

## **Social Group Work in Germany- An American Import and its Historical Development.<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

This paper is conceived as a political paper - as a paper on democracy and on certain aspects of its practical implementation in a post-war situation. Its purpose is to document, to reflect and to preserve some of the pragmatic outcomes of an American strategy how to deal with a defeated enemy whom - nevertheless - they regarded as human - in principle - and of worth to be educated or rather: re-educated. This includes respect for the German culture and people, as acknowledged in history.

I attained a new understanding of the relevance of my subject when John Ramey wrote to the lecturers of this symposium, eight days after the EVENT:

"These are unusual and tragic times....Our democracy in the USA and the very idea of democracy are under attack. Thus it is important that we gather to maintain momentum and vigilance of democracy and freedom of association in societies everywhere. You'll find that idea as integral to the theme of the symposium"

In so far this paper is also meant as a contribution of solidarity with the attacked American friends thus underlining what was supposed to be and has been the result of an American investment into democratization of my country after the war, through education of the German people (at least the Western portion of them) expecting them to walk on the humanistic and democratic side of the street along with all the other members of democratic societies in the world, full of grief and deep sorrow over the many dead and wounded.

My paper represents a rather subjective point of view. I'm predominantly talking about real life experiences living during the first ten years of my life in a Nazi society, attending school, listening to the radio and to political discussions among the adults, being bombed, being evacuated, fleeing from the Soviet Red Army, living under Soviet occupation in that part, that became later on "GDR", landing up as a refugee in West-Germany and finally getting the chance to become and settle down as a citi-

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zen of a democratic society. And I am talking about the beginning of my professional career as a social group worker

From the very platform of my life experience I learned to understand intimately the high value of education in a historical situation, which was marked by mutual feelings of revenge of punishing the guilty of hanging the responsible. That pattern had prevailed for thousands of years and had previously been applied by the Germans to their defeated enemies. In contrast with that ancient moral the American principle was to not return evil with evil. However – that's easier said than done. You cannot accomplish high aspirations like that without having a strategy. But even then putting it into action means to take a high risk, because the concrete outcomes of such historical processes cannot really be predicted. They might go in the wrong direction! - So – amazingly enough - it was trust in human nature that was at the onset of that educational endeavor. But could they trust people, who had committed such terrible crimes as the Holocaust? - Therefore certain preconditions had to be provided. One of those preconditions was a roughly structured program, the American "Re-educational Program" for the defeated Germans.

### **Re-educating the German People**

I cannot and do not want to approach the subject as a historian. If I did, I would have to discuss the causes of WW II, the American image of man during the time of the New Deal under Franklin D. Roosevelt and last but not least the American interpretation and philosophy of "democracy". But there are a few historical facts that have to be taken into account in order to understand the implications of that operation called "Re-education of the Germans", which means the elimination of all Nazi content and Nazi attitudes in a generation reared under Nazism and to define instead "the broad principles governing the restoration of democratic political life to the country"<sup>2</sup>.

Both aspects, however, are standing for different aspects of what could be called a human engineering project: It seems indispensable to mark the difference between

- (1) getting rid of the Nazi ideology - the "cleansing" and
- (2) replacing Nazi ideology by what we may call democratic values or just democracy.

The first - labeled as "denazification" – followed the principle of destruction. It consisted in setting up a juridical and administrative system of punishing the culprits, of removing all Nazi contents from public (and private) life by means of censoring schoolbooks or newspapers, prohibiting all Nazi symbols, restricting the freedom of assembly etc. The second aspect however was the one that promised true efficiency. The new method, the real new way to handle the problem contained the very essence of "reeducation", namely to "educate" the former enemy in the spirit and

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<sup>2</sup> "An Outline of American History - The New Deal and World War" - United States Information Agency, May 1994, Stockholm, Sweden

towards the goals of democracy. This approach was aiming at building up and developing a new system.

The concept of re-educating a whole people had been born during the war at about 1943 or even earlier. British as well as American high rank politicians and military made suggestions as to change the norms of the German society and by that change the Germans themselves. The image of "a German" was at that time - how could it be different - mainly determined by the bogeyman-image of a cruel enemy. Therefore there were not only high humanistic intentions that motivated the large program but - let's say - a mixture of hatred, arrogance, naivety and a big, big portion of helplessness. However, among all that you may also discover that humanistic, positive kernel or core: Somehow that cruel breed consisted of human beings. And human beings - this was their conviction - could be changed by educating them or in other terms by making them learn.

