

A Letter from Brigitte Mohnhaupt on the Ceasefire (February 1993)

To begin with I want to say something about my current “perspective,” which underlies all else I have to say. Throughout everything, the prisoners have not released a common, comprehensive statement about how we understand the current situation or what our position is about it all. We haven’t been able to sufficiently clarify the different points of view and perspectives among ourselves to the degree that we could formulate a shared basic understanding or political approach. But now we simply must talk if we are going to get a realistic grasp of our situation. Each of us must analyze the situation individually and, it is to be hoped, collectively, among ourselves and with many others.

In recent years, I have asked myself—presuming I make a clean break with everything—what are the political “priorities” that remain open and unresolved, but that we must leave behind if we are to craft a new starting point. That sort of prioritizing is, for me, precisely the problem at the heart of the link the RAF makes between the overall political issue of a ceasefire and freedom for the prisoners. In both cases—the political impact of the steps taken by the RAF and the overall logic of its perspective, as well as the efforts to make a dent in the state’s policy toward the prisoners—it has had a negative effect, because the political content has been eviscerated, or at least obscured, and with the political content its “underlying essence.” To recapture these things, I think this link must be broken, and two distinct developments that have been incorrectly tossed together once again separated.

One development is the result of the fact that the prisoners believe the RAF’s decision is correct and necessary, as a result of a historical watershed reached in the mid-eighties—the worldwide wave of domestic upheaval, the hegemony of the capitalist system, and with it the internationalization of the conflict and struggles to find solutions to the escalating misery and death in today’s “one world.”

The ultimate impact was to overturn the conditions and overall context in which revolutionary politics unfold and are determined. Simply repeating and “propagating” old concepts in an entirely new international situation is not an option. We must all begin by assessing the new conditions and the extent of the upheaval, and then work toward a common perspective about the fundamental issues. That is the decisive possibility that the RAF opened up with its ceasefire, the space for a practical discussion that allows us to formulate and postulate the necessary new strategic concepts our politics require. I don’t know if the current criticism of the RAF played a key role in the decision (to suspend armed actions) or what politically motivated and facilitated the decision. What I mainly want to talk about here is what it has meant to us and what our thoughts on the issue have been in recent years. For me, suspending actions was a decision in keeping with current developments and was the politically responsible thing to do.

We understood the armed intervention here in the metropole in the context of the goals and strategies of the international liberation struggle. Our actions, as such, were part of this strategy, insofar as the attacks were meant to inspire both practical and political developments. That was our starting point and those were our goals. Today, armed actions here can no longer play this role; in fact, they cannot really achieve anything, because there is no longer an overall strategic concept. They fail to respond to the new reality. The contradictions, all clamoring simultaneously for solutions, have become too big, and our historical “central perspective” does

not address the new conditions we face. We need a shared understanding of the “new reality of the capitalist system,” as a comrade from the Tupamaros put it when discussing this problem, if we are to formulate the concrete and substantive understanding our politics require. At this point, no one can say what a strategy for the future will look like. It will arise from the current conflicts and struggles.

That, for me, is the most important aspect of the RAF’s decision. We must be clear in our politics.

When these changes began to become obvious, those of us in prison faced the question of how to recontextualize our prison struggle. We had engaged in nine collective hunger strikes to break through the permanent state of emergency measures applied to us, the isolation and separation, and to win association. But we were only able to achieve small-group association (at least, that was what we could hold on to), but never for everyone. Some of us had been prisoners for seventeen, fifteen, twelve years, and many of us were so ill that recovery under these prison conditions was impossible. It was clear, we now had to win this one. We needed a straightforward common process, for and foremost, to address our living conditions and to open the way for political negotiations. It was not only us, the entire situation was incendiary, but we could only deal with what was most essential, because we are only able to communicate with each other intermittently at intervals of weeks, or even months. The difficulty we have acting together and collectively intervening politically became increasingly obvious during our last hunger strike in 1984–1985—after fifteen years of struggle—when isolation became a public concern and was no longer accepted as self-evident, which ultimately made the situation increasingly unviable for the state. There was a major media campaign (“amnesty,” “dialogue”), with the left launching a discussion about the need to get all of the prisoners out. We could only intervene in a very limited way.

