

Helge Döhring with DC

Anarcho-Syndicalism Under and Against the Nazis, an Interview

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The publication of the revised and enlarged second edition of *Anarcho-Syndikalismus in Deutschland 1933 -1945* [*Anarcho-Syndicalism in Germany, 1933-1945*] occasioned the following interview with historian Helge Döhring . The interview was conducted over email in German during November and December 2023. It was then translated into English and edited by DC. Translator's comments appear in brackets []. Appearing in its first edition in 2013, Döhring's book presents a rare account of anarchist resistance to fascism in Germany. It has not yet appeared in English translation.

For more information about the book (in German):

<https://syndikalismusforschung.wordpress.com/2023/11/15/neuaufgabe-anarcho-syndikalismus-in-deutschland-1933-1945/>

Helge Döhring is a historian and literary scholar born in 1972 and currently based in Bremen, Germany. In addition to *Anarcho-Syndikalismus in Deutschland 1933 -1945*, his books about the syndicalist and anarchist labor movement include *Syndikalismus in Deutschland 1914-1918* (*Syndicalism in Germany, 1914-1918*) (2013), *Organisierter Anarchismus in Deutschland von 1918 bis 1933* [*Organized Anarchism in Germany: 1914-1918*] (three volumes, 2018-2020), *Syndikalistisch-Anarchistischen Jugend Deutschlands* [*Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth of Germany*] (2011), *Schwarzen Scharen* [*Black Bands*], and an annotated bibliography of the syndicalist press in Germany (2010). He is an employee and co-founder of the Institut für Syndikalismusforschung (Institute for Syndicalism Research) and co-editor of the yearbook "Syfo – Forschung & Bewegung".

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DC: *Your book is currently only available in German. For those of us who do not read German, what is the book's topic and scope?*

Helge Döhring (HD): The book deals with the history of anarcho-syndicalism in Germany, starting in 1933 when the Nazis came to power, and ending in 1945 at the collapse of the Nazi empire. The book was just under 200 pages in its first edition (2013), and is just under 250 pages in the second, revised edition (2023).¹

DC: *What prompted you to write about this topic?*

HD: In my work as a historian, I try to research every period of anarcho-syndicalism in Germany, from the beginning of the industrial age in the mid-19th century, to the present. It is true that, before 1933, the labor movement experienced dictatorial periods with the monarchy, imperial anti-socialist laws [“Sozialistengesetze”] during World War I, the Social Democrat's efforts to suppress regional revolutionary attempts from 1918-1923, the murder of the philosopher Gustav Landauer, and the pre-fascist government under Heinrich Brüning from 1930 or Franz von Papen from 1932. But 1933 marked a turning point when the labor movement as a whole was smashed, and made completely illegal. However, anarcho-syndicalism continued to show signs of life, and I followed in its footsteps. In almost every region throughout this period, there were courageous people who remained upright and resistant. Some survived and were able to reflect on this period, how they stuck together as people and as comrades and did good.

DC: *For those who might be unfamiliar, please tell us about the Institut für Syndikalismusforschung (Institute for Syndicalism Research), its research and publishing, and your involvement with the project.*

HD: First of all, the term "syndicalism" in German always means "anarcho-syndicalism".²

Along with a friend and comrade, I founded the Institute for Syndicalism Research in 2007. We now have four employees and cooperate with a large number of very different people and institutions, including archives, journalists, publishers, contemporary witnesses, historians, museums, students, and – most of all – anarcho-syndicalists. We research and publish about anarcho-syndicalism for and from within the anarcho-syndicalist movement. We are all wage laborers. We don't earn any money at the Institute for Syndicalism Research. Our work is all-volunteer. We intend our activities to help create a communist-anarchist society.³

We are experts in a field of research that bourgeois science ignores: anarcho-syndicalism, and to some extent the broader anarchist movements in German-speaking countries and Romania. Most of our publications are pioneering work. We research different regions, biographies, periods, organizations, the history of ideas and detailed questions. We also publish collections of material and comment on questions of scientific methodology that are useful for revolutionary research. Of course, we also keep an eye on international history. We help other research initiatives and exchange ideas with them.

1 Verlag Edition AV. “Verlag Edition AV - Helge Döhring; Anarcho-Syndikalismus in Deutschland 1933-1945.” Accessed December 6, 2023. http://www.edition-av.de/buecher/doehring-anarcho-syndikalismus_deutschland_1933-1945.html.

2 Döhring, Helge. “Syndikalismus: Der Begriff im Kontext der Entwicklung - Syndikalismusforschung.” Institut für Syndikalismusforschung, March 2008. <https://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/sybegriff.htm>.

