



Everybody Talks About the Weather . . . We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof

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No other figure embodies revolutionary politics and radical chic quite like Ulrike Meinhof, who formed, with Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, the Red Army Faction (RAF), also known as the Baader–Meinhof Gang, notorious for its bombings and kidnappings of the wealthy in the 1970s. But in the years leading up to her leap into the fray, Meinhof was known throughout Europe as a respected journalist, who informed and entertained her loyal readers with monthly magazine columns.

What impels someone to abandon middle-class privilege for the sake of revolution? In the 1960s, Meinhof began to see the world in increasingly stark terms: the United States was emerging as an unstoppable superpower, massacring a tiny country overseas despite increasingly popular dissent at home; and Germany appeared to be run by former Nazis. Never before translated into English, Meinhof's writings show a woman increasingly engaged in the major political events and social currents of her time. In her introduction, Karin Bauer tells Meinhof's mesmerizing life story and her political coming-of-age; Nobel Prize–winning author Elfriede Jelinek provides a thoughtful reflection on Meinhof's tragic failure to be heard; and Meinhof's daughter—a relentless critic of her mother and of the Left—contributes an afterword that shows how Meinhof's ghost still haunts us today.

Everybody Talks About the Weather . . . We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof Details

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From Reader Review Everybody Talks About the Weather . . . We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof for online ebook

Steve says

Really good to read as a follow up to watching the Baader Meinhof Complex - the first time apparently that UM's konkret columns have been translated into English.

Drew says

This collection of essays by German leftist and founding member of the Red Army Faction (RAF) is an intriguing read. It provides some intellectual background for a person who's main contemporary notoriety is her involvement with the RAF. You often have to read deeply into an article to see that she was an established journalist and liberal, intellectual thinker who grew up and lived in the early decades of postwar West Germany. Her take on students, criminals, political figures and their spouses echoes many thoughts heard in the US from the 1950s until this very day. Her piece on a German show called "File Number XY" was incisive and foreshadowed contemporary American TV reality crime shows such as America's Most Wanted. Feminist thought is a central theme, as well as class. The last piece offered was called "Columnism", published in 1968. It's an interesting look at what it means to be a columnist for a paper and how it benefits the paper and sometimes diminishes the impact the columnist might originally have wanted to have. Given the big name columnists in today's left, middle and rightwing publications, it should be required reading for any consumer of today's printed "talking heads."

The articles, all published by Meinhof in the weekly magazine konkret, are bracketed by two pieces. The first is a well-written and concise biography of Meinhof's life. The second is an attempt at a rebuttal to the pro-Meinhof camp. It's written by Bettina Röhl, one of Meinhof's daughters. For someone who's a published author and publicist, I expected a lot more. It's a superficial rant from the neoconservative right that implies Meinhof was either a fool or a tool of Communist East Germany, the USSR and/or China. This writing could have the names and places replaced and would easily fit into 1950s America or even the rants from the fringe right today. Röhl's piece is basically preaching to the choir, the rightwing, reactionary anti-communists' choir. Ironically, she's exactly the group that Meinhof wrote against in the preceding chapters. Röhl says, rightfully so in some places, that the East German regime was a vicious dictatorship. However, she paints the West (US, France, West Germany, etc.) as being angelic, free, democratic and averse to any illegal or unsavory practices. She misses the coups, assassinations, drug experiments, kidnappings, bribery, bugging, mail interception, etc. that was carried out in kind by the Western intelligence services. She says the USSR wants communism to rule the world, all the while never problematizing or exploring that the US/West want capitalism to rule the world.

There's a publisher's note before Röhl's rant that explains why a great introduction and Meinhof's lucid and exploratory essays could be followed by such trite writing. To quote, "The inclusion of this essay was a condition set by Bettina Röhl, the daughter of Ulrike Meinhof, in exchange for the publication rights to her mother's work." She leveraged her mother's excellence to allow her failed retort.