The way this began (the 1988 “dialogue” initiative) meant that once again the state had the upper hand from the outset. But we had formulated an idea, or at least the outline of an idea, that determined how our next hunger strike, in 1989, unfolded. This was our “prisoners’ project,” with the proposal for a dialogue at its core—the possibility that we could be part of the overall discussion, an open exchange and general debate about all of the questions on the table that must now be addressed and resolved, with the goal of formulating a common understanding of the situation and finding a new shared starting point for our continued practice. We hoped this process would give rise to concrete steps and initiatives toward our freedom, allowing us to politically break through the two-decade-long annihilation program in a way the state could no longer ignore.

Our association was the material necessity, because we could only have a comprehensive and far-reaching discussion if we were together and could talk and debate among ourselves. But again we failed to achieve our goal of association with the ’89 hunger strike, even though more people than ever before actively supported us and this goal. As the hunger strike intensified the prisoners found themselves in the way of a bulldozer rolling steadily toward a “Greater Germany.” What the hunger strike brought into broad relief for a moment was that this was a political conflict, a political confrontation with the state that could only be addressed on the political level, an awareness that completely dissipated over the next three years. I’ll have

something more specific to say about that later. It culminated in the so-called Kinkel Initiative, the KGT¹ plan that has taken up so much space in recent years.

In January, Kinkel publicly unveiled the KGT plan, and then in April the RAF decided for political reasons that it was time to call a halt to things. In the first section of the statement, the RAF explains the reasons for the decision and in the second section discusses Kinkel's announcement to the prisoners. That's where the trouble begins: the two issues are linked. The question of the prisoners was connected to the guerilla's decision to put a stop actions at this point. The political message that accompanied the RAF's decision effectively placed a certain onus on the state: the response more or less expected was that a solution to prisoners' situation be "approved." That seriously undermined both issues. Because at the heart of the RAF's decision was specifically the step toward a new political orientation and the strategic impetus that raises for the process of struggle and organization here and not some sort of "offer" to the state, but that became the focus for quite a number of people. This gave the question of the prisoners a hard push in that direction: freedom for the prisoners was no longer something to be struggled for, and it was not, above all, necessary to *politically push it through*, rather it was now a matter between the RAF and the state and was unfolding quietly behind the scenes in the context of the "Kinkel Initiative." That, in my opinion, was the worst thing about making this link—the RAF's decision as part of a process of struggle with the goal of building something new was tossed aside, and without that freedom for the prisoners will truly remain nothing more than a pipe dream.

Certainly, that was an error on the RAF's part, but subsequently on our part as well, because when we saw where this was going we didn't do anything to reverse it, by which I mean to expose it for what it was and set things straight. Then, of course, "everything" could have come together, and the RAF's decision to de-escalate to create the space necessary for fundamentally new politics could have changed the situation entirely. That and the short statement that Irmgard [Möller] released on behalf of the prisoners, indicating that we too saw the development of the political process here as a priority.

The state also found itself in a new "situation." All of the slogans used for decades to stifle the tiniest step forward for the prisoners could no longer be used. Disrupting the state's policies against us was "objectively" possible. The recognition that after these twenty-two years freedom for all of us was the only option constituted a material step forward toward a new context. But the state chose the opposite path. "Now more than ever" it embraced the delusion that it finally had this one, that an "issue" where all previous measures and strategies had run aground was now under control. In April, Eva [Haule] wrote, "For us, now is the time when our freedom can be won. The RAF's step is both the right one and a necessary prerequisite—without it 'freedom' would just be a pretty dream." That's how I see it too, because it makes obvious sense. If there were attacks, no mobilization for the freedom of the prisoners could gain a foothold, even if it were broad-based and doggedly pursued its goal—the balance of power here is such that the state would unleash its entire arsenal against us, push aside all political issues, and make it purely a question of power. That's something they can't do at this point, so there is possibility that we can break through and make headway, allowing us to work to introduce our political perspective "to society." However, this very real opening has become dangerously narrow in the face of the political confusion of the last year. Nonetheless, it is essential take advantage of it now.