Another consideration was that there existed different types of perpetrators, namely real criminals who could not be changed and had to be punished, and others, who were just fellow travelers of the Nazi party, who were able to learn and to profit from an educational program in a democratic sense. So it seemed to be necessary to find out who is who and then submit them to different treatments. A means to do this task of assessment was the method of "screening". By means of questionnaires the probationers were put into different categories.

Re-education actually started already in some of the British and American camps for POW's (as they were called) at a time when the war was reaching its peak. "Camp 300" and "Wiston House" were examples of British and "The Factory" at Fort Kearney and the important Center at Eustis, camps at Getty and at Wetherhill were examples of the American endeavor to "produce" democratic Germans, who were determined to be the seed of a new beginning in their home country as soon as the war would be finished<sup>3</sup>.

I know from a very good friend of mine, who was 21 when he became a POW in England, that he was offered academic courses and that those courses were very well organized and well done. He still shows proudly the many notes he took in a course of clinical psychology and psychoanalysis. He later became a psychologist and psychotherapist.

We have to be aware, however, that making the "huns" learn the right things, that instructing them, informing and teaching a selected group of war prisoners was quite another matter compared to re-educating the whole people, as soon as the war would be over. Although the same basic principles were applied, this post-war educational enterprise was by far much more complicated and problematic than the former. As an important document I would recommend the authentic novel by Ernst von Salomon "The Questionnaire"<sup>4</sup> showing the problems and pitfalls of that bureaucratic

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<sup>3</sup> In detail see: Krammer, Arnold: "Nazi Prisoners of War in America", New York 10510 USA

<sup>4</sup> Von Salomon: "Der Fragebogen" ["The Questionary"], dtv (publisher) Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1951

instrument and its implications on the reality of life. It also shows the impossibility of being able to blast the whole structure of a criminal political system.

As a matter of fact, most historians and also the majority of the average German contemporaries agreed on the failure<sup>5</sup> of those restrictive measures. As one of the critical commentators<sup>6</sup> formulates:

"However, the way in which denazification developed over time not only made a mockery of justice but also, in the end, defeated any broader educational purposes" and the author argues in detail that there were no set criteria as to who was to be qualified as a bona fide Nazi and who did not, and into which of the four "guilty" categories he should be assigned. Then there was no clear consent among those, who occupied Germany. The **Americans** "sternly believed in separating the guilty from the innocent", the **British** - very formal - tried the same but even more stringent, punishing the ones who were "formally guilty" and on the other hand missing many of the real culprits. Whereas the **Soviets** "exculpated the Nazis in their own Zone....opening them the ranks of their...Communist institutions". The **French** on their part believed in Nazism as an "endemic quality of the German Volk" being incapable of reconstruction. So they "concentrated only on the worst offenders in their Zone, trying them swiftly and expeditiously". Also, with the onset of the Cold War Washington sought Germany's support and was even more ready to forgive and forget, happily backed by capitalist rightwingers at home"; so - as the author concludes - the de-nazification ended up in some kind of re-nazification because "...the renewed rise of radical movements on the right after 1945 turned out to be partly the result of Allied policy".

Also this author cites an observer of Germany saying that "democracy to Germans meant simply 'carbonated soft drinks like Coca Cola, chewing gum, baseball and anti-Communism'".

From my point of view this is a rather authentic description of the political situation at about 1950. Many people I knew at that time seemed to be disillusioned, a-political, very egocentric and often cynical. The result was an overall attitude of "without me...", the Germans were even speaking of an "Ohne-mich-Bewegung" ("Without-me-movement") calling individual persons an "Ohnemichel" ("Without-me-Michael"). – There is no denying the fact, however, that there were also others, beginning to question the old "national socialistic" truths and opening up for a new beginning.

What really failed was - as Kater calls it - the "political reconditioning of a people". To put it into behavioral therapeutic terms: Negative conditioning always needs to be supported by some positive additions or winnings, and there was too much of negative conditioning (destruction) in that experiment and too little of a positive perspective. If you just take (anything) away from the client, the purpose of therapy will be

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<sup>5</sup> see for example: Vollnhals, Clemens: "Entnazifizierung"["De-Nazification"], dtv (publisher) Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1991

<sup>6</sup> Kater, Michael H.: "Problems of Political Reeducation in West Germany, 1945-1960", Simon Wiesenthal Center,(Wien) Annual 4

missed. To give the Germans Coca Cola and Hollywood and a fiction called "democracy" did not work. - And this holds especially true for that macro social experiment called denazification.

