

PARTICULARLY UNIVERSAL?

The Black Panther Party, Angela Davis, and the West German Left

by Andrew Tompkins

Introduction

2008 is the 40th anniversary of 1968 and thus the occasion for a new flurry of commemorations and examinations of that past's relationship to us today. At a recent speech in Chicago, Angela Davis commented that there were many things she did not miss about the world of the 1960s and 1970s, but the widespread empathy for distant others and solidarity with people one had never met were among the positive phenomena of those times that seem to be lacking at present.¹ Solidarity in that period crossed many borders, and not just national ones. Demonstrators everywhere borrowed ideas and ideals from what would on the surface appear to be the unlikeliest of sources.

As the activism of the 1960s spilled over (or out) into the 1970s, Left movements around the world sought to draw their own lessons from the struggles of people who were very different from themselves. The particular situations of the Vietnamese, Palestinians, African-Americans, and other groups resisting specific and highly divergent constellations of oppression were universalized into a symbolic, global discourse about revolution and anti-imperialism. The universalist discourse radically simplified the real histories of the groups in question into a usually hagiographic narrative that had little to say about their internal contradictions and ambivalences. So distilled, the experiences of these radical, "revolutionary subjects" were then picked up and examined by movements elsewhere for whom the broad, revolutionary story served an inspirational and mobilizing

¹ January 24th, 2008 speech in Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago

function. The universal narrative was thus re-particularized as it was adapted to serve the specific contexts of the various movements that interpreted the revolutionary Others. In the crucible of the youth and student movement activism of the 1968 “world-historical moment”², the particular became universal, but the universal also became particular.

This paper explores one instance of the “particularly universal” solidarity of that era: that between elements of the West German Left and African-American militants such as the Black Panther Party (BPP) and Angela Davis.³ While this solidarity may seem in many ways to represent “an unusual transnational alliance,”⁴ it is worth bearing in mind that it was by no means unique. The BPP and Angela Davis were broadly popular both inside and outside West Germany. Domestically, they attracted support from a wide range of groups in the rapidly fragmenting German Left, groups that otherwise saw themselves in bitter competition with one another. Internationally, sympathy for the BPP was very widespread: imitators or solidarity groups existed in the United States, Finland, Japan, Great Britain, Israel, Denmark, Australia, and both Germanys, and the Party had contacts in Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, China and Algeria.⁵ The movement to “Free

² George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987).

³ Throughout this paper, I will use the term “black militants” to refer collectively to the Black Panthers and Angela Davis, even though I recognize both that there are important differences between these two and that the term implies a much broader group than I specifically discuss. However, I feel that the term “black militants” succinctly summarizes something important about what groups far removed from the immediate circumstances of these specific individuals saw in them.

⁴ Jürgen Rolf Ruckaberle, “Black Panthers and German radicals in an unusual transnational alliance for liberation, 1968-1972” (M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon, 2001).

⁵ Michael L. Clemons and Charles E. Jones, “Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena,” in *Liberation, imagination, and the Black Panther Party : a new look at the Panthers and their legacy*, ed. Kathleen Cleaver and George N. Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), Jennifer B. Smith, *An international history of*

Angela Davis and all political prisoners” was also present in many of these countries and even reached into Eastern Europe and the Soviet bloc.⁶ While one must clearly differentiate between these various movements in sundry countries, there is something remarkable in their common focus: they were all talking about the African-American experience in some way or another, even if they were not all saying the same thing.

But what explains these alliances generally, and the West German one in particular? On the surface, it would seem that the differences between white youth in post-fascist, divided Germany and African-Americans in urban ghettos would seem to overwhelm any similarities that might have existed. Why then did this alliance form? Why did people choose to invest their hopes in them? What purpose did solidarity serve in the local context and what were its consequences?

The topic of West German solidarity with the Black Panthers and Angela Davis sits uncomfortably at the intersection of several bodies of literature. For example, one part of it relates to the history of the Black Panthers, specifically their presence on the international stage. Most existing work in this vein discusses international influences on the Black Panthers, their own outreach as an organization, and the imitators they spawned around the globe.⁷ However, it says little about what the Black Panthers meant to many of the foreigners who aligned with them, and less still about what impact the BPP might

the Black Panther Party, Studies in African American history and culture (New York: Garland, 1999).

⁶ "Rettet Angela vor dem Justizmord!" *Der SPIEGEL* no. 46, 8 Nov 1971, "A Conversation with Angela Davis," in *Vibrations* (USA: 1970) (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/freevod.html>).

⁷ Smith, *An international history of the Black Panther Party*, Clemons and Jones, "Global solidarity.", Yohuru R. Williams, "White Tigers, Brown Berets, Black Panthers, Oh My!," in *In search of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

have had on politics outside the United States. Another approach would be to look at books about the German-American encounter as it relates to African-Americans. Here, the experiences of black GIs and the appeal of African-American culture in postwar West Germany have received the most scrutiny, particularly in the period up to the end of the 1950s.⁸ While these studies are important and relevant, this paper will look at the specifically political appeal of black militants to white German youth in the 1960s.

Another category of literature is the sociological and historical work on transnational social movements and “1968.” On the sociological side, McAdam and Rucht have looked at the diffusion of protest practices from the American Civil Rights movement to the West German student movement by way of the American New Left (a pathway which I also consider).⁹ They argue that these practices moved across the Atlantic through a combination of personal networks and less tangible affinities created by the “attribution of similarity” between Left movements; I have accordingly tried to pay some attention to both in my own analysis. While McAdam and Rucht are interested in the flow of protest *practices*, historians have examined the transfer of protest *content*, coming also from other directions. Several authors have highlighted the influence of

⁸ Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler : Black occupation children in postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), Moritz Ege, *Schwarz werden : "Afroamerikanophilie" in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007). I am also aware of reputable books by Höhn and Poiger, but was unable to consult them while preparing this paper. Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins : the German-American encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, rock, and rebels : cold war politics and American culture in a divided Germany*, Studies on the history of society and culture 35 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁹ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528, no. July 1993 (1993).

Vietnam and the “Third World” on American and European youth.¹⁰ They have also articulated many aspects of the transnational discourse that fostered solidarity in the late 1960s. However, they have generally failed to look at how solidarity becomes locally adapted and what functions it can serve for those providing it.

Finally, there exists a very small (but apparently growing) literature on the specific case of West German solidarity with the Black Panthers.¹¹ The most comprehensive treatment of this is in Jürgen Ruckaberle’s M.A. thesis, which is based on a wide variety of sources and goes into greater detail than is possible here.¹² His study, which uses mostly archival material from southern Germany, is nicely complemented by Martin Klimke’s contribution on the *Black-Panther-Solidaritätskomitees* in Wolfgang Kraushaar’s recent compendium on left-wing terrorism.¹³ Klimke’s article is based on materials from the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* (HIS) and Berlin “*APO und soziale Bewegungen*” archives that I also visited for my research. However, I am not interested, as Klimke is, in using these sources to show a connection between the 1968

¹⁰ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Die 68er Bewegung: Deutschland, Westeuropa, USA* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre : eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und -theorien aus der Dritten Welt*, Beiträge zur politischen Wissenschaft Bd. 88 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996). Linkage between exaggerated identification with the Third World and violence in the “First World” also comes up in Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: the Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹¹ Martin Klimke, “Black Power, die Black-Panther-Solidaritätskomitees und der bewaffnete Kampf,” in *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, ed. Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), Ruckaberle, “Unusual transnational alliance”. The German Historical Institute has also announced an upcoming talk by Maria Höhn entitled “‘I Prefer Panthers to Pigs’: German Students, Black Panther GIs and the 1970/71 Racial Crisis in the 7th Army.” The quote in her title comes from KD Wolff’s congressional testimony (see below).

¹² Ruckaberle, “Unusual transnational alliance”.

¹³ Klimke, “Solidaritätskomitees.”

movements and the later violence of the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF); that topic received considerable attention in the German press last year with the anniversaries of both Benno Ohnesorg's 1967 murder by police and the so-called *Deutscher Herbst* of 1977. My purpose instead is to elucidate why the Black Panthers—along with Angela Davis, who makes only brief appearances in these other works—appealed to the Left generally, and not only to elements of it that eventually resorted to terrorism.

An ideal subject: black militants in the imagination of the West German Left

In West Germany, active solidarity with black militants was forged and (partially) guided by specific organizations that sought to ascribe particular meanings to the objects of their solidarity. The Frankfurt-based Black Panther Solidarity Committee (BPSK) was formed in 1969 by Karl Dietrich ("KD") Wolff and other core members of *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS-DE),¹⁴ the central organization of the (then disintegrating) West German student movement.¹⁵ The BPSK was forced to transform itself and divorce its interests from the BPP after the acrimonious, public split between BPP leaders Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver in February 1971. The main period of Angela Davis solidarity in Germany occurred from October 1970 to June 1972, when Davis was in US federal custody and on trial. Though there is a partial overlap between

¹⁴ Because I refer to both the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* and Students for a Democratic Society in this paper, I have added national suffixes to their common acronym to minimize confusion.

¹⁵ I use the term "student movement" to denote the campus-based mobilizations that were most closely associated with the period 1965-1968 in West Germany. The student movement was one phase in the development of the New Left, which I regard as existing roughly from 1960 into the 1980s. Most of the history of Black Panther and Angela Davis solidarity takes place in immediate post-student movement phase of the New Left, after the failures of late 1968 but prior to the mid-1970s domination of the German Left by numerous communist splinter groups (*K-Gruppen*).

the activities of the BPSK and the Angela Davis Solidarity Committee (ADSK), the organizations were more or less distinct.¹⁶ The ADSK “consciously gave itself a status independent of left organizations in order to be able to unite groups of all orientations for the campaign”¹⁷, and summoned numerous intellectuals as speakers—many of whom knew Angela Davis personally—for its largest event, the *Am Beispiel Angela Davis* conference of June 1972. By contrast, the BPSK emerged more directly from the existing student movement and responded to that movement’s needs. In spite of their differences, both the BPSK and ADSK referred to certain images of African-Americans and the United States that had been constructed in the course of the New Left’s transnational history in the mid- to late 1960s. It was on this level that they were able to appeal to a German Left audience and make remote struggles locally meaningful. This section describes how the German Left became familiar with black militants and why it came to see them as a possible focus for solidarity.