3 Der Syfo-Blog. “Über uns/About us,” February 3, 2011. <https://syndikalismusforschung.wordpress.com/uber-uns/>.

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We also publish a research journal called "Kampfgeistern" [Fighting Spirit] and an edition of pamphlets called "Edition Syfo". "Syfo" stands for "syndicalism research". However, our main output is longer, book-length studies. In our 15 years of existence, we have published over 20 self-researched books, and just as many pamphlets.⁴ We also participate in external book projects, anthologies and even in the bourgeois "*Staatslexikon*" [State Encyclopedia] – although we have not compromised our content. We present at book fairs and look forward to further international contacts.

DC: This book covers the historical period 1933-1945, but you have previously traced anarcho-syndicalism in Germany to 1890. What did the anarcho-syndicalist movement look like before the period you cover in your book?

HD: Anarcho-syndicalism was always a minority movement in Germany, much smaller than the social democratic trade unions. The latter were always centralist, pro-capitalist, and pro-state. The anarcho-syndicalists were federalist, anti-capitalist, oriented to class-struggle, and anti-state. The anarcho-syndicalists were also consistently anti-militarist and favored libertarian pedagogy in the spirit of Francisco Ferrer. The centralist Social Democrats made pacts with the state and the military before, during, and after World War I.⁵ In 1933, the social democratic trade unions were unfortunate that the Nazis did not see them as allies as all other previous German governments had.

The anarcho-syndicalist labor unions had regional successes, but remained limited to a few thousand members. At their peak around 1920, there were 150,000 members, mainly construction workers, metalworkers, miners, woodworkers, textile workers, and dockworkers. They were involved in major strikes. Most of their members were in the Berlin area, on the Rhine and Ruhr, Saxony, Thuringia, and in most major cities. They had their own regional and industry-specific publications, along with general newspapers such as "Der Syndikalist" [The Syndicalist] or "Die Internationale" [The International]. They were active in cultural circles like book guilds and societies, the freethinkers (anti-clerical groups), sex education advocates, women's associations, and the youth movement. Internationally renowned artists such as the painter Heinrich Vogeler and the writer Theodor Plievier belonged to or were associated with anarcho-syndicalist organizations. Anarcho-syndicalists were also involved in unemployment organizations, and in the fights against fascism and party communism.⁶ The anarcho-syndicalists in Germany practised solidarity with politically persecuted comrades all over the world. They organized relief funds and rallies for people such as Milly Witkop-Rocker, Mark Mratschny, and Alexander Schapiro. The International Workingmen's Association (IWA) was founded in Germany in 1922 on the initiative of German-speaking anarcho-syndicalists and its secretariat remained there until 1933.⁷ Rudolf Rocker was its theoretical head and is still considered the most important representative of historical anarcho-syndicalism.⁸ In a theoretical sense, the movement was grandiose. But, in

4 "2007-2017 - 10 Jahre Syfo." Bremen: Institut für Syndikalismusforschung, January 2018.

<https://syndikalismusforschung.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/10-jahre-syfo-broschc3bcre.pdf>.

5 Döhring, Helge. *Syndikalismus in Deutschland 1914-1918: "Im Herzen der Bestie."* 1. Aufl. Kapital braucht Kriege - wir nicht! Lich/Hessen: Edition AV, 2013. <http://www.edition-av.de/buecher/doering-syndikalismus-erster-weltkrieg.html>.

6 Döhring, Helge. *Syndicalism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in Germany: An Introduction.* Translated by John Carroll. Bremen: FAU-IAA, 2006. <https://files.libcom.org/files/syndicalism-Germany.pdf>.

7 Döhring, Helge. "100 Jahre Internationale Arbeiter-Assoziation." *Anarchismus.de*, September 7, 2022. <https://www.anarchismus.de/blog/geschichte/100-jahre-iaa>.

8 Döhring, Helge. "Rudolf Rocker Zum 150. Geburtstag. Leben, Werk und Wirkung," March 25, 2023. <https://www.anarchismus.de/blog/geschichte/rudolf-rocker-zum-150-geburtstag-leben-werk-und-wirkung>.

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practice, it was unable to assert itself against the overwhelming alliance of social democrats, German nationalists, industrialists, and the church. Anarcho-syndicalism in Germany was so weakened by the Social Democrats that the labor movement could not oppose the Nazis. A general strike could have brought down the Nazis and industrialists, for example, as the anarcho-syndicalists had done in Spain in 1936. But in Germany, the Social Democrats and Communists waited patiently and in vain for orders from their party and trade union headquarters to rise up.

DC: The Free Workers' Union of Germany (FAUD) seems to have anticipated the rise of National Socialism and prepared its opposition to the Nazis before 1933. What was the FAUD doing in 1932-1933?