Why do I actually elaborate those old stories? - Because (1) I think the actual political world situation of 2001 is not so very much different from that in the mid forties – at least as the question is concerned how democratic structures and democratic values can be introduced into fundamentally authoritarian systems. Also the situation of our East-German fellow countrymen after the fall of the communist "Wall" in 1998 includes a lot of similar elements of the 1945 post war situation. Very similar questions for example arise also, when we are looking to former Yugoslavia or to Iraq or to Palestine and even to Northern Ireland. Or - and this seems to be extremely relevant to the present - when we ask ourselves what has to be done in Afghanistan as soon as the political power has been taken over by Western democratic systems or at least is governed under Western influence.

But the other reason (2) - and that is the main reason in our context - for going back into the history of WW II is to show how some daring humanists – whom I call peace bringers - were able to successfully and convincingly influence and shape a new democratic generation in my country. And that this had and has to do with social work with groups. And you will understand why I call SGW an American import. - Its only if we understand some of the complex and awkward preconditions, that we may estimate the work of certain individuals, who had another approach than the official military administration.

### **A different Approach: Educational Processes aiming at the German Youth.**

#### **Interaction (Interdependence)**

Kater writes: "As a consequence of a collapsed political culture, the need of reeducation, broadly conceived to incorporate both the political and the intellectual sectors, remained paramount from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. While the older generation posed formidable problems of resentment (recalcitrance), suspicion and apathy, German youth was a more promising source of concentration"

Compared to those authoritarian methods of manipulation we should keep in mind, that re-education –as all education – is a process of interaction, and that would mean, that there are always two sides of the coin. If there are on one side individuals full of resistance against taking over a new political culture from their war enemies there are on the other hand the methods of education they are going to apply. Those methods that failed were abstract, bureaucratic instruments popped on them by a military administration. They only had a chance to be successful, if they were connected with real personal engagement<sup>7</sup>. One of the mistakes the Allied Forces made in implementing their ideas of re-education were that they neglected the interdependence of such processes and did not even pay attention to the very nature of

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<sup>7</sup> There are good examples for this in the Krammer book (see above)

education as a broad process instead of just instruction or even preaching. And that means keeping in mind that the intended changes would take a lot of time and would principally be open in regard to the ends.

## Peacemakers

The decision of the Allies at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945 to assist in the reeducation of a German generation reared under Nazism did not only raise those ethical and methodological questions but also the question of who should do that job. And last but not least there was the question of the costs. No need to mention that there existed severe problems of different political currents. There was rivalry and competition for instance between the New Dealers around FDR and his secretary of the treasury, Morgenthau and their liberal opponents and also the leftists who pursued their special political goals. They all, however, agreed "that the United States should follow its democratic mission in the world."<sup>8</sup>

Another relevant problem concerned the recruiting of government officials, to be engaged in the democratization policies. Most of them were intellectuals, linguists, political scientists, psychologists, educators and as we know social workers, some of whom were social group workers. Mostly the German specialists were of German heritage either immigrants or Germans in exile, as for example Thomas Mann, who became one of the members of the US "Committee for the Reeducation of national socialist Prisoners of War" in 1944.

## Examples

Taking all this as background information, the special story of using social work and within that social group work as a method of democratizing and re-educating the Germans started somewhere in the first years after the war. When I mentioned above "peace forces" I would now like to give a few examples of what and whom I mean.

As I know from **Gisela Konopka** there were individual persons and committees traveling through Germany in the late forties and early fifties in order to understand in particular the situation of the German youth and to find points of departure for democratic education. Politically it was clear then, that further development of the European states would not work without a functioning German democracy. So it had to be the youth to be focused on. Therefore points of interest were in the first place schools and universities and the educational system in general. But also youth centers were founded in the American and the British Zone (later BI-Zone) offering all kinds of political and educational courses and workshops.

But there was also another aspect for developing such activities. It was the deep need and poverty and the deep decline of that postwar generation in Germany. Millions of people who had lost their roots in their home provinces in the East now occupied by the Red Army, had lost relatives and many had also lost their health. De-

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<sup>8</sup> Hentschke, Felicitas: "Speak your mind even if your voice shakes! - personal paper 19.02.2000

stroyed cities and devastated factories and industries not only formed a dangerous potential for the future peace in Europe and in the world but were also subject of humanistic considerations touching the hearts of many a member of Western societies. So a broad wave of supports and signs of sympathy with the former enemy rolled over the Western Zones of Germany. As an example let me mention the "CARE" movement that brought considerable relief for many suffering families. (...which functioned as an example and as an encouragement for many people in Germany to later on – until today - support all sorts of suffering people all over the world by sending them packages and all kinds of goods besides the official payments.)

