VOLUME 26 NUMBER 3 SEPTEMBER 2024

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Genocide Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cjgr20

The Postwar Fight Against Fascism: Auschwitz Memory in Leftist Activism

Zoltán Kékesi & Máté Zombory

To cite this article: Zoltán Kékesi & Máté Zombory (09 Oct 2024): The Postwar Fight Against Fascism: Auschwitz Memory in Leftist Activism, Journal of Genocide Research, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2024.2410049

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2410049

Published online: 09 Oct 2024.

JOURNAL OF GENOCIDE RESEARCH
https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2410049

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Postwar Fight Against Fascism: Auschwitz Memory in Leftist Activism

Zoltán Kékesi [a] and Máté Zombory [b]

[a]Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University College London, London, UK; [b]Faculty of Social Sciences, ELTE, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the memory activism of three survivors of the Auschwitz resistance and explores the ways in which they linked fascism and genocide to economic exploitation. By doing so, our paper excavates a leftist-antifascist paradigm of postwar memory that waned with the advent of contemporary Holocaust culture. We analyse the memoirs of Oszkár Betlen, Bruno Baum, and Hermann Langbein, members of the international communist movement before, during, and after the Second World War. For these authors, calls to remember Auschwitz were inseparable from a struggle for social change in the present, and their memory practice was never restricted to writing. Therefore, our paper places their memoirs into the wider context of their political-organizational work, and shows that their efforts to commemorate Auschwitz responded to some pressing issues of their time, including the re-militarization and NATO-membership of the Federal Republic, reparations, amnesty and reintegration of former Nazis, and war crimes trials. Importantly, all these issues were intertwined with what they regarded as capitalist restoration and a looming resurgence of fascism. Our paper argues that the so-called economic case was central to their postwar campaigning because they believed that economic exploitation was central to fascism and had wide-ranging implications for postwar societies as well. Furthermore, we challenge the prevailing view on antifascism by demonstrating that for these authors the economic aspect of fascism did not eclipse the genocidal character of fascism and the specifically Jewish experience of it. In contrast to some Marxist historians, they did not see genocidal policies as merely derivative or secondary either. Rather, these leftist-antifascists commemorated Auschwitz in ways which regarded economic exploitation and genocide as interrelated and constitutive aspects of fascism.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 18 March 2024
Accepted 24 September 2024

KEYWORDS
Memory activism; transnationalism; concentration camps; cold war; anticapitalism

At a meeting of the international leadership of the underground communist party at Monowitz, an Auschwitz subcamp, the four members were discussing the meaning of resistance. "The main goal is to contribute to the defeat of Hitler," declared the French

CONTACT Zoltán Kékesi z.kekesi@ucl.ac.uk Institute of Advanced Studies, University College London, South Wing, Wilkins Building, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK

Bellini. The Polish member contradicted: "That's just a phrase. … Hitler wants to kill, and we are preventing some of the killing. That's the main point of our struggle here." But that, too, is an oversimplification, they agreed: "Hitler doesn't just want to kill, he also wants us to produce profit to support his war industry. If we all survived, but worked obediently for the I. G. [Farben], we could not say we were fighting against Hitler."[1]

This scene is from the Auschwitz memoir of Oszkár Betlen (1909–1969), a Hungarian communist, first published in 1959. The protagonists are not fictional as they represent prominent figures of the Auschwitz resistance: the German Stefan Heymann (1896–1967), the Polish Leon Stasiak (1915–2000), the French Robert Waitz (1900–1978), named Bellini in the memoir, and Betlen himself.[2] They all had been members of antifascist organizations before their deportation to Monowitz, IG Farben's corporate concentration camp that provided workforce for the IG Auschwitz plant. Despite their dispute at the committee meeting, they agreed on the inherently economic nature of fascist aggression. In one way or another, they all continued their fight against fascism after the liberation of the camps.

This paper focuses on the memoirs of three survivors of the Auschwitz resistance, and explores the ways in which they linked fascism and genocide to economic exploitation. By doing so, our paper excavates a leftist-antifascist paradigm of postwar memory that waned with the advent of contemporary Holocaust culture. For that purpose, this paper revisits the Western-centred canon of Auschwitz memoirs by reconstructing a more extensive transnational context and by looking at publications from Hungary, East Germany, and Austria. While cultural memory and memory scholarship alike commonly credit Primo Levi's and Elie Wiesel's memoirs (both published in 1958) as a prelude to historical reckoning with the Holocaust, this paper examines the work of Oszkár Betlen, Bruno Baum (1910–1971), and Hermann Langbein (1912–1995). They were all leading figures of the communist resistance in Auschwitz, and they all wrote their memoirs as part of their political activism. Their works appeared on both sides of the Iron Curtain before or around the time when Levi's and Wiesel's: Baum's *Resistance in Auschwitz* came out in three editions in 1949, 1957, and 1962, Betlen's *Life in the Land of Death* in 1959, and Langbein's *The Stronger Ones* in 1949, followed by a shorter account, "Combat Group Auschwitz," in 1962. Yet, writing was but one aspect of their antifascist activity, and they all came to play a complex role in antifascist memory that included testifying, documenting, campaigning, and organizing. They all were members of an impressive, European-wide, antifascist network, with the International Auschwitz Committee (IAC) at its centre. Established in 1954, the IAC set out to preserve the memory of Auschwitz, represent the interests of its survivors, and struggle against postwar manifestations of fascism.[3]

By arguing for the significance of leftist antifascists for postwar memory, our paper contributes to two separate strands of scholarship: recent research on early postwar memory and antifascist internationalism, respectively. While the latter concentrated on

[1] Oszkár Betlen, *Élet a halál földjén* (Budapest, 1959), 213. All translations are ours, unless otherwise noted.
[2] János Betlen's personal communication on 6 June 2021. For the real names, see Betlen's recollections at the Institute of Party History, PIL 867.f.2/b-33.
[3] The history of the IAC is yet unwritten. On the organisation with Langbein as its secretary general between 1954 and 1962, see Katharina Stengel, *Hermann Langbein: ein Auschwitz-Überlebender in den erinnerungspolitischen Konflikten der Nachkriegszeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012).

the pre-1945 period,[4] our paper reconsiders antifascism as a postwar paradigm of remembering and political organizing. As for memory studies, scholars devoted much attention to Holocaust remembrance in the early postwar period. However, "challenging the myth of silence" went rarely beyond the question whether or not the memory of the Holocaust, as we know it, existed in that period. It is not the objective of our paper to argue against postwar "silence" since it has been done persuasively elsewhere.[5] Rather, we build on the latest studies that examine antifascist memory to demonstrate that although memory was indeed instrumentalized in the Cold War, it cannot be reduced to mere communist propaganda.[6] Instead of multiplying the examples of Holocaust memory in the Cold War East (and West), our aim is to explore a forgotten paradigm of antifascist memory which called for remembering fascism, not the Holocaust—although it recognized the latter as a key aspect of fascism.

When examining antifascist memory, our study puts forward three arguments. First, we argue that for leftist antifascists of the postwar period, calls to remember Auschwitz were inseparable from a struggle for social change in the present. Second, the so-called economic case was so significant for their postwar campaigning because they believed that economic exploitation was central to fascism and had wide-ranging implications for postwar societies as well. Finally, for them, Auschwitz became a symbol of fascism as a site of genocide and exploitation alike. Yet, the economic aspect did not eclipse the genocidal character of fascism. In contrast to the anti-antifascist historiography that became dominant in the post-1989 era[7] and perpetuated a picture of antifascism as a manipulative propaganda that suppressed the memory of the Jewish genocide,[8] our paper demonstrates that these communist memoirs recognized the racial aspect of persecution and the specifically Jewish experience of it. Indeed, they regarded economic exploitation and genocide as equally constitutive for fascism.

[4] Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021); Hugo García et al., eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).

[5] Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Regina Fritz, Éva Kovács, and Béla Rásky, eds., *Als der Holocaust noch keinen Namen hatte: zur frühen Aufarbeitung des NS-Massenmordes an den Juden* (Vienna: new academic press, 2016).