Jamie says

Stephen's Christmas present to me: "You're the one person I know who will appreciate this," he said, after covering Meinhof's work in Art History and wanting someone else to discuss it further. I read it in practically one sitting, a fascinating look at Meinhof's transformation from journalist to revolutionary to terrorist; becoming, in a sense, part of the cycle of inhumanity she had tried so futilely to fight. My father, stationed with US forces in Berlin in the late sixties and early seventies, had first-hand experience of Germany's Cold War politics of the time, the background against which Meinhof lived and died—which, in short, for me, made it all the more an intriguing piece of history.

Ian says

I approached this book with some trepidation, thinking that it would be full of political rhetoric accessible only to those with a wide vocabulary. How wrong I was! Ulrike Meinhof's writing is directed toward the ordinary person, unlike many political writers, she writes for the common people, not elitist students. The depth of her feeling and conviction really come through, and the whole book embodies the feeling of the time, and unrest and political fervour around post-war Europe.

Elevate Difference says

Everybody Talks about the Weather... We Don't is an informative attempt to better understand the revolutionary German journalist-turned-terrorist of the '60s and '70s, Ulrike Meinhof. The heart of the book is a compilation of twenty-four columns from Meinhof's run as a famous left-wing writer for the magazine konkret from 1960-1969 before her founding of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in 1970. The book includes a preface by Elfriede Jelinek, an afterword by Meinhof's daughter Bettina Röhl, and an enlightening introduction by the book's editor, Karin Bauer.

The introduction, "In Search of Ulrike Meinhof," offers an insightful biography of Meinhof from her upbringing to her tragic end. Imprisoned for her violent crimes as a member of the RAF in 1972, Meinhof was found hanging in her prison cell four years later. At the time of her funeral, Meinhof had been constructed into an icon with many forms: "a revolutionary martyr, a product of German circumstance, a woman who wanted to change the system and became its victim," writes Bauer.

Within her columns, readers can observe Meinhof's views change over time and develop into those of politically motivated violence. She makes the transition from protest to resistance and pacifist to terrorist. Despite this, Bauer rightfully urges that while we cannot erase the violence associated with Meinhof, we also should not let it define her completely.

Many of the issues addressed by Meinhof are still relevant to women and politics today. It is no surprise that in the '60s journalism was even more male-dominated than it is today. At that time, Meinhof became one of the first in the profession to expose the inequality faced by women and mothers in the workplace and the unfair view of them by government and society. In "Everybody Talks About the Weather" she writes of "the oppression of women based... on the difficulty for women to see their private trials and tribulations as social problems and to organize them accordingly."

In “False Consciousness” she addresses equal rights in the workforce such as pay equity and what she calls a trap between employment and family. She argues that these problems cannot be solved by women alone, but need to be confronted by the public sphere. Calling the term “working mother” a form of abuse, she chastises society for compensating for its own failures by attacking mothers instead of recognizing their needs. Meinhof experienced this discrimination herself and was often publically chastised for the abandonment of her children and her rejection of a traditional female role.

The columns are also indicative of the many ideals and frustrations faced by Germans in Meinhof’s generation growing up in the aftermath of World War II. She shares the aggravation of being neither involved with the crimes of the Third Reich nor in determining the direction that was taken by the country after the war, yet being forced to share in the blame.

Meinhof was an important voice for her generation. While it may be difficult to read her writing outside the context of her violent acts, that does not mean her views should be dismissed entirely. Readers will find Meinhof’s columns are truthful, engaging, and still relevant today. Most importantly, the columns allow Meinhof to speak for herself.

Review by Jill Hindenach

Ashley Cale says

Hearing Martina Gedeck read Ulrike Meinhof’s columns in the Baader-Meinhof Complex (2008), I was completely won over by the mesmerizing tone of "Offener Brief an Farah Diba." I found her writing to be both striking and alluring coupled with its subtleties. I found myself re-reading certain pieces as I progressed through my Cold War history class to build a fuller context around what she was describing. Interesting read, and one you should benefit from re-reading!

Wesley says

I loved The info about Ulrike Meinhof in this book, but I wish there was writings of hers after she had joined the RAF. If that was included Everybody Talks About The Weather... We Don't would be almost perfect.