Among those travelers on behalf of humanity was also an English publisher who had lost many of his Jewish relatives and friends in the holocaust: **Victor Gollancz**. He was one of the first who brought the situation in Germany to the attention of his compatriots by writing a book "In darkest Germany" and as the speaker of the relief organization "Save Europe Now" he appealed compassionately to the public to prevent children and youths in Germany from becoming sadly neglected and morally dissolute. Somewhat later a foundation was called after him, sponsoring especially young social workers or students in this field. And I myself had the privilege of becoming a Gollancz-scholar. Later Victor Gollancz was highly honored in the German Bundesrepublik on behalf of his rendering his outstanding services to the welfare of the post war generation in Germany.

Others were sent to Germany as social workers - and I am only concentrating on the social work sector leaving out other areas as economy, science, industry etc -. Among them were **Henry B. Ollendorff** from Cleveland, **Gisela Konopka** from Minneapolis, **Ruby Pernel**, also from Cleveland, **Kurt Reichert**, now in San Diego, or **Magda Kelber** returning from emigration in England - just to mention some of them, because they were group workers. Others like **Anne Fischer** from Richmond shaped a whole new generation of German social work students by introducing the principles of social casework into the philosophy of the German social welfare system.

**Magda Kelber** along with **Christa von Schenck** became the founders of "Haus Schwalbach" near Frankfurt. For many years "Haus Schwalbach" was the very center of social group work in Western Germany editing the journal "Schwalbacher Blätter" and performing courses for social workers, educators or teachers. Although they did not apply the notion "social group work" but called it "Gruppenpädagogik" thus picking up or rather adding to the old struggle in the USA.<sup>9</sup> they made a very important contribution towards democratization of social services. Here I'm only pointing out the very first ambassadors and do not mention in detail such important theorists like **Louis Lowy** and **Hans S. Falck**, whose influence on social group work in Germany, at a later date was tremendous

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<sup>9</sup> see: Konopka : „Social Group Work: A Helping Process“Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963: "Kilpatrick thought that group work should be identified with the profession of education....." (p.11)

My very special reverence is directed to **Henry B. Ollendorff**<sup>10</sup>, who also started out as a group work instructor in Germany. As the holder of a doctorate in law from the University of Heidelberg he had left Germany because of being severely hindered in his juridical work, in particular by the racial discrimination laws. After 13 months of solitary confinement he was finally acquitted from the charge and emigrated to the US in 1938. He and his wife became American citizens. Henry Ollendorff studied a second time, this time Social Work in New York and started to work with Cleveland underprivileged children.

In 1954 the US Department of State asked Ollendorff to go to Germany to work for their reeducational program. He started out conducting courses for youth leaders and social workers at "Haus Schwalbach" for five months. But his experiences with those young people motivated him to start his own program bringing those people to the States for about half a year. There he provided for living in Cleveland families, taking an introductory course at Western Reserve and working in different field assignments under the same conditions as their American colleagues.

Ollendorff's motivation as remembered by his wife, Martha, seems to me to be really typical for the majority of the mostly Jewish social work ambassadors to Germany. So, that's what made him go:

*"My life was saved. I want to dedicate my life to assuring that something like the Holocaust never happens again. People, especially youth, must learn early to respect religious, racial or other differences, understand each other and to live together"*

Thus, in 1956, he went to his former homeland where he and his family had been persecuted and brought with him 25 German youth leaders and social workers, whom he thought to be "multipliers", to Cleveland families and to Western Reserve, where he along with other teachers - among them Margaret Hartford and Grace L. Coyle - introduced the foreign students to American social work in theory and practice. No need to mention that within 25 years his program extended enormously. Not only almost all the states in the world were sending their participants to the US but also about 14 American university cities participated as hosts in the name of the American way of life and later on sent their own students to those countries, since in 1960 former participants founded a reverse-program (CIF – Cleveland International Fellowship) inviting professionals from abroad to their own countries preserving and maintaining also the "spirit of Henry" and that means the basic humanistic roots of democracy. The purposes of CIF were officially formulated as:

*"Promotion of education, elementary and vocational training including student help, and  
Promotion of international ways of thinking, tolerance towards all fields of culture and the idea of international understanding"*

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<sup>10</sup> I'm following here: Schmidt, G. and Senssfelder, G: "Short Survey of the History of the Cleveland International Fellowship in Germany", CIF-Germany (ed), Berlin, 2001

In the pursuit of this they are ever sponsoring biennial conferences somewhere in the world.

Not going too much into the details of the CIP/CIF history (CIP had been changed from "Cleveland International Program for Youthleaders and Social Workers" to "Council of International Programs.....") I want to pronounce the enormous snowball effect in the name of peace and humanity.