[6] Zoltán Kékesi and Máté Zombory, "Antifascist Memory Revisited: Hungarian Historical Exhibitions in Oświęcim and Paris, 1965," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 5 (2022): 1087–1104; Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, eds., *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest, Vienna, and New York: Central European University Press, 2022); Jože Pirjevec, Egon Pelikan, and Sabrina P. Ramet, eds., *Anti-Fascism in European History. From the 1920s to Today* (Budapest, Vienna, and New York: Central European University Press, 2023); Anna Koch and Stephan Stach, eds., *Remembering across the Iron Curtain* (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, forthcoming). See also Zoé Grumberg, "'L'Antisémitisme est l'auxiliaire obligatoire du fascisme": Jewish Communists, Antifascism and Antisemitism in France, 1944–1960s," *Fascism* 9, nos. 1–2 (2020): 75–97.

[7] See, most prominently, François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion. Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris: R. Laffont and Calmann-Lévy, 1995); Dan Diner, "On the Ideology of Antifascism," *New German Critique* 67 (1996): 123–132; Jeffrey Herf, "German Communism, the Discourse of 'Antifascist Resistance,' and the Jewish Catastrophe," in *Resistance against the Third Reich, 1933–1990,* ed. Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 257–294; Annie Kriegel, "Sur l'antifascisme," *Commentaire* 50 (1990): 299–302. On anti-antifascist historiography, see Enzo Traverso, "Antifascism between Collective Memory and Historical Revisions," in García et al, *Rethinking Antifascism,* 321–338.

[8] See Kékesi and Zombory, "Antifascist Memory Revisited," 1089.

In order to recuperate leftist-antifascist memory, our study provides a historical-contextual interpretation of primary sources. First, it presents the contrasting careers of Baum, Betlen, and Langbein. Second, it outlines the "economic case" as an idea of economic justice shared by the Allies during the early postwar years. We describe how the economic case disintegrated due to the Cold War and capitalist restoration in the West during the 1950s which in turn fostered antifascist activism and remembrance. Third, we explore how the memoirs of the three activists linked fascism and genocide to economic exploitation, and analyse the particular meanings they each assigned to antifascist resistance. Finally, we trace the decline of postwar antifascism by looking at the afterlife of their memoirs and pointing to a fundamental political shift that led to the emergence of contemporary Holocaust memory.

Contrasting Trajectories

Betlen, Baum, and Langbein were political prisoners whose routes to Auschwitz led from their work for interwar communist parties and sites of antifascist resistance. Langbein, a former member of the International Brigades, was transferred from French internment camps (St. Cyprien, Gurs, and Le Vernet) to Dachau and then to Auschwitz I, the so-called *Stammlager*. Baum, on his part, was taken from the communist underground in Berlin to a Brandenburg prison and then to the *Stammlager* as well. Betlen, who worked for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in Moravia and aided communists in their escape from Nazi-occupied Poland, was sent to Dachau, Buchenwald, and, finally, Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III). While Baum and Betlen were classified as Jewish as well, Langbein avoided that classification due to an administrative error in Dachau. None of them, however, identified as Jewish survivors in their postwar writings, but as former political prisoners. In Auschwitz, Langbein worked as a clerk and Baum as an electrician, while Betlen went from working in the prisoners' hospital to labouring at a construction site and then to becoming a clerk himself. They all were part of organized resistance—indeed, Langbein and Baum were leaders of the so-called Combat Group Auschwitz (*Kampfgruppe Auschwitz*), while Betlen was part of the international leadership of the underground communist party in the Monowitz camp.

After the Liberation, Langbein worked full-time for the Austrian Communist Party in Vienna (for a while, as a member of the Central Committee) and later became a co-founder of the International Auschwitz Committee. Baum occupied various leadership positions in the East-Berlin chapter of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), rising later to become a member of the Central Committee. Betlen worked as editor-in-chief of the communist party daily in Budapest, and became an alternate member of the party's Central Leadership in 1951. After the revolution of 1956, however, he transitioned to a position at the Institute of Party History (PTI) as a historian of the Third International.

Clearly, the "antizionist" campaign of the early 1950s threatened to undermine the legacy they stood for. In late 1952, Betlen attended the Slánský trial, and discussed in an ensuing report the "Jewish question" as one of the "trial's serious political errors." He condemned the references made in the indictment to the Jewish origin of eleven defendants as well as the emphasis put on Jewishness during the hearing itself. For Betlen, "this is untenable in principle and is a serious incitement to antisemitism."

As a consequence, he argued, the antisemitic atmosphere was growing.[9] The events affected Baum personally: in the wake of the Prague trial, while Jewish leaders were fleeing East Germany, copies of his *Resistance in Auschwitz* were temporarily withdrawn, apparently due to its depiction of Jewish resistance.[10] However, Baum's rise continued in the SED, and his book came out in an extended form later in the decade—with an expanded passage on Jewish resistance.

All in all, their careers represent contrasting trajectories in the Cold War era: While Baum became a member of the administrative-political elite in East-Berlin, Betlen landed in a politically insignificant position. Langbein, on the other hand, left the Austrian Communist Party—and, eventually, the communist-dominated International Auschwitz Committee—in response to the revelations of 1956 and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution. Nonetheless, they all regarded economic exploitation as essential for Auschwitz and, more broadly, for fascism. Despite diverging trajectories, they all regarded resistance as central to their experience and to remembering Auschwitz as well. In that regard, their writing reflected the tenets of antifascist memory that foregrounded and, indeed, idolized resistance. Looking at their work can shed light as to why resistance occupied such an important place in antifascist memory. In fact, they regarded their postwar antifascist activity as an extension of what they had done prior to 1945. Past resistance needed to be remembered because the present itself called for resistance. Clearly, they were not disinterested intellectuals with literary ambitions. Importantly, antifascism did not merely represent a culture of memory; for antifascists, remembering fascism remained anchored in the present and made sense only in the context of some form of transformative political struggle. Indeed, for Baum, Betlen, and Langbein, calls to remember Auschwitz were inseparable from a struggle for social change. Although their paths ultimately diverged, their writings and political-organizational work originated in leftist antifascism and an underlying understanding of fascism as a combination of political oppression, racial persecution, and economic exploitation. Their efforts to commemorate Auschwitz responded to some pressing issues of their time: the re-militarization and NATO-membership of the Federal Republic, reparations, amnesty and social reintegration of former Nazis, and, finally, the ongoing preparations for war crimes trials. Yet, for them, these issues were all intertwined with what they regarded as capitalist restoration and a looming resurgence of fascism.

The Rise and Fall of the Economic Case

Although this paper focuses on communist and ex-communist witnesses, the economic explanation did not emerge as an exclusively communist or, indeed, leftist understanding of fascism.[11] As members of the antifascist alliance, both the United States and the Soviet Union interpreted the Second World War as a war of economic imperialism in which industrialists played a leading role. Consequently, the economic case was a constitutive

[9] Oszkár Betlen, "Összefoglaló jelentés a Slánsky-perről, 1952. november 28," 3. MNL OL, M-KS 276.f. 65. cs. 102. ő. e.
[10] Olaf Groehler, "Antifaschismus und jüdische Problematik in der SBZ und der frühen DDR," *Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte* 26 (1995): 25. For a reconsideration of SED policies toward Jews, see Alexander D. Brown, *Rethinking the GDR Opposition: Reform, Resistance and Revolution in the Other Germany* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2019).
[11] See, for example, Olga Wormser and Henri Michel, eds., *Tragédie de la déportation 1940–1945* (Paris: Hachette, 1955), 139–198.

element of the plans for setting up the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (IMT),[12] a core institution of the antifascist alliance. The responsibility of industrialists lay in the fact, explained Francis M. Shea, American lawyer and one of Justice Robert Jackson's chief assistants, that "they had given Hitler the material means to rearm Germany, *with full knowledge* that Hitler planned to use these armaments to carry out a program of German aggrandizement by military conquest."[13] The IMT Judgement pointed to different aspects of the economic case under the criminal categories of crime against peace (contribution to waging war), war crime (e.g. "aryanization" of industries in the occupied territories), and a crime against humanity (e.g. slave labour for German firms).

