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# Paul Frölich, American Exile, and Communist Discourse about the Russian Revolution

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## Introduction

Paul Frölich (1884–1953) was among the most important politicians in the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and later in the Communist Party of Germany Opposition (KPDO) and the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD). His 1939 biography of Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919)<sup>1</sup> also confirms his importance to historical scholarship, as the three volumes he edited about Luxemburg's estate<sup>2</sup> reflect his own position within communist history. In his early days as a communist, Frölich was ideologically similar to his former idol Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924). The two men met for the first time at the Kienthal Conference<sup>3</sup> in 1916, and Frölich followed Lenin and the Bolsheviks' policies in the following years. On the eve of the National Socialist "seizure of power," Frölich praised Lenin's policies in the immediate aftermath of the Russian October Revolution of 1917.<sup>4</sup> Frölich's exile in European countries, time in prison, time in a concentration camp, exiles in Czechoslovakia and France, and emigration from Europe changed nothing for him at the time. Only after he and his future wife Rosi Wolfstein (1888–1987) were exiled to New York in

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Gedanke und Tat* (Paris: Editions Nouvelles Internationales, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>According to the old volume count, these were vol. VI "Die Akkumulation des Kapitals und die Antikritik" (The accumulation of capital and anti-criticism), published in 1923, vol. III "Gegen den Revisionismus" (Against revisionism), published in 1925, and vol. IV "Gewerkschaftskampf und Massenstreik" (Union struggle and mass strike), published in 1928. He also planned Typoscripts to vol. VIII "Ökonomische Schriften" (Economic Writings) and Volume V "Schriften über den Imperialismus" (Writings on Imperialism), but they were not completed in 1933 because of his planned escape and imprisonment. See Alexandra Kemmerer, "Rosakind," *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* 10, no. 3 (2016): 47, n. 8.

<sup>3</sup>See *Zimmerwald und Kiental: Weltgeschichte auf dem Dorfe*, edited by Bernard Degen and Julia Richers (Zürich: Chronos, 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Paul Frölich, "Lenin zu den Organisationsfragen," *Sozialistische Arbeiterzeitung*, January 25, 1933, quoted in Elke Suhr, "'Lenin, es sei in Rußland geschehen was immer, hat sein Volk wenigstens glücklicher gemacht.' (Heinrich Mann 1924) – Deutsche Intellektuelle und Lenin: Ein Fallbeispiel," in *Intellektuelle und Sozialdemokratie*, edited by Ullrich von Alemann et al. (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2000), 130.

1941 did he self-reflect in political isolation. In the following years, he increasingly saw Lenin as a demagogue<sup>5</sup>—Frölich was never a Stalinist, but since he considered his position against Lenin's, his anti-Stalinism culminated in disgust and contempt. One of his later publications entitled “The Stalin Legend”<sup>6</sup> highlights this criticism and provides the reader with a theoretical-methodical tool for deconstructing Stalinist attitudes. However, it is necessary to explain certain historical events and the high points in Frölich's life to contextualize and reconstruct the development of his anti-Leninist and ultimately anti-Stalinist criticisms.

Some information about Frölich's time in Germany and European exile will be highlighted, covering the years before his emigration to the United States (1941) in which he experienced both “new freedom” and “forced integration.” The 1940s constituted one of the most eventful decades in human history; World War II, the demise of the Nazi empire, the Shoah, and its consequences, and Stalin's terror shaped the “Age of Extremes,” as Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012) called it.<sup>7</sup> How did Frölich's experiences during this period influence his view of the Russian Revolution of 1917? What were his main criticisms of the events of October 1917? His own biography, which I would like to outline briefly, provides some context.

### Short biography

Born in 1884 in Neusellerhausen (Saxony), not far from the workers' stronghold Leipzig, Frölich was the second of the 11 children.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Wolfstein's, Frölich's parents Minna (née Munkwitz, 1860–1936) and Max Albin Frölich (1858–1942), a long-time factory worker and locksmith, were enthusiastic advocates of Social Democracy, although the young Frölich lived in far too narrow of an apartment under the watchful eyes of portraits of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Ferdinand Lasalle (1825–1864), which were hung in the living room.<sup>9</sup>

Frölich had to help earn household income, so from an early age he spent two to three hours daily traveling several kilometers as a newspaper boy to distribute the social democratic party's newspaper, *Wähler*, and later the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Until 1907, Frölich served in the 179<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Wurzen, the region from which his paternal grandparents came. He lived in Leipzig again from 1907 to 1910 before wanting to “emigrate”<sup>10</sup> to Hamburg for a job.<sup>11</sup> He applied for a Prussian citizenship in 1912 that was granted to him and his family a year later, whereupon he began working as a reporter for the *Hamburger Echo*. However, he disliked the publication's highly reserved editorial department for a long time. Apart from his own articles, which primarily focused on Altona's local politics—where he was active as a town councilor—the newspaper was softened and dull, and he had never

<sup>5</sup>Henry Jacoby, “Begegnung mit Paul Frölich,” *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (from now: *IWK*) 2 (1983): 183.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Frölich, *Zur Stalin-Legende* (Munich: SPD München, [1952]).

<sup>7</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). This book is the fourth part of a tetralogy with similar titles. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (New York: World Publishing, 1962); *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); *The age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

<sup>8</sup>Leipzig City Archive (from now: LCA), Civil Registration of Volkmarshausdorf, 1885–1888, A-G, PoA No. 1039, F, No. 184. See also the Civil Registration of Neusellerhausen, 1882–1891, A-L, PoA No. 785, F, No. 40. Eight years later, on 1/1/1892, the suburb Neusellerhausen was incorporated into Leipzig. See *Leipzig. Eine landeskundliche Bestandsaufnahme im Raum Leipzig*, edited by Vera Denzer, Andreas Dix, Haik Thomas Porada (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2015), 270.

