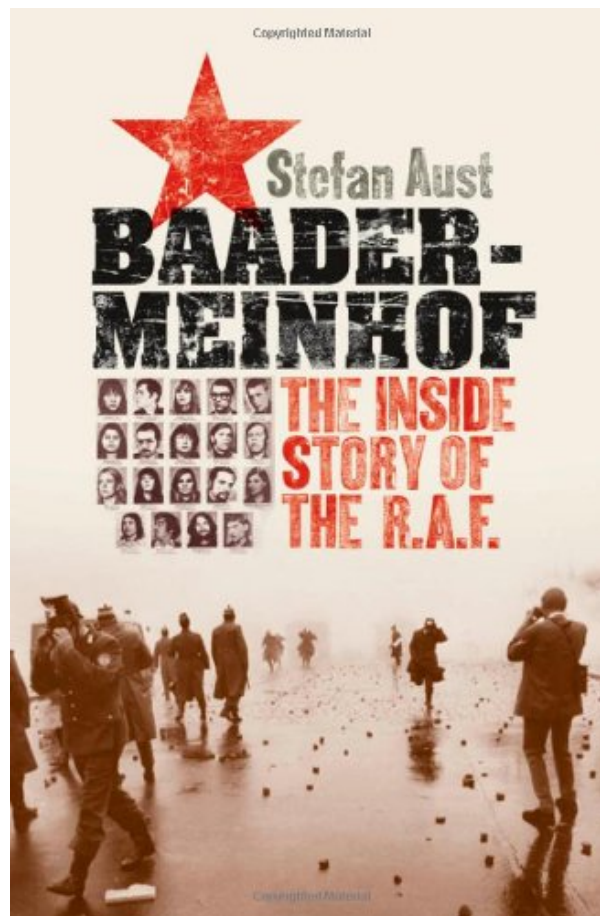
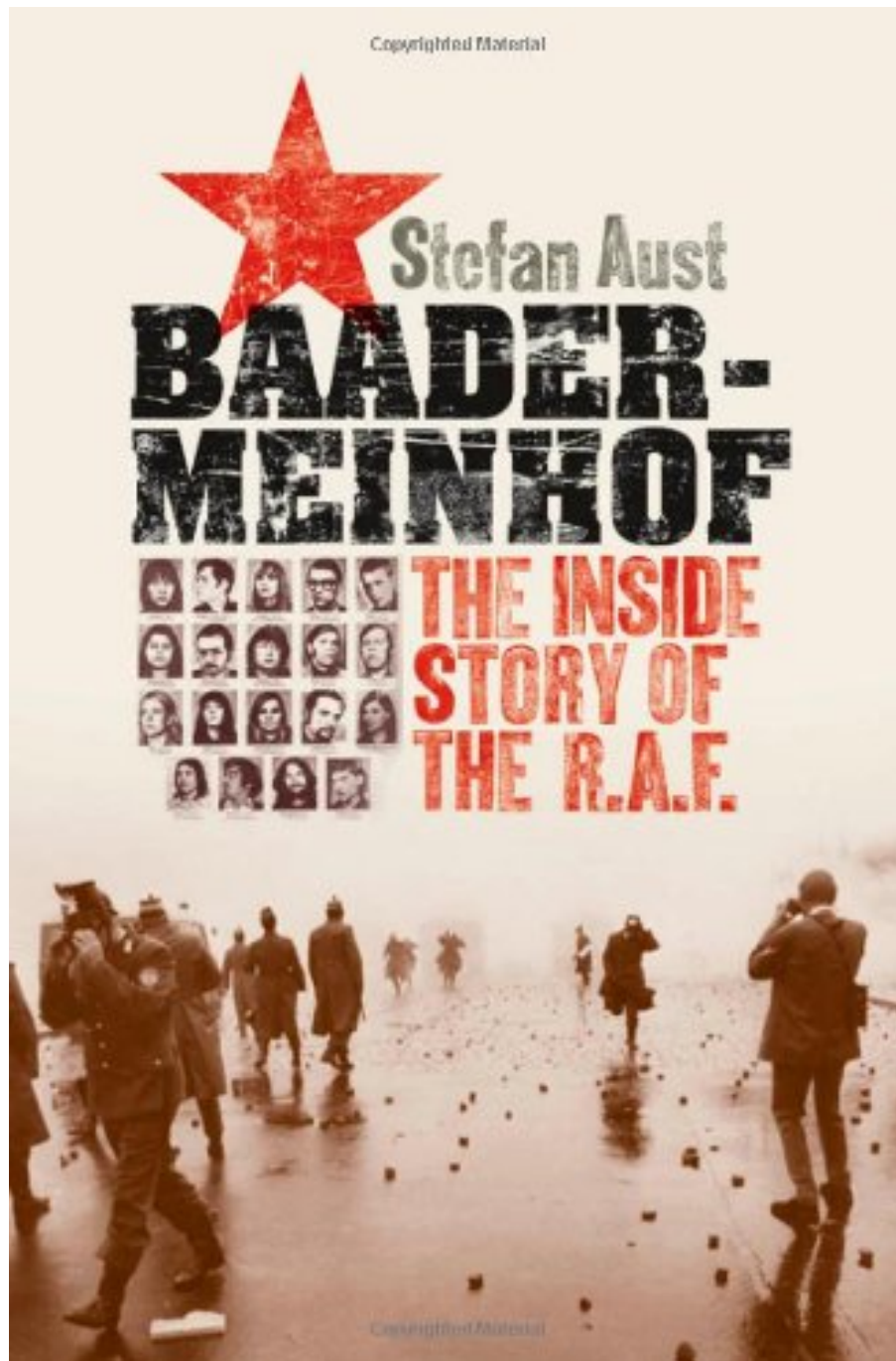


