

Helmut Pohl Letter in the Context of the *Konkret* Interview (February 1992)

The content is out of date, my own thinking is far removed from this, and I certainly now have a different view about some details. I released this letter in the context of the *konkret* interview to document where we were at shortly before the beginning of the “armed struggle hardliners” uproar targeting us. The letter reflected in broad terms the discussion among the majority of the prisoners at the time, with a few thoughts of my own added. In its entirety it was ten pages long. Delivered with the encouragement of more than a few of the prisoners and a fair amount of urging from the outside, this was a final attempt to create some movement among those underground. And that’s how it was written—once again with gnashing teeth, anxious, stressed, and overflowing with the vocabulary of years gone by.

The Verfassungsschutz had this letter immediately, probably before the other prisoners and the underground. The state security apparatus had all the pieces in front of them. They quite likely knew throughout 1991 just what we wanted, but to achieve their goals they needed a contrary “reality.” It was specifically these shifts that were the reason for interview and for releasing the letter.

Before the interview, I reached out to a broad range of political contacts, to see if they agreed that it was necessary for a new approach to our freedom to publicly expose the disinformation (or was that possibly just my fixation). After giving it some thought, all of them said I should do it. I didn’t particularly enjoy talking about our history this way. There wasn’t much left; even “comrades” from the earlier days had cut us off in recent years.
(August 1996)

We’ve been talking about making a “break” since 1987—initially to develop a meaningful way to deal with the significant overall developments. While the substantive contents received only limited attention in our discussion, quite a few of us, nonetheless, found that we saw things similarly. Our starting point was the hegemony the capitalist and imperialist system had achieved by the mid-eighties. They had everything they wanted. “Globalization” and total subjugation to the principles underlying exploitation, with consciousness fading as a result, because there was no “point from where you could see things differently” (one of Günter Anders’s students).¹ While people have begun to talk about this now, it was already an issue for us at the time. We had, in fact, already pointed out what some of the consequences would be. “Concretely speaking,” “stages,” “annexation from below,” and the old concepts of “revolutionary” and “reformist,” as well as the “revolutionary process,” are no longer relevant for those for whom this is already clear, *for those of us* involved in the ongoing discussions.

1 Günter Anders, left-wing philosopher and critic of civilization.

For us this totalization of the system meant that there is no longer a basis for what Karl-Heinz² called the “central perspective,” and that means that even an organization that embodies a revolutionary alternative within the historical process has nothing to offer, because it cannot today provide a “model” for another—at this point, that means worldwide—social structure. The actions no longer serve to advance a perspective. To say the same thing differently, the debates (problems) have become so numerous that guerilla actions no longer play a strategic (inclusive) function.

For myself, I can say—and I think that this is a view I share, for example, with Eva and Brigitte and possibly Heidi³—I have seen these developments from the beginning as signalling “the end” of the RAF. From 1987 until early 1990, I imagined a dialectical radicalization. A (however strong) genuine, politically radical, and militant “movement” (as a real factor) arising from across the left-wing spectrum, with *all* of the potential means at its disposal (to be used when and as determined).

I can’t see any other way to honestly appraise things—it’s crappy to “know” that’s the case, because to think your way through your entire mindset requires a process involving “other people” (communication can have its practical uses), where together we arrive at some clarity. But it is, nonetheless, clear that this is the only possible conclusion we can draw from global events—and that we *must* do this publicly and without reservation.

I wasn’t terribly sure how things were with us and with the RAF. I was, however, feeling positive (the form of action aside), because an entire aspect of the upheaval proved us, as opposed to much of the “left,” right, so to speak. The developments we face are exactly what the RAF’s politics were attempting to prevent, and which over time had come to play key determinant role for us. (This “attempting to prevent” means that a genuine discussion of one’s “personal goals” is in no way superfluous.) At the time, I thought something like, if things become clear, if the unfolding process sets a “dialectical radicalization” in motion, then it would not be as difficult for us, because everybody would be able to see what we see.

That was our “project” during the hunger strike. I never understood why it was so often misinterpreted and misunderstood as if it was meant to *yield* an initial elucidation.

