The extreme marginal position of the radical left, which has almost completely vanished from the public perception, is sometimes breached by members of the ideologically moderate *Die Linke* only for them to publicly renounce, or at least strongly relativise, the support of fundamental political and economic change. The radical rhetoric of leading *Die Linke* politicians therefore merely causes heated debates about political correctness, without igniting more serious arguments.

Accordingly, on 3 January 2011, an interview given by *Die Linke*'s co-chairwoman, Gesine Löttsch, caused a politico-moral scandal, because she emphasised that the party denies the idea that capitalism would mark the end of history, and still fights for the implementation of democratic socialism. Even though Löttsch remained unclear about the nature of this form of socialism, conservative, liberal and social-democratic politicians vehemently criticised her comment and queried the conformity of Löttsch's comment with the German constitution. Several opponents demanded further, more comprehensive observation of *Die Linke* by the *Verfassungsschutz*.⁷⁷²

Despite the inability of radical factions within the party to gain influence, there are discussions in radical circles not affiliated with *Die Linke* as to what extent collaboration among the political far left is feasible and what kind of role the financially and politically most potent party can play in this context.⁷⁷³ Therefore, the relationship of the radical left and *Die Linke* can at best be characterised as highly ambivalent. Although the party's student organisation, *Die Linke.SDS*, the abbreviation refers to the tradition of the original SDS as an agent of the political revolt in the 1960s, canvasses for the overthrow of capitalism by, amongst other things, organising *Capital* reading courses, there is no indication that the party is nearing a pronounced radical turn. However, according to an interviewee, individuals politicised in *Die Linke.SDS* are not shy of attending events organised by other organisations

⁷⁷¹ Dan Hough, 'The Left Party's New Programme and its Implications for Governing Germany', in *American Institute for Contemporary German Studies*, 28 October 2011 <<http://www.aicgs.org/issue/lurch-to-the-left-or-a-spot-of-shadow-boxing-the-left-partys-new-programme-and-its-implications-for-governing-germany/>> [15 November 2012].

⁷⁷² See Stefan Berg, 'Linke-Chefin erklärt Kommunismus zum Ziel der Partei', in *Spiegel online*, 4 January 2011 <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,737780,00.html>> [11 November 2011].

⁷⁷³ Among many others, see Lena Kreck, 'Die radikale Linke profitiert von einem Dialog', in *ak – analyse & kritik – zeitung für linke Debatte und Praxis*, 573 (15 June 2012) <http://www.akweb.de/ak_s/ak573/22.htm> [26 August 2012]; Ingo Stützle, 'Ein Brief an Raul Zelik', on *Lafontaines Linke – Das Blog zur Partei*, 21 August 2012 <<http://www.lafontaines-linke.de/2012/06/gastbeitrag-ingo-stuetzle-raul-zelik-partei-und-staatskritik/>> [26 August 2012].

and publishing houses. The current afflux of individuals interested in the work of *Gegenstandpunkt* capitalises on the impartiality of these and likeminded young activists.⁷⁷⁴

The following section briefly discusses the reflections of Sarah Wagenknecht, arguably *Die Linke*'s most radical and prominent ideologist, regarding the causes of the current financial crisis; as well as *Gegenstandpunkt*'s critique of her approach. This will allow the reader to understand some of the main lines of conflict among today's German far left, especially as other authors raise similar concerns about Wagenknecht's system-affirming approach and also exemplify *Gegenstandpunkt*'s basic idea of what caused the financial crisis.

6.4. 'Freedom instead of capitalism': a brief reflection on the discrepancies between *Die Linke* and the *Gegenstandpunkt*

In her book, *Freiheit statt Kapitalismus* ('Freedom instead of Capitalism'), Wagenknecht reflects on the causes and consequences of the global financial crisis. She opens her line of argument by stating that "capitalism fails not only socially. It primarily fails to fulfil its own expectations."⁷⁷⁵ Wagenknecht asserts that in principle, the crisis is not the product of the necessity to accumulate capital but alien to those principles inherent to capitalism. She identifies negative phenomena and separates them from capitalism's current form of appearance.