HD: Ultimately, the Nazis were simply the political expression of capitalism unleashed. Capitalism has long enslaved and degraded the working class, well before the Nazis. And Nazism did not arrive suddenly. Rather, had its precursors in Prussian militarism and absolutism, and in the pre-fascist Freikorps troops that crushed the Bavarian, Bremen, and Ruhr-area revolutions after World War I. The lineage of despots stretches back through Paul von Hindenburg, Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian King Frederick II, and Martin Luther. In this respect, National Socialism as a reactionary movement offered little that was new. And certainly, they were not socialists, despite the name. Thyssen, Krupp, Deutsche Bank, IG Farben, and other mega-capitalists profited from the Nazis. With the Brüning government's deflationary policy and the global economic crisis, the economic and political situation came to a head. The government under Franz von Papen was already negotiating with Hitler and openly staged a coup against the Social Democratic Prussian government in the summer of 1932. However, it did not last long. As General von Schleicher took over the government in December 1932, big business conducted negotiations with Hitler. It was also clear that the fascist currents in the so-called "Harzburg Front" (1931) stood together and, with Alfred Hugenberg, had absolute media dominance in Germany. Throughout the entire duration of the so-called "Weimar Republic" – which was by no means democratic – thousands of social revolutionaries were imprisoned. Even before 1933, anarcho-syndicalists had no collective bargaining rights with their trade union, and the FAUD was not recognized as a trade union by the legislature!⁹ The FAUD's activities were quickly declared illegal.

Internationally, too, more and more national sections of the IWA in Europe and in South America were forced underground because of emerging or intensifying dictatorships. In 1933, the Bolsheviks ruled in Russia. The fascists were in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Argentina. Everywhere, capital relied on political centralism to strictly control the workers' movement. In this respect, Germany fascism was not surprising; it was a matter of time. But until 1932 it was not yet clear which faction of the fascists would prevail: the German nationalists or the Nazis, the latter who did not hide their destructive urge.

Because of the economic crisis, around 60% of the anarcho-syndicalists' membership was unemployed. That, and the fact their membership was only few thousand, meant the anarcho-syndicalists had little economic power. So they involved themselves in cultural organizations, unemployed groups, and anti-fascist military organizations like the "Schwarzen Scharen" ["Black Band"].¹⁰ They tried to increase

9 Linow, Fritz. "Eine unmögliche Entscheidung des Reichsarbeitsgerichtes." Die Internationale, October 1930. <https://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/linowarbeit.htm>.

10 Döhring, Helge, and Kuhn, Gabriel. "Schwarze Scharen: Anarcho-Syndicalist Militias in Germany, 1929–1933." In *Setting Sights: Histories and Reflections on Community Armed Self-Defense*, edited by Scott Crow, 306. Oakland: PM Press, 2018; Döhring, Helge. *Schwarze Scharen: anarcho-syndikalistische Arbeiterwehr (1929-1933)*. 1. Auflage. Lich-Hessen: Edition AV, 2011. http://www.edition-av.de/buecher/schwarze_scharen.html.

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their influence on the working class as a whole. Direct action, class struggle, and general strikes were the only way to prevent dictatorships and authoritarianism. The anarcho-syndicalists confronted the cultural dumbing down that benefited the capitalists. That is, they organized against the spirit of subservience, religion, command, and obedience.¹¹ Only educated and self-confident people – individuals who believe in values of mutual aid – can build a free society in which the rule of man over man will be abolished. As Rudolf Rocker concisely put it: socialism is ultimately a question of culture. Despite press censorship, they continued to try to produce newspapers. They maintained extensive international contacts. Within weeks of Hitler coming to power, they tried to persuade the workers to go on general strike. They prepared for their organization being made illegal. They discussed who should take over the underground leadership of the FAUD and what they should do. Many local associations disbanded themselves beforehand so that their assets could not be confiscated by the state. This strategy also led to fewer arrests after organizing was banned. After all, organizations that do not exist have no members and no assets. Of course, they were still arrested, placed in "protective custody" for which the authorities did not have to prove any particular illegal activity.

DC: Many outside Germany might be surprised to learn that there was an anarcho-syndicalist movement active in Germany during the years 1933-1945. Organizations like the FAUD were made illegal. But you appear to have found a lot of forgotten history. First, introduce us to the major anarcho-syndicalist figures, organizations, projects, and publications that operated in Germany during this period? Then, how did groups like the FAUD organize within the context of intense repression? Also, how did anarcho-syndicalists manage to produce and circulate illegal publications?