However, the Western powers' engagement in the economic case waned with the growing Cold War tensions. From a decartelized Germany envisaged at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the US goal shifted to a strong and rebuilt Germany that could serve as a buffer against communism.[14] Although during the so-called subsequent Nuremberg trials the American military court (NMT) did hear Third Reich industrialists during the Krupp, the IG Farben, and the Flick cases in 1947 and 1948, it did not link fascist aggression to economic imperialism. On the contrary, these proceedings were to prove the impunity of American industrial companies whose war contribution in a threatening Cold War conflict counted as essential. The NMT trials aimed at the "salvage [of] capitalism's reputation from the moral ruins of German business's complicity in Nazi crimes." They did so by differentiating between two competing notions of capitalism, "one true to the spirit of market liberalism, the other a perversion of its principles."[15]

American lawyers propagating the economic case, like Shea, were disappointed when returning to the US. Their cause had become a taboo, and what had been consensual among antifascists was now seen as "Marxist theory." What is more, several members of the American prosecution team were investigated for possible "bolshevist" leanings in the McCarthy era.[16] At the same time, in the context of the Korean War, many of the perpetrators convicted by the Nuremberg tribunals were set free, and most of the convicted industrialists were reinstated to their former positions.

Not only lawyers were enraged because of the loss of the economic case, but all those who shared the conviction that political oppression and economic exploitation were intertwined in their service for the fascist war machine. What happened during the 1950s was, in their eyes, not simply that convicted perpetrators were released. What mattered even more, was what they saw as a systemic restoration of capitalist exploitation, partly in the service of war aggression.

One of the main targets of the struggles for political and economic justice was Interessengemeinschaft Farbenindustrie AG, a world giant of the chemical industry that supplied Zyklon B, the cyanide-based pesticide the SS used for mass murder in the gas chambers. In 1945 the syndicate "came under Allied authority; its industries … were to be dismantled or dismembered with the stated intent "to render impossible any future

[12] See Grietje Baars, "Capitalism's Victor's Justice? The Hidden Stories Behind the Prosecution of Industrialists Post-WWII," in *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials*, ed. Kevin Heller and Gerry Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 163–92.
[13] Quoted in Baars, "Capitalism's Victor's Justice?," 170.
[14] See ibid., 174 and subsequent pages.
[15] Kim Christian Priemel, "'A Story of Betrayal': Conceptualizing Variants of Capitalism in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials," *Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 1 (2013): 100.
[16] See Baars, "Capitalism's Victor's Justice?," 189.

threat to Germany's neighbours or to world peace.""[17] Although the cartel was broken up into its original three major components (Bayer, BASF, and Hoechst), these quickly became leading firms in their sectors and soon started to produce military facilities again which were used by the US in the Korean War.[18] In 1955, the IG Farben Liquidation Act removed all the remaining restrictions imposed by the Allies, and soon many of the top officials of IG Farben were again in leading positions in the German chemical industry. Still, IG Farben's criminal responsibility in fascist crimes remained a public issue throughout the postwar decades. The judicial cases involving IG Farben's wartime role constituted the main battlefields where leftist internationalists raised the question of the relationship between genocide and economic exploitation. By guarding what they regarded as the true memory of Auschwitz, these activists responded to the developments of capitalist restoration and what in their eyes constituted a betrayal of the antifascist principles of Nuremberg. Baum, Betlen, and Langbein were three among those activists.

Auschwitz Memoirs and the Antifascist Legacy

Langbein's 1949 memoir, *The Stronger Ones* begins with the story of defeat: the retreat of the International Brigades through the Pyrenees. The opening includes a retrospection on the spread of the "black spectre" of fascism in interwar Europe and expands on his own involvement in antifascist fight after the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938.[19] In subsequent chapters, Langbein narrates his path through the French internment camps to Dachau and Auschwitz and from there through Germany back to Austria. His narrative testifies to just how profoundly his experiences as a communist and a member of the International Brigades shaped his commitment to and skills for organizing inside the internment and concentration camps. In Auschwitz, a good part of his resistance work consisted of coordinating international cooperation in spite of the national conflicts and racial hierarchies that penetrated the camps. Furthermore, as clerk of Eduard Wirths (1909–1945), chief SS doctor at Auschwitz, he helped deportees escape lethal conditions and medical policies. The title of his memoir condenses complex meanings in reference to personal composure, perseverance, skills, smartness, and stance, and a belief in the historical supremacy of communism. Talking with fellow Viennese Ernst Burger (1915–1944), another leader of underground resistance, in Auschwitz, he remembered "how we studied the history of the Bolshevik party at Gurs [the French internment camp]. "We are stronger," that's what we learned from it. But are we—even here, in Auschwitz?"[20]

Langbein's point of view is defined by his position inside the camp: unlike Betlen, he worked in the main camp, removed from the major sites of physical forced labour. It was the statistical data he accessed through his work at the camp's medical office that provided the primary lens through which he captured the external sub-camps. His account, however, concentrated mostly on experiences of suffering, survival, and struggle *inside* the main camp. Therefore, physical forced labour is not at the centre of his memoir. Furthermore, an economic analysis of Hitler's war and the genocide is rarely expanded on.

[17] Quoted in "IG Farben," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/IG-Farben. Last accessed on 14 March 2024.
[18] See Baars, "Capitalism's Victor's Justice?," 191.
[19] Hermann Langbein, "Die Stärkeren." ÖStA, NI HL, E/1797.
[20] Hermann Langbein, *Die Stärkeren. Ein Bericht* (Vienna: Stern, 1949), 89.

Yet, it is implied in the memoir's recurring Marxist references. For instance, when he tells his story in a German town on his long way home from the camps to Vienna:

> They don't ask me much about the concentration camp. Perhaps precisely because of that, perhaps because I am sensing people who carry feelings in their hearts and not uniforms, I speak for the first time about what I have experienced. Not just about data and numbers, about the six million that had to suffocate so that Hitler can expand the *Lebensraum* of German financial capital, but about the inhuman—about the deeply human experience that we had, we who survived and remained intellectually sane.[21]

This passage reinforces the economic explanation while intimates that the memoir's contribution to it is to report on the "human experience," and in particular on the experience of those who "remained intellectually sane." This further nuances the meaning of the title: they were "stronger" in the sense that they remained intellectually (*spirituell*) "sane" because they resisted the menace of fascism as it penetrated the camps and imposed racial hierarchies on the deportees.

Baum's *Resistance in Auschwitz*, first published in the same year, 1949, and then expanded and revised in 1957 and 1962, respectively, described the Auschwitz-complex as a culmination of extreme exploitation in modern history.[22] Ultimately, he defined Auschwitz as an outcome of converging political and economic interests of the Nazi state, the military, and the industry—a position no doubt representative of the dominant communist interpretation of the era. As a consequence, Baum infused his report on Auschwitz with demands for economic restructuring, West German demilitarization, and the prosecution of large corporations. Among the latter, especially Siemens played a prominent role first in his life as a worker, a communist organizer, then as a prisoner in Auschwitz, and later as a politician and memoirist. As a young man, he worked for Siemens until 1933 when he lost his employment due to membership in the Berlin chapter of the Young Communist League of Germany (KJVD). According to a 1954 *vita,* in 1935 he was again engaged in a "workers' wage struggle" at Siemens when he was arrested by the SS which ultimately led to his imprisonment and deportation.[23] Working as an electrician in Auschwitz, he then witnessed how Siemens supplied the camp with electric equipment, including some used in the crematoria, as he recalled in his memoir.[24] Nonetheless, *Resistance in Auschwitz* reads as a report on Auschwitz rather than as a personal story of struggle and survival. His own story is inserted almost as an appendix to a sequence of historical documents, quoted in order to substantiate the role of German corporations in genocide (29). It is in that context that he recalls his personal experiences of deportation, especially the shock of arrival, forced labour, and the proximity of mass murder, as a proof of Nazi policies of exploitation and genocide.