<sup>9</sup>Paul Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager: Politische Autobiographie 1890–1921*, edited by Reiner Tosstorff (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2013), 20.

<sup>10</sup>In the sources, the term's use references the fact that Leipzig belonged to the Kingdom of Saxony in 1910 and that Hamburg was a Free City, so both were already part of the German Empire.

<sup>11</sup>LCA, F 2535, Questionnaire, 3.

been able to sympathize with the chief editor.<sup>12</sup> Three and a half years later in 1939, he moved to Bremen.

In Bremen, Frölich was finally free to develop his political ideas. His criticism of the SPD grew; as he wrote in his autobiography, “the party apparatus worked without initiative according to old rules, and from above was dampened.”<sup>13</sup> However, he took advantage of his opportunity to speak politically with his new job at the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, especially in light of the July Crisis and World War I when the SPD began to split following a political truce (*Burgfriedenspolitik*).<sup>14</sup>

Both Frölich and his then best friend Johann Knief (1880–1919) were drafted shortly after the beginning of the war.<sup>15</sup> After various engagements and dangerous campaigns in the field in which Frölich noted the German soldiers’ increasing unwillingness to fight in a lost war, he was severely injured as a corporal. He was treated in the hospital and freed from military service for a short while. What followed was his founding of the newspaper *Arbeiterpolitik*, later an organ of the left-wing radicals from Bremen, which he directed alongside Knief.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned earlier, he was part of the Kienthal Conference—which was something of a sequel to the Zimmerwald Conference—during Easter weekend in 1916.<sup>17</sup> Here, he made his first contact with Lenin.

At the end of 1916, Frölich was recalled and transferred to the Eastern Front. For him, the motto was, “Why the whole muck? That was the constant question.”<sup>18</sup> He communicated his criticism of the war to socialist comrades among the soldiers, which led to his arrest and internment in a health care institution in Kiel in the middle of 1918. Frölich was liberated from this political imprisonment only after the revolution in November 1918, when a socialist paramedic freed him.<sup>19</sup> No one had known that he considered deserting to reach the Mensheviks while on the Eastern Front in February 1917, but fortunately for him, he never tried—the act would have been punishable by death.<sup>20</sup>

After the war, both Wolfstein and Frölich became active politicians for the KPD. Frölich was a member of the German Reichstag from 1921 to 1924, while Wolfstein was part of the Prussian Landtag at the same time.<sup>21</sup> After Lenin’s death and the Bolshevization of the KPD shortly thereafter, Frölich and Wolfstein—being a confirmed couple—were excluded by the new party leadership at the end of 1928. Both worked privately in the following years, Frölich as an author and journalist and Wolfstein as a lecturer for the Berlin publishing houses MOPR and Malik.<sup>22</sup> Frölich got re-elected in 1928, representing the KPD and later the KPDO (inner-communist opposition) in the Reichstag. However, he remained part of parliament even after leaving the

<sup>12</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 80–82. See also *Deutsche Kommunisten: Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*, edited by Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst (Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 2008), 271.

<sup>13</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 104.

<sup>14</sup>Weber, Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 271.

<sup>15</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 102–105. For more information on the relationship between Knief and Frölich, see Gerhard Engel, *Johann Knief – ein unvollendetes Leben* (Berlin: Dietz, 2011), 182, 199, 227–330.

<sup>16</sup>Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 271.

<sup>17</sup>See Degen and Richers, *Zimmerwald und Kiental*.

<sup>18</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 110.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 144–145.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 135. In total about 1% of German soldiers committed delinquency during the First World War. The most affected status group here were the normal soldiers, rarely NCOs. Officers were hardly deserted. In the case of a trial, defendants were entitled to similar rights as in a civil criminal justice process, such as the right to a specially chosen lawyer or a public defender (§§ 337, 338, 342–244 MStGO). See Christoph Jahr, “Der Krieg zwingt die Justiz, ihr Innerstes zu revidieren.’ Desertion und Militärgerichtsbarkeit im Ersten Weltkrieg,” in *Armeen und Deserteure. Vernachlässigte Kapitel einer Militärgeschichte der Neuzeit*, edited by Ulrich Bröckling and Michael Sikora (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1998), 189, 203.

<sup>21</sup>Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 272, and 1044.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 272.

party.<sup>23</sup> In 1932, both Frölich and Wolfstein became members of the SAPD. After Adolf Hitler's (1889–1945) rise to power in 1933, the party decided to send Frölich to Norway. There he led the German exiles in the SAPD,<sup>24</sup> and so his forced life abroad began.

## Exile in Europe and America

Wolfstein also had to flee from Nazi thugs. When the Gestapo started to frisk the couple's apartment in Berlin in 1933, they found neither Wolfstein nor Frölich. Wolfstein had emigrated on foot to Brussels after passing the German border behind Aachen,<sup>25</sup> and she lived there for three years without her partner. Frölich, who was brought to Lübeck, started emigrating by boat on the way to Oslo. He was helped by a young 20-year-old ship boy, who later became famous under his SAPD codename Willy Brandt (1913–1992). However, the ship had to stop at Fehmarn Island after getting caught in a storm.