HD: The anarcho-syndicalist movement was an original workers' movement made up of industrial workers. Its structures had grown over decades. The members in the regions knew each other very well and trusted each other accordingly. It was very difficult for the police to plant informers in the movement. This was also the reason why anarcho-syndicalism in Germany didn't collapse until 1937. The police were only able to track them down when they arrested the communists working with anarcho-syndicalists. So, the cooperation with communists turned out to be a mistake. One resistance group Kassel lasted until 1942. The underground FAUD structures formed in 1933 include:

1. FAUD domestic management
2. FAUD International Executive (in Amsterdam)
3. Regional FAUD networks
4. FAUD contacts within the secretariat of the ILO

All of them were connected by couriers working clandestinely and had the following tasks:

1. Organize escapes abroad
2. Smuggle illegal writings into Germany
3. Organize help for prisoners and surviving relatives and families
4. Distribute magazines produced in Germany
5. Keep in touch with each other through illegal meetings

Offensive agitation was not possible. The goal was survival.

¹¹ Geuenich, Stephan. *Pädagogische Ansätze im historischen Syndikalismus*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-22593-3>.

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DC: What ties existed between German anarcho-syndicalists and the international anarchist movement before 1933? What did internationalism mean to them? How did German anarcho-syndicalists maintain those international relationships after 1933? For those German anarchists who fled to other countries after 1933, did they find new movements to join? For example, who were the Gruppe Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten (DAS), and what did they do in Spain during the Spanish Revolution?

HD: Some managed to escape to Spain to fight against Franco alongside the anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT. They also promoted the social revolution there in Spain. The escaped FAUD members were hopeful about Spain. They tried to communicate this hope back to Germany, which had witnessed the failure of the Marxist and authoritarian organizational principles of the social democrats and communists.

Anarcho-syndicalism has always been an international phenomenon. The IWA's contacts alone were extensive, an impressive network of correspondence and international solidarity. The IWA had a press office serving anarchist and syndicalist publications world. This press office published in English, Spanish, German, French and occasionally Esperanto. International anarcho-syndicalism was always receptive to emigration to centers like London, Paris and Berlin. The IWA's founder and head, Rudolf Rocker, lived and worked in all three of these cities. IWA Secretary, Augustin Souchy, was also a globetrotter. He was succeeded in this position by Helmut Rüdiger, one of the most important theorists of anarcho-syndicalism who was exiled to Sweden after 1945. They each spoke over half a dozen languages! For its part, Berlin in the 1920s was home to world-famous fugitive anarchists and syndicalists like Buenaventura Durruti, Francisco Ascaso, Nestor Makhno, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. The latter two had fled from Bolshevik Russia. There were robust solidarity movements for Sacco and Vanzetti, Radowitzky, Ghezzi, Tom Man, and Boldrini. The anarcho-syndicalists were familiar with flight and exile, and so an international network of mutual aid had grown over the decades.

Helmut Rüdiger and Etta Federn-Kohlhaas went to Spain as early as 1932. Some had already fled before Hitler came to power, in light of the fascist conditions that prevailed even before 1933. In Germany, there were fascist state governments and increasingly violent confrontations with Nazis and German nationalists. Even before Hitler, the governments were repressive and undemocratic. The anarcho-syndicalist newspaper, "Der Syndikalist", had already been banned several times in 1931-1932. It featured remarkable international reporting. Today, it is an excellent source for studying international anarcho-syndicalism in the 1920s and 1930s.¹²

While Augustin Souchy and Helmut Rüdiger immediately found their feet in Spain in 1932, Etta Federn-Kohlhaas (the first biographer of the German Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau) had great difficulty learning the language. However, all three had remarkable roles to play. Souchy and Rüdiger were German correspondents for revolutionary Spain, Federn-Kohlhaas contributed her own ideas about schools to the Mujeres Libres [Free Women]. Irma Götze temporarily led the German Anarcho-Syndicalist group, of which Martha Wüstemann was also a member, and ran an international revolutionary bookshop in Barcelona. Others, such as the German writer Carl Einstein, fought in the Durruti Column. Einstein would later give an impressive account of his experiences. At the beginning of the war, he did not know the German anarcho-syndicalists; he wanted to become involved with the

¹² Institut für Syndikalismusforschung. "Der Syndikalist," 2012.
<https://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/presse/syndikalist.htm>.

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communists in Spain. However, he made a fateful mistake at the office and met Helmut Rüdiger, whose influence on Einstein proved to be more convincing.¹³

The Nazis had built up their foreign organizations abroad, including in Spain, and were socially and economically anchored there. The DAS Group's (Gruppe Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten) [German Anarcho-Syndicalist Group] job was tracking down Nazis and their networks. The DAS carried out armed searches and arrests, expelling Nazis and confiscating their assets. The DAS had executive powers, but coordinated their efforts with the Spanish CNT. From the confiscated extensive material with sensitive data, they produced the documentary "Schwarz-Rotbuch. Dokumente über den Hitlerimperialismus" [The Black and Red Book: Documents Of Hitler's Imperialism], which they published in 1937. It was not very flattering for the Spanish state as it revealed how the Nazis' foreign organizations operated in Spain.¹⁴