# **BAADER-MEINHOF: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE R.A.F. BY STEFAN AUST, ANTHEA BELL**



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Aust presents the complete history of the RAF, from the creation in 1970 to the breakup in 1998, incorporating all of the new information. For instance, there is growing evidence that the German secret service eavesdropped on Baader, Meinhof, and the other RAF members imprisoned in Stammheim and that they knew that the terrorists planned a mass suicide, but did nothing to prevent it. Also, there is new information about the role of the RAF lawyers (among them Otto Schily who later was Minister of the Interior in Gerhard Schroder's cabinet), and the roles of the different RAF members and the rivalry between them. The volume will also contain numerous photos. Terrorism today is never far from most people's thoughts. Baader-Meinhof offers a gripping account of one of the most violent terrorist groups of the late twentieth century, in a compelling look at what they did, why they did it, and how they were brought to justice.

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Q: Given your background as an editor of *Konkret* and your previous friendship with Ulrike Meinhof, how was the original version of your book received by the left when it first came out? Though you did not explicitly state it at the time, your book very conclusively seemed to demonstrate that the strange deaths in Stammheim prison were in fact suicides, yet it seems to be an article of faith amongst leftists that Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe were murdered. How was your book received by the left at the time? And has that

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

41 of 44 people found the following review helpful.

A solid, centrist, journalistic account of the events

By Melanchthon

This is the absolute best mainstream journalistic narration of events relating to the terrorist activities of the Baader-Meinhof group, the RAF, in the 1970s in (then West) Germany, which culminated in the suicides of the group's leadership and the unsuccessful hijacking of the Landshut. It similarly traces the ways in which West German policing and security measures changed in an attempt to come to terms with the terrorists, including their imprisonment in a special jailblock and the creation of a special tribunal to try them. Aust goes into detail about the backgrounds of the terrorists, the atmosphere they experienced in the universities and cities of the 1970s, and their wild and suspenseful career and the fears of and sympathies for their deeds in German society.

This is a must-read for English-speaking readers interested in the topic, although two reservations should be noticed: the book was written for a German audience that was already familiar with the basic structure of events. English readers will need to follow the dates in the narrative carefully, as Aust's chapters are short and he switches back and forth at times between the beginning and end of the story. The second thing readers should be aware of is that for all intents and purposes, Aust ends this story in 1977 with the "German autumn," so the narrative focuses on the so-called "first generation" of the RAF, with the second generation dealt with only as they intersected with the members of the movement in prison, and the third generation

mentioned only very briefly at the end of the book.

Aust was chief editor of Germany's Spiegel magazine, and the narration takes the tone and position of that publication: center-left, highly critical of the terrorists, somewhat critical of the government's attempts to deal with them. Thus the book itself is a document about the reception of terrorism, specifically a document of criticism from the moderate left. It is sympathetic to the victims of terrorism, but not at the level of recent center-right criticism which note that the tendency in Germany has been to mythologize the terrorists and ignore the victims (although Aust hardly ignores the victims--that is just not the focus of the book.) It should be mentioned that Aust had a tangential relationship to the events described in the book: he had worked at konkret magazine with Ulrike Meinhof's ex-husband, knew personally most of the key figures in the terrorist movement from his days in the student Left, and aided in tracking down Ulrike Meinhof's children after Meinhof hid them in Sicily, ostensibly with the plan of sending them to an El Fatah training camp. This book was also the basis of the script for Germany's entry in the 2009 Oscar competition. The book was written in 1985 and updated slightly to include information and disclosures that have been obtained since then. The only unfortunate aspect of this edition is that there are many fewer pictures than in the German editions of the work. There are also a fair number of typos in the German words that remain in the text.