The small, 100-page book is split into four chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the camp's history, structure, the conditions of the prisoners, the camp's role in the Final Solution, forced labour in the subcamps, and the suppression of resistance. Then each subsequent

[21] Langbein, "Die Stärkeren," 183, 540.
[22] Bruno Baum, *Widerstand in Auschwitz* (Berlin: Kongress, 1962), 52. Although the 1957 edition came out as "first" and the 1962 edition as "second" (perhaps because the 1949 publication contained only one of the four chapters of the later editions), for the sake of simplicity we will refer to the 1949 publication as first edition and the 1957 and 1962 editions as second and third. Quotations are from the 1962 edition.
[23] *Neues Deutschland,* 17 November 1954, 3.
[24] Baum, *Widerstand,* 60–1.

chapter concentrates on one particular aspect: Chapter 2 on medical experiments, Chapter 3 on the role of German corporations, and Chapter 4 on resistance. As for German corporations, Chapter 3 proceeds rather systematically, corporation by corporation, and describes the "large production sites" (49) and methods of "mass exploitation" (50) of IG Farben, Krupp, and Siemens, drawing on Nazi documents, the Nuremberg proceedings, and scholarly sources. The last and longest of the four chapters, "Resistance in Auschwitz," shifts to a contrasting tone, as it uses first person plural when recounting how antifascist organizing worked in Auschwitz. Baum presents the many ways of resistance (including help and aid, sabotage, documentation, escape, and preparation for armed uprising) as a result of a cooperation between various political camps, nations, Jews and non-Jews, men and women. This chapter is structured topographically and proceeds site by site, concentrating chiefly on the main camp and then expanding on Birkenau and the subcamps. Still, his own position in the camp as a political prisoner in *Stammlager* shapes his account and in reference to the Monowitz-Buna subcamp he concedes: "it should be reserved to a separate work to describe the fight against the masters of IG Farben" (78).

As if in response to Baum's call, Betlen framed his 1959 Auschwitz memoir, *Life in the Land of Death,* as a story of resistance against IG Farben, the embodiment of fascist war industry. Betlen sets off the story in October 1942 when together with a larger group of inmates he was transferred to Auschwitz from Buchenwald where he had spent the previous three years. "We are going to build Buna, IG Farben's big chemical plant,"[25] they learned upon their arrival. Throughout the book Betlen makes it all too clear that forced labour in the camp served war interests as "the IG, the German war industry needs healthy prisoners" (216). He portrays the Monowitz camp as the essence of fascism characterized not simply by the exploitation of the workforce, but by racial classification and oppression: "[Hitler] painted the Poles with the letter "P," marked the Ukrainians with "Ost," and sewed a star on the clothes of the Jews. He chained almost the whole of Europe, and classified its peoples into inferior and more inferior" (323). According to Betlen, racial hierarchies permeated the camp's everyday life so much that it corrupted resistance itself, as in the story of a kapo who only helped Poles, claiming that Jews would be killed by the SS anyway: "What a success for the Hitlerites. They kill and destroy the Poles, they trample all over their country, but at the same time they blind them with the fact that they are not the most despised caste in the horrible, murderous caste system of German national socialism" (196). For Betlen, saving one while letting the other die did not constitute resistance: one can't save lives "by making concessions to fascist genocide" (197). Consequently, resistance cannot be reduced to rescuing one's own, he maintained. Similarly to Langbein, Betlen regarded resistance as the intellectual practice of consistent refusal of racial classification, controlling one's "instincts," as he put it, instead of being ruled by them.

In Betlen's account, the primary source of resistance is the communist party, which he portrays as something much more than an organization, as a spirit that connects people even without existing institutional ties: "We are not the party. The party means first and foremost an idea. Honour. It means our antifascist hatred and the defence and love of oppressed people. The party is alive, active and in control here, even if there is no

[25] Betlen, *Élet*, 44.

party organization" (113). For Betlen, the concepts of "party," "solidarity," "humanity," and "control of instincts" are all metaphors for resistance. Consequently, resistance did not consist merely of acts such as drawing of a map of war factories to be smuggled out to the Allies. The very fact that prisoners helped each other disregarding racial classification was considered resistance. This is exactly what communists in Betlen's memoir do and promote and what differentiates the "reds" from the "greens," the criminals (although they are both organized). Consequently, resistance is seen as a par excellence internationalist endeavour which involves an awareness of being part of a larger, global fight against the fascist powers. "The front, the huge front that terrifies the Hitlerites, is reaching us. We too are joining the great struggle" (111).

The first part of Betlen's memoir tells the story of the forming and functioning of the leadership of the underground communist party organization in the camp. When in May 1944 the transports from Hungary began to arrive at Auschwitz, Betlen as native Hungarian was put in the camp office as clerk. This increased the opportunities of resistance significantly, though also raised the ethical questions that stem from the ability to choose between those who die and those who survive. The memoir's second part is about the preparation for armed resistance. Although Betlen closes the story with the liberation, he insists that it did not end the struggle against fascism, as all who survived were forever indebted to those "with whom we were one, but who have crumbled away in the crematoria" (327).

Finally, Baum, Betlen, and Langbein alike emphasized the extermination of Jews as a distinct aspect of Nazi policies. In no way did they overlook the special status of Jewish deportees in Auschwitz. On the contrary, they made it painstakingly clear how racial categorization affected Jews.[26] "Many prisoners were wondering," wrote Baum, "what the meaning and purpose of the miserable conditions of the camp were. Bit by bit, it became clear to everyone, especially from 1942 on, as large transports of Jews arrived from most Hitler-occupied countries of Europe, that what unfolded was the largest mass murder of human history."[27] At the same time, they emphasized that not only Jews were victims of racist aggression but others as well, including, for example, the Roma, as the whole of humanity was divided into hierarchical racial groups. In addition, they all detailed how racial hierarchies and prejudices *among* deportees impeded antifascist organizing. Langbein, for instance, noted how

> most of the arrivals are Jewish, yet they die most rapidly. Jews are not accepted in good commandos. They make up the lowest layer. … That is what the SS want. But many prisoners want it this way as well, because for them it brings some sort of protection when there is a category of prisoners that is still lower than them.[28]

Frustrated with how some German prisoners were unable to empathize with Jewish and Russian deportees, he notes: unlike them, "in Spain we learnt the fraternal friendship of all peoples" (55). For him, it was the experience of antifascist internationalism which provided him with a profound lesson in antiracism and solidarity.

While emphasizing the racial aspects of mass murder, Langbein and Baum reported on Jewish resistance as well—especially Baum, who celebrated the *Sonderkommando*

[26] Langbein, *Die Stärkeren*, 55, 91, 116, 170; Betlen, *Élet,* 197; Baum, *Widerstand,* 77.
[27] Baum, *Widerstand,* 15.
[28] Langbein, *Die Stärkeren,* 91.

uprising as an example of Jewish resistance in a hymnic tone. Between 1949 and 1962, subsequent editions did not skimp on praise for Jewish heroism. On the contrary, the passage became ever more pronounced, and the 1962 edition read:

> The members of the *Sonderkommando* were overwhelmingly Jewish; among them were some Soviet citizens as well … The entire camp followed their fight breathlessly. Apart from its symbolic significance, the courageous death of the fighters of the *Sonderkommando* contributed to a more trusting cooperation among Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners from various countries, as they provided a conspicuous example of the Jews' ability to fight. Many Poles and Germans who were infected by Nazi racial agitation had not previously believed that. Yet, these *Sonderkommando* prisoners taught them better. With weapons in hand fell the brave; they did not let themselves be gassed without a fight. After the uneven battle, the self-consciousness and self-respect of the Jews increased in the camp. Thus the blood sacrifice of the *Sonderkommando* became a strong bond that tightened international solidarity.[29]

At the same time, Baum interpreted the Jewish genocide in the wider context of Nazi imperialism. For him, the genocide presented a prelude to the prospective exploitation of Eastern Europe. The "facilities of Auschwitz," including Birkenau and the sub-camps, demonstrated for him that "the purpose of Auschwitz was to become a site of extermination for European Jewry and, after the victory of Nazism, to harness the labour of a steady half-million workforce before their extermination."[30] Similarly, Betlen regarded the Jewish genocide as an experiment for future practices in a Nazi-occupied Europe.[31] For him, the purpose of antifascist organizing was to protect "people from being reduced to numbered slaves … , nations from being classified into superiors and inferiors; deprived and prosperous, oppressed and oppressor."[32]

Again, merely rejecting the celebratory tone of some of these passages as propaganda misses the point. Baum, Betlen, and Langbein regarded racial persecution and economic exploitation as equally key aspects of fascism. If Marxist *theory* in the 1940s and 1950s was "characterized by its *silence* on Auschwitz," and on the Holocaust in particular,[33] this was hardly the case for Marxist antifascist culture of the same period. Not only was the Holocaust not silenced; the Nazi genocide of the Jews had a *constitutive* place in these communist-antifascist memoirs of Auschwitz. The genocide was seen as an extreme form of fascist aggression and condemned in the name of a consistently antiracist view of humanity.