The local Nazis, who suspected Frölich, arrested him and brought him to a prison in Kiel.<sup>26</sup> Frölich was later deported to the concentration camp Lichtenburg in Saxony (today Saxony-Anhalt), where he stayed for five months.<sup>27</sup> He was accidentally freed in the 1933 Christmas amnesty and fled to Czechoslovakia.<sup>28</sup> After he achieved his goal of reaching Paris in the summer of 1934, he began working with the SAPD in exile. Wolfstein also became exiled in 1936, and so she and Frölich railed against Nazi Germany for a few years. Most German "enemies" in France were imprisoned in the beginning of World War II, and Wolfstein and Frölich were only separated because there were male and female camps for the prisoners.<sup>29</sup>

In 1940, the German Wehrmacht conquered the area of Frölich's prison, which caused the camp warden to release the prisoners. He and some others were on a list of prisoners who had to remain interned until the end of war, but the indulgent French guards failed to notice the special prisoners' escape. Henry Jacoby (1905–1986) described this spectacular flight and the subsequent weeks in France in his report on emigration.<sup>30</sup> Jacky, as Frölich called him, lived in New York and was part of Frölich and Wolfstein's transatlantic network. A few months later, the couple emigrated to New York from Portugal, and the Jewish Labor Committee in New York and the glorious Varian Fry (1917–1967) arranged the essentials for their arrival.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Gertrud Lenz, "Gertrud Meyer: Eine politische Biographie" (PhD dissertation, University of Flensburg, 2010), 54, 72, 75–76.

<sup>25</sup> Institute for the City History of Frankfurt/Main (from now: ICH FM), Estate Alfhart/S1/452, No. 8: Statutory declaration of Rosi Frölich, born Wolfstein, Frankfurt/Main, March 18, 1955.

<sup>26</sup> Lenz, *Gertrud Meyer*, 75–76. See also Reinhard Jacobs, *Terror unterm Hakenkreuz – Ort des Erinnerns in Niedersachsen und Sachsen-Anhalt* (Berlin: Otto-Brenner-Stiftung, 2001), 44–45; no author, "Brandt – Nr. F 2019," *Der Spiegel* 36 (1976): 78–79.

<sup>27</sup> State Archive Hamburg (hereafter SAH), confirmation from April 25, 1949, holding 351-11, Department of Restitution 47133, fol. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Information from Edda Tasiemka, Paul Frölich's daughter (phone call, June 28, 2017). See also the correspondence between Frölich and Brupbacher at the International Institute of Social History (hereafter IISH Amsterdam), Estate Brupbacher, ARCH00118.61.

<sup>29</sup> For this period, see, e.g., Ursula Langkau-Alex, *Deutsche Volksfront 1932–1939: Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2004–2005). Regarding the imprisonments, see Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 272, 1044.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Jacoby, *Davongekommen: 10 Jahre Exil 1936–1946. Prag – Paris – Montauban – New York – Washington* (Frankfurt/Main: Sandler-Verlag, [1982]), 82–89.

<sup>31</sup> Columbia University, Butler Library, New York, Varian Fry Collection I 1D. See also "Frölich, Paul," and "Frölich, Rose (Rosi)," *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933*, edited by Institut für Zeitgeschichte und der Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration, Inc., vol. 1 (München: DeGruyter, 1980), 203–204. See also Jack Jacobs, "Review on: Juden und deutsche Arbeiterbewegung bis 1933. Soziale Utopien und religiös-kulturelle Traditionen," edited by Ludger Heid and Arnold Paucker," in *Values, Interests and Identity: Jews and Politics in a Changing World*, edited by Peter Y. Medding (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 271.

## New York 1941–1950

Because of the pervasive anticommunist sentiment in the United States, it was almost impossible for Frölich and Wolfstein to have a political presence during their exile. They visited public lectures and events, drove to congresses abroad (e.g., in Canada) and maintained their personal network, but it was impossible for them to actively engage or interfere with American politics.

Frölich thus retired into private life, mainly as an author, to continue writing his important books or making them anew. He once again wrote about the treatises on the French Revolution, which the Gestapo stole from his apartment in Paris in 1940.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Wolfstein earned a large part of the household income by working for a Jewish refugee committee, assisting in the emigration of those persecuted by the Nazi regime, and as a housekeeper and nanny.<sup>33</sup> In 1948, under pressure from new American friends, Frölich and Wolfstein finally married in New York. Wolfstein even took Frölich's surname despite being 60 years old upon marriage.<sup>34</sup> They shared an apartment in Kew Gardens with a friendly couple, Ilya and Lisa Laub, for financial reasons.<sup>35</sup>

Until 1945, the main theme in the letters between the Frölichs and their old friends in Europe and America was the war, how it could be stopped, and what happened to their old friends who remained in Nazi Germany. After 1945, key themes were the East-West conflict, the building of a new third party between the KPD and the SPD, and dealing with the Soviet Union under its contemporary leader Stalin—the last wedge in the German working-class movement. During his exile, Frölich repeatedly read Lenin's old articles, gained new insights about the Russian Revolution, and gradually changed his attitude about the events in 1917.<sup>36</sup> As for Wolfstein, she never wrote down her opinions about Russia in 1917; moreover, she never followed Lenin's theories like Frölich did until the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> In the following, I will try to reconstruct Frölich's perception of the Russian Revolution.