Jessica Harn says

The Red Army Faction, or "Baader-Meinhof gang", is one of the most important examples of revolutionary urban insurrections. Ulrike Meinhof's writings will remain eternal

david-baptiste says

This is a fascinating edition--I think the first such a one in English--of Ulrike Meinhof's columns of the 1960's, charting the evolution of her political and social thinking on its course towards her eventual co-creation of the Red Army Faction aka Baader-Meinhof Gang. The fascinating aspect for me is that this

edition is not just Meinhof's writings, but really a kind of symposium of/on/for Meinhof presented by three voices around and with and through her writings and life.

These voices include an illuminating Preface by Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek and a very long and I found really excellent and informative Introduction by Kathy Bauer. The only condition for the book's being published was that it must include an Afterword by Bettina Rohl, one of Meinhof's two daughters, who is powerful, passionate and dedicated critic researcher who opposes the Left and what her mother stood for, while at the same time appreciating many of the qualities of her mother's intelligence. She writes that, in fact, the most interesting work of Meinhof's in terms of politics and thought, is greatly overlooked, while her role as an icon has obscured much of what completely wrong in her later years. Bettina, based on documents which have emerged since the dissolution of the DDR (East Germany), has found evidence that in her view proves that her mother was a Communist all along and in the employ of the East Germans. Indeed, the press and journal "konkret" that her parents ran she found to have been funded by Honecker, the leader of the former DDR.

Ulrike Meinhof, a very respected journlaist and essayist of the Left, a celebrity of radical chic who gives up everything to follow the path of the True believer and martyr--in English is really given a much greater range and depth as a person and thinker with the publication of these writings. They are also very interesting in their movement towards Feminism, which had not been previously explored by a Leftist revolutionary in this manner and terms before.

One of the fascinating aspects of writing is the ways in which a writer's own writings begin to create a rhetoric which shapes their thinking and vision of the world, rather than responding with and examining. The writing creates a rhetoric and vision that imposes itself on the events of life and politics, creating an ever deeper sense of a narrowing effect, a coming entrapment if one does not act ever more extremely in attempting to ward this off, the prevent its happening.

Meinhof in a sense as one reads is creating a No Exit situation for herself by a series of choices , each one of which forms a logic for the making of next decision--and so, setting up a "chain of events" which "leads inevitably" to its "conclusion."

On the other hand, one needs to examine the public rhetorics to which this private one is opposed, ion order to understand what kinds of language it is that makes the writer feel ever more suppressed, oppressed and isolated, alienated, from what in most people's eyes "appears" to be "a really good life style." At the time in Germany, a great number of the old Nazis were still floating about and had influence, as well as the Totalitarian effects blowing in from the East in the DDR and USSR. The German Police and Paramilitaries, as wel their anti-terrorist networks, created a form of Police State decades before the USA's attempts at Homeland Security.

The time period Meinhof is writing in saw the rise of the movements which came to fruition in 1968--and their suppression across Europe. England, France, German, Northern Ireland,Italy Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia--all experienced tremendous repressions of solidarity movements especially on the part of the working class. The students got the headlines, while the causes of the workers tended to be buried --with necessity, too, as many were killed, lost jobs, homes, were blacklisted. A student on the other hand often went on to have a career in which their participations were a feather in the cap and became a new form of specialization.

(A number of the Weather Underground people--especially Bernadette Dorhn and Bill Ayers whom have ssen/heard numerous times-- today are Professors--who travel and give talks accompanied by documentaries about themselves in their Weather Days--I thought of them as the word "Weather" is in the title of this book.

The Weather people in the US were also from Upper Class backgrounds and I think never caught as they were bankrolled and protected by lots of money and lawyers behind the scenes. In fact, I have often wondered if they were not actually a covert operation of the government, in a twist on the way that Meinhof's daughter believes her mother was a worker for the DDR, before she co-founded the RAF. That is, the Weather Underground seriously damaged not the government, but the Leftist movements in the USA by their actions and bombastic, hollow rhetorics. Supposedly "going after" the Weather Underground, the government forces were given carte blanche to harass, intimidate, murder and imprison hundreds of people on the flimsiest pretexts. You never know-----)

This is the evolving society that Meinhof is writing of in these selections from her "konkret" columns, and it's

very valuable for English readers to have the opportunity to learn more of Meinhof and the society she lived and wrote in, and as well, to find this symposium as it were conducted by three other writers with in the same volume.