The Fight After the War

Despite their limited scope, the initial detention and internment of German industrialists and the subsequent Nuremberg trials sent a message and interrupted the continuity industrialists had hoped for. Beyond prosecution, the main concern of these industrialists related to the question as to how the German economy itself might be restructured for the postwar future, as large-scale nationalization did not seem improbable at all.[34] As

[29] Baum, *Widerstand,* 77.
[30] Ibid., 35.
[31] Betlen, Élet, 22.
[32] Ibid., 327.
[33] Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question. History of a Marxist Debate* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 196.
[34] Tim Schanetzky, "Unternehmer: Profiteure des Unrechts," in *Karrieren im Zwielicht. Hitlers Eliten nach 1945,* ed. Norbert Frei (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001), 82, 85.

soon as 1948, however, as Allied policies shifted, "liberal economic concepts and the continuity of capitalist economic order were definitively re-asserted" for what would become West Germany.[35] In addition, industrialists were successful in their efforts to at least limit the scope of decartelization as well. The price they paid for continuity was social compromise which gave trade unions in the coal and steel industry the right of co-determination.[36] By the early 1950s, the positions of the economic elite of Nazi Germany were largely restored, those in prison (such as Alfred Krupp) amnestied, and many of them on their way to becoming the icons of West Germany's "economic miracle."[37] Soon, they wielded considerable influence in Bonn. Concurrently, the (ex-)Nazi political elite shifted to positions in social and economic life.[38] Thus, the ongoing demands for the prosecution of the leaders of West German corporations had larger political and economic implications as well.

Closely intertwined with the restoration of the West German economy was the question of rearmament which shaped the Cold War fundamentally and had global significance. Up until 1947–1948, US policies evolved in response to the dilemma as to how to de-militarize Germany without endangering its economy and worsening the devastating European-wide effects of the war.[39] As US policies shifted, Germany's dual-use industries were redefined as key contributors to Europe's economic recovery *and* military potential. Rather than representing a threat to be neutralized, the capacities of dual-use industries were now to be increased *above* the pre-war level. Beside the currency reform, it was this change in policy which led to the Berlin Crisis of 1948–1949, before the Korean War sped up the process of rearmament. In that context, East German condemnations of rearming West Germany under (ex-)Nazi military leadership were anything but exaggerating.[40] Further, West German rearmament had yet another side effect: concentrated efforts in the Cold War West—especially in the US and West Germany—to whitewash the war record of the Wehrmacht.[41] In short, antifascists in East and West had some reason to decry rearmament as "re-fascization." Such denouncements came from a legitimate perspective and cannot be simply ignored as propaganda.

Baum's post-liberation fight against the corporations started in the forties, during the so-called subsequent Nuremberg trials. In early 1947, before the trials of German industrialists, Flick, IG Farben, and Krupp, began, Baum organized a press conference in Berlin. In his capacity as member of the local SED executive committee, he called for the prosecution of Siemens for their Auschwitz plant and for their involvement in the deportation and exploitation of "Jewish forced labourers."[42] In 1949, when the first version of his *Resistance in Auschwitz* came out, he contributed as member of the Berlin City Council and head of the Council's Economic Department to the implementation of a "revolutionary act," as he called it, the nationalization of businesses of "war criminals

[35] Ibid., 90.
[36] Ibid., 88–9.
[37] Ibid., 92.
[38] See Gerald Steinacher, "The Limits of Integration: Nazi Officials and Their New Political Careers after 1945 in West Germany and Austria," *German Yearbook of Contemporary History* 5 (2021): 197–8.
[39] Oliver Haller, "German Industry, the Cold War, and the Bundeswehr," in *Rearming Germany,* ed. James S. Corum, (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2011), 145–75.
[40] Ibid.
[41] See Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davis II, *The Myth of the Eastern Front. The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 64–126.
[42] *Neues Deutschland,* 9 February 1947, 2.

and Nazi activists."[43] The expropriation of small and large businesses, including the IG Farben, had been Soviet policy and part of the large-scale, communist, economic restructuring of what would become East Germany.

At the same time in Budapest, Betlen criticized early depictions of the concentration camps for singling out cases of excessive brutality and ignoring the "capitalist backdrops" of the camp system. For him, the mission of memoir writing was "to explain to the readership what fascism is" (strictly in present tense) and to "mobilize" against re-fascization.[44] "Despite or because of all her bestiality, Ilse Koch was a tool in the hands of the shareholders of Krupp, Thiessen, and IG Farben. If the Americans exculpate the leaders of German industry, they can just as well exculpate Ilse Koch with her lampshades," he remarked in reference to lampshades found in the Buchenwald camp and believed to be made of human skin for Ilse Koch, the wife of the camp commandant. "Should they support and restore the German trusts and cartels and Hitler's bankers in West Germany, they may support the hangmen and Nazi murderers as well," he continued. "Inhumanity does not start with the scalpel knife, but with conquest, oppression, and imperialism." The article, provocatively titled "Mengele and the Marshall Plan," did not *compare* the latter to Nazi imperialism. With the ongoing Berlin Crisis in the background and the looming danger of a Third World War,[45] it pointed to US involvement in restoring German economic continuity and the concomitant "threat of fascism." Previously, Betlen noted that Nazi scientists were being employed by the US Army, and warned that Nazi "crimes were the results of war and Nazi imperialism, and a new war, a new imperialist attack would produce new beasts."[46]

Yet, the mid 1950s brought a true turning point in their activity. An international campaign against re-militarization reached a peak in the lead-up to West Germany's joining NATO in 1955, an act which coincided with the 10th anniversary commemorations. The communist-dominated International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR), established in 1951 to counter Western antitotalitarianism and German remilitarization,[47] mobilized survivors and their national organizations across Europe. In West Germany, the Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime (VVN), an antifascist organization founded in 1947, spearheaded the campaign. Concurrently, the campaign encouraged the reorganization of the so-called camp committees, run, in the main, by one-time political prisoners. The most significant among them, the International Auschwitz Committee (IAC) came into being in Vienna in 1954, under the aegis of the FIR and with Langbein as its secretary general.[48] "We shall act, before it is too late to save humanity. Never again Auschwitz!," stood in a 1954 IAC resolution in relation to the preparations of the anniversary year.[49] In the face of rearmament, IAC regarded its main mission to show the involvement of the West German economic elite, especially the IG Farben, in Nazi crimes. The resolution expressed a sense of urgency which reached far beyond the

[43] *Neues Deutschland,* 9 February 1949, 1.
[44] Oszkár Betlen, "Mengele és a Marshall-terv," *Szabad Nép,* 26 September 1948, 9.
[45] For war expectations, see Tony Judt, *Postwar* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 242.
[46] Oszkár Betlen, 'Fellebbezünk!,' *Szabad Nép,* 22 December 1946, 5.
[47] Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267–275. On FIR, see Maximilian Becker, "Tales of Antifascism: International Survivors' Organizations during the Cold War," *Fascism* 9, nos. 1–2 (2020): 244–71.
[48] Stengel, *Hermann Langbein,* 125–43.
[49] Cited in Stengel, *Hermann Langbein,* 146.

confines of communist parties, and resonated with mobilized masses in West Germany and, in fact, across Europe.