## Re-reading the sources of the Russian Revolution

Frölich first began discussing revolution and mass strikes in 1910. At that time, he wrote to his friend and tutor Dr. Hermann Duncker (1874–1960) that he was confused about political sentiments in Germany and hoped for an immediate revolution of any kind.<sup>38</sup> However,

<sup>32</sup>ICH FM, Estate Alfhart/S1/452, No. 8: Request of Indemnity, Paul Frölich, Kew Gardens, April 11, 1949. See also Paul Frölich, *1789 – Die große Zeitenwende. Von der Bürokratie des Absolutismus zum Parlament der Revolution* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1957). This work was published posthumously and is considered the first part of an incomplete series. The anonymous publishers are most likely Rosi Wolfstein-Frölich and Henry Jacoby.

<sup>33</sup>German Federal Archives (hereafter GFA), SAPMO, NY 4445, 250 (Estate Duncker), letter from Paul Frölich to Kaete Duncker, July 18, 1943, fol. 68; Beate Brunner, "Alles kritisch nachprüfen...! Rosi Wolfstein – eine der bedeutendsten Frauen der Arbeiterbewegung," in: *Wittener Frauengeschichte(n). Dokumentation anlässlich einer frauengeschichtlichen Stadtrundfahrt*, edited by Arbeitskreis Frauengeschichte Witten (Witten: Laube, 1992), 41.

<sup>34</sup>ICH FM, Death records 1953, No. 437/V.

<sup>35</sup>Ilya or Elias Laub was formerly the owner of a social democratic publishing bookstore in Berlin, which was named after him. See Bernd Klemm, "Paul Frölich (1884–1953). Politische Orientierung und theoretische Reflexionen von Linkssozialisten nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Sechs Briefe Paul Frölichs aus der Emigration (1946–1949) an ehemalige KPD/SAP-Mitglieder in Berlin, Duisburg, Offenbach, Wesel, La Habana/Cuba und Stuttgart," *IWK* 2 (1983): 220, n. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Jacoby, "Begegnung," 183.

<sup>37</sup>ICH FM, Sammlungen S 2 Personen, S 2/11.889, Frölich, Rosi: Frauenfunk, Sendung vom 27. Mai 1978, 12:00 Uhr, 2. Programm. Redaktion: Helga Dierichs: "Ich tritt mit Lenin." Lebenserinnerungen von Rose Frölich, Hessischer Rundfunk, Frankfurt/Main, 2–20. The tape recording is in the Women's Research, Education and Information Center's archives in Berlin (FFBIZ), K 64 BRD 18.1.2, Ich tritt mit Lenin: Portrait der Rose Fröhlich (sic!), geb. Wolfstein.

<sup>38</sup>GFA, NY 4445, 171, fol. 46–49, Letter from Paul Frölich to "Herr Doktor" [= Hermann Duncker], Leipzig, February 16, 1910.

history shows nothing happened for the next seven years, even in the face of war. As mentioned before, Frölich first encountered the February Revolution of 1917 as a soldier in the field. Even if he was not too close to the Mensheviks as he was to the Bolsheviks at that time, he was at risk of joining the Russians. Still, nothing happened. He was imprisoned for the next months.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, like Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919), he was forced to wait for the October Revolution's success behind bars.

After being released, Frölich took over as editor-in-chief of the *Red Flag* (*Rote Fahne*) in Hamburg for some time.<sup>40</sup> During Christmas of 1918, he gathered with other left-wing radicals from Hamburg and Bremen in Berlin, where the KPD was founded a week later.<sup>41</sup> During this time and for a while after that, he supported Lenin's positions, especially concerning the Russian Revolution. He also criticized Rosa Luxemburg and became increasingly radical.<sup>42</sup>

After the murder of Kurt Eisner (1867–1919) and the brutal suppression of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, which he observed and documented from the underground for posterity, Frölich went off the radar and lived anonymously for a few months due to his party membership.<sup>43</sup>

On a theoretical level, he had joined Heinrich Brandler (1881–1967), August Thalheimer (1884–1948), and Wilhelm Koenen (1886–1963). They wanted to force a new revolution with their "offensive theory."<sup>44</sup> The March Action also occurred in 1921, which took place in the industrial regions located in Halle, Leuna, Merseburg, and Mansfeld.<sup>45</sup> The extent to which Frölich was involved in the actions on the streets, which were characterized by terrorist attacks and murders, is currently unknown. However, it seems likely that he was an active part of it. Contrary to possible expectations, Lenin was horrified—it was not in his plan to employ the strategies used during October 1917 in Germany, too. After several letter exchanges between the two parties, Lenin demanded that the German ringleaders attend as a closed audience, whereupon he could properly read the Riot Act to them. Nothing else is known about this conversation besides the fact that the Bolshevik leader excused his use of curse words in a subsequent letter to Frölich and others who were part of the meeting.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of the curses, Frölich remained a faithful follower of Lenin and his theories.

A few months later, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee decided that Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) and Adolf Warski (1868–1937) were to publish Rosa Luxemburg's papers. Frölich was envisaged as an editor, which corresponded with Lenin's wishes. However, contrary to all expectations, Frölich's first three volumes were not related

<sup>39</sup>SAH, Request for Restitution, 11th April, 1949, holding 351–11, department of restitution 47133, fol. 28.

<sup>40</sup>Volker Ulrich, "Weltkrieg und Novemberrevolution: die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung 1914 bis 1918," in *Hamburg im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts: die Zeit des Politikers Otto Stolten. Sieben Abhandlungen*, edited by Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, (Hamburg: Landeszentrale, 2000), 121. See also Christiane Teetz, *Otto Stolten und die Sozialdemokratie in Hamburg bis zum Ende der Kaiserzeit* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2004), 159–160.

<sup>41</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 159–160.