During the 1960s, West German activists often looked to their counterparts in the United States for inspiration. Their persistent fascination with American protest was one symptom of a broader “Americanization” that occurred worldwide, but which was especially pronounced in West Germany because of America’s postwar role there.¹⁸ When German would-be protesters peered across the Atlantic in the early 1960s, they saw a society being rapidly transformed as a result of African-American activism. The

¹⁶ None of the key figures of the BPSK appear in the published *Protokolle* of the Angela Davis conference (though ADSK member Detlev Claussen had also published in a BPSK publication).

¹⁷ ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel Angela Davis. Der Kongreß in Frankfurt. Reden, Referate, Diskussionsprotokolle* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1972), 8.

¹⁸ Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *Die Umkehr : deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2004), 164-65.

Civil Rights Movement responded to the particular oppression of black people in the South with a universal moral appeal, demanding that blacks be treated as human beings. The organizing of groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition (SCLC), and others not only built up the political pressure in Washington that led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, it also served to politicize white students in groups like the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS-US).¹⁹ In the long run, Germans too were affected by this growing politicization and themselves copied methods from their American counterparts. When students at the *Freie Universität Berlin* held a sit-in in 1966, it was in conscious imitation of the Berkeley FSM sit-in of 1964; they were also cognizant of that protest's major antecedent, the 1960 Greensboro sit-ins that had led to the founding of SNCC.²⁰ Americanization helped diffuse outward to West Germany the "high degree of identification of the New Left with the Afro-American movement" that existed in the United States.²¹

In the mid-1960s, two largely unrelated but parallel developments in American society occurred that would strongly affect the orientation of the West German left. The first was the increased radicalism of many African-Americans. Over the course of several "long, hot summers," it became clear that the landmark Voting Rights Act had

¹⁹ Each of the aforementioned groups, or individuals associated with them, came to enjoy a certain international celebrity that extended to West Germany.

²⁰ Reimut Reiche, "Studentenrevolte in Berkeley und Berlin," *Neue Kritik*, no. 38/39 (1966) (APO-Archiv). McAdam and Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas."

²¹ Klimke, "Solidaritätskomitees," 565.

done little to change the racist structures that existed across America.²² Many, especially outside the South, now looked to other African-American traditions of resistance like black nationalism (of the kind espoused by Malcolm X), armed militancy (Robert Williams), pan-Africanism (Marcus Garvey), and internationalism (including that of the Communist Party) for solutions to overcome what they deemed to be the failure of SCLC-style integration.²³ These traditions mixed with one another and coalesced with international developments, most importantly the struggles for national liberation in “Third World” countries like Vietnam (see below). Around the same time, politicized white youth in the United States were beginning to direct their attention to the escalating Vietnam War, which became a force for “synchronizing” New Left movements internationally.²⁴ Left activists considered Vietnam to be a paradigmatic case for national liberation, representing (in its most extrapolated form) the hope of global revolution—and the threat of its suppression by US imperialist power. Indeed, precisely this argument was made at a 1966 SDS-DE conference in Frankfurt, entitled “*Vietnam—Analyse eines Exempels*.”²⁵ Resistance by African-Americans and the Vietnamese to their specific circumstances seemed, by the mid-1960s, to represent two particular aspects of a universal struggle against oppression.

²² Just days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965, race riots erupted in the Los Angeles suburb of Watts. From 1964 to 1968, similar events occurred in Philadelphia, Harlem, Cleveland, Omaha, Detroit, Chicago, Newark, and other major cities.

²³ For a discussion of these, see Robert O. Self, “The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era,” in *In search of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁴ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey refers to the January 1968 Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese as the moment of “synchronization,” but the internationalization of it as a protest theme began earlier. Gilcher-Holtey, *Die 68er Bewegung*, 72-80.

²⁵ Herbert Marcuse. “Hauptreferat,” presented at Vietnam--Analyse eines Exempels, Frankfurt, May 22 1966 (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

An influential part of the West German student movement seized on associations between African-Americans and other “revolutionary subjects” to advance radicalization within their own country. The leaders of SDS-DE in West Berlin and Frankfurt (Rudi Dutschke, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, Bernd Rabehl, KD Wolff, and others) were especially captivated by the 1966 Tricontinental conference in Havana, Cuba, which presented itself as a gathering of the oppressed of all “Third World” countries.²⁶ Significantly, SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael also attended—making African-Americans the only group from a Western country to be represented there.²⁷ In 1967, SDS-DE founded a publishing house called Trikont whose purpose was to publish “texts on the Third World” chosen “on the basis of their applicability for campaigns... or strategy discussions” in Germany. African-Americans fell within this understanding of the Third World, and *Trikont* published at least two books on black liberation movements in America.²⁸ That West German Leftists saw African-Americans in particular as symbols of radical authenticity was demonstrated at the International Vietnam Congress of February 1968 in West Berlin.²⁹ There, before an overwhelmingly European audience, SNCC representative Dale Smith was asked to speak on the need for moving “from protest to resistance.” One

²⁶ See, for example, “Die Konferenz der Drei Kontinente,” *Neue Kritik*, no. 35 (1966) (APO-Archiv). In 1970, former SDS-DE president KD Wolff published a book about the conference. Karl Dietrich Wolff, ed., *Tricontinental : eine Auswahl, 1967-1970* (Frankfurt: März, 1970).

²⁷ Juchler, *Studentenbewegungen*, 173-4, 251-2.

²⁸ „Texte zur Dritten Welt werden aufgrund ihrer Umsetzbarkeit in Kampagnen oder als Modelle für Strategiediskussionen der Linken veröffentlicht.“ Conrad Schuhler, *Black Panther. Zur Konsolidierung des Klassenkampfes in den USA*, Schriften zum Klassenkampf, 12 (München: Trikont-Verl., 1969), 1. See also Dorothea Peters, *USA: farbige Revolution und Klassenkampf: die Organisation des farbigen Fabrik- und Lumpenproletariats im Verhältnis zur weissen Arbeiterbewegung*, Schriften zum Klassenkampf ; 26 (München: Trikont, 1972) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

²⁹ Attracting approximately 12,000 demonstrators, the Congress was the largest mobilization of the German student movement up to that time.

of most dramatic moments of the conference consisted of two black Americans burning draft cards, an act that was celebrated as an exemplary practice of resistance.³⁰ In Germany, the radicalization of the New Left was propelled forward by a thematic mix of Vietnam, national liberation movements, and Black Power.

The linkage between African-Americans and Third World/Vietnam solidarity was reinforced in West Germany by the presence of black soldiers stationed in or near Frankfurt, Heidelberg, West Berlin, and other cities and university towns. The German student movement attempted to forge contacts with GIs as part of their own activism against the Vietnam War: at the International Vietnam Congress, SDS-DE announced a campaign to agitate among GIs³¹ that eventually developed into support for GI activities like Resistance Inside the Army (RITA) and the publishing of underground newspapers. The campaign's initial strategies included not only (largely ineffective) actions in front of US bases such as pamphlet distribution, demonstration marches, etc., but also discussions with GIs in the bars they frequented.³² Because of persistent racism among white

³⁰ SDS-Westberlin and INFI, eds., *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes und die Globalstrategie des Imperialismus (Protokoll des Internationalen Vietnam-Kongresses)* (Westberlin: Verlag Libertäre Assoziation, 1968; reprint, 1987), 139-51, Klimke, "Solidaritätskomitees," 566.

³¹ The final statement of the International Vietnam Congress includes announces six action campaigns designed established „[um den] gemeinsamen antiimperialistischen Kampf zu konkretisieren und zum aktiven Widerstand zu entfalten.“ The second one (after increasing material support for the Viet Cong) resolves that „In westeuropäischen Ländern mit amerikanischen Truppenstützpunkten werden so wie in den USA selbst Aufklärungsaktionen unter den GIs durchgeführt mit dem Ziel, die Wehrkraft der US-Armee zu zersetzen und die Soldaten von der Notwendigkeit des Widerstandes, der Sabotage und der Desertion zu überzeugen.“ SDS-Westberlin and INFI, eds., *IVK-Protokoll*, 158-60.

³² Patty Lee Parmalee, "Referat, 16.2.1968: Vom Protest zum Widerstand," (West Berlin: 1968) (APO-Archiv).

American soldiers,³³ black soldiers tended to drink at separate “black bars,” which also attracted German youth interested in African-American culture (and/or sexuality).³⁴ Anti-military agitators targeted black soldiers in particular because it was assumed they would be more receptive to agitprop:³⁵ aside from the traditional racism they faced from white fellow soldiers, African-Americans had serious grievances against the institutional racism of the military, since they constituted a disproportionate number of draftees, and were overrepresented in the bottom ranks—as well as in military jails.³⁶ In fact, there were numerous military base riots (reminiscent of urban race riots) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially in Germany.³⁷ All of this brought “US imperialism”—in both its inwardly directed, racist form and its outward-pointing military form—closer to German activists. At the same time, contact with black GIs created another channel through which discourses of Black Power entered into the West German Left.

Important theoretical influences on the German left also encouraged the idea that the particular situation of African-Americans made them (perhaps in combination with others) the *Hoffnungsträger* of universal liberation. The German-American professor

³³ In her chapter on “Contact zones” between black GIs and white Germans after WWII, Heide Fehrenbach mentions that white soldiers often pressured German bar owners to exclude black soldiers. Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler : Black occupation children in postwar Germany and America*, 43.

³⁴ Ege, *Schwarz werden : "Afroamerikanophilie" in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, 110-15.

³⁵ Ibid., 104. Ege points out that this perception often diverged considerably from reality: many black soldiers did not appreciate being treated as victims, as objects to be pitied (110). This may have been especially true among Black Power advocates, since black masculinity was a major component of that movement’s discourse (100).

³⁶ David Cortright, *Soldiers in revolt : GI resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago IL: Haymarket Books, 2005), 201-19.

³⁷ “Outside of Vietnam itself, the Army probably encountered more internal turmoil in Germany than anywhere else in the world.” Ibid., 99.

Herbert Marcuse, whose significance to the international New Left was considerable,³⁸ felt that social exclusion gave African-Americans a special status. In his internationally bestselling *One-Dimensional Man*, he emphasized the “revolutionary” role of “outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable.”³⁹ Speaking in West Berlin in 1968, he called for the creation of alliances between underprivileged outsiders—specifically “racial and national minorities in the mother countries [*in den Metropolen*] [and the]... struggl[ing] masses in the neo-colonial world”—and privileged actors like students, whose role would be to assist these others.⁴⁰ The intellectual foundation for solidarity with the Black Panthers and Angela Davis was thus also present in theory, as was the linkage between African-Americans and the Third World.