After the fascist victory in Spain in 1939, many German anarcho-syndicalists went to Sweden. The country was neutral during the World War and also had a strong anarcho-syndicalist trade union, the SAC Syndikalisterna (Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation) [Swedish Workers' Central Organization]. After 1945, the German anarcho-syndicalists in Sweden included Helmut Rüdiger, the Götze family (who were the underground FAUD secretariat in Leipzig after 1933), Fred Schröder (founder of the FAUD foreign organization in Amsterdam), Gustav Doster, and Helmut Kirschey, who fought in Spain.¹⁵

Others made their way to France or the Netherlands. When fascism took hold in those countries in 1940, they went into hiding there. Many were discovered, deported to Germany, and sent to concentration camps.

Rudolf Rocker lived in the USA. Augustin Souchy was in Mexico. The very popular anarchist writer Erich Mühsam, who was a friend of Rudolf Rocker, could not be persuaded by friends to flee immediately at the end of February 1933. He did not leave that night because he wanted to claim an honorarium he was owed. He was arrested that very night. The Nazis murdered him in 1934.¹⁶

DC: You have previously written that "By 1927 the FAUD had crossed over from being a union that claimed to be an anarchist organization to being an anarchist organization that claimed to be a union." What happened to the FAUD's local unions when the Nazis took over, if any of them still existed? For example, what was the fate of the Düsseldorf and Berlin tilers, the workers at the Schuler machine factory in Göppingen, and miners in the Ruhr region?

HD: The social democratic, central trade unions, had always been loyal and devoted allies of capital. The capitalists could depend on those unions to protect their interests against the revolutionary working class. However, by 1933, this alliance was not enough to save the capitalists. Therefore, in addition to their system of forced labour, the Nazis created a compulsory organization called the "German Labour Front." They smashed the Social Democrats, who tried in vain to ally themselves with the Nazis. The

13 H. "Carl Einstein Im Spanischen Krieg - Syndikalismusforschung." Institut für Syndikalismusforschung. Accessed December 7, 2023. <https://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/heleinsteinst.htm>.

14 Deutsche-Anarcho-Syndikalisten. Schwarz-Rotbuch: Dokumente über den Hitlerimperialismus. Barcelona: ASY-Verlag, 1937. <https://archivkarloche.wordpress.com/schwarzrotbuch-1937/>.

15 Lindblom, Per. Svenska anarkister och syndikalister i spanska inbördeskriget. Federativs förlag, 2022. <https://www.federativsförlag.se/per-lindblom-svenska-anarkister-och-syndikalister-i-spanska-inbordeskriget/>.

16 Döhring, Helge. "Syndikalist aus Überzeugung - Erich Mühsam und die FAUD." Institut für Syndikalismusforschung. Accessed December 7, 2023. <https://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/helerich.htm>.

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Deutsche Arbeitsfront [German Labor Front] was just as loyal to German economic interests as the Social Democrats. Their similar conception of “national socialism” was used to mollify by entertaining the working class, encouraging workers to turn away from internationalism. During World War I, the Social Democrats called this "war socialism" ["Kriegssozialismus"]. It's a perverse term that represents a paradox. Just as the Social Democrats relied on increased prosperity for the working class to integrate them into capitalism and bourgeois society, the Nazis devised programs for colonization settlement and "Strength Through Joy" ["Kraft durch Freude"] recreational organizations to achieve a similar result.

The anarcho-syndicalists secretly, pointing out these contradictions and the danger of war to friends and colleagues: "If you vote for Hitler, you vote for war!". This agitation was very dangerous. The tilters in the city of Düsseldorf were still so strong in 1933 that there were plans to join the German Labor Front so that the anarcho-syndicalists could stay cohesive. This turned out to be illusory.

In one southern German company, anarcho-syndicalist metalworkers entered into an unusual alliance with their liberal, anti-Nazi boss. This ended up saving some lives. Their illegal meetings were disguised as recreational evening or outings. Since the Reichstag Fire Decree [Reichstagsbrandgesetzen], some 100,000 political opponents had been arbitrarily arrested and taken into "protective custody". Generally, they never saw trial and were only released after months of intimidation. Even after their release, the authorities and informers repeatedly harassed and terrorized these people on the streets. Some were simply murdered at police stations, by the SA [Sturmabteilung; Stormtroopers] or the Gestapo. The book goes into a few case studies. This history shows the difficulty of organizing, of asserting oneself and resisting the Nazi's propagandistic lies. In everyday life, the Nazis relied on all kinds of repression. For example: workers' apartments had to be flagged with a swastika flag on festive occasions; SA columns and the authorities had to be greeted with "Heil Hitler" on the street.