<sup>42</sup>Paul Levi, *Schriften, Reden, Briefe. Vol. II/1, and II/2: Ohne einen Tropfen Lakaienblut. Sozialdemokratie, Sozialistische Politik und Wirtschaft. Sämtliche Texte*, edited by Jörn Schütrumpf (Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 2018), 36.

<sup>43</sup>Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 204.

<sup>44</sup>See Theodor Bergmann, *Die Thalheimers. Die Geschichte einer Familie undogmatischer Marxisten* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2004), 82–85.

<sup>45</sup>See Christian Knatz, "Ein Heer im grünen Rock?" *Der mitteldeutsche Aufstand 1921, die preußische Schutzpolizei und die Frage der inneren Sicherheit in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000).

<sup>46</sup>Letter from Lenin to Wilhelm Koenen, August Thalheimer, and Paul Frölich, [Moscow] June 16, [1921], in: *Briefe Deutscher an Lenin 1917–1923. Vertreter der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung im Briefwechsel mit Lenin*, edited by Ruth Stoljarow and Peter Schmalfuß (Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 1990), 271.



to the Russian Revolution. This was not due to Frölich's agenda, but instead resulted from a legal dispute with Paul Levi (1883–1930), who had already published some passages from the Luxemburg's estate.<sup>47</sup> Frölich was thus blocked from discussing the subject. Nevertheless, he later wrote about the topic in detail when he penned one of the all-time most important Luxemburg biographies during his subsequent exile in France. The book was published in 1939, 20 years after Luxemburg's death. However, five days before Hitler came to power in 1933, Frölich had to defend Lenin's "Red Terror" against Stalin's wheeling and dealing. One of them deplored the regrettable aspects of a monarchist society, while the other used his power as a dictator to suppress his own people.<sup>48</sup>

Frölich, who was still not averse to Lenin, appealed to one of the most original principles in Bolshevik theory during his French exile. He began to draw parallels between the modern revolutions. The fundamental craftwork of every Russian Revolutionary was an attitude, as it were, of the French Revolutionaries in the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> He still drew comparisons, but he had little time to think about them intensively. Because of his active work in the SAPD and constant discussions with comrades, his theoretical development was not a priority for some time. That only changed after his departure to America; on one hand he gained liberty and distanced himself from the war, but on the other hand, he also faced unemployment. Whether Frölich was ever seriously concerned about a job is still unknown, but at any rate, Wolfstein worked steadily to raise money for them both.<sup>50</sup>

Both Frölich and Wolfstein met their old friends during their first year in the United States. However, when this group of 16 former SAPD individuals started meeting more often starting in 1942 to discuss possible political developments in Germany after Hitler, Wolfstein and Frölich dissociated themselves from their old friends. Jacob Walcher (1887–1970) in particular had no sympathy for this attitude, calling Wolfstein and Frölich "cowards" and "chickenshit" in later letters.<sup>51</sup> He did not understand why the two were afraid to face the war between Russia and Hitler's Germany being on Stalin's side.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the fact that they had always rejected the dictator's policies, they also had thorns in their sides that their friends all seemed to ignore.

In the 1920s, the two were excluded from the KPD as so-called "right-dissenters."<sup>53</sup> This was partly not only due to the new leaders of the German party, Arkadi Maslow (1891–

<sup>47</sup> Suhr, "Lenin," 130. See also Frölich, *Im radikalen Lager*, 277, n.

<sup>48</sup> Frölich, "Lenin zu den Organisationsfragen," 130.

<sup>49</sup> Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 145. On Paul Frölich's comparison of the Russian October Revolution with the German November Revolution, see Jürgen Roth and Michael M. Kopf, "Deutsche und russische Revolution," <http://www.arbeitermacht.de/rm/rm26/deutscheundrussischerevolution.htm> (accessed August 24, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> GFA, SAPMO, NY 4445, 250, Letter from Paul Frölich to Kaete Duncker, 18th July, 1943, fol 68; Brunner, "Alles kritisch nachprüfen...," 41.

<sup>51</sup> GFA, SAPMO, NY 4087, 54 (Estate Walcher), Max Diamant to Jacob Walcher, Mexico City, September 21, 1942; Jacob Walcher to August and Irmgard Enderle, [New York], October 9, 1945, 2. See also GFA, SAPMO, NY 4087, 55 (Estate Walcher), Boris Goldenberg to Jacob "Jim" Walcher, Havana, December 15, 1942, 2; Boris Goldenberg to Jim [Jacob Walcher] and Hexe [Herta Walcher], Havana, December 22, 1945, 2; Jacob Walcher to Boris Goldenberg, [New York], February 28, 1946, 1–2; Max Köhler to Jacob Walcher, [Copenhagen], August 23, 1944; Jacob Walcher to Max and "Lieschen" Köhler, New York, August 10, 1945, 1–2. Furthermore GFA, SAPMO, NY 4087, 56 (Estate Walcher), Herta Walcher to "Lämmchen" [Fritz Lamm], New York, October 13, 1944; Fritz Lamm to Jacob Walcher, Havana, October 17, 1944, 1–2; Fritz Lamm to Jacob Walcher, Havana, September 17, 1945, 2; Jacob Walcher to "Liebe Freunde" [= "dear friends" in London], New York, January 10, 1944; Jacob Walcher to "Liebe Freunde" [= "dear friends" in London], [New York], December, 1945, 1. Also GFA, SAPMO, NY 4087, 57 (Estate Walcher), Jacob Walcher to Alfred Moos, [New York], August 10, 1945, 1; Jacob Walcher to Willi Sauter, [New York], August, 19, 1946, 2; Willi Sauter to Jacob Walcher, Ulm, October 9, 1946, 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Weber ans Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 272, 1044.