As I myself got the opportunity to participate in CIP in 1960, which brought me to Cleveland/Ohio and to "Camp Wedico" that therapeutic summer camp for emotionally disturbed boys run by the Bostonian "Judge Baker Child Guidance Clinic" up in the New Hampshire woods - I experienced very intimately the consequences for my future. Back to Hamburg I started a degree in psychology thus trying to fill the gap in knowledge of which I had become aware during my participation in CIP.

It was another Jewish emigrant returning home from the USA who - without his knowledge - motivated me to choose the university of Hamburg to become a psychologist: **Curt Bondy**, a former assistant professor at the William Stern psychological institute in Hamburg before 1933<sup>11</sup>. Curt Bondy had returned to Hamburg in 1950, when he had been asked to take over the former William-Stern-Chair in psychology. bringing along quite an amount of money for building up psychology in Germany and bringing new methods and theories to this country. His first project was the standardization of the Wechsler-Intelligence-Scales for children and for adults, by this marking the beginning of a new era in psychology. Another pioneering innovation he introduced was the classical child guidance approach. As the holder of this academic chair he was the only university teacher in (Western) Germany who besides psychology represented, taught, and helped to develop social work within a university teaching program.

What I did not know at that time and only realized in 1994 when I met Gisela Konopka was the fact that he did not only know Gisa but had cooperated with her and Henry B.Ollendorff in CIP.

Actually, many other names should be added. It is a long list of individuals, who had been driven out of their homes because they were Jewish – as the great majority of them - or had belonged to a socialist or other political party or organizations oppositional to the NSDAP ("National Socialist German Workers' Party" - as their full name was) and their regime.

### **One for all: Gisla Konopka**

It is not possible to list them all. However, much of this memorizing work has been done in the last years in my country as for example the book by Joachim Wieler and

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<sup>11</sup> Gerlicher, Karl and Eyferth, Klaus (ed.): „Erinnerungen an Curt Bondy anlässlich seines 100. Geburtstages (1994)", FIM-Psychologie, Erlangen, 1995 ["In Memory of Curt Bondy, on the Occasion of his 100th Birthday (1994)"]

Susanne Zeller “Emigrierte Sozialarbeit – Portraits vertriebener SozialarbeiterInnen” from 1995<sup>12</sup>. So let me instead take one for all: Gisela Konopka.

I would like to start this by quoting, what she wrote, when I asked her in 1994 to write a foreword for an evaluative booklet on the “Hansische Jugendbund” (HJB), a Hamburg group work project that was taken up in 1947 by Elisabeth Sülau and which stopped in 1967. It had been supported – among others - by Gisa Konopka in a twofold way: Indirectly by handing over or rather translating, group work philosophy and methodology into the German post-war Social Welfare System (especially Youth welfare) and directly by teaching and advising the HJB workers during several stays in Germany. What is very significant for her motivations and her attitude towards Germany seems to be best illustrated by her own words<sup>13</sup>:

*“Elisabeth Sülau – what great memories!*

*I had returned to Germany in 1950 and 1951 to help with the restoration of youth services, children institutions, and to work with delinquent young people after the destructive period of the Nazis. The American government had asked me to do this and I accepted. Many of my friends chided me for going back to help those, who had demeaned me because I am Jewish, who had killed almost all my relatives, who had put me in a concentration camp because of my anti-Nazi activities, and had taken away my German nationality and made me ‘stateless’.*

*I had seen the terror of the Nazis in Austria, in France, and had finally arrived penniless in the United States. I was reunited with my husband, who had also been an anti-Nazi fighter and a new life had started in the United States.*

*I was teaching Social Group Work at the University. It had much meaning to me because its philosophy was based on the understanding that all human beings are interdependent and that in working with people and especially with children and youth, one had to help them to be strong and caring individuals. The individual is important and so is the group. ‘Gemeinschaft’ must not suffocate the individual, and the individual needs the support of the group and community and can contribute to it. Such concept of ‘group work’ could help to restore humanities to youth services.*

*I also went back to Germany because I felt that one must not punish the children for the sins of their elders.*

*And then there was Hamburg, the place where I had been in the Gestapo cellar, but also the place, where I had worked with others, Jews and non-Jews, against the Nazis. I met Elisabeth Sülau and we felt like sisters. She*

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<sup>12</sup> Wieler, Joachim and Zeller, Susanne (ed.): „Emigrierte Sozialarbeit“ [“Social Work emigrated”], Lambertus, Freiburg, 1995

<sup>13</sup> Translation from German: Gasterstaedt, Christel (ed.): „Draußen war Druck, aber im HJB konntest Du aufatmen“, [“Outside was Stress, but in the ‘Hansische Jugendbund’ you could breathe again”] Hamburg, 1995, foreword (p. 11-12)