You say now that maybe you misunderstood us all along—but then what would it have meant if we had won everything we demanded in the hunger strike. The discussion that we had among ourselves at the time, and the discussion we would have had with them, would, for me, obviously have included the idea that the RAF carry out no actions at that point, because what was on the table was revolutionary politics at its most basic, including what the RAF was doing. And the concrete dynamics at the time would have meant that the key issue of the prisoners had to be addressed. . . . We meant it to be a “transition”—to freedom for the prisoners. Freedom, however, would have required a new relationship between the RAF and the state. The state had the power over the prisoners; thinking anything else would have been unrealistic. The basic orientation of our discussion of the new political situation can still be understood to be: withdraw from military action.

² Karl-Heinz Dellwo, a prisoner from the RAF.

³ Eva Haule, Brigitte Mohnhaupt, and Adelheid Schulz, prisoners from the RAF.

But it's obvious that things have turned out differently than hoped. For us, the prisoners, almost everything we had previously achieved was wiped out (which was not the case for some other aspects). The "discussion" with many people *to clarify the new situation* we had been imagining was no longer an option, and we continued to be isolated in our efforts to seek out something new (everyone, not just the prisoners)—in a situation where a key reality is that you can't formulate a critique / debate without having a certain grasp of the existing situation, the necessary basis if any pronouncement is to make any sense. We were all forced to begin once again from a position of retreat and draw the conclusions necessary to seize the initiative anew.

I was saying this for about a year (already too late). That you now call it the "the sentence that nails it" surprises me, because at the time, what I heard from you after a couple of months as a sort of point of orientation was: yeah, it doesn't mean anything anymore.

Given the situation with the cops, and because I thought you already understood, at certain points, including in my final key formulation, I said: I think it would be the right thing for the RAF to openly say that there would be no deadly targeted actions for the time being, and until they say otherwise—but, of course, they could simply say: no more commando actions. I clarified this as follows:

- The reference points for the RAF over the past twenty years, as well the starting point and framework of any revolutionary politics, have fallen apart in radical ways.
- If you lack a new point of orientation ("reestablishment" means laying the groundwork) you cannot use these means. Your proposal simply won't correspond to the existing reality; it will simply indicate that you have a definitive definition of revolutionary struggle, one that will be reflected in the quality of the means proposed.
- Because it is only through confrontation that we can get past the current conditions, conditions that are a response to everyone who is searching for a way to establish revolutionary politics, and who find themselves in a severe crisis. While the actual issue is the degree to which a new basis can be developed.
- Furthermore, the escalation, brutalization, and "blind violence" in society and the global political violence undermine an entire level of potential political intervention. It's too much. The people simply throw up their hands and are no longer able to handle things (on the Three Continents, it's "war fatigue"). All they see is more violence without politics (without solutions), although this mess "warrants" solutions a hundred times over.
- And that I can (only) imagine that by using that approach we will gain much that we will need later, as well as establishing a relationship between the RAF and the state that qualitatively resembles the conditions in 1989. A push.

As a result of the KGT⁴ initiatives, the situation is worse now than it was a year ago. It can be seen as an almost inevitable reaction to us. Nonetheless, this is entirely independent from reaction to the prisoners. They will start by saying "thanks," but that will be it. However, it may end up providing us with better conditions for a *mobilization*.

⁴ Koordinierungsgruppe Terrorismus (Coordination Group for Terrorism), an interagency anti-guerilla police unit.

I also agree with another political observation: that our clarity and radicalism must correspond to the radical nature of reality. Eva⁵ was perfectly correct in what she wrote to me about this: this is a transitional period, and it must not only be *understood* thusly but must also be *defined* as such. It's not possible to transform the RAF into something more elegant or to turn it quietly into something else. A clear *break* is necessary. The RAF can no longer take an offensive position in the international class war. That was the basic idea for twenty years, and it has nothing to do with "until 1977" or "until 1985." It also requires clarity about our twenty-year history, which I want to hold on to. Whether it will be a process whereby the RAF transforms itself, but does so in a way that also guarantees continuity, or a process of "dissolution" into a new structure for struggle, I can't say.

So even now it is specifically correct that "for the time being, and until they say otherwise: no more commando actions"—and not in the half-hearted way that the Celle prisoners⁶ perhaps think of it, without recognizing the overall consequences—on the other hand, perhaps they do, as their second letter makes obvious: "ending it," "the deal." That primarily serves to show you just how things might unfold.