Langbein himself had been serving as editor of *Österreichische Zeitung* (Vienna's Soviet newspaper until the end of Allied occupation in 1955) prior to switching to the position of secretary general at the newly formed IAC. His new position allowed him to resume his previous efforts as a memory activist. Starting in 1954, he published, participated in public commemorations, issued resolutions, and led the IAC office from his home in Vienna. IAC provided *the* primary institutional foundation for his activities.[50]

Betlen resumed writing on Auschwitz in 1954 as well. Writing for *Free People* (*Szabad Nép*, 1942–1956), the daily newspaper of the Hungarian Working People's Party where he served as editor-in-chief (1951–1954, 1956), he responded to the Bonn–Paris conventions by recalling his personal memories of the so-called Theresienstadt family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. A few months later, Betlen reported on a resolution protesting rearmament and accepted at the 10th anniversary commemorations at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, noting: in Auschwitz "we cannot *just* remember, neither can we *just* mourn."[51] In a third report, he detailed the cooperation between the SS and the IG Farben in Monowitz-Buna, the Auschwitz subcamp he himself had survived. His report drew on Nazi documents put on display at the newly opened exhibition at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, and pointed to the rehabilitation of the industrialists in West Germany and the industry's contribution to rearmament.[52]

In the later half of the fifties, when the second and enlarged edition of his *Resistance in Auschwitz* came out, Baum was running a campaign against West German militarism. Now as a SED top candidate for the West Berlin House of Representatives,[53] he warned against the involvement of the industry, in particular the AEG and Siemens, in the development of a research reactor in Wannsee (West Berlin). He did so on the grounds that the involvement of private industry endangered the peaceful use of nuclear energy when combined with remilitarization and the reinstitution of ex-Nazi officers in Bonn.[54] Certainly, his claims were part of a broader East German campaign: in 1957 for instance, the exhibition *Militarism Unmasked* exposed Krupp's involvement in wars from 1871 through 1914 to 1939, and mobilized against the "resurgence of German militarism with the help of US imperialism."[55] Nonetheless, Baum's campaigning against West German remilitarization remained consistent with the lessons he had drawn from Auschwitz.

Baum then worked on the third edition of his memoir during the Eichmann Trial. Although the "Foreword," dated to 31 July 1961, called for "our torturers" and "the murderers of millions" to be held accountable, it emphasized that the "cruelties" were not the "matter of individuals," as "criminal individuals" were merely "epiphenomena of German militarism."[56] While doing so, he described the IG Farben as being "especially responsible" for mass murder in Auschwitz, and condemned their role in recent remilitarization and their influence in Bonn's Federal Ministry for Nuclear Affairs. Unlike Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, often celebrated as a turning point in Holocaust commemoration, Baum's

[50] Ibid., 159–60.
[51] Oszkár Betlen, "Nem felejtünk," *Szabad nép,* 24 April 1955, 6.
[52] Oszkár Betlen, "Nagyobb veszély, mint Hitler …," *Szabad Nép,* 5 May 1955, 3.
[53] On his candidacy, see *Neues Deutschland,* 17 November 1954, 3; *Neues Deutschland,* 21 August 1958, 6.
[54] *Neues Deutschland,* 5 October 1956, 2.
[55] *Neues Deutschland,* 6 June 1957, 6.
[56] Baum, *Widerstand,* 6–7.

commentary upheld the antifascist interpretation that regarded extermination as part of Nazi imperialism and expansion in Eastern Europe.

While West Germany's rearmament led to a turning point in postwar memory in the mid 1950s, another issue opened a second front of antifascist activism: the compensation of former forced labourers. In the wake of a lawsuit by Norbert Wollheim (1913–1998), a former Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz, against IG Farben in 1953, the corporation entered negotiations with The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (or Claims Conference in short).[57] Led by Johann August von Knieriem (1887–1978), a long-standing member of the corporation's managing board and a defendant in the IG Farben Trial at Nuremberg, the IG Farben team offered to pay a lump sum as compensation for forced labour, to be distributed by the Jewish organization among survivors of the IG Farben Auschwitz camp. The payments were intended to preempt later demands for compensation, as these were stalling the corporation's successful liquidation. For the same reason, von Knieriem wanted to cover all prisoner groups, and so he withheld 3,000,000 (from a total of 30,000,000) to compensate non-Jewish prisoners. This way, as Benjamin Ferencz (Claims Conference) noted, "von Knieriem placed the Jewish and the non-Jewish claimants into a competitive position."[58] Claims Conference, which refused to represent non-Jewish survivors, was interested in reducing the scope of eligible applicants, and wanted to exclude non-Jewish survivors in the West as well as non-Jewish *and* Jewish survivors in the East.

In 1955, leaders of a newly formed IAC were informed by the negotiations. Over the next years, a prolonged debate ensued between IG Farben, the Claims Conference, and the IAC over the complex questions of categories of eligibility. During the negotiations, IAC argued for the inclusion of all forced labourers regardless of prisoner categories (except for the "greens," however, i.e. deportees labeled as "criminals"), and consistently refused to apply distinctions enforced in the camp system they regarded as inherently racial. Representatives of the Claims Conference were reluctant to cooperate; and IAC's position in the negotiations was further weakened by the fact that West German legislation effectively protected IG Farben from claims by Eastern European as well as political prisoners, Eastern *or* Western European. Still, the agreement they reached in 1958 rewarded, at least partially, the efforts of the IAC, as it included prisoners not categorized as Jewish as well.[59] Langbein participated in the talks energetically, and Betlen took part in the screening of Hungarian claims.[60]

Baum, on the other hand, joined the IAC leadership in early 1965, as the East German Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters became part of the organization.[61] In the same period, the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt am Main opened a last but animated phase in Baum's battle against IG Farben. Attorney General Fritz Bauer designed the

[57] Wolfgang Benz, "Der Wollheim-Prozeß. Zwangsarbeit für I. G. Farben in Auschwitz," in *Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* ed. Ludolf Herbst and Constantin Goschler (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 303–326.

[58] Benjamin B. Ferencz, *Less than Slaves: Jewish Forced Labor and the Quest for Compensation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 46.

[59] On the compensation negotiations, see Katharina Stengel, "Competition for Scant Funds. Jewish, Polish, and Communist Prisoners of Auschwitz in the Negotiations for the Wollheim Agreement," http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/files/1064/original/pdf_Katharina_Stengel_Competition_for_Scant_Funds_Jewish_Polish_and_Communist_Prisoners_of_Auschwitz_in_the_Negotiations_for_the_Wollheim_Agreement.pdf. Last accessed 14 March 2024.

[60] Ferencz, *Less than slaves,* 220.

[61] Oszkár Betlen, "Jelentés a Nemzetközi Auschwitz Bizottság vezetőségének üléséről, Prága 1965. január 15–17," MNL OL XXVIII-M-21 1. állag 1965. 2. ő. e.

trials as a means of public confrontation with the entire Auschwitz complex, so the defendants, former members of the SS personnel, represented all aspects of the camp system.[62] However, the trial left the economic aspect of the "Auschwitz complex" untouched. Throughout the trials, Baum issued statements demanding for the corporate leaders to be put in the dock.[63]

IG Farben's responsibility was raised in the courtroom by Friedrich Karl Kaul, an East German lawyer who represented victims from East Germany as a civil plaintiff.[64] He engaged Baum as expert on his side,[65] and Baum soon presented documents to the attorney's office to substantiate the claim against IG Farben.[66] The documents were then published (and republished in 1966) in book form as *IG-Farben—Auschwitz—Mass murder,* in an effort to document the corporation's past deeds and continued complicity in war crimes, pointing to their role in the Vietnam war.[67] As the first trial came to an end in 1965, Baum joined the International Auschwitz Committee in protesting the court's decision, and pointed to the GDR's repeated attempts at drawing attention to IG Farben's role in the mass murder.[68] Then in 1966, as the second Auschwitz trial opened, Baum testified again to how IG Farben exploited the forced labour of Auschwitz prisoners. In doing so, he joined other survivors of the resistance group, among them Oszkár Betlen and Robert Waitz whose testimonies supported Kaul's case against the IG Farben as well.[69]

In short, when protesting "re-fascization," Auschwitz survivors responded to very real social and economic changes. Further, they were right in seeing in these changes the corruption of the antifascist consensus of the pre-Cold War period. That they resisted such changes barely ten years after Liberation, should not come as a surprise. Yet, the coming years and especially the crisis of international communism in the post-1956 period led to a bifurcation and, eventually, decline of postwar antifascism.