1941) and Ruth Fischer (1895–1961), but also because of Ernst Thälmann (1886–1944) and, of course, Josef Stalin (1878–1953) himself. Maslow and Fischer were initially loyal to Stalin and demanded a party line along left-wing radicalism after Lenin's death.<sup>54</sup> Those who opposed them were defamed as part of the party's "right wing."<sup>55</sup> After internal disputes and problems with Moscow, which cannot be described in detail here,<sup>56</sup> Maslow and Fischer also had to end their career in the KPD. They lived in French exile from 1933 to 1940, after which they fled to Spain. While Ruth Fischer was granted an entry visa to the United States, Maslow had bad luck<sup>57</sup>—he traveled to Cuba where he died in 1941. His unconscious body was found in the streets of Havana, and a few hours later, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>58</sup> However, Ruth Fischer suspected the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) of murdering her companion with poison. Following the opinion of Fischer's biographer Mario Keßler, I generally agree with the murder hypothesis.<sup>59</sup> Hurt by hatred, she became an anti-Communist, acted as an informant for the FBI, and worked as a researcher for Harvard University studying the history of communism.<sup>60</sup> She accused multiple German emigrants of being Stalin's agents without reason, which brought her former comrades into life-threatening situations.<sup>61</sup>

Frölich's "far-sightedness" is therefore understandable, and he did not pursue any obviously left-wing activities in the United States because even old friends could have been spies. His own savior from his oppressed life in Europe, Varian Fry, had experienced what it meant to sympathize with Hitler's opponents on his own.<sup>62</sup> In addition, even after the war and in the age of massive communist hunting, that is, McCarthyism, Ruth Fischer was not ashamed to testify against her own brothers because they had been communists.<sup>63</sup>

In this poisoned atmosphere, which Frölich judged far more effectively than, for example, Jacob Walcher, the old network of German socialists exiled to America broke apart. In the following years, Frölich sat at his desk each day and reread old books, uncovering new connections, and reconsidered his judgment about Lenin one last time.<sup>64</sup> His old friend Henry Jacoby, a fellow inmate in France who published an autobiography, describes how he had visited Frölich one day in his apartment in Kew Gardens. When Jacoby entered the study,

<sup>54</sup> For their biography, see Mario Keßler, *Ruth Fischer. Ein Leben mit und gegen Kommunisten (1895–1961)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> For so-called right-wing communism, see Dieter Fritz, *Die Kommunistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (KAG) im Vergleich mit der KPO und SAP. Eine Studie zur politischen Ideologie des deutschen "Rechts"-Kommunismus in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: PhD dissertation, 1966).

<sup>56</sup> See Keßler, *Ruth Fischer*, 219–268.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 386–387.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 415, 417–423, 467–491.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., the Chapter "Ruth Fischer vor dem Ausschuss für Unamerikanische Tätigkeit" in Keßler, *Ruth Fischer*, 629–648.

<sup>62</sup> "President Roosevelt could and should speak out again against these monstrous events. A stern warning from him will have no effect on Hitler, but it may impress some Germans like the officer who helped the Jews from Brussels to escape." Varian Fry, "The Massacre of Jews in Europe," *The New Republic*, December 21, 1942, 818. Contrary to the views of the president, who sometimes tolerated anti-Semitic views within his inner circle, his wife Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) had been an advocate for African-American rights since 1934, actively urging Washington to accept Jewish refugees in the US and criticized Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957) for his communist hunt, whose inherent mistrust she found profoundly un-American. See Angelika Meyer, "'Gesucht von der Gestapo'. Varian Fry und die amerikanische Fluchthilfeorganisation 'Emergency Rescue Committee' (ERC). 'Wanted by the Gestapo'. Varian Fry and the American refugee aid organization the 'Emergency Rescue Committee' (ERC)," in *Ohne zu zögern. Varian Fry: Berlin – Marseille – New York*, edited by Aktives Museum Berlin (Leipzig: Messedruck, 2008), 134.

<sup>63</sup> See GFA, SAPMO, ZPA IV 2/11/195, Report in the case of Gerhart Eisler, written by Ruth Fischer, November 20, 1946.

<sup>64</sup> Jacoby, "Begegnung," 183.

Frölich, instead of greeting his friend, said, “Jacky, this is a great story. This demagogue, I have to read something to you.”<sup>65</sup>

Jacoby considered this break from Lenin as an issue of political morality that had only emerged in Frölich’s American exile. In the United States, Frölich had written his book called “1789,” and as a sensitive character, he was consumed by the object of his investigation on more than one occasion. He himself wrote: “I have been led to work to clarify the new development in Russia, and I am convinced that the results will also shed light on the current problems of democracy, dictatorship and the revolutionary bureaucracy.”<sup>66</sup> Frölich also demonstrates remarkable knowledge of contemporary literature:

[Bertram D. Wolfe] shows the negative aspects of Lenin’s personality, especially the brutality in the factional struggle, which is often frightening harmless in the choice of the means destined to squeeze the enemy down [...] [In the book] for the first time, [we can find] a description of the terrorist acts and the expropriations carried out by the Bolsheviks under Lenin’s toleration and encouragement after 1905. Only indications have been known up to this point [...]: the singularity in Lenin’s work, this strict orientation of his thinking and action upon the victorious revolution.<sup>67</sup>

Inner scruples about criticisms of Lenin prevented him from continuing his work. After his death, only two chapters of the planned book were ready for press.<sup>68</sup> As Jacoby stated, “The reason why Paul had not made progress despite the many preparatory work he had done before, was, in part, the existence as a refugee with all his material and psychological handicaps, but also due to the changes in his view of the Russian Revolution, which had also changed the questioning of history.”<sup>69</sup>