Slight deviations aroused suspicion of being anti-Nazis. With each knock on the door, one's pulse would quicken; it could be the Gestapo! Children were indoctrinated in schools – forced to sing Nazi songs and beat up Jewish children. It was risky to tell one's own child that they were doing wrong. In general, children talked a lot and were gullible, so care had to be taken in their upbringing so as not to arouse suspicion. It was also risky not to donate to fundraisers organized by the Hitler Youth. This was everyday life during the Nazi era. Even the anarcho-syndicalists' funerals were monitored by the police. From the beginning of the war, there was always the threat of imprisonment in concentration camps, forced recruitment into the Wehrmacht or other combat units. There were also so-called "probation battalions" [Bewährungsbataillone], which could be deliberately sent to certain death on the front lines. For example, simply listening to illegal radio stations or giving food to prisoners or forced laborers could get one in trouble. During the Hitler era, the aim was to survive with one's own convictions intact or flee the country. Those who still had the strength to do so became active in an organized way. In Germany, around 600 anarcho-syndicalists were active in organized illegal resistance.

DC: What did anarcho-syndicalist resistance to the Nazis look like? Your book addresses the resistance in a 13 different regions in Germany. Tell us about the centers of resistance you write about.

HD: I summarized the activities above. The FAUD domestic management was in Leipzig, represented by Ferdinand Götze. They used certain smuggling routes, including one to Czechoslovakia via the town

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of Schmiedeberg and two others across the western border to the Netherlands and Belgium via the towns of Aachen and Venlo. At these border crossings, the anarcho-syndicalists organized overnight accommodation, money, and local escorts across the border for those fleeing Germany. They continued to smuggle in newspapers from abroad with camouflaged titles. Under the patriotic title page "Deutschtum im Ausland. Blätter zur Pflege deutscher Art" ["German-ness Abroad: Pages for the Cultivation of the German Way"] concealed "Internationale. Neue Folge" ["The International: New Edition"]. One entered Czechoslovakia via heavily forested mountain ranges. There were no constantly-monitored border fortifications with customs checkpoints. Smuggling activities were most inconspicuous here in winter, when the nights were long and offered protection from view. Furthermore, they could resort to a way of getting around that was very fast: skiing.

The border areas were therefore of strategic importance, as was the city of Kassel, as it was located in the middle of Germany and offered a favorable distribution location. Likewise the Rhine-Main region. Anarcho-syndicalist organization and friendship networks were able to grow and consolidate here over many years. After Ferdinand Götze fled abroad at the end of 1934, Richard Thiede from Leipzig took over the role of chairman of the FAUD domestic leadership. The Nazi government could be pressured from abroad, and so international reports from inside the German Reich, for example about the murder of Erich Mühsam, were important.

Of course, even the states later known as the "Allies" were conciliatory with Hitler at this time. For example, there was the German-British naval agreement in 1935. There was also the participation of their teams in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, where the French team entered the stadium with a Hitler salute. Also notable was the "Munich Agreement" in 1938, by which Western powers intended Hitler to square off against the Soviet Union. The latter responded in 1939 with the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

The Nazis benefited from this foreign policy, invading Austria in 1938 and the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland in 1939. There, and in Germany, the Nazis openly and thoroughly terrorized the Jewish population and large sections of the working class. The Allies were not at all interested. The later consequences? The Franco dictatorship and various South American dictators also accommodated the German government. Today the Turkish dictator Erdogan is courted and pampered.

DC: Describe the relationship between the anarcho-syndicalist resistance to the Nazis and the resistance organized by other sections of the left.

HD: There was little and regionally limited cooperation between anarcho-syndicalists and the Marxist movement. This owes not only to ideological differences, but also to the fact that the anarcho-syndicalist resistance was generated from those groups that had already been active before 1933 and were therefore firmly established. They formed a dense network and an independent international organizational system. After 1933, few other resisters joined these groups. Nevertheless, anarcho-syndicalist structures also helped comrades from other organizations by smuggling them abroad or printing their pamphlets. Some of them also distributed written material from other organizations. However, it was clear that if the police penetrated one resistance network, the other resistance networks connected to it would be in great danger. Thus, some anarcho-syndicalist groups worked so clandestinely that there were other anarcho-syndicalists in the same place who were unaware of their activities. So, some anarcho-syndicalists joined other resistance groups who were easier to find. There were also places where the anarcho-syndicalists were so weak that they immediately joined other

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resistance groups. But in general, anarcho-syndicalism has an organizationally and ideologically independent history of resistance.¹⁷

DC: Your book also covers the intense repression that the German state meted out on the anarcho-syndicalists. What happened to the people who resisted the regime and were conscripted or locked up in prisons or concentration camps?