The title, 'Freedom instead of Capitalism', in itself reveals Wagenknecht's practical intentions, referring to an infamous conservative election slogan during the 1970s, which contrasted the concepts of freedom and socialism. By counter-posing the ideas of freedom and capitalism, she criticises the present manifestation of the latter; and thus affirms the idea and ideal of the social market economy as practised in the immediate post-war era. This is linguistically emphasised by contrasting the terms 'capitalism' and 'market economy', implying the ruthlessness of the former and social acceptability of the latter. Wagenknecht concludes that the genuine ideas of market economy lead directly to socialism, "a form of socialism that does not hold centralism in high esteem but meritocracy and competition."⁷⁷⁶

For *Gegenstandpunkt* and its affiliated intellectuals, Wagenknecht's idea that capitalism contradicts its own ideals when failing to fulfil its own expectations of steady

⁷⁷⁴ Interview with K.M., 18 January 2013. See also *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 'Modische Empörung', 30 October 2008 <<http://www.fr-online.de/kultur/medien/modische-empoeerung/-/1473342/3174412/-/index.html>> [23 September 2010].

⁷⁷⁵ Sarah Wagenknecht, *Freiheit statt Kapitalismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Eichborn, 2011), p. 7. This and the following quotes are translated by the author. Although Wagenknecht is not undisputed in her own party, the thesis looks at her work because it reflects major facets of *Die Linke*'s body of thought.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

economic growth is misleading.⁷⁷⁷ In its periodical, *Gegenstandpunkt* argues that the logic of capital accumulation mostly lacks the consideration of social issues. Wagenknecht's modern left-wing thinking therefore would appear void of any insights which Marx provided regarding the principles, purpose and inherent necessity of this "odd sort of production of wealth that does not fit well with its producers."⁷⁷⁸

Considering the MG's theory of state presented in the previous chapter, it is consistent with this that Wagenknecht is also attacked for her contraposition of freedom and capitalism. It is argued that freedom constitutes the adequate judicial and ideological basis on which the self-valorisation of capital prospers.

In contrast, Wagenknecht criticises the fact that businesses release employers despite being profitable, the simultaneous increase in dividends and contract workers, and the negative effects of global players on markets and the political autonomy of decision. Moreover, the free flow of capital and competition among privately owned companies would cause social hardship in Germany and other developed countries. Accordingly, the 'business model' of market-listed companies is criticised for its undermining consequences on its own economic basis.

Obviously, global players have a decreasing interest in the core tasks of commercial enterprises, in research and innovation, in long-term investments, in highest quality, in customer wishes.⁷⁷⁹

Even though Wagenknecht is acquainted with the idea that the "decisive motif of the capitalist production is the realisation of profits,"⁷⁸⁰ she clings to her position that the market-based necessity of cost efficiency and maximisation of profit could coincide with the material interests of wage earners as it did, according to her analysis, during the golden age of capitalism. She also insists that wage dumping, for example, would be counter-productive to the long-term interests of capitalists to accumulate wealth in the form of money. Systematic wage reductions and tax savings would lead to a diminishing portion of wages and ratio of government expenditure to gross national product; and thus undermine the essential conditions of capital accumulation. Here, she asserts that capitalism cannot function without growth and stresses the self-imposed long-term damage of short-term profit seeking.⁷⁸¹ Thus, Wagenknecht promotes the self-limitation of capitalists to secure the long-term benefits she

⁷⁷⁷ See *GegenStandpunkt*, 'Sarah Wagenknechts Hit: 'Freiheit statt Kapitalismus' – damit der 'kreative Sozialismus' den Kapitalismus wieder auf Vordermann bringt!', 1 (2012), pp. 147-167.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁷⁷⁹ Wagenknecht, *Freiheit statt Kapitalismus*, p. 83.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

identifies with the economic system, i.e. production of use-value, and making the self-valorisation of capital crisis-proof.

Wagenknecht postulates a return to the principles of social market economy that, according to her analysis, significantly contributed to the 1950s economic miracle in West Germany. Disregarding the specific historical situation of the early Cold War era, Wagenknecht's proposed reform agenda aims, for the most part, to revive the economic policy and ideals of Ludwig Erhard, Secretary of Trade and Industry during the 1950s and 1960s. The strict regulation of market economy and nationalisation of core industries are identified as the key elements of what she coins 'creative socialism'. Social-democratic policies of the past are thus understood to hold the key for the establishment of socialism in the 21st century. Considering Wagenknecht's line of thought, Hough's judgement of *Die Linke* as the largest *anti*-capitalist party must once more be challenged. The Marxist critique of the principles of private property and capitalism is abandoned in her work and replaced by criticism of greed. A former leader of *Die Linke*'s Communist Platform, Wagenknecht pursues a reform-oriented path to social change.