1 Koordinierungsgruppe Terrorismus (Coordination Group for Terrorism), an interagency anti-guerilla police unit.

Therefore, from my point of view, it is necessary to properly understand the truth about this “link,” otherwise you will be unable clearly grasp the situation. That’s something we discovered for ourselves recently. There is a fundamental distinction at play: the RAF did not make the state any “offer”—not some deal, because they’re ready to throw in the towel, in any case, so they’d like to quickly “resolve” the question of the prisoners—and there were no negotiations about the prisoners in exchange for a ceasefire. Given their own situation, the RAF arrived at a politically necessary decision, one that opens up new options for revolutionary politics here.

Meanwhile, there is an ocean of misunderstanding and mutual incomprehension that I want to address. I didn’t start with the “link” because it is the central issue I wanted to address, or because it is the source of everything that had politically failed. Claiming that would simply be wrong, because there isn’t just one issue to resolve, after which everything will become “clear.” Clarity will only come from a more far-reaching and profound discussion involving many people, a discussion that must begin with how we all understand and think about things and why. No, I started with the “link,” because, from my point of view, the step taken by the RAF was critically important. It had a different significance and impact than anything we—the prisoners—did on our “level”: even with regard to the international context, the discussions with comrades from other countries, and the questions and concepts we choose to address.

So I now come directly to we the prisoners and our politics over the past three years, which I think is the second key issue we need to grasp and clarify and address through discussion. I need to go back to the 1989 hunger strike and to something I said earlier. As the situation intensified at that time, they set out to plow us under, showing their right-wing colors, with their reactionary power coming out plainly into the light of day in their ongoing drive to annex the GDR, to develop a new military capacity for intervention, and to constitute the hard core of a new Fortress Europa.

In the conflict, we directly encountered the right-wing bloc that was taking shape, and we ended the hunger strike with a clear understanding that we needed to continue to struggle collectively to determine our politics and to maintain our grasp on their overall development, as we had during the hunger strike and as we had managed to do so far in spite of being separated and held in miserable conditions. Once again, the hunger strike had as its focus the experience that our real strength as prisoners was collective and that if we continued to act collectively we could achieve our goals. But the collective is not simply “there” because we are all simultaneously in prison and have a shared political history; it is only possible as an ongoing process where we all fight with all our might to create a shared context for this struggle. However, after the strike, we did not keep doing that. Clearly, we were exhausted from the many years when each us had to struggle alone against our isolation. And existing conditions didn’t make it any easier. Most of us remained cut off from the others. There were BKA cell raids, and every time they seized all of our mail, every scrap of paper—our every thought was “illegal” if it was written down. I think that over the three years we lost our shared fundamental understanding that only together will we be able to avoid losing this struggle and find the strength that we need—the subjective and political power. That is the fundamental lesson of our entire prison history. In the early years, it was only together that we were able to deal with the isolation and not be destroyed, instead struggling against it and maintaining our focus on our goals in these entirely new and different conditions.

I should add, even with the gradual deterioration that occurs in here year after year, we struggle to maintain a common process with the others and seek to be realistic, even in the way we live, just as we had when we struggled on the outside. And in here, in spite of everything, it remains possible to struggle for change, change in our conditions and for our own ongoing individual development as human beings. Otherwise, prison truly would mean nothing but stagnation, powerlessness, and a slow, miserable death. We stopped engaging in this common effort. Our need for a shared process of struggle was no longer the most important thing. I think that this is why we have been unable to resolve, or at least reasonably clarify, the differences among us, which have now come out into the open.

What has crept in over the last three years, as I see it, is a political orientation that will gradually render us all objects subjected to the whims of state rule, if we are not simply crushed. It began with the “CDU-SPD line” that developed after the hunger strike. In CDU Ländern there was absolutely no change, while in the SPD Ländern there were a few (new small groups in Cologne and Lübeck, where the prisoners had been held in groups of three for a long time; Gabi from Berlin² was added). These distinctions exist between Ländern because of a negative decision the government made during the hunger strike. Essentially it represented no change in the situation that had existed for years, only a certain reversal: for a long time, small groups were in CDU Ländern; for the SPD association was the Great Satan. But we never placed our hopes in the CDU as a result or formulated a political line or otherwise determined our political approach on the basis of this distinction. The prisoners saw no “contradiction” between the parties that had anything to do with us. On that issue they were always unquestionably united. Differences in their approaches only reflected differences in their respective voter bases, an example being the way the SPD made the Verfassungsschutz’s line their own. That doesn’t mean that we’re blind and fail to seize upon openings that arise from the different approaches. But basing our politics on this would be to go down the wrong road and cause us to drift away from the fundamental truth that there is no resolution for us, not the tiniest bit of ground to be gained, unless we win it through the political struggle with the state. It would also be to go down the wrong road to expect, in this stultifying situation, any motion on the part of the SPD, which despite numerous conversations had never lifted a finger. This is not about a formulaic “right” and “wrong” but about what the basis of our political actions is, how we understand ourselves and, on that basis, our political strategy and initiatives.