Black militants actively encouraged the association of their own plight with that of nationalist, anti-colonial struggles, which had the effect of placing them in a central,

³⁸ Both Marcuse and Fanon (see below) are mentioned in Lionel Abel, "Seven heroes of the New Left," *New York Times*, May 5 1968 (via ProQuest). Regarding Marcuse's importance to the German context, see, for example, "Studenti di tutto il mondo: I loro profeti," *L'Espresso* March 24th 1968 (APO-Archiv), Gilcher-Holtey, *Die 68er Bewegung*, Ingo Juchler, *Rebellische Subjektivität und Internationalismus: Der Einfluß Herbert Marcuses und der nationalen Befreiungsbewegungen in der sog. Dritten Welt auf die Studentenbewegung in der BRD*, ed. Frank Deppe and Georg Fülberth, vol. 79, Schriftenreihe der Studiengesellschaft für Sozialgeschichte und Arbeiterbewegung (Marburg: Verlag Arbeiterbewegung und Gesellschaftswissenschaft, 1989), Michael Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz: Die 68er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und den USA*, ed. Heinz-Gerzard Haupt, et al., Campus Historische Studien (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2003).

³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 256.

⁴⁰ „...zwischen den rassisichen und nationalen Minoritäten in den Metropolen der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft und den schon im Kampf gegen diese Gesellschaft stehenden Massen in der neokolonialen Welt.“ Herbert Marcuse, *Das Ende der Utopie*, ed. Horst Kurnitzky and Hansmartin Kuhn (Berlin: Verlag Peter von Maikowski, 1967), 49.

revolutionary position. BPP leader Huey P. Newton referred to Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial writings in describing African-Americans as "the wretched of the earth," "a colonized people."⁴¹ Such references were undoubtedly well-received in West Germany, where student leaders like Rudi Dutschke saw Fanon as "speak[ing] for the Third World."⁴² Indeed, the leadership of SDS-DE considered the problem of how to "create a political and practical connection between the student movement... in Western Europe and the United States on the one hand and the national liberation movements of the Third World on the other" to be among their thorniest theoretical problems.⁴³ Through the colonial metaphor, black militants asserted that African-Americans were uniquely capable of bridging this divide: they were a "colony in the mother country," the living presence of the Third World—and its liberation strategies—within the First World. According to Che Guevara, this made theirs "the most important fight of all," because they fought "in the heart of the beast."⁴⁴ Black militants thus appeared to represent, almost by definition, a kind of ideal revolutionary subject for the German Left: theory ascribed to them a clear "revolutionary potential" and they were well-positioned to respond to the need of the German Left for mediation between Third World and "mother country" activism.

⁴¹ For example, see Huey P. Newton, "In defense of self-defense (1967)," *Voice of the Lumpen*, Mar. 3 1971 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁴² Rudi Dutschke, "Die geschichtlichen Bedingungen für den internationalen Emanzipationskampf [Rede vor dem Internationalen Vietnam-Kongreß]," in *1968: Eine Enzyklopädie*, ed. Rudolf Sievers (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004), 261.

⁴³ Juchler, *Studentenbewegungen*, 253. See also the discussion of Régis Debray in SDS-Westberlin and INFI, eds., *IVK-Protokoll*, 39-56.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Arbeitskreis antiimperialistische Solidarität, "Warum 'Im Herzen der Bestie?'" *Im Herzen der Bestie* 1, no. 1 (1980) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

Another fundamental aspect of the appeal of black militants to the West German New Left was ideology. The Black Panthers and Angela Davis were both consciously Marxist in orientation. A major aspect of the appeal of these black radicals was that they described the fight against racism as part of a broader anti-capitalist struggle. While this may have led to West Germans (willfully?) conflating race with class,⁴⁵ it also allowed them to perceive a fundamental, shared interest with African-Americans. These black militants also engaged actively with theoretical texts that West Germans read, which significantly enhanced their appeal in a country where debates about theory and the proper practice thereof were the terrain on which many political battles were fought.⁴⁶ Panther leaders read, and cited in their own texts, classic works by Marx and Lenin, the writings of contemporary *guerilleros* such as Che Guevara and Régis Debray, and books by figures like Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse-Tung, and even Kim Il Sung, who were associated with different national struggles in the Third World.⁴⁷ As a professor of philosophy who had studied under leading German Marxist theorists, Angela Davis' commitment to theory encompassed a broad, complementary field of the West German Left's theoretical base (see Figure 1). German observers considered the intellectual leadership of these

⁴⁵ Ruckaberle argues that the West German Left "could not understand how racism operated outside class oppression" and that they failed to address racism in Germany as a result. While this criticism does highlight a sensitive issue, there were critical voices insisting that Marxists needed to pay attention to racism, specifically that directed against workers. See below. Ruckaberle, "Unusual transnational alliance", 8-10.

⁴⁶ The German Left emphasizes theory as a fundamental aspect of politics to a much greater degree than most of the American Left. It is hard to overstate the importance—sometimes deemed excessive—that the West German Left ascribed to theoretical debate. For a discussion of *Theorielastigkeit* in the German Left, see Michael Kimmel, *Studentenbewegungen der 60er Jahre : Frankreich, BRD und USA im Vergleich* (Wien: WUV-Universitätsverlag, 1998).

⁴⁷ Clemons and Jones, "Global solidarity," 28. The BPP also taught the basic ideas of these thinkers to its cadres in political education courses and to the masses in their "liberation schools."

black militants to be “of paramount importance.”⁴⁸ Textual overlap ensured that the Black Panthers and Angela Davis were able to speak the theoretical, Marxist language to which the German New Left was most receptive.

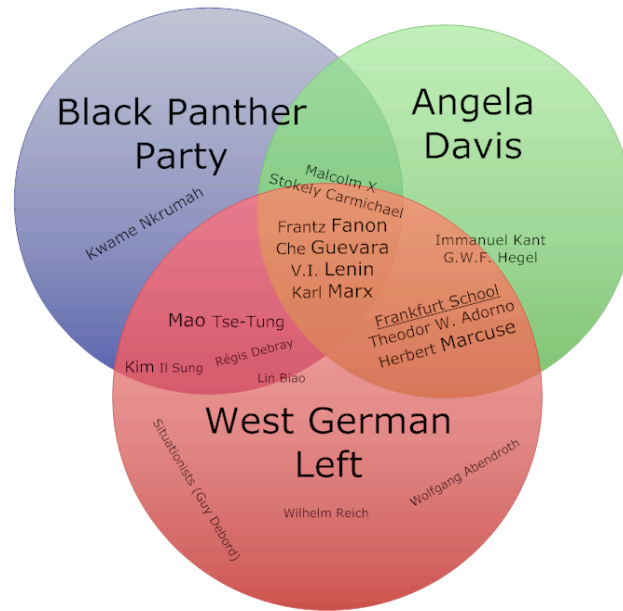


Figure 1: Shared intellectual influences of the BPP, Angela Davis, and the West German Left⁴⁹

However, black militants did not arrive in West Germany solely via theory and the osmosis of the imaginary; the importance ascribed to black radicalism was reinforced by the transnational personal networks of the student movement. During the 1960s, many West German students took advantage of exchange programs to visit the US. KD Wolff was one such individual and, during his 1959-60 stay in Michigan, he even participated in organizing some of the first Freedom Rides.⁵⁰ Exchanges like these

⁴⁸ Schuhler, *Black Panther*, 59, 65.

⁴⁹ Adapted from BPSK, “Zum Arbeitskreis des Black Panther Solidaritätskomitees,” *Infobrief* no. 1, 1971 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS), BPSK (Kaiserslautern), “Literaturliste,” *Black-Panther-Info* Feb 10 1970, Clemons and Jones, “Global solidarity.” “Studenti di tutto il mondo.”

⁵⁰ US Senate (Subcommittee on Internal Security), *Testimony of Karl Dietrich Wolff. Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, first session. March 14 and 18, 1969* (Washington,: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1969), 21.

contributed to the creation of a transnational network that connected SDS-DE with SDS-US and facilitated communication and reciprocal support between the two organizations.⁵¹ For example, Wolff invited Sue Eanet of the SDS-US National Office (along with Dale Smith of SNCC) to the International Vietnam Congress in 1968; in return, fellow National Officer Bernardine Dorhn helped make the arrangements for Wolff's 1969 US visit, and SDS-US local chapters sponsored events on his speaking tour.⁵² Students for a Democratic Society was another force pointing Germans toward the Black Panthers: at a national conference less than a month after Wolff's visit, SDS-US passed a resolution praising the "correct analysis" of the BPP and recognizing it as the "vanguard of the revolution;" the resolution was later reprinted in *Trikont*'s book about the Panthers as evidence of the Party's unifying leadership.⁵³ Personal networks were even more important to solidarity with Angela Davis. After working with Herbert Marcuse as an undergraduate, Angela Davis came to Frankfurt in 1965 to study under his friend and colleague, Theodor Adorno. While there, she also worked "in the rearguard" of SDS-DE,⁵⁴ and so became personally acquainted with activists and intellectuals in the Frankfurt area. Indeed, her "Frankfurt circle of friends" was the force behind the

⁵¹ McAdam and Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," 70.

⁵² US Senate (Subcommittee on Internal Security), *Testimony of KD Wolff*, 27-28.

⁵³ Schuhler, *Black Panther*, 86-90. This perception is, however, misleading since infighting in SDS-US between the National Office and the Progressive Labor faction was a significant motivation behind passage of the resolution. Leaders in the National Office "rested their legitimacy on... verbal support [for the BPP] and used that support as a bludgeon against the women's movement and against recalcitrant SDS factions." David Barber, "Leading the Vanguard: White New Leftists School the Panthers on Black Revolution," in *In search of the Black Panther Party*, ed. Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 224, 30-34. Schuhler's book makes no mention of this controversy, though it must have been known to some in the German Left, especially among SDS-DE leaders.

⁵⁴ Angela Yvonne Davis, *Angela Davis--an autobiography*, 1st ed. (New York,: Random House, 1974), 144.

formation of the ADSK in late 1970.⁵⁵ Personal ties and German-American activist networks contributed significantly to the development of both Black Panther and Angela Davis solidarity organizations.