In contrast, *Gegenstandpunkt* continues to insist on the inseparability of the alleged positive and negative consequences of capitalism.⁷⁸² In its work, the popular idea of greed as the main cause of the current financial crisis is rejected and reduced to its 'systemic' origin. As monetary capital does not have a quality of its own, it is, according to the publishing house, critical for the system of capitalism to maximise the return of capital. For *Gegenstandpunkt*, Wagenknecht's ideas are consistent with the interpretation of *Die Linke* as the new party representing the old ideals of social democracy, following its shift to the centre of the political spectrum in the late 1990s.⁷⁸³ Its approach once more prevents the *Gegenstandpunkt* from making any concessions to the existing developmental potential of capitalism and in particular the democratic state's regulation thereof. In reference to Luxemburg it must be concluded that Wagenknecht and *Die Linke* follow different political and economic goals than those activists supporting the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house.

6.5. Discussion and outlook

With regard to its supporter base and influence on intellectual life, Germany's radical left has not yet recovered from the 'crisis of Marxism' and eventual historical caesura of 1989/91. The

⁷⁸² For the *Gegenstandpunkt*'s analysis of the principles of finance capital in English language, see Finance Capital <<http://www.gegenstandpunkt.com/english/fin-cap/fin-cap-I.html>> [14 July 2012].

⁷⁸³ *Gegenstandpunkt*, 'Eine Linkspartei für Deutschland – konservativ, realistisch, machtbewusst, national', 3 (2007), pp. 31-37.

'red decade' of 1967 to 1976/7 remains a unique historical interplay, characterised by the 'reconstruction' of Marxist theory and intense political activism inspired by Third World revolutionary movements and ideologies, of which Maoism was the most popular.

The only serious attempt to co-ordinate a concerted approach among activists of the radical left, the *Radikale Linke* platform, emerged at the historical interface which culminated in the unification of Germany and thus, against its own intention, marked the end of the New Left's cycle instead of initiating its political revival. Over the past two decades and against the background of numerous controversial events and developments, such as the NATO bombing of Serbia, the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the ideological dominance of neoliberalism, no significant revitalisation of the radical left has taken place.

Moreover, neither the ideologically diffuse anti-globalisation movement, nor the emergence of neo-socialist regimes in South America, have contributed to a significant comeback of radical leftism, albeit interest in *Capital* reading courses and its interpretation has increased in recent years.⁷⁸⁴ In a broader context, the demise of the Soviet sphere of influence has not been succeeded by a new manifestation of anti-capitalism in Germany and Western Europe. Even those radical left parties to have experienced any electoral success, of which the ruling communist party in Cyprus is the most prominent example, have practically abandoned genuine *anti-capitalist* strategies.

Today, no specific strand of the radical left is expected to emerge as the new driving force of social change. In fact, those radical parties generating high proportions of the electorate's votes tend to shift in the direction of ideological moderation and support a 'total revolution' merely from an artistic point of view. Their 'anti-capitalism' manifests itself in a form that demands capitalism to function according to its own ideals, as outlined by Wagenknecht in the previous section⁷⁸⁵

The criticism of ideology provided by *Gegenstandpunkt* and its affiliated intellectuals has continued the *Marxistische Gruppe's* project of theory formation since 1992. Their destructive approach proved a key element of *Gegenstandpunkt's* continuing existence and exertion of influence on the respective milieu. By interpreting Marxism as a theory that "want[s] to find the new world through criticism of the old one,"⁷⁸⁶ the publishing house has rejected the specific concretisation of utopia ever since. On the basis of conceptualising the

⁷⁸⁴ Interview with P.E., 21 January 2013. Amongst various others, see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

⁷⁸⁵ For the tendency of ideological moderation, see Mudde, 'Radikale Parteien in Europa', 2008.