HD: One of the most common criminal charges against the illegal activities described above was "preparation for high treason". Accordingly, many anarcho-syndicalists were sentenced to several years in prison. Some, after serving their sentences, were immediately transferred to concentration camps without trial. Those with valuable professional qualifications were considered "indispensable" and so were lucky to not be drafted into the military. Politically persecuted people were also certified as "unfit for military service". Far from being a relief, those "unworthy of military service" were ostracized in society by a large part of the middle classes. This brought many personal misfortunes and didn't even eliminate the risk of being called up for military service in the final years of the war. Some managed to desert and join partisan units. Many died. In contrast to the communists, the anarcho-syndicalists had no underground network in the German concentration camps. They were isolated.¹⁸ The capitalists profited greatly from the camp and prison system. It was slavery in its purest form, just like in antiquity. Those who could not work were destined to die: "extermination through labor" ["Vernichtung durch Arbeit"] was the principle. Compared to the Jewish prisoners – who were immediately murdered for irrational, anti-Semitic reasons – the political prisoners were lucky.

Another criminal charge was "enemy favoritism". In one case, a comrade who gave shelter and supplies to a downed British pilot was charged because he did not immediately report the half-dead pilot to the Nazis.

The anarcho-syndicalist survivors were treated like criminals even after 1945. Anyone who deserted from the Wehrmacht was still considered to have a criminal record in the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG, West Germany]! During job interviews, a standard rhetorical question asked by company bosses was: "Did you serve?" In order to increase their small pensions (they could not contribute to their pension funds while imprisoned in the concentration camps), politically persecuted people filed "restitution applications". This was technically their right, but it was a degrading, painful, and lengthy procedure of questioning. The old Nazis, who also held high positions in the FRG, then decided on "restitution" (the term alone is a lie) in the "Restitution Authority" ["Entschädigungsbehörden"]. The defeat of the Nazis in 1945 was merely a military capitulation. In reality, they retained their social functions as teachers, professors, academics, bureaucrats, court officials, and police. Prominent Nazis continued to be influential, such as Hans Carl Nipperdey (President of the Federal Labor Court, previously an influential Nazi lawyer), Hans Globke (Head of the Federal Chancellery under Chancellor Adenauer, previously responsible for the racial laws against Jews), and the second president of West Germany, Heinrich Lübke (who is said to have drawn up construction plans for concentration

17 Döhring, Helge. "Das Verhältnis von Anarcho-Syndikalisten zu Marxisten in Deutschland 1933-1951." In *Begegnungen feindlicher Brüder: Zum Verhältnis von Anarchismus und Marxismus in der Geschichte Der sozialistischen Bewegung*, edited by Philippe Kellermann. Münster: Unrast, 2011. <https://unrast-verlag.de/produkt/begegnungen-feindlicher-brueder-iii/>.

18 Döhring, Helge. *Konflikte und Niederlagen des Syndikalismus in Deutschland*. 1. Auflage. Bodenburg: Verlag Edition AV, 2022. <https://syndikalismusforschung.wordpress.com/2022/04/11/neu-konflikte-und-niederlagen-des-syndikalismus-in-deutschland/>.

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camps). In this sense, the official historiography's "zero hour" never really happened, at least in terms of the social history. Capital survived every political change. The political stage on the workers' side was immediately dominated by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), as well as the old social democratic trade unions. Countless Prussian vices existed in the FRG, as did militarism and homophobia - Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code, which prohibited homosexuality, was on the books until 1994! The misogynistic Paragraph 218 of the Penal Code still exists today. Among such atrocities, anarcho-syndicalists and others with a freedom-oriented mindset and found it very difficult to reorganize. One noble attempt in 1950s, an organization called the Föderation freiheitlicher Sozialisten [Libertarian Socialist Federation], failed.¹⁹

DC: You've written about anarcho-syndicalism in Germany before, and some of that writing is available in English. For example, there's your article "Syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism in Germany", available here: <https://files.libcom.org/files/syndicalism-Germany.pdf>. I imagine it is easier to research and write about anarchosyndicalism before 1933. What were some of the challenges you faced in uncovering and writing the history 1933-1945? Also, what surprised you as you recovered this forgotten or neglected history?