*understood that one must accept everybody as a human being regardless of who they are, how they look, what race, religion, etc. She accepted the prostitutes and the pimps and let them learn how life can be different without exploiting others or allowing oneself to be exploited."*

And she ends regarding the continuing group work after that time of the HJB

*"...this work based on the premise that the human being is not a 'thing' to be pushed around or made into someone's image, but is a significant individual who can develop and respect others with their differences and similarities as human beings"*

This text sounds very familiar to our contemporary perception – nothing new, we may say. Looking back, however to the year 1950 and understanding the background on which Gisa's and the others' peace work began, we may realize the incredible gap between Nazi-ideology and the new message. So Gisela Konopka, when coming to the US in the late thirties, expressed her own fascination of that philosophy of social group work when she writes<sup>14</sup>:

*"For myself.....I must say that my first encounter with social group work in 1941 was a revelation. Having just come from a society that seemed to present an inescapable gulf between the individual and the group – which insisted that the individual be sacrificed to the interests of the group - - I found the concept of individualization in and through the group exhilarating"*

Yet Gisa was very much aware of the other side of groups, the dangerous potentials they also contain:

*"On the other hand", she writes, "(groups) also told the story of the disastrous power of group associations and of the skilled misuse that could be made of them. It taught group workers, who at times had considered group activities a value in themselves, that these activities, too, could be used to enslave youth as well as to help them freely participate in a human society" (op.cit., p.8).*

Whenever I read these statements I see before my eyes – and sometimes in reality, because it is still there – the memorial for the many German soldiers who had been killed in the two world wars, marching around a large stone block in their uniforms, and a script says "Deutschland must live, even when we are bound to die". This to me signifies the enormous challenge of the new democratic values and attitudes and structures, which were imported to my country by individual peace bringers – as in opposition to Hitler's image of the German Youth as being "hard as Krupp steel, tough like leather and as fast as greyhounds". And, as the "Hitlerjugend" used to sing: "Our flag means more than our death".

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<sup>14</sup> Konopka, Gisela, op cit. pp9-11:.....

## The “Hansische Jugendbund” - A democratic Group Work Agency

St. Pauli is a red light area in Hamburg with a long tradition. Alcohol and prostitution close by the harbor were characteristic and substantial features of that part of the city. When I started the second half year of my internship between School of social work and entering the profession in 1959 it had just moved to this place. This was the fourth residence of that unique place for children and youth since its foundation in 1947. In the sixties they became the neighbors of the place where a new unknown band from Liverpool was plying their own songs: The Beatles.

Elisabeth Sülau had started that work as a meeting point for young folks under supervision of the Hamburg Youth Authorities, and in the first time they were meeting in the living room of Mrs. Sülau who was then a youth care worker in Hamburg. Before the war she had been an active member of the “Freideutsche Jugend” an association belonging to the “Jugendbewegung” (Youth movement before WW I and between the wars consisting of a cluster of different groups and organizations representing all kinds of political, religious or ideological youth activities.) This movement had been silently taken over by the “Hitlerjugend” since 1933. Gisela Konopka herself had been a member of one of those youth associations like many active and innovative young middle class people of both sexes. There had also been a similar movement in the working class. Wandering out of the gray walls of the industrial cities, living a modest life out in the countryside, being honest and open clear and pure and living their lives as self determined youths, doing all they wanted to do in a group. Neglecting the old authorities ready to set out for a new future – These were some of their central ideals. You may understand that these values were highly appreciated by the National Socialists. Many of the young folks – not all of them - were pure idealists and refused to be political. So they did not become aware of the political intentions of the Nazis –but, as soon as they became aware that they went into the wrong direction they were already captured by and involved in Nazi activities.

After WW II German youth workers, teachers and other people, who took over responsibility for that post war youth, started to look for historical threads they could use to establish a new cultural basis for bringing up and educate a new democratic generation. By separating the means from the political goals they presented and represented those new values but took over the idealism and the means of the pre-Nazi “Jugendbewegung”. So living in the peer group, hiking in the country side, cooking on the open campfire, singing the old songs were preserved. In the eyes of the majority of the German democrats of that time they were not suspect. Most people regarded them as being some kind of Scouts’ activities. They were seen as one of the very few joints to history that seemed to be free from national socialist ideology. The new democratic values were soaked up and were seen as an enrichment and innovation in Youth life.