The kink in the fundamental relationship came with the “two factions of the state” line—a coolheaded faction that was ready for political negotiations with the prisoners and revolutionary praxis overall and another that was holding the course. These “two factions” were soon part of daily discussion; in April the RAF even used the term. But who were they talking about? Who did they mean? Kinkel and the Verfassungsschutz on one side and the BKA and the BAW on the other? And what would that mean—for us? That we all watch to see which faction will “carry the day,” as the RAF put it? The reality that we were facing was a different one. We often talked about the KGT when discussing this context, not because it was the most important detail, but because it was a glaring contradiction you couldn’t avoid. The KGT is the coordinating body for the political and state security organizations, and extralegal coalition meant to facilitate a more efficient, speedier, and better coordinated decision-making process supported and implemented at every level—decisions like the “Kinkel Initiative.”

² Gabriele Rollnik, a prisoner from the 2JM who supported the 1982 fusion with RAF.

It is a myth to ascribe to the BAW the role of *éminence grise* is all of this, as the *taz* so happily did, and it makes clear that politically the situation leaves much to be desired, and that the BAW has managed to meddle in things once again. The BAW has a specific role in this structure; they are its driving force. The Kinkel Initiative *is* the BAW's initiative. The BAW has positioned itself practically: it's about "law enforcement," the same political line they have been using against us since 1970. It is quite simply not true that what was "actually" sought was different from the outcome achieved. Even the new trials against us are not some kind of blowback from one faction against another, but rather integral aspects of an overall policy.

From the outset, the KGT's plan was not meant to include all of the prisoners. In spite of that, we didn't blow it off when it first surfaced. Instead, at the time, we understood Kinkel's announcement as an expression of twenty-two years of the RAF-state and prisoners-state confrontations, with the state unable to militarily destroy the RAF or crush the prisoners. And this was unfolding at a point (the KGT plan was, after all, just a plan, no more) when the prisoners actually were a political issue that was clearly on the table again, so we might have had the leverage necessary to get closer to our goal, maybe even to carve out some political space toward freedom for all. That we could only politically achieve our goal in a long and difficult struggle was perfectly clear. And it was also entirely clear that "freedom for everyone" did not fit into the KGT's plan, which Kinkel himself said clearly enough in Tutzing and in Bonn. It was a mistake that we failed at the time to publicly, concretely, and clearly debate all of this—but we lacked consensus and had different assessments, because what we're doing now, talking as "individuals," was something that had already begun.

But our major error was that we had not already long since developed our own initiative, so that we were ready to respond. There was a discussion for the entire year before that, 1992, about declaring an International Year for the Freedom of Political Prisoners, and about politically promoting the idea in public meetings and initiatives around the five hundredth anniversary of the struggle against white supremacy and the looting of the world. Other things were also considered, such as making the twenty-year prison struggle a point of focus. But we ourselves did not bring anything to fruition. We were too slow, and then state came forward with its proposal.

But three months later, under the rubric of the "two factions," the RAF made public its decision to de-escalate as a step toward a far-reaching political reorientation. With that the KGT plan was cast aside, because now it seemed possible to bribe the prisoners into "reconciling" with the state if they didn't want to be in prison for eternity. Reconciling with the state means saying there is no further need to agitate for revolutionary change. Politically, this means not only to surrender your own goals but also to deny the legitimacy of the RAF continuing to struggle. In this sense, the KGT plan was just a variation on the same old shit, the longstanding goal of using the prisoners to destroy the RAF. The RAF's decision created some crimps, like how high they were now going to hold the stick we had to jump over, while dangling release like a carrot, pulling the rug out from underneath us in the process. It was now clear that the political process was a more distant option. Quite apart from how ridiculous that is, what madness, acting as if we were pawns in their game, as if our struggle had no substance. We are the same people we were ten or twenty years ago, but they never have been able to grasp that.