In the postwar period, West Germans were very attuned to developments in the United States, including the growth of the Civil Rights and student movements that flowered there in the early to mid-1960s. Indeed, Germans even transported the American New Left's fascination with 'the black movement' over to their own continent, sometimes via personal connections. The confluence of African-American, Vietnamese and Third World radicalisms in the second half of the decade had a profound impact on important parts of the German Left. SDS-DE leaders in particular came to be fixated on the resistance of these idealized and generally remote revolutionary subjects. Within this field of radicals, African-Americans stood out because of their perceived place at the intersection of the First and Third Worlds, and because of the actual physical presence of black GIs in West Germany. Marxist theory, some of it shared between German Leftists and black militants themselves, also assigned a special status to African-Americans. By the time the Black Panthers and Angela Davis arrived on the West German scene, a spotlight had already been fixed on the place where they would stand. The next sections of this paper will discuss how particular organizations attempted to direct the West German Left in relation to these ideal subjects.

Solidarity with the Black Panther Party

In October 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California. Though most visibly a response to local

⁵⁵ ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 2,213.

police brutality (the party's initial strategy was armed "observation" of police activity in black neighborhoods), the Panthers articulated their grievances in the contemporary, international language of self-determination and national liberation.⁵⁶ In the first half of 1967, the Party attracted considerable attention from authorities, but relatively few new members. That began to change after Huey P. Newton was arrested in 1967 following a gun battle with police. BPP "Minister of Information" Eldridge Cleaver⁵⁷ used Newton's arrest to organize a highly successful campaign around the issue of repression, which allowed the BPP to reach out to other groups, both black and white.⁵⁸ It was the BPP's willingness to work with white groups that made them particularly appealing to German audiences, who were intrigued by "Black Power," but unable to find a role for themselves in it.⁵⁹ The BPP's appeal was further enhanced in July 1969, when Cleaver, who had fled the US to avoid prosecution, set up an International Section of the Party in Algiers,

⁵⁶ Huey Newton intended for the Party's 10 point program (entitled "What we want, what we believe") to "relate to the philosophical meaning of where in the world we are going, but the philosophical meaning will also have to relate to something specific." Bobby Seale, *Seize the time: the story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1970), 59. The program is found in Black Panther Party, "The Black Panther Platform: 'What we want, what we believe'," in *Takin' it to the streets : a sixties reader*, ed. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Schuhler, *Black Panther*, 77-79.

⁵⁷ An ex-convict himself, Eldridge Cleaver had turned his energies toward writing in prison. Upon release, he went to work with the white New Left magazine *Ramparts*. In 1968, he published *Soul on Ice*, which became an international bestseller. Two German translations were published, in 1969 and in 1970.

⁵⁸ These included the white Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), which nominated Cleaver for president in 1968. The BPP also briefly merged with SNCC. See Agnès Varda, "Huey!," (USA/France: 1968) (<http://www.ubu.com/film/vara.html>).

⁵⁹ Stokely Carmichael's 1967 book was quickly translated into German and released by a major publishing house as part of a new series targeting leftist students. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black power: Die Politik der Befreiung in Amerika* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer-Bücherei, 1969).

Algeria, which conducted outreach to groups around the world.⁶⁰ In the late 1960s, the BPP appeared to West German audiences to be a “vanguard” not only in the United States, but also in an interracial, international struggle against US imperialism.

Though interest in Black Power was present in West Germany as early as 1967, it was not until 1969 that the Black Panther Party became well-known there.⁶¹ The idea for a German solidarity committee was born early in that year, when SDS-DE chairman KD Wolff traveled to the United States to give a speaking tour in March 1969, during which time he met with members of the BPP Central Committee.⁶² The German BPSK was inspired by “similar committees in Scandinavia and England,” which were already providing support to the Party.⁶³ The idea for the committee gestated for several months before it was officially founded in December 1969 after a meeting attended by BPP representatives,⁶⁴ KD Wolff and other SDS-DE members, and several African-American soldiers stationed in Germany.⁶⁵ The Committee defined its goals as follows:

⁶⁰ Though the more radical International Section diverged increasingly over time from the Oakland-based Party, Cleaver was able to dominate the discourse and information flow to European audiences.

⁶¹ Bernward Vesper, ed., *Black power: Ursachen des Guerilla-Kampfes in den Vereinigten Staaten*, Voltaire Flugschriften (Frankfurt,: Edition Voltaire, 1967). The content was translated from English by future RAF terrorist Gudrun Ensslin. *Der Spiegel* printed one article in 1968 mentioning Eldridge Cleaver in passing; in 1969, it printed 5 longer articles on the BPP.

⁶² US Senate (Subcommittee on Internal Security), *Testimony of KD Wolff*, 28.

⁶³ BPSK, “'black panther solidaritätskomitee' (Brief, 6.1.1970),” (1970) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv). Wolff’s visit coincided with a trip by Bobby Seale to Scandinavia.

⁶⁴ Connie Matthews (International Section) and Elbert “Big Man” Howard (Oakland).

⁶⁵ BPSK, “Brief vom Bundesminister des Innern [i.A. Radtke], 26.2.1970,” *Infobrief* no. 2, 1971 (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv). BPSK, “Erklärung des Solidaritätskomitee für die Black Panther Partei,” *SC-Extra* no. 1, 1969 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

- “1. Education about the struggle of the Party and about the fascist terror of the US ruling class.
2. Agitation and propaganda among GIs stationed in Germany.
3. Material support for the Black Panthers”⁶⁶

These tasks were intended to mark a significant change from past approaches and “represent a new form of internationalist solidarity.” Among the numerous groups on the German Left that were sympathetic to the BPP and its cause,⁶⁷ the BPSK saw itself as a “vanguard” of solidarity, setting an example for others to follow.

The timing of the BPSK’s emergence was significant. The student movement that had peaked in the first months of 1968 in West Germany began to decline rapidly in May of that year, when the Grand Coalition government passed emergency laws (*Notstandsgesetze*) that the Left strongly opposed. Protest subsequently trailed off dramatically, as one late 1969 flyer from Frankfurt that compared the present to the recent past bemoaned: “Where are the actions?”⁶⁸ it asked. The BPSK was one of several organizations in an increasingly fragmented Left political landscape that tried to respond to the movement’s ‘blues.’ Indeed, following the Committee’s November 1970 demonstration to “Free Bobby Seale!”, the FAZ wrote that “after a year-long ‘pause,’ Frankfurt again experienced a large political demonstration this weekend.”⁶⁹ However, the BPSK was interested in more than just holding demonstrations: they were interested in the possibility of *concrete* solidarity with an ideal revolutionary subject. Their

⁶⁶ BPSK, “Erklärung des Solidaritätskomitee für die Black Panther Partei.”

⁶⁷ Materials in the APO and HIS archives include pamphlets by *Rote Zellen*, *Proletarische Linke/Parteinitiative*, and unidentifiable groups that competed with the BPSK as well as a Frankfurt-allied BPSK in Kaiserslautern.

⁶⁸ Arbeitskreis 1. Mai, “Was ist in Frankfurt wirklich los?,” (Frankfurt: 1969) (SDS-Nachlaß [Frankfurt Papiere 1967-1969], APO-Archiv).

⁶⁹ „Nach einjähriger ‘Pause’ erlebte Frankfurt am Wochenende wieder eine große politische Demonstration.“ Cited in Gerd Langguth, *Protestbewegung : Entwicklung, Niedergang, Renaissance : die Neue Linke seit 1968*, Bibliothek Wissenschaft und Politik. Bd. 30 (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983), 51.

thinking in this regard was heavily influenced by the perceived failures of the student movement in its solidarity with Vietnam, which was criticized for being too “abstract” and leading to an exaggerated form of identification. *Sozialistische Correspondenz-Info* (a newsletter that shared office space and editorial staff with the BPSK; see Figure 2) complained that “The subjective meaning of the [Vietnam] protests for most students was so overestimated that people conceived of themselves as a substitute for the missing revolutionary subject.”⁷⁰ In its own newsletter, the BPSK argued that solidarity with the Black Panther Party would improve on this, because the focus on the BPP “creates a concrete and more intelligible relationship for agitation in West German circumstances... than the abstract identification with the [Vietnamese] FNL and the other liberation movements of the ‘third’ world was able to.”⁷¹ With the Left looking for new directions after 1968, the BPSK promised to remain true to the goals of the student movement without repeating its mistakes. It would continue to work within an internationalist theoretical framework, but would seek to make solidarity practical and practicable within the West German context.

⁷⁰ „Die Bedeutung der Proteste, die sie subjektiv für den größten Teil der Studenten hatten, wurden so überschätzt, daß man sich selbst als Substitut des fehlenden revolutionären Subjekts begriff...“ BPSK and Hannes Weinrich, “Überlegungen zu unseren Bemühungen beim Aufbau einer zweiten Front gegen den US-Imperialismus,” *SC-Info* no. 44, May 2 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS). It should be noted that the article includes considerable self-criticism as well.

⁷¹ BPSK, “Zum Arbeitskreis,” 15.

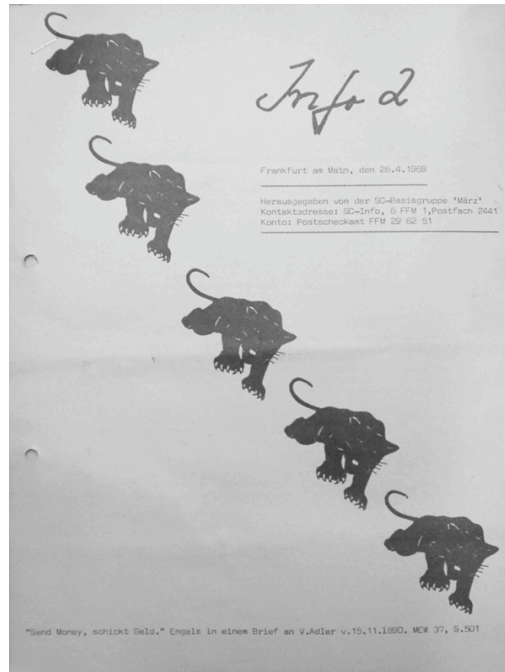


Figure 2: Sozialistische Correspondenz-Info Nr. 2, with Black Panther symbol (HIS)

The BPSK tried to make solidarity concrete in a variety of ways. KD Wolff and the Committee published prolifically about the BPP and used discussion of them to comment on matters in West Germany. For example, one issue of *SC-Info* was devoted almost entirely to two deliberately juxtaposed topics: Black Panther solidarity and the racism faced by *Gastarbeiter* in West Germany and Europe.⁷² A number of other articles about the Panthers appeared in *SC-Info*, the longest and most important of which were not news items, but rather “Reflections on the internationalist question” or other texts situating the role of Black Panther solidarity in German Left politics.⁷³ BPSK members wrote numerous articles on repression, “political justice,” and “fascism” in the United

⁷² *SC-Info* no. 44, May 2 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS). Included is a statement declaring that „Der Befreiungskampf der schwarzen Kolonie in den USA kann europäischen Arbeitern nicht vermittelt werden, wenn nicht beispielsweise Untersuchungen zur Lage der ausländischen Arbeiter begonnen werden...”