What was new in Sülau’s approach was to extend this kind of youth life even to those young folks, who were social dropouts or marginal or even juvenile delinquents. The Hansische Jugendbund opened up for that part of the youth who before had been restricted, isolated and persecuted by the states officials, not only for po-

litical reasons. From beginning on and particularly in the 1950es her group work approach was supported by books and papers on social group work as a method of social work and especially by personal advices, workshops, lectures etc. held by Curt Bondy and Gisela Konopka. Indirectly there was another influence on her work, namely by the many social work students who made their internships in the HJB bringing in their new theoretical knowledge from their schools, which vice versa were also influenced by American book translations and teachers from the US as I described above.

It would be another lecture, though, to describe in detail what that work over 20 years really was like. In 1967, when Elisabeth Sülau, whom all the members called “Ambrosius” (actually as an expression of an anti-authoritarian attitude), retired, this work could no longer be sustained. But the democratic “spirit” was carried over into other organizational forms. Social group work in Hamburg was reorganized and continued in a new organizational structure by Lisel Werninger up into the 1980s.

18 years after the decline of the HJB, in 1985, some former members of the HJB – then in their forties or even in their mid fifties – remembered those “good times” and decided to have a boat trip on the Elbe river. First doubts if it were possible at all to reach a substantial crowd of people turned out to be irrelevant. More than 150 former juvenile members showed up by word-of-mouth-propaganda and had a gorgeous time. There was a mixture of all classes, professions and ages. All returning home in high spirits.

Shortly after this event Christel Gasterstaedt, a former staff member and close friend of Elisabeth Sülau, invited many of the participants to be intensely interviewed by her, trying to find out about the efficiency of that early social group work in HJB, which was really fundamental political education and preparation for a democratic life style.

### **Evaluating the HJB Approach**

Some of the results as summarized in the book I mentioned (see Gasterstadt, C.) are the following. When a former member in looking back to her experiences in the HJB points out that “self organizing of the group was something I probably liked best, because I had to take over responsibility”, this shows in kernel what the majority of the members felt. From beginning on they had developed democratic structures like statutes, a parliament, a court, a newspaper etc. Within this frame of reference a real big portion of participation of the young people could be realized and it amazed me, when I started my work in 1959 in the Club, how self-confident those youngsters were. And when I realized by the time that many of them had been very problematic youths, I was even more impressed.

There was the big open group, where all kinds of young people from the neighborhood as well as from other parts of the city were welcome and encouraged to join different activities – and there were all the small face-to-face-groups where the

young folks were selected and invited to become members of. The group process was planned for about 2 – 3 years. Partly there were groups of special interests but most of them were “friendship groups” as they were called. It was part of the group structure that there were always two on top: the professional group worker and one of the group members, to be elected by the group. The social group worker was called “Gruppenberater” (“group adviser”) and the appointed group member was called “Gruppenleiter” (“group leader”). You may imagine, that this construct was not easy to manage (I hate this expression in this connection!) but it was one of the most efficient means of participation of the young group members, since it was supplied with real power.

One of the former group leaders remembered: “In 1952 I was elected group leader of the ‘City Club’. I had to attend the group leader meetings and had to organize weekend trips for the whole group. I was also elected member of parliament and became even provisional chairman for half a year. ... As the chairman I had to act for the HJB in the public and had to deal with states officers of the Hamburg Youth Authorities – Me, who hated these officers. In the company, where I was trained to become a commercial clerk, I was elected youth representative, later I became a trade union member. I was able to be politically active, because I had learned in the HJB to make and keep the records and not to be afraid to say my opinion in public”. No need to underline, that these were new fields to be tilled, and that it was strange to many of the officials that the ones who accomplished these tasks, were (former) clients. Therefore there was much distrust and ill will on the part of the public authorities, especially as they had to pay for it.

Although those groups were not conceived as (psycho-) therapeutic groups, there were many statements made as to report fundamental personality changes and lasting winnings. For instance an over fifty years old lady reported: “The group gave me a lot of security. At that time I was very shy, reserved and unsociable, particularly as far as boys were concerned. On our flight in 1944 I had been raped by a Russian soldier and therefore I didn’t want to dance with boys. But little by little I gained confidence in the group. All the group members supported me not to run away from boys.”

Another told about his personal development: “A social worker made the proposal to send me to the HJB. Before my mother had brought me into sort of detention home. I begged her to take me home again. I was always fighting with my mother. She treated me unfairly. She was never content with my achievements at school and when she thought she could no longer cope with me she called up my uncle, who gave me an awful thrashing. Our relatives called me a ‘boaster’. Coming to the HJB I felt like shit at first. I brought some classmates and we founded our own group ‘Die Sturm-vögel’ (“Birds of the Storm”). – I believe I have been very much molded through my group experiences in the Club. What I needed then was love and acknowledgement. And I got it there. There it was possible to settle conflicts and disharmonies within a family atmosphere.”