41 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

Desperately Seeking Editing

By Thomas Paul

I grew up with protests against the Vietnam War and with radical leftist organizations like the Weathermen and the RAF. The RAF were perhaps a little more mysterious because they were in far off and, at the time, divided Germany so I was always interested in them. When I discovered this book by Stefan Aust I was excited about the opportunity to read it. I was soon very disappointed. It's not that there isn't a lot of interesting information in the book. The problem is that the author didn't actually go to the trouble to write a book.

The main problem is that there is no structure to the book. There is no logical flow that makes this history of the RAF coherent. After struggling through the beginning of the book, I felt like there were pieces to the puzzle all over the place but no coherent image of what the puzzle looks like. The book doesn't flow as a series of events or topics, in fact it doesn't flow at all. The first 100 pages included more than 40 chapters. Each chapter reads like a brief essay that may or may not have anything to do with the previous chapters. One chapter might take place in 1971 and the next in 1965 and the next in 1967. A chapter might be two pages about a person who gets mentioned once (probably five pages earlier) and then not mentioned again. The biographical essays tell virtually nothing about a person other than straight facts but really give no help in figuring out how they ended up in a radical leftist terrorist group. We read about Andreas Baader's escape from prison without knowing what he was in prison for because that doesn't happen until later. The book reads more like a bunch of notes randomly thrown together as if the author didn't feel like actually editing his notes into a book. As a side note, there are many characters who are mentioned occasionally so a cast of characters such as found on Wikipedia could have been helpful. Also, a map showing the key cities and towns mentioned and their relationship to East and West Germany would also have been helpful. Also, the author mentions Berlin quite often without making it clear if he is talking about East or West Berlin.

This could have been a very interesting, perhaps even a great book. There is plenty of good information scattered around the book. Also, a better translator who could assist the American reader would have been helpful (not everyone will know that the GDR is East Germany - it has been nearly 20 years since Germany was reunified). The great book on the history of the RAF is still waiting to be written. Meanwhile I would avoid this book unless you have a true thirst for knowledge on this topic and are willing to put up with the poor structure and writing.

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Let the Power Fall

By Best Of All

Perhaps a forgotten piece of Cold War history, author Sefan Aust brings the notorious Baader-Meinhof group back into the spotlight with the meticulous exploration of the individuals and fellow travelers associated with the West German-based organization.

Dubbed the "Red Army Faction," the group left a trail of blood and destruction in the 1970s and 1980s; killing at least 47 people and wounding 93, taking 162 hostages and robbing 35 banks. Its peak was in 1977 - the "German Autumn" - when a German businessman was murdered in a botched kidnapping plot, another businessman was kidnapped and later murdered and an airliner was hijacked and flown to Somalia, with the pilot then shot and dumped onto the airport runway.

The RAF - which operated from 1970-1998 - suffered what appeared to be a fatal blow from a mass suicide (murder?) in prison by a trio of top leaders - including founding members Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin - in the aftermath of the "German Autumn," but the organization continued on its brutal trail of bombings and murder into the early-1990s.

Aust - co-writer of the film script for the 2008 German movie, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film - traces the creation of the group from the student movement of the 1960s, with the foundation being built after the suppression of a protest against the Shah of Iran's 1967 Berlin visit. The organization created by journalist Ulrike Meinhof, street fighter Baader and Ensslin.

A wealth of new information unearthed from formerly classified documents from East German government files of the Stasi (East Germany's Ministry of State Security) and additional testimony over the years from RAF members gives a clearer picture on funding sources, planning of the crimes and rivalries within the group. An interesting section concerns the role of the lawyers in the organization, which includes Otto Schily, who was later Minister of the Interior for Chancellor Gerhard Schroder.

Though the ultimate goals may not have been delineated clearly to each member, the drive to a utopian (actually, dystopian) society is spearheaded through the lure of power in Communist "urban guerrilla" warfare to topple the West German government. By exploring the inner-workings of the RAF from a number of fresh angles, Aust delivers a definitive account of the West German terror machine.