6655321 says

Ulrike Marie Meinhof is a really fascinating person but the introduction to this book reduces her to a clear eyed journalist who kept shouting that everything is amiss and then, eventually, went crazy and joined the Red Army Faction while her daughter (in like, the afterword that was the condition for the books translation) views her as a communist instigator puppet. The articles themselves are, frequently, interesting and I think Meinhof really did struggle with the impossibility of reforming a tacitly horrible society (although maybe the RAF isn't the star you want to hitch yr wagon to) but I think most of them read as simply dated (which they are, obviously) and lack any sort of gripping reason to get through them (i.e. if the publisher had woven the articles in as breaks in the historical section to show how Meinhof departed from being a respected journalist and became a freedom fighter/terrorist/communist stooge depending on who you ask) rather than "outline of her life", "a bunch of articles, chronologically", and "dismissal of her life".

Tony Gualtieri says

People of Ulrike Meinhof's generation, who came of age right after the fall of the Nazi's, must have felt they lived in a world full of hypocrisy. Virtually every older person would have contained some taint from the recent past, obliterating any claim to moral authority. It is easy to see how one could become radicalized in such a society.

These writings are the product of living in those times. They barely touch on, and certainly don't excuse the violence and cruelty of the RAF, Meinhof's shift from writer to terrorist remains enigmatic; however, they give an unusually articulate impression of progressive thought in central Europe at the height of the Cold War.

Kittie says

I haven't finished this book, but the selected texts are from Meinhof's period as a journalist, so they sort of read like columns from the Village Voice. The editor's perspective is that of a liberal, so there is reason to present Meinhof in this light.

Maria says

The first half of the book is an essay on Ulrike Meinhoff's life, her experiences (such as we know them) with the Red Army Faction, and a brief discussion of Meinhoff's journalism. The second half of the book is a collection of some of Meinhoff's columns from *Konkret* written from 1960 through 1968 before the birth of the RAF (sometimes called the Baader-Meinhoff Gang by the mainstream media). The final few pages of the book comprise a right-wing, anti-communist rant by one of Meinhoff's daughters; the editor was forced to include it to obtain the daughter's permission to publish Meinhoff's writing.

The biographical essay is somewhat illuminating and makes the reader curious to read more about the RAF and the post-WWII period in Germany. Meinhoff's essays constitute a fine body of political commentary from a left perspective: they're articulate and intelligent, but they reveal hints of a personality that views the world in black and white with few shades of grey. "Extremism" isn't the word I'd use to describe Meinhoff (as so many have); "inflexible" may be the better word. And her inability to see--or willful disregard to--the consequences of leftist violence, both on its immediate victims and the Left in general, is clearly revealed in her late writings.

Leonard Pierce says

A collection of essays by the criminal/terrorists Ulrike Meinhof, of the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Not much new here for those who have already read BMG archival material, but some startling interesting stuff for those who haven't. The critical commentary is a bit of a mixed bag, given that a lot of it (including an essay/memoir by Meinhof's daughter, a right-wing journalist) is de facto hostile to her very existence.

Gina Long says

The book is a collection of Ulrike Meinhof's essays and clearly show her transformation from political journalist to left wing terrorist in the 1970s. Most surprising is the ending essay, written by her daughter, that exposes Meinhof as a paid East German agitator and therefore a hypocrite. Meinhof's work does serve as a warning against creeping government control and its undermining of the democratic process. Everyone talks about the weather ... except us. Meinhof got tired of the constant chatter and tried to guide political dialogue back to topics that truly mattered, such as West Germany's rigid wage system and its overt negative effects on the economic wellbeing of women and children.