All and many more of these reports and narratives can be found in the booklet I mentioned. Taken all together there is an estimation of about 5000 individuals who - in the course of the existence of the HJB - had been members and had been touched and determined to a certain degree, by their group experiences in this unique piece of Youth work. They developed an understanding of democratic values and attitudes and became "multipliers" in the German postwar society.

### **By way of summary:**

There had been a terrible war between 1939 and 1945 in Europe. Hitler-Germany had been defeated and destroyed. One of the purposes for the USA to go into this war had been for the sake of democracy. One of the urgent questions after the war was, how to deal with the defeated enemy. As far as I can see this was the first time in history that the victory was not in the first place used to hang the culprits and then to exploit the losers, but to educate the whole German people in the name of democracy. On this way serious mistakes were made and to some degree the whole action called reeducation was a failure, certainly denazification can be seen as a failure.

On the other side there were certain personalities, humanistic peace bringers, who believed in the very power of democracy and humanistic values. As messengers of a new political beginning they used the reeducational program in a different way namely in the name of humanity. Their personal venture and dedication was convincing, especially as a great number among them were Jews, who had lost their relatives in the Holocaust and who had suffered the loss of their homes and their property. To go back to Germany with the best of intentions giving back with full hands is the almost unbelievable innovation in the historical line. An ethical attitude for them was more important than material gains. In spite of an uncertain outcome they took the risk and the responsibility for their endeavors. Social workers played an essential part - it is their merit that Germany developed a strong democratic system in terms of policy, economy and culture. They were in the first line human beings, who had grown with their pains but who were also pragmatists in order to implement their high aspirations.

I think that time has come not only to write down this part of post-war history that has to do with social group work, but also to say thank you. The American believe in democratic values has since a long time also become a high value in Germany, and there are many examples for bringing it to other people. Today it is our feeling of solidarity facing the attack on democracy on the 11 Sept. 2001, which is shared by the large majority of the Germans in east and west which I also want to convey. That Germany today is one of the most reliable partners of the USA and of their democratic friends is due to the women and men who decided not to return evil with evil. And as Henry Ollendorff used to say: One man can make a difference. - But -stop! - does not this hold also true for Hitler and Stalin? Therefore we have to think further.

John Ramey by reminding us of momentum and vigilance makes us also reflect our own part in that deadly play of today. What could possibly be the annoyance we

passed up to the front that made people of other cultures and believes attack just the very heart of capitalism? – Wasn't the World Trade Center the symbol of the abstract, impersonal and uncanny power of the money – the god of our globalized world?

Also, will bombing be the only and adequate answer setting off destruction with destruction –evil by evil? – As long as the true reasons for that disgusting act are not understood bombing will bear a high risk of inflaming the whole Arabic and Moslem part of the world some are already speaking of a struggle of cultures! We ought to reflect also the damaging side effects on some of our own citizens – looking for a chance to prove their own Ramboism, and on what will happen when we are declaring the war on terrorism – and should not that “war on poverty” be continued along with a new understanding of the roots of terrorism?

Let me – dear friends – just raise the questions – I do not know the answers in a “down to earth” sense. But I learned from those peace bringers whom I mentioned before, that revenge cannot be the only and general answer. And I learned from their engagement that an adequate reaction has to include direct, personal commitment and has to respect the long duration of processes leading to peace in the world. And let me quote again, what Henry Ollendorff once said: “The Americans always produced in their history the power of innovation – thus being able to overcome whatever the challenge might have been”

Let me end with those - maybe critical – thoughts standing on the grounds of democracy and of a real friendship between our nations by citing, what I found in the internet;

*„Monarchy is like a splendid ship, with all sails set; it moves majestetically on, then it hits a rock and sinks forever. Democracy is like a raft. It never sinks, but damn it, your feet are always in the water.“ (Brogan, D.W.: The Free State, London: Hamish Hamilton 1944.)*

**What the Introduction of the book says:**

"Social Group Work in Germany: An American Approach and Its Historical Development" (Chapter 4) by Jürgen Kalcher is a moving personal account that reflects on the concept of reeducating a whole people, developed at about 1943. Both British and American politicians and the military set out to change the norms of German society and, thereby, the Germans themselves. The focus is on a historical overview of an interdependent approach in Germany through the efforts of exiled German professionals in the United States and "daring American Humanists," mostly social workers, who were able to shape successfully and convincingly a new democratic generation in Germany. The vehicle was social work with groups – an American import. Social group work as a method for democratization and reeducating the Germans was brought to Germany by the "peace bringers," including some of our well-known group work pioneers who were successful because they were connected with real personal engagement." (p.p. 2-3)