People in Auschwitz: From Organized Antifascism to the Holocaust Canon

Though Baum, Betlen, and Langbein departed from the same ground, their relationship was weighed by deepening conflicts. Between 1956 and 1962, these conflicts led to Langbein's removal from IAC leadership and the organization's move from Vienna to Warsaw. Certainly, the growing conflicts around Langbein's leadership were interrelated with his distancing from communism following the 1956 revelations and Hungarian revolution of the same year. However, his removal did not simply result from his exclusion from the Austrian party in 1958. Langbein had been criticized within the IAC for the reparations negotiations which some—including Baum—thought was running the risk of legitimizing

[62] On the trial, see Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–65: Genocide, History and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[63] *Neues Deutschland,* 23 January 1964, 2.
[64] On Kaul, see Katharina Rauschenberger, "Friedrich Karl Kaul in Jerusalem and After. Trials in the Anti-Fascist Campaigns," in *Investigating, Punishing, Agitating: Nazi Perpetrator Trials in the Eastern Bloc,* ed. Katharina Rauschenberger, Joachim von Puttkamer, and Sybille Steinbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2023), 114–33, and Katharina Rauschenberger, "Friedrich Karl Kaul. Ein DDR-Anwalt in westdeutschen 'Euthanasie'-Prozessen," in *"Euthanasie" und Holocaust: Kontinuitäten, Kausalitäten, Parallelitäten,* ed. Jan Erik Schulte and Jörg Osterloh (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2021), 385–406.
[65] *Neues Deutschland,* 23 February 1964, 2.
[66] *Neues Deutschland,* 30 September 1964, 2; *Neues Deutschland,* 1 October 1964, 2.
[67] *Neues Deutschland,* 20 January 1966, 6.
[68] *Neues Deutschland,* 20 August 1965, 7.
[69] *Neues Deutschland,* 19 January 1966, 6; *Neues Deutschland,* 17 September 1966, 8.

the corporations rather than holding them accountable. Yet, the real test of comradeship came with the debate around the organization's mission. Faced with what they saw as "re-fascization," many inside the IAC leadership felt the need to rethink the political significance of Auschwitz and IAC's role in honouring it. They argued that the original mission of IAC should be enlarged to the "struggle against Fascism in any form or name" in order to address "any kind of phenomena leading to mass murder" such as war experiments with atomic energy.[70] It was in this context that the conflict between Langbein and the IAC leadership escalated. While Langbein regarded IAC opposition to West German rearmament as "one-sided,"[71] the IAC leadership perceived his "attacks" as inherently political, carried out in the guise of the seemingly apolitical principle of representing all Auschwitz survivors (in both East and West). The 1962 volume *Auschwitz. Zeugnisse und Berichte* that Langbein co-edited with H. G. Adler and Ella Lingens-Reiner fell victim to the conflict, as Langbein divorced the volume from IAC which in turn resulted in thirteen contributors (including Betlen) withdrawing their testimony.[72]

These conflicts manifested in their memoirs as well. In his own contribution to the 1962 volume, titled "Combat Group Auschwitz," Langbein removed all indications to communist biographies that had shaped the narrative in his 1949 memoir. Ernst Burger, for instance, co-founder of Combat Group Auschwitz and former leader of the Communist Youth of Austria, is mentioned simply as a "young Viennese."[73] Baum, on the other hand, removed the names of communist dissidents from his book—including the name of Langbein himself. Baum omitted the name of Heinz Brandt (1909–1986) as well, another member of the Auschwitz resistance who was kidnapped by the East German police from West Berlin in 1961 while a revised edition of Baum's book was in publication. Still, for Baum, his understanding of Auschwitz changed little over the decades. Far from being a "protean" propagandist of changing party policies,[74] he sustained the economic interpretation until his death in 1971. Though celebrated today for being "consistent all his life,"[75] it was Langbein who changed his position in a fundamental way. When he lost his position as head of the Austrian camp association in 1962, he was left without an institution. Following a short period of acting as a private individual, he became general secretary of the International Committee of the Camps (*Comité International des Camps*), and continued to work in an antitotalitarian framework.

Indeed, his contribution to the 1962 volume signalled a turn in Langbein's lifelong work of witnessing. As it removed any indication of his own political commitments, experiences, and skills as a communist, the new account explained resistance in universal-human and moral terms: resistance transformed from political struggle into a "moral force."[76] As to

[70] Report of dr. Árpád Haász and László November on the IAC's Amsterdam meeting, 4 June 1958, MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 32. cs. 1958. 1. ő. e. 18.

[71] Langbein to Waitz, 12 August 1961, SIHR CD Waitz Collection 4.10

[72] See Katharina Stengel, "Auschwitz zwischen Ost und West. Das Internationale Auschwitz-Komitee und die Entstehungsgeschichte des Sammelbandes Auschwitz. Zeugen und Berichte," in *Opfer als Akteure. Interventionen ehemaliger NS-Verfolgten,* ed. Katharina Stengel (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2008), 174–97. On the withdrawals, see "Tadeusz Holuj to the IAC leadership and the members of the control commission," n.d., SIHR CD Waitz Collection 2.12. For the initial book plan, see "Protokoll über die Beratungen der Kommission für das Auschwitz-buch, 22 January 1961." SIHR CD Waitz Collection 2.2.11, 23.

[73] Hermann Langbein, "Die Kampfgruppe Auschwitz," in *Auschwitz. Zeugnisse und Berichte,* ed. H. G. Adler, Hermann Langbein, and Ella Lingens-Reiner (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1962), 231.

[74] Thomas Taterka, "Mythen und Memoiren im 'Antiglobkestaat.' Konturen des zwischen Buchenwald und Auschwitz gespaltenen Lagerdiskurses in der DDR," *Menora* 11 (2000): 155.

[75] Brigitte Halbmayr, *Zeitlebens konsequent. Hermann Langbein. Eine politische Biografie* (Vienna: Braumüller, 2012).

why and how people resisted in Auschwitz and elsewhere, his explanations replaced political commitments by personal character. His new account would inform his 35,000 words long testimony[77] at the Auschwitz trial and his later book, *People in Auschwitz* (1972) as well. Having left behind organized antifascism, he abandoned its conceptual framework as well: the very terms "fascism" and "antifascism" did not enter his new book. The emphasis is on representing the scale of human experience rather than celebrating the "stronger ones." As he puts it in the motto: "I have felt obligated to write this book for the sake of the countless people who carried on a struggle against inhumanity even in Auschwitz and lost their lives." This struggle, fought against inhumanity and not fascism, is far from organized antifascism. There is no coherent narrative of resistance in Langbein's book, because the antifascist narrative is replaced by a kind of panorama of moral-human dilemmas and myriad forms and instances of individual and group resistance. The chapter on resistance opens with individual rather than organized (and collective) acts of resistance, portrayed as instances of personal courage and resourcefulness. This anticipates the disappearance of the antifascist subject from the narrative: indeed, the Combat Group Auschwitz is by no means the protagonist of Langbein's new story of human experience. This transition from antifascist politics to a universal-moral message derived from his changing vision of how the memory of Auschwitz can serve the present.

Eventually, his new vocabulary helped Langbein enter the emerging canon of Holocaust memory. While he may not enjoy the same status as Auschwitz memoirists Jean Améry, Charlotte Delbo, Primo Levi, or Elie Wiesel, *People in Auschwitz* has been re-published in Austria and Germany several times, translated into French, Italian, and Polish, and an American edition came out in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004. In his "Foreword" to the American edition, eminent Holocaust scholar and Auschwitz survivor Henry Friedlander (1930–2012) praised him especially for his inclusion of Romani victims.[78] While Langbein's book resonated with Friedlander's progressive stance in contemporary debates in Holocaust scholarship, Langbein's inclusion of Romani victims constituted a late legacy of antifascism, prefigured by his 1949 account of the so-called *Zigeunerlager* and his work for IAC which recognized Romani survivors as well.

These two forms of inclusivity are distinct and resulted from different conceptual worlds. While a progressive brand of Holocaust memory concentrates on remembering racially persecuted groups—Jews, Roma, and, in some sense, "homosexuals" and the disabled (as the latter were to be removed from the racially defined community of "healthy" Germans)—antifascist memory remembered fascist atrocities and fought against the categorization of humanity into distinct racial and subordinated groups. When warning of German rearmament, for example, Betlen mentioned "Auschwitz and Oradour, Mauthausen and Lidice,"[79] points of reference on a European-wide map of fascist atrocities. In Oradour and Lidice, the SS murdered French and Czech civilians in retaliation for acts of resistance in their region. These atrocities became the subject of postwar trials, international commemorations, and were turned into emblems of fascist atrocities just as the

[76] Langbein, "Die Kampfgruppe Auschwitz," 227.
[77] See "Zeuge Hermann Langbein. 24. Verhandlungstag 06.03.1964," https://www.auschwitz-prozess.de/zeugenaussagen/Langbein-Hermann_1/; as well as "Zeuge Hermann Langbein 84. Verhandlungstag 31.08.1964," https://www.auschwitz-prozess.de/zeugenaussagen/Langbein-Hermann_2/.
[78] Henry Friedlander, foreword to *People in Auschwitz,* by Hermann Langbein (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xi.
[79] Oszkár Betlen, "A terezini gyerekek," *Szabad nép,* 19 December 1954, 4.

crimes committed in the concentration camps. For Betlen and the era he lived in, Auschwitz and its subcamps were certainly symbolic but not separate from the entire complex of war and occupation. In their eyes, these together constituted the crimes of fascism posterity needed to remember. In contrast, in the era of Holocaust remembrance, Oradour or Lidice lost their status as global figures of memory.