We need to make a precise statement: for the time being, until. . . . This must include an openness to practices that were not previously considered part of coming / future revolutionary politics and a new starting point that reflects the current relationship: the confrontation with state power to seize control of the entire field of potential mobilization to the degree that we are able to gain support. And today (even with the KGT initiative) it is still more important than it was a year or two ago that it be immediately connected to a sensible proposal (in a manner of speaking) that makes clear that we have to have the most radical politics possible and a consistent ongoing struggle, because everything now cries out for the successful development of a revolutionary process.

More accurately, I would argue that the development in one way or another will either unfold as destruction or appropriation. The urgency has "more" directly to do with reality than with the vague "goals" and "revolutionary politics" of an unfathomable future. So there can be no talk of "ending it." That must be perfectly clear, because such slippage would inevitably pull all of reality along with it; one needs only to look at the RZ paper⁷ to see this. In this case, a group of people, specifically those who were involved, are perfectly clear about their context and reasoning—"give up" this dominant structure, "deal," "do an about-face," they will steamroller us if we fail to have any meaningful impact on anything but a limited slice of the population. The overall outcome of this is to tear everything down and to call it a wrap for revolutionary politics.

Furthermore, the situation today has less to do with the state than was previously the case. On the one hand, the state is primarily concerned with the structural process of annexation, while at the same time state power is eroding, making attacks on the state less relevant. (This must also be seriously considered in assessing our history.)

5 Eva Haule, prisoner from the RAF.

6 Karl-Heinz Dellwo, Knut Folkerts, and Lutz Taufer, prisoners from the RAF who were in a small group in the Celle prison.

7 A reference to the December 1991 statement from the RZ "Gerd Albartus ist Tod" (Gerd Albartus Is Dead), addressing the murder of an RZ member by the Carlos group.

The jumping off point for “attacks” today is most importantly the question of content, of “recapturing” the content. Reappropriation. The overlapping systemic ideology / ruling ideology / triumphal ideology has been entirely superseded, meaning, in a manner of speaking, the obsolescence of revolutionary and “left” politics overall, at least in their current form.

That, however, doesn’t capture the “power to define,” the importance of the really existing metropole process of shifting the general coordinates. Furthermore, making the necessary adjustments is the current primary issue in any offensive. To align the contents with the structure. By adopting shared attitudes (essentially, “positions”), while nonetheless maintaining differences on specific questions. The offensive.

For example, the G7, “500 Years”;⁸ Who wants these things? The destruction of millions of people and the continuation of this history into the future? What kind of future would that be? One where “global consciousness” or “consciousness of globalism” means imposing the consciousness of the metropole onto global reality? This isn’t just sounding off; political clarity is always to be found in the concrete details.

Or, for example: the prisoners, human rights, the legitimacy of the “solution.” One must be aware that when the RAF took its step, there remained a discrepancy. A “resolution for the prisoners” and the “development of the RAF” and / or a radical and militant orientation didn’t unfold smoothly. There remained contradictory factors. You have to decide. What’s right? Is this the point in history when the prisoners should be released—is whatever is most important also most central? The personal and political lives of a group of us or giving things a jolt in the right direction—which will it be? A dynamic role in the overall process. The contrary aspects of the decision should be taken in stride for the benefit of others. That would only have made sense in this situation if there had been a positive political proposal.

Now we have to find out if all of us, inside and outside, are prepared to accept those sort of proposals from us, the prisoners (then we need to come out publicly with a clear and powerful statement in favour of a “freedom initiative”). But more than that needs to be said: we want *all those* involved to take a radical step and break with twenty-two years of history. We want some prospect of freedom for all of us in the foreseeable future.

As we see it, this will not occur immediately or all at once. It is not only the prisoners who need to grapple with this issue; it requires the entire political milieu to make a break with the past. (This was the implication of the step taken by the RAF.) That’s what we call for, and we do so fully conscious of the history of the prisoners’ struggle—we want this at this point for a straightforward political reason, as an expression of the overall current need for “solutions.”

⁸ A reference to the celebration of five-hundredth anniversary of the “discovery” of the Americas.