⁷³ BPSK and Weinrich, "Überlegungen zu unseren Bemühungen.", Karl Dietrich Wolff, "Überlegungen zur Internationalismusfrage," *SC-Info* no. 34/35, Feb 28 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

States, and, here again, often drew connections to Germany. For example, the symbolically potent trial of Bobby Seale in Chicago, at which the judge ordered him bound and gagged in the courtroom in order to silence his outbursts, was regarded as clear evidence of “*amerikkkanischer Faschismus*”⁷⁴—and not just by the BPSK (see Figure 3). However, it was also used to highlight repression in Germany, as when KD Wolff invoked solidarity with Bobby Seale at his own trial in Frankfurt—and, like Seale, was held in contempt of court for his actions.⁷⁵ Frequent comparison between the US and West German cases was one way in which the BPSK made Black Panther solidarity locally relevant.



Figure 3: Court drawing of Bobby Seale after being bound and gagged on judge's orders.⁷⁶

Another strategy the BPSK used to make solidarity concrete was to invite BPP leaders to speak in West German cities. This served the triple purpose of fundraising for

⁷⁴ Karl Dietrich Wolff, "Chicago 8," *SC-Info* no. 36, Mar 7 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁷⁵ References to German activists' linkage between the so-called *Senghor-Prozeß* and Bobby Seale's conspiracy trial are found in Rupert von Plottnitz, "Der Senghor-Prozess oder die Legende vom Gefecht gegen die Klassenjustiz," *SC-Info* no. 22, Nov 22 1969, 13 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS). and Klimke, "Solidaritätskomitees," 569.. Bobby Seale's Chicago trial was the subject of both an *SC-Info* special issue and one of the three BPP books published to inaugurate KD Wolff's *Roter Stern Verlag*.

⁷⁶ "Rettet Angela!", 138.

the Panthers,⁷⁷ spreading information (among Germans and American GIs alike), and, crucially, making things uncomfortable for the “imperialist lackeys” in the West German government. The Committee tried to organize at least two major speaking tours: one for Big Man in December 1969, and another for Eldridge Cleaver in November 1970. Big Man’s arrival was to coincide with an announced “Day of US Imperialism’s Downfall,” but Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher issued an *Einreiseverbot*, denying him permission to enter the country.⁷⁸ The BPSK by printing an angry attack on “the SPD/FDP government” over the text of its existing flyers—an attack that can also be read as an attempt to maintain a radical orientation on the Left in the face of competition from the centre-left government.⁷⁹ A few months later, the BPSK announced its intention to bring Eldridge Cleaver himself to West Germany, and (rather quixotically) demanded that the government grant him diplomatic immunity as a precaution against extradition.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The BPSK took in over 5000 DM in donations at speeches and informational events in December 1969 and January 1970, representing approximately half of its total receipts (most of the rest came in large donations from student organizations). All earnings beyond the Committee’s operating costs were given to the BPP in the form of plane tickets, cash and equipment donations (to both Oakland and Algiers), and *Black Panther* newspaper subscriptions. BPSK, “Abrechnung des BPSK zum 31. Januar 1970,” *SC-Info* no. 34/35, Feb 28 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁷⁸ BPSK, “Radtke-Brief, 26.2.1970.” Genscher had, in fact, lifted the ban on Big Man the day of his arrival, but his new instructions reached border guards after Big Man had already been deported. The *Infobrief* article—printed more than a year later—includes legal documents on the incident in which the Interior Ministry defended its (in)decision. Big Man was eventually allowed to travel to Germany in January 1970, though he did so then with considerably less fanfare.

⁷⁹ „Einreise von der SPD/FDP-Regierung verboten! Die Panther kommen doch!“ BPSK, “Solidarität mit der Black Panther Partei,” (1969) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv; Wolff-Sammlung, HIS). The formation of the new government in October 1969 had eliminated the two most urgent grievances that had brought the Left together in the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO): the Grand Coalition government and its conservative (ex-Nazi!) chancellor Kiesinger.

⁸⁰ BPSK, ed., *Rassismus und politische Justiz in den USA* (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Roter Stern, 1970), 1. The strategy was undoubtedly copied from the Danish Black Panther

Probably knowing all along that this was hopeless, the Committee presented a ‘coup’ against the government’s pre-announced ban on Eldridge Cleaver at the last minute: his wife Kathleen, herself a high-ranking BPP Central Committee member, would come in his place.⁸¹ A schedule was drawn up for her to do a week-long tour of West Germany, culminating in a speech to black GIs on Thanksgiving.⁸² When she too was refused entry into the country, the BPSK welcoming committee sent for her started a near-riot at the airport.⁸³ The following day, the Cleavers and BPSK released a “message to German comrades” attacking the European “banana republics” and sarcastically suggesting that Genscher “let no black man cross our borders; then definitely no Panthers will get through, and no other black person who might ‘endanger our foreign interests.’”⁸⁴ A later document also cited the government’s *Einreiseverbot* against Kathleen Cleaver as evidence that “Solidarity with the Black Panthers cannot be separated from an attack on the West German puppets of the US imperialists.”⁸⁵ The BPSK thus attempted to guide

Solidarity Committee, which had managed to obtain a hearing in Parliament on US government repression of the Black Panthers as part of its (failed) attempt to invite Cleaver to Aarhus in April 1970. Robert G. Weisbord, "Scandinavia: A Racial Utopia?," *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 4 (1972): 482-84.

⁸¹ BPSK, “Kathleen Cleaver in Frankfurt,” (1970) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

⁸² Karl Dietrich Wolff, Personal letter, Nov 16 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁸³ A copy of her undelivered speech was nevertheless printed under the headline “Kathleen Cleaver addresses black GIs in Germany” in an American BPP paper. “Kathleen Cleaver addresses black G.I.’s in W. Germany,” *Right On!*, undated 1970 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁸⁴ „Das Black-Panther-Solidaritätskomitee [*sic*] empfiehlt Gescher [*sic*] und Komplizen: laßt keinen schwarzen Mann mehr über unsere Grenzen, dann kommt garantiert kein Panther zu uns rein, und auch kein anderer Farbiger, der ‚unsere außenpolitischen Belange‘ gefährden wird“. BPSK, Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver, "Botschaft an deutsche Genossen," (1970) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

⁸⁵ „Solidarität mit den Black Panther kann nicht getrennt werden von dem Angriff auf die westdeutschen Marionetten der US-Imperialisten, kann nicht getrennt werden von der Aufklärung über die Abhängigkeit des westdeutschen Kapitals vom US-amerikanischen“. BPSK, “Über die wachsende Schwierigkeiten der US-Imperialisten im eigenen Lande

BPP solidarity toward greater radicalism and directed it against both distant and local actors.

Perhaps the most important form of solidarity with the BPP was agitation among black GIs in West Germany. This represented a continuation of SDS-DE's previous activities against the Vietnam War, but the addition of the BPP to the equation seemed to challenge the war in new ways; the first BPSK announcement even claimed that Vietnamese negotiators, in alliance with the BPP, had offered to exchange prisoners of war in Vietnam for black "political prisoners" in US jails.⁸⁶ More fundamentally, the BPP's resistance created a "second front in the heartland of imperialism" that was even more powerful than the one Leftists hoped to create in Europe. West Germans did their part primarily by supporting the activities of GI-initiated resistance groups, which proved more effective than their own attempts to organize among GIs.⁸⁷ SDS-DE provided patronage early on for underground GI newspapers like *We got the brASS* and *Venceremos*; the BPSK expanded this support to include *Voice of the Lumpen*, a paper written by Black Panther servicemen specifically for other black GIs in Germany.⁸⁸ Frankfurt SDS also hosted a weekly GI social event at a popular student bar, and BPSK members organized screenings of Newsreel films about the BPP to mixed student/GI

und unsere Aufgaben in Westdeutschland," (Frankfurt: 1970), 9 (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

⁸⁶ BPSK, "Erklärung des Solidaritätskomitee für die Black Panther Partei." This claim is not repeated in later documents.

⁸⁷ German-American Committee and Gerold Dommermuth, "Aufklärungsarbeit unter den in Deutschland stationierten GIs leisten! Ein kritischer Bericht über zwei Aktionen im August," *SC-Info* no. 11, Jul 31 1969 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁸⁸ All three of the GI papers named here were published in Frankfurt at the offices of either SDS-DE or the *Sozialistischer Club*/BPSK. Each also included articles dealing with military racism and/or mentioning the Black Panthers.

audiences.⁸⁹ The Committee combined antiwar activism and BPP solidarity in other ways too, such as by exhorting Germans to donate ‘gift subscriptions’ of the *Black Panther* newspaper to GIs on German bases.⁹⁰ The strategy of linking BPP causes to antiwar activism was central to the “new form of internationalist solidarity” that the BPSK aimed to usher in.

The various solidarity activities of the BPSK converged in the campaign to “Free the Ramstein 2!” The case involved Larry Jackson and William Burrell, two civilian Black Panthers who had a shootout with a German guard when they tried to enter Ramstein Air Force base in November 1970 in order to distribute literature. Police seized upon the copies of the *Black Panther* newspaper and the flyers for Kathleen Cleaver’s upcoming visit that were found in the alleged perpetrators’ car as evidence of the two men’s criminal malice.⁹¹ For the BPSK, this proved that the kind of “political justice” practiced against Bobby Seale was “no longer only in the USA,” but also in West Germany.⁹² The incident also presented the BPSK with an opportunity to enlist symbolic support from the Black Panthers in their attacks on local “imperialist lackeys” (see Figure 4). During the “Ramstein 2” trial, the BPSK overwhelmed the tiny provincial town where Burrell and Jackson were being held with a protest by over 1000 demonstrators and worked to publicize the incident, arguing that it demonstrated persistent German racism. “A general race-baiting,” they argued, was clearly discernible in articles in the

⁸⁹ The Second Front, “Agitation in der US-Army,” *SC-Info* no. 22, Nov 22 1969 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁹⁰ BPSK, “Brief, 6.1.1970.”