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A: When the book first came out in 1985, a lot of copies were being bought by RAF members who were sitting in jail. Some of them learned about the first generation of the group mainly by reading the book. But that didn't stop them--or their sympathizers--from being very critical of it. On a talk show, Hans Christian Ströbele, who was a former RAF lawyer and later a member of parliament (Green Party) said that Baader and Meinhof would roll over in their graves if they read the book...After more than twenty years, I now have the feeling that even people from the left see the book as a rather fair and correct work of journalism. Now their main argument is that the book has the Deutungshoheit about the subject--which means something like opinion leadership about the subject of RAF-Terrorism.

Q: There are many of people who romanticize the leaders of the RAF without understanding the devastation that they wrought. The Baader-Meinhof Complex, the Oscar-Nominee movie that you wrote last year, was accused of glorifying terrorism. What are your thoughts about those criticisms? Is there even a way to portray the Baader-Meinhof saga without being accused of glorifying or romanticizing terrorism?

A: The moment you write or make films about groups like the RAF you support their immorality. I wanted to portray this group as accurately as possible. It would be impossible for a book reader or film viewer to understand why so many people followed them if they were portrayed only as villains and criminals. It was their charisma that made them so dangerous. One of the reasons why we showed the group's bombings and killings in such detail was that we wanted to explain what terrorism really is: the terror and killing of people--of human beings--not of lifeless character masks. The aim was to make viewers understand why people of such high moral standards turned into ruthless killers, how hyper moral turned into immorality.

Q: Do you see any homegrown, leftwing terrorist movements taking root in Europe or America again? One of the reasons that the Baader-Meinhof Group was able to rise to prominence early in the 70's was partially because of ineffective police work. It seems that in the modern climate, particularly since 9/11, it would be extremely hard for any band of urban revolutionaries to wage a similar war without being quickly caught. Do you agree? What kind of left-wing radical movement COULD succeed?

A: Any kind of terrorist activity is always a part of a bigger radical movement. A terrorist group can evolve only when a bigger radical movement of any kind exists--left, right, nationalist or religious. Organizations like al Qaeda can only function from inside a global Islamist movement. Similarly the RAF was a part of the radical left in Germany, at least in the beginning. And only if this terrorist group is imbedded in a major movement can it have enough supporters to operate for a longer period of time. The members of the RAF were mainly arrested because normal people--even leftists--called the police. The enormous buildup of the police and the security agencies in Germany could not have been as effective without the cooperation of the people. The only way for a left-wing radical movement to succeed is by using the power of convincing the people rather than employing violence of any kind.

Q: The single hardest concept for an American living in the early 21st century is to understand is the notion that the members of the RAF felt that by attacking the state and having the state respond with massive retaliation, that there would be an enormous number of German people who would then take up their cause and overthrow the state. It just seems utterly delusional, especially coming from clearly intelligent people. How could they get to the point where this seemed rational?

A: I can only quote Ulrike Meinhof who often said "wie kommt die Dummheit in die Intelligenz?" which means "how can stupidity invade intelligence?" The first mistake the RAF made was not seeing reality. For me the whole struggle from the very beginning of my research was to realizing that the RAF had a quasi-religious character more than a rational political character. To think that in Germany the masses would overthrow the capitalist system was completely irrational. I cannot believe that they really believed that. Rather, they acted like political or religious martyrs to show that the state was as brutal as they thought it

was. It was an experiment with their own--and others'--lives.

Q: What was Ulrike Meinhof like as a person before going underground? Reading her Konkret essays in chronological order, one is struck by how much more hardened, desperate, and humorless she became in her later columns. Was she like that in her personal life? Did she have fun and socialize? Did she seem like she had an internal conflict?

A: Ulrike was a very impressive person. She was well-educated and could get her point across very convincingly. At the same time she was quite an intolerant individual who thought she knew things better than others... However, people of the liberal movement adored her, and she socialized a lot during her time in Hamburg and with Konkret, where at this time she wrote about the poor, about people in sweat shops and in prison. In the end she could not live in these two worlds. When she went to Berlin she grew more and more depressed. Ultimately, I think her involvement in the RAF was due to many personal and psychological reasons. Read more

#### Review

"This is one of the best books I've read this year in any genre."--John Wilson, Christianity Today

"Aust writes about his subject with admirable dispassion and clarity and in exacting detail, tracking the cat-and-mouse movements between the group and the German police and its political leaders not just over several years, but down to the hour... one could not ask for a better guide to this story, and baring some significant new revelations, "Baader-Meinhof" is certain to be the final word on the subject."--The Seattle Times

#### About the Author

Stefan Aust is a journalist and editor living in Germany. He has been chief editor of Spiegel TV, and was chief editor of Der Spiegel in Hamburg from 1994-2008. Aust is co-writer of the film script for the German movie Der Baader Meinhof Komplex, which released in Germany in Fall 2008 and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

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