Concomitantly, all three memoirs faded into obscurity. While *Resistance in Auschwitz* has not been reprinted since 1962, *Life in the Land of Death* came out in a second and third edition in 1959 and 1980. Langbein republished *The Stronger Ones* in 1982 with a new fore- and afterward in which he distanced himself from the "devout communist" who had once written the memoir. Although he still insisted on the importance of representing resistance, he reiterated his later interpretation that it was not political commitment but some sort of "natural humanism" that led members of the Auschwitz underground to "resist being turned into objects" and "act as subjects" instead.[80]

Langbein's trajectory from organized antifascism to a de-politicized notion of resistance corresponded with the emerging "moral universalism"[81] of Holocaust memory in the West. As to what exactly needed to be "resisted" has transformed since then from fascism as a political-ideological and economic regime to an abstract "evil"[82] or a similarly generalizing notion of "hatred" or "prejudice." The contemporary form of Holocaust memory initiated a profound change that unlinked the memory of the concentration camps from antifascist politics—be it in the form of anticapitalist, antinuclear, or anticolonialist struggle.[83] At the same time, it disconnected it from economic-social exploitation and created thereby the conditions for contemporary memory politics.

Conclusion

Since Baum, Betlen, and Langbein did not regard antifascism as merely a matter of the past or a concern of commemoration and recognition, our paper reconnected memory writing with the wider context of transnational political-organizational work: instead of examining published memoirs merely as texts, we reconstructed them as manifestations of a larger set of antifascist practices. In doing so, we argued that for leftist antifascists of the postwar period, calls to remember Auschwitz were embedded into a larger struggle for social change. Baum, Betlen and Langbein responded to pressing issues of their postwar present, and antifascist memory as a practice crystalized in this process. For them, these issues pointed to what they regarded as a looming resurgence of fascism. Indeed, the charge of "re-fascization" was far from being a mere propaganda tool in the hands of the communist regimes; rather, it presented a legitimate argument based on the (bygone) antifascist consensus among the Allied Powers. Amnesty and the reintegration of former perpetrators were only the most conspicuous aspects of "re-fascization;" in fact, antifascists perceived political and social restoration as a threat of a Third World War. What they struggled against when calling for Auschwitz to be remembered was

[80] Hermann Langbein, *Die Stärkeren* (Cologne: Bund, 1982), 7, 278–9.
[81] See Jeffrey C. Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5 (2002): 5–85.
[82] Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen: "On Agonistic Memory," *Memory Studies* 4 (2016): 395.
[83] For the latter, see Zoltán Kékesi and Máté Zombory, "Beyond Multidirectional Memory. Opening Pathways to Politics and Solidarity," *Memory Studies* (5 June 2023): 1–20.

not merely silence, as in the Western canon of Auschwitz memoirs; rather, they were fighting against what they perceived as capitalist restoration interlinked with the threat of an impending war with genocidal potential.

The so-called economic case was central to the leftist-antifascist paradigm of postwar memory and had, in the eyes of these memoirists, wide-ranging implications for postwar societies as well. All three of them reminded their audiences of the economic aspect of fascism and Auschwitz, and they did so not solely on the grounds of Marxist analysis. As shown above, they relied on the pre-Cold War legacy of the antifascist alliance in which postwar retribution involved economic justice. At the same time, they did not deterministically derive racial persecution from exploitation, nor did they reduce the understanding of the genocide to the problem of capitalism—even if some Marxist historians of the era did so.[84] Although especially Betlen and Baum presented the Auschwitz camp complex as a factory supplying the imperialist war machine, they did not see racial persecution and extermination as merely derivative or secondary. While they saw exploitation as intrinsic to the camp experience and, importantly, to the Nazi plan of occupying the East, they did not reduce the extermination of Jews to some notion of "economic rationality."[85] Instead, they emphasized fascism's racist ideology as a separate factor.

Consequently, for leftist antifascists the economic aspect of fascism did not necessarily eclipse the genocidal character of fascism, the racial aspect of persecution, or the specifically Jewish experience of it. These three major figures of antifascist memory characterized the extermination of Jews as a distinct aspect of Nazi policies, and made it painstakingly clear how racial categorization affected Jews in the concentration camps —among other victims of Nazi persecution. What differentiated the three author-activists is certainly not that the ex-communist Langbein acknowledged the Holocaust while the communist Baum and Betlen did not. They all did—although they remembered fascism and not the Holocaust as a separate event. Written before the emergence of our contemporary regime of memory that first conceptualized the Holocaust as "an entity in its own right, distinct from Nazi barbarism in general,"[86] their memoirs recognized the Jewish genocide as a key aspect of fascism, but did not see it as an event to be remembered separated from other crimes of fascism. Importantly, they all rejected racial hierarchization and antisemitism on the same ground: antifascist antiracism. Resisting fascism meant remaining "intellectually sane," as Langbein emphasized, instead of submitting to the racial thinking embedded in the camp's everyday practices.

As antifascist memory declined and the current paradigm of Holocaust memory emerged, resistance lost its prominent status in commemorations. Along with it, the understanding that antifascism called for both intellectual *and* organized resistance—against the interlinked projects of exploitation *and* genocide. What replaced this notion of resistance, is an emphasis on the moral obligation to restore the human dignity of individual victims and to thus convey the moral lessons of the past. In the era of contested moral universals, the antifascist paradigm might inspire us to re-anchor the memory of genocide in transformative politics.

[84] For the latter, see Traverso, *The Jewish Question,* 213.
[85] For this notion, see ibid., 212.
[86] Peter Novick, *Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 133. See also Jeffrey Alexander's classic study, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals."

Acknowledgment

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the conferences "Convergences. Fifth Annual Memory Studies Association Conference" (Warsaw, 5–9 July 2021), "Kádár-korszak, kádárizmus, korlátozott mozgástér: magyar modell?" (Miskolc, 1–3 September 2022), and "Remembering Contentious Lives" (Utrecht University, 12–14 September 2022), as well as presented at the Centre for Social Sciences (Budapest, 22 February 2024). Many thanks to all participants for their comments, especially Péter Apor, Maximilian Becker, Duygu Erbil, Emma Kuby, Ann Rigney, Joanne Sayner, and Clara Vlessing. Furthermore, the authors would like to thank Máté Martinkó, Jasmin Söhner, and Pia Wallnig for their valuable help, and for the peer-reviewers for their close reading and constructive comments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Zoltán Kékesi is a cultural historian of Central and East Central Europe with a focus on Holocaust research, Jewish history, memory studies, and fascism studies. He is a research fellow at the Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University College London. He has worked internationally for several years, and held research fellowships at the Center for Jewish History in New York, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research, the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe, the Institute for Advanced Study at Central European University, and most recently at the Center for Research on Antisemitism in Berlin. He is the author of two books in English: *Agents of Liberation: Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Art and Documentary Film* (Central European University Press, 2015) and *Memory in Hungarian Fascism: A Cultural History* (Routledge, 2023).

Máté Zombory is associate professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University, and senior research fellow at the Centre for Social Sciences in Budapest. His field of interest is the historical sociology of transnational and cultural memory. He is the author of *Maps of Remembrance. Space, Belonging and Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe* (2012), and *Traumatársadalom. Az emlékezetpolitika történeti-szociológiai kritikája* [Trauma Society. A Historical-Sociological Critique of the Politics of Memory] (2019). His current research projects include the Cold War history of Holocaust documentation with particular attention to the work of Hungarian journalist and author Jenő Lévai, supported by the Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah, Paris, and the history and memory of international antifascim.

ORCID

Zoltán Kékesi http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0478-2671
Máté Zombory http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3725-2071