⁹¹ The arrest warrant cited the *Black Panther* newspaper, “in dem offen zum Töten aufgefordert wird,” as part of the justification for the arrests. BPSK, “Rassismus und politische Justiz in der Pfalz,” *Infobrief* no. 1, 1971, 7 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

⁹² „Begleiterscheinungen von politischer Justiz nicht mehr nur in den USA.“ *Ibid.*, 14.

local press that made comments like the following: "Internal military circles have been concerned for weeks with developing effective measures to prevent the spread of the American race war overseas. [The possibility] cannot be excluded that the blacks have provoked these incidents among us in order to attract attention for their cause."⁹³ The Ramstein 2 case showed that solidarity with the BPP could be used to attack German racists as well as American ones.

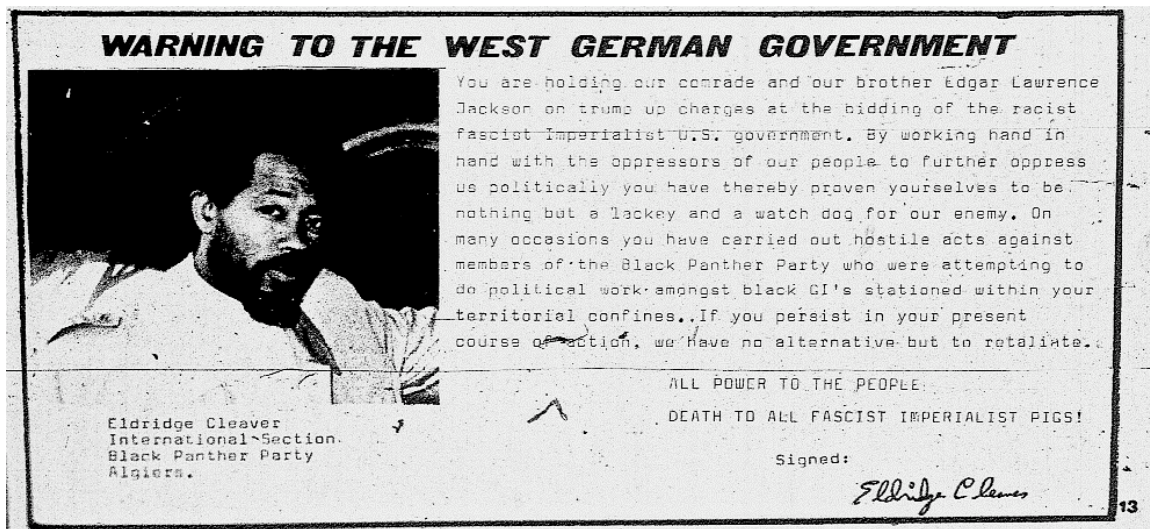


Figure 4: Eldridge Cleaver personally threatens the West German government⁹⁴

In many respects, the BPSK was rather successful in achieving its specified goals. It may even have succeeded where the student movement had failed as far as creating a more concrete form of solidarity. However, the BPSK and its model were inevitably doomed after February 1971, when Panther heavyweights Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver verbally clashed on live television. Following the embarrassing public fight, the increasingly moderate Newton expelled Cleaver and his allies in the radical New York

⁹³ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁴ Eldridge Cleaver, "Warning to the West German Government," *Voice of the Lumpen* no. 8, October 1971.

and International Sections from the Party.⁹⁵ The BPP split forced the BPSK to do some soul-searching, and the committee postponed its heretofore monthly *Infobrief* for more than three months as a result. When the newsletter finally came out, it had been renamed *Antiimperialistischer Kampf* (AIK; see Figure 5). In its assessment of what the BPP had accomplished and what it had meant, the ex-BPSK editors of AIK emphasized “armed struggle” far more strongly than they previously had. They sided openly with the more militant Cleaver faction in all matters, and angrily criticized Newton as a hypocrite who had turned from “revolutionary” tactics to the kind of “bourgeois democratic parliamentary politics” that he himself had once despised.⁹⁶ In the past, the BPSK had often flirted with the violent, “armed struggle” image of the BPP, but it had always balanced this with information about the Party’s significant social programs (the free breakfast for children programs, free health clinics, and liberation schools in many US cities) and, more importantly, the portrayal of it as a victim of repression. Indeed, one of the Solidarity Committee’s purposes all along had been to counter media representations of the BPP as an aggressive, violent band of armed criminals. Ironically, when forced to decide what they found most important about the Black Panther Party, members of the German Solidarity Committee gravitated precisely to that which mainstream Germans (and Americans) had found so alarming about it.

⁹⁵ The dispute had been building for months as a result of both the increasingly divergent strategies of the Oakland and International sections and a covert misinformation campaign by the FBI designed to foment division between the two leaders.

⁹⁶ BPSK, “Zur Spaltung der Black Panther Partei,” *Antiimperialistischer Kampf* 1971 (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv). *Roter Stern Verlag* also published a collection of Newton’s essays and statements after the split. Entitled *Selbstverteidigung!*, the advertisement in AIK makes it appear to be an extended attack on Newton’s change of tactics.

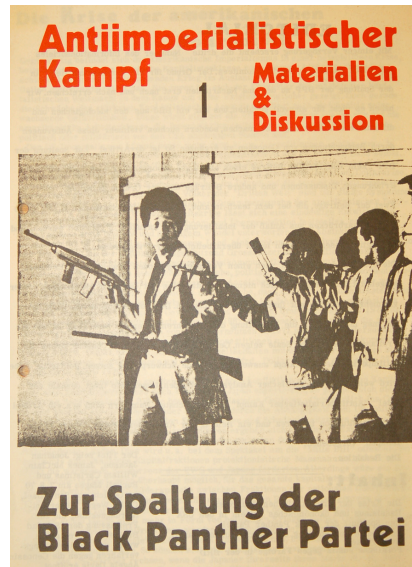


Figure 5: *Antiimperialistischer Kampf* Nr. 1 (APO)

The German Black Panther Solidarity Committee formed at a time of heavy fragmentation within the West German Left, and attempted to use its BPP contacts to (re-?) create Left unity through demonstrations of exemplary solidarity. In defining its own legitimacy according to the effectiveness of its solidarity, it was responding to the needs of the (now-defunct) student movement, which had been disappointed by the quality of its Vietnam solidarity. The BPSK worked with the BPP to create mutually beneficial situations that would make things uncomfortable for their respective governments. Within the Left milieu, the BPSK attempted to harness the broad symbolic power of the Black Panthers and guide it so as to unite radicals and exclude moderates. After the BPP split, it became clear that this radicalism extended to support for some kind of revolutionary violence. However, like the BPP itself, the BPSK was never only about “negroes with guns” attacking “fascist, imperialist pigs.” By bringing the experiences of black GIs in West Germany to the forefront, the BPSK attacked racism on multiple fronts simultaneously, informing Germans about American problems while applying lessons

learned there to the West German context. This exposure of German racism contributed something positive to progressive politics, even if it would be many years before anti-racism caught on within the political mainstream.⁹⁷

Solidarity with Angela Davis

Around the same time that the Black Panther Party split was emerging, Angela Davis was catapulted to international fame. Already well-known in the United States as a result of a free speech dispute at UCLA, Davis appeared in 1970 to be targeted for the same kind of “political justice” that had previously been meted out against Bobby Seale and other BPP members. Charged with murder after a failed kidnapping attempt by her friend Jonathan Jackson (who held a judge hostage in an effort to free his brother George from prison), Davis went underground to avoid facing what many believed were trumped-up, politically motivated charges.⁹⁸ She was immediately placed on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list, further increasing her international profile. By the time she was captured in October 1970, an international campaign for her release had already been initiated, and it continued to build during her trial. As a result of her connections with the Communist Party of the United States, aligned Communist Parties and governments around the world—including both the West German *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* (DKP) and ruling East German *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED)—mobilized their networks in the campaign as well. In West Germany, Angela Davis was

⁹⁷ Ruckaberle, “Unusual transnational alliance”, 107.

⁹⁸ Though Davis was a political supporter of George Jackson and guns registered in her name were found on Jonathan’s body, there was no evidence linking her directly to the crime. Furthermore, a juridical technicality allowed her to be charged with murder (though she did not participate in the hostage-taking and the judge was killed by police bullets during a shootout), for which she could have faced the death penalty. She was eventually acquitted, but still had to spend 16 months in jail during her trial.

also able to draw on support from personal and intellectual networks: Manfred Clemenz, a German former classmate from Brandeis University, and Oskar Negt, who had taught Angela Davis during her 1965-1967 studies in Frankfurt, were among the key founders of the ADSK.⁹⁹ It seems Angela Davis had, numerically and qualitatively, more connections to West Germany than the leadership of the Black Panther Party.

Though the ADSK was organizationally distinct from the BPSK, solidarity activities for the BPP and for Angela Davis did partially overlap for a time. The BPSK participated in teach-ins about Angela Davis' case in late 1970, but it also complained about the kind of supporters she attracted. In its newsletter, the BPSK scoffed at the "sentimental petition" one group was organizing for the "Civil Rights activist" Angela Davis; this kind of solidarity, it seemed, was neither concrete nor revolutionary.¹⁰⁰ In its *Infobrief* at the beginning of 1970, the BPSK reprinted (with approving commentary) an article by Eldridge Cleaver asserting that Jonathan Jackson had been a real revolutionary, and Angela Davis was not one. Her "false friends" in the Communist Party, Cleaver argued, were using her situation to develop their own movement and to distract from the more important solidarity with Bobby Seale.¹⁰¹ However, after the BPP split, Angela Davis supporters returned fire and attacked the BPP (or what remained of it) for being insufficiently revolutionary. One Angela Davis sympathizer criticized "the BPP of today" (the moderate group around Newton) for organizing an all-black activist conference, saying the group understood "as little as many Black Power groups" about

⁹⁹ Davis, *Angela Davis--an autobiography*, 121, ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 2,213.

¹⁰⁰ BPSK, "Freiheit für Bobby Seale!" Zu den Veranstaltungen und Demonstrationen im November/Dezember 1970," *Infobrief* no. 1, 1971, 4 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS). Note that these are not criticisms of the ADSK directly.