⁷⁸⁶ Marx, 'Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge', in *MECW Vol. 1*, pp. 393-395.

alternative form of society's organisation as *ex negative*, proponents of *Gegenstandpunkt*'s theoretical work have not required to develop a concrete alternative to bourgeois mass societies and relied on critique as the *sine qua non* for establishing unity among social critics. Hence, hostility towards the publishing house has remained since the 1980s apogee of the *Marxistische Gruppe*.⁷⁸⁷

Yet although the existence and further development of the body of thought introduced by the *Rote Zelle/Arbeitskonferenz* and its affiliates in the early 1970s is accompanied by harsh criticism of some political opponents, it is fair to suggest that general animosity between factions of the radical left has significantly reduced since 1991. Without struggling for supremacy over a relatively potent movement, the reasons for excessive turf battles have disappeared.⁷⁸⁸

Considering *Gegenstandpunkt*'s approach, it seems unlikely that its supporters will ignite any extra-parliamentary opposition in the future. The anti-actionist strategy allows for the production of criticism of ideology, but isolates the publishing house from any immediate practical approaches with which to stimulate change. By dismissing any alliance with organisations constructively contributing to democracy and capitalism, *Gegenstandpunkt* not only reduces the already slim chances for creating social change, but also 'immunises' Marxist theory and praxis against its critics. Accordingly, it is thus no surprise that already in the mid-1970s the *Gegenstandpunkt*'s predecessor, the RZ/AK, was criticised for its 'self-sufficient habitus'.⁷⁸⁹ With Hegel it can be argued that the fear to make active mistakes is most harmful and only helps to preserve forms of absolute passive errors.⁷⁹⁰

Yet the utopian dimension of *Gegenstandpunkt*'s project of theory formation, its rejection of alternative praxis in the here and now, refers to a much broader problem of Marxism. Its ultimate political goal impedes any system-conforming action, but Marxists nonetheless operate within the bourgeois society, which they aim to overthrow. The radical left, which relates its political efforts to Marx's legacy, must find a way to appropriately deal with the problems it cannot solve because of the antithetic nature of its subject of criticism, i.e. bourgeois society. The paradox implied in the conflict between, from a Marxist perspective, indispensable theoretical opposition to bourgeois society and the practical necessities of an individual's life reality seems irreconcilable. Thus, the fundamental issue of whether or not a Marxist-inspired pattern of radical social transformation will be achieved

⁷⁸⁷ See *MG-Blog* <<http://www.antikapitalismus.spaces.live.com/>> [10 October 2009].

⁷⁸⁸ Interview with P.E., 21 January 2013.

⁷⁸⁹ Meinhard Creydt, 'Die Verkehrung von Kritik in einen selbstgenügsamen Habitus' <<http://www.meinhard-creydt.de/archives/84>> [17 April 2011].

⁷⁹⁰ Hegel, *Werke* 2, p. 550.

through pro-parliamentary activism or destructive extra-parliamentary opposition has not lost its topicality.

If a 'new' New Left is ever to establish the momentum necessary to radically transform the capitalist system and thereby contribute to the emancipation of beings from the necessities inherent within it, has to find answers to these fundamental questions. Neither the MG nor *Gegenstandpunkt* has contributed to the development of practical solutions. To achieve this emancipation, it will be important to deconstruct 'bourgeois science' and Marxism, which will make it possible to learn from the insights of both, yet simultaneously develop a synthetic theory that links its efforts to social reality as the unavoidable starting-point of political change.⁷⁹¹ As innovative and thought-provoking as *Gegenstandpunkt's* criticism of ideology might be in some respects, the idea that the 'new world' could exclusively be found in the criticism of the old is illusory, because it over-estimates the capabilities and willingness of the silent majority to scrutinise its material situation that has improved dramatically over the last two or three generations:

The path to become the revolutionary subject as stipulated by the AK-faction Munich (i.e. the predecessor organisation of the MG) is actually nothing else then the projection of the bourgeois intellectual's path to become a socialist: to work oneself through to the theoretical understanding of the entire movement.⁷⁹²

Despite its inability to lead the way out of this political and ideological impasse, the publishing house has continued to generate a Hegelian-inspired further development of Marx's original work, by deconstructing mainstream and Marxist theories for the last two decades and continuing a key aspect of the New Left's legacy. Those theorists contributing to the ideological body of *Gegenstandpunkt*, precisely because of its alleged unworldly approach, offer the radical left a valuable possibility to chafe its ideas against the publishing house's ideological criticism.

In summary, the radical left's bumpy road back to the future is yet to be constructed; and amid this context, the role of the recently established *Die Linke* remains to be seen. It however seems a chimera to believe in this new left party as a potential transmission belt for further systemic change. For such a political role, *Die Linke* is too adapted to the current political system and its dictates of *realpolitik* that render impossible any fundamental criticism, because any policy has to be *practically* and *financially feasible* and thus *generally*

⁷⁹¹ See Michael Heinrich, 'Theoretical Deficits of the Left and the Struggle for Hegemony', (undated) <<http://www.freeweb.hu/eszmelet/angol2/heinrichang2.html>> [10 Dezember 2011].