After Wolfstein and Frölich returned to Germany in 1950, both joined the SPD.<sup>70</sup> Any alternatives were forbidden. The SED in the Soviet zone was just as Moscow dependent as the KPD was in the three Western territories, so it was not an option for anti-Stalinists. However, a third socialist party besides the KPD and the SPD, the SAPD, was also undesirable. The SAPD’s influence prior to 1933 and the splitting of the working-class movement had shown that this course only led to the movement’s erosion.<sup>71</sup> In the SPD, both Frölich and Wolfstein adopted far-left positions. While Wolfstein had already officially retired at age 63, she was unofficially active in the SPD, the AWO (workers’ charity organization) and trade unions until her death in 1987.<sup>72</sup> Frölich was a teacher at the *Georg-von-Vollmar-Akademie* in Kochel/See for the last three years of his life. However, the couple lived in Frankfurt/Main.<sup>73</sup>

In these last few years, Frölich continued to write about his assessment of the Russian Revolution and further developed his Americanized thought processes. After the second

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> [Rosi Wolfstein et al.], “Einleitung,” in: Frölich, *1789*, IX.

<sup>67</sup> Frölich, *Stalin-Legende*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Frölich, *1789*, XIII.

<sup>69</sup> Jacoby, “Begegnung,” 183.

<sup>70</sup> Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 272, 1044.

<sup>71</sup> For the postwar struggles in the left-wing parties, see Siegfried Heimann, “Zum Scheitern linker Sammlungsbewegungen zwischen SPD und KPD/SED nach 1945: Die Beispiele USPD und UAPD,” in: *Das Ende der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland?*, edited by Rolf Ebbighausen and Friedrich Tiemann (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1984), 303.

<sup>72</sup> Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, 1044.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 272.

volume of the work, “Um den Weg zum Sozialismus”<sup>74</sup> by L.A. Jenssen [= Ludwig Jacobson] had been published in 1951, Frölich answered him in a critical review.<sup>75</sup> Although he does not withdraw his criticism of Lenin’s demagoguery that he made in New York, he contradicts the author by denying the accuracy of some of his statements about Lenin. Jenssen owed the Russian Revolution’s failure to Lenin’s imperialist theory: “It has seduced the Bolsheviks to the premature and therefore failed experiment of setting up a socialist society with its devastating consequences.”<sup>76</sup> Jenssen does not necessarily contradict the *Theory of Determinism* as advocated indirectly by Francis Fukuyama, Eric Hobsbawm or Martin Malia (1924–2004).<sup>77</sup> They considered Stalin’s victory (and thus Stalinism) as a determinant of the October Revolution. David North contested this theory in 2016: “Hobsbawm was completely indifferent to the oppositional tendencies that fought within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for the emergence of the dictatorship under Stalin. For him, discussions about alternatives to Stalin’s rule were counterfactual and thus inadmissible.”<sup>78</sup> North resumes his critical analysis based on the idea of retrospective inevitability: “After the train of history deposited Lenin at the Finnish station in April 1917, he was steered by unscrupulous Marxists and rolled on a one-way track directly into the 1991 debacle, with pre-programmed stop at Lubyanka and the Gulag Archipelago.”<sup>79</sup>

Frölich would probably agree here—perhaps apart from the anachronism—and he certainly did in his historical responses to Jenssen’s work. Frölich also comments about a Marx quote<sup>80</sup> that Jenssen used out of context and had obviously overestimated: “From Marx’s theorem, Jenssen draws the conclusion that a period of catastrophes and, as a consequence of imperial development, is only a pipe-dream, and that the working class should not think of overcoming capitalism until it has made its way to the – soft end.”<sup>81</sup> He concludes: “First there is the heretical objection<sup>82</sup> to be made: even a proposition of Marx proves no more than that Marx once grasped the thought expressed in it. That is, it is not an axiom, but its correctness has only to be proved in history.”<sup>83</sup>

As such, Frölich was relatively undogmatic. The following quote from the same review is intended to illustrate the high level at which the autodidact Frölich opposed his Marxist colleague with his “own weapons,” and, so to speak, extinguished Marx with Marx. He thereby allowed sympathy for Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), which Frölich had lost for Lenin since his American exile:

<sup>74</sup>L.A. Jenssen [= Ludwig Jacobson], *Um den Weg zum Sozialismus. II. Teil: Der Kampf um die Weltherrschaft und die Welteinheit* (Ulm: A.J. Schotola, 1951).

<sup>75</sup>Paul Frölich, “Vom Wege zum Sozialismus,” *Funken* 2, no. 11 (1952): 9–14.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>77</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *Das Ende der Geschichte. Wo stehen wir?* (München: Kindler, 1992), 83–84, 397; Martin Malia, *Vollstrecker Wahn. Russland 1917–1991* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 261, 289, 581; Hobsbawm, *Zeitalter*, 20–23, 720.

<sup>78</sup>David North, *Die Russische Revolution und das unvollendete Zwanzigste Jahrhundert* (Essen: Mehring-Verlag, 2016), 16.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 54–55.

<sup>80</sup>“Eine Gesellschaftsform geht nie unter, bevor alle Produktivkräfte entwickelt sind, für die sie weit genug ist; und neue, höhere Produktionsverhältnisse treten nie an ihre Stelle, bevor die materielle Existenzbedingungen derselben im Schoß der alten Gesellschaft selbst ausgebrütet worden sind.” Karl Marx, “Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Vorwort,” in: *MEW vol. 13* (Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 1961), 9.