¹⁰¹ BPSK, "Zum Fall Angela Davis," *Infobrief* no. 1, 1971, 5 (Wolff-Nachlaß, HIS).

the need to create interracial solidarity for an anti-capitalist revolution.¹⁰² While Angela Davis and Black Panther solidarity were thus placed (somewhat artificially) at odds with one another, supporters of both sides were preoccupied with black militants being properly “revolutionary.” Even if the ADSK did not absorb the BPSK’s organizational network, it was able to capitalize on similar expectations of black militancy.

The main event organized by the ADSK was a large weekend conference in Frankfurt in June 1972, entitled *Am Beispiel Angela Davis*. The conference was divided into a public rally with a few selected speakers on Saturday, followed by a day of discussions in larger working groups on topics related to Angela Davis to coincide with the end of Angela Davis’ trial in California (see Figure 6). Many participants were undoubtedly drawn from the various networks that supported Davis’ cause, but the majority probably connected with her because of her symbolic power. Indeed, the ADSK was generally not preoccupied, as the BPSK had been, with making solidarity “concrete” and it encouraged people to regard Angela Davis as a symbol, an “example” representing “all political prisoners.” At the conference’s rally, union leader Willi Scherer declared, “Angela Davis is the symbol of the international liberation movement. But she is also a symbol of oppression. She is black. She is a woman. She is an intellectual

¹⁰² „Der schwarze Arbeiter kämpft für die Beseitigung des Kapitalismus, der schwarze Bourgeois für seinen Aufstieg im Kapitalismus. Die heutige Black Panther Party sieht diesen Unterschied ebenso wenig wie viele Black Power-Gruppen und propagiert ein Bündnis aller Schwarzen ungeachtet ihrer Klassenzugehörigkeit.“ Volkhart Brandes, ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 130. Cultural nationalist varieties of “Black Power” were consistently and fiercely attacked by BPP supporters in West Germany for undermining class struggle as the primary conflict and even leading to egregious violations of Marxism like “black capitalism.”

revolutionary, and she sides as a Communist with the working class.”¹⁰³ Whereas Black Panther solidarity had consistently emphasized blackness (and often implicitly black *masculinity*), Angela Davis offered numerous possible points of identification that increased her overall appeal. Her skin color was still important, especially as a source of her radicalism: Detlev Claussen argued that “the particular repression and exploitation of blacks ascribes to them a leading role in the struggle for the overthrow of US capitalism.”¹⁰⁴ But compared to the Black Panthers, Angela Davis had the further appeal of a more sophisticated Marxist identity, which earned her respect among both intellectuals and the then-proliferating Marxist sects (*K-Gruppen*). Most important of all, she was a woman, a fact that contributed significantly to her popularity at this moment of post-student movement feminism.¹⁰⁵ In fact, it seemed that Angela Davis had an *even more universal appeal* than the Black Panthers because she was *more particular*: “Angela Davis is black, she is an intellectual, she is a communist. She embodies the overcoming of the very division that weakens the American working class.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ „Angela Davis ist das Symbol der internationalen Befreiungsbewegung. Sie ist aber auch ein Symbol der Unterdrückung. Sie ist farbig. Sie ist eine Frau. Sie ist eine intellektuelle Revolutionärin, und sie stellt sich als Kommunistin an die Seite der Arbeiterklasse.“ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁴ „Die besondere Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung der Schwarzen weist ihnen im Kampf zum Sturz des US-Kapitalismus eine führende Rolle zu.“ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁵ A call for a “women’s and children’s demonstration” for Angela Davis in Frankfurt was signed by more than 50 women representing at least 6 women’s organizations and dozens of professions. Marcella von Heiseler-Knippling, “Freiheit für Angela Davis!,” (Frankfurt: 1971) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

¹⁰⁶ „Angela Davis ist Schwarze, sie ist Intellektuelle, sie ist Kommunistin. Sie verkörpert also die Überwindung jener Spaltung, die die amerikanische Arbeiterbewegung schwächt.“ Frank Deppe, ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 121. Ursula Schmiederer makes a similar comment on p. 157.

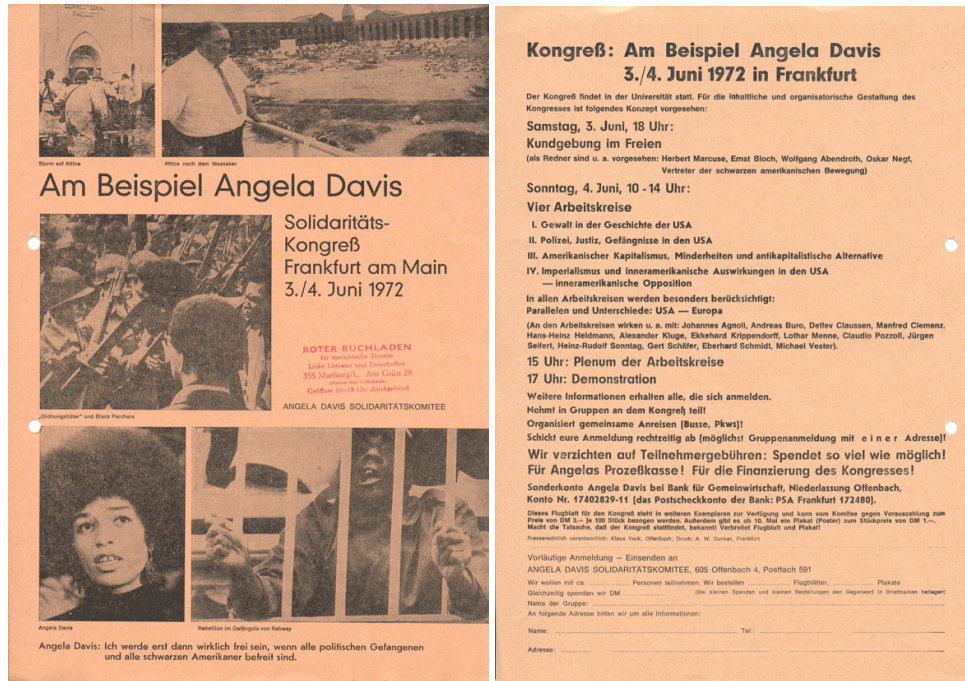


Figure 6: Flyer for the *Am Beispiel Angela Davis* Conference in Frankfurt

If Angela Davis appeared to be a symbol of unity for the American context, organizers clearly hoped that solidarity with her would function to create unity within West Germany as well. The fragmented Left that the BPSK hoped to win over in 1969-1971 had only become more divided by the time of the *Am Beispiel Angela Davis* conference in June 1972. Furthermore, West Germany at that time was still reeling from a wave of RAF terrorist attacks in May—and from government countermeasures that affected the Left as a whole.¹⁰⁷ Oskar Negt devoted much of his speech at the conference to criticizing RAF violence. He concluded by saying that “what brings [the conference participants] together here is the need for supra-regional coordination and the determination to integrate... their concrete work in connection with international solidarity.... We can [best] demonstrate our solidarity with Angela Davis...[by]

¹⁰⁷ RAF members Andreas Baader, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe were arrested the day before the conference.

overcoming our own fragmentation.”¹⁰⁸ Herbert Marcuse, visiting Frankfurt from California for the occasion, shared Negt’s assessment of the situation, saying “the impact of the opposition is weakened by senseless acts of terror and by the endless infighting of small groups.”¹⁰⁹ What was needed, he stressed, was a “united front” that would bring together all of the “minority” [*minoritär*] radical opposition movements, of which African-Americans were but one particular example.¹¹⁰

In the view of the ADSK, their solidarity conference with Angela Davis was one step in a necessary “reorganization of the [West German] Left.”¹¹¹ The numbers alone indicated considerable success in this regard: the conference drew approximately 10,000 participants¹¹² from across the German Left—nearly as many as had attended the International Vietnam Congress in the run-up to the student movement’s peak. Oskar Negt and Klaus Vack further asserted that these participants represented a new part of the Left¹¹³ that showed a “decided tendency to form solidarity with one another” (for

¹⁰⁸ „Was sie [die Teilnehmer] zu diesem Kongreß zusammenführt, ist das Bedürfnis der überregionalen Koordination und die Entschiedenheit, ihre konkrete Arbeit in den Zusammenhang internationaler Solidarität... einzubeziehen. Wir können unsere Solidarität mit Angela Davis... nicht besser demonstrieren als durch die Überwindung unserer eigenen Zersplitterung....“ ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ „Noch immer ist die Stoßkraft der Opposition geschwächt durch unsinnige Terrorakte und durch die endlosen Streitigkeiten kleiner Gruppen....“ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁰ “Die radikale Opposition ist so auf minoritäre Gruppen beschränkt. Die Befreiungsbewegung der Schwarzen findet sich, al seine diser Minoritäten, in derselben anti-kapitalistischen Front mit der Studentenbewegung, den Jungarbeitern, den Frauen... Aber diese gemeinsame Kampfstellung hat noch keine Einheitsfront geschaffen....” Ibid., 15.

¹¹¹ “‘Spielt nicht mit der Legalität!’ Professor Oskar Negt über die Reorganisation der Neuen Linken,” *Der SPIEGEL* no. 25, Jun 12 1972.

¹¹² ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 214.

¹¹³ Negt spoke of “new organizational forms” such as „arbeitende Gruppen, Basisgruppen der Lehrlinge und der Studenten, der Lehrer und der Gewerkschaftsjugend, aktive Minderheiten zahlreicher Jugendverbände aus der ganzen Bundesrepublik.“ “Negt-Gespräch,” ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 26.

example by marching together instead of in party blocks).¹¹⁴ However, this Left unity was an exclusive one that had no room for RAF sympathizers. The ADSK portrayed conference participants as the “substance [*Substanz*] of the Left” and claimed that their reactions to the speeches against terrorism at the rally showed that the RAF “have hardly any followers among the Left.”¹¹⁵ Angela Davis solidarity was thus used in an attempt to create unity on the Left, while simultaneously distancing it from (leftwing) terrorism.