⁷⁹² Gruppe Rheinische Zeitung, 'Akademischer Kommunismus', 1976.

compatible with the interests pursued in capitalist society. As an inevitable consequence of this intellectual integration and the inherent realism of the party, no elaborated theoretical objections to bourgeois society have even been formulated by the party leadership or leading ideologists, such as Wagenknecht. In Marx's terminology, the party can best be described as an assembly of 'bourgeois socialists'.⁷⁹³

Considering the establishment of *Die Linke* in particular and predicament of the radical left in general, the 'adhesiveness' of bourgeois institutions does not bode well for the prospect of fundamental change in Germany's modern capitalist society.⁷⁹⁴ Currently, none of the autonomous movement, the descending anti-German string, other leftist movements or those associated with the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house are able to help the radical left overcome its paralysis.

It will be interesting to observe whether the forthcoming generation can alter this state of affairs at all; or, indeed, whether the global economic crisis ultimately results in any challenge being made to the ideological hegemony of capitalism. Whatever the future will bring, it has become abundantly obvious that no external circumstances will determine the fate of those political forces left of social democracy. No emancipatory conclusions can and will be drawn just from experiencing and enduring capitalism.

Today, the 'teacup world' of the radical left is what it had been prior to the student movement of the 1960s: an extreme minority position on the fringes of the political landscape, which is also the consequence of the integration of the artistic critique of capitalism into bourgeois society, a critique that is also a facet of social revolutionary approaches (though usually considered to be a 'side-contradiction'). Revolutionary elements questioning existing property relationships in continuation of the New Left and its theoretical work are a rare exception indeed. The *Gegenstandpunkt* is the largest of these exceptions and continuing the legacy of the 'red decade'.

⁷⁹³ In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels described the essence of bourgeois socialists as follows: "To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole and corner reformers of every imaginable kind. [...] Bourgeois Socialism attains adequate expression, when, and only when, it becomes a mere figure of speech. Free Trade: for the benefit of the working class. Protective Duties: for the benefit of the working class. Prison Reform: for the benefit of the working class. This is the last word and the only seriously meant word of bourgeois Socialism. It is summed up in the phrase: the bourgeois is a bourgeois—for the benefit of the working class." *MECW Vol. 6*, pp. 513-514.

⁷⁹⁴ See Johannes Agnoli, *1968 und die Folgen* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 1998).

7. Conclusion

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, theory formation had a considerable impact on the divergent developments of New Left factions in the aftermath of the West German student movement. With its analysis of the Red Cells movement and the *Marxistische Gruppe* the present thesis closes a gap in the existing literature on the radical left.

According to the relevance attached to theory formation in this work, any summarising formulation of this development between 1969 and 1991 should begin with the central argument, in which all activists and intellectuals involved in the discussions surrounding the ‘crisis of Marxism’ in its theoretical and practical manifestation concurred. This argument is exemplified in the following statement of the editorial committee of the Socialist Conference in 1981:

[W]e take the crisis of Marxism seriously [...] and analyse the limits and residues in our specific Marxist traditions that made us too short-sighted, if not totally blind, to appreciate the decisive strengths and advantages of this [the ‘German model’⁷⁹⁵] specific form of appearance of bourgeois class rule.⁷⁹⁶

This fundamental objection to the critique of capitalism, formulated by leading New Left proponents in the wake of the student movement, was not really based on theoretical arguments against the content of Marxist theory. It was not the objective of critics to demonstrate the logical untenability and content-related inconsistency of the theory in order to analyse West German capitalism of the 1970s and early 1980s. In reality, the ‘crisis of Marxism’ pointed to the *practical* unsuccessfulness of Marxism in obtaining any political breakthrough.

In West Germany, the ‘crisis of Marxism’ occurred against the backdrop of broader historical developments that resulted in political instability and economic crisis at global level. As Hobsbawn emphasised:

[The] problems which had dominated the critique of capitalism before the war [Second World War], and which the Golden Age had largely eliminated for a generation — poverty, mass unemployment, squalor, instability — reappeared.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁵ The ‘German model’ often describes the specific form of social market economy in post-World War II (West) Germany. It is characterised by a close collaboration between trade unions and employers, and seeks to harmonise relations between regulatory bodies and affected parties. Finding a common denominator was often the main goal of relations between different economic actors; and between them and the state. See Kenneth H. F. Dyson, ‘The Politics of Economic Management in West Germany’, in William E. Paterson and Gordon Smith, eds, *The West German Model: Perspectives on a Stable State* (London: Frank Cass, 1981), pp. 35-55.