HD: Hardly any research has been as straightforward and unsurprising for me as the history of 1933-1945. As I explained above, the period unfolded in predictable manner. There are a few chapters in the book that provide background on the pre-Nazi period. The anarcho-syndicalists were on the losing side, and it was clear that Social Democrats would fail because they had never seriously represented workers' interests. We have the Social Democrats to thank for World War I. According to the historian Fritz Fischer, World War I would not have happened without German Social Democracy. Why should the Social Democrats not also try to cooperate with other fascist Reich government? Rudolf Rocker described the fatal development of the German labor movement in a historically adept and impressive manner, for example in his book "Absolutistische Gedankengänge im Sozialismus" ["Absolutist Thinking in Socialism"]. According to this work, the workers' movement had a centralist tradition; it tended towards command and obedience and was ever faithful to its leaders. Independent thinking and personal initiative were not welcome there. The conventional thinking in the labor movement at that time was that the general strike was "general nonsense". Socialism was supposed to be decreed from above by the political leadership. Trade unions were politically inert. One should rely on the state, parties, and parliaments to enforce the workers' welfare. This is what Marxist theories taught: social democracy was the strongest current, building on the assumption that society would "evolve" into socialism with the development of the productive forces. Therefore, the workers should be complacent and quiet, and vote SPD. The other Marxists also trusted in the principle of leadership, but wanted to make Germany submissive to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence by means of military coups. They received their instructions from Moscow. Social Democrats and communists wanted workers to be obedient. Marxism did not permit any social systems other than those that were centrally imposed from above. None of this was surprising to contemporaries, or me.

Anarcho-syndicalism, on the other hand, developed the model of a free society with labor exchanges [hiring halls] operating on federalist principles. They had an educational model that encouraged individuals to become self-confident, responsible members of a solidarity-based society. Of course, there was a ray of hope with the Spanish Revolution of 1935-1937. While Moscow betrayed the

¹⁹ Degen, Hans Jürgen. Anarchismus in Deutschland 1945-1960. Die Föderation freiheitlicher Sozialisten. Lich: Verl. Edition AV, 2015. <http://www.edition-av.de/buecher/degen-ffs.html>.

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Marxists to Hitler, the anarcho-syndicalists who the Marxists arrogantly ridiculed showed what was only possible without Marxism: one of the most important social revolutions in world history. Because in Spain, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo [CNT; National Confederation of Labor] controlled! The primary sources for the research is completely different from that for the history before 1933, where I had above-ground anarcho-syndicalist press and organizational minutes. After 1933, my sources were mainly court records and police sources. There are also some reports from survivors. I had to do much more archival research.

I was most surprised that Rudolf Rocker's 63rd birthday could be celebrated in a concentration camp in southern Germany. The imprisoned organizer Karl Dingler wrote to Rudolf Rocker in 1946:

On March 25, 1936, a circle of the most reliable prisoners celebrated your 63rd birthday in the camp. We gathered at dusk so as not to be surprised by guards. We had no light. Only the moon cast a pale glow through the barred windows. In a narrative tone, I paid tribute to your life, as far as I could remember the dates, and illuminated your books. [...] Your ears must have been ringing that evening, Rudolf, when I congratulated you on your birthday out of the darkest night into an unknown distance and half a hundred political prisoners, Communists, Social Democrats, Catholic clergymen, former Ludendorff officers and German Nationals joined in the greeting and congratulations with the deepest emotion. Imprisonment makes people receptive. The doctrinarianism that is so characteristic of our compatriots in the days of freedom is transformed into a tolerant openness to other ideas within the dull walls of the prisons, and I have proof today that no one has forgotten that Rocker celebration of March 1936.²⁰

DC: You conclude your book with a chapter looking to the future of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. What lessons do you draw from this history? What can we look forward to?

HD: Once fascism is in power, it is too late. Resistance must take place in advance to be of any significance. It is necessary to abolish the following preconditions of fascism:

- Capitalism in the economic sphere;
- Militarism and centralism in the political sphere; and
- Voluntary servitude and religion in the cultural sphere.

A decent life requires

- A socialist economy;
- A politically federalist social order; and
- Self-confident, energetic, knowledgeable, and socially-capable individuals who think and act freely according to the principles of "mutual aid".

Everything begins on a small scale. I am pleased by the small successes along the way.

DC: Finally, what else can be done to rescue our history from the shadows? What is on the horizon for you as far as research and writing?

HD: You can look forward to:

²⁰ Dingler, Karl. "Letter to Rudolf Rocker," December 31, 1946. IISG Rudolf Rocker Papers, 84. <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH01194.84>.

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- 2024: Anarcho-Syndicalism on the Lower Weser, 1918-1933 (a regional study of North-West Germany: Bremen, Bremerhaven, Delmenhorst)
- 2024: Peasants' Wars of 1525 and Anarcho-syndicalism
- 2025: Women Anarcho-syndicalists: German-speaking Women in Anarcho-syndicalism

I think it is important to see history as a way to approach today's tasks. We must make history useful. For me, it is ideally linked to my own experiences as an activist and to an international orientation. This kind of multidimensionality helps enormously. I am happy to see historical projects that research and publish independently, new contacts and exciting discoveries, a strengthened anarcho-syndicalist movement, and contented readers across the world.

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