West German solidarity with Angela Davis continued to situate African-Americans within a constellation of anti-imperialist, international issues that were seen as related or comparable. Many connected Angela Davis with Vietnam, an idea supported by Davis’ own statement (printed on the conference flyer) that her activism on prison issues was “the logical result” of her other political activities in favor of the working class and against the Vietnam War.¹¹⁶ At the conference itself, numerous speakers used the occasion to juxtapose America’s domestic and foreign violence, for example by comparing the squelching of the Attica prison uprising with the massacre by US troops in My Lai.¹¹⁷ Oskar Negt argued the two were more closely linked and asserted that “methods tried out on a larger scale in Vietnam” were being used to crush the black struggle for liberation in the United States.¹¹⁸ Angela Davis supporters saw her and the Vietnamese as parallel symbols, “fight[ing] against two indivisible sides of the same

¹¹⁴ „Bereits bei Demonstration und Kundgebung zeigte sich eine entschiedene Solidarisierungstendenz unter den Teilnehmern. Kaum noch traten geschlossene und dabei abgeschlossene ‘Parteiblöcke’ in Erscheinung“. ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 214.

¹¹⁵ „...kaum über einen Anhang unter der Linken verfügen“. Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Angela-Davis-Solidaritätskomitee, "Am Beispiel Angela Davis: Solidaritätskongreß Frankfurt am Main 3./4. Juni 1972," (1972) (SDS-Nachlaß, APO-Archiv).

¹¹⁷ Lothar Menne, ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Oskar Negt, Ibid., 88.

thing”: US imperialism.¹¹⁹ The ADSK also invited a representative of the Vietnamese FLN to speak at the Angela Davis rally in an attempt to make this linkage more concrete. However, Ly Van Sau’s telegram message made no mention of either Angela Davis specifically or African-Americans generally.¹²⁰ There was also a conspicuous absence in the conference speeches of any significant reference to black GIs in Germany, who had formerly been a main ingredient in the glue binding local and international anti-imperialism together. Angela Davis supporters thus consistently linked the African-American, Vietnamese, and sometimes also German struggles against US imperialism with one another, but the linkage was primarily a rhetorical one.

For some, Angela Davis and the conference in her name presented opportunities to critically discuss developments in West Germany. Like numerous articles in *SC-Info* had done before in the context of Black Panther solidarity, Brigitte Heinrich used Angela Davis to bring up the “ghetto situation of foreigners,”¹²¹ especially *Gastarbeiter*, in Germany; a few others also made this comparison.¹²² However, most of the discussion devoted to the West German situation focused on state repression, which was seen as following an American trend. Analyzing Angela Davis’ case, Wolfgang Abendroth warned that “the law in the Federal Republic of Germany doesn’t yet dare to fake charges

¹¹⁹ „Sie kämpfen gegen zwei untrennbare Seiten derselben Sache.“ Ursula Schmiederer, *Ibid.*, 158.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 167. Heinrich also advanced the argument that „Die BRD war nach der Zerschlagung des deutschen Imperialismus praktisch zunächst selbst eine Kolonie der USA“.

¹²² The only person to significantly develop the comparison between *Gastarbeiter* and African-Americans was Keith Chamberlain, a Presbyterian minister from Berkeley. Johannes Agnoli and Willi Scherer also mentioned *Gastarbeiter* in passing. *Ibid.*, 31, 112, 34-36.

in such a murderous manner, but the path leading there is already clear.”¹²³ Oskar Negt voiced similar concerns about an “Americanization of crime-fighting”¹²⁴ in Germany, where centralized, extended police powers would make the *Bundeskriminalamt* more like the (at that time visibly abusive) American FBI. In the speeches and working groups at the conference, a few individuals made reference to the social-liberal coalition’s January 1972 *Radikalerlaß*, which allowed *Länder* governments to fire civil servants—including professors, teachers, and social workers with Communist sympathies—deemed hostile to the West German state.¹²⁵ While Angela Davis’ case provided the basis for these unhappy comparisons, the ADSK’s invited speakers did not argue that the US government was responsible for the increasing repression in Germany: in fact, all the speakers at the rally made a point of condemning RAF terrorism, which they argued was feeding the growth of the police apparatus.¹²⁶ Thus the Angela Davis conference functioned to let some talk, in a roundabout way, about West Germany and the orientation of its Left.

While Angela Davis’ case was about Germany by way of comparison, it was more directly about the United States. Indeed, the specific examples discussing West Germany cited above were nearly drowned out in the far lengthier discussions—and condemnations—of the US. Though the conference schedule promised that working group discussions would pay special attention to parallels and differences between the

¹²³ „Machen wir uns nichts vor; noch mag in der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands die Justiz nicht in ähnlich mörderischer Weise Anklagen zu erheucheln. Aber der Weg dahin ist eröffnet.“ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 72, Karrin M. Hanshew, "Negotiating terror: political violence and democracy in 1970s West Germany" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2006), 208-13.

¹²⁶ Marcuse, Negt, Abendroth, and Scherer in ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 16, 21-22, 29, 31.

United States and Europe, all the working group *titles* on the same flyer referred to America and none made any mention whatsoever of West Germany or Europe.¹²⁷ The overwhelming majority of discussions focused exclusively on American problems. Speakers and working group participants situated Angela Davis' trial within a longer history of anti-Left repression by the US government, where Davis herself appeared as the latest in a pantheon of falsely accused victims of American "political justice" (Sacco and Vanzetti, the Rosenbergs, Bobby Seale, and so on).¹²⁸ Angela Davis supporters (like the BPSK before them) repeatedly described America in the language of "fascism,"¹²⁹ and the Angela Davis case led to a *SPIEGEL* cover story investigating the accusation (see Figure 7). The "anti-American" attitudes that some may read in these ever-more-frequent *Faschismusvorwürfe* are hardly surprising when one considers that the Angela Davis trial took place well into Nixon's first term, when state repression was breaking new records. Nevertheless, some at the conference openly chafed at this single-minded focus on America: Johannes Agnoli, for example, warned against the "fixation on a relatively distant country, a fixation that can be politically very convenient..." or even an "escape" from problems at home.¹³⁰ Here, the symbolic nature of solidarity with Angela Davis frequently led to a narrow focus on the United States.

¹²⁷ See Figure 6

¹²⁸ ADSK, ed., *Am Beispiel*, 28, 56, 72.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 147, 87, 91.

¹³⁰ „[Es] muß gewarnt werden vor der Fixierung auf ein relativ fernes Land, einer Fixierung, die politisch sehr bequ岸 [sic]... sein kann..." Ibid., 147, 87, 11.

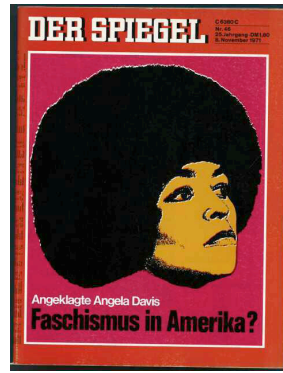


Figure 7: Cover of *Der SPIEGEL* Nr. 1971/46 (6. November 1971)

Solidarity with Angela Davis was part of a long-term association by the West German Left of African-Americans with authentic radicalism. Though the ADSK shared this understanding with the BPSK, solidarity with Angela Davis functioned differently and was steered in other directions. Rather than trying to demonstrate an exemplary form of solidarity, the *Angela-Davis-Solidaritätskomitee* sought to mobilize the maximum number of people possible—and had considerable success doing so. The many particular characteristics of Angela Davis, and networks associated with her, brought together a large swath of the West German Left even in its time of crisis. ADSK organizers attempted to guide understandings of solidarity with Angela Davis in such a way as to drive a wedge between “the substance of the Left” and RAF sympathizers who they held responsible for feeding repression in West Germany—repression that they claimed was beginning to resemble American “political justice” under Nixon.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of 1968, the West German Left found its fortunes in flux as a “phase of revolutionary ebb”¹³¹ set in. Plagued by fragmentation, it spent much of the next five years (if not longer) struggling to find a new orientation amidst a cacophony of

¹³¹ Ekkehard Krippendorf, *Ibid.*, 190.

splinter groups shouting each other down. In their time of crisis and disunity, some West German Leftists looked to outside revolutionary symbols for help and, indeed, to some of the same symbols that had provided them with inspiration before. Just as African-Americans in the Civil Rights movement had triggered a wave of protest in the United States that eventually spread to West Germany, so too it was hoped that black radicals would be able to ignite the fire of global revolution. Over the course of the 1960s, many in the West German student movement had come to associate African-American and Third World struggles with one another. Though African-Americans were, generally speaking, a distant object of fascination, the position that some black militants carved out for themselves as a “colony in the mother country”—as well as their limited presence in West Germany in the form of black GIs—made them a more tangible object of solidarity for some German rebels than the Vietnamese had been. Because of their outsider status and radical views, the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis were regarded as revolutionary subjects, incontestably more authentic than anyone or anything in post-fascist West Germany.

If the appeal of black militants was clear, their exact meaning within the West German context was not. The solidarity committees for the Black Panthers and Angela Davis were two groups that sought not only to provide assistance to these friends under fire, but also to shape German understandings of them. The *Black-Panther-Solidaritätskomitee* attempted to “educate” about the BPP through information and agitprop that highlighted linkages to West Germany; the goal was to make the Black Panthers ‘real,’ giving them a presence and a power within the Federal Republic. The BPSK used its proximity to this authentic subject to stake out a position within the West

German Left, pushing what Jeremy Varon has called “the importance of being militant.”¹³² Their program fostered radicalism, excluded moderates, and eventually promoted some form of revolutionary violence. The work of the *Angela-Davis-Solidaritätskomitee* harnessed the power of a related revolutionary subject to steer the Left in a different direction. In contrast to the BPSK, the ADSK encouraged a symbolic understanding of its subject, where Angela Davis would stand in for “all political prisoners” and for the repressed American Left. It was less concerned that “identification” with her would be abstract or misleading, and even celebrated the numerous aspects of her personality that led people to identify with her. The “example” of Angela Davis was used to promote unity within an increasingly fragmented West German Left and, simultaneously, to shut violent terrorists and their sympathizers out of that consolidation.

In the end, neither BPSK nor ADSK managed to achieve the unity that each pursued; the West German Left was overrun with communist splinter groups (*K-Gruppen*) for much of the 1970s and only achieved a partial reconstitution towards the end of the decade. Nor did their staged clash of symbols resolve the debate over violence on the German Left; it was the failure of revolutionary violence to achieve positive social change that led to it being abandoned as a strategy, not the approval or disapproval of authentic revolutionaries in American urban ghettos. However, even though these groups did not achieve their goals within Germany, all was not lost: if the only impact they had was providing some degree of support, however small, to the Black Panthers and Angela Davis in *their* time of need, then surely this was enough to satisfy them.

¹³² Varon, *Bringing the War Home*.

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