⁷⁹⁶ Redaktionsgruppe ‘Sozialistische Konferenz’, *Der herrschende Block*, 1981.

⁷⁹⁷ Hobsbawn, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 406.

The demise of the Bretton Woods System, the world's first oil crisis and the exhausted modernisation potential of the Fordist economic and social system contributed to the end of the golden age of capitalism. Accordingly, the mid-1970s can be interpreted as a historical caesura after which (neo)-liberalism became increasingly influential, while political Marxism on a global scale entered a phase of sustained decline.

Economic developments went hand in hand with changes in the international political landscape. With Mao Zedong's death, the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's subsequent economic liberation and further international co-operation, the People's Republic lost its status as a 'concrete Utopia'. Maoism eventually lost its appeal as a key ideology with which to promote a revolutionary movement from the periphery to the capitalist centre. Furthermore, the disastrous consequences of communist rule under the leadership of Pol Pot in Cambodia, international and national left-wing terrorism (e.g. Operation Entebbe and German Autumn) or the peak of the dissident movement (e.g. Alexander Solzhenitsyn and his novel, *The Gulag Archipelago*) epitomised the growing disenchantment of the political left with Marxist ideology as an alternative to democratic parliamentarianism.

In West Germany, the *K-Gruppen* had to sustain their own crisis projections against these developments. The fundamental convictions of these groups that capitalism was heading towards an existential crisis, the working class would become ever more revolutionary and that the West German state would appear increasingly fascist in nature failed to materialise in the form of any real substantial opposition to bourgeois society. Moreover, the international political context wrested these Maoist groups from important projection surfaces for their revolutionary projects, while state repression and looming party ban proceedings narrowed the scope for political activities.

More importantly, emerging new social movements attracted many activists and sympathisers of the *K-Gruppen* milieu. Even though these movements were at first interpreted as a potential ally, because of the discontent they expressed with the political status quo, they proved to be the decisive catalyst for the demise of organised Maoism in West Germany. The so-called German Autumn was also conducive to the loss of credibility of Marxism as a political alternative to the German Model. It is, however, important to emphasise that these developments at international and national level can only be understood as the historical background for *theoretical* reflections to unfold their crucial role in determining further political decisions. In other words, there were specific reasons why the *K-Gruppen* and large parts of the New Left reconnected with the political mainstream and democratic capitalism.

The failure of the alleged automatism of crisis and revolution to vindicate the revolutionary *projections* and *hopes* was interpreted as an argument against further Marxist politicking and theory formation. This criterion of success, the idea that gaining *social efficacy* was an argument for or against Marxism itself, was inherent in the idea that ‘history’ was on the side of revolutionary organisations that merely had to aggregate the social discontent existing in West Germany. These groups understood themselves as part of a global revolution that would ultimately and irrevocably transform the capitalist system.

Such political hubris found its complementary expression in academia. The reconstruction of Marxist theory was based on the idealism of leading New Left theorists, who believed they were able to develop an absolute theory of society beyond the limitations of bourgeois theory formation which would be an “expression and product of a real movement”⁷⁹⁸ and superior to its system-affirmative antagonists.

In contrast to these ‘seminar Marxists’, *K-Gruppen* assumed that the answers to all important theoretical questions had already been provided in the works of Mao Zedong, Marx, Lenin and Stalin. Therefore, independent theory formation was, if anything, of secondary importance, and debates on the relevance of new theoretical approaches already caused the Red Cells movement in Munich to split in 1971.

If pre-theoretical ‘*expectations*’ of socio-economic change occurring became the methodological principle of theory formation and interpretation of Marxist literature, as well as the precondition of political praxis, the failure of systemic change to materialise not only denotes failure of practical interest in this change, but also disproves the theoretical approach itself. The idea of *K-Gruppen* to utilise revolutionary theory as the political means with which to overthrow bourgeois society implied the idealisation of theory. Re-interpreting theory as a political manual obliterated the factual difference between thorough theory formation and the practical implementation of its results. On this basis alone, the German model in the late 1970s and during the 1980s did not remain the object of theoretical criticism, but proved *the* major argument for the seemingly long overdue self-criticism of Marxist activists and theorists.

