

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photograph on the cover of this book was taken on 27 March 1977 in Frankfurt, West Germany. It depicts from left to right: Rudi Dutschke, the East German born figurehead of the student protests that had rocked the FRG in the late 1960s; Jiří Pelikán, a former director of Czechoslovak television who had fled his country in 1969 to Italy where he joined the socialist party and became an activist for human rights in eastern Europe; Adam Michnik (hidden behind the microphones), a Polish intellectual who had been a leading figure of student unrests in 1968 and who would become one of the main theoreticians of the Polish opposition movement; Wolf Biermann (playing guitar), a singer-songwriter from the GDR whom the East German authorities had forced into exile in the Federal Republic just a few months earlier. The picture was taken by Milan Horáček, another political refugee from Czechoslovakia who would later become a founding member of the West German Green party. The banner behind the four people on the panel gives the reason for their meeting: the signing of the 'Charter 77'. A petition against human rights violations in Czechoslovakia, the Charter 77 became an iconic text of 'dissent' or 'dissidence' – a new form of political protest that had first emerged in the Soviet Union in the late 1960s.

Sharing a transnational perspective on the history of dissidence, the individual chapters in this book show that the photograph from Frankfurt documents a central aspect of the dissident experience: The similarities between individual movements of dissent – legality, openness, an anti-political approach and a focus on human rights – were not simply a result of the similarities of the communist systems of the Soviet bloc; the dissidents, instead, perceived each other's activities, they held conversations across borders and exchanged ideas, and they saw each other as engaged in a common struggle in which they supported one another.

The fact that the meeting took place in Frankfurt highlights another central theme about these transnational entanglements: the importance of western audiences and interlocutors. With its focus on human rights, dissent presupposed an imagined 'court of world opinion' to which the dissidents appealed for help. A central aim of their activism was thus to reach western audiences in order to raise international awareness for their situation. This insight leads to new questions about dissent: Which intermediar-

ies granted the dissidents access to western audiences? Why did their message resonate with the concerns, ideas or values of people in the west? Answering these and other questions, the contributions to this book demonstrate how the history of dissent was part of broader changes which transformed international politics during the 1970s and 1980s: the eclipse of Marxism, the rise of human rights, the emergence of new forms of transnational activism focused on peace and ecology or the search for new forms of democracy.

The presence in Frankfurt of someone like Dutschke, finally, shows that the transnational history of dissent defies easy categorization according to standard narratives of the cold war. Relating dissidence to the intellectual and political processes of the 1970s and 1980s shows us how dissidents were integrated in transnational, even global changes without having to align their history with an ‘end-of-the cold-war-trajectory’.

The publication of this book is a welcome opportunity to thank its many ‘parents’. The idea for this book was born at the international conference ‘Transnational Perspectives on Dissent and Opposition in Central and Eastern Europe’, held 17-20 September 2010 at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw and jointly organized by Agnes Arndt and myself. It was a pleasure to conceptualize and organize the conference with Agnes and I would like to thank her for her many insights and great work. I also gratefully acknowledge her contributions to the early stages of producing this book as she read some of the texts and provided helpful ideas and suggestions.

I would also like to thank all speakers, commentators, panel chairs and participants at the conference for making it an extraordinary and intellectually stimulating event. The conference could not have taken place without the support of the directors of the two institutions involved: Eduard Mühle from the German Historical Institute in Warsaw and Martin Sabrow of the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam. As always, the staff of the German Historical Institute proved a formidable team in dealing with the practical aspects of organizing such a multinational, multilingual event.

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Robert Brier