<sup>81</sup>Frölich, “Vom Wege zum Sozialismus,” 10.

<sup>82</sup>This refers to Frölich’s own Marxism, which Wolfstein wrote about: “By the nature of his questioning and the way he approaches the historical material, Frölich proves to be a historian of the Marxist school. But he was not a student who clung anxiously to the words of the Master, but an independent and creative researcher, who pushed on new fields and gave new insights.” Wolfstein, “Einleitung,” XIII.

<sup>83</sup>Frölich, “Vom Wege zum Sozialismus,” 10.

Jenssen thinks that the strategy has sprung from Lenin's *Theory of Imperialism*. That's obviously not true. This theory is based on Hilferding's "financial capital," published in 1910.<sup>84</sup> The strategy adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1917, however, was already developed in 1905 in the violent conflicts within Russian social democracy, in which imperialism played no role, and for which Lenin did not share his own views on the decline of capitalism. Trotsky's strategy was most clearly elaborated in his *Theory of Permanent Revolution*, and Trotsky, judging from his works known in the West, did not embrace certain of the ideas that Lenin developed in his "imperialism." In 1905 and later, the Bolsheviks declared that the Russian Revolution was about overcoming absolutism and the remnants of feudalism, that is, a bourgeois revolution. However, the bourgeoisie will by no means muster the will to bring this revolution to an end. Therefore, the working class in alliance with the farmers must seize political power. While Lenin hesitated, Trotsky declared that as a ruling class, the working class would be forced by circumstances and self-interest to go beyond the bourgeois revolution and make its way to socialism. She could reach the goal on this path if she was supported by the revolution in economically advanced countries. If these revolutions did not happen, the Russian Revolution would be doomed to defeat. It is not about a free choice of politics, but about a *historical imperative*.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

Henry Jacoby wrote that Frölich "hoped that the Russian bureaucracy would be made superfluous by the dynamic development of the economy and thus of society as a whole. Once the plan had been expanded, the bureaucracy would lose its function."<sup>86</sup> Frölich always regarded the future skeptically; he lacked alternate solutions to the failing system in Russia to provide a suitable perspective for post-war Germany. Although his 1949 book "Zur Krise des Marxismus"<sup>87</sup> was met with keen interest and extremely positive sentiments, he was annoyed that the book also provided no answers to the question "What then instead?" He even referred to this as the "Achilles verse" of his book.<sup>88</sup> This uncertainty is best illustrated by an answer he gave in a panel discussion on what differentiates his position from Stalin's: "The difference between Stalin and my own kind is not that we do something else in his place, but that we can not be in his place."<sup>89</sup> Indeed, as demonstrated here, Frölich knew Trotsky's role. The following quotes<sup>90</sup> about Stalin will further explain Frölich's deconstruction:

"Even as a schoolboy, he – Stalin – has explained to the workers and peasants the causes of their poverty," quoted Yemelyan Yaroslavsky (1878–1943). "He was Lenin's closest collaborator throughout the whole history of our party," said Vyacheslav Molotov (1890–1986). Lavrentiy Beria (1899–1953), on the other hand, believed that Stalin was "the deepest theorist of our era. ... He is the greatest of our contemporaries," said Henri Barbusse (1873–1935). And only Sergey Kirov (1886–1934) can exceed this judgment by writing: "Stalin is the greatest man of all times, epochs and peoples."<sup>91</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Rudolf Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital. Eine Studie zur jüngsten Entwicklung des Kapitalismus* (Wien: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand & Co, 1910).

<sup>85</sup> Frölich, "Vom Wege zum Sozialismus," 11 [emphasis added by R.A.].

<sup>86</sup> Jacoby, "Begegnung," 184.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Frölich, *Zur Krise des Marxismus* (Hamburg: Ernst-Tessloff-Verlag, 1949).

<sup>88</sup> Jacoby, "Begegnung," 185.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> All quotes from Frölich, *Stalin-Legende*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Mark A. Zöller, *Terrorismusstrafrecht. Ein Handbuch* (Heidelberg: C.F. Müller-Verlag, 2009), 25. It is confirmed that Kirov's murder in 1934 was the trigger for Stalin to start his purges – the Tschistka or Tschistki.

This falsification of history, as Frölich himself described it, ultimately led to the formation of the well-known legend. However, he concluded that “Stalin had no other share in the greatest event of his life, the event to which he owed his career, on the October uprising, except to give him his voice.”<sup>92</sup> The dilemma that came of this is marked by Soviet historical revisionism. Since Lenin’s death, or at least since 1935, the revolutionary history of Stalin and Beria has been falsified and manipulated.<sup>93</sup> It is the accomplishment of self-taught historians such as Frölich to expose myths about Stalin. In this regard, he conducted much of his deconstruction work during his American exile from 1941 to 1950.

What Frölich wrote in one of his last reflections on Lenin and the Russian Revolution in 1951—two years before his death in Germany—summarized his thoughts on the topic:

Grotesque to consider that the world history has been running since 1917 as it is, because one, two or a dozen people have not properly learned their theoretical pensum. All theoretical knowledge arises from the given conditions, to which even such insignificant assumptions belong as the knowledge of the individual, and no theoretical knowledge can be carried through purely by the terrible intertwines of the forces of a historical change. No man and no party dominates the historical process sovereignly, and in the best case they are at a weak helm in a hurricane.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Frölich, *Stalin-Legende*, 7.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid, 5.

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Jacoby, “Begegnung,” 186.