Elimination of the insight that capitalist society is a contradiction-laden system, characterised by various immanent conflicts and ideological illusions about its core principles, represented a step backwards, but also pointed towards the need to subsume political efforts to the dictate of *realpolitik*. From a Marxist perspective, the merging of *K-Gruppen* and other radical left strands in the new social movements in the late 1970s therefore amounted to the

⁷⁹⁸ Joachim Bischoff, *Gesellschaftliche Arbeit als Systembegriff* (Berlin: VSA-Verlag, 1973), p. 290.

replacement of hitherto existing illusions with new ones. These were based on three major premises, explaining the affinity of *K-Gruppen* and the New Left with such movements and the emerging Green Party. First, the basic legally protected interests of freedom and equality would hold the key to improve the social-economic situation of individuals; second, the utilisation of state power is — *in potentialis* — beneficial for the people and third, the radical left and new social movements represented genuine interests of the people and were ideal representatives of these interests.

These were the ideological and practical points of intersection explaining the Marxist-Leninist shift of paradigms following the student movement and also the New Left's decline in the late 1970s. The politicisation prior to and during the years of the student movement occurred on the above described premises. Their substance was radicalised in the aftermath of the student movement by Maoist factions, and 'modernised' at the end of the 1970s when the revolutionary shell was removed, in favour of a reform-orientated worldview. Despite the radical rhetoric and establishment of Marxist-Leninist organisations, which sought to link their efforts to the KPD of the inter-war period, ideological bridges were never entirely burned. Bridging the gap between the radical left 'ghetto' and the new social movements, the emerging Green Party and even West German society as a whole, was also enabled, because the process of professionalisation of internal structures, political campaigns and reproduction of information within all *K-Gruppen* led to an erosion of Marxist categories, which ultimately lost their critical meaning.

Considering all this, it can be argued that the majority of Maoist activists effectively returned to the start of their political journey, which had commenced in the context of the emerging student movement and politicised them *at first* as critical democrats. The ideal of an engaged *citoyén*, who found himself through political catharsis, became the dominant figure on the political left in the early 1980s. In consequence, the historian and former leading *K-Gruppen* activist, Gerd Koenen, was able to conclude his work on the 'small cultural revolution' in West Germany with the following words: "We had loved her so much — the republic! Only we had just not realised it."⁷⁹⁹

Of the plethora of New Left organisations, only the *Marxistische Gruppe* defied the process of developing a capitalism-affirming attitude when the crisis of organised Marxism peaked during the early 1980s. In contrast to the considerable decimation, fractionalisation or entire dissolution of *K-Gruppen*, the *Marxistische Gruppe* expanded its supporter base until its dissolution in 1991. This can be attributed to the long process of theory formation during

⁷⁹⁹ Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt*, p. 497.

the 1970s, which eventually led to the establishment of a national organisation with affiliations in Austria in 1979. The *Marxistische Gruppe* was the only organisation with a self-developed body of thought.

In particular, the ambition to avoid any pre-theoretical considerations regarding the role of the proletariat, the state and practical implementations based on Hegel's doctrine of the notion, set the *Marxistische Gruppe* apart from its main political rivals. The group seized upon anti-state strands in Marx's work and based its theory of the democratic state on severe criticism of freedom and equality. Although other groups and intellectuals were critical about these two basic concepts of the most adequate political form of capitalism, the *Marxistische Gruppe* distinguished itself by denying *any* emancipatory qualities attributed to both concepts. Thus, and in economic tradition, state authority and every aspect of democratic life was one-sidedly derived from its function to serve the interest of the capitalist state to foster competition.

Furthermore, the group criticised hopes for the quasi-automatism of revolutionary change inherent to the crisis-prone capitalist mode of production with regard to the proletariat's volitional support of capitalism. In particular the critique of abstract free will and subsequent psychological theory formation, which underscored the significance of workers supporting the principle of competition as their adequate means with which to fulfil their material interests, expressed the *Marxistische Gruppe's* criticism. Given this stance towards the working class and its 'phony materialism', the *Marxistische Gruppe* was not surprised by the disinterest of proletarians in revolutionising the bourgeois society, nor did its theory of state provide any transitions to democracy and capitalism. However, the group was not able to translate its results into a holistic psychological theory, as postulated by Güßenbacher, by taking into account empirical research. Given that, its unconditional support of the idea of free will was questionable.

The works analysed in Chapters Four and Five amounted not only to an attempt to develop a positive, abstract theory of the democratic state and the psyche of bourgeois individuals, but could also be read as a severe critique of the approaches other far left organisations pursued.