According to the RAF's statement, the power structure had arrived at a decision about us. In August the Ministry of Justice shared it with our lawyers:

1. no political framing of the question of the prisoners, and therefore no “overall solution” for the freedom of everyone, but rather a protracted process of releases over years through individual cases before the judiciary, individual assessments of renunciation of violence, and a “favorable social prognosis”;
2. the new trials against us based on crown witness statements were not stayed, because every additional life sentence based on “serious guilt” counts when determining the when a release will occur;
3. there will be no association, anyone who is alone now will remain alone in the future (that’s Rolf³ for thirteen, soon fourteen, years, Christian and me⁴ for ten years, Manu⁵ for eight years, Andrea, Chris, and Norbert⁶ for five or six years);
4. there will be no week-long meeting of the prisoners, as we hoped, to allow us finally to talk and arrive at an understanding that we can act from today, so I really want to know where one can see evidence for the theory of the two factions of the apparatus that are caught up in a struggle.

So far, so good, but it remains politically superficial. It’s not sufficient to say that the “contradictions within the apparatus” have no objective relevance, or to go further and say that there has never been so little reality to the “two factions” as there is today, neither in their policies towards the people of the former GDR nor in their approaches to intervention, their refugee policies, or on any other fundamental social issue. What I’m talking about goes deeper—it’s about the basic relationships upon which we base our self-understanding and the way in which we shape politics that will allow us to achieve radical change. I don’t “just” mean our relationship to the state, but the overall existential human-capitalist system contradiction that provides the starting point for the search for something else and the fundamental understanding that a life that is worth living, that has some meaning, is only possible in opposition to the existing system. For me, that is what is always at the root of our struggle and our identity.

When we say today that the problems are so numerous and so intense, so extreme, that overall solutions are pressingly necessary and can only be achieved through a social intervention with a new grassroots basis—involving all forces that want to overturn the current conditions and push through a new development—it certainly can’t be without the identity and relationships described above. It is indeed difficult here “in the belly of the beast,” with its staccato of attainment and consumption, senseless lives, and disrupted human relationships, and its reduced sense that human life is valuable, both to find a purpose to your own life and then struggle to achieve it and to find other people that share both your goal and desire to struggle—for a humane world in the most basic sense. Creating an identity against the emptiness, finding your own point of orientation and redeveloping a political approach, and breaking down the separation between

³ Rolf Heißler, prisoner from the RAF.

⁴ Christian Klar and Brigitte Mohnhaupt, prisoners from the RAF.

⁵ Manuela Happe, prisoner from the RAF.

⁶ Andrea Sievering, Chris Kluth, and Norbert Hofmeier, members of the resistance convicted of Fighting Units actions.

your own life and the struggle for change are the major hurdles blocking significant political developments here.

The “two factions” is only an example, but a real one, one based in actual, existing political thought. A way of thinking, where the key option for developing your own politics is no longer your own goals, but rather where the starting point for your actions has been ceded to the state, and where the space we are “granted”—or not—is determined by its interests. This will not allow for any progress, just the same old illusions doing another belly flop and the feeling that “nothing ever works here” growing stronger. I think that in the discussion about a new basis for politics it is essential that we overcome the “dominant perspective”—that the state is so powerful that that we will never be able to achieve our goals—and redevelop *the subject* as an integral concept and expression of consciousness. For me, in any case, that is central to what I want to talk about, because I have been thinking about it for years. We were confronted by this dominant power, and just like everyone else here we have lived through the setbacks and declines for the last twenty-five years. But our response has never been that nothing is possible in this country. That’s simply not the case. Our experience is that quite a lot can be done if we don’t let up and consistently do the necessary work to politically analyze the shifting conditions.

As to the last year and the situation of the prisoners, only a snippet summarizing the discussion among us (insofar as that was possible) focusing on these two problems is possible. It’s quite likely that there are contradictions or even open disagreements in the statements coming from us as a group, but that’s where we find ourselves. For me what is most important at the moment is that everyone who wants to debate with us have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what we concretely think and why we think it, as that basis for finally beginning the discussion and political clarification that we have been talking about for so long.