The contribution of the *Marxistische Gruppe* to Marxist discourse lies in its pointed emphasis of the radical critique implied in Marx's work and its attempted continuation of his legacy via independent theories of the state and how individuals accommodate their thinking to capitalism. By taking the destructive elements of Marx's critique seriously, the group detached itself from thinking the ideals implied in democracy and democracy itself through to

the end. Instead, it developed a distinct, even if underdetermined negative Utopia, in which the emancipated society is not the ameliorated manifestation of the old, but a *substantially* different one beyond capital *and* state. The group criticised intellectuals taking the view that “needless to say, the crises of political Marxism have been eroding the interest in theoretical Marxism (in the sense of critical self-reflection)”⁸⁰⁰ and insisted on the separation of Marxist theory formation and the issue of gaining social efficacy: Marxism interpreted as ‘rational science’.

The termination of the ‘reconstruction’ of Marxist theory by the late 1970s and the challenge of all previously gained ‘insights’ was severely criticised. Given the general developments at that time, the relative success of the group, which developed into the largest New Left organisation with a loyal supporter base, even after the *Gegenstandpunkt* publishing house took over its theoretical work, was exceptional. It was also linked to its ambition not to represent the interests of others but exclusively its own.⁸⁰¹ Regarding its inability to organise significant opposition to the bourgeois society, the *Marxistische Gruppe* was as unsuccessful as its political rivals and thus equally representative for the failure of the New Left’s communist wing to overcome the factual constraints implied in capitalism.

Although no inherent necessity is implied in the historical development of West Germany’s New Left, a common ideological thread runs through its different stages. Understanding the New Left’s specific theory formation and practical interpretation of revolutionary classics enables students of the post-1968 era to develop a holistic theory of historical developments. Neither the sudden manifestation of the ‘red decade’ in the aftermath of the student movement, nor its decline in the late 1970s, amount to evidence of historical discontinuity.

Instead, these developments oscillated, with more or less significant deviation, around the sophistication of the normative concepts of democracy, freedom and equality; a process that included the consideration of socialist interpretations therein. The *K-Gruppen* merely played host to the strongest fluctuations on the political far left, while the *Marxistische Gruppe*’s critique of these concepts was key to them carving out a lasting niche. Even though various external factors affected the historical course of the New Left after 1968, it is, in the end, simply a question of how an individual and an organisation deal intellectually with such

⁸⁰⁰ Frank Deppe, *Krise und Erneuerung Marxistischer Theorie*, (2006) <http://linkedsgruppe3.minuskel.de/fileadmin/linke.sds/MCH_Reader/Frank_Deppe_-_KRISE_UND_ERNEUERUNG_MARXISTISCHER_THEORIE.pdf> [14 June 2012], p. 11.

⁸⁰¹ See Herbert L. Fertl, in an interview with the magazine *Der Ketzer*, cit. in. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Marxistische Gruppe (MG). Ideologie, Ziele und Arbeitsmethoden eines kommunistischen Geheimbundes* (Cologne: Bundespressdienst, 1991), p. 9.

developments. It has been shown that the normative criticism of Maoist activists, which had its roots in the formative years of West Germany's New Left and its specific politicisation (see Chapter One), was more suitable in reconnecting them with the bourgeois majority society than the relentless criticism formulated by the *Marxistische Gruppe*.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided us with the understanding that the fate of the New Left between 1967 and 1991 cannot be sufficiently explained by external factors, i.e. political, economic and cultural factors that influenced organisations, but demands the consideration of the very logic and development of theories and the conclusions organisations reached as guiding their particular choices.

Finally, future research should first and foremost focus on filling the remaining gaps in the literature as outlined in Pfahl-Traugher's review. There are still relevant but yet unconsidered organisations and movements that require further academic analysis.

Moreover, on the basis of the results of the present thesis, it will be important to compare the specific developments in West Germany with those in other countries, and thus not only apply these results to different historical contexts but also to a more universal level. In continuation of this thesis, research on radical factions of the New Left in (West) Germany and other non-English-speaking countries has to be made accessible to an international audience to foster comparative studies beyond national borders and enable students of the radical left to develop a general view of their research subject.

On a more practical level, the analysis of developments in the wake of the West German student movement might also help to understand current protest movements and their long-term perspectives to contribute to the emancipation of humanity from those factual constraints that have once again become the object of criticism during the global financial crisis.

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